

Power Notes: World War II

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany.

- 1) The Great Depression caused Germans to move to extremist parties like the German National Socialist Labor Party (the Nazis).
- 2) The middle class was looking for a savior from Bolshevism. The Depression inflamed German hatred of the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler denounced the Communists, the Weimar Republic, and the Jews as the basis of Germany's problems.
- 3) In July, 1932 the Nazis became the strongest party in the Reichstag (the German parliament), and on January 30, 1933 Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany.
- 4) Using arson of the Reichstag building as an excuse, Hitler abolished civil rights. The Ordinance for the Protection of the People and the State was issued in Feb., 1933. It placed restrictions on personal liberty, on the right of free expression of opinion, and the rights of assembly; it violated the privacy of postal and telephonic communications; warrants were no longer needed for house searches, or for confiscating or restricting private property. The Communist party was outlawed. Anti-Nazi leaders were arrested. After March, 1933 Hitler ruled without the Reichstag. To help achieve total power (totalitarianism) the Nazis used a political police (the Gestapo), private thugs (the SS corps), and propaganda.

Importance: Hitler used legal means to come to power by playing on the fears of the German people → Illustrates the power of demagoguery.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the European causes of World War II.

- 1) In 1935 Hitler began to rearm Germany. In 1936 German troops marched into the Rhineland. The allies appeased Hitler (appeasement: yielding to the demands of the dictators in the belief that once these demands were satisfied the dictators would turn into good members of the international community). The World War I post-war generation was pacifistic. In addition, France was weakened by internal dissent.
- 2) In 1935 Italy took Ethiopia; the condemnation of the League of Nations pushed Mussolini into Hitler's camp.
- 3) In July, 1936 Civil War broke out in Spain between the left-wing republican government and fascists led by General Francisco Franco. Germany and Italy supported Franco, the Soviet Union supported the government. Franco won the war in March, 1939.
- 4) In March, 1938 Austria was incorporated into Germany. In the spring of 1938 Germany began to make demands on Czechoslovakia for the Sudeten region. Czechoslovakia was prepared to resist and was allied with the Soviet Union and France, but at Munich in January, 1939 the British and French gave into Hitler. By March, 1939, all of Czechoslovakia was under Germany control.
- 5) In August, 1939 Germany and The Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact and agreed that in case of war Poland would be divided between them. On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland officially starting World War II.

Importance: The failure of the European powers to stand up to Hitler and Mussolini prior to World War II probably led to war, and would also have a profound affect on Western post war attitudes toward the USSR.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the war in Europe during 1939-1941.

- 1) With Soviet help, Germany easily conquered Poland.
- 2) In October, 1939 the Soviet Union attacked Finland. Finland capitulated in March, 1940.
- 3) In April, 1940 the Germans took Norway and Denmark, and in May Germany attacked France through the Low Countries. France surrendered 6 weeks later. The British managed to save about 338,000 troops through the evacuation at Dunkirk. Italy joined the war on Germany's side, attacking France, Greece, and the British in North Africa.
- 4) In the summer of 1940 Germany began bombing Britain to try to gain air superiority for an invasion. Hitler lost the Battle of Britain and his chance to invade England.

- 5) In September 1940, Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact. In October, Hungary, Romania, & Bulgaria allied with Germany.
- 6) After going to Italy's aid in the Balkans, Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June, 1941.

Importance: The easy victories of 1939-41 made Hitler overconfident and greatly alarmed the people of the United States. If Great Britain had been defeated, the Axis might have won the war.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand Japanese aggression that led to World War II.

- 1) The following factors were responsible for Japanese imperialism: a) the desire for equality with the Western powers; b) getting access to raw materials and markets; and c) the instability of East Asia.
- 2) World War I upset the balance of power in Asia. In 1915, while the European powers and the United States were preoccupied with the war in Europe, Japan presented The 21 Demands to China. These demands were an attempt by Japan to gain hegemony over China. The U.S. opposed these demands.
- 3) At the Versailles Peace Conference Japan believed that it was still not being treated as an equal world power.
- 4) At the Washington Naval Conference of 1921 the size of the navies of Japan, Britain and the U.S. was agreed upon, the U.S. and Britain promised Japan they would not increase their armed forces in Asia, and the 1905 British-Japanese Alliance was terminated.
- 5) The Great Depression caused Japan to attempt to increase its power in China. China was undergoing increased nationalism under Chiang Kai-shek, and it resisted Japan's advances. Nationalism became a runaway force in Japan. The Manchurian Incident of September, 1931 gave Japan the excuse to take all of Manchuria and set up the puppet state of Manchukuo.

Importance: Japanese objectives in Asia were in direct conflict with the United States.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand United States' foreign policy prior to its entry into World War II.

- 1) During the early 1930s Americans were isolationist--the 1934 Senate Nye Committee investigation had convinced Americans that World War I had been fought for greedy bankers.
- 2) The July 1937 "China Incident" began to bring America out of its isolationist mood. The U.S. began to put pressure on Japan to respect the integrity of China.
- 3) After the fall of Poland, Congress passed the "Cash and Carry Act."
- 4) The fall of France moved FDR to run for a 3rd term. Congress appropriated over \$10 billion for the military, and passed the first peacetime draft in the nation's history.
- 5) In September, 1940 the U.S. gave Britain 50 WWI destroyers in exchange for eight Western Hemisphere military bases.
- 6) In March, 1940 Congress passed the "Lend Lease Act," and in April and July 1941 American troops occupied Greenland and Iceland. American warships began to convoy U.S. shipping half-way across the Atlantic. After the September 1941 "Greer Incident" U.S. warships began to escort British merchant ships, and the U.S. navy was issued orders to "shoot on sight" any German submarine. An undeclared war existed in the Atlantic.
- 7) Japan's goal was hegemony over China and the establishment of a "New Order" for Asia under Japan's guidance. In April, 1941 Japan and the USSR signed a neutrality pact. In July, 1941 Japan occupied French Indochina. The U.S. responded with a ban on the sale of aviation gasoline and scrap iron to Japan and gave China a \$100 million loan. The U.S. fleet was moved to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Trade ceased between the two countries by July, 1941.
- 8) With only a year's supply of petroleum on hand, Japan either had to come to terms with the U.S. or strike for an independent supply. The December 7, 1941 attack on the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor was an attempt to by Japan to gain time to overrun its targets in Southeast Asia.

Importance: In both Europe and Asia the United States did not want any country to gain hegemony. By the end of 1941, the U.S. had done everything short of war to hinder German and Japanese war objectives.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the war in Europe 1941-1945.

- 1) The U.S. used its great industrial capacity to become the "Arsenal of Democracy."
- 2) The blitzkrieg (lightning war) soon changed to a war of attrition. Casualties were huge.
- 3) The British wanted to attack Germany on the periphery, the U.S. wanted a direct assault. The Soviets demanded an immediate second front on the continent. The invasion of North Africa in November, 1942 (Operation Torch) was a compromise that allowed American troops to become involved in the war at an early date, but it postponed the cross-channel invasion until June, 1944, and it greatly increased the power and the hostility of the Soviet Union in the post-war world.
- 4) The battle of Stalingrad (October, 1942-January, 1943) was "the end of the beginning" for Germany. Germany was mass bombed from the air. In July, 1944 a group of German military officers attempted to assassinate Hitler -- they failed. The Battle of the Bulge (December, 1944) slowed the Allied advance, but the Rhine was crossed at Remagen on March 7, 1945. In April the Soviets moved into Berlin's suburbs. On May 7, 1945 Germany surrendered.

Importance: Misunderstandings between the Allies during World War II helped lead to the Cold War. The war was one of total destruction and slaughter.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews.

- 1) Near the end of the war the concentration camps were liberated and the full horror of the Holocaust was discovered. Beginning in late 1941 Hitler began a systematic extermination of European Jews. An estimated 6,000,000 Jews were murdered by the Nazis.

Importance: The Holocaust had great impact upon the democracies of the world after the war, in that they had stood by and let millions of people be exterminated.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the war against Japan, 1942-45.

- 1) By the spring of 1942 the Japanese controlled much of Asia. In the battle of Midway (June 1942), the Japanese lost air and naval superiority in the Pacific. Guadalcanal (August, 1942) was the first American offensive against the Japanese. The U.S. military effort was hurt by the country's Europe first policy.
- 2) Mass bombings against the Japanese and a naval blockade created severe hardships for the Japanese people. The Japanese organized suicide (kamikaze) attacks on American warships. On August 6, 1945 the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. After the bombing of Nagasaki, the Japanese surrendered on August 15, 1945. At the Yalta Conference the Soviet Union promised to come into the war against Japan 3 months after the defeat of Germany. The USSR entered the war after the bombing of Hiroshima.
- 3) Much of Europe, China, Japan and the Soviet Union had been destroyed by the war. Sixty million people were dead. World War II destroyed Europe's wealth and influence, and helped the Communists gain power in China. After the war the USA and the Soviet Union would both attempt to dominate the earth.

Importance: Because of racial and cultural hatred on both sides, the war in the Pacific was a "war without mercy," culminating in the use of atomic weapons.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the domestic policy of the U.S. during World War II.

- 1) Like World War I, World War II was a total war in which the U.S., and all other nations involved, mobilized all their resources for war. WWII ended the Great Depression--real wages rose 50% during the war. The size of the government grew rapidly. Women moved into the workplace. As blacks moved north for war jobs, racial tensions increased.
- 2) People of Japanese descent were imprisoned. Of the 112,000 locked-up, 71,000 were American citizens. Over 20,000 Japanese-Americans fought in Europe.

Importance: World War II led to profound social changes in the United States. The status of minorities and women began to improve. The standard of living rose to previously unimaginable heights.