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Rough Draft

Following the conclusion of World War I, both soldiers and citizens of Europe, who had endured wretched conditions for the past five years, were eager to make peace and begin the rebuild of their continent. However, the egos of leaders and thirst for revenge stood between the war torn countries and a peaceful, cohesive Europe. While America sought to be gracious in victory and saw the value in a rebuilt Germany, both England and France desired harsh punishments and reparations for the damaged that they believed Germany had caused. Much to Germany's chagrin, France and England had their way and delighted in victory as the Treaty of Versailles was signed. Although, their celebration was premature because the lack of empathy and grace in victory were the very qualities that lead to the fiscal punishment and national humiliation in the Treaty of Versailles, and eventually, the second World War.

In the scope of recent, and well documented wars, there have been multiple cases where mercy has been shown between soldiers on the battlefield and even with famed general Erwin Rommel, but, in stark contrast, mercy is seldom seen within treaty negotiations. In spite of the tired groans from soldiers and citizens to just end the grueling wars of the early twentieth century, vindictive leaders have been hard pressed to sign treaties and make peace, allowing either, and in some cases both, their egos or imperialist desires to disrupt the peace talks. Most notably, the Treaty of Versailles that concluded World War I was not only unjust, but completely

one sided. In addition to the humiliation of assuming guilt for damages suffered in “The Great War”, Germany also had to sustain large amounts of territorial loss and nearly total disarmament. There was also the factor that Germany had no other choice than to sign, with its military depleted, a temperamental Kaiser abdicating the throne, and a weak provisional government in power, the nation was in shambles and needed to begin the process of rebuilding. Quite ironically, however, the treaty meant to establish peace and usher in a new era of post-war prosperity into Europe had the opposite effect. The harsh terms of the treaty stipulated that Germany would pay one hundred and thirty two billion gold marks in reparations and without coal producing regions, like the Saar region and Upper Silesia, that were now under foreign rule, the German economy was crippled and could not support its population. As expected, a financial crisis ensued and by 1933, a short 14 years after WWI, Adolf Hitler had preyed on the blossomed hatred and poverty sewn by the Treaty of Versailles, and risen to power. However, Germany was not the only country on the receiving end of unfair treaty sanctions, as just a few years earlier, they were in the driver’s seat of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. Before their fate was decided in the larger scope of the war, Germany was able to take advantage of Russia in the form of east european territory, as Russia sought to exit WWI in order to begin a civil war at home. The Germans dictated the terms of the majority of the treaty and received land that would eventually be lost in the Treaty of Versailles. It is rich with irony but also tragedy, because when the same mentality of aggression and vengefulness was applied to the Germans after WWI, it caused the economic collapse of a nation and the start of another world war.

The idea that men who were not involved in the front lines and did not fight are able to instigate and initiate a global conflict, and also seal the fate of the losing country seems

backwards and counterintuitive. Why were leaders seeking armistices and then act vindictive in treaty talks at the expense of a nation's welfare? The question is amplified by the fact that the economic repercussions of the two WWI treaties affected the ethnic groups whose territory was split and low class soldiers and their families more so than the signers of the treaty. As Herbert Hoover said about the end of WWI, "Peace is not made at the council table or by treaties, but in the hearts of men.", summing up the important lesson that even though it is enticing to exact revenge, it is better to win with grace in order to support the greater good.

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