Jobs on Two Fronts

How civilian work and military service reduced Depression-era unemployment

USH.C.5.4.A "Examine how wartime employment in the civilian economy and the armed services contributed to an end of the Great Depression's unemployment."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways civilian jobs grew, circle how military service changed the number of people seeking civilian work, and put a star by one limit on access to wartime jobs. Use your marks to trace how the war reduced unemployment.

From Job Lines to War Work

1 In 1940, millions of Americans still wanted paid work after a decade of depression. Even before the United States entered World War II, orders for weapons and supplies from nations at war pushed American factories to expand. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, federal contracts grew rapidly. A plant that once made cars might build military vehicles instead, hiring machinists, inspectors, and clerks. Shipyards and aircraft plants also needed workers, while farms and railroads helped feed and move the expanding war effort. Government spending turned demand for military supplies into paychecks for people who had been unemployed.

2 The armed services changed the job picture in a different way. Millions of Americans joined or were drafted into the military, where they served rather than searched for civilian work. Their departure also created openings in workplaces they left behind. At the same time, troops needed uniforms, food, ships, and medical supplies, so their service increased the need for civilian workers who made and delivered these goods. A person who enlisted did not take a factory job, but enlistment could reduce the number of people seeking civilian jobs while military needs helped create more of those jobs.

3 These changes did not reach everyone equally. Employers recruited women into jobs previously reserved for men, and many Black Americans moved to industrial cities for war work. Yet discrimination still blocked many applicants from certain positions, and crowded housing made relocation difficult. Wartime labor shortages gave workers more chances to find paid employment, but a low unemployment rate did not mean every person had the same opportunity. By the middle of the war, civilian hiring and military service had greatly reduced the unemployment that marked the Great Depression. Understanding that change requires looking at both new jobs and the changing number of job seekers.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did wartime orders turn spending into jobs for unemployed civilians?

2. How could joining the armed services reduce the number of people seeking civilian jobs without creating a factory job?

3. Beyond leaving an opening at a former workplace, how could a service member's military role help create civilian work?

4. Why would a lower wartime unemployment rate not prove that everyone had equal access to jobs?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a town where a furniture plant switches to making Army radio cases and 200 residents enlist. In four sentences, explain how both changes could reduce local unemployment and describe one obstacle that might still keep someone from getting a job.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.5.4.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways civilian jobs grew, circle how military service changed the number of people seeking civilian work, and put a star by one limit on access to wartime jobs. Use your marks to trace how the war reduced unemployment. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did wartime orders turn spending into jobs for unemployed civilians?	**Orders and federal contracts led factories and other businesses to expand production and hire workers to make and move war supplies.**
2	How could joining the armed services reduce the number of people seeking civilian jobs without creating a factory job?	**People who enlisted or were drafted served in the military instead of seeking civilian work.**
3	Beyond leaving an opening at a former workplace, how could a service member's military role help create civilian work?	**Troops needed goods such as uniforms, food, and medical supplies, increasing demand for civilians to make and deliver them.**
4	Why would a lower wartime unemployment rate not prove that everyone had equal access to jobs?	**Discrimination kept some applicants from certain jobs, and crowded housing made moving for work difficult.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

When the town's furniture plant switches to making Army radio cases, military orders could pay for more shifts and bring unemployed residents into factory jobs. When 200 residents enlist, they stop seeking civilian work and may leave positions for others to fill. Service members also need supplies, which could create more work for local producers and shippers. Still, discriminatory hiring might keep some qualified neighbors from getting those openings.

Accept explanations that distinguish new civilian jobs from the reduction in civilian job seekers caused by military service. For the open task, the obstacle may be discrimination or difficulty relocating because of crowded housing.