World War II: The Home Front

“But there is one front and one battle where everyone in the United States -- every man, woman, and child -- is in action, and will be privileged to remain in action throughout this war. That front is right here at home, in our daily lives, (and) in our daily tasks. Here at home everyone will have the privilege of making whatever self-denial is necessary, not only to supply our fighting men, but to keep the economic structure of our country fortified and secure during the war and after the war. This will require, of course, the abandonment not only of luxuries but of many other creature comforts.”

F.D.R. APRIL 28, 1942

Fear of Spies

The fear of spies in the US was growing. People on the homefront were cautioned not to talk about troop movements or locations, as you never knew when a spy might be listening, or word would get out on the radio or in newspapers accidentally. Wartime restrictions were also imposed on civil liberties. A real black mark on the American home front was the Executive Order No. 9066 signed by Roosevelt in 1942. This ordered those of Japanese-American descent to be removed to "Relocation Camps." This law eventually forced close to 120,000 Japanese-Americans in the western part of the United States to leave their homes and move to one of ten 'relocation' centers or to other facilities across the nation. Most of those relocated were American citizens by birth. They were forced to sell their homes, most for next to nothing, and take only what they could carry.

Fred Korematsu refused to obey the wartime order to leave his home and report to a relocation camp for Japanese Americans. He was arrested and convicted. After losing in the Court of Appeals, he appealed to the United States Supreme Court, challenging the constitutionality of the deportation order. The Supreme Court upheld the order.
World War II: The Home Front

“But there is one front and one battle where everyone in the United States -- every man, woman, and child -- is in action, and will be privileged to remain in action throughout this war. That front is right here at home, in our daily lives, (and) in our daily tasks. Here at home everyone will have the privilege of making whatever self-denial is necessary, not only to supply our fighting men, but to keep the economic structure of our country fortified and secure during the war and after the war. This will require, of course, the abandonment not only of luxuries but of many other creature comforts.”

F.D.R. APRIL 28, 1942

Women At War

When America went to war, women went to work in defense plants and at shipyards doing jobs that before would have been performed by men. The millions of job openings in defense could not be filled without the help of women who were motivated by their patriotism and by the good pay these defense jobs provided. The government launched a campaign to get more women into the workforce. A song titled "Rosie the Riveter" was written and a famous artist drew her on the cover of a popular magazine called the Saturday Evening Post. The term "Rosie the Riveter" was created because jobs such as riveting, usually seen as men's work, were now being done by women.

During WWII, more than six million women joined the workforce. Newsweek magazine reported: “They [women] are in the shipyards, lumber mills, steel mills, foundries. They are welders, electricians, mechanics, and even boilermakers. They operate streetcars, buses, cranes, and tractors. Women engineers are working in the drafting rooms and women physicists and chemists in the great industrial laboratories.” Three million women also served in the Red Cross as volunteers. Millions of women worked for the Civilian Defense as air-raid wardens, fire watchers, and auxiliary police. Women volunteers also spent hours scanning the sky with binoculars, looking out for enemy planes.

Thousands of women also joined the military in units such as the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS), Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), Women’s Army Corps (WAC), and Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP).
World War II: The Home Front

“But there is one front and one battle where everyone in the United States -- every man, woman, and child -- is in action, and will be privileged to remain in action throughout this war. That front is right here at home, in our daily lives, (and) in our daily tasks. Here at home everyone will have the privilege of making whatever self-denial is necessary, not only to supply our fighting men, but to keep the economic structure of our country fortified and secure during the war and after the war. This will require, of course, the abandonment not only of luxuries but of many other creature comforts.”

F.D.R. APRIL 28, 1942

Rationing

When the U.S. entered the war, President Roosevelt realized there would have to be limits on some things, so he created the Office of Price Administration. These restrictions would prevent people from buying as many of one item as they could, leaving other people with nothing. To prevent people from hoarding things, the government developed rationing rules. Each person in a household was given a ration book with specially numbered stamps inside. The ration books and the color of the stamps changed with each new issue.

Some foods were in short supply in the United States during WWII. Many factories that made food products had to convert part of their operations to making defense items for the war. Some food items such as fats, were needed in making the glycerin that was an important ingredient in explosives. Some foods that were imported from other countries across the ocean were not available because the ships that transported them were liable to be attacked by German or Japanese subs. When families cooked rationed food like bacon or meat, they were supposed to save the grease in a can and bring it back to the butcher. The extra glycerin in fat was then used to make explosives. To serve as an incentive, turning in salvaged fats earned you extra ration points. When the first ration book was issued, only sugar was rationed.

By 1943, butter, meat, butter and several canned goods were also included. You were only allowed to use a certain number of stamps per month, but no more. Rationing was a way to make sure that everyone in the country had a fair chance at getting hard to find items. The stamps did not allow people to get the food for free; they were only the permission to buy a certain kind of food. The government encouraged people to plant “Victory Gardens.” An estimated 20 million Americans planted gardens in their backyards and empty lots. These “victory gardens” helped to ease food shortages. The government encouraged families to be patriotic and can their own fruits and vegetables too. This saved the commercial canned goods for the troops.
World War II: The Home Front

“But there is one front and one battle where everyone in the United States -- every man, woman, and child -- is in action, and will be privileged to remain in action throughout this war. That front is right here at home, in our daily lives, (and) in our daily tasks. Here at home everyone will have the privilege of making whatever self-denial is necessary, not only to supply our fighting men, but to keep the economic structure of our country fortified and secure during the war and after the war. This will require, of course, the abandonment not only of luxuries but of many other creature comforts.”

F.D.R. APRIL 28, 1942

The Cost of War

The US government spent a lot of money during WWII. To help pay for the war, Americans were encouraged to buy war bonds. The government and even radio and movie stars worked hard to convince people to buy war bonds. These bonds were kind of like loans to the government. People would buy bonds and the government promised to return them with interest after ten years or more. During the war, the government needed all the extra money it could get to help pay for war equipment. War bonds or defense bonds were bought by purchasing stamps for 10 or 15 cents each. The stamps were then pasted into booklets that could be turned in when full for a $25 war bond. War stamps and bonds were not only a way for the government to raise money, but a way for every person to participate in the war effort. It became very patriotic to buy bonds and stamps.

The government paid car manufacturers to make army trucks, airplanes, aircraft engines, radar units, machine guns, land mine detectors and other machinery needed for the armed forces. For example, Ford made jeeps that were used by the army. Rationing enabled scarce materials to be available for the armed forces and made an important contribution to our winning the war. New cars were simply not available during the war. By February 1942, all car production had stopped and didn’t begin again until late 1945 after the end of the war.

By the time the war ended, American factories had produced 299,000 airplanes, 102,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, 372,000 artillery pieces, 47 million tons of artillery ammunitions, 87,620 warships, and 44 billion rounds of small-arms ammunition. Time magazine called America’s wartime production a miracle.