

C. America in the World Wars

1. Woodrow Wilson believed that America could use its strength to make the world a better place. He wanted America to be *interconnected* with the world, not separate.
2. When this idea of interconnection is combined with nationalism, it is known as “internationalism.” It is the main idea behind the “League of Nations.”
3. The problem for Wilson was that 117,000 Americans had died in World War I. It was profound shock, and Americans recoiled from the role that had been thrust upon them by their president.
4. In the **1920** presidential election, Americans rejected Wilson’s concept of giving up their lives to a global cause. They opted instead to elect Warring Harding, who offered them a “return to normalcy”—which meant a return to the “normal” political separation.
5. Because of this idea, the United States did *not* join the League of Nations.
6. As Hitler rose to power in Germany, and countries like Italy and Japan (both eventual allies of Nazi Germany) began to attack their neighbors and others, Americans were worried about a new war, so they passed a series of “Neutrality Acts” starting in 1935, hoping not to get dragged into another terrible war.

D. World War II (1939-45)

1. Americans, of course, were relieved to not be directly involved in World War II when it finally arrived, but they could not pretend that neutrality was a proper response. It was clear that they needed to help Britain and its allies in some way. They responded by sending supplies to those countries in a program called “Lend-Lease.”
2. Since this included sending supplies to Asia, where the war began even earlier, to stop Japan (an ally of Nazi Germany), that country correctly feared that when America eventually joined the war as a direct participant, it would not be able to win.
3. The Japanese launched the infamous sneak attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, destroying a large portion of the American fleet there, but not as much as they had hoped, resulting in the immediate entry of the United States into the war.
4. The American navy and marines gradually forced the Japanese out of their empire in the South Pacific, and on “D-Day” in 1944, invaded continental Europe from Britain.
5. With Russia, empowered by Lend-Lease aid, fighting back the Germans in the east, America and its allies were able to push them back in the west. Unlike in World War I, the goal was the total conquest and subordination of Germany. In the words of president Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the goal was Germany’s “unconditional surrender.”
6. American and Russian forces converged on Germany, and Germany surrendered in May of 1945.

E. De-nazification and Control of Germany

1. To punish Germany, four countries – the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France – took control of all of its territory.

2. The Germans were not allowed to organize their own government. They were ruled by the armies of these nations. Because they had been truly defeated, they did not resist this process. For years, most Germans lived in squalor.
3. The leaders of Nazi Germany were put on trial for starting the war and for ordering the Holocaust. American leaders did this because they believed the war should end with *justice*. They insisted on a legal demonstration of the “war crimes” of the German leaders, especially those who had participated directly in the planning and execution of the mass murder of the Jews. In the *Nuremberg Trials*, the full horror of the Holocaust was first confronted. Many Nazi leaders were sentenced to life in prison or death.
4. This was an important part of how Germany was “de-Nazified.” They had to accept what they did was wrong, and accept their place as a peaceful member of a world that they did not—and would not—control.

F. The New Bully

1. Although Germany had been defeated, it was now obvious that the Soviet Union had emerged as the next bully.
2. The Soviets had conquered Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia at the beginning of the war, as well as parts of Poland and Finland.
3. After stopping the Germans, the Soviets had pushed them back through eastern Europe, only to take over countries like Hungary and Czechoslovakia for themselves, and force the people there to accept communist governments.
4. In the words of British prime minister Winston Churchill, an “iron curtain” had descended over Eastern Europe.