

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



World War II and the Holocaust, 1939–1945

Lesson 3 The Home Front and Civilians

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does war impact society and the environment?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

widespread widely extended or spread out

circumstances a determining condition; state of affairs

Content Vocabulary

mobilization the process of assembling troops and supplies and making them ready for war

kamikaze Japanese for “divine wind”; a suicide mission in which young Japanese pilots intentionally flew their airplanes into U.S. fighting ships at sea

blitz the British term for the German air raids on British cities and towns during World War II

TAKING NOTES: *Organizing*

ACTIVITY As you read, complete a chart like this one to show the impact of World War II on the lives of civilians.

Country	Impact on Civilian Lives
Soviet Union	
United States	
Japan	
Germany	

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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

During World War II, nations organized their people and their economies for the war effort. While the soldiers fought, citizens at home, or the people on the “home front,” worked hard to produce the materials and supplies for the armed forces. Hundreds of thousands of people on the home front lost their lives in bombing raids, or attacks.

The Mobilization of Four Nations

Guiding Question *How did countries mobilize for war?*

World War I was a total war. It involved all the citizens in the nations at war. World War II was an even more devastating total war. Fighting was much more **widespread**. It covered most of the world. Economic **mobilization** and the mobilization of women was also much greater. Almost 20 million civilians were killed in World War II. Many of them were children. This was a much larger number of civilian deaths than in World War I.

World War II had an enormous impact on civilian life across the globe. This impact occurred in the home fronts of the Soviet Union, the United States, Germany, and Japan.

The Soviet Union

The greatest land battles in history, as well as extreme cruelty, took place in the Soviet Union, between the Russians and the Germans. The Russians refer to (call) the war between the Soviets and the Germans as the Great Patriotic War. The Soviet Union had to use emergency measures after their early defeats by the Germans. These measures, as well as the fighting, affected the lives of the civilian population. For example, the city of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) was under siege for 900 days. The people living there were starving to death. They were so desperate for food that they even ate dogs, cats, and mice. Probably 1.5 million people died in the city.

The German army began the war with its rapid advance into Soviet territory. Soviet workers had to dismantle, or take apart, entire factories in the western part of the Soviet Union. The machines were then shipped to the interior—to the Urals, western Siberia, and the Volga regions. The machines were placed on the bare ground. As laborers began their work, walls went up around them. Factories were rebuilt in new locations.

Stalin called the military and industrial mobilization of the Soviet Union a “battle of machines.” The Soviets won that battle. They produced 78,000 tanks and 98,000 artillery pieces. From 1940 to 1943, the percentage of Soviet national income that went for war materials increased from 15 to 55 percent. The emphasis on producing military goods left Soviet citizens with severe food and housing shortages.

Soviet women played a major role in the war effort. Women and girls worked in factories, mines, and railroads. The number of women working in industry increased almost 60 percent. Soviet women also dug antitank ditches and worked as air-raid wardens. The Soviet Union was the only country in World War II to use women in battle. Soviet women served as snipers and also in aircrews of bomber squadrons.

The United States

The U.S. home front was quite different from those of the other major powers. The United States was not fighting on its own territory. Over time, the United States became the arsenal, or place where arms are made and kept, of the Allied Powers. The United States made much of the military equipment that

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the Allies needed to fight the war. The height of war production was in November 1943. At that time, the country was building 6 ships a day and 96,000 planes per year.

This mobilization of the American economy and workforce caused some social changes and confusion. New factories were built. Boomtowns arose near them. Thousands came to the factories to work. There weren't enough homes or schools to support the workers and their families. Sixteen million men and women were enrolled in the military, and they moved frequently. Another 16 million people also moved around the country. These people were mostly wives and girlfriends of servicemen or workers looking for jobs.

Over a million African Americans moved from the rural South. They came to the cities of the North and West looking for jobs in industry. Racial tensions increased. Riots erupted as people reacted to the new African-American residents. In Detroit in June 1943, white mobs roamed the streets attacking African Americans. One million African Americans joined the military. They served in segregated units. For some, this treatment later led to a fight for civil rights.

Japanese Americans faced even more serious issues. On the West Coast, 110,000 Japanese Americans were removed from their homes. They were forced to live in camps. The camps were surrounded by barbed wire. They were required to take loyalty oaths to the United States. Public officials said that the policy toward the Japanese was necessity for security reasons. They argued this because the United States was fighting Japan. The policy showed racism since Germans and Italians born in the United States were not put into camps. For example, California governor Culbert Olson claimed that he could measure the loyalty of Germans or Italians by simply looking at them. However, he said he couldn't do the same with the Japanese.

Connection to TODAY

Women in the U.S. Military

During World War II, women participated in organizations such as the Women's Army Corps (WACs), where they served in administrative, noncombat positions. In 1948 President Harry S. Truman signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, which enabled women to become active members of all branches of the U.S. military. At that time, women made up 2 percent of the armed forces. Today, women make up 15 percent of the military, though they are often excluded from direct combat missions. In 2009 only 6 percent of the Marine Corps was made up of women, while women accounted for 20 percent of the Air Force, 14 percent of the Army, and 15 percent of the Navy.

Germany

In August 1914 at the start of World War I, Germans had enthusiastically cheered their soldiers marching off to war. In September 1939 at the start of World War II, the streets of Germany were quiet. Even worse for the Nazi regime, many feared disaster.

Hitler knew that the morale (confidence) of the German people was important. In fact, he believed that Germany's defeat in World War I could be blamed on the collapse of the home front, or the loss of support for the war by civilians at home. He wanted to avoid repeating that situation. He adopted economic policies that may have cost Germany the war.

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During the first two years of the war, Hitler refused to reduce the production of consumer goods. He also refused to increase the production of guns and other weapons. He believed this would keep up German morale. Blitzkrieg gave the Germans quick victories at the start of the war. The Germans were then able to plunder, or take, the food and raw materials of conquered countries. As a result, they did not have to take resources away from the civilian economy. The economic situation in Germany changed after defeats on the Russian front and the American entry into the war.

Hitler finally ordered a huge increase in weapons production early in 1942. He also increased the size of the army. Hitler's architect, Albert Speer, was made minister for armaments and munitions in 1942. (Munitions are military supplies such as bullets.) Speer tripled the production of armaments (weapons) between 1942 and 1943. He was able to do this even in spite of Allied air raids, which hit in many places in Germany.

Germany totally mobilized its economy in July 1944. Schools, theaters, and cafés were closed. However, total mobilization for the war came too late to save Germany from defeat.

Nazi attitudes toward women changed over the course of the war. Before the war, the Nazis had tried to keep women out of the job market. As the war progressed and more and more men were called to do military service. This way of thinking no longer made sense. In spite of this change of view, the number of women working in industry, agriculture, business, and domestic service increased only slightly during the war. The total number of employed women was 14.6 million (14,600,000) in May 1939. It was only 14.9 million in September 1944. Many women, especially those of the middle class, did not want jobs. They particularly did not want to work in factories.

Japan

In wartime Japan, society was highly mobilized. The government created a planning board to control prices, wages, labor, and resources. It wanted to control all national resources. The government also called on traditional habits of obedience and hierarchy (a system in which people in society have higher or lower ranks). These values were used to encourage citizens to sacrifice their resources and sometimes their lives for the national cause.

The calls for sacrifice reached a high point in the final years of the war. Young Japanese were encouraged to volunteer to serve as pilots in suicide missions. They would fly their planes right into U.S. ships in the hope of doing damage to the ships. These pilots were known as **kamikaze**, or "divine wind."

Japan was reluctant to mobilize women for the war effort. General Hideki Tōjō, prime minister from 1941 to 1944, opposed female employment. He argued that it was more important to keep the women at home because this kept the family system together. Japan was based on the family system.

Female employment did increase during the war, but only in the textile industry and farming. Women had traditionally worked in these fields. The Japanese government brought Korean and Chinese workers to Japan to fill the labor shortages instead of using Japanese women.

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Reading Progress Check

Contrasting How were war preparations in Germany different from war preparations in the United States?

The Bombing of Cities

Guiding Question *How did the bombing of cities impact the home front?*

In World War II, nations bombed military targets, enemy troops, and civilian populations. Bombing made the home front a dangerous place.

A few bombing raids had been carried out in the last year of World War I. At that time, aircraft were limited in how far they could fly and how much they could carry. The bombing of civilians had led to a public outcry at the time of World War I. Because of this, many leaders concluded that civilians would not accept bombing attacks. They thought that civilians would force their government to make peace in response to bombing attacks. As a result, European air forces began to develop long-range bombers that could carry many bombs in the 1930s. The bombs could be used against either military or civilian targets in enemy countries.

Britain

The earliest sustained, or continuing, use of civilian bombing began in early September 1940 when Germany bombed Britain. Londoners took the first heavy blows from bombs. The German air force bombed London nightly for months. Thousands of civilians were killed or injured. Enormous damage was done to buildings. The loss of lives and property was huge. However, Londoners' morale remained high.

The **blitz**, as the British called the German air raids, soon became a national experience. Many other British cities and towns were targeted. The Londoners' ability to stay positive and determined to fight served as an example for the rest of the British population. The theory that the bombing of civilians would force peace was proved wrong.

Many children were evacuated, or forced to move for their safety, from cities to avoid the bombing. The British moved about 6 million children and their mothers in 1939. Some British parents even sent their children to Canada and the United States. This, too, could be dangerous. A German torpedo hit the ocean liner *Arandora Star* on its way to Canada. Seventy-seven British children on board died.

Germany

The British failed to learn from their own experience. Churchill and his advisers believed that destroying German communities would break civilian morale in Germany and bring victory to Britain. Major bombing raids on German cities began in 1942. On May 31, 1942, Cologne became the first German city to be attacked when it was hit by 1,000 bombers.

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The **circumstances** for civilians in Germany were already difficult because of growing shortages of food, clothing, and fuel. Bombing raids added an element of terror to the situation. The Germans, like the British, wanted to protect their children. They created about 9,000 camps for children in the countryside. The firestorms created by incendiary bombs were especially terrifying to the Germans. The destructive bombing of Dresden lasted from February 13 to 15, 1945. The bombing created a firestorm that killed as many as 35,000 inhabitants and refugees.

Germany suffered enormously from the Allied bombing raids. Millions of buildings were destroyed. Half a million civilians died. Even so, it is unlikely that Allied bombing weakened the German morale. Instead, Germans, whether pro-Nazi or anti-Nazi, fought on stubbornly. They were often driven simply by a desire to live. At times, even young people were expected to fight in the war. In the last years of the war, Hitler Youth members, who were often only 14 or 15 years old, served in the front lines.

The bombing also failed to destroy Germany's industries. Production of war materials actually increased between 1942 and 1944 in spite of bombing. However, bombing did cause widespread destruction of transportation systems and fuel supplies. This destruction made it difficult for supplies and materials to reach the German military.

Japan

Japan was open to air raids toward the end of the war. Its air force had almost been destroyed. As a result, Japanese cities had little protection against air raids. Also, its crowded cities were built of flimsy materials that were especially likely to catch on fire that could quickly spread.

The new U.S. B-29 Superfortresses, the biggest bombers of the war, began attacks on Japanese cities on November 24, 1944. By the summer of 1945, many of Japan's industries had been destroyed, and one-fourth of its houses were gone. The Japanese government needed to add to the strength of its regular army. It ordered the mobilization of all people between the ages of 13 and 60 into a People's Volunteer Corps.

The bombing of civilians reached a new level with the use of the first atomic bomb on Japan. President Truman feared high U.S. casualties if Americans tried to invade Japan by land. Instead, he and his advisers decided to drop atomic bombs in August 1945. This decision resulted in the deaths of thousands of Japanese civilians.



Reading Progress Check

Drawing Conclusions How did the development of airplanes change the way militaries fought?
