

III. From WWI to WWII

A. America Retreats into Normalcy

1. For Americans, the shock of making the world “safe for democracy” was too great because 117,000 American soldiers died to do it in WWI.
2. America elected a new president, Warren Harding, who promised a return to “normalcy,” i.e. neutrality.

B. The Return of War

1. Despite not having lost the war, Germany was forced to pay “reparations” for the destruction they caused in other 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 to loan Germany the money to pay reparations.
4. The Germans could sense that nobody wanted to fight them again, and in 1933, under their new leader of Germany, Adolf Hitler, they began to rebuild their armies.
5. The other countries of Europe were afraid of Hitler's Germany, so they agreed to let him take over Austria and 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.
6. In 1939, Germany invaded its neighbor Poland, proving that appeasement had not achieved peace.

C. America Stays Out

1. Seeing that Germany and other countries were indeed bullies, Americans wished to avoid getting dragged into another war, and the government created Neutrality Acts starting in 1935.
2. These laws 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.
3. 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 completely defeated. By 1945 this goal was accomplished.
3. 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”.)
4. 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.
5. 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.”