

CHAPTER
25

Summary

TELESCOPING THE TIMES

The United States in World War II

CHAPTER OVERVIEW *Soldiers abroad and Americans at home join in the effort to win World War II, which ends with victory for the allies. But American society is transformed in the process.*

1 Mobilization on the Home Front

KEY IDEA *The United States enters the war and mobilizes its citizens and resources to give its allies unprecedented military and industrial support.*

Fighting a war on two fronts required large numbers of soldiers. About 5 million volunteered to enter the armed forces; another 10 million were drafted. After eight weeks of basic training, former civilians became soldiers. Among them were about a half million Mexican Americans, a million African Americans, and many thousand Asian and Native Americans.

To free more men for combat, the army created the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). About 250,000 women served in the military even though they did not receive the same pay or benefits as male soldiers.

The nation's factories converted from peacetime to wartime production. Automakers made planes, tanks, and other vehicles; shipyards built warships. About 18 million workers—one third of them women—kept these war industries productive. African Americans pushed for—and won—equal access to jobs in war industries.

The government recruited scientists to develop new weapons and medicines. This effort produced radar, sonar, penicillin and other drugs, and the atomic bomb. The government also created the Office of Price Administration (OPA). The OPA froze the prices of consumer goods and issued ration books, restricting access to scarce goods such as gasoline and meat. Most Americans cooperated with rationing. They also bought war bonds and collected scrap paper or metal to help the soldiers fighting overseas.

The U.S. government, fearing that Americans of Japanese descent may be working with Japan, confined about 110,000 Japanese Americans in internment camps. Two-thirds were U.S. citizens.

2 The War for Europe and North Africa

KEY IDEA *The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union cooperate in the fight to defeat Germany and its allies.*

President Franklin Roosevelt met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in late 1941. They agreed to concentrate their efforts first on defeating Hitler's Germany. They also agreed that they would accept only unconditional surrender.

At first, many U.S. ships were destroyed by German submarines. Eventually, the Allies won the battle of the Atlantic by using convoys and radar to sink submarines and by relying on the tremendous output of American shipyards.

The German attack on the Soviet Union, begun in 1941, stalled in early 1942. They moved to take Stalingrad and oil fields in the south, but the Soviet army trapped a large German force in the city. In February 1943, the army's remnants surrendered. Just months later, the Americans and British pushed the Germans out of North Africa. The Allies were on the move.

The Americans and British next captured Sicily, leading the war-weary Italian king to overthrow dictator Benito Mussolini. Hitler seized Italy, however, and dug in to fight. The Allies' advance through Italy was slow and bloody.

Meanwhile, the Americans and British launched a massive invasion to liberate western Europe. Landing on June 6, 1944, in northern France, the Allies forced the Germans off the coast and began to advance eastward. By August, they had liberated Paris, and by the fall they had entered Germany. The Germans began a counterattack in December. They cut deeply into Allied lines at first, but the Allies responded quickly. This battle—called the Battle of the Bulge—was Germany's last gasp. At the same time, the Soviets entered Germany from the east.

As the Allied armies advanced, they began to find the death camps that the Nazis had built to kill millions of Jews and others. The Soviets reached Berlin in April 1945. Hitler committed suicide, and a week later Germany surrendered.

3 The War in the Pacific

KEY IDEA America wages an aggressive military campaign against Japan in the Pacific islands and finally ends the war.

After Pearl Harbor, Japan captured large parts of Asia and the Pacific. The United States struck back. First there was a token air raid on Tokyo that lifted American spirits. Then there were real victories in the battles of Coral Sea and Midway, stopping planned Japanese invasions. The enemy lost valuable aircraft carriers and planes.

U.S. strategy called for bypassing the major Japanese strongholds and attacking less well-defended islands. Then airfields were built to launch air attacks on supply lines. The Americans took Guadalcanal in 1943 and gradually moved northwest, recapturing the Philippines in 1944. Next was the extremely bloody battle for Iwo Jima.

As Americans neared Japan, President Roosevelt died. Vice President Harry S. Truman took over while the United States won a costly battle in Okinawa. U.S. leaders feared similar high casualties if Japan itself had to be invaded.

President Truman learned of the secret effort to develop an atomic bomb. Scientists were split over whether or not to use the bomb on Japan, but Truman decided to authorize using the weapon. On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, leveling the city. When the Japanese did not surrender, another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Finally the Japanese agreed to end the war.

Before he died, Roosevelt had met with Churchill and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin at Yalta. They discussed the shape of the postwar world and agreed to create a new international organization, the United Nations. In April 1945, the United Nations officially came into existence. The Allies also took steps to punish the Nazi and Japanese leaders that they held responsible for the war and for cruel treatment of prisoners and civilians. The United States occupied Japan, helping create a democratic government.

4 The Impact of the War

KEY IDEA Americans begin to adjust to new economic opportunities and continuing social problems after World War II.

The economy boomed during World War II, and workers' wages rose significantly. Farmers enjoyed good weather and high demand for their crops, enabling them to thrive. The share of women in the work force rose to 35 percent. Many Americans relocated, moving to find the growing defense jobs in the Middle Atlantic states, Michigan, Florida, and the Pacific coast states. Rapid urban growth led to a housing shortage.

People had to adjust to new family situations. The marriage rate boomed during the war—as did the divorce rate after servicemen returned to civilian life. Single mothers juggled jobs and childrearing. Congress passed a law called the GI Bill of Rights allowing former servicemen to attend college or technical school with paid tuition.

African-American soldiers were placed in segregated units, but some of these all-black units won many medals. At home, during the war, large numbers of African Americans got well-paying skilled jobs. But racial tension erupted into violence in many cities, notably Detroit in 1943. Many communities tried to improve race relations. Mexican-American soldiers also fought bravely and won many honors while civilians suffered discrimination and—in the 1943 riots in Los Angeles—violence.

Japanese Americans suffered the most. Their homes, businesses, and possessions were taken when they were sent to internment camps. Young males joined the army to show their loyalty. Others sued the government to end the internment, but the courts refused. Not until 1988 did the government make reparation—compensation—payments to all those who had been interned.