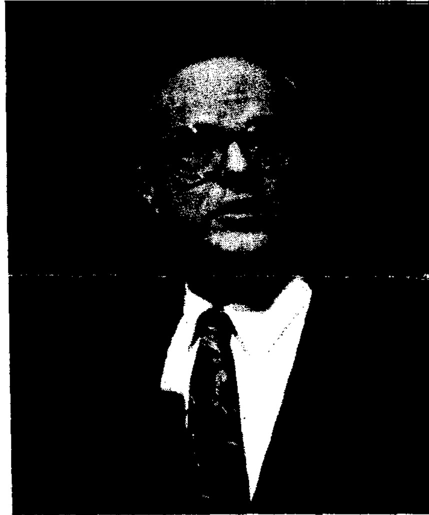
"Slouching Toward Catastrophe: 1914-1939" *by George H. Nash, Author, Presidential Biographer*

Preview: *The year 1992 marks the 50th anniversary of **America's entry into** World War II, the most titanic struggle in human history. Nearly **every nation and every peo**ple were involved. **When** it was over, more than 50 million soldiers and civilians were dead, as were whole **nations** whose borders would be redrawn in the succeeding era. It **came, ironically enough, on the heels of** another war, the one that was to be "the war to end all wars." In reality, however, World War I was only a dress rehearsal for a far more cataclysmic event. Here, historian George Nash explains why. His remarks were delivered during the Center for **Constructive Alternatives seminar, "America's Entry into** World War II," **in** November 1991.*

Seventy-three years ago, the First World War ended in Europe. The armistice took effect at eleven o'clock in the morning—the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month: a symbolic acknowledgement that European civilization had come close to irreversible ruin.

The Great War, as men and women then called it, had been a conflict like none other in history. It had begun in the summer of 1914, when 20,000,000 European men had put on their uniforms, boarded trains, and headed off to preassigned battle stations. At the time, the British foreign secretary had remarked, "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime." The men who marched believed, as the German Kaiser and others promised, that they would be home "before the leaves fell." Instead, *they* fell, in dark, unimaginable encounters like the battle of Verdun, which lasted for ten months and took 850,000 French and German lives. They fell in battles like that of the Somme, on whose very first day (July 1, 1916) the British army



suffered 60,000 casualties, including 20,000 dead. By the time "the war to end wars" ceased, 10,000,000 people had died. In its final months a great pandemic of Spanish influenza swept over much of an exhausted globe. By the time the scourge subsided, 20,000,000 more people had died, including half a million in the United States.

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Less than a quarter of a century later, the Great War had its name changed. Now a numeral—number I—was affixed, as nations embarked upon a second and even more titanic struggle, rightly described as "the largest single event in human history." Fifty million people died before it ended; nearly half of them were civilians. In the United States alone, more than 12,000,000 men and women wore uniforms.

In duration, scale of combat, the expanse of theaters of operations, the number of casual-ties, and physical damage, the Second World War clearly dwarfed the First. But the *psychic* wounds of the earlier war, it seems to me, went deeper, and it is this dimension that I wish to explore this afternoon. It is not my purpose today to chronicle the diplomatic maneuvering that culminated in the German assault on Poland in 1939 or the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor two years later. Still less is it my purpose systematically to analyze the immediate origins, both great and small, of those events. I propose instead to examine some of the ways in which the experience of the *First* World War affected the coming of the Second. You may ask why I do so. Because, in the words of the British historian A.J.P. Taylor: "The first war explains the second and, in fact, caused it, in so far as one event causes another." We cannot fully understand the horrific conflagration of 1939-1945 unless we fathom some of the psy-chological and intellectual impulses that the

earlier war released and that then shaped the consciousness of Europe and America for twenty years.

The Trench

Every war produces its distinctive engravings on our collective memory. Consider the recent Persian Gulf war, for example: Who among us will ever forget the television pictures of Patriot missiles intercepting SCUDs, or the clip of General Schwartzkopf scorning Saddam Hussein's pretensions to military greatness? Look back now to the Second World War; what images arise? Hitler shrieking before a Nazi Party rally; Churchill defiant against the enemy; bombs falling over London during the Blitz; the rubble of Stalingrad; the beaches of Normandy; Pearl Harbor; Hiroshima; Auschwitz. When we search for mental pictures of the First World War, however, I suspect that most of us will think of only one: a trench. This remains the dominant symbol of the Great War—a fact that tells much about that war and about what came after it.

From the autumn of 1914 until the autumn of 1918, the armies of the Allies and of Germany faced each other in a labyrinth of trenches stretching in parallel for more than four hundred miles from the English Channel, across Belgium and France, to the Swiss frontier. On each side the trenches were of three kinds: frontline trenches, theoretically six to eight feet deep (or more) and four to five feet wide, and sometimes only forty yards from the enemy; support trenches a few hundred yards back; and reserve trenches farther back still. Connecting these three rows were communication trenches that ran at right angles to them.

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In all, the belligerents constructed approximately 25,000 miles of trenches—enough, if laid end to end, to encircle the globe. In these dismal, often wet, rat-infested, lice-packed tunnels, several million men spent the war. Between them lay a desolate shell-marked quagmire filled with barbed wire and known as No Man's Land.

For nearly four years the competing armies tried to break out of the ghastly stalemate—by going "over the top" and attempting to rout the enemy. Nothing worked. Millions died or were wounded without militarily significant results. The combatants tried shelling each other in order to destroy the barbed wire and force the evacuation of the opposing trenches. At the battle of the Somme the British fired 1,700,000 artillery shells before the charge began. The principal effect was to make it impossible for their infantry to advance quickly through the churned-up mud. Almost always it was the attackers who lost more men. Secure in his own redoubts, the enemy had only to wait until the opposing soldiers abandoned their shelters and tried to slog across No Man's Land. If the enemy's return bombardment did not mow them down, his machine guns did. The machine gun was the great defensive weapon of World War I.

Herbert Hoover, at the time an American engineer who directed an unprecedented international relief program in German-occupied Belgium during the war, witnessed one of these battles from a vantage point behind German lines. He never forgot what he saw:

> "We motored for several hours to a point near a hilltop observation post in the forest, a distance back from the for-ward trenches and a mile or two away from the main roads. During the last few miles an occasional shell cracked nearby but the ingenious camouflage of the road—to the extent of a false parallel—seemed to give protection to our route. At the post the constant rumble of artillery seemed to pulverize the air. Seen through powerful glasses, in the distant view lay the unending blur of trenches, of volcanic explosions of dust which filled the air where over a length of sixty miles a million and a half men were fighting and dying. Once in a while, like ants, the lines of men seemed to show through the clouds of dust. Here under the thunder and belching volcanoes of 10,000 guns, over the months of this battle, the lives of Germans and Englishmen were thrown away. On the nearby road unending lines of Germans plodded along the right side to the front, not with drums and bands, but in the silence of sodden resignation. Down the left side came the unending lines of wounded men, the 'walking cases' staggering among cavalcades of ambulances. A quarter of a million men died and it was but one battle in that war.
>
> "The horror of it all did not in the least affect the German officers in the post. To them it was pure mechanics. Not one of the Germans showed the slightest anxiety. They said that the British were losing two to one—butting their heads against a stone wall. And that was true. It was all a horrible, devastating reality, no romance, no glory."

Hoover's reaction was representative. The experience of the trenches became for many the dominant memory of the war—the abiding symbol of unutterable horror and waste. In the 1920s, after the euphoria of Armistice Day had long since passed away, a mood of disillusionment with the war took hold in many sectors of European and American life. It spread from the "lost generation" of European soldiers, unable to readjust to civilian occupations, on to poets, painters and novelists. It was reflected in artistic phenomena like the nihilistic Dada movement and surrealism (the very word *surrealism* was invented by a French poet and soldier in 1917). It was evident in the cultural despair that eventuated, among other things, in the French existentialism of the late 1930s. We can detect it, too, in the frenetic hedonism that Americans associate with the Roaring Twenties; in the early novels of Fitzgerald, Faulkner and Hemingway; in the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon and the early T. S. Eliot (whose poem *The Wasteland* became another symbol of the age); and in the febrile decadence of late Weimar Germany, so effectively conveyed in the movie *Cabaret.*

Nowhere, perhaps, was the perceived futility of the war more shockingly depicted than in the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front,* written by a German veteran, Erich Maria Remarque, and published in 1929. There is no glory or grandeur in this tale. It is a story of endless death without meaning. Visiting a hospital full of wounded soldiers, the narrator is

Historian George Nash's study of conservatism prior to the Reagan years, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Basic Books, 1976, reissued in paperback by Harper & Row, 1979), has since become a standard reference for students, scholars and policymakers. While a research fellow at Harvard in 1973-74, he was co-editor of *Province in Rebellion,* a four-volume history of the coming of the American Revolution in Massachusetts, and in 1975 he was commissioned by the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association to prepare a definitive, multivolume biography of the former president. *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Engineer, 1874-1914 (W. W.* Norton & Co.) was published in 1983, and *The Life of Herbert Hoover: The Humanitarian, 1914-1917 (W. W.* Norton & Co.) appeared in 1988. He is currently at work on a third volume. Dr. Nash's articles and reviews have appeared in such publications as the *Wall Street Journal, National Review, the Journal of American History, Modern Age,* the *American Spectator, Continuity,* the *Catholic Historical Review,* and *Policy Review.* ***4***

driven to suggest that Western civilization has no worth:

> "How senseless is everything that can ever be written, done, or thought, when such things are possible. It must be all lies and of no account when the culture of a thousand years could not prevent this stream of blood being poured out, these torture-chambers in their hundreds of thousands. A hospital alone shows what war is."

Remarque's novel was intended to be the *cri de coeur* of the "lost generation." Critics hailed it as "the truth about the war." In just fifteen months it sold **3,500,000 copies in sever-al languages—a record without precedent in several centuries of book publishing.**

Disillusionment Among the Victors

All Quiet on the Western Front **undoubted-**ly abetted a wave of pacifistic revulsion that peaked in the early 1930s in the principal countries that won the war. This sentiment had some curious manifestations. In the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, for instance, sixty-two nations, including the United States, the Soviet Union, and Germany, solemnly renounced war "as an instrument of national policy in their relations with one another," and pledged instead to settle all their disputes only by "pacific means." To some enthusiasts it appeared that the signatories had "outlawed war." The treaty contained no provision for enforcement; it was hoped that public opinion would deter violations. In 1933 the Oxford Union—a prestigious undergraduate debating society comprising the future political leaders of Great Britain—resolved "That this House refuses in any circumstances to fight for King and Country." The vote precipitated a national uproar and may have encouraged Adolf Hitler to believe that the British would not resist his expansionism. In the United States in 1934, a sensational investigation led by Senator Gerald Nye purported to discover that leading American bankers and arms dealers—the so-called "merchants of death"—had maneuvered Woodrow Wilson into entering World War I in order to save their ill-gotten profits and loans to the Allied governments. The Nye Committee hearings helped to persuade many Americans that they should never have fought in the Great War at all and that they should now withdraw from entanglements with an incorrigible Europe. One result was Congressional passage of neutrality laws designed to keep America out of the Old World's quarrels.

By portraying the war as a pointless exercise in brutality, *All Quiet on the Western Front* also may have strengthened the growing appeal of historical revisionists, who argued that Germany was not solely responsible for the terrible conflict. But if this were true—if the war in fact had no decisive moral content—then were not all the combatant nations morally equivalent? And if that were so, how could the winners object to Germany's campaign in the 1930s to subvert and ultimately repudiate the Treaty of Versailles? The pacifist mood in the Allied nations helped to shift the burden of guilt (or at least of doubt) from the vanquished to the victors, thereby inhibiting willingness to rearm.

Revenge Among the Defeated

And now we come to a sobering complica-tion: not everyone who witnessed the carnage of World War I regarded it as the ultimate evil. If the war experience and its aftermath at Versailles induced disillusionment in the victo-rious Allies, the specific terms of the settlement evoked in the defeated Germans a profound resentment and thirst for revenge. Not only did the hated treaty oblige Germany to acknowledge her guilt for starting the war—an admission that, however true, seemed manifestly unfair—it also deprived Germany of all her colonies, nearly half of her iron production, 13 percent of her prewar territory, and 12 percent

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of her population. It also reduced her army to a mere 100,000 men, forbade it to possess tanks or airplanes, and required the Germans to pay immense reparations to the Allies. And it divided the German state of Prussia by permitting the new country of Poland a so-called "corridor" to the Baltic Sea.

Historians still debate whether the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh. What strikes *this* histo-rian is the tremendous gap that ordinary Germans perceived between their circumstances on the battlefield at the time of the Armistice and the final provisions of the Treaty eight months later. In November 1918, when the fighting ceased, Germany was not a conquered nation. In fact, she had just won the war in the East and had compelled her enemy, Russia, to cede vast territories at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. On the western front, at the Armistice, the German army was in retreat, but it had not been destroyed as a fighting force. In fact, at the ceasefire on November 11 it still stood on foreign soil. The Kaiser's army had definitely lost the war in the West (hence the German request for an armistice). But except for certain generals and high government offi-cials, the German *people* did not *know* that they had been beaten. Thus the ultimate terms of the Versailles treaty, when they were promul-gated several months later, appeared to most Germans to be unbelievably punitive and incommensurate with the result of the contest of arms. This perception was false, but it per-mitted Adolf Hitler and many others, including German army leaders who knew better, to foment the insidious legend of "the stab in the back": that is, the claim that Germany had not been defeated on the battlefield but had instead been betrayed from within. By whom? By the "November criminals" who had demanded an armistice and then acquiesced in the draconian treaty. By the socialists, the Communists, the Jews, and all who supported the Weimar republic created out of the ashes of defeat. "Down with the perpetrators of the November crime," Hitler said in one of his early speeches. "We must not forget that between us and those betrayers of the people [the Weimar govern-ment]...there are two million dead." For Hitler and countless other Germans, the war itself had not been meaningless. Rather, an unjust and humiliating peace had deprived them of their land, freedom, property, and their place in the sun.

So Hitler clamored untiringly for vengeance, for repudiation of Versailles and the noxious European order built upon it. Germany must rise again. He was not alone in his hate. The general sentiment was shared by most of his countrymen. In 1929 the German government declared June 28—the tenth anniversary of the treaty—to be a day of nation-al mourning.

Thus were set in motion two conflicting streams of consciousness—and a deep, almost fatal dissonance between Allied guilt and German revanchism. For many in the Allied nations, the peace that followed the First World War was not good enough to justify the sacri-fices in the trenches. For all too many Germans, the peace seemed worse than the war. In 1933, only months after the "best and the brightest" Oxford students were pledging never to fight for king or country, the new Nazi government seized and destroyed copies of *All Quiet on the Western Front. At* the University of Berlin, it was tossed into a bonfire. As a Nazi student did so, he said, "Down with the literary betrayal of the soldiers of the world war! In the name of educating our people in the spirit of

valor, I commit the writings of Erich Maria Remarque to the flames."

The Great War did more than generate disillusionment, cultural pessimism, and pacifism among the victors, and kindle a desire for retaliation among the defeated Germans. It also encouraged military planners to devise new modes of warfare so that when the *next* war came there would be no wanton squandering of lives in a maze of impenetrable trenches. During the First World War, the British had actually invented such a weapon–the tank–but had used it hesitantly and ineffectively. In the next war, tanks would be infinitely more prominent. During the Twenties and Thirties military men, especially in Germany, developed air power–another alternative to the trench–to a point that many predicted the incineration of entire cities in the first hours of any new conflict. In this area, as in other realms of technology, the Nazis pioneered. Trench warfare, Hitler declared, was "degenerate"; air warfare, he said, was a Germanic way to fight.

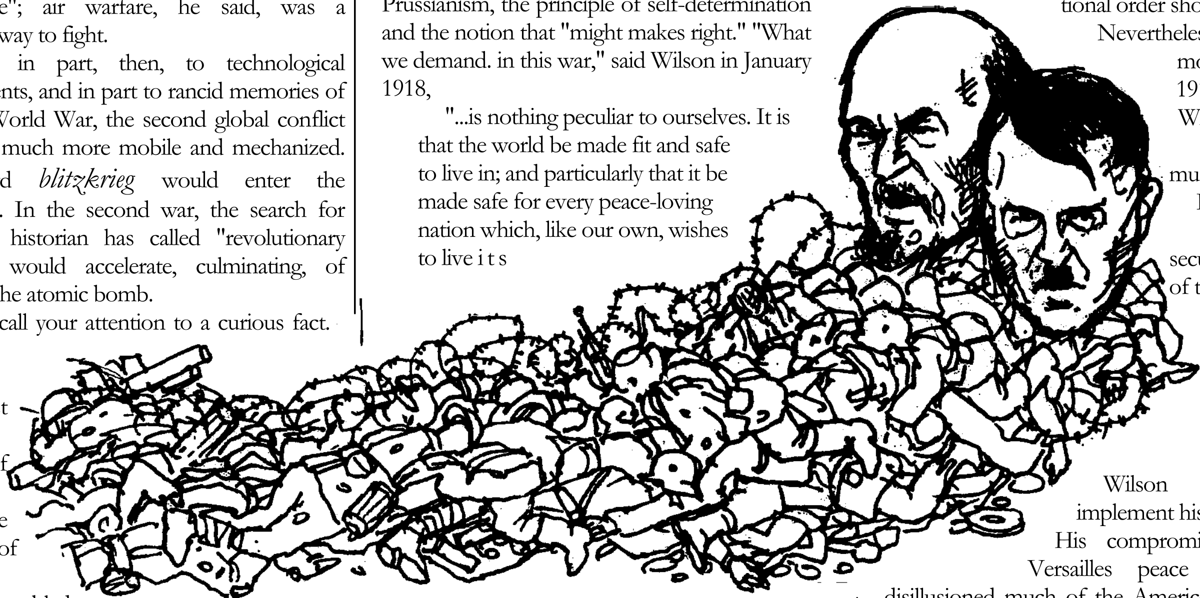
Thanks in part, then, to technological developments, and in part to rancid memories of the First World War, the second global conflict was to be much more mobile and mechanized. The word *blitzkrieg* would enter the vocabulary. In the second war, the search for what one historian has called "revolutionary weapons" would accelerate, culminating, of course, in the atomic bomb.

Here I call your attention to a curious fact. In certain respects the last great battle of World War II–the battle of Okinawa–most resembled the grim encounters on the Western front in World War I. On this Pacific Ocean island, almost eighty miles long, invading American soldiers had to go "over the top"–that is, from the exposed sandy beaches where they went ashore up into the rugged hills and mountains, where desperate Japanese had entrenched themselves in tunnels, caves and other well-guarded fortifications. The American army and marines had to advance upon ridge after ridge, defended by Japanese fighting with manic ferocity. In the end, 35 percent of the American army troops and marines who fought at Okinawa were killed or wounded. One hundred ten thousand Japanese soldiers died–many by suicide–rather than suffer the humiliation of surrender. This enormous loss of life and the fanatical character of the Japanese resistance convinced American military leaders that the impending invasion of the Japanese home islands would cost the American army a million casualties. This was a principal reason for the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. For American soldiers there would be no repetition of the slaughter, twenty-seven years before, in northern France.

Clash of Ideologies

Let me return to the experience of 1914-1918 and certain other of its consequences. The First World War began as a clash of empires. It ended amidst a clash of ideologies. One of these was liberal, democratic internationalism, propounded by its prophet, Woodrow Wilson. "The world must be made safe for democracy," he proclaimed in his address asking Congress to declare war. For many Americans the struggle became a transcendent contest, not between governments, but between principles: between democracy and autocracy, democracy and Prussianism, the principle of self-determination and the notion that "might makes right." "What we demand. in this war," said Wilson in January 1918,

> "...is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world as against force and selfish aggression."



> "The First World War began as a clash of empires. It ended amidst a clash of ideologies."

After listing fourteen components of a just settlement (his soon-to-be famous "Fourteen Points"), the President concluded that a single transcendent principle undergirded them: "It is the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak. Unless this principle be made its foundation no part of the structure of international justice can stand." The current war, he declared, was "the culminating and final war for human liberty." Americans, he said, were ready to give everything to vindicate the principle for which they fought.

In the words of Woodrow Wilson's preeminent biographer, the Fourteen Points address was "the single great manifesto of World War I." Here was a vision that seemed to redeem the frightful slaughter and beckon mankind to a truly better world. Not everyone was carried away by Wilson's eloquence, however. The crusty old French premier Clemenceau–of whom it was said that he had one illusion (France) and one disillusion (mankind) was one. Of the Fourteen Points, he remarked, "The good Lord had only ten." Clemenceau and other Allied statesmen had their own, less lofty conceptions of what the postwar international order should become.

Nevertheless, for a brief moment in late 1918 and 1919, Wilson was acclaimed in much of Europe as a veritable secular savior of the world. Of course, we all know what happened next: Wilson failed to implement his vision. His compromises at the Versailles peace conference disillusioned much of the American Left. His abstract professorial universalism disturbed the American Right. Nevertheless, Wilson's fundamental principle of the self-determination of peoples remained potent. It became one of the enduring revolutionary legacies of World War I–indeed, one of the catalytic doctrines of the twentieth century. (Just a few months ago it provided part of the rationale for the American liberation of Kuwait.)

Unfortunately, not all the ideologies that emerged from the cauldron of the Great War were so altruistic in their intentions. Two of them, alas, were demonic. They were, in fact, ideologies not of peacemaking but of struggle.

The first of these–revolutionary Marxism–was not new; it had been around for more than half a century. But in the hands of V.I. Lenin it now became more than a coffee house theory. Lenin had never been in the trenches. He had spent much of the war in exile in Switzerland plotting–at the time it seemed

futilely—against the Czar. While he condemned the Great War as an imperialistic adventure and exploited weariness with it to the hilt, he had no aversion to violence per se. He merely sought a different kind of violence—an international working class uprising against the bourgeoisie. *Then,* he believed, global harmony would come. Woodrow Wilson wanted the First World War to *end* war; Lenin wanted an even greater war first.

Once he seized power, the Bolshevik leader implemented his conception of politics-as-war with all-encompassing ruthlessness. Long before he became master of Russia, he had said: "In principle we have never renounced terror and cannot renounce it." For Lenin only one question mattered: "We'll ask the man, where do you stand on the question of the revolution? Are you for it or against it? If he's against it, we'll stand him up against a wall." Let no one ever tell you that the Gulag Archipelago originated with Josef Stalin. Within months of the Bolshevik coup in November 1917, Lenin himself and his willing cohorts had created a secret police, had established embryonic concentration camps, and had instituted an unending wave of political executions. In January 1918 he personally ordered the departments of his government to "purge the Russian land of all kinds of harmful insects." This was not hyperbole; he meant it. By the time of his death in 1924, Lenin had willfully and remorselessly created an unparalleled system of internal warfare against his own people. And thus, out of the maw of the "the war to end wars," there arose a hideous new form of warfare: perpetual institutionalized terror against one's own citizens, even to the point of exterminating them. We now call it totalitarianism.

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In this connection, I will never forget a conversation that I had in graduate school with some fellow students, one of them a Marxist who resolutely defended the Soviet Union. Finally, an exasperated friend of mine asked: what about Stalin's liquidation of the *kulaks,* the enterprising peasants who were killed by the millions in the early 1930s? The Marxist replied simply: "They never should have existed as a class."

Leninism was a beneficiary, though not a direct product, of the war in the trenches. To a significant degree, the other ideological demon unleashed by the war was. I refer, of course, to the phenomenon of Nazism. If for the Allies and the United States the ultimate lesson of the trench experience was "No more war," and if for Lenin and the Bolsheviks the lesson was *"One* more war," for Adolf Hitler the fundamental meaning of 1914-1918 was different. Unlike Lenin, Hitler had been a denizen of the trenches. For about four years he fought on the Western front and found the experience to be the most gratifying of his life. What was *not* satisfying to him was its ending.

Historians have noted many similarities between Bolshevism and Nazism, and between their respective founding fathers. Like Lenin, Hitler was a revolutionary and a self-proclaimed socialist, although his variant was called "national socialism" rather than international. Like Lenin, Hitler was anti-Christian and totally without moral scruples. Like Lenin, he conceived of politics in military terms and instituted an apparatus of state violence never before seen on earth. But whereas for Leninists the meaning of existence was *class* struggle, for Nazis the engine of history was *racial* struggle. In short, and, again, as other historians have observed, Hitler's world view was a form of Social Darwinism—the notion, put crudely, of "the survival of the fittest." For Hitler and his followers, the essence of social

evolution was not economic but ethnic.

We need not linger over the odious contents of Nazi ideology: the idea that Germans or "Aryans"" were the "master race" who should dominate the world; that Slays were inferior and must become slaves; that the German *Volk* needed *lebensraum* in the East, all the way to Iran; that the Jews (in Hitler's word) were "vermin" who must be destroyed. Nor need we do more than take note of the fact that for millions of German war veterans and others, Nazi symbolism–the uniforms, the parades, the salutes, the flags, the regimented rallies at night–recreated what was called "the community of the trenches." In a sense, Hitler wanted to renew World War I. But what deceived many in the West was the belief that all he wanted was to reverse the inequities of Versailles and to restore the German nation to prominence in Europe. Transfixed by the trench experience, many could not imagine that Hitler desired all *that—and much more.*

I do not wish to imply that the racism inherent in Hitler's brand of socialism was somehow peculiar to central Europe in the two decades between the world wars. Racial stereotyping was not new, nor was it confined to the Old World. Many Americans, for example, despised and discriminated against Japanese immigrants. Many Japanese boasted of their racial "purity," asserted their "divine mission" to rule over Asia, referred to the Chinese as "chinks," and yearned for the day when, as one of their admirals put it, they "could return Admiral Perry's visit." No, ethnic chauvinism was neither new nor localized. What *was* different after 1918 was that in a number of so-called "have-not" countries, attitudes of racial superiority become transmogrified into "armed doctrines"—rationales for genocide and war without pity.

The First World War, then, gave birth to the Ideological Age. Perhaps this outcome was inevitable in the aftermath of perceived civilizational collapse. Most political ideologies, after all, aim in some way to remake the world. What else but a "purified" world could erase the memory of the bloodletting of the Great War?

In the movie *Cabaret* there is a chilling scene in which a fair-haired German youth sings to a crowd at an outdoor restaurant in the waning days of Weimar. As the camera turns, we see that he is wearing a Nazi uniform and swastika on his armband. He is cheerful. He is confident. His song ends with the words: "Tomorrow belongs to me." This, too, was part of the allure of the two evil ideologies that laid siege to Europe's soul after the Armistice. Yesterday, the war; today, corruption and shame; but "tomorrow belongs to me." This is the false promise of all totalitarians: that the future will atone for the crimes committed in its name.

Conclusion

This has been, of necessity, a somber lecture, and it has not been possible to consider all the intellectual and spiritual consequences of World War I. Other important phenomena of the period come to mind, such as the influence of wartime collectivism on the response of the United States and other countries to the Great Depression. Instead, my focus has been on the direct antecedents of World War II—specifically, the great currents of thought and sentiment that arose, at least in part, in reaction to the sense of futility and loss symbolized by trench warfare and the Versailles treaty: disillusionment, cultural despair, and pacifism among the war's winners; a "lost generation" and dreams of reprisal among the losers; a quest by military minds for alternatives to battlefield paralysis. And, in addition, three competing ideologies that attempted to interpret and transcend the war experience: liberal, democratic internationalism; Communism; and Nazism.

In the Second World War these three would clash, and the guardians of two of them would join to defeat the third. But that is a story for others to tell. For now, let me close with a line from William Butler Yeats. In his poem, "The Second Coming," published just a few years after the Armistice, he asked:

> "And what rough beast, its hour
> come round at last/Slouches towards
> Bethlehem to be born?"

The First World War produced more than its share of "rough beasts." It has taken the rest of this century to subdue them.

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