

## **U.S. HOMEFRONT**

### **Work**

In 1942 American automobile manufacturers announced the end of automobile production for private use. Within weeks the nation's automobile companies had been reworked to produce tanks, planes, boats, and military trucks and jeeps. Automotive factories were not alone, many factories across America converted to war production. Pencil factories made bomb parts, soft drink factories switched from filling bottles with liquids to filling shells with explosives and bedspread manufacturers began creating mosquito netting for the troops. Additionally, shipyards and other defense plants expanded rapidly.



These industries hired over 6 million women and more than 2 million minorities to replace the vacancies left when the troops left for war. Before the war 75% of defense contractors simply refused to hire African Americans. The ones who would hire them were only willing to give them menial jobs, such as janitorial workers. Now with the increase in production more people were needed and companies no longer had the luxury not to employ certain groups. Industrialists began using pre-built parts and assembly lines to build massive ships in record time, some in as little as four days. In order to keep these facilities running the government stepped in and regulated prices on non-defense goods to prevent inflation. The government also increased and expanded the income tax so people would have less money to spend, creating less demand for everyday goods.

### **Women**

Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) allowed women to volunteer and serve in noncombat positions. These women worked as nurses, ambulance drivers, radio operators, electricians, pilots, almost everything except direct combat. They were initially not given full military benefits but after thousands volunteered, these women were granted full US Army benefits. Nearly 6 million women joined the work force to help the war industry. Women had to overcome the stereotype that they lacked the stamina and physical strength to perform the jobs that had traditionally been done by men. Women worked in many factories that had been converted into defense plant creating tanks, aircraft, ammunition, guns and other items that would prove vital to the US. In addition to their work women also continued to take care of their families at home. Once women proved they could use welding torches and riveting guns as well as men employers were happy to hire them. Especially since women earned roughly 60 % of the wages that were paid to men for doing the same jobs. Women played an important role in the United States war effort and were responsible for keeping the production levels up while the men were fighting overseas. A popular icon of the women's contributions to the war effort was Rosie the Riveter.



### **Rationing**

Rationing is a restriction of people's right to buy unlimited amounts of goods and foods that were considered vital to the war effort. Under this system households received ration books to be used for buying goods such as meat, shoes, sugar, coffee, and gasoline. These goods were at a premium because less of them were being made and they were needed for the troops fighting in the war. Most Americans accepted rationing as their personal contribution to the war effort, it became a patriotic activity. In addition to rationing, nationwide drives were set up to collect scrap iron, tin cans, paper, rags, and cooking fat in order to recycle them into war goods. Americans eagerly searched attics, garages, even the garbage to find materials to help out the soldiers.

### **Draft/Selective Service**

In 1940, rapid Nazi victories in Europe convinced Congress to push for the nation's first peacetime military draft. Under this draft 16 million men between the ages of 21 and 35 were registered for military service. After Pearl Harbor 5 million more volunteered for military service, but the US needed even more soldiers to face an all-out war in the Pacific and in Europe. The Selective Service system expanded the draft and provided another 10 million soldiers to meet the armed forces' needs. These new recruits were sent to basic training for eight weeks before being shipped out to fight in Europe or the Pacific.

### **Minorities in the war**

Despite coming from segregated neighborhoods and facing segregation and discrimination in the military many minorities joined the fight in WWII. More than 300,000 Mexican Americans joined the armed forces. Over one million African Americans enlisted. They were put into segregated units and were limited mostly to non-combat roles at first. These men were eager to prove themselves and after much protesting they finally began to see combat in April 1943. Roughly 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the Chinese American men enlisted creating a force about 13,000 strong. Additionally, 33,000 Japanese Americans joined the fight. Many Japanese Americans volunteered to serve as spies and interpreters in the fight in the Pacific. Around 25,000 Native Americans, including 800 women signed up for military service.

### **War Bonds**

WWII was an incredibly expensive war. The United States spent over \$300 billion fighting the Axis powers and supplying the other Allies, that translates to over \$4 trillion today. The US Treasury offered Americans the opportunity to purchase war bonds to help pay for the war. A war bond was an investment in both one's country and one's financial future. A War Bond could be purchased for \$18.75 and in ten years the government would repay it for \$25. War bond drives were held and the purchasing of War Bonds were supported by celebrities like Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra, even Superman, Batman and Bugs Bunny. Children were encouraged to purchase .25 cent War Stamps to paste in War Bond booklets.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Hour \_\_\_\_\_

## United States Home Front

### Women

1. How did WWII affect the lives of women in the United States?
2. What do you think happened with these working women after the war ended?



### Draft/Selective Service

3. What was the draft/Selective Service?
4. What is one thing that was interesting about the draft/Selective Service?

### Minorities in the War

5. Why do you think minorities volunteered to join the war even though they still faced racism and discrimination?
6. If you were a member of a minority group that was facing segregation and discrimination during WWII, would you have joined the U.S. military? **Why or Why Not?**

### Work

7. How did American manufacturers help the war effort?
8. What changes were made in the factories that allowed them to have a great impact of the war?

## War Bonds

9. How did the United States pay for the production and supplies used in WWII?
10. What was surprising about the sale of War Bonds?

## Rationing

11. What was rationing and why were people so accepting of this idea?
12. Would Americans be acceptable of rationing today?
13. The government played a much larger role in business and personal life in the US during World War II. Given the heavy role of the US government, did the US resemble any other forms of government we have discussed?