The Crucial Era: The Great Depression And World War II, 1929-1945

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In the Great Depression of the 1930s, Americans endured the greatest economic crisis in the nation's history--at its worst, more than a quarter of the work force was unemployed. Like the American Revolution and the Civil War, the Great Depression was one of the defining experiences of the nation. However, only the mobilization that followed America's entry into World War II finally brought an end to the Depression. Though the Allies and the Axis Powers had been at war since 1939, the United States remained neutral until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. World War II solidified America's role as a global power. It also ushered in numerous social changes, including the movement of women into previously male-only jobs. And between 1929 and 1945 the Great Depression and World War II utterly redefined the role of government in American society and catapulted the United States from an isolated, peripheral state into the world's hegemonic superpower. To understand the logic and the consequences of those three moments is to understand much about the essence and the trajectory of all of American history. To a much greater degree than in the earlier cases, the changes set in motion by the Great Depression and World War II had their origins outside the United States—a reminder of the increasing interdependency among