

**THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY
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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

**“ARE YOU A GIRL WITH A STAR-SPANGLED HEART?”: GOVERNMENT
MOBILIZATION OF AMERICAN WOMEN WITH PROPAGANDA DURING WORLD
WAR TWO**

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ABSTRACT

Contributions made by women to war efforts often become side notes or go overlooked entirely. The purpose of this study is to examine both the contributions made by American women to World War Two, and the role of propaganda in encouraging women to participate in the war effort. The first chapter provides historical context, while the subsequent chapters look at specific instances of women's interactions with the war and the role of propaganda in encouraging these interactions. Chapter 1 looks at the changes and challenges American society faced with regard to women that resulted in the necessity of propaganda. Basic societal norms and assumptions made the acceptability of the changing roles of women difficult. Chapter 2 looks at the nascent phenomenon of American female military service, and the challenges the servicewomen faced. It addresses the differences in acceptability and treatment that different women received. Chapter 3 examines the mass labor force entrance women made during the war. Though this time is often presented as the first time in which women participated in the labor force, this chapter complicates that narrative. Chapter 4 looks at how women who stayed in the home contributed to the war effort. Though inherently less groundbreaking, the actions taken by these women still contributed to the United States' quest for victory. Without the contributions made by American women, the United States would have likely failed in their quest for victory.

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Introduction



Figure 1. Rosie the Riveter Poster created by artist J. Howard Miller for the Westinghouse Electric Corporation, as part of the War Production Board, c. 1942-1943. From the National Archives at College Park.

One of the most recognizable and beloved symbols of the United States' participation in the World War Two has nothing to do with weapons, nor with men wearing helmets. Rather, it is an image of a stern faced woman against a yellow background. She wears a blue shirt and has a red scarf tied around her head. She bends her arm and raises it into a fist. A blue text bubble above her reads "We Can Do It!" Fondly, many people know her as Rosie the Riveter.¹

Since ancient times, waging war has generally rested in the realm of men. However, this does not mean that women have never taken part in war. In the United States alone, American women have taken part in various wars in multiple capacities since the days of the American Revolution. They have worked such as nurses, cooks, laundresses, and on a few rare occasions in

¹ Although several incarnations of "Rosie" were created during this time, this particular one has become the most recognizable. This particular poster was created by Pittsburgh based artist J. Howard Miller for the Westinghouse Electric Corporation. Other popular "Rosies" include Norman Rockwell's on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*, as well as the numerous photographs of real life "Rosies" working in factories.

disguise as men in combat. However, World War Two marked a time where American women participated in the war effort to a greater extent than in any time before.

The harsh realities of the war necessitated the participation of women in various roles, whether the general public liked it or not. For the duration of the war, a total of 12,209,238 Americans served in the military.² Young, able bodied men who left their homes and jobs in lieu of military service represented the majority of these people. However, waging war requires much more than just combat troops. The war demanded both a large number of people to fight the war, as well as a large number of people to work the crucial jobs that supported the war. These jobs included farming to produce the food needed by the military and its allies and arms manufacturing to produce the weapons and ammunition used in the war. With each man who joined the military, this took away a man to work a war job at home, and vice versa. The increasing demand for more men in both the military and in war jobs forced the hand of the American public to turn to a largely untapped labor resource: Women.

Though World War Two certainly did cause female employment rates to rise dramatically, this does not mean women did not work before the war. In the years leading up to the war, female employment rates had suffered, as the Great Depression had caused a universal scarcity of jobs. However, before (and even to some extent during) the Great Depression unmarried women commonly held jobs as clerks, secretaries, nurses, and teachers. Furthermore, farm women consistently performed many of the same or similar duties as their fathers and husbands without the recognition of being a farmer. Furthermore, married working class women

² "Research Starters: US Military by the Numbers," *The National WWII Museum*, accessed September 7, 2017, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-us-military-numbers>.

This number accounts for military personnel in the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard. Of this number, about 358,074 were women, including the Army and Navy Nurse Corps.

commonly held jobs or performed work from home to supplement their family's income. In essence, the war did not create working women, rather it changed the type of women who worked and the kinds of jobs they did. Changes in female employment included increases in working married women, mothers working outside of the home, and women joining traditionally male dominated fields such as manufacturing.

Despite the clear need for the inclusion of women in the workforce, female employment faced an uphill battle in terms of societal acceptance. Prevailing social norms dictated that women should leave their jobs once they became wives and mothers. Furthermore, it was considered inappropriate, even selfish, for a married woman to hold a job. Societal norms coupled with the prevailing social science research of the day dictated the kinds work considered appropriate for women. For example, the idea that working women were "mannish" impeded female employment efforts. Here, one can interpret the word "mannish" as unfeminine, though it also carried the connotation of lesbianism.³ Furthermore, many equated this supposed masculinization of women with the feminization of men. With this in mind, the United States government needed to find a way to include women in the workforce without upending the basic assumptions that constituted the very fabric of American society. Essentially, the United States government desired to alleviate labor shortages without challenging these prevailing ideas about women's roles in society.⁴

To circumvent issues such as these, the United States Government, in particular the Office of War Information (OWI), used propaganda to convince the American public of the acceptability of working women, and to also convince women to join the workforce. The

³ Donna B. Knaff, *Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in American Popular Graphic Art* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 3.

⁴ Tawnya J. Adkins Covert, *Manipulating Images: World War II Mobilization of Women through Magazine Advertising* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 44.

propaganda they used had two general goals. First, they wanted women to join the workforce to help alleviate wartime labor shortages. Second, they wanted to create a superimposed narrative that made working women seem acceptable. The United States government marketed jobs to women by making them seem charitable or by using language such as “emergency” or “temporary.” They also attempted to appeal to traditional notions of femininity by relating war jobs to conventional notions of women’s work. For example, one recruitment advertisement likened the use of sewing machines to the use of industrial machinery.⁵

Women went to work in more ways than just the factory, as the Second World War also created female military service in the United States. This too was met with obstacles for acceptance by the American public. The idea of women in the military faced scrutiny from the general public, other servicemen, and women themselves. In this case, propaganda had to both combat the initial resistance to the idea of female military service, as well as work to counteract negative stereotypes about servicewomen that grew from its very existence. To achieve this, the United States government used propaganda to emphasize both the beauty and patriotism of servicewomen. For example, many recruiting posters had text referencing the duty and patriotism of military service while at the same time featuring a beautiful young service woman wearing makeup and with a fashionable hairdo, as seen in the image below.

⁵ Knaff, 52.



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Figure 2. Recruiting Poster for the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, 1942. From the University of North Texas Digital Library.

Despite the new job market for women challenging the notion of a woman's proper place in American society, traditionally feminine roles and tasks remained as important as ever during the war. Women represented the idea of the “home front,” so propaganda directly implored women to buy war bonds, reduce food waste, and raise healthy children. As the dominant consumer in most American families, women also had to navigate and rectify the needs of daily life with the strain the war placed on the acquisition of everyday goods. In this sense women had to both change and remain the same.

The United States Government used propaganda to ease the societal woes created by the war. War disrupts the comfortabilities of the status quo and forces societies into uncomfortable realities. This causes additional anxieties in an already stressful situation, which leads people to seek some kind of reassurance. Propaganda, particularly propaganda posters, became this

⁶ This particular poster also shows the symbol of the WAAC/WAC, the goddess Pallas Athene. In Greek mythology, Athene was the goddess of wisdom, military victory, and womanly virtue. WACs sought to embody these attributes.

reassurance. Much in the same way the British saw posters instructing them to “Keep Calm and Carry On,” Americans saw Rosie the Riveter letting them know that “We Can Do It.” Acting as a source of reassurance allowed propaganda posters to both endorse and encourage the difficult but necessary realities of change during the war. Ultimately, World War Two drastically disrupted the status quo of roles occupied by women, and propaganda posters both eased and encouraged these changes.

Chapter 1

“Blueprint for Victory” The Necessity of Propaganda

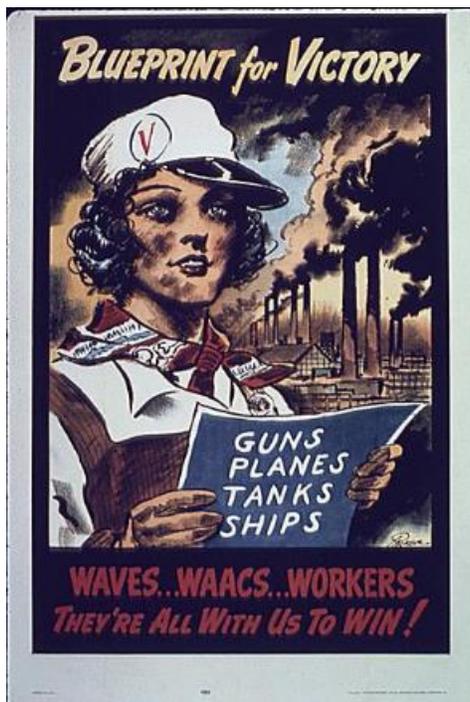


Figure 3. “Blueprint for Victory” Poster appealing to women to join the newly formed female military branches, c. 1942-1945. From the National Archives at College Park.

Members of societies in times of strife and upheaval such as war tend to cling to what feels safe and recognizable. They seek refuge from the unknown in palatable simplicity. For this reason, the traditional boundary lines between masculinity and femininity remained at the front of the American public’s minds during the World War Two. The societal changes necessitated by the war caused many to feel as if these boundaries were deteriorating.

At this time, American society had a few basic assumptions and expectations regarding gender norms. Generally, Americans associated the concept of masculinity with having a job and

servicing in the military. They associated the concept of femininity with raising children and maintaining the home. By in large during the war, men did not cross the femininity barrier. However, women certainly crossed the masculinity barrier. To many Americans, women entering the workforce and joining the military felt like not only an encroachment on traditional gender lines, but also like a complete subversion of the natural order of things. For this reason, women who chose to cross these gender lines faced disapproval and resistance. The United States government's plan for the American involvement in the war necessitated this crossing of the gender lines, and thus they needed a plan to combat the forthcoming resistance. This plan resulted in the creation of a government agency.

The Office of War Information

Though many define propaganda as information that is untrue or misleading, this is not exactly the case. Propaganda simply advances a specific bias or viewpoint, which may or may not be true. When thinking of propaganda during World War Two, many immediately think of the Nazi propaganda machine led by Joseph Goebbels, and thus have a very negative view of it. However, every country involved in the war had their own department of propaganda, including the United States. The United States created their own office for propaganda on June 13, 1942 by Executive Order 9182. They called this new office the Office of War Information (OWI).⁷

President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed journalist and radio commenter Elmer Davis as the first head of the Office of War Information. Davis stated that he hoped to use the office to report the war "clear and concisely."⁸ One should note at the choice of the word "information"

⁷ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9182 Establishing the Office of War Information," June 13, 1942. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16273>.

⁸ Adkins Covert, 9.

over the word “propaganda” for the title of this office. An Office of War Propaganda which had many of the same functions as the OWI had existed during World War One, but Davis preferred the term “information.”⁹ The hesitance to use the word “propaganda” likely came from the negative connotations associated with the word “propaganda.” Furthermore, since Davis hoped to report what he viewed as “unbiased truths,” he likely did not want to conjure up this association. However, one must recognize that the OWI certainly had a bias and agenda. Simply failing to label the office as one of “propaganda” does not mean that what they created was not propaganda.

The OWI sought to achieve several unique but related goals. First, the OWI wanted to unite the American public under a common agenda. Second, they wanted to explain both the *what* and *why* of this agenda. Last, they wanted to encourage the American public to alter their daily lives to accommodate the war. The OWI desired to make knowledge of these goals inescapable; they wanted every American to both know these goals and to participate in them. Executive Order 9182 states that one of the major functions of the OWI shall be “...to facilitate the development of an informed and intelligent understanding, at home and abroad, of the status and progress of the war effort and of the war policies, activities, and aims of the Government.”¹⁰ One OWI spokesman stated “Ideally, people should wake up to find a visual message everywhere like news snow - every man, woman and child should be reached and moved by this message.”¹¹ The OWI undertook various measures to assure that the public could easily understand the messages behind this “news snow.” For this reason, they forbade the use of

⁹ Ibid, 9.

¹⁰ Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9182 Establishing the Office of War Information." June 13, 1942.

¹¹ “THE WAR. At Home. Communication. Propaganda,” PBS, September 2007, http://www.pbs.org/thewar/at_home_communication_propaganda.htm.

abstraction in the illustrations of their posters for fear of misinterpretation. In essence, the OWI strove for ubiquity and legibility in the dissemination of their messages.

To reach their overall goal, a few themes arose within the media produced by the OWI. Among these themes, the new and changing roles and opportunities for women quickly emerged as a major one. The OWI created media which directly appealed to women across the country. Though an abundance of women-focused media may sound out of place during a war, this has a simple explanation. The OWI simply directed their marketing to those who remained on the homefront, as writing a message for a soldier who would not have seen it would have been futile. Because the majority of those deployed were young men, this meant that who remained were mostly women. Furthermore, Executive Order 9182 specifies the functions of the agency “shall not extend to the Western Hemisphere exclusive of the United States and Canada.”¹² Meaning, the OWI did not have the authority to appeal to deployed men even if they desired to do so.

The OWI marketed the war to women in two ways. First, they used propaganda of various kinds of media to convince women to adhere to their message. Women made up the dominant consumer group, and thus the OWI directly targeted them in terms of resource usage and conservation. In this regard, the OWI directly implored women to grow Victory Gardens, save fats, and can foods, among other resource conserving tasks.¹³ Additionally, they urged women to take crucial jobs related to the war, such as in arms manufacturing. These examples demonstrate the outward goals of the OWI, to spread information about the government’s goals and to implore that people participate in them. However, the OWI had a more covert intention with these posters.

¹² Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9182 Establishing the Office of War Information." June 13, 1942.

¹³ Other tasks would have included mending clothes, purchasing only what was absolutely necessary, recycling essential war materials such as tin, aluminum, and rubber, and walking instead of driving.

Secondly, the OWI created propaganda of various media to control the narrative around the societal changes caused by the war. The vast majority of the American public supported participation in the war, particularly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In a poll conducted by Gallup in December of 1941, they found that ninety-seven percent of Americans approved of Congress's declaration of war against Japan.¹⁴ However, this does not mean that they necessarily welcomed the changes necessitated by the war, particularly with regard to the changing roles of women. To combat this, the OWI had to both justify and normalize these changes, as well as combat the negative associations that began subsequent to these changes. Though they refused to use the term, this covert effort to control the societal narrative shows that the Office of War Information truly was an office of propaganda.

...And What They Were Up Against

As women began to take unconventional roles during the war, they were met with various forms of resistance, especially acrid stereotypes. As thousands of men left for the military, women began to fill the void that this created. In essence, women began to enter traditionally masculine domains and fulfill traditionally masculine roles. However, this was more than just a break of traditional gender divides, it also disrupted traditional notions of class and status. Resistance to the changing status of women came from many sources. These included men, employers, and women themselves. Each group regarded these changes with suspicion for different and particular reasons.

¹⁴ Lydia Saad, "Gallup Vault: A Country Unified After Pearl Harbor," *Gallup News*, December 16, 2016, <http://news.gallup.com/vault/199049/gallup-vault-country-unified-pearl-harbor.aspx>.

Employers

Employers took issue with hiring women for several reasons. As an employer always thinks of his bottom line, they often based their resistance or acceptance of hiring women upon the financial consequences of doing so. Many employers opposed to hiring women believed women simply did not have the skills or abilities needed to perform certain jobs. This particularly occupied the minds of employers in fields not traditionally occupied by women, such as in heavy manufacturing or other jobs with a high degree of physicality. Additionally, some employers worried that women would negatively affect productivity, as they would distract male workers. *New Yorker Magazine* parodied this situation and others like it, as seen in the image from its November 6, 1943 issue below.

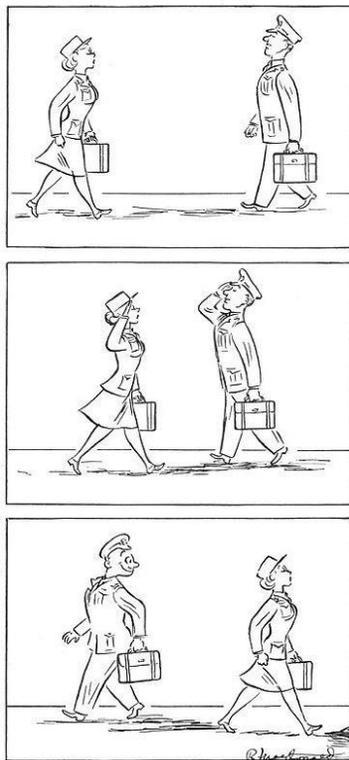


Figure 4. Cartoon from the November 6, 1943 issue of *The New Yorker* parodying work relationships between men and women. From the New Yorker Archives.

Though many employers based their resistance to female employment upon stereotypes about women, sometimes they based it upon realities with financial consequences. In many fields, workplaces need to make adjustments to their facilities to accommodate women. For example, since women are generally shorter than men, the height of some equipment needed lowering. *Women of Steel*, a propaganda film produced by the OWI, mentions some of the structural changes made to manufacturing plants to accommodate women, including the addition of separate lockers and restrooms for women.¹⁵ Of course, these changes and renovations necessitated that employers spend money, which some were not willing to do.

Though many employers initially resisted the idea of female employment, pressure from the War Manpower Commission along with the sheer lack of men to perform jobs caused employers to hire women. Simply put, the need outweighed the opposition. Furthermore, some employers willingly hired women as most did not have union protection, and employers could pay them less. Despite breaking under the pressure of necessity, employers retained many of the stereotypical beliefs about women workers they had held before, despite the successes of women workers. For example, to accommodate the supposed frailty of women, some employers provided benches so women could sit while they were working.¹⁶ This shows the extent to which these beliefs were ingrained.

Men

Many men perceived hiring women as an invasion of traditionally masculine spaces, to which they responded with hostility. This perceived subversion of the proper order of things raised

¹⁵ The Office of War Information, producer, "*Women of Steel*," 1943, film, From the National Archives, Propaganda, Information, and Documentary Motion Pictures, ca. 1942-1945. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/38779> (accessed November 24, 2017).

¹⁶ Adkins Covert, 71.

uncomfortable questions about the proper roles and purpose of men and women in American society. Another OWI created film, *Glamour Girls of 1943*, directly addressed male opposition to the changing status of women. In this film, three men address issues with female employment that commonly occupied men's minds during this time. The first man suggests that if his wife worked, people would think he did not have the ability to support her. The second asks who would mind his home if his wife took a job. The third man wonders if women would retain all the jobs after the war.¹⁷ Though quite obviously dramatized, this film addresses these concerns precisely because many Americans held these types of concerns. The OWI chose to include this scene with the direct purpose of addressing these issues.

The suggestion made by the first man represents the fear of what both female military service and employment meant about men. Some believed that taking a job "masculinized" women. Adversely, they believed that the supposed masculinization of women would then entail the feminization of men. Many men feared that if this should happen, this would irreparably undermine the foundation of American society. Additionally, many people associated "masculine" women with lesbianism, which created even more concerns about the unraveling of American society.

This situation relates to the question asked by the second man in the film, as some thought that women entering the workforce would force men to stay in the home, causing a reversal of traditional gender dynamics. Alternatively, it could also mean that no one would perform home keeping tasks. Even if this did not entail a reversal of gender dynamics, one must consider that households with two parents working full time outside of the home were uncommon during this time. From a practical level, the rise of two working parent households

¹⁷ Office of War Information, producer, *Glamour Girls of 1943*, film, 1943, From the National Archives, Propaganda, Information, and Documentary Motion Pictures, ca. 1942-1945. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/38733> (accessed November 24, 2017).

would have had serious implications to housekeeping and child rearing, which men found both unfamiliar and uncomfortable.

The assertion made by the third man represents fears about the permanence of the changes caused by the war. Many feared that women would not leave their jobs once the war ended, and therefore the returning servicemen would have no jobs to which they could return. Additionally, many men worried that female employment could negatively affect pay rates, as employers could pay women less for performing the same job.¹⁸ Overall, this represents a concern that wartime female employment would radically redefine the nature of employment in the United States, particularly with regard to how these changes would affect men.

Essentially, many men took issue with the changing status of women due to its unfamiliarity and uncertain implications. The OWI paid particular attention to male resistance to female employment, perhaps even disproportionately so. In addition to the propaganda films, the OWI also created posters addressing the issue of male opposition, such as the one seen below. In this poster, the OWI sought to combat many of these concerns all at once. First, the fact that the woman has a husband means that she is not a lesbian. Second, the dress and appearance of the husband suggests that he works a well-paying white-collar job, thus showing that he certainly can support his family without her needing to work. Third, the emphasis upon the word “wants” suggests that the husband agrees to his wife leaving the home to take a job. Lastly, the phrase “to do my part” implies an understanding that her employment is for the war effort, and thus she would leave her job when the war ends. More generally speaking, this shows how much information the OWI was able to put into just a single image.

¹⁸ Adkins Covert, 73.



Figure 5. “I’m Proud...my husband wants me to do my part” poster highlighting the issue of men’s comfortability with having a working wife, c. 1942-1945. From the National Archives at College Park.

Women

Not all women welcomed and jumped at the new opportunities afforded to them; they too held beliefs and values that caused them to resist the newly changing status of women. Many women based their concerns upon worries about how others would treat or perceive them should they take a job or join the military. Furthermore, many women internalized the belief that a woman belonged in the home, and therefore the best way for her to contribute to the war effort was by continuing her work as a wife, mother, and homemaker. Additionally, like many employers, women too doubted their abilities to perform the tasks asked of them in a non-traditional workplace.¹⁹

According to one study conducted during the war, although upper class women were the most likely to report that there was a need for women to join the workforce, they were the group

¹⁹ Ibid, 76.

least likely to do so.²⁰ Many Americans held harsh prejudices against working women based upon class and race, which made upper class women hesitant to join the workforce, as they worried how it would affect their social status and reputation. Furthermore, women held other concerns about how taking a job or joining the military would affect other people's perception of them. Many people believed working women were more sexually available and promiscuous, which particularly concerned young women in search of a husband. However, this does not mean that married women did not have their own concerns. Many married women reported that they did not want to take a war job because of their husband's opposition to it.²¹

Some women had very practical reasons for their unwillingness to take a war job. First, many lacked the necessary job training to perform some jobs. However, the War Manpower Commission worked to provide free job training for women newly entering the workforce. Other women, particularly those with young children, lacked appropriate childcare to allow them to take a job. Though the United States Government tried to alleviate this problem by providing daycare access, this program largely failed and only served about 130,000 children nationwide at its peak.²²

Though the OWI certainly wanted women to join the military or the workforce, they also did not want to alienate women who chose not to do so. For this reason, the OWI also encouraged women to conform to traditional gender roles. For example, the film *Glamour Girls of 1943* assures the viewer that the United State Government wants some women to remain in more traditional lines of work, such as teaching or waitressing.²³ For similar reasons, the OWI also created posters appealing to women about contributing to the war through traditionally

²⁰ Ibid, 68.

²¹ Ibid, 74.

²² Ibid, 77.

²³ Office of War Information, producer, *Glamour Girls of 1943*, film, 1943.

feminine tasks, such as cooking and raising children, and also sheerly patriotic tasks such as sending “Victory Mail” to soldiers or purchasing war bonds. These kinds of posters assured women who chose not to seek employment that they too had a role in winning the war. An example of this can be seen in the poster below. The militarily tinged phrase “Join the ranks” implies a sense of duty and service to what the poster asks women, even though this task is the traditionally feminine task of buying and preparing food.



Figure 6. “Join the Ranks” poster encouraging women to preserve food resources, 1942. From the World War II Poster Collection at Northwestern University Libraries.

Conclusion

The nation, as a whole, needed transforming from the slow and economically depressed state of the 1930’s, to the tumultuous state of the early 1940’s. The Second World War forced the United States into new and uncomfortable territories, both abroad and at home. Understandably, these uncomfortable situations caused members of the American public to attempt to cling to what felt recognizable. However, the war’s necessities forced many Americans to loosen their grip or let

go entirely (if only temporarily). It was the job of Elmer Davis and the Office of War Information to ease this painful process, and create a nation ready for war.



Figure 7. James Montgomery Flagg’s “I Want You” poster encouraging men to enlist in the U.S. Army, c. 1942-1945. From the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

Though the OWI created propaganda in a wide variety of media, their posters have endured the test of time in terms of recognizability. Its ubiquity likely caused the success of the OWI’s propaganda poster campaign. Generally, they would print over one hundred thousand copies of a single poster. The famous “I Want You” poster alone was printed over one million times during the war.²⁴ Furthermore, posters were placed in very public settings, such as in schools, factories, and shop windows.²⁵ This assured that anyone who left their home would encounter a poster during the day. However, the longevity of the propaganda posters of World War Two likely does not rest in their success in achieving their intended purpose. Rather, the colorful artwork and snappy sayings likely caused a resonance so deep that they remain popular

²⁴ Terrence H. Witkowski, “World War Two Poster Campaigns: Preaching Frugality to American Consumers,” *Journal of Advertising* 32, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), pp. 69-82, <http://www.jstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/stable/pdf/4622151.pdf>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

and recognizable after several decades. For this reason, this study specifically examines the way in which propaganda posters were used to target American women during this time.

Chapter 2

“I’m in this war too!” Appealing to Women for Military Service



Figure 8. “I’m in this war too!” poster highlighting female contributions to the war effort through participation in the military, c. 1942-1945. From the National Archives at College Park.

“What influenced me to volunteer? There were several reasons. I was young, and very adventuresome. I wanted to do my share in helping the war effort,” former member of the Women’s Army Corps Lee Gordhammer reflects on her decision to join the military.²⁶ Potential servicewomen did not join the military lightheartedly due to the inevitable prejudice and hostility they would face. Each woman had her own personal reason for her decision to join the military, whether for career advancement, financial gain, sheer patriotism, or for lack of a better option.

²⁶ “Interview of Lee Gordhammer on her service in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and the Women's Army Corps (WAC) during WWII.” From Michigan State University, *Women's Overseas Service League Oral Histories*. Sound Recording. <https://d.lib.msu.edu/wosl/160> (accessed Nov. 5, 2017).

During World War Two, women had the option to join the military alongside men for the first time in American history. Controversial from the start, the newly formed female branches of the armed service made hard work for the Office of War Information. The OWI had two jobs at hand with female military service. First, the OWI needed to convince women to join these newly formed military corps. Second, the OWI had to normalize and justify the very existence of female military service.

Origins of Female Military Service

Engaging in the multiple theaters of World War Two quickly demanded more of the American military than any foreign war that the United States had previously engaged. Though roles as combatants remained firmly out of the realm of possibilities, the idea that women could perform non-combatant roles in the military grew in popularity. This way, a woman performing a non-combatant duty could “free up” a man to serve as a desperately needed combatant. Though the military certainly needed as much help as they could get, this idea was met with a great deal of resistance both within the military and in the general public. The idea of female military service brought up the basic societal issue of the appropriate role of a woman in the grander scheme of proper gender relations. Despite the immediate controversy surrounding the issue, the idea progressed forward.

Though certainly controversial, the idea of a female army corps managed to find support within the ranks of the United States Army, particularly (and importantly) with the Army’s Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall. In the early stages of the war, General Marshall foresaw the military quickly experiencing personnel shortages, so he thought women could alleviate these

shortages when the time came.²⁷ The approval of such a high ranking military official certainly influenced the opinions of others, both within and without of the military.

On May 28 1941, Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers (R-Massachusetts) introduced a bill to the House of Representatives proposing to establish a female Army corps.²⁸ Because the United States had not yet entered the war, this bill sat mostly unnoticed until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th of the same year. The Pearl Harbor attack provided the urgency needed to revive this bill. As with any controversial piece of legislation, members of the House hotly debated Rogers' proposed bill. The debate centered on the propriety of women serving in military, as well as the potential societal implications female military service could hold. One congressman argued "Take the women into the armed service, who then will do the cooking, the washing, the mending, the humble homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself?"²⁹ Other congressmen as well as the general public shared this sentiment.

Despite the lengthy debate and all of the opposition, the bill managed to pass the House of Representatives 249 to 86. It then went on to pass the Senate 38 to 27.³⁰ On May 15, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill into law, thus creating a female Army corps.³¹ The next day he appointed Oveta Culp Hobby, the wife of the former governor of Texas and president of the Texas League of Women Voters, as director of the newly established Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, or WAAC for short. Congresswoman Rogers did not like this name, as

²⁷ "Marshall, WACs and Army Rangers," *The George C. Marshall Foundation*, last updated March 13, 2015, <https://marshallfoundation.org/blog/marshall-wacs-army-rangers/>.

²⁸ Melissa Ziobro, "Skirted Soldiers: The Women's Army Corps and Gender Integration of the U.S. Army during World War II," *The Campaign for the National Museum of the United States Army*, last modified June 21, 2016, <https://armyhistory.org/skirted-soldiers-the-womens-army-corps-and-gender-integration-of-the-u-s-army-during-world-war-ii/>.

²⁹ "Marshall, WACs and Army Rangers," *The George C. Marshall Foundation*, last updated March 13, 2015, <https://marshallfoundation.org/blog/marshall-wacs-army-rangers/>.

³⁰ Ziobro, *Skirted Soldiers*.

³¹ "Creation of the Women's Army Corps," *The United States Army*, accessed September 7, 2017, <https://www.army.mil/women/history/wac.html>.

she thought it sounded too much like “wacky,” and she worried it would damage the reputation of the already vulnerable and controversial young servicewomen. However, lawmakers chose this name to echo the name of the British WAAC. They thought this name would create a positive association with the British WAACs who served valiantly during World War One.³²

Recruitment for the newly created WAAC started immediately, and with much success. The WAAC received thousands more applications than they had originally anticipated. Training for the first batch of new recruits (440 officer candidates and 125 enlisted women) began on July 20th, 1942 at the WAAC Training Center in Des Moines, Iowa.³³ After completing training, the Army then assigned the new female military personnel to their jobs. Originally, the list of duties available to servicewomen was limited to jobs such as clerks, typists, cooks, and drivers. Most of the earliest jobs open to WAACs generally fit traditional notions of women’s work. However, within a year the Army expanded the roles available to WAACs to over four hundred different jobs.³⁴ General Marshall praised the early service of WAACs. He stated “Although the Corps is still in the formative period of organization, its members have convincingly demonstrated their ability to render a vital military service.”³⁵

Despite the early success of the WAAC, its members faced several obstacles and discrimination. Like their male counterparts, female officers had to pass rigorous physical and intellectual tests. Unlike their male counterparts, the WAAC required that even enlisted women

³² Emily Yellin, *Our Mother’s War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 113.

³³ “Creation of the Women’s Army Corps,” *The United States Army*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ “George Marshall Praises W.A.A.C. As It Open 4th Training Center,” Unpublished, From The George C. Marshall Foundation, *Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Unpublished Correspondence, Women’s Army Corps*. http://marshallfoundation.org/library/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2015/02/43.02.18-963431033WAC-Training-Center_opt.pdf (accessed September 8, 2017).

have high school diplomas.³⁶ Furthermore, the majority of WAAC officers held a bachelor's degree while many male officers did not. Despite this, WAACs received less pay than male servicemen and did not receive the same benefits or protections. This bothered Congresswoman Rogers, which prompted her to submit a second bill that essentially dropped the auxiliary aspect of the WAAC, thus granting Army women full military status. By September 1943, the WAAC became the Women's Army Corp (WAC).³⁷

With the success of the WAAC/WAC, other branches of the military began to create their own female divisions. The United States Navy established their own female corps known by the acronym WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) in 1942. Shortly thereafter, the Coast Guard created the SPARs (Semper Paratus, Always Ready). In 1943, the Marines created the U.S. Marine Corps Women's Reserve.³⁸ The creation of additional armed service opportunities allowed a larger number of women to serve in a greater variety of functions. By the end of the war, over 280,000 women served in one of the newly created female service branches. This number does not include the thousands of additional women who served in the Army and Navy Nurse Corps.³⁹ The other female military branches had even stricter admissions requirements than the WACs. The Marines required female enlistees to have at least two years of college, while the WAVES required a high school diploma with college "strongly recommended."⁴⁰ Despite this, servicewomen lacked both respect and compensation on par with their male counterparts.

³⁶ Mary Rasa, "The Women's Army Corps," *National Park Service*, accessed 7 September 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/gate/learn/education/upload/WAC%20pdf.pdf>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Yellin, 115.

³⁹ "Research Starters: US Military by the Numbers," *The National WWII Museum*.

⁴⁰ McEuen, 67.

At best, those with negative opinions of servicewomen believed that they did not contribute to the war effort in a meaningful way. At worse, those with negative opinions of servicewomen believed that they lacked moral entirely. Rumors persisted that female corps existed to serve as prostitutes for males in the military.⁴¹ However, most servicewomen attempted to remain positive and optimistic in the face of negativity. One female Marine recounts a male fellow Marine mocked her by calling her a “BAM,” meaning “big-ass Marine.” She responded by calling him a “HAM,” meaning “halfass Marine.”⁴²

By the war’s end, female military personnel served in a wide variety roles. Originally, the military only permitted servicewomen to serve on United States soil. However, by 1943 WAACs were serving in the Pacific, European, and North African theaters. The expansion of female service demonstrates both the initial success and effectiveness of servicewomen, as well as the overall need for them in the larger picture of the war. However, the expansion of the realm of service created new problems for female military personnel, particularly with regards to uniform. For example, the skirts worn as part of the WAC uniform proved to be impractical, particularly in the Pacific where having exposed skin meant a risk of contracting malaria and other tropical diseases.⁴³ Several servicewomen fell ill because of this. In this way, traditional notions of femininity and appropriate dress tangibly affected servicewomen in a negative way.

Despite the groundbreaking nature at the core of women serving in the armed forces, about seventy percent of these women served in traditionally feminine jobs.⁴⁴ The majority of servicewomen worked clerical jobs as typists and clerks. Others worked as drivers, radio

⁴¹ Though untrue in this situation, groups of prostitutes had previously accompanied servicemen during other wars.

⁴² Yellin, 147.

⁴³ Ibid, 127.

⁴⁴ “Women in the Military – WWII: Overview,” *Minnesota History Center*, accessed February 27, 2018. http://libguides.mnhs.org/wwii_women.

operators, and cooks. Women remained strictly prohibited from engaging in combatant roles throughout the entirety of the war. However, this does not undermine the importance of the jobs performed by the servicewomen of World War Two, nor does it mean that women had no role on the frontlines. Those who worked as secretaries helped support the bureaucracy essential to waging war. Additionally, despite not serving as combatants, this does not mean that women's jobs were inherently more safe or "cushy," as servicewomen assisted combatants on the front lines by delivering food and supplies. By the end of the war, 181 Army women died in the line of duty.⁴⁵ Many others, including nurses, were taken as prisoners of war.

African American Women in the Armed Forces

To create an accurate portrait of the experience of the service women in the Second World War, one must take into account how the experience of non-white women differed from those of white women. Like the male divisions of the United States military at this time, the women's military corps were racially segregated.⁴⁶ African American women represented 40 of the first 440 women to arrive at Des Moines to train to become the WAAC's first officers. The WAAC had created a quota for the number of African American women allowed to serve. They set this number at about 10 percent, echoing roughly the percentage of African Americans as part of the United States population at this time. Though these women had very similar educational backgrounds and work experience as their white counterparts, the African American women had to use separate facilities and generally did not receive equal treatment.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the

⁴⁵ Rasa, "The Women's Army Corps."

⁴⁶ Kathryn Sheldon, "Brief History of Black Women in the Military," *The Women's Memorial*, accessed February 27, 2018. <https://www.womensmemorial.org/history-of-black-women#4>.

⁴⁷ Judith A. Bellafaire, "The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II," last updated February 17, 2005. <https://history.army.mil/brochures/WAC/WAC.HTM>.

majority of African American women served in the WAC, as the female divisions of the other military branches were even less racially permissive.

The service of African American women in the armed forces often went unnoticed and unappreciated. So much so, African American illustrator Charles Alston created a sketch entitled “Doing Their Share, Too” to highlight the contributions to the war effort made by African American women. This sketch features three African American women, one in a nurse’s uniform, one in working coveralls, and the third wearing a military uniform. This image is testament to the alienation and forgottenness felt by African Americans living in both a time of supposed national unity and de jure racial segregation.



Figure 9. Charles Alston’s “Doing Their Share, Too” highlighting African American female participation in the war effort, 1943. From the National Archives Catalog, Records of the Office of War Information, 1926-1951.

Despite facing racial prejudice in the form of race quotas and all out barring from participation, numerous African American women served in the armed forces during the war. In the WAAC/WAC alone, 6,520 African American women served.⁴⁸ Much less racially

⁴⁸ Sheldon, “Brief History of Black Women in the Military.”

permissive, the other female branches of the military had fewer than one hundred African American women serve in each. Additionally, approximately six hundred African American women served in the Army Nurse Corps.⁴⁹

Nursing Services

Unlike the female military corps of the armed forces, a nursing corps had existed before World War Two. Both the Army and the Navy had female nursing corps long before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The Army Nurse Corps was founded on February 2, 1901.⁵⁰ The Navy Nurse Corps was established seven years later on May 13, 1908.⁵¹ Additionally, these corps already had a record of service, as they had actively served in World War One.

The realities of the war necessitated an abundance of nurses and other medical professionals. The United States Military and Government responded to this issue by having a campaign to recruit nurses. When the war started, the Army Nurse Corps had fewer than 7,000 active duty nurses. By 1945, this number had risen to over 57,000 in service.⁵² The escalation of the war through the years caused both the demand for nurses and the shortage of nurses to rise.

Recruitment advertisements for nursing services promised young women a way to “Save his life and find your own” through job training and education sponsored by the government in exchange for service. The United States Public Health Service provided \$5.7 million towards

⁴⁹ “African American Army Nurse Corps Officers,” *U.S. Army Medical Department, Office of Medical History*, accessed February 27, 2018. <http://history.amedd.army.mil/ancwebsite/articles/blackhistory.html>.

⁵⁰ “About the Army Nurse Corps,” *U.S. Army Medical Department, Office of Medical History*, last modified May 1, 2014, accessed October 8, 2017, <http://history.amedd.army.mil/ancwebsite/about.html>.

⁵¹ André B. Sobocinski, “‘The Sacred Twenty’: The Navy’s First Nurses,” *U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery*, 2012, accessed October 8, 2017, <http://navymedicine.navylive.dodlive.mil/archives/2834>.

⁵² Col. C.J. Moore, “Highlights in the History of the Army Nurse Corps, 1940 to 1950,” *The Army Nurse Corps Association*, accessed October 24, 2017, <http://e-anca.org/history/anc-eras/1940-1950>.

nursing education, and this still fell short to completely address the wartime nursing shortages.⁵³ The United State Government need to create an additional Cadet Nurse Program, known as the Bolton Act, with a backing of \$150 million to address this shortage. This program used ads to target young female high school graduates, promising them free tuition in exchange thirty months of nursing service during the war. This program was an extreme success, and it propelled many women into the middle class after the war.

Despite its association to the military, the nurse corps faced very little public resistance. The traditional association between nursing and femininity played to the nurses' advantage. Of all of the new groups of working women during the war, nurses had the highest approval ratings amongst the general public.⁵⁴ Nursing fit well into traditional notions of appropriate work for women, as women had worked as nurses during armed conflict long before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Additionally, nursing fit traditional notions of a woman's supposed caring and nurturing nature.

Military Recruiting Posters

The United States government through the Office of War Information (OWI) used propaganda posters in two ways. First, to convince young women to serve their country and join the newly formed military corps. Second, to combat the negative perceptions that the general public had about female military service. One can see the presence of the first goal in examples of these posters quite evidently. However, the presence of the second goal is often much more covert.

⁵³ Alexandra Lord, "Creating the Cadet Nurse Corps for World War II," *Smithsonian*, last modified May 5, 2016. <http://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/creating-cadet-nurse-corps-world-war-ii>.

⁵⁴ Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women : Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 21.

Many of the hesitations surrounding female military service involved the femininity (or supposed lack thereof) of the new service women. Many people worried that joining the military would make women unfeminine or even lesbian, and thus this would cause the basic fabric of their society to unravel. These concerns were often openly voiced, for example, reporters on the proposed WAAC bill commonly asked if WAACs would be allowed to wear makeup.⁵⁵ These concerns about femininity caused the OWI to depict the women in military recruiting posters as both feminine and conventionally attractive. This meant that the women in military recruiting posters generally wore makeup (in particular red lipstick), had fashionable hairdos, and had clear, fair complexions. The OWI wanted to portray these women as traditionally and conventionally attractive. These traditional feminine ideals emphasized whiteness, youth, and generally middle class values.⁵⁶

“Good soldier”

The “Good soldier” WAC recruiting poster exemplifies both goals set forth by the OWI.⁵⁷ This poster features an idealized image of what a young WAC could and should appear. Her looks fit traditional white beauty standards, and she wears her hair and makeup fashionably. With this, the OWI wanted to show the public that women in the military were not unfeminine and disreputable, but rather feminine patriots. Essentially, they wanted to show that joining the military did not strip a woman of her femininity or beauty.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 36.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 57.

⁵⁷ These goals being: First, to convince women to get on board with their goals and join the WAC and second, to covertly control the narrative around female military service.



**Figure 10. “Good soldier” Women’s Army Corps recruiting poster, c. 1942-1945.
From the National Archives at College Park.**

The label of “Good soldier” alone has a twofold job. First, it works towards the OWI’s goal of controlling the narrative around female military service. By calling her a “good soldier,” this shows the public that service women were making worthwhile contributions to the war effort. At the same time, this encourages women to join the military by showing them that their contributions could be worthwhile. This worked towards their more obvious goal of recruiting women into the military.

This poster meets both of the OWI’s goals in creating it. First, it encourages women to join the WAC by showing them that they too could be a “good soldier.” Secondly, it shows the public that joining the WACs did not strip a woman of her femininity, and that WACs provided a beneficial service. This poster alone demonstrates how much information the OWI managed to pack into what appears as a simple and straightforward image.

“So Proudly We Serve”

The OWI employed similar tactics in regard to recruiting for the other female military branches. The “So Proudly We Serve” U.S. Marine Corps Women’s Reserve recruiting poster functions in many of the same ways as the “Good Soldier” poster. The Marines poster shows a young well-groomed woman standing in front of a motif of flying airplanes. Much like the woman in the WAC poster, she wears red lipstick and a fashionable hairdo, and fits conventional measures of attractiveness. The Marines gave extra attention to the importance of the femininity of their recruits. For example, Marine recruitment pamphlets encouraged women to wear makeup and nail polish.⁵⁸ Cosmetic manufacturer Elizabeth Arden even developed a shade of lipstick called “Montezuma Red” to match the red of the Marine uniforms.⁵⁹ One can see the importance of femininity reflected in this poster.



Figure 11. “So Proudly We Serve” U.S. Marine Corps Women’s Reserve recruiting poster, 1942. From the University of Minnesota Libraries, Manuscript Division.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 67.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 36.

Much like the WAC poster, the OWI created this poster to show both the beauty and femininity of Marine women, as well as to demonstrate the seriousness of their work. They did this by depicting the woman in the poster as stern, yet still beautiful. Essentially, the OWI intended this poster to demonstrate that femininity and a seriousness commitment to the war effort could exist within the same woman.

“Symbol of Life”

In recruiting for the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, the OWI used a slightly different kind of rhetoric and symbolism compared to the military recruiting posters. One can interpret the title “Symbol of Life” in two very different ways. The titular “Symbol of Life” could be the caduceus pictured in the poster, which Army nurses wore on their uniforms. Quite literally, if a soldier saw someone wearing a caduceus, they knew medical help had arrived, thus making it a symbol of life. However, one can interpret “Symbol of Life” in a secondary way. The nurse featured in the poster could be the symbol of life. Concepts such as victory and mercy have commonly been personified as women, and this poster conjures this association.⁶⁰ The Office of War Propaganda commonly used this kind of symbolism in posters during World War One.

The OWI’s goal of recruiting people to participate in the war effort is quite obvious in this poster. The text on this poster explains the need for more nurses to participate in the war effort, calling nursing “a glorious service of mercy.” However, the OWI’s second goal of controlling the narrative and normalizing female work is not present in this poster, nor was it necessary. Nursing was already considered an acceptable and noble profession for women, particularly for young and unmarried women. Because of this, the OWI had no reason to justify

⁶⁰ These associations frequently go back to Greek and Roman mythological personifications, i.e. the goddess of victory is Nike.

the importance of nursing. This exemplifies the way in which the OWI handled issues of varying degrees of controversy.



Figure 12. Lejaren A. Hiller’s “Symbol of Life” U.S. Army Nurse Corps recruiting poster, 1945. From the University of North Texas Digital Library.

Conclusion

Though the experiment of female military corps was an overall success, this did not necessarily disrupt or change the attitudes of the general public. Prejudice persisted about the capabilities and competencies of women. Additionally, women serving alongside men did not change beliefs about the proper place of women. However, failure to change deeply ingrained beliefs does not negate the many successes of the female military service corps. In 1948, the Women’s Armed Service Integration Act created a permanent female corps in the Army. In 1978, the Army chose to abolish the WAC and integrate women into the regular Army. In 2016, women gained the

option to serve in combat roles. Though many initially considered the WAAC Bill dead on arrival, its passage and eventual success permanently changed the face of the American military.

The Office of War Information's propaganda posters did not single handedly guarantee the success of the female military corps, however they certainly played a role in it. The OWI's glamorization of female military service certainly convinced a few women to enlist.

Furthermore, this glamorization helped ease the societal pains caused by such radical social change.

Chapter 3

“We Soldiers of Supply...” Appealing to Women to Join the Workforce

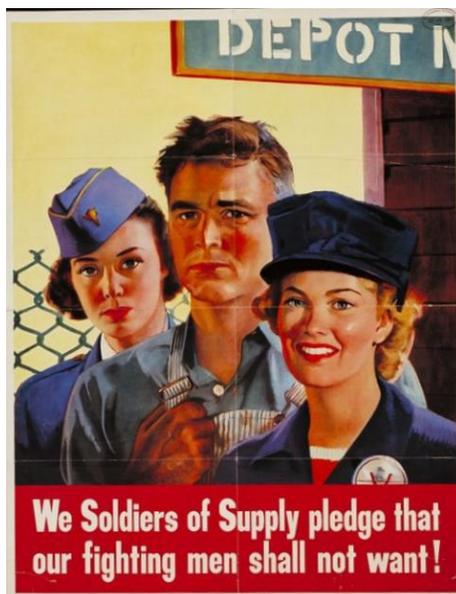


Figure 13. “We Soldiers of Supply pledge that our fighting men shall not want!” poster encouraging participation in war jobs, 1943. From the World War II Poster Collection at Northwestern University Library.

“I was the first one hired and the last one fired. I wasn’t fired; I was laid off because of the end of the war. I know that I cried when—I was there forty-two months, and when they brought me my pink slip to, that’s it, I cried. I cried.”⁶¹ Edythe Esser reflects on the end of her time working in a ship building yard. The Second World War brought women into the workforce en masse.

Without female labor, the wartime economy would have quickly plummeted. Though each

⁶¹ Edythe Esser, “Rosie the Riveter World War II American Home Front Oral History Project” conducted by Sam Redman in 2011, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2012.

woman had her own motivations to join the labor force, what is clear is that the United States Government directly encouraged women to take war jobs.

World War Two did not create the phenomenon of female employment in the United States. Rather, it expanded it in both size and scope. As thousands of men departed for war, businesses needed women to take their place. It was the task of the Office of War Information (OWI) to convince women to fill these job vacancies. They needed to not only appeal to women already in the workforce, but also to women who had never worked or who had left the workforce. Much like their goals with regard to female military service, the OWI needed to both encourage women to take these jobs, and to justify the need for women to work.

Origins of Women in the Workplace

To understand the nature of the workforce in the early 1940's, one must first understand the state of America's workforce in the 1930's. After the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the United States economy plunged into a pattern of slow business and rampant unemployment. By 1933, the unemployment rate had risen by about twenty percentage points.⁶² By 1935, twenty-five percent of the American workforce suffered from unemployment.⁶³ Essentially, the 1930's were a time of widespread and persistent unemployment in the United States. This affected both the way in which average Americans lived their lives, as well as the laws and policies regarding work and employment in the United States.

Overall, the Great Depression had virtually no net effect on female employment, however this does not mean that women did not hold jobs during this time. According to a 1930 census,

⁶² Robert A. Margo, "Employment and Unemployment in the 1930s," *The Cliometric Society*, Accessed January 5, 2018. http://cliometrics.org/conferences/ASSA/Jan_93/Margo%20Abstract/index.html.

⁶³ Gene Smiley, "Great Depression," *Library of Economics and Liberty*, Accessed January 5, 2018. <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/GreatDepression.html>.

about twenty-four percent of all American women held a job outside of the home. By 1940, this number had only risen by one percentage point. The kinds of jobs held by working women were fairly limited, and the majority of employed women worked in domestic service or as clerks.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the majority of working women were young and unmarried, making them a largely homogeneous group. Many Americans opposed the employment of married women. Twenty-six states had laws prohibiting the employment of married women during the Great Depression. According to one *Fortune* magazine poll, only fifteen percent of respondents outright approved of married women working outside of the home. Many Americans believed that husbands should support their families financially, and wives should remain home to perform domestic tasks, particularly during a time of scarce employment opportunities.⁶⁵ Since jobs were universally scarce, many Americans believed that working women “stole” jobs from the unemployed men who were more deserving of them.

With this mindset, the United States entered World War Two. Though not single handedly, the war helped reverse the Depression Era’s shortage of jobs and turned it into the war era’s shortage of labor. Furthermore, the war era economy had a much more significant effect on female employment rates than the Great Depression, as it quickly increased the percentage of working women to about thirty-four percent from twenty-four percent.⁶⁶

By 1945, the war radically had changed the United States economy and labor force. From 1940 to 1945, the female labor force grew by 50 percent. It brought an unprecedented number of women into the labor force, having them work jobs previously reserved for men. The war not

⁶⁴ "Women in the Early to Mid-20th Century (1900-1960): Social and Economic Conditions." *Feminism in Literature: A Gale Critical Companion*, edited by Jessica Bomarito and Jeffrey W. Hunter, vol. 4: 20th Century, Topics, Gale, 2005, pp. 48-67. *U.S. History in Context*, accessed January 5, 2018. <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3441600284/UHIC?u=plant&xid=065d4f4c>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Marie Bussing-Burks, “Women and Post-WWII Wages,” *The National Bureau of Economic Research*, Accessed January 5, 2018. <http://www.nber.org/digest/nov02/w9013.html>.

only caused an increase in the number of working women, but it also diversified the kinds of jobs they worked. Meaning, many women entered the workforce by taking jobs in traditionally male dominated fields.⁶⁷

Employment in Heavy Industry

The fields of heavy industry and manufacturing underwent a major change of face during World War Two. Though no field within heavy industry previously dominated by men reached female domination or even gender parity during the war, the changes in demographics remained substantial. By 1944, women represented one in three of people employed in manufacturing.⁶⁸ The war economy of the United States desperately needed women to take both the vacated jobs left by men who joined the military, and also the thousands of newly created war-related jobs.

The War Manpower Commission was a sister agency to the Office of War Information (OWI). Whereas the OWI was in charge of controlling the narrative surrounding women in the workforce during the war, the War Manpower Commission was in charge of formulating “...plans and programs and establish basic national policies to assure the most effective mobilization and maximum utilization of the Nation's manpower in the prosecution of the war; and issue such policy and operating directives as may be necessary thereto.”⁶⁹ Phrased with less political jargon, the War Manpower Commission had the duty to create and implement a plan for

⁶⁷ “Women & World War II,” *Metropolitan State University of Denver*, accessed February 27, 2018. <https://msudenver.edu/camphale/thewomensarmycorps/womenwwii/>.

⁶⁸ American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning, “Table of Statistics on Women in the World War II Era Workforce,” *HERB: Resources for Teachers*, accessed January 27, 2018, <https://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1241>.

⁶⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt: “Executive Order 9139 Establishing the War Manpower Commission,” April 18, 1942. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16248>.

mobilizing the American workforce in support of the war. The OWI simply aided them in doing so.

As discussed above, the War Manpower Commission needed to appeal to women in order to fulfill the nation's labor shortages. To do so, the War Manpower Commission created informational pamphlets directly imploring women to take jobs. Though less artistic in nature, the messages and tactics used by the War Manpower Commission echo those of the OWI. In one pamphlet appealing to the women of Mobile, Alabama, the War Manpower Commission starts by writing "We must depend upon you - upon womanpower."⁷⁰ It goes on to describe the ways in which women could seek job training and employment, and it also praises women who had already taken jobs. It concludes, in bold capital letters, "EVERY WOMAN WHO TAKES A JOB HASTENS THE DAY OF VICTORY FOR AMERICAN ARMS - AND PEACE."⁷¹ This shows the degree to which the War Manpower Commission strongly needed women to meet not only their goals, but also the country's goal for victory.

Though some industries attracted more women than others, increases in female employment in heavy industry jobs were largely uniform. Of all industries, women workers had the largest presence in the nascent aircraft manufacturing industry. Women workers accounted for about forty percent of the aircraft manufacturing workforce during the war.⁷² Furthermore, between 1940 and 1944, the percentage of women employed in iron and steel production rose from 6.7 percent to 22.3 percent. In vehicle production, the percentage rose from 5.7 percent to

⁷⁰ War Manpower job flyer promoting women to register for War Jobs, 1942, Records of the War Manpower Commission, from the National Archives Catalog, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/281500> (accessed February 6, 2018).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Yellin, 51.

24.4 percent in this same timeframe.⁷³ Though cold numbers can be difficult to visualize, at the very least these numbers represent a clear increase in the percentage of women employed in those industries.

African American Women in the Workforce

One must note the difference between the experience of white women and African American women in terms of job recruitment. Like in military service, African American women also faced discrimination in employment. African American women had a particularly strong and important presence in the war economy. Of the 1,000,000 African Americans who entered the workforce during the war, African American women made up 600,000 of them.⁷⁴ However, African American women did not have equal access to the variety of jobs that white women had. More often, employers would only hire African American women in lower paying jobs (such as plant janitors), despite having the same qualifications as their white counterparts.

Though white women were all but begged to take a job even if they did not have the proper training, African American women with similar or greater qualifications had difficulties finding employment because of their race. A list of complaints from five African American women to the Pratt and Whitney Aircraft Corporation illustrates this phenomenon. One woman named Susie Wiggins complained that despite having a high school diploma and six months of vocational training in riveting, the manager that interviewed her only offered her cafeteria work.

⁷³ American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning, "Table of Statistics on Women in the World War II Era Workforce."

⁷⁴ Karen Tucker Anderson "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II," *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (1982): 82-97. doi:10.2307/1887753.

Furthermore, despite advertising that the company was were in search of women workers, the interviewer told Ms. Wiggins that they were only looking to hire men.⁷⁵

Despite facing both racial and sexual prejudice, African American women managed to make major contributions to the wartime economy. Many of the African American women who took war jobs were already in the labor force at the start of the war. These women commonly left their jobs as domestic servants in favor of higher paying factory jobs, causing a decline in the percentage of African American women working in the service industry. However, the percentage of African American women employed in heavy industry rose from 6.5 percent at the start of the war, to 18 percent by the end of it.⁷⁶ As Fanny Christina Hill, an African American woman employed in a west coast factory during the war, bluntly put it, “The War made me live better. Hitler was the one that got us out of the white folks’ kitchen.”⁷⁷

Employment in Agriculture

An essential but easily overlooked aspect of wartime production is the production of food. For a country to win a war, its people, both at home and on the battle fronts need to stay properly nourished. On January 12, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke on what he dubbed “Farm Mobilization Day.” In his speech, President Roosevelt discussed the important role that agricultural production had in winning the war. In it, he called food “a weapon in total war- fully

⁷⁵ “Complaints of Colored Women Against Pratt and Whitney Aircraft Corporation,” 1945, Records of the Committee on Fair Employment Practice 1940-1945, from the National Archives Catalog, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/292244> (accessed February 6, 2018).

⁷⁶ Anderson.

⁷⁷ “World War Two and After in the Black West,” *The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library*, accessed February 22, 2018. <http://www.inmotionaame.org/migrations/topic.cfm;jsessionid=f8303244201518077175554?migration=6&topic=9&bhcp=1>

as important in its way as guns or planes or tanks.”⁷⁸ Just as women were recruited to manufacture guns and planes and tanks, they were also asked to produce the food that was helping to feed a nation, its military, and its allies.

Like many other professions, the United States had an overwhelming surplus of agricultural workers during the Great Depression. This surplus quickly turned to a deficit once the war began. Not only had the demand for food risen dramatically, but many men who formerly worked as farmers left their jobs and joined the military. In just the two years from 1940 to 1942, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics found that more than two million men left their agricultural jobs.⁷⁹ Of course, American women living on farms had always participated in agricultural production, however the new deficit of men meant that women’s roles on the farm had to change. Furthermore, the wartime food deficits necessitated more female workers than those already living on farms.

At the start of the war in 1940, the U.S. Women’s Bureau reported that about 8 percent of working women worked in agriculture.⁸⁰ However, one must take into account the difficulty in deriving an accurate number such as this. Then, as it is now, it was difficult to ascertain an accurate number of women who worked in agriculture, as many women who performed agricultural work did not consider it their job, but rather they see themselves as a farmer’s wife or daughter who does this work to help. Nonetheless, the U.S. Women’s Bureau reported a rise in women working in agriculture to 22.4 percent.⁸¹ Acknowledging the shortcomings of

⁷⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The President's Statement on Farm Mobilization Day.," January 12, 1943. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16397>.

⁷⁹ Julie Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, "‘To the Rescue of the Crops:’ The Women’s Land Army During World War Two," *Prologue Magazine*, Winter 1993 Prologue Vol. 25, no. 4, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1993/winter/landarmy.html>.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

determining such a number, this data certainly suggests a significant rise in female agricultural employment.

The practice of mobilizing women for wartime agricultural work first began during the First World War. They called this program the Women's Land Army of America (WLAA). Like the Women's Army Corps (WAC), the United States Government modeled this program after a British program of the same name.⁸² Analogous to the "Rosie the Riveters" working in heavy industry, female agricultural workers were dubbed "Farmerettes." Though the WLAA of the First World War functioned as a private organization, the WLAA of the Second World War functioned more as a decentralized government organization.⁸³ In addition to the thousands of women already living and working on farms, this program transported city and suburban women to rural areas to assist with farming. By the end of the war, about 1.5 million non-farm women participated in the WLAA.⁸⁴

Women were not the only targets for wartime agricultural work. As many as 230,000 foreign workers from places such as Mexico and the Caribbean were brought in to produce America's crops.⁸⁵ This demonstrates the severity and importance of the farm labor shortage during the war. Had American women along with foreign workers not continued the work left behind by farmhands who had went off to war, the United States would have failed to produce the food desperately needed to feed America and its Allies. Without food, there would have been no chance at victory.

⁸² Elaine F. Weiss, "Before Rosie the Riveter, Farmerettes Went to Work," *Smithsonian*, May 28, 2009, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/before-rosie-the-riveter-farmerettes-went-to-work-141638628/>.

⁸³ Stephanie Ann. Carpenter, "'Regular Farm Girl': The Women's Land Army in World War II," *Agricultural History* 71, no. 2 (1997): 163-85, <http://www.jstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/stable/3744245>.

⁸⁴ Barrett Litoff and Smith.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Workforce Recruiting Posters

The Office of War Information (OWI) worked tirelessly attempting to convince women to take a job to support the war. Much like their efforts in military recruiting, the goals of the OWI were twofold. First and foremost, the OWI used posters to recruit women into the workforce. In this regard, the OWI was very open about this goal, and the posters that they created reflect their near desperation for women to take jobs. Unlike with military service, their second goal was not the normalization of working women, as they had already long existed. Rather, they attempted to normalize women working in fields traditionally dominated by men.

The OWI employed a few different tactics to normalize women working in non-traditional fields. This included emphasizing the temporary nature of this type of work and insisting that traditionally feminine jobs remained important.

“Women: There’s work to be done...”

The OWI treaded lightly on potentially controversial subjects. They remained very conscious of the implications and innuendo that one could draw from their posters. For this reason, they chose words and images carefully, as to prevent any unintended interpretations. Furthermore, they remained cautious that their choice of words or imagery could alienate someone in an instant. Should someone feel alienated from just one message, the United States Government could potentially lose their support of the entire war effort. Of course, continued support of the war was the OWI’s main goal and purpose. This poster illustrates the careful wording and imagery the OWI used. In this poster, the OWI’s main goal is to convince women to take an essential war job. However, this poster also illustrates the measures they took in order not to alienate anyone.

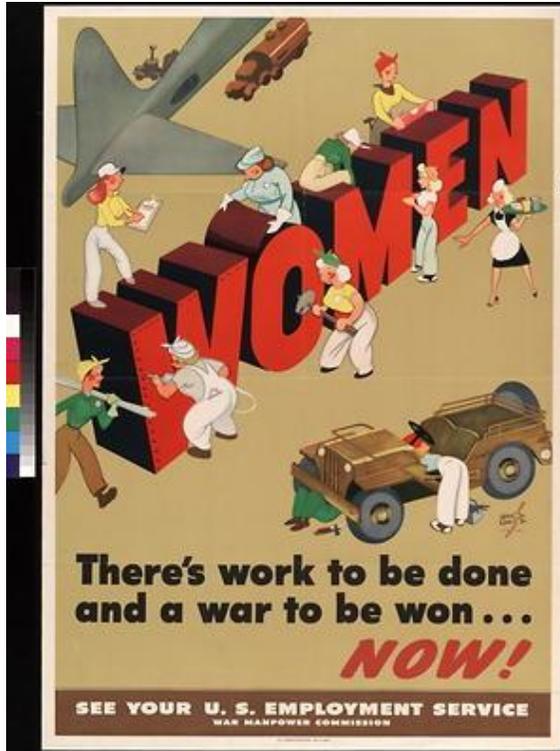


Figure 14. Vernon Grant's "Women: There's work to be done and a war to be won...NOW!" poster encouraging women to seek employment, 1944. From the University of Minnesota Libraries, Manuscript Division.

At a superficial level, OWI sought to show women the kinds of jobs that available to them with this poster. Furthermore, they sought to emphasize the jobs that were desperately needed for women to perform in order to win the war. To do this, the poster features a variety of cartoon women each performing a different jobs. Some of the jobs seen in this poster include riveting, inspecting, and supervising. However, on the right side under the "N" one can see a woman waitressing. She stands out as the only figure not wearing pants. The OWI consciously chose to include the waitress to show that women were still needed to perform traditionally feminine jobs. The implication of this is twofold. First, it shows that women who chose to remain in more traditionally feminine lines of work were still needed and valuable. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it shows that women taking traditionally masculine jobs did not mean

a complete reversal of gender roles. This addresses the concerns that many people held about working women, as it shows that not every traditional sense of gender roles had changed.

One should also note the appearance of the cartoon women. These women have a much wider array of body types compared to similar posters with more photo-like illustrations. Most of the women appear to be thin, however a few of appear to have fuller figures. One should also note that despite the wider array of body types, all of these women are still white. This posters reflects a sharp lack of diversity in the posters created by the OWI. Furthermore, this poster demonstrates the OWI's narrow view of diversity. While older women and African American women made major contributions to the wartime economy, the OWI never featured them in their recruitment posters.

“Find Your War Job”

The OWI made attempts as inclusivity, putting much effort into appealing to the American masses. They wanted each American individual to feel as though they both had the opportunity and the *duty* to participate in the war effort. The rhetoric of the phrases on this poster, particularly *“I’ve found the job where I fit best!”*, exemplifies this goal. This phrasing implies that each individual has their place in the war effort, one simply has to try to find it. It then goes on to list three different industries in which a person could work. This implies a degree of choice, and a desire to cater to different interests and skill sets.

However, though a clear attempt at inclusivity, this poster also demonstrates the shortcomings of the OWI. Despite making obvious attempts to appeal to women in particular, they still held a limited view of women. Simply put, the OWI generally chose to feature attractive young white women in their posters. Despite the large contributions to the wartime

economy and in other regards made by African American women, the OWI never featured an African American woman on a poster, and they only made light attempts to appeal to them.

While the OWI certainly made attempts at inclusivity, they fell short in many regards.

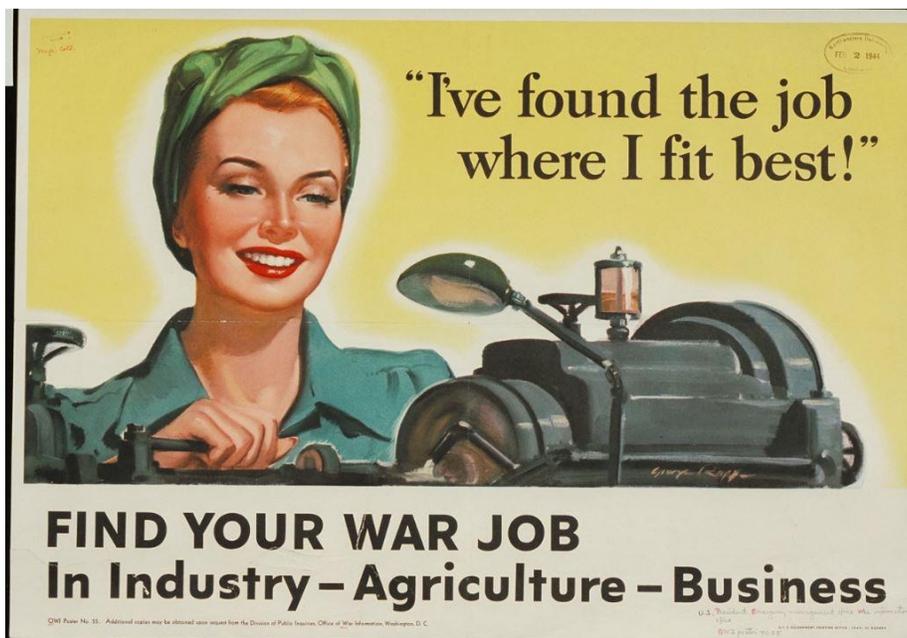


Figure 15. George Roegg’s “I’ve found the job where I fit best!” Find Your War Job in Industry- Agriculture- Business” poster encouraging women to seek war jobs, 1943. From the World War II Poster Collection at Northwestern University Library.

Conclusion

It is difficult to determine why individual so many American women took jobs during World War Two. Though contemporaneously presented as an expression of patriotism first and foremost, one would certainly be amiss to think that this was the sole motivation for hundreds of thousands of women. Certainly, some women did have this as their primary motivation. However, at least some must have felt the “feminine mystique” described by Betty Friedan nearly twenty years later. Just as Edythe Esser cried when her job let her go at the end of the war, some women must have enjoyed their job outside the guise of simply contributing to the war

effort. However, despite the clear inroads made during the war in terms of female employment, one must also take into account that World War Two did not invent the female workforce, rather it just expanded it. The war helped to diversify both the kinds of women who worked, and the kinds of jobs that they took. The changes to the nature of female employment that occurred during the war created lasting changes in terms of the acceptability of working women.

The OWI wanted women to feel that somewhere a job existed that they could do to help support the war effort. In a sense, they were telling the truth. Thousands of new kinds of jobs were open to women, in addition to the jobs that they had previously been available to them. However, access to jobs was not exactly equal based upon barriers faced by different races and social statuses. The OWI conveyed a sense of duty to the war effort in order to convince women to take these jobs. However, many women certainly desired the freedom and independence the employment gave them, independent to their patriotic duty to their country.

Chapter 4

“Of Course I Can!” Propaganda for the Homefront



Figure 16. Dick Williams’ “Of course I can!” poster encouraging women to can food goods to conserve resources during the war, 1944. From the World War II Poster Collection at Northwestern University Library.

Though undeniably useful and important, oral history certainly has a few shortcomings. Namely, those who did not break the status quo, those who chose to remain “normal,” “traditional,” or “unremarkable” often slip through the cracks and their stories become lost. For this reason, oral histories of women who remained in the home as housewives during the Second World War is difficult to come by. However, people like this, the “average” people, have just as much (if not more) to say about period of history as the people leading governments or conducting war.

The war required women to participate in more ways than just going to work or joining the military. The reach of the war extended beyond the public lives of Americans, it also

encroached on the personal lives of the American people. Even women who chose not to participate in the war effort by taking a job or by joining the military still had responsibilities to their country, and the United States Government directly implored them to participate in the war effort. Furthermore, women who remained in traditionally feminine roles still faced changes and challenges to the definition of their femininity.

Just as femininity remained important among women participating in non-traditional roles, traditionally feminine roles rose in importance. Women had to reconcile remaining feminine and performing their jobs as wives and mothers while at the same time dealing with limited resources. For this reason, even housewives had a role to play in winning the war. The Office of War Information (OWI) did not forget about women who did not work or join the military. They also implored non-working women to change their behavior in order to accommodate the war.

The Face of the Homefront

Women became the symbolic face of the homefront for two quite practical reasons. First, women had always symbolized the home, as they had traditionally been the caretakers of the home. Since tasks such as cooking and procuring groceries traditionally fell upon the matriarch of the household's shoulders, it made sense to target women in regard to the changes the war necessitated with regard to food usage. Second, the mass amount of men leaving for the war caused a gender imbalance at home in the United States. This is not to say that the United States became solely female, as non-military aged men remained, and not all military-aged men left for the war. However, the departure of all the men did not go unnoticed, and it was particularly

noticeable in the 18 to 30 age group. Women became the face of the homefront precisely because they were the people who remained on the homefront.

As the face of the homefront, certain “homey” tasks related to the war fell upon the shoulders of American women. Generally, women already regularly performed these tasks. Tasks such as these include cooking and food procurement, child rearing, and more generally the tasks it takes to run a household. To accommodate the war, women needed to alter the way they performed many of these daily tasks.

Resource Management

The war caused a global shortage of common consumer goods, and the military’s need for goods took precedence in terms of resource allocation. For this reason, previously accessible everyday goods and materials became rationed, and at time difficult to obtain. Executive Order 8875 established the Office of Price Administration (OPI) to regulate prices in order to ration goods for the American public. This Order states that the OPI had the duty to “Determine policies and make regulations governing allocations and priorities with respect to the procurement, production, transmission, or transportation of materials, articles, power, fuel, and other commodities among military, economic defense, defense aid, civilian, and other major demands of the total defense program.”⁸⁶ As the war progressed, the OPI added more and more items to the listed of rationed goods.⁸⁷ The OWI assisted the OPI in achieving their goals by creating propaganda for the American public about how to manage their resources during the war.

⁸⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 8875 Establishing the Supply Priorities and Allocations Board.," August 28, 1941. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16164>.

⁸⁷ "Rationed Goods in the U.S. During World War II," *Ames Historical Society*, accessed February 21, 2018. <http://www.ameshistory.org/content/rationed-goods-us-during-world-war-ii>.

Specifically, the OWI directly implored women to change their purchasing habits, as they constituted the largest consumer group.

The requests of the OWI did not fall upon deaf ears. According to research done by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average yearly spending on transportation, including fuel for automobiles, dropped between 1941 and 1945.⁸⁸ Of course, rationing of all materials affected all Americans, including women. However, the war particularly affected goods traditionally purchased by women, these being food and clothing.

To accommodate the war, Americans needed to manage food resources wisely. The United States Government had to balance the resource needs of its constantly growing military with the needs of the civilians remaining at home. The government attempted to manage resource allocation by creating a system of “ration books” that citizens could use to purchase their fair share of rationed goods. While someone could use their “ration points” to buy a variety of goods, food was the most basic and most essential. For this reason, ration books affected the acquisition of food the most. For this reason, food goods considered to most essential, and therefore most sought after (such as sugar, butter, or meat), had particularly strict rationing rules.⁸⁹ When asked in a March 1943 Gallup poll if they understood how the ration system worked, 56 percent of men reported “Yes” while 76 percent of women reported “Yes.”⁹⁰ This discrepancy demonstrates that women, as the dominant household consumers, more frequently interacted with ration books, and therefore had a better understanding of them.

⁸⁸ Steven W. Henderson, “Consumer Spending in World War II: the forgotten consumer expenditure surveys,” *The Bureau of Labor Statistics*, August 2015. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2015/article/consumer-spending-in-world-war-ii-the-forgotten-consumer-expenditure-surveys.htm>.

⁸⁹ “World War II Rationing on the U.S. Homefront,” *Ames Historical Society*, accessed February 21, 2018. <http://www.ameshistory.org/content/world-war-ii-rationing-us-homefront>.

⁹⁰ “Ration Books,” *The National WWII Museum*, accessed February 21, 2018. <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/take-closer-look-ration-books>.

The United States government asked women to take more effort in conserving food resources than simply consuming within the guidelines of the ration books. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) encouraged individual families to grow their own produce, which they called “victory gardens.” The USDA hoped that growing family-use amounts of produce in backyards would help lower the demand for these types of goods. An estimated 20 million households planted victory gardens.⁹¹ Furthermore, they also encouraged families to save food they had grown from being wasted saving excess food by canning. The USDA estimated that Americans canned approximately 4 million cans of food in 1943 alone.⁹² To encourage women to do these tasks, the OWI presented canning and planting victory gardens as patriotic as serving in the military.

The war caused shortages of many of the raw materials used to make clothing. For example, shipments of rubber and silk from East Asia ceased after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. In addition to the shortages, many of these materials were urgently needed for use in the war. Like food and fuel, the United States government rationed materials used to make clothes in order to ensure that the military had proper uniforms and equipment.⁹³ For example, silk was needed to make parachutes, rubber was needed to make rafts and gas masks, and cotton and wool was needed to make tarps and uniforms. Though certainly not as essential to life as food, the rationing of clothing directly affected the daily lives of women. These shortages caused women’s fashion to change to better accommodate the demands of the war.

⁹¹ Claudia Reinhardt, “Victory Gardens,” *Wessels Living History Farm*, accessed March 21, 2018. https://livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/crops_02.html

⁹² Kelly A. Spring, “Food Rationing and Canning in World War II,” *National Women’s History Museum*, last modified September 13, 2017. <https://www.nwhm.org/articles/food-rationing-and-canning-world-war-ii>.

⁹³ “Rationed Goods in the U.S. During World War II,” *Ames Historical Society*, accessed February 21, 2018. <http://www.ameshistory.org/content/rationed-goods-us-during-world-war-ii>.

During the war, women's fashion became more streamlined. Styles such as bell sleeves, pleating, and frills fell out of fashion as they required extra fabric. Furthermore, the rationing limited women with regard to the amount of clothing they could purchase in a year. For example, women could only purchase three pairs of leather shoes in a single year, as the US government prioritized the use of shoe leather to make boots for soldiers.⁹⁴ For this reason, new clothing styles arose to fit the demands of the rationing system. For example, shoes made of synthetic materials or natural fibers (such as espadrilles) rose in popularity, as the government did not ration these materials. Furthermore, women were not only encouraged to consume less clothing, but to also mend their clothing and make do with what they already had.

The necessities of changing women's fashion during the war created a tension with the importance of femininity during the war. As discussed above, in the context of the changing roles and opportunities for women, feminine appearance grew in importance as a reaction to the perceived masculinization of women. In acting in accordance with the rationing of clothing, many women struggled to obtain traditionally "feminine" articles of clothing such as pantyhose and makeup. Furthermore, clothing became less tailored to the feminine shape due to the resource demands of needing extra thread and fabric to do so. This caused many articles of women's clothing to have a more boxy appearance.⁹⁵

Homefront Propaganda Posters

The Office of War Information (OWI) did not forget women who remained in the home during the war. Though they did not need to combat any negative beliefs or stereotypes like they did

⁹⁴ Meghann Mason, "The impact of World War II on fashion in the United States and Britain," *University of Nevada, Las Vegas*, 2011, accessed February 21, 2018. <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2391&context=thesesdissertations>.

⁹⁵ A resurgence of the popularity of the tailored "hourglass" shape in women's clothing occurred in the years after the war. Notably, in designs by Christian Dior.

with working women or women in the military, the OWI still had strategic goals for women who remained in the home. They understood that these women also had a role to play in the quest for victory. For the most part, one can interpret the posters about traditionally feminine tasks at face value. However, a viewer can still draw more covert messages from these posters.

“Use it up- Wear it out- Make it do!”



Figure 17. “Use it up- Wear it out- Make it Do!” encouraging women to conserve daily used goods, 1943. From the World War II Poster Collection at Northwestern University Library.

The OWI sought to create images with simple messages, as to avoid any potential confusion. The text on this poster, “Use it up- Wear it out- Make it do! Our labor and our goods are fighting” clearly conveys the OWI’s goals with regard to resource conservation. The text at the top of the poster offers three clear instructions, and the text at the bottom provides the viewer with a reason to follow the instructions. While the illustration gives the viewer an example of the instructions, it also conveys a secondary message.

In this poster, the woman mends the man's pants, and the man fixes some kind of machine. With this layered image, the OWI desired to show how each action in support of the war effort helped to support another aspect of the war effort. This shows the viewer how actions taken at a personal or individual level fit into the larger scheme of the war effort. It conveys the message that any action, no matter how small, can help support the war effort. This complements the text, as it gives the viewer a sense of their actions being worthwhile. Furthermore, it shows women how traditionally feminine tasks can fit into the larger nexus of the war effort. It shows them that they can participate in the war effort by using skills that they already possess.

“Grow your own, Can your own”

While remaining mostly straightforward with its message, the “Grow your own, Can your own” manages to convey two of the OWI's goals. This poster represents both the OWI's goal of encouraging resource conservation and encouraging the entirety of the American public to participate in the war effort.

One can quite easily see this poster's primary message of resource conservation. The text combined with the image of the canned food quite obviously show the OWI's desire to encourage the American public to conserve food resources. The phrase “Grow your own” encouraged women to plant victory gardens, and the phrase “Can your own” encouraged them to save what they grew. Juxtaposing this phrase with an image of a mother and daughter shows the viewer how aspects of the war effort could become an avenue for traditional family bonding. Furthermore, the mother's feminine and attractive appearance shows the viewer that traditionally femininity had a place in the war effort.



Figure 18. Alfred Parker’s “Grow your Own, Can your Own” poster encouraging women to conserve food resources, 1943. From the World War II Poster Collection at Northwestern University Library.

The motif of a mother and daughter doing this activity together represents both that the task of resource conservation fell upon the shoulders of women, as well as it and that women and girls had a place in the war effort. This represents the OWI’s desire include *all* Americans in the war effort, including children. They wanted to show that each American had a task that they could perform in support of the war.

Conclusion

While Americans need to change several aspects of their daily life to accommodate the war, many other aspects needed to remain the same. The Office of War Information needed to reconcile these conflicting necessities in order to meet their larger goals for the war effort. For this reason, the OWI created seemingly contradictory posters. Some posters encouraged women

to radically change their behavior and take on new tasks. Other poster encouraged them to slightly alter their usual behavior. Though different in content, these two sets of poster shared the same ultimate goal of supporting the war effort.

Because of the less progressive nature of women who participated in the war effort within the confines are more traditionally feminine roles, women's contributions of this kind often contemporaneously go overlooked and forgotten. However, the Office of War Information did not forget about these women, and actively sought to influence their behavior.

One must also note that many women had these traditionally feminine tasks on top of her new work outside of the home, compounding the feminine duty to the war effort. Meaning, many women would have worked her shift in the factory, and then return home to cooks meals and mend clothes. Taking a job did not free a woman of these duties, as the normality of home life needed to continue. While far less women gave their lives to the war in a literal sense than men, a large amount of women gave their lives to the war in terms of their time and actions.

Conclusion

In recent years, much debate has surrounded the identity of woman who inspired J. Howard Miller's well-known depiction of "Rosie the Riveter." On January 23, 2018, numerous major news sources ran articles claiming "the real Rosie the Riveter has died," in reference to the passing of Naomi Parker Frayley.⁹⁶ For many years, a Michigan woman named Geraldine Hoff Doyle claimed to have been the model for this iconic poster. However, in 2016 Seton Hall professor James J. Kimble "debunked" Mrs. Doyle's claim, and instead proposed that Mrs. Frayley was the true inspiration for the poster.⁹⁷ Neither claim can be absolutely substantiated, as J. Howard Miller died in 2004. Identity aside, Rosie remains an icon and symbol of perseverance during the Second World War and beyond.

Perhaps Rosie has no single identity. Perhaps she is the face, the collective identity, of the spirit of the American woman during the war. Furthermore, perhaps her continued popularity represents the fighting spirit of the women who identify with her.

While American men fought the battles of the Second World War, women contributed to the war effort in a variety of ways. World War Two required the United States to create a culture in search of victory. To do so, the United States Government needed to profoundly engage the American public by encouraging them to change their behavior to accommodate the war. To

⁹⁶ News outlets that ran articles and obituaries on the passing of Mrs. Frayley include the BBC, the Washington Post, and CNN, amongst many others.

⁹⁷ Michael Ricciardelli, "Research Debunks Identity of 'Rosie the Riveter' in 'We Can Do It!' Poster," Seton Hall University, last modified May 27, 2016, <http://www.shu.edu/communication-arts/news/research-debunks-id-of-rosie-the-riveter.cfm>.

meet their goals, the government needed to include women in the war effort and make them into active agents for victory. To do this, the United States Government needed to both create opportunities for female participation, as well as use various forms of propaganda to convince them to participate. Various agencies worked to create these opportunities, and the Office of War Information (OWI) assisted them in marketing the war to women.

The United States Government found many avenues in which they believed women could assist in the war effort. Many of the government agencies working to create opportunities for women to participate in the war effort believed they could fill spaces traditionally occupied by men who had departed for war. Furthermore, they believed women could contribute to the war effort within the confines of traditionally feminine roles. This resulted in changes to American society that felt uncomfortable and unfamiliar during an already stressful time. In this way, the war created a crisis of American identity, as the war challenged many of the basic assumptions that Americans held true. To ease the uncomfortable feelings and all out outrage at many of these changes caused, the United States Government further employed the services of the Office of War Information. In this way, the OWI created media that both encouraged these changes, and eased the pains associated with them.

While the new opportunities available to women certainly allowed them to inch towards gender parity, the war did not radically redefine gender relations in the United States. Many sexist assumptions and stereotypes survived the war, despite women proving themselves worthy in many regards. As the OWI promised, employers fired thousands of women at the end of the war, giving the returning servicemen the jobs they had performed. The majority of women employed during the war, 75 to 90 percent depending on the study, desired to keep their job at

the war's end. However, many did in fact leave their jobs and retreated into the domesticity of the 1950's image of the American dream.

This is not to say that the war did not cause anything to change for women in the United States. The war-era created the conditions for women to make inroads toward representation and gender parity in the following decades, and to today. For example, in 1950, one in three women participated in the labor force. By 1998, three in five women participated in the labor force.⁹⁸

According to 2017 statistics, the gap in the United States remains significant, especially regarding workforce participation and pay. However, many of the trends in female employment that began during the war persist to today. For example, the percentage of married women and women with children working outside of the home has risen dramatically. The number of married couples with the husband as the sole earner has decreased from 36 percent in 1967 to 19 percent today. Women have exceeded men in terms of higher education, as 72 percent of young women are enrolled in college, compared to 62 percent of young men.⁹⁹

Perhaps the longest lasting effect of World War Two on the lives of women is the desire for a greater degree of personal autonomy. The war gave many women a glimpse into the possibility of gender equality. The partial retreat from the workforce at the war's end did not represent a complete reversal of the advancements made during the war, rather it represented a temporary gap in societal mores. The continuously evolving roles of women demonstrates that while women certainly made inroads towards gender quality during World War Two, there was still much to be done at the war's end. While the idea of gender parity had existed long before

⁹⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Changes in women's labor force participation in the 20th century," U.S. Department of Labor, February 16, 2000, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/td/2000/feb/wk3/art03.htm>.

⁹⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Women in the labor force: a databook," U.S. Department of Labor, November 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2017/pdf/home.pdf>.

the start of the war, World War Two set in motion many of the societal changes that are continuing to develop. In this way, “We Can Do It!” still rings true.

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