


1945 August 27-September 2

Labor Produced a Victory

Labor Day in 1945 was Monday, September 3.

The originator of Labor Day is disputed, but the first Labor Day celebration was done by the Central Labor Union in New York City on September 5, 1882. Some cities established municipal ordinances to honor workers in 1885 and 1886. The first state law for a Labor Day observance was passed in Oregon on February 21, 1887. On June 28, 1894, Congress passed an act making the first Monday in September a national holiday to honor workers.¹



LABOR DAY

1945

We Salute American Labor . . .

**American Labor has played a vital and un-
failing part in the prosecution of the war
which followed the treacherous attack
dealt us at Pearl Harbor. In this land of
free enterprise, you've given voluntarily
of your efforts—many with great personal
sacrifice and readjustments—to assure
the existence of a free America. America
has outproduced the rest of the world in
meeting war production schedules—the
credit for that record goes to you . . .
the American Worker. As we turn to the
problems of conversion to peace time
occupations, Labor again will be in the
forefront in the job of building a better
standard of living for every American.**

LA CROSSE BREWERIES, INC.
BREWERS OF PEERLESS AMBER BEER.
LA CROSSE, WISCONIN.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 September 2, page 8)

This Labor Day had special significance because it coincided with the end of the most destructive war in human history. It was American labor, the men and women in the factories, shops, shipyards, and farms, that were a big part of bringing about the victory of the Allied nations against Germany and Japan.

The statistics provide ample evidence:

- American industry manufactured almost two-thirds of all Allied military equipment
- American factories made 297,000 aircraft, 193,000 artillery pieces, 86,000 tanks, and 2,000,000 army trucks
- After the Battle of Midway in June 1942, Japan built six new aircraft carriers; the United States built 17
- The Ford Motor Company plant at Ypsilanti, Michigan, completed a B-24 Liberator bomber every 63 minutes; each of these airplanes had 1,550,000 parts
- The United States launched more new ships in 1941 than Japan did in the entire war
- The United States built more airplanes in one year (1944) than Japan did from 1939 to 1945
- Twenty-four million people moved to work in defense industry jobs
- "By the end of the war, more than half of all industrial production in the world would take place in the United States."²

- A Douglas aircraft factory in California finished a new airplane every hour
- American workers produced 15 million guns, more than 20 million helmets, and 165 million military coats
- In 1944, American steel mills were producing 89 million tons of steel
- Coca-Cola made more than 5 billion bottles and cans of their soft drink for the troops
- The Hershey Company turned out 24 million chocolate bars a week for soldiers' rations
- More than 9 million farmworkers cultivated more than a billion acres of land to produce food for the United States and its allies³
- American farmers produced 22% more food in 1945 than in 1940; food grain production increased by 50%⁴

- American industry employed 17.5 million workers to produce \$136 billion in war supplies
- This included 43,000,000,000 rounds of ammunition, 43,400,000 bombs, 196,000,000 uniforms, and 98,000,000 pairs of shoes⁵

A SALUTE TO American Workers.

Labor Day, 1945, will go down in history because it coincides so closely with V-J Day, thus marking the close of another great chapter in the glorious record of achievement of American Workers. In a few short years, these peace loving millions turned of necessity to production for war and in a miraculously quick time were outproducing the combined efforts of all of our enemies as well as those of our allies.

This is but further proof that the ways of Freedom . . . the American way is the best way. The problems of reconversion to peace time living must still be solved . . . will be solved . . . and in this effort, too, American Workers will lead the way to a new and better way of living.

This Labor Day Message Sponsored by
THE ERICKSON BAKERS
Producers of
HOLSUM
Bread At Its Best!



(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 September 1, page 3)

This advertisement by Erickson Bakers rightly celebrates the contribution of labor to victory in World War II. But "American Labor" was still portrayed as a male-dominated field, despite the number of women in the workforce. Women made important contributions to the labor force during the war.

- Eight million women became part of the nation's workforce during the war⁶
- By 1943, women made up almost one-third of the American workforce⁷
- There was an organization called [Women Ordnance Workers \(WOWs\)](#)⁸
- About two million American women worked in defense industries⁹
- Women made up 36% of the labor force in the aviation industry¹⁰
- Women were 10% of shipyard workers by 1944¹¹
- The number of black women in industry increased by 11.3% during the war¹²
- Women also carried the load in a host of volunteer capacities on the home front

Labor has always been one of the components of this country's greatest achievements, and Labor Day in 1945 was one of the best examples in our nation's history.

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Written: 2020 September 6

Sources & Notes:

¹ "History of Labor Day," *U.S. Department of Labor*, accessed 2020 August 6, <https://www.dol.gov/general/laborday/history>.

² "War Production," *PBS.org*, accessed 2020 August 6, https://www.pbs.org/thewar/at_home_war_production.htm.

³ David M. Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 200-201.

⁴ Kennedy, 205.

⁵ *Summary of the Second World War and Its Consequences: An Alphabetical Reference Book* (Chicago; F. E. Compton & Company, 1946), 110.

⁶ *PBS.org*.

⁷ Ronald H. Bailey, *The Home Front: U.S.A.* (Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1977), 90.

⁸ *Summary of the Second World War*, 122.

⁹ Kennedy, 869.

¹⁰ *Summary of the Second World War*, 122.

¹¹ Bailey, 89.

¹² Bailey, 98.