

## World War II—Extra Handout

**Economic Context:** Refer to lecture and handouts for WWI-WWII—problem of the Versailles Peace and subsequent world economic crisis. Remember this is at the same time that Stalin is forcing collectivization on Russia and Japan imposing its will on China. On Oct. 24, 1929 the US stock market took a dive, losing half the value of stocks in a matter of days—and they continued to drop for another 3 years—leading to a world wide depression. Prof. Russell's father, e.g., tells of it costing more money to transport a sheep to market than the price that the sheep would fetch on the market. In this atmosphere US banks called in European loans and put up high import tariffs to protect US goods. Britain and France have their colonial empires to fall back upon. Many countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia were dependent upon selling their exports—usually 1-2 cash crops and people were buying much less. Malaya, Indochina, and Dutch East Indies were the big rubber producers, and when production of automobiles went way down, they suffered. South Africa was about the only place not to be so hard hit b/c the value of its gold went up.

**Rise of Fascism in Italy:** Refer to fascism handout for general methods. Benito Mussolini, a one time socialist, became head of Italy's fascist party, which by 1921 had 300,000 members. (Refer to handout for the role of fascism in industry). In 1922 Mussolini threatened that he would march on Rome if not appointed Prime Minister, and once in place he put party members in all gov't jobs. Mussolini was esp. good at propaganda and utilizing billboards, movies, radio bulletins, etc. to spread his message. During the course of the 1930s fascist parties spring up not only in Europe, but also Latin America, China, and Japan.

**Germany & Hitler:** Son of a minor Austrian official, Hitler fought in WWI and afterwards began a splinter political movement called the National Socialist German Worker's Party, better known by its acronym, Nazi. He published his ideas in a book called *Mein Kampf* in 1925. In it he asserted that Germany needed to absorb all German-speaking people. Furthermore, he felt that Aryans, i.e. Germans, Scandinavians, and Britons, were a master race, followed by the Alpines (French and Italians), and the E Slavs, who were good only for slavery. The goal was for the master race to rule the world. To carry out his plan he would need to remove some of the restrictions placed on the German military by Versailles and expand his greater Germany into Poland and the USSR. At the time when his book came out, Hitler was a nonentity and it did not make much of a splash, but after the depression he found a more interested audience. In March 1933, as leader of the largest party in Germany, he became chancellor, which he changed to *Fuhrer* the following year, initiating a Third Reich (empire)—the first being the Holy Roman Empire and the second being Germany from 1871-1918. Women were urged to take care of their children, the church, and their kitchen—releasing jobs for men.

**Road to War:** In 1933 Hitler withdrew from the League of Nations and set out to rebuild his military. Britain and France barely put up a whimper—both are having problems at home and in their empires and neither wants to wage war. The US sees this as a European concern. Meanwhile, Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935. In March 1938 Hitler invaded

Austria and later part of Czechoslovakia. Europeans were reluctant to do anything—feared war and thought that if they could give Germany something that Hitler would be appeased. Further complicating the matter was the issue of Communism. European politicians feared Stalin more than Hitler, who seemed a good counterbalance. Once Hitler invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1939, it was clear that the war was on—by this time Germany and Italy formed an alliance called the Axis (Sept. 1940, Japan joins). The British and French eagerly sought Soviet help, but Stalin did not trust them and instead signed the Nazi-Soviet pact in which the two powers partitioned Poland. This bought Hitler 2 years time in which he did not have to fight a two-front war.

**Early War:** The period between the winter of 1939-40 is sometimes called the “phony war” b/c Britain and France did not do much. In fact, the USSR was the most active, moving into the Baltic states. Things pick up in the spring of 1940 when Hitler moves into NW Europe and beginning a massive air campaign against Britain. The US provides lend-lease aid to not only Britain, but also countries e.g. Saudi Arabia.

**Soviet Entrance:** In June of 1941 Hitler turned his attention eastward moving into the Baltic states, the Ukraine, and Russia proper (literally at the gates of Moscow and Leningrad)—but then the cold weather set in. Meanwhile, Italy moving across N Africa. By the year’s end, the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor (see Japan handout). In Jan. of 1942, US, Britain, and USSR make a declaration that they will not seek separate peace.

**1943-45:** Tide begins to turn on many fronts—Soviets regain advantage in the E theatre and the W powers get a grip on N Africa and Italy, the latter of which exited the war in the summer of 1943. The Allied forces launched the Normandy invasion (D-Day) in June 1944—but Germany holds on for nearly a year more. In Feb. of 1945 FDR, Stalin, and Churchill meet to discuss postwar world—Stalin and Churchill like the old-style sphere of influence—Stalin was preoccupied with security that would enable his country to rebuild. Stalin considers his moves in E Europe analogous to those of Britain and the US in Italy. Hitler commits suicide in May of 1945. Japan cont’d to fight.

**The Bomb & the Origins of the Cold War:** There are many schools of thought on why the bomb was used and whether or not it was meant as much to “show the Russians” as it was to win the war quickly. Early on in the war, FDR decided to build the bomb and to establish a partnership on atomic energy with Britain and to bar the Soviets from any knowledge. Truman was only dimly aware of project Manhattan when FDR died in April of 1945, just before victory in Europe. Truman inherited FDR’s advisors who viewed the bomb as a legitimate weapon to use against Japan, and thus discussion about its use centered on its effectiveness as a negotiating weapon (vis a vis the Soviets). The Alamogordo test and the Potsdam conference to discuss post-war issues both happened in July 1945. On Aug. 6, 1945 the US dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, killing 80,000 instantly and another 120,000 more slowly; three days later another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. What alternatives to the bomb did the US have: (1) allow Russian entry into war in Pacific (2) utilize a non-combat demonstration of the weapon to initiate fear and surrender (3) redefine the necessity of unconditional surrender—this could potentially lengthen war too (4) pursue Japan’s peace feelers—certain factions of leadership were ready for surrender. (5) use conventional warfare (a ground invasion was planned for November). On Aug. 14, 1945 Japan surrendered.

**Holocaust:** Refer to lecture on WWI-WWII. Note—it is clear that the Allies knew about Hitler’s final solution, but Allied leadership decided that the first priority ought to be

bringing Hitler down. Prior to the war when the anti-Jewish legislation began in the mid-30s, FDR did not want extra immigrants in the midst of the depression. Once he learned of the final solution he allowed 15,000 Jews with visitor permit to stay. Some argue that the US could have bombed the RRs carrying the Jews to the camps, while others state that the US just could not understand the extent of the problem—just too horrible to believe.

**Rise of Nationalism & American Economic Dominance:** The US encouraged nationalist movements worldwide—some argue for altruism while others claim that it was in an effort to reorganize the world for US economic expansion—i.e. that the US fostered nationalism in order to create a new form of economic dependency.

**United Nations:** Before the war's end (1944), representatives from the US, Britain, USSR, and China met to draft the UN charter. Like its predecessor, it would have a general assembly and a security council with 5 permanent members (the 4 above + France) and 7 rotating ones; however it differed from it in that decisions would be made by majority vote, rather than unanimous agreement. The exception to the rule was that the 5 permanent members would have veto power in the security council. Theoretically, all signatories renounced war and territorial conquest. Obviously, the ability of the permanent 5 to veto legislation could play into a variety of Cold War issues. The decolonization of Africa and Asia meant a tremendous growth in the size of the General Assembly. Early on the General Assembly had more power and prestige, e.g. at the time of the UN partition plan for the Palestine mandate. Later, as membership swelled with non-Western members, the powerful Western powers disregarded its initiatives. The UN also created separate agencies to deal with specific issues: UNICEF (UN Children's Emergency Fund), UNRWA (UN Relief Works Agency), UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

Most information taken from Bulliet, et. al., *The Earth & Its People* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

For more on US foreign policy, see Thomas Paterson, *Major Problems in US Foreign Policy*, Vol. II—most recent edition; Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*, Kolko and Kolko, *The Limits of US Foreign Policy, 1945-54*, John Gaddis, *Rethinking Cold War History*. Geir Lundestad "Empire by Invitation" in Paterson and McMahon, eds., *Origins of the Cold War*.