

250 Years in the Making: How well do you know your city? Take our quiz and find out. (Who knows!? You just might learn something.)

Answer Key

1. Which political party dominated our local government during the World War II years? *Hope you cast your vote for b), the Republican Party. Even as the nation elected Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt to the first of his (record-setting) four presidential terms in 1932, city government was firmly in the hands of Republicans from the election of Mayor William B. Smith in 1884 to that of Joseph S. Clark in 1951.*

2. In August 1944, a strike by Philadelphia Transportation Company workers brought the city to a standstill and seriously affected industrial production for the military. What was the main issue of contention? *Toot your horn if you chose a), PTC management's decision to allow Black workers to fill non-menial positions. While the Transport Workers Union officially opposed the strike and supported Black workers' efforts at advancement, it couldn't persuade white members to go back to work. President Roosevelt eventually handed control of the PTC to his secretary of war under the Smith-Connolly Act, and under threat of being fired, having their draft deferments stripped away, and losing their job availability certificates, the strikers returned to work.*

3. What local industry swelled during World War II to become the area's largest employer? *It was c), shipbuilding, that burgeoned during World War II, as vessels became the area's most important contribution to the war effort. Some 150,000 workers at South Philly's Naval Shipyard, Kensington's Cramp Shipbuilding, Camden's New York Shipbuilding, and Chester's Sun Shipbuilding all labored to fulfill President Roosevelt's commitment to growing the U.S. Navy.*

4. Which of the following was accidentally invented at the Cramp shipyard in Kensington? *As the old song goes, everyone knows it's d), Slinky! In search of a way to stabilize equipment aboard ships, mechanical engineer Richard James experimented with a range of springs of varying sizes and strengths. When one fell onto the floor and proceeded to "walk" across it, he knew he'd stumbled onto a winning toy idea and had hundreds more made, putting them up for sale at the Gimbels department store in 1945. His wife, Betty, came up with the name.*

5. The football field of what Philly public school, at the time the home field of the city's Negro League baseball teams, was converted into victory gardens as part of the war effort? *You get an A-plus if you went with a), West Philadelphia High School. The athletic facility, then known as Passon Field, was repurposed in 1943 as 200 25-by-25-foot victory gardens to supply fresh produce and give citizens who were ineligible for enlistment a means of contributing to the war effort. The field had previously served as the home field for Negro League teams, including the Stars and the Bacharach Giants.*

6. Manpower shortages during the war also caused the Philadelphia Eagles to merge with another city's professional football team, resulting in what temporary name? *You scored a TD if you went with c), the Steagles, the result of a temporary union with the—gag—Pittsburgh Steelers. Oh, sure, the official name was the Phil-Pitt Combine, but who the hell would have called the team that? All the players had been deemed physically unfit for military service; they included a leading receiver who was blind in one eye and only partially sighted in the other and a placekicker with a prosthetic leg.*

7. What product invented and made by Delaware's DuPont company became known as "the fiber that won the war"? *The war-winner would be b), nylon, though all the synthetic fibers listed were developed by DuPont. Nylon revolutionized fashion by replacing silk in ladies' stockings, which had become increasingly vital as hemlines moseyed upward in the 1900s. During WWII, though, the government co-opted Du Pont's nylon production for its war effort, using the synthetic instead for airplane and tank tires, ropes, gears, flak jackets, and other needed equipment. While women selflessly donated their used stockings to the cause, once production resumed after the war, demand was so great that the resultant rush to buy replacements became known as the nylon riots.*

8. The labor shortages created by the war greatly expanded working opportunities for women despite fears that their participation would lead to social upheaval (which of course it did). By 1945, what percentage of the city's women were employed outside the home? *As of 1945, more than a third, or c), 35 percent, of the city's female population was working outside the home. Many held traditionally female jobs, but they also filled vital roles in the aforementioned shipbuilding industry as well as in factories, war plants, and the transportation industry. (Women were, for example, hired by the Philadelphia Transportation Company before Black workers were.)*

9. Where did Pennsylvania rank in the order of states suffering the most World War II casualties? *The correct pick is a), second in number of casualties, topped only by New York. Rounding out the top 10: Illinois, California, Ohio, Texas, Michigan, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Indiana.*

10. In 1955, a former Naval Shipyard worker caused a stir by claiming to have witnessed what came to be known as "the Philadelphia Experiment" while employed there during the war. What did Carl M. Allen insist he'd seen in October 1943? *It was d), an experiment in which a U.S. warship became invisible, was teleported to Virginia, and then reappeared in Philly. Ahem. Though Allen's claim is generally acknowledged to have been a hoax, it spun off a whirl of rumors involving everything from alien invaders to UFOs to the Bermuda Triangle to Albert Einstein and became the basis for the 1984 movie The Philadelphia Experiment as well as a number of books.*