

A Brief History of the United States

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We will never know if the New Deal would've ended the Great Depression, because WWII came along and did so faster. Eventually, the Allies were England, France, the USSR, and the United States. The Axis Powers were Germany, Italy, and Japan. The war broke out in Europe, with Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia. The leaders of England and France made a deal with Hitler in return for the promise that it was the last piece of land that he would take. This policy, known as **appeasement**, was an absolute failure. Hitler grabbed all of all of Czechoslovakia and set his sights on **Poland**. Stalin and Hitler signed a secret **Non-Aggression Pact**, to not attack each other and divide Poland among them. **Hitler** invaded **Poland** on September 1, 1939. Britain and France declared war on Germany. **World War II** had begun.

The **United States** was deeply **isolationist** in the 1930's. This was due to the Great Depression, but also to the lingering bad feelings after its involvement in World War I. An official Senate report, called the **Nye Report**, blamed our entry into World War I on the greedy weapons manufacturers so they could earn a profit. The Congress passed a series of **Neutrality Laws**, which hampered our effort to assist other countries. By the mid-1930s, some people were calling for a constitutional amendment to require a national referendum (vote) before Congress could declare war. The war went badly for England and France, and eventually Hitler even attacked his old ally, **Stalin**.

FDR desperately wanted to help the Allies. But the American public and Congress clung to neutrality, even after the Fall of France. He eventually got the **Lend Lease Act** passed, and then **Cash and Carry**, both of which helped the Allies. The United States became the great **Arsenal of Democracy**, but American sentiment would not turn in favor of entering the war until the sinking of the **Reuben James** on Oct. 31, 1941. Then, on **December 7, 1941**, Japan attacked the naval base at **Pearl Harbor** in Hawaii. The next day FDR asked Congress for a declaration of war, and received it.

Stalin wanted the United States and England to open a second, or western, front and take pressure off of the Soviets. However the first campaign the United States took part in was the invasion of North Africa, and then we invaded Italy. The second front was finally opened on **June 6, 1944, D-day**, with an invasion of the beach at Normandy. France was liberated and Germany was pushed back. Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945. This was called **V-E Day** for Victory in Europe. The horror of the **holocaust** was revealed to the world when allied troops discovered the concentration camps. This **genocide** took the lives of 11 million people, six million of whom were **Jews**.

In the **Pacific**, the United States fought Japan virtually alone, but at **Yalta** FDR had secured a promise from Stalin to enter the war 3 months after the defeat of Germany. In the meantime, the United States had secretly been working on the **Manhattan Project**, which was the development of the **atomic bomb**. The first test, in New Mexico in July 1945, was called **Trinity**. By that time, FDR had died and **Truman** was President. He was at the **Potsdam Conference** when he received word of the successful test.

The navy had the island nation of Japan blockaded, and the Japanese were making secret overtures for a conditional surrender (that would guarantee the survival of the Emperor). The U.S. demanded and **unconditional surrender**. The fighting in the Pacific was brutal, because the Japanese were fighting to defend the Emperor, and by some estimates a land invasion of Japan would result in up to one million U.S. casualties. We didn't want to wait for the blockade to work, because the Soviet Union was due on the scene soon and if Japan surrendered after they arrived we would have to share control of Japan with them. (Plus we wanted to send a message of strength to the Soviets.) So the first atomic bomb used in war was dropped on **Hiroshima** on August 6th 1945. It was called **Little Boy** and was dropped from the plane the **Enola Gay**. The Japanese didn't surrender fast enough, so a second bomb, **Fat Man**, was dropped on **Nagasaki** on August 9th. Japan announced it would surrender on August 14th/15th (depending on which side of the International Date Line you were on), and the official surrender took place on September 2, **V-J Day** (for Victory over Japan). The war was over.

During the war, women worked in many new jobs. Those who worked in the defense industry were nicknamed **Rosie the Riveter**. Mexicans were brought into the country under the **Bracero Program** to work in

the fields of the southwest. Japanese-Americans were sent to **Relocation Camps**, and the **442nd Regimental Combat Unit**, consisting of Japanese-Americans was the most decorated of the war.

Prior to the war's end, the Big Three, **FDR**, **Churchill** (England), and **Stalin** (Soviet Union), had met at **Yalta** to discuss what the post war world would look like. The three weighty issues to be decided were: the occupation of Germany, the creation of the **United Nations**, and the status of Eastern Europe. The Soviets wanted a **sphere of influence** in Eastern Europe - a buffer zone to defend against any further German attacks.

The **Cold War** (the term was created by George Orwell) was an ideological conflict and a competition for influence between the **United States** and the **Soviet Union**. The two rivals did not engage in direct war, although both sides participated in a number of **proxy wars**, in which they supported the opposing sides (Korea, Vietnam, etc.). The **Cold War** lasted from 1945-1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and was a consideration in all major foreign policy decisions during that time.

George Keenan was an experienced American diplomat who specialized in Soviet affairs. He issued the **long telegram** which declared that the only thing the Soviets respected was strength. The United States should not try to **appease** the Soviets. The U.S. should vigorously oppose all Soviet expansion with full economic and military force. This policy, known as **containment**, became America's foreign policy for the duration of the Cold War (46 years). The **Truman Doctrine** (1947) proclaimed that America would have to abandon its isolationist past and oppose communism everywhere it threatened to spread. Military aid was given to Greece and Turkey. Secretary of State **George Marshall**, came up with an economic package called the **Marshall Plan** (officially the European Recovery Program, or ERP) to economically rebuild Europe.

In 1948, the Soviets closed access to Berlin, which was located within the Soviet quadrant of occupied Germany, thus preventing American, English, and French shipments of supplies. The British and Americans flew in supplies in an effort known as the **Berlin Airlift**. In 1961, the **Berlin Wall** was built to keep East Germans from fleeing to the West.

China was also crippled by the war, and it had two sides fighting for control, the **communists**, under **Mao Zedong** and the **Nationalists** under **Chiang Kai-shek**. The United States supported the nationalists, but Chang was brutal to his people and lost the U.S. support. Eventually, China became communist under Chairman Mao. The Republican Party blamed the Democrats for the loss, claiming that they were "soft" on communism.

The fall of China and Eastern Europe to communism provoked a hysteria known as the **Red Scare**. It was the second such scare (the first was in 1919, after World War I). **Julius and Ethel Rosenberg** were convicted of spying for the Soviets and were executed. The **House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)** investigated Americans who were suspected communists. Senator **Joe McCarthy** claimed that commie spies had infiltrated the State Department and the US Army. He held hearings that recklessly accused people of being communist, and ruined many people's lives. President Eisenhower denounced the tactics of McCarthyism, but did not directly confront the situation. Newsman **Edward R. Murrow**, however, did.

In 1950, communist forces in **North Korea**, backed by communist China, invaded **South Korea** and was nearly victorious. The **United Nations**, led by the United States, assisted South Korea in fighting off North Korea. This was the first time that black and white soldiers fought together, as Harry Truman had **integrated** the armed forces in 1948. General Douglas MacArthur wanted to drop 10 - 20 nuclear bombs on China. President Truman said no way. MacArthur broke the chain of command and went around the President, trying to get Congress to pressure the President to authorize the use of nuclear bombs. Truman fired MacArthur for insubordination. MacArthur said, "Old soldiers never die. They just fade away." The nation threw him a ticker tape parade.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union developed their own atomic bomb. Both sides started building their stockpiles, and testing nuclear weapons. They developed even more powerful **hydrogen bombs**. People were terrified of a nuclear war. They dug **bomb shelters** and school children practiced **duck and cover drills**. The United States and its allies had formed **N.A.T.O. (North American Treaty Organization)** for protection. The Soviets formed the rival **Warsaw Pact**. The **National Security Agency** was established, and in 1950 issued **NSC-68**, calling for a quadrupling of the defense budget. President **Eisenhower** built the **Interstate Highway System**. The **Eisenhower Doctrine** allowed nations threatened by communist aggression to seek US assistance; the Middle East was the targeted region, but Guatemala and other countries were also affected by it. The Soviets launched **Sputnik** in 1957, and the US intensified math and science education. In his **Farewell Address**, Eisenhower warned of the undue influence of the **military-industrial complex**.