# The Home Front

The Civil War, World War I, and even the New Deal were practice rounds for Big Government. In World War II, it took over almost everything.The **War Production Board**gave it the power to force industry to prepare for war mobilization. The **Labor Disputes Act**gave government the power to resolve labor issues, so that no petty wrangling would interrupt the smooth running of war preparation.

The **Office of Price Administration** and **Office of Economic Stabilization**set maximum and minimum price standards, regulated taxes, and instated **rationing.** This set limits on what Americans could buy—from sugar to gas to butter to nylon stockings. Women started growing **victory gardens**and even buying animals like chickens and goats to give their families extra food. [Here's](http://www.ameshistoricalsociety.org/exhibits/events/ww2ration.jpg) a great image of some ration stamps and booklets.

The **Office of War Information**churned out loads and loads of propaganda. **Hollywood**was enlisted to the cause, creating all sorts of super-patriotic films that made America look like the strongest, happiest, nicest, prettiest, most "swell" country on earth. [Posters](http://bss.sfsu.edu/internment/posters.html) plastered walls, windows, billboards, cars, trains, and every surface that promised not to move for a few hours.

For men, the war brought the **Selective Training and Service Act,**which instituted conscription. Every "able-bodied" man (and boys. Look at this [boyish face](http://chemicaldragon.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/images/AudieMurphyYoungSmiling.4882929_large.jpg) between the age of 21 and 35 was to join the army. Later, this was changed to 18 and 45.

For women, the war brought all sorts of new opportunities. Women could join the **Women's Army Corps (WAC)**and **Women Appointed for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES).**They weren't allowed to fight,but they were allowed to follow the troops and assist with things like communications, transportation, supply and ambulance services. Others went abroad as nurses or, like some Hollywood actors, morale-builders who performed for the troops to remind them of home.

Women at home could join the war effort by going to work. Many accepted jobs that, before the war, had been available only to men. They threw on tar-stained overalls, grabbed hammers, and went to work crawling all over battleships and bombers. This famous [Rosie the Riveter](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/12/We_Can_Do_It%21.jpg)image is classic propaganda promoting this kind of women's work.

It's a little misleading, since most women were still in "womanly" jobs like clerks, typists, or secretaries. However, there were plenty who were unafraid to do some literal "heavy lifting." The unfortunate thing is that this didn't result in any major postwar change. Men came back from the war, smiled at the ladies, and held out their hands for their hammers and overalls. Women, feeling that the end of the war signaled a "return to normalcy," gave them back.

For minorities, the war could be a blessing or a curse. African Americans found new job opportunities in wartime factories—but they too had to give them back after the war. They were also able to serve in the military, but only in segregated units, and not in combat.

Latin Americans were invited back into the U.S. to work in the **Bracero Program**("renting" workers for a while, then sending them back). However, American soldiers often took out their racial anxieties against these young men. Perhaps it was because they were jealous that the braceros were allowed to stay and work, while the soldiers had to risk death in combat. In any case, in the **Zoot Suit Riots**in LA, American soldiers attacked "zoot suiters"—young Latin American men who had long, greased hair, and flashy white suits called "zoots."

The war also provided a cool opportunity for Native Americans. The enemy proved awfully good at code breaking. However, the American government suddenly realized that it had a population with a language so obscure and complex that no one could everfigure it out. The **Navajo Code Talkers**were Navajo Indians who translated code into their own language.

The Germans were totally flummoxed.

A number of Japanese-Americans served in the military, and many distinguished themselves in battle. However, they were rewarded with **Executive Order 9066,**which sent over a hundred thousand Japanese to American concentration (or internment) camps in the west. They weren't anything like Nazi camps, but they were austere, lonely, badly equipped, and miserable.

The return of the GIs sent many women and minorities home from the jobs they had found during the war. It ushered in another period of a "return to normalcy," with a lot of people just wanting to shut themselves off in their homes and go back to nice, quiet lives. The **GI Bill**provided returning soldiers with funding for college educations and loans for new houses and businesses. Suddenly, many more could realize the "American Dream."

American men came home, American women ran out to meet them with open arms, and millions poured into their first, government-subsidized homes. What did that mean? Babies. Tons of them. The end of the war signaled the beginning of the **Baby Boom,**when the American population began to [soar](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f0/U.S.BirthRate.1909.2003.png).

For many, it seemed the Good Times were ready to begin. Yet World War II hadn't erased all conflict and made everyone decide to hold hands and sing "kumbaya." The destruction of Europe created, for a time, a black hole of power. Two nations would step in to fill it: The United States and the Soviet Union. Sadly, they weren't ready to hold hands over the void.

## Sample Questions

1. The purpose of the Atlantic Conference was to

A) discuss the strategy for bringing the United States into the war
B) join the United States to the Allied cause and plan a two-front war
C) discuss the means by which to work around the neutrality acts by providing arms and aid to the Allies
D) plan the ways by which to ensure future peace and prevent World War III
E) discuss the division of the postwar world into communist and capitalist zones

The correct answer is (D).

The ironic thing about the Atlantic Conference was that it discussed plans for a postwar world of freedom and democracy that would never again lead to war…and yet took place four yearsbefore the war even ended. A little presumptuous, wouldn't you say? FDR was sure America would enter soon enough, however, and he wanted the Allies to agree to a Game Plan—a solid, "what-are-we-fighting-this-for" decision. They didn't want another Versailles Treaty disaster happening.

2. By instituting the War Production Board, the government

A) established its right to fully control the wartime economy for the first time
B) ensured that every American industry would be geared solely to wartime production
C) took unprecedented control of American industry
D) established control of wartime propaganda
E) assumed the power to resolve labor issues

The correct answer is (C).

In World War I, the government definitely took major control of the economy—but it didn't have the timeto make an impact. In World War II, the government became a behemoth. It took over American industries, telling them what, how much, and when to make stuff for the war. Of course, not allindustries could make war materials—they still had an American population of civilians to support. However, the government made sure American industry became an American war machine. It alsomanaged propaganda production, and the Labor Disputes Act gave it power over labor disputes.