

## Introduction

Even before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941 and drew the United States into the war, President *Franklin D. Roosevelt* had begun creating agencies to oversee wartime production. As the United States entered the war, additional agencies were set up to plan and regulate the production of war supplies for the United States military and its allies.

The victory by the United States in World War II could not have happened if the entire **civilian** population had not worked hard at home. A *civilian* is a person who is not in the military.

## Wartime Production

The nation needed ships, airplanes, munitions, and other fighting equipment. Industry in the United States quickly **converted**, or changed, to produce supplies for fighting the war. Factories and farms produced enough to supply both the United States and its allies.

By 1942 the United States was producing as many wartime products as Germany, Italy, and Japan combined. By 1944 the country was producing *twice* as many wartime products as the Axis Powers. These products included thousands of planes, armored cars, tanks, and artillery, as well as millions of rounds of ammunition.

## Science and Technology

World War II required new inventions and technology such as improved radar, sonar devices, and rocket weapons. In 1939 *Albert Einstein*, a Jewish refugee from Hitler's Germany, alerted Roosevelt to the possibility that Nazi scientists were seeking to develop an atomic bomb. This perhaps contributed to the setting up of the Manhattan Project which was a plan to develop the atomic bomb for the United States. The Manhattan Project's scientific director was *J. Robert Oppenheimer*, and by 1945 many scientists had worked long hours to develop the atomic



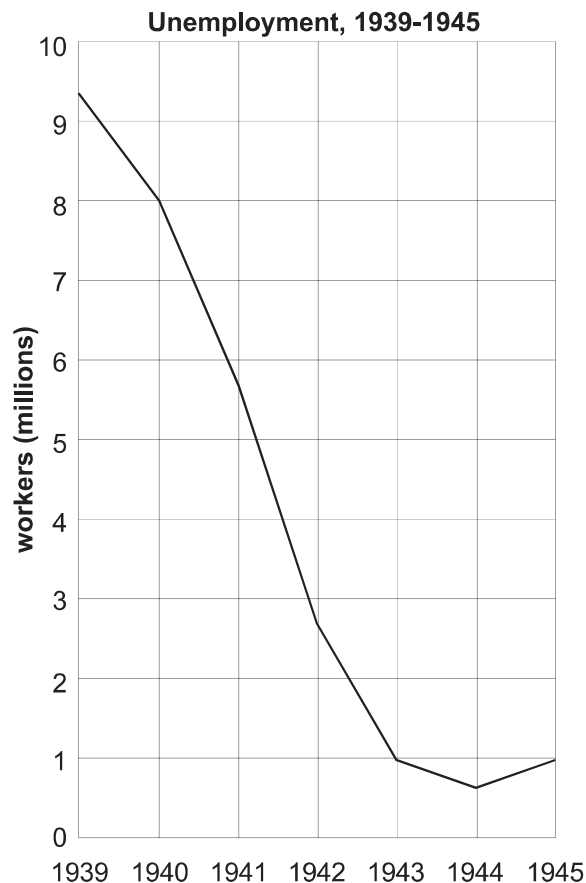
bomb. Interest in space technology grew in part because the military wanted to produce an answer to the deadly V-2 rocket used in the war by Germany.

Scientists also were developing television and computers to aid the military effort. Laboratories produced **synthetics**, or artificial materials, such as nylon and plastic for use in military supplies. In medicine, researchers introduced the “miracle drugs” penicillin and sulfa as new treatments for disease.

### Full Employment

Over 15 million men and 350,000 women served in the military during the war. This caused a labor shortage at home, which was filled by minority groups and women. However, there was discrimination against minorities in the federal government. Therefore, in 1941 President Roosevelt issued **Executive Order 8802**, which outlawed discrimination against federal employees on the basis of race, creed, or color.

The **Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC)** was set up to enforce the order and to insure that minorities were not discriminated against in defense factories. As a result, many African Americans from the South went north to work in factories. Mexican Americans from the Southwest also moved in to fill jobs.



Almost 19 million women worked in the wartime labor force. They handled a wide variety of jobs held previously by men. They became lumberjacks, welders, and blast furnace operators, and learned to operate heavy and complex machinery. Many worked as doctors, chemists, and lawyers for the first time. During World War II, women began overcoming the stereotype that they were not as able workers as men.

For most Americans, World War II ended the long economic depression. After many years of low employment and difficult economic times, the United States was beginning to prosper.



*This post–World War II political cartoon depicts women in the wartime labor force. Half of the women were homemakers who had never before worked for wages. Women proved they could perform jobs traditionally held by men and by the end of the war, women made up one third of the work force.*

Courtesy of the J. N. “Ding” Darling Foundation

## Government Controls

Government agencies were created to oversee the economy during the war. The **War Production Board (WPB)** was formed to control the production of war materials. This board was essential to the country's victory in the war. It was in charge of switching the country's production from a peacetime one to a wartime one.

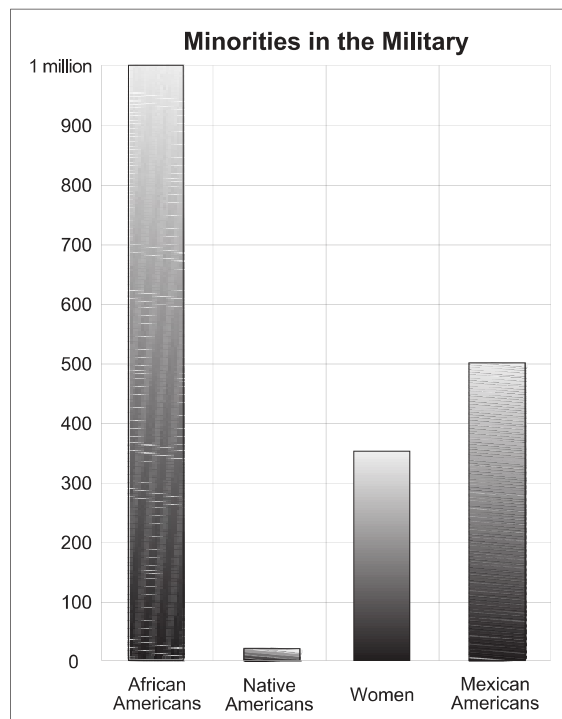
The Office of Price Administration (OPA) helped control the rising cost of living in the United States. The OPA had the right to control wages and prices of goods and services. There was a shortage of many goods such as gasoline, sugar, and meat. The OPA set up a **rationing** system of distributing goods to be sure everyone received a fair share. The OPA issued **coupon books** to help regulate purchases.

## Paying for the War

Between 1941 and 1945, the federal government spent more than \$320 billion on the war. This was *twice as much* money as the federal government had spent from 1788–1941 which was 10 times the cost of World War I. To raise that much money, the government increased taxes and sold war bonds.

## Minorities in the Military

At least 500,000 Mexican Americans joined the armed services. Almost 25,000 Native Americans, including 800 Native American women, served in the war. Another 75,000 Native Americans worked in defense plants and shipyards. American women also played a large role in the military. More than 350,000 women served in **noncombat** jobs in the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marines. *Noncombat* personnel did not take part in the actual fighting.







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About one million African Americans served in every theater of the war. Despite a segregated military, more than 80 African-American officers and pilots were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Dr. *Charles Drew*, an African-American doctor, developed a system for storing blood plasma, which was badly needed by those wounded in fighting. The contributions of African Americans led President *Harry S Truman* to end segregation in the military in 1948; however, segregation was still practiced in schools, housing, and public facilities all over the United States. Many African-American leaders thought that efforts in World War II would help their cause more than it did.

#### Dr. Charles Drew (1904-1950)

Dr. Charles Richard Drew (1904-1950) was born near Burlington, North Carolina. Dr. Drew, an African American physician and surgeon, was an authority on the preservation of human blood for transfusion. He conducted research into the properties and preservation of blood plasma while earning his doctorate at Columbia in the late 1930s. He developed efficient ways to process and store blood plasma in "blood banks." In the early years of World War II, he directed and organized the blood-plasma programs of Great Britain and the United States. He tried to get the authorities to stop excluding the blood of blacks from plasma-supply networks.

## Japanese Americans

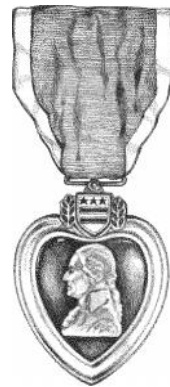
Japanese Americans were one group that did not benefit from the growing opportunities in wartime America. When the war broke out, many Japanese Americans lived on the West Coast of the United States. Although most were United States citizens, they faced severe discrimination. Many Americans feared the Japanese Americans would act as spies for Japan. Some Americans and government officials suspected them of planning to sabotage, or destroy, American war plants.

There was no evidence that Japanese Americans had worked against the United States. However, frightened politicians and military men pressured President Roosevelt into removing them from the West Coast. In 1942 there were 112,000 Japanese Americans who were sent to **internment camps** in the West. Two-thirds of the Japanese Americans sent to *internment camps* were native-born United States citizens.

Internment camps differed from the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. Japanese Americans were not tortured or murdered. However, the internment camps were like prisons. They were wooden shacks and had only the barest necessities. Food, medical care, and schools were inadequate. The internment camps were also surrounded by barbed-wire fences. Japanese Americans were kept under armed guard until 1944.

Japanese Americans had to sell their homes and businesses at a financial loss. Life in the American camps was extremely unpleasant. The people suffered and were humiliated by the government's actions. Without just cause, the government had violated these people's rights.

Despite this harsh treatment, 25,000 Japanese-American men volunteered to fight for the United States. One-third of the men were from the internment camps; the rest were United States Japanese-American citizens from Hawaii where there was no internment policy. They served heroically as a unit in the **442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team** in Italy and France. The second-generation Japanese



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Americans were called *Nisei* (ne sa). The Nisei soldiers suffered more than 9,000 casualties and earned more than 18,000 individual awards. This unit received more awards than any other division in the history of the United States. President Truman welcomed the 442<sup>nd</sup> home in 1946 with these words: "You fought not only the enemy, you fought prejudice—and you won."

Many Americans were ashamed of the treatment of the Japanese Americans during the war. In recent years, the government has attempted to make up for the discrimination. In 1988 a sum of \$20,000 was paid to each survivor of the internment camps, who also received an apology from the United States government for the harm caused in violating their civil rights during World War II. Their personal and financial losses, however, were far greater.

## American Culture

The war renewed prosperity for many Americans. Full employment provided workers with money—a welcome change from the depression years. Marriages increased and the birth rate rose rapidly. However, many of these romances did not survive the long separation. Bad news came in

“Dear John” letters ending relationships. The United States had the highest divorce rate in the world of 31 percent in 1945, double the prewar rate. As a result of the population increases, housing was scarce, and so were desirable goods such as automobiles and chocolate.

In 1944 to ease returning servicemen into civilian life, Congress passed the **GI Bill of Rights**. This provided education and training for veterans paid for by the federal government. It also provided federal loans to veterans buying homes, farms, or businesses.

African Americans made many gains in jobs and in the military. Schools, housing, and public facilities, however, remained racially segregated. Riots occurred in several northern cities where many African Americans had moved to find jobs.



City dwellers found entertainment at movies, theaters, and supper clubs. “Swing” music made Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller popular leaders of dance bands. Teenagers, called “bobby-soxers,” made a young singer named Frank Sinatra famous during the war. USO clubs, often hosted by movie stars, assisted and provided entertainment for servicemen.

## Summary

The United States shifted its industry to wartime production to prepare for war. Government agencies were created to help direct wartime production, regulate the economy, and pay for the war. Wartime brought new opportunities in labor and the military for women and minority groups. The rights of Japanese Americans, however, were violated.

Scientists invented new weapons, and researchers introduced important drugs. Almost every American was affected in some way by World War II.