

# The Home Front

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. Businesses, soldiers, and citizens worked to prepare the United States for war.
2. The war brought new opportunities for many women and minorities.
3. Japanese Americans faced internment during the war.

### The Big Idea

American involvement in World War II helped the U.S. economy and changed the lives of many Americans.

### Key Terms and People

War Production Board, p. 810

A. Philip Randolph, p. 812

Tuskegee Airmen, p. 812

Benjamin O. Davis, p. 812

zoot-suit riots, p. 813

internment, p. 813

### TAKING NOTES

As you read, look for information about how the war brought both opportunities and challenges to minorities. Record your notes in a graphic organizer like the one below.



## If YOU were there...

Shopping for food has become a whole new experience since the United States entered World War II. When your mother sends you to the grocery store these days, she gives you government-issued ration stamps. These stamps limit the amount of sugar, butter, and meat each family can buy. The sacrifice is difficult, but you know it will help the soldiers fighting overseas.

## In what other ways can you help the war effort?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** As World War II raged in 1940 and 1941, the Allies relied on war supplies and food from the United States. President Roosevelt and Congress also increased defense spending at home, believing that the United States would soon join the fighting. The increased spending boosted the U.S. economy.

## Preparing for War

The United States was still experiencing the effects of the Great Depression when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The enormous effort of mobilizing for war finally brought the Depression to an end. Factories ran 24 hours a day, producing ships, tanks, jeeps, guns, and ammunition. Americans turned their knowledge of mass production toward the production of war supplies. One remarkable example was the building of Liberty ships—transport vessels for troops and supplies. Workers could build an entire 441-foot-long Liberty ship in as little as four days.

American workers were soon doubling the war production of Germany, Japan, and all other Axis Power countries combined. Unemployment fell to 1 percent in 1944. Agricultural production increased as well, as farmers sent food overseas to feed Allied soldiers. To organize the war effort, the government created the **War Production Board (WPB)** to oversee the conversion of factories to war production. In 1942, for example, the WPB banned the production of cars so that auto plants could produce military equipment.

The United States also needed millions of soldiers. Congress had begun to prepare for war by passing the Selective Training and Service Act in 1940. This was the first peacetime draft in the country's history.

Men from the ages of 21 to 35 (later 18 to 38) were required to register for the draft. More than 16 million Americans served during the war.

To finance the war effort, the government increased taxes and sold war bonds. War bonds were essentially loans that people made to the government. People who bought war bonds in 1942, for example, would get their money back 10 years later, with interest.

Americans also contributed to the war effort by collecting scrap metal that could be used in weapons factories. People learned to adjust to government rations limiting the supply of gasoline, rubber, shoes, and some foods. Posters urged Americans to “Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.”

### READING CHECK Identifying Cause and Effect

How did the war affect the U.S. economy?

## Wartime Opportunities

You read that wartime production during World War I created new opportunities for many women and minorities. The same thing happened on an even larger scale during World War II.

## New Roles for Women

With so many men leaving home to fight in World War II, factories badly needed new workers. The government urged women to fill these positions. Women found themselves doing work that had traditionally been considered “unladylike.” One female riveter (a person who fastens parts on a machine) recalled her experiences building airplanes:

“[I] learned to use an electric drill . . . and I soon became an outstanding riveter . . . The war really created opportunities for women. It was the first time we got a chance to show that we could do a lot of things that only men had done before.”

—Winona Espinosa, quoted in *Ordinary Americans*, edited by Linda Monk

Women also filled new roles in military service. About 300,000 women served in the armed forces through special divisions such as the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) and Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). WASP pilots flew test flights and ferried planes between factories and air bases. Army and navy nurses served in combat areas.

### Primary Source

#### POSTERS

### Supporting the War

Posters like these encouraged Americans to support their troops in a variety of ways. Building weaponry, growing food, saving scrap metal, and rationing all helped the war effort and allowed soldiers to have necessary supplies.

“Rosie the Riveter” became a symbol of women’s work to support the war.

Victory gardens planted at home allowed more commercially produced food to be sent from farms to troops overseas.



#### ANALYSIS SKILL

### ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

How did posters like these aim to help troops overseas?

## African Americans

The Great Migration that began during World War I continued as African Americans moved to northern cities to find factory jobs. In most cases, however, black workers received lower pay than did white workers. They also were restricted in what kinds of jobs they were hired to perform.

To protest this unfair treatment, African American labor leader **A. Philip Randolph** began to organize a march to Washington, D.C., in 1941. "If freedom and equality are not [granted for] the peoples of color, the war for democracy will not be won," he argued. Randolph canceled the march, however, after President Roosevelt issued an order prohibiting racial discrimination in the government and in companies producing war goods.

## Struggles at Home

Although members of every race participated in the war as American soldiers, life for minorities at home changed very little. African Americans were still subject to segregation, and Mexican Americans continued to have very little economic opportunity. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were removed from their communities and ordered into internment camps far away from the West Coast.



### Primary Source

#### AUTOBIOGRAPHY

### Tuskegee Airmen

*Benjamin O. Davis was a graduate of West Point who became the first African American Air Force officer to achieve the rank of general. During World War II he led the first African American flying unit, the 99th Fighter Squadron. These men had been trained at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.*

“While no AAF [American Air Force] unit had gone into combat better trained or better equipped than the 99th Fighter Squadron, we lacked actual combat experience. So as we approached our first missions, my own inexperience and that of my flight commanders was a major source of concern.

On the other hand, we had averaged about 250 hours per man in a P-40 (quite a lot for pilots who had not yet flown their first missions), and we possessed an unusually strong sense of purpose and solidarity.”

—Benjamin O. Davis,  
*Benjamin O. Davis,  
American: An Autobiography*

ANALYSIS  
SKILL

#### ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

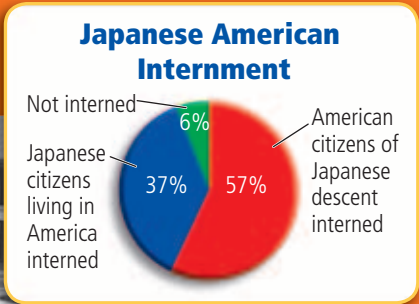
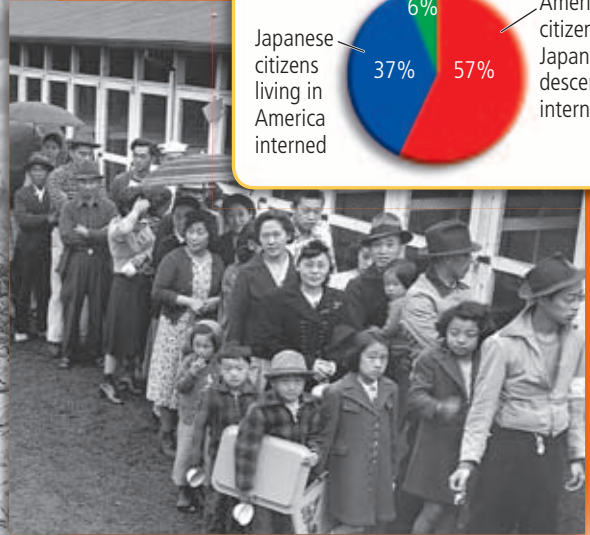
What advantages did the Tuskegee airmen bring to battle?

About 1 million African Americans served in the armed forces during the war, mostly in segregated units. In the Navy, African Americans were assigned only to support positions and denied the right to participate in combat. Despite this, many black soldiers became national heroes during the war, including Dorie Miller. Leaving his post as ship's cook, Miller manned a machine gun on the deck of the USS *West Virginia* until he was ordered to abandon the ship because it was sinking.

The **Tuskegee Airmen** were African American pilots who trained at the Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama. **Benjamin O. Davis**, who later became the first African American general in the U.S. Air Force, led the group. Davis and his pilots had to overcome prejudice in the military as well as the hazards of war. He later described the pilots as “outstanding Americans who served their country unselfishly. Despite treatment that would have demoralized men of lesser strength and character, they persisted through humiliations and dangers to earn the respect of their fellows.” The Tuskegee Airmen flew thousands of successful combat missions in North Africa and Italy.







## Mexican Americans

About 300,000 Mexican Americans served in the military during the war. Many Mexican Americans also found wartime jobs on the West Coast and in the Midwest. Because of a shortage of farm workers, the federal government asked Mexico to provide agricultural workers. The workers, called *braceros*, were guaranteed a minimum wage, food, shelter, and clean living conditions. About 200,000 Mexicans worked in the *bracero* program.

Young Mexican Americans of the time created their own culture by blending different music styles and clothing styles. Some men wore zoot suits—fancy, loose-fitting outfits with oversized hats. Despite their aiding of the war effort, many faced discrimination. In Los Angeles in June 1943, groups of sailors attacked Mexican Americans wearing zoot suits, beginning the **zoot-suit riots**. During the 10-day period, white mobs attacked many Mexican Americans.

**READING CHECK** **Evaluating** How did the war create both opportunities and challenges for minorities?

## Japanese American Internment

Japanese Americans faced a different form of prejudice during World War II. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, some Americans began to look at Americans of Japanese descent with fear and suspicion. Most Japanese Americans lived on the West Coast at this time. It was feared that they would serve as secret agents for Japan and help Japan prepare an invasion of the West Coast or try to sabotage U.S. war efforts.

The U.S. government had no evidence to support these fears. In spite of this fact, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066. This order allowed the government to begin the process of **internment**, or **forced relocation and imprisonment**, of Japanese Americans. About 115,000 Japanese Americans were evacuated from their homes and held in isolated internment camps. Half of those held in the camps were children. A smaller number of Americans of German and Italian ancestry were also held in internment camps during the war.

### THE IMPACT TODAY

Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 to compensate victims of internment. Each living Japanese American who had been interned—60,000 in all—received \$20,000 and a formal apology signed by President Ronald Reagan.

At this time, some Japanese Americans were *Issei*, or immigrants born in Japan. But most were *Nisei*, American citizens born in the United States to Japanese immigrant parents. Whether they were U.S. citizens or not, Japanese Americans lost their jobs, homes, and belongings when they were forced to move to internment camps. A farm owner named Yuri Tateishi spoke of feeling betrayed by his government. “You hurt,” he said. “You give up everything that you worked for that far, and I think everybody was at the point of just having gotten out of the Depression and was just getting on his feet. And then all that happens! You have to throw everything away.”

After the Pearl Harbor attack, the government banned young Japanese American men from serving in the military. But Roosevelt reversed this policy in 1943. Daniel Inouye remembered the excitement he and his fellow Japanese Americans in Hawaii felt when they heard that the government was going to form an all-*Nisei* combat team. An army recruiter had prepared a pep talk for the young Japanese Americans, but this proved to be unnecessary:

“As soon as he said that we were now eligible to volunteer, that room exploded into a fury of yells and motion. We went bursting out of there and ran—ran!—the three miles to the draft board ... jostling for position, like a bunch of marathoners gone berserk.”

—Daniel Inouye, quoted in *Only What We Could Carry*, edited by Lawson Fusao Inada

Inouye was one of about 33,000 *Nisei* who served in World War II. The Japanese American 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team received more than 18,000 decorations for bravery—more than any other unit of its size in U.S. military history. Many of the soldiers of the 100th/442nd served while their families were held in internment camps back home.

**READING CHECK** Evaluating Why were Japanese Americans interned?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** The war effort changed life on the home front. In the next section you will learn about the fighting in Europe and North Africa.

## Section 2 Assessment

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- Describe** How did people on the home front support the war effort?
  - Identify** What government agency oversaw factory production during the war?
- Recall** What were the WAAC and the WASP?
  - Explain** Why did **A. Philip Randolph** organize a march on Washington and then cancel it?
  - Elaborate** How did the *bracero* program benefit both Mexicans and Americans?
- Define** What was the **internment** program?
  - Contrast** How did the U.S. government change its policy toward Japanese Americans serving in the military? How did many respond?