

## **II. America Transformed**

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

1. In order to understand how America stopped being politically separate and became the world police power, we need to learn about three wars.
2. The first small conflict that launched America on its new path began as a war of independence for the people of Cuba against their Spanish rulers. (Unlike the rest of the Iberosphere, Cuba had not yet managed to become independent.)
3. Americans watched as the Spanish Empire brutally suppressed the independence movement, but as the war progressed, they continued to hold true to the main idea of the Monroe Doctrine, that the rights of Americans were the main priority.
4. 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.”*
5. Strangely, an American battleship, the *USS Maine*, was sent to Havana (the capital of Cuba) to protect American “interests.” It was then was destroyed by a powerful explosion, which was blamed on Spain. (Later investigations revealed it to be an accident.)
6. Americans now wanted war. *“Remember the Maine! And don’t forget the starving Cubans!”* was a new rallying cry heard around the country. America joined the war.
7. Once America committed to war, it was an easy victory.
8. 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. Unfortunately, this made war seem easy, which made it easier for Americans to think of going to war again soon.



The proximity of Cuba to America contributed to Americans’s concern about the brutal Spanish oppression of their Cuban colony.

### B. The First Great Leap: World War I (1914-19)

1. In 1914, a great European war began. The heir to the throne of the empire known as “Austria-Hungary” was assassinated by a terrorist from neighboring Serbia. This triggered a regional war when Austria-Hungary’s ally, Germany, took advantage of the conflict to launch an aggressive war against its own neighbors.
2. American president Woodrow Wilson said that the war was one *“with which we have nothing to do, whose causes cannot touch us.”* So the United States stayed neutral from 1914 to 1917.

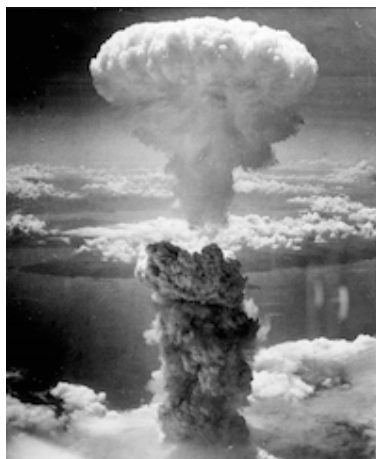
3. President Wilson was celebrated for doing so. He won re-election as president in 1916 running on the slogan, "*He has kept us out of war.*"
4. And yet America entered World War I in 1917.
5. President Wilson said that America must use its growing power in a new way: "*The world must be made safe for 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 said that America's new job was to make 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, and Americans were very unhappy.
2. In the 1920 presidential election, Americans rejected Wilson's idea of being the world police power. They decided 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. Soon the world descended into its second horrible war of the twentieth century, with Germany—this time led by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis—once again the main aggressor against its European neighbors.
4. Again the United States again remained apart at first—from 1939 to 1941.
5. Then entry into the war was forced upon it. The military commanders of the empire of Japan, which was allied to Germany, 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 desire to build an empire.
6. The attack failed to achieve the desired outcome. United States entered the war and played the decisive role in this new and larger conflict just as it had in the previous war.
7. America and its allies invaded Europe from the West, while Russia (America's temporary ally) fought back Germany in the east.
8. Notoriously, the war ended in 1945 when the United States used the newly developed "atomic bomb" twice on Japan, destroying the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and forcing the empire's unconditional surrender.



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.