

# **Propaganda's Power: Changing the Lives of World War II's Women**

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Senior Division

Individual Exhibit

Exhibit: 498 words

Process Paper: 500 words

## Process Paper

I chose to research Women's Propaganda in World War II. I have always been interested in the topic of World War II, and what life was like for civilians then. As a woman, I love seeing how women slowly become equal to men, so this propaganda influencing them to take jobs and become a part of the workforce seemed interesting to me. Because the theme this year is communication, the first thing I thought of was propaganda, because it obviously communicates an opinion.

I started my research process by looking at different websites and examples of propaganda from the time to get a general feel for my topic. I then went to the library and got three books that were full of primary and secondary sources to look at. One book that was helpful in finding pictures and examples from the time was *LIFE Our Finest Hour: The Triumphant Spirit of America's World War II Generation*. It has photographs from the time, along with little explanations and context, and that helped me fully understand my topic and the influence propaganda had. I had a hard time finding first hand accounts of how propaganda inspired women to work and help the war effort, but I found many secondary sources to help me with that.

Firstly when creating my project, I had to decide what type of project I wanted to have, and with the visual nature of my topic, I decided to go with an exhibit. I used a tri-fold board because I felt that would be the best way to display my information. I made the title board out of another blue tri-fold, by cutting off a fold and then using an x-acto knife to get the shape I wanted. The letters for the title were made on a cricut machine. I found all of my pictures in the books that I got from the library, and I got my big Rosie the Riveter poster from Amazon. After getting my title made and printing all of my words and pictures, I cut paper to be the background for each piece, then glued them on. I used red and blue paper because I felt that it matched the patriotic theme of the time.

The switch from a peace to wartime economy in America at the beginning of the war was fast as the men went away and left the women to take care of everything. Propaganda was made to communicate with women and encourage them to take the jobs the men left behind and support the war effort.

Women's propaganda in World War II revolutionized the work force, radicalized the way women were viewed in society, and completely flipped women's opinions of their own capabilities. The way this propaganda communicated to people on the home front and created a patriotic sense of working together to win the war was essential to the U.S. and allied powers' success in the war, and especially to the lives of women in the workforce.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

**Bourke-White, Margaret. "Women in Steel." *LIFE*, 9 Aug. 1943, pp. 75-81.**

I used this source for a quote about how the war dramatically increased the number of women working in aviation, as well as many photos because the article was originally a photo essay. It helped me to visualize the jobs women worked and understand the conditions.

**Gruhitz-Hoyt, Olga. *They Also Served: American Women in World War II*. Secaucus, Carol Pub. Group, 1995.**

This book is a source full of direct quotes from the women who worked in World War II. I used it for a quote about a woman training in the Marines. It gave me a better understanding of how women who weren't necessarily working on the homefront helped with the war effort.

**Jordan, Killian. *Life, Our Finest Hour: The Triumphant Spirit of the World War II Generation*. New York, Time Inc. Home Entertainment, 2000.**

This book is full of primary sources, from articles written in different magazines throughout the war, to photos of all sorts of people in the war. I used both sections from the actual articles and photos I found in the book on my project, and it helped me understand different aspects of life on the homefront like rationing and conscription, rather than just the women who worked.

**Kiernan, Denise. *The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II*. Atria paperback. ed., New York, Simon & Schuster, 2020.**

This is a book that outlines the lives of women who worked at the secret Oak Ridge factories in World War II, and I used photos from it as primary sources on my project. Reading through some of it and looking at the picture helped me understand that not all the work done to help the war effort was public knowledge.

**Miller, J. Howard. *It's Our Fight Too! 1942*, National Archive and Records Administration.**

This is a poster featuring the iconic Rosie the Riveter character, albeit in a different scene that I used on my exhibit. It helped me to understand the perspective of the working woman, who might not feel appreciated during the war.

**Miller, J. Howard. *We Can Do It!* 1943, Westinghouse for the War Production Co-Ordinating Committee, National Archives and Records Administration, Still Picture Branch, Washington, DC.**

This is a classic poster featuring Rosie the Riveter in her very well known pose, I used a large version of this as my exhibit's centerpiece or hook. It was the first thing I thought of when I thought of propaganda under the subject of communication.

**"Miss Mac." *Time*, vol. XLV, no. 11, 12 Mar. 1945.**



This is a web page I found that detailed the way women's participation in the workforce changed after gaining the vote that I used as evidence in my project. It helped me gain a general understanding of when women really began participating in work outside the home.

**Horne, Madison. "These World War II Propaganda Posters Rallied the Home Front." *History*, 12 Oct. 2018, [www.history.com/news/world-war-ii-propaganda-posters-photos-united-states-home-front](http://www.history.com/news/world-war-ii-propaganda-posters-photos-united-states-home-front). Accessed 10 Dec. 2020.**

This is an article that featured many examples of propaganda at the time, some of which I used for my project. This helped me get a feel for the other types of propaganda, like the ones made for men or about other aspects of the war effort I hadn't considered.

**Mathis, Susan. "Propaganda to Mobilize Women for World War II." *Social Education*, [www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/publications/se/5802/](http://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/publications/se/5802/580210.html#:~:text=In%20World%20War%20II%2C%20the,having%20babies%20and%20washin%20dishes)**

**580210.html#:~:text=In%20World%20War%20II%2C%20the,having%20babies%20and%20washin%20dishes. Accessed 7 Dec. 2020.**

This is an online essay about how propaganda made women start working in jobs outside of the home that I used for research. This helped me understand my own perspective a little more and gave me deeper information about how it really mobilized women.

**McDermott, Annette. "How World War II Empowered Women." *History*, 2 July 2018, [www.history.com/news/how-world-war-ii-empowered-women](http://www.history.com/news/how-world-war-ii-empowered-women). Accessed 7 Dec. 2020.**

This is an article about how World War II led women to the workplace and helped to show them that they were just as capable as men which I used in my research process. It helped me to understand that just because they worked a man's job didn't mean they got a man's respect, but that their own empowerment was the important part.

**McNearney, Allison. "Wartime Propaganda Helped Recruit the 'Hidden Army' of Women to Defeat Hitler." *History*, 23 Mar. 2018, [www.history.com/news/hitler-defeated-army-of-women](http://www.history.com/news/hitler-defeated-army-of-women). Accessed 10 Dec. 2020.**

This is an article about all of the government funded jobs that women were given during the war that ultimately helped the U.S. to win that I used for research. It helped me discover the fact that not all jobs during the war were publicly advertised in propaganda.

**Pearce Rotondi, Jessica. "Underpaid, but Employed: How the Great Depression Affected Working Women." *History*, 11 Mar. 2019, [www.history.com/news/working-women-great-depression](http://www.history.com/news/working-women-great-depression). Accessed 29 Jan. 2021.**

This is an article about the Great Depression's effect on women and how it increased their numbers in the workforce that I used as evidence on my project. This gave me a better knowledge of women's roles before the war, as well as what caused them to work outside the home before.

**Rose, Cynthia, et al. *American Decades Primary Sources 1940-1949*. Detroit, Gale, ©2004-2013.**

This is a reference book full of primary sources from the war's time period. I used many of the photo sources along with the author's comments on my exhibit. This was one of the first books I looked at, so it gave me a few more ideas of what was happening at the time, as well as new forms of propaganda.

**Rudiger, Chris, and Sahil Khanna. "World War II and Propaganda." *Stanford.edu*, [web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/](http://web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/)**

**World%20War%20II%20and%20Propaganda.htm#:~:text=Through%20propaganda%20C%20Americans%20promoted%20production,more%20effective%20in%20their%20attempt. Accessed 7 Dec. 2020.**

This is an online essay I found at the very beginning of my research. It's fairly general knowledge on the topic, but it did help me form a basic understanding of the propaganda used at the time and the people that it influenced.

**Spring, Kelly A. "Propaganda during World War II." *National Women's History Museum*, 2017, [www.womenshistory.org/resources/general/propaganda](http://www.womenshistory.org/resources/general/propaganda). Accessed 7 Dec. 2020.**

This is an article specifically about women's propaganda in World War II that I used for my research. It helped me to understand how propaganda directly influenced women, as well as which kinds of propaganda were the most effective.

**"Take a Closer Look: America Goes to War." *The National WWII Museum New Orleans*, [www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/america-goes-war-take-closer-look](http://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/america-goes-war-take-closer-look). Accessed 7 Dec. 2020.**

This is an article that outlines the beginning events of the war, not necessarily anything about propaganda or women, but I did use it for my research. I found it useful for creating context if not in my project then at least in my own understanding of the subject.

**"Women and Work after World War II." *PBS American Experience*, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/tupperware-work/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/tupperware-work/). Accessed 7 Dec. 2020.**

This is an article about women and their work after the war that I used in my research for my exhibit. It helped me to understand that while not all women remained in the workforce, and many didn't remain by choice, some did stay by choice, even though it was harder with the men coming home from war.

**Zeit, Joshua. "How World War II Almost Broke American Politics." *Politico Magazine*, 6 June 2019, [www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/06/06/how-world-war-ii-almost-broke-american-politics-227090](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/06/06/how-world-war-ii-almost-broke-american-politics-227090). Accessed 7 Dec. 2020.**

This is an article about the politics behind World War II in America that I used in my initial stages of research. It helped me to understand where some of the animosities of the time may have come from and also how women joining the workforce actually helped relieve some of them.



# Left Top Panel Photo

## Before the War

“Certain occupations had always been weighted towards women -- teachers, social workers, nurses, and librarians. And for those who were working-class, textile mills had been the one type of factory where jobs could be found. And on the farm, women helped out in myriad ways, as they traditionally had.” (Courtesy of Dan Bryan, “Working and Voting -- Women in the 1920s”)



“Female participation in the workforce increased in the 1920s.” (Courtesy of Dan Bryan, “Working and Voting -- Women in the 1920s”)



“A large group of women working on sewing machines, circa 1937.” (Courtesy of Jessica Pearce Rotondi, “Underpaid, But Employed: How the Great Depression Affected Working Women”)

“By 1940, 90 percent of all women’s jobs could be catalogued into 10 categories like nursing, teaching and civil service for white women, while black and Hispanic women were largely constrained to domestic work.” (Courtesy of Jessica Pearce Rotondi, “Underpaid, But Employed: How the Great Depression Affected Working Women”)

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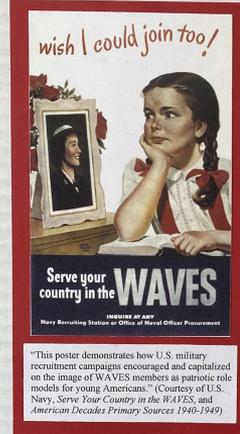
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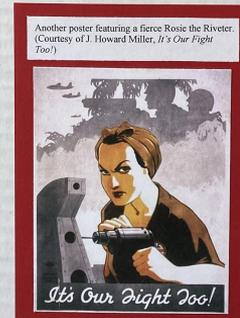
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## Propaganda

All these posters were propaganda encouraging women on the homefront to either take war jobs or support the war effort. There were many posters used for these purposes, as well as for gathering national support and inspiring men to join the Army. If this propaganda hadn't inspired the women to take jobs, the switch to wartime economy would never have been as smooth as it was. If it weren't for the women's hard work in producing important supplies for their boys, the U.S. and allied powers wouldn't have won the war, and we could all be speaking German now.



"This poster demonstrates how U.S. military recruitment campaigns encouraged and capitalized on the image of WAVES members as patriotic role models for young Americans." (Courtesy of U.S. Navy, *Serve Your Country in the WAVES*, and *American Decades Primary Sources 1940-1949*)



Another poster featuring a fictive Rosie the Riveter. (Courtesy of J. Howard Miller, *It's Our Fight Too!*)



"This poster illustrates that women are encouraged to do what they can to win the war." (Courtesy of The Royal Typewriter Company, *Victory Waits on Your Fingers*, and *American Decades Primary Sources 1940-1949*)



This poster encourages women to contribute by working at the end of the war. (Courtesy of Lawrence Wilbur, *Longing Won't Bring Him Back Sooner...*)

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Another poster featuring a fierce Rosie the Riveter. (Courtesy of J. Howard Miller, *It's Our Fight Too!*)

This poster encourages women to contribute by working at the end of the war. (Courtesy of Lawrence Wilbur, *Longing Won't Bring Him Back Sooner...*)

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## The War Effort

Besides the propaganda inspiring women to join the workforce, there were also necessary precautions that needed to be taken for the war effort. "To preserve resources for the war effort, posters championed carpooling to save on gas, warned against wasting food and urged people to collect scrap metal to recycle into military materials. In the spring of 1942, rationing programs were implemented that set limits on everyday purchases." (Courtesy of Madison Horne, "These World War II Propaganda Posters Rallied the Home Front")

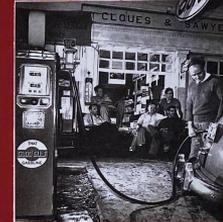


In the summer of 1943 the Agriculture Department pushed creating "Victory Gardens" to lessen the sting of rationing. This mom and daughter are pictured canning their home-grown veggies. (Courtesy of Alfred Parker, *Grow Your Own Can Your Own*)

"We'll have lots to eat this winter, won't we Mother?"



**Grow your own  
Can your own**



Alfred Cloues, the co-owner of a Warner, N.H. gas station, rationing fuel. (Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)



Restrictions to save 15% of yardage used in female clothing included restricting hems and belts to two inches and eliminating sleeve cuffs. (Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)

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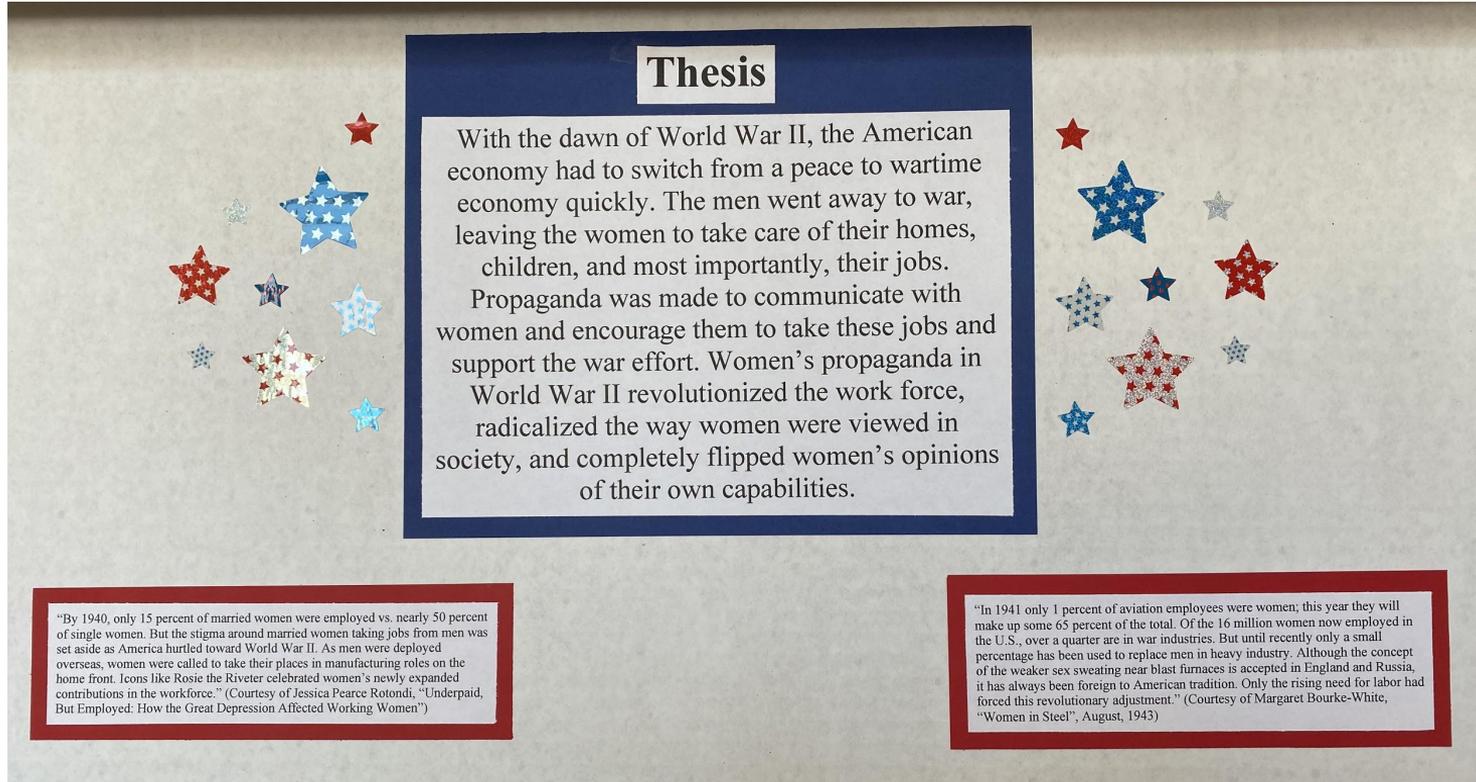
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**Thesis**

With the dawn of World War II, the American economy had to switch from a peace to wartime economy quickly. The men went away to war, leaving the women to take care of their homes, children, and most importantly, their jobs. Propaganda was made to communicate with women and encourage them to take these jobs and support the war effort. Women's propaganda in World War II revolutionized the work force, radicalized the way women were viewed in society, and completely flipped women's opinions of their own capabilities.

"By 1940, only 15 percent of married women were employed vs. nearly 50 percent of single women. But the stigma around married women taking jobs from men was set aside as America hurtled toward World War II. As men were deployed overseas, women were called to take their places in manufacturing roles on the home front. Icons like Rosie the Riveter celebrated women's newly expanded contributions in the workforce." (Courtesy of Jessica Pearce Rotondi, "Underpaid, But Employed: How the Great Depression Affected Working Women")

"In 1941 only 1 percent of aviation employees were women; this year they will make up some 65 percent of the total. Of the 16 million women now employed in the U.S., over a quarter are in war industries. But until recently only a small percentage has been used to replace men in heavy industry. Although the concept of the weaker sex sweating near blast furnaces is accepted in England and Russia, it has always been foreign to American tradition. Only the rising need for labor had forced this revolutionary adjustment." (Courtesy of Margaret Bourke-White, "Women in Steel", August, 1943)

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“We Can Do It!” (Courtesy of J. Howard Miller, *We Can Do It!*)

“**Rosie the Riveter** While other girls attend their fav’rite cocktail bar Sipping dry martinis, munching caviar, There’s a girl who’s really putting them to shame. Rosie is her name. All the day long whether rain or shine, She’s a part of the assembly line. She’s making history working for victory, Rosie the riveter. Keeps a sharp lookout for sabotage Sitting up there on the fuselage. That little frail can do more than a male can do, Rosie the riveter. Rosie’s got a boyfriend, Charlie. Charlie, he’s a Marine Rosie, is protecting Charlie Working overtime on the riveting machine. When they gave her a production “E” She was as proud as a girl could be. There’s something true about, Red, white a blue about Rosie the riveter.” (Courtesy of Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb, *Rosie the Riveter*)

# Center Bottom Panel Photo

## Propaganda's Influence

After the women had proven that they could do a man's job just as well as a man, while supporting a war effort and their own households, people began to realize they were needed in the workforce and they were capable of more than housework.

"The character of Rosie the Riveter has greater resonance than any other character created by artists to symbolize strong, dedicated female factory workers who retained their femininity even while doing what was then considered men's work." (Courtesy of J. Howard Miller, *We Can Do It!*, and *American Decades Primary Sources 1940-1949*)



"Celia (Szapka) Klemksi, a secretary transferred from the Manhattan Project's original offices in New York City, Celia grew up in the coal-mining town of Shenandoah Pennsylvania." (Courtesy of Denise Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*)



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"Jane (Greer) Puckett, a statistician-mathematician from Paris, Tennessee, Jane oversaw a team of young women who crunched numbers around the clock to track the production rates of the Y-12 plant." (Courtesy of Denise Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*)



"Colleen (Rowan) Black, a leak pipe inspector at the K-25 plant, Colleen left Nashville, Tennessee, for Oak Ridge, along with more than 10 members of her extended family." (Courtesy of Denise Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*)

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*Rosie the Riveter* lyrics on the previous text slide.

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## Working Women

Along with keeping house, the women on the homefront worked a variety of jobs. "It's estimated that up to six million women joined the civilian workforce during World War II in both white and blue-collar jobs, such as: streetcar operators, taxi drivers, construction workers, steel workers, lumber workers, munitions workers, agriculture workers, government workers, office workers." (Courtesy of Annette McDermott, "How World War II Empowered Women") They also worked in the military by joining forces like the WASPs and WAVES, or by helping as military nurses.

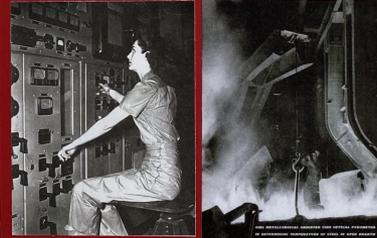


Women work at welding. (Courtesy of Margaret Bourke-White, "Women in Steel", August, 1943)



Nurses in Seattle enrolling for possible military service. (Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)

Woman working at a cubicle control panel in the Y-12 plant. (Courtesy of Denise Klerman, *The Girls of Atomic City*)



"Girl uses optical pyrometer in determining temperature of steel in open hearth." (Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)

"Boot camp consisted of six weeks of marching, saluting, and learning, six weeks of training as hard as the men... The women marched two and three hours without stopping to rest. If some girl fainted you were to step over her and go on, for if you stopped to help you got a demerit," [said one recruit]... the drill instructors were tartars. After shining her shoes for an hour, she would be told they were dirty. If a recruit forgot to button a button, it was roughly pulled off and handed to her. Hair was measured with a rule to be sure it was the proper length... The women hated the drill instructor but they did as he said. They learned that a Marine always follows orders." (Courtesy of Olga Guhzil-Hoyt, *They Also Served*, 1995)

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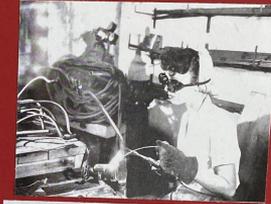
"Aviation machinist mates train at a Navy school in Norman, Oklahoma."  
(Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)



"Women Marines aboard a Coast Guard-manned transport in the Pacific stay in shape." (Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)



"Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) are instructors on .50-caliber machine gun turrets at the Naval Air Gunners School in Hollywood, Florida." (Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)



"Women occupied a wide variety of roles at Oak Ridge, wielding everything from blowtorches to Geiger counters." (Courtesy of Denise Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*)



"Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs) ferry aircraft from factory to base, serve as test pilots and flight instructors, shuttle officers, tow targets for artillery practice. Here, pilot trainees at Avenger Field, near Sweetwater, Texas." (Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)



Shift change between 22,000 workers at the Y-12 plant in 1945. (Courtesy of Denise Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*)

Source Credit Text:

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“Aviation machinist mates train at a Navy school in Norman, Oklahoma.” (Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)

“Women Marines aboard a Coast Guard-manned transport in the Pacific stay in shape.” (Courtesy of Killian Jordan, *LIFE Our Finest Hour*)

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## After the War

While after the war, many men did take their old jobs back, many women remained in the workforce. You may think that with the baby boom and rigid gender roles of the time, women returned to being homemakers, but that is not the case. Middle class families aspiring to live the domestic life needed to have two breadwinners, so while the men went off to high paying jobs, the women went to work in the factories, all while trying to remain within the realm of the ideal 1950's housewife.



"On August 14, 1945, Oak Ridgers and people everywhere celebrated the end of World War II." (Courtesy of Denise Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City*)

"The point that Captain Mildred McAfee liked most to make was that her Waves had released more than 70,000 men for combat, which was the same as adding 70,000 men to the Navy's muster. They were the second largest women's service branch. The Coast Guard's SPARs numbered 9,745; the women Marines 19,000. There were 82,000 Waves in uniform and 92,500 Wacs. Considering the difference in size between the Army and Navy, women were carrying a proportionately far greater load in the Navy." (Courtesy of *Time*, "Miss Mac", March, 1945)

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