

Unit 6: World War Two

In the midst of the First World War, Russia underwent a revolution that changed not only the people in charge, but also the way the government functioned. Beginning with the Industrial Revolution, Russia found itself technologically stunted compared to the rest of Europe. Despite the technological backwardness of the country, Russia was still open to the influx of Enlightenment ideas, especially after the French Revolution. In December 1825, this sparked the [Decembrist Revolt](#), which attempted to overthrow the monarchy. This revolt included many different social classes, all of which had different aims and therefore could not work together to succeed. The government's ability to put down the Decembrist Revolt resulted in extreme measures that reversed liberal reform that had existed throughout the early 19th century. At the same time, the ideas that sparked the revolt did not die, and continued to circulate underground for generations.

By the middle of the 19th century, Russians were still trying to figure out how to make their country better. Public opinion among the intelligentsia—the educated middle classes—was split between those who believed that they had to look to their own indigenous culture in order to find their strength while others believed that westernization was the best course of action. One of the western leaders, [Aleksandr Herzen](#), recognized that the other side's interest in the peasant class was not unfounded. Exposed to the ideas of socialism while in exile in Europe, Herzen decided that socialism was the best course of action for Russia.

World War I was a time of drastic change for most of the Western World. In Russia, those who agreed with socialism triumphed during the [Russian Revolution of 1917](#). Beginning in February 1917, the revolution moved from a bourgeoisie attempt to establish a democracy to an intelligentsia attempt to establish a socialist utopia. Led by Vladimir Lenin, the Bolsheviks created the Communist Party by March 1918. Like Herzen, Lenin understood the power of the peasantry and hoped to control that power by getting peasant guerrilla groups to fight for the Bolsheviks against their enemies—known as the White Army—in the Russian Civil War. The civil war between the Bolsheviks (Red Army) and those who felt wronged by the revolution (White Army) took place between 1918 and 1921. The result was a communist takeover by 1921, with Vladimir Lenin at the helm.

One of the first measures taken by the Communist Party was to implement the [National Economic Policy \(NEP\)](#), which privatized farms and incentivized industrial and agricultural achievement. Very much a capitalist venture, this policy was considered a temporary measure aimed towards getting Russia up-to-speed with the rest of the world. The plan got Russia up to its pre-WWI industrial levels by 1926, and by 1928 the NEP was replaced with the Soviet Union's first five-year plan. In the meantime, Lenin died in 1924, creating a power vacuum within the Communist Party which both [Josef Stalin](#) and [Leon Trotsky](#) hoped to fill. By 1928, Stalin took control of the Soviet Union, exiling Trotsky and making himself leader.



Lenin, Vladimir. Archive Photos. Accessed June 23, 2016.
<http://online.infobase.com/Article/ImageDetails?imageId=47933>.

In 1920, while in the midst of a civil war against the White Army, the Bolsheviks took control of the Ukraine, and immediately began exporting crops to Russia to feed their citizens. Between 1920 and 1922, over 1.5 million Ukrainians starved to death while their crops were used to feed the Russians. Three years later, a policy of Ukrainization glorified Ukrainian heritage and language, slowly rebuilding Ukraine after the famine. However, once Stalin took control of the Soviet Union, he swiftly tried to stomp out any cultural difference within Ukraine by imprisoning or executing both the cultural elite and the religious clergy. Then, in 1930, Ukraine became a major focus of the dekulakization policy. A '[Kulak](#)' was the Russian word for peasants whom the government believed made more money than other peasants and, as such, were subjected to higher taxes. In 1930, Stalin decided to get rid of the Kulaks, and put in process a policy of dekulakization, which resulted in about 2 million deaths. Ukraine was heavily hit in the dekulakization process, but it also led to death or imprisonment in Siberia for kulaks throughout the Soviet Union.¹

Beginning in 1932, Soviet policy moved towards an artificial famine in the Ukraine that many Ukrainians call "[Holodomor](#)," or genocide caused by famine. Stalin imposed a policy that required 40% of the Ukrainian harvest to be exported. The starved Ukrainians tried to escape to Russia, but the borders were closed in 1933. When the Red Cross demanded assistance sent to the Ukraine, Moscow denied the famine and refused to send aid. By June of 1933, approximately 28,000 people were dying *each day*. Policies such as dekulakization and Holodomor led to a zeitgeist of fear and paranoia throughout the Soviet Union for most of their existence.

Meanwhile, in Western Europe, a regime just as repressive but on the opposite side of the political spectrum was taking shape in Italy. [Totalitarianism](#) is a government system in which the central government controls every aspect of human life—including the economy, culture, religion, and education. In Soviet Russia, what began as a socialist enterprise to create universal power eventually led to centralized power in the hands of one man—Stalin. In Italy, fascism began as a centralized system, at the far right of the political spectrum. Although [fascism](#) began as a leftist movement against corruption, it eventually came to reject all established government systems—including socialism. However, fascism also believed in collectivization—to fight

¹ "Time Lines of the Famine/Genocide in Ukraine 1932-1933." December 2014. Accessed June 20, 2016.
<http://www.faminegenocide.com/kuryliw/timeline.htm>.

against socialism. First, they centralized the government, then they turned to a policy of militaristic nationalism to destroy individualism and strengthen an Italy that was losing its way after unification in the 19th century.

[Benito Mussolini](#) came to power through his time in the military, forming the Fasci di Combattimento in 1919, and on October 28, 1922, he marched on Rome and forced King Victor Emmanuel III to form a coalition government with his Fascist Party. By 1929, Mussolini established absolute power over Italy. Now known as Il Duce (The Leader), he solidified his hold over Italy by allying himself with the Catholic Church—thus controlling not only the public sphere but, through religion, the private sphere as well. He also used his secret police, the Black Shirts, to keep people in line through fear-mongering and oppressive laws.

Although both fascism and Nazism were based on militaristic nationalism, Nazism was a race-based ideology while fascism focused on political differences. Nazism, from the German *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers Party), began in 1920, with the rise of Austrian Adolf Hitler within German political circles. Drawing heavily from fascism, and articulated in Hitler's books *Mein Kampf* (1925) and *Das Zweites Buch* (1928), [Nazism](#) was very much an ideology rooted in nationalism and racial pride—of a mythical Aryan race based on the ancient Teutonic peoples that once populated Germany, primarily blonde with blue eyes and tall. Although the Nazis used the word “Socialism” in their official party name in order to draw support from the working class, their primary focus was on “nationalism,” and fixing the economy during the Great Depression between the World Wars. The Nazis chose to use Jews, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and anyone who disagreed with them into scapegoats, thus justifying their cruel treatment of this minorities while simultaneously giving the German people someone to blame for their misfortunes.

While both Italy and Germany worked towards establishing fascist dictatorships under Mussolini and Hitler, Spain also had a strong fascist contingent, led by [General Francisco Franco Bahamonde](#), known as Franco. Franco was a part of the Spanish military, serving in combat in Morocco, as the head of the General Military Academy in Saragossa, and putting down a miners' rebellion against the newly formed government in 1932. King Alfonso XIII abdicated the throne in 1931, leaving the country to an open election. A left-leaning republican government came to power in 1936, deeply frustrating the nationalist, right-leaning Franco and his military. Franco quickly raised the military against the government, staging a coup d'état in February 1936. This coup d'état led to the Spanish Civil War, which lasted until May 1939. In the end, Franco was able to declare victory over the leftist republicans and their allies, creating a nationalist, fascist dictatorship in which he served as Supreme Leader until his death in 1975. Although not as famous as Hitler, Stalin, or Mao, Franco was the longest-ruling dictator of the 20th century.

Franco's success in Spain was a major victory for the fascist cause, and [Adolf Hitler](#), made German Chancellor in 1933 and then Supreme Leader or *der Führer* in 1934, was well on his way to another fascist dictatorship in Germany. In March 1938 Hitler orchestrated [Die Anschluss](#), which united Germany and German-speaking Austria. With this addition, Hitler aimed to increase the Lebensraum, or “living space” of the German people, allowing for more German children to be born and used as Nazi soldiers.

After taking Austria, Hitler met with the heads of other European countries at the [Munich Conference](#) in 1938. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French Premier Edouard Daladier met with Hitler to discuss Germany's desire to take of the Sudetenland, an area of land south of Germany which officially belonged to Czechoslovakia. Afraid of starting another World War, Chamberlain and Daladier chose a policy of Appeasement, in which they attempted to give Hitler enough of what he wanted to in order to prevent war. Hitler took the Sudetenland, and then took the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. When neither Britain nor France took action against him, Hitler pushed his luck further by taking over Poland.

On September 1, 1939, [Germany invaded Poland](#) with a new form of military strategy—the Blitzkrieg. The word means “lightning war” in German and the strategy focuses on fast and deadly warfare focused on overwhelming the enemy and cutting off any backup the enemy may receive. Blitzkrieg does not allow for mercy or respect for the enemy—only complete annihilation of their armed forces. By September 27th, Warsaw surrendered, and the last of the resistance was shut down by October 5th. In a little more than a month, Germany had successfully taken over Poland.

Britain and France declared war on Germany once the Germans attacked Poland, deciding that any further Appeasement could result in lasting horrors throughout Europe. Both countries were reluctant to enter war, and had hoped their pacifist ideals could be upheld even after Czechoslovakia was invaded. [France](#) especially feared war, as they were the most heavily affected by World War I and feared being the main battle front again. On September 3, 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany, effectively starting World War II. Despite this official declaration, the next eight months were relatively quiet. The American press calls this period the “[Phony War](#),” while the new English Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, called it the “Twilight War” and British citizens referred to it as “the Bore War.” The best pun name for this period of silence was perhaps the German “Sitzkrieg” or “sitting war” which rhymed nicely with “Blitzkrieg.”

During this eight-month lull in warfare, Germany courted Japan and eventually succeeded in getting Japan to sign the [Axis Pact](#), which united Germany, Italy, and Japan. The Axis Pact was finally signed in September, 1940. It reinforced the alliance between Germany and Italy while providing Japan with the friends it needed in order to continue expanding its empire. Germany was a powerful ally, as they won the [Battle of France](#) in less than two months and were now occupying a huge land mass in Central Europe.

After France fell, Britain stood almost alone against the expanding Axis Powers. Prime Minister [Winston Churchill](#) rallied his troops through rousing speeches. When the United States entered the war, President Roosevelt also used the idea of using speeches to keep morale high and introduced the idea of “[fireside chats](#),” which played over the new invention of the radio every night throughout all four terms of his presidency. Before entering World War Two after Pearl Harbor, the United States provided financial support to Britain and the British Commonwealth. During this time, Churchill and Roosevelt forged a partnership that ended abruptly with Roosevelt's death in 1945. Together, and with the help of allies around the world, Britain and the United States were able to end World War Two with victory in Europe on May 8, 1945 and Victory in Japan on September 2, 1945.

During World War Two, the Nazis also implemented an extensive and systematic genocidal policy created to destroy the Jewish people of Europe. Known as the Holocaust, this program resulted in the deaths of 6 million Jews, as well as large numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, political prisoners, handicapped people, and the Roma. Following his agenda to make the Aryan race the most powerful in the world, Hitler worked to destroy the Jewish people, which he saw as a parasitic "race." Roma people were destroyed for similar reasons. The Nazis imprisoned and killed Jehovah's Witnesses and political prisoners for choosing neutrality or opposing sides and killed male homosexuals for violating Paragraph 175

of the German Criminal Code.²



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State of Europe in WW2, courtesy of InfoBase Learning

² Internet History Sourcebooks Project. "Nazi Germany: Paragraph 175 and Other Sexual Deviance Laws." Accessed June 24, 2016. <https://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/para175.asp>.

Germany was not alone in singling people out for racial differences. An early incident of genocidal practice offered in the Sino-Japanese War, which occurred in the 1930s between Chinese and Japan. During this war, the Japanese invaded the relatively defenseless city of Nanking on December 13, 1937. Over the span of six weeks, the Japanese raped, pillaged, and killed many Chinese citizens of Nanking.

This time period, known as the [Rape of Nanking](#), is purported by the Chinese to

have killed 300,000 people. Although no official number of deaths has ever been documented by the Japanese government, very few people deny that these horrors took place. Atrocities by the Japanese against the Chinese continued into the Second World War. As shown in the video [“Comfort Women Wanted” by Chang-Jin Lee](#), Japan used women from various Asian countries—including China and South Korea most prominently—in order to provide sexual satisfaction for Japanese soldiers in sex camps.

The United States came to value Japanese lives less as the War in the Pacific dragged on. After Pearl Harbor, on February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed [Executive Order 9066](#). This Order evacuated Japanese-Americans from the West Coast. Eventually, 120,000 ethnically Japanese people living on the West Coast were shipped from their homes into 10 internment camps in the Mid-West. Most of the people forced into these camps were American citizens. In 1945, President Roosevelt died, allowing Vice President Harry Truman to take office. Upon realizing the surrender of the Japanese was unlikely, [Truman decided to drop two atomic bombs](#) on Japanese cities. It is estimated that about 50,000 people died immediately, followed by approximately 100,000 people who died from exposure to radiation. The bombs were effective in two ways—they forced the Japanese into surrender, while simultaneously showing the Soviet Union that the United States was a powerful enemy. These bombs were built just in time for the onset of the Cold War, which we will discuss in Unit 7.



Map of the Pacific Theater during World War II. Red arrows represent the Japanese campaigns, while blue arrows represent the Allied Powers. The orange and orange-stripe areas represent areas controlled by Japan during WWII.