

AP United States History
Unit 7: A Colossus Emerges
Topic- World War II: Mobilization

World War II

Explain how and why U.S. participation in World War II transformed American society.

The mass mobilization of American society helped end the Great Depression, and the country's strong industrial base played a pivotal role in winning the war by equipping and provisioning allies and millions of U.S. troops.

World War II marked a pivotal moment in the history of the United States. It marked the moment, at its conclusion, when America became a superpower. The war also brought America out of the Great Depression. But, winning the war required the effort of every American— it was, after all, a total war, in a manner in which few of us today could fully understand. During the war experience, Americans served in the U.S. military in unprecedented numbers— almost 11.5 million men and women were in uniform by the end of the war. After the bombing of the naval installation at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the mainland of the United States was never touched by the conflict. Millions of Americans went to work in America's defense industries, turning out airplanes, tanks, jeeps, guns, bullets, bombs, battleships, and clothing and protective gear in staggering numbers— which eventually overwhelmed the Axis forces. During the war, American families suffered through rationing (and recycling) campaigns and made personal sacrifices to make certain that the troops were well cared for and provisioned. American farms sprang to life almost overnight, to feed the Allied war effort. American industry and agriculture were two of the most critical elements in the Allied victory in World War II. Americans went to work in large numbers, paid taxes (at much higher rates than today), bought liberty bonds to help finance the war, and participated in food drives to help both the troops and their neighbors who may have been in need. Truly, the American people were the most critical element in supporting the Allied victory in World War II. The contributions of both women and minorities were important components of the American war effort. Despite their contributions, women and minorities also suffered, at times, from prejudice and discrimination.

Mobilization provided opportunities for women and minorities to improve their socioeconomic positions for the war's duration, while also leading to debates over racial segregation. Wartime experiences also generated challenges to civil liberties, such as the internment of Japanese Americans.

The process of mobilizing the American people for the World War II experience opened the door for women and minorities to make important contributions to the war effort, but segregation, discrimination, and even internment for a group of American citizens became a sad chapter in the story of the conflict, too. The process of mobilization put millions of American men and women into the armed forces in a matter of months throughout the spring and summer of 1942. These men had to be inducted, educated, and trained, and then— sent to fight, first in either North Africa in the European theater of the war, or into the Pacific theater of the conflict. It took most of 1942, to get American troops into the action. Equipping soldiers with food, fuel, uniforms, guns, jeeps, tanks, ships, aircraft, and weaponry came down to the American people who were not in uniform. Into this void, American women responded in large numbers to fill the gaps. American women ran family farms, educated children, and built the weapons of war that were necessary for an Allied victory. They made tremendous sacrifices— taking part in rationing, recycling, and liberty bond campaigns. American women also planted Victory Gardens, so that they could help feed their families, while American farms could concentrate on feeding and supplying the war effort. American women were more than just, "Rosie the Riveter," they also answered the mail, produced propaganda for the war effort, and still raised their own families on their own, all during a time of crisis.

Americans worked together to make their way through the crisis and to produce the necessities for winning the war. However, for African-Americans, Native Americans, and Japanese-Americans the war experience came with both prejudice and tremendous hardships.

The war opened the door for the Great Migration of African-Americans who could make the move to northern and western industrial cities to continue to be able to do so in large numbers. African-American men and women, despite the process of segregation, worked in America's factories, producing the materials which were necessary for winning the war. African-Americans participated in World War II and though they served in segregated units, they served with distinction. Vernon Baker, an African-American soldier who served in the European theater of the war, would win the highest award an American soldier can receive for bravery in action, the Congressional Medal of Honor, though he would have to wait more than fifty years to receive it. The Tuskegee Army Airfield Central Postal Directory, one of the most famous fighting units in World War II would have a combat record that would be unmatched— escorting bomber planes to their targets inside the heart of Nazi-occupied territory to destroy vital bridges, roadways, factories, and oil fields, which played a critical role in crippling the German war machine. Their heroic efforts would lead to the first steps in civil rights that would be taken by the federal government after the conclusion of the war. Native Americans also fought in World War II with distinction—volunteering from their reservations to fight in both Europe and the Pacific. One unit, composed entirely of Native Americans, the Navajo Code Talkers, played a pivotal role in the war in the Pacific by using their unique language to encrypt crucial American intelligence and communications signals. But, while African-Americans still faced discrimination and Native Americans still endured the prejudice of having to serve in segregated units, for Japanese-Americans the war experience was one of tremendous hardship.

On February 19, 1942, just two months after the attack on Pearl Harbor and fearing the loyalties of Japanese-Americans, the Roosevelt administration issued Executive Order 9066, which led to the internment, or removal of more than 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry— of whom, more than 70,000, were citizens of the United States, to detention centers throughout the western United States. Segregated from American society, Japanese-American families lost their homes, property, farms, and businesses in the forced relocation. In the detention centers, Japanese-Americans continued to educate their children and to try to live a semblance of a normal life. Only in the present era are we beginning to understand the full extent of the experience of the internment of the Japanese-American population during World War II. But, one young Japanese-American man tried to stand up against the forced relocation to the internment camps. His name was Fred Korematsu. When he hid in northern California to try to evade the forced removal, he was arrested. He sued for his freedom, believing his civil rights (under the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment) had been violated by Executive Order 9066. In the case, *Korematsu vs. the U.S.* (1944) the Supreme Court upheld the right of the federal government to detain the Japanese-Americans during this time of conflict. (The case was not overturned by the Supreme Court until 2018.) Despite the tremendous hardship of internment, Japanese-American men did fight in the European theater of the conflict with distinction. While Japanese-Americans faced the hardship of the internment camps, Mexican-Americans made tremendous contributions to the war effort, but also faced discrimination and even abusive violence, as well.

Migration to the United States from Mexico and elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere increased, in spite of contradictory government policies toward Mexican immigration.

During World War II, immigration from Mexico into the United States helped fill the gaps in the American workforce. In the 1920s, immigrants from Mexico came into the United States to escape the ravages of the Mexican Revolution, which occurred from 1910-1920. But, during the Great Depression, the Hoover administration passed the Mexican Repatriation Act, which deported more than 80,000 Mexican-Americans from the United States back to Mexico— these were people who had become, or in some cases, for generations, had been American citizens. In total, perhaps as many as 400,000 people were deported back to Mexico during the Great Depression. The deportations traumatized many Mexican families, but at the start of the war, immigration, once more began to play a major factor in the mobilization of American military might in

World War II. Through the Bracero Program, the Roosevelt administration began recruiting immigrants to work on America's farms and in its factories. As immigration rose again, so did the tensions which accompanied it. In 1943, the Zoot Suit Riots rocked Los Angeles, California. A mob of soldiers, sailors, and airmen attacked Mexican-American and Filipino-American workers after a sailor had been injured in a fight with a group of youths wearing zoot suits (Zoot Suits were fashionable attire for the day in the Mexican-American, African-American, and Asian-American neighborhoods of most major American cities of the time— but, were especially popular in California. However, many Americans resented them because it required a lot of cloth to make them at a time when such materials were being rationed for the war effort.). The melee finally came to an end after days of intense violence when the military stepped-in and forbade any soldier, sailor, or Marine from being engaged in any conduct in downtown Los Angeles. During the riots, as many as 600 Mexican-American youths were arrested, while very few of the military personnel who were a part of the heinous incident were ever charged with a crime. Despite the prejudice, discrimination, and segregation, Mexican-Americans served in the U.S. military with distinction in World War II. Also, Mexican-Americans worked on America's farms and factories and made important contributions to the mobilization for the war effort.

Despite the tensions, the American people at home, including both women and minorities, made important contributions to both equip and feed the millions of soldiers, sailors, and airmen who fought in the war. But, it was on the battlefields and in the skies of Europe, and throughout the islands of the Pacific where the war would ultimately be won. American troops, once again, would make a difference in a second global conflict. And when it came to an end, America would play a much greater role in global affairs than it ever had before. World War II made America into a superpower.