Room Four: The Approach of World War II

The Homefront

Those non-naturalized immigrants who were not interned were still entered into a system and were removed from all 86 zones that Dewitt had determined were vital for national security. Since many lived near the coast, this meant that most had to move. Families in which only one or a couple members were not naturalized were forced to scramble for housing farther inland. Fishing initially came to a standstill.

The navy also requisitioned many fishing boats from Americans who were of Italian heritage. These boats were often used as tugs, as attempts to make them submarine hunters were unsuccessful. When the military decided that fishing was necessary for the war effort, they asked many of the same families whose boats they had requisitioned to return to the industry. They often encouraged the families to charter the boats from non-Italians. Fishing was determined to be such a necessary industry to the war effort that men were given military exemptions if they could prove that they were part of a crew.

Many first and second generation Italian-Americans were drafted into the military. While some still experienced prejudice at the hands of those who questioned their loyalty, Italian-Americans performed as admirably during the war as any other major ethnic group.