

The Home Front During World War II

I. Industrial & Farm Production

- A. War Production Board halted non-essential building to conserve materials for war purposes.
- B. Rationing goods to consumers reached major levels as goods became scarce—gasoline, butter, rubber, shoes, sugar, and meat were rationed.
- C. Labor groups made no-strike pledges, but some wildcat strikes broke out, particularly among miners.
 - 1) Smith-Connally Anti-Strike Act (1943) made it a criminal offense to tie up industry
 - 2) Except for brief work stoppages, American workers chose not to strike (less than 1% of working time during the war was lost, a record better than England's).
- D. Farm income doubled, as in World War I. Victory gardens were replanted.
- E. Industries switched to war production very quickly. One ship was completed by Henry Kaiser's workers in five days.

II. Women in the Work Force

- A. Women joined the armed forces in record numbers, though not in combat roles. Most took clerical jobs in the various branches (WAVES and WAACS).
- B. Women (characterized as "Rosie the Riveter") took many jobs in heavy industry, such as shipbuilding and aircraft production.
- C. Popular opinion opposed women working and some private contractors refused to hire women.
 - 1. Office of War Information supported a domestic propaganda campaign to make women's work seem patriotic.
 - 2. Between 1941 and 1945, 6.5 million women entered the work force, a 57% increase.

III. Propaganda

- A. As in World War I, the government actually promoted pro-war messages.
 - 1. *Why We Fight* series by Frank Capra
 - 2. Commercial movies were blatantly patriotic and emphasized the "melting pot" nature of American forces.
- B. While Nazis and Japanese were portrayed as ruthless barbarians, Italians were treated more generously in films and written propaganda.
 - 1. FDR wanted to de-emphasize anti-German hysteria and distinguished between Nazis and other Germans.

2. Nazi stupidity became a common stereotype, as viewers were encouraged to laugh at Hitler and his followers.
3. Japanese were portrayed as subhuman, partly in response to atrocities committed by the Japanese and partly because of race hatred.

IV. Civil Rights Issues

- A. Japanese-Americans were arrested, housed in concentration camps, and forced to endure the length of the war in remote locations
 1. Executive Order 9066 (1942) required the internment and relocation of all Japanese in the Western U.S.
 2. In the 1944 *Korematsu* decision, the Supreme Court upheld the relocation on the grounds of military necessity.
 3. Despite this treatment, 18,000 Nisei volunteered for military service.
- B. African-Americans challenged race prejudice during the war in several ways.
 1. Civil rights organizations expanded their membership during the war.
 2. Repudiation of Nazi racism by the U.S. strengthened civil rights efforts
 3. African-Americans were not allowed to serve in integrated units.
- C. Mexican-Americans, particularly in California, faced segregated housing, high unemployment, and low wages.
 1. Pachuco gangs of young Mexican-Americans, wearing zoot suits, challenged conformity to white standards.
 2. Zoot Suit Riots broke out in Los Angeles in 1943 as servicemen beat Mexican-Americans for four days.