



WWII

Why did the US get involved?

What were the economic changes?

**How did the roles of women and
African Americans change during
World War II?**

An end to neutrality

Pearl Harbor brought an abrupt end to American isolationism in December 1941.

FDR had already been readying the nation for war though:

Lend-Lease started loans to Britain and France

Many US industries already producing war goods

FDR encouraged an “arsenal for democracy”

1940 FDR had increased size of the navy

Congress passed War Powers Act

Gave FDR unprecedented control over the nation

FDR created:

War production Board (WPB)

National War Labor Board (NWLB)

Office of Price Administration (OPA)

Office of War Mobilization (OWM)

Economic recovery

US becomes the world's largest manufacturer of armaments

300,000 planes

2.6 million machine guns

6 million tons of bombs

91,000 cargo/war ships

WWII lead the US out of the Great Depression

US government spent \$250 million a day

17 million jobs created

Corporate profits up 70%

Real industrial wages up 50%

Closing gap between rich and poor

Unprecedented prosperity for most Americans

Public effects

Shortages of goods created inflation

Rationing of goods common

Increased wages lead to a high percentage of savings

FDR's Revenue Act raised taxes for most Americans

By late 1942 1/3 economy committed to war production

So, it was World War Two which finally dragged the US out of depression.

Women's role

- The role of women changed during World War II.
- With so many men in the military, there were lots of businesses in need of workers!
- Thousands of women went to work in jobs that had usually belonged to men.



What kind of jobs?

- **They worked in places like:**
 - **Farms**
 - **Aircraft building factories**
 - **shipyards**
 - **office jobs**
 - **joined the military**
 - **Pilots**
 - **Mechanics**
 - **Truck drivers**
 - **Office workers**



- **By the end of the war, 1/3 of the people working in U.S. business and industry were women**

- **This was a BIG change in American life!**

Mobilization

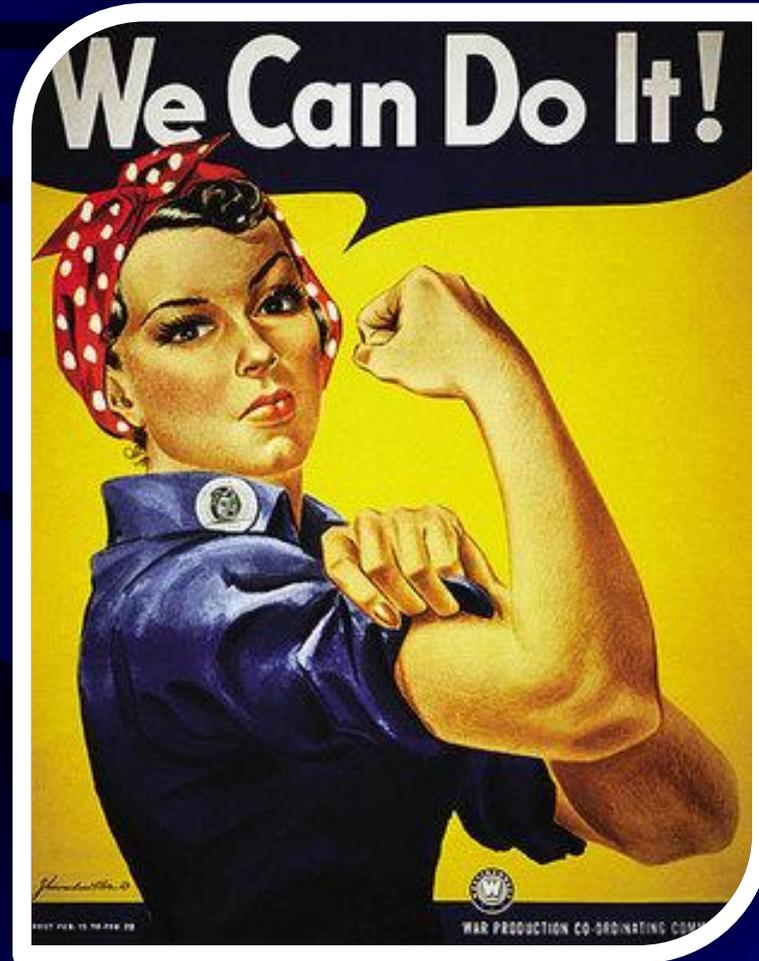


Women were essential to the war mobilization effort. They filled many jobs once reserved for men, such as riveting (above).

Rosie the Riveter

- **Rosie was a fictitious character appearing on government posters encouraging women to help in the war effort**
- **A riveter is a person who inserts and hammers rivets, which are metal devices used to fasten parts together.**
- **Rosie symbolized the many women working in factory jobs.**

Rosie the Riveter



What would Rosie say?

- “We can do it! We can handle the tools and machines just like a guy!”
- “I’d rather stay home than work in a dirty old defense plant.”
- “Sign me up! I’m off to fight the Axis in Europe! I won’t come back till it’s over, over there!”

African Americans' role

- **The need for workers during the war broke down some racial barriers and changed the roles of African Americans, too.**
- **In both the North and South, African Americans began to get good jobs in places like steel mills and shipyards.**

Tuskegee Airmen

- **One group of black men made quite a name for themselves in WWII.**
- **The Tuskegee Airmen was a group of African American pilots trained at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.**
- **Because they were black, they were segregated from the white troops.**
- **They also had to go through a difficult training program.**



- **The Tuskegee Airmen is a group of African American pilots who flew alongside bombers to protect them.**



- **Not one bomber was lost while being escorted by the Tuskegee Airmen!**
- **No other squadron could make this claim during World War II.**



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Source 1

In the armed forces segregation remained until 1948. Black soldiers that enlisted fought in separate battalions, nicknamed the 'Jim Crow' army. In many cases black soldiers ended up doing the menial work and suffered insults from whites, including their commanding officers.

When American soldiers were based in Britain, black and white GIs would come into conflict. Many White American soldiers were upset about the lack of segregation in Britain in pubs, cinemas, buses etc.

Source 2

Many black Americans had high expectations that their effort in the war would improve their rights. "It'll be different after the war" was a common phrase. Over 1 million black people joined the forces.

Over 2 million black people joined in the war effort at home, working in munitions factories and other areas to help defeat the Nazis. The 'Double V' campaign stood for victory over the Nazis and for civil rights.

Source 6:

President Roosevelt passed a law forbidding any company with a contract for war equipment to discriminate against employing black people.

Source 3: from General Eisenhower, Commander In Chief of the Allied Forces in Western Europe.

“The British population lacks the racial consciousness which is so strong in the United States. The small town British girl would go to a movie or a dance with a Negro quite as readily as she would go with anyone else, a practice that our white soldiers could not understand.”

Source 4:

On the home front over 2 million black people worked in the factories for the war effort. These factories were situated in North America and many blacks migrated across America to live and work. This led to overcrowding and housing problems.

In the summer of 1943 more than 47 cities suffered race riots, the worst being in Detroit where 25 black people were killed and hundreds injured.

Source 5:

Membership of the NAACP, the main campaigning black organisation, rose from 50,000 to 450,000 in the four years of the war.

The Selective Service Act of 1940 forbade discrimination in the calling up of black soldiers, but the War Department continued the practice of segregated regiments. This meant that Black and White soldiers fought the same war separately. The Black soldiers were often referred to as the Jim Crow Army.

Miami, Florida hired its first black police officers in 1944.

There was frequent trouble between Black and White Americans in Britain where 1.5 million servicemen were stationed. White southerners could not accept that British pubs and restaurants were open to Black people.

"Along with the desire to fight for equal rights was the feeling that participation in the war effort would be rewarded. If we fight and die for our country, Afro-Americans argued, surely our country will no longer deny us our rights."

Neil Wynn in *The Afro-American and the Second World War*

In the *Chambers v. Florida* court case in 1940, the Supreme Court freed three Black men who were coerced into confessing to a murder.

Hattie McDaniel became the very first African-American to win an Academy Award. She won Best Supporting Actress for her performance as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind*.

In 1946, President Truman proposed an anti-Lynching bill and tried to make it easier for Black people to gain the vote. The US Congress rejected these ideas however.

Truman was able to end segregation in the army, passing this law in 1948.

Benjamin O. Davis, Sr. Was promoted to be the first African-American general in the U.S. Army in 1940.

While African Americans were often relegated to support roles during WWII, often these roles could be exceedingly hazardous. A munitions explosion at Port Chicago, CA, across the bay from San Francisco, claimed the lives of over 200 African Americans in 1944. When some of the workers refused to resume work until conditions were made less hazardous, as many as 50 were tried for mutiny and imprisoned.

Six non-violence activists in the Fellowship of Reconciliation — Bernice Fisher, James Russell Robinson, George Houser, James Farmer, Jr., Joe Guinn and Homer Jack — found the Committee on Racial Equality or CORE in 1942. This later helps strengthen the Civil Rights Movement.

In 1941, the army and air force refused to train black officers and pilots. The navy only employed blacks as kitchen staff (mess-men).

Due to campaigners, 600 black pilots (the Tuskegee Airmen) saw service by 1945. All three services had black officers, including women.

None of aircraft manufacturer Boeing's 41,000 workers was black.

In the **Freeman Field Mutiny**, a series of incidents at a United States Army Air Force base near Seymour, Indiana in 1945, African American members of the 477th Bombardment Group attempted to integrate an all-white officers' club. The mutiny resulted in 162 separate arrests of black officers, some of them twice. Three were court-martialled on relatively minor charges. One was convicted. Later, their actions were declared fair.

When a shipyard in Alabama, under government pressure, employed a dozen black welders, thousands of white welders rioted.