

MOBILIZATION OF SCIENTISTS That same year, in 1941, Roosevelt created the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) to bring scientists into the war effort. The OSRD spurred improvements in radar and sonar, new technologies for locating submarines underwater. It encouraged the use of pesticides like DDT to fight insects. As a result, U.S. soldiers were probably the first in history to be relatively free from body lice. The OSRD also pushed the development of "miracle drugs," such as penicillin, that saved countless lives on and off the battlefield.

The most significant achievement of the OSRD, however, was the secret development of a new weapon, the atomic bomb. Interest in such a weapon began in 1939, after German scientists succeeded in splitting uranium atoms, releasing an enormous amount of energy. This news prompted physicist and German refugee Albert Einstein to write a letter to President Roosevelt, warning that the Germans could use their discovery to construct a weapon of enormous destructive power.

Roosevelt responded by creating an Advisory Committee on Uranium to study the new discovery. In 1941, the committee reported that it would take from three to five years to build an atomic bomb. Hoping to shorten that time, the OSRD set up an intensive program in 1942 to develop a bomb as quickly as possible. Because much of the early research was performed at Columbia University in Manhattan, the **Manhattan Project** became the code name for research work that extended across the country. ☺

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As war production increased, there were fewer consumer products available for purchase. Much factory production was earmarked for the war. With demand increasing and supplies dropping, prices seemed likely to shoot upwards.

ECONOMIC CONTROLS Roosevelt responded to this threat by creating the **Office of Price Administration (OPA)**. The OPA fought inflation by freezing prices on most goods. Congress also raised income tax rates and extended the tax to millions of people who had never paid it before. The higher taxes reduced consumer demand on scarce goods by leaving workers with less to spend. In addition, the government encouraged Americans to use their extra cash to buy war bonds. As a result of these measures, inflation remained below 30 percent—about half that of World War I—for the entire period of World War II.

Besides controlling inflation, the government needed to ensure that the armed forces and war industries received the resources they needed to win the war. The **War Production Board (WPB)** assumed that responsibility. The WPB decided which companies would convert from peacetime to wartime production and allocated raw materials to key industries. The WPB also organized nationwide drives to collect scrap iron, tin cans, paper, rags, and cooking fat for recycling into war goods. Across America, children scoured attics, cellars, garages, vacant lots, and back alleys, looking for useful junk. During one five-month-long paper drive in Chicago, schoolchildren collected 36 million pounds of old paper—about 65 pounds per child. ☺

RATIONING In addition, the OPA set up a system for **rationing**, or establishing fixed allotments of goods deemed essential for the military. Under this system, households received ration books with coupons to be used for buying such scarce goods as meat, shoes, sugar, coffee, and gasoline. Gas rationing was particularly hard on those who lived in western regions, where driving was the only way to get around. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt sympathized with their complaints. "To tell the people in the West not to use their cars," she observed, "means that these people may never see another soul for weeks and weeks nor have a way of getting a sick person to a doctor."

Most Americans accepted rationing as a personal contribution to the war effort. Workers carpooled or rode bicycles. Families coped with shortages of everything from tires to toys. Inevitably, some cheated by hoarding scarce goods or by purchasing them through the "black market," where rationed items could be bought illegally without coupons at inflated prices.

While people tightened their belts at home, millions of other Americans put their lives on the line in air, sea, and land battles on the other side of the world.

HEROES IN COMBAT Among the brave men who fought in Italy were pilots of the all-black 99th Pursuit Squadron—the Tuskegee Airmen. In Sicily, the squadron registered its first victory against an enemy aircraft and went on to more impressive strategic strikes against the German forces throughout Italy. The Tuskegee Airmen won two Distinguished Unit Citations (the military's highest commendation) for their outstanding aerial combat against the German Luftwaffe.

Another African-American unit to distinguish itself was the famous 92nd Infantry Division, nicknamed the Buffaloes. In just six months of fighting in Europe, the Buffaloes won 7 Legion of Merit awards, 65 Silver Stars, and 162 Bronze Stars for courage under fire.

Like African Americans, most Mexican Americans served in segregated units. Seventeen Mexican-American soldiers were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. An all-Mexican-American unit—Company E of the 141st Regiment, 36th Division—became one of the most decorated of the war.

Japanese Americans also served in Italy and North Africa. At the urging of General Delos Emmons, the army created the 100th Battalion, which consisted of 1,300 Hawaiian Nisei. (The word *Nisei* refers to American citizens whose parents had emigrated from Japan.) The 100th saw brutal combat and became known as the Purple Heart Battalion. Later the 100th was merged into the all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team. It became the most decorated unit in U.S. history.