Chapter Summary

The West Between the Wars

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
What can cause economic instability?  
How might political change impact society?

In the years after World War I, peace and prosperity were short-lived as Europe and the United States experienced the Great Depression. The resulting waves of social, political, and economic unrest contributed to the creation of totalitarian governments in many countries. This chapter discusses the causes of instability in the West after World War I; how dictatorial regimes in some European countries gained popular support after the war; and how Hitler and the Nazis gained power in Germany.

Instability After World War I
• The Treaty of Versailles required Germany to pay reparations for the war, but a financial crisis left Germany unable to pay and led to increased economic turmoil.
• The League of Nations was weakened when the U.S. failed to join, opening the door to problems in the interwar years.
• The downturn in the economies of individual nations and an international crisis involving the crash of the U.S. Stock market triggered the Great Depression.
• Economic adversity led to political upheavals; the Great Depression led people to put their trust in authoritarian leaders who offered solutions to problems.
• Art, literature, and scientific breakthroughs produced after World War I reflected political, economic, and social uncertainties.

Hitler and Nazi Germany
• The humiliating loss in World War I and economic devastation led to political struggles in Germany.
• Hitler’s Nazi Party created a totalitarian state based on racism and extreme nationalism that appealed to German nationalism and promised to solve economic problems.
• Hitler understood how political parties could effectively use terror and propaganda in radio and film to promote Nazism.
• The Nazis initiated laws taking away the rights of Jews and destroyed Jewish businesses.
• Nazis enforced their will through a secret police, and they sent Jews to concentration camps.