

America and ww2

When events began happening in Europe that would eventually lead to World War II, many Americans took an increasingly hard line toward getting involved. The events of World War I had fed into the United States' natural desire of isolationism, and this was reflected by the passage of Neutrality Acts and the general hands-off approach to the events that unfolded on the world stage.

Increasing Tensions

While the United States was wallowing in neutrality and isolationism, events were occurring in Europe and Asia that were causing increasing tension across the regions. These events included:

- Totalitarianism as a form of government in the USSR (Joseph Stalin), Italy (Benito Mussolini), Germany (Adolf Hitler), and Spain (Francisco Franco)
- A move toward fascism in Japan
- The creation of Manchukuo, Japan's puppet government in Manchuria, beginning the war in China
- The conquest of Ethiopia by Mussolini
- Revolution in Spain led by Francisco Franco
- Germany's continuing expansion including taking the Rhineland
- The worldwide Great Depression
- World War I allies with large debts, many of whom were not paying them off

The United States passed the Neutrality Acts in 1935–1937, which created an embargo on all war item shipments. U.S. citizens were not allowed to travel on "belligerent" ships, and no belligerents were allowed loans in the United States.

The Road to War

The actual war in Europe began with a series of events:

- Germany took Austria (1938) and the Sudetenland (1938)
- The Munich Pact was created (1938) with England and France agreeing to allow Hitler to keep the Sudetenland as long as no further expansion occurred
- Hitler and Mussolini created the Rome-Berlin Axis military alliance to last 10 years (1939)
- Japan entered an alliance with Germany and Italy (1939)
- The Moscow-Berlin Pact occurred, promising nonaggression between the two powers (1939)
- Hitler invaded Poland (1939)

- England and France declared war on Germany (September 30, 1939)

The Changing American Attitude

At this time and despite President Franklin Roosevelt's desire to help the allied powers of France and Great Britain, the only concession America made was to allow the sale of arms on a "cash and carry" basis.

Hitler continued to expand in Europe, taking Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Belgium. In June 1940, France fell to Germany. The speed of the expansion was noticed in the U.S. and the government began to reinforce the military.

The final break in isolationism began with the 1941 Lend-Lease Act, whereby America was allowed to "sell, transfer title to, exchange, lease, lend, or otherwise dispose of, to any such government...any defense article." Great Britain promised not to export any of the lend-lease materials. After this, America built a base on Greenland and then issued the Atlantic Charter on August 14, 1941. The document was a joint declaration between Great Britain and the U.S. about the purposes of war against fascism. The Battle of the Atlantic began with German U-boats wreaking havoc. This battle would last throughout the war.

Pearl Harbor

The real event that changed America into a nation actively at war was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This was precipitated in July 1939 when Franklin Roosevelt announced that the U.S. would no longer trade items such as gasoline and iron to Japan, which needed it for its war with China. In July 1941, the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis was created. The Japanese began occupying French Indo-China and the Philippines, and all Japanese assets were frozen in the U.S. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, killing more than 2,000 people and damaging or destroying eight battleships, which seriously damaged the Pacific fleet. America officially entered the war and now had to fight on two fronts: Europe and the Pacific.

After the U.S. declared war on Japan, Germany and Italy declared war on the U.S. Strategically, at the beginning of the war the U.S. government began following a Germany First strategy, mainly because it posed the greatest threat to the West, it had a larger military, and it seemed the most likely to develop newer and more lethal weapons. One of the worst tragedies of World War II was the Holocaust, during which between 1933 and 1945 it is estimated that anywhere from 9 to 11 million Jews and others were killed. Only after the defeat of the Nazis were the concentration camps closed and the remaining survivors freed.

American Rationing

Americans at home sacrificed while soldiers fought overseas. By the end of the war, more than 12 million American soldiers had joined or were drafted into the military. Widespread rationing occurred. For example, families were given coupons to purchase sugar based on the size of their families. They could not buy more than their coupons would allow. However, rationing covered more than just food—it also included goods such as shoes and gasoline.

Some items were just not available in America. Silk stockings made in Japan were not available—they were replaced by the new synthetic nylon stockings. No automobiles were produced from February 1943 until the end of the war to move the manufacturing to war-specific items.

Many women entered the workforce to help make munitions and implements of war. These women were nicknamed "Rosie the Riveter" and were a central part of America's success in war.

Japanese Relocation Camps

Wartime restrictions were imposed on civil liberties. A real black mark on the American homefront was the Executive Order No. 9066 signed by Roosevelt in 1942. This ordered those of Japanese-American descent to be moved to "Relocation Camps." This law eventually forced close to 120,000 Japanese-Americans in the western part of the United States to leave their homes and move to one of 10 "relocation" centers or to other facilities across the nation. Most of those relocated were American citizens by birth. They were forced to sell their homes, most for next to nothing, and take only what they could carry.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act that provided redress for Japanese-Americans. Each living survivor was paid \$20,000 for the forced incarceration. In 1989, President George H. W. Bush issued a formal apology.

America and Russia

In the end, America came together to successfully defeat fascism abroad. The end of the war would send the U.S. into a Cold War due to concessions made to the Russians in exchange for their aid in defeating the Japanese. Communist Russia and the United States would be at odds with each other until the downfall of the USSR in 1989.