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Ascent of the Dictators

Mussolini's Rise to Power

Benito Mussolini was born in Italy in 1883. During his early life he worked as a schoolteacher, bricklayer, and chocolate factory worker.

In December 1914, Mussolini joined a group of Italian socialists who broke away from socialism and formed the first fascist group to support Italian expansion.

With the Italian defeat at Caporetto during World War I, Mussolini called for national discipline and a dictator to take over the weak government.

In 1919, Mussolini launched his fascist movement, the Italian Combat Fascists. He formed paramilitary squads and used them against his political enemies.

In 1921, Mussolini and his fascist party won 35 seats in the Italian Parliament and the party was renamed the National Fascist Party.

In October 1922, the paramilitary squads began seizing government offices, and King Victor Emanuel III decided to make Mussolini Prime Minister of Italy.

In the 1924 elections, the fascists won 65% of the vote by using violence and intimidation.

In 1926, Mussolini expelled all opposition from Parliament, abolished all political parties other than the Fascist Party, and created a totalitarian dictatorship with no free press, and a secret police force.

In 1928, Italy signed a friendship treaty with Ethiopia; however, Mussolini sent arms and troops to the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somalia and prepared for a future invasion of Ethiopia.

In 1929, Pope Pius XI agreed to accept the authority of the Fascist dictatorship.

In 1931, Mussolini built 1700 summer camps for city children, gave workers an 8-hour work day and insurance benefits. No unions or strikes were allowed.

In 1931, by public decree, all meetings and public occasions began with the official Roman salute to Mussolini and all fascists were required to wear military-style uniforms.

Stalin's Rise to Power

In 1917, Stalin entered the Soviet cabinet as People's Commissar for Nationalities and began to emerge as a leader of the new regime. During the civil war from 1918 to 1920, he played an important administrative role on military fronts and in government.

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In 1922, he was elected General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, enabling him to control the rank-and-file members loyal to him.

In 1924, he was highly regarded by Lenin as an administrator but not as leader. Toward the end of his life, Lenin wrote a testament in which he strongly criticized Stalin's arbitrary conduct as General Secretary and recommended that he be removed.

On Lenin's death, Stalin and two others allied against Leon Trotsky, who was a strong contender to replace Lenin. After Trotsky was ousted as Commissar of War, Stalin allied himself with Nikolai Bukharin. Stalin subsequently broke with Bukharin and engineered his fall from power.

A primary issue around which these party struggles centered was the course of the Russian economy. The right wing, led by Bukharin, favored granting concessions to the peasantry and continuing Lenin's New Economic Policy. The left wished to proceed with industrialization on a large scale at the expense of the peasants. Stalin's position wavered, depending on the political situation.

In 1928, Stalin reversed this policy and inaugurated collectivization of agriculture and the Five-Year Plan. Ruthless measures were taken against the kulaks, the farmers who had risen to prosperity under the New Economic Policy.

Hitler's Rise to Power

In 1919, a former corporal in the German Army named Adolf Hitler joined the National Socialist Party (Nazi Party). He was typical of many Germans who were disillusioned after the German defeat in the First World War. Ex-soldiers felt that they had been stabbed in the back by their own government.

Economic hardship was coupled with humiliation as a result of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Right-wing groups like the Nazi Party gained popularity by saying that they would not adhere to the terms of the Treaty.

The Nazi Party gained support through the use of force against communists and trade unionists. In addition, the Nazis campaigned on a message of traditional values and with the constant reminders of who was to blame for Germany's economic crisis. Members of the Nazi Party were identified by the military uniforms they wore, which demonstrated strength at a time when the government was weak.

By 1923, Adolf Hitler had assumed control of the Nazi Party and attempted to seize control of the German government through force. This attempt failed and he was imprisoned.

While in prison, he wrote *Mein Kampf (My Struggle)*, in which he outlined his political beliefs. Also at this time, Hitler's political supporters began developing propaganda tactics to influence the German people.

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In 1929, because of world-wide economic depression, the German people became increasingly receptive to the Nazi Party message. At this time many people were unemployed, inflation was skyrocketing, the threat of communism increased, and the German government failed to address these problems.

By 1931, the Nazi Party was growing in strength. Propaganda played on people's fear for the future. The Nazi emphasis on military strength led many former soldiers to support the Nazi Party.

In 1932, the Nazi Party gained the most seats in the German Parliament. In 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany. When President Hindenburg died in 1933, Hitler assumed presidential powers. The Nazi Party's rise to power was complete.

Document 3

Aggressive Foreign Policy

Italy Invades Ethiopia

Italian dictator Benito Mussolini had long held a desire for a new Italian Empire. Reminiscent of the Roman Empire, Mussolini's new empire was to rule over the Mediterranean and North Africa. His new empire would also avenge past Italian defeats. Chief among these defeats was the Battle of Adowa which took place in Ethiopia on March 1, 1896. Mussolini promised the Italian people "a place in the sun", matching the extensive colonial empires of the United Kingdom and France.

Ethiopia was a prime candidate of this expansionist goal for several reasons. Following the scramble for Africa by the European imperialists it was one of the few remaining independent African nations, and it would serve to unify the Italian-held Eritrea to the northwest and Italian Somaliland to the east. It was considered to be militarily weak, but rich in resources.

On October 3, 1935, Italy advanced into Ethiopia from Eritrea without declaration of war. The Italian forces numbered greater than 100,000. The Ethiopians were outnumbered but fought bravely while appealing to the League of Nations for assistance.

After several months of fighting the Italians were victorious and Italy annexed the Ethiopia on May 7, 1936.

Germany Invades Poland

In September 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland. The invasion of Poland marked the start of World War II in Europe, as Poland's western allies, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, soon followed by France, South Africa and Canada, among others. The invasion began on September 1, 1939, one week after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, and ended October 6, 1939, with Germany and the Soviet Union occupying all of Poland.

The Soviet Union Invades Poland and Finland

The 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland was a military operation that started without a formal declaration of war on September 17, 1939, during the early stages of World War II, sixteen days after the beginning of the Nazi German attack on Poland. It ended in a decisive victory for the Soviet Union's Red Army.

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on November 30, 1939. Because the attack was judged as illegal, the Soviet Union was expelled from the League of Nations on December 14, 1939. Finnish resistance frustrated the Soviet forces, which outnumbered the Finns 4 to 1 in men, 200 to 1 in tanks and 30 to 1 in aircraft. Finland held out until March 1940, when the treaty was signed ceding about 9% of Finland's territory and 20% of its industrial capacity to the Soviet Union.

Student Handout 3

Characteristics of Totalitarian Regimes

Directions: Using **Documents 2** and **3**, and your textbooks, identify specific examples of each of the characteristics of totalitarian regimes in Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union. Write your examples in the appropriate section under each country.

Characteristics of Totalitarian Regimes	Italy	Germany	Soviet Union
Indoctrination			
Propaganda			
Censorship			
Terror			
Charisma			
One Party Rule			
Economic Control			
Extreme Nationalism			