



At 11 am on November 11, 1918, an eerie silence settled over the great battlefields of the **Western Front**. Two great armies had fought each other to a bloody stalemate in a war that pitted the **Central Powers** against the combined forces of the **Entente**, or **Allied Powers** as they were commonly known. In April 1917, the United States had formally entered the war on the side of the Allied powers as an associated power. The arrival of fresh American troops was the necessary tipping point that helped bring the war to an end.¹

In September 1918, German military leaders, fearing revolution at home as well as the possibility of an Allied invasion of Germany itself, sought an immediate end to the war. Strikes among workers and soldiers in Germany forced Wilhelm to abdicate and flee the country for good. In the wake of his departure, a new republic was established. The new government agreed to an **armistice**.²

Many conservatives in Germany felt that Germany had been “stabbed in the back” by socialists, liberals, and radicals on the homefront who had sold out their country in order to establish the republican Weimar government at the end of the war.

The Treaty of Versailles

The leaders of the Allied nations gathered at the Palace of Versailles, outside of Paris, France, in January 1919. The proceedings of the peace conference were dominated by the powers known as **the Big Four**, the leaders of France, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States. Individually these were **Georges Clemenceau** of France, **David Lloyd George** of Great Britain, **Vittorio Orlando** of Italy, and **Woodrow Wilson** of the United States.

Western Views

It would really be the views of both France and the United States that would most directly shape the outcome of the peace treaty. France sought to force Germany to help pay for a French economic recovery through **reparations**.

The United States argued for “a peace without victors,” a highly idealistic view that stressed the creation of a new world order based on democratic governments across a redrawn Europe, free international trade, reduced armaments, and the creation of a new international body, **the League of Nations**, that would serve as mediator in all future international conflicts to lessen the possibility of another major war.³

An important idea that Wilson also championed was **self-determination**, the concept that national boundaries should mirror the national makeup of a country rather than having various minorities being ruled over by a government they did not see as their own.

AT A GLANCE

The fact that to the German people Germany seemed to have gone from winning the war to losing the war overnight is an important fact—one that helps explain why in only twenty years the world would find itself once again engulfed by war.



By November 9, 1918, strikes among workers and soldiers in Germany forced Kaiser Wilhelm II, the crown ruler of Imperial Germany, to abdicate and flee the country.



The Big Four (from left to right): David Lloyd George, Vittorio Orlando, Georges Clemenceau, and Woodrow Wilson in Versailles.