

III. From WWI to WWII

A. America Retreats into Normalcy

1. America sent two million troops to Europe altogether. The Germans realized they could not win the war, so they agreed to an armistice (where both sides stop fighting) in late 1918.
2. Although Germany was stopped in 1918, it was not defeated. President Woodrow Wilson wanted a “peace without victory” so that Germany would willingly adopt a democratic government.
3. For Americans, the shock of making the world “safe for democracy” was too great because 117,000 American soldiers died to do it.
4. America elected a new president, Warren Harding, who promised a return to “normalcy,” i.e. neutrality.

B. Appeasement of Germany and the Return of War

1. Despite not having lost the war, Germany was forced to pay “reparations” for the damage that the German armies had done to other European countries.
2. Germans resented having to give up huge sums of money when they had not been defeated. Soon they complained that reparation payments were unfair, pretended that paying them was too difficult, and refused to do so.
3. Americans worried that this might lead to another European war, so the American government created the Dawes Plan of 1924, whereby the United States loaned money to Germany to help it pay the reparations.
4. The Germans could sense that nobody wanted to fight them again, and in 1933, the new leader of Germany, Adolf Hitler, insisted that Germany be allowed to create a strong army to defend itself since all its neighbors had strong armies. Nobody challenged his plans. The German army was soon built up to its strongest levels ever.
5. In 1938, Germany and Austria joined into one larger country.
6. Then, in the same year, Hitler demanded that German-speaking people in Czechoslovakia be allowed to join Germany.
7. The other countries of Europe were afraid of Hitler's Germany, so they agreed to let him take over Czechoslovakia. They hoped this would appease him (that allowing him to have what he demanded would stop him from making more demands). In fact, the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, announced that “peace in our time” had been achieved.
8. In 1939, Germany invaded its neighbor Poland, starting the war in Europe.

C. America Stays Out

1. There had been other bullies appearing in the world as well. In 1931, Japan invaded China, and in 1936 Italy invaded Ethiopia.
2. Seeing that these countries and Germany were indeed bullies, Americans wished to avoid getting dragged into another war, and the government created Neutrality Acts starting in 1935.
3. These acts made it illegal to trade with countries that were at war with each other. It was hoped that this way, trade with fighting countries would not lead to war, as it had in WWI. From 1939 to 1941, America did not get involved in WWII.

D. America in WWII

1. On December 7, 1941, the United States was attacked by Japan at Pearl Harbor. The United States then declared war on Japan and its allies, including Germany.
2. In 1943, America and its allies agreed that this time, Germany would be forced to surrender unconditionally, it would be occupied by their armies, and demilitarized.
3. By mid-1945 this goal was accomplished.
4. Along the way, Americans discovered that the Germans had murdered 6 million innocent Jewish people in “concentration camps.” Many people thought that Germany should be completely wiped out for this Holocaust. (The word “Holocaust” means “great destruction”.)
5. There was still, however, the matter of the war against Japan. Forcing Japan to surrender might have involved the death of 500,000 Americans, were it not for President Harry Truman's choice to use atomic bombs against Japan.
6. On August 6th, 1945 an atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, and two days later another was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. Japan surrendered unconditionally.

IV. The Cold War (1947-1991)

A. The Soviet Union (from “Temporary Ally” to Enemy)

1. When the United States entered WWII, it chose a country known as the Soviet Union as its temporary ally.
2. The Soviet Union had a Communist government, where the government forces people to work according to the motto “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.”
3. This meant that the Soviet Union did not respect an individual's right to his own life and the pursuit of happiness. It had the opposite kind of government of America.
4. When WWII ended it became obvious that the Soviet Union was now going to become America's new enemy. It conquered the countries of Eastern Europe and forced their people to accept Communism.

B. The Truman Doctrine and the Cold War

1. As a result of the Soviet Union's plans to force Communism on others, in 1947 President Harry Truman announced the Truman Doctrine, to “support free peoples” in resisting the growth of Communism.
2. The United States thus committed to being an international police power against Communism.
3. In 1949, the United States joined a military alliance called NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) with the countries of Western Europe to resist Communism.
4. In 1949, the Soviet Union developed its own atomic bomb.
5. Soon both America and the Soviet Union had enough atomic weapons to completely destroy each other. This meant that a “hot war” could not be fought. Instead, the two sides constantly threatened each other with destruction and prepared for war. This situation is known as a “cold war.”