

The Americans (Reconstruction to the 21st Century)

Chapter 16:

TELESCOPING THE TIMES World War Looms

CHAPTER OVERVIEW An imperfect peace leads to the rise of dictators who brutally suppress opponents and innocent people at home and attack their neighbors. Soon the United States is drawn into worldwide war.

Section 1: Dictators Threaten World Peace

MAIN IDEA The rise of rulers with total power in Europe and Asia led to World War II.

The Treaty of Versailles created problems that led to new dangers. Germans resented losing territory and being blamed for starting the war. New democratic governments in many nations were weak. Soon dictators seized power.

In the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin focused on creating a communist state, in which the state takes ownership of farms and factories away from individuals. He also made the nation a huge police state, in which anyone who criticized him or his policies was arrested and removed.

In Italy, Benito Mussolini came to power as head of a fascist movement. Fascism combines nationalism with a strong central government, though it avoids communism's direct control of farms and factories. Mussolini crushed all foes.

In Germany, Adolf Hitler hoped to unite all German-speaking people into a new German empire. Hitler believed that Germans—especially blond, blue-eyed “Aryans”—were a master race, fated to achieve power over all “inferior races.” Hitler also believed that Germany had to expand its territory to thrive. His political movement was called Nazism, which combined extreme nationalism with racism and expansionism. Once appointed chancellor, Hitler seized all power.

In Japan, military leaders believed that more land and resources were needed. In 1931, they launched an attack on a province of China. With success there, Japanese militarists gained control of Japan's government. The League of Nations' failure to stop Japan emboldened Hitler and Mussolini. Hitler rebuilt the German armed forces, breaking the Versailles treaty. Mussolini conquered Ethiopia, in Africa.

World nations responded weakly to these threats to peace. Most Americans wanted the U.S. to avoid foreign conflicts. In the Neutrality Acts, Congress outlawed arms sales or loans to nations at war. In 1935, a civil war broke out in Spain between an elected government and a group of fascists. The U.S. government remained neutral. By 1937, Roosevelt was less willing to remain neutral to the dictators' growing power. When Japan invaded China that year, he continued to send arms and supplies to China.

Section 2: War in Europe

MAIN IDEA Using the sudden mass attack called blitzkrieg, Germany invaded and quickly conquered many European countries.

In Europe, Hitler continued plans to increase German power. In 1937, Germany annexed Austria. The next year, Hitler claimed that Germans living in an area of Czechoslovakia were being mistreated. Great Britain and France appeased Hitler by letting him take over this area. Hitler promised it would be his last land seizure.

The next year, Hitler claimed persecution of Germans in Poland. Many people thought he would never attack Poland for fear of the Soviet Union, on Poland's eastern border. Then Germany and the Soviet Union signed an agreement not to attack each other.

On September 1, 1939, Hitler launched World War II by attacking Poland. The Germans used tanks and planes in an attack called blitzkrieg, or "lightning war." They overran Poland quickly. Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. For the next few months, both sides prepared for war.

Meanwhile, Stalin seized some Baltic states and then occupied Finland. In the spring of 1940, Hitler attacked and captured Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. His forces overran France. Only Great Britain was left uninvaded. However, Hitler's air force bombed Britain frequently. The Royal Air Force, though, destroyed many German planes and won the Battle of Britain.

Section 3: The Holocaust

MAIN IDEA During the Holocaust, the Nazis systematically executed 6 million Jews and 5 million other "non-Aryans."

Part of Hitler's plan for Germany was to make the country racially pure. In 1933, he ordered all non-Aryans out of government jobs. In 1935, new laws hurt the people who were Hitler's main target: the Jews. They lost their civil rights and property. In 1938, the Nazis terrorized Jews in a night of attacks. During the Nazis' rise to power, Jews left Germany in great numbers. The United States accepted some 100,000 refugees, but refused to accept more. Many Americans feared competition for scarce Depression-era jobs.

In 1939, the Nazis adopted a horrible "final solution" to what they called "the Jewish problem." Jews who were healthy would be seized and sent to slave labor camps. The rest would be taken and systematically killed. Some Jews were crowded into ghettos, special sections of cities. Most were taken to concentration camps where they suffered hunger, illness, overwork, and death. In 1941, the Nazis built special "death camps" meant solely to kill people in mass numbers. Prisoners were gassed or shot. Some died in horrible medical "experiments." Nearly six million Jews died in the death camps. The Nazis also murdered many other peoples: Soviets, Poles, gypsies, homosexuals, and the disabled. Remarkably, some survived to tell the world of the atrocity.

Section 4: America Moves Toward War

MAIN IDEA In response to the fighting in Europe, the United States provided economic and military aid to help the Allies achieve victory.

According to the Neutrality Acts, the United States could not enter the war in Europe to aid Poland after Germany invaded Poland. However, President Roosevelt began preparing the nation for war. He persuaded Congress to amend the acts, allowing the United States to sell weapons to Great Britain and France. When Japan signed an agreement with Germany and Italy, many Americans were alarmed. Roosevelt increased the aid to Great Britain. At the same time, Congress passed a military draft and began training men for the armed forces. In 1940, Roosevelt broke tradition and ran for a third term as president. He won.

Roosevelt spoke to Americans of the threat that Hitler posed. He proposed increasing American armaments to loan to Great Britain. He stopped short of entering the war. Some aid went to the Soviet Union, too: Hitler had broken his agreement with Stalin in 1941 and attacked his former ally. The Germans used submarines to attack the American ships carrying weapons and supplies to its enemies.

In August 1941, Roosevelt met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. They issued the Atlantic Charter, a statement of goals for which the war was being fought. The United States had not yet entered that war, however. German submarines attacked American ships, but Roosevelt felt he lacked support to declare war.

In the Pacific, conflict grew between Japan and the United States. When Japan seized Indochina, the United States protested. Peace talks between the two countries began in late 1941. On December 7, 1941, however, the Japanese attacked the main U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The attack left many navy ships destroyed and others crippled. The next day, President Roosevelt asked Congress for a declaration of war, which was quickly approved.