History Formal Essay:

Compare and Contrast World War I and World War II

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Warfare has remained a part of human societies and civilizations since time immemorial. Human cultures have undergone dramatic changes as a result of both internal and external wars that led to their independence, expansion or development. However, in modern human history, no wars have been as brutal and ruthless as the two World Wars which left nearly the entire world devastated. Those who had lived through both wars saw a number of similarities, yet the two wars still differ considerably, especially in terms of their aftermath and causes. The essay compares and contrasts the two World Wars in terms of their causes, after-effects and overall impact on each side of the conflict.

The causes that triggered both the wars were fairly different. World War I emerged from an assassination event in June of 1914 when France Ferdinand, the Archduke of Austria was murdered. In contrast, the second World War emerged from the aftermath of the first that had created political and economic instability; the Treaty of Versailles that was born out of World War 1 served as a leading cause. Resentment in Germany as a result of the treaty’s terms became a critical factor that coupled with ideological clashes, such as between Fascism and Communism, characterized the second World War.

Although both wars were known for the devastation and utter destruction they brought, World War 2 led to the deaths of nearly 60 million people, almost 33 million higher casualties than World War 1. Nearly 38-55 million deaths were civilian casualties from direct and indirect causes associated with the war. The first World War led to 10 million military, and 7 million civilian casualties, with another 21 million people wounded[[1]](#footnote-1). A primary reason for the difference was the advanced machinery and technology used in the Second World War compared to the first which was fought with machine guns, flamethrowers, and tanks, for the first time. The attacks that ended World War 2, however, surpassed from anything mankind had created in terms of destruction; the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima[[2]](#footnote-2).

One way in which the two wars were similar was how both involved civilian participation in unprecedented ways. The warring sides in both wars would not distinguish between the citizens or the military of an opposing nation. Everyone and anyone could be a target. World War 2, in particular, saw bombing other nations from the air as a vital tactic of war regardless of whether the targets were women or children. A general disregard for life was common despite the fact that all parties to World War 2 had already experienced the devastation that a global war could bring. In terms of mobility of resources, weapons, and military, extensive use of artillery and machine guns along with poisonous gas was seen, but the mobility of these weapons remained limited. In contrast, World War 2 saw the use of aerial bombings, missile attacks, and nuclear power. Furthermore, both wars saw military tactics supplemented by the use of propaganda against the enemy to undermine their image and support war efforts in home countries. It would not only be used to keep the spirits high and create public cohesion but to confuse the opposing nation. Although each side to the conflict suffered casualties, propaganda helped muster public support for the war and helped divert public anger towards the adversary.

The two World Wars differed in terms of outcomes. World War 1 ended with the formation of the League of Nations which was a joint organization intended to serve as a peace-building initiative among different nations. Pre-war alliances led to the formation of new countries as more nations joined the League[[3]](#footnote-3). Conversely, World War 2 saw the disintegration of a number of countries that participated in the war along with public executions of people accused of war crimes. Notable empires such as the British, Dutch and the French empires ended with the second World War, just as the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires had collapsed in first War. A similar aspect to the conflict was the emergence of conflicts between nation-states in which people belonging to different religions and ethnicities would find themselves on the same side in contrast with earlier wars in which one ethnic nation or religion would battle the other for domination.

The end of World War 1 saw the rise of Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party rise to prominence in the wake of intense German resentment against the terms and conditions, perceived as unfair, in the Treaty of Versailles. Thus, in many ways, the occurrence of the Second World War could be attributed to the first World War. In Contrast, World War 2 ended with newer conflicts emerging between capitalism and communism which soon manifested into a Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and would last until 1991. The aftermath of the war was a bi-polar world in which both these powers found themselves locked in a political, military, economic and cultural competition to demonstrate superiority[[4]](#footnote-4).

In conclusion, the two World Wars impacted modern human history at an unprecedented level. Both of these post-industrial wars saw the immense and industrial-scale mobilization of human, economic and military resources that involved multiple nations engaging each other. Germany and its militarism remained central to both wars; however, the aftermath of the two wars was different. Many countries disintegrated after World War 2 and led to conflicts emerging in the new bi-polar world it created.

# Bibliography

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2. Compton, Karl T. 2016. *If the Atomic Bomb Had Not Been Used 1946.* Vol. 2, in *For the Record: A Documentary History of America*, 290-233. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
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