**Chapter 23**

**World War II**

**Learning Outcomes**

* 1. Explain the causes of World War II.

**Objectives**

1. Describe the economic and political causes of World War II in Europe.
2. Explain how Japan’s dreams of empire contributed to war in the Pacific.
   1. Explain American foreign policy as it developed after World War I, called isolationism, and describe how that policy changed as World War II progressed.

**Objectives**

1. Describe the isolationist stance of America in the years following World War I, and explain its causes.
2. Discuss the conflicts that arose in America after Hitler moved to Poland.
3. Explain the ways in which FDR planned to get aid to Britain without entering the war directly.
4. Describe the events of December 7, 1941, and explain how they brought the United States into the war.
   1. Describe the major events of World War II, both in Europe and in the Pacific, and explain why the United States acted as it did throughout the conflict.

**Objectives**

1. Describe the close alliance that grew among Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin during World War II, and explain how that impacted their decisions throughout the war.
2. Describe the war in 1942 and 1943, both in the Pacific and in Europe.
3. Explain how the events of 1944 in Europe paved the way for an Allied victory in 1945.
   1. Describe and discuss the American home front during World War II, paying special attention to long-term societal changes.

**Objectives**

1. Explain the ways in which FDR’s administration got America on a war footing, especially with regard to providing laborers to the defense industries and finding finance for the war.
2. Analyze the opportunities that became available to women, African Americans, and Hispanics during the war.
3. Describe the actions taken by the U.S. government against Japanese Americans within the country, most of who were U.S. citizens.
4. Discuss the movement of Americans during the war, and describe ways in which people used their leisure time for relaxation and for staying informed about the war.
   1. Explain how World War II ended, both in Europe and in the Pacific, and discuss the aftermath of the war both in the United States and around the world.

**Objectives**

1. Discuss the meeting of the Big Three at Yalta in 1944, and assess the significance of the meeting on the post-war world.
2. Describe Hitler’s final moves by which he tried to keep his Third Reich alive as the Allies closed in.
3. Explain how Japan was finally defeated, and discuss the disagreements that arose over the method used by the United States to end the war.

**Chapter Summary**

World War I was supposed to be the “war to end all wars.” The tenuous peace that held after, however, lasted a mere twenty years. In the 1920s, the United States made numerous loans to various countries in Europe to help them rebuild, and it was mainly borrowed American dollars that Germany used to pay its stiff reparation payments. While the U.S. was distracted by its domestic woes during the Depression, Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy embarked on a campaign of remilitarization and annexation. The persecution of German Jews was already well underway. And in Asia, an expansionist regime in Japan waged a brutal war against China that it struggled to defeat.

Even without the distraction of the economic crisis, an isolationist American public probably would not have confronted the Axis powers. The U.S. eased off its domination of Latin America during the 1930s with its “good neighbor” policies. Despite declaring neutrality, the U.S was spurred into action after the Battle of Britain. American Lend-Lease aid brought needed relief to the British and an unlikely but needed ally, the Soviet Union. A Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and Germany’s declaration of war brought the U.S. into the war against the Axis.

Germany’s genocidal warfare in Europe and North Africa led to the unusual alliance between communist Russia and capitalist America, who shared a special relationship with the British. For most of the war in Europe, the U.S. supplied the weapons and the Russians supplied the bodies. By taking Hawai’i, Japan hoped to end the American threat in the Pacific before the United States had fully mobilized for war. The Americans managed to stop the Japanese advance at the Battle of Midway after which Japan had reached the limit of its expansion in the Pacific. In Africa, American and British forces pushed the Axis off the continent by 1943, making way for the promised western front against Germany. The south was increasingly secure; Axis advances were repelled, and an avenue appeared through which the Allies could enter Europe. In the east, meanwhile, the Soviets stopped the German advance in the titanic Battle of Stalingard. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Allies struck German forces in Normandy, marking the beginning of the end for the Nazis.

America transformed the home front in an arsenal of democracy. The Depression faded as the need for armaments expanded. Through heavy taxes on the rich, the use of savings bonds, and rationing, the Americans paid for the war. With millions of men in the military, women and minorities filled the positions that were previously denied to them. Racism surfaced in the US with the disgraceful internment of Japanese Americans. Mexican Americans also faced racial hostility as they advanced. In 1943, a series of clashes between whites and Hispanics in Los Angeles became known as the Zoot Suit Riots. Of all American minority groups, Japanese Americans experienced the most egregious mistreatment during the war. Though some Italian and German nationals were targeted, Japanese Americans were the only ethnic group forced into internment camps. Roosevelt set the parameters for future middle class success and eased the return of the still segregated military.

Near the end of the war, Congress passed a number of influential social programs directed to ease the soldiers’ reentry to civilian life after the war. The most significant of these was the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill of Rights (or the GI Bill). One of the bill’s most consequential effects was to provide returning veterans with financial aid for college, which had long been the exclusive domain of the upper-middle class and the wealthy. The upheavals of the war included dramatic shifts in the nation’s population. Less segregated regions of the U.S. were the west and the south. With famous athletes and actors serving in the armed forces, Americans got their entertainment from women sports leagues and Jazz.

In the final year of the war, 1945, Germany made a last stand before collapsing against the two front attacks by the Allies. The U.K., the U.S., and the U.S.S.R. conducted a series of meetings at the Potsdam Conference that ended on August 2, with the Allies demanding Japan’s unconditional surrender. Soon, the Americans built and detonated a horrendous new weapon, the atomic bomb, which raised troubling moral questions about the use of weapons of mass destruction and the victimization of civilians. The peace treaty showed how much had been learned from the draconian peace of World War I, but the Cold War loomed ahead.

**Chapter Outline**

I. Causes of War

1. Provocations for War
2. Reactions

II. American Foreign Policy before the War

* 1. 1930s Isolation

1. Latin America
2. The World’s Arsenal
3. *Blitzkrieg* and Doubt
4. Partial Involvement
   1. From Isolation to Intervention
5. Aid Short of War
6. The Four Freedoms
7. Conflict in the Pacific

III. The War

1. The Alliance
2. The Pacific Theater, 1941–1942
3. The European Theater, 1942–1943
4. Turning Points: 1943
5. The Tehran Conference
6. 1944: Victory in View
7. Normandy

IV. The American Home Front

* 1. The War Economy

1. Manufacturing for War
2. Labor
3. Paying for War
   1. Opportunities
4. Women
5. African Americans
6. Hispanics
7. Japanese Americans
8. The GI Bill
   1. Demographic Shifts
9. The West
10. The South
11. The Midwest
    1. Leisure in Wartime

V. A World Remade, 1945

1. Germany’s Last Stand
2. Yalta
3. Final Moves
4. The Potsdam Conference
5. Defeat of Japan

VI. Looking Ahead…

**Suggested Lecture Topics**

* 1. Dr. Seuss Goes to War: An Examination of Theodore Geisel’s Wartime Political Cartoons
  2. The Girl He Left Behind: She’s a Defense Worker Now!
  3. A Blight on America’s Past: The Internment of Japanese-Americans
  4. Double V for Victory: A Precursor to the Modern Civil Rights Movement
  5. Japanese Moves Toward Empire in the Pacific: Why Such an Empire Was Planned
  6. The Manhattan Project: Destruction Grown in a Desert
  7. Zoot Suit Riots: Treatment of Hispanics in Wartime LA
  8. The Tuskegee Airmen Distinguish Themselves
  9. D-Day: The Normandy Invasion and the Liberation of France
  10. Operation Paperclip: Preparing for a Cold War using German scientists.

(23-2a). There were several reasons why so many Americans favored isolationism before the Second World War:

1. World War I
2. The Great Depression
3. Respect for Hitler
4. Antisemitism

Have the students debate entry into WWII (before Pearl Harbor), roleplaying a person real or imaginary using one of the four specific Reasons Why. Then have the students revisit their opinion in light of Pearl Harbor. How and why would isolationists change their minds? To conclude, have the students discuss the best reason as to why the U.S. should declare war, if in case of a future war, and what is the most important reason for the U.S. not to go to war: economics, idealism, realism, or other?

**The Reasons Why…**

**Research Topics—Projects and Papers**

Students might choose to complete a project to be presented in class or to write a more traditional research paper. Or, as an instructor, one could assign the topics to the students. Below are a few topics that are relevant to this chapter. Instructors may, of course, choose to develop their own topics.

* + 1. Japanese American Internment during World War II: Have the students access Web sites dedicated to those camps and write a one-page reaction to the events. The instructor can also have them plot the locations of the camps on a U.S. map and then delve into the type of land there, the ease or difficulty of growing crops, etc. They should also examine the way the detainees were treated by the local people.
    2. Louis Fairchild published in 1993 one of the best recent books on the experiences of people who migrated to other parts of the country to work in the defense industries. They Called It the War Effort: Oral Histories of World War II. Fairchild’s book focused on the influx of defense workers from around the country who filled every inch of Orange, Texas, shipyards, and the way the locals felt about them. If the library has a copy, or if the instructor can purchase one and put it on reserve, it would be a wonderful resource for the students. The instructor could have each student choose the chapter that appeals to him or her the most and do an analysis of the material presented there.
    3. In a similar vein, the instructor might give some extra credit points to anyone who is able to conduct an oral history interview with someone who lived through World War II. Students would likely need some pointers on how to conduct such an interview, but they are almost guaranteed to come away with an increased knowledge base and a greater appreciation for, as Tom Brokaw so aptly described them, “The Greatest Generation.”
    4. For a different approach, play the first part of “Saving Private Ryan.” Inform beforehand the students the various concepts they will be seeing: the all-female steno and typing pools, the all-male supervisors, the idealism and the disillusionment of the troops, and the harsh reality of storming Omaha Beach. The instructor might gather some quotes from veterans and their wives who were there for the debut of the film. The instructor only needs to show the first half hour or so of the film; preview it and decide how much one wants to show. Afterward, a roundtable discussion should prove very enlightening.

**Additional www Resources**

Holocaust Encyclopedia. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/?gclid=CKyE1oyQmJcCFQQRswod6DmW-A>

World War II in Europe Timeline. The History Place.

<http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/ww2time.htm>