CAUSE 1: JAPANESE AGGRESSION IN THE PACIFIC

After World War I, Japan became interested in creating a Pacific Empire and it had begun building a powerful navy. Great Britain and the United States opposed this action. Soon all three nations were embarked on a naval arms race. In 1921, the United States, Japan and several other nations met in Washington to ease tensions in the Pacific. The delegates to the Washington Naval Conference negotiated three treaties all designed to reduce arms in the Pacific. Soon, however, the Conference agreements unraveled. Nations sidestepped them by building smaller warships and submarines and Japan still continued its quest for a Pacific empire.

In 1931, Japanese troops began to occupy the northern Chinese province of Manchuria. When China petitioned the League of Nations for help, the League asked the United States to participate in an economic boycott against Japan. The Hoover administration refused and in the end, the League took no action. Now easy prey, Manchuria fell in January 1932, and Japan set up a “puppet” government, that is, one controlled by Japan.

After 1930, Japan came under leadership intent on expansion and empire. A military clique (group) gradually assumed more and more control, and Emperor Hirohito became little more than a figurehead. Aggression in Manchuria was only the beginning of an effort to secure markets and raw materials essential to a new and powerful Japan.

With the war raging in Europe, France and the Netherlands soon found themselves defeated by the German army. Their colonies in Southeast Asia were ripe for Japanese picking. In September of 1940, the US was clearly forming on the side of the allies and informed Japan that the US would not tolerate Japanese military presence in Asia. The Japanese, however, soon took over the French colonies now known as Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

The US responded to this aggression by placing an embargo (stoppage) on the export of raw materials to the US and refused to sell them the oil and scrap metal they desperately needed. The following day, Japan announced that it had formed a military alliance with Germany and Italy.

War in the Pacific loomed in the summer and fall of 1941 and Japanese expansion continued to other nation in the Pacific. In response, the United States froze all Japanese accounts in American banks making it impossible for Japan to buy any goods from the US. Even while Japanese diplomats were meeting to solve the crisis, Japan was planning their attack. On Sunday, December 7, 1941, a wave of Japanese bombers struck the United States fleet at Pearl Harbor, the American naval base in Hawaii. Despite warnings from intelligence sources, the US was taken by surprise and most of the fleet was caught at anchor. The results were catastrophic and the United States Congress formally joined the war against Japan and Germany with days.
CAUSE 2: ISOLATIONIST ECONOMIC POLICY FAILS THE US

Throughout the 1920’s, the United States continued its strong isolationist sentiments, even in the areas of international trade. Several laws were passed that reflected this attitude. High tariffs or taxes on imported goods to the United States made it expensive for Americans to buy overseas products, increasing their dependency on US products. At the same time, however, the high protective tariffs by the United States disrupted world trade and worsened economic conditions for all nations.

Economic problems in Europe forced the United States to take a more direct role in the world economy. Devastated by wild inflation in 1923, Germany had failed to make reparation payments to France as required under the Treaty of Versailles. In reaction, France occupied German lands threatening European peace. To help Germany pay its reparations, the United States lent money to Germany so Germany could pay France and the other Allies. The Allies, therefore, would then have the money to pay their wartime debts to the United States. This agreement, helped the worldwide economy, but at the same time brought the US further into world affairs.

When the depression struck the United States, Hoover stopped aid to Germany and Germany slowed its payments to the Allies. Consequently, the Allies were unable to pay their debts to the United States. In 1931, President Hoover tried to relieve the Allies burden by suspending all debt payment for a year. But when payments came due again, many nations were still unable to fulfill their obligations. The United States eventually collected only about one quarter of the money owed by the Allies. Americans resented the Allies for not paying their full share of the cost of the First World War effort. This resentment helped strengthen isolationist sentiment during the 1930’s.
CAUSE 3: TOTALITARIAN DICTATORS RISE IN EUROPE

Most government officials and citizens in the 1920’s were isolationists wanting the US to end connection with overseas nations. Others were considered internationalist and felt that involvement was necessary for our future. The rise of totalitarian dictators in Europe made US isolationism difficult. By the mid-1930’s, dictators had established totalitarian governments in Italy and Germany. In a totalitarian state, the government is supreme and individuals have few rights. All political opposition is forbidden.

In 1922, Benito Mussolini established himself as dictator of Italy. He and his followers, known as fascists, suspended elections put the Italian economy under strict government supervision, and began to modernize the armed forces. Fascist leaders loudly supported an active campaign of territorial expansion. They promised that Italy would become a great power in the Mediterranean region and in Africa.

Even more ominous (threatening) was the rise of Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist or Nazi, party in Germany. The Nazis had grown increasingly popular during the 1920’s and 1930’s because of Hitler’s fierce criticism of German treatment under the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler expressed the feelings of many Germans who believed their nation had been unfairly punished by the treaty. He also proclaimed that the Germans were a “master race” and blamed the German defeat in World War I on the Jews within Germany. Once in power, Hitler and the Nazis established totalitarian control and secretly began to build up the German military in preparation for aggressive expansion.

With tensions in Europe rising by the late 1920’s, United States Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg and French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand proposed a treaty to guarantee peace. In 1928, 14 nations signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact that outlawed war except in cases of self-defense. Although 63 nations eventually ratified (approved) the pact, there was no system to enforce it. As one senator complained, the pact was worth no more than a postage stamp.
CAUSE 4: GERMAN AGGRESSION

Hitler became increasingly convinced that other European nations would not act against his aggression and military build-up. In 1936, German soldiers marched into the French controlled Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. Fearful of war, France and Britain offered no resistance. This passive agreement to Hitler’s demands became known as appeasement. This continued as Germany annexed Austria in 1938 and Czechoslovakian controlled Sudentland later in that same year.

Hitler met with French and British leaders at a conference in Munich, Germany, in 1938 in an effort to resolve the crisis. The French and British agreed to German demands in Czechoslovakia in return for Hitler’s promise to end German expansion. In addition Italy and Germany joined Britain and France in a pledge that one of the four would never make war on the others. Czechoslovakia protested the loss of the Sudentenland, but without support from Britain and France it was powerless to resist.

Hitler realized that if he were to continue seizing European land, he would have to avoid war with the Soviet Union. For its part, the Soviet Union wanted assurance that Germany would not target its territory for expansion. In August 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany signed a non-aggression pact. This agreement promised the Soviets half of Poland and no German intervention if the Soviets invaded Finland. The pact was short lived.

By 1939, Germany launched a full-scale invasion of Poland. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany, fulfilling pledges they had made to defend Poland. In just weeks, Poland fell to German aggression and World War II began in Europe. Shortly after, Soviet troops invaded Poland. Within the month, the Soviet Union invaded Finland, an act that especially outraged Americans.

German aggression seemed undefeatable in the early years of the war in Europe. With the Soviets out of the way, only France and Britain stood between Germany and European domination. The Allies were dealt another blow in 1940 when France surrendered their country to German expansion. Only Britain remained.

In June of 1941, Germany launched a surprise attack on the Soviet Union breaking the non-aggression pact. German troops pushed deep into Soviet territory, overrunning the Ukraine and approaching Moscow and Leningrad. Financial help from the United States to the Soviet Union brought the Soviets to the Allied side. Although not entirely trusting, Britain and France realized Soviet help would be essential in defeating Hitler.
By 1939 the war in Europe was in full swing. German invasions in Sudentland, the Rhineland, and Poland brought France and Britain into the war. Two days after the Polish invasion, President Roosevelt issued a proclamation of neutrality. He commented, however, that the Americans need not “remain neutral in thought.” Even while declaring neutrality, Roosevelt made further efforts to end restrictions on arms sales. Isolationists in Congress fought his proposals.

Finally, the President and Congress reached a compromise. The United States could sell arms to the Allies on a “cash-and carry” basis, that is, as long as the Allies paid cash and transported the materials on their own ships. At the same time, Roosevelt assured Americans that there was not “the remotest possibility of sending the boys of American mothers to fight on the battlefields of Europe.”

While the US followed the Cash-Carry Plan, German aggression continued in Europe. On June 22, 1940, France surrendered to German troops while the Allied forces were forced out of Europe and across the English Channel at Dunkirk. Britain now stood alone. In the United States, a major shift in public opinion allowed preparations for war to begin in earnest. Congress authorized huge sums of money to modernize the army and navy of the United States. Within five months, over $17 billion was appropriated for United States defense.

By the end of 1940, the British were running out of money. Despite sympathy for Britain, many Americans, including members of Congress, were hesitant about lending money. They remembered the Allie’s failure to repay war debts after World War I.

Faced with this dilemma, President Roosevelt proposed a solution: The United States would lend Britain whatever supplies it needed to wage war against Germany. He compared this to helping neighbors whose hose was on fire. If the neighbors need your garden hose to put out the fire, Roosevelt pointed out; you would not waste time arguing about the cost of the hose or how it would be paid for. You would simply give your neighbors the hose and tell them to return it after the fire was out.

Congress approved Roosevelt’s plan and passed the Lend-Lease Act in early 1941. The act gave the president the authority to sell, exchange, lend or lease war materials to any country whose security he deemed vital to the defense of the United States. Roosevelt told Americans that the nations must now become the “arsenal of democracy.”

Getting the Lend Lease materials across the Atlantic to Britain proved difficult. “Wolf packs” of German submarines sank many supply ships throughout the spring of 1941. Some advisors urged Roosevelt to order navy destroyers to escort the ships on the dangerous Atlantic crossing and by July 1941, the President agreed. During September and October, German submarines attacked several American destroyers.
CAUSE ONE: JAPANESE AGGRESSION IN THE PACIFIC

1. What was the purpose of the Washington Naval Conference?

2. What happened to Manchuria in 1932?

3. What action did the US take that made Japan sign an alliance with Germany and Italy?

4. What happened on December 7, 1941?

CAUSE TWO: ISOLATIONIST ECONOMIC POLICY FAILS THE US

5. What laws reflected the US isolationist policy after WWI?

6. How easy was it for the Germans to make their wartime reparation payments?

7. How did the Americans feel when they failed to collect money owed them from Europe?

CAUSE THREE: TOTALITARIAN DICTATORS RISE IN EUROPE

8. What countries had totalitarian dictators in the 1920’s?

9. What did Hitler do to his military in the 1920’s?

10. What was the purpose of the US signing of the Kellogg Briand Pact on 1928?

CAUSE FOUR: GERMAN AGGRESSION

11. What the policy of appeasement?

12. What nations signed the non-aggression pact?

13. How did the Germans break the non-aggression pact?

CAUSE FIVE: US NEUTRALITY ENDS

14. What was the Cash and Carry Program?

15. Why did Roosevelt call America the “arsenal of democracy”?

16. How much success did Roosevelt have in getting goods to Europe before 1941?