

Chapter 36- America in World War II

1941-1945

Introduction

- “Get Japan first” was the cry that rose from millions of infuriated Americans
- Regarded America’s share in the global conflict as a private war of vengeance in the Pacific
- Washington in the ABC-1 agreement with Britain had earlier adopted the grand strategy of “getting Germany first”—America could not afford to divert its main strength to the Pacific
- If Germany was knocked out first, the combined allied forces could be concentrated on Japan
- The get-Germany-first strategy was the solid foundation on which all American military strategy was built, but it encountered much ignorant criticism from Americans who wanted revenge

The Allies Trade Space for Time

- The Allies had the great mass of the world’ population; the US was the mightiest military power on earth and America came close to losing the war to the well-armed aggressors
- Time was the most needed munition; the overpowering problem confronting America was to retool itself for all-out war production—America had to feed, clothe, and arm itself, as well as transport its forces to regions as far separated as Britain and Burma
- It also had to send a vast amount of food and munitions to its hard-pressed allies

The Shock of War

- National unity was no worry thanks to the blow by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor (Communists supported the war and millions of Italian-Americans and German-Americans were loyal)
- America’s ethnic communities were now composed of well-settled members, whose votes were crucial to FDR’s Democratic party—no government witch-hunting of minority groups
- An exception was the plight of some 110,000 Japanese-Americans, concentrated on the Pacific coast; Washington herded them together in concentration camps (saboteurs for Japan?)
- A wave of post-Pearl Harbor hysteria temporarily robbed many Americans of their good sense and justice; the internees lost basic rights, property and foregone earnings
- The wartime Supreme Court in 1944 upheld the constitutionality of the Japanese relocation in *Korematsu v. US*; but the US gov’t officially apologized in 1988, paying reparations of \$20,000
- The conservative Congress elected in 1942 wiped out many programs of the New Deal (CCC, WPA, and NYA); he announced the end of the New Deal and replacement by win the war

- The gov't did propagandize at home but the accent was on action (Atlantic Charter didn't matter)

Building the War Machine

- The war crisis caused the drooping American economy to snap to attention (massive military orders) almost instantly soaked up the idle industrial capacity of the lingering Great Depression
- Under the War Production Board, American factories poured forth an avalanche of weaponry
- Miracle-man shipbuilder Henry J. Kaiser was a prodigy of ship construction (14 days to build)
- The War Production Board assigned priorities from transportation and access to raw materials
- Farmers increased output—heavy investment in agricultural machinery and fertilizers
- Wonders of production brought economic strains: full employment and scarce consumer goods fueled a sharp inflationary surge in 1942—Office of Price Administration brought ascending prices under control with extensive regulations—rationing of critical goods (War Labor Board)
- Labor unions (13 million workers during war) resented the gov't-dictated wage ceilings
- A rash of labor walkouts plagued the war effort—United Mine Workers under John L. Lewis
- Threats of lost production through strikes became worrisome that Congress, in June 1943, passed Smith-Connally Anti-Strike Act—authorized federal gov't to seize and operate tied-up industries
- American workers, on the whole, were commendably committed to the war effort

Manpower and Womanpower

- The armed services enlisted nearly 15 million men in World War II and some 216,000 women, who were employed for noncombat duties; “women in arms”—WAACs, WAVES, SPARs
- As the draft net was tightened after Pearl Harbor, millions of young men were taken from their homes and clothed in “GI” (gov't issue) outfits—exempted key industrial/agricultural workers
- The draft left the nation's farms and factories so short of personnel that new workers had to be found; an agreement with Mexico in 1942 brought thousands of Mexican agricultural workers, called *braceros*, across the border to harvest crops—fixed part of economy in western states
- More than 6 million women took up jobs outside the home (over half had never earned wages)
- The gov't was obliged to set up some 3,000 day-care center; Rosie and many of her sisters were in no hurry to put down their tools and wanted to keep on working and often did after the war
- The great majority of American women did not work for wages in the wartime economy but continued in their traditional roles; at war's end, two-thirds of women war workers left the force

- Many were forced out but others voluntarily quit—“baby boomers” in the decade after 1945

Wartime Migrations

- Many of the 15 million men and women in uniform chose not to go home again at war’s end
- War industries sucked people into boomtowns—Los Angeles, Detroit, Seattle, and Baton Rouge
- California’s population grew by nearly 2 million; on the other hand, the South experienced dramatic changes—Roosevelt accelerated the region’s economic development (\$6 billion)
- Some 1.6 million blacks left the South to seek jobs in the factories in the West and North
- National issue of race relations—explosive tensions over employment, housing, and segregated facilities (Black leader A. Philip Randolph demanded equality in war jobs and armed forces)
- Roosevelt issued an executive order forbidding discrimination in defense industries and established the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to monitor compliance with his edict
- Blacks were drafted into the armed forces but were assigned to service branches rather than combat units—one exception were the “Tuskegee Airmen” who did not lose a single bomber
- In general the war helped to embolden blacks in their long struggle for equality (“Double V” — victory over the dictators abroad and over racism at home; NAACP, CORE)
- The northward migration of African-Americans accelerated after the war due to the invention of the mechanical cotton picker that did the work of fifty people at about one-eighth the cost
- The Cotton South’s need for cheap labor disappeared; some 5 million black tenant farmers headed north in the three decades after the war (by 1970 more than half lived outside the South)
- The war prompted an exodus of Native Americans from the reservations; thousands found war work in the major cities; some 25,000 Native American men served in the armed forces
- Comanches in Europe and Navajos in the Pacific made especially valuable contributions as “code talkers”—they transmitted radio messages in their native languages (incomprehensible)
- Sudden bringing together of unfamiliar peoples produced some distressingly violent friction
- Mexican-Americans attacked in Los Angeles in 1943 and Detroit race riots

Holding the Home Front

- Americans on the home front suffered little from the war; in American the war invigorated the economy and lifted country out of a decade-long depression, vaulted the gross national product
- Disposable personal income, even after payment of wartime taxes, more than doubled

- When price controls were lifted in 1946, America's lust to consume pushed prices up 33 %
- The war pointed the way to the post-1945 era of big-government interventionism (leadership)
- War, not enlightened social policy, cured the depression ("warfare-welfare state")
- The wartime bill amounted to more than \$330 billion—ten times the direct cost of World War I and twice as much as all previous federal spending since 1776 (income-tax net rose to 90%)
- Only about two-fifths of the war costs were paid from current revenues and the national debt skyrocketed from \$49 billion in 1941 to \$259 billion in 1945 (about \$10 million an hour)

The Rising Sun in the Pacific

- With the assault on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese launched widespread and uniformly successful attacks on various Far Eastern bastions (American outposts of Guam, Wake, and Philippines and British port of Hong Kong and British Malaya, which provided critically important supplies)
- The Japanese soldiers plunged in jungles of Burma (Burma Road) while Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese ruler was still resisting the Japanese invader in China; Dutch East Indies fell as well
- General Douglas MacArthur tried to defend the Philippine islands but the American surrender was inevitable and General MacArthur secretly headed off to Australia to head resistance there
- POWs treated with vicious cruelty in the eighty-mile Bataan Death March (Corregidor defeated)

Japan's High Tide at Midway

- Japan invaded the island of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands to threaten Australia; their onrush was finally checked in a naval battle fought on the Coral Sea in May 1942 where an American carrier task force inflicted heavy losses on the victory-flushed Japanese (aircraft)
- Japan then undertook to seize Midway Island (northwest of Hawaii) but Admiral Chester W. Nimitz at Midway from June 3-6, 1942 directed a victory against the invading fleet
- Midway was a pivotal victory—US success along with the Battle of the Coral Sea halted Japan
- Thrust of Japanese into eastern Pacific aroused fear of an invasion of the US from northwest

American Leapfrogging Toward Tokyo

- In August 1942, American ground forces gained a toehold on Guadalcanal Island; after several desperate sea battles, the Japanese troops evacuated Guadalcanal in February 1943 (20,000 lost)
- American/Australian forces, under General MacArthur held onto New Guinea as the scales of war gradually began to tip as the American navy, including submarines, inflicted losses on Japanese supply ships and troop carriers (control of New Guinea completed by August 1944)

- The U.S. Navy with marines and army divisions had been “leapfrogging” the Japanese-held islands in the Pacific—reduce the fortified Japanese outposts on their flank
- The new strategy of island hopping called for bypassing some of the most heavily fortified Japanese posts, capturing nearby islands, setting up airfields, and then using heavy bombing
- Brilliant success crowned the American attacks when Admiral Nimitz coordinated the efforts of naval, air, and ground units (Attu, Kiska, Gilbert Islands, Marshall Islands; suicidal fights)
- Especially prized where the Marianas, including America’s conquered Guam
- The assault on the Marianas opened on June 19, 1944 and the next day, in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, 250 Japanese aircraft and carriers were destroyed (never recovered from losses)
- Victory was a combination of combat superiority with the “Hellcat” fighter plane and the new technology of the antiaircraft proximity fuse that destroyed so much aircraft
- Major islands of the Marianas fell to US attackers in July and August 1944 (bombing of Japan)

The Allied Halting of Hitler

- There were early setbacks for America in the Atlantic as Hitler entered the war with a formidable fleet of ultramodern submarines, which operated in “wolf packs” with frightful effect
- The tide of subsea battle turned with agonizing slowness—old techniques of escorting convoys of merchant vessels and dropping depth bombs were strengthened by air patrol, the newly invented technology of radar, and bombing of submarine bases (British code-breakers cracked the Germans’ “Enigma” codes and therefore pinpoint the locations of the U-boats in the Atlantic)
- Britain won the Battle of the Atlantic and was not forced under—victory was narrow
- At war’s end, Hitler was about to mass-produce a new submarine that could remain underwater
- The turning point of the land-air war against Hitler had come late in 1942 (raid on Cologne)
- Germans under Marshal Erwin Rommel had driven eastward across North Africa into Egypt, perilously close to the Suez Canal—a breakthrough would have spelled disaster for the Allies
- In October 1942 British general Bernard Montgomery delivered a withering attack at El Alamein
- In September 1942 the Russians stalled the German steamroller at Stalingrad (Red army success)
- In November 1942 the Russians unleashed a crushing counteroffensive that was never reversed

A Second Front from North Africa to Rome

- Soviet losses were staggering in 1942: millions of soldiers and civilians lay dead and Hitler's armies had overrun most of the western USSR (at war's end about 20 million Soviets perished)
- Many Americans were eager to begin a diversionary invasion of France in 1942 because they feared that the Soviets might make a separate peace as they had in 1918 in WW I
- Face with British indecision and lack of resources, Americans postponed an invasion of Europe
- An assault on French-held North Africa was a compromise second front; American general Dwight D. Eisenhower headed the secret attack started in November 1942—a joint Allied operation involving 400,000 men and 850 ships, the invasion was the largest waterborne effort
- The German-Italian army was finally trapped in Tunisia and surrendered in May 1943
- At the Casablanca conference in Morocco, January 1943, the Big Two (Roosevelt and Churchill) agreed to step up the Pacific war, invade Sicily, increase pressure on Italy, and insist upon an "unconditional surrender" of the enemy—it steeled the enemy to fight a last-bunker resistance
- The Allied forces turned against Europe and Sicily fell in August 1943; shortly before, Mussolini was deposed and Italy surrendered unconditionally soon after in September 1943
- Hitler's well-trained troops stubbornly resisted the Allied invaders in Italy and now Italy declared war on Germany in October 1943—Italy became almost deadlocked and became a sideshow
- While the Italian second front opened Mediterranean and diverted some Germany divisions, it delayed the main Allied invasion of Europe by many months—allowing Soviet army to advance

D-Day: June 6, 1944

- Time approached for Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin to meet in person coordinate the promised effort; Joseph Stalin refused to leave Moscow; Teheran, the capital of Iran, was finally chosen as the meeting place—discussions ran from November 28 to December 1, 1943
- Agreement on broad plan for launching Soviet attacks on Germany from the east simultaneously with the prospective Allied assault from the west (cross-channel invasion of France)
- Britain prepared nearly 3 million fighting men but the US provided most of the Allied warriors
- French Normandy was pinpointed for the invasion assault and on D-Day, June 6, 1944; the operation started and encountered resistance from Germans but had mastered air over France
- Most spectacular were the lunges across France by American armored divisions, commanded by General George S. Patton—retreat of German defenders was hastened when an American-French force landed in August 1944 on the southern coast of France and swept northward

- Paris was liberated in August 1944; Allied forces rolled irresistibly toward Germany and the first important German city (Aachen) fell to the Americans in October 1944

FDR: The Fourth-Termite of 1944

- The presidential campaign of 1944 came most awkwardly as the awful conflict roared to climax
- Victory-starved Republicans met in Chicago with enthusiasm and nominated Thomas E. Dewey
- As a governor of New York, he was a liberal and was for internationalism; he was put with isolationist Senator John W. Bricker—platform called for an unstinted prosecution of war and for the reaction of a new international organization to maintain peace
- FDR was the “indispensable man” of the Democrats, but an unusual amount of attention was focused on the vice presidency; Henry Wallace had served four years as vice president and desired a renomination but the vice president went to Senator Harry S. Truman of Missouri who had attained national visibility as the efficient chairman of a Senate committee on the war

Roosevelt Defeats Dewey

- Dewey took the offensive while Roosevelt was too consumed with directing the war to spare much time for speechmaking; Dewey criticized FDR’s reign and promised to fight the war better
- Substantial assistance for Roosevelt came from the new political action committee of the CIO, which was organized to get around the law banning the direct use of union funds for politics
- CIO members rang doorbells and championed Roosevelt’s involvement in the Great Depression
- Most newspapers were against Roosevelt but he still won a sweeping victory
- Roosevelt won primarily because the war was going well; foreign policy was a decisive factor

The Last Days of Hitler

- By mid-December 1944, Germany seemed to be wobbling on its last legs; the Soviet surge had penetrated eastern Germany and Germany western front seemed about to buckle under pressure
- Hitler staked everything on one last throw of his reserves; on December 16, 1944, Hitler’s objective was the Belgian port of Antwerp, key to the Allied supply operation
- The ten-day penetration was finally halted after a decision stood firm at Bastogne and the last gasp Hitlerian offensive was stemmed in the Battle of the Bulge (US troops to Rhine River)
- Conquering Americans found the concentration camps where German Nazis had engaged in mass murder of “undesirables,” including an estimated 6 million Jews

- The Washington gov't had long been informed about Hitler's campaign of genocide against the Jews and had been slow to take steps against it; Roosevelt's gov't had bolted the door against large numbers of Jewish refugees but until war's end, the full "holocaust" had not been known
- Soviets reached Berlin in April 1945 and captured the city; Adolf Hitler then committed suicide in an underground bunker on April 30, 1945 while tragedy struck in the United States
- President Roosevelt suddenly died from a massive cerebral hemorrhage on April 12, 1945 while Vice President Truman took the helm; On May 7, 1945, the German gov't surrendered unconditionally and May 8 was proclaimed V-E (Victory in Europe) Day

Japan Dies Hard

- American submarines were sending the Japanese merchant marine to the bottom extremely fast
- Giant bomber attacks reduced the enemy's fragile cities to cinders—massive fire-bomb raid on Tokyo, March 9-10, 1945, gutted a quarter of the city and killed an estimated 83, 000 people
- General MacArthur headed northwest for the Philippines but the Japanese navy wiped out his transports and supply ships and still won the clashes at Leyte Gulf (October 23-26, 1944)
- Japan was through as a sea power as American fleets now commanded the western Pacific
- MacArthur proceeded to capture Manila, which fell in March 1945 (60,000 American deaths)
- America's steel vise was tightening mercilessly around Japan—assault of Iwo Jima (March)
- Okinawa was next on the list and the fighting dragged on for three months in which Japanese soldiers fought with incredible courage from their caves—Japanese suicide pilots caused deaths

The Atomic Bombs

- Strategists in Washington was planning an all-out invasion of the main islands of Japan—an invasion that would cost hundreds of thousands of American casualties (Tokyo foresaw defeat)
- Bomb-scorched Japan still showed no outward willingness to surrender unconditionally to the Allies—the Potsdam conference in July 1945 sounded the death knell of the Japanese in which President Truman met with Joseph Stalin and British leaders—surrender or be destroyed
- Roosevelt had earlier been persuaded by American and exiled scientists (Albert Einstein) to push ahead with preparations for unlocking the secret of an atomic bomb (funded \$2 billion)
- Fears of Germany, which eventually abandoned its own atomic project as too costly
- The war against Germany ended before the American weapon was ready but Japan suffered the fate of being the first nation subjected to atomic bombardment (only Americans ever used)
- In a desert in NM on July 16, 1945, the experts detonated the first atomic device

- With Japan still refusing to surrender, the Potsdam threat was fulfilled and on August 6, 1945, a lone American bomber dropped one atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan—180,000
- Two days later, Stalin entered war against Japan and Soviets overran Manchuria and Korea
- American aviators on August 9, dropped a second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki—80,000
- On August 10, 1945, Tokyo sued for peace on one condition that Hirohito remain on his throne
- The Allies accepted this condition on August 14, 1945 and formal end came on 9/2/45; V-J Day

The Allies Triumphant

- Americans suffered some 1 million casualties (1/3 deaths) but the proportion killed by wounds and disease was sharply reduced; America had emerged with its mainland unscathed
- This complex conflict was the best-fought war in America's history—better prepared
- American military leadership proved to be of highest order—Eisenhower, MacArthur, Marshall
- Assembly lines proved as important as battle lines—more men, more weapons, more machines, more technology, and more money than any enemy could hope to match
- An unusual amount of direct control was exercised over the individual by Washington during war but the American people preserved their precious liberties without serious impairment