

## **Module 07: Did World War II Advance Minorities, Women, and the Poor?**

### **Conclusion**

World War II created new opportunities for women, African Americans, and other minority groups. The exigencies of increased production during the war forced employers to tap into previously ignored labor pools and to hire women and minorities. In this way, Americans marginalized before the war found new job opportunities both at home and in the armed forces. As a result, historically powerless groups in American society enjoyed newfound prosperity and began to emerge from pariah status.

Despite great social leaps forward, hurdles still remained. Japanese Americans benefited not at all from the opportunities created during the war; instead, they found themselves corralled into concentration camps in the U.S. Rockies. While justified at the time as a national security measure, the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II is now universally viewed as a shameful incident in American history. In addition, African Americans experienced racial segregation, exclusion, and subordination within the armed forces, and few soldiers saw actual combat. Those who did fought bravely, and many emerged from World War II determined to end racism in the United States. African American civilians at home did find jobs in defense plants, yet they, too, endured racist treatment on the job and racist rioting in the streets, the most notable of which occurred in Detroit in 1943.

Women joined the workplace in numbers never before seen, fulfilling positions traditionally open only to men, and their involvement added to American prosperity during the war. After the war, however, most women quickly reverted back to their traditional roles as homemakers.

World War II provided unprecedented job and service opportunities to women and minorities on the U.S. home front, thus laying the groundwork for the civil rights and feminist movements later to come. The advances made by marginalized groups during the war spurred them — and others — on to make the gains they had briefly enjoyed a fixture of American life.