

# THE HOME FRONT

BY ROB CITINO, PHD



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When we think of World War II, the first images that enter our minds usually involve battle: armies fighting their desperate struggles on land, huge navies patrolling the oceans, and aircraft soaring sleekly overhead.

All of these stirring images are accurate, of course, and yet they are also incomplete. Consider this: A total of 16 million Americans donned the country's uniform in the course of the war, out of a total US population of 132 million (according to the 1940 Census).

An impressive number, to be sure! But what of the other 116 million Americans, the ones who remained behind? They played a crucial role in the fight, and their story, too, deserves to be told. Global war placed great demands on the American people, requiring a level of involvement, commitment, and sacrifice unknown in previous conflicts. Without the steadfast support of the "Home Front"—the factory churning out weapons, the mother feeding her family while carefully monitoring her ration book, the child collecting scrap metal for the war effort—US soldiers, sailors, and airmen could not have fought and defeated the Axis. America and its Allies did win World War II on the battlefields of Normandy, Iwo Jima, and Midway. However, those victories owed a great deal to the factories of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit, and to the dedication of ordinary Americans coast to coast.

Another reason to study the Home Front is the vast social transformation wrought by World War II. Simply put, World War II changed our country forever. For African Americans, the war meant an opportunity to partake fully in national life, a chance denied them up to then. They answered the call in great numbers, serving heroically in all services and on all fronts, migrating up from the South and moving into industrial work all over the country. They knew what was at stake in the war, and they said so: It was time to win a "double victory," one over fascism abroad and another over racism at home. Women, too, left behind their traditional domestic roles and entered the industrial

workforce by the millions. "Rosie the Riveter"—in her blue coveralls, her hair tied up in a scarf, her bicep flexed, and her famous slogan "We Can Do It!"—was the new icon. America could not have won the war unless everyone answered the call. And like a great fire, World War II touched us all.

Welcome to the Home Front.

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**Rob Citino, PhD, is The National WWII Museum's Samuel Zemurray Stone Senior Historian. He is an award-winning military historian and scholar who has published 10 books including *The Wehrmacht Retreats: Fighting a Lost War, 1943*; *Death of the Wehrmacht: The German Campaigns of 1942*; and *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich*, in addition to numerous articles covering World War II and 20th-century military history. He speaks widely and contributes regularly to general readership magazines such as *World War II*. Dr. Citino, who enjoys close ties with the US military establishment, taught one year at the US Military Academy at West Point and two years at the US Army War College.**

## ONLINE RESOURCES

[ww2classroom.org](http://ww2classroom.org)

-  The Home Front Overview Video
-  America Responds Video