

WWI Document Packet – France

Document 1

The following excerpt is from a book by the American historian Sidney Bradshaw Fay, entitled *Origins of the World War*. It focuses on the problem, long debated by historians, of fixing responsibility for the outbreak of World War 1. This issue is complicated. Everyone agrees that the murder of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand by a Bosnian patriot at Sarajevo was the incident that touched off the war, but there is little agreement about the underlying causes of the war or the ultimate responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities.

Fay's two-volume work on the causes of the war, first published in 1928, has stood the test of time and critical scholarship. To Professor Fay's credit is the fact that he waited until official records of events were available. In his first volume he explored the long-range causes of the war, extending his study far back into the 19th century. He devoted his entire second volume to the immediate causes of the war and examined in detail the responsibilities of each major party.

Questions:

1. In what way was each of the nations involved partly responsible for the outbreak of hostilities?
2. Do you agree with Fay's analysis of individual responsibility?

None of the powers wanted a European War. Their governing rulers and ministers, with very few exceptions, all foresaw that it must be a frightful struggle, in which the political results were not absolutely certain, but in which the loss of life, suffering, and economic consequences were bound to be terrible.

Nevertheless, a European War broke out. Why? Because in each country political and military leaders did certain things which led to mobilizations and declarations of war, or failed to do certain things which might have prevented them. In this sense, all the European countries, in a greater or less degree, were responsible. One must abandon the dictum of the Versailles Treaty that Germany and her allies were solely responsible. It was a dictum exacted by victors from vanquished, under the influence of the blindness, ignorance, hatred, and the propagandist misconceptions to which war had given rise. It was based on evidence which was incomplete and not always sound. It is generally recognized by the best historical scholars in all countries to be no longer tenable or defensible. They are agreed that the responsibility for the War is a divided responsibility. But they still disagree very much as to the relative part of this responsibility that falls on each country and on each individual political or military leader.

Some writers like to fix positively in some precise mathematical fashion the exact responsibility for the war. This was done in one way by the framers of Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles. It has been done in other ways by those who would fix the responsibility in some relative fashion, as, for instance, Austria first, then Russia, France and Germany and England. But the present writer deprecates such efforts to assess by a precise formula a very complicated question, which is after all more a matter of delicate shading than of definite white and black. . . . Moreover, even supposing that

a general consensus of opinion might be reached as to the relative responsibility of any individual country or man for immediate causes connected with the July crisis of 1914, it is by no means necessarily true that the same relative responsibility would hold for the underlying causes, which for years had been tending toward the creation of a dangerous situation.

One may, however, sum up very briefly the most salient facts in regard to each country.

Document 2

The part of France is less clear than that of the other Great Powers, because she has not yet made a full publication other documents. To be sure, M. Poincare {president of France, Raymond Poincare}, in the fourth volume of his memoirs, has made a skilful and elaborate plea, to prove *La France innocente*. But he is not convincing.

It is quite clear that on his visit to Russia he assured the Tsar's Government that France would support her as an ally in preventing Austria from humiliating or crushing Serbia. Paleologue [Maurice Paleologue, French ambassador to Russia] renewed these assurances in a way to encourage Russia to take a strong hand. He did not attempt to restrain Russia from military measures which he knew would call forth German counter-measures and cause war. Nor did he keep his Government promptly and fully informed of the military steps which were being taken at St. Petersburg. President Poincare, upon his return to France, made efforts for peace, but his great preoccupation was to minimize French and Russian preparatory measures and emphasize those of Germany, in order to secure the certainty of British support in a struggle which he now regarded as inevitable.