CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the origins, course and consequences of World War II. Shortly after Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933, Europe's nations started down the road to general war again. Throughout his career, Hitler based his actions on the belief that all the Germanic peoples should be united in Europe's strongest nation. The new Germany should conquer Poland and the Ukraine, and expel the inhabitants to make room for German settlers. Hitler never lost sight of this goal; he was, nonetheless, an opportunist, willing and able to change tactics to fit a changed situation.

To achieve his goal, which would almost certainly require a major war, Hitler had to free Germany from the military restrictions of Versailles. In 1935, he formally denounced the treaty's disarmament provisions, and began to create an army and air force, and allied with Mussolini's Italy. The next year, Hitler took the important step of remilitarizing the Rhineland. By failing to react, Britain and France lost an important chance to stop Hitler cheaply. Their policy now became one of appeasement, that is, of willingness to meet Hitler's goals, on the assumption that they were limited and acceptable.

The chapter continues to detail the German and Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the bloodless Anschluss or union of Germany and Austria in 1938 and the annexation of the Sudetenland as result of the Munich conference also in 1938. Hitler claimed that he had no further territorial demands in Europe and British Prime Minister Chamberlain thought the agreement would bring "peace for our time."

Despite Hitler's pledge to respect Czech sovereignty, he had his troops occupy most of the rest of the country in 1939. Responding to the pressure of public opinion, Chamberlain guaranteed the security of Poland and sought Soviet aid in so doing. Stalin, however, signed a pact with Hitler, despite their ideological enmity, which secretly offered Stalin a new partition of Poland. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and general declarations of war quickly followed. By the end of June, 1940, Poland, Scandinavia, the Low Countries and France had fallen. Only Britain remained as an enemy. The chapter then details Hitler's air war against Britain, the invasion of Russia and retreat from Moscow in 1942.

The American government was sympathetic with the plight of Britain but the isolationism of its people prevented its entry into the war until the bombing of Pearl Harbor in late 1941 by Japan, an ally of Germany. America declared war on Japan, and Hitler declared war on the United States. Equally important to the allied cause, the Russians had halted the German advance at Stalingrad in late 1942 and assumed the offensive the next spring. In 1943, the United States invaded Italy and ended its cooperation with Germany. After massive aerial bombardment of Germany, the allies invaded northern France on
June 6, 1944 and crossed the Rhine by March. The Germans surrendered unconditionally on May 8, 1945. The chapter then details the American victory over the Japanese in the Pacific and the use of the atomic bomb in the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

World War II was the most terrible war in history. It caused between 30 and 40 million deaths. As in 1919, the world hoped for a safe and secure peace in 1945, but a bitter split between the Soviet Union and its allies soon developed. The Soviet Union, not unexpectedly wanted to install Communist governments in the east which were subordinate to Moscow. Britain and the United States opposed such expansion in eastern Europe.

**KEY POINTS AND VITAL CONCEPTS**

1. **Hitler's Goals:** Most historians believe that World War II was the outcome of Hitler's ambitions for vast conquests in eastern Europe and dominance of the rest of the continent, if not the world. A minority view, however, asserts that Hitler only wanted to reverse the Versailles Treaty and restore Germany's borders of 1914. According to this analysis (A.J.P. Taylor), Hitler did not follow a consistent plan in foreign policy, but was an opportunist. The truth probably lies somewhere between these two views.

2. **Nazi Treatment of Subject Peoples:** In all the conquered lands, plunder was the rule of Nazi economics. Far more frightful, however, were the measures taken in accordance with Nazi racial theories. The Nazis may have killed as many as six million Russian prisoners of war and civilian employees. An equal number of Jewish men, women and children, who held the lowest rank in the Nazi racial hierarchy, were slaughtered. The Nazi death camps still bear testimony to man's inhumanity to man.

3. **The Atomic Bomb:** By the summer of 1945, the Americans were poised for an invasion of Japan's home islands which appeared necessary to win a Japanese admission of defeat. It was estimated that this difficult campaign might cost a million American casualties. The decision to drop the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was based upon the desire to end the war quickly and save American lives, not by a desire to scare the Russians.
4. **World War II in World Perspective**: World War II grew out of the unsatisfactory resolution of the first great war of the century. The world suffered more terribly because of the failures of judgment and will on the part of the democratic powers. If the victorious nations in 1918 had remained strong, responsible and realistic, they could easily have remedied whatever injustices or mistakes that arose from the treaties without any danger to the peace. World War II ended with no treaty at all in the European area where it had begun. The world quickly split into two unfriendly camps, a split which also hastened the liberation of former colonial territories. Yet one of the more surprising aspects of the second war, the supportive treatment of the vanquished by the victors, was largely a result of the Cold War. They assisted European and Japanese economic recovery in order to protect against the potential threat of the Soviet Union. And yet the ideological threat posed by Communism has largely been discredited because of the disastrous economic results of such heavy-handed state control in China and the Soviet Union.

**SUGGESTED FILMS**

*Chamberlain vs. Hitler.* Films, Inc. 25 min.

*Hitler - A Profile in Power.* Learning Corporation of America. 26 min.

*Adolf Hitler, Part II: The Fall of the Third Reich.* McGraw-Hill. 27 min.

*Gotterdammerung: Fall of the Third Reich.* Films Inc. 30 min.

*In Search of Nazi Plunder.* Pyramid Films. 24 min.

*The Spanish Civil War.* Films Inc. 26 min.

*Rise of the Dictators: Form, Rifleman, Form.* Time-Life. 52 min.

*Total War.* Learning Corporation of America. 25 min.
Victory at Sea. Encyclopaedia Britannica. 84 min.

Nuremburg Trials. Films Inc. 31 min.


The Spanish Turmoil. Time-Life. 64 min.

Battle of Britain. Films, Inc. 51 min.


Minister of Hate. McGraw-Hill. 27 min.


The Remnant. Films, Inc. 60 min. Deals with concentration camps.

Trial at Nuremberg. CBS. 28 min.

The Decision to Drop the Bomb. Films, Inc. 35 min.

The Last Nazi: Albert Speer. Lutheran Church of America. 72 min.

Tale of Two Cities (Hiroshima and Nagasaki). U.S. War Dept. 28 min.

War and Peace in Europe: Hitler's War. Time-Life. 20 min.

War and Peace in Europe: The New Europe. Time-Life. 20 min.

World at War: 1 - 26. Thames TV. 51 min.

Uniting of Nations. Time-Life. 20 min.
*The Spanish Civil War: Parts I & 2.* History Film. 61 min.

*Aftermath of World War II.* McGraw-Hill. 25 min.