

World War II Reaches America

The dictators were not content to control their own people; they also wanted to take freedom away from others. Hitler said Germany needed *Lebensraum* (living room); the Russian goal was to “liberate the masses” from their capitalist tyrants; and the Japanese wanted a “new order” in Asia. Using the economic stress and self-concern of democratic nations, they threatened their neighbors and warned them that unless they bowed to superior force, they would face serious consequences.

In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, which belonged to China; after the Chinese boycotted Japanese goods, Shanghai was attacked the next year. No one acted against Japan, and other greedy nations saw opportunities open for expansion. Italy attacked Ethiopia in 1935 with modern weapons, while defenders bravely resisted, using ancient guns and spears. Again, little was done. In 1936, German troops occupied the Rhineland. Germany and Italy then formed the Rome-Berlin Axis, and Japan joined later that year.

Spanish Fascists, led by Francisco Franco, revolted against the government in 1936, and each side reached out for support. The Spanish Republicans were aided by Russia, and the Fascists were helped by Italy and Germany. The major countries used this war to try new weapons, and they sent “volunteers” to help fight. By 1939, the war was over, with about 750,000 people killed and Franco in full control.

Austria, Germany’s southern neighbor, was the next target for expansion, and German troops, with the full support of many Austrians, marched into Vienna. The Sudeten section of Czechoslovakia, with a large number of German-speaking residents, was next. This time, England and France objected, and a conference was held at Munich. Hitler assured the English and French that Germany had no further ambitions to expand. But he did not keep his word, and Germans soon occupied all of Czechoslovakia.

The invasion of Poland by Germany was too much, and England and France declared war on Germany on September 1, 1939. World War II officially began. Within a year, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France fell to the Nazis.

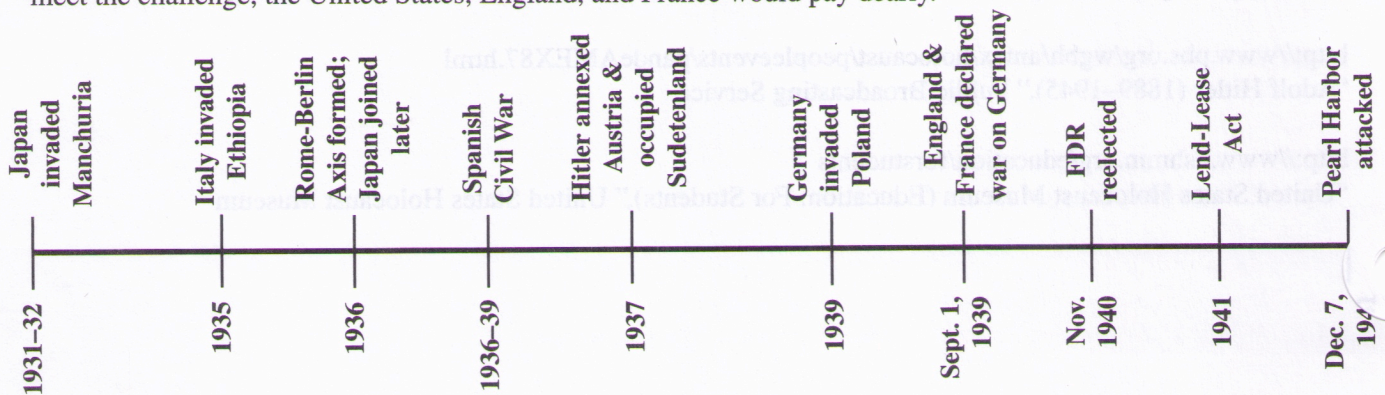
Americans listened to radio reports of the fall of Paris, the air war over England, Hitler’s attack on Russia, and Japanese attacks on China. The United States was not neutral in thought but did not want to fight. The Nye Committee report in 1935 convinced the Americans that World War I was fought to protect selfish interests of bankers and arms makers. Neutrality laws were passed to avoid repeating the “mistakes” of World War I.

The America First Committee, made up of many prominent citizens, was alarmed as Roosevelt inched closer toward helping England by sending supplies, trading 50 old destroyers for bases, and escorting convoys to Greenland. However, it was the Japanese who brought the United States into the war by their sneak attack on Pearl Harbor.

RESULTS: Records indicate that if the democracies had made any show of resistance, Hitler would have withdrawn from the Rhineland, and much of what happened afterward could have been avoided. By refusing to meet the challenge, the United States, England, and France would pay dearly.



W.W. II American Soldiers



Name: _____ Date: _____

World War II Reaches America: Reinforcement

Directions: Complete the following activities, essays, and challenges on your own paper.

ACTIVITIES:

- Using a map, locate the nations mentioned in this section.
- Discuss how the experience of World War I made phrases like “making the world safe for democracy” and “war to end all wars” impossible for any leader to use in World War II.

ESSAYS:

- What do you think caused Germany, Japan, and Italy to expand beyond their borders from 1931 to 1939?
- “Appeasement” became a common phrase. It meant “to give in to demands.” What can nations do so they can avoid appeasing dangerous nations?
- What do you think caused Americans in 1939–41 to think that somehow the United States could avoid getting into the war?

CHALLENGES:

- What nation said it needed *Lebensraum*? Which wanted to create a “new order in Asia”? Which said it wanted to help the workers of the world?
- To whom did Manchuria belong before the Japanese took it?
- Which nation tried to fight tanks with spears?
- How did the situation in Spain become more than an ordinary civil war?
- What excuse could Hitler give for taking the Sudeten from Czechoslovakia?
- What was the official beginning of World War II?
- In 1940, what was the most northern country in German hands?
- What did the Nye Committee think was the reason the United States entered World War I?
- What were some things Roosevelt did to help England?
- What action by Japan pushed the United States into the war?

NATIONAL STANDARDS CORRELATIONS:

NCSS VIid: (Power, Authority, & Governance) Describe the ways nations and organizations respond to forces of unity and diversity affecting order and security.

NSH Era 8, Standard 3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs

WEBSITES:

<http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/amh/AMH-20.htm>

“World War II: The Defensive Phase,” The United States Army

<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/subtitles.cfm?titleID=75>

“America at War: World War II,” Digital History

<http://www.pbs.org/perilousfight/>

“The Perilous Fight: America’s World War II in Color,” Public Broadcasting Service