Winning the War with Women: Women on the Home Front During World War II

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For many Americans, the most influential and mesmerizing event of the twentieth century was World War II. For several crucial and dynamic years, every aspect of the American society was mobilized for war, from government and industry to Hollywood and the home. The press, the war economy, and the battlefields of World War II affected every American citizen from the elderly to the young. With such a dramatic event that has influenced and dominated international relations and postwar institutions, like the United Nations, all aspects of World War II from the battlefields to the home front are worthy of consideration and study. However, for the purposes of this study, the role of women on the home front during World War II will be examined. Unquestionably, women were one of the groups most affected by World War II because their role in society was redefined. As husbands and loved ones left for Europe, Asia, and Africa, the government was faced with a dramatic shortage in manpower. With women entering the workforce, they were allowed to prove their dedication, intelligence, and capability for the first time in American history. Ultimately, the idea of women playing a dual role in society was initiated during World War II because women effectively performed tasks in the home and in the workplace. If women had not participated in war industries, the outcome of World War II may have been different.

Throughout history, including the Great Depression, women have struggled to gain equality in the home, in the workforce, and in the political arena. With the entrenchment of the United States in World War II, the government was forced to convert manpower in the labor force to womanpower. Although social barriers and prejudices inhibited the entrance of women to occupations in the service industry, World War II initiated the entrance of women into every sector of the American economy from teaching and farming to riveting airplanes and operating
cranes. Through the creation of the Office of War Information, the War Manpower Commission, the War Advertising Council, and the Magazine Bureau, the government and business entrepreneurs used propaganda, femininity, patriotism, emotional pleas, and pictorial images to attract single and married women to the workforce; however, their equality and participation in the workforce were temporary.

In examining the participation of women in the workforce during World War II, the following questions will be considered: (1) What created the necessity for women to enter the workforce? (2) What governmental and business agencies were created to recruit women to war occupations? (3) What pictorial images, themes, publications, propaganda, and recruitment campaigns were used by the government, localities, and businesses to recruit single and married women to the workforce? (4) What were the occupations and roles of women in industries during the war? (5) Why did women decide to enter the workforce? (6) Were women fully integrated into the workforce upon the return of the servicemen in the postwar period? Various governmental documents, personal letters, posters from the World War II era, books, and advertisements will be consulted and reviewed in order to answer these questions.

Women in the Pre-World War II Era

Although women attempted to enter the workforce during the Great Depression, they were largely unsuccessful because of preexisting social barriers and prejudices (Winkler 49). Those women who entered the workforce during the Great Depression were confined to the areas of retail and domestic service. Occupations in the service sector of the economy included working in light manufacturing, doing clerical work, and becoming teachers. Like the Great Depression, women were initially excluded from the workforce because the government did not believe that the labor force would be depleted (Winkler 49). In addition, employers, who were
predominantly male, refused to modify their hiring practices in order to incorporate women into the workforce. Throughout the initial stages of the war, the government and the business community questioned the physical and mechanical abilities of women (Winkler 49-50). Initially, the War Department stated that the military “‘should not be encouraged to utilize women on a large scale until all available male labor in the area has first been employed’” (Winkler 50).

The Mobilization and the Recruitment of Women on the Home Front

As the United States became fully engaged in the war, the men, who remained on the home front, primarily acquired all of the war production jobs. Even though social and political barriers prevented the entrance of women into the workforce, females, who had sought to acquire work in the 1930s, were employed by 1942. By 1943, over ten million men had left the United States for the front lines in Europe, and the men, who remained at home, were already being utilized in the workforce (Weatherford 116). As production demands for tanks, airplanes, and ships increased, it became essential to emphasize the need for women in the workforce in order to achieve victory (119). As a September 1943 article from Business Week stated, “‘Now it can be seen. Our entire manpower problem is most acutely a problem in womanpower’” (Weatherford 116). As the need for the entrance of women came to fruition, the government and war industries concentrated on the entrance of “a new worker, the housewife who didn’t necessarily want or need to work” (Weatherford 116; Hartmann 20-21). The necessity of women in the workforce created a “new legitimacy to the woman worker and appeals made government and employers and labor unions more willing to consider the needs of women” (Hartmann 21). To further demonstrate the view of the day, a memorandum from Grenville Clark, dated
February 11, 1942, was issued that stated the War Manpower Board’s Official position on the manpower crisis:

The plans above outlined make no provision for the inventory, classification and allocation of womanpower. However, in view of the vast scope and probable duration of the war, it seems plain that the United States will have to use, in addition to its full manpower, a large proportion of its womanpower, many of whom are just as well or better adapted to special industrial tasks as are the men. This is in line with the experience of the other nations which have adopted a full mobilization.

It would be the function of the Manpower Board or Council to anticipate this problem and to formulate and operate plans as soon as possible for the supplemental registration, classification and allocation of such part of the womanpower of the nation as the national effort will require. (Clark)

Beginning in the summer of 1942, government and industry waged a battle to engage women into the war production workforce (Winkler 50; Coleman 55). As the government began to attempt to incorporate women into the labor force, it had to overcome the social norms that placed an emphasis on the role of women as the primary caretakers and psychological maintainers of the home, which had existed throughout history (Hartmann 16). In creating a program to encourage the entrance of women into the workforce, government and business had to overcome the “dual labor system” in which men refused to work alongside their female counterparts (Hartmann 16).

Although the government had finally realized the usefulness, necessity, and capabilities of women, opposition to the entrance of women in the workforce dominated the American social scene (Winkler 52). Opponents argued that the women, in the predominantly male workforce, would create social and sexual disorder within the American society (Winkler 52). Since the dominant role of the female was preconceived to be in the home, many argued, “‘who will do the cooking, washing, the mending, the humble homey tasks to which every woman has devoted herself who will rear and nurture the children . . . ?’” (Winkler 52). According to Max Lerner, an ordinary citizen, men were concerned that the feminine mystique would succumb to the
creation of the “masculine woman” (Winkler 51). Many feared the creation of the “‘new Amazon’” who would “‘outdrink, outswear, and out swagger the men’” (Winkler 51). As the government strove to initiate the entrance of women into the workforce, it knew that it must quell such concerns and prejudices of the American society.

Even though the government resisted formulating an institutional framework from which to organize an extensive and massive labor recruitment campaign, pressure from advertisers, business leaders, and media representatives forced the government to consider the creation of agencies that would direct and serve as executors of the labor recruitment campaign (Honey 30). As the war waged on, the Roosevelt administration realized that the “fiscal, economic, and labor policy needed an ideological framework” for such recruitment activities to effectively recruit American women to the workforce (Honey 30). “The pressure became overwhelming to bring the communication system into closer alignment with the country’s needs and to mobilize the population” (Honey 30).

Since the Bureau of Labor Statistics anticipated a labor shortage of six million workers by the end of 1943, the government finally moved to create institutions that would devote their efforts to selling war work to the female population of the United States. In April 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt created the War Manpower Commission (WMC), and he assigned Paul V. McNutt to act as the chief executive of the commission. The primary goal of the WMC was “‘to assure the most effective mobilization and maximum utilization of the nation’s manpower in the prosecution of the war’” (Coleman 47). With a deficient amount of manpower, the commission knew that it must initiate massive efforts to create womanpower and to maintain the mass production of war materials (47). According to one government study, “‘With the exception of the few hundred thousand boys of the predraft age, this gap [of workers] will have
to be plugged almost entirely by women-mostly by women who have never before been gainfully employed and who are not driven to seek work by economic necessity’ ” (Coleman 47-48).

Maintaining the prewar ideology that the “‘first responsibility of women in war as in peace is to provide suitable care for their young children,’ ” the government devoted its mobilization efforts to single women and ignored the recruitment of married women (48). However, the WMC also stated in its official policy that “‘Barriers against the employment of women with young children should not be set up by employers. The decision as to gainful employment should in all cases be an individual decision made by the woman herself in the light of the particular conditions prevailing in her home’ ” (Coleman 48-49). In utilizing women in the workforce, the WMC acknowledged that it would have to sell war jobs to women who had no previous work experience and no previous relations with a boss and coworkers (Coleman 49).

Another commission under the supervision of the War Manpower Commission was the United States Employment Service (USES), which held voluntary registration drives, especially during August 1942, in an effort to recruit female workers. As part of their registration drives, the USES strategically executed its radio and newspaper publicity with patriotic content. Not only did the USES operate on a national level, but it also operated in specific regions and areas that were desperate for workers. The USES distributed 600,000 registration cards in the city of Detroit, with a necessity of recruiting eighty thousand women workers by November 1942.

During the drives, the USES asked women to fill out registration cards that contained questions with regard to their level of education, number of children, previous work experience, and job placement preference. After collecting the registration cards, the USES organized the data, and it placed the women willing to work in jobs or in proper training programs. Other areas in which the USES conducted massive registration drives were located in Northampton, Massachusetts,
Seattle, Washington, and Oregon. Many of the registration cards contained personal messages in the margins of the cards, and the messages often conveyed support and a willingness to contribute to the war effort in any way possible (58). For example, one woman noted on her card, “‘I’ll do anything my country wants to help lick the Japs and Nazis’” (Coleman 58). Another stated, “‘I regard it as a duty to my country to do whatever will be helpful’” (Coleman 58).

In June 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt created the Office of War Information (OWI), which would prove to be a powerful ally of the War Manpower Commission (Coleman 49). Appointed as the executive of the commission was Elmer H. Davis, a respected news reporter, and the purpose of the agency was “‘to coordinate the dissemination of war information by means of the press, radio, and motion pictures’” (Coleman 49; Honey 30). Throughout the war, the OWI’s duty was to provide propaganda and to inform the American people about the events of the war because Davis argued that the war was a “‘people’s war’” (Coleman 49). As a result, the OWI provided numerous press releases, pamphlets, posters, and photographs that attempted to inform the public and to sell the war to the public. Included within its propaganda throughout the war, the OWI initiated a campaign to encourage the entrance of women into the war workforce (Coleman 49). In its attempts to entice women into the workforce, the OWI appealed to women by emphasizing good salaries and patriotism (Winkler 50). One example of the images that the OWI presented on its posters was the image of “two sturdy women in work clothes, hands in their pockets, standing beside a locomotive and talking to each other with obvious pleasure” (Coleman 49). The caption of the poster stated:

‘American women fight on home front in U.S. industries: two American girls, employed as war workers by a big American railroad, enjoy a moment of relaxation after cleaning and preparing the locomotive….These girls, like millions of other American women, left homes, schools, and pleasanter occupations to work on U.S. railroads, in shipyards, steel plants and war industries to release more men for U.S. fighting forces.’ (Coleman 49)
Another influential institution of propaganda during World War II was the Magazine Bureau, which was formed in June 1942 (36). Upon its creation, officials of the bureau "quickly grasped the utility of creating efficient lines of communication with the magazine industry, pressing for greater funds and authority to disseminate information for the purposes of influencing the public" (Honey 36). The chief executive of the Magazine Bureau was Dorothy Ducas, and she continuously coordinated the efforts of the bureau with the government through letters and meetings with officials from the U.S. Department of War, the Navy Department, and the War Manpower Commission (37). The bureau took an active role in providing editors with campaign goals and suggesting topics for stories and articles (Honey 37). During the war, Ducas and her staff worked hard to fill the media with images of women working in non-traditional jobs, and the Magazine Bureau wanted to flood the media with "images more appropriate to wartime demands" (Honey 47). Among the many publications distributed by the Magazine Bureau was the booklet, entitled War Jobs for Women, which listed various jobs, training programs, and salaries of factory work (Honey 47). In addition to this pamphlet, the Magazine Bureau distributed pamphlets dealing with the demand for technical workers and the need and availability of daycare centers (Honey 47).

In order to establish an effective network of communication between the magazine industry and the government, the OWI and the Magazine Bureau jointly created the Magazine War Guide which was sent to thousands of radio reporters, newspaper editors, and magazine editors (Coleman 50; Honey 37). Throughout its publication from July 1942 until April 1945, the guide presented editors and reporters with lists of war topics suitable for publication or discussion (Coleman 50; Honey 37). A widely distributed publication, the Magazine War Guide
was distributed to more than nine hundred magazine executives, four hundred government
officials, and one thousand free-lance writers by the end of 1943 (Honey 43). One reason the
guide was successful was due to the fact that most magazine readers were female (38). The OWI
and the Magazine Bureau worked together to present magazines with information detailing the
amount of additional labor needed in the workforce, the sectors in need of additional labor, and
the locations of job training programs for women (38). Not only did the guide provide ideas for
publication and discussion, but it also provided instructions on how these topics could be most
effectively presented and discussed (50).

‘Fiction stories of any kind, set in these industries [steel, coal, copper, lead, zinc, lumber] help considerably in
showing their importance to the war [and] the interdependence of the armed forces and the workmen and
workwoman who make the weapons.’ (Coleman 50)

Periodically, the Magazine War Guide included a supplement entitled Love and Western Love
magazines, which encouraged publicists to write articles in which men supported women in the
workforce (51). One supplement suggested that this goal could be achieved “through stories
showing the advent of women in logging camps, on the railroads, riding the ranges and showing
them not as weak sisters but as coming through the manly style” (Coleman 51).

Throughout the war, the cooperative efforts of the OWI and the WMC were strategically
important to the incorporation of women into the workforce. Not only did these commissions
work to encourage and promote women to enter the workforce, but they also worked to convince
employers to hire women. Within months after the tragedy at Pearl Harbor, employers were
beginning to increase the number of women they hired; however, of the 750,000 women who
had applied for work, only eighty thousand women had been hired (Coleman 51).

Although the government played a key role in recruiting women to the workforce,
organizations created by business and industry also aided in recruitment efforts. Industries also
coordinated their efforts with government institutions (52). Among the important organizations
which cooperated with the OWI and WMC continuously throughout World War II was the War Advertising Council (WAC), which was created by a group of advertising executives in November 1941 (Coleman 52; Honey 31). Concerned over the importance and survival of advertising during wartime, the advertisers voluntarily organized themselves to address this problem (Coleman 52). Throughout the war, the executives emphasized the importance of advertising by stating that “‘We have within our hands the greatest aggregate means of mass education and persuasion the world has ever seen’” (Coleman 52). In addition, they wanted to recruit advertising companies and the government in order to educate the American citizenry about the real issues of the war (Honey 31). Advertising agencies realized that they would lose up to eighty percent of the manufacturers’ business, and as a result, they launched a massive campaign to demonstrate that advertising was essential to the success of the war (Honey 32). Working with the OWI’s Bureau of Campaigns, the WAC launched a cooperative effort to recruit women into the workforce (32). Throughout the war, the WAC worked in concert with the Bureau of Campaigns to publish and to distribute a monthly War Guide for Advertisers in which suggestions of advertisement layouts, objectives, campaign dates, and promotional methods were listed (33). The chairman of the WAC, Chester La Roche, announced that the organization wanted to “‘create a background for the specific directives of the government’” and this would “‘clear up misunderstandings, overcome irritations, disarm unreasonable criticism, and thus condition the public not only to make required sacrifices willingly but to make more than are actually asked’” (Honey 34). Throughout the advertising guides, the WAC directed advertising executives to encourage rationing, victory gardens, victory mail, and female labor recruitment using patriotic appeals (Honey 34).
Of all the war years, the greatest cooperative campaign between the WAC, the Magazine Bureau, and the OWI, in terms of size and financing, came in 1944 with the launching of the "Women in the War" campaign (Honey 35). The overall purpose of the campaign was to recruit women for civilian and military jobs (34). Throughout the yearlong campaign, the council advised advertisers to devote at least part of their advertisement themes to those of recruiting women to the labor force (34). Not only did the organizations want to recruit women to the labor force, but they also wanted to encourage women already working to maintain their jobs (39). In order to initiate the program, the council distributed booklets in the winter of 1944 directing advertisers with methods from which this could be obtained (Honey 34-35).

Among the many private organizations formed during World War II, a group of professional writers, organized by Rex Stout, formed the Writers' War Board, and they were "united in the belief that the board should furnish wholehearted support of any measures which the government considers necessary to a speedy and complete victory over the Axis" (Coleman 52). During the war the Writers' War Board worked closely and cooperatively with the OWI to create and publish stories that recruited women into the workforce (Coleman 52).

Local, Regional, and Specialized Recruitment Campaigns

Not only did government and professional organizations promote recruitment efforts, but also local and regional efforts were initiated in order to recruit women (Winkler 50). Another resource that was used to recruit women to the workforce was the film industry (Coleman 66). Throughout the war, short advertisement films appeared in movie theaters, churches, civic meetings, schools, and colleges throughout the United States. Most of the films were made as a result of the cooperation between the film industry and the U.S. government. Curtiss Wright Aeronautical, the manufacturer of the "Wright Cyclone engine that was used in military planes,"
sponsored a series of films that were narrated by the renowned broadcaster, Lowell Thomas (Coleman 66). Each film began with Thomas being seated in front of the camera saying, “‘Wright is in the fight until the last shot is fired . . . and so should you’” (Coleman 67). Among the titles of the series were: *Back Sons in Service*, *Team Up to Beat Axis*, and *Wife Makes Minutes Count* (Coleman 66).

Furthermore, the local media was a key element to local recruitment efforts. In New Britain, Connecticut, a local program was formulated in order to provide the local shipyards with an adequate workforce (Weatherford 117). A team of twenty-two female workers from various war occupations was organized and sent around to recruit fellow women for war work. They visited the five thousand female citizens of New Britain who had not responded to work recruitment letters. During their personal visits to the women, the workers talked about their jobs and their experiences in the war workforce (Weatherford 117).

During 1943, the labor shortage increased dramatically, and voluntary registration drives and government recruitment efforts were not providing the war industries with adequate labor (Coleman 60). By the end of 1943, four million new workers would need to be added to the American labor force in order for war production to be maintained on a full-scale (65). Of all the recruitment years, 1943 constituted the apex of the government’s recruitment efforts with the WMC and the OWI unveiling a new poster campaign to recruit womanpower (61). Among the many slogans appearing on posters were slogans such as: “Women in the War: WE CAN’T WIN WITHOUT THEM,” in which the actual model for Rosie the Riveter was pictured in a dress riveting a part (“Poster Collection”) (See Appendix Exhibit 1). The OWI sent photographs of female workers in the war industry to various newspapers and magazines throughout the country (61). Images of women riveting airplanes, assembling airplane motors, and installing the
components of B17 bombers were sent to various publications by the OWI. Not only did the OWI provide newspapers and magazines throughout the country with photographs, but it also attached captions written by members of the OWI staff to each photograph. Many captions described the photographs, while others emphasized the jobs being performed by the women pictured. One photograph of women working in a bomber plant from Detroit, Michigan, provided this caption: “‘Girls dipping magnesium tubing in hot clean bath to get rid of grease and acid’” (Coleman 63). However, many captions were advertisements meant to entice women into joining the war workforce. A caption to a photograph that appeared in a publication in Paterson, New Jersey, stated, ‘Emily Rabbat making parts for airplane engines on a horizontal milling machine at a Wright Aeronautical corporation plant. She formerly worked in a silk mill. With modern machine tools, the work is clean, safe, and requires little physical effort’” (Coleman 63). Another article that was published in Lititz, Pennsylvania, was accompanied by a caption reading, “‘Emma Dougherty, who does a man’s work for a man’s pay, cleaning out her end grinding machine’” (Coleman 63).

Even though the OWI and WMC launched a massive campaign to expand the number of single female workers in industries, a special campaign began in 1943 that was aimed at attracting homemakers. Realizing that housewives constituted the largest potential resource for additional labor, the government took massive measures to appeal to them (65). As head of the WMC, Paul McNutt stated that getting married women to enter the workforce would constitute “‘a tremendous sales proposition’” (Coleman 65). In creating an effective recruitment campaign, the government used patriotism as a key theme in its recruitment propaganda directed towards housewives. Once again, the OWI and the WMC waged a propaganda war with posters that had catchy and convincing slogans. Among the posters was a poster stating, “‘We soldiers
of supply pledge that our fighting men will not want!" (Coleman 65). Others included the slogans such as: "‘Do the Job He Left Behind: Apply U.S. Employment Service’" and "‘On the job we must all do our best, can’t you see; for our boys’ very lives rest with you and me. . . .’" (Coleman 65). Along the patriotic theme, one poster distributed featured a woman working with a wrench on some machinery and saying, "‘You bet I’m fighting too! What kind of Americans would we be if we let anyone rob us of our Liberty?’" (Coleman 66). Among the patriotic posters distributed by the USES, was a poster that pictured women riveting, waitressing, and fixing a military jeep. The women were working on building and constructing the word, "WOMEN." With the caption "There’s work to be done and a war to be won . . . NOW!", the poster attempted to use a patriotic message in order to persuade women to enter the workforce ("Poster Collection") (See Appendix Exhibit 2).

Realizing that hiring housewives and homemakers might cause problems between husbands and wives, the WMC distributed pamphlets to address this problem. Among the booklets distributed was "Answers to Questions Women Ask About War Work" (Coleman 74). In the book, the WMC tells women that "‘If your husband understands clearly how urgently you are needed and how much you can contribute toward saving the lives of loved ones now in the armed forces, he will help you work out your home problems.’" (Coleman 74). A poster showing a husband and a wife standing in front of an American flag pictured the wife saying, "‘I’m proud . . . my husband wants me to do my part: See your U.S. Employment Service’" (Coleman 74).

In addition to a shortage of workers in the war industry, a tremendous labor shortage existed in "‘essential civilian’" jobs (Coleman 71). The exodus of men and women already working in traditional civilian jobs to the war industry created a shortage of teachers, telephone
operators, taxi and bus drivers, childcare workers, restaurant workers, bank tellers, clerical
workers, grocery store clerks, stenographers, conductors, and medical workers (Coleman 71;
Honey 40). Once again, the WMC and the Magazine Bureau initiated a campaign in September
1943, which was entitled "‘Woman in Necessary Services,’" and its purpose was to recruit
workers for traditional civilian jobs (Coleman 72; Honey 39). The Magazine Bureau realized
that civilian jobs were essential “‘to keep the wheels of our civilian economy turning during the
war period’” (Honey 40). A major reason for the exodus of women from traditional jobs, like
hospital workers, was because they received higher pay working in the war factories (Coleman
72). In launching its latest recruitment efforts, the WMC and the OWI began a poster campaign.
In selling civilian jobs to women, the government emphasized the fact that any type of work in
the American society contributed to the war effort. The slogan of one poster read “‘Soldiers
Without Guns’” and featured a female typist, a welder, and a factory worker (Coleman 72).
Another poster featured four women standing in front of an American flag and with the word
“‘Secretaries of War,’” written as the slogan (Coleman 72). During the initial campaign, the
government realized that selling traditional civilian jobs to women would be more difficult
because they received less pay and held a lower social status. Thus, the WMC and the OWI
launched a special campaign in which they told editors and writers that traditional war jobs
would have to be glorified “‘as patriotic war service if American women are to be persuaded to
take them and stick to them’” (Coleman 72). In this spirit, one poster distributed by the USES, a
branch of the WMC, promoted jobs in all aspects of the American society. Its caption reads:
“The more WOMEN at work the sooner we win!” (“Poster Collection”) (See Appendix Exhibit
3). The poster also contained civilian positions to which additional labor was needed such as
farm laborers, typists, and elevator operators (“Poster Collection”). Another poster distributed
during the war that was aimed at recruiting farm workers pictured the face of a male and a female with men and women working in fields. The caption encouraged men and women to "Be a VICTORY FARM VOLUNTEER IN THE U.S. CROP CORPS" ("Poster Collection") (See Appendix Exhibit 4). Writers like Dorothy Parker, with her article entitled "Are We Women or Are We Mice?" wrote, "There won't be any chic uniforms . . . . there won't be farewell parties when you set forth to war . . . . [But] you will be doing great work in the greatest of works . . . . the saving of the future" (Coleman 72).

Although many male employers had already realized the importance and capabilities of women in the defense industry, some male employers refused to hire women, and others even closed or reduced production in order to avoid hiring women (Coleman 73). Finally, the War Department joined the OWI and the WMC to convince male employers to hire women. A widely distributed booklet, entitled "'You're Going to Employ Women,'" educated male employers about hiring, training, and supervising female employees (Coleman 73). One part of the booklet stated:

'In some respects women workers are superior to men. Properly hired, properly trained, properly handled, new women employees are splendidly efficient workers. The desire of a new woman worker-to help win the war-to shorten it even by a minute-gives her an enthusiasm that more than offsets industrial inexperience.' (Coleman 73)

In addition to helping employers with techniques that would initiate the employment of women, the WMC worked to assist employers with job training programs (Coleman 74). Not only did the WMC train women for war work, but it also trained the male supervisors and foreman that would oversee the newly hired female employees. Furthermore, the WMC made suggestions to employers on how to improve and adapt machinery so that machines could be easily operated by women. Some of the changes on the factory scene were the addition of conveyor belts, in an
effort to reduce and eliminate carrying heavy items, and the addition of the lever to machines so that they could be operated by the strength of a finger (Coleman 74).

**Selling the Working Woman Image to American Women**

Throughout World War II, images of working women filled magazines and newspapers. One of the most influential sectors of the American press was the American magazine, which featured articles devoted to womanpower. In 1942, *Reader's Digest* republished an article, entitled “Ma’s Making War Bombers,” by Elizabeth Meyer (Coleman 63). Emphasizing working women across America, Meyer wrote about the numerous single, married, and elderly women contributing to the war effort by working in jobs from installing exhaust pipes to riveting and installing the doors of airplanes (Coleman 63).

> 'In low, vast airplane plants squatting in the wheat fields of Kansas or melting into the orange groves of California; in three-story factories in the East and the Middle West and battered machine shops in New England; in the open-air clangor of the giant Pacific Coast shipyards, I [Meyer] saw women working.' (Coleman 63)

Throughout advertisements for war work, the dual role of beauty and contributing to the war effort was emphasized. Not only did advertisements emphasize beauty and war work, but also a national beauty pageant was created to select “‘Miss Victory, the Typical American War Worker’” (Coleman 63). Ladies, like Ann Vickery, were selected to represent the various regions of the United States. The winners were often more proud of their contributions to the war effort than being selected as winners of the pageant. Ann Vickery stated, “‘I’ve never been tardy or absent from work’” (Coleman 63). In addition, various industries named women workers who balanced their dual roles, “queens” (67). In California, for example, Edna Slocum was named “‘Welding Queen,’” and publications covering her story emphasized the fact that she was able to perform the tasks of a welder and a housewife and still have “‘time for a [hair]wave’” (Coleman 68).
In addition to promoting the entrance of women into the workforce, magazines and manufacturers emphasized the importance of women maintaining farms while loved ones and husbands were away (Honey 110). Without food, the citizens and soldiers of America would have perished. In a Kraft advertisement, a woman is throwing hay with a pitch fork while her daughter is driving a tractor, and they are called the “‘Heroines . . . [of the] U.S.A.’” (Honey 110-111). The message of the advertisement reads, “‘Always on our dairy farms, women and girls have had plenty of chores to do . . . But what they are doing now would amaze you’” (Honey 111). As part of the campaign initiated by the OWI to recruit women for farm work during 1943 and 1944, this advertisement not only attempted to sell the importance and necessity of farm work, but it also glorifies farm work as a heroic contribution to the nation (Honey 111). Not only were women encouraged to maintain production on the family farm, but they also were encouraged to save and conserve household goods from clothes to canned foods. Among the many posters distributed by the United States government, one appears with a woman patching a man’s trousers. The caption encourages women to participate in the war at home and in the workforce by stating, “USE IT UP-WEAR IT OUT-MAKE IT DO!” (“Poster Collection”) (See Exhibit 5). In addition, a caption at the bottom reads: “OUR LABOR AND GOODS ARE FIGHTING” (“Poster Collection”) (See Appendix Exhibit 5). Along with the theme of conserving goods, women were often pictured canning food. One poster in this view pictures a child standing with her mother in the kitchen among canned goods and asking, “‘We’ll have lots to eat this winter, won’t we mother?’” (“Poster Collection”) (See Appendix Exhibit 6). The caption reads: “Grow your own [and] Can your own” (“Poster Collection”) (See Appendix Exhibit 6). Throughout the war women appeared on posters in order to encourage their female counterparts to participate in the rationing program. Women, who did not can were made to
appear as though they were not doing their part to win the war. Thus, a woman on one such poster is pictured carrying several jars of canned goods and saying, “Of course I can! [because] I’m patriotic as can be-And ration points won’t worry me!” (“Poster Collection”) (See Appendix Exhibit 7). Whether farming or conserving goods, women were pictured doing their part to win the war.

Viewing the various images, articles, and captions in magazines and other publications the various themes of the wartime propaganda are uncovered. With the conversion of production from consumer goods and household items, such as refrigerators, to the production of essential war materials and products, American advertisers converted their advertisements into a framework for recruiting and encouraging women to do their part in the home and on the factory line. The manufacturer of Eureka vacuum cleaners praised all aspects and areas of women’s work, and Kleenex played a key role in the “Woman at War” campaign due to a paper shortage which prevented the manufacturing of tissues (Honey 109). Furthermore, the manufacturer of Kelly tires praised women performing masculine jobs in service and trade industries (Honey 109).

Throughout the war various themes and messages were used by advertisers and the government to sell war jobs to American women (Coleman 110). A dominant theme of the propaganda was the idea that women were capable of performing jobs predominantly performed by males (Coleman 67). According to one advertisement, running a drill was nothing more than “‘a kind of needle point in metals’” (Weatherford 130). In fact, the OWI exemplified women who temporarily restrained themselves from pursuing personal goals in order to use their talents to contribute to the nation’s war effort (Honey 49). In selling war jobs to women, the OWI praised:
‘[The young woman] who does not regard marriage as her only career in wartime. She stays in the business circulation, knowing that the war program and her country need her brains and skills. She does not retire to the attic to become ‘the world’s greatest painter.’ She wants to make some concrete use of her talents—become a draftsman or take up commercial art. . . . She knows this is not the time for a concert career. . . . The world of entertainment certainly plays its part in building morale, but the modern . . . girl knows that there are plenty of actresses, dancers, and singers.’ (Honey 48-49)

In addition to making patriotic appeals, the Office of War Information asked publishers to portray women as competent, intelligent, and capable of holding a challenging job (Honey 49). An advertisement for Crosley refrigerators praised the “‘resourcefulness and ingenuity of American women’” (Honey 111). A key feature of propaganda was the technique in which publishers placed articles about war jobs at the beginning of publications in an effort to convince women that the contributions of both men and women were needed in the war (49).

Furthermore, women, who chose not to enter the workforce during the war, were forced to justify their act as “socially useful” (Honey 49).

However, of all the messages, the resounding theme of the wartime labor recruitment campaigns was the theme of maintaining femininity while working. Women working in navy yards were told to be “‘feminine and ladylike, even though you are filling a man’s shoes’” (Coleman 67). In fact, some employers, like Boeing Aircraft, offered classes sponsored by the Women’s Recreational Activity Council, which offered expertise “in proper dress, makeup, poise, and personality to help women workers maintain their ‘FQ’ (Femininity Quotient)” (Coleman 67). One electric company advertisement described a woman worker as:

‘5 feet 1 from her 4A slippers to her spun-gold hair. She loves flower hats, veils, smooth orchestras—and being kissed by a boy who’s now in North Africa. But man oh man, how she can handle her huge and heavy press!’ (Coleman 68)

In an article that appeared in Life, Marguerite Kershner a worker for Boeing Aircraft, was described by the following:

‘Now, at day’s end, her hands may be bruised, there’s grease under her nails, her makeup is smudged, and her curls out of place. When she checks in the next morning at 6:30AM, her hands
will be smooth, her nails polished, her makeup and curls in order, for Marguerite is neither drudge nor slave but the heroine of the new order.’ (Coleman 68-69)

Some publishers eluded to the fact that overalls covered with dirt and grease did not disguise or hide the ‘‘real woman’’ (Winkler 52). Finally, magazines featured articles that emphasized maintaining a feminine personality while working. In an article featured in McCall, a female reader is reassured that ‘‘[She] will look like this girl. She does a man’s work in the ground crew, servicing airplanes, but she hasn’t lost any of her feminine sweetness and charm’’ (Winkler 53).

Throughout the war, the dominant feminine image was that of Rosie the Riveter, who appeared “wearing a bandana and work shirt with her employee identification button pinned on the collar. Her right arm is bent and her hand is in a fist” (Coleman 69). Once again, the emphasis on the feminine mystique is noted because she appears with polished fingernails, plucked eyebrows, blush, and mascara. Above her head rests the off-centered message: “‘We Can Do It!’” (Coleman 69). Essentially, the image of Rosie the Riveter reinforced the ideology that beauty could successfully be maintained while working in a factory (Winkler 53).

In comparing war work to housework, propaganda promoted the idea that working in a factory was similar to performing household tasks. A popular movie during the war era was Glamour Girl ’43, which features women performing war jobs and a male narrator assuring the audience that housework is similar to working in a factory by stating, “‘instead of cutting the lines of a dress, this woman cuts the pattern of aircraft parts’” (Coleman 70). Another example: “‘Instead of baking cake, this woman is cooking gears to reduce the tension in the gears after use . . . a lathe holds no more terror than a sewing machine . . . . After a short apprenticeship, this woman can operate a drill press just as easily as a juice extractor in her own kitchen’” (Coleman 70). In Seattle, a radio announcement reinforced the idea that women were physically capable of
effectively performing household and job tasks by stating, "‘an American homemaker with the strength and ability to run a house and raise a family . . . has the strength and ability to take her place in vital war industry’ " (Winkler 50). Such advertisements apparently worked because in a letter to her husband fighting overseas, a woman wrote, "‘Here’s a picture of me in my uniform. Remember how you used to wipe the flour smudges off my nose? Well, you ought to see me now-I’m a regular grease monkey . . . The plant’s as bright and cheery as my own kitchen’ " (Honey 129). Throughout the war, women were praised for successfully performing the dual tasks of the home and the workplace. In an advertisement by Eureka, a mother producing gas masks is portrayed as "‘a two-job woman, running a house for Dad O’Rourke of a morning, and making gas masks on Eureka’s 4-12 shift’ " (Honey 117). In fact, some propaganda glamorized war work above menial household chores. For example, an advertisement in Baltimore said that war work was "‘a lot more exciting than polishing the family furniture’ " (Winkler 50).

Since a major concern of women with families was the welfare of their children, magazines reassured women that taking a war job would not harm or hinder the development of their children (Winkler 50; Honey 50). Many times, women appeared in their overalls comfortably performing domestic tasks and taking care of their children (Honey 117). Furthermore, children regularly appeared in advertisements eagerly working and helping their mothers with the household chores (Honey 117). With the creation of childcare centers during the war, the government encouraged magazines and other publicists to portray these facilities favorably and to encourage their use by working mothers (50). Also, magazines suggested methods in which working mothers could minimize their housework to a few hours a day (Honey 50).
In addition to glamorizing war work, wartime propaganda made emotional and patriotic appeals to women for war work. The radio industry was essential in making emotional pleas to women. During labor recruitment, propaganda was filled with messages reminding women of their husbands and brothers fighting abroad, who depended on the production of goods in America for survival (Weatherford 117). A war worker in Seattle noted, “‘Over and over for months I heard from the radio the call for women to enter war work. I had been delaying for one reason or another but I finally recognized these arguments in favor of my going to the shipyards’” (Weatherford 117). One woman worker, in a factory that built planes, was pictured signing the plane with “‘From Alice to Eddie to Adolf”’ (Honey 126). In making patriotic appeals to women, the government and advertising agencies made women feel guilty for not working or contributing to the war effort in some fashion (Honey 126). American women were bombarded with themes and messages that emphasized that:

‘The citizen must be convinced that, unless he [or she] cooperates, he [or she] personally will pay a penalty, either through loss of the war or through loss of something precious to him [or her]-his [or her] son in the armed forces, his [or her] political rights and social privileges, his [or her] future freedom.’ (Honey 126)

Emotional and patriotic appeals included magazine advertisements which were developed by the WAC and which displayed prisoners starving and standing in the sun (Weatherford 117). During the war women were constantly reminded that in order for their loved ones to return safely, they must do their part by joining the military or by obtaining a war job (Honey 127).

‘Remember the last time you saw him? He was still the boy you could always talk to-when nobody else understood. Next time you see him? He may be a stranger . . . . Perhaps the things you both used to laugh at won’t amuse him any more. When they play your ‘theme song,’ maybe he won’t still reach for your hand.’ (Honey 127)
The Image of the Working Woman during World War II: Additional Propaganda

With resounding positive images and messages throughout the American society, many women decided to enter the wartime workforce. By the end of the war over six million women had entered the labor force (Coleman 16). They worked:

'[In] shipyards, lumber mills, steel mills, [and] foundries. They[were] welders, electricians, mechanics, and even boilermakers. They operate[ed] streetcars, buses, cranes, and tractors. Women engineers [worked] in the drafting rooms and women physicists and chemists in the great industrial laboratories.' (Coleman 18-19)

Not only did women answer the call of the war industries, but they also served as police officers, taxi drivers, farmers, lawyers, clerical workers, statisticians, journalists, and musicians (Coleman 18). With the atrocities and the causalities of the war, women volunteered to serve as nurses, and over three million served as volunteers for the American Red Cross during World War II (19). In addition, ten million women entered the military and participated in the armed forces as air-raid wardens, nurses, fire watchers, messengers, and drivers. Furthermore, girls on the home front scanned the American skies for signs of attacks by the Axis powers (Coleman 19). Most single women welcomed the opportunity to enter the workforce, which was an opportunity they had sought since the Great Depression (Coleman 44).

At the beginning of the war, many female workers that were already active in workforce transferred from jobs, such as waitressing, to war jobs because the pay was substantially higher. In Mobile, Alabama, waitresses made fourteen dollars per week, but shipyard workers made thirty-seven dollars per week (Coleman 43). Margarita Salazar quit her job in a beauty shop to obtain a job in an aircraft factory because "'The money was in defense. You made more hours, and the more hours you made, the more money you made. And it was exciting. . . . You figured you were doing something for your country-and at the same time making money'" (Coleman 42). As a result, there was a mass exodus of workers from the service industry to the war
industry. The number of women working in manufacturing increased by 141 percent between the years of 1940 and 1944 (Winkler 51). The percentage of women in the workforce replacing men grew by 460 percent during World War II because they replaced men in factories, shipyards, and other industries and trades (Hartmann 21). Two years after 1943, women constituted forty-five percent of the workers working in aircraft factories, which equaled 475,000 workers (Weatherford 130). By 1943, women working in Detroit factories constituted 90.8 percent of the workforce (Winkler 51). With the end of World War II, seventy-five percent of American women were married and one in four of them worked outside of the home (Hartmann 21). With their husbands’ absences, servicemen’s wives constituted nearly half of the American workforce during the war (Winkler 50). Beginning in 1941, 14,600,000 women were employed; however, 19,370,000 women were employed by the end of 1944 (Winkler 50). Although some women entered and left the workforce throughout the war, fifty percent of women in the United States were employed during the war at some point (Winkler 50).

While older female citizens encountered barriers when they tried to work at the beginning of the war, they were soon incorporated into the industries that produced war materials. Initially, industries set age limits for hiring women workers; however, they soon abolished this form of age discrimination. According to one older woman seeking war work:

‘The specter of age reared its ugly head whenever I struck out in the direction of an employment office . . . A little later, however, it became evident that the supply of acceptable young workers would soon become exhausted . . . Sure enough, before long . . . the age limit rose from forty to forty-five, forty-five to fifty; and then in the more congested factory districts it disappeared altogether.’ (Coleman 42)

During the war, over two million women over the age of thirty-five found war work and by the end of the war, half of all women workers were over the age of thirty-five (Winkler 50). Although older women could not perform the heavy industrial requirements of all jobs, they
were capable of performing certain jobs that were not as physically demanding. Many older women were used to perform the “drop test” on newly manufactured telephones (Coleman 42).

One of the many legacies that women workers in defense industries have embedded in the American society is the realization of full-scale war production. To date, the American home front’s unparalleled production record during World War II included the production of 296,429 airplanes, 102,351 tanks and self-propelled guns, 372,431 artillery pieces, 57 million tons of artillery ammunition, 82,620 warships, and forty-four billion rounds of small arms ammunition (Coleman 19).

With a shortage of students due to the exodus of men to the fronts in Europe, Africa, and Asia, universities and scientific institutions that were male dominated opened their doors to women (Coleman 76). During World War II, the Harvard Medical School allowed women to enter as students for the first time in its prestigious history (Coleman 76). At such institutions like the Mellon Institute for Industrial Research in Pittsburgh, the number of female chemists jumped five hundred percent during the war (76-77). Through education, women became astronomers, lawyers, architects, geologists, engineers, journalists, and meteorologists (76). Not only were women becoming educated and filling newly opened job opportunities, but they also were instrumental in the development of new products during the war. Elisabeth Ackermann, a chemist at the Westinghouse Laboratories in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, worked with other chemists to develop a plastic glue that was able to support the weight of a two hundred pound locomotive (Coleman 77).

Not only did the population of women working in the service and manufacturing industries increase, but also the number of women filling government jobs increased from 19.4 percent in 1940 to 38.4 percent by 1944. Women filled military positions, where they enjoyed
tremendous success by becoming ranking officers and participating in all military exercises and activities with the exception of combat. Other governmental opportunities were provided by executive agencies, like the United States Department of Agriculture, which hired women to work in the sawmills of Turkey Pond, New Hampshire (Coleman 76). Being dubbed ‘‘pond women,’’ ladies, like Florence Drouin and Elizabeth Esty, worked long hours standing on rafts and floating logs to the sawmill (Winkler 76). In an article appearing in the August 1944 issue of National Geographic the author states:

‘‘The balance of power rests in women’s hands. Literally. Behind the whine of sawmills and roar of blast furnaces, the hammer of arsenals and thunder of machine shops-in shipyards, factories, foundries, slaughterhouses, and laboratories—women are manipulating the machinery of war.’’
(Coleman 77-78)

Throughout the war, women began to work longer hours, and factory workers were transformed into ‘‘‘production soldiers’’’ (Hartmann 21; Weatherford 128). During the war, a traditional workweek consisted of forty-eight hours, and some women, like Ruth Millard, worked as many as fifty-three hours per week (Weatherford 128). Factories transformed their production lines from those of ‘‘‘lingerie to camouflage netting; from baby carriages to field-hospital food carts; from lipstick cases to bombs fuses . . . . from ribbons and silk goods to parachutes; from beer cans to grenades . . . and from vacuum cleaners to gas-mask parts’’’ (Weatherford 128).

Even women whose husbands would not let them enter the factory managed to convince manufacturers to let them participate in the war effort. The mother of Terry Gianzinetti was not allowed to work by her husband; however, she and others like her persuaded employers to allow them to take work home. Thus, these women transformed their homes into assembly lines by assembling products in the home (Coleman 45-46).
Although women faced initial barriers of discrimination when they attempted to enter the workforce, some employers soon realized the utility of women, who could perform some manufacturing tasks better than men. Many manufacturers enjoyed the talents of female welders and commented that certain welding tasks were best performed by women because they could fit into smaller spaces and crevices than many men (Winkler 51).

Reasons Women Decided to Enter the Workforce

Making the decision to enter the workforce proved to be a personal decision, and many women decided to enter the workforce for patriotic, financial, and emotional reasons. Throughout World War II, women predominantly entered war jobs for patriotic reasons. They felt that they were directly contributing to the war and to the victory. Josephine von Miklos abandoned her career as a fashion designer to work in a munitions factory because she felt that she would be “‘pitch[ing] in and fight[ing], too’” (Coleman 45). In addition, other women, who were already working in the service sector of the American economy, left present jobs to seek more patriotic jobs that contributed directly to the war effort abroad. Adele Erenberg, a cosmetic clerk at a drugstore quit her job to obtain a job in which she made hydraulic-valve systems for bombers. To her, working as a cosmetic clerk seemed “‘asinine . . . to be selling lipstick when the country was at war. I felt that I was capable of doing something more than that toward the war effort’” (Coleman 45). Working as a crane operator at the Rex Chain Belt Company, Rose Kaminski helped to construct howitzers (Stevens 10-12). As she lifted heavy parts with the crane she operated, she thought, “‘You can see the gun barrels. You know that it’s part of the war’” (Stevens 12). “‘It wasn’t like at the other place where you had piddly little pieces, and you were doing something. You were accomplishing something’” (Stevens 12). Other women that were currently employed felt that their efforts could be better devoted to their country during
the war because others in their current occupation were better suited to continue their career
during wartime (Coleman 51). A former actress took a job for the Todd Shipyards Corporation
during the war (Coleman 51). She stated:

‘Perhaps you might feel that I could do a good job of entertaining the soldiers in camps. But there
are others who are better entertainers than I. I gladly give way to them. But I feel that I must do
something to help, and it seems to me that an opportunity to work in a shipyard is almost heaven-
sent.’ (Coleman 51)

With the overwhelming number of advertisements for war work on the radio, women felt
that they could not escape entering the workforce. Lue Rayne Culbertson remembers hearing
“‘If you’re an American citizen, come to gate so-and-so at Lockheed or at the shipyards, in San
Pedro. It was just the times, when everybody went to the shipyards. It was ‘We need you.’ You
turned the radio on: ‘We need you!’ ”’ (Coleman 45). With these overwhelming appeals,
women, like Culbertson felt it was necessary to enter the workforce as an American citizen.

Another dominant factor that contributed to the entrance of women into the workforce,
especially the wives of servicemen, was the concern over financial stability. Some women, like
Shirley Hackett, sought war work because they needed to “‘make more money because [they]
were on [their] own . . . so [they] applied for a job at a war plant’ ” (Coleman 45). Others were
driven to the workforce by the children they had at home, and some mothers decided to enter the
workforce in order to work together. According to Nell Conley, she and a friend decided to enter
the workforce because “‘We both had to work, we both had children, so we became welders,
and if I may say so, damned good ones’ ” (Coleman 45). Not only did women enter the
workforce solely for financial reasons, but also many wives suffered from financial stagnation
and loneliness (Coleman 53). The wives of servicemen, like Josephine McKee, worked in
factories in order to pay off debts from weaker times (Winkler 53). Leola Houghland, who was a
welder at the Associated Shipyards, used her wartime income to pay off the loans on her family’s home (Winkler 53).

Many women felt alone on the home front with the absence of their sons and husbands, and as a result, they decided to enter the workforce in order to keep themselves busy and in order to bring their loved ones home sooner. Like others, a former housewife of twenty-seven years took a war job because she “‘would not [be] sit[ting] at home and feeling sorry’” for herself (Coleman 51). A former cook, Evelyn Knight became a worker at a navy shipyard because “After all, I’ve got to keep body and soul together, and I’d rather earn a living this way than cook over a hot stove’” (Winkler 53). A worker at a rubber plant remarked, “‘Every time I test a batch of rubber, I know it’s going to help bring my three sons home quicker’” (Winkler 54).

Not only did women enter the workforce for emotional reasons, but also some women welcomed the opportunity to become acquainted with other women. To them, work served as a method of socialization that was more rewarding than housework. According to one woman worker, “‘[the] companionship of working with others is vastly more stimulating and rewarding than housework’” (Winkler 53). Furthermore, she concluded that working out of the home helped her to avoid the “‘narrowing effect that staying at home full time exerts upon my outlook on life’” (Winkler 53). A government secretary in Detroit stated that she “‘would just die if [she] had to stay at home and keep house’” (Winkler 54). Not only did work serve as a new form of socialization, but also one homemaker concluded that she thought women entered the workforce because ”‘they [women] for the first time in their life feel important’” (Winkler 54).

To some women, entering the workforce was an opportunity to prove that they were equal to men. A former cosmetic clerk, Adele Erenberg was intimidated for two weeks because the male workers alienated themselves from her. Finally she said, “‘Okay you bastards, I’m
going to prove to you I can do anything you can do, and maybe better than some of you’ ” (Winkler 54). Some women, like Rose Kaminski, had fathers and loved ones that served as crane operators, and they took advantage of the opportunity to prove that they could perform these same tasks (Stevens 12). When observing the cranes at the Rex Chain Belt Company she recollected, “‘Oh is that what my father used to do?’” (Stevens 12). She thought, “‘I’d like to try and see if I could do it’” (Stevens 12). Writing to her husband serving abroad, Polly Crow announced her newly acquired war job by stating, “You are now the husband of a career woman-just call me your little Ship Yard Babe! Yeh! I made up my mind that I wanted to work from 4:00 p.m. ‘till midnight so I could have my cake and eat it too” (Litoff and Smith 147).

Creating the Postwar Woman

By the spring of 1943, editors and writers were looking to the government for a “blue print of the postwar American society” (Honey 55). In proposing a blue print of the postwar society to the government, editors and writers were specifically interested in the fate of female industrial workers in the postwar society. Many governmental institutions, like the OWI and the Bureau of Campaigns, failed to play a key role in the reconversion of women from the workplace to the home after 1944 because they lacked congressional funding (55). Without direction and funding, the Bureau of Campaigns ceased to exist and the Magazine Bureau meagerly performed reconversion efforts until the summer of 1945 (Honey 56). “Although the Magazine War Guide did not tackle the issue of reconversion in a clear and comprehensive way, the guide did inform magazines that according to the Women’s Bureau, the best fields for women in the postwar market would be in traditional female areas” (Honey 57). Between June 1944 and August 1945, the only publication produced by the Magazine Bureau was the Magazine War Guide (Honey 56). In reconverting women from the workplace to the home, magazine editors were directed to
discard articles that provided women with ideas of how to decrease the amount of housework done and to replace them with articles that addressed the "'new national problem'" (Honey 56). These new articles would primarily emphasize the rise of juvenile delinquency and other social problems that had arisen with the entrance of working mothers (Honey 56). Continuing the theme that war work was temporary and that the necessity would end with the termination of the war, magazines and advertisers worked to urge women to abandon their war jobs when the servicemen returned home seeking their previous held positions (Honey 57). Women were told to return to the home or to seek traditional careers (Honey 120). With the reconversion of women to traditional sectors of the economy, especially secretarial positions, manufacturers of typewriters "encouraged working women to enter clerical work, one of the areas, along with teaching and nursing, that [the] OWI had indicated would need large numbers of women in the postwar period" (Honey 120). One advertisement, by the manufacturer Smith-Corona, pictured a woman looking at her factory identification badge and asking, "'When it becomes a souvenir, what then? . . . . Like our fighting men, you've earned the right to choose the work you enjoy'" (Honey 122). While advising women to choose enjoyable postwar careers, this advertisement encouraged women to learn how to type and to seek feminine career (122). A Mobil advertisement in September 1944 assured returning soldiers that they would be able to obtain their old job with its caption: "'Yes-your old job is waiting for you, Soldier!'" (Honey 120).

Throughout the era of reconversion of women from the factory to the home, the propaganda of the government and industry used tactics that had attracted women to the workforce in order to encourage women to become homemakers once again. During the war, advertisements encouraged and praised women for dually and equally performing the tasks of the workplace and of the home. However, they used this idea to advise women that they could not
conduct both jobs successfully and efficiently forever. Postwar advertisements now showed women leisurely and enjoyably resting at home after the war victory and women using their war wages to purchase household items that helped to keep housework to a minimum (Honey 122). In addition, advertisers began to attack working mothers with advertisements that showed a factory worker pleading in front of a judge on behalf of her juvenile delinquent son, who was labeled as a “‘Victory Vandal’” (Honey 124). Between June and September of 1945 one in every four female factory workers had been relieved of their duties (Honey 124). At the end of the war, employers and supervisors, such as William Mulcahy said:

‘Unfortunately when the war ended, despite the skill and patriotism the women had displayed, we were forced to lay them off. I will never forget the day after the war ended. We met the girls at the door, and they were lined up all the way down Market Street [in Camden, New Jersey] to the old movie theater about eight blocks away, and we handed them a slip to go over to personnel and get their severance pay. We didn’t even allow them in the building, all these women with whom I had become so close, who had worked seven days a week for years and had been commended so many times by the navy for the work they were doing.’ (Coleman 21-22)

By the summer of 1945, seventy-five percent of the women that were currently working in shipyards and aircraft factories were released from their jobs. Once again, the workforce became male dominated, and the only opportunities were in the service industry, which contained traditional feminine careers, like those of secretaries and teachers (Winkler 56). By the end of 1946, the number of women in the workforce decreased from 19,170,000 to 16,896,000 (Hartmann 24).

Although women hoped and wanted to continue their jobs, they realized that society was not ready for their permanent entrance into the workforce. Many women wanted to maintain their wartime jobs, and surveys distributed between 1943 and 1945 found that between sixty-one percent and eight-five percent of current female workers hoped to continue their work in the postwar period. A worker at the Naval Advance Depot said, “‘My husband wants a wife, not a
career woman’ ” (Winkler 56). Influential industrial female leaders aided in the campaign to reconvert women to the home. A leader of an aircraft union, Jane Sloakes stated on the radio, 

“‘When this war is over—I’ll get a manicure, put on the frilliest dress I can find, pour a whole bottle of cologne over my head, and THEN I’LL BE GLAD to give up my Union chair in the Eagle Airie Room to some boy who comes marching home to deserve it’ ” (Winkler 56). As Bettie Allie, a Michigan government unemployment official stated, “‘When the period of postwar adjustment comes, and their men come home . . . you will see women returning naturally to their homes’ ” (Winkler 56).

Conclusion

Beginning with World War II, out of necessity, traditional social barriers that had prevented women workers in the past were lowered (Coleman 22). For the first time in history, women had the opportunity to prove their capacity and capabilities in the industrial world (Coleman 22). In order to recruit women to the workforce, government organizations, including the OWI, the WMC, the Magazine Bureau, the WAC, and the Bureau of Campaigns, used patriotic appeals, emotional pleas, and pictorial images, like Rosie the Riveter, in order to sell war jobs to women. Women entered the workforce for financial reasons, in order to bring loved ones home sooner, and in order to prove their abilities to their male counterparts (Hartmann 23). Although the government initiated special campaigns, especially ones directed toward married women, the images that filled the posters of World War II reminded women that their primary role was in the home and that their role in the male dominated workforce, while essential to victory, was only temporary (Hartmann 23). Unprecedented in the history of America, women were able to successfully complete the dual tasks of the home and the workplace (Winkler 52). “The appeal to women’s patriotism led them to work for national ends rather than personal
satisfaction, thereby dampening aspirations when the fighting was over” (Winkler 57). At the end of the war, women once again exited the workforce to more traditional careers in the service sector, like those in the secretarial field. Once again, the government and advertisers coordinated their efforts, but this time their efforts were coordinated in order to reconvert women from the workforce to the home and to make way for returning servicemen to acquire their jobs. Nonetheless, World War II served as an important stepping stone on the road to women’s economic and social equality, and the cooperation of businesses and the government clearly helped “to foster attitudinal shifts that provided the groundwork for a women’s movement in later years” (Winkler 57). To ensure victory, America mobilized itself for war by requiring the active support of every citizen and by making women aware of their importance, not just as mothers, wives, and homemakers, but also as workers, citizens, and soldiers (Hartmann 20). For the first time, women had “opportunities to earn income, to enter new employment fields, and to perform in a wide variety of areas that had hitherto been reserved for men” (Hartmann 20). While women were only temporarily allowed to fulfill both the demands of the workplace and the home, their dual role was essential to the Allies’ victory in World War II. Although their dual role was temporary during the 1940s, it would eventually become an inherent characteristic of American society with the increasing realization of women’s rights.
Works Cited


Appendix
Exhibit 1
Women in the war

WE CAN'T WIN WITHOUT THEM
Exhibit 2
There's work to be done and a war to be won... NOW!

SEE YOUR U. S. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE
WAR MANPOWER COMMISSION
Exhibit 3
The more **WOMEN** at work
the sooner we **WIN**!

**WOMEN ARE NEEDED ALSO AS:**

- Farm Workers
- Waitresses
- Typists
- Bus Drivers
- Timekeepers
- Salespeople
- Elevator Operators
- Taxi Drivers
- Messengers
- Launderesses
- Teachers
- Conductors

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SEE YOUR LOCAL U.S. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE
Exhibit 4
Be a Victory Farm Volunteer in the U.S. Crop Corps
Exhibit 5
USE IT UP—WEAR IT OUT—MAKE IT DO!

OUR LABOR AND OUR GOODS ARE FIGHTING
Exhibit 6
"We'll have lots to eat this winter, won't we Mother?"

Grow your own
Can your own
Exhibit 7
"OF COURSE I CAN!

I'm patriotic as can be—
And ration points won't worry me!"