

4 The Home Front

TERMS & NAMES

War Production Board

rationing

Rosie the Riveter

A. Philip Randolph

bracero program

Japanese-American internment

MAIN IDEA

Americans at home made great contributions to the Allied victory.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

World War II caused lasting changes in the lives of civilians.

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Margaret "Peggy" Hooper of San Pedro, California, was 17 years old when the United States entered the war. Her father went off to fight. Eventually, Hooper took a job as an "incoming inspector" at an aircraft plant. Her duties included keeping time sheets and inspecting materials. She often described her work in her letters to a friend serving with the Pacific fleet.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Gosh, we have been working hard at work lately. Just rushed to death and never getting through. Our production schedule has been doubled and still we work harder and put out more all the time. . . .

You had better be careful how you talk to me 'cause I have developed a big muscle in my right arm and a good strong one in my left arm, so take it easy, kid.

Margaret Hooper, quoted in *Since You Went Away*



Women factory workers rivet the interior of an airplane during World War II.

World War II created jobs for thousands of citizens such as Peggy Hooper. Americans on the home front worked together to help achieve an Allied victory, as you will read in this section.

Wartime Production

The effort to defeat the Axis powers took more than just soldiers. American forces needed planes, tanks, weapons, parachutes, and other supplies. Under the guidance of the **War Production Board** (WPB), factories churned out materials around the clock. By 1945, the country had built about 300,000 aircraft and 75,000 ships. The United States was producing 60 percent of all Allied ammunition.

With so many factories in need of workers, jobs became easy to find. In effect, the war ended the Great Depression. Shortly after the war began, the nation's unemployment rate fell. The country's yearly gross national product (GNP) rose to new heights during the war. The GNP is the total value of all the goods and services produced by a nation

ReadingHistory

A. Recognizing Effects How did World War II affect the U.S. economy?

during a year. Between 1939 and 1945, the U.S. GNP soared from \$90.5 billion to nearly \$212 billion.

Because the armed forces needed so many materials, some of the items Americans took for granted became scarce. For example, American auto makers did not produce any cars between 1942 and 1945. Instead, they built tanks, jeeps, and airplanes. Items such as gasoline, tires, shoes, meat, and sugar were also in short supply. To divide these scarce goods among its citizens, the government established a system of **rationing**. Under this system, families received a fixed amount of a certain item.

The war was expensive. To help pay the cost, the government raised income taxes and sold war bonds. These bonds were loans that the government promised to repay with interest. Movie stars urged people to buy war bonds. Americans bought billions of dollars worth of bonds.

Opportunities for Women and Minorities

With so many men fighting overseas, the demand for women workers rose sharply. In 1940, about 14 million women worked—about 25 percent of the nation's labor force. By 1945, that number had climbed to more than 19 million—roughly 30 percent of the work force. Women worked in munitions factories, shipyards, and offices.

Much of the nation welcomed the growing numbers of women into the workplace. The country promoted "**Rosie the Riveter**"—an image of a strong woman hard at work at an arms factory—as its cherished symbol for its new group of wage earners.

The war also created new job opportunities for minorities. More than 1 million African Americans worked in the defense industry during the war years. Many of these jobs were along the West Coast and in the North. As a result, more than 1 million African Americans migrated from the South during the war. Many traveled to California and such Northern cities as Detroit and Chicago. The inflow of African Americans often inflamed racial tensions. In 1943, a terrible race riot broke out in Detroit. Federal troops had to restore order after 34 people were killed.

On paper, at least, African Americans enjoyed equal rights in some workplaces.

A. Philip Randolph, an African-American labor leader, had helped achieve these rights in 1941.

Randolph had threatened to lead an African-American protest march for better jobs through Washington, D.C. President Roosevelt sought to avoid such a march. As a result, he issued Executive Order 8802. It outlawed job discrimination in defense industries working for the federal government.

Other minorities lent their hand to the home-front effort. Some 46,000 Native Americans left their reservations to work in the nation's



A. Philip Randolph and Eleanor Roosevelt chat at a labor rally in 1946.

Background

A. Philip Randolph was the leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a powerful African-American labor union.

war industries. Tens of thousands of Hispanics—people with ancestors from Spanish-speaking lands—also joined the ranks of the country’s war-related laborers. Included in this group were thousands of Mexicans who migrated to the United States at the government’s request. During the war years, the nation faced a serious shortage of farm workers. The government responded by hiring Mexicans to perform the much-needed labor. This policy was known as the ***bracero program***. By mid-1945, more than 120,000 *braceros* worked on farms throughout the country.

Meanwhile, Mexican Americans struggled against prejudice and sometimes violence. In Los Angeles, for example, U.S. sailors often fought with “zoot suiters.” These were young Mexican-American men who wore zoot suits—an outfit consisting of a broad-brimmed hat, a knee-length jacket, and baggy-legged pants. In what became known as the zoot-suit riots, groups of American servicemen attacked Mexican Americans. Beginning the night of June 3, 1943, the violence lasted 10 days before it was brought under control by police.

ReadingHistory

B. Comparing and Contrasting
What did the African-American and Hispanic-American experiences during World War II have in common?

The Internment of Japanese Americans

In the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, a growing number of Americans began to direct their anger toward people of Japanese ancestry. Many Americans saw Asian immigrants as a threat to their jobs. Many also believed that Asians could never fit into American society. As a result,

CITIZENSHIP TODAY

Writing to Government Officials


In the late 1970s, Japanese Americans asked the government to redress, or make up for, the injustice of the World War II internment. A letter-writing campaign by Japanese Americans helped secure passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. This act included a formal apology and authorized payments of \$20,000 each to Japanese Americans who were interned. The act also established a public-education program to prevent such discrimination in the future.

President Ronald Reagan signs the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.



How Do You Write to Government Officials?

1. Think about public issues that are important to you.
2. Choose one issue about which you would like the government to adopt a certain policy or take a certain action.
3. Gather information about the issue.
4. Refine your position on the issue in terms of a specific policy or action that you would like the government to follow.
5. Write a letter to your congressional representative or senator in which you urge him or her to take a particular stand on the issue.

 See Citizenship Handbook, page 106.

For more about contacting elected officials . . .

 **RESEARCH LINKS**
CLASSZONE.COM

Congress banned practically all immigrants from Asia in 1924.

In the days and weeks after Pearl Harbor, several newspapers declared Japanese Americans to be a security threat. President Roosevelt eventually responded to the growing anti-Japanese hysteria. In February 1942, he signed an order that allowed for the removal of Japanese and Japanese Americans from the Pacific Coast. This action came to be known as the **Japanese-American internment**. More than 110,000 men, women, and children were rounded up. They had to sell their homes and possessions and leave their jobs.

These citizens were placed in internment camps, areas where they were kept under guard. In these camps, families lived in single rooms with little privacy. About two-thirds of the people interned were *Nisei* (NEE•say), Japanese Americans born in the United States.

The nation's fear of disloyalty from Japanese Americans was unfounded. Many of the camp internees raised the American flag each morning. In addition, thousands of young men in the camps volunteered to fight for the United States. The all-*Nisei* units, the 442nd Infantry and the 100th Infantry, fought in Europe. They were among the most highly decorated units in the war. One member, Daniel Inouye, showed extreme courage. After being severely wounded, he continued to lead his platoon in an attack in Italy. He lost his right arm, but earned the Distinguished Service Cross. In the next section, you will learn about other effects that World War II had on both the United States and the world.



Soldiers stand by as Japanese Americans in San Francisco board a bus to take them to an internment camp.

Background

Daniel Inouye later became a U.S. senator from the state of Hawaii.

Section 4 Assessment

1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- War Production Board
- rationing
- Rosie the Riveter
- A. Philip Randolph
- *bracero* program
- Japanese-American internment

2. Taking Notes

Use a cluster diagram like the one shown to review the ways in which Americans at home contributed to the war effort.



3. Main Ideas

- How did the war lift the nation out of the Great Depression?
- How did the war spur an African-American migration at home?
- What action did the U.S. government take against many Japanese Americans during the war?

4. Critical Thinking

Comparing and Contrasting How were the war years a time of both opportunity and struggle for American women and minorities?

THINK ABOUT

- Rosie the Riveter
- African-American migrants
- zoot-suit riots

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

ART

Research the wartime life of one of the groups mentioned in this section. Write a **report** or design a **mural** about its members' experiences during the war.