



## World War I – Document Excerpts Argument-Based Reflection Questions

The debatable issue for this project is:

**What was the most fundamental cause of World War I (1914 – 1918): nationalism, militarism, ethnic chauvinism, or imperialism?**

In pairs or small groups of three, students should reflect on, discuss, and answer each of the following argument-based questions on each document excerpt. These documents comprise a set of **primary sources** and **secondary sources**.

### **Document 1: Austro-Hungarian Red Book No. 7; Ultimatum sent to Serbia by Austria-Hungary on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1914**

“The Royal Serbian Government has done nothing to repress these movements. It has permitted the criminal machinations of various societies and associations directed against the Monarchy, and has tolerated unrestrained language on the part of the press, the glorification of the perpetrators of outrages and the participation of officers and functionaries in subversive agitation.”

1. Which Serbian movement caused the most immediate damage to Austro-Hungary shortly before this ultimatum was sent, and what “criminal machination” did it successfully conduct?

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2. Which position on our debatable issue does this excerpt most strongly support, and what specific argumentative claim can be formulated from the excerpt?

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**Document 2: Bradshaw Fay, Historian, *Origins of the World War*, 1928**

“Nevertheless, a European war broke out. Why? Because in each country political and military leaders did certain things which lead to the mobilization [of their armies for war] and to the declarations of war, or [leaders] failed to do certain things which might have prevented [the war]. In this sense, all the European countries in greater or lesser degree were responsible.”

1. Which 3 – 6 word phrase in this excerpt most strongly suggests that militarism was the most fundamental cause of World War I?

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2. Let’s assume that a counter-argument against your position – made either in a classroom debate or offered by you in your argument essay – is that that German aggression was most responsible for causing WWI. Explain how this evidence can be used to respond to that counter-argument.

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**Document 3: Emile Zola, French novelist, 1891; in James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 1992**

“Would not the end of war be the end of humanity? War is life itself. Nothing exists in nature, is born, grows or multiplies except by combat. We must eat and be eaten so that the world may live. It is only warlike nations which have prospered; a nation dies as soon as it disarms. War is the school of discipline, sacrifice and courage.”

1. Emile Zola is proudly and eloquently summarizing the “glorious war” conception. In a very short statement he includes several distinct warrants for war’s glory and necessity. Summarize three of them.

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2. Zola is one of France’s greatest, most acclaimed writers – which doesn’t necessarily make his ideas right, but does mean that he had a highly admired writing style. Identify two literary elements in this excerpt that make it especially worthy of quoting (rather than paraphrasing), assuming you were arguing for militarism as the cause?

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**Document 4: Bertrand Russell, British philosopher, in James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 1992**

“I spent the evening [of August 3, 1914] walking round the streets, especially in the neighborhood of Trafalgar Square, noticing cheering crowds, and making myself sensitive to the emotions of passersby. During this and the following days I discovered to my amazement that average men and women were delighted at the prospect of war.”

1. What two positions on our debatable issue does this excerpt seem to support? Explain why its support for these two cause of WWI equal, rather than favoring one or the other?

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2. Identify two aspects of this evidence that enhance its credibility, one external (i.e., its source) and one internal (i.e., something in the text itself that makes it more believable, reliable, convincing).

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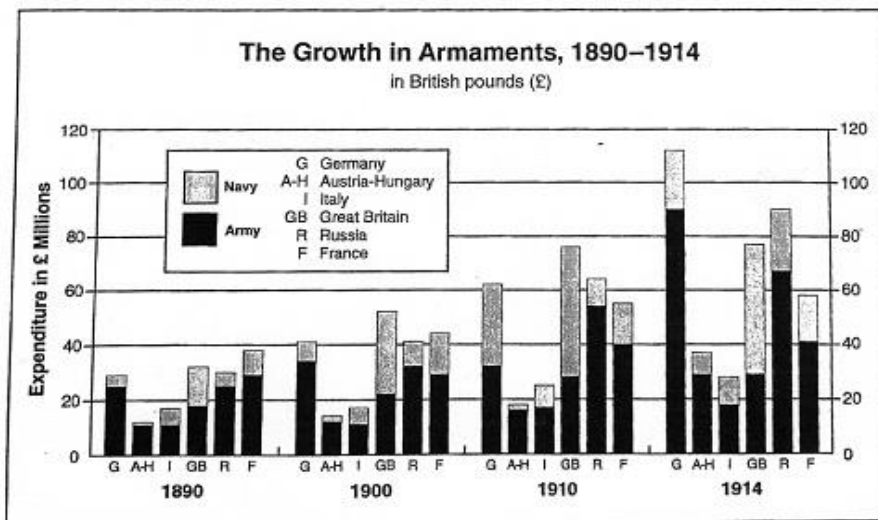


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**Document 5: *The London Times History of the World*, Edited by Richard Overy, 1999**



Note: By 1914 the Entente Powers could field 2.23 million men, Germany and Austria-Hungary 1.2 million.

1. What is the approximate relationship between German and Austria-Hungary armament spending in 1914 and 1910 (expressed as a percentage)? And what is the approximate relationship between British and Russian armament spending in 1914 and 1900 (again, as a percentage)? Do you think this data is significant? Why or why not?

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2. What is the relationship between the total armament spending in 1914 of Entente Powers Britain, Russia, and France, and Central Powers Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy? Do you think this data is significant? Why or why not?

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**Document 6: Various Sources**

**European Alliances, 1914**



1. Explain how the Central Powers (also known as the Triple Alliance) could have felt encircled by Entente Powers and therefore more likely to be paranoid or at least nervous about their military or territorial vulnerability?

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2. Identify two geographic characteristics that might have favored the Entente Powers and two geographic characteristics that might have favored the Central Powers in the conflict of World War I.

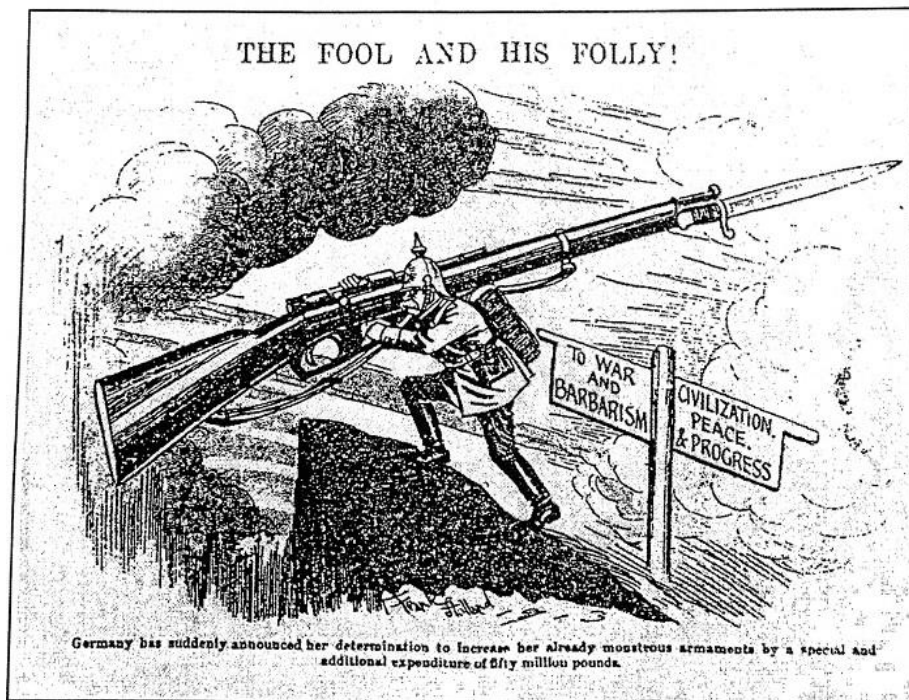
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**Document 7: Reynold's Newspaper, London, March 9, 1913**



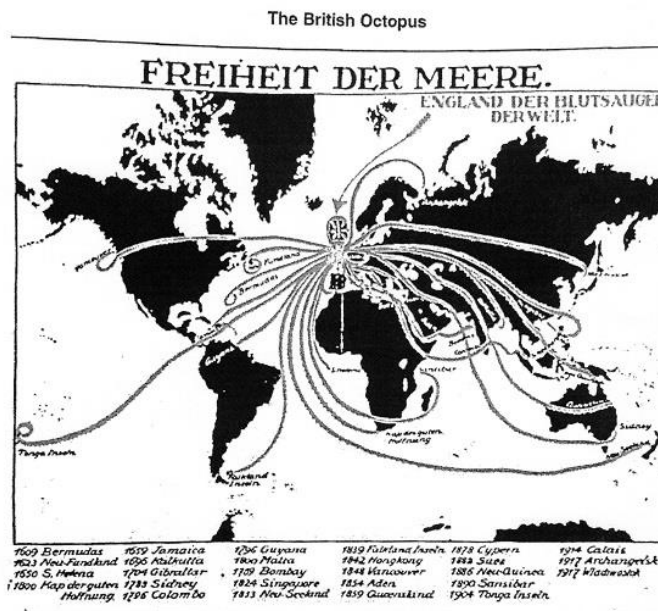
1. What argument is being made in this British political cartoon?

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2. Explain why this political cartoon can be defined and described as British propaganda.

**Document 8: German propaganda cartoon, 1917, Hoover Institution Archives**



*Freiheit Der Meere = Freedom of the Seas*  
*England Der Blutsauger der Welt = England is the Bloodsucker of the World*

1. What argument is being made in this German political cartoon?

2. Explain why this political cartoon is defined and described as German propaganda.

**Document 9: Prince Bernhard von Bulow, German Chancellor, speech to the Reichstag [German Congress], December 11, 1899, in James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 1992**



“We realize that without power, without a strong army and a strong navy, there can be no welfare for us. The means of fighting the battle for existence in this world without strong armaments on land and water, for a nation soon to count sixty millions, living in the centre of Europe and at the same time stretching out its economic feelers in all directions, have not yet been found. In the coming century the German nation will be either the hammer or the anvil.”

1. What are the two choices that the German Chancellor is laying out for the future of German international relations? What is his reasoning for this forced choice?

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2. Which position on our debatable issue does this excerpt most strongly support, and what specific argumentative claim can be formulated from the excerpt?

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**Document 10: Col. Dragulin Dimitrevic, Head of Serbian Secret Intelligence and founder of “The Black Hand,” 1912, in James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 1992**

“The war between Serbia and Austria . . . is inevitable. If Serbia wants to live in honor, she can only do this by war. This war is determined by our obligation to our traditions and the world of culture. This war derives from the duty of our race which will not permit itself to be assimilated. This war must bring about the eternal freedom of Serbia, of the South Slavs, of the Balkan peoples. Our whole race must stand together to halt the onslaught of these aliens from the north.”

1. What in this excerpt pushes Col. Dimitrevic’s writing here from a statement of nationalism into one of ethnic chauvinism or racism?

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2. Explain how this message from an important leader in Serbia in 1912 connects to both the immediate and the fundamental causes of World War I.

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**Document 11: Col. Raymond Aron, Historian, *The Century of Total War*, 1954**

“The rise of Germany, whose supremacy France dreaded and whose navy menaced England, had created among [England and France] an alliance which claimed it was defensive in nature but was denounced by German propaganda as an attempt at [the] encirclement [of Germany]. The two armed camps alarmed each other, and each grew heavy with multiplied incidents, which spread East [with the assassination of Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand], where Russia and Austria were advancing contradictory [competing] claims.”

1. In what specific ways does this passage from Raymond Aron’s history of WWI suggest that expanding alliances prior to the war locked in a vicious cycle that ended in war?

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2. This passage states that prior to WWI there were differences between the way that European nations perceived themselves and the way they were perceived by others. What do you think explains this difference, and why was it important to understanding the causes of the war?

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**Document 12: Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, leader of the German delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference, July, 1919**

“It is demanded of us that we shall confess ourselves to be alone guilty of the war. Such a confession from my lips would be a lie. We are far from declining all responsibility for the fact that this great World War took place or that it was fought in the way that it was...But we energetically deny that Germany and its people...were alone guilty...In the last 50 years, the imperialism of all European states has chronically poisoned international relations. Policies of retaliation, policies of expansion, and disregard for the right of peoples to determine their own destiny, have contributed to the European malady which came to a crisis in the World War. The mobilization of Russia deprived statesmen of the opportunity of curing the disease, and placed the issue in the hands of the military power.”

1. Count Brockdorff-Rantzau names several critical factors to the start of World War I other than German aggression. Identify three factors that he identifies here.

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2. Do you find the German Count’s analysis credible and convincing? Why or why not? Be specific in your answer.

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