Chapter 25: World War II, 1941–1945

Chapter Review

I. AMERICAN COMMUNITIES Los Alamos, New Mexico

On Monday, July 16, 1945, the first atomic bomb was detonated at Los Alamos, NM. Begun in 1941, the secret Manhattan Project headed by J. Robert Oppenheimer had spent more than three years and billions of dollars to design, build, and produce the first atomic bomb. Even while working in strict secrecy, the thousands of scientists and technicians at Los Alamos and other sites were part of the great economic and social mobilization of the war. Millions moved to the South and southwest coasts for war work, breaking up old communities and creating new ones that would outlast the war and set the stage for America’s emergence as a postwar superpower.

II. THE COMING OF WORLD WAR II

The depression helped undermine an already shaky political world as unrest spread across Europe and Asia, international trade dropped by as much as two-thirds, and unemployment rose. As militaristic regimes sprang up to threaten the peace, FDR had no clear foreign policy plans, while most Americans opposed foreign entanglements. Yet the United States would discover it would have no choice in being pulled into war.

MHL video: American Entry into WWII at www.myhistorylab.com

a. The Shadows of War Across the Globe

After seizing Manchuria in 1931, in 1937 militarist leaders in Japan provoked full-scale war by brutally invading China. Meanwhile, the rise of authoritarian nationalism in Italy and Germany cast a dark shadow over Europe. In Germany the National Socialists (Nazis), led by Adolf Hitler, combined militaristic rhetoric with a racist doctrine of Aryan (Nordic) supremacy that classified nonwhites and Jews as “degenerate races.” After becoming chancellor in 1933, Hitler renounced the Versailles treaty and began rearming while pursuing a quest for Lebensraum in central Europe. After annexing Austria, Hitler turned to Czechoslovakia. Rather than face war, England and France agreed at the September 1938 Munich Conference to allow Germany to annex the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia bordering Germany. In return, Hitler pledged to stop his territorial advance. Less than six months later, in March 1939, Hitler seized the rest of Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, German Jews were stripped of citizenship and terrorized by the Nazi-sponsored Kristallnacht attacks on homes and businesses. In September 1940, Germany, Italy, and Japan signed a Tripartite Pact, pledging to “stand by” each other.

MHL image: Nazi Book Bonfire at www.myhistorylab.com

b. Roosevelt Readies for War
World War I had left a legacy of strong isolationist sentiment in the United States, a sentiment with strong support in Congress. In 1935 Congress passed the first of five Neutrality Act restricting trade with belligerents. The threat of war led to a relaxation, permitting arms sales to Britain, France, and China in 1939, but when war broke out with Hitler’s September invasion of Poland, the American public continued to oppose active U.S. involvement. In 1940, Hitler crushed France and began the Battle of Britain. Arms sales to Britain grew and a peacetime draft was instituted, but the election of 1940 forced FDR to pledge not to send American boys to war. But once reelected, he pushed for passage of the Lend-Lease Act with open aid to Britain and, in August 1941 met with British Prime Minister Churchill to draft the Atlantic Charter, a statement of war aims that made greater U.S. involvement inevitable. When Hitler invaded the neutral Soviet Union in June 1941, American aid to Britain accelerated, with armed American convoy authorized to “sink on sight” German U-boats.

c. Pearl Harbor

While the American government and public watched the unfolding of the war in Europe with dread, the war in Asia went on. To protect Asian interests, Roosevelt transferred the Pacific fleet from bases in California to Pearl Harbor, Hawai’i, in May 1940. As diplomatic and economic relations deteriorated, the Japanese leaders decided to make a first strike that might keep America out of war or at least shake the country so that it would not resist Japanese expansion. Although the Japanese diplomatic code had been broken, the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor caught American forces completely off guard. On December 8, declaring the attack on Pearl Harbor a day that “will live in infamy,” Roosevelt asked Congress for a declaration of war against Japan. The United States had not yet declared war on Japan’s European allies, but Hitler made that inevitable when he asked the Reichstag on December 11 to support war against the “half Judaized, the other half Negrified” American nation. World War II now began for Americans.

MHL document: Franklin Roosevelt, Date Which Will Live in Infamy (1941) at www.myhistorylab.com

III. A GREAT ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY

By the time the United States entered World War II, the U.S. economy had already been re- geared for military purposes. In a 1940 “fireside chat,” Roosevelt called upon all Americans to make the nation a “great arsenal of democracy.” Once the United States entered World War II, the federal government poured an unprecedented amount of energy and money into wartime production and assigned a huge army of experts to manage it. The Great Depression suddenly, it seemed, ended.

a. Mobilizing for War
A few days after the United States declared war on Germany, Congress passed the War Powers Act, which established a precedent for executive authority that would endure long after the war’s end. Roosevelt promptly created special wartime agencies. The National War Labor Board (NWLB) mediated disputes between labor and management. The War Manpower Commission (WMC) directed the mobilization of military and civilian services. Other agencies oversaw prices and production of domestic goods. Most significantly, the Office of Scientific Research and Development was charged with applying science to the war effort, yielding better radar, more effective pesticides and medicines and improved weapons. The federal government also sponsored various measures to prevent subversion of the war effort, including an enlarged FBI with sweeping and often illegal domestic surveillance powers.

Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. encouraged Americans to buy government bonds to finance the war and planned a campaign “to use bonds to sell the war, rather than vice versa.” Government’s size and cost grew enormously during a war that cost $250 million a day to fight. Many New Deal programs withered away as “Dr. New Deal” became “Dr. Win the War.” While the REA and Farm Security Administration survived, the CCC and WPA disappeared with the shift to war work virtually ending unemployment.

b. Organizing the War Economy

The country enjoyed many advantages to meet this challenge: a large industrial base, abundant natural resources (largely free from interference by the war), and a civilian population large enough to permit it to increase both its labor force and its armed forces. By the summer of 1941 the federal government was pouring vast amounts into defense production. Facing war orders too large to fill, American industries were now primed for all-out production. No wonder the actual volume of industrial output expanded at the fastest rate in American history. Military production alone grew from 2 percent of the 1939 total gross national product to 40 percent of the 1943 total. Defense production transformed entire regions. The economic boom lifted entire populations out of sharecropping and tenancy into well-paid industrial jobs in the cities and pumped unprecedented profits into southern business. Much like large-scale commercial agriculture, many big businesses did well during the war, many scoring huge profits from military contracts. The 100 largest corporations, which manufactured 30 percent of all goods in 1940, garnered 70 percent of all war and civilian contracts and the bulk of the war profits.

c. New Workers

The war boosted employment for minorities—200,000 Mexican braceros. Southwestern farm workers, as well as Native Americans recruited for construction work. African Americans found increased opportunities in war industries, and overall black employment grew from 2.9 to 3.8 million. The female labor force grew by 50 percent, especially for white women over 35, many of them married.
Neither government nor industry rushed to recruit women, nor expected women to stay in their jobs when the war ended. Posters and informational films depicted women’s new industrial jobs as simple variations of domestic tasks. “Instead of cutting a cake,” one newsreel explained, “this woman [factory worker] cuts the pattern of aircraft parts.” The number of women automobile workers, for example, jumped from 29,000 to 200,000, and women electrical workers from 100,000 to 374,000. While wartime wages grew 50 percent, profits grew even faster. Unions grew apace, from 10.5 to 14.7 million members, including 1.25 million black members. Unions pledged not to strike in exchange for better wages and working conditions, but wildcat strikes plagued mining and other industries as wartime strikes rose to the highest level of any four-year period in American history.

MHL image: Women Riveters in Navy Shipyard at www.myhistorylab.com

IV. THE HOME FRONT

Although battle did not touch the United States directly, the war still affected American society. Alongside an upsurge of patriotism ran deep conflicts on the home front. Families were disrupted and racial and ethnic hostilities flared repeatedly and on several occasions erupted in violence.

a. Families in Wartime

Despite the uncertainties of wartime, or perhaps because of them, men and women rushed into marriage, and, often, immediate separation. Although wartime wages soared, so did rents, and rationing meant careful planning was needed to prepare meals and buy clothing, gasoline, and other staples in short supply—sometimes from a flourishing black market when rationed goods or stamps ran out.

The care of small children became a major problem for working mothers. Although the War Manpower Commission estimated that as many as 2 million children needed some form of child care, federally funded day-care centers served less than 10 percent of defense workers’ children. Juvenile delinquency rose during the war. With employers often relaxing minimum age requirements for employment, many teenagers quit school for the high wages of factory jobs. Runaways drifted from city to city, finding temporary work at wartime plants or at military installations. Public health improved greatly during the war as Americans could again afford to visit the doctor and ate fruits and vegetables raised in backyard “victory gardens.” The death rate in 1942, excluding battle deaths, was the lowest in the nation’s history, although the rural South and Southwest continued to suffer high infant and maternal mortality rates.

b. The Internment of Japanese Americans

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, many Americans feared an invasion of the mainland and suspected Japanese Americans of disloyalty. A coalition of politicians, patriotic organizations, business groups, and military officials called for the removal of all
Americans of Japanese descent from Pacific coastal areas despite a State Department report certifying their loyalty. FDR’s executive order in February 1942 authorized the relocation of 120,000 Japanese Americans to interior internment camps in isolated areas, often with only the barest provisions for shelter and furnishings.

The Japanese American Citizens League charged that “racial animosity” rather than military necessity had dictated the internment policy. In protest, nearly 6,000 Japanese Americans renounced their U.S. citizenship. In *Korematsu v. U.S.* (1944) the Supreme Court upheld the relocation on grounds of national security. Japanese Americans lost homes and businesses valued at $500 million in what many historians judge as being the worst violation of American civil liberties during the war. Not until 1988 did Congress vote reparations and a public apology.

**MHL document: Executive Order 9066 (1942) at www.myhistorylab.com**

c.  “Double V”: Victory at Home and Abroad

African American activists conducted a wartime “Double V” campaign, mobilizing for Allied victory and their own rights as citizens demanding fair housing and equal employment opportunities, laying the foundation for the postwar civil rights movement.

Facing a threatened African American March on Washington organized by A. Phillip Randolph to protest discrimination, on June 25, 1941, FDR issued Executive Order 8802, banning discrimination in defense industries and government. Randolph called off the march but remained determined to “shake up white America.”

Other civil rights organizations formed during wartime to fight both discrimination and Jim Crow practices, including segregation in the U.S. armed forces. The interracial Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) formed by pacifists in 1942 staged sit-ins at Chicago, Detroit, and Denver restaurants that refused to serve African Americans, while NAACP membership soared from 50,000 in 1940 to 450,000 in 1946. “Hate strikes” broke out in defense plants across the country when African Americans were hired or upgraded to positions customarily held by white workers, while whites protested blacks moving into housing in many cities. In the summer of 1943, a violent riot broke out in Detroit along with conflicts in more than 50 other cities. As Langston Hughes wrote, blacks were willing to fight Hitler and Jim Crow at the same time.

**MHL document: A. Philip Randolph, Why Should We March (1942) at www.myhistorylab.com**

d.  Zoot-Suit Riots

On the night of June 4, 1943, sailors launched attacks on East L.A. Mexican Americans dressed in zoot suits. Mexican American teenagers wearing long-draped coats, pegged pants, pocket watches with oversized chains, and big floppy hats outraged the sailors to whom the zoot suit signaled defiance and a lack of patriotism.
The zoot-suiters, however, represented less than 10 percent of their community’s youth. More than 300,000 Mexican Americans were serving in the armed forces (a greater proportion of their draft-age population than other Americans), and they served in the most hazardous branches, as paratroopers and in the Marine Corps. For the first time Mexican Americans were finding well-paying jobs, and, like African Americans, they expected their government to protect them from discrimination.

Military and civilian authorities eventually contained the zoot-suit riots by ruling several sections of Los Angeles off-limits to military personnel, and the city council passed legislation making the wearing of a zoot suit in public a criminal offense.

e. Popular Culture and “The Good War”

With money in their pockets, Americans spent freely at vacation resorts, country clubs, racetracks, nightclubs, dance halls, and movie theaters. Sales of books skyrocketed, and spectator sports attracted huge audiences. Transplanted southern musicians, black and white, brought their regional styles to northern cities, paving the way for postwar rhythm and blues and rock and roll. Many popular songs featured war themes, promoting a “good war” and justifying personal sacrifice. Wartime movies likewise played up soldiers’ heroism and extolled our Allies, including the previously suspect Soviet Union, and movie stars led war bond drives. Patriotic Americans, such as civil defense volunteers and Red Cross workers, dressed in uniforms, and women employed in defense plants wore pants, often for the first time. Production of nylon stockings was halted because the material was needed for parachutes; women’s skirts were shortened, while the War Production Board encouraged cuffless “Victory Suits” for men. While some of these responses were spontaneous, the Office of War Information spread the messages of patriotism and sacrifice with posters while reviewing music, films ads, and radio programs to make sure everyone got the message. The joint sense of participation and patriotism left a generation of Americans with memories of WW II as “the good war” and a time of closer community.

V. MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM

World War II mobilized 16.4 million Americans into the armed forces. Whether working in the steno pool at Great Lakes Naval Training Center in northern Illinois or slogging through mud with rifle in hand in the Philippines, many men and women saw their lives reshaped in unpredictable ways. For those who survived, the war often proved to be the defining experience of their lives.

MHL audio: Soldier Boy Blues, 1943 at www.myhistorylab.com

a. Creating the Armed Forces

In 1939 only 200,000 men served in the armed forces. After October 1940, draft registration was compulsory for all men between 18 and 36. The draft law exempted about 25,000 conscientious objectors who by religious training or belief opposed war who served in noncombatant roles in the military services; another 12,000 performed
“alternative service.” Surprising numbers were refused induction because they were physically unfit for military service or illiterate. The officer corps, exemplified by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, was highly professional, politically conservative, and personally autocratic. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, however, supreme commander of the Allied forces in Europe, projected a new and contrasting spirit. The democratic rhetoric of the war and the sudden massive expansion of the armed forces contributed to this transformation of the officer corps. A shortage of officers during World War I had prompted a huge expansion of the Reserve Officer Training Corps, but it still could not meet the demand for trained officers. Racing to make up for the deficiency, Army Chief of Staff George Marshall opened schools for officer candidates, producing 54,000 graduates in 1942. Most GIs had little contact with the high command, though, and dedication to their unit was at the heart of military loyalty rather than political ideology. Most of all, soldiers were motivated to get the job done and get home as soon as possible.

b. Women Enter the Military

In May 1942 the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), later changed to Women’s Army Corps (WAC), was created, joined in 1942–43 by the Navy WAVES, the Women’s Air Force Service Pilots, and the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve. Approximately 350,000 women served in World War II, two-thirds of them in the WACS and WAVES. Although barred from combat, women were not necessarily protected from danger. Nurses accompanied combat troops, treated men under fire, and dug and lived in their own foxholes. More than 1,000 women flew planes, although not in combat missions. The vast majority in clerical and other “women’s” jobs served at home, far from the front. The overwhelming majority of soldiers believed that most WACS were prostitutes, and the War Department itself, fearing “immorality” or homosexuality among women in the armed forces, closely monitored their conduct and established much stricter rules for women than for men.

c. Old Practices and New Horizons

The draft brought hundreds of thousands of young black men into the army and others enlisted at a rate 60 percent higher than the general population. By 1944, black soldiers represented 10 percent of the army’s troops, and overall approximately 1 million African Americans served in the armed forces during World War II, most in segregated, poorly equipped noncombat units commanded by white officers although the Tuskegee Airmen and the all-black 761st Tank Battalion were exceptions. They encountered discrimination everywhere, from the army canteen to the religious chapels. The year 1943 marked the peak of unrest, with violent confrontations between blacks and whites breaking out at military installations, especially in the South, where the majority of African American soldiers were stationed. The army also grouped Japanese Americans into segregated units, sending most to fight far from the Pacific theater. Better educated than the average soldier, many Nisei soldiers who knew Japanese served stateside as interpreters and translators and Navajos were recruited as “code talkers” in the Pacific. For Jews and other second generation immigrants, army service was a profoundly “Americanizing” experience. Despite rules barring them from service, many homosexuals enlisted and the
pressures of war gave opportunities to express their sexuality more openly in a situation where even straight men danced with each other at canteens for lack of female partners. For most veterans, the war was remembered as the greatest experience of their lives, and by serving with men from diverse backgrounds and regions, they came to recognize “the bigness and wholeness of the United States.”

MHL video: The Desegregation of the Military and Blacks in Combat at www.myhistorylab.com

d. The Medical Corps

For the soldiers fighting in hot humid jungles, malaria, typhus, diarrhea, or dengue fever posed the most common threat to their lives, while all combat troops faced the perils of “combat fatigue” (known today as post-traumatic stress disorder). In 1944, the army concluded that eight months in combat was the maximum and instituted a rotation system to relieve exhausted soldiers.

To care for sick and wounded soldiers, the army depended on a variety of medical personnel. Soldiers received first aid training as part of basic training, and carried bandages to treat minor wounds. The Army Medical Corps sent doctors to the front lines. Of the soldiers who underwent emergency surgery on the field, more than 85 percent survived, due both to improved surgical methods and “wonder drugs” like penicillin. Blood transfusion and use of dried plasma helped reduce shock from blood loss. Soldiers considered medics the true heroes of the battlefront, giving aid under fire on the front lines. American nurses—given military rank and professional status—supplied the bulk of care to recovering soldiers. By 1945, approximately 56,000 women, including 500 African American women, were on active duty in the Army Nurse Corps, staffing medical facilities in every theater of the war.

VI. THE WORLD AT WAR

Through 1942, Hitler’s forces controlled Europe, pounding England and driving deep into Russia and across northern Africa to take the Suez Canal. Things were little better in the Pacific, where Japanese planes struck the main U.S. base in the Philippines and demolished half the air force commanded by General Douglas MacArthur forcing U.S. troops to withdraw to the Bataan Peninsula, admitting that Japan had practically seized the Pacific. Roosevelt called the news “all bad,” and his military advisers predicted a long fight to victory (see Map 25.1). But the Allies enjoyed several important advantages: vast natural resources and a skilled workforce with sufficient reserves to accelerate the production of weapons and ammunitions; the determination of millions of antifascists throughout Europe and Asia; and the capacity of the Soviet Union to endure immense losses.

MHL map: World War II, European Theater at www.myhistorylab.com

a. Soviets Halt Nazi Drive
Unlike World War I, which was fought by immobile armies kept in trenches by bursts of machine-gun fire, World War II was a war of offensive maneuvers punctuated by surprise attacks with armored vehicles, automatic weapons, high-explosive artillery shells, and air power, all aided by better radio communications between commanders and their troops. After June 1941, the burden of the war fell increasingly on the Soviet Union. After initial and bloody defeats, the Soviets rallied, cutting German supply lines and launching a massive counterattack in the winter of 1941–42, catching the freezing German troops off guard. The Soviets suffered more casualties than Americans did during the entire war. By February 1943, the German Sixth Army had met defeat, overpowered by Soviet troops and weapons aided by American Lend-Lease supplies. Nazi officers and German civilians alike began to doubt that Hitler could win the war. The Soviet victories had turned the tide of the war, but the Americans and British faced increasing Soviet demands to open a second front to relieve the German pressure, an immense and complex that took far longer to launch than the Soviets expected.

b. Planning and Initiating the Allied Offensive

During 1942 the Axis offensive stalled, with German defeat at Stalingrad and Japanese failures in the Pacific. As American war production ramped up and as the U-boat threat in the Atlantic was blunted, Allied war materials outstripped Axis resources, ending the Battle of Britain and putting the Luftwaffe on the defensive. Some military leaders and the American public called for avenging Pearl Harbor; FDR and Churchill decided to focus on defeating Germany first. After disagreements on where to open a second front, the Allies compromised by launching an invasion of North Africa. After bitter fighting from Egypt to Morocco, Rommel’s Afrika Korps was defeated by early 1943. Meeting in Casablanca in January, FDR and Churchill—in Stalin’s absence—announced that nothing short of unconditional Axis surrender would be accepted, promising a longer but politically decisive war.

Aerial bombing picked up with British attacking at night and Americans employing day raids. U.S. B-17 Flying Fortresses, while taking terrible losses from ground fire, hit war plants and rail lines as well as civilian areas, with heavy loss of life. Anxious to hasten the war’s end, the Royal Air Force began direct attacks on civilians, destroying Hamburg and 60 other cities, culminating in the U.S.-British firebombing of Dresden in 1945 killing 135,000 civilians. The air war alone could not defeat the Axis, but German war production was seriously disrupted and when the Allies invaded France in 1944 they held total air superiority.

c. The Allied Invasion of Europe

During the summer of 1943, the Allies began to advance on southern Italy. Italy surrendered to the Allies on September 8, but Hitler sent new divisions into northern Italy and stalled the Allied campaign. When the European war ended, the German and Allied armies were still battling on Italy’s rugged terrain.
Facing extermination, Jews in the Warsaw ghetto rose in a futile but bloody rebellion in the summer of 1943, while underground resistance fighters harassed the Nazis from Greece to Norway and Poland to France, encouraged by Allied promises of a new European offensive.

Stalin had long demanded a western invasion and Churchill’s doubts were finally overcome as a huge American army gathered and trained in Britain under Eisenhower’s command. The Allied invasion finally began on “D-Day,” June 6, 1944. Despite fierce German resistance, over a million men landed in Normandy in the next six weeks and, breaking through German lines, pushed the Nazis back. General Charles de Gaulle, accompanied by Allied troops, arrived in Paris on August 25 to become president of the reestablished French Republic. One occupied European nation after another now swiftly fell to the Allied armies. But the Allied troops had only reached a resting place between bloody battles.

d. The High Cost of European Victory

In September 1944, Allied commanders searched for a strategy to end the war quickly. Faulty intelligence reports overlooked a well-armed German division at Arnhem, Holland, waiting to cut Allied paratroopers to pieces. By the end of the battle, the Germans had captured 6,000 Americans.

In a final, desperate effort to reverse the Allied momentum, Hitler directed his last reserves, a quarter-million men, at Allied lines in the Belgian forest of the Ardennes. This last effort—the bloodiest single campaign Americans had been involved in since the battle of Gettysburg—exhausted the German capacity for counterattack. After Christmas Day 1944, the Germans fell back, retreating into their own territory.

In March 1945, the Allies rolled across the Rhine and took the Ruhr Valley with its precious industrial resources. Meanwhile, Soviet forces swept across Poland (standing aside while the Nazis crushed a anti-Russian resistance in Warsaw) and reached the outskirts of Berlin by April. The defense of Germany, now hopeless, had fallen into the hands of young teenagers and elderly men.

e. The War in Asia and the Pacific

In May 1942, U.S. forces went on the offensive in the Pacific, first winning the Battle of the Coral Sea, and then destroying a Japanese fleet preparing to attack Midway Island in June. Naval aviation played a decisive role in these battles, and the loss of Japanese planes and aircraft carriers crippled sea-born offensive operations. Even so, Japanese troops swept across Burma and Thailand and dominated most of South East Asia with systematic and terrifying cruelty. General McArthur and Admiral Nimitz shared the American command in the Pacific, and settled on an “island hopping” offensive strategy that began in 1942 with attacks in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea. On Guadalcanal a bloody battle lasted for six months but proved the Japanese could be defeated. For the next two years, navy, army and Marine forces slowly pushed towards the Japanese home
islands at a high human cost on both sides. In 1944 as the Normandy campaign began, Americans attacked the Marianas and the Philippines, culminating in the Battle of Leyte Gulf in which the Japanese Navy was all but destroyed. Even so, Japan fought tenaciously to defend Okinawa, utilizing kamikaze suicide attacks. By June 1945 the war was over in Europe and Allied bombers were devastating Japanese cities. Japan could not hold over forever, but the Western Allies pressed for a quick end to the war in part out of fear of Soviet expansion, leading to the decision to use the atomic bomb on Japan.

**MHL map: World War II, Pacific Theater** at [www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com)

**VII. THE LAST STAGES OF WAR**

Until mid-1943, Roosevelt had focused on military strategy rather than on plans for peace. With the defeat of Germany in sight, diplomatic objectives moved to the forefront. Roosevelt wanted both to crush the Axis powers and to establish a system of collective security to prevent another world war. He knew he could not succeed without the cooperation of the other key leaders, Stalin and Churchill. During 1944 and 1945, the “Big Three” met to hammer out the shape of the postwar world, not realizing how quickly the Grand Alliance would fall apart in the face of these issues.

\[a. \text{The Holocaust}\]

As early as 1933, Hitler had begun planning a “final solution” to the “Jewish problem.” Eventually 6 million Jews and millions of other “inferior” races and groups—Slavs, Gypsies and homosexuals—were sent to labor and extermination camps, while millions of civilians died under Nazi occupation. Although a few newspapers and magazines reported on the growing Holocaust, the government made little mention of it, and by 1943 most Americans did not believe Hitler was systematically murdering Jews. When leaders of the American Jewish community petitioned FDR for action, he refused, arguing that the best way the Jews was to liberate all of Europe from the Nazis. Although a War Refugees Board was established in 1944 to overcome State Department resistance to Jewish immigration, Roosevelt still refused to take any direct action to aid civilians, such as bombing rail lines leading to death camps. The extent of Nazi crimes was only revealed when Allied troops began liberating the camps finding starving inmates, heaps of corpses, and smoking crematoria. By April 1945, Americans began to know what they had been fighting against, but it came far to late to stop it.

\[b. \text{The Yalta Conference}\]

Reelected to a fourth term in 1944 over Dewey, an exhausted and ill FDR faced the end of the war, characteristically failing to take new Vice President Harry Truman into his confidence. The 1941 Atlantic Charter stated noble objectives for the world after the defeat of fascism: national self-determination, no territorial aggrandizement, equal economic opportunities for all peoples, freedom of the seas, disarmament, and “freedom from fear and want.” But neither Stalin nor Churchill seemed committed to its principles. In February 1945, Roosevelt held his last meeting with them at Yalta on the Black Sea.
Seeking cooperation, the president recognized postwar peace depended on compromise. Neither the United States nor Great Britain resisted a Soviet occupation of the Baltic states and part of Poland as a buffer against future German aggression. The controversial issue was the Soviet entry into the Pacific war, which Roosevelt believed necessary for a timely Allied victory. After driving a hard bargain involving rights to territory in China, Stalin agreed to declare war against Japan within two or three months of Germany’s surrender.

Roosevelt announced to Congress that the Yalta meeting had been a “great success,” proof that the wartime alliance remained intact but privately doubted postwar cooperation. When Roosevelt died of a massive stroke on April 12, 1945 peaceful solutions to global problems cooperation among the Allied nations promised to become much more difficult.

MHL document: Big Three at Yalta at www.myhistorylab.com

c. The Atomic Bomb

President Truman had none of FDR’s experience, finesse, and prestige. At Potsdam, in July 1945, Truman met with Stalin and new British Prime Minister Clement Atlee to address a range of thorny and divisive issues on which the Allies found little consensus. At Potsdam, Truman learned of a successful atomic bomb test in New Mexico on July 16, 1945, the fruits of a program about which he had known nothing before becoming president. Although Truman secured Stalin’s promise to join the war against Japan by August 15, he also authorized atomic attacks that would make Russian forces unnecessary. On August 6, 1945, a single bomb dropped from Enola Gay, a B-29, destroyed Hiroshima and killed 140,000 or more people. When Japan refused to surrender, a second bomb devastated Nagasaki on August 9, and Japan capitulated on August 14. Although Truman never admitted any doubts or qualms about using the bomb and insisted it was a purely military decision aimed at ending the war, others have questioned the morality of atomic attacks. And the use of the bomb was in part intended to intimidate the Soviets and establish a U.S. postwar dominance.

VIII. CONCLUSION

World War II was made incomparably more deadly than earlier wars by new weapons and tactics, leading to massive military and civilian deaths. Although America suffered about a million casualties, by comparison with Soviet losses and a worldwide toll of 40 to 50 million, the United States came out of the war relatively unscathed. The war mobilized almost all Americans, reinforced federal government power and forced the United States into world leadership. With peace and prosperity after the war, Americans, many living in new communities, looked forward with confidence and optimism into what would prove to be an uncertain future.
Learning Objectives:

Students should be able to answer the following questions after studying Chapter 25:

1. What steps did Roosevelt take in the late 1930s to prepare the United States for war?
2. How did the government marshal the nation’s resources to fight the war?
3. What major changes occurred in American society as a consequence of wartime mobilization?
4. What role did women play in the armed forces during World War II?
5. What were the main elements of the Allied war strategy?
6. What were the factors behind the decision to deploy the atomic bomb against Japan?

Discussion Suggestions and Possible Answers

1. What were the reasons that during the 1930s so many Americans strongly opposed playing an active role in foreign affairs?

   Answer: Many Americans believed that the country’s involvement in World War I had been the result of war profiteers and weapons manufacturers. Some Americans supported the anti-Semitism of the Nazis, while others wanted to avoid American entanglement in another overseas war, believing that involvement in World War I had been a mistake.

2. What were the Americans’ goals in WWII? Can you make a connection between those goals and the goals in WWI?

   Answer: In World War II, the United States sought to defeat Germany, Italy, and Japan, while they pursued many of the larger goals that President Wilson had promoted after World War I, including national self-determination, free trade, and open economic and diplomatic relationships.

3. Most Americans believe that the United States won the war with a little help from the Soviets. Most Russians believe the opposite. Which side is closer to the truth? Can you anticipate that these differences of opinion could lead to problems after the war?

   Answer: The United States could not have won the war in Europe without the assistance of the Soviet Union. The Soviets suffered immensely greater casualties than did the United States, and their success in stopping the Nazis at Stalingrad, leading to the loss or capture of a major German Army, was crucial to the Allied Victory. Americans were more focused on the efforts of American forces in North Africa, Italy, and then the D-Day invasion in France. It is not surprising that the Soviets were eager to avoid another bloody conflict with Germany, desiring a buffer of satellite states on its western border, while Americans criticized the expansion of communism.
4. In what ways did women and minorities benefit from their WWII experience? Can you anticipate how this would lead to problems after the war?

**Answer:** Women entered the workforce in massive numbers as men left factories to join the military. Industry propaganda compared factory labor to the domestic chores women had responsibility for in the home. No one, however, expected women to remain in the workforce once the war ended. Many other women joined the military auxiliaries, serving as nurses, in clerical and communication positions, and in some noncombat flight missions. African Americans promoted the “Double-V” campaign, victory over fascism abroad and racism at home. African Americans took advantage of new opportunities in industry as well as the military. President Roosevelt’s Executive Order 8802 barred discrimination in defense industries. One million black Americans served in the armed forces during World War II, but they endured segregation, poor equipment, and the taunts of white officers. Despite this, military service proved to be a vital training ground for future civil rights activists.

5. Why were Japanese Americans singled out for special treatment? Why not German or Italian Americans?

**Answer:** Japanese Americans were suspected of loyalty to the enemy rather than the United States. They were barred from coastal areas, had their property seized and eventually faced internment in camps in the interior of America. Although a few German and Italian Americans were similarly interned, racial animosity against the Japanese dictated the stronger measures taken against them, which have been called the greatest violation of civil liberties in American history.

6. Harry Truman claimed that dropping the bomb saved half a million lives. Do you buy his explanation?

**Answer:** President Truman sincerely believed that using the atomic bomb against Japan would eliminate the need for an American invasion of the Japanese home islands, which was likely to result in heavy American and Japanese casualties. He has been criticized, however, for continuing to insist upon unconditional surrender, which was eventually dropped when the United States allowed the Japanese Emperor to remain, albeit in a ceremonial position. In addition, many believe that Truman also wanted to use the atomic bomb in order to intimidate the Soviet Union, already on their way to becoming America’s global rival.

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**Lecture Outline**

American Communities: Los Alamos, New Mexico

The Coming of World War II
   - Shadows of War Across the Globe: Europe and Asia
   - Roosevelt Readies for War
   - Pearl Harbor
The Great Arsenal of Democracy
  Mobilizing for War
  Organizing the War Economy
  New Workers: Women and Minorities

The Home Front
  Families in Wartime
  The Internment of Japanese Americans
  “Double V”: Victory at Home and Abroad for African Americans
  Zoot Suit Riots
  Popular Culture and “The Good War”

Men and Women in Uniform
  Creating the Armed Forces: The Draft and Conscientious Objectors
  Women in the Military
  African Americans and Segregated Service
  The Medical Corps

The World at War
  Soviet Union Stops the Nazis at Stalingrad
  Allied Offensive in North Africa and Italy
  D-Day: The Invasion of Normandy
  The High Cost of Victory
  The War in Asia and the Pacific: Naval Warfare and Island Hopping

The Last Stages of the War
  The Nazi Holocaust
  Failed Efforts to Call Attention to Genocide
  Atlantic Charter and the Yalta Conference
  Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb

Resources (Web, Films/Video)

Films/Video
The War (900 minutes). PBS Video, 2007. Epic documentary by Ken Burns that shows the impact of the war on the entire nation by studying four American communities in great depth.

Saving Private Ryan (169 minutes). Dreamworks Video, 1999. Steven Spielberg’s account of the invasion of Normandy creates a visually overpowering account of the horror of war.


Zoot Suit Riots (55 minutes). PBS Video, 2002. Account of the zoot suit riots of Los Angeles during World War II. The program highlights a variety of themes including teenage rebellion, tensions between immigrant groups, World War II and the history of Mexicans in the United States.

My History Lab Connections

Reinforce what you learned in this chapter by studying the many documents, images, maps, review tools, and videos available at www.myhistorylab.com.

Read and Review

Read the Documents
Franklin Roosevelt, Date Which Will Live in Infamy (1941)
Executive Order 9066 (1942)
A. Philip Randolph, Why Should We March (1942)

See the Maps
World War II, European Theater
World War II, Pacific Theater

See the Images
Nazi Book Bonfire
Women Riveters in Navy Shipyard
Big Three at Yalta

See the Videos
American Entry into WWII

Research and Explore

Read the Documents
Exploring America: Propaganda
Whose History Is It?: Exhibiting the Enola Gay

Read the Biographies
Douglas MacArthur
A. Philip Randolph
Critical Thinking Exercises

The ranks of World War II survivors are thinning, but it should be possible to find enough of them to conduct interviews similar to those described for Chapter 24. Students might look at Studs Terkel’s *The Good War* for some insight into how ordinary men and women saw things. They should focus on examining how the war shaped people’s lives, whether in uniform or at home, and how the war affected their communities.