

OVERVIEW OF WORLD WAR II: UNITED STATES, 1941-1945

U.S. Entry into World War II

- United States declared war against Japan after Japanese attack on **Pearl Harbor** on December 7, 1941; Pearl Harbor was a complete surprise and the first attack by a foreign power on American soil since the War of 1812; only pacifist Jeanette Rankin of Montana opposed U.S. entry into war ; Germany declared war on U.S.

- In spite of 1930s Neutrality Acts Congress authorized arms sales to Britain on a “cash and carry” basis and the nation’s first peacetime draft in 1940; Congress passed the **Lend-Lease Act** in 1941 funneling billions of dollars worth of arms to Britain, China, and the Soviet Union; FDR froze Japanese assets in U.S., halted virtually all trade, including oil sales to Japan in summer 1941

War in the Pacific

-In early 1942 Japan conquered Burma (now Myanmar), Siam (Thailand), and Dutch East Indies (Indonesia); it occupied Guam, the Philippines, and other Pacific islands. Japan already occupied substantial portions of French Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia)

-**Bataan** (Philippines)--largest surrender in U.S. military history: 78,000 American and Filipino troops captured and thousands perished on “death march” to POW camp, and thousands more died of disease and starvation in camp

- Battle of **Coral Sea**, May 1942: U.S. navy turned back Japanese fleet en route to Australia

- Battle of **Midway Island**, June 1942: U.S. inflicted devastating losses on Japanese navy

- U.S. started to drive Japanese back west and regained fortified islands like **Guadalcanal** (7 Japanese troopships were sunk) and the Solomons (10,000 U.S. sailors died versus 30,000 Japanese)

War in Europe

- In spite of joint British-American invasion of **North Africa** in November 1942, major involvement of American troops in Europe not until D-Day (June 6, 1944); until end of 1944 more American military personnel deployed in Pacific than against Germany

- **D-Day**: close to 200,000 American, British, and Canadian soldiers landed in Normandy under General Dwight D. Eisenhower; more than a million troops followed, greatest amphibious invasion in history nearly failed—100,000 American casualties in first month

Home Front

- **Government Mobilization**: creation of new federal agencies such as War Production Board; number of federal workers rose from 1 to 4 million; as country turned from peacetime to wartime production; by 1944 U.S. produced a ship every day and a plane every five minutes; before the war only 4 million wealthiest Americans paid income taxes, by 1945 over 40 million did

- **Business**: federal spending supported economic concentration, by the end of the war the 200 biggest industrial companies accounted for almost half of all corporate assets; military-industrial complex on West Coast; southern per capita income rose from 60% to 70% of national average

- **Labor:** unions became junior partners of business and government, union membership by 1945 reached 15 million, highest level thus far, “no-strike” pledge during war

- war remembered as “**Good War,**” a time of national unity and a fight for noble goals; FDR proclaimed Four Freedoms in his State of the Union Address on January 6, 1941: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear; in spite of rationing of items like coffee, meat, and gasoline, more consumer goods available in 1944 than in 1941

-**Office of War Information:** created in 1942 but curtailed by Congress because it promoted New Deal social programs and not just war effort; business advertised a fifth freedom, “free enterprise”

- Women: “**Rosie the Riveter**”—a female industrial laborer, depicted as muscular and self-reliant by Norman Rockwell; by 1944 women made up over one-third of civilian labor force, and 350,000 served in auxiliary military units (15 million men in armed forces); married women outnumbered young and single women workers

- “**Economic Bill of Rights**” (1944): FDR sought to expand the power of the government to secure full employment, adequate income, medical care, education, and decent homes for all Americans: “True individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.” Congress did not support it, but enacted the **GI Bill** instead: by 1946, over 1 million veterans attended college (half the total college enrollments) and 4 million would receive home mortgages—one of the most far-reaching pieces of social legislation in American history

- “**Patriotic Assimilation**”: government fostered pluralist vision of American society in Second World War, as opposed to forced Americanization in World War I

-**Mexican-Americans:** Even though 400,000 Mexican-Americans had been “voluntarily” repatriated during Depression, tens of thousands of contract laborers came to U.S. under bracero program (lasted until 1964). “Zoot suit” riots in L.A. (1943): sailors and policemen attacked Mexican-American youths wearing flamboyant clothing

- **Asian-Americans:** more than 50,000 Asian-Americans fought in the army (immigrant children from China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines); Congress ended the exclusion of Chinese immigration in 1943 (although annual quota only set at 105)

- **Japanese-Americans:** while many Americans perceived the war against Germany as an ideological struggle, they viewed the war in the Pacific as **race war**. Long-standing prejudice and the shock of Pearl Harbor created an unprecedented hatred of Japan. Government propaganda and war films portrayed the Japanese as bestial and subhuman. Every person of Japanese descent was viewed as potential spy (in contrast, only a few German-Americans and Italian-Americans were arrested during the war)

-**Japanese-American Internments:** In his Executive Order 9066 of February 1942 FDR ordered the expulsion of all persons of Japanese descent from the West Coast; without public protests 110,000 men, women, and children (two-third of them American citizens) were moved to internment camps. In *Korematsu v. United States*, the Supreme Court upheld legality of internments in 1944. The *Korematsu* decision was never overturned and thus “lies about like a loaded weapon” to be used again, warned dissenting Justice Robert H. Jackson. 20,000 Japanese-Americans joined the armed forces from the camps, while 200 were sent to prison for resisting the draft. In 1988, Congress apologized for the internments and compensated each surviving victim with \$20,000.

-**Blacks:** 700,000 black migrants moved to cities in North and West; 34 killed in Detroit race riot of 1943; lynching continued; over 1 million blacks served in armed forces, even though they served in segregated units. At the beginning of the war, no blacks in air force and marines, only five black officers in army, and only black waiters and cooks in navy.

- **Civil Rights Movement:** A. Philip Randolph, black labor leader, called for March on Washington in July 1941; in response, FDR banned discrimination in defense jobs (Executive Order 8802) and established a Fair Employment Practices Commission to monitor compliance.

- **Double-V:** phrase in 1942 Pittsburgh Courier, victory over Germany and Japan must be accompanied by victory over segregation at home; NAACP membership grew from 50,000 to 500,000 during war; Congress of Racial Equality (an interracial group of pacifists) held sit-ins to integrate restaurants and theaters in northern cities; The Crisis insisted that a segregated army “cannot fight for a free world.”

- by 1945, the left-liberal agenda included **racial justice** alongside full-employment, civil liberties, and New Deal welfare state; Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal published “An American Dilemma” in 1944 analyzing the conflict between American values and American racial policies

End of World War II

- Oct. 1944: **General MacArthur** invaded Philippines; 100,000 Filipino civilians died in battle for capital of Manila

- Battle of the **Bulge**, Dec. 1944: largest single battle ever fought by U.S. Army with 70,000 -100,000 American casualties

- **Iwo Jim** and **Okinawa** in 1945: among the war’s most costly battles; Americans lost 12,000 men on Okinawa to kill 80,000 Japanese

- **V-E Day:** May 8, 1945: Victory in Europe

- **Manhattan Project:** top-secret program to develop atomic bomb; bomb was successfully tested in New Mexico in July 1945 during Potsdam Conference

- U.S. dropped atomic bomb on **Hiroshima** on August 6, 1945, and on **Nagasaki** on August 9, 1945, killing 140,000 instantly; Soviet Union declared war on Japan, and invaded Manchuria; Japan surrendered within one week

- U.S. firebombing of **Tokyo** in March 1945 had killed 100,000 people

-**Enola Gay Controversy:** Truman later claimed atomic bomb saved the lives of half a million Americans, while reports at the time estimated the Japanese invasion to cost up to 50,000 American lives; the Hiroshima bomb killed 80,000 and injured 120,000 from radiation effects; Nagasaki bomb killed 65,000 immediately; thousands more died in bombing of Japanese cities between August 10-14

Planning the Postwar World

- August 1941: FDR and Churchill issued **Atlantic Charter**; it promised that “the final destruction of Nazi tyranny” would be followed by open access to markets, self-determination, and a global extension of the New Deal so people everywhere would enjoy “improved labor standards, economic advancement and social security;” it referred specifically to FDR’s freedom from want and freedom from fear; Stalin added a reservation that made his initial acceptance of the document meaningless.

- Allied leaders met several times to discuss plans for postwar world:

1943: **Teheran**, Iran; Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin: Second Front set for early 1944; defeated Germany should be dismembered; Churchill offered eastern part of Poland to Soviets

1945: **Yalta**, Soviet Union; Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin: Stalin agreed to enter war against Japan after defeat of Hitler in Europe; FDR and Churchill mildly protest Stalin’s plans to keep Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; Soviets signed a watered-down version of the Declaration of Liberated Europe (only “mutual

consultations were needed before an occupying power governed liberated countries); Republicans later claimed that FDR sold out China at Yalta; Stalin requested 20 billion in reparations from Germany 1945: **Potsdam**, Germany: Stalin, Truman, and Churchill (Clement Attlee): Allies established military government for Germany and placed top Nazi leaders on trial for war crimes; dismemberment of Germany went forward

-Tensions among Allies:

--**Combined Chiefs of Staff** in D.C.: British and U.S. officers jointly made broad strategic decisions; Soviets not included, because Stalin did not want to join war against Japan

--**Second Front**: Churchill pushed FDR to delay Allied invasion of France for two years, Soviets had to do the bulk of fighting against Germans; to reassure Soviets FDR and Churchill called for “unconditional surrender” of Germany and Japan during their summit talks at Casablanca in 1943

--**North Africa**: FDR pushed Churchill to work with pro-Nazi Vichy French commander, Admiral Jean Darlan, while Churchill sought alliance with Charles de Gaulle, anti-Nazi leader of Free France; Darlan did not deliver and FDR’s “Vichy gamble” turned into his “Vichy fumble.”

--Stalin promised “free elections” in **Poland** even though he was set to establish communism in Eastern Europe (“whoever occupies a territory also imposes his own social system,” said Stalin)

--Anglo-American forces liberated **Italy** in 1943 and refused to collaborate with Soviets on occupation policies

--FDR pressured Churchill to grant independence to **India and other British colonies** and to dismantle the British Imperial Preference trading system; Churchill opposed FDR’s efforts to build up **China** as U.S. junior partner

--Churchill angered FDR by concluding private deals with Stalin dividing southeastern and eastern Europe into British and Soviet spheres of influence: the British would control **Greece** and the Soviets would control **Romania**

--British resented 1944 **Bretton Woods** agreements that replaced the British pound with the dollar as main international currency; the Bretton Woods meeting also established the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

--1944 **Morgenthau Plan** to de-industrialize Germany after the war: Churchill reluctantly went along with it after U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, offered the British a \$6.5 billion postwar credit; FDR then disavowed the Morgenthau Plan and admitted that he had “pulled a boner” at Quebec

--**Manhattan Project**: a joint Anglo-American project, excluded Soviets

- **United Nations**: June 1945: 51 countries adopted UN Charter in San Francisco; it outlawed force or threat of force as a means of settling international disputes; U.S. endorsed UN Charter in July 1945; U.S., Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, and China served as five permanent members of security council and had veto power

Sources:

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