Chapter 23  
Global Conflict: World War II, 1937–1945

Learning Objectives:

After reading Chapter 23, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the reasons behind the rise of fascism.
2. Explain the fascist aggression in both Europe and Asia.
3. Understand the great debate in the United States over intervention in the war.
4. Detail the significance of the attack on Pearl Harbor.
5. Analyze the causes of the internment of Japanese Americans.
6. Explain the importance of wartime migrations within America.
7. Discuss how propaganda was used to support the war effort.
8. Explain how women and minorities flowed into wartime industries.
9. Comprehend the magnitude of the Holocaust that took place in Europe.
10. Detail the racial tensions that persisted within the United States.
11. Understand how members of minority groups responded enthusiastically to the war effort.
12. Discuss the strains among the Allies concerning the war in Europe.
13. Analyze the United States’ role in the war in the Pacific.
15. Discuss the victory of the Allies and the use of the atomic bomb on Japan.

Time Line

1931
Japan seized Chinese province of Manchuria

1933
Hitler became chancellor of Germany

1935
Italy invaded Ethiopia

1936
Franco led right-wing rebellion against Spanish Republic

1937
Japan started full-scale war against China
1938
Nazi Germany annexed Austria

1939
World War II started in Europe with invasion of Poland
Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact

1940
Hitler defeated Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France
Franklin D. Roosevelt re-elected president

1941
Germany invaded the Soviet Union

1942
Japanese and Japanese Americans sent to internment camps
Mexico joined the Allies
U.S. won the Battle of Midway

1943
Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act
Defeat at the Battle of Stalingrad forced Nazi retreat along the eastern front

1944
FDR re-elected President

1945
FDR died, Harry Truman became president
Truman ordered atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
World War II ended

I. Mobilizing for War

A. The Rise of Fascism

While Americans were preoccupied with their problems at home and avoided foreign
entanglements, they could not help but notice the rise of fiercely anti-democratic and warlike
regimes in both Europe and Asia. In Europe, fascists, as they were called, took power in
Germany, Italy and Spain. Pushing fanatical nationalism, Italy invaded Ethiopia, Germany
openly violated the Versailles treaty, and both aided the right which overthrew Spain’s elected
government.
B. Aggression in Europe and Asia

After the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia, Hitler’s Germany invaded Poland in 1939, while the right won the Spanish Civil War the same year. By 1940, Hitler was successfully invading Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. Then, in the summer and fall, Nazi Germany launched an air war against Great Britain in what was called the Battle of Britain.

In Asia, nationalistic militarists gained control of the Japanese government by 1932 and occupied the Chinese province of Manchuria. Five years later, Japan began a full-scale war against China. Although the United States sent aid to China, American trade with Japan continued.

C. The Great Debate: Americans Contemplate War

Throughout the 1930s, Americans remained divided over war, with most still opposed to intervention. Those opposed to American involvement ranged across the political spectrum from religious pacifists to the pro-Nazi German American Bund. After Hitler had conquered most of western Europe, many Americans began to reconsider their neutrality. President Roosevelt increasingly felt that the United States must help fight aggression and Congress approved the Land-Lease agreement to lend rather than sell munitions to Allied nations. When the Nazis attacked the Soviet Union, breaking a non-aggression pact in June 1941, FDR extended Lend-Lease to the Soviets. As the U.S. came closer to war, problems at home remained, with 17.2 percent of the workforce still unemployed as late as 1939.

II. Pearl Harbor: The United States Enters the War

A. December 7, 1941

After nearly a decade of mounting tensions between Japan and America, the United States froze Japanese assets to force them to bargain over their aggressive Asian policy. Instead, Japan launched a surprise attack against Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The attack destroyed most of the U.S. Pacific fleet and half of the U.S. Far East Air Force. Congress immediately declared war on Japan and three days later, Germany and Italy, Axis allies of Japan, declared war against the United States.

B. Japanese American Relocation

The Pearl Harbor attack sparked rumors that Japanese agents and Japanese Americans were set to commit sabotage. Although no evidence was ever found against Japanese Americans, powerful farming interests saw a chance to eliminate Japanese American competition. Giving in to pressure, FDR signed Executive Order 9066, suspending the civil rights of citizens of Japanese
descent. The order called for the removal of over 100,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast, including 70,000 native-born American citizens.

The Japanese Americans removed were sent to harsh internment camps in isolated areas. Despite this, many Japanese Americans proved their love for the United States by volunteering for military service. Although they served with great distinction, the U.S. government waited until 1968 to reimburse former internees for some of the estimated $500 million in lost property. Only two decades later would Congress vote to pay surviving internees a $20,000 restitution.

C. Foreign Nations in the United States

Japanese Americans were not the only people interned solely because of their ethnic background. Germans and Italians living in the U.S. were also subject to new regulations. The Smith Act of 1940 required fingerprinting of aliens and made deportation easier. Faced with these new rules, thousands of émigrés became U.S. citizens. Naturalization was a way for foreigners to clarify their status and show their loyalty.

D. Wartime Migrations

The war economy would cause many rural Americans to move to cities to work for better pay in defense industries. 60,000 African Americans moved into Chicago alone, a development that caused a severe housing shortage. The most important wartime migration was from Mexico, as the bracero program allowed 300,000 Mexican workers into the United States mainly to labor in agriculture. In addition, large numbers of immigrants became U.S. citizens as a way of showing their loyalty and avoiding the restrictions on foreign residents in wake of the Smith Act (1940).

III. The Home Front

A. Building Morale

The Office of War Information (OWI) was established in 1942 to mount a propaganda campaign to promote support for the war effort. Working with Hollywood, the OWI portrayed the war as a crusade to preserve the “American way of life.” Gone were films with political dissent or ones showing class conflict. It was particularly important that members of the armed forces had high morale, so officials tried to ease the hardship of service with beer, cigarettes, and entertainment by Hollywood celebrities. Men were told that they were fighting so that they could go home to sexy girlfriends. Pinup photos of sexy but wholesome-looking women covered the walls of barracks.
B. Home Front Workers, Rosie the Riveter, and Victory Girls

Wartime led to new opportunities for women, who saw higher wages and access to jobs previously reserved for men. “Rosie the Riveter” became a heroic symbol of women war workers performing what were formerly male jobs in defense plants. Yet discrimination against women and minorities continued and it was not until 1943 that black women were allowed to work in defense plants.

Married women joined the paid labor force in large numbers and in 1943, the federal government responded by funding day-care centers, which would be closed at the end of the war. Women even served in the armed forces, with almost a quarter of a million women serving in either the Army’s WAC or the Navy’s WAVES. War also reversed the declining marriage and birth rates of the 1930s, as women solidified relationships and established connections to the future.

For some young women, called “victory girls,” it was an act of patriotism to have a fling with a man in a uniform before he was sent overseas. This sort of independence raised fears of female sexuality as a dangerous force. Public health officials worried about the spread of venereal disease among service men. Wartime changes likewise caused concerns about homosexuality, as gay men and lesbians found new opportunities to form relationships both in and out of the military.

IV. Race and War

A. The Holocaust

Hitler and the Nazis aimed not only to conquer Europe. They planned to destroy all Jews living under their control. Out of the 10 million Jews living in Europe before the war, 6 million were murdered, along with homosexuals, the disabled, and Gypsies. American officials knew about the Nazi attacks on Jews but did little to stop it. Despite growing evidence of Nazi genocide, the United States refused to increase the number of refugees admitted to the country. Although the U.S. fought the Nazis, it did little to help their victims.

B. Racial Tensions at Home

At home, racial tensions persisted; with black workers were excluded from the best-paying jobs in defense plants. Under pressure from African American activist A. Philip Randolph, FDR issued Executive Order 8802, banning discrimination against blacks and women in defense industries. Despite this action, the problem continued. Sometimes white workers would react against women and blacks who they feared were taking their jobs. Some white workers refused to work next to blacks.
In Los Angeles, Mexican American youth became the targets of white hostility. Wearing a distinctive attire known as zoot suits as a sign of ethnic pride and rebellion, young “pachucos” were singled out by the police. For eight days in June 1943, white soldiers hunted zoot-suiters throughout the L.A. area, pulling off their suits and beating them without mercy. The police sided with the soldiers and did nothing. The rioting ended only when the War Department made the entire city off-limits to military personnel.

C. Fighting for the “Double V”

Despite discrimination at home, minorities responded enthusiastically to the war effort and almost a million African Americans joined the armed forces. African Americans fought for the “Double V” - victory over foreign fascism and domestic racism. Native Americans likewise rushed to serve in the military and, in fact, volunteered at a rate higher than that of whites.

V. Total War

A. The War in Europe

Unable to overcome decades of hostility, the Soviet Union and her western Allies, Britain and the United States, fought the war with an eye to postwar advantage. Since the Soviets suffered huge losses in the face of 200 German divisions rolling through eastern Europe, Stalin asked the United States to open a second front in western Europe to divert some of the Nazi pressure. Although Roosevelt promised this in 1942, Britain’s Winston Churchill convinced FDR to invade north Africa instead.

Meanwhile the Soviets had single-handedly turned back the Nazi war machine in the decisive battle of Stalingrad, which ended in January 1943. The Anglo American campaign in north Africa was also successful and led to the invasion of southern Italy, resulting in the collapse of Mussolini’s government. Finally on June 6, 1944, the western Allies invaded France in an operation code-named “D-Day.” The battered German army was soon routed from France as the Soviet Union closed in from the east. By May 1945, the war in Europe was over, although FDR did not live to see the end of it, as he died on April 12, 1945.

B. The War in the Pacific

Unlike the European campaign, the United States did almost all the fighting in the Pacific. The war was particularly vicious, as both sides used racism to inspire their troops and degrade their enemies. At the key battle of Midway, the American navy sunk four Japanese aircraft carriers and destroyed 322 planes, virtually ending Japanese offensive capabilities. In China, the fight against Japan was complicated by a civil war between a corrupt nationalist government and the Chinese Communists, led by Mao Zedong.
Racial hostility against the Japanese led U.S. troops often to kill prisoners and desecrate the bodies of enemy dead. On the home front, the Japanese were portrayed as a monstrous race. FDR approved the firebombing of Japanese cities, much as he had done with German civilian targets.

C. The End of the War

Allied leaders met several time to plan for the postwar world; President Roosevelt hoped to limit Soviet power while ensuring American dominance. The Allies agreed to divide Europe into separate spheres of influence, although there was strife over Poland, which Stalin clearly planned to keep under his control. After the defeat of Germany, the Allied leaders demanded unconditional surrender from Japan. Although the United States had once thought it needed the Soviet Union to help defeat the Japanese, once President Truman (who replaced the late FDR) learned of the successful test of the atomic bomb, it was clear America could win alone. When Truman ordered the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and a second bomb on Nagasaki two days later, the power of the new weapon was clear to all. Japan surrendered on September 2, 1945.

Identification

Explain the significance of each of the following:

1. Third Reich:

2. Blitzkrieg:

3. America First Committee:

4. Lend-Lease:

5. Jeannette Rankin (R- Montana):

6. Nisei:

7. 442 Regiment:
8. *Bracero* Program:

9. Office of War Information (OWI):

10. Pin-ups:

11. “Victory Girls”:

12. *This is the Army*:

13. Wagner-Rodgers Bill (1939):


15. A. Philip Randolph:

16. Zoot Suits:

17. Navajo “Code Talkers”:

18. Stalingrad:

19. Bataan Death March:

20. Mao Zedong:

21. Battle of Midway:
22. Hitler’s “Final Solution”:

23. Nagasaki:

24. General George C. Marshall:

25. Dachau:

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. During the Holocaust, Nazi Germany killed which of the following?
   A. Jews
   B. Romani
   C. homosexuals
   D. Communists
   E. all of the above

2. Which of the following nations came to the aid of the Spanish Republic?
   A. United States
   B. Soviet Union
   C. France
   D. Great Britain
   E. all of the above

3. In 1940 Japan joined Germany and Italy in the
   A. triple entente.
   B. Axis alliance.
   C. desire to save the free world.
   D. air war against the Soviet Union.
   E. war against Sweden.
4. President Roosevelt’s policy of Lend-Lease meant that the U.S. would
   A. lend rather than sell munitions to the Allies.
   B. sell weapons to both sides, since America was neutral.
   C. lend weapons to both sides to stay out of the war.
   D. all of the above.
   E. none of the above.

5. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii was
   A. a complete surprise, since Japan and the U.S. had been good friends.
   B. revealed two weeks beforehand to President Roosevelt.
   C. in response to the freezing of Japanese assets in the United States.
   D. caused by American support for the Soviet Union in the Far East.
   E. none of the above.

6. Executive Order 9066, signed by President Roosevelt,
   A. removed 110,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans from the West Coast.
   B. sent 70,000 native-born U.S. citizens to internment camps.
   C. did not remove Japanese or Japanese Americans from Hawaii.
   D. all of the above.
   E. none of the above.

7. Under the *bracero* program, 300,000 Mexicans were
   A. deported back to Mexico as security risks.
   B. forced to become naturalized U.S. citizens in order to remain in the country.
   C. allowed into the United States mainly to work in agriculture.
   D. allowed to join the U.S. Navy.
   E. none of the above

8. To maintain the morale of fighting men, the government gave them
   A. beer.
   B. “Victory Girls.”
   C. lectures on the evils of Communism.
   D. all of the above.
   E. none of the above.

9. During the war, with so many men overseas, the
   A. birth rate went up.
   B. number of marriages increased.
   C. defense industries hired more women than ever before.
   D. more women stayed at home.
   E. all of the above.
10. Upon learning of mass Nazi extermination of the Jews and others, the U.S.
A. did virtually nothing.
B. began air raids against death camps in Poland.
C. waived all immigration quotas for refugees from Hitler
D. B and C only
E. all of the above.

11. Fighting for the “Double V” meant victory over fascism and
A. the Communist Party.
B. racism at home.
C. Japan.
D. all of the above.
E. none of the above.

12. The battle of Stalingrad was a/n
A. great victory for the United States.
B. important defeat for Imperial Japan.
C. major turning point in the war.
D. vital victory for Nazi Germany.
E. all of the above.

13. In China, the struggle against Japanese aggression was complicated because
A. both sides were hostile to the United States.
B. China was allied with Italy.
C. China was in the midst of a civil war.
D. all of the above.
E. none of the above.

14. When President Truman learned of the successful test of the atomic bomb, he
A. was anxious to drop it.
B. knew he would not need Russia’s help to defeat Japan.
C. wanted to use it on a major Japanese city without warning.
D. thought it would end the war in the Pacific.
E. all of the above.

15. Which of the following did NOT take place during World War II?
A. The United States became the most powerful country in the world.
B. The United States did most of the fighting against Japan in the Pacific.
C. The United States did most of the fighting against Germany in Europe.
D. America took casualties far below those of most other nations.
E. The United States suffered less material damage than other major combatants.
MAP QUESTION:

After looking at Map 23.1, discuss what it must have been like for Japanese Americans removed from the West Coast and resettled in the locations indicated. How do you think this affected the people interned?

CONNECTING HISTORY

Explain the pros and cons of the United States being the only nation to ever use an atomic bomb on cities. Argue which side of the argument you most agree with and why.

INTERPRETING HISTORY

Imagine you were Zelda Webb Anderson entering military service during World War II. Write a diary entry discussing your reaction to the discrimination you endured.

Answers to Multiple Choice Questions

1. E
2. B
3. B
4. A
5. C
6. D
7. C
8. A
9. C
10. A
11. B
12. C
13. C
14. E
15. C