NAME DATE CLASS

# Economics of History Activity

## World War II and the Holocaust

### The Home Front: Rationing During World War II

*Word War II caused economic hardship for many people around the world. Manufacturing and raw materials were almost exclusively used for the war effort. Meanwhile, agricultural production was disrupted as fields were destroyed in battle and laborers joined the armed forces. As a result, both Allied and Axis powers experienced shortages in food and consumer goods. These conditions caused most countries to implement some form of rationing during the war.*

| Economics Terms to Know |
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| **rationing** a system of allocating goods and services without prices  **ration coupon** a permit allowing the holder to receive a given amount of a rationed product  **quota** limit on the amount of a good that one individual can obtain under a rationing system  **black market** a market in which economic products are sold illegally |

**Rationing** served two important functions during wartime. First, rationing ensured that most civilians would have relatively equal access to food and consumer goods. Second, rationing civilian consumption of products like rubber and gasoline made it easier for governments to dedicate those resources to the war effort. In most countries, the ration system was organized using **ration coupons.** In Great Britain, for example, each person was given a book of coupons that could be exchanged for products like milk, eggs, sugar, or meat. The number of coupons for each product represented that person’s **quota,** or limit.

Most Allied nations relied on rationing for the duration of the war. In 1940 Great Britain issued ration coupons for essential food products, such as flour and milk. By 1941 the British also rationed consumer products like silk stockings, soap, and cloth. Like Britain, the United States began rationing a variety of foods starting in 1942. The United States also limited civilian use of rubber and gasoline soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In the Soviet Union, bread rations were given only to civilians in urban areas; farmers in rural areas were expected to grow their own food. The Axis powers also implemented rationing to support the war effort, such as Italy’s rationing of meat in 1939. Germany, however, did not fully restrict civilian rations until 1944 because Hitler believed that strict rationing would hurt morale on the home front.

Using ration coupons helped governments make sure that all civilians had access to their fair share of limited resources. However, some people tried to get around the regulations by buying products illegally on the **black market.** The price of products on the black market was usually much higher than the legal ration price. In Italy, for example, wheat flour and pasta on the black market sold for 8 to 10 times more than their value. Hard-to-find items like fruit could often be found on England’s black market, but many people considered buying them to be unpatriotic and harmful to the war effort.

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#### Applying Economics to History

1. **Explaining** Why was rationing necessary during World War II?
2. **Comparing and Contrasting** Compare and contrast the way rationing was implemented in different countries.
3. **Drawing Conclusions** Why were goods more expensive on the black market?

**2**