

Lesson 4: Life in WWII Arkansas

OVERVIEW

This lesson explores daily life for various groups in Arkansas during World War II, using the students' textbooks and primary source accounts and photographs.

OBJECTIVES

Using primary source documents and locating information in their textbooks, students will be able to explain the effects of World War II on the lives of Arkansans.

GUIDING QUESTION

What was it like to live in Arkansas during WWII?

ARKANSAS HISTORY FRAMEWORKS

TCC 1.2, 1.3

PPE 1.1

SSPS 1.1, 1.4

MATERIALS

“Workers Get Plenty to Eat”, from the *Camden News*

Arkansas history textbooks

Photograph of fuel oil ration coupon (reproduced following this lesson)

BACKGROUND

In the early 1940s, Arkansas was quite different from what students see today. Though many towns in the state had electricity, many rural areas had just begun the process of electrification. Many Arkansas farmers relied on mules or horses to work their farms. The impact of the Great Depression on Arkansas had been tremendous. Counties and cities had assumed large amounts of debt in order to build roads in the early 1930s, and large floods prevented farmers from having profitable harvests for several growing seasons, making payment of the debt nearly hopeless.

Other problems were present as well: illiteracy, malnutrition, and hookworm. Forty-three percent of inductees into the military from Arkansas were rejected, mostly due to poor health and education level. This rate was the second highest in the nation.

Arkansas changed drastically during World War II. Government rationing took effect, and families adjusted their lifestyle for the duration of the war when goods such as meat, sugar, shoes, tires, and gasoline could only be purchased in limited quantities. Gardens called “victory gardens” were planted by Arkansas residents, both inside the concentration camps and outside, to make up for limitations on other types of food. Arkansans participated in scrap metal drives to provide building materials for the war. They bought war bonds to help finance the war. Most of all, however, the war brought new opportunities for work.

Arkansans worked as carpenters to build the War Relocation Centers at Jerome and Rohwer. As young men began enlisting in the military, new opportunities opened up for those who remained in Arkansas. Defense industries began operating in the larger cities in Arkansas, and many people moved to these towns to work. Others moved out of state to take jobs in war industries that sprung up across the nation. As a result, the state as a whole experienced a population decline during the war, and finding enough laborers to work on Arkansas' farms was difficult. One response to this was an increase in the use of machines. The number of tractors on Arkansas farms increased from 12, 564 in 1940 to 26, 537 in 1945, more than doubling in five years.

While many men volunteered to serve in the armed forces, women continued to work on farms and began working in factories. New opportunities also opened up to African Americans, such as Otis Eubanks, who worked as a brakeman for a railroad company during the war after he was found physically unfit for military service due to a childhood injury. African Americans also enlisted in the army, but like the Japanese Americans who volunteered to serve from the concentration camps, they fought in segregated units.

OPENING

Show students the picture of fuel oil rationing coupons reproduced immediately following this lesson, or on the Internet at <http://skyways.lib.ks.us/library/leavenworth/KSR/doc19.jpg>.

Ask students some or all of the following questions:

What is this document?

For what were these coupons used?

How do you think your life (or that of your family) might have been impacted by these coupons?

ACTIVITIES

1. Have students look in their Arkansas history textbooks to locate information about how World War II affected the lives of Arkansans.

Have students look for information and/or a definition of one of the following key terms:

Ration books/ coupons

Victory gardens

War bonds

Munitions/ ordnance plants

Then, have students write the definition of their key term, as well as draw a picture to represent this term, on a sheet of paper. Students can then trade papers with other students and copy down the definitions of the other 3 key terms.

2. Have students read out loud or independently the excerpts from the article “Workers Get Plenty to Eat,” from the *Camden News*. Discuss the questions that follow the reading selection either in small groups or as an entire class. Ask students if they would have wanted to work in the Camden plant during World War II. If necessary, review the video clip from

the documentary *Time of Fear* that depicts living conditions in southeastern Arkansas in the late 1930s – early 1940s (from 3:00 until 5:25).

CLOSING

Ask the students (as a class) to compare the quality of life described in the newspaper article and in their Arkansas history textbook to that in the relocation camps where Japanese Americans were kept. Guide this discussion by drawing a “T” chart on the board entitled “What was life like in WWII Arkansas?” Make the left side of the T chart “Life in the camps” and the right side “Life outside the camps.”

EXTENSIONS

Assign the students to look through microfilm of the local paper at your public library. Have them check 2-5 issues from 1942 – 1944 for evidence of the types of changes that were taking place in Arkansas during WWII.

Ask a member of the community to come speak to students about their experiences of living in Arkansas during World War II.

REFERENCES

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Wayne, Jeannie, et. al. *Arkansas: a Narrative History*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002.

FUEL OIL 5 GALLONS	FUEL OIL 5 GALLONS	FUEL OIL 5 GALLONS	FUEL OIL 5 GALLONS	FUEL OIL 5 GALLONS	FUEL OIL 5 GALLONS
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION
FUEL OIL RATION
Class 5B Consumer Coupons

Issued to H. C. Peterson
(Signature)

For use only at 409 W. Leavenworth
(Number of District)
Leavenworth, Kansas
(City and State)

This sheet issued for 1788 gallons for the heating year ending August 31, 1946.

Date issued July 19, 1945

COUPON SHEET MUST BE SIGNED

(Signature of owner or member of household)

IMPORTANT: READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS
The unit coupons for each period become valid on dates announced by OPA. Each 5-unit coupon is worth 50 gallons unless raised or lowered because of changes in the national fuel oil supply. Coupons with squares are good at any time for the number of gallons printed on them. R. I.—
BUDGET your ration for heat according to newspaper and radio announcements telling what percent of the heating season has passed. If you heat water with fuel oil, save for next summer's use.
If you move from the address appearing on this stub, you must return this coupon sheet to your Board, as it is not transferable to any other person or address.

GET A RECEIPT FROM YOUR DEALER IF YOU DEPOSIT THIS SHEET WITH HIM.

War Price and Rationing Board number and address:
WAR PRICE AND RATIONING
BOARD No. S27
LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

Fuel Oil Rationing Coupon. Leavenworth Public Library, Leavenworth, Kansas.

LESSON 4: LIFE IN WWII ARKANSAS

Workers Get Plenty to Eat

By Pat Walsh

United Press Staff Correspondent

Camden Ordnance Plant – For the man who likes to eat and eat well, including lots of sweets, the Shumaker Naval Ordnance Plant near Camden, which is badly in need of construction workers, is the place to go, a visit this week through one of the three mess halls disclosed.

Because food for the construction workers is bought by the Navy, items that are scarce on the tables of the average resident of Arkansas or even the wealthy are commonplace to the workers who obtain three meals a day and a place to sleep for the total sum of \$1 a day in the plant area.

Newsmen making a tour of the plant this week visited the bakery in the No. One mess hall which is turning out hundreds of pies, cookies and cakes to fill the workers noon-day lunch box and provide desserts for the evening meals....

“Give a man good food, a dry place to sleep and some means of recreation, Page said, “and he’ll do a great deal more work in less time than if such things were not provided.’

Leval, despite the fact that newsmen were entering his mess hall during the noon rush, insisted on showing his visitors through the kitchens so that all could see just how the food was prepared and how 24,700 workers are fed three meals a day.

Leval threw open the doors to huge cold rooms where a day’s supply of meat had been stored and pointed out that it was Grade A, which his own butchers would cut up for cooking.

A look at breakfast menu for the following day disclosed that the workers would go out on the job after having had their pick of a cereal, a juice, eggs, a quarter of a pound of bacon, toast, butter, jelly, canned fruits and coffee. Such a meal if obtainable in the average café or hotel coffee shop would run to an 80 or 90 cent check.

One section of the huge kitchen had been divided off into a salad room where a group of women were engaged in preparing salads for the evening meal because the noon rush was almost over with.

Near the salad room was the dishwashing section which would bring joy to the heart of the average house-wife as she watched the workers scrape the plates and then slide them into the washing machine which washed and steam cleaned the plates, cups and silverware, before they were returned to the drying room to await being placed back on the tables.

According to Leval and Page the daily menu is planned in advance by a dietician who takes into consideration the fact that the men are doing heavy labor and burn up their food much faster than a person whose job is at a desk.

Workers are given sleeping quarters...near the mess halls...Negroes employed on the job are

fed in a special section of the mess halls and have their own sleeping quarters. However, Page and Leval both pointed out that they are given the same food as the white employees.

Page, in showing the visitors through the plant, always points with pride to the progress that workmen have made in completing the recreation hall in the center of the area where all workers gather nightly after work hours....

Questions to Think About

1. Why do you think this article was published? Who was its intended audience?
2. Why do you think the author stated that “Negroes” employed on the job have separate eating and sleeping facilities, but are served the same food as the white employees?
3. How does the availability of food and other goods in the article compare to the availability of food and goods for people in the rest of the state?
4. Why do you think that sleeping facilities were available at the Camden plant?
5. After reading this newspaper article, list three ways in which World War II impacted Camden, Arkansas, and its residents.