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Overview of World War II

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World War II killed more people, involved more nations, and cost more money than any other war in history. Altogether, 70 million people served in the armed forces during the war, and 17 million combatants died. Civilian deaths were ever greater. At least 19 million Soviet civilians, 10 million Chinese, and 6 million European Jews lost their lives during the war.

World War II was truly a global war. Some 70 nations took part in the conflict, and fighting took place on the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe, as well as on the high seas. Entire societies participated as soldiers or as war workers, while others were persecuted as victims of occupation and mass murder.

World War II cost the United States a million casualties and nearly 400,000 deaths. In both domestic and foreign affairs, its consequences were far-reaching. It ended the Depression, brought millions of married women into the workforce, initiated sweeping changes in the lives of the nation's minority groups, and dramatically expanded government's presence in American life.

The War at Home & Abroad

On September 1, 1939, World War II started when Germany invaded Poland. By November 1942, the Axis powers controlled territory from Norway to North Africa and from France to the Soviet Union. After defeating the Axis in North Africa in May 1941, the United States and its Allies invaded Sicily in July 1943 and forced Italy to surrender in September. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Allies landed in Northern France. In December, a German counteroffensive (the Battle of the Bulge) failed. Germany surrendered in May 1945.

The United States entered the war following a surprise attack by Japan on the U.S. Pacific fleet in Hawaii. The United States and its Allies halted Japanese expansion at the Battle of Midway in June 1942 and in other campaigns in the South Pacific. From 1943 to August 1945, the Allies hopped from island to island across the Central Pacific and also battled the Japanese in China, Burma, and India. Japan agreed to surrender on August 14, 1945 after the United States dropped the first atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Consequences:

1. The war ended Depression unemployment and dramatically expanded government's presence in American life. It led the federal government to create a War Production Board to oversee conversion to a wartime economy and the Office of Price Administration to set prices on many items and to supervise a rationing system.

2. During the war, African Americans, women, and Mexican Americans founded new opportunities in industry. But Japanese Americans living on the Pacific coast were relocated from their homes and placed in internment camps.

The Dawn of the Atomic Age

In 1939, Albert Einstein wrote a letter to President Roosevelt, warning him that the Nazis might be able to build an atomic bomb. On December 2, 1942, Enrico Fermi, an Italian refugee, produced the first self-sustained, controlled nuclear chain reaction in Chicago.

To ensure that the United States developed a bomb before Nazi Germany did, the federal government started the secret \$2 billion Manhattan Project. On July 16, 1945, in the New Mexico desert near Alamogordo, the Manhattan Project's scientists exploded the first atomic bomb.

It was during the Potsdam negotiations that President Harry Truman learned that American scientists had tested the first atomic bomb. On August 6, 1945, the Enola Gay, a B-29 Superfortress, released an atomic bomb over Hiroshima, Japan. Between 80,000 and 140,000 people were killed or fatally wounded. Three days later, a second bomb fell on Nagasaki. About 35,000 people were killed. The following day Japan sued for peace.

President Truman's defenders argued that the bombs ended the war quickly, avoiding the necessity of a costly invasion and the probable loss of tens of thousands of American lives and hundreds of thousands of Japanese lives. His critics argued that the war might have ended even without the atomic bombings. They maintained that the Japanese economy would have been strangled by a continued naval blockade, and that Japan could have been forced to surrender by conventional firebombing or by a demonstration of the atomic bomb's power.

The unleashing of nuclear power during World War II generated hope of a cheap and abundant source of energy, but it also produced anxiety among large numbers of people in the United States and around the world.

Joe Louis

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The most famous boxing match in history took place in 1938. It pitted Joe Louis against Max Schmeling. The match was filled with symbolism: black versus white, freedom versus fascism.

In fact, Schmeling was not a member of the Nazi party and was criticized at home for having a Jewish manager. Still, the match seemed to embody the struggle between Nazism and freedom.

Joe Louis was much more than a sports hero. He was an important American symbol. His life began in a sharecropper's cabin in Alabama; he had only a sixth-grade education. Yet he had become one of America's greatest heroes. A clean-living, modest man, Louis was regarded as the opposite of an earlier black heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, who had shocked white opinion with his affairs with white women.

Schmeling was a shrewd fighter. When he faced Louis in 1936, he studied his opponent and knew his weak spot: a tendency to drop his left hand after throwing a punch, leaving himself open. Schmeling knocked him out. In spite of this, Louis was better prepared for the 1938 rematch. His punches left Schmeling in tears. Louis knocked out the German boxer in the first round.

When World War II began, Louis became an icon for black recruitment, helping to urge prospective soldiers to overcome their doubts about serving in the white man's army. He was instrumental in helping desegregate the Army, not only by encouraging enlistment, but by using his influence to combat racial bias on military bases.

The Holocaust

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At 3 p.m., January 27, 1945, Russian troops of the 100th and 107th divisions entered Auschwitz, a village in southern Poland 30 miles west of Krakow. There, inside Auschwitz's concentration camps, they found 7,600 inmates--including Otto Frank, the father of Anne Frank. The discovery of the concentration camps revealed World War II's most terrible secret: the Holocaust. Two days later, the U.S. 7th Army liberated Dachau, another notorious Nazi death camp located outside of Munich. The liberators could scarcely believe what they saw: starving prisoners with bones protruding from their skin and serial numbers tattooed on their arms; stacks of half-burned corpses; and piles of human hair.

Auschwitz was not the first Nazi concentration camp--that dubious distinction belonged to Dachau, which was set up in 1933--but it was the most infamous. At Auschwitz, 1.6 million people died. Of the victims, 1.3 million were Jews and 300,000 were Gypsies, Polish Catholics, and Russian prisoners of war. Altogether, people from 28 nations lost their lives there, including the disabled, homosexuals, political prisoners, and other deemed unfit to survive by Adolf Hitler's Third Reich.

Auschwitz had two main areas. "Auschwitz I" contained a gas chamber and a crematorium and provided housing for prisoners used in slave labor and in Dr. Josef Mengele's medical experimentation station (where one experiment involved seeing how long babies survived without food).

"Auschwitz II-Birkenau" contained four gas chambers and crematoria. It was here that cattle cars dumped their exhausted passengers. Prisoners entered through a gate inscribed with the infamous words "Work Will Make You Free." SS guards directed each new arrival to the left or to the right. The healthy and strong went to the right. The weak, the elderly, and the very young went up a ramp to the left--to the gas chambers, disguised as showers. Inmates were told that the showers were used to disinfect them, but they contained no plumbing, and the shower heads were fake. Guards injected Zyklon B through openings in the ceilings and walls, then cremated the bodies. The ashes were used as road filler and fertilizer or simply dumped into surrounding ponds and fields.

Auschwitz was a product of Adolf Hitler's demented belief that Germans constituted a master race which had a right to kill those they deemed inferior. "Nature is cruel, therefore, we too may be cruel," Hitler stated in 1934. "If I can send the flower of the German nation into the hell of war...then surely I have a right to remove millions of an inferior race that breeds like vermin!"

In 1941 and 1942, the Nazi fuehrer initiated the "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem." The Nazis did their best to disguise their murderous scheme behind euphemisms and camouflage, but sometimes the truth slipped out. Heinrich Himmler, the official in charge of carrying out the final solution, explained to his top officers: "In public we will never speak of it. I am referring to the annihilation of the Jewish people. In our history, this is an unwritten and never-to-be written page of glory."

In the spring of 1944, four prisoners escaped from Auschwitz, carrying tangible proof of the Nazi's systematic program of mass murder. In mid-July, American and British leaders learned what was happening at Auschwitz, but they rejected pleas to bomb the gas chambers or the roads and rail lines leading to the camps. Military officials opposed the bombing because it would divert "considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations."

This was not the first time that Western help failed to come. During the 1930s, the U.S. State Department blocked efforts by Jewish refugees to migrate to the United States. Between 1933 and 1945, the United States allowed only 132,000 Jewish refugees to enter the country, just 10 percent of the quota allowed by law. This opposition to Jewish immigration, in turn, reflected widespread anti-Semitism. As late as 1939, opinion polls indicated that 53 percent of Americans agreed with the statement, "Jews are different and should be restricted." In the end, less than 500,000 Jews (out of 6.5 million) survived in Nazi-occupied Europe.

The Holocaust was a singular and unique event in human history. Never before had a sovereign state, with the cooperation of bureaucrats, industrialists, and civilians, sought systematically to exterminate an entire people. Yet many wonder whether Auschwitz's terrible lesson has been learned. Despite the establishment of Israel, improved Christian-Jewish relations, and heightened sensitivity to racism, many remain ignorant of the past. A 1995 opinion poll found that 5 percent of Americans deny that the Holocaust occurred and 10 percent express doubts or ignorance. More than half a century after the liberation of Auschwitz, "ethnic cleansing" and the persecution of religious, racial, and ethnic groups continues in Bosnia, China, Guatemala, India, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and elsewhere.

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World War II

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No war in history killed more people or destroyed more property than World War II. Seventeen million combatants--and an unknown number of civilians--lost their lives in the conflict. Altogether, 70 million people served in the armed forces during the war; of these, some 7.5 million Soviet troops died in World War II, along with 3.5 million Germans, 1.25 million Japanese, and 400,000 Americans. Civilian deaths were even higher. At least 19 million Soviet civilians, 10 million Chinese, and 6 million European Jews lost their lives during the war.

More than any previous war in history, World War II was a total war. Some 70 nations took part in the war, and fighting took place on the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and in the seas surrounding Australia. Entire societies participated in the war either as soldiers and

war workers, while others were persecuted as victims of occupation, bombing, and mass murder. In the United States the war had vast repercussions: it ended depression joblessness, brought millions of married women into the workforce, initiated sweeping changes in the lives of the nation's minority groups, and dramatically expanded government's presence in American life. In addition, World War II marked the beginning of the nuclear age.

Isolationism

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In 1936, eight Princeton undergraduates formed the Veterans of Future Wars (VFW). The organization demanded a bonus of \$1,000 for every man between the ages of 18 and 36--payable immediately so that they could enjoy it before being forced to fight the "next war." A women's auxiliary, the Future Gold Star Mothers, demanded government pensions for women so that they could afford to visit their son's graves in Europe.

World War I left the public suspicious of foreign crusades. Americans wanted to retreat from foreign affairs. "The people have had all the war, all the taxation, and all the military service they want," declared President Calvin Coolidge in 1925. During the 1920s, the United States tried to promote world peace through diplomatic means.

In 1921, representatives from nine Asian and European nations met in Washington to discuss ways to ease tensions in the Pacific. The conference resulted in a 10-year moratorium on the construction of battleships and an agreement that for every five naval vessels owned by the United States or Britain, Japan could have three ships, and France and Italy could own one and three-fourths ships.

In 1928, the French foreign minister, Aristide Briand, and Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg attempted to outlaw war. The Kellogg-Briand Pact, which was eventually signed by 62 nations, renounced war as an instrument for resolving international disputes. The Kellogg-Briand Pact lacked an enforcement mechanism. Cynics said the treaty had all the legal force of an "international kiss."

Isolationism During the 1930s

During the Great Depression isolationist sentiment surged. In 1935, some 150,000 college students participated in a nationwide Student Strike for Peace, and half a million signed pledges saying that they would refuse to serve in the event of war. A public opinion poll indicated that 39 percent of college students would refuse to participate in any war, even if the country was invaded.

Anti-war sentiment was not confined to undergraduates. Disillusionment over World War I fed opposition to foreign entanglements. "We didn't win a thing we set out for in the last war," said Senator Gerald Nye of North Dakota. "We merely succeeded, with tremendous loss of life, to make secure the loans of private bankers to the Allies." The overwhelming majority of Americans agreed; an opinion poll in 1935 found that 70 percent of Americans believed that intervention in World War I had been a mistake.

Isolationist ideas spread through American popular culture during the mid-1930s. The Book of the Month Club featured a volume titled *Merchants of Death*, which contended that the

United States had been drawn into the European war by international arms manufacturers who had deliberately fomented conflict in order to market their products. From 1934 to 1936, a congressional committee, chaired by Senator Nye, investigated charges that false Allied propaganda and unscrupulous Wall Street bankers had dragged Americans into the European war. In April 1935--the 18th anniversary of American entry into World War I--50,000 veterans held a peace march in Washington, D.C.

Between 1935 and 1937, Congress passed three separate neutrality laws that clamped an embargo on arms sales to belligerents, forbade American ships from entering war zones and prohibited them from being armed, and barred Americans from traveling on belligerent ships. Clearly, Congress was determined not to repeat what it regarded as the mistakes that had plunged the United States into World War I.

By 1938, however, pacifist sentiment was fading. A rapidly modernizing Japan was seeking to acquire raw materials and territory on the Asian mainland; a revived Germany was rebuilding its military power and acquiring land bloodlessly on its eastern borders; and Italy was trying to restore Roman glory through military might.

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The Coming of World War II

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Adolf Hitler gained power in Germany by exploiting the psychological injuries inflicted on Germans by World War I. Tapping into an ugly strain of anti-Semitism in German culture, he blamed many of the nation's economic woes on German Jews, who only constituted one percent of Germany's population. In addition, he attacked the Treaty of Versailles. Purged of so-called Jewish traitors, cleared of the blame for causing the war, freed from onerous reparation payments, and rescued from emasculating disarmament, Germany would rise anew and reclaim her position as a world leader.

The Treaty of Versailles had saddled Germany with a reparations bill of \$33 billion. Unable to make the interest payments, Germany's economy suffered a wave of inflation without precedent. Forty million marks were worth one cent. A newspaper cost 200 million marks. In 1924, Charles Dawes, a prominent American banker, worked out a proposal (the Dawes Plan) that reduced the reparations bill to \$2 billion and provided Germany with an American loan. Nevertheless, even this burden was more than Germany could pay.

Hitler's drive for political power began in 1919 when he joined a small party, later known as the Nazis. This party demanded that all Jews be deprived of German citizenship, and that all German-speakers be united into a single country. A brilliant propagandist, organizer, and orator, Hitler gave the Nazi movement a potent symbol: the swastika; raised party membership to 15,000 by 1923; and formed a private army, the storm troopers, to attack his political opponents. In the fall of 1923, Hitler engineered a revolt, the Beer Hall Putsch, to overthrow Germany's five year old republic. The uprising was quickly suppressed; the Nazi party was ordered dissolved, and Hitler was imprisoned for nine months.

While in jail, Hitler wrote a book, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), which laid out his beliefs and vision for Germany. He called on Germans to repudiate the Versailles Treaty ending World

War I; rearm; conquer countries with large German populations like Austria and Czechoslovakia; and seize *lebensraum* (living space) for Germans in Russia.

Following his release from prison, Hitler persuaded the German government to lift its ban on the Nazi party. In 1928, the Nazis polled just 810,000 votes in German elections; however, in 1930 after the Depression began, they polled 6 ½ million votes. Two years later, Hitler ran for president; he lost, but received 13 ½ million votes--37 percent of all votes cast. The Nazis had suddenly become the single largest party in the German parliament. In January 1933, Germany's president named Hitler chancellor. A year and a half later Hitler was Germany's dictator.

Within months of becoming chancellor, Hitler's government outlawed labor unions, imposed newspaper censorship, and decreed that the Nazis would constitute Germany's only political party. The regime established a secret police force, the Gestapo, to suppress all opposition and required all children, 10 years and older, to join youth organizations designed to inculcate Nazi beliefs. By 1935, Hitler had transformed Germany into a fascist state. The government exercised total control over all political, economic, and cultural activities.

Anti-Semitism was an integral part of Hitler's political program. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws forbade intermarriages, restricted property rights, and barred Jews from the civil service, the universities, and all professional and managerial occupations. On the night of November 9, 1939--a night now known as Kristallnacht (the night of the broken glass)--the Nazis imprisoned more than 20,000 Jews in concentration camps and destroyed more than 200 synagogues and 7,500 Jewish businesses.

During the 1930s, a series of threats to world peace arose. Japan attacked China; Italy attacked Ethiopia; and Nazi Germany rearmed, occupied the Rhineland, annexed Austria, and seized Czechoslovakia.

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Conflict in the Pacific

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The first major threat to international stability following World War I came in the Far East. Chronically short of raw materials, Japan was desperate to establish political and cultural hegemony in Asia. In September 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria, reducing the Chinese province to a puppet state. President Hoover rejected a military response and also refused to impose economic sanctions against Japan. He simply refused to recognize the new Manchurian government since it was based on force.

Expecting bolder measures, Japan ignored this slap on the wrist and concluded that the United States would not use military might to oppose its designs on the Far East. In 1934, Japan terminated the Five-Power Naval Treaty of 1922, which had limited its naval power in the Pacific. In 1937, Japan invaded China. In response, the League of Nations sponsored a conference at Brussels in November 1937. As the delegates debated whether or not to impose economic sanctions against Japan, the United States announced it would not support sanctions. The conference adjourned after passing a report that mildly criticized Japanese aggression.

Any doubts regarding the U.S. desire to avoid war vanished a few weeks later. In December 1937, Japanese aircraft bombed the *Panay*, a U.S. gunboat stationed on the Yangtze River near Nanking, killing three Americans. While the attack angered the public, few calls for war rang out, a similar response to those following the sinking of the *Maine* or the *Lusitania*. The United States quickly accepted Japan's apology, indemnities for the injured and relatives of the dead, promises against future attacks, and punishment of the pilots responsible for the bloodshed.

Italy

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Benito Mussolini's Italy posed another threat to world peace. Mussolini, Italy's ruler from 1922 to 1943, promised to restore his country's martial glory. Surrounded by storm troopers dressed in black shirts, Mussolini delivered impassioned speeches from balconies, while crowds chanted, "Duce! Duce!"

His opponents mocked him as the "Sawdust Caesar," but for a time his admirers included Winston Churchill and Will Rogers, the humorist. Cole Porter, the popular songwriter, referred to the Italian leader in a line in one of his smash hits. "You're the top," he wrote, "you're Mussolini."

Mussolini invented a political philosophy known as fascism, extolling it as an alternative to socialist radicalism and parliamentary inaction. Fascism, he promised, would end political corruption and labor strife while maintaining capitalism and private property. It would make trains run on time. Like Hitler's Germany, fascist Italy adopted anti-Semitic laws banning marriages between Christian and Jewish Italians, restricting Jews' right to own property, and removing Jews from positions in government, education, and banking.

One of Mussolini's goals was to create an Italian empire in North Africa. In 1912 and 1913, Italy had conquered Libya. In 1935, he provoked war with Ethiopia, conquering the country in eight months. Two years later, Mussolini sent 70,000 Italian troops to Spain to help Francisco Franco defeat the republican government in the Spanish Civil War. His slogan was "Believe! Obey! Fight!"

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Germany

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A third threat to world peace came from a revived Germany. Hitler had vowed to reclaim Germany's position as a world leader. True to his word, he pulled Germany out of the League of Nations and secretly began to rearm. In 1935, he publicly announced that he was building an air force and a 550,000-man army. He also declared that Germany would have a peacetime draft, a clear violation of the Treaty of Versailles.

Next, Hitler concentrated on forging alliances with nations that shared Germany's taste for expansion and aggression. Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact (forerunner of a full-scale military alliance) in 1936. Shortly thereafter, Germany formed the Rome-Berlin Axis with Italy's fascist dictator, Mussolini. Also in 1936, German troops re-occupied

the Rhineland, the German-speaking region between the Rhine River and France. Once again, France and Great Britain did not oppose Hitler's bold advance, for they believed (or wanted to believe) the Rhineland would satisfy his ambitions.

The Rhineland, however, only whetted Hitler's appetite. Intent on reuniting all German-speaking peoples of Europe under the "Third Reich," Hitler annexed Austria in 1938 and imprisoned the country's chancellor. Once again, the British and the French acquiesced, hoping Austria would be Hitler's last stop. Later that year, he demanded the Sudetenland, the German-speaking region of western Czechoslovakia.

This time France and Britain felt compelled to act. In September 1938, Edouard Daladier, the premier of France, and Neville Chamberlain, Britain's prime minister, met with Hitler in Munich, Germany, to determine whether he had further designs on Europe. Fearing they could not count on each other to use force, British and French leaders eagerly accepted Hitler's promises not to seek additional territory in Europe. Upon arriving in England, Chamberlain told his anxious countrymen that he had returned with an agreement that guaranteed "peace in our time." In less than a year, Munich would become synonymous with shameful appeasement, and Chamberlain would be vilified for believing Hitler's lies.

In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression treaty. In exchange for the pact, Hitler agreed to grant the Soviet Union a sphere of influence over eastern Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, and Bessarabia (northeastern Romania), while Stalin approved Germany's designs on western Poland and Lithuania. With his eastern front protected from attack, Hitler was now prepared for war.

War Begins

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At daybreak on September 1, 1939, mechanized German forces broke across the Polish border, while German bombers and fighters attacked Polish railroads from the air. On September 17, Russia attacked Poland from the east. Within three weeks, Poland was overrun.

The key to Germany's success was a new military strategy known as *blitzkrieg* (lightning war). Blitzkrieg stressed speed, force, and surprise; Germany ripped through its adversary's defenses by closely coordinating air power and mechanized ground forces.

Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, two days after the German invasion began. But the two countries did little while Poland fell. France moved its troops to its famous Maginot Line, a supposedly invincible line of defensive fortification built to protect France's eastern border. No fighting took place in late 1939 and 1940, leading people to call this a "phony war."

Then in April 1940, German freighters sailed secretly into Norway's major ports, as well as the port of Copenhagen, Denmark's capital. Their holds were filled with German troops. The Danes, taken completely by surprise, surrendered in two hours; the Norwegians held out until June, when they, too, capitulated. British troops had tried to assist Norway, but were forced to retreat due to a lack of air support. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was forced to resign following the Norway debacle. He was replaced by Winston Churchill, who (since 1932) had been warning people about the danger Hitler posed. Upon becoming prime

minister, Churchill told the British people that he had nothing to offer them but "blood, toil, tears, and sweat" in their fight to resist foreign aggression.

In May 1940, Hitler began his assault on Western Europe. He outflanked France's Maginot Line by attacking Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands before driving his forces into France. Luxembourg surrendered in one day; Holland in five days. A British expeditionary force rushed across the English Channel to try to stop the German offensive. However, a German tank thrust forced the British to retreat to the French seaport of Dunkirk. With the British force nearly surrounded, Hitler had a chance to crush his opponents. But Britain's Royal Air Force held off German bombers long enough to allow a flotilla of yachts, ferries, and fishing boats to evacuate 338,000 allied troops across the English Channel.

British forces had been driven from the continent. Worse yet, they had been forced to leave their weapons and tanks behind. Britain turned to the United States for help. President Roosevelt responded to the Dunkirk disaster by ordering U.S. military arsenals to send all available war materiel to Britain to replace the lost equipment.

During World War I, France held out against the Germans for four years. This time, French resistance lasted two weeks. Germany began its assault on France on June 5; a German troop entered Paris on June 14; and on June 22, a new French government, made up of pro-German sympathizers, was set up at Vichy. In just six weeks, Germany had conquered most of continental Europe.

Next, Hitler sought to occupy Britain. Convinced that Britain would negotiate with him (in order to keep control of its empire), Hitler decided against an immediate invasion. Churchill, however, refused to bargain. Defiantly, he told his people that he would resist any German assault: "We shall fight on the beaches...we shall fight in the streets...we shall never surrender."

Hitler was furious. First, he unleashed German submarines against British shipping. Then, in July, he sent his air force, the Luftwaffe, to destroy Britain from the air. At the time the assault began, the Royal Air Force (RAF) had just 704 serviceable planes, while Germany had 2,682 bombers and fighters ready for action. Throughout July and August, the Luftwaffe attacked airfields and radar stations on Britain's southern and eastern coast. Next, in September Hitler shifted strategy and began to bomb civilian targets in London. These air raids, known as the blitz, continued through the fall and winter. In May 1941, the blitz ended. While outnumbered, the RAF had won the Battle of Britain. Churchill expressed his nation's gratitude with the famous words: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Having failed in his bid to destroy Britain with air power, Hitler shifted strategy and invaded the Soviet Union. The attack, which began on June 22, 1941, violated the German-Soviet nonaggression pact. Hitler's goal was to seize Soviet food and oil and to capture slave labor for Germany. At first, the Nazi war machine seemed invincible; by fall, Hitler's armies had overrun the grain fields of Ukraine and were approaching Moscow and Leningrad. But instead of pressing ahead toward Moscow, as his generals advised, Hitler decided to seize Leningrad and occupy the Ukraine. By the time he was ready to advance on Moscow, temperatures had plunged to 40 degrees below zero. In the frigid cold, German troops suffered frostbite, and their equipment broke down.

The week between December 6 and 11, 1941, proved to be one of the most pivotal in the entire war. On December 6, Soviet forces repulsed the German attack on Moscow; this was

Hitler's first military defeat. The next day, Japanese forces attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, bringing the United States into the war. On December 11, Hitler declared war on the United States.

The United States Responds to War in Europe

As early as 1935, Roosevelt had come to realize that Hitler represented a threat to Western civilization. Yet the American public was strongly isolationist. Over the next six years, Roosevelt schemed to supply aid to the British and French. Many of his most influential advisers were against him. They argued that arms for the Europeans meant fewer arms for Americans.

Roosevelt responded to the European war by issuing a proclamation of neutrality. At the same time, he took a number of steps designed to help Britain. He pushed a fourth Neutrality Act through Congress, which permitted belligerents to purchase war materials, provided that they paid cash and carried the goods away in their own ships. This act aided the British because Britain controlled the Atlantic's sea lanes. In September 1940, he persuaded Congress to pass the first peacetime draft in American history and signed an executive agreement with Great Britain, transferring 50 destroyers in exchange for 99-year leases on eight British bases in the Western Hemisphere.

The European war dominated the election of 1940. During the campaign, Republican candidate Wendell Willkie charged Roosevelt with maneuvering the United States into the European war. Roosevelt was called a warmonger by Charles Lindbergh and the powerful labor leader John L. Lewis. On the eve of the election, Roosevelt responded, offering these reassuring words to American parents: "I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars." Running for an unprecedented third term, Roosevelt easily defeated Willkie, receiving 449 electoral votes to the Republican candidate's 82 votes.

After the election, Churchill informed Roosevelt that Britain could no longer afford to purchase war supplies. The president responded by persuading Congress to replace "cash-and-carry" with "Lend-Lease," which gave the president authority to sell, exchange, lend, or lease war materiel to any country whose defense was vital to U.S. security. In November 1941, President Roosevelt offered lend-lease aid to the Soviet Union, which had been invaded by Germany in June 1941. Meanwhile, the American navy began to signal the location of German submarines to British destroyers.

A Collision Course in the Pacific

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After Japan invaded China in 1937, relations between Washington and Tokyo deteriorated rapidly. In 1940, Japan occupied northern Indochina, a step toward its goal of capturing the oil supplies in the Dutch East Indies. To stop Japanese aggression, the United States placed an embargo on the export of scrap metal, oil, and aviation fuel to Japan. Also, President Roosevelt froze Japanese bank accounts in the United States. Harmed by these sanctions, Japan negotiated with the United States throughout 1941. The United States demanded that Japan withdraw immediately from Indochina and China--concessions that would have ended Japan's dream of economic and military hegemony in Asia.

In a last ditch effort to avoid war, Japan promised not to march further south, not to attack the Soviet Union, and not to declare war against the United States if Germany and America went to war. In return, Japan asked the United States to abandon China. Roosevelt refused. In October 1941, the Japanese government fell, and General Hideki Tojo, the leader of the militants, seized power. War was imminent.

Most military experts expected Japan to attack the Dutch East Indies to secure oil and rubber. Before striking there, however, Japan moved to neutralize American power in the western Pacific.

Pearl Harbor

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At 7:02 a.m., December 7, 1941, an army mobile radar unit set up on Oahu Island in Hawaii picked up the tell-tale blips of approaching aircraft. The two privates operating the radar contacted the Army's General Information Center, but the duty officer there told them to remain calm; the planes were probably American B-17s flying in from California. In fact, they were Japanese aircraft that had been launched from six aircraft carriers 200 miles north of Hawaii.

At 7:55 a.m., the first Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, the main base of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Moored in the harbor were more than 70 warships, including eight of the fleet's nine battleships. There were also 2 heavy cruisers, 29 destroyers, and 5 submarines. Four hundred airplanes were stationed nearby.

Japanese torpedo bombers, flying just 50 feet above the water, launched torpedoes at the docked American warships. Japanese dive bombers strafed the ships' decks with machine gun fire, while Japanese fighters dropped high explosive bombs on the aircraft sitting on the ground. Within half an hour, the U.S. Pacific Fleet was virtually destroyed. The U.S. battleship *Arizona* was a burning hulk. Three other large ships--the *Oklahoma*, the *West Virginia*, and the *California*--were sinking.

A second attack took place at 9 a.m., but the damage had been done. Seven of the eight battleships were sunk or severely damaged. Out of the 400 aircraft, 188 had been destroyed and 159 were severely damaged. The worst damage occurred to the *Arizona*; a thousand of the ship's sailors drowned or burned to death. Altogether, 2,403 Americans died during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; another 1,178 were wounded. Japan lost just 55 men.

It was not a total disaster, however. Japan had failed to destroy Pearl Harbor's ship repair facilities, the base's power plant, or its fuel tanks. Even more important, three U.S. aircraft carriers, which had been on routine maneuvers, escaped destruction. But it had been a devastating blow nonetheless. Later in the day on December 7, Japanese forces launched attacks throughout the Pacific, striking Guam, Hong Kong, Malaya, Midway Island, the Philippine Islands, and Wake Island.

The next day, President Roosevelt appeared before a joint session of Congress to ask for a declaration of war. He began his address with these famous words: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941--a date that will live in infamy--the United States of America was suddenly and

deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan." Congress declared war on Japan with but one dissenting vote.

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Mobilizing for War

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World War II cost America 1 million casualties and over 300,000 deaths. In both domestic and foreign affairs, its consequences were far-reaching. It had an immediate impact on the economy by ending Depression-era unemployment. The war accelerated corporate mergers and the trend toward large-scale agriculture. Labor unions also grew during the war as the government adopted pro-union policies, continuing the New Deal's sympathetic treatment of organized labor.

Presidential power expanded enormously during World War II, anticipating the rise of what postwar critics termed the "imperial presidency." The Democrats reaped a political windfall from the war. Roosevelt rode the wartime emergency to unprecedented third and fourth terms.

For most Americans, the war had a disruptive influence--separating families, overcrowding housing, and creating a shortage of consumer goods. The war accelerated the movement from the countryside to the cities. It also challenged gender and racial roles, opening new opportunities for women and many minority groups.

The Allies prevailed in World War II because of the United States' astounding productive capacity. During the Depression year of 1937, Americans produced 4.8 million cars, while the Germans produced 331,000 and the Japanese 26,000. By 1945, the United States was turning out 88,410 tanks to Germany's 44,857; the U.S. manufactured 299,293 aircraft to Japan's 69,910. The American ratio of toilet paper was 22.5 sheets per man per day, compared with the British ration of 3 sheets. In Germany, civilian consumption fell by 20 percent; in Japan by 26 percent; in Britain by 12 percent. But in the United States, personal consumption rose by more than 12 percent.

During World War II, the federal government took an even larger economic role than it did during the World War I. To gain the support of business leaders, the federal government suspended competitive bidding, offered cost-plus contracts, guaranteed low-cost loans for retooling, and paid huge subsidies for plant construction and equipment. Lured by huge profits, the American auto industry made the switch to military production. In 1940, some 6,000 planes rolled off Detroit's assembly lines; production of planes jumped to 47,000 in 1942; and by the end of the war, it exceeded 100,000.

To encourage agricultural production, the Roosevelt administration set crop prices at high levels. Cash income for farmers jumped from \$2.3 billion in 1940 to \$9.5 billion in 1945. Meanwhile, many small farmers, saddled with huge debts from the depression, abandoned their farms for jobs in defense plants or the armed services. Over 5 million farm residents left rural areas during the war.

Overall, the war brought unprecedented prosperity to Americans. Per capita income rose from \$373 in 1940 to \$1,074 in 1945. Workers never had it so good. Rising incomes,

however, created shortages of goods and high inflation. Prices soared 18 percent between 1941 and the end of 1942. Apples sold for 10 cents apiece; the price of a watermelon soared to \$2.50; and oranges reached an astonishing \$1.00 a dozen.

Many goods were unavailable regardless of price. To conserve steel, glass, and rubber for war industries, the government halted production of cars in December 1941. A month later, production of vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, radios, sewing machines, and phonographs ceased. Altogether, production of nearly 300 items deemed nonessential to the war effort was banned or curtailed, including coat hangers, beer cans, and toothpaste tubes.

Congress responded to surging prices by establishing the Office of Price Administration (OPA) in January 1942, with the power to freeze prices and wages, control rents, and institute rationing of scarce items. The OPA quickly rationed food stuffs. Every month each man, woman, and child in the country received two ration books--one for canned goods and one for meat, fish and dairy products. Meat was limited to 28 ounces per person a week; sugar to 8-12 ounces; and coffee, a pound every five weeks. Rationing was soon extended to tires, gasoline, and shoes. Drivers were allowed a mere 3 gallons a week; pedestrians were limited to two pairs of shoes a year. The OPA extolled the virtues of self-sacrifice, telling people to "use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without."

In addition to rationing, Washington attacked inflation by reducing the public's purchasing power. In 1942, the federal government levied a 5 percent withholding tax on anyone who earned more than \$642 a year.

The war created 17 million new jobs at the exact moment when 15 million men and women entered the armed services--unemployment virtually disappeared. Union membership jumped from 10.5 million to 14.75 million during the war.

Election of 1944

During the 1944 presidential campaign, President Roosevelt unveiled plans for a "GI Bill of Rights," promising educational support, medical care, and housing loans for veterans, which Congress approved overwhelmingly in 1944. Unwilling to switch leaders while at war, the public stuck with Roosevelt to see the crisis through. The president easily defeated his Republican opponent, Governor Thomas Dewey of New York, receiving 432 electoral votes to Dewey's 99 votes.

Molding Public Opinion

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Digital History ID 3492

President Roosevelt hoped to avoid the crude propoganda campaigns that had stirred ethnic hatred during World War I. Nevertheless, anti-Japanese propoganda was intense. Movies, comic strips, newspapers, books, and advertisements caricatured Japanese by portraying them with thick glasses and huge buck teeth.

Motion pictures emerged as the most important instrument of propoganda during World War II. After Pearl Harbor, Hollywood quickly enlisted in the war cause. The studios quickly copyrighted movie titles like *Yellow Peril* and *V for Victory*. Hollywood's greatest contribution to the war effort was morale. Combat films produced during the war emphasized patriotism, group effort, and the value of sacrifice for a larger cause. The films portrayed World War II

as a peoples' war, typically featuring a group of men from diverse ethnic backgrounds thrown together, tested on the battlefield, and molded into a dedicated fighting unit. Wartime films also featured women serving as combat nurses, riveters, welders, and long-suffering mothers who kept the home fires burning.

Off-screen, leading actors and actresses led recruitment and bond drives and entertained the troops. Leading directors like Frank Capra and John Huston made documentaries to explain "why we fight" and to show civilians what actual combat looked like.

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Social Changes During the War

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World War II produced important changes in American life--some trivial, others profound. One striking change involved fashion. To conserve wool and cotton, dresses became shorter and vests and cuffs disappeared, as did double-breasted suits, pleats, and ruffles.

Even more significant was the tremendous increase in mobility. The war set families in motion, pulling them off of farms and out of small towns and packing them into large urban areas. Urbanization had virtually stopped during the Depression, but the war saw the number of city dwellers leap from 46 to 53 percent.

War industries sparked the urban growth. Detroit's population exploded as the automotive industry switched from manufacturing cars to war vehicles. Washington, D.C. became another boomtown, as tens of thousands of new workers staffed the swelling ranks of the bureaucracy. The most dramatic growth occurred in California. Of the 15 million civilians who moved across state lines during the war, over 2 million went to California to work in defense industries.

Women

The war had a dramatic impact on women. The sudden appearance of large numbers of women in uniform was easily the most visible change. The military organized women into auxiliary units with special uniforms, their own officers, and, amazingly, equal pay. By 1945, more than 250,000 women had joined the Women's Army Corps (WAC), the Army Nurses Corps, Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES), the Navy Nurses Corps, the Marines, and the Coast Guard. Most women who joined the armed services either filled traditional women's roles, such as nursing, or replaced men in non-combat jobs.

Women also substituted for men on the home front. For the first time in history, married working women outnumbered single working women as 6.3 million women entered the work force during the war. The war challenged the conventional image of female behavior, as "Rosie the Riveter" became the popular symbol of women who abandoned traditional female

occupations to work in defense industries. Social critics had a field day attacking women. Social workers blamed working mothers for the rise in juvenile delinquency during the war.

African Americans

In 1941, the overwhelming majority of the nation's African American population--10 of 13 million--still lived in the South, primarily in rural areas. During the war, more than one million blacks migrated to the North--twice the number during World War I--and more than two million found work in defense industries.

Black leaders fought discrimination vigorously. In the spring of 1941 (months before America entered the war), the president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, A. Philip Randolph, with strong backing from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), called for 150,000 blacks to march on Washington to protest discrimination in defense industries. Embarrassed and concerned, Roosevelt issued an executive order prohibiting discrimination in defense industries and creating the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC).

During the war, the Marines excluded blacks, the Navy used them as servants, and the Army created separate black regiments commanded mostly by white officers. The Red Cross even segregated blood plasma.

As urban areas swelled with defense workers, housing and transportation shortages exacerbated racial tensions. In 1943, a riot broke out in Detroit in a federally-sponsored housing project when whites wanted blacks barred from the new apartments named, ironically, in honor of Sojourner Truth. White soldiers from a nearby base joined the fighting, and other federal troops had to be brought in to disperse the mobs. The violence left 35 blacks and 9 whites dead.

Similar conflicts erupted across the nation exposing, in each instance, the same jarring contradiction: White Americans espoused equality abroad but practiced discrimination at home. One black soldier told Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal, "Just carve on my tombstone, here lies a black man killed fighting a yellow man for the protection of a white man." A 1942 survey showed that many black Americans sympathized with the Japanese struggle to expel white colonialists from the Far East. Significantly, the same survey revealed a majority of white industrialists in the South preferred a German victory to racial equality for blacks.

During World War II, the NAACP intensified its legal campaign against discrimination, and its membership grew from 50,000 to 500,000. Some African Americans, however, considered the NAACP too slow and too conciliatory. Rejecting legal action, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), founded in 1942, organized a series of "sit-ins." Civil disobedience produced a few victories in the North, but the South's response was brutal. In Tennessee, for example, angry whites savagely beat the civil rights leader Bayard Rustin for refusing to move to the back of the bus.

Mexican Americans

Almost 400,000 Mexican Americans served in the armed forces during the war. For many Mexican Americans, jobs in industry provided an escape hatch from the desperate poverty

of migratory farm labor. In New Mexico, about one-fifth of the rural Mexican American population left for war-related jobs.

The need for farm workers rose dramatically after Pearl Harbor. To meet the demand, the United States established the *Bracero* (work hands) Program in 1942, and by 1945, several hundred thousand Mexican workers had immigrated to the Southwest. Commercial farmers welcomed them; labor unions, however, resented the competition, leading to animosity and discrimination against Mexicans and Mexican Americans alike.

In Los Angeles, ethnic tensions erupted into violence. Anglo society feared and resented newly formed Mexican American youth gangs, whose members celebrated their ethnicity by wearing flamboyant "zoot suits." In June 1943, hundreds of Anglo sailors, on liberty from nearby naval bases, invaded downtown Los Angeles. Eager to put down the Mexican American youths, they attacked the zoot suiters, and riots broke out for several nights. The local press blamed the Mexican American gangs, and the riots did not end until military police ordered sailors back to their ships.

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Italians, Germans, Japanese Aliens and European Jewry

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The day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt suspended naturalization proceedings for Italian, German, and Japanese immigrants, required them to register, restricted their mobility, and prohibited them from owning items that might be used for sabotage, such as cameras and shortwave radios. In general, Italian and German aliens received lenient treatment, while Japanese aliens suffered gross injustices.

The United States and the Holocaust

The images are indelibly etched into our collective memory: slave laborers with protruding ribs; piles of hair; and bodies heaped like kindling. During World War II, Nazi Germany and its allies systematically exterminated approximately six million Jews. No more than 450,000 to 500,000 Jews survived World War II in German-occupied Europe.

Despite efforts by retreating Nazis to destroy incriminating evidence, meticulous German records allow us to document the number of people killed. In 1943, Heinrich Himmler, a top Hitler aide, stated that, "We have the moral right...to destroy this people," and called the extermination program "a glorious page in our history."

The Nazis operated six death camps in Eastern Europe between December 1941 and the end of 1944: Chelmno, Belzek, Majdanek, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Auschwitz. At Auschwitz in Poland, gas chambers and crematorium ovens killed 20,000 victims a day. Zyklon B crystals were injected into gas chambers by small openings in the ceiling or on the side of the wall. Altogether, 1.6 million people were killed at Auschwitz--1.3 million were Jews and 300,000 were Polish Catholics, Gypsies, and Russian prisoners--and their ashes were dumped in surrounding ponds and fields. The ashes of about 100,000 people lie in a small pond near one of the crematories.

As early as June 1942, word reached the United States that the Nazis were planning the annihilation of the European Jews. A report smuggled from Poland to London described in detail the killing centers at Chelmno and the use of gas vans, and it estimated that 700,000 people had already been killed.

Anti-Semitism fueled by the Depression and by demagogues, like the radio priest Charles Coughlin, influenced immigration policy. In 1939, pollsters found that 53 percent of those interviewed agreed with the statement "Jews are different and should be restricted." Between 1933 and 1945, the United States took in only 132,000 Jewish refugees, only 10 percent of the quota allowed by law.

Reflecting a nasty strain of anti-Semitism, Congress in 1939 refused to raise immigration quotas to admit 20,000 Jewish children fleeing Nazi oppression. As the wife of the U.S. Commissioner of Immigration remarked at a cocktail party, "20,000 children would all too soon grow up to be 20,000 ugly adults." Instead of relaxing immigration quotas, American officials worked in vain to persuade Latin American countries and Great Britain to admit Jewish refugees. In January 1944, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, as the only Jew in the Cabinet, presented the president with a "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of the Jews." Shamed into action, Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board, which, in turn, set up refugee camps in Italy, North Africa, and the United States.

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Japanese-American Internment

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The Immigration Act of 1924 barred the Japanese from migrating to the United States. Consequently, the Japanese comprised a tiny portion of the population in 1941--totaling no more than 260,000 people. Of this number, 150,000 lived in Hawaii. The remaining 110,000 Japanese concentrated on the West Coast where they worked mostly as small farmers or business-people serving the Japanese community. After Pearl Harbor, rumors spread about Japanese troops preparing to land in California. Allegedly, they planned to link-up with Japanese Americans and Japanese aliens poised to strike as a fifth column for the invasion.

On February 19, 1942, Roosevelt authorized the Department of War to designate military areas and to exclude any or all persons from them. Armed with this power, military authorities immediately moved against Japanese aliens. In Hawaii, the military did not force Japanese Americans to relocate because a large portion of the population was of Japanese ancestry and the local economy depended on their labor. On the West Coast, however, military authorities ordered the Japanese to leave, drawing no distinction between aliens and citizens. Forced to sell their property for pennies on the dollar, most Japanese Americans suffered severe financial losses. Relocation proved next to impossible as no other states would take them. The governor of Idaho opposed any migration, declaring: "The Japs live like rats, breed like rats and act like rats. We don't want them."

Roosevelt created the War Relocation Authority when voluntary measures failed. It resettled 100,000 Japanese Americans in ten isolated internment camps scattered across seven western states. Called relocation camps, they resembled minimum security prisons. In these concentration camps, American citizens who had committed no crimes were locked behind barbed wire and crowded into ramshackle wooden barracks. The families lived one family to a room that was furnished with nothing but cots and bare light bulbs. They were forced to endure bad food, inadequate medical care, and poorly equipped schools.

Nearly 18,000 Japanese American men won release from those camps to fight for the United States Army. Most served with the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. In Italy, the 442nd sustained nearly 10,000 casualties, with 3,600 Purple Hearts, 810 Bronze Stars, 342 Silver Stars, 123 divisional citations, 47 Distinguished Service Crosses, 17 Legions of Merit, 7 Presidential Unit Citations, and 1 Congressional Medal of Honor. In short, they fought heroically, emerging as the most decorated military unit in World War II. In one of the most painful scenes in American history, Japanese American parents, still locked inside concentration camps, received posthumous Purple Hearts for their sons.

Japanese Americans protested their treatment in court. Citing national security considerations, the Supreme Court upheld the internment order by a six to three vote in the case, *Korematsu v. U.S.* (1944). In a dissenting opinion, however, Frank Murphy admitted that federal policy had fallen "into the ugly abyss of racism." On December 18, 1944, in the *Endo* case, the Supreme Court ruled that a civilian agency (the War Relocation Authority) had no right to incarcerate law-abiding citizens. Two weeks later, the federal government began closing down the camps, ending one of the most shameful chapters in American history.

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The Military Conflict

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Almost 60 nations took part in World War II. The Axis powers consisted of Germany, Italy, and Japan, along with Albania, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Romania, and Thailand. The Allies, which included the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, eventually numbered 49 nations.

During 1942, prospects for an Allied victory appeared slim. In the six months following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese forces captured Guam, Wake Island, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Malaya and slashed deep into Burma. By early 1942, Japanese troops controlled most of the Western Pacific and large parts of Eastern and Southern Asia, leaving India and Australia vulnerable to attack.

The situation in Europe was no better. During the first ten months of 1942, German submarines sank over 500 American merchant ships, threatening the United States' ability to provide supplies to Britain. In the spring, the German army surged deep into Soviet territory, advancing on Moscow and threatening Soviet oil fields in the south. In North Africa, German and Italian forces were sweeping toward the Suez Canal, and the British defense of Egypt was near collapse.

In September 1942, the Red Army stopped the German advancement into the Soviet Union at Stalingrad--the most horrific battle of the Second World War. During the four month long battle, the combined battle deaths exceeded one million. Of the 10,000 men in the Soviet's 13th Guards Rifle Division, only 320 were still alive at the end of the battle.

Lacking the strength to invade France from Britain, the British and the Americans attacked the Germans and Italians in North Africa. The Allied victory in North Africa allowed shipping to cross the Mediterranean in safety and made it possible for the Allies to invade Southern Europe. The Allies decided to invade Italy because that country appeared to be the Axis' weak point. Sicily fell in August 1943, after a campaign of slightly more than a month. Victory in Italy resulted in the overthrow of Benito Mussolini.

In preparation for Operation Overlord (the Allied invasion of France), British and American forces instituted saturation bombing, dropping 2,697,473 tons of bombs on German territory, killing 305,000 civilians, and damaging over 5.5 million homes. The Allies massed more than three million soldiers in England under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The Allied invasion began at 6:30 a.m. on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Nearly 6,000 Allied ships ferried 60,000 troops and their supplies across the English Channel into Northern France. Casualties among the first assault groups totaled 60 percent.

It took six weeks to secure the beachheads. By then, Allied troops had captured the French port of Cherbourg, allowing the Allies to advance into Western Europe. Allied forces liberated Paris in August, and by mid-September Allied forces had crossed the German border.

In December 1944, German troops launched a massive counteroffensive in the Ardennes Forest along the border of Belgium and Luxembourg. In the Battle of the Bulge, the Germans temporarily broke through Allied lines, but only slowed the Allied invasion by about six weeks.

By February 1945, the Red Army was within 45 miles of Berlin. On April 30, Hitler committed suicide, and Germany surrendered a week later. On May 8, 1945, the Allies celebrated V-E (Victory in Europe) Day.

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On December 7, 1941, Japan had launched an offensive incredible in its scale. A thousand Japanese warships attacked an area comprising one-third of the earth's surface, including Guam, Hong Kong, Malaya, Midway Island, the Philippine Islands, and Wake Island. The offensive was a stunning success. Hong Kong was overrun in 18 days; Wake Island in two weeks; Singapore held out for two months. By May, the Japanese had also captured the islands of Borneo, Bali, Sumatra, and Timor. In addition, Japan had taken Rangoon, Burma's main port, and seized control of the rich tin, oil, and rubber resources of Southeast Asia.

By mid-summer of 1942, however, American forces had halted the Japanese advance. In May, a Japanese troop convoy was intercepted and destroyed by the U.S. Navy at Coral Sea, preventing a Japanese attack on Australia. In early June, at Midway Island in the Central Pacific, the Japanese launched an aircraft carrier offensive to cut American communications and to isolate Hawaii to the east. In a three-day naval battle, the Japanese

lost three destroyers, a heavy cruiser, and four carriers. The Battle of Midway broke the back of Japan's navy.

To defeat Japan, Allied forces pursued two strategies. General Douglas MacArthur pushed northward from Australia through New Guinea and from the Philippines towards Japan. Meanwhile, Admiral Chester Nimitz advanced on Japan by attacking Japanese-held islands in the Central Pacific in a leap-frog fashion--invading strategic islands and bypassing others. By late 1944, the United States was able to bomb the Japanese islands.

Controversy Continues

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Fifty years after the United States ended World War II by dropping two atomic bombs on Japan, a major public controversy erupted over plans to exhibit the fuselage of the Enola Gay at the Smithsonian Institution's Air and Space Museum. As originally conceived, the exhibit, titled "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II," was designed to provoke debate about the decision to drop atomic bombs. Museum visitors would be encouraged to reflect on the morality of the bombing and to ask whether the bombs were necessary to end the war.

The proposal generated a firestorm of controversy. The part of the script that produced the most opposition stated: "For most Americans, this...was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese, it was a war to defend their unique culture against Western imperialism." Another controversial section addressed the question: "Would the bomb have been dropped on the Germans?" The answer began: "Some have argued that the United States would never have dropped the bomb on the Germans, because Americans were more reluctant to bomb 'white people' than Asians."

Veterans groups considered the proposed exhibit too sympathetic to the Japanese, portraying them as victims of racist Americans hell-bent on revenge for Pearl Harbor. They called the exhibit an insult to the U.S. soldiers who fought and died during the war and complained that it paid excessive attention to Japanese casualties and suffering and paid insufficient attention to Japanese aggression and atrocities. The U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution calling a revised version of the exhibit "unbalanced and offensive" and reminding the museum of "its obligation to portray history in the proper context of its time."

In the end, the Smithsonian decided to scale back the exhibit, displaying the Enola Gay's fuselage along with a small plaque. In announcing the decision, a Smithsonian official explained, "In this important anniversary year, veterans and their families were expecting, and rightly so, that the nation would honor and commemorate their valor and sacrifice. They were not looking for analysis and, frankly, we did not give enough thought to the intense feelings such an analysis would evoke."

The decision to use atomic bombs against Japan was the most controversial decision in military history.

Early in 1946, the Federal Council of Churches called the bombings "morally indefensible" because Japan had received no specific advancing warning. In July, the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey concluded that Japan would have surrendered "certainly prior to December 31, 1945, and in all probability prior to November 1, 1945...even if the atomic bombs had

not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion [of Japan] had been planned or contemplated." An account of six survivors of the Hiroshima bombing by John Hersey published in the *New Yorker* magazine in August 1946, which helped to humanize the bomb's victims, led the influential magazine *Saturday Review* to describe the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a crime.

Henry Stimson, the 78-year-old former secretary of war, publicly defended the U.S. decision to drop the bombs. He argued that the Japanese were determined to fight to the death and that, without the bombings, it would have cost at least a million American and many more Japanese casualties to achieve victory. Stimson also explained why the U.S. had refused to warn Japan about the new weapon or to stage a demonstration of the bomb's destructive power. Engineers were unable to assure the government that the bombs would work, and officials feared that a failure would have disastrous effects on American morale. Further, they noted that even if a successful demonstration was carried out, the Japanese government might suppress the news.

In 1949, Stimson's arguments were challenged by a British physicist, P.M.S. Blackett. Blackett claimed that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was intended, at least in part, to intimidate the Soviet Union.

Why did the United States drop the bomb when it did? On July 29, a U.S. Navy ship, the *Indianapolis*, was sunk and 883 lives were lost. A U.S. invasion of Southeast Asia was scheduled for September 6, in which case, it was likely that 100,000 British, Dutch, and American Prisoners of War would be executed by the Japanese.

Decrypted Japanese military cables indicated that Japan was building-up its defenses in preparation for an American invasion, and many Japanese leaders testified that they were confident that they could have stopped at least the first wave of an American invasion. Decoded diplomatic cables indicated that Japan's leaders were seeking to persuade the Soviet Union to negotiate an armistice on favorable terms that would have allowed Japan to retain conquered territory. A three-time Japanese premier, Prince Konoye Fumimaro, said that had the atomic bombs not been dropped, the war would have continued into 1946: "The army had dug themselves caves in the mountains and their idea of fighting on was fighting from every little hole or rock in the mountains."

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