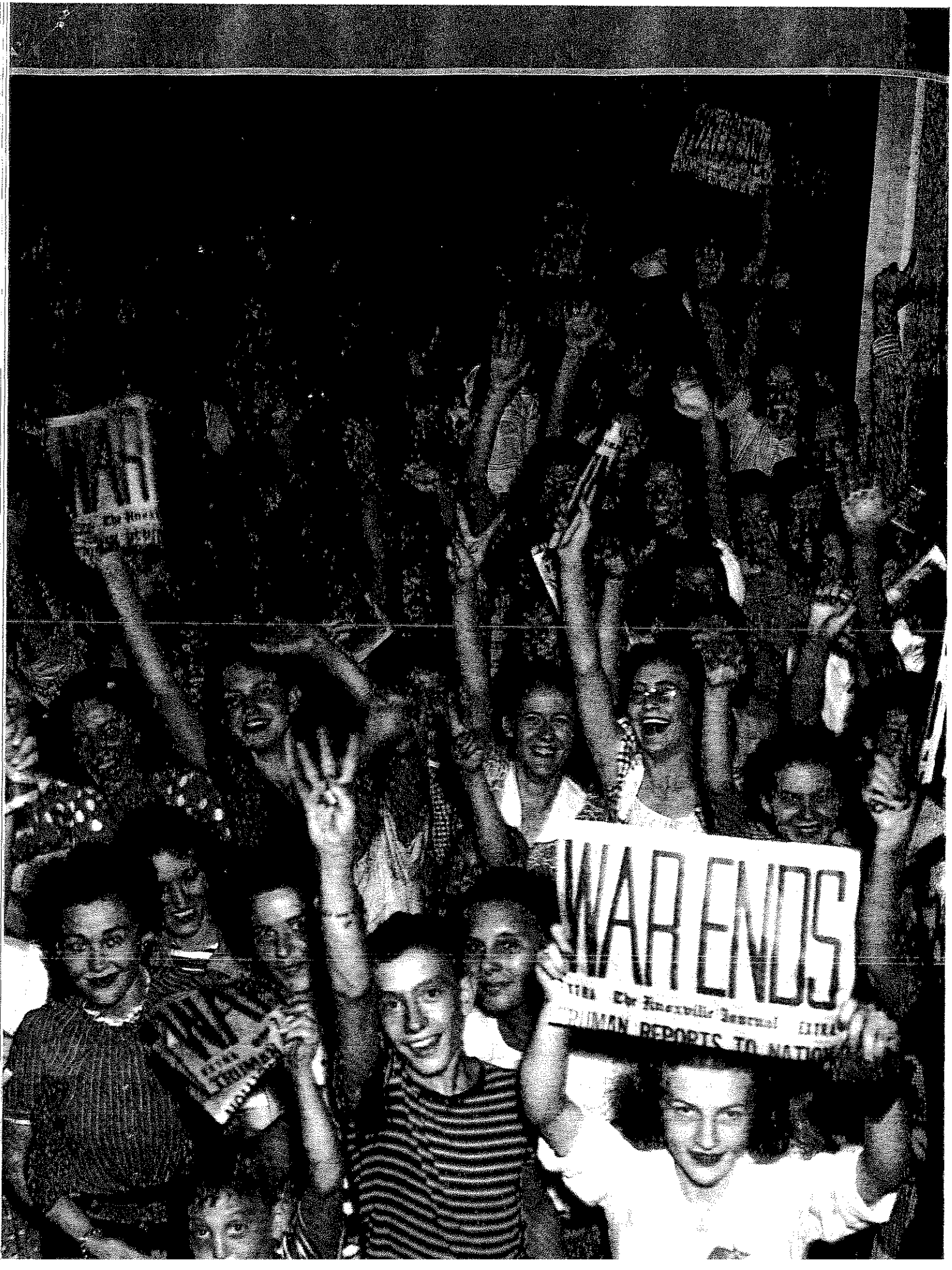

WAR ENDS

Chapter 37

The Aftermath of World War II

Did the United States learn from past mistakes at the end of World War II?

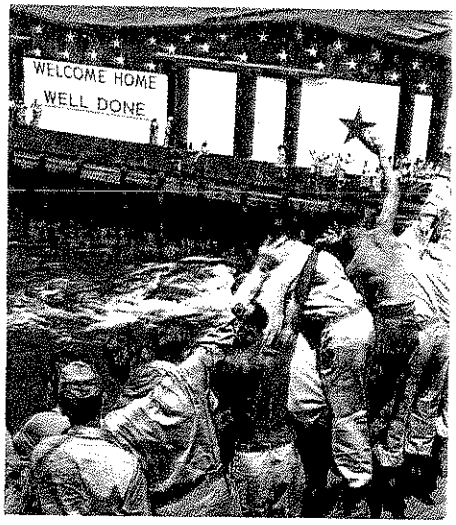
37.1 Introduction

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. With hugs and smiles and joyful cheers, they expressed their relief that World War II had finally ended. 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. One writer noted at the time that some Americans even seemed to fear "the coming of peace." Wartime productivity had lifted the country out of the Depression. Americans wondered what would happen to the economy now. When the government stopped handing out huge military contracts, would the Depression start up again? Many people recalled that after World War I, the economy had collapsed. Along with inflation and unemployment, crime and social tensions had increased. Americans now feared being hit by another wave of problems.

Foreign policy created even greater concerns. Victory brought with it the responsibility for maintaining peace. 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. Other victorious nations had used the Treaty of Versailles to punish Germany, a course that helped lead to World War II. Would the United States now take a leading role in world affairs? 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. 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." 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.



After the war, millions of servicemen were eager to return to civilian life. When they finally got home, many were greeted with open arms. However, the transition from wartime to peacetime also brought challenges for many Americans.

◀ American crowd celebrates V-J Day

Representatives of 50 nations signed the UN Charter in San Francisco, California, on June 26, 1945. The main goal of the United Nations is to maintain peace and security. But it also takes a firm stand on issues such as human rights and social and economic development.

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 In the years leading up to World War II, Roosevelt had quietly fought against isolationism. After Pearl Harbor, more and more Americans realized the United States could no longer stand alone in the world. To be secure, the nation had to work with others to maintain peace. This shift in attitude allowed Roosevelt to move toward a policy of internationalism. Late in the war, he pushed for the creation of new worldwide organizations to help prevent future wars by promoting stronger economic and diplomatic ties between nations.

In July 1944, representatives of the United States and 43 other nations met at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. Together, they founded the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, or the **World Bank**. The bank was designed to provide loans to help countries recover from the war and develop their economies. Much of the bank's funding came from the United States.

The same group of nations also created the International Monetary Fund. The IMF's goal was to stabilize the world monetary system and establish uniform exchange rates for foreign currency. Making exchange rates more predictable would help international banking and trade. Three years later, 23 nations took another step to encourage trade by signing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Member nations of GATT agreed to lower tariffs and to eliminate barriers to international trade.

The United States also worked closely with its allies to design a replacement for the League of Nations. In the fall of 1944, representatives of the United States, Great Britain, China, and the Soviet Union gathered at Dumbarton Oaks, an estate in Washington, D.C. U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull opened the meeting: "It is our task here to help lay the foundations upon which, after victory, peace, freedom, and a growing prosperity may be built for generations to come." The product of this conference was a draft charter for

a new organization called the **United Nations (UN)**. In June 1945, 50 nations signed the UN Charter.

In seeking approval for the League of Nations, President Wilson had worked hard to win public support and thought he did not need the support of Republicans in the Senate. In seeking support for the United Nations, Roosevelt did not make the same mistake. He not only spoke to the public about the need for nations to "learn to work together" for peace and security but also worked to persuade Republican senators. His efforts paid off, although he did not live to see the results. 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 UN flag features a view of the globe centered on the North Pole. A wreath of olive branches, which symbolizes peace, embraces the globe.

The United Nations Gets Organized The United States played a leading role in founding the United Nations. 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 speech in January 1941. In that speech, he depicted a world in which all people would have freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. "The world order which we seek," he said, "is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society." In August 1941, Roosevelt and Winston Churchill had incorporated the Four Freedoms into the Atlantic Charter, which was a major expression of the Allies' postwar goals.

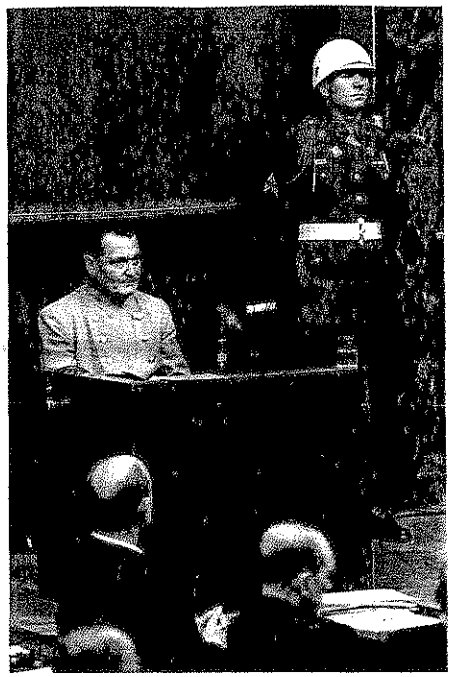
Four years later, the framers of the UN Charter looked to the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms when devising the framework for the United Nations. The preamble to the UN Charter states that members seek to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small."

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 to freedom of religion, expression, and assembly. Eleanor Roosevelt, who was the chair of the committee that drafted the declaration, compared it with the U.S. Bill of Rights and other similar documents.

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.

In 1947, the United Nations faced one of its first challenges. It was drawn into a crisis in Palestine, a region on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Jews, many of whom had migrated to the area to escape the Nazis, wanted to establish their own nation. Arabs in the region rejected that idea, and violent clashes followed. 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.

Eleanor Roosevelt was a lifelong social activist. After the war, she played a key role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the United Nations.



At the Nuremberg Trials, several defendants, including Nazi official Hermann Goering (shown above), claimed they were just doing their duty. "For a soldier, orders are orders!" one blurted. Another defendant said, "We were all under Hitler's shadow." The tribunal rejected these claims, saying that the defendants made a moral choice to carry out orders from their superiors.

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. Germany and Japan did have to disarm and give up the territory they had taken. They also had to pay reparations. But the Allies did not demand a great deal of money. Instead, reparations took the form of industrial equipment and other goods and services.

Roosevelt had explained this approach in his last address to Congress, in March 1945. "By compelling reparations in kind—in plants, in machinery, in rolling stock [railroad cars], and in raw materials," he said, "we shall avoid the mistake that we and other nations made after the last war." 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.

Roosevelt made his statement shortly after returning from Yalta, a Soviet city on the Black Sea, where he had met with Churchill and Joseph Stalin. At Yalta, the Allies began discussing punishment for war criminals. Five months later, at a meeting near Potsdam, Germany, the new president, Harry Truman, agreed with the other Allies on a plan. They would give Nazi war criminals fair and open trials.

The trials took place at Nuremberg, Germany, in front of an international military tribunal. The judges and chief prosecutors of this **tribunal,** or court, came from the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France. The American prosecutor, Robert H. Jackson, presented the opening statement of the trial:

> The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated. That four great nations, flushed with victory and stung with injury, stay [stop] the hand of vengeance and voluntarily submit their captive enemies to the judgment of the law is one of the most significant tributes that power has ever paid to reason.
>
> —Robert H. Jackson, opening remarks, November 21, 1945

The 22 defendants at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials included leaders of the Nazi Party, the military, the SS, and the Gestapo. The SS were the elite Nazi Party corps, most infamous for running the concentration camps. The Gestapo were the secret police. These leaders were charged not only with war

crimes but also with crimes against humanity, such as persecution and extermination. They all pleaded not guilty. On October 1, 1946, twelve defendants were condemned to death by hanging, seven received prison terms, and three were acquitted. Other trials followed. Those convicted of war crimes included officials who ran concentration camps and doctors who carried out gruesome medical experiments on inmates.

A separate tribunal met in Tokyo in 1946 to try Japanese war criminals. The trial lasted more than two years and found 25 defendants guilty. Sixteen received life sentences, and two received lesser sentences. Seven were sentenced to death by hanging, including Hideki Tojo, Japan's leader for much of the war.

From Enemies to Allies: Rebuilding Germany and Japan The Allies also set out to restructure Germany and Japan after the war. At Yalta, they had decided to divide Germany into four military occupation zones, one each for the United States, the USSR, France, and Britain. Although Berlin lay entirely within the Soviet zone, it also was divided in four parts—one for each occupying power.

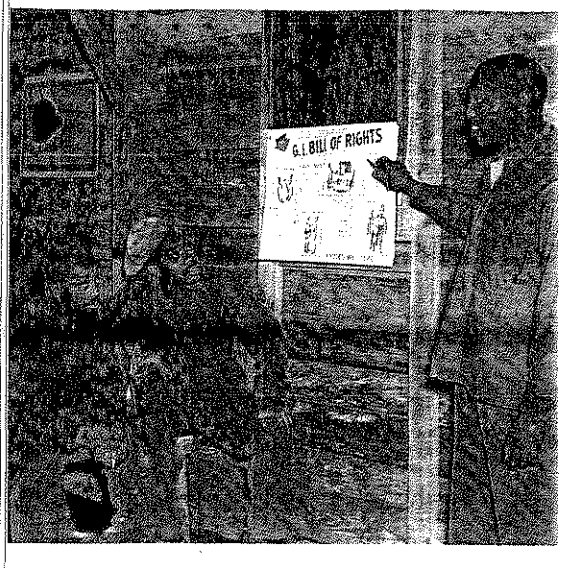
During the war, Allied bombers had destroyed many German cities. As a result, many Germans continued to suffer from famine and disease. At first, the United States did little to help rebuild Germany. It was more concerned with dismantling German factories to eliminate any war-making capacity. Only later would American policy focus on restoring Germany's economic health.

The Allies took a different approach to postwar Japan. They put an American general, Douglas MacArthur, in charge of the country. Allied soldiers occupied Japan, but they did not control the country directly as they did in Germany. Instead, the Japanese government carried out the political reforms that MacArthur and his staff prescribed.

After dissolving Japan's empire and disbanding its military, the Allies worked to bring democracy to Japan. Officials under MacArthur prepared a new constitution. It set up a parliamentary government, based on the British model, with a strong legislature and an independent judiciary. The emperor would only have ceremonial powers. Women as well as men could elect representatives to the parliament, and a lengthy bill of rights ensured civil and political liberties. The constitution also stated that "the Japanese people forever renounce war . . . and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes."

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,** or independent authority.

After the war, the United States promoted political, economic, and social reforms in Japan. It also provided aid to the Japanese people, including food and other goods. Here, Japanese workers hand out rations of wheat flour from the United States in 1946.



The GI Bill provided many benefits to war veterans. It paid up to $500 a year for college costs, enough to cover full tuition at many schools. It paid unemployment compensation of $20 a week for up to a year. It also offered housing loans up to $2,000. These loans led to a real estate boom that generated new jobs.

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. In a radio broadcast heard by American soldiers abroad, Roosevelt spoke of the economic crisis that followed World War I. He promised, "When you come home, we do not propose to involve you, as last time, in a domestic economic mess of our own making."

One year later, Roosevelt asked Congress to pass the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the **GI Bill of Rights**. 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.

Five months after the war ended, the armed services had released 8.5 million men and women from duty. Several million more came home in the next year. Many veterans took advantage of the GI Bill to enhance their prospects in civilian life. With the bill's help, some 2.3 million veterans attended college and 7 million received vocational or on-the-job training. The middle class expanded, as veterans became doctors, lawyers, teachers, and other professionals.

Veterans also took advantage of low-interest federal loans to buy homes. By 1955, the government had granted 4.3 million home loans through the GI Bill. These loans enabled millions of Americans to move out of central cities into outlying neighborhoods. Instead of being renters, they became homeowners.

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. The effect of this legislation was not limited to the individuals it helped. As one veteran pointed out, the GI Bill also helped transform society:

> "I'm not sure whether I could ever have gone to college without the GI Bill . . . It set a whole new standard of improved education for a large number of people, a whole new standard of improved housing . . . I think the GI Bill gave the whole country an upward boost economically and in every other way."
>
> —Ex-GI Don Condren, quoted in an interview in *The Homefront: America During World War II*, 1984

African Americans Seek New Opportunities The GI Bill raised the expectations of all GIs, including African Americans. Shortly after the bill became law, the National Urban League predicted that returning black GIs would want "jobs, opportunities to complete their education, a chance to go into business, and the privilege of sharing completely in the future development and prosperity of the nation."

Not all African American GIs were able to make full use of the GI Bill. Discrimination often prevented African American veterans from buying a home, even if they had the money. Segregation kept them out of many colleges. Still, in the years following the war, many African Americans did become homeowners through the GI Bill. Thousands more received a college education, mainly by attending historically black institutions.

The end of the war did not stop the migration of African Americans from the South. Returning veterans seemed especially eager to leave. By 1947, some 75,000 black GIs had left the South in search of jobs and a better life. A total of 2.5 million black Americans migrated from the region in the 1940s and 1950s.

In general, the lives of African Americans did improve in the postwar years. From 1947 to 1952, the **median income,** or average pay, for nonwhite families rose 45 percent. Politically, though, the picture was more mixed. In national elections, most African Americans backed Truman, who in turn supported progress in the area of civil rights. In the South, however, discriminatory state regulations kept many African Americans from voting.

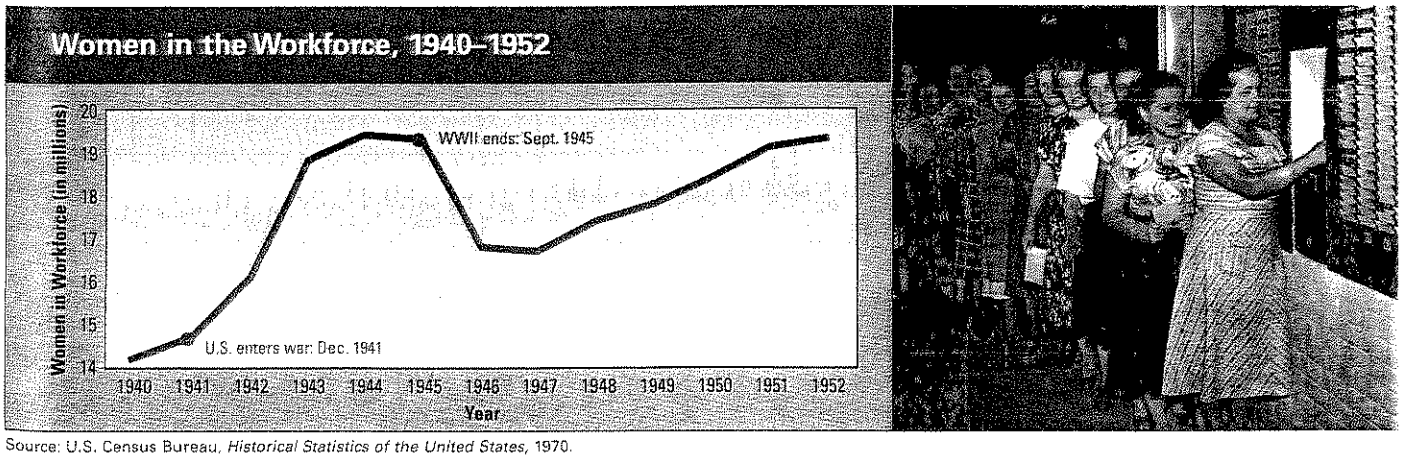
The Demobilization of Women: From Factory Jobs to the Service Sector

By 1947, nearly all war industries had been shut down. The women who had stepped forward to work in shipyards, aircraft plants, and other war-related jobs had received their last paychecks. At the same time, millions of GIs had returned from the war. This set up a potential conflict, pitting men and women against each other for the same jobs.

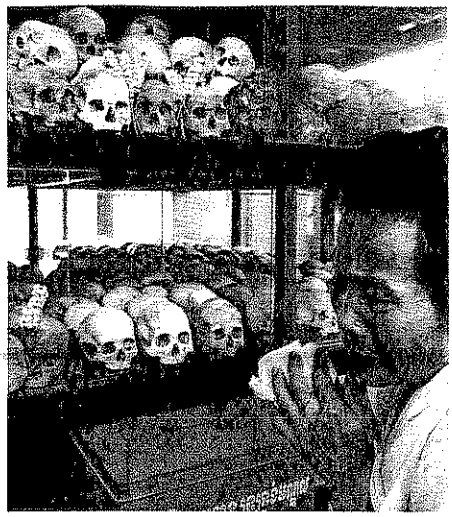
In the postwar period, most female workers felt a duty to step aside for men. They had been told throughout the war that their jobs were temporary. Yet many women enjoyed the independence and self-esteem that came from holding a paying job, and they wanted to keep working. "They are the women," a reporter commented, "who feel that if they are good enough to serve in a crisis they deserve a chance to earn a living in peacetime."

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,** the segment of the economy that does not produce goods. They became teachers, nurses, librarians, bank tellers, and social workers. At these jobs, they earned, on average, just over half of what men earned. For the most part, though, women accepted their new roles and economic status.

From 1940 to 1944, the number of women in the workforce jumped 37 percent, to more than 19 million. That figure declined after the war, but not to prewar levels. Then it began a steady climb. This upward trend signifies a strong economy and a shift in attitudes.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Historical Statistics of the United States,* 1970.



The Khmer Rouge government, led by Pol Pot, carried out mass murder in Cambodia during the 1970s. Nearly 2 million people were killed in the largest genocide since World War II. The current government of Cambodia has put the bones of victims on display as a reminder of this horrendous crime.

Current Connections

37.5 Holding Leaders Accountable for Their Actions

In August 1945, Allied officials met in London to discuss how to bring war criminals to justice. There they drafted the Nuremberg Charter, which spelled out three categories of crime in international law. The first, crimes against peace, included planning and waging a war of aggression. The second, war crimes, involved violating the traditional laws of war. The third, crimes against humanity, included persecution, enslavement, and mass murder. At the Nuremberg Trials, Nazi leaders faced all three sets of charges. The Allies' goal was to hold individual leaders accountable, in a court of law, for their nation's actions. These trials paved the way for today's ongoing prosecution of war criminals.

Defining War Crimes: The Geneva Conventions The Nuremberg Charter was not the first attempt to define war crimes. In 1864, the first in a series of conventions, or international agreements, was signed in Geneva, Switzerland. Called for by the Red Cross, the first of the Geneva Conventions set rules for proper conduct toward sick and wounded enemy soldiers and the civilians who took care of them. Two more Geneva Conventions were issued in 1906 and 1929.

In 1949, a fourth conference was held at Geneva. Here, delegates reformulated the rules of war in four conventions. The first three deal with wounded and sick soldiers and sailors, along with prisoners of war, all of whom are to receive humane treatment. The fourth convention protects civilians during wartime. The United States and nearly every other nation in the world have signed the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

By defining war crimes, the Geneva Conventions are meant to prevent people from committing those crimes. But this does not always work. For five years in the 1970s, the communist dictator Pol Pot controlled Cambodia. Under his harsh rule, some 1.7 million Cambodians died. Many were beaten or worked to death on collective farms. Others died from starvation or disease. Another dictator, Idi Amin of Uganda, also committed war crimes during a period of civil unrest in the 1970s. To hold on to power, he ordered soldiers to execute anyone who criticized him or opposed his rule. Between 300,000 and 500,000 Ugandans were killed under Amin's brutal dictatorship.

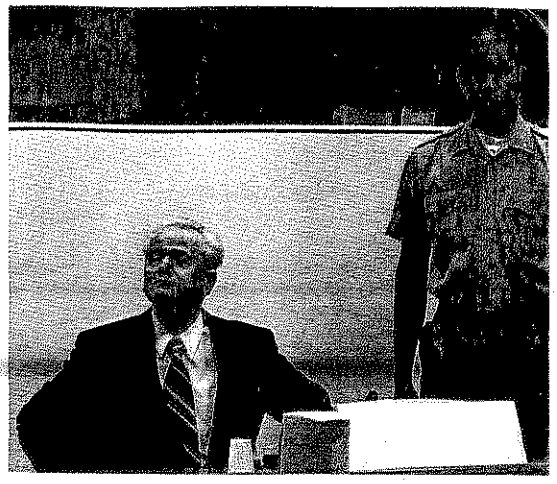
Prosecuting War Crimes: The UN International Criminal Tribunal Pol Pot and Idi Amin never faced an international war crimes tribunal. For decades after the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, no such organization existed. Finally, in 1993, civil war in the former Yugoslavia prompted the United Nations to form an International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The Yugoslav conflict had left about 250,000 people dead.

The ICTY prosecuted more than 50 people for various war crimes, including the use of rape as "an instrument of terror." The tribunal set a precedent by trying an active head of state, Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic. It accused him of carrying out a "campaign of terror and violence" against civilians. It also charged him with genocide and ethnic cleansing, or the forced

removal of an ethnic group from an area. Milosevic died in his jail cell in 2006, before the ICTY could pass judgment on him.

Another civil war leading to genocide occurred in Rwanda in 1994. Up to a million people died, most of them ethnic Tutsis, who were killed by rival Hutus in a massive murder spree. The United Nations set up a second court, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), in 1996. Ten years later, it had tried 27 people for genocide-related crimes, such as extermination and murder. Of those, the ICTR found 24 guilty, including Rwanda's former prime minister, Jean Kambanda. Kambanda was the first head of government convicted of genocide. The court imposed a sentence of life in prison.

The ICTY and ICTR are temporary tribunals. In 1998, 120 nations established a permanent tribunal, the **International Criminal Court (ICC)**. The ICC has the power to try individuals accused of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. More than half the nations of the world have joined the ICC, but not the United States, China, Russia, or Japan. American officials have voiced fears that the ICC might undermine U.S. national sovereignty by claiming the right to try American citizens. They also worry that ICC prosecutions might be "politically motivated." One U.S. official said that the United States might "be accused of war crimes for legitimate but controversial uses of force to protect world peace."



Slobodan Milosevic, the ex-president of Yugoslavia, was charged with committing crimes against humanity during a civil war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. He was tried by the UN's International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague, Netherlands. But he died before his trial ended.

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.

Geneva Conventions To catalog war crimes, many nations of the world met at Geneva, Switzerland, in 1949. The Geneva Conventions prescribed the proper treatment of the wounded, prisoners of war, and civilians.

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.