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TURMOIL AND WAR: 1919–1945

At the end of World War I, many problems remained unresolved, which led to extended conflict among the nations of Europe. Any shreds of optimism disintegrated with the Great Depression, a global economic collapse. Fascist governments grew stronger in nations afflicted by great turmoil: Italy, Spain, and Germany. Civil war in Spain foreshadowed the full-scale conflict that would emerge at the end of the 1930s. Efforts by France and Great Britain to avoid another European war were thwarted by the aggressive intent of Nazi Germany. Only through the combined efforts of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union was Germany defeated and peace restored to Europe, but by then, millions were dead and Europe was once again divided.

KEY TERMS

Allied powers	League of Nations
appeasement	<i>Lebensraum</i>
Axis powers	National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazis)
Blitzkrieg	New Economic Policy (NEP)
collectivization	Normandy invasion
Dawes Plan	Nuremberg laws
fascism	Spanish Civil War
Great Depression	Holocaust
Hiroshima	Stalingrad

Surrealism	Weimar Germany
totalitarianism	Yalta
Treaty of Locarno	

KEY CONCEPTS

- ❖ At the end of World War I, communism had taken root in the Soviet Union, Germany was infuriated by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and aggressive fascist governments were undermining peace. But World War II would prove more destructive than World War I, and it left Europe divided between a pro-democratic West and a Soviet-backed East.
- ❖ The years 1919–1945 were marked by both optimism and great disillusionment. Europeans made economic progress during the 1920s, only to see it obliterated by the Great Depression. Authoritarian states appealed to many searching for hope and order in a bleak world. World War II brought substantial hardship, but European economies rebounded and went on to reach new economic heights.
- ❖ Artists and intellectuals reflected the despair of the interwar years. Traditional codes of behavior were overturned, as women and youth sought greater freedom.

For a full discussion of the period 1919–1945, see *Western Civilization*, 7th and 8th editions, Chapters 26–27.

A PRECARIOUS PEACE

One of the most difficult post-war situations involved Germany and France. In the name of national security, France insisted that Germany make reparations. After an initial payment, Germany realized that reparations were not economically or politically feasible. To force Germany to pay, France occupied the Ruhr valley, precipitating a German economic disaster. The deutsche mark became worthless, and German extremists grew in popularity.

To address the situation, an international commission proposed the Dawes Plan, calling for a reduction in reparations and U.S. loans for German economic recovery. The Dawes Plan relied on foreign investment, primarily from the United States. Although Germany's economy improved in the short run, the dependency on foreign economies proved detrimental at the onset of the Great Depression. France and Germany kept up momentum with further diplomacy, resulting in the Treaty of Locarno (1925), which established Germany's western borders. The agreement produced great optimism, later reinforced by the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which was designed to outlaw war as an "instrument of national policy." However, these diplomatic measures were unenforceable.

AP Tip

Be sure you understand the weaknesses of post-war Germany and the Weimar Republic. These are key to understanding the rise of Nazi Germany.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Economies in the United States and much of Europe flourished during the 1920s, giving many government leaders the impression that the market economy was impervious to decline. This was utterly disproved when the American stock market crashed in 1929. American investors pulled their money from European banks, forcing major European financial institutions to fail. As governments raised tariffs to protect home industry, the global market came to a standstill and nations around the world suffered.

Unemployment rapidly set upon nations, most severely in Germany. Long bread lines became a common sight, as Europeans took the brunt of the international economic crisis. Governments that had sung the praises of the free market now were reluctant to provide aid for citizens in dire circumstances. Demagogues offering simplistic explanations found many new followers.

THE RETREAT FROM DEMOCRACY

The myriad problems in the 1920s gave rise to stark social divisions that threatened national cohesion and democratic forms of governance. Many European countries embraced totalitarianism, establishing dictatorships that controlled the political, economic, and social spheres. Propaganda was one of the most important methods of taking control. Techniques of manipulation that had been developed during the war were adopted by extremists to convince a desperate public that only with a single leader and a single party could a nation's destiny be achieved. Democracy was derided as ineffective—even unhelpful.

Fascism took root in nations that had suffered humiliation and economic deprivation. Fascist leaders blended the principles of totalitarian rule with extreme nationalism to produce a form of government that denied individual freedoms in favor of the collective will of the masses or, in the cases of Italy and Germany, for the good of the state or the nation.

FASCIST ITALY

Italy suffered greatly during World War I. When the country's demands for new territory after the war were rejected, extremists made the case that Italy had been cheated. In addition, high unemployment among returning soldiers set the stage for the rise of a fascist government.

Benito Mussolini led the fascist movement in Italy. Having been expelled from the Socialist Party, Mussolini formed the *Fascio di Combattimento* (League of Combat) in 1919 and took advantage of

rising anticommunism to gain the support of middle-class industrialists. His supporters soon resorted to armed violence. Large numbers of war veterans formed black-shirted paramilitary groups that set out to intimidate political opposition.

Emboldened, the Fascists marched to Rome to seize power in 1922. The gamble was successful, and Mussolini was named prime minister of Italy. Within three years, Mussolini had established a fascist dictatorship. However, the Fascists never achieved total domination. For example, the mass media was not completely cooperative, and Italian youth rebelled against forced militarization. Even the Church, through the Lateran Accords, demanded recognition as the “sole religion of the state” in return for the Vatican’s support of the Fascists.

NAZI GERMANY

Among the many problems faced by the democratic Weimar Republic, established in Germany after the war, were weak leadership and severe economic problems exacerbated by the Great Depression. These difficulties provided an opening for the Nazi party, led by Adolf Hitler. A failed Austrian artist, Hitler had served in World War I and then moved to Munich to get involved in politics. He organized the National Socialist German Workers’ Party—or Nazis—in 1921; it grew quickly in strength.

Confident of their popular support, Hitler and his followers staged an uprising at a Munich beer hall in 1923. The uprising failed, and Hitler was arrested and sentenced to prison, where he wrote *Mein Kampf*, an autobiographical account of the Nazi party and its underlying ideology. Hitler stressed German nationalism, anti-Semitism, anti-communism, and *Lebensraum*, the notion that superior nations have the right to expand their borders.

To further his goals, Hitler appealed to Germany’s youth. As the economy continued to plummet during the 1930s and the Nazis gained seats in the Reichstag, members of Germany’s elite were eager to cooperate with them. Wealthy industrialists and landed aristocrats envisioned Hitler as a pawn in their efforts to thwart the communists. Within months, however, the Nazis had used the German parliament to secure a dictatorship. By 1934, Hitler had become sole ruler of Germany and leader of the Third Reich.

AP Tip

The Nazis succeeded for many reasons—discontent with the Weimar government; anger over the Treaty of Versailles; and economic factors, including the dramatic increase in German employment rates, a result of efforts to re-arm. In addition, the German military elite agreed with Hitler’s plan for expanding the country’s borders. Finally, strong anti-communist factions across Western Europe, especially in France and Britain, supported Hitler’s foreign policy.

Totalitarianism in Germany was based on Aryan racial superiority, and the German people would lead a global movement to assert Aryan dominance. The Nazis skillfully used public demonstrations to suggest

mass support, and as in fascist Italy, women and children played an important role in advancing totalitarianism. Virulent anti-Semitism quickly became official government policy. The rights of Jews were limited by the Nuremberg Laws, which called for the political, social, and legal separation of Germany's Jewish population from Aryan Germany. By the end of the 1930s, German Jews were being sent to concentration camps.

THE SOVIET UNION

The communist victory in the Russian Civil War brought totalitarian government. The war's devastation forced communist leader Vladimir Lenin to institute his New Economic Policy in 1921, allowing for small-scale capitalism. In 1922, the Communists created the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Soviet Union. Lenin's death in 1924 set off a power struggle for Soviet leadership. Two camps formed within the Communist Party; the Left, led by Leon Trotsky, called for international revolution, while the Right called for "socialism at home." Joseph Stalin, party general secretary, used his position to gain control of the party, and Trotsky was soon expelled from it.

Stalin instituted radical measures to transform the Soviet Union into a modern industrial state. Five-Year Plans outlined production goals, emphasizing heavy industry at the expense of agriculture. Propaganda campaigns were used to inspire workers, whose wages and working conditions declined throughout the period. Peasants were forced onto collective farms, and all private property was eliminated. Those who fought this policy met with severe retribution—the government even forced famines in recalcitrant regions such as the Ukraine. Those who openly disagreed with Soviet policy—be they military leaders or peasants—were sent to forced labor camps.

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The Great Depression gave rise to political instability in Spain until 1936, when the Popular Front, a coalition of antifascist parties including democrats and radical socialists, took control. The Spanish military rebelled, however, and launched a three-year civil war.

Led by General Francisco Franco, the right-wing rebels were aided by the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany. Hitler, in particular, saw the civil war as an opportunity to test military weapons and strategy. The Popular Front requested assistance from other European nations, but because it counted socialists among its members, only the Soviet Union would lend support.

Franco's forces overwhelmed the republican army. Many civilians died as a result of indiscriminate aerial bombing raids—the subject matter of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. With victory, Franco became dictator of Spain, a position he would hold until his death in 1975.

CULTURE DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS

Two factors greatly changed European society during the interwar years: the advent of the eight-hour workday gave Europeans time to

participate in leisure activities, once the exclusive domain of the wealthy; and the development of innovations, such as radio and motion pictures. Radio broadcasts became a familiar feature in much of Europe during the 1920s, and by the 1930s, going to the movies on a weekly basis was a common activity.

Authoritarian governments grasped the significance of this new technology and quickly used it to control the masses. Radio broadcasts or motion pictures were ideal media for fascist propaganda. The 1934 documentary by German director Leni Riefenstahl, *Triumph of the Will*, presented a Nazi political rally in Nuremberg in a sympathetic light meant to exploit viewer emotions.

Artists working in the postwar years were inspired by the war's destruction. Abstract art was embraced, and Dadaism and Surrealism emerged. Dadaists set out to create "anti-art," to reflect what they perceived as the insanity of life. Surrealists including Salvador Dalí explored irrational thought and the world of the subconscious.

Literature was influenced by Sigmund Freud's theories, many of which became part of the cultural landscape during the 1920s. Writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf used "stream of consciousness" to capture their fictional characters' thoughts through inner dialogues. Joyce's *Ulysses*, published in 1922, follows a day in the life of an ordinary Dubliner, through inner dialogues that underscore the complexity of human existence.

THE ROAD TO WAR

In the long run, Hitler was determined to conquer Russia and its perceived inferior Slavic peoples. In Hitler's mind, the Russian Revolution had brought forth a weak government controlled by Jews. By invading Russia, Hitler could provide the German people with needed land (and oil) and use the Slavic people as slave labor. But first Hitler had to embark on a "diplomatic revolution" that would break Germany free from the confines of the Versailles Treaty and allow it to gain valuable territory in eastern Europe.

The British especially turned to appeasement. When Hitler re-occupied the Rhineland, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, he met with no military opposition from the French, who refused to confront Germany without first gaining the support of the British. By the end of 1936, Hitler had scrapped the Treaty of Versailles and formed military alliances with Italy and Japan. Neville Chamberlain, an ardent appeaser elected British Prime Minister in 1937, believed that the success of the British empire depended on German cooperation. Emboldened, Hitler carried out the *Anschluss*—the annexing of Austria—with no interference.

In 1938, British and French leaders met with Hitler in Munich to discuss Hitler's demand to annex the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia. Agreeing to all of Hitler's desires, Chamberlain declared that he had achieved "peace in our time." Recognizing Western democracies' lack of will, Hitler took all of Czechoslovakia.

Next on Hitler's list was Poland. To invade Poland, he had to contend with the Soviet Union. In August of 1939, Hitler and Stalin signed the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, which divided eastern Europe into spheres of influence, and included the separation of

Poland. On September 1, 1939, German forces invaded Poland. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

WAR

In preparing for war, the Germans developed a new form of military warfare called Blitzkrieg, or “lightning war.” The idea was to knock out the enemy quickly through coordinated air strikes and mechanized infantry attacks. Air and ground assaults were launched with great success across western Europe. The Germans conquered Poland within a month and divided it with the Soviets, who themselves had overtaken eastern Poland. After a period of inactivity, known as the “phony war,” the Germans resumed attacks on western Europe in the spring. German troops quickly conquered northern Europe, while the French surrendered three-fifths of their own nation to the Germans and placed the remaining territory under the authoritarian rule of Marshal Pétain in the town of Vichy.

Once the war began, the SS started imposing Hitler’s Final Solution—the complete annihilation of the Jewish people of Europe. Many European Jews were sent to ghettos, and special strike forces exterminated entire Jewish villages in eastern Europe. Before long, Hitler would call for the creation of death camps where Jews—along with Gypsies, Slavs, homosexuals, and the infirm—could be annihilated systematically.

British dissatisfaction forced Chamberlain to resign. Winston Churchill, the next British prime minister, despised Hitler and refused to capitulate. Hitler would have to invade. A successful amphibious assault would require control of the air, so the Germans launched a massive air campaign. At the start, British military bases and communication centers were targeted, but Hitler changed tactics: to destroy morale, he ordered the bombing of cities. In fact, however, morale subsequently soared. Churchill convinced Britons to “never surrender.”

Thwarted in Britain, Hitler turned elsewhere, sending German troops to North Africa to aid the Italian army. But his true ambition was to conquer the Soviet Union, and he was confident that his superb army could defeat the ill-trained, poorly led Soviet forces. Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, but the Soviets resisted, and by December, the Germans were bogged down at the start of an unusually harsh winter.

PEARL HARBOR

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Japan had worked to become a world power through industrialization. The Great Depression and ensuing economic crisis gave more influence to the Japanese military, which encouraged a policy of expansion in the Pacific Rim.

In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria and began an encroachment that led to full-scale war with the Chinese in 1937. Interested in Soviet-controlled Siberia, Japan formed an alliance with Hitler, and then turned its attention to European holdings to the south. This led to reprisals from the United States, which, in turn, prompted the

Japanese surprise attack on the American naval fleet housed at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941. The next day, the United States declared war on Japan. Three days later, Hitler declared war on the United States, bringing America into the European conflict.

TURNING POINTS

The U.S. entry into the war resulted in the Grand Alliance among the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Although suspicious of one another, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin recognized that they had to unite to defeat Germany. Agreeing to secure an unconditional surrender from the Axis powers, they ensured a unified front and made an approach of divide and conquer challenging for Hitler.

World War II demanded even more from the home front than World War I. Every facet of society was influenced by the needs of the military. Large numbers of workers were given jobs in factories and on farms. In Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, women were recruited for the industrial workforce. Only in Germany did the female workforce not increase substantially, because conquered regions had become a source of forced labor there.

In the spring of 1942, the Axis nations were at their zenith of power: Japan controlled much of the Pacific, while Germany controlled most of Europe and North Africa. But the tide soon began to change. In North Africa, combined British and American forces defeated Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps. In the Pacific, U.S. forces knocked out four Japanese aircraft carriers at the Battle of Midway, crippling Japan's offensive capability. A key victory came in Stalingrad, the focus of both Hitler and Stalin. Both men had ordered their forces to achieve victory at all costs. By winter, Soviet reserves had reached Stalingrad and surrounded German troops, forcing their surrender in February 1943. By the spring, German forces were on the defensive as the Red Army pushed toward Germany.

THE CONCLUSION

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Stalin had been eager for British and American forces to open a western front as soon as possible. On June 6, 1944, Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy, catching the Germans by surprise. Within months, the Allies liberated Paris, and then turned their sights on Berlin. Desperate attempts by the Germans to regain the advantage—the Battle of the Bulge on the western front and the Battle of Kursk on the eastern front—proved unsuccessful. Allied victories continued during the winter of 1944–1945, and German defeat was only a matter of time. As the Red Army closed in, Hitler took his own life. The German high command surrendered a week later, on May 7th, 1945.

The Allies turned their attention to Asia. After the victory at Midway, American forces had been slowly working their way across the Pacific, clearing one small island after another before closing in on the Japanese mainland. Convinced that an amphibious assault would lead to massive American casualties, President Harry Truman instead ordered a newly created atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Three days later, on August 9, 1945, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and the Japanese surrendered, ending the most destructive war in history.

AFTERMATH

The war's final death toll—both civilian and military—was over 60 million people, a large number of those in China and the Soviet Union. The economic devastation was hard to fathom; cities were in ruins, and all of Europe's infrastructure was severely damaged.

Victory came with many political challenges, starting with the Grand Alliance of Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin met throughout the war. The 1945 Yalta Conference set the stage for the Cold War: in return for Soviet military assistance against the Japanese, Roosevelt agreed to Soviet demands for both territory in east Asia and a role of influence in eastern and central Europe.

After Germany's surrender, the Grand Alliance deteriorated quickly. At their final meeting, in Potsdam in July 1945, Truman confronted Stalin on free elections in eastern Europe, a point that Stalin was unwilling to concede. A few months later, Churchill publicly warned of an "iron curtain" across a divided Europe.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The Lateran Accords of 1924 pertained to
 - (A) German rearmament
 - (B) British naval superiority
 - (C) French political discord
 - (D) Spanish nationalism
 - (E) Italian fascism

2. With the Treaty of Locarno,
 - (A) borders between France and Germany were agreed on, thus assuring future peace
 - (B) reparations between Germany and France were set at a level that promoted German economic stability
 - (C) Germany was allowed to re-arm at levels acceptable to League of Nation members
 - (D) it was agreed that diplomatic controversies would be resolved by the League of Nations
 - (E) Germany's border with Poland was agreed on, thus preventing increased tensions with the Soviet Union

3. All of the following influenced the severity of the Great Depression EXCEPT
 - (A) American investors withdrawing money from European banks
 - (B) overproduction of agricultural goods
 - (C) increasing factory production
 - (D) the raising of tariffs
 - (E) the lowering of wages

4. Which of the following statements best describes the League of Nations?
 - (A) It effectively used military force to keep European peace.
 - (B) Its weakness forced France to form a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union.
 - (C) Its success was caused by the eager involvement of the United States.
 - (D) It was popular among the Nazi leadership.
 - (E) Its sole weapon in halting aggression was economic sanctions.

5. The Dawes Plan served to
 - (A) hinder the economy of Germany
 - (B) promote the economy of France
 - (C) destroy the economy of Italy
 - (D) help the economy of Germany
 - (E) boost the economy of Britain

6. The following are characteristics of the totalitarian states of the 1930s EXCEPT
 - (A) rule by a single leader or party
 - (B) promotion of individual freedoms
 - (C) use of modern mass propaganda techniques
 - (D) a powerful central government
 - (E) control of the intellectual and cultural life of the nation

7. The Weimar Republic
 - (A) successfully united Germany behind authoritarian rule
 - (B) had weak leadership and was unable to solve Germany's economic problems
 - (C) remained popular after successfully challenging the Soviet invasion of Poland
 - (D) quickly re-armed Germany and left the League of Nations
 - (E) angered most of Europe by signing a secret nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union

8. All the following were reasons why the Nazi party was able to seize power in Germany EXCEPT
 - (A) Germany was experiencing serious economic problems during the period of the Weimar Republic
 - (B) the Nazi party appealed to young Germans
 - (C) Hitler opted to allow Catholic and Protestant churches to remain free of Nazi influence
 - (D) Hitler was encouraged by leading German industrialists and landed aristocrats
 - (E) the effective use of propaganda created a strong image of a new Germany

9. The outcome of the Spanish Civil War
 - (A) was a brutal victory for the Franco dictatorship
 - (B) was a hard-fought victory for the Spanish Republic
 - (C) was an inspiring victory for the Spanish monarchy
 - (D) was a costly victory for the Spanish Communists
 - (E) was a stalemate that produced no true victor



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10. The painting above best represents
 - (A) Impressionism
 - (B) German Expressionism
 - (C) Pop Art
 - (D) Dadaism
 - (E) Surrealism

11. In reaction to Hitler's aggression, Czechoslovakia
 - (A) declared war on Germany
 - (B) formed an alliance with Poland and Austria
 - (C) sat helplessly on the sidelines as its fate was decided by others
 - (D) joined Britain and France in declaring war on Germany
 - (E) joined an alliance with the Soviet Union

12. The purpose of the Nazi–Soviet nonaggression pact was to
 - (A) prevent France and Great Britain from forming an alliance
 - (B) allow Germany to form an alliance with Japan
 - (C) keep the United States neutral
 - (D) divide up the Balkans and the Middle East
 - (E) acquire territory in Poland

13. As a result of the Munich Conference,
 - (A) Germany declared war on France
 - (B) the Soviet Union invaded Austria
 - (C) Japan bombed Pearl Harbor
 - (D) Germany took control of the Sudetenland
 - (E) Britain declared war on Germany

14. The German decision to invade the Soviet Union was based on all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) the German belief that if the Soviet Union was defeated, the British would surrender
 - (B) the German hope that a decisive victory over the Soviet Union would lead to France's surrender
 - (C) the German belief that the Soviet military leadership was weak and ineffective
 - (D) a German desire for resources located within the Soviet Union
 - (E) Hitler's anti-Semitism and hatred of the Slavic people
15. Which of the following would be considered turning points in World War II?
- (A) Allied victories at Midway and Stalingrad
 - (B) Allied victories at London and North Africa
 - (C) German victories at Paris and Antwerp
 - (D) the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and German victories in North Africa
 - (E) Allied victories at Leningrad and Iwo Jima

Free-Response Questions

1. Identify and explain the causes for both optimism and anxiety in Europe during the 1920s.
2. Describe and analyze how Hitler's racial views influenced German foreign policy before and during World War II.