

Historical Exploration 1939-1945

Date:	Tuesday, 4 th February 2020
Activity:	Creating the timeline for the historical events during 1939-1945 with focus on Greece.
Time:	90 min.

Complete the tasks below (put a mark when completed).

Don't hesitate to ask the teacher if there is something you are not sure of.

PREFACE	
<p>Historical facts of the period 1939-1945 are divided in 4 areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) National Socialism and World War II: How it all came about? b) World War II: What happened where and when? c) World War II and Greece: How Greek involvement came about? d) National Socialist Occupation of Greece: What it meant. 	
TASK	DONE?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay in 4 assigned teams of 6-7 students. • Each team gets one area of interest • Study the facts and discuss them within the group • Write keywords/key phrases on moderation or post-it cards. • Create the timeline with your cards by retelling the events. • Discussion. 	

DIVERSITY DESTROYED I

NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND WORLD WAR II (1939 – 1945): HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT

Trying to understand *how* National Socialism and the rise of Hitler came about is difficult because of the many different causes involved. But even uncovering these causes ultimately doesn't give a satisfying answer to the question *why* Hitler could manipulate the whole German population, using them as instruments for his atrocities, and mislead almost all other European governments.

Some roots of the rise of National Socialism lie in the consequences of **World War I (1914-1918)**: (1) As all Europe lay severely demolished and demoured millions of victims, the *Versailles Treaty* of **1919** blamed Germany with all responsibility and put enormous loads of reparation payments on it. (2) At the end of the war **in 1918**, there had been a severe political crisis in Germany and a revolution which led to the abdication of the Emperor, the abolishment of the monarchy and installation of a democracy, the *Weimar Republic*. (3) Economic crises, mass unemployment, fear of a spread of communism, the people's uneasiness about the new democratic form of government, and a multitude of political parties left most Germans disoriented and socially as well as politically disappointed and unsatisfied, wishing for a new strong leader.

Differing from the other European fascism (Spain, Italy), the rise of national socialism in Germany is closely connected with these special socio-political tensions, showing in a refusal of parliamentary democracy and in favouring radical, anti-democratic movements.

When in **autumn 1923** hyper-inflation made money almost worthless and radical right-wing organisations became ever more attractive, Hitler, the leader of the small NSDAP in Munich, Bavaria, saw his time come. On **November 8, 1923**, he gathered the men of the

Sturmabteilung ("storm department") and armed Bavarians for a march on Berlin to fight what he called the "Jewish-Marxist breed" and to seize power. As this coup attempt was not at all organised the aggressors were arrested and the NSDAP was banned in all Germany. In **February 1924** Hitler was sentenced to 5 years of prison, but due to "good conduct" was released after 9 months. In prison Hitler had written "Mein Kampf", a book in which he put down his goals of extinguishing all Jewish people, fighting communism and installing dictatorship over Europe.

When in **February 1925** the NSDAP was restored, Hitler reinforced his leadership claim as the only "Führer" to put into effect the National Socialist ideas. As the rigid organisation of the party, its antidemocratic ideas and the so-called "Führer principle" seemed attractive to many people, the party won supporters in all Germany, though still remaining without much influence.

By 1924 however, the Weimar Republic seemed to have established and to do well, international relations improved and economy and society experienced good times (the so-called *Golden 20s*) until **1929** when the great stock exchange crash (*Black Tuesday*) in the US caused a worldwide economic depression. Germany again faced mass unemployment, and a series of political crises radicalised many people which meant an enormous gain of influence and power for National Socialism. In **July 1930**, the parliament was dissolved and the new elections on **September 14, 1930**, made the NSDAP the second strongest party in parliament.

While the crisis continued without the new government – of which the NSDAP was part – being able to cope with ever new negative developments,

Hitler constantly stabilised his power, successfully strengthened his organisation and managed to ever more infiltrate ordinary people's minds with his radical anti-democratic, racist ideas.

On January 1933, trying to install a working parliament, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler as Chancellor, hoping that the conservative forces in parliament would and could control Hitler and keep him within the limits of democratic politics. But Hitler wouldn't have himself controlled and instead set out to radically destroy democracy and establish dictatorship almost immediately after the day he called "seizure of power" (*Machtergreifung*).

Due to shortcomings in the constitution of the *Weimar Republic* the chancellor was given extensive powers which Hitler misused to establish his dictatorship: During the **year of 1933** the oppositional parties were prohibited, communists, social democrats and members of the trade unions persecuted and imprisoned. And Hitler right away began putting into practice his inhumane racist ideas: Jews, Sinti and Roma along with all other people that did not fit with his notion of the "Arian race" were persecuted, imprisoned and sentenced to forced labour.

By the **end of 1933**, all parties, except for the NSDAP, were prohibited, Hitler held all power, and – relying on the brutality his helpers in the National Socialist organisations – went on to consolidate his dictatorship as *Führer*. His aims of making Germany great, rich and influential again and of establishing National Socialist rule over all Europe were consequently put into action both within Germany

and internationally, largely without other European statesmen opposing.

Breaking with the Versailles Treaty, Hitler introduced compulsory military service **in 1935**, shortly after the province of French controlled Saarland was "reintegrated" into Germany. In **March 1936** the demilitarised zone of the Rhineland, also under French control, was conquered. Relations with the other two fascist dictators grew stronger, and **in 1936** Hitler Germany side by side with Italian forces under Mussolini supported Dictator Franco in the Spanish civil war.

In autumn 1937, Austria where large parts of the population favoured National Socialism became part of the German Reich, and in **1938** Czechoslovakia was annexed in two steps, so that Hitler's "Reich" reached almost the size Germany had had before WW I.

All this happened while the Nazis continued and enforced their atrocities of persecuting, imprisoning and deporting Jews whom Hitler blamed for all economic and political problems, and took all necessary measures for a war on the Soviet Union in order to gain living space in the east and subdue all the people that Nazis called "subhuman". Before Hitler could attack Russia, however, he had to focus on Poland and therefore, concealing his plans, he and Stalin, the Russian dictator, agreed on a treaty (the so-called "Hitler-Stalin Treaty") of mutual non-aggression in case of attacks by France or Britain and included a secret passage that divided Poland between Germany and Russia. It was this secret passage that Hitler had needed to start the war when on **September 1, 1939** German troops occupied the western parts of Poland.

(Doris Lax)

DIVERSITY DESTROYED II

WORLD WAR II (1939 – 1945): WHAT HAPPENED WHERE AND WHEN

The **six years of the Second World War** – which only later was to become a world war – started with the vicious attack of the German *Wehrmacht* (army) on Poland on **September 1, 1939**, under the false pretence of Polish aggression against Germany.

On **September 27, 1939**, Poland surrendered, while the Soviet army (in accordance with the *German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact*) had attacked eastern Poland beginning with September 17. It took only 5 weeks to subdue western Poland under the Nazi regime. Even though Great Britain and France, as partners of Poland (followed by Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa – all [former] British colonies), had declared war on Germany already on September 3, 1939, both countries remained in the defensive, trying to secure their own borders.

Without declaring war, Hitler's army then conquered the neutral countries of Denmark and Norway (only a few days before the British had wanted to land in Norway) in a *Blitzkrieg* in **April 1940** in order to gain a good position for war against Britain and to easily get a hold of the Swedish ore (necessary for steel production).

Without waiting for the fights in the north, Hitler gave order to attack the western countries on **May 10, 1940**. In another *Blitzkrieg* the Nazis overran Luxemburg, occupied Belgium and the Netherlands, and then entered France which was not prepared for attacks from its northern borders. Pushing both the French and the British army (stationed in France to assist France) back to Calais (from where more than 300.000 soldiers were rescued by the British), the Nazis conquered two thirds of France within a few weeks. The French government surrendered on **June 17, 1940**, leaving the northern and western parts of France under Nazi rulership, and being allowed to

govern the southern part itself with close German observation.

Warfare against Britain, starting in **August 1940**, however, was unsuccessful despite heavy air raid attacks on British ground and many British victims, also because the USA – not yet directly involved in the war – helped Britain in many respects.

In **September 1940**, the *Tripartite Pact* between Germany, Italy and Japan was signed to form the so called *Axis powers*. Italy's army, however, was weak, and Japan was too far away to become a close partner.

Despite the *Non-aggression Pact*, Hitler's main goal was the war against the Soviet Union, because he wanted to gain living space for so-called Arians, destroy Bolshevism and subdue the humans that he called *Untermenschen* ("subhuman beings"), and extinguish Jews. Stalin, on the other hand, wanted to gain new territory himself in Finland and Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania as well as Bulgaria. Talks between Russia and Germany for a "peaceful" solution were without success. As lot of these countries were afraid of Stalin and Bolshevism, Hitler first seemed to them the better solution.

Before Hitler could send his troops to Russia he had to assist his ally Italy: By the **end of 1940**, Mussolini's troops were under attack in northern Africa (by the British) and in Albania (which then belonged to Italy), after Greece had called Britain for help. Italy then attacked Yugoslavia and Greece, but suffered heavy losses so that Hitler, starting in **April 1941**, invaded the Balkans and Greece in order to secure the southern parts of Europe from a British invasion. Yugoslavia surrendered on April 17, Greece on **April 21, 1941**.

Then on **June 22, 1941**, 3 million German soldiers opened war against Russia, Hitler thinking that it would be another *Blitzkrieg*. During the first 6 months of the war, the Germans made big gains of territory, but as they were not prepared for the Russian winter, it was the weather that stopped them from taking Moscow. The Russian army could finally strike back and there were massive losses in the German army. But Hitler didn't want to back down and withdraw but propagated "total war".

When Japan, Germany's ally, attacked the US fleet in Pearl harbour on **December 7, 1941**, the USA finally entered the war and Hitler declared war on America on **December 11, 1941**.

In **summer 1942**, the Nazis won a few more battles, but in **winter 1942/43** the Russian army succeeded in surrounding the German troops near Stalingrad; 200.000 German soldiers died or were taken prisoners of war. From then on German troops lost almost everywhere.

In **early summer 1943** German and Italian troops had to surrender to the British in northern Africa, allowing British troops to land on Sicily and slowly push to the north to liberate Italy.

After **June 6, 1944** – so-called "D-Day" – when American troops supported by British and French soldiers and French partisans landed in northern France, the "Allies" (USA, Great Britain, France and Russia, having formed an "Anti-Hitler pact") ever more pushed back the Germans, liberating France.

By **August 1944** the Soviet troops had pushed the Germans back to the area from where they had started the war in 1941, and then moved forward into the German mainlands.

By the **end of 1944**, finally the German occupants were also driven out of mainland Greece, though Crete and some small parts of the country only were liberated in 1945.

In autumn and **winter 1944/45** allied troops pushed forward from all sides, defeating the German troops and liberating all European countries from the Nazi regime until in spring 1945, finally – after 12 years of Nazi terror – over all Europe, Germany itself was liberated. Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945; and the rest of the political leadership signed the papers of complete surrender in **May 1945**.

(Doris Lax)

DIVERSITY DESTROYED III

WORLD WAR II (1939 – 1945) AND GREECE: HOW GREEK INVOLVEMENT CAME ABOUT

As Hitler greatly loved and admired the arts of Greek Antiquity, he first considered the Greek people being of so-called “related blood” (that is as a sort of relatives to “Arians”) and did not want to involve Greece in his warfare of subduing the Slavic countries and peoples that he thought to be “subhuman beings” (*Untermenschen*). But his mind changed in 1940.

In the beginning, *Hitler had not wanted to involve the southern European countries* of Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece in a war because Russia had always been his main interest of warfare, and because Hitler needed the resources of the southern European countries.

When, in **June 1940**, Stalin (the Russian dictator) annexed parts of Romania, and when rest-Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria, more or less pushed by fears of being overrun by Bolshevik Russia, decided to join the “Axis Powers” (Germany, Italy, and Japan), the whole *situation changed dramatically* because of Italy.

Mussolini, the Italian dictator, himself had similar ideas as Hitler as to extend his power beyond Italy. Therefore Italian troops occupied Albania **in 1939** and, in August 1940, first wanted to start war on Yugoslavia, something which Hitler didn't want. Disregarding Hitler's wish to keep peace on the Balkans to avoid having a second front line in the south when starting war on Russia, Italy attacked Greece on **October 28, 1940**. As a reaction on this attack, British troops were stationed on the island of Crete. On **November 4, 1940**, Mussolini's troops were defeated by the Greek army, and had to withdraw to Albania.

While the Greek government, having had traditionally good political and economic relations with Germany, tried to avoid war, saying that the British troops would

not attack the Germans but only Italians, Britain wanted to reinforce their troops on the Aegean islands.

Shortly after Bulgaria had extended its territory and joined the “Tripartite Pact” on **March 1, 1941**, massive German troops were stationed in Bulgaria, to allow an easier warfare on Greece. The Yugoslavian government, whose position had been rather pro-Hitler but had not had a treaty with Nazi-Germany, officially joined the Tripartite Pact/Axis powers on **March 25, 1941**, disregarding internal fights for power in Yugoslavia.

On **April 6, 1941**, without having declared war large German troops attacked both Yugoslavia and Greece. Hungarian and Italian troops joined in shortly afterwards.

Yugoslavia as a whole was subdued and occupied by **April 17, 1941**, and the country was divided up between Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany, while in the end the Nazis kept the final say.

Other than the rather quick defeat of Yugoslavia, the Greek army, assisted by British troops, resisted longer. But in the end, because the Greek troops were not mobile enough, had nothing to resist the heavy bombardment by the invaders, and after a surprise attack from southern Yugoslavia, the city of Thessaloniki fell on **April 9, 1941**. 60.000 Greek soldiers had to surrender.

Moving very quickly southward, the German Wehrmacht and Italian troops occupied the rest of the Greek mainland and most of the islands until **April 30, 1941**. While most of the British soldiers that had assisted the Greek army saw a last minute evacuation to Crete and Egypt, 12.000 British and some 223.000

Greek soldiers were taken prisoners of war. But the Greek soldiers were set free again soon after.

In order to make sure that there would be no landing point left for the allied forces, mainly British troops, to attack Hitler's soldiers, the Nazi regime launched "Operation Mercury" on **May 20, 1941** to finally bring Crete under its control. Despite heavy German losses, the Nazis brought Crete under their control, and by **June 1, 1941**, the whole of Greece was occupied by Nazi Germany.

Due to this so-called "Balkans Expedition" Hitler had to postpone his war on the Soviet Union for several weeks which may have contributed to the fact that the hard Russian winter stopped the German troops from taking Moscow and advancing further into Russia – something that ultimately led to the change of war luck and helped the "Allies" (Russia, Great Britain, France, USA) to win territory and finally defeat Germany.

The consequences of the subdual of Yugoslavia and Greece were heavy and *long partisan fights* against the German aggressors, as well as the fact that the Nazis took advantage of their position and deported and killed almost 90% of the Greek Jews. Moreover, as Greek partisans did not give up fight, the German Wehrmacht recklessly killed thousands of Greek civilians in so-called "*measures of atonement*" („*Sühnemaßnahmen*“) – which were nothing but cruel murders of people who wanted nothing else but live their lives in liberty and freedom. Numbers of victims, civilians and partisans, are most likely to be close to 80.000, set aside the prisoners of war that were brought to Germany for *forced labour* („*Zwangsarbeit*“) and the more than 60.000 Jews deported to concentration camps and killed by the Nazis.

The occupation of Greece by the Germans ended in **1944**, when most of the German troops had to withdraw due to the advancement of the Allied troops, but Crete and some Aegean islands remained occupied until **May 1945**.

(Doris Lax)

DIVERSITY DESTROYED IV

NATIONAL SOCIALIST OCCUPATION OF GREECE (1941-1944): WHAT IT MEANT

Relations between Greece and Germany had been good in the 1920s as economic cooperation resulted in political approaches and helped both countries. While big German firms (Siemens, AEG etc.) founded Greek dependencies, Greece exported agricultural goods and ore (such as chromium) to Germany. Traditional German high esteem for Greek culture and the people was reflected in many Greek people studying at Germany universities. One of them was Ioannis Metaxas, Greek Prime Minister in the 1920s, who was not only German-friendly but also liked National Socialist ideas. Hitler, on the other hand, admired Greek Antique arts and for political and economic reasons had initially wanted to keep Greece untouched by the war, relying on their allegiance.

The change came with the first days of the war as Greece increasingly feared **Italian invasion** and therefore asked both Germany and Britain for protection. As Hitler was not willing to intervene with his Italian ally, Greek-German relations deteriorated, the more so as Hitler feared British presence in Greece that would hinder warfare on Russia. Then, when Italy finally tried to occupy Greece but was defeated, Hitler hardly had any other option than to intervene and try to settle affairs on the Balkans and in Greece.

After having **occupied the Greek mainland in May 1941** and invaded Crete in June 1941, Hitler finally focused on the war against the Soviet Union. As he did not want to leave strong troops in Greece and felt that he had successfully chased the British back to Egypt, control of occupied Greece was largely given to Italy and Bulgaria, while Hitler agreed to have a German-friendly, collaborating Greek government and left only 75.000 soldiers stationed in the

strategically important areas of northern Greece, around Athens and on Crete.

With **Italy's defeat and surrender in 1943**, however, almost all Greece came under full German control, which meant 275.000 German soldiers, supported by 55.000 Bulgarians.

Despite the **seemingly settled situation in 1941/42** and as their living conditions were miserable, the **Greek people's attitude** over against the Germans had dramatically changed for different reasons: (1) Partly due to the battles, the Greek economy had almost broken down, causing a high rate of **unemployment** along with hyper-inflation. (2) Regardless of this, Germany rigorously **exploited all Greek resources**, be it technological and agricultural products or fuels and ore. (3) Exploitation of Greek raw materials demanded many workers, so that the Germans urged the Greek to do **"forced labour"** (*Zwangsarbeit*) – meaning hard work for extremely little payment or only a little food (not enough to sustain living). As the war went on, many Greek people were voluntarily and involuntarily deported to the *Reich* (mainly Bavaria and Austria) to do forced labour there. (4) Greece was made to pay **"occupation money"** (*Besatzungsgeld*) to support troops in battle as well as the occupants. (5) From the very beginning, German soldiers recklessly **plundered the Greek population**, stealing and forcing everything from them that was of worth, be it silver and gold or food. (6) Thus left with almost nothing, the Greek population had to face the hard winter of 1941/42 in which more than 250.000 people died from **starvation and diseases**. The situation only changed slightly in spring and summer 1942 after Britain had loosened its sea blockade and then asked neutral

Sweden to coordinate food supply, mainly from Canada.

Yet, Greece remained under the threat of starvation as exploitation wouldn't stop, while naturally the Greek population – apart from a few still pro-National Socialist groups – had turned against the German violators, and partisan fighters organised attacks on the cruel occupants, Italians and Germans alike. The two most important **groups of resistance** were the EAM/ELAS and the EDES which occasionally cooperated, assisted by secretly operating British soldiers, but generally tended to fight each other, thus unwillingly or voluntarily helping the occupants.

As the occupation went on and German troops in Greece were more than tripled (in autumn 1943), each partisan action was answered with **increasing brutality**, not only against the partisan groups in the Greek mountains but also against the civilians: (1) By **intimidating** the population in the small villages, the Nazi soldiers tried to cut off supplies for the partisans in the mountains. (2) Following orders from Berlin, they took **civil hostages** who they shot in official places. (3) They conducted so-called **"atonement measures"** (*Sühnemaßnahmen*), unbelievably inhumane, utterly brutal actions, during which the men of the German *Wehrmacht*, as revenge for attacks by partisan groups, took away everything they could get hold of (animals, tools, clothes, furniture), burnt down whole villages, and killed the civilians.

Apart from these atrocities, the Nazis, in accordance with their efforts to extinguish the Jews, deported more than 60.000 Greek Jews to the concentration camps in Eastern Europe where most of them were murdered.

By the end of the occupation, the **Germans had destroyed hundreds of villages and small towns and killed some 30.000 people** conducting there well-planned and utmost inhumane atrocities, one of which took place in the town of **Kalavryta**, 24 surrounding villages and three cloisters.

After partisans had taken hostage 78 German soldiers in **October 1943** and negotiations for an exchange with imprisoned Greek partisans had been unsuccessful, the partisans shot the Germans (3 Germans escaped). On **December 5**, German troops surrounded the town of Kalavryta, searched the whole area for partisans, and as they couldn't find any suspects burnt a few houses, declaring their operation was finished and the population had nothing to fear. However, on **December 13, 1943**, following the order of General Karl von Le Suire, German soldiers again surrounded the town.

Women, children under 14, and elderly people were separated from the men. While the men were forced to gather on a little hill above the town, constantly threatened by armed soldiers, the women, children and old people – without knowing what happened to the men – were locked in the town school. All town houses, except for the school, were set on fire, and after the men had been urged to watch their houses burn down and the fire approaching the building in which their families were locked, the Germans shot all men. As the barbarian Germans left the town, the women, children and old managed a last minute escape from their trap, only to find their town in ashes, their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons killed and their own lives destroyed.

(Doris Lax)