**Chapter 24. The World at War, 1937-1945**

[[**BIG IDEA:** How did World War II transform the United States domestically and change its relationship with the world?]]

No single event had a more transformative impact on the globe than World War II. The scale of the fighting and, sadly, the horrendous loss of life mark the war as one of the most important events in all of modern human history. Fighting raged on six continents and on every ocean, empires clashed for control of vast portions of Europe and Asia, and new forms of technology, including the atomic bomb, gave armies more destructive capacity than ever before. Estimates vary, but historians believe that somewhere between 60 and 75 million people lost their lives in this terrible war.

Unique among major industrial nations, the United States experienced no fighting on its soil. Yet the war irreversibly altered American society and reshaped relations between the United States and the rest of the world. Keep in mind that prior to the start of the war in 1939, the United States had a very small standing army, only a few hundred thousand men in uniform. Even as Germany and Japan extended their dominion over ever larger parts of Europe, Asia and the Pacific, Americans were reluctant to join the fight.

But when the United States finally entered the war after the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, virtually the entire society was mobilized. More than 16 million men and women served in the military, and millions more took war jobs. The American economy converted to a war footing, as major corporations such a General Motors, General Electric, Boeing, and Dow Chemical, among hundreds of others, began producing tanks, trucks, planes, and artillery, rather than cars, refrigerators, and other consumer products. Millions of Americans migrated during the war: to cities, to the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, from rural areas to urban ones, from South to North and West. The country was changed forever.

And as the United States joined the Allies, Americans moved deeper into engagement with world affairs than ever in their history – an engagement that would become a seemingly permanent feature of the postwar world.