

0 Mobilizing for Defense

MAIN IDEA *Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States mobilized for war.*

Fighting a war on two fronts required large numbers of soldiers. About 5 million volunteered to enter the armed forces; another 10 million were drafted. After eight weeks of basic training, former civilians became soldiers. Among them were about 300,000 Mexican Americans, a million African Americans, and many thousand Asian and Native Americans.

To free more men for combat, the army created the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). About 200,000 women served in the military even though they did not receive the same pay or benefits as male soldiers.

The nation's factories converted from peacetime to wartime production. Automakers made planes, tanks, and other vehicles; shipyards built warships. About 18 million workers—one third of them women—kept these war industries productive. African Americans pushed for—and won—equal access to jobs in war industries.

Through the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) the government recruited scientists to develop new weapons and medicines. This effort produced radar, sonar, penicillin and other “miracle” drugs. The most significant result of OSRD research was the secret development of the atomic bomb.

The government also created the Office of Price Administration (OPA). The OPA froze the prices of consumer goods and issued ration books, restricting access to scarce goods such as gasoline and meat. Most Americans cooperated with rationing. They also bought war bonds and collected scrap paper or metal to help the soldiers fighting overseas.