

History
UNFOLDING

THE AGE OF THE TOTALITARIANS



MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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Introduction

Tyranny and the 20th Century

Tyranny is as old as human history. But the 20th century gave the world a new word for a different, vastly more pervasive form of tyranny. That word is “totalitarian.”

Historians argue about this word. Not all of them accept the need for it. Still, there is no denying the fact that the modern industrial, military and communications technology of the past century gave authoritarian rulers powerful new tools to use in exercising their will to power. Perhaps just as importantly, the modern age saw the birth of ideologies of right and left justifying total state control and basing this justification on the need to eliminate entire classes of human beings.

Rulers such as Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot have seemed positively driven to achieve absolute and total control over all of the political, economic, social and even psychological aspects of their people’s lives. Given this, the word “totalitarian” seems apt.

In any case, the concept is explored in this booklet/transparency set by focusing primarily on the dictatorships of Hitler and Stalin and on the terrible years of the 1930s and ‘40s. The set uses 12 visual displays to focus on several key themes in this story. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Rise of the Dictators

The illustrations here focus exclusively on Hitler and Stalin and the similar yet somewhat different ways in which they presented themselves to their people and justified their drive to total power.

The Total State

The totalitarian state attempted to depict itself as larger than life itself. Through rallies, enormous state projects and many other ways it sought to convey an image of all-encompassing power. The lesson illustrates this theme and also looks at how this drive for power was justified by identifying malevolent race or class enemies, whole groups marked for destruction by the totalitarian dictators.

Genocide and Totalitarianism

Both of the two great tyrannies of the 1930s and ‘40s resulted in acts of unspeakable genocide in which many millions perished.

Total War

In addition to Hitler and Stalin, the dictators in Japan drove the world toward war in the 1930s. This lesson deals with the world war that resulted by posing the question: Is the totalitarian state inherently aggressive and does it have a need to find an outlet for such aggression in war?

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

OBJECTIVE

1. Students will better understand the concept of totalitarianism and why it came to be used as a label for the uniquely powerful tyrannies of the 20th century.

The Rise of the Dictators

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

Tyranny is certainly not new in human history. But in the 20th century, the modern industrial state made possible a new, more total kind of tyranny, hence the name “totalitarian.” The term calls to mind such things as a huge state bureaucracy, a vast secret police and prison network, a system of constant, ever-present political propaganda and total governmental control over the economy and society. Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime is often portrayed as the most brutal example of such a totalitarian system. In the photo on the right, Hitler’s rigid stance, salute, uniform and bearing convey a sense of unbending authority and total power. This cult of power was celebrated in huge spectacles, such as the one shown on the left. In them, the individual disappeared into a disciplined mass, a militarized nation in which all independent thought and feeling was to be eliminated.

Illustration 2

Along with Hitler, Joseph Stalin is the other name most closely linked with the term “totalitarian.” By 1929, he was the master of the Soviet Union’s communist state. Soviet propaganda depicted Stalin as all-knowing and the state as the sole source of all human happiness. The poster on the top conveys the image of a godlike Stalin looking on as his state-guided new industrial order transforms society. Yet, on the right, he was also depicted as a kind, ordinary man of the people. Even sympathetic writers in the West were taken in. But Stalin was to prove that beneath this warm image lay a man driven by fear, spite, sadism and a pure will to power.

Illustration 3

Hitler and Stalin used all the modern techniques of propaganda — radio, film, the press, art, photography and education — to convey a sense of the massive power of the state. Photographer Leni Reifenstahl took the photo on the left of a German athlete at the 1936 Olympics. The photo is subtle but powerful propaganda. Together, the cropping, camera angle, lighting and composition turn this athlete into a symbol of Hitler’s new German master race, ready to burst the tight constraints imposed on it by less worthy nations and races. The Soviet poster on the right portrays the communist state as a massive and unstoppable ship, drowning its puny capitalist enemies as it plows the waves toward a glorious future.

Lesson 1 — The Rise of the Dictators

Illustration 1



The National Archives



The National Archives

Discussing the Illustrations

1. In the 20th century, several terrifying dictators came to power. They used the state to control every aspect of their people's lives, and they had a huge and destructive impact on the entire world. One of these dictators is shown here. He is in the photo on the right standing with his arm extended rigidly. Can you name him and the nation he led?
2. The photo shows Hitler in 1928 at a big rally for his political party — the National Socialist German Workers Party. By what shorter name was it known? What do you think the term “national socialism” meant to Hitler's followers?
3. After taking power in Germany in 1933, the Nazis continued to hold big rallies, such as the one shown on the left here. From both of these photos, what can you tell about Hitler and the kind of leader he was? That is, what do the photos alone show you about him, about his leadership, and about the kind of nation the Nazis wanted Germany to become?

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Together the two photographs shown above reveal a good deal about the nature of the Third Reich, the government Hitler set up. Your group's task is to carefully select five to ten more photos, drawings, posters, or other visuals for a bulletin board display designed to explain to young children what they most need to know about Hitler, the Nazi movement, and the Third Reich. Ask your librarian to help you locate books with photos and other visuals on the Hitler era. Do some reading on your own about Nazi Germany. Discuss the visuals you find, and choose ten images carefully with their educational value for young children in mind. Write simple explanations of each image and link them together to tell a single, easily understood story. If you can make good copies of the images, use them, along with your written explanations, to create a well-organized display.

Illustration 2



Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives



Hoover Institution Archives

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Shortly before Hitler and his Nazis came to power in Germany, another totalitarian nation had arisen in Europe. Like Nazi Germany, it would have a huge and destructive impact on the world. That nation's dictator is shown here in these two images. Can you name him and the nation he led?
2. In the 1930s, the Soviet Communist Party fostered a huge cult of personality around Stalin. What do you think this phrase, "cult of personality," means? The poster on the left is an example of propaganda meant to foster a cult of personality. How would you define the word "propaganda"? What view of Stalin does the poster appear to present?
3. The painting on the right portrays Stalin as a warm, understanding man of the people. Many writers and journalists in Western Europe and the United States in the 1930s also saw Stalin this way — even as he was personally ordering the execution of hundreds or thousands of innocent people each day. Why do you think he was able to fool so many people?

Follow-up Activity

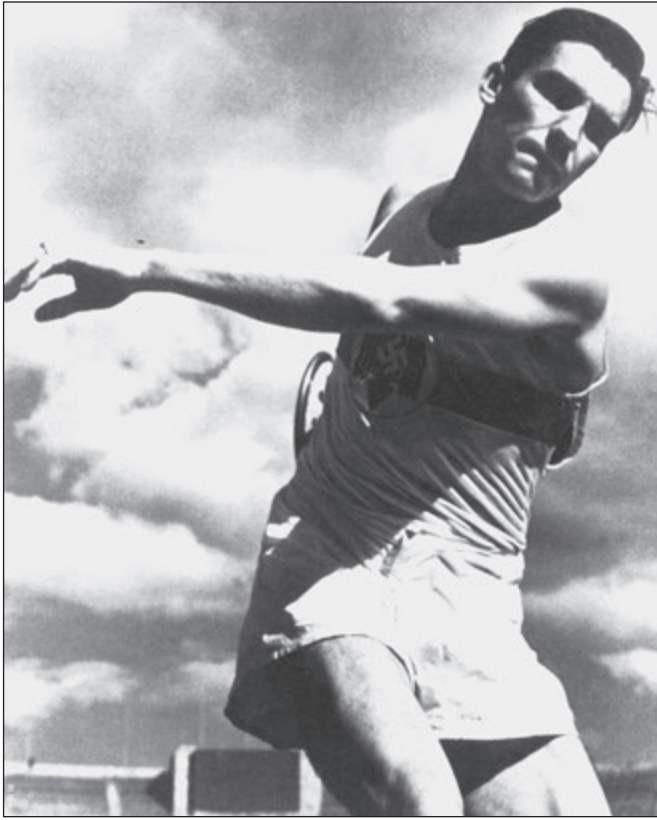
1. **Small-group activity:** H.G. Wells was one of several famous western writers and other intellectuals who praised Stalin. He wrote after interviewing him:

I have never met a man more candid, fair and honest, and to these qualities it is, and nothing occult and sinister, that he owes his tremendous undisputed ascendancy in Russia. I had thought before I saw him that he might be where he was because men were afraid of him, but I realize that he owes his position to the fact that no one is afraid of him and everybody trusts him."

Many in the West were taken in by Stalin in this way, but not everyone was. Have each group member learn more about the views of Stalin by one of the following: George Bernard Shaw, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Jay Lovestone, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill. How would each of these figures have responded to the quote from Wells and how did his or her views of Stalin change over time, if they did? Report your findings in a class discussion.

Lesson 1 — The Rise of the Dictators

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Propaganda played a key role in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. It often used wildly exaggerated and brutal imagery to convey a sense of the power of the state. The poster on the right is one example. Is this a poster for Hitler or Stalin? How can you tell?
2. Visual propaganda need not be obvious or brutal. The photo on the left, for example, is a powerful bit of Nazi propaganda. Without knowing more about the photo, do you think this is apparent in any way?
3. The photo is of a German athlete at the 1936 Olympic Games. In fact, Hitler hoped to use the entire 1936 Olympics as a propaganda tool. From what you know of the 1936 Olympics, can you explain how?
4. One writer says of this photo, "...the camera angle, the dramatic shading, the Classical composition, even the narrow cropping, all help make this a dramatic glorification of Hitler's new Germany." What do you think this writer means? Do you agree with his assessment of this photograph? Why or why not?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activities:** Hitler hoped the 1936 Olympics in Berlin would be a great propaganda triumph for him and his Nazi state. Photographer and filmmaker Leni Reifenstahl did her best to help him realize this desire. She took the above photo. Learn more about the 1936 Olympics and Leni Reifenstahl. Bring to class a wide variety of photos on the 1936 Olympics including, if possible, photos by Reifenstahl or stills from her film on the Olympics. Use these in a class presentation in which you describe what Hitler hoped to accomplish at these Olympic Games, how Reifenstahl tried to help him and why Hitler was not entirely successful.
2. The poster shown here was one of many produced during Stalin's drive to industrialize the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Read more about Stalin's rule in the 1930s. Then find other examples of Soviet poster art from the 1930s on Stalin and his famed "five-year plans." Make photocopies of five to 10 posters. Use them in a presentation to the class entitled "Stalin's 1930s: Propaganda and Reality."

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will better understand the all-encompassing power of the totalitarian state as it was developed by Hitler and Stalin.
2. Students will understand how the drive for total power was aided by depicting whole groups as all-powerful enemies.

The Total State

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

To justify the total control Hitler and Stalin had over their nations, the public had to be kept in a high state of fear and in need of an all-powerful leader to guide them. Hitler, more than Stalin, relied on huge public spectacles, torchlight parades and giant rallies to do this. Here he addresses a 1939 rally, while thousands of teenage girls in the Bund Deutscher Mädel, or League of German Girls, spell out the words, “Wir gehoeren dir!” — “We belong to you!” In addition to Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls, the schools, universities, military, media, and even the churches fell under Nazi control. It became impossible for individuals to escape the presence of the all-powerful state, even inside their own families and homes.

Illustration 2

Stalin sought to industrialize the Soviet Union rapidly. But his harsh “five-year plans” served political and propaganda needs almost as much as real economic ones. They created a mood of constant crisis in which all of Stalin’s rivals could be depicted as “capitalist enemies” of the socialist dream and destroyed. Stress was put on huge projects, such as dams, canals, or power plants. These often made little sense as part of any overall plan. Some projects, such as Moscow’s beautiful subway system, were impressive. Others were gigantic and useless. The model on the right could have been the tallest building in the world. Its statue of Lenin alone was to be 300 feet high. But it was never finished because the ground near the Kremlin could not support it.

Illustration 3

To justify an all-powerful state, Hitler and Stalin pictured their nations as threatened by all-powerful enemies. On the left is the cover of a Nazi book titled *The Poisonous Mushroom*. The mushroom is the Jew, shown here as a fungus living parasitically off of other living things. In the Soviet poster on the right, the spider is a “kulak” — Stalin’s label for peasants opposed to joining state-run “collective” farms. The spider is preying on collective farmers in all sorts of ways. Both the Nazis and the Soviets pictured entire classes or races of people as inhuman or subhuman. Horrible images such as these helped accustom citizens to feel no pity when called upon to destroy such human “monsters” by the thousands, or millions.

Lesson 2 — The Total State

Illustration 1



Debra Gierach, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives

Discussing the Illustration

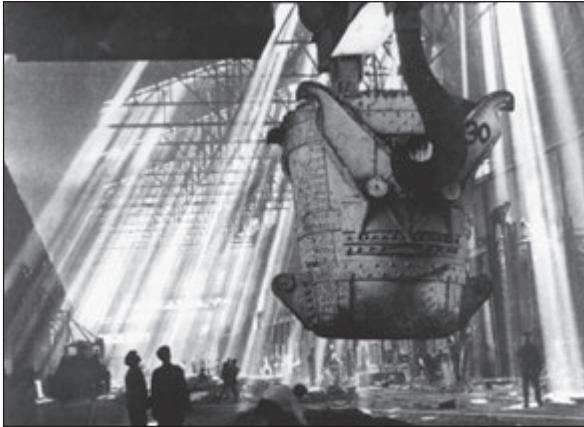
1. This photo shows Hitler addressing a rally in 1939. What similarities do you notice between this rally and those shown in the first illustration in this booklet?
2. Hitler and Stalin alike often used huge rallies of this sort as propaganda devices. What do you suppose went on at such rallies? How might these rallies have had a propaganda effect on the participants? In what ways could there have been a propaganda effect even for those not at the rallies?
3. In the bleachers across from Hitler, thousands of teenage girls in the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) have spelled out the words “Wir gehoeren dir!” — “We belong to you!” What does this suggest about the nature of the Nazi regime?
4. The League of German Girls was part of the “Hitler Youth” movement, which itself was a form of Nazi propaganda. What do you know about the Hitler Youth? In what sense could it be described as a form of propaganda?

Follow-up Activity

1. This activity will take some research work and a great deal of imagination. First read more about Hitler’s organizations for young people in the 1930s—*Hitler Jugend* (Hitler Youth) for boys 14 to 18 and the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls) for girls aged 14 to 18. Now pretend you were actually in one of these organizations and were at the rally shown above on May 1, 1939. You were fifteen years old at the time. Now it is fifty years later, or 1989. In your attic one day you discover a long diary entry you wrote for May 2, 1939, in which you recorded your thoughts about Hitler, the rally and the Nazi youth organization you were in. Your assignment is to write that diary entry for 1939—and another long diary entry written for that day in 1989, as you reflect on what you wrote fifty years earlier. (Extra credit if, in your second diary entry, you also relate your thoughts to the dramatic events unfolding in Europe in 1989). Share these entries in a discussion with the rest of the class.

Lesson 2 — The Total State

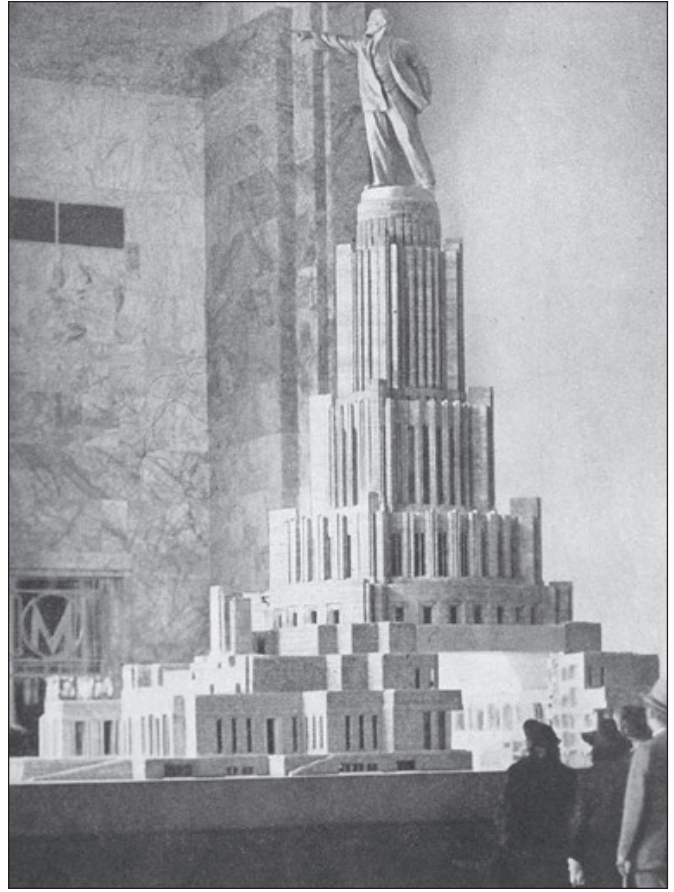
Illustration 2



Hoover Institution Archives



Hoover Institution Archives



Hoover Institution Archives

Discussing the Illustrations

1. In the 1930s, Stalin took steps to turn the Soviet Union into a powerful industrial nation in a very short time. He did this through his “five-year plans.” What were Stalin’s five-year plans? What advantages and disadvantages might such plans have had?
2. Stalin’s five-year plans stressed rapid development of industries central to the entire economy. In the 1930s, what would such industries have been?
3. As these photos suggest, Stalin favored huge, almost gigantic projects, such as enormous steel mills, dams and canals. On the right is a model of what would have been the tallest building in the world at the time. The statue on top alone would have been nearly 300 feet high! Who is the statue of?
4. Like several other huge projects, this one was never finished. The ground near the Kremlin on which it was to be built could not support it. Why do you think Stalin backed such enormous projects, even when they were not all that efficient or productive?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** How does your textbook explain Stalin’s industrialization drive and his five-year plans? What statistics does it use, if any, to measure the results of the plans? Does it deal with the problem of how reliable those statistics are? What questions of yours about this topic does the textbook answer well? What questions, if any, does it not seem to answer? Report your conclusions to the class.
2. In a fable about farm animals, George Orwell’s book *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (Mass Market Paperback, 1996) describes the way a revolution for total equality turns into a totalitarian dictatorship. Read *Animal Farm*. Write a brief review of the book in which you answer these questions: “Does *Animal Farm* help in any way help to explain how the Russian Revolution could have led to the dictatorship of Joseph Stalin?” “In general, can an imaginary fable like *Animal Farm* aid our understanding of real historical events?”

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will better understand how totalitarian states have led to some of the worst cases of genocide in human history.
2. Students will debate the question of how responsible ordinary citizens were for these acts of genocide.

Genocide and Totalitarianism

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

Both Hitler and Stalin justified the total state as necessary to creating a new social order. And that pure social order would be made up of a new type of citizen, perfect in every way. But first, all impure or imperfect human beings had to be eliminated. For Stalin, that included any peasant who resisted agricultural collectivization. To terrorize such peasants, Stalin cut off food distribution to the Ukraine and elsewhere in 1932, causing the death by starvation of at least five million peasants. The orphans staring blankly at the camera here were among the few survivors. This planned terror-famine was one of the greatest crimes of human history. But it was only one of several episodes of mass murder during Stalin's rule.

Illustration 2

With World War II, Hitler and his Nazis got their chance to carry out the goal of exterminating the Jewish people. In lands conquered by the Nazis, Jews were first rounded up and forced into tiny ghettos, such as the one Lodz, Poland, shown above. Eventually, most Jews were herded like cattle into cramped boxcars and sent to "death camps" such as Auschwitz, Sobibor or Treblinka. Some died in the boxcars on the way. At the camps, most were immediately stripped naked — men, women and children. They were lined up and sent to showers that were actually gas chambers. Afterwards, with cold efficiency, everything left was saved and stored: shoes, clothing, teeth filings, and the gold rings shown here. Six million Jews and millions of others died to fulfill the Nazis' insane dream of a state that was Judenrein — "free of Jews."

Illustration 3

At the end of World War II, hardened GIs who had fought their way across Europe broke down and cried at the sight of the Nazi death camps. Many German citizens, such as the woman in this photo, were paraded through the camps to see the results of Nazi tyranny. For years, the wartime Allies (along with many Germans) worked to bring Germany to face its Nazi past and rid itself of the hatreds that brought the Nazis to power. And over time, the entire world has also been made to witness the full horror of the Holocaust. The same is not quite as true regarding the equally massive and monstrous horrors of Stalin's Soviet Union.

Lesson 3 — Genocide and Totalitarianism

Illustration 1



Hoover Institution Archives



Hoover Institution Archives

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Millions of peasants refused to join Stalin's collective farms. Stalin labeled them "kulaks," or rich peasants. But by the late 1920s, few wealthy peasants were left in the Soviet Union. A farmer with a horse might be labeled a kulak, as would anyone who was critical of the collective farms. Why do you think Stalin blamed kulaks for the troubles of the collective farms?
2. In 1932, Stalin demanded so much grain for the state that the peasants had little left for themselves. Stalin didn't care. He sent thousands of communist party members to the countryside to seize the crops. He refused to let anyone leave certain areas, and he stopped all food shipments to them. From these facts and the photos, can you guess what happened to the people in these regions?
3. More than five million starved to death in this man-made famine. Millions of others died later in labor camps. The three orphans shown here were among the survivors. Historians call this event the "terror-famine." Why do you think they give it this name?

Follow-up Activities

1. Why was so little known about the horrors of the Soviet terror-famine of 1932–33? Several well-known journalists and writers who admired Stalin may be partly to blame. Often mentioned is New York Times reporter Walter Duranty. Learn more about Duranty. One book on him is Sally J. Taylor's *Stalin's Apologist: Walter Duranty: The New York Times Man in Moscow*, (Oxford University Press, 1990). Based on this book or other sources on Duranty, write an essay that answers this question: "Should Walter Duranty's 1933 Pulitzer Prize be taken back?"
2. In Ukraine alone, five million or more starved to death. Thousands of orphans wandered village streets. The three shown here were put in a home run by the secret police. The photo's Soviet caption says, "Surrounded by tenderness and care, their eyes, therefore, look so joyfully and so confidently into the face of life." Write an essay about this photo and your reaction to this caption.

Lesson 3 — Genocide and Totalitarianism

Illustration 2



Zydowski Instytut Historyczny
Naukowo-Badawczy,
courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives



The National Archives



The National Archives

Discussing the Illustrations

1. Germany began World War II by attacking Poland in September of 1939. Millions died in the fighting in that war. But the war gave Hitler a chance to do something even worse. It gave him the chance to begin his so-called “Final Solution” to the Jewish problem. Frightening photos like these help to show, in part, what the Final Solution was. From the photos and your knowledge of history, can you explain?
2. Wherever the Nazis conquered, they established ghettos for the Jews. From the photo on top, can you explain what these ghettos were? What do you know about life in these Jewish ghettos?
3. The Nazis killed more than six million Jews and millions of other innocent people in their so-called “death camps.” What do you know about these death camps? Afterwards, the Nazis recorded and carefully stored their victims’ clothes, shoes, jewelry, dental fillings and, as the bottom photo shows, gold rings. How do photos like the one on the bottom add to your understanding of the Holocaust?

Follow-up Activity

1. History is full of horrible acts of slaughter. But some say the Holocaust is unique. Michael Berenbaum* lists four principles he thinks define this uniqueness. He says the Holocaust...

- *was intentional and premeditated.*
- *was total and all-encompassing.*
- *served no political or territorial purpose.*
- *was sanctioned by law and official decrees.*

Read Berenbaum’s complete description of these four principles. Then learn more about one of the following tragic historical episodes:

1. Turkey’s massacre of Armenians in 1915
2. Stalin’s effort to eliminate the Kulaks in the 1930s
3. Spain’s conquest of Mexico in the 1500s.
4. King Philip’s War in New England, 1677–1678

Write a brief essay on the episode you chose. Apply Berenbaum’s four principles to it and comment on his view of the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

* *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Museum*, Michael Berenbaum (Little Brown and Company, 1993), pages 105-107.

Illustration 3



The National Archives

Discussing the Illustration

1. This photo was taken in 1945, just after the U.S. had taken control of a part of Germany. The photo shows a German girl who is upset as she looks at the bodies of 800 slave laborers killed at one point by SS guards in Namering, Germany. What was the SS, and what role did it play in the Holocaust?
2. The U.S. soldiers shown here forced this girl, along with other townspeople in Namering, to view these bodies. Why do you think they did this? Do you agree that it was right to force German citizens to see these bodies? Why or why not?
3. Many Germans claimed that they did not really know what was happening in the concentration camps. Do you think this was always true, sometimes true, or hardly ever true? Why?
4. Suppose a German citizen really did not know what was happening in the camps? Would that citizen then have had no responsibility for the Holocaust at all? Explain your answer.

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Was it right to blame the Holocaust on ordinary German citizens like the woman in the above photo? What did ordinary Germans know about it? How much guilt do they share for it? Daniel J. Goldhagen is one writer who says they were responsible. His book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, Knopf, 1996), has caused a good deal of controversy. This book is very long. But a brief essay on the book and the controversy over it does exist. It is "Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's 'Ordinary Germans': A Heretic and His Critics," by Robert E. Herzstein. The essay appears in *The Journal of the Historical Society*, Vol. II, Winter 2002, pp 89–122. As a group, read and discuss the essay. Read at least some of Goldhagen's book. Also look at some of the critics and supporters mentioned by Herzstein. Use passages from all these writers as part of a brief talk and debate on this issue before the entire class.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will consider the idea that totalitarian states have a built-in tendency to aggression and war.
2. Specifically, students will better appreciate the relationship between totalitarianism and World War II

Total War

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

Totalitarian states give their people no freedom at all. To justify such total control, they often create a mood of deep crisis and danger. For this reason, some historians say totalitarianism always leads to aggression and war. That certainly seems to have been true of World War II. The war began with Germany's attack on Poland on September 1, 1939. The massive Nazi swastika on the left gives a good sense of the relentless German military machine and the fanatical ideas that inspired it. As Hitler's troops marched into one West European nation after another, citizens such as the Czech women on the right looked on in helpless terror. In June 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union. Soon, the U.S. would join with Britain, the Soviets and others to fight back.

Illustration 2

While Germany was conquering Europe, Japan threatened all of Asia. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, brought the U.S. into World War II. But the Japanese were already battle-hardened by then, having been at war in Asia since 1931. Japan's military took control of the nation in the 1930s and destroyed its democratic system. It hoped to create a huge empire out of China, Southeast Asia and other regions. As the map shows, Japan had made great strides toward this goal by 1942. Like the Nazis, the Japanese invaders were brutal to the peoples whose lives they devastated. The photo here shows a terrified baby abandoned in the street during Japanese attacks on Shanghai in 1937.

Illustration 3

By August 1945, two dictatorships — Japan and Germany — had been defeated by the democratic nations, but only with the help of a third huge and powerful dictatorship, the Soviet Union. At Nuremberg, 22 Nazi leaders were put on trial. The cartoon on the left refers to these trials while also using the Nazi swastika to suggest that Nazism itself held the seeds of its own destruction. But peace did not bring peace of mind. A terrifying new problem loomed — nuclear war. And what made the possibility of such a war real were new tensions growing between the democratic West and its former totalitarian ally, the Soviet Union. World War II put an end to two of the worst totalitarian dictatorships. But it did not end the age of totalitarianism.

Illustration 1



Fitzpatrick in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The machine rolling through Poland in the cartoon on the left is actually a well-known symbol called a “swastika.” What does it represent?
2. This menacing swastika seems almost about to devour Poland. What about the events of September 1939 made it reasonable to draw the swastika this way? What does the one-word caption “Next” refer to?
3. Hitler came to power promising to make Germany great again. He played on Germans’ anger over the way recent events had limited Germany’s strength and pride. Can you explain what these events were?
4. Some historians say totalitarian states such as Hitler’s have a need to create enemies and start wars. Why do you think they say this? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
5. Before Poland, an earlier Nazi conquest was Czechoslovakia, where the woman on the right watched the Nazi takeover in horror. How does this photo add to your understanding of totalitarianism?

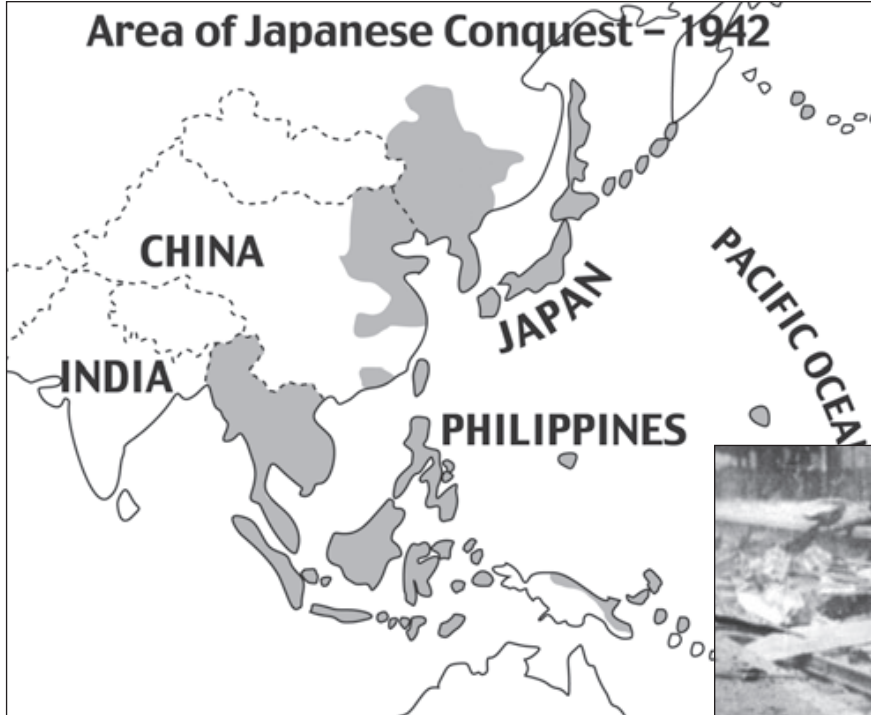


The National Archives

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** It is 1938 and you are the editors of a major American newspaper. The photo above of the woman in Czechoslovakia has just come across the “news wire.” Design an entire front page of your paper for this day, using this photo as the focus of the page. Write news stories to go with the photo. Make your newspaper as realistic-looking as possible. Be sure your stories are as accurate as possible. To give you an idea of what newspapers in the 1930s looked like, ask your school or public librarian for help or look through the library or local bookstores for books that feature famous newspaper front pages from history.
2. **Small-group activity:** A great deal happened very quickly from September 1939 through 1941 as the nations of Europe fell like dominoes before the Nazi onslaught. Create a World War II timeline for the months from August 1939 to June of 1941. Use your timeline as part of a bulletin board display. Include written explanations of key events, photos and any illustrations you find while doing your research.

Illustration 2



The National Archives

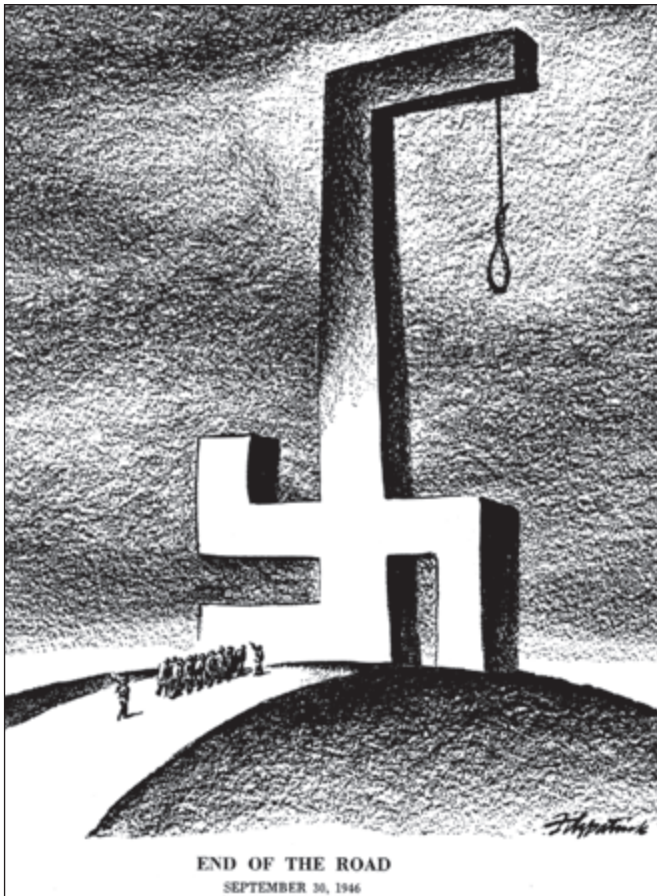
Discussing the Illustrations

1. World War II in Europe began in 1939. But the United States did not enter the war until late in 1941. When it did, it was not due to the fighting in Europe. Can you explain what brought the U.S. into World War II?
2. In the 1930s, military rule had turned Japan into a dictatorship. What do you know about military rule in Japan in the 1930s? Do you think it could be called totalitarian? Why or why not?
3. For 10 years before Pearl Harbor, Japan was at war in Asia. From the map and your knowledge of this era, can you explain what Japan's leaders hoped to accomplish in their Asian wars, and why?
4. The photo here shows a small child left alone during a Japanese attack on the Chinese city of Shanghai in 1937. The photo is meant to illustrate the brutal form of warfare the Japanese carried out in Asia. Based on what you know, do you think this photo is typical? Or does it exaggerates the brutality of Japan's wars of conquest? Explain your answer.

Follow-up Activities

1. In 1937, a full-scale war broke out between Japan and China. The above photograph is of a scene in the city of Shanghai in China. Suffering in the Chinese city of Nanking was just as horrendous. Learn more about what happened in Nanking during the war. A book you may want to consult is *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, by Iris Chang (Penguin USA, 1998). Prepare a brief report to the class on this book or on any other source on this topic you are able to find.
2. Suppose the U.S. had done nothing to upset Japan in 1941 and instead accepted its conquest of Asia. What would history have been like? Read more about the Japanese "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," the name for Japan's planned empire in Asia. Pretend the U.S. never took any action against it. Now write an imaginative alternative history of U.S.-Japanese relations, 1941–1951, as if the U.S. had accepted the Japanese empire as illustrated on the above map.

Illustration 3



Fitzpatrick in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The editorial cartoon on the left is about the Nuremberg Trials held just after World War II. What took place at those trials? What elements in the cartoon show that it is about those trials?
2. Some people say this cartoon's main point is that Nazism contained the seeds of its own destruction. Why do you think they say this? Is this the cartoon's point? If so, do you agree with it? Why or why not?
3. World War II ended in August 1945. The world was again at peace. Yet the cartoon on the right conveys a sense of awe and fear. Explain why the end of the war left the world with this uneasy feeling.
4. The war had destroyed two horrible dictatorships. Yet one powerful totalitarian regime remained, the Soviet Union. How might this fact have added to the fears expressed in this cartoon? Even today, with the Soviet Union gone, many say the age of totalitarianism is still not yet over. Why do you suppose they say this? Do you agree or disagree with them? Why?

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Soviet writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn called the vast Soviet system of labor prisons the "Gulag Archipelago." ("Gulag" is an acronym for the agency that ran the camps.) After World War II, the Nazi death camps were closed down. But the Gulag continued to house millions for decades longer. Create a map of the Soviet "Gulag." You can find helpful maps in *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Stéphane Courtois, et. al. (Harvard University Press, 1999). See especially pages 35–38. Use your map as the key element in a bulletin board display called "The Gulag Archipelago." Include a paragraph next to your map explaining Solzhenitsyn's term and how the map illustrates its meaning. Also in your display, include photocopies of any of any photos or other illustrations of the Gulag you are able to find, along with brief written passages by survivors. A good place to contact for such material is the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305.

Image Close-ups

The Rise of the Dictators

Illustration 1



The National Archives



The National Archives

The Rise of the Dictators

Illustration 2



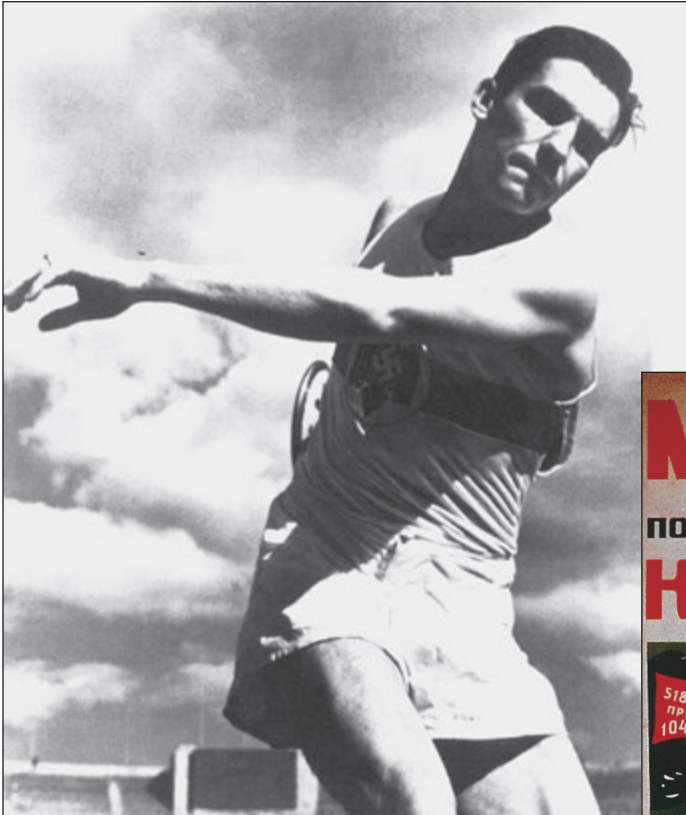
Poster Collection,
Hoover Institution Archives



Hoover Institution Archives

The Rise of the Dictators

Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives

The Total State

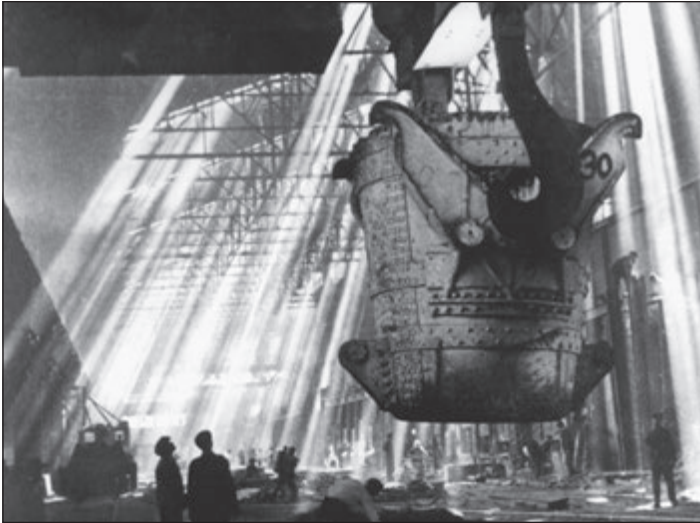
Illustration 1



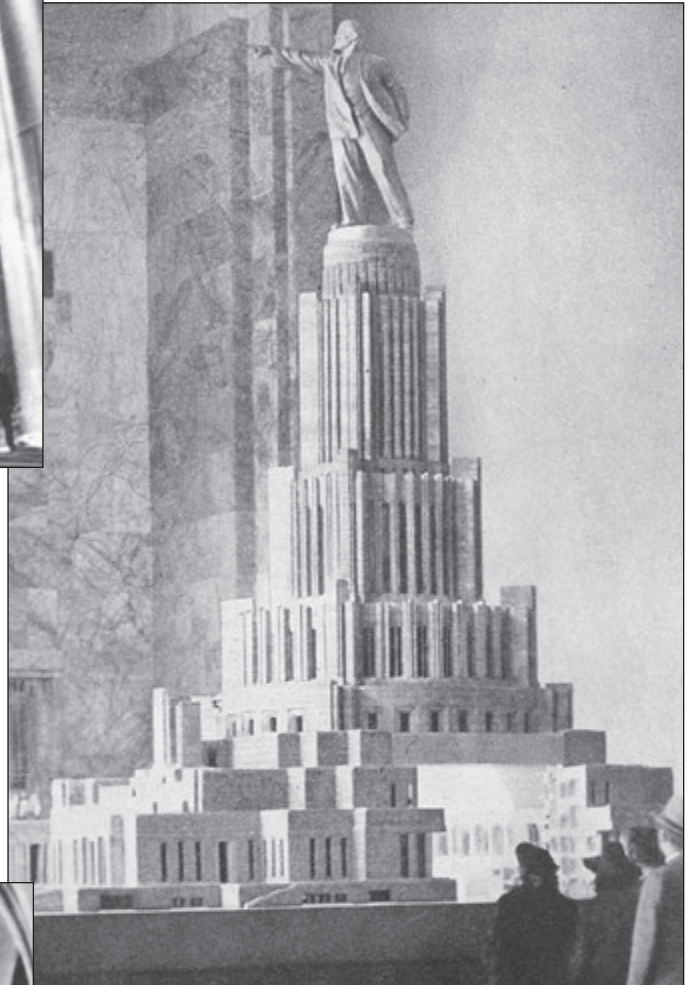
Debra Gierach, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives

The Total State

Illustration 2



Hoover Institution Archives



Hoover Institution Archives



Hoover Institution Archives

The Total State

Illustration 3



Gichner, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives



Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives

Genocide and Totalitarianism

Illustration 1



Hoover Institution Archives



Hoover Institution Archives

Genocide and Totalitarianism

Illustration 2



Zydowski Instytut Historyczny Naukowo-Badawczy,
courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives



The National Archives



The National Archives

Genocide and Totalitarianism

Illustration 3



The National Archives

Total War Illustration 1

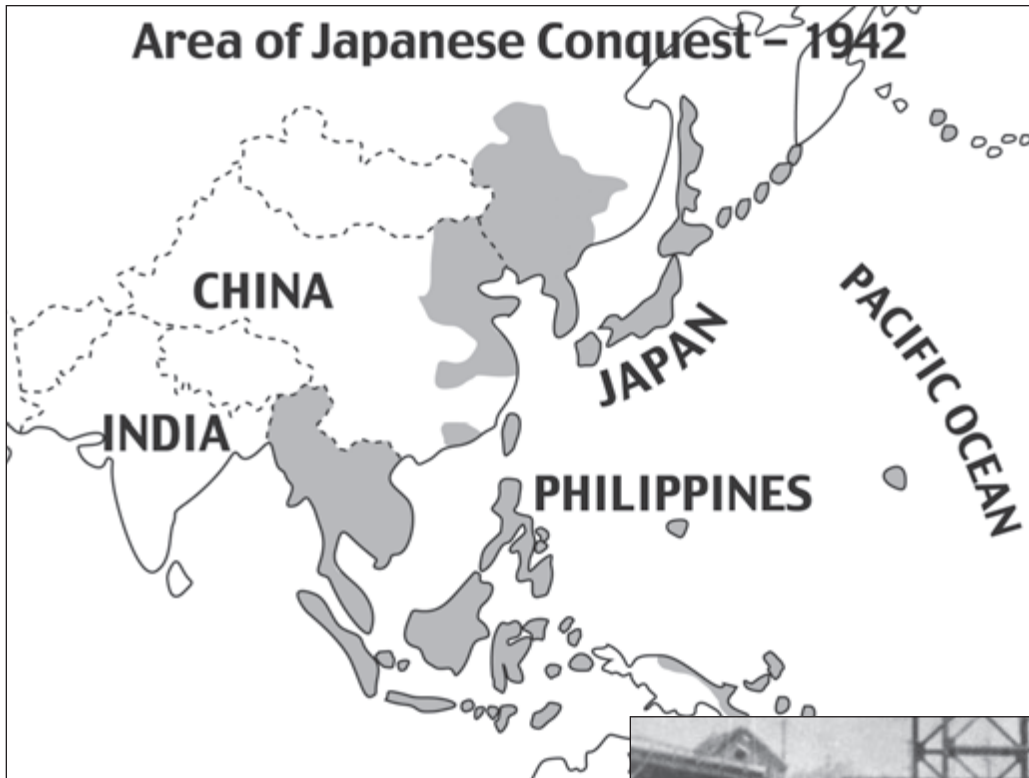


Fitzpatrick in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*



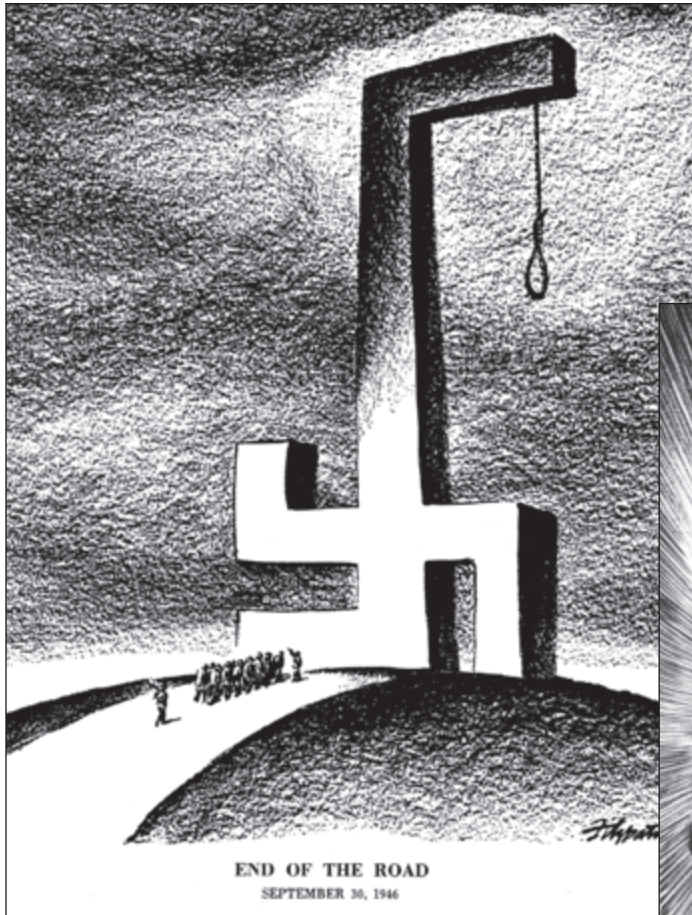
The National Archives

Total War Illustration 2



The National Archives

Total War Illustration 3



Fitzpatrick in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

