

Native Americans in World War II

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In 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "This generation has a rendezvous with destiny." When Roosevelt said that he had no idea of how much World War II would make his prophecy ring true. More than fifty years later, Americans are remembering the sacrifices of that generation, which took up arms in defense of the nation. Part of that generation was a neglected minority, Native American Indians, who flocked to the colors in defense of their country. No group that participated in World War II made a greater per capita contribution, and no group was changed more by the war. As part of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of World War II, it is fitting for the nation to recall the contributions of its own "first citizens."

The Vanishing American

At the time of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the New World, the Native American population living in what is now the United States was estimated at about one million. By 1880, only 250,000 Indians remained and this gave rise to the "Vanishing American" theory. By 1940, this population had risen to about 350,000. During World War II more than 44,000 Native Americans saw military service. They served on all fronts in the conflict and were honored by receiving numerous Purple Hearts, Air Medals, Distinguished Flying Crosses, Bronze Stars, Silver Stars, Distinguished Service Crosses, and three Congressional Medals of Honor. Indian participation in World War II was so extensive that it later became part of American folklore and popular culture.

The Warrior Image

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor seemed to waken an ancestral warrior spirit in many Native Americans. Thousands of young Indians went into the armed forces or to work in the war production plants that abruptly emerged during military and industrial mobilization. A 1942 survey indicated that 40 percent more Native Americans voluntarily enlisted than had been drafted. Lt. Ernest Childers (Creek), Lt. Jack Montgomery (Cherokee), and Lt. Van Barfoot (Choctaw) all of the famed 45th "Thunderbird" Infantry Division won Medals of Honor in Europe. Childers had first distinguished himself in Sicily, where he received a battlefield commission. Later in Italy, unaided and despite severe wounds, he destroyed three German machine gun emplacements. During the Anzio Campaign in Italy, Montgomery attacked a German strongpoint single-handed, killing eleven of the enemy and taking thirty-three prisoners. During the breakout from Anzio to Rome, Barfoot knocked out two machine gun nests and captured seventeen prisoners. Subsequently, he defeated three German tanks and carried two wounded men to safety. All of these exploits reinforced the "warrior" image in the American mind. Maj. Gen. Clarence Tinker, an Osage and a career pilot, was the highest ranking Indian in the armed forces at the beginning of the war. He died leading a flight of bombers in the Pacific during the Battle of Midway. Joseph J. "Jocko" Clark, the first Indian (Cherokee) to graduate from Annapolis, participated in carrier battles in the Pacific and became an admiral. Brumett Echohawk (Pawnee), a renowned expert in hand-to-hand combat, trained commandos.

A Tradition as Fighters

The Iroquois Confederacy, having declared war on Germany in 1917, had never made peace and so automatically became party to World War II. The Navajo and other tribes were so eager to go to war that they stood for hours in bad weather to sign their draft cards, while others carried their own rifles so they would be ready for battle when they joined up. Unwilling to wait for their draft numbers, one-fourth of the Mescalero Apaches in New Mexico enlisted. Nearly all the able-bodied Chippewas at the Grand Portage Reservation enlisted. In a story that has been attributed to many other tribes as well, Blackfeet Indians mocked the need for a conscription bill. "Since when," their members cried, "has it been necessary for Blackfeet to draw lots to fight?"

The annual enlistment for Native Americans jumped from 7,500 in the summer of 1942 to 22,000 at the beginning of 1945. According to the Selective Service in 1942, at least 99 percent of all eligible Indians, healthy males aged 21 to 44, had registered for the draft. War Department officials maintained that if the entire population had enlisted in the same proportion as Indians, the response would have rendered Selective Service unnecessary. The overwhelming majority of Indians welcomed the opportunity to serve. On Pearl Harbor Day, there were 5,000 Indians in the military. By the end of the war, 24,521 reservation Indians, exclusive of officers, and another 20,000 off-reservation Indians had served. The combined figure of 44,500 was more than ten percent of the Native American population during the war years. This represented one-third of all able-bodied Indian men from 18 to 50 years of age. In some tribes, the percentage of men in the military reached as high as 70 percent. Also, several hundred Indian women served in the WACS, WAVES, and Army Nurse Corps.

The "Chiefs" Go to War

In spite of years of inefficient and often corrupt bureaucratic management of Indian affairs, Native Americans stood ready to fight the "white man's war." American Indians overcame past disappointment, resentment, and suspicion to respond to their nation's need in World War II. It was a grand show of loyalty on the part of Native Americans and many Indian recruits were affectionately called "chiefs." Native Americans responded to America's call for soldiers because they understood the need to defend one's own land, and they understood fundamental concepts of fighting for life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness.

Even the clannish Pueblo tribe, whose members exhibited a historical suspicion of the white world, contributed 213 men, 10 percent of their population of 2,205, to the armed forces. Wisconsin Chippewas at the Lac Oreilles Reservation contributed 100 men from a population of 1,700. Nearly all the able-bodied Chippewas at the Grand Portage Reservation enlisted. Blackfeet Indians enlisted in droves. Navajo Indians responded by sending 3,600 into military service; 300 lost their lives. Many volunteered from the Fort Peck Sioux-Assinibois Reservation in Montana, the descendants of the Indians that defeated Custer. The Iroquois took it as an insult to be called up under compulsion. They passed their own draft act and sent their young braves into National Guard units.

There were many disappointments as well-intentioned Indians were rejected for the draft. Years of poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, and general bureaucratic neglect had taken its toll. A Chippewa Indian was furious when rejected because he had no teeth. "I don't want to bite 'em," he said, "I just want to shoot 'em!" Another Indian, rejected for being too fat to run, said that he had not come to run, but to fight.

The Swastika Shadow Over Native Americans

World War II signalled a major break from the past and offered unparalleled opportunities for Indians to compete in the white man's world. Because the Choctaw language had befuddled German code-breakers in World War I, the German government feared the likelihood of Indian communications specialists as World War II loomed. During the 1930s, Nazi agents posing as anthropologists and writers on reservations tried to subvert some Indian tribes and learn their language. Pan-Nazi agitators from the German-American Bund tried to persuade Indians not to register for the draft. Third Reich Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels predicted Indians would revolt rather than fight Germany because the Swastika was similar to an Indian mystical bird symbol depicting good luck.

Goebbels went so far as to declare the Sioux to be "Aryans," but the Indians knew that as a Mongoloid race, they would be enslaved by the Nazis. Fascist attempts to convert Indians to their cause not only met with failure, but it may have encouraged Indians to register for the draft in the large numbers they did. About 20 percent of the Indian population, 80,000 men and women, marched off to fight in the armed forces and at the home front against Adolph Hitler, a man they called, "he who smells his moustache." Benito Mussolini fared little better, as the Indians called him "Gourd Chin."

Indians saw the Axis Powers as a threat to their liberty, and the Indian tribes responded patriotically. The Chippewa and Sioux joined the Iroquois in declaring war on the Axis. Indians took extreme measures to get into the war. Illiterate Papago Indians memorized a few English phrases and learned to write their names when called to the induction centers. The Navajo, also rejected in large numbers for not speaking English, were extremely determined to serve. They organized remedial English training on their reservations to qualify for service in the armed forces.

The draft created a structure within which Indians and whites had to operate together for the defense of their country. The draft set Indians on a new course where they would be integrated into military life with their white counterparts. Their

lives and their land-based society would never be the same. The Indians' success in weakening racial barriers in the armed forces during World War II presaged the rise of the Civil Rights movement later.

The Home Front

Well-known American humorist Will Rogers, a Cherokee from Oklahoma, said, "The United States never broke a treaty with a foreign government and never kept one with the Indians." Nevertheless, the government of the United States found no more loyal citizens than their own "first Americans." When President Roosevelt mobilized the country and declared war on the Axis Powers, it seemed as if he spoke to each citizen individually. Therefore, according to the Indians' way of perceiving, all must be allowed to participate. About 40,000 Indian men and women, aged 18 to 50, left reservations for the first time to find jobs in defense industries. This migration led to new vocational skills and increased cultural sophistication and awareness in dealings with non-Indians.

The purchase of Treasury Stamps and Bonds by Indian tribes and individuals was considerable. By 1944, war bond sales to Indians had reached \$50 million. Indians also made generous donations to the Red Cross and other organizations, giving what they had. All of this from a minority group at the bottom rung of the economic ladder.

Some 2,500 Navajos helped construct the Fort Wingate Ordnance Depot in New Mexico, and Pueblo Indians helped build the Naval Supply Depot in Utah. Because of their hunting, survival, and navigational skills in the harsh regions of the north, Alaskan Indians were involved in territorial defense. The entire football team at the Santa Fe Indian School volunteered for the armed forces after the 1942 homecoming game.

Women took over traditional men's duties on the reservation, manning fire lookout stations, and becoming mechanics, lumberjacks, farmers, and delivery personnel. Indian women, although reluctant to leave the reservation, worked as welders in aircraft plants. Many Indian women gave their time as volunteers for American Women's Volunteer Service, Red Cross, and Civil Defense. They also tended livestock, grew victory gardens, canned food, and sewed uniforms. A wealthy Kiowa woman in Oklahoma sent a \$1,000 check to the Navy Relief signed with her thumbprint. Alaskan women trapped animals to earn war bond money. By 1943, the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) estimated that 12,000 young Indian women had left the reservation to work in defense industries. By 1945, an estimated 150,000 Native Americans had directly participated in industrial, agricultural, and military aspects of the American war effort.

The Indian Service sent 1,119 of its 7,000 employees into military service. Of these, 22 died, while 7 won Silver or Bronze Stars. In 1942, the Japanese captured 45 Aleuts on Attu. Only 24 returned from captivity in Japan, where they had worked in clay pits.

The federal government designated some Indian lands and even tribes themselves as essential natural resources, appropriating tribal minerals, lumber, and lands for the war effort. After the war, Native Americans discovered that their service for the war effort had depleted their resources without reward. Indian lands provided essential war materials such as oil, gas, lead, zinc, copper, vanadium, asbestos, gypsum, and coal. The Manhattan Project used Navajo helium in New Mexico to make the atomic bomb. The war effort depleted the Blackfeet's tribal resources of oil.

Tell it to the Marines

German soldiers during World War I had been befuddled by Indians who transmitted messages over field phones in the Choctaw language. The 32d Infantry Division, Third Army, used Indians from Michigan and Wisconsin to work with microphones and to transmit messages in the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1940. During World War II, the U.S. Marine Corps recruited Navajo Indians for the same purpose. Navajo marines used their language as a battlefield code that the Japanese never broke. The Navajo Code Talkers became the most celebrated and publicized of the radio units.

Marines were "elite" fighters and welcomed Indians because of their warrior reputation. The Navajo marines ended their ceremonial chants by singing the Marine Corps Hymn in Navajo. Their eloquence came naturally to Indians because theirs is an oral culture. Navajos formed special all-Navajo Marine Corps signal units that encoded messages in their native tongue. Taking advantage of the flexibility and range of the Navajo language, they worked out translations of military and naval terms so that orders and instructions could be transmitted by voice over the radio in a code the Japanese were never able to break. They were used first in late 1942 on Guadalcanal. Special Code Talker units were eventually assigned to each of the Marine Corps' six Pacific divisions. By war's end, over 400 Navajo had served as Code Talkers. Untold numbers of Marines owe their lives to the Navajo Code Talkers.

Indians also excelled at basic training. Maj. Lee Gilstop of Oklahoma, who trained 2,000 Native Americans at his post,

said, "The Indian is the best damn soldier in the Army." Their talents included bayonet fighting, marksmanship, scouting, and patrolling. Native Americans took to commando training; after all, their ancestors invented it. One Sioux soldier, Kenneth Scisson of South Dakota, became an American commando unit's leading German-killer. On a single patrol, Scisson added ten notches to his Garand rifle. Native Americans endured thirst and lack of food better than the average soldier. They had an acute sense of perception and excellent endurance, along with superior physical coordination.

Indians first saw action in the Pacific theater. Over 300 Indians, including a descendant of the famed Apache chief Geronimo, took part in the defense of Bataan and Corregidor. Over 2,000 Indian farmers, workers, and businessmen in Oklahoma and New Mexico trained and fought as part of the 45th Infantry Division for 511 days of combat in Italy and Central Europe. The "Thunderbirds" had the highest proportion of Indian soldiers of any division, but Indians served conspicuously in the 4th and 88th Divisions, the 19th and 180th Infantry Regiments, and the 147th Field Artillery Regiment, and in sundry Oklahoma National Guard units.

For Native Americans, World War II signalled a major break from the past. Many Indians in the military made a decent living for the first time in their lives. By 1944, the average Indian's annual income was \$2,500, up two and one-half times since 1940. Military life provided a steady job, money, status, and a taste of the white man's world. Indians learned assertiveness they could use in their fight for equal rights after the war.

The Warriors and War Workers Return

The war, therefore, provided new opportunities for American Indians, and these opportunities disrupted old patterns. The wartime economy and military service took thousands of Indians away from the reservations. Many of these Indians settled into the mainstream, adapting permanently to the cities and to a non-Indian way of life. Moreover, thousands returned to the reservation even after they had proved themselves capable of making the adjustment to white America. Those who left traditional cultures did not necessarily reject their heritage. Instead, they forged a new Pan-Indian identity to cope with the differences they perceived between themselves and whites.

World War II became a turning point for both Indians and Caucasians because its impact on each was so great and different. Whites believed that World War II had completed the process of Indian integration into mainstream American society. Large numbers of Indians, on the other hand, saw for the first time the non-Indian world at close range. It both attracted and repelled them. The positive aspects included a higher standard of living, with education, health care, and job opportunities. The negatives were the lessening of tribal influence and the threat of forfeiting the security of the reservation. Indians did not want equality with whites at the price of losing group identification. In sum, the war caused the greatest change in Indian life since the beginning of the reservation era and taught Native Americans they could aspire to walk successfully in two worlds.

A good deal of credit must go to the Native Americans for their outstanding part in America's victory in World War II. They sacrificed more than most—both individually and as a group. They left the land they knew to travel to strange places, where people did not always understand their ways. They had to forego the dances and rituals that were an important part of their life. They had to learn to work under non-Indian supervisors in situations that were wholly new to them. It was a tremendously difficult adjustment; more than for white America, which had known modern war and mobilization before. But in the process, Native Americans became Indian-Americans, not just American Indians.

The Role of Minorities in WWII

Group Member Names:

Minority Group Studied:



List FIVE (5) important facts about your minority group's participation in/contributions to WWII

1:

2:

3:

4:

5:

5:

5:

Concluding statement: Construct a statement (one sentence) describing the importance of your minority group's contributions to WWII.

4:

5:

5:

JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNMENT



The Mochida family awaits evacuation in Hayward, California, in 1942. Photograph by Dorothea Lange

On December 7, 1941, Japanese naval and air forces attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, bringing the U.S. into World War II. In the weeks following the attack, fear and suspicion grew of the sizable Japanese American community in the U.S. Might these immigrants and first generation Americans side with Japan against the United States? Based on those fears, combined with a long history of anti-Japanese immigrant sentiment, the U.S. government forced more than 110,000 Japanese Americans living along the West Coast into Internment Camps for the duration of the war. In a war that the U.S. fought to preserve liberty around the world, this event stands out starkly as a violation of the civil and human rights of tens of thousands right here at home.

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066—an order that gave the War Department the authority to declare any part of the country a restricted military area “from which any or all persons may be excluded.” California, Oregon, Washington, and southern Arizona were soon designated as such. The persons to be excluded were Japanese Americans.

Beginning in March of 1942, Japanese Americans were ordered to register with the War Relocation Authority (WRA) for “evacuation.” Families were told they could only bring what they could carry. Businesses, homes, and possessions had to be sold or entrusted to neighbors or friends. Pets had to be left behind. Of the more than 110,000 people sent to Internment Camps, two-thirds were Nisei—first generation Americans—and the other third were Issei—born in Japan. A great many of the internees were children and teenagers.

By October 1942 nearly all internees were housed in ten hastily built camps run by the WRA. These camps were located in isolated, often desolate locations. Barbed wire and military police surrounded them. Along with loss of freedom, families shared a single room (often without plumbing and little heat), ate in communal dining halls, endured harsh weather, and suffered mental and physical stresses of being confined against their will. Nutrition, education, and health care were all inadequate. Despite these sub-standard conditions, people did their best to make life in the camps as “normal” as possible. They established schools and governing bodies, organized baseball teams, created music and art groups, planted vegetable gardens, and held religious services—anything they could do to make life in the camps bearable.

In 1943 the U.S. government reversed its exclusion of Japanese Americans from the draft (they had been considered enemy aliens) and asked for volunteers from the camps to serve in the military. More than 800 men volunteered and became part of the 442nd Infantry Regimental Combat team. The 442nd, which fought in Italy, Southern France, and Germany, became one of the most highly decorated units of WWII. While these men fought for America, their families were living behind barbed wire in their own country.

In challenging the constitutionality of Executive Order 9066, Fred Korematsu argued that his rights and those of other Americans of Japanese descent had been violated. In *Korematsu v. United States*, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in favor of the government, saying that military necessity overruled those civil rights. In his dissent, however, Justice Frank Murphy stated that the exclusion of Japanese Americans “falls into the ugly abyss of racism.”

Executive Order 9066 was finally rescinded on January 2, 1945, and internees slowly began to return home to rebuild their lives. In 1988 the U.S. government issued a formal apology to all former internees and paid \$20,000 to each surviving internee. The government acknowledged that the internment had been based on “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.” To this day, Japanese American Internment during WWII is studied as a cautionary tale of the need for vigilance when maintaining the constitutional rights of all Americans.

AMERICAN WOMEN IN WORLD WAR II

On the Home Front and Beyond



American women played important roles during World War II, both at home and in uniform. Not only did they give their sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers to the war effort, they gave their time, energy, and some even gave their lives.

Reluctant to enter the war when it erupted in 1939, the United States quickly committed itself to total war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. That commitment included utilizing all of America's assets—women included. The Axis powers, on the other hand, were slow to employ women in their war industries. Hitler derided Americans as degenerate for putting their women to work. The role of German women, he said, was to be good wives and mothers and to have more babies for the Third Reich.

When the war began, quickie marriages became the norm, as teenagers married their sweethearts before their men went overseas. As the men fought abroad, women on the Home Front worked in defense plants and volunteered for war-related organizations, in addition to managing their households. In New Orleans, as the demand for public transportation grew, women even became streetcar “conductorettes” for the first time. When men left, women “became proficient cooks and housekeepers, managed the finances, learned to fix the car, worked in a defense plant, and wrote letters to their soldier husbands that were consistently upbeat.” (Stephen Ambrose, *D-Day*, 488) *Rosie the Riveter* helped assure that the Allies would have the war materials they needed to defeat the Axis.

Nearly 350,000 American women served in uniform, both at home and abroad, volunteering for the newly formed Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs, later renamed the Women's Army Corps), the Navy Women's Reserve (WAVES), the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, the Coast Guard Women's Reserve (SPARS), the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), the Army Nurses Corps, and the Navy Nurse Corps. General Eisenhower felt that he could not win the war without the aid of the women in uniform. “The contribution of the women of America, whether on the farm or in the factory or in uniform, to D-Day was a *sine qua non* of the invasion effort.” (Ambrose, *D-Day*, 489)

Women in uniform took office and clerical jobs in the armed forces in order to free men to fight. They also drove trucks, repaired airplanes, worked as laboratory technicians, rigged parachutes, served as radio operators, analyzed photographs, flew military aircraft across the country, test-flew newly repaired planes, and even trained anti-aircraft artillery gunners by acting as flying targets. Some women served near the front lines in the Army Nurse Corps, where 16 were killed as a result of direct enemy fire. Sixty-eight American service women were captured as POWs in the Philippines. More than 1,600 nurses were decorated for bravery under fire and meritorious service, and 565 WACs in the Pacific Theater won combat decorations. Nurses were in Normandy on D-plus-four.

At the war's end, even though a majority of women surveyed reported wanted to keep their jobs, many were forced out by men returning home and by the downturn in demand for war materials. Women veterans encountered roadblocks when they tried to take advantage of benefit programs for veterans, like the G.I. Bill. The nation that needed their help in a time of crisis, it seems, was not yet ready for the greater social equality that would slowly come in the decades to follow.

The National WWII Museum recognizes the contribution that women played in the success of the Allied victory in World War II and explores that contribution in depth in its Home Front gallery.



AFRICAN AMERICANS IN WORLD WAR II

Fighting for a Double Victory



African Americans served bravely and with distinction in every theater of World War II, while simultaneously struggling for their own civil rights from “the world’s greatest democracy.” Although the United States Armed Forces were officially segregated until 1948, WWII laid the foundation for post-war integration of the military. In 1941 fewer than 4,000 African Americans were serving in the military and only twelve African Americans had become officers. By 1945, more than 1.2 million African Americans would be serving in uniform on the Home Front, in Europe, and the Pacific (including thousands of African American women in the Women’s auxiliaries).

During the war years, the segregation practices of civilian life spilled over into the military. The draft was segregated and more often than not African Americans were passed over by the all-white draft boards. Pressure from the NAACP led President Roosevelt to pledge that African Americans would be enlisted according to their percentage in the population. Although this percentage, 10.6%, was never actually attained in the services during the war, African American numbers grew dramatically in the Army, Navy, Army Air Force, Marine Corps, and the Coast Guard.

While most African Americans serving at the beginning of WWII were assigned to non-combat units and relegated to service duties, such as supply, maintenance, and transportation, their work behind front lines was equally vital to the war effort. Many drove for the famous “Red Ball Express,” which carried a half million tons of supplies to the advancing First and Third Armies through France. By 1945, however, troop losses virtually forced the military to begin placing more African American troops into positions as infantrymen, pilots, tankers, medics, and officers in increasing numbers. In all positions and ranks, they served with as much honor, distinction, and courage as any American soldier did. Still, African American MPs stationed in the South often could not enter restaurants where their German prisoners were being served a meal.

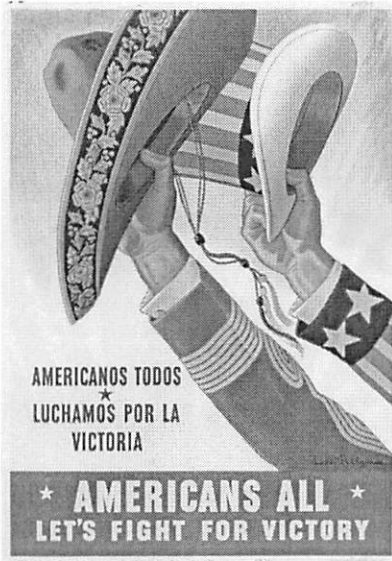
On D-Day, the First Army on Omaha and Utah Beaches included about 1,700 African American troops. This number included a section of the 327th Quartermaster Service Company and the 320th Anti-Aircraft Barrage Balloon Battalion, which protected troops on the beach from aerial attack. Soon the all-black 761st Tank Battalion was fighting its way through France with Patton’s Third Army. They spent 183 days in combat and were credited with capturing 30 major towns in France, Belgium, and Germany.

The Army Air Force also established several African American fighter and bomber groups. The famous “Tuskegee Airmen” of the 332nd Fighter Group became part of the 15th Air Force, flying ground support missions over Anzio and escorting bombers on missions over Southern Italy. The Tuskegee Airmen flew more than 15,000 sorties between May 1943 and June 1945. Bomber crews often requested to be escorted by these “Redtails,” a nickname acquired from the painted tails of Tuskegee fighter planes. Sixty-six Tuskegee Airmen died in combat.

Stephen Ambrose identified the lamentable American irony of WWII, writing, “*The world’s greatest democracy fought the world’s greatest racist with a segregated army*” (Ambrose, *Citizen Soldier*). During the global conflict, African American leaders and organizations established the “Double V” campaign, calling for victory against the enemy overseas and victory against racism at home. This new black consciousness and the defiant rejection of unjustifiable racism planted important seeds for the post-War civil rights movement.

The National WWII Museum honors the contributions of African Americans in World War II.

LOS VETERANOS—Latinos in WWII



Over 500,000 Latinos (including 350,000 Mexican Americans and 53,000 Puerto Ricans) served in WWII. Exact numbers are difficult because, with the exception of the 65th Infantry Regiment from Puerto Rico, Latinos were not segregated into separate units, as African Americans were. When war was declared on December 8, 1941, thousands of Latinos were among those that rushed to enlist. Latinos served with distinction throughout Europe, in the Pacific Theater, North Africa, the Aleutians and the Mediterranean. Among other honors earned, thirteen Medals of Honor were awarded to Latinos for service during WWII.

In the Pacific Theater, the 158th Regimental Combat Team, of which a large percentage was Latino and Native American, fought in New Guinea and the Philippines. They so impressed General MacArthur that he called them "the greatest fighting combat team ever deployed in battle." Latino soldiers were of particular aid in the defense of the Philippines. Their fluency in Spanish was invaluable when serving with Spanish speaking Filipinos. These same soldiers were part of the infamous "Bataan Death March." On Saipan, Marine PFC Guy Gabaldon, a Mexican-American from East Los Angeles who had learned Japanese in his ethnically diverse neighborhood, captured 1,500 Japanese soldiers, earning him the nickname, the "Pied Piper of Saipan."

In the European Theater, Latino soldiers from the 36th Infantry Division from Texas were among the first soldiers to land on Italian soil and suffered heavy casualties crossing the Rapido River at Cassino. The 88th Infantry Division (with draftees from Southwestern states) was ranked in the top 10 for combat effectiveness.

Latino Women and WWII

Latinas served during WWII despite cultural barriers that had in the past prevented them from leaving their families and traveling long distances alone. Bilingualism was highly sought after during the war and so they found important work in cryptology, communications and interpretation. As linguists, nurses and Red Cross aids, and in the WAACS, WAVES, and Marine Corps Women's Reserve, Latinas broke through both gender and cultural barriers to serve their country.

On the Home Front

Thousands of Latino men and women on the Home Front worked on railroads, in mines, shipyard and airplane factories and as crucial agricultural labor. A shortage of manual labor jeopardized the war effort, so the US government established the Bracero Program, allowing 50,000 Mexican agricultural workers and 75,000 railroad workers to come as guest workers to the United States. These workers were crucial to the country's wartime economy.

Zoot Suit Riots

During the 1930s and 40s, many Latino youths in the Southwestern U.S. developed their own sub-culture, which included distinctive fashions, music, and slang. These youths, rebelling both against Anglo culture and even against elements of their own culture, called themselves *Pachucos*. To the White community, Pachuco culture soon became synonymous with gang culture, and social tensions threatened to erupt in several urban areas. On the night of June 3, 1943, eleven U.S. Navy sailors on shore leave in Los Angeles claimed they were attacked by a "group of Mexican kids." Soon after scores of sailors and Marines invaded the Latino community of East Los Angeles, targeting anyone they saw wearing a "zoot suit," a Pachuco style of clothing, featuring a long dress coat with baggy pants. The riots continued for another two nights and the sailors and Marines were portrayed in the press as heroes suppressing a "Mexican crime wave." In some cases, police actually accompanied sailors and Marines and then arrested their beaten victims.

After the War

Latinos felt their efforts and sacrifices during the war had earned them equal rights. But, Latinos, like other minority groups in the United States, faced discrimination when they returned from war. Many future leaders of the Latino and Chicano Civil Rights Movements began their efforts after having served in uniform. Most prominent among these was Dr. Hector Garcia, founder of the American G.I. Forum, a civil rights group still active today fighting for Latino rights in health care, education, labor agreements, and the court system.

