**Learning Objective:**

Explain the causes and effects of the victory of the United States and its allies over the Axis powers.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Diplomatic, economic, cultural, and military interactions between empires, nations, and peoples shape the development of America and America’s increasingly important role in the world.*

1. U.S. participation in World War II transformed American society, while the victory of the United States and its allies over the Axis powers vaulted the U.S. into a position of global, political, and military leadership.
2. Americans viewed the war as a fight for the survival of freedom and democracy against fascist and militarist ideologies. This perspective was later reinforced by revelations about Japanese wartime atrocities, Nazi concentration camps, and the Holocaust.
   1. In August 1941, Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met for the first time. They issued the Atlantic Charter, which described a postwar world based on self-determination for all nations. The Atlantic Charter endorsed the principles of freedom of speech and freedom from want and fear, which Roosevelt had proposed as the Four Freedoms earlier that year.
   2. As U.S. troops advanced through Germany, they came upon German concentration camps and witnessed the horrifying extent of the Nazis’ program of genocide against the Jews and others. Americans and the world were shocked to learn that 6 million Jewish civilians and several million non-Jews had been systematically murdered by Nazi Germany.
   3. The Nuremberg Trials were established after the war to bring Nazi war criminals to justice for genocide and crimes against humanity.
3. Mobilization and military service provided opportunities for women and minorities to improve their socioeconomic positions for the war’s duration, while also leading to debates over racial segregation.
4. The United States and its allies achieved military victory through Allied cooperation, technological and scientific advances, the contributions of servicemen and women, and campaigns such as Pacific “island-hopping” and the D-Day invasion. The use of atomic bombs hastened the end of the war and sparked debates about the morality of using atomic weapons.
   1. European Theater
      1. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States announced a strategy of first defeating Germany and then turning to a full-scale attack on Japan. Although at first unpopular due to anger at the Japanese for Pearl Harbor, the Germany-first strategy prevailed. The United States could not allow Hitler to defeat Great Britain and the Soviet Union, thus transforming the continent into an unconquerable Fortress Europe.
      2. Coordinating their military strategy, the British and Americans concentrated on two objectives in 1942: overcoming German submarine attacks in the Atlantic and beginning bombing raids on German cities. The United States joined in the bombing of the European continent in July 1942. Bombing increased during 1943 and 1944 and lasted to the end of the war.
      3. The Allied Army under General Dwight D. Eisenhower attacked French (under German control) North Africa in November 1942. The French surrendered. In the battle of Kassarine Pass in February 1943, the Allied army met Field Marshal Erwin Rommel’s Afrika Korps. Although the battle was inconclusive, Rommel’s forces were soon trapped by the British moving in from Egypt. In May 1943, the Afrika Korps surrendered. Allied forces under General George S. Patton invaded Sicily from Africa in July 1943 and gained control by August. Moving from Sicily, the Allied armies invaded the Italian mainland in September. Mussolini had already fallen from power and his successor surrendered, but the Germans put up a stiff resistance with the result that Rome did not fall until June 1944.
      4. The Allied forces fought Germany primarily in Russia and the Mediterranean from 1939 through early 1944. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Allied Expeditionary Force, under command of Dwight Eisenhower, began an invasion of Normandy, France. Allied armies under General Omar Bradley took the transportation hub of St. Lo, France in July. Allied armies liberated Paris in August. By mid-September they had arrived at the Rhine, on the edge of Germany.
      5. Beginning in December 1944, the Germans counter-attacked in the Battle of the Bulge, driving the Allies back about 50 miles into Belgium. But by January, the Allies were once more advancing toward Germany.
      6. The Allies crossed the Rhine in March 1945 as the Soviet Union entered Berlin from the east. Recognizing that the end was near, Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945. In the last week of April, Eisenhower’s forces met the Soviet Army and Germany unconditionally surrendered on May 7, marking V-E (Victory in Europe) Day.
   2. Pacific Theater
      1. By the end of December 1941, Guam, Wake Island, the Gilbert Islands, and Hong Kong had fallen to the Japanese. Within months, Raboul, New Britain, Singapore, Java, and Burma. U.S. forces surrendered in the Philippines in May 1942.
      2. In the Battle of the Coral Sea, later in May 1942, planes from American carriers forced Japanese troop transports to turn back from attacking Australia. At the Battle Midway in June, American air power destroyed four Japanese carriers and bout 300 planes. The battle proved to be the turning point in the Pacific.
      3. Island hopping was a series of land, sea, and air battles took place around Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands from August 1942 into February 1943, stopping the Japanese. The strategy of island hopping commenced in 1943. It sought to neutralize Japanese strongholds with air and sea power and then move on. General Douglas MacArthur commanded the land forces moving from New Guinea toward the Philippines, while Admiral Chester Nimitz directed the naval attack on important Japanese islands in the central Pacific. U.S. forces advanced into the Gilbert Islands, Marshall Islands, and Marianas Islands from November 1943 through June 1944. After the American victory in the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944, General Hideki Tojo resigned as premier of Japan.
      4. The Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944 involved three major engagements that resulted in Japan’s loss of most of its remaining naval power. It also brought the first use of the Japanese kamikaze attacks who crashed into American carriers to frighten U.S. sailors.
      5. By June 1945, after the Battle of Okinawa, where Americans suffered nearly 50,000 casualties, virtually all of Japan’s remaining defenses were destroyed.
   3. The Atomic Bomb
      1. The Manhattan Engineering District was established by the Army Corps of Engineers in August 1942 for the purpose of developing an atomic bomb. The mission eventually became known as the Manhattan Project. President Franklin Roosevelt authorized the Manhattan Project. J. Robert Oppenheimer directed the design and construction of a transportable atomic bomb at Los Alamos, New Mexico.
      2. Continuing to use conventional weapons would result in the loss of thousands of American lives. Casualty estimates of an American invasion of Japan ran upward of 500,000. Using the atomic bomb would persuade the Japanese to surrender. Some military leaders estimated that an invasion of Japan would not subdue Japan for years. Ending the war against Japan as quickly as possible would prevent Soviet intervention. The first bomb was dropped on August 6, 1945. The USSR invaded Japanese-held land in Manchuria on August 8. The second bomb was dropped on August 9. Using the atomic bomb would convince the Soviet Union of the need to be more cooperative in formulating its postwar plans.
      3. The use of atomic bombs hastened the end of the war and sparked debates about the morality of using atomic weapons. The United States was the only country possessing atomic bombs in 1945. President Truman authorized the use of the atomic bomb on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
      4. The *Enola Gay* dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945, killing 78,000 people and injuring over 100,000 more.
      5. On August 9, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, killing 40,000 people. Thousands more died later from burns, injuries, and radiation exposure.
      6. Japan agreed to surrender if the Allies would allow the emperor to remain as a titular (powerless) head of state. Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945. The official surrender was signed by General Douglas MacArthur on board the *U.S.S. Missouri* on September 2, 1945.