




CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

World War II

Chapter 17: Key Concepts

-  What characteristics stand out most as proving vital to defining the European sector of the war and its ultimate outcomes? What is your reasoning for choosing these factors?
-  What characteristics stand out most as proving vital to defining the Asian sector of the war and its ultimate outcomes? What is your reasoning for choosing these factors?
-  Who is the most intriguing historical figure from this time period in your view and what is your reasoning behind the choice?

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Introduction

World War II was one of the most volatile periods in world history. There were many actors in this greatest of dramas. It unleashed a myriad of changes after the war's conclusion that are still felt in the present. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, people around the globe lived and died during the greatest war in history. World War II came at a cost of tens of millions of dead and wounded. The conflict also came at a price of hundreds of billions of dollars. However, sheer numbers can only begin to tell the story. Even for those who never served in harm's way, the reality of the war was always ever present. Some people lost their entire families, fortunes, and even sanity. It was even a more horrible and calamitous event than World War I.

World War II was an era that impacted every common citizen of the world, and a few leaders became icons due to their military service. In the United States, the media coverage of the conflict came to people by way of newspapers, radio broadcasts, and film footage. In these diverse portrayals, battle scenes were explained, and in the case of victories, celebrated. Within the media coverage, the war-tested soldier represented the height of courage and patriotic sacrifice. However, the leading American figures of the period became the most powerful icons representing the western war effort. Among these were Generals Omar Bradley, Dwight Eisenhower, George Marshall, Douglas MacArthur, and George Patton. However, without the many millions of average military and civilian workers, these men would have never reached such tremendous acclaim. Moreover, the war could have turned out in a far different manner.

The Road to War in the European Theater

Isolationism and appeasement were the twin ideologies that most often characterized the pre-war period. Isolationism was an approach to diplomacy where nations took a minimalist approach to global interaction beyond those activities which fit their own specific interests. Such a plan de-emphasized more internationalist strategies such as collective security and global diplomacy. Throughout the 1920s and much of the 1930s, the United States took on a largely isolationist agenda regarding foreign affairs. The concept of appeasement involved approaching global policy with a "lesser of multiple evils" strategy. Appeasement meant compromising with potential enemy combatants instead of confronting them in order to avoid conflict. Ravaged by World War I, the Great Depression, and the costs of maintaining international colonies, England and France took on appeasement as a plan to smooth over growing diplomatic difficulties in the 1930s.

In the 1920s, Germany was governed under a democratic constitutional system. The harsh penalties from the aftermath of World War I had left Germany with a severely weakened military and economy. The Great Depression further brought economic and societal difficulties to Germany's long list of hardships. Surging unemployment, inflation, and food shortages left the German people looking for a new approach to their governing structure. Amid these difficult times, the Nazi Party rose to political power. Adolph Hitler was

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Adolph Hitler

the public face and leader of this upstart group. He had served as a corporal in World War I for his native Austria, and then joined the Nazis in the early 1920s. Subsequently, he was arrested as part of a failed government political insurrection in the German region of Bavaria. This incident, popularly known as the Beer Hall Putsch, led to the arrest of Hitler. During his time in jail, he authored a manifesto entitled *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle). In this work, Hitler explained a comprehensive strategy for building a racially pure Nazi empire.

The Nazis seized on existing racial prejudice and theories about history to build support and define their program. Anti-Semitism was an unfortunate tradition throughout Europe and particularly in Austria where Hitler was raised. For the Nazis, Jews were a foreign people not included in the Volk (the

Folk, or the masses) of Germany. Nazis preached that Germans were the true heirs of a pure race called the Aryans, and it was influence by outsiders that kept their nation from dominating the world. To reach global superiority, Hitler encouraged Germans have lots of offspring, and in addition, he endorsed the nation adding more territorial living space to accommodate them. Therefore, Hitler envisioned increasing Germany's borders. Also, Nazism was a form of fascism whereby one pledged total allegiance to the state. Germans would be tutored from birth that service to the mother country was important beyond all other considerations. Hitler's government would become heavily involved in private enterprise to ensure that all efforts were aimed at strengthening Germany. Combined, the Nazi program meant that Germany must be heavily armed, productive in industry, territorially expansive, and free of any group or individuals who were not thought of as naturally belonging to the German "race." This was a disastrous vision for the world.

It is one thing to have a set of goals, as did Hitler, and it is another to successfully put them into practice. Indeed, the Nazis obtained legitimacy in Germany over a short period in the early 1930s. They did so via the German people voting them in as part of a political coalition in the nation's legislative assembly, the Reichstag. Once in power, the Nazis used force and extra-legal persuasion to eliminate other political groups and takeover the German government. Adolph Hitler held the position of chancellor and he was the central figure in what fast developed into a brutal, dictatorial regime.

The democracies of the western world allowed Germany to rebuild their military and economy. The strong sanctions of World War I got cast aside. Instead, nations such as England and France chose to try and appease a potential threat with immediate gratification in the hope it would mean a less likely chance for another total war. In addition, the United States, in its continuing isolated state, focused on domestic economic rebuilding during most of the 1930s. However, the country did have, in President Franklin Roosevelt, a

more internationally inclined Commander-in-Chief. Later in the 1930s, this development led to a more active American involvement in the prewar diplomatic process.

Germany found a willing ally in Italy. After World War I, Benito Mussolini's fascist regime came into power. He brought together a nation in want of a return to prosperous times. As had been the case for other European countries after World War I, Italy suffered great economic hardship and political turmoil. Mussolini promised to correct these issues. In reality, he used a fascist dictatorship to preach nationalism and cement his totalitarian rule. Fascism was a doctrine that emphasized loyalty and obedience to state. These types of regimes were by nature militaristic with an extreme nationalist outlook. Nazism and Italian fascism had many similarities but were not the same. The promises Mussolini boldly proclaimed never actually occurred. He aspired to turn Italy into the central piece of a new Mediterranean-based empire. Instead, his advisors implemented a brutal plan of action and provided a compatible secondary wartime partner to Germany. While they played a pertinent role in the conflict, Italy's inferior military armaments, leadership, and number of forces kept them from fulfilling Mussolini's vision.

In Europe, 1937–1938 proved to be a very tenuous and foreboding year. During this time, Germany declared a union with Austria, and in turn, Nazis took over the national government. Then, under the mantra of Germanic unity, the Nazis sought to take over of the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia. The area had many Germanic people and a useful industrial base, and therefore, Germany saw it as a good fit for its ongoing prewar building process. The Nazi's aspirations to annex the Sudetenland led to the ultimate example of appeasement diplomacy. With the Munich Pact, four nations: Germany, England, France, and Italy developed an agreement to resolve the growing storm of war in Europe. In total, the Munich Pact allowed Germany to take over the Sudetenland and subsequently the entirety of Czechoslovakia.

Despite France having previously agreed to a mutual security treaty with the Czechs, this new plan dismantled that arrangement. For their part, Germany agreed to stop its growing war plans and maintain a calm diplomatic stance with its fellow European nations. Many international press and diplomatic outlets commended the agreement. Notably, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who played a very key role in negotiating the plan, stated that the conference had yielded "peace for our time." In reality, the Munich Pact would not serve as a lasting arrangement. Instead, Germany continued readying for achieving greater imperialistic objectives.

Along with the Munich Pact, Germany negotiated another diplomatic agreement with the Soviet Union. The 1939 German Soviet Non-Aggression Pact publically assured a truce between the two countries. Privately, they agreed to divide up Poland along an east/west geographical line. In turn, Germany secured the right to initiate war on their portion of Poland, and the Soviet Union received territorial concessions. This plan worked for the communist government of the Soviet Union. Under the leadership of Josef Stalin, they had enacted an extremely brutal system of mass internal political imprisonment and murders. To many western countries, Soviet communism was every bit as worrisome as Nazi Germany. To Hitler, the Soviet Union was a central piece to establishing a dominant empire

In September 1939, World War II began in Europe, and Germany's invasion of Poland officially set it into motion. The move forced England and France to declare war on Germany and vice versa. The doctrine of appeasement had allowed Germany to prepare for the conflict in a much better manner than its opponents. Throughout 1940, Germany rolled over European nations. Even a traditionally formidable military power in France was no real match for the onslaught. Germany used a lethal combination of modern armed forces weaponry and frenetic pacing in a strategy dubbed blitzkrieg or "lightening war." It also was implementing a brutal series of air assaults on England. As a result of the ongoing crisis in Europe, England reached out to the United States for assistance. Ultimately, inquiries and communication between the two nations led to the establishment of the 1941 Lend Lease Act. Under the legislation, the United States could send a wide variety of war supplies and funding to England. Later that year, the law was expanded to include another European nation in need of assistance: the Soviet Union.

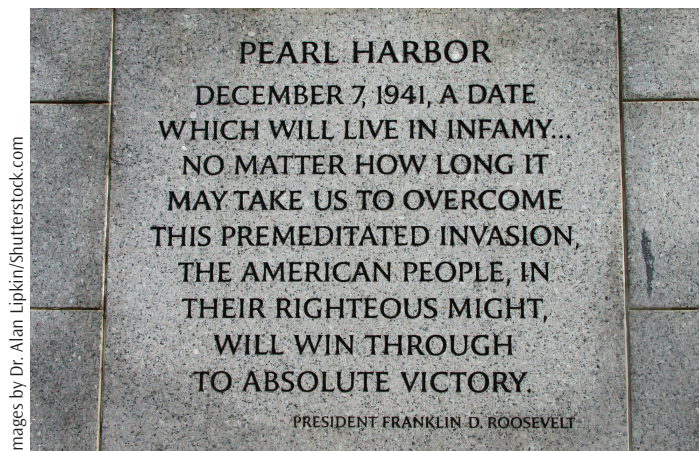
Germany had long planned to launch a massive invasion of the Soviet Union. Its vast natural resources and population base represented a vital cog in Hitler's designs to rule Europe. In June 1941, this strategy became a reality. Over the next several months, Germany pillaged the Soviet Union with massive levels of destruction and casualties. By late 1941, this caused the United States to increase the Lend Lease program to include the Soviets. Over the war's entirety, the Lend Lease program eventually expanded to several dozen nations and a nearly 50 billion dollar cost.

This expansive assistance effort proved to be a controversial policy. In reaction to the growing emphasis by the Roosevelt administration and other internationalists, those that favored a more isolationist stance went on the offensive. In September 1940, the America's First Committee formed, and its primary agenda was to advocate against the U.S. involvement in World War II. Through public rallies, radio programs, and newspaper articles, the group endorsed their plan for staying out of the growing conflict. The America First Committee endorsed several policies to allow the nation to stand strong and neutral from the quagmire brewing in Europe. These actions included improving American defenses at home to repel against potential foreign invaders and avoiding any assistance or involvement in the ongoing European war. At its peak, the America First Committee claimed more than 800,000 members. While they were vocal and influential, the group did not last past the watershed events of the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. The organization disbanded several days after it took place.

The Road to War in the Pacific Theater

Along with Germany, the United States and other global powers faced a growing 1930s diplomatic crisis in Asia. At the heart of the issue was Japan and its growing intention to become a self-sustaining empire. Over the previous eight decades, Japan and western countries, including the United States, had developed a productive diplomatic and trade relationship. However, in the 1920s and 1930s, a new generation of militaristic, nationalistic, and imperialistic policy makers took over the government. As such, the alliance between Japan and western nations

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Speech that President Franklin Roosevelt made after Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is an inscription on the wall of the World War II Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

and economic consequences of such an agenda gave the United States and other western nations a great deal of collective stress. In 1937 and 1938, Japan ramped up toward war. The July 1937 invasion of China, December 1937 sinking of the U.S. Gunboat Panay, and December 1938 siege of the Chinese city of Nanking all demonstrated Japan was dedicated to an ambitious and violent takeover of Asia. The “Rape of Nanking” resulted in over 200,000 civilian casualties and caused great international outrage. Nonetheless, Japan continued on in its imperial expansion strategy.

During the period 1939–1941, the United States continued to experience heightened tensions with Japan. While diplomatic negotiations proceeded, the two countries continued to hit a figurative wall over Japanese expansion and military aggression in Asia. The United States decided to enact numerous economic sanctions against Japan. Among these very serious measures, America discontinued the trade of steel and petroleum with them. These were both vital elements for the Japanese war machine, and therefore, this new reality led Japan into a mode of taking military action against the United States.

On December 7, 1941 Japan initiated an aerial military attack on American naval and air armed forces personnel in Hawaii. This use of force at Pearl Harbor led to more than 2,400 American casualties. In addition, the incident caused the destruction of 18 American warships and over 300 U.S. airplanes. The Japanese military action also largely solidified American unity toward going to war. Over the next several days, the United States formally declared intentions to enter the global war effort on the side of the Allied Forces. As 1942 dawned, the European theater contained the continent of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East as primary battle grounds. In the Pacific theater, the continent of Asia and seemingly countless Pacific and Indian Ocean-based nations and territories provided the main areas of conflict. However, one must also include naval and aerial phases as areas of fighting too. Indeed, this was a war that would be fought in all places and ways possible.

gradually tore apart. Japan’s new regime led the government toward a very aggressive path in global affairs. They wanted to be on an even footing with the western powers in all regards. As a result, Japan endeavored for a greater internal base of industrial capabilities, natural resources, agriculturally arable land, and laborers. Thus, Japan began propagandizing and planning for a takeover of the Asian mainland.

Under the guise of cultural and regional betterment, Japan wanted China and other smaller nations to be the heart of a modern empire of epic proportions. The diplomatic

The Active War Period: American Involvement in the European Theater

In 1942, the first full year of American involvement in the European theater, major Allied nations consisted of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. The United States and Britain spent a great deal of effort battling Germany and Italy in Western Europe, the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Middle East. In Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union served as the primary warfront. In the shared American and British areas of responsibility of the European theater, Allied forces steadily made positive progress in early and mid-1943. By the summer of that year, the Allies readied and began a major military offensive in Italy. Involving more than 500,000 man force, the campaign traveled from south to north into the heart of Italy. Eventually, an over nine-month effort resulted in the Allies taking back the strategic city of Rome. However, the victory came at a high price as the ongoing battles resulted in several hundred thousand Allied casualties. As their plans further evolved, the Allies took back numerous key targets throughout the Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Middle East. Throughout 1943 and 1944, these victorious battles were positioning the landscape for a major western push geared at finalizing Allied victory in Europe.

As the Americans and British made positive inroads, the Soviet Union pushed back against Germany. From 1942 through 1944, the Russian people survived a series of massive military assaults, suffered millions of casualties, and lost many billions of dollars in infrastructure. However, the fire of battle steeled the Russian citizenry, and over time, they managed to take the fight to their German opponents. Over the course of the war, the Soviet Union had created an incredibly strong and modernized industrial economy, and they developed an equally impressive military arsenal. Given these factors, the Soviet Union transitioned from a defensive to offensive philosophy

and forced Germany into a steady, violent, and clear retreat. As a result, by the spring of 1944, the campaign that became known as D-Day was being readied in Western Europe and the push from Eastern Europe was firmly in motion, as well.

When it came to securing the Western European landscape, the Allies needed to force the German military back eastward to Berlin and out of France. The D-Day operation included an extraordinarily complex level of tactical strategy, covert intelligence gathering, and a plentiful and diverse array of military forces and weaponry. In addition, the level of



Omaha Beach after D-Day. Protected by barrage balloons, ships, delivered trucks loaded with supplies. June 7–10, 1944, World War II. Normandy, France

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support logistics and supply gathering was also an unprecedented undertaking. Indeed, this would either be the high point or nadir of the Allied forces' overall war effort. Throughout 1943 and the first part of 1944, the Allies developed a sound strategy and militarily cleared the path for the western push. A big part of this plan included regular aerial bombardment of Germany's industrial sector. In turn, this began draining the German military of the steel, petroleum, and other key resources needed to survive a total war.

After months of meetings and groundwork, June 1944 became the time for launching the D-Day invasion. Throughout the early waves of the attack, the Allies utilized over 150,000 soldiers, 12,000 airplanes, 7,000 naval vessels, and thousands more tanks and other assorted ground-based vehicles. Over the forthcoming months, the Allies deployed several million troops into France. These soldiers risked their lives, and many came home wounded or lost their lives in an incredibly brutal and ultimately successful military campaign.

The D-Day invasion, part of Operation Overlord, was the largest military naval landing in the history of the world. Beaches known as Normandy, Omaha, and others had to be taken one-by-one. The sands were drenched in blood as heavy German guns, snipers, and foot-soldiers barraged Allied forces with storms of deadly fire. Men who made their way onto the beaches knew that many would not make it through the conflict alive. D-Day is one of, if not the, most iconic American military engagements of all time. It was what had to be done to liberate France and conquer Nazi Germany. It also was a major gamble. In wartime, sea landings or crossings always make one vulnerable to a potential disaster. The seas have the power to change at any time, strand, or isolate soldiers. It was the ultimate gamble, but it proved fruitful toward the goal of winning the war.

In the late summer of 1944, Allied forces launched further successful forays in the Mediterranean, and pushed forward to free Belgium and France from German occupation. These efforts yielded great gains, but several more months of arduous warfare lay ahead. In the last weeks of 1944, Germany attacked the Allies near their western border. The Battle of the Bulge represented a final German opportunity to create an offensive strategy against their opponents. The ongoing fight inflicted over 80,000 plus casualties on the Allies. However, they maintained a stable foothold against Germany, and in the end, their side proved victorious in the Battle of the Bulge. In the final months of the war in Europe, the Allies pushed further and squeezed Germany into an eventual surrender. Ultimately, the Nazi regime fell in the spring of 1945.

The Active War Period: American Involvement in the Pacific Theater

While the war in Europe raged forward, the fighting in the Pacific proved just as violent and nightmarish. Both sides consistently demonstrated a strong will to win and at times to just survive. In the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States joined the Allies against the Japanese in an all-out military campaign. Within the United States, people felt a great deal of rage toward Japan. American newspapers, magazines, cartoons, books, and

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radio programming railed against Japan in the harshest of terms. The media used patriotic, religious, musical, humorous, and a plethora of other approaches to create written and audio messages lambasting Japan. These collective efforts were a powerful affront to the Japanese while endorsing calls for unity, vengeance, and victory. In the case of Japan's approach to propaganda, their efforts demonstrated a similar multifaceted approach to decrying the United States and endorsing national support of the total war effort.

From the start of active engagement, the Allies sought to retake islands in the Pacific, and over time they wanted to wear down the Japanese military toward an eventual invasion of their home islands. For their part, throughout 1942 the Japanese continued launching further offensives in the Pacific and Asian mainland. Their military invaded and took over areas such as the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Burma. Also, as the year progressed, the Allies and Japan exchanged firepower in a series of key aerial and naval battles. Fought in May 1942, the Battle of the Coral Sea ended with each side sustaining one lost aircraft carrier. In addition, Japan endured significant destruction to several more of their war ships. The Battle of Midway took place in June 1942. During this conflict, Allied forces totally devastated four Japanese aircraft carriers, and in turn, this Allied victory proved to be one of the important turning points in the war.

From these engagements forward, the Allies utilized efficient aerial and naval strategy to develop and keep the upper hand against the Japanese. These ongoing setbacks made it very difficult for Japan to keep a secure territorial foothold. Owing to a lack of natural resources and manufacturing capabilities, the Japanese did not have the quantity of assets needed to continually rebuild their air and naval stockpile. Contrastingly, the Allies, particularly the United States, maintained a significant depth of strength in these vital areas. Thus, this clear advantage went a long way toward securing the Allies eventual victory in the war. However, Japan did not completely abandon its aerial efforts. In lieu of conventional attacks, they deployed suicide air missions to inflict damage on Allied ships. These missions were called Kamikazes, and although only a fraction of them achieved direct impact, the worst ones resulted in destruction, lost vessels, and casualties. However, Allied personnel took many of them down before the intended goal was fulfilled.

Throughout 1943, the Allies developed and launched complex attacks on Japanese held strongholds in the Pacific. These offensives utilized air personnel, warships, and land soldiers to steadily take islands in the Pacific. Once secured, the Allies used them as key supply stations and airplane landing strips. By late 1944, Allied troops had regained numerous key islands, and in turn, they were progressing forward in the direction of the Japanese. With their voyage toward Japan, the Allies implemented a strategy deemed island hopping.



USS Bunker Hill aircraft carrier was hit by two Kamikazes in 30 seconds, May 11, 1945

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This resulted in positive territorial results but also numerous casualties in what was horrific fighting.

In the spring of 1945, the Allies battled Japanese troops at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. These conflicts represented the height of the vicious fighting that characterized the island-hopping campaign. The total casualty count for both sides was more than 46,000 soldiers at Iwo Jima and 165,000 troops at Okinawa. Along with the high casualty rate, island hopping required engaging opposition forces in a maze of jungles, trenches, marsh, garrisons, and several more natural and man-made challenges. This often meant engaging in direct combat amidst unknown and difficult surroundings. The collective rage and fortitude of both sides spilled onto the battle fields as the Japanese grew increasingly desperate. Both sides were committed to sustaining war until the last man standing was eliminated.

The Allies combined retaking of Pacific islands with an aggressive and around the clock series of bombing operations on Japanese urban and industrial sectors. Their mission was to cause total devastation to key military installations, manufacturing areas, and heavily populated confines. As a result, these raids created extremely high civilian casualty totals. This was not a coincidence. Indeed, there was a psychological element to the strategy. Specifically, the Allies wanted to force Japan into a state of despair and then unconditional surrender. Simply put, they sought to bomb them into complete submission. The best example of the nature of this objective occurred on the evenings of March 9 and 10, 1945. Over those two nights, Allied bombing leveled over 16 square miles in and around Tokyo. In addition, the death toll exceeded more than 100,000 people. Throughout the forthcoming months, the Japanese people suffered an extremely high rate of civilian deaths and loss of infrastructure. However, the nation's military and government leaders remained committed to the ongoing war effort.



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Harry Truman bronze bust in the Missouri State Capitol, Jefferson City, Missouri

Ultimately, the summer of 1945 proved to be the final act of the war in the Pacific. In April 1945, President Roosevelt had passed away. In his place, Vice President Harry Truman came into power. Like the vast majority of Americans, Truman had been in the dark regarding key classified military measures of the ongoing war effort. Among those programs was a program to build an atomic weapon. Upon taking office, Truman found out about the Manhattan Project and its specific parameters. Over several months, he consulted other Allied leaders and his own advisors over the potential of utilizing atomic bombs to force the Japanese into an unconditional surrender.

The alternative plan was to continue implementing a conventional invasion strategy. The continuing bombing efforts of Japan's main land had inflicted a great deal of human and economic damage. However, the concept of an Allied amphibious to ground landing was still several months away. The two part plan was scheduled to be rolled out in

the late fall of 1945 (Operation Olympic) and early spring of 1946 (Operation Coronet). In terms of manpower, supplies, and weaponry, it would have been a larger scale version of the D-Day Operation. The war would have likely been extended into 1947, and in turn, could have led to a high casualty rate. The great human loss totals of the island hopping campaign concerned Truman and other key decision makers. The extension of the brutal fighting by one to two more years meant a finish to the conflict would still be well down the road. More than anything else, the risk of losing hundreds of thousands of Allied troops tilted the decision toward the nuclear option.

The Manhattan Project was a classified project aimed at developing nuclear weapons. The main area of production was in Los Alamos, NM. Oak Ridge, TN and Hanford, WA housed other key facilities. These otherwise quiet outposts became the secretive center of revolutionary scientific progress. Between late 1942 and mid-1945, the process of creating an ultimate weapon of destruction took place. The process involved more than 120,000 people and came at a cost of two billion dollars. Owing to the high security measures of the program, only a small group of people involved in its production were aware of the end goal of the process.

The Allies decided to use two atomic bombs on the Japanese mainland. The first of these weapons, nicknamed “Little Boy,” was dropped on August 6, 1945. The target area was Hiroshima, Japan. Almost instantaneously, a vast majority of the city was leveled. In addition, the bomb led to the immediate deaths of almost 80,000 people, and wounded another 30,000. The powerful blast did not force a submission from the Japanese. A second atomic bomb, nicknamed “Fat Man,” was dropped on August 9, 1945. The target area was Nagasaki, Japan. Upon impact, it killed over 60,000 people and caused an untold amount of damage to the surrounding area. Finally, the Japanese government surrendered on August 15, 1945, and this became known as Victory in Japan Day. Several weeks later, Japan signed an official document of surrender agreement on September 2, 1945.



Photo of Hiroshima bomb explosion
taken in Kure, Japan, August 6, 1945

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The American Home Front: Economic Developments

Perhaps the biggest advantage America brought to the Allies were enormous capabilities regarding agricultural and industrial production. In turn, igniting these production sectors allowed the U.S. economy to finally escape economic depression. Statistics help to paint the picture of the gap between America and its Axis opponents. For example, by the last year of the war in 1945 the United States manufactured over 88,000 tanks compared to

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Germany's output of just over 44,000. In regards to airplane manufacturing, America rolled out just under 300,000 whereas Japan only produced about 70,000.

The federal government exerted a great deal of control and organization regarding overall production of goods for the war. However, officials also realized they needed to be on the same page as major businesses to avoid unwanted conflicts and holdups. As a result, federal planning leaders implemented policies such as: a suspension of competitive bidding, low-interest loans for equipment, and tax incentives for new or expansionary construction projects. For their part, manufacturers adjusted production focus to fit the war effort's needs. For example, Ford Motor Company became a primary producer of military aircraft instead of family automobiles.

The agricultural sector also experienced increased economic growth. The federal government increased the cap on crop prices. This caused agricultural income to experience a growth rate of several hundred percent. One weakness to this financial prosperity is that it tended to favor large farms and agricultural corporations. Therefore, during the war, many smaller farming families chose to trade their agricultural careers for manufacturing jobs. On the whole, Americans' war time income levels rose several hundred percent. This represented a distinct change from the financial doldrums of several years earlier. In total, American job creation exploded, and millions of previously unemployed individuals found work.

However, there was a downside to the period's economic changes. Specifically, there were noticeable inflation increases and product shortages. After 1941, prices rose by nearly 20%. In addition, the military's high level of need for key materials such as glass and steel forced the federal government to suspend manufacturing of regular consumer items. Those items that became temporarily unavailable included vacuums, radios, and automobiles. Rationing efforts included even the smallest of items too, and people had to measure purchases of relatively inexpensive things like tooth paste, coffee, and soap.

Created in 1942, the Office of Price Administration controlled a great deal of policy pertaining to costs and rationing. This authority covered all varieties of products including food, shoes, and gas. Every person in the nation received food ration ledgers. Amounts of food rations were very specific and listed on per person basis. For example, meat rations totaled 28 ounces a week per person. Americans had to adjust to these sacrifices. However, the economic hardships of the previous decade's Great Depression conditioned many people to be capable of surviving with less. In addition, the nation's attitude toward attaining victory in the war built a spirit of unity that made such rationing an acceptable practice.

The American Home Front: Social Developments

One of the most unfortunate domestic issues of the World War II period involved the internment, or forced removal into camps, of Japanese people in America. There was a great deal of paranoia, prejudice, and outright disdain toward anyone of Japanese descent.

Tension ran high enough to make internment camps a reality. In February 1942, President Roosevelt signed an executive order to make this an official policy, and it remained in place through the end of the conflict. Over 127,000 Japanese people became forced occupants of these camps. Over time, there were 10 internment sites spread over 7 states. As camps were being constructed, Japanese people had to stay in various temporary places like horse barns. However, even the permanent encampments did not have acceptable modern living conditions. Things such as living quarters, schools, and cafeterias severely lacked in quality. Those interned had the ability to work for about five dollars a day, and they formed

advocacy groups to share complaints and recommendations about the camps. However, these matters often received very little government attention. Ultimately, a federal legal challenge regarding the internment camps went to the U. S. Supreme Court. However, the court ruled in favor of the federal government. Ultimately, Japanese internment occupants did not receive reparation payments until the late 1980s.

Throughout the conflict, women dealt with various changes. The armed forces arranged female-specific jobs and groups of servicewomen. By the end of the war, more than a quarter of a million women had become members of these units. Some of the more prominent ones included the Women's Army Corps (WAC), Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES), and the Army and Navy Nursing Corps. The positions designated for women were non-combat in nature. Clerical and nursing jobs became primary professional roles for them in the military. On the American home front, there was a great deal of transition for females, too. Specifically, women entered the workforce in greater numbers than ever before. With the surge of men required for war-time military service, over six million females flooded into various professions.

Millions of African-Americans served in the military and became employed on the home front. They also faced discrimination and segregation in both sectors. The Roosevelt administration responded to political outcry with an executive order that created a group called the Fair Employment Practices Commission. In addition, this spearheaded a policy to prohibit discrimination in defense industry civilian jobs. Moreover, a postwar result became a greater public support for further civil rights reforms. In the immediate years after World War II, integration of the armed forces and a litany of civilian sectors became a reality.



Interned Japanese American, Sumiko Shigematsu, standing at left, supervises fellow internees working at sewing machines at Manzanar Relocation Center, California

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The Tragic Legacy of War Time Atrocities

In the 1930s, the Jewish population of Germany was being stripped of property and generally of their human rights. The United States did not offer a cohesive plan to help them. There were American political leaders that favored lifting a federal cap on foreign refugees, and as such, this could have provided German Jews exile in the United States. However, the ongoing economic depression kept this policy from becoming a reality. Specifically, political leaders believed increasing the total allowed number of refugees would displace American-born workers already struggling to secure work. Moreover, there was a history of prejudice against Jewish people, and this reality also hurt their chances for assistance.



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Roll call at Buchenwald concentration camp, ca. 1938–1941. Two prisoners in the foreground are supporting a comrade, as fainting was frequently an excuse for guards to “liquidate” useless inmates

As the decade progressed, Nazi leaders forced a variety of personal and professional restrictions upon German Jews. These included educational segregation, property confiscation, and baseless imprisonment. As the 1930s came to end, things became worse, and Germany began implementing forced relocation of Jewish people. The Nazis quarantined Jews into sections of German cities that were called ghettos. Then, Nazis began to construct concentration camps to house Jews and others deemed inferior. Soon afterward, this policy

extended to Jews from all over Europe. Some of the encampments were work stations where victims endured forced labor on various projects. Within these groups, many people died from exhaustion. Other camps were extermination centers where millions of murders took place, and these mass executions were the most vivid embodiment of the Holocaust. Those killed included people from various ethnic groups as well as homosexuals, the disabled, and others. The highest casualty totals were those of Jewish and Slavic ethnicity. Countless others never made it to camps and were murdered, throughout Europe, by roving Nazi-hit squads.

The discoveries made in the latter part of the war revealed the Nazi prison encampments and all their associated horrors. In Europe, the Nuremberg Trials laid out the historical chronicles of the Holocaust in an in-depth manner. Many of the chief purveyors of the Holocaust were imprisoned and executed. In Asia, there were also many atrocities committed against the civilian populations. Japanese soldiers murdered and pillaged all across the Pacific sector. During the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, war

crimes trials led to many Japanese political and military leaders being sentenced to prison time and execution.

Conclusion: A Complex Historical Legacy

The historical legacy of World War II is complex and led to many changes in the world.

A vital part of this heritage was the birth of the Cold War. The aftermath of the conflict saw two nations, the United States and Soviet Union, left standing as the superior global players. As a new super power, The United States wanted to utilize the financial advantages of capitalism and political assets of democracy to attain greater global influence. In contrast, the Soviet Union endeavored to spread the foundational values of communism. Both countries sought to build international trust through the promotion of financial, military, and diplomatic assistance efforts. Both nations built worldwide and regional collective security organizations. This allowed the two new superpowers to share defense armaments, technology, and training with allied nations. In addition, each country provided monetary support through foreign aid to smaller nations, and this gave them banking, business, and infrastructural stability boosts.

The war gave women unprecedented opportunities to join the workforce. A few million women began working industrial jobs due to so many men joining the military. It was not that women did not work before, but many of these jobs had traditionally been reserved for men. American propaganda encouraged women to seek employment in the badly needed fields of producing wartime materials. The classic “Rosie the Riveter” image is one that outlived the end of the war. Ever since, the muscular woman in work clothes has represented the aspirations of females to pursue any career, no matter the type. Rosie became a symbol of feminism, as well. However, after World War II that propaganda turned to urging women to return home so men could fill these jobs. However, there had been irreversible gains in the area of women’s rights.

Globally speaking, nations were scrambling to define their positions in the new international community. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the Soviet Union temporarily occupied Eastern Europe. They had agreed with the other Allies to allow people in these areas to hold legitimate elections and establish self-determined political identities. Instead, the Soviet Union forced the occupied territories to build communist governments. On the other hand, the United States used financial support to help countries in Western Europe rebuild their war-torn economies. In addition, they utilized collective security to create a unified military front in the same areas. Like the Soviet Union, the Americans used these tools to attain diplomatic loyalty from their allies. Unlike their Cold War counterparts, the United States did not mandate that these countries directly answer to them.

As with Europe, the fallout from World War II’s end and the advent of the Cold War shifted power in Asia, too. Parts of the continent found American capitalism and military assistance to be positive attributes toward building an alliance. Some of the main nations that followed this approach were Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. On the other hand, nations such as China and North Korea developed diplomatic bonds with the Soviet

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Union. Outside of the growing Cold War developments, the most remarkable postwar outcome was Japan's transformation. For several years, the Japanese had an impassioned hatred for the United States and vice versa. However, the nations worked together to mend their diplomatic relationship. They partnered to turn Japan into an international model of peace, prosperity, and stability. In China, the wartime destruction led to tens of millions of casualties. Moreover, their economy and infrastructure were in ruins. It did not help that a civil war reignited between the established national government and rebel communists. Ultimately, in 1949, the communists prevailed in the conflict. This gave the Soviet Union a formidable communist partner in Asia.

One more legacy of World War II was the development of atomic weapons. After generations of industrialization improving modern military armaments, an ultimate weapon of obliteration had finally been invented and used in combat. Just a couple of years after the war, the Soviet Union built an atomic cache. In the ensuing two decades, a number of other nations developed nuclear arsenals. This new reality divided the globe between the haves and have-nots of atomic capabilities. The proliferation of nuclear weapons provided a new level of stress to global affairs. However, this occurrence also forced the concept of war to evolve into a more limited reality. During the Cold War, nuclear weapons made it a necessity to avoid a third installment of complete world war.

In many ways, World War II was the ultimate manifestation of what it meant to wage modern warfare. Technology is often considered a great benefit to humanity, and this is generally true. Although, when one combines mass industrialization, improvements in military capability, science, and the most destructive weapons in the history of mankind, then the world gets something like World War II. Less than 100 years earlier, people were still shooting at each other with muskets. Much had changed in a very short time. The factories of the American mainland had much to do with the Allies winning the war. It suddenly became patriotic to build plane, tank, or jeep parts. This was a different kind of "total war" on a level that dwarfed other American military conflicts like the Civil War and World War I. World War II was the "good war" after all, one in which good and evil were sharply in focus, and one where the United States seemed to save the day. American patriotism would turn to making most of the things that the world consumed. Producing, buying and selling, creating world markets; all of these became part of what it meant to be an American. The Age of America had begun.