

June 28, 1919: The Treaty of Versailles, signed at the culmination of the six-month-long Paris Peace Conference, signaled the official end of World War I. The Treaty forced Germany to accept blame for the war, as well as controversially heavy reparation payments. Radical changes to the national borders of Europe and parts of Asia set in motion the concept of sovereignty that would soon disrupt the colonial empires of all the “Great Powers.” Versailles also provided for the creation of the League of Nations, to publicly arbitrate international conflicts before they lead to war, unlike the secret ententes of the past.



The “Big Three” (Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and Woodrow Wilson) and company at Versailles.

THE WAR TO END WARS

“The World War requires us to test all values.” —El Lisistky

WORLD WAR I had mobilized sixty-five million men: over eight million died, and twenty-one million returned wounded. Europe became obsessed with memorializing its “Lost Generation.”

“Those five years—1918 to 1923—had been...somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different.”
—Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway

“It was as if someone had picked up the world and shaken it into utter confusion. There were no permanent values. What were paper or diamonds, gold, houses or factories? A transient illusion, a fleeting gleam, a dissolving fantasy.”
—Sholem Asch, The Calf of Paper



The trenches of Flanders, 1918, titled by Paul Nash with painful irony: *We Are Making a New World.*



“The war of human cost”: the invention of trench warfare, armored tanks, machine guns, poisonous gas, submarines and airplanes changed the face of war. Entire villages signed up together in bursts of patriotism; fragments of “hollow men” came home.

“Really the composition of this war was not the composition of all previous wars, the composition was not a composition in which there was one man at the centre surrounded by a lot of other men but a composition that had neither a beginning or an end, a composition in which one corner was as important as another corner, in fact the composition of cubism.”

—Gertrude Stein, *Picasso 1938*



Wyndham Lewis's Vorticism expressed the British version of decentered art, the art of energy in the machine age.

The returning heroes were often the

little guys—and their contributions would inspire several tombs for the unknown or untitled warrior. Mass production and the language of democracy united to level out the social playing field—anybody could wear the latest fashions or sing the latest song, thanks to the new mass media like radio and the new department stores. Every bloke could have an English garden, and in the suburbs, every man's home was his castle, every woman could aspire to a room of her own.



The birth of marketing: Even English virtue can be packaged, even by the Underground (1929).

SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY

In a period characterized by extremism, George Bernard Shaw's Fabian brand of moderate socialist change suggested a very English alternative to the upheaval of the 1917 Russian Revolution and 1920s Russian Civil War. The theories of Marx made another step in the understanding of the individual, but under Stalin, the specter of communism meant upheaval and extermination. Shortly before the general election of 1924, British Conservative newspapers published a possibly forged "Zinoviev Letter" from the comintern to the British communist party urging revolutionary activity. It helped swing the middle classes to vote for Conservative victory.

Locarno Treaties (Dec. 1, 1925): The western European Allies and the new western European states signed agreements of arbitration and mutual assurance to guarantee their new borders and to reinstate Germany into the family of alliances. The Treaties marked improved diplomacy, though disagreements remained over Germany's eastern borders with Poland and Czechoslovakia, and tensions persisted in eastern Europe (especially with the left-out USSR). The "spirit of Locarno" was seen in Germany's September 1926 admission to the League of Nations, and in the subsequent withdrawal (completed in June 1930) of Allied troops from Germany's western Rhineland.

Aristide Briand called the Locarno Treaties "the draft of the constitution of a European family within the orbit of the League of Nations...the beginning of a magnificent work, the renewal of Europe."



After countless martyred British suffragettes, women over 30 quietly got the vote in 1918, thanks in part to female war workers in munitions. (The voting age would be lowered to 21 in 1928.)



1928: The "New Women"

The promise of returning working-class soldiers to a higher-standard of living clashed with the bourgeoisie's desire to return to pre-war stability. Clashes between labor and capital intensified and inflation doubled. Britain, formerly the largest international investor, was now one of the biggest debtors. Unemployment in London remained high throughout the 1920s, so 1929 found a city already in *depression*.



Revolution of media: paperbacks made reading more accessible. In 1932 Aldous Huxley published *Brave New World*, measuring history in years AF (After Ford). In 1935 The Left Book Club fed the growing tide of British socialism, publishing works like George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*.



The big movie houses capture culture: *Queen Christina* at the Empire in Leicester Square, 1934.

HOMES FIT FOR HEROES

General Strike (May 3-12, 1926): In reaction to a fall in prices largely caused by the import of German reparations coal, mine owners attempted to increase hours and decrease wages. When miners went on a protest strike, the General Council of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) called out workers in key industries, such as railwaymen, transport workers, printers, dockers and iron and steel workers (fearing that an all out general strike would encourage revolutionary elements). The government managed to ignite public sympathy and get volunteers to fill in, who did not think of themselves as scabs, but merely as patriots. In 1927 the Trade Disputes and Trade Union Act made sympathetic strikes and mass picketing illegal.



The State v. the Strikers.



Strikers read the news.

In August 1931 economic crisis divided the government on the issue of spending cuts. Many Labour ministers resigned, denouncing Ramsay MacDonald a "rat" and traitor, while MacDonald formed a "National Government" coalition with Conservative and Liberal Party members. The election of MacDonald's "second National Government" (much more Conservative) in October showed a victory of moderation.

One flare-up of the financial tensions came in the form of naval mutinies, most famously Invergordon on Sept. 15, 1931, when hundreds of sailors launched a two-day strike in reaction to proposed pay cuts.



Left: The department store of the 1930s: what's mass-produced is mass-consumed. Right: 1936 *Good Housekeeping* ad.



On December 11, 1936,

Edward VIII left the throne in order to marry the American divorcée Mrs. Wallis Simpson, inciting a constitutional crisis and much scandal. As *de jure* head of the Church of England, the king had to recognize the Church's prohibition of remarriage after divorce.

Strong voices of the state (namely PM Stanley Baldwin) presented many alternatives to marriage, which the king refused. Officially, Edward was the first British monarch to voluntarily abdicate. (Note for Coward fans: At first the royal family would not release the abdication speech to the early productions of *This Happy Breed*, as it was deemed an “embarrassment to the throne.”)



Other banner headlines read “God Save our King from Mr. Baldwin.”

THE LEAGUE: AN UNEASY FAMILY

“Death to the killers.” —Stephen Spender, on Spain

“Peace with honour.” —Neville Chamberlain, on Munich

If, in Hitler's words, the State is “no less than a living organism,” then the League comprised an uneasy family. Without recourse to anything but moral sanctions, the League was powerless to assist China when Japan invaded Manchuria in September 1931 and founded the puppet government of Manchukuo in 1932. Of the major countries only Italy and Germany extended diplomatic recognition. Manchukuo gave the Japanese confidence in their aggression, and served as a major war base.

Eruptions continued not only in the starving countries, new countries, or the prime sites of civil war. On May 6, 1932, French president Paul Doumer was assassinated. On May 15, Japan's party system suffered a final blow before giving in to the military state when eleven young Japanese naval officers attempted a coup d'état, killing Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi.

The Spanish Civil War raged from 1926–1939, resulting in extraordinary loss of life and expressing for much of Europe the clash of worlds between left and right. Germany and Italy supported Franco's rightwing nationalists, while enormous international (but untrained) volunteer support poured in from the Soviets, France, and England to help the leftist republicans.



Born of angry nationalism and buoyed by economic depression, dictators like Hitler had fertile ground to nurture hatred.

“If European democracy binds its living body to the putrefying corpse of the 1919 settlement, then it will merely be committing a particularly unpleasant form of suicide.”
—E.H. Carr, November, 1936



A last-ditch effort to avoid war drove Chamberlain to appeasement (here, conversing with Mussolini in Munich).

After Hitler's Anschluss annexation of Austria in March 1938, German eyes turned toward the strongly German population of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland. Bound to the Czechs but unprepared for war, the Great Powers mobilized for the first time since 1919. Hitler as well as France and Britain overestimated German military strength. In a desperate attempt to avoid a seemingly unavoidable war, Neville Chamberlain, Edouard Daladier and Benito Mussolini convinced Hitler to conference in Munich, where they negotiated the Munich Agreement on September 29, 1938, giving Germany control over the Sudetenland in exchange for Hitler's promise to not press past Czechoslovakia.

Though Chamberlain cried out “Peace with honour...Peace in our time” at the Heston Airport upon his return, many were infuriated by the pact, including not only Czechoslovakia, but Hitler (not fond of playing the bourgeois politician), and Stalin, who watched the West sell out an ally, and in fear switched from an anti-fascist alliance with the British and French to a pact with the Nazis, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939.

At first it seemed that the lesson of WWI had been not to jump too quickly in line of the dominoes of deadly alliances. Horrified by the results of nationalism, millions turned to pacifism, hoping to avoid further loss.

Kristallnacht, however, began to wake the British from what George Orwell called their “deep, deep sleep.” On November 9–10, 1938 German and Austrian Jews suffered vandalization of over one billion marks on the “Night of Broken Glass.”



“For me the pre-war period died on the day Mr. Neville Chamberlain returned with such gay insouciance from Munich.”—Noël Coward

“Every war carries within it the seeds for the war which will follow.”—Kathe Kollwitz

As the Spanish Civil War ground to a close in 1939, Franco and his Falange party took total control of Spain, and Germany and Italy cemented their shaky alliance in May with the *Pact of Steel* to take control of the area’s resources, a mere two weeks after announcing the “Rome-Berlin Axis.”

On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland, and on September 3, Britain (and France, six hours later) declared war on Germany. The Island left its still point to rejoin the stream.

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.
...A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
On a winter’s afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.

...
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

—T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding* (1942)



The Churchills visit ruins in the City of London, 1940.

“The last century, through its great cataclysms, offers two clear, ringing, and, unfortunately, contradictory lessons. ...The First [World War] teaches us never to rush into a fight, the Second never to back down from a bully.” —Adam Gopnik

“THE END IS WHERE WE START...”

“Your job in wartime is to sing to them wherever they may be.”—Churchill to Coward



The Noël we think we know, with Gertrude Lawrence in *Private Lives*.

Famed voice of the cocktail era’s Bright Young Things, Noël Coward was in fact born into the “refined suburban poverty” of Teddington, Middlesex in 1899, son of a piano salesman. He began acting in school and made his first professional appearance at age 12, after his family moved to Battersea (and later Clapham) to open a boarding house. A year after playing the “Boy Pushing Barrow” in a D.W. Griffiths film and producing his first one-act, Coward was called to army duty in 1918, but received a medical discharge after nine months. In 1925 he hit it big with *On with the Dance*, *Fallen Angels*, and *Hay Fever*. A director, actor, singer, songwriter, screenwriter, and novelist, his other works include *Cavalcade*, *Design for Living*, *Private Lives*, *Present Laughter*, *Blithe Spirit* and *In Which We Serve*.

During WWII he worked with the Bureau of Propaganda in France, and later liaisoned in propaganda work in the U.S. and on tours for troops, hospitals, factories, and for war charity fundraising. Rehearsals for *This Happy Breed* stopped at the outbreak of war in 1939, and it was not produced until 1942. Of David Lean’s 1944 film version, reviewers heralded “in a house in a row the symbol of a nation.”

“This may be sheer escapism, but if I can make people laugh, etc., maybe I am not doing so very badly. ...This is my job really, and will remain so through all wars and revolutions and carnage.” —Noël Coward, September 14, 1942

This royal throne of kings, this scepter’d isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
The precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happy lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England...

—William Shakespeare, *Richard II*



Coward as Frank Gibbons, 1942

1919-1939: THE WASTELAND

January 18, 1919—WW I Peace Congress opens in Versailles, France
June 28, 1919—Signing of the Treaty of Versailles
April 24, 1920—British Mandate over Palestine goes into effect (lasts 28 years)
March 17, 1921—Dr. Marie Stopes opens Britain's first birth control clinic (London)
April 15, 1921—Black Friday—Labour Party strike of mine workers fails
May 27, 1921—After 84 years of British control, Afghanistan achieves sovereignty
December 6, 1921—Anglo-Irish Treaty: Ireland now dominion; Northern Ireland created
February 15, 1922—Marconi begins regular broadcasting radio transmissions from Essex
February 28, 1922—Egypt regains independence from Britain, but British troops remain
April 16, 1922—German-Russia treaty signed in Italy, Soviet Union recognized
March 31, 1924—London public transport strike ends
January 3, 1925—Mussolini dissolves Italian parliament; becomes dictator
April 3, 1925—Great Britain goes back to gold standard
July 18, 1925—Hitler publishes *Mein Kampf*
March 7, 1926—First transatlantic telephone call (London to New York)
May 3-12, 1926—British general strike; 3 million workers support miners [A]
August 3, 1926—Traffic lights installed on Piccadilly Circus
September 8, 1926—League of Nations votes unanimously to admit Germany
January 10, 1927—Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* premieres
April 12, 1927—Chiang Kai-shek begins Shanghai counter-revolution after British leave
May 20, 1927—Saudi Arabia becomes independent of Great Britain (Treaty of Jeddah)
May 21, 1927—Lindbergh lands in Paris after first solo air crossing of Atlantic [B]
December 14, 1927—Iraq gains independence from Britain; British troops remain
May 7, 1928—England lowers age of women voters from 30 to 21
August 27, 1928—Kellogg-Briand Pact: 60 nations agree to "outlaw war"
September 15, 1928—Alexander Fleming discovers penicillin
October 29, 1929—"Black Tuesday," Stock Market crash triggers Great Depression
November 18, 1929—Stalin routes troops to Manchuria
November 20, 1929—Salvador Dalí's first one-man show
March 12, 1930—Gandhi begins 200-mile march protesting British salt tax in India [C]
September 10, 1931—Lord Cecil says "War was never so improbable"
September 15, 1931—British naval fleet mutinies at Invergordon over pay cuts
September 19, 1931—Japanese troops conquer Mukden, South Manchuria
September 21, 1931—Britain abandons gold standard; pound devalues 20%
November 7, 1931—Chinese People's Republic proclaimed by Mao Tse Tung

December 11, 1931—Canada, Australia, South Africa, Newfoundland gain legislative freedom
August 22, 1932—BBC begins experimental regular TV broadcasts
August 27, 1932—200,000 English textile workers strike
February 27, 1933—Nazis set fire to Reichstag; blame it on Communists
March 12, 1933—First concentration camp completed
October 14, 1933—Nazi Germany announces withdrawal from League of Nations
June 30, 1934—"Night of Long Knives," Hitler stages bloody purge of Nazi party
August 19, 1934—Hitler elected Führer (95.7% of German voters) [D]
January 14, 1935—Oil pipeline Iraq-Mediterranean goes into use
September 15, 1935—Nuremberg Laws deprive Jews of citizenship & officialize swastika
October 2, 1935—Mussolini's Italian army attacks Abyssinia (Ethiopia)
March 7, 1936—Hitler breaks Treaty of Versailles again; sends troops to Rhineland
July 18, 1936—Spanish Civil War begins, Gen Francisco Franco leads uprising [E]
December 11, 1936—King Edward VIII abdicates throne; marries Wallis Simpson [F]
April 26, 1937—German Luftwaffe destroys Basque town of Guernica in Spain; Picasso paints *Guernica* in response [G]
May 6, 1937—Dirigible Hindenburg explodes at Lakehurst, New Jersey (36 die) [H]
September 21, 1937—JRR Tolkien publishes *The Hobbit*
November 17, 1937—Britain's Lord Halifax visits Germany, beginning of appeasement
December 11, 1937—Italy withdraws from League of Nations
March 12, 1938—Nazi Germany invades Austria, announces Anschluss (union)
June 6, 1938—Sigmund Freud arrives in London [I]
July 24, 1938—Instant coffee invented
September 29, 1938—Treaty of Munich gives eastern Czechoslovakia to Germany
October 15, 1938—German troops occupy the Sudetenland; Czech government resigns
November 9-10, 1938—Nazi Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass)
January 22, 1939—Uranium atom first split, Columbia University
March 15, 1939—Hitler occupies Bohemia & Moravia (Czechoslovakia)
March 28, 1939—Spanish Civil War ends; Madrid falls to Franco
April 7, 1939—Italy invades Albania
May 22, 1939—Hitler and Mussolini sign Pact of Steel
August 23, 1939—Molotov-Ribbentrop pact: East Europe divided between Hitler and Stalin
August 31, 1939—British fleet mobilizes; civilian evacuations begin from London.
September 1, 1939—Germany invades Poland, takes Danzig
September 3, 1939—Britain declares war on Germany; France follows six hours later

