

World War II – The Home Front

Introduction

When France fell to Germany in 1940, the strong pacifist sentiment of the American public was somewhat shaken. Suddenly, Great Britain alone stood between Nazi Germany and the U.S. Once the United States was fully committed to the war in December of 1941, patriotism soared in American society. America's strong backing for the war was demonstrated in its citizens' willingness to carry out blackout drills and civil defense drills; to recycle metals, paper, and even cooking fats; to work longer hours but have fewer consumer goods to buy with their salaries. There were political changes as well, as the country began to shift to the political right.

Some Questions to Answer:

1. How did American involvement in WWII affect the political attitudes of liberals? Conservatives?
2. How did American involvement in WWII impact the American economy in the short term? What about lasting economic impacts of the war?
3. Compare and contrast the war's effect on poor Americans vs. rich Americans.
4. Compare the growth of the "imperial presidency" in the administrations of Teddy Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt. What factors contributed to the growth of executive authority in the two administrations?
5. What effects did American involvement in WWII have on rural life? Urban life?

An Overview of the War's Impact on American Society

1. The New Deal and World War II brought about a shift to the right
 - a. Politically
 - b. Psychologically
 - c. Economically
2. Three questions troubled Americans during the war & afterward:
 - a. Big government
 - b. Aspects of the economy
 - c. Infiltration of Communism

"Rosie the Riveter"

1. The wartime economy brought about full employment
2. achieved what the New Deal had been unable to
3. In 1940 there were still 8 million Americans unemployed
4. By 1941, unemployment was almost unheard of
5. actually labor shortages in some industries
6. This required women to enter the workforce in ever-increasing numbers
7. Women took up jobs in industry that had once been reserved for men
8. "Rosie the Riveter" became a popular American icon
9. By 1945, women composed 36% of the workforce

Sacrifice

1. Americans were encouraged to conserve and recycle materials such as
 - a. metal
 - b. paper
 - c. rubber
2. materials could then be reused in the war industry
3. Lots of everyday household trash had value:
 - a. kitchen fats
 - b. old metal shovels
 - c. empty metal lipstick tubes
4. War Bonds

- a. a source of:
 - i. monetary income
 - ii. moral support
 - b. used public stunts such as celebrity auctions
 - c. the government used bonds to sell the war, not the war to sell bonds
5. Clothing styles were influenced by the necessities of war
6. the War Production Board became the nation's premier fashion consultant
 - a. dictating styles for civilian clothing that would use fewer resources
 - b. allowing more cloth and metals to go to the war effort
 - c. menswear rid itself of vests, elbow patches on jackets, and cuffs on pants
 - d. Women's clothing became simplified, with shorter, narrower skirts
7. Americans cut back on other foodstuffs and consumer goods
8. Ration Cards for:
 - a. Gasoline
 - b. Coffee
 - c. Sugar
 - d. Meat
9. eventually led to frustration among the American public
10. For the first time in years, they had money to spend, but were unable to spend it
11. frustration mounted until the end of the war
12. When the war ended in 1945 and industries returned to consumer production, Americans went on a buying spree of unprecedented proportions

Social Solutions

1. Conservatives continued to attack Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal
2. many social problems solved by American involvement in World War II
3. America now enjoyed
 - a. full employment
 - b. higher overall standard of living
4. Labor unions became more powerful
5. membership grew from 10 million before the war to 15 million after the war
6. Pushed farm income to new heights
7. number of tenant farmers was reduced
8. Former farm workers were now urban factory workers
9. Proved the validity of Keynesian economics
10. big government spending in times of crisis was beneficial in the long run

The Nine Specific Effects of US Involvement in WWII

- I. Liberals and reformers gave priority to military spending over reform
 1. Many pieces of reform legislation were rolled back in wartime
 2. A longer working day was reestablished to boost industrial output
 3. The federal government made anti-trust legislation a very low priority
 4. child labor laws and women's labor regulations were ignored
 5. the number of high school dropouts increased significantly
 6. During the war, the teenage workforce grew
 - a. from 1 million to 3 million
 - b. about 1 million of these new workers were dropouts
 7. Internment of Japanese-Americans – February 1942
 - a. U.S. government forced the relocation of all Japanese-Americans
 - b. from the West Coast, which was viewed as a strategically vulnerable area
 - c. government established ten internment camps in Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming
 - d. held 100,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, many of them U.S. citizens
 - e. After reelection in 1944 Franklin D. Roosevelt canceled evacuation order t

- f. the camps were closed by 1945

II. Provided an excuse to abolish segments of the New Deal

1. Conservative politicians fought against these agencies when they were established
2. now FDR was focusing on winning a war instead of reforming society
3. Conservatives slashed funding for the CCC, WPA, and National Youth Administration (NYA)
4. programs designed to help those hired last even in favorable economic conditions
5. so their demise was especially hard on blacks, women, and the elderly

III. Rise in federal deficit

1. As military costs escalated, so did the deficit
2. At the same time, social expenditures plummeted
3. Senate liberals introduced legislation
 - a. to broaden the coverage of Social Security
 - b. a bill to provide comprehensive national health care
 - c. Both were pushed aside in favor of military expenditures

IV. Put the poor "back in their place"

1. With the elimination of many New Deal programs, poverty increased, even with rising wages for many Americans
2. 20 million Americans were on the border of subsistence and starvation
3. 25% of all employed Americans earned less than 64 cents an hour
4. while skilled workers often earned \$7 or \$8 an hour

V. Changes in composition of federal bureaucracy

1. The idealists of the "brain trust"
 - a. became disillusioned with Washington's lack of interest in social reform
 - b. left their posts in droves
2. This vacuum was quickly filled by business executives
 - a. had good managerial skills
 - b. had little interest in reform
3. The magazine Business Week reported cheerfully:
"The war has placed a premium on business talents rather than on 'brain-trusters' and theoreticians. Businessmen are moving up in the New Deal Administration and are replacing the New Dealers as they go."

VI. Increase in the reach and power of the federal government and the presidency

1. From 1940-1945, the number of civilian employees working for the federal government rose from 1 million to nearly 4 million
2. Concurrently, Washington's expenditures grew from \$9 billion to \$98.4 billion
3. The war also accelerated the growth of executive authority
4. Now, important decisions concerning both domestic and foreign policy were not made by Congress, but by the President and his advisors
5. Supreme Court refused to hear cases challenging increase in executive authority

VII. The "Military-Industrial Complex"

1. phrase itself didn't come into use until years later
2. the phenomenon of the "military-industrial complex" had its roots in WWII
3. A systematic relationship arose between big business and the military's expenditures on defense
4. During the war, average daily expenditure on military contracts was \$250 million
5. Inflated American industrial capacity
6. Small companies disappeared
7. two-thirds of government contracts went to the hundred largest corporations

VIII. Further solidification of the "Corporate State"

1. The growing strength of big labor and big agriculture was solidified

2. as well as the relationship between big business and big government
3. all three groups worked together to shore up the corporate state
4. The farm population declined 17% between 1940-1945
5. yet productivity increased, due to better weather, fertilizers, mechanization, and especially the consolidation of small farms into large agri-businesses.

IX. A more urban and technological society

1. The federal government expanded its role as a supporter of research
2. projects as varied as
 - a. perfecting the process of manufacturing artificial rubber
 - b. the Manhattan Project
3. The nation became more urbanized
4. as the six largest cities got two million new inhabitants
5. 15 million Americans moved from rural areas to the cities

The End of the Roosevelt Era

1. President Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945
2. less than a month before the German surrender
3. In 1945, America was profoundly different from what it had been four years prior
4. Because of World War II, America had changed in three significant ways:
 - a. Economy had recovered
 - i. America emerged from WWII with strong economy and *relatively* few casualties
 - ii. Other nations, both Allied and Axis, were devastated
 - iii. In USSR the victims of the Leningrad siege alone exceeded the combined total of British and American wartime deaths
 - b. America was the most powerful nation in world, if for no other reason than it alone possessed the atom bomb.
 - c. America was ready for a rest, just as it had turned inward after WWI
5. the nation suddenly found itself with a new leader: Harry S Truman
 - a. a virtual unknown
 - b. Truman had not been Roosevelt's vice president all along, but only since the 1944 campaign
 - c. Roosevelt had dumped his V.P., Henry Wallace
 - d. Wallace took positions on the far left
 - e. Truman had served on the U.S. Senate for 10 years
 - f. His main qualifications for the vice presidency seemed to be that he didn't take controversial stances and never angered anyone
6. Roosevelt and Truman were dissimilar president/vice president pair
7. FDR
 - a. was from one of the most prominent, aristocratic families in America
 - b. had been educated at Harvard University and Columbia Law School
8. Truman
 - a. came from a family of modest means
 - b. fought in World War I
 - c. held various odd jobs
 - d. got his law degree in night school
 - e. He had risen through the ranks of the Kansas City, MO political machine
 - f. became a senator in 1934
 - g. Followed the only president many Americans had ever known
 - h. Truman certainly had his work cut out for him
 - i. Initially, he made many political mistakes
 - j. but turned out to be one of the most decisive presidents ever
 - k. had a lot of spunk and courage