

THE USA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Principal focus

The principal focus is on the political, economic and social changes in the USA and its emergence as a super power between 1920 and 45.

Problems and issues

Industrialisation; consumerism; anti-communism; racism; isolationism; depression; recovery; state intervention; entry into war; use of the 'A Bomb'.

NORMALCY AND PROSPERITY

REPUBLICAN ASCENDENCY

The Republican Party dominated national politics during the 1920s, not only winning all presidential elections but also dominating both houses of Congress. Reaction against wartime controls and the Democrats' support of Wilson's League of Nations led to the easy victory in 1920 of the Republican Warren Harding against the Democrat James Cox. The result was 16 million votes to nine million; 404 to 127 in the electoral college. President Harding was not well-served and his administration was plagued by scandal:

1. Veterans Bureau Chief Forbes was imprisoned for squandering \$200 million.
2. Attorney-General Dougherty was dismissed due to the illegal sale of liquor permits.
3. Secretary of the Interior Fall was imprisoned for the Teapot Dome Scandal involving corrupt leasing of oil reserves.

Harding died in August 1923 and was replaced by Calvin Coolidge who carried the Republicans to

another election victory in 1924. The Democratic candidate was John Davis, though disaffected Democrats backed the Progressive Party's Robert LaFollette. The electoral vote was: Coolidge—328; Davis—136; LaFollette—13.

Coolidge became known as 'silent Cal' or 'President do-nothing'. That his government was ultra laissez-faire is summed up by his statement, 'The business of America is business'. Coolidge stood down in 1928. The Republican candidate for the 1928 election was Herbert Hoover who defeated the Democrats' Alfred Smith by 444 electoral college votes to 87.

THE DOMESTIC SCENE IN THE 1920S

The United States of the 1920s was characterised by conservatism, nationalism and intolerance leading to bigotry. Harding's presidential campaign in 1920 called for a return to normalcy. The 1920s saw the US become intolerant of anyone not conforming to America's traditional white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant tradition and indifferent to society's problems.

Attack on the left

The spread of communism and the high level of labour disputes immediately after the war led to an hysterical 'red scare':

1. Attorney-General Palmer deported suspected radicals and raided the homes of suspected socialists during 1919–20. Hundreds of people were arrested simply because they held unorthodox economic opinions.
2. The Sacco-Vanzetti murder case resulted in execution for the two Italian immigrants. Though

the evidence was contradictory, their atheistic and anarchic views sealed their fate.

3. Twenty-four States made membership of socialist or communist parties a crime. The Supreme Court endorsed such anti-socialist attacks, for example the case of Abrams versus the US (1919).

Immigration

America's isolationism and intolerance manifested itself in immigration policy. There was a fear that the US would be invaded by a flood of aliens from devastated Europe. This fear led to a series of *Immigration Restriction Acts*:

1. *The Immigration Act* of 1921 introduced a quota system. Intake was limited to 3 per cent of a country's nationals resident in the US in 1910.
2. The 1924 *Johnson Act* lowered the quota to 2 per cent resident in 1890 and banned oriental immigration completely.
3. The 1929 Act reduced total immigration to a maximum of 150 000.

Racism

- The war and its aftermath had a major effect on race relations. Between 1917 and 1925 over 600 000 Negroes moved north.
- Negro soldiers returned from the trenches unwilling to accept second-class citizenship. The response of southern whites was to insist on white supremacy by whatever means necessary.
- In 1919, seventy Negroes were lynched in the south. The Ku Klux Klan grew in strength in the 1920s, boasting five million members by 1924, coming mainly from the south and the west. The Klan attacked not only Negroes but also Jews, Catholics, aliens or anyone not in the American mainstream.
- The Klan's activities were not restricted to terrorism. In some States they gained political control, for example Indiana.

Prohibition

- During the war rural-based Protestants argued that cereals should be used for food not liquor. Prohibition pressure led Congress to adopt the eighteenth Amendment which had been ratified by January 1920.
- The sale and production of intoxicating liquor was banned.
- The Volstead Act (1919) defined an intoxicating drink as any drink more than 0.5 per cent alcohol.
- Prohibition failed miserably. Drinking became fashionable, speakeasies were everywhere and home-brewing nationally popular. Crime bosses like Al Capone proved ready and able to supply the nation's drinking needs.
- Prohibition ended with the twenty-first Amendment (1933) which repealed the eighteenth Amendment.

Popular culture

The 'roaring 20s' or the 'jazz age' provided a whole range of diverting popular pastimes:

- By 1929 nearly all families owned a car. America had in fact gone car crazy as Ford's mass production techniques brought the price of an automobile within the reach of most American households.
- Radio exploded. By 1922 there were three million radios. Music, comedy, news and soap operas all became popular and were usually sponsored by commercial companies.
- Everybody went to the movies to see the likes of Chaplin, Fairbanks, Pickford and Valentino. Sound in films was introduced in 1927 with 'The Jazz Singer'.
- Music in the 1920s produced the jazz greats Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, the Charleston, the Cotton Club and George Gershwin.
- Popular culture also had its heroes be they baseballers (Babe Ruth), boxers (Jack Dempsey) or pilots (Lindbergh).

QUESTIONS

1. Name America's 1920s presidents.
2. What phrase sums up government policy in the 1920s?
3. What were the principal features of post-war American society?
4. What was the aim of immigration policy?
5. Which constitutional amendments affected prohibition?

INDUSTRIALISATION AND MASS CONSUMERISM

Business prosperity

After the brief recession of 1920–21, the American economy entered a period of unparalleled prosperity. Prophets declared prosperity to be a permanent feature of America's economic life.

- The car industry led the way. Mass production kept prices down and car ownership became almost universal. Related industries boomed: road construction, paint, scrap.
- Mass production brought a whole range of consumer durables within the reach of average Americans, for example stoves and irons.
- Millions of dollars were spent on advertising and soon the American public became convinced of its need for a whole range of products. Advertising agencies encouraged style changes and built-in obsolescence to further stimulate demand.
- 'Buy now, pay later' became the catchcry as

millions of people took advantage of the spread of credit facilities.

- Success in business was acclaimed as the height of achievement.

Speculation boom

With prosperity all around them, Americans at all levels felt free to invest their savings on the stock market. Throughout the decade stock market prices continually rose. This only encouraged people to buy more stocks on credit, confident that as the price of stocks could only go up, they would be able to pay their debts. The stock price index rose from 117 in December 1928 to 225 in September 1929. Stock values soared far above levels justified by industry profitability. As more people entered the market, the boom became self-liquidating.

Government and industry

Republican economic policies were deliberately designed to help big business, whether it be in the area of taxation, tariffs or assisting the build-up of monopolies.

- Treasury Secretary Mellon reduced taxes for companies and the rich. Lowered taxes included excess profits tax, surtax, while rebates on earned income were granted.
- The Fordney-McCumber Tariff (1922) pushed tariffs to their highest level in history. The Tariff Commission gave the president discretionary power to vary tariffs by up to 50 per cent. Duties were raised this way thirty-two times!
- Holding companies, corporations that owned the stock of several producing companies, expanded. Commerce Secretary Hoover supported the creation of trade associations, cartels which fixed prices and standardised wages—anything that eliminated competition. By 1932, 53 per cent of all corporate wealth was owned by 594 corporations.

Rural problems

Agriculture remained depressed during the 1920s with farmers never really recovering from the 1920–21 recession. Prices for primary products fell continuously, 75 per cent between 1920–32. As a result, farm incomes dropped dramatically. This fall was accompanied by rising prices for manufactured goods and higher taxes. A farm bloc in Congress tried to pass pro-farmer laws, for example the *McNary-Haugen Act* which provided a scheme for government purchase of surplus crops not needed for the home market. This law was vetoed by Coolidge.

REPUBLICAN FOREIGN POLICY

Although all three Republican administrations followed a generally isolationist course, American traditions

dictated effective co-operation for disarmament and the outlawry of war. (Morison and Commager in *Growth of the American Republic*, volume 2.)

This statement sums up foreign policy in the 1920s. Isolationism, the desire to turn inwards and concentrate on domestic matters while rejecting a world role, showed itself in several ways:

1. Senate refusal to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and thus America's refusal to join the League of Nations.
2. Senate isolationist opposition to US adherence to the World Court.
3. America's failure to join Britain in guaranteeing France's border against a future German attack.

However, in the areas of disarmament and peace the US was more active:

1. The 1922 Washington Conference led to the Five Power Treaty between the US, Britain, Japan, France and Italy which limited the ratio in capital ships to 5:5:3:1.75:1.75 respectively.
2. An attempt made at Geneva in 1927 to extend this check on rearmament to cruisers and destroyers failed, as did the London Conference of 1930.
3. The Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 outlawed war.
4. By 1932 the US had adhered to thirteen League agreements.

Further evidence of America's slowly growing international role can be seen in Europe and the Far East:

1. America was closely involved in the dispute over German reparations which led to the Dawes Plan (1924) and the Young Plan (1929).
2. The Four Power Treaty (1921) between the US, Britain, Japan and France aimed to create a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of north Pacific conflicts. The Nine Power Treaty (1922) guaranteed China's rights and interests by limiting Western powers' concessions and spheres of influence.

QUESTIONS

6. What three factors contributed most to the consumer boom of the 1920s?
7. How was the speculative boom funded?
8. In what areas did the Republicans help business?
9. What was the main problem faced by farmers?
10. What were the exceptions to America's generally isolationist foreign policy?

THE DEPRESSION

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF AMERICA'S ECONOMY IN THE 1920S

In 1929, President Hoover said, 'I have no fears for the future of our country. It is bright with hope'. Hoover's remark typified the lack of economic understanding of the times which failed to see the basic flaws in the US and the international economic situation of the 1920s:

- The boom of the 1920s was deceptive. Mass production, low prices and the availability of credit stimulated production. Eventually the market became saturated and this inevitably necessitated cuts in production and sackings. As unemployment began to spiral upwards, so the problem of market saturation became more acute.
- Market saturation was made worse by the low level of purchasing power prevalent in the 1920s: unemployment never fell below two million; wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few; many sectors of the economy never recovered from the recession of 1920-21, for example farming and coal.
- The holding company system with its inverted pyramidal structure was particularly vulnerable to any 1929 type crisis: if anything happened to the base company, the whole business pyramid would collapse.
- American exports and world trade generally were declining. This was the result of high tariffs, US insistence on the repayment of war debts and German reparations.

THE WALL STREET CRASH: OCTOBER 1929

In January 1929, over \$1 billion of new securities were floated on the stock market: the appetite for stocks seemed unlimited. Between 1927 and 1929 stockbrokers increased their bank borrowings from \$3.5 billion to \$8.5 billion! Stock prices began to drop on 21 October 1929. On 24 October almost 13 million shares changed hands; on 29 October the figure was 16 million. Stock values fell 40 per cent in a month. In three years the share price index fell from 275 to 58!

THE COMING OF THE DEPRESSION

There had been financial panics on other occasions in US history. Hoover and many others felt that 1929 was just another and that the market would soon shake itself out and be back on its feet - 1929, however, was different. The negative aspects of the economy (dealt with earlier) explain the underlying weakness of the system. The crash had the effect of suddenly highlighting them:

1. Millions of people lost their savings; America's credit binge saw public and private debt rising to \$150 billion by 1930 - a third of the national wealth.
2. Bankruptcies escalated and within three years over 5000 banks had been forced to close.
3. As debts rose and purchases fell, employers were forced to lay off workers; this led to increased indebtedness, fewer purchases and to the laying off of more workers. Unemployment thus spiralled upwards, reaching 15 million by 1932.
4. Falling tax receipts led to cuts in government services.
5. Foreign trade fell in three years from \$9 billion to \$3 billion.

It seemed that America was being sucked into a bottomless deflationary whirlpool.

HOOVER AND THE DEPRESSION

Hoover claimed that the situation was not serious arguing that it was merely a stock market fall and that it had created unfounded fear. Thus all that was needed to revive prosperity was confidence. In speech after speech he urged employers to keep prices and wages up.

- There was a small increase in federal public works spending, but this was more than countered by cuts in State and local government spending urged by Hoover.
- The Federal Farm Board bought vast amounts of wheat and cotton. However, failure to encourage reduced production led to prices plummeting.
- Hoover agreed to the Hawley-Smoot Tariff which raised duties by 20 per cent. This, plus the resultant overseas retaliation, led to a contraction of international trade.
- There was too great a reliance on voluntary agreements.
- The Reconstruction Finance Corporation lent \$11 billion to the top banks and railroads, but this had no appreciable impact on the Depression.

Hoover had no idea how to cope with the massive unemployment and national poverty which confronted him. He said federal spending must not rise as it would discourage business investment and cause inflation. He could not provide funds for federal relief as he might be violating States' rights or creating an unbalanced budget. He persistently argued that local government and philanthropic groups could deal with the poverty. This was despite the fact that:

1. in Cleveland unemployment was 50 per cent; in Toledo 80 per cent;
2. New York had 25 000 emergency cases needing relief;
3. Philadelphia had run out of relief funds;

4. shanty towns called Hoovervilles were appearing nationwide;
5. in rural areas as prices fell, banks were foreclosing and farmers were being pushed off the land.

To the people, Hoover seemed unconcerned, a view enforced by his treatment of the 'bonus army' in June 1932. Unemployed veterans marched on Washington to demand early payment of war bonuses. They camped at Anacostia Flats. Hoover ordered the National Guard to burn down their pathetic little hovels and drive the veterans out.

THE ELECTION OF 1932

The Republican platform

Hoover was unenthusiastically chosen as the Republican candidate. The party tried to praise his handling of the Depression and blame it all on the European situation. Hoover encouraged the people to accept his faith in rugged individualism. He warned that Democrat government 'mastery over people's daily lives' could lead to making the government 'master of people's souls and thoughts'.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

- Roosevelt was born in New York in 1882 to a wealthy family.
- He was educated at Groton, Harvard and Columbia Law School and was admitted to the New York Bar in 1907.
- He was elected to the Senate in 1910.
- Under President Wilson he served as assistant secretary to the Navy.
- In 1920 he was James Cox's running-mate.
- In 1921 he contracted polio, yet managed to fight his way back to national Democratic politics.
- Between 1928 and 32 he was Governor of New York.

The Democratic platform

Roosevelt was chosen as the Democrat candidate with little opposition. He called for a 'new deal for the American people'. His platform provided for, among other things: unemployment relief; restoration of agriculture; federal regulation of many areas of business; repeal of the eighteenth Amendment.

The election

Hoover suffered the worst defeat of any Republican candidate in history. He received less than 40 per cent of the vote: 16 million to Roosevelt's 23 million. Roosevelt scooped the electoral college by 472 to 59, winning in all but six States. The Democrats also romped home in both houses of the Congress.

QUESTIONS

11. What factors contributed to market saturation?
12. How many shares changed hands on 29 October 1929?
13. What was the principal economic fall-out of the crash?
14. What was Hoover's view of the crisis?
15. What reasons did Hoover give for not funding federal relief?
16. Who were the victims of the Anacostia Flats attack?
17. What did Roosevelt offer the American people?
18. What term best describes Roosevelt's 1932 victory?

THE NEW DEAL

IMMEDIATE ACTION

In his inauguration address on 4 March 1933, Franklin Roosevelt made two things very clear:

1. America faced a disaster comparable to foreign invasion. He talked of 'the dark realities of the moment'.
2. He would not rely on persuasion as had Hoover: 'This nation asks for action and action now'.

His immediate moves were aimed at dealing with the financial crisis. He called Congress into session and declared a Bank Holiday which closed all banks. An Emergency Banking Law was passed which allowed for the opening of all sound banks and a Bank Conservator was appointed to aid those banks in trouble. In his first 100 days, Roosevelt sent fifteen proposals to Congress which were all enacted. The country began to recapture a sense of purpose.

THE NEW DEAL PROGRAM

Roosevelt's New Deal had three main objectives: relief for workers and farmers from immediate distress; recovery of the nation's economy; and reform of the system to prevent the recurrence of another depression.

Relief measures

- The Civilian Conservation Corps employed 1.6 million people in 2600 camps on environmental conservation work.
- The Federal Emergency Relief Administration gave the States \$3 billion for the unemployed between 1933–35.
- The Civil Works Administration gave temporary work to four million people between November 1933 and May 1934.
- Working through private firms the Public Works

Administration employed many people building schools and bridges for example.

- Headed by Harry Hopkins, the Works Progress Administration employed four million people by 1936. The Federal Arts Project helped actors and writers while the National Youth Administration helped 400 000 people continue their education.

Finance and banking

Roosevelt believed that domestic deflation had to be reversed to alleviate the debt problem and the dollar devalued to stimulate American exports. In pursuit of these aims the following measures were taken:

1. reduction of the dollar gold content to 59.06 cents;
2. the establishment of a \$2 billion stabilisation fund to regulate the devaluated dollar.

Prices did not rise, but devaluation helped American competitiveness abroad.

The New Deal tried to reform bank and stock exchange activities:

1. The 1933 *Glass–Steagall Banking Act* placed tight restrictions on the speculative use of bank credits. All deposits up to \$5000 were insured.
2. Securities exchanges and those people offering shares for sale were now put under greater control with the *Securities Exchange Act* (1934) and the *Truth in Securities Act* (1933).

Agriculture

Farmers faced a major crisis. The New Deal tried to help in four main areas: debt, over-production, soil conservation and electrical power. Figure 11.1 summarises the principal measures that were taken.

Industry

- Residential construction was helped by the Federal Housing Administration (1934) and the US Housing Authority (1937).
- The National Recovery Administration (NRA) was set up in 1933 to draw up a code of fair competition for each industry, covering such things as prohibition of child labour and a minimum wage. The Supreme Court declared the NRA unconstitutional (see below). In its wake came the *Wagner–Connery Act* (1935) which created a National Labor Relations Board whose aim was to protect workers' rights of union membership and collective bargaining.

Social security

Few States provided age pensions or unemployment pay in 1933. To deal with this, Roosevelt introduced a *Social Security Act* in 1935. Its main provisions were:

1. an old age pension to be given at age 65 with employers and employees sharing the tax burden;

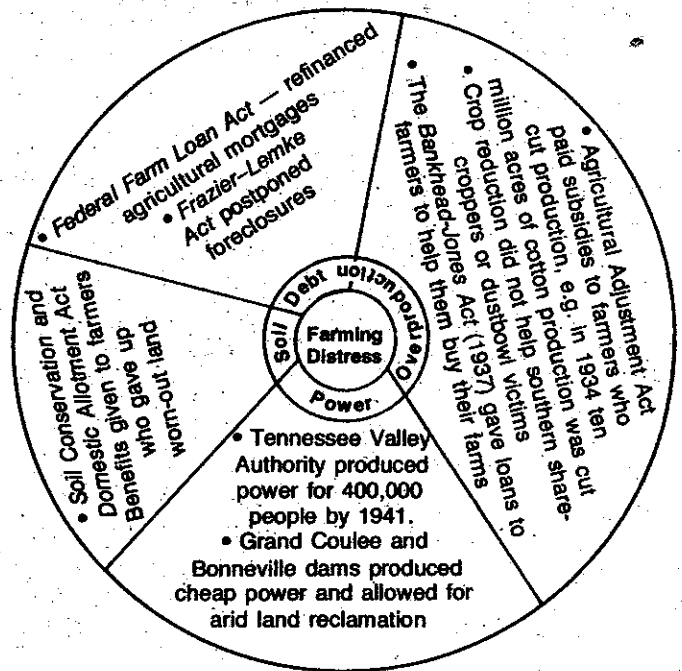


Fig. 11.1 *Agriculture under the New Deal*

2. unemployment pay to be administered by the States but financed federally;
3. federal aid to be given to the States to deal with specific areas such as maternity care and destitutes;
4. a Social Security Board to manage the system.

By 1937 21 million people were insured against unemployment and 36 million against a destitute old age. The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of this measure.

QUESTIONS

19. What was Roosevelt's immediate objective?
20. What were his three longer-term objectives?
21. Which two measures put banking and exchanges on a firmer footing?
22. Which measures helped deal with farmer indebtedness?
23. Why was the *Social Security Act* needed?
24. What was the Supreme Court view of the *Social Security Act*?

Opposition to the New Deal

Though overwhelmingly popular, the New Deal did face opposition from three areas: radicals, conservatives and the Supreme Court:

1. Radicals such as Louisiana Governor Huey Long and Dr F.E. Townsend urged greater reform. They wanted the wealth of the nation shared out among the poor and \$200 pensions brought in. They rallied behind the Union Party's William Lemke in the 1936 election. Lemke received no electoral votes.

- Conservatives argued that the New Deal was creating a massive debt and attacking America's laissez-faire system. They also objected to the increase in executive power.
- The Supreme Court declared seven fundamental New Deal laws unconstitutional, for example the *National Recovery Act* in the 1935 case *Schechter Poultry Corporation v US*. The Supreme Court was dominated by conservative republican appointees. Roosevelt unsuccessfully tried to re-organise the court in his second term.

The New Deal: an evaluation

The America Roosevelt faced in the 1930s was at rock-bottom. It seemed that American capitalism and democracy were not equipped to deal with such a crisis. Life during the Depression made a sick joke of the 'American dream':

- 15 million unemployed in 1932; 8 million still by 1939;
- bread lines and endemic poverty in the cities;
- evictions, dustbowls and forced migrations in the country;
- black unemployment was always higher than white and southern whites tried hard to counter the desegregationary effects of New Deal laws;
- some Americans turned to political extremists, such as Huey Long—more than one million people in 1936 voted for union, socialist or communist candidates.

It is to the credit of Roosevelt and his administration that the US was brought through the crisis of the Depression and proved strong enough to face up to the war with Japan and Germany. The true significance of the New Deal lies in four main areas:

- The responsibility of the government to look after its less fortunate citizens was now undisputed.
- For the first time in its history the US attacked the problem of environmental vandalism in a major way—soil was conserved, trees planted and plains reclaimed.
- Despite the inevitable growth of State intervention, the fundamental free enterprise nature of American capitalism survived.
- Most importantly, while other nations facing a similar crisis took the path of dictatorship, the US maintained its democratic system.

QUESTIONS

- Where did opposition to the New Deal come from?
- How did Roosevelt try to deal with judicial opposition?
- Name the four main areas of significance of the New Deal.

WORLD WAR II

THE LEAD-UP TO THE WAR

Throughout the 1930s the United States looked on as Italy, Germany and Japan invaded Africa, central Europe and Asia. The reaction within the US was overwhelmingly pacifist and isolationist. There were several reasons for this reaction:

- The severity of the depression convinced many that the US should concentrate on its own domestic problems.
- The committee under North Dakota Senator Nye presented evidence in 1936 which showed that bankers and munitions producers had made fortunes during the Great War. Many Americans began to believe that the US entry into the war had been the result of greed not idealism.
- The horrors of the Great War had not been forgotten and isolationists wanted to ensure that the US would not repeat the experience.

As a result of this strong pacifist and isolationist feeling, Congress passed a series of *Neutrality Acts*:

- The 1934 *Johnson Act* prevented countries which had not paid their war debts from selling securities in the US.
- The *Neutrality Acts* of 1935–37 banned the sale of any war equipment to belligerent nations; ordered that indirect war products, for example steel, could only leave the US in the ships of a belligerent nation and had to be paid for in cash; forbade Americans from sailing in belligerent nations' ships; and forbade belligerent nations from raising money in the US.

Roosevelt opposed the neutrality legislation. He did not always invoke the laws, for example in 1937 he did this to allow China to buy arms following the attack by Japan. In his Quarantine speech in Chicago (1937) he argued that aggressors should be isolated. In 1938, he urged Congress to pass a \$1 billion naval construction program. In 1939 Roosevelt revoked a 1911 US–Japan Treaty, thus effectively preventing Japan from purchasing oil and scrap iron from the US. Both products were needed by Japan in her war with China.

US opinion remained divided when war broke out in 1939:

- The America First Committee, backed by editor Randolph Hearst, pushed the isolationist view that America should stay out of the war.
- The Committee to defend America by Aiding the Allies, backed by newspaper man W.A. White, argued that the US must help the allies in every way possible short of war.

As opinion in America shifted to a pro-allied stance, Roosevelt was able to secure a new *Neutrality Act* in

1939. This repealed the arms embargo to belligerents and thus opened the door to supplies being sent to the allies. The US now began to prepare itself for a war more and more people feared could not be avoided.

- In 1940, Congress set aside \$13 billion for military expenditure.
- A *Selective Service Act* was passed in September 1940 which led to 800 000 men being conscripted for training.
- W.S. Knudsen was placed in charge of the Office of Production Management whose purpose was to put the US on a war footing.
- Eight naval and air bases were leased from Britain in return for fifty old destroyers.

In 1940, Roosevelt was nominated for a third term as president. He easily defeated his Republican opponent, Wendell Wilkie, by 449 electoral votes to 38. Throughout 1941 Roosevelt took the US closer and closer to war:

March The *Lend-Lease Act* was passed under which vast amounts of supplies were sent to England. Roosevelt described the US as the 'arsenal of democracy'.

April The US leased military bases in Greenland.

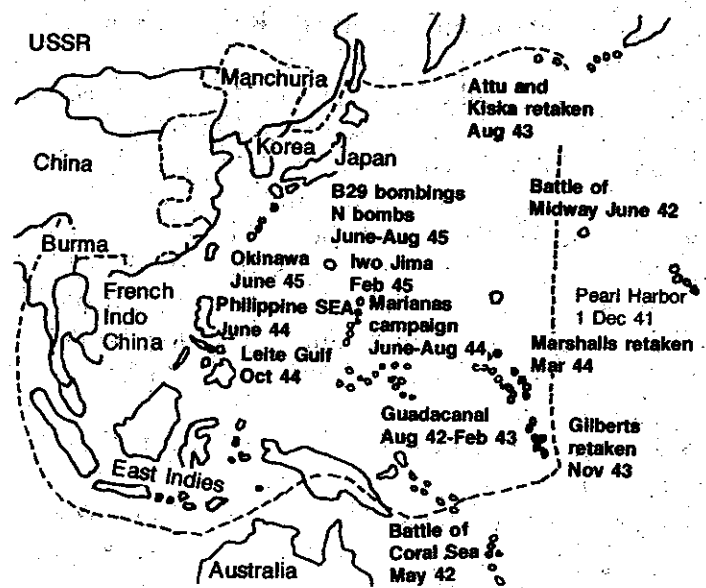
August Roosevelt and Churchill proclaimed the Atlantic Charter. The Charter contained a series of idealistic objectives which came to represent Allied war aims.

Following German attacks on US shipping in late 1941, Congress cancelled all neutrality legislation. The President ordered the navy to shoot on sight.

US-Japanese relations continued to deteriorate. Japan joined Italy and Germany in the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. In 1941, Japan occupied French Indochina, thus putting the Philippines, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies under threat. Roosevelt responded by freezing Japanese assets in the US. America and Japan now entered negotiations to settle their differences. However, Premier Tojo had already decided on a pre-emptive attack on the US Pacific fleet based at Pearl Harbour. The attack came on 7 December - 19 ships were lost. On 8 December the US and Japan were officially at war. A few days later Italy and Germany declared war on the US.

The Pacific War

Following Pearl Harbour, Japan swept through South-east Asia. By mid-1942, Japan controlled Malaya, Singapore, the East Indies and the Philippines. Japanese domination stretched from the Aleutians to New Guinea; from the western Pacific to Burma. The Japanese advance was checked at the Battles of Midway Island and the Coral Sea. Between 1943 and 1945, the US forces under Nimitz and MacArthur gradually pushed the Japanese back by a process of island hopping. The fanaticism of Japanese



Farthest extent of Japanese control: May 1942
Iwo Jima February 1945: Principal Pacific campaigns

Fig. 11.2 The war in the Pacific

soldiers meant that every piece of land was bitterly contested. By 1945 American planes were close enough to the Japanese mainland to bomb at will. Figure 11.2 summarises the progress of the American Pacific campaign.

In August 1945, the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Within a week Japan had surrendered unconditionally. Debate still rages about the reasons for the decision to use atomic weapons.

1. President Truman had been warned that at least another half a million American troops would die if Japan itself had to be invaded. Thus the bomb was seen as a means of ending the war quickly.
2. Some historians have suggested that Hiroshima was nothing more than a scientific experiment.
3. Others argue that the demonstration of atomic weapons was aimed at the Soviet Union as America wanted to intimidate Stalin and thus limit the communist advance in both Asia and Europe.

THE WAR IN EUROPE

- Throughout 1942 the American military presence in Britain grew. In fact Britain at this time was likened to an enormous American aircraft-carrier.
- The British victory at El Alamein in November 1942 saw Rommel's forces pushed back to Tunisia. Eisenhower's forces overran Morocco and Algeria and combined with the British to drive the Axis powers out of North Africa.
- In July, Sicily was invaded. The allies then pushed up through Italy. Mussolini was overthrown, but German troops in Italy refused to surrender and