The Paris Peace Conference and Treaty of Versailles of 1919

By Office of the Historian, adapted by Newsela staff on 01.04.18

World War I ended in 1918. Soon after, the Paris Peace Conference began. The Conference was a meeting between country leaders. These leaders spoke for the countries that had fought in the war.
The Conference took place in January 1919. It was held at the palace of Versailles, just outside Paris in France. Four major powers controlled the talks. They were the United Kingdom, France, the United States and Italy. All were on the winning side. The men who spoke for these countries were known as the "Big Four."


**What Winners Should Get From The Losers**

The Conference led to the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty laid out what each country should do. It also laid out what the winners should get from the losers.
Germany was on the losing side of the war. It was not allowed to take part in the Treaty talks. Wilson wanted a treaty that would help keep the peace. But France and the United Kingdom wanted to punish Germany.

**Treaty Very Hard on Germany**

France and the United Kingdom won out. The Treaty was very hard on Germany. It forced Germany to give up a large amount of land. It had to give up Poland, which became its own country. East Prussia was separated from the rest of Germany. East Prussia was part of the German region of Prussia. Germany also had to give up all its colonies around the world.
The Treaty cut the size of the German army and navy. The Germans also had to pay the winning countries for the costs of the war. They were supposed to pay more than $32 billion.

A Punishment As Bad As Death

These demands made the Germans very angry. One of the German government’s officials, Count von Brockdorff-Rantzau, spoke against this treatment. He said that Germany was not just being cut into pieces. It was then being forced to pay more than it could ever give. He said Germany was given a punishment as bad as death.
The demands were difficult to meet. Changes were made to the Treaty over the years. Some of these changes made things easier for Germany. Still, many Germans remained very angry. Their anger helped Adolf Hitler and the Nazis come to power. Over time, Germany rebuilt its army.

**Treaty Did More Harm Than Good**

In many ways, the Treaty did more harm than good. It didn’t bring lasting peace. Instead, it helped lead to World War II. In 1919, John Maynard Keynes spoke against the Treaty. Keynes was a famous British economist. He studied the way countries made and lost money. Keynes said Europeans should work together. Only then could people work and live in peace. Keynes said that by hurting Germany, the winners were hurting themselves, too.