



Smithsonian Associates

The Legacy of the Treaty of Versailles

with Kevin Matthews

Monday, September 11, 2023 - 6:45 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. ET

Important Dates

June 28, 1914: Serb nationalists assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the crown of Austria-Hungary and his wife, Sophie.

July 28, 1914: Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, setting off the First World War, soon known as the Great War, which it is still called in many parts of the world today.

1914-1918: Over war years, war was waged around the globe on a scale never seen before in human history:

- 61.5 million men were mobilized by both the Allies and their enemies, the Central Powers
- 10 million were dead
- 19 ½ were wounded
- Of that 19 ½ million, 7 million were physically or emotionally scarred for life
- Between 8-10 million civilians died during the war

1918-1920: Three successive waves of a deadly influenza brought on by the war swept the globe. Between 20 million and 50 million people died of this flu.

November 11, 1918: A truce, or armistice ended the fighting, as was said at the time, “at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.”

January 18, 1919: The Paris Peace Conference formally opened.

1919-1920: Five separate treaties were signed bringing the Great War to an end:

- Versailles (Germany, June 28, 1919)
- St Germain-en-Laye (Austria, September 10, 1919)
- Neuilly-sur-Seine (Bulgaria, November 27, 1919)
- Trianon (Hungary, June 4, 1920)
- Sèvres (Ottoman Empire, August 10, 1920)

July 24, 1923: The Treaty of Sèvres is itself reversed with the Treaty of Lausanne, creating the borders of the modern state of Turkey and ending Allied guarantees of protection to minorities in the country.

Noteworthy Personalities

Three men dominated the Paris Peace Conference:

- **Georges Clemenceau:** Premier of France, known as the “Tiger”
- **David Lloyd George:** Prime Minister of Great Britain, known in his country as “the man who won the war”
- **Woodrow Wilson:** President of the United States, whose Fourteen Points played a crucial role first in ending the war and, then, in the peace negotiations

The Fourteen Points (a brief summary)

1. A ban on secret negotiations and treaties
2. Complete freedom of the seas
3. Removal of trade barriers
4. Reduction of national military forces
5. Adjustment of colonial claims based on the interests of the local populations
6. Evacuation of Russian territory by other nations’ military forces
7. Restoration of Belgium’s territorial integrity and independence
8. Liberation of French territory including Alsace-Lorraine, provinces taken by Germany in 1871
9. Readjustment of Italy’s borders to reflect clear lines of nationality
10. Austria-Hungary’s minority populations to be given autonomy
11. Occupying military forces to evacuate Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro
12. Just treatment for both Turkish and non-Turkish populations in the Ottoman Empire
13. An independent Polish state in territories with indisputably Polish populations
14. An association of nations to guarantee peace and security (the League of Nations)

Further reading

Dickinson, Frederick R. *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919-1930*

Fromkin, David. *A Peace to End all Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*

Gerwarth, Robert. *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End*

MacMillan, Margaret. *Paris, 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*

Stevenson, David. *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy*