

The **Treaty of Versailles** was one of the peace treaties at the end of World War I. It ended the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers. It was signed on 28 June 1919, exactly five years after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The other Central Powers on the German side of World War I were dealt with in separate treaties. Although the armistice signed on 11 November 1918, ended the actual fighting, it took six months of negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference to conclude the peace treaty.

Of the many provisions in the treaty, one of the most important and controversial required Germany to accept responsibility for causing the war (along with Austria and Hungary) and, under the terms of articles 231–248 (later known as the War Guilt clauses), to disarm, make substantial territorial concessions and pay heavy reparations to certain countries that had formed the Entente powers (Britain, France, etc.)

The other major achievements of the treaty were the creation of new nations in Europe from Austria-Hungary; the creation of a mandate system for many colonial nations; and the creation of a League of Nations to prevent international conflict (though the US never joined it.)

The following documents represent the views of the major participants and one modern historian. Read the "documents from the Versailles Treaty option 1" and then explain, with reference to those documents, who, between the US, Great Britain, France, or Germany, can be said to have gotten the best deal out of the Treaty - that is, who can be said to have "won" the peace. You should use your mind-map to help you as well. Keep in mind, the answer may not be what you think it is...

#### **A. Woodrow Wilson: Speech on the Fourteen Points Jan 8, 1918**

*President Woodrow Wilson put forth his Fourteen Points proposal for ending the war in a speech on January 8, 1918. In it he established the basis of a peace treaty and the foundation of a League of Nations.*

What we demand in this war, therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world as against force and selfish aggression ... The program of the world's peace, therefore, is our program; and that program can only be this:

I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understanding of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.

III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

(parts VI – XIII suggest that Belgium, all French territory in German hands, Italy, the peoples of Austria-Hungary, the peoples of the Balkan States, former possessions of the Ottoman Empire, and Poland should be either rebuilt as they were before the war, or be given control over new nations created along ethnic national lines – ie – for all people who speak Hungarian to exist in a country to be called “Hungary.”)

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific treaties for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.... (*this would become the League of Nations*)

### **B. 5 January, 1918: Prime Minister Lloyd George on the British War Aims**

*According to an historian, Lloyd George’s goals were five specific points:*

1. *The destruction of the German fleet;*
2. *The destruction of the German colonial empire;*
3. *An increase in British colonial interests and possessions, specifically those in the Middle East for the purposes of attaining oil resources;*
4. *The re-establishment of European trade, which had been interrupted by the war, and;*
5. *The prevention of any country, including France – or especially France – from dominating Europe.*

*The following is from a Lloyd George speech prior to the end of the war:*

We may begin by clearing away some misunderstandings and stating what we are not fighting for. We are not fighting a war of aggression against the German people. Their leaders have persuaded them that they are fighting a war of self-defence against a league of rival nations bent on the destruction of Germany. That is not so. The destruction or disruption of Germany or the German people has never been a war aim with us from the first day of this war to this day. Most reluctantly, and indeed quite unprepared for the dreadful ordeal, we were forced to join in this war in self-defence....We had to join in the struggle or stand aside and see Europe go under and brute force triumph over public right and international justice. It was only the realization of that dreadful alternative that forced the British people into the war.

And from that original attitude [we] have never swerved. [We] have never aimed at the break-up of the German peoples or the disintegration of their state or country. Germany has occupied a great position in the world. It is not our wish or intention to question or destroy that position for

the future, but rather to turn her aside from hopes and schemes of military domination, and to see her devote all her strength to the great beneficent tasks of the world....

The first requirement, therefore, always put forward by the British Government and their Allies, has been the complete restoration, political, territorial and economic, of the independence of Belgium, and such reparation as can be made for the devastation of its towns and provinces...This is not an attempt to shift the cost of warlike operations from one belligerent to another, which may or may not be defensible. It is no more and no less than an insistence that... reparation means recognition. Unless international right is recognized by insistence on payment for injury done in defiance of its canons it can never be a reality.

Similarly, though we agree with President Wilson that the break-up of Austria-Hungary is no part of our war aims, we feel that unless genuine self-government on true democratic principles is granted to those Austro-Hungarian nationalities who have long desired it, it is impossible to hope for the removal of those causes of unrest in that part of Europe which have so long threatened its general peace....

With regard to the German colonies ... none of those territories are inhabited by Europeans. Therefore, in all these cases, it must be that the inhabitants should be placed under the control of an administration, acceptable to themselves, one of whose main purposes will be to prevent their exploitation for the benefit of European capitalists or governments. The natives live in their various tribal organizations under chiefs and councils who are competent to consult and speak for their tribes and members and thus to represent their wishes and interests in regard to their disposal. The general principle of national self-determination is, therefore, as applicable in their cases as in those of occupied European territories.

### **C. Georges Clemenceau (French President, 1919)**

*Clemenceau wrote this shortly after the terms of the Peace Treaty were made known to the public, and after the German delegation protested the "harshness of the terms."*

...Germany's responsibility ... is not confined to having planned and started the war. She is also responsible for the savage and inhuman manner in which it was conducted....They were the first to use poisonous gas, notwithstanding the appalling suffering it entailed. They began the bombing and long distance shelling of towns for no military object, but solely for the purpose of reducing the morale of their opponents by striking at their women and children. They commenced the submarine campaign with its piratical challenge to international law, and its destruction of great numbers of innocent passengers and sailors, in mid-ocean, far from help, at the mercy of the winds and the waves, and the yet more ruthless submarine crews.

...There must be justice for the dead and wounded and for those who have been orphaned and bereaved that Europe might be freed from [German] despotism. There must be justice for the peoples who now stagger under war debts which exceed 130,000,000,000 that liberty might be saved. There must be justice for those millions whose homes and lands, ships and property German savagery has looted and destroyed.

That is why the Allied and Associated Powers have insisted as a unnegotiable feature of the treaty that Germany must undertake to make reparation to the very uttermost of her power; for reparation for wrongs inflicted is of the essence of justice....Germany has ruined the industries, the mines, and the machinery of neighboring countries, not during battle, but with the deliberate and calculated purpose of enabling her industries to seize their markets before their industries could recover from the devastation thus wantonly inflicted upon them.

Germany has despoiled her neighbors of everything she could make use of or carry away. Germany has destroyed the shipping of all nations on the high seas, where there was no chance of rescue for their passengers and crews. It is only justice that restitution should be made and that these wronged peoples should be safeguarded for a time from the competition of a nation whose industries are intact and have even been fortified by machinery stolen from occupied territories.

If these things are hardships for Germany, they are hardships which Germany has brought upon herself. Somebody must suffer for the consequences of the war.

**D. “Lessons of History: the Paris Peace Conference of 1919” by Margaret O. MacMillan  
(written in 2007)**

*This is written by an American historian, analyzing the treaty with 90 years of hindsight*

...In recent years a number of historians, myself included, have come to the conclusion that the German treaty was not as bad as it has been portrayed....Germany had lost the war. It should have expected to lose territory. If Germany had won, it certainly would have taken territory from its defeated enemies. It should have expected that the Allies, and particularly France, would attempt to limit Germany's capacity to wage future wars. It should have expected to pay something just as France had paid after it lost the Franco-Prussian War. In fact, the Germany Foreign Ministry had worked out figures and drawn up schedules for the reparations it expected to be imposed. But with a treaty that was widely seen as unjust, across the political spectrum, there was little will in Germany to pay any reparations. The arguments between Germany and its former enemies, which poisoned international relations for so much of the decade after the war, obscured the fact that Germany never paid that much in the end, probably less than a sixth of what it owed. Nevertheless in Germany, reparations became shorthand for every economic problem, for unemployment and for the dreadful inflation of the early 1920s.