Ch. 37 – The Aftermath of World War II/EQ: Did the United States learn from past mistakes at the end of World War II?

37.1 – Introduction

• On V-J Day, when Japan announced its surrender to the Allies, newspaper headlines in the United States screamed out the news. Factories and offices shut down, and Americans poured into the streets to celebrate.
  o With hugs and smiles and joyful cheers, they expressed their relief that World War II had finally ended.
  o All across the Pacific, from Pearl Harbor to Okinawa, soldiers shouted, “It’s over!”
• The war’s end brought jubilation in the United States, but it also ushered in a period of uncertainty for the nation.
  o Americans wondered what would happen to the economy now.
• Foreign policy created even greater concerns.
  o Victory brought with it the responsibility for maintaining peace.
  o After World War I, the Senate had refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, and therefore the United States did not join the League of Nations.
  o Other victorious nations had used the Treaty of Versailles to punish Germany, a course that helped lead to World War II.
  o Would the United States now take a leading role in world affairs?
  o If so, how would it choose to treat the defeated nations, particularly Germany and Japan?
• President Franklin Roosevelt had realized the importance of these questions as early as 1943.
  o In January of that year, he declared, “Victory in this war is the first and greatest goal before us. Victory in the peace is the next.”
  o Roosevelt did not live to see either victory, but his hard work and realistic vision of the world helped prepare the United States to meet its postwar obligations.

37.2 – The End of Isolationism

• In 1918, when President Woodrow Wilson proposed the League of Nations, Franklin Roosevelt—who was then assistant secretary of the navy—had high hopes for its success.
• If the Senate had ratified the Treaty of Versailles and the United States had become a member of the League of Nations, perhaps the League might have stood up to Germany and helped prevent the actions that led to another world war.
• Now that World War II had ended, would the United States slip back into isolationism, or would it take a strong part in world affairs?

The United States Leads the Creation of New World Organizations

• After Pearl Harbor, more and more Americans realized the United States could no longer stand alone in the world.
  o To be secure, the nation had to work with others to maintain peace.
  o This shift in attitude allowed Roosevelt to move toward a policy of internationalism.
• In July 1944, representatives of the United States and 43 other nations met at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire.
  o Together, they founded the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, or the World Bank [World Bank: a bank founded in 1944 by the United States and 43 other nations in order to provide loans to help countries recover from World War II and develop their economies].
  o The IMF’s goal was to stabilize the world monetary system and establish uniform exchange rates for foreign currency.
• The United States also worked closely with its allies to design a replacement for the League of Nations.
• United Nations [United Nations: an international organization founded in 1945 to further the causes of peace, prosperity, and human rights] (UN). In June 1945, 50 nations signed the UN Charter.
• In July 1945, three months after Roosevelt’s death, the Senate ratified U.S. membership in the United Nations by a vote of 89–2.

The United Nations Gets Organized

• The United States played a leading role in founding the United Nations.
Outline

- Its influence is evident in the UN Charter, which proclaims what Roosevelt called “four essential human freedoms.”
  - He had first identified those Four Freedoms in a 1941 speech and later incorporated into the UN charter: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. in a speech in January 1941.
- To reinforce these principles, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.
  - This document affirms basic human rights, including the rights to life, liberty, and equality before the law, as well as freedom of religion, expression, and assembly.
- In addition to listing principles, the UN Charter lays out the structure of the United Nations.
  - The General Assembly is the main body of the United Nations and consists of all member states.
  - The Security Council, a much smaller but more powerful body, consists of just 15 member states.
  - Five of these members are permanent—the United States, Britain, France, Russia, and China. Each permanent member can veto any Security Council resolution.
  - The Security Council focuses on peace and security issues, and it can use military power to enforce its decisions.
- The United Nations decided to partition Palestine, dividing it into Arab and Jewish territories.
- In 1948, the Jews proclaimed the state of Israel.
- The first of several Arab-Israeli wars followed, and tensions continue in the region to this day.

37.3 – Dealing with the Defeated Axis Powers
- Even before World War II ended, the Allies began to face important decisions about the future of the defeated Axis powers.
  - A generation earlier, the victors in World I had imposed a harsh peace on Germany.
  - The Treaty of Versailles, with its war-guilt clause and excessive reparations, had caused bitter resentment among Germans.
  - Adolf Hitler had used that resentment to help fuel his rise to power.
  - Looking back at the mistakes made after World War I, Roosevelt was determined not to let history repeat itself.

War Crimes Trials
- Allied demands at the end of World War II were much less harsh than those in the Versailles Treaty.
- After World War II, Allied leaders did not want to punish the people of Germany and Japan.
  - They wanted to leave those countries enough resources to remain independent. They sought only to punish the German and Japanese leaders who had committed war crimes. A war crime is a violation of internationally accepted practices related to waging war. A war crime is a violation of internationally accepted practices related to waging war.
- They would give Nazi war criminals fair and open trials.
  - The 22 defendants at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials included leaders of the Nazi Party, the military, the SS, and the Gestapo.
  - A separate tribunal met in Tokyo in 1946 to try Japanese war criminals.

From Enemies to Allies: Rebuilding Germany and Japan
- The Allies also set out to restructure Germany and Japan after the war.
- During the war, Allied bombers had destroyed many German cities.
  - As a result, many Germans continued to suffer from famine and disease.
  - At first, the United States did little to help rebuild Germany.
  - It was more concerned with dismantling German factories to eliminate any war-making capacity.
Only later would American policy focus on restoring Germany’s economic health.

- After dissolving Japan's empire and disbanding its military, the Allies worked to bring democracy to Japan.
  - At first, as in Germany, the United States sought to weaken Japan’s industrial economy.
  - By 1948, however, U.S. officials had decided to promote economic growth. Japan began the difficult task of rebuilding its ruined cities.
  - In 1951, Japan, the United States, and 47 other countries signed a peace treaty.
  - The treaty restored Japan to full sovereignty [sovereignty: a nation’s independent authority], or independent authority.

37.4 – Americans Adjust to Postwar Life

- After World War I, the mass cancellation of government contracts had thrown many Americans out of work.
  - Demobilization of millions of soldiers made the unemployment problem even worse.
  - After World War II, American leaders took steps to try to ease the difficult transition from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy.

From Soldiers to Civilians: The Impact of the GI Bill

- In September 1942, three years before the end of the war, President Roosevelt was already planning for the peace.
- One year later, Roosevelt asked Congress to pass the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the GI Bill of Rights [GI Bill of Rights: a law passed in 1994 to provide federal funds to help returning GIs make the transition to civilian life].
  - This bill provided federal funds to help returning GIs make the transition to civilian life.
  - Those funds would make it easier for many war veterans to continue their education and to buy a home. Congress passed the GI Bill by unanimous vote in the spring of 1944.
  - The GI Bill had other benefits.
  - Returning veterans could receive unemployment compensation.
  - They could also take out cheap federal loans to start farms or businesses.

African Americans Seek New Opportunities

- The GI Bill raised the expectations of all GIs, including African Americans.
- Not all African American GIs were able to make full use of the GI Bill
- The end of the war did not stop the migration of African Americans from the South.
- In general, the lives of African Americans did improve in the postwar years.
- From 1947 to 1952, the median income [median income: average pay], or average pay, for nonwhite families rose 45 percent.

The Demobilization of Women: From Factory Jobs to the Service Sector

- In the postwar period, most female workers felt a duty to step aside for men.
  - They did earn a living, but not in heavy industry.
  - Those jobs went mainly to men. Instead, many women moved into jobs in the booming service sector [service sector: the segment of the economy that does not produce goods], the segment of the economy that does not produce goods.

Summary

At the end of World War II, the United States vowed not to repeat the mistakes of World War I. With the other Allies, it worked to establish ways of avoiding future conflicts and dealing with war crimes. At home, Congress passed legislation to help returning veterans rejoin postwar society.

Four Freedoms In 1941, Franklin Roosevelt expressed the wish that all people should have freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. These Four Freedoms became part of the charter of the United Nations.

United Nations Before the war was over, 50 nations cooperated to form the United Nations. The United States played a strong role in founding this international organization. The goals of the United Nations include world peace, security, and respect for human rights.
Nuremberg War Crimes Trials Instead of punishing all Germans, the Allies held Nazi leaders responsible at the Nuremberg Trials. A similar set of trials brought Japanese leaders to justice. Later, temporary international tribunals, as well as a permanent International Criminal Court, were formed to deal with war criminals.

GI Bill of Rights The United States sought to prevent economic and social problems at home after the war. One measure designed to accomplish this goal was the GI Bill of Rights, which provided unemployment benefits, college funds, and housing loans to veterans.