



America did not Represent Absolute Just within WWII

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World War II was a war fought from 1939-1945. The harsh treaties put upon Germany after WWI led to the uprising of Nazis and, ultimately, the war. It was a war between an allied force of Germany, Japan, and Italy against almost the rest of the world that led to the death of 50-85 million. ¹By consisting of both World Wars and other minor wars, the 20th century earned a “victorious feat” of “275 wars and 115 million deaths in battle... Averaging to 3150 deaths per day, 130 deaths per hour.”² Even compared to the casualties of the century of the great Mongol invasion, it is way ahead of the game. Due to the massive number of deaths, the prolonged ongoing dispute of the just and ethics of killing in war is once again brought to the surface of the plate. Germany did horrible things in WWII, including the murder of thousands of Jews and the practice of human experiments. They have violated multiple international laws regarding war, and there is no way around it. But at the same time, the causation of the war does not primarily lie on the wrongs of the Germans since, in essence, what they were trying to do was aim for a better life, and it was the Treaty of Versailles, signed by the Allied forces, that forced Germany to this end. Therefore, the U.S. did not represent absolute justice within WWII.

The just war theory could be used as a standard to determine the justness of America during WWII. The theory has two crucial perspectives: “Jus ad bellum: One governing the resort to war (and)... Jus in Bello: One governing the conduct of war.”³

Jus ad Bellum focuses on the ethics of a country and the justification of this country to fight in this war. In contrast, Jus in Bello focuses on the rationale of the ethics of the soldiers fighting during the war.⁴ People tend to mix those by claiming that the soldiers represent the government; hence,

1 “World War II.” World War II | High Point, NC, Highpoint Museum, www.highpointnc.gov/2111/World-War-II. Accessed 9 Apr. 2024.

2 McMahan, Jeff. “The Ethics of Killing in War.” Jstor, July 2004, Accessed Feb. 2024.

3 McMahan, Jeff. “The Ethics of Killing in War.” Jstor, July 2004, Accessed Feb. 2024.

4 “Just War Theory.” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Internet encyclopedia of philosophy, iep.utm.edu/justwar/#H2. Accessed 17 Feb. 2024.

if a country is unjust in the war, the soldiers are unjust for fighting. However, that’s not the case. Soldiers are merely subordinates to the government, and “personal choices disappear when this becomes a legal obligation and patriotic duty.”⁵ Domestically, in a peaceful era, people can decide whether or not they are criminals because it’s their freedom to choose to be unjust. However, it is impossible to determine in a war era because the government forces one to join the army, which we usually call the draft, and forces one to be an unjust criminal if they’re fighting for an unjustified reason. Therefore, when considering the justness of a war, it should be viewed both from an institutional level, Jus ad Bellum, and from a soldier’s level, Jus in Bello.

From an institutional level (Jus ad Bellum), America, as a country, did participate in a just war against Japan but not against Germany. From a Jus ad Bellum perspective, the war’s starter must have a proper cause. The only adequate cause sufficient is self-defense against physical aggression. The only exception to this rule is to “retaliate against a wrong already committed (for example, to pursue and punish an aggressor), or to pre-empt an anticipated attack.”⁶ In 1941, America had a justified reason to attend the war because Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. Since that was a physical aggression done by Japan against America, Americans, out of self-defense, joined the war. America had also never been an aggressor to Japan; hence, the rule of retaliation also does not apply. There has not been a massive dispute over the war against Japan since when one country invades another’s territory, it is justified for them to fight back. However, the war against Germany was not just because of the initial aggression the Treaty of Versailles had imposed upon Germany after WWI.

The Treaty of Versailles was a treaty signed after WWI that symbolized peace. It was an unfair treaty that the Allied forces forcefully made Germany sign. It excluded Germany from the conference through military suppressions and gave the winning countries a monopoly on the treaty, and America was one of the countries that formed the treaty. Some examples of military suppression during the treaty were

5 McMahan, Jeff. “The Ethics of Killing in War.” Jstor, July 2004, Accessed Feb. 2024.

6 “Just War Theory.” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Internet encyclopedia of philosophy, iep.utm.edu/justwar/#H2. Accessed 17 Feb. 2024.



the blockade of all supplies from going into Germany when Germany didn't sign the treaty and the public declaration that Germany had no room for negotiation when Germany tried to negotiate.⁷ The exclusion of a country from a treaty related to them through physical force is a form of Physical aggression that could be justifiable for Germany to relaunch an attack to retaliate against the aggressors years after the treaty. Hence, according to Jus ad Bellum, the U.S. did not stand in a position that represented absolute justice during WWII against Germany.

The dictation of the allied forces on Germany in the Treaty of Versailles also invaded one of the foundational concepts of international law: sovereignty. Sovereignty means a country has the right to govern itself without interference from outside factors.⁸ The military threat of Allied forces on Germany to sign the treaty interfered with the idea of Germany's sovereign rights to make decisions. Therefore, forcing Germany to sign a treaty that relates to them but excludes them from the regulations puts the U.S. in a position that cannot represent absolute justice in WWII.

Another aggression that America had done to Germany was economic aggression; in other words, it meant the intent of a country to cause economic destabilization in another country deliberately. The Treaty of Versailles that the Allied forces forced Germany to sign included multiple variables that resulted in the instability of the German economy after WWI. It caused instability by forcing Germany to give up 10 percent of its territories and all overseas territories, plus several billion dollars in reparations to the allied nations. It also claimed 90% of their merchant fleets and thousands of railroad cars. The treaty forced the termination of all commercial agreements between Germans and their former consumers, and the land it requested was its most prosperous coal-producing territory.⁹ These regulations made Germany lose all of its major economic incomes, resulting in insufficient income to pay for the reparations. The only way to solve this problem was to print money, and the Germans did, but the issue related to that was hyperinflation, which led to an even greater economic crisis. The Allied forces anticipated the crush of the German economy through reparations when they took away all of Germany's major economic components, which proves the Allied forces' deliberate intentions of

7 Seeds of Weakness:, cas.loyno.edu/sites/cas.loyno.edu/files/Seeds of Weakness_The Impact of the Treaty of Versailles on the Economic Collapse of the Weimar Republic.pdf. Accessed 19 Feb. 2024.

8 "International Law." Legal Information Institute, Legal Information Institute, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/international-law#:~:text=International%20law%20is%20a%20set,with%20international%20organizations%20and%20individuals. Accessed 5 Apr. 2024.

9 Seeds of Weakness:, cas.loyno.edu/sites/cas.loyno.edu/files/Seeds of Weakness_The Impact of the Treaty of Versailles on the Economic Collapse of the Weimar Republic.pdf. Accessed 19 Feb. 2024.

crushing the economy of Germany. Therefore, it formed an economic aggression against Germany and thus violated Jus ad Bellum, which means that the U.S. could not represent absolute justice within WWII against Germany.

Another law that America broke was the international human rights law. The deliberate destabilization of Germany's economy resulted in widespread hunger and poverty among the German population, violating both Universal Declaration Of Human Rights articles 23 and 25.¹⁰ The prices of everyday necessities skyrocketed so much that even buying a single bread in Germany now requires a whole wheelbarrow of money.¹¹ Also, "from mid-1929 to January 1933, the number of Germans who had full-time jobs fell from 20 million to 11.5 million; by the start of 1933, at least 6 million Germans were unemployed."¹² The Treaty of Versailles prohibited people's rights to an adequate standard of living by establishing an insufficient economic environment that could not promise people proper jobs or guarantee food, clothing, and housing for their families. These were all caused by the Treaty of Versailles established by America and the Allied forces. Therefore, from a moral standpoint, proving that the U.S. could not represent absolute justice during WWII when it had done so much aggression beforehand to Germany.

From the Jus in Bello perspective, America also didn't represent absolute justice in WWII. One fundamental essence, from the Jus in Bello perspective, is that only combatants are permissible attack targets, whereas noncombatants aren't. A combatant is defined as someone who poses a direct threat, whereas noncombatants are people who don't pose a threat.¹³ America has broken that rule multiple times against Japan.

One example of this is the internment of Japanese Americans within the country since the start of WWII. Due to the suspicion of Japanese Americans still loyal to the Japanese, out of national security reasons, they were sent to concentration camps to outrule the possibility of a potential threat to the United States.¹⁴ This decision broke the Jus in

10 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations, United Nations, 10 Dec. 1948, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

11 Seeds of Weakness:, cas.loyno.edu/sites/cas.loyno.edu/files/Seeds of Weakness_The Impact of the Treaty of Versailles on the Economic Collapse of the Weimar Republic.pdf. Accessed 19 Feb. 2024.

12 "How Did the Germans Respond to the Great Depression." The Battle Fore Work, Facing history and ourselves, 2 Aug. 2016, www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/battle-work#:~:text=This%20would%20be%20no%20small,6%20million%20Germans%20were%20unemployed.

13 Ryan, Cheyney. "Democratic Duty and the Moral Dilemmas of Soldiers." Jstor, Jstor, Oct. 2011, www.jstor.org/.

14 "Japanese-American Internment." Japanese-American Internment | Harry S. Truman, Truman Library, www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/presidential-inquiries/japanese-american-internment. Accessed 8 Apr. 2024.

Bello due to the attack America had done on noncombatants that did not pose any direct threat to the nation. Putting the Japanese Americans in violated the Fourth and Fifth Amendment that protects the citizens' rights.¹⁵ The forced removal of Japanese Americans from their home to relocate violates the guarantees of the American citizen's rights to be free from unreasonable searches. It also broke the rule of being put on a crime without a fair trial and judged on their race, breaking the equal protection law. Most Japanese Americans, after the war, did not regain what they once had. The United States also did not have direct evidence proving that all Japanese Americans who were incarcerated were secretly working for Japan, hence breaking the Jus in Bello by attacking noncombatants, proving that the United States was unjust in the war.

Another event that proved America broke the Jus in Bello was the atomic bombing of Japan. "The civilian death toll in Japan from Allied bombing was between 330,000 and 900,000 with an additional 112,000 killed from the atomic bombs."¹⁶ The civilians in Japan were not combatants that had posed direct threats to the war, and the killing of them broke the rule of Jus in Bello, proving America unjust in WWII. Another example is "German civilian deaths from British and American bombing of German cities have been estimated to have been between 570,000 and 800,000, and more than 120 cities were turned to virtual rubble."¹⁷ The killing of noncombatants by Germans once again breaks the rule of Jus in Bello. Therefore, the killing of civilians during WWII proves the fact that America could not represent absolute justice in WWII when fighting against Germany and Japan.

After WWII, there were other wars that, according to the Just War theory, America did not represent just against. The Vietnam War was one of them. The reason for the start of the war was to contain communism and prevent the spread of it. The Dominos theory was the significant supporting theory behind it, stating that the Communist government would

spread like wildfire to nearby nations.¹⁸ However, this theory could not justify their actions in the Vietnam War according to the just war theory. Vietnam has not done any harm against the U.S., and hence, from the Jus ad Bellum perspective, America was not justified in the war. Also, from the Jus in Bello perspective, America has bombed and killed unarmed civilians in different villages within the country, therefore unjust. Another war that the U.S. was unjust against was the Iraq war. The reason for the war was that Iraq possessed so many weapons of mass destruction, so it was necessary for America to intervene to prevent potential harm. However, according to the just war theory Jus ad Bellum, it is not sufficient reason for a country to start a war against another country just out of potential danger. Also, America has killed several civilians during the process of invasion. Therefore, it was an unjust war in which America participated. In conclusion, America does not always represent absolute justice within wars.

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Citation: Binxiu Qin, "America did not Represent Absolute Just within WWII", *American Research Journal of History and Culture*, Vol 10, no. 1, 2024, pp. 18-21.

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