INTRODUCTION
World War 1 is often referred to as The Great War, or the war to end all wars. It was the most significant event of the Twentieth Century. The loss of life was so great and the level of destruction so appalling, that the war achieved a status that no previous war has attained. While World War II was longer, bloodier, and more destructive, it can be argued that this war was one of the results of the Great War. While historians differ as to the causes of the war, the roots can be found in the war between the most powerful of the German states, Prussia, and France in 1870. This war resulted in a French defeat and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine to the newly created German nation. Furthermore, it illustrated the potential of nationalism to be a dynamic influence in shaping future events.
The video examines the impact of the basic or underlying causes of the war - The Alliance System, Imperialism, Militarism and Nationalism. It also examines how the tension was maintained between the two hostile alliances by the crises in Morocco and the Balkans. Finally there is an examination of the excuse used by Austria-Hungary to spark off this terrible conflict and the timetable of death that followed.

An examination of documentary film provides an added dimension to the study of the causes of the war. Also a study of the war allows students to make use of a wide variety of sources. As well as an examination of film and photographs, a range of other sources are available, such as letters, diaries, speeches, newspapers, posters, cartoons, official documents, poetry and memoirs.

Understanding the issues.
Map Study: Examine a map of Europe in 1870 and a map of Europe in 1914.

- What changes occurred during this period?
- How do you think the balance of power in Europe was altered?

Research: Why was the French desire for revenge against Germany so intense following the Franco-Prussian War?

Definitions: Ultimatum, mobilisation, neutrality, pacifism, annexation, colonialism, militarism, propaganda.

Discussion: The role of film and photography as a vehicle for propaganda.

THE ALLIANCE SYSTEM
In 1870 Europe was the richest and most advanced continent and its peoples enjoyed a level of prosperity superior to anywhere else in the world. European powers controlled vast empires that covered most of the world. By 1907 Europe was divided into two armed camps, involving all of the major powers. While the alliances were meant to increase the security of each country, instead they ensured that a war that involved any of these powers would probably involve all of them.

Germany was the dominant partner in the Triple Alliance and was the most powerful European state. After their success in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, Bismarck the German Chancellor, realised peace was necessary for his new country to become a nation. He believed the best way to keep Europe at peace was to keep France isolated and to keep on friendly terms with Britain. As part of his strategy, he made treaties between Germany and the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, and between Germany and Russia. He also...
refrained from any naval build-up or any attempt to carve a colonial empire, to avoid any antagonism with Britain. In 1882, Italy joined the alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, creating the Triple Alliance. However Italy’s membership of this alliance could be said to be at best lukewarm. With the accession to power of the new Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1888, and the dismissal of Bismarck, Germany’s foreign relations began to change. The alliance with Russia was allowed to lapse in 1890, with the result that Russia found a new alliance with France in 1893. Bismarck’s policies were further weakened by the Kaiser, with the construction of the second most powerful navy next to Britain and the creation of a German colonial empire.

**Britain** was a key member in the Triple Entente. Britain had become increasingly concerned about the growing naval strength of Germany. As the naval race between the two powers developed, relations between the two became more and more strained. The result of this situation was that Germany in effect drove Britain into the arms of Germany’s enemies. Britain solved her long standing differences with France and formed the Entente Cordiale in 1904. In 1907 Britain overcame her differences with Russia and reached a similar arrangement. The Triple Entente was now created in opposition to the Triple Alliance.

**Understanding the issues.**

**Map Study:** Examine a map of Africa in 1914. Distinguish between the members of each alliance. Explain the problems faced by the Triple Alliance in the event of warfare.

**Research:** Why did both Turkey and Bulgaria join the alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1914? Why did Italy withdraw from the Triple Alliance?

**Discussion:** To what extent can Europe be regarded as a power keg at the beginning of 1914?

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**Film study:** What does the video reveal about the relationship between Germany and her allies?

**IMPERIALISM**

Imperialism is sometimes referred to as the grab for colonies. By the late nineteenth century the Industrial Revolution had affected all the major European nations. Industrialists demanded that their governments should gain more colonies or spheres of influence, for their own advantage. Colonies became increasingly important for the following reasons:

* a source of raw material
* a market for manufactured goods and investment
* an outlet for surplus population
* strategic reasons
* prestige for the mother country

The rivalry of the powers for colonies in such regions as Africa and China caused a number of crises, which increased tension among the already hostile powers. Germany who started late in the race for colonies following her unification in 1870, was particularly aggressive in claiming a place in the sun.

**Understanding the Issues**

**Map study:** Using a map of Africa in 1914, list the colonies controlled by Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Portugal and Spain.

**Research:** What was the aim of the Conference of Berlin in 1884? How successful was it in solving disputes in Africa? What was the Fashoda incident? Why did it create antagonism between Britain and France? In what ways was the partition of China different to the situation in Africa?

**Film study:** What does the film reveal about Germany’s acquisition of colonies?

**Definitions:** Spheres of influence, extraterritoriality, mandate.

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**MILITARISM**

Militarism is often referred to as the arms race. The buildup of rival alliances was accompanied by an arms race between the two blocs. Each side believed that it was essential to build up their armies and their stockpile of weapons so as to be stronger than the other side. This build up heightened the fear and suspicion between the two blocs, with neither being able to stop for fear the other side would become stronger. The German army was the most powerful in Europe. It was well equipped and well trained. Like all European armies except the British, it was based on conscription or compulsory military service. The peacetime German army numbered 866,000 in 1914. When mobilisation was completed the army numbered 5 million, with another 4 million trained older men available as required. The Russians, French and Austro-Hungarians employed a similar system. Britain unlike the other major European powers did not have a large conscript army. Britain relied on her navy, which was the most powerful in Europe, to protect her and her colonies. Both Germany and France formulated war plans in preparation for the outbreak of war. Germany had the Schlieffen Plan, devised by Alfred von Schlieffen, the Head of the German High Command from 1892–1906. France devised the notorious Plan 17.

**Understanding the issues**

**Map study:** Germany had the Schlieffen Plan, France had plan 17. Outline on a map the intended direction of each plan. Mention the success of each plan when used in 1914.

**Research:** The following weapons were all used during World War 1. Outline the nature of each weapon and make a list of those that were available at the outbreak of war:

- Hand grenades, rifles, machine guns, trench mortars, howitzers, heavy artillery, aircraft, zeppelins, dreadnoughts, mines, submarines, tanks, barbed wire, gas, flame throwers.

  Which of the following countries had conscription during the war and which failed to introduce conscription? Australia, Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, Germany, Russia.

**Film study:** What does the film reveal about British and German naval policies?

**Film study:** What flaws are revealed about the Schlieffen Plan in the film?
NATIONALISM

Nationalism is more than just loyalty and patriotism, and can be defined as the strong identification of people with those of a nation or state. The aim of nationalist movements was to dominate each other.

This can be illustrated in a number of ways:
- In the last decade of the nineteenth and the first of the twentieth century, Britain was in a dominant position and led Europe in economic and colonial fields. Her position of superiority aroused great jealousy especially in France and Germany.
- France, humiliated by her defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, wanted revenge against Germany.
- Germany's unification upset the balance of power in Europe and led to new alliances and colonial rivalry.
- The Austro-Hungarian Empire felt threatened by Slav nationalism and was opposed to Slav nationalism in the Balkans.
- Russia hoping to extend her power in the Balkans became an advocate of Slav nationalism.

Nationalism was potentially a powder keg that could plunge the world into a major conflict.

Understanding the issues

Map study: Examine a map of Europe in 1914 and one part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, nationalism developed into a struggle between the powers to dominate each other.

CRISES PROCEEDING THE WAR

A series of crises which began in 1905, eventually led to the outbreak of war in 1914. Each of these crises revealed the state of tension between the different powers and all of them threatened to involve the world in conflict.

Moroccan crises

A dispute between France and Germany over Morocco broke out in 1905, and led to the Algeciras Conference of 1906. The conference showed the unity of the other powers against Germany, and made Germany more determined than ever to take revenge on France.

The second Moroccan crisis was the Agadir Incident of 1911. This incident threatened to involve Britain in the quarrel between France and Germany and potentially to start a war. This conflict was settled with some concession made to save Germany's dignity.

These events showed that while the powers were prepared to argue, they were not yet ready to go to war over a colonial dispute.

The Balkan crises

Europe's worst trouble spot was the Balkans. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, with the Ottoman Empire in decline, Greece, Rumania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro seized their independence.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Balkans were still in a chaotic mess, with arguments over borders and a continuing conflict with Turkey. Also the Balkans had two rival powers on their borders, Russia and Austria-Hungary, both of whom were suspicious of each other and keen to secure some advantage. Between 1908 and 1914 the Balkans were in turmoil. After the Young Turk Party seized power in Turkey in 1908, Austria-Hungary took advantage of the situation to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina despite Russian protests.

In the First Balkan War of 1912, the Balkan League made up of Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia defeated the Turks. Arguments followed on the division of the spoils and in 1913, the Second Balkan War took place, with Bulgaria crushed by a combination of Greece, Serbia, Rumania and Turkey.

The Balkan wars created even more problems. Austria-Hungary was concerned at Serbia's growing power.

Understanding the issues

Research: Examine the role of Nationalism and Imperialism in both the crises in Morocco and the Balkans.

Discussion: The Moroccan and Balkan crises kept up the tension between the powers and ensured that even a minor incident could spark a conflict.

THE ASSASSINATION OF ARCHDUKE FRANZ FERDINAND - THE SPARK THAT IGNITED THE WAR

Austria-Hungary was afraid that many of her national groups would prefer to unite with Serbia to form a united Slav state, and was looking for an excuse to crush Serbia in a war. This opportunity came about on June 28, 1914, when the Austrian heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated while on a state visit to the newly annexed province of Bosnia by a Bosnian student, Gavrilo Princip.

While there was no direct evidence that the Serbian government was involved, the Austro-Hungarian government saw this as their opportunity and on July 23, issued an ultimatum to Serbia designed to be so harsh that it was unacceptable. They had also been given encouragement by Germany with the so called blank cheque. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28, 1914. The Russian government ordered its army to mobilise and as other powers became involved the countdown to the Great War had begun.

Understanding the issues

Discussion: Why did the major powers allow themselves to be dragged into the war over the issue of the assassination, when war had been averted over more important issues?

Film Study: From your study of this video, what role can documentary film play in the understanding of historical issues such as the causes of the war? What care should an historian take when using documentary film?
Map of Europe in 1914