

Cause & Effect IN HISTORY



Cause & Effect: World War II

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IMPORTANT EVENTS OF WORLD WAR II

1929

The stock market crash in the United States leads to economic turmoil and depression around the world.

1933

Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany and eliminates all opposition to the Nazi Party.

1925

Hitler publishes his book *Mein Kampf*, describing his program for restoring Germany after its defeat in World War I and its humiliation under the Treaty of Versailles.

1918

Germany is defeated by the Allies in World War I.



1910

1920

1930

1940

1919

Germany signs the Treaty of Versailles under protest.

1935

Hitler deliberately violates the Treaty of Versailles by increasing the size of the German army.

1940

Germany, Italy, and Japan sign the Tripartite Pact, forming an alliance against England and France.

1939

The Nazis and Soviets sign a nonaggression pact, setting the stage for the division of Poland between them.





The Allies Defeat the Axis Powers

World War II, which began in the late 1930s, grew out of the Great War (World War I) that took place two decades earlier. The Allies, which included Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and the United States, won victory over Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918. After the war, harsh terms imposed by the Treaty of Versailles left the German economy in shambles and its political system in disarray. Resentment over the treaty brought out strong feelings of nationalism among ordinary Germans. Extremist groups arose in the 1920s to take advantage of the people's impoverished state and desire for revenge. Among these was the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party. Leading the Nazis was a failed artist and malcontent named Adolf Hitler. He incited large crowds at Nazi gatherings with his impassioned speeches about gaining living space for the German people and punishing the supposed treachery of Jews, whom he blamed for Germany's defeat in World War I. In the early 1930s, with the world economy mired in the Great Depression, Germany began to emerge from its doldrums. In 1933 Hitler won election as chancellor of Germany and set about rebuilding its military and industrial might—despite restrictions on German rearmament in the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler also introduced laws and policies to strip German Jews of their citizenship rights and ability to earn a living.

Fascists, Militarists, and the War's Beginning

As Hitler seized power in Germany, dictatorships arose elsewhere in Europe and Asia that were bent on expansion by force. In Italy a journalist and soldier named Benito Mussolini led a Fascist movement based on socialism and nationalism and backed by paramilitary Black Shirt thugs. As dictator—or *Il Duce*, “the leader”—Mussolini subdued Libya and Somalia in the 1920s and conquered Ethiopia in

the mid-1930s, establishing Italy as the dominant power from the western Mediterranean to the Red Sea. Mussolini rejected democracy with remarks such as, “The truth is that men are tired of liberty.”⁴ In Japan a right-wing nationalist regime gained power in the 1930s. Democracy in Japan gave way to military rule and virtual worship of the emperor, Hirohito. In 1931 Japanese armies occupied Manchuria in

“The truth is that men are tired of liberty.”⁴

—Italian Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

China and threatened further aggression in Southeast Asia. Japan’s leaders spurned the United States and Western values that they perceived as being greedy and selfish.

Hitler embarked on his own series of conquests in Europe. In March 1938 Hitler’s troops invaded Austria, enabling Germany to annex the country in a move called the *Anschluss*, or “union.” In September British prime minister Neville Chamberlain tried to halt Hitler’s aggression by agreeing to the Munich Pact, which gave Germany the Sudetenland, a region of ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia. British crowds cheered Chamberlain’s efforts to avert war, but some politicians were skeptical. “We seem to be very near the bleak choice between War and Shame,” Winston Churchill, then a conservative member of Parliament, wrote to a friend in September 1938. “My feeling is that we shall choose Shame, and then have War thrown in a little later.”⁵ As Churchill feared, Hitler would not be appeased. A year later, on September 1, 1939, the German army swept into Poland. In response, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

Also in 1939, impressed by Mussolini’s triumph in Ethiopia and other battlefield successes, Hitler signed an alliance with Italy. In 1940 Germany, Italy, and Japan joined together in the Tripartite Pact, creating the alliance of the three so-called Axis powers. The terms of the agreement looked toward a new world order in Europe and Asia.

Blitzkrieg and the Battle of Britain

To avoid immediately fighting a war on two fronts, Hitler made another important move. He secured a mutual nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union, and he made a secret agreement with Stalin to divide Poland between them. This unleashed Hitler’s armies to



Despite Hitler's assurances that he did not want war, his armies began their conquest of Europe in September 1939 by sweeping into Poland. Using blitzkrieg tactics, the German Army defeated the Polish defenders in roughly a month of fighting. A Nazi parade was held in Warsaw (pictured) to celebrate the victory.

rampage through Europe. They used a new style of warfare called blitzkrieg, or "lightning war." Germany attacked with overwhelming force and a combination of aircraft, infantry, tank divisions, and artillery. While the world looked on in horror, country after country fell to the German onslaught. Hitler redrew the map of Europe in less than a year.

Next, Hitler turned to the island nation of Great Britain. On July 10, 1940, the Luftwaffe, Germany's air force, began bombing raids over major British cities and military installations. Hitler planned to crush the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and prepare the way for a naval invasion of Great Britain. During the early weeks of the operation, more than two hundred German planes bombed London and other British cities every night—a strategy that Londoners dubbed the *Blitz* (short for *blitzkrieg*). Hitler's generals hoped to terrorize and demoralize the populace and force a quick surrender. RAF pilots fought back gamely, but British planes were

World War II and African Americans



World War II brought new calls for an end to discrimination against African Americans. Early in 1941, even before the United States entered the conflict, 150,000 African Americans marched in Washington, DC, to protest discriminatory practices in the defense industry. President Franklin D. Roosevelt responded with an executive order outlawing such discrimination. Once war was declared, however, the US armed forces followed a policy of strict segregation. In the army, which had the greatest number of black troops, African Americans served in separate regiments headed by white officers. The Marine Corps had excluded blacks entirely before the war, and those who served in the Marines mostly worked in supply depots. The navy employed African Americans as cooks and servants, although some also had duties on gun crews. African American women volunteered for nursing or jobs in munitions factories, but they were also segregated. The Red Cross kept stores of blood plasma collected from African Americans separate from those for whites.

When given the opportunity, African Americans distinguished themselves in the war. The Tuskegee Airmen, a squadron of black pilots trained at Tuskegee, Alabama, skillfully flew escort fighter planes for bombers in North Africa, protecting them from attacks by enemy planes. Four of the Tuskegee pilots earned the Distinguished Flying Cross for their exploits. Yet discrimination in the armed services left African Americans even more determined to win social change. Membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People grew tenfold during the war. Demands for racial justice would lead to the civil rights victories of the 1950s and 1960s.

outnumbered. Nevertheless, despite all the death, destruction, and piles of rubble, the British people refused to yield. Even the Nazis' use of incendiary bombs, which spread uncontrollable fires through city streets, failed to turn the tide. British antiaircraft guns began to have some success. The Luftwaffe, stretched too thin by fighting in Britain and in Eastern Europe, could not continue the nightly



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