

Module 8: World War II - 1939 to 1945


Topic 3 Content: Human Resources during World War II Notes

Introduction

Human Resources during World War II

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In the 1940s, the American home front was heavily impacted by the war. Manufacturing plants were retooled to produce military supplies, Americans were encouraged to buy war bonds, and ration supplies. In order to strengthen the military, a draft was instituted. In order to support the men fighting in the war and to earn money, women went to work in the factories. Still fighting for equal rights, minorities enlisted in the military in hopes that they could earn equality with their efforts. In this activity, click each of the panels to learn about how the human resources were utilized during World War II.



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In 1940, the first peacetime draft was instituted by the U.S. government. The draft, also known as the selective service, would select young men at random and require them to join the military. When war broke out, many other young men joined voluntarily. With so many men becoming part of the military, manufacturers had trouble filling all the job openings. Thus, they turned to women and minorities to help make up the difference.



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Women

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Women were encouraged to work in manufacturing and in non-combat military jobs. A fictional character named Rosie the Riveter was even put in the government's propaganda posters to entice women to work in manufacturing. In addition, different branches of the military opened special service units intended specifically for women. The U.S. Navy also created a reserves program nicknamed the WAVES, which stood for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service; and the army created the Women's Army Corp, or WAC. Moreover, the Marines developed the Marine Corps Women's Reserve. All of these military groups served in non-combat roles, which freed up men to serve in combat positions during the war.



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Minorities

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Minorities had an impact on the war. For example, minorities could more easily find manufacturing jobs during the war, compared to beforehand. Many African Americans migrated from rural southern areas to northern and western cities to find jobs in war manufacturing plants. While segregation was still an issue, African Americans and Mexican Americans used the war as an opportunity to continue fighting for equality. Many minorities campaigned for victory in the war, and for equality at home.



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Volunteers

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Many citizens volunteered in support of the war effort. The government encouraged citizens to grow their own fruits and vegetables in "victory gardens." To help conserve gas, citizens voluntarily joined car clubs, where they could share driving responsibilities. The government also encouraged volunteers to collect and donate scrap materials like metal and rubber, which could then be recycled into war materials.



The poster is a vibrant illustration of various fresh vegetables including a large green pea pod, several red tomatoes, yellow onions, a head of lettuce, and several carrots. In the background, a small figure of a soldier is visible in a field, symbolizing the connection between homegrown food and the war effort.

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