How did minorities contribute to Allied victory?
World War II solidified the nation’s role as a global power and ushered in social changes and established reform agendas that would preoccupy public discourse in the United States for the remainder of the 20th century.
Still seeking equality:

- African Americans and others struggled to obtain desegregation of the armed forces and end discriminatory hiring practices on the home front.
• Women entered into previously male job roles

• Women increasingly joined the armed services- in support roles rather than combat!

Riveter at Lockheed Aircraft Corp., Burbank, CA.

Credit: National Archives and Records Administration
MINORITY PARTICIPATION:

+ African Americans generally served in segregated military units

+ Most were assigned to non-combat roles but demanded the right to serve in combat rather than support roles.

Colored Waiting Room- Rome, Georgia. September 1943- Esther Bubley, photographer. Fighting for people’s freedoms in other countries while being denied equality at home.
All Minority Military Units:

- Tuskegee Airmen (African American) served in Europe with distinction.

They flew approximately 15,553 sorties, and completed 1,578 missions protecting the 12th Tactical and 15th U.S. Army Air Force bomber squadrons over Italy and Germany. These courageous men came home with 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, a Legion of Merit, 744 Air Medals, 8 Purple Hearts, two Soldier Medals, 14 Bronze Stars, and a Red Star of Yugoslavia. The Tuskegee Airmen destroyed or damaged over 409 German aircraft.
All Minority Military Units:

- **Nisei** regiments (Japanese Americans) earned a high number of decorations.
- They served in segregated units and were restricted to fighting only in Europe.
- Many felt the need to prove that they were loyal to America, rather than to Japan.

American soldiers of Japanese descent in Europe (National Archives)
All Minority Military Units:

- **Navajo Code Talkers;** communication codes of the Navajo were used in the Pacific.

- Navajo language was oral, not written, and was impossible for Japanese to break.

The Navajo Code Talkers in action in the Pacific. Their language was never “cracked” by the Japanese. Without their special skills, many more Americans would have perished in the Pacific! (National Archives)
Additional Contributions:

- Mexican Americans fought in non-segregated units.
- Women joined all branches of the armed forces to support their country!

"For your country's sake today - For your own sake tomorrow / Go to the nearest recruiting station of the armed service of your choice." 1944. Color poster by Steele Savage.

**Credit:** National Archives and Records Administration
A black regiment as they prepare for the “Battle of the Bulge”- without minority contribution to the war effort America’s fight would have been much harder! (Library of Congress)

Cost for the Contribution:

- Minority units suffered higher casualties.
- Units and individuals won numerous citations and individual medals for bravery in action.
How did minority participation in World War II reflect social conditions in the United States?

• Segregation was the law of the South, and the U.S. government maintained this philosophy through the war.

• Minority soldiers had “tasted” equality in Europe, and they would demand social change when returning home.

• Experiences in war would help to usher in a new Civil Rights Movement!