



University District The World War II Era

Historical Context and Overview

Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933. Hitler believed that pure-blooded Germans were descendants of an ancient Aryan race. This “master race,” according to Hitler, was destined to rule over other groups. To create “living space” for his master race, Hitler began invading other European nations. After initially appeasing Hitler’s aggressive actions, Britain and France finally declared war on Germany following the German invasion in Poland in 1939. This marked the start of World War II in Europe.

The United States did not join the Allied side in World War II until 1941. In response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, the United States declared war on Japan. Many Americans became fearful of potential Japanese attacks on the West Coast. The U.S. government believed Japanese Americans might be loyal to Japan in the event of a Japanese invasion. As a result, Japanese Americans on the West Coast were forced to leave their homes and businesses and move to internment camps. About 120,000 Japanese Americans, many of whom were U.S. citizens, were sent to internment camps.

The decades following World War II were a time of economic expansion and growth. The GI Bill provided funds for veterans to go to college and obtain low-interest housing loans. Over one million veterans used the GI Bill to pursue higher education. A growing economy and greater personal wealth also helped increase the birthrate, causing a baby boom in the 1950s. With growing incomes and families, many Americans began moving from cities to suburbs.

Standards Alignment

Ohio's New Learning Standards: K-12 Social Studies

HS American History Content Statement 22: The United States mobilization of its economic and military resources during World War II brought significant changes to American society.

HS American History Content Statement 29: The postwar economic boom, greatly affected by advances in science, produced epic changes in American life.

Learning Objectives

- Explain Nazi ideology and how Jesse Owens’ accomplishments challenged Hitler’s master race theory.
- Evaluate the actions of the U.S. government toward Japanese Americans during World War II.
- Discuss the major changes that took place in postwar America and how these changes were reflected in the University District of Columbus.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Jesse Owens challenge the racial stereotypes of Nazi Germany? What kind of discrimination did Owens face at home?
2. What happened to Japanese-Americans on the West Coast during World War II? Describe the experiences of the Osuga family before, during, and after the war.
3. How did the University District change as a result of the end of World War II?
4. What was the GI Bill? How did it impact Ohio State?
5. What challenges arose from the rapid population growth of the University District following World War II? How did the city meet these challenges?
6. How did the changes in the University District reflect broader national trends in postwar America?

Extension Activities

Have students conduct a debate on Japanese American internment during World War II. One side should take the perspective of the U.S. government that Japanese Americans could be a threat to national security. The other side should argue that internment was an unfair violation of the civil liberties of Japanese Americans.

Have students create an oral history of someone who was alive during World War II. Students should ask the interviewee what they remember about the war or home front and how life changed for Americans in the postwar period.

Have students create graphs that show the postwar baby boom. Students can access historical census data from the following web site: <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/historical/pre-1980/index.html>

Additional Resources

Exploring Japanese Internment - <http://caamedia.org/jainternment/>

Letters from the Japanese American Internment - http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/japanese_internment/index.html

Jesse Owens - <http://www.jesseowens.com/>

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