World War II Homefront: 
A Historiography

In recent years, the World War II homefront has become a fertile field for historical scholarship. For several decades after the war, historians wrote extensively about the New Deal and the Cold War but neglected the wartime homefront. Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars began to fill that gap with a number of outstanding comprehensive accounts and many more specialized studies. As the United States celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the war in the 1990s, historians looked at the impact of the war even more closely than before, and we now have a rich collection of scholarship dealing with the entire wartime experience. The following are highlights of that scholarship, dealing with the themes appearing in this issue of the OAH Magazine of History, for students and teachers interested in pursuing these issues further.

Two recent books provide the best brief introduction to the war at home. Allan M. Winkler’s Home Front, U.S.A.: America during World War II, 2d ed. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2000) deals with the economic, social, and political effects of the struggle and argues that the war was a watershed that laid the framework for the postwar years. John W. Jeffries’s Wartime America: The World War II Home Front (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996) likewise offers a clear overview of the changes that occurred but suggests that continuities with the past were equally important and argues that basic American values survived the conflict intact. Both of these books contain full bibliographies of all the recent scholarship.


On Franklin D. Roosevelt, such a dominant figure during the war, there is a vast literature. A number of the standard books


On women’s employment, the best starting points are Sherna Berger Gluck, Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987); and Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender and Propaganda during World War II (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). For further study, see Antoinette Chambers Noble, “Utah’s Rosies: Women in the Utah War Industries during World War II,” Utah Historical Quarterly 59 (1991); and Paddy Quick, “Rosie the Riveter: Myths and Realities,” Radical America 9 (1975).


For the difficulties of the Fair Employment Practice Committee, the best recent works are Andrew E. Kersten, Fighting for Fair Employment: The FEPC in the Midwest, 1941-1946 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); and Merl E. Reed, Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991).

Wartime racial violence has also come under close scrutiny. Useful works on the riot in Detroit include Robert Shogan and Tom Craig, The Detroit Race Riot: A Study in Violence (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1964); Alfred McClung Lee and Norman D.


Fiction, likewise, tells us a good deal about the war. Harriette Arnow’s moving novel The Dollmaker (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954) vividly conveys the crowded conditions and human difficulties in wartime Detroit. Allan M. Winkler’s novel for young adults, Cassie’s War (Unionville, NY: Royal Fireworks Press, 1994) describes the war at home through the eyes of a young girl, and is appropriate for classroom use.

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