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How was the world changed by the First World War?

The First World War, also known as the Great War, was a global war which lasted from August 1914 until November 1918. It started in Central Europe and involved eventually 32 countries worldwide. This war conjures up images of wasted youth and thousands of young men walking into machine gun fire. Nevertheless their struggle was not worthless: the First World War created in spite of its brutality and destructiveness many beneficial elements for the start of the modern era and today's society.

One of those profitable effects is the change of women's status in society. Due to men's absence during the First World War, this period represents a turnaround for most of European women's emancipation movements. While men rushed to the battlefields to defend their home country, women had to move into a lot of traditionally male professions. That's why they began to receive a certain degree of self-reliance and independence, which had been inconceivable before this war. For instance shortly after the war ended a lot of countries which were involved in the First World War granted women the right to vote. This includes Great Britain, Germany and the United States.¹

But not just the relationship between men and women changed because of the First World War. The relationships between the countries which were involved in this

¹ William R. Keylor, B.A., M.A., Ph.D. "World War I." *Encarta, Online Encyclopedia 2001*. 9 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.is.wayne.edu/mnissani/WWI/encarta.htm>>

war changed as well: the Great War laid the foundation of highly important commonwealths such as the United Nations. This international organization for instance was founded in 1945 after the Second World War and consists nowadays of 193 member states. Those states commit fundamental issues including developing friendly relations among the nations and maintaining international peace and security. As a result of the Paris Peace Conference which ended the Great War, the League of Nations was the first permanent international organization whose primary goal was to uphold world peace. This included settling international disputes through negotiation and arbitration as well as preventing wars through collective security and disarmament. Despite a number of notable successes in the 1920s the League of Nations finally broke up when it was incapable to prevent the Second World War and failed thereby its primary goal.² As mentioned before the League of Nations was replaced by other commonwealths after World War II and today's society still benefits from it.

But these were not the only beneficial effects. Furthermore monarchy came to an end in several countries such as in Russia where monarchy was replaced by communism or in Germany where after the National Socialism as a form of governing democracy was established.³ This was one step to modern life due to the fact that monarchy is an outdated form of governing because people get no chance to co-create policy.

Nevertheless it's obvious that a war is always cruel and has also unfavorable effects. The First World War led to a widespread social trauma of which many involved countries suffered from and those people who had fought on the battlefields

² Wikipedia contributors. "League of Nations." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 9 Sept. 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations>

³ Pinkmonkey contributors. "The Impact of the First World War." *PinkMonkey*. 9 Sept. 2012. <http://www.pinkmonkey.com/studyguides/subjects/euro_his/chap4/e0404601.asp>

were seen as the Lost Generation. Many soldiers returned suffering from serious traumata and shell shock, which is a condition associated with posttraumatic stress disorder.⁴ The way people looked on the world has changed forever. Americans for instance had to face the tragedy of disabled soldiers and such cruelty for the first time since the Civil War.⁵ There was also a newfound disrespect for the elderly, because many young people saw them as the war's causers.⁶

The brutality of the First World War claimed 15 million people's lives and destroyed the faith in science and the belief in humanity. It involved not just armies and navies but entire populations and was the first big dispute between modern, industrialized countries. After the war the economic structure of the world changed. The Great War led to the downfall of the Old Europe and the loss of power of the European countries in favour of the USA. The cost of war in France, Great Britain and other involved countries put them into debt and raised America's economic power in the world.

In summary it can be said, therefore, that the First World War resulted in massive economic, political, social and cultural changes. Whole generations of youth were traumatized by the distress of the Great War, whilst their countries struggled to

⁴ Gomez Gomez. "The political, economic, social and cultural consequences of World War I." *Helium*. 11 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.helium.com/items/215016-the-political-economic-social-and-cultural-consequences-of-world-war-i?page=4>>

⁵ George Ivanov. "The political, economic, social and cultural consequences of World War I." *Helium*. 11 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.helium.com/items/779500-the-political-economic-social-and-cultural-consequences-of-world-war-i?page=2>>

⁶ Lenna Gonya. "The political, economic, social and cultural consequences of World War I." *Helium*. 11 Sept. 2012. <<http://www.helium.com/items/1668629-the-political-social-economic-and-cultural-consequences-of-world-war-one>>

recover from the serious economic downturns that resulted from this war.

Nevertheless some things would be different today without the First World War as mentioned before. Women's role in society would not be the same today and it is uncertain whether there would have been such a strong emancipation movement or not. This is mainly because men would have been still at home and not on the battlefields at the beginning of the 20th century. There would have been no need for women to move into traditionally male professions and no need to grant women the right to vote. Furthermore the League of Nations was one result of the Great War and it is also not sure if there would have been such a commonwealth without the occurrence of this war. This commonwealth laid the foundation for other really important commonwealths of today's society from which people still benefit and helped because of its pioneering role to develop friendly relations among the nations and to maintain international peace and security. Moreover the hegemonic structures began to change after the war's end. It is uncertain if monarchy would have come to an end in many countries and democracy would have been established without this war.

A war always makes a mark on the world and people should try to take advantage of it no matter how cruel it was. People can't change what happened in the past but they can try to do better in the future.