

TAHPDX: TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

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HISTORICAL TOPIC: World War II on the Home Front

World War II had enormous impacts on American society and national economic growth. The location of defense spending jump-started the development of the future Sunbelt. The huge demand for defense workers altered gender roles and brought racial and ethnic tensions to the fore. The mobilization of science laid the ground work for the powerful alliance of industry, government, and higher education that shaped the last half of the 20th century.

In the Pacific Northwest, war production transformed both Seattle (aircraft) and Portland (shipbuilding). By examining the experiences of war workers, teachers and students can understand the ways in which that experience still shapes the character of northwest communities today. Teachers interested in the role of science and technology in American history can also utilize the experience of Manhattan Project workers and scientists who produced plutonium at Hanford, Washington, and explore the social and environmental consequences of the war effort.

*The WWII: Home Front topic contains the subtopics listed below. Each subtopic includes a narrative with highlighted text **[resources]** and other notations indicating that additional support material is available including primary documents, maps, spreadsheet data and websites.*

*To view or download the resources go to the TAHPDX: Teaching American History Website and use the links on the **HISTORY TOPICS [WWII: Home Front]** page or use the **QUICK NAVIGATION** pages.*

Search "TAHPDX" on the internet or access the website via the link on the Community Geography page at <http://www.pdx.edu/ims/community-geography.html>.

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1. WWII and the Home Front: Peoples on the Move (contains dramatic vignettes)
2. Population, Labor & Education in Portland Oregon during WWII
3. Vanport – More Than Just the Nation’s Largest Wartime Housing Project
4. Women Workers on the Homefront During WWII
5. World War II and the Japanese Internment

1. Context

Background

The United States has a history of distrusting large, powerful governments. The leading example is of course the American Revolution itself, a reaction to a central power’s attempt to impose taxes and other forms of control over the thirteen colonies. Suspicion of federal power remained high during the nation’s infancy, though in 1789 a new constitution, granting much broader power to the federal government, arrived. But southerners and Democrats in general still tended to favor states’ rights and limited government.

The Republican Party’s ascendancy after 1860 served to both nullify succession and make the government a much more active partner with private business—in subsidizing railroads through granting them federal land, for example. As business grew more powerful in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reformers in both parties, together with more radical groups, like the Populists, advocated for closer governmental regulation of big business on the local, state,

and national levels—though large corporations often had a great deal of influence over the nature of that regulation. Meanwhile, states increasingly impinged on the lives of ordinary people—by mandating more and more schooling for their children, for example.

World War I

World War I gave the federal government unprecedented scope and power. It stifled dissent, boosted taxes, and greatly expanded its bureaucracy to oversee the economy, working much more closely than before with private industry.

In the Pacific Northwest the war quickened the economy in several respects. Europeans' need for food stimulated agricultural growth and ship building boomed, particularly when the federal government started ordering vessels and made heavy expenditures especially in Tacoma, Washington. The European conflict prompted an increased demand for airplanes and therefore spruce wood which was both light and strong. Oregon's spruce production doubled between 1914 and 1917, when the federal government took over its production.

After the war federal and many state governments became more conservative and, in general, governments took a less active role in private business affairs. A major exception was road building, as state governments (and therefore tax payers) believed that dependable roads were worth considerable public investment given the booming automobile industry.

The Great Depression and Individuals

The Great Depression, which stretched a decade after 1929, made government, particularly the federal government, a much more intimate part of just about everyone's life. The unemployed sought relief and employment from the government. Farmers began to receive crop subsidy payments. The federal government also created a social security program for retirees and established that workers had the right to form unions and to negotiate with employers. For ordinary people, turning to the government in times of need became an established idea that intermingled in complex ways with the individualism that characterized American life.

The Great Depression and Big Business

President Roosevelt liked to think that his New Deal during the Great Depression had saved big business, and he might have been right. He hoped that his most ambitious program, the National Recovery Administration, would bring government and other sectors of the economy together to stabilize prices, wages, output, and other economic variables. The program collapsed under the weight of manifold and confusing regulations, but other measures were much more successful and durable. Large construction projects of programs like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) worked closely with the private sector to construct dams and other edifices. On these projects and numerous smaller ones New Deal bureaucrats preferred to work with a few, larger businesses than with many smaller ones. Larger farmers and ranchers, as well, received money for keeping land out of production. Consequently, tenant farmers and landless ranchers often

found themselves squeezed out of business by the very New Deal that had promised to look out for the “little guy.”

Note: See the historical topic <The Great Depression> on the TAHPDX: Great Decisions in U.S. History website for resources on the New Deal and Depression-era projects.

Consequences

Nevertheless, the New Deal was a landmark in reducing the average American’s distrust of federal power. Millions of ordinary citizens felt that their President and the government he headed had taken a personal interest in their plight, and they awarded Roosevelt’s Democratic Party with large pluralities across most of the nation throughout the Depression-era election cycles. Conservatives like former President Herbert Hoover, however, felt the New Deal eroded American self-sufficiency – the goose that lay the golden egg of American prosperity. But most Americans now agreed that government could and should take an active role in weaving a safety net for Americans who might fall victim to unemployment, accident, or simply old age.

PDF Chart: *Political Divisions of the U.S. Congress (1899-2009)*, a bar chart showing the divisions between the Democrats, Republicans, and other parties in the House and Senate from 1899 to the present.

Less noticed, but perhaps just as significant, was the growing coordination of big government and big business. Many millions of dollars flowed from the former to the latter, and government bureaucrats and their business counterparts worked more closely than ever before to build infrastructure and otherwise coordinate the economy.

World War II would bring an unprecedented level of government activism. But, the groundwork had already been laid and the role of government in the nation’s economy, especially, had already grown dramatically by the 1930s.

2. World War II: The Social Impact

Urbanization

The Great Depression had halted the nation’s long trend toward urbanization. World War II re-established it with a vengeance, and it did so largely because of measures taken by the federal government. The war itself essentially restored American prosperity by stimulating international demand for American industrial and agricultural products in the late 1930s, and industrial growth of course promoted migration to cities. The U.S. entry into the war (in late-1941) quickened this movement for several reasons. First, many thousands of service men were being trained or stationed in or near urban areas. To be sure, many of the camps were in rural areas. But many of these camps consisted of several thousand people at any given time and therefore became significant, if short-lived, urban areas in their own right.

More importantly, the federal government provided the funding for massive defense factories that employed thousands of people and paid relatively high wages. Coming on the heels of the Great Depression, the presence of seemingly unlimited numbers of good-paying jobs drew people of modest means from across the country to the cities where these projects were concentrated. The federal government also provided funds for housing projects and even entirely new cities that it built from scratch.

The result was an unprecedented urban boom that literally multiplied the size of many small cities and filled even larger ones to the bursting point with workers, servicemen, and their families. City officials commonly complained that their federal counterparts simply shoveled workers into cities with little thought to how this would impact housing, schools, utilities, and transportation. Federal officials countered that local leaders were failing to plan for growth that was essential to winning the war.

PDF Maps: Percent Urban Population (1920-40); Urban Population Increase (1930-40).

Children

The home front transformed the lives of many children. Millions lived apart from fathers who served in the military. Many also saw less of their mothers, as the federal government was now encouraging even the mothers of young children to work outside the home. Daycares appeared, but the great majority of working wives relied on family, friends, or neighbors for child care—or simply left their children to fend for themselves. Many of these children, moreover, had moved with their families to new, unfamiliar homes. Children of all ages often found themselves both unsupervised and in novel surroundings. For adolescents, this autonomy brought much more freedom than before and many teens left school to join the service or to work for unusually high wages in the factories and other supportive industries. Others explored their newfound freedoms; adults worried about wartime delinquency and promiscuity. Thus, the war brought both freedom and vulnerability to many children.

Web Resource: *Life on the Home Front: Oregon Responds to WWII* (from the Oregon State Archives at <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/exhibits/ww2/life/delinquent.htm>). Includes great cartoons showing juvenile delinquency and links to a few interesting primary documents.

Marriage

Although some women served overseas, in groups like the Women's Auxiliary Corps, they were much more likely to stay in the United States than were their male counterparts. But many worked outside the home, lived away from their husbands who were serving in the military, or both. Women made up nearly half of the work force in many defense factories (45 percent of the work force in Los Angeles aircraft factories, for example), though turnover was rapid. The defense industry offered jobs that paid much more than all but a few working women were accustomed to making. Together with husbands' absences, this encouraged more and more independence among war-time wives who were essentially forced to make decisions ordinarily

reserved for their husbands—all under the pressure of rationing, shortages of food and clothing, and often overcrowded housing in unfamiliar places. Complained a New Mexico housewife: “almost everyone in town is doing their own furnace tending and I certainly am having a lesson in applied mechanics . . . I am learning all about coal stokers, hot water heaters, wells and pumps, together with frozen pipes.”

The war also prompted a rise in both marriage and divorce rates. Prosperity played a role in this, but so did the war’s pervasive sense of uncertainty. Young people were thrown together for a few days or weeks or months, fell in love, married, then lived apart for much longer than they had even known each other. Some husbands died; those who returned home often found that both they and their wives had undergone dramatic changes in a few short years.

Map Resources: (see TAH_1 unit)

Web Resources: (women & WWII)

African Americans

Perhaps no group benefited more during the war than African Americans. The most obvious example was economic: war industries were so desperate for competent workers that they were willing to pay unprecedented wages to minorities (though African Americans, like white women, were paid less than white men for doing the same work, and they tended to fill the lowest rungs of the occupational ladder). The chance for good-paying jobs drew African Americans out of the South to major urban areas and played a major role in spreading blacks across the United States. The number living on the West Coast increased several fold.

Map Resource: African-American in-migration to Vanport City, Oregon (1944)

On the other hand, these newcomers were often made to feel unwelcome. Whites fretted openly about the consequences of growing numbers of African Americans in their communities, and blacks found that although the North, Midwest, and West were less prejudiced than the South, they still practiced racism in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Black newcomers to San Francisco, whose African-American community increased by 600 percent, found 80 to 90 percent of the city’s neighborhoods were closed to them, a combination of developments that caused severe overcrowding in black communities.

But the nature of World War II, billed in the United States as a battle against fascism, gave African American leaders a lever with which to demand equality. It was not just that America needed black bodies for the armed services and military production. The war itself could be understood as a war against notions of racial superiority across the globe. Hence African American leaders such as **A. Philip Randolph** [[pdf resource](#)] were able to speak of a “**Double-V**” **campaign** [[pdf resource](#)] against racism abroad and at home. A race riot in Detroit left thirty-four dead, and blacks—particularly those who had served in the military—were less and less willing to accept second-class citizenship.

Web resource: For an excellent biographical account of the life of A. Philip Randolph (including pictures) visit the George Meany Memorial Archive at <http://www.georgemeany.org/archives/apr.html>.

Web resource: The A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum (<http://www.aphiliprandolphmuseum.com/>)

PDF Document: The “Double V” Campaign in World War II (article in the *Journal of Social History*)

Native Americans

Native Americans left their reservations in large numbers for the first time during the war. Like other Americans they left to serve in the military or, more commonly, work in a defense plant. South Dakota’s Rosebud Reservation lost one fifth of its residents during the war.

But the insularity of reservation life made these experiences particularly consequential. Veterans and war workers would return (and most did return) to their reservations with a new political awareness of the nation and of Indians. Indeed, many leaders of the post-World War II Indian-rights movements would be veterans of World War II, men who in meeting indigenous people from across the United States had gained a sense of being not just Hopi or Chippewa, but of being “Indian,” of belonging to a race that transcended tribal identities.

PDF Resource: Native Americans in World War II (excerpted from *Army History: the Professional Bulletin of Army History*, No. 35 Fall 1995).

Look at WWII unit for resources.

Mexicans and Mexican-Americans

Between one third and one half of the Mexican Americans living in the United States left for Mexico during the Depression, as local, state, and federal officials forced or strongly encouraged them to leave the United States. The Oregon Bureau of Labor, for example, ordered the Southern Pacific Railroad to fire its Mexican track workers.

The United States reversed course during World War II, as farmers and other employers found it more and more difficult to find workers willing to toil for relatively low wages. The *bracero* program promised a solution by providing workers from Mexico who signed one-year contracts that brought them to the United States for one purpose, and one purpose only: to work at a specific job before returning to Mexico. The program did bring higher wages than could ordinarily be had in Mexico. But it also commonly brought poor working and living conditions and a great loss of freedom.

Resources: The Bracero Program.

But many Mexicans operated outside of the system. Those who arrived through the *bracero* program (about 200,000) were probably outnumbered by those who came and worked independently (perhaps 300,000), and many *braceros* returned to or stayed in the United States. Hence World War II brought a great surge in the nation's Mexican-American and Mexican populations.

Of course many Mexican Americans had remained in the United States during the Great Depression, and the war affected them in many of the same ways that it affected other citizens. Better jobs were available, many went into the armed services or moved to places where they could find more economic opportunities. Like their Native-American counterparts, the war prompted many to mix with large numbers of people from outside their ethnic group for the first time, and their service during the war often won them respect.

But racism persisted. The most high-profile event involving Mexican-Americans occurred in Los Angeles during the spring of 1943 when thousands of sailors, soldiers, and civilians roamed its streets to attack young, zoot-suit clad Mexican-Americans. Latinos also suffered less spectacular, more systemic forms of discrimination at school and work.

Film Resource: Zoot Suit.

Japanese-Americans

People of Japanese descent suffered the most from World War II. They were, after Pearl Harbor, commonly viewed as at least potential traitors, and the federal government soon resolved to round them up from their West-Coast homes and to hold them against their will in roughly a dozen camps in the West's interior, this despite the fact that two-thirds of Japanese-Americans were actually American citizens. In a couple of years, young men were allowed to volunteer for military service in the European theater, and many adults left the internment camps to work—though they were not allowed to return to the West Coast until the war's end.

This internment inflicted much damage on the Japanese-American community. First, it was predicated on the assumption that no-one of Japanese descent could really be trusted, that all were potential enemies (the so-called "Fifth Column"). Second, it robbed Japanese-Americans of their livelihoods and forced many to sell most of their property for a small fraction of its worth. Third, it reworked family relationships by idling fathers, particularly, and in placing households in camps where the young seemed to know more than the old. Fourth, it created a sort of invisible scar in the Japanese-American community, a deep sense of shame and humiliation for a people who had tried so hard to be exemplary citizens.

Map Resource: Location of Japanese Internment Camps during WWII.

Web Resources: Japanese Internment

Graphic Resources: Executive Order

3. Military Industrial Complex

The Government and Its Citizens

We have already seen some of the myriad ways in which the federal government became more involved in people's lives during World War II. The federal bureaucracy tripled during the war. It drafted, trained and employed millions of people in the armed services. It provided the capital to build new factories and housing projects, even entire cities. It indirectly paid war-workers' salaries by awarding huge contracts (which guaranteed their recipients a profit) to businessmen, and it made those businessmen fabulously wealthy. The federal budget grew tenfold during the war; much of that money found its way into private hands.

The federal government's role expanded with its budget. It sold war bonds to fund the war that soaked up a substantial fraction of people's growing savings. One reason that so many people purchased war bonds was because the government made it so difficult to buy much else by rationing automobiles, tires, food, and metal.

World War II was, of course, the "good war," and most Americans did not complain much about the costs of fighting fascism. Millions volunteered by joining the military, collecting scrap, serving as domestic lookouts for foreign aircraft, or performing other activities, such as sending supplies to the troops. But this patriotism had plenty of federal encouragement, as the Office of War Information worked tirelessly through posters, newsreels, and other media to remind citizens of the need to serve their country however they could.

Hollywood and the War: see books and materials from speaker.

Henry J. Kaiser

Kaiser, a native New Yorker, left school at age thirteen and eventually landed in Washington state, where he started a road-building company in the 1920s, a time in which state governments were pumping public money into building roads and bridges. His business boomed during the Depression; he teamed with several other major contractors to build Hoover Dam, a \$50 million dollar contract that left them a \$10 million dollar profit. Kaiser learned how to work closely with the federal government to win massive and profitable contracts.

World War II of course brought unprecedented opportunities for Kaiser, who switched from building dams to building ships and making steel in factories paid for by the government. Kaiser pioneered in other areas during the war, too. His companies provided not only high wages, but liberal health benefits through the first HMO, Kaiser Permanente, housing and even daycare. His 250,000 workers produced nearly 1,500 ships.

PDF Resource: Bio of Kaiser.

The Sunbelt and World War II

Kaiser centered much of his war-time efforts in California, and he was not alone. California received more than \$16 billion dollars in war-supply contracts, nearly five times as much as Texas, the West's runner up. A great deal of federal money found its way to the Southwest during World War II. The region offered several advantages: proximity to the Pacific Theater, ports, vast stretches of relatively inexpensive and unpopulated land located well away of targets that enemies might find more tempting, and a sunny climate amenable to flying. Hence Southern California had several naval bases; Ogden had the largest quartermaster supply depot in the country; Los Alamos hosted the creation of the atomic bomb; Texas had forty air fields, and Texas A & M produced more military officers than West Point. Many western manufacturers located near the recently constructed dams which produced vast quantities of electricity – power that huge defense plants craved.

These infusions of capital, war industries, and military personnel had a profound affect on the Southwest. San Diego, a city of more than 200,000 in 1940, grew to 500,000 in just four years. Richmond, California, had 270 African Americans among its population of 23,000 in 1940. A Kaiser shipyard brought 100,000 new workers, including 25,000 African Americans.

The Southeast also grew dramatically, particularly port cities. Mobile, Alabama, had an air base, supply depot, aluminum plant, and two major shipyards – additions that prompted its population to expand by 67 percent in just two years. Norfolk, Virginia, a center for both ship building and the military, gained over 100,000 people from 1940 to 1943. Indeed, Florida, Virginia, and Maryland trailed only California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Utah, and Arizona in the rate of growth from 1940 to 1943.

Education

Modern warfare relied heavily on modern science, and the federal government made substantial investments in education in the Southwest during World War II. The Office of Scientific Research and Development contributed nearly \$100 million to western universities during the war, funds which helped the University of California, Berkeley and the California Institute of Technology emerge as national leaders in a variety of war-related science including rocket research and submarine detection.

Race and the Federal Government

As with so many other parts of life, federal policies regarding race were dictated largely by expediency, by what leaders believed would help to win the war. In the case of Japanese-Americans, this meant violating their civil liberties to force them to leave their homes on the West Coast. For Latinos, it meant the creation of the *bracero* program, a guest worker program that officials hoped would bring the economic benefits of cheap labor for agriculture without the social consequences of permanent citizenship.

For African Americans, more than any other ethnic group, the war brought opportunity. The federal government established the *Fair Employment Practices Commission* in 1941 to investigate racism in hiring for industries that received federal contracts. Hence a substantial number of African Americans made their way into good-paying, industrial jobs for the first time in U.S. history. This owed something to African Americans' political advocacy. But it also owed something to the fact that the war and the shortage of labor that came with it gave African Americans unprecedented leverage, as the federal government and employers like Kaiser realized that the full participation of African Americans might mean the difference between winning and losing the war.

Resources: Race and the War.

4. The Pacific Northwest: Seattle and Portland

Boeing

The Boeing Airplane Company had about 4,000 employees when the war began, and it relied heavily on contracts with the federal government for military aircraft such as the Flying Fortress. When Great Britain ordered a batch of these planes in 1940, the company's payroll ballooned to 30,000 by the end of 1941. President Roosevelt then decreed that the nation would build 50,000 airplanes per year, more planes than had existed in the history of the world to that point.

Boeing did not produce that many planes, but it turned out several thousand, and in 1944 its sales totaled over \$600 million, nearly ten times the value of all Seattle manufacturing just five years before. Boeing relied heavily on aluminum partially processed at Pacific Northwest plants, factories which drew their power from the recently completed dams.

Seattle, Washington

As Boeing grew so, too, did Seattle, which doubled its number of manufacturing employees from 1940 to 1942 and received \$5.6 billion in war contracts, ranking it third per capita in the nation. From 1940 to 1944 the city and its surrounding area grew from 368,000 to 530,000.

The city's black population grew much more dramatically, from less than 4,000 in 1940 to about 10,000 at the close of the war, in 1945. Several thousand were stationed at Fort Lawton or other Seattle-area posts. It was at Fort Lawton that race tensions boiled over, as black troops resented that Italian POWs were allowed liberties not accorded to black soldieries. The resulting riot included a lynching of an Italian prisoner of war. Segregation in fact increased in Seattle during the war, though the city's public housing was integrated, and the city's NAACP and Urban League chapters expanded dramatically in both numbers and in their attempts to counter discrimination. Seattle's Japanese-Americans had constituted its largest minority population, but that community evaporated with internment.

Resources: Fort Lawton riots.

Portland, Oregon and Portland-Area Shipyards

As Boeing was to Seattle, Kaiser was to Portland. The industrial leader built three shipyards in the Portland area, including one in Vancouver, Washington. As in the Seattle area, other metropolitan factories turned out a wide variety of war goods—though Kaiser employees constituted more than two-thirds of Portland’s work force.

Portland had a reputation of being a relatively conservative western city, one that approached change more cautiously than did Seattle or Los Angeles. “Portland neither likes nor knows how to accommodate its Virginia City atmosphere,” noted one observer.

Vanport constituted the most dramatic change in the Portland area. When the Portland Housing Authority seemed unwilling or unable to create sufficient housing for the city’s war workers, Edgar Kaiser (Henry’s son) successfully lobbied the federal government to build a city for the company. Vanport was located on a floodplain between Vancouver and Portland and constituted, in the words of one resident “a huge collection of crackerbox houses strung together fast and cheap.” But the project did provide homes and other services for 40,000 newcomers.

Vanport GIS and GoogleEarth Projects: *Vanport.* Built in 1943, Vanport was a hastily constructed public housing project designed to provide residences for thousands of workers employed at the Kaiser wartime shipyards in Portland (OR) and Vancouver (WA). The ArcView, ArcExplorer and Google Earth projects contain layers that show the locations of the apartments, administrative and social buildings, the roads, and water features (the imprints of which can still be seen). Another layer provides points of interest hyperlinked to narrative about life in Vanport.

Plenty of changes occurred inside the boundaries of Portland, too. Schools held scrap drives and offered war-related courses in science and physical education. Even art classes focused on drafting and home economics teachers taught future housewives the principles of household conservation.

In Portland, as in other growing urban centers, women enjoyed more autonomy. Those who sought divorces commonly told judges that they neither sought nor required financial support from their ex-husbands. “I work, and I feel capable of making my own living,” remarked one.

Discrimination based on gender and race by no means disappeared. But for the first time in its history, Portland offered large numbers of well-paying jobs to white women and people of color.

5. The Pacific Northwest: Smaller Cities

Military Bases and Production Centers

Dozens of military bases, large and small, dotted the Pacific Northwest during World War II. Fort Lewis, between Tacoma and Olympia, became the second largest army base in the nation.

Camp Adair, just north of Corvallis, housed up to 45,000 people at a time, most of them soldiers who were being trained. As the camp was built from scratch, its creation required the evacuation of more than 100 farm families in 1941. In six months some 8,000 construction workers created about 1,800 structures, including eleven chapels, eight movie theaters, a post office, an airfield, a rail yard, and a bakery. Much smaller camps in Waldport, Cascade Locks, and Elkton housed conscientious objectors.

Though lagging far behind Seattle and Portland, many smaller Pacific Northwest cities played a significant role in war manufacturing. Bremerton had one of the largest repair bases for ships in the United States, and its African-American population grew from 77 to 4,617 between 1940 and 1945. Renton's Pacific Car and Foundry Company switched from logging trucks to Sherman tanks.

Hanford

Richland, Washington, had about 200 people when it was designated to become the staging area or operating village for the Hanford Site, only some twenty-five miles away from where scientists would actually produce plutonium. The Army Corps of Engineers acquired 560 square miles of land from local farmers and ranchers and set about building an instant town of 50,000.

Rural Oregon

Most small towns and rural areas declined during the war, as residents left for urban opportunities or the armed services. But rural and small-town citizens who did not join the service or work in defense factories also contributed to the war. Lumber and food were of course essential goods. Community members encouraged each other to buy war bonds. Volunteers collected scrap, rolled bandages, enforced evening blackouts, and—especially on the coast—scanned the skies for enemy airplanes.

In much of Oregon—especially in pockets of the Willamette Valley and Eastern Oregon—about 15,000 *braceros* arrived to work on farms during the war, or about ten times the number who had lived in Oregon in 1929. Here, as elsewhere, the Mexican laborers lacked much leverage when dealing with their employers or the federal government, though they undertook work stoppages at several camps to protest low wages.

6. Consequences

Losses

Japanese-Americans who returned home found suspicion and hostility and that their property, entrusted to white friends or neighbors, had often been neglected. The experience of being treated like enemies left many with a lifelong sense of shame. Perhaps the biggest losers in the months and years following World War II were African American and white women war workers, who lost good-paying jobs and generally returned to the lowest rungs of the service economy.

But other workers also lost their jobs. California's industrial employment fell dramatically from 1945, and in Washington, sales for Boeing dropped from \$600 million to \$14 million between 1944 and 1946.

Growth

Yet the war had a lasting impact on the nation in general and the Sun Belt in particular. Many war workers decided to stay in their new homes, even if they had to find new jobs. Former servicemen resolved to relocate to the sunny places they had trained at or passed through during the war. Hence the population of California increased from under 7 million in 1940 to nearly 9.5 million in 1945 and 19 million in 1964.

This population growth of course fueled much economic growth, as these new arrivals needed housing and many other services. Manufacturing recovered quickly in California, Arizona, and Texas. Southern California and Las Vegas, especially, profited from the turn to leisure and prosperity after the war, part of a larger shift toward an economy based more on service, less on manufacturing.

But manufacturing remained much more important after the war than it had been before the war. The value added by manufactures was more than three times higher in 1947 than it had been in 1939 for California and Washington, more than four times higher for Oregon.

All of this added up to greater prosperity. New Mexico had the lowest per capita income in the West in 1948, at \$1,084, but this was much higher than its 1940 average of \$373. California's per capita average stood at \$1,814 in 1948, more than twice what it had been in 1940.

Federal Government

Though the federal budget fell with the arrival of peace, it remained much higher than it had been before the war, and it soon expanded. Much of this was due to the perpetuation of New Deal programs such as social security. The federal government also provided very generous services to veterans, including federal guaranteed loans for home mortgages.

The federal government underwrote much of the Southwest's economic expansion. The Cold War followed hard on the heels of World War II, and with it came a rising federal budget and money for military research and manufacture – particularly for aircraft – and California continued to dominate that industry. Government spending on military hardware more than quadrupled from 1950 to 1953, and much of it was spent in Southern California. Douglas Aircraft expanded its work force from 25,000 to 62,000 between 1950 and 1952. Arizona and Texas also benefited a great deal from federal defense contracts, as did Southwestern universities. Spending on specific weapons could be volatile. But defense spending remained relatively high throughout the Cold War.

The federal government continued ambitious irrigation and hydro-electric projects after the war, a practice that benefited contractors, manufacturers, and large farmers. The resultant boom in large-scale farming fostered the continuation until 1964 of the *bracero* program—even as the federal government also became more active in trying to close its southern border by apprehending the growing number of Mexicans trying to migrate North for this work.

The *G.I. Bill of 1944* [pdf resource] cushioned the economic shock of demobilized veterans by funneling many into college rather than the work force and eased the nation's transition to a peacetime economy.

The Pacific Northwest

Most of the region's military camps closed after the war. The Army had begun dismantling Camp Adair late in 1945—though of course Fort Lewis persisted.

A dramatic blow delivered to a community which owed its very existence to the war occurred in 1948, when Vanport, the instant city build on a floodplain, disappeared beneath the waters of a flood.

Vanport Flood Resources:

Pent-up housing demand and continued growth fuelled the region's housing and therefore timber industry after the war, as Oregon, especially, again turned to lumber as its primary industry.

But Boeing was soon expanding again, and the region's impressive collection of electricity-producing dams left it with an abundance of power. Per capita electrical consumption rose from 1,500 in 1940 to 7,100 in 1955, with half of the latter year's consumption coming from eight aluminum plants. The Columbia River's dams, like so many other federal initiatives, contributed to both the region's private industry and consumption.

7. World War II: The Home Front Bibliography

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