Opportunity After War

Trace how wartime decisions shaped postwar life.

USH.C.5.4 "Examine the impact of World War II on the lives of American citizens. 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 three decisions or developments that changed Americans' opportunities. Circle an effect of each one, then give each linked pair the same number.

From War Jobs to New Homes

1 In 1939, a young worker might have searched for a job for months. During World War II, factories hired civilians to build ships, planes, and supplies, while millions entered the armed forces. These demands sharply reduced unemployment left by the Great Depression. Yet wartime jobs did not offer equal chances to everyone. A. Philip Randolph threatened a mass march to protest discrimination in defense hiring. In 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt issued an order banning discrimination in defense industries and created a committee to investigate complaints. The order opened opportunities, but discrimination did not disappear.

2 When service members returned, the 1944 G.I. Bill offered education benefits and help with home loans. Its goal was to ease the move to civilian life, and its benefits helped many veterans train for better-paying jobs or buy homes. Black veterans, however, often faced segregation in colleges and discrimination in lending, limiting access to those benefits. In 1948, President Harry Truman ordered equal treatment in the armed forces, beginning a gradual end to military segregation. Truman's Fair Deal sought broader economic security through measures such as a higher minimum wage, expanded Social Security, and more affordable housing. Congress enacted some proposals but rejected others.

3 Imagine a family moving from a crowded city apartment into a new suburban house after the war. More home loans and a growing middle class helped many families buy homes outside cities, while highways and cars made commuting possible. The baby boom increased the number of children and demand for schools. Television spread into living rooms, giving advertisers a way to reach millions of viewers at once. Families bought appliances and other goods, feeding a consumer economy. Not all Americans shared these gains equally: discriminatory lending and housing rules kept many Black families from buying suburban homes.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did civilian factory jobs and military service help end the Great Depression's unemployment?

2. How did Randolph's protest effort change federal action on defense jobs, and what problem remained?

3. How did the G.I. Bill and Truman's Fair Deal aim to improve economic security? Explain one limit on their effects.

4. How did Truman's 1948 order differ from the G.I. Bill in the kind of opportunity it addressed?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write one paragraph making your own claim about how World War II reshaped American opportunity. Connect one wartime change, one postwar policy, and one change in daily life, then explain why the gains were unequal.

ANSWER KEY

Opportunity After War

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.5.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three decisions or developments that changed Americans' opportunities. Circle an effect of each one, then give each linked pair the same number. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did civilian factory jobs and military service help end the Great Depression's unemployment?	**Factories hired civilians to make war supplies, and millions entered the armed forces. Both reduced the number of Americans without work.**
2	How did Randolph's protest effort change federal action on defense jobs, and what problem remained?	**His threatened march preceded Roosevelt's order against discrimination in defense industries and the creation of a complaints committee. Discrimination continued.**
3	How did the G.I. Bill and Truman's Fair Deal aim to improve economic security? Explain one limit on their effects.	**The G.I. Bill helped veterans pay for education and buy homes. The Fair Deal sought a higher minimum wage, expanded Social Security, and more affordable housing. Discrimination limited some Black veterans' access to benefits, and Congress rejected some Fair Deal proposals.**
4	How did Truman's 1948 order differ from the G.I. Bill in the kind of opportunity it addressed?	**Truman's order required equal treatment in the armed forces and began a gradual end to military segregation. The G.I. Bill offered returning service members education and home-loan benefits for civilian life.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

World War II opened paths to economic security, but those paths were not equally available. Factory hiring and military service reduced unemployment, giving many families a steadier income. After the war, the G.I. Bill helped veterans train for better jobs and buy homes. As more families moved to suburbs, home ownership became part of middle-class life. Yet segregation in colleges and discrimination in lending kept many Black veterans from using those benefits as fully as other veterans could.

Accept other accurate cause-and-effect links supported by the passage. Strong Part 3 responses connect all three required changes and explain a specific barrier to equal opportunity.