

## **II. America Transformed**

### A. The First Small Step: The Spanish-American War of 1898

1. In order to understand how America abandoned its policy of political separation to become the world police power, we need to look at a series of three wars.
2. The first minor conflict that launched America on its career of policing began as a war of independence for the people of Cuba against their Spanish rulers.
3. Unlike the rest of the Ibersphere, Cuba had not become independent prior to the Monroe Doctrine. The people of Cuba felt more and more like a separate nation, but were not able to break free of Spain.
4. Americans watched as the Spanish Empire brutally suppressed the independence movement in the war. Spain became the first modern country to make use of concentration camps, where citizens were taken and forced to live in essentially prison-like conditions, simply to prevent them from helping the rebels.
5. Americans were deeply disturbed by what they learned of the war, but as its progressed, they continued to hold true to the Monroe Doctrine. President William McKinley announced that *“not a single American citizen is now in arrest or confinement in Cuba of whom this government has any knowledge.”*
6. Strangely, an American battleship, the *USS Maine*, was sent to Havana (the capital of Cuba) to protect American “interests,” and then was destroyed by a powerful explosion, which was blamed on Spain.
7. This seemed to provide a reason for intervention that had not existed before. *“Remember the Maine! And don’t forget the starving Cubans!”* was a new rallying cry heard around America.
8. Once America committed to war, it was an easy victory. Spain had been struggling to put down the rebellion, and America was already more powerful than Spain, which also had to send its forces all the way across the Atlantic Ocean.
9. Through the **Spanish-American War of 1898** Americans got their first “taste” of policing the world. They were proud of themselves for helping Cuba. They were proud of their military for performing so well. They started to think of themselves as a “great” power.
10. In addition to helping Cuba to become independent, American forces also defeated the Spanish at Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and the island of Guam—the latter two being in Asia. This caused an unexpected entanglement. America found itself in possession of overseas territory with a large non-American population. How to solve the problem of managing the Philippines, in particular, was a long challenge that was only really solved by the Japanese takeover of the Philippines in World War II.

B. When America Began to Change Into What It Is: World War I (1914-19)

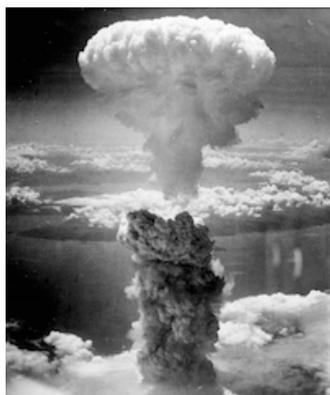
1. In 1914, yet another great European war began.
2. Reflecting the long tradition of political separation, American president Woodrow Wilson assessed the war as being one “*with which we have nothing to do, whose causes cannot touch us.*”
3. Following the Monroe Doctrine, the United States stayed neutral from 1914 to 1917.
4. President Wilson was celebrated for doing so. He won re-election as president in 1916 running on the slogan, “*He has kept us out of war.*”
5. And yet America entered World War I in 1917.
6. President Wilson articulated the reason for this transformation: “*The world must be made safe for democracy.*” The United States is the country that it is today, because it first accepted this responsibility in World War I, and has essentially accepted this responsibility as normal today.



President Woodrow Wilson gave America a new mission: making the world “safe for democracy.”

C. Saving The World A Second Time: World War II (1939-45)

1. 117,000 Americans died in World War I. It was profound shock.
2. In the 1920 presidential election, Americans repudiated Wilson’s concept of giving up their lives to a global cause. They opted instead to elect Warring Harding, who offered them a “return to normalcy”—which, at that time, meant a return to the “normal” policy of political separation.
3. Thus as World War II arrived, the United States remained apart. It did not join World War II from 1939 to 1941.
4. Then entry into the war was forced upon it. Japan launched a sneak attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, with the goal of crippling America’s navy and preventing it from interfering with Japan’s imperial ambitions in Asia.
5. The attack failed to achieve the desired outcome. United States entered the war and played the decisive role in defeating Japan and its ally Nazi Germany.



The explosion that destroyed Nagasaki is captured in this photograph. Atomic bombs are so powerful that a single bomb can destroy an entire city. The explosion produces a huge, characteristic “mushroom cloud” that extends far up into the atmosphere.