

Fall 12-2017

Women In Wartime Shipyards: Operating A Drill Press Was Like Using An Egg Beater

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WOMEN IN WARTIME SHIPYARDS: OPERATING A DRILL PRESS WAS LIKE
USING AN EGGBEATER

by

Carol Ann Strohmetz

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Letters,
and the Department of History
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

December 2017

WOMEN IN WARTIME SHIPYARDS: OPERATING A DRILL PRESS WAS LIKE
USING AN EGGBEATER

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2017

Published by the Graduate School



ABSTRACT

WOMEN IN WARTIME SHIPYARDS: OPERATING A DRILL PRESS WAS LIKE USING AN EGGBEATER

by Carol Ann Strohmetz

December 2017

This research examines the duality of the roles of American women during World War II. The research draws upon oral histories, newspaper accounts and advertisements, music and films of the time, letters and family scrapbooks, and primary and secondary sources. Most prior research focuses on either women in the workforce or women in the home. This research synthesizes all aspects of the lives of women as they navigated the hostile terrain of the male workforce and continued to perform the duties assigned to them by society. This research highlights the multiple roles that women successfully executed as they cared for their families and their country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The creation of a thesis is never completed by a single individual. It is a compilation of support and instruction from fellow students, professors and family members. First I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Deanne Stephens, Dr. Rebecca Tuuri, and Dr. Matthew Casey. Your guidance and support was greatly appreciated. I offer a special thanks to my Committee Chair Dr. Stephens who has supported and encouraged me, beginning in my under graduate years until the final step of my thesis submission. I would never have reached this point in my studies without you. Dr. Stephens is an amazing educator. I also thank my wife, Terie Velardi for her patience and assistance throughout the many years of my journey through academia.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1942 as our country prepared its military industrial complex to meet the needs of World War II, the United States government sent a very clear message to the women of the nation: Your labors and your sacrifices are needed for the nation to win the war. It was both a pledge for new opportunities and a directive to go to work. The years of war unlocked new possibilities for women, but the guarantees for these changes were only “for the duration.” The ranks of those patriotic working women who heeded the call rose from 14.6 million in 1941, to 19.4 million in 1944. That accounted for a 7 percent increase in the female workforce in the United States. According to Sherna Gluck, “half of the women defense workers were drawn from the ranks of women who were already in the work force before the war.”¹ Those women shifted into defense work in search of better paying jobs. Therefore, to place these numbers in context, the total population in the United States in 1941 was 133.4 million. Women comprised 66.4 million members of the population with white females numbering 59.5 million. By 1944, 37 percent of all adult women were employed. The accomplishments of that small percentage of female workers, is nothing short of amazing. These women helped to build 96,318 planes in 1944 alone, more than Japan had constructed totally from 1939 to 1945.² Because of their efforts, many women learned that they had a place in the public sphere, and their accomplishments later led to the future work within the women’s movement of the 1960s.

Initially, employers opposed hiring women, fearing that modifications for them in factories would be expensive and temporary. Additionally, they were apprehensive about

¹ Sherna B. Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 11.

² U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Washington, DC. National Intercensal Tables: 1900-1990. Resident Population plus Armed Forces Overseas—Estimates by Age, Sex, and Race: July 1, 1941

breaching the societal spheres dedicated to the female role by placing women into jobs designated male. They could understand a woman working in a factory sewing cloth to cover a bomber wing, but teaching women to weld was inconceivable. They rightly feared that public opinion would not tolerate the use of women if men were available to perform these emergency war jobs. Men also feared the influx of women into their work sites, believing that decreases in wages, elimination of jobs, and loss of authority might result. Additionally, they held the steadfast belief that a woman's place was in the home.³ The men who demonstrated the greatest resistance to women in the workforce had been displaced from their jobs when war commenced. Factory owners laid them off when they converted from consumer goods to munitions productions. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, however, allayed most fears, and women entered the labor force.⁴ Because of their contributions, America constructed eight million tons of shipping vessels in 1941 alone. This effort produced more vessels than Japan did during the entirety of the war. Workers built ships with such speed that all the Allied fleet previously sunk since 1939 had been replaced in that one year.⁵ America answered Roosevelt's call issued to its workers. As the war drew to a close, greater than half of all industrial production in the world occurred in the United States.

However, not all women benefitted equally from the new work opportunities. In 1941, between 40 and 50 percent of black women were employed as maids and cooks. Initially, employers in war industries refused to hire this group, but thanks to the civil

³ D'Ann Campbell. 1979. "Wives, Workers and Womanhood: America during World War II." PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 53.

⁴ William Henry Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 136-137.

⁵ Air & Space Smithsonian. 300,000 Airplanes. *Air & Space Magazine*.
<http://www.airspacemag.com/history-of-flight/300,000-airplanes-17122703/> (Accessed July 10, 2016).

rights activities of A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and Mary McLeod Bethune of the National Council of Negro Women, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 in June 1941. That order barred discrimination in the defense plants, and if companies continued their discriminatory practices, they could lose the lucrative defense contracts. Still, despite this pathbreaking legislation, most companies ignored the order until they were forced to hire women, black and white, due to the loss of men to conscription. Defense plants began hiring black women only to award them the worst and most dangerous jobs. Elaine Tyler May describes work experiences for black women in *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*. She explained, “In airplane assembly plants, black women worked in the ‘dope rooms’ filled with poisonous fumes of glue, while white women were in well-ventilated sewing rooms. In every industry, the lowest paying, most difficult, most dangerous, hottest, and most uncomfortable jobs went to black women.”⁶ And yet, the pay was better than anything they had received before. Thousands of black women migrated to the East and West coasts and to the Great Lake regions. They were leaving jobs paying \$2.50 a week for jobs offering \$40.00 a week.⁷

Not only black women, but all women noticed an increase in salary. In her work, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*, Susan Hartman examined the composition of the female American work force between 1940 and 1945. She established that those skilled women in World War II earned an average of \$31.21 a week. However, as enticing as that was, skilled male workers received a weekly wage of

⁶ Nancy Cott, *No Small Courage, A History of Women in the United States*, ed. Elaine Tyler May (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 473.

⁷ Elaine Tyler May, “The challenges to a gender-defined social order encouraged by World War II,” in Nancy Cott, ed. *No Small Courage*, 473.

\$54.65. Even though their wages were less than the men's, the rates were substantially higher than most women had been accustomed to receiving.⁸ Prior to World War II, a female teacher earned \$1,435 a year. In the defense plants, that same woman could increase her earnings by \$187.92 a year, without overtime. If women had received the same pay as men, which was \$54.65 per week, that salary would have improved by \$1,218.88 a year.

With that increase, life for women would have been substantially easier on the home front. A woman might have purchased a new electric washing machine for \$48.00. She could have paid for child care, ordered a new Beautyrest mattress for \$39.50, or purchased more groceries. She could have bought gasoline for the car at \$.12 cents a gallon and driven the children to the store to shop for school clothes or safety shoes for herself for work.⁹ Even though their wages were less than the men, the rates were substantially higher than most women had been accustomed to receiving, but they still had to deal with discrimination and challenges in this new environment.¹⁰

This research will examine four main areas of the lives of women as they navigated the hostile terrain of the male workforce. This analysis will focus predominantly on women in the shipyards across the nation. How did women find housing, how did they obtain food, services, transportation and child care? What were their experiences in the work environment? How did race affect women workers? These were common problems for all women on all three American coasts—the Atlantic, the

⁸ Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 21.

⁹ Stephen Pearson. "The Year 1958." *The People History*.
<http://www.thepeoplehistory.com/1958.html>. (Accessed April 19, 2017).

¹⁰ Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 21.

Pacific, and the Gulf Coasts. While navigating these thorny adversities, women also endured the countervailing narratives of the government and the nation, including Jim Crow. The government propaganda persuaded them to “do their bit,” while the nation admonished them for neglecting their home duties and children. These dual reproaches were not always seen or spoken, but the women were keenly aware of their effects.

In the assessment of the endeavors of the women, oral histories provided a unique appraisal that could not be realized through traditional means of analysis. The stories of the women were recorded so that this important history was not lost to future generations. Oral histories may vary in accuracy, but historians believe that they still have value as researchers look for the substructure of the story of the women during World War II.¹¹ When the information unfolds from the speaker’s own words, an image appears allowing the reader to identify with the person more readily than from cold words on a page.¹² This research will bolster the field of women’s history and offer a richer documentation of the experiences of women during World War II because it evaluates the mundane day-to-day lives of women workers. Some works have argued that wages, unions, and patriotism motivated the women, but groceries, child care and housing also powered their actions, their determination, and their choices.

While researching the women of the Gulf Coast, I was most fortunate to examine two family scrapbooks never viewed or analyzed by a historian. They chronicled the story of Nebraska-born Andrew Jackson Higgins and the Higgins Boat Company of New Orleans, Louisiana. The Higgins boat design was originally rejected by the United States

¹¹ Thomas Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, *Handbook of Oral History* (Lanham, Md: AltaMira Press, 2006), 20-21.

¹² James Bennett, “Human Values in Oral History,” *The Oral History Review* 11, (1983). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3674701>(aAccessed June 13, 2017).

Bureau of Ships which wanted to use their draught. Higgins fought back. He stated, “I don’t wait for opportunity to knock, I send out a welcoming committee to drag the old harlot in.”¹³ In an interview in 1999, Steven Ambrose recounted a meeting he had with General Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1964. The general asked if Ambrose had ever met Andrew Higgins. He replied that he had not. Eisenhower said that was too bad because Andrew Higgins was the man who won the war for the United States.¹⁴ While some like Higgins made it a point of pride to pay all employees the same wages, this was not the case throughout the industry.

Andrew Higgins employed a diverse workforce. The grandson of Higgins, Skip, told me that his grandfather was a larger than life figure in the family. Because Andrew Higgins was so vain, he refused to be called grandfather. The title of both family scrapbooks is ‘Uncle.’ Skip was most proud that his grandfather hired anyone who was capable of working- white, black, male, or female. They all worked under the same pay scale. The scrapbooks added a rich layer of information about the Higgins Company and the women who worked there, both black and white. Higgins employed women and African Americans in skilled and supervisory positions. However, at the Delta Shipyards in nearby Houma, Louisiana, employees walked off the job if a black employee moved into any supervisory position.¹⁵

This work also taps into and synthesizes a rich literature of women in wartime.

William Chafe’s *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political*

¹³ Burton W. Folsom. *Andrew Higgins: Boat Builder of WWII*. FEE Foundation for Economic Education. FEE Faculty Network. <https://fee.org/about>. (Accessed June 1, 2017).

¹⁴ Douglas Brinkley, “The Man Who Won the War For Us,” *American Heritage*, May/June, 2000. <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/man-w2ho-won-war-us>. (Accessed April 4, 2016).

¹⁵ On November 17, 2011, the Times-Picayune printed the following story. “1944: Higgins Industries in New Orleans contributes to war effort.” http://www.nola.com/175years/index.ssf/2011/11/1944_higgins_industries_in_new.html. (Accessed June 23, 2016).

Role was a major contribution to the field of study as he assessed the roots of women's inequality as the sexual division of labor and explained the fall of the old-style feminism and the genesis of the new. Then in 1978, Leila Rupp's work *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* examined government propaganda campaigns aimed at attracting women into defense work. In the 1980s, numerous works researched the seminal function of American women during World War II. Additionally, scholars asked the critical question: How did women manipulate the levers of industrial power while fulfilling their time worn roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers? Beginning with Sherna Berger Gluck's, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change*, the author interviewed former aircraft workers and asked about the personal impacts of the war. The women spoke of attitudes challenged, new skills acquired, and pride established in their accomplishments. Oral history projects unlocked new avenues of investigation and bloomed into the 1990s.

In a review of the current literature, Karen Anderson exposed the underbelly of three fast growing workplaces: Detroit, Seattle, and Baltimore in *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II*. She illuminated the problems of violence, race, age discrimination, and broken government promises as women grappled with child care, housing, shopping, and homemaking. Another narrative that contributes to this thesis is *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II, 1984*. This work demonstrates how popular magazines appealed to particular female audiences by class, values and social status. Anderson also examined the work lives of black women in an article entitled, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers During World War II". She assessed the nature of the prejudice

experienced by the women, managerial intransigence, and coworker prejudice that perpetuated the discrimination. The next year, Susan Hartmann published *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s*. This chronology permits readers to view the political and social energies that propelled the preservation of traditional gender roles in postwar America.

Another important work in the review by D'Ann Campbell was *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* in 1984, surveying various groups of women, such as homemakers, military women, service wives, defense workers, and nurses. Women answered the call, but endured the unrelenting reins of conformity attempting to diminish their progress as citizens of the nation. Ruth Milkman produced *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation during World War II* in 1987. She analyzed work processes in the electrical and automobile industries and demonstrated the evolution, function and reproduction of job segregation by sex. Judy Barrett Litoff and David Smith solicited and compiled upwards of 30,000 wartime letters in 1991, giving voice to ordinary American women in *Since You Went Away*.

As the field of cultural studies grew, scholars began to consider how women were perceived at the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ethnicity. Recently, some academicians expanded the links between personal autonomy, gender, and sexuality and advanced the work of previous generations while exploring the function of media in channeling self-awareness, cultural norms, and conduct. How were women characterized during the war and what pressures were proscribed throughout the emergency? The works of Marilyn Hegarty's *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II*, and Melissa McEuen's *Making*

War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945, offer insight into the overt supervision of women during World War II.

This study will emphasize the importance of the daily labors of women in World War II by pointing to women's concerns as mothers and wives. Women had one foot in a professional, patriotic occupation extolled by the United States government, yet, one foot remained at home thinking about the babies. Although women were the beneficiaries of the new opportunities, this did not eliminate the limits imposed by their gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, and education. American women built the engines of war, rivet by rivet, and sacrificed their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers, as well as themselves to the war effort. Victory only became a reality because of their shared sacrifices of time, sweat, and loved ones. Many even lost their lives to the war effort.¹⁶ They struggled under dual expectations as public worker and private caregiver that often placed them in an impossible bind. Yet somehow women found a way to survive (and in some cases, thrive), despite the limited help from the federal government.

¹⁶ The National WWII Museum, Women in WWII at a Glance.
<http://www.nationalww2museum.org/learn/education> (Accessed March 22, 2017).

CHAPTER I -THE IDEAL WOMAN

The day began as any other American Sunday morning on December 7, 1941. People went about their usual Sunday morning rituals. Numerous families moved to the inexorable summons of church bells ringing out the call to worship. The newspaper articles of the day reported the diplomatic challenges facing the White House in negotiations with the Empire of Japan. As author Lee Kennett stated in his work, *For the Duration*, “the vastness of the country meant that its inhabitants awoke and carried out their Sunday rituals in successive stages, east to west, as the sun rose.”¹⁷ As the day progressed, 27,000 people made their way to the football stadium in Washington, D.C. to attend the Redskins-Eagles football game. Alarming, loud speakers in the stadium suddenly blared out the names of American naval officers, requesting that they return to their duty stations immediately. The unusual announcement provided no explanation. Unbeknownst to the football fans, the devastating destruction of Pearl Harbor had begun earlier at 12:48 p.m., Washington time. The United States suddenly entered World War II, and by the end of the day more than 2,400 Americans had lost their lives at Pearl Harbor. It was the deadliest coordinated military attack against the United States at that time.¹⁸

Women were a pivotal part of the war effort from the very beginning. Lou Fly, a young woman working at the White House switchboard, jumped as descriptions of the Pearl Harbor attack came in that Sunday morning. She described the scene as chaotic and

¹⁷ Lee Kennett. *For the Duration* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985), 2.

¹⁸ Michael E. Ruane. “War! How a stunned media broke the Pearl Harbor news” *Washington Post* December 6, 2011.

frightening as people rushed to the White House to confirm the appalling news.¹⁹ Initially, millions of Americans learned of the Japanese attack from a woman named Ruthjane Rumelt. She was the aide of the White House Press Secretary Stephen T. Early, and she relayed the story from her boss to the media as they came into the press room.²⁰ Marvin Kalb, noted radio announcer, reported, “there were 45 million radios in the U.S. and people were listening to the radio an average of four and half hours a day. Newspapers were way down below that. So, the most important means of communication was the radio.”²¹ The conflict that had seemed so far away was suddenly erupting into American living rooms over the airways. The Associated Press finally reported at 2:22 P.M., Eastern Standard Time that the Japanese had launched an attack on Pearl Harbor, interrupting American radio programs that peaceful Sunday afternoon.²²

Immediately, hundreds of thousands of men and women rushed to military enlistment offices, fearful that the Japanese would continue their march across the Pacific. Recruiting stations remained open around the clock, seven days a week. Veterans of World War I volunteered to serve, but many were deemed too old. Every man between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five registered for the draft. Before the end of the war, sixteen million men and women served in the United States military,

¹⁹ Louise (Lou) Fly. Interview by Carol A. Strohmetz, June 15, 2004. This interview documents the atmosphere during the attack on Pearl Harbor as Fly worked as a young telephone operator at the White House in Washington, D.C.

²⁰ Michael Ruane, “War! How a stunned media broke the Pearl Harbor news,” *Washington Post*, December 6, 2011.

²¹ Ruane. “War! How a stunned media broke the Pearl Harbor news.”

²² *Associated Press*, 1941. “Pearl Harbor Radio Newscasts,” by the Mutual Network, the Columbia Broadcasting system, and the National Broadcasting Company. Aired December 7, 1941. <http://library.umk.edu/spec-col/ww2/pearlharbor/radio.htm> (Accessed September 5, 2015).

representing more than twelve percent of the American population.²³ However, the United States was ill-prepared for war.

Less than forty-eight hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Americans ascertained that the country had no comprehensive civil defense programs and few coastal defense plans. Furthermore, the Navy's Pacific Fleet was vulnerable to further attack. To bolster its holdings, the United States government seized planes and munitions waiting for shipment to England through the Lend-Lease Act. Contributing to their initial efforts, locals painted over rooftop signage to confuse potential Japanese fliers.²⁴ With alacrity, the country prepared and raised an army and set in motion the manufacturing of uniforms, military weapons, guns, ships, tanks and warplanes. The industrialists converted the economy to war production, and the country supplied troops. Who now would staff the factories and shipyards?

The loss of millions of men to enlistment created numerous job openings across the United States. As the war effort increased and fewer men were available, the nation looked to its women. The demand for war materials unlocked manufacturing jobs for women. Even though they earned less than half of the salary of a man, the wages were more than women had previously earned. However, most employers enacted policies to thwart equal pay by designating the work as 'women's jobs.' Enticed by government propaganda and a need to secure a better future, women nevertheless entered the workforce in record numbers.²⁵ The country and the women struggled with the duality of

²³ Claudia Reinhardt and Bill Ganzel, "Enlistments and the Draft." The Ganzel Group Communications, 2001, <http://www.livingsitoryfarm.org/index.html> (Accessed October 1, 2015).

²⁴ Kennett. *For the Duration*, 50-53.

²⁵ Susan Mathis. "Propaganda to Mobilize Women for World War II." *Social Education* 58, no.2 (1994): 94-96.. <http://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/se/5802/580210.html> (Accessed September 6, 2015).

the emerging roles of homemakers and wage workers. Mothers inhabited the keystone function of nurturer of the American family. Women were essential to the war effort but, would it initiate the demise of the traditional family?

The Depression fortified American ideals of gender and tradition as men and women faced different challenges. Men lost their status as family breadwinner, but women's roles expanded as they took on additional duties to make ends meet. Some women pressed for a new direction or an education, but necessity became the impetus for women to enter the work force.²⁶ However, societal expectations still presumed that every woman was in a family with a husband. Still, many women were widows, divorced, single, or abandoned. Women faced public derision when they sought government assistance or employment. They were assailed for taking jobs from men deemed more deserving.²⁷

The Depression also reinforced traditional gender roles as legislatures ratified laws limiting the employment of married women. It became illegal for more than one person per family to work for the federal Civil Service. The Civilian Conservation Corps had a policy against hiring women, and many jobs created by the New Deal programs hired women only in traditional housekeeping roles. Other government agencies paid women lesser salaries and gave hiring preferences to men. Operating in concert, government, labor and the media pressed women to stay in the home and out of the work force. Americans had scant interest in any alterations to the existing sexual roles.

²⁶ Jones, Wanda Downing. 1988. "Several Madnesses Are Born": Working-Class Women In the 1930s And WorldWar II, a Social History." PhD diss., University of Texas at Arlington.

²⁷ Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Women and the Great Depression. <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/great-depression/essays/women-and-great-depression> (Accessed February 25, 2017).

As the crisis worsened through the Depression, the United States government stepped more into citizen's private lives. In 1935, the Social Security Act, including Title IV, Aid to Families with Dependent Children became law. These programs and others like them helped Americans survive. Some viewed them as a stigma upon the families' efforts to remain "normal." Others believed it was necessary help.²⁸ The country attempted to assume fiscal normalcy with the help of New Deal policies, but World War II, which pushed the demand for goods and services, rescued the struggling United States economy. The New Deal of Franklin Delano Roosevelt created not only an increase in social welfare programs, but allowed more women appointees to obtain high level government jobs than in previous times. Frances Perkins became the Secretary of Labor, serving from 1933-1945, while Josephine Roche was Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. Lucille Foster McMillin accepted the position of Civil Service Commissioner. Mary McLeod Bethune was the highest ranking African American woman named to the presidents' administration as director of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration. She was also the leader of FDR's unofficial "black cabinet." These women held national power and could push through social welfare programs to help the nation navigate the vicissitudes of the Depression. Additionally, working women established places in labor unions and prepared for the next national challenge.²⁹

Unlike in the Depression, the economic standing of females was dramatically transformed a few short years after the beginning of World War II. The war provided the most significant advantage to women at a time when tremendous industrial production

²⁸ Jones. "Several Madnesses Are Born. 11-12.

²⁹ Mari Jo Buhle, Teresa Murphy, and Jane Gerhard, *Women and the Making of America* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2009), 545-558.

was vital. However, as with the Depression, the country remained steadfast in the value structure of society. The majority of women found themselves chained to the ideal of the unpaid homemaker, and Rosie the Riveter was merely the symbol of empowerment born from emergency.³⁰ As the female labor force increased by more than fifty percent, wages increased, wives entered the job market, and female membership in unions quadrupled.³¹ President Franklin Delano Roosevelt told the United States Congress and the American people: “We must out-produce them [Germany and Japan] overwhelmingly, so that there can be no question of our ability to provide a crushing superiority of equipment in any theatre of war.” He then set staggering goals for the factories of the nation.³² Women answered the call, but received lesser wages.

Much discussion about “equal pay for equal work” in the 1940s occurred, and that debate continues today. Equal pay was true for white males, but was elusive for women and African Americans. Employers justified pay inequity by asserting that women only worked for “pin money”—meaning they used their earnings for luxuries, not the necessities of life provided by a husband or a father. Pin money originally allowed women to earn money within the confines of the “women’s sphere,” where it was permissible without losing her apparent moral station. The term, however, proved to be most enduring even as 20 percent of married women joined the workforce in 1920.³³ It functioned as the justification for paying women less than men. The Women’s Bureau continually issued fliers negating this idea and went on to explain that many of the female

³⁰ Campbell. 1979. “Wives, Workers and Womanhood. 4.

³¹ William H. Chafe. *The American Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 135-136.

³² WETA, Public Television and Classical Music for the Greater Washington, D.C. and American Lives II Film Project, September, 2007. <http://www.weta.org/about/productions> (Accessed June 4, 2016).

³³ Janice Traflet. 2008. “Gendered Dollars: Pin Money, Mad Money, and Changing Notions of a Woman’s Proper Place.” Ph.D. diss., Bucknell University, 192-193.

employees were working as heads of households, needing to support their families. The pin money idea was merely a red herring. Two labor markets existed, one for men and one for women.³⁴ Even though the mobilization of men into the military drew many women into the workforce, the impact was not uniform across states, nor permanent.

Out of necessity, government and industry acquiesced to the hiring of women. Federal agencies declared, “The only answer to the manpower crisis was to employ women on a scale hitherto unknown.”³⁵ A beautician became a switch person for the Long Island Railroad, an Austrian elite perfume bottle designer became a precision toolmaker in Hoboken, a cosmetics salesgirl became a keel binder in Philadelphia, and a woman in Gary, Indiana, maneuvered an overhead traveling crane, cleaning out blast furnaces. Nationally, women ran lathes, cut dies, read blueprints, and serviced planes. They also maintained roadbeds, greased locomotives, and felled giant redwood trees.³⁶

Many employers explained the success of women by comparing their new occupations to household duties thus falling back onto traditional ideas of gender even as those were being challenged. Operating a crane was “just like a giant clothes wringer. The winding of large electrical wires onto spools was like crocheting. Operating a drill press was like using an egg beater.”³⁷ A propaganda newsreel entitled ‘Glamour Girls of 43’ suggested:

Instead of cutting the lines of a dress, this woman cuts the pattern of aircraft parts. Instead of baking a cake, this woman is cooking gears to reduce the tension in the gears after use . . . They are taking to welding as if the rod were a needle and the metal a length of cloth to be sewn. After a short apprenticeship, this woman can

³⁴ Campbell. “Wives, Workers and Womanhood,” 122.

³⁵ Chafe. *American Woman*, 137.

³⁶ Chafe. *American Woman*, 138.

³⁷ Amy S. Wharton. *The Sociology of Gender: An Introduction to Theory and Research* (Malden: Blackwell) 114.

operate a drill press just as easily as a juice extractor in her own kitchen. And a lathe will hold no more terrors for her than an electric washing machine.³⁸

This newsreel illustrated the language of sex-typing and how easily it could be applied to any job. By comparing manufacturing tasks to housework, propagandists unlocked the public resistance to women performing work in the masculine workplaces. The manufacturers continually stressed the fact that women were of lesser physical strength and that a “woman isn’t just a smaller man.” However, the emphasis on the physical limitations served to create a dual disposition. It afforded both a validation for that sexual division of labor, and additionally became the origin for intensification of mechanization and work simplification that benefitted all, regardless of sex.³⁹ Furthermore, the sex-typing of jobs available to women at the time aligned the new economic conditions for women with the conventional role of women as “guardians of the hearth.” Ruth Milkman explained, “The pervasive wartime propaganda image of ‘woman’s place’ on the nation’s production lines, portrayed women’s war work in industry as a temporary extension of domesticity.”⁴⁰ The nineteenth-century ideal of womanhood was still alive and well as the Cult of Domesticity endured with the precepts of femininity exuding piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Middle-class homes were enshrined with great significance where mothers nurtured Christian consciences, educated nascent patriots, and promoted the bedrock of civilization. It became critical to

³⁸ Pamela A. Field. *The Woman Who Dreams Herself: A Guide for Awakening the Feminine* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2006), 46.

³⁹ Ruth Milkman. “Redefining “Women’s Work”: The Sexual Division of Labor in the Auto Industry during World War II.” *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 2 (Summer, 1982), 341.

⁴⁰ Milkman, *Redefining*, 350.

the future health of the nation. Women tried to break free of these traditional chains, but the prevailing conservative viewpoint often ensnared them.⁴¹

Government experts in concert with all media outlets embarked on a massive propaganda campaign to induce women to alter the life-cycle blueprints they previously had adopted. Officials had previously frowned upon employment of wives. Conventional wisdom demanded that the place of a woman was in the home and that her absence would lead to the disintegration of the family. Dana Polan argues in her work, “Blind Insights and Dark Passages” that the sense of family, community, and commitment to country were the motivational underpinnings of the war effort itself. Polan asserted the traditional view of “what ‘we’ are fighting for is the woman in the home, the creator of healthy families, and the prime consumer of products.”⁴² Additionally, Lewis Erenberg and Susan Hirsch spelled out the readjustment of Americans as the traditional gender and domestic norms pushed the country into untested terrain. The war changed the direction of American culture as the nexus of government ideology and the emergence of racial and cultural categories collided. A contemporary textbook warned, “The greater social freedom of women has more or less inevitably led to a greater degree of sexual laxity, a freedom which strikes at the heart of family stability.”⁴³ When women chose to work outside of the home, it removed the one person who traditionally offered the domestic constant that was the most predictable in the life of a family. But as the war continued,

⁴¹ Buhle et al. *Women and the Making of America*. 143-145.

⁴² Dana B. Polan, “Blind Insights and Dark Passages: The Problem of Placement in Forties Film,” *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1983):2 <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/31171811/blind-insights-dark-passages-problem-placement-forties-film>. (Accessed September 17, 2015).

⁴³ First quoted in Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch. *The War in American Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 31-32.

urban homemakers became a national labor source. Women were then being courted assiduously to join the war effort. During the Depression, their participation had been spurned, but now they were vital to the nation's ability to go to war.⁴⁴ Mobilization drives, however, proved to be dismal failures. In Akron, Ohio, when officials interviewed 87,000 women, 18,700 recorded a general interest in taking a job, but when offered, only 630 women accepted. The same pattern persisted in Milwaukee, Buffalo, Syracuse, and New England mill towns.⁴⁵ It appeared that they achieved a mere 6 percent increase of wives working between 1941 and 1944. This demonstrated little change from the preceding decade. Women were not swayed by media propaganda, but were guided by their own value systems, fashioned by families, friends or lovers, devoid of federal interference.

None of the changes to the status of women and their work could have taken place without the vigorous endorsement and support of public opinion. The collaboration of mass media and the government was vital to the change in attitude by the American public. The War Manpower Commission created propaganda encouraging women to consider "What Job Is Mine on the Victory Line", and employers received fliers entitled "You're Going to Employ Women". With the hard-hitting efforts of the government and the massive male labor shortage, the economic position of women changed appreciably. Historians such as Chafe saw the changes as a watershed or revolution for women, based on wartime employment numbers. Other historians such as Sherna Gluck and Susan Hartmann argued that the wartime experiences of the women laid the foundations for the

⁴⁴ Erenberg and Hirsch. *The War in American Culture*, 31-32.

⁴⁵ D'Ann Campbell. "Wives, Workers and Womanhood: Women Working on the Home Front in World War II (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1995), 51.

women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Historian Leisa Meyer asserted that the argument should move away from watershed versus continuity and examine the experiences of women through the lens of sexuality and power.⁴⁶ Sociologist Ruth Milkman explored the intersection of class and gender during the Depression and into World War II. She resolved that World War II did not advance parity for women. However, they did agree that war work was just that—temporary work that women performed for the duration.⁴⁷

The exigencies of war triggered the removal of many barriers to women and employment, however, the cessation of hostilities in 1945 called for women to return to the societal roles that gave comfort to the public at large. As conscription took all available men, anxious employers courted middle-aged and married women. More women learned the satisfaction of earning money and assuming greater responsibility as the public provisionally accepted their shifting roles. Americans experienced acute social dislocation; the new directions of women in the work force caused this phenomenon.⁴⁸ No question existed that female participation in the wartime labor force was essential to the ultimate victory, but was society prepared for the contemporary changes that would emerge in social values and relationships between the sexes? One of the larger issues pushing against the social constructs of gender was this question, is it more important for a mother to stay home and support the institutional family or eschew the home and lend her skills to the workforce?⁴⁹ This ambiguity helped to maintain inequality in female pay

⁴⁶ Leisa Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 71.

⁴⁷ Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers, eds. *Gender and the Second World War: The Lessons of War* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 2.

⁴⁸ Chafe. *American Woman*, 149.

⁴⁹ As first discussed in Chafe. *American Woman*, 149.

and promotions. To what extent did attitudes change concerning women at work during World War II?

Child care, housing, volunteer community activities and service providers became the most challenging issues confronting laboring women and the communities in which they lived. The roles of women and the family collided against national needs as Americans struggled with their strong beliefs of gender and family. Employers questioned the high turnover rate and absenteeism among their female employees. The cause was the dual role of the three million female, married employees as workers and homemakers. Women were exhausted as they worked eight hours or more on an assembly line and still tried to shop for food and clothes. Most stores closed before women left their shifts. How or when were women able to visit repair shops, barbers, banks, or rationing boards? Transportation was poor or absent. Women arriving home after a long shift on the assembly line had to cook, clean, do laundry, care for children, and find time for sleep. These duties resulted in absenteeism and the loss of valuable labor time in the production of vital materials for the war. According to William Chafe, the turnover rate in aircraft plants reached 35,000 per month, and Boeing had to employ 250,000 women over a period of four years to maintain a labor force of 39,000. Bernard Baruch, special advisor to the Director of the Office of War Mobilization, was also an investor, philanthropist, statesman, and political consultant. He estimated that the female turnover and absenteeism rates in just one factory caused the loss of forty planes a month.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Chafe. *American Woman*, 159.

The need for child care was evident, but many women struggled with the concept because they lacked faith in organized custody and related child-care campuses with charity or relief. They also felt that they were renegeing on their duties as mothers. In most areas of the country, the cost of maintaining adequate child-care facilities surpassed the monetary capabilities of local authorities. This resulted in great numbers of children living unsupervised as their mothers worked, and their fathers fought in the war. Many children spent their days in locked cars or basements or looking at movies in the local theaters.⁵¹ This conflict placed women in the crosshairs of wartime needs and traditional values. It also rendered their lives more public as they moved to new cities and regions to compete for wartime opportunities in defense industries.

The mobilization of America heaped uncommon demands on the public and its previously held value systems. Families, servicemen, and job seekers were displaced, and many found themselves living in areas with new and strange cultural, class, and racial classifications. Traditional customs and regional stereotypes caused tension as women and African Americans trod into the previously white male workplaces. Not only was there fear about job loss, but concern about new liberties that women were embracing. A new sexual freedom for women unfolded, and America was not comfortable with this prospect.⁵²

These new choices for working-class women presented great changes for American women. They had access to new types of employment, organizations, information, and financial autonomy. Moving to new cities made their individual lives more public and their activities more open. Contemporary author John Dos Passos

⁵¹ Chafe. *American Woman*, 163.

⁵² Erenberg and Hirsch. *The War*, 4-5.

illustrated the wartime chaos in his work, *Gold Rush Down South*. Astounded at the changes wrought by women's new earning power, Dos Passos wrote, "They can buy radios, they can go to pictures, they can go to beer parlors . . . Girls can go to beauty parlors, get their nails manicured, buy readymade dresses . . . She's never worried about restraining her feelings."⁵³ Many Americans appeared fearful of a perceived lack of feminine restraint being displayed by the working-class women. Those fears of female abandonment of societal norms developed into a foremost disquiet for numerous wartime observers and for them explained a deteriorating moral climate. According to Professor Page Delano, the idea of women participating in the public sphere and on the playing field of male work spaces caused much fear. She stated, "The image of public women being assertive and even assertively sexual, suggested a critical disruption of a masculinist imagination of war and nation."⁵⁴ The times were changing too quickly for some eyewitnesses.

As overwhelmed residents accustomed to small town quietude encountered the influx of wartime workers, including women, the natives dealt with an upsurge in trailers, shacks, tents, traffic jams, juvenile delinquents and a need for a varied range of social services. These changes occurred quickly and as the strangers overran the small towns of America, the distrust of working-class women rose to full display. Community residents blamed the strangers as the reason for all the new problems confronting them. American women found themselves the focal point of reformers. This atmosphere of reform permeated workplaces, where women had to compete for standing and their

⁵³ John Dos Passos, *Gold Rush Down South* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1944), 92-94, 99.

⁵⁴ Page Dougherty Delano. "Making Up for War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture," *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 33.

respectability.⁵⁵ What was at work here? The traditional image of a woman was the homemaker. Nature had deemed her unfit for the exercise of power outside of her domestic sphere. How then could society accept that she was manipulating the levers of industrial power and performing the tasks designated to breadwinners?⁵⁶ The precepts of gender and sexuality were newly defined daily by management and employees, positioning the country for the sexual revolution that would follow in the post-war years.⁵⁷

The federal government, as well as local communities, also attempted to control women in the workplace. Pamphlets from the Office of War Information forbade women from wearing tight sweaters, flirting with others, dating the boss, and manipulating co-workers, as these acts were considered detrimental to war production.⁵⁸ It is unclear how these engagements threatened the war effort, but the purpose was quite certain—control the women. By the end of 1942, Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins gave an interview that was reprinted in the *Baltimore Sun* explaining that 3,000,000 women would have to be recruited for essential defense work. President Roosevelt stated that the government was considering the registration of women for this work, but that a draft was not being considered. When questioned about women returning to their kitchens after World War II, Perkins replied, “I’ll marry them to the soldiers. Nature will take care of that problem as 90 percent of our women want to live in homes and engage in normal family

⁵⁵ Jones, *Several Madnesses Are Born*, 27.

⁵⁶ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Boston: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 1.

⁵⁷ Eileen Boris, “Desirable Dress: Rosies, Sky Girls, and the Politics of Appearance,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 69 (Spring 2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27673025> (Accessed February 25, 2016).

⁵⁸ Jones, *Several Madnesses Are Born*, 38.

relationships.”⁵⁹ The selective service system readied the bureau to carry out compulsory registration of America’s women if the Congress and the President agreed, with the understanding that they would return home after the cessation of hostilities.⁶⁰

The film industry also conspired to keep women in traditional roles. Movies brutalized women with contradictory messages as World War II films depicted them as neglectful of their children and sometimes even as violent and criminal. The plots of many films portrayed the uncaring mother. In 1944, a series of films included *Are These Our Parents? Where Are Your Children?* and *Youth Runs Wild*. These features portrayed respectable young girls abusing alcohol and driving in fast cars because their mothers were preoccupied with earning money and pursuing men.⁶¹ Meanwhile, magazine articles extolled women who did their part to win the war. The messages were contradictory to American women: You are needed for war work, but you cannot leave your job in the home.

The United States government and the American state constructed a paradox of demands issued to women. Women had two requirements: to contribute to the United States war effort and to maintain the sanctity of the home. But time and again, the federal government was unable to provide women with the basic tools to stay on the job. The country was fighting a war on two fronts, the battle front and the home front. The life sustaining work of the women in their homes was invisible and deemed inappropriate for government policy. Cultural mores were tested, and most government officials were

⁵⁹ The Baltimore Sun, Baltimore, MD, November 1, 1942.
<https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/216651928/>

⁶⁰ Senatorial Subject Files 970-1145, Box 5 out of 6. Box 1071, folder 10. McCain Library, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Ms.

⁶¹ Jones, *Several Madnnesses Are Born*, 78.

fearful of any sex role changes that began to bubble up as the wartime conditions threatened the American moral fabric.

Prominent commentators lamented the utilization of mothers in the defense industry, fearing the destruction of the nuclear family and a possible increase in juvenile delinquency. Some suggested women should only work at night, allowing them to care for their children and homes during the day. Historian Judy Litoff noted a comment from that time, “I suppose they can sleep at odd times like horses or elephants—standing up!”⁶² However, statistics illustrate that at any one time, nine out of ten mothers with children under the age of six were not in the labor force.⁶³

How did ordinary men and women view each other during the 1940s? What did it mean to be a man, to be a woman, and how did they view the role of gender? Roper Gallup of the National Opinion Research Center and the Department of Agriculture Survey Unit asked a cross section of Americans about their daily lives, and they also asked for opinions about women in the work place. It appeared there were multiple reasons for women to choose to embark on a defense career: socio-economic, occupational status, education, and, surprisingly religious upbringing. Regional differences also contributed to the opinion on the role of women in society. Three fourths of western folk, 65 percent of mid-westerners, and 62 percent of easterners believed that women should take part in public affairs. Conversely, the South took a more traditional approach with only 40 percent agreeing that women should take part in public activities. Similarly, southerners believed that moral standards for women should be higher than

⁶² Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, *American Women in a World at War: Contemporary Accounts from World War II* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 1997), 22.

⁶³ Campbell. “Wives, Workers and Womanhood,” 30.

those for men.⁶⁴ These statistics provide the context for changes that were beginning in the many coastal communities as they adjusted to the needs of the war.

As families attempted to navigate the vicissitudes of wartime existence on the home front, they also confronted the decline in privacy and the intrusion of government. In his essay “No Time for Privacy: World War II and Chicago’s Families,” Professor Perry R. Duis argued that federal government official propaganda “required an unprecedented invasion of home front duties into the private lives of its citizens. At the same time, the pace of American life accelerated with factory whistles, school bells, train horns, rush hour traffic, and extended hours of stores and businesses. The slower cadence of American daily life had been interrupted, and the new rhythms vastly intruded into that private sphere. Originally, the home was the safe harbor, and a successful family needed to build social barriers for protection. Children could be kept safe in backyards, a piano provided entertainment, and families needed their own toilet facilities. A man’s income was the measure of how much privacy the family could afford.⁶⁵ This goal of family security eroded as World War II unfolded. Professor Duis asserts that the loss of privacy made it easier for the government to intrude into the sanctity of the traditional family. The American landscape was changing.

During the Depression and World War II, women were called upon to take on additional responsibilities for their families and the nation. In 1930, approximately 10.5 million women worked outside of the home. By 1940, nearly 13 million women were engaged in wage work outside of the home. As women increased their numbers in the workforce, they were faced with dual challenges every day. They were asked to “do their

⁶⁴ Campbell. “Wives, Workers and Womanhood,” 218, 244.

⁶⁵ Erenberg and Hirsch. *The War*, 17-19.

bit” for the war effort while simultaneously dealing with issues of homemaking and childcare. Additionally, they assisted with scrap drives, dealt with rationing, volunteered for blood drives, and supported the United Service Organization (USO). They moved great distances for jobs or followed military husbands. They acquired skills, confidence, and self-assurance as they signed leases and opened checking accounts. These times created immense changes for the nation and the citizens. Women’s economic existence improved, but it was a temporary manifestation. The country longed for a return to the status quo.

CHAPTER II - WORLD OF WORK

In 1940, as World War II crept across the European continent, unemployment still plagued American workers. After December 7, 1941, men by the thousands, however, enlisted in military service. The alacrity with which the country moved to wartime production capabilities was astounding, and this quickly altered the American economy. This transformation wrenched the nation from the grips of the Depression, and production demands forced reluctant employers to fill positions with women. By 1944, nineteen million women joined the workforce with 72 percent of them married.

In 1939, only thirty-six women in the United States worked in shipyards. Most of these types of businesses did not employ women, even as office staff. By 1943, women comprised four percent of shipyard workers, and by 1945, they made up over ten percent of the workforce.⁶⁶ As women navigated their new roles in society and employment, this shared experience crossed regional boundaries. Women across the nation “put on their pants and tied up their hair” to go to work. Many went to the shipyards and other related wartime industries. They traveled to the General Electric Boat Company in Bridgeport, Connecticut, the Vultee Aircraft Plant in Nashville, Tennessee, Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi, Alabama Dry Docks Company in Mobile, Alabama, Higgins Industries of New Orleans, Louisiana, Bath Iron Works, South Portland, Maine, Kaiser Shipbuilding, Richmond, California, Vancouver, Washington, and Consolidated Shipyard of Orange, Texas. Women also sought employment at the Southeastern Shipyard, Savannah, Georgia, the Army Ordnance Shop in Bangor, Maine, Los Angeles Aircraft

⁶⁶ Mary Martha Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1987), 7.

Plants, California, the very secret Clinton Engineering Works, Oak ridge, Tennessee, Portsmouth Naval Shipyards, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, The Boston Gear Works, Quincy, Massachusetts, Naval Dry Docks, Boston, Massachusetts, and Washington Navy Shipyard, Washington, D.C. Women also worked at the Consolidated-Vultee, Fort Worth, Texas, Viola Ammunition Plant, Viola, Kentucky, Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard, Baltimore, Maryland, and the Charleston Naval Shipyard, Charleston, South Carolina.

Other industries also experienced growth and change. For instance, most of the women in the Alabama defense industries were employed in airplane modification and repair plants. The scarcity of metals created the plastic industry. The fashion industry removed cuffs and vests from men's suits, and women's hemlines went up as belts disappeared. As the government rationed nylon to produce parachutes, women painted their legs. The state of North Carolina experienced a revival in mining. Mica mining in the United States had ceased when India and Brazil imported the mineral, but the supply lines were jeopardized by submarine warfare in World War II.

The entrance of women into wartime industries was simply a slight shift in the work world and the state's role within it. The war quickened the change in grocery stores from counter service to self-service and witnessed the demise of home delivery. This delivery service had been widespread prior to the war; it was offered by dairies, dry cleaners, bakeries, bottling plants, department stores, and drug stores. The changes resulted from the arrival of tire rationing and the loss of men to the draft. A Florida soft-drink bottler announced that home deliveries would end because the government had reduced his syrup allotment. Service station owners broadcast that they would be closing earlier, claiming a vague connection to civil defense. Henningsen Company of Dennison,

Texas, had operated a seasonal egg-drying business since 1934. They provided dehydrated eggs to the military. With the arrival of the Lend-Lease Act, the company received overwhelming massive orders from the British. Henningsen and the J.R. Clymer Poultry and Egg Company ramped up into full-time production. The town of Dennison proudly proclaimed itself “The Egg Breaking Capital of the World.”⁶⁷ Backyard chicken and egg production moved from homes to factories as the war effort expanded.

As factory conversions increased, shortages in the civilian economy required the government to institute a nationwide rationing system. It was also the government, and not just women workers that was transforming factory work. Government officials were anxious about public acceptance of rationing, but many merchants were eager to see its inception. They had experienced the wrath of many unhappy customers as supply never seemed to fit demand. The need for rationing received a boost in January 1942, when people spotted five German submarines off the East Coast. The German submarines were part of *Operation Paukenschlag*, a German campaign to shut down coastal traffic as far as the Gulf of Mexico. By March, U-boats had sunk a score of tankers, and gas shortages sent Florida tourists fleeing the beaches for their home states. As gasoline rationing began, Americans acutely felt the limits to their freedoms. The enemy had found an American vulnerability, the sacred love Americans had for their cars. The war had now become an ugly reality for many Americans.

As the world moved inexorably towards World War II, Americans became accustomed to a muscular form of government under the numerous New Deal programs

⁶⁷ Kennett. *For the Duration*, 122-125.

and agencies of President Franklin Roosevelt. Roosevelt assured the American people that they should not fear the burgeoning power of the national government because it alleviated the hardships of the Depression. He extolled the benefits of many public works programs, social security, and the virtues of the New Deal. Now, the seminal issue for American businesses was now “Conversion.”⁶⁸ Americans prepared for war.

Although many businesses exhibited a reluctance to lose their customer base by converting to military production during World War II, the merchant shipbuilding industry mobilized quickly and successfully. This industry operated under the auspices of the United States Maritime Commission, a New Deal agency. The support and financing of that agency provided the country with the ability to meet the demands of wartime, including the Gulf Coast, and the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Between 1930 and 1936, the industry had only produced 71 ships, but from 1938 to 1940, the shipyards manufactured 106. In 1941, that number exceeded more than 100.⁶⁹ Women entered the shipyards in droves as the demand increased for more ships to fight the Nazi menace and fascism.

The need for employees however, exceeded the number of applicants. The government explored numerous options for recruitment, some more creative than others. If women could not be persuaded, perhaps they could be forced. As the summer of 1942 approached, some chatter began about the possibility of drafting women into the labor force. A Gallup Poll found that 68 percent of the country responded in the affirmative for single women between the ages of 21 to 35 to train for defense work. The major unease

⁶⁸ Christopher Tassava, “The American Economy during World War II”. EH.Net Encyclopedia, ed. Robert Whaples. Feb. 10, 2008. <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-american-economy-during-world-war-ii/> (Accessed June 3, 2016).

⁶⁹ Tassava, “The American Economy during World War II.”

about this undertaking was the concern about increases in the migration of people, including those who were already in transit. It is estimated that during World War II, as many as twenty million people left their homes for a myriad of reasons. During the Great Migration, at least half of African American agricultural workers from the rural South moved to urban areas such as Milwaukee and Detroit for better paying jobs.⁷⁰ Within approximately three years, more than seven million women changed their addresses.⁷¹ These major population swings caused enormous problems for the cities receiving the new émigrés. Policy makers, resolved not to draft women, but to recruit those already living in the affected areas.

As factories geared up for war production, the Women's Bureau stipulated that employers should provide rest rooms, adequate toilets, cafeterias, good lighting, and comfortable furniture for the female employees. Many factory owners complied with the government policies, and the conditions in the war production factories were significantly better than in other industrial situations for women. Labor also was the beneficiary of the presence of women as jobs were simplified, and companies long ignored enacted safety requirements. For example, safety equipment became mandatory, protective coverings appeared on machines, and lighter tools were the norm.⁷² However, these changes were sometimes slow to be implemented or nonexistent, and women still faced dangerous conditions.

Wartime economic demands coupled with proactive legislators ensured that one of the most significant areas for shipbuilding was the Gulf Coast. In 1938, Governor

⁷⁰ Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers During World War II," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 1 (June, 1982): 84-85, 88, 93.

⁷¹ Penny Coleman. *Rosie the Riveter* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1995), 55, 57, 58.

⁷² Chafe. *American Woman*, 142.

Hugh L. White of Mississippi introduced legislation known as the Balance Agriculture with Industry Plan, allowing local governments to promote and sponsor industrial growth with bonds. This innovative arrangement helped to create Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation in Pascagoula, Mississippi. From its inception, the Ingalls Corporation promoted a family atmosphere and provided the employees with summer picnics and entertainment such as military bands and local entertainers.⁷³

Ingalls Iron Works purchased land in Jackson County, Mississippi on October 20, 1938, and immediately moved all its equipment from Chickasaw, Alabama, to Pascagoula. They introduced their new all-welded technique which was more cost effective. Previously, ships had been constructed by riveting the steel plates together. This new approach became the company's signature process. On June 8, 1940, the *Exchequer* rolled down the ramp and became the first all-welded ship to sail off to war. In July, 1940 after dredging the surrounding channels and installing a 3,500-foot spur railroad track, the company received a contract for four 17,600 ton C3 cargo ships. Two months later, the government requested four more ships. The United States was still not at war, but global developments quickly moved our country in that direction.⁷⁴ As President Roosevelt watched the expansionist policies of Japan in Asia and Hitler's blitzkrieg in Germany, he understood that America needed to advance a more muscular international presence. He urged Congress to repeal the arms embargo while the revision of the Neutrality Act coupled America, England, and France against Germany.

⁷³ James C. Cobb. *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 14.

⁷⁴ Kevin Dougherty, *Weapons of Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 147-150.

Pascagoula, Mississippi, like other coastal areas, underwent changes in the workplace as a result of the influx of women laborers. In April 1943, women comprised approximately 8.7 percent of the Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation employees. Due to the growing numbers, the federal government built a special room for workers with pregnancy-related difficulties. However, the city of Pascagoula struggled to provide the needed social services for the increasing numbers of new inhabitants.

Transformations were also felt outside the factories. Monthly reports to the War Manpower Commission regarding the Mississippi Coast indicated that “Shipbuilding was the most important industry in the area, and the only industry of any significance relative to war production in Pascagoula, Mississippi. In 1940, the population of Jackson County increased dramatically. It grew from a low in the Depression of 15,973 to 20,601. Pascagoula, the home of Ingalls Shipyards enlarged from 4,339 to 5,900.”⁷⁵ Like other towns and cities in the South, a massive influx of people created vast social upheaval and unwelcome changes to the resident society. As the city of Pascagoula struggled to accommodate the new workers, Ingalls, Maritime and Naval authorities, and the Federal Public Housing Authority developed the largest local defense housing project with 1,800 units.⁷⁶ This development included apartments, trailers, dormitory rooms, and detached homes. The new neighborhood also offered a community center and a super market. Ingalls eventually provided day care centers, private areas for pregnant women, and medical insurance to recruit and retain female employees.⁷⁷ Not all defense plants were so accommodating to women workers.

⁷⁵ “Women in Shipyards,” Series 12, Box 9. Labor, 29. National Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

⁷⁶ Ingalls News, *Construction of New Housing Rushed*, Sept. 24, 1942.

⁷⁷ Ingalls News, *Construction of New Housing Rushed*, September 24, 1942.

Mobile, Alabama was another significant Gulf Coast site of industry. The United States Employment Service conducted drives in Mobile to recruit women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five for employment in the shipyards or at Brookley Army Airfield, the base on Mobile Bay where they trained air corps glider pilots. The Alabama Dry Docks and Shipbuilding Company had been in operation, building liberty ships and tankers, for more than a year. Running six days a week, twenty-four hours a day, these companies were unable to hire and maintain a sufficient number of male employees. The director of the vocational program stated, "We have scraped the bottom of the barrel as far as men are concerned and women are going to have to take over the war industry program." Conversely, Mary Anderson of the United States Women's Bureau said, "Until a short time ago [a woman was] considered in certain quarters a person of limited usefulness, the woman worker is now being hailed for her nimble fingers and agile brain, and recommended for almost all kinds of employment."⁷⁸ Hiring women became a last resort for most companies, but as time marched on, women proved their worth and received grudging acclaim.

Two shipyards in Mobile reluctantly hired women in August 1942, but they provided no adequate restrooms, locker space, first aid, or safety equipment for these new employees. They made no attempt to provide a transition for the women into this male stronghold of employment, and by October, more than two hundred received termination notices for incompetence. The following year, the work force contained 9 percent female, and by July of that same year, female workers increased to 10.8 percent, finally reaching a high of 11.6 percent in November 1944. The War Manpower Commission

⁷⁸ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 28.

encouraged women through advertisements saying, “We do not believe that you, Women of Mobile will shirk your responsibility. . . . we believe you will rally to the call now.” Only fifteen hundred to two thousand women answered the call, while a thousand women only wanted part-time employment and were unwilling to take training courses.⁷⁹

Work crews were usually comprised of a mix of genders. Also at the Alabama Dry Docks and Shipbuilding Company (ADDSCO), an “all-girl” white crew worked and welded together. Fourteen women made up the crew with a male supervisor. He later commended the women and admitted they did a “swell job.”⁸⁰ Another all-woman crew worked assembling electrical shipboard panels. These crews, however, proved to be exceptions as most teams remained mixed. Thirteen women received promotions to supervisory positions and earned a great deal of notoriety because of their minority female status. Women worked as machinists, drill press operators, burners, pipe threaders, boilermakers, electrical maintenance workers, guards, and time checkers. With the inclusion of women in the shipbuilding work force, an age old-custom had to be abolished. One of the oldest superstitions among sailors was that allowing women on board ships would infuriate the “sea gods” who in turn would rain their anger on the water. For the first time in the history of the Alabama Dry Docks and Shipbuilding Company, women boarded the ships.

Some companies were reluctant to hire women workers on a large scale and believed that these women needed to prove their capability first. In October of 1942, the

⁷⁹ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 28-35.

⁸⁰ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 23.

Higgins Boat Company announced it would be hiring women for the plant in Michaud.

The management of the plant stated:

We know the placing of these women must be done on a very small scale, and the absorption by the shipyard must be slow, in order not to disturb production; and to acquaint both the women placed in our plants with their duties as well as to accustom men on the job to these women being used in the shipyards.⁸¹

The company planned to hire eighty women and place twenty each in an electrical unit, the machine shop, welding unit, and ship carpentry.⁸² Their employment tested their determination and their ability to be successfully integrated into the workforce. Women had to pass physical skills tests and received the same union scale wages as men.

Management placed articles in the *Eureka News Bulletin* the monthly company newsletter, explaining that only women applicants with the highest probability of success be hired, exhibiting a minimum of an eighth-grade education, good eyesight, and normal ranges of blood pressure. Only 10 percent weight variations from normal proved acceptable. The appropriate ages ranged between nineteen and forty-five.⁸³

For those women who managed to secure a position at Higgins, there were perks. Higgins Industries tried to make the environment a welcoming one, employing a group of fine musicians. They played at Higgins' functions, marched in parades, and performed at War Bond rallies. One of the horn players in the band was Al Hirt who later went on to win worldwide acclaim as a trumpeter. The company broadcast the Higgins Radio Program, which highlighted their "Ship Ahoy" Program over WDSU with weekly quarter hour programs featuring sea stories and travelogues.⁸⁴ The station also broadcast "Eight

⁸¹ Jerry E. Strahan. *Andrew Jackson Higgins and the Boats that Won World War II* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994) 149-150.

⁸² Strahan, *Andrew Jackson Higgins*, 149-150.

⁸³ Strahan, *Andrew Jackson Higgins*, 151.

⁸⁴ *The Times-Picayune*. May 12, 1991.

Bells,” every Sunday afternoon, and “Anchors Aweigh” every Wednesday evening. Employees enjoyed the showing of several war movies at the New Orleans Municipal Auditorium, paid for by the company. Those movies gave the employees a better appreciation for their vital work in the war effort.

Further north in Bath, Maine, women also entered the yards. By 1940, the bulk of the senior staff of Bath Shipyard management had been looking towards retirement. The eligible management and production employees agreed to postpone retirement, however, and stayed on through the war emergency. As the numbers of employees swelled, Bath developed training programs to prepare its new workers. While the war depleted the pool of eligible men for military service, women joined the ranks at the yard and comprised 16 percent of the labor force during the height of the conflict. The lady welders received the same sixty cents per hour as the men and enjoyed the guaranteed “equal pay for equal work” once they joined the production force. The experiment proved to be a great success. The company hired an assistant director of personnel for women and financed a nursery for their children as the numbers of women swelled the ranks. William S. Newell, president of Bath spoke about the impact of women in 1942. Two years earlier Newell adamantly opposed hiring married women.⁸⁵ He later explained “the women’s contributions to the shipyard were an eye-opener to us.” The general employees worked six days a week and held the lowest rates of absenteeism in the industry and retained the best safety record in the country.

⁸⁵ Ralph L. Snow, *Bath Iron Works, The First Hundred Years* (Portland: Anthoensen Press, 1987), 320, 321.

The Shipyards of Bath, Maine instituted many employee benefits to reduce the attrition rates. Initially, they established a ride-sharing program with 9,500 employees participating. Unfortunately, Maine weather and roads, aging cars, and a lack of spare parts brought the program to a halt. The company then turned to busses and later formed the Rationing and Employees Service Division maintaining records on each employee. They matched employees with drivers and riders, information on parking places, and plowed parking lots in the winter months. Additionally, they aided employees in their quest for tires, gasoline coupons, and car parts. This essential employee benefit saved time and frustrations. Employees no longer drove to the local rationing board for those necessities after a long day at work.

Previously restricted to specific types of employment, women found gratifying employment in wartime industries. Their participation increased the democratization of the national labor force. Their improved salaries allowed for the purchase of houses, the ability to afford reliable childcare, the ability to impact consumer trends, and to pay for further education. A cultural alteration was beginning and the government responded. The War Department distributed propaganda illustrating a return to prewar employment practices as the patriotic duty of the women. Women went into wartime industries for a variety of reasons. Some went out of devotion to their husbands, who were fighting in the war. Some were the sole supporters of their families. Many women of color wanted to improve their economic status. Countless women felt it was their patriotic duty. Yet, some wanted to learn and better their skill sets. Military wives became a target for employment. Early in the war, government officials reluctantly recruited married women for work in the defense industries. However, as World War II progressed, it was apparent

that single women could not meet the quotas needed in the factories. Married women had homes to keep, children to raise, and letters to send, encouraging their husbands overseas. Military men believed that mail was just as important as food. Letters carried an emotional power and embodied their connection to their homes. The government urged civilians to write to the men overseas because it played a substantial role to the maintenance of morale.

Although women were responsible for maintaining wartime production levels, government propaganda claimed that they needed to do more for the war effort—again reinforcing the traditional gender roles that were simultaneously challenged. The number one ingredient to ensure the determination of a fighting man or woman remained the receipt of a letter from home. A widely-distributed government poster during World War II confidently declared: “Mail from home is more than a fighting man’s privilege. It is a military necessity, for there probably is no factor as vital to the morale of a fighting man as frequent letters from home.”⁸⁶ During the war, the number of letters handled by the post office annually rose from 28 billion in 1940 to 38 billion in 1945.⁸⁷ The letters of young brides often extolled their newly acquired self-reliance as they moved to distant and unfamiliar places, learned how to make ends meet, opened checking accounts for the first time, and found jobs in hostile environments. Polly Crow in Pensacola, Florida, wrote her husband “You are now the husband of a career woman—just call me your little Shipyard Babe!”⁸⁸ She further stated, “Opened my little checking account too and it’s a

⁸⁶ Ephemeral Collection, Shipbuilding, National Archives, Morrow, Georgia. The poster clearly encouraged families to boast morale of the military personnel through letters. It Stated, “BE with him at every mail call.”

⁸⁷ Judy Barrett Litoff and David Smith, *Since You Went Away* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 21-45.

⁸⁸ Litoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*, 455.

grand and glorious feeling to write a check all your own and not have to ask for one.”⁸⁹

Women across America were “doing their bit” for the country. This was the time for all Americans to work for victory. The letters revealed significant observations on the momentous economic and social changes that were occurring in America as the war raged overseas.

Some women obtained employment due to their personal circumstances and needed their jobs to take care of their families. Josephine Fundoots faced the world as a widow with three-month-old twins and a four-year-old. She found work at the United States Steel Company in Farrell, Pennsylvania. In her position as a burner, she operated an oxy-acetylene torch to join pipes and weld steel fabrications. She related her first experience with work clothing. She expressed, “You had to wear goggles, long sleeves and gloves. I was terrified. Then I got used to the job and knew what I was doing.” One winter morning when she was riding to work, the snow became so deep that the bus could not continue its path to the factory. Fundoots and several people walked the two and one-half miles to the plant to work. She justified those actions saying, “I needed the money. Remember, there was no social security or no widow’s pension. So, I walked in.”⁹⁰

Others wanted to earn better pay for their families. In the early 1940s, Dorothy "Dot" Kelley of Portland Maine found herself divorced and the sole supporter of her four children. She worked at Montgomery Ward Department Store, but after seeing other women earn \$600 paychecks from working at the South Portland Shipyard, she quit her job and went to learn how to build ships. She continued to work at the yard until 1945

⁸⁹ Litoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*, 147.

⁹⁰ Nancy Baker Wise, *A Mouthful of Rivets* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 210-211.

when it closed. She labored on the night shift so she could remain at home during the day to care for her children.⁹¹

Some women joined the work effort for the pure thrill of the experience. At the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in New Hampshire, a story in the Portsmouth Herald reported, “Rosie the Riveter and her boyfriend are dancing in dungarees . . . munching and lunching in time to swing music that echoes through the cavernous expanse of the yard.” Volunteer bands played in the yards as management encouraged the lunchtime interval to boost morale and promote relaxation. Entertainment opportunities played out in many regions of shipbuilding enterprises. “Morale was good.” noted Helen Lawrence in an interview, as the couples tripped the lights fantastic through the turret lathes and propeller screws.⁹²

After women chose to join the war industries, they had to be trained. Most laborers in 1941 lacked the general qualifications needed to fulfill the specialized tasks they were asked to perform in various manufacturing enterprises. Men and women were given a free twelve-week course that included structural design, mechanical and electrical maintenance, chemical engineering, and other relevant course material. This training was available throughout the war years in many regions of the country, but as America pushed for a final victory in Europe, the last of these courses took place.⁹³

The federal government sponsored three types of community vocational programs: Vocational Training for War Production Workers; Engineering, Science and

⁹¹ Joyce Butler. Interview by Michael Garfalo, Dec.15, 2006. National Public Radio. *My Mother's Story: Dot the Welder*, for StoryCorps.

⁹² Richard E. Winslow, *Portsmouth-Built: Submarines of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard* (Portsmouth, ME.: Peter E. Randall, Publisher, 1985), 84.

⁹³ Brenda Ralph Lewis, *Women at War: The Women of World War II-at Home, at Work, on the Front Line* (London: Amber Books, 2002), 86.

Management War Training; and Training Within Industry. The lack of mathematical and mechanical competencies of the newly employed women presented an impediment. Companies relied on a combination of federal dollars and their own in-house classes to finance the programs. Some instructors tried to compare a drill press with a sewing machine, only to learn that one quarter of the students had never operated a sewing machine. Other instructors invoked images of women as “delicate creatures to be handled with extreme care.”⁹⁴ The Training Within Industry program received so many requests for information on the development of female workers from anxious employers that the co-director, Channing Dooley, instructed his office administrator to “go out and buy a rubber stamp to use on every printed piece we send out, reading, ‘This includes women, Negroes, Handicapped, Chinamen and Spaniards.’”⁹⁵ However, many employers remained reluctant to cast their employment nets into uncharted waters of workers.

A call for trainees for the Greenville Trades School went out in the *Delta Democrat-Times* of Mississippi on July 22, 1942. The article explained that the Gulf Coast shipbuilding companies would employ any person completing any of the National Defense Trade School Training Programs. Any persons interested in the National Defense Training courses could apply to the United States Employment office or the Greenville Trades School. In November of the same year, the advertisement in that same

⁹⁴ Campbell. “Wives, Workers and Womanhood, 96.

⁹⁵ War Manpower Commission, Bureau of Training, Training Within Industry Service, Washington, D.C. September 1945, 52. Volume: 3 issue: 2, 127-289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15234220122238283> (Accessed June 5, 2016).

newspaper stated, “Earn While You Learn! Men! Women! Be a Welder in 72 hours.”⁹⁶
Times were changing.

As women entered the world of male designated jobs in greater numbers, their training varied from weeks to months, and to on-the-job. Sometimes they worked on equipment that they had never seen. Some wartime workers received their training at local schools and vocational centers, many of them converted to training facilities for the war. Art majors easily trained as drafters, and many professional women began working in jobs that had not been available to them because of the absence of men.⁹⁷ They included pharmacists, drafters, train engineers, and trolley conductors.

Women’s economic importance did not guarantee acceptance from male co-workers. In Woodland, New Jersey in 1942, Matilda Havers attended a defense school program at the urging of her neighbor. Matilda had three sons in the military, and her husband worked for General Electric. She had never been to high school. She was eager to gain an education and excelled in the operation of machines and reading blueprints and micrometers. Her training lasted two months, and she became the first woman machinist hired in the New York Shipyard. Initially, the men resented her presence; the supervisor advised her not to engage with the men. She told him, “You needn’t worry. I won’t bother them. They’re going to talk to me first.” She said they later apologized. When her second son learned that she was working at the shipyard, he told her to take his tools and use them instead of buying new ones. When the men saw her return to work with her own tools, they treated her with respect.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ In the *Delta Democrat-Times* an article explained the numerous training programs available at local trade schools (July 22, 1942).

⁹⁷ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 34.

⁹⁸ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 35, 36.

Even the US government required women to prove their capabilities. In spring 1943, the Civil Service Administration advertised for women to take mechanical aptitude tests. Evelyn Rand passed the test and received a work release from her employer to travel to Brighton Trade School in Massachusetts. Women competed in a ten-week course in automotive mechanics. Upon graduation, the class of forty returned to Bangor to work in the Army Ordinance Shop. Upon arriving at the Ordinance Shop, they saw a large sign over the desk of the foreman. It read, "The difficult we do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer." Rand said to herself, "Aut-Oh they mean business." She never missed a day of work.⁹⁹ With the country at war, she made the impossible, possible.

After training the women, industry managers confronted a complex dilemma as they navigated through the new models of employment. How could they implement work schedules that comported with state laws regulating women's hours of work? Many laws barred women from working more than forty-eight hours or six days a week. Some laws even forbade women from working past ten o'clock at night.¹⁰⁰ In the late nineteenth century, many states utilized protective labor legislation to limit the number of hours that women could work, how much weight they could lift, and excluded them from working at night. This situation came about due to preindustrial gender hierarchy that defined men's salaries as a living wage. This required the belief that men supported a family unit unassisted. The Women's Trade Union League argued that women should also be paid a living wage, but that became an unworkable argument. It was

⁹⁹ Evelyn Rand. Interview by Rita M. Breton. Brewster, Maine, April 5, 1982.

¹⁰⁰ "Women in Public Life 1933-1941." *Historic Events for Students: The Great Depression*. . *Encyclopedia.com*. (March 2, 2017). <http://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/women-public-life-1933-1941> (Accessed July 7, 2016).

inconceivable to most Americans to suggest that women could support themselves, let alone a family. For example, in 1874, Massachusetts passed the first effective law that limited the employment of women and children to ten hours a day. In 1900, fourteen states adopted similar laws and by the 1960s every state had some form of protective labor laws. Organized labor backed this legislation because they saw women workers as competitors. New York law banned bakers from working more than ten-hour days or sixty hours per week. In 1905, *Lochner v. New York* stated that “the limitation necessarily interferes with the right of contract between the employer and employee . . . [which] is part of the liberty of the individual protected by the Fourteenth Amendment.” In 1908, *Muller v. Oregon* argued that long working hours harmed the physical, economic and social wellbeing of women. Many legislators seemed preoccupied with the seemingly delicate physical nature of women and their ability to conceive. Justice David Josiah Brewer argued in *Muller* for the majority opinion stating that the physical and social differences between the sexes warranted a different rule respecting labor contracts. Consequently, gender was not a source of the dissimilarities. This opinion simply expressed the established perceptions of the time: women remained unequal to and continued to be inferior to men.¹⁰¹ This superseded the *Lochner* decision and placed women into a separate class due to their reproductive capacities.¹⁰² The decision of the Supreme Court stated:

That women’s physical structure and the performance of material functions place women at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence is obvious. This is especially true when the burdens of motherhood are upon her . . . and as healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, the physical well-being of women

¹⁰¹ "Muller v. Oregon." <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1900-1940/208us412> (Accessed April 11, 2017).

¹⁰² Women in Public Life. Historic Events for Students. 1933-1941.

becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race.¹⁰³

The court explained that their concerns about the health of the women resulted from the egalitarian ideal to perpetuate the republic and the human race. After careful consideration, The Women's Bureau gave its reluctant approval to the proposed work schedules for the women. They could now work overtime.

As women and nonwhite men entered the shipyards, war needs exacerbated tensions between classes, labor and management, and skilled and unskilled workers as well as conflicts between males and females. Friction amid ethnicities also occurred. Women and nonwhite men appeared to be economic competitors, resulting in various organizing campaigns by the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The lack of basic services also was a further contribution to the tense relations. Because of the pressures, many skilled workers left the shipyards after working a few days because of their inability to find reasonable housing. They additionally had to contend with the attempts of the local communities to restrict their ability to park their trailer homes.

It became necessary for the government to step in and encourage diversity in the work place. To encourage more workers, in 1943, a presidential order came down informing defense contractors that they must cease discriminatory hiring practices. Most companies ignored the order until the acute labor shortage forced them to admit minorities into the work force. The Alabama Dry Dock Company agreed to hire twelve African American men as welders. On completion of their first shift, the men faced

¹⁰³ David Kennedy, Lizabeth Cohen, and Mel Piehl, *The Brief American Pageant: A History of the Republic* (New York: Cengage Learning, 2016), 466.

assaults by white, male shipyard workers and white women who attacked any African American they could find with bricks and tire irons. Labor strife caused the violence along with rumors of a white woman being raped. The riot frightened the entire city of Mobile and most workers did not report to work. The next day, white workers stood outside the gates in menacing groups near their cars. Inside their cars, they had concealed wrenches and tire irons. Security guards escorted black employees to work and the National Guard arrived at the shipyard. Because of the violent reaction, the company formed four separate shipways where African Americans could apply for any open jobs, except foreman. In other words, the shipyard created segregated workspaces. This was not the last time racial violence erupted at that Mobile yard. Even though black women outnumbered white women two to one in Mobile's total population, recruitment or admission into the training programs continued to exclude them.¹⁰⁴

The policies of racial hierarchy made it impossible for most black workers to gain employment in the shipyards. As southern industries and state officials continued to enforce low wages and restrictive color hiring practices, they engendered worker discontent that produced high attrition rates and labor volatility. World War II laid bare the necessity for equal opportunity and equal rights as well as the economic toll of Jim Crow.¹⁰⁵ The federal government mandated the inclusion of African Americans in the shipyards because of increasing pressure from the black community leaders. Although

¹⁰⁴ Ann V. Collins, *All Hell Broke Loose: American Race Riots from the Progressive Era through World War II* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), 20.

¹⁰⁵ Charles D. Chamberlain, *Victory At Home*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 38-39.

the shipbuilding industries on the West Coast provided better economic opportunities than the Jim Crow South, African Americans still faced subservience in social settings.

African American women acquired the dirtiest, lowest paying, and labor-intensive jobs in the shipyards. A study conducted by the Department of Labor exposed the fact that 63 percent of black women worked as welder trainees and laborers. Only 6 percent of white women toiled as laborers, 9 percent worked as welder trainees, and 9 percent as electrical trainees. Many times, black women encountered white women refusing to work alongside of them. Additionally, fewer African American women gained interviews because of the power of Jim Crow laws. Even though working in shipyards signified greater financial opportunities for black women, they remained at the bottom of the industrial ladder.¹⁰⁶

Historians disagree on the employment gains of women and African Americans during World War II. William Chafe contended that the war presented black women with a “second emancipation” through job opportunities.¹⁰⁷ But, per Karen Anderson, a careful examination of those experiences exposed “labor-force discrimination, managerial intransigence, and coworker prejudice.” Between 1940 and 1944, the numbers of black women in domestic service decreased from 59.9 percent to 44.6 percent. Aircraft plants in Los Angeles hired black women early in the war, and by 1945, black women worked in all Los Angeles aircraft plants. A study conducted by the Women’s Bureau of the United States Department of Labor in 1945 indicated that nonwhite women worked in outside labor gangs at foundries and in the meat-packing

¹⁰⁶ Cuahutémoc Arroyo. “‘Jim Crow’ Shipyards: Black Labor and Race Relations in East Bay Shipyards During WWII.” *The Berkeley McNair Journal*.
<http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/links/misclink/shipyards.htm>. (Accessed June 12, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Chafe, *The American Woman*, 142.

industry; they took jobs all others had refused. On the ore docks, black women obtained positions shoveling the remnants of ore from the bottom of ships and onto the hoists. Black women also became street cleaners in Baltimore, Maryland.¹⁰⁸ The effects of Jim Crow could be felt across the country, far from its origins in the South. White American workers carried their prejudices with them as they traveled across the land in search of jobs and opportunity.

While black workers were challenging segregation, both black and white women in the 1940s began to challenge the inflexible sex roles prescribed for them. Women in the Mobile shipbuilding industry in 1941 confronted this definition every day as they performed their functions in the wartime economy. However, these changes proved to be transitory as the government constantly reassured the public that a “woman welder can retain her feminine beauty.” The newsletters of ADDSCO, the Alabama Dry Docks Company, depicted some women as “mighty pretty,” and even called individuals an “attractive young ‘Miss,’” or “fair lady.” The organization printed two pictures of one woman, the first example in working clothes and the second one in an evening gown. These descriptions convinced the American public that even if the women performed a man’s job, underneath their work clothes, no change in the traditional notions of the American sex roles occurred. In one newsletter, they asked women about their hobbies. They depicted each woman as “this pretty secretary, the lovely Miss Ruby, vivacious Miss, the pretty brazer, the attractive Miss, attractive and smart, charming little lady, or

¹⁰⁸ Anderson, “Last Hired, First Fired. 82-88.

the pretty as a speckled puppy and cute as pie.”¹⁰⁹ When the war was over, life would return to normal.¹¹⁰

The growth of women as employees in the shipyards created more than just an increase in the number of workers; it compelled management to reassess perceptions of the abilities of women. They commenced to understand that women had to be treated differently from the men. Employers therefore began to hire counselors for women. The Women’s Bureau sent out pamphlets to work sites, explaining outside influences that affected job performance:

The factory or shipyard is not located in a vacuum, nor do the affairs of its workers begin and end with the 8-hour shift. There are many ways in which outside influences aid the worker on the job or lead to discontent, absenteeism, turn-over and other production saboteurs. The lack of adequate housing, recreation, transportation and child care facilities is among outside influences that affect women workers the most.¹¹¹

American businesses learned that the employment of women required new methods and policies.

Counselors interpreted company rules and regulations, attempted to make male workers and supervisors more understanding, and assisted women with services such as child care, housing, and transportation. Mary McMullen Roberts was director of counseling at ADDSCO. She helped women gain work confidence by creating orientation programs and informational sessions regarding safety clothes. She also assisted them in their searches for child care facilities, shopping centers, and other community resources.

¹⁰⁹ *Fore & Aft*. September 1, 1944, September 29, 1944. On these two dates, photographs of female workers appeared. First dressed in work clothes and next in feminine attire.

¹¹⁰ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 58.

¹¹¹ Gluck, *Rosie The Riveter Revisited*, 240. “The Women Counselor in War Industries: An Effective System,” *Women’s Bureau Special Bulletin* No.16, February 1944. Records of the Women’s Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, 1918-1965. <https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/086.html>.

Initially, women arrived unprepared for the shipyard environment, but the counselors persuaded them to tie up their hair and wear hard hats, gloves, and safety-toed shoes. Many counselors discovered that women resisted changes to their femininity, especially altering their hair styles. For example, after a Vultee Aircraft employee in Nashville, Tennessee, told a bus driver that the company wanted female workers to wear caps on the factory floor, he responded, “That’ll be harder to enforce than prohibition.”¹¹² The duties of the counselors included observation as they toured the shop floors, “looking for the coy curl unconfined by a bandana, the bejeweled hand, and the revealing sweater.” They satisfied the need to police the defiant women, to control their sexuality, and to conceal their femininity as issued by the rules from the Women’s Bureau.¹¹³ Officials constantly reassured the public that women were taking men’s places only for the duration of the war. A newspaper headline broadcast, “Mary Roberts Discusses Everything from Recipes to Babies to Hairdos with Girl Workers.”¹¹⁴ Begrudgingly, America accepted a “woman’s place in war” if her femininity remained intact and appropriately overseen.¹¹⁵

Many women had trouble adjusting to “dressing like men.” The first-time Colleen Rowan’s little sister saw her and her mother in a kerchief and pants, the child began to sob inconsolably. People initially thought that only actresses like Katherine Hepburn and Marlene Dietrich wore pants, as she, too, now did. Bobby socks were only worn by ‘fast women.’ Rowan now found herself similarly attired as she climbed

¹¹² Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War Making Women* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 170-171.

¹¹³ Katherine Archibald, *Wartime Shipyards: A Study in Social Disunity* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2006), 21.

¹¹⁴ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 63.

¹¹⁵ McEuen. *Making War*, 41.

mammoth pipes in the company of men. This new secret world of war and work determined the apparel choices of the women.¹¹⁶

Shipyard publications created columns and articles just for the women workers. The newsletters of ADDSCO, *Fore & Aft*, featured a column that focused only on items of interest to women. It encouraged women to tie up and cover their long hair. Ladies were to wear bandanas or turbans. One industrious woman named Della Fulghum described her creation, a snood from an old window curtain.¹¹⁷ Other women chose to brighten up their overalls with a dickey or a matching handkerchief. Florence Johnson made her own coveralls out of bed ticking, which she described as comfortable and easy to wash.¹¹⁸ ADDSCO provided these suggestions to ensure a happy work force. An advertisement for "Women's Good Looking Safety Shoes" appearing in the August edition of *Fore & Aft* reveals the dual concern with practicality and femininity: "We have a supply of safety shoes with boxed toes for women to prevent accidental crushing of the toes of the wearers. These shoes are surprisingly good looking, are strong and safe, and cheap and unrationed."¹¹⁹ Since the defense industries believed that women in the workforce created a temporary anomaly, the production of work clothes for female employees was almost nonexistent. Many women found the physical work necessitated the utilization of pants or overalls. Some companies provided changing rooms for women too hesitant to wear pants in public. *Harper's Magazine* quoted the women at Todd Shipyards, commenting about the lack of safety shoes. They said about women's

¹¹⁶ Denise Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 126, 127.

¹¹⁷ A snood is a bag worn over the hair at the back of a woman's head, like a hood or a scarf.

¹¹⁸ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 65.

¹¹⁹ Doyle Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama. File F. *Fore & Aft*. Aug. 4, 1944

shoes, “The soles aren’t heavy enough, oxford-cut low shoes aren’t safe enough; we want them over the ankles too. And we want steel toes like the men.” The personnel department began searching the city of San Francisco for men’s safety shoes in small sizes.¹²⁰

Ultimately most women wore clothes that suited their new jobs. After a six-week training program in Savannah, Georgia, Lucretia Tucker became a rod welder. She donned boots up to mid-calf, heavy pants, long sleeve shirts, a welder’s shield, and heavy suede-type gloves. The greatest challenge was keeping the welding temperature within the required range—too hot and the weld ran off the seams or too cold and the metal would not melt. The work was also very heavy. Because of the long hours, employees received two fifteen minute breaks. This practice later became normal in all industrial settings. The summer heat in Savannah was debilitating. As workers perspired in their protective gear, they lost salt, so salt dispensers appeared throughout the yard and workers took the tablets as needed.¹²¹

Clothing became a politically charged topic on the factory floor. An incident at the Ford Motor Company in Detroit set the standard policy for women across the defense industry sites. It was the case of the woman in the red pants. Wearing pants often conveyed employer control and female subjectivity: who controlled a woman’s wardrobe, what colors can you wear? Additionally, it expressed political resistance to authority figures. Carolyn Miller, a United Auto Workers activist arrived at the Ford Motor

¹²⁰ Doris Weatherford, *American Women during World War II: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 444.

¹²¹ Lucretia Jane Tucker. Interview by Anne de Mare, June 28, 2010, *The Real Rosie the Riveter Project*, for the Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University. <http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/5d41pbv> (Accessed July 27, 2016).

Company in 1944 wearing bright red slacks. Her supervisor issued this warning, “such a display of curves on the human body would certainly upset the whole male work force,” and he docked her pay by half an hour. *Business Week* printed an article decrying, “tight sweaters, snug slacks, and feminine artifices of color and style.” These exhibited “distracting influences, and hazards to the workmen, especially when a very shapely girl wanders in and takes her place in the swing shift.”¹²² The union took the case of the red slacks to a labor umpire, Harry Shulman, who ruled on the complaint. Shulman scoffed at the ruling of the foreman and wondered if the singling out of red as a color of sexual desire was tantamount to a production hazard because males were so distracted by the women. Apparently, companies would accept bright green slacks.¹²³ One management journal, however, recommended that “any uniform which adds bulges in the wrong places is not conducive to employment contentment.”¹²⁴ And yet, sometimes a sweater is just a sweater. This incident demonstrates how workplace appearance not only signified an individual’s preference, but exposed the gender skirmishes between workers and employers.

Millions of women entered the workforce during World War II, performing industrial jobs that previously had been the purview of men. However, even the war did not displace the sex typing of jobs. Historian Ruth Milkman emphasized the fact, “that during the war the boundary between men’s and women’s work was merely relocated, not eliminated.”¹²⁵ Milkman further contended that rather than the deconstruction of sex

¹²² Eileen Boris, “Desirable Dress: Rosies, Sky girls, and the Politics of Appearance,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 69, (Spring 2006): 126.

¹²³ Elkouri and Elkouri, *How Arbitration Works*, (Edison, N.J.:Bloomberg BNA Books, 2008), 109; Meyer, “The Woman in the Red Slacks” 1, 54-6. *New England Law Review* 25 (Summer 1992), 1429-1430.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Meyer, “The Woman in the Red Slacks” 45-46.

¹²⁵ Milkman, *Gendered Work*, 338.

segregation, new patterns of segregation fell into place for the duration of the war. Companies transformed the Rosie the Riveter type jobs in a manner that made them female specific and ultimately appropriate for women to execute. Women faced impossible requirements— be feminine, not sensual, and do a man’s job. Using red lipstick demonstrated their femininity. The color red stood as a metaphor for the problem. It was both threatening, yet alluring.

Cosmetics companies launched a wartime advertising campaign in magazines in 1943 and 1944. The Tangee Cosmetics Company advertisement explained that “Lipstick was a ‘mysterious little essential’ in the world at war, praising women’s success in ‘keeping your femininity—even though you are doing man’s work.’”¹²⁶ Women patriotically gave up many things such as nylons, girdles, and some cosmetics, but they refused to relinquish their lipsticks. Lipstick gave women a symbolic boost and permitted them to do a man’s job while remaining feminine. Kathy Peiss in *Hope in a Jar* recounts, “Lipstick helped women to put on a brave face, conceal heartbreak or pain, to gain self-confidence when it was badly needed. The Tangee Cosmetics Company equated the protection of freedom and democracy with the protection of beauty.”¹²⁷

Other cosmetic companies followed Tangee’s lead. Bésame by Gabriela Hernandez launched “Victory Red” a classic colored lipstick. The advertisement extolled, “The glamour of gorgeous red lips lifts the spirit. Like all expressions of glamour, a classic red lip elevates the morale of the woman wearing the lipstick, as well as all who see her. That’s why we are proud to introduce ‘Victory Red.’” The Cyclax Company initiated the production of its new “Auxiliary Red.” The DuBary Company

¹²⁶ Kathy Peiss. *Hope in a Jar* (Philadelphia: First University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 240-248.

¹²⁷ Peiss. *Hope in a Jar*, 240.

announced the creation of “Emblem Red” and Elizabeth Arden presented “Montezuma Red.” This last color signified the women in the United States Marine Corps, illustrating the first line in the Marine Corps Hymn that began with, “From the Halls of Montezuma.” Advertisements urged women factory workers to wear their red lipsticks with their “Rosie the Riveter apparel and to apply matching red polish to their ‘factory-practical’ short nails.”¹²⁸ The illustrations of women in advertising depicted women as beauty queens and Rosies. These images created a double-bind for American women by encouraging and limiting their roles in the workforce and the home.

It quickly became apparent that women everywhere needed specialized clothing in these new industrial work environments. The problem laid bare the fact that these types of work clothes for women did not exist in adequate numbers. The Women’s Bureau also recommended to employers that safety equipment and training be introduced to new female employees, but compliance was spotty at best. A typical female welder in the South posed these questions:

Should overalls fit snugly or be loose? Should one purchase the kind with straps for tools? Should one buy long socks, cotton or wool? We were given no advice on clothing and many of us had flash burns and slag burns on our necks. Our slacks were perforated with small burn holes and some caught fire and burned sizeable holes. Those who wore low cut shoes frequently had ankle burns. My glasses were pitted by slag before the matron in the restroom told me to ask for goggles.¹²⁹

These questions needed answers, but industrialists were not prepared to offer explanations nor were they following uniform guidelines published by the federal government. Labor Secretary Francis Perkins pleaded with American shoe retailers and

¹²⁸ Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin, eds. *There She Is, Miss America: The Politics of Sex, Beauty, and Race in America’s Most Famous Pageant* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 57.

¹²⁹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bulletin of the Women’s Bureau, *Employing Women in Shipyards*, Sept. 21, 1944, No. 192-6 (Washington, DC). <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/243> (Accessed June 17, 2016).

their lobbyists in Washington to create shoes that would help women prevent slip, fall, and stumble accidents. The manufacturers insisted that women would rather wear sandals, moccasins, and espadrilles to work.¹³⁰

Women faced numerous challenges in their attempts to find appropriate clothing for the work place. Nell Young's clothes were indicative of the drastic wardrobe changes that women faced in the shipyard. She said she wore dropdown coveralls, the kind that fell down quickly when you had to go to the bathroom. Leather overalls covered the dropdown pants, and she donned a leather jacket. She also had leather gloves that came up to her elbows and thick socks under her steel toed shoes. A bandana topped her outfit. She tied her hair up beneath a hard hat to protect it from sparks that could cause burns. Some fans removed the smoke from the welding process, but they did not blow it all away. Sometimes the summer temperatures reached 110-120°. ¹³¹ These women welders experienced extreme heat conditions and needed such protective clothing.

The shipyard environment was punishing with its accompanying noise, dirt, temperature fluctuations, vibrations, stress, and danger. An anonymous female riveter heard from her boss: “you’re a woman, you’ll always be a woman, and if you don’t put that hair in [your head scarf] you’ll have the damnedest permanent you’ve ever had because that weld is hot.”¹³² As the supervisor rebuked the riveter for her frivolous hair,

¹³⁰ U.S. Department of Labor, Women’s Bureau, “Report of Conference on Women in War Industries,” April 1943, p. 1, in Record Group 179, War Production Board, Policy Documentation File, 241.11, Box 1016, hereafter cited as *WB War Industries Conference Report*. Minutes of Shoe Retailers Advisory Committee, February 16, 1943; April 16, 1943; June 1943, Record Group 179, War Production Board, Policy Documentation File, 545.109 and 545.1005. McEuen. *Making War, Making Women*, 152.

¹³¹ Nell Young. Interview by Elizabeth Hemmerdinger, June 25, 2010, *The Real Rosie the Riveter Project*, for the Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/5dv41pbv> (accessed July 27, 2016).

¹³² Wise. *A Mouthful of Rivets*. 13-21.

he put her in her place as a woman, a woman without the ability to be a real worker. Regardless of the sex of the worker, building ships for the wartime industries was a hazardous endeavor. Working at furious production speeds created a recipe for misfortune. Combined with the influx of inexperienced workers, shipyards continued to struggle with safety concerns.

It was extremely dangerous to work in the shipyards. Lucretia Tucker's sister almost lost her fingers while working on the ship's way, also known as the boat ramp or launch. Building the ships' bottom was a hazardous job. So, construction of the bottoms excluded the women from working in that portion of the hull of the ship. A most frightening thing happened to Tucker on her first day on the job. A coworker, approximately fifty yards in front of her, received a serious burn. A man using an acetylene torch on the deck above her had failed to clear the area underneath of his work space. The hot liquid metal burned through the deck and ran down the ankle of the woman. Tucker believed that she did not return to work because of her wounds. Her sister disliked the heavy work in the shipyard and went to the office and quit. The management informed her that they were sorry, but she could not just resign because she had signed a year-long defense contract and was not free to leave.

Women faced many challenges in the defense plants and some even lost their lives. More than 210,000 women became permanently disabled due to factory accidents, while an additional 37,000 died. The first female war worker to lose her life working in a defense plant in the United States was Easter Posey. Posey and her sister Stacey became employees of the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama in early April 1942. On April 21, she died in an accidental explosion in the plant that produced four-pound incendiary

bombs. Her sister suffered severe burns and remained in a hospitalized for the rest of the year. The public did not hear of the accident at the time due to the secret nature of the plant and its products. As Posey and numerous women generated the feminization of Huntsville, Alabama, in 1943, recent high school graduates took their places in the Alabama defense plants. Thousands of women refused to be dissuaded from their defense jobs and returned after numerous injuries had healed.¹³³

Many women died and received injuries working in the defense industries for World War II. Caryl McIntire, a welder at the Boston Navy Yard recounted her love of the job, but also its dangers. She shared the story of a woman working as a shipfitter's helper on the day shift when a load of steel broke loose from an overhead crane. "She was killed," said McIntire, "and I often had a sense of uneasiness whenever the crane passed overhead. We all felt that her death was terrible, but the work had to get out. Our ship had to be launched."¹³⁴

Other women were injured on the job. Many industries exposed their female workers to explosives, detonators, and hazardous materials. Some suffered from breathing problems due to poor air quality in the facility. Many endured burning in their noses and their throats. Doris Warden did not know the adverse effects from her war job until she married and had her first child. In 1944, Doris gave birth to her daughter, Linda. The baby screamed night and day and refused to eat. A specialist examined her and directed the panic-stricken parents to inspect the baby's diapers after bowel movements. They found aluminum metal shavings that Doris had inadvertently ingested while working in the factory as a riveter. They had filtered through her body, passed into

¹³³ Brenda Ralph Lewis, *Women at War* (Pleasantville, NY: Amber Books Ltd, 2013), 78-79.

¹³⁴ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 140-141.

her uterus, and finally into the intestinal tract of the baby. The metal shavings eventually and naturally expelled, and the baby seemed fine.¹³⁵ As bizarre as this incident appeared, it reveals the lack of industry-wide safeguards to protect American workers. The lingering and undesirable effects of war work for women were just surfacing.

Often health concerns remained in the forefront while women worked as welders. Tucker became exposed to a ray burn while working in the Southeastern Shipyard in Savannah, Georgia. This type of accident happened to welders when the welding arc gave off radiation. That same evening, despite the irritation to her eyes, she went to the movies with a male friend. While watching a comedy, Tucker felt tears running down her cheeks, and she was unable to stop them. People stared at her on the bus ride home and looked at the young man as if he had done something terrible to the poor young girl, not realizing her injurious situation. The burn caused very painful symptoms of sensitivity to light, a feeling that something floated in the eye, and tearing. Regardless of her injury, she only missed one day of work. An older welder told her to grate potatoes and pack her closed eyes with the moist vegetable, and she would get some relief. The remedy is still used today, according to Tucker.¹³⁶

“Hot flashes” became a daily occurrence in the work place. Jackie McCarthy of the New England shipyards related that she suffered from “hot flashes” in her eyes. This further demonstrates the lack of safety awareness in industry during World War II. The glass front of her helmet did not fit properly, and the flashes produced from the welding

¹³⁵ Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *Never Will We Forget: Oral Histories of World War II* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008), 202.

¹³⁶ Tucker Interview.

caused great pain, heavy fumes, and burning sensations.” Because no national uniform safety guidelines existed, many workers endured physical injuries such as McCarthy’s.

Safety standards regarding the health of workers that are common today were nonexistent in the 1940s. Peggy Terry, her mother, and her sister worked at a plant in Viola, Kentucky, pouring powder into shell casings. They worked alternating shifts at the factory so they could rotate child care. The first paycheck of \$32 a week seemed a godsend as they had suffered with no steady income since the Depression. However, the powder they emptied into the shell casings proved to be harmful, unbeknownst to them. Peggy remembered, “Our hair was streaked orange. Our hands, face, and our necks just turned orange, even our eyeballs. We never questioned. Is this harmful? We simply didn’t think about it. This was just one of the conditions of the job.”¹³⁷

Head coverings were extremely important in the defense industries. Althea Gladish recounted her days in the Boston Gear Works in Quincy, Massachusetts, and the hazards of working there. She remembered that a girl caught her hair in a burring machine and almost lost her scalp. Another woman reached across a machine to hand a tool to a worker and caught her uniform on a burr on the steel machine, pulling her into it. If not for the quick action of a man working nearby, Gladish might have died. Althea stated, “We didn’t have any real training, but if it helped to win the war, I am proud of my contribution.”¹³⁸ While the women labored in the factories, because of a general lack of safety equipment and measures, they were at risk.

Ethel Linscott of Maine described:

¹³⁷ Julia Brock et al., *Beyond Rosie* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2015), xviii.

¹³⁸ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 64.

At the first of my being there seems so I'd get an attack of galvanized poisoning. This is when the sucker tubes came in. That is one thing the union did help with. Those hose lines drew the smoke and gasses out of the work area, and if you were careful and used the hose properly, you weren't so apt to get galvanized poisoning.¹³⁹

She also told how the women suffered from "flashes." When a welder struck an arc, the hood slipped down, and the colored shield of her helmet offered protection. Sometimes if the hood did not snap down quickly, the arc would strike before the protective shield fell into place. She recounted that "flashing would make it feel like someone had driven sand into your eyes; it really was an awful feeling, and so we had to take drops for that. We also suffered from a lot of spark burns." Linscott went on to describe:

In the day time, you had riveters around you all the time or somebody making a lot of racket around you. You'd get down inside the bottoms of the ships, there would be a riveter on the outside of the same bulkhead and OOH! Wouldn't you feel like screaming?¹⁴⁰

Concerning safety equipment for noise levels, she related, "No, I don't remember wearing any kind of ear muffs or plugs."¹⁴¹

Safety took a back seat in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, as the yards rushed to replenish the ships of the United States Navy. Helen Lawrence was an electrician's helper, and she recounts the story of her initial journey down a submarine ladder. She indicated, "Safety was lax during the war, no hard hats, safety shoes, or ear plugs." As she proceeded down the hatch of the submarine for the first time, she tightly gripped the rungs of the ladder. "Once I reached the bottom, my co-workers painted the heels of my boots yellow. It was the sign of my initiation into the group."¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Ethel Linscott Interview. "Maine Women During the Depression and World War II." Interview by Rita M. Breton, Maine Folklife Center. November 1, 1981.

¹⁴⁰ Linscott, interview, 14-27.

¹⁴¹ Linscott, interview, 14-27.

¹⁴² Winslow, *Portsmouth-Built*, 84.

Some women also suffered physical and emotional abuse from their colleagues. In Fort Worth, Texas, Bonnie Saunders shared in an interview the instances of physical abuse that she observed while working at the Vultee Plant as an expert in turrets and fifty-caliber guns. Male supervisors shoved and twisted the arms of female employees. Saunders accused her male supervisor of retaliating when she reported that he was smoking in a restricted area. He threatened to terminate her and refused to give her a work assignment. She further asserted that he concealed a screwdriver in her tool box, causing her to be questioned by the police for several hours for theft of shipyard equipment. She then alleged that he told her husband's friends that she had obtained an abortion. She finally quit her job and declared, "This is what I have to contend with for the right to work for my country."¹⁴³

Still, despite the hazards, women rose to the call and many felt that their experience was a positive one. A recently minted inspector, Colleen Rowan worked at the Oak Ridge, Tennessee, facility. Rowan worked in this top-secret facility in 1943. She appeared in the employment records as a leak pipe inspector. This new and secret world boasted unexplained acronyms and numbers. In her book, *The Girls of Atomic City*, Denise Kiernan described that "She [Rowan] worked in building 1401 for FB & D at the K-25 plant on the CEW and had earned a Q clearance." This clearance allowed her to go into protected areas without an escort and she was required to pass a more extensive background check. She never learned what the alphabet soup of designations meant.¹⁴⁴ A never ending supply of pipes arrived in Rowan's area, various shapes and sizes. She never saw pipes that big, and she had grown up in a family of plumbers. Every day pipes

¹⁴³ Jones, *Several Madnesses Are Born*, 43.

¹⁴⁴ Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*, 124-127.

came in one door and went out another. She wondered, “Where did they come from? Where were they going?” No one asked questions; people just did their portion of the work.¹⁴⁵

The experiences of work also had the power to break down regional differences within the country. After the war, everyone in her hometown told Lucretia Tucker that it would be hard to make friends in Chicago and asked why she wanted to go to a “Yankee school”? But she explained that because of her experiences in the shipyards during World War II where she met people from across the country, she learned that people are all basically the same wherever they call home. She further expounded on the positive things that came out of her World War II experiences. Tucker explained that disabled people found employment, antibiotics were widely utilized, women played in symphony orchestras, and women’s baseball teams blossomed. Many women benefitted from these new opportunities in a broad variety of activities.¹⁴⁶

Women gained self-confidence from their work. Tucker experienced a great sense of independence as she earned a good salary, helped pay the bills and saved a little for the future. She also spoke about her new habit of smoking: ‘Ladies’ did not smoke in public at the time.” She stated, “I was sixteen and said, well we are doing men’s work so we can smoke if we want to, where we want to.”¹⁴⁷ She also recounted her war bond purchases. A \$25 bond could be purchased for \$18.75. Employers automatically deducted the money out of her paycheck. She purchased one every month to help win the war. Tucker remembered being shunned by the locals and by the men in the factories. The local

¹⁴⁵ Kiernan, *Girls of Atomic City*, 126,127.

¹⁴⁶ Tucker Interview.

¹⁴⁷ Tucker Interview.

people were displeased that these young women were wearing pants and smoking in public. They normally wore dresses in public, but when they rode public transportation to work, they wore their pants. The women avoided the locals and had gatherings in their government-built homes.

Bettye Branan moved from Oklahoma to Richmond, California to find work in the defense industries. Her parents worked at the Kaiser Yards and she eventually found a job at Douglas Aircraft Company. She befriended a German woman who had come to America from Frankfurt, Germany. When she received word that the United States Air Force had bombed her hometown, she broke down and cried. She was immediately fired from her job.¹⁴⁸

Women also benefitted from the work, and some became famous for their skills. The most famous woman at the Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation in Pascagoula, Mississippi, was Vera Anderson. She and her sister, Minnie Anderson of Gulfport, entered a welding training program and began working at Ingalls in 1942. Per the late Monro Landier, former president of the shipyard, “Vera Anderson proved to be one of the most earnest, adaptable, and skillful workers in welding.” Before her death in 2013 at the age of ninety, Anderson stated in an interview, “One highlight of my experience at Ingalls was a local contest, and then a similar national contest, to determine the champion woman welder, based upon speed, quality and workmanship.” She went on to win the national championship at the Vancouver Yard of Kaiser Shipbuilding Company in Washington State, defeating Hermina Strmiska in 1943. The championship garnered her

¹⁴⁸ Bettye Branan. Interview by David Dunham, 2011. “Rosie the Riveter, World War II Home Front Oral History Project.” Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

\$350 in war bonds and a trip to the White House for tea with Eleanor Roosevelt.¹⁴⁹ In a newspaper interview, Vera explained how proud she was when Mrs. Roosevelt praised her and all the American women who were making essential contributions to the war effort. Vera was not just a local hero, but now she was a national celebrity, helping the American polity to cheer and accept the role of women in the shipyards. She later recalled, “Newspapers and radios stressed that women were needed in the war effort, so I became a welder at Ingalls.” Women on both American coasts answered the call to help the United States defeat the enemies in Europe and in the Pacific.

In the spirit of local competition, later five female welders at ADDSCO prepared to take on Vera Anderson of Ingalls Shipyard for the title of the national welding champion. They were Gertrude Carney, Winnie G. Latham, Vivian L. Tracey, Dean Prysock, and Mildred Harpole. After competing in several elimination rounds, the winner prepared to take on the champion from another Gulf Coast shipyard. That victor was Mary Baroni of Natchez, Mississippi, a worker from Pinto Island, Alabama. She was scheduled to compete against the Pascagoula champion on April 15, 1944, in Pascagoula.¹⁵⁰ Vera Anderson retained her title.

As southern men and women like Anderson moved across the nation and the world during World War II, their experiences created changes in the South. The Census Bureau estimated that upwards of 15 million civilians moved within the borders of the United States during the war. Additionally, millions of “outsiders” experienced postings at southern military bases. For many, this became their first direct contact with

¹⁴⁹ *The Sun Herald* article on women welders in World War II, Oct. 4, 2013, The life of a local woman, welder Vera Anderson.

¹⁵⁰ *Fore & Aft*. March 17, 1944, 2.

southerners. One woman in Tampa, Florida, wrote to an army friend, “It will take five years to win the war—one year to beat the Japs—one year to beat the Germans, and three years to get these damn Yankees out of the South.”¹⁵¹ Three million people left the rural confines of the South and headed for the coastal areas in pursuit of new opportunities in the military and shipbuilding industries. In Alabama, approximately 10 percent of the rural white population and 25 percent of the rural black population moved out of state or to the coastal cities in search of work. The urban population of Alabama grew 57 percent during the war years. By 1944, industrial and commercial jobs had increased by 46 percent. Other coastal states across the nation experienced similar patterns of population movement.¹⁵²

Shipyard employees around the country recalled the tensions between men and women with these shifts. Jackie McCarthy related her experiences working as a welder in a shipyard in Portland, Maine. She explained she had just a few days of training and then was put to work tack welding on a flat deck. The men teased her and convinced her to weld something that was not appropriate for her type of equipment. While she struggled to perform that task, they laughed at her. She also stated that she used to cry when she had to go in the “inner-bottoms” of the ship because it was such tight quarters that she was claustrophobic. Another incident occurred when working in the bottom of the ship. A man performing his tasks on a high staging area, spit tobacco juice down on the women. “That was really gross,” she exclaimed. Still, she believed that the women were

¹⁵¹ Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, “Will He Get My Letter?” Popular Portrayals of Mail and Morale during World War II. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 23 (Spring 1990).

¹⁵² *The Encyclopedia of Alabama*, TM, 2016. [Alabama Humanities Foundation](http://AlabamaHumanitiesFoundation.org). A service of Auburn University Outreach. www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/content/about-eoa (Accessed July 24, 2016).

treated “pretty well” partly because they had unions and because many of the men remaining could not serve due to classifications of fitness. She stated, “They probably didn’t dare put women down.”¹⁵³ Americans felt an obligation, a solemn duty to fight in the war and if a man faced rejection from the military and the inability to serve, he felt bitter disappointment. When asked about how the men and women treated each other, Ethel Linscott recalled:

There were women who were flirts and there was some sexual harassment by men, too. I don’t remember anything being said to us about problems, except as I said about a foreman who was fired, but that was because he didn’t report to his job, but they knew he was out with one of the women workers.¹⁵⁴

She furthered maintained that the shipyard did not alter the qualifications of welders or simplify the machines for the women workers at her place of work. “You went in there as a welder and your name could be a woman’s name or a man’s name, we were treated all alike,” according to Linscott. The interviewer asked her if she could summarize her experiences at the shipyard, and she said, “It was an interesting experience and I met all types of people. They spoke different languages and I learned an awful lot about life. I enjoyed the relationships I had with the people I rode on the bus with.”¹⁵⁵

Some former workers explained that they had not been aware of any forms of sexual harassment in the work places. Geraldine Toole of Bangor, Maine, further explained that “there were an awful lot of men and women working together at the shipyard. There was not much sexual harassment. I don’t remember men saying terrible things.” She described “that businesses employed upper class women and college girls as

¹⁵³ Jackie McCarthy, Interview by Rita M. Breton, March 3, 1982, Interview T1672, Maine Folklife Center, University of Maine, Orono, Me.

¹⁵⁴ Linscott Interview, 14-27.

¹⁵⁵ Linscott Interview, 14-27.

time keepers. They got better jobs because they weren't going to do anything dirty." The class division among women only allowed some to cross the limits of propriety into the "masculinized" workplace of heavy industry while many more could not. The interviewer questioned Toole about how the work changed the women. She replied, "I think that it made women tough. It probably made me tough I think, I probably changed a lot."¹⁵⁶

Some women did not realize that they were receiving less pay than the men. Lucretia Tucker also learned about pay inequality in this setting. She worked then in an all-female unit with a male supervisor. She said that the boss treated her fairly. The American Federation of Labor required all employees to join the organization if they worked in the shipyard. In 1944, the union instructed them to go out on strike for better pay. The action only lasted 2-3 days, and they received raises. Tucker said that she did not realize that men earned more than the women. Later in life when she was a member of a church search committee for a new pastor, she learned about the inequity of the gendered pay issues. A man on the committee explained that they should hire the male applicant, but that would mean they would have to pay him more than the female candidate. She stated that she did not think that was fair.

The new employment opportunities forced women to cope with a comprehensive list of demands, in addition to the unfamiliarity of their new defense jobs. That list included housing, transportation, heavy industrial work clothes, limited child-care options, rationing, and tedious grocery store lines. These adverse conditions forced new friendships as women gathered against adversity. Women also pursued their goal of

¹⁵⁶ Geraldine Toole, Interview by Lizabeth MacDonald, Oct. 4, 1982, Interview 1610004, University of Maine, Orono, Me. 21-22.

contributing to the war effort. Gas rationing limited transportation options, and train and bus travel was unreliable. Some department stores offered customized overalls, but many women preferred to shop at the army surplus stores. The inabilities of women to meet many basic needs required them to employ an additional level of coping skills, and most continued with a sense of humor.¹⁵⁷

Men changed too. Frank Emery worked as a leadman at the South Portland shipyard and described a crew that was under his direct supervision. He stated:

At one time I had practically an all women crew. I thought I had the best crew in the yard because they wasn't taking time to stop and smoke cigarettes and tell stories. They'd bear right down hard, they'd work, work, work, welding, welding, welding. You treat the women right, and you're doing all right aren't you, huh, yeah.¹⁵⁸

Some male supervisors appreciated the talents of their female workers, but many did not.

Some women recalled being treated nicely by the men. Geraldine Berkey followed her Navy husband to New London, Connecticut, and found a job at the Electric Boat Company. After six weeks of training, she became an electric motor inspector. She was the only woman in the yard and stated that the men were very respectful and treated her nicely. She declared, "I had no problems. The men treated us like sisters. Many of the men were Groton lobstermen, and they would bring lobsters to us."¹⁵⁹

Women employed many strategies to deal with work place difficulties. Julie Elliot of Massachusetts welded at the Boston Naval Dry Dock. She explained that the men treated her like a younger sister at the facility. She recalled that occasionally the men acted "fresh" to the young girls, but her boss advised her to strike an arc anytime the guys

¹⁵⁷ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 108-109.

¹⁵⁸ Frank Emery, "Wives, Mothers and Sweethearts." Maine Maritime Museum, SPSY Oral Histories, <http://mainemaritimemuseum.org>. (Accessed May 13, 2016).

¹⁵⁹ Wise, *A Mouthful of Rivets*, 10.

gave her any trouble. The flash from the arc can be very painful, as explained so the men would back away. She reported that some men believed the girls to be “fast and loose” because they worked in the shipyard, but the boss told her, “Don’t take any stuff from those guys.” Many of Julie’s coworkers had husbands in the service. She lost her husband in Romania in 1944, making her a twenty-four-year-old widow. She continued to work until the end of the war.¹⁶⁰

Many women recalled being harassed. One aircraft factory worker recounted the harassment of her early days, “I never walked a longer road in my life than that to the tool room. The battery of eyes that turned on my jittery physique, the chorus of Hi, sisters’ and ‘tsk-tsk’ soon had me thinking. ...Maybe I’m from Mars.”¹⁶¹ Patricia Cody needed money to go to graduate school, so she went to work as an electrician’s helper in the Connecticut Electric Boat Factory. The boss paired her with a master electrician for training. She explained, “The attitude of the men towards the women was totally exploitative—what would you expect? And women never attained the ability to become journeymen instead of apprentices.” This was a massive shipyard, located on the Thames River with winds blowing mightily up the waterway. Many married men worked there and had deferments because of the critical needs of that industry. Cody continued, “There was always constant harassment by these assholes. They were always propositioning you and making remarks.”¹⁶² Working women in the shipyards sometimes experienced different encounters with the men. It appears that the incidents were situational.

¹⁶⁰ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 92-93.

¹⁶¹ Karen Sue Anderson, 1975. “The Impact of World War II in the Puget Sound Area on the Status of Women and the Family,” PhD diss., University of Washington. 40-46.

¹⁶² Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 96-97.

Each woman found her own way of dealing with the unwanted attention of the men who believed that the women encroached on their masculine domain. Phyllis Kenny Skinner became vocally defiant as her boss put his arm around her shoulder. When he questioned her about her reaction, she picked up a seventy-pound worm, a metal part that feeds a sixteen-inch gun, and swung it in a wide arc in front of her. She shouted, "I'll take your head right off your shoulders if you don't take your arm off me." She explained that she was very shy and raised strictly. The perpetrator quickly stepped back. She then declared, "This is to let you know that I'm not that type of person." From that point on, the men called her Miss Kenny and showed her the proper deference accorded to a nice young lady of that time. Women wore coveralls, hair nets, and caps, and Skinner recounted, "We had to keep our hair covered all the time to keep it away from those spinning things on the machines. Some girls fought it, but they realized they could lose their scalps otherwise."¹⁶³

Many times, the male supervisors and employees discounted the contributions of the women until they could prove their worth. Marie Westcott of New York took an electrical course at General Electric to improve her ability to be hired in the test department. Initially, the graduates worked in jobs designated as women's places. That lasted for two weeks, and then they moved on to a man's job. This move came with the caveat that when the men fighting overseas returned, the women surrendered the positions. As Westcott watched the other women building parts from blueprints, she told her boss, "I think I can do that." He looked at her in surprise, and then said, "We'll try it." While building push buttons, Westcott noticed the number of the bottom screw was

¹⁶³ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 99-100.

missing from the blueprints. A second set of blueprints indicated the bottom screw was to be a flathead and not the roundhead that was currently being used. She told the boss about the problem and that all the roundhead screws needed to be replaced. He paid no attention to her information. Later, as she walked through the adjoining room of the plant, she saw a huge pile of items that had been returned. The boss later returned to her work station and asked, "Marie, where did you find the number for that last screw?" She told him about the two sets of blueprints. After examining the prints, the supervisor told the women that all the roundhead screws had to be replaced. Westcott had been right.

Elmer Becky and his brothers served during World War II when their mother Matilda Hoffman became the first woman hired at the South Yard of the New York Shipyard. He reported, "She told me stories about how the men resented her being there at first. But when she showed them she was capable they asked her if there 'was anyone else like you at home.'" She recruited her younger sister, and they rode together on a motorcycle to work every day."¹⁶⁴ American women found methods to travel to their war jobs even with the rationing of gasoline and rubber tires. The Hoffman girls appeared to be no different.

While the supervisors slowly accepted women, other male workers sometimes had difficulty with them. At General Electric, the men usually accepted women workers. However, one man did not like the women coming into his department. He shouted, "Get the women the hell out of here!" He could not be drafted and serve in the military because of a lung condition. More than likely, he was frustrated, not just because women were at General Electric, but because of his inability to serve his country.

¹⁶⁴ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 236-238.

Freezing temperatures also made things difficult for the women. In winter, the conditions in the New York Shipyard in Camden, New Jersey made it difficult to stay warm. Cecelia Kutner explained how they fought the cold while working. She stated, “Sometimes I had to have antifreeze in my tank. It was two degrees below zero and the wind was constantly blowing.” She never explained if her “antifreeze” was coffee or something a little bit stronger. The workers placed their sandwiches against the heated bulkhead and toasted them. Kutner mused, “For that I got \$1.12 an hour, but I loved it because I was helping to do my part to win the war and bring our men home victorious.” Kutner recounted the elation she felt on Victory in Europe Day.¹⁶⁵ She stood atop an aircraft carrier and cried for joy at the news as the tug boats blasted their horns on the Delaware River. She explained, “Building the battleships and the aircraft carriers gave me a lot of confidence for later years, and I found out I could do anything I wanted if I wanted to do it hard enough.”¹⁶⁶ Although women were empowered by their newfound roles, their industry jobs were only temporary. Many women worked in defense plants during World War II, knowing that this was the situation. They initially accepted positions in the job market, aware they would return to their home duties once the men returned from war. Elizabeth Morrison worked at Easter Aircraft in Linden, Massachusetts, as a temporary worker. She described her experience saying, “Everyone was participating patriotically so I stayed there until the war stopped. My husband was in the service, and my mother took care of my two daughters. There was no question about

¹⁶⁵ VE Day. Victory in Europe. The public holiday celebrated on 8 May 1945 to mark the formal acceptance by the Allies of World War II of Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender of its armed forces.

¹⁶⁶ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 156-157.

whether women would be kept on. Nobody seemed to mind and we went back to our lives.”¹⁶⁷ Not all women so graciously expressed this sentiment.

Some college women worked in the defense industries. Marna Angell Cohen had married and had recently graduated from college in 1942. She accepted a job with General Electric Boat Company in Bridgeport, Connecticut, making searchlights for the Navy. She described that “the sense then was, we’re stepping forward to replace the men that have to go to the front kind of attitude, and nobody sort of questioned whether women could do these things or not.” She reported that she resented being laid off when the men began to return home from the war. She affirmed, “I was angry. I had really enjoyed my work. They simply said, ‘We can get men now, so goodbye.’ I was laid off right away.” This developed into a common theme through numerous interviews with the women in all parts of the country who had worked in the male dominated professions.¹⁶⁸

Even with the skill and patriotism displayed by countless numbers of women, they found themselves unceremoniously laid off at the end of the war. William Mulcahy, a supervisor at a Camden, New Jersey, factory recalled:

We met the girls at the door and handed them a slip to go over to personnel and get their severance pay. We didn’t even allow them in the building, all those women with whom I had become so close, and had worked seven days a week for years and had been commended so many times by the Navy for the work they were doing.¹⁶⁹

Further south, Antoinette Miller Tamburo worked as a clerk at the Higgins Aircraft plant in New Orleans. “Toni” as she was called saved her first pay stub. It reminded her of the contribution she made to the war effort. She worked more than twenty hours overtime

¹⁶⁷ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 196-197.

¹⁶⁸ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 175-176.

¹⁶⁹ Brock et al., *Beyond Rosie*, xix.

and contributed \$11.25 towards the purchase of a war bond. She faced a lay-off at the end of the war and came back later at a reclassified lower rated job and lower salary.¹⁷⁰ Likewise in New York Marie Westcott indicated, “When the war was over and the men came back, we had to go back on women’s jobs. At first, I was angry. Then I quit General Electric and went back to teaching.”¹⁷¹

Susan B. Anthony II, great niece of the woman’s suffrage champion, contended that women merited “equal pay for equal work” in 1944. She, like countless numbers of women had worked all three shifts as a grinder in the Washington Navy Yard machine shop. Her fifty-six-year-old mother also worked at a radar factory in Pennsylvania. She believed that when the war ended, the fight for women’s equality would reach a turning point. Sadly, for the nation, she was incorrect. Women still had a few more miles to go.¹⁷²

Before the war ended in 1945, male policy makers, labor and management, and government officials planned a return to “normalcy.” One labor leader contended “we should immediately start planning to get these women back to [house] work where they belong, amid the environment of home life, where they can raise their children in

¹⁷⁰ Kimberly Guise, “Worker Wednesday: Toni Miller Tamburo,” The National WWII Museum blog. Entry posted July 16, 2014, <http://www.nww2m.com/2014/07/worker-wednesday-toni-tamburo/> (Accessed April 4, 2017).

¹⁷¹ Wise, *Mouthful of Rivets*, 143-145.

¹⁷² Jean Barrett, “Riveter Rosie Going Back to Kitchen? ‘Never’ Says Susan B. Anthony 2nd,” *Philadelphia Record*, September 1, 1944. americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/...001.../acrefore-9780199329175-e-55

normal, healthy, happy conditions.” Women who fought back ran into a wall of opposition from employers and unions.¹⁷³

Regrettably, the unholy alliance of women, unions, and the industrial managers fashioned by the United States government collapsed after wartime needs ceased. The feasibility of this pact survived only “for the duration.” It assumed that at war’s end, societal normalcy would return. However, the numbers tell a different story. A sizeable number of the women who worked in industry during World War II had been previously employed, albeit in dissimilar jobs. Those women eagerly seized upon the opportunity to work at higher paying jobs over their prior clerical or service-type employments.¹⁷⁴ According to the United States Department of Labor, 61 percent of women working in March 1944 worked the week before the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Of that group, 17 percent had been students, unemployed, too young or unable to work, and only 22 percent had been housewives.¹⁷⁵

Women found themselves pushed out of the work force after World War II by several forces. Management and union leaders utilized the rules of seniority and their organizational biases to restore the male workforce. It is interesting that the industry leaders entertained this political agenda rather than retain the clear economic benefits of the females whose work productivity was high even with lower salaries.¹⁷⁶ However, women retained the title of “secondary workers.” The principal ingredient for family

¹⁷³ Sherrie A. Kossoudji and Laura J. Dresser, “Working Class Rosies: Women Industrial Workers during World War II,” *The Journal of Economic History* 52, no. 2 (June 1992). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2123119> (Accessed July 26, 2016).

¹⁷⁴ Kossoudji and Dresser, “Working Class Rosies,” 431.

¹⁷⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, Changes in Women’s Employment. Mary Elizabeth Pidgeon. Special Bulletin No. 20 of the Women’s Bureau, June 1944. <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/243> (Accessed June 17, 2016).

¹⁷⁶ Kossoudji. “Working Class Rosies.”

incomes was not the female worker. Their wages remained useful for holiday spending or new family luxuries. The societal construct of the pre-World War II national family had to be restored. Unfortunately, the countless problems that women encountered and often overcame during that time still exist today—pay inequity, lack of affordable and safe childcare, and hostility from male workers are all common to today’s working women. Many in society still maintain that women remain responsible for the work at home “on the second shift.” The complexity of women workers, especially in the shipyards during World War II remains a rich avenue of research.

At the end of the war, The Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor surveyed women about their future work plans. The survey revealed that most women preferred to remain employed. Numerous government planners had expected the employment of women to be a temporary situation. When asked why, the most common reason to remain employed indicated a financial responsibility for themselves or their families. Women had manipulated the levers of wartime production, managed homes, imparted care for children and families, moved to new regions of the country, and provided the country with the “womanpower” that was essential to victory in World War II. However, at the close of the war, they were unceremoniously shown the door. America no longer needed women in the defense plants, but their stories survive. They can be found in employment records, magazine accounts, newspaper articles, national archives, and oral histories. The emergency of World War II ended and so did the usefulness of the women. Now they returned to their private spheres to which society relegated them. The men were back in charge. However, women everywhere learned from their experiences.

CHAPTER III - HOUSING

As 15 million Americans moved across state lines in search of defense work, housing became the most significant need. The housing industry innovated its construction methods and Americans bought or rented 200,000 trailers. Additionally, prefabricated houses arrived on the scene revolutionizing the way housing units were constructed and how Americans bought them. Homes could be assembled and moved more quickly to the areas with the greatest need. The Levitt and Sons Construction Company of New York received a navy contract to build tract housing in Norfolk, Virginia, for defense workers. The homes were “simple wooden structures on a concrete slab.” William Levitt applied the assembly-line technique to housing construction and built 2,350 housing units. Levitt deconstructed home building into 27 operations that were repeated at each building site. He used these innovative techniques after the war and built Levittown, New York, and Levittown, Pennsylvania, for returning soldiers and their families. The wartime experiences of many contractors led to the home building transformation after the war.¹⁷⁷

Another southern city, Mobile, Alabama, experienced extreme uncontrolled immigration. As its shipyards absorbed 40,000 workers, another 55,000 migrants arrived, searching for jobs, housing, and unobtainable city services. Officials of the United States Employment Division reported, “Almost every conceivable housing facility was taken and trailer camps were cropping up outside the city limits without any visible sanitary arrangements.”¹⁷⁸ Migrant workers in the defense industries utilized various approaches

¹⁷⁷ Mark David Van Ellis, *To Hear Only Thunder Again: America's World War II Veterans Come Home* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 211.

¹⁷⁸ Chamberlain, *Victory At Home*, 35-37.

to achieve their goals of economic security and were not as one-dimensional as most observers portrayed. Class and ethnic diversity indeed obfuscated the “full utilization” policies created by the federal government. Communities deemed the migrants as unsanitary and threats to the moral fabric of their societal harmony.

Small towns across the United States were unprepared for the changes wrought by World War II. In 1940, Childersburg, Alabama, had a population of five hundred. It had no paved streets, no hotel, and no house was empty. By 1942, the population topped 6,000 with the increased population mostly working at the Alabama Ordnance Works. Due to the lack of housing, many workers commuted from Birmingham along a treacherous thirty-nine-mile “suicide strip.” With the introduction of a train shuttle, the number of cars in the parking lot of the plant decreased by approximately 9,000 a day. Another Alabama city, Montgomery, attempted to ease the transportation and overcrowding issues by instituting staggered hours of operation for schools, offices, and businesses. The most immediate effect on the southern states was not a parking issue, but an increase in economic viability, bringing higher standards of living to the areas. This was a boon to a region that had suffered so greatly during the Depression.¹⁷⁹

Richmond, California, was a small town of 24,000 inhabitants in 1940. In the next year, the city grew to approximately 100,000 people and was unable to meet the needs of this new dynamic in its city. In 1943, Richmond earned the *Washington Post* and *Fortune Magazine* designation of “Purple Heart City.” It received this designation because of the “fiscal, environmental, social, and economic impacts of the industrial

¹⁷⁹ Thomas, *Riveting and Rationing*. 19-20.

build-up and associated population explosion that it experienced during World War II.”¹⁸⁰
No vacant housing existed in the city. Residents took in boarders, people rented rooms, garages, and barns. Private builders attempted to fill in the gaps. People rented out “Hot Beds” on eight-hour shifts. As the waves of people continued to pour over the small town, newcomers slept in “movie theaters, parks, hotel lobbies and automobiles.”¹⁸¹

Contractors and the government built 700 simple homes in an unincorporated area of Richmond. This was the first attempt by the Federal Housing Administration to help ease wartime housing shortages. In 1941, the Richmond Housing Authority incorporated to manage the construction and maintenance of the area. The Lanham Act of 1940 provided \$150 million to the Federal Works Administration, which constructed about 625,000 housing units. The Richmond Housing Authority segregated the public housing units with a buffer zone between the older and mostly white community and the growing numbers of African American families that arrived in the area to work in the shipyards. This was the largest public housing development during World War II. The development cost more than \$35 million dollars.¹⁸²

Following this development, President Roosevelt approved the allocation of funds to construct two different villages, Atchison and Nystrom. These were small 450 unit complexes, outside of Richmond and were hailed as cutting-edge designed communities for workers. The construction visibly displayed the constraints of the time with simple wood-frame buildings. The plan followed the precepts of the “garden city” movement

¹⁸⁰ Rosie the Riveter/World War II Homefront National Historic Park. The American World War II Homefront. https://www.google.com/#q=richmond++shipyards+Calif++WWII,+employee=housing&* (Accessed April 10, 2016).

¹⁸¹ Rosie the Riveter/World War II.

¹⁸² Rosie the Riveter/World War II.

with winding streets and spacious yards, one and two-story duplexes, four-plexes and a community center and park. This area today is part of a living park and designated as an intact historic site. In 1956, the housing cooperative allowed residents to purchase the homes for as little as \$273. This complex is the only project funded by the Lanham Act that remains in California, and one of the few in the land not destroyed after the war.¹⁸³

As with women's employment, changes resulting from World War II evaporated after the conflict.

Housing remained a critical issue on every coast. An article in *Look Magazine*, March 20, 1941, explained the myriad problems and some solutions to the rising need for permanent, affordable and adequate housing. It explained that some industries were unable to retain employees because the local housing facilities were inadequate, as demonstrated in Mobile. A study corroborated the local opinions that hotels were filled with essential war employees, executives, business and technical experts visiting the war industries in these areas. Hotel room revenues increased sharply in 1939 and continued through 1942. It also pointed out the lack of defense housing and trailer homes.¹⁸⁴ A story reprinted in the *Mississippi Delta Democrat-Times* appeared on July 17, 1942, entitled, "Your Spare Bedroom May Be in Demand to House War Workers." Reporters James Marlow and William Pinkerton asked readers to invite strangers into their homes to provide housing for incoming laborers. They quoted John B. Blandford, administrator for National Housing Administration. He called for the housing of 850,000 war workers in private homes between July 1942 and July 1943. When Blandford called upon citizens

¹⁸³ Rosie the Riveter/World War II.

¹⁸⁴ Ephemeral Collection, Hotels Are A Vital Factor on Three Coasts, National Archives, Morrow, Georgia. The poster clearly demonstrates the critical need for housing in crowded war areas.

to help house workers, he offered no mandates about the accommodations. The article continued to explain that housing and homing would be ultimately necessary for up to 1,600,000 workers. New war housing needed to provide accommodations for 50,000 to 100,000 single persons and for 400,000 to 500,000 families. The United States government expected private contractors to deliver 240,000 to 300,000 family homes.¹⁸⁵

Material shortages, however, hampered the government plan to build those dwellings. This necessitated the redesigning of building plans to maximize those materials that were available for construction. The new plans emphasized dormitory style lodgings. This reduced the need for plumbing supplies, and kitchen-ware. It created community dining halls and recreation rooms. Contractors further explained that it was essentially impossible to lay out jobs in advance as the material availability changed from week-to-week. The movement of vast numbers of people created chaos all over the nation.

Baltimore in 1942 appeared unable to implement the government utilization policy, thwarting the in-migration and associated social ills. Federal officials feared that the South would not meet employment needs and thus hinder the success of the war industrial complex. By that summer in Baltimore, 20,000 white migrants arrived from North Carolina and West Virginia and entered that city. The city of Charleston, South Carolina, calculated 9,000 white workers a month, ignoring the 4,000 black workers already registered at the local United States Employment Services offices (USES). Charleston was unable to provide adequate housing for the 100,000 migrants already present in the city but continued to advertise for white men. The blame for this social

¹⁸⁵ In a *Mississippi Delta Democrat-Times* on the housing demands for war workers (July 17, 1942), James Marlow and William Pinkerton discuss issues.

chaos can be laid squarely on the shoulders of industrial personnel directors in cooperation with organized labor, the War Manpower Commission, and the United States Employment Division administrators.¹⁸⁶

By January 1943, Congress had appropriated over \$2 billion dollars for emergency housing in the war boom towns of the nation. In Mobile, workers cleared slums and constructed housing for “certified colored war workers.” The new communities had modest homes, auditoriums, day care centers, and dormitories for up to 1,200 men and women. The complex included barber shops, gymnasiums, cafeterias, and hospitals. Government-owned trailers were installed adjoining the shipyards where the workers were employed. They offered 1,700 units for 7,000 war workers families and rented for \$15 per month. Larger units of two to four family units were built on the outskirts of Mobile. This complex housed 150,000 people and five nurseries. More nurseries were planned in the hopes of reducing female absenteeism. They believed that by providing housing, transportation, medical care, and child care, absenteeism would decrease, and the ratio of production in the shipyards would increase. At the beginning of the war, workers constructed one ship every six weeks. By 1943, one ship slid down the shipway every week.¹⁸⁷ This increase in production caused disruptions in cities and towns of America.

It is accurate that World War II created a myriad of economic benefits to the South; however, the cost of the social dislocation for that economic boom was significant. As American cities experienced the powerful and far-reaching changes

¹⁸⁶ Chamberlain, *Victory At Home*, 34-35.

¹⁸⁷ CRITICALPAST. Archival footage World War II, U.S. Government Agency Archives. War Information Bureau of Motion Pictures. Mobile, Alabama, U.S.A., 1943. Distributed and exhibited by The War Activities Committee of the Motion Picture Industry. (Accessed March 4, 2017).

associated with the war, none compared with the changes that befell the Gulf Coast cities of Mobile, Alabama, and Pascagoula, Mississippi. The brisk pace of industrialization and the call for labor in these two municipalities created headaches for local governments unable to provide the basic services needed for the new residents. In-migration and inter-migration within the states exacerbated the problems. The meager facilities and services of the cities created serious health threats, great stress to local schools, shortages of welfare services, and untenable relations with residents. The eager workers arrived from the rural and destitute agricultural regions of Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and West Florida. Mobile swelled from 78,720 residents in 1940 to 200,000 in 1944. Pascagoula, Mississippi enlarged from 5,900 in 1940 to 30,000 in 1944. Mobile strained to provide the basic services to this 61 percent increase in population. The new inhabitants struggled to find tolerable housing, transportation, medical services, educational facilities, food, and shopping places.¹⁸⁸ The Mobile natives believed they were witnessing the demise of their fair city, which was being destroyed by the newcomers. Locals described them as primitive, uneducated, backwoods hicks. They were convinced that these interlopers were the cause of juvenile delinquency, sexually transmitted diseases, illegitimate children, and every other problem that they could associate with that “riffraff.”¹⁸⁹

Housing facilities in Pascagoula, Mississippi, continued to be in short supply and there remained a shortage of trained nurses, but medical facilities appeared to be adequate. As 1942 moved into summer, food distribution improved.¹⁹⁰ Two large

¹⁸⁸ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 11-14.

¹⁸⁹ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 14.

¹⁹⁰ National Archives—Morrow, Georgia. Series 12 Box 9. Labor, pg 28.

cafeterias opened in the city for employees and the public, store hours adjusted to accommodate working parents, and all schools operated with two shifts. Officials implemented a curfew for young people, and localities paved local roads with concrete to facilitate the considerable number of cars. Some local streets were impassable with the installation of a city sewer system, but the residents were inconvenienced for only a short time. No public transportation system existed in the city of Pascagoula as most shipyard employees commuted to work in private cars.¹⁹¹ In April 1943, approximately 8.7 percent of the Ingalls Shipbuilding Corporation employees were women.

The greatest hindrances to full production at Ingalls remained absenteeism and turnover, caused mostly by the lack of housing. The company created several small in-plant programs to reduce absenteeism in various departments. For example, workers were asked to donate to a fund to buy war bonds with a weekly drawing to determine the winner of the bond. Anyone absent during the time was not eligible to win the bond. The program seemed to garner results since absenteeism decreased.

Labor turnover at the shipyard was also considered a very serious problem. The chart below, published in December 1943, demonstrates this problem:

<u>Month</u>	<u>No. Hired</u>	<u>No. Terminated</u>
May	1097	1572
June	712	1588
July	1546	1360
August	1594	2303
September	2139	1575
October	1757	1167
Total	8845	9565

¹⁹¹ National Archives—Series 12 Box 9. Labor, pg 28.

This chart indicates a significant turnover rate every month, except for July. These numbers were unsustainable at the time.¹⁹² In June the percent more than doubled. The circumstances that affected the excessive turnover rate were housing conditions, transportation difficulties, labor competition, wages, working conditions, and work hours. Ingalls established a termination interviewing unit to understand why employees were leaving. The company tried to persuade workers to stay on the job by adjusting to the individual complaints.¹⁹³ However, this turnover rate compelled recruiters and the government to continue to bring new employees into the war production facilities.

Senator Theodore G. Bilbo of Mississippi wrote to the Federal Public Housing Authority and the Federal Works Agency requesting federal assistance for increased parking capabilities at Ingalls, funds for the completion of the sewer systems in Pascagoula, and questions about the pace of federal housing assistance in April 1944. Angry constituents in Pascagoula wrote to the governor complaining about the newcomers, including many trivial matters. They wanted him to ban these newest migrants from raising chickens in the yards of their houses. The chickens were not penned and caused property damage. They pointed out that it was unnecessary since the workers were making such substantial salaries. Senator Bilbo replied that he would not ban the workers from raising chickens and that they were not receiving exorbitant paychecks; they were just trying to feed their families.¹⁹⁴

Bath Iron Works in Bath, Maine, experienced a great deal of labor turnover, also. At this plant, 16,000 workers left the company between 1942 and 1944 because of

¹⁹² Senatorial Subject Files—Series 12 Box 9. Labor, pg. 32. National Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

¹⁹³ Senatorial Subject Files—Series 12 Box 9. Labor, Section A. General Summary, pg. 2. National Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

¹⁹⁴ Senatorial Subject Files—Series 12 Box 9. Labor, 2. National Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

military service obligations. However, available housing remained the most common cause for turnover, and this was the primary reason that Bath did not endeavor to recruit skilled workers from other parts of the country. The Department of Defense built some housing and dormitories there, but the need for housing far outstripped the numbers of employees seeking shelter.¹⁹⁵

Housing issues were so profound in the Bath and Portland, Maine area that three quarters of the employees lived outside of the community. The demand caused the shipyard to recruit from ninety-four towns within a sixty-mile radius of the shipyard. This was largely a rural region of the country, lacking public transportation. Roads were inhospitable to an increase in traffic, especially in the bitter Maine winters. Aided by the Federal Public Housing Authority, Portland architects John Calvin Stevens II and his son created the Redbank Village housing project in South Portland. The complex included over 500 dormitory-style units, with Long Creek and Peary Village adding barracks-type arrangements. The shipyard and federal government in partnership created the communities for the workers. The complex included community buildings, offices, shops, clinics, kitchens, a grammar school, and recreational spaces. Next door was Westbrook Street Trailer Park with 300 units on thirty-eight acres. Additionally, the South Portland Housing Authority opened Cushing Village which provided 60 single homes and 883 dormitory rooms. Each building supplied a laundry room and a sitting area. Utility trailers contained tubs and showers and Bendix electric washing machines.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ Ralph L. Snow, *Bath Iron Works, The First Hundred Years* (Portland: Anthoensen Press, 1987), 320-321.

¹⁹⁶ Maine History Online, "South Portland's Wartime Shipbuilding," <http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/85> (Accessed July 7, 2016).

As the government and industries provided some housing, many families experienced the joy of their first new home. In 1942, Marsha Spencer celebrated her tenth birthday. She and her family moved into Redbank Village, which was constructed for shipyard workers and their families in South Portland, Maine. She exclaimed, “How exciting this was to move into a brand-new house!”¹⁹⁷ Even with this immense project, defense housing continued to be in short supply. The National Housing Agency explained, “They were unable to spare materials and manpower to take care of the normal housing needs of the nation, to accommodate the increased number of families, or to replace substandard housing or slums.” This meant that roughly two million migrating war workers and their families had to locate living arrangements wherever they could; this resulted in overcrowding and sometimes forced children to live in squalor.¹⁹⁸

The urban and rural white poor and African Americans congregated in the new defense towns looking for work and a better life on the West Coast. The housing situation was dire and families lived in garages and even chicken coops until adequate housing provided the needs of numerous families. The black population of Seattle increased from 4,000 to nearly 30,000. Defense plants were hiring African Americans even as prewar conditions barred African American women from trying on gloves in department stores, and black couples were denied the opportunity to dance at the Trianon Ballroom. After the cessation of hostilities, officials tore down wartime housing all over King County, Washington, and sold or towed off the debris. The homefront was

¹⁹⁷ William M. Tuttle, *Daddy's Gone to War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 65-66.

¹⁹⁸ First quoted in World War II & The American Home Front. A National Historic Landmarks Theme Study. John W. Blandford, “Wanted: 12 Million New Houses,” *National Municipal Review*, 34, issue 8 (September 1945): 376-377. <http://npshistory.com/publications/nhl/theme-studies/world-ii-home-front.pdf> (Accessed April 4, 2016), 56

temporary, just as opportunities in employment and civil engagement were for minorities.¹⁹⁹

The Northwest Shipyards of the Kaiser Company employed 97,000 workers in 1942. Women represented approximately 30 percent of the Kaiser workers. They hired a very diverse workforce that included African Americans, Native Americans, Asians, Latinas, and women. To fill the need for employee housing, they built the city of Vanport on the northern edge of Portland, Oregon. The new town was home for 42,000 men, women, and children. In addition, Kaiser created social services and a healthcare system that today is known as Kaiser Permanente. However, a flood destroyed Vanport in 1948.²⁰⁰

By 1943, the Gulf Coast experienced severe housing shortages. Higgins Industries of New Orleans employed 1,800 workers by 1941, and Delta Shipbuilding Company engaged 13,000 employees of which 400 were women. From 1940 to 1945, Greater New Orleans grew from 494,537 to 559,000. By 1943, Higgins had expanded to seven plants and employed approximately 20,000 people. This growth caused housing shortages, and a lack of basic services. Fresh groundwater usage increased by ten percent, and rental property was impossible to find.²⁰¹ A desperate military wife ran an advertisement in the local newspaper:

Wanted By Naval Officers Wife whose Husband is serving—and Three Monsters

¹⁹⁹ Sharon Boswell and Lorraine McConaghy, “Over here: Gearing up for the fight,” *Seattle Times*, June 30, 1996.

http://old.seattletimes.com/special/centennial/june/over_here.html. (Accessed March 14, 2016).

²⁰⁰ The Oregon Project. Oregon Historical Society. War Housing and Vanport. Kaiser Shipyards, Gordon Oliver. 2017. <http://oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/war-housing-and-vanport/#.WNQfs2e1uUk> (Accessed March 18, 2017).

²⁰¹ Jerry Purvis Sanson, *Louisiana During World War II: Politics and Society, 1939-1945* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1999), 217, 219, 237, 238.

in the form of my little children—TO RENT a 2 or 3 bedroom house, apartment, BARN or cage or whatever is supposed to serve as shelter when such terrible creatures as children have to be considered²⁰²

This advertisement speaks to the desperation of workers and military wives to find adequate housing accommodations during the war. It also hints at the possible discrimination of apartment owners to people with small children. This problem was nationwide.

On the eastern border of Texas, the Depression decimated the City of Orange. In 1930, only 8 percent of the population had jobs. Overnight, the city revitalized because of the war and became one of the largest shipbuilding towns in the country. This now booming economy was unable to keep pace with the demands of the increase in population, however. People lived in any make-shift structures that they could to work in the shipyard. They resided in tents, fields, barns, sheds, and spare rooms. The federal government stepped in and bulldozed sand into the marshes to create more land on which they erected 4,500 temporary homes. The new development was Riverside. Located by the Sabine River, rainwater ran down the concrete streets with nowhere to drain, causing people to walk barefoot to their homes. Even though an environmental disaster ensued, the housing project provided much needed housing facilities for the workers and their families.

Early in 1944, *Washington Post* reporter, Agnes Meyers began a yearlong odyssey, exploring areas of the country where defense industries were springing up, almost overnight. She chronicled the shipyard districts in Mississippi and Alabama and exposed the miserable housing and over-crowding conditions that were the most extreme

²⁰² Doris Weatherford, *American Women during WWII: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 225.

in the nation. She recalled her shock when finding, “row upon row of tents, trailers and shacks inhabited by families who had emerged from the neglected rural areas of the southern states.” She reported, “These people are pitiful. The adults are usually illiterate, the children ragged, undernourished, disease-ridden. They are as shy as wild animals, suspicious and unfriendly even with their neighbors in a trailer or tent six feet away.” She then asked her readers, “Is this America?”²⁰³

Men and women answered the call of their nation as they moved across the country to find jobs and “do their bit” for the war effort. Each area of the nation struggled to meet the needs of the ever-burgeoning population shifts some were more successful than others. When Jean Muller Pearson married a pilot, she followed him to his base in Boise, Idaho. The housing shortage was so extreme there that people rented any habitable space, just as in other parts of the country. Jean and her husband squeezed into the top floor of a house with another couple. They shared a bathroom, kitchen, and a sitting room on the landing. When her husband was transferred to Nevada, the only thing they could find was an abandoned miner’s shack. The kitchen had an old iron stove which served as an oven and a hot water heater. The “refrigerator” was a wooden crate attached to the outside wall of the kitchen that was reached through a window opening inward. When the nights were cold, the milk and the produce would be frozen. The bathroom was in a lean-to, added onto the side of the shack. They were the proud owners of one of the thirty bath tubs in the town. On many nights, Pearson invited other wives to come over to take a bath.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Quoted first in Charles D. Chamberlain, *Victory At Home*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 1.

²⁰⁴ Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War* (New York: Penguin, 2011), Chapter: Future Hopes.

Lucretia Jane Tucker shared her story in an interview for *The Real Rosie the Riveter Project* in Nashville, Tennessee, conducted in 2010. In World War II, her divorced mother received a phone call soon after the war broke out. A cousin in Savannah told them about good jobs in the shipyard. Tucker, her sister and her mother all moved from Alabama to Savannah and took jobs at the Eastern Shipyards as welders. This facility built cargo ships that President Roosevelt called “ugly ducklings.” Life had been difficult for her mother because as she stated, “nobody in her family had ever been divorced. Nobody in her hometown was divorced. She was totally undone and very unhappy.”²⁰⁵

The Tucker family chipped in and helped their mother Iris satisfy the debts she left behind in Alabama as they shared a government-built duplex as their new home. Growing up in Alabama, Tucker explained that she and her family did not have running water or inside bathrooms, and the house had no refrigerator or central heat. Their new duplex seemed luxurious to them with running water, central heat, a bathtub, and a refrigerator. The house was small but offered two bedrooms, a small living room and a kitchen-dining-room combination. Tucker explained that those dwellings are still in use in Savannah today, but did not disclose the address in the interview. Transportation in the city was difficult during the war, so the family found a neighbor who owned a car. He drove them to work. His old Ford convertible leaked when it rained, so the girls sat in the back with an open umbrella over their heads and giggled all the way to work. In one instance, the car owner called and told them that he was sick and could not go to work, but he said if one of them could drive they could take the car. An unlicensed sister

²⁰⁵ Tucker Interview.

volunteered and drove the family to work without incident.²⁰⁶ Many interviewees recounted unusual stories of local assistance in their pursuit of better lives.

As people moved across the country in search of wartime jobs, housing became the most vexing problem facing the nation. Some employers provided housing units, some government programs built communities for workers, and each locale handled the crisis differently. Some landlords took advantage of the desperate situations, and material shortages forced builders to create new models and methods of construction. These new building methods helped to generate the suburbanization of America after the war.

²⁰⁶ Tucker Interview.

CHAPTER IV - CHILDCARE AND DAILY LIFE

As the country entered World War II, American society and the economy altered the old order of things and initiated fresh opportunities for women and the nation. The conditions produced by the war made the customary duties of homemaking—shopping, cooking, washing and ironing, and parenting more challenging. Shortages, rationing, inadequate schools and medical facilities, and stress due to family disorder and fears for loved ones affected women across the nation. However, women managed the numerous trials of preserving family life throughout those many difficult years.²⁰⁷

During the Depression, thousands of women had delayed starting a family, but now they wanted children. World War II was upon them and many were nearing the conclusion of their childbearing cycles, however. When these same women chose to work outside of the home, pregnancy often became difficult as the women were overworked and exhausted. This created a myriad of problems for the family and society.²⁰⁸ Little public child care existed because children were to be cared for by their mothers, juvenile delinquency increased, and school dropout rates rose. Stories of abandoned children were numerous in the daily papers, and society heaped upon working women the irony of these developments, the same women who were working to gain victory in the war. While women workers struggled with finding childcare, other aspects of daily life in World War II were completely disrupted by the war.

With the advent of the war, the incidence of marriage skyrocketed. Between 1940 and 1943, many people spurred on by the war married. In fact, 6,579,000 marriages

²⁰⁷ Thomas, *Riveting and Rationing*, 99.

²⁰⁸ Erenberg and Hirsch. *The War*, 32.

occurred. The resultant baby boom left numerous young mothers alone, attempting to make ends meet and care for their offspring. During that same period, families produced 11,355,000 babies. According to J.C. Capt, director of the Bureau of Census, in an address to Congress, more babies were born in September 1942 than any other month since February 1942. The birth rate in 1943 yielded the greatest birth explosion in United States history.²⁰⁹ However, this large birthrate created new problems. Many women “tripled up” sharing apartments and dividing rents, food costs, housekeeping chores, and child care. Federal child care facilities in war boom areas were underfunded and served a mere 13 percent of the child care needs. The exception to this dismal situation was on the West Coast. Kaiser Shipbuilding Company provided excellent facilities in Washington, Oregon, and California. Other areas were not as fortunate.²¹⁰

The industrialization of all coastal regions of the United States created the need for outside child care as the numbers of women entering the workforce increased. Historically, childcare in the United States originated with private philanthropic organizations targeting poor mothers and widows in the slums of the nineteenth century. World War II created a new paradigm for social services and a severance of the traditional policies. Any public funds directed at child care due to war were temporary. At the end of the war, the federal policies quickly reverted to the traditional sex norms, returning women to their homes and men into the paid labor force. Child care once again became a private matter, and any family needing such services appeared deviant,

²⁰⁹ William M. Tuttle, *Daddy's Gone to War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 24-25.

²¹⁰ Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 187-190.

according to Congressman Rolla McMillen of Illinois who issued this statement concerning the funding of childcare:

I am afraid, Mr. Chairman, with this great grant allocated to child care, instead of discouraging it, it will encourage these women to remain in these plants, knowing that their children will be looked after. The policy should be, it seems to me, that they should be discouraged and driven if necessary, back to their homes where they belong, to look after these children.²¹¹

This reluctance of Congress to fund child care fully in the post-war years was partly an opposition to the expansion of New Deal social programs. Policy leaders stigmatized the program as a continuation of the big government policies instituted by the Franklin Roosevelt administration, instead of seeking a more limited government footprint. Americans feared that the end of the war would produce an economic depression with high unemployment. Many asked what would happen when the war ended. What will Rosie do? The more accurate question should have been, however, “what will we do with Rosie?” Some Americans desired a return to “normal” family lives. The War Manpower Commission issued this practical policy idea:

The WMC hereby declares as basic national policies that . . . women, without children under 14 years of age, be actively recruited for employment and training, but that this principle shall not be construed to mean that women who are responsible for the care of young children who desire to work are to be deprived of an opportunity for training and employment.²¹²

²¹¹ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, *Hearings on H.R. 3178 and H.R. 3278* . . . , 79th Cong., 1st sess., 5/16/45 and 5/22/45 (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1945), 44.

²¹² Employment Security Review, Volume 9, Issues 7-12, page 6. United States Bureau of Employment Security. 1942.

Federal policies during and after World War II successfully safeguarded and advanced the traditional sex roles, maintained male privilege, and aided in the conservative backlash that was seen at the end of the war. However, the arrival of the military industrial complex stirred a head-on clash of values and culture.

American women who answered the call of their country in the war emergency exhibited concern about the health and welfare of their children. Labeled the “Eight-Hour-Orphans,” children of working mothers likewise suffered the harsh new realities of the home front at war. In 1942, through an addition to the Lanham Act, Congress erected emergency nurseries in every state except New Mexico because it did not request any money for that project. The Lanham Act of 1940 authorized government grants during wartime to create childcare services in communities contributing to the war effort. The program was massive and exceeded \$1 billion in today’s currency. Between 550,000 and 600,000 children enrolled in one of the Lanham Act nursery programs during World War II.²¹³ The facilities for childcare fell far from meeting the needs. The Department of Labor estimated that funds from the act only reached approximately ten percent of the affected children. By late 1944, parents could send a child between the ages of two to five to daycare for fifty cents a day, if available. Adjusted for inflation, that would cost roughly seven dollars in today’s money. After the war, President Harry Truman tried to extend this federal program for a few more years, but the effort failed. Closing the day care centers also forced women out of the workforce, thus opening jobs for returning

²¹³ Rhaina Cohen, “Who Took Care of Rosie the Riveter’s Kids?” *The Atlantic* November 18, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/11/daycare-world-war-rosie-riveter/415...> (Accessed May 14, 2016).

soldiers.²¹⁴ This act also reinforced the ideal that women working displayed a wartime emergency only.

Kaiser Shipyards in Richmond, California, and Portland, Oregon, took the most progressive approach to the problem of childcare for employees. They developed daycare facilities at their work sites. The company subsidized nursery schools for 7,000 children of their female workers to assess the theories of child care development in the new field of *psychological study*. Henry Kaiser, president of the company summoned prominent leaders in the field of child development to create “ideal” facilities and programs. This innovation allowed his employees to build his ships without worry of the safety of their children. The nursery schools also employed a nutritionist who explained, “Food influences behavior. Small children . . . have pounded into us in unforgettable ways that hungry people are irritable.” Chief nutritionist, Miriam Lowenberg added, “The nursery school helps teachers . . . bring the child who needs medical care to the attention of a visiting nurse or doctor.”²¹⁵ The Kaiser Childcare Centers collected indispensable research that greatly aided and advanced the study of early childhood education for decades after the war.²¹⁶

The Richmond, California, area was home to approximately thirty-five nursery school units during World War II. The United States Maritime Commission funded and constructed the Maritime Child Development Center which was part of a larger complex that encompassed housing, an elementary school, and a fire house. The housing was

²¹⁴ Cohen, “Who Took Care of Rosie the Riveter’s Kids?”... (Accessed May 14, 2016).

²¹⁵ Ginny McPortland, *Promise of jobs attracts wartime workers to West Coast shipyards*. Coast Shipyards, A History of Total Health, Kaiser Permanente. <http://kaiserpermanentehistory.org/tag/west-coast-shipyards/> (Accessed March 25, 2017).

²¹⁶ McPortland, *Promise of jobs attracts wartime workers to West Coast shipyards*. (Accessed March 25, 2017).

temporary and demolished after the war, but other buildings remain. The local school district operated the Development Center and staffed nutritionists, psychiatrists, and certified teachers. It supervised 180 children a day. As 24,500 women filled the Kaiser payroll, the citywide child-care programs sustained 1,400 children. The programs sponsored by the Kaiser Shipyards earned a reputation for innovation and quality care of the children. The Maritime Child Development Center continues to function as a premier service provider, nearly six decades after the war.²¹⁷

Even with industry and government attempts to create child care options, the most pressing problem facing women shipyard workers, however, was still their children's care. Employers indicated that the rate of female absenteeism in their plants was a direct result of the lack of safe and affordable child care options. Most industries did not provide child care facilities, and many women worked while their husbands served. By June 1943, eight nurseries had opened in Mobile with the idea that four more would be constructed.²¹⁸ Congress provided \$2 million dollars for housing that included segregated housing and day care for children of war workers in that city.

The city of Mobile, Alabama, wrestled with the recent realities of newcomers who were escaping rural poverty and looking for opportunities to improve their existence. Life was near impossible for the new residents and their search to find basic needs like childcare. Instead of understanding that the war caused this new reality, the Mobilians, for example blamed the newcomers for the alteration of their once staid society.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Rosie the Riveter Trust. <http://www.rosietheriveter.org/visit-discussion/park-sites/item/50-maritime-chi> (Accessed July 26, 2017).

²¹⁸ Susan M. Hartmann, "The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 70, no.3 (December 1983), 720.

²¹⁹ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 14.

Congestion in cities caused an increased demand on city services. Recent workers, unaccustomed to the pace of hourly labor, unsure of locations, and unfamiliar with the hustle and bustle of city life, moved from farms to towns, seeking higher-paying jobs, adding to the frenzy.²²⁰

As women employees increased, the public-school system in Mobile created a daycare program to assist young mothers. Additionally, they offered daycare for grade school children at the Yerby School on Conti Street and the Oakdale School on South Washington Street. Children belonged to “The Early Bird Club” at the Yerby School because they arrived at 6:30 a.m. Workers first fed the children breakfast, then they washed and combed their hair, cleaned their nails, and prepared for school. This expanded service was available for children from the first through seventh grades for the cost of \$2 dollars a week. There were four other nursery schools and kindergartens in the Mobile area for white children and two for black children.²²¹ As summer drew near, day camps became available for the working mothers at the Yerby School and the Brookley Theatre. They opened at 6:30 a.m. and closed at 6:00 p.m. Children received snacks mid-morning and mid-afternoon and a hot lunch at noon. They were also given instruction in handcrafts. The enrollment fees were \$3 a week for one child; \$5 a week for two children, and \$6 a week for three. Information concerning the schools was available at the Women’s Counseling Service in the Employees Services building.²²² By war’s end, eleven nurseries and kindergartens functioned in Mobile under the auspices of

²²⁰ Pete Daniel, “Southern Reactions to World War II,” *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 3 (December 1990): 895, 899.

²²¹ Doyle Leale McCall Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of South Alabama, File 6. Fore & Aft, May 26, 1944. *Day Camps to Open For Children. Nursery Schools Contribute Much Assistance To Work Of Alabama Shipyard And Other War Industries in Mobile.*

²²² Fore & Aft, May 26, 1944, 6. *Day Camps to Open For Children Here.*

the Lanham Act Funds. The Lanham Community Facilities Act further enhanced local endeavors, and the Board of School Commissioners administered it.²²³ Other businesses offered services for school-age children before and after school and on Saturdays.

However, child care centers were never fully utilized for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the conditions at the centers were not clean, and other times the food choices were inadequate. Women also chose to leave their children with family members. While waiting for a bus, in Charleston, South Carolina, some women were told by local protesters that they should be at home caring for their children and performing their motherly duties; this only embarrassed the women and stressed them more. Other women felt that by utilizing these child care centers, they were receiving a government handout. As historian Susan Hartmann pointed out, “Given a public consensus that working mothers were at best a necessary evil and that children were better off with individual nurturing, women’s resistance to group care is not surprising.”²²⁴ Women and the nation grappled with these new realities caused by the war and the needs of industry for workers. The availability of childcare was unevenly distributed across the nation.

In conjunction with the Department of War Emergency Children’s Services, Andrew Higgins, president of Higgins Boats urged all his female employees to utilize the childcare services in the city of New Orleans. The centers offered care for children from two to six years old for fifty cents per day. They also extended care for before and after school services for children up to fourteen years of age for twenty-five cents a day. The centers were manned by teachers and dieticians. The company also conveniently located four centers in the city, three for white children and one for black children. The company

²²³ Nancy Cott, *History of Women in the United States* (New Providence: K.G. Saur, 1993), 477.

²²⁴ Hartmann, “*The Home Front and Beyond*,” 85.

located one center in the administration building of the Higgins housing units between the old and new Gentilly highways. It was open 24 hour a day. Higgins created another facility in Shipyard Homes, a public housing project in 1943 to house employees. Outside of the Higgins plant on the Industrial Canal, the company built a community called Ourtown. Here he constructed the Higgins Little Red School House for the children of its 750 residents. Higgins also opened the Higgins Hospital and Clinic across the street from the City Park Plant. It boasted the arrival of X-ray machines, the most modern electric therapeutic devises, physicians, dentists and nurses, and 24-hour operations for employees and company officials.²²⁵ As working women moved into the public spheres of American life and began to find purchase in civic engagement, legislatures took steps to include them in the daily functions of their towns and cities across the nation. Unfortunately, few answers were apparent for dealing with shortages of goods and services.

In addition to work, housing, and childcare disruptions, daily life was also completely changed by the wartime experience. American workers faced another dilemma during World War II. They found new prosperity as the war energized the economy, but shortages of many goods and services thwarted their desires. Nell Young recounted the hard times of war and the need to economize on everything. They collected scraps, cans, and little pieces of wire and rubber tires or tubes. She asked, “What do you do without elastic in your panties?” She replied that they used buttons to hold up their underwear because elastic was needed by the Air Force. She laughed and said that one day as two girls were walking down the street, one girl’s button popped and

²²⁵ Strahan. *Andrew Jackson Higgins*, 96.

her panties just hit the sidewalk. She placed her foot in the panties on the ground and kicked them up, caught them and put them in her purse and just kept going, never missing a step. Nell told the story to her mother and asked what could be done to prevent this problem from reoccurring? Her mother made a strip of string, ran it through the waistband to tie a knot, and the panties could not fall down. Young added slyly during her interview that now it would happen, “Only if you wanted them to come down.”²²⁶ From bubble gum to underwear, the war reached into the everyday lives of Americans.

The war also reached into American life around every corner, and the dining room tables of America were no exceptions. The government-rationed foods affected the eating habits of people across the country. Americans had little control over what they ate and when they ate due to rationing of foods. While ration coupons expired on some items, families had to continue to eat other goods as time ran out on the coupon period. For example, meat was in high demand and short supply. Therefore, meat consumption plummeted. The government issued guidelines for meatless Mondays and wheatless Wednesdays.²²⁷ Many pet owners, unable to buy meat to feed their animals, abandoned their pets causing animal control problems. Clothes also reflected the continuing hardships of the war as zippers disappeared, and hemlines receded. College officials shortened terms, and Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and the new American Youth Reserves conducted scrap drives. Yearlong Daylight Savings Time went into effect; employers

²²⁶ Nell Young. Interview by Elizabeth Hemmerdinger, June 25, 2010, *The Real Rosie the Riveter Project*, for the Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/5dv41pbv> (Accessed July 27, 2016).

²²⁷ Laura Schumm, “Food Rationing in Wartime America,” history.com, A+E Networks, Corp. <http://www.history.com/news/hungru-history/food-rationing-in-wartime-ame>. (Accessed February 25, 2017).

staggered shift times, night time job training ensued, and car pools held riders hostage to the shift schedules of the drivers. Swing shifts disrupted the normal patterns of family life as children were encouraged to be quiet or play somewhere else during the afternoon hours while their parents attempted to catch some shut-eye. Other subtler changes occurred around the country.

The war changed the world of women, and it affected the lives of the children of the nation. Dot Chastney of Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, was entering the third grade when she noticed that the world around her altered in very fundamental ways. She heard her parents talking about her friend Annie, and how she was having difficulty returning from her trip to Ireland. Restrictions enacted by the German Nationalist Party and submarine warfare made international travel almost impossible. Annie more than likely never returned to Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey. Chastney remembered, “I couldn’t quite figure out what was going on, but I knew there was a problem.”²²⁸ Chastney was most disturbed that bicycles were difficult to acquire. Her father had promised to replace her three-wheeled bicycle with a new two-wheel edition, but an article in a magazine stated, “Bicycles were rapidly approaching the exit of life-as-usual.” In an article in the *Delta Democrat* in 1942, the author explained the necessity of bicycles for transportation for work. Employees, officers, agents and voluntary workers, traveling to the Washington County War Price and Rationing Board used bikes.²²⁹ *Business Week* published a list of things that once were staples of American life, but became casualties of war. The seemingly endless register contained items such as toasters, waffle irons,

²²⁸ Campbell. “Wives, Workers and Womanhood, 1.

²²⁹ Newspapers.com. *The Delta Democrat-Times*, Greenville, Mississippi, July 21, 1942, 5. “Applications Now Being Received For Bike Rationing.” [http://www.newspapers.com/search/#Ind=1&ynd=1942-07-21&query=July+21%](http://www.newspapers.com/search/#Ind=1&ynd=1942-07-21&query=July+21%21). (Accessed April 2, 2016).

flashlights, batteries, zippers, tea, toys, vacuum cleaners, bicycles, and vending machines. Chastney's favorite bubble gum no longer contained chicle, the natural tree gum that made it chewable. She explained, "It had a grainy texture and my tongue would go right through it when I tried to blow bubbles."²³⁰ The childhood treat of the country was now reduced to grainy unpleasantness. Dot Chastney and many more children in the country would have to wait much longer for bicycles to be available again.

Children became an important part of the war-effort too. The collection of scrap metal was essential for the war effort, and the Office of Civilian Defense called on American families to become "fighting units on the home front." Manufacturers used scrap metals to create armaments, and in Mobile, Alabama, the citizens collected twenty-two million pounds in one year. Children proved to be the most enthusiastic collectors. They gathered and smashed cans, cut common milkweed plants for the manufacture of safety vests, amassed tires for rubber drives, and bought stamps instead of candy and treats to assist the bond drives. The children felt they were contributing to the war effort by filling their Radio Flyer wagons with every precious item they could unearth.²³¹ When the children were older, they helped in other ways, like joining the Junior Red Cross and the American Youth Reserves. Junior Red Cross membership, including males and females, grew to almost 20 million during World War II.

All Americans were reminded in great and small ways that life as they had once known it was no longer the same. Industries now manufactured lunchboxes made of

²³⁰ Coleman, *Rosie the Riveter*, 8.

²³¹ WETA, Washington, D.C., and American Lives II Film Project, September 2007. www.pbs.org/thewar//search_home.htm (Accessed May 12, 2016).

fiberboard and stamped them with, “Customary use of metal for your lunchbox has been forbidden . . . as steel is needed for war materials.” Other commodities became critical to the war effort. One pound of waste fat contained enough glycerin to create a pound of black powder for bullets. Nylon could be utilized for parachutes and towropes for glider planes. An old shovel could be converted into four grenades, and 12,000 razor blades could produce a 2,000-pound bomb. Dot Chastney remembered that “Life was absolutely consumed by the war. And if anyone forgot, they always had someone around to remind them.”²³²

American housewives had little faith in the rationing system as one week’s worth of potatoes would vanish from store shelves only to be followed the next week with a glut of the ubiquitous spuds. They further disliked the idea that commercial bakeries received a preference for the distribution of sugar. This forced them to rely on store bought cakes, thus depriving them of the simple pleasure of baking. In the autumn of 1944, eggs disappeared from shelves, yet reappeared the next spring with more than could be comfortably consumed. European nations endured far greater food shortages than Americans, but for Americans the rationing was disquieting and inopportune.²³³

Due to rationing of materials deemed essential for war, non-food items such as razors and stockings were also impossible to obtain. These materials continued to be essential to women, still trying to maintain a level of femininity. Some women in Maine resorted to sandpapering the hair off of their legs and coating their limbs with pancake makeup. Then they drew faux stocking seams with their eyebrow pencils. Less use of

²³² Coleman, *Rosie the Riveter*, 8, 14.

²³³ Madeline Crum, *How World War II Changed The Way Americans Ate*. *The Huffington Post*. Excerpted from Lizzie Collingham’s “The Taste of War.” (Accessed June 20, 2017).

facial makeup usage became necessary. The components turned out to be essential war materials. Women acquiesced to most of the requirements; however, they refused to relinquish their tubes of lipstick.²³⁴ And American men wanted their red meat.

Americans displayed the most frustration around the inability to acquire red meat. Red meat was the working man's best source of energy, and its inclusion on the dinner plate exemplified the "proper meal." Women used "stretchers" like bread crumbs to make the meat last longer, and the government produced recipes to make leftovers more inviting. It was during the Great Depression that meatloaf became popular as housewives stretched cheap meat cuts with oats, breadcrumbs, and other starches. Meatloaf became very popular also during World War II. "Penny Prudence" was a fictional newspaper celebrity chef who politely offered housewives practical recipes and food tips. She promoted a version of meatloaf called "Vitality Loaf." She suggested formulations that provided as much nutrition as possible for the dinner tables of American housewives. The recipe included onion, parsley, ground beef, veal or pork, wheat germ, oatmeal, one egg, evaporated milk, salt and pepper, sage, celery salt, and chili sauce. Vegetarian alternatives also became obtainable as rations reduced the availability of meat. Marian Manners, another popular celebrity chef, and Penny created popular weekly cooking classes, radio programs and weekly columns to assist women with their recipes and deliver cooking advice.

Doris Ladd recounted her memories of the scarcity of food in Bath, Maine. She recalled:

²³⁴ Maine Historical Society, "Maine History Online, 1920-1945, Countryside at Midcentury," 2000-2010, <http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/907/page/1318/print> (Accessed June 21, 2016), 2.

“So many people came to work in the shipyards that meat, milk, and gasoline was scarce.”²³⁵ Helen Studer worked as a welder at the Douglas Aircraft Factory in California. She recollected the friendly woman at the grocery store who dropped items into her grocery bag that she had not bought. She remarked:

When I’d get home, I’d have three or four things in there that wasn’t said out loud. I’d have a carton of cigarettes. . . . There might have been a couple of pounds of oleo or there may have been five pounds of sugar. I never knew what I was going to get. The city of Augusta, Maine, allowed people to create victory gardens three or four miles outside of town. They did so much canning that they held canning bees. She further described the wardens checking homes during the blackouts and the need to work three shifts.²³⁶

During the war, advertisers created a vision of victory that included the amenities for which Americans had been deprived. Norman Rockwell produced paintings that were emblematic of the American way of life—families at prayer, parents lovingly caring for children, and the family around dinner tables abundantly appointed with food.

In contrast to Rockwell’s American scenes, in October 1944, soldier Phil Aquila wrote a letter to his sister. He was part of a large and mostly poor Italian family in New York with nine children. Every summer his mother would take the children to the farms in upstate New York to harvest vegetable crops. He wrote:

I hope by now Ma’s finished canning, although she still can buy a lot of stuff at the market of Bailey & Clinton Streets to can if she feels she needs more food this winter. Yep, people in this country are sure lucky, to be able to stock up as much food as they want. That’s what us guys are fighting for, so tell Ma to stock up.²³⁷

After the end of the war, Americans were encouraged to purchase without restraint. The government hoped that this behavior would prevent a post-war economic slump. In some rural areas, rationing was not as major a concern.

²³⁵ Doris Ladd interview. Interview by Rita Breton. Brewster, ME. May 30, 1981.

²³⁶ Doris Ladd interview.

²³⁷ Crum. *How World War II Changed The Way Americans Ate*.

Some living in rural areas had the ability to supplement their diets in spite of rationing. Jackie McCarthy explained that she made about \$85 per week in a Portland, Maine, shipyard. She and others considered that really “big” money after the Depression years. She said that rationing was not too bad, and her grandfather would go out into the surrounding woods and pick berries and cranberries for her mother to preserve. She stated that it was a real treat to have jelly on her mother’s big fluffy biscuits and cranberry pies with lattice work crust on top. They would hunt for deer in and out of season. The family grew melons in the garden and bought bushels of sale-priced oranges. They rented their home from an individual who had apple trees, and they were permitted to pick the bruised fruit that fell to the ground. Her mother would then cook and can apples, beets, pickles, string beans, turnips, and carrots. She also made beautiful homemade bread.²³⁸ Roughly 60 percent of American families, like the McCarthy’s, planted gardens producing more than eight million tons of food each year. This not only helped the average family, but reduced the burden on American food suppliers.²³⁹ Like food, transportation was another obstacle for Americans.

In 1943, Congress passed a public law authorizing the Navy to lease buses to plants with Navy contracts, so in March, thirty-seven buses arrived at the Bath, Maine Shipyard to supplement the transportation initiatives of Bath Iron Works. Many times in the mud and snow of Maine, horse teams, oxen, farm tractors, snow plows and tow trucks had to pull these busses out of the winter slush. Nonetheless, the service to the employees continued until the end of the war. This important employee benefit traveled 2,972,933

²³⁸ Jackie McCarthy interview. Interviewed by Rita M. Breton, Bangor, ME. March 3, 1982.

²³⁹ Christopher Tassava “The American Economy during World War II”. EH.Net Encyclopedia, ed. by Robert Whaples. February 10, 2008. URL <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-american-economy-during-world-war-ii/> (Accessed Marh 28, 2017).

miles and, carried 1,218,676 passengers. The bus operation additionally managed a full-service garage in a downtown building, the former site of a car dealership. Mechanics maintained the busses with tire recapping, engine repairs, and cold weather modifications. Other workers manufactured scarce parts in the shipyard machine shops. This vital amenity contributed greatly to Bath's key role in World War II destroyer production.²⁴⁰

Management at the Bath Shipyards fostered a family atmosphere, and the company organized annual picnics and field days that were attended by 60-80 percent of the employees and their families. The attendees enjoyed skeet shooting, three-legged races, band concerts, and food. The box dinners included half a chicken, lobster, boiled eggs, potato chips, pickles, hardtack, and coffee, paid for by the company. The president of the company felt it was essential to build a sense of common purpose to meet the production goals needed for the war effort.²⁴¹ His efforts bore fruit according to historian Ralph Snow, "as the shipyard in four years built 274 ships--more than a good-sized commercial shipyard could expect to produce in three decades of operation." That success was partly due to the determined Mainers and Pete Newell as he led his shipbuilders from the original Bath Iron Works.²⁴²

Additionally, the company produced a semi-monthly newspaper, *The Bulletin*. All employees received the newspaper and the company mailed it to those in military service. The paper promoted a sense of the Bath Iron Works (BIW) "family." It touted bond rallies and award ceremonies, local announcements, and the arrival of Hollywood

²⁴⁰ Snow, *Bath Iron Works*, 322-323.

²⁴¹ Snow, *Bath Iron Works*, 324.

²⁴² Snow, *Bath Iron Works*, 386.

celebrities, urging employees to support the war effort with their hard work. Bath also purchased a nearby vacant church for \$15,000 for a company recreation center. Boxing matches were the most popular event. Officials also established a Labor-Management Committee to speed up production, to increase morale, to offer suggestions, and to foster departmental cooperation. The company paid \$5,000 a year to any employee for cost saving ideas. In 1941, the employees voted to join the Independent Brotherhood of Shipyard Workers, and the relationship between the union and management remained cordial. Not all work places were as accommodating as Bath Iron Works.

Commandant Thomas Withers oversaw the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Navy Yard and enjoyed wartime emergency powers, which allowed him to fire workers at will. The employees also were not permitted to go on strike and there was no union. Fred White was a rigger at the yard. Riggers lifted and moved large and heavy objects while operating cranes, derricks, or chain hoists. He offered, “There were some deadheads and rummies around, but very few.”²⁴³ White included no women in this colorful description. Other regions addressed social problems on a more personal level as local issues bubbled up.

In small communities around New Orleans, members of the First Baptist Church of Ashland and the Women’s Missionary Union of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Winnfield called for the prohibition of intoxicating liquors. They protested the use of rationed sugar in the production of alcohol. All over Louisiana, cities reduced garbage pick-ups, stores no longer delivered packages, dairies cut the number of deliveries, and beer drinkers bought only quart bottles of their favorite beverage. This move reduced the number of

²⁴³ Winslow, *Portsmouth-Built*, 85.

metal bottle caps manufactured for civilian use. The Office of Price Administration allowed bakers to stop slicing bread in an effort to offset the price increases in the purchase of wheat. This created a new problem as many residents had donated their bread knives to scrap drives. The problem lasted from January to March 1941 when federal officials permitted bakeries to slice the bread again, announcing they had not realized the expected savings.²⁴⁴

In Orleans Parish, the School Board cancelled all public nighttime activities. This was an effort to avoid interfering with blackout requirements. Consumers quickly emptied hardware store shelves of their supplies of flashlights and candles. Next, local gun stores experienced a run-on guns and ammunition because citizens feared for their safety during curfews and black-out requirements.²⁴⁵ Many times the actions of governments, local and federal produced unintended consequences.

The United States government encouraged businesses to expand shopping hours and to initiate prepared, ready to eat, food services. In July 1942, stores in Birmingham, Alabama, remained open until 9:00 P.M. on Mondays and until 6:00 P.M. on all other days to accommodate women workers. These new hours allowed women to shop at later times, and eased transportation congestion. Mobile was slower than Birmingham to eschew tradition, but by April 1943, merchants began to stay open later in that city. The retail stores, public utilities, barber shops, and other service providers altered their hours, but banks, drugstores, laundries, and dry cleaners retained their old timetables. Laundries

²⁴⁴ Michael Suede, "The 1943 ban on sliced bread." *The Libertarian News*, March 27, 2012. <https://www.libertariannews.org/2012/03/27/the-1943-u-s-ban-on-sliced-bread/> (Accessed March 2, 2016).

²⁴⁵ Jerry Purvis Sanson, *Louisiana During World War II: Politics and Society, 1939-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 254.

had difficulty obtaining chlorinated solvents to perform their operations so flexibility of schedules became difficult. Banks competed with defense industries for female employees. Laundries were unable to retain black women as they were moving into domestic jobs left open by upwardly mobile white women. Pharmacists were not exempted from the draft, thus, 15 percent of drug stores in America closed because of a lack of male employees. The remaining stores operated with shorter hours due to the manpower shortages.²⁴⁶ The alteration of business hours created a positive benefit in increased sales volume for retailers and a decrease in absenteeism for other businesses.

The United States Employment Services affirmed that the change of the business schedules resulted in a 12 to 9 percent decrease in absenteeism because of the expanded hours of most local businesses. The merchants also welcomed the new hours as people now had more time to shop, and profits increased for the store owners.²⁴⁷ With these changes, women workers were better able to provide for their families while meeting the responsibilities of their workplaces and the nation.

During World War II, an overwhelming population growth beset the city of Pascagoula, Mississippi, with shortages in housing, insufficient sewerage and garbage collection, and excessive numbers of school students, just as in other war boom cities. These problems marched in tandem with national shortages of meat, gas, tires, cigarettes, and footwear. The area also experienced exorbitant rental prices and extended waits at

²⁴⁶ Dennis B. Worthen, *Pharmacy in World War II* (New York: Pharmaceutical Products Press, 2004), 93-100.

²⁴⁷ Thomas. *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie*, 65-67.

lunch counters. Local municipalities struggled to meet the needs and find the funds to pay for school expansions and road improvements.²⁴⁸

Transportation problems created many challenges for women across the nation. Public transportation was sporadic, cars were expensive to maintain, and parts and tires were difficult to obtain. Many women resorted to all means of transportation. In response, the December 22, 1942, edition of the *Tuscaloosa News* featured an article from the doyenne of etiquette, Emily Post. She concluded in a letter to the Office of War Information that it was both proper and patriotic for women defense workers to thumb a ride to and from work. However bold this pronouncement was, it came with rules. She explained that it would be ‘derigeur’ if the girls displayed their defense plant identification badges rather than to cock a feminine thumb and bellow, “Going my way, bud?” or to wait for rides only at trolley or bus stops. Conversation should also remain impersonal, and women should not discuss their work at the defense plant. Post explained that she wrote this letter due to her “admiration for the way women have rallied to the war effort.”²⁴⁹ Again, women pushed the gendered boundaries of propriety to aid in the war work and find agency in these new and dynamic times of change. Attendance at work was critical, and transportation was an essential component of their daily existence.

Doris Ladd recounted how people used to commute from Augusta, using car pools. The roads were not in very good condition, and this made traveling difficult. The city allowed people to create victory gardens three or four miles outside of town. They

²⁴⁸ Richard Aubrey McLemore, ed. *A History of Mississippi* (Hattiesburg: University & College Press of Mississippi, 1973) 123-129.

²⁴⁹ Emily Post, “Girls, You May Thumb Rides,” *The Battle Creek Enquirer*, December 22, 1942. <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/211608180/> (Accessed April 7, 2016).

did so much canning that they held canning bees. She further described how wardens checked homes during the blackouts and the need to work three shifts. She stated, “The welders got a lot more pay than the teachers.”²⁵⁰ This demonstrated the fact that since most teachers were women, they were paid less than their male counterparts. Even though they received higher salaries in the shipyards, overall women were still being paid less than men at most war production facilities. As the war continued, cities across the nation experienced great change.

The city of Orange, Texas, had a shipbuilding infrastructure before the onset of World War II. In 1914, the population was 7,000. Within months of the onset of World War II, the steel fabricator Consolidated Western Steel Corporation built a shipyard and Levingston and Weaver companies expanded their shipbuilding operations. Thousands of people descended on the area, and production ensued around the clock. The shipyard lights illuminated the burgeoning city as people moved about twenty-four hours a day. Young boys sold papers and shoe shines at the shipyard gates as each shift changed. Service providers could not keep up with the demands for groceries, barbershops, auto repair shops, cleaners and shoe repairs. The once tiny town of Orange, Texas, was tiny no more, boasting a population of 60,000.²⁵¹ But, as the cities grew around the country, women workers were imagining lives outside of the workplace.

Wartime working women dreamed of prosperity and marriage, which had been difficult by the Depression, but they also realized the options of autonomous sexual lives outside of the confines of mates, families, or nosy neighbors. In her work *Rosie the*

²⁵⁰ Ladd interview.

²⁵¹ Ginger Mynatt, “Texas Stories: Orange’s World War II Shipbuilding Boom,” *Texas Co-op Magazine*, October 2011. <http://www.texascooppower.com/texas-stories/history/oranges-world-war-ii-shipbuilding-boom> (Accessed May 3, 2016).

Riveter Gets Married, Elaine Tyler May asserts that the ballads of the Glenn Miller and Guy Lombardo Bands embodied the longings of men and women separated by the war. The words of “Back Home for Keeps” succinctly relayed the feelings of so many during World War II:

Back home for keeps, yes that will be the day you’ll sweetly kiss the angry years away. Some things will have changed that much we knew from the start. We wanted them changed after all, that’s why were apart.

Back home with you, imagine what that means we’ll revel in the old familiar themes, and walk the quiet hillside while the world peacefully sleeps. In your welcome arms, I’ll be back home for keeps.²⁵²

Men hoped to recreate the picture of domestic happiness in a postwar world where women exemplified the home front values.²⁵³ However, women found themselves away from home, away from parental supervision, meeting people with varied cultures, and free to make independent decisions. Many women no longer attended Sunday morning services with their families as they worked on the Sabbath. At the same time, amid wartime fear and the scrutiny of women’s sexual behavior by societal constructs, female magnetism and desirability became normal for the sale of laundry soap, cosmetics, and troop morale. Advertisers used women’s sexuality to sell goods. This in turn created situations where women believed that having sexual relations out of a patriotic duty became acceptable for the war effort.²⁵⁴ World War II epitomized the “pin-up girls” in concert with an extraordinary exhibition of American women’s bodies. As movie stars

²⁵² Carmen Lombardo and Bob Russell, *Back Home for Keeps*, Decca Records, 18672 B, 1945. https://www.historyonthenet.com/authentichistory/1939-1945/3-music/13-Homecoming/19450223_Back_Home_For_Keeps-Guy_Lombardo-Kay_Armen.html (Accessed May 28, 2017).

²⁵³ Erenberg and Hirsch. *The War*, 8.

²⁵⁴ Melissa McEuen, “Women, Gender, and World War II” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (June 2016), <http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acr...> (Accessed July 26, 2017).

like Betty Grable and Rita Hayworth posed for racy photographs and calendars, conventional women copied the poses and sent the photographs to their guys in the military.²⁵⁵ The long separations from their mates were an added difficulty.

World War II also had negative consequences on the populace. Men and women, separated for long periods of time, experienced loneliness that took its toll. The rate of female alcoholism rose fivefold; arrests for female juvenile delinquency multiplied dramatically. Birthrates climbed for the first time in two decades; marriage rates increased, but divorce rates escalated.²⁵⁶ Numerous American couples imprudently rushed into wartime marriages. The American landscape was changing on all fronts. Some of the changes were not positive.

The changing demands of goods and essential services, coupled with the absence of men offered women new prospects and the enlargement of opportunities in work, and in voluntary services. Women gained greater recognition for their value as workers while fulfilling their dual responsibilities as workers and moms. However, these new-found assessments and opportunities were grounded in the idea of temporary wartime needs. By the end of the war, working women were confronting public opposition to their continued employment. They were instructed to return to the kitchens and surrender their jobs to the returning veterans. The influence of continuity had triumphed over change.²⁵⁷

This research has examined the intricacies of the lives of women. The mundane nature of the daily chores and questions that women faced when they left their homes and entered the work force, often overwhelmed them. Who would feed the children lunch?

²⁵⁵ McEuen, "Women, Gender, and World War II."

²⁵⁶ WETA, Public Television and Classical Music for the Greater Washington, D.C. and American Lives II Film Project, September 2007. <http://www.weta.org/about/productions> (Accessed June 4, 2016).

²⁵⁷ Thomas, *Riveting and Rationing*, 115, 121.

What would suffice for supper? Did the children get off to school? How can one focus on riveting while worrying about kids? Women had one foot in a professional, patriotic occupation extolled by the United States government, yet, one foot remained at home thinking about the babies. Women faced a multiplicity of challenges, demands, and opportunities while attempting to fulfill the central roles that had identified them as mothers and housewives for centuries. Government campaigns exhorted women to move into the wartime workforce, approximately 1.5 million out of 32 million women answered that call. Most women of that time did not enter the workforce for a career or because they had ambition, they entered because their country needed them. It was like helping your extended family. Women did not leave the workforce without a fight however, because they had enjoyed the work. However, they knew that the jobs belonged to the veterans.

The greatest changes in the labor force appeared in war related industries. Changes that rendered work easier for women, ultimately benefitted all workers. Safety equipment, smaller and lighter machinery, work breaks, and flexible scheduling all resulted when women entered the factories. Women of all ages performed their work requirements quite well; yet, they rarely saw advancement to more skilled or supervisory positions. Women also did not receive the same pay as men in most situations. Gender stereotyping was prevalent, and most Americans believed that men made the best executives, politicians, and welders. African Americans gained employment infrequently and when they did, they garnered the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs in the shipyards, tasks shunned by their white counterparts.

As the war dragged Americans out of the Depression, simultaneously, the roles and responsibilities of women mushroomed. They made decisions based on family needs, rationing, financial demands, work schedules, child care, and meal times. Women moved distances near and far to find the means to support their families and fulfill their civic duties during World War II. They gained immeasurable experience during this time, and that experience helped them to find their path to empowerment in the 1950s and 1960s.

During the war, nuclear families remained intact, marriage and fertility multiplied, and the value of motherhood intensified. But quickly, the familiar limits of “free choice” for women closed the door on those opportunities. Two months after the end of the war, 800,000 women were terminated from aircraft companies. By November of 1946, more than 2 million women were abruptly fired from their positions in wartime industries. Women had stepped into the breach. They had performed their jobs beyond the expectations of the naysayers. They had a major role in saving democracy in the world. Yet, they were informed that they were taking jobs from men returning home from war. They were told their participation lowered wages and weakened the economy. Go home and have babies. The loss of jobs was partly a function of the closing of war related industries, but also because of ideology. The country felt it was time for women to go back home. The country needed a return to normalcy.

American society was not configured to accommodate the needs of working women during the war. Mothers were particularly hard pressed to juggle the duality of their daily existence in the work site and in the home. The War Manpower Commission did not encourage women with children to enter the work force until the need for more

workers became critical. Initially, there was little organized day care available in the country.

The long-term residue of World War II can be seen in the employment numbers of women in the 1950s. The numbers increase strongly. Women learned that working was a good thing. They also learned that they could complete wage work and blend the needs of family life. They determined that they could realize satisfaction from work, and a type of contribution that they did not foresee before the war. As economic pressures intensified during the 1950s, women were not reluctant to return to the work force, they had a desire to do so. The experiences of women in World War II laid the foundation for the future evolution of the women's movement. You can't put the toothpaste back in the tube.

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