Why is the study of World War 1 important?

1. World War is one of the most influential events that has taken place in modern history. World War I and later World War II shaped our modern reality. The end of direct colonialism, the decline of Europe and the rise of the United States, the development of the European Union, development of advanced weaponry which let to other scientific advances as a by product are all partly or as a direct result of the world wars.

2. World War I was a massive influence on the shaping of the modern world. It contributed to the reshaping of Europe with the Ottoman Empire and the Austria-Hungarian Empire disappearing into history. The war was a key influence in the collapse of Tsarist Russia and the later Communist revolution and the development of the Soviet Union. Britain like France's participation in 2 world wars sped up the decline of the British Empire which ultimately led to its collapse.

3. The terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the armistice between Germany and the opposing allies led to a significant feeling of anger in Germany which combined with economic collapse and hyperinflation led to instability in Germany and ultimately the development of a fascist state in Germany which laid the foundations of the Second World War.

4. The rise of the United States as an international economic giant is linked to the boom in industrialisation and simultaneous decline of the former European colonial powers (Britain, France, Holland and Belgium) as a consequence of two world wars.

5. It has been argued that with the collapse of monarchical regimes across Europe including Germany, Austria-Hungary sped up the process of true democratization in Western Europe.
6. The total number of casualties during World War I was over 37 million. There were over 16 million deaths and 20 million wounded making it one the worst conflicts in terms of loss of life in human history.

How should World War I be taught to young people

World War I has traditionally been taught in a way which excluded the massive contribution both in terms of conscripted soldiers, volunteers, natural resources and money which African, Asian and Caribbean countries gave to Britain during that time. This has created a situation whereby the contribution of Britain’s colonies is non existent in the mainstream British psyche.

It could be said This has contributed to a lack of community cohesion Britain and issues around identity for people from ethnic minorities. To improve the well being of our society we need to make people from different communities and ethnic groups feel proud of being a citizen and part of the society. If the majority of people within the country are totally unaware of the contributions of Black and Asian soldiers and states during Britain’s wars and ethnic minority communities themselves are unaware this can only contribute to misunderstanding. Therefore to alleviate issues we suggest the following methods could be used when teaching about Britain’s wars.

1. Whenever discussing Britain’s World War I effort special attention should be made to the massive contribution of African, Asian and Caribbean troops and states. The number of soldiers from ethnic minority groups who died and were injured, resources that Britain used which were given by these states and money that was either donated or appropriated. Special attention must be given to this area to improve the mass awareness of the contribution of the Commonwealth especially those of ethnic minorities. The objective is to improve social awareness so that the masses are aware that Britain’s post war migrants were from nations which paid a heavy price for supporting Britain during the war and contributed to the nations victory. Hopefully this will increase understanding and tolerance from the host society and improve the feeling of self esteem and belonging felt by people from ethnic minorities.

2. Resources which specially discuss this subject should be used.

3. How the war effort affected the colonies in terms of collateral damage, lives lost, financially and in terms of infrastructure development should be discussed.

Resources:


Links

www.7eyouthacademy.org

http://www.iwm.org.uk/

http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zqhxcv

http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/remembrance/ww1-centenary

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/west_indies_01.shtml

http://www.bcaheritage.org.uk/