

Mobilizing for War ^[1]

In 1940, fearing that war in Europe would soon involve the United States, Congress passed the nation's first peacetime draft. After World War I, the U.S. had disbanded most of its armed forces, and the army and navy had to be rebuilt almost from scratch. At the same time, American companies began supplying Allied nations with arms and equipment. The Lend-Lease program, begun in early 1941, allowed Britain, the Soviet Union, and China to buy war materiel on credit — something that U.S. neutrality laws had previously prohibited.

When it officially entered the war, though, the U.S. still had to build tremendous fighting capacity in a matter of months. While the Japanese captured most of Southeast Asia and island after island in the Pacific, the U.S. Navy had been severely damaged in the attack on Pearl Harbor. More than soldiers, the military needed ships, guns, trucks, tanks, food, and other supplies.

The film on this page is an excerpt from a U.S. Government film produced in 1942 to educate Americans about the war. It shows early scenes of war production and mobilization. The goal was to reassure Americans that the U.S. and its allies could, and would, win, but also to steel them for the long and difficult road ahead.

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From *World at War*, produced by the U.S. Office of War Information, 1942.

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