

World War II and the Holocaust, 1939-1945

THE STORY MATTERS...

World War I slowed the push toward independence among colonies in many parts of the world, but the end of the war gave a new strength to these efforts. Mohandas Gandhi was the charismatic leader of the Indian nationalist movement against British rule. He was committed to nonviolent action as a method for political and social change. Using peaceful methods, he eventually led India to independence. His actions inspired people to seek the end of colonialism, racism, and violence.

Lesson 30-5

World War II Ends

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

ideological assure

Content Vocabulary

partisan Cold War

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why do political actions often lead to war?
- How does war impact society and the environment?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

By 1943, the Allies had strengthened their strategies and stopped the advances of both the Germans and the Japanese. Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, and Japan surrendered on August 14. When the war ended, political tensions, suspicions, and conflicts of ideas led to a new struggle – the Cold War.

Last Years of the War

GUIDING QUESTION *How did the tide of battle turn against Germany, Italy, and Japan?*

By the beginning of 1943, the tide of battle had turned against Germany, Italy, and Japan. Axis forces in Tunisia surrendered on May 13, 1943. The Allies then crossed the Mediterranean and carried the war to Italy, an area that Winston Churchill, prime minister of Great Britain, called the “soft underbelly” of Europe. After taking Sicily, the Allies began an invasion of mainland Italy in September.

The European Theater

After Sicily fell, King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy arrested Mussolini, but in a daring raid the Germans liberated him. He was then made the head of a German puppet state in northern Italy as German troops moved in and occupied much of Italy.

The Germans set up defense lines in the hills south of Rome. The Allies advanced up the peninsula with heavy casualties, but they took Rome on June 4, 1944. By then, the Italian war was secondary as the Allied forces opened their long-awaited “second front” in western Europe.

Since the autumn of 1943, the Allies had planned an invasion of France from Great Britain, across the English Channel. Finally, on June 6, 1944 (D-Day), Allied forces

under U.S. general Dwight D. Eisenhower landed on the Normandy beaches in history’s greatest naval invasion. The Allies fought their way past hidden underwater mines, treacherous barbed wire, and horrible machine gun fire. Believing the battle was a diversion and the real invasion would occur elsewhere, the Germans responded slowly. This gave the Allied forces time to set up a beachhead. Within three months, the Allies had landed 2 million men and 500,000 vehicles. Allied forces then began pushing inland and broke through German defensive lines.

Allied troops liberated Paris by the end of August 1944. In December, with Allied aircraft grounded, the Germans launched a counter-offensive to regain the seaport of Antwerp in Belgium. The Battle of the Bulge was named for the “bulge” the German attack caused in Allied lines. By January 1945, both sides had suffered heavy losses, but the Allied lines held. In March 1945, the Allied forces crossed the Rhine River and advanced into Germany. At the end of April 1945, Allied armies in northern Germany moved toward the Elbe River, where they linked up with the Soviets. The Soviets had come a long way since the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943. The Soviets had soundly defeated the German forces at the Battle of Kursk (July 5 to 12), the greatest tank battle of World War II. Soviet forces now began a steady advance westward. Reoccupying the Ukraine by the end of 1943, they moved into the Baltic states by early 1944. Advancing along a northern front, Soviet troops occupied Warsaw in January 1945 and entered Berlin in April. Meanwhile, Soviet troops along a southern front swept through Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

As the Allied forces advanced into Nazi – occupied Europe, they also liberated the concentration camps and death camps. Although the Nazis tried to destroy some of the evidence, the Allies were able to see for themselves the crimes against humanity carried out by the Nazis.

By January 1945, Adolf Hitler had moved into a bunker 55 feet (almost 17 m) under the city of Berlin. In his final political testament, Hitler, consistent to the end in his anti-Semitism, blamed the Jews for the war. He wrote:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“Above all I charge the leaders of the nation and those under them to scrupulous observance of the laws of race and to merciless opposition to the universal poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry.”

– from Hitler’s *Final Will and Testament*,
April 29, 1945

Hitler committed suicide on April 30, two days after Italian partisans, or resistance fighters, shot Mussolini. On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered. The war in Europe was finally over.

The Asian Theater

The war in Asia continued. Beginning in 1943, U.S. forces went on the offensive and advanced across the Pacific. Along with their allies, the U.S. forces continued their island – hopping campaign. At the beginning of 1945, the acquisition of Iwo Jima and Okinawa helped the Allied military power draw even closer to the main Japanese islands. The islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa were of great strategic importance. Iwo Jima was essential to the air war on Japan. This small volcanic island had two airfields used by the Japanese to attack Allied aircraft and to support their naval forces. The Allies believed capturing Iwo Jima would lessen the Japanese threat and could aid in the invasion of the Japanese mainland. The Allies hoped that controlling Okinawa would also provide them with a base near the mainland.

The Allies were victorious in both battles, but the victories came at a great cost. Casualties were great on both sides, and many began to fear even more losses if the war in the Pacific continued. This left Harry S. Truman, who had become president after Roosevelt died in April, with a difficult decision to make. Scientists, including Enrico Fermi, worked on a top secret project called the Manhattan Project. Their efforts led to the development of the atomic bomb. Should he use newly developed atomic weapons to bring the war to an end? If the United States invaded Japan, Truman and his advisers were convinced that American troops would suffer heavy casualties. There were only two bombs; no one knew how effective they would be.

Truman decided to use the bombs. The first bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6. Of the city’s 350,000 inhabitants, 190,000 died—some immediately and others after suffering the effects of radiation. Three days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Both cities were leveled. Thousands of people died immediately after the bombs were dropped. Thousands more died in later months from radiation. The devastation led Emperor Hirohito to accept the Allied forces’ demands for unconditional surrender on August 14, 1945.

World War II was finally over. Seventeen million had died in battle. Perhaps 20 million civilians had perished as well. Some estimates place total losses at 60 million.

The dropping of the atomic bombs in Japan also marked the beginning of the Nuclear Age. After the world had witnessed the deadly potential of nuclear energy, other countries raced to build their own nuclear weapons. In August 1949, the Soviet Union set off its first atomic bomb, starting an arms race with the United States that lasted for 40 years.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying What was the strategic importance of the “second front” that the Allies opened in western Europe?

Peace and a New War

GUIDING QUESTION *What led to the Cold War?*

No real peace but a period of political tensions, known as the Cold War, followed the total victory of the Allies in World War II. An ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Cold War dominated world affairs until the end of the 1980s.

Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill were the leaders of the Big Three (the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain) of the Grand Alliance. They met at Tehran in November 1943 to discuss strategy. Their major tactical decision had concerned the final assault on Germany—an American-British invasion through France scheduled for the spring of 1944.

The acceptance of this plan had important consequences. It meant that Soviet and British-American forces would meet in defeated Germany along a north-south dividing line. Soviet forces would liberate Eastern Europe. The Allies also agreed to a partition of postwar Germany.

The Big Three powers met again at Yalta in southern Russia in February 1945. By then, the defeat of Germany was assured. The Western powers, having once believed that the Soviets were in a weak position, now faced the reality of 11 million Soviet soldiers taking possession of Eastern Europe and much of central Europe.

Stalin was deeply suspicious of the Western powers. He wanted a buffer to protect the Soviet Union from possible future Western aggression. This meant establishing pro-Soviet governments along the Soviet Union’s borders. Roosevelt favored the idea of self-determination for Europe. This involved a pledge to help liberated Europe create “democratic institutions of their own choice” through free elections. Roosevelt also agreed to Stalin’s price for military aid against Japan: Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, **REA** ruled by Japan, as well as two warm-water ports and railroad rights in Manchuria.

The creation of the United Nations was a major American concern. Both Churchill and Stalin accepted Roosevelt’s plans for the establishment of the United Nations and set the first meeting for San Francisco in April 1945.

The issues of Germany and Eastern Europe were treated less decisively. After Germany surrendered, the Big Three agreed to divide Germany into four zones, one each

for the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union to occupy and to govern. Stalin compromised and agreed to free elections in Poland. However, it was clear that Stalin might not honor this provision for other Eastern European countries. The issue of free elections caused a serious split between the Soviets and Americans. This split became more evident when the Big Three next met at Potsdam, Germany.

The Potsdam Conference of July 1945 began in a cloud of mistrust. President Harry S. Truman, having succeeded Roosevelt, demanded free elections in Eastern Europe. Stalin responded, "A freely elected government in any of these East European countries would be anti-Soviet, and that we cannot allow." Stalin sought absolute security for the Soviets. Free elections would threaten his goal of controlling Eastern Europe. Short of an invasion by Western forces, nothing would undo developments in Eastern Europe. After the war's most destructive conflict had just ended, very few supported a policy of invasion.

The Allies agreed that trials should be held of leaders who had committed crimes against humanity during the

war. In 1945 and 1946, Nazi leaders were tried and condemned at war crimes trials in Nuremberg, Germany. War crimes trials were also held in Japan and Italy.

As the war slowly receded into the past, a new struggle was already beginning. Many in the West thought Soviet policy was part of a worldwide Communist conspiracy. The Soviets viewed Western, and especially American, policy as nothing less than global capitalist expansionism.

In March 1946, in a speech to an American audience, the former British prime minister Winston Churchill declared that "an iron curtain" had "descended across the continent" dividing Europe into two hostile camps. Stalin branded Churchill's speech "a call to war on the USSR." Only months after the world's most devastating conflict had ended, the world seemed to be bitterly divided once again.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying Central Issues What was the major disagreement between the United States and the Soviet Union at the conclusion of World War II?

LESSON 30-5 REVIEW

Reviewing Vocabulary

1. **Defining** Write a paragraph in which you answer the question: What was the central ideological conflict of the Cold War? Be sure to define the terms ideological and Cold War in your discussion.

Using Your Notes

2. **Identifying** Use your notes to identify three of the major military events that brought an end to World War II and where they took place. Briefly explain the significance of each event.

Answering the Guiding Questions

3. **Analyzing** How did the tide of battle turn against Germany, Italy, and Japan?
4. **Explaining** What led to the Cold War?

Writing Activity

5. **Argument** Imagine that you are an adviser to President Truman. You must persuade him to use or not to use the atomic bomb against Japan. Which position do you take? How do you make your case?