

What's so Great About the Great War?

World War I
Primary Source Documents

Section 1: What was the importance of the war to people at the time?

Document 1

Growth of National Debts

The Mechanics and Metals Bank of New York issued a statement showing the debts of the leading nations at the beginning and close of the war.

Gross Debt of	Aug. 1, 1914	Jan. 1, 1919
U.S.	\$ 1,000,000,000	\$ 21,000,000,000
Gt. Britain	3,500,000,000	40,000,000,000
France	6,500,000,000	30,000,000,000
Russia	4,600,000,000	27,000,000,000
Italy	2,800,000,000	12,000,000,000
Entente nations	\$18,400,000,000	\$130,000,000,000
German Emp. and States	5,200,000,000	40,000,000,000
Austria-Hungary	3,700,000,000	24,000,000,000
Teutonic nations	\$ 8,900,000,000	\$ 64,000,000,000
Gross debt	\$27,300,000,000	\$194,000,000,000

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/rotogravures/rotoevents2.html>

Document 2

Nations at War Map

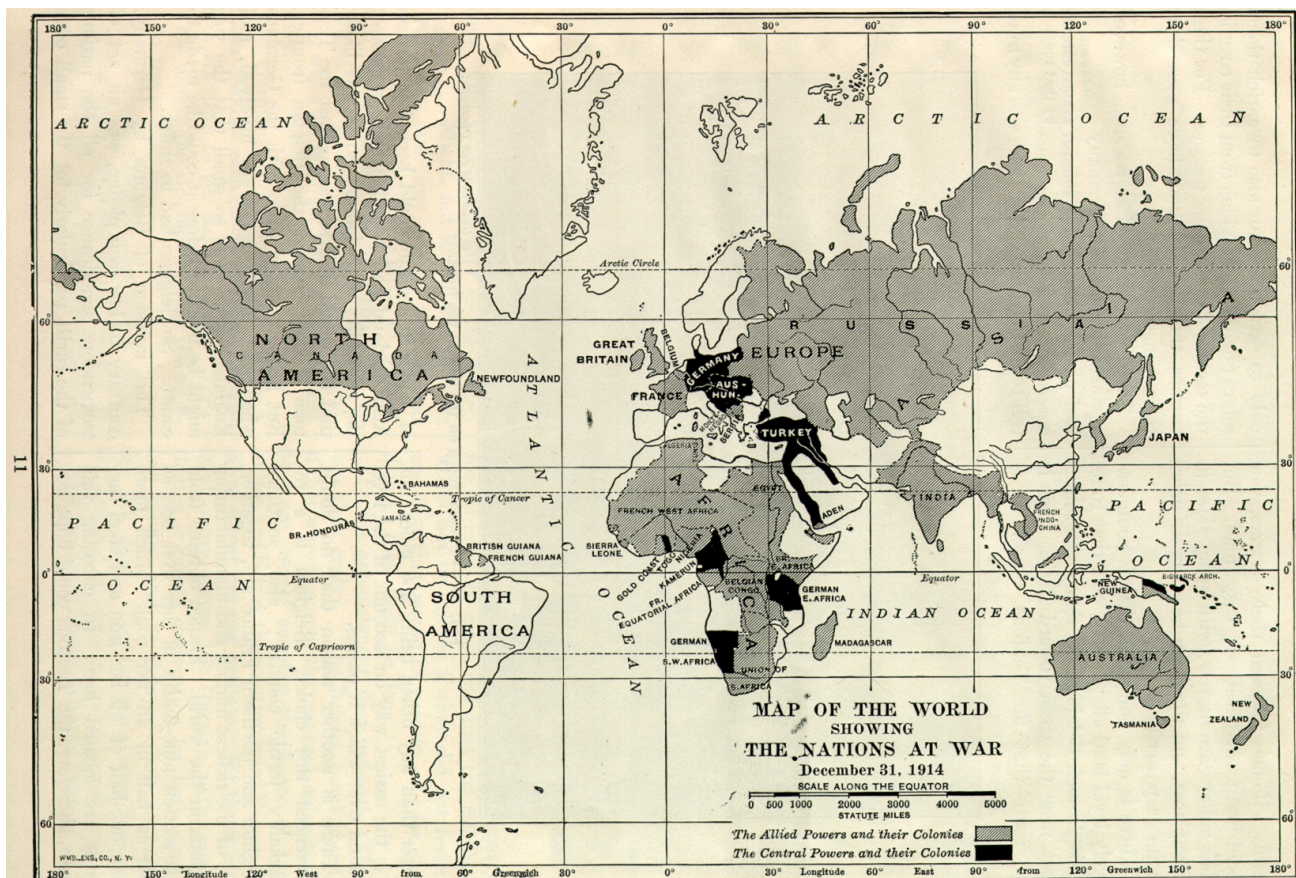


FIG. 9.

<http://freepages.military.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~worldwarone/WWI/TheGeographyOfTheGreatWar/images/Figure9-Page11.jpg>

Document 3

Be a Trained Nurse



<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/wwipos/item/00650746/>

Document 4

Red Cross War Fund



<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm215.html>

Document 5

Labor's Service to Freedom: Samuel Gompers

The World War in which we are engaged in is on such a tremendous scale that we must readjust practically the whole nation's social and economic structure from a peace to a war basis. It devolves upon liberty-loving citizens of this country, to see to it that the spirit of democracy (is) maintained within our country while we are engaged in a war to establish them in international relations...

The workers have a part in this war equal with the soldiers and sailors on the ships and in the trenches...They are demonstrating their appreciation and loyalty by war work, by loaning their savings, and by the supreme sacrifice. Labor will do its part. Our republic, the freedom of the world, progress, and civilization hang in the balance. We dare not fail. We will win.

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/nfor:@field%28DOCID+@range%28900000036+900000037%29%29>

Document 6

War Messages

When men by the million are being called upon to suffer and die, and vast populations are being subjected to the sufferings and privations of war on a scale unprecedented in the history of the world, they are entitled to know for what cause they are making the sacrifice. We are not fighting a war of aggression against the German people. We are fighting for a just and lasting peace, and we believe that three conditions must be fulfilled; the sanctity of treaties established; a territorial settlement must be secured, and, we seek to limit the burden of armaments and diminish the probability of war. On these conditions the British Empire would welcome peace; to secure these conditions its peoples are prepared to make even greater sacrifices than those they have yet endured.

~ Great Britain Prime Minister Lloyd George, 3 August, 1914

The present German submarine warfare is a warfare against mankind. It is a war against all nations. Our motive will not be revenge, but the vindication of right, of human right, of which we are only a single champion. While we do these things, let us make clear to all the world what our motives are. Our object is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world. We have no quarrel with the German people. We have no feeling towards them but one of sympathy and friendship. We are glad to fight for the peace of the world. The world must be made safe for democracy. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have.

~United States President Woodrow Wilson, 2 April, 1917

Our fine and courageous army, which France today accompanies with her maternal thought has risen eager to defend the honour of the flag and the soil of the country. France has used its strength in the interest of progress and for the good of humanity. For today she stands before the universe for Liberty, Justice, and Reason.

~ French President Raymond Poincare, 5 January, 1918

<http://firstworldwar.com/index.htm>

Section 2: How deeply were people's lives affected by the war?

Document 7

Mobilized Strength and Casualty Losses

Exact figures for World War I data can vary due to different definitions used in each category, the questionable accuracy of the recording system used, and the loss or destruction of some official documents.

Excerpted from *The War of the Nations: Portfolio of Rotogravure Etchings*, 528.

United States and Mobilized Nations					
Nation	Mobilized	Dead	Wounded	Prisoners or Missing	Total Casualties
United States	4,272,521	67,813	192,483	14,363	274,659
British Empire	7,500,000	692,065	2,037,325	360,367	3,089,757
France	7,500,000	1,385,300	2,675,000	446,300	4,506,600
Italy	5,500,000	460,000	947,000	1,393,000	2,800,000
Belgium	267,000	20,000	60,000	10,000	90,000
Russia	12,000,000	1,700,000	4,950,000	2,500,000	9,150,000
Japan	80,000	300	907	3	1,210
Rumania	750,000	200,000	120,000	80,000	400,000
Serbia	707,343	322,000	28,000	100,000	450,000
Montenegro	50,000	3,000	10,000	7,000	20,000
Greece	230,000	15,000	40,000	45,000	100,000
Portugal	100,000	4,000	15,000	200	10,000
Total	39,676,864	4,869,478	11,075,715	4,956,233	20,892,226
Central Powers					
Nation	Mobilized	Dead	Wounded	Prisoners or Missing	Total Casualties
Germany	11,000,000	1,611,104	3,683,143	772,522	6,066,769
Austria-Hungary	6,500,000	800,000	3,200,000	1,211,000	5,211,000
Bulgaria	400,000	201,224	152,399	10,825	264,448
Turkey	1,600,000	300,000	570,000	130,000	1,000,000
Total	19,500,000	2,912,328	7,605,542	2,124,347	12,542,217
Grand Total	59,176,864	7,781,806	18,681,257	7,080,580	33,434,443

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/rotogravures/rotoevents3.html>

Document 8Evelyn Albright Letter

Taber, Alta
Nov. 23, 1917

Dearest:-

It is not yet two weeks since I wrote my last letter to you, not two weeks since I read that awful telegram that told me you were gone from me.

I suppose it seems silly for me to write to you, but if you know, you'll understand, and nobody else need know. But it has come to me that time might dim your image and the knowledge of your dear companionship, and I cannot bear to think of that. Then too, my darling, oh my darling, I sometimes cannot believe that you are gone, and I go on pretending as I have ever since you went away last March, that you were coming home again. And if you should - why then you'd be glad of a link between the times. It is so easy, sweetheart, to lose myself in dreaming, for whenever hard unpleasant things have come, I have always made believe things were as I would have them. But in this case, the coming back to Earth is hard.

I think it has been like this, sweetheart. I could not, would not face the thought that you would not come back: I interpreted those psalms we read together, as meaning that you would be kept safe from accident, danger and death. When I knew that you were in the thick of things, I went calmly to sleep at night, believing that you were in God's hands and that He would keep you safe. Some of the time, while I so calmly slept and went about my work, you were lying dead Dead! Oh my darling, as I have so often called you - the light of my life.

I have thought of late dear one, that I did not fully realize what it meant to you to go. I was so filled with my own grief, with the thought of my loneliness, and with the dread of what you would have to face, that I did not fully realize what it meant to you to give up all you did and to leave me, fearing that you might never come back. You have always said I wrote cheerful letters; I am glad if you thought they were, for I tried to make them so for you had enough to bear, without me making your lot harder.

The woman is coming up to sweep, so I'll stop. But my dear one, it almost seems as if you'll read this some day. Or is it that you are reading it over my shoulder as I write? In any case, you know I adore you, my sweetheart and my friend. Oh darling, I shall try to live on cheerfully and well, but it seems that I am like a tree, half killed my [sic] lightning. Such a tree, I suppose is not expected to give the shade of a whole one - but the question always comes, why should it have been marred and blighted? Do you know now?

Your wife, for wherever you are, my darling, I shall always be that.

Evelyn

<http://sites.google.com/site/echoinmyheartsite/the-letters/part-four>

Document 9Soldier Giving Direction to Family

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003668495/resource/>

4th March 1916, French Headquarters

What is the secret motive underlying the German attempt to break the French line at Verdun, in which the Crown Prince's Army is incurring such appalling losses?

From the evidence of German deserters it is known that the attack was originally intended to take place a month or two hence, when the ground was dry. Premature spring caused the Germans to accelerate their plans. There were two final delays owing to bad weather, and then came the colossal onslaught of February 21st.

Their *avions* were not idle, and, if confirmation were needed it was given by deserters, who, surmising the horrors that were to come, crept out of the trenches at night, lay down by the edge of the Meuse till the morning, and then gave themselves up, together with information that has since proved to be accurate.

The district of Verdun lies in one of the coldest and also the most misty sectors. Changes of temperature are frequent.

The opposing French and German trenches were so close that they were actually within hearing of each other.

That the sufferings of the wounded lying out through the long nights of icy wind in the No Man's Land between the lines would be great did not probably disturb the Crown Prince. It is one of the most gruesome facts in the history of the War that the French, peering through the moonlight at what they thought to be stealthily crawling Germans, found them to be wounded men frozen to death.

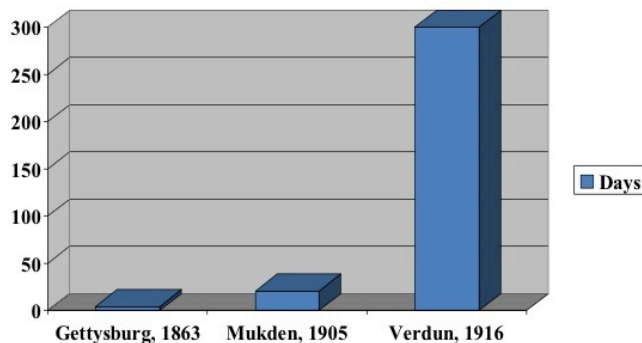
During the War, in France and in Flanders, in camps and in hospitals, I have conversed with at least 100 Germans. Prisoners' talk is always to be accepted with great reserve, but the prisoners of the Verdun campaign have so plainly horror and misery depicted upon their countenances that I need no other evidence as to the tragedy through which they have passed.

The town is a place whose people have all gone, save a few of the faithful who live below ground.

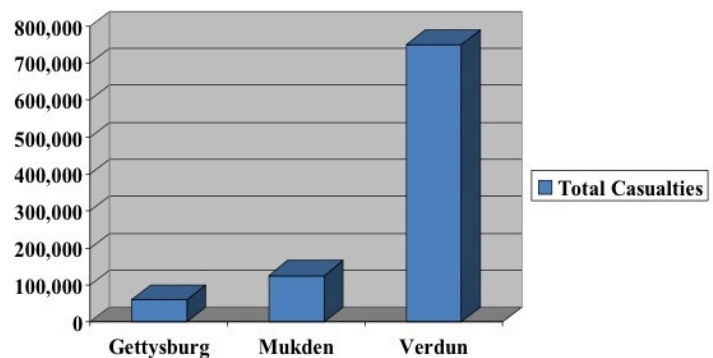
The tall tower of Verdun still stands. Close by us is a hidden French battery, and it is pretty to see the promptitude with which it sends its screaming shells back to the Germans within a few seconds of the dispatch of a missive from the Huns.

http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/verdun_northcliffe.htm

Duration of Battle



Battle Casualties



217 - 218



1



2

Section 3: How does the war contribute to your understanding of life following the war?

Document 12

African American Soldier in France

Colored Soldier Wins Croix de Guerre

BALTIMORE, Md., Sept. 17.—Sergeant Robert Terry, Colored, a former member of the old First Separate Company of Baltimore, and who is now fighting with the American troops in France, has been awarded the French Croix de Guerre for bravery in action. Word to this effect reached Baltimore in a letter sent by Chief Gunner Rufus Pinckney, who tells of the daring feat of Sergeant Terry ~~that won him the honor.~~

According to Pinckney, Sergeant Terry, with several other members of his company, ~~went over the top while under a heavy barrage fire from the enemy, reaching all objectives.~~

~~BUY LIBERTY BONDS~~

Colored Soldier Wins Croix de Guerre

BALTIMORE, Md., Sept. 17 – Sergeant Robert Terry, Colored...who is now fighting with the American troops in France, has been awarded the French Croix de Guerre for bravery in action. Word to this effect reached Baltimore in a letter sent by Chief Gunner Rufus Pinckney, who tells of the daring feat of Sergeant Terry that won him the honor.

According to Pinckney, Sergeant Terry, with several other members of his company, went over the top while under a heavy barrage fire from the enemy, reaching all objectives.

<http://dbs.ohiohistory.org/africanam/page1.cfm?ItemID=7578>

Document 13

A Wrecked German Ammunition Train, Destroyed by Shell Fire



Ypres, Belgium



<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/jun28.html>

Document 14German Response to Treaty of Versailles Terms

Gentlemen,

WE are deeply impressed with the lofty character of the task which has brought us together, namely to give the world a speedy and enduring peace. We cherish no illusions as regards the extent of our defeat, the degree of our impotence. We know that the might of German arms is broken. We know the force of hatred which confronts us here, and we have heard the passionate demand that the victors should both make us pay as vanquished and punish us as guilty.

We are required to admit that we alone are war-guilty; such an admission from my lips would be a lie. We are far from seeking to exonerate Germany from all responsibility for the fact that this world war broke out as it was. The attitude of the former German Government.... may have contributed to the calamity, but we emphatically combat the idea that Germany, whose people were convinced that they were waging a defensive war, bears sole guilt.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/g5/cs1/g5cs1s3a.htm>

Count Brockdorff-Rantzau's Speech.

(Translation.)

Gentlemen,

WE are deeply impressed with the lofty character of the task which has brought us together, namely, to give the world a speedy and enduring peace. We

cherish no illusions as regards the extent of our defeat, the degree of our impotence. We know that the might of German arms is broken. We know the force of the hatred which confronts us here, and we have heard the passionate demand that the victors should both make us pay as vanquished and punish us as guilty.

We are required to admit that we alone are war-guilty; such an admission from my lips would be a lie. We are far from seeking to exonerate Germany from all responsibility for the fact that this world war broke out and was waged as it was. The attitude of the former German Government at The Hague Peace Conferences, their actions and omissions in the tragic twelve days of July, may have contributed to the calamity, but we emphatically combat the idea that Germany, whose people were convinced that they were waging a defensive war, bears the sole guilt.

Document 15German Reaction to the Treaty of Versailles

POPULAR EXCITEMENT IN BERLIN OVER THE QUESTION OF SIGNING THE PEACE TREATY: A SPEAKER ADDRESSING AN IMMENSE OPEN-AIR AUDIENCE.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/greatwar/g5/cs2/g5cs2s1b.htm>

Europe 1914



Europe 1919

