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 agencies 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 Mediterranean, 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 Edouard 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

In late December 1940—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," making the needed goods and 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," making the needed goods and 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," making the needed goods and machines that would win the war for the Allies. After December 7, 1941, U.S. strategy remained much the same. 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March, he issued Executive Order 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 Mary Anderson, head of the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, "women were reclassified by industrial workers 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; Rosie's a marine; Rosie's 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 workforce. 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. Life on the Home Front

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 645,000 airplanes; 120,000 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 Knapp's mass-production techniques to cut construction time for Liberty ships—the 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 founded 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 press...the far-reaching line of half-born skyscrapers growing wings under swarms of workers." His words reveal the might of American industry though it also offered 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 idealized 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 (Hawaii was a U.S. territory, and the Philippines a U.S. possession, but neither was part of the nation proper). Americans worried about Japanese 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 and a panhandle of newly discovered gold, was spared the war's impact on 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 citizens 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." Citizens 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 gelatin to make blackstrap molasses or bullets. Children collected scrap metal, aware that the iron in one old shaved blade was enough for four hand grenades and that every tin can could help 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 worth canned fruits and vegetables, red 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 shoulders, however, remained cheaper: a half barrel. 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 flourished, warding off some consumer goods, 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 flag. 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 "Assassinate the Positive." Others made fun of America's enemies ("You're a sip, Mr. Jap / You make a Yenkee cranky / You're a sap, Mr. Jap / Uncle Sam is gonna spakey / It's 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 WAV, and a Marine promised "no battle scenes, no messages, just happy fun and jive to make you happy you're alive." The others, such as Bataan or Wake Island, portrayed cruel, often sanitized—events in the war. Even in the most festive comedies, however, the war was always present. The airmen held "plasma premiers," offering free admission to those who donated a pint of blood to the Red Cross. Audiences rose to sing "The Star Spangled Banner," then watched newsreels featuring carefully edited footage of recent conflict before the feature film began. On Dec. 6, 1944, as Allied troops landed at Nambang, the American Legion mess folk publicized the war's progress. At the end of the war, piercing the lives of millions, the "Stars and Stripes" became a familiar sight all over the world.

In Detroit, as in other cities, radio broadcasts and newspapers were filled with news about the war. The Detroit Free Press carried a daily column titled "The War News," which included information about the war's impact on Detroit, and other cities, around the world. The column was updated several times a day, providing a steady stream of news to Detroiters.

The war had a profound effect on American life. It changed the way people thought and acted. The war also changed the way people talked. The word "bomber" became synonymous with "airplane," and the word "tank" became synonymous with "vehicle." The war also changed the way people dressed. Women wore more practical clothes, and men wore more casual clothing.

The war also had a profound effect on American economy. The government spent billions of dollars on the war effort, which created a boom in the economy. The war also created a shortage of goods, which led to a rise in prices. The war also had a profound effect on American culture. The war created a sense of national unity, and it also created a sense of national purpose. The war also created a sense of national sacrifice, as people worked together to win the war.
Racial tensions also led to riots in Los Angeles in 1943. Young Mexican Americans in the city, who were largely employed in the defense industries, demonstrated against what they perceived as discrimination. The resulting riot, known as the Zoot Suit Riots, lasted for several days and involved thousands of people. The zoot suit was a fashion statement that had been adopted by young Mexican American men, often wearing suits with wide lapels and flowing, baggy pants. The riots were sparked by an incident in which a young white man was attacked by a group of Mexican American men, and the controversy continued for several days with several deaths and many arrests.

Families in Wartime

During the war, families faced a variety of challenges, including the separation of husbands, fathers, and sons as they went off to serve in the armed forces. The divorce rate increased, as did the number of children living in single-parent households. These changes had a significant impact on the social and economic stability of families. In addition, the war brought about changes in gender roles, as women entered the workforce in large numbers, taking on jobs that were traditionally held by men. This was particularly true in industries such as shipbuilding and defense manufacturing.

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 and posters emphasized democracy and totalitarism, freedom and fascism, equality and oppression. Despite such definitive 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 giving their all to win 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 economic necessity found their work to be "for the duration"—the home-front equivalent of men's wartime military service. Even so, women who worked were frequently blamed for neglecting their children and creating an "epidemic of juvenile delinquency"—even 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.
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 1945. 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 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 Oda 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."

Wives fanned out to every state of the union. Women from war-decimated cities were impressed by the material abundance of American society and pleased by the warm welcome they received. But America's racial prejudices 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 files 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 Dieper 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)

The Limits of American Ideals

The government 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...
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 that "a 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 Nisei (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 Utah; and to the desert of Arizona; and to other remote and desolate spots in the West. The camps were bleak and demoralizing. Behind barred wire stood tarpatched wooden barracks where entire families lived in a single room furnished only with beds, 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 8,000 interned Japanese workers renounced U.S. citizenship and decided 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, 330 Silver Stars, and more than 3,600 Purple Hearts. In 1988, Congress apologized for "wrongful condemnation and payment of $20,000 to each of the 60,000 surviving Japanese Americans.

As America mobilized for war, some African Americans also sought 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. Pro-African American groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) saw the war as an opportunity "to persuade, embarrass, control and shame our government and our nation... and to gain 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 activities influenced by the philosophy of India's Mahatma 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 all citizens. 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 5 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 80 percent of Americans were white) opposed integration, and of them vehemently. As a sign of how deeply race based 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 was the majority of which were in the South, with provoking a crisis as federalpower 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 expected, but the War Department did not take that course. Posturing that the War Department argued that it could not "act outside the law, no contrary to the Constitution ... the army is not a sociological laboratory." Army for racial justice, so long delayed, was another casualty of the war. Despite such discrimination, many African Americans stood up for their rights. Lt. Jackie Robinson refused to move in 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 unrestrained 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 Ninetieth 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 779). 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 ideals was in refusing to assist European Jews and others attempting to escape the Hitler's Germany (see page 725). As early as 1942, the Holocaust American papers reported the "mass slaughter of Jews and other "undesirables" (Gypsies, homosexuals, the physically or 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 to 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)

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's) 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 draftees, but they did not disproportionately benefit the well-to-do. The small number of college deferments was more than halved 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 need reeds and deteriorated eyesight—signs of malnourishment. Army dentists pulled 15 million teeth and found 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 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 as "4-F"—not fit 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," a kid from Brooklyn and the one from rural Mississippi—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 WAVES (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 "men-to-total" ratio of any of the combatants, with each combat soldier backed up by eight or more support personnel. Japan's ratio was closer to one to one. One-third of U.S. military personnel served in clerical positions, but well-educated men most likely to be slated into noncombat positions. African Americans, though assigned army and dangerous tasks, were largely kept from combat service. In World War II, lower-class, les-educated white men had the brunt of the fighting.

For those who fought, combat in World War II was not as "homefront" as they had experienced. Curious about what it was like to be a soldier, millions watched the war films Hollywood churned out. Too many died bravely, shot cleanly through the heart and comforted by their buddies in their last moments. What men experienced was carriage. Fewer than one percent of casualties were caused by bullets. Most men were killed or wounded by mortars, bombs, 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 and burning wreckage of a torpedoeship. It meant using flame-throwers that burned at 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit on other human beings. It meant being violently ill on a landing craft steering through flooding body parts of those who had attempted the landing first, knowing that if you tripped you would likely drown under the sixty-right-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 for 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 psychoneurotics, 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

Aixis 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 reenforcing 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 fought an early, decisive defeat. 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 Judaised, and the other half Negrified. How can one expect a State that is so weak 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