

## □ CHAPTER 22 □

# FIGHTING FOR THE FOUR FREEDOMS: WORLD WAR II 1941–1945

### FOCUS QUESTIONS

- [What steps led to American participation in World War II?](#)
- [How did the United States mobilize economic resources and promote popular support for the war effort?](#)
- [What visions of America's postwar role began to emerge during the war?](#)
- [How did American minorities face threats to their freedom at home and abroad during World War II?](#)
- [How did the end of the war begin to shape the postwar world?](#)

By far the most popular works of art produced during World War II were paintings of the [Four Freedoms](#) by the magazine illustrator Norman Rockwell. In his State of the Union address, delivered before Congress on January 6, 1941, President Roosevelt spoke eloquently of a future world order founded on the “essential human freedoms”: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The Four Freedoms became Roosevelt’s favorite statement of Allied aims. At various times, he compared them to the Ten Commandments, the Magna Carta, and the Emancipation Proclamation. They embodied, Roosevelt declared in a 1942 radio address, the “rights of men of every creed and every race, wherever they live,” and made clear “the crucial difference between ourselves and the enemies we face today.”

Rockwell’s paintings succeeded in linking the Four Freedoms with the defense of traditional American values. “Words like *freedom or liberty*,” declared one wartime advertisement, “draw close to us only when we break them down into the homely fragments of daily life.” This insight helps to explain Rockwell’s astonishing popularity. Born in New York City in 1894, Rockwell had lived in the New York area until 1939, when he and his family moved to Arlington, Vermont, where they could enjoy, as he put it, “the clean, simple country life, as opposed to the complicated world of the city.” Drawing on the lives of his Vermont neighbors, Rockwell translated the Four Freedoms into images of real people situated in small-town America. Each of the paintings focuses on an instantly recognizable situation. An ordinary citizen rises to speak at a town meeting; members of different religious groups are seen at prayer; a family enjoys a Thanksgiving dinner; a mother and father stand over sleeping children.

The Four Freedoms paintings first appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* early in 1943. Letters of praise poured in to the magazine’s editors. The government produced and sold millions of reprints. The paintings toured the country as the centerpiece of the Four Freedoms Show, which included theatrical presentations, parades, and other events aimed at persuading Americans to purchase war bonds. By the end of its tour, the Four Freedoms Show had raised \$133 million.

Even as Rockwell invoked images of small-town life to rally Americans to the war effort, however, the country experienced changes as deep as at any time in its history. Many of the economic trends and social movements that we associate with the last half of the twentieth century had their roots in the war years. As during World War I, but on a far larger scale, wartime mobilization expanded the size and scope of government and energized the economy. The gross national product more than doubled and unemployment disappeared as war production finally conquered the Depression. The demand for labor drew millions of women into the workforce and sent a tide of migrants from rural America to the industrial cities of the North and West, permanently altering the nation’s social geography. Some 30 million Americans moved during the war, half going into military service and half taking up new jobs.

World War II gave the country a new and lasting international role and greatly strengthened the idea that American security was global in scope and could only be protected by the worldwide triumph of core American values. Government military spending sparked the economic development of the South and West, laying the foundation for the rise of the modern Sunbelt. The war created a close link between big business and a militarized federal government—a “military-industrial complex,” as President Dwight D. Eisenhower would later call it—that long survived the end of fighting.

World War II also redrew the boundaries of American nationality. In contrast to World War I, the government recognized the “new immigrants” of the early twentieth century and their children as loyal Americans. Black Americans’ second-class status assumed, for the first time since Reconstruction, a prominent place on the nation’s political agenda. But toleration had its limits. With the United States at war with Japan, the federal government removed more than 110,000 Japanese Americans, the majority of them American citizens, from their homes and placed them in internment camps.

As a means of generating support for the struggle, the Four Freedoms provided a crucial language of national unity. But this unity obscured divisions within American society that the war in some ways intensified, divisions reflected in debates over freedom. While some Americans looked forward to a worldwide New Deal, others envisioned “free enterprise” replacing government intervention in the economy. The war gave birth to the modern civil rights movement but strengthened the commitment of many white Americans to maintain the existing racial order. The movement of women into the labor force challenged traditional gender relations, but most men and not a few women longed for the restoration of family life with a male breadwinner and a wife responsible for the home.

Even Rockwell’s popular paintings suggested some of the ambiguities within the idea of freedom. With the exception of *Freedom of Speech*, which depicts civic democracy in action, the paintings emphasized private situations. The message seemed to be that Americans were fighting to preserve freedoms enjoyed individually or within the family rather than in the larger public world. This emphasis on freedom as an element of private life would become more and more prominent in postwar America.



The immensely popular Office of War Information poster reproducing Norman Rockwell’s paintings of the Four Freedoms, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s shorthand for American purposes in World War II. “Four Freedoms” Illustrations © SEPS licensed by Curtis Licensing Indianapolis, IN.

## • CHRONOLOGY •

- 1931 Japan invades Manchuria
- 1933 U.S. recognizes Soviet Union

**1935–1939** Congress passes Neutrality Acts

**1937** Sino-Japanese War begins

**1938** Munich agreement

**1939** Germany invades Poland

**1940** Draft established

**1941** Four Freedoms speech

Henry Luce's *The American Century*

Lend-Lease Act

Executive Order 8802

Atlantic Charter

Pearl Harbor attacked

**1942** Executive Order 9066

Battle of Midway Island

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) formed

**1943** Zoot suit riots

Detroit race riot

Congress lifts Chinese Exclusion Act

**1944** *Smith v. Allwright*

D-Day

GI Bill of Rights

Bretton Woods conference

*Korematsu v. United States*

Battle of the Bulge

**1945** Yalta conference

Roosevelt dies; Harry Truman becomes president

V-E Day (May)

Atomic bombs dropped on Japan

End of war in Pacific

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## Glossary

### Four Freedoms

Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear, as described by President Franklin D. Roosevelt during his January 6, 1941, State of the Union address.

# FIGHTING WORLD WAR II

## Good Neighbors

During the 1930s, with Americans preoccupied by the economic crisis, international relations played only a minor role in public affairs. From the outset of his administration, nonetheless, FDR embarked on a number of departures in foreign policy. In 1933, hoping to stimulate American trade, he exchanged ambassadors with the Soviet Union, whose government his Republican predecessors had stubbornly refused to recognize.

Roosevelt also formalized a policy initiated by Herbert Hoover by which the United States repudiated the right to intervene militarily in the internal affairs of Latin American countries. This Good Neighbor Policy, as it was called, had mixed results. During the 1930s, the United States withdrew its troops from Haiti and Nicaragua. FDR accepted Cuba's repeal of the Platt Amendment (discussed in [Chapter 17](#)), which had authorized American military interventions on that island. These steps offered a belated recognition of the sovereignty of America's neighbors. But while Roosevelt condemned "economic royalists" (wealthy businessmen) at home, like previous presidents he felt comfortable dealing with undemocratic governments friendly to American business interests abroad. The United States lent its support to dictators like Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, Rafael Trujillo Molina in the Dominican Republic, and Fulgencio Batista in Cuba. "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's *our* son of a bitch," FDR said of Somoza.

However, as the international crisis deepened in the 1930s, the Roosevelt administration took steps to counter German influence in Latin America by expanding hemispheric trade and promoting respect for American culture. Nelson Rockefeller, the head of an office that hoped to expand cultural relations in the hemisphere, sent the artists of the American Ballet Caravan and the NBC Symphony Orchestra on Latin American tours. This was a far different approach to relations with Central and South America than the military interventions of the first decades of the century.

## The Road to War

Ominous developments in Asia and Europe quickly overshadowed events in Latin America. By the mid-1930s, it seemed clear that the rule of law was disintegrating in international relations and that war was on the horizon. In 1931, seeking to expand its military and economic power in Asia, Japan invaded Manchuria, a province of northern China. Six years later, its troops moved farther into China. When the Japanese overran the city of Nanjing, they massacred an estimated 300,000 Chinese prisoners of war and civilians.

An aggressive power threatened Europe as well. After brutally consolidating his rule in Germany, Adolf Hitler embarked on a campaign to control the entire continent. In violation of the Versailles Treaty, he feverishly pursued German rearmament. In 1936, he sent troops to occupy the Rhineland, a demilitarized zone between France and Germany established after World War I. The failure of Britain, France, and the United States to oppose this action convinced Hitler that the democracies could not muster the will to halt his aggressive plans. Italian leader Benito Mussolini, the founder of fascism, a movement similar to Hitler's Nazism, invaded and conquered Ethiopia. When General Francisco Franco in 1936 led an uprising against the democratically elected government of Spain, Hitler poured in arms, seeing the conflict as a testing ground for new weaponry. In 1939, Franco emerged victorious from a bitter civil war, establishing yet another fascist government in Europe. As part of a campaign to unite all Europeans of German origin in a single empire, Hitler in 1938 annexed Austria and the Sudetenland, an ethnically German part of Czechoslovakia. Shortly thereafter, he gobbled up all of that country.

As the 1930s progressed, Roosevelt became more and more alarmed at Hitler's aggression as well as his accelerating campaign against Germany's Jews, whom the Nazis stripped of citizenship and property and began to deport to concentration camps. In a 1937 speech in Chicago, FDR called for international action to "quarantine" aggressors. But no further steps followed. Roosevelt had little choice but to follow the policy of "appeasement" adopted by Britain and France, who hoped that agreeing to Hitler's demands would prevent war. British prime minister Neville Chamberlain returned from the Munich conference of 1938, which awarded Hitler the Sudetenland, proclaiming that he had guaranteed "peace in our time."

## Isolationism

To most Americans, the threat arising from Japanese and German aggression seemed very distant. Moreover, Hitler had more than a few admirers in the United States. Obsessed with the threat of communism, some Americans approved of his expansion



of German power as a counterweight to the Soviet Union. Businessmen did not wish to give up profitable overseas markets. Henry Ford did business with Nazi Germany throughout the 1930s. Indeed, Ford plants there employed slave labor provided by the German government. Trade with Japan also continued, including shipments of American trucks and aircraft and considerable amounts of oil. Until 1941, 80 percent of Japan's oil supply came from the United States.

Many Americans remained convinced that involvement in World War I had been a mistake. Senate hearings in 1934–1935 headed by Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota revealed that international bankers and arms exporters had pressed the Wilson administration to enter that war and had profited handsomely from it. Pacifism spread on college campuses, where tens of thousands of students took part in a “strike for peace” in 1935. Ethnic allegiances reinforced Americans' traditional reluctance to enter foreign conflicts. Many Americans of German and Italian descent celebrated the expansion of national power in their countries of origin. Irish Americans remained strongly anti-British.

Isolationism—the 1930s version of Americans' long-standing desire to avoid foreign entanglements—dominated Congress. Beginning in 1935, lawmakers passed a series of Neutrality Acts that banned travel on belligerents' ships and the sale of arms to countries at war. These policies, Congress hoped, would allow the United States to avoid the conflicts over freedom of the seas that had contributed to involvement in World War I. Despite the fact that the Spanish Civil War pitted a democratic government against an aspiring fascist dictator, the Western democracies, including the United States, imposed an embargo on arms shipments to both sides. Some 3,000 Americans volunteered to fight in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade on the side of the Spanish republic. But with Germany supplying the forces of Franco, the decision by democratic countries to abide by the arms embargo contributed substantially to his victory.

## War in Europe

In the Munich agreement of 1938, Britain and France had caved in to Hitler's aggression. In 1939, the Soviet Union proposed an international agreement to oppose further German demands for territory. Britain and France, who distrusted Stalin and saw Germany as a bulwark against the spread of communist influence in Europe, refused. Stalin then astonished the world by signing a nonaggression pact with Hitler, his former sworn enemy. On September 1, 1939, immediately after the signing of the Nazi–Soviet pact, Germany invaded Poland. This time, Britain and France, who had pledged to protect Poland against aggression, declared war. But Germany appeared unstoppable. Within a year, the Nazi *blitzkrieg* (lightning war) had overrun Poland and much of Scandinavia, Belgium, and the Netherlands. On June 14, 1940, German troops occupied Paris. Hitler now dominated nearly all of Europe, as well as North Africa. In September 1940, Germany, Italy, and Japan created a military alliance known as the Axis.

For one critical year, Britain stood virtually alone in fighting Germany. Winston Churchill, who became prime minister in 1940, vowed to resist a threatened Nazi invasion. In the Battle of Britain of 1940–1941, German planes launched devastating attacks on London and other cities. The Royal Air Force eventually turned back the air assault. But Churchill pointedly called on the “new world, with all its power and might,” to step forward to rescue the old.

## Toward Intervention

Roosevelt viewed Hitler as a mad gangster whose victories posed a direct threat to the United States. But most Americans remained desperate to remain out of the conflict. “What worries me, especially,” FDR wrote to Kansas editor William Allen White, “is that public opinion over here is patting itself on the back every morning and thanking God for the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.” After a tumultuous debate, Congress in 1940 agreed to allow the sale of arms to Britain on a “cash and carry” basis—that is, they had to be paid for in cash and transported in British ships. It also approved plans for military rearmament. But with a presidential election looming, Roosevelt was reluctant to go further.

In 1940, breaking with a tradition that dated back to George Washington, Roosevelt announced his candidacy for a third term as president. The international situation was too dangerous and domestic recovery too fragile, he insisted, for him to leave office. Republicans chose as his opponent a political amateur, Wall Street businessman and lawyer Wendell Willkie. Differences between the candidates were far more muted than in 1936. Both supported the law, enacted in September 1940, that established the nation's first peacetime draft. Willkie endorsed New Deal social legislation. He captured more votes than Roosevelt's previous opponents, but FDR still emerged with a decisive victory. Soon after his victory, in a fireside chat in December 1940, Roosevelt announced that the United States would become the “great arsenal of democracy,” providing Britain and China with military supplies in their fight against Germany and Japan.

## “America First” and Lend-Lease

As the United States became more closely involved in the war, a diverse group mobilized against American participation, including some liberals and socialists. But by far the largest and most influential organization was the [America First Committee](#), which grew to approximately 500,000 members with over 400 chapters nationwide. Led by conservative businessmen opposed to Roosevelt's domestic and foreign policy, the organization drew upon isolationist ideas, arguing that a Nazi triumph over Great Britain was less of a threat to the United States than entry into the war. Participation in the war, they warned, would bring an end to the "American system of free enterprise" by augmenting government regulatory power. Instead, they called for building up an "impregnable" military defense.

Though the national leadership condemned Nazi support, well-known members such as Henry Ford, radio priest Father Coughlin, and aviator Charles A. Lindbergh embraced anti-Semitic and conspiratorial thinking. Both Ford and Lindbergh accepted the highest medals of honor granted to foreigners from Nazi officials in 1938. At a rally in Des Moines, Iowa, Lindbergh blamed Jews, the Roosevelt administration, and the British for pressuring the United States to enter the war. America First, along with conservative women's organizations such as the National Legion of Mothers of America and the Women's National Committee to Keep United States Out of War, energized the crusade against intervention. Well-attended speeches and rallies, especially in the Midwest, showed the grassroots resonance of such sentiments. The isolationist drumbeat proved a thorn in the side of the Roosevelt administration, though increasingly Americans began to support intervention.

By 1941, Britain was virtually bankrupt, no longer able to pay for supplies provided by the United States. At Roosevelt's urging, Congress passed the [Lend-Lease Act](#), which authorized military aid so long as countries promised somehow to return it all after the war. Under the law's provisions, the United States funneled billions of dollars' worth of arms to Britain and China, as well as the Soviet Union, after Hitler renounced his nonaggression pact and invaded that country in June 1941. FDR also froze Japanese assets in the United States, halting virtually all trade between the countries, including the sale of oil vital to Japan.

Those who believed that the United States must intervene to stem the rising tide of fascism tried to awaken a reluctant country to prepare for war. Interventionists popularized slogans that would become central to wartime mobilization. In June 1941, refugees from Germany and the occupied countries of Europe joined with Americans to form the Free World Association, which sought to bring the United States into the war against Hitler. The same year saw the formation of Freedom House. With a prestigious membership that included university presidents, ministers, businessmen, and labor leaders, Freedom House described the war raging in Europe as an ideological struggle between dictatorship and the "free world." In October 1941, it sponsored a "Fight for Freedom" rally at New York's Madison Square Garden, complete with a patriotic variety show entitled "It's Fun to Be Free." The rally ended by demanding an immediate declaration of war against Germany.

## Pearl Harbor

Until November 1941, the administration's attention focused on Europe. But at the end of that month, intercepted Japanese messages revealed that an assault in the Pacific was imminent. No one, however, knew where it would come. On December 7, 1941, Japanese planes, launched from aircraft carriers, bombed the naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, the first attack by a foreign power on American soil since the War of 1812. Japan launched the attack in the hope of crippling American naval power in the Pacific. With a free hand in its campaign of conquest in East Asia, Japan would gain access to supplies of oil and other resources it could no longer obtain from the United States. It hoped that destroying the American fleet would establish Japan for years to come as the dominant power in the region.

Pearl Harbor was a complete and devastating surprise. In a few hours, more than 2,000 American servicemen were killed, and 187 aircraft and 18 naval vessels, including 8 battleships, destroyed or damaged. By a stroke of fortune, no aircraft carriers—which would prove decisive in the Pacific war—happened to be docked at Pearl Harbor on December 7.

To this day, conspiracy theories abound suggesting that FDR knew of the attack and did nothing to prevent it so as to bring the United States into the war. No credible evidence supports this charge. Indeed, with the country drawing ever closer to intervention in Europe, Roosevelt hoped to keep the peace in the Pacific. But Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, who saw the president after the attack, remarked that he seemed calm—"his terrible moral problem had been resolved." Terming December 7 "a date which will live in infamy," Roosevelt asked Congress for a declaration of war against Japan. The combined vote in Congress was 388 in favor and 1 against—pacifist Jeanette Rankin of Montana, who had also voted against American entry into World War I. The next day, Germany declared war on the United States. America had finally joined the largest war in human history.

## The War in the Pacific

In retrospect, it appears inevitable that the entry of the United States, with its superior industrial might, would ensure the defeat of the [Axis powers](#). But the first few months of American involvement witnessed an unbroken string of military disasters. Having earlier occupied substantial portions of French Indochina (now Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), Japan in early 1942 conquered Burma (Myanmar) and Siam (Thailand). Japan also took control of the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), whose extensive oil fields could replace supplies from the United States. And it occupied Guam, the Philippines, and other Pacific islands. At Bataan, in the Philippines, the Japanese forced 78,000 American and Filipino troops to lay down their arms—the largest surrender in American military history. Thousands perished on the ensuing “death march” to a prisoner-of-war camp, and thousands more died of disease and starvation after they arrived. At the same time, German submarines sank hundreds of Allied merchant and naval vessels during the Battle of the Atlantic.

## WORLD WAR II IN THE PACIFIC, 1941–1945



Although the Japanese navy never fully recovered from its defeats at the Coral Sea and Midway in 1942, it took three more years for American forces to near the Japanese homeland.

Soon, however, the tide of battle began to turn. In May 1942, in the Battle of the Coral Sea, the American navy turned back a Japanese fleet intent on attacking Australia. The following month, it inflicted devastating losses on the Japanese navy in the Battle of Midway Island. American codebreakers had managed to decipher the Japanese communications code, so the navy was forewarned about the timing of the assault at Midway and prepared an ambush for the attacking fleet. In the battle, four Japanese aircraft carriers, along with other vessels, were destroyed. Midway was the turning point of the Pacific naval war. The victories there and in the Coral Sea allowed American forces to launch the bloody campaigns that one by one drove the Japanese from fortified islands like Guadalcanal and the Solomons in the western Pacific and brought American troops ever closer to Japan.

## The War in Europe



The “Grand Alliance” of World War II in Europe brought together the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, each led by an iron-willed, larger-than-life figure: Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin. United in their determination to defeat Nazi Germany, they differed not only in terms of the societies they represented but also in their long-range goals. Stalin was set on establishing enough control over eastern Europe that his country would never again be invaded from the west. Churchill hoped to ensure that the British Empire emerged intact from the war. Roosevelt, like Woodrow Wilson before him, hoped to establish a new international order so that world wars would never again take place.

Facing wars in two hemispheres, Roosevelt had to determine how best to deploy American manpower and resources. Bearing the brunt of the fighting after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Stalin demanded an early Allied attack across the English Channel to confront German forces in occupied France and relieve pressure on his beleaguered army. Churchill’s strategy was to attack the “soft underbelly” of Axis power through Allied operations in the Mediterranean, starting with an invasion of North Africa. Churchill’s approach prevailed, and the cross-Channel invasion did not come until 1944.

In November 1942, British and American forces invaded North Africa and by May 1943 forced the surrender of the German army. By the spring of 1943, the Allies also gained the upper hand in the Atlantic, as British and American destroyers and planes devastated the German submarine fleet. But even though Roosevelt was committed to liberating Europe from Nazi control, American troops did not immediately become involved on the European continent. As late as the end of 1944, more American military personnel were deployed in the Pacific than against Germany. In July 1943, American and British forces invaded Sicily, beginning the liberation of Italy. A popular uprising in Rome overthrew the Mussolini government, whereupon Germany occupied most of the country. Fighting there raged throughout 1944.

WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE, 1942–1945

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Most of the land fighting in Europe during World War II took place on the eastern front between the German and Soviet armies.

The major involvement of American troops in Europe did not begin until June 6, 1944. On that date, known as [D-Day](#), nearly 200,000 American, British, and Canadian soldiers under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower landed in Normandy in northwestern France. More than a million troops followed them ashore in the next few weeks, in the most massive sea–land operation in history. After fierce fighting, German armies retreated eastward. By August, Paris had been liberated.

The crucial fighting in Europe, however, took place on the eastern front, the scene of an epic struggle between Germany and the Soviet Union. More than 3 million German soldiers took part in the 1941 invasion. After sweeping through western Russia, German armies in August 1942 launched a siege of Stalingrad, a city located deep inside Russia on the Volga River. This proved to be a catastrophic mistake. Bolstered by an influx of military supplies from the United States, the Russians surrounded the German troops and forced them to surrender. Some 800,000 Germans and 1.2 million Russians perished in the fighting. The German surrender at Stalingrad in January 1943 marked the turning point of the European war. The campaign in the east devastated Hitler's forces and sent surviving units on a long retreat back toward Germany.

Of 13.6 million German casualties in World War II, 10 million came on the Russian front. They represented only part of the war's vast toll in human lives. Millions of Poles and at least 20 million Russians, probably many more, perished—not only soldiers but also civilian victims of starvation, disease, and massacres by German soldiers. After his armies had penetrated eastern Europe in 1941, moreover, Hitler embarked on the “final solution”—the mass extermination of “undesirable” peoples—Slavs, gypsies, gay men and women, and, above all, Jews. By 1945, 6 million Jewish men, women, and children had died in Nazi death camps. What came to be called the [Holocaust](#) was the horrifying culmination of the Nazi belief that Germans constituted a “master race” destined to rule the world.

## Glossary

### [isolationism](#)

The desire to avoid foreign entanglements that dominated the U.S. Congress in the 1930s; beginning in 1935, lawmakers passed a series of Neutrality Acts that banned travel on belligerents' ships and the sale of arms to countries at war.

### [Neutrality Acts](#)

Series of laws passed between 1935 and 1939 to keep the United States from becoming involved in war by prohibiting American trade and travel to warring nations.

### [America First Committee](#)

An influential organization led by prominent businessmen (1940–1941) opposed to American involvement in World War II.

### [Lend-Lease Act](#)

1941 law that permitted the United States to lend or lease arms and other supplies to the Allies, signifying the increasing likelihood of American involvement in World War II.

### [Axis powers](#)

In World War II, the nations of Germany, Italy, and Japan.

### [D-Day](#)

June 6, 1944, when an Allied amphibious assault landed on the Normandy coast and established a foothold in Europe, leading to the liberation of France from German occupation.

### [Holocaust](#)

Systematic racist attempt by the Nazis to exterminate the Jews of Europe, resulting in the murder of over 6 million Jews and more than a million other “undesirables.”

# THE HOME FRONT

## Mobilizing for War

By the end of World War II, some 50 million American men had registered for the draft and 10 million had been inducted into the military. The army exemplified how the war united American society in new ways. Military service threw together Americans from every region and walk of life, and almost every racial and ethnic background (African Americans continued to serve in segregated units). It brought into contact the children of immigrants and Americans with very different cultures and outlooks. By 1942, the federal government relied entirely on the draft for manpower. This ensured that wartime sacrifice was widely shared throughout American society. By contrast, in the decades following the Vietnam War, the armed forces have been composed entirely of volunteers, and the military today includes very few men and women from middle- and upper-class backgrounds.

World War II also transformed the role of the national government. FDR created federal agencies like the War Production Board, the War Manpower Commission, and the Office of Price Administration to regulate the allocation of labor, control the shipping industry, establish manufacturing quotas, and fix wages, prices, and rents. The number of federal workers rose from 1 million to 4 million, part of a tremendous growth in new jobs that pushed the unemployment rate down from 14 percent in 1940 to 2 percent three years later.

The government forced civilian industries to retool for war production. Michigan's auto factories now turned out trucks, tanks, and jeeps for the army. By 1944, American factories produced a ship every day and a plane every five minutes. The gross national product rose from \$91 billion to \$214 billion during the war, and the federal government's expenditures amounted to twice the combined total of the previous 150 years. The government marketed billions of dollars' worth of war bonds, increased taxes, and began the practice of withholding income tax directly from weekly paychecks. Before the war, only the 4 million wealthiest Americans paid income taxes; by 1945, more than 40 million did so. The government, one historian writes, moved during the war from "class taxation" to "mass taxation."

## Business and the War

The relationship between the federal government and big business changed dramatically from the days of the Second New Deal. "If you are going to go to war in a capitalist country," observed Secretary of War Henry Stimson, "you had better let business make money out of the process." As corporate executives flooded into federal agencies concerned with war production, Roosevelt offered incentives to spur output—low-interest loans, tax concessions, and contracts with guaranteed profits. The great bulk of federal spending went to the largest corporations, furthering the long-term trend toward economic concentration. By the end of the war, the 200 biggest industrial companies accounted for almost half of all corporate assets in the United States.

Americans marveled at the achievements of wartime manufacturing. Thousands of aircraft, 100,000 armored vehicles, and 2.5 million trucks rolled off American assembly lines, and entirely new products like synthetic rubber replaced natural resources now controlled by Japan. Government-sponsored scientific research perfected inventions like radar, jet engines, and early computers that helped to win the war and would have a large impact on postwar life. These accomplishments not only made it possible to win a two-front war but also helped to restore the reputation of business and businessmen, which had reached a low point during the Depression.

Federal funds reinvigorated established manufacturing areas and created entirely new industrial centers. World War II saw the West Coast emerge as a focus of military-industrial production. The government invested billions of dollars in the shipyards of Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco and in the steel plants and aircraft factories of southern California. By the war's end, California had received one-tenth of all federal spending, and Los Angeles had become the nation's second-largest manufacturing center. Nearly 2 million Americans moved to California for jobs in defense-related industries, and millions more passed through for military training and embarkation to the Pacific war.

|                                   |
|-----------------------------------|
| Table 22.1 Labor Union Membership |
|-----------------------------------|

| Years | Number of Members |
|-------|-------------------|
| 1933  | 2,857,000         |
| 1934  | 3,728,000         |
| 1935  | 3,753,000         |
| 1936  | 4,107,000         |
| 1937  | 5,780,000         |
| 1938  | 8,265,000         |
| 1939  | 8,980,000         |
| 1940  | 8,944,000         |
| 1941  | 10,489,000        |
| 1942  | 10,762,000        |
| 1943  | 13,642,000        |
| 1944  | 14,621,000        |
| 1945  | 14,796,000        |

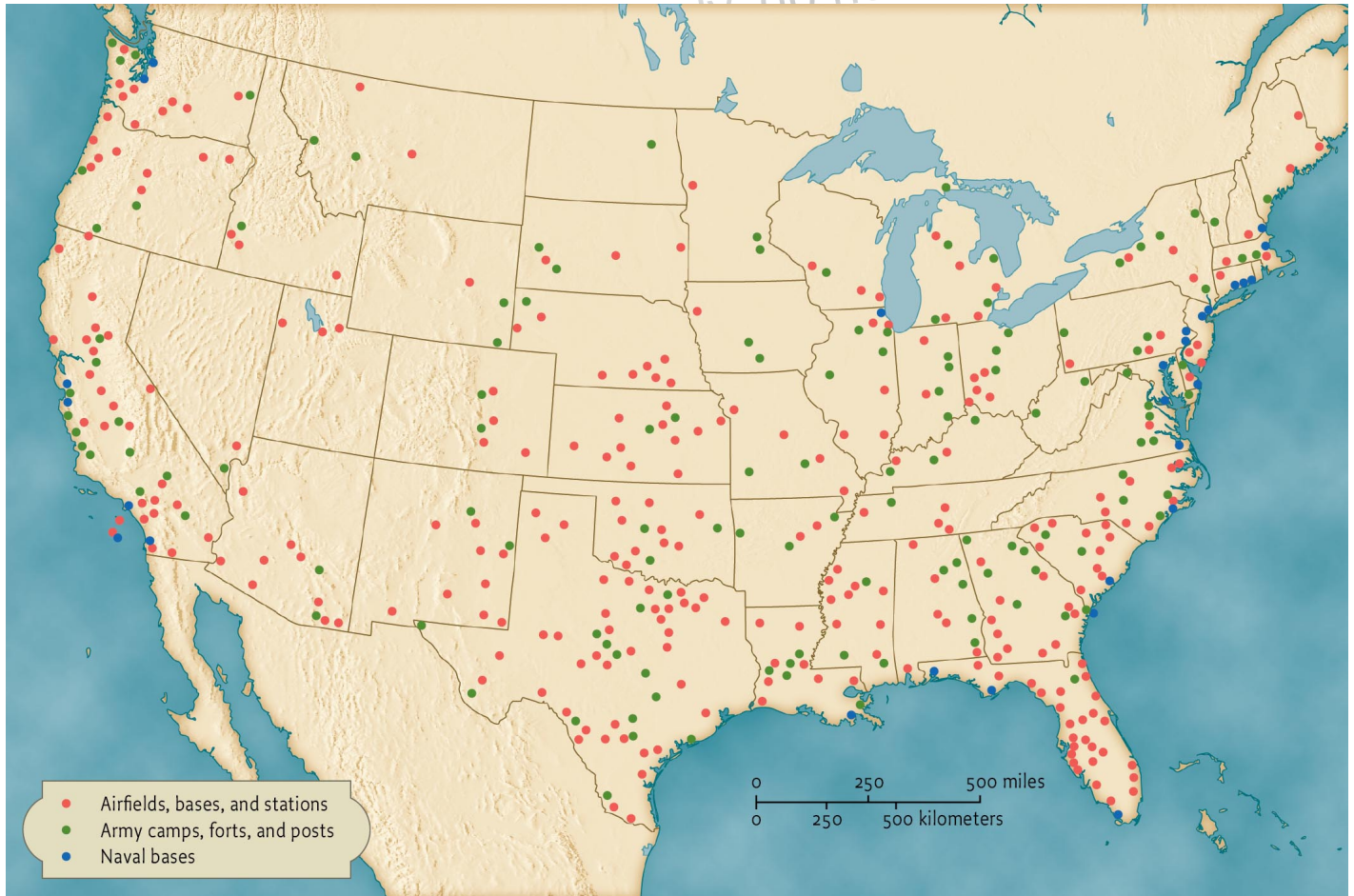
In the South, the combination of rural out-migration and government investment in military-related factories and shipyards hastened a shift from agricultural to industrial employment. During the war, southern per capita income rose from 60 percent to 70 percent of the national average. But the South remained very poor when the war ended. Much of its rural population still lived in small wooden shacks with no indoor plumbing. The region had only two cities—Houston and New Orleans—with populations exceeding 500,000. Despite the expansion of war production, the South's economy still relied on agriculture and extractive industries—mining, lumber, oil—or manufacturing linked to farming, like the production of cotton textiles.

## Labor in Wartime



Organized labor repeatedly described World War II as a crusade for freedom that would expand economic and political democracy at home and abroad and win for unions a major voice in politics and industrial management. During the war, labor entered a three-sided arrangement with government and business that allowed union membership to soar to unprecedented levels. In order to secure industrial peace and stabilize war production, the federal government forced reluctant employers to recognize unions. In 1944, when Montgomery Ward, the large mail-order company, defied a pro-union order, the army seized its headquarters and physically evicted its president. For their part, union leaders agreed not to strike and conceded employers' right to "managerial prerogatives" and a "fair profit."

#### WARTIME ARMY AND NAVY BASES AND AIRFIELDS



As this map indicates, the military and naval facilities built by the federal government during World War II were concentrated in the South and West, sparking the economic development of these regions.

Despite the gains produced by labor militancy during the 1930s, unions only became firmly established in many sectors of the economy during World War II. By 1945, union membership stood at nearly 15 million, one-third of the non-farm labor force and the highest proportion in American history. But if labor became a partner in government, it was very much a junior partner. The decline of the New Deal, already evident in the late 1930s, proceeded during the war. Congress continued to be dominated by a conservative alliance of Republicans and southern Democrats. They left intact core New Deal programs like Social Security but eliminated agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, National Youth Administration, and Works Progress Administration. Congress rejected Roosevelt's call for a cap on personal incomes and set taxes on corporate profits at a level far lower than FDR requested. Despite the "no-strike" pledge, 1943 and 1944 witnessed numerous brief walkouts in which workers protested the increasing speed of assembly-line production and the disparity between wages frozen by government order and expanding corporate profits.

## Fighting for the Four Freedoms

Previous conflicts, including the Mexican War and World War I, had deeply divided American society. In contrast, World War II came to be remembered as the Good War, a time of national unity in pursuit of indisputably noble goals. But all wars require

the mobilization of patriotic public opinion. “To sell *goods*, we must sell *words*” had become a motto of advertisers. Foremost among the words that helped to “sell” World War II was “freedom.”

Talk of freedom pervaded wartime America. To Roosevelt, the Four Freedoms expressed deeply held American values worthy of being spread worldwide. Freedom from fear meant not only a longing for peace but also a more general desire for security in a world that appeared to be out of control. Freedom of speech and religion scarcely required detailed explanation. But their prominent place among the Four Freedoms accelerated the process by which First Amendment protections of free expression moved to the center of Americans’ definition of liberty. In 1941, the administration celebrated with considerable fanfare the 150th anniversary of the Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to the Constitution). FDR described their protections against tyrannical government as defining characteristics of American life, central to the rights of “free men and free women.” In 1943, the Supreme Court reversed a 1940 ruling and, on First Amendment grounds, upheld the right of Jehovah’s Witnesses to refuse to salute the American flag in public schools. The decision stood in sharp contrast to the coercive patriotism of World War I, and it affirmed the sanctity of individual conscience as a bedrock of freedom, even in times of crisis. The justices contrasted the American system of constitutional protection for unpopular minorities with Nazi tyranny.

## Freedom from Want

The “most ambiguous” of the Four Freedoms, *Fortune* magazine remarked, was freedom from want. Yet this “great inspiring phrase,” as a Pennsylvania steelworker put it in a letter to the president, seemed to strike the deepest chord in a nation just emerging from the Depression. Roosevelt initially meant it to refer to the elimination of barriers to international trade. But he quickly came to link freedom from want to an economic goal more relevant to the average citizen—protecting the future “standard of living of the American worker and farmer” by guaranteeing that the Depression would not resume after the war. This, he declared, would bring “real freedom for the common man.”

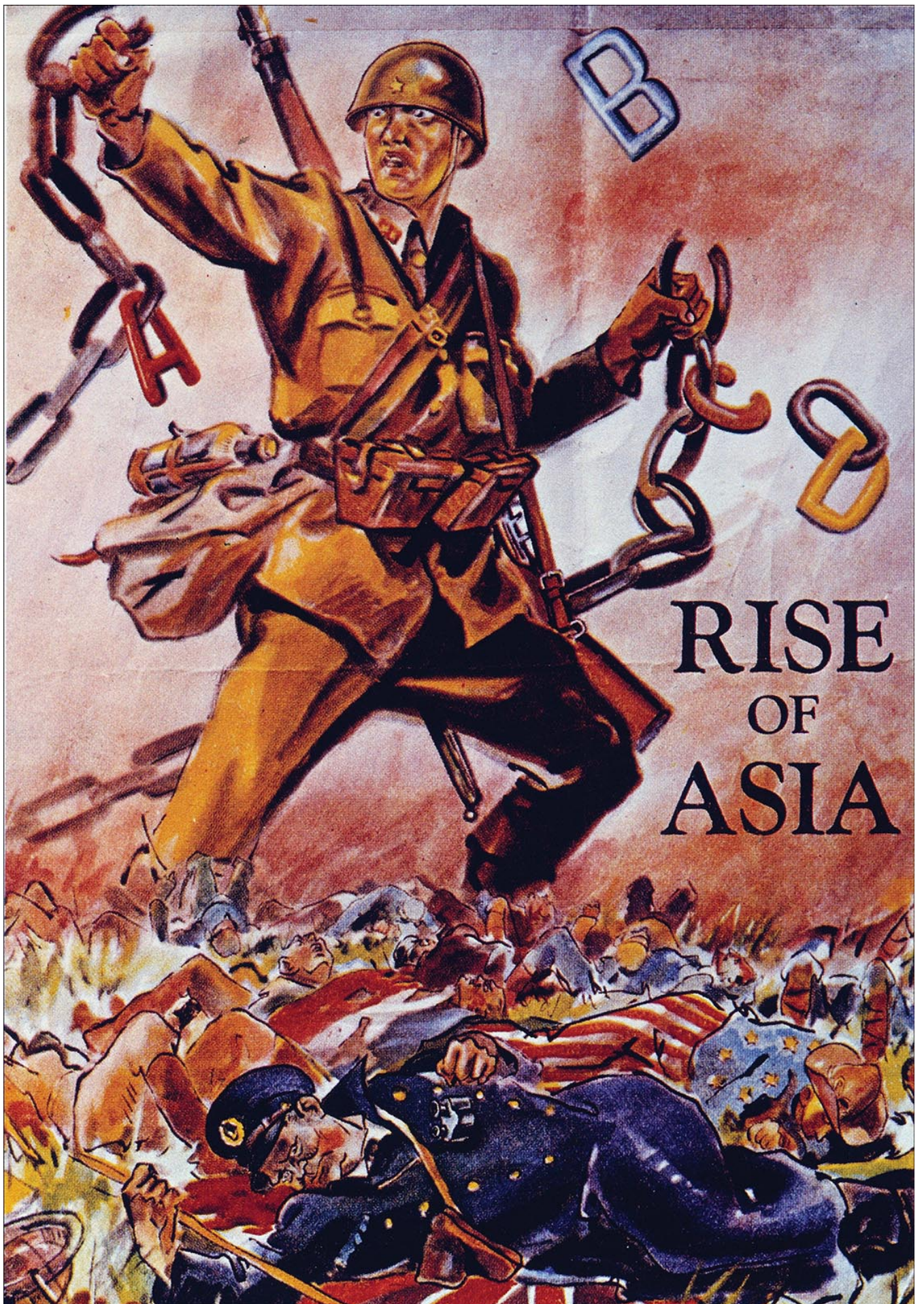
When Norman Rockwell’s paintings of the Four Freedoms first appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*, each was accompanied by a brief essay. For *Freedom from Want*, the editors chose an unknown Filipino poet, Carlos Bulosan, who had emigrated to the United States at the age of sixteen. Bulosan’s essay showed how the Four Freedoms could inspire hopes for a better future as well as nostalgia for Rockwell’s imagined small-town past. Bulosan wrote of those Americans still outside the social mainstream—migrant workers, cannery laborers, Black victims of segregation—for whom freedom meant having enough to eat, sending their children to school, and being able to “share the promise and fruits of American life.”

## The Office of War Information

The history of the Office of War Information (OWI), created in 1942 to mobilize public opinion, illustrates how the political divisions generated by the New Deal affected efforts to promote the Four Freedoms. The liberal Democrats who dominated the OWI’s writing staff sought to make the conflict “a ‘people’s war’ for freedom.” The OWI feared that Americans had only a vague understanding of the war’s purposes. They utilized radio, film, the press, and other media to give the conflict an ideological meaning, while seeking to avoid the nationalist hysteria of World War I.

Wartime mobilization drew on deep-seated American traditions. The portrait of the United States holding aloft the torch of liberty in a world overrun by oppression reached back at least as far as the American Revolution. The description of a world half slave and half free recalled the Great Emancipator. But critics charged that the OWI seemed most interested in promoting the definition of freedom Roosevelt had emphasized during the 1930s. One of its first pamphlets listed as elements of freedom the right to a job at fair pay and to adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. Concerned that the OWI was devoting as much time to promoting New Deal social programs as to the war effort, Congress eliminated most of its funding.







**"THIS WORLD CANNOT EXIST  
HALF SLAVE AND HALF FREE"**



**FIGHT FOR FREEDOM!**



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Each side in World War II invoked history to rally support for its cause. “Rise of Asia” depicts Japan liberating Asia from “ABCD” imperial oppressors (Americans, British, Chinese, Dutch), while the poster issued by the Office of War Information in the United States links the words of Abraham Lincoln to the struggle against Nazi tyranny.

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## The Fifth Freedom

After Congress curtailed the OWI, the “selling of America” became overwhelmingly a private affair. Under the watchful eye of the War Advertising Council, private companies joined in the campaign to promote wartime patriotism, while positioning themselves and their brand names for the postwar world. Alongside advertisements urging Americans to purchase war bonds, guard against revealing military secrets, and grow “victory gardens” to allow food to be sent to the army, the war witnessed a burst of messages marketing advertisers’ definition of freedom. Without directly criticizing Roosevelt, they repeatedly suggested that he had overlooked a fifth freedom. The National Association of Manufacturers and individual companies bombarded Americans with press releases, radio programs, and advertisements attributing the amazing feats of wartime production to “free enterprise.”

Americans on the home front enjoyed a prosperity many could scarcely remember. Despite the rationing of scarce consumer items like coffee, meat, and gasoline, consumers found more goods available in 1944 than when the war began. With the memory of the Depression still very much alive, businessmen predicted a postwar world filled with consumer goods, with “freedom of choice” among abundant possibilities assured if only private enterprise were liberated from government controls. One advertisement for Royal typewriters, entitled “What This War Is All About,” explained that victory would “hasten the day when you . . . can once more walk into any store in the land and buy anything you want.” Certainly, ads suggested, the war did not imply any alteration in American institutions. “I’m fighting for freedom,” said a soldier in an ad by the Nash-Kelvinator Corporation. “So don’t anybody tell me I’ll find America changed.”

## Women at Work

During the war, the nation engaged in an unprecedented mobilization of “womanpower” to fill industrial jobs vacated by men. OWI publications encouraged women to go to work, Hollywood films glorified the independent woman, and private advertising celebrated the achievements of Rosie the Riveter, the female industrial laborer depicted as muscular and self-reliant in Norman Rockwell’s famous magazine cover. With 15 million men in the armed forces, women in 1944 made up more than one-third of the civilian labor force, and 350,000 served in auxiliary military units.



Women shipfitters on board the USS *Nereus* in 1943.

Even though most women workers still labored in clerical and service jobs, new opportunities suddenly opened in industrial, professional, and government positions previously restricted to men. On the West Coast, one-third of the workers in aircraft manufacturing and shipbuilding were women. For the first time in history, married women in their thirties outnumbered the young and single among female workers. Women forced unions like the United Auto Workers to confront issues like equal pay for equal work, maternity leave, and childcare facilities for working mothers. Having enjoyed what one wartime worker called “a taste of freedom”—doing “men’s” jobs for men’s wages—many women hoped to remain in the labor force once peace returned.

## The Pull of Tradition

“We as a nation,” proclaimed one magazine article, “must change our basic attitude toward the work of women.” But change proved difficult. The government, employers, and unions depicted work as a temporary necessity, not an expansion of women’s freedom. Advertisements assured women laboring in factories that they, too, were “fighting for freedom.” But their language spoke of sacrifice and military victory, not rights, independence, or self-determination. One union publication even declared, “There should be a law requiring the women who have taken over men’s jobs to be laid off after the war.” When the war ended, most female war workers, especially those in better-paying industrial employment, did indeed lose their jobs.

Despite the upsurge in the number of working women, the advertisers’ “world of tomorrow” rested on a vision of family-centered prosperity. Like Norman Rockwell’s Four Freedoms paintings, these wartime discussions of freedom simultaneously looked forward to a day of material abundance and back to a time when the family stood as the bedrock of society. The “American way of life” celebrated during the war centered on the woman with “a husband to meet every night at the door,” and a home stocked with household appliances and consumer goods. Men in the army seem to have assumed that they would return home to resume traditional family life. In one wartime radio program, a young man described his goal for peacetime: “Havin’ a home and some kids, and breathin’ fresh air out in the suburbs . . . livin’ and workin’ decent, like free people.”

# VISIONS OF POSTWAR FREEDOM

## Toward an American Century

The prospect of an affluent future provided a point of unity between New Dealers and conservatives, business and labor. And the promise of prosperity to some extent united two of the most celebrated blueprints for the postwar world. One was *The American Century*, publisher Henry Luce's 1941 effort to mobilize the American people both for the coming war and for an era of postwar world leadership. Americans, Luce's book insisted, must embrace the role history had thrust upon them as the "dominant power in the world." They must seize the opportunity to share with "all peoples" their "magnificent industrial products" and the "great American ideals," foremost among which stood "love of freedom." After the war, American power and American values would underpin a previously unimaginable prosperity—"the abundant life," Luce called it—produced by "free economic enterprise."

Luce's essay anticipated important aspects of the postwar world. But its bombastic rhetoric and a title easily interpreted as a call for American global dominance aroused opposition among liberals and the left. Henry Wallace, Roosevelt's vice president after the 1940 election and one of the more liberal New Dealers, offered the liberal response in "The Price of Free World Victory," an address delivered in May 1942 to the Free World Association.

In contrast to Luce's *American Century*, a world of business dominance no less than of American power, Wallace predicted that the war would usher in a "century of the common man." The "march of freedom," said Wallace, would continue in the postwar world. That world, however, would be marked by international cooperation, not any single power's rule. Governments acting to "humanize" capitalism and redistribute economic resources would eliminate hunger, illiteracy, and poverty.

Luce and Wallace both spoke the language of freedom. Luce offered a confident vision of worldwide free enterprise, while Wallace anticipated a global New Deal. But they had one thing in common—a new conception of America's role in the world, tied to continued international involvement, the promise of economic abundance, and the idea that the American experience should serve as a model for all other nations. Neither took into account the ideas that other countries might have developed as to how to proceed once the war had ended.

## "The Way of Life of Free Men"

Even as Congress moved to dismantle parts of the New Deal, liberal Democrats and their left-wing allies unveiled plans for a postwar economic policy that would allow all Americans to enjoy freedom from want. In 1942 and 1943, the reports of the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB) offered a blueprint for a peacetime economy based on full employment, an expanded welfare state, and a widely shared American standard of living. Economic security and full employment were the board's watchwords. It called for a "new bill of rights" that would include all Americans in an expanded Social Security system and guarantee access to education, health care, adequate housing, and jobs for able-bodied adults. The NRPB's plan for a "full-employment economy" with a "fair distribution of income," said *The Nation*, embodied "the way of life of free men."

The reports continued a shift in liberals' outlook that dated from the late 1930s. Rather than seeking to reform the institutions of capitalism, liberals would henceforth rely on government spending to secure full employment, social welfare, and mass consumption, while leaving the operation of the economy in private hands. The reports appeared to reflect the views of British economist John Maynard Keynes, who, as noted in the previous chapter, had identified government spending as the best way to promote economic growth, even if it caused budget deficits. The war had, in effect, ended the Depression by implementing a military version of Keynesianism. In calling for massive spending on job creation and public works—urban redevelopment, rural electrification, an overhaul of the transportation system, and the like—the NRPB proposed the continuation of Keynesian spending in peacetime. But this went so far beyond what Congress was willing to support that it eliminated the NRPB's funding.

## An Economic Bill of Rights

Mindful that public-opinion polls showed a large majority of Americans favoring a guarantee of employment for those who could not find work, the president in 1944 called for an "Economic Bill of Rights." The original Bill of Rights restricted the power of government in the name of liberty. FDR proposed to expand its power in order to secure full employment, an adequate income, medical care, education, and a decent home for all Americans.



Already ill and preoccupied with the war, Roosevelt spoke only occasionally of the Economic Bill of Rights during the 1944 presidential campaign. The replacement of Vice President Henry Wallace by Harry S. Truman, then a little-known senator from Missouri, suggested that the president did not intend to do battle with Congress over social policy. Congress did not enact the Economic Bill of Rights. But in 1944, it extended to the millions of returning veterans an array of benefits, including unemployment pay, scholarships for further education, low-cost mortgage loans, pensions, and job training. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or [GI Bill of Rights](#), was one of the most far-reaching pieces of social legislation in American history. Aimed at rewarding members of the armed forces for their service and preventing the widespread unemployment and economic disruption that had followed World War I, it profoundly shaped postwar society. By 1946, more than 1 million veterans were attending college under its provisions, making up half of total college enrollment. Almost 4 million would receive home mortgages, spurring a postwar suburban housing boom.

During 1945, unions, civil rights organizations, and religious groups urged Congress to enact the Full Employment Bill, which tried to do for the entire economy what the GI Bill promised veterans. The measure established a "right to employment" for all Americans and required the federal government to increase its level of spending to create enough jobs in case the economy failed to do so. The target of an intense business lobbying campaign, the bill only passed in 1946 with the word "Full" removed from its title and after its commitment to governmental job creation had been eliminated. But as the war drew to a close, most Americans embraced the idea that the government must continue to play a major role in maintaining employment and a high standard of living.

## **The Road to Serfdom**

The failure of the Full Employment Bill confirmed the political stalemate that had begun with the elections of 1938. It also revealed the renewed intellectual respectability of fears that economic planning represented a threat to liberty. When the *New Republic* spoke of full employment as the "road to freedom," it subtly acknowledged the impact of *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), a surprise best-seller by Friedrich A. Hayek, a previously obscure Austrian-born economist. Hayek claimed that even the best-intentioned government efforts to direct the economy posed a threat to individual liberty. He offered a simple message—"Planning leads to dictatorship."

Coming at a time when the miracles of war production had reinvigorated belief in the virtues of capitalism, and with the confrontation with Nazism highlighting the danger of merging economic and political power, Hayek offered a new intellectual justification for opponents of active government. In a complex economy, he insisted, a free market mobilizes the fragmented and partial knowledge scattered throughout society far more effectively than a planned economy.

Unlike many of his disciples, Hayek was not a doctrinaire advocate of laissez-faire. His book endorsed measures that later conservatives would denounce as forms of socialism—minimum wage and maximum hours laws, antitrust enforcement, and a social safety net guaranteeing all citizens a basic minimum of food, shelter, and clothing. Hayek, moreover, criticized traditional conservatives for fondness for social hierarchy and authoritarian government. But by equating fascism, socialism, and the New Deal and by identifying economic planning with a loss of freedom, he helped set the stage for a renewed battle over the government's proper role in society and the economy, and the social conditions of American freedom.

## **Glossary**

### [GI Bill of Rights](#)

The 1944 legislation that provided money for education and other benefits to military personnel returning from World War II.

# THE AMERICAN DILEMMA

The unprecedented attention to freedom as the defining characteristic of American life had implications that went far beyond wartime mobilization. World War II reshaped Americans' understanding of themselves as a people. The struggle against Nazi tyranny and its theory of a master race discredited ethnic and racial inequality. Originally promoted by religious and ethnic minorities in the 1920s and the Popular Front in the 1930s, a pluralist vision of American society now became part of official rhetoric. What set the United States apart from its wartime foes, the government insisted, was not only dedication to the ideals of the Four Freedoms but also the principle that Americans of all races, religions, and national origins could enjoy those freedoms equally. Racism was the enemy's philosophy; Americanism rested on toleration of diversity and equality for all. By the end of the war, the new immigrant groups had been fully accepted as loyal ethnic Americans, rather than members of distinct and inferior "races." And the contradiction between the principle of equal freedom and the actual status of Blacks had come to the forefront of national life.

## Patriotic Assimilation

Among other things, World War II created a vast melting pot, especially for European immigrants and their children. Millions of Americans moved out of urban ethnic neighborhoods and isolated rural enclaves into the army and industrial plants. What one historian has called their "patriotic assimilation" differed sharply from the forced Americanization of World War I. While the Wilson administration had established Anglo-Saxon culture as a national norm, Roosevelt promoted pluralism as the only source of harmony in a diverse society. The American way of life, wrote the novelist Pearl Buck in an OWI pamphlet, rested on brotherhood—the principle that "persons of many lands can live together . . . and if they believe in freedom they can become a united people."

Government and private agencies eagerly promoted equality as the definition of Americanism and a counterpoint to Nazism. Officials rewrote history to establish racial and ethnic tolerance as the American way. To be an American, FDR declared, had always been a "matter of mind and heart," and "never . . . a matter of race or ancestry"—a statement more effective in mobilizing support for the war than in accurately describing the nation's past. Mindful of the intolerance spawned by World War I, the OWI highlighted nearly every group's contributions to American life and celebrated the strength of a people united in respect for diversity. One OWI pamphlet described prejudice as a foreign import rather than a homegrown product and declared bigots more dangerous than spies—they were "fighting for the enemy."

Horried by the uses to which the Nazis put the idea of inborn racial difference, biological and social scientists abandoned belief in a link among race, culture, and intelligence, an idea only recently central to their disciplines. Ruth Benedict's *Races and Racism* (1942) described racism as "a travesty of scientific knowledge." In the same year, Ashley Montagu's *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* became a best-seller. By the war's end, racism and nativism had been stripped of intellectual respectability, at least outside the South, and were viewed as psychological disorders.

Hollywood, too, did its part, portraying fighting units whose members, representing various regional, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, put aside group loyalties and prejudices for the common cause. *Air Force* featured a bomber crew that included an Anglo-Saxon officer, a Jewish sergeant, and a Polish American gunner. In the film *Bataan*, the ethnically balanced platoon included a Black soldier, even though the real army was racially segregated. The war's most popular motion picture, *This Is the Army*, starring, among others, future president Ronald Reagan, offered a vision of postwar society that celebrated the ethnic diversity of the American people.

Intolerance, of course, hardly disappeared from American life. One correspondent complained to Norman Rockwell that he included too many "foreign-looking" faces in his *Freedom of Worship* painting. Many business and government circles still excluded Jews. Along with the fact that early reports of the Holocaust were too terrible to be believed, anti-Semitism contributed to the government's unwillingness to allow more than a handful of European Jews (21,000 during the course of the war) to find refuge in the United States. Roosevelt himself learned during the war of the extent of Hitler's "final solution" to the Jewish presence in Europe. But he failed to authorize air strikes that might have destroyed German death camps.

Nonetheless, the war made millions of ethnic Americans, especially the children of the new immigrants, feel fully American for the first time. During the war, one New York "ethnic" recalled, "the Italo Americans stopped being Italo and started becoming Americans." But the event that inspired this comment, the Harlem race riot of 1943, suggested that patriotic assimilation stopped at the color line.

# The *Bracero* Program

The war had a far more ambiguous meaning for non-white groups than for whites. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, racial barriers remained deeply entrenched in American life. Southern Blacks were still trapped in a rigid system of segregation. Asians could not immigrate to the United States or become naturalized citizens. As noted in the previous chapters, more than 400,000 Mexican Americans had been repatriated during the Depression.

The war set in motion changes that would reverberate in the postwar years. Under the [bracero program](#) agreed to by the Mexican and American governments in 1942 (the name derives from *brazo*, the Spanish word for arm), tens of thousands of contract laborers crossed into the United States to take up jobs as domestic and agricultural workers. Initially designed as a temporary response to the wartime labor shortage, the program lasted until 1964. During the period of the *bracero* program, more than 4.5 million Mexicans entered the United States under government labor contracts (while a slightly larger number were arrested for illegal entry by the Border Patrol). *Braceros* were supposed to receive decent housing and wages. But since they could not become citizens and could be deported at any time, they found it almost impossible to form unions or secure better working conditions.

Although the *bracero* program reinforced the status of immigrants from Mexico as an unskilled labor force, wartime employment opened new opportunities for second-generation Mexican Americans. Hundreds of thousands of men and women emerged from ethnic neighborhoods, or *barrios*, to work in defense industries and serve in the army (where, unlike Blacks, they fought alongside whites). For Mexican American women in particular, the war afforded new opportunities for public participation and higher incomes. “Rosita the Riveter” took her place alongside “Rosie” in the West Coast’s multiethnic war production factories. Government publications and newspaper accounts celebrated their role as patriotic mothers who encouraged their sons to enlist in the army and offered moral support while they were away at war. A new “Chicano” culture—a fusion of Mexican heritage and American experience—was being born. Contact with other groups led many to learn English and sparked a rise in interethnic marriages.

## Mexican American Rights

The [zoot suit riots](#) of 1943, in which club-wielding sailors and policemen attacked Mexican American youths wearing flamboyant clothing on the streets of Los Angeles, illustrated the limits of wartime tolerance. But the contrast between the war’s rhetoric of freedom and pluralism and the reality of continued discrimination inspired a heightened consciousness of civil rights. Mexican Americans brought complaints of discrimination before the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to fight the practice in the Southwest of confining them to the lowest-paid work or paying them lower wages than white workers doing the same jobs.

Perhaps half a million Mexican American men and women served in the armed forces. And with discrimination against Mexicans an increasing embarrassment in view of Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy, Texas (the state with the largest population of Mexican descent) in 1943 unanimously passed the oddly named Caucasian Race—Equal Privileges resolution. It stated that since “all the nations of the North and South American continents” were united in the struggle against Nazism, “all persons of the Caucasian race” were entitled to equal treatment in places of public accommodation. Since Texas law had long defined Mexicans as white, the measure applied to them while not challenging the segregation of Blacks. The resolution lacked an enforcement mechanism. Indeed, because of continued discrimination in Texas, the Mexican government for a time prohibited the state from receiving laborers under the *bracero* program.

## The War and Indigenous Freedom

In her 1944 book, *Speaking of Indians*, Lakota author Ella Deloria wrote that the war “wrought an overnight change in outlook, horizon, and even habits of the Indian people.” As in World War I, wartime service by Native Americans intensified debates about their place in society but now brought significant changes. Among the 25,000 Native Americans who served in the war were the famous Navajo “code-talkers” who transmitted messages in their complex native language, which the Japanese could not decipher. On the home front, Native Americans worked in wartime industry in factories, on farms, and on military installations. Marge Pascale, an Ojibwe woman, joined the Women’s Army Corps in 1943, explaining “One thing about the service, you get two pair of shoes and you get a bed and you get to eat.”

Indeed, many Native Americans joined the military to escape impoverishment. Many others were drafted, but military service was also viewed by some as an act of tribal and American patriotism—one they hoped would foster Indigenous freedoms. One Santa Clara Pueblo man, learning that Congress was considering construction of dams that threatened tribal homes, protested, “We are fighting with Uncle Sam’s army to defend the right of our people to live our own life in our own way.” Most American



Indian nations cooperated with the draft, but the Hopi, Ute, Seminole, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), Yakima, and Tohono O'odham (Papago) resisted. After losing a court case seeking to exempt their nation from the draft, Haudenosaunee officials deployed the language of freedom: "After taking practically all the beautiful country that once was ours," they claimed, the United States now looked to "take from us our last possession, our freedom." For most Native Americans, self-determination, or sovereignty, was foundational to their conception of freedom.

The wartime home front brought renewed challenges to Native sovereignty. The U.S. government seized Indian land for military purposes. On the Lakota Pine Ridge reservation, the government appropriated over 350,000 acres for a gunnery range, forcing many families to leave behind their homes, crops, and livestock. Without the consent of the Pima, Mohave, and Chemehuevi Indians, and despite protests, the U.S. government built two internment camps, the Poston internment center and the Colorado River camp, on Indigenous land in Arizona. During the war, private interests and state officials eager to abolish tribal sovereignty and open Indian lands argued that Indians who moved off reservations temporarily during wartime wished to do so permanently. In response, Indian representatives from fifty tribes formed the National Congress of American Indians in 1944. The organization fought against the assault on sovereignty, called for a commission to settle land claims, and sought to gain voting rights in states like New Mexico and Arizona where Indians faced disfranchisement.

## Bound by War

With China an ally in the Pacific war, Congress in 1943 ended decades of complete exclusion by establishing a nationality quota for Chinese immigrants. The annual limit of 105 hardly suggested a desire for a large-scale influx. But the image of the Chinese as gallant fighters defending their country against Japanese aggression called into question long-standing racial stereotypes. As in the case of Mexican Americans, large numbers of Chinese Americans moved out of ethnic ghettos to work alongside whites in jobs on the home front. More than 50,000 Asian Americans—the children and grandchildren of immigrants from China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines—fought in the U.S. army, mostly in all-Asian units.

The Philippines had been granted Commonwealth status by Congress in 1934 and promised a ten-year transition from colonial rule to full independence. But many Filipinos fought under U.S. military command in the Pacific. In the battle of Bataan alone, the United States Armed Forces in the Far East included about 80,000 soldiers, the vast majority of whom were Filipino scouts and Filipino army soldiers. Among the many killed on the infamous Bataan death march and in the prison camps in the two months that followed, most were Filipino soldiers.

For Japanese Americans, the war proved a harrowing experience. Many Americans viewed the war against Germany as an ideological struggle. But both sides saw the Pacific war as a race war. Japanese propaganda depicted Americans as a self-indulgent people contaminated by ethnic and racial diversity. In the United States, long-standing prejudices and the shocking attack on Pearl Harbor combined to produce an unprecedented hatred of Japan. "In all our history," according to one historian, "no foe has been detested as were the Japanese." Government propaganda and war films portrayed the Japanese as rats, dogs, gorillas, and snakes—bestial and subhuman. They blamed Japanese aggression on a violent racial or national character, not, as in the case of Germany and Italy, on tyrannical rulers.

About 70 percent of Japanese Americans in the continental United States lived in California, where they dominated vegetable farming in the Los Angeles area. One-third were first-generation immigrants, or *issei*, but a substantial majority were *nisei*—American-born, and therefore citizens. Many of the latter spoke only English, had never been to Japan, and had tried to assimilate despite prevailing prejudice. But the Japanese American community could not remain unaffected by the rising tide of hatred. The government bent over backward to include German Americans and Italian Americans in the war effort. It ordered the arrest of only a handful of the more than 800,000 German and Italian nationals in the United States when the war began. But it viewed every person of Japanese ethnicity as a potential spy.

## VOICES OF FREEDOM

### **From LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS, "WORLD WAR II AND MEXICAN AMERICANS" (1945)**

Founded in 1929, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) campaigned for equal treatment for Americans of Latino descent and their full integration into American life. Soon after the war ended, an editorial in its publication *LULAC News* condemned continuing discrimination, reflecting how the war sparked a rising demand for equal rights among many minority groups.

"We do not serve Mexicans here." "You will have to get out as no Mexicans are allowed." "Your uniform and service ribbons mean nothing here. We still do not allow Mexicans."

These, and many other stronger-worded ones, are the embarrassing and humiliating retorts given our [returning veterans](#) of Latin American descent and their families. They may all be worded differently, and whereas some are toned with hate and loathsomeness while others are toned with sympathy and remorse, still the implication remains that these so-called "Mexicans" are considered unworthy of equality, regardless of birthright or service. . . .

Why this hate, this prejudice, this tendency to discriminate against a people whose only fault seems to be that they are [heirs of a culture](#) older than any known "American Culture," to find themselves a part of a land and people they have helped to build and to defend, to find themselves a part of a minority group whose acquired passive nature keeps them from boldly demanding those rights and privileges which are rightfully theirs? Can it be the result of difference in race, nationality, language, loyalty, or ability?

There is no difference in race. Latin Americans, or so-called "Mexicans," are [Caucasian or white](#). . . . There is no difference in nationality. These "Mexicans" were born and bred in this country and are just as American as Jones or Smith. . . . Difference in language? No, these "Mexicans" speak English. Accented, perhaps, in some cases, but English all over the United States seems to be accented. . . . Difference in loyalty? How can that be when all revere the same stars and stripes, when they don the same service uniforms for the same principles? Difference in intelligence and ability? Impossible. . . .

This condition is not a case of difference; it is a case of ignorance. . . . An ignorance of the cultural contributions of Americans of Latin American descent to the still young American Culture; . . . an ignorance of a sense of appreciation for a long, profitable, and loyal association with a group of Americans whose voice cries out in desperate supplication: "We have proved ourselves true and loyal Americans . . . now give us social, political, and economic equality."

### **From CARLOS BULOSAN, "FREEDOM FROM WANT" IN *THE SATURDAY EVENING POST* (1943)**

**When Norman Rockwell's paintings of the Four Freedoms appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1943, each was accompanied by an essay. The "Freedom from Want" essay was authored by the novelist and poet Carlos Bulosan. A Filipino who had worked as a migrant and cannery worker, Bulosan focuses on working and laboring groups on the margins of American society and emphasizes the importance of economic security as the foundation for freedom and democracy.**

If you want to know [what we are](#), look upon the farms or upon the hard pavements of the city. You usually see us working or waiting for work, and you think you know us, but our outward guise is more deceptive than our history. . . .

Our march toward security and peace is the march of freedom—the freedom that we should like to become a living part of. It is the dignity of the individual to live in a society of free men, where the spirit of understanding and belief exist; of understanding that all men are equal; that all men, whatever their color, race, religion, or estate, should be given equal opportunity to serve themselves and each other [according to their needs and abilities](#).

To us, freedom is not an intangible thing. When we have enough to eat, then we are healthy enough to enjoy what we eat. Then we have the time and ability to read and think and discuss things. Then we are not merely living but also becoming a creative part of life. It is only then that we become a growing part of democracy. . . .

The totalitarian nations hate democracy. They hate us because we ask for a definite guaranty of freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom from fear and want. Our challenge to tyranny is the depth of our faith in a democracy worth defending. . . . We are multitudes in Pennsylvania mines, in Alaskan canneries. We are millions from Puget Sound to Florida. . . .

Sometimes [we walk across the land](#) looking for something to hold on to. We cannot believe that the resources of this country are exhausted. Even when we see our children suffer humiliations, we cannot believe that America has no more place for us. We realize that what is wrong is not in our system of government, but in the ideals which were blasted away by a materialistic age. We know that we can truly find and identify ourselves with a living tradition if we walk proudly in familiar streets. It is a great honor to walk on the American earth.

Everywhere we are on the march, passing through darkness into a sphere of economic peace. When we have the freedom to think and discuss things without fear, when peace and security are assured, when the futures of our children are ensured. . . . America lives and becomes a growing part of our aspirations again.

## QUESTIONS

1. What evidence does the editorial offer that Latinos are deserving of equality?
2. How does Bulosan make the case that economic security is essential for freedom?
3. What differences and what commonalities exist between these two claims for greater rights in American society?

## Japanese American Internment

California, as discussed in [Chapter 19](#), had a long history of hostility toward the Japanese. Now, inspired by exaggerated fears of a Japanese invasion of the West Coast and pressured by whites who saw an opportunity to gain possession of Japanese American property, the military persuaded FDR to issue Executive Order 9066. Promulgated in February 1942, this ordered the relocation of all persons of Japanese descent from the West Coast. That spring and summer, authorities removed more than 110,000 men, women, and children—nearly two-thirds of them American citizens—to camps far from their homes. The order did not apply to persons of Japanese descent living in Hawaii, where they represented nearly 40 percent of the population. Despite Hawaii's vulnerability, its economy could not function without Japanese American labor. But [Japanese American internment](#) provided ammunition for Japan's claim that its aggressions in Asia were intended to defend the rights of non-white peoples against colonial rule and a racist United States.

The internees were subjected to a quasi-military discipline in the camps. Living in former horse stables, makeshift shacks, or barracks behind barbed-wire fences, they were awakened for roll call at 6:45 each morning and ate their meals (which rarely included the Japanese cooking to which they were accustomed) in giant mess halls. Armed guards patrolled the camps, and searchlights shone all night. Privacy was difficult to come by, and medical facilities were often nonexistent. Nonetheless, the internees did their best to create an atmosphere of home, decorating their accommodations with pictures, flowers, and curtains, planting vegetable gardens, and setting up activities like sports clubs and art classes for themselves.

Internment revealed how easily war can undermine basic freedoms. There were no court hearings, no due process, and no writs of habeas corpus. One searches the wartime record in vain for public protests among non-Japanese against the gravest violation of civil liberties since the end of slavery. The press supported the policy almost unanimously. In Congress, only Senator Robert Taft of Ohio spoke out against it. Groups publicly committed to fighting discrimination, from the Communist Party to the NAACP and the American Jewish Committee, either defended the policy or remained silent.

JAPANESE AMERICAN INTERNMENT, 1942–1945





More than 100,000 Japanese Americans—the majority American citizens—were forcibly moved from their homes to internment camps during World War II.

The courts refused to intervene. In 1944, in [Korematsu v. United States](#), the Supreme Court denied the appeal of Fred Korematsu, a Japanese American citizen who had been arrested for refusing to present himself for internment. Speaking for a 6-3 majority, Justice Hugo Black, usually an avid defender of civil liberties, upheld the legality of the internment policy, insisting that an order applying only to persons of Japanese descent was not based on race. In 2018, in a case involving President Trump's order banning travel to the United States by citizens of several Muslim-majority countries, the Supreme Court, as an aside, declared that the *Korematsu* decision was "gravely wrong" and had no legal standing.

## WHO IS AN AMERICAN?

### From JUSTICE ROBERT A. JACKSON, DISSENT IN *KOREMATSU V. UNITED STATES* (1944)

The decision upholding the order interning Japanese Americans during World War II is one of the most infamous in the Supreme Court's history. Justice Jackson's dissent has often been cited as a powerful warning against government-sponsored racism. In 2018, the Court repudiated the *Korematsu* decision.

Korematsu was born on our soil, of parents born in Japan. The Constitution makes him a citizen of the United States by nativity, and a citizen of California by residence. No claim is made that he is not loyal to this country. . . .

Now, if any fundamental assumption underlies our system, it is that guilt is personal and not inheritable. Even if all of one's antecedents had been convicted of treason, the Constitution forbids its penalties to be visited upon him. . . . But here is an attempt to make an otherwise innocent act a crime merely because this prisoner is the son of parents as to whom he had no choice, and belongs to a race from which there is no way to resign. . . .

In the very nature of things, military decisions are not susceptible of intelligent judicial appraisal. . . . Courts can never have any real alternative to accepting the mere declaration of the authority that issued the order that it was reasonably necessary from a military viewpoint.

Much is said of the danger to liberty from the Army program for deporting and detaining these citizens of Japanese extraction. But a judicial construction of the due process clause that will sustain this order is a far more subtle blow to liberty than the promulgation of the order itself. A military order, however unconstitutional, is not apt to last longer than the military emergency. Even during that period, a succeeding commander may revoke it all. But once a judicial opinion rationalizes such an order to show that it conforms to the Constitution, or rather rationalizes the Constitution to show that the Constitution sanctions such an order, the Court for all time has validated the principle of racial discrimination in criminal procedure and of transplanting American citizens. The principle then lies about like a loaded weapon, ready for the hand of any authority that can bring forward a plausible claim of an urgent need.

## QUESTIONS

1. *Why does Justice Jackson believe that even though military authorities have the power to violate constitutional protections in time of war, the courts should not approve their actions?*
2. *What does he mean by likening the Court's decision to "a loaded weapon"?*

The government marketed war bonds to the internees. It established a loyalty oath program, expecting Japanese Americans to swear allegiance to the government that had imprisoned them and to enlist in the army. Some young men refused, and about 200 were sent to prison for resisting the draft. "Let us out and then maybe I'll think about risking my skin for 'the land of the free,'" one of the resisters remarked. But 20,000 Japanese Americans joined the armed forces from the camps, along with another 13,000 from Hawaii.

A long campaign for acknowledgment of the injustice done to Japanese Americans followed the end of the war. In 1988, Congress apologized for internment and provided \$20,000 in compensation to each surviving victim. President Bill Clinton subsequently awarded Fred Korematsu the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

## Blacks and the War

Although the treatment of Japanese Americans revealed the stubborn hold of racism in American life, the wartime message of freedom portended a major transformation in the status of Blacks. "There never has been, there isn't now, and there never will be," Roosevelt declared, "any race of people on the earth fit to serve as masters over their fellow men." Yet Nazi Germany cited American practices as proof of its own race policies. Washington remained a rigidly segregated city, and the Red Cross refused to mix blood from Blacks and whites in its blood banks (thereby, critics charged, in effect accepting Nazi race theories). Charles Drew, the Black scientist who pioneered the techniques of storing and shipping blood plasma—a development of immense importance to the treatment of wounded soldiers—protested bitterly against this policy, pointing out that it had no scientific basis. In 1940 and 1941, even as Roosevelt called for aid to the free peoples of Europe, thirteen lynchings took place in the United States.

The war spurred a movement of Black population from the rural South to the cities of the North and West that dwarfed the Great Migration of World War I and the 1920s. In the [second Great Migration](#), about 700,000 Black migrants poured out of the South on what they called "liberty trains," seeking jobs in the industrial heartland. They encountered sometimes violent hostility. In 1943, a fight at a Detroit city park spiraled into a race riot that left thirty-four persons dead, and a "hate strike" of 20,000 workers protested the upgrading of Black employees in a plant manufacturing aircraft engines. The war failed to end lynching. Isaac Simmons, a Black minister, was murdered in 1944 for refusing to sell his land to a white man who believed it might contain oil. The criminals went unpunished. This took place in Liberty, Mississippi.

## Blacks and Military Service

When World War II began, the air force and marines had no Black members. The army restricted the number of Black enlistees and contained only five Black officers, three of them chaplains. The navy accepted Blacks only as waiters and cooks.

During the war, more than 1 million Blacks served in the armed forces. They did so in segregated units, largely confined to construction, transport, and other noncombat tasks. Many northern Black draftees were sent to the South for military training, where they found themselves excluded from movie theaters and servicemen's clubs on military bases and abused when they ventured into local towns. Black soldiers sometimes had to give up their seats on railroad cars to accommodate Nazi prisoners

of war. “Nothing so lowers Negro morale,” wrote the NAACP’s magazine, *The Crisis*, “as the frequent preferential treatment of Axis prisoners of war in contrast with Army policy toward American troops who happen to be Negro.”

When southern Black veterans returned home and sought benefits through the GI Bill, they encountered even more evidence of racial discrimination. On the surface, the GI Bill contained no racial differentiation in offering benefits like health care, college tuition assistance, job training, and loans to start a business or purchase a farm. But local authorities who administered its provisions allowed southern Black veterans to use its education benefits only at segregated colleges, limited their job training to unskilled work and low-wage service jobs, and restricted loans for farm purchase to white veterans.

## Birth of the Civil Rights Movement

In 1942, a public-opinion survey sponsored by the army’s Bureau of Intelligence found that the vast majority of white Americans were “unaware that there is any such thing as a ‘Negro problem’” and were convinced that Blacks were satisfied with their social and economic conditions. They would soon discover their mistake.

The war years witnessed the birth of the modern civil rights movement. Angered by the almost complete exclusion of African Americans from jobs in the rapidly expanding war industries (of 100,000 aircraft workers in 1940, fewer than 300 were Blacks), the Black labor leader A. Philip Randolph in July 1941 called for a March on Washington. His demands included access to defense employment, an end to segregation, and a national antilynching law. Randolph, who as founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters had long battled racism among both employers and unions, hurled Roosevelt’s rhetoric back at the president. Randolph declared racial discrimination “undemocratic, un-American, and pro-Hitler.”



A sign displayed opposite a Detroit housing project in 1942 symbolizes one aspect of what Gunnar Myrdal called “the American Dilemma”—the persistence of racism in the midst of a worldwide struggle for freedom.



The prospect of thousands of angry Blacks descending on Washington, remarked one official, “scared the government half to death.” To persuade Randolph to call off the march, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, which banned discrimination in defense jobs and established a Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to monitor compliance. The Black press hailed the order as a new Emancipation Proclamation.

Essentially an investigative agency, the FEPC lacked enforcement powers. But its very existence marked a significant shift in public policy. Its hearings exposed patterns of racial exclusion so ingrained that firms at first freely admitted that their want ads asked for “colored” applicants for positions as porters and janitors and “white” ones for skilled jobs, and that they allowed Black women to work only as laundresses and cooks. The first federal agency since Reconstruction to campaign for equal opportunity for Black Americans, the FEPC played an important role in obtaining jobs for Black workers in industrial plants and shipyards. In southern California, the aircraft manufacturer Lockheed ran special buses into Black neighborhoods to bring workers to its plants. By 1944, more than 1 million Blacks, 300,000 of them women, held manufacturing jobs. (“My sister always said that Hitler was the one that got us out of the white folks’ kitchen,” recalled one Black woman.)

## The Double-V

When the president “said that we should have the Four Freedoms,” a Black steelworker declared, he meant to include “all races.” During the war, NAACP membership grew from 50,000 to nearly 500,000. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), founded by an interracial group of pacifists in 1942, held sit-ins in northern cities to integrate restaurants and theaters. After a Firestone tire factory in Memphis fired a Black woman for trying to enter a city bus before white passengers had been seated, Black workers at the plant went on strike until she was reinstated.

In February 1942, the *Pittsburgh Courier* coined the phrase that came to symbolize Black attitudes during the war—the [double-V](#). Victory over Germany and Japan, it insisted, must be accompanied by victory over segregation at home. While the Roosevelt administration and the white press saw the war as an expression of American ideals, Black newspapers pointed to the gap between those ideals and reality. Side by side with ads for war bonds, *The Crisis* insisted that a segregated army “cannot fight for a free world.”

Surveying wartime public opinion, a political scientist concluded that “symbols of national solidarity” had very different meanings to white and Black Americans. To Blacks, freedom from fear meant, among other things, an end to lynching, and freedom from want included doing away with “discrimination in getting jobs.” If, in whites’ eyes, freedom was a “possession to be defended,” he observed, to Blacks and other racial minorities it remained a “goal to be achieved.” “Our fight for freedom,” said a returning Black veteran of the Pacific war, “begins when we get to San Francisco.”

## “Imperialisms at Home”

During the war, a broad political coalition centered on the left but reaching well beyond it called for an end to racial inequality in America. The NAACP and American Jewish Congress cooperated closely in advocating laws to ban discrimination in employment and housing. Despite considerable resistance from rank-and-file white workers, CIO unions, especially those with strong left-liberal and communist influence, made significant efforts to organize Black workers and win them access to skilled positions. AFL craft unions by and large continued their long tradition of excluding Black workers. But during World War II, the CIO was probably more racially integrated than any labor organization since the Knights of Labor in the 1880s.

As Blacks demanded an end to segregation, southern politicians took up the cry of protecting white supremacy. They also spoke the language of freedom. Defenders of the racial status quo interpreted freedom to mean the right to shape their region’s institutions without outside interference. The “war emergency,” insisted Governor Frank Dixon of Alabama, “should not be used as a pretext to bring about the abolition of the color line.” Even as the war gave birth to the modern civil rights movement, it also planted the seeds for the South’s “massive resistance” to desegregation during the 1950s.

In the rest of the country, however, the status of Black Americans assumed a place at the forefront of enlightened liberalism. Far more than in the 1930s, federal officials spoke openly of the need for a dramatic change in race relations. American democracy, noted Secretary of War Stimson, had not yet addressed “the persistent legacy of the original crime of slavery.” Progress came slowly. But the National War Labor Board banned racial wage differentials. In *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), the Supreme Court outlawed all-white primaries, one of the mechanisms by which southern states deprived Blacks of political rights. The government also ordered that soldiers be allowed to vote without paying a poll tax, enabling thousands of Black men to cast ballots for the first time. In 1944, the navy began assigning small numbers of Black sailors to previously all-white

ships. In the final months of the war, it ended segregation altogether, and the army established a few combat units that included Black and white soldiers.

After a world tour in 1942 to rally support for the Allies, Wendell Willkie, Roosevelt's opponent of 1940, published *One World*. It sold 1 million copies, faster than any other nonfiction work in American history. Willkie's travels persuaded him that Asia, Africa, and Latin America would play a pivotal role in the postwar era. But the book's great surprise came in Willkie's attack on "our imperialisms at home." Unless the United States addressed the "mocking paradox" of racism, he insisted, its claim to world leadership would lack moral authority. "If we want to talk about freedom," Willkie wrote, "we must mean freedom for everyone inside our frontiers."

## ***An American Dilemma***

No event reflected the new concern with the status of Black Americans more than the publication in 1944 of *An American Dilemma*, a sprawling account of the country's racial past, present, and future written by the Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal. The book offered an uncompromising portrait of how deeply racism was entrenched in law, politics, economics, and social behavior. But Myrdal combined this sobering analysis with admiration for what he called the American Creed—belief in equality, justice, equal opportunity, and freedom. The war, he argued, had made Americans more aware than ever of the contradiction between this creed and the reality of racial inequality. He concluded that "there is bound to be a redefinition of the Negro's status as a result of this War."

Myrdal's notion of a conflict between American values and American racial policies was hardly new—Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois had said much the same thing. But in the context of a worldwide struggle against Nazism and rising Black demands for equality at home, his book struck a chord. It identified a serious national problem and seemed to offer an almost painless path to peaceful change, in which the federal government would take the lead in outlawing discrimination. This coupling of an appeal to American principles with federal social engineering established a liberal position on race relations that would survive for many years.

By 1945, support for racial justice had finally taken its place on the liberal-left agenda alongside full employment, civil liberties, and the expansion of the New Deal welfare state. Roosevelt himself rarely spoke out on racial issues. But many liberals insisted that racial discrimination must be confronted head-on through federal antilynching legislation, equal opportunity in the workplace, an end to segregated housing and schools, and the expansion of Social Security programs to cover agricultural and domestic workers. This wartime vision of a racially integrated full employment economy formed a bridge between the New Deal and the Great Society of the 1960s (see [Chapter 25](#)).

## **Black Internationalism**

In the nineteenth century, Black radicals like David Walker and Martin Delany had sought to link the fate of African Americans with that of peoples of African descent in other parts of the world, especially the Caribbean and Africa. In the first decades of the twentieth century, this kind of international consciousness was reinvigorated. Garveyism (discussed in [Chapter 19](#)) was one example; another was reflected in the five Pan-African Congresses that met between 1919 and 1945. Attended by Black intellectuals from the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa, these gatherings denounced the colonial rule of Africa and sought to establish a sense of unity among all people in the African diaspora (a term used to describe the scattering of a people who share a single national, religious, or racial identity). At the home of George Padmore, a West Indian labor organizer and editor living in London, Black American leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson came into contact with future leaders of African independence movements such as Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), and Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria). "I discovered Africa in London," Robeson remarked.

Through these gatherings, Du Bois, Robeson, and others developed an outlook that linked the plight of Black Americans with that of people of color worldwide. Racism, they came to believe, originated not in irrational hatred but in the slave trade and slavery. In the modern age, it was perpetuated by colonialism. Thus, freeing Africa from colonial rule would encourage greater equality at home.

World War II stimulated among African Americans an even greater awareness of the links between racism in the United States and colonialism abroad. In 1942, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a major Black newspaper, began publishing regular columns on events in India (where the British had imprisoned leaders of the movement for national independence) and China. In the same year, Robeson founded the Council on African Affairs, which tried to place colonial liberation at the top of the Black American agenda.

# Glossary

## [bracero program](#)

System agreed to by Mexican and American governments in 1942 under which tens of thousands of Mexicans entered the United States to work temporarily in agricultural jobs in the Southwest; lasted until 1964 and inhibited labor organization among farm workers since *braceros* could be deported at any time.

## [zoot suit riots](#)

1943 riots in which sailors on leave attacked Mexican American youths.

## [Japanese American internment](#)

Policy adopted by the Roosevelt administration in 1942 under which 110,000 persons of Japanese descent, most of them American citizens, were removed from the West Coast and forced to spend most of World War II in internment camps; it was the largest violation of American civil liberties in the twentieth century.

## [second Great Migration](#)

The movement of Black migrants from the rural South to the cities of the North and West, which occurred from 1941 through World War II, that dwarfed the Great Migration of World War I.

## [double-V](#)

Led by the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the movement that pressed for victory over fascism abroad and over racism at home. It argued that since African Americans were risking their lives abroad, they should receive full civil rights at home.

## [Korematsu v. United States](#)

1944 Supreme Court case that found Executive Order 9066 to be constitutional. Fred Korematsu, an American-born citizen of Japanese descent, defied the military order that banned all persons of Japanese ancestry from designated western coastal areas. The Court upheld Korematsu's arrest and internment.

## [returning veterans](#)

Approximately 500,000 Latinos served in the U.S. armed forces in World War II. Unlike African Americans, they served in non-segregated units.

## [heirs of a culture](#)

This phrase refers to the Spanish conquest of the Americas beginning in the late fifteenth century.

## [Caucasian or white](#)

Many Latin Americans during this period emphasized their "whiteness." In Texas (the state with the largest population of Mexican descent), the law had long defined Mexicans as white. Despite this, Latinos often faced *de facto* segregation, especially in border states.

## [what we are](#)

The "we" in this essay refers to the working class, traditionally excluded from the idea of the "American Dream."

## [according to their needs and abilities.](#)

This clause combines ideas from the U.S. Declaration of Independence ("all men are created equal") with ideas from Karl Marx in *Critique of the Gotha Program* ("From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!").

## [we walk across the land](#)

These sentences would resonate with Americans coming out of the Great Depression when there were millions of Americans displaced by the Dust Bowl and joblessness.



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