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DIPLOMACY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR



Principal Investigator: Jennifer Siegel, Department of History

World War I was a defining event of the 20th century – a military and economic disaster from which Europe's Great Powers never recovered. The war left 8.5 million men dead, toppled three monarchies, ended four empires, and set the stage for European decolonization.

Scholars have studied the origins of World War I and its results from every possible angle, whether social, military, economic or intellectual. What they have not considered, however, is diplomacy during the war itself. This is what Jennifer Siegel sets out to explore in her next book.

The usual diplomatic demands of wartime – such as efforts to gain allies, challenges of cooperation with allies, and preventing neutral parties from becoming enemies – were even more acute because of the scale of World War I. Combatants were obsessed with balance of power.

Deadlock on the fighting fronts meant that any shift in alliances would be disastrous for the losing party. This led to desperate attempts to keep alliances intact, bring in new allies, and garner financial or military aid from neutral parties.

Intertwined with wartime diplomacy was a diplomatic peace movement that from the start of the war attempted to influence the peace. Combatant countries engaged in this effort in various ways, but rather than a separate endeavor, peace and war diplomacy influenced each other.

As a result of these movements, a number of conflicting agreements were reached between various countries that shaped the overall peace agreement of 1919, setting up the global framework for the entire interwar period until World War II.

A grant from the Mershon Center allowed Siegel to spend four weeks at the British National Archives in Kew and six weeks at Les Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Français, La Courneuve.



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