Written Out of History: German Atrocities in Belgium during the First World War

by

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# Table of Contents

List of Figures iii  
Acknowledgements iv  
**Introduction** 1  
I. The War Years: Atrocities, Investigations, and Propaganda 10  
*The Bryce Report* 10  
*Propaganda in Anglophone Countries* 24  
*The German Response* 32  
II. The Interwar Years: Revisionism Takes Hold 42  
*Immediately Prior to the Revisionist Movement* 42  
*Proliferation of German Propaganda* 51  
*Revisionism of the late 1920’s in Great Britain* 58  
*Revisionism of the later 1920’s in the United States* 66  
*Revisionism on the Eve of and at the Beginning of World War II* 75  
III. Post World War II: The Overturn of the Revisionist Narrative 85  
*Historical Narrative During the Cold War Period* 85  
*Restoration of German Atrocities in Belgium to the Historical Narrative* 100  
*Narration of Atrocities After Their Re-establishment in the Historical Record* 119  
**Conclusion** 127  
Figures 138  
Bibliography 151
List of Figures

1. Recruiting Poster: The “Scrap of Paper” 138
2. Recruiting Poster: A British Soldier Defends Belgium 139
3. British Recruiting Poster: Atrocities Against Women in Belgium 140
4. British Poster Appealing for Humanitarian Aid to Belgium 141
5. American War Bonds Poster: German Sexual Violence Against Women 142
6. War Bonds Poster in the Philippines: Crucifixion of a U.S. Soldier 143
7. Poster Appealing to the “Women of Queensland” 144
8. Cartoon: The Murder of Luxemburg and Belgium 145
10. Cartoon: Exhuming the Victims of a German Massacre 147
11. Cartoon: Belgian Civilians Stand in Line for Food 148
12. Recruiting Poster: Edith Cavell “Murdered by the Huns” 149
13. Small Drawing called “The Martyrdom of Edith Cavell” 150
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Introduction

On August 2, 1914, as Europe mobilized for war, German Minister Karl-Konrad von Below-Saleske delivered a written ultimatum to Belgian Foreign Minister Julien Davignon. In the note, Germany asserted that France was planning to march through Belgium to attack Germany. Therefore, the Germans would have to enter Belgium first to preempt the French invasion. However, Germany stated that Belgium should not interpret this “as an act of hostility.” It further stated that, if the Belgians did not resist, Germany would evacuate Belgium and compensate it after the war. However, if the Belgians did resist, then the Germans would regard Belgium as an enemy. The Belgians were given twelve hours to respond to this letter.¹

Rather than actually being an attempt to counter a possible French invasion, the German invasion of Belgium had long been planned by the German military as the best way to win a two front war against France and Russia. According to the Schlieffen Plan, Germany needed to quickly defeat France and then to concentrate its forces against Russia, which Germany assumed would mobilize more slowly.² In order to avoid French border fortresses, which would slow the invasion, the German plan required an invasion through Belgium, which would give the Germans a quicker entry into France.³ In the 1839 Treaty of London, Belgium had been established as a neutral country, and a German invasion would be a violation of its neutrality.⁴

However, German military leaders valued military success over upholding Belgian

² Alexander Watson, Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918 (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 106.
⁴ Zuckerman, The Rape of Belgium, 8.
neutrality, and they implemented the Schlieffen Plan at the outset of the war. Belgian government leaders rejected the German ultimatum and vowed to resist the invasion. On August 4, the German Army invaded Belgium. The defense of Belgian neutrality was a reason used by British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey for a declaration of war against Germany. Indeed, Britain declared war against Germany on the day that Germany invaded Belgium. According to historian Alexander Watson, it was likely that the British would have declared war on Germany without the invasion. Grey believed that Britain was obliged to enter the war to protect its ally, France, and that remaining neutral would have unacceptably isolated Britain. However, the invasion did ensure that Britain “would enter the war earlier rather than later and united in moral fervour.”

Contemporary historians have concluded that, during the German invasion of Belgium, German soldiers committed a series of atrocities against Belgian civilians, many of which violated established international law. However, the historical narrative of these atrocities has changed significantly over time. Starting with a wave of revisionist history that began during the 1920’s, and continuing until another shift in historical opinion that occurred during the 1990’s and 2000’s, writers analyzing the atrocities either denied that they occurred or deemphasized them in their narratives. Few deviated from this argument. As a consequence, during this approximately seventy-year period, German atrocities in Belgium were basically written out of history.

5 Clark, The Sleepwalkers, 550.
6 Zuckerman, The Rape of Belgium, 19.
7 Watson, Ring of Steel, 50-51.
In order to critically examine the erasure of German atrocities in Belgium from the historical record, it is important to understand the consensus of contemporary historians about the atrocities. Current belief is that significant violence occurred and that it took many forms. One common form of atrocity was the massacre of civilians without due process. In the vicinity of Liège, the first city to be attacked by the Germans, German soldiers massacred civilians. After the fall of Liège, the Germans advanced across Belgium, killing civilians in many different towns. In Aerschot, in response to the mysterious death of Colonel Stenger, German soldiers executed many Belgian civilians. During the German capture of Dinant, there were multiple massacres of Belgian civilians. As a result of German violence, twenty-three civilians in Visé, 156 civilians in Aerschot, 383 civilians in Tamines, and 674 civilians in Dinant died. Contemporary historians, John Horne and Alan Kramer, estimated that, in total, the German soldiers massacred 5,521 Belgian civilians and 906 French civilians during their advance on the Western Front in August, September, and October of 1914. Their total estimate of civilians killed was 6,427, and most other estimates placed the number of dead at roughly 6,000 civilians.

German violence against civilians also included destruction of buildings and pillage of Belgian property. At Dinant, during the worst of the massacres, Germans burned many houses. Once the massacre ended, German soldiers systematically

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9 Ibid., 28-29.
10 Watson, *Ring of Steel*, 127.
destroyed and looted the surviving parts of the town.\footnote{Ibid., 51-52.} One of the most infamous incidents was the destruction of Louvain and its famous university library. On August 25, 1914, German soldiers set the city on fire. The fire destroyed the university library and one quarter of Louvain’s building surface area. The Germans also engaged in an extensive looting operation during the destruction.\footnote{Zuckerman, \textit{The Rape of Belgium}, 33.} Analyzing the entirety of the destruction in Belgium, Horne and Kramer estimated that the Germans intentionally destroyed between 15,000 and 20,000 buildings.\footnote{Horne and Kramer, \textit{German Atrocities, 1914}, 76.}

Another form of German violence against Belgian civilians was the use of human shields. As documented by Horne and Kramer, the use of human shields started with the attack on Liège and its surroundings. The Germans used hundreds of Belgian civilians as human shields as they entered Liège. Many were placed on strategic bridges for days without food.\footnote{Ibid., 15.} British soldiers also noted German crimes against enemy combatants. In an October 22, 1914 entry in his diary, British soldier Albert Edward Gumm stated that German soldiers had fired on the British “from a hospital flying a red cross flag.” In response, the British mined the hospital and exploded the mines.\footnote{A diary belonging to A.E. Gumm, 22 October 1914, Documents.12911, Private Papers of A E Gumm, Imperial War Museum, London, United Kingdom.} George Henry Davies also noted German crimes against prisoners of war after his capture by the Germans. On November 30, 1917, German soldiers captured Davies and his compatriot. Although they surrendered, German
soldiers shot at them and killed Davies’ compatriot before being stopped by their officer.\textsuperscript{17}

During the invasion, German soldiers believed that they were being attacked by francs-tireurs, a term used to describe Belgian and French guerilla fighters. The German belief that they had been attacked by francs-tireurs in Belgium was a common precipitant of atrocities against civilians. In Aerschot, General Colonel Stenger died in a mysterious shooting that German soldiers attributed to francs-tireurs, resulting in the executions that took place in the city.\textsuperscript{18} German suspicions of a franc-tireur uprising also accompanied the destruction of Louvain.\textsuperscript{19} However, most Anglophone scholars have concluded that, except for a few isolated incidents, there was no sustained franc-tireur campaign. Horne and Kramer categorized the franc-tireur attacks as “a massive case of self-suggestion.”\textsuperscript{20} Contemporary historian, Larry Zuckerman, also concluded that there was no franc-tireur uprising in Louvain and that German assertions of francs-tireurs were broadly suspicious.\textsuperscript{21} In his own analysis, contemporary historian, Jeff Lipkes, agreed that there was no sustained franc-tireur campaign.\textsuperscript{22}

Finally, the Germans also mistreated Belgian civilians after the Western Front hardened and they had secured control over almost all of Belgium. One notable form of mistreatment was the deportation of Belgians to Germany to work in German war industries. The Germans sent the Belgian deportees to Germany in unsanitary and

\textsuperscript{17} A diary belonging to G.H. Davies, 30 November 1917, Documents.11608, Private Papers of G.H. Davies, Imperial War Museum, London, United Kingdom.
\textsuperscript{18} Horne and Kramer, \textit{German Atrocities, 1914}, 28.
\textsuperscript{19} Zuckerman, \textit{The Rape of Belgium}, 31.
\textsuperscript{20} Horne and Kramer, \textit{German Atrocities, 1914}, 77.
\textsuperscript{21} Zuckerman, \textit{The Rape of Belgium}, 55-57.
\textsuperscript{22} Jeff Lipkes, \textit{Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914} (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 543-547.
uncomfortable trains, and their living conditions did not improve on arrival in Germany. Zuckerman concluded that, by the end of 1916, approximately one hundred thousand Belgians had been deported to Germany or to northern France.

Many of the German actions against civilians were violations of the rules of war agreed on in the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions. For example, in the 1907 treaty, Article 25 proscribed the bombardment and destruction of undefended buildings. Article 28 also banned pillage. German soldiers violated these articles in their wanton destruction and looting of homes and stores. Article 56 of the 1907 Treaty forbade the destruction of “institutions dedicated to religion, charity and education, [and] the arts and sciences.” The wanton destruction of the culturally important city of Louvain and its university library were violations of this provision. Finally, Article 50 of the 1907 Treaty proscribed the implementation of collective punishment, which clearly occurred when German soldiers massacred large groups of people without due process in response to a suspected franc-tireur attack.

Considering current historical conclusions about the veracity and magnitude of the atrocities, it is surprising that they could basically have been written out of the historical record for approximately seventy years. Clearly, it is important to understand how and why this occurred. A comprehensive analysis seeking to answer these questions has not yet been undertaken.

It is also surprising how few historians have written books that support the veracity of the atrocities and how recently they have published their texts. The three major works devoted specifically to this subject are the 2001 text, German Atrocities.

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24 Ibid., 164.
1914: A History of Denial by John Horne and Alan Kramer, the 2004 text, The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I by Larry Zuckerman, and the 2007 text, Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914 by Jeff Lipkes. While these texts are seminal works in the field of German atrocities in Belgium, none of them comprehensively examines the erasure of these atrocities from the earlier historical record. Zuckerman’s book contains no discussion of the historiography of German atrocities at all. Horne and Kramer and Lipkes include historiographical reviews, but their accounts are not complete. Horne and Kramer extensively discuss the narration of German atrocities that occurred during the war, but their analysis of the accounts written after World War I is incomplete. The important postwar revisionist texts typically receive little more than a sentence of analysis each, and many of the important revisionist texts receive no mention at all. There is little exploration of the texts themselves and little analysis of their arguments. Lipkes does include a detailed exploration of the texts that were written between the end of the World War I and the publication of his book. His analysis is thorough in demonstrating the denial that occurred during this time period. However, he holds an excessively extreme and negative view of past writers, and his chapters about the subject are literally titled “Denials: Germany” and “Denials: U.K. and U.S.” He does not sufficiently differentiate the arguments of the various revisionists. He typically does not examine the entirety of these writers’ arguments or the context in which they wrote their texts. Lipkes also does not discuss atrocity propaganda in World War I, which is necessary to understand the origins of atrocity revisionism. Neither Horne and Kramer nor Lipkes include some important sources, including Irene Cooper Willis’ England’s
Holy War and Dalton Trumbo’s Johnny Got His Gun. Finally, neither Horne and Kramer nor Lipkes analyze general texts of First World War history to track the narration of the German invasion and occupation of Belgium.

This thesis explores how and why the German atrocities in Belgium were written out of history. To do this, it analyzes the entire historiography of German atrocities in Belgium during the wartime period, the interwar period, and the post-World War II period. Significant weight is given to all three components of the narrative, with special emphasis on the interwar period. It is important to examine the entire record in order to understand the origins of the revisionism and denialism that removed the atrocities from the record. It is also important to examine the entire record in order to ascertain whether books that challenged the revisionist narrative have had a sustained effect on the narrative of German atrocities in Belgium.

This thesis is organized into three chapters: “The War Years: Atrocities, Investigations, and Propaganda,” “The Interwar Years: Revisionism Takes Hold,” and “Post World War II: The Overturn of the Revisionist Narrative.” In the first chapter, government reports and visual and print war propaganda are examined in order to understand the origins of the revisionist and denialist movements. In the second chapter, the revisionist and denialist texts are analyzed in detail. New sources are introduced into the analysis of the interwar literature. In the third chapter, historical texts written after World War II are analyzed in order to assess their adherence to or deviation from the master revisionist narrative. Included in the source material are general texts of World War I history written after 1945 that narrated the atrocities. The addition of these texts creates a more complete study of the historiography of this
subject. In this thesis, historical texts are being studied, so published texts that would often be considered secondary sources are actually primary sources for the purpose of this work, and the bibliography reflects this.

This thesis addresses many important issues. It analyzes the way in which war crimes were written out of history, and it explores the grave implications of this act. It discusses the ways in which writers of history can be induced into creating inaccurate or incomplete accounts and informs current writers about these pitfalls. Finally, this thesis examines the larger issues of what it means to be written out of history, the responsibility of historians, the construction of historical truth, and the ways in which historians can be influenced by the context in which they write historical narratives.
I. The War Years: Atrocities, Investigations, and Propaganda

In order to understand the erasure of the atrocities that occurred between the 1920’s and the 1990’s, it is necessary to make a study of wartime material that set the narrative to which Allied revisionists and German denialists would later respond. Two major means by which the atrocity stories became public were the British Bryce Report of 1915 and Allied visual and written war propaganda. The Germans sought to counter these allegations with their own propaganda, including the White Book of 1915 and the work of German propagandist, Bernhard Dernburg, in the United States.

The Bryce Report

In 1914, in the wake of the German invasion, thousands of Belgians fled to Britain and France. Many of these refugees claimed to have witnessed atrocities committed by German soldiers during the invasion, and British soldiers who had served in Belgium had similar reports. The British government appointed Lord Bryce to lead a committee to create an accurate account of German atrocities in Belgium. This committee was officially titled the “Committee on Alleged German Outrages,” but it was colloquially dubbed the Bryce Committee after its chairman. Lord Bryce had formerly served as Ambassador to the United States and was known to be sympathetic to Germany. He had served in the House of Lords, had published well-known books about politics, and had received the Prussian Pour le Mérite. Furthermore, he had been critical of British conduct during the Boer War. As Bryce was a respected figure in the United States, a man who was known for his opposition

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26 Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 1914, 232.
to wartime brutality, and one who had not allowed his love for his country to prevent
him from speaking what he believed to be true, he was an ideal candidate to lead the
committee.\textsuperscript{28}

To collect evidence for this report, a group of barristers interviewed Belgian
refugees and recorded their testimonies. Contrary to some later assertions, the
barristers did not uncritically accept all Belgian testimony, and they attempted to
separate the trustworthy from the untrustworthy. In the summary of the depositions,
hearsay evidence was recorded in one column, and testimony that derived from direct
observation was recorded in another column.\textsuperscript{29} The barristers annotated their findings
and judged some accounts to be superior to others due to the interview subjects’
demeanor, perceived intelligence, and consistency of testimony. The investigators
usually found the witnesses’ accounts to be trustworthy. For example, in the
testimony of a Belgian soldier named Alberic De Wilde, one of the Bryce Committee
members noted that the witness had a composed demeanor, and, thus, his testimony
was likely to be reliable.\textsuperscript{30} In the case of Amelia and Louis Caducque, the
interviewer noted that they appeared to be reliable and possessed high intelligence
relative to other peasants.\textsuperscript{31} The interviewers were also sometimes critical of
witnesses. In the deposition of Julia Verdin, the witness claimed to have seen

\textsuperscript{28} Zuckerman, \textit{The Rape of Belgium}, 134.
\textsuperscript{29} German Atrocities: Précis of Statements taken on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions from
Belgian civilians, Belgian soldiers, and others, n.d., Documents.13021, Reports on German Atrocities
in Belgium During the First World War, September 1914 - February 1915, Imperial War Museum,
London, United Kingdom.
\textsuperscript{30} Testimony of Alberic De Wilde, 1914-1915, Documents.13021, G.A. 237 (f), Reports on German
Atrocities in Belgium During the First World War, September 1914 - February 1915, Imperial War
Museum, London, United Kingdom.
\textsuperscript{31} Testimony of Amelia Caducque, 29 December 1914, Documents.13021, G.A. 256 (c), Reports on
German Atrocities in Belgium During the First World War, September 1914 - February 1915, Imperial
War Museum, London, United Kingdom.
German soldiers stealing jewelry and then claimed that her friend had been raped, even though she had not directly witnessed the rape. The interviewer noted that her testimony was “somewhat vague” and that the claims of theft had little reason to be doubted, while the rape claims were less likely to be accurate in his assessment.  

Samuel Dewhurst, a sergeant in the British Army, reported having seen massacred civilians and naked women who were possibly rape victims. His testimony was deemed unhelpful because of his perceived reluctance to participate, even though the interviewer did not believe that his testimony was false. Witnesses who were of higher social status were given more trust by the interviewers. In the case of Madame Peeters, the interviewer acknowledged that her report was mostly hearsay, but, given that she was the wife of the Burgomaster of Willebroeck, he noted that her testimony did have some value. Thus, it appears that the barristers’ biases did affect their determination of what evidence was trustworthy, but it also appears that their intent was to create an honest report.

The Committee members synthesized these testimonies and then combined them with accounts from the diaries of dead German soldiers. They released their final report in May 1915, officially titled the Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, and colloquially known as the Bryce Report. The final report consisted of two publications. The first was a sixty-one-page report that synthesized

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33 Testimony of Samuel Dewhurst, 29 December 1914, Documents.13021, G.A. 698, Reports on German Atrocities in Belgium During the First World War, September 1914 - February 1915, Imperial War Museum, London, United Kingdom.
34 Testimony of Mme. Robert Peeters, 1 January 1915, Documents.13021, G.A. 647, Reports on German Atrocities in Belgium During the First World War, September 1914 - February 1915, Imperial War Museum, London, United Kingdom.
the testimony into a comprehensive narrative, and the second was an appendix of the testimonies by Belgian and British soldiers and civilians that were used as sources for the final report.  

In the introduction, the Bryce Committee discussed its methodology and defended the veracity of the report. The Committee anticipated many of the criticisms that it would later face and attempted to preempt those criticisms. It claimed that “gentlemen of legal knowledge and experience” had conducted the interviews and that these men had been instructed not to influence the witnesses. However, it did acknowledge that the witnesses had not been forced to swear an oath, as the interviewing lawyers were not authorized to swear in the witnesses. The Committee also defended the Belgian witnesses, claiming that they were not animated by irrational passions. It defended the decision not to name any of them, stating that many of them were reluctant to give testimony due to fear of reprisals against their family members by the occupying Germans. Finally, the Committee anticipated charges by skeptics that the witnesses’ testimonies had been unreliable. The Committee countered this by repeating its trust in the interviewing barristers’ competency and by claiming that it had not used witness testimony that it believed to be unreliable. It acknowledged that individual witnesses might have been inaccurate in their reports. However, it also claimed that, when all testimonies were taken together, most were corroborated by other testimonies and that the evidence for

37 Ibid., 5.
certain “broad facts” became overwhelming and undeniable. In the Report, the Committee stated that both its members and the barristers who conducted the interviews were initially skeptical but that they were eventually convinced of the truth of the testimonies due to the totality of the evidence.

The introduction was followed by a narration of the atrocities by region. The most common type of atrocity was the massacre of civilians by shooting or stabbing. These massacres started with the invasion at Liège and its surrounding towns. According to one witness at Herve, a town to the east of Liège, a young man had been shot by German soldiers after trying to flee from them in fear. Another witness near Liège claimed to have seen the corpses of a man, woman, and child who had been killed by gunfire and inferred that they had been killed while trying to escape. Another example was a massacre at Andenne on the Meuse River. The Committee alleged that the German Army brought together the town’s inhabitants and then selected approximately four hundred of them to be shot. Several individual deaths were noted, including that of a man who was shot and whose wife brought him home in a wheelbarrow and that of a hairdresser who was shot while accompanied by two of his children. In Aerschot, German soldiers executed ten men, including the Burgomaster, his brother, his son, and several Red Cross workers. In Hofstade, several witnesses claimed to have seen corpses of civilians who had been killed by bayonets. In Alost, a weaver died by bayonetting, and other witnesses described a
litanies of incidents in which civilians were either shot or stabbed.\textsuperscript{44} The Committee noted that the German authorities had never denied that massacres had occurred, and it further reasoned that the scale of refugees was evidence that large-scale violence against civilians had occurred.\textsuperscript{45} Though it is difficult to prove the veracity of these individual cases, they can be considered credible as a whole, as recent historical analysis has demonstrated that numerous executions of civilians did occur during the German invasion.

The first section of the Bryce Report also contained descriptions of German soldiers burning cities and destroying and looting property. After describing the shooting incident in Herve, the Committee wrote that there followed a “burning and pillage” committed by German soldiers.\textsuperscript{46} In another incident near Liège, civilians were reportedly burned alive in their homes, and German soldiers prevented them from escaping the burning buildings.\textsuperscript{47} In Montigny-sur-Sambre, a witness considered by the Committee to be of “high standing” described the destruction of the town by German soldiers. After being attacked by French soldiers, German incendiaries systematically burned 130 houses on the town’s main street. The Committee then reviewed the destruction at Dinant. One witness claimed that all of the houses on the city’s prominent Rue St. Jacques had been destroyed.\textsuperscript{48} The destruction of Louvain was the most famous of these incidents, and the Bryce Report included a detailed description. The German Army first occupied Louvain on August 19, and the occupation was initially peaceful. However, on August 25, German

\begin{footnotes}
\item[44] Ibid., 37.
\item[45] Ibid., 40.
\item[46] Ibid., 10.
\item[47] Ibid., 12-13.
\item[48] Ibid., 18.
\end{footnotes}
soldiers retreated to Louvain after having been defeated by the Belgian Army, and they proceeded to destroy the city. The German Army used special corps of incendiaries to carry out this task.\textsuperscript{49} It destroyed the library at the Catholic University at Louvain and the church of St. Peter. It also destroyed many homes. The Committee cited one witness who worked as a servant for an old man. According to her, German soldiers invaded the house, took the house’s master and his son outside, shot them, and then set the house on fire.\textsuperscript{50} Looting also accompanied arson in many examples. In Visé, a village near Liège, the Germans looted the houses of valuable china before burning them.\textsuperscript{51} In Aerschot, the Committee wrote in its Report that German soldiers looted the city’s stores soon after arriving.\textsuperscript{52} Again, it is difficult to prove the veracity of individual examples, but current scholarship has confirmed that the German Army did destroy thousands of Belgian buildings and loot Belgian property, so these accounts can be seen as credible in aggregate.

Though not discussed as frequently as the massacres and burnings, the Bryce Committee did incorporate reports of rape into the narrative about German atrocities. In Liège, the daughter of a family died after being repeatedly raped.\textsuperscript{53} In another episode in Liège, between fifteen and twenty women were raped on tables in the Place de l’Université after thirty-two Belgians were killed either by shooting or by burning.\textsuperscript{54} In its narration of atrocities near Sempst, the Bryce Committee included two more rape accounts in the Report. In Sempst, one witness met a woman who

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 29-30.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 31.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 12.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 22.  
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 10.  
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 13.
claimed that German soldiers had seized and raped her and multiple other women and that some of the women had also been stabbed to death. An intended victim thwarted another rape attempt in nearby Werchter, and the German soldiers executed her for resisting.\textsuperscript{55} Reports of murder and destruction of property far outweighed reports of rape, and the authors did not give them a special place in the narrative or devote a large portion of the text to them. According to Horne and Kramer, rapes by German soldiers “occurred quite widely,” but it is impossible to calculate exact figures due to “the difficulty of recording this crime.”\textsuperscript{56}

Another type of atrocity included in the Report was mutilation of Belgian civilians. Examples of this crime comprised a relatively small part of the narrative. However, the accounts were shocking. In Malines, one interviewee witnessed a German soldier kill a woman and then cut off her breasts. Another interviewee in Hofstade claimed to have seen a corpse with her breasts cut off, and the Committee believed that German soldiers had perpetrated this crime.\textsuperscript{57} In the area near Sempst, one witness saw a man with his legs severed, a man in Elewyt was disfigured “in a manner too horrible to record,” and a woman who was estimated to be between thirty and thirty-five years old was found mutilated in Haecht.\textsuperscript{58} Also in Haecht, the Committee reported that a two or three-year old child had been killed by having his hands and feet nailed to a door. The Committee acknowledged that this might not have seemed credible to the reader but that its members believed that the story was

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 26-27.
\textsuperscript{56} Horne and Kramer, \textit{German Atrocities, 1914}, 75.
\textsuperscript{57} Committee on Alleged German Outrages, \textit{Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages}, 25.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 26-27.
likely true.\textsuperscript{59} However, most of this testimony was based on reports from witnesses who saw the mutilated bodies long after the supposed crimes had occurred. Few were reported as direct observations. Much later, Horne and Kramer argued that mutilation stories, including those involving severed breasts and severed limbs, were less likely to be true.\textsuperscript{60}

The second section of the Bryce Report grouped the atrocities by type rather than by location and was further subdivided into two parts, violence against non-combatants, and violations of the Hague Conventions. In the first subpart, claims of massacred civilians and destroyed property were repeated. The Committee discussed the use of human shields by German soldiers and cited many examples of this occurring in Belgium.\textsuperscript{61} Brutality against women and children was included. The Committee discussed sexual crimes and mutilations, but neither were the primary focus of accusations of violence against women and children. As in all other parts of the Report, massacres and destruction of homes and property were the overwhelming focus. For example, at Louvain, women and children were victims in massacres and were witnesses to the destruction of their homes. In Liège, Louvain, Sempst, and Malines, women were prevented from leaving their burning homes and died. The gang rape that allegedly occurred in the Liège marketplace was presented. However, the Report was careful to note that rape was not an official policy of the German Army and that individuals or small groups were responsible for these crimes. The claim that German soldiers cut off victims’ hands was acknowledged. However, the

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{60} Horne and Kramer, \textit{German Atrocities, 1914}, 200-204.
\textsuperscript{61} Committee on Alleged German Outrages, \textit{Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages}, 54.
Committee also acknowledged explanations of these claims that diminished German
guilt, such as the possibility that the Belgians had been carrying weapons.\textsuperscript{62}

The Report’s final chapters contained a discussion of German violations of the
Hague Conventions during combat against British and Belgian soldiers. The first
accusation was that Germans had killed wounded Allied soldiers and prisoners of
war. Two witnesses directly observed German soldiers bayoneting wounded British
soldiers.\textsuperscript{63} German attacks on hospitals, ambulances, and stretcher-carrying medics
were a second violation of the Hague Conventions. The Committee cited many
interviewees who claimed that hospitals and ambulances had been shelled. The
Bryce Committee could not prove with certainty that these attacks had been
intentional, but they did conclude that they were, at the minimum, careless.\textsuperscript{64}
However, there was ample evidence indicating that German soldiers had deliberately
attacked stretcher-bearers.\textsuperscript{65} Finally, there were well-documented cases of German
soldiers perfidiously using the Red Cross and white flag to gain military advantage.
In one case, German soldiers raised the white flag and then fired on the soldiers that
advanced to take them prisoner.\textsuperscript{66} In the appendix to the report, the Bryce Committee
included several relevant clauses of the Hague Conventions that they believed had
been violated by Germany. In this case, Article 23 was the most relevant, as this
article prohibited abusing the flag of truce or killing an enemy who had surrendered.\textsuperscript{67}
The Committee’s claims that the Germans had committed atrocities against enemy

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 48-50.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 58-59.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{67} Committee on Alleged German Outrages, Evidence and Documents Laid Before the Committee on
Alleged German Outrages (London: Ballantyne, Hanson, and Company, 1915), 275.
combatants and had violated the Hague Convention have been confirmed by primary sources and by contemporary historians.

The report concluded with a brief summary of the Committee’s findings. Germans had deliberately organized mass killings of Belgian civilians. Belgian men, women, and children had been murdered, and Belgian women had been raped. The German Army had systematically looted and destroyed property, and it had violated the previously agreed upon rules of war by using human shields and by perfidiously using the Red Cross or the white flag.\textsuperscript{68}

Though not the main purpose of the Bryce Report, the Committee members did offer explanations for German atrocities. Common explanations were that soldiers feared franc-tireurs, that soldiers reacted angrily to military setbacks, and that soldiers misbehaved because they were intoxicated. During the Franco-Prussian War, the Prussian Army was attacked by francs-tireurs.\textsuperscript{69} The German military leadership assumed, in the event of another war, that the German Army would again face civilian resistance. In the 1902 tactical manual, \textit{Usages of War}, German commanders were permitted to use execution as a punishment for franc-tireur tactics.\textsuperscript{70} Seeing potential francs-tireurs everywhere, the Germans described in the Bryce Report engaged in violence against the civilian population. However, the Bryce Committee claimed that franc-tireur violence was actually a myth. At Aerschot, a shot was fired, which caused the soldiers to burn the town and to execute several townspeople,

\textsuperscript{68} Committee on Alleged German Outrages, \textit{Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages}, 61.
\textsuperscript{69} Zuckerman, \textit{The Rape of Belgium}, 44.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 47.
including the Burgomaster, his brother, and his son. The Germans claimed that the
Burgomaster’s son had fired this shot and that it had killed a high-ranking German
officer, Colonel Stenger. The Bryce Committee concluded that an intoxicated
German soldier had accidentally fired his rifle, and, in the confused firing that
followed, the German officer was accidentally killed. Horne and Kramer also
concluded that Colonel Stenger was killed by friendly fire and not by a franc-tireur.
The Committee further cast doubt on franc-tireur violence by noting that Belgian
authorities had forbidden this behavior and had even confiscated firearms in some
cases. German officials used the franc-tireur excuse to justify violence against
civilians. However, the Bryce Committee rejected this defense, given that alleged
incidents of franc-tireur violence were not defended with convincing evidence. The
Committee suggested that these alleged incidents were likely the result of attacks by
the Belgian Army or by friendly fire.

Two other explanations for German violence were frustration due to military
setbacks and drunkenness. The Bryce Committee argued that the atrocities began at
Liège when the Germans encountered stiff and unforeseen resistance and that the
Germans were desperate to quickly push through Belgium and into France. Along
with fear of franc-tireur violence, the Committee posited that anger as a result of
military failure was the main factor in the German destruction of Louvain and its

71 Committee on Alleged German Outrages, Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, 23-24.
72 Ibid., 23.
73 Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 1914, 28-29.
74 Committee on Alleged German Outrages, Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages, 9.
75 Ibid., 40-41.
76 Ibid., 39.
historic buildings. It also believed that intoxication caused German soldiers to commit acts of violence. Inebriation was advanced as one explanation for the massacres that occurred in Aerschot. In the section about violence against women and children, the Committee claimed that intoxication was one factor that gave rise to rape and murder.

Finally, the Bryce Committee denounced the German military for its actions in Belgium, but it was careful to separate the Army from the German people as a group. It claimed that the behavior by German soldiers was due to a greater strategy of terror, with the intent of cowing the Belgian people into submission. The claim that francs-tireurs had attacked German soldiers was the German excuse to implement this strategy. In the German Army, victory and service to the state were reportedly the main goals, and any immoral behavior was permissible if it aided German victory. However, the Bryce Committee included many statements warning its readers against placing blame on the German people as a whole and advised them to direct their indignation toward the German Army. The Committee offered a positive appraisal of German peasants, claiming that they were just as “kindly and good-natured” as any other European group. The Committee also mentioned that Germans had not implemented a strategy of violence against civilians during the Franco-Prussian War. According to the Committee, Germans as an ethnic group were not responsible for the atrocities in Belgium. Clearly, the Bryce Report tried to offer a measured analysis of German guilt.

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77 Ibid., 29.
78 Ibid., 51.
79 Ibid., 52.
80 Ibid., 44.
The Bryce Report had an immediate and important impact. It was released only six days after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, in which a German submarine torpedoed a British passenger liner and killed over one thousand people, 128 of whom were Americans.\(^81\) In addition, the German use of poison gas and German zeppelin raids on Great Britain in early 1915 had further damaged the German reputation.\(^82\) Given these actions, Germany had an especially poor standing in the British and American presses at that time, and the Report both benefitted from and further fed anti-German sentiment.\(^83\) According to Zuckerman, the Bryce Report exceeded all other World War I documents in shock value among the British and American publics.\(^84\) The *Manchester Guardian* wrote that the report was “like a hideous nightmare. It should be in the hands of every eligible man who still wonders where his duty lies.”\(^85\) Articles publicizing the Bryce Report and endorsing its findings were also published in the *New York Herald* and in the *Washington Herald*.\(^86\) Two weeks after the Report was released, Wellington House, the government agency that directed British propaganda efforts, informed the Cabinet that every major New York newspaper had published the Bryce Report. In a letter to Bryce, Wellington House leader C.F.G. Masterman claimed that the Committee’s report was extremely popular in the United States and that this was partially due to Bryce’s positive reputation.\(^87\) Wellington House also sent forty-one thousand copies of the Bryce Report to the United States, and it was translated into ten languages within a month of having been

\(^81\) Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, 131.
\(^83\) Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, 131.
\(^84\) Ibid., 132.
\(^85\) Ibid., 131-132.
\(^86\) Ibid., 132.
\(^87\) Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War*, 74.
Clearly, the British government used the Bryce Report to advance the war effort and to influence the United States to enter the war.

**Propaganda in Anglophone countries**

German atrocities in Belgium were also incorporated into history in less comprehensive and scholarly forms, including various types of visual and written propaganda. The British government used this propaganda to induce its citizens to support the war effort. During 1914 and 1915, public opinion was broadly in favor of fighting the war. One piece of evidence for this was that the British Army sustained itself during the first seventeen months of the war without conscription due to the voluntary enlistment of three million men. Wartime propaganda fell on a receptive audience.

One form of British visual propaganda denounced the German violation of Belgian neutrality. This act of aggression was a catalyst for the British declaration of war against Germany. German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg’s dismissive comment referring to the 1839 Treaty of London, which ensured the neutrality of Belgium, as “a scrap of paper,” was material for a famous poster. It depicted a piece of paper with the signatures and seals belonging to the six signatory powers. The header read “The ‘Scrap of Paper,’” and the bottom text read: “The Germans have broken their pledged word and devastated Belgium. Help to keep your

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Country’s honour bright by restoring Belgium her liberty.” This was followed by a call to enlist (fig. 1). 91

Accounts of atrocities emanating from Belgium were also commonly the focus of British propaganda. One means by which anti-German propaganda was disseminated was through posters. Many of them depicted or implied pillage, murder, and violence against women and children. One famous recruiting poster depicted a British soldier standing firm against Germany while a mother and child fled from a burning village (fig. 2). 92 Another British poster created by David Wilson contained content that was particularly graphic, depicting a German soldier standing on top of a dead adult woman and an infant. The soldier carried a rifle with a bloody bayonet and stood in front of a burning city with more corpses strewn on the ground. Placed to the right of the image was a letter written by a British officer witness and an excerpt from an interview with a German general containing a callous and unconvincing denial of civilian suffering. The soldier’s letter documented German crimes against Belgian girls, including rape and severed breasts (fig. 3). 93 British artists also released posters that, while not depicting atrocities, still emphasized the suffering of the Belgians. In 1916, John Hassall used one such poster to assist a humanitarian aid program in Belgium. The poster depicted a woman wearing a Corinthian helmet attending to a woman and three children. It read, “1,500,000 Belgians are destitute in Belgium. They must not starve. Support the Local Fund”

92 Ibid., 96.
(fig. 4). Even when in the service of humanitarian rather than military goals, the suffering of Belgium was a commonly used trope in propaganda posters.

German atrocities in Belgium also appeared in posters produced in other Anglophone countries. In one poster created by American Ellsworth Young, a large mustachioed German soldier in silhouette pulled a young girl across the picture while a town burned in the background. The German carried a gun, and it was heavily implied that he was planning to rape the girl. This poster exhorted viewers to “Remember Belgium” and urged them to buy war bonds (fig. 5). Another American poster, designed for an audience in the American Philippines, depicted an American soldier being crucified by a German with a stone axe (fig. 6). This related to a dubious story circulated in 1915 about a Canadian soldier in Ypres who had allegedly been crucified. In an Australian poster, a defiant woman raised her fists toward the sky, while two children lay dead at her feet, and a town burned in the background. The text around the woman read, “Women of Queensland! Remember how women and children of France and Belgium were treated. Do you realize that your treatment would be worse? Send a man to-day to fight for you” (fig. 7).

Present in many of the above posters were tropes reflective of gender norms in the Allied Anglophone countries. These were used to persuade ordinary people to aid the war effort. The rise of this type of propaganda was partly due to the belief that the “scrap of paper” argument would not be enough to mobilize the general

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94 Ibid., 76.
96 Ibid., 71.
98 Stanley, *What Did You Do in the War Daddy?*, 35.
population to go to war. Elite Britons were horrified by the German decision to violate Belgian neutrality with blithe indifference to previous treaties, but propagandists were convinced that the lower classes would not feel similarly compelled. To facilitate mass support for the war, atrocity stories with gendered images became more common. According to Todd, posters often aimed to portray the ordinary Allied male as a soldier valiantly defending the homeland, and the women were portrayed as victims to be defended.

Cartoons were another means of distributing propaganda about atrocities in Belgium. The most famous cartoonist was Louis Raemaekers, a Dutchman who despised the German government. Raemaekers published from the Netherlands, a neutral country. British propaganda officials became interested in using his work partly because he appeared to the public to be independent of Wellington House. The British government sought to distribute Raemaekers’ cartoons in the United States, but at first this proved difficult due to their overt and harshly critical nature. Once the United States entered the war, however, Raemaekers cartoons became resoundingly popular.

Raemaekers’ work was a scathing indictment of German atrocities. In a 1919 compilation of his work, *Raemaekers’ Cartoon History of the War*, many cartoons depicted German atrocities through symbolism. In one example, a woman labeled “Luxemburg” lay dead. Another woman labeled “Belgium” lay face down, and the

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Kaiser prepared to kill her with a sword (fig. 8).102 The cartoon appealed to the gendered themes common in other forms of war propaganda. However, most of Raemaekers’ cartoons about Belgium were depictions of atrocities or violations of the Hague Conventions. One cartoon depicted German soldiers forcing Belgians to march in front of the Army as human shields, an allegation also made in the Bryce Report (fig. 9).103 Another cartoon depicted a group of Catholic friars exhuming bodies, and the 1919 compilation juxtaposed it with a description of German soldiers shooting civilians at Aerschot (fig. 10).104 Raemaekers also produced cartoons about the German occupation of Belgium and the suffering that more indirectly occurred due to heavy-handed German policies. One cartoon depicted a group of haggard and downtrodden Belgians waiting in a line for food while a German soldier watched over them (fig. 11). In the 1919 compilation, this was juxtaposed with an order from Governor-General von Bissing imposing an indemnity of four hundred and eighty million francs on Belgium.105

German atrocities were also portrayed through film. Film was a relatively new medium, but it was increasingly ascendant during World War I.106 Some Hollywood films negatively portrayed Germans and depicted them as barbarians who were prone to committing atrocities. J. Stuart Blackton, an English-American known for his jingoism, created the 1915 film, *The Battle Cry of Peace*. The film featured an invasion by an army, and the invaders murdered many innocent people. There was

103 Ibid., 16-17.
104 Ibid., 20-21.
105 Ibid., 56-57.
also a scene in which the wife of a negatively portrayed pacifist character was forced to shoot her daughters so that they would not be raped. The invaders engaged in drunken revelry along with violent destruction. While not named as Germans, their appearance and mannerisms were clearly tailored after those of stereotypical Germans, and audiences understood this at the time. Once the United States entered the war, Hollywood produced more of these films. In Rupert Julian’s *The Kaiser, The Beast of Berlin*, the Kaiser’s obsession with world domination led to atrocities in Belgium. At the end of the film, in an ironic role reversal, the Kaiser was captured and imprisoned by the Belgian king. Finally, *The Little American*, a Cecil B. DeMille film, featured a woman whose ship was torpedoed while traveling to Europe. She inherited her aunt’s chateau in Europe, which was then invaded by the Germans. They damaged the house and its valuables, and the film’s leading lady was almost raped and was forced to do degrading tasks. The crimes in this film were thinly veiled references to the *Lusitania* and to alleged rapes that had occurred in Belgium and France. They were made especially shocking by casting Mary Pickford, an actress known as “America’s Sweetheart,” as the female lead. American filmmakers used this rising medium as another avenue by which to broadcast German atrocities in Belgium or events reminiscent of them.

Print propaganda also communicated German atrocities in Belgium. One important writer was Brooklyn minister Newell Dwight Hillis. He referenced alleged German wartime behavior in his 1918 book, *German Atrocities: Their Nature and Philosophy*, which denounced Germany and encouraged Americans to fight in the

107 Ibid., 169.
108 Ibid., 174.
109 Ibid., 176-179.
war. He accused German soldiers of destroying property, violating international treaties, and destroying houses of learning and worship. He also repeated the more lurid claims against German soldiers, including the stories of mutilation, rape, and crucifixion.\(^{110}\) Most of these claims had also appeared in the Bryce Report but were not emphasized in it. Hillis also incorporated the forced labor projects during the occupation into his narrative. For example, he contrasted the American practice of building weapons with fairly paid workers with the German practice of forcing Belgians to work in German factories for starvation wages.\(^{111}\) However, while the Bryce Report was careful not to cast blame on the German people as a whole, Hillis was eager to portray the entire German nation negatively and to denounce it as uncivilized and dangerous.\(^{112}\) Per Hillis, “Germany… was denied by nature any gift of imagination,” it could not create or appreciate art or architecture, and it was, thus, inclined to destroy it.\(^{113}\) Finally, Hillis asserted that the ultimate German goal was world domination, with all of the countries in Europe sending tribute to Berlin.\(^{114}\) As such, the discussion of atrocities in Hillis’ work was a part of a larger discussion about the depraved nature of Germany as a whole. This was in contrast to the Bryce Report which was careful to separate the German Army from the German people and which positively depicted ordinary Germans.

Another German action in Belgium exploited by British propagandists was the execution of Edith Cavell. Cavell was an English nurse and a matron at the

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 113.
\(^{112}\) Committee on Alleged German Outrages, *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages*, 44.
\(^{113}\) Hillis, *German Atrocities*, 48-49.
\(^{114}\) Ibid., 66-67.
Berkendael Medical Institute in Brussels. She cared for the wounded during the war and helped approximately two hundred Allied soldiers escape to the Netherlands, for which she was arrested. She freely admitted her guilt, and the German authorities had her executed by firing squad on October 12, 1915. Regardless of whether the execution was justified, American and British publics were outraged by this action. In part, this was because Cavell was a woman. Her angelic role as one who cared for those in need also contributed to the outrage at her execution. Reporting on her death, The Times exalted Cavell’s piety and “womanly work” and contrasted this with the brutality and harshness of her German executioners. According to the Manchester Guardian, newspapers in New York had also expressed revulsion at the decision to execute Cavell, with the New York Tribune noting that Britain had shown leniency toward a German woman who had committed similar offenses. To capitalize on this outrage, Wellington House issued a pamphlet entitled The Death of Edith Cavell, and it emphasized the attempts by the American legation in Belgium to have her death sentence overturned so as to appeal to the still neutral Americans. Propaganda posters about the execution were also made. One enlistment poster featured an image of a dignified Cavell surrounded by the words “Murdered by the Huns. Enlist in the 99th and help stop such atrocities” (fig. 12). A drawing titled “The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell” depicted Cavell stoically advancing toward what

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117 Sanders and Taylor, British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-18, 145.
118 An article in The Times titled “The Execution of Miss Cavell,” 22 October 1915, Documents.2482, Private Papers of Edith Cavell, Imperial War Museum, London, United Kingdom.
120 Sanders and Taylor, British Propaganda during the First World War, 1914-18, 145.
121 Aulich and Hewitt, Seduction or Instruction?, 47.
was implied to be her execution. Menacing mustachioed Germans brandishing weapons followed her. The German figures were dark-toned while Nurse Cavell’s figure was light-toned (fig. 13). This incident was particularly useful as propaganda for the Allied war effort.

**The German Response**

Having received much bad press, Germany launched its own campaign to counter Allied propaganda and to justify its actions. From the beginning, Germany was at a disadvantage in the war for public opinion. In the United States, British and French propaganda was broadcast to a far greater degree than was German propaganda. One reason was that the British had enforced a blockade and had cut German underwater cables that ran across the Atlantic. Thus, the Germans could not directly communicate with the United States. There were German propagandists in the United States, but they were similarly hindered by an inability to directly communicate with Germany. Germany had two radio stations in the United States, but these were expensive and only in use until 1915, when the United States government seized control of them.

Despite these disadvantages, the German government did release publications to counter the Allied narrative of atrocities in Belgium and to influence neutral countries. The most famous of these works was the *German White Book of May*

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1915, published as a response to the accusations made about German violence against civilians and their property in Belgium. This book began with a preface written by the German government that outlined its main arguments. The preface was followed by several hundred pages of appendices containing the testimonies of German soldiers that the government used as evidence for its claims. All of those submitting testimony were named, and the book also published their units and ranks.

The German government asserted that Belgian civilians had launched a savage guerilla war against German soldiers and that Belgians of every “grade, age, and sex” had participated in the treacherous violence. According to the White Book, when German soldiers captured a town, the local population greeted them warmly. However, this was a deceitful façade. Once the German Army seemed vulnerable, the previously friendly civilians attacked. Reacting to common accusations that the Germans had violated international law, the White Book’s writers asserted that it was actually the Belgian civilians who were in violation. The writers reasoned that the francs-tireurs had not followed the requirements of Articles 1 and 2 of the Hague Conventions, which outlined the rules of waging an organized People’s War versus an unorganized People’s War. As the supposed francs-tireurs did not have clear leadership or wear signifying badges, they were not waging a legal organized People’s War. Furthermore, as they did not carry their weapons openly and did not follow other rules of war, they were also not fighting a legitimate unorganized People’s War. In addition, the Hague Conventions only permitted fighting an unorganized People’s War on unoccupied land, and the Germans claimed that the

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126 Ibid., xv-xvi.
Belgian francs-tireurs had also violated this provision.\textsuperscript{127} Just as the Allies claimed that Germans had committed particularly lurid atrocities, the German White Book writers claimed that the Belgians had inflicted ghastly atrocities on German soldiers. Wounded German soldiers had been robbed, killed, and mutilated by Belgians. There were also allegations that German soldiers had been poisoned or burned alive. The Belgians were also accused of not respecting the Red Cross sign and of attacking hospitals.\textsuperscript{128} Toward the end of the preface, there was an admission that the German Army had, in fact, engaged in shootings. However, the victims of these shootings had first engaged in attacks against the German soldiers, and the reprisal shootings were a military necessity. When possible, prisoners were given hearings, and the Germans attempted to avoid killing “old men, women, and children.”\textsuperscript{129} In Aerschot and Dinant, the shootings by Germans were a direct result of perfidious attacks by Belgians. In Louvain, the fires were only started when necessary to fight francs-tireurs, and the Germans made efforts to spare the city’s culturally significant buildings.\textsuperscript{130}

In the appendices, the White Book’s writers presented soldier’s testimonies defending the assertions made in the preface. There were multiple examples of German soldiers who claimed that they had been attacked by treacherous francs-tireurs. Lieutenant Zielsche claimed that his unit, the 18th Pioneers, had been the subject of a nighttime surprise attack at Visé.\textsuperscript{131} According to Captain Strauss, francs-tireurs fired on his men from a house, prompting his men to return fire and to

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., xiv-xv.  
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., xvi.  
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., xvii.  
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., xviii.  
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 4.
burn the house.\textsuperscript{132} Lieutenant of Reserve Felsmann reported that he received assistance from a Belgian civilian in watering his horses, but bullets were then fired from the civilian’s house, killing the horses. In another incident, German soldiers were fired on from houses and trees, prompting the Germans to kill one of the shooters.\textsuperscript{133} There were also lurid testimonies about atrocities against German soldiers. One Captain Sternberg testified that he had examined the body of a German soldier and had determined that he had a survivable wound and severe burns on his head. Seeing bottles of gasoline nearby, he inferred that this soldier had been wounded and then burned alive by vengeful Belgians.\textsuperscript{134} Near Louvain, houses flying white flags were used as vantage points from which to fire at the Germans.\textsuperscript{135} Another German who was wearing a Geneva Cross was also the target of fire from a supposed franc-tireur.\textsuperscript{136} Other testimonies defended German actions in high-profile cases, such as Aerschot, Dinant and Louvain. The White Book writers admitted that German soldiers had shot the Burgomaster of Aerschot and his son, but they stated that the Burgomaster and his family had been participants in an uprising that killed many German soldiers, including Colonel Stenger. German writers argued that there was a plot to assassinate the German leadership and then to attack the leaderless soldiers.\textsuperscript{137} It was acknowledged that, in Dinant, the German soldiers had burned the city and killed many Belgians. However, the Belgians were ultimately to blame for this, as they had “collectively” engaged in violence against the German Army.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 272.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 179.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 70-72.
Reprisals were militarily justified. At Louvain, the White Book’s authors claimed that Germany had, in fact, defeated the Belgians shortly after seizing Louvain. However, the people of Louvain believed that it was the Germans who had been defeated, and they used this opportunity to revolt. The German soldiers were forced to respond with shootings and burnings. The Germans claimed that they tried to limit the fire’s destruction. Though they were unable to save the cathedral, they were successful in saving the town hall. The main argument was not that shootings and burnings had not occurred, but that they were not as widespread as had been reported and that the alleged Belgian francs-tireurs were ultimately responsible. However, contemporary historians have concluded that there was no franc-tireur campaign, so this explanation is baseless.

While the White Book was the most prominent and lengthy response to the atrocity claims, it was not the only such response. Another response was the “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three German Intellectuals” which was released in 1914. In this document, ninety-three prominent German academics and artists defended Germany’s war conduct and rebutted the claims made by Allied propagandists. The signatories included several of the world’s most illustrious men in their respective fields, including Fritz Haber, Max Planck, and Wilhelm Roentgen. These men claimed that Germans had not wanted to fight a war and had only joined the current war out of self-defense. The letter then denied Allied claims about German misdeeds in Belgium. According to the ninety-three signatories, Germany had not violated

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138 Ibid., 103.
139 Ibid., 193.
140 Ibid., 196.
141 Snyder, *Historic Documents of World War I*, 124-126.
Belgian neutrality. This was because Britain and France had conspired with Belgium beforehand to have British and French troops pass through Belgium to attack Germany. In light of this, Germany’s invasion of Belgium was understandable. As in the White Book, they claimed that any killings or burnings in Belgium were a just response to vicious franc-tireur violence. They further alleged that Belgians had committed grotesque atrocities, such as mutilating wounded soldiers and killing medics. The ninety-three specifically denied that German soldiers had deliberately destroyed Louvain. Similar to the German government’s assertions in the White Book, the signatories claimed that only part of Louvain had been burned and that German soldiers had made efforts to control the flames, saving the town hall. They finished their manifesto by stating that Germany was justified in being more concerned about winning the war than about preserving art. Again, contemporary historians have concluded that there was no franc-tireur campaign and, further, have determined that the Germans did deliberately burn Louvain.

The Germans also attempted to deny the atrocity claims by spreading propaganda in the United States, the world’s most powerful neutral country. In September 1914, the German government established a propaganda office in the United States, led by Bernhard Dernburg. Through the German Information Service, Dernburg and his colleagues hoped to counter propaganda that depicted Germany negatively and ultimately to prevent the United States from entering the war. Dernburg was at a disadvantage from the outset, as Germany’s decision to

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143 Fulwider, German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I, 49.
invade Belgium had permanently hurt its image. When evaluating his situation, Dernburg observed that Americans were dismayed by the invasion of Belgium and by the atrocity stories. Furthermore, there was a general belief that the Germans had caused the war. To combat this, Dernburg published an article in the New York Sun providing the German perspective on the outbreak of the war and on the invasion of Belgium. He claimed that Germany had entered the war because of actions by Austria-Hungary and Russia. He argued that Britain’s decision to enter the war did not derive from a humanitarian desire to defend Belgium, but rather from a desire to maintain Europe’s prewar balance of power. Finally, Dernburg argued that Belgium had crafted a secret military agreement with the British and that Britain would have violated Belgian neutrality if Germany had not invaded it first. Assisting Dernburg was Karl Alexander Fuehr, a German diplomat to Japan who was stranded in the United States at the war’s outset. Fuehr published The Neutrality of Belgium from the United States, in which he argued that Belgium had relinquished its neutrality as guaranteed by the 1839 Treaty of London by accepting British military protection and by annexing the Congo. Therefore, the British and Belgians had abrogated Belgium’s neutral status long before the war began. The German Information Service created a daily bulletin sent to American newspaper editors. The bulletin included reports of supposedly virtuous behavior by German soldiers, such as providing food aid to starving Belgians.

144 Castellan et al., American Cinematographers in the Great War, 1914-1918, 48.
146 Ibid., 62.
147 Castellan et al., American Cinematographers in the Great War, 1914-1918, 51.
148 Fulwider, German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I, 70.
149 Ibid., 68.
This effort by the Germans to excuse their behavior in Belgium was aided by some American journalists. The pro-German Chicago Tribune sent five journalists to Europe to determine the veracity of the atrocity reports. While their German hosts did bring them to Louvain, they were not brought to Aerschot or Dinant. On September 2, 1914, they stated that they had seen “absolutely no evidence of atrocities committed by the German Army against civilians in Belgium.” They acknowledged that the German Army had destroyed much of Louvain, but they also parroted the German claim that this violence was excusable because the Belgians had first engaged in franc-tireur violence. They also focused on debunking the more lurid German atrocities, such as rapes and mutilations, while ignoring other atrocities, such as shootings of civilians.

To further combat British propaganda, German propagandists turned to racist arguments regarding the Allied use of colonial soldiers. In the “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three German Intellectuals,” the signatories argued that the Allied Powers were guilty of “inciting Mongolians and negroes against the white race.” Dernburg deployed similar arguments in an interview in the United States. He claimed that the use of colonial soldiers had “amounted to a reversal of the dignity of the white man.” He stated that these soldiers were uncivilized and had low moral standards. In any case, they were far more “barbaric” than the caricatures of German soldiers in Allied propaganda. In 1915, Dernburg’s wife arrived in the United States and assisted her husband with his propaganda efforts. She also denounced the British for using

150 Castellan et al., American Cinematographers in the Great War, 1914-1918, 67.
151 Ibid., 65.
152 Ibid., 66.
153 Professors of Germany, “To the Civilized World,” 285.
154 Fulwider, German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I, 61.
colonial soldiers in World War I, especially when Germany had to rely almost fully on men from its European territories. She believed that Britain had become a “traitor to the white race.” The Continental Times, a newspaper controlled by the German Foreign Office, also deployed racial arguments. An article released in February 1915 denounced the Allies for using “uncivilized mercenaries” from Africa, India, and East Asia to fight against Germany. Asserting that Africans and Asians fought wars in a more barbaric manner than did Europeans, the German Foreign Office alleged that colonial soldiers had mutilated German soldiers. Foreign Office propaganda warned that if the British and French triumphed, the Germans would then find themselves subordinate to French Senegalese soldiers.

Ultimately, the German propagandists had only limited success in achieving their goals. According to Fulwider, while these agents were not able to prevent the United States from officially entering the war, they were able to delay its entry until early 1917. Fulwider also argued that the German propagandists had some success in preventing Allied attempts to obtain war goods from the United States and that they induced some skepticism about the British atrocity stories. However, they were ultimately unsuccessful in reversing the narrative about the war or preventing the United States from formally joining the Allies. Fuehr’s The Neutrality of Belgium was not widely persuasive. While a New York Times reviewer acknowledged that his arguments about Belgian neutrality did have some basis in fact, he believed that they

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155 Ibid., 65.
157 Fulwider, German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I, 49.
did not rebut or excuse the atrocities that had occurred.\textsuperscript{158} An overarching difficulty faced by the German Information Service was creating propaganda that appealed to American cultural codes. The Germans rooted their arguments in logic rather than in emotion, hoping that this would sway the Americans.\textsuperscript{159} As stated by Troy Paddock, while propaganda does not need to be devoid of intellectual content, it does need to appeal to emotion and to the target audience’s cultural values to be effective.\textsuperscript{160} Dernburg’s work in the United States ended when he defended the sinking of the \textit{Lusitania}, which backfired and further outraged his American audience.\textsuperscript{161} He returned to Germany in June 1915. Thus, while German propagandists had some minimal success, they were not able to appreciably effect a change in the Belgian atrocity narrative.

Thus, the Bryce Report and Allied war propaganda wrote the atrocities into history. Available historical evidence supports the major allegations of the Bryce Report. However, the Bryce Report and Allied war propaganda soon became associated with the war effort. Methodological flaws and inclusion of lurid crimes in the Bryce Report made it vulnerable to future attack. Depictions of extremely lurid crimes in Allied propaganda also made it vulnerable to future attack. The German propaganda effort was only minimally successful at this time, but it was the beginning of a more successful German campaign of denial that continued after the war.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{161} Fulwider, \textit{German Propaganda and U.S. Neutrality in World War I}, 65.
II. The Interwar Years: Revisionism Takes Hold

During the period of time between World War I and World War II, German atrocities in Belgium were written out of history. The two main groups of writers were British and American revisionists and German denialists. Although they had different concerns, the combined weight of their publications was able to overturn the narrative established during the war. A study of the major publications of this period demonstrates how and why this shift took place.

Immediately Prior to the Revisionist Movement

In 1920, less than two years after the end of World War I, the Committee on Public Information chairman, George Creel, published How We Advertised America. This was a boastful celebration of the work done by the CPI to bolster American popular support for the war and an explanation of the success of its different forms of propaganda. The CPI used every medium of information, such as printed matter, motion pictures, and posters. It also created photographs to be used in lectures. Discussion of the CPI’s atrocity propaganda was scant, although Creel acknowledged his aim of educating the American public about enemy “aggressions… and barbarities.” He responded to criticism of the atrocity propaganda which claimed that the CPI had not been sufficiently harsh about German conduct. Creel defended the atrocity propaganda used by the CPI and stated that including untrue accusations

163 Ibid., 131.
164 Ibid., 6.
would have led all American atrocity propaganda to be seen as suspect. With the support of the War Department, the CPI officials had issued denials of what they had believed to be exaggerated atrocity stories. Instead, the CPI had created pamphlets based in facts and evidence, including *German War Practices* and *German Treatment of Conquered Territory*. However, Senator Miles Poindexter of Washington concluded that the atrocity denials made by the Committee amounted to spreading “German propaganda,” a charge that Creel believed was absurd.\(^{165}\) While Creel felt the need to counter certain criticisms of the CPI, he did not feel the need to respond to any criticism claiming that the war propaganda was too critical of Germany. Indeed, Creel only felt the need to respond to claims that his atrocity stories had not been harsh enough. This indicates that, at the time, there was no established revisionist movement from which he needed to defend the CPI.

However, beginning with the passage of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, some writers began to revise the wartime narrative of German aggression, instead directing criticism toward the Allied governments. In particular, some observers regarded the treaty as excessively punitive. The first important book to criticize the treaty was John Maynard Keynes’ *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, first published in 1919. Keynes had been a member of the British delegation to Versailles and resigned due to his disagreement with the treaty. The book was widely popular, having been translated into eleven languages by 1924, and it was effective in souring British public opinion about the treaty.\(^ {166}\)

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\(^{165}\) Ibid., 56-57.  
\(^{166}\) Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, 260.
Keynes’ general argument was that the Treaty and Allied postwar conduct were unjustifiably harsh toward Germany and its citizens. The Treaty gave the Allied Powers the ability to expropriate German property in Germany’s relinquished territories without compensation.\textsuperscript{167} The reparations committee was given the power to demand that Germany pay one billion pounds before May 1, 1921. Keynes believed that this would give the committee the ability to seize German businesses and property both inside and outside Germany.\textsuperscript{168} More generally, Keynes believed that the reparations provisions levied by the Allied Powers were unfair and that Germany would not be able to pay such a sum. If the treaty stood as written, Germany would have “to hand over to the Allies the whole of her surplus production in perpetuity.”\textsuperscript{169} Keynes believed that this would permanently cripple the German economy. In his view, this would be seen as “one of the most outrageous acts of a cruel victor in civilized history.”\textsuperscript{170} Finally, Keynes believed that the treaty would not rehabilitate the damaged European economy or create lasting good relations with the defeated Central Powers.\textsuperscript{171}

Keynes also expressed concern with the Allied blockade of Germany, which had begun during the war and was continued after the armistice to force Germany into signing the peace treaty. Keynes noted that German coal output had collapsed during the war. One reason for this was that the wartime blockade had prevented Germany from importing mine equipment and food. This caused mine equipment to fall into

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 48-49.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 105.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 143.
disrepair and also caused malnutrition among German workers. Keynes later quoted Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, the first Foreign Minister of Weimar Germany, who believed that the Treaty of Versailles would permanently damage the German economy and cause starvation. According to Brockdorff-Rantzau, Germans were already close to starvation due to the wartime blockade, and this had been further aggravated by the blockade during the armistice. Keynes did not have an “adequate answer to these words.” In a sense, by critiquing the blockade, Keynes was reversing the moral verdict of the war. In his view, the Allies were also guilty of mistreating civilians.

It was in this context that Keynes analyzed the damages in Belgium and the reparations that Germany was ordered to pay to Belgium as compensation. Keynes acknowledged that there had been extensive destruction on the Western Front. However, he believed that the Allied governments had exaggerated the destruction, particularly the damage to Belgium. Keynes briefly acknowledged the ordeal of the Belgian people, noting that they had suffered during the initial invasion. There had been damage to the area of Belgium crossed by the Western Front, and German soldiers had later engaged in sabotage and theft while retreating. In the short-term, he characterized the destruction to Belgian industry as “paralyzing,” but he felt that recovery would occur with time. However, more of his text was devoted to the argument that Belgium did not suffer as much as believed, and he concluded that the

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172 Ibid., 56.
173 Ibid., 145.
174 Ibid., 146.
175 Ibid., 75-76.
176 Ibid., 76.
177 Ibid., 77.
reparations demanded of Germany were unjustifiable. According to Keynes, after 1914, all of the fighting in Belgium occurred in a small, poor, and non-industrialized corner of the country, and its large cities suffered little damage.\textsuperscript{178} While Belgium suffered the most destruction at the beginning of war in 1914, it suffered little after that. Keynes believed that, contrary to then contemporary thought, Belgium was not the main victim of World War I. He asserted that Serbia and France had proportionately suffered greater damage.\textsuperscript{179} In light of these assertions, Keynes concluded that the reparations that the Treaty levied to compensate Belgium could not be justified.\textsuperscript{180} However, Zuckerman has more recently disagreed with Keynes’ analysis, arguing that the Belgian economy suffered extensive destruction as a result of the German occupation.\textsuperscript{181}

Another writer who held a sympathetic view of Germany was Sidney Bradshaw Fay, a professor of history at Smith College. He was the first scholar to reevaluate the origins of the war. His first publications challenging the orthodox narrative of German war guilt were a series of 1920 articles titled “New Light on the Origins of the World War,” which were published in the \textit{American Historical Review}.\textsuperscript{182} During the war, Fay as a historian, and the \textit{Review} as a publication, had advanced the “sole-guilt theory,” and Fay had even contributed to a CPI publication.\textsuperscript{183} In 1920, however, Fay came to a different conclusion.

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\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 76. \\
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 79. \\
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 77-78. \\
\textsuperscript{181} Zuckerman, \textit{The Rape of Belgium}, 218-219. \\
\textsuperscript{182} Deborah E. Lipstadt, \textit{Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory} (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 32. \\
\end{flushright}
In the first article of his “New Light” series, Fay analyzed European diplomacy during the time period between the dismissal of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and the declaration of war on Serbia by Austria-Hungary. He devoted extra attention to the diplomatic maneuvering that occurred after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. While rejecting the thesis that German leadership had intentionally started the war, Fay did believe that German incompetence made a general European conflict possible. According to Fay, Bismarck had left Germany in a powerful position, but Kaiser Wilhelm II and his allies in the government had squandered this position with diplomatic blunders. As the Triple Alliance grew weaker, the opposing Triple Entente grew stronger and, by 1914, Germany and Austria-Hungary found themselves encircled by enemies. Because of this situation, German leaders felt a need to back Austria-Hungary when Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated. They were convinced that any action taken by Austria-Hungary would not lead to a greater European war. Fay judged this to be a serious mistake, as Austria-Hungary proved to be highly aggressive. Due to its earlier promise of support, Germany felt obligated to continue backing Austria-Hungary in order to sustain the Alliance. Fay stated that Bethmann-Hollweg and Kaiser Wilhelm “were not criminals plotting the World War.” In fact, they were “simpletons” being led around by “a stupid and clumsy adventurer [Austria-Hungary] who now felt free to go as far as he liked.”

185 Ibid., 624.
186 Ibid., 628.
187 Ibid., 638-639.
188 Ibid., 628.
After receiving support from Germany, the Austro-Hungarian leadership moved inexorably toward war, occasionally over German objections. Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Berchtold sent Friedrich von Wiesner to Sarajevo to collect evidence proving that the Serbian government was directly linked to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, which would give Austria-Hungary a casus belli. According to Fay, when Wiesner reported that there was no such evidence, Berchtold suppressed the report.\(^{189}\) The next step to war was to release an ultimatum to Serbia with terms that the Serbs would certainly not accept. Fay again absolved Germany of any guilt, stating that Berchtold released the ultimatum without notifying Germany, as Germany might have tried to restrain Austria-Hungary.\(^{190}\) Indeed, the day before the declaration of war, Bethmann-Hollweg did try to restrain Berchtold, but he ignored these pleas, and Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.\(^{191}\)

A final contention about German war guilt that Fay disputed was the notion of a “crown council” in Berlin, in which German leadership planned for a general European war. Fay concluded that such an event never took place.\(^{192}\)

In his analysis of the diplomatic maneuvers between the June 28 Austro-Hungarian declaration of war against Serbia and the August 1 German declaration of war against Russia, Fay again asserted that Germany was not the immediate instigator of the war and that Austria-Hungary bore greater responsibility. According to Fay, Bethmann-Hollweg forwarded many proposals for conciliation to Berchtold, but he

\(^{189}\) Ibid., 634.
\(^{190}\) Ibid., 636.
\(^{191}\) Ibid., 637-638.
\(^{192}\) Ibid., 630-631.
refused to yield. Diplomatic cables among the various Austro-Hungarian diplomats demonstrated that they all found the idea of a mediated peace distasteful. As time passed, Austria-Hungary continued to stonewall any peace discussions, and the Russian leaders began to mobilize the country’s military, suggesting that Germany was in danger of being unprepared if a general European war were to break out. Because of this, Germany issued its “Imminence of War” declaration along with ultimatums to France and Russia. Fay saw Austria-Hungary, which felt vulnerable to internal nationalism and Russian encroachment, as the main instigator of World War I. However, he also placed some of the blame on Russia. Partially as a result of its humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, Russia was also unwilling to de-escalate the drive toward war.

While firmly opposed to the view that Germany had deliberately caused the war, Fay’s articles did not completely exonerate the German leaders. He claimed that Germany had foolishly given Austria-Hungary a “free hand” and that it did not try to restrain its ally until it was too late. At a deeper level, Fay partially attributed the outbreak of the war to “militarism,” and he believed that Germany was particularly militaristic. Fay was similarly critical of the ultimatum to Belgium. While Fay believed that Bethmann-Hollweg opposed an invasion through Belgium “on moral grounds,” the remainder of his narrative negatively portrayed German leadership. The decision to violate Belgian neutrality was viewed as being motivated by German

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194 Ibid., 47-48.
195 Ibid., 51.
196 Ibid., 52.
197 Ibid., 52-53.
military considerations. Fay contested the claim made by General von Moltke in the ultimatum that France was planning to invade Germany through Belgium. He saw no concrete evidence to support this assertion and believed that this pretext could not justify the violation of Belgian neutrality. While Fay was not willing to completely exonerate Germany, his writings were still a large departure from the wartime narrative of German war guilt.

While analyzing the Anglophone revisionist works, it is important to understand contemporary scholars’ conclusions about the war’s origins as many revisionists engaged in both denial of Germany’s war guilt and its atrocities in Belgium. Early revisionist conclusions about war guilt are similar to those of most contemporary historians, who also do not believe that Germany alone caused the war. Watson argued that Austria-Hungary was the main instigator of the war, claiming that its leaders “were exceptional, for they alone actively planned from early July 1914 to take their country to war.” He believed that its ultimatum had been written in a way that Serbia could not accept it, necessarily leading to a war. Watson believed that Austro-Hungarian aggression was rooted in anxiety over its internal disunion and fear of Russian encroachment. Recent historical analysis supports the idea that Germany did not want a general European war and was not directly responsible for it. According to Clark, although Germany did give a “blank check” to Austria-Hungary to support its aggressions against Serbia, the German leadership did not believe that

198 Ibid., 48-49.
199 Watson, Ring of Steel, 8.
200 Ibid., 13.
201 Ibid., 14-28.
this would cause a general European war. Regarding Bethmann-Hollweg, Clark argued that the Chancellor was intent on allowing Austria-Hungary to proceed with its localized war. Once the Russian mobilization occurred, however, Bethmann-Hollweg attempted to restrain Austria-Hungary. At that point, it was impossible to avoid a greater European war. Finally, Clark noted that Russia had enacted the first general mobilization, indicating that Russia also bore some responsibility for the war. In the accounts that follow, many Anglophone revisionist authors linked war origin and war guilt revisionism with atrocity revisionism. It is important to analyze atrocity revisionism separately as a distinct feature of revisionism about World War I.

*Proliferation of German Propaganda*

Also in the immediate post-war period, there was a proliferation of pro-German propaganda that sought both to exonerate Germany and to question the veracity of German atrocities in Belgium. In 1921, E.N. Bennett, a veteran of World War I, a former Liberal MP, and a future Labour MP, translated the German White Book. This book was then published in the United Kingdom for the first time, and, according to Lipkes, his forward to the book was the first British printed text to defend German conduct in Belgium. In it, Bennett expressed concern with what he believed to be an inaccurate portrayal of events by the Bryce Committee. He claimed that the Committee members were influenced by “war-fever” and that this led them toward prejudiced conclusions that he hoped to correct. He critiqued the testimony

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203 Ibid., 524-525.
204 Ibid., 509.
collected by the barristers and the manner in which it was collected, stating that the testimony was “made by excited and angry Belgians” and was not taken under oath, casting doubt on its reliability.²⁰⁶ He was particularly unwilling to accept claims that there was no franc-tireur campaign against German soldiers.²⁰⁷ He provided fifteen excerpts from Belgian newspapers printed during the war ostensibly demonstrating that there was a franc-tireur campaign, thus proving his suspicion to be accurate.²⁰⁸ It was because of this that Bennett felt compelled to publish the German reply so as to counter what he believed was a false narrative.

Further, Bennett subtly expressed disappointment with war propaganda and censorship as well as a negative view of the war itself. He directly questioned why the British people were prevented from seeing the German White Book, with the only possible conclusion being that it would have damaged the wartime narrative of German responsibility of the war. Bennett believed that it was absurd for British authorities to ask Germany to prove franc-tireur stories and then to suppress the German response, implying that the British had not been arguing in good faith.²⁰⁹ He also claimed that the British government had engaged in “the deliberate and disgraceful circulation of pseudo-atrocity stories during the war.” He believed that this propaganda was created with the goal of winning the war, which Bennett, quoting Woodrow Wilson, described as “a commercial and industrial war.” This cynical outlook on the causes of the war was coupled closely with skepticism of anti-German

²⁰⁶ Bennett, *The German Army in Belgium*, v-vi.
²⁰⁷ Ibid., vi.
²⁰⁸ Ibid., viii-ix.
²⁰⁹ Ibid., vii.
propaganda and of German atrocities in Belgium.\textsuperscript{210} Bennett was also horrified by British conduct during the then ongoing Anglo-Irish War, and he suggested that British conduct in Ireland was more reprehensible than German conduct in Belgium. He named the massacre at Croke Park and the destruction of buildings and property in Cork as examples of horrific behavior by British soldiers in Ireland, and he felt that this conduct was less defensible than similar alleged German conduct in Belgium. Bennett also believed that the alleged Belgian francs-tireurs were brigands without an organized structure. He contrasted this with the IRA fighters, who he claimed were organized enough to be considered “combatants engaged in civil war.” Therefore, reprisals against Irish fighters were less justified than were reprisals against Belgians.\textsuperscript{211} In Bennett’s writing, condemnation of British postwar conduct and minimization of the atrocities in Belgium were closely linked.

German military figures published their own memoirs, which sought to deny that the German Army had committed atrocities in Belgium. During his brief exile in Sweden following the end of World War I, former Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff wrote his memoirs, which were published in 1919. Ludendorff served at Liège during early August 1914 before being transferred to the Eastern Front. He portrayed Germany as being surrounded by malicious enemies, with Russia, France, and Britain all eager to overpower the Central Powers. He believed that the war was forced onto Germany.\textsuperscript{212} Ludendorff assumed that France would invade Belgium first or that Belgium would join France. This, coupled with the perceived inability of

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., x.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., xi-xii.
Germany to fight a long, defensive war, led Count von Schlieffen and the German High Command to approve an invasion through Belgium.\textsuperscript{213}

On entering Belgium, Ludendorff noted that the Belgians had destroyed roads and bridges to block the German advance, and he noted that they had not placed obstacles to entry from France, intimating that Belgium was secretly aligned with France.\textsuperscript{214} Ludendorff claimed that there were francs-tireurs, and his temporary lodging was the target of one such attack. He charged the Belgian government with having “systematically organized civilian warfare” and stated that soldiers would covertly change from military to civilian dress. Thus, German soldiers were completely justified in enacting harsh measures to crush the franc-tireur violence. He characterized the assertion that Germans committed atrocities in Belgium to be “nothing but clever, elaborate and widelyadvertised legends.”\textsuperscript{215} Later, in arguments that mirrored those made by Keynes, Ludendorff complained about the conduct of the Allied governments, sometimes implicitly referencing the Treaty of Versailles. He also complained about the British decision to seize German businesses during the war and about the blockade, which caused much suffering.\textsuperscript{216}

Another memoir was that of Prince Bernhard von Bülow, which was first published in German in 1931 and in English in 1932. Bülow served as chancellor of Germany from 1900 to 1909 and as a diplomat in Italy during the early stages of the war. He criticized the Treaty of Versailles, calling it “the shameful peace of Versailles,” and referred to it as especially “crushing,” “ignominious,” and “brutally

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 24-25. \\
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 30-31. \\
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 30. \\
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 475. \\
\end{footnotes}
imposed” relative to other historical treaties.\textsuperscript{217} He bemoaned the loss of territory and the disarmament demands, but he was most aggrieved by the “War Guilt Clause,” arguing that Germany did not begin the war and that errors by German statesmen caused Germany to “fall into the trap set for us.”\textsuperscript{218}

Bülow also made reference to the invasion of Belgium and to the subsequent atrocity stories. In retrospect, Bülow believed that the decision to invade Belgium was a serious mistake that permanently turned global public opinion against Germany. According to Bülow, this was made even worse by Bethmann-Hollweg’s speech to the Reichstag, in which he claimed that the invasion was morally wrong, but necessary. Bethmann-Hollweg again hurt his cause with his “scrap of paper” comment.\textsuperscript{219} Later, he noted that the invasion of Belgium and the violation of its neutrality were used as cudgels against Germany for the remainder of the war and that Germany was unable to counter these arguments.\textsuperscript{220} However, while almost conceding the argument regarding the violation of Belgian neutrality, Bülow did contest Allied atrocity propaganda. He claimed that the Allies had circulated small statues of Belgian children with hands cut off in Italy. He claimed that this atrocity propaganda was false and then stated that the German Army had always been “valiant and humane.” Bülow did not address other accusations against Germans, such as better-established allegations of shootings and burnings. Instead, he chose to focus on and to contest the mutilation accusations, which later historians concluded were less likely to be true. After denying the mutilation accusations, Bülow then pivoted to

\textsuperscript{217} Bernhard von Bülow, Memoirs of Prince von Bülow III: The World War and Germany’s Collapse, 1909-1919 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1932), 350-351.\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 352.\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 195-196.\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 199.
overarching statements seeking to convince the reader that German soldiers had behaved in an exemplary fashion in France and Belgium.\textsuperscript{221}

In addition, the Weimar government itself created propaganda that argued against the narrative of German guilt. One agency that devoted itself to creating this propaganda was the War Guilt Section of the Foreign Ministry, which distributed its propaganda through the Working Committee of German Associations (ADV), the Center for the Study of the Causes of the War, and the parliamentary Committee of Enquiry.\textsuperscript{222} Parliamentary committees seeking to exonerate Germany were created alongside these propaganda campaigns. One committee was created to address war guilt, and a sister committee was created to dispel accusations that Germany had violated international law. The Committee admitted that the deportation of Belgian workers was “brutal” but attributed this entirely to “inadequate organization of German transports.”\textsuperscript{223}

Germany also denied mistreatment of Belgians in its official history of the war, published in 1925. In it, the authors alleged that there was franc-tireur violence in Dinant but omitted any mention of the killing of 674 civilians. The writers narrated the events at Tamines in a similar manner.\textsuperscript{224} Starting in 1926 and intensifying with a memorandum released in 1928, the Reichswehr Ministry also pushed to influence the narrative of German atrocities in Belgium. This led to the publication of Robert Oszwald’s \textit{The Dispute about the Belgian Franc-Tireur War} in 1931, based on archival records of German Army units. The thesis of Oszwald’s

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 249.
\textsuperscript{222} Holger H. Herwig, “Clio Deceived: Patriotic Self-Censorship in Germany after the Great War,” \textit{International Security} 12, No. 2 (Fall, 1987), 6.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{224} Horne and Kramer, \textit{German Atrocities, 1914}, 394.
book was that the Belgian people had engaged in an illegal franc-tireur campaign against the German Army. According to Horne and Kramer, both the Reichswehr and Oswald had political agendas. Horne and Kramer believed that the leaders of the Reichswehr hoped to rehabilitate the image of the Army of Imperial Germany, which would, in turn, give themselves greater credibility. Meanwhile, Oswald hoped to prove the existence of a Belgian franc-tireur campaign, which would justify the reprisals and would undermine the Treaty of Versailles and its reparations claims. Oswald was also a member of the German National People’s Party (DNVP), a right-wing and anti-republican nationalist party.²²⁵

Finally, German propaganda continued to exploit racism after the war. Once the Treaty of Versailles went into effect, France deployed thirty to forty thousand colonial soldiers, most of whom were Africans, to the Rhineland.²²⁶ This revived the wartime trope of “the savagery of colonial soldiers,” and stories were widely circulated that African soldiers were raping German women.²²⁷ This “Black Horror on the Rhine” was universally condemned by Germans regardless of their political or religious beliefs. German women’s groups were also irate, with one pamphlet complaining that “The same Negro, treated as second-class in France and held on a bridle, is allowed to behave in the Rhineland as a conqueror and master.” According to Andrew Jarboe, this argument was received sympathetically in Allied countries. In Great Britain, anti-Congo Free State crusader, pacifist, and future Labour MP E.D.

²²⁵ Ibid., 395-396.
²²⁷ Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 1914, 362-363.
Morel condemned the French use of African troops in Germany. In France, this directly related back to the issue of German atrocities, as left-wing activists used the alleged rapes by African soldiers to argue that Germany and the Allies were both guilty of atrocities, diluting German guilt. This supported their arguments favoring revision of the war responsibility clauses of the Treaty.

Revisionism of the late 1920’s in Great Britain

Though the first revisionist ideas had appeared in the early 1920’s, it was in the late 1920’s that revisionism of German atrocities in Belgium reached its crest in British literature. One of the first and most notable books was Arthur Ponsonby’s *Falsehood in War-Time*, which was first published in 1928. Ponsonby was a member of Morel’s Union of Democratic Control during the war which had opposed the use of atrocity propaganda. After the war, he became a Labour MP and strongly advocated for pacifism. Ponsonby made no secret of his views in *Falsehood in War-Time*, arguing that “War is, in itself, an atrocity.” He argued that governments typically used falsehoods to induce their people to support war and to recruit soldiers. He stated that “atrocity lies” were one type of falsehood that governments used and that this type of propaganda was particularly popular in Great Britain and the United States during World War I.

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230 Ibid., 368.
232 Ibid., 13-14.
233 Ibid., 22.
For most of the remainder of his book, Ponsonby presented examples of what he believed to be false atrocity propaganda and sought to demonstrate their inaccuracies. He discussed the issue of Belgian infants who allegedly had their hands chopped off. He ridiculed this assertion, noting that an infant with a severed hand would quickly die without medical attention. He then gave examples of wartime newspaper clippings and posters forwarding the severed hands story, arguing that it was widely accepted by the British public.\(^{234}\) However, three Allied wartime politicians and soldiers cast doubt on the severed hands story.\(^{235}\) He devoted three pages to the discussion of the crucified Canadian soldier in Ypres. This was first reported in *The Times* in May 1915 and later used in wartime propaganda posters.\(^{236}\) Ponsonby noted that the Allied governments could not prove this story, and at least one general denied it.\(^{237}\) Similarly, in 1918, an American soldier claimed to have seen a crucified girl on the Western Front, but his claims were also suspect.\(^{238}\) Ponsonby then cited a story in the *Daily Citizen* of Glasgow claiming that the Germans had buried Belgian miners alive by blocking the mine exits. The General Secretary of the Belgian Miners denied this story.\(^{239}\) Later, he used five newspaper articles of escalating sensationalism to demonstrate how a story about German soldiers ringing church bells after the capture of Antwerp became a tale of German soldiers using Belgian priests as bell clappers.\(^{240}\) However, two of the news articles

\(^{234}\) Ibid., 78-79.  
\(^{235}\) Ibid., 81.  
\(^{237}\) Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time*, 92-93.  
\(^{238}\) Ibid., 184.  
\(^{239}\) Ibid., 157.  
\(^{240}\) Ibid., 161.
did not actually exist, and Ponsonby’s source was a German satire of Allied propaganda.\textsuperscript{241}

Ponsonby’s book also included a seven-page chapter titled “Atrocity Stories.” He examined a claim by a man stating that his wife had treated Belgian women who had had their breasts cut off, and he then examined a claim by a clergyman stating that a Belgian girl “had had her nose cut off and her stomach ripped open by the Germans.” He concluded that neither story was accurate.\textsuperscript{242} Mirroring a claim made by Bennett, Ponsonby asserted that Belgian witness testimony was unreliable and that the Bryce Report was flawed for uncritically basing itself on this testimony.\textsuperscript{243} To further defend claims that atrocities in Belgium were fabricated, Ponsonby cited the testimony of the five journalists sent to Belgium by the \textit{Chicago Tribune}.\textsuperscript{244} Ponsonby attempted to deny atrocity reports by discrediting witnesses and citing biased reporters. He also sought to prove that atrocity claims were false by citing the most lurid examples of mutilations while never acknowledging the more well-established examples of shootings and burnings.

Ponsonby coupled his effort to dispel atrocity stories with a revisionist view of the war’s origins. He argued that Britain’s alliance with France had forced the British to enter the war.\textsuperscript{245} However, as honoring an entangling alliance with France was not a \textit{casus belli} that the public would accept, British leadership instead forwarded a defense of Belgian neutrality as the reason for entering the war.\textsuperscript{246} Ponsonby sought

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\item \textsuperscript{241} Lipkes, \textit{Rehearsals}, 622.
\item \textsuperscript{242} Ponsonby, \textit{Falsehood in War-Time}, 132-133.
\item \textsuperscript{243} Ibid., 128.
\item \textsuperscript{244} Ibid., 130.
\item \textsuperscript{245} Ibid., 33.
\item \textsuperscript{246} Ibid., 50-51.
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to convince his readers that “The invasion of Belgium was not the cause of the war.” Similar to Fay, he contested the belief that Germany bore sole responsibility for the war. Ponsonby noted that, with the end of the war, the sole responsibility theory had lost popularity and credibility, and even the wartime leaders had spoken against it. Quoting Austin Harrison of the *English Review*, he denounced the Treaty of Versailles for the infamous War Guilt Clause and for its “economic monstrosities.” Unlike Fay, however, Ponsonby was willing to excuse the German violation of Belgian neutrality. He first argued that every country has violated another country’s neutrality at one time, making the German violation of Belgian neutrality not particularly worthy of condemnation. He also repeated German propaganda claims that Belgium had already violated its own neutrality by making military arrangements with France and Britain and that France would have invaded Belgium if Germany had not. Furthermore, Ponsonby complained about the excessively negative view of the Kaiser in wartime propaganda. Indeed, wartime caricatures and films had portrayed Kaiser Wilhelm II as bloodthirsty and intent on world domination. Finally, Fay was concerned by what he viewed as hypocrisy by the Allied governments and press. For example, the British press harshly condemned the German use of poison gas, but the Allied armies also used chemical warfare. Thus, in his dissatisfaction with entry into the war and with Allied behavior during

247 Ibid., 56.
248 Ibid., 58-59.
249 Ibid., 60.
250 Ibid., 52-53.
251 Ibid., 71.
252 Ibid., 146-147.
and after the war, Ponsonby sought to reverse the wartime narrative of German guilt and Allied innocence.

Another important British text was Irene Cooper Willis’ *England’s Holy War*. Cooper Willis was a British barrister who published three short texts in 1919, 1920, and 1921, and republished them as *England’s Holy War* in 1928. The focus of Cooper Willis’ study was the British Liberal press. She argued that, before the war, Liberals were not favorably disposed toward intervention in war as a result of military alliances and promises. For example, in the case of Belgium, the Liberal *Manchester Guardian* had argued that Britain was not obliged to declare war on Germany as a result of its violation of Belgian neutrality. However, once the war began, Liberals convinced themselves to support it through framing the conflict as a struggle to achieve “the final overthrow of militarism and the liberation of all oppressed peoples.” Cooper Willis argued that support for the so-called “holy war” was misguided and that involvement in the war was an abandonment of Liberal principles. From her perspective, the war had caused people to abandon “fact and reason” and to believe in “passionate delusions and superstitions.”

According to Cooper Willis, stories of German atrocities in Belgium were used to galvanize Liberal support for the war. After the war began, Liberals used atrocity stories to convince themselves to support the war for humanitarian reasons. Cooper Willis noted that the Liberal press was initially dismissive of atrocity reports, claiming that atrocities occurred in all wars and that negative stories about the enemy

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254 Ibid., 56-57.
255 Ibid., x.
256 Ibid., xviii-xix.
always accompanied war. However, she argued that the Liberal press soon
succeeded to spreading atrocity propaganda.257

Cooper Willis analyzed an October 1914 article in the *Nation* which discussed
massacres at Dinant and the shooting of a French boy and argued that “the story reads
like truth.” Cooper Willis ridiculed this analysis as not providing satisfying proof,
stating that it was possible and even common for untrue stories to appear truthful.258
She also examined the *Daily News* which published stories about atrocities in
Louvain, Malines, and Rheims and discussed girls with severed breasts and infants
with severed hands. Cooper Willis believed that the publication of these details was
part of a conscious campaign to demonize Germany. This would then make Germany
appear evil relative to Russia and justify the wartime alliance with Russia, an illiberal
absolute monarchy.259 Finally, she argued that Belgian atrocity stories were
intentionally used to gain recruits. She observed that these stories were so useful that,
even if there were no atrocities, it might “have been necessary to invent them.” In
this passage, Cooper Willis argued that the British government had reason to fabricate
atrocities and left open the possibility that it may have done this.260

Similar to other revisionist writers, Cooper Willis opposed the idea of German
war guilt asserted by the Treaty of Versailles. In her preface, she argued that this
belief was inaccurate and contributed to the creation of the “holy war” myth
complex.261 In addition, Cooper Willis was appalled by the Allied wartime blockade
of Germany. As the blockade plan included neutral ports, Britain was violating the

257 Ibid., 128.
258 Ibid., 132.
259 Ibid., 133.
260 Ibid., 186.
261 Ibid., xviii.
rights of neutral countries while also denouncing the German violation of Belgian neutrality. She noted that the blockade had driven the Germans toward starvation and criticized the Liberal press for either denying this fact or justifying the blockade policy in spite of it. She also observed that the blockade continued after the armistice despite horrific starvation and that the British public and press displayed callous indifference to it. Cooper Willis believed that atrocity propaganda was the cause that Liberals needed to justify support of the war. The war caused them to abandon their principles, to support wartime myths, and to justify appalling wartime and postwar actions. She hoped to discredit the atrocity propaganda itself by arguing that it was not sufficiently proven, and she used lurid examples of mutilation rather than more commonly accepted examples in order to do this.

A third British text that made reference to atrocities in Belgium was Good-Bye to All That, a 1929 memoir by British author Robert Graves that included his experiences on the Western Front in World War I. Immediately after the beginning of the war, Graves enlisted in the British Army. At the time, he was angered by the violation of Belgian neutrality and by the atrocity stories which he had heard. When he enlisted, he had believed most of the atrocity stories, but he was far more skeptical later when he wrote his memoir. To support his skepticism about the atrocity stories, he cited Ponsonby’s chapter that described the sensational but very likely false account of German soldiers using Belgian priests as bell clappers. After long service in the trenches, Graves and his comrades came to doubt the atrocity stories.

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262 Ibid., 207.
263 Ibid., 201.
264 Ibid., 325.
Graves excluded massacres from his definition of “atrocity” and restricted his definition to the more lurid acts of “rape, mutilation and torture.” He depicted French and Belgian civilians negatively, stating that they tried to convince the British soldiers of mutilation tales by showing them body parts that, according to Graves, were probably severed by shells.\footnote{Ibid., 162-163.} Graves then claimed that Commonwealth soldiers often killed German prisoners of war. The Canadians were believed to be the most willing to kill prisoners of war due to their outrage over the crucified Canadian soldier, an atrocity story which Graves believed “had never been substantiated.”\footnote{Ibid., 163-164.} Graves also noted German outrage at the deployment of “semi-civilized coloured troops in Europe,” with which he and other the British soldiers “sympathized.”\footnote{Ibid., 165.} In his brief analysis of German atrocities in Belgium, Graves focused on the most lurid examples, expressed his belief that they were false, and then redirected the accusation of atrocities toward the Allies.

Graves’ memoir was part of the “literature of disenchantment” movement that sought to counter the romantic portrayals of both the war and the British soldier that were popular during the conflict.\footnote{Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 1914, 372.} He discussed his horrific experiences, including being hit by a shell and almost being killed.\footnote{Graves, Good-Bye to All That, 193.} Graves attributed his decision to enlist in this conflict to his belief, derived from the newspapers, that the war would be over before Christmas, that he would likely not be sent into combat, and that the atrocity stories were real.\footnote{Ibid., 59.} Therefore, it was unsurprising that his disillusionment was
associated with a desire to dispel these atrocity stories. Similar to other revisionists, Graves was also a critic of the Treaty of Versailles. Similar to Keynes, he believed that it would lead to another war, and he was appalled that “nobody cared” about this.272

Revisionism of the late 1920’s in the United States

The wave of revisionism influenced American historians too, and Harry Elmer Barnes emerged as its most famous advocate. Similar to Fay, Barnes had created anti-German propaganda during the war. However, starting in 1920, while he was a lecturer at Clark University, Barnes began to doubt his past work. After reading Fay’s ground-breaking articles about the war’s origins, Barnes’ skepticism solidified, and he devoted himself to writing revisionist history about the war.273 His two most famous books forwarding his revisionist conclusions were The Genesis of the World War, published in 1926, and In Quest of Truth and Justice, published in 1928.

In The Genesis of the World War, Barnes argued that the two most significant underlying causes of the war were the French desire to recapture Alsace-Lorraine and the Russian desire to seize the Turkish Straits, which ultimately motivated both countries to create a war with the Central Powers.274 According to Barnes, Allied propaganda and the Treaty of Versailles had depicted Germany as being responsible for the war.275 He strongly disagreed, arguing that most Germans did not want a war

272 Ibid., 255.
273 Blakey, Historians on the Homefront, 133.
275 Ibid., 230.
and, indeed, had no reason to want one.\textsuperscript{276} Germany had given a “blank check” to Austria-Hungary, but when a greater European war seemed possible, the Kaiser sought to restrain Austria-Hungary. While Fay criticized the German leadership for not restraining its ally quickly enough, Barnes believed that this pressure was only “too late” due to “Austrian obstinacy” and the “indefensible Russian general mobilization.”\textsuperscript{277} Barnes believed that Britain had always planned to go to war with Germany if France did. He asserted that the two countries had made military preparations together before the war.\textsuperscript{278} This “secret promise” to France was the actual reason that Great Britain entered the war. The issue of Belgian neutrality was only used as a casus belli so as to “inflame the British public against Germany” and to obscure the real reason for war, which, Barnes implied, would have been less popular.\textsuperscript{279} Barnes devoted part of \textit{In Quest of Truth and Justice} to proving the theses of his previous book.

Barnes’ views and persona provoked different reactions among different groups. Barnes was unpopular with many of his historian colleagues due to his vicious style of argument and his personal attacks against those who disagreed with him.\textsuperscript{280} However, he still proved popular in some circles, which enabled him to lecture about his views at American universities.\textsuperscript{281} He also proved popular among German deniers. The Center for the Study of the Causes of the War assisted him in his research and published his works. At the same time, the ADV created German

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{276} Ibid., 233.
\item \textsuperscript{277} Ibid., 299-300.
\item \textsuperscript{278} Ibid., 578.
\item \textsuperscript{279} Ibid., 545-546.
\item \textsuperscript{280} Blakey, \textit{Historians on the Homefront}, 136.
\item \textsuperscript{281} Lipstadt, \textit{Denying the Holocaust}, 67.
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and French translations of *The Genesis of the World War*. In 1926, Barnes went on a lecture tour in Germany where he was received favorably and even received an audience with the exiled Kaiser.283

Most of Barnes’ work related to the issue of war guilt, and he devoted little of his attention to the issue of German wrongdoings on the Western Front.284 His scant analysis of the invasion of Belgium was a de facto defense of Germany. He also sought to demonstrate that the Allied conduct was no more moral than German conduct. In his first book, he argued that the decision to invade Belgium was “a diplomatic blunder of the first magnitude,” but he also believed that Britain and France had “contemplated” military action through Belgium. Germany openly admitted that it had violated Belgian neutrality, while Great Britain refused to admit that it had violated the rights of neutral countries through its naval actions or its invasion of Greece. Barnes also believed that the invasion of the Ruhr was a violation of the Treaty of Versailles.285 He acknowledged that the Germans had bombed Rheims in spite of its historical and artistic value, but he also noted that the Allies had bombed Damascus.286 He acknowledged that Germany might have committed atrocities, though not to a greater extent than any other power. He attacked the Bryce Report and other publications as untrue, and he used the unlikely stories of Belgian children with severed hands to defend this assertion.287 Like many

282 Herwig, “Clio Deceived,” 26-27.
283 Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust*, 68.
286 Ibid., 296.
287 Ibid., 292.
other revisionist writers, Barnes took one of the least provable and most unlikely stories and used it to imply that all atrocity assertions were suspicious.

In his second book, Barnes continued to cast doubt on the atrocity stories and to deny German guilt by stating that the Allies were equally guilty of crimes. Barnes mentioned crucifixions, rapes, and mutilations as atrocities of which Germans had been accused. He tried to discredit tales of looting by listing them alongside more lurid but less credible atrocity stories. He attacked the Bryce Committee for propagating these stories, and he argued that its Report was a key factor in the United States’ decision to enter the war. Barnes noted that the Committee’s report of mutilations could not be proven after the war, but he did not analyze its other types of atrocity reports. He concluded his discussion with an analysis of Allied conduct during and after the war, including the British blockade of Germany, which he claimed killed eight hundred thousand German women and children. In doing this, he was inverting the moral lesson of the war. He again raised the issue of the French occupation of the Rhine, and, in his second book, he added a reference to the alleged rapes of German women by African soldiers. Barnes echoed German arguments about African soldiers raping German women. It was evident in In Quest of Truth and Justice that this racist worldview was beginning to influence his scholarship and that it had played a role in his decision to direct outrage away from German conduct.

In 1927, Harold D. Lasswell, a doctoral student at the University of Chicago, published Propaganda Technique in the World War, which was the first scholarly

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288 Harry Elmer Barnes, In Quest of Truth and Justice (Chicago: National Historical Society, 1928), 95.  
289 Ibid., 97.
book to specifically analyze World War I propaganda. Lasswell believed that propaganda was an important component of any war effort and argued that, along with military and economic pressure, it was one of the three main types of action against an enemy. He argued that the most powerful effects of propaganda were to increase hatred for the enemy and to induce neutral countries to enter the war.

Lasswell devoted part of his text to the study of atrocity propaganda. In some respects, relative to many other writers who analyzed this subject, Lasswell was less vociferous in his criticism of Allied propaganda claims. In his analysis of the Bryce Report, he insinuated that it was effective propaganda, stating that it was “initiated” by Wellington House. He also argued that the Report was created with the intent of influencing American public opinion. These statements did cast some doubt on the independence of the Committee and suggested that it had ulterior motives, calling into question the Report’s accuracy. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, Lasswell did not directly argue that the Report’s claims were false. Later, he analyzed the German White Book, which he described as being “for the purpose of incriminating the Belgians,” intimating that the book was not an impartial examination of fact. In his comments about the Bryce Report and the White Book, Lasswell gave a more favorable view of the British and a less favorable view of the Germans than many of his predecessors and contemporaries. Not arguing that the Bryce Report was false was a change in the narrative.

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292 Ibid., 19.
293 Ibid., 88.
294 Ibid., 132.
However, Lasswell was willing to criticize some Allied atrocity stories in Belgium and France. He gave the example of a story about a seven-year-old who was killed by Germans for pointing a wooden gun at them, stating that this account had been recycled from the Franco-Prussian War. He also noted that, in wartime, it was common to emphasize crimes against women and children, sexual crimes, and mutilations. These stories inflamed the emotions of the propaganda targets. This was an allusion to the accusations made against the Germans, and Lasswell cast doubt on their truthfulness by arguing that these were tropes present in all war propaganda.295

In addition, in the instances when Lasswell did not deny claims of German atrocities, he often noted that the Allies had also been guilty of similar atrocities. For example, he noted that the Germans were castigated for bombing Allied civilians but that the Allies had also engaged in this conduct.296 Lasswell noted that the Allies expressed outrage at the execution of Edith Cavell but that the French then proceeded to execute two German nurses.297 He further discussed Allied hypocrisy by repeating the German argument that Britain was violating other countries’ neutrality at sea. Also, he presented the Allied desire to free oppressed peoples, with Belgians being one such group, as hypocritical due to British rule over “Ireland, Egypt, and India.”298

Finally, Lasswell took note of the excessively negative view of the Kaiser in Allied propaganda.299 Thus, Lasswell was attempting to undermine the atrocity stories by focusing on lurid examples and by equating the moral status of the Allies and Germany.

295 Ibid., 82.
296 Ibid., 83-84.
297 Ibid., 32.
298 Ibid., 65-66.
299 Ibid., 89-90.
In his book, Lasswell stated that the effective propagandist first established war guilt and then solidified the case against the guilty party via atrocity propaganda. He argued that “every war must appear to be a war of defence against a menacing, murderous aggressor” in order to gain universal support, as the public typically opposed war. He noted that, in both Germany and in the Allied countries, historians and writers held the enemy responsible for the war. While Lasswell did not explicitly discuss the merits of these arguments, his general tone implied a belief that arguments placing the blame on only one country were untrue. By tying war guilt to atrocity guilt and then by arguing that the Germans were not guilty of starting the war, Lasswell also cast doubt on the Belgian atrocity stories.

Another American revisionist writer in the late 1920’s was C. Hartley Grattan. Grattan matriculated at Clark University in 1920 and quickly became an acolyte of Harry Elmer Barnes. After graduating from Clark, Grattan became a journalist associated with H.L. Mencken. In 1927, Grattan, Barnes, and Mencken collaborated to create “The Historians Cut Loose,” an article that ran in Mencken’s *American Mercury*. This article attacked the various American propaganda agencies, as well as the historians who created propaganda during the war. In 1929, Grattan published *Why We Fought*, an analysis of the American entry into the war.

Grattan was vehemently critical of allegations of German atrocities in Belgium. He argued that many of the atrocity allegations were not violations of international law and often were “a normal part of warfare.” Grattan believed that the

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300 Ibid., 77.
301 Ibid., 47.
302 Ibid., 51.
303 Blakey, *Historians on the Homefront*, 137.
304 Ibid., 138.
propagandists had obscured this fact.\textsuperscript{305} He discussed the idea, which he claimed was popular in America, that Belgium “was made a desert” by the invasion. He argued that this idea would not “bear investigation.”\textsuperscript{306} To further defend this position, he cited Keynes’ assertion that the initial invasion did “some damage locally” but that most of the subsequent fighting occurred only in the western corner of the country. Belgium’s cities and most of its land suffered little damage. He also cited a British admiral who claimed that Belgian coal production had not significantly fallen during the war.\textsuperscript{307} By casting doubt on the atrocity of property destruction, he attempted to weaken the accuracy of the atrocity claims as a whole.

Grattan was also critical of the Bryce Report, arguing that Lord Bryce had been “victimized by war fever.”\textsuperscript{308} He also believed that the “vast majority of the atrocity stories will not bear investigation” and stated that Ponsonby had exposed many of the more egregious lies.\textsuperscript{309} However, Lipkes correctly noted that Ponsonby did not specifically discuss any incidents in the Bryce Report.\textsuperscript{310} In addition, Grattan asserted that “so many” of the atrocity stories “had a sexual connotation.”\textsuperscript{311} However, most of the incidents in the Bryce Report were not of a sexual nature. Grattan also released an especially vehement defense of German behavior in Louvain. He noted that the Allied and German accounts of the city’s destruction were equally inconclusive and that only “about one-eighth of the town was actually destroyed.” He implied that Germans might have had good reason “in applying severe measures of

\textsuperscript{305} C. Hartley Grattan, \textit{Why We Fought}, (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1929), 63.
\textsuperscript{306} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{307} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{308} Ibid., 242.
\textsuperscript{309} Ibid., 69.
\textsuperscript{310} Lipkes, \textit{Rehearsals}, 631.
\textsuperscript{311} Grattan, \textit{Why We Fought}, 69.
repression to the Belgian population.” He further claimed that German soldiers had preserved most of the books from the destroyed library.312 Lipkes referred to this claim as a “truly breathtaking fabrication.”313

Grattan also addressed the issue of deportations of Belgians to Germany later in the war for forced labor. He disputed the belief that the deportations were “legally and morally wrong.” He argued that the situation developed from Belgian mass unemployment, which he attributed to both the British blockade and the German occupation. He portrayed the deportations as “an attempt to relieve unemployment” which he saw as “a political danger and a financial burden.” He further denied that deportees were effectively slaves.314 In analyzing the comfort levels of the deportees, Grattan noted that comfort was subjective, implying that no definitive conclusion could be made. He also asserted that there were Belgian workers who found living and working in Germany to be preferable to doing so in Belgium.315

Grattan paired his atrocity revisionism with revisionism about the war’s origins. Like other revisionists, he believed that the alliance with France motivated the British entry into the war but not the German invasion of Belgium. He repeated arguments that Germany was not responsible for the outbreak of the war. He believed that Russian mobilization was what made a general European war unavoidable.316 Grattan also condemned the British blockade system. He referred to the blockade as “irregular and illegal” and stated that the British blockade placed pressure on neutral countries as well as on Germany. British justifications were mere

312 Ibid., 69-70.
313 Lipkes, Rehearsals, 632.
314 Grattan, Why We Fought, 383.
315 Ibid., 384-385.
316 Ibid., 19.
Grattan’s extreme views about the atrocities were given strength by his rejection of German war guilt and his assertion that Britain had violated international law.

*Revisionism on the Eve of and at the Beginning of World War II*

In 1939, as World War II was beginning, Dalton Trumbo published his book, *Johnny Got His Gun*. Trumbo was a Hollywood screenwriter and novelist who held communist and isolationist beliefs. His book was a harrowing fictional tale of Joe Bonham, an American soldier fighting in World War I who lost all four of his limbs and his senses after being hit by a shell but retained all of his mental abilities. Joe thought of himself as “a dead man with a mind that could still think.” Much of the book consisted of Joe’s thoughts about war and society, and his thoughts also echoed Trumbo’s isolationist beliefs.

Part of the text was a bitter reflection on the Allies’ ostensibly idealist war aims, arguing that these ideals had little basis in reality and were used to manipulate ordinary men into fighting the war. Joe believed that “anybody who went out and got into the front line trenches to fight for liberty was a goddam fool and the guy who got him there was a liar.” Similarly, Joe could not understand the claims made by propagandists that the Allied soldiers were fighting for “liberty” or “decency,” arguing that these were also not well defined. He further argued that as the soldiers died, they were not concerned with any of these high ideals, but were actually

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317 Ibid., 165.
319 Ibid., 143-144.
320 Ibid., 146.
concerned with their loved ones and with a desire to stay alive. These soldiers “knew that life was everything and they died with screams and sobs.” Trumbo narrated the Belgian atrocity stories as part of this manipulation campaign. He mentioned the story of the crucified Canadian soldier, stating that this increased hatred toward Germany. Through Joe, Trumbo argued that propagandists used atrocity stories when high ideals failed to gain recruits. Joe thought, “Look at the dirty Huns they would say look at them how they rape the beautiful French and Belgian girls.” This inspired men to join the military and to get themselves needlessly killed. While not explicitly stating that these stories were false, Trumbo did present them as part of a plot to trick soldiers into getting themselves killed, which did cast suspicion on their veracity. This book exposed the personal consequences of war and presented the message that lies about atrocities directly led to soldiers being killed. Trumbo referenced examples of lurid crimes such as crucifixion and rape to make his point. The personal nature of the story likely made its message very convincing to its readership.

Also in 1939, H.C. Peterson published Propaganda for War: The Campaign Against American Neutrality, 1914-1917. Peterson was an intellectual successor to Lasswell, and his book detailed British propaganda campaigns in the United States. In his preface, Peterson appeared to express sympathy for the isolationist movement in America. He explicitly argued that, as a result of American involvement in World War I and wartime propaganda, American attitudes toward foreign policy were

321 Ibid., 153.
322 Ibid., 35.
323 Ibid., 147-148.
324 Lipkes, Rehearsals, 635.
motivated by “emotion instead of reason” and that “the United States seems to have become a partisan to all the world’s troubles.” As such, he thought that Americans should reexamine their entry into World War I so that they would “develop a cooler approach to disturbing events and individuals in other parts of the world.” Peterson believed that American leaders should not take drastic action without first being certain whether they were being motivated by falsehoods or self-delusions, which he implied had happened during World War I.\textsuperscript{325} Though Peterson’s comments were vague and did not name any people or countries, they were almost certainly a caution against taking action against the Axis Powers, and he hoped to use the example of World War I propaganda to support his position.

Peterson addressed the German atrocities in Belgium. In some respects, Peterson was less willing than his revisionist peers to issue flat denials of German atrocities. He did acknowledge some of the less lurid atrocity stories. He acknowledged that Germans took “inordinately severe” measures against the civilian population and that the German soldiers took hostages, destroyed buildings, and killed Belgian civilians.\textsuperscript{326} Peterson cautioned that most atrocity stories, though often distorted and misleading, typically had some basis in truth.\textsuperscript{327} However, he tied the German atrocities against Belgian civilians to Belgian franc-tireur violence, and he asserted that the propagandists had hidden this fact from the public.\textsuperscript{328} In his account of Louvain, he conceded that the Germans had killed civilians and had “destroyed about one-eighth of the city.” However, he argued that the massacre originated in a

\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{327} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{328} Ibid., 53.
possible collaboration between Belgian civilians and advancing Belgian soldiers, and he accused propagandists of omitting this.\textsuperscript{329} Peterson also discussed the outrage over the execution of Edith Cavell, who he claimed was “made the personification of innocent people who were crushed under the German war machine.” He argued that this was inaccurate, as Cavell had helped prisoners escape from Belgium, and he remarked that her behavior likely assisted spies. He correctly argued that tropes of violence against women were used for propaganda purposes and that Cavell, a middle class nurse and matron, was a useful figure to publicize.\textsuperscript{330} Peterson also presented the unlikely story of the crucified Canadian soldier.\textsuperscript{331} Finally, he discussed the policy of deporting Belgians to Germany. He depicted this policy as originating from a well-founded distrust of Belgian brigands and as having precedent in the deportations of the Franco-Prussian War. He also attributed the privations in Belgium to the British blockade but not to German policy.\textsuperscript{332} While not actually denying the atrocities, Peterson offered explanations and justifications.

Finally, Peterson was especially critical of the Bryce Report. He entertained the Committee’s claims that German soldiers had been drunk, destroyed property, and used human shields. He argued that these could have occurred. However, he argued that these claims were exaggerated, may not have conceded military necessity, and were “of minor importance in the atrocity literature.”\textsuperscript{333} He wrote that many of the events in the Bryce Report were hearsay, that “rumors and opinions were included uncritically,” and suggested that the interviewing barristers asked leading

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{329} Ibid., 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{330} Ibid., 61-62.
  \item \textsuperscript{331} Ibid., 57.
  \item \textsuperscript{332} Ibid., 244.
  \item \textsuperscript{333} Ibid., 54.
\end{itemize}
questions. Most of the stories in the Bryce Report disputed by Peterson were sex and mutilation stories. Of the eight presented atrocity accounts, two discussed rape, two discussed severed breasts, three discussed bayoneted children, one discussed severed hands, and one was the crucified child story. Like many of his revisionist peers, Peterson used the most extreme and unlikely testimony to discredit the entire Bryce Report. He also observed that one of the severed hands stories bore a close resemblance to an atrocity story circulated during the Spanish-American War. During the Spanish-American War, American newspapers, most notably William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal*, had used false stories of Spanish atrocities against Cubans to turn public opinion toward supporting a war with Spain. It was possible that memory of this influenced Peterson to be skeptical of atrocities in Belgium. Peterson argued that the issue of Belgian victimization by the invading Germans resonated strongly with Americans and insinuated that it was a key reason for the American entry into the war. Thus, in his analysis of the Bryce Report, Peterson admitted that the reported atrocities could have occurred. He then questioned some of the testimony and methodology, focused attention on the less credible outrages, and did not mention the more plausible ones. However, this was a somewhat weakened version of denialism.

Peterson also expressed opinions common among the revisionists on matters other than the atrocities in Belgium. He ridiculed the argument that Germany bore

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334 Ibid., 53.
335 Ibid., 55-57.
336 Ibid., 55-56.
sole responsibility for the war, arguing that this ignored the actions taken by “Serbia, Russia, France, and England” that made a war more likely. Peterson also did not support the assertion that Britain entered the war to protect Belgium, claiming that Britain was destined to enter the war “long before German troops crossed the Belgian frontier.” He also described how the British propagandists turned the Kaiser into a monstrous villain and used him for propaganda purposes. Peterson also argued that the British naval blockade was a violation of international law and that British justifications mirrored those made by the Germans to excuse their violation of Belgian neutrality. While Peterson himself was not aggrieved by the failure to uphold international law, he noted that the blockade demonstrated British hypocrisy. Later, he again criticized the British blockade policy, making a brief reference to its “inhumane results.” Finally, Peterson briefly criticized the Treaty of Versailles, stating that it contained “vicious aspects” resulting from “the propaganda of hate” spread during the war.

James Morgan Read, a professor at the University of Louisville, published *Atrocity Propaganda: 1914-1919* in 1941. This was the final scholarly work that was released before American involvement in World War II that addressed the issue of atrocities in Belgium. In his preface, Read discussed the Treaty of Versailles in the context of its collapse and the beginning of another world war. Read sought to explain how the treaty collapsed, and he concluded that war propaganda was one of

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339 Ibid., 43.
340 Ibid., 44-45.
341 Ibid., 41-42.
342 Ibid., 78.
343 Ibid., 191.
344 Ibid., 286.
the main culprits. He stated that Part VII of the treaty, the section outlining trials for war criminals, was the harshest section and the one to which the Germans had most strongly objected. Read believed that, had the Germans not been required to accept Part VII, “the treaty would have been a much fairer and probably a more durable instrument.” Read believed that this section originated in atrocity propaganda, as the propaganda had caused outrage among the Allied publics and had led to a desire for justice. Thus, the Allied governments had to enact these provisions. Given the significant influence of this atrocity propaganda, Read determined to study it in his book.  

Read was significantly more willing to acknowledge German atrocities against Belgian civilians than were most of his revisionist predecessors. Read stated that there was some truth behind propaganda claims, but they were often inaccurate or distorted. He stated that “most of the things told, I believe, were the truth, but it was not all the truth.” In a chapter titled “Francs-Tireurs?” Read questioned whether Germans had committed cruel atrocities against Belgian civilians during the initial invasion. He concluded that there were some examples of violence by soldiers toward civilians, including execution of civilians, arson, and pillage. However, Read found little evidence for the most extreme atrocity cases, arguing that the cases of “calculated fiendishness were probably not numerous.” The most atrocious stories that Read found believable were accounts noting that some Belgians were burned alive when the German soldiers did not allow them to escape from their burning

346 Ibid., 32.
homes. Read also analyzed the alleged massacres of Belgians by German soldiers, a topic often avoided by revisionists. Read concluded that many of these massacres did occur and estimated that thousands of Belgians were killed. He confirmed that there was a massacre at Dinant and advanced the Belgian claim that 665 people had been killed there. Later, Read sought to answer the question of whether the Germans had used Belgian civilians as human shields. He concluded that the Germans had used Belgian civilians as human shields and had exposed them to fire from Belgian soldiers. Thus, Read claimed that most of the atrocities were true with some qualifications. He went further than Peterson who claimed that the atrocities could have occurred, and his work was a further departure from previous denialism.

However, Read was still fixated on the most lurid atrocity stories, including the stories of severed hands, severed breasts, and crucifixions. He often referenced the fact that the Bryce Committee had included these lurid accounts in their Report. He argued that the case of the severed hands was unlikely to be true. Read placed part of the blame for the circulation of this story on the Bryce Report, arguing that Bryce had “confirmed the story in several places.” He acknowledged that the Bryce Committee had discussed the possibility that the mutilations were unintentional. However, Read believed that the Committee had written the Report in such a way that the reader would believe that the mutilations were intentional. He also discussed the unlikely stories of Belgian women with severed breasts, arguing that the Bryce

347 Ibid., 80-81.
348 Ibid., 83-84.
349 Ibid., 87-88.
350 Ibid., 36.
Report had also spread these false stories.\textsuperscript{351} Finally, Read analyzed the crucifixion stories. He argued that the accounts from witnesses who purported to see a crucified Canadian soldier were actually so-called “as-if” accounts. In fact, there was no such soldier, but the witnesses had seen something that looked like a soldier who had been crucified. He then discussed the story about the crucified child in the Bryce Report, arguing that this story was unlikely to be true.\textsuperscript{352} All of these lurid stories had appeared in the Bryce Report, but the Report primarily discussed shootings and destruction of homes and property. Despite being willing to acknowledge real atrocities, Read still adhered to the revisionist narrative through his continued emphasis on lurid atrocity stories and his strident criticism of the Bryce Report.

Thus, there were many reasons for the erasure of Belgian atrocities from the historical record during this time period. It is difficult to conclusively prove these writers’ underlying motivations, but there were patterns of arguments present in the revisionist texts. Most British and American writers expressed disillusionment with World War I and sometimes with war in general. Many of them expressed negative opinions about the Treaty of Versailles and the assertion contained in Article 231 of the Treaty that Germany was responsible for the outbreak of the war. There were also condemnations of Allied practices that occurred during and after the war, including the British blockade of Germany and British military actions in the Irish War of Independence. There was a feeling that Allied wartime propaganda had been deceptive and that it had convinced people in Allied countries to mistakenly support involvement in World War I. The British government used the Bryce Report to

\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., 36-37.
\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., 42.
support the war effort, and its methodological flaws and inclusion of lurid allegations made it the target of disillusioned Allied revisionists. Finally, American revisionists writing in the late 1930’s were sometimes motivated by opposition to American involvement in World War II. The argument that stories of German atrocities in Belgium were exaggerated or invented serviced or complemented all of these concerns. German revisionists typically hoped to deny the atrocities to rehabilitate the image of their state and military and to resist the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Also, at least in one instance, atrocity denial connected to racist feelings common in Europe at the time. The revisionist narrative began in and remained dominant throughout the interwar period but became more nuanced in the writings of Peterson and Read, presaging the revisionism of the Cold War period.
III. Post World War II: The Overturn of the Revisionist Narrative

During the Cold War period, the revisionist narrative continued, although generally less passionate and more matter-of-fact. The only two writers who significantly deviated from the narrative were Peter Schöller and Barbara Tuchman. It was not until the 1990’s and the early 2000’s that the narrative was finally overturned with the research of John Horne and Alan Kramer. Subsequent contributions by Larry Zuckerman and Jeff Lipkes strengthened the veracity of German atrocities in Belgium. A study of subsequent publications indicates that the revisionist master narrative has been largely eradicated from the historical record.

Historical Narrative During the Cold War Period

After World War II, books written about World War I often did not incorporate the German atrocities in Belgium into their narratives. The revisionist narrative was still influential. One of the earliest books written in this time period was *The Great War* by Cyril Falls which was published in 1959 and which provided a general overview of the entire war. Falls' narrative was stridently supportive of Belgium, and he referred to the German argument that the French were planning to invade Belgium as “lying rubbish.” He characterized the German soldiers preparing to invade Belgium as being “stationed for no other purpose than that of raping a small, inoffensive state.” However, his narration of the actual invasion of Belgium featured no discussion of German atrocities against Belgian civilians. Instead, clashes between the German Army and the armies of Britain, France, and

354 Ibid., 41.
Belgium dominated Falls’ narrative. Falls devoted one paragraph to Belgian refugees and their hardships, but there was no mention of the atrocities that could have motivated many refugees to flee.\textsuperscript{355}

One of the most popular general World War I books of this era and the only one to significantly challenge the revisionist narrative was Barbara Tuchman’s 1962 narrative history, \textit{The Guns of August}. In her book, Tuchman described the outbreak of World War I and the battles that occurred during August 1914, with particular attention to the campaigns on the Western and Eastern Fronts. One battle presented was that of Liège. In her narration of the initial assault on Liège and its surrounding villages, Tuchman incorporated accounts of German atrocities. Starting on the first day of the invasion, German soldiers shot Belgian civilians, with special attention being given to Belgian priests. In one incident at Warsage, German soldiers shot six hostages. Burning of villages was another tactic that Tuchman alleged was used by angry German soldiers.\textsuperscript{356} In the Battle of Liège, the Germans used tactics aimed at intimidating civilians. Tuchman wrote that Germans bombed the city with zeppelins, killing nine civilians.\textsuperscript{357} She explicitly connected the zeppelin raids on Liège with the bombings of civilians that occurred during World War II, which had only ended seventeen years prior to the publication of \textit{The Guns of August}. According to Tuchman, similar to the British civilians that withstood the Blitz, the citizens of Liège were not cowed by the attacks.\textsuperscript{358}

\textsuperscript{355} Ibid., 42-43.
\textsuperscript{357} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{358} Ibid., 178-179.
As the Germans advanced past Liège, Tuchman continued to weave German mistreatment of Belgian civilians into her narrative. When discussing the Bavarian soldiers, she uncritically quoted French general Dubail, who called them “barbarians.” She then described an incident in which they destroyed a house.\(^{359}\) As the Germans moved toward Namur, Tuchman compared the German advance to that of destructive predator ants in the Amazon.\(^{360}\) The German soldiers killed 150 civilians at Aerschot and another 664 at Dinant, and the Germans decided whom to execute randomly and without any due process. She again compared the German violence in Belgium with German violence against civilians in World War II by mentioning Belgian cemeteries containing those who were killed by Germans in both of the wars.\(^{361}\) When Germans seized control of Brussels, they enacted an indemnity of fifty million francs on the city and another four hundred and fifty million francs on the surrounding province of Brabant.\(^{362}\) This cruel behavior typically originated in harsh orders by German generals and in the general German strategy of terror. General von Hausen, who commanded the Third Army, laid out methods for attacking civilians who resisted the invasion, including seizing political and religious leaders as hostages and burning houses. When entering newly occupied territory, the Germans hung posters warning civilians against engaging in resistance. In these posters, the Germans announced that they would enact the death penalty for even small infractions, such as approaching airplane or balloon hangars. Entire

\(^{359}\) Ibid., 208.
\(^{360}\) Ibid., 213.
\(^{361}\) Ibid., 226.
\(^{362}\) Ibid., 229.
communities were held responsible for any resistance, and Tuchman correctly asserted that this was a violation of the Hague Convention.\textsuperscript{363}

Tuchman then devoted an entire chapter to narrating the German destruction of Louvain. Her account began with a description of the city’s magnificent medieval architecture, including its university, its Town Hall, its churches, and its library. The churches and the library contained large numbers of books and works of medieval art.\textsuperscript{364} At first, the occupying Germans were restrained in their behavior. However, the German Army suffered a military setback, and the surprised Germans were forced to retreat to Louvain. Following this, the Germans burned Louvain as a demonstration of German power to the conquered Belgians and the world.\textsuperscript{365}

According to Tuchman, the destruction was extensive and deliberate, and theft and destruction of household items and the killing of civilians accompanied it. The flames destroyed the library, but the Town Hall and the Church of St. Pierre survived. Tuchman cited confirmations of the destruction both by neutral Americans and by the Germans themselves to emphasize the truth of this event.\textsuperscript{366} She rejected the arguments made in the Manifesto of the Ninety-Three that downplayed or excused the destruction in Louvain.\textsuperscript{367}

While narrating the atrocities, Tuchman offered explanations for the German attacks against civilians. Tuchman explained that the Germans hoped to punish and to deter supposed francs-tireurs. Surprised and traumatized by the difficult fighting near Liège, German soldiers came to believe that treacherous civilians were sniping at

\textsuperscript{363} Ibid., 227.
\textsuperscript{364} Ibid., 318.
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid., 319.
\textsuperscript{366} Ibid., 320-321.
\textsuperscript{367} Ibid., 322.
them, and they often believed that Belgian priests were the instigators of franc-tireur attacks. This was a precipitant of much of the violence that occurred there.\textsuperscript{368} In Louvain, alleged franc-tireur attacks increased tensions in the city and then led to the city’s destruction.\textsuperscript{369} Both the German military leadership and the ordinary soldiers were convinced that there was a sustained guerilla campaign against the German Army and that the Belgian government had organized it.\textsuperscript{370} However, Tuchman argued that franc-tireur violence was a myth. She cast doubt on claims that civilians had attacked German soldiers near Liège, noting that the Belgian government had taken measures to ensure that the people would surrender their weapons and avoid the German soldiers.\textsuperscript{371} In Louvain, German claims of franc-tireur attacks could not be proven, and Belgians claimed that the shots were actually friendly fire incidents.\textsuperscript{372}

Tuchman also attributed the violence against civilians to a desire to meet the rigorous requirements set by the Schlieffen Plan. The plan called for German soldiers to enter France quickly and with overwhelming force, meaning that the German Army could not devote soldiers to defending the rear against possible francs-tireurs. This prompted the Germans to issue their harsh proclamations and to execute hostages.\textsuperscript{373} When faced with unexpected resistance from the Belgian Army, which impeded the progress of the German Army, German soldiers lashed out in anger. A military setback precipitated the destruction of Louvain.\textsuperscript{374} Tuchman attributed some of the violence to preexisting German military strategy, namely the “German theory

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{368} Ibid., 172-173.
\item \textsuperscript{369} Ibid., 319.
\item \textsuperscript{370} Ibid., 317.
\item \textsuperscript{371} Ibid., 173.
\item \textsuperscript{372} Ibid., 319.
\item \textsuperscript{373} Ibid., 227.
\item \textsuperscript{374} Ibid., 319.
\end{itemize}
of terror," which she believed partially explained German behavior.\textsuperscript{375} She gave further context by asserting that German leaders, businessmen, and intellectuals desired for Germany to greatly increase its power through the war, which included the subjugation of Belgium.\textsuperscript{376}

*The Guns of August* was a popular bestseller, and it won the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction. It provided an accurate account of the atrocities as they are now understood by contemporary historians. Unlike revisionist works which preceded this book, Tuchman’s text addressed killings, burnings, theft, and property destruction and made no mention of lurid atrocity stories. However, its conclusions about the atrocities in Belgium did not change the overall revisionist master narrative. This was possibly because historians as a whole held the book in low esteem due to its style and its deviations from historical rigor. According to Max Hastings, a British journalist and military historian who was seventeen years old when the book was published, *The Guns of August* was wildly popular among his cohort of students. However, Hastings recalled that at least one academician referred to Tuchman’s work as “hopelessly unscholarly.”\textsuperscript{377} Indeed, Tuchman devoted much of the book to describing the sensational idiosyncrasies and incompetence of the major figures involved, which could be interpreted as valuing entertaining the reader over writing rigorous history. She also made sweeping statements that were difficult to prove. Her style of writing tended toward literary flourishes, such as her comparison of the German Army in Belgium to South American ants.\textsuperscript{378} Finally, Tuchman’s work was

\textsuperscript{375} Ibid., 313-314.
\textsuperscript{376} Ibid., 312.
\textsuperscript{378} Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, 213.
written with knowledge of World War II incorporated into her narrative, such as her
collection of Belgian victims in World War I to those of World War II. Historians
may have viewed this as unfairly biasing the reader against the Germans of World
War I. These were some of the reasons why the book may have been viewed as
“hopelessly unscholarly” and why its findings did not shift the narrative of German
atrocities as fictitious or extremely exaggerated.

Subsequent books written during the Cold War period did not incorporate
Tuchman’s findings. They typically adhered to the revisionist narrative and generally
did not incorporate the German atrocities in Belgium into their texts. A.J.P. Taylor
published his *The First World War: An Illustrated History* in 1963, soon after
Tuchman published her book. Taylor discussed military engagements between
Belgians and Germans, such as the capture of Liège, and he also discussed the
Belgian decision to sabotage its own infrastructure so as to delay German actions.
However, there was no mention of atrocities committed by German soldiers. Like
Falls, Taylor later included a reference to Belgian refugees, but there was still no
mention of violence committed by German soldiers against Belgian civilians.

Unsurprisingly, German narrations of the war also omitted the atrocities. One
notable German text about World War I was *Germany and the Central Powers in the
World War, 1914-1918* by military historian and professor Walther Hubatsch.
Hubatsch published this book in the United States in 1963. He included the German
actions against Belgian military targets, such as the fortresses of Liège, Namur, and

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379 Ibid., 226.
381 Ibid., 59.
Antwerp, and he mentioned the seizure of Brussels. However, the only reference to German violence against Belgian civilians was a vague assertion that “the civilian population fought energetically and disturbed the military units which were forced to take harsh countermeasures.”\textsuperscript{382} This narration obscured the horror of the German “countermeasures” and asserted that the Belgian victims bore ultimate responsibility for German actions. The massacre at Dinant and the burning of Louvain were also not included in Hubatsch’s book.

B.H. Liddell Hart’s \textit{History of the First World War} also omitted references to German atrocities against Belgian civilians. This book, which was a general overview of the important battles and campaigns of the war, was originally published in 1930 but was republished in 1970 as a companion to his \textit{History of the Second World War}. The German decision to violate Belgian neutrality was mentioned in four sentences in the context of Britain’s decision to enter the war. The Belgians and their suffering were not the focus of these passages.\textsuperscript{383} In his description of the invasion of Belgium, Liddell Hart discussed the military actions against Liège and Namur, as well as the occupation of Brussels, but there was no mention of the atrocities that occurred during this advance.\textsuperscript{384} Later, Liddell Hart discussed Belgium in the context of the Siege of Antwerp and the battles that occurred during the Race to the Sea, but atrocities were again not included.\textsuperscript{385} In his works about World War II, Liddell Hart’s writing propagated the Rommel myth and, more generally, the clean Wehrmacht

\textsuperscript{382} Walther Hubatsch, \textit{Germany and the Central Powers in the World War, 1914-1918} (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Publications, 1963), 29-30.
\textsuperscript{384} Ibid., 79.
\textsuperscript{385} Ibid., 90-91.
myth, so it is unsurprising that his writings about World War I also downplayed German atrocities.

This pattern of omission continued into the 1980’s. In 1981, James L. Stokesbury published *A Short History of World War I*, in which he attempted to write a book-length general history of the war. Similar to his predecessors who wrote books about World War I, Stokesbury devoted the majority of his book to discussing military actions and battles. In his description of the German invasion of Belgium, he devoted two pages to discussing both the planning and fighting that surrounding the Battle of Liège. However, there was no mention of the atrocities that occurred near Liège. Later, after the fall of Liège, Stokesbury wrote that “General Kluck had been roaring through Belgium.” In fact, the German Army committed many atrocities during this advance, but Stokesbury did not mention these. Later, he included only a single sentence about the burning of Louvain and the execution of Edith Cavell as true examples of German brutality. However, there was no further exploration of German atrocities, and he repeated the German claim that there were franc-tireur attacks in Louvain without criticism.

However, examination of the German atrocities in Belgium was not completely abandoned in post-World War II Germany. The most notable study of this subject was Peter Schöller’s *The Case of Louvain*, published in 1958. It was a strong deviation from the revisionist master narrative. In it, Schöller attempted to prove that the White Book was not an honest or a rigorous attempt to depict the truth

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387 Ibid., 43.
388 Ibid., 110.
but, rather, a cynical attempt to forward a version of events that excused German behavior and shifted the blame onto Belgian civilians. To do this, Schöller compared the final published version of the White Book’s investigation into Louvain with a newly discovered earlier version. The newer version’s authors had removed all of the evidence that contested the thesis that Belgian civilians had engaged in a treacherous revolt against German soldiers.\footnote{Horne and Kramer, \textit{German Atrocities, 1914}, 240-241.} Schöller demonstrated that there was a genuine panic in the German ranks regarding the existence of francs-tireurs, but he also concluded that the German behavior in Belgium could not be justified.\footnote{Ibid., 413.} According to Horne and Kramer, however, Schöller’s work did not eliminate the denialist narrative. This was because his study had a limited scope and did not explore the scale of the franc-tireur panic or of the atrocities.\footnote{Ibid., 415.}

One of the most notable books about World War I written by a German historian and published during the Cold War was Fritz Fischer’s \textit{Germany’s Aims in the First World War}. This book was published in Germany in 1961 and was translated into English in 1967. The main explosive thesis of Fischer’s book was that Germany was responsible for the outbreak of World War I and that Germany’s entry into the war was motivated by far-reaching annexationist visions in Europe and in Africa. His narrative also included the views of nationalist and annexationist businessmen, journalists, and intellectuals as well as politicians. As businessmen had formed interest groups to lobby for aggressive foreign policy, and as the opinions of
businessmen converged with government and military leaders before the war, Fischer believed that their views had to be incorporated into the book.392

According to Fischer, German leaders during World War I planned to subjugate Belgium, though the degree of subjugation was always a matter of debate. On September 9, 1914, with the assumption that German armies would soon triumph, Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg issued his September Program, which outlined German war aims.393 The Chancellor wrote that Liège would be annexed to Germany, that Germany would gain control over the Belgian coast, and that Belgium “must become economically a German province.”394 Bethmann-Hollweg’s vision was not the most extreme one, as some German figures hoped to annex Belgium outright.395 Fischer argued that these annexationist policies were the consensus views of German “economic, political - and also military - circles” and that this annexationist grand strategy remained constant for the duration of the war.396 German business interests supported the Chancellor’s suggested subjugation of Belgium. In 1915, the “Six Associations,” which represented a wide swath of German businesses, wrote a memorandum demanding that Belgium be subjugated to Germany and that Belgians be denied political rights.397 In another instance cited by Fischer, business interest groups demanded that Germany should take control over all Belgian communications and industry, that Belgium should adopt the mark, and that

393 Ibid., 103.
394 Ibid., 104.
395 Ibid., 190.
396 Ibid., 106.
397 Ibid., 167-168.
it should join a German-led customs union.\textsuperscript{398} During the war, the Germans had made other plans to increase control over Belgium, such as the proposed creation of a canal between Antwerp and the Rhine.\textsuperscript{399} German occupation policy also involved stoking Flemish nationalism in the hope that this would further draw Belgium into the German sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{400} Through his cited evidence, Fischer argued that German occupying authorities had nefarious and annexationist intentions with regard to Belgium.

However, while Fischer discussed the planned and enacted wrongdoings committed by Germany against Belgium as a country, atrocities committed by German soldiers against actual Belgian civilians were given just two paragraphs of an over six hundred page text. There was no discussion of atrocities during the initial invasion in 1914. The aforementioned two paragraphs described deportations of Belgian civilians to Germany to work in German factories. Fischer emphasized that these deportations were the result of pressure from business interests and rightist political groups. He noted that Moritz von Bissing, the Governor-General of Occupied Belgium, actively fought against the implementation of the deportation policy but was unable to resist the political pressure.\textsuperscript{401} Fischer also briefly mentioned that the Belgian people were surviving on American food imports, but the hardships encountered by Belgian civilians were not explored beyond that.\textsuperscript{402} The claims that Fischer did make promoted fiery controversy, with other contemporary German historians, most notably Gerhard Ritter, strongly disagreeing with Fischer’s

\textsuperscript{398} Ibid., 265.
\textsuperscript{399} Ibid., 262.
\textsuperscript{400} Ibid., 268.
\textsuperscript{401} Ibid., 270.
\textsuperscript{402} Ibid., 271.
argument that Germany had caused the war.\textsuperscript{403} Fischer’s reluctance to examine German atrocities in Belgium indicates the then extremely taboo nature of this subject in Germany and also the strength of the innocentist narrative.

Finally, post World War II historians who analyzed the German atrocities in Belgium often focused on the Bryce Report, and they typically did so with a critical tone, which was consistent with that of previous revisionists. In 1979, Trevor Wilson published an article in the \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} expressing this viewpoint. Wilson acknowledged German atrocities in Belgium. He specifically acknowledged the German decision to violate Belgian neutrality and the German plans to subjugate Belgium after military victory, as well as the shooting of civilians and the destruction of Belgian towns.\textsuperscript{404} As mentioned previously, most of the Bryce Report’s content did consist of these more verifiable atrocities. However, Wilson focused on the Report’s methodology, which he believed was poor, as well as its inclusion of lurid sexual crimes, mutilations, and crimes against women and children. Wilson noted that the depositions had not been taken under oath and that German soldiers’ diaries collected by the Committee did not support allegations of widespread sexual violence.\textsuperscript{405} Wilson believed that members of the Bryce Committee were aware that many of the statements alleging rape or mutilation were likely untrue.\textsuperscript{406} However, its solution to this problem was to reject the individual untrustworthy testimonies and instead to base reports “on the totality of cases.” The only member of

\textsuperscript{405} Ibid., 372.
\textsuperscript{406} Ibid., 374.
the Committee who rejected this approach was Harold Cox, who believed that this approach could introduce errors into the Report and could undermine its credibility. Cox further argued that the Committee should have been able to interview the witnesses and the barristers to further determine the truth.\textsuperscript{407} This view was not popular with other members of the Committee, and, ultimately, Cox’s efforts were almost completely unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{408} Wilson contended that the Committee’s decision to include more sensational testimony was due to its concern that questioning any of the atrocity testimony would unfairly cast doubt on all of the atrocity testimony. As Britain had entered the war to protect Belgium, it would also undermine the British war effort.\textsuperscript{409}

The Bryce Report was also criticized in Gary S. Messinger’s 1992 book, \textit{British Propaganda and the State in the First World War}. The title of his chapter about the Bryce Report, “Misusing the Judiciary,” already indicated his stance toward the Report and its chairman. In his first paragraph, Messinger classified the Bryce Report as “one of Britain’s most shameful propaganda endeavours at any time in the war.”\textsuperscript{410} He presented the Report’s content as being of dubious veracity. He condemned the Committee for including accounts of “sensationalistic” atrocity stories, such as large-scale destruction of buildings, use of human shields, rapes, mutilations, and crucifixions of children.\textsuperscript{411} The most lurid examples cited by Messinger, such as crucifixions of children and mutilations, were included in the Bryce Report, but these were not the main focus of it. Accounts of human shields and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{}\textsuperscript{407} Ibid., 374-375.
\bibitem{}\textsuperscript{408} Ibid., 376-377.
\bibitem{}\textsuperscript{409} Ibid., 381.
\bibitem{}\textsuperscript{410} Messinger, \textit{British Propaganda and the State in the First World War}, 71.
\bibitem{}\textsuperscript{411} Ibid., 73.
\end{thebibliography}
destruction of buildings were factually better established than the rape and mutilation stories. Messinger further suggested that destruction of property and killing of civilians occurred in all wars and that it was unfair for the Bryce Committee to castigate Germany for this behavior without qualification. He also believed that that many of the memories of atrocities were likely to have been constructed in the face of trauma and hatred and that the Bryce Report did not account for this effect.\textsuperscript{412} In contrast to his skepticism with regard to the Bryce Report, Messinger uncritically parroted the findings of the already discredited German White Book, stating that the Belgian government had instigated franc-tireur violence against the invading Germans.\textsuperscript{413} Messinger concluded his chapter with an exploration of why Bryce conducted himself as he did. He endorsed the finding, previously made by Trevor Wilson, that Bryce felt he could not debunk some of the evidence without casting doubt on all of it. He also speculated that “Bryce’s native temperament and his social origins” could have been another explanation.\textsuperscript{414}

In her 1993 book, \textit{Denying the Holocaust}, Deborah Lipstadt briefly discussed World War I revisionism as an avenue of study that influenced Holocaust denial. She was particularly interested in the writings of Harry Elmer Barnes, one of the most notable revisionists, who was later disgraced due to his Holocaust denial. However, she was careful not to equate revisionism, which she believed was based in facts and research, with Holocaust denial, which she argued was based in anti-Semitism and pseudohistory. Ironically, her analysis of the revisionists actually endorsed many of

\textsuperscript{412} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{413} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{414} Ibid., 80.
their arguments. In her discussion of German atrocities in Belgium, Lipstadt endorsed the argument that the British had distributed lurid and exaggerated atrocity stories to smear Germany. She cited claims that Germans had shot infants and mutilated Belgian women as examples of this exaggerated propaganda, and she also claimed that this caused Americans to become increasingly supportive of the Allied cause. However, Lipstadt did not mention the less lurid atrocity stories that had a more factual basis, including the shooting of civilians and the burning of Belgian villages and cities. It appears that Lipstadt was unable to extricate her accounts of German atrocities in Belgium from the still influential revisionist narrative.

Restoration of German Atrocities in Belgium to the Historical Narrative

In 2001, Professors John Horne and Alan Kramer of Trinity College Dublin published *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*, the text that would overturn the revisionist narrative and begin the restoration of German atrocities in Belgium into the historical record. This book was a comprehensive overview of the German invasion of Belgium through the lens of violence against civilians. German atrocities in Belgium during World War I had already been a topic of interest to these two historians, and, as early at 1993, they had published articles that explored this subject. In 1993, Horne and Kramer published their first articles in French and German language journals, respectively. They followed this with an English language article that was published in 1994. In this article, they explored the atrocities through

415 Ibid., 31.
416 Ibid., 34.
entries in German soldiers’ diaries. They aimed to redirect the focus from the war propaganda to the atrocities themselves.\(^\text{418}\) The two authors noted that, starting in the interwar period, “German atrocities” had been viewed as slanderous propaganda and that contemporary historians, with Trevor Wilson being given as an example, endorsed this viewpoint.\(^\text{419}\) However, Horne and Kramer demonstrated that, in German soldiers’ diaries, there were several admissions of atrocities. In one example, a German soldier recounted the destruction of eight houses and the killings of their residents. At the time, German intellectuals concluded that rebellious civilians must have caused those killings.\(^\text{420}\) From the evidence they gathered, Horne and Kramer also concluded that German soldiers had suffered from a “collective delusion” about francs-tireurs which motivated many of the atrocities. Before the invasion, military leadership had primed the soldiers to believe that there would be a franc-tireur campaign, and the hardships of the invasion inflamed those fears.\(^\text{421}\) Horne and Kramer also briefly explored other explanations for the atrocities, such as anti-Catholicism among Protestant German soldiers.\(^\text{422}\) These ideas would later be fully fleshed out in *German Atrocities, 1914*.

In the book’s first section, Horne and Kramer discussed the atrocities committed by German soldiers and the role that fear of francs-tireurs had played. The passages were well researched and contained specific examples of atrocities. They typically included specific locations and times as well as specific casualty numbers.

From the beginning of the invasion, in which the Germans sought to capture Liège,
Horne and Kramer depicted the German soldiers as deliberately killing Belgian civilians and destroying their property. For example, in Hermée, German soldiers killed eleven civilians and burned their homes because they believed that the villagers were francs-tireurs. In Warsage, German soldiers killed twelve hostages.\(^{423}\) As in their articles, Horne and Kramer concluded that, before the invasion, German soldiers had been primed to believe that Belgian civilians would violently resist. Horne and Kramer concluded that military failure exacerbated the German soldiers’ hatred and suspicion of the Belgians.\(^{424}\) However, as German soldiers had behaved similarly across the front, even in places with less resistance, military failure did not completely explain the atrocities.\(^{425}\)

German atrocities continued after the soldiers had captured Liège. Horne and Kramer investigated the incident in Aerschot, analyzed in the Bryce Report and in the White Book, in which Colonel Stenger was killed. The Germans blamed this killing on the burgomaster’s son, a charge denied by the Belgians. Horne and Kramer agreed with the conclusions in the Bryce Report that the burgomaster’s son was innocent and that the shooting was likely an example of panicked friendly fire.\(^{426}\) The German soldiers responded to the death of Colonel Stenger by killing many civilians, including the burgomaster and his son. They then proceeded to burn Aerschot and to deport civilians to Germany.\(^{427}\) As for Louvain, the authors came to the same conclusion about the destruction as did the Bryce Committee. In their account, the occupation of Louvain was initially peaceful, but, on August 25, a mysterious

\(^{424}\) Ibid., 17-18.
\(^{425}\) Ibid., 22-23.
\(^{426}\) Ibid., 28-29.
\(^{427}\) Ibid., 29.
shooting caused the German soldiers to attack Belgian civilians and to burn the city and its historic buildings. Horne and Kramer concluded that the destruction in Louvain was intentional and explicitly disproved contrary claims in the White Book. For example, the White Book’s writers claimed that the Germans had saved the town hall, but Horne and Kramer noted that this was because this building served as the German headquarters.\textsuperscript{428} Horne and Kramer concluded that this atrocity was sparked by a friendly fire incident being mistaken for franc-tireur attacks. Horne and Kramer also connected the destruction with the anti-Catholicism among many Protestant Germans, as Louvain was the site of many important Catholic buildings.\textsuperscript{429} They considered German military failure as the cause of the violence and anxious retreating German soldiers as the likely cause of the shooting.\textsuperscript{430} However, while the German destruction of the city was not premeditated, the destruction of Louvain followed an evolving pattern of punishment, which included massacres, arson, and deportations all over Belgium.\textsuperscript{431}

In Dinant, by contrast, the German soldiers’ attacks were premeditated and had the aim of crushing all potential franc-tireur resistance.\textsuperscript{432} The Germans seized the town after a difficult confrontation with French soldiers and then engaged in brutal killings of the city’s male population. In Horne and Kramer’s account, German soldiers imprisoned Belgian civilians in a church, killed forty-three of the men, and fined the monks for allegedly supporting an uprising. The German soldiers used one man, whom they accused of being a franc-tireur, as a human shield and then executed

\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 39.
\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{430} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{431} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{432} Ibid., 46.
him. Horne and Kramer emphasized that, by this stage, the German soldiers saw Belgian civilians as “collectively culpable” and that this motivated violence against civilians even when there was no evidence that they had directly attacked German soldiers.

At the end of their description of the invasion and the atrocities, Horne and Kramer summarized their findings in a comprehensive and quantitative manner. They calculated that there were 101 “major incidents” and 383 “minor incidents” in Belgium, along with 28 “major incidents” and a difficult to determine number of “minor incidents” in France. In all, German soldiers massacred 6,427 Belgian and French civilians during the invasion of 1914. Horne and Kramer also concluded that rape was common, but that it was not quantifiable. Destruction of property was common in most of the cases analyzed. Out of the 129 major incidents in Belgium and in France, 113 cases involved destruction of buildings, with at least 14,101 buildings destroyed. Human shields were a less common form of atrocity, but they were used. They concluded that the franc-tireur war was a “massive case of collective self-suggestion” on the part of the German soldiers. They asserted that there was no other historical example of such a large guerilla campaign occurring at the start of an invasion to support such fear. They also grouped the atrocities by date, noting that there was a burst of atrocities from August 5 to August 12, immediately after the war began, and another one from August 18 to August 31.

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433 Ibid., 47.
434 Ibid., 49.
435 Ibid., 74-75.
436 Ibid., 76-77.
437 Ibid., 77.
Horne and Kramer also attempted to deconstruct the franc-tireur myth and its causes. The authors argued that the franc-tireur fear was an example of “mass delusion.” They drew on the work of Georges Lefebvre, who forwarded the concept of mass delusion to explain the Great Fear of the French Revolution, in which French peasants came to believe that aristocrat-brigands were invading the countryside to crush the Revolution.\footnote{Ibid., 91-92.} The German soldiers invading Belgium were in a strange, anxiety-provoking environment, and the image of the franc-tireur comforted them and helped them to make sense of frightening occurrences.\footnote{Ibid., 94.} Furthermore, Horne and Kramer argued that the image of the franc-tireur was the exact opposite of the image that the German soldiers had of themselves. German soldiers viewed themselves as professional, while the franc-tireur was seen as treacherous. There was universal conscription in Germany, so all German males were associated with the military. Even though Belgium did not have conscription, German soldiers still believed that all Belgian males were associated with the Belgian military, fuelling franc-tireur fears.\footnote{Ibid., 95.} Horne and Kramer again emphasized the role that anti-Catholicism played in the atrocities. German soldiers saw Belgian priests as instigators of resistance, and their churches were seen as locations from which the Belgians could attack the Germans.\footnote{Ibid., 105-106.} German soldiers also came to believe that Belgian civilians were guilty of mutilations, which Horne and Kramer interpreted as a means by which to justify the aggressive invasion.\footnote{Ibid., 113.} They argued that the exacting timetable set by the
Schlieffen Plan physically and mentally exhausted the soldiers, causing them to be more prone to committing violent acts.\textsuperscript{443}

Horne and Kramer also proposed a theory that pre-existing German military culture contributed to the atrocities. They argued that in the German Army, the memory of francs-tireurs during the Franco-Prussian War was a factor that led to the franc-tireur delusion in Belgium. This confirmed what had been a speculative finding in the Bryce Report. However, while the Bryce Committee claimed that atrocities were not common during the Franco-Prussian War, Horne and Kramer demonstrated that angry Prussian soldiers did commit atrocities against French civilians.\textsuperscript{444} They further argued that, before World War I, Social Darwinist and anti-socialist attitudes were common in the German officer corps, promoting fear of “outsiders” and “insiders” ready to destroy Germany. These threats had to be destroyed through warfare.\textsuperscript{445} Horne and Kramer demonstrated that, during the invasion, German soldiers expressed a belief that Belgians were inferior to Germans and deserved to be crushed. General Hans von Beseler was one notable proponent of this belief.\textsuperscript{446} Furthermore, they argued that German conduct in colonial Africa, most notably the Herero and Namaqua Genocide, made German soldiers and politicians more likely to support violence against civilians in other military theatres.\textsuperscript{447}

Horne and Kramer provided an analysis of the Bryce Report. The authors were not able to definitely conclude why the Asquith Cabinet decided to create the Bryce Committee. They agreed with some atrocity skeptics that Britain may have

\textsuperscript{443} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{444} Ibid., 142-143.
\textsuperscript{445} Ibid., 154.
\textsuperscript{446} Ibid., 156.
\textsuperscript{447} Ibid., 169.
wanted to sway American public opinion and that Britain may have needed to justify its involvement in the war, as it had formally entered the war to protect Belgian neutrality. However, Horne and Kramer agreed with the fundamental conclusions of the Bryce Report. They confirmed the Committee’s claims that there had been shootings, arson, and human shields, and they noted that these accusations were significantly more common than accusations of rape and mutilation. They argued that accusations of rape were “plausible” but difficult to prove and that accusations of mutilation were less likely to be true. They did, however, charge the Committee members, with the exception of Cox, with being too trusting of lurid testimony. Contrary to Trevor Wilson who believed that the final Bryce Report accepted horrifying but implausible stories so as to maintain the war effort, Horne and Kramer speculated that the Committee might have wanted to downplay the more lurid stories so as not to damage British credibility. They noted that the Report’s witnesses disproportionately originated in certain parts of Belgium, and atrocities in these regions were subsequently given disproportionate attention. They also noted that the Report provided inaccurate casualty numbers in a few cases, yet, interestingly, the Committee’s final tallies sometimes underestimated the number of Belgians killed. The authors’ analysis of the White Book was almost entirely critical. Horne and Kramer showed that, from the outset, the point of the German investigation was to prove the German government’s claim that the Belgian people had engaged in a

448 Ibid., 233-234.
449 Ibid., 236.
450 Ibid., 231-232.
451 Ibid., 232-233.
Unsurprisingly, this was the White Book’s main conclusion. Horne and Kramer concurred with Schöller’s conclusion that the evidence had been selected and manipulated to support this thesis, that witnesses were primed to give certain answers, and that much of the evidence was hearsay. In one example, a German lieutenant implied that German soldiers had engaged in friendly fire, and his testimony was altered to remove this implication. Finally, the White Book was uneven in its coverage and in the type of testimony that it included. Horne and Kramer noted that it placed disproportionate emphasis on Dinant and Louvain without any attempt to explain the atrocities in Tamines. The White Book’s writers also did not use testimony from Belgian civilians, and Horne and Kramer concluded that this was because the collected testimony did not fit the German narrative.

*German Atrocities, 1914* was a turning point in how the German atrocities in Belgium were viewed in Anglophone historiography. However, it was also part of a greater movement of increasing interest in the atrocities that began shortly before the book was published. Why this shift in opinion occurred during in the 1990’s and early 2000’s is not immediately apparent, but there are several possible reasons. Horne and Kramer acknowledged some factors that aided their research. In their 1994 article, they acknowledged funding provided by the Royal Irish Academy. They also received fellowships from the French and German governments. In the 1990’s, the fall of the Soviet Union allowed scholars from the West to access the Russian archives for the first time. These archives contained information from the

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452 Ibid., 238.
453 Ibid., 241.
454 Ibid., 244.
455 Ibid., 3.
German archives that was seized by the Soviets after World War II, and Horne and Kramer acknowledged that these archives were necessary in crafting an accurate narrative about the attack on Dinant.\(^{457}\)

Furthermore, according to Nico Wouters, the Director of the CEGES-SOMA research institute in Belgium, there was a growing interest in World War I and in German atrocities in the Belgian historical community during the 1990’s. He argued that, through 1995, World War II had been the main topic of interest for Belgian military historians. However, with the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, the subject of World War II had mostly been exhausted, and Belgian military historians looked to World War I for new material. The publication and success of Flemish historian Sophie de Schaepdrijver’s *The Great War: The Kingdom of Belgium during the First World War* further spurred on the revival of World War I study. Unfortunately, this book has not yet been translated into English. Wouters asserted that Horne and Kramer’s book was also part of this revival.\(^{458}\) Also, Nicoletta Gullace noted that study of war crimes and war rape in Africa became popular during this time period, and she speculated that this could explain a willingness to reexamine and reevaluate the German atrocities in Belgium.\(^{459}\)

The next major contribution to the field was Larry Zuckerman’s *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I*, published in 2004. Like Horne and Kramer, Zuckerman strongly challenged the revisionist narrative and placed mistreatment of Belgian civilians back into history. His book covered the entire time

period from the ultimatum through the fight over reparations in postwar Europe. In his discussion of the 1914 conquest of Belgium, Zuckerman confirmed the conclusion that German soldiers had committed atrocities against Belgian civilians. His conclusions about the killings, burnings, and destruction of property in Dinant and Louvain were similar to those of Horne and Kramer. While the Bryce Committee and Horne and Kramer mentioned deportations to Germany, Zuckerman directed greater focus to this issue and to the abuse of Belgian civilians in Germany. He documented that the Germans deported many residents of Louvain to Germany, where they were abused and attacked by their guards and by crowds of xenophobic Germans.

Zuckerman also addressed the franc-tireur myth complex. While Horne and Kramer placed more emphasis on the “collective delusion” hypothesis, Zuckerman placed more emphasis on prewar German military culture. He argued that, after their experience during the Franco-Prussian War, German military leaders became convinced that there would be franc-tireur violence in the next war. They advocated harsh measures to counter this hypothetical violence. In the infamous 1902 manual, *Usages of War*, the German military leadership even declared that international law should be violated if doing so would crush civilian resistance. German soldiers interpreted most strange occurrences and objects as being part of a nefarious people’s war. For example, he showed that Germans accused Belgians of building houses with loopholes from which civilians could attack German soldiers. In fact, these loopholes

460 Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, 30-33.
461 Ibid., 36.
462 Ibid., 47.
were constructed for the benefit of house painters. Zuckerman concluded that, with the exception of a few isolated incidents, the notion that Belgians were waging a guerilla war was not true. In the example of Louvain, the Germans never provided evidence that Belgian civilians had attacked German soldiers, and friendly fire was the most likely explanation for the shootings that instigated the destruction of the city.

Zuckerman also included brief analyses of the Bryce Report and the White Book. Similar to Horne and Kramer, he concluded that the Bryce Report had several broadly accurate findings. He stated that the Committee’s descriptions of atrocities in Herve, Aerschot, Andenne, and Louvain were largely correct. Per Zuckerman, the accusation that German soldiers used human shields, long doubted by detractors, was also accurate. However, drawing on the works of Wilson and Messinger, both of whom were cited in his footnotes, Zuckerman spent much of his analysis criticizing the Report’s methodology. He repeated the common criticism that the interviewing barristers typically did not administer an oath and that the Committee did not name its witnesses. While the anonymity may have made sense for Belgian interviewees, Zuckerman believed that it was not sensible to extend this anonymity to British soldiers. He also claimed that the Report overly emphasized rape and mutilation, and he cited many dubious stories that were included in the Bryce Report, such as the toddler nailed to the door. A final critique by Zuckerman, and his most original, was that the Bryce Report focused on mistreatment during the invasion but ignored

\[463\] Ibid., 53.
\[464\] Ibid., 57.
\[465\] Ibid., 135.
\[466\] Ibid., 132-133.
\[467\] Ibid., 133.
mistreatment that occurred after it.\textsuperscript{468} This was part of his overall attempt to expand the scope of the study of German atrocities in Belgium. Zuckerman did not present the White Book in detail, but he also concluded it was not trustworthy. He noted that German interviewers asked suggestive questions, that the editors dropped testimony that did not fit the narrative of a people’s war, and that the atrocities at Tamines and the deportations to Germany were ignored.\textsuperscript{469}

Zuckerman’s largest contribution in the field, however, was his incorporation of the continued mistreatment of civilians following the initial invasion and after the Western Front descended into trench warfare. The country was divided into three zones with varying levels of military control, but all German administrators imposed harsh restrictions and duties on Belgian residents. In the Etappengebiet, the second most controlled zone, German administrators compelled Belgian civilians to provide forced labor and fined them when they did not comply.\textsuperscript{470} German authorities placed unreasonable restrictions on Belgian civilians’ personal freedoms. Belgian civilians were required to buy a pass in order to travel, and the Germans created an electrical fence to prevent travel to the Netherlands. Belgians were not allowed to communicate by telegraph or by telephone.\textsuperscript{471} Much of Zuckerman’s narrative concerned the deportation of Belgian civilians to Germany. Belgian deportees were sent to Germany and were then coerced into signing contracts to work in German war industries. They were given inadequate food and housing, and those who resisted

\textsuperscript{468} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{469} Ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{470} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{471} Ibid., 97.
signing were subjected to beatings and exposure to cold temperatures.\textsuperscript{472} Zuckerman cited examples of Belgian workers who returned to Belgium having lost an unhealthy amount of weight or having developed rheumatism and anemia, among other diseases, as a result of working in German factories.\textsuperscript{473} Finally, German policies damaged the Belgian economy and standard of living. By 1917, Belgian food consumption had plummeted, and people died of starvation.\textsuperscript{474} German soldiers pilfered Belgian factories and sent their machines to Germany.\textsuperscript{475} Later, Germans demanded that Belgian civilians surrender other possessions, such as medicines and shoes. When the Belgians resisted these requisitions, German soldiers responded by ransacking their homes. Construction collapsed due a lack of supplies.\textsuperscript{476} When the war ended, “Belgian industry lay in ruins,” and unemployment was high due to German economic policies, seizure of factory equipment, and damage to the railroads. Belgian agriculture was in a similar condition.\textsuperscript{477} In his final chapter, Zuckerman criticized Keynes’ \textit{The Economic Consequences of the Peace}, stating that he minimized the damage suffered by the Belgian economy during the war.\textsuperscript{478}

The third important work in this shift in historical thought was Jeff Lipkes’ 2007 book, \textit{Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914}. Of the three texts, Lipkes’ was the strongest in its opposition to the revisionist narrative. The majority of the book was devoted to an extremely detailed account of the 1914 invasion, and the details of killings and human suffering that he provided likely left a

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\textsuperscript{472} Ibid., 157. \\
\textsuperscript{473} Ibid., 189. \\
\textsuperscript{474} Ibid., 183. \\
\textsuperscript{475} Ibid., 92. \\
\textsuperscript{476} Ibid., 183-184. \\
\textsuperscript{477} Ibid., 218-219. \\
\textsuperscript{478} Ibid., 259-260.
\end{flushright}
strong impression on his readership. Lipkes’ narrative of German atrocities during World War I was informed by German atrocities during World War II, and he argued that the two could not be separated. His title implied that the former was a “rehearsal” for the latter. In his prologue, he explicitly related the atrocities in Belgium to the atrocities on the Eastern Front of World War II, stating that massacres, lootings, and deportations had occurred in both theaters of war.\textsuperscript{479} Lipkes also asserted that the German atrocities in Belgium were the beginning of a series of events that resulted in the killing of millions of civilians during the 20th Century. The Nazi regime was, in some ways, a “restoration” of the old regime, which also sought to become a world hegemon and had little regard for individual rights.\textsuperscript{480}

Lipkes’ description of the invasion of Belgium was comprised of vignettes and direct quotes from witnesses. On entry into Aerschot, the German soldiers shot several men and burned homes.\textsuperscript{481} Lipkes explored the story of the shooting of Colonel Stenger and the subsequent execution of the burgomaster and his son. For the Germans, this story became an example of Belgian treachery, and Colonel Stenger was lionized after his death as a more important figure than he had been in life.\textsuperscript{482} However, through witness statements, Lipkes, like other contemporary historians, concluded that Colonel Stenger was killed by friendly fire as a result of panic.\textsuperscript{483} He also described other atrocities in Aerschot. In one incident, Cécile Michiels witnessed her husband, a security guard at the local train station, being shot by the Germans. The German officer did not directly suspect him of firing but stated, “the

\textsuperscript{479} Lipkes, \textit{Rehearsals}, 13.
\textsuperscript{480} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{481} Ibid., 127.
\textsuperscript{482} Ibid., 130-131.
\textsuperscript{483} Ibid., 133.
good will pay with the bad.” 484 Finally, Lipkes concluded that rape had also occurred in Aerschot, but that it was underreported due to cultural norms. 485 He even stated that it was “nearly as ubiquitous as murder, arson, and looting, if never as visible.” 486

Lipkes devoted another chapter to the atrocities in Tamines. Historically, the atrocities at Tamines were not as well reported as those at Dinant and Louvain. To emphasize the horror at Tamines, Lipkes started his chapter with a quote from the American Minister to Belgium who claimed that the worst atrocities occurred there. 487 After German soldiers captured the town, they herded the inhabitants into a church. The men, and especially the priests, were taken from the church and shot. 488 Lipkes provided many more ghastly details to convey a more accurate description of the massacre. For example, after the summary execution and the subsequent stabbing of the wounded, a group of medics entered the mass of the dead and the wounded. These medics were actually soldiers in disguise and, when the wounded cried out, they were killed. 489 Another vignette described the process of burying the dead, which was difficult because many of the bodies had been pulverized and disfigured and were difficult to extricate from the other bodies. 490 Lipkes noted that this was actually the bloodiest massacre committed by the Germans until World War II. 491

Lipkes devoted approximately half of the invasion narration to the massacres at Dinant and Louvain. The author confirmed that there had been atrocities in these two cities and narrated them in great detail. For example, in Louvain, the Germans

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484 Ibid., 144.
485 Ibid., 162.
486 Ibid., 165.
487 Ibid., 207.
488 Ibid., 224-226.
489 Ibid., 235.
490 Ibid., 246.
491 Ibid., 251.
initially occupied the city in a peaceful manner, but they warned that there would be violent reactions to any resistance. Some of the city’s residents were already familiar with German mistreatment of civilians, so they desired to placate the invaders. Lipkes also described the opening shots that would provoke the massacre, concluding that they were likely of German origin. The subsequent German attacks against civilians and the search for francs-tireurs were told through individual stories. In one example, Dr. Adriaan Noyons’ seminary was invaded and searched for francs-tireurs. Noyons recounted an example in which one soldier feigned a franc-tireur attack. This soldier collapsed in pain, claiming that a franc-tireur had shot him, but he had actually only suffered a foot contusion from a fall. Lipkes also discussed the burning of the Library in great detail, devoting more than a page to its contents, all of which were lost. According to Lipkes, Allied newspapers devoted much more focus to this verifiable incident than to rumors of mutilated infants. Most previous accounts did not extensively explore the events that occurred after the burning of Louvain, but Lipkes’ narration continued to describe the expulsion of civilians from the city and the suffering that they encountered.

After his description of the atrocities, Lipkes analyzed some possible explanations for them. Lipkes concurred with the belief that there was no organized people’s war. He stated that the tactics of the supposed francs-tireurs were

492 Ibid., 384-385.
493 Ibid., 395.
494 Ibid., 404.
495 Ibid., 425.
496 Ibid., 445-446.
497 Ibid., 444.
498 Ibid., 471.
completely illogical and that the small number of German soldiers killed or wounded from supposed attacks suggested that few actual attacks had occurred. German investigators also could not find evidence of a sustained people’s war after the Western Front descended into trench warfare. Lipkes considered the “collective delusion” thesis crafted by Horne and Kramer to be an unsatisfactory explanation. He stated that most of the ordinary soldiers in the campaign had not fought in the Franco-Prussian War and had not read military literature about francs-tireurs, so it was unclear how they would have become primed to anticipate them. He also believed that it was inappropriate to compare the German soldiers of 1914 to the French peasants of 1789, as these groups had significant differences. Lipkes, instead, supported the explanation that German soldiers were engaged in a policy of terrorism. He offered evidence suggesting that German soldiers had fired weapons as an excuse to commit atrocities. The German military leadership had condoned mass executions in response to alleged franc-tireur attacks without investigation or due process. Lipkes further supported his terrorism thesis by noting the German use of terrorism in other wartime contexts. He cited the shelling of Scarborough, Whitby, and Hartlepool, the shelling of Paris during the Spring Offensive, and the Black Tom explosion as examples.

At the end of his book, Lipkes analyzed the Bryce Report. He believed that the final report itself was “unimpeachable” but that some stories in the appendices

499 Ibid., 544-545.
500 Ibid., 548-549.
501 Ibid., 551.
502 Ibid., 557-558.
503 Ibid., 562.
had some inaccuracies. Furthermore, he stated that “the conclusions of the Bryce Report are entirely correct.” In further analysis, Lipkes concluded that the Committee actually underestimated the civilian death toll. The Committee did overestimate the death toll in Andenne by 138, but reported that a total of 410 civilians died in Dinant, when the true death toll was 685. Lipkes noted that there was a significant difference in the accuracy of the testimony of Belgian soldiers from that of Belgian civilians. The soldiers were more likely than the civilians to have provided dubious testimonies or to have added hearsay to their testimonies. In each city, the testimony of soldiers was less trustworthy than that of civilians. Therefore, in the cities where soldiers provided a high percentage of the atrocity testimony, the Bryce Report’s data was less likely to be accurate. In Liège, where soldiers only provided seventeen percent of the depositions, Lipkes found the Bryce Report’s narrative to be largely accurate. Meanwhile, in Hofstade, where eighty-five percent of the depositions consisted of soldiers’ testimonies, the Bryce Report’s account of atrocities was deemed less reliable. Finally, Lipkes acknowledged the common concern that the depositions used in the Bryce Report were not taken under oath, and he admitted that this was “a legitimate criticism.” However, he also claimed that this problem was overstated, as an oath was not a strong barrier to untruthful testimony, especially when witnesses might themselves have believed the untruths. Furthermore, veteran barristers collected the information and did not allow

504 Ibid., 694.
505 Ibid., 703.
506 Ibid., 697.
507 Ibid., 698-699.
508 Ibid., 700.
hearsay evidence. Lipkes asserted that sworn testimony was not necessarily more accurate, as exemplified by the German White Book.\(^{509}\)

**Narration of Atrocities After Their Re-establishment in the Historical Record**

The revolution in scholarship with regard to German atrocities in Belgium had a significant impact on the narration of the German invasion and occupation of Belgium. This could be seen in general World War I texts published from the early 2000’s to the present. In 2003, Hew Strachan, a professor of history at Oxford University, published his *The First World War*. This text showed the influence of the reincorporation of German atrocities in Belgium into the narrative. Strachan argued that Belgium had pursued “a policy of pure neutrality” leading up to the war and had not conspired with any power.\(^ {510}\) He noted the fear of francs-tireurs among the German soldiers and also noted the German belief that attacks by civilians against an invader were not permissible. The Germans responded to perceived franc-tirer attacks with violence against Belgian civilians, including hostage-taking and massacres. Strachan argued that 5,521 Belgian civilians and 896 French civilians died as a result of German violence. He also repeated the claim made by Horne and Kramer that few to no franc-tireur attacks actually occurred.\(^ {511}\) Strachan described the violent massacre at Dinant, stating that 674 civilians died there. Strachan did not go as far as Horne and Kramer, who argued that the killings at Dinant were premeditated, but he did argue that the killings were ordered by corps commanders in

\(^{509}\) Ibid., 608.
\(^{511}\) Ibid., 49.
an attempt to crush all franc-tireur activity. Strachan also incorporated scholarship about Belgian suffering under the occupation into his narrative, noting that Belgium “had been stripped of its industrial plant and raw materials” and had had thousands of its people deported to Germany. Strachan’s narrative did include some aspects of historical thought from before the 1990’s, such as his assertion that atrocity stories focused on rapes, mutilations, and executions of Catholic clergy. Ultimately, however, his book primarily endorsed and incorporated the revolution in historical thought that occurred during the 1990’s and 2000’s.

Another notable World War I text demonstrating this reintroduction of German atrocities into the historical narrative was Adam Hochschild’s popular book, *To End All Wars*, which was published in 2011. Hochschild devoted special attention to the war’s dissidents and sympathized with their cause. In his conclusion, he emphasized the destruction and sorrow caused by the war and wrote about the post-war world in a bleak tone. Hochschild had some similar concerns to those of the disillusioned post-war revisionists. He correctly argued that the Allies had bombed Germany despite condemning Germany for bombing Allied cities. He also correctly argued that the Allies had established a blockade of Germany that had caused more civilian deaths than did German violence in occupied territories. He argued that war propagandists had used shocking but unlikely stories of German violence, including the stories of severed hands and crucifixions, to demonize the Germans.

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512 Ibid., 51.
513 Ibid., 327.
514 Ibid., 49.
516 Ibid., 215.
517 Ibid., 149.
However, he still documented the real atrocities committed by the Germans against Belgian civilians. He stated that the Germans “imposed a regime of terror” in response to military setbacks. He also argued that German soldiers burned homes, including those with families inside, and executed thousands of hostages. He argued that there was no concrete evidence of francs-tireurs.\textsuperscript{518} He also included in his text the mistreatment that occurred under German occupation, such as the deportations to Germany and the electrical fence to prevent Belgians from fleeing to the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{519}

In 2014, Alexander Watson published \textit{Ring of Steel}, a comprehensive account of Germany and Austria-Hungary during World War I. His account of the German invasion of Belgium drew heavily from Horne and Kramer’s research and endorsed many of their conclusions. He confirmed that German soldiers had committed atrocities against Belgian civilians, including massacres, hostage-taking, and use of human shields. He cited Horne and Kramer’s estimate that 5,521 Belgian and 906 French civilians were killed and that “between 15,000 and 20,000 buildings” were destroyed. He confirmed the destruction of the cultural treasures of Louvain and the high death tolls in other cities, including 383 deaths at Tamines and 674 deaths at Dinant.\textsuperscript{520} Watson correctly characterized the mass executions without trials as being violations of international law, and he depicted the German notion of a franc-tireur menace as being “illusory.”\textsuperscript{521} He also reported the deportations of Belgians to Germany. As did Zuckerman, he noted the cruel treatment faced by the Belgian

\textsuperscript{518} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{519} Ibid., 217.
\textsuperscript{520} Watson, \textit{Ring of Steel}, 127.
\textsuperscript{521} Ibid., 131-132.
deportees, who were held in unsanitary camps and forced to sign contracts to work in the German war industry. Within months of the start of the deportation program, over one thousand inmates had died.\footnote{Ibid., 387.} German mistreatment of Belgian civilians during the initial invasion and the subsequent occupation had become accepted as fact by historical writers of this time period.

While German atrocities in Belgium were firmly in the historical record, that did not mean that debate among historians about the details had ceased. There was still debate as to why these atrocities occurred. Horne and Kramer explained this through their thesis of a “collective delusion.” They argued that the German soldiers who had invaded Belgium were in a state of “collective anxiety” and were afraid of the image of the franc-tireur. The franc-tireur was an easy explanation for any shocking or mysterious action, such as a gunshot being fired without an obvious source.\footnote{Horne and Kramer, \textit{German Atrocities, 1914}, 94.} Primed by the memory of the Franco-Prussian War and by reports of franc-tireur violence that they heard before entering Belgium, German soldiers saw francs-tireurs everywhere and reacted harshly. Lipkes, however, did not find Horne and Kramer’s thesis to be convincing. He engaged their argument that the franc-tireur fear originated in the Franco-Prussian War and found it unconvincing, as few ordinary soldiers had actually fought in that war.\footnote{Lipkes, \textit{Rehearsals}, 548.} He believed that their explanation “generalizes and universalizes what was in fact a German problem,” and he contrasted the German behavior in Belgium in 1914 with the reputable conduct of Allied soldiers entering Germany in 1945.\footnote{Ibid., 550-551.} Lipkes believed that the explanation for
German violence could be attributed to a policy of terrorism and to militarist and expansionist thought that was prevalent in Germany.\textsuperscript{526}

Lipkes’ argument received criticism from other scholars. Watson argued that German culture was not responsible for the atrocities, and he also argued that Lipkes had “uncritically” repeated “absurd stereotypes of Entente propaganda.” He referenced the work of Christopher Browning that claimed that “ordinary men,” not just “psychopaths or ideologues,” could be induced to commit atrocities in certain military settings.\textsuperscript{527} He gave an example of this process through the diaries of Wilhelm Schweiger who served in Reserve Jäger Bataillon Nr. 7. At first, Schweiger was a “gentle man” who “expressed understanding rather than enmity towards the Belgian population.” However, he soon encountered soldiers who claimed to have been attacked by francs-tireurs, and he also personally experienced what seemed to be a franc-tireur attack. Schweiger then participated in executions of civilians and destruction of their property.\textsuperscript{528}

Another debate began with the publication of Isabel Hull’s \textit{Absolute Destruction}, published in 2005. A professor of history at Cornell University, Hull devoted an entire book to explaining the atrocities committed by the German Army between 1871 and 1918. She argued that there was a “German military culture” that encouraged extreme and unlimited levels of violence against civilians in order to achieve victory. Hull incorporated the 1904 to 1908 Herero and Namaqua Genocide into the story of German violence against civilians. This had only briefly been discussed by Horne and Kramer. According to Hull, the Herero and Namaqua revolt

\textsuperscript{526} Ibid., 567-570.
\textsuperscript{527} Watson, \textit{Ring of Steel}, 128.
\textsuperscript{528} Ibid., 129-130.
in German South West Africa prompted German statesmen and the German public to demand a heavy-handed response. After defeating the Herero at the Battle of Waterburg, General Lothar von Trotha pursued the defeated Herero into the desert, where thousands of them died. According to Hull, Trotha eventually came to support the annihilation of the Herero as a people. Hull believed that this policy of extermination extended the conflict and caused extensive destruction to the colony, so a desire to quickly end the war or limit damage could not explain German actions. Instead, she believed that the genocide could be explained by German military culture. Out of this culture developed a “standard practice” of seeing enemy civilians as the same as enemy soldiers and treating them likewise. Hull argued that “All males were suspected of being actual or potential soldiers,” and German soldiers would frequently fire at fleeing civilians. Civilians in all German wars between 1871 and 1918 became victims of German atrocities. Hull saw German actions in Belgium as consistent with the broader German military culture. According to Hull, burning buildings, summary executions of civilians, and a belief that alleged resistance by civilians “placed them outside the protection of international law” were common to both South West Africa and Belgium.

Hull’s thesis has been scrutinized and disputed by other historians. Alan Kramer, a co-author of *German Atrocities, 1914*, published *Dynamic of Destruction* in 2007. Kramer also sought to explain the atrocities and cultural destruction that

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530 Ibid., 59-60.
531 Ibid., 91.
532 Ibid., 149-150.
533 Ibid., 210.
occurred during World War I. He argued that there was a transnational “dynamic of
destruction” that motivated soldiers to conduct these violent acts.\(^{534}\) He chose not to
focus specifically on Germany, and he included the actions of Austria-Hungary, Italy,
the Ottoman Empire, and the Balkan countries in this “dynamic of destruction.” This
dynamic had precursors in the atrocities committed during the Balkan Wars and the
Italian conquest of Libya. Kramer also noted the Ottoman violence against Greeks
and Armenians.\(^{535}\) Later in the book, Kramer discussed examples of German
violence against civilians and culturally significant objects, such as the destruction of
Louvain.\(^{536}\) However, he was careful to argue that Germany was not the only country
to use violence to achieve its goals and claimed that there was no direct link between
the German actions in World War I and those in World War II.\(^{537}\) Toward the end of
the book, Kramer directly discussed the merits of Hull’s arguments. He agreed with
Hull’s belief that German military culture was different from the military cultures of
Britain and France, as the latter two countries had civilian oversight of the military,
while Germany did not. However, he argued that other countries, such as Russia and
Italy, engaged in the destructive and wasteful behavior that Hull ascribed to Germany.
Kramer also argued that the violence against the Herero and the violence against the
Belgians were distinct in scale and in type.\(^{538}\)

Susanne Kuss also challenged Hull’s thesis in *German Colonial Wars and the
Context of Military Violence*, published in German in 2010 and translated into

\(^{534}\) Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (New
\(^{535}\) Ibid., 3-4.
\(^{536}\) Ibid., 10-11.
\(^{537}\) Ibid., 115.
\(^{538}\) Ibid., 341-343.
English in 2017. She contested Hull’s argument that there was a continuous military culture that underwrote German violence against civilians. According to Kuss, this argument assumed that the soldiers had no agency and could not deviate from the policy of complete destruction. Moreover, Kuss claimed that there were significant deviations in behavior among German soldiers in the Boxer Rebellion, the Herero and Namaqua Genocide, and the Maji Maji Rebellion, calling into question the existence of an overarching military culture.  

Thus, although there are current debates about the reasons why the German atrocities in Belgium occurred, their veracity has been solidly established. During the Cold War, the revisionist narrative continued, with the exceptions of Schöller and Tuchman. Cold War period writers more often omitted atrocities than made accusations of false atrocities. With the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II, historians turned from the well-studied World War II to the relatively unstudied World War I. With time and distance from World War I, Horne and Kramer were able to reanalyze the events without an ideological agenda. They were able to overturn the revisionist narrative by grounding their conclusions in solid research. This is likely the reason that the atrocities continue to be solidly in the record today and why they will continue to be in the record in the future.

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Conclusion

A study of the historiography of the German invasion and occupation of Belgium demonstrates the power that a wave of revisionism can have on the historical narrative. From shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles through the outbreak of World War II, writers downplayed and excused the real atrocities committed by German soldiers. During the Cold War period, with the exception of Tuchman and Schöller, those who wrote about the German invasion or occupation of Belgium omitted the German atrocities in Belgium from their narratives.

Like all historical writers, the postwar revisionists who erased the German atrocities in Belgium from the record were writing in the context of their time period, and their biases and concerns were reflected in their texts. Many of the British and American texts from this period reflected disillusionment with World War I and sometimes with war in general. Many of them also expressed negative views of the Treaty of Versailles and of the actions of the Allied governments during and after the war, including the blockade of Germany and the actions against rebels in Ireland. They were also often reacting against wartime propaganda, including the cartoonishly negative portrayal of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the belief that the Germans were solely responsible for the war. Authors writing in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s either explicitly expressed isolationist opinions or were preoccupied with the collapse of the Treaty of Versailles and the beginning of another general European war. Meanwhile, German writers wrote in the context of the restrictions and war guilt forced on Germany by the treaty, and they hoped to reverse these restrictions and to improve the position and reputation of their country. Others desired to rehabilitate the German
military in the postwar era. Finally, some German postwar propaganda reflected racist feelings that were shared by some of the revisionists in Anglophone countries, such as the Black Horror on the Rhine.

Unfortunately, the truth about the German atrocities in Belgium was collateral damage of this revisionist movement. British and American writers who were disillusioned with World War I and its effects in the postwar world hoped to undermine any claims that the war was fought for noble purposes. In contrast, they hoped to demonstrate that the Allied governments had deceived their people into fighting the war on false pretenses. One common argument used to demonstrate this was the argument that Germany was not the sole aggressor in World War I, a claim that has largely been accepted by present-day scholarship. Also, the postwar revisionists correctly argued that British intervention was not solely due to a humanitarian concern with protecting Belgian neutrality. However, in their zeal to disprove any noble ideals for fighting in World War I, they attacked the reports of violence in Belgium as fictitious or exaggerated. There were, indeed, some atrocity stories that were less likely to be true, but these were overemphasized, and the more credible atrocity stories were omitted. Others used Allied wrongdoings during and after the war to prove a moral equivalency between the Allies and the Germans and to undermine any Allied claims to moral superiority. This diminished the significance of the German atrocities. Those who opposed American entry into World War II also sought to demonstrate the link between false propaganda and the entry into World War I, which they saw as unjustifiable in retrospect. They improperly denied or downplayed the German atrocities in Belgium to achieve their goal. While Belgian
civilians were the casualties of German violence during the war, it was the atrocities themselves that were the casualties of postwar revisionism.

An interesting facet of the revisionist movement was that, at the outset, most of its important writers were not professional historians. In the early 1920’s, neither John Maynard Keynes nor E.N. Bennett was a professional historian. In the late 1920’s, Ponsonby, Cooper Willis, and Graves were also not professional historians. Harry Elmer Barnes was a professional historian, but he was considered to be a maverick by the academic community, and many historians harbored an intense dislike of him.540 While Grattan was inspired to join the revisionist movement as a student of Barnes at Clark University, he primarily worked “in the realm of literary criticism and international journalism.”541 The only conventional professional historian to intervene during the late 1920’s was Harold Lasswell. Thus, it was non-historians who set the narrative. When academic historians such as Peterson and Read intervened in the late 1930’s, their conclusions were more measured than those of the early revisionists, but their writings were still solidly in the revisionist tradition. Until the 1990’s, few historians intervened in the field of German atrocities in Belgium, and most of those who wrote about World War I failed to mention them. Ironically, in the Anglophone world, the author who most emphatically affirmed and documented the existence of these atrocities was Barbara Tuchman, who was herself a popular writer, not an academic historian. It was only in the 1990’s and 2000’s that historians finally intervened and corrected the narrative.

540 Blakey, Historians on the Homefront, 136.
541 Ibid., 137.
Several reasons have been forwarded to explain why this intervention by historians was so delayed. Nico Wouters argued that, in Belgian academia after 1945, there were few scholars devoted to contemporary history, and those who were, favored the study of World War II over World War I. In 1995, with the fiftieth anniversary of World War II, “WWII studies seemed like a saturated field without clear direction,” and World War I received a renaissance of interest from researchers. Wouters argued that this shift in Belgian historiography was one key inspiration for Horne and Kramer’s work. Sophie de Schaepdrijver also offered an explanation in a short article written for the British Library website, arguing that there was a “waning of the passions of the war in Europe” that allowed historians to reincorporate the atrocities into the narrative of the German invasion of Belgium. According to Horne and Kramer, the opening of the Russian archives during the 1990’s provided them with information that was important in reconstructing the events during the invasion.

While all of the above explanations may be true, none of them fully explain why academic historians did not intervene in the field sooner and why they allowed laymen to set the narrative. A more in-depth explanation may be that historians had abdicated their responsibility to do so. In The Uses and Abuses of History, published in 2008, Margaret MacMillan argued that professional historians had increasingly “turned inward” and had become averse to intervening in public discourse about history. A consequence of this was that “amateurs” had become ascendant in the

544 Horne and Kramer, German Atrocities, 1914, 5.
field of writing and discussing history. She argued that much of the content produced by amateur historians was of low quality, and that bad history “makes sweeping generalizations for which there is not adequate evidence and ignores awkward facts which do not fit.” MacMillan finished by calling on historians to reassert themselves and to challenge the false or misleading history that was published by amateurs.

Indeed, there were missed opportunities to intervene and to challenge the postwar revisionist narrative. According to Blakey, both Barnes and Grattan were considered to hold extreme positions and were not popular with many academic historians. He noted that, while few still supported the wartime orthodox views of history, “few had become total revisionists in their scholarship.” Many historians, including those whose work received vicious attacks from Barnes, did not respond to his attacks, instead choosing to subtly exile him from the historical community. Professional “organizations and journals disapproved of and disregarded” Barnes and only used him “as a point of reference.” Similar to Barnes, Grattan also did not receive criticism from professional historians who disagreed with his scholarship. According to Blakey, no historical journal wrote a review of Why We Fought. As such, the book’s misleading representation of the German atrocities in Belgium proliferated without criticism or intervention. Another missed opportunity occurred in Read’s Atrocity Propaganda, 1914-1919. Read included some criticism of

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545 Margaret MacMillan, The Uses and Abuses of History (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008), 35.
546 Ibid., 36.
547 Ibid., 37.
548 Blakey, Historians on the Homefront, 139.
549 Ibid., 137.
550 Ibid., 139.
Ponsonby, focusing on his analysis purporting to demonstrate the creation of false propaganda through the creation of a story of Belgian priests being used as bell clappers. Read disproved Ponsonby’s story, showing that many of the newspaper articles Ponsonby cited did not exist. However, Read did not make any further criticism of Ponsonby, even referring to *Falsehood in War-Time* as an “excellent little volume,” nor did he establish the truth of the German atrocities as a central part of his narrative.\(^{551}\) The preceding are excellent examples of historians abdicating their responsibility for the veracity of the historical narrative.

Because the German atrocities in Belgium were narrated poorly or not narrated at all, they largely disappeared from the historical record. There are two important implications of this erasure. The first is that, by omitting the atrocities from history, the postwar revisionists and those influenced by their scholarship disrespected the Belgians who died as a result of German violence during World War I, effectively committing another act of violence against them, their living relatives, and Belgian society. In a 2004 article, Antoon de Baets argued that the dead “possess dignity” and, thus, “deserve respect” from the living. It logically followed that the living had obligations and responsibilities to the dead.\(^{552}\) From this conclusion, Baets formulated his hypothetical international document, *A Declaration of the Responsibilities of Present Generations toward Past Generations*.\(^{553}\) The tenth stipulation, categorized as a “consequential right,” was “The right to know the truth

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\(^{553}\) Ibid., 142.
about past human rights abuses. He based this stipulation on already existing international declarations and rulings, which asserted that victims of human rights abuses, their friends and family members, and their societies, had a right to know what had transpired. Governments had an obligation to investigate the truth and to allow others to investigate and discuss human rights abuses. The revelation of truth was seen as a necessary type of reparation toward the victims and as a preventative measure toward future atrocities. By writing the atrocities out of the historical narrative, the postwar revisionists from Great Britain, the United States, and Germany violated this “right to know the truth.” They obscured the true cause of death of those killed, and some writers even slandered them by insinuating that the dead were often francs-tireurs who were justly punished. The dead were thus denied the respect that they deserved. By omitting the German atrocities in Belgium, the Belgian people were denied the reparation gained by an honest account of their mistreatment at the hands of the Germans. Both in their roles as historians and humans, these writers owed the victims of violence and their loved ones an honest account of their deaths, and this was denied in their narration of German atrocities in Belgium.

A second implication of the distorted analysis of the atrocities and their subsequent omission from history was that the guilty were able to escape culpability for the criminal acts that they had committed. In history, the perpetrators of atrocities have often been states, political groups, or organizations. These entities have historically benefitted from revisionism, and they have been willing to politicize history so as to exonerate themselves. This was the case in the example of the

554 Ibid., 143.
555 Ibid., 154-155.
German atrocities in Belgium. German government agencies and the German military were key creators of postwar propaganda that obscured the culpability of the German state and military. German government officials and soldiers, notably Prince von Bülow and Erich Ludendorff, also published denialist works. In the end, the German perpetrators of violence almost completely escaped culpability for their actions. The Allied governments attempted to try German war criminals, with Article 227 of the Treaty of Versailles arranging for the Kaiser to be extradited and tried, and with Articles 228 through 230 arranging for other Germans to be tried and punished for war crimes.\footnote{Zuckerman, \textit{The Rape of Belgium}, 239-240.} However, at the Leipzig war crimes trials of 1921, only a limited number of Germans were brought to trial under the German court system, and they were either acquitted or received light sentences.\footnote{Horne and Kramer, \textit{German Atrocities, 1914}, 345-348.} The Kaiser and other top military and political leaders were never tried. The omission of these atrocities from revisionist texts also exonerated the guilty in the court of public and historical opinion, and the truth was only revealed after the guilty had died without being held responsible for their actions.

Finally, the historiographical analysis of the German atrocities in Belgium raises its own questions. For a long period of time, historians were certain that the postwar narrative was truthful. However, the analysis of the 1990’s and 2000’s demonstrated that this scholarship was either incomplete or inaccurate. Given this, how can students of history be certain that the current scholarship is accurate? How do readers and historians know that Horne and Kramer’s book is an accurate and trustworthy representation of the events? At a more fundamental level, is there a
historical truth that can eventually be reached through careful analysis of the facts?
The postwar revisionist historians and popular writers created historical narratives that clearly reflected the context in which they were living and their ideological stances with regard to the salient issues of the time period. Likewise, the historical writers of the 1990’s to the present are also living in the context of their time period, and it is unlikely that their scholarship is completely separated from this context or from the biases of the historian.

An additional complicating factor is that the historical record from which the current scholars have derived their source material is not complete, as much of the German military archives were destroyed during World War II. They were not available to Horne and Kramer and will not be available to future historians. Finally, there are issues that exist in this historical field that are still evident in the currently accepted scholarship as well as in the postwar scholarship which has largely been discredited or revised. One issue is that of “emplotment.” Coined by Hayden White, this term refers to a tendency for historians to turn chronicles and seemingly unrelated events into a single narrative. In doing so, their narratives often conform to “specific kinds of plot structures,” especially those that are commonly found in fiction.\footnote{Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” in \textit{Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 83.}

Quoting Lévi-Strauss, White argued that the overarching narratives crafted by historians are made possible by removing or omitting facts that do not fit the story that the writer hopes to tell.\footnote{Ibid., 90-91.}

This was evident in the texts of postwar writers, which omitted or downplayed real atrocities in favor of lurid atrocities that were less likely to be true. This was in
service of an overall narrative arguing that the atrocities were exaggerated or concocted to deceive people into fighting an unjustifiable war. However, recent scholars also have omitted material that did not fit into their greater thesis. They typically argued that there was little to no accurate description of the atrocities in Belgium until the publication of their own books. While this is largely true, the narrative is inconvenienced by Tuchman, who did incorporate German atrocities against Belgian civilians into her narrative of the invasion of Belgium. Although Tuchman was not a professional historian, *The Guns of August* was a book of consequence, a winner of the Pulitzer Prize with a vast readership. Possibly due to the inconvenience of her narrative, neither Horne and Kramer nor Zuckerman nor Lipkes included any mention of *The Guns of August* in their narratives. In light of these issues, the question of whether it is possible to entirely trust the most recent sources arises again.

However, despite these issues, it is still possible to accept the current scholarship as the best approximation of the truth in present time. The books produced by Horne and Kramer, Zuckerman, and Lipkes were all based on in-depth analysis of archival sources and on the evidence that was available at the time. This is in contrast to the postwar revisionist writers who often included content that was not based on an analysis of primary sources or which omitted information that more recent scholars have demonstrated to be an important component of the story. The issues of context, incomplete archives, and “emplotment” are issues that will continue to affect future generations of historians. However, that does not prevent historians from ever drawing any valid conclusions about history. As the historical shift that
occurred during the 1990’s demonstrates, it is possible that a better analysis could be written in the future. These conclusions would still have to be defended by historical evidence to be accepted as trustworthy scholarship. Finally, it must be remembered that new groundbreaking scholarship is not immune to dispute and does not end all debate on a subject. After the publication of *German Atrocities, 1914*, there remained a lively debate about why these atrocities occurred, and this debate has not been completely resolved. Thus, the historical narrative continues to be constructed, and the story of German atrocities in Belgium continues to be told.
Figures

Figure 7. Australian Poster Appealing to the “Women of Queensland.” Artist: J. S. Watkins, 1914-1918, 99 x 72 cm. “A particularly powerful poster, issued by the Queensland Recruiting Committee. A woman raises her fists in anger. Two children lie dead at her feet, her hair is in disarray and a breast naked.” In What Did You Do in the War Daddy? A Visual History of Propaganda Posters, by Peter Stanley, 35, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
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