

How American Society was Affected by Participation in the World Wars

Posted on March 23, 2018

The war is difficult for all those who are even remotely related to it. Be it the soldiers who participated actively and even lost their lives, or the people who stayed back home and waited for news, voluntarily or involuntarily, not to mention those who were away from their country. The United States of America (USA), in particular, was significantly affected by the World Wars that shook the world twice. The USA was affected socially, politically, and economically, and every aspect of its society was disturbed, be it the minorities, the women, or the workers. This report will discuss how the World Wars influenced American Society both on a national and an international level.

One of the most drastic consequences of war is the psychological and physical trauma that people suffer. The reality of war was more complicated for the American citizens than those living in other countries that were also participating in the war. The reason behind this was that the American authorities had taken extreme measures for the first few years of the war to hide the harsh truths of war from the public. A magazine avoided showing dead Americans till the third quarter of 1943, while the Office of War Information drilled the directors of movies and other television shows produced in Hollywood to curb the negativity in their productions, showing the minimum amount of death and injury scenes (Overy 1996)[1]. Only five out of sixty-one films produced on war portrayed deaths occurring in battle during May and November of 1942. Pictures of sad sights were banned from being displayed publicly. All this led to the American public feeling a false sense of morality and safety regarding World War. It was in 1944 that the American government began to show accurate depictions of the war via the media after the public started protesting and demanding the true colors of war. Hence, the truth came as a shock to the American population, who were not prepared for the brutality they saw exposed. This psychological trauma was the reason why the first force team that battled in North Africa showed a twenty-five percent casualty rate, which they suffered from psychosomatic distress. Psychologists discovered that some soldiers even got sick physically during heavy action. Psychological trauma is a feature that does not disappear easily from anyone's life. It became a permanent part of the lives of the Americans and continued to affect their position in society as well as on a personal level.

Racial discrimination was and still is a part of almost every society. When American commanders were forming army divisions during the World Wars, they at first did not classify men according to their race, but instead treated all people, black and white alike, choosing not to discriminate. In fact, in the beginning, blacks were more trained for combat, handed war equipment, and were also given the role of minding the trenches. Even though whites headed almost all of the divisions, the overall population in the partitions was fairly distributed (Keene 2001)[2]. But then, due to political pressure as well as pressure from several communities, the commanders were forced to rethink their decisions

and agreed that putting so many blacks alongside whites was not the safe step to take, even if the white soldiers did not object to their presence. Believing that a calamity within the American army could occur as a result of the mixing of races, it was advised that the collection of black combat units be suspended, and the black soldiers instead be reassigned to areas where unskilled labor was required. White and black lobbyists started petitioning for their races as a result. In the end, black men found themselves free to stay at home while young white males were recruited from their farms and houses for battle. The white soldiers had the same mindset in both World Wars. Still, they were forced to rethink their logic when the need arose during the Second World War for more riflemen during combat, and ended up confessing that the majority of the black soldiers recruited did a great job (Keene, *The Great War's Final Legacy to the Country: The GI Bill 2001*)². This kind of racism is still prevalent in all areas of the world, especially America, and has the same firm hold on the societal mindset as it did during the World Wars, which noticeably worsened the dispute.

An important feature realized because of the World Wars was the role of women in society as workers who were equally adequate at various occupations, which was once thought to be solely a man's area of expertise. During the World Wars, with the men away, women were hired to complete tasks once assigned to males. They acquired a high status in society when it was realized that they could handle jobs, even if they were too demanding (Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America, 2001*). Women used President Woodrow Wilson's liberal views against him to argue and petition that they were still not recognized as individuals who had the right to vote. Women attained the power to vote in 1920 but were still expected to follow the men of their households and do their bidding, with the mentality that they were inferior when handling issues other than taking care of the family. After the end of World War I, some of the women refused to go back to the roles that society had 'marked' for women. When World War II began, women and their abilities were again in great demand. Women partook in almost every sector of the country, be it industrial, agricultural, or even serving abroad as nurses. After the end of both World Wars, women started being seen as independent individuals capable of contributing positively to society and the economy just as much as men were.

The World Wars contributed to shaking American society and the beliefs that were once so paramount. While there were uncountable obstacles that the country had to face after the end of each war, there were also some positive outcomes, like the empowerment of women. Racial discrimination was actively in play in both wars, even hindering war tactics at times, when white leaders were hesitant to allow black men to serve the country, even if it was under their rule. The psychological trauma experienced by all those who were affected was apparent in society many years after the end of the war. Participating in the World Wars left some permanent imprints on American society, some of which it is still trying to overcome today.

Bibliography

Keene, Jennifer D. 2001. *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America*. Maryland: the John Hopkins University Press.

Overy, Richard. 1996. "Evil Things, Excellent Things- The Moral Contest." In *Why The Allies Won*, by Richard Overy, 396. New York: W.W.Norton & Company.