



# Winston Churchill

## Early Life

Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born on November 30, 1874, to a British father and an American mother. His father, Lord Randolph Churchill, was a British politician and aristocrat. His mother, Jennie Jerome, was the beautiful daughter of an American entrepreneur.

Young Winston was sometimes rebellious and often in trouble. He was not as bad a pupil as he subsequently claimed, but neither was he particularly distinguished academically. On leaving school at the age of eighteen, he joined the British cavalry. Lord Randolph died in 1895—before Winston had the opportunity to prove himself to his often critical father.

## Political Rise

In 1900 Churchill began a remarkable career in the same political world where his father, Randolph, had left a brilliant, if brief, impression.

Churchill's ascent to power became even more rapid after the Liberals won a decisive electoral victory in 1906. In swift succession, his party's leaders entrusted to him a series of important positions leading to a seat in the Cabinet. By 1911, at the age of thirty-six, he was serving as First Lord of the Admiralty—the civilian head of Britain's navy. On the eve of World War I the young politician had established himself as one of his nation's most influential public figures.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 offered Churchill his first opportunity to influence events on a global scale. Dismayed by the development of the bloody stalemate in Europe, Churchill promoted the development and use of such new weapons as airplanes and tanks. He also sent an expedition to attack Germany's ally, Turkey, through the Dardanelles Strait. This military effort failed, contributing to his fall from power. Widely blamed and thoroughly disheartened, Churchill volunteered for six months as an infantry officer on the western front and endured the hardships and dangers of trench warfare.

In peacetime Churchill assumed even more responsible positions. As his government's special emissary, he had mixed success in coping with war-related disruptions in such widely separated places as Russia, Ireland, Palestine, and Iraq. By 1924 Churchill, a Conservative once more, had become Chancellor of the Exchequer, a post once held by his father and considered to be second only to that of prime minister.

## World War II

Churchill's warnings about the danger of the new Nazi regime in Germany initially fell on deaf ears. In 1938 Britain and Germany almost went to war over Hitler's desire to annex part of Czechoslovakia. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain flew to Munich to secure a guarantee that there would be no further German aggression. Churchill was critical of the policy of appeasement and broadcast directly to the United States, appealing for greater American involvement in Europe. When Hitler occupied Prague and the Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, Churchill's predictions were seen to be coming true.

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In September 1939 Germany invaded Poland. Churchill became Prime Minister on May 10, 1940, the day Hitler launched his invasion of France, Belgium, and Holland. During the tense months that followed, Britain stood alone with her Empire and Commonwealth, surviving the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. Churchill's speeches and broadcasts carried a message of determination and defiance around the globe.

### An American Connection

The fall of France, in June 1940, left Britain in a desperate situation. Threatened with a Nazi invasion and with his country under savage attack, Churchill was determined to obtain assistance and eventually a declaration of war against Germany and its allies from the United States.

Churchill intensified his contacts with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had started corresponding with him even before Churchill became Prime Minister. Churchill also welcomed the American supplies, both military and civilian, that Roosevelt had provided through such measures as the Lend-Lease Act of March 1941.

In June 1941 the immediate pressure on the British eased somewhat after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. Two months later Churchill and Roosevelt met in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, to formulate a joint military strategy and a statement of war aims—the Atlantic Charter.

### America Enters the War

The Japanese surprise attack on the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, brought America into the war. Churchill was with the President's special envoy, Averell Harriman, and the U.S. Ambassador to Britain, John Gilbert Winant, when he received the news over the telephone from President Roosevelt.

Four days later, Germany declared war on the United States, making U.S. involvement in Europe inevitable. Churchill was eager to have the U.S. fight alongside the British forces in Europe and wasted no time. He undertook a dangerous transatlantic journey on the HMS Duke of York, arriving in America on December 22, in time to spend Christmas at the White House.

On December 26, Churchill made his first historic address to a joint session of Congress to win support for his concept of the war. In public, he seemed to epitomize the "bulldog" fighting spirit. In private, the strain was taking its toll, and that very evening Churchill suffered a mild heart attack.



## Joseph Stalin

When Joseph Stalin came to power in the mid-1920s, the Soviet Union was a vast but under-developed country, mostly agricultural with little industry. Russians had been through World War I, two revolutions in 1917, civil war and famine. These events had left their impact on the state of the economy.

In 1928, Stalin began a state-run program of rapid industrialization. Factories were built, transport networks developed and workers encouraged, even forced, to work harder. Stalin intended to turn the economy around and make the USSR competitive with capitalist countries. To bring about this huge change, he acted ruthlessly.

Whether as a result of his direct orders or as a result of his policies, it is possible that 20 million people died during Stalin's reign. He was hated and feared as a dictator. He was also

adored. During his lifetime he was glorified in newspapers and films, cities and streets were named after him, and statues of him were put up around the USSR. He was seen as the man who turned an undeveloped and divided nation into an industrial superpower.

### World War II

During World War II, Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin needed help from President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Despite Stalin's agreement with the German dictator Adolph Hitler, German forces were attacking the Soviet Union.

On August 13, 1942, Stalin wrote a memorandum to Roosevelt and Churchill opposing their decision not to invade Western Europe at that time. Stalin wanted the Americans and British to distract the Germans in Russia by fighting them on another front, Western Europe. Where were the Americans?

Just a few months after Stalin's letter, Great Britain and the United States (who were already fighting in the South Pacific) entered Africa to fight the Germans. But it was not until 1943 that the American and British forces would invade Italy. Then, on June 6, 1944, D-Day, the Americans and British invaded Western Europe on the beaches of Normandy, France, almost one year after the German army began its retreat from Russia.

The USSR became strong enough to help defeat Germany during World War II and after the war was one of the most powerful nations in the world. Stalin's policy of industrialization helped achieve this, but at the cost of many Russian lives.



# Franklin D. Roosevelt

## The Early Years

Franklin D. Roosevelt was born in Hyde Park, New York on January 30, 1882. His parents and private tutors provided him with almost all his formative education. He received a B.A. degree in history from Harvard in only three years (1900–03). Roosevelt next studied law at New York's Columbia University. He entered politics in 1910 and was elected to the New York State Senate as a Democrat from his traditionally Republican home district.

In the meantime, in 1905, he had married a distant cousin, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, who was the niece of President Theodore Roosevelt. The couple had six children, five of whom survived infancy: Anna (1906), James (1907), Elliott (1910), Franklin, Jr. (1914) and John (1916).

Roosevelt was reelected to the State Senate in 1912, and supported Woodrow Wilson's candidacy at the Democratic National Convention. As a reward for his support, Wilson appointed him Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1913, a position he held until 1920. He was an energetic and efficient administrator, specializing in the business side of naval administration. This experience prepared him for his future role as Commander-in-Chief during World War II.

While vacationing at Campobello Island, New Brunswick in the summer of 1921, Roosevelt contracted poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis). Despite courageous efforts to overcome his crippling illness, he never regained the use of his legs. In time, he established a foundation at Warm Springs, Georgia to help other polio victims, and inspired, as well as directed, the March of Dimes program that eventually funded an effective vaccine.

With the encouragement and help of his wife, Eleanor, and political confidant, Louis Howe, Roosevelt resumed his political career. In 1924 Roosevelt was elected governor of New York State.

Following his reelection as governor in 1930, Roosevelt began to campaign for the presidency. While the economic depression damaged Hoover and the Republicans, Roosevelt's bold efforts to combat it in New York enhanced his reputation. In Chicago in 1932, Roosevelt won the nomination as the Democratic Party candidate for president. He campaigned energetically calling for government intervention in the economy to provide relief, recovery, and reform. His activist approach and personal charm helped to defeat Hoover in November 1932 by seven million votes.

## The Great Depression

The Depression worsened in the months preceding Roosevelt's inauguration, March 4, 1933. Roosevelt faced the greatest crisis in American history since the Civil War. He undertook immediate actions to initiate his New Deal programs. The nation-at-large supported Roosevelt, and elected additional Democrats to state legislatures and governorships in the mid-term elections.

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## World War II

By 1939, with the outbreak of war in Europe, Roosevelt was concentrating increasingly on foreign affairs. New Deal reform legislation diminished, and the ills of the Depression would not fully abate until the nation mobilized for war.

When Hitler attacked Poland in September 1939, Roosevelt stated that, although the nation was neutral, he did not expect America to remain inactive in the face of Nazi aggression. Accordingly, he tried to make American aid available to Britain, France, and China and to obtain an amendment of the Neutrality Acts which rendered such assistance difficult. He also took measures to build up the armed forces in the face of isolationist opposition.

With the fall of France in 1940, the American mood and Roosevelt's policy changed dramatically. Congress enacted a draft for military service and Roosevelt signed a "lend-lease" bill in March 1941 to enable the nation to furnish aid to nations at war with Germany and Italy. America, though a neutral in the war and still at peace, was becoming the "arsenal of democracy," as its factories began producing as they had in the years before the Depression.

The Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, followed four days later by Germany's and Italy's declarations of war against the United States, brought the nation irrevocably into the war. Roosevelt exercised his powers as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, a role he actively carried out. He worked with and through his military advisers, overriding them when necessary, and took an active role in choosing the principal field commanders and in making decisions regarding wartime strategy.

He moved to create a "grand alliance" against the Axis powers through "The Declaration of the United Nations," January 1, 1942, in which all nations fighting the Axis agreed not to make a separate peace and pledged themselves to a peacekeeping organization (now the United Nations) upon victory.

He gave priority to the western European front and had General George Marshall, Chief of Staff, plan a holding operation in the Pacific and organize an expeditionary force for an invasion of Europe. The United States and its allies invaded North Africa in November 1942 and Sicily and Italy in 1943. The D-Day landings on the Normandy beaches in France, June 6, 1944, were followed by the allied invasion of Germany six months later. By April 1945 victory in Europe was certain.

The unending stress and strain of the war literally wore Roosevelt out. By early 1944 a full medical examination disclosed serious heart and circulatory problems; and although his physicians placed him on a strict regime of diet and medication, the pressures of war and domestic politics weighed heavily on him. During a vacation at Warm Springs, Georgia, on April 12, 1945, he suffered a massive stroke and died two and one-half hours later without regaining consciousness. He was 63 years old. His death came on the eve of complete military victory in Europe and within months of victory over Japan in the Pacific. President Roosevelt was buried in the Rose Garden of his estate at Hyde Park, New York.





# Adolf Hitler

## Early Life

Dictator Adolf Hitler was born in Braunau am Inn, Austria, on April 20, 1889, and was the fourth of six children born to Alois Hitler and Klara Polzl. When Hitler was three years old, the family moved from Austria to Germany. As a child, Hitler clashed frequently with his father. Following the death of his younger brother, Edmund, in 1900, he became detached and introverted. His father did not approve of his interest in fine art rather than business. In addition to art, Hitler showed an early interest in German nationalism, rejecting the authority of Austria-Hungary. This nationalism would become the motivating force of Hitler's life.

## Hitler During World War I

At the outbreak of World War I, Hitler applied to serve in the German army. He was accepted in August 1914, though he was still an Austrian citizen. Although he spent much of his time away from the front lines, Hitler was present at a number of significant battles and was wounded at the Somme. He was decorated for bravery, receiving the Iron Cross First Class and the Black Wound Badge.

Hitler became embittered over the collapse of the war effort. The experience reinforced his passionate German patriotism, and he was shocked by Germany's surrender in 1918. Like other German nationalists, he believed that the German army had been betrayed by civilian leaders and Marxists. He found the Treaty of Versailles degrading, particularly the demilitarization of the Rhineland and the stipulation that Germany accept responsibility for starting the war.

## Hitler Between the Wars

After World War I, Hitler returned to Munich and continued to work for the military as an intelligence officer. While monitoring the activities of the German Workers' Party (DAP), Hitler adopted many of the anti-Semitic, nationalist and anti-Marxist ideas of DAP founder Anton Drexler. Drexler invited Hitler to join the DAP, which he did in 1919.

The DAP changed its name to the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP). Hitler personally designed the party banner, featuring a swastika in a white circle on a red background. He used the Nazi Party as strong propaganda to enlist young Germans to support his causes and convinced Germany he knew what was best for it. Hitler soon gained notoriety for his vitriolic (hateful) speeches against the Treaty of Versailles, rival politicians, Marxists, and Jews. In 1921, Hitler replaced Drexler as NSDAP party chairman.

Hitler's vitriolic beer-hall speeches began attracting regular audiences. Early followers included army captain Ernst Rohm, the head of the Nazi paramilitary organization, the Sturmabteilung (SA), which protected meetings and frequently attacked political opponents.

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## Rise to Power

The Great Depression in Germany provided a political opportunity for Hitler. Germans were ambivalent to the parliamentary republic and increasingly open to extremist options. In 1932, Hitler ran against Paul von Hindenburg for the presidency. Hitler came in second in both rounds of the election, garnering more than 35 percent of the vote in the final election. The election established Hitler as a strong force in German politics. Hindenburg reluctantly agreed to appoint Hitler as chancellor in order to promote political balance.

Hitler used his position as chancellor to form a de facto legal dictatorship. The Reichstag Fire Decree, announced after a suspicious fire at the Reichstag, suspended basic rights and allowed detention without trial. Hitler also engineered the passage of the Enabling Act, which gave his cabinet full legislative powers for a period of four years and allowed deviations from the constitution.

Having achieved full control over the legislative and executive branches of government, Hitler and his political allies embarked on a systematic suppression of the remaining political opposition. By the end of June, the other parties had been intimidated into disbanding. On July 14, 1933, Hitler's Nazi Party was declared the only legal political party in Germany.

Military opposition was also punished. The demands of the SA for more political and military power led to the Night of the Long Knives, which took place from June 30 to July 2, 1934. Ernst Röhm and other SA leaders, along with a number of Hitler's political enemies, were rounded up and shot.

## Hitler and the Beginning of World War II

In 1938, Hitler, along with several other European leaders, signed the Munich Agreement. The treaty ceded (gave over) the Sudetenland districts to Germany, reversing part of the Versailles Treaty. As a result of the summit, Hitler was named *Time* magazine's Man of the Year for 1938. This diplomatic win only whetted Hitler's appetite for a renewed German dominance. On September 1, Germany invaded Poland. In response, Britain and France declared war on Germany.

Hitler escalated his activities in 1940, invading Scandinavia as well as France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Hitler ordered bombing raids on the United Kingdom, with the goal of invasion. Germany's formal alliance with Japan and Italy, known collectively as the Axis powers, was signed to deter the United States from supporting and protecting the British.

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# Benito Mussolini

## Early Life

Born on July 29, 1883, in Dovia di Predappio, Forlì, Italy, Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini was the eldest of three children. His father, Alessandro, was a blacksmith and an impassioned socialist who spent much of his time on politics and much of his money on his mistress. His mother, Rosa (Maltoni), was a devout Catholic schoolteacher who provided the family with some stability and income. As a youth, Benito Mussolini showed much intelligence, but was boisterous and disobedient. His father instilled in him a passion for socialist politics and defiance against authority. Though he was expelled from several schools for bullying and for disobeying school authorities, he eventually obtained a teaching certificate in 1901 and, for a brief time, worked as a schoolmaster.

## Mussolini and World War I

Mussolini initially condemned Italy's entry into World War I, but soon saw the war as an opportunity for his country to become a great power. His change in attitude broke ties with fellow socialists, however, and he was expelled from the organization. He joined the Italian army in 1915 and fought on the front lines, reaching the rank of corporal before being wounded and discharged from the military.

## Mussolini Between the Wars

After the war, Mussolini resumed his political activities, criticizing the Italian government for weakness at the Treaty of Versailles. He organized several right-wing groups into a single force and, in March 1919, formed the Fascist Party—the movement proclaimed opposition to social class discrimination and supported nationalist sentiments, hoping to raise Italy to the levels of its great Roman past.

Capitalizing on public discontent, Mussolini organized a paramilitary unit known as the “Black Shirts,” which terrorized political opponents and helped increase fascist influence. By 1922, as Italy slipped into political chaos, Mussolini declared that only he could restore order and he was given the authority to do so. He gradually dismantled all democratic institutions, and by 1925, had made himself dictator, taking the title “Il Duce” (“the Leader”). To his credit, Mussolini carried out an extensive public works program and reduced unemployment, making him very popular with the people.

## World War II

In 1935, determined to show the strength of his regime, Benito Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. The ill-equipped Ethiopians were no match for Italy's modern tanks and airplanes, and the capital, Addis Ababa, was quickly captured. Mussolini incorporated Ethiopia into the new Italian Empire. In 1939, he sent support to fascists in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, hoping to expand his influence.

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Impressed with Italy's early military successes, German dictator Adolf Hitler sought to establish a relationship with Benito Mussolini, who was flattered by Hitler's overtures and interpreted Italy's recent diplomatic and military victories as proof of his genius. By 1939, the two countries had signed a military alliance known as the "Pact of Steel." Influenced by Hitler, Mussolini instituted discrimination policies against the Jews in Italy. In 1940, Italy invaded Greece with some initial success.

With Italy's resources stretched to capacity, many Italians believed the alliance with Germany would provide time to regroup. But Hitler's invasion of Poland and declaration of war with Britain and France forced Italy into war and exposed weaknesses in its military. Greece and North Africa soon fell, and only German military intervention in early 1941 saved Mussolini from a military coup.

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