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LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR SOME - EXPERIENCES OF MARGINALIZED CHILDREN ON THE WORLD WAR II UNITED STATES HOME FRONT

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ABSTRACT:

Many scholars have discussed the experiences of the home front and its significant contributions to the war effort. However, the study of children in World War II home front has not been widely examined. Even more so, the experiences of minority children are rarely discussed. Youth of African Americans, those of German and Japanese descent, and the poor classes experienced a drastically different home front than the mainstream culture. Especially, the experiences of children are not addressed as they are an ignored group without economic or political power. Yet, numerous primary source accounts explain how these marginalized youth experiences helped to shape the war. The implications of research in this area seek to expand the scholarship of home front contributions and pave the way for marginalized groups to be recognized for their support in past and future events.

“To the young people of the nation, I must speak a word tonight. You are going to have a great opportunity. There will be high moments in which your strength and your ability will be tested. I have faith in you. I feel as though I was standing upon a rock, and that rock is my faith in my fellow citizens.”

- Eleanor Roosevelt

In the hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed a shocked nation. The war in Europe had been waging on for two years. Citizens of the United States already felt a part of the war through shared heritage, but also economically through programs providing aid to the Allied powers. As the throes of war loomed ever nearer, leaders of the nation urged all citizens to prepare for war. Total mobilization for war had reached all corners of Europe; now it would reach all corners of the globe.

As the nation geared up for war, all levels of society in the United States mobilized together to serve the military interests of the nation. Despite calls for unity from President

Roosevelt, the social conditions of the United States at the onset of World War II divided the nation. The lingering effects of the Great Depression left many families in dire economic straits. Legalized segregation kept minorities from equal access to protection under the laws. Children with German and Japanese heritages made them combatants on home soil. The experiences of these marginalized groups in the American home front are in stark contrast to those of wealthier white children and are often forgotten by the common memories of the era.

These glaring realities affected marginalized children in a variety of ways. Already living on the fringes of society and culture, these children had a double war to fight: both the patriotic duties expected of them from the American war effort and the fight for their equality. Much of the focus on child contributions to the American war effort focuses on the successes. These are important to study to understand how the home front contributed to the victories in both the Pacific and European theaters. However, the realities of the Great Depression, nativism, and segregation all impacted the way children uniquely experienced the war.

The dichotomies of these experiences are part of a recent, larger social history of the United States which seeks to understand the expectations of home front citizens. The experiences of children during the war have not been widely studied. Comprehensive works are rare. While they do provide an overarching dive into the topic, the scope is limited to the experience of the majority.¹ Other authors are much more focused on a single type of experience from a single race: Japanese or African Americans.² There are few to no resources dedicated to the experiences of the poor during the war on the American home front. The experiences of marginalized groups are an integral part of the narrative of the American wartime home front. While the nation fought for equality abroad, it was sorely lacking at home.

This current lack of comprehensive and detailed works about youth on the home front during World War II is indicative of the scholarship in its early years. Much of the effort of World War II scholars has been focused on the main power and policy figures. Little attention has been spent on groups with no voting influence or economic spending power. A bottom-up study of history seeks to understand the reality of the lives of children in the war and how American culture reacted when citizens failed to meet standards of loyalty. Current historical works leave room for further scholarship to understand how class, race, and heritage all impact how children experienced the war.

The expectations for war and total mobilization were the same for all citizens of the United States. After the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt both addressed the nation. President Roosevelt asked Congress for a

¹ Tuttle, William, *Daddy's Gone to War: The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) X.; Emmy Werner, *Through the Eyes of Innocents: Children Witness World War II*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 3-4.

² Andrew E. Kersten, "African Americans and World War II" *OAH Magazine of History* 16, No 3 (Spring 2002), 13. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25163520> ; Dorn, Charles, "I Had All Kinds of Kids in My Classes, and It Was Fine": Public Schooling in Richmond, California, during WWII" *History of Education Quarterly* 45, No 4, (Winter 2005), 539, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20462008>.

declaration of war, saying the American people would be victorious in their righteous cause.³ First Lady Roosevelt addressed the nation, citing the same recriminations towards Japan and affirming the role of American patriotism in the nation. She specifically addresses the youth of the nation to explain their opportunity to be an integral part of this war on the home front. The role of citizens of all ages is to support those in war by building morale and maintaining security.⁴ The population of youth, categorized as individuals under the age of 19, of the United States at the time of the war was an estimated 34%. A massive portion of the United States mobilized for war, without being able to serve overseas.⁵

The United States citizens offered tremendous sacrifices to support the war effort in both Europe and the Pacific. They held many programs and events across the United States to provide for the military. One type of these programs was the recycling of varied goods for reuse in the military. The most well-known recycling drives collected iron, copper, tin, and aluminum. These drives had children collecting items from their homes and neighborhoods to provide materials to be recast into a variety of military equipment.⁶ Many community schools turned the drives into a competition, vying to be the first to provide enough scrap metal to build a jeep. Barbara Finneson was one such youth in this example. She was a fifth grader living on the West Coast at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. Due to her proximity to the Pacific theater, her experiences are especially pertinent. Finneson recalls how when the school raised enough money to build a jeep, the military brought a jeep to the school for children to ride in it.⁷

Another type of home front patriotic duty was in the saving and recycling of food. Most families experienced this with rationed food items. Every month families received their ration books from the grocery store and received stamps for certain products. Items like sugar, coffee, and nylons were strictly controlled to provide more resources to the fighting soldiers.⁸ The allotment was for one month's worth of products, and it was forbidden to receive replacements. As a child, Jane Bristoll remembered dropping a jar of oil and being unable to replace it. Her memory includes the waves of emotion at the loss, knowing they could not get more due to the

³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Speech by Franklin D. Roosevelt, New York Transcript*. 1941. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/afccal000483/>.

⁴ Eleanor Roosevelt, *Pan American Coffee Bureau Series*, December 7, 1941, PDF, <https://scholarspace.library.gwu.edu/work/7h149q24d>.

⁵ United States Bureau of the Census, *United States Summary*, "Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940" United States Government Printing Office: 1943. Pg 22. https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population_-_volume-2/33973538v2p1ch2.pdf

⁶ Lois Olhoft Breitbarth, "War Bonds and Saving Materials", Interview by Erin Mead and Benjamin Vennes, *National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War II*, April 9, 2001. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/breitbarth-lois/>

⁷ Barbara Finneson, *School Efforts to Support the War*, National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War II. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/finneson-barbara/>

⁸ Breitbarth, "War Bonds and Saving Materials", 2001.

rations and the sadness of a waste of such a precious food supply.⁹ Simple accidents could mean another month of waiting for new rations coupons to be available and many families experienced this time after time.

Further food savings involved the recycling of cooking fats for reuse. Saving fats from cooking and returning them to the grocers or butchers allowed customers to receive extra ration coupons. A pamphlet from the War Food Administration explained how to repurpose recycled fats into explosives, vaccines, soaps, and medicines among many other uses.¹⁰

The most well-known method of home front support was the sale of war bonds. These bonds came in many denominations to allow all citizens a chance to contribute. The government expected citizens to purchase war bonds to provide war materials for its soldiers. Publications from the government illustrate the enormity of what fighting a war of large magnitude will cost, breaking it down into categories of ammunition, equipment, payroll, and vessels of multiple types. The pamphlet explained the importance of ample monetary supplies to meet the needs of soldiers. The public responded with the purchase of war bonds to support the war in return for interest from these loans.¹¹ The sale of bonds was not only direct to adults but also children. The youngest citizens could purchase miniature versions of savings bonds to aid in the war effort.¹²

Despite the expectations for total mobilization of the United States home front for war, there was an intentional effort to keep major changes from impacting children and youth. Many parents questioned how to explain the war to their children in terms they could understand and wondered how to prepare them for talk of air raids, battles, and death. Multiple attempts from both the public and the private sectors addressed these concerns to provide resources to parents in preparation for a deadly and long-lasting war. The United States Children's Bureau suggested a two-fold approach: Preparing for what may come and ensuring as little change as possible affected the daily lives of children.¹³ Dorothy Baruch suggests in her book *You, Your Children, and War: How to Develop Morale on the Home Front* to alleviate the fear of the unknown by facing the realities of war.¹⁴ Navigating the war would be tough for any citizen to come to terms with, but the realities of war can be difficult to understand if children do not comprehend the

⁹ Jane Bristoll, "Buying Rationed Groceries" Interview by Emma Buchman, Cherie Ciaudella, Maria Betancur, & Cullen Joyce, *National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War II*, June 9, 2015 & June 27, 2017. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/bristoll-jane/>

¹⁰ United States War Food Administration, *A War Job in Your Own Home*, Southern Methodist University, 1945. <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/hgp/id/379/rec/23>

¹¹ United States Office for Emergency Management, *Dollars for Democracy*, Southern Methodist University, 1941, <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/hgp/id/523/rec/76>.

¹² United States Treasury Department, *Even a Little Can Help a lot Now: Buy U.S. War Stamps and Bonds*, Illinois State Library, 1942. <https://digital.library.illinois.edu/items/b8782cb0-0d92-0135-23f6-0050569601ca-e>

¹³ United States Children's Bureau, *To Parents in Wartime*, Southern Methodist University, 1942. <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/hgp/id/462/rec/22>

¹⁴ Dorothy Baruch, *You, Your Children, and War: How to Develop Morale on the Home Front*, (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942), 9.

meaning of war in the first place. These sources sought to guide parents on how to deal with the war, but nothing could prepare the nation for the inequalities the realities of war would bring.

One of the glaring realities of the home front war was how economic class influences children's experiences. Many of the efforts of the home front depended upon what a family could afford to do without or could donate for the sake of patriotism. For many families already facing shortages even before the United States entered the war, the patriotic programs made life even more difficult after the attack on Pearl Harbor. One of the focuses of the government was on how to provide nutritional and balanced foods to its citizens in war. While both parents in many poor families were already working to provide, the war exposed long-standing problems of the poor. The concern became how the nation would function in the future if its children did not receive adequate sustenance in their youth. Information from the government linked childhood hunger to supporting the nation in its patriotic duties.¹⁵ Ensuring the children of the home front had access to ample and nutritious food would make it possible for them to be productive citizens of the future. Responsibility for this was not just placed on the families, but on communities and schools. Poor children would have benefitted from these programs and attention much more than their wealthier peers. Children whose mothers were working were not always able to access adequate food, if at all.

A further issue for poorer families was the government's recommendation to families to avoid buying things on credit so more of their money could go to the purchase of war bonds and not pay hefty interest fees. Many families living in the poorer economic classes lived within a vicious poverty cycle. Families would borrow against their future earnings to provide for their current situations. Unforeseen circumstances forced families back into debt if they managed to get out of it. Since it was the expectation for citizens to contribute to the war effort through the purchase of bonds, it would have been extremely difficult for families living in poverty to contribute in this manner. The lack of the ability to purchase bonds to support the war effort would have caused the families' patriotism to be suspicious. While the government encouraged people to pay debts before purchasing war bonds, the reality would have been very different.¹⁶

During the war, Americans were also saddled with higher tax rates to financially support the war. While most of the taxes increased were on capital gains, the personal income tax went up from four to six percent.¹⁷ While this may seem insignificant, when a family was already living on the edge of poverty, any adjustment to their cash flow could create a monumental fiscal crisis. Families in poverty had to be extremely careful about how their income was spent. Even

¹⁵ United States Children's Bureau, *Children Bear the Promise of a Better World: Have They The Protection of Proper Food?*, United States Government Printing Office, 1942, 3.
<https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/hgp/id/473/rec/7>

¹⁶ United States Office of War Information, *Battle Stations for All: The Story of the Fight to Control Living Costs*, United States Government Printing Office, 1943, 62.
<https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/hgp/id/557/rec/32>

¹⁷ United States Office of War Information, *Battle Stations for All: The Story of the Fight to Control Living Costs*, 31.

the poorest families saw an increase of at least \$200 on their tax bills.¹⁸ Further changes to tax laws reduced the number of people who received exemptions from paying taxes. In 1941, an estimated 18 million people paid taxes. In 1943, an estimated 27 million people would be paying taxes to the government.¹⁹ The change here is significant, around a 50% increase. While the publication does not state which groups would be paying taxes that had not before the changes, the poorer classes are usually the groups which would have previously received tax exemptions. These law changes forced poorer class families to either pay higher taxes than usual or begin to pay them, whereas in previous years they would not. Either category families fall into, they would face significant changes in the paying of taxes which would put them into a financial bind.

An additional issue many families faced was the employment of their children in war work to help provide financially for their families. While their wages would have been low on account of their age, the patriotic nature of the work outshone economic necessity. When the summer ended, it was an expectation for children to return to their classrooms. This, however, was not the case. Many children were intending to stay in their places of employment during the school year. Students viewed their work as a patriotic duty to support the war. Men had left for war jobs or been deployed to fight overseas. Women and children filled the positions as needed. The national government, however, felt the children's rightful place was in the classroom, where their education would secure their future in the workforce. Agencies from all sides agreed children needed to return to the classroom. A pamphlet from the United States Children's Bureau cites data showing many of the children in the labor force worked in jobs not necessary for the war. This figure justified the children's return to the classroom.²⁰ However, this fact can be used to understand the importance of work for children who come from poverty. These jobs were important to the livelihood of their families and their return to school could put them in dire economic straits.

While the expectation for children to contribute to the war effort was clear, economic situations for families could make this difficult. As a result, it is important to understand how many children experienced poverty during the war. The statistics for children in poverty during World War II are difficult to ascertain. The United States Census Bureau began tracking poverty rates in the Census for 1959. As such, it is difficult to understand just how many children experienced war in dire economic straits as compared to their wealthier counterparts. It is, however, possible to estimate the number based on the salaries of families from the 1940 Census and the inflation rates available. Poverty status for a family of four was if their income was less than \$2,973, based on data from the National Census Bureau.²¹ The income, adjusted for inflation using a calculator from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, illustrates how a family of

¹⁸ United States Office of War Information, *Battle Stations for All: The Story of the Fight to Control Living Costs*, 31.

¹⁹ United States Office of War Information, *Battle Stations for All: The Story of the Fight to Control Living Costs*, 32.

²⁰ United States Children's Bureau, *Back to School! Suggestions for a Fall Campaign to Reduce Child Labor and Encourage Attendance at School During the New School Year*, United States Government Printing Office, 1943, 6. <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/hgp/id/440/rec/31>.

²¹ United States Census Bureau, *Historical Poverty Tables: People and Families - 1959-2020*, Table 1. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty/people.html#par_list

four would be in poverty if it had an income of \$1609.²² Using this figure to analyze the incomes of the 1940 census, an estimated 64% of the nation's families were living in poverty as of January 1942.²³ This estimate allows a comparison of families living under the poverty threshold in relation to the expectations for the home front. Families were constantly expected to save, be thrifty, and give of their household goods for the war effort. Yet most of the nation was already living paycheck to paycheck and would have understood their patriotic duties to be more difficult due to the realities of their economic situations.

While children in poor economic classes suffered because they lacked resources to show patriotism like their wealthier counterparts, children with heritages in Axis countries also faced difficulties in showing their patriotism in the home front efforts. For many Americans, immigrants of any background were conspicuously different and subject to suspicion and derision. Citizens and residents of German and Japanese descent especially came under suspicion as being spies for their motherlands and threats to home front security. The experiences children in these ethnic groups faced were far different than the American mass culture. Even if children were born in the United States, they still faced scrutiny ramifications for their heritages.

The 1940 census reveals much about the German population in the United States at the onset of World War II. An estimated 5,236,612 native and foreign-born Germans were living in the United States at the time.²⁴ While this number may appear to be insignificant at nearly four percent of the United States Population, the hatred for the Nazis eclipsed the minority of Germans in the United States. The common heritage with the Axis powers brought any Germans under suspicion, which only increased during the war's duration. Speaking the German language, celebrating German culture, or even having German pets would create speculation on the person's loyalties. Robert Farrell, in his early teens when the war started, recalls his friend and their family's butcher shop. The community he lived in became suspicious of the German family.²⁵ These suspicions were not unique to adults as animosity towards the enemy at home spilled over to the experiences of children as well.

The most significant obstacle children of German descent faced was the backlash from other children. Numerous stories cite words and violence between the groups based on their hatred for the enemy. Children who had been born in the United States but spoke the German language equally felt the hate as those born abroad. Daniel Levin, a teenager when the war began, recalls how many children of German descent feared forced relocation into camps as the

²² United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, *CPI Inflation Calculator*, Last Modified August 5, 2016. https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

²³ United States Census Bureau, "Wage or Salary Income in 1939" *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*. 1943. pg 75. https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-labor-force-sample/41236810p1_ch7.pdf

²⁴ United States Census Bureau "Nativity and Parentage of The White Population" *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*. 1943. Pg 1. https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-nativity/41272165_ch3.pdf

²⁵ Robert Farrell, *National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War II*, Interview by Victoria Lincoln & Helen Farrell in 2017. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/farrell-robert/>

Japanese had been after Pearl Harbor.²⁶ Not only was detainment a real possibility, but many German American children often got into fights with other children over their culture. Roberta Bremer recalls as an adult during the war, how her son would get into fights with other children due to his German heritage.²⁷ The United States home front polarized against its enemies and those who shared a common heritage.

Families often face scrutiny not only from the public but also from law enforcement. Barbara Finneson remembers how many members of her mother's extended family faced questioning by the government regarding their ties back to Germany.²⁸ This experience would have been exceedingly difficult for children to understand. They both know the people they have come to love as family members but are simultaneously being told by the government and propaganda that the Germans are a dangerous enemy.

Most white Americans at the time could trace their lineage back to any number of countries in Europe, both Allied and Axis. Families who continued to celebrate their German culture became symbols of the enemy on the home front. Private citizens perpetrated much of the backlash taking place against Germans. Unlike World War I, there was no concentrated government effort to remove German culture from the United States. Children of this time knew the war was going on and knew Hitler was the enemy.²⁹ Many children, however, could not understand the connections the adults were making between Hitler and the Germans in the United States. Much of the animosity children exhibited towards Germans began within their homes and from the sentiments of their parents.

For as much as the home front hated the Germans, the animosity towards Japanese Americans was worse. Japanese children suffered more at the hands of their tormentors more so than German American children. Many factors contributed to the animosity. The most important was the attack on Pearl Harbor. This was a tangible event that shook the nation. Japanese Americans were a reminder to the public of the atrocities committed by the Japanese empire and were a daily symbol of the day that lives in infamy. Japanese Americans endured discrimination, oppression, and forced relocation because of this hate.³⁰

Another factor contributing to the hatred for the Japanese over the Germans was their categorization as non-Whites in the National Census. The white population included those of German heritage. The Census listed the Japanese with other non-white groups like Indians, Koreans, and other ethnic groups of Asia. The separation of the Japanese from the white

²⁶ Danny Levin, *Danny Levin: Remembering the Propaganda and Support for the War on the Home Front*, Interviewed by Jess Rigelhaupt, (University of California - Berkeley: California, 2012) <https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/218679?ln=en>

²⁷ Roberta Bremer, *Roberta Bremer: Rosie The Riveter World War II American Home Front Oral History Project*. Interview by Jess Rigelhaupt in 2008. Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2009. <https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/218432?ln=en>

²⁸ Barbara Finneson, *German Family Members*, National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War II. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/finneson-barbara/>

²⁹ Finneson, *German Family Members*, <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/finneson-barbara/>

³⁰ Werner, *Through the Eyes of Innocents*, 79-99.

population creates a psychological separation, which highlights differences between groups of people. These differences can in turn spur hatred. As of the 1940 census, there were approximately 126,947 people of Japanese ethnicity living in the United States which was about .09% of the population.³¹ The small number of Japanese living in the United States at the time of World War II drew more hatred than the people of German descent.

The most widely known experience of Japanese American children was the time spent in the relocation camps. Enforced by Executive Order 9066, residents and citizens of Japanese descent on the Western Coast of the United States faced relocating to camps under the guise of safety of the United States.³² Uprooted from their homes, jobs, and businesses, families had no idea of when or if they would be able to return to their lives. Barbed wire surrounded the edges of the internment camps, to identify it as a prison it was for the Japanese Americans.

The children in the camps had mixed experiences in their understanding of the purpose of the camps and why they moved to them. Adults understood the reasons for relocation to camps and it created anxieties about the future. Will their homes still be there after the war? What about the personal possessions they could not bring with them? Will they be sent back to Japan despite being American citizens? All these questions plagued parents as they traveled inland to the camps. Children felt these anxieties yet did not grasp the severity of the situation.³³

The relocation disrupted the lives of Japanese Americans. Families lost homes and businesses, and children lost their access to education. Kenji Ima's experience in the Minidoka camp showed that intolerance did not affect all the workers within the camp. Ima was only four years old when his family was relocated to the camp. Children do not often retain memories from an early age, yet Ima recalls his time from the camp with impressive detail. He does not recall being treated differently as ethnically Japanese; however, the anxieties were all too real for his mother as she let her emotions be visible on the bus ride to the camp.³⁴ The fact remains that Japanese Americans were segregated from the rest of the population on account of their race, a practice in the United States which had been around since the end of Reconstruction in 1877 regarding African Americans. Many children were upset with their relocation to the camps and a lack of access to the friends and teachers they had become attached to in their homes. Ima's older cousins, Fumi and Ozzie, had a unique experience. They were well into high school and felt a greater disruption in their lives than Ima did. They were more versed in the laws of the United States and wondered how the American Constitution could allow the detention of its citizens without due process.³⁵

³¹ United States Bureau of the Census, *United States Summary*, "Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940" United States Government Printing Office: 1943. 19.
https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population_-_volume-2/33973538v2p1ch2.pdf

³² Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1941, *Executive Order 9066: Resulting in the Relocation of Japanese*,
<https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=74#>

³³ Kenji Ima, "Memories of Childhood in an American Internment Camp", *World War II*, February 2020. <https://www.historynet.com/memories-of-childhood-in-an-american-internment-camp.htm>

³⁴ Ima, "Memories of Childhood in an American Internment Camp, 2020.

³⁵ Ima, "Memories of Childhood in an American Internment Camp, 2020.

While Japanese Americans on the West Coast were experiencing life in the relocation camps, others also faced the same discrimination. Don Elliot has distinct memories of the Japanese friend he had growing up in Florida. His friend's father had come to the United States to work on the railroad and received land after the line's completion. When war broke out, discrimination against the Japanese grew. Elliot's friend and his father had their land confiscated and they were forcibly relocated to an internment camp outside Boca Raton. Elliot's loyalty to his friend went as far as to quit Latin classes when a teacher told him not to associate with his Japanese friend anymore.³⁶ The relations between Japanese American children and other white children were positive if left to their own devices.

The influence of parents and propaganda created the hostility many children experienced. Barbara Finneson remembers the rant her father went on in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. Barbara did not understand the meaning behind the attack and yet knew, based on her father's words, the Japanese had become the enemy.³⁷ In the eyes of children, they heard everything from their parents and applied it to the world they understood. For Barbara, the fear and suspicion included Japanese American children.³⁸ While it would eventually become clear there were no subversives among the Japanese population, children would not have held the role anyway. Yet society lumped children in with adults as enemies on home soil. Gloria Johnson recalls hating the Japanese as the enemies of the United States yet had never encountered them; there was a small population of Asian-Americans.³⁹ Her perspective, as an older teenager, can provide more detail than children who were much younger at the time of the war. An estimated 755 ethnic Japanese were living in the Midwest at the counting of the 1940 census, which was .5% of the total population of Japanese in the United States at the time. Compared to the Pacific, which had a population of 112,353, which was 89% of the Japanese population in the United States as of the 1940 census.⁴⁰ The difference in the distribution of the Japanese population contributes to the hatred many felt towards the Japanese people. People of the Midwest had fewer experiences with diversity than the coasts did and had fewer opportunities to understand people beyond their physical appearances.

The hatred for citizens of German and Japanese descent was a creation of the individual scorn for those who had ethnicities in the Axis powers abroad. Discrimination against these groups rose and fell with the war. Another group in the United States faced discrimination as well but had been legally permissible by law and Supreme Court rulings. African Americans in

³⁶ Donald Elliot, *Background on Japanese American Best Friend*, Interviewed by Graham Clark March 7, 2018. National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/elliott-donald/>

³⁷ Barbara Finneson, *Losing Japanese Friends*, National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War II. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/finneson-barbara/>

³⁸ Finneson, *Losing Japanese Friends*, <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/finneson-barbara/>

³⁹ Gloria Johnson, *Views Towards Japanese American Communities*, Interviewed by Joel Cates & Chad Horrmann on March 30, 2001, National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War II. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/johnson-gloria/>

⁴⁰ United States Bureau of the Census, *United States Summary*, Pg 52. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p1ch2.pdf>

the United States contributed to the war and still had to live life as second-class citizens. African American children, too, endured most of the oppression as actors in a fight over race they did not understand. Just like children of German and Japanese descent, African American children faced discrimination at the hands of adults and children alike. The expectations for equality in the workforce and the reality of a racially divided society created a stark dichotomy of the American home front.

The war support of African Americans on the home front is well documented. Many pieces of government propaganda emphasize the necessity of the races working together to provide for and protect the home front from the enemy. Executive Order 8802 from President Roosevelt prohibited the defense industry from discriminating against job applicants based on color, race, creed, or national origin.⁴¹ The nation mobilized for war and could not afford to distinguish between the races of workers if it were to win the war. Yet even as the efforts of African Americans contributed to the war, it did nothing to address the social inequality they faced.

Schools provided a place for children to exercise their patriotic duties to help the war effort. Programs and activities were accessible to children of all races. Like Barbara Finneson's experience with the school's War Bond drive, a South-Central Chicago Black school district raised \$263,148.63 through the sale of war bonds and stamps. A photograph published by the Office of Emergency Management indicated the amount was enough to purchase 125 jeeps, two planes, and a motorcycle.⁴² This was an immense amount of money during World War II era. The contributions of the Black community during the war were considerable. Further examples show children play-acting in a supermarket to understand the rationing system on the home front.⁴³ This image helps to illustrate the impact the patriotic efforts had upon children of the time. Even they were able to understand Americans on the home front would have to sacrifice their food so more could be sent to the soldiers serving overseas.

While many Black families were able to support the war effort by participating in programs and events, the war-time experiences were not the same for all races. African Americans in the home front of World War II were fighting a two-front war: against the Axis powers around the world and racial discrimination on the home front. In a letter to the Pittsburgh Courier, James Thompson questioned if the nation could fight the battle against the forces of evil abroad and at home.⁴⁴ Hoping to achieve a "Double Victory," many African Americans hoped

⁴¹ Franklin Roosevelt, 1941 *Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry*, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=72>

⁴² Office of Emergency Management, "*the public school children of the South-Central District of Chicago purchased \$263,148. 83 in war bonds and stamps...a huge check representing enough money for 125 jeeps, two pursuit planes and motorcycle was presented to Maj. C. Udell Turpin of the Illinois War Bond Sales staff.*" 1941-1945, Photograph, African Americans World War, 1939-1945 home front, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/535815>

⁴³ Office for Emergency Management, "*To learn how to shop with point stamps, these youngsters in a Fairfax County, Virginia, grade school have set up a play store, complete with point value table and informational material on point rationing.*" 1941-1945, African Americans World War, 1939-1945 home front. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/535821>

⁴⁴ James G. Thompson, "Should I Sacrifice to Live 'Half-American?'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, Op-Ed, January 1942. <https://www.pcsb.org/cms/lib8/FL01903687/Centricity/Domain/7034/james-thompson-letter.pdf>

racial equality in the United States would follow victory against the Germans and Japanese abroad.

The fight for a Double Victory did not affect just the adults, African American children confronted racial conflict they did not understand. Sue Bramhall recalls the racial tensions in her Delaware home during the war. She remembers the declining friendship with a Black friend who did not want to go to the same high school as Sue. Sue assumed it was because her friend wanted to go to the Black school which was superior to the area. In reality, the friend did not want to go to the white school.⁴⁵ Since segregation separated educational facilities by race, Bramhall's friend was reluctant to attend. Ralph Deaton remembers growing up on an integrated neighborhood block and recalls playing with children of both races. The hatred came from the adults in their lives and remembers the racist names they would call the Black children.⁴⁶ Deaton's experiences illustrate again the hatred of African Americans for the color of their skin is the prejudices children experienced over and over. The repeated experiences contributed to the next generation's prejudice.

As the war ended, the efforts the American home front had undertaken during the war seemed worth it for the victory achieved in both the European and Pacific theaters. Soldiers received a warm welcome home and life moved on into the thriving nation the war helped to pull from the Great Depression. The experiences of people on the home front remain an enduring symbol of the American spirit and perseverance. The collective memories of the American home front embody the fortitude, sacrifice, and patriotism of its population. Yet, beneath the shiny veneer lies the realities that many residents and citizens of the United States endured for the duration of the war and beyond. Families who lived in poverty, had German or Japanese ancestry, or were in the Black minority, all experienced adverse effects of the war on account of their circumstances and race. The children of these marginalized groups experienced the war in a different manner than the adults.

The stark contrast between the varied experiences is an important part of the study of the American home front during World War II. Children living in poverty at the beginning of the war found it difficult to participate in the war bond and stamp drives. Being able to purchase war bonds and stamps was a tangible way to help the war effort. The purchase of these was also very visible. People showed their purchases with pride. Yet for families who were already living hand to mouth, the purchase of bonds could be detrimental to a household budget. Furthermore, it would also have been difficult for families of little means to donate items for recycling to support the war effort. Families of the middle class who had spare items around the home were able to do without. Those who already had little would have been hard-pressed to freely give of what they had.

Other characteristics of the United States population contributed to the hatred and prejudice many people faced. Families and children of German and Japanese descent faced

⁴⁵ Sue Bramhall, *Racial Tensions*, Interviewed by Patricia Rana, Isaiah Reese, and Ethan O'Malley on June 20, 2018. National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War II. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/bramhall-sue/>

⁴⁶ Ralph Deaton, *Growing Up on an Integrated Block*, National Home Front Project: Collecting Memories of World War II. <https://nationalhomefrontproject.org/deaton-ralph/>

recriminations due to their shared language or culture with the Axis power. Many oral histories of childhood during the war recall the animosity towards German and Japanese children. While the accounts of the Japanese in the internment camps are well documented, the children again are usually forgotten in the immensity of the topic. Japanese suffered the effects of the camp and prejudices without fully understanding the reasons for the hatred. Based on census data, the number of German and Japanese people living in the United States was small, yet multiple personal histories recall the magnitude of the hatred.

The experiences of African American children in the United States home front, like the German and Japanese children, are also based on assumptions made by the mainstream culture on account of their ethnicity and race. While the discrimination against African Americans in the United States has a long history stretching back to the pre-Civil War era, the effects of the discrimination remained the same. And just like the German and Japanese children, they did not fully comprehend the reasons for racial discrimination. Personal narratives of the children who lived through the war recall playing with children of many races and experiencing hatred when they encountered adults. Furthermore, the hatred from the adult generation spread to the next generation.

Since the victory over the Japanese in the Pacific, the world has not experienced a total war on the scale of World War II. The United States would go on to experience multiple wars and conflicts over the spread of communism and terror on both near and far fronts. The September 11th attacks would be the next big challenge the United States would have to face against a foreign opponent who attacked the United States on its own soil. As the War on Terror commenced, the nation was again called upon to face the horrors of war and the support of the American home front was imperative to its success. The population of all ages was once again expected to contribute to the war effort and support it by any patriotic means available. What parallels exist between these two sets of mobilizations, set seven decades apart? Instead of the attack on a military installation in Hawaii, it was a coordinated attack on symbols of the American government and capitalism. Instead of Germans and Japanese, the United States was fighting against radical Islamic terror groups. Modern technologies mean changes in warfare, and yet sacrifices and experiences on the home front remain the same. Children of all ages eagerly supported a war against an enemy they did not personally know and learned prejudices from adults in their lives they did not truly understand. While World War II ended for the United States in four years, the War on Terror continues to this day. Children born after the September 11th attacks were not alive to have memories of the day but learned the events and emotions surrounding it to become invested in the outcome. Children of Middle Eastern descent and the Islamic religion faced discrimination and oppression in the wake of the war. Will the nation remember the struggles of marginalized children in the United States? Or will mainstream culture again forget about the experiences of the minorities to celebrate the successes of the majority? In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Eleanor Roosevelt offered the opportunity for citizens, specifically the youth, to provide support for the nation. Only time will tell if the same opportunity has been handed to *all* modern youth to provide equal support for the nation.

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