Adolf Hitler: Dictator, Chancellor of Germany

Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889 in Braunau, Austria. Throughout his younger years, he suffered from lung infections and eventually quit school at the age of 16, partially the result of ill health and partially the result of poor school work.

When World War I was touched off by the assassination by a Serb of the heir to the Austrian Empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Hitler's passions against foreigners, particularly Slavs, were inflamed. He was caught up in the patriotism of the time, and submitted a petition to enlist in the Bavarian army.

Hitler narrowly escaped death in battle several times, and was eventually awarded two Iron Crosses for bravery. He rose to the rank of lance corporal but no further. In October 1916, he was wounded by an enemy shell and evacuated to a Berlin area hospital. After recovering, and serving a total of four years in the trenches, he was temporarily blinded by a mustard gas attack in Belgium in October 1918.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Hitler led a political movement known as Nazism, controlled by the National Socialist German Workers (Nazi) Party. They rose to power calling for the rejection of the Versailles Treaty, taking over land, and revoking the rights of Jews.

Appointed Chancellor of Germany in 1933, Hitler told Germans that the German (or Aryan) race was superior to other nations and blamed others for Germany’s troubles. Hitler’s extreme nationalism, or love for Germany, was supported with a strong military presence. Hitler called upon his secret police to deal with any who protested against his government. He burned books of famous writers who spread ideas and truths that were contrary to his beliefs. He killed people because of their religion or if they were handicapped. For example, in 1938, mobs attacked Jews in their homes, at work, and in the streets in what became known as Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass). Also, the murder of 6,000,000 Jews and 5,000,000 other German enemies became known as the Holocaust.
Stalin is Russian means “Man of Steel.” Joseph Stalin was born in 1879. He rose to power in 1922 as Secretary General of the Communist Party. Stalin’s form of government was called communism. In the 1930s Stalin launched his Great Purge, killing millions of his own people who he believed might threaten his rule. As Secretary General, Stalin also had the power to appoint people to important positions in the government. The new holders of these posts were fully aware that they owed their promotion to Stalin. They also knew that if their behavior did not please Stalin they would be replaced.

Stalin was probably the most ruthless and successful tyrant the world has known. He created in the Soviet Union a totalitarian state in which the government controlled everything - all agriculture, all industry, the arts and sciences, sports, entertainment, the media, and religion. Every aspect of society was under the control of the government. The government decided what should be produced, how much, and at what price. All wages and prices were subject to government control. In return, the people got a welfare state: cradle to grave security. Hospitalization, education, housing, and pension plans were all guaranteed by the state, as were jobs. The people, in turn, gave up every trace of freedom. To make sure that his commands were obeyed and that no one disagreed with him, Stalin employed a vast network of secret police. A large system of prison camps was built to accommodate all who were accused of subverting the state.

Stalin brutally transformed Soviet agriculture through a process called collectivization-- by taking over private farms and creating a system of government-owned farms. These farms were called collective farms. Stalin controlled manufacturing and production in all industries. Anyone who disagreed with Stalin could be arrested and sent to labor camps in Siberia.
After World War One, Italy was in turmoil. The economy was shattered and there were strikes and protests everywhere. On March 23, 1919, Mussolini and several other veterans formed the National Fascist Party (became known as fascism). This party grew in popularity among the people of Italy, who were disenchanted with the chaos surrounding them. Mussolini seemed to have the answers to bring their country into order. During this time, he adopted the Roman salute and the Black Shirt militia, which Hitler later copied from him as the Brown Shirts.

On October 29, 1922 Mussolini managed to assume the powers of all the government offices in order to regain control of the economy. In a short period of time, he was successful in stabilizing the economy and taking his country out of economic turmoil. He became known as "Il Duce" (the leader). Mussolini had visions of a new Roman Empire and he could see the day when the Mediterranean Sea became the "Mare Nostrum" (Our Sea). But Mussolini found his country blacklisted by the League of Nations and it forced his relationship closer to Nazi Germany, which was also isolated for their actions. Mussolini soon realized that the League of Nations did not have the backbone to stop Hitler or himself in gaining new colonies, so he pressed forward. In 1935, Italy attacked Ethiopia and in 1939, it invaded Albania. His forces attacked with weapons such as tanks, machine guns, and airplanes while those he attacked fought back with spears and lances.

Like Hitler and Stalin, Mussolini was also a bully who picked on those who were weak and opposed his totalitarian rule.

On May 22, 1939, Italy and Germany cemented their alliance with the Pact of Steel.

**Military Dictatorship in Japan**
Under Emperor Hirohito, a military dictatorship took control of Japan in the 1930s and began stomping on its neighbors in Asia. The Japanese were also suffering from an economic depression. The Japanese were angry at white leaders who acted with arrogance (superiority) toward Asian nations.

Just like the ambitious Germany, Japan aimed to be the masters of Asia and the Pacific. Japan started to invade China in 1937. Its main reasons for the invasion were to obtain raw materials like coal and iron from China and also gain control of China’s vast trade. When the war with China dragged too long, Japan began to change its target. Spotting a precious opportunity in the Europe war, Japan decided to become a member of the Axis Powers. In September 1940, Japan signed a treaty with Germany and Italy, marking its participation in the war against the Allies.

Like in Germany and Italy, Japanese rulers told the people that they were a superior race destined to rule others. Japan invaded China to support their notion of being a superior race.

The Japanese had a strict military code. The concept of Yamato Damashi equipped each soldier with a strict code: never be captured, never break down, and never surrender. To be a coward or to be captured was a disgrace to one’s family, community, and country. Each soldier was trained to fight to the death and was expected to die before suffering dishonor. Often, imperial soldiers would shout "Banzai" before charging into battle, believing that the exuberant cheer would indicate their willingness to die with honor.