

## WWII: THE WAR AT HOME

**Production:** In a fireside chat in December 1940, one year before Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt called on the country to become the “arsenal of democracy.” That year, Nazi Germany had overrun Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France. Only Britain, which was being bombed from the air, stood in the way of Nazi domination of the Atlantic. The United States would soon unleash its productive might to send weapons, raw materials, and food to Britain and its allies.

By the end of the war in 1945, American civilian workers had built 14,000 ships, 88,000 tanks, 300,000 airplanes, and millions of guns. War production pushed the United States out of a depression and into a boom economy. Posters were the ideal technique to spread the message that every bit of effort was a contribution to this feat, and that every sick day, every extra minute on a break, and every broken tool was a help to the enemy. Posters could be mounted at the factory itself as a reminder that the factory, too, was a battlefield.

As most young men were entering the military, millions of women entered the workforce, many in places that had not seen women before. The Ford Motor Company, for instance, lifted a ban on hiring women for any but secretarial positions, and women would soon make up nearly half of the workforce at Ford’s Willow Run bomber plant in Michigan.

These working women became known as “Rosie the Riveters” and posters created for the factory to reflect to women an ideal image of themselves. A labor-management committee of the Westinghouse Company created the now-famous poster on which a young woman flexes her muscles while remaining as glamorous and beautiful as always. The caption on the poster reminds women of their importance in the war: We Can Do It!

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**Investment:** One of the great examples of the volunteer spirit in American history was the public response to a government savings-bonds program. Called Defense Bonds before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and War Bonds afterwards, these U.S. Treasury bonds served two purposes, financing the war and taking money out of circulation to hold down inflation. The bonds were sold in amounts beginning at \$25. Purchase of bonds provided to a generous loan from the American people to the American government during WWII.

The Treasury Department began to create bond posters early in 1941. From the beginning, the emphasis was on what each individual could do to help America win the war by buying "a share in America."

"I cannot tell you how much to invest in War Bonds," said President Franklin D. Roosevelt in one of his radio "fireside chats" in 1943. "No one can tell you. It is for you to decide under the guidance of your own morals."

While a sense of duty to America encouraged people to buy bonds, the campaign was helped along by an American sense of flash and fun. Hollywood celebrities appeared at "stars over America" bond rallies across the country to encourage fans to buy war bonds. Lana Turner alone raised \$5.25 million by offering kisses in exchange for buying bonds. In 1944, purchasing a bond was an admission ticket for a circus-like three-way baseball game at the Polo Grounds in New York, in which the Brooklyn Dodgers defeated both the Yankees and the Giants. The event raises \$56.5 million in bond money.

By the end of the war, more than 85 million Americans, out of a population of 139 million, had bought bonds. Millions had participated in bond-selling drives organized by such groups as Scout troops, men's lodges, women's clubs, and union locals. The total cost of the war to the federal government has been estimated at \$340 billion in 1940s dollars. Nearly half of the money spent on the war came from bond sales.

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**Conservation:** In 1944, American farms produced 324 million more bushels of wheat and 477 million more bushels of corn than in 1939. But the economic shortages of the Great Depression were replaced during the war by government-enforced rationing of those goods. Consumers were issued ration cards to limit their purchases of groceries and gasoline. Factories that had made everything from automobiles to waffle irons were now producing war material exclusively. Fabrics changed as the military dictated civilian fashion: long evening gowns went out, along with cuffs, pleats, vests, patch pockets, and wide padded shoulders. To the alarm of many, the skimpy two-piece women's bathing suit came in. Fabrics needed to help make uniforms were no longer sold to civilians.

Posters reminded Americans of the reasons for the shortages and asked them to make do by conserving, by avoiding the black market, and by generally becoming more self-reliant. Nowhere is the war effort seen more clearly than on posters that connect the campaigns overseas with growing vegetables in a home "Victory Garden," cleaning one's plate, or saving bacon grease. (Glycerin in recycled fat was used for ammunition and for some medicines.) One poster encouraged the making of one's own clothes with a pun on Pearl Harbor and the purling stitch in knitting: Remember Pearl Harbor. Purl Harder.

A product that never became scarce was the war-effort poster itself. In the 1930s, the government Works Progress Administration (WPA) had developed a silk-screening process that facilitated the mass reproduction of color posters. In 1943, the WPA put out a handbook for amateurs that stated, "Anyone can make a poster." By the end of the war, businesses and private organizations were producing more posters than were government agencies. The government urged employers to "use enough" posters, at least one for every hundred workers.