AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE AUTO INDUSTRY

1939
World War II begins

World War II (WWII) began on September 1, 1939 when German forces invaded Poland. Adolf Hitler's 'Blitzkrieg', or 'lighting war', consisted of unwarned air attacks that destroyed most of the Polish air force, bombing road, and rail communications. The war organized most world nations into two opposing military alliances; the Allies, consisting of the Untied States, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union and the Axis, consisting of Japan, Germany and Italy.

Originally the United States vowed not to enter the war, but on December 7, 1941, Japan bombed a U.S. naval based at Pearl Harbor, and the U.S. declared war. The Allies liberated Jews in Nazi concentration camps and in 1945, with Germany and Japan's surrender, the war ended. The causalities from the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima made WWII the deadliest conflict in human history, with over 70 million casualties.

[1] Adolf Hitler, 1889-1945
Library of Congress, Miscellaneous Items in High Demand, [LC-USZ62-12667]

[2] African American pilots
Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Toni Frissell Collection, [LC-DIG-ppmsca-09549]

[3] African American women work in War Plants
Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

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Credits:

Gilbert, Martin. *The Second World War: A Complete History.* New York: Henry Holt and
    Company, 1989. Print.

Keywords/Topics:

Work/Jobs

Questions:

1. What caused the conflict between the allies and the axis in World War II?

2. What event caused the United States to enter World War II?

3. How did World War II affect African Americans?

4. How did the role of women change during World War II?

Links to Internet Websites:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II

http://www.worldwar-2.net/

http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/

http://www.ushmm.org/

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Library of Congress, Miscellaneouis Items in High Demand, [LC-USZ62-12667]

The Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler chose to invade Poland to regain territories Germany lost during World War I. His ultimate goal was to establish a New Order dominated by the Aryan race. In the United States, war propaganda become very important. African Americans began the Double V Campaign of Victory abroad and Victory at home, fighting fascism and discrimination.

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In the image shown above, blacks pilots receive escape kits during active duty in Italy. Contrary to World War I, African Americans were immediately drafted into this war and worked hard to show their dedication to the United States. Many blacks hoped that by fighting in World War II they would be seen as American citizens, equal to whites, and earn the civil rights that had been denied to them because of racial prejudice.

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Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

Women played an important role during World War II. With the majority of men being drafted, women had to maintain their home and family while aiding in war production. Women became an iconic image of the American Dream.