

The Home Front

MAIN IDEA	WHY IT MATTERS NOW	Terms & Names
After World War II, Americans adjusted to new economic opportunities and harsh social tensions.	Economic opportunities afforded by World War II led to a more diverse middle class in the United States.	• GI Bill of Rights • James Farmer • Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) • internment • Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)

One American's Story

The writer and poet Maya Angelou was a teenager living in San Francisco when the United States got involved in World War II. The first change she noticed was the disappearance of the city's Japanese population. The second change was an influx of workers, including many African Americans, from the South. San Franciscans, she noted, maintained that there was no racism in their city by the bay. But Angelou knew differently.

A Personal Voice MAYA ANGELOU

"A story went the rounds about a San Franciscan white matron who refused to sit beside a Negro civilian on the streetcar, even after he made room for her on the seat. Her explanation was that she would not sit beside a draft dodger who was a Negro as well. She added that the least he could do was fight for his country the way her son was fighting on Iwo Jima. The story said that the man pulled his body away from the window to show an armless sleeve. He said quietly and with great dignity, 'Then ask your son to look around for my arm, which I left over there.'"

—I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

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At the end of the war, returning veterans—even those who weren't disabled—had to begin dealing with the very real issues of reentry and adjustment to a society that offered many opportunities but still had many unsolved problems.

Opportunity and Adjustment

In contrast to the Great Depression, World War II was a time of opportunity for millions of Americans. Jobs abounded, and despite rationing and shortages, people had money to spend. At the end of World War II, the nation emerged as the world's dominant economic and military power.

ECONOMIC GAINS The war years were good ones for working people. As defense industries boomed, unemployment fell to a low of 1.2 percent in 1944. Even with price and wage controls, average weekly paychecks rose 35 percent during the war. And although workers still protested long hours, overtime, and night shifts, they were able to save money for the future. Some workers invested up to half their paychecks in war bonds.

Farmers also prospered during the war. Unlike the depression years, when farmers had battled dust storms and floods, the early 1940s had good weather for growing crops. Farmers benefited from improvements in farm machinery and fertilizers and reaped the profits from rising crop prices. As a result, crop production increased by 50 percent, and farm income tripled. Before the war ended, many farmers could pay off their mortgages.

Women also enjoyed employment gains during the war, although many lost their jobs when the war ended. Over 6 million women had entered the work force for the first time, boosting the percentage of women in the total work force to 35 percent. A third of those jobs were in defense plants, which offered women more challenging work and better pay than jobs traditionally associated with women, such as as waitressing, clerking, and domestic service. With men away at war, many women also took advantage of openings in journalism and other professions. "The war really created opportunities for women," said Winona Espinosa, a wife and mother who became a riveter and bus driver during the war. "It was the first time we got a chance to show that we could do a lot of things that only men had done before."



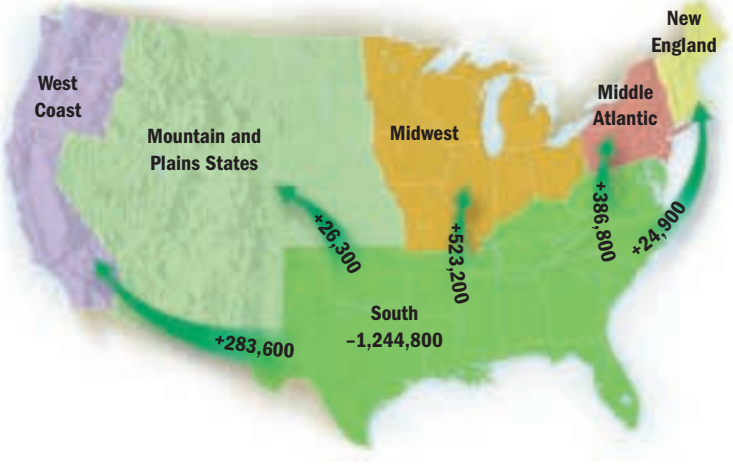
▲ The war gave women the chance to prove they could be just as productive as men. But their pay usually did not reflect their productivity.

POPULATION SHIFTS In addition to revamping the economy, the war triggered one of the greatest mass migrations in American history. Americans whose families had lived for decades in one place suddenly uprooted themselves to seek work elsewhere. More than a million newcomers poured into California between 1941 and 1944. Towns with defense industries saw their populations double and even triple, sometimes almost overnight. As shown in the map to the right, African Americans left the South for cities in the North in record numbers. A

Vocabulary
migration: the act of moving from one country or region to another

MAIN IDEA
Analyzing Causes
A How did World War II cause the U.S. population to shift?

African-American Migration, 1940–1950



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER
1. **Movement** To which geographic region did the greatest number of African Americans migrate?
2. **Movement** How did the wartime economy contribute to this mass migration?



Attending Pennsylvania State College under the GI Bill of Rights, William Oskay, Jr., paid $28 a month for the trailer home in which you see him working. ▶

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENTS Families adjusted to the changes brought on by war as best they could. With millions of fathers in the armed forces, mothers struggled to rear their children alone. Many young children got used to being left with neighbors or relatives or in child-care centers as more and more mothers went to work. Teenagers left at home without parents sometimes drifted into juvenile delinquency. And when fathers finally did come home, there was often a painful period of readjustment as family members got to know one another again.

The war helped create new families, too. Longtime sweethearts—as well as couples who barely knew each other—rushed to marry before the soldier or sailor was shipped overseas. In booming towns like Seattle, the number of marriage licenses issued went up by as much as 300 percent early in the war. A New Yorker observed in 1943, "On Fridays and Saturdays, the City Hall area is blurred with running soldiers, sailors, and girls hunting the license bureau, floral shops, ministers, blood-testing laboratories, and the Legal Aid Society."

In 1944, to help ease the transition of returning servicemen to civilian life, Congress passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the **GI Bill of Rights.** This bill provided education and training for veterans, paid for by the federal government. Just over half the returning soldiers, or about 7.8 million veterans, attended colleges and technical schools under the GI Bill. The act also provided federal loan guarantees to veterans buying homes or farms or starting new businesses. B

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

B How did the war affect families and personal lives?

Discrimination and Reaction

Despite the opportunities that opened up for women and minorities during the war, old prejudices and policies persisted, both in the military and at home.

CIVIL RIGHTS PROTESTS African Americans made some progress on the home front. During the war, thousands of African Americans left the South. The majority moved to the Midwest, where better jobs could be found. Between 1940 and 1944, the percentage of African Americans working in skilled or semiskilled jobs rose from 16 to 30 percent.

Wherever African Americans moved, however, discrimination presented tough hurdles. In 1942, civil rights leader **James Farmer** founded an interracial organization called the **Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)** to confront urban segregation in the North. That same year, CORE staged its first sit-in at a segregated Chicago restaurant.

As African-American migrants moved into already overcrowded cities, tensions rose. In 1943, a tidal wave of racial violence swept across the country. The worst conflict erupted in Detroit on a hot Sunday afternoon in June. What started as a tussle between blacks and whites at a beach on the Detroit River mushroomed into a riot when white sailors stationed nearby joined the fray. The fighting raged for three days, fueled by false rumors that whites had murdered a black woman and her child and that black rioters had killed 17 whites. By the time President Roosevelt sent federal troops to restore order, 9 whites and 25 blacks lay dead or dying.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

C What caused the race riots in the 1940s?

The violence of 1943 revealed to many Americans—black and white alike—just how serious racial tensions had become in the United States. By 1945, more than 400 committees had been established by American communities to improve race relations. Progress was slow, but African Americans were determined not to give up the gains they had made. C

TENSION IN LOS ANGELES Mexican Americans also experienced prejudice during the war years. In the violent summer of 1943, Los Angeles exploded in anti-Mexican "zoot-suit" riots. The zoot suit was a style of dress adopted by Mexican-American youths as a symbol of their rebellion against tradition. It consisted of a long jacket and pleated pants. Broad-brimmed hats were often worn with the suits.



▲ These Mexican Americans, involved in the 1943 Los Angeles riots, are seen here leaving jail to make court appearances.

The riots began when 11 sailors in Los Angeles reported that they had been attacked by zoot-suit-wearing Mexican Americans. This charge triggered violence involving thousands of servicemen and civilians. Mobs poured into Mexican neighborhoods and grabbed any zoot-suiters they could find. The attackers ripped off their victims' clothes and beat them senseless. The riots lasted almost a week and resulted in the beating of hundreds of Mexican-American youth and other minorities.

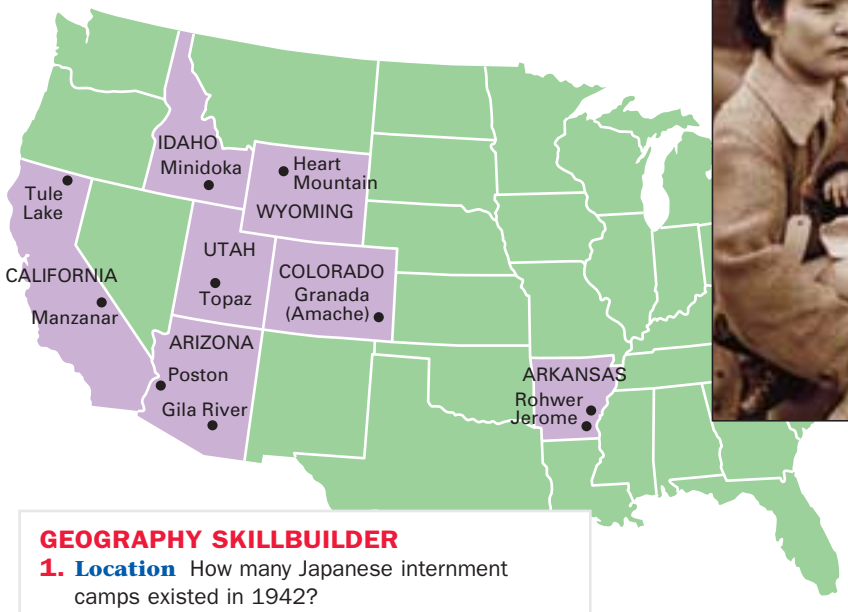
Despite such unhappy experiences with racism, many Mexican Americans believed that their sacrifices during wartime would lead to a better future.

A Personal Voice MANUEL DE LA RAZA

"This war . . . is doing what we in our Mexican-American movement had planned to do in one generation. . . . It has shown those 'across the tracks' that we all share the same problems. It has shown them what the Mexican American will do, what responsibility he will take and what leadership qualities he will demonstrate. After this struggle, the status of the Mexican Americans will be different."

—quoted in *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*

Japanese Relocation Camps, 1942



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

1. **Location** How many Japanese internment camps existed in 1942?
2. **Place** Why do you think the majority of these camps were located in the West?



On March 3, 1942, a Japanese-American mother carries her sleeping daughter during their relocation to an internment camp.

Internment of Japanese Americans

While Mexican Americans and African Americans struggled with racial tension, the war produced tragic results for Japanese Americans. When the war began, 120,000 Japanese Americans lived in the United States. Most of them were citizens living on the West Coast.

The surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii had stunned the nation. After the bombing, panic-stricken citizens feared that the Japanese would soon attack the United States. Frightened people believed false rumors that Japanese Americans were committing sabotage by mining coastal harbors and poisoning vegetables.

This sense of fear and uncertainty caused a wave of prejudice against Japanese Americans. Early in 1942, the War Department called for the mass evacuation of all Japanese Americans from Hawaii. General Delos Emmons, the military governor of Hawaii, resisted the order because 37 percent of the people in Hawaii were Japanese Americans. To remove them would have destroyed the islands' economy and hindered U.S. military operations there. However, he was eventually forced to order the **internment,** or confinement, of 1,444 Japanese Americans, 1 percent of Hawaii's Japanese-American population.

On the West Coast, however, panic and prejudice ruled the day. In California, only 1 percent of the people were Japanese, but they constituted a minority large enough to stimulate the prejudice of many whites, without being large enough to effectively resist internment. Newspapers whipped up anti-Japanese sentiment by running ugly stories attacking Japanese Americans.

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed an order requiring the removal of people of Japanese ancestry from California and parts of Washington, Oregon, and Arizona. Based on strong recommendations from the military, he justified this step as necessary for national security. In the following weeks, the army rounded up some 110,000 Japanese Americans and shipped them to ten hastily constructed remote "relocation centers," euphemisms for prison camps.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Motives D Why did President Roosevelt order the internment of Japanese Americans?

About two-thirds were Nisei, or Japanese people born in this country of parents who emigrated from Japan. Thousands of Nisei had already joined the armed forces, and to Ted Nakashima, an architectural draftsman from Seattle, the evacuation seemed utterly senseless. D

A PERSONAL VOICE TED NAKASHIMA

"[There are] electricians, plumbers, draftsmen, mechanics, carpenters, painters, farmers—every trade—men who are able and willing to do all they can to lick the Axis. . . . We're on this side and we want to help. Why won't America let us?"

—from *New Republic* magazine, June 15, 1942

No specific charges were ever filed against Japanese Americans, and no evidence of subversion was ever found. Faced with expulsion, terrified families were forced to sell their homes, businesses, and all their belongings for less than their true value.

Japanese Americans fought for justice, both in the courts and in Congress. The initial results were discouraging. In 1944, the Supreme Court decided, in *Korematsu* v. *United States*, that the government's policy of evacuating Japanese Americans to camps was justified on the basis of "military necessity." (See pages 596–597.) After the war, however, the **Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)** pushed the government to compensate those sent to the camps for their lost property. In 1965, Congress authorized the spending of $38 million for that purpose—less than a tenth of Japanese Americans' actual losses.

The JACL did not give up its quest for justice. In 1978, it called for the payment of reparations, or restitution, to each individual that suffered internment. A decade later, Congress passed, and President Ronald Reagan signed, a bill that promised $20,000 to every Japanese American sent to a relocation camp. When the checks were sent in 1990, a letter from President George Bush accompanied them, in which he stated, "We can never fully right the wrongs of the past. But we can take a clear stand for justice and recognize that serious injustices were done to Japanese Americans during World War II."

SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- **GI Bill of Rights**
- **James Farmer**
- **Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)**
- **internment**
- **Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)**

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES
List the advances and problems in the economy and in civil rights during World War II.

	Advances	Problems
Economy		
Civil Rights		

Which of these advances and problems do you think had the most far-reaching effect? Explain your answer.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. COMPARING
How were the experiences of African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Japanese Americans similar during World War II? How were they different?

4. DEVELOPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
Do you think that the government's policy of evacuating Japanese Americans to camps was justified on the basis of "military necessity"? Explain your answer.

5. ANALYZING EFFECTS
What effect did World War II have on American families? **Think About:**

- the role of women in families and the economy
- the relationship between the races
- the impact of the federal government on society