Guided Notes: WWII

**What led America to WWII**

The **treaties** that ended WWI did not resolve all of the issues that started the war in the first place. **Japan and Italy** were both a part of the Allies during WWI, and they helped win the war, but they were particularly unhappy with the treaties. Of the **Central Powers**, the losing nations, **Germany** was treated most severely, ordered to take **full blame** for the war and **pay $33 billion** in reparations. Economically, most countries in Europe lay in ruins and they came out of the war heavily in debt. While there were some gains made in the 1920’s, the Great Depression in America and Europe caused massive unemployment and unrest. People in Italy, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union turned to new leaders to solve their problems. The men they turned to would become absolute **dictators.**

**Italy**’s dictator was name **Benito Mussolini**. He arrived on the political scene in 1922, and started a political movement known as **fascism**. Fascists believed in an **extreme** form of patriotism and nationalism that was often .linked to racism. In 1925, he became dictator and took the title *Il Duce*, meaning the leader.

In **Germany**, **Adolf Hitler** led the Fascist National Sociality German Worker’s Party, more commonly known as the **Nazi Party**. The Nazis recruited members by preaching that Germany was racially superior. In 1932, Hitler was named chancellor of Germany, and he overthrew the constitution, taking complete control of the government. He called himself *der Fuhrer,* again meaning the leader.

In the **Soviet Union**, the communist party had a tight rule**. Joseph Stalin** took power in 1924 after the death of Vladimir Lenin. Under Stalin, the government tried to control every aspect of life in the nation, crushing any hint of opposition.

**Japan** also grew in its military strength during the 1930’s. In 1941, former army officer **Hideki Tojo** became Prime Minister of Japan, and assumed dictatorial powers as the war progressed.

As these dictators grew in power within their own nations, they decided they wanted to **expand their territory**. In 1936, Hitler and Mussolini formed an alliance called the Rome-Berlin Axis. Japan joined in 1940 and they simply became known as the **Axis Powers**. The Axis were developing **policies of aggression** to invade other territories. In n1938, Hitler invaded **Austria**. Since many Austrian citizens there spoke German, they welcomed the unification. After taking over Austria, Hitler moved onto **Sudetenland**, a German speaking portion of Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia didn’t want to cede control of its territory, and both France and the Soviet Union vowed to back them up should Germany invade.

Trying to avoid another war, British Prime Minister **Neville chamberlain** met with Hitler in Munich. They decided that Germany would gain control of Sudetenland and Hitler promised to stop seeking more territory. The **Munich agreement** was part of the British and French policy of **appeasement:** meeting the demands of a hostile power to avoid war. While Chamberlain thought he had allowed for world peace, many disagreed with appeasement policies, and saw that Hitler would not stop his aggressive strategy to take over other nations.

In 1939, German troops conquered the remaining portion of Czechoslovakia, then set out to invade **Poland**. Britain and France warned Hitler that invading Poland would be an act of war. In August of 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union agreed not to attack each other. With that agreement made, on **September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland**. Britain and France declared War and WWII had begun.

German forces used an effective tactic called **blitzkrieg** or “lightning war.” Blitzkrieg stressed **speed and surprise** in the use of tanks, troops, and planes. **Poland fell to Germany** in less than a month. In 1940, Hitler also conquered **Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands**.

In June of 1940, **Germany invaded France**. In less than two weeks, France surrendered. Hitler expected the British to seek a peace agreement after France fell, but the **British had no intentions of quitting.** Hitler planned to invade Britain, but in order to be successful, he had to destroy the British Air Force. In the summer and fall of 1940, the highly destructive **Battle of Britain** was fought. Britain’s Royal Air Force clashed with Germany, and Germans purposely **bombed several civilian targets** around London. The Battle of Britain lasted nearly **three months.** Despite being bombed constantly, the British people did not surrender.

Even though Hitler made a previous agreement with Stalin, he feared Stalin’s intentions for territorial growth. He also wanted Soviet wheat and oil to help sustain his military. So in June of 1941, he **invaded the Soviet Union**. The Soviets suffered heavy casualties, but a harsh winter stopped the Nazi advance.

Up until this point, America was not officially involved in the war, although this time, we did less to remain neutral. In 1941, Congress approved the **Lend-Lease Act**, which allowed the U.S. to lend or lease resources and equipment to allied powers. Through this act, we sent about $50 billion of goods to various allied powers.

As **Japan joined the Axis** and developed a war mentality, Prime Minister Tojo decided he wanted to conquer the **Dutch East Indies** (modern day Indonesia) and other Asian territories. In the eyes of Japan, the U.S. Navy was the only force that stood in the way of them conquering the oil-rich Dutch East Indies. **On December 7, 1941, Japanese warplanes bombed the naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.** The attack came as a complete surprise, and killed about 2,400 Americans. The U.S. naval fleet was also devastated by this attack.

FDR asked Congress for a declaration of war on Japan. He called December 7, 1941, “**a date that will live in** **infamy**,” Once we declared war on Japan, Germany and Italy quickly declared war on us.

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| **Allied Forces** | **Axis Powers** |
| **Britain** | **Germany** |
| **France** | **Italy** |
| **United States *after 1941*** | **Japan** |
| **Soviet Union a*fter 1941*** | **Soviet Union *until 1941*** |
| **China** |  |

**The War Effort**

To defeat the Axis Powers, America would need more than just soldiers. They needed planes, tanks, weapons, parachutes, food, and other supplies. **As in WWI, the whole country got involved with the War Effort**. The **War Production Board** was set up to coordinate the production of military equipment and supplies. The WPB added second and third shifts to factories, and increased production schedules to a record pace. America ended up producing more than **300,000** planes, and **75,000** ships.

For the first time in a long time, **jobs were easy to find**. Many of these factories needed extra help, and struggling families were happy to find the work. It was the war effort that officially **ended the Great Depression**. Minorities also were finding work, and migrating from the south to the north and west. Unfortunately, the influx of minorities caused **racial tensions**, and **riots** broke out. In 1943, a race riot in Detroit killed 34 people before order was restored. A positive step for minority workers came when Roosevelt issued **Executive Order 8802**, outlawing discrimination in defense industries working for the Federal Government. While many African Americans and Native Americans worked in the war industries, many **Mexican Americans** worked as **farm hands** to help produce more food.

In addition to helping with the war effort at home, many minorities joined the armed forces. More than a million African Americans and more than 300,000 Mexican Americans served during WWII. Unfortunately, due to prejudice, they served in segregated units. One unit was the **Tuskegee Airmen**, a group of African American pilots who served in Europe and North Africa.

With so many men fighting overseas, opportunities for women expanded broadly. Traditionally told to stay at home and attend household duties, women were now joining the work force. The image of **Rosie the Riveter**, a strong woman hard at work in an arms factory was a **propaganda** symbol used to support this new group of wage earners. Women also served in the armed forces for the **Women’s Army Corps** (WAC). In addition to serving as nurses, they also served as mechanics, drivers, and clerks.

While jobs were easy to find, some items were in short supply. Auto makers didn’t produce any **cars** from 1942-1945, instead devoting their energies to making jeeps, tanks, and airplanes for the war. **Tires, shoes, meat, and sugar** were also in short supply. So much so that the government instituted a system of **rationing** to divide up these commodities among citizens.

To help pay for the cost of the war, the United States sold **War Bonds**, much like they did during WWI. War Bonds were a loan to the government that would be paid back with interest. This tactic raised billions of dollars for the war.

**Japanese Internment**

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, **anti-Japanese sentiment** grew in America. Many thought Japanese Americans were **a security threat**, and in 1942, President Roosevelt issued **Executive Order 9066**, allowing for the **removal of Japanese-Americans** on the west coast. **More than 110,000 people were rounded up, forced to sell their homes and possessions, and move to prison-like internment camps**. Fred Korematsu was charged and convicted for defying the executive order. He took his case to the Supreme Court, saying **the law** **was unconstitutional as it was based on race.** The court said that the law was a military **necessity** and was therefore constitutional. The fear of Japanese Americans was **unfounded**. Many in internment camps raised American flags every morning. Many volunteered to serve in the military. Japanese Internment is a prime example of the hatred that occurs when blame for a singular incident is placed on an entire race or religious group.

**Allied Advances**.

While most of the war was fought in Europe, Britain had been fighting the Germans for control of North Africa… specifically Egypt. The **Suez Canal** was the main route to Asian and Middle Eastern Oil fields, and Britain wanted to maintain control of the canal. **German commander Erwin Rommel** gave Allied troops a run for their money. Finally it was **general Dwight D. Eisenhower** who stopped the German advance in Tunisia.

After **North Africa** was cleared of Germans, Allied powers moved into **Sicily,** an island off the coast of Italy. There was bitter fighting in Sicily, but ultimately the Germans were driven out. Next the Allies invaded **Italy**. By 1943, when this invasion took place, many **Italian citizens had turned on Mussolini**, and officials imprisoned him. While he did escape, he never returned to power. The new Italian government surrendered to the Allies in September 1943.

While the first few years of the war saw Germany winning victory after victory, the **tide of the war was turning**. The cold winter in the **Soviet Union** caused the Nazi defeat in **Stalingrad.** Thousands of Nazi soldiers froze and starved during the harsh conditions. After this loss, the Soviet troops began pushing the Germans back out of their nation. Fighting the war on two fronts spread Hitler’s forces too thin.

On **June 6, 1944,** more than 150,000 troops crossed the English Channel into **Normandy.** The plan, called **Operation Overlord,** was commanded by **General Eisenhower**. First, paratroopers landed in the cover of night behind German troops. Then at daylight was the invasion from the sea. They were trying to take back France. This invasion became known as **D-Day.** It was the **largest seaborne invasion in history**. By August, the Allies had taken back the French capital. Throughout the rest of the fall, the Allied troops, under General **Omar Bradley** and General **George S. Patton**, pushed the Germans out of France. In December, Hitler launched his final assault, the **Battle of the Bulge.** There were severe human causalities, but the Allies prevailed.

**The End of the Nazis**

By early 1945, the Germans were retreating everywhere. The **Yalta Conference** was held where the big three… **Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin** discussed plans to end the war and the future of Europe. They wanted to establish an international peace keeping organization to sustain peace long term. Roosevelt wouldn’t be able to see much of the peace he fought so hard for. In April 1945, months after being sworn in for a **fourth term**, Roosevelt died. Vice President **Harry S. Truman** took over the war effort.

At the end of April, 1945, Soviet troops reached Berlin. **Adolf Hitler** went into hiding in a bunker. Sensing the end was near, he committed suicide by taking a cyanide pill and shooting himself in the head. Many now question whether this was the true end of Hitler, but evidence brought forth has not yet been conclusive enough to change the history books. A few days after Hitler’s death, the **Soviet army Captured Berlin**. On May 7, 1945, Germany signed an **unconditional surrender**.

As the Allies fought towards Berlin, they made the shocking discovery of the **concentration camps** of the **Holocaust**. No one truly knew until then the extent of German atrocities toward Jewish people. More than **6 million** Jewish people were **needlessly killed**. Hitler also targeted gypsies (Roma), Russians, Poles, disabled people, and the mentally insane in his attempt to create an **Aryan race**. Allied forces were sickened by the heartless devastation of Hitler’s **final solution.**

**The War in the Pacific**

While the War was over with Germany, **Japan** had not surrendered. Japan threatened America possessions in the Pacific Ocean. The U.S., upon entering the war, was fighting both in Europe and in the Pacific. The Japanese advances included them taking control over **Hong Kong, Thailand, and Guam**. They also pushed into **Malaya, Burma, and the Philippines**. By 1942, the Allies began to gain strength against the Japanese. A series of battles successfully blocked the Japanese push for **Australia** and thwarted their overall advances.

After the Battle of Midway, Americans tried to **liberate** the Japanese lands that had been conquered. Often they decided to invade islands not heavily guarded by the Japanese and use them as strategic jumping grounds to recapture more taken territory. This strategy is known as **island hopping**.

Another strategic measure used by the United States was **code talkers.** In order to keep Japanese intelligence from breaking American codes, we began using the **Navajo** language to transmit important messages. The group of Native American translators that helped American soldiers was crucial to their success in the pacific.

In October of 1944, the Allies invaded the **Philippines**, which had been overrun by the Japanese. The naval battle of Leyte left Japan’s fleet so badly damaged that they were no longer a threat. Back in 1942, **General MacArthur** vowed that he would return to the Philippines and defeat the Japanese. By March of 1945, he kept his promise. Allied troops reached Manila and liberated the Philippines once again.

Despite their defeat, the Japanese began use of a military technique: the **kamikaze**. A kamikaze pilot filled their airplanes with explosives and crashed them directly into Allied warships. Several Japanese pilots volunteered for these **suicide missions** as a last ditch effort to stop Allied advances.

Their efforts did not detour the Allies. By the end of 1944, they were bombing Japan directly. Allies sought to create military bases on Japanese islands of **Iwo Jima** and **Okinawa** in order to attack the mainland. Fighting to capture these small islands is brutal, but after several months we succeeded. Despite being surrounded, Japan continued to fight. There was a plan to invade Japan directly, but there was also a fear that such an invasion would **cost up to 1 million American lives**.

The solution that American officials employed was the **atomic bomb**. The **Manhattan Project,** the secret project to build such a bomb, had been underway since America entered the war. Led by scientist **Robert J. Oppenheimer,** the building of the atomic bomb took three years. This bomb was so powerful, that many scientists who witnessed the **test explosion** were **temporarily blinded** from watching the blast.

Once all testing was complete, President **Harry Truman** told Japan that they needed to **surrender or face imminent destruction**. The Japanese refused. On August 6, 1945, a B-29 bomber called the Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb on the industrial city of **Hiroshima**. The explosion decimated everything **within one square mile** of ground zero. 70.000 were killed instantly, and hundreds of thousands more died from radiation poisoning within the next few years. Despite these immense casualties, the Japanese still refused to surrender, so on August 9, **we dropped a second atomic** **bomb** on the city of **Nagasaki**. On August 14, Japan agreed to surrender. On **September 2, 1945**, they signed an official document of surrender aboard an American warship, **officially ending WWII**.

**The Costs and Legacy of the War**

**No war in history was as deadly as WWII**. Millions were dead and cities all over the world lay in **ruins**. While soldiers were thrilled to be returning home, many had no idea of the emotional toll the fighting would take on them as they tried to put it all behind them and return to their normal lives. It is estimated that over **20,000,000 soldiers** lost their lives in battle. The heaviest losses were sustained by the Soviet Union. Americans lost 400,000 men, and 600,000 more were wounded.

While the death toll of soldiers is staggering, **millions of civilians also died**. **WWII was a war without boundaries**. Cities and towns were bombed without regard for civilian life. Previously, the goal would be to bomb military targets and rid the enemy of soldiers and military supplies. Bombing civilians was a whole new level of destruction.

WWII also created a massive population of **refugees.** These were prisoners of war, people who escaped from concentration camps, and people who fled invading armies. Now that the war was over, this group of 21 million people had to figure out how to rebuild their lives.

Economically, only the **United States** came out of the war stronger than they were before. With the exception of **Pearl Harbor**, **no major battles** were fought on U.S. soil, and the extensive production of war supplies brought America out of the Great Depression. Trying to help Europe, we approved the **Marshall Plan**, which would grant loans to European nations to help them get back on their feet. We ended up giving out more than **$13 billion**. U.S. forces also occupied Japan for many years after the war, and created programs to help their economies recover.

In November of 1945, several top Nazi officials were put on trial for **crimes** **against Humanity**. These were known as the **Nuremburg Trials**. Several top officials were convicted and sentenced to death, proving that even in a time of war, people are held responsible for their actions.

M any world leaders wanted to create an international peace keeping body, to prevent a war like this from ever happening again. Although Woodrow Wilson came up with the idea of the **League of Nations**, and it was created, Congress refused to join the league. Since not everyone was on board with the League of Nations, it failed to function as a true international peace keeping authority. Before he died, **Roosevelt** told Americans not to turn their back on the international community again. This time we took the lead and held a conference of delegates from 50 countries in **San Francisco** to charter the **United Nations**.

As a result of the **Holocaust,** the **United Nations** created the nation of **Israel in 1948** as a homeland for Jewish people living in Palestine. Since **Muslim, Jewish, and Christian** faiths can all trace their roots back to this area, it is considered sacred ground to the faithful. Arabic people living in Palestine were furious about this homeland created for Jewish people, and began attacking the new country. The **Arab-Israeli** **conflict** is still heated to this day and is one of the main obstacles to peace in the Middle East.

Returning soldiers encountered a different America. **Population** had shifted to cities for wartime production. When soldiers returned, cities faced **overcrowding** and racial tensions. There was also a housing shortage. To help soldiers, the government passed the **G.I. Bill of Rights**, paying for soldiers to go to school and granting them a housing allowance. Several million veterans received their education under the G.I. Bill.