

5-2022

What Happened to Rosie the Riveter?: Media Portrayals of Women in the Workforce, 1942-1946

Vivienne Cookmeyer
The University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Journalism Studies Commons](#), and the [Mass Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cookmeyer, Vivienne, "What Happened to Rosie the Riveter?: Media Portrayals of Women in the Workforce, 1942-1946" (2022). *Honors Theses*. 846.
https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/846

This Honors College Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu, Jennie.Vance@usm.edu.

What Happened to Rosie the Riveter?:
Media Portrayals of Women in the Workforce, 1942-1946

by

Vivienne Cookmeyer

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

May 2022

Approved by:

David R. Davies, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor,
School of Communication

David R. Davies, Ph.D., Director,
School of Communication

Sabine Heinhorst, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

ABSTRACT

Rosie the Riveter is a common feminist icon; however, few people know what happened to the Rosies after the war. Due to the Veterans Preference Act, women lost their jobs and went back to their home lives, which is contrary to the belief that women were incorporated into the workforce after World War II. Many women were laid off and had to fight to keep their jobs, resort to stereotypical female work, or revert to the caretaker of the home. While these women struggled for equality, there was a sustained increase in the number of women in the workforce in the years after the war, but not to the degree that it was during the war.

This thesis also argues that African American women were not typically considered Rosies and it was found that African American women were often turned away from factory work up until near the end of the war. This scholarly writing uses primary sources to show that women joined the workforce as a duty to the country and the war effort and that some of the women did not want to continue their work after the war. Other women wanted to continue working and earning their wages.

Industry leaders had varying opinions on incorporating women into the workforce. Henry J. Kaiser, who owned shipyards, defended women and their needs in the workplace. Kaiser also had an internal industrial magazine for his workers, called *Bo's'n's Whistle* that portrayed women in shipyards as sexual beings, oddities, and helpless. Cartoons and advertisements in the magazine make fun of women to boost male worker morale.

This thesis includes numerous first-hand accounts of real Rosies from Oral Histories provided by the National World War II Museum and the New York Times

archives, including black women such as Betty Soskin. Soskin discusses the issues black women faced during the war. Fashion also took a turn during the war due to rationing and changing ideas of femininity. Women no longer needed heels and dresses, and instead needed overalls and work shirts.

After the war, most women wanted to continue working while men who had returned from the war returned to the role of being the providers of the family. Society was increasingly becoming middle class and the new American Dream was considered as white families shifted to neighborhoods in the suburbs and husbands got their college education, using the G.I. Bill. Women continued to work but transitioned to retail spaces and other more feminine industries as well as journalism and sales. While Rosie the Riveter helped women enter the workforce, equality in the workforce did not come until much later.

Keywords: Rosie the Riveter, women in the workforce, World War II, Henry J. Kaiser, Bo's'n's Whistle, wartime fashion

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| CHAPTER I: Introduction and Literature Review | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Research Questions & Methodology | 2 |
| Literature Review..... | 3 |
| Chapter Outline..... | 4 |
| CHAPTER II: Pre-War Concerns and the Build-Up to Rosie the Riveter | 6 |
| Who is Rosie the Riveter?..... | 6 |
| Opinions on Women in Industry..... | 8 |
| Female Masculinity..... | 12 |
| CHAPTER III: Women During the War | 15 |
| <i>Bo's'n's Whistle</i> : Kaiser's Industrial Magazine | 15 |
| Women as Oddities, Sexual Beings, and Helpless | 16 |
| African-American Rosies..... | 18 |
| Wartime, Rations, and Women's Fashion | 20 |
| The United Service Organization..... | 24 |
| CHAPTER IV: What Happened to Rosie After the War? | 25 |
| Women out of the Workplace..... | 25 |
| The New American Dream..... | 27 |
| Women's Desire to Work | 28 |

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Conclusion | 30 |
| APPENDIX A: Figures..... | 33 |
| REFERENCES | 39 |

CHAPTER I: Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

Since World War II, high school students across America have learned about Rosie the Riveter and the campaign for women to be incorporated into the work force. However, they were not taught about what happened to Rosie the Riveter after the war. They also are not taught about how working women were covered in media coverage and advertisements during that time, even though it played a major factor in gender roles as well as how the women were treated.

This thesis will explore the many overlooked aspects of American society as millions of American women entered the work force during World War II. Relying on press accounts of the period, the thesis will describe how industry adapted to the entry of women into American factories. The research conducted found that women were laid off and returned to their home lives, which is contrary to the belief that after WWII, women were incorporated into the workforce from the war. While many women were laid off, there was a sustained increase in the number of women in the workforce in the years after the war, but not to the degree that it was during the war.

This research primarily focuses on gender as well as the racial issues with surrounding women in the workforce. This thesis shows that African-American women were not typically considered Rosies and were often turned away until near the end of the war. Based on the analysis of primary sources, women joined the workforce as a duty to the country and the war effort and that many of the women did not want to continue their work after the war. Other women wanted to continue working and earning their own wages.

Research Questions & Methodology

To conduct this research, the following questions were asked:

- What happened to Rosie the Riveter during and after the war?
- How did the media portray women in the workplace during and after the war?
- According to this media coverage, what were the issues that women in the workplace faced at that time?
- How did men respond to the women in the workplace?
- Was the experience different for African American women during World War II?
- How did women during World War II change women today?

The research suggests that no other person has explored these questions through a media lens and first-hand accounts from women who lived through World War II. To answer these research questions, I looked at the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*, which is the standard reference to magazines and major newspapers for the 20th century. Afterward, the *Readers Guide* was cross-referenced my keywords and index items with what was found in the *New York Times* archives or *The Times Machine*. The keywords searched include: Rosie the Riveter, Henry J. Kaiser, women in the workforce, women in industry, and gender roles in World War II. My research also led me to a specialty publication for industry called *Bo's'n's Whistle*, which was included in a portion of my analysis. My study fixated on the dates between January 1, 1942 and December 31, 1946 when searching through the *Readers Guide* and the *New York Times* archive. This date range was chosen in order to look at women, their work, and the changing roles in society from the time the United States entered the war to the year after the war ended. Oral Histories provided by the National World War II Museum offered first-hand accounts

from women about their experiences during the war to compare it to what the media portrayed.

Literature Review

The goal of this thesis was to analyze primary sources during and after WWII as well as academic journals in relation to this topic and determine what happened to women in the workforce during and after the war. This thesis analyzes media sources such as newspapers and magazines from the period to support the argument and to focus on the mass communication perspective of the issue. Also, looking at primary sources from the World War II era gave insight into the general public's opinion and the general culture surrounding women in the workforce.

Many historians have studied issues relating to Rosie the Riveter and the changes women faced during World War II. Scholar Jane Marcellus studied Henry J. Kaiser and his magazine for his shipyard workers, *Bo's'n's Whistle*.¹ Marcellus goes into detail about what kind of content was included in the magazine and how it represented the women who worked in the shipyards. Scholars such as Andre J. Alves and Evan Roberts focused their research on the idea of Rosie the Riveter and what that meant for women during World War II.² Leonard E. Colvin focused on the issues that African-American women faced while they attempted to join the workforce.³

¹ Jane Marcellus, "Bo's'n's Whistle: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

² Andre J. Alves and Evan Roberts, "Rosie the Riveter's Job Market: Advertising for Women Workers in World War II, Los Angeles," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*.

³ Leonard E. Colvin, "Invisible Warriors' Documentary Pays Tribute to WWII Women Civilian Workers," *New Journal and Guide*, 3 March 2016.

This study seeks to add to this scholarship by considering Rosie the Riveter through the lens of media coverage in relation to all of these topics. There has been research on specific background information related to women in the workforce from this period, but there is little research based around media sources. This thesis will add a new and more accurate depiction of the women during that time and is more valuable since the research is based in primary sources rather than secondary knowledge. My research will add to this broad topic because there is no significant research on how women in the workforce were portrayed by the media during and after the war.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: This chapter outlines the overall thesis as well as the literature review. An outline of my research methods is mentioned in this chapter as well as a chapter outline.

Chapter 2: The second chapter will outline who Rosie the Riveter was and background information on the women that joined the workforce as a part of the war effort. It will explore the idea of female masculinity, or women showing typical masculine traits, which was formed when women began working. It also includes the opinions on women in industry, including Henry J. Kaiser, who owned shipyards and defended women and their needs in the workplace.

Chapter 3: The third chapter outlines the real Rosies and their stories from experiences during the war. Kaiser also had an internal industrial magazine for his workers, called *Bo's'n's Whistle*, that portrayed women in shipyards as sexual beings, oddities, and helpless. Cartoons and advertisements in the magazine make fun of women and attempted to boost male worker morale. There are numerous first-hand accounts from real Rosies in this chapter, including black women such as Betty Soskin. Soskin discusses

the issues black women faced during the war. Fashion also took a turn during the war due to rationing and changing ideas of femininity. Women no longer needed heels and dresses, and instead needed overalls and work shirts.

Chapter 4: The last chapter focuses on the issues after the war. Most women wanted to continue working, but men wanted their jobs back because the men were considered the providers of the family. Society was increasingly becoming middle class and the new American Dream was created as white families shifted to neighborhoods in the suburbs and husbands got their college education, using the G.I. Bill. Women continued to work but transitioned to retail spaces and other more feminine industries as well as journalism and sales.

CHAPTER II: Pre-War Concerns and the Build-Up to Rosie the Riveter

Rosie the Riveter is well known in most households, but not many know much about what happened to the real Rosies during and after the war. Henry J. Kaiser was an industry leader and played an influential role in the transition to having women in the workforce.

This chapter will cover the concerns that American society had and the history leading up to Rosie the Riveter and the iconic “We Can Do It!” poster. This chapter will also discuss the opinions held by women and industry leaders as well as the idea of female masculinity and how it was created with the introduction of women into industry. The switch to wartime industry was difficult and unprecedented, but women joined the war effort anyway. This chapter will also describe the important role played by Henry J. Kaiser, who was an industry leader and played an influential role in the transition to having women in the workforce.

Who is Rosie the Riveter?

As the United States entered World War II, men were being shipped overseas by the thousands, leaving women to take off their aprons and start working. Before World War II, women stayed at home and took care of the children, while the men worked and provided for the family. These broad societal changes can be examined through the public image of Rosie the Riveter. The Rosie the Riveter propaganda poster (see Figure 1 in Appendix) showed a woman with a strong arm, makeup on, a uniform shirt, and her hair tied up. The poster was distributed by the War Production Coordination Committee and had the phrase “We Can Do It!” in bold white letters at the top. According to scholar

Leonard E. Colvin, once Americans joined the war, “Women were at home working in jobs men had to abandon, to produce the weapons and other materials the fighting men needed to achieve their mission.”⁴ Some women wanted to stay at work while others were working only for patriotic reasons. Because this was a significant change in women’s role in society, there were varying opinions across the United States.

Women lined up to work in the factories to join the war effort, and Rosie the Riveter was born. According to researcher Bruce Kauffmann, “The combination of female beauty and ‘can do it’ muscularity was what attracted both women and men to the Rosie image, making her one of the most iconic symbols of the war.”⁵ Rosie the Riveter was thousands of women in all different shapes, personalities, and races that worked together for the country and themselves. Historian Elaine Tyler May wrote, “The war emergency required the society to restructure itself and opened the way for the emancipation of women on an unprecedented scale.”⁶ Rosies trained and learned skills in a short time to bridge the gap that was created in the transition to wartime industry and the absence of male workers. One woman, Primrose “Pat” Robinson, worked for the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services) from 1943 to 1945. *Glamour* magazine did a profile on Robinson in 1944, and Robinson told the magazine, “I fully realize that winning the war is the most important thing in a girl’s life today.”⁷ These women, including Robinson, worked because they felt patriotic, but many also

⁴ Leonard E. Colvin, “Invisible Warriors’ Documentary Pays Tribute to WWII Women Civilian Workers,” *New Journal and Guide*, 3 March 2016.

⁵ Bruce Kauffmann, “After the end of WWII, Rosie the Riveter Retires,” *Telegraph Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 1 September 2019.

⁶ Jordan Pitt, “American Masculinity After World War II,” National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/american-masculinity-after-world-war-ii>, 23 July 2021.

⁷ Kim Guise, “Curator’s Choice: *Glamour* Goes to War,” National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/glamour-magazine-primrose-robinson>, 31 March 2021.

worked because they wanted to be more than a housewife. In 1943, the magazine *Glamour of Hollywood* recognized the importance of women in the workforce and changed its name to *Glamour: for the girl with the job*.⁸

At the peak of wartime production, two million women were working in war-related industries. Henry J. Kaiser was one of the first to have an integrated workforce in his shipyard with gender and race. He had three large shipyards in Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington. He also had an industrial magazine called *Bo's'n's Whistle* that was sent out to all of the shipyard workers.⁹ The magazine framed women as an oddity in the workplace. There were still some men working, so the magazine boosted the male workers' morale while urging women to go back home at the end of the war.¹⁰ This aligned with mainstream media as well, which made it seem as if women were working only because of the war, but many wanted to keep their jobs.

Opinions on Women in Industry

Kaiser was revolutionary in his shipyards because he also was the first to offer company-operated childcare for employees. A major concern of women working was that there was no one to watch their children. Kaiser told the *New York Times*, "I'm the one who believes that 50 percent of women now in war work will stay in industry after the war... Do you think women are not going to demand the right to stay in industry?"¹¹ Kaiser argued with members of Congress that the manpower problem would be improved

⁸ Kim Guise, "Curator's Choice: *Glamour* Goes to War," National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/glamour-magazine-primrose-robinson>, 31 March 2021.

⁹ Jane Marcellus, "*Bo's'n's Whistle*: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

¹⁰ Jane Marcellus, "*Bo's'n's Whistle*: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

¹¹ Lucy Greenbaum, "As Kaiser Sees It," *New York Times*, 31 October 1943, 13.

if proper childcare facilities were provided for women trying to work and that the government should provide those services. He also advocated for health clinics, shopping centers, banking, dry-cleaning, recreation, comfortable lockers, and women's restrooms for all of the Rosies.¹²

It was not a smooth transition for women to work in industry because they had no experience. On one hand, the American government was telling women "We Can Do It!" while on the other hand, nothing was provided for the women to make the transition into work manageable. There was no precedent set, so employers needed to train women quickly to pump out war production goods. The women also needed to undergo some training to perform skills because engineering and other industry jobs required complex math. As reporter Margaret Culkin Banning said in an article for the *New York Times*, "It is time for girls to get out the slide rules, time to study plane geometry, trigonometry, physics, chemistry."¹³

Banning also reported that the switch to women in labor needed order and structure just as the draft did. Essentially, the transition would not be smooth without a system in place. Women would need to adjust their personal lives, including childcare and clothing. They also needed to be properly trained to work in these positions. An example Banning cited was the struggle to switch to female workers in the aircraft industry on the West Coast. Operations had to continue 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but women needed to be trained first. Unfortunately, there was no precedent for the major shift in production and no precedent for female masculinity becoming the norm, so

¹² Lucy Greenbaum, "As Kaiser Sees It," *New York Times*, 31 October 1943, 13.

¹³ Margaret Culkin Banning, "Women Can Man Machines," *New York Times*, 10 May 1942, 12.

it was a rough transition.¹⁴ The turnover was high in industries due to the draft pulling men out of work and due to the better pay at other plants. This led National Industrial Conference Board executives to urge industries to deferments of essential workers and stabilize pay as well as turn to women for work.¹⁵ There was a concern across the nation that there would be a lack of highly trained men and a spike in unskilled female workers.

By the summer of 1942, women were working, and people were noticing that they could often do a better job than the men in many fields. In a *New York Times* article titled “Women Can Man Machines,” Banning wrote, “Of 623 operations in war industries, only 57 have been found unsuitable for women who have the training.”¹⁶ Women were working in sheet metal, processing, assembly, painting, welding, and more. Around 297,000 airplanes, 102,000 tanks, 372,000 artillery pieces, 88,000 warships, 44 billion small arms ammunition rounds, and 47 million tons of artillery ammunition were put together by Rosies across the United States.¹⁷

Tina Rongstad Falk is one example of the Rosies who wanted to work for the war and then go back home to care for their families. The American Rosie the Riveter Association was created in 1998 to honor the working women of World War II and is a 501c non-profit organization that focuses on carrying on the history of the Rosies.¹⁸ According to an ARRA article, Falk moved to Kansas City to become a riveter at the North American Aviation Company. She worked on a B25 bomber, drilling holes into the

¹⁴ Margaret Culkin Banning, “Women Can Man Machines,” *New York Times*, 10 May 1942, 12.

¹⁵ “Hire More Women, Industry is Urged,” *New York Times*, 1 October 1942, 20.

¹⁶ Margaret Culkin Banning, “Women Can Man Machines,” *New York Times*, 10 May 1942, 12.

¹⁷ “Rosie Facts,” American Rosie the Riveter Association, <https://rosietheriveter.net/the-founding-of-arra/rosie-facts/>, 22 April 2022.

¹⁸ “About: The Founding of American Rosie the Riveter Association,” American Rosie the Riveter Association, <https://rosietheriveter.net/the-founding-of-arra/>, 22 April 2022.

metal to put planes together. She said, “There were both night and day shifts. Security was tight. The work was very secret. To prevent sabotage or theft, they searched our pockets and lunch buckets morning and night, turning them inside out. There were no windows in the plant. They were worried that the enemy could fly over and bomb us. It was very urgent.” She worked for one and half years before she had to take care of her sick mother.¹⁹

Other women wanted to work, but in more traditional female roles. Rosalie Richardson moved to New Orleans with her brother when he went to work for Higgins Industries. She had gone to business college and took a job in the Higgins rationing department. Higgins Industries was a major factor in the U.S. victories during the war because of the boat it manufactured that could carry troops from ships to open beaches. According to the National World War II Museum website, “Andrew Jackson Higgins of New Orleans, who had been manufacturing shallow-water work boats to support oil and gas exploration in the Louisiana bayous, adapted his Eureka Boat to meet the military’s specifications for a landing craft.”²⁰ While this was not a typical “Rosie” job, Richardson was still helping the war effort. Her job was to give out ration coupons to the Higgins workers for various items such as gas, shoes, and tires. Because the workers were helping the war effort, they received more gas rations than other people. Richardson also managed to oversee the workers, making sure they were not lying to get more rations. She was one of the women who left work after the war and after she got married. In her

¹⁹ “Tina Rongstad Falk: Coffee, Cookies, and Conversation,” American Rosie the Riveter Association, <https://rosietheriveter.net/rosie-stories/tina-rongstad-falk-minnesota-and-kansas-city/>, 20 April 2022.

²⁰ “Higgins Industries,” The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/higgins-industries> , 20 April 2022.

oral history, she mentions being proud of her involvement in the war and being proud to obey the rules and quit when it was over.²¹

Female Masculinity

Rosie the Riveter was a propaganda icon created by the War Production Coordinating Committee, but what Americans did not realize is that Rosie the Riveter was much more than a propaganda tool once women began experiencing industry. Scholar Donna B. Knaff argued that “O.W.I [Office of War Information] campaigns to recruit women into the work force and the Women’s Auxiliary Corps challenged dominant ideas of womanhood while they attempted to alleviate fears of gender upheaval,” and female masculinity became a part of society.²² Female masculinity is a theory created by Judith Halberstam that argues “the notion that women are also producers of masculinity.”²³ Rosie the Riveter is depicted with a strong arm, which was typically depicted in males, but she also has a beautiful face and smile. This depiction allows society to think of women as more than just caretakers and babymakers, which also allows for a shift in what defines masculinity. Masculinity was redefined because men no longer had to be the provider of the house. Many women worked to support their families and the war but were still feminine. This idea was unthinkable pre-war because the dominant social expectation was that men – not women - were supposed to support and provide for their families.

²¹ Rosalie Richardson, interview by Joey Balfour, Oral History, America in World War II: Oral Histories and Personal Accounts, The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, 29 October 2021.

²² Donna B. Knaff, “Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of WWII in American Popular Graphic Art,” *The Journal of American History* (2013): 579-580.

²³ Donna B. Knaff, “Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of WWII in American Popular Graphic Art,” *The Journal of American History* (2013): 579-580.

Some Rosies were treated like they were dainty women who could not do a lot, while others had no special treatment. Two women, Brooksie Boyd and Harryette Petersen spoke to the *New York Times* about their experience as employees of the U.S. Army of Engineers. They were given fur-lined parkas, ski pants, ski boots, woolen house shoes and stockings, sleeping bags, and more from the army but had to live in an unheated room with no running water. They had to carry their clothes a mile away to do laundry and take a bath at the Public Roads Administration barracks. They eventually got moved to female civilian barracks, but they were not much better than their previous accommodations.²⁴ They were not coddled and rose to the occasion to help the engineers.

Three sisters joined the workforce together at the J. A. Jones Shipyard in Brunswick, Georgia. They were three of 1,000 women working at the shipyard and they helped launch some of the 85 Liberty Ships that were launched between March 1943 and March 1945.²⁵ One of the sisters, Nanelle Surrency, participated in the launch ceremony of the SS Randall Richard as a symbolic representation of all of the workers. The Brunswick population tripled because housing was built for shipyard workers, who came from all over the country. Another one of the sisters, Carobeth Surrency, said, “First I went to school for a week. Soon as I learned to tack, they put me out to tacking, and in a month, I was doing flat welding, vertical welding, and overhead welding.”²⁶ The ships were cheap and quick to build because they needed to be able to send materials and

²⁴ “Girls Brave Cold Helping Engineers get New Highway through Yukon,” *New York Times*, 16 June 1943, 18.

²⁵ Sandy White and Kim Campbell, “Ladies Who Launch: Women of the Brunswick Shipyard,” National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/women-of-the-j-a-jones-brunswick-shipyard>, 12 March 2021.

²⁶ Sandy White and Kim Campbell, “Ladies Who Launch: Women of the Brunswick Shipyard,” National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/women-of-the-j-a-jones-brunswick-shipyard>, 12 March 2021.

supplies to the Allies, so short training periods were put in place to continue the quick flow of production.²⁷

Often, women worked better when they were treated with respect and as equals to their male counterparts. In a *New York Times* article, public relations official William A. Simonds spoke for the Ford Willow Run bomber plants located in Michigan. He said, “Women in industry have mastered spot welding machines with the same proficiency they once displayed in handling vacuum cleaners, but they become flippant when kidded and less efficient when coddled.”²⁸ The foremen had learned that women were suited for detail work such as tinsmithing, locksmithing, plumbing, and cabinet making. These jobs required patience, sensitive fingers, and a delicate touch, which made women work better than men in these roles. The article also noted that half of the Rosies considered their jobs temporary while the other half wanted to continue working and get out of the kitchen.²⁹ The war offered an opportunity for women to be something more than caretakers and some industry leaders recognized that women did not need to be treated lesser than men at work.

²⁷ Sandy White and Kim Campbell, “Ladies Who Launch: Women of the Brunswick Shipyard,” National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/women-of-the-j-a-jones-brunswick-shipyard>, 12 March 2021.

²⁸ “Women in Industry Must Not Be Coddled or Kidded Ford Official Tells Engineers,” *New York Times*, 16 June 1943, 18.

²⁹ “Women in Industry Must Not Be Coddled or Kidded Ford Official Tells Engineers,” *New York Times*, 16 June 1943, 18.

CHAPTER III: Women During the War

As women entered the American workforce by the millions during World War II, they encountered resistance across society. Still, their presence forced American society to come to terms with rapidly changing gender roles.

This chapter focuses on women during the war and their experiences in the workforce. One magazine, *Bo's'n's Whistle*, offers insight into how women were represented in media as oddities, sexual beings, and helpless. There are also first-hand accounts from Rosies, including African-American women, who were not allowed to work in industry until later in the war. Because of rationing and the changing role of women, there were also drastic changes in fashion and this chapter will also describe those changes.

Bo's'n's Whistle: Kaiser's Industrial Magazine

Scholar Jane Marcellus analyzed Kaiser's internal magazine for shipyard workers, *Bo's'n's Whistle*. She noted that "framing women in sexual language and as oddities on male turf may have aimed at boosting male workers' morale."³⁰ The internal media and the mainstream propaganda portrayed Rosies as an oddity rather than a progressive change. The boost in male worker morale and negativity surrounding female workers ultimately led to many women leaving work after the war and reverting to caretaker roles. The relationship between Kaiser and the O.W.I. to gain shipbuilding contracts ultimately impacted the tone of *Bo's'n's Whistle*. The magazine aligned with general news outlet

³⁰ Jane Marcellus, "Bo's'n's Whistle: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

coverage because it did not want to portray men as less than women and, instead portrayed women as temporary help for the war cause.³¹

While Kaiser's industrial magazine was not progressive, his business was. His shipyards were the first to offer company-operated childcare for employees, which had been a necessity for many women trying to work.³² If women didn't have anyone to watch their children, then they could not work, even if they wanted to.

This was also a problem for women who wanted to join the service. One woman, Grace Thorpe, joined the aircraft assembly line at Ford Motor Company and enlisted into the Women's Auxiliary Corps after four months. She had no ties or obligations to tend to and said, "While some other woman, possibly one with a small child, could do my former job, but [she] would not be able to make the grade for enlistment."³³ Industry leaders such as Kaiser made it easier for mothers to come to work by providing childcare, but that was not necessarily the case for women who joined the military. Thorpe took it upon herself to continue helping the war effort in other ways, that women with children could not.

Women as Oddities, Sexual Beings, and Helpless

Kaiser and other industry leaders let women work due to necessity, not because of respect. Sexual segregation, sexual harassment, and racial discrimination were all issues that women faced. Industry leaders solidified the stereotype of women as sexual beings

³¹ Jane Marcellus, "Bo's'n's Whistle: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

³² Jane Marcellus, "Bo's'n's Whistle: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

³³ Chrissy Gregg, "Grace Thorpe: Rosie, WAC, and Activist," National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/grace-thorpe-rosie-wac-activist>, 13 November 2020.

by creating the “Miss Shipbuilder” contest and the “Boilermaker Beauties.”³⁴ According to Marcellus, “Jobs were ‘typed,’ with female workers concentrated in jobs requiring repetition or manual dexterity.”³⁵ The women were given simpler tasks because society thought they couldn’t work as well as men could. Marked language also became a norm to notate female workers, such as lady welders or painter-ettes because welders and other jobs had a masculine connotation.³⁶ Marked language changes the normal meaning of a word, so in this instance, the jobs became female jobs only when they were marked that way. Sexual segregation could also be seen in *Bo’s’n’s Whistle*, where articles targeted at female workers focused on how women needed counseling services while articles targeted at male workers focused on how men needed recreation such as sports to boost their morale.³⁷ This juxtaposition led to women increasingly looking helpless as a result of how they were portrayed in the media.

Kaiser was one of the first shipyards to have an integrated workforce. While this was a progressive notion, Kaiser’s in-house magazine, *Bo’s’n’s Whistle*, portrayed workplace discrimination. Marcellus noted that jobs were typed for all women, but black women were “barred from skilled work regardless of qualifications or training.”³⁸

Bo’s’n’s Whistle presented women as an oddity in the workplace. Cartoons often made

³⁴ Jane Marcellus, “*Bo’s’n’s Whistle*: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job,” *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

³⁵ Jane Marcellus, “*Bo’s’n’s Whistle*: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job,” *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

³⁶ Jane Marcellus, “*Bo’s’n’s Whistle*: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job,” *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

³⁷ Jane Marcellus, “*Bo’s’n’s Whistle*: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job,” *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

³⁸ Jane Marcellus, “*Bo’s’n’s Whistle*: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job,” *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

fun of women to bolster male workers' egos and applauded women for helping the men keep up morale and accept women working in industry. One example would be a cartoon found in the March 26, 1942, edition of *Bo's'n's Whistle* (see Figure 2 in Appendix). The cartoon shows numerous examples of women in the workplace injuring themselves, using equipment wrong, and complaining about tools. Women were not respected and that was evident in cartoons such as this one.

Cartoons also stereotyped women and suggested that they would be too concerned with their looks to do a man's job. An advertisement in *Bo's'n's Whistle* (see Figure 3 in Appendix) depicted a woman rushing back to the kitchen and caring for her kids.³⁹ Advertisements such as this one further stressed the idea that women were not fit for industry and were not there to stay.

African-American Rosies

Marcellus also discussed the racial discrimination that African-American women faced during the war. "Black women were barred from skilled work regardless of qualifications or training,"⁴⁰ she wrote. In some cases, black women were turned away entirely. At Kaiser's shipyard, black women didn't feel comfortable leaving their children at the daycare because out of 450 children, only three were black. While Kaiser's daycare was a progressive addition to the shipyard, the children and workers were still racist,

³⁹ Diane Simmons, "Rejection, Reception, and Rejection Again," Oregon Historical Society: 114.

⁴⁰ Jane Marcellus, "Bo's'n's Whistle: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job", *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

therefore black women felt that they couldn't use the service and even feared that their children would be ignored or mistreated.⁴¹

Scholar Leonard E. Colvin said that overall, "More than 600,000 African-American women left their jobs as domestics and sharecroppers to work, to build America's 'arsenal of democracy.'"⁴² Black women were part of the 20 million Rosies, but they were underrepresented. He said that "[w]artime recruitment posters and media have featured images exclusively of white women workers, completely ignoring the existence of African-American 'Rosies.'" Colvin noted that black women were "systemically omitted from the mainstream pages of history."⁴³

One African-American woman, Ruth Wilson, recounted her time as a Rosie. "They wanted us to work constantly... even during our lunch break," she said, "so I told them I was leaving." Wilson had trained at the Defense Training School at Bok Technical High School to be a sheet metal worker. After training, she helped build aircraft carriers. Wilson said, "We were down in the hole every day, and I was small enough to work in areas where men couldn't...I did something I never thought I would be doing as a woman."⁴⁴ Wilson had trained to work and did the work that men couldn't do to support the war. This was the case for many jobs taken on by women because they built physically and mentally different than men.

⁴¹ Jane Marcellus, "Bo's 'n's Whistle: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

⁴² Leonard E. Colvin, "Invisible Warriors' Documentary Pays Tribute to WWII Women Civilian Workers," *New Journal and Guide*, 3 March 2016.

⁴³ Leonard E. Colvin, "Invisible Warriors' Documentary Pays Tribute to WWII Women Civilian Workers," *New Journal and Guide*, 3 March 2016.

⁴⁴ Leonard E. Colvin, "Invisible Warriors' Documentary Pays Tribute to WWII Women Civilian Workers," *New Journal and Guide*, 3 March 2016.

Another African-American woman, Betty Soskin, said that Rosie the Riveter “was always a white woman’s story” and noted that black women were not allowed to be Rosies until 1944, near the end of the war.⁴⁵ Soskin said “black women were not freed or emancipated in the workforce. Unions were not racially integrated and wouldn’t be for a decade.”⁴⁶ Soskin was a file clerk for a segregated union. She said, “We paid dues, but didn’t have power or votes.” Soskin served as a park ranger at the Rosie the Riveter World War II Homefront National Historical Park in Richmond, California. She retired in April of 2022 at the age of 100 and said her voice was heard because she of her opportunity to work for a federal agency. ⁴⁷

Ida Mae Lawson was a black woman who worked at the Brunswick Shipyard, and she said, “I felt like I was helping when I was hired. African-American women were always hired to do harder work than the white women.”⁴⁸ Lawson’s job was to carry steel to the assembly line for the next days work. Many African-Americans were allowed into the workplace, but they typically worked the graveyard shift and had unskilled jobs that required more heavy lifting.

Wartime, Rations, and Women’s Fashion

Ultimately, women’s fashion also took a turn due to the war. The Function All Suit became the new feature garment that was easier to work in. The suit was fitted to female figures but had the functionality of a male suit. Due to rationing, the country had

⁴⁵ “Betty Soskin: A living monument to WWII History,” *The Washington Post*, 12 June 2015.

⁴⁶ “Betty Soskin: A living monument to WWII History,” *The Washington Post*, 12 June 2015.

⁴⁷ “Oldest US Active Park Ranger Retires at 100,” *Associated Press*, 1 April 2022, *The New York Post*, <https://nypost.com/2022/04/01/oldest-us-active-park-ranger-retires-at-100/>, 10 April 2022.

⁴⁸ Sandy White and Kim Campbell, “Ladies Who Launch: Women of the Brunswick Shipyard,” National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/women-of-the-j-a-jones-brunswick-shipyard>, 12 March 2021.

to use fewer materials for fashion and more for wartime production. Designer Stanley Marcus of Neiman-Marcus department stores headed the textile division of the War Production Board and set rules to reduce textile use in women's apparel by 15 percent. According to an American Rosie the Riveter Association article, "The reduction included the elimination of double-breasted suits, no hoods or double cuffs on blouses, only one pocket on coats, no cuffs on trousers, only two buttons on sleeve cuffs, no pleats, ruffles, or waistbands over three inches wide, and many more." The restrictions also banned metal zippers and elastic, and limited footwear to three pairs a year to save leather and rubber for the military.⁴⁹

On June 14, 1940, Hitler took over Paris, and many designers shut down or fled the city. While Paris had been the center of the fashion realm, the war and Hitler's control of Paris allowed New York to step in. In New York, two performances were held called "Fashion of the Times" to benefit the Army Emergency Relief Fund. New York became the fashion hub, as 400,000 people had jobs related to the fashion industry and 11,000 factories were manufacturing clothes that were sold in 2,660 retail outlets.⁵⁰ While Hitler tried to regain the fashion world, he didn't stand a chance against New York.

Redefining femininity also meant redefining fashion trends. The advertisement seen here (see Figure 4 in Appendix) depicts "the wrong way vs. the right way" and shows two different women. The woman dressed "the wrong way" was pictured wearing open-toed high heels, loose slacks, flowing hair, and jewelry. The woman dressed in war

⁴⁹ "Fashion at War: How WWII Changed Women Fashion," American Rosie the Riveter Association, <https://rosietheriveter.net/fashion-at-war-how-wwii-changed-women-fashion/>, 13 October 2021.

⁵⁰ "Capital of Fashion to Show its Best: Topflight Designers to Pool Their Efforts in Parade of Styles in Times Hall," *New York Times*, 1 October 1942, 20.

fashion was deemed “the right way” and included blue jeans or overalls, a men’s jacket, no jewelry, and hair up, tightly covered like Rosie.

The War Production Board ordered the manufacture of 1,320,000 items of women’s work clothes for war and war-supporting industries. The WPB also called for the allocation of fabrics such as twill, drill and gabardine, jean, flannel, corduroy, sheeting, mead’s cloth, covert, seersucker, carded broadcloth, poplin, long-cloth, and net.⁵¹ Between rationing and the changing role of women, fashion took a major turn. In May of 1946, French couture designer Jacques Heim introduced his bikini suit and named it “Atome” to compare its impact to the atomic bomb. So, the idea of a feminine woman changed as well as the idea of beauty. The advertisements for primarily female products did not adjust to the new ideas. When the women went back into the home, the advertisements reverted to showing women with beautiful faces and a home-cooked meal on the table to please the men.

While advertisements did not change, magazines began publishing patterns and clothing designs for women to make their clothes using older ones and even altering men’s suits to be styled as women’s suits. In 1942, Claire McCardell introduced the “Pop Over Dress” that could be worn as a house dress, cover-up, or party dress for \$6.95 (see Figure 5 in Appendix). Shoes were highly restricted, so the style changed to fit the restrictions. Fashion veered away from high heels and towards t-straps, lower heels, and cork-heel wedges (see Figure 6 in Appendix). Hats and turbans also became popular along with materials such as ribbon and netting, which were plentiful.⁵²

⁵¹ “Women’s Work Clothes are Authorized by War Production Board,” *New York Times*, 2 June 1945.

⁵² “Fashion at War: How WWII Changed Women Fashion,” American Rosie the Riveter Association, <https://rosietheriveter.net/fashion-at-war-how-wwii-changed-women-fashion/> , 13 October 2021.

On May 15, 1940, nylon stockings went on sale and were a huge success, but by 1942 they had to be rationed for parachutes and other essential items. Homemade solutions included using a makeup pencil to draw a stocking line on the back of women's legs and dyeing them with tea bags or using Liquid Stocking. The price of real nylons had jumped from \$1.25 a pair to \$10. By August 1945, ads began for nylons coming back for Christmas and New Year's, but the demand was higher than the supply. Tens of thousands of women lined up across the country and caused riots in many stores.⁵³ Rationing had changed women's lives and while women had worked in the wartime industry, it was also important for them to be beautiful and dress appropriately after work.

Oral histories provided insight into what it was like during the war for many real Rosies. One woman, Mary Knickmeyer, worked at the Bremerton Navy Yard in Washington as a forklift driver. In summer of 1943, she took a trip with her friend to fulfill their patriotic duty. Knickmeyer said she worked with white men, women, and Native Americans from morning through night. To work, she participated in two days of written and interview testing. She said it was fun and exciting to join the crazy shipyard in comparison to the schoolyard where everyone was a maiden lady. She also discussed how rationing became the norm. When she traveled back home at the end of the summer, she went through Canada, which had different rationing rules. She made sure to buy shoes in Canada because she could not in the United States.

⁵³ "WWII and the Nylon Riots!" American Rosie the Riveter Association, <https://rosietheriveter.net/wwii-and-the-nylon-riots/>, 13 October 2021.

The United Service Organization

USO (United Service Organization) dances were also popular on the Home Front. Women would dance with the soldiers and then bring them home for a home-cooked meal.⁵⁴ The USO provided aid and recreation to service men and workers in the wartime industry. Each club provided various services such as dances, celebrity shows, sporting activities, and daycare. One volunteer worked as an audio recorder for service men to send messages to loved ones. According to the American Rosie the Riveter Association article, “She recalled when a hospital ship came in. Men on crutches or bandaged who came in to record a message to tell their wives or mothers that they had lost a limb. She vividly recalled how the men would break down as they tried to explain what happened, so that when they got home it wouldn’t be such a shock.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Mary Knickmeyer, interview by Joey Balfour, Oral History, America in World War II: Oral Histories and Personal Accounts, The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, 13 October 2021.

⁵⁵ “The USO: A Home Away From Home,” American Rosie the Riveter Association, <https://rosietheriveter.net/the-uso-a-home-away-from-home/>, 13 October 2021.

CHAPTER IV: What Happened to Rosie After the War?

By 1945, the Americans had won the war, and the country had an economic boom. The Rosies were no longer needed because the soldiers returned home from the war.

This chapter focuses on what happened to all the Rosies after the war. Society changed post-World War II because of the country's prosperity and rose as a superpower. The middle class was steadily increasing in size, and suburbs were growing. Men continued to work as the providers of the household. While women had pushback if they tried to stay at work, many transitioned to other jobs.

Women out of the Workplace

After the war ended, it was time for the men to come home to their normal lives. The Veteran's Preference Act was put into effect, and, according to scholar Bruce Kauffmann, "Men would be given back their old jobs, leaving the women out of work and back to their old lives."⁵⁶ The problem was that four out of five women hoped to keep their wartime jobs.⁵⁷ Instead, they returned to being secretaries, clerical workers, domestics, department store sales ladies, housewives and mothers after the war ended. Most advertisements for women's jobs were not related to industry and were often stereotypical female occupations.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Bruce Kauffmann, "After the end of WWII, Rosie the Riveter Retires," *Telegraph Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 1 September 2019.

⁵⁷ Bruce Kauffmann, "After the end of WWII, Rosie the Riveter Retires," *Telegraph Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 1 September 2019.

⁵⁸ Andre J. Alves and Evan Roberts, "Rosie the Riveter's Job Market: Advertising for Women Workers in World War II, Los Angeles," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*.

Working-class women had done their part to win the war and wanted more for themselves. Despite the push to keep women out of the workforce, there was a sustained increase in the women's labor force through the 1980s.⁵⁹ Scholars Andre J. Alves and Evan Roberts argue that the Rosie the Riveter period was "less a milestone than a natural response to the call for patriotism, the milestone came after."⁶⁰ It can be argued that the milestone came after because, after the war, women still faced sexual discrimination in the workplace and often took less desirable jobs than men. During the war, there was less of a problem with this discrimination because most of the men were fighting. Once the men came home, the women were either laid off or given the jobs men did not want. Scholars Sheila Tobias and Lisa Anderson hypothesized that "Rosie stopped riveting, but she did not stop working."⁶¹ This is shown by the number of women who continued to work into the 1950s and the women who joined the workforce as they came of age. Some women chose college, sales, and journalism because they wanted more for themselves.

The idea that women were weak and emotional was reinforced when the men came home from the war. Post-war American masculinity was defined as having fought in World War II, working, and being a husband and father. Any sense of insecurity felt by the men who came back disabled or with injuries could be fixed by women's love and care.⁶² The pride that men felt for winning the war and the United States becoming a

⁵⁹ Andre J. Alves and Evan Roberts, "Rosie the Riveter's Job Market: Advertising for Women Workers in World War II, Los Angeles," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*.

⁶⁰ Andre J. Alves and Evan Roberts, "Rosie the Riveter's Job Market: Advertising for Women Workers in World War II, Los Angeles," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*.

⁶¹ Quoted in Jane Marcellus, "Bo's 'n's Whistle: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

⁶² Jorden Pitt, "American Masculinity After World War II," National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/american-masculinity-after-world-war-ii>, 23 July 2021.

superpower also gave men an intensified ego and reaffirmed the assumption that men were the providers and defenders while the women were helpless.

The New American Dream

The new American Dream in United States post-war society offered an opportunity for some. After World War II, middle-class society boomed, and after the G.I. Bill passed in 1944, about 8 million veterans went to college over the next 12 years.⁶³ The G.I. Bill led to a higher education background expected from men and women. Some women chose college, sales, and journalism because of this expectation. The American Dream depicted a nuclear family living in a suburban neighborhood, with a husband who had a good-paying job to support the family.⁶⁴ This idea reinforced the old ways of men being the financial providers and women being the caretakers. The problem was that many of the Rosie's wanted to be home with their families, but not full-time housewives.

Another problem was that the American Dream was unattainable by black families. HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) did not receive increased funding, and they had to turn away about 20,000 black veterans.⁶⁵ Racial discrimination also led to black families having limited housing options, which led to all-white neighborhoods in the suburbs.⁶⁶ The American Dream had been painted white across the country in advertisements, TV, and movies.

⁶³ "Tension in a Peacetime Society," National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/gi-bill-executive-order-9981>, 28 January 2022.

⁶⁴ "Tension in a Peacetime Society," National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/gi-bill-executive-order-9981>, 28 January 2022.

⁶⁵ "Tension in a Peacetime Society," National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/gi-bill-executive-order-9981>, 28 January 2022.

⁶⁶ "Tension in a Peacetime Society," National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/gi-bill-executive-order-9981>, 28 January 2022.

Women's Desire to Work

Women still wanted to work, even if society did not want them to, so they worked in different industries from the wartime industries they had just left. The Women's Bureau of the Labor Department surveyed ten war-production areas and found that "75 percent of all women war workers interviewed planned to continue working, and that 84 out of every 100 of these [women] said that they needed to support themselves and, sometimes, other persons."⁶⁷ While those women might not have stayed in factories and shipyards, they did find opportunities elsewhere.

For example, the garment industry in Eastern Union County, New Jersey posted an article in the *New York Times* advertising 700 additional sewing machine operators and said it was offering 1,050 jobs to women.⁶⁸ While this job would not be like welding or locksmithing, it did give women an opportunity to make their own money and define themselves as more than a housewife. At a luncheon for the American Association of University Women, female store executives spoke about the job opportunities in retail. The Vice President of the Namm department store, Bess Bloodworth, said the necessary attributes for job seekers to have include, "vital interest, decision [making skills], [being able to] work under pressure, and a democratic attitude."⁶⁹ The executives noted that women could have salaries up to \$20,000 a year in retail. While retail is deemed a stereotypical job for women, it still offered a source of money for women who wanted to work. They also recommended college training and leadership skills for women who wanted to have managerial positions.

⁶⁷ "Women Workers Aim to Keep On," *New York Times*, 25 November 1946, 34.

⁶⁸ "Jobs for 1,050 Women Offered," *New York Times*, 22 December 1946, 3.

⁶⁹ "Good Jobs Await Women," *New York Times*, 24 November 1946, 62.

The need for labor inspired many women to join the workforce during the war, but Rosie the Riveter encouraged women to keep working after the war. One 14-year-old girl, Jo Ann Durand, started her own fish-fly factory with 14 women workers. Her father was a trout fisherman, and a family friend recognized her talent for making fly hooks for her dad. He asked her to make him some money and ended up coming back to her with an order for 500 dozen flies.⁷⁰ At a young age, she owned a business with the help of her father, and it was thriving. Without the Rosies during World War II, she and other women may have never joined the workforce.

Women were facing many issues with equality and tried to advocate for change. In 1946, U.S. Secretary of Labor Lewis B. Shwellenbach spoke to the Women's Bureau and noted that "now was a propitious time" to push for basic employment decisions such as equal pay and minimum wage.⁷¹ Schwellenbach made the point that women should not wait until there is an oversupply of labor to demand change because then their argument would become irrelevant. His two reasons included "the recent demonstration in the war period of the capabilities of women not dreamed of prior to the war and prophecies of experts that employers will want more workers."⁷² Even though Schwellenbach was a male politician, he still recognized that women were not helpless and could be more than caretakers. While leaders such as Schwellenbach and Kaiser advocated for women in the workplace, women still struggled to gain equal rights and wages. While the concept of

⁷⁰ "Girl, Plant Owner, is Acclaimed Here," *New York Times*, 6 December 1946, 2.

⁷¹ "Exhorts Women Workers: Schwellenbach Urges Them to Press for Equal Pay," *New York Times*, 31 October 1946, 27.

⁷² "Exhorts Women Workers: Schwellenbach Urges Them to Press for Equal Pay," *New York Times*, 31 October 1946, 27.

Rosie the Riveter helped women in the right direction, it took time for women to have the roles that they do today.

Conclusion

Almost 80 years later, Rosie the Riveter appears on t-shirts, mugs, and posters as frequently as she did during the war. She still influences women today to join the workforce and teaches them that they can do anything. Before college, students only learn about Rosie the Riveter as a feminist icon, since she depicts a woman as more than a housewife. The Rosie propaganda poster acts as a reminder that women can do anything they want to do. Students are led to believe that not only did women suddenly enter the workforce in the wartime economy, but they also continued to work after the war without any backlash. This thesis disproves this assumption and describes how women faced issues and were removed from factories and shipyards after the war. Instead, they had to resort to typical female jobs such as retail, sales, and of course, being a housewife.

When Rosie the Riveter entered the workforce, women were treated as helpless, oddities, and sexual beings. Cartoons and advertisements in publications such as *Boys'n's Whistle* portrayed women in the workplace in this manner. Many media graphics humorously showed working mothers and portrayed that Rosies were only temporary and not a threat to male workers or society. Other graphics portrayed women sexually because, before the war, society deemed women as fit for reproduction, taking care of children, and looking pretty. This furthered the expectations of mainstream society and

urged women to be housewives again at the end of the war.⁷³ While leaders such as Kaiser were progressive in helping women with training and providing services such as childcare to them, women were still removed from industry after the war.

This research added to the field by viewing women in the workforce through a media lens comparative to first-hand accounts from 1942 to 1946. Scholars have looked at smaller topics related to Rosie the Riveter but have not used media to look at the women, their work, and the change in gender roles.

This study proved that women had more difficulty keeping jobs after the war than history portrays. Real Rosies generally worked for a patriotic cause, and some planned to leave work once the war ended. However, many wanted to stay at work and sought out jobs in retail, journalism, and other stereotypical female jobs after the war. The media portrayed these women as oddities, helpless, and sexual in the workplace. Posters such as the iconic Rosie the Riveter one were only used for propaganda and did not align with societal norms and gender roles. Women still were seen as less than men and were needed for the war cause, but not respected for their work. Society, in general, struggled with women in the workforce and this was portrayed in advertisements and cartoons in publications during the war. African American women struggled more than white women because they were not given the opportunity to work for the war until the latter half and faced discrimination and racism in the workplace once they did. While women were denied jobs after the war, the number of working women in the United States steadily increased in other industries.

⁷³ Jane Marcellus, "Bo's'n's Whistle: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.

This thesis primarily looked at media coverage from the *New York Times* and *Bo's'n's Whistle*, so there were limitations on the media that was researched. Further research into this topic could be to analyze other industrial magazines and newspapers from during the war. Many other major industries had specialty publications, and it would be beneficial to compare them to Kaiser's *Bo's'n's Whistle*. Another option would be to look at women in a specific state and see if it was different for women in that state than it was at the national level.

APPENDIX A: FIGURES



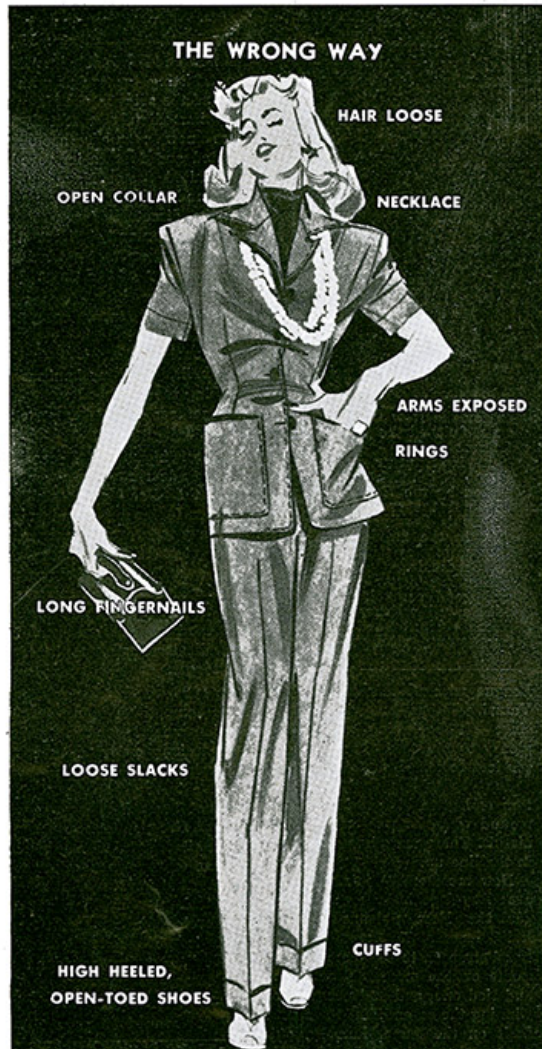
Figure 1: Rosie the Riveter Poster



Figure 2: Cartoon in March 26, 1942 edition of Bo's'n's Whistle



Figure 3: 'The Kitchen'- Women's Big Post-War Goal cartoon in May 11, 1945
edition of Bo's'n's Whistle



WAR FASHIONS

Hard work is here and glamour is out as women take men's jobs in building ships. And men's jobs they really are; with all of the grime, discomfort and hazard. Miss Shipbuilder has learned too, that war is mighty serious business, that ships aren't being built for fun and that peace-time glamour along with spare tires and breakfast in bed is out for the duration.

Taking a tip from the men on the job, the wise feminine shipbuilder wears working clothes for comfort and safety. She wears a man's type shirt with a close fitting collar



FOR FEMINE SAFETY

for protection, her hair is up, closely covered to protect it against sparks and machines. She wears strong serviceable jeans or overalls without cuffs, heavy low-heeled work shoes and a closely fitting jacket for comfort.

She will leave her necklace and rings at home along with her high-heeled open-toed shoes and inflammable cellulose or silk slacks and jackets. For these are downright dangerous. Preferred colors are dark and subdued.

The safety record of women in the Higgins yard is excellent. Proper work-wear will help to keep it this way.

Figure 4: War Fashion Advertisement from The Eureka News Bulletin

POP-OVER
Pat. U. S. Pat. Off.

THE ORIGINAL
UTILITY FASHION
DESIGNED BY
Claire McCardell

Household device de-luxe for busy women. Gray, practical pin-tore that you can wear by itself or over your dress. Equally at home in the kitchen, at play or outdoors. So becoming you can greet your guests in it. Has capacious, quilted, catch-all pocket. Quilted mitt swings from waistband. Striped and plain washable cottons. Sizes 10 to 20. **\$6.95**

Figure 5: “Pop Over” Dress advertisement

REFERENCES

- Andre J. Alves and Evan Roberts, "Rosie the Riveter's Job Market: Advertising for Women Workers in World War II, Los Angeles," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*.
- Bruce Kauffmann, "After the end of WWII, Rosie the Riveter Retires," *Telegraph Herald* (Dubuque, Iowa), 1 September 2019.
- "Hire More Women, Industry is Urged," *New York Times*, 1 October 1942, 20.
- Jane Marcellus, "Bo's 'n's Whistle: Representing Rosie the Riveter on the Job," *American Journalism* 22 (2005): 83-108.
- Jorden Pitt, "American Masculinity After World War II," National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/american-masculinity-after-world-war-ii>, 23 July 2021.
- Kim Guise, "Curator's Choice: *Glamour* Goes to War," National World War II Museum, New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/glamour-magazine-primrose-robinson>, 31 March 2021.
- Leonard E. Colvin, "Invisible Warriors' Documentary Pays Tribute to WWII Women Civilian Workers," *New Journal and Guide*, 3 March 2016.
- Lucy Greenbaum, "As Kaiser Sees It," *New York Times*, 31 October 1943, 13.
- Margaret Culklin Banning, "Women Can Man Machines," *New York Times*, 10 May 1942, 12.