

2 Hour
Reserve



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History 221
War Guilt Paper

War is and has never been a good idea for humanity. Yet after all of the battles have been won, both sides want someone to blame for all the damage and the lives lost. While the winners normally would choose where the blame officially goes, in the case of World War I there is no obvious answer as to who to blame for the war. The issue is heavily debated since the start of the war and continues to rage. I believe that the heart of the issue as to who is to blame is that the attitudes of the major world powers, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany as well as the country of Serbia, are all at fault for the war to mostly equal extent. The attitudes that prevailed at the time where not only that each nation had to be the biggest, most feared country in the world, each felt that they needed to spread their influence to other less developed parts of the world as well as the need to have greater influence over the others. These attitudes also provided the chances that there would be conflicts that turned into a worldwide struggle.

To begin to explain the attitudes of the major world players, one must examine the mindsets of the two most involved countries in the beginning of the war, Austria-Hungary and their most feared neighbors, a country called Serbia. The attitudes of the monarchs of Austria-Hungary, the Hapsburgs, was that they needed to maintain their control of their ethnically diverse country, containing Serbs, Germans, Italians, Hungarians, Czechs, Ukrainians, Romanians and Croats. The Hapsburgs, in Austria-Hungary where mostly of German descent and felt that in order to keep their country together that they needed a short quick war that they could win in order to foster confidence in not only their power as monarchs but to build confidence in country as a

whole. This lends Austria-Hungary to be looking for a fight to prove themselves with to the rest of the world. As they virily eyed their neighbors the Serbians in both of the Balkan Wars as they, through the use of alliances, set to remove the Ottoman Empire, from the Balkans, gained territory and people and started to become threatening considering their desire to unite all peoples of Slavic descent under one nation.

As well the attitude of the Austria-Hungary towards the Serbians needs to be examined. The Austrian-Hungarians treated Serbia as they were not equals and that Serbia was going to take parts of Austria-Hungary in order to unite all of the Slavic people under one nation of Yugoslavia. As well during the Balkan Wars the Austrian Empire had stopped Serbia from getting all of the spoils it should have and Serbia without help from Russia was powerless to defend itself, let them get away with it. Tensions thus between Serbia and Austria-Hungary where very high and the annexation of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina into Austria-Hungary only served to increased these tensions. The increase in tensions leads the people of Serbia to form a terrorist group, the Black Hand, which was responsible for the assignation of Franz Ferdinand the heir to the Austrian-Hungarian throne. The assignation gives the people of Austria-Hungary a reason to go to war to crush the Serbian resistance. This war that enfolds gives the Russian empire a stage to reenter the international scene in an attempt to gain credibility and back their Slavic brethren, Serbia.

Russia had lost international status by not only failing to back Serbia for fear of a war with Germany, but as well as a defeat suffered from the Japanese, who were considered a nobody internationally. The Russian Tsar Nicholas II was under immense pressure from his advisers to go to the aid of Serbia and to mobilize the army in order to

defend their Slavic brethren. Also the people of Russia did not want to be humiliated again as they had over the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the people felt that they needed to back the Serbians against anti-Slavic aggression on the part of the Austrian Empire. Yet even with the Serbians getting backing from the Russians the war did not have to consume the world, the alliances that had been established helped to bring Germany, France and Great Britain into the conflict.

Germany was a relative newcomer to the international stage, as a recently united by the Prussians through several wars with both France and Austria-Hungary. The French were very bitter about this loss and were buying time until they could get back at Germany. The German military was a modern army that took advantage of technological advances both on land and on the sea. The naval fleet of Germany was a threat to the British who felt that they were the greatest naval power. Great Britain also sees herself as the international police, decides that after Germany decides to go through neutral Belgium to get to France that Great Britain will enter the conflict on the side of the French and Russians as the alliance would dictate that they should. Yet the French had not decided to go to war as a result of hatred towards the Germans, but because of a public sympathy towards the Serbians who they thought were being pushed around by Austria-Hungary.

The French while angered at losing the territory of Alsace-Lorraine, were comfortable waiting until they would be stronger than Germany to gain back the territories. The French decided that they would back Russia in the fight to help Serbia defend herself. Without this the French would not have appealed to the British to help them against a German invasion. Yet as the Germans made the decision to go to war

based on the fact that the Russians were mobilized for war the French did not want to enter into armed conflict with Germany.

While most of the major powers seemed to be looking for a fight in the early 1900's war was avoidable. More of the leaders of the nations of Europe grossly over reacted to the crisis that resulted from the assassination of Franz Ferdinand than letting cooler heads prevail to diplomatically avoid war. If the European leaders had taken the time to think about the complete consequences for their country of their decisions war would have been avoided. The fact that war would have been avoided by cooler heads means that Germany, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary and Serbia are all to blame for the start of World War I