

Reactions to World War II

*The Great Depression and
World War II (1929–1945)*



The home front

Rapid change

The Holocaust

Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

Icons: For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will learn about how World War II affected American society and be able to answer these key questions:

- How did the United States mobilize troops?
- Who served in the armed forces?
- How was the economy prepared for war?
- What effect did the war have on the powers of federal government?



Looking back timeline



In order to contextualize reactions to World War II, use this timeline to recap previous key historical events. Either press on a date or drag the pointer along the timeline to find out information about what happened in each year.

Press **start** to begin.

start





Previously, the U.S. had maintained an **isolationist** approach to foreign policy and passed the Neutrality Acts in 1935 to confirm this stance.



Despite this, in 1939 the federal government began war preparations by enlarging the military, supporting critical allies and positioning the economy for war. This foresight was to prove valuable as the U.S. entered the war in 1941 in reaction to **Pearl Harbor**.

How do you think U.S. war preparation changed after the events of December 1941?



One of the main difficulties facing the U.S. upon entering World War II was having enough men to fight. The U.S. was now in a global war on two fronts and across two oceans.

Recruitment increased dramatically following Pearl Harbor with five million volunteering for military service.



Another 10 million men were forced to join the armed forces when the **Selective Service System** was extended. This made all men between 18 and 45 liable for armed service.

What groups might be angered by the draft? Why?



Different sections of society served
in the U.S. military and aided the
war effort.

Press **start** to learn more.

start



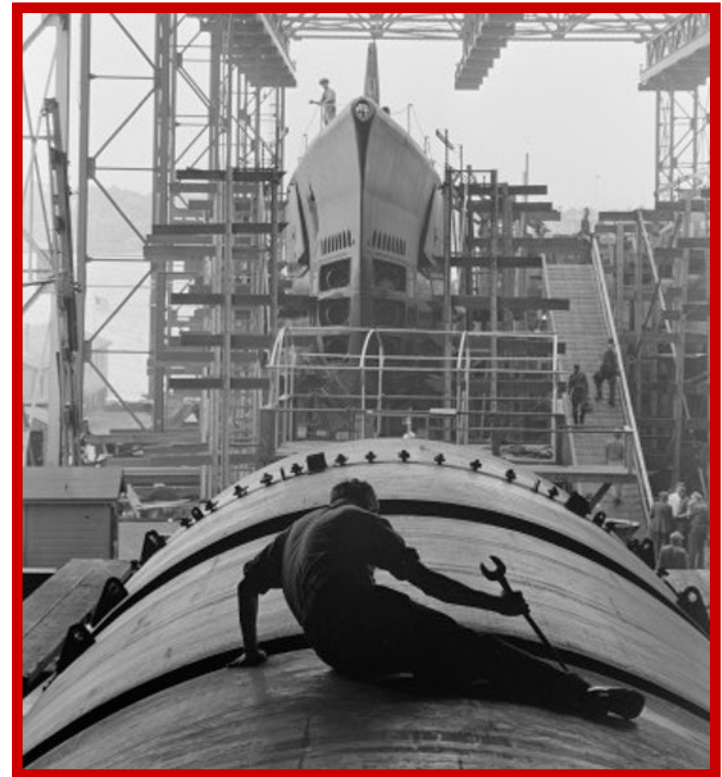
What problems might be caused by these new roles?



The **New Deal** programs, introduced by **President Roosevelt** in 1939, had resulted in the federal government becoming actively involved in social and economic affairs.

This experience meant that the federal government was in a strong position to manage the enormous war effort.

One of their key actions was to change the focus of the U.S. industry to make it more **war-orientated**.

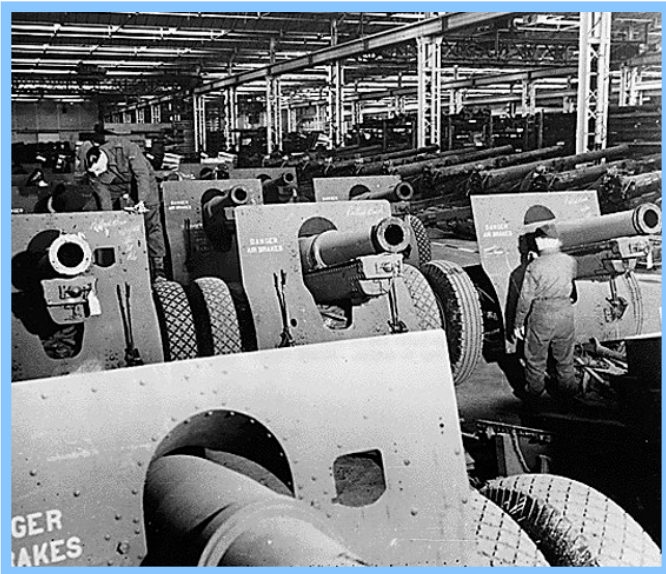


What changes would this include?



As a consequence of the war, many U.S. industries became increasingly focused on defense-related production. The car industry, for example, started making tanks and planes.

In addition, existing war industries, such as **shipyards** expanded at a extremely quick rate.



The U.S. industry was revitalized. Between 1941 and 1945, production increased at an unprecedented rate.

In numerous areas, such as tank production, the U.S. dwarfed the achievements of Axis powers.





The war also stimulated **innovation** in science, technology and management techniques.

This accelerated a trend that had begun during the New Deal, creating confidence in and expectation of American **ingenuity**.

One of the best examples of how successful American expertise was in the field of technology, was in shipbuilding.



Here the principles of mass production were applied to create thousands of standardized **Liberty** ships.

How else were science and technology affected?



In order to fund the war effort and reduce the increasing risk of **inflation**, the federal government and President Roosevelt introduced numerous economic controls. Can you match each economic control with an appropriate description?

Press **start** to begin.

start



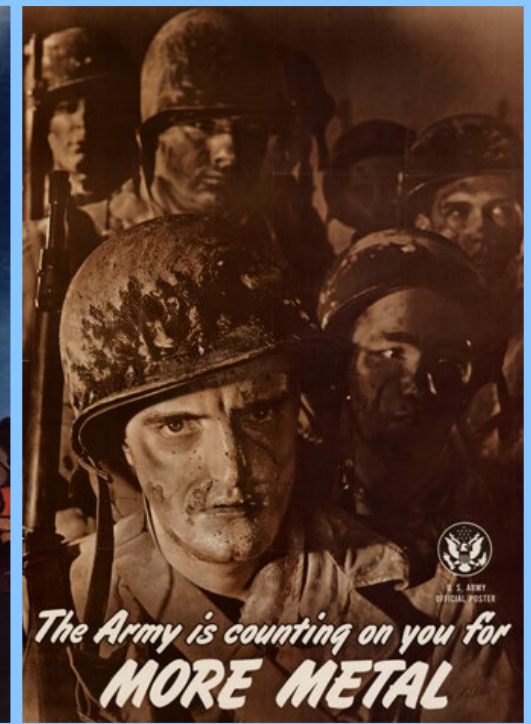
How did these measures help the war effort?



In addition to deciding which factories would convert to war production, the **War Production Board (WPB)** attempted to encourage society to collect and hand in key raw materials.

Campaigns were organized throughout the U.S. for people to collect scrap metal, paper and clothing.

These materials were then recycled and used in war equipment.



What other resources might the military need?



To ensure that the military had enough essential supplies, the **Office of Price Administration (OPA)** introduced **rationing**.

This limited each household a set amount of certain goods, which were considered necessary for the armed forces.

Rationed goods included sugar, meat and gasoline.

Items were bought using ration books with coupons.



How do you think Americans reacted to rationing?



The federal government



World War II dramatically expanded the role of the U.S. federal government.

The federal government emerged from the war as a major component in the U.S. economy. Due to its taxation and spending policies, it acted as both a regulator of economic activity and as a catalyst for growth. Its influence in the social sphere also increased.



How else do you think the war affected American society?