***INSIDE THE MIND OF WWII JAPAN***

**Rise of Militarism and Nationalism**

When the Great Depression struck Japan in 1929, many Japanese blamed the government. Military leaders gained support and soon won control of the country. While Emperor Hirohito, who the Japanese saw as a descendant of the sun god, was technically still the head of the government, the fascist military elite made all the actual decisions for the country. They demanded obedience and servitude to the emperor and Japan above all else!

General Hideki Tojo became Japan’s most powerful military leader. Tojo reasoned that foreigners had never defeated Japan in a war and that there was no reason to believe they ever could. After all, Japan’s emperor was a direct descendant of the sun god. With divine (God’s) power on its side, Tojo reasoned, no nation could ever stop Japan’s quest for empire.

Like Hitler and Mussolini, Japan’s militarists were extreme nationalists. They wanted to solve the country’s economic problems through foreign expansion. They planned a Pacific empire that included a conquered China. The empire would provide Japan with raw materials and markets for its goods. It would also give Japan room for its rising population.

**The Bushido mentality of Japanese soldiers**

During World War II, Japanese society was very nationalistic and there was national acceptance of military rule during the war years. The Japanese armed forces were a highly nationalistic, well established modern fighting force. The ancient battle code of honor developed by the samurai in Japan, the Bushido Code, had become a part of the psyche and mentality of Japan’s new national army. The Bushido Code promoted a love for battle and hated weakness. It demanded bravery, loyalty, allegiance to orders and forbade surrender. It was believed that death in combat was honorable. In combat, this code was used to rally troops into suicidal banzai charges, or to encourage encircled troops to take their own lives with grenades before they could be captured.

Surrender was disgraceful not only to the soldier, but to his entire family. There are documented accounts of soldier's wives driving themselves to disgrace or death because of rumors that their husband dishonorably surrendered.

The Japanese had long held a belief that they were the socially and racially superior race, a sort of "Asian Aryan" viewpoint. The Japanese saw themselves as the saviors and leaders of Asia. The Japanese even categorized the various Asian races as "master races" and "servant races", with the Japanese as the superior "Yamato race".

***INSIDE THE MIND OF WWII UNITED STATES***

**Isolation and Neutrality**

Isolationism has sturdy roots in American history. George Washington’s parting advice to the nation had been to avoid the “rivalries” of Europe. For much of its history, the United States preferred to mind its own business. During the 1930’s the troubles at home stemming from the Great Depression gave Americans good reason to ignore events in Europe. Politicians caught the anti-war mood. Congress passed neutrality laws in 1935, 1936, and 1937.

**Concern and Racism**

However, America’s attitude toward war began to change as they understood that the Nazi threat was not just a European power struggle, and that the Japanese had their sights set on America’s territories of the Philippines and Guam and the rest of the Pacific.

Americans held racist views of all Asians for decades, but America's hatred for the Japanese came full circle with the surprise attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Racial slurs that were commonly used by soldiers, and could be also used by the newspapers were ***Jap, Nip*** (short for Nippon, which is what Japanese people refer to their country as. It means “Land of the Rising Sun”), and ***Yellow Monkey***.

**(PS. US Soldiers often referred to as the Yanks, a short form of Yankee)**