

America in World War II

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1941–1945

Never before have we had so little time in which to do so much.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, 1942

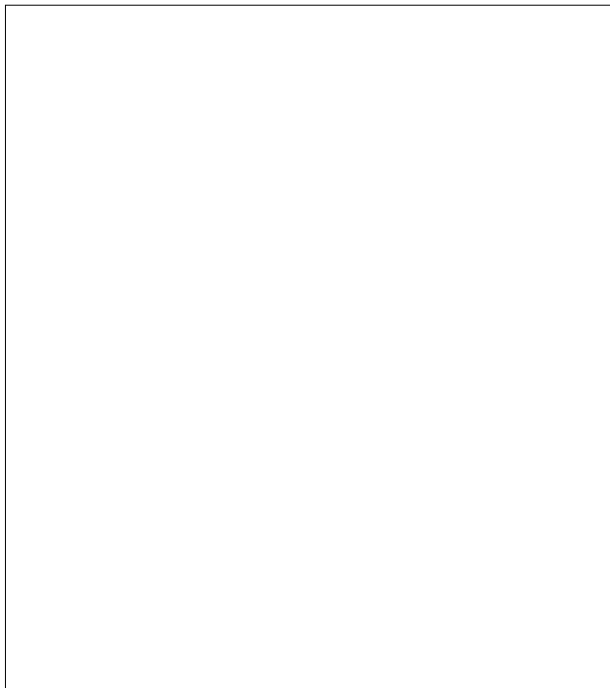
The United States was plunged into the inferno of World War II with the most stupefying and humiliating military defeat in its history. In the dismal months that ensued, the democratic world teetered on the edge of disaster.

Japan's fanatics forgot that whoever stabs a king must stab to kill. A wounded but still potent American giant pulled itself out of the mud of Pearl Harbor, grimly determined to avenge the bloody treachery. "Get Japan first" was the cry that rose from millions of infuriated Americans, especially on the Pacific Coast. These outraged souls regarded America's share in the global conflict as a private war of vengeance in the Pacific, with the European front a kind of holding operation.

But Washington, in the so-called ABC-1 agreement with the British, had earlier and wisely adopted the grand strategy of "getting Germany

first." If America diverted its main strength to the Pacific, Hitler might crush both the Soviet Union and Britain and then emerge unconquerable in Fortress Europe. But if Germany was knocked out first, the combined Allied forces could be concentrated on Japan, and its daring game of conquest would be up. Meanwhile, just enough American strength would be sent to the Pacific to prevent Japan from digging in too deeply.

The get-Germany-first strategy was the solid foundation on which all American military strategy was built. But it encountered much ignorant criticism from two-fisted Americans who thirsted for revenge against Japan. Aggrieved protests were also registered by shorthanded American commanders in the Pacific and by Chinese and Australian allies. But President Roosevelt, a competent strategist in his own right, wisely resisted these pressures.



The Allies Trade Space for Time

Given time, the Allies seemed bound to triumph. But would they be given time? True, they had on their side the great mass of the world's population, but the wolf is never intimidated by the number of the sheep. The United States was the mightiest military power on earth—potentially. But wars are won with bullets, not blueprints. Indeed America came perilously close to losing the war to the well-armed aggressors before it could begin to throw its full weight onto the scales.

Time, in a sense, was the most needed munition. Expense was no limitation. The overpowering problem confronting America was to retool itself for all-out war production, while praying that the dictators would not meanwhile crush the democracies. Haste was all the more imperative because the highly skilled German scientists might turn up with unbeatable secret weapons, including rocket bombs and perhaps even atomic arms.

America's task was far more complex and back-breaking than during World War I. It had to feed, clothe, and arm itself, as well as transport its forces to regions as far separated as Britain and Burma. More than that, it had to send a vast amount of food and munitions to its hard-pressed allies, who stretched all the way from the USSR to Australia. Could the American people, reputedly "gone soft," measure up to this Herculean task? Was democracy "rotten" and "decadent," as the dictators sneeringly proclaimed?

The Shock of War

National unity was no worry, thanks to the electrifying blow by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. American Communists had denounced the Anglo-French "imperialist" war before Hitler attacked Stalin in 1941, but they now clamored for an unmitigated assault on the Axis powers. The handful of strutting pro-Hitlerites in the United States melted away, while millions of Italian-Americans and German-Americans loyally supported the nation's war program. In contrast to World War I, when the patriotism of millions of immigrants was hotly questioned, World War II actually speeded the assimilation of many ethnic groups into American society. Immigration had been choked off for almost two decades before 1941, and America's ethnic communities were now composed of well-settled members, whose votes were crucial to Franklin Roosevelt's Democratic party. Consequently, there was virtually no government witch-hunting of minority groups, as had happened in World War I.

American song titles after Pearl Harbor combined nationalism with unabashed racism: "We Are the Sons of the Rising Guns," "Oh, You Little Son of an Oriental," "To Be Specific, It's Our Pacific," "The Sun Will Soon Be Setting on the Land of the Rising Sun," "The Japs Don't Stand a Chinaman's Chance," and "We're Gonna Find a Fellow Who Is Yellow and Beat Him Red, White, and Blue."

A painful exception was the plight of some 110,000 Japanese-Americans, concentrated on the Pacific Coast (see “Makers of America: The Japanese,” pp. 830–831). The Washington top command, fearing that they might act as saboteurs for Japan in case of invasion, forcibly herded them together in concentration camps, though about two-thirds of them were American-born U.S. citizens. This brutal precaution was both unnecessary and unfair, as the loyalty and combat record of Japanese-Americans proved to be admirable. But a wave of post-Pearl Harbor hysteria, backed by the long historical swell of anti-Japanese prejudice on the West Coast, temporarily robbed many Americans of their good sense—and their sense of justice. The internment camps deprived these uprooted Americans of dignity and basic rights; the internees also lost hundreds of millions of dollars in property and foregone earnings. The wartime Supreme Court in 1944 upheld the constitutionality of the Japanese relocation in *Korematsu v. U.S.* But more than four decades later, in 1988, the U.S. government officially apologized for its actions and approved the payment of reparations of \$20,000 to each camp survivor.

Monica Sone (b. 1919), a college-age Japanese-American woman in Seattle, recorded the shock she and her brother felt when they learned of Executive Order No. 9066, which authorized the War Department to remove Japanese—aliens and citizens alike—from their homes:

“In anger, Henry and I read and reread the Executive Order. Henry crumbled the newspaper in his hand and threw it against the wall. ‘Doesn’t my citizenship mean a single blessed thing to anyone? Why doesn’t somebody make up my mind for me? First they want me in the army. Now they’re going to slap an alien 4-C on me because of my ancestry. . . .’ Once more I felt like a despised, pathetic two-headed freak, a Japanese and an American, neither of which seemed to be doing me any good.”

The war prompted other changes in the American mood. Many programs of the once-popular New Deal—including the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, and the National Youth Administration—were wiped out by the conservative Congress elected in 1942. Roosevelt declared in 1943 that “Dr. New Deal” was going into retirement, to be replaced by “Dr. Win-the-War.” His announcement acknowledged not only the urgency of the war effort but the power of the revitalized conservative forces in the country. The era of New Deal reform was over.

World War II was no idealistic crusade, as World War I had been. The Washington government did make some effort to propagandize at home and abroad with the Atlantic Charter, but the accent was on action. Opinion polls in 1942 revealed that nine out of ten Americans could cite no provisions of the Atlantic Charter. A majority then, and a near-majority two years later, confessed to having “no

MAKERS OF AMERICA

The Japanese

In 1853 the American commodore Matthew Perry sailed four gunboats into Japan's Uraga Bay and demanded that the nation open itself to diplomatic and commercial exchange with the United States. Perry's arrival ended two centuries of Japan's self-imposed isolation and eventually led to the overthrow of the last Japanese shogun (military ruler) and the restoration of the emperor. Within two decades of Perry's arrival, Japan's new "Meiji" government had launched the nation on an ambitious program of industrialization and militarization designed to make it the economic and political equal of the Western powers.

As Japan rapidly modernized, its citizens increasingly took ship for America. A steep land tax imposed by the Meiji government to pay for its reforms drove more than 300,000 Japanese farmers off their land. In 1884 the Meiji government permitted Hawaiian planters to recruit contract laborers from among this displaced population. By the 1890s many Japanese were sailing beyond Hawaii to the ports of Long Beach, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Between 1885 and 1924, roughly 200,000 Japanese migrated to Hawaii, and around 180,000 more ventured to the U.S. mainland. They were a select group: because the Meiji government saw overseas Japanese as representatives of their homeland, it strictly regulated emigration. Thus Japanese immigrants to America arrived with more money than their European counterparts. Also, because of Japan's system of compulsory education, Japanese immigrants on average were better educated and more literate than European immigrants.

Women as well as men migrated. The Japanese government, wanting to avoid the problems of an itinerant bachelor society that it observed among the Chinese in the United States, actively promoted women's migration. Although most Japanese immigrants were young men in their twenties and thirties, thousands of women also ventured to Hawaii

and the mainland as contract laborers or "picture brides," so called because their courtship had consisted exclusively of an exchange of photographs with their prospective husbands.

Like many Chinese and European immigrants, most Japanese who came to America expected to stay only temporarily. They planned to work hard for wages that were high by Japanese standards and then to return home and buy land. In Hawaii most Japanese labored on the vast sugar cane plantations. On the mainland they initially found migratory work on the railroads or in fish, fruit, or vegetable canneries. A separate Japanese economy of restaurants, stores, and boardinghouses soon sprang up in cities to serve the immigrants' needs.

From such humble beginnings, many Japanese—particularly those on the Pacific Coast—

quickly moved into farming. In the late nineteenth century, the spread of irrigation shifted California agriculture from grain to fruits and vegetables, and the invention of the refrigerated railcar opened hungry new markets in the East. The Japanese, with centuries of experience in intensive farming, arrived just in time to take advantage of these developments. As early as 1910, Japanese farmers produced 70 percent of California's strawberries, and by 1940 they grew 95 percent of the state's snap beans and more than half of its tomatoes. One Japanese farmer, known as the Potato King, sent his children to Harvard and Stanford Universities and died in 1926 with an estate valued at \$15 million.

But the very success of the Japanese proved a lightning rod for trouble. On the West Coast, Japanese immigrants had long endured racist barbs and social segregation. Increasingly, white workers and farmers, jealous of Japanese success, pushed for immigration restrictions. Bowing to this pressure, President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 negotiated the "Gentlemen's Agreement," under which the Japanese government voluntarily agreed to limit emigration. In 1913 the California legislature denied Japanese immigrants already living in the United States the right to own land.

Legally barred from becoming citizens, Japanese immigrants (the "Issei," from the Japanese word for *first*) became more determined than ever

that their American-born children (the "Nissei," from the Japanese word for *second*) would reap the full benefits of their birthright. Japanese parents encouraged their children to learn English, to excel in school, and to get a college education. Many Nissei grew up in two worlds, a fact they often recognized by Americanizing their Japanese names. Although education and acculturation did not protect the Nissei from the hysteria of World War II, those assets did give them a springboard to success in the postwar era.

clear idea what the war is about.” All Americans knew was that they had a dirty job on their hands and that the only way out was forward. They went about their bloody task with astonishing efficiency.

Building the War Machine

The war crisis caused the drooping American economy to snap to attention. Massive military orders—over \$100 billion in 1942 alone—almost instantly soaked up the idle industrial capacity of the still-lingering Great Depression. Orchestrated by the War

Production Board, American factories poured forth an avalanche of weaponry: 40 billion bullets, 300,000 aircraft, 76,000 ships, 86,000 tanks, and 2.6 million machine guns. Miracle-man shipbuilder Henry J. Kaiser was dubbed “Sir Launchalot” for his prodigies of ship construction; one of his ships was fully assembled in fourteen days, complete with life jackets and coat hangers.

The War Production Board halted the manufacture of nonessential items such as passenger cars. It assigned priorities for transportation and access to raw materials. When the Japanese invasion of British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies snapped America’s lifeline of natural rubber, the government imposed a national speed limit and gasoline rationing in order to conserve rubber and built fifty-one synthetic-rubber plants. By war’s end they were far outproducing the prewar supply.

Farmers, too, rolled up their sleeves and increased their output. The armed forces drained the farms of workers, but heavy new investment in agricultural machinery and improved fertilizers more than made up the difference. In 1944 and 1945, blue-jeaned farmers hauled in record-breaking billion-bushel wheat harvests.

These wonders of production also brought economic strains. Full employment and scarce consumer goods fueled a sharp inflationary surge in 1942. The Office of Price Administration eventually brought ascending prices under control with extensive regulations. Rationing held down the consumption of critical goods such as meat and butter, though some “black marketeers” and “meatleggers” cheated the system. The War Labor Board (WLB) imposed ceilings on wage increases.

Labor unions, whose membership grew from about 10 million to more than 13 million workers during the war, fiercely resented the government-dictated wage ceilings. Despite the no-strike pledges of most of the major unions, a rash of labor walkouts plagued the war effort. Prominent among the strikers were the United Mine Workers, who several times were called off the job by their crusty and iron-willed chieftain, John L. Lewis.

Threats of lost production through strikes became so worrisome that Congress, in June 1943, passed the Smith-Connally Anti-Strike Act. This act authorized the federal government to seize and operate tied-up industries. Strikes against any government-operated industry were made a criminal offense. Under the act, Washington took over the coal mines and, for a brief period, the railroads. Yet

work stoppages, although dangerous, actually accounted for less than 1 percent of the total working hours of the United States' wartime laboring force—a record better than blockaded Britain's. 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. Best known of these “women in arms” were the WAACs (army), WAVES (navy), and SPARs (Coast Guard). As the draft net was tightened after Pearl Harbor, millions of young men were plucked from their homes and clothed in “GI” (government issue) outfits. As the arsenal of democracy, the United States exempted certain key categories of industrial and agricultural workers from the draft, in order to keep its mighty industrial and food-producing machines humming.

Poster appeals and slogans urging women to enlist in the WAACs (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) were “Speed Them Back, Join the WAAC,” “I'd Rather Be with Them—Than Waiting for Them,” “Back the Attack, Be a WAAC! For America Is Calling,” and (a song throwback to World War I) “The WAACs and WAVES Will Win the War, Parlez Vous.”

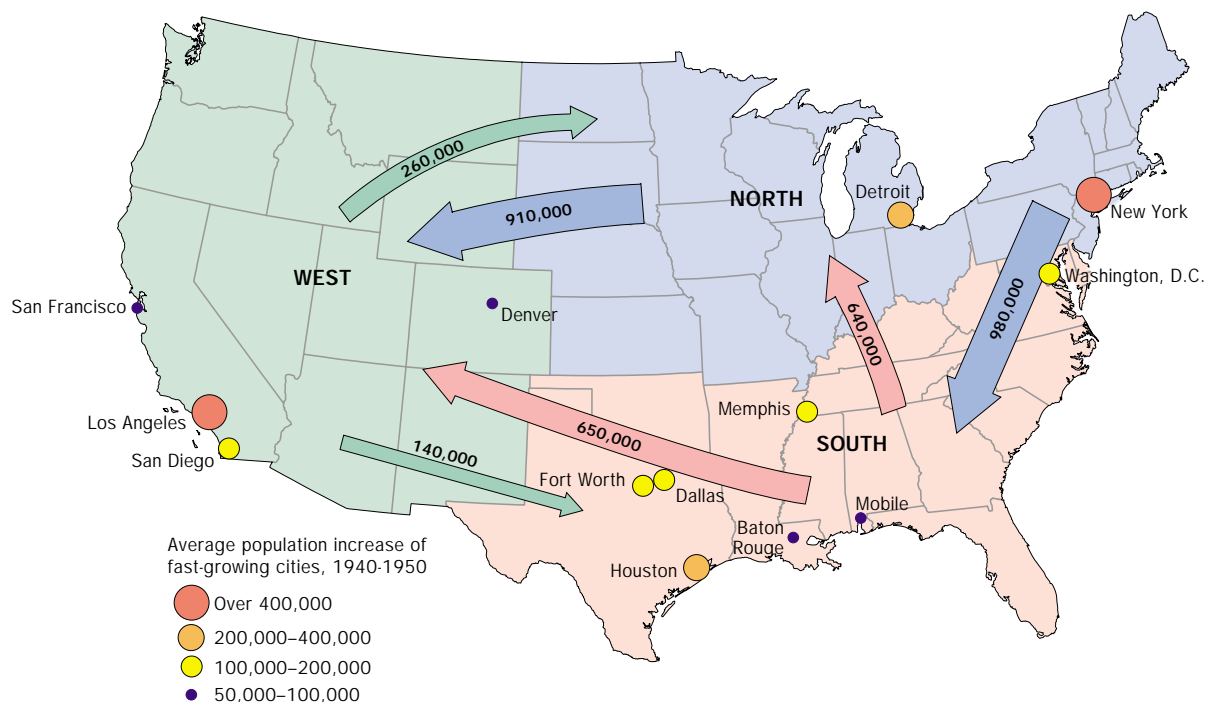
But even with these exemptions, the draft left the nation's farms and factories so short of personnel that new workers had to be found. An agreement with Mexico in 1942 brought thousands of Mexican agricultural workers, called *braceros*, across the border to harvest the fruit and grain crops of the West. The *bracero* program outlived the war by some twenty years, becoming a fixed feature of the agricultural economy in many western states.

Even more dramatic was the march of women onto the factory floor. More than 6 million women took up jobs outside the home; over half of them had never before worked for wages. Many of them were mothers, and the government was obliged to set up some 3,000 day-care centers to care for “Rosie the Riveter’s” children while she drilled the fuselage of a heavy bomber or joined the links of a tank track. When the war ended, Rosie and many of her sisters were in no hurry to put down their tools. They wanted to keep on working and often did. The war thus foreshadowed an eventual revolution in the roles of women in American society.

Yet the war’s immediate impact on women’s lives has frequently been exaggerated. The great majority of American women—especially those with husbands present in the home or with small children to care for—did not work for wages in the wartime economy but continued in their traditional roles. In both Britain and the Soviet Union, a far greater percentage of women, including mothers,

were pressed into industrial employment as the gods of war laid a much heavier hand on those societies than they did on the United States. A poll in 1943 revealed that a majority of American women would not take a job in a war plant if it were offered.

At war’s end, two-thirds of women war workers left the labor force. Many of these were forced out of their jobs by employers and unions eager to re-employ returning servicemen. But half of them told census takers that they quit their jobs voluntarily because of family obligations. The immediate postwar period witnessed not a permanent widening of women’s employment opportunities, but a widespread rush into suburban domesticity and the mothering of the “baby boomers” who were born by the tens of millions in the decade and a half after 1945. America was destined to experience a thoroughgoing revolution in women’s status later in the postwar period, but that epochal change was only beginning to gather momentum in the war years.



Internal Migration in the United States During World War II Few events in American history have moved the American people about so massively as World War II. The West and the South boomed, and several war-industry cities grew explosively. A majority of migrants from the South were blacks; 1.6 million African-Americans left the region in the 1940s. (Source: United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

Wartime Migrations

The war also proved to be a demographic cauldron, churning and shifting the American population. Many of the 15 million men and women in uniform, having seen new sights and glimpsed new horizons, chose not to go home again at war's end. War industries sucked people into boomtowns like Los Angeles, Detroit, Seattle, and Baton Rouge. California's population grew by nearly 2 million. The South experienced especially dramatic changes. Franklin Roosevelt had called the South "the nation's number one economic problem" in 1938; when war came, he seized the opportunity to accelerate the region's economic development. The states of the old Confederacy received a disproportionate share of defense contracts, including nearly \$6 billion of federally financed industrial facilities. Here were the seeds of the postwar blossoming of the "Sunbelt."

Despite this economic stimulus in the South, some 1.6 million blacks left the land of their ancient enslavement to seek jobs in the war plants of the West and North. Forever after, race relations constituted a national, not a regional, issue. Explosive tensions developed over employment, housing, and segregated facilities. Black leader A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, threatened a massive "Negro March on

An African-American soldier angrily complained about segregation in the armed forces during World War II:

"Why is it we Negro soldiers who are as much a part of Uncle Sam's great military machine as any cannot be treated with equality and the respect due us? The same respect which white soldiers expect and demand from us? . . . There is great need for drastic change in this man's Army! How can we be trained to protect America, which is called a *free* nation, when all around us rears the ugly head of segregation?"

Washington" in 1941 to demand equal opportunities for blacks in war jobs and in the armed forces. Roosevelt's response was to issue an executive order forbidding discrimination in defense industries. In addition, the president established the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to monitor compliance with his edict. Blacks were also drafted into the armed forces, though they were still generally assigned to service branches rather than combat units and subjected to petty degradations such

as segregated blood banks for the wounded. But in general the war helped to embolden blacks in their long struggle for equality. They rallied behind the slogan “Double V”—victory over the dictators abroad and over racism at home. Membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) shot up almost to the half-million mark, and a new militant organization, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), was founded in 1942.

The northward migration of African-Americans accelerated after the war, thanks to the advent of the mechanical cotton picker—an invention whose impact rivaled that of Eli Whitney’s cotton gin. Introduced in 1944, this new mechanical marvel did the work of fifty people at about one-eighth the cost. Overnight, the Cotton South’s historic need for cheap labor disappeared. Their muscle no longer required in Dixie, some 5 million black tenant farmers and sharecroppers headed north in the three decades after the war. Theirs was one of the great migrations in American history, comparable in size to the immigrant floods from Ireland, Italy, and Poland. Within a single generation, a near majority of African-Americans gave up their historic home-

land and their rural way of life. By 1970 half of all blacks lived outside of the South, and *urban* had become almost a synonym for *black*. The speed and scale of these changes jolted the migrants and sometimes convulsed the communities that received them.

The war also prompted an exodus of Native Americans from the reservations. Thousands of Indian men and women found war work in the major cities, and thousands more answered Uncle Sam’s call to arms. More than 90 percent of Indians resided on reservations in 1940; six decades later more than half lived in cities, with a large concentration in southern California.

Some twenty-five thousand 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, which were incomprehensible to the Germans and the Japanese.

The sudden rubbing against one another of unfamiliar peoples produced some distressingly violent friction. In 1943 young “zoot-suit”-clad Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles were viciously attacked by Anglo sailors who cruised the streets in taxicabs, searching for victims. Order was restored

only after the Mexican ambassador made an emotional plea, pointing out that such outbreaks were grist for Nazi propaganda mills. At almost the same time, an even more brutal race riot that killed twenty-five blacks and nine whites erupted in Detroit.

Holding the Home Front

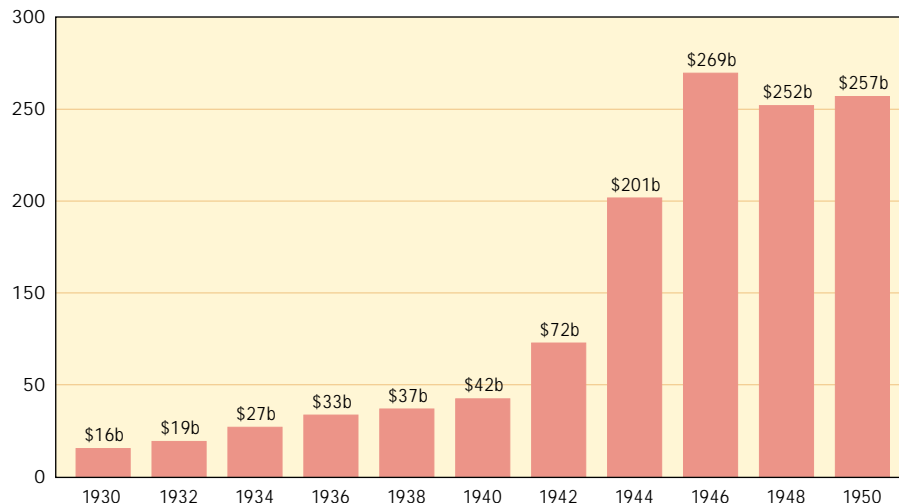
Despite these ugly episodes, Americans on the home front suffered little from the war, compared to the peoples of the other fighting nations. By war's end much of the planet was a smoking ruin. But in America the war invigorated the economy and lifted the country out of a decade-long depression. The gross national product vaulted from less than \$100 billion in 1940 to more than \$200 billion in 1945. Corporate profits rose from about \$6 billion in 1940 to almost twice that amount four years later. ("If you are going to try to go to war in a capitalist country," said Secretary of War Henry Stimson, "you have to let business make money out of the process, or business won't work.") Despite wage ceilings, overtime pay fattened pay envelopes. Disposable personal income, even after payment of wartime taxes, more than doubled. On December 7, 1944, the third anniversary of Pearl Harbor, Macy's department store rang up the biggest sales day in its history. Americans had never had it so good—and they wanted it a lot better. When price controls were

finally lifted in 1946, America's pent-up lust to consume pushed prices up 33 percent in less than two years. The rest of the world, meanwhile, was still clawing its way out from under the rubble of war.

The hand of government touched more American lives more intimately during the war than ever before. The war, perhaps even more than the New Deal, pointed the way to the post-1945 era of big-government interventionism. Every household felt the constraints of the rationing system. Millions of men and women worked for Uncle Sam in the armed forces. Millions more worked for him in the defense industries, where their employers and unions were monitored by the FEPC and the WLB, and their personal needs were cared for by government-sponsored housing projects, day-care facilities, and health plans. The Office of Scientific Research and Development channeled hundreds of millions of dollars into university-based scientific research, establishing the partnership between the government and universities that underwrote America's technological and economic leadership in the postwar era.

The flood of war dollars—not the relatively modest rivulet of New Deal spending—at last swept the plague of unemployment from the land. War, not enlightened social policy, cured the depression. As the postwar economy continued to depend dangerously on military spending for its health, many observers looked back to the years 1941–1945 as the origins of a "warfare-welfare state."

Billions of dollars



The National Debt, 1930–1950

Contrary to much popular mythology, it was World War II, not the New Deal, that first ballooned the national debt. The debt accumulated to still greater amounts in the 1980s and 1990s (see table, p. 986). (Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States*.)

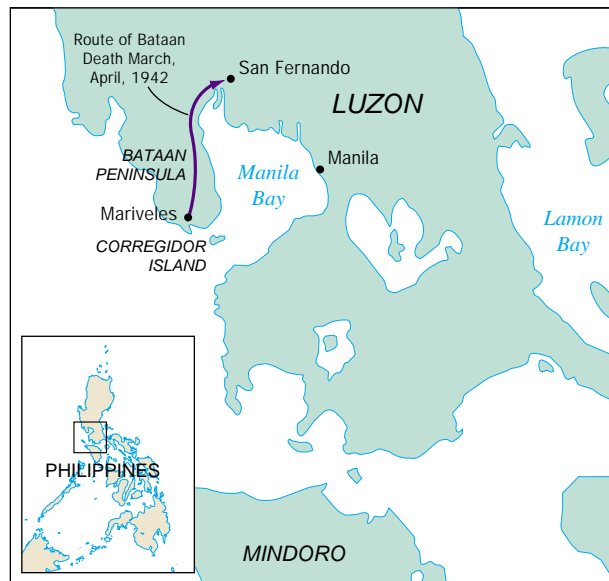
The conflict was phenomenally expensive. The wartime bill amounted to more than \$330 billion—ten times the direct cost of World War I and twice as much as *all* previous federal spending since 1776. Roosevelt would have preferred to follow a pay-as-you-go policy to finance the war, but the costs were simply too gigantic. The income-tax net was expanded to catch about four times as many people as before, and maximum tax rates rose as high as 90 percent. But despite such drastic measures, only about two-fifths of the war costs were paid from current revenues. The remainder was borrowed. The national debt skyrocketed from \$49 billion in 1941 to \$259 billion in 1945. When production finally slipped into high gear, the war was costing about \$10 million an hour. This was the price of victory over such implacable enemies.

The Rising Sun in the Pacific

Early successes of the efficient Japanese militarists were breathtaking: they realized that they would have to win quickly or lose slowly. Seldom, if ever, has so much territory been conquered so rapidly with so little loss.

Simultaneously with the assault on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese launched widespread and uniformly successful attacks on various Far Eastern bastions. These included the American outposts of Guam, Wake, and the Philippines. In a dismayingly short time, the Japanese invader seized not only the British-Chinese port of Hong Kong but also British Malaya, with its critically important supplies of rubber and tin.

Nor did the Japanese tide stop there. The over-ambitious soldiers of the emperor, plunging into the snake-infested jungles of Burma, cut the famed Burma Road. This was the route over which the United States had been trucking a trickle of munitions to the armies of the Chinese generalissimo Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), who was still resisting the Japanese invader in China. Thereafter, intrepid American aviators were forced to fly a handful of war supplies to Jiang “over the hump” of the towering Himalaya mountains from the India-Burma theater. Meanwhile, the Japanese had lunged southward against the oil-rich Dutch East Indies. The jungle-matted islands speedily fell to the assailants after the combined British, Australian, Dutch, and



Corregidor and Bataan

American naval and air forces had been smashed at an early date by their numerically superior foe.

Better news came from the Philippines, which succeeded dramatically in slowing down the mikado’s warriors for five months. The Japanese promptly landed a small but effective army, and General Douglas MacArthur, the eloquent and egotistical American commander, withdrew to a strong defensive position at Bataan, not far from Manila. There about twenty thousand American troops, supported by a much larger force of ill-trained Filipinos, held off violent Japanese attacks until April 9, 1942. The defenders, reduced to eating mules and monkeys, heroically traded their lives for time in the face of hopeless odds. They grimly joked while vainly hoping for reinforcements:

*We’re the battling bastards of Bataan;
No Mamma, no Papa, no Uncle Sam. . . .*

Before the inevitable American surrender, General MacArthur was ordered by Washington to depart secretly for Australia, there to head the resistance against the Japanese. Leaving by motorboat and airplane, he proclaimed, “I shall return.” After the battered remnants of his army had hoisted the white flag, they were treated with vicious cruelty in the infamous eighty-mile Bataan Death March to prisoner-of-war camps. The island fortress of Corregidor, in Manila harbor, held out until May 6,

1942, when it too surrendered and left Japanese forces in complete control of the Philippine archipelago.

Japan's High Tide at Midway

The aggressive warriors from Japan, making hay while the Rising Sun shone, pushed relentlessly southward. They invaded the turtle-shaped island of New Guinea, north of Australia, and landed on the Solomon Islands, from which they threatened Australia itself. Their onrush was finally checked by a crucial naval battle fought in the Coral Sea, in May 1942. An American carrier task force, with Aus-

tralian support, inflicted heavy losses on the victory-flushed Japanese. For the first time in history, the fighting was all done by carrier-based aircraft, and neither fleet saw or fired a shot directly at the other.

Japan next undertook to seize Midway Island, more than a thousand miles northwest of Honolulu. From this strategic base, it could launch devastating assaults on Pearl Harbor and perhaps force the weakened American Pacific fleet into destructive combat—possibly even compel the United States to negotiate a cease-fire in the Pacific. An epochal naval battle was fought near Midway on June 3–6, 1942. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, a high-grade naval strategist, directed a smaller but skillfully maneuvered carrier force, under Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, against the powerful invading fleet. The fighting was all done by aircraft, and the Japanese broke off action after losing four vitally important carriers.

Midway was a pivotal victory. Combined with the Battle of the Coral Sea, the U.S. success at Midway halted Japan's juggernaut. But the thrust of the Japanese into the eastern Pacific did net them America's fog-girt islands of Kiska and Attu, in the Aleutian archipelago, off Alaska. This easy conquest aroused fear of an invasion of the United States from the northwest. Much American strength was consequently diverted to the defense of Alaska, including the construction of the "Alcan" Highway through Canada.

Yet the Japanese imperialists, overextended in 1942, suffered from "victory disease." Their appetites were bigger than their stomachs. If they had only dug in and consolidated their gains, they would have been much more difficult to dislodge once the tide turned.

American Leapfrogging Toward Tokyo

Following the heartening victory at Midway, the United States for the first time was able to seize the initiative in the Pacific. In August 1942 American ground forces gained a toehold on Guadalcanal Island, in the Solomons, in an effort to protect the lifeline from America to Australia through the Southwest Pacific. An early naval defeat inflicted by the Japanese shortened American supplies dangerously, and for weeks the U.S. troops held on to the

malarial island only by their fingernails. After several desperate sea battles for naval control, the Japanese troops evacuated Guadalcanal in February 1943. Japanese losses were 20,000, compared to 1,700 for the Americans. That casualty ratio of more than ten to one, Japanese to American, persisted throughout the Pacific war.

American and Australian forces, under General MacArthur, meanwhile had been hanging on courageously to the southeastern tip of New Guinea, the last buffer protecting Australia. The scales of war gradually began to tip as the American navy, including submarines, inflicted lethal losses on Japanese supply ships and troop carriers. Conquest of the north coast of New Guinea was completed by August 1944, after General MacArthur had fought his way westward through tropical jungle hells. This hard-won victory was the first leg on his long return journey to the Philippines.

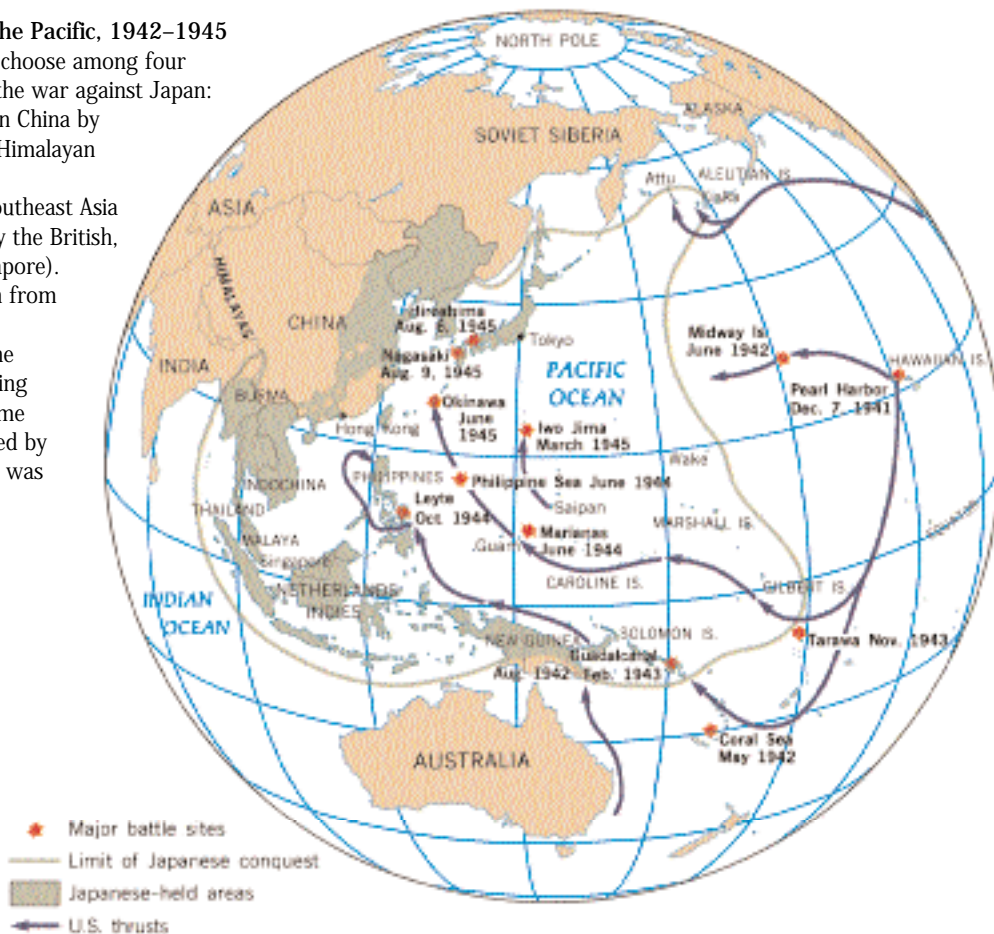
The U.S. Navy, with marines and army divisions doing the meat-grinder fighting, had meanwhile been “leapfrogging” the Japanese-held islands in the Pacific. Old-fashioned strategy dictated that the American forces, as they drove toward Tokyo, should reduce the fortified Japanese outposts on their flank. This course would have taken many bloodstained months, for the holed-in defenders were prepared to die to the last man in their caves. The new strategy of island hopping called for bypassing some of the most heavily fortified Japanese posts, capturing nearby islands, setting up airfields on them, and then neutralizing the enemy bases through heavy bombing. Deprived of essential supplies from the homeland, Japan’s outposts would slowly wither on the vine—as they did.

Brilliant success crowned the American attacks on the Japanese island strongholds in the Pacific, where Admiral Nimitz skillfully coordinated the

United States Thrusts in the Pacific, 1942–1945

American strategists had to choose among four proposed plans for waging the war against Japan:

1. Defeating the Japanese in China by funneling supplies over the Himalayan “hump” from India.
2. Carrying the war into Southeast Asia (a proposal much favored by the British, who could thus regain Singapore).
3. Heavy bombing of Japan from Chinese air bases.
4. “Island hopping” from the South Pacific to within striking distance of the Japanese home islands. This strategy, favored by General Douglas MacArthur, was the one finally emphasized.



efforts of naval, air, and ground units. In May and August of 1943, Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians were easily retaken. In November 1943 “bloody Tarawa” and Makin, both in the Gilbert Islands, fell after suicidal resistance. In January and February 1944, the key outposts of the Marshall Islands group succumbed after savage fighting.

Especially prized were the Marianas, including America’s conquered Guam. From bases in the Marianas, the United States’ new B-29 superbombers could carry out round-trip bombing raids on Japan’s home islands. The assault on the Marianas opened on June 19, 1944, with what American pilots called the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot.” A combination of the combat superiority of the recently developed American “Hellcat” fighter plane and the new technology of the antiaircraft proximity fuse destroyed nearly 250 Japanese aircraft, with a loss of only 29 American planes. The following day, in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, U.S. naval forces sank several Japanese carriers. The Japanese navy never recovered from these massive losses of planes, pilots, and ships.

After fanatical resistance, including a mass suicide leap of surviving Japanese soldiers and civilians from “Suicide Cliff” on Saipan, the major islands of the Marianas fell to the U.S. attackers in July and August 1944. With these unsinkable aircraft carriers now available, virtual round-the-clock bombing of Japan began in November 1944.

The Allied Halting of Hitler

Early setbacks for America in the Pacific were paralleled in the Atlantic. Hitler had entered the war with a formidable fleet of ultramodern submarines, which ultimately operated in “wolf packs” with frightful effect, especially in the North Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico. During ten months of 1942 more than 500 merchant ships were reported lost—111 in June alone—as ship destruction far outran construction.

The tide of subsea battle turned with agonizing slowness. Old techniques, such as escorting convoys of merchant vessels and dropping depth bombs from destroyers, were strengthened by air patrol, the newly invented technology of radar, and the bombing of submarine bases. “Keep ‘Em Sailing” was the motto of oil-begrimed merchant seamen,

British prime minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965) observed in a speech (May 1943),

“The proud German Army has by its sudden collapse, sudden crumbling and breaking up . . . once again proved the truth of the saying, ‘The Hun [German] is always either at your throat or at your feet.’”

hundreds of whom perished as unsung heroes in icy seas. Eventually Allied antisubmarine tactics improved substantially, thanks especially to British code-breakers, who had cracked the Germans’ “Enigma” codes and could therefore pinpoint the locations of the U-boats lurking in the North Atlantic.

Not until the spring of 1943 did the Allies clearly have the upper hand against the U-boat. If they had not won the Battle of the Atlantic, Britain would have been forced under, and a second front could not have been launched from its island springboard. Victory over the undersea raiders was nerve-rackingly narrow. When the war ended, Hitler was about to mass-produce a fearsome new submarine—one that could remain underwater indefinitely and cruise at seventeen knots when submerged.

Meanwhile, the turning point of the land-air war against Hitler had come late in 1942. The British had launched a thousand-plane raid on Cologne in May. In August 1942 they were joined by the American air force and were cascading bombs on German cities. The Germans under Marshal Erwin Rommel—the “Desert Fox”—had driven eastward across the hot sands of North Africa into Egypt, perilously close to the Suez Canal. A breakthrough would have spelled disaster for the Allies. But late in October 1942, British general Bernard Montgomery delivered a withering attack at El Alamein, west of Cairo. With the aid of several hundred hastily shipped American Sherman tanks, he speedily drove the enemy back to Tunisia, more than a thousand miles away.

On the Soviet front, the unexpected successes of the red army gave a new lift to the Allied cause. In September 1942 the Russians stalled the German steamroller at rubble-strewn Stalingrad, graveyard

of Hitler's hopes. More than a score of invading divisions, caught in an icy noose, later surrendered or were "mopped up." In November 1942 the resilient Russians unleashed a crushing counteroffensive, which was never seriously reversed. A year later Stalin had regained about two-thirds of the blood-soaked Soviet motherland wrested from him by the German invader.

A Second Front from North Africa to Rome

Soviet losses were already staggering in 1942: millions of soldiers and civilians lay dead, and Hitler's armies had overrun most of the western USSR. Anglo-American losses at this time could be counted only in the thousands. By war's end, the grave had closed over some 20 million Soviets, and a great swath of their country, equivalent in the United States to the area from Chicago to the Atlantic seaboard, had been laid waste. Small wonder that Kremlin leaders clamored for a second front to divert the German strength westward.

Many Americans, including FDR, were eager to begin a diversionary invasion of France in 1942 or 1943. They feared that the Soviets, unable to hold out forever against Germany, might make a separate peace as they had in 1918 and leave the Western Allies to face Hitler's fury alone.

But British military planners, remembering their appalling losses in 1914–1918, were not enthusiastic about a frontal assault on German-held France. It might end in disaster. They preferred to attack Hitler's Fortress Europe through the "soft underbelly" of the Mediterranean. Faced with British boot-dragging and a woeful lack of resources, the Americans reluctantly agreed to postpone a massive invasion of Europe.

An assault on French-held North Africa was a compromise second front. The highly secret attack, launched in November 1942, was headed by a gifted and easy-smiling American general, Dwight D. ("Ike") Eisenhower, a master of organization and conciliation. As a joint Allied operation ultimately involving some 400,000 men (British, Canadian, French, and chiefly American) and about 850 ships, the invasion was the mightiest waterborne effort up to that time in history. After savage fighting, the

remnants of the German-Italian army were finally trapped in Tunisia and surrendered in May 1943.

New blows were now planned by the Allies. At Casablanca, in newly occupied French Morocco, President Roosevelt, who had boldly flown the Atlantic, met in a historic conference with Winston Churchill in January 1943. The Big Two agreed to step up the Pacific war, invade Sicily, increase pressure on Italy, and insist upon an "unconditional surrender" of the enemy, a phrase earlier popularized by General Ulysses S. Grant during the Civil War. Such an unyielding policy would presumably hearten the ultrasuspicious Soviets, who professed to fear separate Allied peace negotiations. It would also forestall charges of broken armistice terms, such as had come after 1918. Paradoxically, the tough-sounding unconditional surrender declaration was an admission of the weakness of the Western Allies. Still unable in 1943 to mount the kind of second front their Soviet partner desperately demanded, the British and the Americans had little but words to offer Stalin.

"Unconditional surrender" proved to be one of the most controversial moves of the war. The main

criticism was that it steeled the enemy to fight to a last-bunker resistance, while discouraging antiwar groups in Germany from revolting. Although there was some truth in these charges, no one can prove that “unconditional surrender” either shortened or lengthened the war. But by helping to destroy the German government utterly, the harsh policy immensely complicated the problems of postwar reconstruction.

The Allied forces, victorious in Africa, now turned against the not-so-soft underbelly of Europe. Sicily fell in August 1943 after sporadic but sometimes bitter resistance. Shortly before the conquest of the island, Mussolini was deposed, and Italy surrendered unconditionally soon thereafter, in September 1943. President Roosevelt, referring to the three original Axis countries—Germany, Italy, and Japan—joked grimly that it was now one down and two to go.

But if Italy dropped out of the war, the Germans did not drop out of Italy. Hitler’s well-trained troops stubbornly resisted the Allied invaders now pouring into the toe of the Italian boot. They also unleashed their fury against the Italians, who had turned their coats and declared war on Germany in October 1943. “Sunny Italy” proceeded to belie its name, for in the snow-covered and mud-caked mountains of its elongated peninsula occurred some of the filthiest, bloodiest, and most frustrating fighting of the war.

For many months Italy appeared to be a dead end, as the Allied advance was halted by a seemingly impregnable German defense centered on the ancient monastery of Monte Cassino. After a touch-and-go assault on the Anzio beachhead, Rome was finally taken on June 4, 1944. The tremendous cross-channel invasion of France begun two days later turned Italy into a kind of sideshow, but the Allies, limited in manpower, continued to fight their way slowly and painfully into northern Italy. On May 2, 1945, only five days before Germany’s official surrender, several hundred thousand Axis troops in Italy laid down their arms and became prisoners of war. While the Italian second front opened the Mediterranean and diverted some German divisions from the blazing Soviet and French battle lines, it also may have delayed the main Allied invasion of Europe, from England across the English Channel to France, by many months—allowing more time for the Soviet army to advance into Eastern Europe.

D-Day: June 6, 1944

The Soviets had never ceased their clamor for an all-out second front, and the time rapidly approached for Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin to meet in person to coordinate the promised effort. Marshal Joseph Stalin, with a careful eye on Soviet military operations, balked at leaving Moscow. President Roosevelt, who jauntily remarked in private, “I can handle that old buzzard,” was eager to confer with him. The president seemed confident that Rooseveltian charm could woo the hardened conspirator of the Kremlin from his nasty communist ways.

Teheran, the capital of Iran (Persia), was finally chosen as the meeting place. To this ancient city Roosevelt riskily flew, after a stopover conference in




World War II in Europe and North Africa, 1939–1945

Cairo with Britain's Churchill and China's Jiang Jieshi regarding the war against Japan. At Teheran the discussions among Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill—from November 28 to December 1, 1943—progressed smoothly. Perhaps the most important achievement was agreement on broad plans, especially those for launching Soviet attacks on Germany from the east simultaneously with the prospective Allied assault from the west.

Preparations for the cross-channel invasion of France were gigantic. Britain's fast-anchored isle virtually groaned with munitions, supplies, and troops, as nearly 3 million fighting men were readied. Because the United States was to provide most of the Allied warriors, the overall command was entrusted to an American, General Eisenhower. He

had already distinguished himself in the North African and Mediterranean Campaigns, not only for his military capacity but also for his gifts as a conciliator of clashing Allied interests.

French Normandy, less heavily defended than other parts of the European coast, was pinpointed for the invasion assault. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the enormous operation, which involved some forty-six hundred vessels, unwound. Stiff resistance was encountered from the Germans, who had been misled by a feint into expecting the blow to fall farther north. The Allies had already achieved mastery of the air over France. They were thus able to block reinforcements by crippling the railroads, while worsening German fuel shortages by bombing gasoline-producing plants.



EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

Franklin Roosevelt at Teheran, 1943 In late 1943 the “Big Three” wartime leaders—Britain’s prime minister Winston Churchill, American president Franklin Roosevelt, and Soviet leader Marshal Joseph Stalin—gathered together for the first time. They met amidst growing Soviet frustration with the British and the Americans for their failure thus far to open a “second front” against Germany in western Europe, while the Soviets continued to suffer horrendous losses in the savage fighting in eastern Europe. American military planners were eager to open a second front as soon as possible, but the British, who would necessarily have to supply most of the troops until America was fully mobilized, balked. Tension among the three leaders over the second front plan—code-named OVERLORD, the operation that resulted in the Anglo-American invasion of Normandy on “D-Day,” June 6, 1944—is evident in this transcript of

their discussions in the Iranian city of Teheran on November 28, 1943. The excerpts printed here are actually taken from two separate accounts: one composed by the American diplomat and Roosevelt’s official translator Charles Bohlen, the other written by a military officer on behalf of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff. Both versions are published in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, a compilation of American diplomatic records since 1861. The Soviets and the British also kept their own records of the Teheran meetings, giving historians remarkably rich sources with which to reconstruct the crucial negotiations and decisions that shaped wartime diplomacy. Why might the history of diplomacy be so lavishly documented? At this meeting, what were the principal objectives that each leader pursued? How did each man address his task? In what ways was the future of the war—and the post-war world—here foreshadowed?

**FIRST PLENARY MEETING,
NOVEMBER 28, 1943, 4 P. M., CONFERENCE
ROOM, SOVIET EMBASSY**

Bohlen Minutes

SECRET

THE PRESIDENT said as the youngest of the three present he ventured to welcome his elders. He said he wished to welcome the new members to the family circle and tell them that meetings of this character were conducted as between friends with complete frankness on all sides with nothing that was said to be made public. . . .

Chief of Staff Minutes

MARSHAL STALIN asked who will be the commander in this Operation Overlord. (THE PRESIDENT and PRIME MINISTER interpolated this was not yet decided.) MARSHAL STALIN continued, “Then nothing will come out of these operations.” . . .

THE PRESIDENT said we again come back to the problem of the timing for OVERLORD. It was believed that it would be good for OVERLORD to take place about 1 May, or certainly not later than 15 May or 20 May, if possible.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he could not agree to that. . . .

. . . He said he (the Prime Minister) was going to do everything in the power of His Majesty’s Government to begin OVERLORD at the earliest possible moment. However, he did not think that the

many great possibilities in the Mediterranean should be ruthlessly cast aside as valueless merely on the question of a month’s delay in OVERLORD.

MARSHAL STALIN said all the Mediterranean operations are diversions. . . .

THE PRESIDENT said he found that his staff places emphasis on OVERLORD. While on the other hand the Prime Minister and his staff also emphasize OVERLORD, nevertheless the United States does not feel that OVERLORD should be put off.

THE PRESIDENT questioned whether it would not be possible for the *ad hoc* committee to go ahead with their deliberations without any further directive and to produce an answer by tomorrow morning.

MARSHAL STALIN questioned, “What can such a committee do?” He said, “We Chiefs of State have more power and more authority than a committee. General Brooke cannot force our opinions and there are many questions which can be decided only by us.” He said he would like to ask if the British are thinking seriously of OVERLORD only in order to satisfy the U.S.S.R.

THE PRIME MINISTER replied that if the conditions specified at Moscow regarding OVERLORD should exist, he firmly believed it would be England’s duty to hurl every ounce of strength she had across the Channel at the Germans.

THE PRESIDENT observed that in an hour a very good dinner would be awaiting all and people would be very hungry. He suggested that the staffs should meet tomorrow morning and discuss the matter. . . .

The Allied beachhead, at first clung to with fingertips, was gradually enlarged, consolidated, and reinforced. After desperate fighting, the invaders finally broke out of the German iron ring that enclosed the Normandy landing zone. Most spectacular were the lunges across France by American armored divisions, brilliantly commanded by bluster and profane General George S. (“Blood ‘n’ Guts”) Patton. The retreat of the German defenders was hastened when an American-French force landed in August 1944 on the southern coast of France and swept northward. With the assistance of the French “underground,” Paris was liberated in August 1944, amid exuberant manifestations of joy and gratitude.

Allied forces rolled irresistibly toward Germany, and many of the Americans encountered places, like Château-Thierry, familiar to their fathers in

1918. “Lafayette, we are here again,” quipped some of the American soldiers. The first important German city (Aachen) fell to the Americans in October 1944, and the days of Hitler’s “thousand-year *Reich*” were numbered.

FDR: The Fourth-Termite of 1944

The presidential campaign of 1944, which was bound to divert energy from the war program, came most awkwardly as the awful conflict roared to its climax. But the normal electoral processes continued to function, despite some loose talk of suspending them “for the duration.”

Victory-starved Republicans met in Chicago with hopeful enthusiasm. They quickly nominated

the short, mustachioed, and dapper Thomas E. Dewey, popular vote-getting governor of New York. Regarded as a liberal, he had already made a national reputation as a prosecutor of grafters and racketeers in New York City. His shortness and youth—he was only forty-two—had caused one veteran New Dealer to sneer that the candidate had cast his diaper into the ring. To offset Dewey's mild internationalism, the convention nominated for the vice presidency a strong isolationist, handsome and white-maned Senator John W. Bricker of Ohio. Yet the platform called for an unstinted prosecution of the war and for the creation of a new international organization to maintain peace.

FDR, aging under the strain, was the "indispensable man" of the Democrats. No other major figure was available, and the war was apparently grinding to its finale. He was nominated at Chicago on the first ballot by acclamation. But in a sense he was the "forgotten man" of the convention, for in

view of his age, an unusual amount of attention was focused on the vice presidency.

The scramble for the vice-presidential plum turned into something of a free-for-all. Henry A. Wallace, onetime "plow 'em under" secretary of agriculture, had served four years as vice president and desired a renomination. But conservative Democrats distrusted him as an ill-balanced and unpredictable liberal. A "ditch Wallace" move developed tremendous momentum, despite the popularity of Wallace with large numbers of voters and many of the delegates. With Roosevelt's blessing, the vice-presidential nomination finally went to smiling and self-assured Senator Harry S Truman of Missouri ("the new Missouri Compromise"). Hitherto inconspicuous, he had recently attained national visibility as the efficient chairman of a Senate committee conducting an investigation of wasteful war expenditures. Nobody had much against him or on him.

Roosevelt Defeats Dewey

A dynamic Dewey took the offensive, for Roosevelt was too consumed with directing the war to spare much time for speechmaking. The vigorous young “crime buster,” with his beautiful baritone voice and polished diction, denounced the tired and quarrelsome “old men” in Washington. He proclaimed repeatedly that after “twelve long years” of New Dealism, it was “time for a change.” As for the war, Dewey would not alter the basic strategy but would fight it better—a type of “me-tooism” ridiculed by the Democrats. The fourth-term issue did not figure prominently, now that the ice had been broken by Roosevelt’s third term. But “Dewey-eyed” Republicans half-humorously professed to fear fifth and sixth terms by the “lifer” in the White House.

In the closing weeks of the campaign, Roosevelt left his desk for the stump. He was stung by certain Republican charges, including criticism that he had sent a U.S. Navy destroyer to retrieve his pet Scottie dog, Fala. He was also eager to show himself, even in chilling rains, to spike well-founded rumors of failing health.

Substantial assistance 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 political purposes. Zealous CIO members, branded as communists by the Republicans, rang countless doorbells and asked, with pointed reference to the recent depression, “What were you doing in 1932?” At times Roosevelt seemed to be running again against Hoover. As in every one of his previous three campaigns, FDR was opposed by a majority of the newspapers, which were owned chiefly by Republicans. Roosevelt, as customary, won a sweeping victory: 432 to 99 in the Electoral College; 25,606,585 to 22,014,745 in the popular vote. Elated, he quipped that “the first twelve years are the hardest.”

Roosevelt won primarily because the war was going well. A winning pitcher is not ordinarily pulled from the game. Foreign policy was a decisive factor with untold thousands of voters, who concluded that Roosevelt’s experienced hand was needed in fashioning a future organization for world peace. The dapper Dewey, cruelly dubbed “the little man on top of the wedding cake,” had spoken smoothly of international cooperation, but his isolationist running mate, Bricker, had implanted serious doubts. The

During the bitter campaign of 1944, Roosevelt’s pre-Pearl Harbor policies came under sharp attack from Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce (1903–1987) (the “Blonde Bombshell”), who violently blasted Roosevelt: “[He] lied us into war because he did not have the political courage to lead us into it.”

Republican party was still suffering from the taint of isolationism fastened on it by the Hardingites.

The Last Days of Hitler

By mid-December 1944, the month after Roosevelt’s fourth-term victory, Germany seemed to be wobbling on its last legs. The Soviet surge had penetrated eastern Germany. Allied aerial “blockbuster” bombs, making the “rubble bounce” with around-the-clock attacks, were falling like giant explosive hailstones on cities, factories, and transportation arteries. The German western front seemed about to buckle under the sledgehammer blows of the United States and its Allies.

Hitler then staked everything on one last throw of his reserves. Secretly concentrating a powerful force, he hurled it, on December 16, 1944, against the thinly held American lines in the heavily befogged and snow-shrouded Ardennes Forest. His objective was the Belgian port of Antwerp, key to the Allied supply operation. Caught off guard, the outmanned Americans were driven back, creating a deep “bulge” in the Allied line. The ten-day penetration was finally halted after the 101st Airborne Division had stood firm at the vital bastion of Bastogne. The commander, Brigadier General A. C. McAuliffe, defiantly answered the German demand for surrender with one word: “Nuts.” Reinforcements were rushed up, and the last-gasp Hitlerian offensive was at length bloodily stemmed in the Battle of the Bulge.

In March 1945, forward-driving American troops reached Germany’s Rhine River, where, by incredibly good luck, they found one strategic bridge undemolished. Pressing their advantage,

General Eisenhower's troops reached the Elbe River in April 1945. There, a short distance south of Berlin, American and Soviet advance guards dramatically clasped hands amid cries of "*Amerikanskie tovarishchi*" (American comrades). The conquering Americans were horrified to find blood-spattered and still-stinking concentration camps, where the German Nazis had engaged in scientific mass murder of "undesirables," including an estimated 6 million Jews. The Washington government had long been informed about Hitler's campaign of genocide against the Jews and had been reprehensibly slow to take steps against it. Roosevelt's administration had bolted the door against large numbers of Jewish refugees, and his military commanders declined even to bomb the rail lines that carried the victims to the camps. But until the war's end, the full dimensions of the "Holocaust" had not been known. When the details were revealed, the whole world was aghast.

The vengeful Soviets, clawing their way forward from the east, reached Berlin in April 1945. After desperate house-to-house fighting, followed by an

Battle of the Bulge,
December 1944–January 1945



orgy of pillage and rape, they captured the bomb-shattered city. Adolf Hitler, after a hasty marriage to his mistress, committed suicide in an underground bunker on April 30, 1945.

Tragedy had meanwhile struck the United States. President Roosevelt, while relaxing at Warm Springs, Georgia, suddenly died from a massive cerebral hemorrhage on April 12, 1945. The crushing burden of twelve depression and war years in the White House had finally taken its toll. Knots of confused, leaderless citizens gathered to discuss the future anxiously, as a bewildered, unbriefed Vice President Truman took the helm.

On May 7, 1945, what was left of the German government surrendered unconditionally. May 8 was officially proclaimed V-E (Victory in Europe) Day and was greeted with frenzied rejoicing in the Allied countries.

Japan Dies Hard

Japan's rickety bamboo empire meanwhile was tottering to its fall. American submarines—"the silent service"—were sending the Japanese merchant

marine to the bottom so fast they were running out of prey. All told, these undersea craft destroyed 1,042 ships, or about 50 percent of Japan's entire life-sustaining merchant fleet.

Giant bomber attacks were more spectacular. Launched from Saipan and other captured Mariana islands, they were reducing the enemy's fragile cities to cinders. The massive fire-bomb raid on Tokyo, March 9–10, 1945, was annihilating. It destroyed over 250,000 buildings, gutted a quarter of the city, and killed an estimated 83,000 people—a loss comparable to that later inflicted by atomic bombs.

General MacArthur was also on the move. Completing the conquest of jungle-draped New Guinea, he headed northwest for the Philippines, en route to Japan, with 600 ships and 250,000 men. In a scene well staged for the photographers, he splashed ashore at Leyte Island on October 20, 1944, with the summons, "People of the Philippines, I have returned. . . . Rally to me."

Japan's navy—still menacing—now made one last-chance effort to destroy MacArthur by wiping out his transports and supply ships. A gigantic clash at Leyte Gulf, fought on the sea and in the air, was actually three battles (October 23–26, 1944). The Americans won all of them, though the crucial

engagement was almost lost when Admiral William F. ("Bull") Halsey was decoyed away by a feint.

Japan was through as a sea power: it had lost about sixty ships in the greatest naval battle of all time. American fleets, numbering more than four thousand vessels, now commanded the western Pacific. Several battleships, raised from the mud of Pearl Harbor, were exacting belated but sweet revenge.

Overrunning Leyte, MacArthur next landed on the main Philippine island of Luzon in January 1945. Manila was his major objective; the ravaged city fell in March, but the Philippines were not conquered until July. Victory was purchased only after bitter fighting against holed-in Japanese, who took a toll of over sixty thousand American casualties.

America's steel vise was tightening mercilessly around Japan. The tiny island of Iwo Jima, needed as a haven for damaged American bombers returning from Japan, was captured in March 1945. This desperate twenty-five-day assault cost over four thousand American dead.

Okinawa, a well-defended Japanese island, was next on the list: it was needed for closer bases from which to blast and burn enemy cities and industries. Fighting dragged on from April to June of 1945.

Japanese soldiers, fighting with incredible courage from their caves, finally sold Okinawa for fifty thousand American casualties, while suffering far heavier losses themselves.

The American navy, which covered the invasion of Okinawa, sustained severe damage. Japanese suicide pilots (“kamikazes”) in an exhibition of mass hara-kiri for their god-emperor, crashed their bomb-laden planes onto the decks of the invading fleet. All told, the death squads sank over thirty ships and badly damaged scores more.

The Atomic Bombs

Strategists in Washington were meanwhile planning an all-out invasion of the main islands of Japan—an invasion that presumably would cost hundreds of thousands of American (and even more Japanese) casualties. Tokyo, recognizing imminent defeat, had secretly sent peace feelers to Moscow, which had not yet entered the Far Eastern war. The Americans, having broken the secret Japanese radio codes,

knew of these feelers. But bomb-scorched Japan still showed no outward willingness to surrender *unconditionally* to the Allies.

The Potsdam conference, held near Berlin in July 1945, sounded the death knell of the Japanese. There President Truman, still new on his job, met in a seventeen-day parley with Joseph Stalin and the British leaders. The conferees issued a stern ultimatum to Japan: surrender or be destroyed. American bombers showered the dire warning on Japan in tens of thousands of leaflets, but no encouraging response was forthcoming.

America had a fantastic ace up its sleeve. Early in 1940, after Hitler’s wanton assault on Poland, Roosevelt was persuaded by American and exiled scientists, notably German-born Albert Einstein, to push ahead with preparations for unlocking the secret of an atomic bomb. Congress, at Roosevelt’s blank-check request, blindly made available nearly \$2 billion. Many military minds were skeptical of this “damned professor’s nonsense,” but fears that the Germans might first acquire such an awesome weapon provided a powerful spur to action. Ironically, Germany eventually abandoned its own

atomic project as too costly. And as it happened, the war against Germany ended before the American weapon was ready. In a cruel twist of fate, Japan—not Germany, the original target—suffered the fate of being the first nation subjected to atomic bombardment.

The huge atomic project was pushed feverishly forward, as American know-how and industrial power were combined with the most advanced scientific knowledge. Much technical skill was provided by British and refugee scientists, who had fled to America to escape the torture chambers of the dictators. Finally, in the desert near Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945, the experts detonated the first awesome and devastating atomic device.

With Japan still refusing to surrender, the Potsdam threat was fulfilled. On August 6, 1945, a lone American bomber dropped one atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. In a blinding flash of death, followed by a funnel-shaped cloud, about 180,000 people were left killed, wounded, or missing. Some 70,000 of them died instantaneously. Sixty thousand more soon perished from burns and radiation disease.

Two days later, on August 8, Stalin entered the war against Japan, exactly on the deadline date pre-

viously agreed upon with his allies. Soviet armies speedily overran the depleted Japanese defenses in Manchuria and Korea in a six-day “victory parade” that involved several thousand Russian casualties. Stalin was evidently determined to be in on the kill, lest he lose a voice in the final division of Japan’s holdings.

Fanatically resisting Japanese, though facing atomization, still did not surrender. American aviators, on August 9, dropped a second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki. The explosion took a horrible toll of about eighty thousand people killed or missing.

The Japanese nation could endure no more. On August 10, 1945, Tokyo sued for peace on one condition: that Hirohito, the bespectacled Son of Heaven, be allowed to remain on his ancestral throne as nominal emperor. Despite their “unconditional surrender” policy, the Allies accepted this condition on August 14, 1945. The Japanese, though losing face, were able to save both their exalted ruler and what was left of their native land.

The formal end came, with dramatic force, on September 2, 1945. Official surrender ceremonies were conducted by General MacArthur on the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. At the same time,

Americans at home hysterically celebrated V-J Day—Victory in Japan Day—after the most horrible war in history had ended in mushrooming atomic clouds.

The Allies Triumphant

World War II proved to be terribly costly. American forces suffered some 1 million casualties, about one-third of which were deaths. Compared with other wars, the proportion killed by wounds and disease was sharply reduced, owing in part to the use of blood plasma and “miracle” drugs, notably penicillin. Yet heavy though American losses were, the Soviet allies suffered casualties many times greater—perhaps 20 million people killed.

America was fortunate in emerging with its mainland virtually unscathed. Two Japanese submarines, using shells and bombers, had rather harmlessly attacked the California and Oregon coast, and a few balloons, incendiary and otherwise, had drifted across the Pacific. But that was about all.

Much of the rest of the world was utterly destroyed and destitute. America alone was untouched and healthy—oiled and muscled like a prize bull, standing astride the world’s ruined landscape.

This complex conflict was the best-fought war in America’s history. Though unprepared for it at the outset, the nation was better prepared than for the others, partly because it had begun to buckle on its armor about a year and a half before the war officially began. It was actually fighting German submarines in the Atlantic months before the explosion in the Pacific at Pearl Harbor. In the end the United States showed itself to be resourceful, tough, adaptable—able to accommodate itself to the tactics of an enemy who was relentless and ruthless.

American military leadership proved to be of the highest order. A new crop of war heroes emerged in brilliant generals like Eisenhower, MacArthur, and Marshall (chief of staff) and in imaginative admirals like Nimitz and Spruance. President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, as kindred spirits, collaborated closely in planning strategy. “It is fun to be in the same decade with you,” FDR once cabled Churchill.

Industrial leaders were no less skilled, for marvels of production were performed almost daily. Assembly lines proved as important as battle lines, and victory went again to the side with the most smokestacks. The enemy was almost literally smothered by bayonets, bullets, bazookas, and bombs. Hitler and his Axis coconspirators had chosen to make war with machines, and the ingenious Yankees could ask for nothing better. They demonstrated again, as they had in World War I, that the American way of war was simply more—more men, more weapons, more machines, more technology, and more money than any enemy could hope to match. From 1940 to 1945, the output of American factories was simply phenomenal. As Winston Churchill remarked, “Nothing succeeds like excess.”

Hermann Goering, a Nazi leader, had sneered, “The Americans can’t build planes—only electric iceboxes and razor blades.” Democracy had given its answer, as the dictators, despite long preparation, were overthrown and discredited. It is true that an unusual amount of direct control was exercised over the individual by the Washington authorities during the war emergency. But the American people preserved their precious liberties without serious impairment.

Chronology

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1941 United States declares war on Japan
Germany declares war on United States
Randolph plans black march on Washington
Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) established</p> | <p>1943 Japanese driven from Guadalcanal
Teheran conference</p> |
| <p>1942 Japanese-Americans sent to internment camps
Japan conquers the Philippines
Battle of the Coral Sea
Battle of Midway
United States invades North Africa
Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) founded</p> | <p>1944 <i>Korematsu v. U.S.</i>
D-Day invasion of France
Battle of Marianas
Roosevelt defeats Dewey for presidency</p> |
| <p>1943 Allies hold Casablanca conference
Allies invade Italy
Smith-Connally Anti-Strike Act
“Zoot-suit” riots in Los Angeles
Race riot in Detroit</p> | <p>1944-</p> <p>1945 Battle of the Bulge</p> <p>1945 Roosevelt dies; Truman assumes presidency
Germany surrenders
Battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa
Potsdam conference
Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
Japan surrenders</p> |

World War II: Triumph or Tragedy?

After World War II ended in 1945, many historians were convinced that the tragedy could have been averted if only the United States had awakened earlier from its isolationist illusions. These scholars condemned the policies and attitudes of the 1930s as a “retreat from responsibility.” Much of the historical writing in the postwar period contained the strong flavor of medicine to ward off another infection by the isolationist virus.

This approach fell into disfavor during the Vietnam War in the 1960s, when many U.S. policymakers defended their actions in Southeast Asia by making dubious comparisons to the decade before World War II. Some scholars responded by arguing that the “lessons” of the 1930s—especially about the need to avoid “appeasement” and to take quick and decisive action against “aggressors”—could not properly be applied to any and all subsequent situations. Ho Chi Minh, they pointed out, was not Hitler, and Vietnam was not Nazi Germany. One controversial product of this line of thinking was Bruce Russett’s *No Clear and Present Danger* (1972), which argued that the United States had no clearly defined national interests at stake in 1941, and that both the nation and the world might have been better off without U.S. intervention. This analysis paralleled “revisionist” commentaries written in the 1930s about U.S. participation in World War I.

Although few scholars fully accept Russett’s conclusions, more recently writing on American entry into World War II has tended to avoid finding in that episode lessons for posterity. Attention has focused, rather, on the wisdom or folly of specific policies, such as Washington’s hard line toward Tokyo throughout 1941, when the possibility of a negotiated settlement perhaps existed. P. W. Schroeder’s *The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations, 1941* (1958) makes that point with particular force. Other issues include Franklin Roosevelt’s diplomatic role. Was the president a bold internationalist struggling heroically against an isolationist Congress and public opinion, or did he share much of the traditional isolationist credo? Robert Dallek’s encyclopedic study of Roosevelt’s foreign policy portrays Roosevelt as a shrewd and calculating international-

ist, whereas Donald Cameron Watt’s *How War Came* (1989) depicts him as a myopic and ill-informed leader who overestimated his own peacemaking abilities and, like most other Americans, only belatedly awakened to the menace of totalitarianism.

No decision of the war era has provoked sharper controversy than the atomic bombings of Japan in August 1945. Lingering moral questions about the nuclear incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have long threatened to tarnish the crown of military victory. America is the only nation ever to have used an atomic weapon in war, and some critics have even claimed to find elements of racism in the fact that the bombs were dropped on people of a nonwhite race. The fact is, however, that Germany surrendered before the bombs were ready; had the war in Europe lasted just a few months longer, some German city would probably have suffered the fate of Hiroshima.

Some scholars, notably Gar Alperovitz, have further charged that the atomic holocausts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not the last shots of World War II, but the first salvos in the emerging Cold War. Alperovitz argues that the Japanese were already defeated in the summer of 1945 and were in fact attempting to arrange a *conditional* surrender. President Truman ignored those attempts and unleashed his horrible new weapons, so the argument goes, not simply to defeat Japan but to frighten the Soviets into submission to America’s will, and to keep them out of the final stages of the war—and postwar reconstruction—in Asia.

Could the use of the atomic bombs have been avoided? As Martin J. Shewin’s studies have shown, few policymakers at the time seriously asked that question. American leaders wanted to end the war as quickly as possible. Intimidating the Soviets might have been a “bonus” to using the bomb against Japan, but influencing Soviet behavior was never the *primary* reason for the fateful decision. American military strategists had always assumed the atomic bomb would be dropped as soon as it was available. That moment came on August 6, 1945. Yet misgivings and remorse about the atomic conclusion of World War II have plagued the American conscience ever since.

For further reading, see page A24 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.
