Factories and Families

Weighing the results of the wartime economy

USH.5.5 "Summarize the efforts the government made to convert to a wartime economy, how it affected Americans, and evaluate the successes or failures of these efforts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two government actions and circle two effects on Americans. Write S beside evidence of a success and L beside evidence of a limitation.

Turning the Economy Toward War

1 In 1942, a Detroit auto plant no longer built cars for families. Its machines and workers turned out tanks and other military supplies. The federal government signed large war contracts, paid to expand factories, and created the War Production Board to steer scarce steel, rubber, and other materials toward military needs. The board limited the manufacture of many civilian goods, including new cars. Government direction gave companies a reason and a way to change production quickly. This shift did not happen by itself: businesses, workers, and federal agencies had to coordinate orders, supplies, and factory schedules.

2 The change reached far beyond the factory gate. Millions of Americans took defense jobs, and many women entered paid industrial work, even as they faced lower pay or pressure to leave after the war. To keep scarce goods available, the Office of Price Administration set price ceilings and rationed items such as sugar and gasoline. Families used ration coupons and sometimes waited in lines. Price controls helped restrain inflation, but shortages and illegal black markets still appeared. Taxes increased, and the government urged Americans to buy war bonds to help pay for the war, leaving households with less money to spend.

3 The wartime economy supplied the armed forces on a huge scale: U.S. factories produced more than 300,000 military aircraft during World War II. Still, a booming factory did not guarantee fair treatment. Black workers faced discrimination in hiring and promotion. After civil rights leaders threatened a mass march, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, barring discrimination in defense employment, and established a committee to investigate complaints. Enforcement remained uneven, and unequal access to jobs persisted. Government action helped win the production race, but rationing burdened households and expanded opportunities did not reach everyone equally. These results make success a question of both output and fairness.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the War Production Board help convert factories to wartime production? Give one result of the broader shift.

2. How did price ceilings and rationing affect families? Explain one benefit and one cost described in the passage.

3. How did Executive Order 8802 try to improve the wartime economy, and why was its success limited?

4. Was the government's wartime conversion successful in both production and fairness? Support your judgment with evidence from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a town council in 1944. Write a five- or six-sentence public statement recommending one change to how a wartime policy is carried out. Explain how your change would protect production and improve life for a group named in the passage, using two details from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

Factories and Families

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.5.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two government actions and circle two effects on Americans. Write S beside evidence of a success and L beside evidence of a limitation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the War Production Board help convert factories to wartime production? Give one result of the broader shift.	**It directed scarce materials toward military needs and limited civilian production. The wartime shift helped U.S. factories produce more than 300,000 military aircraft.**
2	How did price ceilings and rationing affect families? Explain one benefit and one cost described in the passage.	**Price ceilings helped restrain inflation, but families had to use ration coupons and sometimes wait in lines for scarce goods.**
3	How did Executive Order 8802 try to improve the wartime economy, and why was its success limited?	**It barred discrimination in defense employment, and a committee investigated complaints. Uneven enforcement meant unequal access to jobs persisted.**
4	Was the government's wartime conversion successful in both production and fairness? Support your judgment with evidence from the passage.	**It succeeded more in production than in fairness: factories produced more than 300,000 military aircraft, while Black workers still faced unequal access to defense jobs.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our town should ask its local ration board to offer evening hours for workers who need sugar and gasoline coupons. Millions of Americans have taken defense jobs, so daytime trips can cut into factory shifts. Families already use coupons and sometimes wait in lines, making later visits useful. Keeping the same ration limits would still conserve scarce goods and support military production. Evening hours would make the rules easier for working families to follow without weakening rationing.

Accept other supported judgments about success and failure. For Part 3, look for a workable change, two accurate passage details, and an explanation of its effects on both production and a named group.