

received a disproportionate share of all these federal expenditures at a time when they had grown enormously.

The most apparent effect on California's economy, apart from the general increase in its size, was the wartime expansion of manufacturing. Under government contracts, American private industry produced a great variety of the sinews of war. In California, almost overnight, ships and airplanes became the most important of all the state's products.

Wartime Shipyards

With the government providing the bulk of the capital, Henry J. Kaiser of Oakland became the chief private entrepreneur of California's wartime shipbuilding industry. Kaiser's reputation as an engineering and industrial genius had begun with the construction of Hoover and Parker dams and had continued to grow with his major role in the building of the San Francisco Bay Bridge and the dams at Bonneville and Grand Coulee. In order to produce his own cement, Kaiser had built Permanente, the largest cement plant in the world. Before the United States entered the war, he had projected the first steel mill on the Pacific coast, at Fontana, 50 miles east of Los Angeles.

New shipyards sprang up in 1942 at Richmond, Oakland, Sausalito, Vallejo, and San Pedro. In full operation for 24 hours a day in three shifts, they were soon building "liberty ships" in 25 days, and in 1943 a new freighter was launched every 10 hours at one or another of the Kaiser shipyards.

At the peak of production in July 1943, civilian employment in the shipbuilding industry in California was nearly 300,000. Instead of the mass unemployment of the 1930s there was now a desperate shortage of labor. To one sign that read "Help Wanted!!! Male or Female, Young or Old, Experienced or Inexperienced," someone added "Dead or Alive!!!" Kaiser advertised for workers in every part of the country, and, in addition to the climate, he offered such inducements as high wages, on-the-job training, a subsidized plan for group medical care, and exemption from the draft by virtue of employment in an essential war industry.

The mushrooming growth of the shipyards put heavy strains on the surrounding communities, and every facility from schools to sewers was stretched to the breaking point or beyond it. Thousands of families lived in "temporary" wartime housing projects that would remain as slums for decades afterward. The most severe growing pains were probably those of the cities of Richmond and Vallejo. In each, the population increased from about 20,000 in 1940 to more than 100,000 in 1945, and the nonwhite population rose from less than 2 percent to nearly 14 percent.

"Americans All"

Because the shipyards could not afford to exclude anyone from their desperately



Workers at the Kaiser shipyard in San Pedro raise their hats in a victory salute during the spring of 1945. Note especially the presence of women in the workforce. (Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.)

electricians, steamfitters, and welders. At the Kaiser shipyards in Richmond, women made up more than a quarter of the workforce; a Rosie the Riveter Memorial honors their achievement and a 150-acre national historical park is currently taking shape along the Richmond waterfront.

But the disunity within American life during the war was painfully evident in the intense prejudices of male shipyard workers against women and of whites against nonwhites. Black shipyard workers organized the United Negro Labor Committee to demand equal insurance benefits and voting privileges denied them by racially discriminatory unions. As historian Roger W. Lotchin has observed in *The Bad City in the Good War* (2003), African Americans hoped the war would result in a “Double V”—victory over the enemy abroad and victory over racism at home. African American women were especially active in the fight for equal rights. When Frances Albrier completed twice the required number of hours of training for being a welder and was denied employment at the Kaiser shipyards in Richmond, she successfully campaigned to change the company’s hiring practices. Tarea Hall