

The Home Front: Economic and Social Impact of WWII on the USA

Reference: Brinkley, pp. 727-739

War and civilian mobilization had direct and indirect, short and long-term consequences on American society.

End of the Depression:

By 1941-42, huge gov't spending created a wartime industrial expansion.

By 1945, gov't was spending \$100 billion.

GNP rose from \$9 billion in 1941 to \$166 billion in 1945.

Migration to the West:

Movement of population to the North from the South and the East to the West.

Development of shipbuilding and aircraft industries on the west coast, especially in California (to fight war against Japan in the Pacific first).

Los Angeles becomes an industrial center.

Workforce Composition:

Labor shortages caused by 15 million men and women taken up by military service.

Total workforce increased by 20% - people who had not worked previously were being hired - women, minorities, young and old

Women workers increased by 60% - many took industrial jobs, eg. Rosie the Riveter, but were paid less than men.

But most women worked in services, especially gov't work.

Black women had the most menial and lowest paying jobs.

One third of **Youth** (teenagers) had jobs by the end of the war, which led to lower high school attendance rates.

Minorities:

Blacks migrated from the rural South to industrial cities in the North and West to find better paying jobs and improve their overall living conditions.

But this led to racial tensions – 1943 race riot in Detroit left 34 dead.

There were early signs of the modern civil rights movement: Black labor unions opposed segregation in public facilities and discrimination in hiring and wages.

US Army began to integrate units during the war, but not fully achieved until 1946.

Mexican-American migration increased during the war – 1942 Bracero Program was an agreement between US and Mexico to admit generally unskilled contract laborers (Braceros) into the US for a limited period to do migrant farm work (mostly) and some industrial jobs.

Helped to alleviate labor shortages in key industries (agriculture)

Tensions in L.A. 1943 'zoot suit' riots when US sailors attacked Mexican Americans

Internment of over **100,000 Japanese-Americans** after attack on Pearl Harbor

Overall impact:

Wartime prosperity due to high demand for workers and higher wages led to increased marriage rates and beginning of the 'baby boom' by 1946.

G.I. Bill: US gov't provided money to returning veterans to further their higher education

Avoided immediate post-war labor surplus and unemployment

Created educated workforce and long-term prosperity (affluent society of the 1950s and 60s)