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Evaluate the social impact of the Second World War on women and ethnic minorities in any one country of the Americas.

15 Any conflict with the magnitude of the Second World War will inevitable cause domestic social changes (and sometimes revolution) within a country involved. With the men away to war, groups needed to step up and fill in the gaps left in society. In the United States, this was certainly true for both women and ~~women~~ ethnic minorities. All groups felt effect by their roles in WWII, but the extent to which they were impacted varies between groups.

Likely the group that played the largest role in WWII were the women, and thus witnessed significant impact on their social status. This was felt on multiple fronts. In the workforce, they certainly played a large role as there were no white males to run firms, and employers at the time still felt discrimination against minorities - thus, women were hired. While they began clerical/office work, the need for high output in munitions



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factories required them to start working as machinists and mechanics in munitions / other factories. While at the time there was opposition, Revisionist historians can witness the impact this had ~~to~~ besides simply higher economic output out of necessity. Firstly, it allowed women to wear clothing that wasn't a traditional feminine style seen in the 1930s. Instead, women began wearing power suits, overalls, and pants - all of which are typical men's styles. Thus, coupled with the fact that they ~~were~~ held a male job, largely empowered women, and this change in image closed the gender gap tremendously. The somewhat-androgynous-looking Rosie the Riveter was a personification of this movement. On the homefront, women were forced to play both the male and female role. Besides being a mother, they also ~~to~~ were more inclined to learn to drive,



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for instance; an activity often seen as unladylike. Even smoking among women increased, another 'unladylike' activity. Thus, coupled with the need to go through policies such as rationing, and the emotional stress that came with the war, created a very resilient and independent woman. While the impact of these changes weren't experienced until well after WWII (as the instability of society post-war forced women back into their stereotyped 'housewife' roles, as evident in Christian Dior's the New Look fashion of 1947, which was ^(and the fact that women quit their ^{year} jobs) romantic), the seed was planted.

As society liberalized by the 1960s and 1970s, women experienced much higher standards of equality, such as higher representation in the workplace, higher number of women wearing pants, as well as liberalized divorce ~~and~~ laws and laws of women's sexual freedom and



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abortion rights. These occurred largely because a precedence of independence and tenacity was set for women in WWII, as they were able to show that they could accomplish anything a man could.

Women also had the opportunity to serve in the armed forces. While it was met with much opposition by both men and conservative women's groups, women became a more predominant group in the army, aviation, navy, and eventually marines as well - although they were normally given their own 'regiments' and rarely saw combat. In the beginning of the war, there was a shortage of nurses, but by the middle & end of the war thousands had enlisted. In fact, a group of American nurses sent overseas were captured and held as prisoners of war in the Philippines by the Japanese! The impact of this



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was (again) not experienced for at least a couple of decades after the war; in present day, however, women experience equality in the armed forces as a result of the precedent set in WWII.

African-Americans were another group who played a significant role in WWII. In the armed forces, A-As were permitted to enlist as part of the US Army; however, they were most often put into segregated units.

~~The~~ Yet, many officers in the US Army were A-A, which led to eventual changes in the dynamic of the armed forces (more equality). In the workforce, there was a new 'Great Migration' northwards to find work in Northern factories, which impacted the ethnic dynamic of Northern US cities. While A-As still faced disenfranchisement, ^{President} Franklin D. Roosevelt (i.e. riots in Detroit in 1943),



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implemented an order in 1941 to provide equal workplace equality. A few years later, this was made even more official as an actual bill, which was highly significant as it was the first federal bill aimed at establishing racial equality since Reconstruction. The impact of this was clearly significant; this set the standard for A-As to better participate in the economy and get an income, which would raise their standard of living. While reinforcement of this policy couldn't be guaranteed (i.e. they, like women, just received lower wages), it was still an advancement in a positive/forward direction.

The impact of the war was not especially good for the ~~Asian~~ Japanese-Americans, even those domestically born. After the attack on Pearl Harbour, Japanese were seen as enemy aliens, and treated as such. Many



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were harassed by the government and citizens alike. Some were thrown into internment camps or prison if suspected of treason, and there wasn't much evidence needed to reach that conclusion. There were harsh anti-immigration laws implemented as well, so families couldn't be united after the war. This was especially harsh in California, where most immigrants from Asia would arrive. This caused much discrimination against the Japanese-Americans, which lasted much longer than the war.

The Mexican-Americans were another predominant minority group during WWII. In the workforce, they largely worked in agriculture in the Southern states, harvesting crops for food, which was extremely important to the war effort. They also had the opportunity to serve in the



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15 army, and played a large role in the armed forces. However they too were met with discrimination. An excellent example surrounded the 'zoot suit', a clothing style that used a large amount of cloth and material. Orthodox historians sympathize with the reactions of the US public - in Los Angeles, it sparked a riot because it was seen as unpatriotic to be using so much extra cloth. American nationalists actually ripped the 'zoot suits' off their wearers. Unlike the other minority groups, the Mexican-Americans faced discrimination, but saw less social advancement/regression as a result of the war.

Thus, all groups felt an impact as a result of WWII, but the extents to which they were felt differed among the various groups.



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