Japan after WWI: Building an Empire
Military Nationalists Gain Power in Japan

- They see aggressive nationalism and territorial expansion as a means to solve their economic problems.
- Japanese government did not want to rely on foreign imports. They wanted to create a colonial empire by conquering countries rich in natural resources.
1931 – Japan Invaded the Chinese Province of Manchuria

• Why? Japanese leaders wanted more living space for a growing population. Important for natural resources (coal and iron deposits).

• Violated all international agreements, but the League of Nations only wrote a report of condemnation.
League of Nations - an association of nations established in 1920 (after WWI) to promote international cooperation and peace;

Fatal flaw of League - no ability to enforce its edicts. Insistence on unanimous vote for its actions gave each country an effective veto over League judgments;

Japan was taking a calculated risk that there would be few repercussions from its aggression;

They were proven right. Mussolini and Hitler were watching.
• Japan withdrew from the League and also violated the Washington Conference agreement by building up its navy.
1937 – Japan invaded China

- In the summer of 1937, the Chinese army put up a stiff resistance against the Japanese at the industrial center, Shanghai.
- Japanese eventually defeat the Chinese in Shanghai and move on to Nanking in December, 1937.
The Rape of Nanking

- After 4 days, the capital of China fell to the Japanese;
- Japanese army murdered approximately 90,000 Chinese POWs – surrender was seen as an act of cowardice, making a Chinese prisoner unworthy of life;
- Japanese spent six weeks terrorizing the citizens of Nanking via rape, murder, torture and massive property destruction – approximately 300,000 citizens were killed and 20,000 women were rape and killed.
- This incident became known as the “Rape of Nanking.”
Tripartite Pact (1940)

- Creation of a loose alliance between Japan, Germany, and Italy effectively extending the “axis” into the Pacific (Asia).
- Pact was aimed at keeping the U.S. out of the war. Under the treaty, each Axis nation agreed to come to the defense of the others in case of attack. Would be a military nightmare for the U.S.- a two-ocean war, with fighting in both the Atlantic and the Pacific.
1941 – Japan moves into French Indochina

- Japanese wanted to take over French military bases to unite East Asia under Japanese control (Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere);
- In protest, the U.S. cut off trade with Japan denying them much needed oil and other supplies needed for the Japanese war machine;
• In October 1941, a military leader, Hideki Tojo, became Prime Minister of Japan;
• In November 1941, an envoy went to Washington in the name of peace, but Tojo simultaneously gave orders to prepare for an attack on the U.S. and invasion of key areas in the Pacific.