

WORLD WAR II: AN ECONOMIC RAMIFICATION
OF THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES,
1919-1939

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The problem of this thesis was to analyze the relationship of World War II as an economic outgrowth or consequence of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The premise of the thesis is that the results of the Peace Conference in Versailles, France not only failed to allow Germany a participatory role in the Peace Conference but also imposed an unjust Treaty upon Germany. Consequently, the economic results of the Treaty were harshly devastating to Germany and became the very seedbed that allowed Germany to rise from the ashes of defeat in 1919 to war again twenty years later.

The procedure to illustrate the relationship of World War II to the Versailles Treaty was directed at the historiography of the subject in order to gain a more in-depth knowledge of the various interpretations of this subject. The research was directed at analyzing the economic peculiarities of Europe prior to the outbreak of war in 1914 and to illustrate the legacy of World War I once it was over. It was also necessary to explore the reparations aspect of the Treaty in depth and the interwoven economic relationship of reparations to war debts. Particular emphasis was placed on National Socialism within the context of the more broadly existent ideology of Fascism between 1920-1945. The rise of National Socialism in Germany was not only explored within the economic climate of Germany and the world between 1919

and 1939 but also as a doctrine that never became a possibility. The role of Hitler was treated from the viewpoint of a force within the period of War, Revolution, and the Peace Treaty. The latter factors coupled with certain personality traits of Hitler afforded him a unique place in history.

The conclusion of this thesis is that World War II was an economic ramification of the Treaty of Versailles which is one of many interpretations. The innumerable interpretations of this topic are as diverse as the sources read. Some authors, like Walter Lippman, contend that this era fell victim to idealism and the idea of perpetual peace. Others, like George Kennen, concur that Versailles was a problem of realism versus idealism and that the realism of the balance of power theory won out. Harold Nicolson and Samuel Bemis contend that Versailles was a result of diplomatic ineptitude on the part of America. Paul Birdsall contended that the Treaty would have been more devastating to Germany if Wilson had not been a "tempering influence." However, the latter does feel that Versailles and its subsequent era fell victim to the struggle between the Wilsonian principles of world order and the principles of reactionary nationalism.

This thesis concludes that the Treaty of Versailles was so devastating to Germany that it created an economic climate that allowed the rise of Hitler who brought about World War II.