Module 1: The Revolutionary War

As late as the 1750s, few Americans objected to their membership in the British Empire. By the mid-1770s, the relationship between the American colonies and their British rulers had become so poisoned that the empire was on the verge of unraveling.

In the spring of 1775, open war erupted between British troops and the New England militia. No one at the time thought that this would be a revolution. The revolution began when the commander of British troops in Boston, General Gage, sent his troops to Lexington and Concord. Their purpose was to capture the arsenal at Concord and trap colonial leaders such as John Hancock, John Adams, and Samuel Adams.

Congress chose George Washington as the commander of the newly formed Continental Army. He was the best known and most widely respected individual in the colonies with military experience. He was also a symbol of stability, security, and resourcefulness.

During the Battle of Bunker Hill, which the British won, the colonists ran out of ammunition and ran away. However, the British suffered very high losses. This battle proved that the newly formed Continental Army could effectively fight the best trained and most professional army in the world at that time.

The war began in April 1775 and lasted for seven years. It was not only a military conflict with Great Britain, but also a political conflict within America. American battle deaths were 5,000. The war was a shift from traditional conventional war to a revolutionary war for liberation. This is what made it possible for the United States to defeat the more powerful British. It was also a global war, as many other nations and peoples were involved.

On Christmas night, 1776, Washington and his troops crossed the Delaware River and surprised the Hessian (Prussian soldiers in the pay of the British) garrison at Trenton, New Jersey. This was after the troops endured freezing temperatures at Valley Forge, as the Congress did not have any money to purchase supplies for the army.

The surrender of British Major General John Burgoyne’s troops at Saratoga in October 1777 was very significant. This battle caused the French to embrace the American cause. It was also the battle in which Washington’s favorite General, Benedict Arnold, participated. However, General Gates, General Arnold’s commander, took credit for the victory. On being passed over for advancement in rank due to political infighting, General Arnold went over to the British side. This was a terrible blow to the colonial cause. In his will, General Arnold requested to be buried in his Continental Army uniform.
The final phase of the Revolutionary War took place in the South. The British overestimated the extent of loyalist support (there were over 100,000 colonists throughout the colonies loyal to the British), and they did make some mistakes. Washington’s troops, now a combined French-American army of 17,000 marched over 450 miles to Yorktown, Virginia. The young Marquis de Lafayette was very fond of Washington, and he had great influence with King Louis XVI in France. Thus the colonists were provided with guns, uniforms, money, soldiers, and the support of the French Navy. At Yorktown, Comte de Rochambeau (who was a veteran of many siege battles) and Washington, along with French Admiral de Grasse’s fleet, trapped Lord Cornwallis and his army of 8,000.

Cornwallis surrendered on October 17, 1781. British General Clinton’s army and navy came from New York a week after the battle. The British still held New York and were up in the Pacific Northwest, however, Britain had grown tired of the war, and the peace treaty was signed in France on September 3, 1783.
Module 2: The War of 1812

The War of 1812 was the second war with Great Britain. It started as a result of the interplay on the oceans, and the westward expansion. England was stopping American ships to find deserters from the British Navy. This was called *impressment*. Americans at the time felt that “Manifest Destiny” was their God-given right to expand westward onto tribal lands. Much of the war was fought at sea; however the British did burn down various parts of Washington. Dolly Madison was said to save the painting of George Washington at this time.

In January 1815, at Fort McHenry near Baltimore, Maryland, Francis Scott Key wrote the “Star Spangled Banner.” The American Navy, although rather small in size, achieved victories at the Battle of Lake Champlain and Lake Erie. It was at this time, the Barbary States took advantage of the weakness of the Navy to capture American ships and sailors and demand tribute. The United States bombed Tripoli, and eventually the payment of ransom stopped. Of major significance was the Battle of New Orleans. Andrew Jackson and his troops inflicted major losses on the British. However, this battle took place weeks after the peace treaty (the Treaty of Ghent) had been signed.
Module 3: The Mexican War

President Tyler—on his last day in office—offered the Republic of Texas annexation to the United States. This did not set well with the Mexican government, as this was Mexican territory. However, the Mexicans had encouraged “Texicans” to come to Mexico, so they could tax them. Texas accepted the offer and became the 28th state in the Union. In 1846, President Polk ordered Brigadier General Zachary Taylor and his 4,000-man army to the Rio Grande area to pressure Mexico into accepting the Rio Grande River as the boundary between the two nations. The Mexicans wanted the Nueces River as the boundary. On April 25, 1846, Mexican troops crossed the Rio Grande (still in doubt) and fired on American soldiers. On May 11, 1846, President Polk said that Mexico had invaded U.S. territory and shed American blood. He did not say that the territory was in dispute. On May 13, 1846, the United States declared war on Mexico, and Mexico declared war on the United States on May 23, 1846.

The Mexican General Santa Anna—who fought more battles than Washington and Napoleon—and his 20,000 soldiers were defeated at the Battle of Buena Vista. President Polk sent a second army under General Winfield “Old Fuss and Feathers” Scott to Mexico. General Scott served on active duty as a general longer than any other man in American history.

The major campaign of the Mexican war was General Scott’s advance from Veracruz to Mexico City. Scott won the battles of Cerro Gordo, Puebla, Contreras, Churubusco, and Molino Del Rey. The final battle for Mexico City took place at Chapultepec on September 13, 1847.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war and was approved on March 10, 1848. The treaty added 1.2 million square miles of territory to the United States.
Module 4: The Civil War: Preservation of the Union

The Civil War was the defining event of the 19th century. There were many causes of the Civil War—sectionalism, slavery, states’ rights, the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, John Brown’s Raid, economic issues, the Dred Scott decision, and the election of Lincoln. New issues arose during the 1850s, such as the expansion of slavery, the powerful abolitionist movement. Also, the vigorous nationalism that was helping to keep the United States together was producing a desire for territorial expansion that would tear the nation apart.

For the South, the election of Abraham Lincoln was the final straw. President Lincoln had said that no matter what the union must be preserved. The South felt that their rights were being taken away. The process of disunion began.

South Carolina was the first state to leave the Union on December 20, 1860. By the time Lincoln took office, six other Southern states had seceded and formed a new nation—the Confederate States of America. The response from the North was confused and indecisive.

On April 12–13, 1861, Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard’s troops fired on Fort Sumter and the Civil War had begun with four more states leaving the Union.

All the important material advantages lay with the North: more population, bigger cities, and a better industrial system with twice as much railroad trackage as in the South. The South was fighting a defensive war on its own land. The North had to fight on unfamiliar ground, amid a hostile population, and had to maintain long lines of communication. The commitment of the white population of the South was clear and firm; however in the North, opinion about the war was more divided.

Over 2.1 million men served in the Union (North) military forces. In 1861, the regular army of the United States was only 16,000. By March 1863, Congress was forced to pass a national draft law.

As the war progressed, the North seemed slowly to accept emancipation as a central war aim; nothing less would justify the enormous sacrifices of the struggle. On September 22, 1862, after the Union victory at the Battle of Antietam, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation freeing all slaves in all areas of the Confederacy except those under Union control. This showed that the war was being fought not only to preserve the Union but also to eliminate slavery.

Lincoln could not find a general who could give him victories. The South had General Robert E. Lee, who many thought had been best officer in the U.S. Army. However, Lee did not
accept Lincoln’s offer to command the Army of the Potomac, and took command of the Army of Northern Virginia.

At the Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in July of 1863, Lee’s 75,000 were outnumbered by General George Meade’s 90,000. Pickett’s charge of 15,000 Confederates resulted in some 10,000 casualties. This was Lee’s biggest mistake of the war, and he had to withdraw back to the South. Lee lost one third of his army at Gettysburg, and this retreat was a major turning point in the war. The South did have major victories at Chancellorsville (where General “Stonewall” Jackson was killed) and Fredericksburg.

Lincoln finally found a great general in 1864 and made Ulysses S. Grant general in chief of all Union armies. General Grant planned two great offensives for 1864—one to Richmond and the other with General William T. Sherman.

In Georgia, Sherman and his 60,000-man army took Atlanta on September 2, 1864, and his “march to the sea” cut a wide swath of destruction across Georgia. Sherman is known as the father of modern warfare. His statement, “War is hell,” meant that war should be made as horrible as possible for the opponent. He wanted to break the will of the southern population by burning towns and plantations along his route. After his troops burned down one third of Atlanta, they went to South Carolina. As one of Sherman’s troops said, “Here is where treason began and, by God, here is where it will end!” (McPherson, 2005, p. 202).

After losing Atlanta (which helped Lincoln get reelected) and Vicksburg, the South had no rail access and was shut off from other Confederated forces. The Confederate Army was plagued by heavy casualties and massive desertions. General Lee informed the Confederate government (President Jefferson Davis) that he could no longer defend Richmond.

On April 9, 1865, General Lee met General Grant at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia and surrendered. The war had cost 620,000 deaths—more than all of America’s wars combined.

Reference

Module 5: The Spanish-American War and Imperialism

The American Republic had been an expansionist nation since the earliest days of its existence. It was the nation’s “Manifest Destiny” many Americans believed, to expand into new realms. The most effective apostle of imperialism was Alfred Thayer Mahan. His thesis was that countries with sea power were the great nations of history, and the greatness of the United States, bounded by two oceans, would rest on naval power. By 1898, the U.S. Navy was fifth in the world. By 1900, it was third.

The Spanish-American War grew out of events in Cuba. The Spanish Commander “Butcher” Wyler confined civilians in concentration camps, where they died by the thousands. This horrified Americans, and the “yellow press” of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer reported this in their newspapers.

Two events took place which ended any chances for a peaceful settlement with Spain. In 1898, the Spanish Minister wrote in a private letter that McKinley was a weak man and a “bidder for the admiration of the crowd” (Berkin, Miller, Cherny, and Gormly, 2007, p. 600). In February 1898, the battleship Maine blew up in Havana harbor with a loss of 260 sailors. The United States blamed Spain for this, although it was later proven to be an accident. However, the war cry came up, “Remember the Maine! To hell with Spain!” (Tucker, 2009, p. 360). Congress appropriated $50 million for military preparations.

Secretary of State John Hay (who had been Lincoln’s personal secretary) called it a splendid little war. Declared in April, it was over in August 1898. Only 460 Americans were killed or died of wounds, although 5,200 died of disease.

Commodore George Dewey steamed into Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, and completely destroyed the Spanish fleet. Only one American sailor died (of heatstroke), and what had begun as a war to free Cuba became a war to strip Spain of its colonies.

The Rough Riders, led by Colonel Theodore Roosevelt (who had resigned as Assistant Secretary of the Navy) attacked Kettle Hill, adjacent to San Juan Hill. Roosevelt was recommended for the Medal of Honor, but the paperwork was “lost.”

With the end of the war, Spain ceded Puerto Rico and Guam to the United States and accepted continued American occupation of Manila. Spain also recognized the independence of Cuba. A peace treaty, signed in December 1898 in Paris, brought a formal end to the war. The United States paid $20 million to Spain for the Philippines.

The war made the United States a Pacific power. In one of America’s least remembered wars (the Philippine Insurrection) the United States killed 50,000 Filipinos. From 1898–1902, the United States had 200,000 soldiers in the Philippines. However, in 1901 Emilio Aguinaldo
surrendered, and the war was over. The commander of the American troops was General Arthur MacArthur, father of General Douglas MacArthur. In 1901, the military transferred authority over the islands to William Howard Taft, who became the first civilian governor. The Philippines did not gain their independence until July 4, 1946.

References


Module 6: Great War and the Second World War: Global Warfare

The Great War (World War I)

The Great War started in August 1914, when Austria-Hungary invaded Serbia. It dragged on for two and a half years before the United States entered the war in April 1917. The “Triple Entente” linked Britain, France, and Russia and the “Triple Alliance” united Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Italy. The chief rivalry was between the great powers that dominated the alliances: Great Britain and Germany. On June 28, 1914, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, which triggered the war.

President Woodrow Wilson had said that the United States would remain “impartial in thought as well as in action” (Tuchman, 2004, p. 400). The British imposed a naval blockade against Germany, and the Germans launched unrestricted submarine warfare. On May 7, 1915, the Lusitania was sunk, and 128 Americans died. This was not a cause for America to enter the war, but it changed American public opinion about Germany.

The Zimmerman note (from the German foreign minister) asked that Mexico join Germany if the United States entered the war, and Mexico could regain her “lost provinces.” This inflamed American public opinion.

Due to unrestricted submarine warfare, Wilson asked Congress for a Declaration of War, and on April 6, 1917, war was declared on Germany.

The commander of the American Expeditionary Forces was General John J. Pershing. Among the new weapons of war were the tank, the airplane, the submarine, and poison gas. With fresh American troops arriving in France, there was no doubt as to the outcome of the war. The war ended on the 11th hour, of the 11th day, of the 11th month (November 11, 1918).

President Wilson went to Paris to negotiate the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty had fourteen points—nations had rights to self-determination, freedom of the seas, free trade, and a proposal for a “League of Nations.” Clemenceau of France, David Lloyd George of England, and Vittorio Orlando of Italy did not want a “just peace.” They wanted to blame Germany for the war. This included demilitarizing Germany, make it pay reparations, and stripping it of its colonies. The treaty was very harsh for the Germans. On January 25, 1919, the Allies voted to accept the covenant of the League of Nations.

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, the powerful chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee loathed President Wilson. The President refused to agree to minor changes in the language of the treaty. Wilson went on a cross-country trip to appeal to the American people, and in Colorado he suffered a stroke. He was essentially an invalid for the remaining 18
months of his presidency, with Mrs. Wilson and his doctor forming an almost impenetrable barrier around him.

**World War II**

World War II changed America, as it created unprecedented carnage and horror. The war started on September 1, 1939, when Germany attacked Poland. Great Britain and France were treaty-bound to come to Poland’s aid. In June of 1940, Germany took France, along with many other countries in Europe. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and America went to war.

The turning point in the Pacific War was the Battle of Midway from June 3–6, 1942. The army commander in the Pacific was General MacArthur and the naval commander was Admiral Chester Nimitz. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s strategy was to defeat Germany first, then Japan.

General George C. Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, supported a plan for a major Allied invasion of France across the English Channel in the spring of 1943. He placed General Dwight D. Eisenhower in charge of planning the operation.

The Holocaust, the Nazi campaign to exterminate the Jews of Europe and one of history’s greatest tragedies, was known to high officials in Washington, but American policy was to concentrate on winning the war.

In response to pressure from military officials and political leaders, President Roosevelt authorized the army to intern Japanese-Americans. More than 100,000 people were sent to internment camps.

By mid-1943 America and its Allies had succeeded in the stopping the Axis advance both in Europe and in the Pacific. By early 1944, American and British bombers were attacking Germany around the clock. On June 6, 1944, some three million troops and 6,000 ships invaded Normandy (D-Day). In mid-December, German forces struck in desperation at the Battle of the Bulge but were stopped at Bastogne. On April 30, 1945, Hitler killed himself in his bunker in Berlin. On May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally.

In the Pacific, the Mariana Islands fell to U.S. forces, followed by Tinian, Guam, and Saipan. On October 20, 1944, General MacArthur’s troops landed in the Philippines. In February 1945, Iwo Jima fell; and in late June, Okinawa (370 miles from Japan) was taken with 50,000 casualties.

President Roosevelt passed away in April 1945, and Harry S. Truman became President. He ordered the air force to use a new atomic weapon against Japan. On August 6, 1945, a B-29
(the Enola Gay) dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. On August 8, the United States dropped a second bomb on Nagasaki, killing over 100,000 people. On August 14, the Emperor of Japan convinced the cabinet to surrender and on September 2, 1945, on board the battleship Missouri, the Japanese signed the articles of surrender. The United States had over 320,000 dead.

Reference

Module 7: Korea and Vietnam: Fighting Communism

The Korean War

On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. Secretary of State Dean Acheson had given a speech at the Washington Press Club, and when he talked about American interests in Asia, he left out Korea, so the North Korean dictator invaded South Korea to unify the country under communist rule. The Truman administration responded quickly, appealing to the United Nations. The Soviet Union was boycotting the Security Council to protest its refusal to recognize the new communist government of China. General Douglas MacArthur was given the command of the United Nations forces. He was 70 years old at that time.

In a bold move, MacArthur invaded Inchon and got as far as Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea. As the invasion of South Korea was a unilateral action by North Korea, the Chinese became very nervous with UN troops on their border at the Yalu River. The Chinese attacked with eight divisions and forced the UN troops all the way down south to Pusan. MacArthur had written to House Republican leader, Joseph W. Martin that “in war there is no substitute for victory” (Rovere & Schlesinger, 1997, p. 227).

More than once, President Truman had warned MacArthur to keep his objections to himself. On April 11, 1951, he relieved MacArthur of his command. A majority of Americans favored MacArthur over Truman. Some 69% of the American people supported MacArthur. MacArthur came home to a hero’s welcome. The adulation for MacArthur reflected American frustrations with containment.

Sixteen nations sent troops to Korea, but the United States furnished most of the personnel and weapons, deploying 1.8 million troops. For the only time during the Cold War, the United States tried to roll back communism. Ceasefire negotiations began in July 1951, but peace talks dragged on for two more years. Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected President in 1952, and he made good on his promise to end the Korean War.

In July 1953, the two sides reached an armistice that left Korea divided again at the 38th parallel. The war took the lives of 36,000 Americans and wounded more than 100,000. South Korea lost more than a million people and more than 1.8 million North Koreans and Chinese were killed or wounded.

The Truman administration judged the war a success for containment, since the United States had backed up its promise to help nations that were resisting communism.
The War in Vietnam

The Eisenhower administration introduced the first military advisers (650 of them) into Vietnam, and the Kennedy administration expanded this figure to 15,500. President Lyndon Johnson inherited a substantial American commitment to the survival of an anticommunist South Vietnam.

In August 1964, the President announced that American destroyers had been attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. Congress then passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which authorized the President to take all necessary measures to protect American forces and prevent further aggression.

By March 1965, there were more than 100,000 American troops in Vietnam and by the end of 1967, over 500,000 American soldiers.

By the end of 1967, the twin crises of the war in Vietnam and the deteriorating racial situation at home had produced profound social and political tensions. The United States could not fund both Johnson’s Great Society programs and the war in Southeast Asia. On January 31, 1968, the first day of the Vietnamese New Year (Tet), the communists attacked everywhere, and even got on the grounds of the American Embassy in Saigon. Although the communists lost many, the Tet Offensive shocked most Americans and resulted in a belief that the United States could not win this war. It was a political defeat for the administration and opposition to the war grew.

Richard Nixon was elected in 1968 mostly as a result of the unpopularity of Lyndon Johnson and of the war. On January 27, 1973, the United States and the North Vietnamese signed the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam, or the Paris Accords. This agreement allowed the North Vietnamese to release several hundred American prisoners of war, whose fate had become an emotional issue of great importance in the United States.

In March 1975, the North Vietnamese launched a full-scale offensive against the now greatly weakened forces of the south. Congress refused to provide additional funding, and in late April 1975, communist forces marched into Saigon. More than 1.2 million Vietnamese soldiers had died; some 47,000 Americans died and over 100,000 were wounded. The war had cost the United States $150 billion in direct costs. The nation had suffered a blow to its confidence and self-esteem from which it would not soon recover.

Reference

Module 8: The Gulf War: Operation Desert Storm

In August 1990, the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein sent troops into the small, oil-rich country of Kuwait, threatening the world’s largest oil reserves in Saudi Arabia. President George H. W. Bush responded by ordering a massive mobilization of American forces. The United Nations authorized the use of force if Iraq did not withdraw by January 15, 1991. By then, the United States had deployed 400,000 soldiers to Saudi Arabia, who were joined by 265,000 troops from other nations.

On January 17, 1991, the U.S. led coalition launched Operation Desert Storm, a 40-day air war against Iraq. The major weapon was the F-117 Nighthawk. On February 23rd, the coalition stormed into Kuwait with massive ground forces led by General H. Norman Schwarzkopf. President Bush ended the war in 100 hours, and the loss of American personnel was 270.