

# The Home Front: World War II in America

## A Segregated Military

As the United States began to mobilize for the war against Germany and Japan, General George C. Marshall was put in charge of the largest expansion of our military in American history. The US passed the **Selective Training and Service Act**- the draft. The army grew from less than 190,000 in 1939 to over 8 million by the war's end.

Although training stressed the importance of unity, the US army was very segregated.

In 1941, the air force created its first African American unit, the 99<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron. Trained in Tuskegee, Alabama, the pilots became known as the **Tuskegee Airmen**. These squadrons flew over 200 missions without ever losing a single member to an enemy aircraft. Other segregated African American units, such as the 761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion were commended for their service during the Battle of the Bulge.

Although Japanese Americans were not allowed to serve at first, as the war progressed the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion and 442<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Combat Teams were created. Nearly half of these troops had been in internment camps but together these units became the most decorated in the history of the United States military.

About 500,000 Hispanic Americans openly served in all branches of the military despite racial hostility, and by the end of the war 17 had received the Medal of Honor.

About one-third of all Native American men aged 18-50 served in the military during the war. More than 400 Navajo Marines served as "**Code Talkers**," relaying critical information and orders over field radios coded in their own native language.

Women also joined the armed forces. Although they were barred from combat, they served in the armed forces doing clerical and administrative work, which opened up more men for combat. Congress first allowed women in the military in 1942 by creating the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), though many women were unhappy they were not part of the regular army. A year later, the army replaced the WAAC, with the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Other branches of the military followed suit and created all female units. About 300 women served as Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) and making than 12,000 flights to deliver planes to the war effort.

**1. Describe the military contributions that African Americans, Japanese Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans and women made during WWII.**

**2. Who were the Tuskegee Airmen?**

**3. What contribution did the Navajo "Code Talkers" make to the war effort?**

**4. Who were the WAAC, WAC, and WASPs?**

## Opportunity on the Home Front

World War II was a time of opportunity for many Americans on the home front. The economy boomed. There were plenty of jobs. Wages rose. Farmers also did well.

War production increased rapidly after Pearl Harbor. By summer of 1942 almost all major industries and some 200,000 companies had converted to war production. Automobile plants began making tanks, jeeps, and trucks, as well as rifles, helmets, and artillery. Shipyards, like the one in Tampa, quickly made "**Liberty Ships**" for the Navy. Mass production of these resources would help to win the war.

Women had many job opportunities during the war. The share of women in the work force rose to 35 percent. (They lost some of these jobs when the men returned from military service.) Women also did a wide range of jobs and entered professions that had not been open to them before the war.

### Building an Army

In 1940, Congress passed a peacetime draft law to build the armed forces.

- The military was segregated,
- Minorities sought to be allowed to fight,
- Women joined the military as nurses, transport pilots, and clerks.

### Industry at War

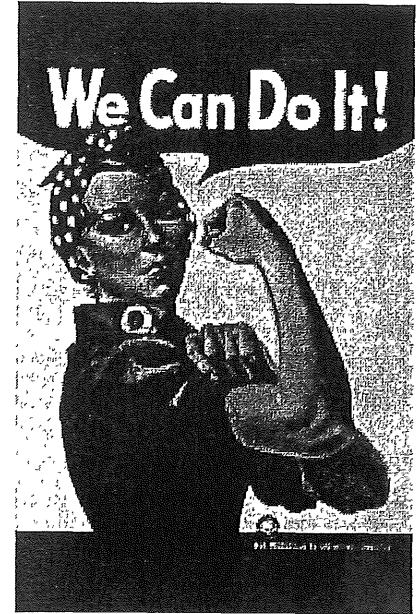
Industrial war production grew quickly after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

- Companies produced war materials under the cost-plus system,
- About 200,000 companies made war products,
- The car industry made tanks,
- Liberty ships carried troops.

Although the government hired nearly 4 million women, primarily for clerical work, the women working in factories captured the public's imagination. The great symbol of the campaign to hire women was "Rosie the Riveter." Images of Rosie appeared on posters, in magazines and newspapers. Eventually 2.5 million women worked in shipyards, aircraft factories and other manufacturing plants.

In 1944, Congress passed the **GI Bill of Rights**, which was designed to help servicemen readjust to civilian life. This bill paid for veterans to attend college or technical school. Over half the returning soldiers took advantage of this opportunity. It also gave federal loan guarantees to veterans buying homes or farms or starting businesses. The GI Bill gave many people opportunities they otherwise would never have had.

5. How did automobile plants and shipyards boost war production?
6. What was the purpose of the GI Bill of Rights? What did it pay for?
7. Explain who "Rosie the Riveter" was. What does the slogan "We can do it" refer to?



## DISCRIMINATION AND REACTION

On the home front, many African Americans left the South and moved to the West Coast. There they found skilled jobs that paid well. But they also found prejudice. In 1942, civil rights leader James Farmer formed a new interracial organization to fight discrimination. It was called the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).

The NAACP launched what it called the "Double V" campaign to urge African Americans to support the war to win a double victory over Hitler's racism abroad and racism at home in the US.

African Americans also moved into the crowded cities of the North. Tension among the races grew. In 1943 it led to race riots. The worst one was in Detroit, where over 30 people were killed. In response, many communities formed committees to improve race relations.

Mexican Americans experienced prejudice during the war years as well. In 1942, there were anti-Mexican riots in Los Angeles. In the "zoot-suit" riots, Mexican Americans were beaten by white service men and civilians.

8. What was the goal of the "Double V" campaign?
9. Describe the results of the prejudice faced by African Americans and Mexicans in the US during WWII.

### Economic Changes at Home

War production created many new jobs.

- Women were hired for jobs usually done by men.
- African Americans demanded fair treatment in hiring.
- Mexicans worked under the Bracero program.

## INTERNMENT OF JAPANESE AMERICANS

### *KOREMATSU v. UNITED STATES, 1944*

#### Background of the Case

During World War II, President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 and other legislation gave the military the power to exclude people of Japanese descent from areas that were deemed important to U.S. national defense and security. In 1942 Toyosaburo Korematsu refused to leave San Leandro, California, which had been designated as a "military area" based on the district court's violation of civilian exclusion order no. 34. Korematsu petitioned the Supreme Court to review the federal court's decision.

#### How the Court Ruled

In their decision, the majority of the Supreme Court, with three dissenting, found that, although exclusion orders based on race are constitutionally suspect, the government is justified in time of "emergency and peril" to suspend citizens' civil rights. A request for a rehearing of the case in 1945 was denied.

Members of the Mochida family await an evacuation bus in Hayward, California, May 8, 1942.



Japanese Americans endured terrible treatment during the war. After Pearl Harbor, panic-stricken Americans believed Japanese Americans living in the U.S. were disloyal to the United States. In Hawaii, the commanding general ordered the **internment**, or confinement of about 1 percent of Japanese-American residents.

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt ordered the internment of all Japanese Americans living in California, and parts of other western states. More than 100,000 people were rounded up and shipped to internment camps. Many lost their businesses, jobs, and homes.

No charges were ever filed against Japanese Americans. No evidence of subversion was ever found. In 1944, in the case of **Korematsu v. United States**, the Supreme Court said the government policy was justified by “military necessity.” After the war, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) pushed the government to compensate, or pay back those sent to the camps.

Over the years, Congress passed bills to repay those who had been interned for the loss of their property. Finally, in 1990, cash payments were sent to all former internees. In a letter that year, President Bush said the nation “recognized the injustice done to Japanese Americans during World War II.”

10. What was the reason given for the internment of the Japanese Americans?

11. Explain the details of the *Korematsu v. United States* case. Why did the Supreme Court find in favor of the government in this case, even though the justices were suspicious of exclusion based on race?

### Victory Gardens and Scrap Drives Background

During World War II, everything was in short supply because everything was needed to support the war effort. Americans faced shortages of paper, metals, and nylon—just about anything you can think of. Food was also on the list of commodities that needed to be shared between civilians and the military.

The U.S. government issued ration books that limited the amounts of items Americans could purchase, including meats, butter, eggs, oil, dry beans, frozen vegetables, milk, and ketchup. Ration books not only helped conserve food, but also prevented wealthy Americans from buying up scarce foodstuffs.

As part of the food conservation efforts, the government urged Americans to plant **Victory Gardens**, where they could grow fruits and vegetables to help feed family and friends. Some 20 million gardens were planted—in back yards, vacant lots, on baseball diamonds, and even on rooftops. To encourage the planting of Victory Gardens, the federal government printed posters to remind people that their gardens not only provided food, but also were a key component of the war effort.

**Scrap drives** enabled people to donate common household items needed for the war effort. These items included shoes, rubber, gasoline, silk, nylon, and even shellac. People would bring their donations to scrap-drive locations located throughout cities and towns.

12. What does the phrase “Our food is fighting” on the victory garden poster mean?

13. Who is gathering the scrap metal in the photo? Why do you think that is? Why would the government want scrap metal?

14. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States was determined to avoid war and remain neutral. In what ways does this poster attempt to change public opinion?

#### PLANT A VICTORY GARDEN



A GARDEN WILL MAKE YOUR RATIONS GO FURTHER

