World War II (1939-1945)

# Foreshadowing of War

* US was **isolationist** during the 1920s-1930s (didn’t want to get involved in foreign conflicts) and over 70% of Americans felt that US involvement in WWI was wrong.
* The rise of **authoritarian dictatorships** throughout Europe and Asia in the 1930s was cause for concern worldwide.
  + **Italy** – Facism – Benito Mussolini (came to power in 1922)
  + **Soviet Union** – Communism – Josef Stalin (came to power in 1929)
  + **Germany** – Nazism – Adolf Hitler (came to power in 1933)
  + **Spain** – Facism – Francisco Franco (came to power in 1939)
  + **Japan** – military dictatorship – Tojo Hideki (came to power in 1941)
* These nations were a threat to Europe and Asia as they **all had the goal of territorial expansion** and domination of their ‘spheres of influence’ and the League of Nations (which had formed following WWI) could do little to stop their aggression. The League failed to stop the following:
  + **Hitler’s invasion of the Rhineland** (area between Germany and France that was French-controlled)
  + **Japanese invasion of Manchuria** (area in northern China)
  + **Italian invasion of Ethiopia**
  + **German, Italian and Soviet involvement in the Spanish Civil War** (that brought Franco to power)
* The **US, Britain and France realized that war was inevitable but were hesitant to get involved** because their citizens were so isolationist and anti-war following WWI.
* FDR passed a series of **Neutrality Acts (1935,1936,1937)** that denied US companies the right to sell arms to hostile nations, prevented Americans from traveling on ships of warring nations
  + The goal was to keep the US out of war in Europe
  + Revised in 1939 to allow US companies to sell arms to warring nations (Britain) on a “cash and carry basis”, **revised in 1941 to “lend-lease**”
  + **US was worried about Britain attempting to defeat Hitler alone** (France was occupied by Germany by 1940)
* By **1938**, Britain and France tried to stop Hitler’s territorial gains at the **Munich Conference**, but **appeasement was a complete failure**.
  + Britain and France agreed to give Hitler part of Czechoslovakia in return for a guarantee that Germany would stop attempting to take over any more territory. Hitler agreed, but the invasions continued.

# World War II Begins in Europe (1939)

* After Hitler signed the **Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pac**t with Stalin (in which each nation agreed not to attack the other, and in return they would split up Poland), he ordered the **invasion of Poland (Sept 1939**). Britain and France declared war on Germany and **this began WWII**.
* Germany had an advanced military and new tactics based on the coordination of planes, tanks and motorized troop carriers.
  + This rapid advance of German forces became known as **“blitzkrieg**” (lightening warfare) and was very effective.
* The German army quickly took over **most of Western Europe (including France) by 1940** and threatened to take over Britain.
  + “**Battle of Britain**” – Hitler tried to use his air force to bomb the British into surrender but failed. **Radar helped the British** defend themselves by pinpointing the areas of planned German attacks

# Attack on Pearl Harbor (December 1941)

* In September 1940, **Japan allied with Germany and Italy**. Japan only had limited oil supplies after the US had placed an embargo (refusal to trade) on Japan. They wanted to take control of the oil fields of the Dutch East Indies, which would bring the US into the war.
* They decided to attack the US first and launched a **surprise attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941 – “a day that will live in infamy”**.
  + Germany and Italy then declared war on the US, as well.

# The War in Europe

* The US decided on a **“Germany first”** plan of attack because they believed that Germany was the greater danger.
* Germany had broken their non-aggression agreement with the Soviet Union and launched an invasion. **They were defeated** (the Nazi army’s first real loss) **by the Soviets at** **Stalingrad, which is considered a major turning point in the war.**
  + At this point, the SU joined the Allied side.
* **D-Day** (or the invasion of Normandy, France in June 1944) was the Allied attempt to liberate France from German control.
  + **Dwight Eisenhower** was the Supreme Commander of the invasion, which was successful and is **considered a major turning point in the war**.
* The Allied forces then attacked Germany from the west, which the Soviets attacked Germany from the east.
  + Soviet troops occupied the German capital city of Berlin (Hitler committed suicide) in April 1945
  + **Germany officially surrendered on May 7, 1945** (V-E Day – “victory in Europe”)

# The War in the Pacific

* In the Pacific, the Japanese advanced into SE Asia and the Pacific after their attack on Pearl Harbor.
* Japanese and US aircraft carriers fought major battles throughout the Pacific (island-hopping), pushing the Japanese back island by island.
  + **Battle of the Coral Sea** (May 1942)
  + **Battle of Midway** (1943) – turning point in the war in the Pacific
* The US government invested $2 billion in the **“Manhattan Project”** (a secret project to develop the atomic bomb).
  + US leaders feared that Nazi Germany might develop the bomb first so raced to beat them
  + The first **atomic bomb** was tested in New Mexico in 1945, and were then dropped on the **Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki** in August 1945.
  + **Japan surrendered in September 1945** (V-J Day – ‘Victory in Japan’ Day)