



SECOND EDITION

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# THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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A Brief  
American History  
in Two Volumes

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VOLUME 2, SINCE 1945

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WILLIAM A. LINK  
ARTHUR S. LINK

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A Brief American History  
in Two Volumes*

Second Edition

Volume 2 / Since 1945

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*William A. Link*

*University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

*Arthur S. Link*

*Princeton University*

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Since the appearance of the first edition of *The Twentieth Century: An American History* in 1983, Americans have witnessed one of the most turbulent and baffling decades in their history. The emergence of Ronald Reagan brought great hopes for renewal and reaffirmation of old values; "morning again in America," the campaign slogan of 1984, became a catch-phrase for the decade. Reagan, as much as any president of the twentieth century, embodied the spirit of his time: the perception that Americans were still world leaders in their ability to generate wealth and that their military and strategic position in the world was still paramount. Yet behind this glib veneer of progress lay another reality: Americans were experiencing substantial change, most of it related to trends of previous decades. It is clear also that much of this change was troubling: the erosion of the American manufacturing base, the prevailing public and private greed, the ballooning budget deficits, the transformation of the United States into a debtor nation, and the disastrous foreign policy adventures in Lebanon and Nicaragua.

However, the 1980s were not out of step with the pattern of this century—a pattern of turbulence and change. This edition seeks to tell the sometimes confusing, always fascinating, story of the United States from the opening of the twentieth century to the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War in 1991. The constant theme of change throughout this century emerged in the impact of the industrial revolution on American habits, attitudes, work, gender and race relations, recreation, and families; the changing nature of the American political

system; and the evolving role of the United States in a rapidly changing world. At home, Americans have confronted transforming economic forces; the role of women and the nature of the family have undergone sweeping alteration. Reform during the Progressive Era, the New Deal, and the Great Society has refashioned government, especially the federal government, but an equally important agent of change has been U.S. involvement in two world wars and wars in Korea and Vietnam. Abroad, the United States has asserted, not always with great clarity, its dominance in the world scene. In addition to its decisive intervention in both world wars, it played a major role in fashioning each postwar peace. Americans also faced revolutions and the eruption of nationalism across the globe in the twentieth century, and out of revolutions in Mexico, Russia, and Iran came their preeminent foreign-policy concerns.

Into the 1990s, Americans continued to live in a world of change, and it is our hope that this second edition of *The Twentieth Century* will help students understand the roots of their political, economic, cultural, and social environment. The story of the United States in the twentieth century is the unfolding of what Walter Lippmann called "the American century," the transformation of a large but isolated nation into the center of world commerce and diplomacy. As Americans enter the last decade of this century, they have new evidence of the relevance of their nation to world history, yet they also face new and disturbing challenges on the horizon at home and abroad.

A number of people have been instrumental in the writing of this book. Family members, including Susannah J. Link and Margaret D. Link, have provided both patience and advice. Percy, Maggie, and Josie shared their father's time with the revision. The book drew its original inspiration from the late Harlan Davidson, who suggested the collaboration and then provided unflagging support. Angela Davidson and Andrew Davidson have been encouraging throughout the publication process of both editions. Maureen Hewitt urged this second edition and continues to exemplify both good editing and integrity, and we thank her for her support and friendship.

William A. Link  
Arthur S. Link

Greensboro, N.C.  
Princeton, N.J.  
July 1991

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# CHAPTER 11

## THE UNITED STATES IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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### 1. AMERICAN INTERVENTION

#### **Rising Japanese-American Tensions**

In view of America's growing commitment to Great Britain by late 1941, it probably remained only a question of *when*, not of *whether*, full-scale fighting would break out with Germany. As events turned out, the United States was plunged into active belligerency, not by any incident in the North Atlantic, but by the action of Japan.

Even though the Japanese continued their aggression against China and occupied northern Indochina after the fall of France in 1940, the United States Government followed a cautious policy toward Tokyo out of fear that too much pressure might cause the Japanese to attack Siberia or the Dutch East Indies. Roosevelt, however, issued a sharp warning on July 26, 1939, by renouncing the Japanese-American Commercial Treaty of 1911. According to the terms of that treaty, the United States Government could now limit or halt entirely trade between the two countries within six months and thus block Japan's access to American scrap iron, oil, and other war materials.

The attitude of leaders in Washington hardened rapidly during the autumn of 1940 in the wake of what seemed to be new signs of hostility from Tokyo. In September, the Japanese, German, and Italian governments concluded the Triple, or Axis, Alliance, which was apparently directed at the United States. The Japanese government also made it clear that it intended to establish what it called a Greater East

Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, or, in essence, Japanese dominance over the entire Far East. Certain powerful Japanese leaders specified that they would pursue their plans in spite of the risk of war with the United States. As Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka told the Japanese parliament on January 26, 1941: "There is nothing left but to face America. . . . Japan must demand America's reconsideration of her attitude, and if she does not listen, there is slim hope for friendly relations between Japan and the United States."

Japanese military leaders and the more militaristic of the Japanese political leaders hoped to take advantage of German victories in Europe and seize the relatively unprotected French, British, and Dutch possessions in Asia. Yet, they also wanted a successful end to their war with China, which had caused a terrible drain on their manpower and resources, and peace with the United States.

The Japanese first occupied bases in southern French Indochina to seal off supply lines to China and provide bases for possible future expansion southward. Roosevelt and Hull, who interpreted this action as the opening move in a campaign of conquest, responded by freezing Japanese assets in the United States in July 1941; they also clamped an embargo on the export to Japan of oil, steel, aviation gasoline, and other materials. The British and Dutch followed suit immediately.

Authorities in Tokyo were now in a desperate dilemma. Half their supplies of oil, iron, and steel came from the United States. Without these supplies, it would be impossible to maintain the Japanese economy—or war machine. Some way had to be found to resume normal trade with the United States or else to find vital raw materials elsewhere. Since all but the most extreme military leaders in Tokyo continued to oppose war with the giant of the West, Japanese diplomats turned to Washington in the hope of finding some compromise arrangement.

Japanese-American negotiations had started in the early months of 1941. After an interruption caused by the embargo, they were resumed in the summer and dragged on into the autumn. The Japanese offered many concessions. They promised to make no move southward and not to attack the Soviet Union. They declared also that they would not feel bound by the Triple Alliance to go to war against the United States if the latter became involved in hostilities with Germany. The more the Japanese conceded, the harder Secretary Hull turned the vise in the mistaken belief that the Japanese had to cave in and ultimately would do so. In the final analysis, the one sticking point was China. The Japanese demanded that the United States stop all aid to Chiang Kai-shek. Hull not only refused to abandon the Chinese or to make any compromising concessions which would have postponed if not avoided war; he also insisted that the Japanese withdraw from China at once. The Japanese were faced with the alternative of either enormous blows to their pride and their new empire, on the one hand, or war, on the other hand. They reluctantly chose the latter course. The Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, which removed a potential threat to the Japanese northern flank, made their choice easier.

### **The Attack on Pearl Harbor**

On the morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941, three waves of bombers from

Japanese aircraft carriers suddenly struck the great American naval and air bases at Pearl Harbor and elsewhere in the Hawaiian Islands. Their rain of destruction completely surprised all American leaders, despite warnings that a Japanese attack somewhere might be imminent. An American code analyst had broken the Japanese top-priority diplomatic code, and Americans had also deciphered the Japanese intelligence code. United States agents had furthermore monitored the movements of a huge Japanese fleet moving through the South China Sea; other evidence from intelligence sources suggested the location of the attack and its date. Nonetheless, American leaders, who simply refused to believe that a Japanese carrier flotilla could reach Pearl Harbor, neglected to send full intelligence information, or to suggest its urgency, to naval and army commanders in Hawaii.

Altogether, the Japanese sank or disabled nineteen ships, including eight battleships; in addition, they destroyed 120 planes on the ground and killed more than 2,300 men. Their success exceeded the most optimistic Japanese hopes. Their task force even escaped without detection by American planes or ships. The Japanese also blasted naval and air bases in Guam, Midway, British Hong Kong, and the Malay Peninsula. The Japanese also almost completely annihilated the American air force in the Philippines when it was caught on the ground near Manila, even though military leaders in that area knew of the earlier attack on Pearl Harbor.

This negligence on the part of American leadership appears to defy rational explanation. Some historians have assigned the blame of the Pearl Harbor fiasco to Roosevelt, who, they claim, had prior knowledge of the Japanese attack and yet allowed it to occur as a way to galvanize public opinion in support of entering the war. This Machiavellian view of Roosevelt, however, questions not only his concern for human life but also his intelligence. A more plausible explanation is simply that American political and military leaders grossly underestimated the military capabilities of the Japanese. Whatever its cause, Pearl Harbor was the most devastating military disaster that the United States had ever suffered.

Roosevelt appeared before Congress on December 8, 1941, to ask for a declaration of war against Japan. It was voted with but one dissenting voice (Jeannette Rankin of Montana, who had also voted against the war resolution in 1917) in the House and unanimously in the Senate. Three days later, Germany and Italy somewhat reluctantly honored their agreement with Japan and declared war on the United States on December 11. The American government replied in kind on the same day.

General George C. Marshall served as Army Chief of Staff from 1939 to the end of the war. Admiral Ernest J. King was named commander in chief of the fleet in December 1941 and, a few months later, was also appointed Chief of Naval Operations. Later these leaders received the new five-star ranks of General of the Army and Admiral of the Fleet.

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## 2. THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

### First Phases

Not since the Civil War had the American people faced such stupendous

military tasks as in 1941. In the Second World War, they were called upon to fight two major wars on two far-flung fronts at the same time. The government rounded up the small number of open Nazi sympathizers and later tried them, unsuccessfully, for sedition. At Roosevelt's instructions, the army apprehended all inhabitants of Japanese ancestry, some 100,000 persons, citizens and noncitizens alike, on the West Coast, although no evidence existed (or does now) to show that they were anything but loyal to the United States. Nevertheless, the army transferred them to makeshift camps in the interior. The evidence is unmistakable that Caucasian Californians took advantage of the panic after Pearl Harbor to persuade federal authorities to "settle" the Japanese-American "problem" once and for all. Thus California authorities, including Attorney General Earl Warren, were primarily responsible for one of the single greatest violations of civil liberty in American history. Thousands of Californians of Japanese ancestry lost their homes, farms, and other businesses, and most of their possessions. In what can best be described as "concentration camps," many persons lost their health and some their lives. Yet, thousands of young men in the camps volunteered to fight for the United States in the war against Japan as well as against Germany.

### **Domestic Mobilization**

Young men rushed to recruiting stations after Pearl Harbor, but the main task of raising an army and navy fell on the Selective Service authorities. In all, they registered some 31,000,000 men, of whom 10,000,000 were inducted into service. A total of more than 15,000,000 men and women (including volunteers) served before the end of the war. There were more than 10,000,000 men and women in the army, 3,884,000 in the navy, nearly 600,000 in the marines, and 242,000 in the Coast Guard. It was by far the largest mobilization of manpower in American history, but it was not exceptional compared to the mobilization of 22,000,000 in the Soviet Union, 17,000,000 in Germany, and 12,000,000 in Great Britain, the dominions, and the British Empire.

American casualties numbered 253,573 dead and 65,834 missing, 651,042 wounded, and 114,205 prisoners. However, these figures were remarkably low considering the numbers involved and the length and ferocity of the fighting. These low casualties were largely the result of recent medical advances such as penicillin and the use of blood for transfusions. Technology also provided new and superior medical equipment.

Industrial mobilization went through several stages, just as it had done during the First World War. In January 1942, with the creation of the War Production Board, Roosevelt first tried to institute effective controls. The failure of the War Production Board to gain control of raw materials led Roosevelt, in October 1942, to establish the Office of Economic Stabilization, with former Supreme Court Justice James F. Byrnes at its head. He successfully imposed priorities that assured an uninterrupted flow of raw materials to war industries. In May 1943, Roosevelt made Byrnes head of the new Office of

War Mobilization, with near dictatorial authority over the entire economy.

Next in importance was the task of preventing runaway inflation, which could have seriously impeded the entire war effort. Roosevelt established an Office of Price Administration (OPA) in April 1941, but it lacked authority to prevent price increases, and during the next year the cost of living rose at the rate of 2 per cent a month. But the OPA received statutory authority from the Emergency Price Control and Anti-Inflation acts of 1942, and the OPA and Office of Economic Stabilization thereafter fought successfully to hold the line in the face of pressures for increases in wages and farm prices. The cost of living increased less than 1.5 per cent between the spring of 1943 and the summer of 1945, despite the severe scarcity of consumer goods (no cars were made during the period, for example) and the huge increase in the number of Americans employed and in their incomes. The government's success in stabilizing prices was a remarkable achievement, which could have been accomplished only with wide cooperation from the American civilian population.

The lifting of production controls was all that was necessary to achieve an abundant supply of food, in spite of a decline in the number of agricultural workers during the war. The index of farm production rose from 108 in 1940 to 123 in 1945, and the increases in food crops were even more striking. There was never any threat of food shortages, and the rationing of scarce items such as sugar and meat to the public assured a plentiful supply of these items to the armed forces.

The growing demands of war industries pushed domestic civilian employment up from 46,500,000 in 1940 to 53,000,000 in 1945, despite the induction of millions of men into the fighting services. The government had no such difficulty manning new shipyards and assembly lines during the Second World War as it had experienced during the First, because the United States went to war in 1941 with about 7,000,000 unemployed workers. They were quickly trained and absorbed into the labor force and provided the core of the new labor required. Women who might otherwise have remained at home constituted another huge pool of workers which was tapped to fill wartime needs. In April 1942, Roosevelt created a War Manpower Commission, which helped to direct the flow of labor into war industries. The United States never suffered a serious shortage of workers; thus the country was spared the necessity of having to institute severe manpower controls, such as the conscription of labor.

The main task in the mobilization of labor was to see that strikes did not slow down the war economy. The War Labor Board, created by Roosevelt in January 1942, went to work at once to establish guidelines for wages, hours, and collective bargaining. Employers, workers, and unions cooperated with an unprecedented show of unity. Under the protection of the War Labor Board, union membership grew to nearly 15,000,000 by 1945. The weekly earnings of persons engaged in manufacturing increased by 70 per cent from 1941 to 1945, while the cost of living rose by 23 per cent (mostly before the Anti-Inflation Act of 1942). There were numerous irritating work stoppages, but most were short-lived and caused a loss of only one ninth of 1 per cent of total working time. Even the British, with much more rigorous controls, did not exceed this record.

## **Blacks and the War**

The Second World War was a dividing line in the history of race relations in the United States. Open segregation still prevailed throughout the South, to be sure, but blacks acquired a new sense of participation in national affairs from the knowledge that 1,000,000 of their number were serving in the armed forces.

American blacks also benefited more than any other single group in the country from the expanded opportunities which came with wartime full employment. More than 1,000,000 black men and women left the South and found jobs in war industries in the North, Middle West, and the Pacific Coast area.

But participation in the war effort also demonstrated the problems facing blacks. Although many blacks served their country, they were forced to fight in Jim Crow armed services. Other blacks remembered that the reward for patriotism in the First World War was lynchings and mob beatings and a series of terrible race riots (see pp. 99–100).

The demands for employment opportunities for blacks and the dire need for labor combined to cause Roosevelt, on June 25, 1941, to issue Executive Order 8802 which forbade discrimination in defense hiring on account of color. Roosevelt's order was a response to the threat of a gigantic march by blacks on Washington, to be led by A. Philip Randolph, head of the sleeping-car porters' union, to press for equal opportunity in federal hiring. At the same time, Roosevelt established the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to investigate charges of racial discrimination in industry. This first federal agency dedicated to the protection of the rights of blacks since the Freedmen's Bureau worked ineffectively until 1943; then, Roosevelt gave the FEPC real authority to enforce Executive Order 8802. By the beginning of 1945, nearly 2,000,000 blacks were at work in war plants throughout the country. In some areas, the influx of black workers led to mob violence, as in Detroit, where a "riot" in June 1943 left twenty-three blacks and nine whites dead, and many more injured.

## **The War Economy**

Most American businessmen and economists thought that Roosevelt was dreaming when he talked in 1940 and 1941 about producing 100,000 planes and 50,000 tanks a year. As it turned out, Roosevelt overestimated only moderately the productive potential of the American economy once it received stimulus from unlimited governmental credit, wartime demand, and effective organization. American factories turned out a total of 275,000 military aircraft, 75,000 tanks, and 650,000 pieces of artillery. American shipyards built 55,239,000 tons of merchant shipping. A brand new synthetic rubber industry, built during 1942 and 1943, produced 762,000 tons in 1944 and 820,000 tons in 1945. The total value of all goods and services in the United States increased about 75 per cent between 1939 and 1945—a tremendous achievement—while war-related goods never exceeded one third of America's industrial production.

Furthermore, American scientists at least kept pace with Germany's research and development—despite the latter's head start—of decisive military weapons. In cooperation with the British, American scientists made

available effective radar which detected enemy ships, submarines, and planes, and accurately directed shells against them; proximity fuses, which detonate explosives just before impact; and rockets, which enormously increased the firepower of planes, ships, and tanks (although Americans lagged behind German research in this area). Fortunately, the Germans did not develop an atomic bomb, or the war might have had an entirely different conclusion.

### **The War: Costs and Consequences**

Federal expenditures, virtually all of which went for the war effort, totaled a little more than \$321 billion from 1941 to 1945. This sum was twice as large as all federal expenditures between 1789 and 1941, and ten times as large as expenditures during the First World War.

The government met 59 per cent of these costs by borrowing. As a result, the gross national debt increased from \$49 billion in 1941 to \$259 billion at the end of hostilities. The American people, already faced with greatly increased taxes in a bill passed in September 1941, accepted with little grumbling a new Revenue Act in October 1942 which more than doubled the tax burden. Tax receipts between 1941 and 1945 totaled about \$131 billion and paid for 41 per cent of the costs of the war. It was the highest percentage of expenditures raised by taxes during any major war in American history. Moreover, this draining off of private income helped significantly to combat price inflation and to prevent handing to future generations a larger burden of debt.

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## **3. A WAR ON TWO FRONTS**

### **North Africa**

The first massive operation in which American forces played a leading role was the campaign to drive the Italians and Germans from North Africa and to break their stranglehold on the Mediterranean supply line. The Italians had bogged down in their drive for the Suez Canal and the oil fields of Arabia. Hitler's Afrika Korps, commanded by the dashing "Desert Fox," General (later Field Marshal) Erwin Rommel, poured into North Africa and fought the British for possession of Egypt. American ships, forced to take the long route around southern Africa, arrived with tanks at Alexandria just in time to help stop the Nazis. Then, on October 23, 1942, General Sir Bernard Montgomery and his British Eighth Army launched a counteroffensive. Montgomery defeated Rommel at El Alamein and then drove the Italians and Germans 2,000 miles westward to the borders of Tunisia. At this point, the Americans struck at the enemy's rear through Morocco and Algeria.

On November 8, 1942, a huge Anglo-American force, in 500 transports convoyed by 350 warships, landed on the northwestern coast of Africa. The campaign was directed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, new American commander in the European theater of operations. It had been planned by Roosevelt and Churchill to aid the Russians by diverting German troops and equipment from their crucial campaign against Stalingrad.