1914–1945 | Global Conflict

WHP 1200 Unit 7 Frames | World History Project

In Unit 7, students look at World War I, World War II, and the twenty years of the Interwar period in between them as a single global conflict spanning from 1914-1945. Rising nationalist tensions, and a new system of internationalism, paved the way for new ideas about community. The First World War diminished global networks, and as those networks rebuilt, they also contributed to the spread of extreme nationalism. Meanwhile, global production and distribution were completely reshaped as the war effort consumed resources. How can we use these frames to understand this conflict and the horrors it brought with it?

0:13

Images of warfare.

The First World War was called the "war to end all wars." But the fact that we call it "The First" world war, should give you a hint that it did not end wars. In fact, just twenty years after the first, the Second World War engulfed the world. And both wars witnessed horrific atrocities that stain the pages of human history.

Timelines of World War I and II.

Now history books often divide these two wars and the twenty years of the interwar period in between into three distinct events. But in this course, we ask you to think about them together, as a single, thirty-year period of global conflict, from 1914 to 1945.

Communities, Production and Distribution, and Networks frames graphics.

And of course, with the three frames, we can better understand the connections that link this period of global conflict.

Communities frame graphic.

For example, we can begin to understand the causes of both wars through the Communities frame.

1:10

Political cartoon map of Europe.

As you learned in Units 4 and 6, nationalism emerged as a transformative force in the long nineteenth century. But while helping people to unite, nationalism also caused resentment between states–resentment that simmered under European politics.

Image and illustration of World War I.

In 1914, these nationalist tensions erupted into conflict. And, as a result of the war, several large empires crumbled, while new nations emerged.

Image of the League of Nations.

But as the victorious powers carved up the spoils of war, they also attempted to create a new system of internationalism. They wanted to create organizations like the League of Nations that would bind communities to each other in peaceful cooperation.

Images of world leaders.

However, nationalist rivalries did not disappear. In fact, in many places, nationalism intensified between rivals. Racism, ethnic chauvinism, fear, and bitterness turned people against the populations of rival states abroad and against minorities at home. And in the end, internationalism failed in the face of this extreme nationalism.

2:20

Images of leaders of Italy, Germany, and Japan.

So in the 1930s, ideologies like fascism and authoritarianism gained increasing power in many countries, including Italy, Germany, and Japan. New leaders rose to power, and they called for a nationalism that advocated militarism and territorial expansion and racist policies. These ideas about community laid the groundwork for the Second World War and the atrocities that followed, especially the Holocaust.

Networks frame graphic.

Now switching to the Switching to the networks frame can help us make sense of these atrocities as well as the failures of international politics that led to them.

Images of sunken and destroyed ships.

The devastation of the First World War diminished global networks. During the war, the exchange of ideas between opposing powers nearly came to a halt. People had less ability to travel, communications were censored, and distrust broke apart relationships across borders.

Image of colonial army.

The control of European empires over their distant colonies also diminished.

3:22

Images of diplomacy.

But at the end of the war networks and exchange grew again. Relationships, from the diplomatic to the personal, resumed quite quickly. And colonialism was rapidly reasserted.

Images of groups of scientists and diplomats.	Now many leaders hoped that networks of doctors, scientists, and diplomats could work together for the betterment of all and help prevent another war.
	But they learned, ironically, the ideas of extreme nationalism moved along the same kinds of networks as those of internationalism.
Production and Distribution frame graphic.	Can looking at production and distribution also help us to understand this period? Maybe.
Image of women working in a factory with text defining total war.	Many historians refer to the two world wars as "total" wars. The phrase "total" war indicates a war in which all of the society's political, social, and economic systems commit to warfare.
Images of destruction of cities.	The economic cost and devastation of two global total wars reshaped patterns of production and distribution everywhere.
Images of advertisement and armies.	I mean in both wars, nations raised armies in the millions, drawing from their colonies as well as their homeland.
4:26	And production of consumer goods slowed everywhere as the war effort consumed resources to the tools of war.
Image of bomb factory.	
Image of technologies of war.	This sort of large-scale industrialized warfare had never been seen before, and in fact it only intensified between the wars.
Images of Ally power leaders and technologies of war.	The threat of defeat by the Axis powers brought together leaders of the two great systems of production and distribution in the world. The Western, capitalist states and the communist Soviet Union created a political alliance and mobilized massive wartime production to win the war.
Images of a cemetery and devastation caused by war.	By 1945, this period of global conflict had killed tens of millions of soldiers and civilians and left economies everywhere in tatters. In its wake, the world was left with huge questions.
	Was it possible to have national communities without extremism?
	Could international networks be built to avoid a future war?
	And what kind of production and distribution system would allow the world to rebuild?
	Those were some of the issues facing governments and people everywhere at the end of the Second World War, in 1945.