

Class Set

Mini-Q Sample Essay: Non-Proficient What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

World War I killed millions of people but why? There were lots of reasons and most of them show up in the documents. One of them is colonialism. We can get rid of that reason right away because I visited colonial Williamsburg with my grandpa and it was really peaceful.

The first reason so many people died was alliances. These were big organizations of countries that fought together. One big one was for England and France who really didn't like Germany. They tried to blacken them out on their maps (Doc A).

Another reason was all the guns which people made in 1914. It's pretty clear if you don't have guns you can't fight which is my main point. Their guns weighed millions of pounds (Doc C). That's a lot of guns.

So that's pretty much it. Guns cause wars. Try fighting a war with your fists. I don't think you can do it.

Mini-Q Sample Essay: Basic Proficiency What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

At the end, no one was singing. World War I was one of history's great tragedies. It was fought for four long years between 1914 and 1918, and cost 10,000,000 lives and left 20,000,000 wounded. But what were the underlying causes of this war and the one main cause that stands out. The war had at least three significant causes – alliances, an arms race, and imperialism. Of these, colonialism was the most underlying.

Alliances were an important cause of war. When Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was assassinated in 1914 by a Serbian, Europe was divided into two giant alliances, the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, and the Triple Entente with England, France, and Russia (Doc A). When countries started pointing fingers at each other after the killing, war quickly happened (Doc B). Without the alliances, the killing could have stayed a local problem, not a world war.

A second big cause of World War I was the arms build-up. Total arms spending by the five big countries went from 140 million pounds in 1890 to 540 million pounds in 1914 (Doc C). The Germans were especially afraid of being the anvil and getting hammered by England, France, and Russia (Doc D). Arms cause war.

Alliances and arms were important but the main underlying cause of World War I was imperialism. Germany and Austria-Hungary were way behind England and France in getting colonies. In 1913 they trailed 17 million square miles of territory to about one million square miles (Doc F). Germany saw England as a giant octopus sucking up the resources of Africa (Doc E). Alliances and arms could help Germany get even, but the big deep problem was losing colonial resources to England and France. That's why you needed alliances and arms.

WWI had other causes like nationalism which led to the assassination of Ferdinand, but the big cause of the war was imperialism. Countries are made up of people and people are greedy. They want more and more. Sometimes, like in 1914, war results.

Mini-Q Sample Essay: Higher Proficiency What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

In the end, no one was singing. World War I lasted four long years from 1914 to November 1918. It was triggered by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. In a matter of one month events had spun out of control. By August 4, 1914, armies across Europe were squared off against each other. By late 1918, over 10,000,000 soldiers and civilians were dead and another 20,000,000 were wounded (BGE). It is important to try to understand the underlying cause of this tragedy. Along with nationalism, three basic causes were responsible: a network of alliances, a build-up of arms, and imperialism. It will further be argued that, of these, imperialism was the most important of all.

Alliances were a key contributor to the war. Europe was generally divided into two groups of nations. On the one side was the Triple Alliance – Germany, Austria-Hungary, and for a short time, Italy. On the other side was the Triple Entente – France, England, and Russia (Doc A). Once the conflict began and two nations were at war, the other nations were automatically pulled into the conflict due to their alliance agreements. Because of alliances, a regional conflict between Serbia and Austria-Hungary grew into a war that engulfed the whole continent. Alliances help explain the death of peace in Europe (Doc B).

A second cause of World War I was the arms build-up of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1890 total arms spending by Europe's big five powers – Germany, Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, and Russia – was about 140 million British pounds. Twenty-four short years later this spending had increased by two and one half times to 570 million pounds. Germany showed the greatest growth of all, nearly quadrupling their spending from 30 million to 120 million (Doc C). The German increase was no accident. As early as 1899, German leader Bernhard von Bulow announced that in the struggle for national survival Germany would have to choose whether to be "the hammer or the anvil" (Doc D). Germany clearly chose to be the hammer. True, an arms build-up can lead to something called deterrence. That is, countries might not want to fight if everyone is heavily armed. However, in Europe in 1914 it didn't work out that way. The stockpile of weapons made Europe a powder keg. All it took was the spark of an assassination in the Balkans to set off an explosion. Had there been no race to arms, the explosion might have been avoided.

While alliances and the arms build-up were important, they don't explain what drove European countries to take these measures. For the answer one must look hard at imperialism. By the late 19th century Europe had carved up much of the planet, especially in Africa and southern Asia. On the eve of the war in 1913 Britain controlled more than 12 million square miles of overseas possessions. France had over 4 million (Doc F). This clearly did not look like a good situation to Germany and Austria-Hungary, who had just over 1 million square miles of possessions between them. In other words, they trailed England and France 16 to 1. In fact, Germans saw England as a giant octopus, with its tentacles around the world sucking out the earth's resources (Doc E). Clearly arms and an alliance were necessary to fight this colonial monster. But arms and alliances were simply the means for dealing with the real problem. The real problem, the underlying problem, was the unequal distribution of the colonial pie.

In closing, it is important to repeat that there was no single cause behind the Great War. Nationalism, barely touched upon here, was a key factor. Alliances and arms we have discussed. But at the center of the horror, like a giant sea monster lurking in the depths of man's soul, was the greed of imperialism and the determination by the great powers to get, or keep, their piece of the pie.