

mind” that Stalin was right, and promised to open a “second front” to Germany’s west before the end of 1942. Churchill, however, blocked this plan. In part because of experience with the agonies of prolonged trench warfare in World War I, British military commanders did not want a large-scale invasion of Europe. Churchill argued that it was essential to win control of the North Atlantic shipping lanes first, and promoted air attacks on Germany and a smaller, safer attack on Axis positions in North Africa. Churchill meant to halt the Germans in North Africa and so protect British imperial possessions in the Mediterranean and the oil-rich Middle East.

Against the urging of his advisers, Roosevelt accepted Churchill’s plan. The U.S. military was not yet ready for a major campaign, and Roosevelt needed to show the American public some success in the European war before the end of 1942. Thus, instead of coming to the rescue of the USSR, the British and Americans made a joint landing in North Africa in November 1942. American troops, facing relatively light resistance, won quick victories in Algeria and Morocco. In Egypt, the British confronted General Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Korps in a struggle for control of the Suez Canal and the oil fields of the Middle East. After six months of fighting, trapped between British and American troops, Rommel’s army surrendered. On the Soviet front, against all odds, the Soviet army hung on, fighting block by block for control of Stalingrad in the deadly cold, to defeat the German Sixth Army in early 1943. By the spring of 1943, German advances had been stalled and, like Japan, from this point on Germany was on the defensive. Relations among the Allies remained precarious as the United States and Britain continued to resist Stalin’s demand for a second front. The death toll, already in the millions, continued to mount.

The Production Front and American Workers

Zn late December 1940—almost a year before the United States entered the war—Franklin Roosevelt pledged that America would serve as the world’s “great arsenal of democracy,” making the machines that would win the war for the Allies. After December 7, 1941, U.S. strategy remained much the same. The United States would prevail through a “crushing superiority of equipment,” Roosevelt told Congress. Though the war would be fought on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific, the nation’s strategic advantage lay on the “production front” at home.



■ Unprepared to fight a war of such magnitude, the U.S. government turned to the nation’s largest and most efficient corporations to produce the planes and ships and guns that would make America “the great arsenal of democracy,” and General Motors received 8 percent of the value of all government war contracts. With no new cars to sell, GM continued to advertise in national magazines, proclaiming “Victory is Our Business.” Pictured here is GM’s in-house magazine for employees, reminding these “production soldiers” of the importance of their work. (Courtesy, Collection of Peter Kreidler/General Motors)

Goals for military production were staggering. In 1940, with war looming, American factories had built only 3,807 airplanes. Following Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt asked for 60,000 aircraft in 1942 and double that number in 1943. Plans called for the manufacture of 16 million tons of shipping and 120,000 tanks. The military needed supplies to train and equip an armed forces that would grow to 16 million men. Thus, for the duration of the war, military production took precedence over the manufacture of civilian goods. Automobile plants built tanks and airplanes instead of cars; dress factories sewed

military uniforms. The War Production Board, established by Roosevelt in early 1942, had the enormous task of allocating resources and coordinating production among thousands of independent factories.

During the war, American businesses overwhelmingly cooperated with government war-production plans.

BUSINESSES, UNIVERSITIES, AND THE WAR EFFORT

Patriotism was one reason, but generous incentives were another. Major American industries had at first resisted government pressure to shift to military production. Beginning in 1940, as the U.S. produced armaments for the Allies, the American economy had begun to recover from the depression. Rising consumer spending built industrial confidence. Auto manufacturers, for example, expected to sell 4 million cars in 1941, a more than 25 percent increase over 1939. The massive retooling necessary to produce planes or tanks instead of cars would be enormously expensive and leave manufacturers totally dependent on a single client—the federal government. Moreover, many major industrialists, such as General Motors head Alfred Sloan, remained suspicious of Roosevelt and what they saw as his antibusiness policies.

Government, however, met business more than half way. The federal government paid for expensive retooling and factory expansions; it guaranteed profits to industry by allowing them to charge the government for the cost of producing items plus a fixed amount as profit; it created generous tax write-offs and exemptions from antitrust laws. War mobilization did not require America’s businesses to sacrifice profits. Instead, corporations doubled their net profits between 1939 and 1943. As Secretary of War Henry Stimson explained, when a “capitalist country” goes to war, it must “let business make money out of the process or business won’t work.”

Most military contracts went to America’s largest corporations, which had the facilities and experience to guarantee rapid, efficient production. From mid-1940 through September 1944 the government awarded contracts totaling \$175 billion, no less than two-thirds of which went to the top one hundred corporations. General Motors alone received 8 percent of the total. This approach made sense for a nation that wanted enormous quantities of war goods manufactured in the shortest possible time; most small businesses just did not have the necessary capacity. However, government contracts for war production further consolidated American manufacturing in the hands of a few giant corporations.

Wartime needs also created a new relationship between science and the U.S. military. As the federal government mobilized scientists and engineers for the war effort,

MANHATTAN PROJECT

millions of dollars went to America’s largest universities: \$117 million to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) alone. These federally sponsored research programs developed important new technologies of warfare, such as radar and the proximity fuse. The most important focus of government-sponsored scientific research, however, was the Manhattan Project, a secret effort to build an atomic bomb, into which the government poured more than \$2 billion. Roosevelt had been convinced by scientists fleeing the Nazis in 1939 that Germany was working to create an atomic weapon, and he resolved to beat them at their own efforts. The world’s first sustained nuclear chain reaction was achieved by the Manhattan Project at the University of Chicago in 1942, and in 1943 the federal government set up a secret community for atomic scientists and their families at Los Alamos, New Mexico. In this remote, sparsely populated, and beautiful setting, some of America’s most talented scientists worked with Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany to develop the weapon that would change the world. Although the expression “military-industrial complex” had not yet been coined (president and former five-star general Dwight Eisenhower would do so in 1961) the web of military-business-university interdependence had begun to be woven.

America’s new defense factories, running round the clock, required millions of workers. At first workers were

NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKERS

plentiful: 9 million Americans were still unemployed in 1940 when war mobilization began, and 3 million remained without work in December 1941. But during the war, the armed forces took 16 million men out of the potential civilian labor pool, forcing industry to look elsewhere for workers. Women, African Americans, Mexican Americans, poor whites from the isolated mountain hollows of Appalachia and the tenant farms of the Deep South—all streamed into jobs in defense plants.

In some cases, federal action eased their path. In 1941, as the federal government poured billions of dollars into war industries, many industries refused to hire African Americans. “The Negro will be considered only as janitors and other similar capacities,” one executive notified black applicants. A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, proposed a march on Washington, D.C., to demand equal access to jobs in defense industries. Roosevelt, fearing that the march might provoke race riots and also that communists might infiltrate the movement, offered the March on Washington movement a deal. In exchange for canceling the

march, he issued Executive Order No. 8802, which prohibited discrimination in war industries and in the government. Officially guaranteed the right to war industry jobs on an equal basis with white workers, more than 1.5 million black Americans migrated from the South to the industrial cities of the North and West during the war.

In addition, Mexican workers filled wartime jobs in the United States. Although the U.S. government had deported Mexicans as unemployment rose during the Great Depression, about 200,000 Mexican farm workers, or *braceros*, were offered short-term contracts to fill agricultural jobs left vacant as Americans sought well-paid war work. Mexican and Mexican American workers alike faced discrimination and segregation, but they seized the economic opportunities newly available to them. In 1941, not a single Mexican American worked in the Los Angeles shipyards. By 1944, seventeen thousand people of Mexican descent were employed there.

Women, also, played an important role on the production front. At first, employers had insisted the women were not suited for industrial jobs. As labor shortages began to threaten the war effort, however, employers did an about-face. “Almost overnight,” said

WOMEN AT WORK

As labor shortages began to threaten the war effort, however, employers did an about-face. “Almost overnight,” said

Mary Anderson, head of the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor, “women were reclassified by industrialists from a marginal to a basic labor supply for munitions making.” Posters and billboards urged women to “Do the Job HE Left Behind.” The government’s War Manpower Commission glorified the invented worker “Rosie the Riveter,” who was featured on posters, in magazines, and in the recruiting jingle “Rosie’s got a boyfriend, Charlie / Charlie, he’s a marine / Rosie is protecting Charlie / Working overtime on the riveting machine.”

Rosie the Riveter was an inspiring image, but she did not accurately represent women in the American work force. Only 16 percent of women workers held jobs in defense plants, and only 4.4 percent of the jobs classified as “skilled” (such as riveting) were held by women. Nonetheless, during the war years, more than 6 million women entered the labor force, and the number of working women increased by 57 percent. Many did take advantage of the new employment opportunities. More than 400,000 African American women quit work as domestic servants to enjoy the higher pay and union benefits of industrial employment. Seven million women moved to war-production areas, such as Willow Run, Michigan, site of a massive bomber plant, and southern California,

home of both shipyards and aircraft factories. And the majority of women workers who did not hold war-production jobs—whether they took traditional “women’s jobs” as clerical workers or filled traditionally male jobs as bus drivers or even “lumberjills” as men left for military service or better-paid factory jobs—kept the American economy going and freed other workers for the demanding work in the war-production plants.

Workers in defense plants were often expected to work ten days for every day off, or to accept difficult night shifts. Recognizing the importance of keeping people on the job, both businesses and the federal government provided workers new forms of support. The West Coast Kaiser shipyards offered not only high pay, but also childcare, subsidized housing, and healthcare: the Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program, a forerunner of the health maintenance organization (HMO), supplied medical care to workers for a weekly payroll deduction of 50 cents. The federal government also funded childcare centers and before- and after-school programs. At its peak, 130,000 preschoolers and 320,000 school-age children were enrolled in federally sponsored childcare.

Because industrial production was key to America’s war strategy, the federal government attempted to make sure that labor strikes, so common in the 1930s, would not interrupt production. Less than a week after Pearl Harbor, a White House labor-management conference agreed to a no-strike/no-lockout pledge. In 1942 Roosevelt created the National War Labor Board (NWLB) to settle labor disputes. The NWLB forged a temporary compromise between labor union demands for a “closed shop,” in which only union members could work, and management’s desire for “open” shops. Workers could not be required to join a union, but unions could enroll as many members as possible. Between 1940 and 1945, union membership ballooned from 8.5 million to 14.75 million.

However, the government did not hesitate to restrict union power if it threatened war production. When coal miners in the United Mine Workers union went on strike in 1943, following an attempt by the NWLB to limit wage increases to a cost-of-living adjustment, lack of coal halted railroads and shut down steel mills essential to war production. Few Americans supported this action. An air force pilot said, “I’d just as soon shoot down one of those strikers as shoot down Japs—they’re doing as much to lose the war for us.” Congress responded with the War Labor Disputes (Smith-Connally) Act, which gave the president authority to seize and operate any strike-bound plant deemed necessary to the national security.

ORGANIZED LABOR DURING WARTIME

sure that labor strikes, so common in the 1930s, would not interrupt production. Less than a week after Pearl Harbor, a White House labor-management conference agreed to a no-strike/no-lockout pledge. In 1942 Roosevelt created the National War Labor Board (NWLB) to settle labor disputes. The NWLB forged a temporary compromise between labor union demands for a “closed shop,” in which only union members could work, and management’s desire for “open” shops. Workers could not be required to join a union, but unions could enroll as many members as possible. Between 1940 and 1945, union membership ballooned from 8.5 million to 14.75 million.



Women workers mastered numerous job skills during the war. In 1942 crews of women cared for Long Island commuter trains like this one. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

For close to four years, American factories operated twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fighting the war on the production front. Between 1940 and 1945, American factories turned out roughly 300,000 airplanes; 102,000 armored vehicles; 77,000 ships; 20 million small arms; 40 billion bullets; and 6 million tons of bombs. By war’s end, the United States was producing 40 percent of the world’s weaponry. This amazing feat depended on transforming formerly skilled work in industries such as shipbuilding into an assembly-line process of mass production. Henry Ford, now seventy-eight years old, created a massive bomber plant on farmland along Willow Run Creek not far from Detroit. Willow Run’s assembly lines, almost a mile long, turned out B-24 Liberator bombers at the rate of one an hour. On the West Coast, William Kaiser used mass-production techniques to cut construction time for Liberty ships—the huge, 440-foot-long cargo ships that transported the tanks and guns and bullets overseas—from 355 to 56 days. (As a publicity stunt, Kaiser’s Richmond shipyard, near San Francisco, built one Liberty ship in 4 days, 15 hours, and 26 minutes.) The ships were not well made; welded hulls sometimes split in rough seas, and one ship foundered while still docked at the pier. However, as the United States struggled to produce cargo ships faster than German U-boats could sink them, speed of production was more important than quality.

A visitor to the Willow Run plant described “the roar of the machinery, the special din of the riveting gun absolutely deafening nearby, the throbbing crash of the giant metal presses . . . the far-reaching line of half-born skyscrapers growing wings under swarms of workers.” His words reveal the might of American industry but also offer a glimpse of the experience of workers, who did dirty, repetitive, and physically exhausting work day after day “for the duration.” Though American propaganda during the war badly overstated the contributions of well-paid war workers as being equal to those of men in combat, the American production front played a critical role in winning the war.

Life on the Home Front

The United States was the only major combatant in World War II that did not experience warfare directly (Hawai’i was a U.S. territory, and the Philippines a U.S. possession, but neither was part of the nation proper). Americans worried about loved ones fighting in distant places; they grieved the loss of sons

and brothers and fathers and husbands and friends. Their lives were disrupted. But the United States, protected by two oceans from its enemies, was spared the war that other nations experienced. Bombs did not fall on American cities; invading armies did not burn and rape and kill. Instead, war mobilization ended the Great Depression and brought prosperity. American civilians experienced the paradox of good times amid global conflagration.

Though the war was distant, it was a constant presence in the lives of Americans on what was called “the home front.” Civilians supported the war effort in many ways. Families planted 20 million “victory gardens” to free up food supplies for the armed forces. Housewives saved fat from cooking and returned it to butchers, for cooking fat yielded glycerin to make black powder used in shells or bullets. Children collected scrap metal, aware that the iron in one old shovel blade was enough for four hand grenades and that every tin can helped make a tank or Liberty ship.

Many consumer goods were rationed or unavailable during the war. To save wool for military use, the War Production Board basically redesigned men’s suits, narrowing lapels, shortening jackets, and dispensing with vests and pant cuffs. Bathing suits, the WPB specified, must shrink by 10 percent. When silk and nylon were diverted from stockings to parachutes, women used makeup on their legs and drew in the “stocking” seam with eyebrow pencil. The Office of Price Administration (OPA), created by Congress in 1942, established a nationwide rationing system for consumer goods such as sugar, coffee, and gasoline. By early 1943, the OPA had instituted a point system for rationing food. Every citizen—regardless of age—received two ration books each month. Blue stamps were for canned fruits and vegetables; red for meat, fish, and dairy. To buy a pound of meat, for example, consumers had to pay its cost in dollars and in points. With only 48 blue points and 64 red points per person per month, in September 1944 a small bottle of ketchup “cost” 20 blue points, while “creamery butter” cost 20 red points and sirloin steak 13 red points a pound. Pork shoulder, however, required only dollars. Sugar was tightly rationed, and people saved for months to make a special birthday cake or holiday dessert. Feeding a family required complex calculations. A black market for counterfeit ration books and scarce consumer goods existed, but most Americans understood that sugar produced alcohol for weapons manufacture and that meat went to feed “our boys” overseas.

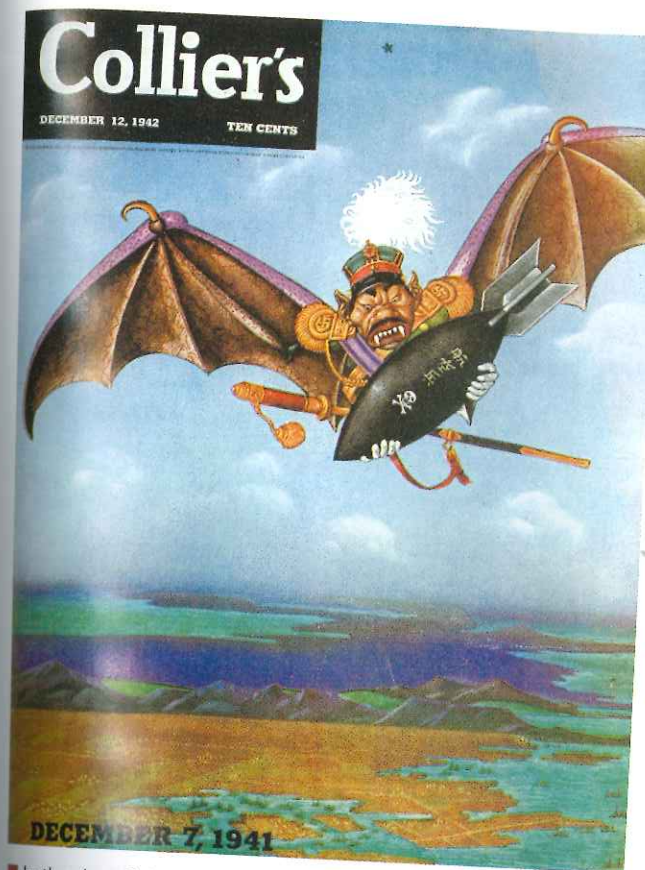
Despite near unanimous support for the war effort, government leaders worried that, in a long war, public willingness to sacrifice might lag. To build public support, in 1942 Roosevelt created the Office of War Information (OWI), which took charge of domestic propaganda and hired Hollywood filmmakers and New York copywriters to sell the war at home. Striking OWI posters exhorted Americans to save and sacrifice and reminded them to watch what they said, for “loose lips sink ships.”

Popular culture also reinforced wartime messages. An advertisement for vacuum cleaners (unavailable for the duration) in the *Saturday Evening Post* urged women war workers to fight “for freedom and all that means to women everywhere. You’re fighting for a little house of your own, and a husband to meet every night at the door. You’re fighting for the right to bring up your children without the shadow of fear.” Popular songs urged Americans to “Remember December 7th” or to “Accentuate the Positive.” Others made fun of America’s enemies (“You’re a sap, Mr. Jap / You make a Yankee cranky / You’re a sap, Mr. Jap / Uncle Sam is gonna spanky”) or, like “Cleanin’ My Rifle (and Dreamin’ of You),” dealt with the hardship of wartime separation.

Movies drew 90 million viewers a week in 1944—out of a total population of 132 million. Many Hollywood films sought to meet Eleanor Roosevelt’s challenge to “Keep ’em laughing.” A *WAVE*, a *WAC*, and a *Marine* promised “no battle scenes, no message, just barrels of fun and jive to make you happy you’re alive.” Others, such as *Bataan* or *Wake Island*, portrayed actual—if sanitized—events in the war. Even in the most frivolous comedies, however, the war was always present. Theaters held “plasma premieres,” offering free admission to those who donated a half-pint of blood to the Red Cross. Audiences rose to sing “The Star Spangled Banner,” then watched newsreels featuring carefully censored footage of recent combat before the feature film began. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, as Allied troops landed at Normandy, theater managers across the nation led audiences in the Lord’s Prayer or the Twenty-third Psalm (“The Lord is my shepherd . . .”). It was in movie theaters that Americans saw the horror of Nazi death camps in May 1945. The Universal newsreel narrator ordered audiences: “Don’t turn away. Look.”

The war demanded sacrifices from Americans, but it also rewarded them with new highs in personal income. Between 1939 and the end of the war, per capita income rose from \$691 to \$1,515. Wages and salaries increased more than

WARTIME PROSPERITY



In the days following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese were often pictured as subhuman—buck-toothed, nearsighted rodents and other vermin. Racial stereotyping would affect how both the Americans and the Japanese waged war. The Americans badly underestimated the Japanese, leaving themselves open for the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and American forces in the Philippines. And the Japanese, believing Americans were barbarians who lacked a sense of honor, mistakenly expected the United States would withdraw from East Asia once confronted with Japanese power and determination. (*Collier's*, December 12, 1942)

135 percent from 1940 to 1945. OPA-administered price controls kept inflation in the single digits so that wage increases didn't disappear to higher costs. With few consumer goods to buy, the savings rate rose.

Though fighting World War II was enormously expensive, costing approximately \$304 billion (more than \$3 trillion in today's dollars), the United States chose not to finance the war primarily through taxation. Instead, the government relied on deficit spending, borrowing money in the form of war bonds sold to patriotic citizens and fi-

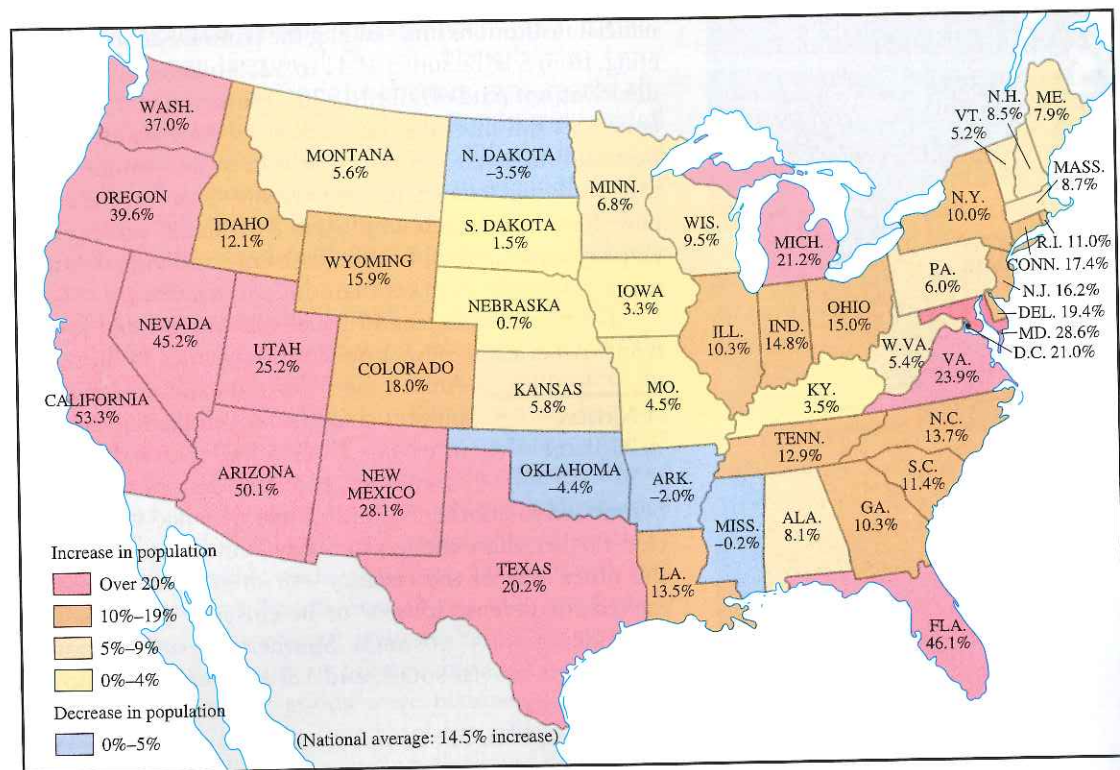
nancial institutions and sending the national debt skyrocketing, from \$49 billion in 1941 to \$259 billion in 1945 (the debt was not paid off until 1970). However, wartime revenue acts did increase the number of Americans paying personal income tax from 4 million to 42.6 million—at rates ranging from 6 to 94 percent—and introduced a new system in which employers “withheld” taxes from employee paychecks. For the first time, individual Americans paid more in taxes than did corporations.

Despite hardships and fears, the war offered homefront Americans new opportunities, and millions of Americans took them. More than 15 million civilians moved during the war (see Map 27.2). More than half moved to another state, and half of that number moved to another region. People who had never traveled farther than the next county found themselves on the other side of the country—or of the world. People moved for defense jobs or to be close to loved ones at stateside military postings. Southerners moved north, northerners moved south, and 1.5 million people moved to California.

The rapid influx of war workers to major cities and small towns strained the resources of surrounding communities. Migrants crowded into substandard housing, such as woodsheds, tents, or cellars, or into trailer parks without adequate sanitary facilities. Disease spread: scabies and ringworm, polio, tuberculosis. Many native citizens found the war workers—especially the unmarried men—a rough bunch. In the small town of Lawrence, Kansas, leaders bragged of the economic boost a new war plant gave the town but fretted over the appearance of bars, “dirty windowed dispensaries” that sold alcohol to the war workers.

In and around Detroit, where car factories now produced tanks and planes, established residents called war workers freshly arrived from southern Appalachia “hillbillies” and “white trash.” A new joke circulated: “How many states are there in the Union? Forty-five. Tennessee and Kentucky moved to Michigan, and Michigan went to hell.” Many of these migrants knew little about urban life. One young man from rural Tennessee, unfamiliar with traffic lights and street signs, navigated by counting the number of trees between his home and the war plant where he worked. Some Appalachian “trailer-ites” appalled their neighbors by building outdoor privies or burying garbage in their yards.

As people from different backgrounds confronted one another under difficult conditions, tensions rose. Widespread racism made things worse. In 1943 almost 250 racial conflicts exploded in forty-seven cities.



Map 27.2 A Nation on the Move, 1940–1950

American migration during the 1940s was the largest on record to that time. The farm population dropped dramatically as men, women, and children moved to war-production areas and to army and navy bases, particularly on the West Coast. Well over 30 million Americans (civilian and military) migrated during the war. Many returned to their rural homes after the war, but 12 million migrants stayed in their new locations. Notice the population increases on the West Coast, as well as in the Southwest and Florida.

RACIAL CONFLICTS

Outright racial warfare bloodied the streets of Detroit in June. White mobs, undeterred by police, roamed the city attacking blacks. Blacks hurled rocks at police and dragged white passengers off streetcars. At the end of thirty hours of rioting, twenty-five blacks and nine whites lay dead. Surveying the damage, an elderly black woman said, "There ain't no North anymore. Everything now is South."

The heightened racial and ethnic tensions of wartime also led to riots in Los Angeles in 1943. Young Mexican American gang members, or *pachucos*, had adopted the zoot suit: a long jacket with wide padded shoulders, loose pants "pegged" below the knee, a wide-brimmed hat, and dangling watch chain. With cloth rationed, wearing pants requiring five yards of fabric was a political statement, and some young men wore the zoot suit as a purposeful rejection of wartime ideals of service and sacrifice. Though in fact a high percentage of Mexican

Americans served in the armed forces, many white servicemen believed otherwise. Racial tensions were not far from the surface in overcrowded L.A., and rumors that *pachucos* had attacked white sailors quickly led to violence. For four days, mobs of white men—mainly soldiers and sailors—roamed the streets attacking zoot-suiters and stripping them of their clothes. The city of Los Angeles outlawed zoot suits and arrested men who wore them, but the "zoot suit riots" ended only when naval personnel were removed from the city.

The dislocations of war also had profound impacts on the nation's families. Despite policies that exempted married men and fathers from the draft during most of the war, almost 3 million families were broken up. Young children grew up not knowing their fathers. The divorce rate of 16 per 1,000 marriages in 1940 almost doubled to 27 per 1,000 in 1944. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of men and women were

FAMILIES IN WARTIME



Members of the Vega family pose for the camera in uniforms of the Marine Corps, National Guard, and U.S. Navy. (Los Angeles Public Library)

getting married. The number of marriages rose from 73 per 1,000 unmarried women in 1939 to 93 in 1942. Some couples scrambled to get married so they could live together before the man was sent overseas; others doubtless married and had children to qualify for military deferments. As might be expected, the birth rate also climbed: total births rose from about 2.4 million in 1939 to 3.1 million in 1943. Many births were "goodbye babies," conceived as a guarantee that the family would be perpetuated even if the father died in battle.

On college campuses, some virtually stripped of male students, women complained along with the song lyrics: "There is no available male." But other young women found an abundance of male company, sparking concern about wartime threats to sexual morality. *Youth in Crisis*, a newsreel shown throughout the nation in 1943, featured a girl with "experience far beyond her age" necking with a soldier on the street. These "victory girls" or "cuddle bunnies" were said to support the war effort by

giving their all to men in uniform. Many young men and women, caught up in the emotional intensity of war, behaved in ways they never would have done in peacetime. Often that meant hasty marriages to virtual strangers, especially if a baby was on the way. Taboos against unwed motherhood remained strong, however, and the percentage of babies born to unmarried women in the United States increased only from 0.7 percent to 1 percent of all births during the war. Wartime mobility also increased opportunities for young men and women to explore sexual attraction to members of the same sex, and gay communities grew in such cities as San Francisco.

In many ways, the war reinforced traditional gender roles that had been weakened during the depression, when many men had been unable to fulfill roles as breadwinners. Now men defended their nation while women "kept the home fires burning." Some women took "men's jobs," but those few who did so from patriotism rather than need understood their work to be "for the duration"—the home-front equivalent to men's wartime military service. Even so, women who worked were frequently blamed for neglecting their children and creating an "epidemic" of juvenile delinquency—seen in the "victory girl." Nonetheless, millions of women took on new responsibilities in wartime, whether on the factory floor or within their families. Many husbands returned home to find that the lives of their wives and children seemed complete without them, and some women found that they enjoyed the greater freedom and independence they had during that time. By war's end, many Americans were changed by their wartime experiences.

The Limits of American Ideals

During the war, the U.S. government worked hard to explain to its citizens the reasons for their sacrifices. In 1941 Roosevelt had pledged America to defend "four essential human freedoms"—freedom of speech; freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear—and government-sponsored films contrasted democracy and totalitarianism, freedom and fascism, equality and oppression.

Despite such confident proclamations, as America fought the totalitarian regimes of the Axis powers, the nation confronted questions with no easy answers. What limits on civil liberties were justified in the interest of national security? How freely could information flow to the nation's citizens without revealing military secrets to the enemy and costing American lives? How could the United States protect itself against the threat of spies or

War Brides

During and immediately after World War II, more than 60,000 American servicemen married women from other nations, both those the United States had fought alongside and those it had fought against. The U.S. government promised these servicemen that it would deliver their wives and babies to their doorsteps, free of charge.

The U.S. Army's "Operation War Bride," which would eventually transport more than 70,000 women and children, began in Britain in early 1946. The first batch of war brides—455 British women and their 132 children—arrived in the United States on February 4, 1946. As the former WWII transport *Argentina* sailed into New York harbor in the predawn darkness, the Statue of Liberty was specially illuminated to greet them. Women who had sung "There'll Always Be an England" as they set sail from Southampton, England, gathered on the deck to attempt "The Star Spangled Banner." These women, many of them teenagers, had left their homes and families behind to join their new husbands in a strange land. Mrs. Edna Olds Butler, "nearly seventeen," practiced a southern accent in hope that her new in-laws in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, would be

able to understand her. Two young British women had married African American soldiers, and one carried with her a letter from her husband promising that she would be the "white queen of Atlanta."

Women fanned out to every state of the union. Women from war-destroyed cities were impressed by the material abundance of American society and pleased by the warm welcome they received. But America's racial prejudice shocked Shanghai native Helen Chia Wong, wife of Staff Sgt. Albert Wong of Fourteenth Air Force Service Command, when she and her husband were turned away from a house by a rental agent with the explanation: "The neighbors wouldn't like it." The file of one young woman who sought passage back to England showed another kind of distress. An American official noted that she was "too shocked to bring her baby up on the black tracks of a West Virginia [coal] mining town as against her own home in English countryside of rose-covered fences." It wasn't always easy, but most of the war brides settled into their new families and communities, becoming part of their new nation and helping to forge an intimate link between America and other nations of the world.

The army's "Operation War Bride" (sometimes called "Operation Mother-in-Law" or "the Diaper Run") began in Britain in early 1946. Employing eleven former World War II troopships, including the *Queen Mary*, the U.S. government relocated the wives and babies of U.S. servicemen from dozens of nations to the U.S. These English war brides, with babies their fathers have not yet seen, are waiting to be reunited with their husbands in Massachusetts, Missouri, and Iowa. (© Bettmann/Corbis)



saboteurs, especially from German, Italian, or Japanese citizens living in the United States? And what about America's ongoing domestic problems—particularly the problem of race? Could the nation address its own citizens' demands for reform as it fought the war against the Axis? The answers to these questions often revealed tensions between the nation's democratic ideals and its wartime practices.

For the most part, America handled the issue of civil liberties well. American leaders embraced a "strategy of truth," declaring that citizens of a democratic nation required a truthful accounting of the war's progress. However, the government closely controlled information about military matters. Censorship was serious business, as even seemingly unimportant details might tip off enemies about troop movements or invasion plans. Government-created propaganda sometimes dehumanized the enemy. Nonetheless, the American government resorted to hate mongering much less frequently than during the First World War.

More complex was the question of how to handle dissent, and how to guard against the possibility that enemy agents were operating within the nation's borders. The Alien Registration (Smith) Act, passed in 1940, made it unlawful to advocate the overthrow of the U.S. gov-

ernment by force or violence or to join any organization that did so. After Pearl Harbor, the government drew upon this authority to take thousands of Germans, Italians, and other Europeans into custody as suspected spies and potential traitors. During the war, the government interned 14,426 Europeans in Enemy Alien Camps. Fearing subversion, the government also prohibited ten thousand Italian Americans from living or working in restricted zones along the California coast, including San Francisco and Monterey Bay.

In March 1942, Roosevelt ordered that all the 112,000 foreign-born Japanese and Japanese Americans living in California, Oregon, and the state of Washington (the vast majority of the mainland population) be removed from the West Coast to "relocation centers" for the duration of the

war. While individual German and Italian nationals were interned because of specific charges against them, that was not the case here. There were no individual charges; Japanese and Japanese Americans were imprisoned as a group, under suspicion solely because they were of Japanese descent.

American anger at Japan's "sneak attack" on Pearl Harbor fueled the calls for internment, as did fears that

INTERMENT OF JAPANESE AMERICANS



■ In February 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered that all Japanese Americans living on the West Coast be rounded up and placed in prison camps. These families were awaiting a train to take them to an assembly center in Merced, California; from there, they would be sent to relocation camps in remote inland areas. (National Archives)

West Coast cities might yet come under enemy attack. Long-standing racism also played a critical role, and General John L. DeWitt, chief of the Western Defense Command, warned, “The Japanese race is an enemy race.” Finally, people in economic competition with Japanese Americans were among the strongest supporters of internment. Though Japanese nationals were forbidden to gain U.S. citizenship or own property, American-born Nissei (second generation) and Sansei (third generation) were increasingly successful in business and agriculture. The relocation order forced Japanese Americans to sell property valued at \$500 million for a fraction of its worth. West Coast Japanese Americans also lost their positions in the truck-garden, floral, and fishing industries.

The internees were sent to flood-damaged lands at Relocation, Arkansas; to the intermountain terrain of Wyoming and the desert of western Arizona; and to other arid and desolate spots in the West. The camps were bleak and demoralizing. Behind barbed wire stood tarpapered wooden barracks where entire families lived in a single room furnished only with cots, blankets, and a bare light bulb. Toilets and dining and bathing facilities were communal; privacy was almost nonexistent. In such difficult circumstances, people nonetheless attempted to sustain community life, setting up schools for the children and clubs for adults to battle monotony.

Betrayed by their government, almost 6,000 internees renounced U.S. citizenship and demanded to be sent to Japan. Some Japanese Americans sought legal remedy, but the Supreme Court upheld the government’s action in *Korematsu v. U.S.* (1944). Still others sought to demonstrate their loyalty. The all-Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team, drawn heavily from young men in internment camps, was the most decorated unit of its size. Suffering heavy casualties in Italy and France, members of the 442nd were awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor, 47 Distinguished Service Crosses, 350 Silver Stars, and more than 3,600 Purple Hearts. In 1988, Congress issued a public apology and largely symbolic payment of \$20,000 to each of the 60,000 surviving Japanese American internees.

As America mobilized for war, some African American leaders attempted to force the nation to confront the uncomfortable parallels between the racist doctrines of the

Nazis and the persistence of Jim Crow segregation in the United States. Proclaiming a “Double V” campaign (victory at home and abroad), influential groups such as the National Association

for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) saw the war as an opportunity “to persuade, embarrass, compel and shame our government and our nation . . . into a more enlightened attitude toward a tenth of its people.” Membership in civil rights organizations soared during the war. The NAACP, 50,000 strong in 1940, had 450,000 members by 1946. And in 1942 civil rights activists influenced by the philosophy of India’s Mohandas Gandhi founded the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which stressed “nonviolent direct action” and staged sit-ins to desegregate restaurants and movie theaters in northern cities and Washington, D.C.

Military service was a key issue for African Americans, who understood the traditional link between the duty to defend one’s country and the rights of full citizenship. But the United States military remained segregated by race and strongly resisted efforts to use black units as combat troops. As late as 1943, less than 6 percent of the armed forces was African American, compared with more than 10 percent of the population. The marines at first refused to accept African Americans at all, and the navy approximated segregation by assigning black men to service positions in which they would rarely interact with nonblacks as equals or superiors.

Why did the United States fight a war for democracy with a segregated military? The United States military

understood that its sole priority was to stop the Axis and win the war, and the federal government and War Department decided that the midst of world

war was no time to try to integrate the armed forces. The majority of Americans (approximately 89 percent of Americans were white) opposed integration, many of them vehemently. As a sign of how deeply racist beliefs penetrated the United States, the Red Cross segregated blood plasma during the war. In most southern states, racial segregation was not simply custom; it was the law. Integration of military installations and training camps, the majority of which were in the South, would have provoked a crisis as federal power contradicted state law. Pointing to outbreaks of racial violence in southern training camps as evidence, government and military officials argued that wartime integration would almost certainly have provoked even more racial violence, created disorder within the military, and hindered America’s war effort. Such resistance might have been short-term, but the War Department did not take that chance. Justifying its decision, the War Department argued that it could not “act outside the law, nor contrary to the will of the majority of the citizens of the Nation.” General



■ During World War II, for the first time, the War Department sanctioned the training and use of African American pilots. These members of the 99th Pursuit Squadron—known as “Tuskegee Airmen” because they trained at Alabama’s all-black Tuskegee Institute—joined combat over North Africa in June 1943. Like most African American units in the racially segregated armed forces, the men of the 99th Pursuit Squadron were under the command of white officers. (National Archives)

Marshall himself proclaimed that it was not the job of the army to “solve a social problem that has perplexed the American people throughout the history of this nation. . . . The army is not a sociological laboratory.” Hopes for racial justice, so long deferred, were another casualty of the war.

Despite such discrimination, many African Americans stood up for their rights. Lt. Jackie Robinson refused to move to the back of the bus while training at the army’s Camp Hood, Texas, in 1944—and faced court-martial, even though military regulations forbade racial discrimination on military vehicles, no matter local law

or custom. Black sailors disobeyed orders to return to work after surviving an explosion that destroyed two ships, killed 320 men, and shattered windows 35 miles away—an explosion caused by navy practice of assigning black stevedores, completely untrained in handling high explosives, to load bombs from the munitions depot at Port Chicago, near San Francisco, onto Liberty ships. When they were court-martialed for mutiny, future Supreme Court justice and chief counsel for the NAACP Thurgood Marshall asked why only black sailors did this work. He proclaimed: “This is not fifty men on trial for mutiny. This is the Navy on trial for its whole vicious policy toward Negroes.”

As the war wore on, African American servicemen did fight on the front lines, and fought well. The Marine Corps commandant in the Pacific proclaimed that “Negro Marines are no longer on trial. They are Marines, period.” The “Tuskegee Airmen,” pilots trained at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, saw heroic service in all-black units such as the Ninety-ninth Pursuit Squadron, which won eighty Distinguished Flying Crosses. After the war, African Americans—as some white Americans had feared—called upon their wartime service to claim the full rights of citizenship. Black men and women shared fully in the benefits offered to veterans under the GI Bill (see page 799). African Americans’ wartime experiences were mixed, but the war was a turning point in the movement for equal rights.

America’s most tragic failure to live up to its democratic ideas was in refusing to assist European Jews and others attempting to flee Hitler’s Germany (see page 725). As early as 1942, American papers reported the “mass slaughter” of Jews and other “undesir-

ables” (Gypsies, homosexuals, the physically and mentally handicapped) under Hitler. Roosevelt knew about the existence of Nazi death camps capable of killing up to two thousand people an hour using the gas Zyklon-B. However, American leaders chose not to divert airpower from principal targets in Germany to destroy the camps or the rail access to them.

British and American representatives met in Bermuda in 1943 to discuss the situation but took no concrete action. Appalled, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. charged that the State Department’s foot dragging made the United States an accessory to murder. “It takes months and months to grant the visa and then it usually applies to a corpse,” he wrote bitterly. Early in 1944, stirred by Morgenthau’s well-documented plea, Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board, which set up



■ When the British liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp near Hanover, Germany, in April 1945, they found this mass grave. It held the remains of thousands of Holocaust victims who had been starved, gassed, and machine-gunned by their Nazi jailers. This photograph and many others provide irrefutable proof of the Holocaust's savagery. (Imperial War Museum)

refugee camps in Europe and played a crucial role in saving 200,000 Jews from death. But, lamented one American official, "by that time it was too damned late to do too much." By war's end, the Nazis had systematically murdered almost 11 million people.

Life in the Military

More than 16 million men and approximately 350,000 women served in the U.S. armed forces during World War II. Eighteen percent of American families had a father, son, or brother in the armed forces. Some of these men (and all of the women) volunteered, eager to defend their nation. But most who served—more than 10 million—were draftees. Compared with the draft in both the Civil War and the Vietnam War, the World War II draft reached broadly and fairly equitably through the American population. Almost 10,000 Princeton students or alumni served—as did all four of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's sons—

while throughout the nation judges offered minor criminal offenders the choice of the military or jail.

The Selective Service Act provided for deferments, but they did not disproportionately benefit the well-to-do. The small number of college deferments was more than balanced by deferments for a long list of "critical occupations," including not only war industry workers but also almost 2 million agricultural workers. Most deferments were for those deemed physically or mentally unqualified for military service. Army physicians discovered what a toll the depression had taken on the nation's youth as draftees arrived with rotted teeth and deteriorated eyesight—signs of malnutrition. Army dentists pulled 15 million teeth and fitted men with dentures; optometrists prescribed 2.5 million pairs of glasses. Hundreds of thousands of men with venereal diseases were cured by sulfa drugs, developed in 1942. Military examiners also found evidence of the impact of racism and poverty. Half of African American draftees had no schooling beyond the sixth grade, and up

SELECTIVE SERVICE

to one-third were functionally illiterate. Forty-six percent of African Americans and almost a third of European Americans called for the draft were deferred, classified "4-F"—unfit for service.

Nonetheless, almost 12 percent of America's total population served in the military. Regiments were created rapidly, throwing together men from very different backgrounds. Regional differences were profound, and northerners and southerners—literally—often could not understand one another. Ethnic differences complicated things further. Though African Americans and Japanese Americans served in their own separate units, Hispanics, Native Americans—including the Navajo code talkers—and Chinese Americans served in "white" units. Furthermore, the differences among "whites"—the "Italian" kid from Brooklyn and the one from rural Mississippi (or rural Montana)—were profound. The result was often tension, but many Americans became less prejudiced and less provincial as they served with men unlike themselves.

Military service was widespread, but the burdens of combat were not equally shared. Though women served their nation honorably and often courageously, women's roles in the U.S. military were much more restricted than in the British or Soviet militaries, where women served as anti-aircraft gunners and in other combat-related positions. Many U.S. women volunteers served as nurses, in communications offices, and as typists or cooks. In the United States, the recruiting slogan for the WACs (Women's Army Corps) was "Release a Man for Combat." However, most men in the armed forces never saw combat, either; one-quarter never left the United States. The United States had the lowest "teeth-to-tail" ratio of any of the combatants, with each combat soldier backed up by eight or more support personnel. Japan's ratio was close to one to one. One-third of U.S. military personnel served in clerical positions, with well-educated men most likely to be slotted into noncombat positions. African Americans, though assigned dirty and dangerous tasks, were largely kept from combat service. In World War II, lower-class, less-educated white men bore the brunt of the fighting.

For those who fought, combat in World War II was as horrible as anything humans have experienced. Home-front audiences for the war films Hollywood churned out saw men die bravely, shot cleanly through the heart and comforted by their buddies in their last moments. What men experienced was carnage. Fewer than 10 percent of casualties were caused by bullets. Most men were killed or wounded by mortars, bombs,

FIGHTING THE WAR

or grenades. Seventy-five thousand American men remained missing in action at the end of the war, blown into fragments of flesh too small to identify. Combat meant days and weeks of unrelenting rain in malarial jungles, sliding down a mud-slicked hill to land in a pile of putrid corpses. It meant drowning in the waters of the frigid North Atlantic amid burning wreckage of a torpedoed ship. It meant using flamethrowers that burned at 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit on other human beings. It meant being violently ill on a landing craft steering through floating body parts of those who had attempted the landing first, knowing that if you tripped you would likely drown under the sixty-eight-pound weight of your pack, and that if you made it ashore you would likely be blown apart by artillery shells. Service was "for the duration" of the war. Only death, serious injury, or victory offered release. In this hard world, men fought to victory.

In forty-five months of war, close to 300,000 American servicemen died in combat. Almost 1 million American troops were wounded, half of them seriously. Medical advances, such as the development of penicillin and the use of blood plasma to prevent shock, helped wounded men survive—but many never fully recovered from those wounds. Between 20 and 30 percent of combat casualties were psychoneurotic, as men were pushed past the limits of endurance. The federal government strictly censored images of American combat deaths for most of the war, consigning them to a secret file known as "the chamber of horrors." Americans at home rarely understood what combat had been like, and many men, upon return, never talked about their experiences in the war.

Winning the War

Axis hopes for victory depended on a short war. Leaders in Germany and Japan were well aware that if the United States had time to fully mobilize, flooding the theaters of war with armaments and reinforcing Allied troops with fresh, trained men, the war was lost. However, powerful factions in the Japanese military and German leadership believed that the United States would concede if it met with early, decisive defeats. Hitler, blinded by racial arrogance, stated shortly after declaring war on the United States, "I don't see much future for the Americans. . . . It's a decayed country. . . . American society [is] half Judaized, and the other half Negrified. How can one expect a State like that to hold together." By mid-1942 the Axis powers understood that they had underestimated not only American resolve but also the willingness of other Allies to sacrifice