

World War II: Europe and Japan in Ruins

1939 - 1945

Europe and Japan in Ruins

Devastation in Europe

- Many great cities of Europe suffered terrible destruction. London, Warsaw, and Berlin all suffered some of the worst devastation.



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Devastation in Europe

- Many people wandered the roads of Europe hoping to find their families or a safe place to live.
- Agriculture had been completely disrupted. Many died as famine and disease spread through the bombed-out cities. The suffering lasted for years.



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Postwar Governments and Politics

- In France and Italy, Communist Party membership skyrocketed. Their initial success was sabotaged when they sponsored violent strikes. They declined even more as the economies began to recover.



Market day in Saarbruecken, France, ca. 1948. NARA.

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Postwar Governments and Politics

- Nazi war criminals were arrested and charged with “crimes against humanity” in the Nuremberg Trials. Twelve were sentenced to death.



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Postwar Japan

- Japanese cities were also largely destroyed in the war. The Allies also stripped Japan of its colonial empire.
- U.S. General MacArthur developed a plan for fair, but firm rebuilding:



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Postwar Japan

- **Demilitarization:** disbanding the Japanese armed forces, leaving only a small police force.
- **Democratization:** creating a government elected by the people. Americans wrote a new constitution for a constitutional monarchy based on Great Britain.
- **Economic recovery:** Large land holders had to sell their land to the government, which then sold the land to small farmers at reasonable prices. Workers were allowed to create labor unions.



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Occupation Brings Deep Changes

- Japan's emperor had to declare that he was not divine. He became a figurehead for the country.
- The new constitution said Japan could not make war; they could fight only if attacked.
- With no armed forces, the Japanese agreed to a continuing U.S. military presence to protect their country.

