

# Mobilization

## READING FOCUS

- How did Roosevelt mobilize the armed forces?
- In what ways did the government prepare the economy for war?
- How did the war affect daily life on the home front?

## MAIN IDEA

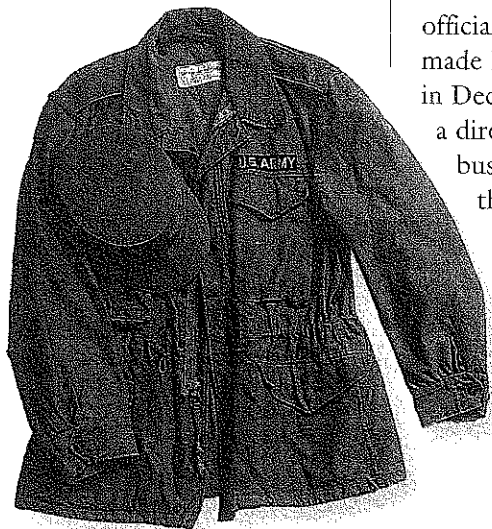
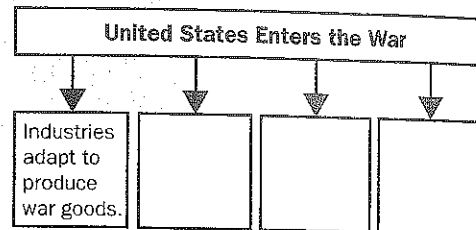
The United States quickly mobilized millions of Americans to fight the Axis powers. The government organized the economy to supply the military.

## KEY TERMS

Selective Training and Service Act  
GI  
Office of War Mobilization  
Liberty ship  
victory garden

## TAKING NOTES

As you read, complete the following flow-chart to show some of the effects that America's entry into war had on the economy of the United States.



Millions of Americans traded their civilian clothes for military fatigues (above) as the United States prepared to fight the Axis.

**Setting the Scene** Well before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, officials in the United States had begun to prepare for war. President Roosevelt made his concerns and worries clear to the American people in a radio address in December 1940. He stated that the Axis nations, especially Germany, posed a direct threat to the security of the United States. He appealed to American business owners and workers to support Britain's defensive efforts or face the ultimate task of defending their own land against the "brute force" of the Axis.

*"We must be the great arsenal of democracy. For us this is an emergency as serious as war itself. We must apply ourselves to our task with the same resolution, the same sense of urgency, the same spirit of patriotism and sacrifice as we would show were we at war."*

—Franklin D. Roosevelt, fireside chat, December 29, 1940

FDR understood that the outcome of the war in Europe ultimately depended on his country's ability to produce planes, tanks, guns, uniforms, and other war materials for the Allies.

## Mobilizing the Armed Forces

FDR realized that a crucial step that he had to take was to strengthen the armed forces if the United States were to enter the war on the side of the Allies. In September 1940, Congress authorized the first peacetime draft in the nation's history. The **Selective Training and Service Act** required all males aged 21 to 36 to register for military service. A limited number of men was selected from this pool to serve a year in the army. The United States also boosted its defense spending from \$2 billion at the start of the year to more than \$10 billion in September.

As the United States prepared for the possibility of war, thousands of American men received official notices to enter the army. In what came to be known as the "Four Freedoms speech," FDR shared his vision of what these troops would be fighting for:

“We look forward to a world founded upon four essential freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression. . . . The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way. . . . The third is freedom from want [need]. . . . The fourth is freedom from fear.”

—Franklin D. Roosevelt, State of the Union Message, January 6, 1941

Artist Norman Rockwell illustrated these four freedoms in a series of paintings that the government distributed in poster form during the war. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, feelings of patriotism swept over the United States. Tens of thousands of men volunteered to serve in the military.

**The GI War** World War II greatly changed the lives of the men and women who were uprooted from home and sent far away to fight for their country. More than 16 million Americans served as soldiers, sailors, and aviators in the war. They called themselves **GIs**, an abbreviation of “Government Issue.”

During the war, American GIs slogged through swamps, crossed hot deserts and turbulent seas, and flew through skies pounded by enemy guns. Soldiers on the front lines often found their experience in the war was a daily struggle just to stay alive. Between battles, the typical GI dreamed of home and a cherished way of life. When asked what he was fighting for, a young marine replied, “What I’d give for a piece of blueberry pie.” American soldiers knew that they were fighting to preserve the freedoms that they held dear.

**Diversity in the Armed Forces** Americans from all ethnic and racial backgrounds fought during World War II. More than 300,000 Mexican Americans served their country, primarily in the army.

Some 25,000 Native Americans also served in the military. A group of Navajos developed a secret code, based on their language, that the enemy could not break. The marines recruited more than 400 Navajos to serve as radio operators. These “code talkers,” as they became known, provided an important secure communications link in several key battles of the war.

Nearly a million African Americans joined the military. At first, officials limited most black troops to supporting roles. By late 1942, however, faced with mounting casualties, military authorities reluctantly gave African Americans the opportunity to fight. African Americans fought in separate units. One such group, called the Tuskegee Airmen, became the first African American flying unit in the United States military. In late 1944, heavy casualties forced the army to accept African Americans into some white combat units.

**Women in the Military** Not all who served in the military were men. By the war’s end, roughly 350,000 American women had volunteered for military service. Faced with a personnel shortage, officials agreed to use women in almost all areas except combat. Many worked as clerks, typists, airfield control tower operators, mechanics, photographers, and drivers. Others ferried planes around the country and towed practice targets for antiaircraft gunners.

## Preparing the Economy for War

The United States entered the war at a time when the production levels of the other Allies had dropped sharply. Bombing campaigns and German advances had affected production in Britain and the Soviet Union, and Japan’s conquests in the Pacific threatened to cut off

OURS...to fight for



Norman Rockwell’s *Freedom From Want* was widely reproduced during the war.

**INTERPRETING POLITICAL CARTOONS** Bill Mauldin created the characters of GIs Willie and Joe for the Army newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*. **Distinguishing False From Accurate Images** What does this cartoon say about the GIs who fought in World War II?



“Me future is settled, Willie. I’m gonna be a pefessor on types o’ European soil.”

supplies of such vital raw materials as rubber, oil, and tin. President Roosevelt pushed industries to move quickly into the production of war equipment.

**War Production** FDR knew that the federal government would have to coordinate the production of American businesses to meet Allied demand. The government had already assumed tremendous power over the economy during the New Deal. Now the Supreme Court, filled with Roosevelt appointees, tended to support FDR's attempts to boost the government's power even further.

In January 1942, the government set up the War Production Board (WPB) to direct the conversion of peacetime industries to industries that produced war goods. It quickly halted the production of hundreds of civilian consumer goods, from cars to lawn mowers to bird cages, and encouraged companies to make goods for the war. The armed forces decided which companies would receive contracts to manufacture military hardware, but the WPB set priorities and allocated raw materials.

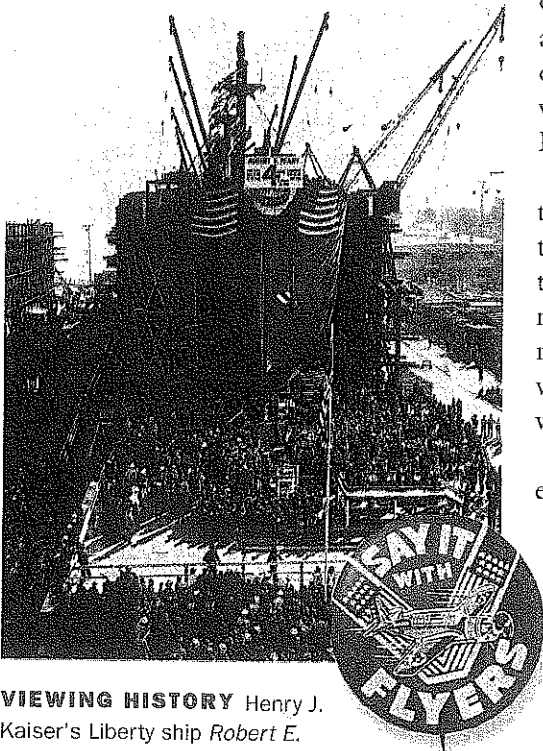
As the war went on, the government established dozens of additional agencies to deal with war production, labor questions, and scarce resources. In May 1943, the President appointed James F. Byrnes, a longtime member of Congress and a close presidential advisor, to head the **Office of War Mobilization**. The office would serve as a super-agency in the centralization of resources. Working from a makeshift office in the White House, Byrnes had such broad authority that he was often called the "assistant president." Some people said that Byrnes ran the country while FDR ran the war.

As production of consumer goods stopped, factories converted to war production. The Ford Motor Company built a huge new factory to make B-24 Liberator bombers using the same assembly-line techniques used to manufacture cars. Henry J. Kaiser introduced mass production techniques into shipbuilding and cut the time needed to build one type of ship from 200 days to 40 days. The vessels that made Kaiser famous were called **Liberty ships**. They were large, sturdy merchant ships that carried supplies or troops.

To motivate businesses and guarantee profits, the government established the "cost-plus" system for military contracts. The military paid development and production costs and added a percentage of costs as profit for the manufacturer. Pride and patriotism also motivated business executives. As in World War I, thousands went to Washington, D.C., to work in the new federal agencies that coordinated war production. They received a token "dollar-a-year" salary from the government while still remaining on their own companies' payrolls.

Each year of the war, the United States raised its production goals for military materials, and each year it met these goals. In 1944, American production levels doubled those of all the Axis nations put together. By the middle of 1945, the nation had produced approximately 300,000 airplanes; 80,000 landing craft; 100,000 tanks and armored cars; 5,600 merchant ships (including about 2,600 Liberty ships); 6 million rifles, carbines, and machine guns; and 41 billion rounds of ammunition.

**The Wartime Work Force** War production benefited workers, too, ending the massive unemployment of the 1930s. As the graphs on the next page show, unemployment virtually vanished during the war. Not only did people find



**VIEWING HISTORY** Henry J. Kaiser's Liberty ship *Robert E. Peary* (above) was built in a matter of days. A button (right) shows the spirit of workers building airplanes for the war effort. **Drawing Conclusions** Why was military production so important to winning the war?

jobs, they also earned more money for their work. Average weekly wages in manufacturing,

adjusted for inflation, rose by more than 50 percent between 1940 and 1945. Under pressure to produce high-quality goods in a hurry, the American labor force delivered. A journalist wrote of a war production factory: "Not a day passes but you'll hear somebody say to a worker who seems to be slowing down, 'There's a war on, you know!'"

With more people working, union membership rose. From 1940 to 1941, the number of workers belonging to unions increased by 1.5 million. Union membership continued to rise sharply once the United States entered the war, increasing from 10.5 million in 1941 to 14.8 million in 1945.

Two weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, labor and business representatives agreed to refrain from strikes and "lockouts." A lockout is a tactic in which an employer keeps employees out of the workplace to avoid meeting their demands. As the cost of living rose during the war, however, unions found the no-strike agreement hard to honor. The number of strikes rose sharply in 1943 and continued to rise in the last two years of the war.

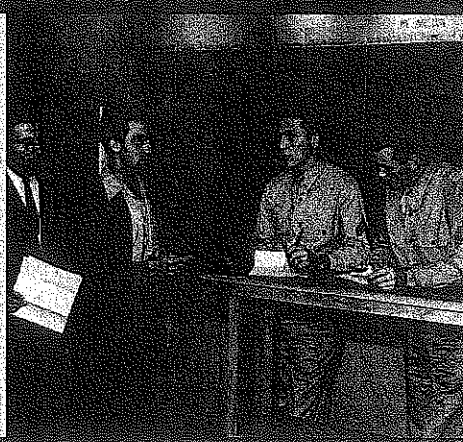
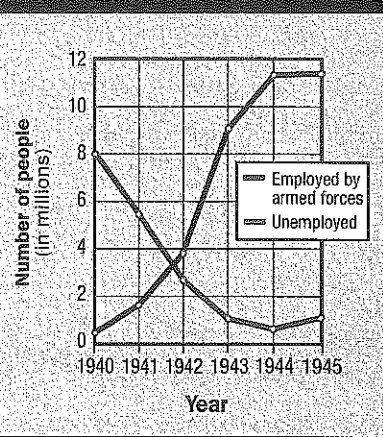
The most serious strikes occurred in the coal industry. John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers union, called strikes on four occasions in 1943. Lewis and the miners had watched industry profits and the cost of living soar while their wages stayed the same. Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes finally negotiated an agreement with Lewis. Meanwhile, Congress passed the Smith-Connally Act in June 1943, limiting future strike activity.

**Financing the War** The United States government vowed to spend whatever was necessary to sustain the war effort. Federal spending increased from \$8.9 billion a year in 1939 to \$95.2 billion in 1945. The Gross National Product (GNP) more than doubled. Overall, between 1941 and 1945, the federal government spent about \$321 billion—ten times as much as it had spent in World War I.

Higher taxes paid for about 41 percent of the cost of the war. The government borrowed the rest of the money from banks, private investors, and the public. The Treasury Department launched bond drives to encourage Americans to buy war bonds to help finance the war. Total war bond sales brought in about \$186 billion.

During the Depression, British economist John Maynard Keynes had argued in favor of deficit spending to get the economy moving. While spending did increase during the 1930s, the government failed to generate large deficits until World War II. The country could not afford to pay all the costs of war, so deficits provided a way to postpone some payments until after the war. High levels of deficit spending helped the United States field a well-equipped army and navy, bring prosperity to workers, and pull the United States out of the Depression. It also boosted the national debt from \$43 billion in 1940 to \$259 billion in 1945.

Unemployment and Armed Service Enlistment, 1940–1945



**INTERPRETING CHARTS** Ten years of high unemployment came to an end as workers joined the military or found jobs in defense industries. **Analyzing information** In what year did the number of people in the armed forces increase by 5 million?

**READING CHECK** How did the government pay for the war effort?



## Focus on DAILY LIFE

**Black Markets** Despite rationing and shortages, people could buy rare goods if they were willing to pay a high price. Nylon stockings could be found for \$5 a pair in most cities, if not in the stores. Gas stations, shoe stores, and groceries sold rationed goods to trusted customers “off-ration,” or without ration coupons, at a higher price. These deals were known as the black market. They hurt the war effort by taking resources away from war production and upsetting Americans who played by the rules and stuck to their rations. Because it depended on thousands of personal relationships and small trades, the black market was impossible to defeat.

## Daily Life on the Home Front

The war affected the daily lives of most Americans. Nearly everyone had a relative or a friend in the military, and people closely followed war news on the radio. During the war, nearly 30 million people moved, including soldiers, families of soldiers, and civilians relocating to take jobs in military production. The end of the Depression helped lift Americans’ spirits. One measure of people’s optimism was an increase in the birthrate. The population grew by 7.5 million between 1940 and 1945, nearly double the rate of growth for the 1930s.

**Shortages and Controls** Wartime jobs gave many people their first extra cash since the Depression. Still, shortages and rationing limited the goods that people could buy. Familiar consumer items were simply unavailable “for the duration.” Metal to make zippers or typewriters went instead into guns, and rubber went to make tires for army trucks instead of for bicycles. Nylon stockings, introduced in 1939, vanished from shops because the nylon was needed for parachutes.

The supply of food also fell short of demand. The government needed great amounts of food for the military. In addition, the closing of shipping lanes and enemy occupation of foreign countries cut off some of America’s supplies of sugar, tropical fruits, and coffee.

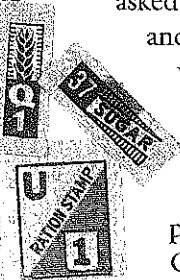
Worried that shortages would cause price increases, the government used tough measures to head off inflation. In April 1941, the Office of Price Administration (OPA) was established by an executive order. The OPA’s job was to control inflation by limiting prices and rents. Such controls sometimes backfired, however. For example, companies would cut back on the production of goods whose prices did not allow for a substantial profit. Such cutbacks could cause the very shortages they were supposed to prevent. Also, people found ways of getting around the limits. Still, the OPA accomplished its main task, keeping inflation under control. The cost of living rose, but not nearly as much as it had in World War I.

The OPA also oversaw rationing during the war. The goal of rationing was a fair distribution of scarce items. Beginning in 1943, the OPA assigned point values to items such as sugar, coffee, meat, butter, canned fruit, and shoes. It issued ration books of coupons worth a certain number of points for categories of food or clothing. Once consumers had used up their points, they could not buy any more of those items until they received new ration books or traded coupons with neighbors. Gasoline for cars was strictly rationed, too, on the basis of need. Signs asked, “Is this trip necessary?” Customers found some shortages and ration rules confusing, but any complaint could be answered with the question, “Don’t you know there’s a war on?”

**Popular Culture** With so many goods unavailable, Americans looked for other ways to spend their money. Civilians bought and read more books and magazines. They purchased recordings of popular songs, such as “White Christmas” by Irving Berlin, a sentimental favorite of both soldiers and civilians. They flocked to baseball games, even though most of their favorite players had gone off to war. Millions of Americans—about 60 percent of the population—also went to the movies every week.



**VIEWING HISTORY** Shoppers needed ration points (right) as well as cash to buy rationed goods.  
**Drawing Inferences** Why did Americans support rationing?



**Enlisting Public Support** The government understood the need to maintain morale. It encouraged citizens to participate in the war effort while persuading them to accept rationing and conserve precious resources. Roosevelt established the Office of War Information in June 1942 to work with magazine publishers, advertising agencies, and radio stations. It hired writers and artists to create posters and ads that stirred Americans' patriotic feelings.

One popular idea was the **victory garden**, a home vegetable garden planted to add to the home food supply and replace farm produce sent to feed the soldiers. Soon people in cities and suburbs were planting tomatoes, peas, and radishes in backyards, empty parking lots, and playgrounds. By 1943, victory gardens produced about one third of the country's fresh vegetables.

The war became a part of everyday life in many ways. People drew their shades for nighttime "blackouts," which tested their readiness for possible bombing raids. Men too old for the army joined the Civilian Defense effort, wearing their CD armbands as they tested air raid sirens. Women knit scarves and socks or rolled bandages for the Red Cross.

The government encouraged efforts to recycle scrap metal, paper, and other materials for war production. In one drive, people collected tin cans, pennies, and pans, razor blades, old shovels, and even old lipstick tubes. The collection drives kept adults and children actively involved in the war effort. "Play your part." "Conserve and collect." "Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without." These slogans echoed throughout the United States and reminded people on the home front of their important contributions to the war effort.



Victory gardens gave people a chance to help the war effort and to add fresh vegetables to their food rations.

## Section

# 1

## Assessment

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. Describe three ways that individual Americans contributed to the war effort.
2. How did the government pay for the war effort?
3. What was the purpose of the **Office of War Mobilization**?
4. What effect did shortages have on the economy?

### CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

5. **Making Comparisons** (a) How were African Americans in the military treated differently from white soldiers? (b) How were women in the military treated differently from men? (c) Why do you think the military insisted on these differences at the start of the war?
6. **Writing to Describe** Write a paragraph detailing daily life from the point of view of an American in the early 1940s. Include the effects of the mobilization for war.



### Take It to the NET

#### Activity: Analyzing Primary

**Sources** Select a primary source from the American home front during World War II (for example, a letter, a poster, or an oral history). Describe the source you selected in a brief report. What did the source reveal about the home front? Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area at the following Web site for help in completing this activity.

[www.plischool.com](http://www.plischool.com)