

How did Americans change their lives to support the war effort?

Think Before You Start

Before you begin this lesson, think about and discuss in small groups the following questions.

- What resources are needed to wage a war?
- How could people on the home front help to supply these resources?
- What would you be willing to contribute to a war effort?

While the United States struggled with the Great Depression of the 1930s, Germany, Italy, and Japan prepared for war. As the “clouds of war” formed in Europe and Asia, many Americans remembered the losses suffered in World War I and supported a strong isolationist foreign policy. In 1939, the US still had a small and outdated army that used horses to pull its artillery. With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, America — while still not in the war — began to prepare for war and focus on the need to increase the production of arms and food to support the struggling democracies of Europe.

On 7 December 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The American isolationist debate was over. Within days the United States was at war with Japan and its allies, Germany and Italy. A war of this size required an enormous commitment of resources and labor. Victory was dependent on the contributions of Americans on two fronts: the battlefield and the home front. Between 1941 and 1945, millions of American men and women served in the armed forces in a global war. Here at home, millions more worked to produce the weapons, equipment, and supplies needed to fight the war. The federal and state governments were required to take a very active role in managing the lives of Americans to ensure that their efforts would support the war. The US Census Bureau reported that during the war more than one-fifth of the US population moved — 15.3 million — to find jobs and 16 million to serve in the armed forces. With millions of men overseas, America looked to its women to bring up our workforce strength.

Document 1

During WW II Ray Hartman was a teenager living in Chicago.

“Everybody was campaigning to sell war bonds. We were using our allowances and paper drives.... We’d go door-to-door and ask people to contribute dimes and quarters and fill up a book of stamps and buy the bonds.

The goal of the school was to raise \$80,000 to purchase a P-38 fighter plane.... [A]fter probably eight or nine months of work, we were successful...

Alphonsus was the name of the school, but they named the plane “The Spirit of Saint Al’s.” We went to some Douglas Aircraft Company when they painted the name on the plane. I was thrilled, being the chairman of the student drive. I did the ribbon cutting... There were pictures taken with a couple of air force men who were pilots dressed in their uniforms, so it was a thrill.”

— From Roy Hooper, *America Remembers the Home Front*

Document 2



Document 3

Military Service and Unemployed

	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946
Active Military Service (millions)	0.4	1.8	3.8	9	11	12	3
Unemployed Workers (millions)	8.1	5.5	2.6	1	0.6	1	2.2

Document 4

Anne Relph remembers what it was like to be evacuated from her home in California to go to Louisiana:

"I was in an elementary school, and soon after Pearl Harbor my mother got very worried...that the Japanese were going to attack the coast of California, because a submarine was sighted or something like that. So she sent me to stay with relatives in Louisiana ...I didn't realize why I was being sent until I got there... [My mother] simply said, 'You're going off to spend a vacation with Aunt Gladys in Louisiana.'

My mother brought me home in about six or eight months. Of course, it had become obvious that the Japanese were not circling Los Angeles and were not going to come and drag us all off. But the psychological effect of that attack on Pearl Harbor created a kind

of war hysteria that took a while for people to get over. To me as a child, though, the war never had any reality. We lived in North Hollywood, and they had big searchlights on those hills, I guess to look for aircraft or something, I can remember going up and taking hot coffee to the soldiers in uniform. I was a member of the Civil Air Patrol, which was something they organized for kids. We bought WAC uniforms from the army surplus and were given wooden guns to drill with, and we were taught Morse code and the different kinds of airplanes to watch for. We were never actually used, but we did have a sense of being prepared for something, for some time in the future. That was the only time that to me the war seemed real."

— From Roy Hooper, *America Remembers the Home Front*

TIMELINE

1939

- World War II begins in Europe

1940

- France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway and Romania fall to Germans
- \$8.4 billion federal budget includes \$1.8 billion for defense
- Chevrolet sedan sells for \$659

1941

- \$17.5 billion federal budget includes \$11 billion for defense
- Inflation increases consumer prices by 10%
- Cheerios cereal is introduced
- Pearl Harbor attacked, US enters WW II
- Germany declares war on US

1942

- Tire and gas rationing plans begin
- Maxwell House instant coffee introduced in military K rations
- US auto production halted until 1945

1943

- \$109 billion federal budget includes \$100 billion for defense
- Rent controls imposed nationwide
- American rationed three pairs of shoes per year
- Meat rationing set at 28 oz per week

1944

- 176,000 Allied troops land at Normandy beaches
- President Roosevelt elected to 4th term
- War now costing US \$250 million per day
- Gasoline prices average 21¢ per gallon

1945

- President Roosevelt dies in office, Harry Truman becomes president
- WWII ends
- Penicillin, first developed for the military, introduced for public use
- Rationing of all items except sugar ends, shortages continue

1946

- Wage and price controls end on all areas except rents, sugar and rice
- US college enrollments reach new high of more than 2 million
- US birthrate soars from 2.9 million to 3.4 million in one year



Document 5

Morning Call Newspaper 1944

Document 6



Time Magazine 1943

KEEP PRICES DOWN!

Use it up • Wear it out
Make it do • Or do without

Uncle Sam

This advertisement, prepared by the War Advertising Council, is contributed by this magazine in co-operation with the Magazine Publishers of America.

Document 7

SALVAGED TIN CANS GO INTO MANY WAR ITEMS...

TIN IS SAVED NOW IN THE MAKING OF TIN CANS
 HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF CANS WILL NOW BE MADE BY THE NEW HIGHLY MECHANIZED ELECTROLYTIC PROCESS. BY THIS ELECTROLYTIC METHOD TIN CAN BE MADE TO COVER STEEL FOR NEARLY 3 TIMES AS MANY CANS AS UNDER THE CONVENTIONAL "HOT DIP" METHOD.

SAVE 'EM-WASH 'EM-CLEAN 'EM-SQUASH 'EM
 THESE ARE THE FOUR STEPS IN THE AMERICAN HOUSEWIFE'S JOB TO HELP SALVAGE STEEL AND TIN BY SENDING TIN CANS BACK TO THE SCRAP HEAP

THERE IS ENOUGH TIN IN 3 SALVAGED CANS TO MAKE A HAND GRENADE..

ONE TIN CAN YIELDS ENOUGH TIN FOR A PAIR OF BINOCULARS...

A FAMILY OF FOUR SAVING ITS CANS FOR TWO WEEKS WILL SAVE SUFFICIENT TIN TO SUPPLY THIS METAL FOR A PORTABLE FLAME THROWER...

A MONTH'S SAVING OF CANS WILL MAKE THE BUSHINGS FOR 3 MACHINE GUNS

Keep the tin cans rolling into the salvage heap. This plea to housewives is more urgent than ever, since rationing has resulted in less buying of food in cans. Tin is used in many items used by our soldiers on war fronts, so save it and help win the war.

Minneapolis Star-Journal 1943

STOP
...and think!
 What sacrifices did people make?

Document 8

Dorothy Currier lived in Massachusetts and worked for the state farm bureau during the war:

I went into civil defense.... [and] very shortly was a zone warden. You had to spend hours on the telephone trying to sell civil defense. "Why do I have to walk up and down the streets and be a post warden?" people would say.... "What's the point of all of this — nobody's ever going to attack us here." It was an awful selling job.... I had the biggest zone — I was kind of pleased they thought I could do it. I chose a man for an assistant, but I think I was the only woman zone warden.... [W]ith practice drills and night blackouts, people became a little more aware that the whole country was getting prepared for the war. We all made curtains for the windows that we put up for the night blackouts.

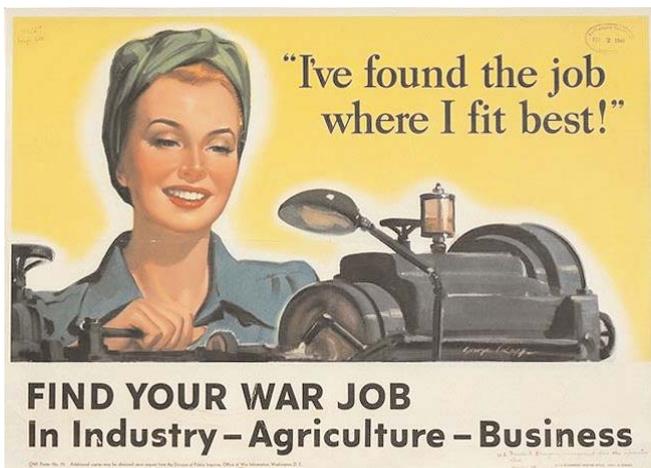
Food stamps were a big problem, because we were just a family of two, and there was no way you could stretch it. When you signed up, you had to say

how many were in your family, and you were given so many food stamps for a week or a month. I had a small backyard garden, and I canned every vegetable we ate for the entire winter. I had a big stock — then along came the rationing, and you were supposed to declare every single edible you had in the house, and that had to be deducted from your food stamps.

Gas stamps worked the same way. You had to go down and declare why you needed a car at all... We couldn't drive where we wanted to. Then there was rent control. We had a two-family house, and the rent was frozen at some ridiculous figure, like thirty-two dollars a month. We couldn't raise it, we couldn't do a thing. We just had to sit there and maintain the place. That went on for years too.

— From Roy Hooper, *America Remembers the Home Front*

Document 9



US Office of War Information 1943

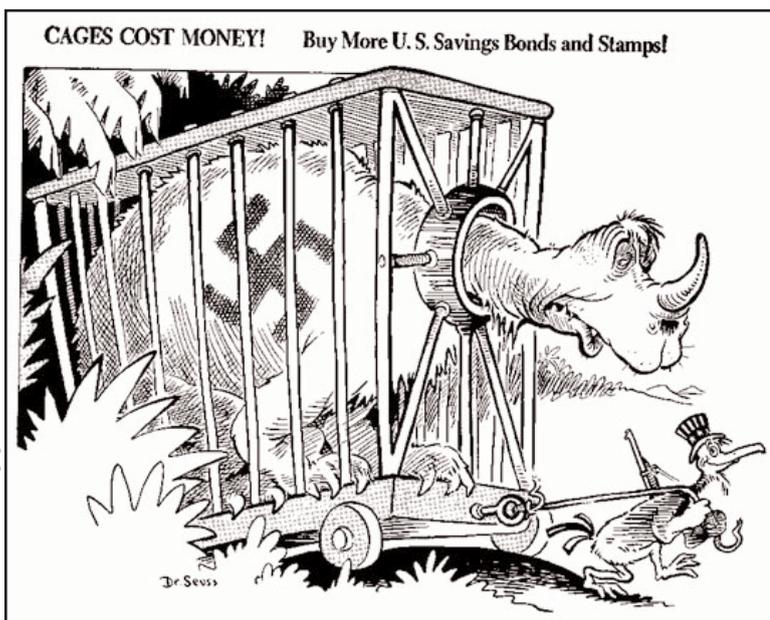


Document 11



by Weimer Pursell, 1943 / US Office of Price Administration 1943

Document 10



Dr. Seuss PM Newspaper 1941

DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

Using the organizer

After you analyze each document, collect your information in the concept map organizer. It will help you to sort the information to answer to the question. "How did Americans change their lives to support the war effort?" The documents contain information that will help you to identify the changes. Find examples in the documents to support your answer.

Thinking about the assignment

To deepen your understanding of the assignment, consider these questions as you review your completed organizer.

- Do you think the actions on the home front made a difference in the war?
- Why were the attitudes of people on the home front important to the war effort?
- What efforts did the government take to ensure the contributions of people on the home front?

The question today

Civilians have always been impacted by war and they are frequently called upon to contribute to national war efforts. Since 2001, the United States has fought wars against Afghanistan, Iraq, and global terrorism.

- How have Americans on the home front contributed to the effort?
- How do those efforts compare with the home front in WWII?
- How did the attacks of September 11, 2001 change the nature of the "home front?"