



Frames in Unit 7

The 1920s and 1930s were periods of highs and lows. Two big ideas about communities—nationalism and internationalism—vied for influence. Networks of scientists, diplomats, and doctors sought solutions to the world's problems, but not always successfully. Meanwhile, global production and distribution faltered, creating enormous suffering. How can we use these frames to understand the origins of the conflict and the horrors it brought with it?



00:01

*Bob Bain, PhD, University
of Michigan
Photo of a makeshift-
hospital filled with patients*

As we have seen, the First World War shrank global networks and severed ties between states and among people, at least for a while. Then, a global influenza pandemic, one of the largest and deadliest disease events in human history, followed the four years of war, deprivation, and death. By 1919, shattered populations across the globe were reeling from war and disease. They desperately wanted to return to peace and a chance at prosperity.

00:40

*Picture of the League of
Nations, a meeting room
filled with attendees*

In many places, a new set of ideas emerged in the 1920s. People began to call for more international cooperation, internationalism. They wanted to create organizations, like the League of Nations, that would bind communities to each other in peaceful cooperation. The internationalists hoped for a return to an economy in which production and distribution could happen on a global scale. National economies would once again be linked to each other. They hoped networks of doctors, scientists, and diplomats around the world could work together for the betterment of all.

01:14

*Map shows the Union of
Soviet Socialist Republics
– formerly Russia*

However, this international dream didn't quite work out. For one thing, the global economy never fully recovered in the 1920s and the 1930s. Global production and distribution in this period were split in two. There was a capitalist economy that tied together most of the world.

01:55

*Image shows a mother
and two children dressed
in tattered and dirty
clothes; another photo
shows a family in a
makeshift shelter; a large
crowd of people stand
outside an unemployment
office*

But there was also a separate, socialist system in the vast and newly formed Soviet Union, which had once been Russia. The capitalist economy never really overcame the problem that the peace treaties created by punishing the defeated nations. For example, Germany was required to pay a vast fine that crippled its economy and stopped growth.

Partly as a result of this, the capitalist global economy sputtered to a halt in 1929, resulting in what we have come to know as the Great Depression. The crash began in the United States, but quickly spread everywhere. Workers were left unemployed, and in many places around the world, families were left starving and homeless. The socialist economy of the Soviet Union didn't fare any better. It was perhaps a bit more stable in this period, but failed to produce prosperity for workers.

02:27

*WWI propaganda poster
that states "Destroy this
mad brute!" encourages
US-army enlistment. An
ape wielding a sword
inscribed with "Kultur"
represents Germany.*

Partly because of the Great Depression, many people turned away from internationalism. They again sought the community of their nation. In the post-World War I era, this nationalism brought together some terrible trends. Racism, ethnic chauvinism, fear, and bitterness turned people against the populations of rival states. It also turned them against ethnic and religious minorities in their own countries.

02:55

*Photo of Hitler, a representative of extreme nationalism;
Photos of nationalist armies in Italy and Germany*

*An army tank and soldiers;
a photo of a nuclear explosion*

03:56

An image of a factory where military weapons are made

Ironically, these ideas of rigid, extreme nationalism moved along the same kinds of networks as the ideas of internationalism had in previous years. In the end, internationalism failed in the face of the economic deprivations and this extreme nationalism.

Now, extreme nationalism gained increasing power in many countries in the 1930s, such as Italy, Germany, and Japan. They began to take over neighbors whose land they desired or distant territories whom they wished to make into colonies. The other states—like Britain, France, and the United States—failed to stop them. The road to the Second World War had begun. It was only the threat of defeat by the Axis powers that brought together leaders of the two great systems of production and distribution. The Western capitalist states and the communist, socialist Soviet Union created a political alliance. They defeated first Germany and its European allies, and then Japan.

The Second World War saw an almost complete commitment of resources to develop and use new weapons and move vast armies. It resulted in the deaths of millions of soldiers and civilians. In its wake, the world was left with huge questions. Was it possible to have national communities without extremism? What should be done to help the refugees and survivors of war? What kind of production and distribution system would allow the world to rebuild? And could international networks be built to avoid a future war? Those were some of the questions facing governments and people everywhere at the end of the Second World War in 1945.