

## **Day 21 The Great Depression** {The Notes containing video links will be posted to our GoogleClassroom}

In the U.S. we have elections for our president every four years. President Hoover was NOT popular. People claimed that he did too little, too late in responding to the Stock Market Crash. The 1932 election brought **Franklin Delano Roosevelt, (FDR)**, into the White House. Yes, he was Teddy Roosevelt's cousin. He was an amazing man who, despite waking up one day with his legs paralyzed from Polio; he led the country through The Great Depression and World War Two.

**Major Features of the New Deal** As the presidential elections of 1932 approached, America was eager to elect a new president to replace Herbert Hoover. Many Americans felt that he had done too little to help the country during the Great Depression. As a result **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** was elected as the 32<sup>nd</sup> president of the United States. He immediately put into action his plan to end the Great Depression.

Roosevelt's plan was called the **New Deal** and it would use government programs to help the nation recover from the Great Depression. Built around the idea of relief, recovery, and reform, the New Deal had a number of major features. One of these features was **Social Security**. In 1935, Congress passed the Social Security Act. This act set up a federal system of retirement insurance to provide pensions for retired workers, disabled workers, and payments to spouses and children of retired workers, and survivor benefits to families of workers who died prematurely.

Another feature of the New Deal included **Federal work programs** designed to get Americans back to work. The Works Progress Administration, or WPA, was an organization that hired American workers to build schools, libraries, airports, and roads. The Tennessee Valley Authority, or TVA, was another program that put thousands of Americans to work building hydroelectric dams used to produce electricity for rural areas. **Environmental improvement programs** were another feature of Roosevelt's New Deal. One of these programs was the Civilian Conservation Corps, or CCC. It gave conservation jobs to unemployed youths. By the 1940s, state and national parks had been improved, and over 17 million trees had been planted.

Farmers also benefited from Roosevelt's New Deal. **Farm assistance programs** such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act, or AAA increased the price of farm products so that farmers could make a profit. It also paid farmers not to produce so much food. Food surpluses would only make farm prices continue to drop. The New Deal also increased **rights and protections for labor**. The government began to support the organization of labor unions to protect workers. In addition, the Fair Labor Standards Act enforced a national minimum wage of 25 cents per hour and a maximum workweek of 44 hours.

**The New Deal's Impact on Banking and Role of Government** The **banking industry** was also impacted by the New Deal. A federal agency was created to promote public confidence in the banking industry once again. This agency called the **Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, or FDIC**, was set up to provide government-backed insurance coverage for bank deposits. Roosevelt wanted to make sure that Americans never again lost their bank deposits or savings accounts. The New Deal also impacted the role of the federal government in the lives of the American people. Before Roosevelt's plan went into action, the government had adopted a "hands off" policy regarding the economy. Once in place, the federal government took on an increased responsibility for the social welfare of its citizens. It began to **regulate the stock market, reform the banking industry**, and bring Americans **relief through work programs and economic aid**.

*Some people liked the "New Deal" and some did not. FDR is given credit for keeping America going through some very difficult times. These programs gave many people hope to keep going on. This economic crisis was not just in the U.S.; it was world wide, and in some countries, much worse. Some of those countries turned to some pretty drastic ways to keep their country together. We remained a democracy. What did get us out of the Great Depression? World War Two...*

**DAY 22.** *As we often did: Lets start out with a song* **Tour The States**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_E2CNZIIIVlg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_E2CNZIIIVlg)

If you don't have access to the interweb, try to remember the song from class and hum along...

**Try and name the states on Seterra** <https://online.seterra.com/en>

**Challenge someone at home to see who can label the states fastest at 100% accuracy!**

**So**, the world was going through some pretty difficult times. Europe was trying to get back on its feet from World War One. They had spent most of their money and resources fighting. World War I took the lives of more than 9 million soldiers; 21 million more were wounded. Civilian casualties caused indirectly by the war numbered close to 10 million. The two nations most affected were Germany and France, each of which sent some 80 percent of their male populations between the ages of 15 and 49 into battle. – Wow! They were recovering with the help of America. When we crashed, they did too. People were angry, scared, and desperate. Some times people make bad decisions when they are in this type of situation – they follow people who they normally would not...

### **Europe: Setting the Stage for World War II**

America was not the only nation suffering through a depression in the 1930s. **Political instability and economic devastation in Europe** following World War I was widespread. Many countries struggled to rebuild and repay their war debts. How could the political and economic conditions in Europe following World War I lead the world once again to the brink of another war?

*Our favorite cartoon review of WWII:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FmadyxEcBM&t=1s>

In 1914 Europe was home to the world's leading financial and industrial centers. This changed after World War I. The widespread economic devastation and death toll **left much of Europe in ruins and unable to recover**. Many European countries owed huge war debts and most were not able to repay.

Even though European countries owed the United States over ten billion dollars in war debts, America became the leading supplier of money and industrial goods. With the crash of the stock market in 1929, America's role changed. Suddenly the U.S. stopped lending money and started demanding that war debts be repaid. **A worldwide depression had begun.**

**Germany** was especially hard hit. It owed huge war debts to most of the countries it fought during WWI. European countries were determined that Germany would pay for the damages it had caused to civilians and property during the war. These huge war debts led to higher inflation and massive unemployment in Germany. This led to popular unrest and resentments.

*A Good & Short Video of The Causes of WWII:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppr-zjxmdPY>

Other countries were also affected. **Japan and other Asian countries** began to run out of the resources they needed to make their economies grow. In addition, Japan's silk exporting market was destroyed and famine conditions spread across the country. **Italy** was also in turmoil. The Italian economy was shattered and strikes and protests were common. **Great Britain and France**, crippled by the war and war debts, had to rely on the U.S. to supply most of their food and manufactured products. **Russia**, too, felt the economic impacts as the United States stepped in to help feed millions of Russia's starving citizens.

**Day 23.** Usually we have a little U.S. geography time in the beginning of each lesson. We're reviewing WWII, so lets look at a good review of WWII using world maps. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCnEbQjaUvY>

**Fascism: Setting the Stage for World War II** After World War I, the conditions in some countries were so horrible that people began to look for a different type of government. They wanted a government that would rebuild their countries, restore their national pride, and deliver them from their troubles.

**New: Class made rap song:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfOL98CcpDM>

This need for a solution to political instability and economic devastation led to the rise of another far more serious threat: **fascism**. Fascism is a political philosophy, or belief, in which total power is given to a dictator and individual freedoms are denied. Fascism also promotes a strong sense of nationalism and, in many cases, racism is emphasized. In Europe and Asia, the rise of fascism threatened peace.

In **Germany, Adolph Hitler**, the leader of a political party called the National Socialist, or Nazis, rose to power. As he and his party grew in size and power, his mission became to convince the people of Germany that they had not been treated fairly after World War I. He also began to blame most of the country's problems on Germany's Jewish population. In 1933, the Nazi party took control of the German representative government and set up a fascist state with Hitler in charge.

In **Italy**, another fascist dictator by the name of **Benito Mussolini** came to power. After World War I, many Italians were angry. They felt that their country, which had fought on the side of the Major Allied Powers, should have benefited more from the Treaty of Versailles. As a result, they began to support Mussolini's mission to regain the power and prestige they felt Italy had lost. Advances in the Italian economy, an extensive public works program, and lower unemployment rates made Mussolini an even more popular figure.

In **Japan**, the country's War Minister, **Hideki Tojo**, was appointed as **prime minister** by **Emperor Hirohito**. Although Hirohito remained officially in charge of the nation, he had little authority as Tojo took command of the Japanese military and assumed the role of a dictator. Under Tojo's leadership, Japanese military leaders put together a plan to get the resources the country needed to increase trade and industry.

The countries of Germany, Italy, and Japan became known as the **Axis Powers**. Together, these countries and their dictators threatened the peace of Europe, Asia, and the world.

## Day 24

Interesting Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RW9mv1gsByQ>

### **America Enters World War II The Move from Neutrality to Involvement**

As the rest of the world rushed toward war, the United States was reluctant to become involved in another European conflict. Following World War I, the United States had refused to join the League of Nations and had adopted a policy of **isolationism. (Isolation = Quarantining)** Many Americans believed that the country should stay out of other countries' problems. The Great Depression strengthened this belief. Americans found themselves more worried about their next paycheck than some madmen half a world away.

As America closed its eyes, the German Army stormed across Europe conquering countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Norway, and France. Great Britain fought on but was increasingly threatened by the German advance. With the future of its Allies at stake, the United States began to offer **economic aid**. Roosevelt acted quickly to push the **Lend-Lease Act** through Congress. This legislation gave the president the authority to sell, trade, lease, or transfer \$50,000,000,000 worth of military equipment to help any country defend itself against the Axis Powers.

*If you have seen a film named "Dunkirk" it is about this time frame.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOrx1WqgmUU>



Unable to maintain a policy of isolationism, the **United States was drawn into direct involvement in the war.** In Asia, Japan became more and more aggressive with neighboring countries. Its growing industries depended on supplies of iron, rubber, and oil. As a result, Japanese military forces began occupying neighboring countries in Southeast Asia and the Pacific to meet this demand. In response, President Roosevelt called for an **international embargo to cut off all foreign oil supplies to Japan.** He hoped that this would cause Japan to retreat to its own soil.

The Japanese government had other ideas. On the morning of December 7, 1941, the Japanese naval and naval air forces launched a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at **Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.** The Japanese military dropped bombs that killed over 2,400 U.S. military men, destroyed over 140 planes, and sank or badly damaged eight battleships. Mr. Betts does a good job of giving some background in this short video (NOT a song): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIF\\_TQeccRw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIF_TQeccRw)

America could no longer maintain neutrality. Calling Pearl Harbor **"a day that shall live in infamy,"** President Roosevelt addressed Congress on December 8, 1941 to ask for a declaration of war against Japan. Within a few days, Germany responded by declaring war on the United States.

**The Allies** Upon entering the war, the United States became a member of the **Allies**, or Allied Powers. The Allies included the democratic nations of the **United States**, led by **President Franklin D. Roosevelt**, and at the end of the war, **President Harry S. Truman**; Great Britain, led by **Prime Minister Winston Churchill**; and Canada. The **Soviet Union**, led by **Joseph Stalin**, (We call it Russia now) joined the Allies after being invaded by Germany.

## Day 25

## **Major Events and Turning Points of World War II**

On September 1, 1939, **Germany invaded Poland**. With a combined force of 2,700 tanks, 1,300 planes, and 1.8 million soldiers, they successfully occupied the country and destroyed major roads and cities. This powerful and swift combination of air and ground forces was called a *Blitzkrieg* or lightning war. The Soviet Union, still an ally of Germany at the time, followed soon after. **It invaded eastern Poland and the Baltic nations** of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Great Britain and France reacted quickly. Having signed a pact with Poland to come to its defense, the two nations declared war on Germany. **World War II had officially begun.**

German military leaders soon came up with a plan to defeat the French Army. Moving through the dense forests, rolling hills, and rapid rivers of the Ardennes, an area that the French thought could not be traveled by tanks, the **German army invaded France and captured Paris**. It was a sudden and humiliating defeat that left Great Britain standing alone to face Hitler and his allies.

In the summer of 1940, **Germany turned its sights on Great Britain and bombed the city of London**. The **Battle of Britain** was an attempt by Germany to gain control of British airspace and destroy the Royal Air Force. They also hoped to destroy aircraft production and intimidate the nation into surrender or neutrality.

The Battle of Britain was the first major battle to be fought entirely in the air and the largest and longest bombing campaign ever attempted. Bold daylight bombing raids over the city of London resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians. In the long run, the Royal Air Force maintained its strength over the German Luftwaffe, and the resulting **British victory** marked the first failure of Germany's war machine. **Battle of Britain**

As the fighting in Europe continued, President Roosevelt began to prepare for the possibility that the U.S. would be drawn into the conflict. He doubled the size of the U.S. Navy, pushed for the first peacetime military draft in U.S. history, got authorization for the Lend-Lease Act, and gave Great Britain war supplies and old naval warships in return for military bases in Bermuda and the Caribbean.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese naval and naval air forces launched a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at **Pearl Harbor, Hawaii**. The next day, President Roosevelt addressed Congress to ask for a declaration of war against Japan. Within a few days, Germany declared war on the United States. Congress then responded by declaring war on Germany. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japan continued its assaults in the Pacific. The Japanese military attacked U.S. air bases in the Philippines and went on to conquer the island nation along with Guam, Burma, Hong Kong, and Singapore. U.S. military leaders realized that they had to stop the Japanese advance in the Pacific. One plan of attack, *island-hopping*, called for Allied forces to retake the islands one by one until they reached Tokyo. This strategy turned out to be costly. Thousands of American and Japanese troops lost their lives as the U.S. advanced toward Tokyo under this plan.

Another tactic focused on stopping the Japanese offensive. In the summer of 1942 a fierce battle took place near **Midway Island in the North Pacific**. Japan's navy hoped to draw out and destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet's aircraft carrier strike forces. These forces tried to protect the U.S. airbase at Midway from Japanese attack. Japan wanted to establish an air base at Midway after defeating the American forces. During the fight, the United States was able to sink four Japanese aircraft carriers. This **American victory over Japan in the Battle of Midway**

was the **turning point of the war** in the Pacific. It marked the beginning of the end of Japan's control of the Pacific Ocean.

On Europe's Eastern Front, Germany and its Axis allies **invaded** the Soviet Union in an attempt to gain control of the land and its oil reserves. The capture of the Soviet industrial city of Stalingrad was of particular interest to Hitler. The battle that followed has been called the largest single battle in human history. It raged for 199 days and resulted in approximately 2 million civilian and military casualties. The Axis powers lost about a quarter of their total manpower and never fully recovered from the defeat. The **Battle of Stalingrad** halted the German advance in World War II and **marked the turning point of the war in Eastern Europe**.

As the fighting in Europe raged on, the Allies planned a decisive invasion of the European continent. Six hundred warships, 4,000 landing craft, and 176,000 American and Allied soldiers crossed the English Channel and landed on the beaches of **Normandy, France** on June 6, 1944. **General Dwight D. Eisenhower**, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, led the **D-Day** invasion to begin the liberation of Western Europe. In a letter to his troops on the day of the invasion he stated, "The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!"

In May of 1945, American and Russian troops met along the Elbe River in Germany. As they advanced on the capital city of Berlin, word came that Hitler was dead. Because Germany was in ruins and defeat was inevitable, the Nazi dictator had taken his own life. Berlin fell to Allied Forces, and on May 8, 1945, **Germany surrendered**.

Unfortunately, "V-E" or "Victory in Europe" Day did not mark the end of World War II. Japan was still a threat to the Allies. On July 26, 1945, the Allies presented a surrender ultimatum to Japan. It was rejected. As a result, on August 6, 1945, a U.S. bomber, the *Enola Gay*, dropped an atomic bomb on the city of **Hiroshima**. More than 75,000 people were killed and another 100,000 were injured.

Very Good National Geographic short video: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com.au/search/?q=atomic+bomb>

Though stunned by the horrific destruction and loss of life, Japan still did not surrender. Three days later, the United States dropped another atomic bomb on the city of **Nagasaki**. **Japan surrendered** on August 10, 1945.

Even though the Axis Powers were successful in both Europe and the Pacific, the Allies persisted and defeated Germany and Japan. World War II, the bloodiest and most destructive war in human history, was finally over.

***WWII changed the world. There are so many amazing things that happened, both good and bad, that we could spend months learning/looking and discussing about them. I encourage you all to learn more about what went on and how it affected the world. WWII is the most covered (books, movies and yes, even video games) time frame in U.S. history.***

**Day 26 The Holocaust** : *The holocaust is a sensitive and complex part of history. I encourage you to treat the topic with respect and take some time to further learn about it through legitimate sources.*

This video is a bit slow, but contains good info: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EB4q\\_qgZGM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-EB4q_qgZGM)

One of the greatest evils of World War II took place in the concentration camps and death camps of Nazi Germany. The **Holocaust** was the persecution and murder of more than 12 million innocent men, women, and children during World War II.

As Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party rose to power, they began to spread their views about **Aryan supremacy**, or the superiority of the German race, to the German people. Hitler believed that "true Germans" had blond hair and blue eyes and were better than other Germans and other nationalities. He encouraged Germans to stay "pure" by not marrying Jews or people of other races or nationalities.

Hitler had particularly strong feelings about the Jewish people. He believed that the Jewish people were responsible for many of the evils in the world and Germany. He soon began to pass laws that took away the rights and freedoms of Jews. **This prejudice or cruel and unfair treatment of Jews is called anti-Semitism.** Hitler did not stop there. His evil plan also included a systematic attempt to rid Europe of all Jews.

The Nazis used many tactics to discriminate against the Jewish people in Germany. Across Germany, **Jews were threatened** and attacked and Jewish property was vandalized. A **boycott of Jewish businesses** was enacted along with increasingly harsh racist laws. With the passing of these laws, Jews could no longer hold government jobs, were stripped of their citizenship and the right to vote, could not attend German schools or universities, were forbidden to marry non-Jews, and were not allowed to attend social events like plays or movies.

Jews were also **segregated** from the rest of the German population and forced to live in crowded, filthy ghettos. Tens of thousands of Jews died from starvation and diseases like typhoid in the unsanitary conditions. Curfews were also established and Jews could not leave their neighborhoods without police permission. By 1940, Hitler began deporting Jews from the ghettos and Germany's occupied lands to **concentration camps**. Concentration camps were prisons in which "enemies of the German nation" were taken or *concentrated*. Millions of prisoners died in concentration camps due to mistreatment, disease, starvation and overwork, or they were executed because they were not able to work. Before the end of the war more than 100 such camps were set up. It was at another type of camp, known as a **death camp**, that the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" became evident. Death camps had only one purpose: the extermination of all European Jews. Over the next few years, as many as 12 million people were murdered in concentration camps and death camps. Not all of those murdered were Jews. Other groups like the handicapped, the ill, those who disagreed with Hitler's politics, and Gypsies were also held and murdered in these camps.

When Hitler and his forces realized that the end of the war was near, they attempted to cover up the atrocities, or horrible acts, that were occurring inside the concentration camps and death camps. Buildings, gas chambers, and crematories were destroyed. Documents were burned, bodies were disposed of, and able-bodied prisoners were evacuated to other sites. With the end of the war came the **liberation of Jews and others in concentration camps by the Allied forces**. General Eisenhower later remarked that if the American soldier did not know what he was fighting for, he would now know what he was fighting against.

Day 27

**Impact of World War II on the Home Front** American involvement in World War II brought an end to the Great Depression. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, factories and workers were desperately needed to produce goods to win the war. Suddenly, where there had been a shortage of jobs, there was now a shortage of workers.

Good Overview of WWII at Home: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aRVVae2i\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aRVVae2i_c)

As millions of men left for war, the U.S. experienced a severe shortage of labor in industries, business offices, and farming. As a result, many **American women** left their kitchens to take jobs in factories, offices, and fields. Thousands more **took jobs in defense plants** as electricians, welders, and riveters.

The U.S. Government even used a fictional character by the name of **Rosie the Riveter** to convince women to get involved in the war effort. Still others served in the armed forces as nurses, ambulance drivers, air traffic controllers, pilots, and clerks. Video on Women in WWII:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxDdVoiLHcg>

As the U.S. geared up for war production, many raw materials and basic supplies were scarce. New government rules were soon put into action to place limits on what and how much Americans could buy. Items such as coffee, butter, sugar, meat, tires, and gasoline could only be purchased with government coupons. Americans at home began supporting the war effort by **conserving and rationing national resources**. They were willing to sacrifice to make sure that the armed forces had what they needed to win the war.

African Americans also benefited from the labor shortages caused by World War II. The need for workers **temporarily broke down some racial barriers** at home as African Americans were hired to fill job openings in defense plants.

In preparation for war, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 which stated that there should be "no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin." During the war approximately one million African Americans served in the armed forces. Unfortunately, even on the front lines of the war, African Americans still experienced discrimination and segregation.

Another group of Americans also met with discrimination during World War II. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, **people of Japanese descent**, or ancestry, were seen as the enemy by the American public and the federal government. While many Japanese Americans served in the armed forces, others were forced to leave their homes, businesses, and farms. Executive Order 9066 required that all Japanese Americans be removed from the western coastal regions and put into guarded **internment camps** in the middle of the country. Internment Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hI4NoVWq87M>



**Day 28. Rebuilding Europe and Japan after WWII** Following World War II, much of Europe and Japan were in ruins. Fifty million people had lost their lives, millions were homeless, and seventy percent of the transportation and communication systems, industries, roads, and buildings had been destroyed. As a new world superpower, the United States felt that it was in its best interests to rebuild the war-torn areas in order to restore economic and political stability.

In contrast to [World War I](#), most of the victorious Allies of World War II did not ask for reparations, or payment from the defeated nations. The United States realized that the huge war reparations demanded after World War I had actually worsened the world-wide depression. Instead, the United States instituted the **Marshall Plan**, which was named after President Truman's secretary of state, General George C. Marshall. This plan provided billions of dollars in financial aid to help **rebuild European economies**.

The United States hoped that the Marshall Plan would also **prevent the spread of communism**.

Communism is a system of government in which all land, industries, and businesses are owned by the government and people have few rights. **Great Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMXjsVLOznc>

Although the United States and the Soviet Union had been allies during the war, this alliance changed. The U.S. grew concerned by the spread of Soviet influence and communism in post-war Europe. The U.S. strategy was to use the financial aid offered through the Marshall Plan to create strong economic allies who would not be tempted by communist propaganda. The United States did not want communism to spread as fascism had after World War I. After World War II, the world had two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. In addition, Europe was divided into two main areas of influence: those countries helped by the U.S. led Marshall Plan and those that were under the control of the Soviet Union.

Countries under Soviet control were located in Eastern and Central Europe. They included Albania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Baltic States.

"Free" or capitalist countries included Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey.

Germany was also divided. It was partitioned into **East and West Germany**. East Germany remained under the domination of the Soviet Union and communism. West Germany, however, was occupied by the United States, Great Britain, and France. It became a democratic nation governing itself within a few years.

The United States also took a leading role in the rebuilding of Japan. At the end of World War II, Japan's major cities, industries, agriculture, and transportation systems were severely damaged. Beginning in 1945, Japan was occupied by American forces, and the remains of its war machine were destroyed. A new constitution and a **democratic form of government** were adopted. It gradually resumed self-government and became a **strong ally of the United States**.

After World War II, the nations of the world once again wanted an organization that would help them safeguard world peace and **prevent future global wars**. This time the United States agreed and the result was the **United Nations, or U.N.** By joining the United Nations, the U.S. adopted a long-term foreign policy of internationalism.

**Day 29** During the war millions of men left their homes, women went to work and everything was focused on winning the war. There was rationing, where you couldn't buy many things that were needed for the war. Many companies changed from making consumer goods, like refrigerators, cars and nice clothes, to making military radios, tanks, and uniforms. Now that the war was over it took a little while for things to return to peacetime life. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oa2UgA-2FhE>

### **The American Economy after World War II**

World War II had a major impact on the U.S. economy. Before the war, the world had suffered from a devastating economic depression. Many feared that the U.S. economy would suffer again once the war came to an end in 1945. Instead the United States emerged as the richest, most powerful nation on the globe. Its citizens were prospering due to an expanding economy stimulated by wartime production. There were many reasons for the **rapid growth of the American economy following WWII.**

One reason for the rapid economic growth was the **production and demand for consumer goods.** As American soldiers returned home, they took jobs and started spending. Now that the limiting, or rationing of goods had ended, businesses began to quickly change from the production of war materials to the production of consumer goods to meet the new demands. There were some shortages of products, such as appliances and automobiles, before factories were able to switch over to peacetime production levels.

Another reason for the rapid economic growth after World War II was the **increase in Americans purchasing goods on credit.** New products, many developed from wartime inventions, filled the marketplace and tempted the American consumer. Private debt grew as more and more Americans bought goods on credit or installment plans. By the 1950s, the credit card made its first appearance and consumer spending continued to increase.

The rapid growth of the American economy was also due to the return of American servicemen from the war. As the soldiers returned home, the workforce shifted back to the men and many **women returned to their homes and family responsibilities.** However, as the economic prosperity continued, the next generation of **women re-entered the labor force in large numbers.**

As the job market expanded and industries grew and prospered, **labor unions** began to flex their muscles. Many unions merged and became more powerful. With their support, the American worker received new benefits and higher salaries. By the 1950s, the federal minimum wage had risen to \$1.00 an hour. Benefits like health care insurance, 40 hour work week and paid vacation time.