

America Moves Toward War

TERMS AND NAMES

Axis powers Germany, Italy, and Japan

Lend-Lease Act Law that allowed lending or leasing arms to any nation "whose defense was vital to the United States"

Atlantic Charter British and American statement of goals for fighting World War II

Allies Group of nations, including the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, who opposed the Axis powers

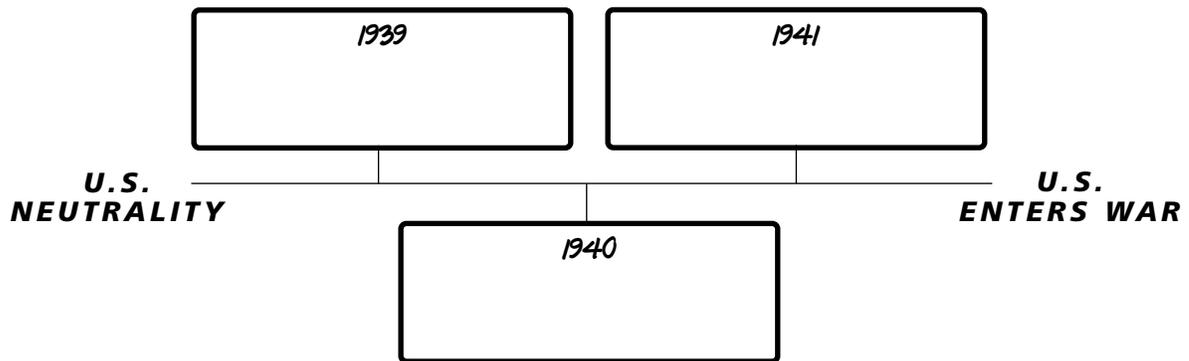
Hideki Tojo Prime minister of Japan during World War II

BEFORE YOU READ

In this section, you will see how the United States moved closer to entering the war against the Nazis.

AS YOU READ

Take notes on the time line below. Fill it in with the events in each year that brought the United States to war.



The United States Musters Its Forces

How did the United States try to stay out of war but be prepared?

According to the Neutrality Acts, the United States could not enter the war in Europe. However, President Roosevelt asked for a change in the Acts. He suggested a cash-and-carry provision. Such a provision would allow Britain and France to buy and transport American arms. Congress passed this new Neutrality Act in November 1939.

In 1940, Germany, Italy, and Japan signed a mutual defense treaty. They became the **Axis powers**. The treaty meant that if the United States went to war against any one of them, all three would fight. That would put America at war on two *fronts*: in Europe and in Asia. Nevertheless,

Roosevelt gave the British "all aid short of war" to help them fight Hitler.

Roosevelt assured the nation that the United States would stay out of war. But he prepared for war. Congress increased spending for national defense. It passed the nation's first *peacetime draft* in September 1940.

FDR broke the tradition of a two-term presidency and ran for re-election in 1940. His opponent, Wendell Willkie, shared Roosevelt's beliefs that the United States should help Britain, but that it should not get involved in war. Voters chose the candidate they knew. FDR won a third term.

1. How did the United States slowly move toward war?

“The Great Arsenal of Democracy”

Why did the United States change its policy of neutrality?

After the election, Roosevelt spoke to the American people. He said that the United States could not stand by and let Hitler conquer the world. America would become “the great *arsenal* of democracy.” At that time, Britain could no longer pay for arms and supplies. Roosevelt suggested lending or leasing arms to any nation “whose defense was vital to the United States.” Isolationists bitterly opposed his policy. But Congress passed the **Lend-Lease Act** in March 1941.

Meanwhile, Germany invaded its former ally, the Soviet Union. The United States gave lend-lease support to the Soviets as well as to Britain.

Nazi submarines called U-boats attacked and sank ships carrying arms across the Atlantic to Germany’s enemies. In June 1941, Roosevelt ordered the U.S. Navy to protect lend-lease ships. He also gave American warships permission to attack German U-boats in self-defense.

2. Name two ways in which the United States became the “arsenal of democracy.”

FDR Plans for War

How did the United States move toward war?

In August 1941, Roosevelt met secretly with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Roosevelt did not actually commit the United States to war. But he and Churchill did sign the **Atlantic Charter**. That was a statement of the goals for fighting World War II. These goals included protecting peoples’ rights to choose their own form of government and building a secure peace.

Later, 26 nations signed a similar agreement. These nations, called the **Allies**, were united in fighting Germany, Italy, and Japan.

On September 4, 1941, a German U-boat fired on an American *merchant ship*. President Roosevelt

ordered the U.S. Navy to fire on German ships on sight. U-boats responded by sinking several American ships, and American seamen were killed. The Senate finally allowed the arming of merchant ships. Full scale war seemed inevitable.

3. What events moved the United States closer to war?

Japan Attacks the United States

What brought the United States into conflict with Japan?

In Japan, expansionists had long dreamed of creating a huge empire. Japan was now acting on this dream. It began seizing Asian territory held as colonies by European nations. The United States also owned islands in the Pacific.

When Japan invaded Indochina, the United States cut off trade with Japan. Japan needed American oil to run its *war machine*. The new prime minister of Japan was a *militant* general named **Hideki Tojo**. He started peace talks with the United States, but he also prepared for war.

The United States broke Japan’s secret communications code. The Americans knew Japan was preparing for a military strike. But they did not know when or where the strike would be.

On December 7, 1941—during the peace talks—Japan attacked the main U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The Japanese crippled the U.S. Pacific fleet in one blow. Planes and ships were destroyed. Over 2,400 people were killed.

Roosevelt was grim. He did not want to fight a war on two fronts. He had expected to enter the war in Europe, not to fight in Asia, too. On December 8, 1941, Roosevelt addressed Congress asking for a declaration of war against Japan. He said: “Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy . . . [the Japanese launched] an unprovoked and dastardly attack.” Congress quickly agreed to declare war. Germany and Italy then declared war on the United States.

4. What event caused the American declaration of war against Japan?
