

World War II (1939-1945)

World War II thus far, has been the deadliest and bloodiest war to date. More than 38 million people died by the end of the war, many of them innocent civilians. It was also the most destructive war in our current history. The fighting raged on in many parts of the world, with the brunt of it being in Europe and Japan. More than 50 nations took part in this war, which changed the world forever. For Americans, World War II had a clear-cut purpose; they were fighting to defeat tyranny. Most of Europe had been conquered by Nazi Germany, which was under the evil control of Adolf Hitler. The war in Europe began with Germany's unprecedented invasion of Poland in 1939. It seemed that wherever the Nazi army went, they came down with a vengeance on the Jews of that area. They also went after anyone that didn't fit in to their idea of the "Master Race", Aryans.

In Asia and the Pacific, the Japanese armies invaded countries and islands. On December 7, 1941, The Japanese planes bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Within hours the U.S. Congress declared war against Japan, plunging the U.S. headfirst into World War II.

What Were the Causes of World War 2?

Many historians today believe that some of the causes of World War II can be traced to World War I (1914-1918). Americans had fought in that earlier war to "Make the world safe for Democracy." Those were the words and goals of President Woodrow Wilson (President from 1913 to 1921). However, the peace treaties that ended World War I seemed only to create in many people and governments, bitterness and anger that eventually boiled over and helped instill the inevitable beginnings of World War II.

Germany and its allies had been defeated in World War I. Germany was ordered to hand over one sixth of its territory and forced to pay huge reparations (payments by a defeated country for the destruction it caused in a war). After World War I, Germany suffered from high unemployment and uncontrollable inflation which made the German money become almost worthless. A "League of Nations" was set up after World War I to help try to keep the peace, however, the United States did not join, and other countries were too busy with their own problems to concern

themselves with Germany and other trouble spots. As the 1930s came about, the world was hit by an economic depression. Workers all over the world lost their jobs, world trade fell off, and times were extremely hard all around. The citizens of the world were looking for leaders that could bring them the change they so desperately wanted and needed.

There were numerous causes to the War itself; however, the most important cause in my opinion was World War 1 in and of itself. After the First World War, the actively involved nations were divided into two groups; the Allied Powers, formed by France, British Empire, Russian Empire, United States of America etc. and the Central Powers, which consisted of the German Empire, Austria-Hungary and others of the like that were not on the winning end of the war. The Treaty of Versailles; a peace treaty which followed the end of World War 1, held Germany responsible for the war and put many harsh penalties on Germany, including military restrictions and disarmament of their country. They were also to pay a rather large fine and make substantial territorial concessions to the Allied Powers.

After the end of World War I, Germany saw the rise of Adolf Hitler and his concept of Nazism (National Socialism, later converted to the National Socialist German Workers Party, NSDAP) both of which became quite popular in 1930s. Nazism was a form of Socialism, and totally different from Marxism, which was typically characterized by racism and expansionism. National Socialism calls for obedience to a strong leader, so Adolf Hitler portrayed himself as that strong leader. While Germany witnessed the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazism, Italy witnessed the rise of Benito Mussolini and Fascism. Fascism is formed by violence, racism and totalitarianism. Both of these concepts are quite similar to each other and this portrayed Hitler and Mussolini as the leaders of the war against the Allied Powers.

In the 1930s, the United States found itself largely concerned with the domestic economic troubles of the Great Depression, even as international crises loomed in Europe and Asia. Benito Mussolini, the dictator of Italy, had begun waging a war in Ethiopia using chemical weapons, such as mustard gas, and slaughtering thousands of innocent people. A violent and brutal civil war raged in Spain, staging General Francisco Franco's fascists against a variegated alliance of Communists and Democrats. Josef Stalin had risen to absolute power in Russia after imprisoning and executing several of his political enemies. Downtrodden Germans had rallied around Adolf Hitler, their new hero and leader, who called for Aryan deliverance after Germany's humiliation in World War I and launched an aggressive campaign to "unify" the German race throughout Europe. Meanwhile, in the East, Japan had invaded Manchuria and was threatening to conquer China because they were, at the time, virtually unchecked by Western powers, who were preoccupied with problems closer to home.

Through the troubled years of the late 1930s, Americans did everything they possibly could to avoid being drawn into these growing conflicts abroad. In the end, staying out of World War II proved impossible; by the middle of 1941, President Roosevelt had committed American ships to an undeclared naval war with Germany in the North Atlantic, and on 7 December 1941 any question of America's further neutrality in the conflict ended with the mortifying surprise attack by the Japanese against the American naval station at Pearl Harbor.

What Were some the Effects of World War 2?

Even though the effects of World War I were bad, the effects of World War II were even worse in comparison. The number of people who were left homeless paled in correlation to the number of lives lost on both sides of the war. However, World War 2 also marked the end of dictatorship in Europe, and launched the United States and Soviet Union as the super powers of the world. It also resulted in the formation of the United Nations, an organization formed to promote peace and security throughout the world. The Paris Peace Treaty signed on February

10th, 1947, allowed nations like Italy, Bulgaria and Finland to resume as sovereign states in international affairs, thus allowing them to become members of the United Nations. This Treaty also included provisions for the repayment for the cost of the war, and for the aid in repairing the devastation to many nations, cities and towns, as well as post war territorial adjustments.

Several European and Asian countries had to bear the brunt of the Second World War, when the territorial borders of European countries were redrawn. The biggest beneficiary, in terms of territorial expansion, was the Soviet Union which annexed parts of Finland, Poland, Japan, Germany and some independent states to its territories. The worst affected nation over all, was Germany, which was divided into four parts – controlled individually by; France, The United States of America, Soviet Union and Great Britain. While the first plans put forth by the United States for Germany were very harsh, they were refined after it was realized that the revival of Europe was not possible without the revival of the German industrial base. Everything was not all right though, as it was World War 2 which laid the foundation for Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, which lasted for a period of 44 years (1947-1991).

As far as the economic effects of World War 2 are concerned, it did have some positives but they were by no means a match for the chaos this war created. The numerous jobs created during the war brought an end to the crisis of unemployment during the Great Depression. While those industries which manufactured various products required during the war flourished, other industries suffered a major setback. The European economy was almost brought to a standstill during the Second World War. It took quite a few years for the world to revive after the war came to an end in 1945. After all was said and done, in the end as many as 24,000,000 soldiers and 49,000,000 civilians lost their lives on both the sides.

An Ever Changing World.

Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, ending the war in Europe. The war in the Pacific did not end until after the U.S. dropped two atomic bombs on Japan – the only time such bombs were ever used in war. Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had led the U.S. in wartime, did not live to see peace, however, in a speech written but never delivered, he spoke of the need to preserve peace: “Today we are faced with the preeminent [above all other] fact that, if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships – the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together in the same world, at peace.”

World War 2 was a global military conflict that lasted for nearly 6 years and resulted in heavy losses for all that were involved all over the world. In this paper I will express my opinion on what I feel were two crucial attributes of the Second World War; why it was fought and how it affected the entire world.