Chapter 26: AMERICAN PEOPLE DURING WARTIME

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CHAPTER 26: Objectives

- We will examine the economy of the United States during World War II and the government’s relationship with organized labor.
- We will examine the science and technology developed by the U.S. during the war.
- We will examine the treatment of minorities in the U.S. during the war.
- We will examine the domestic life and popular culture of domestic life during the war.
Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Joel 2:15-16.
Prosperity:

- World War II had its most profound impact on American domestic life by at last ending the Great Depression.
- The great war time expansion put an end to America’s economic misery.
- The most important agent of the new prosperity was federal spending, which after 1939 was pumping more money into the economy each year than all the New Deal relief agencies combined had done.
Prosperity:

- In 1939, the federal budget had been $9 billion, the highest level it had ever reached in peacetime; by 1945 it risen to $100 billion, rose almost ten-fold.
The War and The West:

- The impact of government spending was perhaps most dramatic in the West, which had long relied on federal largesse more than other regions.

- The West Coast, naturally, became the launching point for most of the naval war against Japan; and the government created large manufacturing facilities in California and elsewhere to serve the needs of its military.
The War and The West:

- By the end of the War the economy of the Pacific coast and to a lesser extent, other areas of the West had been transformed.
- The Pacific Coast has become the center of the growing American aircraft industry.
The War and The West:

- New yards in Southern California, Washington State, and elsewhere made the West a center of the shipbuilding industry.
- Los Angeles, formerly a medium-sized city notably chiefly for its film industry now became a major industrial center as well.
The War and The West:

- Once a region without adequate facilities to support substantial economic growth, the West now stood poised to become the fastest-growing region in the nation after the war.
Labor and the War:

- Instead of the prolonged and debilitating unemployment that had been the most troubling feature of the Depression economy, the war created a serious labor shortage.

- The armed forces took more than 15 million men and women out of civilian workforce at the same time that the demand for labor was rising rapidly.
Labor and the War:

- Another was the no-strike pledge by which unions agreed not to stop production in wartime.

- In return, the government provided labor with a maintenance-of-membership agreement.

- Which insisted that the thousands of new workers pouring into unionized defense plants would be automatically enrolled in the Unions.
Labor and the War:

- The agreement ensured the continued health of the union organizations, but in return, workers had to give up the right to demand major economic gains during the war.

- Despite the non-strike pledge, there were nearly 15,000 work stoppages during the war, mostly wildcat strikes (strikes unauthorized by the Union leadership).
Labor and the War:

- When the United Mine Workers defied the government by striking in May 1943, Congress reacted by passing, over Roosevelt’s veto, the Smith-Connally Act (or the War Labor Disputes Act),
- This required unions to wait thirty days before striking and empowered the president to seize a struck war plant.
- In the meantime public animosity toward labor rose rapidly and many states passed laws to limit union power.
Stabilizing the Boom:

- Inflation was a much less serious problem during World War II than it had been during World War I.
- The Revenue Act of 1942 established a 94 percent rate for the highest brackets and for the first time, imposed taxes on the lowest-income families as well.
- To simplify collection, Congress enacted a withholding system of payroll deductions in 1943.
- Income taxes were radically increased to help address federal spending because of the war effort.
Mobilizing Production:

- The War Production Board (WPB) under the direction of former Sears Roebuck executive Donald Nelson.
- In theory, the WPB was to be a superagency with broad powers over the economy.
Mobilizing Production:

- In fact, it was never much authority as the WWI equivalent.
- WPB was never able to win control over military purchases; the army and navy often circumvented the board entirely in negotiating contracts with producers.
Mobilizing Production:

- It was never able to satisfy the complaints of small businesses who charged that most contracts were going to large corporations.
- Gradually power was transferred to the White House in the Office of War Mobilization.
- Despite the administrative problems, the war economy managed almost all the nation’s critical war needs with new factory complexes springing up in the space of few months, many of them funded by the federal government’s Defense Plant Corporations.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- World War II was a watershed for technological and scientific innovation.
- That was partly because the American government poured substantial funds into research and development beginning in 1940.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- In that year, the government created the National Defense Research Committee, headed by MIT scientist Vannevar Bush, who had been a pioneer in the early development of the computer.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- At first, all the technological advantages seemed to lie with the Germans and Japanese.
- Germany had great advances in armor and in their U Boat Submarines and the Japanese with their fighter airplanes.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- The British and U.S. had the advantage of mass production producing ships, tanks, and airplanes and other armaments in much greater numbers than the Germans and Japanese could produce.
- By late 1942, allied weaponry was at least as advance as the enemy.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- American and British physicists made rapid advances in improving radar and sonar technology.
- Taking advantage of advances in radio technology in the 1920s and beyond which helped Allied naval forces decimate German U-boats in 1943 and effectively end their effectiveness in the naval war.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- Important was the creation of the Centimetric Radar in 1940.
- This radar used narrow beams of short wave length that made radar more efficient and effective than ever before.
- The British navy discovered in April 1941, when it detected a surfaced submarine ten miles away at night and on occasion, spotted a periscope at three-quarters of a mile range.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- These innovations put the Allies far in advance of Germany and Japan in radar technology.
- The Allies also learned how to detect and disable German naval mines;
- When the Germans tried to counter this progress by introducing “acoustic” mine which detonated when a ship came near it, not necessarily just on contact;
- The Allies developed acoustical countermeasures of their own, which transmitted sounds through the water to detonate mines before ships came near them.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- Germany made substantial advances in the development of rocket technology in the early years of the war, and it managed to launch some rocket-propelled bombs across the English Channel.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- The allies developed the Gee Navigation System that gave the Allies a decisive advantage in the air war to use bombers to bombard the enemy.
- The Gee Navigation System was also valuable to the navy.
- This system used electronic pulses to help pilots plot their exact location, something that in the past only a highly skilled navigator could do, and then only in good weather.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- This was utilized in March 1942 when eighty allied bombers fitted with the Gee System staged a devastatingly effective bombing raid on German industrial and military installations, especially for night bombing.

- The area in which the Allies had perhaps the greatest advantage in technology was the gathering of intelligence, much of it through Britain’s top-secret Ultra project.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- Some of the advantage the Allies enjoyed came from the successful efforts to capture or steal German and Japanese intelligence devices.

- More important, however, were the efforts of cryptologists to puzzle out the enemy’s systems, and advances in computer technology that helped the Allies decipher coded messages sent by the Japanese and Germans.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- Much of Germany’s coded communication made use of the so-called Enigma machine which was effective because it constantly changed the coding system it used.
- In the first months of the war, Polish intelligence had developed an electro-mechanical computer, which it called the “Bombe,” that could deciphered some Enigma messages.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- After the fall of Poland, British scientist led by the brilliant computer pioneer Alan Turing, took the Bombe which was too slow to keep up with the increasingly frequent changes of coding the Germans were using and greatly improved on it.
- On April 15, 1940, the new, improved, high-speed Bombe broke the coding of a series of German messages within hours (not days as had previously been the case).
Wartime Science and Technology:

- Few weeks later, it began decrypting German messages at the rate of 1,000 a day providing British and later the Americans with a constant flow of information about enemy operations unknown to the Germans.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- Later in the War, British scientists working for the intelligence services building the first real programmable, digital computer—the Colossus II, which became operational less than a week before the beginning of the Normandy invasion.

- It was able to decipher an enormous number of intercepted German messages almost instantly.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- The United States had some important intelligence breakthroughs, including in 1941, with the successful American Magic operation (the counterpart to the British Ultra).

- In breaking a Japanese coding system not unlike the German Enigma, a mechanical device known to the Allies as Purple.
Wartime Science and Technology:

- The result was that Americans had access to intercepted information that if properly interpreted could have alerted them to the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor.
- Because such an attack was seen as unrealistic to most American officials prior to the attack, those who received the information failed to understand or disseminate it in time.
African Americans and the War:

- During World War I, many African Americans had eagerly seized the chance to serve in the armed forces, believing that their patriotic efforts would win them an enhanced position in postwar society.
- They were disappointed.
African Americans and the War:

- As World War II approached, African Americans sought to improve their situation.
- In the summer of 1941, Civil Rights labor leader A. Philip Randolph insisted that the government require companies receiving defense contracts to integrate their work forces.
- To mobilize support for the demand, Randolph planned a massive march on Washington which he promised would bring 100,000 demonstrators to the capital.
African Americans and the War:

- Roosevelt afraid of potential violence and a political embarrassment persuaded Randolph to cancel the march in return for a promise to establish a Fair Employment Practices Commission to investigate discrimination in war industries.
- FEPC’s enforcement powers, and effectiveness were limited, but its creation was a rare symbolic victory for African Americans.
African Americans and the War:

- Demand for labor in war plants greatly increased, the migration of blacks from the rural areas of the South into industrial cities.

- A migration that continued for more than a decade after the war brought many more African Americans into northern cities than the Great Migration of 1914-1919.
African Americans and the War:

- Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) mobilized mass popular resistance organizing sit-ins and demonstrations in segregated theaters and restaurants.
- They won a much publicized victory by forcing a Washington, D.C. restaurant to agree to serve African Americans.
- CORE's defiant spirit set the stage for the Civil Rights movement.
African Americans and the War:

- Pressure for change was also growing within the military.
- At first, the armed forces maintained their traditional practice of limiting blacks to the most menial assignments, keeping them in segregated training camps and units, and barring them entirely from the Marine Crops and the Army Air Force.
African Americans and the War:

- Gradually military leaders were forced to make adjustments in part because of public and political pressures but also because they recognized that these forms of segregation were wasting man power.
African Americans and the War:

- By the end of the war, the number of Black servicemen increased sevenfold to 700,000;
- Some training camps were being at least partially integrated;
- African Americans were beginning to serve on ships with white sailors and more black units were being sent into combat.
- But tensions remained.
Native Americans and the War:

- Approximately 25,000 Native Americans performed Military Service during World War II.
- Many of them served in combat (including Ira Hayes one of the flag bearers of Iwo Jima).
- Others worked as “code-talkers” working in military communications and speaking their own languages (which enemy forces would be unlikely to understand over the radio and the telephone).
Native Americans and the War:

- The war time emphasis on national unity undermined support for the revitalization of tribal autonomy that the Indian reorganization Act of 1934 had launched.

- New pressures emerged to eliminate the reservation system and require the tribes to assimilate into white society—pressures so severe that John Collier, the director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs who had done so much to promote the reinvigoration of reservations, resigned in 1945.
Mexican American War Workers:

- Large number of Mexican workers entered the United States during the war in response to labor shortages.
- The American and Mexican governments agreed in 1942 to a program by which braceros (contract laborers) would be admitted to the United States for a limited time to work at specific jobs, and American employers in some parts of the Southwest began actively recruiting Hispanic workers.
Mexican American War Workers:

- Mexicans formed the second largest group of migrants (After African Americans) to the cities.
- The sudden expansion of Mexican American neighborhoods created tensions and occasionally conflict in some American cities.
- Some white residents of Los Angeles became alarmed at the activities of Mexican American teenagers, many of whom were joining street gangs.
- They wore zoot suits, a style borrowed from Harlem that whites saw as outrageous.
Mexican American War Workers:

- In June, 1943, animosity toward the Zoot-Suiters produced a four day riot in Los Angeles.
- White sailors stationed at a base in Long Beach invaded Mexican American communities and attacked Zoot-Suiters.
- City Police did little to stop the sailors who grabbed Hispanic teenagers, tore off and burned their clothes, and beat them.
Mexican American War Workers:

- But when Hispanics tried to fight back, the police moved in and arrested them.
- In the aftermath of the “Zoot-Suit Riots,” Los Angeles passed a law prohibiting the wearing of Zoot Suits.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- World War I produced widespread hatred, vindictiveness, and hysteria in America, as well as widespread and flagrant violations of civil liberties.
- World War II did not produce a comparable era of repression.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- There was little hostility toward German or Italian Americans.
- Instead they seemed on the whole to share the view of their government propaganda:
- That the enemy was less the German and Italian people than the vicious political systems to which they had succumbed to.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- There was a glaring exception to the general rule of tolerance:
- the treatment of the small politically powerless group of Japanese Americans.
- From the beginning, Americans adopted a different attitude toward their Asian enemy than they did toward their European foes.
- The Japanese, both government and private propaganda encouraged Americans to believe, were a devious malign and cruel people.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- Many White Americans continued to consider Asians (even native-born citizens) so “foreign” that they could never become “real” Americans.

- Partly as a result, much of the Japanese American population in the West continued to live in close-knit to some degree even insular, communities which reinforced the belief that they were alien and potentially menacing.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- Pearl Harbor inflamed these long-standing suspicions and turned them into active animosity.
- Wild stories circulated about how the Japanese in Hawaii had helped sabotage Pearl Harbor and how Japanese Americans in California were conspiring to aid an enemy landing on the Pacific Coast.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- There was no evidence to support any of these charges; but according to Earl Warren the attorney general of California, the apparent passivity of the Japanese Americans were itself evidence of the dangers they posed.
- Because they did nothing to allow officials to gauge their intentions, Warren claimed it was all the more important to take precautions against conspiracies.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- In February 1942, President Roosevelt authorized the army to “intern” the Japanese Americans.
- He created the War Relocation Authority (WRA) to oversee the project.
- More than 100,000 people (Issei and Nisei alike) were rounded up, told to dispose of their property however they could (which often meant simply abandoning it), and taken to what the government euphemistically termed “relocation centers” in the “interior.”
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- The internment camps were little different from prisons.
- Many of them located in the western mountains and the desert.
- Conditions in the internment camps were not brutal but they were harsh and uncomfortable.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- Government officials talked of them as places where the Japanese could be socialized and “Americanized.”
- But the internment camps were more a target of white economic aspirations than of missionary work.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- In 1944, the Supreme Court ruled in *Korematsu v. U.S.* that the relocation was constitutionally permissible.
- In another case the same year, it barred the internment of “loyal” citizens but left the interpretation of “loyal” to the discretion of the government.
The Internment of Japanese Americans:

- By the end of 1944, most of the internees had been released; and in early 1945 they were finally permitted to return to the West Coast.
- Where they faced continuing harassment and persecution, and where many found their property and businesses irretrievable lost.
- In 1988, they won some compensation for their losses.
- Congress voted to award them reparations.
- But by then many of the former internees had died.
Chinese Americans and the War:

- Just as America’s conflict with Japan undermined the position of Japanese Americans;
- The American alliance with China during World War II significantly enhanced both the legal and social status of Chinese Americans.
In 1943, partly to improve relations with China, Congress finally repealed the Chinese Exclusion Acts which barred almost all Chinese immigration since 1892.

The new quota for Chinese immigrants was minuscule (105 a year) but a substantial number of Chinese women managed to gain entry into the country.
Chinese Americans and the War:

- Permanent residents of the United States who were of Chinese descent were finally permitted to become citizens.
- Racial animosity toward the Chinese did not disappear, but it did decline.
Chinese Americans and the War:

- In part because government propaganda and popular culture began presenting positive images of Chinese (party to contrast with the Japanese);
- In part because Chinese Americans (like African Americans and other previously marginal groups) began taking jobs in war plants and other booming areas suffering from labor shortages and hence moving out of the isolated world of the Chinatowns.
Chinese Americans and the War:

- A higher proportion of Chinese Americans (22 percent of all adult males) were drafted than any other national group and the entire Chinese community in most cities worked hard and conspicuously for the war effort.
Women and Children at War:

- The war drew increasing number of women into roles from which, by either custom or law, they had been largely barred.

- These wage-earning women were more likely to be married and older than most women who had entered the workforce in the past.
Women and Children at War:

- However African American women were regulated to menial jobs and were paid less than their white counterparts.
- Many women entered the industrial workforce to replace male workers serving in the military.
- The popular image of Rose the Riveter symbolized the new importance of the female industrial work force.
Women and Children at War:

- Most women workers during the war were employed not in factories but in service-sector jobs.
- Above all, they worked for the government, while bureaucratic needs expanded dramatically alongside its military and industrial needs.
- Many did clerical work as typists, secretaries, and clerks and were called government girls.
Women and Children at War:

- With women working more, and men at war the scarcity of child care facilities caused young children to be left at home alone or sometimes locked in cars in factory parking lots while they worked.
Women and Children at War:

- Perhaps in part because of the family dislocations the war produced, juvenile crime rose markedly in the war years.
- Young boys were arrested at rapidly increasing rates for car theft, burglary, vandalism, and vagrancy.
- The arrest rate for prostitutes, many teenage girls arose up too as did transmissions of STDs.
Women and Children at War:

- More than a third of all teenagers between the ages of fourteen and eighteen were employed late in the war, causing some reduction in high school enrollments.
Women and Children at War:

- The return of prosperity during the war helped increase the rate and lower the age of marriage after the Depression decline.
- But many of these young marriages were unable to survive the pressures of war time separation.
- The divorce rate rose rapidly.
- The rise in the birth rate that accompanied the increase in marriages was the first sign of what would become the great postwar “baby boom.”
Wartime Life and Culture:

○ The war created considerable anxiety in American life.

○ Families worried about loved ones at the front and struggled to adjust to the absence of husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, and to the new mobility of women which also drew family members away from home.

○ Businesses and communities struggled to compensate for shortage of goods and the absence of men.
Wartime Life and Culture:

- Suddenly people had money to spend and despite the many shortages of consumer goods at least some things to spend it on.
- Resort hotels, casinos, dance halls, theaters were very popular.
- Dance Halls were packed with young people drawn to the seductive music of swing bands;
- Soldiers and sailors home on leave, or awaiting shipment overseas, were especially attracted to the dances and the big band.
Wartime Life and Culture:

- Swing was a new form of Jazz that was innovated by Fletcher Henderson in Harlem in the 1920s.
- He began working with White jazz musicians Benny Goodman who brought it to the masses.
- Other artists both Black and White became popular such as Count Basie and Duke Ellington.
Wartime Life and Culture:

- Swing was not without its critics.
- Some were fearful of the interracial culture and others abhorred the openly sensual style and the romantic at times overtly sexual dancing it inspired.
- It had a “dangerously hypnotic influence,” the New York Times complained in 1938 and led dangers toward “moral weakness” and “the breakdown of conventions.”
Wartime Life and Culture:

- To maintain morale for troops, the USO recruited thousands of young women to serve as hostesses in their clubs who were expected to dress nicely, dance well and chat with lonely men but forbade women to have dates with soldiers after the parties in the clubs.

- However it did quietly tolerate illicit heterosexual relationships.
The Retreat from Reform:

- As of late 1943, Roosevelt shifted from New Deal reforms to focusing on winning the war.
- New managers of war time agencies came from overwhelmingly from large corporations and conservative Wall Street law firms.
The Retreat from Reform:

- Conservatives in Congress seized on the war as an excuse to do what many of them had wanted to do in peacetime; dismantle many of the achievements of the New Deal.

- They were assisted by the end of mass unemployment, which decreased the need for such relief programs as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Work Progress Administration (WPA).
The Retreat from Reform:

- Roosevelt quietly accepted this new direction seeking to win reelection knowing that identifying with world peace stood a better chance than on domestic issues.

- He also accepted Harry Truman, a senator from Missouri who helped uncover waste and corruption in wartime production as Vice President, a man he hardly knew.
The Retreat from Reform:

- As the elections of 1944 approached, Republicans believed that they could win the election and the significant issue of the campaign was on domestic economic issues and not on the conduct of the war.

- In the 1944 elections, although ill, Roosevelt won reelection, the Democrats lost 1 seat in the Senate, gained 20 in the House and maintained control of both.