

Section IV: World War II



Title: Changing Gender Roles on the Home Front

Grade Level: Middle/High School

Objectives: Conduct historical research using the Museum's collections of Rosie the Riveter artifacts and images. Analyze how World War II changed gender roles in U.S. society. Determine the societal impact of females holding industrial jobs during the war (numbers involved, effect on other relationships in society).

National History Standards:

Standards 4: Student Research Capabilities; Era 8:3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs.

Time: 45 minutes to introduce the project, plus in-class work time and any additional lessons on conducting historical research



Woman war worker coveralls
National Museum of American History

Background:

By the time the United States entered World War II in 1941, American defense industries were already churning out large numbers of planes and ships, trucks and tanks, guns and shells, supplies and equipment. Tons of war materials were being shipped to Britain and other nations battling the Axis. As America joined the fight, and battlefronts multiplied around the globe, demands on war production skyrocketed. Civilian industries re-tooled, manufacturing tanks instead of cars, parachutes instead of stockings, machine guns instead of Kleenex. And as men went off to war, six million women took their places on factory floors and assembly lines.

American industry and American workers produced most of the war matériel the United States and some forty other nations used to fight the war:

324,000 aircraft, 88,000 tanks, 8,800 warships, 5,600 merchant ships, 224,000 pieces of artillery, 2,382,000 trucks, 79,000 landing craft, 2,600,000 machine guns, 15,000,000 guns.



Woman welder *Courtesy of National Archives*



Welding mask *National Museum of American History*

“I worked the graveyard shift 12:00–8:00 a.m, in the shipyard. I had leather gloves, leather pants, big hood, goggles, and a leather jacket. They said you weld like you crochet.”

—Katie Grant

- Materials:**
- [Online Video—World War II Overview: North Atlantic and North Africa](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/Lesson10.aspx)
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/Lesson10.aspx>
 - Woman war worker coveralls
 - Maidenform ad: “Brassieres ... A Vital Necessity to Women at Work”
 - Welding mask used by ship welder Augusta Clawson
 - African American woman welding
 - Women riveting

Lesson:

This lesson should give students a different perspective on the effects of World War II. It provides an excellent topic for a class-wide, semi-guided research project that teaches students how to do in-depth historical research. This will prepare them for the types of projects they will have to conduct in college.

First, set the stage by showing the students the World War II overview of the North Atlantic and North African theaters on the video. Then have them write down the steps they would take to research a topic on the impact on U.S. society of the Rosie the Riveter campaign. (Steps should include: establishing a thesis, developing a process to prove the thesis, reviewing secondary sources, analyzing primary sources, and testing the accuracy of the thesis.)



Women riveting *Courtesy of National Archives*

Make sure students use a variety of sources, both primary and secondary. Have them analyze images and artifacts in the manual from the National Museum of American History collections, as well as review library primary accounts about female workers. Students should supplement this analysis with statistical data from the U.S. census; ask them to find out the numbers of female workers and compare this to totals before the war. Also, have the students compare their findings to the theses of other historians. Encourage them to be critical of what others have concluded in the past.

Follow-up Activity:

Students may know of women in their local community who recall life in America during World War II. Some of these women may be willing to say how they feel about the changes in society that occurred during their youth. This would introduce students to the skill of interviewing in addition to providing an eyewitness perspective to their current research project.

Students could research the impact of the need for workers on African Americans or American immigrants, particularly the Hispanic population. How did the new opportunities to work affect their lives?

Brassieres . . .

A VITAL NECESSITY TO WOMEN AT WORK



Work in the war industries — for the most part — is much heavier than that to which a woman has hitherto been accustomed. Working with her hands and arms — pulling, lifting, stretching — means a continual strain on the important muscles of the breasts. Though the ill-effects may not be immediately apparent, they will take their toll over a period of time — unless the worker wears a brassiere scientifically constructed to give her bosom proper support and protection. That is one of the reasons why — in this wartime era — Maiden Form is glad to be able to reassure the women of America that today, as always, they can obtain correct support with Maiden Form's scientifically designed brassieres.

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Bibliography

General

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Section III: Civil War

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Section IV: World War II

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Section V: Cold War/Vietnam

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Section VI: September 11 and Its Aftermath

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The Price of Freedom: Americans at War Teacher's Manual DVD Menu

***Americans at War*, produced by The History Channel**

An introduction to the themes of the exhibition

War of Independence

First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:

- Lydia Minturn Post, Long Island housewife, 1776
- James Collins, teenage soldier, no date
- Doonyontat, Wyandot chief, 1779
- Elijah Churchill, recipient of the first Purple Heart, 1783

Mexican War

First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:

- José María Tornel y Mendivil, Mexican secretary of war, 1837
- George Ballentine, English volunteer for the United States, 1853
- Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid, acting governor of New Mexico, 1846
- Ulysses S. Grant, American soldier, 1885

Civil War

First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:

- Louis Myers, Third West Virginia Infantry, 1862
- William G. Christie, Minnesota soldier, 1863
- Eugenia Phillips, spy for the South in Washington D.C., 1861
- Spottswood Rice, African American Union soldier, 1864

World War I

World War I Overview, produced by The History Channel

World War II

World War II Cartoons, produced by The History Channel

**World War II Overviews in the Newsreel format,
produced by The History Channel**

- From World War I to World War II
- The North Atlantic and North African Theater
- The European Theater
- The Pacific Theater

The USO in World War II, produced by The History Channel

First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:

- George Hynes, U.S. Army, a last letter home, 1942
- Robert Morris, U.S. Coast Guard, fighting in Italy, 1943
- Robert Sherrod, journalist, the beach at Tarawa, 1943
- Ann Darr, Women Airforce Service Pilots, 1997
- Daniel Inouye, Medal of Honor recipient, 2000

Vietnam

**Excerpt from *Huey Helicopter—Air Armada*, The History Channel
documentary, 2002**

First-Person Accounts, produced by Arrowhead Film & Video:

- Hal Moore, commander of a Seventh Cavalry Regiment
battalion, 2003
- Fred Castleberry, veteran of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Division, 2002
- Clarence Sasser, recipient of the Medal of Honor, 2004,
(produced by Pyramid Studios)



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