Home Front during World War II

Home Front

Service on the Home Front by Louis Hirshman and William Tasker.

Location	United States
Date	1941 - 1945

The **United States home front during World War II** supported the war effort in many ways, including a wide range of volunteer efforts

and submitting to government-managed rationing and price controls. The labor market changed radically and peacetime conflicts with respect to race and labor took on a special dimension because of the intense pressure for national unity. The Hollywood film industry found a role to play and every aspect of life from politics to personal savings changed when put on a wartime footing.

Economics

The main contributions of the U.S. to the Allied war effort comprised money, industrial output, food, petroleum, technological innovation, and (especially 1944-45), soldiers. Much of the focus in Washington was maximizing the economic output of the nation. The overall result was a dramatic increase in GDP, the export of vast quantities of supplies to the Allies and to American forces overseas, the end of unemployment, and a rise in civilian consumption even as 40% of the GDP went to the war effort. This was achieved by tens of millions of workers moving from low-productivity occupations to high efficiency jobs, improvements in productivity through better technology and management, and the move into the active labor force of students, retired people, housewives, and the unemployed, and an increase in hours worked. It was exhausting; leisure activities declined sharply. People tolerated the extra work because of patriotism, the pay, and the confidence it was only "for the duration" and life would return to normal as soon as the war was won. Most durable goods became unavailable, and meat, clothing, and gasoline were tightly rationed. In industrial areas housing was in short supply as people doubled up and lived in cramped quarters. Prices and wages were controlled, and Americans saved a high portion of their incomes, which led to renewed growth after the war instead of a return to depression.

Taxes and controls

Federal tax policy was highly contentious during the war, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt battling a conservative Congress. However, both sides agreed on the need for high taxes (along with heavy borrowing) to pay for the war: top marginal tax rates ranged from 81%-94% for the duration of the war, and the income level subject to the highest rate was lowered from $5,000,000 to $200,000. Roosevelt tried unsuccessfully, by executive order 9250, to impose a 100% surtax on after-tax incomes over $25,000 (equal to roughly

$331,683 today). Congress also enlarged the tax base by lowering the minimum income to pay taxes, and by reducing personal exemptions and deductions. By 1944 nearly every employed person was paying federal income taxes (compared to 10% in 1940).

Many controls were put on the economy. The most important were price controls, imposed on most products and monitored by the Office of Price Administration. Wages were also controlled. Corporations dealt with numerous agencies, especially the War production Board (WPB), and the War and Navy departments, which had the purchasing power and priorities that largely reshaped and expanded industrial production.

Rationing

In 1942, a rationing system was begun to guarantee minimum amounts of necessities to everyone (especially poor people) and prevent inflation. Tires were the first item to be rationed in January 1942 because supplies of natural rubber were interrupted. Gasoline rationing proved an even better way to allocate scarce rubber. By 1943 one needed government issued ration coupons to purchase typewriters, coffee, sugar, gasoline, bicycles, clothing, fuel oil, silk, nylon, stoves, shoes, meat, cheese, butter, lard, margarine, canned foods, dried fruits, jam, and many other items. Some items—like new automobiles and appliances were no longer made. The rationing system did not apply to used goods (like clothes or cars).

To get a classification and a book of rationing stamps, one had to appear before a local rationing board. Each person in a household received a ration book, including babies and children. When purchasing gasoline, a driver had to present a gas card along with a ration book and cash. Ration stamps were valid only for a set period to forestall hoarding. All forms of automobile racing were banned, including Indianapolis. Sightseeing driving was banned, too.

The United States did not have food rationing in World War I. Through slogans such as "Food Will Win the War", "Meatless Mondays", and "Wheatless Wednesdays", the United States Food Administration under Herbert Hoover reduced national consumption by 15%. In summer 1941 the British appealed to Americans to conserve food to provide more to go to Britons fighting in World War II. The Office of Price

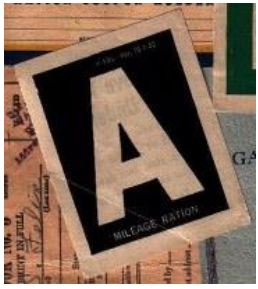
Administration warned Americans of potential gasoline, steel, aluminum, and electricity shortages. It believed that with factories converting to military production and consuming many critical supplies, rationing would become necessary if the country entered the war. It established a rationing system after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Of concern for all parts of the country was a shortage of rubber for tires since the Japanese quickly conquered the rubber-producing regions of Southeast Asia. Although synthetic rubber had been invented in the years preceding the war, it had been unable to compete with natural rubber commercially, so the USA did not have enough manufacturing capacity at the start of the war to make synthetic rubber. Throughout the war, rationing of gasoline was motivated by a desire to conserve rubber as much as by a desire to conserve gasoline.

Tires were the first item to be rationed by the OPA, which ordered the temporary end of sales on 11 December 1941 while it created 7,500 unpaid, volunteer three-person tire ration boards around the country. By 5 January 1942 the boards were ready. Each received a monthly allotment of tires based on the number of local vehicle registrations, and allocated them to applicants based on OPA rules. The War Production Board (WPB) ordered the temporary end of all civilian automobile sales on 1 January 1942, leaving dealers with one half million unsold cars. Ration boards grew in size as they began evaluating automobile sales in February (only certain professions, such as doctors and clergymen, qualified to purchase the remaining inventory of new automobiles), typewriters in March, and bicycles in May. Automobile factories stopped manufacturing civilian models by early February 1942 and converted to producing tanks, aircraft, weapons, and other military products, with the United States government as the only customer. By June 1942 companies also stopped manufacturing for civilians metal office furniture, radios, phonographs, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and sewing machines.

Civilians first received ration books—War Ration Book Number One, or the "Sugar Book"—on 4 May 1942, through more than 100,000 schoolteachers, PTA groups, and other volunteers. A national speed limit of 35 miles per hour was imposed to save fuel and rubber for tires. Later that month volunteers again helped distribute gasoline cards in 17 Atlantic and Pacific Northwest states. To get a classification and rationing stamps, one had to appear before a local War Price and

Rationing Board which reported to the OPA (which was jokingly said to stand for "Only a Puny A-card"). Each person in a household received a ration book, including babies and small children who qualified for canned milk not available to others. To receive a gasoline ration card, a person had to certify a need for gasoline and ownership of no more than five tires. All tires in excess of five per driver were confiscated by the government, because of rubber shortages.

By the end of 1942, half of U.S automobiles were issued an 'A' sticker which allowed 4 gallons of fuel per week. That sticker was issued to owners whose use of their cars was nonessential. Hand the pump jockey your Mileage Ration Book coupons and cash, and she (yes, female service station attendants because the guys were *over there*) could sell you three or four gallons a week, no more. For nearly a year, A-stickered cars were not to be driven for pleasure at all.



The green 'B' sticker was for driving deemed essential to the war effort; industrial war workers, for example, could purchase eight gallons a week.

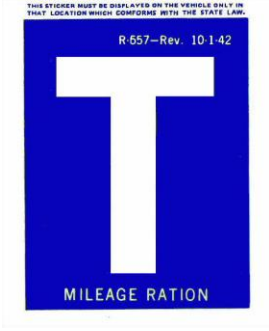
The "C" sticker was issued primarily to professional people, physicians nurses, dentists, ministers, priests, Mail delivery, embalmers, farm workers, construction or maintenance workers, Soldiers and armed forces going to duty, and several others.

It has a tab under the "C" for the individual to check his occupation. There are 17 different occupations for this sticker.

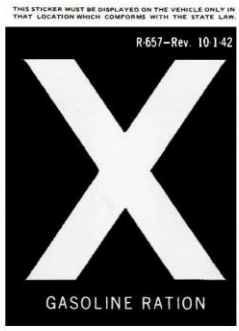
In reality this one was more used than the "A" sticker which is pretty much mostly seen today simply because it was larger. Immediately after the war it was quickly scraped off the windshield as it revealed the exact occupation of professional people who did not wish their occupation revealed on their cars.

The "M" sticker was issued to motorcycle drivers which included Western Union and other types of delivery people who used motorcycles for their business.

The "T" sticker was issued to truck drivers. Truckers supplying the population with supplies had a T sticker for unlimited amounts of fuel.



The "X" sticker was issued in special instances for high mileage type jobs such as travelling salesmen etc. X stickers on cars entitled the holder to unlimited supplies and were the highest priority in the system. Ministers of Religion, police, firemen, and civil defense workers were in this category. A scandal erupted when 200 Congressmen received these X stickers.



As of 1 March 1942 dog food could no longer be sold in tin cans, and manufacturers switched to dehydrated versions. As of 1 April 1942 anyone wishing to purchase a new toothpaste tube had to turn in an empty one. Sugar was the first consumer commodity rationed, with all sales ended on 27 April 1942 and resumed on 5 May with a ration of one half pound per person per week, half of normal consumption. Bakeries, ice cream makers, and other commercial users received rations of about 70% of normal usage. Coffee was rationed nationally on 29 November 1942 to one pound every five weeks, about half of normal consumption, in part because of German U-boat attacks on shipping from Brazil. By the end of 1942 ration coupons were used for nine other items. Typewriters, gasoline, bicycles, footwear, Silk, Nylon, fuel oil, stoves, meat, lard, shortening and oils, cheese, butter, margarine, processed foods (canned, bottled, and frozen), dried fruits, canned milk, firewood and coal, jams, jellies, and fruit butter were rationed by November 1943. Many retailers welcomed rationing because they were already experiencing shortages of many items due to rumors and panics, such as flashlights and batteries after Pearl Harbor.

Medicines such as penicillin were rationed by a triage committee at each hospital.

Many levels of rationing went into effect. Some items, such as sugar, were distributed evenly based on the number of people in a household. Other items, like gasoline or fuel oil, were rationed only to those who could justify a need. Restaurant owners and other merchants were accorded more availability, but had to collect ration stamps to restock their supplies. In exchange for used ration stamps, ration boards

delivered certificates to restaurants and merchants to authorize procurement of more products.

The work of issuing ration books and exchanging used stamps for certificates was handled by some 5,500 local ration boards of mostly volunteer workers selected by local officials.

Each ration stamp had a generic drawing of an airplane, gun, tank, aircraft carrier, ear of wheat, fruit, etc. and a serial number. Some stamps also had alphabetic lettering. The kind and amount of rationed commodities were not specified on most of the stamps and were not defined until later when local newspapers published, for example, that beginning on a specified date, one airplane stamp was required (in addition to cash) to buy one pair of shoes and one stamp number 30 from ration book four was required to buy five pounds of sugar. The commodity amounts changed from time to time depending on availability. Red stamps were used to ration meat and butter, and blue stamps were used to ration processed foods.

To enable making change for ration stamps, the government issued "red point" tokens to be given in change for red stamps, and "blue point" tokens in change for blue stamps. The red and blue tokens were about the size of dimes (16 mm) and were made of thin compressed wood fiber material, because metals were in short supply.

As a result of the rationing, all forms of Automobile racing, including the Indianapolis 500, were banned. Sightseeing driving was also banned.

Personal savings

Personal income was at an all-time high, and more dollars were chasing fewer goods to purchase. This was a recipe for economic disaster that was largely avoided because Americans—cajoled daily by their government to do so—were also saving money at an all-time high rate, mostly in War Bonds but also in private savings accounts and insurance policies. Consumer saving was strongly encouraged through investment in War bonds that would mature after the war. Most workers had an automatic payroll deduction; children collected savings stamps until they had enough to buy a bond. Bond rallies were held throughout the U.S. with famous celebrities, usually Hollywood film stars, to enhance

the bond advertising effectiveness. Several stars were responsible for personal appearance tours that netted multiple millions of dollars in bond pledges—an astonishing amount in 1943. The public paid 3/4 of the face value of a war bond, and received the full face value back after a set number of years. This shifted their consumption from the war to postwar, and allowed over 40% of GDP to go to military spending, with moderate inflation. Americans were challenged to put "at least 10% of every paycheck into Bonds". Compliance was very high, with entire factories of workers earning a special "Minuteman" flag to fly over their plant if all workers belonged to the "Ten Percent Club". There were seven major War Loan drives, all of which exceeded their goals.

Labor

The unemployment problem ended in the United States with the preparations leading up to World War II. Greater wartime production created millions of new jobs, while the draft reduced the number of young men available for civilian jobs. So great was the demand for labor that millions of retired people, housewives, and students entered the labor force, lured by patriotism and wages. The shortage of grocery clerks caused some stores to convert from service at the counter to self-service and to lower shelves to 5 feet 8 inches (1.73 m), allegedly the height that a woman could reach. Before the war most groceries, dry cleaners, drugstores, and department stores offered home delivery service. The labor shortage and gasoline and tire rationing caused many stores to stop delivery. They found that requiring customers to buy their products in person increased sales.

Women

"Rosie the Riveter", working on an A-31 "Vengeance" dive bomber. Tennessee, 1943.

Women also joined the workforce to replace men who had joined the forces, though in fewer numbers. Roosevelt stated that the efforts of civilians at home to support the war through personal sacrifice were as critical to winning the war as the efforts of the soldiers themselves. "Rosie the Riveter" became the symbol of women laboring in manufacturing. The war effort brought about significant changes in the role of women in society as a whole. At the end of the war, many of the munitions factories closed. Other women were replaced by returning veterans. However most women who wanted to continue working did so. Young daughters of these working women learned that to be a working woman was a normal part of life and later many of these daughters also became working women.

In the figure below the development of the United States labor force by gender during the war years.

Year	Total labor force (*1000)	of which Male (*1000)	of which Female (*1000)	Female share of total (%)
1940	56,100	41,940	14,160	25.2
1941	57,720	43,070	14,650	25.4
1942	60,330	44,200	16,120	26.7
1943	64,780	45,950	18,830	29.1
1944	66,320	46,930	19,390	29.2
1945	66,210	46,910	19,304	29.2
1946	60,520	43,690	16,840	27.8

Farming

Labor shortages were felt in agriculture, even though most farmers were given an occupational exemption and few were drafted. Large numbers volunteered or moved to cities for factory jobs. At the same time many agricultural commodities were in greater demand by the military and for the civilian populations of Allies. Production was encouraged and prices and markets were under tight federal control.

The Bracero Program, a bi-national labor agreement between Mexico and the U.S. started in 1942. Some 290,000 braceros ("strong arms," in Spanish) were recruited and contracted to work in the agriculture fields. Half went to Texas, and 20% to the Pacific Northwest.

Between 1942 and 1946 some 425,000 Italian and German prisoners of war were used as farm laborers, loggers and cannery workers. In

Michigan, for example, the POWs accounted for more than one-third of the state's agricultural production and food processing in 1944.

Teenagers

With the war's ever increasing need for able bodied men consuming America's labor force in the early 1940s, industry turned to teen-aged boys and girls to fill in as replacements. Consequently, many states had to change their child-labor laws to allow these teenagers to work. The lures of patriotism, adulthood and money led many youth to drop out of school and take a defense job. Between 1940 and 1944, the number of teenage workers increased by 1.9 million, and the number of students in public high schools dropped from 6.6 million in 1940 to 5.6 million in 1944, as a million students—and many teachers—took jobs.

Labor unions

Welder making boilers for a ship, Combustion Engineering Co., Chattanooga, Tennessee. June 1942.

The war mobilization changed the relationship of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) with both employers and the national government. Both the CIO and the larger American Federation of Labor (AFL) grew rapidly in the war years.

Nearly all the unions that belonged to the CIO were fully supportive of both the war effort and of the Roosevelt administration. However the United Mine Workers, who had taken an isolationist stand in the years leading up to the war and had opposed Roosevelt's reelection in 1940, left the CIO in 1942. The major unions supported a wartime no-strike pledge that aimed to eliminate not only major strikes for new contracts, but also the innumerable small strikes called by shop stewards and local union leadership to protest particular grievances. In return for labor's no-strike pledge, the government offered arbitration to determine the wages and other terms of new contracts. Those procedures produced

modest wage increases during the first few years of the war but not enough to keep up with inflation, particularly when combined with the slowness of the arbitration machinery.

Even though the complaints from union members about the no-strike pledge became louder and more bitter, the CIO did not abandon it. The Mine Workers, by contrast, who did not belong to either the AFL or the CIO for much of the war, threatened numerous strikes including a successful twelve-day strike in 1943. The strikes and threats made mine leader John L. Lewis a much hated man and led to legislation hostile to unions.

All the major unions grew stronger during the war. The government put pressure on employers to recognize unions to avoid the sort of turbulent struggles over union recognition of the 1930s, while unions were generally able to obtain maintenance of membership clauses, a form of union security, through arbitration and negotiation. Employers gave workers new untaxed benefits (such as vacation time, pensions and health insurance), which increased real incomes even when wage rates were frozen. The wage differential between higher skilled and less skilled workers narrowed, and with the enormous increase in overtime for blue collar wage workers (at time and a half pay), incomes in working class households shot up, while the salaried middle class lost ground.

The experience of bargaining on a national basis, while restraining local unions from striking, also tended to accelerate the trend toward bureaucracy within the larger CIO unions. Some, such as the Steelworkers, had always been centralized organizations in which authority for major decisions resided at the top. The UAW, by contrast, had always been a more grassroots organization, but it also started to try to rein in its maverick local leadership during these years. The CIO also had to confront deep racial divides in its own membership, particularly in the UAW plants in Detroit where white workers sometimes struck to protest the promotion of black workers to production jobs, but also in shipyards in Alabama, mass transit in Philadelphia, and steel plants in Baltimore. The CIO leadership, particularly those in further left unions such as the Packinghouse Workers, the UAW, the NMU and the Transport Workers, undertook serious efforts to suppress hate strikes, to educate their membership and to support the Roosevelt Administration's tentative efforts to remedy

racial discrimination in war industries through the Fair Employment Practices Commission. Those unions contrasted their relatively bold attack on the problem with the timidity and racism of the AFL.

The CIO unions were progressive in dealing with gender discrimination in wartime industry, which now employed many more women workers in nontraditional jobs. Unions that had represented large numbers of women workers before the war, such as the UE and the Food and Tobacco Workers, had fairly good records of fighting discrimination against women. Most union leaders saw women as temporary wartime replacements for the men in the armed forces. It was important that the wages of these women be kept high so that the veterans would get high wages.

Civilian support for war effort

A synagogue in New York City remained open 24 hours on D-Day (June 6, 1944) for special services and prayer.

Early in the war, it became apparent that German U-boats were using the backlighting of coastal cities in Eastern and Southern United States to destroy ships exiting harbors. It became the first duties of civilians recruited for local civilian defense to ensure that lights were either off or thick curtains drawn over all windows at night.

State Guards were reformed for internal security duties to replace the National Guardsmen who were Federalized and often sent overseas. The Civil Air Patrol was established, which enrolled civilian spotters in air reconnaissance, search-and-rescue, and transport. Its Coast Guard counterpart, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, used civilian boats and crews in similar roles. Towers were built in coastal and border towns and spotters were trained to recognize enemy aircraft. Blackouts were practiced in every city, even those far from the coast. All exterior

lighting had to be extinguished and black-out curtains placed over windows. The main purpose was to remind people that there was a war on and to provide activities that would engage the civil spirit of millions of people not otherwise involved in the war effort. In large part, this effort was successful, sometimes almost to a fault, such as the Plains states where many dedicated aircraft spotters took up their posts night after night watching the skies in an area of the country that no enemy aircraft of that time could possibly hope to reach.

The United Service Organizations (USO) was founded in 1941 in response to a request from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to provide morale and recreation services to uniformed military personnel. The USO brought together six civilian agencies: the Salvation Army, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, National Catholic Community Service, National Travelers Aid Association and the National Jewish Welfare Board.

Women volunteered to work for the Red Cross, the USO and other agencies. Other women previously employed only in the home, or in traditionally female work, took jobs in factories that directly supported the war effort, or filled jobs vacated by men who had entered military service. Many high school and college students dropped out to take war jobs.

Various items, previously discarded, were saved after use for what was called "recycling" years later. Families were requested to save fat drippings from cooking for use in soap making. Neighborhood "scrap drives" collected scrap copper and brass for use in artillery shells. Milkweed was harvested by children ostensibly for lifejackets.

Draft

A female factory worker in 1942, Fort Worth, Texas. Women entered the workforce as men were drafted into the armed forces.

In 1940 Congress passed the first peace-time draft legislation. It was renewed (by one vote) in summer 1941. It involved questions as to who should control the draft, the size of the army, and the need for deferments. The system worked through local draft boards comprising community leaders who were given quotas and then decided how to fill them. There was very little draft resistance.

The nation went from a surplus manpower pool with high unemployment and relief in 1940 to a severe manpower shortage by 1943. Industry realized that the Army urgently desired production of essential war materials and foodstuffs more than soldiers. (Large numbers of soldiers were not used until the invasion of Europe in summer 1944.) In 1940-43 the Army often transferred soldiers to civilian status in the Enlisted Reserve Corps in order to increase production. Those transferred would return to work in essential industry, although they could be called back to active duty if the Army needed them. Others were discharged if their civilian work was deemed essential. There were instances of mass releases of men to increase production in various industries. Working men who had been classified 4F or otherwise ineligible for the draft took second jobs.
In the figure below an overview of the development of the United States labor force, the armed forces and unemployment during the war years.

Year	Total labor force (*1000)	Armed forces (*1000)	Unemployed (*1000)	Unemployment rate (%)
1939	55,588	370	9,480	17.2
1940	56,180	540	8,120	14.6
1941	57,530	1,620	5,560	9.9
1942	60,380	3,970	2,660	4.7
1943	64,560	9,020	1,070	1.9
1944	66,040	11,410	670	1.2
1945	65,290	11,430	1,040	1.9
1946	60,970	3,450	2,270	3.9

One contentious issue involved the drafting of fathers, which was avoided as much as possible. The drafting of 18-year olds was desired by the military but vetoed by public opinion. Racial minorities were drafted at the same rate as Whites, and were paid the same, but blacks were kept in all-black units. The experience of World War I regarding

men needed by industry was particularly unsatisfactory—too many skilled mechanics and engineers became privates (there is a possibly apocryphal story of a *banker* assigned as a *baker* due to a clerical error, noted by historian Lee Kennett in his book "G.I.") Farmers demanded and were generally given occupational deferments (many volunteered anyway, but those who stayed at home lost postwar veteran's benefits.) Later in the war, in light of the tremendous amount of manpower that would be necessary for the invasion of France in 1944, many earlier deferment categories became draft eligible.

Suspected disloyalty

Civilian support for the war was widespread, with isolated cases of draft resistance. The FBI was already tracking elements that were suspected of loyalty to Germany, Japan or Italy, and many were arrested in the weeks after Pearl Harbor. 7000 German and Italian aliens (who were not U.S. citizens) were moved back from the West Coast, along with 100,000 of Japanese descent. Some enemy aliens were held without trial during the entire war. The U.S. citizens accused of supporting Germany were given public trials, and often were freed.

Population movements

There was large-scale migration to industrial centers, especially on the West Coast. Millions of wives followed their husbands to military camps; for many families, especially from farms, the moves were permanent. One 1944 survey of migrants in Portland, Oregon and San Diego found that three quarters wanted to stay after the war. Many new military training bases were established or enlarged, especially in the South. Large numbers of African Americans left the cotton fields and headed for the cities. Housing was increasingly difficult to find in industrial centers, as there was no new non-military construction.

Commuting by car was limited by gasoline rationing. People car pooled or took public transportation, which was seriously overcrowded. Trains were heavily booked, with uniformed military personnel taking priority, so people limited vacation and long-distance travel.

Racial tensions

The large-scale movement of blacks from the rural South to defense centers in the North (and some in the South) led to small-scale local confrontations over jobs and housing shortages. Washington feared a major race war. The cities were relatively peaceful; much-feared large-scale race riots did not happen, but there was small-scale violence, as in the 1943 race riot in Detroit and the anti-Mexican Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles in 1943.

Role of women

Standlee (2010) argues that during the war the traditional gender division of labor changed somewhat, as the "home" or domestic female sphere expanded to include the "home front". Meanwhile the public sphere—the male domain—was redefined as the international stage of military action.

Riveting team working on the cockpit shell of a C-47 transport at the plant of North American Aviation. Office of War Information photo by Alfred T. Palmer, 1942.

Woman aircraft worker checking assemblies. California, 1942.

Employment

Women took on an active role in World War II and took on many paid jobs in temporary new munitions factories and in old factories that had been converted from civilian products like automobiles. This was the "Rosie the Riveter" phenomenon.

They also filled many traditionally female jobs that were created by the war boom—as waitresses, for example. And they worked at jobs that previously had been held by men—such as bank teller or shoe salesperson. Nearly one million women worked as so called "government girls," taking jobs in the federal government, mainly in Washington, DC, that had previously been held by men or were newly created to deal with the war effort.

In general, when they replaced men, they came with fewer skills. Industry retooled its machine jobs so that unskilled workers could handle them. (This opened many jobs for men who had been unemployed in the 1930s.) Some unions tried to maintain the same pay scale as men had because they expected men to resume their jobs after the war. In 1944, unemployment hit an all-time low of 1.2%.

Volunteer activities

Women staffed millions of jobs in community service roles, such as nursing, USO, and Red Cross. Unorganized women were encouraged to collect and turn in materials that were needed by the war effort. Women collected fats rendered during cooking, children formed balls of aluminum foil they peeled from chewing gum wrappers, and also created rubber band balls, which they contributed to the war effort. Hundreds of thousands of men joined civil defense units to prepare for disasters, such as enemy bombing.

The Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) mobilized 1000 civilian women to fly new warplanes from the factories to airfields located on the east coast of the U.S. They are important in gender history because flying a warplane had always been a male role. Unlike Russia, no American women flew warplanes in combat.

Baby boom

Marriage and motherhood came back as prosperity empowered couples who had postponed marriage. The birth rate started shooting up in 1941, paused in 1944-45 as 12 million men were in uniform, then continued to soar until reaching a peak in the late 1950s. This was the "Baby Boom."

In a New Deal-like move, the federal government set up the "EMIC" program that provided free prenatal and natal care for the wives of servicemen below the rank of sergeant.

Housing shortages, especially in the munitions centers, forced millions of couples to live with parents or in makeshift facilities. Little housing had been built in the Depression years, so the shortages grew steadily worse until about 1948, when a massive housing boom finally caught up with demand. (After 1944 much of the new housing was supported by the G.I. Bill.)

Federal law made it difficult to divorce absent servicemen, so the number of divorces peaked when they returned in 1946. In long-range terms, divorce rates changed little.

Housewives

Juggling their roles as mothers due to the Baby Boom and the jobs they filled while the men were at war, women strained to complete all tasks set before them. The war caused cutbacks in automobile and bus service, and migration from farms and towns to munitions centers. Those housewives who worked found the dual role difficult to handle. The worst psychological pressure came when sons, husbands, fathers, brothers and fiancés were drafted and sent to faraway training camps, preparing for a war in which nobody knew how many would be killed. Millions of wives tried to relocate near their husbands' training camps.

Role of minorities

The Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) was a federal executive order requiring companies with government contracts not to discriminate on the basis of race or religion. It assisted African Americans in obtaining jobs in industry. Under pressure from A. Philip

Randolph's growing March on Washington Movement, on June 25, 1941, President Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) by signing Executive Order 8802. It said "there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin". In 1943 Roosevelt greatly strengthened FEPC with a new executive order, #9346. It required that all government contracts have a non-discrimination clause. FEPC was the most significant breakthrough ever for Blacks and women on the job front. During the war the federal government operated airfield, shipyards, supply centers, ammunition plants and other facilities that employed millions. FEPC rules applied and guaranteed equality of employment rights. These facilities shut down when the war ended. In the private sector the FEPC was generally successful in enforcing non-discrimination in the North, it did not attempt to challenge segregation in the South, and in the border region its intervention led to hate strikes by angry white workers.

African American: Double V campaign

Participants in the Double V campaign, 1942. From the collection of the National Archives and Records Administration.

The African American community in the United States resolved on a Double V Campaign: Victory over fascism abroad, and victory over discrimination at home. Large numbers migrated from poor Southern farms to munitions centers. Racial tensions were high in overcrowded cities like Chicago; Detroit and Harlem experienced race riots in 1943. Black newspapers created the Double V Campaign to build black morale and head off radical action.

Most Black women had been farm laborers or domestics before the war. Despite discrimination and segregated facilities throughout the

South, they escaped the cotton patch and took blue-collar jobs in the cities. Working with the federal Fair Employment Practices Committee, the NAACP and CIO unions, these Black women fought a “Double V” campaign—against the Axis abroad and against restrictive hiring practices at home. Their efforts redefined citizenship, equating their patriotism with war work, and seeking equal employment opportunities, government entitlements, and better working conditions as conditions appropriate for full citizens. In the South black women worked in segregated jobs; in the West and most of the North they were integrated, but wildcat strikes erupted in Detroit, Baltimore, and Evansville where white migrants from the South refused to work alongside black women.

Internment

In 1942 the War Department demanded that all enemy nationals be removed from war zones on the West Coast. The question became how to evacuate the estimated 120,000 people of Japanese citizenship living in California. Roosevelt looked at the secret evidence available to him: the Japanese in the Philippines had collaborated with the Japanese invasion troops; most of the adult Japanese in California had been strong supporters of Japan in the war against China. There was evidence of espionage compiled by code-breakers that decrypted messages to Japan from agents in North America and Hawaii before and after the attack on Pearl Harbor. These MAGIC cables were kept secret from all but those with the highest clearance, such as Roosevelt. On February 19, 1942, Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which set up designated military areas "from which any or all persons may be excluded." The most controversial part of the order included American born children and youth who had dual U.S. and Japanese citizenship. Germans and Italians were not interned shown from the *Korematsu v. United States* case.

In February 1943, when activating the 442nd Regimental Combat Team—a unit composed mostly of American-born American citizens of Japanese descent living in Hawaii—Roosevelt said, "No loyal citizen of the United States should be denied the democratic right to exercise the responsibilities of his citizenship, regardless of his ancestry. The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry."

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the legality of the executive order in the *Korematsu v. United States* case. The executive order remained in force until December when Roosevelt released the Japanese internees, except for those who announced their intention to return to Japan.

Italy was an official enemy, and citizens of Italy were also forced away from "strategic" coastal areas in California. Altogether, 58,000 Italians were forced to relocate. They relocated on their own and were not put in camps. Known spokesmen for Benito Mussolini were arrested and held in prison. The restrictions were dropped in October 1942, and Italy switched sides in 1943 and became an American ally. In the east, however, the large Italian populations of the northeast, especially in munitions-producing centers such as Bridgeport and New Haven faced no restrictions and contributed just as much to the war effort as other Americans.

Wartime politics

Roosevelt easily won the bitterly contested 1940 election, but the Conservative coalition maintained a tight grip on Congress. Wendell Willkie, the defeated GOP candidate in 1940, became a roving ambassador for Roosevelt. After a series of squabbles with Vice President Henry A. Wallace, Roosevelt stripped him of his administrative responsibilities and dropped him from the 1944 ticket, choosing instead Senator Harry S. Truman. Truman was best known for investigating waste, fraud and inefficiency in civilian programs. In very light turnout in 1942 the Republicans made major gains. In the 1944 election, Roosevelt defeated Tom Dewey in a relatively close race that attracted little attention.

Propaganda and culture

Rural school children in front of home front posters in San Augustine County, Texas. 1943

Patriotism became the central theme of advertising throughout the war, as large scale campaigns were launched to sell war bonds, promote efficiency in factories, reduce ugly rumors, and maintain civilian morale. The war consolidated the advertising industry's role in American society, deflecting earlier criticism. All the media cooperated with the federal government in presenting the official view of the war. All movie scripts had to be pre-approved. For example there were widespread rumors in the Army to the effect that people on the home front were slacking off. A Private SNAFU film cartoon (released to soldiers only) belied that rumor. Tin Pan Alley produced patriotic songs to rally the people.

Posters

Posters helped to mobilize the nation. Inexpensive, accessible, and ever-present, the poster was an ideal agent for making war aims the personal mission of every citizen. Government agencies, businesses, and private organizations issued an array of poster images linking the military front with the home front—calling upon every American to boost production at work and at home. Some resorted to extreme racial and ethnic caricatures of the enemy, sometimes as hopelessly bumbling cartoon characters, sometimes as evil, half-human creatures.

Bond drives

A strong aspect of American culture then as now was a fascination with celebrities, and the government used them in its eight war bond campaigns that called on people to save now (and redeem the bonds after the war, when houses, cars and appliances would again be available.) The War Bond drives helped finance the war. Americans were challenged to put at least 10% of every paycheck into bonds. Compliance was high, with entire work places earning a special "Minuteman" flag to fly over their plant if all workers belonged to the "Ten Percent Club".

Hollywood

Hollywood used the Philippines to show American territory under attack.

Hollywood studios also went all-out for the war effort, as studios encouraged their stars (such as Clark Gable and James Stewart) to enlist. Hollywood had military units that made training films – Ronald Reagan narrated many of them. Most of all Hollywood made hundreds of war movies that, in coordination with the Office of War Information (OWI), taught Americans what was happening and who the heroes and the villains were. Ninety million people went to the movies every week. Some of the most highly regarded films during this period included *Casablanca*, *Mrs. Miniver*, *Going My Way*, and *Yankee Doodle Dandy*.

Even before active American involvement in the war, the popular Three Stooges comic trio was lampooning the Nazi German leadership and Nazis in general, with a number of short subject films, starting with *You Natzy Spy!* in January 1940, nearly two years before the United States was drawn into World War II. Indeed, *You Natzy Spy!* was the very first Hollywood-produced work to ridicule Hitler and the Nazis. Cartoons and short subjects were a major sign of the times, as Warner Brothers Studios and Disney Studios gave unprecedented aid to the war effort by creating cartoons that were both patriotic and humorous, and also contributed to remind movie-goers of wartime activities such as rationing and scrap drives, war bond purchases, and the creation of victory gardens. Warner shorts such as *Daffy - The Commando*, *Draftee Daffy*, *Herr Meets Hare* and *Russian Rhapsody* are particularly

remembered for their biting wit and unflinching mockery of the enemy (particularly Adolf Hitler, Hideki Tōjō and Hermann Göring. Their cartoons of Private Snafu, produced for the military as "training films", served to remind many military men of the importance of following proper procedure during wartime, for their own safety. Hanna Barbara also contributed to the war effort with slyly pro US short cartoon The Yankee Doodle Mouse with "Lt" Jerry Mouse as the hero and Tom Cat as the "enemy".

To heighten the suspense, Hollywood needed to feature attacks on American soil, and obtained inspirations for dramatic stories from the Philippines. Indeed, the Philippines became a "home front" that showed the American way of life threatened by the Japanese enemy. Especially popular were the films *Texas to Bataan* (1942), *Corregidor* (1943), *Bataan* (1943), *They Were Expendable* (1945), and *Back to Bataan* (1945).

The OWI had to approve every film before they could be exported. To facilitate the process the OWI's Bureau of Motion Pictures (BMP) worked with producers, directors and writers before the shooting started to make sure that the themes reflected patriotic values. While Hollywood had been generally nonpolitical before the war, the liberals who controlled OWI encouraged the expression of New Deal liberalism, bearing in mind the huge domestic audience, as well as an international audience that was equally large.

Censorship

The Office of Censorship published a code of conduct for newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters. The office did not use government censors to preapprove all articles and radio programs. It relied on voluntary cooperation to avoid subjects, such as troop movements, weather forecasts, and the travels of the President, that might aid the enemy. Journalists did not have to publish positive propaganda, unlike during World War I.

Local activism

One way to enlist everyone in the war effort was scrap collection (it would be called "recycling" in the 21st century). Many everyday commodities were vital to the war effort, and drives were organized to

recycle such products as rubber, tin, waste kitchen fats (a raw material for explosives), newspaper, lumber, steel and many others. Popular phrases promoted by the government at the time were "Get into the scrap!" and "Get some cash for your trash" (a nominal sum was paid to the donor for many kinds of scrap items) and Thomas "Fats" Waller even wrote and recorded a song with the latter title. Such commodities as rubber and tin remained highly important as recycled materials until the end of the war, while others, such as steel, were critically needed at first. War propaganda played a prominent role in many of these drives. Nebraska had perhaps the most extensive and well-organized drives; it was mobilized by the *Omaha World Herald* newspaper.