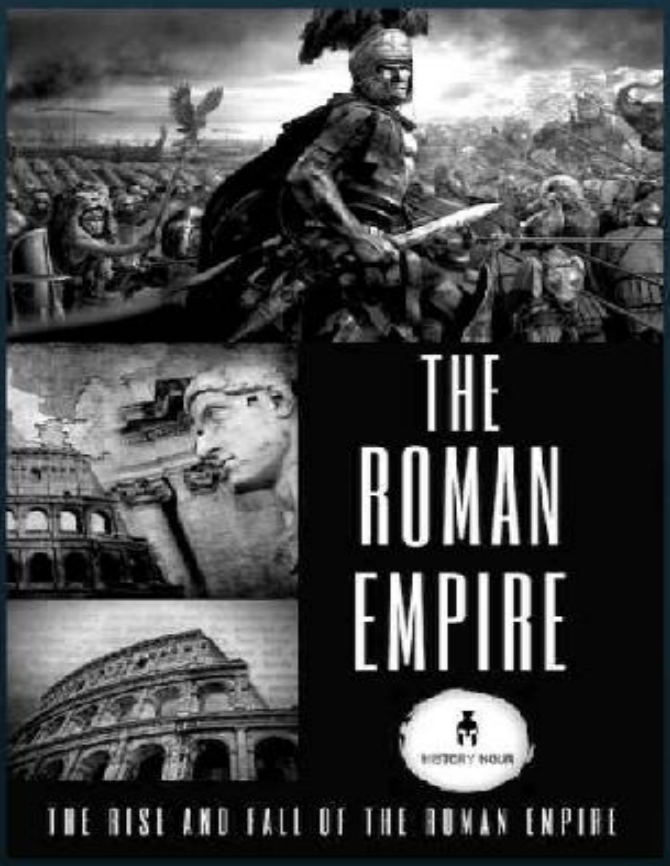
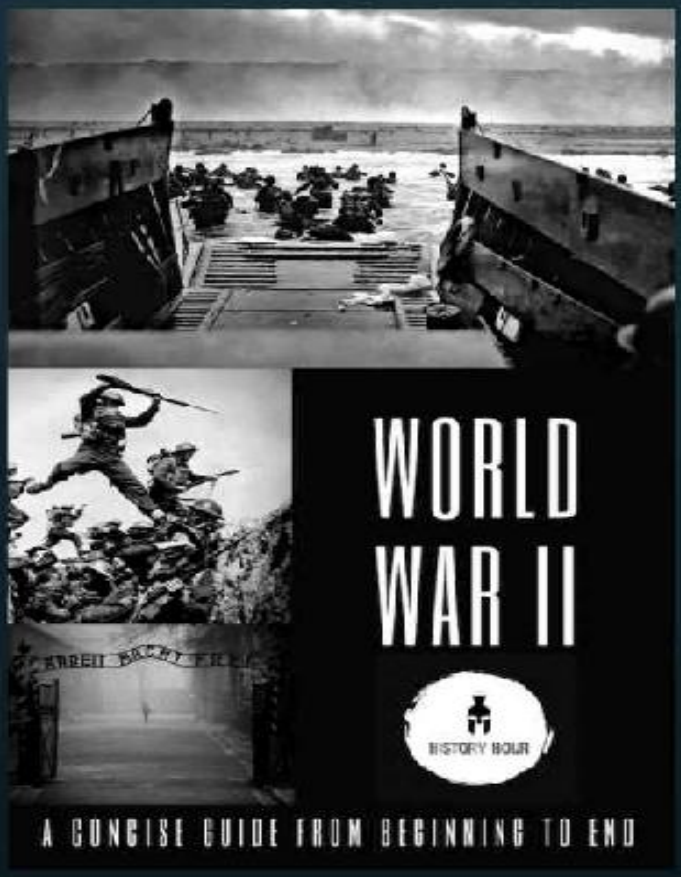
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HISTORY HOUR

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WORLD WAR II

A Concise Guide from Beginning to End

History Hour

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Final Words

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Introduction

Congratulations on purchasing *World War II: From Beginning to End*, the best concise history of that epochal conflict.

Your selection of this book demonstrates a rare seriousness. You recognize the need to study history, for to ignore it is to repeat it. Yet you also recognize the time constraints imposed by modern life. There is no shortage of massive tomes covering every aspect, even the most trivial, of World War II. Volumes that take months to read and can double as doorstops after you've given up in frustration.

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Can a history as concise as this one still offer surprises? Oh, yes. Don't believe me? Just turn the page and begin. Surprises await you in the first paragraphs. Think you already know how World War II began?

Prepare to be astonished...

Chapter One: The Match Is Lit

Dusk.

The German side of the border with Poland.

Seven German soldiers in Polish uniforms moved quickly through the encroaching darkness towards the Gleiwitz radio station, its 111-foot wooden tower dominating the twilight landscape.

The German soldiers had brought guns.

They also had brought a man who would become the first victim of World War II.

The soldiers stopped outside the station doors and turned to their unit leader, Alfred Naujocks, for the signal. It was August 31, 1939. The deception they were now undertaking, and the murder they would soon commit in the cool of the evening, would lead, they knew, to the invasion of Poland the following day—the stated goal of the entire operation.

Naujocks paused. Then nodded.

The German soldiers burst into the radio station and immediately overpowered the three engineers on duty. One can only imagine the confusion that reigned as they tried to make sense of the bizarre scene playing out before them: fellow Germans dressed as Polish soldiers, guns raised, barking orders.

One of the German soldiers, Karl Hornack, spoke fluent Polish. He grabbed a station microphone, flipped a switch, and shouted a lie that

would lead to war: "*Uwage! Tu Gliwice. Rozglosnia znajduje sie w rekach Polskich*." ("Attention! This is Gleiwitz. The broadcasting station is in Polish hands.")

Outside, on the station's front steps, the German soldiers shoved Franciszek Honiok back a few feet and looked at him with satisfaction. The man was a 43-year-old German Catholic, a farmer known locally as sympathetic towards Poles. The Germans had arrested him the day before with plans for bringing him along this night. They had dressed him in a Polish soldier's uniform. He would be their 'proof' of a Polish insurgency on the German side of the border.

One of the soldiers walked up to Honiok, raised a pistol, and shot the innocent man in the face.

Over the course of the next few hours, the fabricated 'official' story solidified and spread, just as the Nazis had planned: militant Poles had crept across the border and, with the help a German traitor, Franciszek Honiok, attacked a German radio station.

The German Chancellor, Adolph Hitler, would use this false flag event as the pretext for invading Poland the following day.

Thus, World War II began with a lie, and with an innocent German farmer dead on a radio station's front steps.

Why Poland?

The question immediately presents itself: Why was Adolf Hitler so anxious to invade Poland—so anxious, in fact, that he tasked others with crafting a deliberate lie to justify his invasion?

The answer is, in a word, *lebensraum*.

Lebensraum, or 'living space', was the Nazi concept of territorial expansion. The Nazi party that ruled Germany promoted the racist idea of 'Aryan' superiority. Germans, according to this line of thinking, were racially and culturally superior to the other, more 'decadent' countries that surrounded it. This alleged superiority granted Germany the right to annex and dominate, with impunity, regions and countries it deemed weak and unworthy. The 'inferior' populations of these countries would be systematically starved to death or deported, and eventually replaced with Germans. Thus, it was hoped by the Nazis, that Germany would conquer Europe without recourse to a wider war.

The Soviet Question

Germany inaugurated its *lebensraum* policy by annexing Austria in 1938, then the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia in 1939. These aggressions had produced no significant responses from the world's major powers, and Hitler had hoped that his planned invasion of Poland would likewise yield no protests.

For the leader of Germany, the only question mark was the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin. The Soviet Union bordered Poland in the east, and Stalin most likely would not want Germany invading a buffer state. To prevent the Soviet Union from coming to Poland's aid, Hitler convinced Stalin to sign a non-aggression pact: in exchange for not aiding Poland, Hitler agreed to give half the conquered country to Stalin. The pact was signed August 23, 1939—one week before the invasion.

Hitler's Miscalculation Leads to World War

His invasions of Austria and Czechoslovakia having provoked little protest from other countries, and with Stalin neutered by a non-aggression pact, Adolph Hitler assumed that his armies would roll into Poland on September 1, 1939, with little outside protest.

He assumed wrongly.

Two days later, on September 3, 1939, France and Great Britain declared war on Germany, and World War II officially began.

Invasion and Swift Victory Over Poland

The Germans employed a strategy known as *blitzkrieg*—a swift, intense invasion by overwhelming forces that divides and scatters the opposition. A modern analogue might be the 'shock and awe' campaign that inaugurated the American military invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The Poles fought valiantly but were no match for the vastly superior German war machine. Consider the lopsided numbers:

- The German army boasted 1.5 million soldiers; the Polish army numbered only 500,000.
- The German air force launched 2,500 aircraft against the Poles' 600.

- The Germans rolled 2,400 tanks into Poland; the Poles met them with just 880.

Given such imbalances, it should not be surprising that the German forces made relatively short work of the Polish defenses. Germany effectively eliminated the Polish air force within the first two days of the conflict, and by the end of the war's first week, German troops were approaching the outskirts of Warsaw, the Polish capital.

Russia Enters the Fray

On September 17, Soviet forces crossed into Poland from the east. The Polish forces, already outnumbered, were now battling two nations on two fronts—an impossible task for so small an army.

Ten days later, on September 27, Warsaw surrendered to German forces. Poland woke to find itself partitioned, with Nazi Germany controlling the west, and Soviet Russia controlling the east.

The war was less than a month old.

Chapter Summary

- On August 31, 1939, Germany staged an attack on its own Gleiwitz radio station, falsely claiming it had been the work of Polish insurgents. Adolph Hitler used the staged attack as a pretext for invading Poland the following day.
- German farmer Franciszek Honiok was murdered by Nazis on the steps of the Gleiwitz radio station and is often considered the first victim of World War II.
- Germany annexed Austria in 1938, then the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia in 1939, to little international protest.
- On August 23, 1939, one week before its invasion of Poland, Germany signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. The countries agreed to split Poland between them.
- On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland.
- Two days later, on September 3, 1939, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, and World War II officially began.
- On September 17, as part of Stalin's agreement with Germany, Soviet forces invaded Poland from the east.
- Ten days later, on September 27, Warsaw surrendered to German forces. The country was now partitioned: Nazi Germany occupied the west, while Soviet Russia occupied the east.

Chapter Two: The European Players

When exploring a global conflict, it's important to know and understand the key players and their (occasionally shifting) motivations. What follows is an introduction to the major European figures of World War II.

Adolph Hitler

History is replete with characters whose dark desires shaped the times in which they lived. Rarely, however, does history give us a figure so vile that his very name becomes synonymous with evil. Adolph Hitler is such a figure.

Born in Braunau am Inn, Austria, on April 20, 1889, he was the fourth of six children. Failing to distinguish himself in any particular way, the young Adolph was often at odds with his overbearing father, who would eventually disapprove of his son's burgeoning interest in art.

Hitler's father died unexpectedly in 1903, and his mother passed away four years later. He was alone in the world, with no prospects and no discernible talents. Seeking a fresh start, he moved to Vienna and tried his hand as a watercolor painter. He twice applied to the Academy of Fine Arts —and was rejected both times. (Many commentators have wondered how differently the 20th century would have played out had Hitler been accepted to art school.) He struggled financially and passed many nights in

homeless shelters. He would later claim that it was this difficult time that stoked his anti-Semitism.

A year before the eruption of World War I—at the time known only as the Great War, or the War to End All Wars—Hitler moved to Munich, where, in August 1914, his application to serve in the German army was accepted. Although he spent most of his time far from the front lines, he was in fact wounded at the Battle of Somme and eventually decorated for bravery, receiving both the Iron Cross First Class and the Black Wound Badge.

Germany's surrender in 1918 came as a shock to the young Hitler, whose nationalistic fervor had reached a fever pitch. Like many patriotic Germans, he found the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which closed the war, unduly harsh and degrading. The victors imposed sanctions on Germany that collapsed the defeated country's economy and bred popular resentment—resentment that Hitler would, in time, shrewdly exploit for his own political gain.

His political career began in 1919, when he joined the German Workers' Party (or DAP, for *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*). The DAP soon changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party (or NSDAP, for *Nazionalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*—usually shortened to Nazi).

Hitler quickly became the party's most effective orator, railing against the Treaty of Versailles, Marxists, and Jews. He designed the now-infamous Nazi Party banner, festooning a red background with a white circle and prominent swastika.

His ascent through the party ranks was impressively swift. By 1921, just two years after joining the NSDAP, Adolph Hitler had improbably maneuvered himself into position as the Nazi Party chairman.

Not surprisingly for a megalomaniac, the rapid success went to his head.

On November 8, 1923, Hitler and some of his followers stormed a public meeting at a large beer hall in Munich. He proclaimed the start of a national revolution and declared the formation of a new government. A violent struggle broke out in the hall, and several people died. The so-called 'Beer Hall Putsch' quickly failed, though, and Hitler was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to nine months in prison. Those nine months would prove fateful for Europe, and especially Europe's Jews, for it was during his incarceration that Hitler committed his fanatical musings to paper in *Mein Kampf* ('My Struggle'), an autobiographical political manifesto that would eventually sell more than five million copies by 1939.

Hitler's book cannily played into widespread German resentment over the harsh sanctions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles. He advocated revenge against France, and a renewed eastward expansion toward Russia. Anti-Semitism pervaded the book, with Jews being his chosen scapegoat for all of Germany's ills. His beleaguered fellow citizens yearned for a national resurgence; Hitler laid out a plan for just that—albeit a national resurgence based on the supposed purity and superiority of the German race.

Emboldened by his early successes and eager to exploit the suffering of Germans for his own gain, Hitler campaigned for the presidency in 1932. He lost, but his second-place showing was strong enough to gain him the position of chancellor. It would be from this position that Hitler would create for himself a dictatorship whose evil shocks the conscience even today.

Over the next two years, Hitler would systematically suppress his political rivals. And when suppression finally could not be guaranteed, he simply had his rivals killed. The so-called Night of Long Knives—which in fact took place over three days—saw Hitler's political enemies rounded up and shot.

By the close of 1934's hot summer, Adolph Hitler was Germany's sole, undisputed leader, with his Nazi Party the only party allowed to operate legally in the country.

Darkness had fallen, under cover of which one man steered the continent toward war.

Joseph Stalin

Curiously, Joseph Stalin wasn't born 'Joseph Stalin'.

The future leader of the Soviet Union was born Josef Vissarionovich Djugashvili on December 18, 1878, in Georgia. Decades later, his totalitarian tendencies in full bloom, he would invent a new birth date for himself—December 21, 1879—and take the name *Stalin*, from the Russian for 'man of steel'.

The young Joseph was an only child in a desperately poor family. He shared with Hitler a difficult relationship with his father, an alcoholic who frequently beat him. Poverty and abuse were soon followed by smallpox, an illness that left Stalin with lifelong facial scars.

It is impossible not to suspect that the harshness of his early years inculcated in the young man a brutal, dog-eat-dog understanding of the world, a mindset that would naturally influence his later actions as a totalitarian leader.

An intellectually bright teenager keen to escape the wretched conditions in which he lived, Stalin (rather improbably, given the tyrant he would later become) entered an Orthodox Christian seminary and studied for the priesthood. It was here that he first encountered the writings of Karl Marx, whose works, especially *The Communist Manifesto*, were deemed revolutionary and subversive. Their impact on Stalin was profound. In 1899 he was expelled from the seminary, the official reason being his penchant for skipping exams. Stalin himself would later claim a different reason: his superiors' disapproval of his Marxist propaganda.

The revolutionary spirit having been lit within him, Stalin became an underground political agitator and routinely participated in labor demonstrations and strikes. He adopted the name 'Koba' (taken from a fictional Georgian outlaw-hero), and joined the Bolsheviks, a militant wing of the Marxist Social Democratic movement. The militancy of the Bolsheviks appealed to the increasingly thuggish side of his personality. He was soon engaged in all manner of criminal activity, including bank robbery—the fruits of which directly funded the Bolshevik Party. His

multiple arrests were a point of pride for him, as was his eventual imprisonment and exile in Siberia.

Tragedy haunted Stalin, and no doubt fueled his violence toward others. His wife, Ekaterina, died of typhus while their one child, Yakov, was still an infant. Yakov himself would eventually die a prisoner in Germany during World War II.

A second marriage, this time to Nadya Alliluyeva, held the promise of happiness and produced two children, a boy and a girl. But tragedy refused to let Stalin slip its shadow: Nadya committed suicide only a few years later.

In November 1917, the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia after assassinating the royal family. Vladimir Lenin became the first leader of the Soviet Union, and appointed Stalin to the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Stalin was shrewd and cunning, and quickly moved up the party ladder. He became the Secretary General of the Central Committee, a position from which he could appoint allies and establish a power base. When Lenin finally died in 1924, Stalin was well-placed to outmaneuver his rivals and assume leadership of the Communist Party—and of the Soviet Union itself.

It had been quite an accomplishment for the pockmarked son of an abusive father.

Any hopes that his hardscrabble beginnings might inspire a merciful approach to governing were quickly dashed. Stalin was a dictator and took to the role with relish. He implemented a series of ‘ five-year plans’ that

were designed to transform the Soviet Union from a largely rural society into a manufacturing and industrial powerhouse. The government took control of the economy and mandated the collectivization of Soviet agriculture—in other words, the government now controlled the farms. Not surprisingly, this plan met with stiff resistance from millions of farmers who refused to give up their land. Stalin would tolerate no resistance, however, and farmers who failed to comply were either exiled to labor camps or shot dead on the spot. Government mismanagement of farmland resulted in devastating famines across the Soviet Union. Millions perished.

Dictators are notorious for their insecurity and paranoia, traits Joseph Stalin displayed with historically horrifying results. He wielded terror like a whip and thrashed anyone who might oppose him. He broadened the powers of the secret police. He imposed his paranoia on the country he sadistically ruled, encouraging citizens to inform on one another and send family and neighbors to the Gulag. In the run-up to World War II, Stalin instituted the so-called Great Purge, a series of violent efforts to rid the Communist Party—and the nation itself—of anyone he considered a threat to his power.

The cult of personality he built around himself is by now familiar to students of tyrannical regimes, where cult-like devotion is a mandated feature of daily life. Stalin renamed cities in his own honor (Tsaritsyn, for example, was rechristened Stalingrad). He had Soviet history books rewritten to give him a more prominent role in the 1917 revolution. And his name was inserted into the Soviet national anthem.

By the time he died in 1953, Joseph Stalin was responsible for taking as many as 20 million innocent lives, mostly Russian. The scale of his barbarism is even today difficult to fully grasp.

Benito Mussolini

Had his actions not led to so much bloodshed and misery, it would be easy to dismiss Benito Mussolini as a buffoon. The shaved cranium, the incessant preening, the ridiculous bluster—Mussolini was downright cartoonish at times. But he was violent when his political survival needed him to be, and he shared with all dictators the shrewdness to eliminate rivals and solidify his own power base.

Mussolini was the founder of fascism, an authoritarian one-party ideology that mandated government control over industry. In this, fascism can be seen as related to, while opposed to, communism.

He headed the Italian government from 1922 to 1943. Unafraid of conflict, he led Italy into three straight wars, the last of which led to his own demise.

Mussolini was born at Dovia di Predappio, Italy, on July 29, 1883. His family was poor and lived a cramped existence in a two-bedroom apartment. Benito was intelligent but violent and learned very little in school. (His outsized ego apparently prevented him from taking school seriously.) He once stabbed a fellow student and was immediately expelled.

He managed to earn a diploma in 1901, however, and taught school for a short time. The following year, hoping to avoid military service, he hurried to Switzerland and took up with socialists there, having some time earlier become a socialist himself.

Sufficiently inspired by his time in Switzerland, Mussolini returned to Italy in 1904 and immediately attracted attention—and even admiration—for the extreme and violent rhetoric he deployed in political speeches. His words may have urged revolution and violence, and his manner may have been haughty, but he was nevertheless an articulate and powerful writer who energized the socialist faithful.

At the 1912 Socialist Party Congress, at the relatively young age of twenty-nine, he became editor of the party's daily paper, *Avanti*. His future in the party seemed extraordinarily bright.

But something happened that altered the course of Benito's life: World War I.

Smart enough to recognize that the war would destroy the 'old' Europe, Mussolini deserted the Socialist Party in 1914 and began developing his concept of fascism for the 'new' Europe he saw taking shape.

He founded several newspapers and the National Fascist Party. The election of 1921 saw him enter Parliament, and a year later, with 250,000 followers in tow, he marched into Rome and assumed leadership of the country. Like Hitler in Germany, Mussolini exploited his countrymen's post-war desperation. He indulged his thuggish nature by establishing a harsh, dictatorial central government to eliminate opposition and restore 'law and order'.

Buffoonish but not entirely stupid, Mussolini took the necessary steps to ensure his own power. He called for elections—but rigged them. He suspended civil liberties and destroyed all opposition. His followers assassinated a socialist rival. And his 1929 concordat with the Vatican settled, at least for a time, some of the notable disagreements between the Italian state and the Roman Catholic Church.

Desperate people often long for a strongman to set things right. It was true in Germany, it was true in Russia, and it was true in Italy. As the 1930's began, Mussolini enjoyed wide support. He talked tough and told people what they wanted to hear. But he had no workable plan to solve Italy's many problems, and the country fell deeper into economic despair. Italy's average income was significantly lower than that of France, Great Britain, and America. Mussolini's minions profited wildly while the rest of the nation suffered.

The worldwide Great Depression of the 1930's did not spare Italy. In 1935, Mussolini launched the Ethiopian War in hopes of distracting his countrymen from their grinding poverty. It didn't work. In 1936, Mussolini tried another bit of misdirection by coming to the aid of General Francisco Franco in Spain's civil war. This, too, failed to work. Desperate, Mussolini joined forces with Adolf Hitler, and in 1938 began attacking Italian Jews in emulation of Germany's leader.

By the outbreak of World War II, Mussolini was deeply unpopular in Italy. And at the war's end, he was unceremoniously executed by his countrymen.

Francisco Franco

It could be argued that Spanish dictator Francisco Franco doesn't bear inclusion in this chapter. His role in World War II was, admittedly, small to nonexistent. But he deserves inclusion for several reasons, not least of which is for what he *didn't* do: he didn't take up arms against the Allies in support of the Axis powers. The European conflict might well have turned out differently—and unfavorably for the Allies—had Franco actively participated.

As a child, Franco was close to his mother, a traditional and religious Roman Catholic of the upper middle class. His relationship with his father was not warm, but neither was it particularly hostile. Hailing from a long line of naval officers, it was assumed that young Francisco was likewise destined for such a career. He chose, however, the army, and in 1907, at the tender age of 14, he entered the Infantry Academy and graduated only three years later.

Franco volunteered for active duty in Spanish Morocco and quickly earned a reputation for seriousness. In an army marked by sloppiness and indifference, he stood out as a young man of professionalism and poise and demonstrated a mature ability to effectively command troops. In the years that followed, he moved his way up the ranks and was given full command of the Spanish Foreign Legion in 1923. Three years later, at the age of 33, Franco became a national hero after helping to put down a Moroccan rebellion.

By the mid-1930's, Spain was sliding into a terrible civil war. Franco had never been a member of a political party, but soon found himself the

head of a new Nationalist regime that had conquered the country on April 1, 1939. His government was essentially a military dictatorship.

The outbreak of World War II destabilized his government, at least temporarily. He had sympathy for the Axis powers but declared Spain neutral in the conflict. After the fall of France, however, he approached Adolph Hitler and offered to bring Spain into the war with the Axis powers in exchange for economic assistance and France's territorial holdings in north Africa. Hitler said no. Franco's government thereafter walked a tightrope: it let its sympathy for the Axis powers be known, but it strenuously avoided giving any economic or military help to them. Spain's 1943 return to neutrality arrived too late to gain it favorable treatment from the Allies, who had little use for Franco. But his wartime diplomacy, driven by self-interest, kept him from being destroyed along with the Axis powers.

Winston Churchill

Often lionized as 'the savior of his country', Winston Churchill's statesmanship was the polar opposite of Mussolini's buffoonery. His formidable personality and unyielding faith in the rightness of Britain's cause made him a popular figure during the war years, and even today he is the subject of books and award-winning movies.

Unlike several of World War II's European leaders, Winston Churchill was born into great wealth. Someone once joked that his family was so wealthy they could afford to give him four names instead of the usual three: Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born on November

30, 1874, at Blenheim Palace. But rather like many of Europe's other war-time leaders, Churchill's relationship with his father was strained at best. He was a sensitive child who took slights personally. His slight speech impediment no doubt enhanced his self-consciousness. It is generally understood that the young Winston's home life was not very warm.

His prep school academic record was quite average, perhaps even slightly less than average. It was not until he gained admittance to college —after his third attempt—that his brilliance began to be noticed. When he graduated in 1894 he was eighth in his class.

Churchill distinguished himself as a soldier journalist, writing about military exploits in Cuba, India, and Sudan. As a journalist for the *Morning Post*, he documented the battles between the British and Dutch soldiers in South Africa. He was once taken prisoner by the Dutch, but, displaying a personal courage that would become his hallmark, he managed a jailbreak and escaped.

It is ironic that Winston Churchill, who is now regarded as a great statesman, lost more elections than any other modern politician. He tried for many years to enter Parliament and the British government. It took many mistakes and many decades, but by the start of World War II he was Britain's Prime Minister and head of the Ministry of Defense. His leadership during the war was marked by noble and inspiring speeches, which encouraged the British while awaiting American help. Under an unrelenting aerial assault by the Nazi air force, the British took courage from their Prime Minister's fighting spirit.

After the United States entered World War II, in December 1941, Churchill was confident that the Allies would eventually win the war. In the months that followed, Churchill worked closely with Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin (a man Churchill reputedly loathed) to develop an Allied war strategy and plan for a post-war world. In their famous meeting at Yalta, the three men discussed a future Europe with the United Nations as its centerpiece.

As the war wound down, Churchill offered many plans for social reforms in Britain, but was unable to convince the public. A strange reversal of political fortune befell Churchill once it became apparent the war would be won. Despite Germany's surrender on May 7, 1945, Churchill was defeated in the general election just two months later.

To gain a sense of the encouragement Winston Churchill gave his people in a dark time of near-constant bombardment and the threat of invasion, it is worthwhile to read a selection from his now-famous speech to the House of Commons, given on June 4, 1940:

"Turning once again, and this time more generally, to the question of invasion, I would observe that there has never been a period in all these long centuries of which we boast when an absolute guarantee against invasion, still less against serious raids, could have been given to our people. In the days of Napoleon, of which I was speaking just now, the same wind which would have carried his transports across the Channel might have driven away the blockading fleet. There was always the chance, and it is that chance which has excited and befooled the imaginations of many Continental tyrants. Many are the tales that are told. We are assured that novel methods will be adopted, and when we see the originality of malice, the ingenuity of aggression, which our enemy displays, we may certainly prepare ourselves for every kind of novel stratagem and every kind of brutal and treacherous maneuver. I think that no idea is so outlandish that it should not be considered and viewed with a searching, but at the same time, I hope, with a steady eye. We must never forget the solid assurances of

sea power and those which belong to air power if it can be locally exercised.

"I have, myself, full confidence that if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangements are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once more able to defend our island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone. At any rate, that is what we are going to try to do. That is the resolve of His Majesty's Government—every man of them. That is the will of Parliament and the nation. The British Empire and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the utmost of their strength.

"Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on

the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never

the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old."

Winston Churchill

Chapter Summary

- World War II's European leaders were notable for their strong personalities.
- Adolph Hitler's autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, written while he was in prison, outlined his racist ideology and plans for German renewal.
- Following the death of Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin assumed control of the Soviet Union and ruled it brutally, being ultimately responsible for approximately 20 million deaths.
- Benito Mussolini, founder of Italy's National Fascist Party, was thuggish but economically incompetent, and his repeated failures led to his downfall at the hands of his subjects.
- Francisco Franco expressed sympathy for the Axis cause, but never offered direct assistance to them.
- Winston Churchill's inspiring speeches and strong will urged the beleaguered Brits to maintain optimism in the face of repeated Nazi air assaults.

Chapter Three: Rising Sun

December 7, 1941.

The U.S. naval base, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Early morning.

Just before 8:00 a.m. local time.

The sky suddenly swarmed with 353 Imperial Japanese aircraft, including fighters and torpedo bombers. They buzzed through in two waves, having been launched from six aircraft carriers. All eight of the U.S. Navy battleships docked there were damaged, and four were sunk. In total, 188 U.S. aircraft were destroyed, 2,403 Americans were killed, and 1,178 others were wounded. It was an unprecedented attack on an American outpost.

> "A day that will live in infamy..."
> **President Franklin D. Roosevelt**

The shock of the attack can be compared, perhaps, to that of September 11, 2001, when terrorists stunned Americans by flying planes into the World Trade Center. Although Americans in 1941 anticipated eventual hostilities with the Empire of Japan, they never imagined an unprovoked attack on a military installation. This was an obvious act of war, and one day later the United States did indeed declare war on Japan.

America's declaration launched the nation into war in the Pacific—but also resulted in America going to war in Europe. Why?

Before we can examine the consequences of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, we must determine exactly how and why Japan arrived at such a decision. Why would Japan attack America?

Dreams of Empire

For the decade prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan had been making incursions into Chinese territory. In 1931, the Japanese army staged the so-called Manchurian Incident: Japanese soldiers blew up a railway and blamed it on Chinese hooligans. Japan then used the event as a pretext to invade and conquer Manchuria in northeastern China. A puppet state was soon established there, and the Japanese continued their incursions into other areas of China.

Not surprisingly, war soon broke out between the two countries. December of 1937 saw the Japanese army massacre 200,000 civilians and POW's in and around the city of Nanking. (Even today the Chinese insist the count was much higher, with northwards of 300,000 civilian deaths.)

Japan did indeed have dreams of establishing an empire, but empires are expensive to build and maintain. Japan is a comparatively small nation with few natural resources; yet fresh supplies were constantly needed. This demand for natural resources was, in fact, the ultimate reason for Japan's attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor. Japan wanted to conquer the resource-rich Dutch East Indies, and the only thing standing in its way was

America's Pacific fleet. *Knock out Pearl Harbor*, the thinking went, *and the entire South Pacific is ours*.

A Miscalculation That Wakes a Sleeping Giant

By December 1941, war had been raging in Europe for two years. The United States had remained neutral, in part because the American public had shown little interest in getting involved so quickly in another foreign conflict. What today is known as World War I was in 1941 known as The War to End All Wars, the bloody memory of which was still fresh in people's minds.

Japan was well aware of Americans' distaste for war and gambled that a lightning-quick strike on Pearl Harbor would do little to inflame passions.

Japan gambled.

And Japan lost.

Americans' reaction to the Pearl Harbor attack was immediate and vitriolic: they wanted revenge and they wanted it *right then*.

The very next day, December 8, 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt declared war on Japan.

Three days after that, Germany declared war on America.

But why would America's declaration of war against Japan prompt a declaration of war from Germany?

The Tripartite Pact

In 1940, long before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan had signed a treaty with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, forming an alliance that came to be called the Axis. The three nations agreed to come to the defense of the others if attacked by a nation not already embroiled in World War II.

Ironically, a major goal of the treaty was to keep the United States out of the war. Specifically, the Axis powers wanted to keep America from coming to the aid of Great Britain, which was under heavy bombardment by Germany and would likely soon fall. The Tripartite Pact was intended to dissuade the United States from helping Britain, for it would trigger a response from all three Axis powers.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, then, was a grave miscalculation, one that ultimately destroyed its dreams of empire by provoking America into the war.

Hirohito

It would be impossible to discuss Japan's connection to World War II without taking a brief look at the country's enigmatic and controversial leader, Emperor Hirohito.

The eldest son of Crown Prince Yoshihito, Michinomiya Hirohito was born on April 29, 1901, in Tokyo's Aoyama Palace. As a member of the imperial family, Hirohito was, by ancient custom, not raised by his parents. Instead, he spent his early years in the care of imperial attendants and attended schools for the children of nobility. He received a rigorous

education not only in traditional subjects such as math and science, but also in military matters. He was an intelligent and refined young man, who in 1921 spent six months touring Western Europe. He was the first Japanese crown prince to ever go abroad.

Hirohito came of age during a difficult and tumultuous time. In 1923, a devastating earthquake struck Tokyo, claiming 100,000 lives and destroying over 60% of the city's homes. Irate Japanese mobs blamed ethnic Koreans (unfairly, it seems) for setting random fires and looting homes in the quake's aftermath; thousands were killed. Later that same year, Hirohito survived an assassination attempt after taking over the duties of emperor from his chronically ailing father. He celebrated a few months later by marrying Princess Nagako, with whom he eventually would have seven children. (Perhaps at the insistence of his new bride, Hirohito ended the practice of imperial concubinage.)

When his father finally passed in December 1926, Hirohito officially became the 124th Emperor of Japan. For his imperial name he chose Showa, or 'enlightened peace.'

It would be a mistake to assume that, as emperor, Hirohito was all-powerful, or in any sense a true monarch as is commonly understood. As emperor, Hirohito was the nation's highest spiritual authority and commander-in-chief of its armed forces. But he did not have unilateral decision-making authority. Japan's government was thoroughly dominated by the military, and in fact it would be they who would eventually decide to attack Pearl Harbor—a decision to which Hirohito would consent.

Hirohito is notable for many reasons, not least of which is the fact that he was the only Axis leader to survive the war. (Hitler committed

suicide and Mussolini suffered execution.) It may appear strange that the Allies allowed Hirohito to escape prosecution as a war criminal. The reasons for the relatively gentle treatment he received are complex and many, but perhaps two can be explained here briefly.

Following the Japanese surrender that ended the Pacific war, the Allies began an occupation of Japan. General Douglas MacArthur had been named the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers and oversaw the reconstruction and de-militarization of the defeated nation. Although it has been claimed that MacArthur had been genuinely moved by Hirohito's humility in surrender, and that this fact alone accounts for the emperor's continued presence in post-war Japanese affairs, a more likely scenario is preferred by other historians:

The men needed each other.

The post-war occupation of a defeated people is always a dicey proposition. The occupying force must always encourage continued cooperation and goodwill. The populace is demoralized and often angry. Insurgencies can be ignited with the faintest of sparks. That was the situation MacArthur found himself in following Japan's surrender. He needed a buddy.

MacArthur presented Hirohito as something of a victim, a pro-Western, pro-democracy forward thinker whose nation had been hijacked, so to speak, by the nation's generals and military brass back in the early 1930's. Blame for Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor? That went to the military. Blame for the use of rape in wartime? That went to the military, too. Practically every Japanese atrocity was eventually blamed on Japanese generals such as Hideki Tojo. MacArthur and the Allies feared that if they made a move to marginalize Hirohito, who was still a popular

figure with his countrymen, it could throw the occupation into disarray. MacArthur certainly did not need Hirohito becoming a martyr around whom the Japanese would rally and agitate.

So, he used Hirohito, and Hirohito let himself be used. Both men benefitted. MacArthur maintained a peaceful rebuilding of the country, and Hirohito avoided prison.

Although by most accounts he genuinely liked Hirohito, General MacArthur was not above reminding the emperor just who was in charge. An amusing incident involving a photograph offers an example of the General's willingness to embarrass Hirohito when he felt it was expedient to undermine the emperor's self-perpetuated imperial mystique.

The general's staff released the now-famous picture of his first meeting with the emperor. The impact of this on the Japanese public was immediate and profound. For the first time, they saw the emperor as a mere mortal, now standing in the shadow of the much taller Douglas MacArthur. Hirohito, hewing closely to the Japanese tradition, had always taken great pains to appear remote, silent, mysterious—a living god. (In fact, Japanese monarchs were believed to be descended from the gods.) When photographed, he had always insisted on certain angles to make him look tall and physically impressive. The photograph of him and MacArthur standing side by side, the emperor getting the worse of the comparison, would never have been snapped by a Japanese photographer.

The Japanese government immediately banned the photo. MacArthur was having none of it. He not only rescinded the ban, he mandated that all Japanese newspapers print the photo. In so doing he sent a not-too-subtle message to Hirohito about who was really calling the shots.

From 1945 to 1951, Hirohito toured the country and oversaw the reconstruction efforts. A postwar constitution preserved the monarchy but reduced the emperor to a mere symbol of the state. Political power bypassed emperor and military and resided solely with elected politicians. When the American occupation ended in 1952, Hirohito served largely in the background while Japan went through a period of rapid economic expansion.

He died on January 7, 1989, having spent nearly 64 years on the throne—the longest imperial reign in Japanese history. To this day, Hirohito's wartime record remains a subject of much debate.

Chapter Summary

- Japan nursed a dream of building an empire that dominated Asia and the Pacific.
- Being poor in natural resources, Japan sought to control the Dutch East Indies; the only barrier was the U.S. fleet based at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.
- Japan miscalculated by assuming Americans would not want war following an attack on Pearl Harbor.
- The U.S. declared war on Japan the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor.
- Germany, bound to Japan by the Tripartite Pact, declared war on America on December 11, 1941.
- Emperor Hirohito was the only Axis leader to survive the war.

Chapter Four: The Blitz

A year after Hitler ordered the invasion of Poland and thus precipitated World War II, the German leader ordered the regular bombing of London and other British cities. ‘The Blitz’, as it came to be known, was itself a sort of Plan B necessitated by the failure of Germany’s Luftwaffe (the Nazi air force) to defeat the Royal Air Force in the aptly-named ‘Battle of Britain’ only months earlier. The Luftwaffe had targeted airfields and radar stations, hoping to knock out England’s air defenses. The ostensible purpose of the ‘Battle of Britain’ was to dominate the skies over Britain in preparation for a German invasion.

An invasion that would never come.

The much-vaunted German Luftwaffe had found itself struggling against, and eventually losing to, the much smaller and less-heralded Royal Air Force. Frustrated, Hitler delayed his plans for invasion and finally scrapped them altogether.

His new plan was to simply bomb London off the map and thereby demoralize the country and force it to accept Germany’s terms.

Daylight attacks on London commenced on the afternoon of September 7, 1940. The skies darkened as 617 German fighters escorted 348 bombers over the city. At approximately 4:00 p.m., the bombers began dropping their payloads over London. For two straight hours the Nazis bombed the capital of Great Britain. The roar of aircraft rattled windows and bomb blasts shattered them.

The Germans were only getting started.

Just after dark, the sky screamed again as a second wave of German planes approached. Guided by the fires set by the bombings of hours earlier, the German planes repeatedly bombed London till just after 4:00 in the morning. This was something new in modern warfare: the deliberate bombing of a civilian population—not to enable an invasion, but simply to terrorize and demoralize an entire people.

The daylight attacks soon gave way to nighttime attacks, which continued for 76 straight nights, not only in London but in other cities as well. Initially, the British were in a quandary, for they lacked effective deterrents to the German fighters. Anti-aircraft artillery was in short supply, and searchlights, with which to identify German planes in the darkened skies, were hard to come by. Worse, the Brits had no skilled nighttime pilots who could confront the German planes.

The repeated bombing set fires that destroyed great stretches of the city. Air raid sirens alerted the citizens of approaching German planes, but shelter was hard to come by and was sought wherever people could find it. Many Londoners would flee to the Underground stations that sheltered as many as 177,000 people each night.

But of course there were losses. In one of the worst single incidents of the Blitz, 450 Londoners were killed when a bomb ripped through a school being used as an air raid shelter. As time wore on, though, British defenses began slowly to improve. Anti-aircraft guns became more plentiful and the number of searchlights increased. With each passing month, the number of German casualties grew. The British appeared to wear the Nazis down by simply not buckling.

In early 1941, Hitler, encouraged by advice from his navy, decided to focus attacks on Britain's maritime resources. The reasoning was simple: the repeated bombing of London and other interior cities had not broken the will of the British people; but what if the people could no longer receive food and supplies from the outside world? Surely *that* would break them…

But it didn't. Port cities around the island were pounded heavily between February and May but still managed to operate. The proverbial 'stiff upper lip' of the British was beginning to rankle the Nazi brass, who had expected England to surrender by then.

The British may have been impressively stoic, but they were not completely invincible. By the time the Blitz ended on May 11, 1941, over 43,500 of its citizens had been killed. The country had withstood the worst of the Nazi Luftwaffe and survived, though at considerable human cost.

Why did Hitler call off the Blitz?

There were a few reasons, each one an indicator of his eventual destruction.

Firstly, Hitler's patience had been thoroughly sapped by his inability to break the apparently indomitable will of the British people. Few things annoy a tyrant quite like a population refusing to cooperate in their own subjection. The so-called 'Battle of Britain' ended with Nazi frustration; and the subsequent Blitz only exacerbated it.

Secondly, Hitler's megalomania was, paradoxically, growing more unhinged by the day. Unable to conquer tiny England, he nevertheless convinced himself, in the absence of any and all evidence, that he could conquer gargantuan Russia.

By December of 1940, six months before definitively ending the Blitz, Hitler approved plans to invade the western regions of the Soviet Union. He approved these plans over the objections of many of his military advisors, who argued that even should Germany be successful, the economic drain of occupying and coordinating western Russia would be debilitating, and would severely hamper a war effort that was already displaying serious signs of exhaustion.

The non-aggression pact he'd signed with the Soviet Union had never been worth the ink in the pen, though it's unclear whether Stalin had trusted Hitler to remain true to the terms of the agreement. Hitler was an avowed hater of communism; Stalin was likewise an avowed hater of fascism. Neither man liked the other, but they'd apparently held their noses and agreed to cooperate to further their countries' expansions Thus they divided Poland and remained, for a time, not allies but also not enemies.

Hitler's irrational decision to invade the Soviet Union very likely doomed the Nazis to defeat in World War II. The surprise invasion, which the Germans had codenamed 'Operation Barbarossa,' set off the Great Patriotic War, which is Russia's name for that portion of World War II fought on Soviet soil. The Soviet Union needed to defend its borders and citizens—and to do that, Stalin joined forces with the Allies. This was a significant turnaround after the pact with Hitler, but a necessary one to defeat the Nazis in war.

It has been speculated by many historians that if Hitler had not attacked the Soviet Union, Stalin may well have never entered World War II, and would have continued to supply the Nazis with the materials of war. An even worse scenario would have had Stalin supplementing Hitler's

forces with Soviet troops. The outcome of World War II in Europe might have been very different.

As it turned out, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union prompted an unlikely resolution between Moscow, London, and Washington, DC, in September 1941. The United States and Britain pledged quarterly allotments of supplies to the Soviet Union to aid in their struggle with Germany. By the end of winter, Hitler's divisions had been diminished by roughly two-thirds: it was a force he would never fully rebuild.

Hitler had an obsession, a hatred, that drove him far more than his disdain for communism and his frustration over not breaking Britain’s will: his virulent hatred of Jews. In the next chapter we will examine the dark heart of the Nazi enterprise—its attempt to murder every Jew in Europe.

Chapter Summary

- The so-called London Blitz began on September 7, 1940.
- The Blitz was a response to the failure, just months earlier, of Germany's inability to win the Battle of Britain, a contest for air superiority over the island.
- The Blitz came to a close in the spring of 1941 when Adolph Hitler decided to open up a second front in the war by attempting to invade Russia.

Chapter Five: The Shoah

From the very start of Adolph Hitler's reign as Chancellor of Germany, he and his regime enacted hundreds of laws to restrict the participation of Jews in society. Once the war began, however, Hitler lost interest in merely excluding Jews from German society and instead decided to push for their extinction as a people. Thus, were the network of death camps that spider-webbed across Nazi-controlled Europe implemented.

The attempted destruction of European Jews—or the *shoah*, as it has come to be known (from the Hebrew word for 'catastrophe')—is inarguably one of the darkest periods in human history. Genocide is not, regrettably, an unknown element of wartime activity. In fact, less than two decades before Hitler's rise to power, the Ottoman government in Turkey systematically murdered 1.5 million Armenians during World War I. But the Nazi persecution and attempted elimination of Europe's Jews stands as a uniquely troubling moment in human affairs, for it began during peacetime and targeted a statistically tiny segment of the population. The single-mindedness with which the Nazi regime carried out what it termed 'the Final Solution' is disquieting and beyond comprehension.

A Burning Hatred From The Beginning

From the very start of their reign, the Nazis' pledged to persecute Jews. This alone is striking to the modern mind. Imagine, for example, either the Democratic or Republican party having as a plank in its official platform the marginalization and persecution of a religious and ethnic minority group. Such a thing is unthinkable. Yet it was the reality of 1930's Germany.

The legal persecutions began almost immediately. On April 1, 1933, Hitler mandated a national boycott of Jewish businesses. One week later, he instituted the so-called 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service', which excluded Jews from state service. Anti-Semitic laws passed regularly, curtailing the public participation of Jews in German social life. Laws targeted Jewish students at schools and universities, limiting their number. Similar laws targeted Jews in the medical and legal professions and revoked the licenses of Jewish accountants. By 1934, Jewish actors were banned from German theater and film productions. Jews were even accused of having an 'un-German spirit', and their books were banned and burned by the thousands.

The Nazis, their ideology dominated by an obsession with blood and race, defined a Jew as anyone with at least three Jewish grandparents, regardless of whether the person identified as Jewish. The melodramatically named 'Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor' banned marriage between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. Following this line of racist thinking to its logical conclusion, the Nazis stripped Jews and other 'non-Aryans' of the benefits of German citizenship.

Although such hatred had quickly become the norm in German society, Hitler and the Nazis were nevertheless aware that it was a hatred

not shared by most other countries. In 1936, when Germany hosted the Winter and Summer Olympic Games, the government temporarily removed the anti-Semitic signage that had become a regular feature of life under the Nazi regime. Hitler was keen to maintain the country's robust tourism industry and wanted to present a sanitized national image on the world stage.

Following the close of the Olympics, however, the Nazi persecution of Jews resumed and even intensified. Jewish workers and business owners were fired and replaced with non-Jewish, 'Aryan' Germans. Jewish doctors were forbidden to treat non-Jewish patients. Hitler banned Jews from public schools and universities, from theaters, and from public sporting events.

By the autumn of 1938, all Jews were required to carry identification cards, and their passports were stamped with a prominent 'J'.

The Persecution Turns Violent

A sudden wave of anti-Jewish violence swept Germany, Austria, and parts of the Sudetenland on November 9 and 10, 1938. Nazis desecrated synagogues and attacked Jewish schools and businesses. They vandalized Jewish homes and murdered nearly a hundred people. The broken glass left behind in the wake of the violence gave the event the name by which it is known to this day: *Kristallnacht*, or 'Night of Broken Glass'.

The persecution was escalating. By the end of the year, nearly 30,000 Jewish men had been detained and sent to concentration camps.

The German Death Machine

The names are today well-known and conjure haunting images of starvation and death: Auschwitz, Birkenau, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Treblinka. And those are only the most infamous of the Nazi death camps. Throughout Germany and German-occupied countries, Jews and others the Nazis deemed undesirable were arrested and condemned to a network of concentration camps, many of which were designated solely for executions. Prisoners were used as forced labor for construction projects, often enlarging the very camps to which they'd been condemned. The death camps themselves employed a number of means of murdering their victims: starvation, gassing, and cremation. Many prisoners also died during medical experimentation by Nazi doctors.

Other Victims

Although Jews were the primary targets of Nazi hatred, other groups were targeted as well. Trade unionists, communists, Roma (gypsies), homosexuals, Poles, Catholic priests and nuns who criticized the Nazi regime—even Jehovah's Witnesses were subject to deportation to the death camps. In the camps, homosexual prisoners were forced to wear pink triangles to identify them as gay. (The Nazis believed homosexuality a disease.) German authorities, obsessed as they were with intelligence and physical perfection, sought to eliminate the mentally and physically handicapped through euthanasia. No brutality was deemed excessive in the Nazi pursuit of 'Aryan' perfection.

Between two and three million Soviet prisoners of war were murdered or died of starvation. The Germans also targeted non-Jewish Polish intellectuals and ‘decadent’ artists, sending them to labor camps where they often died under deplorable conditions.

A Question Of Denial

As unsavory as the topic may be, the problem of Holocaust denial should be addressed, if only briefly.

One of the more bewildering developments of recent decades has been the cottage industry of Holocaust denial. (*Holocaust*, the word often used interchangeably with *shoah* to indicate the Nazi attempt to eradicate European Jews, derives from a Greek word signifying a sacrifice by fire.) To deny the historical reality of the Holocaust is no more rational than to deny the historical reality of World War II itself. Yet the calumny persists: Jews, the conspiracy theory insists, fabricated (or at the very least exaggerated) the Nazi persecution to generate sufficient international sympathy for the creation of a new Jewish state, that of Israel. The theory is patently bizarre and untenable, especially given the thoroughness of German record-keeping, which proves beyond any doubt the horrific and wide-scale nature of the Nazis’ attempt to murder every Jew in Europe.

In 1933, European Jews numbered just over nine million.

By the war’s close in 1945, the Nazis and their collaborators had killed nearly two out of every three European Jews.

Six million dead. No amount of conspiracy theorizing will ever destroy the fact of Nazi atrocities. Today, Holocaust denial is a crime in no

less than 16 European countries.

A Timeline of Nazi Persecution

1933

- The Nazi Party takes power in Germany. Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany and begins to suspend the civil liberties of Jews.
- The first Nazi concentration camp is established at Dachau.
- Books considered antithetical to Nazi ideology are publicly burned.

1934

- Hitler combines the offices of Chancellor and President and christens himself ‘Fuhrer’ (or leader) of Germany.
- Jewish newspapers can no longer be sold openly.

1935

- Jews are stripped of their citizenship rights.
- The Nazis intensify their persecution (and prosecution) of citizens objecting to the treatment of Jews.

1936

- The Nazis begin taking over Jewish-owned businesses.
- The Winter and Summer Olympic Games are held in Germany; anti-Semitic signs are removed until the events

are over.
- Jews are stripped of their right to vote.

1938

- German troops annex Austria.
- On *Kristallnacht*, the ‘Night of Broken Glass’, Nazis terrorize and arrest nearly 30,000 Jews throughout Germany and Austria.
- Jews are required to carry identification cards and their passports are stamped with a ‘J’.
- Jews may no longer head businesses.
- Jewish children are forcibly moved to Jewish-only schools.
- Jewish businesses are shut down and sold.
- Jews are required to hand over drivers’ licenses and car registrations.

1939

- Germany invades Poland.
- World War II begins when Great Britain and France declare war on Germany.
- Hitler imposes curfews on Jews and requires them to wear yellow Stars of David.

1940

- The Nazis begin deporting German Jews to Poland, where they are forced into ghettos.

- The Nazis begin the systematic mass murder of Jews in Poland.

1941

- Jews throughout Western Europe are forced into ghettos.
- Jews are now required to have permission from the police to leave their homes.
- Jews are forbidden from using public telephones.

1942

- Nazi officials begin openly discussing “The Final Solution,” their plan to murder all European Jews.
- Jews are forbidden to subscribe to newspapers, maintain electrical equipment, or use public transportation.

1943

- By February, approximately 80% of all Jews who would die in the Holocaust have already been murdered.

1944

- Adolph Hitler takes control of Hungary and begins deporting 12,000 Hungarian Jews daily to Auschwitz, where they are murdered in the crematoriums.

1945

- Germany is defeated, Hitler commits suicide, and World War II ends in Europe.
- The death camps are emptied, and the world can no longer deny the German atrocities.

Chapter Summary

- Once in power, the Nazi regime immediately began targeting Jews.
- Other groups were targeted as well, including Roma (gypsies), homosexuals, priests and nuns, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Poles.
- The Nazi plan to eliminate Jews from Europe was known as 'The Final Solution'.
- By the war's end, the Nazis had murdered nearly six million Jews.

Chapter Six: The War In North Africa

When World War II is discussed, the topics almost always revolve around the European and Pacific theaters of war. The military campaigns in North Africa are often forgotten, or somehow seen as not sharing the same importance as those in Europe or the East. In truth, however, the conflict in North Africa was important to the Allies' eventual victory, and consequently bears some mention.

Why Africa?

While the battles waged in Europe and the Pacific seem geographically appropriate—the main players were, after all, connected in some way to the regions in which they fought—the notion of the war spreading to North Africa might strike some as immediately odd. Why would Germany, for example, be interested in taking the fight to Africa? What's in it for them?

Actually, there was a lot of incentive for both the Axis and Allied powers to wrestle for control of North Africa.

Oil, for instance.

The Axis powers wanted to cut off the Allies' access to oil and other supplies—as well as to secure access to those same resources for themselves. Great Britain was considered an empire, after all, and boasted colonies in both Africa and Asia. If Germany and the other Axis nations

could cut off Britain's access to her colonies—and thus to their natural resources—then a serious blow could be struck against the Allies.

For their part, the Allies needed an opportunity to regroup and bounce back from what had been a disastrous 1940, when most of Western Europe fell to the Nazi juggernaut.

To better understand why World War II spread to Africa, it is helpful to consider for a moment the main players' territorial holdings there. At the start of the North Africa campaign in 1941, each of the five territories along the North African coast—Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco—had a colonial (or at the very least semi-colonial) status under a European power. Egypt was a British protectorate and had been so since 1914. Although it had granted Egypt a nominal independence in 1922, Britain nevertheless retained control of all Egyptian foreign policy and military defense. Great Britain also occupied the shores of the Suez Canal, a shipping channel of strategic importance.

Italy, meanwhile, had conquered the North African provinces of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Fezzan in 1911 and renamed the unified region Libya in 1934.

Tunisia had become a French protectorate in 1881, with the Tunisian ruler being supervised by a French Resident-General. Morocco, long ruled by a Sultan, had become a French protectorate in 1912. France had begun its conquest of Algeria in 1830, and by 1940 the North African territory had been made a formal part of France and was ruled directly by a Governor-General. With the fall of France to the Nazis and the establishment of the Vichy regime in 1940, the French North African colonies came under Nazi control.

The Desert Fox

Today, if one is aware of the North African campaigns at all, it is almost certainly because of one man: Erwin Rommel, whose strategic prowess in the early campaigns earned him the nickname ‘ The Desert Fox’ from British journalists.

Rommel is an interesting figure—which is not something one might say about most of the Nazi commanders.

He drew fame from leading from the front instead of from the rear like other Nazi generals. His unbroken string of successes in the early campaigns did not go to his head, and he developed a reputation among the Allies for being a man of genuine chivalry and fairness. The North African leg of World War II, while brutal, was nicknamed ‘ the war without hate’ by Allied journalists who credited Rommel for avoiding what had become the regular Nazi recourse to atrocity.

Some historians view Rommel as a complex, even tragic figure. By 1944 he had become well aware of Hitler’s instability, and no longer believed the war could be won. He discussed with other officers the possibility of surrendering to Allied forces.

In July of 1944, a plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler was uncovered, as was Rommel’s connection to the conspirators. Implicated in the plot, he was offered the option of taking his own life to avoid a public trial and to protect his family. On October 14 of that year, German officers took Erwin Rommel from his home to a remote location. There he took his own life by biting into a cyanide capsule. He was 52 years old.

Back And Forth

The North African campaign began in June of 1940 and continued for three years, as Axis and Allied forces pushed each other back and forth across the desert. It can be asked just what was gained from the constant back-and-forth across the sand. Quite a lot, it turns out.

The eventual Allied victory in North Africa killed or marginalized nearly 900,000 German and Italian troops. It also opened a second front against the Axis and permitted the invasion of Sicily and the Italian mainland in the summer of 1943. And finally, it repelled the Axis threat to the oilfields of the Middle East and to British supply lines to her colonies in Africa and Asia. It was therefore a critically important component of the ultimate Allied victory in World War II.

There was a price, however. The British Commonwealth lost 220,000 men and American casualties in Tunisia alone totaled more than 18,500. The Germans and Italians suffered nearly 620,000 casualties.

The surrender of all Axis troops in Tunisia in May 1943 effectively ended the North African campaign of World War II.

Chapter Summary

- The campaign for North Africa offered strategic benefits for both the Axis and Allied powers.
- The Axis wanted to cut off Allied access to oil and natural resources in Africa and Asia.
- The Allies wanted to force the Axis powers to fight on an additional front.
- Erwin Rommel, the commander of Axis forces in North Africa, earned the nickname ‘The Desert Fox’ for his strategic prowess.

Chapter Seven: The Pacific On Fire

Just six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States quickly rebounded to claim a surprising—and surprisingly decisive—Pacific victory against Japanese forces. Advances in code breaking enabled the United States to preempt Japan's planned ambush and inflict permanent damage on the Japanese Navy. The battle at Midway Island would prove to be a major turning point in the Pacific campaign and allow America to maneuver into an offensive position.

Japan had committed several errors of judgment in its decision to attack Pearl Harbor. The first and most serious, of course, was assuming that America would not respond to an attack. But other errors can be seen as leading ultimately to Japan's defeat in the Pacific. The attack had not been a knock-out punch, and for two reasons. The first is that Pearl Harbor boasts unusually shallow water. Most of the U.S. ships that sank on December 7 were eventually raised and repaired and reentered into the war effort. The second reason is that Japan's timing of the attack coincided with the absence of all three U.S. aircraft carriers—the *Enterprise*, the *Lexington*, and the *Saratoga*. Had Japan destroyed America's carriers, the blow might have been insurmountable. But Japan's decision to attack on December 7 ensured America's ability to maintain a presence in the Pacific.

Midway

A military presence, however, offers no guarantee of victory.

In the seven months that followed its attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan occupied the Dutch East Indies, British Singapore, New Guinea, the Philippines, and several other locations in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Its dreams of a sprawling empire appeared suddenly quite feasible. But June 1942 brought with it the battle at Midway Island and a stunning, improbable victory for the Americans.

Japan had realized its need to sink the American aircraft carriers that had escaped destruction seven months earlier at Pearl Harbor. Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, Japan's fleet commander, decided to invade a target relatively close to Pearl Harbor and thereby draw out the American fleet, concluding that when the United States began its counterattack, the Japanese would be prepared to crush them. Instead, a fortuitous breakthrough in deciphering Japanese fleet codes enabled Admiral Chester Nimitz, the U.S. Pacific fleet commander, to know Japanese plans, in advance, and strategize accordingly. Nimitz brought U.S. aircraft carriers into position to surprise the Japanese as they prepared for strikes on Midway Island.

The Americans' advances in code-breaking would prove decisive to the outcome. Weeks before the battle itself, American radio nets in the Pacific picked up Yamamoto's dispatches to his forces. A May 16 transmission intercepted by the Americans offered an unexpected gift: the planned day-of-battle position of the Japanese carriers.

An intelligence advantage is of little use without well-trained forces to take make use of it. American scouting planes located the Japanese early in the morning of June 4, and the United States commenced its

attack. Initial sorties by Midway-based fighters were generally unsuccessful. Strikes by carrier-based planes, however, quickly took a toll on Japanese forces that outnumbered the Americans two to one.

The Japanese were reeling, and were no doubt wondering how the Americans could have been so prepared. In a moment of rare vulnerability, Japanese carriers began refueling and rearming their planes; the Americans took full advantage, sending wave after wave of bombers to destroy the ships. By the end of the battle, the U.S. had sunk four Japanese carriers—the *Akagi,* the *Kaga,* the *Soryu*, and the Hiryu—and a heavy cruiser, the *Mikuma*. The Japanese had lost 322 aircraft and over five thousand sailors.

Japan's surprising defeat at Midway dealt a devastating blow to the Imperial Navy, especially in terms of trained mechanics lost with the downed ships. Historians generally see Midway as the turning point in the Pacific theater of the war, and a truly decisive battle.

Guadalcanal

With its surprising victory at Midway, America moved from a defensive to an offensive posture. The battle at Guadalcanal would be the Allies' first major offensive in the Pacific theater and constituted a resounding win. Guadalcanal was a 2,500-square-mile speck of jungle in the Solomon Islands. Prior to the battle there, very few people outside of the South Pacific had ever heard of it. The Allies' victory there made it famous.

On June 8, 1942, Japanese troops arrived on Guadalcanal to construct an air base. Two months later, American marines landed there and launched a surprise attack to take it away from them. The victory was decisive but not easily attained. The Guadalcanal campaign lasted six months, with both sides suffering heavy losses to their navies. The Japanese, however, suffered a far greater number of casualties, and withdrew from Guadalcanal by February 1943. This retreat, coming so closely on the heels of America's victory at Midway, proved the turning point of the Pacific war.

One may legitimately ask: If Guadalcanal was such a small bit of the Solomon Islands, why was it so strategically important?

Very simply, whoever controlled the airbase at Guadalcanal would control the sea lines of communication between the United States and Australia. The U.S. marines who took control of the air base there and defended it against Japanese attempts to reclaim it have earned the respect of historians ever since, who marvel at the marines' tenacity and resourcefulness in defending the base they nicknamed Henderson Field.

The battle officially ended on February 9, 1943. Japanese losses were staggering: nearly two-thirds of their 31,400 army troops had perished. The Americans, meanwhile, had lost less than 2,000 of the 60,000 soldiers deployed.

After its devastating defeat at Guadalcanal, Japan no longer had a realistic hope of winning the Pacific war.

Iwo Jima

If Guadalcanal was a speck, what are we to make of Iwo Jima? Only 4.5 miles long and 2.5 miles wide, the island was almost comically tiny. But there was nothing funny about the brutality displayed there, or the staggering loss of human life that bloodied its soil.

Iwo is the Japanese word for sulfur, and indeed the island is still today full of sulfur. A yellowish sulfuric mist regularly rises from cracks in its earth, giving the island a nauseating stench of rotten eggs.

As with Guadalcanal, the question immediately arises: What was so important about so small an island?

The answer is: quite a lot.

Iwo Jima served as an early warning station for Japan, giving Tokyo at least two hours of warning before American bombers could reach their targets. Also, the Japanese routinely launched aerial missions against Saipan from there. And lastly, the United States could gain an additional airfield for future operations against Japan if Iwo Jima could be captured.

The Japanese defenders under the command of Tadamichi Kuribayashi were ready for the Allies' arrival. The plan was to inflict severe losses on them and discourage an invasion of the mainland. Each Japanese soldier was expected not only to die in defense of the homeland, but also to take 10 enemy soldiers with him.

On the tiny island, approximately 750 defense installations were built to shelter weapons and provisions. The installations were connected by nearly 13,000 yards of tunnels that honeycombed the interior of the island. These tunnels were astonishingly sophisticated. Some had plaster walls, and many were well-ventilated.

Within them, 21,000 Japanese soldiers awaited.

The Americans knew their attack would not surprise the Japanese. This alone presented many difficulties in staging a landing on the tiny outcrop of land. Another difficulty was posed by the intelligence reports, which indicated a truly staggering amount of artillery on the island. The final (and perhaps most dangerous) difficulty was posed by the Americans' ignorance of the true number of Japanese soldiers hiding in the tunnels. Allied intelligence had only detected 12,000, a dangerously underestimated number. Landing on Iwo Jima was going to be, even in the best-case scenario, harrowing beyond belief.

On December 8, 1944, Allied bombers pounded the island in hopes of softening up its defenses. Over the course of 70 days, Allied forces dropped 5,800 tons of bombs on Iwo Jima, a tiny jut of rock in the Pacific.

When the Americans began bombing the island, the display was impressive. Soldiers joked with each other about having no Japanese to kill because the bombs were doing the work for them. What the American soldiers didn't know, unfortunately, was that the bombing was having no practical effect on the number of Japanese. Why? Because the Japanese were *in* the island and not *on* it.

Japanese forces kept the Americans pinned down with mortar rounds and shelling. By the end of the first day—the *first day*—the Americans had already lost over 2,400 men.

At the southern tip of the island rose Mount Suribachi, which gave the Japanese a perch from which to mow down Allied troops, who could advance only a few yards at a time. Soldiers who survived Iwo Jima testify

that it was the most violent conflict they had ever seen. Bodies cut cleanly in half, arms and legs strewn dozens of feet away.

> "We buried fifty at a time in bulldozed plots. We didn't know if they were Jewish, Catholic or whatever, so we said a general committal: 'We commit you into the earth and the mercy of Almighty God.' I buried eighteen hundred boys."
>
> **Marine Chaplain Gage Hotaling**

On February 23, 1945, the summit of Mount Suribachi was within reach. A patrol of 41 men was assembled and sent toward the summit. Colonel Chandler Johnson looked at the lieutenant leading the patrol, handed him a flag, and told him to put it up if he got to the top. (Notice the chilling qualifier, *if*.)

The patrol did in fact reach the top. And in a moment immortalized first in grainy film footage and then in a famous monument, Lieutenant Schrier, Platoon Sergeant Ernest Thomas, Sergeant Hansen, Corporal Lindberg, and Louis Charlo raised the flag on Iwo Jima.

But wait: this wasn't the moment immortalized on film.

History is nothing if not surprising.

Here's the little-known story of what happened next:

To their collective surprise, they heard the island erupt in cheers. The Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, had witnessed the flag-raising from a nearby naval vessel and immediately wanted the flag as a personal souvenir. Colonel Chandler Johnson, the man who had originally given the flag to the brave soldiers who scaled Mount Suribachi, could not believe that Forrestal would deprive the flag to those Marines who rightfully

deserved it. He decided to immediately secure the flag (and thus keep it from Forrestal) and replace it with another.

A second flag went up, a flag that had been recovered from a sinking ship at Pearl Harbor. The men sent up the mountain with this replacement flag thought little of the mission. But they became a part of history, because following them was photographer Joe Rosenthal, who would later win a Pulitzer Prize for snapping the quickly famous ‘Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima’ photograph.

Iwo Jima saw the only battle in the Pacific war where American casualties surpassed those of the Japanese.

Chapter Summary

- Just six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States quickly rebounded to claim a surprising Pacific victory against Japanese forces.
- Advances in code breaking enabled the United States to preempt Japan's planned ambush and inflict permanent damage on the Japanese Navy at Midway Island.
- With its surprising victory at Midway, America moved from a defensive to an offensive posture.
- Guadalcanal was a small 2,500-square-mile member of the Solomon Islands.
- After its devastating defeat at Guadalcanal, Japan no longer had a realistic hope of winning the Pacific war.
- The island of Iwo Jima was only 4.5 miles long and 2.5 miles wide.
- *Iwo* is the Japanese word for sulfur, the stench of which regularly rises from cracks in its earth, giving the island a nauseating rotten eggs odor.
- The battle for Iwo Jima was one of the bloodiest of the Pacific war.

Chapter Eight: Stalingrad

Until the Allied invasion of Normandy, a year later, the battle of Stalingrad was the most significant event in the European theater of war.

Wars are often fought for obscure reasons, and individual battles are fought for reasons obscurer still. The battle over Stalingrad, which was waged during the winter of 1942-1943, inflicted terrible casualties on the Germans and, in a very real sense, bled them dry. But it need never have happened. Although an argument could be made that Stalingrad was a significant manufacturing center and thus a deserving target for the Germans, in truth the city was, for the most part, strategically unimportant. Hitler apparently ordered the taking of the city because of the city's name and his seething hatred of Joseph Stalin.

War is never pretty and is often juvenile.

The Pact of 1939

But you are wondering: Wait—didn't Germany and the Soviet Union sign a non-aggression pact in 1939?

Yes, they did.

And the Germans unilaterally dissolved the pact by suddenly invading Soviet Russia on June 22, 1941. *Operation Barbarossa*, as it was called, attacked Soviet positions in eastern Poland. Within six months, the

Russians had suffered 4.3 million military casualties, with three more million soldiers taken prisoner.

Many words have been used to describe Adolph Hitler: evil, deranged, demonic—there is no shortage of applicable adjectives. But the one that seems most apt for his decision to invade the Soviet Union is: *hubristic*.

Convinced of his own genius and invincibility, Hitler made a very foolish decision: he opened a second front in the war, a move that most historians agree ensured his eventual defeat.

Hitler's Waterloo

In early September 1942, the German Army approached the city. The Russians resolved to stand their ground no matter what, defending the city named for their leader. They could not—and in fact, did not—let it fall.

The battle for the city descended into one of the most brutal exchanges in the entire war. The Germans took big chunks of the city but could never fully assert control over them. Neighborhoods taken by the Germans this week were retaken by the Soviets the following week. Hand-to-hand combat was a commonplace sight in the city's streets.

Stalingrad eventually bled the German army dry and forced them to retreat. The city's inhuman winter freeze ensured the German's didn't want to return for a second pass at it.

By the end of January 1943, the 91,000 Germans still at Stalingrad surrendered to Soviet forces.

Hitler was not a man who took bad news well. In his fury over the news of Germany's defeat at Stalingrad, he ordered a national day of mourning—not for the soldiers killed in battle, but for the shame his military commanders had brought upon the nation by surrendering to Soviet forces.

Following the debacle at Stalingrad, the Germany army never fully recovered. Their loss of manpower and weaponry would later prevent them from defending Germany from Soviet invasion.

Chapter Summary

- Until the Allied invasion of Normandy, a year later, the battle of Stalingrad was the most significant event in the European theater of war.
- The Germans unilaterally dissolved the non-aggression pact of 1939 by suddenly invading Soviet Russia on June 22, 1941.
- *Operation Barbarossa*, as it was called, attacked Soviet positions in eastern Poland. Within six months, the Russians had suffered 4.3 million military casualties, with three more million soldiers taken prisoner.
- In early September 1942, the German Army laid siege to Stalingrad.
- Stalingrad eventually bled the German army dry and forced them to retreat.
- By the end of January 1943, the 91,000 Germans still at Stalingrad surrendered to Soviet forces.

Chapter Nine: D-Day

Today it is nearly impossible to think of the D-Day invasion of Normandy without the brutal images of Steven Spielberg's epic World War II film, *Saving Private Ryan*, flickering through one's mind. At the time of the film's release, viewers were warned that the movie's half-hour opening segment, which showcased the landing at Omaha Beach, was searingly violent and would no doubt disturb even jaded audience members. Spielberg, who researched the battle extensively to ensure historical accuracy, acknowledged the film's violence, but said that it was nothing compared to the reality of the event. A film that honestly portrayed the violence of the D-Day invasion would be, he insisted, unwatchable in its horror.

Preparations For Invasion

As early as 1942, the Americans and the British were considering the possibility of a major Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France via the English Channel. Over the course of the next year, plans began to take shape. Hitler was concerned about the vulnerability of the northern French coastline and charged his most capable general, Erwin Rommel, with establishing fortifications there.

In January 1944, General Dwight Eisenhower was appointed commander of Operation Overlord, the codename for the invasion. In the

months and weeks before D-Day — ‘D-Day’ incidentally simply indicates a day on which a significant event is to take place—the Allies successfully managed a massive deception operation to trick the Germans into thinking the main target was Pas-de-Calais instead of Normandy. (Which would have made a kind of sense to the Germans: Pas-de-Calais was the narrowest point between Britain and France, and thus would be the easiest crossing point for an invasion force.)

The ruse worked.

Overlord

In one of those curious facts that history so often provides, D-Day was originally set for June 5, 1944. But foul weather forced a 24-hour delay, and the invasion commenced on June 6.

It is nearly impossible to conceive the epic scope of the Normandy invasion. Over 156,000 American, British, and Canadian forces landed on five beaches along a 50-mile stretch of France’s Normandy coast. One of the largest amphibious military assaults in history, it required two years of planning and over 5,000 ships and 11,000 airplanes.

> “You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade,
> toward which we have striven these many months.
> The eyes of the world are upon you.”
> **General Dwight D. Eisenhower**

And indeed, they were. It is not melodramatic to affirm that the entirety of the Allied cause was depending on the success of this one

invasion. The Allies smelled blood; the Nazis had suffered demoralizing losses at Stalingrad and now was the time to strike a blow that would finish them off for good and end the war in Europe.

The effort required of the young men, many just barely out of high school, strikes one today as almost superhuman. When the boats hit the beaches and their ramps opened, the soldiers were forced into the surf carrying 80 pounds of equipment. They then stared at 200 yards of uncovered beach they had to cross while German artillery rounds strafed the sand.

It was hell.

But by June 11, the beaches had been secured and over 326,000 troops, more than 50,000 vehicles, and nearly 100,000 tons of equipment had landed at Normandy.

German Confusion

The Nazis were caught flat-footed.

General Rommel was away on leave, and absent his leadership the German ranks floundered about in confusion. And then Hitler made a seemingly strange but acutely important error in judgment: he thought it was all a ruse. He refused to order reinforcements to Normandy because he thought the amphibious assault there was a trick. He believed the Allies were going to invade north of the Seine River. His mistake allowed the Allies to drive deeper into France and ultimately liberate the northern part of the country, including Paris. The D-Day invasion of June 6, 1944 is the marker by which all subsequent military operations have been judged.

Chapter Summary

- General Dwight Eisenhower was appointed commander of Operation Overlord, the codename for the D-Day invasion.
- ‘D-Day’ indicates a day on which a significant event is to take place.
- The Allies tricked the Germans into thinking the main target of the invasion was Pas-de-Calais instead of Normandy.
- D-Day was originally set for June 5, 1944. But foul weather forced a 24-hour delay, and the invasion commenced on June 6.
- Over 156,000 American, British, and Canadian forces landed on five beaches along a 50-mile stretch of France’s Normandy coast.
- One of the largest amphibious military assaults in history, it required two years of planning and over 5,000 ships and 11,000 airplanes.
- Hitler mistakenly believed the Allies were going to invade north of the Seine River.

Chapter Ten: Victory

By the close of 1944 it was apparent that an Allied victory was in the making. The Japanese, though refusing to surrender, were increasingly unable to mount serious challenges to U.S. naval superiority. And the Germans were now feeling the walls close in on all sides, as American and British forces prepared to enter from the south and Soviet forces moved in from the east.

The Thousand-Year Reich Collapses

When he came to power, Adolph Hitler had promised the German people a ‘thousand-year Reich’, or empire. It was not to be.

By the end of April 30, 1945, Hitler himself was not to be: he would commit suicide.

By early 1945, Hitler realized that Germany was going to lose the war. The Soviets had driven the German army back into Western Europe and the Allies were advancing into Germany from the west. At midnight the day before their deaths, Hitler and his girlfriend, Eva Braun, were married in a small civil ceremony. Someone approached Hitler and told him that Benito Mussolini had been executed by the Italians.

The dark world he had created now collapsing around him, and with defeat imminent, Adolph Hitler retreated to his bunker and, along with his new wife, Eva Braun, committed suicide.

The exact method of suicide is subject to some dispute. One story has Hitler and Braun shooting themselves with a pistol. Most historians, however, believe that Hitler and Braun died by ingesting cyanide. The reason for the confusion is simple: there are no bodies to examine.

Hitler had left written instructions that their bodies should be doused with gasoline and burned, which is apparently what was done. The lack of identifiable remains has left the issue somewhat murky and has given rise to all manner of conspiracy theories that Hitler successfully faked his death and fled to South America. The general consensus however, is that death by suicide fits Adolph Hitler's narcissistic psychological profile.

The End Of War In Europe

On May 2, 1945, just days after Hitler's suicide, the Soviets conquered Berlin. The remaining German leadership, having no leverage for setting conditions on their surrender, submitted to General Eisenhower's demand for a full and unconditional surrender, which they signed on May 7, and which took effect the following day. Victory-in-Europe Day, or V-E Day, as it's known, was celebrated throughout Europe on May 8, and remains a public holiday in several countries.

Japan's Refusal

On July 26, 1945, the war in Europe having ended, Allied leaders demanded that Japan surrender as well. The nation's Supreme War Council refused. The Allies threatened catastrophic consequences, and quickly

followed up their threat with the first use of atomic weapons in mankind's long history of war.

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, a city of some 280,000 people. The bomb, known as 'Little Boy', was carried in a B-29 plane called the Enola Gay, after the pilot's mother. The bomb exploded with thirteen kilotons of force. The devastation was paradoxically immediate and lingering: those civilians not incinerated by the initial blasts were forced to live with excruciating burns and deadly cancers. It has been estimated that 237,000 people were killed directly or indirectly by the bomb's effects.

Three days later, the United States dropped a second bomb, this one on Nagasaki. The 21-kiloton plutonium device was called 'Fat Man'. Between 40,000 and 75,000 people died immediately following the explosion, while another 60,000 people suffered severe injuries. Total deaths by the end of 1945 may have reached 80,000.

The morality of President Truman's decision to deploy weapons of mass destruction has been debated ever since and will likely remain a topic of deep and occasionally heated discussion.

What cannot be debated, however, is the demoralizing effect it had on Japan's national leadership. Emperor Hirohito urged the Supreme War Council to accept the Allies' demands for unconditional surrender, and they relented.

Imperial Japan announced its surrender on August 15, and formally signed the declaration on September 2, 1945.

World War II, the bloodiest, costliest war in human history, was now over.

Chapter Summary

- By the close of 1944, it was apparent that an Allied victory was in the making.
- Adolph Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945. His body was doused with gasoline and burned.
- The Allies demanded Japan's unconditional surrender on July 26, 1945. Japan refused.
- On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped a 13-kiloton atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan.
- Three days later, the United States dropped a second bomb, this time on Nagasaki.
- Imperial Japan announced its surrender on August 15, and formally signed the declaration on September 2, 1945.

Final Words

A strange kind of nostalgia fragrances the air around our collective understanding of World War II.

We call it ‘The Good War’ and consider the people who fought it ‘The Greatest Generation’. We think of the conflict as a simple battle between good and evil, with good emerging victorious without so much as breaking a sweat. After all, good always triumphs.

Except… we know that it doesn’t.

The value of reading a book of history—this book of history or another—is not to acquire a command of dates or to busy oneself with bits of trivia. It is to understand the motivations and sacrifices of those who in some way contributed to the world we now inhabit. To understand oneself as a part of a larger swirl of activity.

The second world war offers lessons for us today if we but study, and warnings for us if we but listen. Contemporary observers have noted the disturbing similarities between societal conditions in the pre-war years and those of our own: the yawning chasm between rich and poor, the burgeoning social unrest, and the widespread desire for a strongman leader to set things right. The old certainties seem suddenly unconvincing; fear seeps in and softens the wood of our resolve.

World War II was a brutal, inhuman thing, and we trivialize it whenever we try to reduce it to something we can name and thereby control and keep at a distance. History books allow us to escape the

temptation of sentimentality. They help us see the sweat and loss and sacrifice that built the world around us and that allows us the freedom to pursue the happiness for which we are made.

I leave you with the words of Winston Churchill, spoken during an address to the U.S. Congress on December 26, 1941:

> "Members of the Senate and of the House of Representatives of the United States, I feel greatly honored that you should have thus invited me to enter the United States Senate Chamber and address the representatives of both branches of Congress. The fact that my American forebears have for so many generations played their part in the life of the United States, and that here I am, an Englishman, welcomed in your midst, makes this experience one of the most moving and thrilling in my life, which is already long and has not been entirely uneventful. I wish indeed that my mother, whose memory I cherish, across the vale of years, could have been here to see. By the way, I cannot help reflecting that if my father had been American and my mother British instead of the other way around, I might have got here on my own. In that case this would not have
>
> been the first time you would have heard my voice. In that case I should not have needed any invitation. But if I had it is hardly likely that it would have been unanimous. So perhaps things are better as they are.
>
> "I may confess, however, that I do not feel quite like a fish out of water in a legislative assembly where English is spoken. I am a child of the House of Commons. I was brought up in my father's house to believe in democracy. 'Trust the people.' That was his message. I used to see him cheered at meetings and in the streets by crowds of workingmen way back in those aristocratic Victorian days when as Disraeli said, 'The world was for the few, and for the very few.'
>
> "I should like to say, first of all, how much I have been impressed and encouraged by the breadth

of view and sense of proportion which I have found in all quarters over here to which I have had access. Anyone who did not understand the size and solidarity of the foundations of the United States, might easily have expected to find an excited, disturbed, self-cantered atmosphere, with all minds fixed upon the novel, startling, and painful episodes of sudden war as they hit America. After all, the United States have been attacked and set upon by three most powerfully armed dictator states, the greatest military power in Europe, the greatest military power in Asia-Japan, Germany and Italy have all declared and are making war upon you, and the quarrel is opened which can only end in their overthrow or yours.

"But here in Washington in these memorable days I have found an Olympian fortitude which, far from being based upon complacency, is only the mask of an inflexible purpose and the proof of a sure, well-grounded confidence in the final outcome. We in Britain had the same feeling in our darkest days. We too were sure that in the end all would be well.

"You do not, I am certain, underrate the severity of the ordeal to which you and we have still to be subjected. The forces ranged against us are enormous. They are bitter, they are ruthless. The wicked men and their factions, who have launched their peoples on the path of war and conquest, know that they will be called to terrible account if they cannot beat down by force of arms the peoples they have assailed. They will stop at nothing. They have a vast accumulation of war weapons of all kinds. They have highly trained and disciplined armies, navies and air services. They have plans and designs which have long been contrived and matured. They will stop at nothing that violence or treachery can suggest.

"It is quite true that on our side our resources in manpower and materials are far greater than theirs. But only a portion of your resources are as yet mobilized and developed, and we both of us have much to learn in the cruel art of war. We have therefore without doubt a time of tribulation before us. In this same time, some ground will be lost which it will be hard and costly to regain. Many disappointments and unpleasant surprises await us. Many of them will afflict us before the full marshalling of our latent and total power can be accomplished.

"For the best part of twenty years the youth of Britain and America have been taught that war was evil, which is true, and that it would never come again, which has been proved false. For the best part of twenty years, the youth of Germany, of Japan and Italy, have been taught that aggressive war is the noblest duty of the citizen and that it should be begun as soon as the necessary weapons and organization have been made. We have performed the duties and tasks of peace. They have plotted and planned for war. This naturally has placed us, in Britain, and now places you in the United States at a disadvantage which only time, courage and untiring exertion can correct.

"We have indeed to be thankful that so much time has been granted to us.

[…]

"Sure I am that this day, now, we are the masters of our fate. That the task which has been set us is not above our strength. That its pangs and toils are not beyond our endurance. As long as we have faith in our cause, and an unconquerable willpower, salvation will not be denied us. In the words of the Psalmist: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

"If we had kept together after the last war, if we had taken common measures for our safety, this renewal of the curse need never have fallen upon us. Do we not owe it to ourselves, to our children, to tormented mankind, to make sure that these catastrophes do not engulf us for the third time?

"It has been proved that pestilences may break out in the Old World which carry their destructive ravages into the New World, from which, once they are afoot, the New World can not escape. Duty and prudence alike command first that the germ-centers of hatred and revenge should be constantly and vigilantly served and treated in good time, and that an adequate organization should be set up to make sure that the pestilence can be controlled at its earliest beginnings, before it spreads and rages

throughout the entire earth.

"If you will allow me to use other language, I will say that he must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that some great purpose and design is being worked out here below of which we have the honor to be the faithful servants. It is not given to us to peer into the mysteries of the future. Still, I avow my hope and faith, sure and inviolate, that in the days to come the British and American peoples will, for their own safety and for the good of all, walk together in majesty, in justice and in peace."

Winston Churchill

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire

History Hour

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Introduction

Congratulations on purchasing *The Roman Empire: The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*!

You'll quickly find this to be the best concise history of the 500-year reign of that most storied of realms.

There are, to be sure, hundreds if not thousands of books on the Roman Empire. A book on every emperor, a book on every century, a book on every battle or assassination, a book on every meal enjoyed by every despotic Caesar. The Roman Empire has been the subject of countless tomes and innumerable movies. Why, then, should you take another look?

Because—to be blunt—the books tend to be bloated and the movies interminable. A quick scan of the particulars reveals that books on the Roman Empire are undeniably plentiful—and undeniably long. Before a reader has gotten much past Romulus and Remus, the very length of the book becomes a distraction. The reader is only a few pages into the history and already dreading the monumental amount of time that will be required to finish it. The book is set aside in frustration.

The Roman Empire: The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire lets you avoid all of that. Instead of snooze-inducing, micro-detailed accounts of what Hannibal's rear guard soldiers had for lunch two days before leaving Carthage for Italy, you'll get only the *pertinent* details of the Roman Empire's existence. No extraneous details, no bloat. This is history as it's meant to be written: factual, concise, informative, and entertaining.

Unlike the ancient world of Rome, the modern world moves very fast. Your time is valuable, as is your interest in the world around you. *The Roman Empire: The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* allows you to satisfy both needs. Accessibly written and easily digestible in small bites, you'll get your fill of the Roman Empire's smorgasbord of characters and events.

You already know, if vaguely, some of the characters: Julius Caesar, Nero, Constantine. Prepare to meet many more

Prepare to be surprised. History is seldom predictable, and no history is less predictable than that of the Roman Empire.

So congratulate yourself on your wise purchase and turn the page. You're about to be transported back in time, past written records to the misty terrain of myth.

See? Just there, on the riverbank, a small basket carrying twin boys has come to rest.

And a she-wolf approaches…

Chapter One: An Empire Born of Myth

Travel far enough back into human history and you'll discover the certainty of fact giving way to the intuition of myth. The origins of every culture, every religion, and every civilization burble up from a wellspring of deep human intuition about life itself. The Roman Empire is no exception to this universal law, and in fact stands as its exemplar. Rome's thousand-year stride across history is analogous to human life: the miracle of birth, the full flowering of maturity, and the decrepitude of old age. The rise and fall of the Roman Empire is the most human of stories, hence the fascination it continues to exert over the minds of people the world over.

A parable, a cautionary fable, and above all, a grand tale: the story of Rome's ascendancy and collapse is truly epic.

The River, the Twins, and the She-Wolf

The legends surrounding Rome's founding are many and varied, but most involve the demi-god twins, Romulus and Remus. The boys were sons of Mars, the god of war, and descendants of the Trojan hero, Aeneas, whose exploits were chronicled by Virgil in *The Aeneid*. The boys' mother was the daughter of Numitor, king of what is now central Italy. Numitor's brother, fearing the twins would cheat him out of the throne, sought to kill them in infancy. A kind-hearted servant of their mother, upon hearing of

the planned murders, wrapped the boys in blankets, placed them in a basket, and set them in the gentle current of the Tiber River, which, guided by the river god Tibernus, carried them to a safe riverbank some distance away near the Palatine Hill.

In what is easily the most fantastical element of the tale, a she-wolf happened upon the infants and nursed them to health, after which they were fed by a woodpecker.

A shepherd and his wife, Faustulus and Acca, discovered the boys and took them as their own children. In time, the brothers grew into young adulthood and became shepherds like their adoptive father. And, as brothers often do, Romulus and Remus quarreled. Unlike most brothers, however, one of their quarrels would prove fateful for Western Civilization.

A City on Seven Hills

The brothers wanted to start a new city, and so looked about for a suitable spot among the area's seven small hills. Romulus chose the Palatine Hill; Remus argued instead for the Aventine Hill. To settle their dispute, they agreed to engage in augury—determining the future by observing the flight patterns of birds. The brothers established sacred spaces on their respective hills and awaited the appearance of the birds. Romulus claimed to see twelve birds to Remus' six and thus declared himself the winner. Remus insisted that since he had seen his six birds first, *he* was the winner.

Things remained at a standstill until Romulus began digging trenches around the Palatine Hill and started constructing a wall. Remus mocked the wall, which was relatively short, and even leaped over it in ridicule. Romulus quickly became enraged and killed his brother.

It is from this moment that we date the founding of Rome: April 21, 753 BCE. Romulus, having killed his brother in cold blood, named the city after himself: *Roma*.

The mythical elements of the traditional story are obvious and entertaining: gods, demi-gods, compassionate she-wolves—even a generous woodpecker. The archaeological evidence of Rome's founding is, it must be said, just as fascinating if slightly less whimsical.

Archaeological evidence indicates human activity in the vicinity of Rome for at least 5,000 years. Excavations carried out in 2014 discovered a stone wall and pottery shards dating back a century or more before the city's official founding in the eighth century. And archaeologists unearthed evidence of human activity on the Palatine Hill as early as the 10th century BCE.

Whatever the absolute truth of Rome's founding, the mythical elements of the Romulus and Remus story evince a deeper truth about the nature of the city that would bear a murderer's name: Rome would be a city—and eventually an Empire—seeded with the blood of innocents.

Chapter Summary

- According to tradition, Rome was founded on April 21, 753 BCE.
- It was on that date that Romulus killed his twin brother, Remus.
- The twins were said to be the offspring of Mars, the god of war, and a human mother.
- The uncle of the boys' mother planned to kill the twins, but a servant placed them in a basket and set them afloat in the Tiber River.
- The basket came to rest on a riverbank near the Palatine Hill, one of seven hills in the area.
- The infant twins were suckled by a she-wolf and fed by a woodpecker before being discovered by a shepherd and his wife, who adopted the boys.
- Archaeologists have discovered evidence of human activity around Rome dating back 5,000 years.

Chapter Two: From Myth to Republic

Rome was originally a small village on the banks of the Tiber River. It grew quickly, aided by the convenience of its location. Having an easily navigable waterway allowed merchants to successfully traffic their wares, and this economic activity generated rapid growth and power.

The region's proximity to Greece—and to Greece's colonies in the south of Italy—gave it a culture on which to build something familiar but new. The Greek pantheon of gods, for example, was adopted by the early Romans, who renamed the deities. The Greek god Zeus became the Roman god Jupiter; the Greek Ares became Mars (who was credited, you'll recall, with having sired Romulus and Remus), and Apollo became Mercury. The Romans also adapted Greek architecture and literature, imbuing it with a certain *romanitas*.

Its adaptive skills enabled the new Kingdom of Rome to grow rapidly from a trading town to a prosperous city between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE. During that time, Rome was ruled by seven kings, from Romulus to Tarquin. When this last king, known as Tarquin the Proud, was deposed in 509 BCE, his rival for power, Lucius Junius Brutus, forcefully reformed the government, abolished the monarchy, and established the Roman Republic.

Ruling: A Matter of Class

Unlike in a *democracy,* in which all citizens are expected to take an active role in governing and in which citizens have supreme power, in a *republic*, the citizens elect representatives to rule on their behalf. (America, you'll recall from grade school, is a constitutional republic: the citizens elect representatives to rule on their behalf, guided by an approved constitution.) Strikingly progressive for its era, elements of the Roman Republic have been incorporated into many modern systems of government the world over.

In the Roman Republic, two consuls, elected each year and advised by the Roman Senate, were at the head of the government. Magistrates were elected by the people to serve in the Senate. Though the monarchy had been overthrown, and ruling power returned to the people through the creation of the Republic, a hierarchical class structure was still ingrained in both politics and society.

Many of the Senators were patricians, meaning that they were descended from the original ruling classes of Rome that were established during Romulus's reign. Patricians were highly-regarded members of society with all the trappings of wealth and privilege. In contrast to the rich and powerful patricians stood the rest of the Roman people, known as plebeians. Eventually, after a few hundred years, the plebeians would gain additional rights, such as the right to marry patricians, and even the opportunity to rise to leadership ranks within the military. In time, plebeians who were successful in military service or business could become what was known as self-made nobles.

Although self-made plebeians may have been the original nouveau-riche, the term still had negative connotations, especially among the

patricians. In fact, a shortened version of the term, *plebe*, is still used today. In the United States and the Philippines, freshmen at military academies are referred to as *plebes*. In Great Britain and former Commonwealth nations, the term *pleb* or *plebby* is a derogatory term for someone who is uncouth or who lacks culture and upbringing.

Law and Order in the Roman Republic

In 449 BCE, the Senators carved a series of Roman laws into twelve stone tablets that became known as the Twelve Tables. The Twelve Tables outlined laws relating to civil complaints between citizens, trial procedures, how judgments were to be carried out, the power of fathers over their children, inheriting property, real estate, ownership and possession of property, and laws regarding crime, as well as other matters. Examples include forbidding the burying or burning of corpses inside the city and decreeing that fruit from a tree on one property that falls onto a second man's property becomes the property of the second man. Roman law was nothing if not fastidious about details.

In addition to the Twelve Tables, there was a three-part collection of laws and legal interpretations known as the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, or Body of Civil Law. Sometimes referred to as the Justinian Code, it included laws regarding religion, heresy, and paganism. To give an indication of its long-reaching influence, the Justinian Code was the basis for the Napoleonic Code, which was the French Civil Code established in 1804. Although the Napoleonic Code expanded on the Justinian Code, it served as the basis for many legal reforms undertaken by European and Middle Eastern countries

after the Napoleonic Wars. As a foundation, the Justinian Code continues to influence modern legal processes even today.

The Power and the Glory

Rome's size and power grew exponentially during the Republican era thanks in part to the Punic Wars. The Punic Wars were a series of wars that began in 264 BCE with the First Punic War, which ended in 241 BCE. Sicily was positioned between Rome, located in present-day Italy, and Carthage, in present-day Tunisia in North Africa, and called upon the two powers to solve internal disputes as they arose. Part of Sicily was under Carthage's control. Rome had already conquered most of Italy, and the Romans were interested in expanding their territory to include Sicily. Most of Rome's conquests had been through its powerful army in land battles. It did not have the size and strength of Carthage's navy, and Rome's bid to secure Sicily eventually failed.

The Second Punic War began in 218 BCE, and by the time it started, Rome had extended its influence and tightened its hold on Sicily, Corsica, and Sardinia. First, the Carthaginians fought the Romans in Iberia (modern-day Spain). Leaving his brother, Hasdrubal, in charge of the Iberian front, Hannibal, Chief Commander of the Carthaginian Army, embarked on a bold campaign to take Rome itself. From Iberia, he crossed the Pyrenees Mountains, which bordered Iberia and Gaul (an area that coincides with modern-day France) and the Rhone River. With him, between infantry and cavalry, he had a force numbering somewhere between 30,000 and 90,000 by various historical accounts. Taking a page

from Alexander the Great's military playbook from over a century before, Hannibal also took 40 elephants on his campaign.

Elephants were powerful weapons in ancient war, and were used for transporting men, ramming fortifications, trampling, and generally striking fear in the hearts of enemies by creating chaos on the battlefield. If crossing a lot of territory with an army fully loaded with supplies, cavalry, and elephants wasn't daunting enough, Hannibal marched his troops, along with the horses and elephants, over the Alps, eventually making his way to Capua, the second largest city in Italy. Though he won several battles, the Romans engaged Hannibal's army in a series of smaller battles and skirmishes, effectively chipping away at the invaders until they were forced to retreat back to Carthage.

In 151 BCE, Carthage launched an expedition of 25,000 soldiers to repel invaders from the Berber kingdom of Numidia, in present-day Tunisia and Libya, and was defeated. Some Roman Senators, however, pushed the idea that Carthage, though significantly weakened, continued to be a threat. With an incited Senate, Rome launched a campaign against Carthage in retaliation for breaking the treaty established at the end of the Second Punic War. The Roman siege of Carthage went on for over two years until a change in Roman command signaled a change in tactics. In 146 BCE, the Roman army first tightened its positions around Carthage, then launched an aggressive attack beginning at the harbor and pushing through the city. After seven days of devastation, Carthage surrendered. The Carthaginians who remained were sold into slavery, and the great city of Carthage, which had existed for more than seven centuries, disappeared from the annals of history.

The Reach of the Republic

The Roman Republic was an era of exploration and expansion of power. As the Romans warred with foreign powers, conquered territories became Roman outposts, also known as *coloniae*, or colonies. When a Roman citizen retired from a legion or military unit, they were often granted lands in the conquered territory in which they served. The colonization of conquered territories led to their Romanization. The Latin language, Roman traditions, and technological advances, such as good roads and viaducts for transporting water, became part of the way of life in Roman colonies. Granting status as Roman citizens to conquered peoples created in them a sense of Roman pride and reduced the risk of rebellions after new lands were conquered.

Though the period following the Punic Wars saw a decline in prosperity among Romans, particularly among plebeians, Roman territories expanded throughout the era of the Republic. By the first century, BCE, Rome's conquests included Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, most of Spain, Macedonia, North Africa, and Gaul. Roman coins were used throughout the lands of the Republic. A common currency, a system of good roads, and a naval presence to ward off pirates combined to make trade between Roman territories and allies easy.

Agriculture had a strong influence on Roman markets. Grain was an important agricultural staple due to its use in producing bread. Food crops, such as asparagus, corn, onions, gourds, plums, and other fruits, vegetables, and spices were also popular for both consumption and to produce income through selling of goods in the market. Many farms also kept a vineyard for the production of wine. Trade with outposts and allies

was frequently undertaken based on specialties that were available regionally. Spices and silk were imported from the Middle and Far East, olives and olive oil from Iberia, and imports from other territories included fish, grains, meat, beer, and livestock. Beyond foodstuffs, precious metals, textiles, pottery, glass, marble, wool, and other materials were also traded between the far-reaching corners of the Roman lands. During ancient times, the enslavement of conquered peoples was a common practice. As a result, Rome engaged in a significant slave trade with its outposts and allies.

Chapter Summary

- Under the Republic system, citizens elected representatives to rule on their behalf.
- Although any citizen could work hard and improve their status, the class system was still a defining characteristic of Roman life.
- Patricians were descended from the original ruling class of Rome.
- Plebeians were the common people of Rome.
- The Roman legal system, the Justinian Code, was the basis for the Napoleonic Code, the bones of which are still used in many societies today.
- The expansion of Roman territories brought expanded power, influence and trade.
- After the three Punic Wars, satisfaction among Romans began to fall into decline.

Chapter Three: The Rise of Julius

The Republic of Rome grew in power and prestige. Not surprisingly, it also began to suffer the effects of corruption, greed, and an over-reliance on foreign slave labor. Unemployed Romans, put out of work by the constant infusion of slave labor (itself the consequence of Rome's continual territorial conquests), formed gangs and hired themselves out as thugs to do the bidding of whatever wealthy Senator would pay them. The patricians, already wealthy, became ever-richer at the expense of the working lower class, the plebeians. Resentment built.

In the second century BCE, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchi, brothers who also happened to be Roman tribunes, urged the implementation of land and political reforms. The brothers were both killed for their efforts, but their sacrifice did spur legislative reforms and the rampant corruption of the Senate was curtailed—or at least hidden with greater skill.

Rome was now in its full flowering.

The Republic and Its Caesar

Flowering it may have been, but Rome was nevertheless divided by class. The ruling class called themselves *Optimates* (or "the best men") while the lower classes, and those who sympathized with them, were

known as *Populares* (or “the people”). These names did not denote particular political parties, but rather signified the political ideologies adhered to by specific groups.

Generally, the Optimates held traditional political and social values and favored the power of the Senate and the prestige and superiority of the ruling class. The Populares, meanwhile, favored reform and the democratization of the Roman Republic. These opposing ideologies would famously clash in the form of three men who would, unwittingly, bring about the end of the Roman Republic.

Not long after the end of the Third Punic War, a climate of unrest began to take hold in Rome. Slave revolts began to erupt both in the city and in its outposts. A social war erupted in Rome early in the first century, led by allies within the city, and civil war followed in 88 BCE, lasting a year. There was infighting among Senators as they jockeyed for political control.

The Ascent of Julius Caesar

Gaius Julius Caesar, whom we more popularly know today without his first name, was a Roman General who led his army to conquer northern Gaul, along with parts of Spain that were not secured in previous campaigns. He was the first Roman General to cross the Rhine, and the first to cross the English Channel and invade Britain. His success made Caesar a military leader of unmatched power. While the army and the people respected Caesar for his accomplishments and abilities, the Senate

feared his power and popularity. After the Gallic wars ended, the Senate called Caesar back to Rome. He would have to step down from his military post and would no longer be immune from prosecution for unsanctioned wars.

Caesar knew that the climate of infighting, rebellion, and discontent among the citizens could not continue if Rome was to survive. He knew something had to change. Realizing the position in which he had been placed by the Senate, Caesar did what no military leader was allowed to do: he assembled his army and marched toward Rome in military formation. Pompey, a consul who supported the Senate, rose an army from the south of Italy and met Caesar in a civil war for the control of Rome. The politico-military struggle between Pompey and Caesar lasted from 49-45 BCE. The two leaders grappled for control, trading wins and losses in skirmishes across Italy, Greece, Egypt, Africa, and regions across the modern Balkan and Iberian peninsulas. Although Pompey had been victorious at the Battle of Dyrrhachium, the Battle of Pharsalus would prove a decisive defeat at the hands of the Caesarean forces.

Caesar was, surprisingly for a military leader, a rather accomplished author of prose, and captured some of his military successes for posterity. The culmination of the clashes between Pompey's and Caesar's forces was in August of 48 BCE and is believed to have taken place in the area of modern-day Farsala in Greece. Caesar's forces were outnumbered, and Pompey stood his ground, rather than advancing, believing that Caesar's army would be worn down by having to advance twice as far to engage in battle. Caesar, having held back a fourth line of infantry, surprised Pompey's cavalry, pushing them back. This caused extensive casualties among Pompey's cavalry, who became disoriented and broke ranks, along with his legions, and retreated. After Pompey and what was left of his

forces retreated to camp, Caesar's army attacked the camp walls, ensuring a complete victory. Pompey fled to Egypt, where he was eventually assassinated.

In 45 BCE, upon his victorious return to Rome, the Roman citizens declared the 54-year-old Julius Caesar Dictator for Life. He restored the city-states of Carthage and Corinth, granted Roman citizenship to foreigners, and invited some of his rivals to join him in government. He even granted amnesty to Marcus Brutus, who had fought with Pompey against him. Though he tempered his rule with benevolence, Caesar was careful to exert authority in such a way as to leave no question that it was he who ruled. Roman coins bore his image, and he opened assemblies of government, always speaking first, as Rome's leader. Caesar embarked on a campaign of reforming the government and social programs. One key change under Caesar was the expansion of the Senate, which he filled with his own supporters, much to the dismay of the Patricians, who preferred the Senate being controlled by the aristocracy. He transformed Italy into a province and created more cohesion among the outlying provinces and territories to reduce the risk of uprisings. Caesar appointed himself Prefect of the Morals, a title whose responsibilities were, for all intents and purposes, identical to those of Censors. This allowed Caesar control over choosing magistrates, allowing him to place supporters in key roles within the government.

Bringing the Heavens to Heel

Julius Caesar's influence over the Republic extended even to the marking of time.

The Roman calendar of Julius's day consisted of 355 days divided into 12 months. In addition, a 27- or 28-day "intercalary" month, was sometimes inserted between February and March. This intercalary month was comprised of an extra 22 or 23 days inserted after the first 23 days of February. The net effect, naturally, was to add 22 or 23 days to the year, forming an intercalary year of 377 or 378 days.

In practice, these intercalations were rather haphazardly inserted and tended to be irregularly observed. They usually occurred every second or third year but were sometimes omitted for much longer periods of time or were even inserted into two consecutive years.

Why was there such confusion about the calendar?

Well, the calendar was maintained by an official known as a *pontifex*. And the pontifices were quite often politicians themselves. A magistrate's term of office corresponded with a calendar year; it was natural for him to want his time in power extended. A pontifex could lengthen a year in which he or one of his political allies was in office or refuse to lengthen one in which his opponents were in power.

Over time, given the shabby way in which the calendar was treated and abused, it began to drift out of alignment with the solar year. Plus, because intercalations were usually determined quite late, the average Roman citizen often did not know the date. In fact, the confusion became so great during the last years of the pre-reform calendar that these were known as the "years of confusion." It was hoped that the new calendar, which not surprisingly took Caesar's name, would eliminate problems by

creating a calendar tied to the solar year and in need of no political intervention or maintenance.

The Julian calendar, though a marked improvement, was not a perfect solution to the problem of timekeeping and would need to be reformed 1,500 years later. A slight inaccuracy in the Julian measurement of the solar year caused the calendar dates of the seasons to regress almost one day per century. By the time the 16th century rolled around, the calendar differed from the solar year by some 14 days. Something had to be done.

Pope Gregory XIII implemented a reform of the Julian calendar in 1582. The change was put into effect by advancing the calendar 10 days after October 4, 1582. In other words, that year, the day after October 4 was October 15.

The fault of the Julian calendar had resided in its implementation of leap years. Specifically, it had mandated a leap year every four years, which was too often. The Gregorian calendar differs from the Julian in that no century year is a leap year unless it is exactly divisible by 400. For example, the year 2,000 would be a leap year, for it is divisible by 400. The year 1800, meanwhile, would not be a leap year.

The absence of an empire made the Gregorian calendar somewhat difficult to implement, with many countries resistant to the reform. Julius Caesar, by virtue of his status as supreme ruler of the empire, had met with no such resistance. Pope Gregory, a millennium and a half later, was dealing with a Europe still torn and bloodied from the Protestant Reformation. Within a year, the change had been adopted by the Italian states, Portugal, Spain, and the German Catholic states. Only gradually did other nations adopt the new calendar. The Protestant German states, for

example, took over a century to accept the reform; England and its colonies took even longer. Unbelievably, several countries, including China, the Soviet Union, and Greece, didn't adopt the Gregorian calendar until the 20th century.

Beware the Ides of March

Although Caesar made changes that were popular with the people, his upending of policies that made the aristocracy the ruling class of Rome caused dissent among members of the Senate. Many Senators believed that Caesar would move to dissolve the Senate and rule as king. As a result, Caesar had many enemies. Although he was dictator for life, his tenure was brief. Only a year into his rule, Caesar was assassinated in a conspiracy entered by many of the Roman Senators. On the 15th of March, a date known as the Ides of March, in the year 44 BCE, Julius Caesar went to attend a gladiatorial contest in the Theatre of Pompey, which, unbeknownst to him, had been arranged by conspiring members of the Senate for the express purpose of luring him to his death.

Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, had warned Caesar not to attend the Senate on the Ides of March. She'd suffered a disturbing dream in which her husband was murdered and had hoped to dissuade him from attending the contest.

The conspirators against Caesar included Gaius Cassius Longinus, Lucius Tillius Cimber, Marcus Brutus, and Servilius Casca. The conspirators called themselves *Liberatores*, or liberators. Casca, who was nervous about the plot, had let slip the details to Marc Antony the evening

before. Antony tried to intervene and stop Caesar from attending the Senate, but the conspirators had anticipated just such a complication, and sent someone to the portico to prevent Marc Antony from entering the Theatre of Pompey. Thanks to the warnings of his wife and others about the dangers of the Ides of March, Caesar delayed, and Decimus Brutus, not to be confused with the also-present Marcus Brutus, was sent to bring Caesar to the Senate. As he arrived, Cimbus approached Caesar to ask about a pardon, and other Senators crowded around under the pretence of weighing in on the matter.

As Caesar dismissed the inquiry, Cimber grabbed him.

Casca produced a dagger.

Suddenly frightened by the act he was about to commit, Casca, dagger in hand, yelled, "Help, brothers!" The other Senators descended on Caesar like a wolfpack, stabbing him repeatedly. Some of the Senators shouted "Liberty!" as they plunged their daggers deep.

Although he took artistic license with the words themselves, Caesar's murder and final moments are immortalized in William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar.* In the play, Shakespeare portrays Caesar's dying words to Marcus Brutus, whom he had pardoned and trusted as an ally.

'Et tu, Brute?'

Julius Caesar to Marcus Brutus

In English: *You too, Brutus?*

He suffered 27 stab wounds and was bleeding profusely. A flawed man but proud to the last, Julius Caesar pulled his toga over his face so

that no one could see him grimace through his last breath and die.

Marc Antony pleaded for a public burial. The crowds rioted and cremated Caesar's body in the Forum. The people of Rome were enraged that the ruling class had murdered the leader they saw as their champion. In the wake of the assassination, Marc Antony negotiated a compromise in which the conspirators would not be penalized for their part in the assassination. In concession, the appointments Caesar had made before his death would stand.

It is interesting to note that the burial marker of Julius Caesar's grave still exists in the Forum, and is even today, 2,000 years later, venerated by certain Romans.

The Creation and Dissolution of the Second Triumvirate

Marc Antony used his political savvy and the climate of public discontent to his own advantage, perhaps with the intention of ruling. Caesar, however, had named his grand-nephew, Gaius Octavius, as his adopted son and successor. Gaius Octavius was only 18 at the time of Caesar's death, but he had the love of the people as Caesar's named heir. Although Marc Antony viewed Octavian, as he was then known, as young and inexperienced, and because of this thought of him as little threat to his own ambitions, Caesar's supporters embraced him. The Second Triumvirate was formed between Octavian, Antony, and Lepidus.

Just as the First Triumvirate eventually fell apart due to instability and shifting alliances, the Second Triumvirate, too, began to disintegrate. Antony hated Octavian, and Lepidus preferred Antony to Octavian, but

was overshadowed by both of this fellow Triumvir. Lepidus was a skilled military leader in his own right. He raised a considerable navy and an army of 14 legions, each legion having between 4,000 and 6,000 soldiers, and captured many of the cities and towns in Sicily. After his conquest of Sicily, Lepidus asserted that the provinces he had conquered should be absorbed into his territories and stationed his legions in the conquered lands.

Lepidus had long accused Octavian as treating him as a subordinate rather than an equal. This was no surprise, given that Octavian had been named by Julius Caesar as successor and undoubtedly thought that he would inherit Caesar's rule after a long reign. With Lepidus holding his troops in Sicily, Octavian accused him of planning a rebellion and used his own considerable influence to remove Lepidus from power. Lepidus's troops in Sicily joined Octavian and Lepidus was stripped of all his titles except for the religious title of Pontifex Maximus, or chief high priest of the College of Pontiffs. Octavian subsequently sent Lepidus into exile in Circeii, in what is central Italy today.

As Octavian was removing Lepidus from power, he was also preparing for a war in Illyricum to expand the Roman territories. Illyricum was in what is modern-day Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and Herzegovina.

Antony was married to Octavius's sister, Octavia, and was preoccupied with enhancing his military reputation. He left a pregnant Octavia to live in Alexandria, where he was pursuing war against Parthia in the region of modern-day Iran. The move was more than just an attempt to show off his military skill, however. He had heard that Parthia was allied with Brutus and Cassius and sought revenge against them for their

assassination of Julius Caesar. Antony also wanted to acquire spoils of war, including gold and treasure that he could use to pay his troops, solidifying their loyalty.

Marc Antony and Cleopatra

Cleopatra had been involved with Julius Caesar before his death. In fact, she had given birth to Julius's only son, Caesarian. Without the full support of Octavian and the resources of Rome, much of Antony's resources for war had come from Cleopatra in Egypt, Antony's territory to oversee. He captured Jerusalem and put Herod on the throne in place of Antigonus, the Parthian king who had the support of Roman Senators Cassius and Brutus. Antony had hoped that the massive army he had amassed, along with a train of siege weapons, would allow him to take advantage of unrest and divisions created by the new king, Phraates IV. His winter campaign against Parthia, though, was disastrous. He had overreached, underestimating the enemy, and met his defeat with heavy casualties.

Marc Antony and Cleopatra lived together in Alexandria despite his marriage to Octavia. Antony sired Cleopatra's children, and after he defeated Armenia, he made a declaration known as the Donations of Alexandria, granting the territories to Cleopatra's children. Antony had embraced Egyptian life, openly living as a family man with Cleopatra and their children.

Not everyone, however, was as enamored of Marc Antony as was Cleopatra. The Roman writer, Cicero, was not shy about letting his opinion

be known.

‘A drink-sodden, sex-ridden wreck.’
Cicero on Marc Antony

Others were growing exasperated as well.

Octavian had reached his limit with Antony’s exploits in the east and met him in September of 31 BCE in battle on the Ionian Sea—the Battle of Actium. The Battle of Actium is also known as the Final War of the Roman Republic and is sometimes referred to as Antony’s Civil War. Although a large faction of Senators and consuls defected from Rome to Antony’s side, two of those defectors, Munatius Plancus and Marcus Titius, deserted and returned to Octavian with information that reinforced his accusations that Antony had become more Egyptian than Roman. At the temple of the Vestal Virgins, Octavian forced his way inside and seized a secret will belonging to Marc Antony. Octavian published the damning document in Rome, which outlined the Donations of Alexandria, in which he willed his possessions to his children by Cleopatra and indicated his desire to be buried beside her in Alexandria.

With Rome having officially declared war, Antony backed Egypt and the Senate removed all of his power, calling him an outlaw and a traitor. Octavian took almost 200,000 legionaries to fight Antony. A ferocious naval and land battle ensued, with Antony’s troops eventually surrendering to Octavian. Antony fell upon his own sword in August of 30 BCE but did not immediately die. He joined Cleopatra in a mausoleum in which she was taking refuge, and, according to some accounts, died in her arms.

Cleopatra tried to negotiate with Octavian, begging for her son Caesarion's life. Caesarion was butchered as Octavian explained the terms of surrender to Cleopatra. By killing Cleopatra's—but more importantly Caesar's—son, Octavian eliminated any rival to his own power. History tells of Cleopatra, defeated and bereft, taking her own life by snake venom. According to various accounts, she wrapped an asp around her arm and allowed it to bite her. The venom worked quickly and Cleopatra passed from life to death and became the stuff of legend.

An Empire Emerges

Soon after the Battle of Actium, Octavian was named Pharaoh of Egypt. In 27 BCE, he took the name Augustus Caesar, and the Senate bestowed upon him unprecedented powers. Under Augustus, the Republic became the Roman Empire, with him as its first Emperor. He passed laws that ensured his continued power, while allowing the people to feel as if they still had some semblance of control. Rome and the Mediterranean world were in Augustus's grip now. The conversion of the Republic to the Roman Empire signalled an era known as the *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace, that lasted for centuries beyond Augustus's reign.

Chapter Summary

- The Punic Wars ended in the destruction of Carthage and left a period of unrest in their wake.
- The great Roman General, Julius Caesar, marched on Rome with his army and essentially overthrew the government, becoming dictator for life.
- During his reign, Caesar expanded the Senate and included non-nobles and non-Romans among its ranks.
- Discontent with the changes Caesar was implementing and fearful that he wanted to become king, a cabal of Senators assassinated him only a year after he had ascended to the role of dictator.
- Marc Antony, Lepidus, and Caesar's grand-nephew Octavian became the Second Triumvirate.
- After pushing Lepidus out of power, Octavian and Marc Antony found themselves at odds, each trying to destroy the other.
- Having fallen in love with Caesar's mistress, Cleopatra of Egypt, Marc Antony went with her to Alexandria, where they lived together and had children.

- Octavian defeated Marc Antony, who fell on his sword after his loss. Cleopatra committed suicide to join her love, Marc Antony, and her son, Caesarian, killed by Octavian's order.
- Octavian became Pharaoh of Egypt and Emperor of Rome, taking the name Augustus Caesar.
- Augustus's reign as emperor ushered in a period of peace in Rome known as the *Pax Romana*, which lasted for centuries beyond his life.

Chapter Four: The Empire Reaches Its Zenith

Like Julius Caesar before him, Augustus implemented social reform programs that were popular with the Roman people. The military victories enjoyed during Augustus's time allowed Rome to continue to expand, trading and collecting taxes from outposts and territories in exchange for providing citizens of those territories with some of the benefits of being citizens of Rome. As new lands were annexed or conquered, their cultures, technological advances, art, literature, and architecture were incorporated into the Roman culture, becoming part of Rome itself.

Augustus ruled for an astonishing 56 years, earning the status of a god, bestowed by the Senate upon his death in 14 CE. The deification of emperors would become a long-running tradition in Rome.

The Age of Emperors

After Augustus's death, a succession of emperors ruled over Rome and its territories. Just as with other world leaders, some of the emperors in Rome's history earned notoriety or infamy, while others have faded into obscurity. Although an examination of every Roman emperor would be a task too exhaustive for a book this size, and would most likely be rather boring, it will be instructive and enlightening to examine some of the more notable Caesars.

Caligula

One of the more memorable emperors—and for entirely negative reasons—was Caligula, who ruled from 37 to 41 CE. Unstable and bloodthirsty, he took power at the age of 25 and immediately distinguished himself with wild theatrics and bizarre behavior. He belittled, bullied, and taunted Senators and others with demonstrations of his own power—for example, forcing Roman Senators to run in front of his chariot for sport. Caligula was said to have engaged in torrid affairs with his allies' wives. He often wore strange clothing and spent money without regard for the impact of his excesses. In a conspiracy involving the Praetorian Guard, personal bodyguards of the emperor, Caligula, along with his wife and daughters, were murdered.

Caligula's name become well-known once again in our own day—again for negative reasons, though this time they were not entirely his doing—when, in 1979, a feature film of his life was released. Starring well-regarded actors Malcolm McDowell, Helen Mirren, Peter O'Toole, and John Gielgud, the film's production had been mired in controversy from its inception, when Bob Guccione, founder of *Penthouse* magazine, was revealed as the movie's primary backer. More controversial still was Guccione's decision to add unsimulated sex scenes to director Tinto Brass's final cut of the film, altering its tone and style significantly and making its theatrical release considerably more difficult to arrange. Screen legends Gielgud and O'Toole now suffered the indignity of suddenly finding themselves in what had become, without their knowledge or approval, a hardcore pornographic film. Brass disavowed the movie, which

even today is banned in many countries for its extreme violence and sexual content.

The irony, of course, is that the movie's excesses, while shocking and distasteful to modern audiences, were very much aligned with those of Caligula's actual reign.

Nero

Emperor Nero was the son of an imposing mother, who may well have taken advantage of his young age of only 17 when he ascended to the role of emperor in 54 CE. Politically, Nero shared power with the Senate and left decisions to the philosopher Seneca, the prefect Burrus, and his mother, Agrippina, so he could pursue his own interests in the arts.

He eventually fell in love with the wife of a friend, Poppaea, and married her. After a tumultuous three-year marriage, he killed Poppaea, kicking her in the stomach in a fit of rage.

Nero loved to play the lyre and sing. During a fire in 64 CE, the shops around the Circus Maximus became engulfed in flames. Three of Rome's districts were destroyed and seven more damaged. A popular saying recalls that *Nero fiddled while Rome burned.* Bowed instruments were not yet invented in Nero's time, but popular folklore recalls Nero singing from the roof of his palace as the blaze engulfed parts of the city.

The blaze itself was, and is, the subject of much controversy. Historians remain divided on whether Nero set the fire himself, a claim made by the Roman writer Tacitus, who'd been a boy of eight or nine at

the time of the incident. According to Tacitus, Nero set the fire—but blamed it on a new religious sect whose members were known as Christians.

There are reasons for doubting Nero's culpability—not least of which is the fact that the blaze destroyed some of his own property. Also, some historians maintain that, at the time of the fire, Christians had not yet wholly separated from Judaism, a protected religion, and therefore would not have been the target of persecution.

But there are also many reasons for believing Tacitus's accusation. The first is the testimony of Tacitus himself. Highly regarded as a historian, Tacitus's histories of the Roman emperors are still read today and offer invaluable insight into the world of first-century Rome. Another reason is the constant tradition of the Christian Church, which from the beginning has placed the martyrdoms of both Peter and Paul during the reign of Nero. A curious evidence of that emperor's persecution of Christians rests in the final book of the New Testament itself, in what is generally called the Book of Revelation.

The Number of the Beast

John, the apostle of Jesus, is named as the author of Revelation, a phantasmagorical overview of Christian history from the first century to the return of Christ. John makes repeated references to "Babylon," which is understood as symbolizing Rome. Just as ancient Babylon had persecuted the Hebrew faithful, Rome—according to John—was persecuting the Christian faithful. And John may well have been

intimately aware of such persecution, for Christian tradition has always held that the apostle wrote Revelation while exiled on the island of Patmos—a banishment ordered during another persecution of Christians, this one by the emperor Domitian.

In Revelation, John presents a frightening figure, that of the Antichrist, who persecutes the faithful. As a clue to the mysterious tyrant's identity, John gives the man's "number" as 666. Few people are unaware of the dark significance of this number, but even fewer know that it points directly to Nero as a persecutor of Christians.

By "number," John is referring to the practice of *gematria*, or numerology, in which letters are given certain number values. Significantly, when transliterated into Hebrew, the Greek version of "Caesar Nero" yields a total number value of 666. Curiously, there exist Latin manuscripts of Revelation that present the number as 616 instead of 666; when the Latin form of "Caesar Nero" is used, the letters add up to 616. Nero is quite obviously, then, the "beast" of John's vision. Most historians believe that the author of Revelation was both commenting on Nero's persecution of Christians and presenting it as a type of the final persecution to come.

Whatever the truth of the matter may be, it remains an intriguing area of research.

Another Ignominious End

The costs of rebuilding Rome after the great fire, along with revolts in the Roman territories of Judea and Britain, caused the imperial currency

to become devalued. A conspiracy to assassinate Nero emerged, with his advisor Seneca being named as one of the conspirators. This provoked Seneca to commit suicide. Nero consoled himself by touring Greece and participating in the Olympic Games. After Nero returned home and failed to address a revolt in Gaul or problems in other territories, Galba declared himself legate of the Senate and Roman People in Spain. The Praetorian Guard allied with Galba, declaring Nero an enemy of the Roman people. Upon hearing of his impending arrest and execution, Nero committed suicide.

Domitian

The Roman Emperor Domitian was a thoroughly dreadful human being, remembered today chiefly for two reasons: his brutal suppression of Christians and his despotic terrorizing of prominent Senate members.

Titus Flavius Domitianus was born in 51 CE, the second son of the future emperor Vespasian. During a brief civil war in 69 CE, he managed to escape injury by going into hiding in Rome. When his father's supporters entered Rome, Domitian was saluted as Caesar. His time to lead the Empire had not yet come, however, and his father named him a *praetor*, a magistrate ranking just below that of consul.

During his father's lifetime, he gradually and methodically maneuvered himself through the official ranks, always seeking to leverage other people's successes as his own. Antagonistic towards his brother, Titus, it has been speculated that Domitian hastened his brother's death to facilitate his own ascension to the emperor's throne in 81 CE.

Cruel and ostentatious, Domitian was loathed by the aristocracy. His foreign policy was not successful. He failed to consolidate Scotland because of serious wars on the Danube, wars for which he never was able to achieve satisfactory settlements, and, worse still, to which he lost two legions and many other troops. To be fair, even Tacitus, whose disdain for Domitian cannot be doubted, admitted that Domitian's Danube problems were often the result of his commanders' rash decisions. Although cruel, Domitian was not stupid. He raised soldiers' pay by one-third in 84 CE and retained their loyalty.

Domitian's Troubles Deepen

By 89 CE, scattered revolts began to occur. The first, and in many ways the most notable, was the revolt of Antonius Saturninus, the governor of Upper Germany. The revolt was put down by the army from Lower Germany, and many executions followed. The years 93–96 CE were a period of terror hitherto unsurpassed, as Senators were routinely charged with treason—and punished accordingly.

Domitian considered philosophy dangerous to his authority. Too much thinking might lead one to doubt the soundness of Domitian's policies. Consequently, on at least two occasions, Domitian banished philosophers from the Empire—a quixotic act, to be sure.

Domitian's profligacy brought with it, as it usually does, severe financial difficulties. He began confiscating the property of his victims in an effort to secure more funds. His building program had been ambitious, with a new Forum among many other public works. He had a new house

built for himself on the Palatine Hill and a vast new villa on the Alban Mount. And the increased army pay was a recurrent cost. In his final years, it was only his confiscations that averted bankruptcy and total financial ruin.

He had his cousin, Flavius Clemens, executed in 95 CE, and this proved to be the breaking point: those around him now realized that no one was safe and that action needed to be taken—and taken swiftly. On September 18, 96 CE, a group of conspirators, which included his wife, Domitia Longina, murdered Domitian. Nerva, who almost certainly had to have known of the plot to murder Domitian, immediately took over as Roman Emperor. Senators rejoiced, and via legislation, they officially condemned Domitian's memory. The army, having prospered financially under his reign, were unhappy with the turn of events, and demanded the punishment of those responsible for the former emperor's death.

Hadrian

The emperor Hadrian, who ruled from 117 to 138 CE, was the third of the so-called Five Good Emperors. The remaining four were Nerva, Trajan, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius. These five, in contrast with the rest of the early emperors, were esteemed for the fairness and justness that marked their reigns.

Born Publius Aelius Hadrianus, most probably in Hispania (modern-day Seville, Spain), Hadrian is best known today for a structure that still stands as a demarcation between countries and bears his name: Hadrian's Wall, a stone structure dividing England and Scotland.

Before Assuming the Throne

In 117 CE, Emperor Trajan died on a military campaign in Cilicia. Hadrian, who had been in command of Trajan's rear guard, became his successor. There is some confusion and disagreement over how, exactly, Hadrian assumed the throne. Some historians believe that Trajan had named Hadrian as his successor. This is certainly possible, for there is no doubt that Trajan held Hadrian in high regard. But there is also another story that carries with it some intriguing overtones: Trajan's wife, Plotina, who was fond of Hadrian, may have signed the papers of succession. Some historians speculate that it was she, not the emperor, who was responsible for Hadrian's adoption as heir. Whatever the case may be, it is well-known that Trajan respected Hadrian and had considered him as his successor even if he did not officially name him as such. Hadrian's service to Trajan is well documented through the various important positions he held prior to becoming emperor of Rome.

Hadrian As Emperor

Absent from Rome for the better part of his reign—nearly 12 of his 21 years as emperor were spent traveling the Empire and visiting the provinces—Hadrian was an excellent administrator who took an active interest in all aspects his government. But far from being a meddler, or someone who sought to impose his own will, Hadrian appeared genuinely concerned about the administration of justice. Having ascended to the

throne via the army, Hadrian remained devoted to them, and would often sleep and eat among the common soldiers when visiting troops. The Roman army returned his esteem, and it is significant that Hadrian is often portrayed in military attire even though his regime was marked by relative peace.

Hadrian's building projects are perhaps his most enduring legacy. He had a great interest in architecture and seems to have contributed ideas, or even plans, though scholars doubt he was the lead architect on any single project.

The *Vallum Hadriani*

The wall in northern England that bears his name is the most famous of his building projects. Construction of the wall, known in his day as the *Vallum Hadriani*, was begun around 122 CE and coincided with Hadrian's visit to the province, and marked the northern boundary of the Roman Empire in Britain. The wall, which stretches from coast to coast, was not uniformly tall or wide. East of the River Irthing, the wall originally stood just under 10 feet wide and 16-20 feet high. West of the River Irthing, the wall stood 20 feet wide and 11 feet high. The wall stretched an astonishing 73 miles across uneven terrain. The legions stationed in Britain needed six years to build it. A "vallum," which was a kind of humanly-constructed ditch, ran parallel to the wall, and was 20 feet wide and 10 feet deep. Hadrian, whose foreign policy was "peace through strength," ordered the wall plastered and white-washed to make it clearly visible to the barbarians he'd hoped to keep out of Britain.

Though never intended as a strict border between Britain and Scotland—the wall itself is completely within the boundaries of Britain—it was nevertheless hoped that the wall would dissuade the barbarians in Scotland from attempting an incursion into the British territory controlled by Rome.

Trouble in Jerusalem

Although an intelligent and cultivated man, Hadrian was nevertheless fallible. In 130 CE he visited Jerusalem, which was still in ruins from the First Roman-Jewish War of 66-73 CE. He generously rebuilt the city according to his own designs and renamed it after himself and the Roman god Jupiter. But when he built a temple to Jupiter on the ruins of the Second Temple, a site sacred to Jews, the population rioted under the leadership of Simon bar Kokhbah, and a four-year military campaign ensued. Hadrian's losses in the so-called Bar Kokhbah Revolt (132-136 CE) were enormous, as were Jewish losses. By the time the rebellion ended, 580,000 Jews had been killed and over 1,000 towns and villages had been destroyed. As further punishment for having revolted, Hadrian banished the remaining Jews from the region and renamed it Syria Palaestina in honor of the traditional enemies of the Jewish people, the Philistines. Clearly enraged, he ordered a public burning of the Jewish scriptures, executed Jewish scholars, and outlawed the practice and observance of Judaism.

He Chooses Not a Successor, But Successors

In the later years of his life, Hadrian's health began to fail. Turning his attention toward the Empire's future, he named as his successor Antoninus Pius—on the condition that Antoninus would in turn choose the young Marcus Aurelius when the time came. Hadrian died in 138 CE at the age of 62. His successor was indeed Antoninus Pius, who repaid his benefactor's kindness by having Hadrian deified and building temples in his honor.

The Eastern and Western Provinces

During the era of the Roman Empire, people who were not Roman or Greek were known as barbarians. In later empirical times, the term came to mean a foreigner and was often used simply to describe someone who was uncultured, uncouth, or uncivilized.

By the year 285 CE, Rome's vast territories were too far-reaching to be governed from the central city of Rome. The emperor Diocletian split the Roman region into two halves: Eastern and Western Rome. Byzantium, known later as Constantinople, was the seat of the Eastern Empire, while Rome was the head of the Western Empire. The Eastern Empire included territories from Greece and around the Mediterranean Sea to what is now modern Egypt. The Western Empire included Italy and around the Mediterranean Sea to modern Tunisia in northern Africa. Despite the logistical division between the two halves of the Empire, Rome continued to be a single state as far as its citizens were concerned.

Throughout the Age of Emperors, there was the Roman practice of creating alliances with neighboring peoples and former enemies, granting them the rights of Roman citizens, and ingratiating them further by allowing them into the Roman army. For those in Italy and other areas in close proximity to Rome itself, this strategy allowed those outside of Rome to enjoy the privileges and benefits of citizenship. For those in far-reaching areas beyond Rome, the transition from identifying with the land of their birth to becoming Roman was not as smooth.

Many of the tribes from Germania, the region that includes modern-day Germany, were considered barbarians by the Romans. A people with fierce fighting skills, many barbarians from Germania were recruited into the Roman army as mercenaries. Like many other soldiers of fortune throughout history, though, the Germanic soldiers were far more loyal to the gold they received in pay, or the generals they followed, than they were to Rome. In fact, many barbarians-turned-Roman soldiers had never set foot in Rome itself. For these soldiers, Rome was not a place so much as an idea.

Mercenaries who lacked loyalty to Rome often drove civil war. It is no surprise that, throughout the Age of Emperors, so many leaders, including generals in the Roman army, simply gathered their troops and declared themselves Emperor of Rome, or at least emperor of some portion of the Empire. In fact, during the first through fifth centuries, there were 87 different Roman Emperors, ruling either the Eastern or Western provinces, or all of Rome.

Although some ruled for years, many ruled for only a few months. The list of Roman emperors below does not account for the many people,

perhaps into the hundreds, who challenged the seated emperor, attempting to declare themselves ruler.

List of Roman Emperors

1st Century CE

Augustus: 31 BCE–14 CE

Tiberius: 14–37 CE

Caligula: 37–41 CE

Claudius: 41–54 CE

Nero: 54–68 CE

Galba: 68–69 CE

Otho: January–April 69 CE

Aulus Vitellius: July–December 69 CE

Vespasian: 69–79 CE

Titus: 79–81 CE

Domitian: 81–96 CE

Nerva: 96–98 CE

2nd Century CE

Trajan: 98–117 CE

Hadrian: 117–138 CE

Antoninus Pius: 138–161 CE

Marcus Aurelius: 161–180 CE

Lucius Verus: 161–169 CE

Commodus: 177–192 CE

Publius Helvius Pertinax: January–March 193 CE

Marcus Didius Severus Julianus: March–June 193 CE

Septimius Severus: 193–211 CE

3rd Century CE

Caracalla: 198–217 CE

Publius Septimius Geta: 209–211 CE

Macrinus: 217–218 CE

Elagabalus: 218–222 CE

Severus Alexander: 222–235 CE

Maximinus: 235–238 CE

Gordian I: March–April 238 CE

Gordian II: March–April 238 CE

Pupienus Maximus: April 22–July 29, 238 CE

Balbinus: April 22–July 29, 238 CE

Gordian III: 238–244 CE

Philip: 244–249 CE

Decius: 249–251 CE

Hostilian: 251 CE

Gallus: 251–253 CE

Aemilian: 253 CE

Valerian: 253–260 CE

Gallienus: 253–268 CE

Claudius II Gothicus: 268–270 CE

Quintillus: 270 CE

Aurelian: 270–275 CE

Tacitus: 275–276 CE

Florian: June–September 276 CE

Probus: 276–282 CE

Carus: 282–283 CE

Numerian: 283–284 CE

Carinus: 283–285 CE

Diocletian: Eastern Provinces, 284–305 CE; divided the Empire into Eastern and Western Provinces

Maximian: Western Provinces, 286–305 CE

4th Century CE

Constantius I: Western Provinces, 305–306 CE

Galerius: Eastern Provinces, 305–311 CE

Severus: Western Provinces, 306–307 CE

Maxentius: Western Provinces, 306–312 CE

Constantine I: 306–337 CE; reunified the Empire

Galerius Valerius Maximinus: 310–313 CE

Licinius: 308–324 CE

Constantine II: 337–340 CE

Constantius II: 337–361 CE

Constans I: 337–350 CE

Gallus Caesar: 351–354 CE

Julian: 361–363 CE

Jovian: 363–364 CE

Valentinian I: Western Provinces, 364–375 CE

Valens: Eastern Provinces, 364–378 CE

Gratian: Western Provinces, 367–383 CE; co-emperor with Valentinian I

Valentinian II: 375–392 CE; crowned as a child

Theodosius I: Eastern Provinces, 379–392 CE; Eastern and Western Provinces, 392–395 CE

Arcadius: Eastern Provinces, 383–395 CE, co-emperor; 395–402 CE, sole emperor

Magnus Maximus: Western Provinces, 383–388 CE

Honorius: Western Provinces, 393–395 CE, co-emperor; 395–423 CE, sole emperor

5th Century CE

Theodosius II: Eastern Provinces, 408–450 CE

Constantius III: Western Provinces, 421 CE, co-emperor

Valentinian III: Western Provinces, 425–455 CE

Marcian: Eastern Provinces, 450–457 CE

Petronius Maximus: Western Provinces, March 17–May 31, 455 CE

Avitus: Western Provinces, 455–456 CE

Majorian: Western Provinces, 457–461 CE

Libius Severus: Western Provinces, 461–465 CE

Anthemius: Western Provinces, 467–472 CE

Olybrius: Western Provinces, April–November 472 CE

GlyCErius: Western Provinces, 473–474 CE

Julius Nepos: Western Provinces, 474–475 CE

Romulus Augustulus: Western Provinces, 475–476 CE

Leo I: Eastern Provinces, 457–474 CE

Leo II: Eastern Provinces, 474 CE

Zeno: Eastern Provinces, 474–491 CE

Chapter Summary

- The Age of Emperors marked a period of both great expansion and progress and, at times, unrest and discord in the Roman Empire.
- Emperors ruled Rome and its Roman outposts from the first century BCE through the fifth century CE.
- Some emperors, like Marcus Aurelius, Caligula, and Nero left a lasting mark due to their leadership, legacy, or infamy, while others faded quietly into history.
- Some emperors ruled the entire Empire, while during other times, there was a divide, with one emperor ruling the Eastern provinces and/or one ruling the West.

Chapter Five: Constantine

As emperor, Constantine gave his name as Flavius Valerius Constantinus. The date of his birth is not known for certain, given as early as 274 CE and as late as 288 CE. What is known is that he was born in what is today Serbia, the son of a Roman officer, Constantius, who later became Roman Emperor himself. Constantine's mother, revered as a saint by both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, would later claim to have discovered the actual cross on which Jesus of Nazareth was crucified.

After his father's death in 306 CE, Constantine was acclaimed as emperor by the army. However, his leadership was not universally acknowledged, and he was forced to fight many battles against rival claimants. He became sole ruler of both West and East Rome in 324 CE.

In what can only be described as a seminal moment in the history of the world (and not just in the history of the Roman Empire), Constantine converted to Christianity—the first emperor to do so. Although not insignificant, the Christian population throughout the Empire was relatively small, and had been mercilessly persecuted by Rome for most of the previous 300 years. Constantine's conversion, and the subsequent tolerance he extended to the Christian Church, was unprecedented, and not wholly supported. The Caesars themselves had been considered semi-divine and pride of place had always been given to the traditional pantheon of Roman gods. For a Roman Emperor to deny his own semi-divine status and, even worse, to promote the Jewish deity of a relatively obscure sect,

was an undeniably seismic event and, in the minds of some, a betrayal that portended disaster.

Constantine's conversion—specifically, the genuineness of it—has been endlessly debated through the centuries and will likely be debated for centuries to come. He lived most of his life as a pagan and officially entered the Christian faith only on his deathbed, being baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia. Yet he played an influential role in the Edict of Milan of 313, which declared religious tolerance for Christianity throughout the Roman Empire and he convoked the First Council of Nicea in 325 CE, a gathering of Christian bishops that produced a creedal statement of belief for all Christians.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Holy_Sepulchre He demanded that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher be built over the purported site of Jesus's tomb in Jerusalem, a site that has become the holiest place in Christendom. He is venerated as a saint by both the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic Churches, though his cult is considerably more popular in the East. Although often referred to as "the first Christian emperor," it is unclear precisely how much of his adopted faith he even understood.

His conversion, no matter the degree of its sincerity, was based on a vision he'd received before a battle in 312 CE. Constantine's forces were set to clash with those of Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, which spanned the Tiber. The vision had assured him that he would defeat his enemies in the sign of Christ, so he ordered his troops, most of which were pagans, to emblazon their shields with the *chi rho*, a monogram of Christ. Maxentius's troops suffered a total defeat and Maxentius himself drowned in the Tiber.

Constantine proved his gratitude for the victory by legalizing Christian worship throughout the Empire. Perhaps more surprisingly, he treated his defeated enemies with great compassion and, in a striking break with the tradition of his predecessors, forbade any executions following his victory at Milvian Bridge.

Many misunderstandings swirl about Constantine's involvement with Christianity. It is sometimes claimed by religious polemicists that he somehow "invented" Christianity or that he managed to meld pagan beliefs into what had previously been a pristine and pure Christian faith. This is most certainly false. Christian beliefs underwent no dramatic change with the advent of Constantine. What changed, rather, was Christians' ability to worship openly in buildings built for the expressed purpose of Christian worship. The era of bloody persecutions had ended and tolerance had now been extended.

It should be stressed, too, that Constantine—again, contrary to what many believe—did not declare Christianity the official religion of the Empire. That declaration would be made several decades later by a different emperor, Theodosius. For his part, Constantine merely instituted a policy of religious freedom.

Constantine Looks Eastward

Constantine decided to make Byzantium the future capital of the Empire and with his usual energy, he took every measure to enlarge, strengthen, and beautify it. And in a move very much in keeping with

imperial self-regard, he renamed the city after himself, calling it Constantinople.

Not long before Constantine's death, the Persian king made hostile movements into the outer realms of the Empire. Constantine prepared to join his troops in battle. But before he could march against the Persian king, he was suddenly stricken with an illness and rendered bed-ridden. Asking for, and receiving, baptism, he died in May of 337 CE.

Chapter Summary

- In 312 CE, before a battle near the Tiber River's Milvian Bridge, Constantine received a vision of a Christian symbol and the assurance of victory.
- In gratitude for his victory over Maxentius at Milvian Bridge, Constantine converted to Christianity and promulgated the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, legalizing Christianity throughout the Empire.
- He convoked the First Council of Nicea, a gathering of Christian bishops that produced a creedal affirmation for all believers.
- Stricken suddenly by illness, Constantine died in May of 337 CE, having asked for and received Christian baptism.

Chapter Six: The First Sack of Rome

Just as the Roman Empire wasn't built in a single day, or even a single year, its collapse was likewise long in coming.

Although people could sense something was amiss and that the Empire was straining under the demands of too many territories and too many peoples, the sacking of Rome by Visigoth barbarians nevertheless came as a devastating shock.

On August 24, 410, the Visigoth General Alaric led his forces into Rome, looting and pillaging the city for three straight days. Though a sack nonetheless, it was considered restrained by the standards of the day: there were no mass killings and most structures survived intact.

At the time of the sack, Rome was no longer capital of the Empire. The capital of the Empire had already been moved to Ravenna some eight years prior. Nevertheless, Rome still had great symbolic and emotional significance in peoples' lives. The sack would reverberate like a shockwave through the Empire.

It will come as a surprise to many that Alaric, the leader of the Visigoth barbarians, had once served in the Roman army. In fact, Alaric makes for a rather fascinating character.

Alaric

In 394, Alaric had led a 20,000-strong force in aid of Theodosius, the Eastern Roman Emperor, in his defeat of the Frankish Roman General Arbogast at the battle of Frigidus. Alaric lost half his men and had expected some show of gratitude for their sacrifice. Unfortunately, Theodosius barely acknowledged it.

In response, the Visigoths decided to fight for their own interests rather than those of Rome. They raised Alaric on a shield and proclaimed him their king. He would reign as the first king of the Visigoths from 395 to 410.

Although considered a barbarian, Alaric was in fact a Christian, albeit a heretical one. To understand the subtlety of this, we must briefly return to the reign of Constantine and his convoking of the Council of Nicea.

One of the issues confronting the bishops assembled at Nicea was the correct understanding of Jesus's humanity and divinity. The orthodox teaching of the Church had always maintained that Jesus was both fully God and fully man, and that He, as the "eternally-begotten" Son of God, was the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, which is itself a communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The traditional understanding of this included the belief that Jesus is "equal" to God the Father and has existed with both the Father and the Holy Spirit for all eternity. In other words, there has never been a moment in which Jesus has not existed.

Enter Arius, a bishop from Egypt who espoused a strikingly different belief, one that would catch on and cause much division in the Church for several more centuries, and which exists still today in the American religious sect known as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Put simply, Arius taught that Jesus was not fully divine and thus not equal to the Father.

Constantine himself was not particularly concerned with the dispute and it is doubtful that many Christian faithful understood the theological issue at stake. But Constantine wanted peace in his Empire and hoped a council of bishops would help smooth over the growing ruptures between prelates over the nature of Christ's divinity.

The Council of Nicea condemned Arianism and reaffirmed the traditional (if little-understood) doctrine of the Trinity. The controversy wasn't settled, however, and percolated for another century or more, especially in the eastern half of the Empire. A Gothic convert to Arianism named Ulfilas was sent as a missionary to the Gothic tribes across the Danube River and found great success making converts. The result was two parallel Churches, one Nicene and the other Arian, each with its own hierarchies. The Germanic kingdoms were overwhelmingly Arian, and when the Germanic tribes began encroaching on the Empire's western borders, they brought with them the heretical Arian form of Christianity that had been condemned a century earlier at Nicea.

Alaric, as a Visigoth, was a member of the Arian camp.

Warnings from the East

The sack of Rome had been preceded by sacks of several Greek cities in 396 and 397. The armies of the Eastern Empire had been busy fighting the Huns, which allowed the Goths to raid unprotected regions such as Attica and Sparta, though Alaric spared Athens.

The sack of Rome in 410 was largely due to the failed alliance of Alaric and Stilicho, a high-ranking general in the Roman Army

Stilicho was half-Vandal and married to the niece of the Emperor Theodosius. Though comrades in the battle of Frigidus, Stilicho had later defeated Alaric's forces in Macedonia and Pollentia. Stilicho, however, planned to enlist Alaric to fight for him against the Eastern Empire in 408. These plans never came to fruition and Stilicho, along with thousands of Goths, were killed by the Romans, though without Emperor Honorius's say-so. Alaric, strengthened by 10,000 Goths that had defected from Rome, sacked several Italian cities and set his sights on Rome.

Although portrayed as a barbarian, Alaric attempted numerous times to negotiate with Rome and avoid the sack. Emperor Honorius did not take Alaric's threats seriously enough and negotiations crumbled under evidence of Honorius's bad faith and desire for war. Honorius ordered a failed surprise attack on Alaric's forces at a meeting where the two were scheduled to negotiate. Angered by the attack, Alaric finally entered Rome.

He would not enjoy his success very long. Rome may have suffered a devastating blow, but she did land a final counterpunch against the Visigoth king: not long after the sack, Alaric died, most likely of fever.

Devastation

The sack was the first time in 800 years that Rome had fallen to a foreign foe. The previous sack had been in 390 BCE and had been perpetrated by the Gauls after their victory over the Romans at Allia.

The physical devastation of Alaric's sack of Rome was nothing compared to the emotional and psychological devastation suffered by a

populace for whom the unimaginable had just happened. There may have been a growing sense of unease over the barbarians' repeated incursions into the Empire, but a sack of Rome itself, "the eternal city," was a psychological wound from which the Romans—and their Empire—would never recover.

Chapter Summary

- Alaric, King of the Visigoths, successfully led his forces in a sack of Rome that started on August 24, 410.
- The sack was, by standards of the day, restrained.
- Alaric had tried to negotiate to avoid the sack but had been rebuffed.
- Alaric's sack of Rome was the first successful sack of the city in 800 years.
- Alaric belonged to a heretical form of Christianity known as Arianism, which takes its name from an Egyptian bishop named Arius.
- Shortly after the sack of Rome, Alaric died, most likely from fever.

Chapter Seven: The End of the Empire

In 476, it finally happened.

Rome fell.

And for good.

In the decades that followed Alaric's sack of Rome, wave after wave of Germanic barbarian tribes swept through the Roman Empire, ravaging it and carving out areas in which to settle.

By 476, Rome itself was a shadow of its former self, and was easily overtaken by barbarians a final time. After a nearly 500-year run as the world's greatest superpower, the Roman Empire collapsed in the late fourth century and passed into memory and myth. Historians and experts have blamed the collapse on hundreds of different factors, from military failures and crippling taxation to natural disasters and even, more recently, climate change. Others, meanwhile, argue that the Roman Empire didn't really fall in 476, since its eastern half continued for another thousand years in the form of the Byzantine Empire, based in Constantinople. While just how—and when—the Empire fell remains a subject of continuing debate, certain theories have emerged as the most popular explanations for Rome's decline and disintegration.

Invasions by Barbarian Tribes

The most obvious theory for Rome's collapse pins the fall on a string of military losses sustained against outside aggressors. Rome had tangled with Germanic tribes for centuries, but by the 300s, barbarian groups like the Goths had encroached beyond the Empire's borders. The Romans endured a Germanic uprising in the late fourth century, but in 410 Alaric successfully sacked the city. The Empire spent the next several decades under constant threat before the Eternal City was raided again in 455, this time by the barbarian tribes known as the Vandals. Finally, in 476, the Germanic leader Odoacer staged a revolt and deposed Emperor Romulus Augustulus. From then on, no Roman emperor would ever again rule from a post in Italy, leading most historians to cite 476 as the year the Western Empire suffered its deathblow.

Economic Troubles and Overreliance on Slave Labor

Even as Rome was under attack from outside forces, it was crumbling from within. A kind of inner rot had developed. Constant wars and overspending had significantly lightened Imperial coffers, and oppressive taxation had widened the already substantial gap between rich and poor. In the hope of avoiding the tax collector, many members of the wealthy classes had fled to the countryside and set up independent communities.

At the same time, the Empire was rocked by a severe labor deficit. Rome's economy depended on slaves to fill its fields and work as craftsmen, and its military might have traditionally provided a fresh influx of conquered peoples to put to work. But when expansion slowed drastically in the second century (generally seen as the Empire's apex),

Rome's supply of slaves and other war treasures began to dry up. A further blow came in the fifth century, when the Vandals claimed North Africa and began disrupting the Empire's trade by pirating vessels in the Mediterranean. With its economy faltering and its commercial and agricultural production in decline, the Empire began to lose its grip on its far-flung European territories.

The Focus of the Empire Shifts Eastward

The fate of Rome was partially sealed in the late third century when Diocletian divided the Empire in two—the Western Empire centered in Milan and the Eastern Empire centered in Byzantium, later known as Constantinople. The division made the Empire more easily governable in the short term, but over time, the two halves drifted apart. East and West failed to adequately work together to combat outside threats. Worse, they often squabbled over resources and military aid. As the gulf widened, the largely Greek-speaking Eastern Empire grew in wealth while the Latin-speaking West descended into economic crisis. Perhaps most importantly, the strength of the Eastern Empire served to divert barbarian invasions westward. Emperors like Constantine ensured that the city of Constantinople was fortified and well-guarded, but Italy and the city of Rome—which only had symbolic value for many in the East—were left open and vulnerable. The Western political structure would finally disintegrate in the fifth century, but the Eastern Empire endured in some form for another thousand years.

Overexpansion and Military Overspending

At its height, the Roman Empire stretched—if one can believe it—from the Atlantic Ocean all the way to the Euphrates River in the Middle East. Yet its grandeur may also have been its downfall. With such a vast territory to govern, the Empire faced an administrative nightmare. Even with the excellent roads they'd constructed throughout the Empire, Romans were unable to communicate quickly or effectively enough to manage their holdings. Rome struggled to marshal troops and resources to defend its frontiers from local rebellions and outside aggression, and by the second century, Hadrian was forced to build his famous wall in Britain just to keep the barbarians in Scotland. As more and more funds were funneled into the military's maintenance of the Empire, Rome's civil infrastructure fell into disrepair.

Government Corruption and Political Instability

If Rome's sheer size made it difficult to govern, ineffective leadership only exacerbated the problem. Being the Roman emperor had always been a particularly dangerous job, but during the tumultuous second and third centuries it was more often than not a death sentence. Constant civil war thrust the Empire into chaos, and over the course of one 75-year stretch, more than 20 men took the throne—usually after the murder of their predecessor. The Praetorian Guard—the emperor's personal bodyguards—assassinated and installed new sovereigns at will and were not above auctioning the spot off to the highest bidder. The inner

rot also extended to the Senate, which failed to temper the excesses of the emperors due to its own incompetence and corruption. As the situation worsened, civic pride plummeted, and many Roman citizens lost trust in the city's leadership.

The Arrival of the Barbarian Tribes

The barbarian attacks on Rome partially stemmed from a mass migration caused by the Huns' invasion of Europe in the late fourth century. When these nomadic warriors rampaged through northern Europe, they drove many of the Germanic tribes to the borders of the Roman Empire. The Romans allowed—begrudgingly— members of the Visigoth tribe to cross south of the Danube and into the safety of Roman territory, but they treated them with disdain and extreme cruelty. According to one Roman historian, officials even forced the starving Goths to trade their children into slavery in exchange for dog meat. In brutalizing the Goths, the Romans created a dangerous enemy within their own borders.

When the oppression finally became too much to bear, the Goths rose up in revolt and killed the Eastern Emperor Valens in 378. The Romans were shocked, and they negotiated a flimsy peace. The truce unraveled in 410, when Alaric sacked Rome. With the Western Empire weakened, Germanic tribes like the Vandals and the Saxons were able to surge across its borders and occupy Britain, Spain, and North Africa.

Christianity as Culprit

The decline of Rome dovetailed with the spread of Christianity, and while it might sound odd today to hear it said, many Romans at the time of Alaric's sack blamed Christianity for the Empire's fall. The Edict of Milan legalized Christianity in 313, and it later became the state religion in 380. According to complaints made at the time, the spread of the Christian faith eroded the traditional Roman values system by supplanting the Roman pantheon of gods with the monotheistic god of Christianity. The polytheistic Roman religion had conferred a divine (or at the very least semi-divine) status on the emperor, which, according to this line of thinking, served to shift the focus away from the glory of the state and onto a sole deity. Once the traditional Roman religion had been marginalized, the importance of the state eclipsed that of the emperor, which led to bloated budgets and severe deficits.

This view, which reached its peak with Edward Gibbon in the 18th century, is now widely ridiculed as having little to recommend it. Military, economic, and administrative factors were far more important in hastening Rome's fall.

Weakening of the Roman Legions

Rome's military was, for most of its history, the envy of the ancient world. During its decline, however, the makeup of the once-mighty legions began to morph. Unable to recruit enough soldiers from the Roman citizenry, emperors like Diocletian and Constantine began hiring foreign mercenaries to prop up their armies. Germanic Goths and other barbarians eventually swelled the legion's ranks to such an extent that Romans began using the Latin word *barbarus* in place of *soldier*. The Germanic soldiers

of fortune were fierce warriors, but they evinced no loyalty to the Empire, and their power-hungry officers often turned against their Roman employers. In fact, many of the barbarians who sacked Rome and brought down the Western Empire had earned their military stripes while serving in the Roman legions. Alaric, you may recall from the last chapter, was one such barbarian.

From Romulus to Romulus

It is fascinating to note that Rome's last and final emperor was named Romulus. That the great city should be founded, at least mythically, by a man named Romulus, and then, over a thousand years later, see its empire stripped from a man named Romulus—history is nothing if not interesting.

Chapter Summary

- In the decades following Alaric's sack of Rome in 410, wave after wave of barbarian tribes streamed into the Empire and established footholds.
- In 476, the Germanic leader Odoacer staged a revolt and deposed Emperor Romulus. The Roman Empire was no more.
- The reasons for the Empire's collapse are many and varied, but most historians cite military, economic, and

administrative factors.

Final Words

It is impossible in our day to discuss the Roman Empire without someone asking: Is America Rome?

The question itself reflects our shared awareness that no empire has ever survived its own excesses. The Greek, the Persian, the Roman, the Ottoman, the Hapsburg, the British—all these empires have receded into memory and history books. The British Empire in particular offers a sobering splash of water to the face of those who place their hopes in the glory of imperial power. In 1900, Great Britain—note well the adjective—stood astride the globe and dominated it. So vast and far-flung were the Crown's colonies and territories that it could be said that the sun never set on British soil.

That was 1900.

By 1950—just five decades later—the adjective preceding *Britain* seemed more wishful thinking than political reality. The country had lost, or was in the process of losing, most of its holdings in Africa and Asia, and the United States had supplanted it as the West's most powerful nation.

50 years. Five decades. That's all the time it takes for an empire to unwillingly pass its baton to another, younger power eager for its turn on the world stage.

The 20th century was called the American Century, and there is continuing speculation over which country's name will ultimately describe our current century. Will it be China? Will it be India? Will it be a country currently off our collective radar? What's taken for granted in this line of questioning is that it won't be America.

Are we right to so casually dismiss what is, even today, the most economically and militarily powerful nation the world has ever seen?

Perhaps we're being hasty.

What can be called the American "empire" was unsought, and, unlike most of the other empires whose carcasses litter history, has not been driven by a succession of autocratic rulers. The United States has had no Alexander, as did the Greeks; no Xerxes, as did the Persians; no Augustus, as did the Romans. The American experiment was launched by men such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, men with scant use for empire and its consequent tyranny. Their faith, whether justified or not, was placed in the judgment of a citizenry they trusted to elect responsible representatives. With power placed ultimately in the hands of the citizens, despotism finds it harder to wrestle a government under its control.

Harder, but not impossible. Just ask the citizens of 1930s Germany, who freely elected Adolph Hitler to public office.

Perhaps the 21st century will not belong to any particular country because a kind of parity is taking shape among nations, and parity is the bane of empire. Most of the so-called First World countries have nuclear capabilities, which surely act as a greater deterrent than Alexander's elephants or Hadrian's white-washed wall. "Peace through strength" is not just the privileged policy of the United States; it is the general understanding and stated policy of most nations now. Economic and

military strength, though obviously found in unequalled abundance in America, are nevertheless not the possessions of America alone. The past decades have seen exponential increases in global prosperity, with more of the world's citizens being lifted out of poverty than ever before in human history. This in itself blunts a desire for conquest.

But more importantly, perhaps we can indulge a belief that a world made small by a bewildering array of telecommunication gadgetry simply has no countries left to conquer or peoples to subjugate. Has the metaphorical shrinking of the planet via technology left no room for imperial aspirations? Is empire-building not just passé but practically impossible?

This is not to deny the corrupting power of influence; and nature, as the saying goes, abhors a vacuum. There will likely always be men and women who seek that which is not rightly theirs. Power corrupts, and the temptation to accumulate more and more of it strikes even the most generous of souls. The limiting of power, then, appears the only safeguard against such temptations running rampant.

That, and the recognition of every human being's innate, ineffaceable dignity.

Consider for a moment the Visigoth king, Alaric. His sack of Rome in 410 mortally wounded the Empire and ensured its final toppling six decades later. Years before the sack, he had wanted recognition for his troops' valiant sacrifices at the battle of Frigidus. Not recognition for himself, but for his men, many of whom had given their last breaths in service to Rome. Not especially keen on Alaric's cultural background—being neither Roman nor Greek, Alaric was considered a barbarian—Emperor Theodosius barely acknowledged Alaric and his men. Quite

understandably, Alaric was angered. Theodosius—and by extension the Empire itself—had refused to recognize, much less affirm, his and all Goths' basic humanity. The resentment that such treatment engenders rarely finds positive outlets.

But again, our question: Is America Rome?

A full treatment remains beyond the scope of a book as concise as this one, but at least a preliminary answer can be attempted.

The question itself betrays a certain insecurity in the face of reality, an insecurity born of a recognition: life is short, all things pass away. In other words, the question is generated by our recognition of the transitory nature of things.

The human heart craves permanence. Our lives pass by like a cloud overhead and we rebel against this, wanting more. It is an elemental feature of the human heart to never be satisfied. We want more happiness, more love, more justice—*more*. The impulse toward empire is born of this never-ending human desire for more.

In this sense, then, America is Rome.

In this sense, *every* country is Rome.