

Britain at War

What is war?

War is a period of intentional actions, including armed fighting, between two or more countries or groups to force the enemy to adhere to their will.

First World War 1914–1918

Timeline of events

August 1914	Britain declares war on Germany
October 1914	First Battle of Ypres
Jan–Feb 1915	Ottoman Empire attacks Suez Canal
February 1915	Gallipoli Campaign begins
May 1915	Italy joins the Allied Powers
Feb–Dec 1916	Battle of Verdun
June–Sept 1916	Brusilov Offensive
July–Nov 1916	Battle of the Somme
April 1917	United States joins the Allied Powers
November 1918	Germany surrenders and the war ends

Causes of the war

There were several long-term causes of the First World War.

- Countries had previously made alliances because war seemed likely. Britain had signed a treaty to protect Belgium and was allied with France and Russia. Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy were allies.
- Germany had an imperialist desire to conquer other countries.
- Countries including Germany, France, Russia and Britain practised militarism, growing their armies and developing weaponry.
- Nationalism was widespread in Europe, and the leading powers each believed their country was superior.

The short-term trigger was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian Nationalist on 28th June 1914. This resulted in Austria-Hungary declaring war on Serbia.

Volunteers

Britain needed millions of men to join the army. The government launched a recruitment campaign that enlisted over 2.7 million men during the war. Britain's colonies also sent 2.5 million men to fight. Men joined the army for various reasons, such as wanting to defend their country or succumbing to peer pressure.

Warring nations

At the start of the war, the warring nations divided into two opposing groups. The Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire) were on one side. The Allied Powers (Great Britain, France and Russia) were on the other. The Central Powers were geographically surrounded by the Allied Powers and had to fight on several fronts.



Start of the First World War

In August 1914, German troops invaded Belgium. Allied forces pushed the German army back to north-west France, where both sides dug defensive trenches. This Western Front stretched from the English Channel to Switzerland. The German military also fought Russian forces on the Eastern Front, dividing their troops. With a stalemate in Europe, the Allies attacked the Ottoman Empire at Gallipoli in April 1915 to try to take the capital, Constantinople. The Allies were defeated and suffered heavy casualties.

Trench warfare

On the battlefield, soldiers faced firepower from machine guns and artillery. Both sides dug networks of trenches to escape shells and bullets. Trenches were cold and muddy and often infested with rats. Diseases spread quickly, and food was poor. Trench warfare took a considerable toll on soldiers' physical and mental health.



Weapons and technology

During the First World War, new weapons and technology were developed.

- Machine guns and heavy artillery bombarded the enemy.
- Armoured tanks countered the firepower of the front line.
- Poisonous gas was used to kill and injure enemy soldiers.
- Planes were mounted with machine guns and used for bombing.
- Warships fought at sea, and radio communication was used.

Life on the home front

Life changed for people in Britain. Food was scarce. Rationing was introduced towards the end of the war, leading to long queues at shops, hoarding, protests and strikes. People were worried about their safety as Zeppelins, and later German Gotha planes, carried out air raids over cities. Women took on roles traditionally done by men, such as working in factories or on the land.



End of the First World War

The First World War ended on 11th November 1918, when Germany surrendered. Several factors brought about the Allied Powers' victory, including the United States declaring war on Germany after German submarines sank American ships. In 1919, the Treaty of Versailles held Germany responsible for the war and ordered Germany to pay vast amounts in reparations. The devastation this caused to Germany played a part in the outbreak of the Second World War.

Second World War 1939–1945

Timeline of events

September 1939	Germany invades Poland and Poland surrenders
April 1940	Germany invades neutral Norway
May 1940	Germany takes control of Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands
May–June 1940	Germany invades France and Operation Dynamo rescues Allied soldiers from Dunkirk
June 1940	France surrenders to Germany
July–Oct 1940	Battle of Britain
December 1941	Japan attacks Pearl Harbor and the United States enters the war
July 1943	Allied forces invade Italy and Italy later surrenders
June 1944	D-Day
May 1945	Germany surrenders (VE Day)
Aug–Sept 1945	The United States drops atomic bombs on Japan, Japan surrenders and the war ends

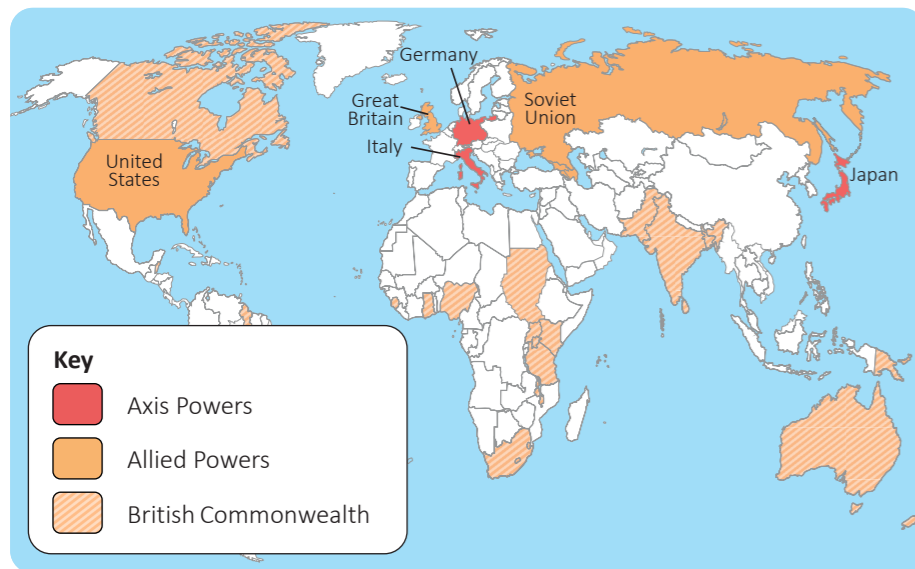
Causes of the war

The Treaty of Versailles had devastated Germany. By the 1930s, unemployment and poverty in Germany were widespread. Adolf Hitler became Germany's leader in 1934 and claimed his Nazi Party would restore German pride and save the economy. He then invaded the surrounding countries. Britain and France tried appeasement rather than challenging this expansion. On 1st September 1939, German forces invaded Poland. Britain and France declared war on Germany.



Warring nations

The major nations involved in the Second World War were the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) and the Allied Powers (Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States). Germany was led by the fascist dictator Adolf Hitler, who wanted to expand German territory and create a pure German race. At the start of the war, Britain's prime minister was Neville Chamberlain. Winston Churchill replaced him in May 1940.



Preparation for war

Britain had learned lessons from the First World War. Barrage balloons were placed over London to stop low-flying bombers. Gas masks were issued to the civilian population, and bomb shelters were built. Blackouts were compulsory, and children were evacuated from cities. Conscription was introduced to increase numbers in the army. Food rationing began and ration cards were issued.

Weapons and technology

The Second World War was the most technologically advanced war in history, with many new weapons and technological innovations.

- Radar used radio waves to detect enemy positions.
- Codebreakers developed machines to intercept and decode enemy messages.
- The bouncing bomb was used to destroy German dams.
- German engineers made rocket missiles that damaged British cities.
- A new lightweight fighter plane, the Supermarine Spitfire, was developed.
- The United States used the atomic bomb on Japan.

Battle of Britain

The Battle of Britain took place in the skies above Britain from July to October 1940. Adolf Hitler was planning a land attack on Britain but first had to control the skies to prevent British air attacks. The superior British planes and their organised air-defence system overcame the German Luftwaffe. This was a turning point in the war as Adolf Hitler could not continue with his land invasion plan.



Civilian life

Civilians in Britain had to cope with frightening air raids and bombing in cities. Finding their way during the blackout was difficult and dangerous. Children were separated from their families in the evacuation, and many women joined the Women's Land Army or worked in factories. Rationing became normal, and people found ingenious ways to make food and clothing last longer.

End of the Second World War

The Second World War ended on 2nd September 1945, when Japan formally surrendered. Many factors brought about the end of the war. The Allied Powers' D-Day invasion, on 6th June 1944, resulted in Allied troops liberating Paris and Brussels. The Battle of the Bulge failed to break the Allied line. Adolf Hitler realised Germany had lost the war and committed suicide on 30th April 1945. The war against Japan ended after the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Post-war world

After the Second World War, the Allied Powers split Germany into West and East Germany. International agreements were signed to ban chemical weapons, torture and genocide. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved, which still forms the basis of international human rights law. The welfare state and National Health Service were created in Britain. Many of the war's technological innovations were redeveloped for civilians.

Remembrance

Remembrance is the act of remembering and honouring the people who died as a result of conflict. The poppy is a symbol of remembrance after poppies grew on the Western Front battlefields. Memorials, monuments and war cemeteries all serve to remind us of the sacrifice made by millions of people.



Glossary

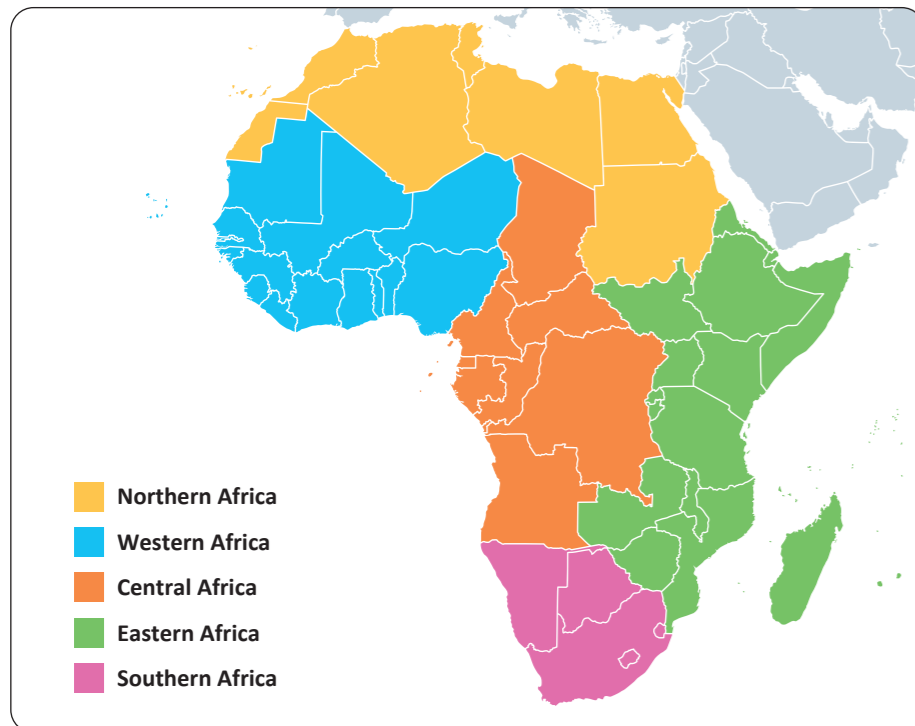
alliance	A group of countries who have agreed to work together because of shared aims.
appeasement	Giving the opposing side something they have demanded to prevent further disagreement.
colony	A nation controlled by another country.
conscription	Forcing people by law to join the armed services.
imperialist	A supporter of a system in which a country rules another country, sometimes having used force to gain control.
genocide	The deliberate killing of large numbers of people from a particular nation or ethnic group, with the aim of destroying that nation or group.
militarism	The belief that it is necessary to have strong armed forces to win political or economic advantages.
reparation	Payment for harm or damage.
stalemate	A situation in which neither side can get an advantage, and no action can be taken.



Maafa

Africa

Africa is the world's second largest continent, and is made up of 54 different countries. Today, more than one billion people live in Africa, including over 3000 different indigenous groups. As well as a diverse range of people, languages and cultures, the continent has a vast range of landscapes and habitats. Sprawling metropolises, rural villages and shanty towns can all be found here, along with grasslands, deserts, swamps and rainforests, which together support thousands of plant and animal species.



Ancient kingdoms

Humans have lived in Africa for millions of years. Great civilisations developed in every part of Africa, including the Kingdom of Aksum, the Kingdom of Benin and the Mali Empire. Each were great trading nations and gained wealth and power by trading natural resources, such as gold and salt, with other African kingdoms, Europe, the Middle East, India and China.



Illustration of Benin City, 1668

Beginning of the European slave trade

Portugal's involvement

From 1441 onwards, enslaved African people were transported to Portugal and were bought, sold and treated like cattle. This form of enslavement became known as chattel slavery. African tribes sold enslaved people from central Africa to Europe in exchange for luxury goods and guns.

Spain's involvement

In 1492, Christopher Columbus discovered Hispaniola, a Caribbean island, which he claimed for Spain. On a later voyage, he took sugar cane to the Caribbean to create sugar plantations. The indigenous people of Hispaniola suffered greatly when they were enslaved to work on the sugar plantations. A Spanish priest believed that African people would be more suited to work on the plantations, because of their darker skin. African people were then targeted for enslavement.

Britain's role in the Maafa

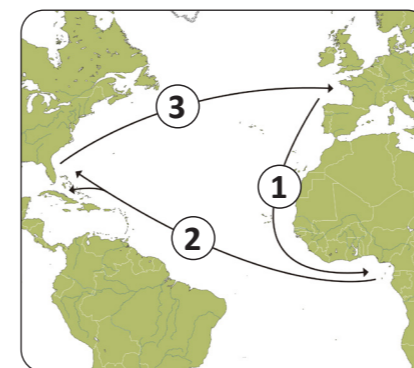
Britain first began transporting enslaved African people in 1562, when Elizabeth I gave John Hawkins, an English naval commander, the permission to do so. By 1650, Britain had seized several West Indies islands from Spain, and was transporting several thousand enslaved African people across the Atlantic Ocean each year. By the early 1800s, this number had increased to 120,000 each year. In total, Britain transported more enslaved African people than any other European country.



John Hawkins

Triangular slave trade

The triangular slave trade was a very profitable system of enslavement, developed to provide labour for plantations in the Americas. It involved three journeys:



① The first journey

Goods, including metal and guns, were transported to the west coast of Africa.

② The second journey

Enslaved African people were transported to the Caribbean and the Americas. This journey was also known as the middle passage.

③ The third journey

Goods produced on the plantations were transported back to Europe.

Life for enslaved African people

African people were forcibly taken from their villages and marched to coastal trading forts on the west coast of Africa. They were locked up in cells before being transported to the Americas. Conditions on board the ships were appalling, and many people died from sickness or disease. Once they arrived in the Americas, they were sold at auction and transported to work on plantations or as domestic servants. Enslaved workers who tried to escape or rebel were severely punished, but acts of resistance were common, as they despised the situation that they had been forced into.

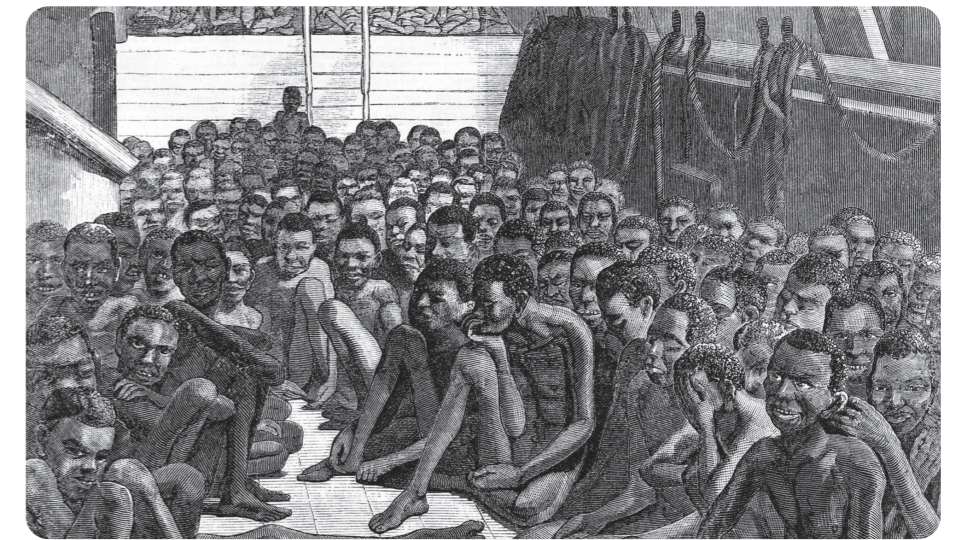


Illustration of the slave deck on the ship, *Wildfire*, 1860

Abolition of slavery

Many people, including plantation owners and traders, profited greatly from the slave trade and were keen for it to continue. British cities, banks and businesses also developed as a result of the money made from the slave trade. However, over time, people came to believe that slavery was wrong. A range of factors, such as enslaved people rebelling against plantation owners in the First Maroon War and the work of abolitionists, eventually led to the end of the slave trade in Britain in 1807. The Slavery Abolition Act was passed in 1833, which made slavery illegal. However, the lives of most emancipated slaves did not improve for many years.

African nations after slavery

After the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884–1885, was held between 14 European countries, Africa was divided into 50 European colonies. Many European people became extremely wealthy by exploiting Africa and its wealth of natural resources, and the division of Africa marked another struggle that African people faced for their freedom from European control.

Black people in Britain in the 20th century

During the 20th century, Britain recruited thousands of soldiers and workers from the West Indies to help Britain fight in both World Wars and to rebuild the economy afterwards. However, mass arrivals of black people between the 1950s and 1970s

caused a rise in racial tensions and prejudice, and black people were treated badly. The Race Relations Act was passed in 1965, to combat prejudices that black and ethnic minority communities faced. It has since been replaced with the Equality Act 2010. This act covers racial discrimination, but also other kinds of intolerance, such as discrimination against gender, disability, sexual orientation or religion.



Great black Britons

Many black Britons have achieved amazing things, instigating change and empowering others, while overcoming racial and social barriers in the process.

John Blanke was one of the earliest recorded black people in England after the Roman period, and was a trumpeter in the Tudor court in the 1500s.

Ignatius Sancho was an abolitionist and one of the first black writers to have a wide British readership in the 1700s.

Olaudah Equiano was an abolitionist who wrote a bestselling autobiography in the 1700s.

William Cuffay was a leading figure in the fight for the rights for the working class during the 1800s.

Mary Seacole was a nurse in the 1800s who set up the 'British Hotel' in the Crimea, where she cared for soldiers injured in the Crimean War.

Claudia Jones was a political activist in the 1900s, who is described as the 'mother of the Notting Hill Carnival'.

Olive Morris was a community leader and key organiser of the Black Women's movement in the mid 1900s.

Lenford Kwesi Garrison was an educationalist and activist, who set up the Black Cultural Archives to track the history of black British identity.



Claudia Jones

Maafa timeline

1441	Portugal starts transporting enslaved African people.
1492	Christopher Columbus discovers Hispaniola.
1562	Britain begins transporting enslaved African people across the Atlantic Ocean.
1728	The First Maroon War begins in Jamaica, where escaped enslaved workers fight British troops for the right to live independently.
c1800	Approximately 120,000 enslaved people are transported, by British ships, to the Caribbean and Americas every year.
1807	The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act is passed.
1831–1832	The largest rebellion of enslaved people takes place in the British Caribbean.
1833	The Slavery Abolition Act is passed.
1884–1885	Africa is divided into 50 European colonies.
1948–1973	Around 500,000 people are invited to Britain from the Caribbean to fill job positions after the Second World War. The first people arrived on a ship called HMT <i>Empire Windrush</i> . All of the people arriving in this way become known as the 'Windrush generation'.
1965	The Race Relations Act is passed.
2010	The Equality Act is passed.

Glossary

abolitionist	A person who fights to ban something, such as slavery.
auction	A public sale, where goods are sold to the person who bids the most money.
chattel slavery	A form of enslavement, where people are kept as another person's property and are treated very badly.
colonisation	The act of sending people to live in, govern and control another country and its indigenous people, forming a colony.
emancipation	To be set free from legal, social or political restrictions, such as slavery.
enslavement	To have one's freedom taken away and to be forced to work for no money.
indigenous	To naturally exist in a country or area, rather than arriving from somewhere else.
maafa	A Swahili word meaning 'great catastrophe'. The name Maafa is used to describe the African Holocaust and the history and effects of the transatlantic slave trade.
plantation	A large estate where crops, such as sugar cane or tobacco, are grown.
trading forts	A place designed for the storage, buying and selling of goods.
West Indies	A group of islands surrounded by the North Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. More commonly known as the Caribbean.

