

# 1 Steps to War

## TERMS & NAMES

fascism  
Adolf Hitler  
Nazi Party  
Joseph Stalin  
Axis  
appeasement  
Lend-Lease Act  
Pearl Harbor

### MAIN IDEA

The rise of dictators in Europe and Asia led to World War II.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Aggressive rulers still threaten peace today.

## ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

One of George Messersmith's duties as a U.S. diplomat in Austria in the 1930s was to watch events in Central Europe closely. What he saw happening in Germany worried him. Although Germany had been devastated after its defeat in World War I, it was again on the rise. In March 1936, Messersmith described what he saw.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The National Socialist [Nazi] regime in Germany is based on a program of ruthless force, which program has for its aim, first, the enslavement of the German population to a National Socialist social and political program, and then to use the force of these 67 million people for the extension of German political and economic sovereignty over South-Eastern Europe—thus putting it into a position to dominate Europe completely.

George Messersmith, quoted in *The Making of the Second World War*



Adolf Hitler greets a crowd of more than one million people at a Harvest Festival in 1937.

Messersmith's predictions would soon prove true. In the coming years, Germany and its allies threw the world into war, as you will read in this section.

## The Rise of Dictators

By the mid-1930s, dictators, or absolute rulers, had seized control in several countries—Italy, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Their rise to power was due to economic and political factors that dated back to the end of World War I.

The treaties that ended the war had left many nations feeling betrayed. Japan and Italy, for example, had helped to win the war. However, both were dissatisfied by the peace treaties. Italy gained less territory than it wanted. Japan felt ignored by the European powers. Of the losing countries, Germany was treated the most severely. The winners stripped Germany of more than 10 percent of its territory and all of its overseas colonies. The winners also forced Germany to disarm. And they made Germany pay for war damages and accept responsibility for the war.

All

**GERMAN SCIENTISTS**

Many scientists left Germany or gave up their German citizenship after the Nazis took power. The most famous German scientist to do so was the physicist Albert Einstein (below).

Einstein, a German Jew, was visiting the United States when Hitler took control of Germany in 1933. Einstein announced he would not return home. "I shall live only in a country where civil liberty, tolerance, and equality of all citizens before the law prevail," he said. Einstein played a key role in convincing President Roosevelt to support research that would lead to the development of nuclear weapons.



Meanwhile, World War I had left the economies of Europe in ruins. Both sides emerged from the war heavily in debt. There was some economic growth in the 1920s. But the world economic situation collapsed with the Great Depression of the 1930s. Mass unemployment caused widespread unrest. Many Europeans turned to new leaders to solve these problems.

**Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin**

One new leader was Benito Mussolini of Italy. Shortly after World War I, Mussolini began a political movement known as **fascism** (FASH•IZ•uhm). Fascists preached an extreme form of patriotism and nationalism that was often linked to racism. They oppressed people who did not share their views. In 1922, Mussolini became prime minister of Italy. In 1925, he established a dictatorship and took the title *Il Duce* (eel DOO•chay), or "the Leader."

In Germany, **Adolf Hitler** led the fascist National Socialist German Workers' Party, or **Nazi Party**. Throughout the early 1930s, the Nazis gained power by preaching German racial superiority. They also promised to avenge the nation's defeat in World War I. In 1933, the Nazis won control of the government. Hitler then overthrew the constitution. He called himself *der Führer* (duhr FYUR•uhr), or "the Leader."

In the Soviet Union, the Communists tightened their grip on power during the 1920s and 1930s. V.I. Lenin, who led the Communist takeover of Russia in 1917, died in 1924. His successor was **Joseph Stalin**. Under Stalin, the government tried to control every aspect of life in the nation. It crushed any form of opposition.

**Dictators Seek to Expand Territory**

While dictators were gaining power in Europe, the military was gaining increasing power in Japan. By 1931, the Japanese military pushed the island nation to grab more land and resources. That year, the Japanese attacked Manchuria, a province in northern China rich in natural resources. They conquered the region within months.

Both Italy and Germany also sought new territory. In 1935, Italy attacked Ethiopia, one of the few independent African nations. Italian troops roared in with machine guns, tanks, and airplanes. By the spring of 1936, *Il Duce* had his first conquest.

That same year, Hitler moved troops into the Rhineland, a region of Germany along the French border. Under the Treaty of Versailles, the Rhineland was to remain free of German forces. The French government was outraged by the treaty violation. However, it took no action. Nor did the League of Nations.

**Reading List**  
A. Finding Main Ideas: What factors led to the rise of dictators after World War I?

Mussolini

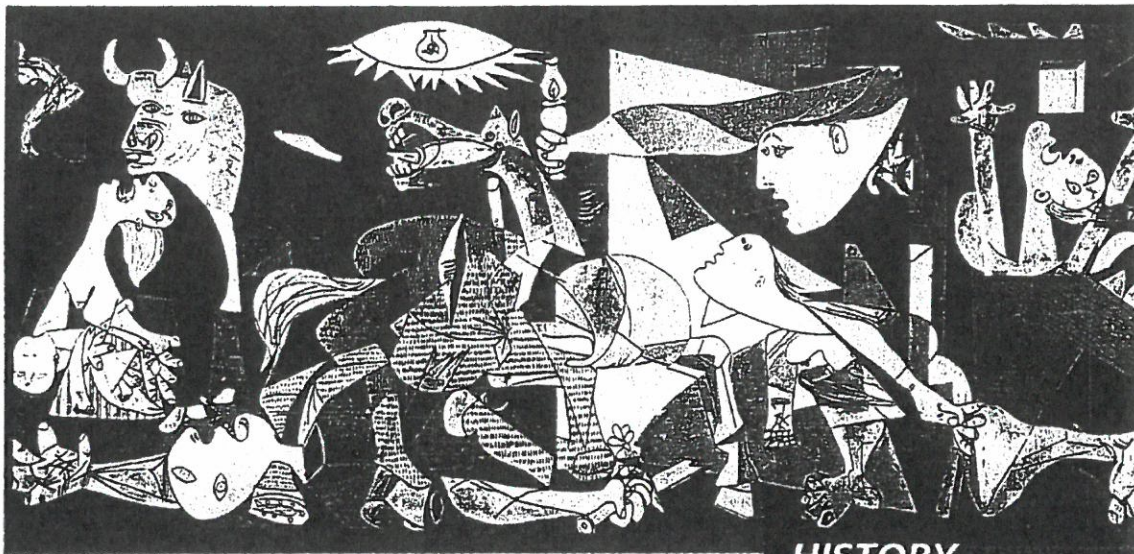
**Vocabulary**  
avenge: to get revenge

**Background**  
In theory, Communists and fascists have opposing ideas about government and society. Despite these differences, Stalin and Hitler were both brutal dictators.

Japan

Italy

Germany



## HISTORY through ART

Spanish artist Pablo Picasso expresses the horrors of war in his painting *Guernica* (GUAHR•nih•keh), shown above. Picasso created this work after German planes destroyed much of the Spanish town of Guernica in April 1937, during the Spanish Civil War. Through Picasso's painting, the town became a symbol of the destructiveness of air warfare.

**What characteristics of war does the painting bring out?**

**Background**  
Some Americans went to Spain to fight against the fascists. They were known as the Abraham Lincoln Battalion.

Germany  
Germany & Italy

In 1936, Hitler and Mussolini formed an alliance known as the Rome-Berlin Axis. After this treaty, Germany, Italy, and their allies became known as the **Axis**. That year, a civil war erupted in Spain. The conflict pitted Spain's fascist-style military against the country's elected government. Hitler and Mussolini supplied the fascist forces with troops, weapons, and aircraft. In April 1939, Spain's army declared victory over the government and established a dictatorship.

In 1938, Hitler invaded Austria, home to mostly German-speaking peoples. He insisted that the Austrians wanted to be part of Germany. Many residents of Austria and Germany welcomed the unification.

## Appeasement at Munich

After taking over Austria, Hitler set his sights on the Sudetenland. This was a region of Czechoslovakia where many people of German descent lived. Czechoslovakia, though, did not want to give up the region.

France and Russia pledged their support to Czechoslovakia if Germany attacked. Suddenly, Europe teetered on the brink of another war. Britain's prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, stepped in. He met with Hitler in an attempt to calm the situation. But their talks made little progress.

On September 29, 1938, Hitler and Chamberlain met in Munich, Germany. By the next day, the two sides had made a breakthrough and signed an agreement. Germany gained control of the Sudetenland. In return, Hitler promised to stop seeking any more territory.

The Munich Agreement was an example of the British and French policy known as **appeasement**. Under this policy, they met Germany's demands in order to avoid war. Chamberlain returned home from Munich and triumphantly announced that he had achieved "peace in our time."

Others, however, disagreed with appeasement. Winston Churchill reportedly wrote of the agreement: "[Britain and France] had to choose between war and shame. They chose shame. They will get war, too."

### Reading History

Analyzing  
points of view  
What were the  
different points  
of view about  
the policy of  
appeasement?

Appeasement

## Germany Expands

Hitler dreamed of avenging Germany's defeat in World War I. "The lost land will never be won back by solemn appeals to God," he told Germans, "nor by hopes in any League of Nations, but only by force of arms." Hitler wanted to build an empire, uniting all German-speaking people in Europe. He also wanted "living space" for the growing German population.

In violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler began to rebuild the German military. In 1936 Nazi troops invaded the Rhineland, a former German territory lost during World War I. **That year he also signed an alliance with Mussolini, forming the Axis Powers. Japan later joined this pact.** In 1938 Hitler forced Austria to unite with Germany. Then he demanded control of the Sudetenland, a region in Czechoslovakia where many Germans lived. When the Czechs refused, Hitler threatened war.

## Appeasement Fails

Czech leaders looked to their allies in France and Great Britain for help. But neither country wanted to be pulled into an armed conflict. British prime minister Neville Chamberlain organized a meeting with Hitler to work out a peaceful solution. At the 1938 Munich Conference, Germany was given control over the Sudetenland in return for a promise not to demand more land. This approach was known as **appeasement—a policy of avoiding war with an aggressive nation by giving in to its demands.** British admiral **Winston Churchill** was convinced that this strategy would not stop Hitler. "The government had to choose between shame and war," Churchill warned. "They have chosen shame. They will get war."

Churchill was right. In March 1939, German troops seized the rest of Czechoslovakia and began demanding territory from Poland. Great Britain and France pledged to defend Poland if Hitler attacked. To keep the Soviets out of the conflict, Hitler signed a nonaggression pact with Joseph Stalin in August 1939. In



Nazi planes bombed London from September 1940 to May 1941. During that time, residents of London sought shelter wherever they could, including subway stations. Here, a relief effort passes out food to Londoners who have lost their homes.

addition to promising not to attack each other, the two countries secretly agreed to divide Poland between them.

On September 1, 1939, Hitler's troops and tanks rushed into Poland. This was the start of World War II. Two days later, **Britain and France, known as the Allied Powers,** declared war on Germany. Neville Chamberlain spoke bitterly of the failure of appeasement, saying, "Everything that I believed in during my public life has crashed into ruins."

## Hitler Moves West

The Allied Powers had little time to organize their forces to protect Poland. Using a strategy called **blitzkrieg**, or "lightning war," German tanks and airplanes broke through Polish defenses. As German forces drove into Poland from the west, the Soviets attacked from the east. Within a month, the two powers had taken control of Poland.

With Poland secure, Hitler turned toward western Europe. In the spring of 1940, Germany quickly conquered Denmark, Norway,

Germany

Germany, Italy, Japan

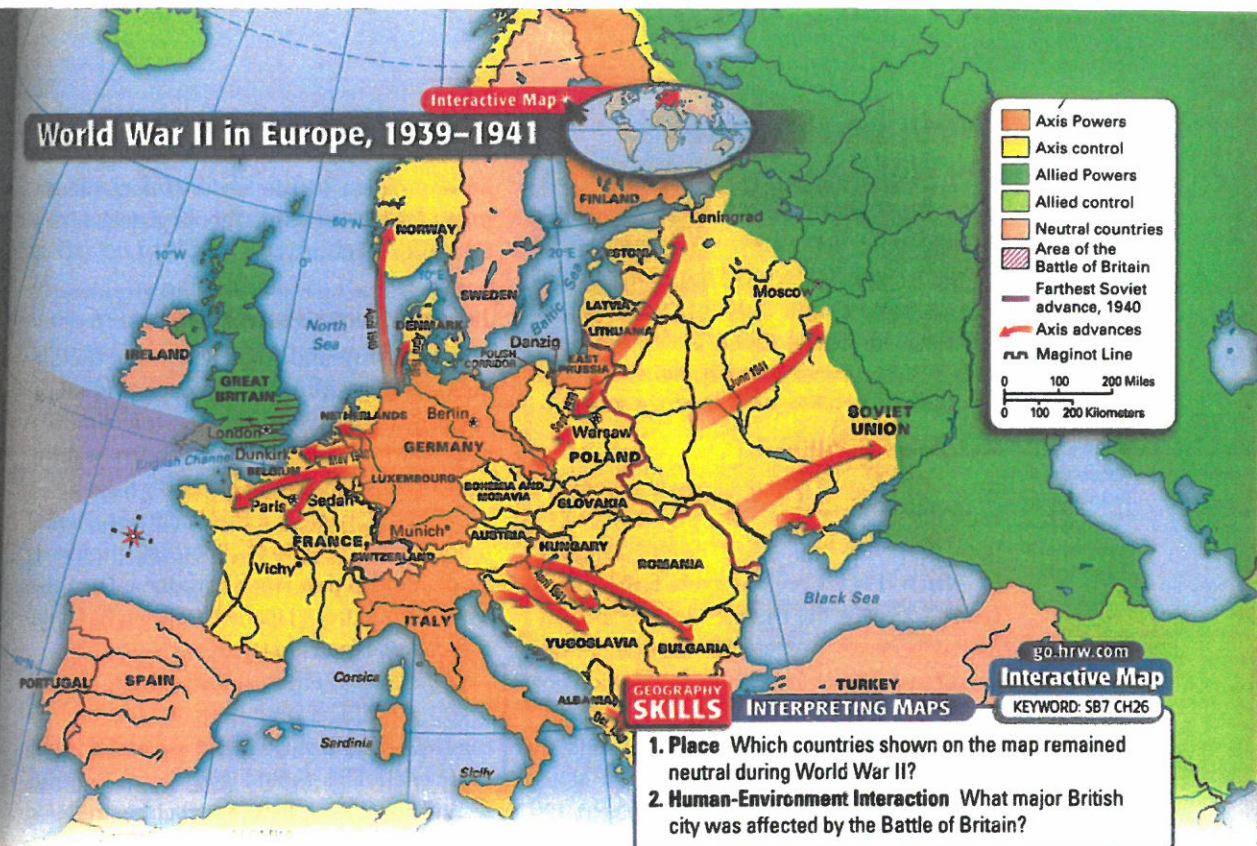
Appeasement

Germany & Soviet Union

Germany

Blitzkrieg

## World War II in Europe, 1939–1941



Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. German troops then invaded France, trapping hundreds of thousands of Belgian, British, and French soldiers in the French port city of Dunkirk. British ships raced to Dunkirk and carried the soldiers across the English Channel to safety in Britain.

German forces, meanwhile, continued their march through France. As the Germans approached the French capital of Paris, Italy declared war on the Allied powers. France surrendered to Germany on June 22, 1940. Many of the French soldiers who had escaped at Dunkirk, however, continued to resist Germany's occupation of France. In London, French general Charles de Gaulle organized a "Free French" army to fight alongside the Allies. "France has lost a battle," de Gaulle declared. "But France has not lost the war!"

### The Battle of Britain

Great Britain now stood alone against Hitler's war machine. "The final German victory over

England is now only a question of time," said German general Alfred Jodl. Hitler prepared to invade Britain. To safely move troops and equipment across the English Channel, Germany first had to defeat the British Royal Air Force (RAF). In July 1940 the Luftwaffe, or German air force, began attacking British planes and airfields in what became known as the Battle of Britain.

In August Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to begin bombing British cities in the hope of crushing British morale. But Winston Churchill, the new prime minister, refused to give in. "We shall fight on the beaches," he vowed. "We shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall never surrender." Using the new technology of radar, the RAF was able to detect and destroy some 2,300 of the Luftwaffe's aircraft. Hitler canceled the invasion of Britain.

**READING CHECK Sequencing** What event sparked World War II?

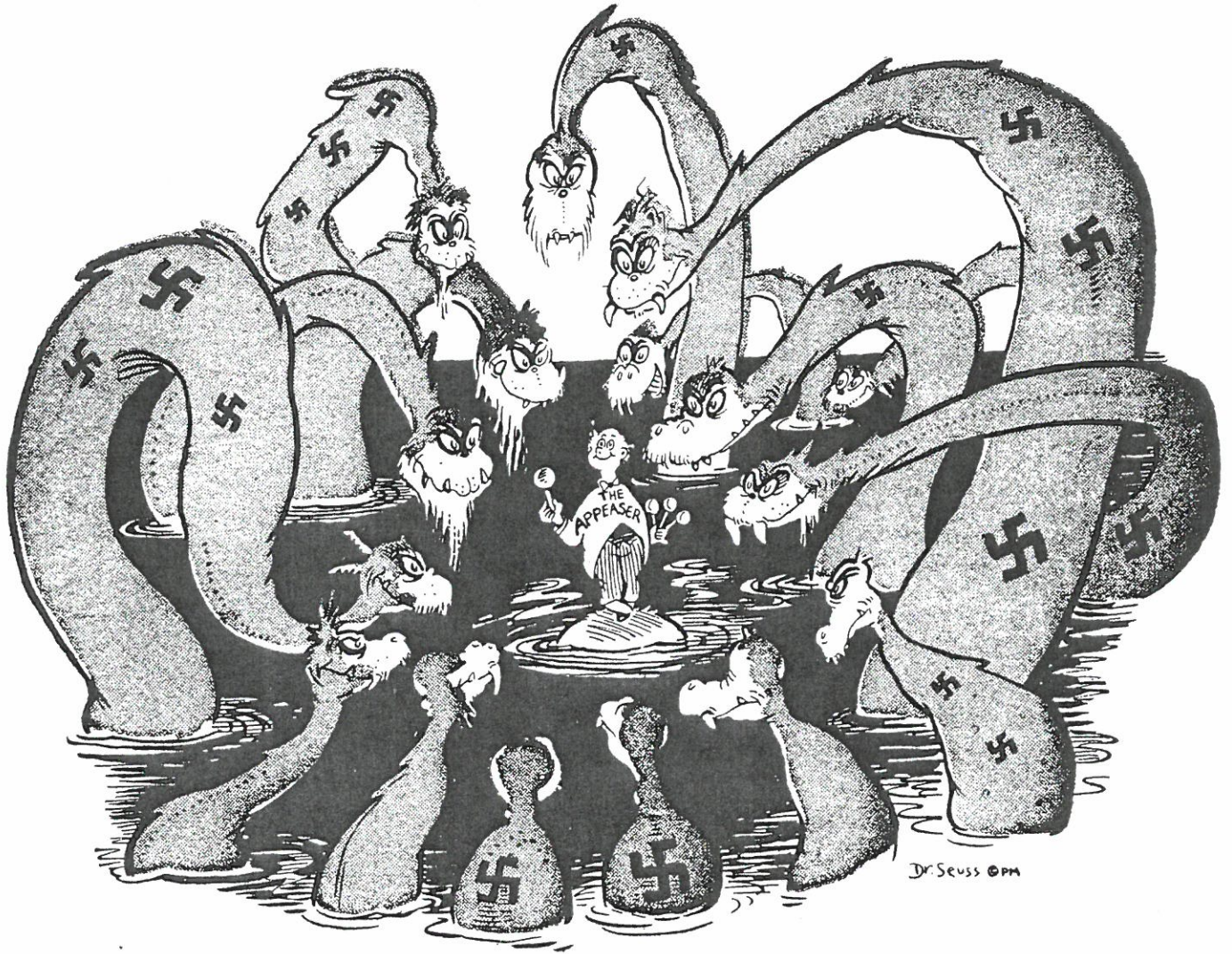
Anschluss

It was becoming more and more obvious that Hitler's policies were aimed at threatening people as much as governments or armies. In the spring of 1938 the Germans marched into Austria in an invasion that met almost no challenge from the Austrian people. Hitler called it the Anschluss, or "union." Within days, Austria was completely transformed into an extension of the Nazi Reich. Shops owned by Jews were looted, and synagogues were occupied by soldiers. As crowds taunted them with insults, Jews were made to scrawl anti-Semitic slogans across their own storefronts, or to get down on their knees to scrub anti-Nazi graffiti from the sidewalks. Policemen even forced them to clean toilets using their precious prayer bands, or *tefillin*, in place of rags.



Appeasement

*'Remember . . . One More Lollypop, and Then You All Go Home!'*



# Lend-Lease

It's truly encouraging how much of this stuff drifts into British ports!"

