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SECTION 1

Mobilizing for War

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

The United States quickly mobilized its economy and armed forces to fight World War II.

Key Terms and Names

cost-plus, Reconstruction Finance Corporation, Liberty ship, War Production Board, Selective Service and Training Act, disfranchise

Reading Strategy

Organizing As you read about American mobilization for World War II, complete a graphic organizer like the one below by filling in the agencies the U.S. government created to mobilize the nation's economy for war.



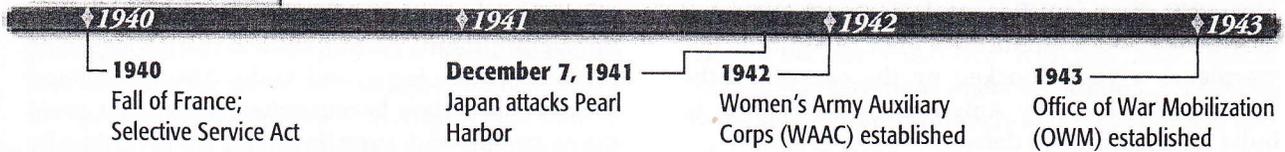
Reading Objectives

- **Explain** how the United States mobilized its economy.
- **Describe** the issues involved in raising an American army.

Section Theme

Individual Action The success of the United States in mobilizing for war was due largely to the cooperation of individual American citizens.

Preview of Events



★ An American Story ★



Franklin D. Roosevelt

Shortly after 1:30 P.M. on December 7, 1941, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox phoned President Roosevelt at the White House. "Mr. President," Knox said, "it looks like the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor." A few minutes later, Admiral Harold Stark, chief of naval operations, phoned and confirmed the attack.

As Eleanor Roosevelt passed by the president's study, she knew immediately something very bad had happened:

"All the secretaries were there, two telephones were in use, the senior military aides were on their way with messages." Eleanor also noticed that President Roosevelt remained calm: "His reaction to any event was always to be calm. If it was something that was bad, he just became almost like an iceberg, and there was never the slightest emotion that was allowed to show."

Turning to his wife, President Roosevelt expressed anger at the Japanese: "I never wanted to have to fight this war on two fronts. We haven't got the Navy to fight in both the Atlantic and Pacific. . . . We will have to build up the Navy and the Air Force and that will mean we will have to take a good many defeats before we can have a victory."

—adapted from *No Ordinary Time*

Converting the Economy

Although the difficulties of fighting a global war troubled the president, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was not worried. Churchill knew that victory in modern war depended on a nation's industrial power. He compared the American economy



to a gigantic boiler: "Once the fire is lighted under it there is no limit to the power it can generate."

Churchill was right. The industrial output of the United States during the war astounded the rest of the world. American workers were twice as productive as German workers and five times more productive than Japanese workers. American war production turned the tide in favor of the Allies. In less than four years, the United States achieved what no other nation had ever done—it fought and won a two-front war against two powerful military empires, forcing each to surrender unconditionally.

The United States was able to expand its war production so rapidly after the attack on Pearl Harbor in part because the government had begun to mobilize the economy before the country entered the war. When the German blitzkrieg swept into France in May 1940, President Roosevelt declared a national emergency and announced a plan to build 50,000 warplanes a year. Shocked by the success of the German attack, many Americans were willing to build up the country's defenses.

Roosevelt and his advisers believed that the best way to rapidly mobilize the economy was to give industry an incentive to move quickly. As Henry Stimson, the new secretary of war, wrote in his diary: "If you are going to try and go to war, or to prepare for war, in a capitalist country, you have got to let business make money out of the process or business won't work."

Normally when the government needed military equipment, it would ask companies to bid for the contract, but that system was too slow in wartime. Instead of asking for bids, the government signed *cost-plus* contracts. The government agreed to pay a company whatever it cost to make a product plus a guaranteed percentage of the costs as profit. Under the cost-plus system, the more a company produced and the faster it did the work, the more money it would make. The system was not cheap, but it did get war materials produced quickly and in quantity.

Although cost-plus convinced many companies to convert to war production, others could not afford to reequip their factories to make military goods. To convince more companies to convert, Congress gave new authority to the **Reconstruction Finance Corporation** (RFC). The RFC, a government agency set up during the Depression, was now permitted to make loans to companies to help them cover the cost of converting to war production.

Reading Check

Analyzing What government policies helped American industry to produce large quantities of war materials?

American Industry Gets the Job Done

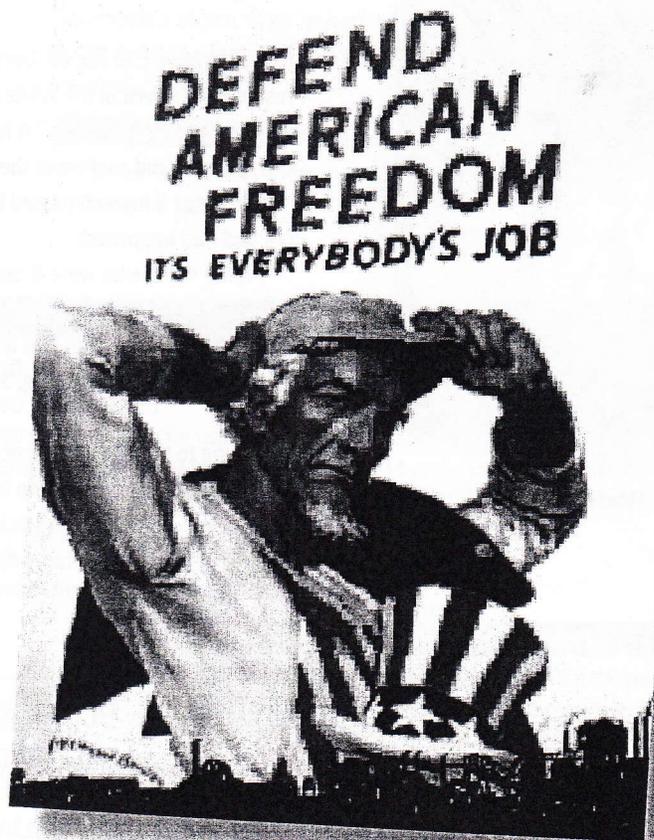
By the fall of 1941, much had already been done to prepare the economy for war, but it was still only partially mobilized. Although many companies were producing military equipment, most still preferred to make consumer goods. The Depression was ending and sales were rising. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, however, changed everything. By the summer of 1942, almost all major industries and some 200,000 companies had converted to war production. Together they made the nation's wartime "miracle" possible.

ECONOMICS

Tanks Replace Cars The automobile industry was uniquely suited to the mass production of military equipment. Automobile factories began to produce trucks, jeeps, and tanks. This was critical in modern warfare because the country that could move troops and supplies most quickly usually

History Through Art

WW II Posters War posters were designed to help encourage and inform the American public. How would you have felt to see a poster such as this one?



won the battle. As General George C. Marshall, chief of staff for the United States Army, observed:

“The greatest advantage the United States enjoyed on the ground in the fighting was . . . the jeep and the two-and-a-half ton truck. These are the instruments that moved and supplied United States troops in battle, while the German army . . . depended on animal transport. . . . The United States, profiting from the mass production achievements of its automotive industry . . . had mobility that completely out-classed the enemy.”

—quoted in *Miracle of World War II*

Automobile factories did not just produce vehicles. They also built artillery, rifles, mines, helmets, pontoon bridges, cooking pots, and dozens of other pieces of military equipment. Henry Ford launched one of the most ambitious projects when he created an assembly line for the enormous B-24 bomber known as “the Liberator” at Willow Run Airport near Detroit. By the end of the war, the factory had built over 8,600 aircraft. Overall, the automobile industry produced nearly one-third of the military equipment manufactured during the war.

Building the Liberty Ships Henry Kaiser’s shipyards more than matched Ford’s achievement in aircraft production. Kaiser’s shipyards built many ships, but they were best known for their production of Liberty ships. The Liberty ship was the basic cargo ship used during the war. Most Liberty ships were welded instead of riveted. Welded ships were cheap, easy to build, and very hard to sink compared to riveted ships.

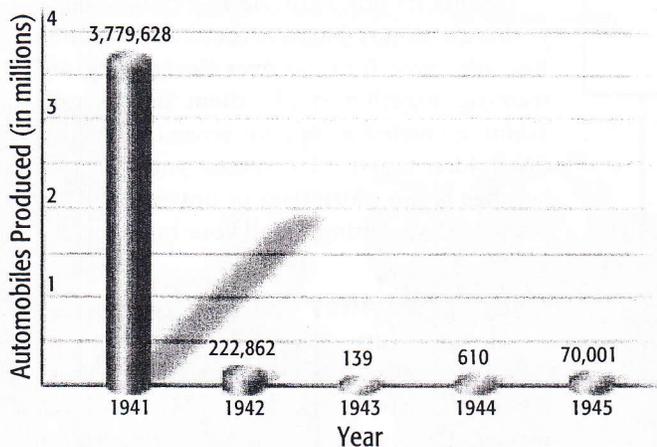
When a riveted ship was hit, the rivets often came loose, causing the ship to fall apart and sink. A welded ship’s hull was fused into one solid piece of steel. A torpedo might blow a hole in it, but the hull would not come apart. A damaged Liberty ship could often get back to port, make repairs, and return to service.

The War Production Board As American companies converted to war production, many business leaders became frustrated with the mobilization process. Government agencies argued constantly about supplies and contracts and whose orders had the highest priority.

After Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt tried to improve the system by creating the **War Production Board** (WPB). He gave the WPB the authority to set

Switching to Wartime Production

Automobile Production, 1941—1945



Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970.*

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priorities and production goals and to control the distribution of raw materials and supplies. Almost immediately, the WPB clashed with the military. Military agencies continued to sign contracts without consulting with the WPB. Finally, in 1943, Roosevelt established the **Office of War Mobilization (OWM)** to settle arguments between the different agencies.

Reading Check Explaining What military need led to the production of Liberty ships?

Building an Army

Converting factories to war production was only part of the mobilization process. If the United States was actually going to fight and win the war, the country also needed to build up its armed forces.

Creating an Army Within days of Germany's attack on Poland, President Roosevelt expanded the army to 227,000 soldiers. After France surrendered to Germany in June 1940, two members of Congress

introduced the **Selective Service and Training Act**, a plan for the first peacetime draft in American history. Before the spring of 1940, college students, labor unions, isolationists, and most members of Congress had opposed a peacetime draft. Opinions changed after Germany defeated France. In September Congress approved the draft by a wide margin.

You're in the Army Now At first the flood of draftees overwhelmed the army's training facilities. Many recruits had to live in tents and use temporary facilities. The army also endured equipment shortages. Troops carried sticks representing guns, threw stones simulating grenades, and practiced maneuvers with trucks carrying signs that read "TANK."

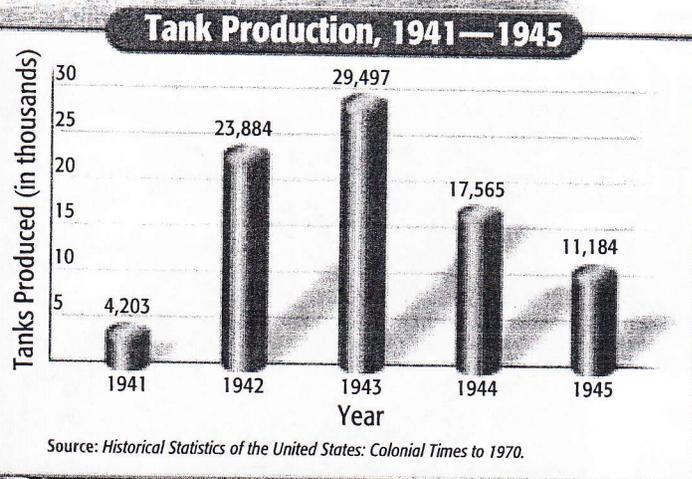
New draftees were initially sent to a reception center, where they were given physical exams and injections against smallpox and typhoid. The draftees were then issued uniforms, boots, and whatever equipment was available. The clothing bore the label "G.I.," meaning "Government Issue," which is why American soldiers were called "GIs."

After taking aptitude tests, recruits were sent to basic training for eight weeks. They learned how to handle weapons, load backpacks, read maps, pitch tents, and dig trenches. Trainees drilled and exercised constantly and learned how to work as a team.

After the war, many veterans complained that basic training had been useless. Soldiers were rushed through too quickly, and the physical training left them too tired to learn the skills they needed. A sergeant in Italy told a reporter for *Yank* magazine that during a recent battle, a new soldier had held up his rifle and yelled, "How do I load this thing?"

Despite its problems, basic training helped to break down barriers between soldiers. Recruits came from all over the country, and training together made them into a unit. Training created a "special sense of kinship," one soldier noted. "The reason you storm the beaches is not patriotism or bravery. It's that sense of not wanting to fail your buddies."

A Segregated Army Although basic training promoted unity, most recruits did not encounter Americans from every part of society. At the start of the war, the U.S. military was completely segregated. White recruits did not train alongside African Americans. African Americans had separate barracks, latrines, mess halls, and recreational facilities.



Graph Skills

- Interpreting Graphs** How does the number of tanks produced relate to the number of automobiles produced in the previous graph?
- Making Generalizations** How do these two graphs illustrate the commitment of the United States to winning the war?

Once trained, African Americans were organized into their own military units, but white officers were generally in command of them. Most military leaders also wanted to keep African American soldiers out of combat and assigned them to construction and supply units.

Pushing for "Double V" Some African Americans did not want to support the war. As one student at a black college noted: "The Army Jim Crows us. . . . Employers and labor unions shut us out. Lynchings continue. We are disenfranchised . . . and spat upon. What more could Hitler do to us than that?" By *disfranchised*, the student meant that African Americans were often denied their right to vote. Despite the bitterness, most African Americans agreed with African American writer Saunders Redding that they should support their country:

☞ There are many things about this war I do not like . . . yet I believe in the war. . . . We know that whatever the mad logic of [Hitler's] New Order there is no hope for us under it. The ethnic theories of the Hitler 'master folk' admit of no chance of freedom. . . . This is a war to keep [people] free. The struggle to broaden and lengthen the road of freedom—our own private and important war to enlarge freedom here in America—will come later. . . . I believe in this war because I believe in America. I believe in what America professes to stand for. . . . ☞☞

—quoted in *America at War*

Picturing History

Tuskegee Airmen The Tuskegee Airmen distinguished themselves in combat, yet they were not allowed to serve in integrated units. In what theater of the war did the Tuskegee Airmen serve?



Benjamin O. Davis

Many African American leaders combined patriotism with protest. In 1941 the National Urban League set two goals for its members: "(1) To promote effective participation of [African Americans] in all phases of the war effort. . . . (2) To formulate plans for building the kind of United States in which we wish to live after the war is over. . . ."

The *Pittsburgh Courier*, a leading African American newspaper, embraced these ideas and launched what it called the "**Double V**" campaign. African Americans, the paper argued, should join the war effort in order to achieve a double victory—a victory over Hitler's racism abroad and a victory over racism at home. If the United States wanted to portray itself as a defender of democracy, Americans might be willing to end discrimination in their own country.

President Roosevelt knew that African American voters had played an important role in his election victories. Under pressure from African American leaders, he ordered the army air force, navy, and marines to begin recruiting African Americans, and he directed the army to put African Americans into combat. He also appointed Colonel **Benjamin O. Davis**, the highest-ranking African American officer in the U.S. Army, to the rank of brigadier general.

African Americans in Combat In response to the president's order, the army air force created the 99th Pursuit Squadron, an African American unit that trained in Tuskegee, Alabama. These African American fighter pilots became known as the **Tuskegee Airmen**. After General Davis urged the military to put African Americans into combat, the 99th Pursuit Squadron was sent to the Mediterranean in April 1943. The squadron played an important role during the Battle of Anzio in Italy.

African Americans also performed well in the army. The all-African American 761st Tank Battalion was commended for its service during the Battle of the Bulge. Fighting in northwest Europe, African Americans in the 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion won 8 Silver Stars for distinguished service, 28 Bronze Stars, and 79 Purple Hearts.

Although the military did not end all segregation during the war, it did integrate military bases in 1943 and steadily expanded the role of African Americans within the armed forces. These successes paved the way for President Truman's decision to fully integrate the military in 1948.

Women Join the Armed Forces As in World War I, women joined the armed forces. The army enlisted women for the first time, although they were barred from combat. Instead, as the army's recruiting slogan suggested, women were needed to "release a man for combat." Many jobs in the army were administrative and clerical. By assigning women to these jobs, more men would be available for combat.

Congress first allowed women in the military in May 1942, when it established the **Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC)** and appointed **Oveta Culp Hobby**, an official with the War Department, to serve as its first director. Although pleased about the establishment of the WAAC, many women were unhappy that it was an auxiliary corps and not part of the regular army. A little over a year later, the army replaced the WAAC with the **Women's Army Corps (WAC)**. Director Hobby was assigned the rank of colonel. "You have a debt and a date," Hobby explained to those training to be the nation's first women officers. "A debt to democracy, a date with destiny." The Coast Guard, the navy, and the marines quickly followed the army and set up their own women's units. In addition to serving in these new organizations, another 68,000 women served as nurses in the army and navy.

Americans Go to War The Americans who went to war in 1941 were not well trained. Most of the troops had no previous military experience. Most of the officers had never led men in combat. The armed forces mirrored many of the tensions and prejudices of American society. Despite these challenges, the United States armed forces performed well in battle.



Picturing History

Women Pilots General Barney M. Giles inspects the guard of honor of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas. Many pilots wore Filinella patches (right) for good luck. Why do you think the army refused to allow women to fly in combat?

Of all the major powers involved in the war, the United States suffered the fewest casualties in combat.

American troops never adopted the spit-and-polish style of the Europeans. When they arrived at the front, Americans' uniforms were usually a mess, and they rarely marched in step. When one Czechoslovakian was asked what he thought of the sloppy, unprofessional American soldiers, he commented, "They walk like free men."

Reading Check Summarizing How did the status of women and African Americans in the armed forces change during the war?

SECTION | ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

- Define:** cost-plus, Liberty ship, disfranchise.
- Identify:** Reconstruction Finance Corporation, War Production Board, Selective Service and Training Act.
- Describe** the role of the OWM in the war production effort.

Reviewing Themes

- Individual Action** Why do you think African Americans were willing to fight in the war even though they suffered discrimination in American society?

Critical Thinking

- Evaluating** How effectively did American industry rally behind the war effort? Give examples to support your opinion.
- Categorizing** Use a graphic organizer like the one below to list the challenges facing the United States as it mobilized for war.



Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Graphs** Study the graphs of automobile and tank production on pages 614 and 615. Why did automobile production decrease while tank production increased?

Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Take on the role of a draftee who has just completed the first week of basic training. Write a letter to your parents telling them about basic training and what you hope to accomplish once the training is over.