Orders and Opposition

How wartime policies expanded industry and sharpened divisions

SS24.US2.2c "Analyze how government actions in the United States during World War I produced both economic growth and social division."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each federal action, circle its stated effect on production or jobs, and write D beside effects that divided Americans.

The Home Front in 1918

1 In 1918, a steel mill could run day and night to fill federal orders for ships and weapons. Congress had declared war the year before, and the federal government became a major buyer of industrial goods. The War Industries Board coordinated purchases, directed scarce materials toward military needs, and urged factories to standardize products. Guaranteed orders encouraged firms to expand equipment and hire more workers. War production raised industrial output and brought paychecks to many families, though rising prices could erode those gains. A government decision about supplies could now shape both a factory's profits and its workers' livelihoods.

2 To keep production moving, President Woodrow Wilson created the National War Labor Board in 1918. It settled disputes between employers and workers and supported workers' right to organize. Its decisions could help prevent strikes while improving wages or working conditions. Federal orders also increased demand for factory labor. Black Americans leaving the South during the Great Migration found industrial jobs in northern cities, sometimes at better wages. Yet many faced job discrimination and segregated housing. Wartime demand opened doors without ensuring equal access to the rewards. For some families, a new paycheck came with a new fight for fair treatment.

3 The government also tried to build support for the war. Its Committee on Public Information distributed posters and news bulletins urging Americans to unite behind the effort. Officials argued that unity would help sustain recruitment and production. At the same time, the Espionage Act of 1917 and Sedition Act of 1918 restricted certain forms of antiwar expression. Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs was convicted under the Espionage Act after an antiwar speech. Officials saw dissent as a threat to the war effort, while critics saw prosecutions as attacks on free speech. Americans disagreed over where loyalty ended and the right to protest began.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the War Industries Board's actions help factories expand, and why might workers still have felt little financial gain?

2. How could the National War Labor Board's approach benefit both wartime production and workers?

3. Why did officials defend restrictions on antiwar expression, and how did those restrictions divide Americans?

4. How did federal demand for factory labor create opportunity for Black migrants while leaving a social division in place?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a short 1918 memo to Congress proposing one new safeguard against a social division in the passage. Explain how one federal action supported economic growth, how another deepened division, and why your safeguard would protect production.

ANSWER KEY

Orders and Opposition

GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.2c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each federal action, circle its stated effect on production or jobs, and write D beside effects that divided Americans. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the War Industries Board's actions help factories expand, and why might workers still have felt little financial gain?	**The board coordinated purchases and directed materials to military production, while guaranteed federal orders encouraged expansion and hiring. Rising prices could erode workers' pay gains.**
2	How could the National War Labor Board's approach benefit both wartime production and workers?	**Settling disputes could prevent strikes that interrupted production, while its decisions could improve wages or working conditions and support organizing.**
3	Why did officials defend restrictions on antiwar expression, and how did those restrictions divide Americans?	**Officials believed dissent threatened the war effort and that unity sustained recruitment and production. Critics viewed prosecutions, including Debs's, as attacks on free speech.**
4	How did federal demand for factory labor create opportunity for Black migrants while leaving a social division in place?	**War orders increased factory hiring, giving some Black migrants better-paying jobs. Job discrimination and segregated housing still limited their access to wartime gains.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To Congress, 1918: Keep federal orders flowing through the War Industries Board because coordinated supplies help factories expand and employ workers. But revise the Sedition Act so peaceful criticism of war policy cannot be punished. Prosecutions of antiwar speakers deepen mistrust by treating disagreement as disloyalty. Protecting peaceful criticism would let workers raise concerns about conditions without stopping production. This safeguard would preserve jobs supported by war orders while allowing Americans to debate the government's choices.

Accept other safeguards if the response connects one federal action to growth, another to division, and explains how the proposal would protect production. Students may cite unequal access to wartime jobs or restrictions on dissent as the division.