# Chapter 24

## *Homefront: The Experience of Total War*

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor propelled the United States into total war for the first time since the Civil War. Although no battles were fought on American soil, the nation's military and industrial mobilization efforts affected the lives of nearly all Americans. Social and economic changes occurred rapidly at home and had far-reaching consequences. In some instances, trends that started during the Depression and New Deal were reinforced—as, for example, the expanding size and scope of the federal government, the widespread mobility of the population, and the extensive participation of women in the work force. In other instances, the war produced new developments. These included the beginning of a successful attack on racial segregation, the rise of organized labor as an important political force, and the emergence of a close relationship between industry and government—especially for defense purposes—that would outlast the war.

After Pearl Harbor, most Americans supported the nation's entry into the war wholeheartedly. This unity did not, however, dispel racial antagonisms, and in some cases civil liberties were curtailed. The most drastic example of such abridgment of rights was the forced relocation of over 100,000 Japanese-Americans from their homes on the West Coast—an action that was approved by the Supreme Court.

Many other people relocated voluntarily during the war, responding to job opportunities in areas where defense plants were located. These massive population movements disrupted many traditional social patterns, and aggravated racial and ethnic tensions.

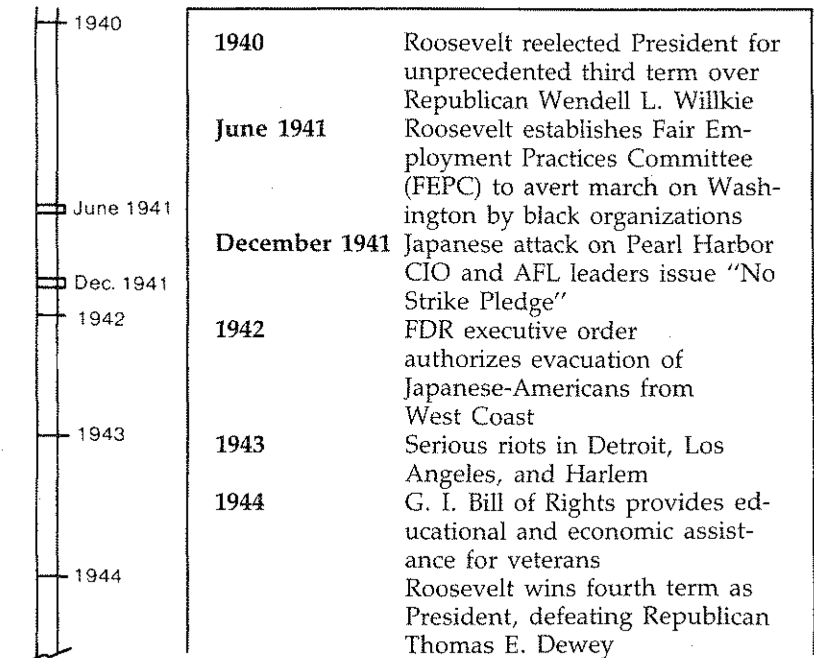


Full-scale industrial mobilization also created special opportunities for minority and women workers, people who had been the "last hired, first fired" during the Depression. Though social attitudes failed to keep pace with economic realities, minority groups' civil rights and women's rights received substantial boosts from wartime developments.

Fighting against Nazi racial supremacy, the United States could not continue to condone racial discrimination at home (though the relocation of Japanese-Americans represented a major blot on this awakening civil-rights consciousness). Because the government depended on popular commitment for fighting the war, it had to ensure that all Americans felt they were important participants in the mobilization effort. The "democratizing" of the tax burden was one result of this policy.

The selections in this chapter deal with these important aspects of American participation in World War II. They describe and illuminate economic, social, and political developments that redefined relationships among American citizens and between organizations and individuals and the government. These changing relationships, in turn, were to lead to a distinctively different society in postwar America.

## *Chronology*

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|---|---|
| **1940** | Roosevelt reelected President for unprecedented third term over Republican Wendell L. Willkie |
| **June 1941** | Roosevelt establishes Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to avert march on Washington by black organizations |
| **December 1941** | Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor<br>CIO and AFL leaders issue "No Strike Pledge" |
| **1942** | FDR executive order authorizes evacuation of Japanese-Americans from West Coast |
| **1943** | Serious riots in Detroit, Los Angeles, and Harlem |
| **1944** | G. I. Bill of Rights provides educational and economic assistance for veterans<br>Roosevelt wins fourth term as President, defeating Republican Thomas E. Dewey |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Apr. 1945 | **April 1945** | Roosevelt dies, Harry S. Truman becomes President |
| May 1945 | **May 1945** | Germans surrender (V-E Day) |
| Aug. 1945 | **August 1945** | Atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki<br>Japan surrenders (V-J Day) |

# *Documents*


**24.1** Image of the Republic at War (visual source)
**24.2** Labor Debates the "No Strike Pledge," Michigan CIO Council (primary source)
**24.3** Democratizing the Tax Structure, Mark H. Leff (secondary source)
**24.4** Japanese-American Relocation, U.S. House Select Committee Hearings (primary source)
**24.5** Race Relations during the War, Carey McWilliams (primary source)
**24.6** Women and Wartime Mobilization, Susan M. Hartmann (secondary source)
**24.7** The Returning Hero: Contrasting Images, Norman Rockwell (visual source)


## 24.1 Image of the Republic at War

The United States was drawn into World War II by an attack on its military forces. Unlike World War I, there was little need for the government to persuade the public of the need to fight. Total war, however, required total mobilization—military, industrial, and even social—and this massive national effort called for extraordinary public commitment. To sustain this commitment and enthusiasm, President Roosevelt established the Office of War Information, which channeled war news and propaganda to newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasting stations (see Doc. 23.5). At least as important in stimulating patriotism, however, were the many posters produced by the government during the war. One such poster is reproduced here.

***Consider:***

1. *The symbols that are employed in the poster to call up patriotic, democratic, and militaristic responses;*
2. *How the symbols in this poster compare to early "images of the Republic" (see Doc. 6.9).*

SOURCE: *Library of Congress.*

## 24.2 Labor Debates the "No Strike Pledge"

### Michigan CIO Council

As defense production boosted the American economy in 1940 and 1941, organized labor became militant, attempting through numerous strikes to increase wages that workers considered to be insufficient. Therefore, the "no strike pledge" of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and American Federation of Labor (AFL), issued shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, was controversial among rank-and-file union members. Worker opposition to the pledge increased with unpopular rulings by the newly established National War Labor Board. At its annual meeting in the summer of 1943, the Michigan CIO Council debated and eventually passed a resolution calling for repeal of the pledge. This excerpt from the proceedings of that meeting includes arguments for and against the resolution.

***Consider:***

1. *What the strongest arguments were on each side of the question;*
2. *Whether the leaders of the CIO and AFL acted in the best interests of union members in making such a pledge;*
3. *What options dissatisfied workers had during the war, after their leaders had promised no work stoppages.*

DELEGATE RUTH BIGGIN . . . Mr. Chairman, I think this resolution is an insult to Phil Murray, to President Roosevelt and to all the win-the-war forces and labor organization itself and to all labor people who are interested in winning the war. . . .

I think this resolution should be defeated. I came here in the interest of extending the CIO program and policy for winning the war. . . .

DELEGATE REYNOLDS: . . . Mr. Chairman, I rise to support the resolution. I believe that we of labor should stay on the side of labor. The reactionary forces are trying to have us vote down this resolution which takes away the right of labor to get its rightful gains and the only way to get those gains, and there isn't any use of kidding ourselves, is by striking. I don't believe we should strike these plants unless we absolutely have to. You can take the Chrysler workers. Chrysler workers are underpaid. We have our contract. We have been trying to get a contract or some six or seven months out of the War Labor Board and what do we get. We get just a plain run around! When we had a three-day stoppage, the War Labor Board promised us that they would get the Chrysler contract out of the red tape that it is meshed down in Washington inside of two weeks. Here it is going into another five or six weeks and we still have not a contract. . . . When we had that three day stoppage we wanted them to upgrade people, people with seniority, people that have a right to be upgraded. The company goes out on the street hiring, hiring for the good jobs and leaving the people with seniority on those lower priced jobs. . . .

The corporation that I work for knows only one language and that is the language of strike, and there isn't any one in this convention that can say they can deal with the Chrysler Corporation on any other terms. The only language they understand is the language of strike, and I say, let's give it to them. . . .

DELEGATE PAUL WEBER . . . : Brother President, I am speaking against the resolution. . . .

I would like . . . to make this point,—that when you strike in a war industry, you do not damage the management. Unfortunately,

. . . Convention of the Michigan CIO Council, *June*



that is true. . . . The company has a contract with the government for X number of guns and they don't care whether you make those guns in six weeks or eight weeks. The only one hurt is the future of the labor movement and the capacity of the armed forces that defend us all. . . .

DELEGATE LUCAS: . . . Sometime ago labor made a very noble gesture. That was a matter of giving a no-strike pledge. Arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, there were certain commitments that were made to labor at that particular time. Does anyone in this hall question that these commitments have not been lived up to by the administration? I don't think that we can honestly say that the administration has done the things that [it] stated would be done at the time of giving the no-strike pledge.

. . . I have become convinced that the giving of the no-strike pledge was the biggest mistake that labor has ever made. (Applause and boos) . . .

## 24.3 Democratizing the Tax Structure

Mark H. Leff

Tax policy played an important role in the government's approach to conducting the war. Higher taxes could be used to raise needed revenues and, at the same time, to check the threat of inflation caused by too much money flowing into the economy. One key tax measure of the war years was the Revenue Act of 1942. This dramatically increased the tax rolls to include most wage-earning Americans, while raising corporate taxes and the excess profits tax. Historian Mark Leff discusses a second tax measure, the Current Tax Payment Act of 1943, in this excerpt from his study of New Deal tax policies. Leff argues that Roosevelt's wartime policies had symbolic and political as well as economic implications, and that they helped keep the spirit of the New Deal alive.

***Consider:***

1. *Whether taxation is an effective device for creating a sense of shared sacrifice—and thus, national unity—in wartime;*
2. *Whether Congress acted appropriately in shielding middle-class Americans from tax increases as high as those on the wealthy;*
3. *The factors, besides commitment to the war effort, that may have shaped*

. . . In World War II, the personal income tax ceased to be an indicator of affluence and became a mere token of citizenship. In 1943, the Current Tax Payment Act introduced the now-familiar withholding system in which estimated tax was deducted from paychecks (before World War II, tax bills only came due in quarterly installments in the year after the income was earned – an unsustainable system once the tax applied to most Americans, for it demanded too much of both the Internal Revenue Service and popular patterns of savings and accounting). No more than 5 percent of the population had been covered by taxable income-tax returns in any year in the 1930s; in World War II, the ranks of income-tax payers swelled to 74 percent. No longer was the income tax reliant on the $50,000+ brackets for most of its revenue; in fact, by the end of the war, these opulent Americans, though several times as numerous as in the Depression, accounted for only 13 percent of income-tax collections. Treasury Secretary Morgenthau observed that "for the first time in our history, the income tax is becoming a people's tax."

. . . Many recognized that the wartime hike in taxes on the upper brackets "would not yield great revenue" because of already-high rates and because "the total of income in these brackets is not a large percentage of the national income." To cap strong wartime inflationary pressures, the income tax needed to rein in mass purchasing power and to significantly narrow the budget deficit, and that required a revamped income tax. . . . Lower tax exemptions and higher tax rates were also sanctified by the ethos of universal wartime participation and sacrifice, in which it became an asset "that the greatest possible number of persons may contribute directly to the costs of the defense program." Wartime economic advances facilitated this process, for it was far easier to raise taxes when paychecks, even after tax deductions, were substantially higher than those before the war. . . .

As in the New Deal, however, the financial and economic context of taxation affords an incomplete understanding of its role. Though the relatively affluent middle brackets faced vastly increased tax bills over those of the New Deal years (a family with two children, for example, owed less than $50 tax on a $5,000 salary in the late 1930s, but theoretically could pay more than $700 by 1943), the tax hammer did not come down as hard as it might have on this group. . . . Congressmen, of course, still sought to defend the middle class from excessive tax increases. This group, after all, made up "the most articulate part of the voting public," and congressmen were quick to assert that this "good solid element of society upon which we have to depend" deserved protection as "the backbone of the country." Though demands to tax the rich had slackened (particularly with the refurbished wartime reputation of industrialists), the . . . 1930s tendency to focus on taxing "them" (the surplus incomes of the specially privileged) carried over into the World War II conceptualization of income taxes. Thus, middle brackets were shielded from higher burdens by being included in the category of the presumptively overburdened common man.

Taxation also continued to play an important symbolic function. President Roosevelt was acutely aware that "a fair distribution of the war burden," or at least the semblance of it, was "necessary for national unity" at a time when the government needed to "impose sacrifices on all of us." . . . Not to "cut the superfluities of the few" would "have a shattering effect on morale," for wage earners' sacrifice seemed contingent on the assurance that "their bosses are making at least faintly equivalent sacrifices." . . .

FDR was a past master at the use of taxation to convey the image of the hour. He explained at one point that he would prefer "to see a tax which would tax all income above $100,000 at the rate of 99½%." This even shocked his budget director, but the president's joking comeback was a revealing one: "Why not? None of us is ever going to make $100,000 a year. How many people report on that much income?" . . . In 1942 and again in 1943, he proposed that all income above $25,000 ($50,000 for families) be taxed away, saying that "all excess income should go to win the war." Inequities, he warned, "seriously affect the morale of soldiers and sailors, farmers and workers, imperiling efforts to stabilize wages and prices, and thereby impairing the effective prosecution of the war." When this income limit got nowhere in Congress, FDR acted on his own, handing down an executive order limiting after-tax salaries to $25,000 plus certain allowances, only to have his action indignantly repealed by Congress.

Surely more than posturing was involved here. Franklin Roosevelt sincerely disapproved of efforts to shift the wartime tax burden away from the rich; he played a critical role in blocking congressional efforts to substitute a regressive federal sales tax for income-tax increases. He also became increasingly disillusioned with what he saw as forces of petty selfishness in the midst of a far nobler world crusade, a bitterness that emerged most prominently in 1944 when he vetoed a loophole-ridden tax bill as "not for the needy, but for the greedy." . . . taxes and other countermeasures against wartime profiteering were an integral part of the administration's antiinflation program, not simply to collect revenue, but also to legitimize the sacrifices that war necessitated and to take the edge off the grievances that war engendered.

Thus, even in war, which required a vast expansion and renovation of the tax system, the symbolic role of New Deal tax policy was prominent.

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SOURCE: *Mark H. Leff,* The Limits of Symbolic Reform: The New Deal and Taxation, 1933–1939, *287–91.* *Copyright © 1984, Cambridge University Press. Reprinted with permission.*

## 24.4 Japanese-American Relocation: Civil Rights Abridged

### U.S. House Select Committee Hearings

The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor intensified long-held prejudices and fears in the United States of the "yellow peril." In February 1942, President Roosevelt yielded to strong pressure, largely from politicians and the press on the West Coast, and issued an executive order that enabled the army to relocate more than 110,000 *Issei* (foreign-born Japanese noncitizens) and *Nisei* (United States-born Japanese-American citizens) to government-run processing centers and eventually to ten internment camps. The War Relocation Authority that was in charge of the camps allowed 35,000 of these detainees to leave for new jobs elsewhere in the country and about 8,000 (mostly *Nisei*) to go to Japan. The remaining Japanese-Americans were kept in the camps until January 1945.

In these excerpts from hearings held by a select House committee right after Roosevelt's executive order, California Attorney General Earl Warren (later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court) and Louis Goldblatt of the California State Industrial Union Council (affiliated with the CIO) present some of the arguments for and against relocation.

***Consider:***

1. *The persuasiveness of Warren's reasoning on the nature of the Japanese-American threat;*
2. *How the attitudes expressed by Warren compare to fears of alien subversion during World War I;*
3. *Why the CIO spoke out against the sweeping nature of Japanese-American relocation.*

Attorney General WARREN. . . . For some time I have been of the opinion that the solution of our alien enemy problem with all its ramifications, which include the descendants of aliens, is not only a Federal problem but is a military problem. We believe that all of the decisions in that regard must be made by the military command that is charged with the security of this area. I am convinced that the fifth-column activities of our enemy call for the participation of people who are in fact American citizens, and that if we are to deal realistically with the problem we must realize that we will be obliged in time of stress to deal with subversive elements of our own citizenry.

SOURCE: *U.S. House of Representatives,* Hearings Before the Select Committee Investigating



. . . the civil authorities cannot take protective measures against people of that character. . . .

. . . We believe that any delay in the adoption of the necessary protective measures is to invite disaster. It means that we, too, will have in California a Pearl Harbor incident. . . .

Unfortunately, . . . many of our people and some of our authorities and, I am afraid, many of our people in other parts of the country are of the opinion that because we have had no sabotage and no fifth column activities in this State since the beginning of the war, that means that none have been planned for us. But I take the view that that is the most ominous sign in our whole situation. It convinces me more than perhaps any other factor that the sabotage that we are to get, the fifth column activities that we are to get, are timed just like Pearl Harbor was timed. . . .

I believe that we are just being lulled into a false sense of security and that the only reason we haven't had disaster in California is because it has been timed for a different date. . . .

I want to say that the consensus of opinion among the law-enforcement officers of this State is that there is more potential danger among the group of Japanese who are born in this country than from the alien Japanese who were born in Japan. That might seem an anomaly to some people, but the fact is that, in the first place, there are twice as many of them. There are 33,000 aliens and there are 66,000 born in this country.

In the second place, most of the Japanese who were born in Japan are over 55 years of age. There has been practically no migration to this country since 1924. But in some instances the children of those people have been sent to Japan for their education, either in whole or in part, and while they are over there they are indoctrinated with the idea of Japanese imperialism. They receive their religious instruction which ties up their religion with their Emperor, and they come back here imbued with the ideas and the policies of Imperial Japan. . . .

. . . We believe that when we are dealing with the Caucasian race we have methods that will test the loyalty of them, and we believe that we can, in dealing with the Germans and the Italians, arrive at some fairly sound conclusions because of our knowledge of the way they live in the community and have lived for many years. But when we deal with the Japanese we are in an entirely different field and we cannot form any opinion that we believe to be sound. Their method of living, their language, make for this difficulty. . . .

It seems strange to us that airplane manufacturing plants should be entirely surrounded by Japanese land occupancies. It seems to us that it is more than circumstance that after certain Government air bases were established Japanese undertook farming operations in close proximity to them. You can hardly grow a jackrabbit in some of the

MR. GOLDBLATT. . . . We naturally go along and concur with all the recommendations that the Government deems necessary to safeguard this territory. We feel, however, that a good deal of this problem has gotten out of hand, . . . inasmuch as both the local and State authorities, instead of becoming bastions of defense, of democracy and justice, joined the wolf pack when the cry came out "Let's get the yellow menace." As a matter of fact, we believe the present situation is a great victory for the yellow press and for the fifth column that is operating in this country, which is attempting to convert this war from a war against the Axis Powers into a war against the "yellow peril." . . .

What we are concerned with, Mr. Chairman is this: That if this is to become the index of our dealings with the alien problem—in other words, that if we are not to deal only with aliens but also with the descendants of aliens—then there is no limit to this problem and the program, and this vitally affects our unions. . . . I am positive the military authorities know that neither Hitler nor Mussolini will hesitate a moment to sacrifice any Germans or Italians in this country if that will suit their purpose in an all-out war.

So that we can expect, I think, that if this campaign of isolating the Japanese is successful the next step will be for several incidents to occur which involves Germans or Italians; then the whole of the wolf pack will scream to the moon again and this time it will be "Evacuate all Italians, evacuate all Germans." The principle will have been set; the pattern will have been cut as it has been by the Hearst press, by the rabid, hysterical elements. . . .

We believe the efforts of the Federal Government should not be based on making distinctions by race, nationality, or citizenship. We favor a campaign that will detect sabotage no matter what its source and from which there will be no immunity by virtue of wealth, political connections, or position in society.

## 24.5 Race Relations during the War

### Carey McWilliams

To a nation at war against Nazi ideals of racial supremacy, persistent problems of race relations at home were embarrassing. Moreover, the large-scale industrial and military mobilization required by the war effort made discrimination against blacks and other minorities impractical. These factors, together with the rising self-consciousness and assertiveness of racial minorities (see Doc. 22.6), helped produce an environment in which advances in civil rights were possible. However, the road to better race relations was bumpy, for the economic and demographic developments of the war also stimulated new interracial tensions. The following excerpt from a 1946 essay by civil-rights authority Carey McWilliams discusses race relations during World War II.

***Consider:***

1. *How wartime mobilization increased interracial tensions;*
2. *Why, in World War II, "the wartime prejudices of the majority tended to be directed at our own racial minorities rather than, as in World War I, against enemy aliens";*
3. *Whether the developments McWilliams describes justify the optimism of his concluding observation.*

Outwardly "the race question" has passed through three clearly defined phases since the war began: a period of mounting tension and friction (from the outset of the defense program to January 1, 1943); a period of overt hostility and aggression (through 1943); and a period in which the democratic forces of the nation mobilized to meet the menace so clearly apparent in the shocking events of 1943 (from mid-summer, 1943, to date).

To fight a total war successfully on a global scale, America quickly realized that all available sources of manpower, including the racial minorities, must be utilized—in the services, in the defense industries, in all phases of the war effort. The attempt to make full utilization of the racial minorities, however, ran counter to long-established usages and customs. Since it involved the grafting of emergency wartime requirements upon a peacetime structure of race relations, the effort was naturally productive of considerable friction, particularly in the crowded defense areas, where sharp issues arose over housing, employment, and transportation. By rapidly shifting populations from rural to urban areas, the war heightened existing tensions and created new tension areas. . . .

. . . On February 28, 1942, a savage riot occurred at the Sojourner Truth Housing project in Detroit, in which prospective Negro tenants were attacked with clubs, knives, rifles, and shotguns, resulting in many injuries and over 104 arrests. When 14 Negro families were finally moved into the project in May, 2,000 National Guardsmen were on duty to give them protection. Two of the men arrested for fomenting this riot—which was a dress rehearsal for the Detroit riots of 1943—were members of an organization which had been disseminating pro-Axis propaganda. . . .

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SOURCE: *Carey McWilliams, "What We Did About Racial Minorities," in* While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States, *ed. Jack Goodman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 89–97.* *Copyright © 1946, 1973 by Simon and Schuster, Inc.*

Also during this period enemy agents sought to foment racial discord by direct instigation. . . . The evidence would indicate, however, that these activities were not particularly successful. Even the limited effectiveness of such enemy-inspired activity was largely due to the fact that the war had momentarily created a situation which could be exploited to advantage.

Where the enemy did make effective use of racial discord in America was in their world-wide propaganda. Every racial "incident" was immediately seized upon for propaganda purposes. Not only did such incidents serve to discredit America, but they tended to support the Japanese propaganda thesis that this was a racial war. . . .

In the United States important changes began to take place, as the war progressed, in the attitude of the minorities toward each other and toward the majority; in the attitude of the majority toward the minorities; and in the conception which the minorites entertained of their own predicament. A noticeable ferment began to develop in the minority groups, in particular the Negro minority. . . .

Strangely enough, the wartime prejudices of the majority tended to be directed at our own racial minorities rather than, as in World War I, against enemy aliens and naturalized citizens of German descent. . . .

Realizing that the dynamics of the war were releasing new forces which were profoundly disturbing the racial *status quo* in America, the traditionally biased section of the white majority became increasingly provocative. Demagogues, in and out of Congress, began to indulge in rabid anti-Negro speeches which not only infuriated the Negro minority but shocked large sections of the white majority. . . .

Also during 1941 and 1942 a noticeable ferment began to develop among middle-class white elements on the racial question. . . . As the American people became more deeply involved in the war, the inconsistency between our traditional ideals and our racial practices became increasingly embarrassing and progressively indefensible. . . .

Thus, as the war developed, a triangle of forces began to form in America: better organized than ever before, the racial minorities were struggling to fight free from all restrictions of caste and color; one section of the majority, responding to the challenging issues of the war, began to rally to the defense of the minorities; while a minority of the majority redoubled its efforts in defense of the prewar racial *status quo*.

The dangers implicit in these mounting tensions were clearly apparent. . . .

The explosions came in 1943. They began with the so-called "zoot-suit" riot in Los Angeles early in June (although there had been some violence in connection with a "hate" strike in the shipyards at Mobile, Alabama, on May 29). Then came the Detroit race riot of June 20–21, the worst race riot which America had experienced in twenty-five years, followed by subsequent disturbances in Beaumont and Harlem. . . . The rapid succession of these violent and destructive riots, coming as they did in the midst of the greatest war in which America has participated, profoundly shocked the American people. . . .

Out of this . . . activity came a host of conferences, institutes, programs, and studies, constituting in the aggregate an enormous amount of energy and effort. Much of this activity was sporadic and unintegrated and will doubtless lapse now that the war is over. But it was this activity which accounts for the fact that few racial disturbances were recorded in 1944 . . . or 1945. Interest in racial minorities, moreover, has continued to increase.

. . . Forced to deal with the realities of the problem, if only on an emergency wartime basis, the American people have begun to see through some of the myths and fallacies which have long enshrouded their thinking about racial issues.

## 24.6 Women and Wartime Mobilization

Susan M. Hartmann

The war not only opened up employment opportunities for women, it virtually forced them to enter the work force. As a result, several million female workers took jobs for the first time, often in defense industries where hours were long and wages relatively high. These working women had special problems. As in the past, they encountered discrimination in unions; and those who were mothers with husbands away at war had to worry about maintaining a home, obtaining enough food and other necessities, and caring for their children—at the end of their long working days. In this selection from her book *The Home Front and Beyond*, historian Susan Hartmann points out that social attitudes toward women in the work force changed only gradually—and partially—during the war. Still, most historians agree that these years marked a turning point. Though attitudes about working women were slow to change, the economic opportunities open to them expanded significantly during and after the war.

***Consider:***

1. *How attitudes toward working women during the Depression (see Doc. 22.5) compare with attitudes during World War II;*
2. *The impact on family life of wartime employment patterns;*
3. *The overall impact of the war years on the status of American women.*

The material deprivation, the economic discrimination and the psychological discouragement experienced by women during the Depression made the Second World War all the more important in improving their lives and status. Because the nation mobilized for war required the active support of every member, the media continuously made women aware of their importance, not alone as mothers, wives and homemakers, but also as workers, citizens, and even as soldiers. As their value in extrafamilial roles increased in the public consciousness, women also benefited from real opportunities to earn income, to enter new employment fields, and to perform in a wide variety of areas that had hitherto been reserved for men.

Although the popular ideology that women's primary role was in the home survived the war both in public discourse and in the beliefs of most women, the military crisis did create an ideological climate supportive of women's movement into the public realm. In the first place, the public depiction of the war as a struggle for freedom and democracy provided symbols for women to enlist in their own cause. Moreover, where the Depression had encouraged public criticism of women workers, the labor shortage of the war years necessitated appeals by government and employers for women to take jobs. The need for female labor lent a new legitimacy to the woman worker and made government, employers, and labor unions more willing to consider the needs of women. Finally, wartime propaganda enhanced the importance of women as citizens and assigned them significant public responsibilities. . . .

Women's employment grew in every occupational field but that of domestic service. Their most spectacular gains, however, were in factory work, particularly in those industries producing defense materials where their numbers mushroomed by 460 percent. . . .

Women enjoyed higher incomes in the war economy as their wages in industry increased both absolutely and in relation to men's. Female gains were highest in war manufacturing, where they worked in formerly male jobs, but their earnings also rose in industries where women were traditionally concentrated, as well as in office work and in service industries. The general labor shortage elevated women's earnings, but of greatest importance were the opportunities for women to work in jobs where rates were historically higher. In addition, women, though not to the same extent as men, worked longer hours during the war, and government and union equal pay policies, while never systematically applied, helped to raise women's income. . . .

Public awareness of women's real and potential contributions to national goals was manifested in legislative action which chipped away at some of the legal and civil disabilities suffered by women. Four



state legislatures enacted equal pay laws during the war, and several others removed their bans against women jurors. In direct contrast to attitudes and practices during the Depression, a number of states passed laws protecting married women from discrimination in employment. In addition, for the first time Congress seriously considered an equal pay bill and an equal rights amendment to the Constitution. . . .

Less apparent at the time were the limitations placed upon women's aspirations by the very agencies that were encouraging women to assume larger functions outside the home. The nation desperately needed the services of women during the war, but it was equally resolutely attached to the traditional sexual order. Indeed, as war brought social dislocation of an inordinate degree, the institution of the family with wife and mother at its core took on even more significance. Americans adjusted to women's new prominence in the public realm because that position was defined in terms which denied the erosion of cherished social norms.

The public discourse on women's new wartime roles established three conditions which set limits on social change. The first was that women were replacing men in the world outside the home only "for the duration." . . . The second condition was that women would retain their "femininity" even as they performed masculine duties. Photographs of women war workers emphasized glamour, and advertising copy assured readers that beneath the overalls and grease stains there remained a true woman, feminine in appearance and behavior. Finally, the media emphasized the eternal feminine motivations behind women's willingness to step out of customary roles. Patriotic motives were not ignored; but also highlighted was women's determination to serve their families albeit in novel ways. In the public image, women took war jobs to bring their men home more quickly and to help make the world a more secure place for their children. . . .

That many of the crisis-induced changes in women's lives were reversed by the end of the 1940s does not cancel out the importance of World War II in altering sex roles. The contradiction between women's behavior and deeply entrenched social beliefs had never been greater, and the resolution of that disharmony failed to return women to the status quo ante bellum. Although those conventional standards survived . . . women's behavior in the public realm had undergone considerable change and would continue to develop in altered patterns.

## 24.7 The Returning Hero: Contrasting Images

Norman Rockwell

The way soldiers returning from a war are viewed provides a good indica-

*Evening Post* consistently reflected "mainstream" American values, captured two very different images of the "returning hero" in the *Post* covers reproduced here. The first appeared in February 1919, the second in May 1945.

### *Consider:*

1. *The attitudes toward military life the two illustrations suggest;*
2. *What might account for these differences in outlook after the two wars.*

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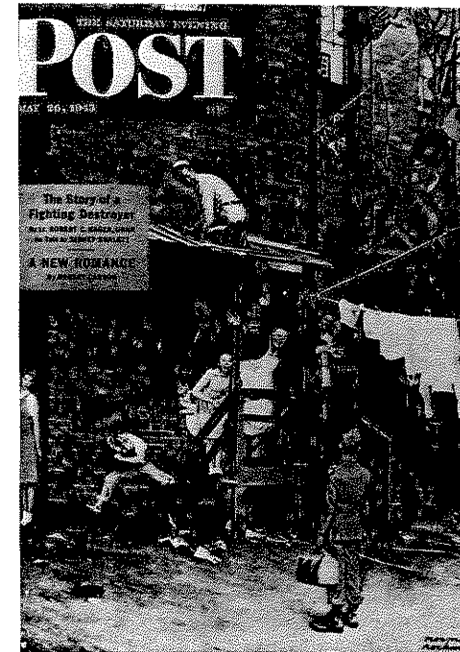


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## CHAPTER QUESTIONS

1. *Explain how the experience of World War II represented a "democratizing" influence on American life.*
2. *Discuss the major effects of the war on American economic life.*
3. *Compare the way the government handled issues related to civil rights and civil liberties during World War I and World War II.*