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9. The Second World War (1939-1945)


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9. The Second World War (1939-1945)

Abstract

In the first year of war, while Poland succumbed to German armored columns, on the western front the contestants were stalemated. Then, in the spring of 1940, Germany struck through the neutral Netherlands and Belgium and overran France. Norway and Denmark were also captured. Seizing carrion, Mussolini acted the jackal and brought Italy into the war on Germany's side at what he confidently expected was the moment of victory. For a year only Britain held out against the Axis, protected by her island position and the air umbrella provided by the Royal Air Force. Late in 1940, Mussolini invaded Greece, but when he ran into unexpected resistance he had to call on the Germans for help. To accommodate Mussolini, Hitler had to conquer Yugoslavia. Then, frustrated by Britain's resistance, he turned on Russia in the summer of 1941. Back and forth the battle line swayed across the plains of eastern Europe as the two giants slugged it out. [excerpt]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, World War II, Second World War, WWII

Disciplines

Eastern European Studies | European History | History | Military and Veterans Studies | Military History | Political Science | United States History

Comments

This is a part of [Section XVIII: The Western World in the Twentieth Century: The Historical Setting](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

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help. To accommodate Mussolini, Hitler had to conquer Yugoslavia. Then, frustrated by Britain's resistance, he turned on Russia in the summer of 1941. Back and forth the battle line swayed across the plains of eastern Europe as the two giants slugged it out.

Late in 1941 the war spread to the Pacific. Japan, convinced that East Asia would be hers only after the United States had been defeated, launched a surprise raid on the Pearl Harbor naval base, which brought most of the Western hemisphere into the war. Ultimately, forty-five states were banded together as the United Nations to defeat the Axis. Meanwhile, the Japanese armies swiftly overran the Philippines, Malaya, Burma, and the East Indies. The year 1942 marks the high water mark of Axis aggression.

Nevertheless, during the same year the tide turned. Allied troops landed in, and then conquered, North Africa. Italy was dealt a knockout blow in 1943. Subsequently Mussolini was lynched by his own people. In 1944 Allied troops landed in Normandy and during the course of that year virtually cleared France of Axis troops. Coordinating their drive with the Russian advance from the east, they caught the Germans in a pincers movement. On "V-E Day," in May, 1945, Germany surrendered. Shortly before, Hitler took his own life. Victory in the Pacific soon followed. Already Allied forces had taken huge bites out of the Japanese Empire. When atomic bombs were dropped on the home islands in August 1945, Japan surrendered.