



CHAPTER PREVIEW

- What were the most important characteristics of Communist and Fascist ideologies?
- How did Stalinism transform state and society in the Soviet Union?
- What kind of government did Mussolini establish in Italy?
- What policies did Nazi Germany pursue, and why did they appeal to ordinary Germans?
- What explains the success and then defeat of Germany and Japan during World War II?

Forced Labor at Auschwitz Concentration Camp

This rough painting by an anonymous inmate of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi concentration camp is preserved on the ceiling of a camp barracks. Guarded by SS officers, prisoners labor on a drainage canal under the worst conditions, while two carry a dead worker off the field. (De Agostini/ Getty Images)

What were the most important characteristics of Communist and Fascist ideologies?

Both conservative and radical dictatorships took power in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Although these two types of dictatorship shared some characteristics, in essence they were quite different. Conservative authoritarian regimes, which had a long history in Europe, were limited in scope. Radical totalitarian dictatorships, based on the ideologies of communism and fascism, were a new and frightening development aimed at the radical reconstruction of society.

Conservative Authoritarianism and Radical Totalitarian Dictatorships

The traditional form of antidemocratic government in European history was conservative authoritarianism. Like Catherine the Great in Russia and Metternich in Austria, the leaders of such governments relied on obedient state bureaucracies in their efforts to control society. Though political opponents were often jailed or exiled, these older authoritarian governments were limited in both power and objectives. They had neither the ability nor the desire to control many aspects of their subjects' lives. As long as the people did not try to change the system, they were typically allowed considerable personal independence.

After the First World War, authoritarianism revived, especially in eastern Europe. What emerged, however, were new kinds of radical dictatorship that went much further than conservative authoritarianism, particularly in the Soviet Union, Italy, and Germany. In addition, Communist and Fascist political parties were established in all major European nations and mounted challenges to democratic rule.

Some scholars use the term **totalitarianism** to describe these radical dictatorships, which made unprecedented "total claims" on the beliefs and behavior of their citizens. The totalitarian model emphasizes the characteristics that Fascist and Communist dictatorships had in common. One-party totalitarian states used violent political repression and intense propaganda to gain complete power. In addition, the state tried to dominate the economic, social, intellectual, and cultural aspects of people's lives.

Most historians agree that totalitarianism owed much to the experience of total war in 1914 to 1918 (see Chapter 25). World War I required state governments to limit individual liberties and intervene in the economy in order to achieve one supreme objective: victory. Totalitarian leaders were inspired by the example of the modern state at war. They showed a callous

disregard for human life and greatly expanded the power of the state in pursuit of social control.

Communist and Fascist dictatorships shared other characteristics. Both rejected parliamentary government and liberal values. Classical liberals (see "Liberalism and the Middle Class" in Chapter 21) sought to limit the power of the state and protect the rights of the individual. Totalitarians, on the other hand, believed that individualism undermined equality and unity, and they rejected democracy in favor of one-party political systems.

A charismatic leader typically dominated the totalitarian state—Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union, Benito Mussolini in Italy, Adolf Hitler in Germany. All three created political parties of a new kind, dedicated to promoting idealized visions of collective harmony. They used force and terror to intimidate and destroy political opponents and pursued policies of imperial expansion to exploit other lands. They censored the mass media and instituted propaganda campaigns to advance their goals. Finally, and perhaps most important, totalitarian governments engaged in massive projects of state-controlled social engineering dedicated to replacing individualism with a unified "people" capable of exercising the collective will.

Communism and Fascism

Communism and fascism clearly shared a desire to revolutionize state and society. Yet some scholars have argued that the differences between the two systems are more important than the similarities. To understand those differences, it is important to consider the way ideology, or a guiding political philosophy, was linked to radical experiments in social engineering.

Following Marx, Soviet Communists strove to create an international brotherhood of workers. In the Communist utopia ruled by the revolutionary working class, economic exploitation would supposedly disappear and society would be based on fundamental social equality. Under **Stalinism**—the name given to the Communist system in the Soviet Union during Stalin's rule—the state aggressively intervened in all walks of life to pursue this social leveling. Using brute force to destroy the upper and middle classes, the Stalinist state nationalized private property, pushed rapid industrialization, and collectivized agriculture.

The Fascist vision of a new society was quite different. Leaders who embraced **fascism**, such as Mussolini and Hitler, claimed that they were striving to

TIMELINE

| 1930 | 1933 | 1936 | 1939 | 1942 | 1945 | 1948 |
|--|--|---|--|--|---|------|
| ◀ 1921 New Economic Policy (NEP) in U.S.S.R. | ■ 1933 Hitler appointed chancellor in Germany; Reichstag passes the Enabling Act, granting Hitler absolute dictatorial power | ■ 1936 Nuremberg Laws deprive Jews of citizenship rights | ■ 1939 Germany occupies Czech lands and invades western Poland; Britain and France declare war on Germany, starting World War II; Soviet Union occupies eastern Poland | ■ 1940 Germany defeats and occupies France; Battle of Britain begins | ■ 1945 Soviet and U.S. forces enter Germany; United States drops atomic bombs on Japan; World War II ends | |
| ◀ 1922 Mussolini gains power in Italy; growth of Nazi Party in Germany | | | | | | |
| ◀ 1927 Stalin comes to power in U.S.S.R. | | ■ 1935 Start of great purges under Stalin; Spanish Civil War begins | | | ■ 1941 Germany invades U.S.S.R.; Japan attacks Pearl Harbor; United States enters war | |
| ■ 1928 Stalin's first five-year plan | | ■ 1937 Japanese army invades China | | ■ 1941-1945 The Holocaust | | |
| ■ 1929 Lateran Agreement; start of collectivization in Soviet Union | | ■ 1938 Kristallnacht marks beginning of more aggressive anti-Jewish policy in Germany | | ■ 1942-1943 Battle of Stalingrad | | |
| ■ 1932-1933 Famine in Ukraine | | | | | ■ 1944 Allied invasion at Normandy | |

build a new community on a national—not an international—level. Extreme nationalists, and often racists, Fascists glorified war and the military. For them, the nation was the highest embodiment of the people, and the powerful leader was the materialization of the people's collective will.

Like Communists, Fascists promised to improve the lives of ordinary workers. Fascist governments intervened in the economy, but unlike Communist regimes they did not try to level class differences and nationalize private property. Instead, they presented a vision of a community bound together by nationalism. In the ideal Fascist state, all social strata and classes would work together to build a harmonious national community.

Communists and Fascists differed in another crucial respect: the question of race. Where Communists sought to build a new world around the destruction of class differences, Fascists typically sought to build a new national community grounded in racial homogeneity. Fascists embraced the doctrine of **eugenics**, a pseudoscience that maintained that the selective breeding of human beings could improve the general characteristics of a national population. Eugenics was popular throughout the Western world in the 1920s and 1930s and was viewed by many as a legitimate social policy. But Fascists, especially the German National Socialists, or Nazis, pushed these ideas to the extreme.

Adopting a radicalized view of eugenics, the Nazis maintained that the German nation had to be “purified” of groups of people deemed “unfit” by the regime. Following state policies intended to support what they called “racial hygiene,” Nazi authorities attempted to control, segregate, or eliminate those of “lesser value,” including Jews, Sinti and Roma (often called Gypsies, a term that can have pejorative connotations) and other ethnic minorities, homosexuals, and people suffering from chronic mental or physical disabilities. The pursuit of “racial hygiene” ultimately led to the Holocaust, the attempt to purge Germany and Europe of all Jews and other undesirable groups by mass killing during World War II. Though the Soviets readily persecuted specific ethnic groups they

totalitarianism A radical dictatorship that exercises “total claims” over the beliefs and behavior of its citizens by taking control of the economic, social, intellectual, and cultural aspects of society.

Stalinism The name given to the Communist system in the Soviet Union during the rule of Joseph Stalin.

fascism A movement characterized by extreme, often expansionist nationalism; anti-socialism; a dynamic and violent leader; and glorification of war and the military.

eugenics A pseudoscientific doctrine saying the selective breeding of human beings can improve the general characteristics of a national population, which helped inspire Nazi ideas about national unity and racial exclusion and ultimately contributed to the Holocaust.



Eugenics in Nazi Germany Nazi “race scientists” believed they could use the eugenic methods of social engineering to build a powerful Aryan race. In this photograph, published in a popular magazine in 1933, a clinician measures a man’s nose. Such pseudoscientific methods were used to determine an individual’s supposed “racial value.” (Hulton Deutsch/Getty Images)

believed were disloyal to the Communist state, in general they justified these attacks using ideologies of class rather than race or biology.

Perhaps because both championed the overthrow of existing society, Communists and Fascists were sworn enemies. The result was a clash of ideologies, which was in large part responsible for the horrific destruction and loss of life in the middle of the twentieth century. Explaining the nature of totalitarian dictatorships thus remains a crucial project for historians, even as they look more closely at the ideological differences between communism and fascism.

One important set of questions explores the way dictatorial regimes earned the support of the people they governed. Neither Hitler nor Stalin ever achieved the total control each sought. Nor did they rule alone; modern dictators need the help of large state bureaucracies and the cooperation of large numbers of ordinary people. Which was more important for creating popular support: terror and coercion or material rewards? Under what circumstances did people resist or perpetrate totalitarian tyranny? These questions lead us toward what Holocaust survivor Primo Levi called the “gray zone” of moral compromise, which defined everyday life in totalitarian societies. (See “Individuals in Society: Primo Levi,” page 860.)

How did Stalinism transform state and society in the Soviet Union?

Lenin’s harshest critics claim that he established the basic outlines of a modern totalitarian dictatorship after the Bolshevik Revolution and during the Russian civil war. If so, Joseph Stalin (1879–1953) certainly finished the job. After he consolidated his power in the mid-1920s, Stalin and his government undertook a radical attempt to transform Soviet society into a Communist state.

From Lenin to Stalin

By spring 1921 Lenin and the Bolsheviks had won the civil war, but they ruled a shattered and devastated land. Many farms were in ruins, and food supplies were exhausted. In southern Russia, drought combined with the ravages of war to produce the worst famine in generations. Industrial production had broken down completely. In the face of economic disintegration, riots by peasants and workers, and an open rebellion by previously pro-Bolshevik sailors at Kronstadt, Lenin was tough but, as ever, flexible. He repressed the

Kronstadt rebels, and in March 1921 he replaced War Communism with the **New Economic Policy (NEP)**, which re-established limited economic freedom in an attempt to rebuild agriculture and industry. During the civil war, the Bolsheviks had simply seized grain without payment. Now peasant producers were permitted to sell their surpluses in free markets, and private traders and small handicraft manufacturers were allowed to reappear. Heavy industry, railroads, and banks, however, remained wholly nationalized.

The NEP was a political and economic success. Politically, it was a necessary but temporary compromise with the Soviet Union’s overwhelming peasant majority. Realizing that his government was not strong enough to take land from the peasants and turn them into state workers, Lenin made concessions to the only force capable of overturning his government. The NEP brought rapid economic recovery, and by 1926 industrial output surpassed, and agricultural production almost equaled, prewar levels.

In 1924, as the economy recovered and the government partially relaxed its censorship and repression, Lenin died without a chosen successor, creating an intense struggle for power in the inner circles of

New Economic Policy (NEP) Lenin’s 1921 policy to re-establish limited economic freedom in an attempt to rebuild agriculture and industry in the face of economic disintegration.

the Communist Party. The principal contenders were Stalin and Trotsky. Joseph Dzhugashvili (joo-guhsh-VEEL-yih)—later known as Stalin (from the Russian for “steel”)—was a good organizer but a poor speaker and writer, and he had no experience outside of Russia. Trotsky, an inspiring leader who had planned the 1917 Bolshevik takeover and then created the victorious Red Army, appeared to have all the advantages in the power struggle. Yet Stalin won because he was more effective at gaining the all-important support of the party. Having risen to general secretary of the party’s Central Committee in 1922, he used his office to win friends and allies with jobs and promises.

Stalin also won because he was better able to relate Marxist teaching to Soviet realities in the 1920s. Stalin developed a theory of “socialism in one country,” which was more appealing to the majority of party members than Trotsky’s doctrine of “permanent revolution.” Stalin argued that the Russian-dominated Soviet Union had the ability to build socialism on its own. Trotsky maintained that socialism in the Soviet Union could succeed only if a socialist revolution swept throughout Europe. To many Russian Communists, this view sold their country short and promised risky conflicts with capitalist countries. Stalin’s willingness to revoke NEP reforms furthermore appealed to young party militants, who detested the NEP’s reliance on capitalist free markets.

With cunning skill, Stalin achieved supreme power between 1922 and 1927. First he allied with Trotsky’s personal enemies to crush his rival, and then he moved against all who might challenge his ascendancy, including former allies. Stalin’s final triumph came at the party congress of December 1927, which

condemned all “deviation from the general party line” that he had formulated. The dictator and his followers were ready to launch “the revolution from above,” radically changing the lives of millions of people.

Stalin and the Nationalities Question

Stalin’s ascendancy had a momentous impact on the policy of the new Soviet state toward non-Russians. The Communists had inherited the vast multiethnic territories of the former Russian Empire. Lenin initially argued that these ethnic groups should have the right to self-determination even if they claimed independence from the Soviet state. In 1922, reflecting such ideas, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (or U.S.S.R.) was organized as a federation of four Soviet republics: the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Ukraine, Belorussia, and a Transcaucasian republic. The last was later split into Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and five Central Asian republics were established in the 1920s and 1930s (Map 27.1).

In contrast to Lenin, Stalin argued for more centralized Russian control of these ethnic regions. His view would dominate state policy until the breakup of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. The Soviet republics were granted some cultural independence but no true political autonomy. Party leaders allowed the use of non-Russian languages in regional schools and government institutions, but the right to secede was a fiction, and real authority remained in Moscow, in the hands of the Russian Communist Party. The Stalinists thus established a far-flung Communist empire on the imperial holdings of the former tsars.



Ethnic Minorities in the U.S.S.R.

The Soviet Union inherited the vast and diverse territories of the former Russian Empire. This 1921 propaganda poster, titled “Unfurling the Flag of Freedom in Every Land,” champions the arrival of Bolshevism in Central Asia. It depicts a Muslim Tartar woman waving a red flag. She has torn off her veil and turned her back on members of the older generation, who point imploringly toward a mosque, while two men beckon toward the open door to the Communist future. This idealized testament to peaceful coexistence within the Soviet empire masked the conflicts aroused by Russian domination in the Soviet republics. How does this poster resolve the tensions between tradition and modernity in the fledgling Communist state? (British Library, London, UK/© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/Bridgeman Images)



MAP 27.1 The Formation of the U.S.S.R. When the Bolsheviks successfully overthrew the tsarist government and won the civil war that followed, they inherited the vast territories of the former Russian Empire. Following policies instituted by Stalin, they established a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) that gave limited cultural autonomy but no real political independence to the Soviet republics now under Communist control.

The Five-Year Plans

The party congress of 1927, which ratified Stalin's consolidation of power, marked the end of the NEP. The following year marked the start of the era of the Communist five-year plans. The first **five-year plan** had staggering economic objectives. In just five years, total industrial output was to increase by 250 percent, with heavy industry, the preferred sector, growing even faster. Agricultural production was slated to increase by 150 percent, and one-fifth of the peasants in the Soviet Union were to give up their private plots and join collective farms.

Stalin unleashed this "second revolution" for interrelated reasons. There were, first of all, ideological

considerations. Stalin and his militant supporters were deeply committed to communism as they understood it. They feared a gradual restoration of capitalism and wished to promote the working classes. Moreover, Communist leaders were eager to abolish the NEP's private traders, independent artisans, and property-owning peasants. Economic motivations were also important. A fragile economic recovery stalled in 1927 and 1928, and a new offensive seemed necessary to ensure industrial and agricultural growth. Such economic development would allow the U.S.S.R. to catch up with the West and so overcome traditional Russian "backwardness," and the Soviet Union began to train a new class of Communist engineers and technicians to manage the transition.

The independent peasantry remained a major problem as well. For centuries the peasants had wanted to own their own land, and finally they had it. Sooner or later, Stalinists reasoned, landowning peasants would embrace conservative capitalism and pose a threat to the regime. At the same time, the Communists—mainly urban dwellers—believed that the feared and despised “class enemy” in the villages could be squeezed to provide the enormous sums needed for all-out industrialization.

To resolve these issues, in 1929 Stalin ordered the **collectivization of agriculture**—the forced consolidation of individual peasant farms into large, state-controlled enterprises that served as agricultural factories. Peasants across the Soviet Union were compelled to move off their small plots onto large state-run farms, where their tools, livestock, and produce would be held in common and central planners could control all work.

The increasingly repressive measures instituted by the state first focused on the **kulaks**, the class of well-off peasants who had benefited the most from the NEP. The kulaks were small in number, but propagandists cast them as the great enemy of progress. Stalin called for their “liquidation” and seizure of their property. Stripped of land and livestock, many starved or were deported to forced-labor camps for “re-education.”

Forced collectivization led to disaster. Large numbers of peasants opposed to the change slaughtered their animals and burned their crops rather than turn them over to state commissars. Between 1929 and 1933 the number of horses, cattle, sheep, and goats in the Soviet Union fell by at least half. Nor were the state-controlled collective farms more productive. During the first five-year plan, the output of grain barely increased, and collectivized agriculture was unable to make any substantial financial contribution to Soviet industrial development.

Collectivization in the fertile farmlands of the Ukraine was more rapid and violent than in other Soviet territories. The drive against peasants snowballed into an assault on Ukrainians in general, who had sought independence from Soviet rule after the First World War. Stalin and his associates viewed this peasant resistance as an expression of unacceptable anti-Soviet nationalism. In 1932, as collectivization and deportations continued, party leaders set levels of grain deliveries for the Ukrainian collectives at excessively high levels and refused to relax those quotas or allow food relief when Ukrainian Communist leaders reported that starvation was occurring. The result was a terrible man-made famine in Ukraine in 1932 and 1933, which claimed 3 to 3.5 million lives. (See “Evaluating Written Evidence: Famine and Recovery on a Soviet Collective Farm in the Ukraine,” page 838.)

Collectivization was a cruel but real victory for Stalinist ideologues. Though millions died, by the end of 1938 government representatives had moved 93 percent of peasant households onto collective farms, neutralizing them as a political threat. Nonetheless, peasant resistance had forced the supposedly all-powerful state to make modest concessions. Peasants secured the right to limit a family’s labor on the state-run farms and to cultivate tiny family plots, which provided them with much of their food. In 1938 these family plots produced 22 percent of all Soviet agricultural produce on only 4 percent of all cultivated land.

The rapid industrialization mandated by the five-year plans was more successful—indeed, quite spectacular. A huge State Planning Commission, the “Gosplan,” was created to set production goals and control deliveries of raw and finished materials. This was a complex and difficult task, and production bottlenecks and slowdowns often resulted. In addition, Stalinist planning favored heavy industry over the production of consumer goods, which led to shortages of basic necessities. Despite such problems, Soviet industry produced about four times as much in 1937 as it had in 1928. No other major country had ever achieved such rapid industrial growth.

Steel was the idol of the Stalinist age. The Soviet state needed heavy machinery for rapid development, and an industrial labor force was created almost overnight as peasant men and women began working in the huge steel mills built across the country. Independent trade unions lost most of their power. The government could assign workers to any job anywhere in the U.S.S.R., and an internal passport system ensured that individuals could move only with permission. When factory managers needed more hands, they called on their counterparts on the collective farms, who sent them millions of “unneeded” peasants over the years. Rapid industrial growth led to urban development: more than 25 million people, mostly peasants, migrated to cities during the 1930s.

The new workers often lived in deplorable conditions in hastily built industrial cities such as Magnitogorsk (Magnetic Mountain City) in the Ural Mountains. Yet they also experienced some benefits of

■ **five-year plan** A plan launched by Stalin in 1928 and termed the “revolution from above,” aimed at modernizing the Soviet Union and creating a new Communist society with new attitudes, new loyalties, and a new socialist humanity.

■ **collectivization of agriculture** The forcible consolidation of individual peasant farms into large state-controlled enterprises in the Soviet Union under Stalin.

■ **kulaks** The better-off peasants who were stripped of land and livestock under Stalin and were generally not permitted to join collective farms; many of them starved or were deported to forced-labor camps for “re-education.”

Famine and Recovery on a Soviet Collective Farm in the Ukraine

Fedor Belov describes daily life on a kolkhoz, or collective farm, in the Soviet Ukraine during the famine of the early 1930s. Belov, a former collective farm chairman, fled the Soviet Union for the West, where he published this critical account in 1955.

In these kolkhozes the great bulk of the land was held and worked communally, but each peasant household owned a house of some sort, a small plot of ground and perhaps some livestock. All the members of the kolkhoz were required to work on the kolkhoz a certain number of days each month; the rest of the time they were allowed to work on their own holdings. They derived their income partly from what they grew on their garden strips and partly from their work in the kolkhoz. . . .

By late 1932 more than 80 per cent of the peasant households in the raion [district] had been collectivized. . . . That year the peasants harvested a good crop and had hopes that the calculations would work out to their advantage and would help strengthen them economically. These hopes were in vain. The kolkhoz workers received only 200 grams of flour per labor day for the first half of the year; the remaining grain, including the seed fund, was taken by the government. The peasants were told that industrialization of the country, then in full swing, demanded grain and sacrifices from them.

That autumn the “red broom” [government agents who requisitioned grain] passed over the kolkhozes and the individual plots, sweeping the . . . “surpluses,” [and] everything was collected. . . . As a result, famine, which was to become intense by the spring of 1933, already began to be felt in the fall of 1932.

The famine of 1932–1933 was the most terrible and destructive that the Ukrainian people have ever experienced.

upward mobility. In a letter published in the Magnitogorsk newspaper, an ordinary electrician described the opportunities created by rapid industrialization:

In old tsarist Russia, we weren’t even considered people. We couldn’t dream about education, or getting a job in a state enterprise. And now I’m a citizen of the U.S.S.R. Like all citizens I have the right to a job, to education, to leisure. . . . In 1931, I came to Magnitogorsk. From a common laborer I have turned into a skilled worker. . . . I live in a country where one feels like living and learning. And if the enemy should attack this country, I will sacrifice my life in order to destroy the enemy and save my country.¹

The peasants ate dogs, horses, rotten potatoes, the bark of trees, grass—anything they could find. Incidents of cannibalism were not uncommon. The people were like wild beasts, ready to devour one another. And no matter what they did, they went on dying, dying, dying. . . .

There was no one to gather the bumper crop of 1933, since the people who remained alive were too weak and exhausted. More than a hundred persons—office and factory workers from Leningrad—were sent to assist on the kolkhoz; two representatives of the Party arrived to help organize the harvesting. . . .

That summer (1933) the entire administration of the kolkhoz—the bookkeeper, the warehouseman, the manager of the flour mill, and even the chairman himself—were put on trial on charges of plundering the kolkhoz property and produce. All the accused were sentenced to terms of seven to ten years, and a new administration was elected. . . .

After 1934 a gradual improvement began in the economic life of the kolkhoz and its members. . . . In general, from the mid-1930s until 1941, the majority of kolkhoz members in the Ukraine lived relatively well.

EVALUATE THE EVIDENCE

- How did the organization of the collective farm express the basic ideas of communist ideology?
- How did party leaders respond to widespread starvation? Did government policy contribute to the intensity of the famine in 1932?

Source: *History of a Soviet Collective Farm* by Fedor Belov, Research Program on the U.S.S.R. (Praeger, 1955), pp. 11–12. Reproduced with permission of PRAEGER in the format Republish in a book via Copyright Clearance Center.

We should read such words with care, since they appeared in a state-censored publication. Yet the enthusiasm was at least partly authentic. The great industrialization drive of 1928 to 1937 was an awe-inspiring achievement, purchased at enormous sacrifice on the part of ordinary Soviet citizens.

Life and Culture in Soviet Society

Daily life was difficult in Stalin’s Soviet Union. The lack of housing was a particularly serious problem. Millions were moving into the cities, but the government built few new apartments. A relatively lucky family received one room for all its members and shared both a kitchen and a toilet with others living on the same floor.



Day Shift at Magnitogorsk

Beginning in 1928, Stalin's government issued a series of ambitious five-year plans designed to rapidly industrialize the Soviet Union. The plans focused primarily on boosting heavy industry and included the building of a gigantic steel complex at Magnitogorsk in the Ural Mountains. Here steelworkers review production goals at the Magnitogorsk foundry. (Sovfoto/ Getty Images)

There were constant shortages of goods as well. Because consumption was reduced to pay for investment, there was little improvement in the average standard of living in the years before World War II. The average nonfarm wage purchased only about half as many goods in 1932 as it had in 1928. After 1932 real wages rose slowly, but by 1937 workers could still buy only about 60 percent of what they had bought in 1928 and less than they could purchase in 1913. Collectivized peasants experienced greater hardships.

Life was by no means hopeless, however. Idealism and ideology had real appeal for many Communists and ordinary citizens, who saw themselves heroically building the world's first socialist society while capitalism crumbled in a worldwide depression and degenerated into fascism in the West. This optimistic belief in the future of the Soviet Union attracted many disillusioned Westerners to communism in the 1930s. On a more practical level, Soviet workers received important social benefits, such as old-age pensions, free medical services, free education, and day-care centers for children. Unemployment was almost unknown.

Stalinism also opened possibilities for personal advancement. Rapid industrialization required massive numbers of skilled workers, engineers, and plant managers. In the 1930s the Stalinist state broke with the egalitarian policies of the 1920s and offered tremendous incentives to those who could serve its

needs. It paid the mass of unskilled workers and collective farmers very low wages but provided high salaries and special privileges to its growing technical and managerial elite. This group joined with the political and artistic elites in a new upper class, whose members grew rich and powerful.

The radical transformation of Soviet society had a profound impact on women's lives. Marxists had traditionally believed that both capitalism and middle-class husbands exploited women, and the Russian Revolution of 1917 immediately proclaimed complete equality for women. In the 1920s divorce and abortion were made easily available, and women were urged to work outside the home. After Stalin came to power, he reversed this trend. The government revoked many laws supporting women's emancipation in order to strengthen the traditional family and build up the state's population.

The massive mobilization of women was a striking characteristic of the Stalinist state. The Soviets opened higher education to women, who could now enter the ranks of the better-paid specialists in industry and science. Medicine practically became a woman's profession. By 1950, 75 percent of all doctors in the Soviet Union were female. Alongside such advances, however, Soviet society demanded great sacrifices from women. The vast majority had no choice but to work outside the home. Wages were so low that it was almost impossible for a family or couple to live only on the husband's earnings. Peasant women continued

to work on farms, and millions of women toiled in factories and in heavy construction, building dams, roads, and steel mills in summer heat and winter frost. Men continued to dominate the very best jobs. Finally, rapid change and economic hardship led to many broken families, creating further physical and emotional strains for women.

In the U.S.S.R. culture was thoroughly politicized. Party activists lectured workers in factories and peasants on collective farms, while newspapers, films, and radio broadcasts endlessly revealed capitalist plots and recounted socialist achievements. Whereas the 1920s had seen considerable modernist experimentation in theater and the arts, in the 1930s intellectuals were ordered by Stalin to become “engineers of human minds.” Following the dictates of “Socialist Realism,” they were instructed to exalt the lives of ordinary workers and glorify Russian nationalism. Russian history was rewritten so that early tsars such as Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great became worthy forerunners of the greatest Russian leader of all—Stalin. Writers and artists who could effectively combine genuine creativity and political propaganda became the darlings of the regime.

Stalin seldom appeared in public, but his presence was everywhere—in portraits, statues, books, and quotations from his writings. Although the government persecuted those who practiced religion and turned churches into “museums of atheism,” the state had both an earthly religion and a high priest—Marxism-Leninism and Joseph Stalin.

Stalinist Terror and the Great Purges

In the mid-1930s the great offensive to build socialism and a new society culminated in ruthless police terror and a massive purging of the Communist Party. First used by the Bolsheviks in the civil war to maintain their power, terror as state policy was revived in the collectivization drive against the peasants. Top members of the party and government publicly supported Stalin’s initiatives, but there was internal dissent. In late 1934 a top Soviet official, Sergei Kirov, was mysteriously killed. Stalin—who probably ordered Kirov’s murder—blamed the assassination on “Fascist agents” within the party. He used the incident to launch a reign of terror that purged the Communist Party of supposed traitors and solidified his own control.

Murderous repression picked up steam over the next two years. It culminated in the “great purge” of 1936 to 1938, which opened with a series of spectacular public show trials in which false evidence, often gathered using torture, was used to

incriminate party administrators and Red Army leaders. In August 1936 sixteen “Old Bolsheviks”—prominent leaders who had been in the party since the Russian Revolution—confessed to all manner of contrived plots against Stalin. All were executed. In 1937 the secret police arrested a mass of lesser party officials and newer members, using torture to extract confessions. In addition to the party faithful, army officers, union officials, managers, intellectuals, and numerous average citizens were accused of counter-revolutionary activities. At least 6 million people were arrested. Probably 1 to 2 million were executed or never returned from prisons and forced-labor camps.

Stalin’s mass purges remain baffling, for most historians believe that the victims posed no threat and were innocent of their supposed crimes. Some scholars have argued that the terror was a defining characteristic of the totalitarian state, which must always fight real or imaginary enemies. Certainly the highly publicized purges sent a warning: no one was secure; everyone had to serve the party and its leader with redoubled devotion.

The long-standing interpretation that puts most of the blame for the purges on Stalin has been confirmed by recent research in newly opened Soviet archives. Apparently fearful of active resistance, Stalin and his allies used the harshest measures against their political enemies, real or imagined. Moreover, many in the general population shared such fears. Bombarded with ideology and political slogans, numerous people responded energetically to Stalin’s directives. Investigations and trials snowballed into mass hysteria, resulting in a modern witch-hunt that claimed millions of victims. In this view of the 1930s, a deluded Stalin found large numbers of willing collaborators.²

The purges seriously weakened the Soviet Union in military, economic, and intellectual terms. But they left Stalin in command of a vast new state apparatus, staffed by the 1.5 million new party members enlisted to replace the purge victims. Thus more than half of all Communist Party members in 1941 had joined since the purges. Taking the place of those forced out by the regime, they experienced rapid social advance. Often the children of workers, they had usually studied in the new technical schools, and they soon proved capable of managing the government and large-scale production. Despite the human costs, the great purges thus brought substantial practical rewards to a new generation of committed Communists. They would serve Stalin effectively until his death in 1953, and they would govern the Soviet Union until the early 1980s.

What kind of government did Mussolini establish in Italy?

Mussolini's Fascist movement and his seizure of power in 1922 were important steps in the rise of dictatorships in Europe between the two world wars. Mussolini and his supporters were the first to call themselves "Fascists"—revolutionaries determined to create a new totalitarian state based on extreme nationalism and militarism.

The Seizure of Power

In the early twentieth century, Italy was a liberal constitutional monarchy that recognized the civil rights of Italians. On the eve of World War I, the parliament granted universal male suffrage, and Italy appeared to be moving toward democracy. But there were serious problems. Much of the Italian population was still poor, and many peasants were more attached to their villages and local interests than to the national state. Moreover, the papacy, many devout Catholics, conservatives, and landowners remained strongly opposed to liberal institutions, and relations between church and state were often tense. Class differences were also extreme, leading to the development of a powerful revolutionary socialist movement.

World War I worsened the political situation. To win support for the war effort, the Italian government had promised territorial expansion as well as social and land reform, which it could not deliver. Instead, the Versailles treaty denied Italy any territorial gains, and soaring unemployment and inflation after the war created mass hardship. In response, the Italian Socialist Party followed the Bolshevik example, and radical workers and peasants began occupying factories and seizing land in 1920. These actions mobilized the property-owning classes. Moreover, after the war the pope lifted his ban on participation by Catholics in Italian politics, and a strong Catholic party emerged. Thus by 1921 revolutionary socialists, conservatives, Catholics, and property owners were all opposed—though for different reasons—to the liberal government.

Into these crosscurrents of unrest and fear stepped bullying, blustering Benito Mussolini (1883–1945). Mussolini began his political career before World War I as a Socialist Party leader and radical newspaper editor. In 1914 he had urged that Italy join the Allies, a stand for which he was expelled from the Socialist Party. Returning home after being wounded at the front in 1917, Mussolini began organizing bitter war veterans like himself into a band of Fascists—from the Italian word for "a union of forces."

At first Mussolini's program was a radical combination of nationalist and socialist demands. As such,

it competed directly with the well-organized Socialist Party and failed to get off the ground. When Mussolini saw that his violent verbal assaults on rival Socialists won him growing support from conservatives and the middle classes, he shifted gears in 1920 and became a sworn enemy of socialism. Mussolini and his private militia of **Black Shirts** grew increasingly violent. Few people were killed, but Socialist Party newspapers, union halls, and local headquarters were destroyed, and the Black Shirts managed to push Socialists out of city governments in northern Italy.

Fascism soon became a mass movement, one which Mussolini claimed would help the little people against the established interests. In 1922, in the midst of chaos largely created by his Black Shirt militias, Mussolini stepped forward as the savior of order and property. Striking a conservative, anticommunist note in his speeches and gaining the support of army leaders, Mussolini demanded the resignation of the existing government. In October 1922 a band of armed Fascists marched on Rome to threaten the king and force him to appoint Mussolini prime minister of Italy. The threat worked. Victor Emmanuel III (r. 1900–1946)—who himself had no love for the liberal regime—asked Mussolini to take over the government and form a new cabinet. Thus, after widespread violence and a threat of armed uprising, Mussolini seized power using the legal framework of the Italian constitution.

The Fascist Regime in Action

Mussolini became prime minister in 1922 and moved cautiously in his first two years in office to establish control of the government. At first, he promised a "return to order" and consolidated his support among Italian elites. Fooled by Mussolini's apparent moderation, the Italian parliament passed an electoral law that gave two-thirds of the representatives in the parliament to the party that won the most votes. This change allowed the Fascist Party and its allies to win an overwhelming majority in April 1924. Shortly thereafter, a group of Fascist extremists kidnapped and murdered the leading Socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti (JAHK-oh-moh mat-tee-OH-tee). Alarmed, a group of prominent parliamentary leaders demanded that Mussolini's armed squads be dissolved and all violence be banned.

Mussolini may not have ordered Matteotti's murder, but he took advantage of the resulting political crisis. Declaring his desire to "make the nation Fascist," he imposed a series of repressive measures. The

Black Shirts Mussolini's private militia, which destroyed socialist newspapers, union halls, and Socialist Party headquarters, eventually pushing Socialists out of the city governments of northern Italy.



Mussolini and Hitler In September 1937 Italian dictator Benito Mussolini traveled to Germany to cement the Rome-Berlin Axis alliance. In this photo, Mussolini (left), Nazi leader Adolf Hitler (center), and the Italian foreign minister (right) review maps on a train specially outfitted for the Italians' visit. (ullstein bild/Getty Images)

government ruled by decree, abolished freedom of the press, and organized fixed elections. Mussolini arrested his political opponents, disbanded all independent labor unions, and put dedicated Fascists in control of Italy's schools. Mussolini trumpeted his goal in a famous slogan: "Everything in the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state." By the end of 1926 Italy was a one-party dictatorship under Mussolini's unquestioned leadership.

Mussolini's Fascist Party drew support from broad sectors of the population, in large part because he was willing to compromise with the traditional elites that controlled the army, the economy, and the state. He left big business to regulate itself, and there was no land reform. Mussolini also drew increasing support from the Catholic Church. In the **Lateran Agreement** of 1929, he recognized

the Vatican as an independent state, and he agreed to give the church significant financial support in return for the pope's support. Because he was forced to compromise with these conservative elites, Mussolini never established complete totalitarian control.

Mussolini's government nonetheless proceeded with attempts to bring fascism to Italy. The state engineered popular consent by staging massive rallies and sporting events, creating Fascist youth and women's movements, and providing new social welfare benefits. Newspapers, radio, and film promoted a "cult of the Duce" (leader), portraying Mussolini as a powerful strongman who embodied the best qualities of the Italian people. Like other Fascist regimes, his government was vehemently opposed to liberal feminism and promoted traditional gender roles. Mussolini also gained support by manipulating popular pride in the grand history of the ancient Roman Empire—as one propagandist put it, "Fascism, in its entirety, is the resurrection of Roman-ness."³

Mussolini matched his aggressive rhetoric with military action: Italian armies invaded the African nation of Ethiopia in October 1935. After surprising setbacks at the hands of the poorly armed Ethiopian army, the Italians won in 1936, and Mussolini could proudly declare that Italy again had its empire. Although it shocked international opinion, the war resulted in close ties between Italy and Nazi Germany. After a visit to Berlin in the fall of 1937, the Italian dictator

pledged support for Hitler and promised that Italy and Germany would "march together right to the end."⁴

Deeply influenced by Hitler's example (see the next section), Mussolini's government passed a series of anti-Jewish racial laws in 1938. Though the laws were unpopular, Jews were forced out of public schools and dismissed from professional careers. Nevertheless, extreme anti-Semitic persecution did not occur in Italy until late in World War II, when Italy was under Nazi control. Though Mussolini's repressive tactics were never as ruthless as those in Nazi Germany, his government did much to establish a Fascist state in Italy before the war.



What policies did Nazi Germany pursue, and why did they appeal to ordinary Germans?

German National Socialism (or Nazism) shared some characteristics with Italian fascism, but Nazism was far more interventionist. Under Hitler, the Nazi dictatorship smashed or took over most

independent organizations, established firm control over the German state and society, and violently persecuted Jews and other non-German peoples. Truly totalitarian in aspiration, Nazi Germany's policies of



Fascist Youth on Parade Totalitarian governments in Italy and Nazi Germany established mass youth organizations to instill the values of national unity and train young soldiers for the state. These members of the Balilla, Italy's Fascist youth organization, raise their rifles in salute at a mass rally in 1939. (Hulton Deutsch/Getty Images)

racial aggression and territorial expansion led to history's most destructive war.

The Roots of National Socialism

National Socialism grew out of many complex developments, of which the most influential were nationalism and racism. These two ideas captured the mind of the young Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), and he dominated Nazism until the end of World War II.

The son of an Austrian customs official, Hitler spent his childhood in small towns in Austria. A mediocre student, he dropped out of high school at age fourteen. He then moved to Vienna, where he developed an unshakable belief in the crudest distortions of Social Darwinism, the superiority of Germanic races, and the inevitability of racial conflict. Exposure to poor eastern European Jews contributed to his anti-Semitic prejudice. Jews, Hitler now claimed, directed an international conspiracy of finance capitalism and Marxist socialism against German culture, German unity, and the German people.

Hitler was not alone. As we have seen, racist anti-Semitism became wildly popular on the far-right

wing of European politics in the decades surrounding the First World War. Such irrational beliefs, rooted in centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, were given pseudoscientific legitimacy by nineteenth-century developments in biology and eugenics. These ideas came to define Hitler's worldview and would play an immense role in the ideology and actions of National Socialism.

Hitler greeted the outbreak of the First World War as a salvation. The struggle and discipline of war gave life meaning, and Hitler served bravely as a dispatch carrier on the western front. Germany's defeat shattered his world. Convinced that Jews and Marxists had "stabbed Germany in the back," he vowed to fight on.

In late 1919 Hitler joined a tiny extremist group in Munich called the German Workers' Party. In addition to denouncing Jews, Marxists, and democrats, the

Lateran Agreement A 1929 agreement that recognized the Vatican as an independent state, with Mussolini agreeing to give the church heavy financial support in return for public support from the pope.

National Socialism A movement and political party driven by extreme nationalism and racism, led by Adolf Hitler; its adherents ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945 and forced Europe into World War II.

party promised a uniquely German National Socialism that would abolish the injustices of capitalism and create a mighty “people’s community.” By 1921 Hitler had gained control of this small but growing party, renamed the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, or Nazis for short. Hitler became a master of mass propaganda and political showmanship. His wild, histrionic speeches, filled with demagogic attacks on the Versailles treaty, Jews, war profiteers, and the Weimar Republic, thrilled audiences eager to escape the crises that followed German defeat in World War I.

In late 1923, when the Weimar Republic seemed on the verge of collapse, Hitler organized an armed uprising in Munich—the so-called Beer Hall Putsch. Despite the failure of the poorly planned coup and Hitler’s arrest, National Socialism had been born.

Hitler’s Road to Power

At his trial, Hitler gained enormous publicity by denouncing the Weimar Republic. He used his brief prison term to dictate his book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), where he laid out his basic ideas on “racial purification” and territorial expansion that would define National Socialism.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler claimed that Germans were a “master race” that needed to defend its “pure blood” from groups he labeled “racial degenerates,” including Jews, Slavs, and others. The German race was destined to triumph and grow, and, according to Hitler, it needed *Lebensraum* (living space). The future dictator outlined a sweeping vision of war and conquest in which the German master race would colonize east and central Europe and ultimately replace the “subhuman” Jews and Slavs living there. Hitler championed the idea of the leader-dictator, or *Führer* (FYOUR-uhr), whose unlimited power would embody the people’s will and lead the German nation to victory. These ideas would ultimately propel the world into the Second World War.

In the years of relative prosperity and stability between 1924 and 1929, Hitler built up the Nazi Party. From the failed beer hall revolt, he had concluded that the Nazis had to come to power through electoral competition rather than armed rebellion. To appeal to middle-class voters, Hitler de-emphasized the anticapitalist elements of National Socialism and vowed to fight communism. The Nazis still remained a small splinter group in 1928, when they received only 2.6 percent of the vote in the general elections.

The Great Depression of 1929 brought the ascent of National Socialism. Now Hitler promised German voters economic as well as political salvation. His appeals for “national rebirth” appealed to a broad spectrum of voters, including middle- and lower-class groups—small business owners, officeworkers,

artisans, peasants, and skilled workers. Seized by panic as bankruptcies increased, unemployment soared, and the Communists made dramatic election gains, voters deserted conservative and moderate parties for the Nazis. In the election of 1930 the Nazis won 6.5 million votes and 107 seats, and in July 1932 they gained 14.5 million votes—38 percent of the total. They were now the largest party in the Reichstag, where Nazi deputies pursued the legal strategy of using democracy to destroy democracy.

The breakdown of democratic government helped the Nazis seize power. Chancellor Heinrich Brüning (BROU-nihng) tried to overcome the economic crisis by cutting back government spending and ruthlessly forcing down prices and wages. His conservative economic policies intensified Germany’s economic collapse and convinced many voters that the country’s republican leaders were stupid and corrupt, adding to Hitler’s appeal.

Division on the left also contributed to Nazi success. Even though the two left-wing parties together outnumbered the Nazis in the Reichstag, the Communists refused to cooperate with the Social Democrats. Failing to resolve their differences, these parties could not mount an effective opposition to the Nazi takeover.

Finally, Hitler excelled in the dirty backroom politics of the decaying Weimar Republic. In 1932 Hitler cleverly gained the support of the conservative politicians in power, who thought they could use Hitler for their own advantage, to resolve the political crisis, but also to clamp down on leftists. They accepted Hitler’s demand to be appointed chancellor in a coalition government, believing that he could be used and controlled. On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler, leader of the most popular political party in Germany, was appointed chancellor by President Hindenburg.

State and Society in Nazi Germany

Hitler moved rapidly and skillfully to establish an unshakable dictatorship that would pursue the Nazi program of racial segregation and spatial expansion. First, Hitler and the Nazi Party worked to consolidate their power. To maintain appearances, Hitler called for new elections. In February 1933, in the midst of an electoral campaign plagued by violence—much of it caused by Nazi toughs—the Reichstag building was partly destroyed by fire. Hitler blamed the Communists and convinced Hindenburg to sign emergency acts that abolished freedom of speech and assembly as well as most personal liberties.

The façade of democratic government was soon torn asunder. When the Nazis won only 44 percent of the vote in the elections, Hitler outlawed the Communist Party and arrested its parliamentary

representatives. Then on March 23, 1933, the Nazis pushed through the Reichstag the **Enabling Act**, which gave Hitler dictatorial power for four years. The Nazis' deceitful stress on legality, coupled with divide-and-conquer techniques, disarmed the opposition until it was too late for effective resistance.

Germany became a one-party Nazi state. Elections were farces. The new regime took over the government bureaucracy intact, installing Nazis in top positions. At the same time, it created a series of overlapping Nazi Party organizations responsible solely to Hitler. As recent research has shown, the resulting system of dual government was riddled with rivalries, contradictions, and inefficiencies. The Nazi state was often disorganized and lacked the all-encompassing unity that its propagandists claimed. Yet this fractured system suited Hitler and his purposes. The lack of unity encouraged competition among state personnel, who worked to outdo each other to fulfill Hitler's vaguely expressed goals. The Führer thus played the established bureaucracy against his personal party government and maintained dictatorial control.

Once the Nazis were firmly in command, Hitler and the party turned their attention to constructing a National Socialist society defined by national unity and racial exclusion. First they eliminated political enemies. Communists, Social Democrats, and trade-union leaders were forced out of their jobs or arrested and taken to hastily built concentration camps. The Nazis outlawed strikes and abolished independent labor unions, which were replaced by the Nazi-controlled German Labor Front.

Hitler then purged the Nazi Party itself of its more extremist elements. The Nazi storm troopers (the SA), the quasi-military band of 3 million toughs in brown shirts who had fought Communists and beaten up Jews before the Nazis took power, now expected top positions in the army. Some SA radicals even talked of a "second revolution" that would create equality among all Germans by sweeping away capitalism. Now that he was in power, however, Hitler was eager to win the support of the traditional military and maintain social order. He decided that the leadership of the SA had to be eliminated. On the night of June 30, 1934, Hitler's elite personal guard—the SS—arrested and executed about one hundred SA leaders and other political enemies. Afterward, the SS grew rapidly. Under its methodical, ruthless leader Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), the SS took over the political police and the concentration camp system.

The Nazis instituted a policy called "coordination" that forced existing institutions to conform to National Socialist ideology. Professionals—doctors and lawyers, teachers and engineers—saw their previously independent organizations swallowed up by Nazi associations. Charity and civic organizations

EVENTS LEADING TO WORLD WAR II

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1919 | Treaty of Versailles signed |
| 1922 | Mussolini gains power in Italy |
| 1927 | Stalin takes full control in the Soviet Union |
| 1931 | Japan invades Manchuria |
| January 1933 | Hitler appointed chancellor of Germany |
| October 1933 | Germany withdraws from the League of Nations |
| March 1935 | Hitler announces German rearmament |
| October 1935 | Mussolini invades Ethiopia |
| 1936–1939 | Civil war in Spain, culminating in establishment of Fascist regime under Franco |
| March 1936 | German armies move unopposed into the Rhineland |
| October 1936 | Rome-Berlin Axis created |
| 1937 | Japan invades China |
| March 1938 | Germany annexes Austria |
| September 1938 | Munich Conference: Britain and France agree to German seizure of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia |
| March 1939 | Germany occupies the rest of Czechoslovakia; appeasement ends in Britain |
| August 1939 | Nazi-Soviet pact signed |
| September 1, 1939 | Germany invades Poland |
| September 3, 1939 | Britain and France declare war on Germany |

were also put under Nazi control, and universities, publishers, and writers were quickly brought into line. Democratic, socialist, and Jewish literature was put on ever-growing blacklists. Passionate students and radicalized professors burned forbidden books in public squares. Modern art and architecture—which the Nazis considered "degenerate"—were prohibited.

By 1934 the Nazi dictatorship was largely in place. Acting on its vision of racial eugenics, the party began a many-faceted campaign against those deemed incapable of making positive biological contributions to the "master race." The Nazis persecuted a number of

Enabling Act An act pushed through the Reichstag by the Nazis that gave Hitler absolute dictatorial power for four years.

groups. Jews headed the list, but Slavic peoples, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, and Jehovah's Witnesses were also considered social "deviants." Nazi bureaucrats furthermore invented two categories targeted for "racial hygiene": the "hereditarily ill" and "asocials." The "hereditarily ill" included people with chronic mental or physical disabilities, such as schizophrenics, manic depressives, epileptics, and people suffering from what Nazi physicians called "congenital feeble-mindedness." The catchall category of "asocials" included common criminals, alcoholics, prostitutes, the "work shy" (or chronically unemployed), beggars and vagrants, and others on the margins of German society.

Nazi leaders used a variety of measures to convince Germans that "racial hygiene" was justified and necessary. In what some historians term the Nazi "racial state," barbarism and race hatred were institutionalized with the force of science and law.⁵ New university academies, such as the German Society for Racial Research, wrote studies that measured and defined racial differences; prejudice was thus presented in the guise of enlightened medical science, a means for creating a strong national race. Schoolroom lessons, articles in the popular press, feature films, traveling exhibitions, and even children's board games touted the benefits of racist eugenic practice. (See "Thinking Like a Historian: Normalizing Eugenics and 'Racial Hygiene' in Nazi Germany," page 848.)

The results were monstrous, a barbaric violation of the ethical norms most of us take for granted. Thousands of innocent people faced social ostracism and then brutal repression, simply because the Nazis deemed them racial outsiders. Convinced by their own racial ideology, Nazi authorities denied outsiders welfare benefits and put them out of work, forced people with disabilities into special hospitals where they could be segregated from "healthy" Germans, and imprisoned homosexuals and "asocials" in concentration camps for "re-education." Under a series of sterilization laws, Nazi medical workers forcibly sterilized some 400,000 German citizens, mainly "asocials" or the "hereditarily ill," so their "degenerate blood" would not pollute the "Aryan race." The eugenics campaign reached a crescendo in 1938, when the authorities initiated a coldhearted euthanasia program—dubbed "mercy killing" by Nazi physicians and administrators—and systematically murdered about 70,000 Germans with chronic disabilities.

From the beginning, German Jews were a special target of Nazi racial persecution. Anti-Jewish propaganda was ever present in Nazi Germany. Ugly posters of stereotypical Jews; feature films and documentaries about the Jewish "menace"; signs in shop windows, banks, and parks forbidding Jewish entry—all and more were used to stigmatize German Jews. Such means were backed up with harsh legal oppression.

Shortly after they took power, Nazi authorities issued the Professional Civil Service Restoration Act, which banned Jews from working in government jobs; by 1934 many Jewish lawyers, doctors, professors, civil servants, and musicians had been summarily dismissed from their jobs. In 1935 the infamous Nuremberg Laws classified as Jewish anyone having three or more Jewish grandparents, outlawed marriage and sexual relations between Jews and those defined as German, and deprived Jews of all rights of citizenship. Conversion to Christianity and abandonment of the Jewish faith made no difference.

In late 1938 the assault on the Jews accelerated. During a well-organized wave of violence known as Kristallnacht (or the Night of Broken Glass pogrom), Nazi gangs smashed windows and looted over 7,000 Jewish-owned shops, destroyed many homes, burned down over 200 synagogues, and killed dozens of Jews. German Jews were then rounded up and made to pay for the damage. By 1939 some 300,000 of Germany's 500,000 Jews had emigrated, sacrificing almost all their property to escape persecution. Some Germans privately opposed these outrages, but most went along or looked the other way. Historians still debate the degree to which this lack of opposition expressed popular anti-Semitism. In any case, it revealed widespread support for Hitler's government.

Popular Support for National Socialism

Why did millions of ordinary Germans back a brutally repressive, racist regime? A combination of coercion and reward enlisted popular support for the racial state. Using the secret police and the growing concentration camp system in a reign of ruthless terror, the regime persecuted its political and "racial" enemies. Yet for the large majority of ordinary German citizens who were not Jews, Communists, or members of other targeted groups, Hitler's government brought new opportunities. The German "master race" clearly benefited from Nazi policies and programs. Even the creation of demonized outsider groups probably contributed to feelings of national unity and support for the Hitler regime.

Moreover, Hitler had promised the masses economic recovery, and he delivered. The Nazi state launched a large public works program to help pull Germany out of the depression. Work began on super-highways, offices, gigantic sports stadiums, and public housing, which created jobs and instilled pride in national recovery. By 1938 unemployment had fallen to 2 percent, and there was a shortage of workers. Between 1932 and 1938 the standard of living for the average worker increased moderately. Business profits rose sharply.

The persecution of Jews brought substantial benefits to ordinary Germans as well. As Jews were forced out of their jobs and compelled to sell their homes and businesses, Germans stepped in to take their place in a process known as Aryanization (named after the “Aryan master race” prized by the Nazis for their supposedly pure German blood). For millions of so-called Aryans, a rising standard of living—at whatever ethical price—was tangible evidence that Nazi promises were more than show and propaganda.

Economic recovery was accompanied by a wave of social and cultural innovation intended to construct what Nazi propagandists called the *Volksgemeinschaft* (FOLKS-ge-MINE-shaft)—a “people’s community” for racially pure Germans. The party set up mass organizations to spread Nazi ideology and enlist volunteers for the Nazi cause. Millions of Germans joined the Hitler Youth, the League of German Women, and the German Labor Front. Mass rallies, such as annual May Day celebrations and Nazi Party conventions in Nuremberg, brought together thousands of participants. Glowing reports on such events in the Nazi-controlled press brought the message home to millions more.

As the economy recovered, the government also proudly touted a glittering array of inexpensive and enticing people’s products. Items such as the Volkswagen (the “People’s Car”) were intended to link individuals’ desire for consumer goods to the collective ideology of the “people’s community.” (See “Evaluating Visual Evidence: Nazi Propaganda and Consumer Goods,” page 850.) Though such programs faltered as the state increasingly focused on rearmament for the approaching war, they suggested to all that the regime was working hard to improve German living standards.

Women played a special role in the Nazi state. Promising to “liberate women from women’s liberation,” Nazi ideologues championed a return to traditional family values. They outlawed abortion, discouraged women from holding jobs or obtaining higher education, and glorified domesticity and motherhood. Women were cast as protectors of the hearth and home and were instructed to raise young boys and girls in accordance with Nazi ideals. In the later 1930s, facing labor shortages, the Nazis had to reluctantly reverse course and encourage women to enter the labor force. Whatever the employment situation, the millions of women enrolled in Nazi mass organizations, which organized charity drives and other social programs, experienced a sense of freedom and community in these public activities.

Nazi propagandists continually played up the supposed accomplishments of the regime. Economic growth, the vision of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, national pride in recovery, and feelings of belonging created

Mothers in the Fatherland Nazi ideologues promoted strictly defined gender roles for men and women, and the Nazi state implemented a variety of social programs to encourage “racially correct” women to stay home and raise “Aryan” children. This colorful poster portrays the joy of motherhood and calls for donations to the Mother and Child division of the National Socialist People’s Welfare office. A woman who had four children was awarded the bronze Cross of Honor for the German Mother (left). The medal came with a letter of appreciation signed by Hitler. (medal: Private Collection/Peter Newark Military Pictures/Bridgeman Images; poster: akg-images)



by acts of racial exclusion led many Germans to support the regime. Hitler himself remained popular with broad sections of the population well into the war.

Not all Germans supported Hitler, however, and a number of groups actively resisted him after 1933. But opponents of the Nazis were never unified, which helps explain their lack of success. Furthermore, the regime harshly clamped down on dissidents: tens of thousands of political enemies were imprisoned, and thousands were executed. After Communists

THINKING LIKE A HISTORIAN

Normalizing Eugenics and “Racial Hygiene” in Nazi Germany

The Nazi regime issued a number of laws and regulations that institutionalized racial eugenics, including the Civil Service Restoration Act (1933) and the Nuremberg Laws (1935). Notions of “racial hygiene” also penetrated the very fabric of everyday life in the Third Reich. What means did Nazi supporters use to teach Germans that racial engineering was legitimate and even desirable?

1 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle). The dictator of the Nazi state explained the importance of racial education in his infamous political manifesto, first published in 1925.

If, as the first task of the State in the service and for the welfare of its nationality we recognize the preservation, care, and development of the best racial elements, it is natural that this care must not only extend to the birth of every little national and racial comrade, but that it must educate the young sapling to become a valuable link in the chain of future reproduction.

2 Joseph Goebbels, party rally speech. Propaganda Minister Goebbels sums up his view of welfare benefits in a 1938 speech, delivered to functionaries working in the Nazi welfare agency.

Our starting point is not the individual, and we do not subscribe to the view that one should feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, or clothe the naked—those are not our objectives. Our objectives are entirely different. They can be put most crisply in the sentence: we must have a healthy people [*Volk*] in order to prevail in the world.



(Akg+images)

3 An anti-Semitic children’s book. In this scene from a notorious 1936 anti-Semitic children’s book, blond-haired “Aryan” schoolchildren laugh and jeer as a Jewish schoolteacher and a group of Jewish students are forcibly ejected from a German grade school. The portrayal of the Jewish teacher and students draws on the most ugly racist stereotypes. Approximately 100,000 copies of the book were printed by a Nazi publisher, and it was used in many German schoolrooms.

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

1. In Source 1, why does Hitler emphasize the importance of education for the development of “the best racial elements”?
2. Review Goebbels’s statement on the relationship between the individual and the “people” in Source 2. How do his ideas, and those expressed in Sources 5 and 6, challenge the rationale behind Christian charity and/or liberal-democratic ideals of individual human rights?
3. How do Sources 3–6 bring Nazi assumptions about “racial hygiene” to ordinary Germans?
4. The evidence presented here is “top down”—it was created by propagandists who supported the Nazis’ racial ideas. Given these limitations, how can historians tackle the question of reception? Can we really know what ordinary people thought about these sources?

So würde es enden

Qualitativer Bevölkerungsabstieg bei zu schwacher Fortpflanzung der höherwertigen.



(bpk, Bildagentur/Art Resource, NY)

- 4 A lesson in racial biology.** In 1935 educator Jakob Graf wrote a series of exercises designed to teach young students to identify a person's "racial soul" by observing his or her habits and physical characteristics.

How We Can Learn to Recognize a Person's Race

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Summarize the spiritual characteristics of the individual races.
2. Collect from stories, essays, and poems examples of ethnological illustrations. Underline those terms which describe the type and mode of the expression of the soul.
3. What are the expressions, gestures, and movements which allow us to make conclusions as to the attitude of the racial soul?
4. Determine also the physical features which go hand in hand with the specific racial soul characteristics of the individual figures.
5. Try to discover the intrinsic nature of the racial soul through the characters in stories and poetical works in terms of their inner attitude. Apply this mode of observation to persons in your own environment.
6. Collect propaganda posters and caricatures for your race book and arrange them according to a racial scheme. . . .
7. Collect from illustrated magazines, newspapers, etc., pictures of great scholars, statesmen, artists, and others who distinguish themselves by their special accomplishments (for example, in economic life, politics, sport). Determine the preponderant race and admixture, according to physical characteristics. Repeat this exercise with the pictures of great men of all nations and times.
8. . . .
9. Observe people whose special racial features have drawn your attention, also with respect to their bearing when moving or when speaking. Observe their expressions and gestures.
10. Observe the Jew: In his way of walking, his bearing, gestures, and movements when talking.
11. What strikes you about the way a Jew talks and sings?
12. What are the occupations engaged in by the Jews of your acquaintance?
13. What are the occupations in which Jews are not to be found? Explain this phenomenon on the basis of the character of the Jew's soul.

- 5 Envisioning "racial decline."** Visitors to the 1935 Wonders of Life eugenics exposition in Berlin could view this poster titled "The Qualitative Decline of the Population Due to Weak Reproduction Rates Among the Highly Valued." The poster graphs population rates, using the symbol of a chronically disabled "Lowly Valued" man that grows to tower over the "Highly Valued" figure. The text explains that "This Is How It Will End" after 120 years if each "Lowly Valued" family continues to have four children while each "Highly Valued" family has only two.

- 6 A lesson in mathematics.** A great variety of Nazi propaganda materials—including feature films, traveling exhibits, and these 1936 math exercises—brought home the message that the chronically ill and handicapped were an expensive and ultimately unnecessary burden on German society.

Question 95: The construction of a lunatic asylum costs 6 million RM [Reich Marks]. How many houses at 15,000 RM each could have been built for that amount? . . .

Question 97: To keep a mentally ill person costs approx. 4 RM per day, a cripple 5.50 RM, a criminal 3.5 RM. Many civil servants receive only 4 RM per day, white-collar employees barely 3.5 RM, unskilled workers not even 2 RM per head for their families.

(a) Illustrate these figures with a diagram.

According to conservative estimates there are 300,000 mentally ill, epileptics, etc., in care.

(b) How much do these people cost to keep in total, at a cost of 4 RM per head?

(c) How many marriage loans at 1,000 RM each . . . could be granted from this money?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Historians have often argued that victims of Nazi racial policy and the Holocaust—Jews, homosexuals, people with chronic mental illness, and others considered "less worthy"—were subjected to processes of dehumanization before they were persecuted or even murdered. Using the sources above, along with what you have learned in class and in this chapter, write a short essay that outlines this process. What are the most important eugenic ideas, and how are they "normalized"—made acceptable to ordinary people—in Nazi propaganda?

EVALUATING VISUAL EVIDENCE

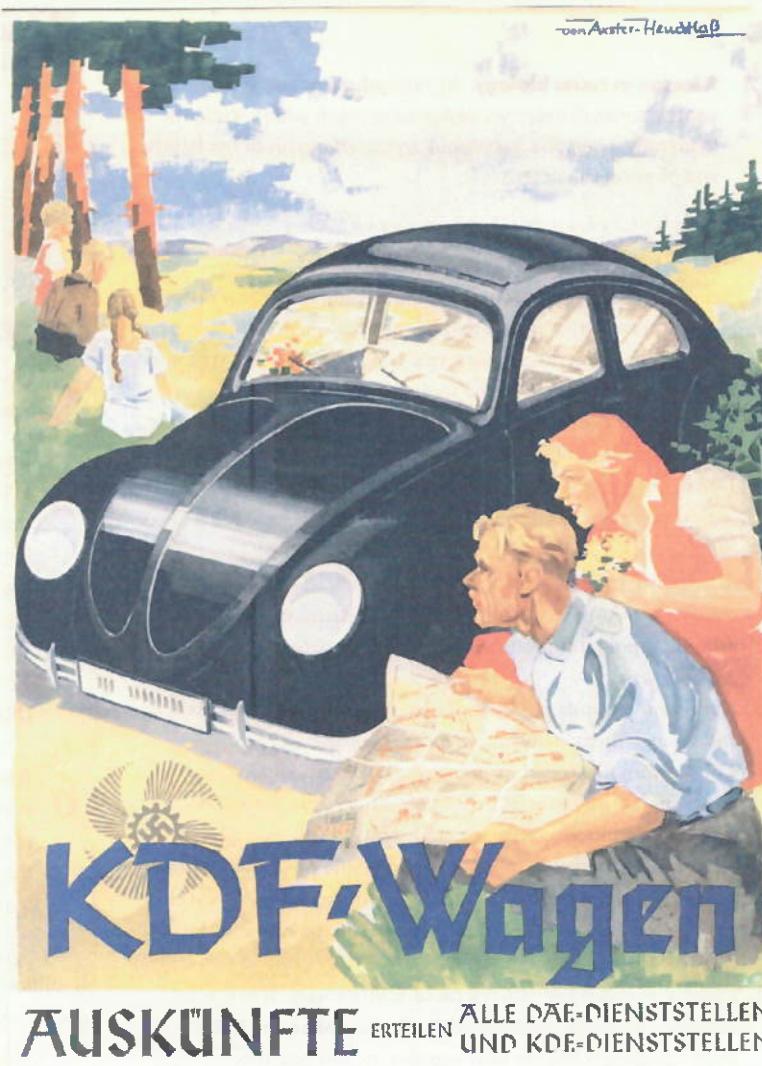
Nazi Propaganda and Consumer Goods

It is easy to forget that the Volkswagens that zip around America's streets today got their start in Hitler's Germany, introduced as part of a Nazi campaign to provide inexpensive but attractive consumer goods to the *Volk* (people). Marketed to Aryans, but not to Jews and other "racial enemies," the Volkswagen (or People's Car) symbolized a return to German prosperity. As the advertisement shown here suggests, the appeal of material abundance was a central plank in Nazi propaganda. Yet despite Hitler's promise that a "new, happier age" would "make the German people rich," many of the consumer goods promoted by the Nazi state remained out of reach of ordinary Germans.*

EVALUATE THE EVIDENCE

1. What does this image suggest about everyday life in Nazi Germany? What does it reveal about the aspirations of the German people for a good life in the 1930s?
2. Consider why both the government and commercial businesses attached the prefix *Volk*, or "people," to products like the Volkswagen. What larger message did these two groups seek to convey through the use of this prefix?
3. How is this advertising image similar to advertisements today? What makes it different?

*Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 59.



and socialists were smashed by the SS system, a second group of opponents arose in the Catholic and Protestant churches. Their efforts, however, were directed primarily at preserving religious life, not at overthrowing Hitler. In 1938 and again during the war, a few high-ranking army officers, who feared the consequences of Hitler's reckless aggression, plotted against him, but their plans were unsuccessful.

■ appeasement The British policy toward Germany prior to World War II that aimed at granting Hitler's territorial demands, including western Czechoslovakia, in order to avoid war.

Aggression and Appeasement

The Nazification of German society fulfilled only part of the Nazi agenda. While building the "people's community," the regime aggressively pursued territorial expansion for the supposedly superior German race. Although Germany withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933, at first Hitler carefully camouflaged his expansionist goals. Germany was still militarily weak, and the Nazi leader loudly proclaimed his peaceful intentions. Then in March 1935 Hitler declared that Germany would no longer abide by the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles.

He established a military draft and began to build up the German army. France and Great Britain protested strongly and warned against future aggressive actions.

Any hope of a united front against Hitler quickly collapsed. Britain adopted a policy of **appeasement**, granting Hitler what he demanded to avoid war. British appeasement, which practically dictated French policy, was largely motivated by the pacifism of a population still horrified by the memory of the First World War. As in Germany, many powerful conservatives in Britain underestimated Hitler. They believed that Soviet communism was the real danger and that Hitler could be used to stop it. Such strong anticommunist feelings made an alliance between the Western powers and Stalin against Hitler highly unlikely.

When Hitler suddenly marched his armies into the demilitarized Rhineland in March 1936, brazenly

violating the treaties of Versailles and Locarno (Map 27.2), Britain refused to act. France could do little without British support. Emboldened, Hitler moved ever more aggressively, enlisting powerful allies in international affairs. Italy and Germany established the Rome-Berlin Axis in 1936. Japan, also under the rule of a Fascist dictatorship, joined the Axis alliance that same year.

At the same time, Germany and Italy intervened in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), where their military aid helped General Francisco Franco's revolutionary Fascist movement defeat the democratically elected republican government. Republican Spain's only official aid in the fight against Franco came from the Soviet Union, for public opinion in Britain and especially in France was hopelessly divided on whether to intervene.



MAP 27.2 The Growth of Nazi Germany, 1933–1939 Until March 1939 Hitler's conquests brought ethnic Germans into the Nazi state; then he turned on the Slavic and Jewish peoples he had always hated. He stripped Czechoslovakia of its independence and attacked Poland in September 1939.



A Republican Militia in the Spanish Civil War The enthusiasm of the republican forces of the democratically elected government of Spain could not overcome the rebel Fascist armies of Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Once in power, Franco ruled over a repressive dictatorial state in Spain until his death in 1975. Women combatants like the *militicianas* pictured here, carrying rifles with their male comrades, made a significant contribution to the republican cause. (Universal History Archive/Getty Images)



"Peace for Our Time" British prime minister Neville Chamberlain speaks at the London airport after a meeting with Adolf Hitler in Munich in September 1938. In return for acceptance of the German annexation of the Czech Sudetenland, Hitler promised to halt foreign aggression, and Chamberlain famously announced that he had negotiated "peace for our time" with the Nazi leader. Less than a year later, Germany invaded Poland and Europe was at war. (Central Press/Getty Images)

In late 1937 Hitler moved forward with plans to seize Austria and Czechoslovakia as the first step in his long-contemplated drive for living space in the east. By threatening Austria with invasion, Hitler forced the Austrian chancellor to put local Nazis in control of the government in March 1938. The next day, in the Anschluss (annexation), German armies moved in unopposed, and Austria became part of Greater Germany (see Map 27.2).

Simultaneously, Hitler demanded that territories inhabited mostly by ethnic Germans in western Czechoslovakia—the Sudetenland—be ceded to Nazi Germany. Though democratic Czechoslovakia was allied with France and the Soviet Union and prepared to defend itself, appeasement triumphed again. In negotiations British prime minister Neville Chamberlain and the French agreed with Hitler that Germany should immediately take over the Sudetenland. Returning to London from the Munich Conference in September 1938, Chamberlain told cheering crowds that he had secured "peace with honor [and] peace for our time." Sold out by the Western powers, Czechoslovakia gave in.

Chamberlain's peace was short-lived. In March 1939 Hitler's armies invaded and occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia. The effect on Western public opinion

was electrifying. This time, there was no possible ethnic rationale for Nazi aggression, since Hitler was seizing ethnic Czechs and Slovaks—not Germans—as captive peoples. When Hitler next used the question of German minorities in Danzig as a pretext to confront Poland, a suddenly militant Chamberlain declared that Britain and France would fight if Hitler attacked his eastern neighbor. Hitler did not take these warnings seriously.

In August 1939, in an about-face that stunned the world, sworn enemies Hitler and Stalin signed a nonaggression pact that paved the road to war. Each

dictator promised to remain neutral if the other became involved in open hostilities. An attached secret protocol ruthlessly divided Poland, the Baltic nations, Finland, and a part of Romania into German and Soviet spheres of influence. Stalin agreed to the pact because he remained distrustful of Western intentions and because Hitler offered immediate territorial gain.

For Hitler, everything was now set. On September 1, 1939, German armies and warplanes smashed into Poland from three sides. Two days later, Britain and France, finally true to their word, declared war on Germany. The Second World War had begun.

What explains the success and then defeat of Germany and Japan during World War II?

Nazi Germany's unlimited ambition unleashed an apocalyptic cataclysm. German armies quickly conquered much of western and eastern Europe, while the Japanese overran much of Southeast Asia. This reckless aggression brought together a coalition of unlikely but powerful allies determined to halt the Fascist advance: Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union. After years of slaughter and genocide that decimated much of Europe and East Asia, this "Grand Alliance" decisively defeated the Axis powers.

German Victories in Europe

Using planes, tanks, and trucks in the first example of a blitzkrieg, or "lightning war," Hitler's armies crushed Poland in four weeks. While the Soviet Union took its part of the booty—the eastern half of Poland and the independent Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia—French and British armies prepared their defenses in the west.

In spring 1940 the Nazi lightning war struck again. After Germany occupied Denmark, Norway, and Holland, motorized columns broke into France through southern Belgium, split the Franco-British forces, and trapped the entire British army on the French beaches of Dunkirk. By heroic efforts, the British withdrew their troops—although equipment could not be saved. Soon after, France was taken by the Nazis. By July 1940 Hitler ruled practically all of continental Europe. Italy was a German ally. Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria joined the Axis powers, and the Soviet Union, Spain, and Sweden were friendly neutrals. Only the Balkans and Britain, the nation led by the uncompromising Winston Churchill (1874–1965), remained unconquered.

To prepare for an amphibious invasion of Britain, Germany sought to gain control of the air. In the Battle of Britain, which began in July 1940, up to a thousand German planes a day attacked British airfields and key factories, dueling with British defenders high in the skies. Losses were heavy on both sides. In September 1940 Hitler turned from military objectives to indiscriminate bombing of British cities in an attempt to break British morale. British aircraft factories increased production, and, encouraged by the words of the ever-determined Churchill, the heavily bombed



German Bomber over Poland Germany opened its September 1939 invasion of Poland, one week after the signing of the German-Soviet nonaggression pact, by subjecting the nation to repeated bombardment. Here a German airman aims bombs at a Polish city from the cockpit of an airplane in October 1939. By the end of the war, both sides had engaged in massive air campaigns against civilian targets, taking the lives of hundreds of thousands of noncombatants and leading finally to the use of the atomic bomb against Japan in 1945. (Galerie Bilderwelt/Getty Images)

- Axis powers and their allies
- Occupied by Germany and its allies
- Allied powers and their allies
- Neutral nations
- Boundary of Greater Germany
- Major battle



MAP 27.3 World War II in Europe and Africa, 1939–1945

This map shows the extent of Hitler's empire before the Battle of Stalingrad in late 1942 and the subsequent advances of the Allies until Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945. Compare this map with Map 27.2 to trace the rise and fall of the Nazi empire over time.

ANALYZING THE MAP What was the first country conquered by Hitler (see Map 27.2)? Locate Germany's advance and retreat on the Russian front in December 1941, November 1942, spring 1944, and February 1945. How do these points compare to the position of British and American forces on the battlefield at similar points in time?

CONNECTIONS What implications might the battle lines on February 1945 have had for the postwar settlement in Europe?

people of London defiantly dug in. (See “Viewpoints: Oratory and Ideology in World War II,” page 856.) By October Britain was beating Germany three to one in the air war, and the Battle of Britain was over. Stymied there, the Nazi war machine invaded and occupied Greece and the Balkans.

Hitler now allowed his lifetime obsession of creating a vast eastern European empire ruled by the master race to dictate policy. In June 1941 he broke his pact with Stalin and launched German armies into the Soviet Union (Map 27.3). By October most of Ukraine had been conquered, Leningrad was surrounded, and Moscow was besieged. But the Soviets did not collapse, and when a severe winter struck German armies outfitted only in summer uniforms, the invaders retreated. Nevertheless, Hitler and his allies now ruled over a European empire stretching from eastern Europe to the English Channel. Hitler, the Nazi leadership, and the loyal German army were positioned to accelerate the construction of their so-called New Order in Europe.

Europe Under Nazi Occupation

Hitler’s **New Order** was based firmly on the guiding principle of National Socialism: racial imperialism. Occupied peoples were treated according to their place in the Nazi racial hierarchy. All were subject to harsh policies dedicated to ethnic cleansing and the plunder of resources for the Nazi war effort.

Within the New Order, the “Nordic” peoples — the Dutch, Danes, and Norwegians — received preferential treatment, for the Germans believed they were related to the Aryan master race. In Holland, Denmark, and Norway, the Nazis established puppet governments of various kinds. Though many people hated the conquerors, the Nazis found willing collaborators who ruled in accord with German needs. France was divided into two parts. The German army occupied

Vichy France, 1940



Nazi Occupation of Poland and East-Central Europe, 1939–1942



the north, including Paris. The southeast remained nominally independent. There the aging First World War general Marshal Henri-Philippe Pétain formed a new French government — the Vichy (VIH-shee) regime — that adopted many aspects of National Socialist ideology and willingly placed French Jews in the hands of the Nazis.

In all conquered territories, the Nazis used a variety of techniques to enrich Germany and support the war effort. Occupied nations were forced to pay for the costs of the war and for the occupation itself, and the price was high. Nazi administrators stole goods and money from local Jews, set currency exchanges at favorable rates, and forced occupied peoples to accept worthless wartime scrip. Soldiers were encouraged not only to steal but also to purchase goods at cheap exchange rates and send them home. A flood of plunder reached Germany, helping maintain high living standards and preserving home-front morale well into the war. Nazi victory, furthermore, placed national Jewish populations across Europe under German control, allowing the mass murder of Europe’s Jews.

In central and eastern Europe, the war and German rule were far more ruthless and deadly than in the west. From the start, the Nazi leadership had cast the war in the east as one of annihilation. The Nazis now set out to build a vast colonial empire where Jews would be exterminated and Poles, Ukrainians, and Russians would be enslaved and forced to die out. According to the plans, ethnic German peasants would resettle the resulting abandoned lands. In pursuit of such goals, large parts of western Poland were incorporated into Germany. Another part of

Poland was placed under the rule of a merciless civilian administration.

New Order Hitler’s program based on racial imperialism, which gave preferential treatment to the “Nordic” peoples; the French, an “inferior” Latin people, occupied a middle position; and Slavs and Jews were treated harshly as “subhumans.”

VIEWPOINTS

Oratory and Ideology in World War II

In times of intense warfare, political leaders do their utmost to convince the nation's citizens to fight on to victory. In "Their Finest Hour," British prime minister Winston Churchill called on the people to defend Great Britain from German attack. The speech was given in the House of Commons on June 18, 1940, just after the British defeat at Dunkirk and just at the beginning of the Battle of Britain. Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels's speech "Storm Break Loose," delivered to a sympathetic crowd at the Berlin Sports Palace on February 18, 1943, followed the critical German defeat at the Battle of Stalingrad.

Winston Churchill, "Their Finest Hour"

I cannot accept the drawing of any distinctions between Members of the present Government. It was formed at a moment of crisis in order to unite all the Parties and all sections of opinion. It has received the almost unanimous support of both Houses of Parliament. Its Members are going to stand together, and, subject to the authority of the House of Commons, we are going to govern the country and fight the war. . . .

[T]he Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire.

The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this Island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands.

But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science.

Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say,

"This was their finest hour."

Joseph Goebbels, "Nation, Rise Up, and Let the Storm Break Loose!"

The German people, raised, educated and disciplined by National Socialism, can bear the whole truth. It knows

the gravity of the situation, and its leadership can therefore demand the necessary hard measures, yes even the hardest measures. . . .

The goal of Bolshevism is Jewish world revolution. They want to bring chaos to the Reich and Europe, using the resulting hopelessness and desperation to establish their international, Bolshevik-concealed capitalist tyranny.

I do not need to say what that would mean for the German people. A Bolshevization of the Reich would mean the liquidation of our entire intelligentsia and leadership, and the descent of our workers into Bolshevik-Jewish slavery. . . . [T]he storm from the East that breaks against our lines daily in increasing strength is nothing other than a repetition of the historical devastation that has so often in the past endangered our part of the world. . . .

This explains, by the way, our consistent Jewish policies. We see Jewry as a direct threat to every nation. . . . Germany . . . has no intention of bowing before this threat, but rather intends to take the most radical measures, if necessary, in good time. . . .

I am firmly convinced that the German people have been deeply moved by the blow of fate at Stalingrad. It has looked into the face of hard and pitiless war. It knows now the awful truth, and is resolved to follow the Führer through thick and thin. . . .

We promise you, we promise the front, we promise the Führer, that we will mold together the homeland into a force on which the Führer and his fighting soldiers can rely on absolutely and blindly. We pledge to do all in our life and work that is necessary for victory. . . .

Now, people rise up and let the storm break loose!

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Compare and contrast the two speeches. What are the most obvious similarities and differences? What threats and sources of strength do Churchill and Goebbels evoke?
2. How do the assertions made in these two famous speeches reflect the political values of Great Britain and Nazi Germany?

Sources: Winston Churchill, "Their Finest Hour," June 18, 1940. Copyright © The Estate of Winston S. Churchill. Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown Ltd. on behalf of The Estate of Winston S. Churchill; "Goebbels' 1943 Speech on Total War," ed. and trans. Randall Bytwerk, Calvin College Propaganda Archive, <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb36.htm>. Reprinted by permission of Randall Bytwerk.

With the support of military commanders, Himmler's elite SS corps now implemented a program of destruction and annihilation to create a "mass settlement space" for racially pure Germans. Across the east, the Nazi armies destroyed cities and factories, stole crops and farm animals, and subjected conquered peoples to forced starvation and mass murder. Nazi occupation in the east destroyed the lives of millions.⁶

Small but determined underground resistance groups fought back against these atrocities. They were hardly unified. Communists and socialists often disagreed with more centrist or nationalist groups on long-term goals and short-term tactics. In Yugoslavia, for example, Communist and royalist military resistance groups attacked the Germans, but also each other. Poland, under German occupation longer than any other nation, had the most determined and well-organized resistance. The Nazis had closed all Polish universities and outlawed national newspapers, but the Poles organized secret classes and maintained a thriving underground press. Underground members of the Polish Home Army, led by the government in exile in London, passed intelligence about German operations to the Allies and committed sabotage. The famous French resistance undertook similar actions, as did groups in Italy, Greece, Russia, and the Netherlands.

The resistance presented a real challenge to the Nazi New Order, and the German response was swift and deadly. The Nazi army and the SS tortured captured resistance members and executed hostages in reprisal for attacks. Responding to actions undertaken by resistance groups, the German army murdered the male populations of Lidice (Czechoslovakia) and Oradour (France) and leveled the entire towns. Despite such reprisals, Nazi occupiers were never able to eradicate popular resistance to their rule.

The Holocaust

The ultimate abomination of Nazi racism was the condemnation of all European Jews and other peoples considered racially inferior to extreme racial persecution and then annihilation in the **Holocaust**, a great spasm of racially inspired mass murder.

As already described, the Nazis began to use social, legal, and economic means to persecute Jews and other "undesirable" groups immediately after taking power. Between 1938 and 1940 persecution turned deadly in the Nazi euthanasia (mercy killing) campaign, an important step toward genocide. Just as Germany began the war, as already mentioned, some 70,000 people with physical and mental disabilities were forced into special hospitals, barracks, and camps. Deemed by Nazi administrators to be "unworthy lives" who might "pollute" the German race,

they were murdered in cold blood. The victims were mostly ethnic Germans, and the euthanasia campaign was stopped after church leaders and ordinary families spoke out. The staff involved took what they learned in this program to the extermination camps the Nazis would soon build in the east (Map 27.4).

The German victory over Poland in 1939 brought some 3 million Jews under Nazi control. Jews in German-occupied territories were soon forced to move into urban districts termed "ghettos." In walled-off ghettos in cities large and small—two of the most important were in Warsaw and Lodz—hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews lived in crowded and unsanitary conditions, without real work or adequate sustenance. Over 500,000 people died under these conditions.

The racial violence reached new extremes when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Three military death squads known as Special Task Forces (*Einsatzgruppen*) and other military units followed the advancing German armies. They moved systematically from town to town, shooting Jews and other target populations. The victims of these mobile killing units were often forced to dig their own graves in local woods or fields before they were shot. In this way the German armed forces murdered some 2 million civilians.

In late 1941 Hitler and the Nazi leadership, in some still-debated combination, ordered the SS to implement the mass murder of all Jews in Europe. What the Nazi leadership called the "final solution of the Jewish question" had begun. The Germans set up an industrialized killing machine that remains unparalleled, with an extensive network of concentration camps, factory complexes, and railroad transport lines to imprison and murder Jews and other so-called undesirables and to exploit their labor before they died. In the occupied east, the surviving residents of the ghettos were loaded onto trains and taken to camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, the best known of the Nazi killing centers, where over 1 million people—the vast majority of them Jews—were murdered in gas chambers. Some few were put to work as expendable laborers. The Jews of Germany and occupied western and central Europe were rounded up, put on trains, and sent to the camps. Even after it was quite clear that Germany would lose the war, the killing continued.

Given the scope and organization of Nazi persecution, there was little opportunity for successful Jewish resistance, yet some Jews did evade or challenge the killing machine. Some brave Jews went underground or masqueraded as Christian to escape Nazi roundups; others fled to rural areas and joined bands of anti-Nazi

Holocaust The systematic effort of the Nazi state to exterminate all European Jews and other groups deemed racially inferior during the Second World War.



A “Transport” Arrives at Auschwitz Upon arrival at Auschwitz in May 1944, Jews from Subcarpathian Rus, a rural district on the border of Czechoslovakia and Ukraine, undergo a “selection” managed by Nazi officers and prisoners in striped uniforms. Camp guards will send the fittest people to the barracks, where they will probably soon die from forced labor under the most atrocious conditions. The aged, ill, very young, or otherwise infirm will be murdered immediately in the Auschwitz gas chambers. The tower over the main gate to the camp, which today opens onto a vast museum complex, is visible in the background.

(Galerie Bilderwelt/Getty Images)

partisans. Jews also organized secret resistance groups in ghettos and concentration camps. When news of pending deportation to the Treblinka killing center reached the Jews still living in the Warsaw Ghetto in January 1943, poorly armed underground resistance groups opened fire on German troops. The Ghetto Uprising, with sporadic fighting dominated by the vastly superior German forces, lasted until May, when the last Jews were taken to extermination camps and the ghetto was razed to the ground. In Auschwitz itself, in October 1944, a group of Jewish prisoners revolted and burned down one of the camp’s crematoriums before all were captured and summarily executed.

The murderous attack on European Jews was the ultimate monstrosity of Nazi “racial hygiene” and racial imperialism. By 1945 the Nazis had killed about 6 million Jews and some 5 million other Europeans, including millions of ethnic Poles and Russian POWs. (See “Individuals in Society: Primo Levi,” page 860.) Who was responsible for this terrible crime? Historians continue to debate this critical question. Some lay the

guilt on Hitler and the Nazi leadership, arguing that ordinary Germans had little knowledge of the extermination camps or were forced to participate by Nazi terror and totalitarian control. Other scholars conclude that far more Germans knew about and were at best indifferent to the fate of “racial inferiors.” The question remains: what inspired those who actually worked in the killing machine—the “desk murderers” in Berlin who sent trains to the east, the soldiers who shot Jews in the Polish forests, the guards at Auschwitz? Some historians believe that widely shared anti-Semitism led “ordinary Germans” to become Hitler’s “willing executioners.” Others argue that heightened peer pressure, the desire to advance in the ranks, and the need to prove one’s strength under the most brutalizing wartime violence turned average Germans into reluctant killers. The conditioning of racist Nazi propaganda clearly played a role. Whatever the motivation, numerous Germans were somehow prepared to join the SS ideologues and perpetrate ever-greater crimes, from mistreatment to arrest to mass murder.⁷



MAP 27.4 The Holocaust, 1941–1945 The leaders of Nazi Germany established an extensive network of ghettos and concentration and extermination camps to persecute their political opponents and those people deemed “racially undesirable” by the regime. The death camps, where the Nazi SS systematically murdered millions of European Jews, Soviet prisoners of war, and others, were located primarily in Nazi-occupied territories in eastern Europe, but the conditions in the concentration camps within Germany’s borders were almost as brutal.

Japanese Empire and the War in the Pacific

The racist war of annihilation in Europe was matched by racially inspired warfare in East Asia. In response to political divisions and economic crisis, a Fascist government had taken control of Japan in the 1930s. As in Germany and Italy, the Japanese government was highly nationalistic and militaristic, and it was deeply committed to imperial expansion. According to Japanese race theory, the Asian races were far superior to Western ones. In speeches, schools, and newspapers, ultranationalists eagerly voiced the extreme anti-Western views that had risen in the 1920s and 1930s. They

glorified the warrior virtues of honor and sacrifice and proclaimed that Japan would liberate East Asia from Western colonialists.

Japan soon acted on its racial-imperial ambitions. In 1931 Japanese armies invaded and occupied Manchuria, a vast territory bordering northeastern China. In 1937 Japan brutally invaded China itself. Seeking to cement ties with the Fascist regimes of Europe, in 1940 the Japanese entered into a formal alliance with Italy and Germany, and in summer 1941 Japanese armies occupied southern portions of the French colony of Indochina (now Vietnam and Cambodia).

The goal was to establish what the Japanese called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Under the

INDIVIDUALS IN SOCIETY

Primo Levi

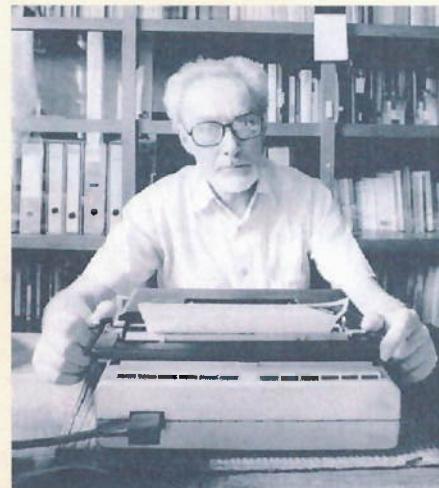
Most Jews deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau were murdered soon after arriving, but the Nazis used some prisoners as slave laborers, and a few of them survived. Primo Levi (1919–1987), one of these laborers, lived to become one of the most influential witnesses to the Holocaust.

Like much of Italy's small Jewish community, Levi's family belonged to the urban professional classes. Levi graduated from the University of Turin with highest honors in chemistry in 1941. Growing discrimination against Italian Jews led him to join the antifascist resistance two years later. Captured, he was deported to Auschwitz with 650 Italian Jews in February 1944. Stone-faced SS men picked 96 men, Levi among them, and 29 women from this group to work in labor camps; the rest were gassed upon arrival.

Levi and his fellow prisoners were kicked, punched, stripped, branded with tattoos, crammed into huts, and worked unmercifully. Hoping for some prisoner solidarity, Levi found only a desperate struggle of each against all and enormous status differences among prisoners. Many bewildered newcomers, beaten and demoralized by their bosses—the most privileged prisoners—collapsed and died. Others struggled to secure their own privileges, however small, because food rations and working conditions were so abominable that prisoners who were not bosses usually perished in two to three months.

Sensitive and noncombative, Levi found himself sinking into oblivion. But instead of joining the mass of the "drowned," he became one of the "saved"—a complicated surprise with moral implications that he would ponder all his life. As Levi explained in *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947), the usual road to salvation in the camps was some kind of collaboration with German power. Savage German criminals were released from prison to become brutal camp guards; non-Jewish political prisoners competed for jobs entitling them to better conditions; and, especially troubling for Levi, a few Jews plotted and struggled to become "bosses," who gained not only better rations but also the power of life and death over other Jewish prisoners.

Though not one of these Jewish bosses, Levi believed that he, like almost all survivors, had entered the "gray zone" of moral compromise. "Nobody can know for how long and under what trials his soul can resist before yielding or breaking," Levi wrote. "The harsher the oppression, the more widespread among the oppressed is the willingness, with all its infinite nuances and motivations, to collaborate." The camps



Primo Levi never stopped thinking, writing, and speaking about the Holocaust. (Gianni Giansanti/Getty Images)

held no saints, he believed: the Nazi system degraded its victims, forcing them to commit sometimes-bestial acts against their fellow prisoners in order to survive.

For Levi, salvation came from his education. Interviewed by a German technocrat for work in the camp's synthetic rubber program, Levi was chosen for this relatively easy labor because he spoke fluent German, including scientific terminology. Work in the warm camp laboratory offered Levi opportunities to pilfer equipment he could then trade to other prisoners for food and necessities. Levi also gained critical support from three prisoners who refused to do wicked and hateful acts. And he counted luck as essential for his survival: in the camp infirmary with scarlet fever in February 1945 as advancing Russian armies prepared to liberate the camp, Levi was not evacuated by the Nazis and shot to death like most Jewish prisoners.

After the war, Levi was haunted by the nightmare that the Holocaust would be ignored or forgotten. Ashamed that so many people whom he considered better than himself had perished, and wanting the world to understand the genocide in all its complexity so that people would never again tolerate such atrocities, he turned to writing about his experiences. Primo Levi, while revealing Nazi guilt, tirelessly grappled with his vision of individual responsibility and moral ambiguity in a hell designed to make the victims collaborate and persecute each other.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Describe Levi's experience at Auschwitz. What does he mean by the "gray zone"?
2. Will a vivid historical memory of the Holocaust help prevent future genocide?

*Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage, 1989), pp. 43, 60. See also Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity* (London: Collier Books, 1961). These powerful testimonies are highly recommended.

slogan “Asia for Asians,” Japanese propagandists maintained that this expansion would free Asians from hated Western imperialists. By promising to create a mutually advantageous union for long-term development, the Japanese tapped currents of nationalist sentiment, and most local populations were glad to see the Westerners go.

But the Co-Prosperity Sphere was a sham. Real power remained in the hands of the Japanese. They exhibited great cruelty toward civilian populations and prisoners of war, and they exploited local peoples for Japan’s wartime needs, arousing local populations against them. Nonetheless, the ability of the Japanese to defeat the Western colonial powers set a powerful example for national liberation groups in Asia, which would become important in the decolonization movement that followed World War II.

Japanese expansion from 1937 to 1941 evoked a sharp response from U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt, and Japan’s leaders came to believe that war with the United States was inevitable. After much debate, they decided to launch a surprise attack on the U.S. fleet based at Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese sank or crippled every American battleship, but by chance all the American aircraft carriers were at sea and escaped unharmed. Pearl Harbor brought the Americans into the war in a spirit of anger and revenge.

As the Americans mobilized for war, Japanese armies overran more European and American colonies in Southeast Asia. By May 1942 Japan controlled a vast empire (Map 27.5) and was threatening Australia. The Americans pushed back and engaged the Japanese in a series of hard-fought naval battles. In July 1943 the Americans and their Australian allies opened a successful island-hopping campaign that slowly forced Japan out of its conquered territories. The war in the Pacific was extremely brutal—a “war without mercy,” in the words of a leading American scholar—and soldiers on both sides committed atrocities. A product of spiraling violence, mutual hatred, and dehumanizing racial stereotypes, the fighting intensified as the United States moved toward Japan.⁸

The Grand Alliance and the “Hinge of Fate”

While the Nazis and the Japanese built their savage empires, Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union joined together in a military pact Churchill termed the Grand Alliance. This was a matter of circumstance more than of choice. It had taken the Japanese surprise attack to bring the isolationist United States into the war. Moreover, the British and Americans were determined opponents of Soviet communism, and disagreements between the Soviets

and the capitalist powers during the course of the war sowed mutual distrust. Stalin repeatedly urged Britain and the United States to open a second front in France to relieve pressure on Soviet forces, but Churchill and Roosevelt refused until the summer of 1944. Despite such tensions, the overriding goal of defeating the Axis powers brought together these reluctant allies.

In one area of agreement, the Grand Alliance concurred on a policy of “Europe first.” Only after Hitler was defeated would the Allies mount an all-out attack on Japan, the lesser threat. The Allies also agreed to concentrate on immediate military needs, postponing tough political questions about the eventual peace settlement that might have divided them. To further encourage mutual trust, the Allies adopted the principle of the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan. This policy cemented the Grand Alliance because it denied Hitler any hope of dividing his foes. It also meant that Soviet and Anglo-American armies would almost certainly be forced to invade and occupy all of Germany, and that Japan would fight to the bitter end.

The military resources of the Grand Alliance were awesome. The United States harnessed its vast industrial base to wage global war and in 1943 outproduced not only Germany, Italy, and Japan, but all the rest of the world combined. Great Britain became an impregnable floating fortress, a gigantic frontline staging area for a decisive blow to the heart of Germany. After a determined push, the Soviet Union’s military strength was so great that it might well have defeated Germany without Western help. Stalin drew heavily on the heroic resolve of the Soviet people, especially those in the central Russian heartland. Broad-based Russian nationalism, as opposed to narrow communist ideology, became a powerful unifying force in what the Soviet state called the Great Patriotic War of the Fatherland.

The combined might of the Allies forced back the Nazi armies on all fronts (see Map 27.3). At the Second Battle of El Alamein (el al-uh-MAYN) in October–November 1942, British forces decisively defeated combined German and Italian armies and halted the Axis penetration of North Africa. Winston Churchill called the battle the “hinge of fate” that opened the door to Allied victory. Shortly thereafter, an Anglo-American force landed in Morocco and Algeria. These French possessions, which were under the control of Pétain’s Vichy government, went over to the Allies. Fearful of an Allied invasion across the Mediterranean, German forces occupied Vichy France in November 1942, and the collaborationist French government effectively ceased to exist.

After driving the Axis powers out of North Africa, U.S. and British forces invaded Sicily in the summer of 1943 and mainland Italy that autumn. Mussolini



MAP 27.5 World War II in the Pacific In 1942 Japanese forces overran an enormous amount of territory, which the Allies slowly recaptured in a long, bitter struggle. As this map shows, Japan still held a large Asian empire in August 1945, when the unprecedented devastation of atomic warfare suddenly forced it to surrender.

was overthrown by a coup d'état, and the new Italian government publicly accepted unconditional surrender. In response, Nazi armies invaded and seized control of northern and central Italy, and German paratroopers rescued Mussolini in a daring raid and put him at the head of a puppet government. Facing stiff German resistance, the Allies battled their way slowly up the Italian peninsula. The Germans were clearly on the defensive.

The spring of 1943 brought crucial Allied victories at sea and in the air. In the first years of the war, German submarines had successfully attacked North Atlantic shipping, severely hampering the British war

effort. Later new antisubmarine technologies favored the Allies. Soon massive convoys of hundreds of ships were streaming across the Atlantic, bringing much-needed troops and supplies from the United States to Britain.

The German air force had never really recovered from its defeat in the Battle of Britain. With almost unchallenged air superiority, the United States and Britain now mounted massive bombing raids on German cities to maim industrial production and break civilian morale. By the war's end, hardly a German city of any size remained untouched, and many—including Dresden, Hamburg, and Cologne—lay in ruins.



Soviet Troops After the Battle of Stalingrad Triumphant Soviet soldiers march through the center of bomb-damaged Stalingrad after the end of the battle on February 2, 1943. In the background stands the destroyed department store that housed the headquarters of German Field Marshal von Paulus before his Sixth Army was surrounded and forced to surrender. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides lost their lives, and of the approximately 100,000 German prisoners taken by the Red Army, only about 5,000 returned home after the war. (Emmanuel Yevzerikhin/Getty Images)

Great Britain and the United States had made critical advances in the western theater, but the worst German defeats came at the hands of the Red Army on the eastern front. Although the Germans had almost captured the major cities of Moscow and Leningrad in early winter 1941, they were forced back by determined Soviet counterattacks. The Germans mounted a second and initially successful invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1942, but the campaign turned into a disaster. The downfall came at the **Battle of Stalingrad**, when in November 1942 the Soviets surrounded and systematically destroyed the entire German Sixth Army of 300,000 men. In January 1943 only 123,000 soldiers were left to surrender. Hitler, who had refused to allow a retreat, suffered a catastrophic defeat. For the first time, German public opinion turned decisively against the war. In summer 1943 the larger, better-equipped Soviet armies took the offensive and began to push the Germans back along the entire eastern front (see Map 27.3).

Allied Victory

The balance of power was now clearly in Allied hands, yet bitter fighting continued in Europe for almost two years. Germany, less fully mobilized for war in 1941 than Britain, stepped up its efforts. The German war industry, under the Nazi minister of armaments Albert Speer, put to work millions of prisoners of war and slave laborers from across occupied Europe. Between early 1942 and July 1944, German war production tripled despite heavy Anglo-American bombing.

German resistance against Hitler also failed to halt the fighting. An unsuccessful attempt by conservative army leaders to assassinate Hitler in July 1944 only brought increased repression by the fanatic Nazis who had taken over the government. Closely disciplined by the regime, frightened by the prospect of

■ Battle of Stalingrad A Russian victory over Germany in winter 1942–1943 and a major turning point in the war, which led to the ultimate defeat of the Germans in May 1945.



Nuclear Wasteland at Hiroshima Only a handful of buildings remain standing in the ruins of Hiroshima in September 1945. Fearing the costs of a prolonged ground and naval campaign against the Japanese mainland, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The bombings ended the war and opened the nuclear age. (AP Images)

unconditional surrender, and terrorized by Nazi propaganda that portrayed the advancing Russian armies as rapacious Slavic beasts, the Germans fought on with suicidal resolve.

On June 6, 1944, American and British forces under General Dwight Eisenhower landed on the beaches of Normandy, France, in history's greatest naval invasion. In a hundred dramatic days, more than 2 million men and almost half a million vehicles broke through the German lines and pushed inland. Rejecting proposals to strike straight at Berlin in a massive attack, Eisenhower moved forward cautiously on a broad front. Not until March 1945 did American troops cross the Rhine and enter Germany. By spring of 1945 the Allies had finally forced the Germans out of the Italian peninsula. That April, Mussolini was captured in northern Italy by Communist partisans and executed, along with his mistress and other Fascist leaders.

The Soviets, who had been advancing steadily since July 1943, reached the outskirts of Warsaw by August 1944. Anticipating German defeat, the Polish underground Home Army ordered an uprising, so that the Poles might take the city on their own and establish independence from the Soviets. The Warsaw Uprising was a tragic miscalculation. Citing military pressure, the Red Army refused to enter the city. Stalin and Soviet leaders thus allowed the Germans to destroy the Polish insurgents, a cynical move that paved the way for the establishment of a postwar Communist regime. Only after the decimated Home Army surrendered did the Red Army continue its advance. Warsaw lay in ruins, and between 150,000 and 200,000 Poles—mostly civilians—had lost their lives.

Over the next six months, the Soviets moved southward into Romania, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. In January 1945 the Red Army crossed Poland into Germany, and on April 26 it met American forces on

the Elbe River. The Allies had overtun Europe and closed their vise on Nazi Germany. As Soviet forces fought their way into Berlin, Hitler committed suicide, and on May 8 the remaining German commanders capitulated.

The war in the Pacific also drew to a close. Despite repeated U.S. victories through the summer of 1945, Japanese troops had continued to fight with enormous courage and determination. American commanders believed the invasion and conquest of Japan itself might cost 1 million American casualties and claim 10 to 20 million Japanese lives. In fact, Japan was almost helpless, its industry and dense, fragile wooden cities largely destroyed by intense American bombing. Yet the Japanese seemed determined to fight on, ready to die for a hopeless cause.

After much discussion at the upper levels of the U.S. government, American planes dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan on August 6 and 9, 1945. The mass bombing of cities and civilians, one of the terrible new practices of World War II, now ended in the final nightmare—unprecedented human destruction in a single blinding flash. On August 14, 1945, the Japanese announced their surrender. The Second World War, which had claimed the lives of more than 50 million soldiers and civilians, was over.

NOTES

- Quoted in S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 221–222.
- R. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934–1941* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 16–106; also M. Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: Free Press, 1995), pp. 227–270.
- Quoted in C. Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 227.
- Quoted in Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy*, p. 234.
- M. Burleigh and W. Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany, 1933–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- See, for example, the population statistics on the German occupation of Belarus in C. Gerlach, "German Economic Interests, Occupation Policy, and the Murder of the Jews in Belorussia, 1941–43," in *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, ed. U. Herbert (New York: Berghan Books, 2000), pp. 210–239. See also M. Allen, *The Business of Genocide: The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 270–285.
- D. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); for an alternate explanation, see C. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper, 1992).
- J. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).
- E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p. 21.



LOOKING BACK / LOOKING AHEAD

The first half of the twentieth century brought almost unimaginable violence and destruction, leading historian Eric Hobsbawm to label the era the “age of catastrophe.”⁹ Shaken by the rapid cultural change and economic collapse that followed the tragedy of World War I, many Europeans embraced the radical politics of communism and fascism. Some found appeal in visions of a classless society or a racially pure national community, and totalitarian leaders like Stalin and Hitler capitalized on these desires for social order, building dictatorial regimes that demanded total allegiance to an ideological vision. Even as these regimes rewarded supporters and promised ordinary people a new age, they violently repressed their enemies, real and imagined. The vision proved fatal: the great clash of ideologies that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s led to history’s most deadly war, killing millions and devastating large swaths of Europe and East Asia.

Only the reluctant Grand Alliance of the liberal United States and Great Britain with the Communist Soviet Union was able to defeat the Axis powers. After 1945 fascism was finished, discredited by total defeat and the postwar revelation of the Holocaust. To make sure, the Allies would occupy the lands of their former enemies. Rebuilding a devastated Europe proved a challenging but in the end manageable task: once recovery took off, the postwar decades brought an economic boom that led to levels of prosperity unimaginable in the interwar years. Maintaining an alliance between the capitalist West and the Communist East was something else. Trust quickly broke down. Europe would be divided into two hostile camps, and Cold War tensions between East and West would dominate European and world politics for the next forty years.

Make Connections

Think about the larger developments and continuities within and across chapters.

1. Historians continue to disagree on whether “totalitarianism” is an appropriate way to describe Communist and Fascist dictatorships in Europe. How would you define this term? Is it a useful label to describe state and society under Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler? Why is the debate over totalitarianism still important today?
2. Why would ordinary people support dictatorships that trampled on democracy, political freedoms, and civil rights?
3. Summarize the key issues in the origins of World War II and the key turning points in the war itself. Was political ideology the main driving force behind these events, or were other factors at play?

27 REVIEW & EXPLORE

Identify Key Terms

Identify and explain the significance of each item below.

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| totalitarianism (p. 832) | Black Shirts (p. 841) |
| Stalinism (p. 832) | Lateran Agreement (p. 842) |
| fascism (p. 832) | National Socialism (p. 843) |
| eugenics (p. 833) | Enabling Act (p. 845) |
| New Economic Policy (NEP) (p. 834) | appeasement (p. 851) |
| five-year plan (p. 836) | New Order (p. 855) |
| collectivization of agriculture (p. 837) | Holocaust (p. 857) |
| kulaks (p. 837) | Battle of Stalingrad (p. 863) |

Review the Main Ideas

Answer the section heading questions from the chapter.

1. What were the most important characteristics of Communist and Fascist ideologies? (p. 832)
2. How did Stalinism transform state and society in the Soviet Union? (p. 834)
3. What kind of government did Mussolini establish in Italy? (p. 841)
4. What policies did Nazi Germany pursue, and why did they appeal to ordinary Germans? (p. 842)
5. What explains the success and then defeat of Germany and Japan during World War II? (p. 853)

Suggested Resources

BOOKS

- Aly, Götz. *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State*. 2005. A controversial interpretation of popular support for the Hitler regime, focused on the material benefits of wartime plunder.
- Bergen, Doris L. *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 3d ed. 2016. A concise and accessible discussion of National Socialism and the murderous Nazi assault on European Jews and other groups.