

in the military during the war, including 350,000 women. To defeat Japanese imperialism and German and Italian fascism, the United States mobilized all of its economic resources. The massive government spending required to wage total war boosted industrial production and wrenched the economy out of the Great Depression.

Four years after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States and its allies emerged victorious in the costliest and most destructive war in history. Cities were destroyed, nations dismembered, and societies transformed. More than 50 million people were killed in the war between 1939 and 1945—perhaps 60 percent of them civilians, including millions of Jews and other ethnic minorities in Nazi death camps and Soviet concentration camps.

The global scope and scale of the Second World War ended America's tradition of isolationism. By 1945, the United States was the world's most powerful nation, with new international interests and global responsibilities. The war left power vacuums in Europe and Asia that the Soviet Union and the United States sought to fill to protect their military, economic, and political interests. Instead of bringing peace, the end of the war led to a "cold war" between the two former allies. As the *New Yorker* magazine asked, "If you do not know that your country is now entangled beyond recall with the rest of the world, what do you know?"

## THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE

In 1917, Woodrow Wilson had led the United States into the First World War to make the world "safe for democracy." In fact, though, democracy was in retreat after 1919, while Soviet communism was on the march. So, too, was **fascism**, a radical form of totalitarian government in which a dictator uses propaganda and brute force to seize control of all aspects of national life—the economy, the armed forces, the legal and educational systems, and the press. Fascism in Germany and Italy thrived on a violent ultranationalist patriotism and almost hysterical emotionalism built upon claims of racial superiority and the simmering resentments that grew out of defeat in the First World War.

At the same time, halfway around the world, the Japanese government fell under the control of expansionists eager to conquer China and most of Asia. Japanese leaders were convinced that they were a "master race" with a "mission" to lead a resurgent Asia, just as Adolf Hitler claimed that Germany's "mission," as home of the supposedly superior "Aryan" race, was to dominate Europe. By 1941, there would be only a dozen or so democratic nations left on earth.

**ITALY AND GERMANY** In 1922, former journalist Benito Mussolini and 40,000 of his black-shirted supporters seized control of Italy, taking advantage of a paralyzed political system incapable of dealing with widespread unemployment, runaway inflation, mass strikes, and fears of communism. By 1925, Mussolini was wielding dictatorial power as "Il Duce" (the Leader). He called his version of antisocialist totalitarian nationalism *fascism*. All political parties except the Fascists were eliminated, and several political opponents were murdered. There was something darkly comical about the strutting, chest-thumping Mussolini, who claimed that "my animal instincts are always right."

There was nothing amusing, however, about Mussolini's German counterpart, the Austrian-born Adolf Hitler. Hitler's remarkable transformation during the 1920s from social misfit to head of the National Socialist German Workers' (Nazi) party startled the world. Hitler and the Nazis claimed that they represented a German ("Aryan") master race whose "purity and strength" were threatened by liberals, Jews, socialists, Communists, homosexuals, Gypsies, and other "inferior" peoples. Hitler promised to make Germany strong again by renouncing the Versailles Treaty, defying the limits on its armed forces, and uniting the German-speaking people of Europe into a Greater German Empire that would give the nation "living space" to expand, dominate "lesser" races, and rid the continent of Jews.

Hitler portrayed himself as Germany's savior from the humiliation of having lost the Great War and the widespread suffering caused by the Great Depression. Appointed chancellor on January 30, 1933, five weeks before Franklin Roosevelt was first inaugurated, Hitler, like Mussolini, was idolized by the masses of voters. He declared himself absolute leader, or *Führer*, became president in 1934 and supreme commander of the armed forces, banned all



**Fascist propaganda** Benito Mussolini's headquarters in Rome's Palazzo Braschi, which bore an oversized reproduction of his head.



**Adolf Hitler** Hitler performs the Nazi salute at a rally. The giant banners, triumphant music, powerful oratory, and expansive military parades were all designed to stir excitement and allegiance among Nazis.

political parties except the Nazis, created a secret police force known as the *Gestapo*, and stripped people of voting rights. There would be no more elections, labor unions, or strikes.

During the mid-1930s, Hitler's brutal Nazi police state cranked up the engines of tyranny and terrorism, propaganda and censorship. Two million brown-shirted, brawling thugs, called "storm troopers," fanned out across the nation, burning books and persecuting, imprisoning, and murdering Communists, Jews, Gypsies—and their sympathizers.

**THE EXPANDING AXIS** As the 1930s unfolded, a catastrophic series of events in Asia and Europe sent the world hurtling toward disaster. In 1931–1932, some 10,000 Japanese troops had occupied Manchuria in north-east China, a territory rich in raw materials and deposits of iron ore and coal. At the time, China was fragmented by civil war between Communists led by Mao Zedong and Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek. The Japanese took advantage of China's weakness to proclaim Manchuria's independence, renaming it the "Republic of Manchukuo." In 1934, Japan began an aggressive military buildup in anticipation of conquering all of east Asia.

The next year, Mussolini launched Italy's reconquest of Ethiopia, a weak nation in eastern Africa that Italy had controlled until 1896. When the League of Nations branded Mussolini an aggressor and imposed economic sanctions on Italy, the racist Italian leader expressed surprise that European leaders would prefer a "horde of barbarian Negroes" in Ethiopia over Italy, the "mother of civilization."

In 1935, Hitler, in flagrant violation of the Versailles Treaty, began rebuilding Germany's armed forces. The next year, he sent 35,000 soldiers into the Rhineland, the demilitarized buffer zone between France and Germany. In a staged vote, 99 percent of the Germans living in the Rhineland approved Hitler's action. The failure of France and Great Britain to enforce the Versailles Treaty convinced Hitler that the western democracies were cowards and would not try to stop him from achieving his goal of German dominance.

The year 1936 also witnessed the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, which began when Spanish troops loyal to General Francisco Franco, with the support of the Roman Catholic Church, revolted against the fragile new republican government. Hitler and Mussolini rushed troops ("volunteers"), warplanes, and military and financial aid to support Franco's fascist insurgency.

While peace in Europe was unraveling, the Japanese government fell under the control of aggressive militarists. In 1937, a government official announced that the "tide has turned against the liberalism and democracy that once swept over the nation." On July 7, 1937, Japanese and Chinese soldiers clashed at China's Marco Polo Bridge, near Beijing. The incident quickly escalated into a full-scale conflict, the Sino-Japanese War.

By December, the Japanese had captured the Nationalist Chinese capital of Nanjing, whereupon the undisciplined soldiers ran amok, looting the city and mercilessly murdering and raping civilians. As many as 300,000 Chinese were murdered in what came to be called the Rape of Nanjing. Thereafter, the Sino-Japanese War bogged down into a stalemate.

## FROM ISOLATIONISM TO INTERVENTION

Most Americans responded to the mounting crises abroad by deepening their commitment to isolationism. In his 1933 inaugural address, President Roosevelt announced that he would continue to promote what he called "the good neighbor policy" in the Western Hemisphere, declaring that no nation "has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another." True to his word, Roosevelt withdrew U.S. troops from Nicaragua and Haiti.

The nation's deeply rooted isolationist mood was reinforced by a prominent Senate inquiry into the role of bankers and businesses in the



**Neutrality** A 1938 cartoon shows U.S. foreign policy entangled by the serpent of isolationism.

American decision to enter World War I. Chaired by Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota, the “Nye Committee” began hearings in 1934 that lasted until early 1936. The committee concluded that weapons makers and bankers (the “merchants of death”) had spurred U.S. intervention in the European conflict in 1917 and were continuing to “help frighten nations into military activity.”

**U.S. NEUTRALITY** In 1935, *Christian Century* magazine declared that “ninety-nine Americans out of a hundred would today regard as an imbecile anyone who might suggest that, in the event of another European war, the United States should again participate in it.” Such widespread isolationism led President Roosevelt to sign the first of several “**neutrality laws**” passed by Congress to help avoid the supposed mistakes that had led the nation into the First World War. The Neutrality Act of 1935 prohibited Americans from selling weapons or traveling on ships owned by nations at war. In 1936, Congress revised the Neutrality Act by banning loans to warring nations.

Roosevelt, however, was not so sure that the United States could or should remain neutral. In October 1937, he delivered a speech in Chicago, the heart-

land of isolationism, in which he called for international cooperation to “quarantine the aggressors” who were responsible for disturbing world peace. But his appeal fell flat.

The Neutrality Act of 1937 allowed Roosevelt to require that nonmilitary American goods bought by warring nations be sold on a cash-and-carry basis—that is, a nation would have to pay cash and then carry the American-made goods away in its own ships. This was intended to preserve America’s profitable trade with warring nations without running the risk of being drawn into the fighting.

**THE AXIS ALLIANCE** In 1937, Japan joined Germany and Italy in establishing the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo “**Axis**” alliance. Hitler and Mussolini vowed to create a “new order in Europe,” while the Japanese imperialists pursued their “divine right” to control all of east Asia by creating what they called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.

**ANSCHLUSS** In March 1938, Hitler forced the *Anschluss* (union) of Austria with Germany. Hitler’s triumphant return to his native country was greeted by pro-German crowds waving Nazi flags and tossing flowers. Soon, “Jews not Wanted” signs appeared in Austrian cities.

A month later, after arresting more than 70,000 opponents of the Nazis, German leaders announced that a remarkable 99.75 percent of Austrian voters had “approved” the forced annexation. (In fact, some 400,000 Austrians, mostly liberals and Jews, were prevented from voting.) Again, no nation stepped up to oppose Hitler, and soon the Nazi government in Austria began arresting or murdering opponents and imprisoning or exiling Jews, including the famed psychiatrist Sigmund Freud.

**THE MUNICH PACT (1938)** Hitler then threatened to annex the Sudeten territory (Sudetenland), a mountainous region in western Czechoslovakia along the German border where more than 3 million ethnic Germans lived. British and French leaders repeatedly tried to “appease” Hitler, hoping that if they agreed to his demands for the Sudeten territory he would stop his aggressions.

On September 30, 1938, the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, and the French prime minister, Édouard Daladier, joined Mussolini and Hitler in signing the notorious Munich Pact, which transferred the Sudetenland to Germany. In Prague, the capital, the Czechs listened to the official announcement of the Munich Pact with the excruciating sadness of people too weak to preserve their own independence. As pawns in the chess game of European politics, the

Czech people now faced a grim future. A disgusted President Roosevelt privately grumbled that Britain and France had left Czechoslovakia “to paddle its own canoe” and predicted that they would “wash the blood from their Judas Iscariot hands.” Hitler, he had decided, was a “wild man,” a “nut” with an insatiable desire for a new German empire.

Chamberlain claimed that the Munich treaty had provided “peace for our time. Peace with honor.” Winston Churchill, a member of the British Parliament who would become prime minister in May 1940, strongly disagreed. In a speech to the House of Commons, he claimed that “England has been offered a choice between war and shame. She has chosen shame, and will get war.” The Munich Pact, he predicted, would not end Hitler’s assaults. “This is only the beginning of the reckoning.”

Churchill was right. Hitler had already confided to aides that he had no intention of abiding by the Munich Pact. Although Hitler had promised that the Sudetenland would be his last territorial demand, he scrapped his pledge in March 1939, when he sent German tanks and soldiers to conquer the remainder of the Czech Republic. The European democracies, having shrunk their armies after the Great War, continued to cower in the face of his ruthless behavior and seemingly unstoppable military.

After German troops seized Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939, Hitler announced it was “the greatest day of my life.” Jews were immediately lumped together with “thieves, criminals, swindlers, insane people, and alcoholics.” By the end of May, the Nazis were filling prisons with Czechs who resisted or resented the German occupation.

The rape of Czechoslovakia convinced Roosevelt that Hitler and Mussolini were “madmen” who “respect force and force alone.” Throughout late 1938 and 1939, Roosevelt tried to convince Americans, as well as British and French leaders, that the fascists would respond only to force, not words. He also persuaded Congress to increase military spending in anticipation of a possible war.

**THE CONQUEST OF POLAND** Later in 1939, the insatiable Hitler, having decided that he had “the world in my pocket,” turned to Poland, Germany’s eastern neighbor. Conquering Poland would give the German army a clear path to invade the Soviet Union, especially the fertile Ukraine region.

To ensure that the Soviets did not interfere with his plans, Hitler camouflaged his virulent anticommunism on August 23, 1939, when he signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact with Josef Stalin, the antifascist Soviet premier. The announcement of the treaty stunned a world that had understood fascism and communism to be enemies. The two tyrants agreed to divide

and a portion of Lithuania. Just nine days later, at dawn on September 1, an estimated 1.5 million German troops invaded Poland from the north, south, and west. Hitler ordered them “to kill without mercy men, women, and children of the Polish race or language.” He also ordered all terminally ill patients in German hospitals killed to make room for soldiers wounded in Poland.

This was the final straw for the western democracies. Having allowed Austria and Czechoslovakia to be seized by Hitler’s war machine, Great Britain and France now did an about-face. On September 3, they honored their commitment to defend Poland. Europe, the world’s smallest continent, was again embroiled in what would soon become another world war. The nations making up the British Empire and Commonwealth—Canada, India, Australia, New Zealand—joined the war. Americans watched in horror as

another world war erupted. “This nation,” declared Franklin Roosevelt, “will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well. Even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or conscience.”

Sixteen days after German troops stormed across the Polish border, the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east. Pressed from all sides, 700,000 poorly equipped Polish soldiers surrendered after a few weeks, having suffered 70,000 deaths and many more wounded. On October 6, 1939, the Nazis and Soviets divided Poland between them. Hitler’s goal was to obliterate Polish civilization, especially the Jews, and Germanize the country. For his part, Stalin wanted to recapture Polish territory lost during the First World War. Over the next five years, millions of Poles were arrested, deported, enslaved, or murdered. In April and May 1940, the Russians executed some 22,000 Polish military officers to ensure that its conquered neighbor would never mount a rebellion.

In late November 1939, the Soviets invaded neighboring Finland, leading President Roosevelt to condemn their “wanton disregard for law.” Outnumbered five to one, Finnish troops held off the invaders for three months before being



**Josef Stalin** Brutal leader of the Soviet Union who rose to power in the mid-1920s after the death of Vladimir Lenin.

**REVISING THE NEUTRALITY ACT** In September 1939, President Roosevelt decided that the United States must do more to stop “aggressor” nations. He summoned Congress into special session to revise the Neutrality Act. “I regret that Congress passed the Act,” the president said. “I regret equally that I signed the Act.”

After six weeks of heated debate, Congress passed the Neutrality Act of 1939, which allowed Britain and France to send their ships to the United States to bring back American military supplies. Public opinion supported such measures as long as other nations did the actual fighting.

**WAR IN EUROPE** The war in Europe settled into a three-month stalemate during early 1940, as Hitler’s generals waited out the winter. Then, in the early spring, Germany attacked again. At dawn on April 9, Nazi armies occupied Denmark and landed along the Norwegian coast. German paratroopers, the first ever used in warfare, seized Norway’s airports. Denmark fell in a day, Norway within a few weeks. On May 10, German forces invaded the Low Countries—Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands (Holland). Luxembourg fell the first day, the Netherlands three days later. Belgium lasted until May 28.

A few days later, German tanks roared into northern France. “The fight beginning today,” Hitler declared, “decides the fate of the German nation for the next thousand years!” His brilliant *Blitzkrieg* (“lightning war”) strategy centered on speed. Fast-moving columns of tanks, motorized artillery, and truck-borne infantry, all supported by warplanes and paratroopers, moved so fast that they paralyzed their stunned opponents.

British and French troops sent to help the Belgians were forced to make a frantic retreat to the English Channel coast, with the Germans in hot pursuit. On May 26, while German *Panzer* divisions (made up of tanks and other armored vehicles) followed Hitler’s surprising order to rest and refuel, Great Britain was able to organize a weeklong evacuation of British and French soldiers from the beaches at Dunkirk, on the northern French coast near the border with Belgium. Despite attacks from German warplanes, some 338,000 defeated and demoralized soldiers escaped to England, leaving behind vast stockpiles of vehicles, weaponry, and ammunition. “Wars are not won by evacuations,” observed Prime Minister Churchill, “but there was a victory inside this deliverance.”

While the evacuation was unfolding, German forces decimated the remaining French armies. Tens of thousands of panicked French refugees clogged the roads to Paris. The crumbling French war effort prompted Italy’s dictator, Mussolini, to

posed into Paris. Eight days later, French leaders surrendered, whereupon the Germans established a puppet fascist government in the city of Vichy.

The rapid fall of France stunned the world. In the United States, complacency about the Nazis turned to fear and even panic as people realized the Germans could eventually assault America. The Second World War was but ten months old, yet Germany ruled most of western Europe. Only the “neutral” nations of Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland had avoided the Nazi onslaught. Great Britain now stood alone against Hitler’s relentless military power. “The war is won,” an ecstatic Hitler bragged to Mussolini. “The rest is only a matter of time.”

### AGGRESSION IN EUROPE, 1935–1939



- Keeping in mind the terms of the Treaty of Versailles ending the First World War, explain why Hitler began his campaign of expansion by invading the Rhineland and the Sudetenland.
- Why did the German attack on Poland begin the Second World War, whereas Hitler's previous invasions of Austria and Czechoslovakia did not?

**PREPARING AMERICA FOR WAR** As Hitler's armies conquered Europe, the United States found itself in no condition to wage war. After the First World War, the U.S. Army was reduced to a small force; by 1939, it numbered only 175,000. By contrast, Germany had almost 5 million soldiers. In promoting "military preparedness," President Roosevelt in May 1940 called for increasing the size of the army and producing 50,000 combat planes in 1942, a seemingly outlandish goal, since Germany was producing only 15,000 warplanes that year.

Roosevelt also responded to Winston Churchill's repeated requests for assistance by increasing military shipments to Great Britain and promising to provide all possible "aid to the Allies short of war." Churchill was focused on one strategic objective: to convince, coax, bluff, charm, seduce, or frighten the United States into entering the war.

**THE MANHATTAN PROJECT** Adding to Roosevelt's concerns was the possibility that Germany might have a secret weapon. The famous physicist Albert Einstein, a Jewish Austrian refugee from Nazism, had alerted Roosevelt in the fall of 1939 that the Germans were trying to create atomic bombs. In June 1940, Roosevelt set up the National Defense Research Committee to coordinate military research, including a top-secret effort to develop an atomic bomb—the Manhattan Project—before the Germans did. Almost 200,000 people worked on the Manhattan Project, including Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, who led the team of distinguished scientists scattered among thirty-seven secret facilities in thirteen states.

**THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN** Having conquered western Europe, Hitler began planning the invasion of Great Britain ("Operation Sea Lion"), scheduled for September 1940. The late summer brought the Battle of Britain, as the Germans first sought to destroy Britain's Royal Air Force (RAF). The Nazis deployed some 2,500 warplanes,



**Winston Churchill** Prime Minister of Great Britain who led the nation during the Second World War.

outnumbering the RAF two to one. "Never has a nation been so naked before its foes," Churchill admitted.

Churchill became the symbol of Britain's determination to stop Hitler. With his bulldog face, ever-present cigar, and "V for Victory" gesture, he urged the British citizenry to make the war "their finest hour." He breathed defiance while preparing for a German invasion, building fortifications, laying mines, digging trenches and fashioning tank traps, and mobilizing the population. The British, he pledged, would confront Hitler's invaders with "blood, toil, tears, and sweat." They would "never surrender."

In July and August, 1940, the German air force (*Luftwaffe*) launched day and night bombing raids against military targets across southeast England. The pilots in the Royal Air Force (their average age was twenty-three), with the benefit of radar, a secret new technology, fended off the German assault, ultimately destroying 1,700 German warplanes. Hitler then ordered his bombers to target civilians and cities (especially London) in night raids designed to terrorize British civilians. In what came to be called "the Blitz" during September and October of 1940, the Germans caused massive damage in Britain's major cities, destroying a million homes and killing 40,000 civilians. "The last three



**The London "Blitz"** An aerial photograph of London set aflame by German bombing raids in 1940. Winston Churchill responded, "We shall never surrender."

nights in London,” reported the U.S. ambassador to Great Britain on September 10, “have been simply hell.”

The Blitz, however, enraged rather than demoralized the British people. A London newspaper headline summarized the nation’s courage and defiant mood: “Is That the Best You Can Do, Adolf?” The British success in the air proved decisive, for in October 1940, Hitler gave up his invasion plans. It was the first battle he had lost, and it was Britain’s finest hour.

**“ALL AID SHORT OF WAR”** During 1940, Franklin Roosevelt began a crucial campaign to convince Americans that isolationism was impractical and even dangerous. His phrase, all “aid short of war,” became the label for his efforts to help Great Britain. The president was especially concerned about a likely German invasion of the British Isles. “It is now most urgent,” Prime Minister Churchill cabled Roosevelt, “that you let us have the destroyers” needed to stop such an invasion. “This is a thing to do now!”

To address the challenge, Roosevelt and Churchill, whose mother was an American, negotiated a trade on September 2, 1940, called the Destroyers for Bases Agreement, by which fifty old U.S. warships went to the British Royal Navy in return for allowing the United States to build military bases on British island colonies in the Caribbean.

Two weeks later, on September 16, 1940, Roosevelt pushed through a reluctant Congress the first peacetime conscription (military draft) in American history. The Selective Training and Service Act required all 16 million men ages twenty-one to thirty-five to register for the draft at one of 6,500 local draft boards. (The minimum age was later reduced to eighteen.)

**A SAVAGE DEBATE** The world crisis transformed Roosevelt. Having been stalemated for much of his second term by congressional opposition to the New Deal, he was revitalized by the need to stop Nazism. Yet his efforts to aid Great Britain and prepare America for war outraged isolationists. A prominent Democrat remembered that the dispute between isolationists and so-called interventionists was “the most savage political debate during my lifetime.”

Isolationists, mostly midwestern and western Republicans, formed the America First Committee to oppose “military preparedness.” Charles Lindbergh, the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic ocean, led the isolationist effort. To Lindbergh, Roosevelt’s efforts to help Britain were driven primarily by Jews who owned “our motion pictures, our press, our radio, and our government.” Lindbergh assured Americans that Britain was doomed; they should join hands with Hitler.

**ROOSEVELT’S THIRD TERM** The isolationists sought to make the 1940 presidential campaign a debate about the war. In June, just as France was falling to Germany, the Republicans nominated Wendell L. Willkie of Indiana, a plainspoken corporate lawyer and former Democrat who had voted for Roosevelt in 1932.

Once the campaign started, Willkie warned that Roosevelt was a “war-monger” and predicted that “if you re-elect him you may expect war in April, 1941.” Roosevelt responded that he had “said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars.” In November 1940, Roosevelt won an unprecedented third term by 27 million votes to Willkie’s 22 million and by an even more decisive margin, 449 to 82, in the electoral college. Winston Churchill wrote Roosevelt that he had “prayed for your success and I am truly thankful for it.”

**THE LEND-LEASE ACT** Once reelected, Roosevelt found an ingenious way to provide more military aid to Britain, whose cash was running out. The



**Lend-lease** Members of the isolationist “Mother’s Crusade,” urging defeat of the lend-lease program, kneel in prayer in front of the Capitol in Washington, D.C. They feared the program aiding America’s allies would bring the United States into the wars in Europe and Asia.

**Lend-Lease Act**, introduced in Congress on January 10, 1941, allowed the president to lend or lease military equipment to “any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States.” It was a bold challenge to the isolationists. As Senator Hiram Johnson of California claimed, “This bill is war.”

Roosevelt responded to critics by arguing that “no nation can appease the Nazis. No man can turn a tiger into a kitten by stroking it.” The United States, he added, would provide everything the British needed while doing the same for China in its war against Japan, all in an effort to keep Americans from going to war themselves. “We must again be the great arsenal of democracy,” Roosevelt explained. Churchill shored up the president’s efforts by announcing that Britain did not need American troops to defeat Hitler: “Give us the tools and we will finish the job.” In early March, 1941, Congress approved the Lend-Lease Act. “Let not the dictators of Europe or Asia doubt our unanimity now,” Roosevelt declared.

Between 1941 and 1945, the Lend-Lease program would ship \$50 billion worth of supplies to Great Britain, the Soviet Union, France, China, and other Allied nations. The Lend-Lease Act was Roosevelt’s most emphatic effort to move America from isolationism to interventionism and it gave a huge boost to British morale. Churchill called it the most generous “act in the history of any nation.”

**GERMANY INVADES THE SOVIET UNION** While Americans continued to debate Roosevelt’s efforts to help Great Britain, the European war expanded. In the spring of 1941, German troops joined Italian soldiers in Libya, forcing the British army in North Africa to withdraw to Egypt. In April 1941, Nazi forces overwhelmed Yugoslavia and Greece. With Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria also part of the Axis, Hitler controlled nearly all of Europe. But his ambition was unbounded.

On June 22, 1941, without warning, Hitler launched “Operation Barbarossa,” a shocking invasion of the Soviet Union, his supposed ally. Hitler’s objective in turning on Stalin was his long-standing obsession to destroy communism, enslave the vast population of the Soviet Union, open up new lands for German settlement, and exploit Russia’s considerable natural resources.

Hitler’s foolhardy decision was the defining moment of the European war. The 3 million German soldiers sent to the Soviet Union would eventually be worn down and thrown back. At first, however, the invasion seemed a great success, as the German armies raced across the vast plains of Ukraine and western Russia. Entire Soviet armies and cities were surrounded and destroyed. During the second half of 1941, an estimated 3 million Soviet soldiers, 50 percent of

the Soviet army, were captured. For four months, the Soviets retreated in the face of the German blitzkrieg.

During the summer of 1941, German forces surrounded Leningrad, now called St. Petersburg, and began a siege of the city. As weeks passed, food and supplies became scarce. Hunger alone would kill 800,000 people. Desperate people ate cats, dogs, rats, and even sawdust. As the bitterly cold winter set in, corpses were left to freeze in the snow. Still, the soldiers and civilians held out. Leningrad became known as the city that refused to die. By December, 1941, other German armies had reached the suburbs of Moscow, a thousand miles east of Berlin.

To American isolationists, Germany’s invasion of Russia confirmed that America should stay out of the war and let two dreadful dictatorships bleed each other to death. Roosevelt, however, insisted on including the Soviet Union in the Lend-Lease agreement; he and Churchill were determined to keep the Russians fighting Hitler so that Hitler could not concentrate on Great Britain.

Gradually, Stalin slowed the Nazi advance by forcing the Russian people to fight—or be killed by their own troops. During the Battle of Moscow, Soviet defenders showed their pitiless resolve by executing 8,000 civilians charged with “cowardice.”

Slowly, the tide started to turn against the Germans. By the winter of 1941–1942, Hitler’s generals were learning the same bitter lesson that the Russians had taught Napoléon and the French in 1812. Invading armies must contend not only with Russia’s ferocious fighters and enormous population but also vast distances, deep snow, and subzero temperatures.

**THE ATLANTIC CHARTER** By the late summer of 1941, the United States was no longer a “neutral” nation. In August, Roosevelt and Churchill drew up a joint statement of “common principles” known as the **Atlantic Charter**. The agreement pledged that after the “final destruction of the Nazi tyranny,” the victors would promote certain common values: the self-determination of all peoples, economic cooperation, freedom of the seas, and a new system of international security to be called the United Nations. Within weeks, eleven anti-Axis nations, including the Soviet Union, had endorsed the Atlantic Charter.

**WAR IN THE ATLANTIC** No sooner had Roosevelt signed the Atlantic Charter than U.S. warships came under fire. On September 4, 1941, the *Greer* was tracking a German submarine (“U-boat”) off the coast of Iceland and sharing the information with British warplanes when it was attacked. Roosevelt seized the opportunity to tell Americans that the ship was the victim of an unprovoked attack. In response, he essentially began an undeclared war in the Atlantic by ordering naval warships to provide protection for convoys all the way to Iceland, allowing them to “shoot on sight” any German submarines.

## WORLD WAR II MILITARY ALLIANCES, 1942



- What was the Atlantic Charter?
- Compare and contrast the political/military alliances in the First World War with those in the Second World War.
- How were the German armies able to seize most of Europe so quickly?

Six weeks later, on October 17, 1941, a German U-boat sank the American warship *Kearny*. Eleven sailors were killed. “The shooting has started,” Roosevelt reported, “and history has recorded who fired the first shot.” Two weeks later, the destroyer *Reuben James* was torpedoed and sunk while escorting a convoy near Iceland, with a loss of 115 seamen.

The sinkings spurred Congress to change the 1939 Neutrality Act by allowing merchant vessels to be armed and to enter combat zones and the ports of nations at war (“belligerents”). Step by step, the United States had begun to engage in naval warfare against Nazi Germany. Still, Americans hoped to avoid all-out war.

## THE STORM IN THE PACIFIC

In 1940, Japan and the United States had begun a series of moves that pushed them closer to war. Convinced that they were Asia’s “leading race,” the Japanese had forced the helpless Vichy French government, under German control, to permit the construction of Japanese airfields in French-controlled Indochina (now Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam). The United States responded with the Export Control Act of July 2, 1940, which authorized President Roosevelt to restrict the export of military supplies and other strategic materials crucial to Japan. Three weeks later, on July 26, Roosevelt ordered that all Japanese assets in the United States be frozen and that oil shipments be stopped.

**THE TRIPARTITE PACT** On September 27, 1940, the Imperial Japanese government signed a Tripartite Pact with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, by which each pledged to declare war on any nation that attacked any of them. Roosevelt called the pact an “unholy alliance” designed to “dominate and enslave the entire human race.” Several weeks later, the United States expanded its trade embargo against Japan to include iron ore, copper, and brass, deliberately leaving oil as the remaining bargaining chip.

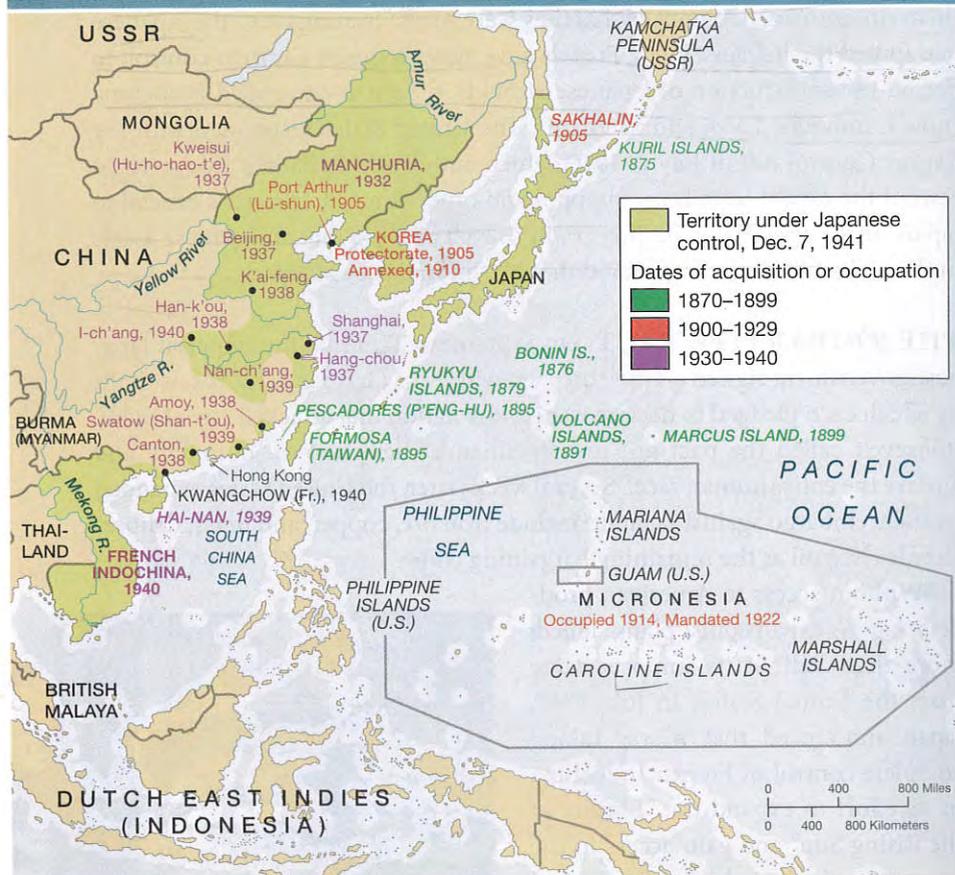
Without access to American products, Japan’s expansionist plans stalled; more than half of its imports came from the United States. In July 1941, Japan announced that it was taking complete control of French Indochina in its effort to expand the “Empire of the Rising Sun” and gain access to the raw materials denied it by the United States. Roosevelt responded by restricting oil exports to Japan. He also closed the Panama Canal to Japanese shipping and merged the Filipino army with the U.S. Army. *Time* magazine claimed that Roosevelt was “waging the first great undeclared war in U.S. history.”

**THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR** On October 16, 1941, Hideki Tōjō became the Japanese prime minister. Viewing war with the United States as inevitable, he ordered



**Hideki Tōjō** Prime minister and war minister of Japan simultaneously until 1944, one year before Japan’s unconditional surrender.

## JAPANESE EXPANSION BEFORE THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR



- Why did the Japanese want to control French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies?
- Why did Japan sign the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy?

a powerful fleet of Japanese warships to prepare for a secret attack on the U.S. bases in Hawaii. The Japanese naval commander, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, knew that his country could not defeat the United States in a long war; its only hope was “to decide the fate of the war on the very first day” by launching a “fatal attack” on the U.S. Navy.

On November 5, 1941, the Japanese asked the Roosevelt administration to end its embargo or “face conflict.” The American secretary of state, Cordell Hull, responded on November 26 that Japan must remove its troops from China



**Explosion of the USS Shaw** The destroyer exploded after being hit by Japanese warplanes at Pearl Harbor. The *Shaw* was repaired shortly thereafter and went on to earn eleven battle stars in the Pacific campaign.

before the United States would lift its embargo. The Japanese then ordered a fleet of warships to begin steaming toward Hawaii. By this time, political and military leaders on both sides considered war inevitable. Yet Hull continued to meet with Japanese diplomats in Washington, privately dismissing them as being as “crooked as a barrel of fish hooks.”

In late November, Roosevelt told his “war cabinet” that the United States or Great Britain was “likely to be attacked, perhaps next Monday.” He and others expected the Japanese to attack Singapore or the Philippines. The U.S. Navy Department sent an urgent message to its commanders in the Pacific: “Negotiations with Japan . . . have ceased, and an aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days.”

Roosevelt staked his desperate hope for a peaceful solution on a last-minute message to Japan’s Emperor Hirohito. “Both of us,” Roosevelt said, “have a sacred duty to restore traditional amity [cooperation] and prevent further death and destruction in the world.”

By the time Roosevelt's message arrived, Japanese warplanes were already headed for U.S. bases in Hawaii. In the early morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941, Japanese planes began bombing the unsuspecting U.S. fleet at **Pearl Harbor**. Of the eight American battleships, all were sunk or disabled, along with eleven other ships. Japanese bombers also destroyed 180 American warplanes. The raid, which lasted less than two hours, killed more than 2,400 American servicemen (mostly sailors) and civilians, and wounded nearly 1,200 more. At the same time that the Japanese were attacking Pearl Harbor, they were assaulting U.S. military facilities in the Philippines and on Guam and Wake islands in the Pacific, as well as British bases in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaya.

The surprise attack actually fell short of military success in two important ways. First, the bombers ignored the maintenance facilities and oil storage tanks that supported the U.S. fleet, without which the surviving ships might have been forced back to the West Coast. Second, the Japanese missed the U.S. aircraft carriers that had left port a few days earlier. In the naval war to come, aircraft carriers, not battleships, would prove to be decisive.

In a larger sense, the attack on Pearl Harbor was a spectacular miscalculation, for it brought the American isolationist movement to an abrupt end. Even the Japanese admiral who planned the attack had misgivings amid his officers' celebrations: "I fear that we have only succeeded in awakening a sleeping tiger."

At half past noon on December 8, President Roosevelt delivered his war message to Congress: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan." He asked Congress to declare a "state of war." The Senate approved the resolution twenty-five minutes after Roosevelt finished speaking; the House followed immediately thereafter.

Three days later, on December 11, Germany and Italy declared war on what Hitler called the "half Judaized and the other half Negrified" United States. After learning of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hitler shouted that "it is impossible for us to lose the war." The separate wars in Asia, Europe, and Africa had now become one global conflict. Roosevelt told the American people in a radio address that "it will not only be a long war. It will be a hard war." Yet he assured everyone that "we are going to win, and we are going to win the peace that follows."

## ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY

Waging war against Germany and Japan required all of America's immense industrial capacity. On December 18, 1941, Congress passed the War Powers Act, which gave the president far-reaching authority to reorganize government

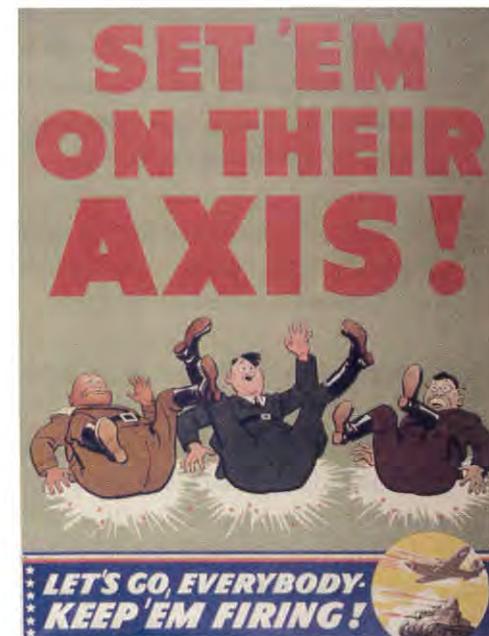
agencies and create new ones, regulate business and industry, and even censor mail and other forms of communication. With the declaration of war, men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five were drafted.

Some 16 million men and several hundred thousand women served in the military during the war. The average American soldier or sailor in the Second World War was twenty-six years old, stood five feet eight, and weighed 144 pounds, an inch taller and eight pounds heavier than the typical recruit in the First World War. Only one in ten had attended college and only one in four had graduated from high school.

In 1940, Adolf Hitler had scoffed at the idea that the United States could produce 50,000 warplanes a year, claiming that America was nothing but "beauty queens, millionaires, and Hollywood." His ignorance of America's industrial potential proved fatal. By the end of 1942, U.S. war production had already exceeded the *combined* output of Germany, Japan, and Italy. At an Allied planning conference in Iran in 1943, Josef Stalin raised a glass to toast "American production, without which this war would have been lost."

The **War Production Board**, created by Roosevelt in 1942, directed the conversion of industries to war production. In 1941, more than 3 million automobiles were manufactured in the United States; only 139 were built during the next four years, as automobile plants began making huge numbers of tanks, jeeps, trucks, and warplanes. "Something is happening that Hitler doesn't understand," announced *Time* magazine in 1942. "It is the Miracle of production."

In making the United States the "great arsenal of democracy," the Roosevelt administration transformed the nation's economy into the world's most efficient military machine. By 1945, the year the war ended, the United States would be manufacturing half of the goods produced in the world. American factories, many running twenty-four hours a day, seven



**War Production Board** This 1942 poster features caricatures of Mussolini, Hitler, and Tōjō, who—according to the poster—will fall on their "axis" if Americans continued their relentless production of military equipment.

days a week, produced 300,000 warplanes, 89,000 tanks, 3 million machine guns, and 7 million rifles.

**FINANCING THE WAR** To cover the war's huge cost (more than \$3 trillion in today's values), Congress passed the Revenue Act of 1942 (also called the Victory Tax). Whereas in 1939 only about 4 million people (about 5 percent of the workforce) filed tax returns, the new act made most workers taxpayers. By the end of the war, 90 percent of workers were paying income tax. Tax revenues covered about 45 percent of military costs from 1939 to 1946; the government borrowed the rest, mostly through a massive promotional campaign that sold \$185 billion worth of government war bonds, which paid interest to purchasers. By the end of the war, the national debt was six times what it had been at the start.

The size of the federal government soared during the war. More than a dozen new federal agencies were created, and the number of civilian federal workers quadrupled from 1 million to 4 million. Jobs were suddenly plentiful as millions quit work to join the military. The nation's unemployment rate plummeted from 14 percent in 1940 to 2 percent in 1943.

People who had long lived on the margins of the economic system, especially women, were now brought into the labor force. Stubborn pockets of poverty did not disappear, but for most civilians, especially those who had lost their jobs and homes in the Depression, the war spelled a better life. Some 24 million Americans moved during the war to take advantage of new job opportunities. Many headed to the West Coast, where shipyards and airplane factories were hiring nonstop.

**ECONOMIC CONTROLS** The need for the United States not only to equip and feed its own military forces but also provide massive amounts of food, clothing, and weapons to its allies created shortages of virtually all consumer goods that caused sharp price increases. In 1942, Congress responded by authorizing the Office of Price Administration to set price ceilings. With prices frozen, basic goods had to be allocated through rationing, with coupons doled out for limited amounts of sugar, coffee, gasoline, automobile tires, and meat.

The government promoted patriotic conservation by urging every family to become a "fighting unit on the home front." Posters featured slogans such as "Save Your Stuff to Make Us Tough," "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without," and "Save Your Scraps to Beat the Japs." People collected scrap metal and tin foil, rubber, and cardboard for military use. Households were even encouraged to save cooking fat, from which glycerin could be extracted to make explosives.

Businesses and workers often grumbled about the wage and price controls, and on occasion the government seized industries threatened by strikes. Despite these problems, the effort to stabilize wages and prices succeeded. By the end of the war, consumer prices had risen about 31 percent, far better than the rise of 62 percent during the First World War.

**A CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH** For all of the patriotism inspired by the war effort, criticism of government actions such as rationing increased with each passing year. In the 1942 congressional elections, Republicans gained forty-six seats in the House and nine in the Senate. During the 1940s, a coalition of conservatives from both parties dismantled "nonessential" New Deal agencies such as the Work Projects Administration (originally the Works Progress Administration), the National Youth Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Organized labor, despite substantial gains in membership and power during the war, felt the impact of the conservative trend. In the spring of 1943, when 400,000 coal miners went on strike demanding a \$2-a-day wage increase, conservatives in Congress passed, over Roosevelt's veto, the Smith-Connally War Labor Disputes Act, which authorized the government to seize plants and mines and keep them operating if workers went on strike.

## THE WAR AT HOME

The Second World War transformed life at home as it was being fought abroad. Housewives went to work as welders and riveters, and farmers joined industrial unions. Some 3.5 million rural folk from the South left farms for cities. The federal government paid for a national day-care program for young children to enable their mothers to work full-time. The dramatic changes required by the war also caused unexpected changes in many areas of social life, the impact of which would last long after the war's end.

**WOMEN IN THE WAR** The war marked a watershed in the status of women. During the war, nearly 350,000 women served in the **Women's Army Corps (WAC)**, the navy's equivalent, Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), the Marine Corps, the Coast Guard, and the Army Air Force.

With millions of men going into military service, the demand for civilian workers shook up old prejudices about gender roles. Sidney Hillman, appointed by Roosevelt to find workers for defense plants, announced that "war is calling on the women of America for production skills." More than 8 million women entered the civilian workforce. To help recruit women for



**Women of the workforce, 1942** At the Douglas Aircraft Company in Long Beach, California, three women assemble the tail section of a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bomber.

traditionally male jobs, the government launched a promotional campaign featuring the story of “Rosie the Riveter,” a woman named Rosina Bonavita, who excelled as a riveter at an airplane factory.

Many men opposed the surge of women taking traditionally male jobs. A disgruntled male legislator asked who would handle traditional household tasks if women flocked to factories: “Who will do the cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself; who will rear and nurture the children?” Many women, however, were eager to escape the grinding routines of domestic life and earn good wages. A female welder remembered that her wartime job “was the first time I had a chance to get out of the kitchen and work in industry and make a few bucks. This was something I had never dreamed would happen.”

**AFRICAN AMERICANS** While President Roosevelt focused on military strategy, his wife Eleanor focused on organizing the home front. She insisted that the government’s wartime partnership with business not neglect the needs

of workers, argued that America could not fight racism abroad while tolerating it at home, and championed the mass influx of women into the once-male work force during the war.

More than a half million African Americans left the South for better opportunities during the war years, and more than a million blacks nationwide joined the industrial workforce for the first time. Lured by jobs and higher wages in military-related plants and factories, African Americans from Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana headed west, where the dramatic expansion of defense-related jobs had significant effects on the region’s population. During the war years, the number of African Americans rose sharply in western cities such as Seattle, Portland, and Los Angeles.

At the same time, the war provided a boon to southern textile mills by requiring millions of military uniforms. Manufacturing jobs led thousands of



**Bigotry at home** During the Detroit Riots of 1943, police officers do nothing when a white thug hits a black man.



**Tuskegee Airmen** The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African American military pilots. Here, the first graduates are reviewed at Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1941.

“dirt poor” sharecroppers and tenant farmers, many of them African Americans, to leave the land for steady work in new mills and factories. Sixty of the 100 army camps created during the war were in southern states, further transforming local economies. During the war, the U.S. rural population decreased by 20 percent.

**RACIAL TENSION AT HOME** The most volatile social issue ignited by the war was African American participation in the military. Although the armed forces were still racially segregated in 1941, African Americans rushed to enlist after the attack on Pearl Harbor. As African American Joe Louis, the world heavyweight boxing champion, put it, “Lots of things [are] wrong with America, but Hitler ain’t going to fix them.” Altogether, about a million African Americans—men and women—served in the armed forces during

Black soldiers and sailors, assigned to racially segregated units, were initially excluded from combat units. They loaded ships, drove trucks, dug latrines, and handled supplies and mail. Black officers could not command white soldiers or sailors. Henry L. Stimson, the secretary of war, claimed that “leadership is not embedded in the negro race.” Military bases had segregated facilities—and experienced frequent racial “incidents.”

In late 1944, however, the need for more troops led the government to revisit its racial policies. Under pressure from the African American community as well as Eleanor Roosevelt, General Dwight Eisenhower, commander of the U.S. forces in Europe, agreed to let black volunteers fight in fifty-two all-black fifty-man platoons commanded by white officers. A black officer said the decision was “the greatest” for African Americans “since enactment of the constitutional amendments following the Civil War.”

The black soldiers earned the reputation of being fierce fighters. The same was true of some 600 African American pilots trained in Tuskegee, Alabama. The so-called **Tuskegee Airmen** flew more than 15,000 missions, and their unquestionable excellence spurred military and civilian leaders to desegregate the armed forces after the war. At war’s end, however, the U.S. Army reimposed segregation. It would be several more years before the military was truly integrated.

**MEXICAN AMERICANS** As rural dwellers moved west, many farm counties experienced a labor shortage. In an ironic about-face, local and federal authorities who before the war had forced migrant laborers back across the Mexican border now recruited them to harvest crops on American farms. The Mexican government would not consent to provide the laborers, however, until the United States promised to ensure them decent working and living conditions. The result was the creation of the **bracero program** in 1942, whereby Mexico agreed to provide seasonal farmworkers on year-long contracts. Under the bracero program, some 200,000 Mexican farmworkers entered the western United States, mostly packed in cattle cars on trains. At least that many more crossed the border as undocumented workers.

The rising tide of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles prompted a stream of anti-Mexican editorials and ugly racial incidents. Even though some 300,000 Mexican Americans served in the war and earned a higher percentage of Congressional Medals of Honor than any other minority group, racial prejudices still prevailed. In southern California, there was constant conflict between white servicemen and Mexican American gang members and teenage “zoot-suiters.” (Zoot suits were flamboyant clothing worn by some young Mexican American men.) In 1943, several thousand off-duty sailors and soldiers, joined



**Off to court** Latinos dressed in zoot suits are loaded onto a Los Angeles County Sheriff's bus for a court appearance in June 1943.

by hundreds of local whites, rampaged through Los Angeles, assaulting Hispanics, African Americans, and Filipinos. The weeklong violence came to be called the “Zoot Suit Riots.”

**NATIVE AMERICANS IN THE MILITARY** Indians supported the war effort more fully than any other group in American society. Almost a third of eligible Native American men served in the armed forces. Many others worked in defense-related industries, and thousands of Indian women volunteered as nurses or joined the WAVES. As was the case with African Americans, Indians benefited from the experiences afforded by the war by gaining vocational skills and a greater awareness of how to succeed within mainstream society.

Why did so many Native Americans fight for a nation that had stripped them of their land and ravaged their heritage? Some felt that they had no choice. Mobilization for the war effort ended many New Deal programs that had provided Indians with jobs. At the same time, many viewed the Nazis and Japanese warlords as threats to their own homeland. Whatever their motivations, Indians distinguished themselves in the military. Unlike their African American counterparts, Indian servicemen were integrated into regular units with whites. Perhaps their most distinctive role was serving as “code talkers”: every military branch used Indians, especially Navajos, to encode and decipher messages using Indian languages unknown to the Germans and Japanese.



**Navajo code talkers** The complex Navajo language made it impossible for the Germans and Japanese to decode American messages. Here, a code talker relays messages for U.S. marines in the Battle of Bougainville in the South Pacific in 1943.

**DISCRIMINATION AGAINST JAPANESE AMERICANS** The attack on Pearl Harbor ignited a hunger for vengeance against the nisei—people of Japanese descent living in the United States. Many Americans saw no difference between the Japanese who attacked Pearl Harbor and Japanese Americans. As Idaho’s governor declared, “A good solution to the Jap problem would be to send them all back to Japan, then sink the island.”

Such hysteria helps explain why the U.S. government sponsored one of the worst violations of civil liberties during the twentieth century, when more than 120,000 nisei were forcibly removed from their homes and transported to ten “war relocation camps.” Forced to sell their farms and businesses at great loss within forty-eight hours, ordered to bring with them only what they could carry, the internees were sent by train and bus to ten barbed-wire enclosed internment camps scattered across remote areas in the western states. They lost not only their property but also their liberty.

President Roosevelt initiated the relocation when he issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, authorizing the forcible removal of all

ethnic Japanese living on the Pacific coast. It was perhaps his worst decision as president. Roosevelt called his action a “military necessity” although not a single incident of espionage involving Japanese Americans was proved. As it turned out, more than 70 percent of those affected were U.S. citizens.

On Evacuation Day, Burt Wilson, a white schoolboy in Sacramento, California, was baffled as soldiers ushered the nisei children out of his school:

We wondered what had happened. They took somebody out of eighth grade, a boy named Sammy, who drew wonderful cartoons. He was my friend, and one day he was there and the next day he was gone. And that was very difficult for us to understand because we didn't see Sammy or any Japanese American—at least I didn't—as the enemy.

Few if any nisei were disloyal. In fact, 39,000 Japanese Americans served in the armed forces during the war, and others worked as interpreters and translators. But all were victims of fear and racial prejudice. Not until 1983 did the government acknowledge the injustice of the internment policy. Five years later,



**A farewell to civil rights** American troops escorted Japanese Americans by gunpoint to remote internment camps, some of which were horse-racing tracks, whose stables served as housing.

it granted those nisei still living \$20,000 each in compensation, a tiny amount relative to what they had lost during four years of confinement.

## THE ALLIED DRIVE TOWARD BERLIN

By mid-1942, the “home front” was hearing good news from Europe. U.S. naval forces had been increasingly successful at destroying German U-boats off the Atlantic coast. Up to that point, German submarines had sunk hundreds of Allied cargo vessels, killing 2,500 sailors. Stopping the submarine attacks was important because the Grand Alliance—Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union—called for the defeat of Germany first. Defeating the Japanese could wait.

## WAR AIMS AND STRATEGY

A major consideration for Allied military strategy was the fighting on the vast Eastern Front in the Soviet Union. During 1941–1942, the Nazis and Soviets waged colossal battles. The Soviet population—by far—bore the brunt of the war against the Nazis, leading Josef Stalin to insist that the Americans and British relieve the pressure on his troops by attacking the Germans in western Europe, thereby forcing Hitler to pull units away from the Russian Front.

Meanwhile, with most of the German army deployed on the Russian Front, the British and American air forces, flying from bases in England, would bomb military and industrial targets in German-occupied western Europe, and especially in Germany itself, while American and British generals prepared plans to attack Nazi troops in North Africa, Italy, and France.

Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill agreed that they needed to create a second front in western Europe, but they could not agree on the timing or location of an invasion. U.S. military planners wanted to attack the Germans in France before the end of 1942. The British, however, were wary of moving too fast. An Allied defeat on the French coast, Churchill warned, was “the only way in which we could possibly lose this war.” Finally, Roosevelt decided to accept Churchill's compromise proposal for a joint Anglo-American invasion of North Africa, which was occupied by German and Italian armies not nearly as strong as those in Europe.

**THE NORTH AFRICA CAMPAIGN** On November 8, 1942, British and American forces landed in Morocco and Algeria on the North African

coast (“Operation Torch”). They were led by an untested, little-known U.S. general, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Farther east, British armies were pushing the Germans and Italians back across Libya.

The Americans lost badly in early battles. In early 1943, however, Eisenhower, soon known by his nickname, “Ike,” found an audacious field commander in General George Patton, who said he loved war “more than my life.” Armed with ivory-handled pistols and brimming with bravado, Patton showed American troops how to fight a war of speed and daring. Corporal Morris Zimmerman, a soldier fighting under Patton, wrote his mother from North Africa, “This is your son reporting from the land of Arabs and wine, sticky flies and red sand. I have always wanted to cross an ocean to see what was on the other side and darned if I didn’t.”

Hammered from all sides and unable to retreat, some 250,000 Germans and Italians surrendered on May 12, 1943, leaving all of North Africa in Allied control. The “continent had been redeemed,” said Winston Churchill. Ernie Pyle, a war correspondent embedded with the American army, reported that



**Major General George S. Patton** Patton commanded the U.S. invasion of Sicily, the largest amphibious action in the war up to that point. He believed that war “brings out all that is best in men.”

the U.S. troops “fought like veterans. They were well handled. We had enough of what we needed. Everything meshed perfectly, and the end was inevitable. . . . Tunisia has been a good warm-up field for our armies.” But, he added, “the worst was yet to come.”

**THE CASABLANCA CONFERENCE** Five months earlier, in January 1943, Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Anglo-American military chiefs met at a seaside resort near Casablanca, the largest city in French Morocco. It was a historic occasion. No U.S. president had ever flown abroad while in office, and none had ever visited Africa. Stalin chose to stay in the Soviet Union, but he sent a message which again urged the Allies to invade Nazi-controlled western Europe to relieve the pressure on the Russians.

At the Casablanca conference, the British convinced the Americans that they should follow up the anticipated victory in North Africa with an assault on the Italian island of Sicily before attacking Italy itself. Roosevelt and Churchill also decided to step up the bombing of Germany and to increase shipments of military supplies to the Soviet Union and the Nationalist Chinese forces fighting the Japanese.

Before leaving the Casablanca conference, Roosevelt announced, with Churchill’s blessing, that the war would end only with the “unconditional surrender” of all enemy nations. This decision was designed to quiet Soviet suspicions that the Americans and British might negotiate separately with Hitler to end the war in western Europe. The announcement also reflected Roosevelt’s determination that “every person in Germany should realize that this time Germany is a defeated nation.” Whatever its impact on Soviet morale or enemy resistance, however, the decision to require unconditional surrender ensured the destruction of Germany and Japan that would create power vacuums along the western and eastern borders of the Soviet Union.

**THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC** While fighting raged in North Africa, the Battle of the Atlantic reached its climax. Great Britain desperately needed more food and military supplies from the United States, but German submarines operating in groups called “wolfpacks” were sinking the British vessels transporting American goods faster than British shipyards could replace them. There could be no invasion of German-occupied France until the U-boat menace was defeated. By July 1942, some 230 Allied ships and almost 5 million tons of war supplies had been lost. “The only thing that ever frightened me during the war,” recalled Churchill, “was the U-boat peril.”

By the end of 1942, however, the British and Americans had discovered ways to defeat the U-boats. British experts cracked the German naval radio

codes, enabling Allied convoys to steer clear of U-boats or to hunt them down with long-range warplanes (called “subchasers”) and anti-submarine weapons deployed on warships. New technology also helped, as sonar and radar allowed Allied ships to track submarines. Yet the best tactic against U-boats was to group cargo vessels into tightly bunched convoys so that warships could protect them more effectively. In May 1943, the Allies destroyed forty-one U-boats. Thereafter, the U-boats were on the defensive, and Allied shipping losses fell significantly.

**SICILY AND ITALY** On July 10, 1943, following the Allied victory in North Africa, about 250,000 British and American troops landed on the coast of Sicily. General Eisenhower called it the “first page of the liberation of the European continent.” The island was in Allied hands by August 17, bringing to an end Benito Mussolini’s twenty years of fascist rule in Italy.

On July 25, 1943, the Italian king had dismissed Mussolini as prime minister and had him arrested. The new Italian government startled the Allies when it offered not only to surrender but also to switch sides. To prevent them from doing so, Hitler sent German armies into Italy.

The Italian campaign thereafter became a series of stalemated battles that left people wondering if it had been worth the cost. Winter came early to southern Italy, making life even more miserable for the soldiers. The Germans positioned themselves behind formidable defenses and rugged terrain that enabled them to slow the Allied advance to a crawl. “Italy was one hill after another,” said a U.S. soldier, “and when it was wet, you were either going up too slow or down too fast, but always the mud. And every hill had a German [machine] gun on it.” Allied casualties soared as the stalemate continued.

By February 1944, the two sides were, in the words of U.S. commander Mark W. Clark, like “two boxers in the ring, both about to collapse.” Mussolini, plucked from prison by a daring German airborne commando raid, became head of a puppet fascist government in northern Italy as Allied forces finally took control of the rest of the country. On June 4, 1944, the U.S. Fifth Army entered Rome, just two days before D-day on the coast of France. “We were woken by trucks moving through the street,” one overjoyed Italian remembered. “At first I thought it was the Germans, but then I heard American accents. . . . By dawn people were lining the streets. I cried.”

**THE TEHRAN CONFERENCE** Late in the fall of 1943, in Tehran, Iran, Churchill and Roosevelt had their first joint meeting with Josef Stalin. Their discussions focused on the planned invasion of Nazi-controlled France and a simultaneous Russian offensive westward across eastern Europe. The three

leaders agreed to create an international organization—the United Nations—to maintain peace after the war. Upon arriving back in the United States, Roosevelt confided to Churchill his distrust of Stalin, saying that it was a “ticklish” business keeping the “Russians cozy with us” because of the tension between communism and capitalism. As General Eisenhower stressed, however, the fate of Britain and the United States depended on the Soviets’ survival as an ally. “The prize we seek,” he said in 1942, “is to keep 8 million Russians [soldiers] in the war.”

**THE STRATEGIC BOMBING OF EUROPE** Months of preparation went into the long-anticipated Allied invasion of German-occupied France. While waiting for D-day (the day the invasion would begin), the U.S. Army Air Force tried to pound Germany into submission with an air campaign that dropped thousands of bombs and killed some 350,000 civilians. Yet the air offensive failed to shatter either German morale or war-related production. Many bombs missed their targets because of thick clouds, high winds, and inaccurate navigational systems, and many Allied planes were shot down. The bombing campaign, however, did force the Germans to commit precious resources to air-raid defense and eventually wore down their air force. With Allied air supremacy assured by 1944, the much-anticipated invasion of Hitler’s “Fortress Europe” could move forward.

**PLANNING AN INVASION** In early 1944, Dwight D. Eisenhower arrived in London with a new title: Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF) that would invade Nazi-controlled western Europe. Eisenhower faced enormous challenges, ranging from creating an effective command structure to handling disagreements between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill.

Eisenhower also faced the daunting task of planning **Operation Overlord**, the daring assault on Hitler’s “Atlantic Wall,” a formidable array of fortifications, mines, machine guns, barbed wire, and jagged beach obstacles along the French coastline. An attack by sea against heavily fortified defenders was the toughest of military operations. The planned invasion gave Churchill nightmares: “When I think of the beaches . . . choked with the flower of American and British youth . . . I see the tides running red with their blood. I have my doubts. I have my doubts.”

For months, Eisenhower, neither an experienced strategist nor a combat commander, dedicated himself to planning the risky invasion and managing the complex political and military rivalries among the Allied leaders. Well-organized and efficient, he was a high-energy perfectionist, impatient and



**General Dwight D. Eisenhower** Eisenhower visiting with U.S. paratroopers before they began the D-day assault in Operation Overlord.

often short-tempered with his staff. He attended to every detail, including the amassing of 5 million tons of military equipment and munitions and thousands of warplanes and ships.

As D-day approached, Eisenhower's chief of staff predicted only a fifty-fifty chance of success. The seaborne invasion was the greatest gamble and most complex military operation in history. "I am very uneasy about the whole operation," admitted Sir Alan Brooke, head of British forces. "It may well be the most ghastly disaster of the whole war." Eisenhower was so concerned that he carried in his wallet a note to be circulated if the Allies failed. It read: "If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt, it is mine alone."

**D-DAY AND AFTER** Operation Overlord succeeded in part because it surprised the Germans. The Allies made elaborate efforts—including the positioning of British decoy troops and making misleading public statements—to fool the Nazis into believing that the invasion would come at Pas-de-Calais, on the French-Belgian border, where the English Channel was narrowest. Instead, the landings would occur along fifty miles of shoreline in northern Normandy, a French coastal region almost 200 miles south.

On the blustery evening of June 5, 1944, Eisenhower visited some of the 16,000 American paratroopers preparing to drop behind the German lines in France. The soldiers, their faces blackened by burnt cork and heads shaved to resemble Indian warriors, noticed Eisenhower's concern and tried to lift his spirits. "Now quit worrying, General," one of them said, "we'll take care of this thing for you." A sergeant said, "We ain't worried. It's Hitler's turn to worry." After the planes took off, Eisenhower returned to his car with tears in his eyes. He later confided to an aide: "I hope to God I know what I'm doing." As he got into bed that night, Winston Churchill, with tears running down his cheeks, asked his wife: "Do you know that by the time you wake up in the morning, 20,000 men may have been killed?"

As the planes carrying the paratroopers arrived over France, thick clouds and German anti-aircraft fire disrupted the formations. Some soldiers were dropped miles from their landing sites, some were dropped far out at sea, and some were dropped so low that their parachutes never opened. Yet the U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions outfought three German divisions during the chaotic night and prepared the way for the main invasion by destroying bridges and capturing artillery positions and key road junctions.

Donald Burgett, a nineteen-year-old paratrooper in the 101st Airborne Division, recalled dropping into France in the dark of night and being alone: "My throat went dry and I swallowed, but nothing went down. My heart pounded, sending blood throbbing through my temples and causing a weak-feeling in the pit of my stomach." But he had no time for fear. As he stumbled upon others who had survived the landing, they soon found themselves embroiled in combat.

**THE NORMANDY LANDINGS** As the gray, misty light of dawn broke on D-day, June 6, 1944, the biggest invasion fleet in history—some 5,300 Allied ships carrying 370,000 soldiers and sailors—filled the horizon off the Normandy coast. Sleepy German soldiers guarding the beaches awoke to see the breathtaking array of ships. "I saw an armada like a plague of locusts," said a German officer. "The number of ships was uncountable."

Major battles often depend on luck. (When asked what kind of generals he preferred, Napoléon said "lucky ones.") Eisenhower was lucky on D-day, for the Germans misinterpreted the Normandy landings as a diversion for the "real" attack at Pas-de-Calais. It helped that the German commander, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, assuming that the weather was too rough for an invasion, had gone home to Germany to celebrate his wife's June 6 birthday. "How stupid of me," Rommel said when he heard the news. "How stupid of me!" By one in the afternoon, he was racing back to France.



**The landing at Normandy** D-Day, June 6, 1944. Before they could huddle under a seawall and begin to dislodge the Nazi defenders, U.S. soldiers on Omaha Beach had to cross a fifty-yard stretch that exposed them to machine guns housed in concrete bunkers.

When Hitler learned of the Allied landings, he boasted that “the news couldn’t be better. As long as they [the Allied armies] were in Britain, we couldn’t get at them. Now we have them where we can destroy them.” In the United States, word that the long-anticipated liberation of Nazi Europe had begun captured the nation’s attention. Businesses closed, church bells tolled, and traffic was stopped so that people could pray in the streets. Stalin cabled to Churchill and Roosevelt that the news brought “joy to us all.”

Resilience and creativity are crucial virtues amid the confusion of great battles (the “fog of war”), which rarely go according to plan. Despite Eisenhower’s meticulous preparations, the huge operation almost failed. During the first day, foul weather and rough seas caused injuries and nausea and capsized dozens of landing craft. More than 1,000 men, weighed down by seventy pounds of equipment, drowned as they stepped off landing craft into water up to their necks.

Some of the boxy, flat-bottomed landing craft delivered their often seasick troops to the wrong locations. “We have landed in the wrong place,” shouted fifty-six-year-old Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr. (son of the former president), who would receive the Medal of Honor for his courage that day. “But we will start the war from here.”

The noise was deafening as shells exploded across the beach and in the surf. The bodies of the killed, wounded, and drowned piled up amid wrench-

ing cries for help. “As our boat touched sand and the ramp went down,” Private Harry Parley remembered, “I became a visitor to Hell” as German gunners fired on the attacking soldiers.

The first U.S. units ashore at Omaha Beach, beneath 130-foot-tall cliffs defended by German machine guns and mortars, lost more than 90 percent of their men. In one company, 197 of the 205 men were killed or wounded within ten minutes. Officers struggled to rally the exhausted, bewildered troops pinned down on the beach. “Two kinds of men are staying on this beach,” shouted cigar-smoking Colonel George Taylor on Omaha Beach. “The dead and those who are going to die. Get up! Move in! Goddammit! Move in and die! Get the hell out of here!” He then began to run forward and his men followed, stumbling across the deadly beach into the dunes.

Inch by inch, backed by waves of reinforcements, the U.S. soldiers pushed across the beach and up the cliffs. By nightfall, 170,000 Allied soldiers—57,000 of them Americans—were scattered across fifty miles of windswept Normandy coastline. So too were the bodies of some 10,724 dead or wounded Allied soldiers.

On June 13, a week after the Normandy landings, Erwin Rommel, the German commander, told his wife that the “battle is not going at all well for us.” Within three weeks, the Allies had landed more than 1 million troops, 566,000 tons of supplies, and 171,000 vehicles. “Whether the enemy can still be stopped at this point is questionable,” German headquarters near Paris warned Hitler. “The enemy air superiority is terrific and smothers almost every one of our movements. . . . Losses in men and equipment are extraordinary.”

Operation Overlord was the greatest seaborne invasion in the annals of warfare, but it was small when compared with the offensive launched by the Soviet army in Russia a few weeks later. Between June and August 1944, the Soviets killed, wounded, or captured more German soldiers (350,000) than were stationed in all of western Europe.

Still, the Normandy invasion was a turning point in the war. With the beachhead secured, the Allied leaders knew that victory was just a matter of time, as Hitler’s armies were caught between the Soviets advancing from the east and the Allied forces from the west. “What a plan!” Churchill exclaimed to the British Parliament. Even Stalin applauded the invasion’s “vast conception and masterly execution.”

For all of the Allied success, however, Eisenhower privately struggled with the daily casualty reports. “How I wish this cruel business of war could be completed quickly,” he wrote his wife. “War demands real toughness of fiber—not only in the soldiers [who] must endure, but in the homes that must sacrifice their best.”

**THE LIBERATION OF PARIS** It would take seven more weeks and 37,000 more lives for the Allied troops to gain control of Normandy; the Germans lost more than twice that many, and some 19,000 French civilians were killed. Then, on July 25, 1944, American armies broke out from Normandy and headed east toward Paris. On August 15, a joint American-French invasion force landed on the Mediterranean coast and raced up the Rhone Valley in eastern France.

**WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE AND AFRICA, 1942–1945**



- What was the Allied strategy in North Africa, and why was it important for the invasion of Italy?
- Why did Eisenhower's D-day plan succeed?
- What was the role of strategic bombing in the war? Was it effective?

German resistance collapsed after only ten weeks of ferocious fighting. On D-day, one German unit, the 21st Panzer Division, boasted 12,000 men and 127 tanks; ten weeks later, having retreated across France, it had 300 men and just 10 tanks. A division of the Free French Resistance, aided by American units, had the honor of liberating Paris on August 25. As U.S. soldiers marched through the cheering crowds, a reporter said that he had never “seen in any place such joy as radiated from the people of Paris this morning.”

By mid-September, most of France and Belgium had been cleared of German troops. Meanwhile, the Soviet army moved relentlessly westward along a 1,200-mile front, pushing the Germans out of Russia. Between D-day and the end of the war in Europe a year later, 1.2 million Germans were killed and wounded.

**ROOSEVELT’S FOURTH TERM** In 1944, amid the largest war in history, the calendar required another presidential election. The Republicans nominated New York governor Thomas E. Dewey, who argued that it was time for a younger man to replace the “tired” Democratic leader. Voters, however, preferred the seasoned Franklin Roosevelt. On November 7, 1944, the president was elected for a fourth term, this time by a popular vote of 25.6 million to 22 million and an electoral vote of 432 to 99.

**THE RACE TO BERLIN** By the time Franklin Roosevelt was reelected, Allied armies were approaching the German border from the east and west. Churchill, worried that if the Soviets arrived first in Berlin, the German capital, Stalin would control the postwar map of Europe, urged Eisenhower to beat the Soviets to Berlin. Eisenhower, however, decided it was not worth the estimated 100,000 Americans who would be killed or wounded in such an operation.

**THE YALTA CONFERENCE** As the Allied armies converged on Berlin, Stalin hosted Roosevelt and Churchill at the **Yalta Conference** (February 4–11, 1945) in Crimea, on the Black Sea. The leaders agreed that, once Germany surrendered, the Soviets would occupy eastern Germany, and the Americans and British would control western Germany. Berlin, the German capital within the Soviet zone, would be subject to joint occupation. The Americans and British later created a fourth occupation zone in Germany for the French to administer.

Stalin’s goals at Yalta were to retrieve former Russian territory transferred to Poland after the First World War and to impose Soviet control over the countries of eastern and central Europe. Roosevelt, exhausted and in failing health, agreed to Stalin’s proposals because he needed the Soviets to support the creation of a new international peacekeeping organization, the United

Nations, and to help defeat Japan. Military analysts estimated that Japan could hold out for eighteen months after the defeat of Germany unless the Soviets joined the war in the Pacific. Stalin agreed to do so but the price was high: he demanded territories from Japan and China.

Roosevelt and Churchill got Stalin to sign the Yalta Declaration of Liberated Europe, which called for free and open elections in the liberated nations of eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the wily Stalin would fail to live up to his promises. When the Red Army “liberated” Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and eastern Germany, it plundered and sent back to Russia anything of economic value, dismantling thousands of factories and mills and rebuilding them in the Soviet Union. To ensure control over eastern Europe, the Soviets shipped off to prison anyone who questioned the new Communist governments they created.

Roosevelt viewed the Yalta meeting as a test of whether the wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union would survive once the conflict ended. He staked his hopes for postwar cooperation on the creation of the United Nations (UN).



**The Yalta Conference** Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin (with their respective foreign ministers behind them) confer on plans for the postwar world in February 1945.

At Yalta, the “Big Three” agreed to hold organizational meetings for the UN beginning on April 25, 1945. Like Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt was determined to replace America’s “outdated” isolationism with an engaged internationalism. But to get Stalin’s approval of the UN, Roosevelt gave in to his demands for territory held by Japan in northeast Asia.

Republicans later savagely attacked Roosevelt for “giving” eastern Europe over to Soviet domination. Some blamed his behavior on his declining health. (He would die in a few weeks.) But even a robust Roosevelt could not have dislodged the Soviet army from its control of eastern Europe. The course of the war shaped the outcome at Yalta, not Roosevelt’s failed diplomacy. The United States had no real leverage. As a U.S. diplomat admitted, “Stalin held all the cards.” “I didn’t say the result

was good,” Roosevelt said after returning from the Yalta Conference. “I said it was the best I could do.”

**DEATH OF A PRESIDENT** By early 1945, Nazi Germany was on the verge of defeat, but sixty-three-year-old Franklin Roosevelt would not live to join the victory celebrations. In the spring of 1945, he went to the “Little White House” in Warm Springs, Georgia, to rest up for the conference that would create the United Nations. On the morning of April 12, 1945, he complained of a headache but seemed to be in good spirits. It was nearly lunchtime when he said to an artist painting his portrait, “Now we’ve got just about 15 minutes more to work.” Then, as she watched him reading some documents, he groaned, saying that he had “terrific pain” in the back of his head. Suddenly he slumped over and fell into a coma. He died two hours later.

On hand to witness the president’s death was Lucy Mercer Rutherford, the woman with whom Roosevelt had an affair thirty years before. Eleanor Roosevelt was in Washington, D.C., when Franklin died, unaware of the president’s guest. Although Franklin had promised in 1918 to end all communications with Mercer, he had in fact secretly stayed in touch, even enabling her to attend his presidential inauguration in 1933.

Roosevelt’s death shocked and saddened the world, in part because few people were aware that he was sick. Even his sharpest critics were devastated. Ohio senator Robert Taft, known as “Mr. Republican,” called Roosevelt’s death one of the worst tragedies in the nation’s history. “The President’s death removes the greatest figure of our time at the very climax of his career. . . . He dies a hero of the war, for he literally worked himself to death in the service of the American people.” By contrast, Hitler viewed Roosevelt’s death as a “great miracle.” “The war is not lost,” he told an aide. “Read it. Roosevelt is dead!”

A U.S. soldier was on a warship in the Pacific when he heard the news of Roosevelt’s death. “I felt a great sense of loss,” he said, for Roosevelt had been president almost all his life. “He was our leader, but he was also, in some way, our friend.” In the short term, he worried about the military implications of Roosevelt’s death. “How will we go on fighting the war when our Commander in Chief is dead?”

**THE COLLAPSE OF NAZISM** Adolf Hitler’s shrinking Nazi empire collapsed less than a month later. In Berlin on April 28, as Soviet troops prepared to enter the city, Hitler married his mistress, Eva Braun, in an underground bunker. That same day, Italian freedom fighters captured Mussolini and his mistress. Despite his plea to “Let me live, and I will give you an empire,”



**May 8, 1945** The celebration in New York City's Times Square on V-E day.

Mussolini and his mistress were shot and hung by their heels from a girder above a Milan gas station. On April 30, Hitler and his wife retired to their underground bedroom, where she poisoned herself and he put a bullet in his head. Their bodies were taken outside, doused with gasoline, and burned.

On May 2, Berlin fell. Axis forces in Italy surrendered the same day. Five days later, on May 7, the chief of staff of the German armed forces agreed to unconditional surrender. So ended Nazi domination of Europe, little more than twelve years after Hitler had come to power proclaiming his “Thousand-Year Reich.”

On May 8, V-E day (“Victory in Europe”) generated massive celebrations. In Paris, an American bomber pilot flew his plane through the Eiffel Tower. In New York City, 500,000 people celebrated in the streets. But the elation was tempered by the ongoing war against Japan and the immense challenges of helping Europe rebuild. The German economy had to be revived, a new democratic government had to be formed, and millions of displaced Europeans had to be clothed, housed, and fed.

**THE HOLOCAUST** The end of the war in Europe revealed the horrific extent of the **Holocaust**, Hitler’s systematic effort to destroy the Jews and other racial, political, sexual, and religious “undesirables,” including Communists and prostitutes. Reports of the Nazis’ methodical slaughter of Jews

had appeared as early as 1942, but the gruesome stories seemed beyond belief until the Allied armies liberated the hundred or so “death camps” where the Germans had imposed their shocking “Final Solution”: the wholesale extermination of some 6 million Jews, along with more than 1 million other captured peoples. At the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp in Poland, 865,000 were killed as soon as they arrived, and up to 6,000 were gassed in a single day.

The Allied troops were appalled by what they discovered in the huge extermination camps. Bodies were piled as high as buildings; survivors were living skeletons. General Eisenhower reported to his wife that the evidence of “starvation, cruelty, and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick.”

American officials, even some Jewish leaders, had dragged their feet in acknowledging the Holocaust during the war for fear that relief efforts for Jewish refugees might stir up anti-Semitism at home. Under pressure, President Roosevelt had set up a War Refugee Board early in 1944. It managed to rescue about 200,000 European Jews and some 20,000 others. But the president refused appeals to bomb the concentration camp at Auschwitz, arguing that the Nazis would simply build another one. Overall, the Allied response to the



**Holocaust survivors** American troops liberate survivors of the Mauthausen concentration camp in May 1945. The Nazis tattooed the prisoners with identification numbers on their wrists or chests, as seen on the man at left.

Nazi atrocities was inept at best and disgraceful at worst. In 1944, Churchill called the Holocaust the “most horrible crime ever committed in the history of the world.” He did not know at the time that Stalin’s death camps killed more people than Hitler’s.

## THE PACIFIC WAR

For months after the attack on Pearl Harbor at the end of 1941, the news from the Pacific was “all bad,” as President Roosevelt acknowledged. With stunning speed, the Japanese captured numerous territories in Asia, including the British colonies of Hong Kong, Burma, Malaya, and Singapore, and the French colony of Indochina. “Everywhere in the Pacific,” said Winston Churchill, “we were weak and naked.”

**THE PHILIPPINES** In the Philippines, U.S. forces and their Filipino allies were overwhelmed by Japanese invaders. On April 10, 1942, the Japanese gathered some 12,000 captured American troops along with 66,000 Filipinos and forced them to march sixty-five miles in six days up the Bataan peninsula. Already underfed, ravaged by tropical diseases, and provided with little food and water, the prisoners were brutalized in what came to be known as the Bataan Death March. Those who fell out of line were bayoneted or shot. Others were beaten, stabbed, or shot for no reason. More than 10,000 died along the way. News of the Bataan Death March outraged Americans and contributed to the Pacific war’s ferocious emotional intensity and mutual atrocities.

By the summer of 1942, Japan had seized control of a vast Asian empire and was on the verge of assaulting Australia when its naval leaders succumbed to what one admiral called “victory disease.” Intoxicated with easy victories and lusting for more, they pushed into the South Pacific, intending to isolate Australia and strike again at Hawaii.

**CORAL SEA AND MIDWAY** During the spring of 1942, U.S. forces in the Pacific finally had some success. In the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 2–6, 1942), U.S. naval warplanes forced a Japanese fleet headed toward the island of New Guinea to turn back after sinking an aircraft carrier and destroying seventy planes.

A few weeks later, Admiral Yamamoto steered his main Japanese battle fleet of eighty-six warships toward Midway, the westernmost of Hawaii’s inhabited islands, from which he hoped to strike Pearl Harbor again. This time, however, the Japanese were taken by surprise. Americans had broken the



**General Douglas MacArthur** MacArthur theatrically coming ashore at the island of Leyte in the Philippines, October 1944.

Japanese military radio code, allowing Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander of the U.S. central Pacific fleet, to learn where Yamamoto’s fleet was heading.

The first Japanese attack hit Midway hard on June 4, 1942, but at the cost of about a third of their warplanes. American planes from the *Yorktown* and *Enterprise* then struck back, crippling the Japanese fleet. The **Battle of Midway** was the first major defeat for the Japanese navy in 350 years and the turning point of the Pacific war. The American victory blunted Japan’s military momentum, eliminated the threat to Hawaii, and bought time for the United States to organize its massive industrial productivity for a wider war.

**MACARTHUR’S PACIFIC STRATEGY** American and Australian forces were jointly under the command of the imperious General Douglas MacArthur, a military genius with tremendous willpower and courage who constantly irritated his superiors in Washington with his “unpleasant personality” and his repeated efforts to embellish his image. MacArthur had retired in 1937 but was called back into service in mid-1941, in part because he was such a brilliant strategist. In 1942, he assumed command of the Allied forces in the southwest Pacific.

On August 7, 1942, after first pushing the Japanese back in New Guinea, MacArthur landed 16,000 U.S. Marines on Guadalcanal Island, one of



**A WAR TO THE DEATH** The closer the Allied forces got to Japan, the fiercer the resistance they encountered. While fighting continued in the Philippines, 30,000 U.S. Marines landed on Iwo Jima, a volcanic atoll 760 miles from Tokyo. The Americans thought Iwo Jima was needed as a base for fighter planes to escort bombers over Japan. The Japanese fought with suicidal intensity, and it took nearly six weeks to secure the tiny island at a cost of nearly 7,000 American lives—and 21,000 of the 22,000 Japanese soldiers. In the end, the furious battle was fought for an air base that never materialized.

The assault on the Japanese island of Okinawa, which began on Easter Sunday, April 1, was even bloodier. Only 360 miles from the main Japanese islands, Okinawa was strategically important because it would serve as the staging area for the planned Allied invasion of Japan. The conquest of Okinawa was the largest amphibious operation of the Pacific war, involving some 300,000 troops and requiring almost three months of brutal fighting. More than 150,000 Japanese were killed; the remaining 7,871 were either captured or surrendered. A third of U.S. pilots and a quarter of submariners lost their lives at Okinawa.

As the fighting raged on Okinawa, Allied commanders began planning Operation Downfall—the invasion of Japan itself. To weaken the Japanese defenses, destroy their war-related industries, and erode civilian morale, the Allied command began bombing raids in the summer of 1944. In early 1945, General Curtis Lemay, head of the U.S. Bomber Command, ordered devastating “firebomb” raids upon Japanese cities: “Bomb and burn ‘em till they quit.”

On March 9, some 300 B-29 bombers dropped napalm bombs on Tokyo. The attack incinerated sixteen square miles of the city and killed some 100,000 people while rendering a million homeless. By then, American military leaders had lost all moral qualms about targeting civilians. The kamikaze attacks, the Japanese savagery toward prisoners of war, the burning of Manila that killed 100,000 civilians, and the “rape” of China had eroded almost all sympathy for the island nation. By August 1945, sixty-six Japanese cities had been firebombed. Secretary of War Henry Stimson called the lack of public outcry in the United States over the raids “appalling.”

**THE ATOMIC BOMB** Still, the Japanese leaders showed no willingness to surrender. In early 1945, new U.S. president Harry S. Truman learned of the first successful test of an atomic bomb in New Mexico. Now that military planners knew the bomb would work, they selected two Japanese cities as targets. The first was **Hiroshima**, a port city and army headquarters in southern Japan. On July 25, 1945, Truman, who knew nothing about the devastating effects of



**The aftermath of Little Boy** This image shows the wasteland that remained after the atomic bomb “Little Boy” decimated Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945.

radiation poisoning, ordered that the atomic bomb be used if Japan did not surrender before August 3.

Although an intense debate emerged over the decision to drop the bomb—spurred by Truman’s chief of staff, Admiral William D. Leahy, who argued that the “Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender”—Truman said that he “never had any doubt that it should be used.” He later recalled that “we faced half a million casualties trying to take Japan by land. It was either that or the atom bomb, and I didn’t hesitate a minute, and I’ve never lost any sleep over it since.”

To Truman and others, the use of atomic bombs seemed a logical next step to end the war. As it turned out, scientists greatly underestimated the physical effects of the bomb. Their prediction that 20,000 people would be killed proved much too low.

In mid-July 1945, the Allied leaders met in Potsdam, Germany, near Berlin. There they issued the Potsdam Declaration. In addition to outlawing Nazism, it demanded that Japan surrender by August 3 or face “prompt and utter destruction.” Truman left Potsdam optimistic about postwar relations with the



**Bombing of Nagasaki** A 20,000-foot tall mushroom cloud enveloped the city of Nagasaki after the atomic bombing on August 9, 1945.

Soviet Union. “I can deal with Stalin,” he wrote. “He is honest—but smart as hell.” (Truman would soon change his mind about Stalin’s honesty.)

The deadline calling for Japan’s surrender passed, and on August 6, 1945, a B-29 bomber named *Enola Gay* (after the pilot’s mother) took off at 2:00 a.m. from the island of Tinian and headed for Hiroshima. At 8:15 a.m., flying at 31,600 feet, the *Enola Gay* released the five-ton, ten-foot-long uranium bomb nicknamed “Little Boy.”

Forty-three seconds later, the bomb exploded at an altitude of 1,900 feet, creating a blinding flash of light followed by a fireball towering to 40,000 feet. The tail gunner on the *Enola Gay* described the scene: “It’s like bubbling molasses down there . . . the mushroom is spreading out . . . fires are springing up everywhere . . . it’s like a peep into hell.”

The bomb’s incredible shock wave and firestorm killed some 78,000 people, including thousands of Japanese soldiers and 23 American prisoners of

war housed in the city. By the end of the year, the death toll would reach 140,000, as people died of injuries or radiation poisoning. In addition, of the city’s 76,000 buildings, only 6,000 were left standing, and four square miles of the city were turned to rubble.

President Truman was aboard the battleship *Augusta* returning from the Potsdam conference when news arrived that the atomic bomb had been dropped. “This is the greatest thing in history!” he exclaimed. In the United States, Americans greeted the news with similar joy. To them, the atomic bomb promised a quick end to the long nightmare of war. “No tears of sympathy will be shed in America for the Japanese people,” the *Omaha World-Herald* predicted. “Had they possessed a comparable weapon at Pearl Harbor, would they have hesitated to use it?” Others reacted more soberly when they considered the implications of atomic warfare. “Yesterday,” journalist Hanson Baldwin wrote in the *New York Times*, “we clinched victory in the Pacific, but we sowed the whirlwind.”

Two days after the Hiroshima bombing, an opportunistic Soviet Union, hoping to share in the spoils of victory, hastened to enter the war in the Pacific by sending hundreds of thousands of troops into Japanese-occupied Manchuria along the border between China and the Soviet Union. Truman and his aides, frustrated by the stubborn refusal of Japanese leaders to surrender and fearful that the Soviet Union’s entry would complicate negotiations, ordered a second atomic bomb (“Fat Man”) to be dropped on Japan. On August 9, the city of Nagasaki, a shipbuilding center, experienced the same nuclear devastation that had destroyed Hiroshima. Five days later, on August 14, 1945, the Japanese emperor accepted the terms of surrender. The formal surrender ceremony occurred on an American warship in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945.

Upon learning of the unexpected Japanese decision to surrender, Paul Fussell, one of the American soldiers preparing for the dreaded invasion of Japan, said he went into his tent and pulled the zipper closed. “And I sat there in silence for at least a full day before I could compose myself because my joy was such that I knew I couldn’t survive it in public.” Then he came out and cheered and danced with everyone else.

## A NEW AGE IS BORN

Thus ended the costliest war in history. It was a *total* war in its scope, intensity, and numbers. Including deaths from war-related disease and famine, some 50 million civilians and 22 million combatants died.

The Second World War was more costly for the United States than any other foreign war: 292,000 combat deaths and 114,000 noncombat deaths among soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. A million more were wounded, with half of them seriously disabled. In proportion to its population, however, the United States suffered far fewer losses than did the other major Allies or their enemies, and American territory escaped the devastation suffered in so many parts of the world. For every American killed in the Second World War, for example, some fifty-nine Soviets died.

The war was the pivotal event of the turbulent twentieth century. It engulfed five continents, leveled cities, reshaped societies, and transformed international relations. German and Italian fascism as well as Japanese militarism were destroyed. The war set in motion the fall of China to communism in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War a year later. Colonial empires in Africa and Asia rapidly crumbled as the conflict unleashed independence movements. The Soviet Union emerged from the war as a new global superpower, while the United States, as Winston Churchill told the House of Commons, stood “at the summit of the world.”

**WHY DID THE ALLIES WIN?** Many factors contributed to the Allied victory. Roosevelt and Churchill were better at coordinating military efforts and maintaining national morale than were Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese emperor, Hirohito. By 1944, Hitler had grown increasingly unstable and unpredictable and more withdrawn from the German people, especially after a failed attempt by high-ranking officers to assassinate him that July.

In the end, however, what turned the tide was the awesome productivity of American industry and the ability of the Soviet Union to absorb the massive German invasion and then push back all the way to Berlin. By the end of the war, Japan had run out of food and Germany had run out of fuel. By contrast, the United States was churning out more of everything. As early as 1942, just a few weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Fritz Todt, a Nazi engineer, told Hitler that the war against the United States was already lost because of America's ability to out-produce all the other warring nations combined.

**A TRANSFORMATIONAL WAR** Like the First World War, the Second World War had far-reaching effects. It shattered the old world order and created a new international system, and nations such as France, Germany, Great Britain, and Japan were left devastated or impoverished. Henry Luce, the powerful publisher of *Time* magazine, said that the war had demonstrated the “moral and practical bankruptcy of all forms of Isolationism.” Internationalism was now the dominant outlook, as most Americans acknowledged that the United States had profound responsibilities for global stability and security. It had emerged from the war with the most powerful military in the world—and as the only nation with atomic weapons.

The expansion of the federal government spurred by the war effort continued after 1945, and presidential authority increased enormously at the expense of congressional and state power. The war also ended the Great Depression and launched a long period of unprecedented prosperity and global economic domination. Big businesses grew into gigantic corporations as a result of huge government contracts for military weapons and supplies. New technologies and products developed for military purposes—radar, computers, electronics, plastics and synthetics, jet engines, rockets, atomic energy—transformed the private sector, as did new consumer products generated from war-related innovations. And the opportunities created by the war for women as well as for African Americans, Mexican Americans, and other minorities set in motion major social changes that would culminate in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the feminist movement of the 1970s.

In August 1945, President Truman announced that the United States had “emerged from this war the most powerful nation in this world—the most

powerful nation, perhaps, in all history.” But the Soviet Union, despite its profound human losses and physical destruction, had gained much new territory, built massive armed forces, and enhanced its international influence, making it the greatest power in Eurasia. A little over a century after Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville had predicted that Europe would eventually be overshadowed by the United States and Russia, his prophecy had come to pass.

# CHAPTER REVIEW

## SUMMARY

- **Fascism and the Start of the War** In Italy, Benito Mussolini assumed control by promising law and order. Adolf Hitler rearmed Germany in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles. By March 1939, Nazi Germany had annexed Austria and seized Czechoslovakia. Hitler then invaded Poland with the *blitzkrieg* strategy in September 1939, after signing a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. The British and French governments declared war.
- **America Goes to War** The United States issued “*neutrality laws*” to avoid being drawn into wars in Europe and Asia, but with the fall of France, Roosevelt accelerated military aid to Great Britain through the *Lend-Lease Act*. In 1941, the United States and Great Britain signed the *Atlantic Charter*, announcing their aims in the war. After Japan joined with Germany and Italy to form the “*Axis*” alliance, President Roosevelt froze Japanese assets in the United States and restricted oil exports to Japan, which frustrated the Japanese, who decided to launch a surprise attack at *Pearl Harbor*, Hawaii.
- **The Second World War and American Society** The war had profound social effects. Americans—white, black, and brown—migrated west to take jobs in defense industry factories; unemployment was soon a thing of the past. Farmers recovered, supported by Mexican labor through the *bracero program*. The federal government, through agencies such as the *War Production Board*, took control of managing the economy. Many women took nontraditional jobs. About 1 million African Americans served in the military in segregated units. More than 100,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly interned in “*war relocation camps*.”
- **Road to Allied Victory in Europe** By 1943, the Allies had defeated the German and Italian armies occupying North Africa. From there, they launched attacks on Sicily and then the mainland of Italy. Stalin, meanwhile, demanded a full-scale Allied attack on the Atlantic coast of France to ease pressure on the Russian Front, but *Operation Overlord* was delayed until June 6, 1944. German resistance slowly crumbled. The “Big Three” Allied leaders—Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin—met at the *Yalta Conference* in February 1945, where they decided that a conquered Germany would be divided into four occupation zones. In May, Soviet forces captured Berlin, and Germany surrendered. After the war, Allied forces discovered the extent of the *Holocaust*—the Nazis’ systematic effort to exterminate the Jews.
- **The Pacific War** The Japanese advance across the Pacific was halted in June 1942 with the *Battle of Midway*. Fierce Japanese resistance at Iwo Jima and Okinawa and Japan’s refusal to surrender after the firebombing of Tokyo led the new president, Harry S. Truman, to order the use of atomic bombs on the cities of *Hiroshima* and *Nagasaki*.
- **Postwar World** The Soviet Union and the United States emerged from the war as global superpowers, with the United States possessing the world’s strongest

economy. The opportunities for women and minorities during the war also increased their aspirations and would contribute to the emergence of the civil rights and feminist movements.

## CHRONOLOGY

1933	Adolf Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany
1937	War between China and Japan begins
1939	Non-Aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union
September 1939	German troops invade Poland
1940	Battle of Britain
June 1941	Germany invades Soviet Union
August 1941	United States and Great Britain sign the Atlantic Charter
December 7, 1941	Japanese launch surprise attack at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii
June 1942	Battle of Midway
January 1943	Roosevelt and Churchill meet at Casablanca
November 1943	Roosevelt and Churchill meet Stalin in Tehran
June 6, 1944	D-day
February 1945	Yalta Conference
April 1945	Roosevelt dies; Hitler commits suicide
May 8, 1945	Nazi Germany surrenders; V-E day
August 1945	Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
September 2, 1945	Japan surrenders; V-J day

## KEY TERMS

fascism p. 1152	Tuskegee Airmen p. 1179
“neutrality laws” p. 1156	bracero program p. 1179
“Axis” alliance p. 1157	“war relocation camps” p. 1181
Lend-Lease Act (1941) p. 1166	Operation Overlord p. 1187
Atlantic Charter (1941) p. 1167	Yalta Conference (1945) p. 1193
Pearl Harbor p. 1172	Holocaust p. 1196
War Production Board p. 1173	Battle of Midway p. 1199
Women’s Army Corps (WAC) p. 1175	Hiroshima p. 1202



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