

**MOMMY, WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR?:
REPUBLICAN MOTHERS MARCH OFF TO WAR, 1940-1945**

BY

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of
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Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy



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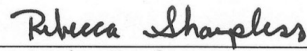
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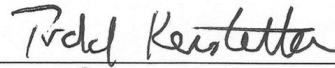
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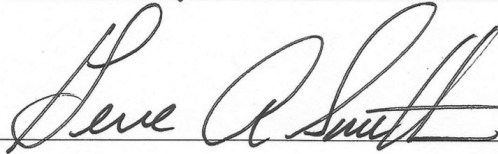
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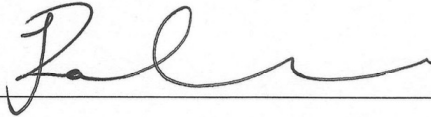
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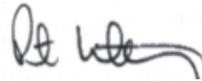
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For the AddRan College of Liberal Arts

DEDICATION

to my parents:

Edmund Winfield Cunningham
U.S. Coast Guard
USS LST 16
Feb 1943 – Mar 1946
Electrician Mate 3C
World War II Veteran



Catherine Fagan Cunningham
Republican Mother



1960s'
Democratic Family

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ABSTRACT

MOMMY, WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR? : REPUBLICAN MOTHERS MARCH OFF TO WAR, 1940-1945

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War is an agent for social change. After World War I, American women came of age politically, presenting a challenge to men's control over the political arena. In face of hostilities abroad, women began organizing to defend their communities in face of the threat of war. Their response threatened the prevailing expectations regarding women's proper place in society as homemakers. During the prewar period, government bureaus, including the Women's Bureau and Children's Bureau, recognized the need for women's involvement in the war as newly established wartime commissions worked to put the nation on a wartime status. The integrity of two core values of American society, the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family, were threatened as Selective Service found it necessary to draft ever greater numbers of men and the government instituted recruitment campaigns urging women to take war jobs outside the home and enter factories.

A lively public debate took place as government bureaus utilized the full spectrum of media in hopes of galvanizing public opinion, while the opposition highlighted the deterioration of the Democratic Family. As large numbers of women entered the sexually charged work environment, fear increased over deteriorating standards of morality and the deterioration of the Democratic Family. The most serious threat was the welfare of the

nation's children. Concerns over latch-key children and juvenile delinquency increased as mothers marched off to work. The need to care for "Rosie's" children and the federal government's responsibility for childcare became paramount.

As great numbers of working women grew tired of juggling work and home responsibilities, they quit industrial jobs. As the war wound down, government officials looked forward to returning women to their rightful place, the home, and rebuilding the Democratic Family. Women's newly acquired freedom and individuality complicated the question of women's proper place in post-war American society. At the end of the war, unmarried women, those widowed or with husbands disabled due to war, returned to lower-paying, traditionally gendered jobs while the bulk of American women returned to their home duties, legends in their time.

INTRODUCTION

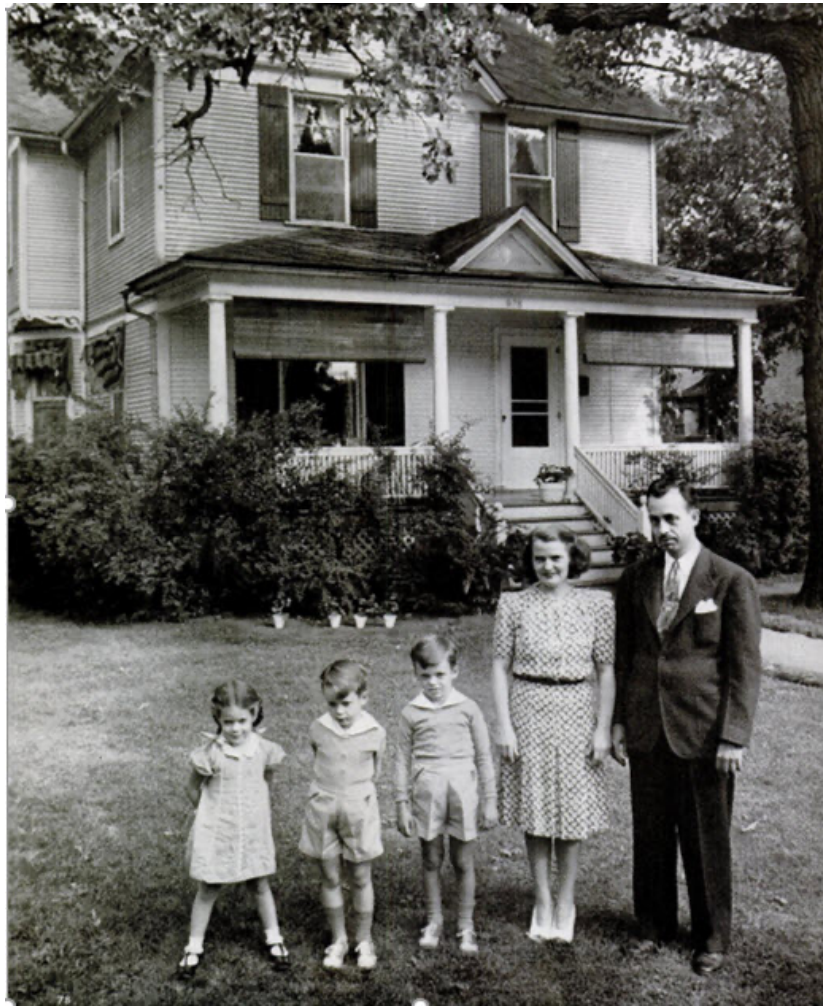


Figure 1: “Occupation: Housewife,” 1941¹

The picture above accompanied an article entitled “Occupation: Housewife.” The article stated women were the ““Biggest single group of workers’ available to draw upon [for labor] in the U. S. A.”² The author wrote that “Labor unions have worked long and successfully to reduce the number of hours workers should toil. The housewife, as a worker, remains a unique

¹ Unknown, “Operation Housewife,” *Life*, 11 (September 22, 1941): 78.

² “Operation Housewife,” 83.

classification in the 1940s. Her job is 24-hours-a-day, including Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. Asleep or awake, she is always on call.”³

Entrance into World War II threatened to draw attention away from rebuilding the highly revered family unit, weakened after almost a decade of the Depression. In prewar days, sociologists pondered the potential impact of war on the family. James Bossard commented, “Studies of the effects of war have concerned themselves in the past chiefly with its economic and political consequences, somewhat less with its social reverberations, and to a rather minor extent with its meaning for the family.”⁴ Two years later as women entered the workforce, Charles R. Hoffer wrote the effect of war on established families would be “far-reaching.”⁵ He stated:

For the wife, no ready-made pattern of conduct is available. She must make her adjustment as the exigencies of the situation permit or demand. . . . Employment of women outside the home is bound to contribute to the economic independence of women and make more secure for them a status which is similar to that enjoyed by men. Absence of the husband from home also contributes to this result. The war, therefore, is accentuating changes in American family life. The trend is away from the traditional patriarchal family to a companionship type in which affection will play a dominant role.⁶

When men entered the armed forces, the military subjected them to a rigid lifestyle—training, drilling, and eventually overseas assignments—however for the wife there existed no established routine and they needed to reinvent their routines to accomplish the all the daily household chores, economic duties, and routine maintenance, once done by two. Hoffer states the

³ The September 22, 1941 issue of *Life Magazine* featured Jane Amberg, a typical housewife, her husband and three children. A *Life* photographer followed Jane through her day starting at 6:30 a.m. serving breakfast, making beds, cleaning bathrooms, preparing lunches, shopping, and “at the end of the day she turns into hostess and party girl for her husband. “Operation Housewife,” 83.

⁴ James Bossard, “War and the Family”, *American Sociological Review* 16, no. 3 (June 1941): 330-344, 330.

⁵ Charles Hoffer, “Impact of War on American Communities,” in “The War, Education and Society,” special issue, *Review of Educational Research* vol. 13, no. 1, (February 1943): 7.

⁶ Hoffer, 7.

overarching social value of the Republican Mother would be challenged. After working outside the home, women would look at their role as homemakers, mothers, and wives differently.

Worries over the impact of war on the American family became a national concern. In the 1940s, mainstream journalism focused on the trials that white, middle-class American families would face in wartime, ignoring the racist division between white and black American women. In hindsight, women's relationship to the family and state had already undergone great change, particularly during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A significant body of scholarly literature looks at American women's roles in war work outside the home. Historians trace the social and economic changes that undermined the sentimentality attached to motherhood, making the ideal more myth than reality. Historians have written volumes on women's role during World War II and its impact on women and American society. World War II inspired a new genre of historiography focused on women's activities during the war. The early 1970s saw the first efforts to write women's history into World War II; prior to that time, archival information on women had been limited to records of the Children's Bureau and Women's Bureau.⁷ The number of books and articles on working women in World War II is quite extensive. The selections reviewed are considered the most important contributions to an understanding of women's role in World War II.

Historian William Chafe started the debate over the impact World War II had on women's role in post war society in *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1930-1970*. The best way to summarize his view, in terms of garnering women greater equality in post-war America, was that it was a lost cause. Chafe laments that "While the war produced unprecedented changes in women's numerical representation in the

⁷ Jessie Kratz, "Pieces of History," National Archives, March 1, 2017, <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2017/03/01/womens-history-in-the-archives/>.

labor force, it failed to bring a parallel improvement in the economic opportunities most women enjoyed” after the war.⁸ In his introduction, he sets the stage for the women’s contribution to the war effort as part of a continuum of the earlier feminist movement and laments their failure to gain postwar equality. Recognizing the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment giving women suffrage after World War I, Chafe chronicles how the various clashes between groups of women seeking a greater voice in unions, better working conditions, and equal rights, resulted in the failure to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. While Chafe praises women’s roles in war work and describes World War II as a “watershed event” and a “milestone for women in America,” he acknowledges economic equality remained a distant goal.⁹

The 1980s saw a rash of new studies on women war workers, setting up a lively debate over the war’s impact on women’s place in society. Women historians utilized case studies, comparing and contrasting women’s work in different defense industries across the country, to understand what, if any, change resulted in women’s position in post-war American society. Karen Anderson, in *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the Status of Women during World War II*, compared the impact the war had on women’s employment in three cities involved in heavy war production in different regions of the United States: Baltimore, Seattle, and Detroit, examining a variety of issues women faced related to war work, including racial and age discrimination in these communities. Anderson agrees with Chafe, that the war was a “turning point” and “greatly accelerated the tendency of women to seek paid employment, especially including those with family responsibilities,” but she concludes, “The influx of large numbers of married women into the labor force marked an important event in American social history. . . involving as it did the implicit rejection of the idea that a woman’s household

⁸ William Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 184.

⁹ William Chafe, *The American Woman*, 195.

responsibilities could not be reconciled with outside employment.”¹⁰ While Anderson recognized women’s entrance into war jobs had the potential to change gendered relations, Dee Ann Campbell disagrees.

Campbell argues that once the war was over, society returned to prewar gendered relationships, men and women resumed their traditional roles, and there was no real change in society. In *Women at War: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era*, Campbell offers a broad overview of women’s wartime activities—war workers, nurses, volunteers, and women in military services—demonstrating the scope of their experiences during the war but disagrees with Chafe’s optimistic assessment that the war was a turning point in women’s history, arguing changes that did occur were only temporary. Based on the results of postwar interviews, Campbell rejects claims that “women had a ‘taste for male jobs or aspired to a rewarding career’” and participated in war work reluctantly.¹¹ While Campbell acknowledges wartime experiences “set the stage for the future,” they made no significant difference in women’s lives for a couple decades.¹²

In contrast to the national studies on working women in World War II, historians have also written on local aspects of the war. Amy Kesselman offers a local study of a single industry, the Kaiser shipyards in Vancouver, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, and the changing nature of the workforce, once a male domain where only two percent of the workforce was female.¹³ In *Fleeting Opportunities*, Kesselman uses a variety of documents—interviews, government archives, and periodicals—incorporating thirty-five interviews with wartime shipyard women employees. She states her goal is “to reconstruct the dynamic generated by women attempting to

¹⁰ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the Status of Women during World War II*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981), 12, 4.

¹¹ D’Ann, Campbell, *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 4.

¹² Campbell, *Women at War*, 4.

¹³ Amy Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers, in Portland and Vancouver During World War II and Reconversion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 6.

shape their lives in an environment that sometimes presented them with opportunities and challenges and at other times with constraints and obstacles.”¹⁴ Her work highlights sexual tensions in the shipyards, i.e. management’s exploitation of women’s bodies and women’s efforts to navigate through them.

Historians have focused on components outside of war work such as propaganda campaigns employed to bring millions of women into war work, noting the classist differences in their appeal. Working together, the Office of War Information and the Advertising Council, generated fictional stories and advertisements meant to appeal to women in different social classes. Maureen Honey, in *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II*, analyzes the propaganda used to draw women into service to their country. Honey focused her study on two popular magazines appealing to different economic groups: *True Story*, popular with working class women, and the *Saturday Evening Post* for its appeal to the middle-class. She argues stories published in *True Story* “concentrated on the problems that hampered its readers from achieving the American dream compared to stories in the *Post* which “celebrated the virtues of middle-class life.”¹⁵ Honey concludes the government’s propaganda campaign was “the most comprehensive, well-organized effort this society has made toward ending prejudice against women in male occupations and toward legitimizing the notion that women belong in the paid labor force.”¹⁶

Leila Rupp’s study, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda*, compares the recruitment campaigns conducted in the United States to German efforts to attract women workers. Propaganda campaigns in both countries offered various incentives for women

¹⁴ Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 6.

¹⁵ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 17.

¹⁶ Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 211.

to leave their homes and take war jobs. Rupp points out American propaganda stressed glamour, respectability, and patriotic service. She argues German propaganda efforts paled in comparison to American campaigns. Nazi recruitment messages stressed the age-old ideals of “sacrifice for the nation,” and “the mother of the *Volk*,” or people.¹⁷ Rupp agrees with historians who claim that the war did not have any permanent impact on American women.

The Civil Rights Movement incited scholarship on African American women, and in more recent years, historians broadened their studies to include African American and Mexican American (Latina) women in former eras. During World War II, as men left for war, women adapted to their new environment which demanded a new level of independence. Demands for women workers offered African American women an opportunity to leave housekeeping jobs and enter war industries. Although historians have praised the increased job opportunities for women in World War II, Karen Tucker Anderson, in “Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II,” criticizes their failure to draw attention to the lack of opportunity for black women in wartime employment. Anderson disagrees with William Chafe’s assessment, that “opportunities generated by the wartime economy and the long-term changes they fostered constituted a ‘second emancipation’ for black women.”¹⁸ Acknowledging that black women advanced in terms of increased employment, Anderson argues that Chafe “understate[s] the extent to which discrimination persisted and ignores the fact that the assumptions of a historically balkanized labor force continued to determine the distribution of the benefits of a full-employment economy.”¹⁹ She notes he also ignored the unequal distribution of workers

¹⁷ Leila Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 168.

¹⁸ Anderson, “Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II,” *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (June 1982), 82-97, 83.

¹⁹ Anderson, “Last Hired, First Fired,” 83.

across the wide range of jobs available with African American women finding few opportunities for skilled labor in high-paying, highly-skilled factory jobs.

Anderson points out Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, establishing the Fair Employment Practice Committee, was an effort to enforce equal opportunities regardless of race, religion, or national origin; however, she argues, the government "was not inclined to hamper the production of essential war materials in order to foster racial equity."²⁰ Anderson demonstrates white women workers' desire to "maintain social distance, rather than safeguard economic prerogatives" resulted in black women finding themselves in the dirtiest, most dangerous, and lowest paying jobs, noting that black males found more opportunity than black women.²¹ Anderson also demonstrates how white women's resistance to working alongside black women played a key role in hindering their opportunities for advancement.²² Anderson points out the Women's Bureau's failure to increase opportunities for black women in the post-war era, "directing most of its attention to upgrading the pay, security, and working conditions of domestic servants."²³ She notes that post-war job opportunities outside industry did offer some black women greater opportunities including clerical work and nursing.

In "*We, Too Are Americans*," Megan Shockley Taylor compares African American women's experience during the war in two American cities on either side of the Mason Dixon line—Detroit, Michigan, in the north, and Richmond, Virginia, a southern city steeped in Jim Crow. Although racial prejudice was not codified in Detroit, it remained a strong social value and discriminatory hiring kept black women in lower paid jobs. With the help of the federal Fair Employment Practices Committee and unions such as the American Federation of Labor and the

²⁰ Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired," 86.

²¹ Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired," 86.

²² Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired," 92.

²³ Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired," 92.

Congress of Industrial Organizations, opportunities for work improved but in favor of males in comparison to females. Prejudice against black women ultimately resulted in fewer opportunities in defense jobs.

Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II is an eclectic collection of short stories, poetry, and fiction written by African Americans during the war. Maureen Honey argues, a “sea of white faces erased the contributions African American women made to the home-front war on racism, while it left for posterity white images of Rosie the Riveter, the glamorous pinup, the female soldier, the compassionate nurse, and the brave mother.”²⁴ Honey claims this erasure is evident in the absence of feature articles or fictional stories on African American women published in the mainstream press. She uses newspapers and popular race magazines—including the *Negro Digest*, *The Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and the *Negro Story*—giving black voices a platform highlighting prejudice and discrimination during the war.

Demands for women workers offered Latina women an opportunity to leave housekeeping jobs and enter war industries. Latina historians highlight their experiences during the war and trace the changes in women’s status as a result of their wartime experiences. Authors on this topic include Vicki Ruiz’s *From Out of the Shadows* (2008) which highlights the war’s impact on traditional male-dominated culture in Los Angeles, California. Immigration and the demands of war challenged the traditional patriarchal Mexican family as the husband/father saw his power over the women in his household diminish. Ruiz focuses on the “social transformation of Mexican womanhood in the U.S. context as “caught between two worlds,” between tradition and the values of their newly adopted land.”²⁵ Traditionally employed as housekeepers or as

²⁴ Maureen Honey, ed., “Introduction,” in *Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 2.

²⁵ Ruiz, Vicki L., “Nuestra America: Latino History on United State History,” *The Journal of American History* (December 2006): 655-672.

seasonal workers in canneries, Latinas came to represent a significant portion of women working in aircraft plants during the war. Elizabeth Escobedo discusses both the gendered and cultural transformation that occurred as Latina women took jobs outside their homes in war industries; “challeng[ing] the existing cultural definition of womanhood within their community.”²⁶

Escobedo’s *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits*, highlights Mexican American/Chicana women’s role in war work. Predominantly located in Southern California, Chicanas represented a significant number of women working in aircraft plants, canneries, and other war industries. Escobedo studied Latina’s employment records of airplane production plants and other industries estimating the number of women workers of Mexican descent and information on discriminatory practices in federal records kept by the Commission of Fair Employment Practice and the War Manpower Commission to piece together her book.

Escobedo argues that during the war, second generation Mexican women “navigated across and within varying cultural world and boundaries” and their work outside the home “challenged the existing cultural definition of womanhood within their community.”²⁷ Based on oral interviews, she states “[w]artime conditions and ideologies of racial liberalism played a key role in providing Mexican American women with new opportunities to challenge their position in the home and U.S. society with more legitimacy than previous years.”²⁸ She notes young Mexican women sought a cultural identity distinct from the generic label “white,” and distinguished themselves by wearing zoot suits—masculine clothing—symbolic of their defiance to traditional ways.

²⁶ Escobedo, Elizabeth R., *from Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 4.

²⁷ Escobedo, *from Coveralls to Zoot Suits*, 4.

²⁸ Escobedo, *from Coveralls to Zoot Suits*, 4.

In addition to published works, present-day historians have collected oral interviews, first-hand accounts from women employed during the war. Sheila Gluck's *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* includes interviews with ten southern California former aircraft workers, including African American, and Latina/Chicana. Gluck concludes "the unintended effect of their wartime experience[was] a transformation of themselves as women. This change was not translated into a direct challenge of the status quo. At the time, it was probably not even recognized by most of these women, but it did affect their status in their own eyes—and in their homes."²⁹ In addition, the Rosie the Riveter WWII American Home Front Project, Regional Oral History Office at the University of California, Berkeley, offers a wide variety of interviews.³⁰

Most recently historians have paid attention to collecting war stories from women on the fringes of American society such as Native American women's contribution to the war effort. As thousands of Native Americans left the reservations to enter military or defense jobs, women on reservations took men's jobs on farms or assumed local jobs as farmers, bus drivers, teachers, and mechanics. Although there was no formal recruiting of Indian women, large numbers of Indian women left their communities and off-reservation schools to take jobs in industries, i.e. aircraft and ordnance plants. Trained in hand production that required fine, intricate work, native women possessed skills in jobs requiring precision. Author Grace Mary Gouveia points out that while many industries "refused to hire Blacks, male or female, apparently there were no generalized restrictions on the hiring of Indian women, who found no racial designation for Native Americans were classified as "white."³¹ Gouveia reports that Glenn L. Martin Aircraft,

²⁹ Gluck, Sheila, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War and Social Change* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987), 265-268, 268.

³⁰ "Rosie the Rosie/World War Two American Homefront," Berkeley Library, University of California, <https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/visit/bancroft/oral-history-center/projects/rosie>.

³¹ Gouveia, Grace Mary, "'We Also Serve': American Indian Women's Role in World War II." *Michigan Historical Review* 20, no. 2 (1994): 153-82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20173463>.

Douglas Aircraft Corporation, and other aircraft industries “had no restrictions on hiring Indian women” where they worked as riveters, punch press operators, and in assembly.

Childcare, traditionally provided by a mother or her extended family, became a controversial national issue as traditional resources—grandmothers, sisters, sisters-in-law, and nannies—took war jobs. Before the start of the war, the only organized alternative available to impoverished, working mothers were local community social services. In *Fleeting Opportunities*, Kesselman, explores the experimental nurseries program started by the Kaiser Shipyards. She argues they are unique because they were independent, private nurseries offering an enviable menu of services for working mothers, making it easy for women to go to work and still be a mom. Kaiser’s corporate nurseries, funded by the Maritime Commission, also placed them outside the control of the Federal Works Administration which oversaw the federal nursery program which was viewed as only a wartime measure. Kaiser Company shipyards were the most unique of all war industries, offering the most innovative response to women workers’ childcare needs and became highly controversial as they breached highly valued social expectations regarding a mother’s need to remain in the home caring for her children.

Historians have also focused on the role the government played in keeping the future home and family a goal to which women aspired, primarily through advertising. The federal government and The Office of War Information and the War Advertising Council worked closely with graphic artists and publishers to keep women’s feminine side on their minds. Tawnya J. Adkins Covert’s *Manipulating Images* explores the use of media shaped by government bureaus and ad agencies to direct women’s behavior as production demands changed between 1941 and 1946. Covert argues, “the Second World War provides a case study not only in how the government can function to manipulate and alter media coverage and media portrayals of groups and events, but also how this manipulation functions within the larger

context of gender and class inequality.”³² Covert’s work looks at the changing nature of advertisements over time—prewar war and post-war—as dictated by wartime needs.

Donna B. Knaff highlights glamour as a tool utilized by the media to recruit women in *Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in American Popular Graphic Art*. Knaff utilizes graphic art found in popular magazines such as *Forbes* and *Collier’s*. Sexual tensions increased during the war as women stepped out of their domestic role and into the men’s roles. Knaff argues advertisements “captur[ed] some of the profound concerns about women’s changing roles in the wartime world, including changes that were not restricted to women themselves but were also fraught with consequences for men, children, and the culture.”³³

Melissa A. McEuen in *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945*, argues the Office of War Information and advertisers worked together to create images “to inspire women to participate fully in the war effort without compromising their femininity.”³⁴ McEuen adds a significant dimension to the historiography of women during the war with her emphasis on African American women in wartime media. She argues “whiteness” predominated in wartime advertisements, noting when black women’s images appeared in mainstream publications, publishers utilized middle-class, black women with light skin and European features.³⁵

Images of bathing suit clad Hollywood movie stars “functioned as icons of the private interests and obligations for which soldiers were fighting.”³⁶ Robert B. Westbrook’s article, “I

³² Tawnya J. Adkins Covert, *Manipulating Images: World War II Mobilization of Women through Magazine Advertising*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), xxxi.

³³ Donna B. Knaff, *Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in American Popular Graphic Art*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2012), 2.

³⁴ Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 17.

³⁵ Melissa McEuen argues the lack of images of African Americans in *Life Magazine* during the war, lead to John H. Johnson, a Chicago publisher, to publish the *Negro Digest* during the war, focused on the African American community, and create *Ebony Magazine* in 1945. *Making War, Making Women*, 21.

³⁶ Robert Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II,” *American Quarterly*, no. 4, (Dec. 1990): 587-614, 596.

Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James,” in the *American Quarterly*, argues, “Though male soldiers were the principal collectors of pin-ups, the pin-up girl also addressed herself to American women suggesting that if men were obliged to fight for their pin-up girls, women were in turn obliged to fashion themselves into girls worth fighting for.”³⁷ The allure of female bodies at home kept soldiers’ morale high and supported the war effort.

Although twenty years had passed since World War I, Americans remembered the harsh realities of World War I—the war to end all war. Postwar, many Americans focused on political radicals, mob crime as a product of Prohibition, and Congressional investigations on war profiteering. With economic recovery seemingly out of reach, many Americans saw Hitler’s aggression in Europe as a distant, isolated event, which the US had no business involving itself in, and prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, most Americans desired and supported isolationism. Involvement in a distant conflict threatened to take national attention away from restoring the nation’s economic health and rebuilding the weakened Democratic Family.

Chapter One starts as Americans hear reports of Germany’s nightly bombings of London from a distance; however, isolationism prevailed as the national policy. Unlike World War I, women in the late 1930s wielded the vote and belonged to political parties and many women, seeking to influence politicians, actively took stands on both sides of the question of involvement in the foreign war. When the federal government failed to establish home defense, independent groups of women organized to protect their homes, joining together in local, state, and national defense units. Women’s clubs took the initiative supporting the passage of the Lend-Lease bill and challenged the stranglehold the isolationist organization America First had over public opinion. Women’s organizations stepped into the national arena and with Eleanor Roosevelt sought to help shape America’s civilian defense efforts.

³⁷ Robert Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl,” 603.

Chapter Two shifts to preparations within the federal government, notably the Women's Bureau and Children's Bureau, in preparation for women's roles in war industries. Federal officials hoped fathers' service in the military would not have negative impact on the Democratic Family. The government employed existing and newly established war agencies, such as the War Manpower Commission and the Federal Works Projects, to facilitate the war effort. To minimize disruptions to family life on the home front, it depended on the Children's Bureau to uphold the mental and physical health of the nation's children and preservation of the Democratic Family, and on the Women's Bureau to lay the ground rules for industries hiring women, setting safety standards and training opportunities for lucrative war jobs. The Bureau's research and educational efforts took second place to the needs of children and mothers in wartime as it turned its focus to issues such as transient women following their men to war camps and programs to support women and children's health in wartime.

Chapter Three discusses recruitment and the war's potential impact on family life as the demand for married women and mothers to enter war work exceeded the available pool of single women and women without children. Despite efforts to convince employers that older women and grandmothers can do war jobs, industries preferred women in their prime years who were often raising children. In face of the large in-migration in areas with war industries that stressed local infrastructure, the newly established Office of War Information conducted a national advertising campaign directed toward women and ordered cities to establish local recruitment campaigns. The Office of War Information produced propaganda in both print and other forms of media to attract women and garner their husbands' support.

Chapter Four offers a glimpse into loosened sexual mores in wartime, fueling public debate over the Republican Mothers entering the male workforce. Society traditionally viewed the stay-at-home mother as virtuous and morally superior to women in the workforce and defined

her role to instill republican ideals in the next generation. The large numbers of white women entering the factories during World War II challenged these ideals. Surrounded by men, women in factories worked in a sexually charged environment and instances of harassment and romantic encounters threatened to sully Republican Mothers. Women's sexual presence led to heated debates over her clothing, choice of undergarments, and hairstyles. Fear of moral decline also increased as black women and lower-class women in great numbers entered factories creating a sexually charged environment which fostered liaisons between men and women working close together as well as an increase in lesbianism. Wartime loosened conventional morality and saw an increase in divorces generating fears about the return of the Democratic Family and Republican Mother in the postwar.

Chapter Five looks at the issue of childcare for women working outside the home for the duration of the war. Historically, the issue of childcare focused on impoverished women without a breadwinner working outside the home to work and support their children. This chapter explores the hotly debated issue of outsider care versus family care of children of working mothers. World War II witnessed a break in the government's policy of nonintervention in family life by establishing the Lanham war nurseries for mothers employed in war work. The chapter also focuses on the public debate over childcare as an inter-agency battle played out between established government agencies—the Office of Education and Children's Bureau—and a temporary wartime agency—the Federal Works Agency—designated by President Roosevelt to oversee the care for the children of war workers.

Chapter Six explores problems women experienced balancing work and home while holding down a war job. Women's absenteeism and quitting war jobs became problematic for continued high levels of production, potentially lengthening the war. This chapter discusses the day-to-day problems women workers faced as factories lengthened the work week and the failure

of local communities to step up and ease the burden of women workers to stay on the job and fulfill their families' needs. Although industry expected a woman to work as a man, it gradually adopted alternative practices enabling women to hold both jobs. As the war drew to a close, the question loomed as to whether women would have opportunities to continue to earn good wages when servicemen returned home. However, not all women could return home since many were single, war widows, had disabled husbands, or just liked working, eventually leading to renewed efforts on the part of the National Women's Party to pass the Equal Rights Amendment.

To capture the federal government's effort to maintain the values of the Republican Mother and Democratic Family during the war, I have utilized historical documents, offering a peephole into the minds of government officials and actions that guided the war effort. My dissertation builds upon previous scholarship included in my historiography but also offers an insider's view on debates within the government departments and wartime agencies through extensive use of materials from the National Archives. By relying heavily on primary sources across a wide variety of departments and agencies, I offer a personal, insider perspective to the important questions surrounding women's employment during the war. In addition, I also make extensive use of local newspapers to bring the past alive. My work also delves into national issues that rise up in wartime society such as race, abortion, birth control, and homosexuality. The reality of women stepping outside their traditional roles and into factories was difficult for many in society to accept, especially their entrance into male bastions such as defense factories and the military. The war was fought to protect America and it was important that its most cherished values, the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family, emerge unscathed. Defending the nation meant defending a cherished way of life; winning the war would mean little if war undermined these values.

CHAPTER 1: IT'S A CRUSADE FOR ALL AMERICAN WOMEN: "WOMEN WILL PARTICIPATE IN THIS, NOT AS WOMEN, BUT AS CITIZENS."¹

In a poll conducted in December 1938, 63 percent of Americans opposed compulsory military training, with only 37 percent in favor; when war broke out in Europe in the fall of 1939, little had changed.² As reports of nightly bombings on London continued, the Institute of Public Opinion reported 85 percent of Americans cited they did not feel safe, and 65 percent believed Germany would attack the United States if they defeated England and France. Even so, the majority still rejected compulsory military training.³ During the years between the declaration of war in Europe and Pearl Harbor, civilians and government officials took part in a lively debate over the possibility of the country's involvement in a foreign war which would necessitate building up military defenses against a foreign enemy versus taking in prewar America.

The word **defense** is the operative word in discussing the prewar period; however, its meaning changes over time. **Home defense** was the term used during the prewar period as politically active, upper-and middle-class women's instigated efforts to influence the nation's stance on defense. The year 1938 saw women beginning to organize to defend their communities and prepare for a potential attack. Although the general public supported isolationism and no foreign involvement, this period is characterized by independent, grassroots, paramilitary efforts by women seeking to protect their communities from foreign attack, without federal sanction. As

¹ "Report on Conference on National Defense held at Alumnae House, Vassar College," December 5-6, 1940, June 4, 1940, Box: 173, "Conference on Standards for Women's Employment . . . in the Defense Program," RG 86, National Archives College Park, College Park, MD.

² George Gallup, "Sentiment for Compulsory Military Training Rises Sharply; Overwhelming Majority Favor Drill For CCC, Gallup Poll Shows," *The Lincoln Star*, June 2, 1940.

³ George Gallup, "Sentiment for Compulsory."

the threat of war intensified, defense became a national, political concern. Aware that many millions of American citizens still suffered from hardships related to the Depression, Mrs. Roosevelt hoped that renewed energies for social defense programs would build national morale, instill faith in the government, and defuse any popular support for foreign ideologies. **Social defense** is the term Eleanor Roosevelt coined for socially beneficial programs meant to reinstall patriotic support and direct the nation's attention to the need to rebuild confidence in democracy. After the establishment of the Office of Civilian Defense under Fiorella La Guardia, a new variant of defense became popularized. La Guardia combined the two goals, military and social defense, into civilian defense under the Office of Civilian Defense, but he neglected the social aspect. La Guardia focused on **military defense** in preparation for war and relegated social needs to the back burner. Ultimately, once the war started, **civilian defense**, the Office of Civilian Defense oversaw protective functions overseeing emergency relief in the case of attack and civilian needs home front during the war.

For a brief period, Republican Mothers asserted their political power in a flurry of activism just as they had in the early twentieth century into the mid-1920s.⁴ Grassroots organizations proliferated. Pacifist women called for protecting the status quo—isolation from

⁴ For a brief of time after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, during the early 1920s, women promoted a feminine legislative agenda—i.e. the Sheppard-Towner Act—but were unable to sustain their initial success and their power declined in the years after 1925. Historians have studied the decline in women's political power in the 1920s. Robyn Muncy finds the roots of women's initial legislative success led by the growing professionalization of women in fields such as medicine and their demands action as self-assertive; placing them in direct conflict with traditional belief of male professionals and these aspiring women as unfeminine; contradicting age old images of women as passive and self-sacrificing; Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991). Cynthia Harrison also sees the rise in women's political power lodged in the rise of cohort of women professionals cooperating as a voting bloc (which she calls "the dominion"), enabling the passage of measures that culminated in the Sheppard-Towner Act, ultimately bringing them into direct conflict with powerful groups such as the American Medical Association and the .S Public Health Service, resulting in their downfall; Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women's Issues, 1945-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Anna L. Harvey claims that these interim years of deferential treatment allowed women advances, the period of time it took men to regroup after the disruption of their unchallenged control over American politics. Anna L. Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage: Women in American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

hostilities in Europe—while others prepared to defend their homes from attack. Still others sought to protect American democracy from external enemies by addressing the national social problems resulting from economic hard times. Nationally recognized women’s organizations actively engaged in dialogue at the highest level of government, hoping to strengthen democracy from within while defending it from foes.

The federal government considered the home as vital to the cultivation of future citizens. Indeed, government officials considered the home “a school for democracy.”⁵ While mothers raised the children, society recognized the father as the breadwinner and head of the Democratic Family. Ensuring the health of the American family became crucial to social stability and the need to address citizens’ social and economic needs became a matter of national defense. Years of unemployment had undermined the male’s value as the breadwinner and head of the home, leaving the Democratic Family in crisis. To ensure more opportunities for men, fathers, and husbands to retain their role as breadwinners, the Social Security Administration conducted an Unemployment Census, directed by John D. Biggers, in 1937. The census determined that “an influx of women workers” was at the core of continuing high unemployment rates.⁶ In response to Biggers’ findings, states passed a rash of legislation restricting wives from holding traditionally male jobs outside the home. Such laws forced women to find work in occupations considered “women’s work,” such as clerical, nursing, light industrial jobs, or service industries. At the same time, the public condemned women for taking low-paying jobs away from men despite men’s unlikelihood of pursuing such work. In addition, cities, states, and the federal government enacted discriminatory “marriage bars.” These laws called for firing married women

⁵ Sonya Michel coins the phrase “discourse of the democratic family” which she defines as “a system of meaning that linked the family to the defense of freedom and mothers in the home as necessary to the family’s survival and stability;” Sonya Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights: The Shaping of America’s Child Care Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 138.

⁶ “Big Rise Revealed in Women Workers,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1938.

working in government jobs if their husbands held government employment. Such discrimination also applied to teaching and clerical work. Legislation caused wives to lose their current jobs and reduced employment opportunities.⁷ By 1940, twenty-six states had restricted married women's employment in state government jobs in the same manner as the federal government called for firing the spouses of male federal workers. These actions further undermined the economic health of families.⁸

Understanding the impact the Depression had on American society, especially on its smallest, most valued entity, the Democratic Family, President Roosevelt and the First Lady called experts and other concerned individuals to attend the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy in January 1940. Amid escalating concerns over hostilities in Europe, Frances Perkins, Secretary of the US Department of Labor, heralded the upcoming conference, stating, "events in Europe must not be allowed to divert the attention of the American people from the task of strengthening our democracy from within, and that the needs of childhood require particular attention at the present time."⁹ Unlike previous conferences dominated by experts focused solely on disadvantaged children in impoverished homes, this conference brought together government officials, social welfare advocates, child care experts, and clubwomen to establish a baseline for normal life in a world at war.

The three-day Conference on Children in a Democracy opened on January 18, 1940. President Roosevelt addressed the participants as the "new American army of peace" saying, "Mothers and fathers, by the kind of life they build within the four walls of the home, are largely

⁷ Megan McDonald Way, *Family Economics and Public Policy, 1800s—Present: How Laws, Incentives, and Social Programs Drive Family Decision-Making and the US Economy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 152.

⁸ No author, "Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1938," U.S. Department of Labor, (Washington: GPO, January 1, 1938), 149.

⁹ Gertrude Hill Springer and Kathryn Close, "Children in a Democracy," *Survey Midmonthly* LXXVI no.2 (1941): 37.

responsible for the future social and public life of the country.”¹⁰ Although discussions did not focus on the distant European war, individuals attending the conference realized democracy was fragile and under attack. In light of the rise and strength of Communist and fascist states abroad, the conferees sought to identify the weaknesses of American democracy, understand what undermined Americans’ confidence in the republic’s future, and explored ways to strengthen the democratic family.

The ideal of the Democratic Family was not an elusive concept nor the sole property of government officials, psychologists, and sociologists but championed by the public itself. The 1939-1940 World’s Fair in New York City, “Building the World of Tomorrow,” focused on the future. While the fair’s focus was on advancements in technology, it also embodied the conservative ideals of the Republican Mother and Democratic Family of the future. Author Deborah Shepard commented, “During a time of national instability, the Typical American Family contest tapped into a reassuring national myth formed at the birth of the Industrial Age.”¹¹ Newspapers across the United States conducted contests to identify the most typical American family in their state.

Local papers asked their readers to submit applications, and subscribers voted for the winners. Each of the winning families, one from each of the forty-eight states, received an all-expense-paid trip to the World’s Fair in a brand-new Chevrolet and lived on the grounds in one of two new Federal Works Administration’s model homes for a week. The fair organizers treated the families to chauffeured tours of New York City and free admission to all exhibits. In exchange, families carried out their daily lives while the public watched. One typical family was the Leathers of Clarendon, Texas. An article in the *New York Herald Tribune* described Mr.

¹⁰ “Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Annual Report,” 22.

¹¹ Deborah B. Shepard, “The 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair: Typical American Families Build Tomorrow,” 2011, https://scholar.umw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=student_23, 3.

Leathers as a farmer raising Hereford cattle, active in community organizations, with a personal ambition to be a more useful citizen and Mrs. Leathers as a typical housewife, who “does all of her own work and is a member of the Women’s Missionary Society.”¹² She stated her chief ambition was to raise her children and “give them the best education possible and to teach them to be good [American citizens].”¹³ Although designed to stimulate the economy, the contest also gave an abstract concept, the Democratic Family, a face. Pictured below, Figure 2, is the winning family from Minnesota, the Petersons, standing in front of a Federal Works Administration cottage.



Figure 2: “Most ‘Typical’ Family at Fair”¹⁴

¹² “Most ‘Typical’ Family at Fair Off for Home,” *New York Herald Tribune*, October 27, 1940.

¹³ Shepard, “Most ‘Typical’ Family.”

¹⁴ Shepard, “Most ‘Typical’ Family.”

In May 1940, President Roosevelt took his first halting step toward protecting the Democratic Family from war when he requested a billion dollars to finance a rearmament program. He also revived the Defense Act of 1916, dormant since World War I. The National Defense Advisory Commission's role was "to coordinate the national economic segments in the drive to strengthen the nation's preparedness as quickly as possible."¹⁵ Unlike the all-male National Defense Council established in World War I, six men and one woman comprised Roosevelt's National Defense Advisory Council. Harriet Elliott, dean of the woman's college of the University of North Carolina and sole female member, was named to the Consumer Protection Division, charged with "the study of the defense program as it affects the consumer and with the coordination of government activities in the field of public welfare so far as they relate to the defense program."¹⁶ Elliott's job related primarily to women's problems as consumers. Elliott had equal voting power as the males on the committee.

President Roosevelt sought to reassure the people that he was not putting the country on a wartime status. The *New York Times* wrote, "The whole idea underlying his use of the wartime statute was to prevent any sudden changes in government structure for handling the defense problem or in the normal American way of life."¹⁷ The President further reassured Americans that this statute did not reflect a move toward war, stating, "There was no reason to become discomboomerated in the apprehension of what may come to pass. The women of the country would not have to give up their cosmetics, lipsticks, and chocolate sodas."¹⁸ Although Roosevelt's council resembled the one established in 1916, he did not revive the adjunct

¹⁵ "President Sets Up a Defense Council to Hasten Arming," *New York Times*, May 29, 1940.

¹⁶ Joseph. Harris, "The Emergency National Defense Organization," *Public Administration Review*, no. 1 (Autumn, 1940), 1-24, 14.

¹⁷ "President Sets Up a Defense Council."

¹⁸ "President Sets Up a Defense Council."

women's subcommittee which President Wilson had created during the First World War.¹⁹

Rather than women's participation in a war time committee as a courtesy bestowed upon women, with the passage of the Twentieth Amendment, they now had the right to actively campaign for women and family matters and take part in the national political process.

Elliot stressed the importance of her role as the consumer advisor, explaining, "By making hearth and welfare a defense concern, the president has emphasized the fact that human welfare is as important to the national defense as the manufacture of arms and the mobilization of material resources."²⁰ Elliott praised the president for putting traditional feminine concerns—such as nutrition and consumer activities—at the forefront. Newspapers referred to Elliott as "Aunt Hit," a nickname underscoring her role in a familial context and recognizing women's traditional role as the family consumer.²¹ A news article on Elliott's appointment sported the headline "Price of Beans is Her Lookout." It commented, "What the housewife pays this winter for her husband's supper may depend largely upon the success 'Aunt Hit' makes of a job unique in the professional and industrial progress of women."²² While other members focused on the matériel of war, commandeering resources for military and defense production, Elliott concentrated on the family. Elliot's position also captured the necessity for total defense in a troubled society where many had lost faith in democracy's ability to resolve national problems.

She explained:

It is easy to grasp the part played by guns, tanks, and planes in a defense program. It is all too easy to overlook the foundations upon which any effective use of these weapons must rest. We are engaged in a defense effort because, as a nation, we feel that we have something to defend. Our effort will be not only be in vain but self-defeating if we do not maintain

¹⁹ Emily Newell Blair, "The Women's Committee, United States Council of National Defense: An Interpretive Report," April 21, 1917, to February 27, 1919," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 18.

²⁰ Ruth Cowan, "Price of Beans is Her Lookout," *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 15, 1940.

²¹ Unable to say Aunt Harriet, Elliott's nephew gave her the nickname Aunt Hit. It came into popular use on the campus of the University of North Carolina where she taught political science. Ruth Cowan, "Ask 'Aunt Hit' For Price of Beans, Socks," *The Sacramento Union*, September 15, 1940.

²² Cowan, "Price of Beans."

and strengthen our American way of life as we go along. It will be vain and self-defeating if, with our vast national resources, we allow the standard of living of the American people to be depressed while there are idle resources, idle men, and idle plants to produce the things people need; if we allow numbers of our people to continue at levels of living dangerously low from the point of view of national strength; if we allow groups in the population to be isolated from the main stream of American life.²³

Elliott predicted, “This winter is going to be mighty busy—and differently busy—for American women. Less bridge. More work. Work for ‘total defense.’”²⁴ Her comments also illustrate the President’s unwillingness to sacrifice New Deal reform—under attack in Congress by southern Democrats—by his continued commitment to strengthening the home and family.

On the eve of the Battle of Britain, the President sent a memorandum to state governors advising them to “reestablish state and local [defense] councils of the World War I type if they considered such action warranted.²⁵ Along the industrialized eastern seaboard, governors quickly put defensive measures in place. In New York, Governor Lehman reorganized the State National Guard with plans for three anti-aircraft regiments in operation by summer and converted infantry regiments in New York City to anti-aircraft regiments.²⁶ The Maine legislature “strengthen[ed] the state’s military defenses . . . without debate,” and Connecticut’s governor announced he would call the new State Council of Defense to meet immediately to organize and plan its activities.²⁷ Secretary of War Henry Stimson and other war officials “acknowledged the existence of a ‘pressing need’ for some other force besides the army to ensure the defense of

²³ “AAUW Journal Tells Story of Defense Commission,” *St. Cloud Times*, September 21, 1940.

²⁴ “Surging Defense Program Put Women in ‘Home Guard’ Role,” *Indianapolis News*, November 22, 1940.

²⁵ Nehemiah Jordan, “*U.S. Civil Defense Before 1950: The Roots of Public Law 920*,” Institute For Defense Analyses, Economic and Political Studies Division (May 1966), 35.

²⁶ “Protecting New York From Air Raids,” *New York Age*, June 15, 1940.

²⁷ “*Flashes From Press Wires: ‘Move for Defense,’*” *Hartford Courant*, May 29, 1940; “Gov. Baldwin Acts Quickly For Defense,” *Hartford Courant*, June 14, 1940.

civilians” and urged citizens to look to their states and municipal governments for civilian defense.²⁸

Across the country, states quickly organized councils of defense. Connecticut, Maryland, and Indiana appointed women to membership on their state defense councils, although most states did not. In September, President Roosevelt signed the Burke-Wadsworth Act, subsequently modified by the new Selective Service Acts. The law called for men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five to register with their local draft boards and serve a one-year tour of duty. The president had no popular mandate for war since large vocal groups of isolationists vehemently opposed the nation’s involvement in a foreign war. Unlike World War I, the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the power of the ballot and increased their ability to influence government policymaking. Like their male counterparts, women were politically partisan and asserted their voices against the nation’s involvement in a foreign war, some groups verging on treason. Educated, middle-class women spanned the political spectrum regarding domestic and international issues, but most tended to agree with the prevailing isolationist opinion.

Women of both political parties sought to shape the government’s response to a distant threat and protect the nation’s families from war. Impressed by Germany’s economic recovery and their technological advances in aeronautics, famous aviator and national celebrity Charles Lindbergh opposed American involvement in a foreign war and became the spokesman for the America First Committee, the nation’s largest national pacifist organization. Women also had a counterpart to America First, the “mother’s movement.” Historian Glen Jeansonne argues that this ultra-conservative cohort of women, “motivated by a complex, ironic mixture of maternal

²⁸ “Civic Clubs Ask Civilian Defense,” *Austin American*, October 21, 1940.

love and fanatical prejudice,” arose in a “rare right-wing antiwar movement.”²⁹ The movement spread like wildfire across the United States.

Women attracted to isolationist groups were predominately white, middle-class, middle-aged, and Christianity served as the “bedrock of their psychological security and identities.”³⁰ Sharing the same “imagined aura of purity” which attracted women reformers to social housekeeping in the early twentieth century, ultra-conservative women did not join the America First Committee. Historian Glen Jeansonne argues, conservative women chose to remain in the feminine sphere, in which “women were guardians of morality,” with an emphasis on issues involving children, the family, the poor, and the uneducated.³¹ For many, memories of World War I remained an open wound and many Republican Mothers sought to protect their homes and families and communities from entering the ravages of a foreign war once again.

In light of the strong isolationist sentiment and little desire to become involved in a European war, the nation remained pacifist. Women’s anti-war organizations sprang up in major cities across the nation. Historian Laura McEnaney describes this broad women’s movement “as isolationism in the service of preserving home, family, and good old-fashioned Americanism.”³² Mothers’ organizations proliferated across the country; between fifty and one hundred groups formed spontaneously between 1939 and 1941. Pacifist women found their ideological leader in Elizabeth Dilling, a political activist. Her books and lecture tours established her as “the pre-eminent female right-wing activist.”³³ While she admired Mussolini and was sympathetic to fascism, Dilling was strongly anti-Semitic, anti-communist, and opposed aid to the British. Her

²⁹ Glenn Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mother’s Movement and World War II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.

³⁰ Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, 8.

³¹ Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, 3.

³² Laura McEnaney, “He-Men and Christian Mothers: The America First Movement and the Gendered Meaning of Patriotism and Isolationism,” *Diplomatic History* 18, no. 1 (1994), 47-57, 48.

³³ “Elizabeth Dilling,” accessed June 11, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Dilling.

books, speeches, and articles in women's magazines added momentum to the isolationist atmosphere led by celebrities such as Charles Lindbergh, triggering the Mothers' Crusade.³⁴ Often unattached to any established political party, these women formed organizations to lobby against the government's efforts to pass bills that might lead to the nation's involvement in a foreign war. Like Lindbergh, they refused to sacrifice their sons to perpetuate a society filled with moral decay which they attributed to "aliens," such as communists, Jews, and other "subversives."³⁵

In early September 1939, in Los Angeles, California, three mothers, Francis Sherrill, Mary M. Sheldon, and Mary Ireland founded the National Legion of Mothers of America, starting the mother's movement. The organization described itself as "motivated solely by patriotism" and opposed "any attempt to send their sons to fight on foreign soil."³⁶ The *Los Angeles Herald-Express* quoted the first woman to sign up for the organization: "I have a 21-year-old son, and I'm going to fight for him. It was too much trouble to bring him into the world and bring him up all these years to have him fight the battles of foreign nations."³⁷ In 1940, under the leadership of Harriet Vittum, head of the Northwestern University Settlement House, six women gathered around a tea table and organized the Roll Call of American Women. By making telephone calls and writing personal letters, these women reached out across the nation, establishing branches in two hundred cities in two weeks. The organization encouraged its members to contact their legislators to "solidify opinion against armed intervention."³⁸ Historian, Glen Jeansonne writes, mother's groups spread eastward like a "prairie fire," with between fifty

³⁵ June Benowitz, *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right-Wing Politics 1933-1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 45.

³⁶ Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, 45.

³⁷ Jeansonne, 45.

³⁸ Corrinne Hardesty, "Women Start Drive to Keep Us Out of War," *Pittsburgh Press*, June 16, 1940.

and one hundred springing up across the nation.³⁹ Emergent groups chose patriotic names and mottos, such as the Mothers of Sons Forum, Mothers of the U.S.A, We, the Mothers, and Mothers Mobilize for America. The Mothers of Sons, founded by Mrs. Arthur D. Lynn of Massachusetts, adopted the following motto: “We want our sons to live in peace, not rest in peace on European battlefields.”⁴⁰ The Women’s National Committee to Keep the U.S. Out of War emphasized that “war would negate the work of mothers: homemaking and nurturing sons from cradle to manhood.”⁴¹ By asserting themselves in this manner, republican mothers were exercising their maternal conscience and support for neutrality.

The Mothers Crusade to Kill Bill 1776, launched in February 1941, was an attempt to defeat the Lend-Lease Bill. The protest brought five hundred women from various mothers’ groups to Washington, D.C. to lobby against bills that would place the nation on a wartime stance such as the Burke-Wadsworth Selective Service Bill. The bill threatened to further the nation’s commitment to intervention by calling for men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five to register with their draft boards and serve a one-year tour of duty. The women staged several demonstrations, picketing the White House while parading a banner with the slogan “Kill Bill 1776, Not Our Boys.”⁴² The police arrested members of the mothers’ group for attempting to hang journalist Dorothy Thompson in effigy on the White House gate. Dilling explained she wanted “to give Dorothy to the White House for a present because [President Roosevelt] wants to give away a million of our boys.”⁴³ Charged with two counts of conspiracy, Dilling stood trial with twenty-seven other women. The trial dragged on; eventually she was acquitted in 1946.

³⁹ Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, 45.

⁴⁰ “West Side Unit to Join Crusade in Washington,” *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, February 9, 1941.

⁴¹ Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*, 63.

⁴² Once passed by Congress, “Bill 1776” was the officially known as the Lend-Lease, allowing America to supply allies with war aid. Benowitz, *Days of Discontent*, 35.

⁴³ “Effigy of Writer,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1941.

While pacifist women protested American involvement in a foreign war, many American women watched as Hitler's fast-moving armies marched into Belgium and onward to a string of military successes in western Europe. Women's groups launched scattered efforts across the nation for military preparedness to protect their homes and families. Despite passage of the Selective Service Act after the fall of Belgium, non-pacifist women nationwide felt vulnerable without national direction or leadership. Taking a militant stance and breaking away from the customary image of the caring, nurturing mother, these women embraced less traditional roles and started mobilizing to protect their homes. Unlike women of the far-right, women of the political left attempted to rout negativity, build a consensus, and volunteer in local military-style corps, providing a homegrown army for local defense. Spontaneous, individual leadership resulted in a wide variety of local efforts on the part of many individual women.

In early 1940, after the Army Air Corps turned down her request to join the service, Virginia Nowell of Raleigh, North Carolina, started a campaign to organize women into a Home Defense Corps. A seasoned organizer, Nowell was known in Washington for "promoting everything from real estate to circus parades."⁴⁴ Nowell established a military-style woman's corps called the Women's Green Guard. She told reporters, "Today there is no place for women in national defense. . . . The men tell us to go home and knit. That was all right 20 years ago. But today, wars are fought in our front yards and on our rooftops, and we want American Women to be ready."⁴⁵ Cities across the United States applied to start their own corps, including Los Angeles, Chicago, and Atlanta.

The Green Guard's name derived from their "green felt uniforms." The uniform consisted of "green frontier trousers, zipper jackets, and overseas hats," and cost fifty-five dollars.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "Green Guards Are Ready," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 12, 1940.

⁴⁵ "Enlist Women in Guard Unit," *Mansfield News-Journal*, November 16, 1940.

⁴⁶ "Women's Green Guard Ready to Defend U.S.," *Wilmington Morning News*, August 10, 1940.

Nowell refused to have the corps wear skirts, commenting, “Whoever heard of a soldier wearing skirts except them Scotch men?”⁴⁷ The women drilled in various skills, including ambulance driving, engine repair, infantry tactics, rifle shooting, and air-raid work. Membership in the guard grew quickly; in just one month six hundred women joined. “General” Nowell—as she preferred to be called—envisioned recruiting one million women training in a “chain of armories throughout the country;” and boasted, “When I have 1,000,000 American women Green Guards, thoroughly trained and equipped, God help any invader.”⁴⁸ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* commented, “Her dream is not shared by President Roosevelt, the US War Department, or the National Defense Advisory Commission.” Nor did Mrs. Roosevelt, who replied, “your program sounds very sensible except the part pertaining to military drill. She does not feel that this is this necessary for women.”⁴⁹ Although a growing number of Republican Mothers were anxious to protect their homes, government officials agreed with the President and First Lady.

Mrs. Roosevelt’s words did not deter women across the country from organizing for defense. Described as an “EMBATTLED U.S. MOTHER,” Edna L Johnston, of the New York chapter of the far-right National Legion of Mothers of America, organized the Women’s Rifle Corps for Defense to “teach American mothers how to shoot rifles in defense against parachute troops.”⁵⁰ Johnston called for the formation of a nationwide women’s rifle corps within the next two months to protect American homes. She argued, “We saw what happened in other countries when the parachutists dropped out of the sky and women and children were everywhere left defenseless. . . . We feel that the time has come for women to become a part of the vast national defense scheme of our country.”⁵¹ Johnson claimed that Holland and Belgium would not have

⁴⁷ “Women’s Green Guards Ready.”

⁴⁸ “Enlist Women in Guard Unit.”

⁴⁹ “Enlist Women in Guard Unit.”

⁵⁰ “American Women Train to Shoot,” *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader*, May 23, 1940.

⁵¹ “American Women Train.”

fallen to German parachute troops “if the housewives of Europe had been armed and trained.”⁵² Activist women placed defense squarely in the context of women’s historic roles, “just as they did in the days of the American revolution and in fighting Indians.”⁵³ Johnson highlighted the Republican Mothers’ historic responsibility for taking part in defending their homes on the frontier.

Women organizers also trained for emergency response in case of attack. In Joplin, Missouri, women founded the Powder Puff Platoon to study military science under a National Guard captain, and in Tulsa, Oklahoma, women started an air corps.⁵⁴ In Tacoma, Washington, Mrs. Harriet Virginia—who drove ambulances overseas in World War I—organized the Women Mechanics Army to teach women to drive and repair ambulances. She also aligned her group with local military troops stationed in the area. A reporter observed the shock displayed by soldiers at Camp Murray “seeing attractive young women in overseas caps in their camp” and noted how the men “watched bug-eyed, [as] corps members worked on army ambulances under the supervision of tough sergeants.”⁵⁵

Colonel Julia Dowell also founded a Women’s Ambulance and Transport Corps in May 1940 on the west coast in San Diego. Dowell’s goal was to organize units throughout California, and by March 1941, the organization extended across the country. Women joining the corps participated in a “rigid training program overseen by the Army officers at Fort Rosecrans designed to keep [them] physically fit.”⁵⁶ Organized to act in case of an actual attack on American soil, the corps offered women training in a wide range of skills besides ambulance

⁵² “Women’s Rifle Corps Formed For Defense,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1940.

⁵³ “American Women Train.”

⁵⁴ Adelaide Kerr, “American Women Join Up,” *Wilmington Morning News*, March 19, 1941.

⁵⁵ “Women Mechanics Army is Launched,” *Salem Statesman Journal*, November 24, 1940.

⁵⁶ “Women Form Military Unit.” *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1940.

driving, including airplane mechanics, shortwave radio operation, parachute jumping, firefighting, and emergency care of people exposed to chemical warfare.⁵⁷

Women also made individual pleas to the First Lady. Just days after renowned aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran flew “2,000 kilometers at a speed of 324 miles an hour to claim a new world record for distance,” the Civil Aeronautics Authority changed the ratio of men pilots to women, creating significantly more opportunities for women pilots.⁵⁸ Cochran approached Eleanor Roosevelt and proposed creating a women’s air corps as part of homeland defense. Not a feminist per se, Cochran acknowledged gendered boundaries proposing that women pilots could be “trained for non-combat duties behind the lines . . . as a basic part of Uncle Sam’s huge aerial defense program,” freeing men for air defense.⁵⁹ With the potential for aerial attack, not an issue in World War I, women on the east coast recognized the possibility of coastal bombing and worked to organize emergency response measures.

Katharine Garrett of Baltimore, having spent the previous year driving ambulances in France, started the Women’s Ambulance and Safety Patrol in 1941. Garrett anticipated affiliating with similar organizations already in existence in sixteen other American cities to be ready to go when the call came to from a national authority.⁶⁰ The Women’s Civilian Defense School organized a response team to defend the coastal city of Boston. Members practiced the skills necessary in an urban setting undergoing an aerial attack. These skills included “motor corps, including blackout and convoy driving; mobile casualty corps, including first aid; mobile canteen

⁵⁷ Incorporated in January 1942, the Women’s Ambulance and Transport Corps established units across the country.

⁵⁸ Cochran’s proposal was the precursor to the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots. “Sets Speed Record,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 7, 1940; Amy Porter, “CAA Has Dropped the Last Bars to Flying As a Career For Girls,” *Tampa Tribune*, May 12, 1940.

⁵⁹ Inez Robb, “Defense: Non-Combat Duties for U.S. Women Fliers?,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 22, 1940.

⁶⁰ Margie Hersh Luckett, *Maryland Women: Baltimore, Maryland, 1931-1942, Vol. 3*, (Baltimore: King Brothers, Incorporated Press, 1942), 122.

corps; warden service; radio corps and communications corps,” in preparation for a potential disaster.⁶¹

The most successful and enduring women’s effort to aid the homeland in case of attack was the American Women’s Voluntary Services (AWVS). Organized in 1940 by wealthy socialite Alice Throckmorton McLean of New York City and modeled after the British Women’s Voluntary Services, the AWVS grew to be the country’s largest service organization by the beginning of the war. This service was the most inclusive of the war services, with African American, Hispanic, and Chinese units. Besides offering a wide variety of training programs related to local civilian defense, the organization continued to support the war effort through activities such as the sale of war bonds. Although it grew to be the largest domestic service organization and lasted the duration of the war, it also became controversial because its services often overlapped with those of the Red Cross and the Office of Civilian Defense. While the emphasis remained on military defense, advice columnist Ruth Millett noted that not all opportunities for patriotic service would involve training for military service. She wrote, “There will be a place for the talents of Mrs. Jones who is better equipped to knit and make jelly than to [drive] an ambulance, and for Miss Jones who is suited to clerical work.”⁶² Millet stressed the need for all women to aid in community efforts at mobilization for war to protect home and family, defending traditional gendered roles.

The international situation continued to deteriorate in 1940. As the German Army marched into France and the lowlands, a generalized fear of impending war hung in the air and a clamor for national guidance rose. In face of the strong isolationist sentiment which gripped the country, President Roosevelt felt conflicted, weighing the economic burden of welfare programs

⁶¹ Florence Kerr, “Move to Train Women For Defense Scheduled,” *Mansfield News Journal*, March 7, 1941.

⁶² Ruth Millett, “Women Eager to Aid,” *Wilkes Barre Times Leader*, November 2, 1940.

necessary to rebuild the nation's economy versus building up military forces. The President's failure to establish a coordinated national defense plan prompted concerned citizens from all walks of life and national organizations to offer him advice.⁶³ They overwhelmed the President with suggestions. Historian, Julia Sibel writes, diverse organizations and individuals offered proposals, including the "Boy Scouts, American Legion, Community Chest, and even the Tournament of Roses Committee in Pasadena, California."⁶⁴ While each plan included elements for military preparedness, social welfare concerns, and morale building, they were localized and failed to offer a national solution that met the President's needs.

Club women also gathered their forces to discuss measures necessary for home front defense at the National Social Work Conference at Vassar College in December 1940. Two government officials, Harriet Elliott's assistant Caroline Ware and Allen Moore, a member of the National Defense Advisory Council, met with representatives of twenty-one national volunteer and welfare organizations to discuss a coordinated plan of action to make their communities safe in light of the threat of war.⁶⁵ Aware of the duplication of defense efforts and the plethora of new organizations competing for volunteers, the attendees called for national coordination. Louise Bache, of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women, stated,

⁶³ William O'Neill, *A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad I World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 129.

⁶⁴ Julia Mynette Siebel, "Silent Partners/Active Leaders: The Association of Junior Leagues, the Office of Civilian Defense, and Community Welfare in World War II" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 1999), 40.

⁶⁵ The NSWC was a federation of approximately thirty health and welfare agencies and volunteer organizations/ The membership included American Women's Association, Associated Women of the American Farm Bureau Federation, Campfire Girls, Girl Scouts, Junior Leagues of America, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, National Council of Jewish Women, National Council of Negro Women of the United States, National Council of Women of the United States, National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, National League of Women Voters, National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution, National Women's Trade Union League of America, Seven College Alumnae Associations, Young Women's Christian Associations of the U.S.A., Young Women's Hebrew Association, Women's Overseas Service League. "Findings of the Conference on National Defense." "Conference on National Defense," December 5-6, 1940, Box 173: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Conferences 1943 (1940-1943)'" : Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

We see women marching off in units, some doing this, some that, consumed with the desire to do something but not always with a clear picture of their contribution in terms of the common good. It is, therefore, becoming increasingly clear that some practical suggestions are needed, which will convert this desire to service into a productive well-focused force which can be used effectively in defense of democracy.⁶⁶

Bache's plea for a national plan called for a unified response. However, without any clear direction from the President, government officials attending the conference listened politely to the women but did not sanction them to act. Closing the meeting, Ware advised the women that there was "no 'blue print' for the integration of women in the defense program" at present.⁶⁷ In response to the rash of spontaneous, home grown defense efforts on behalf of women's corps springing up across the nation, Allen Moore commented, "The job of total defense is the job of all citizens, and that while the job of active defense is that of the military authorities, that of passive or nonmilitary defense includes everything else and should be participated in by everyone. Women will participate in this, not as women, but as citizens."⁶⁸ The conference further recommended establishing Citizens Committees in state and local defense councils, with at least one woman on them who understood the full scope of what women's organizations could contribute to defense, demonstrating that every citizen would be part of the defense program.

One week later, the Association of Junior Leagues of America convened a conference on Women in the Defense Program.⁶⁹ The top item on their agenda was finding a solution to coordinating volunteers for action at the local level. Kathryn Van Slyck proposed the creation of a Centralized Volunteer Bureau, modeled after one established by the International Chapter of

⁶⁶ "Conference on National Defense," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁷ "Conference on National Defense," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 6.

⁶⁸ Findings of the Conference on National Defense." Conference on National Defense; December 5-6, 1940, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
Conference on National Defense, December 1940, 5.

⁶⁹ The American Junior League Association also had a branch in Canada. From this point, I will use the abbreviation JL when discussing the United States association.

the Junior League in Winnipeg, Canada. After studying the community's needs, their local bureau created a "file of 7,000 Winnipeg women," willing to volunteer, including information on their "capabilities for war work but also on interests, training, and experience in relation to community service," from which volunteers could be selected.⁷⁰ Suggesting the Winnipeg League could serve as a possible model for the United States, the convention proposed creating a Centralized Volunteer Bureau at the national level to help communities establish their local units. The conference approved the motion and directed their efforts toward "gaining a White House endorsement of their plan and mak[ing] it the 'official' government plan for civilian defense during the defense crisis."⁷¹ Interested in the Centralized Volunteer Bureau as a tool for recruiting local volunteers, Eleanor Roosevelt invited Van Slyck to the White House to hear more about it. The Junior League's proposal, printed under the title *Volunteer Office: What It Is, How It is Set Up, What It Does, How to Organize* eventually became a model for the Office of Civilian Defense Social Division.⁷²

Individual women also approached Eleanor Roosevelt with various plans for national defense. The Women World War Veterans who served in the military services during World War I met to "promote women's role in national defense and organize a national committee to promote women's engagement."⁷³ Dorothy Frooms, the head of the organization, proposed a national committee comprised of the presidents of all the important women's organizations in the

⁷⁰ Close, Kathryn, "Volunteers in Critical Times," *Survey Midmonthly: journal of social work*, 87, no. 1 (January 1941): 392-94, available at: https://archive.org/stream/surveymidmonthly76survrch/surveymidmonthly76survrch_djvu.txt, accessed June 30, 2122.

⁷¹ Siebel, "Silent Partners," 50.

⁷² The Office of Civilian Defense's plan for a national network of local bureaus was based on the CVBs established by the Junior League. In many cases the Junior League helped organize the local Office of Civilian Defense offices. Siebel, "Silent Partners," 59.

⁷³ Frooms served as a chief yeoman in the United States Navy in World War I. Membership in the WWWV included women who served in the Navy as Yeomanettes and the Army's Hello Girls. "The WWWV [was] an organization composed of honorable discharged women who served in the Army, navy, and Marine Corps. They are united to promote world peace and to commemorate the services of those who died for their country." Frederic J. Haskin, "Answers to Your Questions," *La Crosse Tribune*, March 10, 1941.

country to conduct localized surveys of women's talents.⁷⁴ Fooks called upon all women—not only those trained to drive ambulances or pilot planes—to use their unique skills. Fooks' proposal—that all American women find their place in national defense—sparked a series of national debates regarding compulsory registration for women. Fooks's committee failed to materialize; however, the national defense program proposed by the First Lady and Florence Kerr reflected the ideas put forward by these various women's groups.

A national poll conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion in mid-December 1940, asked a sampling of women if they favored conscripting women for war jobs between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five years. The findings revealed a nearly even split between women for conscription (48 percent) and women against (52 percent).⁷⁵ The results showed the majority of women in the age group twenty-one to thirty-five were in favor of conscription.⁷⁶ Women who responded positively pointed out the value of readiness, "Modern warfare isn't confined to fighting at the front. The present war with its bombing of cities and towns shows us that every step to prepare must be taken, even to the training of women."⁷⁷ The poll also indicated that women desired to share "equal responsibility with men in defending the country" and should receive training for emergency war work.⁷⁸ Weighing heavily on the decision to place the nation on a wartime stand were concerns over economic recovery and the social problems associated with the Depression as millions of Americans continued to suffer from its impact, the administration continued to walk a fine line between powerful antiwar forces, social welfare advocates, and military advisors. The president's "frustration with creating an organized national

⁷⁴ Millett, "Women, Eager To Aid Our National Defense, Organize For Training," *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, November 2, 1940.

⁷⁵ Institute of Public Opinion, "Special Training of Women For Wartime Work Appeals to Many," *La Crosse Tribune*, December 18, 1940.

⁷⁶ Institute of Public Opinion, "Special Training of Women."

⁷⁷ Institute of Public Opinion, "Special Training of Women."

⁷⁸ Institute of Public Opinion, "Special Training of Women."

defense plan was two-fold; he continued to view the need for social welfare to be among the highest priorities of his administration, while at the same time he supported his military advisors who argued in favor of civil protection from potential foreign attacks on American cities.”⁷⁹ The President feared directing the government’s energies and resources into military defense would mean sacrificing the administration’s social goals.

Recognizing the deep divide between the haves and have-nots in American society, Eleanor Roosevelt agreed with the President’s assessment and advocated continued emphasis on social welfare to build a stronger America—“a wartime New Deal to continue with the progressive social legislation as part of national defense”—and used her influence to help shape public opinion, arguing that focus on military defense would overshadow existing social disparities.⁸⁰ She drew parallels between the home front and European battlefields, reminding her radio show listeners and readers of her “My Day” column that “preserving democracy and welfare at home was as important as fighting to regain it elsewhere.”⁸¹

After the long years of lingering economic depression, Mrs. Roosevelt realized many Americans questioned the value of fighting for a democracy which they believed had abandoned them. Mrs. Roosevelt described her philosophy in an article entitled, “Social Gains and Defense,” written for the political journal *Common Sense*. In her article, Mrs. Roosevelt quoted from a letter written by an anonymous woman who stated the New Deal had failed her and her family. The woman stated, “I am starving, and my children are starving. What do I care—if Hitler will give me any kind of a living and promise it to me steadily—what do *I* care who is in

⁷⁹ Siebel, “Silent Partners,” 40.

⁸⁰ Dallek, Matthew, *Defenseless Under the Night*, (New York, Oxford university Press, 2016), 87.

⁸¹ Mary Anne Borrelli, *The Politics of the President’s Wife* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2011), 175-76.

power and who wins the war!”⁸² Eleanor Roosevelt responded, “We must understand their point of view. . . . because only by understanding it, only by knowing what brings it about, are we going to move forward in our social gains. [However] I do not see why, under the defense program, we cannot move forward.”⁸³ Mrs. Roosevelt believed serving the needs of people living on the margins of society was essential to assure their support for national defense. Historian Matthew Dallek contends the First Lady envisioned expanded social programs under Home Defense would bring “virtually all women as volunteers in an effort to provide food, shelter, recreation, and health care to every citizen. Her plan was a promise to transform gender roles and bring women more fully into the beating heart of the nation’s economic life.”⁸⁴ Recognizing that society as a whole had not recovered from the Depression, the First Lady envisioned social welfare as an essential component to overall victory in total war—rebuilding American society and winning the war against fascism. Mrs. Roosevelt was “colorblind” and believed all American women—black, white, or brown—should have the opportunity to participate in home defense activities. Wartime demands called for a united citizenry, especially the inclusion of black Americans.

The President’s failure to issue a statement calling for equal opportunity for black workers in industries with government contracts prompted A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, to threaten a march on Washington D.C., with hundreds or even thousands to protest discrimination against blacks in wartime employment. At President Roosevelt’s request, Mrs. Roosevelt arbitrated the deadlock, facilitating Executive Order 880. Announced on June 25, 1941, the newly established Fair Employment Practices Commission

⁸² Eleanor Roosevelt’s article entitled, “Social Gains and Defense” was originally published in *Common Sense*, in March 1941; Black, Allida, ed., *Courage in a Dangerous World: The Political Writings of Eleanor Roosevelt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 132-135, 134.

⁸³ “Social Gains and Defense,” 134.

⁸⁴ Matthew Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night: The Roosevelt Years and the Origins of Homeland Security* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2016), 86.

ordered an end to discriminatory employment practices due to race, creed, color, or national origin. Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, credited Eleanor Roosevelt with playing a “major part in resolving the dispute.”⁸⁵ In September, Rebecca Stiles Taylor, an African American columnist for the *Chicago Defender*, cited the latest report by Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins in the *Women Worker*. The bulletin discussed the increasing need for great numbers of women to be employed in a wide range of industries outside of traditional labor. Taylor issued a call to leaders of Black women’s organizations, “Now that clubs are opening for the new club year, it would be a fine thing if the study of and a practical follow-up of the defense program be placed on your club agenda and committees appointed to seek the necessary knowledge for a fuller integration of Race women into the defense program.”⁸⁶ In turn, Mrs. Roosevelt increased the opportunities for African American women to express their opinions in Washington.

For the first time, leading African American women were invited to be part of the national dialog and invited to give their opinions and participate in the creation of national policy. In response to a call from the War Department, “thirty-one presidents of nationally organized women’s groups formed a volunteer advisory committee for the Women’s Interest section in the Bureau of Public Relations with members of the National Council of Negro Women representing black women.”⁸⁷ The conference convened on October 13th with the express purpose “to help the War Department reach the women of the country with information of interest to them in connection with the men in the army.”⁸⁸ After hearing speakers from

⁸⁵ Black, “Championing a Champion,” 732.

⁸⁶ The article “Championing a Champion,” was published in the *Woman Worker*, signed by “A Woman”; Rebecca Stiles Taylor, “Activities of Women’s National Organizations,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 20, 1941.

⁸⁷ “Women’s Organizations to Aid War Department; National Negro Women’s Council Will Co-operate,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 11, 1941.

⁸⁸ “Women’s Organizations.”

various areas related to home defense, the program closed with a luncheon and later that afternoon a tea at the White House.

On October 16th, two days after the War Department's conference, six hundred members of the National Association of Colored Women arrived in Washington, D. C. for their eighth national convention. Speakers included Mrs. Roosevelt and an "impressive array" of nationally known African Americans: Mrs. Mary Bethune, president of the National Association of Colored Women, Dorothy Height, executive secretary of the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, and Earl Dickerson of the Fair Employment Practice Committee. Mrs. Roosevelt and other federal officials, including Paul McNutt of the Federal Security Agency, addressed the group. The highlight of the conference was a reception at the White House, hosted by the First Lady, for the six hundred conference attendees. In her column, Taylor praised Mrs. Roosevelt, "The gracious hostess is the first of the first ladies of the land is the first in the history of this country to make organized groups of Race women of this nation feel they, too, are citizens of the country and a part and parcel of that it has."⁸⁹ This event marked a major step forward in validating African American women's voice in national affairs and their opinions in a national debate over national defense.

As the end of the President's second term approached, support for New Deal goals waned and the nation's concerns over economic hardship had taken a back seat. However, the First Lady recognized the necessity to continue to promote social reform at the local level, invigorate support for home defense, and rebuild national morale making it strong enough to withstand the hardships of war. The President agreed and after his election to an unprecedented victory to a third term in 1941, Mrs. Roosevelt saw the opportunity to keep the New Deal alive and

⁸⁹ Taylor, Rebecca Styles, "Activities of Women's National Organizations," *The Chicago Defender*, October 18, 1941.

“transform American life by empowering millions of women and catapulting them into the economic mainstream . . . and complete what she saw as the unfinished New Deal revolution.”⁹⁰

She advocated for the necessity of making progressive social legislation part of national defense, building a strong nation from the ground up and was not willing to support an all-out war which would draw attention away from rebuilding local communities still impacted by the Depression. She argued that creating a home defense program that incorporated social legislation would make “every woman and child, as well as every man, an indispensable unit in Home Defense.”⁹¹ Mrs. Roosevelt shared this goal with Florence Kerr, the assistant commissioner of the Work Progress Administration, asking her to author a plan which incorporated the ideals they shared, “turning the New Deal into a grassroots program in which an army of millions of women served in roles that benefitted wartime society through social action.”⁹² Kerr agreed and called for millions of women to be “mobilized” in their home towns and called for the government to “step lively” and avoid losing “the energy that is awaiting leadership and training.”⁹³ Both women hoped their plan would serve as a stimulus for social legislation during the President’s third term. Kerr presented her plan, the “Volunteer Mobilization of Women,” to the President on New Year’s Day 1941, and asked him to submit the plan to Congress for approval and the establishment of a new agency entitled the American Social Defense Administration.⁹⁴ In essence, the agency would “meld social welfare ideals to civilian defense needs and creat[e] a total program for social defense.”⁹⁵ Ultimately, the First Lady saw social welfare as a way of creating a stronger nation less likely swayed by foreign propaganda, inspiring patriotism at the grassroots level, and being committed to the war effort.

⁹⁰ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 86.

⁹¹ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 86.

⁹² Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 88.

⁹³ “President Gets Plan to Train U. S. Women,” *Washington Post*, January 2, 1941.

⁹⁴ “President Gets Plan.”

⁹⁵ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 87-88.

January was a busy month for the First Lady and Kerr as they entertained various groups of women to generate support for their new plan, named the American Social Defense Administration. To garner support for her plan Mrs. Roosevelt held a series of meetings. Not ready for prime time, the first gathering at the White House on January 6, 1941, was “a secret meeting.” In attendance were more than fifty politically powerful women, including congresswomen and directors of government bureaus.⁹⁶ The meeting began with Mrs. Roosevelt “swearing every one present to the deepest secrecy” and asking that anyone who would not agree to remain silent leave immediately; all the women remained to hear the plan. The First Lady read aloud: “The Home Defense Commission will provide the president of the United States with a unified nation-wide organization which will be capable of flexibility and readjustment to meet any of the unpredictable needs of war or peace. It will be so tightly organized that it can respond without delay and with unanimous action to meet new situations.”⁹⁷ The First Lady also advised the women, there would be a “spectacular drive to win millions of women” to the cause. She informed them of the possibility of a parade and a personal appeal for volunteers from the president in a fireside chat.

That same morning, Kerr attended a private meeting with the President and other high-ranking male officials, including Paul McNutt. Kerr stressed the home defense plan’s inclusiveness, stating, “Women will play a huge part,” and it would “give the women of the country a chance to make a contribution to the defense fronts in definite services to maintain morale for the total defense of the nation.”⁹⁸ Paul McNutt, head of the Federal Security

⁹⁶ The list of attendees included Secretary of Labor Perkins, Katherine Lenroot of the Child Welfare Bureau, Mary Anderson of the Women’s Bureau, Harriett Elliott of the National Defense Commission, wives of several cabinet members and supreme court justices and all women members of Congress except Caroline O’Day (D-N.Y.), who was ill.” “First Lady to Lead Mobilization of Women into ‘Home Defense’ Guards,” *Kane Republican*, March 6, 1941; Marie Manning, “Home Defense Groups to Be Formed,” *Lowell Sun*, March 6, 1941.

⁹⁷ Manning, “Home Defense Groups.”

⁹⁸ “President Drafts Home Guard Plan,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1941.

Administration, commented on territorial conflicts in the proposal, including existing state and local defense councils. Kerr noted that she sensed “jurisdictional problems”, and that other government officials present did not share her enthusiasm. Even her ally in the House of Representatives, Mary T. Norton, advised Kerr to beware of charges of “regimentation, socialization, propagandizing, etc.,” from the opposition.⁹⁹ Kerr commented, “I seem to be treading upon all of the agency toes in Washington.”¹⁰⁰ Kerr did not get a speedy reply and a waiting game ensued over the next two months. During that time, the First Lady continued to court clubwomen at the White House, hoping to build a ready set of volunteers to lead the charge once it was made official.

On one occasion, Mrs. Roosevelt entertained the directors of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs at a luncheon where she announced the proposed American Social Defense Administration was under review by a presidential committee and she expected approval in a couple of weeks.¹⁰¹ The First Lady stated that the plan should be regarded as a community project, “preparation to defend, if necessary, your way of life.”¹⁰² She informed the group the plan would allow for “streamlined communications between the president and the people” and allow response “without delay.” She also advised them that all service would be voluntary, with only a few paid positions: one in the federal government and one executive in each state. All other posts would be voluntary.¹⁰³ She stressed clubwomen’s commitment to volunteering was essential and cautioned that women involved in any part of the home defense program must be

⁹⁹ Eleanor Straub, “Government Policy Toward Civilian Women During World War II,” (PhD diss., Emory University, Atlanta, 1973), 72.

¹⁰⁰ “Home Defense Plans Unfold,” *Bloomington Pantagraph*, March 7, 1941.

¹⁰¹ The President’s committee members included: Florence Kerr, Harriett Elliott, and Paul McNutt.

¹⁰² Jessie Ash Arndt, “First Lady Receives G.F.W.C. at White House,” *Washington Post*, January 16, 1941.

¹⁰³ Arndt, “First Lady Receives G.F.W.C.”.

dependable and “cannot say, ‘I’ll do such and such—and tomorrow go to Florida.’ Discipline will be required.”¹⁰⁴

Speaking in her official role as part of the National Defense Council, Harriet Elliott informed the women “the present grave emergency will demand some sacrifices . . . but these can be made without jeopardizing the American concept of democracy which we are preparing to defend.”¹⁰⁵ She urged the attendees “to see that women are appointed in their States as members of their advisory councils—not to represent women but as authorities in their special fields, representing all the citizens.”¹⁰⁶ A question and answer session followed with a panel of leading figures in various areas in home defense topics, including maternal and child health, nutrition, recreation, and welfare. These meetings signaled an end to women starting quasi-military organizations, arming themselves, training to shoot down enemy paratroopers, or the formation of independent national organizations. The First Lady hoped her new national defense plan would shift women’s attention to community work and the domestic roles they knew best.

When the proposed American Social Defense Administration came under discussion in the House of Representatives, Representative John Taber (R-NY) addressed the issue of home defense, specifically the First Lady and Kerr’s meeting with club women and their “ideas” for defense. Referencing the proposed social defense program, he commented, “Is it not time that we clean house and have an honest-to-goodness, active defense program, and that the President cooperate with it?”¹⁰⁷ Representative Everett Dirksen (R-IL), broached the subject of Mrs. Roosevelt’s tea and her social defense program, scornfully commenting, “Let that sink in—a

¹⁰⁴ Once again there is evidence of the need to restore the Women’s Advisory Committee active in World War I. Arndt, “First Lady Received G.F.W.C.”

¹⁰⁵ “Dr. Harriet Elliott Heard at Night,” *Washington Post*, January 16, 1941.

¹⁰⁶ “Dr. Harriet Elliott Heard at Night.”

¹⁰⁷ *77 Congressional Record.*, 2014-2019 (1941). Accessed March 10, 2019, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-CRECB-1941-pt2/pdf/GPO-CRECB-1941-pt2-15.pdf>. Discussion over the proposed social defense program is found between pages 2014 and 2019 and includes a summary of the Social Defense Plan proposed by Florence Kerr.

program of social defense in which the women of America shall be enlisted to develop unity of spirit” and “the purpose of developing a great united instrumentality in behalf of a social program.”¹⁰⁸ He noted the plan called for a million or more women to learn specialized skills “for map reading, for training in Spanish, for first aid in safety, for food conservation, for home-defense work, and a great many other things included in the idea of mobilization.”¹⁰⁹ Continuing his rant, Dirksen referenced an article in *Time* magazine on women’s fledgling efforts at home defense; he displayed a picture of the Green Guards of America, dressed in green outfits, and chanting their official song:

We will keep the beacons burning
For our soldiers out there yearning;
To our shores, America.
Guard our lands, our homes, our young ones,
Blast to hell invading wrong ones.¹¹⁰

When the laughter ended, Dirksen concluded, “I had no idea that in a few short months there should issue from the White House itself a program for the mobilization of the womanhood of America, and then have it given official sanction by those in an official position.”¹¹¹ Rep. Mary Norton (D-NJ) countered Dirksen’s assertion, replying, “The women I know are very anxious to be organized to do their part in the work that lies ahead. . . . I can show him any number of letters from women everywhere, urging that some coordinated plans be adopted to prepare us for the work we are best qualified to perform.”¹¹² Historian, Holly Allen writes, “Federal officials and other aspirants to political power began to feminize New Deal social policy, casting it as frivolous social experimentation during a time that called for decisive,

¹⁰⁸ 77 *Congressional Record*, 2014-2019 (1941).

¹⁰⁹ 77 *Congressional Record*, 2014-2019 (1941).

¹¹⁰ 77 *Congressional Record*, 2015 (1941).

¹¹¹ 77 *Congressional Record*, 2015 (1941).

¹¹² 77 *Congressional Record*, 2015 (1941).

masculine leadership.”¹¹³ The political focus was changing as politically powerful men brushed “feminine” concerns to the sidelines.

On May 20, 1941, the president announced the Office of Civilian Defense and named Fiorello La Guardia, mayor of New York City, director of the nation’s defense. As director of the Office of Civilian Defense, La Guardia charged communities with establishing local defense councils “for the protection of the community in case of enemy attack.”¹¹⁴ This action signified military preparedness as a priority, ignoring social defense activities, much to the irritation of the First Lady and Kerr. Unaware the President would announce a civilian defense program four days before their convention, the Greater Federation of Women’s Clubs’ leadership had devised a plan for national defense and anticipated announcing it at their annual convention.

On the opening night of the convention, outgoing president Saidie Orr Dunbar addressed the conference and announced the creation of the Office of Defense and Roosevelt’s appointment of La Guardia as head of the organization. With no further announcements regarding La Guardia’s plan for homeland defense, newly elected president of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, Sara Anderson Whitehurst of Baltimore, who had served as the chairman of the Women’s Committee of the Maryland Council of Defense in World War I, proposed moving the federation from an isolationist position to a proactive role in national defense. Convention attendees included many isolationists who balked at adopting a resolution to support shipping material aid to Britain on the high seas, fearing this action might invite naval altercations and bring the nation into the war overseas. After a heated debate, the attendees narrowly passed the emergency resolution approving material aid to the democracies at war, making a strong public

¹¹³ Holly Allen, *Forgotten Men and Fallen Women: The Cultural Politics of New Deal Narratives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 137.

¹¹⁴ Office of Civilian Defense, “An Operating Guide for Local Defense Councils,” Publication 3626, August 1943, Civilian War Services, Washington, D C, 1, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112101585237&view=1up&seq=3>.

statement in opposition to First America, Charles Lindbergh's pacifist organization. Coming from the largest association of women's clubs in the country, the Greater Federation of Women's Club's vote to support Lend-Lease and to advocate action necessary to protect United States ships carrying war materials overseas to Great Britain signaled the end to the hold isolationism had over the nation.

Impatient with the President's lack of leadership in the matter of home defense, Sarah Whitehead took the initiative. In a speech, entitled "Women and National Defense," Whitehurst announced the establishment of a new independent, self-supporting organization, the Department of National Defense, and named Lucy Anderson Milligan as chairman of the newly established group. She stated, "It will be one of the new department's aims to convince such women that national security will be best served if every possible precaution is taken to make this country safe against possible invasion. Hitler may have conquered Europe . . . but the women of this country will see to it that he meets his Waterloo when he crosses swords with the women of America."¹¹⁵ Whitehurst described the movement as "a crusade for all American women" and urged club members "to follow her in a 'crusade to preserve our representative form of government, to combat fifth columnists and to prepare our country and our people to defend themselves.'"¹¹⁶ She also expressed hopes that La Guardia would allow club women to play a vital role in planning for national defense and utilize women to advance social goals.

Although never touted as such, the new organization bore a strong resemblance to the structure of the Women's Subcommittee of the National Council of Defense established during World War I. Whitehurst described the Department of National Defense as democratic,

¹¹⁵ Sarah Whitehurst's efforts to bring women together to aid in the war reflects her role as a member of the Maryland Council of Defense in World War I. "Clubwomen Set Up New Defense Unit," *New York Times*, May 27, 1941; "Mightiest Defense Movement' Launched," *San Francisco Examiner*, May 27, 1941.

¹¹⁶ Ruth Cowan, "Women's Organizations Line Up to Work Out Program of Action" *Tampa Bay Times*, June 8, 1941.

originating at the local club level. Individual women's clubs would nominate representatives at the county level, who in turn would vote for a single state representative to attend national meetings. Newly elected members of the Department of National Defense would work in one of twelve committees under the leadership of the national chairman Lucy Milligan with state and local offices coordinating and implementing action items.¹¹⁷

Whitehurst recognized a major stumbling block to successfully forming the new defense unit: the loyalty many women felt for their individual organizations, i.e. Junior League and League of Women Voters, and their uncertainty as to its impact upon their organization's autonomy. To dispel any fears that the Greater Federation of Women's Clubs would take control over the newly established organization, Whitehurst planned to bring the defense activities of existing women's clubs together and prevent overlapping and wasted efforts, describing the new organization as democratic.¹¹⁸ Individual women's clubs would choose representatives at the county level, who in turn would vote for a single state representative to attend national meetings. Newly elected members of the Department of National Defense would work in one of twelve committees under the leadership of the national chairman Lucy Milligan, "with particular focus on child welfare and women's rights."¹¹⁹ Whitehurst envisioned the new organization as an opportunity to realize the First Lady's social defense goals, strengthen American democracy, and undermine the appeal of foreign ideologies. Capitalizing on club women's commitment to the betterment of their communities, she hoped that this ready-made army would enable "easy cooperation with state and local defense councils" organized by the national Office of Civilian

¹¹⁷ Whitehurst's plan bore a strong resemblance to the Women's Advisory committee win World War One, which she served as the Maryland representative. The twelve-point program called for twelve separate committees which included "Organization, registration, nursing, Americanization, recreation, consumer, housing nutrition, industry agriculture, aviation, and sale of defense bonds"; Mary Padgett, "Club Leaders to Rally for National Defense," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 8, 1941.

¹¹⁸ "Federation Leader Wants Role for Women in U. S. Defense," *Rochester Democrat and Republican*, July 13, 1941.

¹¹⁹ Padgett, "Club Leaders to Rally for National Defense."

Defense.¹²⁰ When delegates returned home from the convention, the women began organizing their club members in preparation for the upcoming meeting on June 13th, in New York City.

Anticipating a meeting with La Guardia, Whitehurst hoped to present him a ready-made social defense division, wholly funded and financed by the participating women's organizations, with a budget of \$90,000 supported by a per capita assessment of 15 cents per member.¹²¹

Whitehurst expressed "her earnest hope" of convincing the mayor to utilize their plan, which would "save him time and effort and the taxpayers the expense" of developing a new one.¹²²

Florence Kerr praised the clubwomen's initiative, commenting, "Defense of a community demands a knowledge of its needs, facilities, and opportunities. . . . Woman's Clubs work with their communities—know its needs, and it is in their power to strengthen it. We'll call on voluntary organizations whenever they can be fitted into the defense picture, and the local defense councils will place a great deal of reliance on them."¹²³ Like the First Lady and Kerr, Whitehurst hoped La Guardia would find a place for women in civilian defense activities.

After his appointment, La Guardia quickly went to work organizing a "quasi-military force," enlisting "10 million men and 27 million women as home defense volunteers," trained in military skills to protect their community from foreign invaders on land, sea, or air.¹²⁴ The director extended his call for quasi-military preparedness outside the metropolitan area by directing the mayors of large cities to turn over control of the civilian government to their local police departments, "temporarily imposing a police state on major metropolitan areas."¹²⁵ In keeping with his militaristic view of defense, one of La Guardia's first steps was to design

¹²⁰ Padgett, "Club Leaders to Rally for National Defense."

¹²¹ "Women to Press for Defense Program: Federation Head, Here, Hopes to See May and Take Up Projected Help," *New York Times*, May 30, 1941.

¹²² "Women to Press."

¹²³ Jane Cochran, "Women Also Playing a Large Part in National Defense Program Today," *Greenfield Daily Reporter*, July 7, 1941.

¹²⁴ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 128.

¹²⁵ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 133.

uniforms to distinguish members of the Office of Civilian Defense from other civilians and establish their authority.

As previously planned, women representatives of the newly established Department of National Defense, arrived in New York City to meet with Sara Whitehurst and Lucy Milligan to discuss their needs and goals in their proposed defense program. The bi-racial conference attracted a variety of national organizations, many already actively registering and surveying members' organizational skills and other areas of particular interest regarding home defense. At Whitehead's request, La Guardia agreed to attend their meeting and allow the women to present their ideas. The women proposed action on various national programs related to home defense, including housing, consumer protection, public health, and the sale of war bonds, and representatives from several Negro women's groups called for the "promotion of tolerance."¹²⁶ After a series of proposals by special interest groups, Whitehurst intervened, and La Guardia took the floor.

La Guardia drew attention back to civil, rather than social defense, directing the women's attention to pending threats of a foreign attack. His speech took a non-conciliatory tone as he attempted to shape their expectations for involvement to match his view of defense. La Guardia dashed their hopes of leadership in the organization or even equality with men volunteers, stating, "There will be no women's divisions. . . . Women are going to be right in the squads with men. They will be in command in many cases, and this will depend solely on the ability and leadership of the individual, not of sex."¹²⁷ The Director sought to appeal to women's interests and concluded his speech by informing the women that leading fashion designers were busy styling uniforms and insignia for women volunteers. While La Guardia listened to women's

¹²⁶ "Mayor Emphasizes Need of Discipline Civil Defense Demands More Soldiers, Fewer Generals," *New York Times*, June 14, 1941.

¹²⁷ Jane Cochran, "Women to Play Invaluable Role in U.S. Defense," *Mansfield News-Journal*, June 30, 1941.

comments reflecting social defense as proposed by Mrs. Roosevelt, he brushed the club women's concerns aside, drawing their attention to the potential for a foreign attack and possible devastation.

In line with his militant view of national defense, La Guardia favored uniforms as a symbol of authority, distinguishing members of the protective division from other civilians. The day after announcing his new organization to a gathering of clubwomen, La Guardia invited Eleanor Roosevelt to preview an array of expensive dress uniforms designed by renowned fashion designers such as Elizabeth Hawes and Lily Daché. Models paraded the various uniforms to distinguish women serving in various volunteer activities, including "catastrophe workers, emergency first-aid helpers, protection of children, medical service, air-raid warden, street clearance, canteen, and fire auxiliary."¹²⁸ The particular categories La Guardia chose for women's activities reflected his indifference to the skill and talents that professional and club women possessed and reflected his gendered expectations of women's services during the war. In her syndicated newspaper column, "My Day," Mrs. Roosevelt pondered the value of designing uniforms before determining the official roles women would serve. She wrote, "This morning, at Mayor La Guardia's request, I looked at some designs for uniforms, which volunteers may wear in the future. I confess to a little confusion in thinking about uniforms before being entirely certain what work is to be done in them, but I suppose simple working clothes can fit all types of work."¹²⁹ She also noted the uniforms' cost and expressed her fear that many female volunteers could not afford uniforms and therefore would be unable to

¹²⁸ Virginia Pope, "Civilian Defense Uniforms", *New York Times*, December 14, 1941.

¹²⁹ Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day," June 14, 1941, The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, accessed July 7, 2016, <https://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm? y=1941& f=md055913>.

participate.¹³⁰ La Guardia clearly demonstrated his chauvinism when he placed his emphasis on how the women under his command looked rather than what they did in them.

The day after attending the General Federation of Women's Club's gathering, La Guardia announced Florence Kerr as head of the Office of Civilian Defense's women's division; however, Kerr soon learned La Guardia had no intention of making use of women. Kerr had anticipated her top priority would be to survey and catalog clubs and organizations—a total of 50 million women—and create a national directory for volunteer services. However, Kerr told reporters the director rejected “strictly ‘women’s divisions,’” adding, La Guardia planned to “enlist volunteers without distinction between sexes.”¹³¹ She assured women they would be “given a chance on an equal basis with men”; however, she cautioned, “How many survive will depend upon their ability.”¹³² She also advised women that logically some jobs “naturally fall to men and others to women, “It would be logical to train men as fire-fighters and women in the care of children.”¹³³ Kerr also commented on women's need to accept direction and discipline: “Now I know we American women took the ‘and obey’ out of the wedding lines, but I have no doubt that we can accept the strict discipline needed for civilian defense and give our all to the humble and unglamorous task that may be assigned us.”¹³⁴ She reiterated La Guardia's repeated concerns over feminine flightiness and willingness to take orders, and cited a recent registration event where only two out of fourteen women volunteer registrants showed up to do their job: “the others just had dates, I guess.”¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Uniforms received final approval one week after the war started in December 1941. Due to Mrs. Roosevelt's concern that uniforms be affordable, “all unnecessary details were eliminated to reduce the cost to a workable minimum.” Pope, “Civilian Defense Uniforms.

¹³¹ Ruth Cowan, “OCD To Enlist Men and Women,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 22, 1941.

¹³² Cowan, “OCD To Enlist.”

¹³³ Ruth Cowan, “Civil Defense To Put Sexes On Equal Basis,” *Washington Post*, Jun 22, 1941.

¹³⁴ John Thompson, “Mrs. Kerr, Here, To be OCD Aides,” *Nashville Tennessean*, June 15, 1941.

¹³⁵ Thompson, “Mrs. Kerr, Here.”

La Guardia's rhetoric, meant to ensure women a meaningful role in the protective services, was vacuous and the assignment of defense jobs remained sexist. Such was the case with "one woman who visited her local Office of Civilian Defense to enlist as an air-raid warden and was informed by the director that air-raid warning was physically strenuous and therefore unsuitable for women. He suggested that she clean the office instead."¹³⁶ The director emphasized military preparedness using his budget for plane watching, firefighting, and practicing air raids. Despite his bow to the ladies, La Guardia "barely tolerated" the protective division in "his organization" and "often remarked privately that the whole concept was "sissy stuff."¹³⁷ He branded social defense activities, "basket-weaving, dancing in the streets, and community singing," as "unmanly." As La Guardia gained control over the direction which home defense would take, he made little effort to promote Mrs. Roosevelt's social defense, relegating it to the background.

Women's hopes for involvement waned as La Guardia failed to utilize women's skills. Florence Kerr resigned from her post as La Guardia's administrative assistant after he censored her efforts to "survey and catalogue volunteer associations around the country, many of them women's groups."¹³⁸ Kerr often spoke openly of her frustration over the lack of opportunities for women's leadership in the official ranks of the Office of Civilian Defense. Frustrated at the failure to invigorate women's voluntarism, Kerr resigned and took a position in the Federal Works Administration. At a later date, in a personal letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Kerr expressed her frustration with La Guardia: "No one feels more keenly than I do the fact that I have not been able to be of greater service to the civilian defense program, but I want you to recall what I am

¹³⁶ Allen, *Forgotten Men*, 161.

¹³⁷ Formally known as the Civilian War Services; Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 209; Siebel, "Soldiers on the Home Front," 155.

¹³⁸ "Demands Defense Role for Women," *Des Moines Register*, July 31, 1941.

sure you fully sensed, that in the days and weeks in which I was at the Office of Civilian Defense, I was not allowed to do one single constructive thing. I did neither good work nor bad work—I did no work.”¹³⁹

The assistant director’s role on the Office of Civilian Defense remained in flux over the next couple of months after Kerr’s resignation. Demonstrating his chauvinism once and reluctance to support a non-protective division, La Guardia replaced Kerr with T. Semmes Walmsley, a past mayor of New Orleans. La Guardia’s failure to replace Kerr with a female, prompted public commentary. Women’s Club president Sara Whitehurst, a supporter for women’s involvement in wartime planning, responded angrily to the news that La Guardia replaced Kerr with a man, commenting, “women were being ‘intolerably’ discriminated against” and “without representation on the national home defense program.”¹⁴⁰ She demanded the creation of women’s divisions at all levels—national, state, and local. She argued, “We have to be practical about this. Women are more interested and can be more efficient than men in certain fields—housing, nutrition, setting up camp recreation programs. For instance, would men be interested in nursing?”¹⁴¹ She also protested the recent exclusion of women from the Civilian Pilot Training program and she stated she would take this to the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in the coming fall for action: “I feel confident that our 2,000,000 members will feel as I do—that this discrimination against women in aviation is not to be tolerated.”¹⁴² Sarah Whitehurst called for club members to make themselves heard on this new evidence of discrimination against women. Whitehurst hoped to shake the members from their lethargy and told them they to use their organizing and leadership skills to perform more significant roles,

¹³⁹ Letter from Florence Stewart Kerr to Mrs. Roosevelt, February 16, 1942, “Florence Kerr, 1939-1942,” accessed March 26, 2019, <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/resources/images/ersel/ersel058.pdf>, 191.

¹⁴⁰ “Complains About Discrimination Against Women,” *The Newport News Daily Press*, July 31, 1941.

¹⁴¹ “Complains About Discrimination.”

¹⁴² “Complains About Discrimination.”

advising club women to “get down and roll up their sleeves” and cut out pink teas and playing cards. Book clubs and similar organizations should stop reading merely for pleasure and instead should study housing and nutrition and subjects connected with the defense program.”¹⁴³

However, disillusioned club women, once clamoring for volunteer opportunities, had returned to their bridge games and book clubs. Newspaper columnist Ruth Millett commiserated with Whitehurst’s frustration over women’s exclusion from an active role in defense. She wrote, “When are women going to learn that nobody takes them seriously in their determination to play the part of responsible citizens until an emergency or a crisis is actually at hand?”¹⁴⁴ She counseled, “when it comes time to defend our homes, we’ll have all the responsibility we can take. We won’t be funny women in funny uniforms taking ourselves far too seriously then. We’ll be courageous citizens doing difficult jobs.”¹⁴⁵ Millett firmly believed that if and when war broke out, women would take national defense seriously

Since the Executive Order creating the Office of Civilian Defense did not specify the creation of Mrs. Roosevelt’s Social Defense Administration, Congress paid little heed to it and budgeted \$100 million for the Office of Civilian Defense to purchase “firefighting equipment, protective clothing, helmets, medical supplies, gas masks, and training facilities,” and nothing for activities related to social defense.¹⁴⁶ La Guardia’s machoism antagonized Mrs. Roosevelt who believed national morale was more crucial for the nation’s well-being than protection from an unlikely aerial attack. She pressed the director to pay attention to the social problems that threatened the health and welfare of individuals and families: “malnutrition, venereal disease, and substandard housing.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Mary Patterson Routt, “A Woman Looks On,” *San Pedro News-Pilot*, August 19, 1941.

¹⁴⁴ Ruth Millett, “Women Want Work To Do,” *Phoenix Arizona Republic*, September 24, 1941.

¹⁴⁵ Millett, “Women Want Work To Do.”

¹⁴⁶ Allen, *Forgotten Men*, 164.

¹⁴⁷ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 154.

Using the power of the pen, Eleanor Roosevelt expressed her dissatisfaction with La Guardia's short-sighted focus on preparing men for military response to an attack, which she believed unlikely. She strongly believed the nation had not recovered from the Depression and that without a strong society at home, there was little point to fighting a war. While recognizing the distinction between men and women's work, the First Lady had great confidence in women's ability to participate in home defense. Mrs. Roosevelt had thought about and written on this question in the past. In her first book, *It's Up to the Women*, Mrs. Roosevelt expressed her confidence in women's ability to problem solve and lead. She recognized differences between men and women but noted they were complementary. "When all is said and done, women are different than men. They are equals in many ways, but they cannot refuse to acknowledge the differences."¹⁴⁸ In an interview with *Good Housekeeping*, the First Lady explained, "Women must become more conscious of themselves as women and of their ability to function as a group. . . women should unite only for fundamental causes, such as peace or protection of the home."¹⁴⁹

The First Lady believed the President's Executive Order establishing the Office of Civilian Defense incorporated home defense as a vital component of Civilian Defense, authorizing the power to direct social defense activities on regional and local levels to raise public morale. Frustrated by La Guardia's failure to promote social defense, Mrs. Roosevelt arranged a meeting at the White House and insisted the President open the meeting with a few words, warning him, "If he did not do this' then La Guardia 'will not do much with his volunteers."¹⁵⁰ First Lady believed if given the resources, "she could imbue Americans with a spirit of hope to counter the anxiety precipitated by the crisis."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 14.

¹⁴⁹ Ware, *Beyond Suffrage*, 16.

¹⁵⁰ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 158.

¹⁵¹ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 157.

In response, La Guardia reluctantly created a Volunteer Participation Committee within the Office of Civilian Defense. The new Civilian Defense Volunteer Office would promote a variety of social defense activities meant to “To strengthen morale through the satisfaction which will come to civilian volunteers—those with much leisure and those without—doing useful community work.”¹⁵² Volunteers would help in civilian defense, participate in federal and state programs related to “health, family security, recreation, social protection, child welfare, and education.”¹⁵³

In preparation for her announcement on women’s role in national defense, the First Lady invited forty-five representatives, from nine regional Volunteer Participation Committees to a meeting at the White House on July 24th, to announce her plan for social defense and garner women’s support. The invitees included both males and females, including many politically high-profile women.¹⁵⁴ President Roosevelt welcomed the committee members and called for unity. He told the women that both he and the First Lady received an “amazing number of letters from men and women in every county of the United States . . . pleading to be told what they can do to help.”¹⁵⁵ The President told the attendees this is a new type of war: “It’s a war between populations and not alone between armies” . . . women will have to play as large a part as men.”¹⁵⁶ “We know the fact that women in London—mothers of families—are just as important

¹⁵² “Civilian Defense Volunteer Office: What it is How it is set up What It Does, How to Organize it,” United State Office of Civilian Defense, Washington, D.C.”, 1941? Availabe at: Government Information Resources, Southern Methodist University, <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/hgp/id/566/>, accessed April 2, 2023.

¹⁵³ ¹⁵³ “Civilian Defense Volunteer Office: What it is How it is set up What It Does, How to Organize it,”

¹⁵⁴ The group included: Ellen Woodward, Anna Rosenburg, Florence Jaffray, Mary Pillsbury Lord, Dorothy Smith McAllister, Ruth Buxton Sayre, Ruth Baird Ryan, Helen Gahagan, Aurelia Reinhardt, and Anna Roosevelt Boettinger, the president’s daughter.

¹⁵⁵ “President Spurs Civilian Defense,” *The New York Times*, July 25, 1941.

¹⁵⁶ “Text of Roosevelt’s Talk to Defense Committeemen,” *Phoenix Arizona Republic*, July 25, 1941; “President Spurs Civilian Defense.”

in the defense of Britain as men on a destroyer.”¹⁵⁷ The President advised committee members to return to their communities and “Act as starters in this ‘horse race.’”¹⁵⁸

Bickering between La Guardia and Mrs. Roosevelt continued as La Guardia continued to charge forward planning military preparedness, using his budget for plane watching, firefighting, and practicing air raids; neglecting social defense activities and refusing to allow any resources to be used on defensive activities along the lines of social needs. La Guardia’s machoism frustrated Mrs. Roosevelt who believed national morale was more crucial for the nation’s well-being than military preparedness in the case of an unlikely aerial attack. The First Lady believed in women’s ability to lead and argued “the best way to challenge fascism abroad was by strengthening democracy at home.”¹⁵⁹ She continued to pressure the director to pay more attention to the social problems that threatened the health and welfare of individuals and families—malnutrition, venereal disease, and substandard housing—without which there would be little reason to fight a war.¹⁶⁰ As a result of the First Lady’s insistence, La Guardia created a new branch within the Office of Civilian Defense.

The newly defined Civilian Defense Volunteer Office called for the establishment of local Defense Councils, with two branches— Civilian Defense and Civilian War Services (the embodiment of the Volunteer Participation Committee).¹⁶¹ La Guardia continued to favor the military division of civilian defense, training local militias to respond to an actual emergency and directed most of his energies into its development, neglecting the Civilian War Services and relegating its sphere of activities to protecting the community in case of enemy attack by

¹⁵⁷ “Text of Roosevelt’s Talk.”

¹⁵⁸ “President Spurs Civilian Defense.”

¹⁵⁹ Anya Jabour, “It’s Up to the Women,” accessed February 18, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/elro/learn/historyculture/it-s-up-to-the-women.htm>.

¹⁶⁰ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 154.

¹⁶¹ From this point on the term social defense and home defense become synonymous with Civilian War Services.

installing blackout curtains or a variety of local problems arising from an attack.¹⁶² La Guardia and his “soldiers” denounced the Civilian War Services and identified social service activities as women’s work, secondary to defending lives and property. Much to the chagrin of Mrs. Roosevelt and Kerr, La Guardia made it clear he had no need for women’s services and “expended minimal initiative and almost no money to develop that side of the agency;” a clear rejection of Mrs. Roosevelt’s hope of developing social defense as part of the Civilian Defense program.¹⁶³

La Guardia “barely tolerated” the Civilian War Services, failing to see it as an essential part of “his organization” and “often remarked privately that the whole concept was “sissy stuff;”” choosing instead to build neighborhood militias.¹⁶⁴ He continued to place military needs above social needs relegating Mrs. Roosevelt’s social defense program as secondary. Congress also paid no heed to social defense when it budgeted one hundred million dollars for home defense to purchase “firefighting equipment, protective clothing, helmets, medical supplies, gas masks, and training facilities;” nothing for activities related to social defense.¹⁶⁵

Criticism rained down on La Guardia for his one-sided view of civilian defense from many angles. Journalists across the country questioned his priorities; was he the head of the Office of Civilian Defense or mayor of New York City? The *Washington Post*, in a series of articles on war preparations, criticized the Office of Civilian Defense, characterizing it as a “full-

¹⁶² Volunteer Participation Committee was La Guardia’s bow to the First Lady’s Social Defense program, published as the Office of Civilian Defense, “An Operating Guide for Local Defense Councils.”

¹⁶³ The Junior Leagues’ volunteer program influenced the Office of Civilian Defense. The OCD’s implementation manual is almost identical to the AJLA pamphlet, “Central Volunteer Program” which Junior League distributed nine months earlier; The Civilian War Services, under La Guardia started in January 1941 with “forty-four Volunteer Bureaus “. . . one year later there were 235 Volunteer Bureaus . . . by the end of 1943, there were 4,300 active Civilian Defense Bureaus registered with the OCD.” “The History of the Junior League,” May 12, 2010, accessed March 25, 2020, https://issuu.com/ajli/docs/the_history_of_the_junior_league; 83.

¹⁶⁴ Formally known as the Civilian War Services; Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 209; Siebel, “Soldiers on the Home Front,” 155.

¹⁶⁵ Allen, *Forgotten Men*, 164.

time job run on a part-time basis.”¹⁶⁶ The writer observed that many women are clamoring to take civilian defense jobs and advised the government it should take advantage of their enthusiasm and harness their energy.¹⁶⁷ The *Post* wrote:

As for the women who are bombarding the White House and ‘pleading’ for something to do in the defense effort, they take their patriotism for granted. It is a part of them and always has been. They are the same women or the daughters of the women who did their bit in 1917-1918. Many of them have sons, relatives, or friends in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. It is supposed to be the task of OCD and the State and municipal defense councils to harness their energy and enthusiasm.¹⁶⁸

The *Post* author recognized that home defense was essential to public commitment to war; garnering public support for the war effort would require women’s support as well as men’s.

La Guardia’s machoism came under criticism from many high-profile news sources. Dorothy Bromley’s article “Women on the Home Front,” in *Harper’s Magazine*, lamented Washington’s lack of direction. She pointed out that the Office of Civilian Defense’s failure to harness women’s desire for action left them rudderless. She argued that women, especially those who have been most active in relief activities, such as ambulance corps abroad, found it “bewildering” they could not find a role in civilian defense at home and she pointed out the proliferation of independent militias.¹⁶⁹ Bromley concluded it was unlikely the women would ever serve in leadership positions; arguing that deeply ingrained sexism in American society would not allow it and suggested that women who wanted to participate in the Office of Civilian Defense would need to find a place fitting their talents and skills within La Guardia’s limited view of their usefulness. *Newsweek* magazine also commented on the mayor’s vision for civilian defense, noting the battle shaping up between the First Lady and La Guardia; stating that Mrs.

¹⁶⁶ “Civilian Defense is Full-Time Job Run on Part-Time Basis,” *Washington Post*, September 6, 1941.

¹⁶⁷ “Civilian Defense is Full-Time.”

¹⁶⁸ “Civilian Defense is Full-Time.”

¹⁶⁹ Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, “Women on the Home Front,” *Harper’s Magazine* (July 1941): 188.

Roosevelt has “made no bones about pointing out that thus far the defense program has fallen down in not giving women volunteers an opportunity to participate.”¹⁷⁰ The article’s author chastised the government for its failure to utilize one of its most abundant resources for national defense. “When women’s organizations have asked what their members could do, they have usually been put off with vague talk about the necessity for women doing their everyday tasks more efficiently.”¹⁷¹ Writing in the *Washington Post*, Ernest Lindley concurred with the First Lady’s view. Lindley described the Office of Civilian Defense “pretty much a flop.”¹⁷² He went on to state that La Guardia’s preoccupation with the military aspect of defense meant neglecting “health, welfare and nutrition” and “the vitally important registration of volunteers.”¹⁷³ Other critics continued to charge that the director had “too many irons in the fire” and was not able to balance both his job as mayor and head of the social component of civilian defense.¹⁷⁴ La Guardia’s stalwart position against social defense continued to be a roadblock to Mrs. Roosevelt’s goal.

Despite criticism, the director continued to operate on sexist assumptions of women’s emotional weaknesses, inherent fear of violence, and their dependency on strong men to protect them. At a luncheon held by the New York Fashion Group, the Mayor highlighted nightly bombings on London. He stressed the potential danger of German planes dropping bombs on the east coast of the United States, arguing an “American-built bomber can be set down in England only six and a half hours after hopping off from our coast, and it is no farther one way than it is the other.”¹⁷⁵ He also warned the women that cities should prepare for aerial attacks and highlighted that the Office of Civilian Defense had three pamphlets on air raid readiness

¹⁷⁰ “OCD on Fire,” *Newsweek*, September 8, 1941, 45-46.

¹⁷¹ “OCD on Fire.”

¹⁷² Ernest Lindley, “The OCD Flounders,” *Washington Post*, September 5, 1941.

¹⁷³ Lindley, “The OCD Flounders.”

¹⁷⁴ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 298.

¹⁷⁵ “Woman Will Head Defense Project,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 1941.

prepared for distribution. The pamphlets outlined how to prepare communities for air raids and the steps to take to minimize the loss of life and damage from an attack. He also highlighted that “new forms of warfare turn women into soldiers on the home front. . . . This is a war fought in back streets, schools, kitchens, and hospitals.”¹⁷⁶ By stressing foreign attack and the potential for death and destruction, La Guardia hoped to discourage women from seeking an active role in defense activities, and train for support roles instead. Adding an air of suspense to the meeting, La Guardia announced one of the women at the luncheon would lead one of the newly established volunteer centers scheduled to open in the city soon. Virginia Pope, the fashion editor for the *New York Times*, closed the meeting with news that the mayor, “who takes a personal interest in women’s uniforms,” decided the women’s “skirts are to be pleated center front and center rear.”¹⁷⁷ The final announcement that afternoon indicated the director’s narrow view of women’s potential importance in national defense and his preoccupation with trivial aspects of civilian defense by his focus on skirts rather than service.

As wartime preparedness increased, pictures of male figures as protectors proliferated. In conjunction with La Guardia’s campaign for civilian protection, the Office of Civilian Defense produced messages that reinforced his militarized image of manhood. Publications portrayed virile images of Uncle Sam as grim and resolute in the face of the enemy and references to the minutemen and Revolutionary War heroes, reaffirming men’s all-important role as protectors of their homes and families. Unlike journalist Jane Cochran who initially celebrated La Guardia’s remark that “there will be no petticoat brigades’ in modern warfare,” it became clear that the director did not intend to put women in brigades at all.¹⁷⁸ La Guardia saw women in supportive

¹⁷⁶ “Woman Will Head Defense Project.”

¹⁷⁷ “Woman Will Head Defense Project.”

¹⁷⁸ Jane Cochran, “Women to Play Invaluable Role in Nation’s Defense Efforts,” *Richmond Palladium-Item*, June 30, 1941.

roles as men's helpers. He often made disparaging comments on women's ability to serve, using stereotypical images of women as flighty, undisciplined busybodies unable to stick to their assigned jobs. La Guardia continued, "By that, I mean that in moments of attack, it is very necessary that they stay at their posts, not go to the area five blocks away from where an attack is in progress. They never know when their own section will be hit."¹⁷⁹ Despite empty promises that women would work side by side with men in civilian defense, local officials continued to steer women into what they deemed sex-appropriate jobs.

On August 21, when Walmsley was ordered to report to active duty, the leadership in the social division of the Office of Civilian Defense turned over once again. La Guardia announced Eloise Davison, a home economist on loan from the *New York Herald Tribune* Home Institute, placed in charge of women's activities in the newly established Civilian Defense Social Division. La Guardia described her job as overseeing volunteer activities, however, the initial spirit that drove clubwomen to be involved had faded with the lack of leadership and the Office of Civilian Defense's machismo. Post journalist Ernest Lindley had predicted the downward spiral of the Office and blamed La Guardia, who "has steered clear of almost everything except what the President calls 'semi-military activities'."¹⁸⁰ With La Guardia's repeated denial of women's potential value in defense, his lack of appreciation of their leadership capacity, or recognition of their tradition of volunteerism, their morale and energy had faded.

Taking the job of assistant director of the Office of Civilian Defense, Eloise Davison understood the reason for low morale and the necessity of "arousing the enthusiasm of American women in the volunteer civilian defense program is one of the major problems."¹⁸¹ Davison assured women, "There will be work for everybody. Of course, everybody can't drive

¹⁷⁹ Cochran, "Women to Play."

¹⁸⁰ Lindley, "The OCD Flounders," *Washington Post*, September 5, 1941."

¹⁸¹ "Women's Aid in Defense is Stressed," *Washington Post*, September 25, 1941.

ambulances. But civilian defense begins at home. Working in a community health project may be just as important to defense as serving in a bomb squad. Helping to provide proper nutrition—even learning better ways to feed one’s own family—may be a woman’s best possible assignment.”¹⁸² Although Davison’s statement did not commit herself to the First Lady’s and Kerr’s home defense plan, her focus on social concerns demonstrates her support for it. When Davison took the job, civilian defense was at a low point in public commitment and enthusiasm for social defense had reached a new nadir. A general feeling of complacency continued to exist regarding women’s voluntarism.

While La Guardia continued to demonstrate the necessity to prepare for civilian defense—carrying out mock aerial bombing attacks in stadiums to gain support for Civilian Defense— spokeswomen inside and outside the government took to the lecture trail to revitalize Social Defense. Mrs. Roosevelt and her associates renewed their efforts to establish the new volunteer division of the Office of Civilian Defense into a “women’s civilian volunteer army” on the march and lost no time putting the newly established committee to work. On one of the First Lady’s weekly radio programs broadcast on the WJZ Blue network, she opened with, “In a country as great as ours, to achieve total defense, every individual must feel responsible for defense. Defense must be built in every community and gradually grow and grow until the country as a whole is impregnable.”¹⁸³ She explained the committee’s purpose was threefold: to compile a list of all agencies—federal, state, and local, public and private—to train volunteers, to determine local needs, and to enroll individuals interested in a civilian defense job.

¹⁸² “Lag in Civil Defense Noted by First Lady,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1941.

¹⁸³ “ER and George Hickes discuss National Defense Week, civilian defense, Queen Juliana’s visit, and election day.” *Pan-American Coffee Bureau*, November 9, 1941, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

Clubwoman Sarah Whitehurst took it upon herself and joined the campaign against the “sixth column,” women who failed to support the war effort. Whitehurst used the bully pulpit to spur club members to action, urging them to recognize America’s involvement in the “war” effort. After attending the New England General Federation of Women’s Club’s annual meeting, Whitehurst took to the road to build support for women’s commitment to volunteerism.¹⁸⁴ She visited seven midwestern states, a hotbed for isolationism. In Nebraska, Whitehurst told clubwomen that “Sixth columnists . . . are those who allow Nazi propaganda to continue in this country, those who are opposing the national defense program, those who are unwilling to give up luxuries to further defense, those who let political orators continue to abuse our form of government, and those who are generally lacking in patriotic fervor.”¹⁸⁵ In Des Moines, Iowa, she warned women that apathy “acts as an opium, a drug on our people.”¹⁸⁶ She also noted a “strange” report she received from New England, a potential area for aerial and naval attacks, on people’s failure to see the value of social defense. Mrs. Roosevelt commented on the misguided assumption that war service at home needed to be of militaristic nature: “It appears that volunteers are reluctant to go to work unless they can do some work which is distinctly a war-time occupation. They do not realize that improving social services in a community is basic defense work.”¹⁸⁷

Tensions between the First Lady and La Guardia came to a head at a gathering for the youth program in the Office of Civilian Defense where Mrs. Roosevelt publicly belittled the director for the way he ran it. Tired of her criticism, La Guardia responded by offering her the job as head of the Volunteer Participation Division and promised the First Lady, “she could run

¹⁸⁴ “G. F.W. C. Head Leaving,” *Baltimore Sun*, September 21, 1941.

¹⁸⁵ “Club Leader Urges Women to Awaken,” *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, October 23, 1941.

¹⁸⁶ “Women’s Clubs’ President Speaks Here—Attacks U.S. ‘6th Column,’” *Des Moines Register*, September 26, 1941.

¹⁸⁷ Roosevelt, “My Day.”

her division without his interference.”¹⁸⁸ Mrs. Roosevelt accepted the job. Aware that La Guardia already had an assistant, Eloise Davison, she informed him that she did not care how he straightened out the situation with the “other woman” in charge of volunteer participation; “I could say that I was working with her, but she must understand that my word goes.”¹⁸⁹ She advised La Guardia she had two objectives: first, “the participation of every individual throughout the country in a volunteer job who is able to do so,” and secondly, make the volunteer jobs “useful to the community.”¹⁹⁰ Upon the announcement that she was taking the position, the mayor praised the First Lady for taking the job, calling her “America’s No. 1 Volunteer.” The First Lady believed she had won, overcoming La Guardia’s resistance and making volunteer participation an important part of civilian defense.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Roosevelt took the job knowing that she faced considerable opposition from La Guardia and other government officials who refused to recognize the importance of social welfare to the overall health of a nation on the edge of war. Writing in her “My Day” column, she stated, “I find a wealth of volunteers who are anxious to do something useful, but I shall not be satisfied until I begin to see people actually at work in communities all over the country. That is where the real civilian defense must be done. That is where the real civilian defense must have its roots.”¹⁹¹ Upon starting her new job, Eleanor Roosevelt set out to fulfill her goals. She systematized office procedures and looked to coordinate new activities with existing entities—such as government offices (i.e. Office of Defense, Health and Welfare Services) and civilian volunteer organizations such as the Red Cross. Mrs. Roosevelt found new

¹⁸⁸ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 159.

¹⁸⁹ Newspapers identify Davison as assistant director; Mrs. Roosevelt also shared the title while La Guardia was director. John P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), 647.

¹⁹⁰ Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin*, 647.

¹⁹¹ Roosevelt, “My Day,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, Sept 24, 1941.

or overlooked opportunities for volunteers and gave clarity and definition to the Office of Civilian Defense.

The First Lady surrounded herself with able women, including her close friend Elinor Morgenthau as her assistant. The First Lady chose a team of women with specialized experiences: Eloise Davison with her home economics expertise; Judge Justine Polier, on loan from the Domestic Relations Court in New York City, to aid with needy families; Mary Dublin, a specialist in defense communities' needs; Molly Flynn, a welfare advocate; and Kathryn Van Slyck, coordinator of volunteer registration. These women formed the office's core, working alongside the First Lady and filling in for her when she needed to fulfill official duties. Their diverse experience allowed Mrs. Roosevelt's defense program to serve a wide variety of women.

The Volunteer Participation Committee took shape under Mrs. Roosevelt's leadership, giving her the resources necessary to achieve her goals in social defense; "The committee was given the responsibility of proposing, suggesting, and promoting plans and activities 'designed to sustain morale and to provide opportunities for constructive civilian participation.'"¹⁹² The First Lady and her associates now focused their attention on promoting the Office of Civilian Defense's second mandate: the social division. In November 1941, representatives of sixty-seven national women's organizations representing a combined force of twenty million women met in the Department of Labor's basement to hear government officials discuss volunteer opportunities. Mrs. Roosevelt introduced La Guardia to kick off the morning session. La Guardia highlighted the increased danger to the country as the Japanese militarized and then focused on the need for home defense. He called for "three million women to volunteer for all-out national defense, even in 'non-target areas,' to get to work, citing it was 'essential to bolster soldiers'

¹⁹² "Executive Order 8757 Establishing the Office of Defense," May 20, 1941, accessed on February 18, 2018, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-8757-establishing-the-office-civilian-defense>.

morale and strengthen civilian resources.”¹⁹³ Assistant director of the Office of Civilian Defense, Eloise Davison, speaking on behalf of the Voluntary Participation Committee, introduced the afternoon session. She estimated the need for four million volunteers to handle social defense jobs immediately and indicated the need for volunteers would grow in the future. A variety of government officials followed, each addressing their various specialties, including nutrition, school lunch programs, housing registration, home gardening, lifesaving, and other forms of assistance women volunteers could provide.¹⁹⁴ Harriet Elliott called upon women to help conserve resources which would be in short supply due to military production demands; she pointed out that scarcities of household appliances might mean using a neighbor’s washing machine or necessitate carpooling. She also encouraged a return to the “creative arts,” including “button-hole making, patching, and stocking-darning on the part of women to help offset clothing shortages and also ‘get around the loss of the zipper.’”¹⁹⁵ Officials also addressed the increasing number of social evils resulting from wartime dislocations. Paul McNutt pointed out that migration to jobs in defense industries produced localized housing shortages, and “trailer camps constitute a new ‘slum on wheels’ problem.”¹⁹⁶ United States Surgeon General Thomas Parran specified the need for public health programs and increased social diversions for soldiers living in military camps to help stop the spread of venereal disease. He explained, “The ‘mobilization of prostitutes has become one of our most expanded war industries.’”¹⁹⁷ That night, the First Lady reiterated the need for social defense in her newspaper column: “I do not

¹⁹³ Emma Bugbee, “Mayor Issues Call for Women to Aid Defense, *New York Daily Tribune*, November 9, 1941.

¹⁹⁴ Bugbee, “Mayor Issues Call.”

¹⁹⁵ Bugbee, “Mayor Issues Call.”

¹⁹⁶ Bugbee, “Mayor Issues Call.”

¹⁹⁷ Winifred Mallon, “Women Leaders Map Defense Aid, Mrs. Roosevelt Presides at Capital Session of 200 From National Groups Stress Welfare, Health, McNutt and Dr. Parran Point to Problems in Areas of Army Camps and Industries” *New York Times*, November 9, 1941.

feel that we can overemphasize the importance of coordinating all of our resources on a community basis to serve us now and in the future.”¹⁹⁸

Mrs. Roosevelt believed the greatest defense work Americans could do was building up their own communities against the forces of a foreign war. Hoping to instill enthusiasm for the home defense program, members of the First Lady’s staff took the message to women’s groups. On November 25, Eleanor Roosevelt invited members of the Women’s National Press Club to a luncheon and gave them a status report on the new civilian defense bureaus. Mrs. Roosevelt announced that one hundred seven local bureaus had opened across the country and that others were in the process of development.¹⁹⁹ At a gathering of five hundred home economists at New York University, Eloise Davison told the women: “Civilian Defense is a new approach to a new kind of war whereas much depends as much on a strong back line of people as a strong front line of soldiers. The total strength of the civilian defense is in the local communities. What happens in Washington is not important.”²⁰⁰ Davison informed the women that federal, state, and local agencies were working to organize a civilian defense plan and that information would flow through a block system. She explained how the newly established local defense councils would collect and manage information on volunteer jobs, and that “400 kinds of defense jobs have been outlined,” and newly established “block systems” would disseminate information to everyone in the community on the availability of jobs.²⁰¹

Women on the Civilian Defense Committee took to the road to spread their message to various women’s groups. Speaking to the Woman’s City Club, Anna Rosenberg, a member of

¹⁹⁸ Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” *Pittsburgh Press*, November 10, 1941.

¹⁹⁹ “Women Defense Leaders at Luncheon in Washington Yesterday,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1941.

²⁰⁰ “Civilian Defense Called Local Job,” *New York Times*, Dec 7, 1941.

²⁰¹ “Civilian Defense Called Local Job.”

the Voluntary Participation Committee, reprimanded the women for their “lack of vision” in the defense program and urged them to act:

Women have shouldered the responsibility of home defense for so many years that it is ridiculous to speak of their part now. . . . The work of your committees on education, housing, health, and government are the very backbone of home defense. Today these responsibilities are being neglected while people seek their place in the defense program. Do the things you have already done, only do them a little better, and know that is part of a long-range program for things that will be here tomorrow and when the war is over. Know that, without this, without a strong and healthy nation, there is nothing to defend and nothing to fight with.²⁰²

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941, the climate of apathy dissipated, and voluntarism mushroomed. *Washington Post* columnist Hope Ridings Miller reported an overnight increase in volunteerism; she described the American Woman’s Voluntary Services headquarters as a “bee-hive of activity.”²⁰³ In Manhattan, the first week of the war saw a total of 2,400 persons registered for volunteer work; a spokeswoman said, “women volunteers outnumbered the men by two to one.”²⁰⁴ In Washington, D.C., volunteers “stormed” the registration booths scattered throughout the city at police and fire departments. In three weeks, “more than 2.5 million Americans registered in volunteer programs, nearly tripling the ranks of volunteers.”²⁰⁵ The trend continued into January as more than two million additional volunteers registered for service, bringing the total number to more than 5.6 million.²⁰⁶ Mrs. Roosevelt commented on the volumes of people registering for civilian defense activities: “It is a wonderful thing to feel that in this emergency, everyone wants to help.”²⁰⁷ Mrs. Roosevelt’s “home defense” plan had finally taken off the ground.

²⁰² “Criticized on Defense Work,” *New York Times*, November 29, 1941.

²⁰³ Hope Ridings Miller, “Capital Whirl: D.C. Women are Swinging into War Work: AWVS Headquarters Is Bustling These Days.” *Washington Post*, December 11, 1941.

²⁰⁴ “Volunteers’ Rush Swamps Office,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1941; “Eager Volunteers Hamper Civilian Defense Decentralization Efforts,” *Washington Post*, December 10, 1941.

²⁰⁵ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 207.

²⁰⁶ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 207.

²⁰⁷ Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, January 10, 1942.

The newly vitalized volunteerism was exciting; however, it brought previously unidentified problems to the surface. The loyalty women had to their organizations was one. But in times of war, the federal government needed to act as the authority and coordinate individual volunteer efforts under the Office of Civilian Defense. Clashes rose over areas of service between groups trained and organized for the same purpose. To avoid confusion, Anna Rosenberg called for cooperation between social and civic organizations to avoid competition and uncoordinated efforts. She stressed the need for coordination “to avoid duplication in the work of these agencies.”²⁰⁸ Addressing one dispute, Rosenberg announced the Office of Civilian Defense and American Women’s Voluntary Service had reviewed their training programs and agreed to coordinate their activities.

The First Lady also addressed the question of uniforms, which many women volunteers viewed as status symbols. In the past, she had questioned La Guardia’s emphasis on uniforms, an expense that Eleanor Roosevelt feared would prevent women of lesser means from volunteering. Wartime demands helped put the issue to rest. Mrs. Roosevelt announced that uniforms were out, except for the canteen and Red Cross nursing workers. She commented, “supply officials requested that uniforms be worn only by persons whose duties would be less efficiently performed without them,” and all uniforms would be cotton, a readily available fabric, settling a long dispute the First Lady had with La Guardia.²⁰⁹

In January 1942, the Office of Civilian Defense underwent a “partial reorganization” as Dean Landis assumed the role of Executive, overseeing the “War Department civilian defense functions and funds from the Office of Civilian Defense, while La Guardia would be free to

²⁰⁸ “Volunteer Services to be Coordinated: A.W.V.S. and Other Groups come Under OCD Officials,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1942.

²⁰⁹ The various branches of the A.W.V.S. received special permission to continue to wear their uniforms. “Mrs. Roosevelt Doubts Mayor Will Quit O. C. D: She Doesn’t Plan to Resign, Either” *New York Herald Tribune*, January 12, 1942.

“devote more time to perfecting the organization throughout the country.”²¹⁰ As part of the transition, Eloise Davison resigned from the Office to return to her full-time job at the *New York Herald Tribune*. Despite the tremendous gains in the number of volunteer registrations and the increase in volunteer centers after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the First Lady realized “her dream of building a women’s army was misguided and that men and women had to be recruited into the same program. . . . If women’s activities compete with other [national defense] activities . . . that is bad.”²¹¹ She also recognized that by defining women’s place as social defense, she had limited their access to the powerful positions that men dominated.

The Voluntary Participation Committee, overseen by Mrs. Roosevelt for five months, became a target of Congressional ridicule. With control over the Committee, the First Lady looked to enlarge the scope of home defense to include the arts and physical education. She proposed placing two friends in these jobs: Melvyn Douglas, a film star, to create an arts council, and Mayris Chaney, leading the dance program for children as part of physical fitness. Mrs. Roosevelt came under criticism for paying them excessive salaries and for hiring Chaney because of her previous career as a semi-nude fan dancer. This action opened an opportunity for Congress to wrest control of the Voluntary Participation Committee and place it under the War Department. Mrs. Roosevelt argued that civilian defense was “not a responsibility that possibly can be met by the Army” and vowed to resist all attempts by the War Department to bar women from volunteer jobs they currently held, including “the air watching posts now manned, and womaned, mostly by [OCD] registrants.”²¹² She added that “Civilian defense is not just a matter of ‘learning how to handle air raid bombs’. . . . but real defense meant preparing people to have

²¹⁰ “Dean Landis Made ‘Executive’ of OCD As La Guardia Aide,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1942.

²¹¹ Dallek, *Defenseless Under the Night*, 209.

²¹² Christine Sadler, “First Lady Says OCD is not in Army’s Realm,” *Washington Post*, January 13, 1942.

confidence in themselves and in their way of life.”²¹³ Although decisions Mrs. Roosevelt made forced her to step away from active leadership, her efforts at creating a civilian army and securing the loyalty of the disillusioned portion of Americans still in dire straits during the prewar years had been achieved. Congress recognized its value and did not dismantle the program, renaming the Office of Civilian Defense the Civilian Mobilization Program. Giving women a role in preserving their freedom and democratic government had made American democracy stronger.

While Congress attempted to place responsibility for the Office of Civilian Defense under the army, army officials felt the Office was a civilian matter. The *Army and Navy Journal* reported, “Civilian defense is a job for civilians. . . . The army’s part in civilian defense is devoted entirely to the protection of the civilian populace, to the protection of industrial plants, the training of civilian defense workers, and similar activities.”²¹⁴ On February 20, the First Lady announced that she would step down from her role “to save the Office of Civilian Defense from attacks she believes are aimed at her.”²¹⁵ Commenting on Mrs. Roosevelt’s resignation, Virginia Bacon, chairman of the Long Island Defense Center, claimed, “the [OCD] had become bogged down by activities having nothing to do with civilian defense. . . . [Mrs. Roosevelt] is not fighting the same war that we are, . . . she is fighting a war of her own.”²¹⁶ Landis reordered the Office of Civilian Defense’s priorities and transferred activities, such as the arts and physical fitness, to the Office of Defense, Health, and Welfare Services under McNutt.

In Mrs. Roosevelt’s absence, the Office of Civilian Defense once again placed women in a subservient position in home defense. The leadership maligned women who desired roles in the

²¹³ “Mrs. Roosevelt Backs Civilian Rule of O. C. D.,” *New York Herald Tribune*, January 13, 1942.

²¹⁴ “How Civilians and Army Share in Civilian Defense,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, February 1, 1942.

²¹⁵ Virginia Pasley, “First Lady Quits OCD-To Shield It,” *New York Daily News*, February 21, 1942; “Mrs. Roosevelt Quits OCD,” February 21, 1942, p 1, 10.

²¹⁶ “Mrs. Bacon Tells Women O.C.D. Is Bogged Down,” *New York Herald Tribune*, February 26, 1942.

protective services while praising male participation as patriotic. Once again, they branded the women as overly concerned with appearances of authority and frivolous matters such as uniforms and ridiculed them as vain and bossy. The Office of War Information played on the gossiping female stereotype in its battle against careless talk. Posters produced by the Office of War Information warned that idle talk could be dangerous to the war effort, claiming: “loose lips sink ships,” “Someone Talked,” and the poster below, Figure 3, “Wanted! For Murder: Her careless talk costs lives.”²¹⁷



Figure 3: “WANTED! FOR MURDER Her careless talk costs lives”²¹⁸

²¹⁷ “Wanted! FOR MURDER! Her careless talk costs lives,” Digital Library, <https://digital.library.unt.edu>.

²¹⁸ “Wanted! FOR MURDER!”

The Office of Civilian Defense's *Newsletter* characterized upper and middle-class women as "fluttery club women dressed for tea and scones at the Ritz" who preferred "the cozy chattiness of the Red Cross sewing room to more meaningful defense activities."²¹⁹ The illustration below accompanied Ruth Millet's column, demonstrating the government's fear that women gathering and gossiping was a threat to undermining national morale.



Figure 4: "Idle Gossip on War Dangerous."²²⁰

²¹⁹ Allen, *Forgotten Men*, 160.

²²⁰ "Idle Gossip on War Dangerous," *Fort Worth Press*, February 12, 1942

Soon after the war started, a new genre of literature appeared, encouraging women to find their place in the war effort. Messages varied from Keith Ayling's conservative view of the home as every woman's place to more assertive feminist voices. Ayling was a Royal Air Force bomber pilot during World War I, and his book, *Calling All Women*, encouraged women to find the right activity for their position in life. Journalist Elsie Robinson praised his advice on "how she can use her spare hours in national defense which she once spent gabbling over the back fence or dishing the dirt over the phone to Maybelle."²²¹

Ayling did not see a role outside the home for every woman. His condescending attitude toward women's work outside the home is evident in the advice he gave at a women's club meeting:

A young woman stood up. "Should one put voluntary work before the welfare of one's children?" she asked. "Do you think a woman should put her children in nursery school to drive an ambulance or be any kind of full-time voluntary worker: I answered. I said that home life must be maintained. I went further. I could not see that any woman's war work could justify neglect of the home. . . . Simply because in the American way of living there is a deep-rooted respect for, and healthy desire to preserve, the home. . . . I can think of no greater tragedy than the American woman dumping her children in some nursery school and hurling herself willy-nilly into voluntary work at the expense of home and family."²²²

Ayling provided an extensive list of volunteer jobs suitable for homemakers. Most of the jobs he proposed remained well within the traditional role of the Republican Mother including teaching traditional women's topics such as nutrition or health-related issues, educational programs or programs lending themselves to patriotism such as essay or speech competitions, book exhibits, or traveling library displays on democracy. In his final chapter, entitled "Martha Jobs," he listed prosaic jobs which allowed women to maintain and preserve home life.²²³ He

²²¹ Elsie Robinson, "Listen World," *Shreveport Times*, July 22, 1942.

²²² Keith Ayling, *Calling All Women* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), 152.

²²³ Ayling offers no definition of the term 'Martha jobs.' Upon researching the term, my assumption is that Ayling uses the term 'Martha jobs' as a biblical reference to St. Martha. Canonized by the Catholic Church, St. Martha is the patron saint of housekeepers; Ayling, *Calling All Women*, 154.

called upon homemakers with children to volunteer for tasks like knitting or sewing, done in the home, which could support national defense and prevent disruption of family life. He advised, “The home life of the nation must be kept going at all costs. There is no one who can do that better than the American woman.”²²⁴ Ayling believed women leaving their homes to do voluntary service or war work would undermine the ideal of the Republican Mother and weaken the Democratic Family.

In contrast to Ayling’s paternal approach, feminist authors, such as Margaret Culkin Banning and Susan B. Anthony II, focused less on housekeeping responsibilities and more on encouraging women to participate in the war effort. In her book, *Women for Defense*, Banning—a successful fashion designer turned wartime journalist—advised women that war would be different this time. “Total war is something this country has never yet experienced.”²²⁵ She explained, “Women properly belong in democracy’s greatest battle and in the total war, in order for democracy to survive. Because it is total war, with new civilian fronts, and because victory is dependent on health and ability to produce, and on character, they can be basically useful. The effort must be made to draw all women—everyone—into definite fields of active usefulness, where differences of education and advantage and income bracket would disappear.”²²⁶ Banning encouraged all women to advance the cause through active participation in physical production or intangibles like morale and saw the war effort as all-inclusive, reminding women, “we are defending a system, not a boundary alone.”²²⁷

Susan B. Anthony II’s message in *Out of the Kitchen—Into the War* was strongly feminist. A journalist and the great-niece of the women’s rights activist Susan B. Anthony, she

²²⁴ Ayling, *Calling All Women*, 154.

²²⁵ Margaret Culkin Banning, “Women for Defense,” *American Women in a World at War: Contemporary Accounts from World War I*, ed. Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1997), 5.

²²⁶ Banning, “Women for Defense,” 7.

²²⁷ Banning, “Women for Defense,” 10.

denounced the Office of Civilian Defense for “temporizing” women’s work and “voluntary jobs . . . hastily fabricated, as busy work.”²²⁸ Anthony’s book read like a jeremiad, advocating for women’s acceptance in the workplace, equal opportunity, equal pay, and inclusion in the post-war workplace. She argued, “The actual key to Victory in this war is the extrication of women—all women—from the relative unproductivity of the kitchen and the enrolling of them in the high productivity of factory, office, and field.”²²⁹ Anthony argued wartime demands made it more conducive for married women to enter the workplace and encouraged expanded child care and restaurant services, easing the burden of holding down the dual job of factory and housekeeping. She praised American women’s expanded role in a democracy to the fascist ideal which relegated women to servitude in their homes and called on the democratic state to “elevate woman so that the world is her home.”²³⁰ War briefly offered women the expanded opportunities which Anthony praised; however, they were short-lived and not fully a part of American culture until the Women’s Liberation Movement started in the 1960s.

Although the federal government hoped for large numbers of women to volunteer for Office of Civilian Defense jobs, they also cooperated with private agencies including the newly organized United Services Organization which combined the responsibilities of six existing civilian organizations under one umbrella, including the Red Cross.²³¹ At the President’s request, Mary Ingraham, president of the Young Women’s Christian Association, created a charitable, nonprofit organization popularly referred to as a soldier’s “home away from home,” to “provide

²²⁸ Susan Brownell Anthony, Jr., *Out of the Kitchen—Into the War: Women’s Winning Role in the Nation’s Drama* (New York: Stephen Daye, Inc., 1943), 41-42.

²²⁹ Anthony, *Out of the Kitchen*, 5.

²³⁰ Anthony, *Out of the Kitchen*, 217.

²³¹ The six organizations were: the Salvation Army, Young Men’s Christian Association, Young Women’s Christian Association, National Catholic Community Services, National Travelers Aid Association and the National Jewish Welfare Board.

morale and recreation service to [US] uniformed military personnel.”²³² Acting as surrogate Republican Mothers, women volunteers in the United Service Organizations hoped to keep young servicemen’s focus on wholesome values and fuel the desire to return from the war and start their own families. Historian Meghan Winchell argues that senior hostesses performed the “emotional work of mothering” and “preserved a sense of ‘home,’” supporting the idea that war was to make safe the “things they left at home” by providing homespun alternatives to less savory activities.²³³ Winchell argues that for soldiers from poor or working-class families, the United Service Organizations “modeled the ideal middle-class home” and “encouraged men by its example to embrace an ‘American dream’ predicated on middle-class gender norms.”²³⁴ Winchell’s book, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, discusses clubs located near military camps which offered soldiers wholesome entertainment. Hand-picked “hostesses who possessed sexual respectability and positive social reputations” were requirements to earn a spot as a hostess.²³⁵ Clubs upheld dominant racial attitudes and arranged segregated activities.

Founded in 1881, the Red Cross was a well-known organization with twenty-seven branches coordinating its activities with the Office of Civilian Defense. The Red Cross started its war relief work at home in September 1939, before most Americans wanted any involvement in a foreign war. One of the Red Cross’s most popular training programs was Nurses Aid training. Besides its overseas operations, the Red Cross’s domestic services included blood donor stations, canteens at ports, hospitals, and recreation. The Red Cross’s Production Corps encouraged women to aid in the war effort through knitting and rolling bandages with a mission to make “90

²³² US Surgeon General Thomas Parran encouraged government support for the USO as a solution to means to reduce prostitution and venereal disease among idle troops in military camps. Julia M H Carson, *Home Away from Home: The Story of the USO* (New York: Harper & Brothers: 1946), 194.

²³³ Meghan Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses during World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 23.

²³⁴ Winchell, *Good Girls*, 34.

²³⁵ Carson, *Home Away from Home*, 48.

percent of all the surgical dressings used by the armed forces.”²³⁶ The organization also provided services for sweethearts, wives, and children as men migrated to cities with defense plants or military camps. Capitalizing on popular notions of women as compassionate and nurturing, the organization offered women a variety of volunteer activities, including training to provide first aid, serving as nurse’s aides, working at blood banks, providing disaster relief, or as hostesses at canteens.

Many women unable to leave their homes to participate in defense work jobs found inexpensive, familiar homespun activities such as knitting a way to contribute to the war. Knitting became a nationwide obsession that offered every woman an opportunity to volunteer. It quickly became a national fad and symbol of patriotism. In response to the War Production Corps’ urging, women knitted clothing and other items to send to the war-torn allied nations. When the First Lady addressed a group of women attending a tea at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, the host introduced her as the “first knitter of the land.”²³⁷ Mrs. Roosevelt’s visit launched a national campaign, “Knit for Defense,” enlisting “every American woman in a knitting army for American soldiers.”²³⁸ The knitting craze prompted the November 24, 1941, cover on *Life*, that pictured a thoughtful Peggy Tippet appearing to have difficulty with one of her knitting projects. The article entitled “Knitting for Victory” answered the “Great American question . . . ‘What can I do to help the war effort?’”²³⁹ *Life* told its readers “to knit” and offered directions on knitting a service sweater.²⁴⁰ Even the First Lady, pictured below in Figure 5,

²³⁶ “World War II and the American Red Cross,” accessed April 4, 2019, <https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/National/history-wwii.pdf>.

²³⁷ “Women Criticized on Defense Work,” *New York Times*, November 29, 1941.

²³⁸ “Knit for Defense Tea,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1941.

²³⁹ “Knit for Defense.”

²⁴⁰ “How to Knit,” *Life* 11, no. 21 (November 24, 1941): 111.

carried her knitting bag to special events such as a “Knit for Defense Tea held at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City on September 31, 1941.”²⁴¹



Figure 5: “Knitting for Victory”²⁴²

Although “Martha Jobs” contributed little to victory on the battlefield or in the face of impending disaster, they perpetuated family life, offering many women an outlet for patriotic service while allowing them to care for their children in their homes and thus maintain national morale. The program was so successful that by January 1942, the War Production Board and the War Department sought to stem the knitting craze, claiming it “consume[d] millions of pounds of wool needed for more essential purposes.”²⁴³ In light of growing shortages of wool necessary

²⁴¹ “Knitting for Victory,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1941.

²⁴² “Knitting for Victory”; “How to Knit.”

²⁴³ “Do Not Knit for Forces Unless Asked, Says WPB,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1942.

for uniforms, the War Department designated the Red Cross to fill all requests for knitted products.²⁴⁴

Calls went out across the country for women to register at their local Office of Civilian Defense, volunteer at Red Cross centers, or sign-up for recreation courses or vocational training in preparation for a war job. Women's allegiance to independent organizing efforts lessened as local Civilian Defense offices assumed authority over registration for all voluntary services and relegated women to community volunteer ranks where their training and leadership skills were vital. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, James Landis, now head of the Office of Civilian Defense, spun off a newly created Civilian Defense Corps, recruiting ten million volunteers by the end of 1943.²⁴⁵

As the United States ramped up its efforts to take an active role in a war on two fronts, the Selective Service process quickened. At first, the goal was to limit the draft to single men or men without dependents. However, the greedy war machine clamored for ever greater numbers of servicemen, potentially undermining the Democratic Family. Memories of women's independent militias, women's clubs' activities, and Eleanor Roosevelt's effort to the push "home defense" into the spotlight in the years before the war faded as the actual need for a coordinated national and military defense rose to the forefront.

²⁴⁴ "Do Not Knit."

²⁴⁵ Patrick S. Roberts, "The Lessons of Civil Defense Federalism for the Homeland Security Era, *The Journal of Policy History* 26, no.3 (2014): 362.

CHAPTER 2: PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER: HOW TO FIGHT A WAR AND MINIMIZE COLLATERAL DAMAGE TO THE FAMILY

Historians have recognized two distinct American values, the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family, as core values in American society dating as far back as the colonial era. War threatened to erode or detract attention from family life which had already suffered destabilization by the Depression. Concern over the integrity of the family was Eleanor Roosevelt's number one priority in creating a Department of Home Defense to buoy up families destabilized by the Depression. The nation's leading sociologists and other experts in family life shared these concerns about the Democratic Family's ability to withstand the destructive forces of war after a decade of economic hardship. In *The Family at War*, published in January 1942, Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, director of the Child Study Association of America, expressed concerns over the nation's commitment to protecting the family during troubled times. Gruenberg's book contained essays, written by government officials and recognized experts in family life, focused on the impending social disorder resulting from wartime demands and the vulnerability of the family. Gruenberg visualized the home front as a second battlefield and stressed the necessity of protecting the family from the various hazards inherent in war: rapid transplantation, material and social deprivations, and emotional strains.¹ She concluded, "We have to win every battle on the home front as a condition of victory in the war. . . . We can win the peace only if we recognize that democracy and the good life begin in the family."² Gruenberg was not alone in her fears that the traditional family was in jeopardy.

¹ Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, "The Family—War or Peace," in *The Family in a World at War*, ed. Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1942), 1.

² Gruenberg, "The Family—War or Peace," 20.

Ray Baber, in his book *Marriage and the Family*, identified the family's health as essential to the nation's health and the government's responsibility to ensure it. He wrote, "To this small primary group, the state entrusts the initial care and training of its future citizens in the most formative period of their lives. This makes the home and family the center of our total culture pattern."³ Regarding times of war, Barber stated, "Of all the agents of social change, probably none is more powerful than war. . . . Scarcely any phase of human activity escapes unchanged."⁴ At the New York State Conference on Marriage and the Family in March 1941, Dr. Sidney Goldstein, a leading authority on social problems for the League of Nations, warned, "If the family is in danger, the social order itself is insecure. No institution can serve as a substitute for the family."⁵ Gruenberg agreed: "There is no little danger that in meeting the immediate demands of the emergency we may inadvertently sacrifice those very values for which we are called upon to fight. . . . It was always for hearth and home that men laid down their lives when assaulted by invaders or marauders. And now that we are at war, it is the family for which we are fighting."⁶ Authorities on family life counseled that protecting the family involved more than success on the battlefield; it required attention to health, nutrition, inflation, and morale on the home front. Chapter 2 focuses on preliminary steps taken by existing government departments, bureaus, and newly created war agencies to put the country on a wartime status with a focus on protecting national values—the Republican Mother and Democratic Family—and keep them from eroding.

³ Ray Baber, "Marriage and the Family After the War," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 229 (September 1943): 164-175, 164.

⁴ Baber, "American Family," 164.

⁵ Sidney Goldstein, "The Family as a Dynamic Factor," *American Society, Living* 2, no. 1 (1940): 8.

⁶ Gruenberg, "The Family—War or Peace," 1.

As preparations for war moved at a frenzied pace, federal bureaus worked to prevent the erosion of cherished ideals regarding childhood as the reality of war necessitated relaxing national values and shifting to war related demands. The draft and changing manpower demands threatened the long-standing ideal of a mother's role as homemaker as it depended upon women to replace men in industry, undermining the stability of the Democratic Family. Meeting the needs of a nation at war created tensions between the mother as homemaker and her wartime added role as a surrogate father—breadwinner and authority figure in the home—potentially changing the power dynamics within postwar families and creating long-range social instability.

With the establishment of wartime agencies, the Federal Security Administration and the Federal Works Agency in 1939, President Roosevelt consolidated New Deal interests—social and economic—under a single umbrella, keeping some New Deal programs, albeit smaller in number, active in shaping the wartime landscape. As national defense concerns deepened, new wartime agencies emerged, supplanting social concerns. While many citizens remained opposed to a military draft and participation in a foreign war, federal officials moved forward attempting to maintain social stability by drafting single men, leaving fathers at home with their families.

Mobilization for war began in earnest in 1940 as Germany racked up military victories. The public increasingly pressured members of Congress to initiate military mobilization, leading to the passage of the Burke-Wadsworth Selective Training and Service Act on September 16, 1940, the nation's first "peacetime draft."⁷ Upon signing the draft, the President proclaimed, "May we all strengthen our resolve to hold high the torch of freedom in this darkening world so that our children and their children may not be robbed of their rightful inheritance."⁸ Notably, the peacetime draft took care to avoid removing married men with children.

⁷ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 459.

⁸ Charles Hurd, "400,000 by Jan. 1," *New York Times*, September 17, 1940.

The draft began one month later, requiring all men between the ages of 21 to 35 years old to register for one year of service. An executive order called for registration by election precincts. The Selective Service favored the drafting of young, single men, preferably between twenty and twenty-six years of age, but opposed the drafting of fathers and the loss of their influence in their children's development. The *New York Times* wrote, "Possession of a wife by a young soldier always has been considered by the Army as a liability," claiming a wife at home hampered a soldier's development, "a task requiring undivided attention."⁹ In light of a fathers' value in the home, Brigadier General Lewis Blaine Hershey instructed local draft boards to exempt all married men and clarified the question regarding the eligibility of a married man with a working wife. "Local boards should remember that every husband is under a legal obligation to support his wife and children, and that obligation is not removed because his wife has chosen to aid in the family maintenance."¹⁰ Despite assurances that husbands would be spared, the *New York Times* reported that half a million women quit their jobs, presumably to protect their husbands from conscription. Women's actions underscored the strong societal support for the Democratic Family and the value of the father as a partner in raising his children, increasing concerns over changes in the draft law.¹¹ Selective Service officials "made it clear that national policy was opposed to the inclusion of married men with children; a father's absence in the Army, unless absolutely needed, might interfere with their training and their discipline. These children . . . might be 'dependent' upon their

⁹ Hurd, "Age Limit 21 to 26, Married Exempt, Planned in Draft," *New York Times*, May 4, 1941, <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/results/54ACC7DA5B8F4A19PQ/1?accountid=7090>.

¹⁰ Hurd, "Age Limit 21 to 26."

¹¹ "Drastic Widening of Draft Looms," *New York Times*, Feb 6, 1942.

father in other ways than money.”¹² The need for protecting the family provides evidence that this core value should not be sacrificed.

The impact poor nutrition had on American manhood during the years of the Depression was evident as the draft boards turned away scores of young men who failed their physical examinations. Out of two million pre-Pearl Harbor draftees, 50 percent—one million men—were rejected. Director of the Selective Service, Lewis Blaine Hershey noted that many men displayed the ill effects of malnutrition and emphasized the necessity for continued emphasis on stable family life and mothers’ diligent care. He commented, “Probably the depression years left their marks. . . . Whether we are worse off physically than we were in 1917-1918 is undoubtedly controversial.”¹³ Hershey estimated that “one-third of the rejections were due either directly or indirectly to nutritional deficiencies.”¹⁴ The high rejection rate among inductees due to physical and mental deficiencies necessitated drafting men with collateral dependents in increasingly large numbers, potentially making it necessary to draft fathers.¹⁵

The impact of a poor diet on the nation’s children motivated the Children’s Bureau to call a White House Conference in 1940, part of a series of decennial White House Conferences on children first held in 1909. The Children’s Bureau asserted the security of the home and family needed to be a top priority and a matter of civilian defense. Experts attending the conference contrasted “totalitarian ideologies [which] force upon youth a spurious security in exchange for freedom” to a “democratic society [meant to] safeguard, defend, and develop the fundamental pillars of a well-ordered civilization.”¹⁶ By juxtaposing life in a fascist state to the “Democratic

¹² Hurd, “400,000 by Jan. 1.

¹³ Lewis B. Hershey, “The Lesson of Selective Service,” *Survey Graphic* 30, no.7 (1941), 383.

¹⁴ Hershey, “The Lesson of Selective Service,” 383.

¹⁵ Although the Children’s Bureau worked tirelessly since its creation in 1914 to educate the public on early childhood development and nutrition in hopes of improving children’s health, the hardships experienced during the Depression had a negative impact of this generation of children, now our nation’s warriors.

¹⁶ Children’s Bureau, US Department of Labor, *Conference on Children in a Democracy: Papers and Discussions at the Initial Session*, April 26, 1939, Publication No. 265 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1940), 7.

Family,” the bureau linked children’s well-being to the nation’s defenses, and “women were deemed essential to the family’s survival and stability.”¹⁷ Commenting on the international scene, President Roosevelt stated, “A succession of world events has shown us that our democracy must be strengthened at every point of weakness,” and “the family was the place to start.” He reaffirmed the government’s commitment to children, calling the home the ‘threshold of democracy’ and a “school for democratic life.”¹⁸ He added, “We make the assumption that a happy child should live in a home where he will find warmth and food and affection; that his parents will take care of him should he fall ill; that at school he will find the teachers and tools needed for an education.”¹⁹ Additional speakers reinforced the importance of protecting the nation’s children and the role of families, schools, and churches in teaching democratic traditions. The Right Reverend Monsignor Robert F. Keegan, executive director of the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, affirmed:

Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. The home is in fact the very cornerstone of society and the child is the capstone of the home. Any program for children and youth in a democracy must preserve and strengthen home life. Any threat to the home must be considered a challenge which will call for the marshaling of every resource of society to repel it. And the first to respond to this call must be our welfare agencies, private and public, local, State, and Federal, all cooperating in a common effort. This is the American way.²⁰

The conference affirmed the value of childhood, the Democratic Family, and recognized the impact involvement in the distant European conflict would have on its future.

¹⁷ Sonya Michel, “American Women and the Discourse of the Democratic family in World War II,” in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, et al (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 154.

¹⁸ Children’s Bureau, *Conference on Children in a Democracy*, 8.

¹⁹ Children’s Bureau, *Conference on Children in a Democracy*, 8.

²⁰ Children’s Bureau, *Conference on Children in a Democracy*, 8.

With the passage of the Lend Lease Act in the spring of 1940, President Roosevelt had taken his first steps toward setting the country on a defensive footing with the creation of the National Defense Advisory Committee (NDAC) to produce war matériel, appointing Sidney Hillman as its head. The passage of the Selective Training and Service Act in September meant large numbers of young men who would have taken war jobs were no longer available, thus creating a crisis in getting enough war workers. Before 1940, women constituted only 24 percent of the nation's labor force, most from lower- or working-class families. They generally held jobs classified as "women's work" in offices, stores, and service or light industries. War work in America would necessitate women entering heavy industry—the male sphere—just as the British had found necessary.²¹

President Roosevelt's State of the Union address on January 6, 1941, sought to build popular support for aid to European countries at war against Germany. In his speech, Roosevelt invoked "Four Freedoms," the freedom of speech, of worship, from want, and from fear, which he described as "fundamental to people everywhere in the world."²² The newly created Office of War Information became the chief propaganda organ for the government. The office consolidated all government public relations activities in one department, including press relations, public reporting, movies, publications, exhibits, and campaigns. The office's mission was to encourage popular backing for the war and tolerance for its hardships.

The Office of War Information issued a pamphlet entitled *The United Nations Fight for the Four Freedoms*, constructing an ideology upon which support for the war could be built: freedom of speech, worship, and religion, and freedom from fear. The Office of War Information adopted Roosevelt's Four Freedoms as the ultimate wartime goal for people worldwide. The

²¹ Eliot, "Civil defense measures for the protection of children," 151-52

²² U.S. Office of War information, "The United Nations fight for the Four Freedoms," 1941, <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/hgp/id/614/>, 6.

document stressed democracy depended upon all Four Freedoms; “Each supports the whole, which is liberty. When one is missing all the others are jeopardized.”²³ The pamphlet alluded to the protection of highly revered national values. In the illustration below, Figure 6, shows a young boy with a female figure—invoking the Republican Mother—as her child stops playing to wave to a defender protecting the Democratic Family’s home in the background.



Figure 6: “Bringing Human Rights Home: Portraits of the Movement”²⁴

The “Four Freedoms” captured the public’s imagination and became very familiar to Americans. The *Saturday Evening Post* contracted Norman Rockwell, an artist working for the US Army’s Ordnance Department, to illustrate four consecutive covers of the magazine between February and March 1943. Rockwell immortalized each

²³ “The United Nations Fight for the Four Freedoms,” 6.

²⁴ “The United Nations Fight for the Four Freedoms,” 14.

freedom in an illustration, partnered with an essay by a well-known writer or historian. Rockwell struggled with making the ideals concrete and tangible to readers. He took the “noble language” proclaimed in the speech and put it “in terms, everybody can understand.”²⁵ He personalized the viewers’ experience; by focusing on the all-important Democratic Family and constitutional rights worthy of defending.²⁶ “Freedom from Want” highlighted the revered American tradition of Thanksgiving, rich in historical meaning. The illustration pictured a pleasant, middle-class, multi-generational family feast: a bespectacled grandmother presenting a large turkey with a kindly patriarchal grandfather standing at the head of the table prepared to carve the bird. “Freedom from Fear” focused on two parents gazing lovingly upon their sleeping children in a warm protective home. While the mother tucks in the children, the father appears deep in thought, holding a newspaper with the words “bombing” and “horror” in the headlines, invoking thoughts of yet another night’s air raid on London. In the essay accompanying this image, Stephen Vincent Benét, wrote: “We have the chance, if we have the brains and the courage, to destroy the worst fears that harry man today—the fear of starving to death, the fear of being a slave, the fear of being stamped into the dust because he is one kind of man and not another, the fear of unprovoked attack and ghastly death for himself and for his children because of the greed and power of willful and evil men and deluded nations.”²⁷ The public embraced Rockwell’s Four Freedoms and the *Saturday Evening Post* received “millions of requests” for copies, printing and

²⁵ Elizabeth, Borgwardt, “FDR’s Four Freedoms and Wartime Transformations in America’s Discourse of Rights,” in *Bringing Human Rights Home: Portraits of the Movement*, ed. Cynthia Soohoo, Catherine Albisa, and Martha F. Davis (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), 32.

²⁶ Sonya Michel defines the discourse of the democratic family “as a key link in the nation’s defenses and women were deemed essential to the family’s survival and stability.” Michel, “American Women and the Discourse of the Democratic family,” 154. Denise Kiernan references Norman Rockwell’s autobiography *My Adventures as an Illustrator: Norman Rockwell*, stating, “Rockwell famously painted the world not as it was but as he would have like it to be, he said. His was a more comforting vision of a world in conflict, a vision that focused on determination and stick-to-it-tiveness, on family and home, even as that home, that way of life felt threatened.” Denise Kiernan, *The Girls of Atomic City: The Untold Story of the Women Who Helped Win World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 30. This needs to be integrated into the text.

²⁷ Stephen Vincent Benét, “Freedom from Fear,” *Saturday Evening Post* (March 13, 1943).

distributing “2.5 million sets, including both essays and full colour reproductions of the paintings, sold for cost.”²⁸ The agency also utilized a five-minute newsreel entitled “The Four Freedoms” to garner patriotic participation in the War Bonds drive. Rockwell’s images cast a different light on war; it “wasn’t just about killing the enemy. It was also about saving a way of life.”²⁹ These images represent distinctively middle-class values. Such mainstream values portrayed the wife/mother as homemaker and child-rearer under the patriarchal oversight of a husband/father, provider of the family wage. Government officials spent a great deal of time and energy seeking to protect this middle-class image and placed the Democratic Family in opposition to Fascism and Nazism as a global standard, ignoring the reality and diversity of family life in America.

As the likelihood that America would enter the war grew evident, established government agencies shifted into high gear, preparing for its possibility. In keeping with the values expressed in the Four Freedoms, two government bureaus—the Children’s Bureau and the Women’s Bureau—addressed women’s interests: motherhood, childrearing, the quality of family life, and the needs of working women. Recognized as authorities in their areas, the directors of these bureaus assumed their expertise as guardians of women and children was integral to planning for home defense, just as it was in the First World War.

Since its creation in 1912, the Children’s Bureau assumed responsibility for the nation’s maternal and child health and had seen its obligations expand to the oversight of child welfare programs under the Social Security Act. The Bureau spread its programs and information through local child welfare programs and agencies across the nation.

²⁸ “*Four Freedoms*”, accessed 2008, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Freedoms_\(Rockwell\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Freedoms_(Rockwell)).

²⁹ Deborah Solomon, *American Mirror: The Light and Art of Norman Rockwell* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 213.

Especially important to the Bureau was protecting legislative gains made in recent years, in particular the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act which outlawed child labor. Although it affected only 6 percent of all children workers—limited to industries involved in interstate trade—the legislation had set a standard for states to follow. Many states passed similar legislation; however, the Bureau feared that given the high demand for labor in wartime, employers might seek to undermine the law.³⁰

As the government adopted a wartime status, funding for the Children’s Bureau’s research programs stopped, putting an end to their social outreach programs—i.e. Better Baby contests and collecting scientific data—requiring the Bureau to shift their efforts to educating parents on children’s needs while living under the cloud of war. In keeping with the goals set during the latest White House Conference, the Children’s Bureau continued its educational efforts in the form of educational pamphlets printed between 1941 and 1942.³¹ In the first series, “Children bear the promise of a better world—their defense is security they find at home.” This series focused on children and family life entitled “The Defense of Children.” Each pamphlet focused on a different topic related to children and home life. In a question-and-answer format, the brochures ask parents: “Are we safeguarding those whose mothers work?”³² A second series, “Children bear the promise of a better world —Our Concern—Every Child,” echoed Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech, offering proactive suggestions for parents and communities to ensure the safety and happiness of children and the continuity of American democratic values. The realities of war threatened normal family life; fathers entering the military or working overtime hours and mothers taking jobs outside the home placed new stresses on the Democratic Family. The Bureau

³⁰ Children’s Bureau, *The Children’s Bureau Legacy*, 86.

³¹ The pamphlets are not dated. Children’s Bureau, “Children bear the promise of a better world . . . Their defense is security they find at home.” US Department of Labor, <https://digitalcollections.smu.edu/digital/collection/hgp/id/475/>.

³² Children’s Bureau, “Children bear the promise of a better world.”

counseled parents to guard their children as the enemy might target coastal areas or cities or areas with defense industries, to protect them from “neglect, exploitation, and undue strain in defense areas . . . strengthen the home life of children mobilized for war or war production. . . . and “conserve, equip, and free children of every race and creed to take their part in democracy.”³³

While supporting fundamental American values—the Republican mother, the right to childhood, and the value of the Democratic Family to society—the Children’s Bureau’s firm stand against working mothers failed to recognize the financial realities of poor working families or the increasing wartime demand for women to enter the workforce. In hopes of dissuading women from taking jobs, the Bureau recommended recruitment centers and factories offered counseling services for mothers seeking jobs; “The mother must be helped to think through her problem and to make plans that will safeguard the health and welfare of her children first.”³⁴ The Bureau’s expectations were that women in this situation would seek aid from local social welfare resources for support, matching both the mother’s and children’s needs to a specific social service.

By spring 1941, the increasing demand for women to enter war industries “ran headlong into basic American values about women’s place, the home, and family.”³⁵ The Children’s Bureau hosted a two-day Conference on Day Care of Working Mothers, held July 31- August 1, 1941. Under the leadership of Katharine Lenroot, head of the Children’s Bureau, Charles I. Schottland, Assistant Chief to the Children’s Bureau, and

³³ Children’s Bureau, “*A Children’s Charter in Wartime*,” Issue 283 of Bureau Publication, United States, Children’s Bureau, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1912, accessed October 23, 2008, https://www.google.com/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=bibliogroup:%22Bureau+Publication%22&source=gbs_meta_datar&cad=2.

³⁴ No author, “Program for Care of Children of Working Mothers,” *The Child*, 6, no. 2 (1941).

³⁵ Eleanor Straub, “Government Policy Toward Civilian Women During World War II,” (PhD. diss., Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, 1973), 259.

Charles Taft from the Office of Education attended. The conference focused the government's call for women workers and took a united position on mothers' place in the home in response to the call for women to take war jobs. Attendees included interested members of welfare and social service organizations including Mary Anderson of the Women's Bureau, Florence Kerr, head of the Works Progress Administration's nursery school program, Frank McSherry of the Office of Production Management, and a variety of representatives from social welfare agencies.³⁶ While all the assembled agreed it was "best" that mothers did not work, they agreed it was necessary to plan for the reality that mothers would take jobs.

Although it was evident industry would hire significant numbers of women and women in financial straits would desire to work, the officials in the Children's Bureau dismissed the need for expanded daycare facilities for working women, believing that a mother in the home already had a job tending her children.³⁷ The Children's Bureau recommended social workers investigate the children's homelife before determining what specific services to render a woman. The menu of services ranged from "day care in foster-family homes, in public or parochial schools, day camps and vacation camps, after-school and vacation leisure time programs, or "other methods . . . which should be developed."³⁸ Most services were only available for school-aged children, leaving mothers with infants and preschool children without care unless family members were available. Notably, some communities offered services to selective groups of

³⁶ Under the direction of Harry Hopkins, the Federal Relief Administration, Grace Langdon organized the Work's progress Administration's nursery schools in 1934. Florence Kerr, served as head of the W.P.A.'s nursery program in 1939. Kerr opposed to the social welfare model which the Children's Bureau and an educational program rather than a social welfare program. Straub, "Government Policy, 266.

³⁷ Kriste Lindenmeyer, *A Right to Childhood: The US Children's Bureau and Child Welfare, 1912-1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press) 1997, 218.

³⁸ "Verbatim Transcript, Conference on Day Care," August 1, 1941, Box: 37, "Office Files of Director, 1918-1948, Historical Files (1940-1943)": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

younger children; however, local nurseries often discriminated against children of black women, single mothers, and immigrants.

The conference organized a Joint Planning Board on the Day Care of Children and adopted a “10-point program,” “emphasiz[ing] individualized care to meet the needs of each child and parent,” including the development of nursery groups as community services, quality of care, and menu of services, including day nurseries, “nurseries for children under two, foster family care, housekeeping services, and after school recreational programs including proposals for summer and school breaks,” emphasizing that children from varying backgrounds had very different needs.³⁹ It specified such services should not be located in industrial plants or limited to children of mothers employed in such establishments” and insisted “infants should be given individual care, preferably in their own homes and by their own mothers.”⁴⁰

The Children’s Bureau sought to align their efforts with the Works Progress nursery schools, a Depression era government program for preschool aged children of poor mothers working on federal projects, administered by Florence Kerr. Lenroot asked Kerr to join the Bureau’s newly established planning board. However, Kerr saw a possible conflict between her job as head of a national organization while simultaneously overseeing a second program with competing state and local initiatives and refused.⁴¹ The Works Progress Administration program differed from the Children’s Bureau’s nurseries, offering more than custodial care. Their nurseries were modeled after the popular middle-

³⁹ “Verbatim Transcript, Conference on Day Care,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴⁰ “Program for Care of Children of Working Mothers,” 31-32, 32.

⁴¹ Damplo, Susan, “Federally Sponsored Child Care During World War II: An Idea Before Its Time,” 1987, <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1051129/damplos1987.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>, 14.

class concept of the nursery school preparing children for elementary school. “The education and health programs of nursery school can aid as nothing else in combating the physical and mental handicaps being imposed upon these young children in the homes of needy and unemployed parents.”⁴² The Works Progress Administration’s inclusiveness was significantly different from the Children’s Bureau’s limited services for preschool children. The Children’s Bureau’s nurseries also reflected local biases and did not include children of black or immigrant mothers, whereas the Works Progress Administration offered separate but equal services to African Americans. Lenroot’s efforts to bring Kerr into cooperation with the Children’s Bureau and the Office of Education failed, as the Children’s Bureau’s position was to make every effort to prevent women from using services outside of their home by using extended family or friends instead.

Anderson agreed with the Children’s Bureau’s position on the value of a mother in the home and that mothers should not necessarily work but qualified her agreement by saying, “unless there is a much more serious labor shortage than is now envisioned.”⁴³ She also did not want to put any barriers in the way of women working if they needed jobs to feed their children or if war production demanded it. Anderson outright rejected the Children’s Bureau’s insistence on the use of social workers to qualify women for childcare services and worried about what impact these interviews might have upon women needing to take jobs. She replied:

I wonder a little bit whether or not the woman might think the supervision by public organizations might not be jeopardizing her chance of employment. . . . We must remember that the women work for the same reason men work, they work to live; they work to get bread and butter and not only for themselves but for dependents; and they are not all children dependents, either; there are older people and other people in their families. For that reason, I am not at all sure that we ought to be too very strict and try to do all of these counseling things, because I

⁴² Burlbaw, Lynn, “An Early Start: WPA Emergency Nursery Schools in Texas, 1934-1943.” *American Educational History Journal*. 36, No. 2 (2009), p. 269-298, 270.

⁴³ “Program for Care of Children of Working Mothers,” 31-32, 32.

don't believe we could do it anyway, and I wouldn't set up any more barriers than there are for the women to get work.⁴⁴

The situation was tangled. While Anderson agreed a mother's first duty was their children, she also recognized impoverished women needed to hold jobs outside the home and should have an equal opportunity for war jobs, choosing for themselves what they deemed best for their families without supervision by social workers.

Anderson had a long history advocating for working women between the 1890s and 1920 before she became head of the Women's Bureau. After immigrating to the United States in the late nineteenth century, Anderson had worked in low-paying, exploitative jobs in the garment industry, eventually becoming a union leader. In 1918, she entered government service as the assistant director of Woman in Industry Service, established to address women's work issues as separate from men's, before she became head of the Women's Bureau in 1920. She had strong feminist views, refuting generally accepted biases in industry and society that relegated women to the home, volunteer services, or traditional light manufacturing jobs. As a past union leader, Anderson advocated for working women and took a decidedly feminist stance during the Second World War.

Anderson knew war production would require great numbers of women to take war jobs and recognized the necessity of training women for those jobs. At the request of Frances Perkins, Secretary of the Department of Labor, she established a labor advisory committee to study jobs suitable for women in war industries and formulate standards for women war workers and lost no time creating an advisory board to help develop policies

⁴⁴ Children's Bureau, *Verbatim Transcript Of Statements And Discussion: Conference On Day Care Of Working Mothers*, "Proceeding Of Conference On Day Care Of Children Of Working Mothers-With Special Reference To Defense Areas - Held In Washington, D. C. -July 31 And August 1, 1941," Dept of Labor (Washington D.C.: GPO. 1942), 160.

to uphold labor standards the Bureau had fought hard to put in place over the past two decades.⁴⁵ Recognizing that women needed representation and a voice on committees overseeing war production, Anderson assembled a committee to draw up guidelines regarding women's employment in defense industries and presented her plan to Sidney Hillman, a longtime union leader now at the head of the National Defense Advisory Committee. In June 1940, Anderson asked Hillman to assign a female representative to the committee who would "have charge of women's questions."⁴⁶ Hillman concurred with others in the Division of Training that women were needed for "research rather than policy-making."⁴⁷ Despite his rejection, Anderson drew up a series of recommendations and in late July, released "the first statement on labor policy issued by any federal agency during the World War II period."⁴⁸ Anderson continued to press forward and work within her Bureau to enlarge employment opportunities for women. Frustrated by the failure to gain a greater sphere of influence for the Bureau's work, Anderson lamented, "Most men never think that women can do anything but housekeeping and should not do anything else. . . . even though they are calling upon them every day to enter defense industries."⁴⁹ Failing to gain membership on Hillman's all-male advisory committee, Anderson continued to press the Secretary of Labor to formulate standards for women workers and created her own board Labor Advisory Committee.⁵⁰ Tensions between Anderson and Hillman reflected the social changes that would impact post war society, that women in war jobs could do men's work would open doors long held shut.

⁴⁵ The NDAC adopted the WB's plans in December 1941.

⁴⁶ Straub, "United States Government Policy," 262.

⁴⁷ "Womanpower Committees During World War II," Women's Bureau Bulletin No. 244, U.S. Department of Labor, accessed March 15, 2023, https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/publications/women/b0244_dolwb_1953.pdf, 1.

⁴⁸ Straub, "United States Government Policy," 262.

⁴⁹ Straub, "United States Government Policy," 247.

⁵⁰ "Womanpower Committees during World War II," 2.

Anderson continued to criticize the lack of defense training opportunities for women prior to the war, calling it the “Achilles heel of our second line of defense workers—the woman power of the Nation.”⁵¹ She pointed out that males’ prejudices delayed women’s access to higher-paid, non-traditional positions; she stated, “Though industry wants women and women want jobs, future bottle-necks in the absorption of women by industry are likely unless the present bottle-necks to their training is broken.”⁵² In January 1941, the Women’s Bureau monthly publication, *The Woman Worker*, summarized the situation: “There is little *new* opportunity for women without definite skills, nor for those who have not worked recently, nor for those with other experience who desire to get into industry, and do defense work.”⁵³

Anderson predicted the lack of training opportunities would hinder production if women did not receive training for male jobs soon, stressing, “We cannot afford not to train these women. It is later than many people think in regard to an all-out demand for the strategic advance of the second line of defense workers.”⁵⁴ She expressed hope that “greatly expanded and speeded-up” training programs on the part of the government would “prove the ‘open sesame’” for increasing numbers of women to fill the anticipated void in skilled, technical jobs; however, maternalism continued to trump the potential need for women’s labor outside the home.⁵⁵

During the summer and fall of 1941, Anderson and other members of the committee—Thelma McKelvey of the Office of Production Management and Nell Miles

⁵¹ “Urgent Need for Better Training Program for Women Workers,” June 6, 1941, Box 209: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Worker’s in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Training’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵² Urgent Need for Better Training Program for Women Workers,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵³ “Women’s Chances for Defense Jobs,” *The Woman Worker*, January 1941, Box 186, Division of Records, Records Re: Women Worker’s in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Labor’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archive College Park, College Park MD.

⁵⁴ Urgent Need for Better Training Program for Women Workers,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁵ Urgent Need for Better Training Program for Women Workers,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

of the United States Employment Service—actively worked towards placing the Bureau in a position of authority regarding training opportunities for women in war work. Anderson and women in other war-related agencies attended meetings held by the Office of Production Management’s National Labor Supply Committee but felt slighted as the committee’s attention remained focused on military recruitment and hiring males for war production.⁵⁶ Despite the apparent lack of interest in female employment, the Bureau continued to educate groups on women’s potential use in industry and pressed for opportunities to start training before the need arose.

Midway through 1941, most women seeking war jobs found their opportunities limited to employment in traditional women’s work, such as textile mills. Seeking to understand what opportunities would be available to women in war industries, Anderson sent female agents, “specialists in these matters,” across the country into factories to confer with employers, carry out extended investigations of key war industries, and make recommendations. Bureau officials, such as Thelma McKelvey Special Assistant, Labor Supply and Training Section of the Labor Division in the Office of Production Management, traveled to speak to groups of industrialists advising them that studies “indicate that women have been found satisfactory in virtually every kind of job ordinarily filled by men. It cannot be said categorically that any particular job is absolutely unsuitable for women.”⁵⁷ By the end of 1941, Anderson, reported companies had begun experiments in utilizing women in a wide variety of skilled jobs on lathes, drill presses, milling machines, and as inspectors.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Staub, “United States Government Policy,” 247.

⁵⁷ “Release: Women’s Role in Defense Industries,” April 19, 1941, Box 209: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Worker’s in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Training’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁸ “Defense Program Increases Need for Women Workers,” November 1941, Box 215, “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Worker’s in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘War Manpower Commission’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

As part of preparing women with no industrial experience to enter factories for the first time, the Women's Bureau launched a series of studies on "safety standards, plant facilities, and work clothing for women, the Bureau began investigations of defense industries such as airplane manufacturing in which few women were currently employed."⁵⁹ The Bureau printed a variety of informational leaflets for industries describing protective labor practices specific to women's jobs and plant conditions which would allow them optimal performance: including, "Lifting and Carrying Weights," "Safety Clothing," "Night Work," "Washing and Toilet Facilities," and "Safety Caps."⁶⁰ Since it was the first time many employers in heavy industries hired women, the Bureau sent agents into plants to advise employers as to measures necessary to enable women employees to optimize their productivity and noted conditions that might hamper women's performance.

In November 1941, in anticipation of the need for women to enter war industries, Anderson brought together representatives from all the remaining Depression era industrial training programs for women—including the Works Progress Administration, National Youth Administration, Office of Education, and Federal Works Administration. Anderson sought to understand what women were currently doing and lay the groundwork for the future use of females in war industries.⁶¹ Officials in charge of existing government training programs delivered reports that demonstrated their biases and their collective failure to comprehend the

⁵⁹ Straub, "United States Government Policy," 246.

⁶⁰ The web site below provides access to the "Special Bulletin of the Women's Bureau," which prepared a series of pamphlets between 1941-1944, focused on issues related to women holding industrial jobs during World War II. Topics included: appropriate clothing, posture, night work, and housing. Women's Bureau, "*Special Bulletin of the Women's Bureau*," 1940-1944, accessed October 17, 2021, <http://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/special-bulletin-women-s-6113?browse=1940s>.

⁶¹ "What are the policies and possibilities for training women as part of the defense program," Nov 8, 1940, Box 37: "Office Files of Director, 1918-1948, Historical Files (1940-1943)": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

necessity of preparing women for men's jobs in war industries. Charley Tidd Cole of the Federal Works Administration reported that Works Progress Administration was "giving women experience in kinds of work that might be defined along secondary defense lines, such as providing food and clothes for the needy and building up the morale of women WPA workers."⁶² Greta Franke, of the National Youth Administration, spoke of offering girls training in producing items of "various types designated to give youth practical training and experience leading them into defense goods manufacture" like "work on Army garments, canteen bags, surgical dressings, plane covers," and "other types of work . . . of possible defense value."⁶³ It was evident that women administrators did not anticipate a "sexual revolution" in "women's work" at the start of the war. While they may have foreseen the need for increased production, they hardly anticipated the loss of manpower to the military draft.

After listening to the various reports from Depression era make-work agencies, Anderson realized all the opportunities under discussion were in areas traditionally considered women's work. Anderson advised the officials present that "Many more skilled opportunities would be open to women in many more of these factories if they could be trained along the lines not only of manipulative skills as operators but also in related skills of reading blueprints, micrometers, calipers, of acquiring a knowledge of metals and shop mathematics. In discussing the satisfactory performance of some women for such jobs such as welding, drilling, milling, etc., Anderson also stressed the value of women's fine touch in other mechanical processes."⁶⁴ The men present, such as Dr. John Wright, assistant commissioner for vocational education in the Office of

⁶² "What are the policies and possibilities," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 2.

⁶³ "What are the policies and possibilities," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 2.

⁶⁴ "What are the policies and possibilities," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 2.

Education, responded, “at present, there were almost no women in the defense training courses sponsored by his division but now he realized there was a need to train girls at the present time.”⁶⁵ Although the conference served as a wake-up to the potential work women were capable of doing, it had little impact on increased training opportunities.

While the Office of Education and Federal Works Administration increased training opportunities for young, single and working-class women it continued training women for the same traditionally low-paying jobs, such as secretarial, retail, laundries, and restaurants, as in the past. As long as unemployment rolls showed significant numbers of men available to take industrial jobs, the most significant gains women achieved during 1941 were in clerical positions in the War Department. The War Manpower Commission remained focused on hiring men to work in war related industries and uninterested in hiring women, even as the male population dwindled.

Utilizing the full force of the nation’s womanpower faced an additional obstacle, racial prejudice. African American women were left out of the lucrative opportunities war work offered despite Executive Order 8802 which guaranteed equal opportunities for black women in war industries. Employers translated this order to mean males and failed to address black women’s employment. Although the Order specified “full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of “race, creed, color, or national origin,” it left out the word “sex,” failing to specify equal employment opportunities for black women.⁶⁶ Tired of low-paying domestic jobs, black women seeking war jobs were not considered equal to white women applicants;

⁶⁵ “What are the policies and possibilities,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 2.

⁶⁶ “Executive Order No. 8802, dated June 25, 1941. Exec. Order 8802, June 25, 1941,” Record Group: 86; National Archives Building, Washington, DC. [Online Version], <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/executive-order-8802>, February 29, 2024.

widespread national prejudice kept them from jobs available for white women in war factories.

Although the order called for desegregating factories and lifting racial barriers to higher paying jobs, employers did not embrace it. Black women protested their lack of representation in a Bureau which dealt exclusively with working women. Speaking on behalf of the Alpha Kappa Sorority, President Dr. Dorothy Boulding Furbee, and Janita Welch, legislative representative of the Non-Partisan Council, questioned why a Bureau with sixty-three female employees had no black women employed. They argued:

Race women are compelled to earn a living than any other group, yet there is not a Race woman in the bureau to interpret the needs and living conditions of the group. . . . it is no more than right that they should be represented by one of their own as is done in the cases of all other minority groups. That millions of Negro women might have representation in the bureau . . . being women citizens.”⁶⁷

Welch and Furbee asserted, that one in every six women workers in America was a Negro and “more Negro women work for their living than white women. . . . work in more menial jobs, the lower paid, [and] in general the more hazardous and in general the least agreeable and desirable ones. . . . It seems logical that black women should work in the agency that concerns itself with the problems, policies, and standards of wage-earning women.”⁶⁸ African American women urged the Bureau to give black women equal opportunities in securing war work.

Mary Anderson responded that the Bureau had employed three black employees since its founding in 1920, two left to be married and the remaining women left to take another job, and at present the Department of Labor had no funds available to hire another employee.⁶⁹ A few months later, after the Women’s Bureau received additional funds, African American women petitioned Anderson once again requesting she “receive a committee of five prominent women to

⁶⁷ Rachel Stiles Taylor, “Activities of Women’s National Organizations,” *Chicago Defender*, October 18, 1941.

⁶⁸ No author, “A.K.A.’s Continue ‘Job Equality’ Campaign: Important Query Answered . . .”, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 20, 1941.

⁶⁹ “A.K.A.’s Continue ‘Job Equality’ Campaign.”

discuss representation” in the Bureau, but Anderson “flatly refused.”⁷⁰ Efforts to take their request to Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins met similar resistance. A spokeswoman for Perkins replied that the Secretary “saw no necessity for an interview or conference inasmuch as the matter had been discussed previously.”⁷¹ Perkins viewed the matter resolved and did not make any further efforts to address African American women’s issues. While individual black women would be recognized as potential laborers, as a race they achieved no further advancement within the federal bureaus during the war, remaining outside government policy making.

As a sex, efforts to place women in production traditionally met resistance from men in powerful positions; little changed until the bombing of Pearl Harbor and subsequent declaration of war. Considering the increasing need for trained women workers and pressure to meet production deadlines, Anderson once again attempted to gain women a seat and voting rights on the Management-Labor Policy Committee. Anderson visited Paul McNutt, Hillman’s replacement as Director of the War Production Board. Anderson was relentless, and after repeated requests McNutt appointed Sara Southhall, a personnel manager for International Harvester and recognized figure in industrial relations, as his advisor on women’s activities.⁷² However, Southhall’s work commitments prevented her from giving her full attention to the job and she resigned. Within the first six months of the war, employers had “increased estimates regarding the numbers of women they needed to employ from 29% to 55%. Anderson demanded a representative from the Women’s Bureau be assigned to the committee. Although

⁷⁰ “A.K.A.’s Continue ‘Job Equality’ Campaign.”

⁷¹ No author, “Madam Perkins ‘Interested’, But Won’t Hire Us”, *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 7, 1942.

⁷² “International Harvester News Releases: 1948,” Wisconsin Historical Society, McCormick-International Harvester Collection, accessed October 20, 2022, <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/ihc/id/49407>, 1.

McNutt remained “hostile to the idea of a full-fledged voting membership for woman,” he finally broke down and created a Women’s Advisory Committee.”⁷³ In addition, McNutt allowed a member of the committee to attend meetings; however, he refused the representative a seat at the table with the men, an active voice, or a vote.

The newly established Women’s Advisory Committee had thirteen representatives, prominent women from many walks of life: club women, union, farm, and business leaders. Meeting for the first time on October 1, 1942, the Women’s Advisory Committee members broke into subcommittees to study topics related to women’s roles in the war: industrial training, recruitment campaigns, plant and community facilities, services for working mothers, and work-related issues such as shift work and the length of the workweek. When Hickey attended meetings, she sat “offside;” after several meetings, the men invited her to join them at the conference table; however, she still had no power to vote. Historian Judith Sealander comments, “The all-male Management-Labor Policy Committee rejected the idea of women as equal colleagues; some members threatened to resign if any woman received an appointment to the committee.”⁷⁴ Mary Hornaday, a reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor*, described members of the advisory committee as “a bang-up group of outstanding women leaders,” but their lack of a vote on the Management Labor Committee limited their power to a publicity organ. Utilizing the media—speeches, press releases, and articles and committee members’ connections to women’s organizations—their recommendations filtered down to the local level.⁷⁵ Commenting on the lack of respect and limited power given to the women on the advisory committee,

⁷³ Women’s Advisory Committee consisted of Margaret Hickey as head and thirteen representatives including national club women, union leaders, farm, and business leaders.

⁷⁴ Judith Sealander, “Policy Formation,” In *Federal Social Policy: The Historical Dimension*, edited by Donald T. Chritchlow and Ellis W. Hawley, eds., p. 79-98, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981.

⁷⁵ Mary Hornaday, “Why More Women Don’t Go to Work,” Box 217, “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Worker’s in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘WMC 1945—Women’s Advisory Committee’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Hornaday wrote, “Women policymakers had just as embarrassing experiences as girls who get whistled at in war plants and Wacs who get off-color stories told about them.”⁷⁶ The potential for women to have real influence in shaping government policy failed to materialize during the war. Membership on the committee was only symbolic, women remained a token, and had no power to influence policy. Feeling powerless, Hickey felt it was a waste of the committee members’ time—travel to Washington and time away from their jobs—and proposed dissolving the committee; however, the other members believed they should continue, serving as a vital link for women to the war effort and a force to be dealt with.

With the prospect of large numbers of women working, the image of the Republican Mother, the stay-at-home mom whose primary duty was raising her children to become good citizens, came under assault. Despite the fact that most older women had grown or school-aged children, employers preferred hiring the young women, which “embodied the fears of employers, government policy makers, labor unions, and doctors.”⁷⁷ As large numbers of young, married and single women entered war factories, it complicated existing industrial policies and practices, requiring industrial and personnel accommodations.

With the increase in women’s employment during the early 1900s, the Progressive Era had seen passage of protective labor laws, a product of reformers’ efforts to protect working women from long hours and a variety of industrial dangers such as lifting heavy objects and exposure to industrial chemicals. Proponents of such legislation

⁷⁶ Hornaday, “Why More Women Don’t Go to Work,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁷ Ruth L. Fairbanks, “A Pregnancy Test: Women Workers and the Hybrid American Welfare State, 1940-1993, <https://www.in.gov/history/files/Fairbanks-for-WEB-FINAL.pdf>, 1.

believed “women’s primary social responsibilities lay in their roles as caretakers of house and children, and feared that without legislation wage-earning women . . . would work so many hours in the factory that they would be too fatigued and run down to perform properly those household duties.”⁷⁸ As war production demands increased, states lifted protective labor laws to accommodate war work; freeing employers to set their own policies regarding the length of the workday, weight-lifting, exposure to industrial chemicals, and hours on the job. Likewise, the Women’s Bureau produced literature on standards regarding acceptable clothing, shoes, personal grooming, restroom facilities, and rest periods for working women. However, pregnancy and maternity leave were new issues for employers in heavy industries—aircraft, tank, and ship building.

Victorian values continued to hold sway in the 1940s. As younger married women entered war work, many viewed pregnant women working on the male dominated production lines as improper.⁷⁹ Industrialists fretted over pregnancy’s impact on productivity and potential court action should an accident befall a pregnant worker. Besides accidents, additional concerns included dangers inherent in factory work—long hours, heavy lifting, exposure to industrial chemicals—and potential court actions in case of injury to the fetus, miscarriage, and pregnancy’s impact on a woman’s productivity. Fears over liability prompted industrial policies preventing women from keeping their jobs after their pregnancy became known or evident.

Viewed as an unbecoming public display of female sexual activity, employers claimed pregnant women’s presence on the factory floor as distracting and caused male employees’ discomfort and embarrassment; they rarely saw a woman who needed a job.⁸⁰ The Women’s

⁷⁸ Allison Hepler, “And We Want Steel Toes Like the Men: Gender and Occupational Health during World War II,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 72, no. 4, (Winter 1998): 689-713, 694.

⁷⁹ Fairbanks, “A pregnancy test,” 27.

⁸⁰ Courtni E. Molnar, “Has the Millennium Yet Dawned?”: A History of Attitudes Toward Pregnant Workers in America, 12 *MICH. J. GENDER & L.* 163 (2005). Available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjgl/vol12/iss1/4>.

Bureau viewed the issue as greater than males' comfort level around pregnant women and focused its attention on the pregnant woman's health and safety in the factory. Unlike many European countries with legally mandated maternity policies, the United States government did not get involved, leaving policymaking to individual employers.

Employers expected women to quit voluntarily upon knowledge of their pregnancy, ideally in the first trimester, although most employers did not discover their employee's pregnancy until her second trimester, past the most likely period of time for a miscarriage. Industry justified firing women employees upon discovery of their pregnancy, claiming it was distracting and "not nice" because of its "bad effect on the male employees, diminished efficiency of pregnant women workers, and the possibility of miscarriage."⁸¹ When pregnancy was confirmed, some employers transferred women to a different work assignment, others dismissed them.⁸² To avoid being let go, women often tried to conceal their pregnancies, i.e. wearing loose fitting clothes to avoid detection. Suspicion of an employee's pregnancy might require an invasive pelvic examination and immediate discharge upon confirmation.

Employers fears of legal liability associated with pregnant workers outweighed their contribution. Under pressure, state legislatures relaxed protective legislative measures allowing lengthened hours of exposure to toxic chemicals (such as benzene), and increased hours or number of days on the job.⁸³ As with many enlightened ideals in

Charlotte Silverman; "Maternity-Leave and Maternity-Care Practices in Industry," no date, Box 21: "Office Files of the Director 1918-1948, Government, 'Labor Dept – Chief Clerk Committee'": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸¹ Fairbanks, "A pregnancy test: Women workers and the hybrid American welfare state, 1940-1992," (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015),

<https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1815141528/85F36DCFB56445C3PQ/1?accountid=7090>.

⁸² An additional layer in regulating women's physical limits and industrial regulation on a national level was the difference in philosophy between supporters of a national Equal Rights Amendment versus protective legislation, which Mary Anderson, head of the Women's Bureau supported. Hepler, "And We Want Steel Toes," 694.

⁸³ Fairbanks, "A pregnancy test," 45.

peacetime, the expediency of wartime production overrode concerns over women's health during the war. Professor Ruth Fairbanks states, "American industry viewed the pregnant woman as a "production problem, an occupational safety and health problem, and obstetric problem."⁸⁴

In conjunction with the Children's Bureau, the Women's Bureau called for a conference on November 6, 1942 to discuss industrial policies regarding employment during pregnancy and the issue of maternity leave. The meeting included representatives from the Women's Bureau, Children's Bureau and its Obstetric Advisory Committee, and outside specialists. Dr. Charlotte Silverman, a researcher for the Children's Bureau, traveled extensively investigating the issue. Between November 1942 and January 1943, Silverman surveyed seventy-three plants in eleven states, employing approximately one-quarter million female employees. In her report, "Maternity-Leave and Maternity-Care Practices in Industry," Silverman disclosed, "out of seventy-three firms checked, sixty-four were found to have fixed policies with regard to pregnant women."⁸⁵ One-half of the companies had policies terminating women's employment upon being informed of their condition or forced them to take a leave of absence when their condition was discovered. Fear of being fired led to the concealment of pregnancy by women who wanted or needed to work.⁸⁶ Worried over losing their jobs, pregnant women sought to avoid detection by wearing loose or ill-fitting clothes. However, a supervisor noting that "a woman was getting fat" was enough reason for immediate dismissal or a mandated pregnancy leave. Silverman concluded the presence of pregnant women on the factory floor was too personal and uncomfortable for men, and companies preferred using words such as "leave for

⁸⁴ Fairbanks, "A pregnancy test," 27.

⁸⁵ "Maternity-Leave and Maternity-Care Practices in Industry," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁶ James Marlow and George Zielke, "Woman Physician Scores Policies of War Plants in Pre-Natal Cases," *The Evening Independent*, September 17, 1943, 7.

domestic reasons,” “home duties,” or “personal reasons,” reinforcing women’s socially proper place in the home as a Republican Mother.⁸⁷

In a chart entitled “Time and Seniority Conditions of Return to Work After Delivery,” Silverman presented data collected by type of industry, policies regarding minimum post-delivery period before reinstatement, the possibility of extending the post-delivery period, and the retention of seniority rights.⁸⁸ She found that forty-five out of the sixty-two companies’ policies required a minimum six- to eight-week maternity leave after delivery. The remaining seventeen companies required more extended periods, with the aircraft and shipbuilding industries listing more than one year. In many cases, women could ask for extensions, and a majority of plants permitted women to retain seniority rights if they returned.⁸⁹ Silverman added that in one “large, widely-known corporation . . . pregnancy had been treated on the same basis as illness.”⁹⁰ Her report made no recommendations regarding maternity leave for women temporarily entering the workforce or mothers-to-be remaining at work.⁹¹

Mary Anderson, a veteran in championing women’s employment issues, pointed out the length of time industries had employed women influenced their attitude toward pregnancy. Historically, female-dominated industries such as textile, garment, and cigar production had “easy going” attitudes compared to male-dominated industries, i.e.

⁸⁷ “Maternity-Leave and Maternity-Care Practices in Industry,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁸ “Maternity-Leave and Maternity-Care Practices in Industry,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁹ “Maternity-Leave and Maternity-Care Practices in Industry,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹⁰ “Maternity-Leave and Maternity-Care Practices in Industry,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹¹ Elizabetta Vezzosi, “Why is there no maternity leave in the United State? European Models for a law that was Never Passed,” accessed November 20, 2013, <http://www.northwestern.edu/rc19/Vezzosi.pdf>.

aircraft and shipbuilding, new to hiring women.⁹² Women's Bureau studies had revealed women often hid their pregnancies as long as possible, especially in factories with policies forcing their dismissal; Silverman argued, most fears reflected concern over the factory's liability rather than their employee's health.⁹³ In her final report, "Tentative Recommendations on Standards for Maternity Care and Employment on Mothers in Industry," Silverman reflected on the need for women in all economic and social classes to take up war work and eliminated the words "for economic or other reasons" to eradicate any class and social stigma. However, industrialists' bias against women workers in the male bastion stood as a barrier to full production. Despite their differences, both bureaus realized many lower-class women worked out of necessity to provide for their families and they sought to insure that these mothers could return to their employment if the woman deemed it necessary.

The pamphlet prepared for distribution, "Standards for Maternity Care and Employment of Mothers in Industry," reflected the Children's Bureau's oft repeated, yet unrealistic, caveat against the employment of women with children. Highly defensive of their position regarding the mother remaining in the home, the pamphlet advised "the labor situation in this country does not necessitate recruitment or employment of these women."⁹⁴ Once again the Women's Bureau and Children's Bureau were at loggerheads as the Children's Bureau remained opposed to mothers of young children taking jobs. As an alternative, the Women's Bureau advised factories to transfer pregnant women to a more suitable job if necessary and give a minimum six weeks maternity leave before her delivery date and a minimum two months maternity leave after delivery.

⁹² "Maternity-Leave and Maternity-Care Practices in Industry," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹³ "Maternity-Leave and Maternity-Care Practices in Industry," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹⁴ "Increased Employment of Women in Industry," September 25, 1942, Box 204: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Worker's in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Office of Civilian Defense - Oyster Shucking': Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Unlike many European countries, the United States had no universal maternity policy. Since maternity leave was not available, an impoverished or widowed mother had no recourse but charity. To minimize the impact pregnancy would have on women's continued employment, the Women's Bureau proposed that union contracts include a clause assuring women that "leave" would not jeopardize their return to her job or loss of seniority privileges, stressing that such clauses would be invaluable to a wife of a disabled soldier or a war widow, but these proposals never materialized. Outside the fact that industry did not want pregnant women to remain on the job, the unspoken but overriding concern was the underlying fear that women would fail to return to the home after the war, undermining traditional expectations regarding women's and men's places in society.⁹⁵

With the formal declaration of war, the question of drafting married men, especially those supporting dependents, arose. Congress continued to refuse to draft fathers, stressing their importance to the Democratic Family. General Hershey commented, "Married men with dependents have been deferred because it is to the interest of the government to maintain, if possible, the family as the basic social unit," tempered with the caveat that deferrals would continue "until the need for men becomes much greater than it is at present."⁹⁶ The schedule for the draft appears below:

Category 1. Men generally fit and available for service with no bona-fide financial dependents.

Category 2. Men qualified for military service who have financial dependents, other than wives or children, such as aged parents or siblings, prior to December 8, 1941, but no children born prior to the start of the war.

⁹⁵ "Recommended standards for the employment of pregnant women," August 24, 1945, Box 41: "Office File of Director, 1918-1948, 'Miller, Freida - Publications': Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹⁶ Frank L. Kluckhohn, "New Draft to Fit Men to War Jobs," *New York Times*, January 11, 1942.

Category 3. Married men who have wives and children or children alone prior to December 8, 1941.

Category 4. Served as a catchall category,” allowing men to plead for an exemption from their draft board for sympathetic regard.”⁹⁷

The final category included a broad range of exemptions for clergy, a dependent divorced wife, an adopted child, or a physically/mentally handicapped family member. Married men with children born after the attack on Pearl Harbor, often marrying after the establishment of the draft, did not qualify for father deferments unless the child was born within eight months of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Men who failed to report to their draft boards after notification were classified as draft dodgers.

The debate over expanding the draft to include fathers reached a critical point in the summer of 1943. Members of Congress proposed various stop-gap measures, including national registration, drafting single women, and drafting government workers to prevent tearing families apart. The proposal to draft fathers into the military was set to begin on October 1, 1943 whereupon Senator Burton K. Wheeler (D-Montana) introduced a new bill seeking to protect fathers, reopening the debate over drafting fathers. Despite Senator Wheeler’s valiant efforts to protect fathers from the draft, the bill passed and was signed by the President on November 22, 1943. Dorit Geva, author of *Conscription, Family and the Modern State*, states the debate over drafting fathers “illustrated how central a paternalist breadwinning ideology remained to U.S. politics even at the height of the war.”⁹⁸ Arriving home after a five-week tour of the South Pacific and Australia, reporters asked “first mother” Eleanor Roosevelt for her opinion on the father draft. She responded, “To be exempted just because a man is a father seems to me stupid. To be exempted because one is needed for essential obligations is common sense. Every one of

⁹⁷ Dorit Geva, *Conscription, Family, and the Modern State: A comparative Study of France and the United States*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 169.

⁹⁸ Geva, *Conscription, Family, and the Modern State*, 195.

my boys has children. I think that's an added reason for fighting."⁹⁹ The First Lady saw the man of the house as a model for leadership and viewed fathers' patriotic service in the military as instilling virile values and patriotism in his sons. Despite efforts in Congress to block the passage of the "father draft," it went into effect on October 13, 1943, eliminating all exemptions for pre-Pearl Harbor fathers, although not implemented until December.

Realizing the hardship the loss of the breadwinner would mean to the family, Congress desired to do whatever was necessary to keep families intact and solvent while their breadwinners served their country. Upon approving the father draft, Congress revisited the Servicemen's Dependents Allowance Act of 1942. Legislators recognized the government's obligation to protect families and increased safeguards to protect servicemen's assets, meet their financial obligations, and provide for their families. Allotments supported a serviceman's family the same way a worker provided the family wage, ensuring his patriarchal responsibility as the provider. Without passing allotments, families stood a high probability of becoming impoverished, losing their homes, and needing to rely on public assistance, i.e. Aid to Dependent Children, or through philanthropic organizations.¹⁰⁰ These forms of aid were tainted by their association with impoverished women, often due to a broken home or a husband who failed to provide a family wage. After years of economic troubles, the war provided jobs and a return to prosperity and the government needed to draft fathers without pauperizing families.

Upon approval of the father draft, the Senate proposed increasing payment to a wife and one child to seventy-five dollars, with an additional twenty dollars for the

⁹⁹ "Exempting Dads Just Because They're Dads Is Stupid, Mrs. Roosevelt Says," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, September 24, 1943.

¹⁰⁰ "McNutt Backs Plan on Dependent Pay," *New York Times*, April 30, 1942.

second child and fifteen for each additional child.¹⁰¹ The amendment expanded allotments to cover the first seven grades of military personnel rather than just the lowest four categories. This action recognized the loss of the father's leadership was a hardship to any family no matter its financial status and might force wives and mothers to take jobs outside the home, leave the family in serious economic straits, and children without a father's guidance. Representative Andrew May (D-KY), a strong opponent to the father draft, went on record saying, "I'm still opposed to taking fathers. The cost of this bill . . . is the cost of doing wrong."¹⁰² John J. Sparkman declared, "If fathers are to be taken, we have to pay the bill. This bill . . . changes the status of the allotments for dependents from assistance to subsistence."¹⁰³ The bill was of particular importance in its broader definition of family. Passage of the bill extended allotments to husbands and children of women in the armed services "if they can prove sole dependency," elevating the status of military service and allowing soldiers' families to remain solvent and self-respecting.¹⁰⁴ Paul McNutt praised the government's efforts to protect the Democratic Family, boasting, "We are the most liberal nation in taking care of dependency through allotments and allowances."¹⁰⁵ Additional benefits relieved servicemen from liabilities and benefits for their dependents for the duration of the war and six months after their return home.

The debate over the allotments demonstrates financial concerns were a significant barrier to drafting fathers. Realizing the hardships the family experienced when a man left his family, the War Department increased the furlough period from seven to fourteen days. The War Department asserted, "heads of families maintained more elaborate establishments than single

¹⁰¹ "Draft Officials Are Criticized," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 10, 1943.

¹⁰² "House Group Pares Dependency Rises," *New York Times*, October 8, 1943.

¹⁰³ "House Group Pares Dependency Rises."

¹⁰⁴ "House Group Pares Dependency Rises."

¹⁰⁵ When the father's draft finally passed, in October 1943, child allotments doubled. Louis Stark, "New Draft Order Puts All 18 To 38 In Service In '43," *New York Times*, April 13, 1943.

men or married men with no children [and] would need more time to make arrangements for their families and wind up their business affairs.”¹⁰⁶ The Office of War Information praised Congress, stating, “the average serviceman and his family now have an income greater than anything of this kind heretofore in effect for soldiers and sailors.”¹⁰⁷ Induction into the military also threatened servicemen’s financial obligations as civilians, including life insurance premiums, automobile loans, and mortgages. Results of a Gallup Poll conducted in March 1942 indicated public support for the policy. A majority of respondents believed “if the government is willing to support dependents, there is no reason why young married men and other young men with dependents should not be called to the colors.”¹⁰⁸ Like Eleanor Roosevelt who felt the father should serve as an example—fighting courageously for the country’s freedom—Congress supported allotments as a means to keep soldiers’ families solvent and intact in face of separation.

For the first time in history, Congress expanded soldiers’ rights while on active duty. The passage of the Soldier and Sailors Civil Relief Act protected servicemen from divorce proceedings, foreclosures, and evictions. However, their actions did not cancel debts but suspended payments and allowed a grace period after the serviceman’s discharge. The act upheld the family wage ideal and dependence on the male breadwinner, including post-war provisions. Services included unemployment compensation and creating a Reemployment Division to ensure “every man honorably discharged from active service either get his old position back and keeps it; gets one just as good and keeps it; [and] receives special training if necessary.”¹⁰⁹ It also ensured

¹⁰⁶ “Induction of Fathers Hinted,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 14, 1943.

¹⁰⁷ Office of War Information, “Rights and Privileges of American Servicemen,” May 1943, accessed October 7, 2013, <http://www.usmm.org/wsa/rights.html>.

¹⁰⁸ “Dependency as Bar to Draft Opposed,” *New York Times*, March 22, 1942.

¹⁰⁹ Office of War Information, “Rights and Privileges of American Servicemen.”

additional benefits, including absentee voting in federal elections, medical and hospital care for wives and dependents, and National Service Life Insurance.¹¹⁰

In response to the high rejection rates for draftees, children's health and prenatal care for mothers became a national concern. An editorial in *The New York Times* bemoaned "the high rate of selective service rejections" and "cited the World War I defense slogan, 'The health of the child is the power of the nation.'" The author noted that children's health needs had been neglected, commenting, "now the infants of World War I had matured into the current generation of medical rejects" and "called for the expansion of maternal-child health service to benefit the 'recruits for 1960.'"¹¹¹ This realization stimulated efforts to improve the health of the nation's children and the nation's future defense. Looking to the future, Congress recognized the need for prenatal care, families' financial burdens, and servicemen's morale and the need for families' emotional support in face of the father's removal from the family with passage of the Emergency Maternity and Infant Care Act (EMIC).

The EMIC was notably the most groundbreaking program to emerge from the war. In early 1942, news stories first publicized the dilemma. Eleanor Ragsdale's article, "Care of 'Boom Town' Kids," revealed a situation which existed around many army camps as young, newlywed women followed their servicemen to crowded towns outside army encampments. Pregnant women, referred to as "storkers," needed maternity services and quickly overtaxed base medical services.¹¹² When Colonel Clark, the commanding officer at Fort Lewis, could not provide for the growing number of wives in need of maternity services, he turned to the state health department, asking for assistance with maternity care. The health department received

¹¹⁰ Office of War Information, "Rights and Privileges of American Servicemen."

¹¹¹ Temkin, Elizabeth, "Driving Through: Postpartum Care During World War II," *American Journal Public Health* 89, (1999): 587-595, 589.

¹¹² "Storkers" were women who had followed their servicemen to military camps and became pregnant. Temkin, "Driving Through: Postpartum," 587.

monies from unused funds under the Social Security Act Title V Part 1 to provide pregnant women maternity care between August 1941 to July 1942.¹¹³ When state funds ran out, Congress passed the First Deficiency Appropriation Bill under Title V, Fund B monies of the Social Security Act, providing funds to support the EMIC. Although not funded through the Children's Bureau, responsibility for the program fell under their oversight.¹¹⁴ The appropriation provided national obstetric services, hospitalization, and infant care for the wives and children of the lowest grades of enlisted US servicemen. Funding from the maternal and child health program of the Social Security Act covered the cost of medical exams, hospital delivery, and nursing care.

News of the passage of the Emergency Maternity and Infant Care Act in March 1943—serving the wives of all servicemen, black or white, in the four lowest pay grades—spread quickly, triggering “an avalanche of demand . . . upon state departments of health.”¹¹⁵ The Act also included services for the wives of servicemen who died or were missing.¹¹⁶ By March 1943, twenty-eight states set up similar programs. Letters to the Children's Bureau from servicemen and their wives abundantly testified to the need for care. “One soldier writing to us said, ‘if my wife can get the medical care she needs, it will sure lighten the load on my pocketbook and mind.’”¹¹⁷ Another soldier wrote, “Boy! What a relief it is for me to know that my wife will be properly taken care of. God bless

¹¹³ Nathan Sinai and Odin W. Anderson, “The Emergency Maternity and Infant Care Program, 1943-1946,” Bureau of Public Health, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1947, III-2, accessed 2015, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c029740909&view=1up&seq=5&skin=2021>.

¹¹⁴ Monies received by the state of Washington, approved by the Children's Bureau, were Fund B monies from the Social Security Administration under Title V. Nena J. Powell, “The Fort Lewis Maternity Care Project,” *Family and Community Health* 37, no. 3, 179-187, 183.

¹¹⁵ Sinai and Anderson, “The Emergency Maternity and Infant Care Program 1943-1946; “Uncle Sam May Foot Bill For Five of Every 100 Babies,” *Kansas City Star*, June 13, 1943.

¹¹⁶ “Uncle Sam May Foot Bill,” June 13, 1943.

¹¹⁷ “Advance Release: For Thursday Afternoon Paper”, November 26, 1943, Box 1: “Office of War Information, Records of Natalie Davisen, Program Manager for Homefront Campaigns, 1943-1945, ‘Accidents-Magazine Bureau’”: Women's Bureau, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

you.”¹¹⁸ The Children’s Bureau reported, “A member of [a] servicemen’s organization said to us: During this great conflict, the man at the front needs to have someone behind to look out for his duties at home. His mind has to be on his job. If he has worries about his family at home, he cannot do his job well. It is up to us at home to help. A happy family at home means a good fighter at the front.”¹¹⁹ Although the program had its detractors, particularly within the raising medical profession, as had the Mothers’ Pension program, it represents a significant step forward in ensuring medical care.

The Emergency Maternity and Infant Care Act broke with previously established federal welfare practices. First, it was an outright grant and did not require matching state funds like the defunct Sheppard Towner Act. Although it was federally funded, state health departments set standards for practitioners participating in the EMIC program. Secondly, it was *not* intended to be construed as “welfare” and broke with traditional forms of payments made to a specific economic class of citizens.¹²⁰ The program served black women as well as white women. The Fort Lewis hospital delivered both black and white women’s babies; “While each woman was segregated after delivery to a private room on the maternity ward,” the fact they delivered at St. Joseph’s hospital at all is significant in that neither was refused delivery. In addition, “neither woman was moved to some other area of the hospital such as the basement—a practice that was typical for African Americans in the 1940s—especially in Southern hospitals.”¹²¹ The

¹¹⁸ “Advance Release For Thursday Afternoon Paper,” November 18, 1943, Box: 1: “Records of Natalie Davisen, Program Manager for Homefront Campaigns, 1943-1945”: Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁹ Nathan Sinai, “Advance Release for November 18, 1943, The Emergency Maternity and Infant Care Program, 1943-1946,” available at: Bureau of Public Health, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1947, III-2, 3, 4. <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupid?key=ha102441872>.

¹²⁰ In light of the low rank of servicemen’s wives qualified for EMIC there was some truth to it being a form of welfare, being it served as a form of social insurance and maternalism by protecting maternal health and reducing infant mortality, goals long sought by the Children’s Bureau.

¹²¹ Nena J. Powell, “The Fort Lewis Maternity Care Project,” *Family and Community Health* 37, no.3 (July-September 2014)” 184.

Emergency Maternity and Infant Care Act was an enlightened program which not only protected the Democratic Family but ensured the health and welfare of the upcoming generation.

Many members of Congress offered various proposals to limit the scope of payments, including a one-time cash allowance given to the pregnant woman for expenses. Grants to individuals broke with the established practice of means-testing. “The absence of a means test to determine eligibility before persons are given assistance from public funds to which they have not contributed directly ran counter to long-established public welfare traditions.”¹²²

Troubled by both the omission of a means test and the lack of definitive limitations on assistance, US Representative Butler Hare (D-SC), commented he could only justify it as “a contribution to the family as an expression of gratitude to those in the armed forces who are actually offering their lives in the service.”¹²³

The Children’s Bureau also addressed the topic of illegitimacy, an issue intensified by wartime conditions. The Census Bureau reported, “The number of illegitimate live births for the United States in 1942 . . . for mothers 15 to 19 years represented 45.9 percent of the total illegitimate births.”¹²⁴ Marriage was a crucial component in establishing eligibility for funding; EMIC funds were not available for single mothers. The Bureau prepared a document entitled “Services for Unmarried Mothers and their Children as a guide to support services.” Since many unwed mothers were often transient, state aid through Title V and/or local welfare social services varied

¹²² Race and class were still evident in the program as it limited eligibility to wives and infants of low-ranking servicemen, up to the grades of sergeant in the Army or comparable grades in the other services. Sinai, “*The Emergency Maternity and Infant Care Program*” III-13, available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c029740909&view=1up&seq=5&skin=2021>.

¹²³ Sinai and Anderson, “Emergency Maternity and Infant Care Program,” III-14 available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c029740909&view=1up&seq=5&skin=2021>.

¹²⁴ Children’s Bureau, “Unmarried Mothers and Their Children,” US Department of Labor (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1945), 3.

across the country. Often eligibility for funds was limited by residency requirements, and itinerant women could not receive monetary support. The American Red Cross offered services to help mothers-to-be establish paternity. If the pregnant woman had attempted to communicate with the father unsuccessfully, the Red Cross would assist “to ascertain the attitude of the serviceman toward the mother and baby.”¹²⁵ In cases where the serviceman did not want to marry, the Red Cross would attempt to get his written acknowledgment of paternity to enable the woman to apply for a family allowance for the child.¹²⁶

The question of federal interference in state matters arose as military personnel moved around the country and wives often followed. Discussions focused on standardizing the program across the country, particularly the issue of physicians’ fees. Recognizing the differing economic standards across the nation, the Children’s Bureau dictated maternity care fees ranging from a low of thirty-five dollars to a maximum of fifty dollars. Physicians, longtime adversaries of the Bureau and a powerful force behind the demise of Mother’s Pensions, attacked the EMIC. In particular, medical groups protested pre-set payments in the form of federal funds rather than “set allotments to service men’s wives, who would pay the doctor themselves.”¹²⁷ An editorial in the *Journal of Pediatrics* alleged that “the Children’s Bureau’s activities has wandered rather far afield.”¹²⁸ The article charged, “The function and purposes of the Children’s Bureau have been abruptly changed so that it is now an active factor in the practice of medicine throughout the United States, dictatorially regulating fee and conditions of practice on a Federal basis.”¹²⁹ Martha Eliot of the Children’s Bureau denied charges that the bureau sought to control the

¹²⁵ “Doctors Keep Off Infant Plan,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 29, 1943.

¹²⁶ “Doctors Keep Off Infant Plan.”

¹²⁷ Elinor Siegel, “Pediatricians Quit Children’s Bureau,” *New York Times*, Aug 3, 1944, <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/results/957D761895494A3BPQ/1?accountid=7090>.

¹²⁸ Siegel, “Pediatricians Quit Children’s Bureau.”

¹²⁹ Siegel, “Pediatricians Quit Children’s Bureau.”

medical profession, stating that EMIC was a “wartime measure” authorized under the Social Security Act and would end when the war was over.

Seven months after the EMIC passed, Texas remained one of “three or four” states not participating despite the large number of eligible military wives who accompanied their soldiers to Texas and were living in towns outside the camps; legal barriers prevailed.¹³⁰ A Fort Worth newspaper reported the young wife of a noncommissioned serviceman appeared in the local Red Cross office and announced, “I’m going to have a baby.” She then pulled out a pamphlet that came with her allotment check advising her, “the Government will pay the hospital and doctor bill and I want to make an application. . . .”¹³¹ The Red Cross worker explained, “The State of Texas does not yet participate in this federal plan.”¹³² She went on to tell the reporter that their office received “from five to 10 such visitors a day, each certain her financial difficulties are going to be solved by a paternalistic government.”¹³³ However, by October 1943, the Texas attorney general cleared legal barriers, and eligible women began to receive services in December.¹³⁴

A less controversial but inspired program to aid soldiers’ families was the creation of the War Department’s Office of Dependency Benefits that oversaw payments to servicemen’s dependents. First Lieutenant Harry Grossman’s article on the administration of the department stated that according to military law under the Articles of War, “SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES does not annul a man’s moral and legal

¹³⁰ “Soldiers Wives in Texas Run Into Disappointment Over Maternity Care,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 17, 1943, Morning Edition.

¹³¹ “Soldiers Wives in Texas.”

¹³² “Soldiers Wives in Texas.”

¹³³ In the state of Texas, the EMIC had difficulty getting established as the United States Medical Corps and Children’s Bureau only recognized doctors certified by the American Medical Association, and not physicians belonging to the American Osteopathic Association; “Soldiers Wives in Texas.”

¹³⁴ “Mann Rules Aid For Maternity Care,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 20, 1943.

obligation to support his family.”¹³⁵ Grossman argued that inducting family men and removing the breadwinner from home undermined family life, leaving mothers with inadequate means to support their children or forcing them into the workforce, choices that violated American family values.

According to Harry Grossman, processing allotments required a large bureaucracy; an average of twelve thousand applications arrived at the War Department’s Office of Dependency Benefits daily.¹³⁶ True to their motto, “Get ‘em paid,” monthly checks came “with promptness and regularity,” despite difficulties caused by “gypsy-like” wives who moved “six times in as many months.”¹³⁷ Many American families “considered the office a sort of fairy godfather,” taking on a paternalistic function and replacing the distant husband.¹³⁸ Women who had been dependent upon their husbands saw the checks as a form of family wage, and some reached out for additional aid, including requests for help in finding a new trailer or home. When one young mother “[wrote] desperately that she has been unable to buy diaper pins, an obliging clerk [dug] some up for her.”¹³⁹ This department also negotiated its way through a myriad of domestic and marital entanglements, acting “as a national court of domestic relations.”¹⁴⁰ This program put the government in the role of a benevolent guardian for women whose husbands were no longer home to take care of the many little details that complicated family life without a man in the house.

Common-law marriages, divorces, separations, and annulments were all judged legal according to the state laws where contracted. Grossman noted that the “compulsory allowance

¹³⁵ Harry Grossman, “Administration of the Servicemen’s Dependents Allowance Act of 1942,” <http://ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v6n7/v6n7p21.pdf>

¹³⁶ Grossman, “Administration of the Servicemen’s Dependents,” 121.

¹³⁷ Grossman, “Administration of the Servicemen’s Dependents,” 121.

¹³⁸ “Dependency Funds Are Sped by Army,” *The New York Times*, August 10, 1943.

¹³⁹ “Draft of Father of 8 Deferred,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 3, 1943, Morning Edition.

¹⁴⁰ Grossman, “Administration of the Servicemen’s Dependents,” 23.

feature” led many servicemen to seek divorce from philandering wives: “A man’s complaint that he has not seen his wife for a long time, that she has been unfaithful, that he no longer cares for her, or that she has deserted him cannot affect in any way the statutory obligation of contribution from his pay.”¹⁴¹ The Office of Dependency Benefits adjudicated each case individually but had “no authority to consider the moral conduct or character of a beneficiary in determining that individual’s eligibility for the family allowance,” unlike local civil authorities’ determination of a worthy mother in welfare cases.¹⁴² Unlike federal programs to support women and children in the past, such as Mother’s Pensions, the federal government did not investigate homes, deny payments for suspected immoral behavior on the part of the mother, or remove children from homes.

When the father draft started, local boards granted deferments unevenly across the nation. Wallace Turner was the father of two, Alfred and Josephine, and expecting his third child when he received his notice. Turner, who worked in a non-deferrable job as a professor at Colorado Women’s College in Denver, Colorado, gave his notice. The family quickly sold their house and made plans for his wife and children to join the family in Kentucky. At the last moment, the university president received notice that postponed Wallace’s induction to the end of the school year.¹⁴³ Harry Barnay of Highland Park, Michigan, whose wife had deserted him, reported to the induction center with his two daughters because “he had no one to leave them with.”¹⁴⁴ Barnay was inducted and informed that the “Army was sympathetic . . . but Barnay had made no move to protest

¹⁴¹ Grossman, “Administration of the Servicemen’s Dependents,” 23

¹⁴² Grossman, “Administration of the Servicemen’s Dependents,” 23.

¹⁴³ The basic Selective Service Law listed professor or instructor in colleges and universities as a nondeferrable job. Alfred Turner shared a family story with me in conversation and later sent a copy of the family memoir. News of his postponement came at the final moment, as the family waited for the taxi to the train station. Wallace Turner, *Memories of Wallace Blythe Turner* (self-published, 1985); Michael E. Stevens, ed.

¹⁴⁴ “Daddy’s Girls,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 19, 1943.

his 1-A classification” and he received a “brief” furlough to make arrangements for them.¹⁴⁵ A drug store clerk, husband, and father of five, Stuart Day received a draft notice. Day lived on Nantucket, an island with no essential war jobs, in order to take a war job he needed to move to the mainland. He told the draft board he would rather enter the army than move his family to the mainland.¹⁴⁶ Ultimately, the army rejected Day, classifying him as an “administrative reject.”¹⁴⁷

Draft boards operated according to set national standards but made their own choices which on occasion seemed inconsistent. Raymond (Red) P. Kelley, a father of nine children in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, enlisted to serve overseas; according to his nine-year-old daughter, he was “anxious to ‘get that Hitler.’”¹⁴⁸ The newspaper reported that Red’s family would “receive \$142 a month from his pay and Army allotments, much more than he has been getting on the WPA and the relief rolls.”¹⁴⁹ Thomas Dutton of Krebs, Oklahoma, stated, “he hadn’t asked for a deferment ‘because the Government wants me’ I guess I was lucky not to to be called sooner.”¹⁵⁰ Dutton added, “I’ll do my best and if I don’t come back I guess that’ll be all right,”¹⁵¹ His wife was to receive 240 dollars a month. On the other hand, Anthony Arthur Christian, also on relief, registered for the draft claiming no dependents. Christian was caught in his lie when news reached his wife regarding his hospitalization for a digestive problem. Finding out her husband was in the army, Mrs. Christian showed up at the draft board with legal documents and informed the draft board she was not receiving allotment checks. When she heard her husband lied, Mrs. Christian exclaimed, “‘How about our 11 children?’ and produced birth certificates

¹⁴⁵ “Daddy’s Girls.”

¹⁴⁶ “Drug Store Clerk, Father of Five is Rejected,” *Eau Claire Leader-Telegram*, August 8, 1943.

¹⁴⁷ “Drug Store Clerk, Father of Five is Rejected.”

¹⁴⁸ “Father of 9 Enlists; Family Will Benefit,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 1942.

¹⁴⁹ “Father of 9 Enlists; Family Will Benefit.”

¹⁵⁰ “Father of 9 Enlists; Family Will Benefit.”

¹⁵¹ “Father of 9 Enlists; Family Will Benefit.”

and a wedding certificate.” With his pay and his allotment check, Mrs. Christian received \$212 a month.¹⁵²

War threatened to disrupt the stability of the American family in countless ways beyond the draft and women entering the workforce. In-migration brought men, single women, and families into communities without adequate housing, community facilities, and schools to support them. Women, particularly middle-class women, were pressured to work, and potentially a generation of children would lack firm parental guidance. The survival of the family represented the home front battle as equally as challenging as the foreign battleground. Reflecting on the social disorder inherent in war, social scientist Ray Baber identified the family’s health as essential to the health of a nation and the responsibility of government. Baber argued the government depended upon the home and family to raise their children to ensure the perpetuation of our democracy. He wrote, “The family is such an integral part of our whole social system that it cannot hope to remain immune from the changes brought by war. Just as political power, highly centralized in time of emergency, is not wholly diffused after the crisis is past, so also the attitudes and habits clustering about marriage and family life, which are altered so visibly under the emotional tensions and abnormal situations of war, can never slip back into exactly the same grooves as before.”¹⁵³ Baber’s reflection on war—working mothers and soldier fathers—and its cost to the home front reflected the inevitability that American society would never return to its prewar situation. With the Republican Mother entering the work force and the loss of a father’s leadership in the home raising his children, American society would never be the same as prewar society.

¹⁵² “Has Ulcers, Wife, 11 Children but He Was Drafted Anyway,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, January 4, 1943.

¹⁵³ Ray E. Baber, “Marriage and the Family After the War,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 29, no. 1 (September 1943): 164.

To preserve the Democratic Family, Congressmen had struggled to prevent the father draft and only passed the bill as a last resort. Despite all efforts to preserve fathers as a protected group, the father draft was necessary, and the government sought to protect families from the loss of their breadwinner. However, the draft threatened but did not pose the ultimate threat to the stability of the home. Social change accelerated as the need for war workers accelerated and the government reluctantly turned to the only remaining source of workers. The next chapter covers the controversial recruitment of women, especially mothers, into the workforce that became necessary to achieve the high level of war production required for victory.

CHAPTER 3: “OPENING PANDORA’S BOX: A WOMAN’S PLACE IN WAR IS ALMOST EVERYWHERE”

Women’s wartime employment threatened traditional gendered expectations, a woman’s place in the home. Although challenged since the early twentieth century, this expectation remained firmly entrenched in the social fabric until World War II. Mrs. “C” was one of more than 12 million women who went to work as men marched off to war, doing jobs previously viewed as ‘men’s work.’”¹ “C” worked as a crossing tender, manually operating railroad gates. She was proud of her contribution to the war. She revealed a touch of feminist pride, commenting, “I am the first of my sex on the System to protect a railroad crossing by the use of hand-operated gates.”² “C” also revealed her maternal side as she proudly talked of her nine-year-old daughter Betty who asked if she could “dry the dishes, and by helping me, do her part in helping the war industry.”³ Mrs. “C”’s participation in the war—in the workplace and the home—illustrates a dilemma that federal officials faced in maintaining the balance between winning the war and the postwar return to traditional values.

Entering the war mobilized Americans to fight on three fronts: European, Pacific, and home. Victory depended on rallying all Americans to pull together and commit to military service, work, or volunteerism. On the one hand, the government recognized women were the only available reserve of workers; conversely, they believed that women’s work in their homes raising children was invaluable and irreplaceable.

¹ “Women’s Radio War Program Guide,” September 1943, Box 6: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes 1943-1944, ‘Wo-Wr,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

² “Women’s Radio War Program Guide,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

³ “Women’s Radio War Program Guide,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Although challenged since the 1920s, the dominant stereotype of the middle-class woman defined her as a wife and homemaker, dependent upon her husband for financial support, whose most significant contribution to society was caring for her home, children, and husband. No husband expected their wife to disrupt their home life, such as taking a war job, without his approval. Even in the face of increasing pressures for married women to enter the workforce, men such as Walter V. Marquis commented, “I never let my wife work, and I know she is a far sweeter woman than many women who have been coarsened by having to get out in the business world. I say, let’s keep the women out of industry and out of the war.”⁴ Suggesting that a woman could do heavy work in factories or civilian jobs traditionally held by males such as grocery clerks meant she would be stepping outside her comfort zone and into the unknown, a place where her husband had no control.

This chapter highlights the nation’s growing dependency upon womanpower to “man” factories in order to win the war. After great efforts to protect the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family, the federal government needed to find the right message to convince women to take war jobs for the duration of the war. This led to a series of localized experiments with various recruitment programs, including proposed national service legislation, government-directed recruitment drives, and advertising campaigns. It also highlights black women’s desire to find wartime work and the barriers that limited their opportunities, inside and outside Jim Crow states. Mary Anderson, head of the Women’s Bureau equated women moving into war industries as “the Achilles heel of our labor supply.”⁵ The struggle at home necessitated a delicate balance between a democracy where wartime needs threatened to undermine long-

⁴ Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and Status of Women During World War Two*, (Westport, Conn. Greenwood Press, 1981), 24.

⁵ “Urgent Need for Better Training Program for Women Workers,” June 6, 1941, Box 209: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Training’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

standing gendered values to ensure an adequate supply of workers. The use of forceful measures threatened to undermine the very democracy the nation was fighting to preserve.

Most Americans aspired to and adhered to a set of informal gendered expectations for husband and wife. This unwritten contractual arrangement strictly defined social roles, placing men in the role of the breadwinner and spokesman for the family. Women's place was the hearth and home, a vital force overseeing the needs of members of the family and managing a smoothly running household. In wartime, the lines became blurred and many feared women's new independence and earning power might jeopardize their postwar willingness to return home and care for their families. Recruiting women to take war jobs outside the home threatened to open Pandora's box, and if opened, could the old regime be reestablished in the postwar?

When the draft reduced the number trained men necessary to meet production, industrial experts urged employers to start training women. Management engineer H. G. Crockett predicted that industrial production would need to double over the next two years. He called upon industry to expand opportunities for women: "It is doubtful whether there are sufficient men, however, to provide for forty-hour shifts for the country's potential war plant, if we are basing our plans on a long war . . . women can be trained in all the key manufacturing centers and be ready when needed. . . . If the organized training of new workers and supervisors is not begun promptly, the country will inevitably be faced with the problem of conscripting workers along the lines of Great Britain's present policy."⁶ Women would be America's front-line soldiers, essential to war production. However, job opportunities for women in war plants remained elusive during the early months of 1942. *The Woman Worker* contended, "while the number of war jobs increased, working women lost jobs — called 'priorities unemployment'—as plants producing consumer

⁶ J. G. Forest, "Doubling of Jobs in War Plants With Women Taking Part Is Seen," *New York Times*, December 28, 1941.

products converted to war production.”⁷ After conversion, male workers took the newly created positions.⁸

As the labor situation grew more serious, war industries gradually acknowledged the need to employ women, specifically white women. Don Lescohire, an industrial consultant for the Labor Supply Committee of Region VI, wrote Mary Anderson, head of the Women’s Bureau, for advice regarding hiring women from diverse groups: “A large number of employers are still thinking of labor supply in terms of the kinds of labor which they have been accustomed to employ in the past and are unwilling to take women, negroes, handicapped workers, and older workers.”⁹ He dismissed the widespread expectation that women could not perform men’s work in an industrial setting. Lescohire cited a study completed by Sarah Southall, the personnel director of International Harvester, who had recently completed an analysis of every job in twenty industrial plants and women’s ability to do the same work as a man. Southall reported, “There were relatively few jobs that women could not do.”¹⁰ Lescohier commented that most employers preferred Selective Service revisions to protect their industrial workers from the draft over hiring women. Since that appeared unlikely, Lescohier recommended local officials institute training programs for women in anticipation of industrial needs.¹¹

⁷ “Women Workers,” 3.

⁸ A report entitled “Women of the United States and the War,” prepared for the Federal Security Agency (FSA) in April 1942, by Marguerite Zapoleon, reviewed the scope of employment opportunities available for women. Her report found only a marginal increase in women participating in industrial training and that programs for women continued to focus solely on jobs within the traditional sphere of women’s role in society—” projects concerned with child care, nutrition, and attendants in clinics hospitals and other institutions.” Margarite W. Zapoleon, “Women of the United States and the War,” April 1942, Box 208: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Speeches – Suggester Standards’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹ “Letter to Miss Anderson from D. H. Davenport, Excerpt from the January 1942 report of Professor Don D. Lescohier Industrial Consultant for the Bureau of Statistics, Madison, Wisconsin (Region VI),” February 20, 1942, Box 20: “Office of the Director 1918-1948, Government, ‘Labor Dept – ATL-BLS’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰ Sarah Southall held the position of industrial relations specialist at International Harvester and known for promoting equal employment opportunities for African Americans. “Letter to Miss Anderson From D. H. Davenport,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹¹ “Letter to Miss Anderson From D. H. Davenport,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Uncertain as to the number of women needed for war work, Congress debated the necessity for national registration legislation to create a database of women willing to take war jobs. Representative Joseph Clark Baldwin (R-NY), an advocate for women's rights, proposed an amendment to the Selective Service Act to permit the national "registration of women between the ages of 18 and 65. . . listing their training, occupations, and capabilities."¹² He argued that registering women would provide "a picture of the woman-power available for use in industry."¹³ Baldwin reassured the public that registration was not a draft; it simply meant some form of compulsory work outside the home in a civilian job. Baldwin's bill died in the House although the idea of conscripting women would resurface during the war, most significantly the Austin-Wadsworth Bill in 1943 that never passed.¹⁴

As Mary Anderson predicted, the need for women to enter the workforce came suddenly and the lack of trained women threatened a production crisis. The *Woman Worker* reported women's opportunities for war work increasingly caused local manufacturers and city officials to turn to local women's groups to organize registration drives, in hopes these drives would generate lists of women willing to work and identify specific skills they possessed that would be useful to employers when needed. Cities in Oregon, Connecticut, Alabama, Michigan, Ohio, and Washington conducted localized registration drives.¹⁵ Localized drives by women's clubs proved inefficient and labor-intensive—requiring hand tabulation of thousands of enrollment cards—and the results were discouraging. Localized recruitment campaigns fell out of favor as their results were not worth the time, energy, and cost. The July 1942 *Social Security Bulletin* blamed the

¹² "Baldwin Has Bill to Register Women," *New York Times*, February 17, 1942.

¹³ Baldwin stated he would wait to introduce a national service bill until Congress had finished considering legislation regarding Women's Auxiliary Army. "Baldwin Has Bill to Register Women."

¹⁴ Pregnant women and those with children under the age of eighteen would be excluded. National Service legislation in World War II, Congress first entertained a national service law for women in 1941, and it continued to be debated for the duration of the war, however, Congress never passed it.

¹⁵ Eleanor Ferguson Straub, "Government Policy Toward Civilian Women During World War II" (PhD diss., Emory University, Atlanta, 1973), 106-7.

limited number of training programs for women on local employers' failures to relax their restrictions on hiring women: "With several million unemployed workers and no widespread labor shortage as yet, it will be some time before women are employed on a large scale everywhere."¹⁶ However, as long as able breadwinners were available, employers refused to hire women. Competition for labor was fierce as local defense industries continued to pirate men with specific skills from neighboring factories, and skilled men job-hopped from their current employer to new ones willing to pay higher wages. It seemed ironic that employers competed for trained and untrained men but refused to hire women trained in government programs. The *Bulletin* made no mention of job opportunities for black women or married women with children.

By August 1942, Detroit, Michigan, and other industrial cities began experiencing severe labor shortages that slowed war production, initiating the first federal experiments in recruiting. Since locally generated recruitment efforts produced poor results and were discredited, government authorities agreed the problem required Federal oversight and direct intervention in private industry. The War Manpower Commission prepared a carefully planned national recruitment campaign under federal oversight as the solution, choosing Detroit as the proving ground.

The city of Detroit struggled with critical labor shortages preventing war industries from meeting deadlines. The War Production Board chose Ernest Kanzler as regional director, who projected the need to hire eighty thousand women between August and November. The board directed an enrollment drive, soliciting local women; "preliminary results indicated that out of 300,000 participants, 180,000 had indicated a desire to accept factory work."¹⁷ The War

¹⁶ "Employment of Women in War Production," 1942, *Social Security Bulletin* 5, no.7, Reports and Analysis Division, Bureau of Employment Security, <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v5n7/v5n7p4.pdf>, 15.

¹⁷ Straub, "Government Policy Toward Civilian Women," 108.

Production Board forced local employers to expand their recruitment efforts to include white women and African American men and women.

In light of the pressure migrants put on cities with war plants the War Manpower Commission stressed hiring local residents, forcing employers to turn to the local female population. Past director of the United States Employment Service (USES) John Corson authored the book *Manpower for Victory* on the nation's manpower needs. He argued it would take a major "sales job" to bring women out of their homes and "neglect" their household duties and childcare responsibilities. He argued, "Women . . . must be induced to change their customary life pattern of school, a few years of work, marriage and children. Some must remain in jobs, others must go to work."¹⁸ A myriad of problems stood in the way of utilizing women in war jobs: persuading women to take jobs, convincing employers and unions to accept them in factories, convincing the community and plants to accommodate the needs of working wives and mothers, and convincing women to keep their jobs until the war was over. Regional director Ernest Kanzler assembled leading manufacturers and pressured them to "act on their own," threatening if they did not, "the Army and Navy will come in and direct you how to run your business."¹⁹ Kanzler warned federal officials would assume control over hiring, even transferring workers from one factory to another if the city did not resolve its employment problem.

Kanzler called for a survey of women in Detroit and surrounding counties to determine how many were available for armament work.²⁰ The War Production Board, in conjunction with USES, employers, unions, and women's clubs, solicited communities surrounding Detroit by mail to determine local women's availability for various types of work.²¹ Recognizing the

¹⁸ Straub, "Government Policy," 103.

¹⁹ Straub, "Government Policy," 107.

²⁰ David Wilkie, "Kanzler Forecasts Big Enrollment of Women Workers in Detroit Area," *Indianapolis Star*, August 2, 1942.

²¹ "Kanzler Forecasts Big Enrollment."

difficult sales job it would take to create a reservoir of women workers, “Kanzler and the USES included questions asking married women with children whether they would accept work if nursery school care is provided for the youngsters.”²² Federally supervised enrollment efforts drew a positive response from women in the city and surrounding counties.²³ Newspapers hyped the results of a successful recruitment drive commenting, “*IT’S A MAN’S WAR* no longer!”²⁴ Out of 180,000 women expressing a desire to work, USES reported that 11,000 women registered and applied for jobs.²⁵

Despite continuing racial tensions in Detroit, black women increasingly found jobs although not equal employment opportunities. Black women in southern states experienced codified racial discrimination and segregation. In addition, when it came to hiring, black women faced a “double whammy”—black and female. The percentage of black women holding production jobs increased from 6.5 percent before the war to 18 percent during the war, while the proportion of black women working in domestic service “declined from 59.9 percent of all Black women in the workforce to 44.6 percent,” leaving many upper- and middle-class women without the domestic help upon which they had grown dependent.²⁶

Yielding to the pressure for national registration for homeland service, the President ordered a national registration day for men between the ages of 45 and 65, scheduled for April 27, 1942. In response to pressure for a national women’s registration day, the President “declined to say what would be done with the women” and no date was set for a similar registration in the

²² “Kanzler Forecasts Big Enrollment.”

²³ Straub, “Government Policy,” 109.

²⁴ Diane Briggs, “Women Power in War,” *Chicago Defender*, September 26, 1942.

²⁵ Straub, “Government Policy Toward Civilian Women,” 111-12.

²⁶ “Letter to Cecile H. Scott from Mary Anderson,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

future.²⁷ In response, Eleanor Roosevelt addressed the issue in a radio broadcast, lamenting, “I do regret . . . that women are not being registered at the same time as men. . . . I think it would save time if we registered women now and analyzed their capabilities and decided in advance where they could be used, if they are needed and as the need arises.”²⁸ Writing in *The Nation*, journalist Maxwell Stewart praised General Hershey’s call for national service legislation and patriotic duty including women in war production. Stewart reported that “out of the 5 million people employed in war industries at the beginning of this year, only about 500,000 were women. . . . At least a million, and probably more, of this year’s war jobs will have to be filled by women who are not now looking for work and have no intention of going into a war factory.”²⁹ Stewart urged communities to increase the number of Office of Civilian Defense offices where women could volunteer for community services or register for jobs with the USES. Stewart highlighted the role Republican Mothers played during the American Revolution as an example for present-day women, stating, “Under the shades of Betsy Ross and Molly Pitcher, the plan is to have women march to the registration places to rededicate Independence Day by offering their service in the ‘war of survival.’”³⁰ By referencing the wartime service of heroic Republican Mothers in the American Revolution, Stewart implied that women would participate in the war voluntarily, even without a registration drive. The failure to hold a national registration day for women increased pressure to enlist women for war work through individual registration campaigns.

²⁷ The President did propose drafting women as nurses in his 1945 State of the Union Address. “FDR Considering Registration of 42,058,000 Women for War Jobs,” *Greenville News*, April 11, 1942; “F.R. Considers Plan to Register Women Between 18 and 65,” *Camden Morning Post*, April 11, 1942.

²⁸ “Eleanor Roosevelt on ‘Enemy Aliens’ and Women in War Work.” January 11, 1942, <https://apmreports.org/episode/2014/11/04/eleanor-roosevelt-on-enemy-aliens-and-women-in-war-work#:~:text=1%feels20quite%0certain%20that,ways%0as%20England%20has%20done>, accessed, January 13, 2023.

²⁹ Maxwell Stewart, “Shall We Draft Women,” *The Nation*, April 25, 1942, 485.

³⁰ Stewart, “Shall We Draft Women,” 483.

Employers reluctantly began hiring white women; however, black working-class women could not find war jobs.³¹ As the draft deepened and increasing numbers of men left for military service, war jobs promised freedom from housekeeping and opened the opportunity for black women to get higher-paying skilled war jobs. Like efforts on the part of the Congress of Industrial Organizations to unionize and elevate the respectability of black maids during the 1920s and 1930s, black women's employment opportunities for war work failed to increase substantially. Despite the establishment of the Fair Employment Practices Committee, black women who trained for skilled jobs in defense work failed to get hired.

Black newspapers reported on discrimination against trained black women seeking jobs in war plants. The *Pittsburgh Courier* wrote, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sent forty trained black women to Sperry Rand Corporation on Long Island to apply for jobs. The women sat and watched white women get interviewed and hired. When they finally spoke to an interviewer, he informed them there were no more jobs available.³² Black women such as Louise Thomas and Hiawatha Clifton had completed government training programs but could not find skilled jobs. The front page of the *Detroit Tribune* reported that when Miss Louise Thomas—who had completed one hundred and twenty hours of training and had job experience as a riveter—and two other trained African American women applied for jobs at the Ford Bomber plant, not one got a job. Thomas complained she had spent hours and sacrificed a great deal to get defense training and while a white woman with the

³¹ Nina Banks' blog entry on the Economic Policy Institute's website makes an interesting observation regarding black women serving as surrogate mothers for white women. It states, "black women have been the most likely of all women to be employed in the low-wage women's jobs that involve cooking, cleaning, and caregiving even though this work is associated with mothering more broadly. Black women's labor market history reveals deep-seated race and gender discrimination." Economic Policy Institute: Working Economics blog," accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.epi.org/blog/black-womens-labor-market-history-reveals-deep-seated-race-and-gender-discrimination/#:~:text=Black%20women's%20main%20jobs%20historically,women%20in%20domestic%20service%20work>.

³² "War Plant Turns Down Negro Girls," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 22, 1942.

same credentials could walk into the Ford Willow Run plant and get a riveting job, she could not. She concluded, "It is time for those in authority to get behind the issues and help get a square deal for Negro women in defense industry. We too are Americans."³³ Likewise, Hiawatha Clifton, a trained lathe operator with job experience, was unable to secure a new job after the company she worked for closed due to a shortage of raw materials. She concluded, "I believe that my trouble in finding work (is) only because I am a Negro. I keep hearing stories of how white girls with no training at all are getting jobs without any trouble, while people like myself with almost 700 hours of training at government expense are walking the streets."³⁴ Black women also took their complaints to the Federal Employment Commission, while others wrote personal letters to the President. After applying repeatedly at the Ford plant for two years, Mrs. William E. Mumford wrote President Roosevelt charging it was "because of her race" she did not get a job. "Every time they tell me the same thing, 'We aren't hiring today,' but they do hire white girls."³⁵ Reporters laid the blame on the Fair Employment Practices Committee's (FEPC) failure to enforce the President's order and penalize factories that failed to hire black women.

In the fall of 1942, the shortage of workers continued to plague production, but "only one out of five of the married women [had] yet gone to work."³⁶ The War Manpower Commission issued the "Policy on Recruitment, Training, and Employment of Women Workers," warning industry and unions not to impose any barriers to women entering employment and that women

³³ "White Instructor Protests School Board's Race Bias," *The Detroit Tribune*, October 24, 1942; *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92063852/1942-10-24/ed-1/seq-1/>.

³⁴ Marguerite Brown, "Because of My Race: Gender, Race, and Black Women Workers in Detroit During World War II" (MS thesis, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1994), 57-58, ProQuest Dissertation Publishing, <https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/2491861485/E8A5EEDB272C4240PQ/1?accountid=7090>.

³⁵ Brown, "Because of My Race," 57.

³⁶ Hadley Cantril and Mildred Strunk, *Public Opinion, 1935-1946: Under the Editorial Direction of Hadley Cantril*, Mildred Strunk (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 1045.

were to be hired on an “equal basis” with men.³⁷ While the War Manpower Commission called for the expansion of job opportunities for women in war production and essential civilian services, it continued to stress that “normal family life should be preserved and maintained to the maximum extent consistent with all-out production,” and that efforts “to secure the employment of women with young children be deferred until all other sources of local labor supply have been exhausted, in order that established family life will not be unnecessarily disrupted.”³⁸ Results from the Office of Public Opinion Research a poll demonstrated that both men and women agreed that married women without children should work in war industries. However, when questioned whether married women with children should take jobs, more than half of the respondents answered no.³⁹ After studying the negative impact migration had on defense areas, John Abbott (D-CA), head of the House Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration (a.k.a. the Toland Committee), advocated hiring local women to fill war jobs. General Louis Hershey, director of the Selective Service (SS), warned Americans, “Eventually we are going to be driven to some sort of allotment of manpower. . . . Every country at war has total mobilization.

The War Manpower Commission chose Baltimore, Maryland, as the next trial balloon for recruiting women. Baltimore was a major production center located on the east coast with shipyards that produced the Liberty ships and Glenn L. Martin, a manufacturer of military aircraft and its supporting industries. Baltimore faced serious housing issues as large numbers of unemployed men, often accompanied by wives and children, migrated from rural areas to cities looking for war jobs and some place to live. The *Jackson Sun* reported, “In the past year and a

³⁷ “Policy on Recruitment, Training and Employment of Women Workers,” October 17, 1942, Box 32: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, General Records, 1942-1945, ‘Woman Power,’ Entry 126”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

³⁸ “Policy on Recruitment, Training and Employment of Women Workers,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

³⁹ Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 1045.

half . . . More than seventy thousand workers have thus been brought into the area, creating untold problems of housing and transportation.”⁴⁰ The city’s infrastructure could not support the large numbers of migrants leaving economically depressed areas, particularly Tennessee and Kentucky, seeking employment. Hiring local women was the only solution to stop in-migration. In hopes of creating a model program for use nationally in labor-tight areas, the Office of War Information set out to attract large numbers of local women and stem the tide of in-migration.

In preparation for the Baltimore recruitment campaign the Office of War Information gathered intelligence to determine the most formidable barriers to recruitment including “the attitudes and habits of the women themselves and the members of their families.”⁴¹ The local womanpower committee disagreed, pointing out the drive would not “get enough recruits unless men changed their minds about their wives and daughters working.”⁴² The survey’s chief finding indicated men’s protective attitudes toward their wives and sweethearts and the concerns over their children as the most serious impediment to recruitment. In an effort to change attitudes, the Office of War Information launched a “massive educational program” before the enrollment campaign.

The campaign began in September 1942, with hopes of registering twenty thousand women by January 1.⁴³ Office of War Information volunteers canvassed the city recruiting. Although volunteers found at least one interested woman, recruiters frequently heard women point to family responsibilities preventing them from working outside the home and cited the need to discuss it in a “family conclave,” a desire that everyone in the household “would be

⁴⁰ Peter Edson, “With Edson In Washington,” *Jackson Sun*, August 26, 1942.

⁴¹ “Intelligence Report 66,” March 12, 1943, Box 2: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of the Director, Records of Raymond Rubicon, 1942, ‘MA-OI,’ Entry 127”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴² “Intelligence Report 66,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴³ “Women Sought for War Work,” *Baltimore Sun*, September 26, 1942.

happy,” or deemed it a “collective decision” between husband and wife.⁴⁴ Baltimore housewives refused to take war jobs and remained committed to raising their children and caring for their husbands.

To dispel fears that factory work was too heavy, dirty, or strenuous for women, the War Manpower Commission opened a community employment office in the downtown shopping area. USES installed “typical machines used for light work’ in the ‘show windows.’”⁴⁵ Trained women demonstrated how to use the machines to observers, while representatives from various companies answered questions and handed out applications.⁴⁶ Several weeks into the campaign a local newspaper announced, “Baltimore Must ‘Import’ Workers Despite Big Untapped Labor Pool.” They reported the recruitment campaign had failed to convince 371,000 available workers to take 65,000 jobs.⁴⁷

The Office of War Information failed to address the issue of race which stood as a barrier to employment in Baltimore. White women raised in the Jim Crow South saw black women as “dirty, sexually available, disease ridden, and impure.”⁴⁸ When management hired African American women, white women employees refused to work in close proximity to them or share bathroom facilities, often quitting or going on strike. When the Western Electric plant refused to provide segregated restrooms, white women and sympathetic males walked out, refusing to return to work until management rectified the situation. Five plants shut down. The strike lasted three months, ending after the installation of segregated restrooms. The *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer* concluded that Baltimore’s industries had no other choice but to continue to import

⁴⁴ Joseph A. Moran, “Job Offers Taken Directly to Housewives in Homes,” *The Baltimore Sun*, October 21, 1943.

⁴⁵ S. Burton Heath, “Baltimore Must ‘Import’ Workers Despite Big Untapped Labor Pool,” *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*, November 1, 1942.

⁴⁶ “With Edson In Washington.”

⁴⁷ “Baltimore Must Import.”

⁴⁸ Megan Taylor Shockley, *We, Too, are Americans: African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 66; Karen Tucker Anderson, “Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II,” *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (1982), 86.

white workers from surrounding states.⁴⁹ Commenting on the power white women wielded over production, the War Manpower Commission reported, “whites are largely unionized and capable of organized protest” which manufacturers hoped to avoid.⁵⁰

The pecking order for employment was the same across the country. White women were the first hired in community, followed by African American males and finally black women. Blacks continued to migrate from the South to defense centers. Field representatives in the War Manpower Commission reported, “aircraft plants on both the East and West Coasts are beginning to utilize Negro women as production workers.”⁵¹ While racial discrimination remained a factor in these regions, strict codified Jim Crow law did not. At the Oregon shipyards, black males met resistance upon arrival but gradually made inroads into skilled factory jobs. However, black women who faced “dual discrimination,” both gender and racial harassment. As in other parts of the country, black women found few opportunities and when they did, they were the most menial, dirtiest, and lowest-paid jobs which white women would never be expected to take.

Black women in the shipyards fought for better paying, higher skilled jobs, filing voluminous suits with the FEPC protesting discriminatory hiring practices and limited, low paying job opportunities. The tide changed slowly. The *Pittsburg Courier* reported an increasing number of jobs went to black women in California and on the west coast as the result of agreements between federal authorities and aircraft manufacturers. In San Diego, California, Consolidated Aircraft hired forty-five Negro women,” nine of which were upgraded from custodial work in the plant, and 36 were hired for jobs in the spot welding, finishing, salvage and

⁴⁹ Anderson, “Last Hired First Fired,” 86.

⁵⁰ Anderson, “Last Hired First Fired,” 86.

⁵¹ “Aircraft Plants Using Race Women,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 5, 1942.

other departments;” other California plants followed suit including Boeing Aircraft in Seattle, Lockheed-Vega and Douglas in Burbank and Santa Monica.⁵²

Ingrained biases and Jim Crow laws impeded African American women’s opportunities for employment in southern industrial cities, but all defense industries shared discriminatory hiring practices which continued to plague recruitment and local areas’ ability to reach full employment. Seeking to understand industrialists’ attitudes and employment practices regarding the employment of women, including black women, the Women’s Bureau sent field agents to various locations in the country to evaluate the factory environment and ascertain employers’ attitudes toward women’s employment. The agents investigated factory managers’ willingness to hire women, willingness to make necessary physical accommodations, and regional attitudes toward hiring black women.

The Bureau agents sent to cities in southern states were to gather first-hand information from factory managers regarding job opportunities for black women. Women’s Bureau agent Elise Wolfe, after visiting an unnamed factory in Texarkana, Louisiana, reported that one official, Mr. Bowers, stated, “they would be employing 25 to 28% negroes;” however, he indicated African Americans holding production jobs was “unlikely.”⁵³ April 1942 She summarized the situation as, “The feeling is bitter, and it would be foolish to deny that it exists. As labor shortages become more acute, probably, there will be a change of attitude in the South.”⁵⁴ Despite the Women’s Bureau’s efforts to expand training opportunities and access to industrial and civilian jobs for African American women, reports of discriminatory hiring practices continued to mount.

⁵² “Aircraft Plants Using Race Women.”

⁵³ “Letter to Mary Anderson from Elise Wolfe,” April 4, 1942, Box 171: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Community Surveys’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁴ “Letter to Mary Anderson from Elise Wolfe,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Black businessmen and women's frustration on the failure to increase African American women's access to jobs increased. The secretary of an unnamed organization, Berenice Wiggins, wrote the Department of Labor complaining that black women in St. Louis were unable to find jobs and if they did, "only in unskilled capacities. . . . We are sure the Department of Labor is not aware of the gross discrimination practiced against the Negro women despite the President's proclamation that there should be no discrimination in the War Production Industry on account of color."⁵⁵ From Cincinnati, Ohio, Cecile H. Scott, the supervisor of "colored" employee's activities" at Wright Aeronautical Corporation contacted the Women's Bureau, asking, "What are the opportunities for 'Negroes'?"⁵⁶

As a result of Scott's inquiry, the Women's Bureau sent field agents to collect information on hiring practices, resulting in a pamphlet entitled "Employment of Negro Women on Production Jobs."⁵⁷ The pamphlet, compiled from a variety of sources including field agents' reports, the Negro Manpower Service of the War Manpower Commission, and newspapers listed jobs black women performed successfully.⁵⁸ The list indicated African American women held a wide variety of skilled jobs operating machinery, riveting, assembly, and clerical work in government-operated plants—including shipyards and arsenals. Anderson reported that twelve

⁵⁵ "Letter to The Department of Labor from Berenice Wiggins," September 21, 1942, Box 181: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Employment'": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁶ "Letter to Mary Anderson from Cecile H. Scott," September 26, 1942, Box 179: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Defense (General)'": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁷ "Letter to Cecile H. Scott from Mary Anderson," October 26, 1942, Box 179: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Defense (General)'": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁸ The Women's Bureau reported: "In only two cases is there definite information on upgrading. Consolidated Aircraft upgraded 9 Negro women from maintenance to production, and Douglas Aircraft of Santa Monica, California transferred several Negro girl production workers to clerical and stenographic jobs." "Memorandum: Employment of Negro Women on Production Jobs," October 7, 1942, Box 179: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Defense (General)'": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

civilian aircraft plants and five government-operated plants employed black women on production lines, “including inspection, assembly, and machine operations.”⁵⁹

Unsuccessful registration drives and the growing labor crisis revived congressional debate over conscripting women to for war jobs. Representative James Wadsworth (R-NY) and Senator Warren Austin (R-VT) introduced the Austin-Wadsworth Bill, also known as the National War Service Act, in January 1943. The bill stated, “that an obligation rests on every person . . . to render such personal service in aid of the war effort as he or she may be deemed best fitted to perform.”⁶⁰ Proposed national service legislation included women up to their fifty-first birthday; however, it did not include pregnant women or mothers with young children, recognizing these women were already performing a patriotic service by raising future citizens. The bill received a positive reception from labor unions, women’s clubs, and the press.

While the debate over national registration simmered in the background, Paul McNutt called for an end to localized recruitment campaigns and the development of a national womanpower campaign to be conducted in specific to areas with extreme need.⁶¹ As the draft reduced locally available male labor, McNutt redirected his efforts, encouraging defense employers to hire more women. Aware of the dismal results of early citywide recruitment efforts, McNutt announced the federal government would oversee all recruitment and conduct a national womanpower campaign, under the direction of the War Manpower Commission. McNutt specified an end to “job-hopping,” by requiring workers who had been discharged or laid off to obtain a “statement of availability” issued by their previous employer or USES before they could

⁵⁹ “Memorandum: Employment of Negro Women on Production Jobs,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁰ Benjamin H. Williams, *Emergency Management of the National Economy: Volume V, Manpower* (Washington, DC: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1954), 48.

⁶¹ Besides his job as head of the War Manpower Commission, Paul McNutt was also director of the Office of Defense Health and of Welfare Services that oversaw issues regarding wartime migration. McNutt saw local recruitment as the solution to reducing migration into defense areas, preventing health and other problems resulting from overcrowded conditions.

be hired by a different company, putting a stop to trained and highly skilled men from marketing their skills to obtain bigger paychecks in a different company.⁶² Such control over hiring put a stop to competitive practices between companies by requiring all contractors to hire workers through the United States Employment Service (USES). Originally established during the Depression to place unemployed men in jobs, USES now became a centralized, national clearinghouse for war employment which would reduce in-migration and direct all hiring efforts to local communities. Forcing job applicants to register with USES served dual purposes: it provided workers with a centralized location to apply for jobs and provided a resource for employers seeking specialized skills. McNutt also began developing a nationally directed recruitment program for civilians, especially women living in critical areas, including essential civilian jobs—laundries and food services—and war production jobs. McNutt charged the Office of War Information with generating propaganda. The agency sought to utilize every available means, including press releases, patriotic cartoons, billboards, posters, movies and newsreels, radio programming, and advertising campaigns in collaboration with the Advertising Council.⁶³

After an intensive study of military production needs and community assets, the War Manpower Commission called for a coordinated effort between the federal government, local industries, and local leaders to put an end to “hit or miss” recruitment campaigns which often failed. After completing a study of community resources—including aid for working women juggling factory shifts and housework/childcare—the Commission determined a communities ability to fill jobs and complete war contracts. Only those receiving a designation of “critical,” cities received federal permission to conduct a recruitment campaign and a “Basic Urgency” plan

⁶² “Evaluation of the Operation of Employment Stabilization Programs,” no date, Box 1: “Office of the Assistant Executive Director for Program Development, General Records of Julius J. Joseph, 1942-1943, Entry 94”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶³ Renamed the War Advertising Council.

including all materials essential to conducting an effective recruitment campaign. Before the campaigns started that fall, the conduct a media blitz to increase public awareness before “intensive recruitment” efforts started. The commission demanded local industries reserve positions for women and required communities to commit to running the campaign over an extended number of months. Although the solution depended heavily upon women’s participation in the workforce, women’s voices on planning committees were not mandatory.

In preparation for a national recruitment campaign, the War Manpower Commission also conducted a series of surveys to determine women’s availability and attitudes toward taking jobs outside the home. The results found, “Only one out of five of the married women have yet gone to work. Moreover, wives constituted the overwhelming majority of the female population, so that they represent the most abundant reserve supply of workers.”⁶⁴ Authorities agreed that for a successful recruitment campaign it was also crucial to understand women’s attitudes toward working outside their homes and within communities to develop effective media campaigns. In terms of the public’s reception of recruitment measures, the report stated that “the public overwhelmingly (71%) recognizes the need for married women without children to work in the war industry.”⁶⁵ However, most respondents rejected the idea that mothers caring for children should work outside the home and “only 14 percent believe there is any need for this group right now.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ “The Public Looks at Manpower Problems, Surveys Division, Memorandum No. 43,” January 3, 1941, Box 186: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Labor’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁵ “The Public Looks at Manpower Problems,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁶ “The Public Looks at Manpower Problems,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Mothers in the most desired age bracket often cited caring for children as their most significant hindrance to going out to work. The survey asked mothers at home if it was best to “continue to do what you’re currently doing now” and “what inconveniences or trouble do you think working might cause you.”⁶⁷ Eighty-one percent of married women, between twenty to thirty-four- years old, cared for children at home, as did seventy-seven percent of women aged 35-54 years.⁶⁸ Mothers indicated they could contribute best by continuing to do what they were currently doing; the report concluded it would be vital to provide “excellent facilities” that would match a mother’s care at home “if mothers are to be used extensively.”⁶⁹ A majority of women’s responses reflected traditional values of the Republican Mother and indicated their devotion to their families “completely overshadowed any patriotic impulse to take war jobs.”⁷⁰

Surveys also probed women’s attitudes toward essential civilian jobs. Eighty-three percent of respondents said they believed jobs such as telephone operators, laundresses, and waitresses were crucial to the war effort.⁷¹ Results indicated while educated women agreed such services were an essential part of the war effort, women who had not graduated high school women did not. Commenting on the attitudes of the latter group, the Office of War Information commented, “This evaluation may have meant they identify their home activities with what they regard as essential civilian services and possibly may be related to their unwillingness to take

⁶⁷ “The Public Looks at Manpower Problems,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁸ “The Public Looks at Manpower Problems,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁹ “The Public Looks at Manpower Problems,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁰ “The Public Looks at Manpower Problems,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷¹ “Willingness of Women to Take War Jobs,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

war jobs.”⁷² Armed with research, the War Manpower Commission prepared for a national recruitment campaign, focused strictly on labor stringent areas.

Recruitment for essential civilian jobs—waitresses, gas station attendants, and laundry workers—were the least attractive jobs, posing the greatest challenge for recruitment. Being less financially lucrative and least “glamorous” or “patriotic,” they were essential to keeping the home front fed, clothed, and on the job. However, they required little training and offered women another way to contribute to the war effort. These jobs provided the vital services that allowed other war workers to stay on the job. McNutt made it clear that it was not necessary for every woman to work in a war factory, that any civilian job which kept production high was patriotic. He estimated that it was essential for two out of three women to work in civilian jobs.⁷³ Essential jobs included stores, offices, transportation, restaurants, laundries, and childcare facilities. In many instances, women had worked in these jobs for many years and required little or no specialized training. These jobs were traditionally the most problematic to fill, offering the lowest pay, poorest working conditions, and least glamour.⁷⁴ The Office of War Information argued, “It is almost impossible under present conditions to make many of the jobs more attractive;” they “will have to be glorified as a patriotic war service if American women are to be persuaded to take them and stick to them.”⁷⁵ Manpower officials estimated that, for each woman taking a defense job, five additional women needed to fill civilian jobs.⁷⁶ McNutt issued a

⁷² The group identified as “educated” were women who graduated high school, or higher education, while the uneducated group contained all women who had not graduated high school. “Willingness of Women to Take War Jobs,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷³ “For Release in SUNDAY Papers,” January 17, 1943, Box 192: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Mobilization - Policies’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁴ “Plan for Information Program on Womanpower,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁵ “Plan for Information Program on Womanpower,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁶ “Plan for Information Program on Womanpower,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

statement highlighting the problem's seriousness, "If the home front does not run smoothly—the war will be lost."⁷⁷

The Women's Bureau also held a conference, Women in War Industries, on March 11-12, 1943, in preparation for the national recruitment drive. The Bureau saw the problem as a product of industrialists' discrimination against women in the industrial workforce and invited representatives from thirteen states experiencing tight labor conditions, including: Michigan, Connecticut, Maryland, and the District of Columbia and representatives from the War Department and other federal departments, including Labor and the Children's Bureau, to a conference. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins opened the conference, stating, "The problem has shifted from one of convincing employers to one of overcoming women's reluctance or inertia to taking wartime employment."⁷⁸ Looking forward, she acknowledged that hiring women, although problematic, would be vital to industrialists; noting how few unemployed males remained available as the father draft reduced the number of males available for jobs. Perkins reported, "Women constituted less than a quarter of our civilian force . . . about 1,300,000; that is, one million more women entered the labor force in that year than ordinarily would have entered in peacetime. From December 1941 to December 1942 . . . the total increase was 1,700,000. The increase in the number of women engaged in the war industries has been especially striking."⁷⁹ She estimated at least twelve million seven hundred and fifty thousand women in urban areas would need to fill war jobs. In keeping with the federal government's

⁷⁷ "Too Few Women Recruits," July 1943, Box 32: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of the Director, General Records 1942-1945, Entry 126": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; "An Outline of Appeals to be used on Womanpower Program," June 13, 1943, Box 6: "Records of the Information Services, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda Barnes, 1943-1944, 'Wo-Wr,' Entry 129": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁸ "Developments in the Employment of Women, Bureau of Program Requirements," May 31, 1943, Box 215: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'War Manpower Commission': Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁹ "Developments in the Employment of Women, Bureau of Program Requirements," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

desire to protect the Republican Mother and minimize collateral damage to the family, Perkins stressed nearly twelve million women with no childcare responsibilities lived in urban areas, classified as housewives with children under sixteen years old.⁸⁰ Perkins also noted the majority of women without childcare responsibilities were forty-five years old and expressed hope that prejudice against this age group could be overcome. She pointed out that the Bureau often received letters from older women without childcare responsibilities complaining that employers discriminated against them.⁸¹

In spring 1943, industrial demands spiked, male labor reserves dried up, and married women and mothers were the only untouched reservoir. The Office of War Information launched its first trial campaign to hire older women without childcare responsibilities, many of whom had husbands, sons, brothers, and nephews in the service, in hopes of relieving the employment problem. Magazines and daily newspapers featured stories praising them and their performance. Mona Gardner's article in the *Ladies Home Journal*, "Only Grandmothers Need Apply," pointed out that older women, potentially three million of them, could serve the country by taking jobs. She wrote, "here in America 'the cult of youth has amounted to worship,' and now, with labor shortages, the 'No one over 40 wanted,' signs have come down . . . The new conception of age never asks, 'How old are you?' but 'What can you do?'"⁸² She debunked myths that women over

⁸⁰ "Report of Conference on Women in War Industries," April 1943, Box 37: "Office Files of the Director 1918-1948, Historical Files (1940-1943)": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸¹ "Report of Conference on Women in War Industries," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸² The use of the term teenager became a new term distinguishing a distinctive stage of life for older children in the early half of the twentieth century with the passage of child labor laws and compulsory education laws. Viviana Zelizer in *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, writes, "By the 1930s, lower-class children joined their middle-class counterparts in a new nonproductive world of childhood, a world in which the sanctity and emotional value of a child made child labor taboo" leading to the increased "sentimentalization of the childhood." Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, Mona Gardner, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, (Princeton: Princeton, New Jersey) 1985; Mona Gardner, "Only Grandmothers Need Apply," *Ladies Home Journal* 60, no. 6 (June 1943), 25.

forty years old were slow to learn, slow on the job, more likely to be ill, susceptible to disease and accidents, opposed to learning new skills, or worked too slowly.

At the urging of the Office of War Information, publications carried stories praising grandmothers' work in factories. A news article described Leona McKeam and Carrie Park working in the railroad yards in San Francisco and Josephine Willerton at Continental Oil Company in Fort Worth as competent workers and patriots working to end the war and bring husbands home. The article extolled, "Everywhere wives, mothers, sisters, sweethearts . . . even grandma and Aunt Molly . . . are expending their energy in industries hit hard when [Johnny] went to war."⁸³ As part of the effort to encourage employers to hire older women, the Office of War Information prepared a fact sheet, "The Older Woman Can Do the Job." It described the work that forty-six older women did at a North Carolina shipyard, "practically all are in production and are doing a good job."⁸⁴ One of the more novel approaches to selling the public on war work was the use of billboards such as the one pictured below, "Grandma's got her gun." The billboard stated, "Let's all Work—Not Wait for Victory."⁸⁵ The advertisement hyped hiring capable, older women with fewer family responsibilities.

⁸³ "Women Fill Shoes of Departed Conoco Men," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 28, 1943.

⁸⁴ "The Older Woman Can Do the Job," July 22, 1944, Box 33: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of the Director, General Records 1942-1945, Entry 126": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁵ "Grandma's Got Her Gun," undated, Box 32: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of the Director, General Records 1942-1945, Entry 126": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.



Figure 7: “Grandma’s Got Her Gun”⁸⁶

A rapidly growing organization, War Working Grandmothers of America, founded in Philadelphia, celebrated the older war working woman. The association spread to cities such as Detroit and Fort Worth with three thousand members by February 1943. The president, Mrs. Darelle Shirley, stated, “The modern Grandmother is convincing evidence of the steadily decreasing or at least stationary age of American women. They bear witness that there is no age limit to usefulness, activity, or keen interest in world affairs.”⁸⁷ The *St. Louis Post Dispatch* carried a story of fifty-eight-year-old Flora Kaldian, a great-grandmother working as a custodian at the Tap and Die Corporation in Greenfield, Massachusetts. It noted that she was the third generation of women in her family to embark on war work.⁸⁸ Pictured in the *Chattanooga Times*,

⁸⁶ “Grandma’s Got Her Gun,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁷ “The Modern Grandmother is Convincing Evidence that Women Refuse to Grow Old,” *Patterson News*, February 5, 1943.

⁸⁸ “Great-Grandmother in War Work,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 10, 1943.

the byline under Beulah Wade's picture, announced that she passed her examination at her local USES office and would start training as an air mechanic.⁸⁹ Newspapers across the nation also touted the story of Wade, a thirty-seven-year-old with a one-year-old granddaughter, illustrating the point that grandmother did not mean old.

Recruitment efforts by the federal government remained plagued by mixed messages, from abroad and at home, influencing women's decisions about taking a war job. Swift victories in North Africa and Sicily fueled optimism the war might be a brief conflict; however, as the Army pressed north through Italy it became apparent the nation faced a long war. Registration drives also experienced sporadic layoffs in high production areas as factories fulfilled contracts, retooled to meet new product specifications, or waited for the delivery of raw materials, all which resulted in mixed messages which complicated recruitment efforts. Frequent shutdowns and layoffs left many women skeptical there was a shortage of workers. Government officials sought to explain these ups and downs, the Women's Bureau reported, "The recent shift in emphasis from tanks to aircraft meant that workers in the tank factories were laid off and could not immediately be shifted around to fit in elsewhere."⁹⁰ Aside from the current feeling that "the war is in the bag' . . . women applying for jobs in some industries had been turned down," undermining the calls for women to turn their lives upside down.⁹¹ War Manpower Commission officials recognized the reason why women quit defense and civilian jobs was they did not believe they were urgently needed.

Despite these temporary disturbances, campaign preparations continued unabated. The *New York Times* reported that at least one million women had to enter the work force in the next

⁸⁹ "Grandma Seeks War Work," *Chattanooga Times*, December 9, 1943.

⁹⁰ "Plan for Information Program on Womanpower," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹¹ Eleanor Darnton, "Women Must Take Million More Jobs," *New York Times*, September 3, 1943.

six months.⁹² The Office of War Information interviewed a cross-section of 1,099 women which revealed a significant disparity between the responses correlated with the women's level of education. Seventy five percent of the women polled responded they were "unwilling to take a full-time job, seventeen percent "willing," nine "would depend," and one percent could not decide.⁹³ Overall seventy-nine percent of all women between the ages of twenty-one to thirty-nine indicated they were "needed at home."⁹⁴ Forty-one percent of the women over forty-years-old cited family responsibilities as the reason for remaining at home.⁹⁵ While home responsibilities continued to top the list, younger married women specified childcare responsibilities: "I have two small youngsters and have a husband; I think women should stay home to take care of them."⁹⁶ Women also expressed concerns about their health, listing physical disabilities or poor health prevented them from working in war plants.

The national campaign kicked off in the fall of 1943. The Office of War Information solicited one hundred magazines to use the front and back covers of their September issues and articles inside to draw attention to the campaign.⁹⁷ The *Saturday Evening Post* enlisted Norman Rockwell to create a cover for its Labor Day issue. The cover of the September issue of the *Post* below, pictured a "Liberty Girl,"—dressed in red, white, and blue—wearing a welder's visor on her head and burdened with a variety of tools: farm implements, a railroad lantern, pipe wrench,

⁹² Darnton, "Women Must Take Million More Jobs."

⁹³ "Willingness of Women to Take War Jobs," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹⁴ "Willingness of Women to Take War Jobs," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹⁵ "Willingness of Women to Take War Jobs," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹⁶ "Willingness of Women to Take War Jobs," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹⁷ "Plan for Information Program on Womanpower," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

oilcan, mop, and change dispenser. Liberty Girl illustrated the wide variety of jobs women could fill.⁹⁸



Figure 8: “Liberty Girl”⁹⁹

The September cover of *McCall's Magazine* featured a picture a woman's face as she contemplates all the possibilities available to her as a partner of men at war. The background features a variety of women's heads, each wearing one of the many hats worn by women holding a variety of jobs: Rosie's bandana, welder helmet, chef's toque, waitress's cap hat, and the various branches of military services to which women might aspire. Of particular interest is the one woman not wearing a hat and holding a smiling baby girl, indicating the magazine

⁹⁸ Norman Rockwell, “Liberty Girl,” *Saturday Evening Post*. September 4, 1943.

⁹⁹ Rockwell, “Liberty Girl.”

recognized motherhood as a war job too. Also notable is *McCall's* readers were white middle-class women; there is no image of an African American woman in the group.

Additional government sponsored activities supported the campaign. Margaret Hickey, the chairman of the Women's Advisory Committee, addressed women on national radio. Fourteen thousand theaters across the nation showed the short film entitled "Glamour Girls of 1943," and the War Advertising Council urged retailers to include patriotic messages in their advertisements, calling for women to take jobs in necessary civilian activities.¹⁰⁰ In cooperation with the Retailers War Campaign Committee, over one hundred thousand stores agreed to allow the use of their window displays. Other advertising aids included fashion shows selling women on the glamour aspect of working outside the home.¹⁰¹ Recruitment programs stressed the localized nature of the demand for workers in hopes of stemming further in-migration into defense communities¹⁰²

The War Manpower Commission played hardball with industries that failed to cooperate with the plan, putting punitive measures in place to punish industries that could not complete government contracts for priority war materiel. The commission identified one hundred cities within the thirteen regional divisions as Critical War Areas based on their failure to deliver war necessities and fill government contracts on time.¹⁰³ The War Manpower Commission rated war production cities with large war industries on their productivity, using a scale from 1 to 4: Group I identified the city as having an "acute labor shortage"; Group II as an "area of labor

¹⁰⁰ Ned Evans, "September Campaign - Women in War Work," April 22, 1943, Box: 151, "Office of War Information, NC-148, Entry E-42": Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰¹ Evans, "September Campaign - Women in War Work," Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰² Evans, "September Campaign - Women in War Work," Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰³ Melissa McEuen, "Women Gender, and World War II," accessed June 9, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.55>.

stringency”; Group III as an “area of labor shortage after six months”; and Group IV having an “adequate labor supply.”¹⁰⁴ (The term “Group” and “Category” were interchangeable).

In Texas, located in Area X, three out of six cities with war contracts failed to fulfill their contracts due to manpower issues, including the cities of Fort Worth and Dallas.¹⁰⁵ The War Manpower Commission classified the city of Dallas as Group I and Fort Worth as Group II. Cities in Group I would not be eligible for any new lucrative contracts in the future or renewals; Group II was only eligible for renewed contracts which called for no additional labor force.¹⁰⁶ Designation as Group I or II not only slowed down the nation’s supply of war materiel but labeled a city as unpatriotic. The commission ordered these cities to create local emergency committees “composed of community leaders and other influential men . . . tasked with “enlisting the whole-hearted cooperation of all community groups.”¹⁰⁷ Focusing on a single city’s womanpower campaign, Fort Worth allows for a closer look at the mechanisms put in place to recruit women during the 1943 Womanpower Campaign.

The “Women in War Jobs,” campaign started in the fall, limited to select cities with vital war industries. The Office of War Information oversaw the production and a broad spectrum of media—advertisements, posters, radio shows, pamphlets, news articles, motion pictures—to generate women’s enthusiasm for war work. In August, the government launched a full media blitz “designed to soften-up the public so that it would respond readily to the intensive

¹⁰⁴ “War Manpower Acute Labor Area Shortage Cities,” April 21, 1943, Box 4: “General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records relating to Child Care in World War II, 1943-46, Entry 38”: Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁵ Texas, Louisiana, and New Mexico made up Region X. “War Manpower Acute Labor Area Shortage Cities,” Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁶ “Special manpower issue of Copy from OWI,” November 15, 1943, Box 4: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes, 1943-1944, ‘N-S,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁷ “Special manpower issue of Copy from OWI,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[recruitment] drives.”¹⁰⁸ The objective of their media blitz was of a “general educational nature explaining why more women must take jobs in many localities, why the need is localized rather than over-all, and the kinds of jobs for which women are most needed.”¹⁰⁹ In late August, the first local womanpower campaigns opened. The campaign focused on housewives, especially in cities designated as “labor shortage areas,” in hopes of convincing them to take war industry jobs or essential civilian jobs.

After softening the public with weekly features on women of all ages serving in various war jobs, the Office of War Information began their campaign with a salute to woman workers in a well-coordinated publicity plan. During the spring of 1943, the National Women in War Services Campaign ran for a month in designated communities. Employing the newly popularized scientific field of psychology, the Office of War Information attempted to “awaken women who are not already working, to the realization that eventually they, too, may have to enter the ranks of women workers, because of the wartime need.”¹¹⁰ Information centers opened near shopping districts to increase visibility and easy access to recruitment centers in cities. The newspaper described the Cape Cod Cottage in Buffalo-Niagara as “an attractive blue and white structure, tastefully decorated, located close to shopping, and designed to appeal to women who might normally resent applying at a public employment office.”¹¹¹ The “WAC Shack,” on the

¹⁰⁸ The Office of War Information, founded in 1942, functioned until September 1945. Under the direction of Elmer Davis, a journalist and newsman, the agency generated propaganda for domestic and international use. Evans, “September Campaign - Women in War Work,” Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.; “Womanpower Campaign, War Manpower Commission,” no date, Box 6” “Records of the Information Services, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda Barnes, 1943-1944, ‘Wo-Wr,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁹ “Plan for Information Program on Womanpower,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. “Letter to Philip Broughton from Ken Beirn,” April 14, 1943, Box 6” “Records of the Information Services, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda Barnes, 1943-1944, ‘Wo-Wr,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹¹¹ Adkins Covert, *Manipulating Images: World War II Mobilization of Women Through Magazine Advertising* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 68.

corner of Houston and Fourth in the heart of Fort Worth's shopping district, centralized recruitment efforts for both female military and civilian job applicants. Centers provided a comfortable environment, allowing women to explore job openings and discuss their employment issues, such as childcare facilities.¹¹²

The womanpower campaign in Fort Worth, Texas, serves as a good example of a community seeking to prevent classification in Category 1. The War Manpower Commission's area director, James R. Ellis, announced, "Fort Worth must recruit 10,000 to 11,000 workers by January 1, and, because the city is already 'scraping the bottom of the barrel' for men workers, at least 4,000 of the total must be women."¹¹³ Meeting this goal required recruiting an estimated three hundred women per week during the twenty-week campaign.¹¹⁴ The *Star-Telegram's* editor praised the government's choice to "cling to the voluntary plan of manpower mobilization rather than adopting compulsion through universal draft."¹¹⁵ Ellis continued, "Fort Worth is dangerously near a bad reputation for their poor response to the national need for more women in war production."¹¹⁶ Pointing out that the city faced a "gloomy outlook," Ellis stated that avoiding Group I classification would "require registration by 300 acceptable women workers each week for several months for the city to meet the quota of war workers."¹¹⁷ The most pressing womanpower demands were in laundries, restaurants, stores, packing plants, garment plants, textile mills, and transportation.¹¹⁸

In preparation for the womanpower campaign, the city organized an army of women to canvass neighborhoods, including community leaders, local clubwomen, and civilian defense

¹¹² "Developments in the Employment of Women," Bureau of Program Requirements, May 31, 1943, 86, Box 215, "Division of Research, Records Re: Training": War Manpower Commission – 1942, N.A.

¹¹³ "Drive for Women to Man War Jobs Is Begun Here," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 1, 1943.

¹¹⁴ "Women Labor Outlook Dark," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 3, 1943.

¹¹⁵ "Manpower Problem," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 8, 1943.

¹¹⁶ "Manpower Problem," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 8, 1943.

¹¹⁷ "Women for War Work," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 3, 1943.

¹¹⁸ "Women Labor Outlook Dark," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 3, 1943.

volunteers. The drive included African Americans, with the Negro Welfare Council canvassing black neighborhoods. Local Boy Scout troops blanketed the city with several thousand recruitment posters provided by the federal government.¹¹⁹ Aiding in the recruiting effort, Ellis announced that the city's major employers agreed to drop their previous age ceiling on hiring women employees—which was forty-three to forty-five-years old—and hire women based on “an applicant's physical ability and skill to do the work specified.”¹²⁰

The recruitment drive took on a martial air. On October 19, 1943, the “blitz” started. An “army” of well-to-do club women gathered to start the campaign, mimicking a military foray, complete with a general, colonels, majors, captains, lieutenants, and foot soldiers to distribute information and recruit as many as three hundred women per week.¹²¹ Mustering her troops, “General” Ella Marie Mansfield, issued their orders and reminded them that women with children under fourteen years old should not be pressured to go to work. At sundown, the “majors” returned and reported the results of their “housing-womanpower- survey.”¹²² Women volunteers canvassed their assigned geographic areas for several weeks. They rang doorbells, distributed job information, answered homemakers' and mothers' questions regarding balancing home responsibilities and work, and noted women's willingness to complete a job application at the local USES office.

Local newspapers kept the campaign at the forefront, noting its success rate by printing weekly results in a table called “Womanpower Statistics.” After five hundred home visits during the first week, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported eighteen to twenty women willing to do part-time work, thirty willing to take wartime jobs, and numerous older women expressing a

¹¹⁹ “Manpower Drive Posters Expected Here Soon for City-Wide Drive,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 16, 1943; Stanley Gunn, “Womanpower Drive Head Has Other Irons in the Fire,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 22, 1943.

¹²⁰ “More Women Taking Jobs,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 10, 1943.

¹²¹ “House to House Survey Starts,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 10, 1943.

¹²² “House to House Survey Starts.”

willingness to care for children. The article also informed women that they did not need to wait for a visit and urged them to fill out the coupon at the bottom of the article and mail it to the Office of Civilian Defense. The campaign failed to reach the goal of attracting three hundred women per week. However, after the first week of December, enough women in Fort Worth had entered the workforce to secure Group II status, and the city was no longer in danger of losing its war contracts; however, it was not enough to advance to Group III, making it impossible for Fort Worth to receive new, more lucrative war contracts. Considering the complexity of Fort Worth's campaign, even a well-designed campaign was not sufficient to convince women steeped in tradition to forego their primary role within the home as housekeeper and mother.

The timing for the Women in War Campaign was problematic from the start, coinciding with the beginning of the father draft which threatened to remove the breadwinner from the home. Confusion and concerns over married men's new status created a wave of questions, fueling uncertainty as to the stability of the family if the breadwinner was called up. Some husbands would not allow their wives to take jobs, fearing they would be drafted if their wives went to work. In Fort Worth, Alma Herndon, manager of a local USES office, received a letter that said, "Do you want to know the real reason why the women of Fort Worth aren't going to work like they've been asked to do? The husbands will not allow it, for fear they will be drafted if their wives go to work. If that is not true, give some publicity to the fact and you will get your 300 women per week," signed "One of the Wives."¹²³ In response, the Texas State Selective Service headquarters reassured worried husbands that "draft boards have instructions not to pay attention to a wife's occupation."¹²⁴

¹²³ "Wives Stop Worrying—Husband's Draft Status Will Not Change if you Work," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 7, 1943.

¹²⁴ "Wives Stop Worrying."

It also became evident that local communities needed to reach more deeply into their womanpower reserves, in particular, patriotic, well-to-do clubwomen with idle time on their hands. Strictly canvassing middle and lower-class housewives to leave their homes for a war job was a poor choice. Most committee members agreed: “The approach has been psychologically wrong. . . . Women are a class-conscious group, and the woman who has to work resents being prodded into action by the woman who does not have to” and suggested recruiting “should be done by paid volunteers.”¹²⁵ The manager of the Womanpower Program of the Office of War Information’s Office of Program Coordination, Mary Brewster White, addressed the lack of affluent women’s active participation in the workforce. Speaking in New York City to members of the Fashion Group, she “slashed away at ‘**any** able-bodied women without the complete responsibility of small children, who are loafing,” and pointed out “**any** woman who continues to practice leisure as an art is helping the ‘wrong team.’”¹²⁶ White acknowledged no difference in women’s social and economic status as she called for their active participation in war work. In addition, the committee agreed recruiting mothers to work meant “supplementary community adjustments in the form of child-care centers and other community facilities should be provided” to encourage mothers to take jobs and give them peace of mind.¹²⁷ George Clark, a syndicated cartoonist, highlighted the economic and class divide between women. Clark’s cartoon, “The Neighbors,” illustrates this divide between a well-dressed, manicured recruiter and a working-class mother and homemaker with two young children in the cartoon below. Clark depicts a young mother hanging her laundry, with her young children demanding her attention while listening to a clubwoman urging her to take a war job. The young woman comments that caring

¹²⁵ “WMC-WAC Minutes of the Third Meeting,” October 28, 1942, Box 215: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘War Manpower Commission’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD

¹²⁶ My emphasis. “OWI Aide Berates Women of Leisure,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1943.

¹²⁷ “Womanpower Committee During World War II: United States and British Experience,” *Women’s Bureau Bulletin*, No. 244, (Washington, GPO 1953), 10.

for her young children prevents her from war work of any kind. As she tells the recruiter, “Oh, there’s no way out of it! I can’t even join the army until the kids are 18.”¹²⁸ Mothers, with children too young to go to school, remained one of the few valid excuses for women to refuse to take war jobs.



Figure 9: “Oh, There’s No Way Out of it!”¹²⁹

The ideal of the Republican Mother continued to be revered and women with children were doing their patriotic duty raising the next generation. Historically the public accepted that women with children too young to go to school needed their mothers at home, reluctantly

¹²⁸ George Clark, “Oh, There’s no Way Out of It!,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 26, 1943.

¹²⁹ “Oh! There’s No Way out of it!”.

accepting lower-class women's need to work outside the home due to poverty, widowhood, divorce, abandonment, or immorality. Although the government frowned on mothers working, it turned a blind eye to educated upper-middle and upper-class women taking jobs. An occasional news article highlighted a middle-class wife and mother like Mrs. Cook, a mother and doctor's wife, turning out factory casings. She commented, "Why it's no harder than housework . . . and it's ever so satisfying to know that I, personally, have a hand in making vital parts for those airplanes our boys are flying and fighting in."¹³⁰ Upper- and middle-class women's decisions about going out to work centered on fears of the potential loss of social status. They feared that taking a job—other than volunteer work—might be construed as their husbands' failure to support the family and their lifestyle.

With the declaration of war, upper- and-middle class women rushed to don uniforms and volunteer for prestigious defense positions in the American Red Cross, the American Women's Voluntary Service, and the United States Citizens Defense Corps.¹³¹ Sociologist Adkins Covert argues the government recognized upper-class women's belief that a factory war job "would damage their social standing. . . . eliminat[ing] any chance to effectively mobilize this group of women in all but volunteer activities."¹³² In order to accomplish this, Hazel Howard, of the Women's Unit of the Office of War Information's News Bureau, urged, "special efforts needed to be undertaken to breakdown the resistance of middle and upper-class women to take jobs, including a lack of 'financial incentive for working and worry lest one's social status will suffer.'"¹³³ Frustrated with upper-class women's refusal to roll up their sleeves and go to work bubbled up, even America's Allies dependent on American planes, ships, and weapons criticized

¹³⁰ "Mother, Doctor's Wife, Aids Turning Out Factory Casings," *Dallas Morning News*, March 19, 1943.

¹³¹ "Women War Workers Needed, Fact Sheet No.191," January 1944, Box 6, "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Program Division, Office Files of John F. Kinerk, 1943-1944, 'U - Z,' Entry 136": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹³² Covert, *Manipulating Images*, 69.

¹³³ Covert, *Manipulating Images*, 68.

American women's low commitment to fighting the war, expressed discontent over their complacency, and judged them lacking for not working in whatever capacity necessary to win the war.

In response to elite women's lack of support for home defense, *The New York Times* arranged a forum, appropriately themed "You Are Still Needed," in October 1943. Raymond Daniell, head of the London Bureau of the *Times*, opened the conference with a warning that Americans had grown "complacent" about the war since Allied victories in Sicily and Italy, calling those victories only a "prelude to the destruction of Germany's armed forces."¹³⁴ He praised the English and German women who, after a night of bombing, returned to their factories the next day to continue producing war materiel. In contrast, American women just bought "another war bond."¹³⁵ A variety of speakers condemned privileged American women's relative lack of effort in war production and support for the troops compared to women in countries under siege. Virginia Gildersleeve, a Dean from Barnard College and recently returned from England, derided upper- and middle-class American women's failure to take up war jobs compared to the commitment of English women doing "dull and prosaic jobs" day after day while surrounded by devastation.¹³⁶ She praised Britain's universal conscription where "the duke's daughter and the garbage man's daughter work side by side."¹³⁷ Gildersleeve called American women "spoiled" and commented, "Many older women are loath here to give up their bridge games and that many younger women, husky and able, instead of serving in any of the women's auxiliary forces, are 'getting away' with serving a few hours a week in canteen duty."¹³⁸

¹³⁴ "Our Complacency On War Is Decried," *New York Times*, October 8, 1943.

¹³⁵ "Our Complacency On War."

¹³⁶ "Our Complacency On War."

¹³⁷ "Our Complacency On War."

¹³⁸ "Our Complacency On War."

Commenting on the recruitment of homemakers into the workforce, Howard noted that these women's upbringing focused on "superficial attributes such as beauty, fancy clothes, 'oomph,' 'it,' and so on," which only prepared them to put "forward those assets most likely to capture and hold the 'job'" of marriage, wife, and homemaker.¹³⁹ However, once a woman married, homemaking became a career choice, and women who had prepared for it all their lives took pride in managing their own homes and schedules, answering only to their husbands. In addition, maid service was getting more difficult to find as African Americans, immigrants, and poor white women found jobs, albeit low-paying ones, yet paying more than housework.

The Office of War Information continued to employ a variety of methods to recruit upper and middle-class women; one was implanting guilt. The advertisement below, Figure 10, published in September 1943 issue of *Life Magazine*, delivered a message meant to stir women from their lethargy: "Will it take a BOMB to break up the afternoon bridge game?"¹⁴⁰ The advertisement pictures a group of well-manicured women enjoying an afternoon card game.¹⁴¹ The accompanying story featured a distracted Helen Williams who arrived late for bridge club. After placing an opening bid of "hearts," she apologized and told the other women she couldn't focus on the game. Helen related a story about stopping to help Ralph—a young boy too short to reach the mail slot—trying to mail a letter to his serviceman father. When Helen questioned Ralph about the address on the envelope, "M..I..S..S...I..N....," the child replied, "It's Pop's new address; I heard Mom say it this morning."¹⁴² When she told her son everyone must do all they can to speed the end of the war, the boy asked, "What do you do in the war?" Stopping the card

¹³⁹ Susan Brownell Anthony II, *Out of the Kitchen—Into the War: Women's Winning Role in the Nation's Drama* (New York: Stephen Daye, Inc., 1943), 221.

¹⁴⁰ "Will it take a BOMB to break up the afternoon bridge game?" *Life Magazine* 15, no. 2 (1943), 85.

¹⁴¹ "Will it take a BOMB," 85.

¹⁴² "Information Service, #1 – One Hundred and Thirty Million Hearts, no date, Box 32: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, General Records, 1942-1945, 'Woman Power,' Entry 126": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

game, Helen addressed them, “What do I do for the war? I play bridge. But not anymore. I can make my bid to really do something. There’s a United States Employment Service Office around the corner. You’ll excuse me; I’m going there now.”¹⁴³ The advertisement, designed to encourage well-off women to take jobs, laid guilt on women who continued to enjoy leisure activities while war work called.

¹⁴³ “Will it take a BOMB;” “Information Service #1,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.



**Will it take a BOMB to break up
the afternoon bridge game?**

Must bullets whine and the sirens shriek before all American women realize that the time is here. The time for them to get out and drive a truck, load a freight car, carry a waitress's tray, work in a day nursery, operate an elevator?

It isn't pleasant, not! But neither is war. And the war *won't* be won unless our men abroad, *fighting*, are backed up by our women at home, *working*.

Read the want ads in your home paper to see what war jobs there are for women in your area, then register at your local

U.S. Employment Service. There are paying jobs in many areas with training for the inexperienced. Get out and work 4 hours, 8 hours, 10 hours if you can...but work... and stick to it till the war is won.

The idle woman will be a very lonely soul this year!

* * *

WHATEVER WAR WORK you do, may we ask one thing more. Rayon is important to military and economic warfare. So that it may continue to serve you at home as well, we ask you to buy carefully, and to conserve "according to the directions on the tag!"



A "Gee Glass" dress that will help you in your woman quest for more pay and experience. Made of "Empire", a fabric of Tube Certified Quality Rayon. In black only...with buttons and tiny gold buttons. Size 8 to 12, model 21. The Tube Certified Quality label is the sure success that the fabric has been tested, and is certified to be satisfactory as to strength, color and durability for normal use with the Garment Co., Inc., 207 Grand Avenue, Kansas City, Mo.



Prepared in cooperation with the War Advertising Council and the U. S. E. by TUBE CERTIFIED CORPORATION, New York

Figure 10: "Will It Take A Bomb To Break Up The Afternoon Bridge Game?"¹⁴⁴

The Office of War Information continued its efforts to reach out to upper-class women with prepared speeches—meant “to be given by women to women”—to address women’s clubs, using images they were familiar with. One such speech imagined a conversation between four

¹⁴⁴ “Will it take a BOMB;” “Information Service #1,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

women playing a round of golf when one woman suggested to the others that it seemed their patriotic duty to take a war job. “Within 48 hours all four of them were enrolled in a training course and at work as mechanic helpers in carburetor, motor tune-up, and ignition work at the camp.”¹⁴⁵ Such speeches praised women who shunned social barriers and patriotically took war jobs without bowing to perceived social expectations.

Radio stories highlighted affluent women who took manufacturing jobs. When the manager of a plant discovered that one of his new assemblers was the wife of the assistant to the president of a large local concern, she explained that her son was a corporal, and the thought of him in service made her eager to enter war work herself. “My son’s outfit might be sent overseas at any time, and his life may depend on just such implements of war as I will be helping to make.”¹⁴⁶ The script closed with a patriotic appeal: “It’s a women’s war now. All women—as all men—are all in it all the way. We must think in terms of full-time work, carrying along our volunteer work as sidelines.”¹⁴⁷ Advertisements such as these informed women that despite their social standing they were essential to the outcome of the war. The Office of War Information also recognized the importance women placed on what their neighbors thought. To counter that belief they produced the brochure “Women and the War” which advised, “Eventually the neighbors are going to think it very strange if you are not working . . . any strong, able-bodied woman who is not completely occupied with a job and a home—is going to be considered a ‘slacker’ just as much as the man who avoids the draft.”¹⁴⁸ The Office of War Information

¹⁴⁵ “Women and the War, Speech on Recruitment,” Box 4: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes, 1943-1944, ‘N-S,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁴⁶ “Women and the War, Speech on Recruitment,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁴⁷ “Women and the War, Speech on Recruitment,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁴⁸ “Office Memorandum to Verda Barnes from Lillian Derow,” July 27, 1943, Box 6: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes 1943-1944, ‘Wo-Wr,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

advised women that their husbands would feel pride in them forsaking leisure activities for patriotic efforts, contributions to the nation's success on the battlefield, and efforts to protect their homes and country.

Middle- and upper-class women's failure to take jobs became a frequent target for cartoonists. In the cartoon below, Clark illustrates two well-dressed women with brochures in hand, taking to the streets to recruit other women to take war jobs. Walking her poodle, one woman places the blame on her husband's ridicule for her failure to take a job. "I don't feel that I'm doing nearly enough, but when I decide to go out and get behind a plow, my husband just laughs at me!"¹⁴⁹ Clark's cartoon illustrates the superficial concerns that might keep affluent women from taking war jobs, such as what their neighbors or acquaintances might think.



Figure 11: "I don't Feel Like I'm Doing Nearly Enough."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Clark, "I Don't Think I'm Doing Nearly Enough." *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 3, 1943.

¹⁵⁰ Clark, "I Don't feel like I'm Doing Nearly Enough."

In a second cartoon, Clark addresses a patriotic women's concerns over her appearance and possible judgment by a peer regarding her social status by highlighting a war worker meeting a well-dressed acquaintance and apologizing profusely for her appearance. "Oh, dear! I was AFRAID I'd meet someone I knew if I came downtown! I must look a fright without any makeup on my face!"¹⁵¹ The worker's comment reflects fear of losing social status in the eyes of women in their class if they took a war job.



Figure 12: "O Dear! I Was Afraid I'd Meet Someone I Knew If I Came Downtown! I Must Look A Fright Without Any Makeup On My Face!"¹⁵²

At the opposite end of the socio-economic spectrum were black women who desired war jobs, but local prejudice and discrimination limited their access. With the start of the war, many

¹⁵¹ Clark, "Oh Dear!" *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 11, 1944.

¹⁵² Clark, "Oh Dear!"

African American women left their jobs in private homes to find higher paying war jobs. The *Chicago Defender* wrote that many domestics in Portsmouth, Virginia left their jobs in other women's homes to find war work themselves or "served notices on their white employers that they had married Navy men and would 'rest for a while.'" ¹⁵³ Husbands who secured jobs in the Navy Yard, for example, were "making good money." ¹⁵⁴ By October 1942, the domestic worker situation took on crisis proportions. The New York Commissioner of the State Department of Labor, Frieda Miller, reported, "With only 4,00 domestic workers registered for jobs with [USES] here, as compared with 8,000 a year ago. . . sleep-in workers became nonexistent." ¹⁵⁵ The same situation existed across the country.

Frank Beck's cartoon, "No, I'm not busy Mabel." Figure 13, pictured below, illustrates the allure war work had for underpaid domestic workers. Leaving an unhappy child in the bath, the maid chats with her friend on the phone: "No I'm not busy Mabel. The Madam is out on her Red Cross job. You what? You've got a job in a munitions factory? You make fifty cents an hour? Swell . . . Have you given Mrs. Jones your notice? You didn't? . . . You start in tomorrow? Listen dearie, find out if you can get me a job, too?" ¹⁵⁶ After years of subjugation working in white women's homes and raising their children, Beck's cartoon illustrates the appeal of a war job for a nanny with low pay and long hours. Definite hours and higher paying war jobs attracted many black women to leave private employment.

¹⁵³ "Domestic Help Shortage Hits Portsmouth," *The Chicago Defender*, June 5, 1941.

¹⁵⁴ "Domestic Help Shortage."

¹⁵⁵ "Sleep-in" refers to domestics who resided at their place of employment, "Shortage Acute in Domestic Help," *New York Times*, October 21, 1942.

¹⁵⁶ Frank Beck, All in a Lifetime: The Forgotten Man, "No, I'm Not Busy Mabel." *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 13, 1942.



Figure 13: “No I’m Not Busy Mabel”¹⁵⁷

During the early years of the war rumors of maids unionizing threatened Southern women’s status quo. Starting in South Carolina, rumors spread across the South regarding the establishment of Eleanor Clubs, quasi-unions sanctioned by the First Lady, to stop the exploitation of maids. According to Sociologist Howard Odum, these rumors were a product of the reconstructed South’s “historical and psychological backgrounds, a part of the caste-sex conflict.”¹⁵⁸ These rumors took various forms, ranging from purposefully violating a white women’s personal spaces, such as bathing in the mistresses bathtub; demanding their employer address them by as Miss or Mrs.; walking in the front door instead of the back door; or turning the table on their employer when asked to do the laundry by responding that they “would be glad

¹⁵⁷ “All In a Lifetime: The Forgotten Man.”

¹⁵⁸ Howard W. Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race: Challenge to American Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1943), 67.

to pay the white women to wash her clothes,” and issuing the threat that every white woman would be working in their own kitchens by Christmas.¹⁵⁹ While these threats created quite a stir, investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation proved them unfounded.

Efforts at lifting up the status of black women in domestic jobs had begun in the 1920s. Groups such as the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), Women’s Trade Union League, and Women’s Bureau worked to elevate the status of black domestics and improve their earning power.¹⁶⁰ When debating the creation of a social security system, wealthy Southern Democrats, who controlled Congress, refused to consider any form of social protection which would aid minorities, including blacks, unwed mothers, and migrant agricultural workers. As a result of Congress’s refusal to recognize domestics as entitled to the same economic guarantees such as unemployment insurance or Social Security benefits available to industrial workers, the Congress of Industrial Organizations quickened its efforts to unionize domestic workers. Historian Alana Erikson Coble asserts, “[A]nother consideration was Southern legislators’ fear that a federal program that provided income to blacks would disrupt both the wage and racial structures of the South.”¹⁶¹ Southern Congressmen blocked the extension of any form of social welfare to African American women, relegating them to low-wage, exploitive jobs as agricultural laborers and domestic servants.¹⁶²

In the effort to unionize domestic workers, Mrs. Jean C. Brown, formerly of the Women’s Bureau and the National Board of the YWCA, took the lead. Representatives from Local 1283, a union established for domestic workers by the Congress of Industrial Organizations in Baltimore, Maryland, attended the rally held in Washington D. C. to launch the

¹⁵⁹ Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race*,” 69-76.

¹⁶⁰ Alana Erikson Coble, *Cleaning Up: The Transformation of Domestic Service in Twentieth Century New York City*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 99.

¹⁶¹ *Cleaning Up*, 99.

¹⁶² Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 5.

new local union. Brown highlighted the Baltimore Local's achievements: "standards of eight hours a day, 48 hours a week and no Sunday work for its union members which now number 300."¹⁶³ She continued, "requests are coming in so fast to the union's employment bureau that they are having difficulty filling jobs" and "predicted that this same situation would hold true for Washington where there is already a tight situation as far as domestic help is concerned."¹⁶⁴ On a separate occasion, the *Fort Worth Mind*, a local African American newspaper, announced Mrs. M. O. Breaux of Fort Worth, Texas, called a meeting to secure better working conditions for domestic workers.¹⁶⁵ Breaux stated, "in many instances women are hired to cook but on reporting on the job are requested to work as washer woman, maid, and to do general housework, with no addition in wages."¹⁶⁶ She argued the minimum wage for domestics was seven dollars a week out of which she paid one dollar traveling to and from work. Breaux asked religious groups and club members in the community to reach out and "bring out the problem of domestics to every nook and corner in order to secure a "representative attendance" at the meeting.¹⁶⁷ Although there is no follow-up article available, Mrs. Breaux's effort demonstrates efforts to address black women's grievances were ongoing at the local level.

Although the early years of the war brought a diminished number of domestics in Dallas/Fort Worth homes according to the Women's Bureau, "The actual number of Negro domestic workers increased slightly between 1940 and 1944, the number rising by about 50,000, but this addition was not sufficient to offset the decline of 400,000 among white domestic

¹⁶³ "Domestic Workers Get First Lady's Greeting," *The Chicago Defender*, December 12, 1942.

¹⁶⁴ "Domestic Workers."

¹⁶⁵ The *Fort Worth Mind* was a weekly newspaper published by the Southwestern Negro Press between 1933 and 1984. The collection is incomplete.

¹⁶⁶ "Mrs. M. O. Breaux Calls Meeting of Domestic Workers," *The Fort Worth Mind*, April 13, 1943, 4.

¹⁶⁷ "Mrs. M. O. Breaux Calls."

employees.”¹⁶⁸ The fall of 1942 witnessed more black women leaving their mistresses’ homes in hopes of securing higher paying jobs, but the majority took menial jobs left by white women in laundries and clerical positions as defense industries refused to hire black females.

While the government recognized that women who chose not to take war jobs were exercising their democratic rights, national registration was the next logical step to filling war jobs. Once again, proposals to pass a national labor draft arose. The Austin-Wadsworth National Service Bill to draft both men and women drew criticism as to whether using the tactics of totalitarian states was consistent with democratic principles to draft anyone, male or female, for civilian jobs on which a corporation made a profit.”¹⁶⁹ With the proposal for a universal draft on the table, newspaper articles sought to increase public awareness of how fascist nations exploited their women to ensure victory.

The media blitz continued as the Office of War Information provided a steady supply of stories for use in pamphlets, daily newspapers, and monthly women’s magazines highlighting women’s slave-like position in Axis nations and their deteriorating family life. In hopes of firing up patriotism, the nation’s newspapers and magazines stressed how American women’s freedom to choose their wartime service was not universal; women in Axis nations did not have a choice.

¹⁶⁸ “Negro Women War Workers, Bulletin 205,” April 6, 1945, Box 169: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘A-B’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁶⁹ “On Registering Women,” *Independent Woman* 21 (May 1942), 145; Doris Weatherford, *American Women During World War II: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2010). 30. According to Charles Evans Hughes, Supreme Court Justice, the government’s power to conscript women or call for national registration in wartime was constitutional. In 1917, Hughes stated “[t]he power to wage war is the power to wage war successfully.” Hughes argued that the expansion of war powers in war wartime was necessary “to accommodate the ever-changing demands of national defense, justifying actions such as the internment of Japanese Americans. Barnard Baruch, chairman of the War Industries Board, conversely equated the conscription of women to slavery, writing, “As long as our present industrial organization maintains, industry is in the hands of millions of private employees. It is operated for profit to them. The employee therefor serves in private industry operating for gain. Enforced and involuntary service for a private master is and has been clearly and repeatedly defined by our Supreme Court as slavery inhibited by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.” Maxwell C. Waxman, “The Power to Wage War Successfully,” *Columbia Law Review*, 117, no. 3, 3-4/, accessed March 25, 2021, <https://columbialawreview.org/content/the-power-to-wage-war-successfully/>.

In a similar way, to stir women from complacency, shake their confidence, and make the war more personal, the Office of War Information instructed magazines and newspapers to contrast living in a democratic state to the harsh realities women faced in other warring nations.

Journalists stressed that living in a democracy should not be taken for granted, and that victory depended on every American woman's commitment. Journalists contrasted American women's enviable position in wartime, especially mothers, and their freedom—an essential component of democracy—to choose not to work, in contrast to warring nations.

News stories described the horrors of war and the deprivations that women in foreign countries experienced. In Italy, when it became necessary to “release many of the 4,000,000 men at present engaged in industry for active duty on the fighting fronts,” the government passed a decree that “placed women under civil mobilization.”¹⁷⁰ Germany, which once revered motherhood in the Nazi tradition of “Kinder, Küche, Kirche” (children, kitchen, church), now threatens women “with punishment if they don't measure up to expectations,” the antithesis of the democratic family.¹⁷¹ The German Reich established training programs and required “employers to replace males with female workers even if this replacement entailed a considerable readjustment of machinery.”¹⁷² The Nazi government warned women if “admonitions, summonses, and threats to impose punishment did not impress . . . radical measures will now have to be taken,” including “the confiscation of food ration books.”¹⁷³ In the *Woman's Home Companion*, Robert Bellaire described the Japanese government's authoritarian controls over women. In an article entitled “Slave Women of Japan,” Bellaire highlighted that Tokyo Radio asked Japanese women how they could “remain ‘still’ when thousands of

¹⁷⁰ Daniel T. Brigham, “Italy Orders Boys to Join the Army,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1943.

¹⁷¹ Sally Reston, “Women Must Get Jobs, Nazis Warn,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1943.

¹⁷² Reston, “Women Must Get Jobs.”

¹⁷³ Reston, “Women Must Get Jobs.”

American women are making ‘the hateful Flying Fortresses.’”¹⁷⁴ Bellaire pointed out that the Japanese government mobilized women in all strata to free men for battle: “More than in any other nation at war—with the single exception of Soviet Russia—the women of Japan are today carrying the main burden of fighting on the home front.”¹⁷⁵ Highlighting their subjugated status, he commented, “Although the women of Japan are expected to carry the brunt of the war on the home front, their traditional subservient position in Japanese society has not improved. . . . they have gained little public recognition.”¹⁷⁶ The agency hoped to motivate American women to take factory or civilian jobs through these releases, instilling fear or doubt that the allies could not contain the enemy without an all-out effort.

News articles praised patriotic women in allied nations and held them up as examples. Russian women serving alongside Russian men on active combat duty like Vera Tikhomirova and Lt. Liudmila Pavlichenko were featured.¹⁷⁷ Photographs accompanied the article “Women at War: Russian Women Fight Beside Men to Help Stem German Invasion,” showing Russian women in various defensive roles: sniper, ambulance driver, wireless operator, railroad station master, guerilla fighter, military surgeon and nurses, and even a female bomber pilot “who was also a devoted mother.”¹⁷⁸ Russian soldier Liudmila Pavlichenko, the heralded No. 1 sniper of the Red Army, answered reporters’ questions about her job. She commented, “The only feeling I have . . . is the satisfaction a hunter feels who has killed a beast of prey.”¹⁷⁹ Writing in the *Woman’s Home Companion*, American journalist Fannina W. Halle praised Russian women’s patriotic volunteerism: “Women in Russia are on the firing line—not because they fear their

¹⁷⁴ “Germans Japs Call on Women,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, December 5, 1943.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Bellaire, “Slave Women of Japan,” *Woman’s Home Companion* (February 1943): 29.

¹⁷⁶ Bellaire, “Slave Women of Japan,” 29.

¹⁷⁷ “Women at War: Russian Women Fight Beside Men to Help Stem German Invasion,” *Duncannon Record*, October 15, 1942.

¹⁷⁸ Fannina W. Halle, “Free Women of Russia,” *Woman’s Home Companion* (February 1943): 31.

¹⁷⁹ Joseph L. Myler, “Really Life-Saver, Says Girl Who Shot 309 Nazis,” *New York Daily News*, August 29, 1942.

masters but because they love their homes.”¹⁸⁰ Halle added, “They need no prodding or cajoling by Soviet officialdom . . . fierce patriotism drives Russian women to take over countless men’s jobs.”¹⁸¹ Halle’s comment pointed a finger at the failure of American women to embrace war jobs and make a significant contribution to the war effort.

The Office of War Information also exploited historic images of American women’s patriotism, hoping of to inspire women by juxtaposing the present to the Revolutionary War and the self-sacrificing pioneers. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* prepared a series of eighteen educational ads for syndicated newspapers entitled “America’s Leading Ladies.” These ads celebrated women’s diverse contributions to building the nation. They celebrated battlefield legends such as Molly Pitcher, spy Lydia Darrah, trailblazer Sacajawea, and pioneering missionaries Narcissa Prentiss Whitman and Eliza Spalding. They also highlighted business-savvy women such as Abigail Adams and Eliza Pinckney successfully running farms and conducting business in their husbands’ absence.¹⁸² These stories, set in troubled times, sought to inspire women to patriotic community or war service by praising women who went the extra mile in the past.

The government utilized every form of media available to convince women who had never held a job outside the home and doubted their ability to balance home and family life with factory jobs that doing so was possible and admirable. Newspaper articles, often the product of an “Advance Release” sent out by the War Manpower Commission, pointed out how essential housekeeping skills were to the war effort. Articles sought to persuade homemakers that operating simple appliances in their homes was no different than operating a machine in a factory. An article in the *Times-Herald* heralded that the “Feminine Touch Turns Out Bullet

¹⁸⁰ Halle, “Free Women of Russia,” 30.

¹⁸¹ Halle, “Free Women of Russia,” 31.

Resistant Glass.” It described the working woman’s job, making bullet-resistant glass for bombers or cruisers, was no harder than “making sandwiches in their own kitchens;” equating traditional women’s work in their kitchens to a valued skill in the factory.¹⁸³ The article concluded with how her windshield would “make a tasty dish for a Nazi fighter when he tries to put his bullets through it.”¹⁸⁴

Film joined print media in recruitment efforts appealing to women to take war jobs. Patriotic messages played before the main movie feature, such as the Ford Motor Company’s production “Women on the Warpath” where more than 40 percent of workers on the fuselage line were women. Filmmakers masterfully incorporated all the Office of War Information’s messages into a short 10 minute and 12 seconds. The narration informed women that working was a “patriotic privilege” and crossed class lines by equating women’s work on the line as “a new kind of club.”¹⁸⁵ The script incorporated family values and the return of the breadwinner; women were “building strong bodies for the planes that would carry their men into foreign skies, shield them on foreign shores.”¹⁸⁶ The film compared male jobs to work women performed in the home to factory jobs. “Here the lady of the clothesline became an expert on hydraulic line’; “Rivets are but the buttons of bombers to hold it together’; and “a Jig Saw was no puzzle to a woman who knew her sewing machine. Cutting the plexiglass for a bombardier’s enclosure was as easy as cutting Suzie’s new apron.”¹⁸⁷ It also reassured women that everyday family life

¹⁸³ Corrinne Hardesty, “Feminine Touch Turns Out Bullet Resistant Glass,” November 26, 1943, Box 200: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Occupations’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁸⁴ Hardesty, “Feminine Touch Turns Out Bullet Resistant Glass,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁸⁵ “Special manpower issue of Copy from OWI,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁸⁶ “Special manpower issue of Copy from OWI,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 4.

¹⁸⁷ “Women on the Warpath, 1943,” YouTube video, 10:21, October 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNQ9q4zsmSA>. “Women on the Warpath, 1943,” YouTube video, 10:21, October 6, 2016. Creator: Ford Motor Company Collection, ca. 1903-ca. 1954, National Archives Identifier: 93633, Local Identifier: FC-FC-4502, National Archives Catalogue: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/93633>

would be restored at the end of the war: “The girl I left behind has the job I left behind, and she can have it too, till Johnny comes marching home again,” reenforcing the fact that women in factory jobs were only temporary.¹⁸⁸

Radio also served as a popular source for news and entertainment, reaching ninety percent of American homes. It attracted an estimated 20 million women listeners a day, the “vast majority of whom were housewives.”¹⁸⁹ The National Broadcasting Company broadcast on two networks. The Blue Network delivered the news and public service messages while the Red Network emphasized music, entertainment—i.e., soap operas—and war-related propaganda. The Office of War Information provided patriotic propaganda to the Red Network, including prerecorded messages of varying lengths—five seconds, one minute, or five minutes—complete with live entertainment and interviews. The radio show “What’s Your War Job?” featured popular vocalist Kate Smith. Smith urged, “A good woman—is one who is willing to work tirelessly for the safety or future of loved ones. Well, today, your loved ones are facing a real danger—and you can do something about it.”¹⁹⁰ Smith’s call to war work, like other appeals, struck at the heart, invoking women’s fear of losing a husband, brother, or son for a lack of munitions.

Radio shows rewrote the words to familiar tunes, turning popular songs into war jingles, meant to appeal to women: “Tea for Two,” “I’ve Got Spurs That Jingle, Jangle, Jingle,” “Embraceable You,” “My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean,” and even “Mary Had a Little Lamb”:

Mary has a good war job, good war job, good war job,
Mary has a good war job, she works on [airopplanes].
She rivets on the wing one day, wing one day, wing one day,
She rivets on the wing one day, the next day on the tail.

¹⁸⁸ “Women on the Warpath, 1943.”

¹⁸⁹ Gerd Horton, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 147.

¹⁹⁰ “20 Appeals for Women War Workers,” no date, Box 4: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Program Division, Office Files of Wendell S. Gibbs, 1942-1943, ‘Transfers – Z’, Entry 140”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Mary wants to win this war, win this war, win this war,
Mary wants to win this war and win it rightaway.
Mary is a happy girl, happy girl, happy girl,
Mary is a happy girl, she helps her Uncle Sam.
Mary says to come on in, come on in, come on in,
Mary says to come on in, get work and help us win.
YOU CAN GET A GOOD WAR JOB, good war job, good war job,
You can get a good war job and do your part to win.¹⁹¹

While this lighthearted jingle might seem innocuous, “it reduced the woman doing a man’s job to her role as a mother or future mother and kept her in a submissive role serving males as she helps her Uncle Sam.”¹⁹² Adkins Covert argues that “describing adult women as ‘girls’ reflects an assumption about women’s lack of maturity and capacity for responsibility.”¹⁹³ Other jingles associated with love tore at the heartstrings, reminding women they were objects of love and affection, “He called you his SWEET EMBRACEABLE YOU. Now’s your chance to show you care for him too.”¹⁹⁴ Duty to the family also played a crucial role in messages meant to attract women to jobs. Historian Maureen Honey commented, “By working for country, sweetheart, husband, or brother, women who stepped into men’s shoes were doing so as helpmates and thus stayed within the boundaries of acceptable female behavior,” pointing out their motivation “was not money or status or job security, but patriotism and love.”¹⁹⁵

Despite all this effort, the recruiting campaign netted mediocre results. A change was in the air as awareness grew that the sentimental approach focused on women as sweethearts, wives, and mothers working to bring the men home produced limited results. Women in

¹⁹¹ “Script #3, Necessary Civilian, Mary Had A Little Lamb,” no date, Box 3: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Program Division, Office Files of Wendell S. Gibbs, 1942-1943, ‘O - Training’, Entry 140”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁹² “Script #3, Necessary Civilian” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁹³ Covert, *Manipulating Images*, 62.

¹⁹⁴ “Script #3, Necessary Civilian” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁹⁵ Maureen Honey, “The ‘Womanpower’ Campaign,” Advertising and Recruitment Propaganda during World War II,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 6, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer, 1981), 50-56, 52.

leadership positions criticized the Office of War Information for its campaign's emphasis on glamour, stressing that something so superficial was the wrong reason to ask women to upend family life and too frivolous to justify leaving children and housekeeping responsibilities for the rigors of a second job. In "Why More Women Don't go to Work," printed in the *Christian Science Monitor*, Mary Hornaday blamed Paul McNutt for the failure to attract and keep homemakers on the job, claiming he "hasn't been doing right by women."¹⁹⁶ She highlighted the inability of the War Manpower Commission to "[do] as much as it could have to make it possible for women to hold two jobs—one at home and one in the factory. . . . Most women won't be persuaded until there is [an] adaptation of working conditions to suit their domestic situations."¹⁹⁷

Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce (R-CT) concurred, blaming women's failure to take jobs to the predominance of men in charge. "To a large extent, I believe it is because the *men* who are in command of the war program, out of misplaced chivalry, bad psychology, or mere inefficiency have not made the urgency of the womanpower shortage or the nature of American women's duty sufficiently clear."¹⁹⁸ She pointed out that recruitment tools—brochures and appeals—have focused on a "glamour-cum-dough" basis.¹⁹⁹ She complained that government brochures gave made war jobs "seem incredibly glamorous and attractive. They seem to promise the woman who goes into them the sort of time she might have if she joined a community dance festival training program."²⁰⁰ She called for less glamour and more realism in recruiting, with the focus on patriotism and bringing the boys home. She expressed confidence in American women's response; "I believe that not many months would pass before few women

¹⁹⁶ Hornaday, "Why More Women Don't Go To Work."

¹⁹⁷ Hornaday, "Why More Women Don't Go to Work."

¹⁹⁸ Clare Boothe Luce, "Victory is a Woman," *Woman's Home Companion*, 34 (November 1943), 121.

¹⁹⁹ Luce, "Victory is a Woman," 121.

²⁰⁰ Luce, "Victory is a Woman," 121.

would be left in America who were not playing their part.”²⁰¹ Luce also praised the League of Women Voters for drawing attention to the lack of women in war agencies, especially those involved in recruiting women. The League’s research demonstrated the lack of women’s presence on government agencies and war-related boards. “If the government really wants to get women all-out for the war as well as the peace, it is high time that it began to put more and more able women into the bureaucratic and administrative end of things in Washington. Women can and do most effectively call women to the colors. Women can and do organize women most successfully. Women can, if they are given the chance, get the three million women still needed for victory.”²⁰²

Anna Rosenberg, director of the Office of Defense and regional director of Health and Welfare Services, supported Representative Luce’s argument that the agency’s advertisements were too superficial and failed to convince women of the situation’s seriousness.²⁰³ Philip S. Broughton, Director of Information, agreed and wrote to his assistant Verda Barnes that officials in western cities found the women on recruitment posters and pamphlets “attractive looking but do not do the job we wanted them to. Their feeling is that a prospective woman worker should look at the poster and say to herself, ‘that could be me.’ They think that by using the very glamorous type model, we partially defeat our purpose, and pointed out that the posters using men show more typical men rather than the movie hero type.”²⁰⁴ Barnes believed this

²⁰¹ Luce, “Victory is a Woman,” 121; “The Role of American Women in Wartime,” September 24, 1942, <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2018/02/22/the-role-of-american-women-in-wartime-sept-241942/>.

²⁰² Luce, “Victory is a Woman,” 121.

²⁰³ “Letter to Verda Barnes from Mr. Philip S. Broughton,” November 23, 1943, Box 5, “Records of the Information Services, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda Barnes, 1943-1944, ‘T-W,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁰⁴ “Letter to Verda Barnes from Mr. Philip S. Broughton,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

propaganda focused on the wrong thing—glamour was not a component of war work—and the focus should be on an ordinary, everyday woman they could relate to.

Critical of the government's approach to recruitment, journalist, Dorothy Parker sent a copy of her essay "Miss Brass Tacks," rejected by the *Reader's Digest*, to officials in the Office of War Information, which eventually reached Mary Brewster White's desk.²⁰⁵ Brewster White, head of the Office of War Information's womanpower campaigns, recognized the value of Parker's article which was critical of flighty women too good for a paying job and who "still have the notion that war is conducted rather like a charity bazaar, with the workers . . . giving their services for a couple of hours around cocktail time."²⁰⁶ Getting down to "brass tacks," Parker wrote, "girls and young women are needed, needed badly and needed immediately, for the steady [daily] job that must go on if our world is to go on. It cannot be put on the basis of fun."²⁰⁷ She debunked any illusions that wartime service was heroic and worthy of public gratitude, "There won't be any chic uniforms. . . . Photographers will pass you by; nobody will give you wrist-watches and service kits, there won't be any farewell parties when you set forth to war."²⁰⁸ Women on the home front, like soldiers abroad, were doing their part in fighting the war and there was no award other than winning the war; they were simply a cog in the war machine. Parker's article stirred Brewster White to action.

Brewster White wrote that she agreed the agency had failed to address women's concerns about taking jobs, writing, "I don't think we can entirely blame women for the rather terrible lack

²⁰⁵ Dorothy Parker, "Miss Brass Tacks of 1943," Box 151, "Office of War Information, NC-148, 'Admin-Women,' Entry E-42": Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁰⁶ Dorothy Parker, "Miss Brass Tacks of 1943," Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁰⁷ "Letter from Mary Brewster White to Robert R. Ferry," August 13, 1943, Box 154: "Office of War information, NC-148, Entry E-42, 'Fight Waste – Work Fight'": Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁰⁸ Dorothy Parker, "Miss Brass Tacks of 1943," Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

of cooperation and understanding to date. We haven't pulled the whole mess together. It is little wonder that our exhortations to women to turn their lives upside down fall on deaf ears."²⁰⁹

Brewster White called for a fresh approach to recruitment: "It must be lifted from the humdrum, and almost phony, patriotic appeal and given vitality, freshness, and realism. . . . recruiting is more than just calling the individual to action. It's a case of selling families, communities, and the nation at large on the necessity of women's total participation in a very tough and 'elusive' war."²¹⁰ Brewster White pointed her finger at two roadblocks to women's entrance into the work force, employers and husbands. She demanded journalists stop comparing women's work in factory to the home, stop referring to women as girls, and stop expressing surprise at women's ability to perform traditionally masculine work as extraordinary. Brewster White wrote that this type of "make-em-squirm' literature should be circulated as widely as possible," inciting women to take jobs.²¹¹ The campaign addressed issues that women faced when entering a war job. In a question-and-answer format, media addressed the need for and possible solutions to the problems associated with a wife and mother leaving her home to work outside it. Advertising took a new angle stressing the importance for women's husbands' approval and support for a working wife.

Posters produced in mid-1943, such as "What? Me in a War Job?" reflected changing attitudes. Addressing the emptiness that Dorothy Parker's socialite friend expressed, unable to

²⁰⁹ "Letter from Mary Brewster White to Robert R. Ferry," Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²¹⁰ "Letter from Mary Brewster White to Robert R. Ferry," Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 1-2. Emphasis in original.

²¹¹ In a letter, one in a chain of letters regarding Parker's article, Albert Z. Carr, assistant to the chairman of the War Production Board, identifies the *Digest's* rejection of the article as political statement. He ties it into an underlying fear of women working outside the home triggering the revitalization of feminism. Carr writes, "I have the feeling that there is something much more important to be said on the subject—and said seriously. I seem to detect a growing note of feminine opinion to the effect that there is something unwomanly about the WAACS, WAVES, and the female factory workers. This feeling of course, ties in neatly with the Nazi propaganda line that women's place is in the home. I am expressing this rather badly, but my thought is that many women who psychologically hold themselves aloof from war work or feel superior to it are unconsciously lending themselves to the Nazi propaganda machine." Letter to Robert R. Ferry from Albert Z. Carr, April 27, 1943, Box 151: "Office of War information, NC-148, Entry E-42, 'Admin – Women'": Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; McEuen, 178.

find happiness because she did not know how to help, the advertisement below features a well-coiffed woman with manicured nails pointing at herself, asking, “WHAT? ME IN A WAR JOB?”²¹² The images on the left side of the advertisement show women working civilian jobs—taxi driver, phone operator, or riveter. In simple, straightforward language, the poster implies that if women left their homes and took jobs, they could shorten the war and be “happier than you’ve ever felt because you’re *really* doing a job.”²¹³

²¹² “What Me in a War Job?” no date, Box 32: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of the Director, General Records 1942-1945, ‘Womanpower,’ Entry 126”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²¹³ “What Me in a War Job?”

W-N-A-3

**WHAT?
ME IN A
WAR JOB?**

IF YOU CAN DRIVE
A CAR, YOU CAN
DRIVE A TAXI...

"I never dreamed I'd be a cab driver, but my husband suggested that I try it. I've been driving 6 weeks now, and really like it. The man I replaced is in the service!"

I'M A RIVETER—
AND I LOVE IT...

"I never thought I'd last at first. But once I got the hang of it, I found I could keep up with the best men in the shop. The money comes in handy, too!"

I'M A PHONE
OPERATOR — I WAS
A HOUSEWIFE...

"A friend of mine told me many housewives were doing it, so I applied. The training was free and interesting. Now I'm a full-fledged war worker!"

Yes, YOU!

You probably don't need the money . . . staying home is much easier . . . but **READ THIS** — then decide!

WOULD you take a war job if you thought you could bring home a son, a father, a brother a year sooner? That's just what you may do by applying for a war job today!

The shortage of labor in this area is so acute that vital war production is threatened and necessary civilian services and businesses are seriously affected.

Taking a war job won't be easy. It means changing your life routine—perhaps getting your hands dirty, coming home pretty tired. But women—thousands of them on the job—will tell you that after a few weeks you'll feel happier than you've ever felt because you're really doing a job!

If you are over 18, in good health, and have no children under 14, you should prepare to take a war job now.

Look in today's Classified Advertising Section and see the many kinds of jobs there are. Then go to your local United States Employment Service office for your job.

U. S. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE
(Local street address and city)

QUESTION BOX

Q. Is every woman in my community going to have to work?

A. Every woman over 18 who is physically fit, and who has no children under 14, should prepare to take a war job.

* * *

Q. Just what is a "war job"?

A. A "war job" is a job in a war production plant, or a job in a necessary civilian business—such as transportation, laundry, restaurant, grocery store, school, hospital or public utility.

* * *

Q. Will my husband be drafted if I work?

A. Your taking a war job does not, in itself, affect your husband's draft status.

* * *

Q. How do I go about getting a war job?

A. Go to your local office of the UNITED STATES EMPLOYMENT SERVICE—your Government's own employment agency. Apply for your war job today!

THE MORE WOMEN AT WORK — THE SOONER WE'LL WIN

Figure 14: "What? Me In A War Job?"²¹⁴

The stability of the home and family, the bedrock of democracy, was perhaps the most significant barrier for women considering a job; therefore, making the war personal was an essential step towards bringing more women into factories and essential services. One notable, possibly insurmountable barrier remained: convincing husbands that their wives should work. The

²¹⁴ "What Me in a War Job?"

Office of War Information believed husbands to be the most potent influence behind wives' reluctance to leave their domestic duties and take jobs outside the home. Many women trained in housekeeping by their mothers and home economics classes in school believed their career was homemaking, and they took great pride in caring for their house, husband, and children. Acting as a liaison between Hollywood and the Office of War Information, Helen Runge sent a copy of Edith Stern's article "America's Pampered Husbands" to Verda Barnes with a memo attached. Runge wondered if Barnes had seen the report, asking—tongue in cheek— "what man [in the Office of War Information] will be willing to take the lead in introducing this idea?"²¹⁵

Stern's article criticized husbands' refusal to allow their wives to leave home and work for the war effort. Writing in *The Nation*, Edith Stern identified "pampered husbands" as an "unorganized but powerful pressure group."²¹⁶ She chastised them for their refusal to allow their wives to work, stating it was part of a "time-hallowed, unspoken refusal [on their part] to share in home responsibilities."²¹⁷ She chided men's unwillingness to change their attitudes toward taking a more active involvement in the household: "It is evident that men, however much they pooh-pooh housework, however loudly they proclaim, 'Women make too much fuss about it' or 'I could do it with one hand tied behind my back' are fully aware of the extent of the services rendered to them by their wives. . . . If pampered males would take on more home-making responsibilities, the American home would be not disrupted but strengthened."²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Edith Stern, "America's Pampered Husband," July 10, 1943, Box 1: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes 1943-1944, 'A-En,' Entry 129": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²¹⁶ Stern, "America's Pampered Husband," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²¹⁷ Stern, "America's Pampered Husband," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²¹⁸ Stern, "America's Pampered Husband," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Most husbands remained unconvinced that their wives should enter the workforce. Polls conducted in November 1943 asked a national cross-section of married men, “Would you be willing to have your wife take a full-time job running a machine in a war plant?” They answered: Yes, 30%, Yes if, 11%, Has one now 2%, No, 55%, and Don’t Know 2%. Those answering “Yes if” listed concerns such as the children getting proper care and their wife being physically able to handle the job.²¹⁹ Further questioning revealed that “20% of all men felt that women were not needed in war jobs, while 40% of the men in non-war jobs felt that women were not needed.”²²⁰ The Office of War Information also identified the significant points of resistance husbands had to their wives working, which included 1) fear it would change his draft status, 2) give the appearance he did not earn enough money to support his family, 3) concern over the maintenance of his household, and 4) what the neighbors might think.²²¹

The Office of War Information published the pamphlet entitled “Answers to Questions Women Ask About War Work” that specifically addressed the concerns that stopped middle- and upper-class women from choosing to take a job. The pamphlet, “HELP SELL HUSBANDS,” offered women answers to questions that their husbands might ask and advice on how to talk about the idea that they take a job. It stated, “The husband must be sold, or it will be difficult for the wife to stay on the job even if she enthusiastically enters war work herself.”²²² It assured a woman that working a war job would contribute to its security, guaranteeing “the security of your family—making certain that your own children may live their lives in a free world.”²²³ It also

²¹⁹ Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 1044.

²²⁰ “Womanpower,” no date, Box 4: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Program Division, Office Files of Wendell S. Gibbs, 1942-1943, ‘Transfers – Z’, Entry 140”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²²¹ “Womanpower,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²²² Lawrence A. Appley, “Women’s Recruitment Campaign Plan Book,” June 26, 1943, Box 4: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes, 1943-1944, ‘N-S,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²²³ Appley, “Women’s Recruitment Campaign Plan Book,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

highlighted how women's paychecks could improve their lives after the war. It also expounded on how the money she earned might not be needed to maintain her household but could be used to purchase war bonds to protect against a "rainy day" or provide for the children's college education.²²⁴ Another pamphlet, "TALK IT OVER With Your Family" seen below, Figure 15, invoked the Democratic Family, encouraging women to hold a family meeting to discuss her decision and lay out the consequences it would have on family life. Directives for the womanpower campaigns called for presenting the information to become "the basis of sensible family discussions of the problem—because it is a family problem. Only those women who make adequate arrangements for the care of their families will stick to their jobs."²²⁵

²²⁴ "Answers to Questions Women Ask About War Work," no date, Box 1: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes 1943-1944, 'A-En,' Entry 129": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²²⁵ "Womanpower," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.



TALK IT OVER *with Your Family*

YOUR DECISION to get a war job should be made after talking it over with your family.

It means that certain adjustments must be made if you are now wholly or principally responsible for the housework in your home. 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.

Literally millions of married women have proved that they can work and manage their household affairs too. It just takes careful planning and unselfish cooperation from everyone in the household. It's a small price to pay when you consider that you are protecting the security of your own family—making certain that your own children may live their lives in a free world.

The money you'll make will be a welcome addition to the family income to meet the demands of your family budget. The money you save (in War Bonds, of course) can provide for children's education—make certain there will be no "rainy days."

Figure 15: "Answers To Questions Women Ask About Work: Talk It Over With Your Family"²²⁶

²²⁶ "Answers to Questions Women Ask About War Work," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

To dispel popular misconceptions and concerns about working wives, the government prepared pamphlets such as “Should Your Wife Take a War Job?” Figure 16. Rather than condemning men for being selfish, its message put a positive spin on wives taking war jobs: “Maybe you know how badly she *is* needed and are helping her to get the *right* war job.”²²⁷ It also sought to soothe the male ego: “Chances are you’ve put off discussing the subject—have secretly hoped she wouldn’t be needed because you’re making enough to take care of your family.”²²⁸

²²⁷ “Should Your Wife Take a Job?” Poster collection, Hoover Institution & Archives, <https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/35437/should-your-wife-take-a-war-job-read-these-facts-about-how>.

²²⁸ “Should Your Wife Take a Job?”

SHOULD YOUR WIFE TAKE A WAR JOB? TAKE A WAR JOB?

THE ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS WOMEN ASK ABOUT WAR WORK



Read these facts about How Seriously Women are Needed right here in Philadelphia

HOW many times has your wife said: "I'm going to get a war job myself whenever I'm needed!"

Maybe you know how badly she is needed and are helping her to get her right war job. Chances are you've put off discussing the subject frankly—have secretly hoped she wouldn't be needed because you're making enough to take care of your family.

Well, it's only fair that you both know the facts.

Why YOU Are Needed

By the end of 1943 one-third of all the workers in the United States must be women, if we are to maintain our war production and necessary civilian activities on a level to insure victory.

Thousands of new women workers—most of them housewives—are needed right here in our home area.

Remember—an idle machine may mean a dead soldier!

Why not sit down and talk it over tonight?

If your wife is physically fit, and has no children under 14, she should be prepared to take a war job.

Naturally, with both of you working, your family income will be increased.

You can help fill the needs of your family budget—and put away enough in War Bonds to insure your children's education.

Don't Put it Off!
The time for women to get war jobs is here! So why not help your wife to get her right war job?

Many of the questions women ask are answered in the right-hand column on this page. If you have others, your local United States Employment Service Office will be glad to answer them.

U. S. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE
INSERT LOCAL STREET ADDRESS AND CITY

How to Go About Getting Your RIGHT War Job

Apply at your local United States Employment Service Office. USES is your Government's own employment agency. No fees—no favorites!

Look in the Classified Advertising Section of this newspaper to see the many kinds of jobs open now.

EVERY WOMAN WHO CAN DO THIS



CAN DO THIS VITAL WAR JOB



TRAINING IS FREE!

Some plants hire you right away and pay you while you learn. Others require training before you start to work. In either case, training is FREE! Ask about courses at your United States Employment Service Office.

Q Is every woman in my community going to have to work?

A Every woman over 14, who is physically fit and has not been prepared to take a war job.

Q Just what is a "war job"?

A A "war job" is a job in a war production plant, a service such as transportation, food supply, maintenance, grocery stores, schools, hospitals, or public buildings.

Q Why should I take a war job?

A Because there just aren't enough men to do all the work there is to be done. There are many qualified women who have been trained to do the job.

Q I've never worked in my life. Do you want me?

A Certainly, if you are prepared to take a job and stick to it. There's more energy than you think. Thousands of women who have never worked before are doing a good job.

Q Will my husband be drafted if I work?

A Your taking a job does not in itself affect your husband's draft status.

Q I don't know a thing about machinery. Can they use me?

A They can and they will. A FREE training course brings you up to speed on the job. Right away and teach you while you work. Others require training before starting to work.

Q Won't I get terribly tired?

A Of course, you may at first. You are not used to working full time. However, after some time for habit, and you'll be surprised how they don't tire you. Remember—"The greatest virtue is not the hardest!"

Q Is 45 too old to serve my country in a war job?

A It is not! Much depends upon your health, your training, your energy, and your experience. You can still work with part-time work in schools, transportation, advertising, and other essential services which your skills. One of the most important is child care.

Q How much can I expect to earn?

A Wages depend upon the job. U. S. Government policy is to pay all for equal work.

Q How many hours would I have to work?

A Most full-time jobs require 40 hours a week. Some may be able to get part-time work.

Q What kind of factory jobs do women do?

A Women run drill presses, millers, machines, lathes, and turning grinding, boring, and planing. They do welding, painting, sheet metal, inspecting—literally millions of important jobs. They also do typing, stenography, clerical work, and other important work.

Q How do I go about getting a war job?

A Go to your local office of U. S. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE. Get your name on the job list. Look in the Classified Advertising Section of this newspaper to get an idea of the kinds of jobs which are open.

THE MORE WOMEN AT WORK—THE SOONER WE'LL WIN

Figure 16: "Should Your Wife Take A War Job"²²⁹

The Kleenex cartoon in *Life Magazine*, pictured on the next two pages, Figure 17, is an example of advertising manufacturers utilized to demonstrate their support for the war and sell their products. The advertisement advised men, "It isn't a question of pride. Millions of women

²²⁹ "Should Your Wife Take a Job?"

must take jobs, or our war effort will bog down. . . . It's up to each husband to help his wife get a job.”²³⁰ In cooperation with the War Advertising Council, the advertisement supported the war effort and promoted women taking war jobs. Husbands were hard to sell on the idea since they believed respectable women did not work for money outside the home if they didn't have to.

²³⁰ “What to Tell Your Husband if He Objects to Your getting a War-Time Job, Wartime Jobs for Women” International Cellucotton Products Co., *Life*, 16, no. 7 (February 14, 1944), 13. Accessed August 14, 2018, <http://gogd.tis-labs.com/show-picture?id=1115227069>.

What to tell your husband

if he objects to your getting a war-time job



1. ANSWER: It isn't a question of pride! Millions more women *must* take jobs or our war effort will bog down! It means winning the war—saving the lives of our boys! It's up to each husband to help his wife get a job.



2. ANSWER: Just as fighters need weapons, so civilians must have restaurants, stores, laundries, buses, etc. to keep going. That's why housewives, who take vital *civilian* jobs, help speed victory just as much as girls in war plants!



3. ANSWER: A wife's job does not, in itself, affect her husband's draft status in any way. And isn't it better for you to get a *job* now... if he's to be called anyway... and have a definite plan to support yourself and your family?



4. ANSWER: Right now is the time to discuss it! Because your country needs women *at once!* Millions of them! With or without experience! Full time or part time! In war plants and in civilian jobs.



5. ANSWER: Easy! The want ads in your newspaper show the kind of jobs in *your town.* And you can get free advice at your local U. S. Employment Service Office. "*The More Women at Work—The Sooner We'll Win!*"



Published in the interest of the war effort by *Kleenex Tissues



Paper, too, has a war-time job . . . that's why there's not enough Kleenex to go around. But regardless of what others do, we are determined to maintain *Kleenex quality* in every particular, consistent with government regulations.

Figure 17: "What To Tell Your Husband If He Objects To Your Getting A War-Time Job"²³¹

The advertisement called for men to support their wives' choice to take a war job and stressed that women's war jobs were temporary, only to "help speed victory." It also stressed many essential civilian jobs were activities women did in their homes every day—cooking meals

²³¹ "What to Tell Your Husband."

and doing the laundry. The ad addressed a husband's concern over his draft status, advising him that her work would not affect it in any way. It appealed to a man's sense of responsibility for his family's financial stability, especially if the government drafted him. The advertisement asked women, "Isn't it better for you to get a *job* now . . . if he's to be called anyway . . . and have a definite plan to support yourself and your family?"²³²

The Office of War Information also addressed another likely concern, a husband's fear that their wife's job would disrupt daily life. A five-minute radio segment, "Listen Women!" featured Joe walking home with his coworker Harry. When Joe learns his friend's wife works outside the home his immediate response is, "And your house hasn't turned into a shambles?"²³³ He tells Harry he "thinks one worker in the family is enough" and of his fears that their home would be "neglected. . . . When I get home after a hard day's work, I like my wife to be there so I can have things comfortable."²³⁴ When they reach Harry's house, Harry asks Joe to come in; when they enter, Joe smells dinner cooking. Harry tells Joe that his wife "leaves my supper all ready for me . . . I wonder what it is tonight." Opening the pot, he exclaims, "Lamb stew! All I have to do is heat it up!"²³⁵ Harry explains to Joe that his wife did not work all day, so she still had time to do her housework, and he "helps out all I can."²³⁶ A common theme that cartoonists chose to comment on was "pampered" husbands feeling neglected or resentful due to their wives taking a job. Dinnertime was a frequent target for cartoonists. Ed Reed's cartoon strip, "Off the Record," pokes fun at husbands who expected a hot, home-cooked meal upon finishing a long

²³² "What to Tell Your Husband."

²³³ "Listen Women," no date, Box 4: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes, 1943-1944, 'N-S,' Entry 129": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²³⁴ "Listen Women," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²³⁵ "Listen Women," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²³⁶ "Listen Women," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

day at work and felt neglected if their wives did not fulfill their home duties while holding down a job. In the cartoon below, Figure 18, Reed portrays a woman war worker serving her husband the leftover sandwich she didn't eat for lunch rather than the savory meal she would have prepared if she remained home during the day.



Figure 18: "We're Having Leftovers Tonight"²³⁷

In the cartoon below, Figure 19, George Clark comments on the husband, dressed for office work, relaxing in his comfortable chair after his workday, while his wife cleans the house after her day working outside the home. The cartoon clearly demonstrates the division of power within the home as he complains that the noise and confusion disrupt his leisure.

²³⁷ Ed Reed, "Off the Record," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, January 16, 1943.



Figure 19: "Isn't There Any Other Way of Cleaning House?"²³⁸

In a radio interview, the chairman of a local womanpower committee, Mrs. Charles O. Rose, urged middle-class women with no important financial incentive to take civilian jobs, especially the "unimportant and unglamorous" ones.²³⁹ She argued, "Husbands simply must be made to realize that the contribution of wives to the war effort is a very real and vitally important

²³⁸ Clark, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 14, 1942.

²³⁹ "Release: Manpower Problem Confronting the Nation – re: Child Care," May 24, 1944, Box 1: "Records of Natalie Davison, Program Manager for Homefront Campaigns, 1943-1945, 'Accidents – Magazine Bureau, Entry 84': Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

thing. Few men would deliberately shirk a war-time responsibility, and they shouldn't be an obstacle to their wives. . . . particularly when the wife wants to help."²⁴⁰

Interviews conducted by historian Sherna Gluck during the oral history project "Rosie the Riveter Revisited" offers additional insight into husbands' feelings about their wives' employment. Charlcia Neuman stated, "My husband didn't like it. He was one of these men that never wanted his wife to work. He was German and raised to believe the man made the living; the woman didn't do that."²⁴¹ Beatrice Morales Clifton reported, "I was scared because I had never been among a lot of men. Actually, I had never been out on my own. Whenever I had gone anyplace, it was with my husband. . . . He didn't have very much to say, 'cause he didn't approve from the beginning."²⁴² Marie Baker stated, "I had the impression that women were tough that worked in factories, and I was scared to death, hoping nobody would hit me. . . . It didn't seem like nice people worked in factories. I don't know where I got that idea. So I was nervous about going. Because I had been so sheltered, I was a Caspar Milquetoast."²⁴³ Women living in the shadow of their husbands, especially in public places, lacked social skills and/or confidence in new unfamiliar places on their own.

Despite the government's official stance on women with children taking jobs, the lack of response from women with grown children kept the childcare debate alive. Pressures for government-sponsored nurseries increased, even though most mothers remained unconvinced of the necessity for them to work outside the home. Many women continued to hold conventional views about their role in the house despite the war. In a national cross-section of mothers with young children, only 29 percent responded "Yes" to having their children cared for in a day

²⁴⁰ "Release: Manpower Problem Confronting the Nation," Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁴¹ Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, The War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 163.

²⁴² Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited*, 209-10.

²⁴³ Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited*, 229.

nursery at no charge, while 56 percent responded No.²⁴⁴ A housewife from Detroit stated, “I think a woman’s place is in the home because of my two children. I can’t go out and take so many civilian defense courses because I haven’t anyone to leave them with, and I feel my first responsibility is with my family and holding my home together. But that is the way I think they want our nation to be.”²⁴⁵

The prospect of recruiting women into the workforce proved daunting. A postwar publication reflected that many women had little interest in going outside the home to work: “Almost half of the women employed in the war period in most of the 10 [industrial] areas had not wanted jobs the week before Pearl Harbor. Of these wartime entrants into the labor force, a little over half had been engaged in their housework, and the rest had been in school.”²⁴⁶

When the U.S. entered the war, the production of consumer products shifted to manufacturing war materiel. War called for great numbers of newly trained employees in vital war industries. In addition, civilian jobs needed large numbers of women to support war workers. Since single women took war jobs early on, the only resource available as demand increased were housewives and mothers. Early in the war localized campaigns in cities, such as Detroit, failed to generate enough womanpower, prompting Congress to debate the highly controversial idea of conscripting women to fill war jobs. The federal government, specifically the Office of War Information, planned and executed a national recruitment campaign. Under the direction of the Office of War Information recruitment campaigns employed all available media, including news articles, billboards, advertisements, magazines, and radio programming to soften the public. Following the media blitz, local communities conducted recruitment efforts.

²⁴⁴ Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 1046.

²⁴⁵ Covert, *Manipulating Images*, 77.

²⁴⁶ “Women Workers in Ten Production Areas and Their Postwar Employment Plans,” Bulletin of the Women’s Bureau Bulletin No. 209, Dept of Labor (Washington, D. C., Government Printing Office , 1946) 3, accessed April 16, 2020, https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/publications/women/b0209_dolwb_1946.pdf.

Recruiters sought white middle- and working-class women to fill war jobs and black males found employment opportunities, including grandmothers and society women. However, Black women failed to find lucrative employment, despite government contracts stipulating fair employment opportunities which allowed black women some employment opportunities, however limited. Although some black women made inroads into some skilled jobs, many industries relegated them to the dirtiest and most menial jobs. Failing to convince women to take employment the Office of War Information recognized that the glamour angle failed to convince women to turn their lives upside down and got down to “brass tacks.” Advertising shifted gears to address women’s real concerns about balancing a job, children, and home and produced more thoughtful ads, including ads to convince women that their social status would not be impacted or soften husbands’ attitudes toward a working wife. While recruitment campaigns were important women still faced new trials working in an all-male environment, keeping up with housework, especially considering the diminishing number of domestics, and how to care for their children and maintain a home while working. The war had opened Pandora’s Box threatening the very fabric which held American society together. Fears over the stability of the democratic family, the loss of the highly esteemed republican mother, and the maintenance of male dominance in the home generated a great deal of public debate. Once in the workplace women experienced more discrimination and often were targets of sexual harassment as described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: SPOILING THE IMAGE OF THE REPUBLICAN MOTHER: SEXUAL TENSIONS IN THE WORKPLACE AND SOCIETY

On November 17, 1941, the president of Stephens College in Columbus, Missouri, James Madison Wood, opened a forum at the New Rochelle Women's Club with the following words: "You should desert your homes to defend them. The women who go out of the home to participate in defense work are learning practical citizenship. . . . They will return to their homes with an appreciation of their responsibilities as citizens. If mothers learn citizenship by firsthand experience during a national emergency, they are bound to raise the citizenship-appreciation quotient among their children. In that light, the American home need not worry over the exodus of women."¹ Wood stressed the mother's all-important role in perpetuating the democratic American family, especially in wartime. He spoke directly to a problem that would plague government officials as they sought to win the war abroad while preserving the essence of American democracy—the Democratic Family—at home. Wood advocated women's patriotic service to the nation as active citizenship and necessary to instill democratic values for their children's future. Wood's words reflected confidence that women entering defense work would return to the home and perpetuate the ideal Democratic Family.

This chapter explores the multi-faceted problems generated by young women and mothers leaving their homes and children to work in the sexually charged environment of a factory and its ramifications for the stability of the family postwar. War and its demands on the home front unintentionally cultivated more independent-minded women; even those remaining in their homes caring for their children under wartime conditions became more

¹ "First Lady Appeals for Unified People," *New York Times*, November 18, 1941.

self-sufficient by necessity. More than just experiencing stories of marital discord or illicit romance in magazine articles and soap operas in the solitude of their homes, women working in war factories, essential services, or the military were exposed to temptations previously only imagined.

War threatened to rend the very fabric of society, disrupting gender identities and undermining home life. Wartime disruptions—such as taking a war job or becoming head of the household when their soldier-husband went off to fight—unintentionally provided women with new opportunities for problem-solving, individual expression, and self-discovery, including repressed sexual preferences. As tensions mounted and millions of women answered Uncle Sam’s call to service outside the home, the question loomed: “What would these women be like by the time the war was over?”² Could the ideal “Democratic Family”—father as breadwinner and wife and mother in the home—be reestablished after the war?

Radio programming, produced under the auspices of the Office of War Information, highlighted Republican Mothers, white and black, doing their patriotic duty and having a positive impact on family life. One radio interview featured an economically secure young society matron, Eva May Lippman, as “the highest kind “ of war worker.³ In an interview on the radio show “What’s Your War Job?” the host Ted Collins introduced Lippman as the wife of an executive of an important company and the mother of a seven-year-old boy, stressing her rank in the “leisure class.”⁴ By choosing Lippman to represent working

² Jane Mersky Leder, *Thanks for the Memories: Love Sex, and World War II* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 28.

³ “Women in War Work,” November 13, 1942, Box 3: “Records of the Program Division, Office Files of Lawrence Hammond, 1942-1943, ‘M,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴ Ted Collins was a show business manager, best known for managing singer Kate Smith. “Women in War Work,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

women, the Office of War Information attempted to debunk two popular notions: first, the belief only women in economic straits worked outside the home, and second, that wives and mothers could not work and keep their households running. Introducing Lippman as an elite woman who was “not working for money or any other reason except a sense of duty,” asserted women could have it all, war job, home, and family.⁵ Lippman stated her dissatisfaction with volunteer work as her sole contribution to the war. She explained, “People are happiest when they are doing something useful.”⁶ She added, “Volunteer work is good—but there you find a great many people working for diverse ends. At the shop, we are all working together with a common job and a common end.”⁷ Mrs. Lippman boasted both her husband and seven-year-old son were “terribly proud of her” and supported her choice to work.⁸ In closing, Collins reiterated the government’s stand on a mother in the home, indicating family responsibilities should not be a barrier to mothers: “Although many women with children are doing war jobs today in key production centers where they are badly needed, the War Manpower Commission believes that women with small children should not leave their houses UNLESS, as in Mrs. Lippman’s case, there is no one else available to run machines that would otherwise be idle.”⁹ The War Manpower Committee hoped that messages, such as Lippman’s commitment to producing military needs, would appeal to other women of leisure.

⁵ “Women in War Work,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶ “Women in War Work,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷ “Women in War Work,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸ “Women in War Work,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹ “Women in War Work,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Mrs. Lippman represented one cohort of war workers the nation hoped to employ, upper-middle and upper-class women who likely employed nannies or other domestic help allowing them the freedom to take a job without neglecting their homes and families. The campaign also directed radio spots to recruiting a previously overlooked group of women, black women. In an interview conducted by Fowler V. Harper, a professor at Howard University and founder of the Non-Partisan Council, interviewed Norma S. Boyd. Harper opened the interview, “A Salute to Negro Women,” stating, “With the shortage of manpower, America is calling upon womanpower.”¹⁰ Boyd responded with the question, “You say ‘womanpower.’ . . . That includes all women, doesn’t it? Colored as well as white?”¹¹ Harper replied, “Very definitely, . . . In total war we must have the help of all. Thirteen millions of our people are colored, 70 to 75% are of employable age” and “are needed to take their places in industry and the professions.”¹² Boyd pressed, “And are they filling them?,” to which Harper responded, “They are indeed. The colored women of America have accepted the challenge. . . . In precision work they demonstrate that high degree of skill needed where the slightest mistake may ruin the whole job.” He then gave a long list of jobs requiring highly specialized skills which college educated black women were qualified for. Boyd countered, “A huge number colored women workers [with] highly specialized skills as of yet are untouched.”¹³ Fowler failed to address Boyd’s charges and closed their interview with, “Our country is proud of the American women, colored and

¹⁰ Fowler Vincent Harper was a lawyer, government official, and strong advocate for civil liberties. “Newsreel Statement: Fowler V. Harper and Norma Boyd,” April 23, 1943, Box 3: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Program Division, Office: Files of Wendell S. Gibbs, 1942-1943, ‘O-Training,’ Entry 140”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹¹ “Newsreel Statement: Fowler V. Harper and Norma Boyd,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹² “Newsreel Statement: Fowler V. Harper and Norma Boyd,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹³ “Newsreel Statement: Fowler V. Harper and Norma Boyd,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

white. She knows that wiping out Hitler and all he stands for vitally affects her and everything she stands for

Another large pool of women was also untapped, mothers. Despite society's concern over mothers leaving children in others' care, the media portrayed children as proud of their working mothers. In the forementioned interview with Ted Collins, Mrs. Lippman's seven-year-old son piped in, "Gosh, you ought to see my mother in the morning. Her face is covered with smiles."¹⁴ Lippman boasted that her son was proud of her and "wants me to get him a job in a war plant too."¹⁵ In the cartoon below, cartoonist George Clark illustrated a child's point of view. Clark highlights how one mother's essential war job led to her son's newfound pride of her and popularity. In the foreground, one youngster appears to be everyone's buddy as he leads a group of friends looking for a ride on the streetcar his mother drives. Two young boys discuss the crowd ahead of them, "Oh, his mother is going to be the streetcar conductor, and they think he can get them all free rides."¹⁶

¹⁴ "Newsreel Statement: Fowler V. Harper and Norma Boyd," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁵ "Newsreel Statement: Fowler V. Harper and Norma Boyd," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁶ George Clark, "The Neighbors," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, November 14, 1942.



Figure 20: “Oh his mother is to be a streetcar conductor”¹⁷

Although the children whose mothers took war jobs may have supported some women’s decision to work, it did not alleviate most women’s concerns over holding together the home and family. Prevailing mores placed women in the home as dependent housewives and mothers and the moral backbone of the Democratic Family. Cultural changes—women’s “place,” dress, and newfound freedoms—generated fear in traditionalists who viewed these changes as the destruction of social mores in American society; however war spurred a “silent revolution” not culminated until the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁷ “The Neighbors.”

Despite government produced programming recruiting women to take war jobs, contemporary sociologists and psychologists also feared that wartime conditions would produce social changes that would demoralize the family and diminish children's prospects for happiness and individual fulfillment. Learned authorities agreed war would have a destabilizing impact on family life, not only in the short run, but potentially in long-term consequences, including permanent changes in women's commitment to homemaking and childcare. In the article entitled "The Family in a World at War," parenting expert Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg argued the family "remains inseparable from public policy."¹⁸ Gruenberg pointed out the need to address the disruptions of war, especially its impact on family life, "because whatever it is we want in the nation must first have its roots in the family," and its health is "inseparable from public policy."¹⁹ She concluded, "We have to win every battle on the home front as a condition of victory in the war."²⁰ Professor of Sociology Ivan E. McDougale of Goucher College, warned, "The wife cannot be employed in industry without deleterious effects on her family unless she can procure some sort of state or community care for children. Thus, whether the character of the American home will be changed by war does not depend so much on the will of the woman as upon whether she can secure someone else to perform her duties in her absence."²¹ Sociologist S. E. Goldstein predicted that the father's absence from the home, or the longer number of hours he spent away from home due to war employment, ultimately weakened a man's role

¹⁸ Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, "The Family –War or Peace," in *The Family In a World At War*, ed. Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1942), 8.

¹⁹ Gruenberg, "The Family–War or Peace," 20.

²⁰ Gruenberg, "The Family–War or Peace," 20.

²¹ Meredith P. Gilpatrick and Robert Eisner to George S. Pettee, "Statements of Private Thought Leaders on Women and the War," August 5, 1942, Box 191: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Mobilization-Policies'": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

as the authority figure and breadwinner threatening to turn America into a matriarchy, [and] turn their children into “sissies.”

As women “invaded” men’s spaces—the factory and army—they disrupted the status quo. Uncertainty and fear of this radical social change caused grave concerns over whether wartime employment would permanently alter women’s proper place in society. The Help Wanted advertisement below, “Women’s Place in Industry,” Figure 21, meant to calm fears that women would forsake glamour and femininity. The caption below the photograph reads, “A woman war worker need not be an ‘Amazon.’”²²

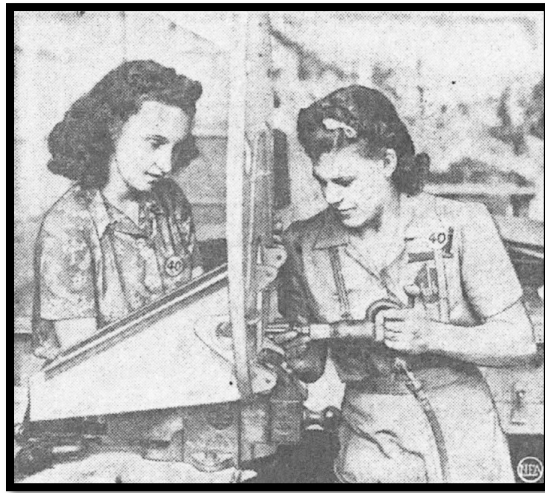


Figure 21: Eleanor Ragsdale, War Industries to Use Women As a Gigantic Labor Reserve²³

The article, accompanying the photograph, boasted that women working with a rivet gun, “symbolize the fact that in this war, the most delicately manicured hands can serve,” implying women can still enjoy their nail polish.²⁴

While makeup and polished nails caused little distraction, clothing and hair styling became problematic. Clothing and hairdos demarcated women’s social class and could be

²² Eleanor Ragsdale, “Women’s Place in Industry,” *Abilene Reporter News*, February 18, 1942.

²³ Ragsdale, “Women’s Place in Industry.”

²⁴ Ragsdale, “Women’s Place in Industry.”

distracting or a safety concern. When Sperry Gyroscope Corporation required women to wear pants, management faced an uphill battle as “respectable, middle-class women did not wear pants” and resisted wearing working-class men’s clothing. As author Stephen Patnode in “Safety Campaigns and Fashion in the World War II Factory” writes, “The seemingly innocuous difference between women in social classes working together, was in fact significant.”²⁵ Clothing and hairstyles had always separated women; “wearing a skirt in public signaled a specific social position.”²⁶ What women wore to work was an important contest between workers and Sperry managers that revolved around issues of gender and identity which would become a management nightmare in many defense firms.²⁷

Art historian Melissa Dabakis argues, “Visual representation [of women workers] played a large role in the construction of wartime femininity, a social construction rife with contradictions as it sought simultaneously to encourage and limit women’s participation in paid work.”²⁸ Dabakis points out that Norman Rockwell’s illustration of Rosie the Riveter on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* blurred lines between femininity and masculinity; depicting Rosie’s muscular arms and workingman’s clothes exposed “ruptures in gender . . . codes.”²⁹ Similarly, Dorothea Lange’s photograph, “Shipyard Worker,” Figure 22, below, challenged the “prevailing notions of femininity through the signification of body, glance, and dress. . . . Lange’s shipyard worker lack[s] signs of womanhood, thus

²⁵ Stephen R. Patnode, “Keep it Under Your Hat: Safety Campaigns and Fashion in the World War II Factory,” *The Journal of American Culture* 35, no. 3 (September 2012): 231-243, 231.

²⁶ Patnode, “Keep it Under Your Hat,” 231.

²⁷ Patnode, “Keep it Under Your Hat,” 234.

²⁸ Melissa Dabakis, “Gendered Labor: Norman Rockwell’s Rosie the Riveter and the discourses of wartime womanhood,” in *Gender and American History Since 1890*, ed. Barbara Melosh (London: Routledge, 1993), 183.

²⁹ Dabakis, “Gendered Labor,” 185.

participated in the transgressive behavior of cross-dressing.”³⁰ The term “Amazon” empowered women who questioned their femininity or declared themselves lesbians.³¹



Figure 22: Dorothea Lange, Shipyard Worker, Richmond, California”³²

In light of the ongoing public debate over women’s appropriate attire, newspaper columnists sought to quell the controversy, touting pants as a wartime necessity for working women. Columnist Lank Stir opened with the rhetorical question, “What in tarnation are all the women wearing men’s pants for?” He answered, there was a war going on and women serving in traditional men’s jobs such as factory workers, ambulance

³⁰ Dabakis, “Gendered Labor,”194.

³¹ The term Amazon was popularly known at the time. William Moulton Marsten was creator of the popular “Wonder Woman” comic book, in 1942, World War 2 popularized the term Amazon for strong, capable women.

³² Dorothea Lange, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/51684>, 1942, “Shipyard Worker, Richmond, California,” MoMA accessed September 3, 2021.

attendants, airplane spotters, and farm workers, have “gone for pants in a big way.”³³ He assured readers that when the war was over, “they’ll be entirely out of the notion of wearing ‘men’s pants.’”³⁴ Syndicate newspaper columnist and child psychologist, Dr. Gary Meyers, noted that men’s chief objection is that they “feel women are usurping a masculine privilege” and discredited the charge that women wearing slacks was a moral dilemma: “Since there is nothing either exhibitionistic or immodest in these outfits, the issue seems merely to be on expediency.”³⁵ Ruth Millett wrote in her syndicated column “We the Women” also attempted to defuse the controversy; “This is wartime and in wartime whether or not men like the idea, women at home wear the pants. . . . women are becoming the men of their families” and “the pants-wearing bug is just an outward expression of women’s new role. . . . They want women to do their work while they are gone and to assume their responsibilities.”³⁶ Millet rejected the allegorical associations attached to women wearing pants and assured men it was a passing fad and women would return to wearing skirts and dresses after the war. Despite varying opinions as to the propriety of pants, “World War II made them both a fashion statement and a necessity.”³⁷ Practicality and modesty for women doing factory work overrode social concerns over women’s equality to males in the workplace or women’s sexual preference. Women’s newfound freedom to wear pants in the male domain did blur clearly defined gendered lines between males and females, allowing lesbian women greater social freedom.

³³ Lank Stir, “To Grandpa,” *Lancaster Eagle Gazette*, October 19, 1942.

³⁴ Stir, “To Grandpa.”

³⁵ Gary C. Meyers, “Myers Favors Women With Right Slacks,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 22, 1942.

³⁶ Ruth Millett, “Women Must Wear Pants,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 11, 1943.

³⁷ Mellissa A McEuen, *Making War Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 149.

Homosexuality was rarely discussed in the print media; however, it became a front-page news story in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* concerning two women working at Consolidated Vultee Aircraft in Fort Worth, Texas. On May 12, 1943, the paper reported that John Disney was shot in his home and critically wounded by Kathleen Latham, his wife's coworker. Both women worked in the same department and shared lunches at work. Latham reached out to Bernice Disney, reading Bernice poetry she had written specifically to woo her. Believing that Bernice's husband was in the way of her having a closer relationship with his wife; Latham appeared at their residence with a .38 revolver and shot John Disney three times. He died later that night at the hospital. Viewed as having a psychiatric condition, Latham was tried and sent to an insane asylum for psychiatric treatment, the usual sentence given homosexuals at the time. The term lesbian was never used in the news stories about Latham; however, the public most likely recognized her as "gay," "queer," or "butch," generating fears of exposing Republican Mothers who went to work to alternative lifestyles other than homemaker, motherhood, and apple pie.

Wartime demands forced defense industries to lift sexist employment barriers and marriage bars imposed on women during the Depression and increase industrial opportunities for women in male dominated factories. While white women found defense jobs in war factories, black women's employment in war industries never constituted more than "6 percent of all employees in aircraft, whereas white women constituted nearly 40 percent of all aircraft workers."³⁸ Black women at work rarely appeared on recruitment posters in government campaigns or in mainstream magazines.³⁹ While photographs in government archives contain vast numbers of photographs of

³⁸ Christine Dualé, "Women Through the lens of World War II Propaganda in the United States: Discourses on White and African American Women," *Miroirs: Revue des civilisations anglophone, libe risque et ibero-americaïne*, 1 no., 2016, 4, 14-30, 25.

³⁹ Dualé, "Women Through the lens," 25.

black women on the job, however, they did not appear in government advertising and recruitment posters designed to attract middle-class housewives. Working a paid job, even janitorial duties, was not considered exceptional for an African American woman, and secured middle-class status.⁴⁰ Black women made their greatest employment gains in low skilled, often dangerous, heavily male dominated fields: foundries, shipbuilding, blast furnaces, steel mills, and munitions factories.

Nevertheless, war production brought white and black women together in a new work environment—a man’s world—where they faced similar male prejudices, although black women experienced discrimination from white females as well as from white and black males. Like white men, black men strongly believed they should be the breadwinners and head of the household and opposed women’s intrusion into the male sphere. Black males sought to keep black women from taking factory jobs, actively protesting their presence on the production line, making unsolicited comments or catcalls, and engaging in harassment, injury, or intentional efforts to slow down black women’s productivity which negatively impacted their wages.⁴¹

Although black males increasingly found employment when Federal officials intervened in labor tight areas, job discrimination remained an issue for black women.

Reporters Frank Jones and Leonard Johnson of the *Chicago Defender* wrote:

The Negro comprises 48 percent of the employees in this government defense plant. There are only two Negro women among us employed as washroom matrons, while there are approximately 800 white women employed at various jobs. There are Negro women just as qualified if not more so, than whites. But will they hire them? It seems to be the intention of said plant to let this question go unanswered. There has been a fictitious report that Negro women would be hired March 1, 1943, as yet there is no evidence of this, and eight days of March have passed.⁴²

⁴⁰ Dualé, “Women Through the lens,” 25.

⁴¹ A. G. Mezerik, “The Factory Manager Learns the Facts of Life,” *Harper’s Magazine* (September 1943), 291.

⁴² Frank Jones, Leonard Johnson, “What People Say: Negro Women Refused Defense Jobs,” *Chicago Defender*, March 27, 1943.

The *Defender* pointed out the irony that a large number of white women worked in traditional jobs, while only a miniscule number of black women were given such jobs, and if employed, continued to work in the lowest paying “housekeeping.”

Historian Karen Anderson validates Jones’s statement, reporting that “Whatever the hierarchy of preference. . . black women could always be found at the bottom.”⁴³ She states a 1943 survey by the United Auto Workers reported only 74 out of 280 establishments employing women hired black women. The “National Metal Trades Association revealed that only twenty-nine out of sixty-two plants that used women workers had black women in their employ. Moreover, most of them only used black women in janitorial positions. Even some employers willing to hire white women and black men in large numbers balked at including black women in their work forces.”⁴⁴ Anderson concludes whereas white males worried over maintaining their advantaged economic position, for white women it was a matter of maintaining their superior social standing over black women.

Seeking to improve black women’s public image, Dr. Mary Mcleod Bethune, vice president of the Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration, sought to prove black women’s work ethic was equal to white women and called upon local units to “analyze and recommend treatment of the ‘employment ills’ [in] industrial areas.”⁴⁵ Audrey McCluskey writes, Bethune “understood the godlike power that whites often held over blacks, and witnessed the power being used to deny African Americans their human rights, property

⁴³ Karen Tucker Anderson, “Last Hired First Fired: Women Workers during World War II,” *The Journal of American History*, 69, no. 1 (June 1982), 82-97, 84.

⁴⁴ Anderson, “Last Hired First Fired,” 82-97, 84.

⁴⁵ Bethune served as the director of the Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration, and leader of FDR’s unofficial ‘black’ cabinet, Assistant Director of the Women’s Army Corps. No author, “Wartime Employment Clinics Planned by National Women’s Organizations,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 6, 1941.

rights, and even their lives.”⁴⁶ Working with the National Council of Negro Women, Bethune advised black women to recognize the “challenge flung to you—to the women of our country and our race.”⁴⁷ She called upon the affiliated clubs to launch their own localized campaigns—a continuation of their “racial uplift” movement of the twenties—designed to increase black women’s access to war jobs.

Aware that most African American women were unprepared to enter industrial and government jobs, Bethune urged the national organization to hold wartime employment clinics. The National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) called upon “national organizations, churches, labor, civic, and fraternal associations . . . to cooperate . . . with the national committee in sponsoring mass meetings in local communities to celebrate the ‘Hold Your Job’ observances in every section of the country.”⁴⁸ Plans for the celebration included a variety of programs including clinics on topics germane to getting and holding a job including “health, attendance, personal appearance, behavior on the job, attitude, efficiency and union participation of workers.”⁴⁹ The event coordinators employed a variety of formats: “forums, movies with speakers, followed by questions and answers, short plays or skits dealing with a specific problem; series of radio presentations; open air meetings with community sings, round table discussions led by employers; round table discussions led by employees; [and] block dances at which literature will be distributed.”⁵⁰ The coordinators of the events hoped business would recognize the educational component of these events leading to an increase in black women’s employment opportunities.

⁴⁶ McCluskey, Audrey Thomas, “Multiple Consciousness in the Leadership of Mary McLeod Bethune” *NWSA Journal* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1944): 69-81, 69.

⁴⁷ Debra Michals, ed., “Mary McLeod Bethune,” 2015, accessed February 2, 2023, <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/mary-mcleod-bethune>.

⁴⁸ “Hold Your Job Leader Pleads,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 15, 1943.

⁴⁹ “Women in the National Picture,” *The Chicago Defender*, November 20, 1943.

⁵⁰ “Nat’l Council of Women Plans Employment Clinics,” *The Chicago Defender*, August 14, 1943.

In hindsight, historian Megan Shockley Taylor's study of working-class African American women points out that the Council misdirected its efforts. "Instead of focusing on better training, working with union representatives, and addressing other pressing issues faced by working women," however, "NCNW members maintained that respectable women would be successful workers."⁵¹ Flyers, distributed to working-class black women advised them on hygiene rather than what really mattered to management: work ethic and productivity. The pamphlets advised them to "Wake Up! Your Job is in Danger! Check up on—Your Personal Appearance: Do not offend others by being careless. Bathe frequently and insure against body odors. . . . Avoid 'showing off' and being loud and boisterous. . . . get along with other workers on the job. Work with them, not against them. . . . Don't loaf on the job. Monday and the day after payday are not legal holidays."⁵² Black associations focused on the wrong points, focusing their warnings on trivial matters, such as behavior, appearance or absenteeism.

Diligence, training, and skills were the keys that opened opportunities for both black and white women looking to meet Washington D.C.'s demands for women trained in secretarial skills, general office work, processing war requisitions, and correspondence. Black and white women from across the country flocked to the nation's capital to find clerical jobs in rapidly expanding war departments. Francis Perkins, Labor Secretary, commented on black women's increasing access to office jobs, noting "an encouraging trend has been a break-down in many quarters of prejudices against certain types of woman workers, married women . . . older women . . . [and] Negro women in unprecedented

⁵¹ Megan Shockley Taylor, "Working for Democracy: Working -Class African-American Women, Citizenship, and Civil Rights in Detroit, 1940-1954," *Michigan Historical Review* 29 (Fall, 2003): 125-157, 132.

⁵² Taylor, "Working for Democracy," 132.

fashion are getting a foothold.”⁵³ However, Perkins accepted the discrimination which occurred within office spaces where Jim Crow segregation remained the rule and black women remained outsiders.

Hoping to capitalize on this opportunity for black women’s advancement and in keeping with the spirit of the national “Hold Your Job” campaign, the *Chicago Defender*, a national black newspaper, solicited “G-girl,” Lucia M. Pitts, to write a newspaper column advising newly arrived African American women looking for secretarial jobs on how to get a job and keep it.⁵⁴ Pitts penned a column entitled “Written For Women.” Fearing her readers might take offense at the blunt personal advice, she prefaced it:

First of all, you must know that this is written by one who is one of you and on your side—by a Negro woman who, while now working more on the executive end, has been a stenographer, a clerk, a typist all her life: who has had her share of troubles and perhaps more than her share of experience, and who knows what a Negro stenographer is up against in this white world. It is because of you that I ask you to listen to me—as a friend, a counsellor, a fellow-worker. . . . You must realize that upon you depends the future of thousands of other colored clerks and stenographers. How you handle your job may decide whether or not thousands of other Negro clerks ever get jobs.⁵⁵

Pitts echoed the sentiments expressed by the NCNW, advising her readers to cultivate personal attributes for success including efficiency, appearance—hair, skin, clothes, personal hygiene—attitude, and discretion-honesty.⁵⁶ She concluded, “I am concerned that you see the broad picture of your job—that you know you are front women for many other Negro clerical workers and that you are not working for yourself alone.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Government girls were college graduates or “Government Girls,” Doris Weatherford, *American Women During World War II: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, Taylor Francis Group, 2009), 191.

⁵⁴ Black “government girls” remained second-class workers. Frederick Gooding writes “once federal agencies actually hired black employees in larger numbers, Jim Crow segregationist customs stubbornly trumped federal ideals and black employees were consistently limited to ‘black collar jobs,’ or job opportunities with lower wages and slower raises relative to their white coworkers. Frederick W. Gooding, *American Dream Deferred: Black Federal Workers in Washington, D.C., 1940-1981*, (Pittsburg, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018) 31.

⁵⁵ Lucia M. Pitts, “Written For Women,” *The Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1942.

⁵⁶ Pitts, “Written For Women.”

⁵⁷ Pitts, “Written For Women.”

Pitts encouraged black women to emulate the patterns of white society, despite the fact white society did not accept them: desks in government offices remained separated by partitions and restrooms segregated. However, white collar jobs were not readily available for black women in most cities, they looked for jobs in war plants.

Despite Executive Order 8802 prohibiting racial discrimination, investigations carried out by the Federal Employment Practices Committee confirmed overt discrimination hampered black women's advancement in industry. A three-month investigation into the employment practices of firms holding government contracts revealed one hundred black males at the Chrysler plant "objected to putting all Negro women in as janitresses and showing a reluctance to upgrade."⁵⁸ Even more incriminating was a report on hiring practices at the Convair plant in Fort Worth, Texas. The report offers a good example of overt discrimination against black women. When Convair sought to hire one hundred black men—seventy-five to fill skilled and unskilled jobs and twenty-five for janitorial positions—the Fair Employment Participation Committee proposed they hire "250 Negro men in the Buck Wing divisions where planes are made," opening the opportunity for 250 black men to be trained for skilled jobs, including the black men currently working as janitors, and hire black women to replace them in custodial positions.⁵⁹ Black women remained in an inferior position even after getting hired and were rarely elevated to jobs with higher skill levels, enduring racial prejudice in plant facilities, such as separate bathrooms and serving lines in cafeterias, constant reminders of their second-rate status. Their late arrival in factories also deprived them of seniority or

⁵⁸ "Upgrading, Use of Women—Not Exclusion—Problem in Detroit," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 10, 1943.

⁵⁹ "FEPC Officials Weigh Negroes' Working," *The Chicago Defender*, December 25, 1943.

opportunities for advancement in the ranks of workers, making it harder for them to accumulate the necessary time of service required for postwar retention.

Not all the harassment black women endured in factories was overt; evidence shows some actions were meant to cause a woman physical or mental discomfort, planting doubt as to whether she was up to the job. White women often retaliated if black women stepped out of their “place” by violating the white space in the cafeteria or using a white restroom. Marguerite Brown highlights an instance of white intolerance at the Chrysler Highland Park plant where a black woman used the white girls’ restroom to change her clothes and later found the buttons had been cut off her coat and her galoshes were cut into shreds in retaliation.⁶⁰

Work stoppages were also a frequent form of protest at the introduction and upgrading of black female workers into a factory. When black women entered the assembly lines at Packard in Detroit, the white women walked off the job and shut down the production line. In this particular instance, rather than firing the black workers, “the UAW convinced Packard that the best way to solve the problem was to increase the number of black women workers so the four original workers would not be such easy targets.”⁶¹ Black women protested second-class treatment, “One group of black women at General Electric refused to work after a white woman inspector allegedly “called a colored worker either ‘Black Son of a Bitch’ or ‘Black Heifer.’”⁶² When a black woman, promoted to the job of inspector, showed up on the line, she was greeted by white women throwing banana skins at her. The union charged the white women with “conduct unbecoming” and “accused

⁶⁰ Marguerite Brown, “Because of My Race:” Gender, Race, and Black women Workers in Detroit During World War II,” (MS thesis, Wayne State University, Detroit, 1994), 83-84.

⁶¹ Taylor, “Working for Democracy,” 146.

⁶² Eileen Boris, “You Wouldn’t Want One of ‘Em Dancing With Your Wife: Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II, *American Quarterly* 50, (March 1998): 77-108, 96.

[them] of being undemocratic and hindering the war effort.”⁶³ Many white women held the same lowly jobs as black women, however, white women’s work was more highly valued by employers; leaving their homes and taking jobs to aid in the war effort was considered a sacrifice for the war cause, whereas black women’s homemaking had always been compromised by work outside the home.

Segregating women from male workers was impractical but provided employers with a convenient excuse to “categorize the sexes and pay them at different rates.”⁶⁴ In the hierarchy on the factory floor, women’s work was never as valuable as men’s work and black women’s work the least valuable. With little or no work experience, white and black housewives and mothers left their homes and entered a new, unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment, the factory. Most women had no previous experience in factories and their expectations as to what they would face came from patriotic posters or romance stories in magazines. Plus, working with men in a factory was very different from working close to men inside their homes, churches, or social groups.

In Louisville, Kentucky, an African American woman, Rebecca Smith, working in a segregated factory loading smokeless powder bags reported, “The blacks were on one side and the whites on the other side. I mean the whole unit, as a whole, was segregated but it wasn’t too bad to work with . . . the whites would go to the cafeteria first and then we’d go second, see, I mean we couldn’t even go to the cafeteria together. . . . We all just about had the same jobs, but [white women] made more money.”⁶⁵ Smith also related a conversation

⁶³ Taylor, “Working for Democracy,” 146.

⁶⁴ Union shops—where all employees were required to join the union, were de-segregated and called for equal treatment of employees. Sandra Denise Harvey, “Working for Change: Wage-Earning Women in Waco, Texas Defense Industries During World War II” (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, Lubbock, 2009), 116.

⁶⁵ Shirley Mae Harmon, “A Comparison Study of Black and White Women War Workers in Louisville, Kentucky during World War II” (B.A., Xavier University, Cincinnati, 1995) ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 57-58.

with a black male coworker who told her, “yawl ain’t got no business out here. We ain’t got no women working down there [in Alabama].”⁶⁶ To which, Smith responded, “the reason we are working is because we are unionized here. That is the only reason, it’s not because they want us to work.”⁶⁷ Smith’s comment points out the value unions played in overseeing companies’ hiring and disciplinary action despite management’s efforts to keep black workers numbers low.

While unions could defuse racial tensions with demands for equal opportunities and pay, the adage “Boys will be boys” remained a well-established “double standard” in the 1940s. Author Shoshana Loos argues the Depression had scarred men’s egos, and they lacked confidence in their ability to be the family breadwinner. Loos states, “After the depression ended men felt the need to reassert themselves as a family’s primary provider. Doing this required sending women back to working in specific women’s industries, or out of the workforce all together. There were also great efforts taken to make women as unhappy as possible when they were at work.”⁶⁸ Harassment served as an outlet for men’s inappropriate, crude, and sexually offensive behaviors tolerated in that era. In the factory, the supposition was women were responsible for men’s behavior and they deserved what they got. However, not all harassment was overt; evidence shows some men’s actions were intentional and meant to cause a woman discomfort and ensure that she knew she was not up to the job. Trained and high-performing women at work were not exempt from whistles and unsolicited advances were prevalent everywhere.

⁶⁶ Harmon, “A Comparison Study of Black and White Women War Workers,” 57.

⁶⁷ Harmon, “A Comparison Study of Black and White Women War Workers,” 57.

⁶⁸ Shoshanna Loos, “Women and Unions During World War Two: How Social Climate Affected Women’s Labor Participation in World War Two,” accessed October 24, 2023, <https://wou.edu/history/files/2015/08/Shoshana-Loos1.pdf>, 43.

When industries started employing women, they were a novelty in the all-male bastion, and industry, government, and the military all viewed women's sexual presence in male spaces as a "threat to pre-war patterns of social relations."⁶⁹ Husbands worried about their wives working side by side with other men, knowing all too well the possibility of their wives' exposure to undesired attention, sexual innuendo, and even romantic involvement. Sexual harassment was not labeled or considered a serious employment issue until the mid 1970s. Male harassment kept women employees as "others," tolerated for the duration, but never viewed an equal co-worker.

Many single girls and lonely wives with money in their pockets for the first time indulged themselves spending money on small luxuries—stylish clothing, hair styles, footwear—which caused problems more easily addressed than the sexual harassment women faced in the workplace. In the 1940s, the double standard which defined male and female behavior was a well-established norm. Daily, some men made women workers' lives difficult, including intentional efforts to slow down their productivity which could negatively impacting their wages.⁷⁰ The socially accepted double standard that viewed women as the "guardians of proper sexual behavior" while men could "sow their wild oats" prevented women from truly fitting into the workplace and served as a reminder that they were an exception and only for the duration.⁷¹ Plant managers often blamed women's presence whenever production slowed down, but they rarely addressed male's unsolicited forms of harassment towards women coworkers. Undesired attention by male coworkers is well documented by cartoonists, company newsletters, and newspapers.

⁶⁹ Philomena Goodman, *Women, Sexuality and War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 19.

⁷⁰ A.G. Mezerik, "The Factory Manager Learns the Facts of Life," *Harper's Magazine* (September, 1943): 291.

⁷¹ Donald E. Maypole and Rosemarie Skaine, "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace," *Social Work* 28, no. 5 (1983), 387.

In one highly publicized comment, Oliver West, executive vice president at Boeing Aircraft Company in Seattle, Washington, stated the “widespread use of women in all kinds of jobs, ‘had created problems.’”⁷² West’s comments captured the broad spectrum of issues regarding women in the workplace. He argued, women wore the “wrong clothing,” and “have long hair down around machinery” and he threatened to segregate women from men by placing them in “sub-assembly work.”⁷³ West also pointed out the potential for fraternization, stating “riveting often turned into romance.”⁷⁴ He explained, “Women who helped the riveter by holding a metal bar against the surface into which he drives a rivet often make acquaintances leading to meetings outside.”⁷⁵ West’s comments reinforced society’s belief “boys will be boys” and that women by their very presence on the factory floor made her responsible for men’s inappropriate behavior or any other form of unwanted attention.⁷⁶ West’s comments created a hornet’s nest. Officials from other aircraft companies dependent on womanpower countered his comments. Harry Woodhead, president of Consolidated, discounted glamour as a “detriment” to production and praised women’s work, stating “his company aimed at having women as half of its employees.”⁷⁷ T.S. Sullivan of Vultee also praised women, adding he expected the number of women employees in his factory to increase quickly.

Fashion, popularized by women’s magazines and movie stars, “hampered” war work. Working women wearing fashionably tight, form-fitting sweaters, gained national

⁷² “Women a Problem in Boeing Plants,” *New York Times*, August 19, 1942.

⁷³ “Women a Problem in Boeing Plants.”

⁷⁴ H. Oliver West is quoted as making the disparaging comments about women workers in in his employ. In an article printed the next day, highlights other industrialists’ rebukes to West’s comments, viewing them as a detriment to hiring women needed to fill their demand for women workers. “Women Defended in Aircraft Work,” *New York Times*, August 23, 1942.

⁷⁵ “Women a Problem in Boeing Plants.”

⁷⁶ “Women a Problem in Boeing Plants.”

⁷⁷ “Women a Problem in Boeing Plants.”

attention. Cone-shaped bras, popularized by movie stars, became a fashion statement, especially when they accentuated women's breasts under a tight-fitting sweater. However, the unspoken problem, which lay under the sweaters, was the aptly named bullet or torpedo bra. Believing that women's tight sweaters slowed production, factory managers at Vought-Sikorsky Aircraft in Bridgeport, Connecticut, took measures to stop women from wearing them. At the heart of the quarrel lay management's decision that "the production line would move faster if the girls wore jackets . . . so that male [employees] could work without distraction, avoid accidents and keep production high."⁷⁸ While male management's actions appeared to be in response to women's clothing, at its core lay the employer's concern over productivity.

Women's refusal to obey the rule prompted the company to "halt work on vitally needed war material" which management viewed as "entirely unjustified."⁷⁹ As a replacement for sweaters, management provided the women with "jeep suits," described as "ill-fitting, bulky, expensive and unattractive jackets."⁸⁰ When the women protested the factory policy and walked off the job, they garnered support from their male coworkers who also walked off in support of the women. After two months of negotiations, the company agreed to allow up to seventy-five percent of the women concentrated in offices to wear sweaters, restricting only those who worked on moving machinery. The company's concession did not end the dispute. Newspapers across the country started covering the debate.

Officials at Curtiss-Wright and other manufacturers supported Sikorsky's punitive actions as did the Office of War Information which cited sweaters as a safety issue; "It isn't just

⁷⁸ "Keep the Girls in Sweaters is Plea of Submarine Crews," *Milwaukee Journal*, February 16, 1943.

⁷⁹ "Ban on 'Sweater Girls' Causes War Plant Strike," *New York Times*, February 12, 1943.

⁸⁰ "Sweater Girls Issue At Plant," *Hazleton Plain Speaker*, February 12, 1943, 6.

a rumor that a tightly sweated working companion takes a man's eyes off his machine."⁸¹ The conflict continued to escalate reaching the Connecticut State House where a resolution passed allowing women to wear sweaters on the job "so long as this attractive female apparel does not interfere with production of vital war materials."⁸² After two months of negotiation, the company agreed to allow up to seventy-five percent of women to wear sweaters, restricting only those working on moving machinery. The company supplied new two-piece suits for these women, at company cost. As mentioned above the issue was resolved when the company supplied The agreement stated office workers, approximately seventy-five percent of the women in the factory, could wear sweaters, however, women who worked on "hazardous jobs" could not.⁸³

The issue continued to escalate, first to the Connecticut State Legislature and finally the federal government. Elizabeth Christman, of the Women's Bureau, went to Washington D.C. to arbitrate negotiations between management and union representatives of the Congress of Industrial Organizations Local 877. After two months of negotiation, the company agreed to allow up to seventy-five percent of women to wear sweaters, restricting only those working on moving machinery. The company supplied new two-piece suits for these women, at company cost. The agreement stated office workers, approximately seventy-five percent of the women in the factory, could wear sweaters, however, women who worked on "hazardous jobs" could not.⁸⁴

Glamour on the job drew condemnation from many quarters. Miss Dorothy Sells of the Office of Defense Transportation commented, "there's too much talk and emphasis on

⁸¹ Steve Silverman, "The Sikorsky Sweater Girls-Podcast #57", *Useless Information: Fascination True Stories From the Flip Side of History*, November 11, 2021, Podcast, website, 23:05, <https://uselessinformation.org/sikorsky-sweater-girls/>.

⁸² Joan Adams, "Rebels Against Safety Garb Go On Sweater Strike," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 14, 1943.

⁸³ "The Sikorsky Sweater Girls-Podcast #57."

⁸⁴ "The Sikorsky Sweater Girls-Podcast #57."

well-filled sweaters, uniforms and smart appearances. . . . Let's have more concentration on work, even if faces get smudged.”⁸⁵ Sells's comments reflected the general attitude among industrialists. Getting down to business required diligent women and the focus on beauty and glamour did not enhance production. The focus on glamor in the workplace trumped well-thought-out safety recommendations. However, to the chagrin of employers, many women desired to remain attractive, even alluring, while working in war factories, making fashion a matter of safety on the job.

Style-focused women desired to be trendy and alluring, rejecting safety guidelines until accidents occurred. Women's refusal to wear safety helmets rather than more fashionable hair coverings also resulted in serious injuries. Long hair hanging down got caught in machinery, resulting in many reports of partial, even complete, scalping. “One spinning machine operator was totally disabled for sixteen weeks and partially disabled for another forty-five weeks; an ordnance factory worker who lost a ‘large clump of hair’ on a barrel-turning machine suffered as much from the shock as from the actual wound”; a Rhode Island woman was ‘completely scalped’ after her hair caught on an assembly line belt.”⁸⁶ After the War Manpower Commission received reports of twenty thousand women war workers scalped, all of them sporting movie star Veronica Lake's peek-a-boo hairstyle, Mary Brewster White, of the Office of War Information, contacted the actress and asked her to change her hair style. Relieved, Lake replied, “that hank of hair came down in front of my eye,” during styling for a film, “and the headman insisted I leave it that way. I've been worrying about it and stumbling through life ever since. This request from the

⁸⁵ “Bars Glamour in War Jobs,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1943.

⁸⁶ Gilpatrick and Eisner, “Statements of Private Thought Leaders on Women and the War,” Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 47; McEuen, *Making War*, 166-67.

government isn't only a pleasure! It's a relief."⁸⁷ Lake wore her hair in a topknot for her next movie, "So Proudly We Hail!" Lake set a patriotic example for fashion savvy war workers; the actress's support of the industries and the government's plea for women to tie their hair up made it a fashion essential.

The Women's Bureau provided detailed guidelines for women's comfort and safety in the factory, publishing a series of pamphlets, distributed to manufacturing firms. The pamphlets advised women on proper working clothes, including proper footwear, goggles, caps, and hand coverings; however, the Bureau had no power to enforce their recommendations. Despite government guidelines for women's work clothes, "the WPB failed to address what the US Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins found most alarming in occupational safety reports,—the numerous industrial accidents among women in the "slip, fall, and stumble categories." The pamphlet "Safety Shoes for Women Workers," produced by the Women's Bureau, recommended various styles of work shoes to protect women's feet for a variety of jobs—welders' boots, steel toes, neoprene soles, and low heels—but women continued to wear stylish, impractical footwear despite warnings.⁸⁸ Additional pamphlets included safety clothing, safety caps, and night work. Perkins's insistence upon shoe designs to help women prevent accidents failed to take hold as leather supplies dwindled and fashion trumped safety.

Stylish clothing, hair styles, and footwear were problems more easily addressed than the sexual harassment women faced in the workplace. In the 1940s, the double standard which defined male and female behavior was a well-established norm. Daily, some men made women workers' lives difficult, beyond unsolicited comments or catcalls,

⁸⁷ "Veronica's Bang Slapped Up With Manpower Order," *Waterloo Courier*, February 16, 1943.

⁸⁸ McEuen, *Making War, Making Women*, 166.

harassment often involved physical contact, injury, or other intentional efforts to slow down their productivity, often negatively impacting their wages.⁸⁹ The socially accepted double standard viewed women as the “guardians of proper sexual behavior” while men could “sow their wild oats,” preventing women from truly fitting into the workplace and serving as a reminder that they were an exception and only there for the duration.⁹⁰ Plant managers often blamed women’s presence whenever production slowed down, but they rarely addressed male’s unsolicited comments, attentions, and other forms of harassment towards women coworkers. Harassment and undesired attention by male coworkers is well documented by cartoonists, company newsletters, and newspapers.

With or without glamor, women working in factories stood out in the previously all-male environment. Although catcalls, whistles, or inappropriate touching were not labeled “sexual harassment” at the time, newspapers carried stories highlighting inappropriate male advances on the job. *The New York Times*’s article, “Romance in Milk Slows Plant Work,” captured the novelty of females in the workplace where “Milk, morals and machinery became hopelessly entangled here today and the result was that for fifteen minutes not a wheel turned.”⁹¹ Although a daily milk break had been established the year before, it suddenly became controversial when the company hired women. The article reported that tensions brewing at the Wright Aeronautical Corporation reached a critical point as “some of the more high-spirited men began paying ‘considerable attention’ to the ‘milkmaids’ during their daily rounds selling milk on the factory floor.”⁹² Although the article offered no

⁸⁹ A.G. Mezerik, “The Factory Manager Learns the Facts of Life,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 817 (September 1943): 293-297, 293.

⁹⁰ Donald Maypole and Rosemarie Skaine, “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace,” *Social Work*, Vol. 28, 5, September-October 1983, 385-390, <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=65d5a7f8-3343-421f-87d2-c2f5a49f1df5%40redis>, accessed September 1, 1983.

⁹¹ “Romance in Milk Slows War Plant,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1942.

⁹² “Romance in Milk.”

specifics as to what “considerable attention” might entail, it revealed that some of the saleswomen took offense at the workers’ overtures with hostility and complained to the manager of the company cafeteria.⁹³ Management issued warnings that milk breaks would stop if men continued such behavior; however, the day they carried out their threat, one hundred men refused to work until the breaks resumed. After fifteen minutes, management yielded, and milk breaks resumed although management reported it continued to “worry over the situation.”⁹⁴ Rather than taking punitive measures coercing men into acceptable behavior, management folded, turned a blind eye to men’s sexist behavior, and resumed the milk delivery. Ultimately, Wright’s management could have made an example out of the leading individuals and stopped the harassment, but it failed its female employees, viewing production as more important than the comfort of their women employees doing a traditional job.

Business Week wrote women’s presence was “a new headache” for management, describing them as temptresses. “More and more as women invade the industrial domain of man, management is encountering the delicate problem of maintaining an acceptable level of social conduct among employees without encroaching on their liberties.”⁹⁵ The article suggested “the infiltration of women was best handled . . . by controlling appearance: tight sweaters, snug slacks, and feminine artifices of color and style [are] distracting influences,” and a “hazard to men.”⁹⁶

⁹³ “Romance in Milk.”

⁹⁴ “Romance in Milk.”

⁹⁵ “New Headache: Infiltration of Women Workers into War Plants turns Management’s Eyes from Morale to Morals,” *Business Week*, October 17, 1942.

⁹⁶ “Sexual Harassment,” Doris Weatherford, *American Women During World War II: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 404-406, 405.

Harassment occurred, but women failed to report aggressive, inappropriate behavior or sexual advances, believing it was something they invited, and if reported, told they were to blame. Plant managers often blamed women's presence or clothing whenever production slowed down but rarely addressed the wasted time spent on male's unsolicited comments, attentions, or other forms of harassment toward women coworkers. Women, white or black, often remained silent regarding harassment in the workplace, driven by guilt for attracting unwanted male attention, the socially accepted double standard deemed women the "guardians of proper sexual behavior" while men could "sow their wild oats."⁹⁷ Everylee Ashby's reported her experience at L&N rail yard powder plant in Louisville, Kentucky. Ashby stated there were many instances of sexual harassment, but you didn't make anything out of it: "No sir we were bending over and working and one of them passed and patted us on the butt and said hi, we didn't get insulted about it."⁹⁸ Hayden, working at Curtiss-Wright reported her boss "told her she could come and sit in his office between hours and get out of the cold. . . . I thought, why not? Everybody else does it. So I went in there and sat down. He walked over and kissed me. I just sat there and cried. I didn't know what else to do."⁹⁹ Nova Rhodes, a white, married woman also employed in the powder bag plant, reported after refusing to date her boss he didn't say anything but "punished her," putting her on a more difficult job. A woman of her time, Rhodes remained silent rather than reporting it to management, deciding it was not worth all the fuss.¹⁰⁰

Entering the male bastion—the factory yard—for the first time, women were shocked at males' reactions. Sociologist Katharine Archibald, who spent time at the Moore

⁹⁷ Maypole and Skaine, "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace."

⁹⁸ Harmon, "A Comparison Study of Black and White Women War Workers," 57-58,62.

⁹⁹ Harmon, "A Comparison Study," 62.

¹⁰⁰ Harmon, "A Comparison Study," 61.

Shipyards, commented that males' attention was often uninvited and prevented any "possibility of establish[ing] businesslike relationships between men and women on the job and discredit[ed] them as effective workers."¹⁰¹ A variety of primary sources, including a comic book entitled *Plane and Convulsions: Great Moments in Life of a War Worker*, the Grumman Company newsletter, interviews from the "Rosie the Riveter World War II American Front Oral Project," and contemporary letters written to advice columnist Dorothy Dix reveal the sexual tensions women encountered when they took jobs in an all-male factory.

The 1944 publication *Convulsions, Great Moments in Life of a War Worker*, originating in Fort Worth, Texas, by Ed Young and Bill Sublett, printed in Fort Worth, Texas, parodies the interaction between males and females in an unnamed aircraft factory, presumably Convair. The introduction states, "This book was conceived to bring laughs and entertain those who play such a great role in the country's war effort by devoting their time to producing tools, equipment, and ammunition for war," as seen through the eyes of the country-boy named Timothy Mopps.¹⁰² The first cartoon highlights women workers' reception at the entry gate into an airplane factory. The cartoon below entitled "Inspection," Figure 23, focuses on men's reception of a new, very shapely woman in a tight dress and hat who appears bewildered by the attention, entering the gate to an airplane factory, seemingly for her first day at work.¹⁰³ Wearing a slinky, form fitting dress, the woman has dropped her purse, lunch, and other articles she carried

¹⁰¹ Johnson, Marilyn S., *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 64.

¹⁰² Young, Sublett, and McDonald, *Convulsions: Great Moments in the Life of a War Worker* (Fort Worth, TX: Reimers- Taylor Co., 1944), 19.

¹⁰³ Acknowledgements at the end of the book credit art work by Mrs. Harry Young and Bill Sublett, although she does not get credit on the cover of the book. Young, Sublett, and McDonald, *Convulsions*.

in. With her hands on her face, she appears overwhelmed at the men's attention as she is greeted by a variety of male responses varying from laughter, surprise, interest, and a smirk.



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Figure 23: "Inspection"

The Grumman publication *Plane News* reported one foreman's recollection of the first day women reported to his shop: "Catcalls and whistles followed the girls from the minute they appeared that morning. All day long, the men paraded past the Inspection Crib,

¹⁰⁴ Young, Sublett, and McDonald, *Convulsions*, "Inspection."

rubbernecking at those ten new girls. They were quite a curiosity.”¹⁰⁵ While some women found males’ attention empowering, others felt uncomfortable, even threatened. Such behavior was universal as described in a fictional short story printed in Grumman’s *Plane News*, “Private War-The Story of a Girl Aircraftfer.” The article highlights the sexual tension a “frail dame” felt as a macho welder trained her.¹⁰⁶ The author described Molly’s introduction into the male bastion: “Bill Norton grinned from ear to ear like a wolf watching an unsuspecting dinner fall into his lap.”¹⁰⁷ He predicted Molly “would faint every time he lit his torch. . . Slowly his eyes went over the girl . . . He could tell she knew he was looking her over . . . from the nervous way her hands fluttered.”¹⁰⁸ Bill further tormented Molly by “giving her a pair of safety goggles purposely dipped in soot.”¹⁰⁹ Filled with sexual overtones, articles in the factory newsletter acknowledged males’ sexist behavior and supported the adage “boys will be boys.” Although the authors of these articles acknowledged women’s work was important, they expressed relief it was only “for the duration” and women would return home after the war. Figure 23, “Inspection,” portrays a very different “inspection” than one would expect in a factory’s precision workshop. The cartoon below, entitled “Game,” Figure 24, portrays four male workers in a plane factory leering and drooling at the sight of an attractive, shapely female worker

¹⁰⁵ Christine Kleinegger, “The Janes Who Made the Planes: Grumman in World War II,” *The Long Island Historical Journal* 12, no. 1 (1999), 5.

¹⁰⁶ Kleinegger, “*The Janes*,” 5.

¹⁰⁷ Kleinegger, “*The Janes*,” 5.

¹⁰⁸ Kleinegger, “*The Janes*,” 5-6.

¹⁰⁹ In a prelude to her article, “The Janes,” author, Christine Kleinegger, offered additional comments from men made during her interviews published in “The Janes”: “They could never stand the gaff;” “I don’t miss them at all, except like a toothache;” “You couldn’t swear if you had to; you have to be a perfect gentleman all the time;” “Women are okay; they did a swell job helping us get out the planes, but darn it, no matter how hard they tried they never could stand the gaff like men. They wanted all the equality of man, but you couldn’t talk to them like you’d talk to a man. They’d cry if you bawled them out, and they’d cry if you praised them;” “The men could never be natural with the women around. You couldn’t swear if you had to; you have to be a perfect gentleman all the time and no guy can do that and get his work done. Women are okay—I married one, didn’t I?—but they didn’t belong in the shop with men.” Kleinegger, “*Editorial Comment*’ to *The Janes*,” 6.

walking by in high heels. As she moves by, she keeps her eyes focused straight ahead with her hand held up like a traffic cop signaling she has no interest. The cartoon also features a wolf on the left behind a barrel. Historically, wolves have been symbols of lust since early Roman times and “by Elizabethan times wolves had become primarily symbolic . . . of “sexually aggressive males.”¹¹⁰ The presence of alpha males created a threatening atmosphere on the factory floor which harbored a sense of danger, warning women off, and keeping them in secondary positions.

¹¹⁰ Online Etymology Dictionary, “Wolf,” accessed February 4, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/wolf>.

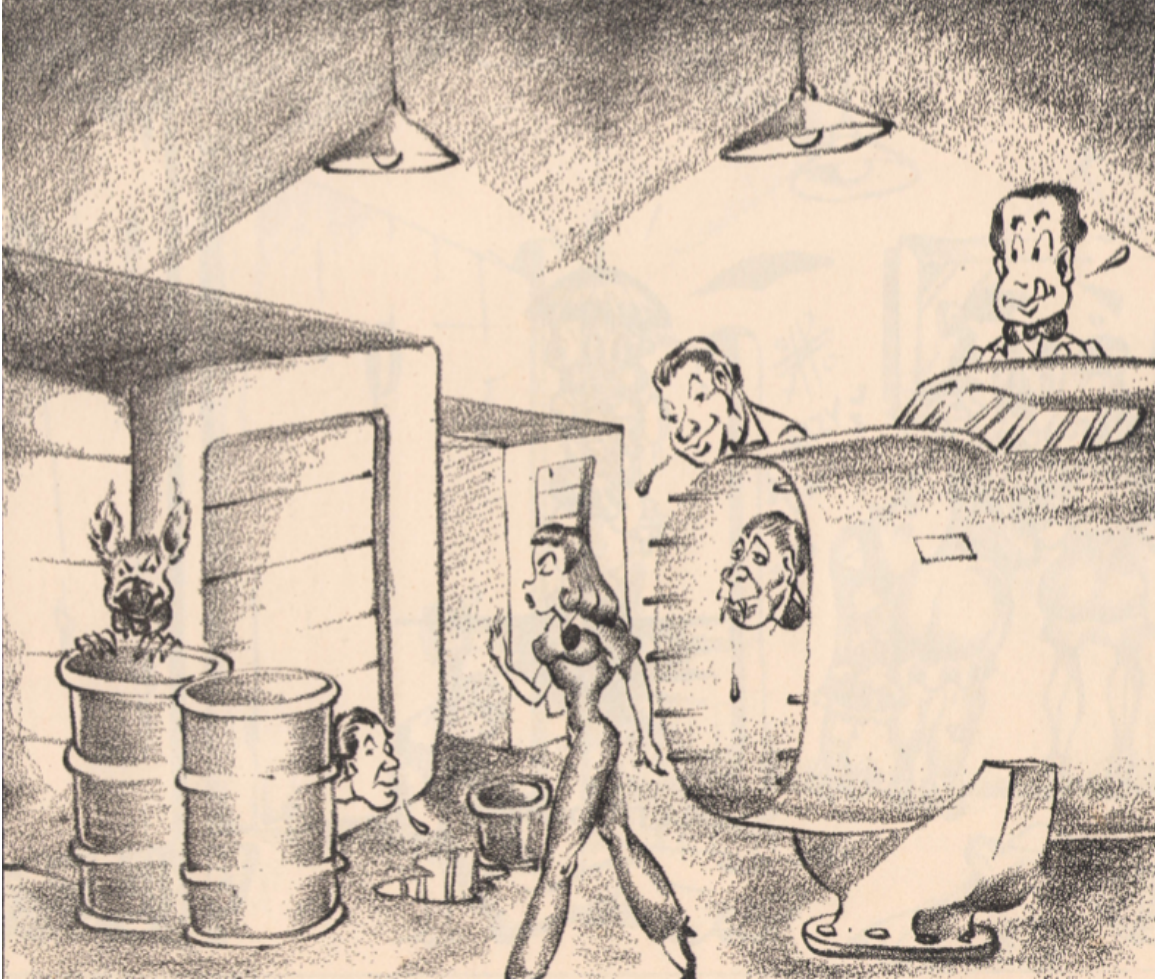


Figure 24: “Game”¹¹¹

Even trained, high-performing women were not exempt from whistles, unsolicited advances, or even the sabotage of their machines. Harassment in the shipyards took various forms; some males’ actions were subtle and meant to cause a woman discomfort and reinforce she was not up to the job, while others were more aggressive, such as sabotaging a woman’s machine, or other overt actions meant to cause physical harm. While working as a riveter at the Boeing plant in California, Josephine Wikelund reported “men weren’t used to working around women then. They would pinch your bottom, then squeeze your breasts; they would get you in a

¹¹¹ “Game,” Young, Sublett, and McDonald, *Convulsions*.

corner and try to kiss you. I mean, they were ravenous beasts.”¹¹² Rose Lesslie, a young married woman working at Moffett Field, California, spoke openly of an “incident” when the boss asked her to ““Come with me.””¹¹³ Lesslie followed him up the stairs to a higher deck and down a dark aisle when he unlocked the padlocked door. Lesslie looked inside and took off running when she saw a bed in the corner of the room. She told the interviewer, “You couldn’t report it. In those days you just shut up. It was wrong, but it was one of those things that happened.”¹¹⁴

Although most of the examples cited by historians occurred on the factory floor, harassment also occurred in white-collar jobs. Shipyard management failed to address harassment and aggressive behavior and considered women as temporary and misbehavior an inevitable product of women invading a man’s workplace. The problem was not unique to the airplane factories or shipyards. Historian Sandra Harvey, in her study of women in manufacturing in Waco, Texas, argues that segregating men from women workers was impractical and potentially provided employers with a convenient excuse to categorize the sexes and pay them at different rates. Harassment prevented any teamwork; Katherine Archibald, comments, the “real and only power of women was the power of sex, and their sole possible contribution to the field of masculine endeavor was one of negative distraction and disturbance rather than positive aid.”¹¹⁵

Historian Christine Kleinegger, co-curator for the exhibit entitled “The Janes Who Made the Planes,” authored an article by the same name in which she highlights men’s and women’s

¹¹² Wikelund interview, “Rosie the Riveter World War II American Front Oral History Project” conducted by Sam Redman, University of California, Berkeley, 2012, 39, https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/wikelund_joephine.pdf 9.

¹¹³ Rosie Lesslie interview, “Rosie the Riveter World War II American Front Oral History Project” conducted by Sam Redman, University of California, Berkeley, 2012, 39, https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/lesslie_rose.pdf

¹¹⁴ Lesslie interview, 40.

¹¹⁵ Katherine Archibald, *Wartime Shipyards: A Study in Social Disunity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1947), 18.

reactions to working in the sexually charged environment at Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation in Bethpage, Long Island, New York. Kleinegger points out women had mixed reactions when working alongside male coworkers. Some women felt empowered. They experienced camaraderie, friendliness and cooperation, and harmless practical jokes such as sending them off to get bogus tools. Lucille Saccareccia had fond memories of working at Grumman.

I mean it was ‘Hallelujah.’ You have to picture—twenty-two years old and you’re walking down an aisle . . . and there’s nothing but men on either side, right? and there’s five women—they’d bring you in about half a dozen at a time. And five women walking down this aisle—and the whistling and the yelling. You’d go to a fountain to get a drink and all of a sudden there’s twenty guys around you, you’re like ‘wow.’ I got reprimanded quite a bit for attracting too much attention . . . but it was fun.¹¹⁶

The company publication *Plane News* was full of gossipy columns about shop floor flirtations. Notices such as this were typical fillers: “Al Dobler, leadman in Dpt. 59, P1. 2, and Doris Pignataro, same Dpt., are taking the fatal step on June 20. It’s a Grumman romance.”¹¹⁷ While harassment was an issue in the workplace, some women sought and enjoyed the attention they received from males, ignoring restraints on clothing—uniforms and jewelry, and hairstyle and practical shoes—all the while seeking male attention and flirting with male coworkers. However, the idiom “girls will be girls” threatened production on a number of levels including attracting male workers by their choice of clothing, hair styles, and failure to abide by company policies. Young and Sublett’s “Hunters,” Figure 25, illustrates the flip side of women’s response to working in an all-male environment, as a gaggle of women office workers ogle a male coworker, expressing the same thrill and emotions as Lucille Saccareccia.

¹¹⁶ Kleinegger, “The Janes,” 5.

¹¹⁷ Kleinegger, “The Janes,” 5.

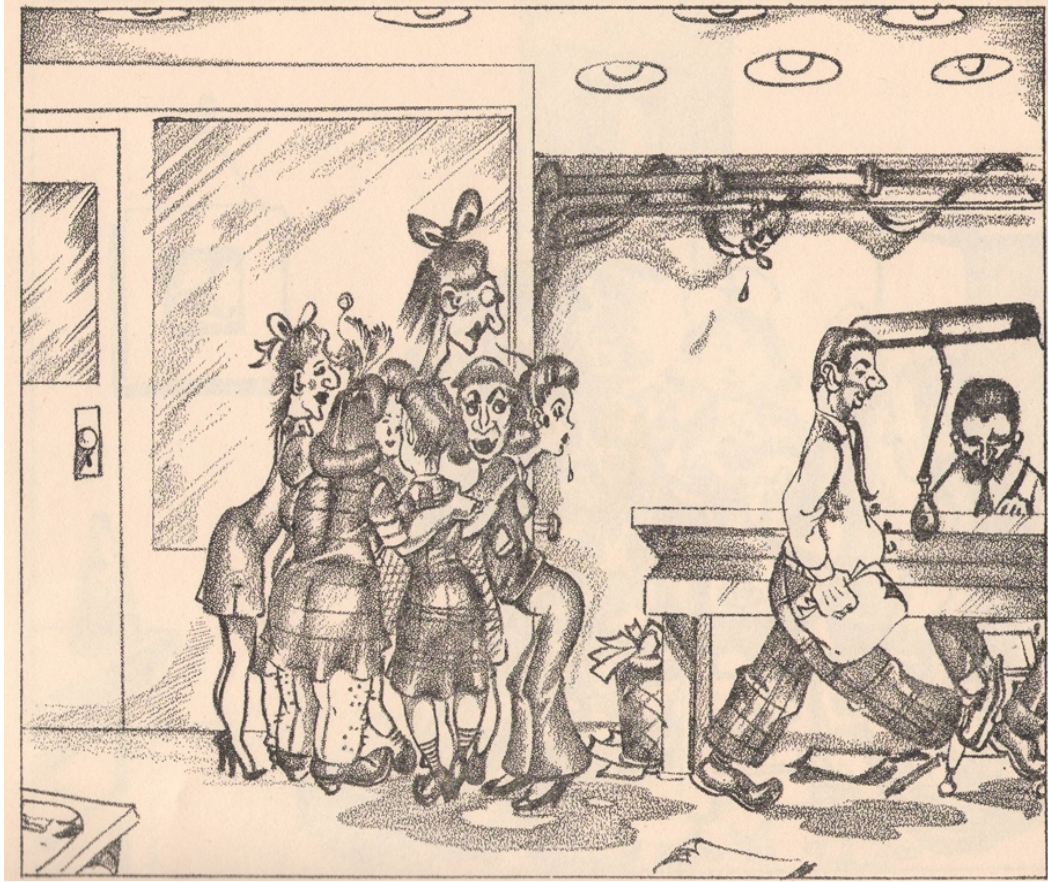


Figure 25: “Hunters”¹¹⁸

Elizabeth Hawes—a wife, mother, and fashion designer turned war worker—noted blame on both sides. Hawes’s wartime job at Wright Aeronautical Corporation offered her a firsthand experience. Hawes countered claims that males were always the aggressors, and claimed some women were she-wolves. She recalled, “Some females cheat. . . . One little creature went flipping herself around night after night at Plant Seven, and then when a subforeman made her the proposition she’d been signaling for with her wiggles, she turned around and asked her union shop steward to save her!”¹¹⁹ Hawes added, “If a girl wanted one of the boys, I guess she got him all right—for free. I will swear on the Bible that if she

¹¹⁸ “Hunters,” Young, Sublett, McDonald, *Convulsions*.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Hawes, *Why Women Cry; or Wenches with Wrenches* (New York, Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943), 90.

didn't want one, she was left strictly to her own devices except for whistling."¹²⁰ In the sexual climate of the 1940s, women silently accepted lewd male behavior as something to be tolerated or quit their job. In the sexist environment of the factory shipyard or office most women would not complain to authorities about unwanted sexual advances. They would have believed it was their fault for entering a male bastion. No matter how uncomfortable women in the 1940s felt about males' comments on their physique or more aggressive actions, they would not have labeled them "sexual harassment," a term not in use until 1975.¹²¹ The relaxation of moral standards became evident as traditional gendered expectations flew out the window. As young single and married women entered the previously all-male factories, they shared machinery and lunch with fellow coworkers, and old standards of acceptable behavior went out the window.

Women's reports of unwanted attention or males' menacing sexual behavior resulted in few consequences, causing the harassed woman to quit her job and requiring constant hiring and training rituals to be repeated. Government agencies, like the Department of Education and the Women's Bureau, sent agents to the shipyards to conduct studies, regarding women's high quit rates soon after training; reports on male workers' inappropriate advances prompted no open discussion. As an experienced union organizer, Mary Anderson recognized that harassment, overt or covert, was often the reason women quit their jobs. Anderson stated, "Wherever there are women workers in numbers, particularly in industries where they have never worked before, there should be women

¹²⁰ Hawes, 91.

¹²¹ Writer Sascha Cohen attributes the first use of the term "sexual harassment" to a *New York Times* article by Enid Nemy, "Women Begin to Speak Out Against Sexual Harassment at Work" (*New York Times*, August 19, 1975), covering the Carmita Wood's suit against Cornell University after being subjected to sexually offensive behavior. Sascha Cohen, "A Brief History of Sexual Harassment in America Before Anita Hill," *Time*, April 11, 2016, accessed May 15, 2020, <http://time.com/4286575/sexual-harassment-before-anita-hill/>.

personnel directors and counselors. . . . Recognition of such group differences as exist between men and women workers, not as any ‘assumption of inferiority or superiority’ but because better results come ‘from treating like things alike and different things differently.’”¹²² The War Manpower Commission urged expanded in-plant counseling services for women employees overseen by trained professionals. Introducing professional counselors to serve as liaisons between employees and management would encourage women to talk freely about their problems. This meant convincing women a counselor was there for advice and assistance rather than a proctor policing restrooms and enforcing company policy.

Establishing women’s trust was a stumbling block to instituting counseling services in plants. While management was concerned over production, they failed, or refused, to recognize the variety of problems women dealt with inside and outside the factory. Formerly, the “counseling” jobs that did exist went to untrained “friends of executives, socially prominent women, [or] social workers. . . [with no] special training,” leading to distrust, preventing women employees from sharing confidences with them.¹²³ Working women viewed these “counselors” as “tattlers;” there only to report on women who took long lunch breaks, excessive bathroom breaks, or loafed on the job.

Unlike bathroom or floor monitors who spied for management or reprimanded women workers for laxity, company counselors could address women’s work needs, problems on the floor, personnel issues, and help women work through problems rather than quit. Trained women counselors would provide women a confidant, someone they would feel safe sharing a wide variety of personal needs with, including topics such as birth

¹²² “Asks Women Heads in Job Counseling,” *New York Times*, January 21, 1944.

¹²³ United States Department of Labor, “Womanpower Committees during World War II,” *Women’s Bureau Bulletin 244*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1953), 25.

control and pregnancy which men were not prepared to talk about. Defining the role of a counselor, the Women's Advisory Committee specified that she should act only as a liaison between the women and management. She "should assist production supervisors in solving personal problems of the workers in their departments. . . [to] deal with problems that affect the worker on the job, not the problems of actual job performance, to advise and help, but not to serve as a 'matron.'"¹²⁴ By gaining women's trust, counselors also learned about specific problems on the factory floor that they could share with management including harassment, work-related injuries or health issues, and insights into home and community problems that lay at the root of absenteeism. Counselors also provided women workers information on useful services available in their community as well as serving as liaisons between women and management to resolve conflicts. Trained female personnel helped ensure trained women stayed on the job.

Even counselors failed to control the high attrition rates in the shipyards which slowed down production and was a major concern to federal officials. The government sent agents, such as Dorothy K. Newman into shipyards to observe and report on the problem. Agent's reports documented the double standard and evidence of overt sexual harassment in agents' reports after government investigations.¹²⁵ In her report, *Employing Women in the Shipyards*, Newman found high turnover rates were due to the industry's opposition to the presence of women, even secretaries. In her report, she stated, "One periodical made sport of the extreme anti-feminine attitude of what is now one of the most publicized

¹²⁴ "Advance Release: For Friday Papers," December 3, 1943, Box 6: "Records of the Information Services, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda Barnes, 1943-1944, 'Wo-Wr,' Entry 129": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹²⁵ There were over 150 shipyards operated in Coastal areas during WWI, The majority located on the west coast, the Portland/Vancouver area was the largest. Although the phrase Rosie the Riveter was popularized, shipbuilders utilized welding more than riveting.

woman-employing ship building and repair corporations in the country.”¹²⁶ As the failure to hire women slowed down production and refitting of ships for war service, the U.S. Department of Labor studied agent’s results and found shipyards had “plunged headlong” into hiring women, “before essential and obvious provision had been made to accommodate the newcomers,” or made the “physical and administrative adaptations” necessary to help women employees prepare for “the mental hurdles that must be overcome,” i.e. men’s attitudes.¹²⁷ The Women’s Bureau report described the yards as “an industry so bound in a tradition of dirt, sweat, and rough and tumble, so thoroughly male that any woman who ventured into a yard was greeted with hooting and whistling.”¹²⁸ In an oral interview collected during the Rosie the Riveter project, riveter Josephine Wikelund reported, “since there were no sexual harassment laws, you really could get yourself into trouble; you had to be really careful. . . . They would pinch your bottom, then squeeze your breasts; they would get you in a corner and try to kiss you. I mean they were ravenous beasts.”¹²⁹ Some male workers intentionally caused women physical harm, as in the case of one male coworker who intentionally threw hot rivets at women, which would burn their skin.¹³⁰ In her book *Shipyard Diary of a Woman Welder*, Clawson advised women, “Go into the yard as workers, not women,” and cautioned women entering jobs in the yard that men viewed them as ‘imposters,’ warned them men would not be ‘chivalrous,’ and [they

¹²⁶ Dorothy K. Newman, *Employing Women in the Shipyards*, (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1944), 1. Department of Labor, 3, https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/publications/women/b0192-6_dolwb_1944.pdf.

¹²⁷ Newman, *Employing Women in the Shipyards*, 3.

¹²⁸ The report described women pool of potential hires as “inexperienced women securing employment in an entirely alien field. . . [however] some yards were using the worst possible hiring methods . . . the people were treated like a bunch of cattle.” Newman, *Employing Women*, 14-15.

¹²⁹ Wikelund interview, 9.

¹³⁰ Wikelund interview, 9.

would] always be ‘a minority.’”¹³¹ One female welder told Clawson, “The men don’t want you there. They say, ‘I wouldn’t have my wife work here,’ and they just try to wear you out and make you quit. Except the young things.”¹³²

Historian Amy Kesselman notes that women in the shipyard on the West Coast—Portland-Vancouver—were constantly reminded of their femininity. While women’s daily harassment happened on the job, the males who ran the yards contributed to making it an unpleasant environment. “The attitudes of male workers, the columnists and cartoonists of the shipyard newspapers, and the yard’s management contributed to an environment that heightened rather than minimized the differences between male and female workers. . . . [women] were never allowed to forget they were women— imposters on male territory treated as amusing toys or tolerated ‘for the duration.’”¹³³ Women were never led to believe that their jobs would continue after the war was over. With the knowledge that women were temporary, neither management nor male workers felt any inclination to change their behavior.

In *Fleeting Opportunities*, Kesselman argues that articles in the Portland and Vancouver shipyard newsletters, while noting women’s achievements it also highlighted women’s appearance, family life, and mode of dressing during off-hours.”¹³⁴ By keeping the focus on glamour, management kept women as outsiders and distinct from the predominantly male culture. Kesselman states, “Glamour was a shipyard institution” at the Kaiser shipyards in Oregon, and a “constant reminder that women were women and not

¹³¹ Clawson went into the yards as an undercover special agent, for the US. Office of Education to study women’s high rate of turnover. Augusta H. Clawson, *Shipyard Diary of a Woman Welder* (New York: Penguin Books, 1944), 121.

¹³² Augusta H. Clawson, 121-22.

¹³³ Amy Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver During World War II and Reconversion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 48.

¹³⁴ Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 53.

men's equals. A gallery of 'pin-up girls' exhibited pictures of women shipyard workers selected by roving male 'glamour detectors.'"¹³⁵ These displays focused on women's femininity, reminding women they were "outsiders" in the shipyard, and undermined their accomplishments.

Company sponsored bathing beauty contests exploited women workers' as sexual objects, drawing attention away from women's skilled labor to their physique. Many defense companies sponsored such contests with women employees parading on the stage in bathing suits. A contestant in the Portland shipyards, Doris Avshalomov, described the attention to her physical appearance rather than her job as an electrician as "disconcerting and uncomfortable. . . . I remember that beauty contest. I was really embarrassed about the whole thing."¹³⁶ The photograph below shows "Bathing Beauties," Figure 26, posing for pictures at the Armour Meatpacking plant's contest in Fort Worth, Texas.

¹³⁵ Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 53.

¹³⁶ Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 55.



Figure 26: Armour & Co. “Bathing Beauties” Circa 1940¹³⁷

Not all women found males’ attention to their physiques unnerving and eagerly participated in beauty contests. The *Fort Worth Press* covered the War Girl Contest, a commercially sponsored beauty contest in Fort Worth, Texas, open to all war workers, married and single, working in a local business, plant, or office associated with the war effort. A series of articles encouraged women’s participation: “She doesn’t have to be a beauty—but looks will be no handicap. She’ll be a girl . . . who has poise, a pleasing personality, and above all have shown unusual interest in her job on the Home Front.”¹³⁸ Although this contest had a conservative bent, it did include the bathing suit contest, exploiting women’s patriotic bodies and appearance. The “lucky girl” won a chaperoned,

¹³⁷ Armour & Co. “Bathing Beauties” Circa 1940. Courtesy of North Fort Worth Historical Society.

¹³⁸ “Personable Poised and On Job---She’ll Be War Girl of 1945, *Fort Worth Press*, June 4, 1945.

all-expense-paid weekend trip to Galveston, a new wardrobe from a local women's store, and a War Bond.¹³⁹ Events such as War Girl Contests reminded women that they were women first, and after the war they could put away their work clothes, wear their hair down, and shop for pretty, sexy clothing.

Changing gender roles played havoc with established social expectations. Fears of spouses cheating, or sexual trysts motivated many letters from spouses, both males and females, to advice columnist Dorothy Dix. Cheating spouses, or suspicions of one, prompted fears for the integrity of existing wartime marriages and post-war families and were one of the most frequent topics. The "Worried Wife at Home" wondered how often husbands sneaked down the production line to flirt and chat with pretty girls and complained her husband eating lunch and sharing smokes with women workers "is making a big domestic problem."¹⁴⁰ "Worried" argued that women with husbands at war flirted with married men: "Some of these girls have husbands who are away at camp, and they like to show off their power to attract men. Believe me, Miss Dix, I think that the Government putting these women to work beside men is a mistake and is going to make plenty of trouble."¹⁴¹ "Puzzled," a homemaker and mother of twin baby girls, wrote, "Everything has been perfectly harmonious between us until now when my husband has taken a defense job in which women also are employed. He works on the night shift and rides to his work with three other men and a young girl, and accidentally I have discovered he has been seeing

¹³⁹ "Some Lucky Girl Will Win Big Week-End at Galveston," *Fort Worth Press*, June 1, 1945; "War Girl of 1945, Now At Work, to Get Big Vacation," *Fort Worth Press*, June 15, 1945; "Personable, Poised and On Job."

¹⁴⁰ Dorothy Dix, "Woman's Fears for Husband in Plant with Women Workers," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, January 28, 1943.

¹⁴¹ Dix, "Woman's Fears for Husband."

this girl home after working hours.”¹⁴² “Puzzled” expressed a genuine fear that many women had: that unfaithful husbands could mean the ruination of the Democratic Family.

Husbands also wrote Dix with questions regarding their wives taking war jobs and what it might mean for the future of the father as head of the family. “Worried Husband” wrote of female aggressors, “putting these women to work beside men is a mistake.”¹⁴³ In a different type of letter, a husband identified himself as a decent, married man working in a defense plant with hundreds of women, or “she-wolves,” who “ask men for dates, offer to pay the bills, and make men handsome presents.”¹⁴⁴ He commented these women have “no respect for marriage” and [t]hey don’t wait for men to pursue them. They take the initiative. . . . I wonder what this world is coming to?”¹⁴⁵ Dix commiserated, “I get so many letters similar to this from men workers in defense plants that it looks as if Uncle Sam will have to hire chaperons for male employees instead of the females.”¹⁴⁶ She advised “Worried” to keep his marriage together for the sake of his son and the preservation of the Democratic Family.¹⁴⁷ Many letters expressed concerns over the deterioration of traditional vows of marriage and working women’s impact on the home and family, in particular the threat to their status in the home. Judge Sarah Hughes, in Dallas, Texas, stated a man and a woman working at the same job often found romance.¹⁴⁸ “They twist the same bolt on an airplane, adjourn for a soft drink together in rest periods—and many eventually make dates with

¹⁴² Dorothy Dix, “Young Mother of Twins Worries Over Husband,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 18, 1943.

¹⁴³ Quote from the Broadway show “Oklahoma” which opened on Broadway on March 31, 1943.

¹⁴⁴ Dix, “Wives Weary of Housework,” *Star Press*, July 31, 1943.

¹⁴⁵ Dix, “Wives Weary of Housework.”

¹⁴⁶ Dix, “Wives Weary of Housework.”

¹⁴⁷ Dix, “Wives Weary of Housework.”

¹⁴⁸ Judge Sarah T. Hughes, appointed by President Kennedy as the first female federal district judge in Texas, and administered the oath of office to President Lyndon Baines Johnson after President Kennedy’s assassination.

each other, regardless of whether they are married.”¹⁴⁹ Hughes commented that hardly a day went by without hearing a divorce case in her court.

While women were expected to remain celibate before marriage, society accepted males had to “sow their wild oats.” Early in the war, the government launched a campaign against venereal disease, primarily directed against prostitutes—referred to by various names including camp followers, patriotutes, or victory girls (V-Girls)—seeking to protect the nation’s fighting forces. Recognizing the potential for promiscuous behavior, the government enabled “boys to be boys” by providing soldiers with pamphlets on venereal disease and prevention, condoms, and prophylactic kits to keep a healthy fighting force, in essence, a silent nod of approval for soldiers’ sexual misconduct outside the camp or on leave. Brothels and red-light districts sprang up outside army camps to service soldiers. However, no such courtesy protected women from unwanted aggressive behavior in the workplace. Local hygiene campaigns vilified women as disease-carrying. The government actively pursued and penalized women testing positive for venereal diseases while simultaneously failing to protect women from male sexual predation in the workplace. Commenting on the national acceptance of the double standard regarding sex, Susan B. Anthony II posed the rhetorical question: “Does the double standard impede women who, today, must work jointly with men to win this war?” She answered, “yes,” and argued the double standard took a toll on women’s psyches and “not merely in distorted emotional concepts—but in a narrowing of women’s vision, a limiting of their lives, a cramping of

¹⁴⁹ Dick West, “Disregard of Parental Duties Marks War-Inspired Increase in Dallas Divorce Proceedings, *Dallas Morning News*, December 12, 1943.”

their economic progress.”¹⁵⁰ Acceptance of the double standard was larger than illicit sex; it also impacted married women who held jobs and became pregnant.

War anxieties threatened social disorder including increased infidelity, indiscriminate sexual activity, divorce, and children born out of wedlock. The *New York Times* reported the nation experienced record numbers of divorces and predicted they could exceed marriages. In Philadelphia, the number of suits filed during 1942 reached an all-time high, with 457 more divorces granted than in 1941.¹⁵¹ Divorce clerk Thomas Riordan “attributed the increase to improved economic conditions,” citing reports that “divorces increase in direct ratio with wage and employment rises.”¹⁵² Judge Sarah Hughes agreed, blaming wartime conditions and hasty furlough marriages as forces behind the divorce epidemic. She put it this way: “The uncertainty of war, the unrest, and don’t-give-a-dam attitude often cause many men and women to be independent in their actions and utterly indifferent to the consequences.”¹⁵³ Hughes added working outside the home and earning high wages seemingly changed women’s commitment to motherhood and noted that before Pearl Harbor many women who divorced their husbands demanded custody of their children; now, they are “willing to let the daddy have them.”¹⁵⁴ *The Dallas Star Telegram* printed details of one of Hughes’s most unusual cases involving a woman separated from her husband for an extended period of time who fell in love with a soldier and had his child. Five days after giving birth, the new mother appeared in front of Judge Hughes on a stretcher, seeking to get a divorce and marry the soldier/father who was on leave. The rise

¹⁵⁰ Susan Brownell Anthony II, *Out of the Kitchen—Into the War: Women’s Winning Role in the Nation’s Drama* (New York: Stephen Daye, Inc., 1943), 19.

¹⁵¹ “Divorces at Record High,” *New York Times*, January 3, 1943.

¹⁵² “Divorces.”

¹⁵³ “Disregard of Parental Duties.”

¹⁵⁴ “Disregard of Parental Duties.”

in divorce was just one symptom of a larger malady in American society as the war broke down long standing Victorian sexual restraints. A woman's contribution to the war wasn't always in a factory, historian Marilyn Hegarty writes in *Patriotutes, Victory Girls, and Khaki-Wackies*. "It became difficult to separate acceptable morale-maintaining sexuality from dangerous promiscuous sexuality at a time when female sexuality was simultaneously needed and feared."¹⁵⁵ While many decried the loosened sexual morals; the military saw it as essential for morale and provided servicemen with Prophylaxis and protective measures from venereal disease.

Protections from divorce by their wives were in place for soldiers serving abroad and unable to represent themselves during a divorce hearing. Marital law stated, "Any person in uniform is immune from judgment by default, for the duration and six months thereafter, and he can not be compelled to come into court to answer a complaint, whether in divorce or other matters. Therefore, a woman who has married a soldier cannot get a divorce from him, even if he is conveniently based in her community, if he chooses to disregard the summons."¹⁵⁶ One notable exception was the son of the president. Elliott Roosevelt's wife sued him for divorce while he was stationed in England serving in the Army Air Service. The court allowed Elliott Roosevelt to sign a waiver, granting him a divorce from his wife. The increase in divorces were just one symptom of a society in peril fighting a foreign war.

Pregnancy—in marriage or illegitimate—was not welcome in the factory. Just as factory managers had no experience dealing with women's desire to dress in the latest

¹⁵⁵ Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 9.

¹⁵⁶ The same protection held true for women in the WAC. Ray E. Baber, "Marriage and the Family After the War," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 229 (September 1943), 164-175, 167.

fashion and wear their hair long, they did not desire to deal with the issues surrounding pregnancy in the factory. Despite assurances by medical personnel that the first trimesters were safe for women to continue working, Ruth Fairbanks states, “Many employers became concerned with the ‘esthetic and moral’ issues raised by pregnancy, namely, that a visibly pregnant woman was proof of female sexuality.”¹⁵⁷ Employers stated it was ‘not nice’ for obviously pregnant women to be working in a factory because of its “bad effect on male employees”—distracting them from their jobs.¹⁵⁸ For many employers, trained women were invaluable and keeping them on the job was essential.¹⁵⁹

As recruitment campaigns focused on bringing young women into the workforce, high attrition rates due to pregnancy became an industrial problem. *The New York Times* reported, “One Midwestern aircraft plant hired 2,000 women, in the same month 1,600 women left.” Another article stated, a “West Coast aircraft factory, whose estimated six-month need was 20,000 workers, during a two-month period, when 4,000 women were hired, 3,000 women left.”¹⁶⁰ The article pointed out that approximately eight million women employed in war plants were of childbearing age and “**at all times one sixth** of the married women employed by a large corporation which has war plants in several sections of the country are absent from work because of pregnancy.”¹⁶¹ Even union contracts supported management, “as comparatively few union contracts take cognizance of the

¹⁵⁷ Ruth L. Fairbanks, “A Pregnancy Test: Women Workers and the Hybrid American Welfare State, 1940-1993,” (PhD. Urbana-Champaign, 2015), 2.

¹⁵⁸ Fairbanks, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Historian Eileen Boris argues, the failure of the Women’s and Children’s Bureaus to take advantage of the opportunity to establish paid maternity leave, which existed in many European countries, was a lost opportunity, leaving the United States, as one of the largest industrial nations without a comprehensive family leave policy, resulting in no “layettes, nursing time, or cash income replacement for time away from their jobs.” Eileen Boris, “No Right to Layettes or Nursing Time’: Maternity Leave and the Question of U.S. Exceptionalism,” *Workers across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History*, 2011, 171-193, 173

¹⁶⁰ “Pregnancy No. 1 Health Problem of Women Engaged in War Jobs,” *Wilmington Daily Press Journal*, Oct. 4, 1943.

¹⁶¹ Author’s emphasis. “Pregnancy No. 1 Health Problem of Women Engaged in War Jobs,” *Wilmington Daily Press Journal*, October 4, 1943

pregnancy problems, even in industries where there is a high percentage of women workers.”¹⁶² Fear of potential law suits resulting from miscarriage due to hazards inherent in women’s jobs or other accidents in the workplace drove employers to protect themselves from law suits.

Despite existing evidence that most factory jobs were not dangerous to pregnant women, many companies continued to fire them upon discovering their pregnancy. As a result, “women concealed [it] and continued to do work too heavy for them, with miscarriages, abortions, or birth on the factory floor the inevitable results.”¹⁶³ Dr. Charlotte Silverman of the Children’s Bureau reported statistics collected from “seventy-three plants employing 273,000 people” regarding their pregnancy policies.¹⁶⁴ She reported, “64 industries did something about it. The results indicated thirty-two discharged the employees as soon as they heard they were pregnant or within the next three months. Three plants discharged pregnant women on their physicians’ advice. Only one gave leaves of absence.”¹⁶⁵ In rare cases, enlightened industrialists took individual efforts to ensure a woman’s ability to work during pregnancy or saw her placed on a less dangerous job.

Journalist Gretta Palmer openly addressed the conflict women faced between becoming pregnant and keeping their job. The term pregnancy was too explicit or intimate to be openly used, and large numbers of young women in the factory simply referred to it as the “problem.” Writing for *Harper’s Magazine*, Palmer openly addressed the issue: “The plant manager’s knowledge of women is not complete until he has learned about two

¹⁶² “Touchy Problem,” *Business Week*, Sept 25, 1943, 80.

¹⁶³ Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 7; Ernest Goodman to George F. Addes, August 7, 1943, UAW Papers, “Research on the Women’s Auxiliary,” folder 32, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶⁴ Fairbanks, “A Pregnancy Test,” 5.

¹⁶⁵ Mezerik, “The Factory Manager,” *Harper’s Magazine* (September 1943): 296.

cardinal facts of life—pregnancy and abortion. Perhaps the problem would be solved more easily if every pregnant woman wanted her baby, but more don't than do.” Palmer investigated the problem of pregnancy in the factory, noting management’s response, and its impact on production. Palmer’s article, “Your Baby or Your Job,” in the *Woman’s Home Companion*, asserted, “pregnancy is America’s Number One industrial problem today.”¹⁶⁶ She cited one large corporation with multiple plants located across the country, had as high a rate of absenteeism due to pregnancy and miscarriage as respiratory infections and flu.¹⁶⁷ Another employer’s files showed that for “*married* women alone, one hundred and eighty-five out of every thousand were absent due to pregnancy on an average day.”¹⁶⁸

No protective legislation existed for pregnant women or paid maternity leaves; “[t]he private welfare state has produced the family wage ideal of a male breadwinner and the female homemaker and depended on marriage-based entitlement.”¹⁶⁹ Tying social benefits to this ideal obviated the need for the other kinds of benefits that pregnant workers needed in their own right—job-secure maternity leaves with wage replacement provisions, possibility of job transfer out of dangerous occupations, [and] perhaps accommodations to pregnancy in some situations.”¹⁷⁰ Despite making minimum accommodations necessary for pregnant women, factory managers were not prepared for post-partum women returning to their jobs after the mandated post-pregnancy leave. In light of the hardships experienced by post-partum mothers—juggling home, family, and job—factory managers found it

¹⁶⁶ Gretta Palmer, “Your Baby or Your Job,” *Women’s Home Companion* (October 1943): 70.

¹⁶⁷ Palmer, “Your Baby or Your Job,” 4.

¹⁶⁸ Palmer, “Your Baby or Your Job,” 4.

¹⁶⁹ Ruth Fairbanks, “A Pregnancy Test: Women Workers and the Hybrid American Welfare State, 1940-1993” (PhD diss. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2015), 17.

¹⁷⁰ Fairbanks, “A Pregnancy Test,” 5.

“surprising that large numbers of young, married women of child-bearing age would become pregnant and desire to continue working while pregnant.”¹⁷¹ Republican Mothers’ difficulties remained a private matter for the home; employers did not believe pregnant Republican Mothers had a place in a male bastion; however, wartime necessities were agents of social change.

While pregnancy and giving birth remained a private family affair, times were “a-changin.” Kaiser Cargo provided Sally Johnson to transfer from construction to the time department after she became pregnant. A government agent reported, “Her husband’s overseas and the check he sends home won’t quite pay for the baby. So, Sally’s sticking here as long as they’ll let her.”¹⁷² However, most factories had little sympathy for pregnant women who needed to work and factory management continued to act heavy handedly, even punitively, regarding maternity leaves, forcing women to make the choice between having their baby or keeping their war job, a seeming contradiction in a time of such great need for production and loss of life on the battlefield.

The issue of abortion gained national attention in October 1943, as a new recruitment campaign sought to bring more women into the workforce. Two journalists directed the national spotlight on working women and abortion. Gretta Palmer’s article openly discussed women’s concerns over keeping their jobs and found abortion was the working women’s solution to an unplanned pregnancy. Palmer disclosed that one munitions plant—in an unnamed southern state—reported “forty-five out of two thousand women were brought to the company hospital in less than a year with ‘incomplete

¹⁷¹ Mezerik, A.G., “The Factory Manager Learns the Facts of Life,” *Harper’s Magazine* 817 (September 1943), 295.

¹⁷² “Sally’s Going to Have a Baby, *Fore ‘n’ Aft* 3 no.42,” October 22, 1943, Box 3: “Office File of Verda W. Barnes, 1943-1944, ‘M,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

abortions.”¹⁷³ An interview with a foundry worker in the Midwest confirmed the frequency of abortions: “half the pregnancies of women working there were ‘fixed up’—and I mean for respectable married women.”¹⁷⁴ A female aircraft worker in Buffalo, New York, told Palmer, “There are only three subjects we discuss in the women’s rest room—‘my operation’; how to keep from getting pregnant if you aren’t; how to get rid of the baby if you are.”¹⁷⁵ Most factory counselors, for fear of losing their job, complied with management’s directive and avoided openly distributing birth control information or aiding married or unmarried women seeking an abortionist, which was illegal.

Without readily available access information on preventing pregnancy, working women often took a long weekend to get illegal abortions, popularly known as “the three-day illness,”—women called in sick on Monday to recover. When employers in one city in Alabama investigated the extremely high absentee rate for women on Mondays, they found a local abortion mill performed abortions on Saturdays so women could return to work on Tuesday. Abortion mills were a booming business. The *New York Times* printed numerous articles on abortions carried out by small groups of doctors, highly profitable “wholesale abortion mills,” and an “interstate abortion ring” that proliferated during the war years.¹⁷⁶ Fees for abortions ranged widely, from \$50 to \$500 and even as high as \$2,500.¹⁷⁷ City authorities actively sought out abortionists. In one example, seventeen doctors were

¹⁷³ Palmer, “Your Baby *or* Your Job,” 138.

¹⁷⁴ Palmer, “Your Baby *or* Your Job,” 138.

¹⁷⁵ Palmer, “Your Baby *or* Your Job,” 138.

¹⁷⁶ Countering the popular belief it was “young wayward girls” seeking abortions,” the *Long Beach Independence* wrote “most were married women” and the “majority of these abortions fall into criminal classification, some performed by midwives, some by the woman herself—but most by the predatory professional abortionists or midwives to get them. Max Mendelko, “Abortion Criminal; Many Wives Guilty,” *Long Beach Independent*, February 10, 1944. “Abortion Charges Made After Raids,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1943.

¹⁷⁷“3 Doctors Are Seized On Abortion Charge,” *New York Times*, June 1, 1944; “Hugh Profit Laid to Abortion Ring,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1941.

arrested and charged with running the biggest organized abortion syndicate in the city's history.¹⁷⁸

As labor shortages got more serious, companies began to establish maternity policies. In December 1943, a Philadelphia war plant announced, "We'll fire no more women workers because they are pregnant."¹⁷⁹ Five companies in the New York City area—including Bridgeport Brass, Wright Aeronautical, Grumman, Sperry-Gyronautics, and Republic—announced new pregnancy policies in compliance with those of the Women's Bureau. Grumman's maternity policy specified: "Women are encouraged to report pregnancy at once so that they may receive special consideration in the type of work they do. They are permitted to continue to work until the seventh month but must have a doctor's certificate to do this and if there were no complications they are allowed to return eight weeks after the birth of the child."¹⁸⁰ In addition, Grumman and Republic also offered group insurance plans for women. Dunbar's article also noted the Kaiser Corporation's effort to "develop a company hospital plan whereby women are given full prenatal care and are even delivered of their babies."¹⁸¹ Companies reported that women given the opportunity to continue to work into the seventh month safely delivered their babies. This evidence demonstrated the previous policies were mistaken and working women, especially those needing a paycheck, were freed from early dismissal and guaranteed a job to return to.

The national increase in abortions indicated the Republican Mother did not necessarily see childbearing and rearing as her only job which stimulated debate over

¹⁷⁸ "17 Doctors Named By Amen in Racket," *New York Times*, April 23, 1941.

¹⁷⁹ Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, "Arms Plants Have Problem of Maternity," *New York Herald Tribune*, January 30, 1944.

¹⁸⁰ Bromley, "Arms Plants Have Problem."

¹⁸¹ Bromley, "Arms Plants Have Problem."

women's access to birth control information and contraceptive devices, allowing women to take more control over their bodies. Historian Susan M. Hartmann writes, "The little research available indicates that couples were using more effective forms of contraception. As douching became less popular as a contraceptive measure, condoms, diaphragms, and rhythm gained popularity. But none of these practices were failproof, and the rhythm method was much less effective than appliance methods."¹⁸² A Gallup poll indicated seventy-seven percent of people in the United States "favor the spread of birth control knowledge," stimulating greater demand for information on birth control.¹⁸³ As women gained greater opportunities outside the home they also desired more control over their bodies and the size of their families, thus changing one of the basic tenets of the Democratic Family.

As more women entered the workforce and enjoyed the experience, pressure for a means to control their fertility increased along with the desire to control the size of their families, accelerating the activities of the American Birth Control League. When the league changed its name to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), it assumed a less controversial approach, focusing on "the family, not the woman within it, as the unit for the application of reproductive control," and the decision maker about whether to use it or not.¹⁸⁴ The newly named organization opened a nationwide network of clinics starting in 1942.¹⁸⁵ To popularize their cause, Margaret Sanger distanced PPFA from earlier associations to fields such as eugenics.¹⁸⁶ Their new message empathized family planning

¹⁸² Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 171.

¹⁸³ "Here Are the Facts." *The Wainwright Sun*, May 7, 1942.

¹⁸⁴ Linda Gordon, *Women's Body, Women's Right: Birth Control in America*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 338.

¹⁸⁵ "Connecticut Kills Birth Control," *The New York Times*, April 22, 1943.

¹⁸⁶ Eugenics increasing became associated with German and Italian efforts at population control. In a February 1939 article in *The Commentator*, "The Stork is the Bird of War," Eugene Lyons contrasted democracy with totalitarian governments and their exploitation of women's procreative powers, claiming "Prolific motherhood is preached as a

or “child spacing” as a way to make families healthier and wealthier.¹⁸⁷ Richard Pierson, president of the PFFA, argued in favor of “child spacing” from a wartime perspective, pointing out women’s critical role in production and lost production due to absenteeism. “Absenteeism in industry is twice as great among women as among men, and . . . ‘one of the most important causes has been found to be abortions among married women in industry, who have been forced to resort to this barbaric measure because of unwanted pregnancies.’”¹⁸⁸ Morris Fishbein, editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, “estimated that during the first two years of the war, abortions increased from twenty to forty percent” and “in 1942, 17 percent of deaths of women during pregnancy and childbirth resulted from abortion despite being ‘illegal in almost all states and territories in the 1940s.’”¹⁸⁹ The number of doctors “prosecuted for performing abortions, [drove] the practice underground and into less skilled hands.”¹⁹⁰ In an effort to empower women to prevent unwanted pregnancies, the PFFA, in conjunction with the Alabama State Health Department, published and distributed informational pamphlets regarding “industrial health”—such as “Employing the Married Woman Worker” and “To the Molly Pitchers of this War”—to employers across the country. The pamphlet warned modern Molly Pitchers of the complications associated with neglect or overwork while pregnant and recommended women seek medical care as well as warning of the dangers of

patriotic duty” in nations like Germany, Italy, Japan, and the Soviet Union.” He highlighted foreign propaganda that “focused on the female of our species, cajoling, taunting, threatening, *demanding* more children. . . supplemented with cash rewards for fecundity . . . bonuses for unusually large families, preferential treatment for fathers.” Eugene Lyons, “The Stork is the Bird of War,” *The Commentator* (February 1938): 97-104, 97.

¹⁸⁷ Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974) 244; Jonathan Eig, *The Birth of the Pill: How Four Crusaders Reinvented Sex and Launched a Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2014), 57.

¹⁸⁸ Kathleen McLaughlin, “Dr. Pierson Would Instruct Wives in Arms Plants, Help fight Absenteeism,” *Herald Tribune*, January 29, 1943.

¹⁸⁹ Annalise Winny, “A Brief History of Abortion in the U.S.,” accessed April 30, 2023, <https://magazine.jhsph.edu/2022/brief-history-abortion-us>.

¹⁹⁰ Winny, “A Brief History of Abortion in the U.S.”

abortions. Rather than directly advising women of their right to control pregnancy, it urged them to seek advice from their physicians on effective contraceptive measures to space births.¹⁹¹ The PPFA provided booklets and other information to disseminate among workers. Still, it focused its efforts on factory managers, generally males, rather than directly addressing women employees. The booklets argued “child spacing” would benefit production, significantly reducing absenteeism and allowing production to continue without complications resulting from pregnancy and maternity leaves.¹⁹² In general, male factory managers did not approve of the distribution of literature and counselors avoided openly distributing birth control information or advising women seeking help finding an abortionist or psychiatrist.¹⁹³

Birth control advocates traveled the country encouraging women to seek medical professionals’ help in preventing unwanted pregnancies. Speaking at a Planned Parenthood meeting in New York state, Eva Dodge—obstetrical consultant to Alabama State Board of Health and assistant director of the PPFA—stated, “Complete maternal care for industrial women is most important and must include child spacing as one of its component parts.”¹⁹⁴ Dodge argued that child spacing under medical supervision was only available in a few areas and that industries lacked medical staff with the training necessary to offer child spacing information. She warned, “Abortions will increase unless there is reliable spacing information made available to women in war work.”¹⁹⁵ Even in normal years, she pointed

¹⁹¹ Alabama State Health Department, “To the Molly Pitchers of This War,” 1943, Box 24 Folder 22, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College Special Collection.

¹⁹² Planned Parenthood Federation of America, “84.9% said Yes! But . . .” 1944, Box 7: Folder 13, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College Special Collection.

¹⁹³ Medical doctors were the only authorized practitioner who could perform abortions but only in life-or-death situations.

¹⁹⁴ “Churchman Urges Birth Control Aid,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1943.

¹⁹⁵ “Child Spacing Seen as Help To War Workers,” *Berkshire Eagle*, October 30, 1942.

out, 90 percent of illegal abortions were among married women.¹⁹⁶ Dodge argued that although available birth control methods—diaphragms and douches—were not popular or fool proof, without readily available information regarding birth control, abortion would be most women’s only solution to family planning.

Seeking to empower women to prevent unwanted pregnancies, the PPFA, in conjunction with the Alabama State Health Department, published and distributed informational pamphlets regarding “industrial health”—such as “Employing the Married Woman Worker” and “To the Molly Pitchers of this War”—to employers across the country. The pamphlet warned modern “Molly Pitchers” of complications associated with neglect or overwork while pregnant and recommended women seek medical care as well as warning of the dangers of abortions. Rather than directly advising women of their right to control pregnancy, it urged them to seek advice from their physicians on effective contraceptive measures to space births.¹⁹⁷ The PPFA provided booklets and other information to disseminate among workers. It continued to focus its efforts on factory managers, generally males, rather than directly addressing working women. The booklets argued “child spacing” would benefit production, which would significantly reduce absenteeism, and allow manufacturing to continue without complications resulting from pregnancy and maternity leaves.¹⁹⁸

Increased sexual activity among young, unmarried women also drove up birth rates, which had lagged for the past two decades. Katherine Lenroot reported that in 1941, “Wartime conditions resulted in the largest recorded birth rate in the history of the United

¹⁹⁶ “Child Spacing.”

¹⁹⁷ Alabama State Health Department, “To the Molly Pitchers of This War.”

¹⁹⁸ Planned Parenthood Federation of America, “84.9% said Yes! But . . .”

States. . . . Nearly 2,500,000 births were recorded last year, 140,000 more than 1940.”¹⁹⁹ Many births were out of wedlock and in 1942, the number of illegitimate births rose to 3,040,000 and in 1943, to 3,200,000.²⁰⁰ With only thirty-eight states reporting, the Census Bureau reported the illegitimate birth rate was 5.3 percent higher in 1944 than 1943.²⁰¹ The Census Bureau reported the latter part of the war saw the biggest increase in the illegitimate birth rate.²⁰²

More disturbing than the escalating numbers of illegitimate births was the trend for single, unmarried mothers to keep their illegitimate babies rather than putting them up for adoption. This practice threatened to undermine the fabric of post-war society and a return to the conventional Democratic Family. Henrietta Gordon of the Child Welfare League of America decried the changing attitude toward illegitimacy. Speaking to the league’s membership, she stated women who kept children born out of wedlock failed to appreciate the prospect of social ostracism and did not recognize well-paid job opportunities would cease after the war. She wrote that many of these mothers are “blinded by what might appear to be ‘manna from Heaven.’”²⁰³ She also warned of a “false sense of security many mothers had due to the availability of jobs and allotments available during the war.”²⁰⁴ Gordon believed these women, as single mothers, and their offspring would face hard times in postwar society. She warned that neither women’s employment opportunities nor the size of their paychecks would be as lucrative after the war and their children would be

¹⁹⁹ “Birth Rate in ‘41 Highest in History,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1942.

²⁰⁰ “1943 Birth Rate A Record,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1942.

²⁰¹ Ten states, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, and Wyoming did not require information on legitimacy in birth registration. “Illegitimate Births Rise,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1945.

²⁰² John Costello, *Love Sex and War: Changing Values, 1939-1945* (London: Collins, 1985), 277.

²⁰³ “More Babies Kept By Unwed Mothers,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1944.

²⁰⁴ “More Babies Kept.”

stigmatized as society embraced once more its traditional values of the Republican Mother and Democratic Family.

A second alternative to birthing an illegitimate child was abandonment, often the choice of an increasing number of “bad mothers” who did not desire to keep their children. Historians Molly Ladd Taylor and Lauri Umansky discuss “bad” mothers as defined by contemporary society. The authors argue single, divorced, even widowed mothers fell outside the good category. Despite the barrage of advertisements calling mothers to hang up their aprons and “desert” their children for war jobs appearing regularly in newspapers during the war years, society continued to hold Victorian familial values, which in the postwar years would condemn them for abandoning their responsibility and children in exchange for money. The lack of a father’s presence—single mothers with husbands in the military, lost in combat, divorce, or desertion—forced many women to carry the burden of supporting their children alone during and after the war.

While fighting the “good war” to protect the Democratic Family, it appeared the war was destroying it. Stories of Republican Mothers turned bad appeared in newspapers frequently, decrying women’s faltering commitment to family and the state of crisis produced by the war: weakened family bonds, women’s faltering commitment to raising children, placing their children second and their own happiness first. Child neglect and abandonment became epidemic during the war years as married women with a soldier abroad and unmarried women living in a society with loosened morals felt the burden of an unwanted child too much to bear alone. A Pittsburgh newspaper wrote that four cases of abandonment had occurred in the city so far that year, concluding that “most of the mothers left their children to go out for a good time.”²⁰⁵ In Chicago, where the number of

²⁰⁵ “Mother Who Left Infant Also Faces Morals Charge,” *Pittsburg Press*, July 24, 1944.

abandonments doubled during the war years, newspapers claimed loose women were “responsible for 95 percent of the cases.”²⁰⁶ The paper commented, women’s “new-found freedom causes many . . . to forget their obligations to their children—and their homes—and the next thing they’re going out with other men.”²⁰⁷ Sociologist Professor Louis Wirth from the University of Chicago called the war “a social catastrophe.”²⁰⁸ Fearing the loss of a core American value, the mother in the home, a.k.a. the Republican Mother, to a patriot threatened the very pinning’s of American society, essentially leaving it rudderless.

Often the product of a woman’s promiscuity, infidelity, or loneliness, the number of infants abandoned by their mothers grew epidemic. War bride Norma Lee Kimble, posing as Mrs. Fay Hill, called the police to report an “abandoned baby” at the train station. She told detectives a woman had left it with her and walked away. When the police caught Kimble in her lie, she stated, “she had concocted the tale because she was afraid her soldier husband wouldn’t understand her infidelity.”²⁰⁹ Also cheating on her husband serving overseas, Mrs. Jesse Norman from Elliott, Mississippi arrived at the Los Angeles bus depot and told her waiting boyfriend, Floyd Bennett, she felt sick. Retreating to the restroom, she gave birth to a premature baby boy. Norman proceeded to stuff the infant into a pile of newspapers leaving him to die.²¹⁰ In Long Beach, California, Marie Elder, a waitress and wife of a sailor stationed at Terminal Island, went to the movies with a “boyfriend.” During the film, she took her one-month-old son into the powder room to care for him; when another theater patron commented on the cute baby, Elder told her, “You can have it. . . . His father was a sailor who was killed. I’m going to marry another sailor, and he objects to

²⁰⁶ “Child Desertions Double in Chicago,” *New York Daily News*, February 20, 1944.

²⁰⁷ “Child Desertions.”

²⁰⁸ “Child Abandonments in Chicago Area Double,” *The Modesto Bee*, November 29, 1943.

²⁰⁹ “Soldier’s Wife Greets Baby She Left in Station,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1944.

²¹⁰ “Woman Gives Birth to Boy in Bus Depot,” *Shreveport Times*, October 18, 1945.

the baby.” She handed the baby to the woman and returned to the show.²¹¹ The other woman returned to her seat and told her escort it was her baby now; he disagreed and contacted the police; authorities arrested Elder and charged her with a felony. Bernadine Healy, director of social services at St. Vincent’s orphanage, summed up the rash of abandonments this way: women’s “newfound freedom causes many of the women to forget their obligations to their children—and to their husbands away from home—and the next thing you know, they’re going out with other men.”²¹² Newspapers across the country carried stories of lonely, young wives’ infidelity, out of wedlock sex, and cheating on their absentee husbands. The growing number of “Jezebels” cheating on their soldier husbands fighting on foreign shores shocked and angered the public.

Not all abandoned children were infants. The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported on two siblings, a five-year-old girl and her eight-year-old brother, abandoned by their parents and picked up by police while attempting “to catch a ride to their grandparents” in Oklahoma.²¹³ The children told the police they hadn’t seen their parents for two years, since they left for work in California. The *Chicago Tribune* reported a court psychiatrist declared Mrs. Myrtle Kubon emotionally unstable “due to war tensions” and sentenced her to six months in county jail after abandoning her husband and three children for the sixth time and taking up with another man. Despite the father’s appeal for “another chance,” the judge referred the children to Juvenile court.²¹⁴ Women also ran away, abandoning their husbands and family.

²¹¹ “Mother Gives Infant to Film Theater Patron,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1945.

²¹² Additional articles the following day state after the baby was returned to Elder, and Elder’s husband was alive and stationed at Terminal Island. “Child Abandonment in Chicago Area Doubles,” *Argus Leader* (Sioux Falls, South Dakota) November 30, 1943.

²¹³ “Nobody at Home, So Tots Start for Oklahoma,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 25, 1945.

²¹⁴ “Alarm Grows Over Mothers’ Child Neglect,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 13, 1945.

In a different twist, the state attorney general in Kansas, Jay Parker, told reporters he “received many complaints from men who haven’t heard from their spouses for weeks,” making it impossible for them to work. In answer to the question of prosecuting mothers deserting their families, Parker replied, “A man can be prosecuted for family desertion,” but “the law doesn’t include errant women.”²¹⁵ Women’s rejection of motherhood was viewed as unnatural. The Republican Mother and Democratic Family, once the American ideal, appeared to be in grave peril.

The war abroad threatened to undermine the highly cherished traditional American value, the republican mother working in her home meeting the family’s daily needs coping with wartime shortages, dealing with wartime protocols such as rationing, recycling, and planting victory gardens on top of calls for women to take on a man’s work inside and outside the home. Many full-time mothers had never imagined they would be in a position where it became necessary to work outside the home. However, for women with husbands serving in the military, government allotments often proved inadequate in the face of wartime inflation, and they desired to do whatever was necessary to bring the war to a successful conclusion.

The January 1943, *New York Times* covered the opening of a new childcare facility for working mothers. New York officials gathered to celebrate the first information and counseling service opened by the Mayor’s Committee on Wartime Care of Children in Harlem. Ironically, Mayor La Guardia lashed out against working mothers, stating, “The worst mother is better than the best institution when it is a matter of child care,” adding, “he did not believe in making the State the ‘father and mother of a child.’”²¹⁶ War-affected

²¹⁵ “Fathers Are Worried,” *The Manhattan Mercury*, January 9, 1943.

²¹⁶ “Child Care Center Opened by Mayor,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1943.

communities, such as Brooklyn, saw a dramatic increase in the numbers of children needing care while mothers worked, prompting great public criticism. Leading women spoke out against working mothers. Councilwoman Genevieve B. Earle from Brooklyn “cautioned mothers against taking jobs;” the city “can’t be a dumping ground for children.”²¹⁷ Mary Childes Draper, president of the Bureau of Charities, also of Brooklyn, claimed many women were trying to evade their home responsibilities and make money under the guise of patriotism: “We must be all out for war,” she declared, “but not all out of the home.”²¹⁸ Similarly, in a letter to the editor of the *Dallas Morning News*, Pearl McDougal argued, “The purpose of war has always been to defend the home, women, and children. Women are ready and willing to do their part but with homes being broken up by taking women out to work in war plants and doing other war work . . . it seems that soon there will be no homes to defend.”²¹⁹ The next chapter looks at the government’s effort to establish childcare for working mothers, in an effort to hold civilian society together and protect children until the war ended.

²¹⁷ “Mothers Advised to Shun War Jobs,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1943.

²¹⁸ “Mothers Advised to Shun War Jobs.”

²¹⁹ Pearl McDougal, “Fewer Homes to Defend,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 10, 1942.

CHAPTER 5: THE BATTLE OF THE CHILD: MOMMY, WHO'S GOING TO TAKE CARE OF ME IF YOU TAKE A WAR JOB?

In May 1942, Mary Anderson, director of the Women's Bureau, the government's authority regarding women's policy, received a letter from Louise DeLong, an employee of the Tarrant Broadcasting Company in Fort Worth, Texas. DeLong had enrolled in the Personnel Management Class at Texas Christian University leading to a counselor position for women employees in defense plants.¹ As a mother of a young child, DeLong shared a personal interest in the topic of childcare for preschool children with many other mothers thinking of taking jobs at the newly constructed Consolidated Vultee bomber plant and Globe Aircraft. DeLong requested information to complete a class assignment "on some personnel problem and its solution . . . either from our own experience or a hypothetical one."² She explained:

Inasmuch as I have had no actual personnel experience, my report must necessarily be based on some problem other than one of my own. . . . I have chosen to write on a subject I am personally interested in since I am the working mother of a five-year-old son. . . . the problem of what is to be done about the pre-school children of mothers who are to be engaged in War Production. If you have any material on this subject concerning the Government Schools that have been established for this purpose in England, Germany, and other warring countries, as well as any information whatever as to what is being done, or has been done,

¹ The Personnel Management Class was part of the Engineering, Science, Management, and Defense Training Program sponsored by the US Office of Education. The ESMDT program offered college-level training at universities and colleges across the United States between October 1940 and June 1945, when it became "evident that the number of engineers and scientist who could be graduated from the Nation's college would be insufficient to meet the critical needs of national defense." In 1942 the name changed to ESMWT (Engineering, Science, Management War Training). Contemporary personnel departments find their roots in World War II, dealing with women's issues. Henry H. Armsby, "Engineering, Science, and Management War Training: Final Report, Bulletin 1946, No. 9. Federal Security Agency, Office of Education, v11-ix, accessed March 5, 2018, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED543335.pdf>. Letter to Mary Anderson from Miss Louise De Long, May 13, 1942, Box: 185: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, Hu-I": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

² Letter to Mary Anderson from Miss Louise De Long, Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

along these lines in our own Country, I should certainly be most grateful to receive it.³

Upon receipt of DeLong's letter, Mary Anderson forwarded it to the Children's Bureau, the government's authority on children. Since no national plan existed, Katharine Lenroot, head of the bureau, would have referred DeLong to an existing day nursery, overseen by the local social welfare community, for information. The only federal commitment to childcare was the Works Progress Administration's nurseries established during the Depression exclusively for mothers working on projects. The need for nursery services increased as married women with children became the largest labor reserve. DeLong recognized her job as a counselor was on the cutting edge of a national debate over childcare for working mothers in a nation where the ideal of the Republican Mother at home caring for her children was quickly losing ground. The father draft meant thousands of Republican Mothers had to work outside the home to support their families and the war effort. War production called for an "all hands-on deck" effort, including a national childcare solution.

When DeLong wrote her letter, the federal government had just started to tackle the question of childcare as recruitment efforts drew increasing numbers of mothers with young children into industry. Adequate public daycare services for mothers were not available for women taking jobs in defense industries or essential services. The only formalized childcare available was in local day nurseries and foster-family care, exclusively for poor, disadvantaged mothers. DeLong's question illustrates the need for a national childcare solution for working mothers who did not qualify for social welfare services. When Republican Mothers went to

³ Letter to Mary Anderson from Miss Louise De Long, Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

work, it caused great concern over preschool children's development and long-term consequences for the future. The "motherless home" became a national dilemma.

Unlike totalitarian governments that forced their women to work outside the home, efforts to pass national registration for women in war services in the United States repeatedly failed, leaving women to choose for themselves whether or not to work. The national consensus remained heavily in favor of tradition, the mothers' place in the home caring for her children. The War Manpower Commission's official policy maintained that no woman with children fourteen years old or younger should abandon her home and full-time childcare responsibilities to take a job; however, employers increasingly turned to womanpower. The reasons women chose to work varied: many out of need, others out of patriotism, and some to get ahead and save for the future. Manpower shortages hindered production, forcing mothers, the only untapped reservoir of laborers, to take jobs outside the home. Reluctantly, the government abandoned its former policy of the mother "at home as usual" and considered establishing a childcare program for working mothers. This chapter focuses on the government's response to Republican Mother's "proper place" in wartime, prompting a long drawn-out battle over control of the wartime nurseries resulting in what is referred to as the "battle over the child."⁴

The question of wartime childcare took on great importance as thousands of men, with families in tow, migrated to cities for jobs in war industries, leaving their familial support systems and arriving in communities unprepared for them. Communities with war industries lacked the necessary physical infrastructure to provide adequate living quarters, schools, and restaurants. Existing public services—roads, water, schools, and sewage—were inadequate, and preschool children with working parents were often left without any adult supervision. The

⁴ A phrase coined by Susan B. Anthony to describe the long-drawn-out national debate over the best form of wartime childcare.

question loomed as to where financial and administrative authority lay. Opinion was divided between two factions: those who believed that the government should provide childcare in an educational environment and those who believed local areas should adhere to the traditional social work model, the day nursery. Day nurseries were local programs funded by federal and state monies and overseen by social workers under the jurisdiction of the Children's Bureau.

Great numbers of migrants moving from rural areas and smalltown America to cities with war jobs left their familial support systems behind. The *New York Times* reported, "Our correspondent tells of a letter she has received from a grandmother who wrote, 'If anyone should ask for a name for this war, it's 'Grandmother's War.' I have had my house full of grandchildren for a month and so have all of my friends whose children are off for war work of one kind or another.'"⁵ Women holding jobs outside the home often depended upon mothers or family members for childcare, however migrants arrived in a strange place with no familial support system, inadequate housing and public utilities, and no one to watch their children.

In 1939, the government created a wartime construction agency, the Federal Works Agency, responsible for building housing, schools, water and sewer projects, roads, and public housing projects to accommodate migrants taking jobs in defense industries.⁶ One such housing project was Avion Village in Grand Prairie, Texas, designed to house five hundred families working at North American Aviation.⁷ The blueprint for Avion Village's community center, Figure 27, included nursery facilities for working parents. The arrow points to the area for pre-school children, most likely meant to serve as a Works Project Administration nursery, a Depression-era solution to childcare for poor mothers.

⁵ "Topics of The Times," *New York Times*, August 24, 1942.

⁶ By the end of the war nearly 168,000 defense housing units were built. Avion Village is one example, <https://ushistoryscene.com/article/mutual-housing/>.

⁷ The Mutual Ownership Defense Housing Division was part of the FWA, created under the Division of War Public Service to build public housing for defense workers.

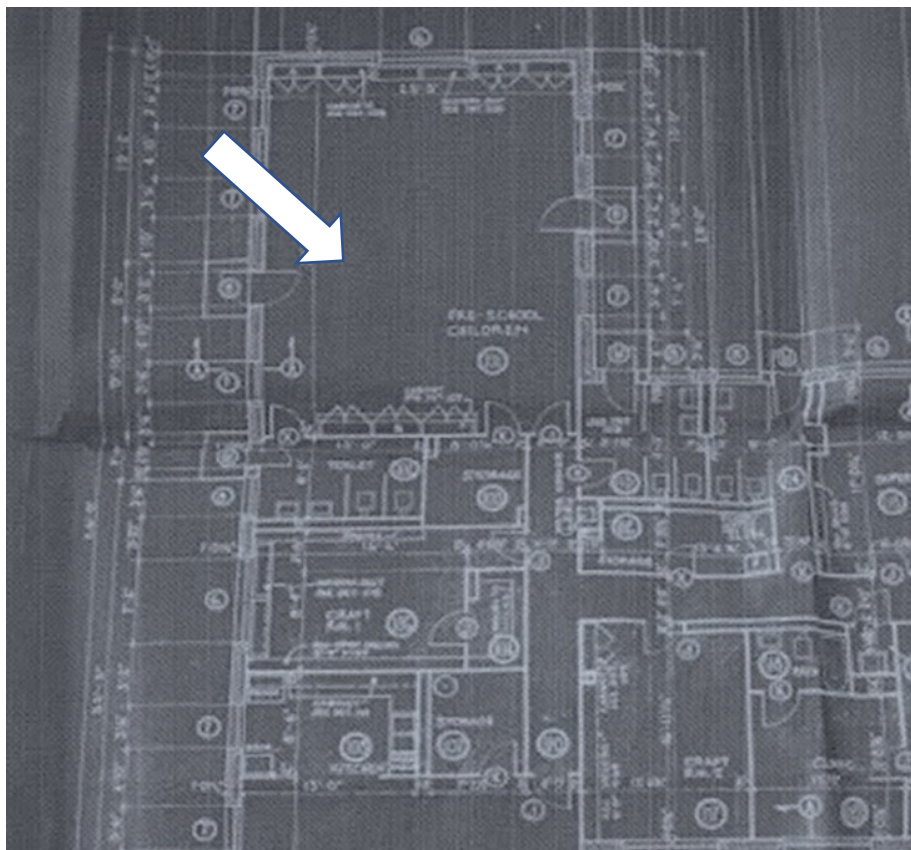


Figure 27: Partial view of the Social and Community Building for Avion Village”⁸

As a newly created war agency, the Federal Works Agency had difficulty keeping up with the demands to build an adequate infrastructure to meet expanding populations in war communities. For example, “When the U.S. government announced plans to build a shipyard in Seneca, Illinois, the community had just one restaurant and a single hotel to feed and house twenty-seven thousand newcomers.”⁹ Crowded tent cities and trailer parks cropped up on cities’ outskirts close to the war plants. Some families were lucky enough to find empty boxcars to live in, while others settled for “[c]hicken houses, barns, shacks and woodsheds.”¹⁰ The image below

⁸ Partial view of the Social and Community Building for Avion Village, area for Pre-School Children is in the center of photograph; “Blueprint of Avion Village, October 1940,” 162, Box: 1: “Blue Print Social and Administration Bldg. Project,” TEX9-1, (for Housing Authority-City of Dallas),” N.A.

⁹ Dean J. Kotlowski, *Paul McNutt and the Age of FDR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 325.

¹⁰ Grace Thorne Allen, Maxime Davis, et al., “Eight Hour Orphans,” *Saturday Evening Post* 215, no. 15 (1942), 20-21, 105-106.

is a photograph taken by Jack Selano of a trailer camp in Childersburg, Alabama in May 1941. Selano wrote, “Many workmen and their families living here are either waiting for job openings or already have jobs at the nearby powder plant.”¹¹ The photograph, Figure 28, demonstrates the crowded living conditions in which many migrants migrating for war jobs called home.



Figure 28: “A Trailer Camp in Childersburg (Alabama)”¹²

Communities, already stretched to the breaking point, had few resources to accommodate migrants and hastily established mobile home parks near war plants. Migrants met with hostility from local residents. In Willow Run, Michigan, locals complained “numerous trailer families had outdoor privies and some buried their garbage in the backyard,” potentially contaminating the

¹¹ “A trailer camp in Childersburg [Alabama],” May 1941, Photo by Jack Delano, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017749503/>

¹² A trailer camp in Childersburg.”

water and increasing the threat of outbreaks of typhoid fever.¹³ Still worse, locals complained that “trailerites showed no interest in restraining their rude and belligerent children.”¹⁴ However, the source of the problem was not simply a distaste for the hoard of “foreigners” arriving in great numbers but a lack of local infrastructure to support the increasing population—housing, roads, water and waste services, schools, and childcare services for preschool children—necessary to support them.

Officials in Baltimore reported that a family of seven had recently moved to the city and were unable to find more than a single room for rent in which the husband slept since he needed to sleep to keep his job. His wife and five children, ages three to twelve years old, slept in the car. She reported, “In three weeks, I never lay down. I held the baby in my lap on the front seat every night. Two of the children slept on the rear seat and two on the floor.”¹⁵ The article prompted the offer of two attic rooms for the family. The expanded aviation industry in North Texas also reported housing shortages. The Dallas newspaper reported that migrant families found homes in “abandoned service stations, former wayside beer joints, and vacant stores. By using curtains or screens for privacy and separate sleeping quarters, some of the war workers are making the best of what they can find until better living quarters can be obtained.”¹⁶ Fort Worth conducted campaigns seeking homeowners willing to rent rooms to migrants. During “Share Your Home Week,” Fort Worth encouraged homeowners to make a room or more available to a war worker or a family. Children were a stumbling block for many homeowners; many housewives opposed renting rooms to families with young children. One expressed “a preference

¹³ William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Daddy's Gone to War: The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Tuttle, *Daddy's Gone to War*, 60.

¹⁵ “Mother of 5 Living in a Car,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, September 27, 1942, Morning Edition.

¹⁶ “Mother of 5 Living in a Car.”

for a visit by a fire company to the admission of children.”¹⁷ The Office of War Information created cartoons for use by the media, Figure 29, suggests the absurd level the housing problem might reach—when a sewer might be home.



Figure 29: “Better Grab it, Mister—It’s the Last Room in Town!”¹⁸

“Making do,” living in improvised, substandard housing was such a shared experience that a radio show, “Hasten the Day,” airing on the Blue Network, followed the Tuckers and their fictitious family’s relocation to an industrial city and a new way of life. Unable to find suitable accommodations, they settled for a vacant gas station. The show followed the Tucker family—

¹⁷ “Share Your Home Week,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 16, 1943, Morning Edition.

¹⁸ “Better Grab it, Mister--It’s the Last Room in Town! November 15, 1943, Box 4: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes, 1943-1944, Entry 129”, Special Manpower Issue of Copy from OWI,” ‘N-S,’ Record Group 211, War Manpower Commission, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

father, stay-at-home mother, two sons abroad in the service, a teenaged son, daughter, and five-year-old boy—as they navigated their way through a variety of common wartime problems.¹⁹

Recognizing that parents moving to a new location had no family to rely on for care of their children while they worked, W.H. White, assistant to the vice president of Consolidated Aircraft Corporation in Fort Worth, Texas, attempted to be proactive when he turned to local ministers for help. He urged, “Turn your well-equipped Sunday school rooms into war nurseries for these children. If these children aren’t worth that—what is it worth to win at all?”²⁰ White’s plea to local clergy followed closely behind Louise DeLong’s letter to Mary Anderson regarding childcare solutions.

Society frowned on working mothers and in the early 1940s, licensed childcare programs were as elusive as wartime housing. In many war-impacted areas, the only options included unlicensed in-home nurseries or local, charitable day nurseries overseen by local women with no professional training or state certification. Day nurseries overseen by professional social workers offered the only safe, reliable care available; however, married women with working husbands did not qualify for these services. First established during the Progressive Movement, day nurseries were designed “to confront the difficulties brought on by rapid industrialization and urban growth in the late nineteenth century” and were meant to serve women in dire economic straits usually due to a spouse’s death, divorce, abandonment, disabled or indigent husbands, or birthing a child out of wedlock.²¹ Under state licensing, social welfare committees opened local day nurseries in impoverished areas of town for mothers who needed to work, and they became

¹⁹ Migration remained a problem until May 1943, when Paul McNutt announced the War Stabilization Plan, effectively ending voluntary migration. The focus turned to hiring local women through womenpower campaigns. “Hasten the Day Publicity Releases, August 28, 1944, Box: 834, “Entry E-152”: Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁰ “Churches Asked to Aid Nursery Plan, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 27, 1942.

²¹ Anne Durst, “Of Women, By Women, and For Women: The Day Nursery Movement in the Progressive -Era United States,” *The Journal of Social History* 39, no.1 (Autumn, 2005): 141-159, 141.

an integral part of a community's social welfare system. Social workers determined which mothers deserved services based on need and home visits. The staff, often volunteers, provided care which included meals, lessons in hygiene, and a safe, supervised environment.

Dependence upon charitable organizations stigmatized women and flagged their families as poor and dysfunctional. A wide variety of family situations forced impoverished women to seek public care for their children. Sociologist Esther Soddeck's study on working women in Boston revealed 17 percent "are families in which there is a sickness or death of a parent, 10 per cent have unsatisfactory social conditions, 5 per cent have illegitimate children, and 7 per cent of the families" live in "environments unfitted for the children."²² Soddeck's study revealed that only twenty-seven percent of mothers who used day nurseries worked out of need.²³ Soddeck concluded that the day nursery "tends to deal not with an average group of young children but with a group containing a higher percentage of children who already have emotional disorders or whose situation is one that is conducive to the development of emotional maladjustments."²⁴

During the early stages of war production, industry remained in denial that married women with children would be needed for war work and federal authorities did little to plan for wartime childcare. The solution for childcare, therefore, grew out of the afore mentioned emergency nursery program initiated during the Depression under the Works Progress Administration.²⁵ The program empowered individual communities to establish nurseries for children of mothers in the Works Progress Administration's programs. Although partially

²² Esther E. Soddeck, "Case Work, in a Day Nursery: A Study of 41 Cases at the Morgan Memorial Day Nursery 1942 - 1943," (MS thesis, Boston University, Boston, 1943), 82.

²³ Soddeck, "Case Work, 82.

²⁴ Soddeck, "Case Work," 7.

²⁵ In 1933, at Eleanor Roosevelt's urging, Harry Hopkins approved *the establishment of a nursery program* funded by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), exclusively for use by mothers working in government relief programs. As well as providing a service for mothers working on government projects, *the WPA program provided jobs for thousands of unemployed teachers, nurses, cooks, janitors, and carpenters.*

supported by government funds, it was not bogged down by social service representatives or tainted by any association with public welfare.

The Works Progress Administration's nurseries grew out of the emerging field of child development during the early twentieth century, focusing less on simple custodial care and embracing the rising field of child development in an educational environment, a.k.a. the kindergarten movement. Besides offering socialization, these nursery schools employed developmentally appropriate learning opportunities. Staffed by trained teachers, nursery schools lacked the stigma of poverty associated with day nurseries. These nurseries also provided healthy meals, health care, and adult education for parents. As economic prospects improved, efforts to shutter all of the Work's Progress Administration's projects, including their childcare nurseries, increased. However, women working in these projects needed to continue to work. Wartime needs gave these nurseries a new life.

As part of the response to the need for improved infrastructure in expanding industrial areas, the government passed the Defense Public Works Act (a.k.a. the Lanham Act) in 1940, consolidating all the remaining programs, including the Work's Progress nurseries, under one umbrella. That October, Fritz Lanham (D-TX) sponsored an amendment to the Lanham Act to expand funding for "the establishment of necessary social services," including the perpetuation of nurseries for working mothers, opening an opportunity to implement childcare.²⁶

Newspapers highlighted the serious nature of the childcare situation, including the neglect of older children. A variety of terms came into widespread use to describe unsupervised children. Terms such as "eight-hour orphans," "floating," or "latchkey," described children

²⁶ Alicia Barber, Historic American Buildings Survey, Maritime Child Development Center, accessed September 5, 2021, <http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/2126/Martime-Child-Development-Center---Historic-American-Buildings-Survey-HABS>, 7; Andrew L. Yarrow, "Is Federally Funded Child Care a Thing of the Past?" accessed February 1, 2023, <https://www.milkenreview.org/articles/is-federally-funded-child-care-a-thing-of-the-past>.

“roaming the streets with their house keys pinned to their clothes, walk[ing] home from school or wander[ing] aimlessly until their families return[ed] from work.”²⁷ Advocates for increased childcare facilities reported how pervasive parental neglect was: in Baltimore, “youngsters . . . swarmed around the factory entrance with no place to go;” in Detroit, children played noisily during the day while their mothers worked, keeping nighttime workers awake. In “at least three different places, groups of children were found herded into a chicken-wire enclosure in the basement of a house while mothers were working;”²⁸ and in Connecticut, “mothers employed in war industries kept their children in locked cars during working hours.”²⁹ Reports of women factory workers leaving their children locked in automobiles “grew so extensive it drew police action.”³⁰ Elinor Gimbel, president of the Child Study Association and Committee for the Care of Children in Wartime, warned, “The problem of door-key children looms in America and threatens to take on the proportions of the army of homeless children in Russia after the revolution.”³¹ A growing number of public officials feared that mothers’ failure to “hold down the fort” and guide their children would lead to an increase in juvenile delinquency and undermine the future of the Republican Mother and traditional family values.

Popular media fed upon the generalized fear as to whether the quality of care a child received when cared for by others was of the same caliber as that of their mothers at home.

Criticism directed at working mothers leaving their children in the care of others surfaced in

²⁷ Helen Gabbert, “industry Helps Solve Puzzle for County,” *Hackensack Record*, July 30, 1942; “War Jobs ‘Orphans’ A Major Problem,” *New York Times*, August 10, 1942; “Women’s Radio War Program Guide,” July 1943, 208, Box: 151, “Office of War Information, Nc-148, Box: 4 “Entry E-42, Admin – Women,” N.A.

²⁸ Corrine Hardesty, “CHILDREN—Need Care and Supervision Come Peace or War, Say Experts,” *Washington Post*, August 11, 1942; Abby J. Cohen, “A Brief History of Federal Financing for Child Care in the United States,” *The Future of Children* 6, no. 2, (Summer-Autumn, 1996), 29; Alfred Toombs, “War Babies,” *Women’s Home Companion* (April 1944): 50-56.

²⁹ “War Job Orphans” became a popular term for children of war workers. Hardesty, “CHILDREN—Need Care;” Cohen, “Brief History of Federal Funding,” 29; Toombs, “War Babies,” 50-56.

³⁰ “War Job Orphans.”

³¹ Hardesty alludes to the millions of homeless children after the World War I—whose parents incapacitated or dead or abandoned due to a lack of funds to support them—in post WWI Russia. Hardesty, “CHILDREN—Need Care;” Toombs, “War Babies,” 50-56.

popular media, even the daily comics. Between February 12 and April 14, 1943, the popular daily comic strip by Chester Gould, “Dick Tracy,” seen below, hyped the danger inherent in daycare, intensifying working mothers’ concerns over leaving their children in others’ care and making it even more imperative for a concerted effort to provide safe, licensed daycare. The cartoon depicted Frizzletop, a friend of detective Dick Tracy, who operated Potter Home for Small Children of War Workers. While making a delivery to the nursery, truck driver Myrtle Wreath learns of a new, free nursery and is excited to find a place for her son Johnny while Nifty, Myrtle’s unemployed, gambling, ex-husband spies on her. Resentful that the court awarded his wife custody of Johnny, Nifty discovers his ex-wife’s plan to use a day nursery to care for Johnny. Nifty expresses his discontent over his ex-wife working and not caring for his child, “I WON’T STAND FOR HIM BEING LEFT WITH STRANGERS.”³² Nifty continues spying on his ex-wife, noting the hours she drops Johnny off and picks him up. One morning Nifty arrives at the nursery delivering a large basket of fruit. After entering, he knocks-out the cook and kidnaps his son.



Figure 30: Chester Gould, “Dick Tracy, ‘Take Off’”³³

³² Author’s emphasis. Chester Gould, “Dick Tracy,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, February 10, 1943 – March 20, 1943, February 15.

³³ Chester Gould, “Dick Tracy, ‘Take Off,’” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, February 20, 1943.

Afraid the police officer on patrol might have spotted him, Nifty leaves his son on the tailgate of a parked truck. Unaware that Johnny is on the tailgate, the driver takes off, driving into a storm. Tracy witnesses this action and follows the truck into a blinding snowstorm. When the truck hits a bump in the road, Johnny falls off the back of the truck into a snowbank; a kindly man witnesses it and rescues Johnny, taking the boy to his farmhouse. Tracy also skids off the road and into a drift. The cartoon concludes with the highway patrol finding both Tracy and Johnny, who narrowly escaped death from exposure. Cartoons like this perpetuated parent's fears over leaving children in the care of others, instilling fear in mothers with young children considering a war job.

Cartoons like this and other exposés on nurseries led to questions regarding the care of a child outside the protection of their mother and home. Day nurseries oversaw the physical and mental health of children, including healthy meals and good hygiene, but they placed little or no emphasis on learning. After touring day nurseries in the Philadelphia area, Dr. Douglas Thom, a strong proponent of child guidance, described his visit to a day nursery. "In only two of the schools [there is] little or no opportunity for the children to learn to do things for themselves or to make decisions. . . . the only activity for the youngest children (three to four years) . . . seemed to be getting on and off chairs. The assistant spent much of her time trying to keep the children seated. . . . there were absolutely no toys or play materials and no play activity was provided for."³⁴ Placing a child in local city nurseries offered the children little but custodial care and stigmatized an impoverished woman as a "bad mother," the antithesis of the republican mother.

³⁴ Sonya Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights: The Shaping of America's Childcare Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 115.

Across the country, most independent childcare remained unregulated by local authorities; few cities or states mandated inspections of childcare facilities to ensure minimum safety standards or licensing. After the disappearance of a three-week-old child under the care of an unlicensed childcare agency was found abandoned in San Antonio, the Fort Worth city health director, Dr. H. M. Williams, “advised householders to deal only with organizations which have state and city permits.”³⁵ In Los Angeles, California, a state senate committee considering state regulations for nurseries held public hearings. One housewife testified she saw fifteen to twenty cribs and buggies in one room in one such “home.” “The odor was so bad I couldn’t stand it. I went into the back yard and found children in individual kennels, not playpens—they were more like kennels for cattle. The children looked at me through the bars and cried.”³⁶ Local areas depended upon mothers to care for their children and had no mandate to establish or regulate childcare in the local community.

Newspapers also reported children’s deaths due to the lack of state regulations and failure to enforce licensing of independent childcare facilities. War workers Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Clairmont found a babysitter, Ardis Parmenter, through a classified ad in the newspaper and left their two children in her care while searching for a place to live. The next evening, Parmenter called the mother and reported that nine-month-old Mary Jean seemed ill. Mrs. Clairmont said she took the girl to a hospital where she died from injuries sustained the day before. The sad story of Mary Jean’s death made national news. An autopsy revealed the child “died of a brain hemorrhage. . . . Both arms were broken and she had suffered numerous bruises.”³⁷ Parmenter told reporters, “She jerked the baby by the wrists and threw her back into the crib because she

³⁵ “City Warns Against Child Agency Here,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, January 16, 1945.

³⁶ Maxine Davis and Warner Oliver, “Eight-hour Orphans,” *Saturday Evening Post* 215, no. 15 (1942): 104.

³⁷ “Woman Admits She Inflicted Injuries Upon Dead Infant,” *Albany Democrat-Herald*, March 2, 1943.

refused to eat,” and “her head struck a bar in the crib.”³⁸ As a result of this tragedy, the Seattle newspapers established new policies and only accepted advertisements from licensed foster homes.³⁹ If state regulations and licensing processes had been conducted before Parmenter assumed the role of caretaker, an investigation would have revealed that she had previous records of child neglect. Two of Parmenter’s natural-born children had died in their mother’s care, and the state of Montana took her third child into custody. Events like these launched local efforts to mandate standards and regulate childcare providers.

Many women distrusted institutionalized care and tried to schedule their lives to minimize the time they were absent from their childcare duties; they devised means which allowed them to “care” for their young children. Audrey Moore, a single mother with a preschool child, worked the night shift. She revealed her solution to sleeping during the daytime; “I took me a rope and tied it around his waist—because he was very active, and he’d like to take it off . . . I tied it in back of him. . . . We had a front and back door where he could get out each door and play and look. So, one day I woke up and he was loose. . . . He was gone.”⁴⁰ Moore found her son, but two-and-one-half-year-old Patsy Howard’s mother was not so lucky. Patsy’s mother took her daughter to work. Distracted by her job for “only a few minutes,” she failed to see her child walk out the door and into a busy intersection where an automobile hit Patsy and she died.⁴¹ Incidents like these generated social pressure calling for “good” mothers to take full responsibility for their children, distrust putting them in the care of others, and better still remain home and give fulltime care to their children.

³⁸ “Charge Mother Killed Infant,” *New Philadelphia Daily Times*, March 5, 1943; “Woman Admits She Inflicted Injuries Upon Dead Infant,” *Albany Democrat-Herald*, March 2, 1943.

³⁹ Kathryn Close, “Day Care Up To Now,” *Survey Midmonthly* 79, no.7 (1943): 194-197, 194.

⁴⁰ The boy was found, and Moore hired a babysitter to care for him. Amy Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 72.

⁴¹ “Little Girl is Fatally Hurt in Traffic accident,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 16, 1943, Morning Edition.

On the federal level the question loomed large as to how to protect the nation's children while encouraging mothers to take jobs in war plants. An impassioned debate over control of the nation's childcare solution played out between existing federal agencies and a temporary wartime agency, the Federal Works Administration, as to what services should be made available to women seeking war jobs. Laying aside the question of whether any mother, except those living in poverty, should work were questions as to the propriety of federal involvement and what type of childcare services should prevail. Underlying this debate were fears that the war would produce changes in the the traditional role of the Republican Mother and her relationship to the Democratic Family. A statistical report from one southern California airplane plant demonstrates how quickly the increase in women's employment occurred: "in December 1941—900 women employed, in April 1942—3,600, and by November 1942—13,000," and the demand continued to grow nationwide.⁴² The increase in working mothers meant an increased need for wartime childcare services and called for a national solution.

Responding to increasing industrial expansion and federal campaigns bringing mothers into war jobs, Congress took the first steps in providing childcare for war workers when it passed the Lanham Act. Sponsored by Representative Fritz Lanham of Texas in June 1941, it provided funding for community facilities in "war impacted areas."⁴³ The Federal Works Agency absorbed the remaining New Deal programs, including the Works Progress Administration's nurseries. After several months of negotiations between congressional committee members, federal agencies, and the White House, "the planning board received a favorable ruling:

⁴² Dratch, "The Politics of Childcare," 167-204, 169.

⁴³ Michel, *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights*, 132.

childcare centers in war-impacted areas could be considered ‘public works’ and were therefore eligible for federal monies from the Lanham Public Facilities Act.”⁴⁴

As a temporary war agency specifically created to deal with war related problems, the Federal Works Agency seemed a logical place to put a “temporary program” such as wartime childcare. In June 1942, as war production expanded and job opportunities increased, the President ordered the remaining Work Progress Administration projects shut down and placed the nursery program under the Federal Works Agency, without Congressional approval. Historian Susan Riley summarizes it this way: “the federal government’s wartime childcare program thus took shape without official congressional debate, without passage of legislation specifically authorizing childcare, and without appropriation of funds directly for that purpose.”⁴⁵ This failure became a point of contention that plagued the federal nursery program for the duration of the war. Not all Works Progress Administration’s nurseries were slated to close, only the nurseries in areas with no war industries. The remainder would be absorbed into the new federal nursery program.

On July 2, 1942, with support from the women’s auxiliaries of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, Representative Mary T. Norton (D-NJ) spearheaded the effort to pass \$6 million “to convert two thousand WPA nursery schools scheduled for closure, into war nurseries for the children of defense workers” and fund their operation.⁴⁶ Norton argued, “Unless the mothers are assured of the welfare of their children, it will be impossible for them to extend their best efforts to the production of those essentials necessary to win the war.”⁴⁷ In a highly contested seventy-

⁴⁴ Susan E. Riley, “Caring for Rosie’s Children: Federal Childcare policies in the World War II Era,” *Polity* 26, no. 4 (1994): 665-675, 659.

⁴⁵ Riley, “Caring for Rosie’s Children,” 660.

⁴⁶ Norton had spearheaded the opening of two private day nurseries during World War I in New Jersey, her home state. Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights*, 147.

⁴⁷ Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights*, 147; James B. Reston, “House Keeps WPA, Votes 336,000,000,” *Washington Post*, June 12, 1942.

four to seventy-three vote, funding for the newly designated Emergency Nursery Schools passed on July 30, 1942. Philip B. Fleming, Administrator of the Federal Works Agency, praised the funding, commenting, “With the opening of new schools under the wartime program, mothers in increasing numbers are being freed to go into bomber plants, munitions works, and other war production.”⁴⁸

The nurseries came to be known as the Lanham nurseries, named after Congressman Fritz Lanham who sponsored them. Using Congressional funding, Fleming set up the War Public Service in anticipation of keeping hundreds of Works Progress Administration nursery schools open during the transition and the approval of new war nurseries. Fleming brought Kerr on as assistant commissioner of the Federal Works Agency.⁴⁹ He noted the funding was sufficient to provide nursery services for fifty thousand children of working mothers. Works Progress Administration nurseries in areas without war industries ceased operations at the end of 1942.

The Federal Works Agency set up an application process required local communities to file applications demonstrating need and its ability to fund fifty percent of the startup and operating costs, the balance coming from parents’ fees. Fees varied by location, “from 35¢ to 60¢ per child per day, with an average of about 46¢.”⁵⁰ Parents also paid an additional fee for meals and snacks since the legislation did not authorize the agency to provide food. Kerr, Assistant to the Administrator of the Public Works Program in the Federal Works Agency, affirmed the middle-class value of paying for services, stating, “When parents are making good

⁴⁸ The Federal Works Agency approved the first Lanham nursery in New Haven, Connecticut, in August 1942. “WPA Nurseries to Aid Mothers Working in War Plants,” *Washington Post*, July 18, 1942; Yarrow, “Is Federally Funded Childcare.”

⁴⁹ “Employed Mothers and Childcare,” *Bulletin of the Women’s Bureau*, No. 249 (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1953), 18.

⁵⁰ “The ‘Lanham Act’ What It Is, How It Is Being Administered, What It Is Accomplishing,” no date, Box: 174: General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records Relating to Childcare in World War II, 1943 – 46, Entry: 38”: Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

wages, they generally ask for nothing free. They willingly pay to the sponsor of the nursery school fees according to their ability.”⁵¹ Paying for services also elevated Lanham nurseries from the stigma attached to poverty. The Federal Works Agency’s nurseries consciously sought to reduce any stigma associated with using nursery services by comparing the service to a consumer product, a commodity that working women voluntarily chose to purchase. Noteworthy is the fact that war workers’ use of nurseries created yet more war jobs, increasing employment opportunities for more women. The *New York Times* magazine supplement praised the act, commenting, “America’s women must supplant men in the manpower of this nation. . . . The federal government, states, and communities must be prepared to meet the child-care problem in order that children of the nation be spared gross neglect.”⁵² The opening of the first Lanham Nursery in New Haven, Connecticut, ignited an interagency battle between the Federal Works Agency and the Office of Education which believed it had the Constitutional mandate to oversee the national childcare and that Lanham funding undermined the cherished ideal of Republican Mothers in the home raising their children.

Unlike the custodial care offered in a day nursery, the newly ordained Emergency Nursery Schools, modeled after the kindergarten movement, offered an educational alternative. Emergency Nursery schools, primarily used by upper and middle-class mothers, served as a means for socialization and academic readiness. Although children in the Works Progress Administration’s program would have been classified as disadvantaged and impoverished, the

⁵¹ Florence Kerr assumed the job of WPA assistant administrator for the Women’s and Professional Projects in early 1939 at a time when executive reorganization reconstituted the WPA as the Works Projects Administration under the Federal Security Act, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/economics/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/kerr-florence>; “Statement by Florence Kerr, Broadcast on War Nurseries and Day Care of Children through the Evening Star Forum, Wednesday 4, 1942, 162, General Records of type the Federal Works Agency Information Records Relating to Childcare in World War II, 1943-46”, Basic Material for Articles, Speeches, Broadcasts etc., N.A.

⁵² Yarrow, “Is Federally Funded Childcare.”

Emergency Nursery Schools offered them the benefits of early childhood education rather than just simple custodial care.

Under the guidance of Director Grace Langdon and Florence Kerr, the Lanham nurseries served as “educational institutions, not make-work endeavors for the unemployed or mere holding pens for poor children.”⁵³ A bulletin prepared for state and local agencies and childcare committees described the nursery as a “day school whose program and environment are planned to stimulate learning and development of children too young to go to kindergarten.”⁵⁴ With newly available funding, Langdon expanded services to the children of servicemen whose wives worked in war industries and increased the number of hours and days of operation as industry demanded, including Saturdays and Sundays. She also extended daily services beyond the scope of day nurseries, “operating a minimum of six to ten . . . twelve . . . fourteen hours—running six days and seven days a week when necessary.”⁵⁵ The Emergency Nursery Schools were fee based and responded readily to changes in industrial need, such as increased hours of service when overtime necessitated. The nurseries were responsive to the needs of republican mothers who voluntarily stepped outside their traditional role as mother and homemaker to help win the war.

Existing government bureaus—the War Manpower Commission and the Federal Security Agency—contested the constitutionality of placing the Emergency Nursery Service under the auspices of the Federal Works Administration, setting up an administrative “war” over the welfare of the nation’s children. A bureaucratic war ensued as Paul McNutt, Director of the War

⁵³ Danbom and Danbom, “Survival through Adaptation,” *North Dakota History* 76, no. 3 & 4, 4.

⁵⁴ Also known as “Policies and Procedures Governing the Day Care Programs of the Federal Government: A Handbook for State and Local Agencies and Childcare Committees;” Dr. Henderson, “Difference Between a Day Nursery and a Nursery School”, Box: 225, “Entry 225”: War Manpower Commission, Entry 225: Office of Education, Record Group 12, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁵ “Broadcast on War Nurseries and Day Care of Children through the Evening Star Forum,” November 4, 1942,” Box: 1: General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records relating to Child Care in World War II, 1943-46, Entry 38”: Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at Collee Park, College Park, MD.

Manpower Commission, overseeing defense related health and safety programs, and his cohort Charles Taft, head of the Federal Security Agency which oversaw the Department of Education, determined to take over wartime childcare. Control over nursery services became a bureaucratic battlefield. The President's choice, placing child care under a "construction agency" rather than existing bureaus already charged with overseeing the welfare of the nation's children, enraged traditionalists including: Paul McNutt administrator of the War Manpower Commission, Charles Taft of the Office of Education, and Katharine Lenroot of the Children's Bureau. McNutt opposed a wartime agency being assigned childcare, usurping the power of existing government bureaus already responsible for the welfare of the nation's children. He asserted existing government agencies dealing with children's concerns in peacetime should take the lead during the war; initiating an administrative battle over the care of preschool children which continued for the duration of the war.

A long-drawn-out battle over the proper care for preschool children of working mothers simmered in the background. McNutt, in opposition to the President's support for the Lanham nurseries, directed Taft to "develop a coordinated program of Federal assistance in providing care for children of working mothers. . . . to be used for administrative services to ascertain childcare needs [and] to meet the needs of state and local communities arising from the defense program."⁵⁶ His directive "reflected the prevailing social attitudes towards the role of women as mothers," particularly the "belief that young children should be cared for in their homes," and ensuring the return to traditional values after the war.⁵⁷ McNutt, like Taft, believed the nation's childcare solution should fall under the control of the Office of Education. Using \$400,000

⁵⁶ The funds McNutt used were given to his agency. No author, "The Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services" *Science* 94, no. 2437 (September 1941), 250. Accessed May 27, 2023, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.94.2437.250.c>.

⁵⁷ Damplo, "Federally Sponsored Childcare Funds for Day-care Programs," Women's Legal History Seminar, June 8, 1987, accessed June 13, 2023, <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/1051129>, 26.

McNutt received from the President, Taft “set up a second staff”—not to operate public childcare programs, but to advise local communities on how to solve childcare problems and expand state childcare programs, under the existing social work paradigm.⁵⁸

Taft advised local authorities not to apply for Lanham funds and assured them his office and the Children’s Bureau would specify an alternative childcare program which would be announced soon. Aware that funding for the Federal Works Agency’s nurseries would require Congressional approval for renewed funding in April 1943; McNutt and Taft conspired to redirect child care funding from the Lanham nursery program to local communities’ day nurseries, in keeping with the traditional social work model. Taft also aligned with the Children’s Bureau and the newly established Office of Community War Services to assure agreement “on major policies, procedures affecting the operation of childcare programs, and . . . to formulate or modify such major policies or procedures only after such joint consultation.”⁵⁹ However, without access to the Lanham funds, Taft’s agency had no money to expand existing state-level operations or aid communities in establishing new day nurseries. The Federal Security Agency’s focus remained on the traditional mother-in-the-home rather than mothers in war production.

While Taft sought to limit access to day care, the Federal Works Agency started to establish Lanham nurseries in communities with war industries. The agency required communities hoping to establish nurseries to submit an application demonstrating their need and evidence that the community could fund fifty percent of the startup and operating costs. Parents paid fees which varied by location, “from 35¢ to 60¢ per child per day, with an average of about 46¢.”⁶⁰ Parents also paid an additional fee for meals and snacks since the legislation did not authorize the agency to provide food. Florence Kerr, Assistant to the Administrator of the Public

⁵⁸ Dratch, “The Politics of Childcare,” 178.

⁵⁹ Dratch, “The Politics of Childcare,” 181.

⁶⁰ “The ‘Lanham Act’ What It Is.”

Works Program, Federal Works Agency, affirmed the middle-class value of paying for services, stating, “When parents are making good wages, they generally ask for nothing free. They willingly pay to the sponsor of the nursery school, fees according to their ability.”⁶¹ Paying for services also elevated Lanham nurseries from the stigma attached to poverty. The Federal Works Agency’s nurseries consciously elevated their services to a consumer status, a commodity that working women voluntarily chose to purchase. Noteworthy is the fact that war workers’ use of nurseries created yet more war jobs; increasing employment opportunities for more women.

Lanham nurseries operated under the guidance of Director Grace Langdon. Unlike childcare in day nurseries, emergency nursery schools served as “educational institutions, not make-work endeavors for the unemployed or mere holding pens for poor children.”⁶² A bulletin prepared for state and local agencies and childcare committees described the nursery as “a day school whose program and environment are planned to stimulate learning and the development of children too young to go to kindergarten.”⁶³ With newly available funding, Langdon expanded services to the children of servicemen whose wives worked in war industries and increased the number of hours and days of operation, including Saturdays and Sundays. She also extended daily services beyond the scope of day nurseries, “operating a minimum of six to ten . . . twelve . . . fourteen hours—running six days and seven days a week when necessary.”⁶⁴ The newly

⁶¹ Florence Kerr assumed the job of WPA assistant administrator for the Women’s and Professional Projects in early 1939 at a time when executive reorganization reconstituted the WPA as the Works Projects Administration under the Federal Security Act, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/economics/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/kerr-florence>; “Statement by Florence Kerr, Broadcast on War Nurseries and Day Care of Children through the Evening Star Forum,” November 4, 1942, Box 1: “General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records relating to Child Care in World War II, 1943-46, Entry 38”: Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶² Danbom and Danbom, “Survival through Adaptation,” 4.

⁶³ Dr. Henderson, “Difference Between a Day Nursery and a Nursery School”, Box: 225, “Entry 225”: War Manpower Commission, Entry 225: Office of Education, Record Group 12, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁴ “Broadcast on War Nurseries and Day Care of children through the Evening Star Forum,” November 4, 1942,” 1962, General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records Relating to Child care in World War II, General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records relating to Child Care in

established Emergency Nursery Schools, unlike traditional, charitable day nurseries, were fee based and responded readily to changes in the demands of industry, such as increased hours of service when overtime necessitated. The nurseries were responsive to the needs of Republican Mothers who voluntarily stepped outside their traditional role as mother and homemaker to help win the war.

Without any further direction from the President as to what would happen to the Federal Works Agency's nurseries when their funding ran out in April 1943, Taft started a personal campaign to take over the Lanham nurseries when their current funding ran out and replace them with nurseries modeled after the day nursery's traditional social work model which he believed would protect the nation's children from maternal deprivation. However, his hopes were dashed when Congress passed funding to expand the Lanham nursery schools, absorbing qualified Work Progress nurseries, and began approving applications for community nursery services for working mothers across the country.⁶⁵

The issue appeared resolved when the Federal Works Agency received official recognition as to its responsibility for the nation's childcare program. The President approved the use of Lanham funds for the first Emergency Nursery Schools in war-disrupted areas. Fleming boasted that the president approved thirty-nine Lanham nurseries, "the largest group of projects yet to be approved at a single time under the [Federal Works Administration]'s child-care program."⁶⁶ In response to criticism that the application process was long and tedious, involving up to "175 steps," Fleming announced changes in the process. The newly streamlined process made waivers available for communities where established budgets the previous year had not

World War II, 1943-46, Entry 38": Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁵ Not all Works Progress nurseries were qualified. Only nurseries in communities in war production areas received federal funds, despite continued need, all remaining nurseries were closed.

⁶⁶ "39 Day-Care Projects Approved," *Washington Post*, June 6, 1943

included [a] nursery school provision.”⁶⁷ Fleming boasted, “as a result . . . early approval of hundreds of war nurseries and childcare centers in all parts of the country is to be expected.”⁶⁸ The agency continued to respond to changing communities’ needs approving two twenty-four-hour nurseries.⁶⁹ However, President Roosevelt’s failure to resolve the dispute between the Federal Security Agency and the Federal Works Agency remained a stumbling block as McNutt and Taft continued their campaign to gain control. Questions regarding the Federal Works Agency’s authority to fund federal wartime childcare resulted in delays in approving funding for additional war nurseries, resulting in spontaneous industrial solutions to childcare outside both federal and state regulation.

Industry could not stop production waiting for government nurseries to expand; some corporations took the matter into their own hands and set up private nurseries administered by local nonprofit organizations or through corporate contributions to community operations. In Bethpage, Long Island, a suburb of New York City, Grumman Aircraft “operated three ‘war-time nurseries’ in nearby communities that accommodated up to fifty children between the ages of two and five and cost [a maximum of] fifty cents a day.”⁷⁰ In Buffalo, New York, Curtiss-Wright Corporation was the first to open a private daycare, “doubl[ing] the size of the plant’s nursery school.”⁷¹ In East Hartford, Connecticut, Pratt and Whitney, a manufacturer of plane engines, paid for the operation of a nursery housed in a public-school building, and the textile mills in Burlington, Vermont, paid employees’ child-care fees.⁷² In the picture below, children

⁶⁷ “39 Day-Care Projects Approved.”

⁶⁸ “39 Day-Care Projects Approved.”

⁶⁹ Aubrey E. Taylor to Harry Hews, “War Nurseries,” April 10, 1943, 162, General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records Reflecting to Childcare in World War II, 1943-46, Box: 4: “Entry 38”, Childcare Program – January thru June, 1943, N.A.

⁷⁰ Christine Kleinegger, “The Janes Who Made the Planes: Grumman in World War II,” *Long Island Historical Journal* 12, no. 1 (1999), 4.

⁷¹ Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War*, 83.

⁷² William M. Tuttle, Jr., “Rosie the Riveter and Her Latchkey Children: What American Can Learn About Child Day Care From the Second World War,” in *A History of Child Welfare*, ed. Eve P. Smith and Lisa A. Merkel-

enjoy a snack in a Grumman childcare center set up to care for children while their mothers worked building planes.



Figure 31: “Solving the Man-Woman-Power Problem”⁷³

Western states, which had the highest concentration of large-scale production centers, also began opening corporate nurseries to attract women workers. Douglas Aircraft and Kaiser Shipyards sought childcare solutions to encourage mothers to work in hopes of retaining skilled women in the face of active “pirating” of trained workers by competing firms.⁷⁴ Douglas announced the opening of its corporate-run childcare facility in August 1942. The nursery, located in a “large mansion-type home three miles from the factory and war danger zones,”

Holguín (New York: Routledge, 1996), 83; Lucy Greenbaum, “Plane Plant Adds A Child Nursery,” *New York Times*, August 24, 1942; Close, “Day Care Up To Now,” 196.

⁷³ “Solving the Man-Woman-Power Problem,” *Binghamton Press and Sun-Bulletin*, March 15, 1943.

⁷⁴ Bess Stephenson, “Douglas Prepares Huge Nursery for Children of Women Workers,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 30, 1942

accommodated between two hundred and five hundred children of working mothers who found “it increasingly difficult to get responsible help to leave in their homes with the children.”⁷⁵ The company president, Donald Douglas, ordered the opening of a day nursery after hearing that many wives of men in the armed forces would like to take factory jobs but couldn’t because of the childcare problem.⁷⁶ Bess Stephenson’s article “Douglas Prepares Huge Nursery for Children of Women Workers” stated that other local corporations planned similar solutions since “local agencies are not quick to carry through the expansion of existing community services.”⁷⁷

The most controversial but highly praised of all independently established childcare nurseries were at the Kaiser Shipyards in Portland, Oregon. By “March 1943, almost half of the fourteen thousand women, in the three yards, were mothers, and about one-third of them had children between the ages of one and six.”⁷⁸ Factory owner Henry J. Kaiser circumvented local community day-care committees and the Federal Works Agency when he announced he would build nurseries to care for preschool children at his shipyards. Kaiser obtained 1.5 million dollars in federal funding, through the U.S. Maritime Commission, to construct nurseries at three locations, two in Portland and one in Vancouver, each had the capacity for 450 children.⁷⁹ The nurseries offered a wide variety of services for the working mother. These services included twenty-four-hour daycare—accommodating mothers on the night shift—nursing services for sick children, an educational program designed by early childhood specialists, and preordered take-

⁷⁵ Stephenson, “*Douglas Prepares Huge Nursery*.” Greenbaum, “*Plane Plant Adds a Child Nursery*.”

⁷⁶ Stephenson, “*Douglas Prepares Huge Nursery*.”

⁷⁷ Stephenson, “*Douglas Prepares Huge Nursery*.”

⁷⁸ Amy Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 69.

⁷⁹ The Kaiser nurseries were built by “an independent agency of the U.S. federal government that was created by the Merchant Marine Act of 1936. The Women’s Advisory Committee protested vehemently at Kaiser undermining federal authority, noting, “Each nursery will accommodate 500 children” between the ages of 6 months and 6 years.” “United States Maritime Commission,” accessed June 11, 2023, [//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Maritime_Commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Maritime_Commission);

“Minutes of the Fourteenth Meeting,” no author, May 12, 1943, 86, Women’s Bureau, D of R, Records RE: WMC 1945 - Women’s Advisory Committee, Box 217: “WMC-WAC,” Records Re: . . . WMC— Women’s Advisory Committee April 1943, WMC 1945,” Minutes of the 14th Meeting, N.A.; Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 74.

home meals to lighten the mothers' dual burden. Kesselman writes that despite the "instability of many programs and the lack of ideological support for the idea of group care," Kaiser's nurseries "served three shifts of workers, the center filled up immediately upon opening," and "always had a waiting list."⁸⁰ The nurseries achieved national acclaim.

Commenting on the Kaiser Nurseries, Jerold Owen of the Oregon Defense Council wrote to Sadie Dunbar, "Oregon . . . is recognized nationally as having a child-care program second to none."⁸¹ However, not everyone praised Kaiser's successful nursery program. Writing in the *Social Service Review*, Hazel Fredericksen argued, "Involvement of the employer in the care of employee's children violates the sound principle of an impersonal, objective approach to industrial problems for both employer and employee."⁸² Funded independently by a federal commission outside the control of the Federal Works Agency, Kaiser's nurseries offered the most comprehensive services for working mothers, so much so it posed a danger to the postwar ideal of the mother in the home.

Corporate daycare threatened government control on both sides of the issue, superseding the debate between the Federal Works Agency and Federal Security Agency, by offering women a choice: worker homemaker or mother in the home. Fearing the consequences of the proliferation of public daycare, the Women's Advisory Committee invited Paul McNutt to address the government's failure to assume authority over childcare. They pointed out that due to his failure to allow federally funded nurseries to grow, private nurseries were springing up. Using funds provided by the Maritime Commission, Kaiser Shipyards built three large nurseries,

⁸⁰ Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 88.

⁸¹ Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 88.

⁸² Hazel A. Fredericksen, "The Program for Day Care of Children of Employed Mothers," *Social Science Review* 17, no. 2 (1943): 9, 163.

allowing private industry to enter a field where it had no expertise.⁸³ The Women's Advisory Council concluded that McNutt's failure to give them a voice in policy decisions, such as childcare undermined their ability to help shape government policy regarding women's employment and matters related to it.

The lack of adequate childcare continued to hamper war production and remained hotly debated. Government officials at the highest levels lamented the need to remove mothers from their homes. At the invitation of the Aircraft War Production Council, Inc., Kerr joined women counselors in California to discuss the "industry's problem of recruiting and retaining women workers with small children" followed by a two-week tour of war industries in three western states.⁸⁴ Upon her return to Washington, Kerr called for the "immediate expansion of childcare facilities for war working mothers of young children." She explained, "Many mothers of young children won't take jobs until facilities are provided for them while mothers work. Others threatened to resign unless better provision is made for the children."⁸⁵ She observed, "Nobody on the West Coast is happy about women by the thousands leaving their homes and children for war work, but public officers are realistic and are trying to provide ameliorating facilities."⁸⁶ Leading officials commiserated. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted Earl Warren, Governor of California: "I regret that the hand that customarily rocks the cradle must now be used in the war plant, but it is a war necessity, and we must accept it."⁸⁷ Head of the Federal Works Agency,

⁸³ WMC-WAC Minutes of the Fourteenth Meeting," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park.

⁸⁴ "Suggested release upon Mrs. Kerr's return to Wash. D.C." no date, Box 3: "General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records Reflecting to Childcare in World War II, 1943-46, Entry 38": Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD

⁸⁵ "Suggested release upon Mrs. Kerr's return to Wash. D.C." Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

"Suggested release upon Mrs. Kerr's return."

⁸⁶ "Suggested release upon Mrs. Kerr's return to Wash. D.C." Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁷ Earl Warren served as governor of California from 1943 to 1953 and then became the fourteenth chief justice of the United States Supreme Court. "Childcare Plan only for war, Says Warren," *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1943.

Philip Fleming, simply stated the nursery program was crucial, “as much a war emergency as meat rationing or the practice blackout.”⁸⁸ While officials expressed regret over working mothers, they viewed women in war jobs as essential to victory and saw it as a wartime necessity and government responsibility.

On April 29, 1943, the last vestige of the Works Progress Administration’s program, the Emergency Nursery School, officially became part of the War Public Services Bureau of the Federal Works Agency. Becoming fully funded under the Lanham Act empowered the Federal Works Agency to energize its efforts and launch a publicity campaign. An increasing number of Lanham-funded nurseries sprang up. Articles in national newspapers boasted that “Uncle Sam is assuming a large part of that responsibility” for wartime care.⁸⁹ A syndicated news article boasted, “in a single day, cities across the country received allotments for nurseries, covering a geographical spread from Pendleton, Oregon, to Gulfport and Pascagoula, Mississippi, to Lawrence, Kansas, and Bridgeport, Connecticut.”⁹⁰ It noted that even “the smallest state in the union, Rhode Island, received \$102,000 for Lanham Childcare Centers in fourteen war-impacted communities.⁹¹ Speaking to the Minneapolis Council of Social Agencies, Fleming commented on the success of the Lanham nurseries: “Shortly before I left Washington, applications for 918 centers to care for 43,556 children had been approved. This is a fast-moving program, and the number may be even larger now. Applications are pending for projects to care for additional thousands. Of the total number of children affected, about half are being cared for, or will be cared for, in nursery schools, and the other half in centers for children of school-age before and

⁸⁸ Absenteeism Laid to Lack of Childcare,” *Minneapolis Star*, April 6, 1943.

⁸⁹ Florence Kerr, “Day Nurseries Built,” *Idaho Falls Post Register*, April 21, 1943.

⁹⁰ Kerr, “Day Nurseries Built.”

⁹¹ Kerr, “Day Nurseries Built.”

after their regular school hours.”⁹² The absorption of the Emergency Nursery Schools into the Lanham nursery program drew the Federal Works Agency’s attention away from the threat posed by Taft’s and the Federal Security Agency’s campaign to wrest control of the nation’s nurseries.⁹³ Articles such as “Dawn of a New Work Day” promoted the availability of nurseries, accompanied by a realistic picture of a mother with three children arriving at a nursery in the early morning hours, seen below in Figure 32.



Figure 32: “Dawn of a New Work Day,” *Battle Creek Enquirer*, April 18, 2943⁹⁴

⁹² “Address of Major General Philip B. Fleming, Administrator, Federal Works Agency Before Luncheon Meeting of the Minneapolis Council of Social Agencies,” April 6, 1943, Box 3: “General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records Reflecting to Childcare in World War II, 1943-46, Entry 38”: Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹³ Only Emergency Nursery Schools (ENS) in war impacted areas would remain operational under the Lanham monies, ENS schools located in other areas no longer received federal monies and most likely closed without local support.

⁹⁴ Dawn of a New Work Day,” *Battle Creek Enquirer*, April 18, 1943.

Knowing that funding for Lanham Childcare Centers would expire on June 30, 1943, Taft requested a hearing by the Senate Committee on Education and Labor hold a hearing on Senate Bill 876, the War Area Childcare Act, in preparation for a showdown as to which agency—the Federal Security Agency or Federal Works Agency—would control the funding, philosophy, and implementation of wartime childcare.⁹⁵ If Taft’s proposed bill passed Congress it would award the Federal Security Agency funding for increased day nurseries and eliminate further funding for Lanham nurseries, effectively shutting them down. Passage of Taft’s bill would allow his agency to administer childcare for working mothers according to the Federal Security Agency’s narrow view of working mothers and childcare. The hearing before the Committee on Labor and Education was held on June 8, 1943.

In his opening address to the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Chairman Elbert Thomas (D-UT) made it clear that the question of government support for wartime childcare was not under debate: “It is entirely proper the Federal Government should appropriate money to [nurseries] because Congress declared war. . . . Congress should contribute liberally toward meeting a problem that is a war problem.”⁹⁶ Thomas explained that the bill under consideration would establish the Federal Security Agency as the single government agency overseeing the nation’s wartime childcare program. Granting the Federal Security Agency \$20 million annually until the end of the war would effectively shutter the Lanham nurseries and end the Federal Works Agency’s involvement in wartime childcare.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ *a.k.a. Thomas Bill*

⁹⁶ “Wartime Care and Protection of Children of Employed Mothers,” Hearing Before the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate, Seventy-Eighth Congress, First Session on S. 876, A Bill to Provide for the Wartime Care and protection of Children of Employed Mothers and S. 1130 A Bill to Provide for Care of Children of Mothers Employed in War Areas in the United States, and For Other Purposes, June 8, 1943 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), accessed July 31, 2020, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112120068462&view=1up&seq=81>, 9.

⁹⁷ Twenty thousand dollars was inadequate, such a small amount of funding would not allow a significant number of children to be cared and would create great shortages in woman powered war production.

Senator Carl Hayden (D-AZ) praised the government's efforts in the area of childcare, which he claimed "increased the number of employed mothers, reduced absenteeism, curbed child neglect, and allayed the anxiety of mothers in a "comprehensive childcare program providing for health, recreation, education, and general welfare in a variety of services to meet the varying needs of families."⁹⁸ The Senator concluded, "You can't have a contented mother working in a war factory if she is worrying about her children, and you cannot have children running wild on the streets without a bad effect on the coming generations."⁹⁹ The Chairman added he had no preference as to which agency—a war agency or existing agency—should have control but was opposed to ending childcare for working mothers in wartime.

When Mr. Taft took the floor, the Chairman asked if all parties involved had reviewed the bill under consideration. Taft replied, "all except the Federal Works Agency," demonstrating his unwillingness to work alongside the agency despite its specific responsibility for overseeing wartime childcare.¹⁰⁰ Taft, director of community war services for the Federal Security Agency, argued the existing day nursery program overseen by authorities in the Office of Education and Children's Bureau should control childcare on the local level rather than the Federal Works Agency, a "construction agency" without expertise in early childhood behavior. He touted day nurseries and their professional staff—including educators and social workers—as the best source of childcare services already established in many communities. He insisted children of working mothers receive individual care in foster homes, "something not authorized in the Lanham Act."¹⁰¹ He also stressed nursery services paid for with government funds should use the existing social service model under the Federal Security Agency's direction. Taft did not

⁹⁸ Jane Eads, "Result of War is 'Floating of Children,'" *Asbury Park Press*, October 10, 1943.

⁹⁹ "Wartime Care and Protection of Children," 8.

¹⁰⁰ "Wartime Care and Protection of Children," 6.

¹⁰¹ "Wartime Care and Protection of Children," 14.

mention mothers' needs or a "menu" of services for use at their discretion, relegating mothers' and industrial needs as secondary to the agency's philosophy.¹⁰² Thomas emphasized his plan "was cheaper" and would be "easier to dismantle" at the end of the war.¹⁰³

Thirty-one individuals representing various groups addressed the Senate Committee; the majority of speakers represented social service agencies, boards of education, journalists, and parent groups arguing in favor of the localized social service model under state and local control. The speakers called for a more comprehensive program including the need for social workers, counselors, and health care as part of necessary services in group childcare, not covered under Lanham funding. Speakers highlighted the serious social consequences resulting from a shortage of facilities and lack of services for children under two years old in some areas. In summation, they argued inadequate facilities hindered mothers from taking war jobs.

Broadening the scope of the childcare discussion, journalist Agnes Meyers's testimony went beyond the scope of care for preschool children of working mothers, arguing the need for expanded services for school-aged children, services not available in the Federal Works Agency's childcare program.¹⁰⁴ Representing the Child Welfare League, Meyers, a journalist, and wife of the editor of the *Washington Post*, traveled extensively during the war, visiting twenty-six war-impacted areas and published her observations on the social upheaval resulting from the war in a book entitled *Journey Through Chaos*. Meyers warned of the descent of a "civilian army" (a.k.a. war workers) in every section of the United States, particularly industrial areas, and the resulting "chaos and the human suffering" of migrants, including six million

¹⁰² Taft did not highlight the intrusive home investigations that social workers conducted in determining women's eligibility for services.

¹⁰³ Dratch, "The Politics of Childcare in the 1940s," 180.

¹⁰⁴ Agnes Meyers did not speak on behalf of any organization but was a representative of the National Child League in Washington, D.C., Meyers also had further means to promote her opinion, her husband was editor of the *Washington Post*.

children, laying the blame on working mothers.¹⁰⁵ Meyers stated she was “horrified by the neglect of our children, literally from one end of the country to the other,” and argued for the “decentralization of authority” [as] one of the most important aspects of this bill because the adequate care and protection of children is essentially a local problem and can only be handled successfully on a local basis.”¹⁰⁶ Meyers stressed that taking the child from their home and mother’s influence undermined a foundational value upon which the nation was built, the Republican mother.

Speakers in favor of childcare under the auspices of the Federal Works Agency also gave testimony. Thomasina Johnson, speaking on behalf of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, a national black women’s organization, expressed her concern that leaving childcare up to the individual states would result in a “racist administration of the programs” on the state level. Johnson pointed out government programs discriminated against blacks whenever it came to the distribution of public funds, especially in the South, and noted the Children’s Bureau’s failure to provide an “equitable distribution in funds for Negro children” in the past.¹⁰⁷ Johnson also pointed out the Federal Works Administration’s policy of nondiscrimination “takes specific responsibility in seeing to it that the total needs of all groups in the population are met.”¹⁰⁸ She concluded, if there is a “choice between Federal and State control and supervision, it is to the best interest of all that a Federal agency administer such funds. . . . resulting in “a larger measure of justice and impartiality for all.”¹⁰⁹ In the photograph below, Figure 33, “Negro Children

¹⁰⁵ Agnes E. Meyers, *Journey Through Chaos* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), x-xi.

¹⁰⁶ “Wartime Care and Protection of Children,” 71.

¹⁰⁷ “Wartime Care and Protection of Children,” 79.

¹⁰⁸ “Wartime Care and Protection of Children,” 76.

¹⁰⁹ “Wartime Care and Protection of Children,” 74.

playing in a nursery school. The Lakeview Project,” in Mississippi a segregated Federal Work’s Agency’s nursery school served black preschool children.¹¹⁰



Figure 33: “Negro Children playing in nursery school. Lakeview Project”¹¹¹

Defending the Federal Works Agency’s program, Florence Kerr offered evidence of its success. She contended the agency had already established “2,000 nursery-school units for children 2 to 5 years of age and over 1,000 childcare centers for before- and after-school care for children of school age. This provides for 75,000 children in the preschool group and about 85,000 children of school age, or a total of 160,000 children. . . . Over a quarter million children of working mothers are covered right now by this means.”¹¹² Kerr highlighted the program’s

¹¹⁰ The Resettlement Agency established the Lakeview settlement in Arkansas as part of the federal New Deal program in 1937. Accessed August 11, 2023, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/lakeview-resettlement-project-historic-district-15371/>.

¹¹¹ “Negro Children playing in nursery school. Lakeview Project,” Reproduction Number: LC-USF34-031836-D (b&w film neg.), Repository: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>, Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA.

¹¹² “Wartime Care and Protection of Children,” 34.

local nature, pointing out that nurseries' operations lay solely within the local community after satisfying federal requirements to receive funding for setup. Localized nurseries allowed for local customs and community values to prevail, reflecting traditional values including the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family.

In response to critics, Alan Johnstone, general counsel for the Federal Works Agency, acknowledged the delays in opening nurseries and charges of exorbitant fees that mothers could not pay. He stressed problems were often due to local communities' failure to submit applications that fit the criteria required for a grant. He cited many communities continued to tie social service costs—for the various types of services favored by the Federal Security Agency—into their requests, something the Federal Works Agency could not fund, thereby delaying their application's approval. Johnstone acknowledged the president's failure to formally define the agency's responsibility for wartime childcare, commenting, "I cannot find anybody who has discussed this bill with the President, although it is represented to us by a minor official of the Bureau of the Budget that this bill represents the Administration's program."¹¹³ Johnstone suggested Senator Thomas discover how President Roosevelt felt, "asserting the Budget Bureau was not a final authority on the President's views."¹¹⁴ Johnstone's comment highlights Taft's egotistical refusal to accept the President's wishes and the Bureau of Budget's failure to stand up against Taft.¹¹⁵ Although the majority of spokespersons recognized the need for wartime childcare in their communities, they desired it be addressed on the local level and not by the

¹¹³ "Wartime Care and Protection of Children," 49.

¹¹⁴ Mary Spargo, "Care for a Million Children of War Working Wives Sought," *Washington Post*, June 9, 1943.

¹¹⁵ On June 30, 1943, the FSA received another blow when "the funds from the President's emergency fund [were] discontinued June 30, 1943, because of legal restrictions on the use of this fund." This essentially left the FSA with no financial resources for programming childcare. No author, "Employed Mothers and Childcare," *Bulletin of the Women's Bureau*, No. 246, Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, 1953.

federal government. Taft and his supporters received the green light to introduce the Thomas Bill, a.k.a. the War Area Childcare Act, into the Senate for consideration.

In late July 1943, “[t]he administrative and ideological dispute over child care reached a showdown” when Taft “succeeded in arranging for a Senate Bill which directly challenged the [Federal Work’s Administration’s] Program . . . favoring “foster homes and childcare on an individual basis.”¹¹⁶ Taft appeared to have gotten his way when the Senate unanimously approved the Second Deficiency Bill, awarding the Federal Security Agency \$20 million annually to expand the wartime child-care program “since more and more mothers are being called into war work, demands for child-care facilities are constantly increasing.”¹¹⁷ However, later that day, the Senate reduced the funding to \$50 million. Legislators also added a clause stipulating **if** the House approved the War Area Childcare Act became law, control over childcare would be transferred to the Federal Security Agency.¹¹⁸ However, the House failed to vote on the changes in the bill before recess, leaving the fate of the nation’s daycare undecided. The failure to pass the Thomas Bill meant Lanham funding remained available during the recess and applications for Lanham nurseries continued receiving approval during the recess. However, Congressional recess left the future of federal childcare in limbo and existing war industries dependent on women employees left hanging in the lurch.

The delay in approving new funding left industry impatient. The Aircraft War Production Council in Los Angeles reported that many housewives were quitting their jobs as their children started summer break and they urgently needed to employ more women. The Council estimated

¹¹⁶ “Federal Works Agency Statement of Policy on Financing Childcare Facilities,” July 15, 1943, Box 4: “Federal Security Agency, Office of the Commissioner, Office File on Wartime Educational Programs, 1940-1945, ‘Salvage to Study,’ Entry 8”: Office of Education, Record Group 12, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁷ Dratch, “The Politics of Child Care,” 180.

¹¹⁸ My emphasis. “Senate Authorizes 200 Million for FWA Under Lanham Act, but Cuts It to 50, and Tangle May Stop That,” *New York Times*, July 8, 1943.

they currently employ “more than 101,000 women, who have 19,000 children requiring care outside the home—a job for 197 child-care facilities. . . . If one child-care facility permits 40 women to work full shifts in aircraft plants, that child-care facility is making possible 8000 productive man-hours per month. Conversely, the absence of that child-care facility may withdraw women representing 8000 productive man-hours of work per month.”¹¹⁹ In New York state, the *Buffalo News* announced fifteen newly approved Lanham childcare centers were no longer expected to open at the end of June due to “governmental red tape.”¹²⁰ Robert T. Bapst, the superintendent of schools in Buffalo, New York, noted a lack of funding for the nurseries meant no oil to heat water for washing dishes or dirty hands and blankets and cots for children’s naps could not be purchased, forcing them to delay opening. Bapst blasted state legislators for their failure to vote for funding and blamed the President for not stepping in.¹²¹ Further legislative action regarding funding childcare hung in the balance, waiting for Congress to return on September 13th.

Unable to wait, President Roosevelt called for the two agencies to reconcile. When that failed, the President issued an order granting the Federal Works Agency “a liberal interpretation of the law specify[ing] that child-care centers were public works.”¹²² He also consolidated the Emergency Nursery Service (a remnant of the New Deal nursery program) and Lanham Nurseries, giving the Federal Work’s Agency “final judgment as to the extent to which the need was to be met and the types of projects to be submitted to the President for approval, then rested with the Federal Works Agency.”¹²³ A memorandum further confirmed the scope of Federal

¹¹⁹ “Lack of Childcare Cuts Los Angeles Plane Production,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 30, 1943.

¹²⁰ “Bapst Declares Red Tape Delays Child-Care Units,” *The Buffalo News*, June 17, 1943.

¹²¹ “Red Tape Delays Childcare Program,” *Dunkirk Evening Observer*, June 17, 1943, 8.

¹²² “Employed Mothers and Childcare,” US Department of Labor, Bulletin 246 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1953), 17-18.

¹²³ “Employed Mothers and Childcare,” 18-19.

Work's Agency's responsibilities as more than a construction agency and listed additional services under its purview, specifically, "childcare outside educational jurisdiction."¹²⁴ Despite the unresolved Congressional battle, the President continued to approve new war nurseries during the recess. On August 2, he approved "the largest number of units . . . at one time." A total of 264 nurseries in 24 states, able to serve a total of 15,888 children, including the first twenty-four hour nursery located in Englewood, California, bringing the total number of war nurseries to 3,570, serving 198,598 children.¹²⁵ Although Congress passed the Lanham Act two years earlier, the debate was not resolved until 1943 when the President broke with tradition, giving priority to the needs of women war workers over the need to preserve the Republican Mother. The necessity for war production called for an exceptional effort on the part of mothers and the federal government. Being only a wartime measure meant the act would expire, nurseries would be discontinued, and the Federal Works Administration terminated.

Despite the President's actions, supporters of the Office of Education continued their campaign to dismantle the Lanham nurseries. Advocates favoring the Thomas Bill refused to acknowledge their failure and worked tirelessly to garner support against passage of Lanham funding when Congress resumed. Supporters argued that "state officials want the money to be channeled through their offices rather than through [the Federal Works Agency]."¹²⁶ Mary Leeper, acting chair of the subcommittee of the Women's Joint Congressional Committee on the

¹²⁴ "Memorandum for the President," August 12, 1943, Box 4: "Federal Security Agency, Office of the Commissioner, Office File on Wartime Educational Programs, 1940-1945, 'Salvage to Study,' Entry 8": Office of Education, Record Group 12, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹²⁵ "Memorandum for the Press, Release No. 687," August 2, 1943, Box 1: "General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records Reflecting to Childcare in World War II, 1943-46, Entry 38": Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹²⁶ "States Jockey for Control of Nursery School Funds," *Chicago Defender*, June 12, 1943.

Thomas Bill, continued to campaign tirelessly, pressuring members of the House of Representatives to reintroduce the bill and close the Lanham nurseries.¹²⁷

Despite a lack of support by its male members, the women's auxiliaries of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, led by Eleanor Fowler, created a strong grassroots movement lobbying in favor of the Lanham nurseries. At the heart of their argument lay the fundamental issue of the constitutionality of government dictating the use of funds given to state Boards of Education, traditionally viewed as a local prerogative.¹²⁸

The National Council of Negro Women also protested the Federal Security Agency's discriminatory practices and campaigned in support of the Lanham Nurseries, calling for the defeat of the Thomas Bill. The *Chicago Defender* threw its support behind the bill. Columnist, Rebecca Stiles Taylor argued that she "favor[ed] the present plan whereby childcare in war areas is administered through the Federal Works Agency and Lanham Act Funds come directly to the community in need, instead of through state agencies."¹²⁹ Another article pointed out that under the Federal Work's Agency, "all construction contracts must contain a clause against discrimination in the hiring of Negro skilled and semi-skilled workers" and that "its race relations office, under the direction of William Trent, maintains a close check on the equitable distribution of the funds for the benefit of Negroes."¹³⁰ The article pointed out that neither the Children's Bureau nor its director Katherine Lenroot ever insisted on the equal distribution of funds for Blacks.¹³¹ Despite the increasing number of patriotic African American females in the

¹²⁷ The Women's Joint Congressional Committee on the Thomas Bill represented the American Home Economics Association, The Association for Childhood Education, the National Jewish Women, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the American Association of University Women, the National Education Association, the National Service Start Legion and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. "Calls For Childcare Law," *New York Times*, August 23, 1943.

¹²⁸ "Father Draft To Spur U.S. Childcare Program," *Knoxville Journal*, October 1943.

¹²⁹ Rebecca Stiles Taylor, "Federated Clubs: National Council Negro Women Hold Executive Session in New York," *Chicago Defender*, August 21, 1943.

¹³⁰ "States Jockey for Control."

¹³¹ "States Jockey for Control."

work force and armed forces, prejudice and racial barriers remained strong, reflecting the larger issue of racism in the United States.

When Congress returned in September, Thomas Bill supporters reintroduced the bill into the Senate hoping to rescue the Federal Security Agency nursery model. Taft argued once again there was no federal mandate over education, a power reserved to the states, and cited the need to “protect State educational programs from Federal influence.”¹³² Representative Mary Norton countered, introducing a bill in the House of Representatives to “empower the [Federal Works Administration] to operate child-care centers, as well as to construct them.”¹³³ Despite Taft’s and his supporters’ efforts, Congress approved \$12 million enabling the Federal Work’s Agency to open “2000 nursery schools and 1700 extended care centers for older children.”¹³⁴ The rivalry continued to simmer with each appropriation request during the last two years of the war and reared up each time appropriations came up for approval.

As a byproduct of the extended debate and the uncertainty of the future of Lanham nurseries, during the late summer and fall of 1943 requests for new nurseries declined. Reporter Betty Biddle reported that during the Congressional break there was a decline in nursery applications in June due to national coverage of the Lanham financing. “The majority of these institutions have lost in attendance during June an average of 12 to 15 children a day. It is hoped by those in charge that an increase will be noted as the program gains momentum.”¹³⁵ Grace Langdon, a consultant in the Childcare Service of the Federal Security Agency, toured the nation seeking an answer to parents’ failure to use the nurseries. Phyllis Lockley, the nusery supervisor

¹³² “FSA and FWA Claim Child-Care Funds,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1943.

¹³³ Norton had a history for supporting nurseries, organizing two private day nurseries during World War II, Damplo, “Federally Sponsored Childcare During World War II,” 25; Bess Furman, “‘Day Care’ Bill for Children Lags,” *New York Times*, October 6, 1943; Ambrose Cort, “Education Proposal Favored,” *New York Times*, October 18, 1943.

¹³⁴ Bess M. Wilson, “Failure to Use Facilities,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1943.

¹³⁵ Betty Biddle, “Six nurseries Provide for Working Mothers’ Children,” *Tucson Daily Citizen*, June 25, 1943.

in Glendale, California, reported their nursery was at “capacity enrollment and had a waiting list of 60” in June but by September it was “so deserted it may have to close. Mothers do not use it.”¹³⁶ Mrs. Lockley said, “We still have children locked in trailers and many situations similar to that of the small girl who spends her whole day on the steps of one of the plants, seeing her mother only at lunchtime.”¹³⁷ Lockley also reported that without expanded nursery services women quit war jobs because they could no longer hold down two jobs—factory and home—and took their children back to the Midwest.¹³⁸

Many established nurseries also failed to attract enough children for a variety of reasons, such as their location in the wrong neighborhoods, the lack of transportation to nurseries, or the mother’s job or shift work. In Detroit, Caroline Burlingame of the Office of Civilian Defense’s Children’s War Service noted the location of the nursery was an important factor in their success. Upon questioning women working in a local war plant, she discovered that “more than one-fourth of the children of mothers interviewed are left in the uncertain care of older children or allowed to look after themselves.”¹³⁹ She reported while “23 war nurseries existed, servicing 575 children; 1,134 children remained on waiting lists, which hardly reflected the number of children in need of care.”¹⁴⁰ Reports often conflicted; Burlingame noted that while one area nursery reported 94 vacancies, another, had 252 children on the waiting list.¹⁴¹

Like industries’ problems employing mothers for the first time, nurseries were new and untried by many stay-at-home mothers taking a factory job for the first time. Henry Zucker, a social worker in Cleveland, stated nurseries were still a “novelty” and blamed the low use of war

¹³⁶ Wilson, “Failure to Use Facilities.”

¹³⁷ Wilson, “Failure to Use Facilities.”

¹³⁸ Wilson, “Failure to Use Facilities.”

¹³⁹ “Expert Cites Problems of ‘War Orphans,” *Detroit News*, September 29, 1943.

¹⁴⁰ “Expert Cites Problems.”

¹⁴¹ “Expert Cites Problems.”

nurseries to suspicions of a “lack of trained personnel available to care for children,” which discouraged city officials from promoting nurseries.¹⁴² Zucker also addressed women’s concerns over going to work, especially the “single” mother with a husband in the military leaving her children in others care for the first time and the fear of the impact a job would have on her family; whereas a mother who stayed home had control over the contact her child had with “bad” children. Zucker noted mothers instinctively distrusted group care, fearing their child might come in contact with bad influences: “I don’t want my kid playing with just anybody’s kid.”¹⁴³ Others feared their “fussy” children might not eat the food they were served and go hungry.¹⁴⁴ While some nurseries continued to operate at a financial loss and some threatened to close when attendance levels went down, Zucker noted the “novelty of this form of daytime substitute parental care, as with any new idea, would take time to communicate their value to parents.”¹⁴⁵ Wartime conditions called for changes in family routines and the loss of control over their children’s new ideas and acquaintances outside the home.

With the Congressional battle behind them, the Federal Works Administration shifted back into high gear to garner support for the nurseries. An article in a California newspaper—one of the states in the direst need for women to fill jobs—announced, “Army Sends Man to Break Bottleneck in Child Center; Need Women for Jobs.” It reported, “Washington has sent Capt. Arthur Krim to Los Angeles county with instructions to stay here until every such bottleneck is blasted and the power to arrange for priorities on buildings and equipment for the childcare centers.”¹⁴⁶ Krim estimated his effort increased attendance “as much as 50 percent” in

¹⁴² Henry L. Zucker, “Working Parents and Latchkey Children,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 236, no. 1 (November 1944), 47.

¹⁴³ Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 84.

¹⁴⁴ Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 84.

¹⁴⁵ Zucker, “Working Parents and Latchkey Children,” 47.

¹⁴⁶ “Army Sends Man to Break Bottleneck in Child Centers; Need Women for Jobs,” *Long Beach Independent*, October 24, 1943.

employment.¹⁴⁷ One week later, Philip Fleming boasted that, “784 children enrolled in 30 nurseries and childcare centers, as a result of increasing employment of mothers in war work and the reopening of schools . . . compared to 453 children enrolled in 24 centers the previous month.”¹⁴⁸ On the national level, enrollment reportedly increased to about 48,000 by the end of October.¹⁴⁹

The demand for nursery services increased again as the father draft drew men into military service and mothers answered the call to work. Lewis Hershey, director of the Selective Service, predicted drafting one million fathers by mid-1944, forcing many mothers to supplement their allotments. *Washington Post* journalist, Walter Wood, charged, “Congress has failed to provide adequate care for children of the prewar fathers now being drafted in ever-increasing numbers.”¹⁵⁰ As fathers marched off to war, the Democratic Family lost their breadwinner and the patriarchal figure in the home.

Originally, the Lanham Act did not provide group services for children under two-years-old, offering no childcare solution for these mothers. As the need for mothers to enter the workforce grew more critical at the end of 1943 and into 1944, Lanham funding remained flexible, and services expanded to include childcare for toddlers. As the father draft expanded, the need for increased nursery services, especially for children under the age of two, forced public officials to recognize the need to expand nursery services. The Federal Works agency approved expanded services to children under the age of two-years-old and infants on May 1, 1944, two years after the original establishment of Lanham nurseries. Besides group childcare

¹⁴⁷ The article reported that two-thirds of the workers at the Douglas plant in Long Beach, California, were women. “Army Sends Man.”

¹⁴⁸ “Army Sends Man.”

¹⁴⁹ “Childcare Enrollment Up Sharply in State,” *Hartford Courant*, October 29, 1943.

¹⁵⁰ Walter Wood, “Children of Service Dads Lack Adequate Care, Survey Shows,” *Washington Post*, December 16, 1943.

for babies and toddlers, it offered a variety of additional services including information centers for parents, health care for children, transportation for children between their homes and centers, and a visiting teacher service. In a public statement, Kerr concurred with the general sentiment that care for children under two-years-old “was frowned upon,” but conceded, “if a community needs group care for children under two-years-old to answer a pressing war need, we shall be glad to provide funds for it.”¹⁵¹ The article noted that services favored by the Children’s Bureau, such as foster home care and day nurseries paid for out of public funds, were not covered.

Following suit, in July 1944, the Children’s Bureau called together professionals in many fields related to infant and young children’s well-being—medicine, child development, psychology, and social welfare—to discuss the extension of services to working mothers’ children under the age of two, a group which they previously refused to serve. Although they continued to favor the social work paradigm, they laid out a four-point plan, including counseling services “deciding whether the mother is going to work, . . . a homemaker service to enable children to remain in their own homes, . . . and foster-family care for small children in neighborhood homes.”¹⁵² They continued to focus on specialized services and reject group care as an alternative, and educational services remained outside their purview.

As increasing numbers of mothers with young children entered the workforce, complaints over excessive fees for nursery services increased. In Arizona, “one mother found it cheaper to woman for about \$10 a week to stay with her small babies.”¹⁵³ Nurseries in cities such as Detroit, Michigan, Vallejo, California, and Hartford, Connecticut, charged prohibitive fees of seventy-five cents to one dollar a day.¹⁵⁴ When this was discovered, the Federal Work’s Agency

¹⁵¹ “U.S. Funds Expand Child-Care Service,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1944.

¹⁵² Wood, “Children of Service Dads Lack Adequate Care.”

¹⁵³ “Ready to Increase Child-Care Grants,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1943.

¹⁵⁴ “Ready to Increase Child-Care Grants.”

responded. The *Hartford Courant* praised Flemings' efforts: "The FWA has liberalized assistance to nurseries and centers so that hereafter they will be able to keep fees under 50 cents per child per day."¹⁵⁵ In addition, the agency approved centers to operate a greater number of hours a day and reduced excessive rates, making it possible for several hundred war-congested communities to minimize fees, keeping them under fifty cents per child per day.¹⁵⁶

The issues women working war jobs faced remained myriad. Nighttime care was most problematic for mothers working in factories running twenty-four hours a day. In Connecticut, where manpower problems reached critical proportions, localized hurdles prevented the US Employment Service from filling jobs with women. Union benefits, which granted men seniority status based on the length of employment, favored men who desired to transfer to the day shift, leaving the bulk of job vacancies at night. Night shifts limited mothers' opportunities for jobs that matched children's school hours and allowed time for shopping, home duties, and interacting with their children. In the *Washington Post*, Walter Wood wrote, "Of the 1500 job openings, 700 are for men only and on the night shift; 400 are for women on the night shift and only 125 for women on the day shift."¹⁵⁷ Despite acute need, most employers refused to accommodate women by offering alternatives such as part-time work.

Newspapers across the country carried a syndicated news story "Bureau Drawer Babies: Is a Mother's First Duty to Her Country or to Her Children?" on their front page. The article highlighted the dilemma faced by mothers in a war industry working the nightshift, highlighting the seriousness of the childcare situation.¹⁵⁸ The article said, "Doing the best she could, a mother tucked her baby into a dresser drawer in her hotel room before leaving for work. Hotel guests

¹⁵⁵ "Childcare Enrollment Up Sharply In State," *Hartford Courant*, October 29, 1943."

¹⁵⁶ "Cut to Be Made in Fees Charged At War Nurseries," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, November 28, 1943.

¹⁵⁷ Wood, "Children of Service Dads Lack Adequate Care."

¹⁵⁸ Sue Thompson, "Bureau Drawer Babies: Is a Mother's First Duty to Her Country or to Her Children?" *Oakland Tribune*, April 2, 1944.

woke to the “continued wailing of a baby” emanating from a room” and found a “helpless baby . . . crying with “tiny fists clenched in fury—snugly tucked into an open bureau drawer. . . . Not knowing what else to do [the mother] had put her offspring to bed in the bureau drawer, from which he couldn’t fall out, with a fervent hope he wouldn’t awaken while she was absent.”¹⁵⁹ The illustration accompanying the article showed a happy housewife beaming down on her four babies and stated, “NO SUBSTITUTE for mother love can give children the sense of security that is so important in a world at war” but didn’t address any solution to a single mother or warrior’s wife making do on her own.¹⁶⁰ For patriotic women it became a question of priorities; work for money to buy essentials needed for life—food and housing—trusting someone else or an institution to care for their child/children, or stay home and raise their children. War could not be fought without a strong workforce, leaving the question of priorities for each woman to decide.

¹⁵⁹ Using dresser drawers was a popular solution across the nation, particularly in hospitals which were unable to acquire proper cribs for newborns. With the nation’s war industries focused on war materiel and resources were not available for manufacturing baby furniture in an unexpected baby boom. Diapers were another highly publicized shortage. Thompson, “Bureau Drawer Babies.”

¹⁶⁰ Thompson, “Bureau Drawer Babies.”



Figure 34: "Bureau Drawer Babies: Is a Mother's First Duty to Her Country or to Her Children?"¹⁶¹

Despite difficulties, the government needed to convince women that by working in factories they helped defend the home and perpetuate American values. While their soldier fought for freedom on foreign soil, mothers were soldiers working for victory on home turf. Propaganda produced by the Federal Works Agency was an important tool in building support for nurseries. It described women's place as "almost everywhere" and "way up front in industry's battleline, which is implementing the men who will win the war" and hyped use of

¹⁶¹ Dorothy Bird Nyswander, "Prepared for The Christian Science Monitor," April 9, 1943, Box 3: "General Records of the Federal Works Agency, Information Records, Records Reflecting to Childcare in World War II, 1943-46, Entry 38": Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

nurseries as an extension of mothers' patriotism.¹⁶² After a tour of war industries on the West Coast, Florence Kerr commiserated: "Providing suitable facilities for the care of children while mother works doesn't solve all the problems caused by the movement of mothers into war work. But it does add to the mothers' peace of mind and helps to protect the children and that is important."¹⁶³ The media also helped sell the idea to absentee fathers in the military far from home, including blurbs such as "It is the thought of their children and their homes that carry them through discomfort and loneliness and danger—it's their children and homes that fill their minds as the medal is pinned on for bravery in action—it's for their children and their homes . . . it's for the freedom to have a home and children that the others fight."¹⁶⁴ Pictures of happy, busy youngsters were also a helpful tool in propagandizing nurseries as seen below in Figure 35, "Chubby 'Fairies' Fill Modern Wonderland."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² "Suggested release upon Mrs. Kerr's return to Wash. D.C." Federal Works Agency, Record Group 162, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁶³ "Suggestions for Philosophy and Content of Childcare Service Portrayal," Box: 3, "Entry 38": "Correspondence on Failure of the Childcare Program, letters and clippings, also telegrams to State Supts of Education—letters to McNutt WMC", Childcare Articles and Radio Broadcasts, Speeches, etc. January thru June 1943, N.A. "3 October 1, 2011— "Documentary Film on Child care," no date (includes: "Suggestions for philosophy and content of Child Care Service Portrayal, Examples of Situations Arising From Lack of Child Care Facilities)

¹⁶⁴ "Suggestions for Philosophy and Content of Childcare Service Portrayal," Box" 3

¹⁶⁵ "Chubby 'Fairies' Fill Modern Wonderland" *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 26, 1944.



Figure 35: “Chubby ‘Fairies’ Fill Modern Wonderland”¹⁶⁶

Local newspapers carried stories and pictures of nurseries with photographs of happy faces and detailed descriptions of their care during the day. The “Chubby ‘Fairies,” pictured above, attended the Liberator Village Nursery, the largest nursery in Texas. “The ‘fairies’ in this particular Wonderland are chubby and sometimes grubby: self-assertive and forever curious with an eye for canaries and goldfish bowls and doll carriages and wet modeling clay.”¹⁶⁷ The Thomas Place Nursery School, also in Fort Worth, highlighted its busy, happy youngsters, describing one boy as a “young Tarzan hanging by his heels from the top rung of ‘Jungle Jim’ and a pig-tailed lady of five who has just punched her doll’s eyes out, both yelling simultaneously for Miss Gorton to come and see.”¹⁶⁸ Newly opened nurseries in the defense city of East Hartford, Connecticut, received a full-page article describing how the town “has ‘gone to war’ in the matter of providing care for war workers’ children while the war workers are working

¹⁶⁶ “Chubby ‘Fairies’ Fill Modern Wonderland,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 26, 1944.

¹⁶⁷ “Chubby ‘Fairies’ Fill Modern Wonderland,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 26, 1944.

¹⁶⁸ Ellen Wilson, “Children Eat, Sleep and Play Under Supervisions as Mothers Aid War Effort,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 31, 1943.

on war work.”¹⁶⁹ This form of propaganda in local newspapers offered mothers thinking of taking jobs the reassurance that they were making a good choice for their children, preserving their families, and the war effort.

The poster below, found in the National Archives, offers evidence the federal government produced at least one poster advertising the availability of childcare for working mothers. The poster, “Working Mothers,” Figure 36, is not part of popular memory, unlike the widely circulated images of Rosie the Riveter. Two well-dressed, cheerful mothers clutch their children’s hands as they drop them off for daycare on their way to work. Busy, smiling children, in the pictures at the bottom of the poster, aimed to reassure doubtful mothers that nurseries were a satisfactory solution to wartime childcare.

¹⁶⁹ “Childcare—East Hartford Style,” *Hartford Courant Magazine*, April 16, 1944.



Figure 36: "Working Mothers-Your Schools Can Help"¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ "Working Mothers-Your Schools Can Help," Unknown Author, between 1941 and 1945, 44, Records of Government Reports, 1932-1947, NARA-51613.jpg, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Overall, society continued to view mothers working outside the home as a detriment to the community's general health and the Democratic Family. Mothering never had a dollar sign; it was not a commodity. Lanham nursery service elevated childcare to a commodity, placing a dollar sign on mothers' service in the home. Florence Kerr lamented, "No money earned in the United States . . . costs so dear, dollar for dollar, as the money earned by the mothers of young children."¹⁷¹ The idea of group childcare remained a new concept for many working-class and middle-class women who viewed it suspiciously and only as a "Last Resort."¹⁷² An essential, but unexplored question was whether unemployed mothers who chose to stay at home recognized the economic value of the services they gave freely. If not, paying for childcare services went against prevailing views of childcare and its monetary value. Upper-class and affluent middle-class women accustomed to employing paid help—nannies and domestics—to care for their children while pursuing their charitable activities viewed their work outside the home as an extension of their duties as Republican Mothers. It remained an alien idea for middle-class and working-class women to pay an "other-than-mother" to care for their children. The war also offered African American women—who had often served as nannies before the war—new choices: the opportunity for war employment or the luxury of caring for their own families in their own homes if their husbands held war jobs.¹⁷³

Influential women from different walks of life appealed to others to take jobs and expressed optimism for permanent changes in women's status in society as a result of the war.

Susan B. Anthony II, the city desk editor for the *Washington Star*, was a powerful voice in

¹⁷¹ Sonya Michel, *Children's Interest*, 73.

¹⁷² My emphasis. "Last resort" appears to have been a popularly used expression for mothers in the situation where they needed to use childcare. The reference to "last resort" is also found in "POLICIES REGARDING THE EMPLOYMENT OF MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN OCCUPATIONS ESSENTIAL TO THE NATIONAL DEFENSE," "Except as a last resort, the nation should not recruit for industrial production the services of women with such home responsibilities," Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, Jan 26, 1942; Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities*, 71.

¹⁷³ Cohen, "Brief History of Federal Financing," 27.

opposition to “the home as usual forces.”¹⁷⁴ Anthony wrote, “The first responsibility of women with young children as well as all women is to join the war effort, where and when they are needed.”¹⁷⁵ Anthony identified the “fear of a social revolution” at the core of the debate: “If we free women now from the care of children . . . it is like letting the stopper out of the bottle of carbonated water. Women will come pouring out of the home permanently and will never be satisfied to go back home once they get accustomed to a paycheck or to the satisfaction of productive work. And above all, if they know their children can be better cared for by professionals than by amateurs.”¹⁷⁶ Encouraging the “hard to convince” woman to work outside the home, cultural anthropologist and author, Margaret Mead applied her research to wartime needs and the working mother.¹⁷⁷ Referencing her research, Mead argued American families were “too insular” and “put too much pressure on growing children” in comparison to the extended family structure in Samoa where “children [were raised] by a network of people, to be part of several households with several caretakers.”¹⁷⁸ Mead believed “a wife taking a job to help win the war was appropriate, but only after seeing that her house is well run and the children properly cared for.”¹⁷⁹ Journalist Dorothy Thompson’s article “Women and the Coming World,” printed in the *Ladies Home Journal*, was more radical, predicting **great** social changes would come about as a result of the war and women’s work outside the home, permanently changing their relationship between home and the outside world.¹⁸⁰ Thompson predicted, “the introduction

¹⁷⁴ Susan Brownell Anthony, Jr., *Out of the Kitchen—Into the War: Women’s Winning Role in the Nation’s Drama* (New York: Stephen Daye, Inc., 1943), 131.

¹⁷⁵ Anthony, *Out of the Kitchen*, 130.

¹⁷⁶ Anthony, *Out of the Kitchen*, 130.

¹⁷⁷ Ji-Hye Shin, “Virginia, Margaret Meade,” accessed June 9, 2023,

<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199791231/obo-9780199791231-0231.xml>.

¹⁷⁸ Shin, “Virginia, Margaret Meade.”

¹⁷⁹ Louis Menand, “How Cultural Anthropologists Redefined Humanity,” *The New Yorker*, August 19, 2019, accessed June 9, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/08/26/how-cultural-anthropologists-redefined-humanity>.

¹⁸⁰ Menand, “How Cultural Anthropologists.”

of women into industry on a large scale will inevitably create the demand for a greater extension of the home into the factory and also into the school. For children of preschool age, the factory of the future will have to provide nurseries, kindergartens, and gardens for the children to play in. It will have to become to some extent a center of home life.”¹⁸¹ Thompson optimistically predicted a bold new world, including women’s equality to men and the birth of a “family world.” *New York Times* columnist Lucille Leimert stated her approval the ideal of a working mother; quoting Thompson, she wrote, “The aim of every American home is to have a full-time homemaker on the job, but that doesn’t mean, necessarily, that the wife has to be the homemaker!”¹⁸² Leimert argued a working mother and wife did not necessarily mean neglecting her children or husband; “a welder wife can listen with just as much interest to what her husband says and is ready for more fun than the woman who burned her finger on a hot frying pan.”¹⁸³ Columnist Walter Ferguson summed up the resistance to going back to the usual in his syndicated column: ““WATCH OUT for ‘women’s-place-is-in-the-home” stuff.” Ferguson dismissed “masculine Moralizers” who advocate women’s place in the home. He commented that “Ancient slogans are no longer adequate. Women’s place is where she can make the best contribution to her country and humanity. The world is her home.”¹⁸⁴

A rising wave of feminism is also evident in an article in *New York Times* from December 1944. The *Times* noted subtle changes in women’s attitudes toward work outside the home. The article stated mothers were less hesitant to use nursery services and found that “leaving their children with the neighbors was not a satisfactory solution.”¹⁸⁵ The article noted

¹⁸¹ Dorothy Thompson, “Women and the Coming World,” *Ladies Home Journal* (October 1943), 6, 156.

¹⁸² Lucille Leimert, “Wife’s Job Approved if Home Welfare’s Safe,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1944.

¹⁸³ Leimert, “Wife’s Job Approved.”

¹⁸⁴ Mrs. Walter Ferguson, “Woman’s Place,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, Nov 6, 1945.

¹⁸⁵ “Childcare makes Strides on Coast: 10,000 Are Now Employed in Los Angeles Centers,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1944.

“skepticism” over childcare programs had dwindled, noting changes evident in Southern California airplane plants.¹⁸⁶ The article stated newly hired women were “younger and had nursery or school-age children” between two and five years old. Historian William Tuttle points out that “by mid 1944, happy stories of child-care successes had begun to supplant the sad tales of latchkey children highlighted in numerous magazines just the year before.”¹⁸⁷

Due to demand, the Federal Works Administration expanded services related to childcare, and the scope of the program was enormous, operating in every state except New Mexico. “Between 1943 and 1946, spending on the program exceeded the equivalent of \$1 billion today, and each year about 3,000 childcare centers served roughly 130,000 children. Government officials estimated that between 550,000 and 600,000 children received some care from Lanham programs” during the war.¹⁸⁸ Despite parents’ initial skepticism about institutional care, fully one hundred percent of mothers reported that the “child enjoyed nursery school,” and 81 percent had a “generally favorable” opinion of “early childhood education.”¹⁸⁹ Republican Mothers who left the home found nurseries a surrogate care, allowing them to aid in the war effort.

Despite increased demands, the Federal Works Administration continued to face financial problems and possible extinction. Howard Dratch writes, “Throughout 1944 and 1945 the agency was continually threatened with the termination of funds.”¹⁹⁰ Support for nurseries primarily came from unions’ support, particularly the women’s auxiliaries of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, with little more than “a minimum of moral or financial support” from male union

¹⁸⁶ “Childcare Makes Strides.”

¹⁸⁷ Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War*, 83.

¹⁸⁸ Rhaina Cohen, “Who Took Care of Rosie the Riveter’s Kids?” *The Atlantic*, November 18, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/11/daycare-world-war-rosie-riveter/415650/>.

¹⁸⁹ Susan Riley, “Caring for Rosie’s children: Federal Childcare Policies in the World War II Era,” *Polity* 26, no. 4 (Summer 1994), 659.

¹⁹⁰ Dratch, “The Politics of Childcare,” 184.

members. The Women's Auxiliaries of the Congress, under the leadership of Eleanor Fowler, launched a campaign to extend Lanham funding. Through a letter-writing campaign and personal lobbying of Congressmen and women, the appropriations extended funding through 1944 and 1945. Although the Lanham nurseries continued to be funded through the war, increasing military victories overseas turned the public's focus towards peace, post-war planning, and a return to "normalcy."

Historian Susan Riley writes "the number of employed women catapulted from about 13 million in 1940 to over 19 million in 1944. Employed mothers had at least 1.5 million children under the age of six. But even at its peak, daycare, served no more than 130,000."¹⁹¹ She concludes, "In the view of most members of Congress, the FWA, and the White House, [childcare] was a wartime-only program. In the view of health, education, and welfare officials it was a failed program administered by a totally inappropriate agency; they made it clear that having no program at all would be preferable to that of a construction agency."¹⁹² Howard Dratch argues that despite the failing support for nurseries as the war drew to a close, childcare responsibilities had become "de-privatized." "Many women came to realize that childcare was not inherently 'women's work,' but instead the responsibility of both men and women." As a result, "former attitudes, self-concepts, and forms of dependence were changed."¹⁹³ For many women who had worked outside the home, their war work brought a sense of accomplishment, perhaps empowerment, changes in attitude that women brought back into their homes and passed on to their daughters.

Despite increasing victories abroad, the demand for armaments remained high. Journalist Sue Thompson addressed the question that was on everyone's mind, citing the headlines "Is a

¹⁹¹ Riley, "Caring for Rosie's Children," 659.

¹⁹² Riley, "Caring for Rosie's Children," 658.

¹⁹³ Dratch, "The Politics of Childcare," 188.

Mother's First Duty to Her Country or to Her Children?" and "Mothers make bombs while Junior does a bang-up job of becoming a first-class bum."¹⁹⁴ While Thompson recognized that filling available defense and civilian jobs meant drawing upon homemakers, she worried aloud about nurseries or "synthetic mothers" raising children and the consequences for post-war America. She advised, "It will profit us little to win a world peace and return to a normal way of living only to find that a generation of children has grown up entirely unprepared and untrained to live in that world."¹⁹⁵ Times were changing, and the operative question remained as to the Republican Mothers' priorities: care for their children in their homes or work outside the home?

The final chapter looks at the transition to peacetime and women's prospects when the war ended. For four years, change was a constant during the war, however, almost as quickly as demand for women workers materialized, the tide turned as the desire to return to normalcy gripped society. Job retention remained an issue as the dual job of work and home and lack of social services wore many women down. Factory work, substitute mothers, and day care services for children now threatened the very fabric of American democracy. Women, once the master of private spaces, were now expected to quit work and return to their homes to rebuild the most highly regarded, fundamental American values—the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family. As American forces steadily advanced toward Berlin and won major battles in the Pacific, factories finished contracts, used shutdowns to retool, and lay-offs required constant recruitment efforts. The question that remained unanswered was whether the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family could be restored upon the soldiers' return.

¹⁹⁴ Thompson, "Bureau Drawer Babies." *Morning Pioneer*, Aug 24, 1944.

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, "Bureau Drawer Babies."

CHAPTER 6: THE WAR IS OVER: WILL YOU COME HOME, MOM?

Many G.I.s left their families as the wartime economy boomed and production called for every able man and woman to take a war or civilian job. The war had changed society and the federal government realized soldiers needed support transitioning from the military to civilian life. To aid them in their return, the War Department requested the American Historical Association to produce a series of pamphlets to aid in the transition from military to civilian life. The Association produced forty-two brochures on a broad range of topics including postwar foreign policy and social changes on the domestic front meant to “reassur[e] servicemen that they would have a place in post-war America.”¹ The purpose of the series was to inform servicemen reentering civilian life of social changes back home during the war and ease their transition back into civilian life. The cover of the EM.31 pamphlet, “Do You Want Your Wife to Work After the War?” Figure 37, pictured a “Rosie” with her hair tied back in a kerchief as she applies her lipstick, highlighting one of the most significant social changes produced during the war: working wives.

¹ American Historical Association, “EM 31: Do You Want Your Wife to Work after the War,” GI Roundtable Series: “Introduction”; No author, American Historical Association, GI Roundtable Series: “Wartime Wives”; accessed April 6, 2019, <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/gi-roundtable-series/gi-roundtable-series-introduction>.



Figure 37: “EM31: Do You Want Your Wife to Work after the War?”²

The pamphlet dealt with wives who took war jobs outside the home and the domestic changes experienced as a result of the war. It sought to answer general questions such as whether their wives or girlfriends would still be the same girl they left behind:

Will their wives be only too glad to give up their strenuous jobs in war plants and return to homemaking? Or will homemakers continue to work outside the home? If they must or prefer to stay home again, what will be done to make the tasks of homemaking more attractive? If a woman wants to keep on working after the war, what will her husband’s attitude be? If there are no longer jobs enough for everyone, should a married woman be allowed to work? Does she have as much right as her husband to try to find the work she wants? These were only a few of the questions that had to be faced when the war is over. They are not new questions, for inventions old and new, including spinning machinery and the typewriter, changed the status of women. But these and all related questions have been magnified by the war.³

² American Historical Association, GI Roundtable Series: “Introduction.”

³ GI Roundtable Series.

Wartime realities had undermined the ideals of the Republican Mother and Democratic Family. As the draft reached deep into the male population, as industry grew more dependent upon women workers, the war upset family schedules, childcare responsibilities, and disrupted homelife. Women took jobs unthinkable in peacetime: working side by side and consorting with men other than their husbands, leaving preschool children in group care without a mother's nurturing hand, or worse, leaving older children running amuck. Besides the family, wartime demands had challenged daily life—rationing, transportation systems, shopping schedules, almost every aspect of the community. War production meant a shortage of automobiles, household appliances, and consumer goods as industry shifted to manufacturing weapons of war. With the end of the war, consumer production would be restored, and Americans anticipated a return to “normalcy”: the restoration of the male as breadwinner and the woman as wife and mother and father as head of the Democratic Family. While most working women desired to return to their homes after the war, single women, war widows, and the wives of disabled servicemen could not afford to. As the war wound down, government officials and the public openly debated the question of women's rightful “place” in society and focused their attention on rebuilding the Democratic Family. This chapter discusses the trials the government faced keeping women on the job during this see-saw period, challenges women faced trying to hold down both war jobs and home, industrial and community responses to their needs, and efforts on the part of the Women's Bureau to shape job opportunities in the postwar years for women who desired/needed to work.

National recruitment campaigns proved to be only half of the answer to achieving full employment or maintaining high production levels, as women, especially those with children, grew tired and quit their jobs. However, industry had never utilized all the manpower resources available. Despite the increasing demand for women workers and Executive Order 8802—

guaranteeing African Americans equality in employment opportunities—industry continued to discriminate, preferring to hire white women. The War Manpower Commission reported “a serious time-lag both in the wider use of Negroes among many of the smaller individual firms and in the occupational upgrading of Negroes in all firms.”⁴ Sexual disparities in employment continued as black men found increasing opportunities compared to black females. A report by Robert Weaver of the War Manpower Commission stated that “fewer than 30 per cent” of the five thousand leading businesses . . . employed as much as 10 per cent Negro labor, and over a third did not believe that Negroes could be effectively used in their plants.”⁵ In “The Negro Comes of Age,” Weaver recalled the violent uprisings in areas of labor shortages and eruptions of racial tension in cities such as Detroit, Michigan, and Beaumont, Texas, in response to local industries hiring Negro men for skilled jobs. White men feared blacks’ occupational advancement, but despite shortages, opportunities for black women remained few.⁶ A War Manpower Report, stated, “Negroes constitute a far more important proportion of the unemployed labor reserve than is commonly recognized, both in the South and in many northern urban-industrial areas.”⁷ The report noted, “Available data indicate[s] that the employment of Negro women is limited to a small number of firms in a few industries. . . . A recent survey of selected war industries in the Baltimore area reveals that 75.5 percent of the 2,249 Negro women employed were working in only four establishments. . . . Detroit Employment Service reports [indicate] considerable opposition to the employment of Negro women in even the unskilled

⁴ “Developments in the Employment of Negroes in War Industries,” October 16, 1943, Box 3: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes, 1943-1944, ‘M,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵ “Developments in the Employment of Negroes in War Industries,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 5.

⁶ Robert C. Weaver, “The Negro Comes of Age in Industry,” Reprint from *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1943): 55.

⁷ “Negro Workers and the National Defense Program,” September 16, 1941, Federal Security Agency, Social Security Board, Bureau of Employment Security, Division of Research and Statistics, <https://books.google.com/books?id=T2AXvgAACAAJ>.

grades.”⁸ Racism hampered production. Unlike black males, efforts to integrate black women workers often failed and slowed production. Continued discrimination appeared to be the only solution to maintaining the personnel required to meet production levels.

Wartime realities beyond women’s control made daily life and a war job difficult: transportation issues to and from work, waiting in line for ration books, shopping for food, shortages of perishable products, purchasing clothing for growing children, obtaining medical care, and accessing essential services including laundry and banking needs. Seasonal changes also added to manpower problems, such as teachers and students leaving the workforce when schools opened in the fall. In a see-saw fashion, women worked and were laid off as demands for war materiel changed. This chapter addresses the primary issues working women faced as the war drew to a close and society returned to “normal.” Increasing numbers of victories on two fronts—Europe and Asia—created a period of instability. Manufacturer’s needs varied as contracts were fulfilled, fewer new contracts reduced the demand for war production, and the federal government shifted its priority in hiring, reestablishing male workers as breadwinners, forcing women who needed jobs to return the low skilled, low paying jobs held during the prewar years.

Employment needs varied, dependent upon the progress of the war. When the number of war contracts increased, production quickened, factories operated around the clock, three shifts a day, six days a week. When contracts were fulfilled or dried up, women lost their jobs to men. The November 1943, “Special Manpower” issue from the Office of War Information addressed the causes and cures for turnover in factories. The Office of War Manpower reported, “An East Coast war contractor had a labor force of 30,550 in March 1943. Although he hired 4,850

⁸ “Developments in the Employment of Negroes in War Industries,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

workers in the next two months, his payroll increased only by 150 workers. In the Midwest, a war manufacturer hired 1,300 workers and still experienced a net loss in his labor force of 100 between May and July.”⁹ However, recruiting women into the workforce was only part of the problem; absenteeism and retention also plagued industry.¹⁰

Absenteeism remained at the top of the list of problems that hampered the production and the delivery of necessary supplies and war materiel to troops. The Bureau of Labor Statistics noted, “One large war plant reports current absence rate at 4.8 percent for men and 7.4 percent for women. Another gives the percentages as 5.2 for men and 8.5 for women. . . . It is established . . . that absenteeism rates are generally higher for women than for men, even on jobs of the same character. Consequently, it is to be expected that, as more women are drawn into the labor force, absenteeism rates may tend to increase.”¹¹ Illness was the most frequent reason given for absence by both men and women, followed by work related causes including fatigue from long hours on the job, poor working conditions, and home responsibilities.¹² However, many women, particularly mothers, came to the factory with “baggage:” a second job—a home and children to care for.

⁹ “Special manpower issue of Copy from OWI,” November 15, 1943, Box 4: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes, 1943-1944, ‘N-S,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰ In late 1943 and 1944, in light of the need for more women recruits, the government actively recruited the largest untapped reserve of women available to take jobs. These minorities not actively recruited earlier, they included Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and even Japanese American (Nisei). As Native Americans had full citizenship since 1924, males were syphoned off their reservations into the military, Native American women picked up the slack on the reservation: hunting, farming, driving buses, etc. Many young native women left the reservation to take advantage of war jobs, it was estimated one-fifth of all young, able-bodied women left the reservation for outside employment. There was no effort to recruit Indian women, however many attending Indian boarding schools signed up for the Women’s Auxiliary Corps (WAC). Many Indian women studied office skills positions and other noncombat specialties including welding and ordnance and machine shop skills and served in the Women’s Auxiliary Army, accounting for the largest ethnic group in the WAC. Japanese Americans and Puerto Rican women, accepted into the WAC, served as nurses and office workers.

¹¹ Duane Evans, “Problem of Absenteeism in Relation to War Production, Bureau of Statistics, Serial No. R. 1507,” January 1943, Box 169: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘A-B’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹² Elizabeth Christman, “Absenteeism,” April 10, 1943, Box 169: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘A-B’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

The Office of War Manpower provided this illustration, Figure 38, for local newspapers' use, to highlight the seriousness of the turnover problem in factories.

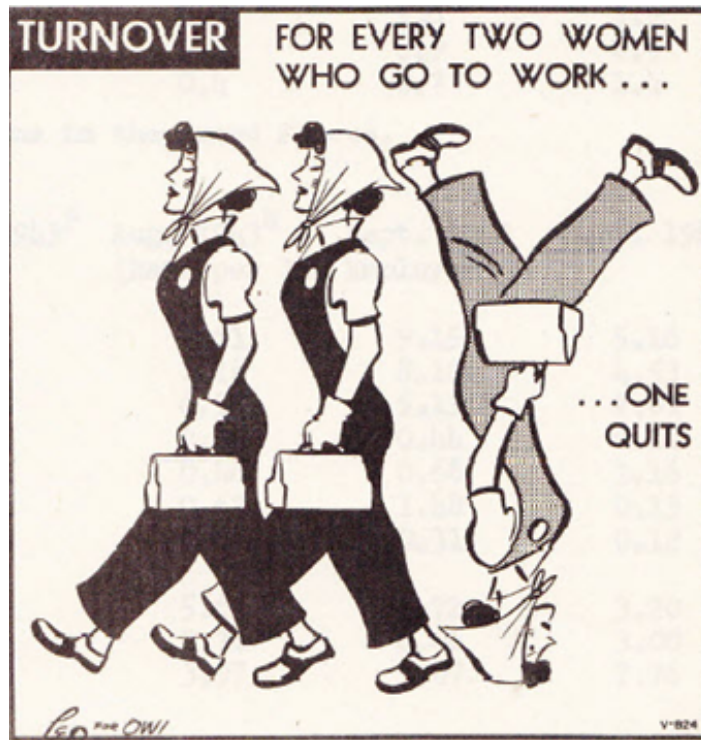


Figure 38: "Turnover: For Every Two Women Who Go To Work . . . One Quits"¹³

A survey of nine cities, conducted by the Magazine Division of the Office of War Information, demonstrated the need for womanpower was not a problem faced only by war plants but also civilian service jobs. These jobs, especially the ones previously dominated by men, included public transportation—subways, trolleys, railroads—banks, diners, chain stores, and law enforcement. War workers' complaints produced conflicted feelings. A government report noted the public resented "women working in war industries earning wages three and four

¹³ "Special manpower issue of Copy from OWI," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

times as great as those brought home by their sisters in civilian employ.”¹⁴ However, the vast majority of civilians remained unaware of the day-to-day difficulties women war workers faced juggling a job while maintaining a home, especially with young children.

When war factories failed to meet war time demands the War Production Board responded by issuing punitive controls when awarding new contracts to industries in labor stringent areas. The War Manpower Commission advised communities with war industries that they needed to make necessary changes to support war workers and keep them on the job, stating, “Administrative controls by themselves have a serious weakness. They become operative only after the worker has decided to quit. They deal with symptoms but do not get at the root of the problem by removing the causes which motivate the worker to quit.”¹⁵

A wide spectrum of problems complicated women’s lives as they juggled work and family in a complicated wartime society. As part of patriotic support for the war effort, the government expected local communities to be supportive of working women by helping to solve local problems that deterred women from taking a job and remaining at work by increasing services necessary for working women. All working women faced similar problems: transportation, shopping, and the dual job—home and work—and parenting responsibilities that caused women to quit.

Transportation was an important problem for all war workers, especially after the production of automobiles ceased in February 1942 when companies retooled to build war materials such as tanks and aircraft.¹⁶ Production of tires and replacement parts for civilian cars

¹⁴ “Special manpower issue of Copy from OWI,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁵ “Special manpower issue of Copy from OWI,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁶ At that time, tires lasted only “two years under normal conditions.” National World War II Museum, “Making Automobiles last During World War II,” January 6, 2022, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/automobile-rationing-world-war-ii>.

ceased as the war progressed and civilians' dependency on public transportation increased. Dependable public transportation was a necessity for war workers. While some war production areas held public hearings and drew up urgency plans to aid working women, other cities made halfhearted or no efforts. New Jersey launched round-table discussions seeking answers to the question, "What can we do to help?"¹⁷ The city of West Orange broadcast a public forum that highlighted the problems faced by local working women. Besides complaints over an inadequate number of buses, working women had difficulties accessing banking services, shopping for rationed foods, and easily accessible childcare centers. The failure to increase bus services or run express buses to plants caused workers to be tardy. One worker reported, "The bus I wait for to take me to my job just never stops at all. . . . Morning after morning, I stand at the corner waiting and when it does get there it is so overloaded it just won't stop."¹⁸ Despite the shortage of bus services, plant managers docked tardy workers' pay or fired them.

Grocery shopping also ranked at the top of every working woman's burden followed closely by the need for clothing and new shoes for growing children. Working women expressed frustration over difficulties shopping for essentials. "Navy Wife" wrote to the editor of the *Dallas Morning News*, "I rush home and to the store where all that is left is picked-over vegetables, rotten fruit, no meat, and I try to feed my family on these scraps."¹⁹ D. L., a war worker in St. Louis, Missouri, wrote the editor calling for local merchants to consider war workers' needs. She asked:

I wonder if the housewives of the community realize they are throwing monkey wrenches in the war machinery when they come down to shop for clothing on Monday night. I wonder if they realize that Monday night is the only night some industrial women workers can shop for all the clothing items that keep a family running. . . . Do they think it is fair to stand in front of the meat counter, chatting in a leisurely way, while the defense worker is hoping that some meat will be left

¹⁷ "Absenteeism is Aimed at Causes," *New York Times*, September 11, 1942.

¹⁸ "Absentee Causes Are Told in Forum," *New York Times*, September 13, 1943.

¹⁹ "Absentee Causes Are Told in Forum."

to buy, knowing the store hours are over and the clerk will give her scant attention?²⁰

Rationing added to the difficulties of purchasing food and other sundries. Often when hard-to-find items became available, such as children's coats and shoes, working mothers could not get to the store in time to buy them. Pressure increased for department stores to stay open two nights a week, especially on pay days. Since buses and streetcars had limited capacity; war workers often found them full of housewives with no seats available for tired women leaving the factory after a long day at work. One war worker commented, "Many a time have I found the bus and street cars more than half full of women shoppers who could have done their shopping early and started for home before 3 p.m. had they gotten out of bed before 11."²¹ Women who did not work resented workers leaving their factories after a day at work—with grease on their faces, without proper hygiene, and wearing their dirty clothes—sitting next to them on buses and waiting next to them in shops for service.²² To avoid overcrowded stores, the *Oakland Tribune* proposed housewives could do their shopping earlier in the day when the buses were in less demand.

Newspapers, such as the *Monrovia News-Post*, printed articles urging "co-operation" and suggested housewives cooperate by changing their shopping habits. "Leave the luncheon dishes for an hour so as to go shopping;" change their shopping hours, or shop on a weekday allowing working women time to shop on the weekends since workers get paid on the week's end and

²⁰ D.L., "Shopping Right-of-Way," *St. Louis Star and Times*, November 15, 1943.

²¹ "'Shop Early,' Offered as Slogan for Housewives," *Oakland Tribune*, September 16, 1943.

²² The Women's Advisory Committee in a report by Lillian Herstein discussed the lack of hot water in women's restrooms in plants; "one plant in which there was no hot water which made it impossible for the women workers to keep clean. When they go into town to do their shopping, residents complain of the fact that they are dirty." "War Manpower Commission, Women's Advisory Committee, Minutes of the Thirty-Seventh Meeting," January 17, 1945, Box 217: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'WMC 1945 – Women's Advisory Committee': Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

have the time to shop on their day off.²³ One journalist argued that when buying meat, “There is no difference from the preservation standpoint, between the refrigerator in the butcher shop and the one at home” and recommended weekly, rather than daily shopping for food.²⁴ The demand for additional hours to shop met local resistance.

Many store owners were reluctant to change schedules. In New York City, the spokeswoman for the Gristedes grocery store explained, “We couldn’t extend our store hours because we can’t overwork our employees. As for starting later in the day, produce markets open early, and it wouldn’t be practical for us to open up late.”²⁵ Instead, she recommended that women on shiftwork shop earlier in the day before they went to work. Edward Allen, president of a Hartford, Connecticut, department store and head of the National Retail Dry Good Association, said it “would be ‘inadvisable’ and ‘unnecessary’ to ask retail stores to open at night to give war workers more time in which to shop.”²⁶ Despite appeals to women who did not work to avoid shopping during the hours war workers were free, many women continued to do their chores according to their traditional way of doing things, and saw other actions they voluntarily did in their homes, such as saving fat, canning fruits, or growing a victory garden, as their sacrifice for which they got no concessions or recognition.

In Pottstown, Pennsylvania, Friday night shopping became popular with workers, forcing the hands of reluctant merchants who “had to follow suit or see business taken to other towns where businesses did stay open.”²⁷ However, evening shopping hours which aided war workers generated new problems, especially in light of conserving gasoline. In June 1943, Sunbury,

²³ “War Working Wives to Air Problems at Conference,” *Monrovia News-Post*, April 10, 1943.

²⁴ “War Working Wives.”

²⁵ “How and When Can War Workers Shop? *PM’s Daily Picture Magazine*,” no date, Box 205: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Part-Time Work – Plant Community Facilities’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁶ “Stores Open Nights Held Inadvisable,” *Hartford Courant*, August 22, 1943.

²⁷ “Keeping Shoppers Happy,” *Pottstown Mercury*, September 3, 1943.

Pennsylvania, placed a ban on pleasure driving in reaction to the “extreme shortage of gasoline in [the] area.”²⁸ After stopping and questioning drivers, the police attributed most traffic to “stores being open Friday evening for shoppers.”²⁹ When the government called for the conservation of electricity, all stores, except groceries, stopped evening hours, virtually eliminating Friday night shopping. Shopping-related problems increased as everyday household items including soap, meat, and other rationed products were in short supply despite the Office of Price Administration’s efforts to ration them. Many rationed products found their way to the black market including, “shoes, canned goods, tires, sugar, coffee, laundry services, fresh vegetables, and almost everything money can buy,” including gasoline.³⁰ Balancing the needs of war workers often conflicted with other government priorities.

An important barrier to mothers’ attendance on the job was their children’s health. Seasonal epidemics such as strep, flu, scarlet fever, and other childhood maladies, including measles and chickenpox, kept thousands of working mothers at home caring for sick children. In the cartoon below, Figure 39, Clark highlights a problem often faced by mothers with school-aged children. In this case the war worker/mom tells her child, who appears to have a cold, she can’t stay home and to get ready for school even if she doesn’t feel well.

²⁸ “Police Check Motorists on Driving Ban,” *Sunbury Daily Item*, June 1, 1943.

²⁹ “Police Check Motorists on Driving Ban.”

³⁰ “Black Markets Honeycomb Dade County Area,” *Miami Herald*, June 6, 1943.



Figure 39: “Now, you get dressed and catch that school bus!”³¹

Newspapers printed statistics and school closures resulting from seasonal epidemics. The flu epidemic in December 1943 was front-page news in the Fort Worth newspaper. During the second week of December the paper announced, “5,827 Absent from School,” which increased to 10,501 the next day. The following Monday absenteeism remained high but decreased to 5,559 absences, indicating the height of the epidemic was over.³² During the summer of 1943, North Texas, like other areas across the country, experienced a severe polio epidemic. City officials shut down swimming pools, recreation programs, and nurseries. They advised parents to

³¹ Clark, “The Neighbors: Now You Get Dressed for School,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April 5, 1943.

³² “5,827 Absent From Schools,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, December 10, 1943; “One Third of Students Are Absent,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, December 11, 1943; “More Students Back to Classes,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, December 14, 1943.

keep their children at home and to avoid large gatherings.³³ Children's health, remained a constant problem for working mothers and contributed to mothers' increased absenteeism.

Housewives-turned-workers needed to balance both the demands of their homes and jobs. In Figure 40, cartoonist George Clark captures a women taxi driver balancing her life as she apologizes to her fare when she stops at home to check on her family's dinner.



Figure 40: "I know this isn't where you wanted to go, sir!"³⁴

³³ "Severe Siege of Polio Seen For Summer," *Dallas Morning News*, June 29, 1943; "Polio Hits Epidemic Stage Here," *Dallas Morning News*, June 30, 1943; "Pools Closed, Strict Health Care Asked to Fight Polio," *Dallas Morning News*, July 3, 1943; "Nurseries Closed to Combat Paralysis," *Dallas Morning News*, August 1, 1943.

³⁴ George Clark, "The Neighbors: I know this isn't where you wanted to go, sir," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, September 30, 1943.

Federal agencies also took notice of women's low rate of job retention. The Women's Bureau studied industries' reports regarding women's high rates of absenteeism, job burnout, and turnover. Upon completing an investigation, the bureau reported that many absences for which workers seemed entirely at fault were actually rooted in plant conditions, including long hours of work, inadequate supervision, and inefficient management. Since the retention of trained workers was of great value, the bureau worked to address working women's problems and keep them on the job. One of their early approaches was to heighten plant managers' and local communities' awareness of the problems faced by women war workers. Speaking at the Institute of Women's Professional Relations' Conference on women's employment issues and retention, Mary V. Robinson, Chief of the Women's Bureau's public information bureau, called on local communities to help by implementing solutions to working women's needs: "Unless some means are taken to relieve the worry as well as the actual burden of household responsibilities . . . the problem of turnover will not be met. . . While it is not the responsibility of employers to tackle problems outside the factory proper, certainly they are most influential in rousing community opinion to take action."³⁵ Women's Bureau agent Elizabeth Christman argued that women who went to work did so out of need, patriotism, or to support a husband in the service. She explained, "The simple mechanics of living have grown more complicated. Not only are the workdays and workweek longer, we must stand in lines more often for groceries, gasoline, ration books, or to catch a bus. To shop on the one evening the stores are open—and in many cities, there are not evening store hours—is hectic but necessary."³⁶ She called upon communities in war-impacted areas to help meet war workers' needs, stating, "The general public has a definite

³⁵ "Letter to Mrs. Frances S. Goodell from Mary V. Robinson," August 26, 1943, Box 179: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Defense (General)'" : Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

³⁶ Christman, "Absenteeism," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

share in this whole remedial program. There is too much uninformed criticism in print and in speech about workers as shirkers. . . . Let's call an armistice to the constant scolding publicly of workers."³⁷ While absenteeism slowed production, trained women quitting their jobs was more problematic, requiring not only hiring a replacement but in the time lost training a newly hired, inexperienced woman.

In an effort to heighten awareness of the problem of women's absenteeism, the Office of War Manpower distributed copies of "The Employment of Women: Facing Fact in the Utilization of Manpower" to regional and local staffs to aid in reducing absenteeism. One paragraph in the twelve-page report addressed women's second full-time job: children, home, and shopping. It identified women's high absenteeism as a product of their need to balance both a job and home life: "No matter how intense a woman's interest in her job may be, her children must be cared for, the work of running a home falls on her, and she must have time for shopping."³⁸ The War Manpower Commission stated steps taken to reduce men's absenteeism such as "patriotic posters" and "attendance bonuses . . . have little impact on women's absenteeism."³⁹ Taking measures to lighten women's responsibilities for home and children were more important. The commission recommended "an employer's main contribution will be in planning hours and shifts of work with the women's point of view in mind and placing individual women on the shifts most suitable for their requirements."⁴⁰ Taking the solution one step

³⁷ Christman, "Absenteeism," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 2.

³⁸ "More than half a million women with children under ten took jobs as their proportion of all women in this category increased from 7.8 percent in 1940 to 12. 1 percent in 1944." Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 78; "Employment of Women: Facing Facts in the Utilization of Man Power," July 14, 1943, Box 1: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes, 1943-1944, 'A-En,' Entry 129": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

³⁹ "Employment of Women: Facing Facts in the Utilization of Man Power," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴⁰ "Employment of Women: Facing Facts in the Utilization of Man Power," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

further, the Commission urged industries to use their influence to win communities cooperation and make necessary adaptations to ease working women's difficulties obtaining services.

The Women's Bureau prepared supplements offering tips and solutions to help women navigate wartime conditions and balance household responsibilities in and outside the home. The Office of War Information distributed the "Women's Page," which included articles for local newspapers to print providing women with practical advice. The bureau also prepared a monthly "Women's Radio War Guide" broadcast over the Blue Network. The show offered time-saving shortcuts for the working woman. The script for the program "Four Hours a Day for Housework" demonstrated how keeping a home while working was possible. Designed for women working an eight-hour day and a six-day workweek, it aimed to "cut down drastically on the usual time you have been taking to do your housework."⁴¹ It advised the homemaker new to a job to rise at 6:00 a.m., with two hours for dressing, making beds, preparing breakfast and lunchboxes and possible preparations for dinner, and head off to work at 8:00 a.m., home by 5:30 p.m., and ready to relax by 8:30 p.m. The author reminded women they would have to make compromises: "You cannot keep up this schedule day after day without the help of your family."⁴² It closed with the caveat: "Don't under any circumstances drive yourself to the point of irritability. In the midst of the war the home should be peaceful."⁴³ The Bureau also advised women, especially those working

⁴¹ "Women's Radio War Program Guide: Supplement of Time-Saving Housekeeping Shortcuts," September 1943, Box 6: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of Director, Office Files of Verda W. Barnes 1943-1944, 'Wo-Wr,' Entry 129": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴² The "Women's Radio War Program Guide" supplement included: a compilation of contributions from national home service magazines including "Four Hours A Day For Housework," *Good Housekeeping*; "Twelve Suggestions For Saving Time in Food Buying, Twelve Suggestions for Speeding Up Meal Preparation," *Ladies Home Journal*; "How To Save Time Preparing Lunch Boxes," *Woman's Day*; "Save Time For Your War Job," *American Home*; "Fifteen Cleaning Short Cuts That Don't Sacrifice Cleanliness," *House Beautiful*, "Time-Saving Care of the Living Room," *McCalls*, "Getting The Washing and Ironing Done," *Women's Home Companion*"; and "The Use and Care of Household Appliances," *House and Garden*; "Women's Radio War Program Guide: Supplement of Time-Saving Housekeeping Shortcuts," War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴³ "Women's Radio War Program Guide," Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

outside the home, that wartime necessities required them to relax the high standards they expected in peacetime.

Home clothes washing machines were a luxury as they were no longer in production, neither were replacement parts. The laundry problem contributed to women's high absentee rates, "reaching such proportions that in several war centers absenteeism is chronic on Mondays and Tuesdays as the women war workers . . . take time off to do their family wash."⁴⁴ The Guide advised women to leave the bulk of their washing to a laundress or professional laundry. However, laundries could not handle the demand and had difficulties finding women to take jobs there as they were among the least desirable places to work. Commercial laundries paid workers poorly in comparison to factories with lucrative war contracts. To control wartime inflation, the Office of Price Administration set price ceilings on laundry services and kept wages low. One laundry owner in Dallas, Texas, complained government regulations and high paying war jobs "put laundries in a bad plight . . . They hired away our help . . . Labor costs have gone up 40 percent, and we're always short of help."⁴⁵ The newspaper in New Brunswick, New Jersey, reported due to a chronic shortage of workers, "more than 100 laundries have shut down in the past three months, and for the year, the total is 600."⁴⁶ At a time when consumer products were in short supply, delays caused great hardship. Women who used to count on one-day service now waited ten or fourteen days for their laundry to return.⁴⁷ Laundries also cut back on services; the only item starched and pressed were men's shirts. "Damp Wash Laundry" service for "10 pounds for 54 c" was one solution to speeding up the return. The service included "inexpensive washing of all your garments, with everything returned just damp enough to iron."⁴⁸ The *Manpower*

⁴⁴ Dorothy Rockwell, "WPB Requests Unite for Civil Supplies," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 28, 1943.

⁴⁵ "Hit by War, Laundries to Seek Relief," *Dallas Morning News*, April 16, 1943.

⁴⁶ "Laundry Problem Brings Plea From OWI 'to Wash Your Own,'" *Central New Jersey Home News*, July 30, 1943.

⁴⁷ "Laundry Problem Brings Plea From OWI."

⁴⁸ "Step Out . . . and Leave Your Laundry Problems to Us!" *Lincoln Star*, February 27, 1944.

Review wrote, “The most beleaguered of all the trades and services were the laundries. . . . In the excessive turnover among women, workers of lesser and lesser skill had to be hired. As a result, the quality and quantity of work suffered; the backlog of dirty linen piled up, with reports of thousands of tons accumulating in individual laundries; pick-up and delivery intervals grew longer; customers became disgruntled and discouraged.”⁴⁹ Dress shirts were of particular concern for men working in offices since laundries only processed them on a two-week schedule.

The war also demanded that women whose breadwinners were in the service take over home and appliance maintenance, typically considered men’s work. The program “Prepare for Winter” advised women to “act early and help ensure the production, transportation and delivery of fuels . . . conserve the supplies available,” and “to winterproof their homes, put up storm windows, seal all windows and cracks, and put heating equipment in top condition.”⁵⁰ The *War Manpower Guide* also pointed out “the crippling effect on every household was the loss of an appliance and the shortage of repair men lost to the draft. It commented, “This evacuation of a trade is literally throwing the repair shops and housewives into a state of panic—at a time when new appliances cannot be purchased and factory repairs are unavailable. To mobilize women in these jobs would call for training since repair services are a specialized group. But women can be trained and should be used for these jobs.”⁵¹ Like other men’s work, the *War Manpower Guide* recognized women trained for work in factories to produce war materiel could be a good source to replace the dwindling supply of repairmen.

⁴⁹ “WMC Calling All Women,” September 1943, 211, Box 3: “Records of the Program Division, Office Files of Lawrence Hammond, 1942-1943, ‘M,’ Entry 129”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁰ “Women’s Radio War Program Guide,” Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵¹ “WMC Calling All Women,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Employee turnover created a headache for management. The constant cycle of hiring, training, quitting, and hiring new untrained personnel affected production. The War Manpower Commission and the United States Employment Service (USES) instituted policies to keep trained male workers from taking their expertise from a low-paying factory to a higher-paying one, a practice popularly referred to as job-hopping. Job-hopping was commonplace as men frequently left jobs requiring specific training in one factory to do the same job in another plant offering more money. Like their male counterparts, women workers also switched jobs to earn the highest wages possible for their work or to take a less demanding one. The government imposed a “freeze” on women employees wishing to leave war jobs. Like men, women seeking to change jobs needed to obtain a Certificate of Availability that would enable them to switch jobs, and like men, if they worked in a highly skilled position a certificate could be denied, forcing them to quit. Women who quit war jobs had to take lower-paying jobs in factories producing consumer products or service jobs because they demanded fewer hours than war plants and offered postwar security. Classified advertisements like the one below illustrate the need for civilians in nonessential jobs—salesclerks, maids, and laundry workers—and the restraints put upon trained factory workers. The ad, Figure 41, stresses the need for proper documentation, meaning a “certificate of availability” to obtain a nonessential job.



Figure 41: Classified Ad: *Salt Lake Telegram*, September 6, 1943⁵²

Even women working for the federal government expressed discontent over its lack of support for them balancing their jobs, home responsibilities, and motherhood. During the fall of 1943, Warwick Hobart, a mother of two and director of civilian employment for the War Department, conducted an eight-week tour of government war plants, the largest employers of women. Hobart spent two months “nosing her way into more than 1000 plants owned and operated by the government to ascertain how women can best operate in industry and what factors contribute to their rapid turnover.”⁵³ Hobart pointed out that frequently women were placed in jobs for which they were unsuitable. She argued that most women who quit claimed ill

⁵² Classified Ad, *Salt Lake Telegram*, September 6, 1943.

⁵³ Martha Jackson, “Tired Women Soon Quit War Jobs,” March 4, 1944, Box 211: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Turnover’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

health resulting from fatigue. She found most managers had done nothing to address women's employment issues and "what little it has done, has been on a piecemeal and stop-gap basis, with here a nursery school and there a shopping service, but nothing which will keep women from quitting as a result of cumulative fatigue from four to six months after their hiring. . . . Women would be just as effective in war plant jobs as men, in many instances, if they just had the equivalent of a 'good wife' at home!"⁵⁴ Hobart concluded that management needed to work with women in a way that is "not necessary with men," and advocated management use skilled interviewers to place women in suitable jobs.⁵⁵ Hobart emphasized finding the right job for a woman based on her skills and strength would aid in reducing turnover.

Dorothy Ducas, also a working mother, resigned from her position as chief of the Office of War Information's magazine bureau. She used her resignation to make a statement about the lack of community support for working women. Ducas explained that this failure resulted in the "definite neglect of my two children."⁵⁶ She argued, "**Women wouldn't need to neglect their children . . . if the whole community felt it important to help women do war jobs. But the communities don't feel it important and do nothing to make it possible for women to work.**"⁵⁷ Women within the federal government who recognized the underlying conflict between holding a war job and keeping the home lights burning as an inherent difficulty of maintaining the ideals of the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family.

In early 1944, news from the war front—the capture of Sicily and steady progress in the Italian campaign—generated great public enthusiasm and confidence that victory was in sight.

Business Week noted, "The air is filled with talk of reconversion and the return to peacetime

⁵⁴ Jackson, "Tired Women Soon Quit War Jobs," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵⁵ Bess Furman, "Tired Women Impair War Plants, U. S. Personnel Official Reports," *New York Times*, February 23, 1944.

⁵⁶ "Working Mother Who Recruited Others Raps Public, Plans to Quit," *Minneapolis Star*, December 8, 1943.

⁵⁷ Emphasis in original. "Working Mother Who Recruited Others Raps Public."

production.”⁵⁸ Despite civilians’ confidence, military needs required production to continue at full speed in factories across the nation. Fearing a letdown in wartime manufacturing, government officials sought to temper the enthusiasm. Bernard Baruch, a special advisor to the Office of War Mobilization, while anxious to resume civilian production, cautioned, “Victory is our first and only duty, but just as we prepare for war in time of peace, so we should prepare for peace in time of war.”⁵⁹ The War Production Board warned, “There can be no reconversion in any industry . . . until war needs are fully met.”⁶⁰ The belief that the war “was in the bag,” saw increasing numbers of women quitting their jobs.⁶¹

This generalized confidence in victory resulted in shortages as experienced male workers jockeyed to get higher skilled, higher paid jobs in anticipation of the end of the war and greater numbers of women left their jobs despite newspapers and classified ads calling for more female workers. The *New York Times* reported statewide shortages: Buffalo needed 2,120 women for “immediate positions in essential industry and 400 in nonessential jobs, Rochester needed 2,000 women to work in essential jobs, more than three-fourths in essential industries; 1,500 jobs in the Albany area,” and “Kingston will need several hundred assemblers at the Radio Corporation of America.”⁶² The *San Francisco Examiner* wrote, “10,000 additional women workers are needed in this area right now.”⁶³ In Bowling Green, Kentucky, the *Park City Daily News* advertised “86,700 Jobs Open in Area War Plants.” The article also cautioned readers against job-hopping, warning, “all these job opportunities are for persons not already holding war jobs where they are

⁵⁸ “Our War Production Task: Phase 2,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 9, 1944.

⁵⁹ Bernard Baruch, “Baruch Report: ‘Sound Lasting Prosperity Through Preparation,’” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 9, 1944.

⁶⁰ “Problem of Reconversion Grave, WPB Official Warns,” *Washington Post*, January 6, 1944.

⁶¹ The origin of the term “in the bag” comes from President Roosevelt’s July 28, 1943 Fireside Chat: “The next time anyone says to you that this war is “in the bag,” or says, “it’s all over “but the shouting, you should ask him these questions: “Are you working full time on your job? “Are you growing all the food you can? “Are you buying your limit of war bonds?,” accessed August 25, 2023, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/fireside-chat-1>.

⁶² “War Jobs Offered for 10,000 Women,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1944.

⁶³ “Part-Time Employment Cause of Many Problems,” *San Francisco Examiner*, March 6, 1944.

needed. Any job-seeker already in an essential industry must present a release from his current employer, indicating that he is available for new employment.”⁶⁴ Associated Press columnist, Jane Eads noted the situation was growing critical as “Practically every inducement except a free set of dishes is being held out by recruiting agents of the War Manpower Commission to get more men and women into war work.”⁶⁵ She stated, “the WMC’s 1500 US Employment services office anticipate they must place 1,000,000 men and women workers a month in war jobs.”⁶⁶ Eads stated recruiters for the commission brought their message to church services, “especially negro churches,” “movie houses,” “the Navajo Indian reservation” and “door to door campaigns in cities like Baltimore and Cleveland” to find women willing to take war jobs.⁶⁷

A generalized atmosphere of complacency continued as the newspapers reported the armed forces made favorable progress resulting in thousands of workers quitting to take jobs in civilian industry. Boston serves as a case study for the labor situation as the numbers of women quitting jobs increased and recruiting efforts failed to convince housewives to take defense jobs. In hopes of stopping this trend, regional director Leon J. Kowal threatened the city of Boston with the designation of a Critical Labor Area. Kowal blamed the high quit rate and absenteeism on a false sense of confidence that the war in northern Europe would be over soon. Kowal stated, “The rapidity with which women are leaving war industries and the disinterest of others, particularly married women with no children, in light of appeals to take vital production jobs . . . ‘frightening.’ . . . I hope there is no occasion for remorse at invasion time.”⁶⁸ He identified “childless married women” as the “major offenders.”⁶⁹ Kowal described women’s refusal to

⁶⁴ “Surplus Labor is Listed, 17,000 Jobs Unfilled,” *Park City Daily News*, March 12, 1944.

⁶⁵ Free sets of dishes, silverware, or drinking glasses were promotional “gifts” for using services such as banks and gas stations. Jane Eads, “Recruiting Agents Seek War Workers,” *Bristol Herald Courier*, March 5, 1944.

⁶⁶ Eads, “Recruiting Agents.”

⁶⁷ Eads, “Recruiting Agents.”

⁶⁸ Arthur Stratton, “Desertions of Women,” *Boston Globe*, March 7, 1944.

⁶⁹ “Manpower Director Says Boston Women Avoiding Jobs,” *Boston Herald*, March 7, 1944.

work as “baffling.” He ordered a psychological survey to understand their “desertions” from war jobs.⁷⁰ Kowal hired a New York firm to conduct a psychological study to provide government officials with raw data for producing propaganda materials to further recruitment efforts.⁷¹ Representatives from the War Manpower Commission and plant agents visited women who had returned home. Ninety-nine women out of the one hundred interviewed responded: “first, they wanted to stay at home; second, the war was about won, so there was no need for women in war factories; and third, they had become tired of war work;” out of the one hundred women interviewed. Only “one woman had . . . a legitimate reason for giving up her job.”⁷² Kowal reported women had “an apathetic attitude toward their patriotic duty,” adding, “This is a dangerous situation. . . . In order to keep production going, three or four women are needed to replace one highly skilled man.”⁷³ He expressed his disgust that these married women without children were counting on fourteen- and fifteen-year-old schoolgirls to take up the slack when they should be getting an education.

When women failed to return to work, the regional director intervened and announced that all men who quit war jobs for nonessential work needed to return to war work. The Commission revoked factories’ rights to hire male workers at the gate and required employees claiming illness provide documentation from a medical doctor. To further stabilize the workforce, women engaged in nonessential work jobs could not move from one nonessential

⁷⁰ Stratton, “Desertions of Women.”

⁷¹ Government officials employed psychology widely during the war, often in the draft selection, propaganda materials, and recruiting of women. First applied in World War I, the government utilized psychology widely in the drafting process to identify “five psychiatric ‘categories of handicap’” including “homosexual proclivities” in their list of disqualifying ‘deviations.’” The government did not screen women entering the services during World War II for lesbianism, as they did men. “Neither the Army or the Navy had developed policies and procedures concerning lesbians” since there were no existing policies or procedures concerning lesbians as men’s screening was based on the criminal justice system, which “ignored lesbian sexual acts and women were rarely prosecuted in court for engaging in sex with other women.” Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 12.

⁷² Stratton, “Desertions of Women.”

⁷³ Stratton, “Desertions of Women.”

position to a new one, although they could take war jobs. In the face of the severe labor shortage, the government employed a policy designed to squeeze as much out of the diminishing number of employees as possible, putting war industries on a longer workday. Although the Women's Bureau opposed this move, McNutt mandated a forty-eight-hour workweek go into effect in thirty-two areas in industries in designated regions.

At the beginning of the war, the Women's Bureau had authorized a study correlating productivity and the length of the workday, publishing a report entitled, "The 48-Hour Week A Basis For Maximum Production." The study recommended the forty-eight-hour week as the absolute limit to achieve maximum production. Despite this information, many war industries adopted the longer work week; some went a step further and instituted the fifty-four-hour workweek. The fifty-four-hour week took shape as five ten-hour days and a half-day on Saturday or six nine-hour days, failing to heed scientific studies prepared by experts in industrial physiology. The report stated: "Machines, with proper care, will produce the largest output when they are worked the longest hours. . . . however . . . scientific studies conducted over half a century ago, demonstrate the fallacy of the assumption that an individual worker will produce an ever-greater output simply by lengthening his hours of work. These studies have established beyond the possibility of successful contradiction the fact that output of the individual worker not only does not increase but actually declines when his hours of work are increased beyond a certain point."⁷⁴ The report stated longer work hours increased industrial accidents and spoiled work due to fatigue.

The Bureau found that many women juggling three jobs—factory, family, and household responsibilities—often reported fatigue as the reason for absenteeism. Women often reported

⁷⁴ "The 48-Hour Week As A Basis For Maximum Production," February 1942, Box 190: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Long Hours and Rest Periods – Military Services'": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

“they were ‘tired’ rather than ill [were] generally those working more than 8 hours a day.”⁷⁵ The study reported workers on ten hour or longer shifts did not get more than 7 hours sleep, resulting in low productivity. The lack of coordination between women’s work schedules and family life had a major impact too. Working more than eight hours a day, women on first shift worked more hours and got less sleep than women who worked second shift which allowed her to return home, sleep undisturbed at the same time as her family, and do her housework during the day.⁷⁶

Industrialists failed to heed the Women’s Bureau’s advice. Eager for the next lucrative war contract, they put their workers on the fifty-four-hour workweek and, as predicted, women’s attrition rate increased. Pre-termination interviews at Consolidated Vultee in San Diego, California, found “88% of the women leaving for personal illness were suffering from cumulative fatigue. Many come in and say they are just too tired to work any longer.”⁷⁷ Cherry-Burrell Corporation reported it operated seven-day weeks the previous winter but “found fatigue was too great to justify the production gained.”⁷⁸ When the National Manufacturing Company in Kansas City, Missouri, went on a ten-hour day as an emergency measure necessary to complete a contract, the plant superintendent said, “The women were ‘all worn out’ by the end of the month. . . . Officials decided it was a bad practice.”⁷⁹ When the N. A. Woodworth Company in Michigan

⁷⁵ “The 48-Hour Week As A Basis For Maximum Production,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁶ “Women’s Wartime Hours of Work: The Effect on Their Factory Performance and Home Life, Bulletin of the Women’s Bureau”, No.208, US Gov Printing Office, 1947, 3-4, accessed August 25, 2024, https://www.google.com/search?q=Women%E2%80%99s+Wartime+Hours+of+Work%3A+The+Effect+on+Their+Factory+Performance+and+Home+Life%2C+Bulletin+of+the+Women%E2%80%99s+Bureau%2C+No.208%2C+US+Gov+Printing+Office%2C+1947%2C+3-4&rlz=1C5CHFA_enUS877US881&oq=Women%E2%80%99s+Wartime+Hours+of+Work%3A+The+Effect+on+Their+Factory+Performance+and+Home+Life%2C+Bulletin+of+the+Women%E2%80%99s+Bureau%2C+No.208%2C+US+Gov+Printing+Office%2C+1947%2C+3-4&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCTM0MzBqMGoxNagCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8.

⁷⁷ “The 48-Hour Week As A Basis For Maximum Production,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁸ “The 48-Hour Week As A Basis For Maximum Production,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷⁹ “The Ten-Hour Day,” 1943, Box 190: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Long Hours and Rest Periods – Military Services’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

reduced its hours from “a 54-hour, seven day week . . . to a 48-hour, six-day week, their absentee rate which was around 11 percent, [went] down.”⁸⁰ Exit interviews revealed the most frequent reasons women quit fell into one of the following categories: poor placement in assigned jobs, the fifty-four- or sixty-hour week, the lack of community response to a working women’s needs, and the dual job of both worker and housewife/mother.⁸¹

Anderson’s prediction played out; the ramifications of the longer workweek impacted many industries. After a visit to Wichita, Kansas, Women’s Bureau agent Elise Wolfe reported that “people seem to have accepted the 10-hour day as a necessary war measure, failing to see the harmful effects.”⁸² She wrote that in addition to factory workers putting in longer days, local communities were unresponsive to workers’ demands. Interviews showed community members resented the demands made by war workers earning high wages resulting from overtime pay. Wolfe reported, “Professional people are rather resentful of the high wages” that workers earn and “not too concerned over the cumulating fatigue.”⁸³ Shopping for necessities was cited again as a major problem. Wolfe reported on negative community attitudes towards workers’ demands for convenient shopping hours. “Various people,” told her that “the department stores” experimented with late hours “one night per week (Monday) for several weeks . . . immediately following Christmas.”⁸⁴ But store officials discontinued the practice, stating that “the sales did

⁸⁰ “The Ten-Hour Day,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD

⁸¹ In every case reported to date of group layoffs, due to cutbacks or other reason, a considerable portion of the women separated from their jobs did not seek other employment but simply faded from the labor market, the OWI reports. Pointing out that, in a number of areas, women did not seek other jobs even when they were available, the OWI offered a composite of the reasons which were advanced in various local reports for the failure of women workers to take other employment.” U.S. Labor Press Service, “Women Leaving Labor Force, says OWI,” August 23, 1944, Box 211: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Turnover’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸² “Women Leaving Labor Force” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸³ Elsie Wolfe, “Return Trip To Wichita, Kansas,” April 11-14, 1944, Box 38: “Office Files of the Director 1918-1948, ‘Historical Files (1943-1946)’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁴ Wolfe, “Return Trip To Wichita, Kansas,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

not justify giving additional shopping hours to the workers. At present, there are no night openings.”⁸⁵ Unlike the British, American businessmen did not desire to make accommodations for women who did not fit traditional expectations. By the end of August 1944, the War Manpower Commission reported, if “male labor continues steadily to decline because of inductions [into the services] . . . the total labor force may fall below the minimum needed to maintain this war economy if the number of women in the labor market also diminishes.”⁸⁶ Women remained the key to war production as the draft continued to draw off men.

War exigencies forced employers to look for new and novel ideas to increase production and keep employees. Before the war, part-time employment opportunities were rare and usually limited to high school or college students and seasonal workers, during the Christmas rush or in service occupations, but they were not standard practice in industrial settings. While some manufacturing firms began offering part-time employment in 1943, large war industries had not. The War Manpower Commission supported part-time work, a solution adopted in Great Britain and Germany, to solve the problem women faced regarding home responsibilities. The Commission issued a report entitled “Wartime Use of Part-Time Labor” stating, “Experience abroad, and our own limited experience here, demonstrate the practical usefulness of controlled part-time programs in areas which have completely exhausted their full-time labor supplies.”⁸⁷ They believed part-time work would draw from a larger pool of citizens, including “eighteen million students over 14 years of age . . . five million non-working women between 20-55 years of age without children, [and] [a]most 18 million workers in trade service and government.

⁸⁵ Wolfe, “Return Trip To Wichita, Kansas,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁶ Women Leaving Labor Force” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁷ Also known as the “4-4 plan. “Wartime Use of Part-Time Labor,” December 1, 1943, Box 192: “Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, ‘Mobilization - Policies’”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Recruitment campaigns indicated that more than 40 percent of the non-working women who are willing to enter industry are interested only in part-time work.”⁸⁸ While many nonessential jobs were available for part-time employment, war industries were not. Initially, plant managers considered part-time work undesirable when judged by traditional industrial practices.

The Women’s Bureau threw its support behind part-time jobs, also known as “Victory Shifts” or “Apron Shifts,” as a way to accommodate women keeping homes and raising children, and a solution to manpower and homemakers’ needs. Mary Anderson argued, “Full-time jobs will be out of the question; no matter how anxious they may be to take employment, they must continue to carry the major responsibility for running the home. The services of these women could be utilized on a part-time basis.”⁸⁹ The Office of War Information also agreed it was a radical idea and anticipated defense firms’ reluctance to adopt it. William Haber, of the War Manpower Commission thought part-time work was such a new idea that employers would reject it. He believed the Commission would need to sell the idea, especially in areas with severe labor shortages that had no time to experiment with a new practice. A spokesman commented, “The introduction of part-time programs necessitates changes and adjustments which many employers, even in areas of acute labor shortages, will accept only with considerable hesitance. Some employers are still trying to use 1933 personnel policies in a 1943 labor market.”⁹⁰ Despite their reluctance, some employers began to experiment with part-time workers and found it successful.

When Noblitt-Sparks Industries in Columbus, Indiana, initiated the new “apron shift,” newspapers across the country carried the news. The news article commented on how it would

⁸⁸ “Wartime Use of Part-Time Labor,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁸⁹ “Part-Time Employment of Women in Wartime,” Special Bulletin No. 13, June 1943, Department of Labor (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/publications/women/specialbulletins/sb13_dolwb_1943.pdf.

⁹⁰ “Wartime Use of Part-Time Labor,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

allow mothers “to work from eight in the morning to noon and then go home to see what devilment Junior has got into.”⁹¹ The Office of War information boasted this was a win/win for all—employers and women workers and society as well. Willing to do their part without turning their lives upside down, women responded positively to the four-hour work shift as an alternative. While many employers were slow to adopt this new idea, many companies reported successful results. In July 1943, the War Manpower Commission “received reports from 17,000 major establishments employing 15 million workers engaged in war production indicated that part-time employment is spread widely but very thin.”⁹²

The new idea slowly gained popularity. When Noblitt-Sparks in Columbus, Indiana, inaugurated the “apron shift,” an idea which originated with their female employees, newspapers across the country announced this new, novel way to entice women to take war jobs and meet the needs of industry. *The Courier News*, in Newark, New Jersey wrote, “The appellations of ‘swing,’ ‘owl,’ and ‘graveyard’ attached by industrial workers to various shifts had a new rival today in the jargon of war worker—the ‘apron’ shift.” An article in *The New York Times* praised the apron shift: “Mrs. Anne Lundgren baked twelve loaves of bread yesterday. Prepared three meals for her family of five, shopped for herself and four shut-in neighbors, cleaned her house, did some ironing, wrote letters to her nephews in the Army Air Corps, and put in four hours at a clattering machine in the plant.”⁹³ Journalist Beatrice Oppenheim also praised part-time work: “Many . . . have heavier than average home responsibilities. All the housewives interviewed said they regularly prepared three meals a day for their families, often baking cakes and pies besides.”⁹⁴ Eva Lapin, author of *Mothers in Overalls*, highlighted a variation on shift work,

⁹¹ “Columbus Plant Has ‘Apron Shift.’” *Muncie Star Press*, August 15, 1943.

⁹² “Wartime Use of Part-Time Labor,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁹³ Beatrice Oppenheim, “The ‘Apron Shift’ Takes Over,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1943.

⁹⁴ Oppenheim, “The ‘Apron Shift’ Takes Over.”

noting that two workers equaled one eight-hour day. Working the part-time shift at Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in East Hartford, Connecticut, a “husband and wife work four hours each to make up a shift.”⁹⁵ Also in Connecticut, Winchester’s employment supervisor K. Willers praised shift workers and reported absenteeism was not a problem with part-time employees who “take their work as seriously as full-time employees.”⁹⁶ Part-time work offered women workers, the best of both worlds, the mother in the home caring for her family and the war worker helping soldiers, one of which might be their husband.

The advertisement below, “Prem, A Swift Premium Meat: Susan Harvey Thinks It Through,” Figure 42, demonstrates the appeal of the apron shift to a homemaker. After Susan Harvey hears her husband complain about retention problems at the plant, she wonders whether she could do a job in the factory while still caring for her children. Susan has a “swell idea” and suggests to her neighbor that they share a job at the factory. Susan proposes working three days and her neighbor three days, swapping childcare responsibilities on non-working days.⁹⁷ The final frame shows that even though Susan is working outside the home, she can still serve a delicious dinner to her family, the pinnacle of homemaking.

⁹⁵ Eva Lapin, *Mothers in Overalls*, (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1943), 11.

⁹⁶ Oppenheim, “The ‘Apron Shift’ Takes Over.”

⁹⁷ “Prem: A Swift’s Premium Meat,” “Susan Harvey Thinks It Through,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 7, 1944.



HUBBY'S BIG PROBLEM right now—he's a factory foreman—is man power. "We're getting men about as fast as a baby gets teeth." Susan wonders . . . could *women* do the work, untrained women like her? "Sure they could," says Hubby. "But what'd you do with the kids? Put 'em in a zoo?"



SUSAN'S A GAL WITH IDEAS. As she slices delicious ready-to-eat *Prem* for dinner she thinks, "Experts at Swift's prepare and cook this meat for me. A fine time-saving idea. Can't I get a big idea, too? C'mon, brain . . . how can I help out at the factory without neglecting the children?"



TURNABOUT WILL DO IT! Susan gets a swell idea. Neighbor, Mrs. Allen, also has children, also wants to earn extra money doing essential factory work. Three days a week she'll work, while Susan looks after all the children and does the marketing. Then it's turnabout for the next 3 days.

RUNNING A POWER LOADER is the job Susan and Mrs. Allen divide between them. "Some fun," says Susan. "I drive around all day in my little car and it does all the work." "Some gal," says Hubby. "Her idea's caught on with other women... we're getting plenty of help since they heard about her."

FORTUNATELY BOTH FAMILIES are mighty fond of *Prem*. (But then, who isn't? *Prem* is Swift's Premium meat, sugar-cured the exclusive Swift's Premium way for finer flavor.) Ready to chill and slice or just heat through. *Prem* saves lots and lots of time. All solid meat, *Prem* saves ration points, too.

OH, BOY! WHAT A MEAL! Pan browned *Prem* and mush with green beans. Quick to get, grand to eat, well-balanced for nutrition. Susan learned in her Nutrition Class about the important food values of meat... knows that *Prem* supplies complete protein, B complex vitamins, and important minerals.

Prem
a Swift's Premium Meat

Prem, sugar-cured the exclusive Swift's Premium way; in oblong tins, round tins, and glass jars.

MEAT
 is materiel of War!

Figure 42: "Prem, A Swift Premium Meat: Susan Harvey Thinks It Through"⁹⁸

⁹⁸ "Susan Harvey Thinks It Through."

As the demand for womanpower increased, whether for patriotic reasons or the desire to take advantage of the additional income a war job could provide, interested citizens wrote Mary Anderson proposing alternatives to factory work. Arnold Sahler sent a letter to Francis Perkins, the Secretary of Labor, proposing the restoration of industrial homework. He suggested women could contribute to the war by working in their homes while earning money. He argued his wife's friends—many servicemen's wives—would like to help in the war effort; however, they are tied to the home caring for their babies and children. He said they'd like to do some form of defense work if they could do it in their spare time at home.⁹⁹ Opposed to government inference in business, Vivien Kellems, a business woman and a Republican representative for Connecticut, praised "homework as a partial solution to the present manpower shortage."¹⁰⁰ She argued a woman working in her own home would reduce social problems associated with women working outside the home, by "perform[ing] the double service of providing aid to those who need it and eliminating evils such as increasing juvenile delinquency and the growing number of abortions resulting from the employment of women in factories."¹⁰¹ Kellems viewed homework as a panacea, solving a wide variety of war-caused social evils including illegitimate births and abortions, and empowering women's freedom to play a part in the war.

⁹⁹ "Letter from Arnold Sahler to Frances Perkins," November 12, 1943, Box179: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Defense (General)': Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

In the early twentieth century, social reformers characterized homework, also known as industrial housework, as a social evil, an exploitative form of labor. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, reformers—including the Women in Industry Division (later the Women's Bureau) and the Children's Bureau--worked to eradicate homework. However, homework played an important role in production during World War I. During that war, efforts to eliminate homework stalled and the government viewed homework as "a system that during a national emergency wrapped exploitation in the flag of patriotism." Over the next two decades the Women's Bureau, with the aid of unionists and reformers, had eliminated most homework by 1945, although remnants remained. Eileen Boris, *Home To Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 125, 129.

¹⁰⁰ Vivian Kellems was a radical, high-profile figure. She came under Congressional scrutiny because of her efforts to convince businessmen not to pay their income taxes. Claiming that she withheld her taxes to set aside cash reserves for her business, Representative John M. Coffee (D-WA) called Kellems "a menace to the American war effort" and accused her of conspiracy with a Nazi agent. No author, "Avers Miss Kellems is Menace to War Effort," *The Scranton Times Tribune*, April 1, 1944.

¹⁰¹ "Miss Kellems is Menace to War Effort;" "War Homework As Social Aid," *New York Sun*, June 2, 1945.

Fearful of reviving this form of workers' exploitation which the Women's Bureau and other reformers had worked hard to outlaw during the early decades of the twentieth century, the Bureau spoke out in opposition.¹⁰² Anderson responded to Sahler, "Homework has been such an evil in the past, and because the law applies to all workers, irrespective of other reasons or motives for wanting to do homework, it would be difficult for the women to who you refer in your letter to arrange to do industrial work in their homes."¹⁰³ The Bureau had no desire to reestablish the exploitative practice of industrial homework. Passage of legislation against homework had been a hard-fought battle. Legislation prohibiting "homework" had passed during the Depression, citing the practice "curtailed factory employment, undercut wage and health standards, and lowered family purchasing power;" in addition, the bureau believed "mothers ought to care for their children [and] the pressures of homework increased the difficulty of carrying out that task."¹⁰⁴ Wartime did witness an increase in the employment of children between 14 and 16-years old as federal and state governments relaxed child labor laws for the duration of the war. After the war, national and state governments restored child labor laws.

In light of the volatility of the labor market, "Czar" McNutt, as the War Manpower Commissioner became popularly known, asserted control over all hiring for war jobs with the intent to stop the exodus of trained men searching secure, higher paying postwar jobs. He dictated that all future applications for war jobs would go through the United States Employment

¹⁰² Although not all "homework" was illegal during the war, it was finally outlawed in 1945.

¹⁰³ The Department of Labor issued a policy statement in 1942 regarding homework: "Nothing in this statement of policy should infer that the presence of young children in the home should be considered a valid reason for permitting women to work at industrial homework in order to care for their children." "Policy Clarification re: Young Children in Home as Preventing Women to Work," November 1942, Box 179: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Defense (General)'" : Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Letter to Mr. Arnold Sahler from Mary Anderson, November 26, 1943, Box 179: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, 'Defense (General)'" : Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁴ Eileen Boris, "Regulating Industrial Homework: The Triumph of 'Sacred Motherhood'," *The Journal of American History*, 71, no. 4, (1985): 745-763, 751.

Service and not individual personnel departments, until the end of the war. In 1943, as more skilled men sought higher-paid jobs with guarantees for postwar employment, pressure for women to take lower-paid jobs increased. McNutt also mandated a forty-eight-hour workweek to go into effect in thirty-two areas in industries in designated regions by April 1, 1944. As attrition continued the War Manpower Commission increased its efforts to force women into “high priority” but not well paid jobs.

In response to changing wartime needs, the War Manpower Commission instituted a new hiring practice, “priority referral,” designed to reflect the “changing picture of male hiring in some areas, focus[ing] attention sharply on their importance in the employment market.”¹⁰⁵ This action on the part of the War Manpower Committee signified the general desire to move women out of heavy industry and fill high-paying war jobs with men. The document, “How Priority Referral Affects Women Workers,” reflects the general attitude that women were there only for the duration and would not find postwar jobs in heavy industry. This new policy focused attention sharply on males’ importance in the employment market and women’s return to prewar employment opportunities. The Women’s Bureau’s “Women’s Page” reported, “With local plans underway for channeling all-male labor through U.S. Employment Service offices to war industries where they are most badly needed, questions as to women’s status under the system are in order. . . . As men move from less essential jobs to war-important spots, as they turn for patriotic reasons from work women can perform to heavy industries where able-bodied men—and no one else—can do the work, women will be needed more and more to replace them.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ “How Priority Referral Affects Women,” April 30, 1944, Box 33: “Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of the Director, General Records 1942-1945, Entry 126”: War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁶ “How Priority Referral Affects Women,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 10.

The document restated the general expectation that women were in war factories only for the duration and focused its attention on men's importance in the employment market. The article concluded, "Women are only **indirectly** affected," reiterating the traditional value that men were the family's breadwinner needing high-paying jobs.¹⁰⁷

During that summer, the War Manpower Commission started using forceful measures to coerce female applicants to apply for low-skilled, high priority jobs, i.e. the Connecticut ball bearing plants. Historian William Breen argues, "the War Manpower Commission actually placed additional obstacles in the way of women entering the workforce."¹⁰⁸ Not only were women who applied for war jobs given undesirable shifts, the jobs were not necessarily close to their homes, involving traveling a distance to and from work, lengthening their workday. Unlike a man who had unlimited opportunities to find the right job, when a woman applying at a USES office refused her first job offer, she got a second offer, and if she refused that, she needed to wait sixty days before placing a new application. This action on the part of the War Manpower Commission signified its general desire to force women out of heavy industry. Breen argues new restrictions regarding when and where women could work forced many to refuse low-paying war jobs at a distance from their homes and a return to traditional, low-paying "women's" jobs to guarantee postwar employment or return to their homes.

The Women's Bureau and Women's Advisory Committee protested the Commission's plan, calling it "an impediment" to women's future job opportunities and contributing to the "existing concern for post-war security arising out of confusion as to the role of women in industry."¹⁰⁹ Summoning members of the advisory committee, Hickey called for an adjustment

¹⁰⁷ "How Priority Referral Affects Women Workers." 10

¹⁰⁸ William J Breen, "Women and Work: The Limits of War Manpower Commission Policy in World War II," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 20, no. 2 (December 2001): 62-78.

¹⁰⁹ "An appraisal by Women's Advisory Committee, Womanpower," April 30, 1944, Box 7: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Program Division, Office Files of D. Thomas Curtain, 1943-1945, 'U-Z,' Entry 139": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

in the postwar treatment of women regarding plans for the readjustment period and an end to treating them as “usurpers to men’s jobs” and denying them equal opportunities for employment.¹¹⁰ The committee argued that job security and increased job opportunities after the war were essential for upwards of 14 million women, particularly unmarried women and those who lost the family’s breadwinner in the war. Hickey, a women’s rights advocate, closed the session with the caveat, “No society can boast of democratic ideals if it utilizes its womanpower in a crisis and neglects it in peace.”¹¹¹ The group proposed government counseling services for women separating from wartime jobs, transfers to other jobs, retraining, and raising the status of household workers.

In response to the growing sense of complacency and fear that “too many citizens were becoming lax in their home front war efforts, even overconfident about the course of the war,” the Office of War Information launched a new, aggressive propaganda campaign in 1944 to fuel public commitment to the war effort.¹¹² Elmer Davis, Director of the Office of War Information, sought to relax censorship, allowing the use of censored photographs from the Pentagon’s “Chamber of Horrors”—the repository for genuine battlefield footage—in movies and magazines and recruitment materials, a form of civilian “shock and awe.”¹¹³ President Roosevelt’s approval made the way for new candor and placing the emphasis on the gruesome reality of war and death in hopes of shocking the public and stimulating an all-out effort to put all of the nation’s energy into winning the war.

¹¹⁰ “An appraisal by Women’s Advisory Committee,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹¹¹ “An appraisal by Women’s Advisory Committee,” War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹¹² Horton, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 9.

¹¹³ The “Chamber of Horrors” was the repository for all photographs of dead or badly wounded Americans in a secret Pentagon file which only top officials knew existed. The photos were released to overcome what they believed was a growing sense of complacency and convince the public to work harder to win the war. George H. Roeder, *The Censored War: American Visual Experience During World War Two* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2.

Women with husbands, fathers, or sons fighting abroad waited anxiously for letters from their soldiers and lived under a cloud of uncertainty: Would their loved ones return home? Local businesses paid for variations of the advertisement below entitled “This Soldier wants a word with you. . .,” featuring a crude wooden cross with a helmet hanging from it. Widely used during 1944-1945 in newspapers across the nation, this ad pictured a grim reality if production did not remain high. Such ads encouraged women to stay on the job and keep the implements of war flowing to the front.



Figure 43: “This Soldier Wants a Word With You”¹¹⁴

The *Tucson Daily Citizen* printed the ad below on April 26, 1944, as preparations for the D-day invasion increased. It beckoned:

And if our lines should sag and break
Because of things you failed to make;
That extra tank, that ship, that plane
For which we waited all in vain;
Will you then come to take the blame?

¹¹⁴ “This Soldier Wants a Word With You,” *Decatur [Illinois] Daily, Review*, July 19, 1944.

For we, not you, must pay the cost
Of battles you—not we—have lost.¹¹⁵

The advertisement below, Figure 44, “Their’s is not to reason why.” Asked the men and women on the home front if they were doing all they could to ensure their soldier would come home. Quoting a portion of the “Charge of the Light Brigade,” by Alfred Lloyd Tennyson, the ad pictured a dead body draped over a soldier’s shoulder and the words, “Theirs is not to reason why, theirs but to do or die.”¹¹⁶ The sentiment reflects a soldier’s duty when facing great obstacles and bloody death and carrying on through the difficult times, a sentiment that corresponded with the need for workers to keep production high.



Figure 44: “Their’s not to reason why. . .”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ “This Soldier Wants a Word With You.”

¹¹⁶ “Their’s not to reason why . . .”, *Hartford Courant*, February 28, 1944.

¹¹⁷ “Their’s not to reason why . . .”

The Manufacturers of Connecticut sponsored the advertisement above. It called for personal introspection: “Ask yourself these questions: Am **I** giving my **BEST EFFORT** to the boys who are protecting me—fighting, suffering, and dying for the things **I** hold dear? Would **I** give more if the enemy were on our shores? Can **I** give more effort while they risk all to keep the enemy thousands of miles away?”¹¹⁸ It pressured the public to make further sacrifices at home and commit to keeping industrial production high for the safety of their loved ones in war zones and bring them home.

While the War Manpower Commission debated the best way to stem women’s exodus from war jobs for the duration, it increasingly focused on planning for postwar reestablishment of the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family. However, lyrics from a popular song from World War I, “How are you going to keep them down on the farm, after they’ve seen Paree?” reverberated in people’s minds as recruitment campaigns continued calling women to war work, enlivening fears that women would not voluntarily leave their jobs after the war.¹¹⁹ Despite the steady exodus of women from war jobs, the question remained, would Rosie return to her place—the home—after the war? Printed in the first weeks of the Women at War campaign, Jay Norwood Darling’s cartoon below captured that underlying fear for the second time in a generation.

¹¹⁸ “Their’s not to reason why . . .”

¹¹⁹ Margaret Culkin Banning, “*Will They Go Back Home?*” *The Rotarian*, September 1943, 28.



Figure 45: “Someone Else Let a Genie Out of a Bottle Once Too”¹²⁰

Entitled “Somebody Else Let a Genie Out of a Bottle Once Too,” the cartoon above highlights a woman leaving her home for a war job in one of the factories belching smoke in the distance. The image shows “Rosie” dressed in a working man’s clothes, fully equipped with a tool belt, a man-sized pay envelope, a lunch pail in one hand, and a hammer in the other.¹²¹ At the bottom left, a small male figure, standing outside a ramshackle homestead reminds Rosie she needs to return home after the war, to which “Rosie” replies, “Oh Yeah?”¹²² Margaret Culkin Banning, a best-selling author, addressed Rosie’s ambivalent answer to whether she would return. Banning wrote, “The complication in answer[ing that] question . . . lies in the fact that in

¹²⁰ Jay Norwood Darling, “Someone Else Let a Genie Out of a Bottle Once Too, ‘A Rosie is a Rosie is a Rosie,’” *Des Moines Register*, January 17, 1943.

¹²¹ “A Rosie is a Rosie is a Rosie.”

¹²² “A Rosie is a Rosie is a Rosie.”

thousands upon thousands of cases it is not a free choice. . . . If it were a matter of changing places between men and women . . . so few [women] would keep the job that they would be negligible.”¹²³ The issue was complicated. In a war of a scale never seen before, many married women’s husbands would never return and many veterans would be victims of shell shock or permanently disabled or unable to hold down employment. The federal government offered “Veterans’ preference” which guaranteed returning, ex-servicemen “top listing on any waiting list for jobs in the agencies, bureaus, administrations, projects, and department of the government which they had serviced in uniform.”¹²⁴ Historian Cynthia Harrison states, “Government planners had defined the major postwar domestic problem as the readjustment of sixteen million veterans, and they believed that readjustment would come sooner if the vets found their girls as they had left them, not as independent working women.”¹²⁵ However, there was no compensation for the sacrifices made by women war workers; postwar planning did not provide training or job opportunities for women.

A distinct change in attitudes and tolerance for women working outside the home increased as public opposition to working mothers grew stronger. Positive statements regarding childcare centers and advice to help working women juggle work and household chores disappeared from the media: mothers belonged in the home. The Office of War Information “dropped [their] campaigns to generate positive attitudes toward childcare centers and to develop ways for women workers to cut down their hours of housework.”¹²⁶ Newspapers and other media turned their attention to older school-aged children, focusing on the rise in juvenile delinquency.

¹²³ Margaret Culkin Banning, “Will They Go Back Home?” *The Rotarian*, Sep 1943, 28-30.

¹²⁴ The term “veterans’ preference” meant the same as priority referral, the terminology changed after passage of the GI Bill of Rights.

¹²⁵ Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women’s Issues, 1945-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 6.

¹²⁶ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 56.

Spearheaded by J. Edgar Hoover, the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched a campaign against delinquency which he attributed to the increase of working mothers. The Sunday newspaper supplement, the *Magazine War Guide* published by the Office of War Information, stressed women's responsibility for the national problem of juvenile delinquency and hyped the increase in juvenile crimes including vandalism, arson, "commando gang" activities, violent behaviors, and train derailments.

Nationally distributed supplements such as the *American Weekly* arrived in Sunday papers adding fuel and urgency for the return of the "mother in the home."¹²⁷ In light of working women's increased time away from the home and failure to provide daily oversight and guidance for her children, teen girls became the primary focus for journalists. Sociologist Genevieve Parkhurst, in her article "Juveniles on the Loose," described underaged girls lying about their age to get jobs, alcohol, and running around with soldiers as "victims" of irresponsible parents rather than "culprits."¹²⁸ J. Edgar Hoover wrote a series of three syndicated articles in a weekly magazine supplement for Sunday newspapers. In the first, "Juvenile Delinquency Begins at Home!" Hoover broadened the blame from working mothers to fathers and older siblings for the increase, feeding fears for the destruction of the Democratic Family.¹²⁹ In "The Gang's All Here—Again," he continued his assault on mothers who neglected their most important job, "staying at home and supervising their children!"¹³⁰ He argued, "There is no patriotic duty that an American mother can perform which transcends the proper bringing-up of an American

¹²⁷ My emphasis.

¹²⁸ Genevieve Parkhurst, "Juveniles on the Loose," *American Weekly*, April 30, 1944.

¹²⁹ "J. Edgar Hoover declares Juvenile Delinquency Begins at Home," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 18, 1944.

¹³⁰ "Opinions About the Wartime Employment of Women, Report No. C31," May 29, 1944, Box 32: "Records of the Information Service, Records of the Office of the Director, General Records 1942-1943, 'Woman Power,' Entry 126": War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

child.”¹³¹ The figure below, “The Gang’s All Here,” advertised Hoover’s third article, to be printed for March 18, 1944.



Figure 46: Advertisement for “The Gang’s All Here”¹³²

Newspapers around the country pointed out that young girls were a growing concern in regard to increased cases of delinquency. Individual newspapers in cities across the nation produced local exposés. The *Fort Worth Star Telegram* ran a series of articles on “uniform girls,” teenaged girls chasing after men in uniform and the sharp increase in venereal disease.¹³³ The *Telegram* followed up with a ten-day series on the delinquency of teenage girls between the

¹³¹ “No. 2—Our Wandering Daughters,” *San Francisco Examiner*, March 19, 1944.

¹³² “The Gang’s All Here.” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 18, 1944.

¹³³ “Uniform Girl Delinquents,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 18, 1945.

ages of twelve and eighteen. The article, entitled “Behind Every ‘Uniform Girl’ May be Found One Delinquency Item: Parents,” was the first in the series.¹³⁴ Delinquent girls “represent not only today’s juvenile delinquent but a potential source of venereal disease 10 times greater than the professional woman in the street.”¹³⁵ Police blotters showed that “they aren’t all from the ‘wrong side of the track’” and laid blame on homes with soldier-fathers and absentee mothers working in war industries for laxity in supervision.¹³⁶

Propaganda generated by the Office of War Information also shifted and began to downplay the social acceptance for mothers working full-time outside the home, no longer praising homemakers’ heroic efforts at balancing work and home life. Homemaking became patriotic. An advertisement for Mrs. Baird’s Bread, Figure 47, pictured below, blended the images of patriotism and homemaking into a defense job. It congratulated women for a job well done and thanked them for answering their country’s call to action: “Lady!!! If Uncle Sam gave medals for what you’re doing, you’d get one. As an American homemaker, you’re performing a vital wartime duty. You’re helping to keep the home front strong by giving your family the *basic foods* they need . . . and BREAD is one of them. This is one of *your* most vital contributions to Victory. . . . Remember . . . Bread is basic to a nation working to win. . . . Serve MRS. BRAIRD’S BREAD regularly . . . wear your uniform *proudly!*”¹³⁷ The traditional Republican Mother, “stay-at-home” mom now stood as the shining example for the post-war American mother.

¹³⁴ Nedra Jenkins, “Behind Every ‘Uniform Girl’ May be Found One Delinquency Item: Parents,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, May 15, 1943.

¹³⁵ “Behind Every ‘Uniform Girl.’”

¹³⁶ “Behind Every ‘Uniform Girl.’”

¹³⁷ Mrs. Baird’s Bread, Advertisement, “Aprons Are Uniforms Too,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, April 2, 1944.



Figure 47: Mrs. Baird's Bread Advertisement: "Aprons are Uniforms Too"¹³⁸

The message conveyed to women was that leaving the workforce and returning to the domestic sphere was a hard-earned reward for participating in the war effort. Mrs. Baird's advertisement highlighted women's patriotic duty was keeping the home fires burning. Wearing an apron as her "uniform," the housewife was in her assigned duty station—her kitchen—and bread, the staff of life, was an essential weapon for building a strong nation. Many women, tired

¹³⁸ "Aprons Are Uniforms Too."

of juggling two jobs, found advertisements like this consoling. Historian Maureen Honey states that while earlier ads “assured women that they could manage home and work duties simultaneously, ads at the end of the war began insinuating that woman could not tolerate such a taxing load indefinitely.”¹³⁹ In her essay on wartime advertising, Associate Professor of Media Culture, Bilge Yesil, writes, “War work was now portrayed as a thing of the past, and despite their wartime symbolization of patriotism, sacrifice, and support, women were construed as not caring about anything, but physical attractiveness, home, family life, and the well-being of their children.”¹⁴⁰ Mothering became the patriotic choice as the soldier’s return restored him as the head of the Democratic Family.

The language used in government releases demonstrates the War Manpower Commission’s changing attitude towards women workers. Embedded in their rhetoric is the assumption that women’s work was at the discretion of government officials “only for the duration of the war” and secondary to the need for men.¹⁴¹ The release stated that “the ‘evaporation’ of women, to a large extent, took care of the problem of placing discharged male workers.”¹⁴² Reporters and pollsters questioned women to determine their feelings about leaving their war jobs and returning to their homes. Polls abounded as women’s magazines attempted to understand how women felt over the loss of employment opportunities. The *Ladies Home Journal*, using a “careful, statistical method,” polled a national cross-section of women war workers: “Do you plan to stop working after the war?”¹⁴³ Author, Nell Giles, wrote, “By and

¹³⁹ Maureen Honey, “Remembering Rosie: Advertising Images of Women in World War II,” in *The Home-Front War: World War II and American Society*, ed. Kenneth Paul O’Brien and Lynn Parsons (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 79-102.

¹⁴⁰ Bilge Yesil, “Who said this is a Man’s War? Propaganda, Advertising discourse and representation of war worker women during the Second World War,” *Media History* 10, no. 2 (August 2006), <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F1368880042000254838>

¹⁴¹ My emphasis

¹⁴² “Office of War Information, Advance Release,” August 23, 1944, Box 7; “Records of Natalie Davisen, Program Manager for Homefront Campaigns 1943-1945, ‘Venereal Disease-Information to War Production Drive,’ Entry 139”: Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁴³ Nell Giles, “What About the Women?” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, Vol. 6, no. 6 (June 1944), 23.

large the answer is YES.”¹⁴⁴ The survey revealed that 44 percent of respondents said “Yes,” 47 percent responded “No”, and 9 percent, “I don’t know.”¹⁴⁵ After questioning the 47 percent who responded “no,” Giles found that 75 percent of these women were “solely self-supporting,” and “87 percent of that group had worked before 1941.”¹⁴⁶ Giles dug deeper, asking the women who answered “Yes” to the question as to whether “men be given job preference over women who have no other means of support?” She reported, a “Third of the women responded affirmatively while a realistic, pocketbook minded majority said no.”¹⁴⁷ Giles concluded that the poll “clearly indicated that women want marriage and homemaking, not factory jobs; that they work in the industry only because they have to, or for the emergency; that they want man’s wages as long as they do a man’s work.”¹⁴⁸ Middle-class women’s answers demonstrate how deeply engrained the value of the Republican Mother was in American society and the desire to perpetuate this social value.

Similarly, women who had migrated to Pensacola, Florida with their husbands and worked in shipbuilding and welding shops during the war also reflected similar values. *The Pensacola News Journal* polled sixty-five women asking if they wanted to continue working after the war. Most of the women’s responses reflected the traditional value, that a wife and mother belong in the home. The paper reported, “answers on the question of continuing their careers were almost violent from most of the women who answered, ‘No.’”¹⁴⁹ When questioned “Why?” women responded, “my husband doesn’t want me to work,” or “their husbands wanted

¹⁴⁴ “What About the Women?” 23.

¹⁴⁵ “What About the Women?” 23.

¹⁴⁶ “What About the Women?” 23.

¹⁴⁷ “What About the Women?” 23.

¹⁴⁸ “What About the Women?” 23.

¹⁴⁹ “Survey Shows.”

them to go ‘back to the kitchen,’” and “I’m a great believer that a woman’s place is in the home.”¹⁵⁰ One woman, a true Republican Mother, explained:

My husband feels as I do that being a homemaker[r] is a full-time job and a very important one. Establishing a home and rearing a child in an atmosphere of family devotion and instilling in those children the principles of wholesome, helpful living is still a woman’s first and most important job. . . . I am still old fashioned enough to believe that a woman’s place is in the home and that from that vantage point, if she desires, may wield her greatest influence. . . . This country was founded on the homes established by a freedom loving people. The seeds of democracy were planted by those first homemakers and are coming to maturity today.¹⁵¹

In the minority, married women who responded “Yes” to continuing to work outside the home, displayed a desire for upward mobility. They stated they would like to earn enough to send their child to college or pay off their house. Their answers reflected expectations for a prosperous economy, a higher standard of living, and hopes for their children’s future, a reality which played out in the 1950s.

For women who faced the future single, widowed, or with a disabled or shellshocked husband, continued employment was not a question. Labor economist, Mary Elizabeth Pidgeon wrote, “The death of men in the present war and the consequent depletion of the male population will require still more women to contribute to their families’ support. . . . greater proportions of the woman population in some than in other localities must assume a large share of the support of their families.”¹⁵² Pidgeon expressed the very values which the Women’s Bureau advocated, the right of women to earn decent wages, and called for an end to economic and legal discrimination despite the rising tide of male employment.

¹⁵⁰ “Survey Shows.”

¹⁵¹ “Survey Shows.”

¹⁵² Mary Elizabeth Pidgeon, “A preview as to Women Workers in Transition From War to Peace,” Special Bulletin No. 18 of the women’s Bureau, March 1944, Washington, D.C., USPO, accessed October 12, 2023, <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/special-bulletin-women-s-bureau-6113/a-preview-women-workers-transition-war-peace-588248>, 5.

As contracts for war materiel were completed and new orders ceased, the emphasis on producing consumer goods, such as automobiles and household appliances, increased. Economic growth seemed a guarantee at home along with a commitment to rebuilding war-torn nations abroad. Confident in postwar prosperity, the Women's Bureau advocated for an inclusive plan to include women in postwar reconversion through speeches, radio addresses, articles in scholarly journals, popular magazines, and newspapers. Using these various outlets, it proposed a plan for full employment and a living wage. "Full employment seems a real possibility when we hear economists stress the essential and rapid expansion of all kinds of consumer goods manufacture on a scale never before conceived to replenish depleted stocks the world over—especially in view of the international programs of relief, rehabilitation, and nutrition already launched."¹⁵³ By way of illustration, the U. S. Chamber of Commerce forecasted, "postwar demands for almost 3 ½ billion dollars' worth of automobiles for 3,675,000 families, over 1 ½ million new homes valued at nearly 7 ¼ billion dollars, over a billion dollars' worth of household appliances such as refrigerators, kitchen mixers, and so on. It takes no stretch of the imagination to foresee extensive employment of women in this industrial expansion."¹⁵⁴ Anderson endorsed consumerism, which in turn would expand the economy and create jobs for the women for whom these new consumer goods were intended. Upon Anderson's retirement in August 1944, Frieda Miller assumed the role as chief of the Women's Bureau and began planning for women's role in the postwar economy.¹⁵⁵ Coming from the same tradition of social feminism as Mary

¹⁵³ Mary Anderson, "Postwar Role of American Women," *The Economic Review* 34, no. 1 (March 1944), Part 2, Supplement, Papers and Proceeding of the Fifty-sixth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association, (March 1944) 237-244, 241.

¹⁵⁴ "Postwar Position of American Women," 3.

¹⁵⁵ Wikipedia describes Social feminism as: "women interested in broad issues in narrow political struggles. . . . campaigned for social improvements and protection of the interests of women. Issues included education, property rights, job opportunities, labor laws, consumer protection, public health, child protection and the vote." Examples include the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Accessed June 6, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_feminism.

Anderson—a feminist movement that focused on social rights and special accommodations for working women versus equality—Miller vowed to continue supporting working-class women and their right to work.¹⁵⁶ As one of her first acts, Miller called for representatives from thirty-one national and labor organizations to gather in New York City to address the transition from wartime employment to peace, and proposed a “Reconversion Blueprint” for women in the postwar changes ahead.

On the opening night of the Conference on Post War Adjustments of Women Workers held in Washington, D.C. in December 1944, Miller pointed out that reconversion—the return to civilian production—would call for “job-shifting” as women would need to leave war jobs to make way for returning soldiers to take high-paying manufacturing and essential civilian jobs. Looking forward, Miller warned the group, “One of the greatest problems during the D-days of demobilization of war industries and armed forces will be the need to reshuffle women workers.”¹⁵⁷ She compared demobilization to “a robot bomb that cuts in all directions and undermines community welfare and morale,” and called for a “shock-absorber” program, to ensure a fair deal for women.¹⁵⁸ Miller pointed out that as a result of the war, “The number of families with a woman head has been increasing. They constituted 15.3 percent of all families in the country in 1940. . . . By V-E Day (May 1945) the percent had jumped to 21.9.”¹⁵⁹ Many war widows and wives with disabled veterans needed jobs, and she called for initiatives on both the state and national levels to help fight against the discrimination of women during reconversion and the peacetime economy.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Social Feminism sought to keep protections for women employees rather than equality in the workplace, unlike the Suffrage movement focused solely on the vote and not working women’s rights and protections.

¹⁵⁷ “Job Program Urged to Avert Hardship,” *New York Times*, November 4, 1944.

¹⁵⁸ “Job Program Urged.”

¹⁵⁹ Frieda S. Miller, “Women in the Labor Force,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol 251, 1, (May 1947): 35-43, 40.

¹⁶⁰ “The Veterans Affairs Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1947,” offers best estimation as to the number of widows with children and extended family receiving service-connected death benefits as of June 30,

Miller praised women's participation in the work force during the war, peaking the prior month, "when 18 1/2 million were at work," and she proposed a "reconversion blueprint, a plan whereby women who needed jobs could find new opportunities."¹⁶¹ Knowing war jobs would "evaporate," she called for the transfer of industrial skills women had learned in defense plants to be transferred to consumer production.¹⁶² She called for state level initiatives to ease women's transition from war employment to new jobs, including counseling, training and retraining facilities, establishing minimum conditions in traditional women-employing industries," and the "provision of funds for women workers when demobilized to return to former homes or to new areas where employment opportunities are available" to be underwritten by unions, states, or the federal government.¹⁶³ However, she warned, public opinion was rapidly changing, "veering from a period of excessive admiration for women's capacity to do anything back to the idea, expressed at times with considerable vehemence, that women ought to be delighted to give up any job and return to their proper sphere—the kitchen."¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Miller, like many, hoped to return to prewar ideals and restore the nation's fundamental values: the Republican Mother and Democratic Family.

To better understand the financial issues facing women after losing defense jobs, the Women's Bureau conducted home visits of 13,000 women war workers in the ten most congested areas of war work between late 1944 through early spring 1945. Cumulative results

1947, (including widows, children, and the deceased parents.) "The Veterans Affairs Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1947," U.S. Government Printing House, Washington D.C. 1948, <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/FY1947.pdf>; Frieda S. Miller, "War and Postwar Adjustments of Women Workers," December 4-5, 1944, Box 175: "Division of Research, Records Re: Women Workers in World War II, 1940-1945, '1944 Conferences 1943'": Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁶¹ Miller, "War and Postwar Adjustments of Women Workers," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁶² Miller, "War and Postwar Adjustments of Women Workers," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 3.

¹⁶³ "Post-War Job Plan Drawn for Women," *New York Times*, December 7, 1944.

¹⁶⁴ Miller, "War and Postwar Adjustments of Women Workers," Women's Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

showed that 75 percent of women indicated that they planned to continue working in peacetime.¹⁶⁵ In terms of their need to continue employment, results indicated that 93 percent out of every one hundred working women “contributed regularly to family expenses” and “nearly two-thirds (62 percent) spent part of their paycheck on household expenses.”¹⁶⁶ Ninety-one percent of married women living with their families indicated they planned to work and contribute to the family expenses; however, they also saw their income as bettering their families’ lifestyle. Jobs would enable them to save for homes and children’s college educations.¹⁶⁷ Widowed and divorced women living outside of an established family remained solely dependent on their resources for self-support. Included in the last group surveyed by the Bureau were “400,000 of the country’s 2 million household employees.”¹⁶⁸ The Bureau’s postwar legislative initiatives, designed to end economic discrimination against women, included passage of equal pay legislation for equal work, under consideration in forty-three states, and elevating domestic work and wages in service industries. The study did not include women employed in domestic work, 60% of whom were black women.

Traditional prewar racial biases remained. Miller failed to call for significant changes in the prewar status of African American women who had found better-paying jobs during the war, equal postwar employment opportunities for African American women, or inclusion under the Social Security system. Miller accepted the postwar reality that black women would need to return to low-paying jobs as domestics. Even before layoffs began, some African American

¹⁶⁵ “The Economic Responsibilities of Women Workers as Shown By a Women’s Bureau Study of Women War Workers and Their Postwar Employment Plans,” February 1946, Box 10: “Division of Research, Records of the Women’s Bureau, Conferences 1946”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 86.

¹⁶⁶ “The Economic Responsibilities of Women Workers,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 86.

¹⁶⁷ “The Economic Responsibilities of Women Workers,” Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, 86.

¹⁶⁸ “Wartime Shifts of Household Employees into Other Industries.” March 1946, Box 10: “Division of Research, Records of the Women’s Bureau, Conferences 1946”: Women’s Bureau, Record Group 86, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

women continued to work as maids. Statistics showed that, nationwide, there were actually more African American women working in domestic service after the war than before, but they represented a smaller proportion of all African American women workers since many had found employment in war jobs or other occupations.¹⁶⁹ For women with no specific wartime training, domestic work, paying up to \$15 a week, was attractive. However, the Labor Department reported that although “the number of Negro women domestics increased 50,000” during the war, “it was not enough to counterbalance the decline of 400,000 among white domestic servants.”¹⁷⁰ Alana Erickson Coble states that during the postwar years, “domestic service became more racially polarized as the black share of all female household employees increased from 46.6 to 60.9 percent.”¹⁷¹ To elevate black women’s income, Miller argued in favor of establishing national standards of training for domestic service workers equal to the respect and pay of women working in the “visiting nurse service,” arguing that because “service industries are valuable to the community as a matter of health and well-being, they should be made attractive to the most competent workers leaving the war factories.”¹⁷² Miller recognized there were no labor laws setting standards for domestic workers in the United States and the few random attempts made over the years to unionize them had failed. Miller remained committed to the bureau’s tradition of raising women’s labor to a higher standard, but at a time when the American Dream was the return to Republican Mother and the Democratic Family, it remained out of reach.

Starting in January of 1945 “about 60,000 men [were] being released from the armed services every month, exclusive of war casualties, for physical reasons, ineptitude, or other

¹⁶⁹ Alana Erickson Coble, *Cleaning Up: The Transformation of Domestic Service in Twentieth Century*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 140.

¹⁷⁰ “Negro Maids Lured to War Jobs, Survey Finds,” *Chicago Defender*, March 3, 1945.

¹⁷¹ *Cleaning Up*, 140.

¹⁷² “Plan Higher Level For Domestic Work,” *New York Times*, November 10, 1944.

causes.” A newspaper advertisement for war bonds, Figure 48, featured a sentimental letter that promised servicemen that their wives anxiously awaited their return and that they were still the girls they left behind. The ad envisioned him in an “easy chair,” at home with children versed in democratic values and the long-waiting Republican Mother, promising “[e]verything will be just as it was before you went away.”¹⁷³

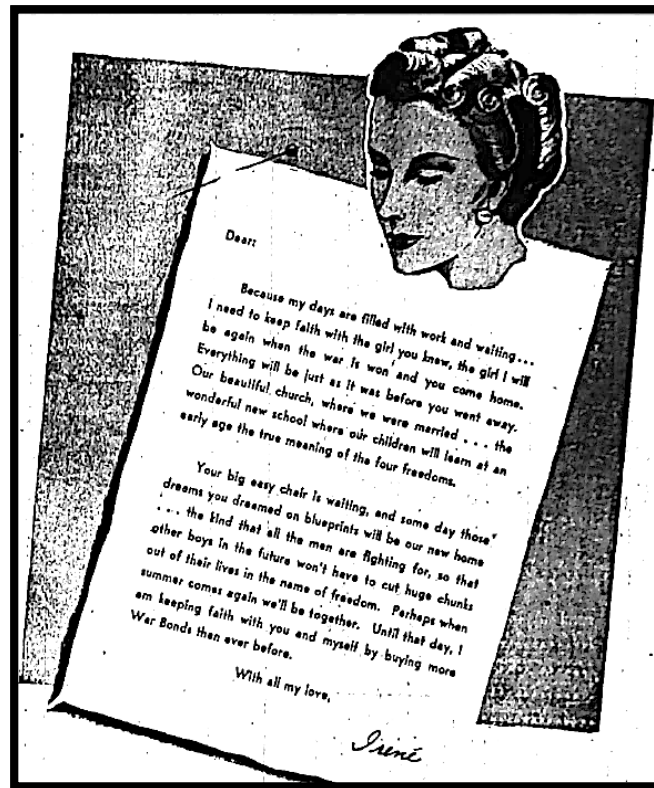


Figure 48: “Because my days are filled with work and waiting . . .”¹⁷⁴

With Germany’s surrender, the war in Europe ended and the focus moved to the Pacific. Dropping atomic bombs over Nagasaki and Hiroshima led to Japan’s surrender on September 2,

¹⁷³ Advertisement for war bonds, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 18, 1944

¹⁷⁴ “Because my days are filled with work and waiting . . .,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 8, 1944.

1945. Starting on August 6, Operation Magic Carpet, “the largest combined air and sealift ever organized” lasting 360 days, carried approximately 22,222 Americans home per day.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Colin Makamson, ‘Home Alive By ‘45’: Operation Magic Carpet.’, October 2, 2020, National World War II Museum, accessed October 12, 2023, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/operation-magic-carpet-1945>.

CONCLUSION

Feminist historian Philomena Goodwin states, “home” represents “a ‘physical’ sense of belonging and a source of stability.”¹ However, after a dozen years of social turmoil resulting from an economic depression and four years of foreign war, only the ideal remained part of the American Dream. Times of economic insecurity gave way to fathers, even mothers, entering the military and workforce in an attempt to preserve this ideal, leaving many homes with a working mother holding them together. During the post-war years Americans sought rebuild an endangered species, the republican mother and democratic family.

In wartime, home remained a cherished ideal: “a place of physical belonging” instilling “nationalism and patriotism,” an ideal soldiers fighting on foreign shores sought to protect. Philomena Goodwin argues the traditional image of women in the home became problematic as women’s entry factory work challenged the dominant, culturally accepted division of labor. Historian Sonya Michel brands the national debate over women’s roles during the 1940s as the “discourse of the democratic family.”² She contends authorities regarded “family as a key link in the nation’s defenses and women were deemed essential to the family’s survival and stability.”³ Michel points out that while the discourse elevated the wartime role of the Republican Mother, it also heightened the political importance of the family, making it more difficult in the postwar transition for women to continue working outside the home without looking treasonous.⁴

The announcement that the war was over in Europe, V-E Day on March 8, 1945, witnessed great celebrations. Parades and prayer services marked the occasion in New York City

¹ Philomena Goodman, “*Women, Sexuality and War*” (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 19.

² Sonya Michel, “American Women and the Discourse of the Democratic Family in World War II,” in *Behind the Line: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. by Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 154.

³ “American Women,” 154.

⁴ “American Women,” 154-55.

and its surrounding boroughs, in San Francisco, Baltimore, and Hawaii.⁵ However, not all Americans celebrated as war against Japan continued. Truman reminded Americans the war against the Japanese would continue for a prolonged period of time. “Our victory is only half over,” he cautioned and “asked Americans to refrain from celebrating in order to focus on the task ahead in the Pacific.”⁶ Heeding the President’s call to remain focused on production, in cities such as Chicago, New Orleans, Boston, and Dallas the mood remained “somber” and “reflective.”

In light of victory over Germany, President Truman announced some “soldiers would be released through [a] cut in the size of the Army, selected from among fathers and those who have had the most extended and arduous service.”⁷ However, thousands of servicemen remained in Europe, lingering in camps, waiting reassignment in the Pacific theatre or news of Japan’s capitulation. Truman also announced that rationing would continue for an unknown period of time and urged Americans “to bring our maximum forces to bear.”⁸ However, the transition to peacetime was underway. The *New York Herald Tribune* dedicated a full page to the official timeline for shifting to peacetime status. The article outlined reconversion and a general timeline for renewed civilian production, with an emphasis on producing consumer products in short supply—including automobiles and household appliances—and the end to rationing and wage and price controls.⁹ Factories no longer needed for war production began manufacturing essential civilian items such as washing machines and refrigerators.¹⁰ The article projected 4,500,000 workers would lose their jobs over the next year and within one month of Japan’s surrender “the

⁵ Lauren Monsen, “How Americans observed V-E Day During World War II,” accessed June 27, 2022, <https://uk.usembassy.gov/how-americans-observed-v-e-day-during-world-war-ii/>, May 3, 2020.

⁶ Monsen, “How Americans observed V-E Day.”

⁷ “Vinson’s Report on the Prospects Facing Americans in the Second Phase of the War,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 10, 1945.

⁸ “Vinson’s Report on the Prospects Facing Americans.”

⁹ “Vinson’s Report on the Prospects Facing Americans.”

¹⁰ “Vinson’s Report on the Prospects Facing Americans.”

government cancelled \$35 billion worth of defense contracts.”¹¹ Rather than heap praise on women’s contribution at the height of wartime production, in the “postwar version,” industrialists downplayed their value: “they had not been very good after all, prone to high absenteeism and ‘bad attitudes.’”¹² This statement not only failed to recognize women’s contribution to the war but belittled their patriotic efforts for its victorious end.

V-J Day marked the end of the war and the nation celebrated on September 2, 1945, with the formal signing of the Instrument of Surrender aboard the USS Missouri. Four days later, the U.S. government officially launched the afore mentioned Operation Magic Carpet with Liberty and Victory ships transporting “22,222 Americans home every day for nearly one year straight.”¹³ The last soldiers returned home on September 1, 1946. The war had challenged core American values—the cherished tradition of the Republican Mother, the wife and mother in the home—as the government launched employment campaigns bringing them into factories or other lines of work. An estimated three hundred and fifty thousand housewives answered the call to work outside the home, taking jobs in production or essential community services, helping to fuel the war machine and placing their children in the care of “others.” The soldiers’ victorious return home restored the “Democratic Family” with the husband and father at the helm.

Willard Waller’s article, “The Coming War on Women,” in the *New York Herald Tribune*, offered insight into what soldiers expected regarding their wives continuing to work outside the home. Interviews with returning veterans demonstrated they expected to return to prewar family values. Tech. Sgt. John A. Price, wounded in Europe, spoke of his expectations of life after the war when he returned to his wife and daughter. “After the war . . . women will be

¹¹ “Vinson’s Report on the Prospects Facing Americans.”

¹² Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women’s Issues, 1945-1968*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 5.

¹³ Colin Makamson, ‘Home Alive By ‘45’: Operation Magic Carpet,’ October 2, 2020, National World War II Museum, accessed October 12, 2023, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/operation-magic-carpet-1945>.

needed to rear children to become good citizens. Our civilization needs homes, and the woman is the foundation of a good home.”¹⁴ Price’s expectations were echoed by married men without children and single men as well. Cpl. Fred Bienstock said, “I’m married, my wife’s working now, but we want to start a family as soon as possible. You can’t have a family when the wife is working. I want her to quit and let me do the supporting.”¹⁵ Cpl. Otto Makovy, a bachelor, commented, “I’m not married. But when I am, I’ll insist on doing all the supporting and my wife staying home. That’s woman’s place.”¹⁶ The overwhelming consensus among soldiers was that women belonged in the home, evidence that ideals such as the Republican Mother and the Democratic Family were ingrained as part of the American Dream.

Regarding women who had entered war jobs, replacing men drafted for war service, the operative question was would they leave voluntarily at the end of the war? The government had aptly planned and executed the transition through policies put in place by the War Manpower Committee, making way for returning vets to resume their place at the head of the family. Hope for the return to normalcy—the father as breadwinner, the mother as housewife and care giver, and a brood of children—was strong. But after approximately fifteen years of economic change—the Depression followed by a booming war economy—could the U.S. return to traditional gender expectations?

Polls conducted at the war’s end indicated subtle changes in women’s attitudes toward work outside the home in the future. While many mature married women saw their future as wife and mother, younger, high school-aged girls who had watched their mothers balance home and war work reflected a marked generational change in attitude toward women entering the workforce and contributing to their families’ finances. A survey entitled “High School Girls

¹⁴ Willard Waller, “The Coming War on Women,” *New York Herald Tribune*, September 18, 1945.

¹⁵ Waller, “The Coming War on Women.”

¹⁶ Waller, “The Coming War on Women.”

Deny that ‘Women’s Place is In the Home’” reported results from a national poll conducted by the Institute of Student Opinion. In response to the question: “Do you think that girls should plan a career other than homemaking?” National results revealed that “23,360 (88 %), replied Yes; 1,383 (4 %) No; and 2,599 (8 %) No Opinion,” indicating a large majority of high school girls believed they should plan for careers outside the home after graduation.¹⁷ According to one reporter, the girls at Greenville High School in Alabama “offered sound reasons for their opinions.”¹⁸ Responses included: “A girl doesn’t generally know when she will marry. Therefore, she should plan for the gap between school and marriage;” “Working in the business world teaches a girl to get along with others and to handle her husband’s money better than she otherwise would;” and “After marriage, a girl may have to assist with the family finances.”¹⁹ In any cases these young girls soon learned to navigate society and saw an opportunity to make a difference in their daughters’ future. However, social forces beyond their control set America on a course to renew the traditional core values of the Republican Mother and Democratic Family.

Passage of “The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act” in June 1944, popularly called the GI Bill of Rights, meant to ensure males opportunities for employment. Females in the Women’s Army Corps were also included in the bill.²⁰ When the war ended, veterans took advantage of the GI Bill to get degrees from colleges and universities. Male veterans dominated in professional programs: medical, legal, and doctoral programs. However, qualified female veterans did not have equal access.²¹ The movement toward college degrees also saw an increase in black men and women seeking degrees. However, women also sought higher education but

¹⁷ “High School Girls Deny that ‘Woman’s Place Is In the Home,’” *Greenville [Alabama] Advocate*, March 8, 1945.

¹⁸ “High School Girls Deny.”

¹⁹ “High School Girls Deny.”

²⁰ Susanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 145

²¹ Hartmann states, “When the program ended in 1956, 64,728 women had been among the 2,232,000 veterans educated under the GI Bill, a proportion approximating their representation in World War II Service.” Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 106.

did not find a pathway to economic success. Higher education did not lead to high paying professional jobs; more often it led to finding a husband and starting a family.

As civilians, women doing war work were ineligible for benefits under the GI Bill; however, women married to veterans benefited indirectly. The act offered a variety of economic benefits, including a guarantee that veterans could return to prewar jobs or receive job training. In addition to job guarantees, the menu of benefits included job placements, industrial training, or a college education. Soldiers' benefits also included: vocational rehabilitation, loans for purchasing homes, life insurance, and medical care.²² Despite women's support for the war as military personnel, pilots, nurses, and industrial workers, they received no further recognition beyond the satisfaction for a job well done.²³

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, increasing numbers of women attended college and the number of professional women increased, although they "rarely received the same treatment as men" or achieved top positions.²⁴ Due to a shortage of males, wartime offered women greater opportunities to study subjects traditionally considered masculine. Although female attendance in college increased during the war years, it never constituted "fifty percent of college enrollments."²⁵ While women's activities outside the home "serving" their country during war—making the weapons of war to speed victory and save men's lives—was commendable, journalist Philip Wylie argued they were wasting their childbearing years

²² "An Analysis of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, *Social Security Bulletin* (July 1944), 6-10, accessed July 10, 2022, https://www.google.com/search?q=GI+Bill+of+rights&rlz=1C5CHFA_enUS877US881&oq=GI+Bill+of+rights&aq_s=chrome..69i57.12374j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8.

²³ The WACs did not receive veterans benefits until 1980, and even then the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs) were excluded. They were not recognized until 1970, as a result they were ineligible for benefits.

²⁴ William Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 90

²⁵ Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1982) 102, 104.

studying and preparing for a career and considered it a waste of a woman's time and effort when she could be raising children.

There was no postwar GI Bill for women who worked in defense jobs during the war. Society expected women to return to the home or traditional, low-paying women's jobs. Women had trained in specialized industrial skills capable of building tanks, planes, and ships for war were no longer valued by industry. Historian Karen Anderson wrote that factory management quickly "reinstated most prewar discriminatory policies regarding working women, even to the point of disregarding their seniority rights."²⁶ *Newsweek Magazine* reported only a small percentage of women who had done war work were looking for immediate reemployment.²⁷ Outside the war factory, USES officials also discriminated, denying unemployment benefits to those women who refused referrals to jobs in traditional female-employing fields. "²⁸ *Business Week* commented on the dilemma: "while most job openings are for men, most job seekers are women."²⁹ Many women continued to hold out waiting for higher paying jobs to open up; when they didn't, they abandoned hope and returned to traditional forms of work. In January 1947, the Women's Bureau reported one million women left production lines at the end of the war and half of them were still looking for jobs.³⁰

Whether women worked outside the home or not Motherhood remained the women's main occupation. Although the term "baby boom" officially refers to post-war years with the return of the soldiers following the war, the "boom" actually started during the war. Articles such as "Have Your Babies While You're Young" urged young couples in their early twenties to start

²⁶ Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II," *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (June 1982): 82-97, 95.

²⁷ "Nation Aims Towards Jobs for all in Change-Over to Ways of Peace," *Newsweek*, September 3, 1945, 29-30, 29.

²⁸ Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired," 95.

²⁹ Amy Kesselman, *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver During World War II and Reconversion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 106.

³⁰ Million Women Quit Jobs I Year to Resume Housework," *Washington Sunday Star*, January 12, 1947.

a family while “Physically and mentally sound, emotionally stable and willing to give their children the components of a good home” and “spaced sufficiently close together to make child-bearing her primary occupation. . . . Have enough children so that you won’t say regretfully after it’s too late, ‘I wish I had more.’”³¹ Reestablishing a new “normalcy,” for the Republican Mother and Democratic Family took no time as a record setting baby boom took place between the years, between 1946 and 1964. Showing support for the nuclear family, Congress approved tax deductions in 1954 for child and dependent care, increasing the deduction in 1956 to \$600 per dependent. Below, in Figure 49, is a baby boy’s bathing suit which celebrates the deduction.³²



Figure 49: “I’m a Little Tax Deduction”³³

An additional roadblock to women hoping to take a job and remain employed after the nation’s transition from war to peace and beyond was the pressure to shut government nurseries since the mother could resume her duties at home. As the war drew to a close, it was expected that wartime childcare services would end. As the expiration date for funding the Federal Works Administration nurseries loomed in October 1945, an avalanche of letters, petitions, wires, and postcards from mothers with servicemen abroad along with the Congress of Industrial

³¹ Sophia J. Kleegman, “Have Babies While Young,” *Ladies Home Journal* (February 1946): 30-31, 130-132, 31.

³² I’m a Tax Deduction” personal photograph.

³³ I’m a Tax Deduction” personal photograph.

Organizations Women's auxiliaries lobbied President Truman to recommend Congress pass additional appropriations to keep the nurseries open.³⁴ At the President's urging, Congress allotted funding to keep the program operating until February 1946. However, for widowed women or those with disabled husbands, working was not a choice and childcare remained a necessity. The author of *Citizen, Mother, Worker: Debating Public Responsibility for Child Care After the Second World War*, Emilie Stoltzfus argues the failure of the government to continue daycare was consistent with women's civic invisibility and Republican Motherhood, which "paradoxically linked white women to the public by the performance of a private, domestic duty of childcaring."³⁵ Women in many cities across the country protested and actively petitioned the government to continue funding the federal wartime nursery program in peacetime. The city's welfare commissioner dismissed the protests as "hysterical."³⁶ The *New York Times* published the picture below, Figure 50.

³⁴ Howard Dratch, "The Politics of Childcare in the 1940s," *Science & Society* 38, no. 2 (1974): 167-204, 186.

³⁵ Emilie Stoltzfus, *Citizen, Mother, Worker: Debating Public Responsibility for Child Care After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 3.

³⁶ Lydia Kiesling, "Paid Child Care for Working Mothers? All It Took Was a World War," *New York Times*, October 2, 2019.



Figure 50: “Paid Child Care for Working Mothers? All It Took Was a World War”³⁷

Stoltzfus highlights the postwar, grassroots efforts by women in three areas— Washington, D.C., Cleveland, Ohio, and California—to save childcare facilities. California was the only state to approve a permanent state-wide program. Stoltzfus states legislators provided monetary support for childcare because they recognized women’s contribution to the state economy, “the productive citizenship rationale uniquely allowed mothers to argue for publicly provided child care from the status of a publicly valued wage earner.”³⁸ The inability to maintain or further the establishment of daycare in the postwar years demonstrates the national consensus to return American society to its prewar status, the Republican Mother in the home. Social scientist Howard Dratch points out, “All eyes turned toward postwar planning, and assumptions about the post-war economy were effective in keeping the federal childcare program from

³⁷ Kiesling, “Paid Child Care for Working Mothers?”

³⁸ Stoltzfus, *Citizen, Mother, Worker*, 195.

expanding beyond its 1944 peak.”³⁹ With the increasing confidence that peace was lasting, all eyes turned to recreating the traditional and sentimentalized image of the stay-at-home mom, restoring the highly revered American value of the republican mother and the democratic family.

The return to peacetime conditions, after years of actively working outside the home doing men’s work, shone a spotlight on women’s inequalities in the male dominated economy, legal system and society at large. American women, while living in the land of “equality,” remained without full rights under the law. Legally, women’s rights remained unchanged since the passage of the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution gave them the right to vote but failed to give them legal equality with males. The failure of the government and society at large to recognize women’s accomplishments during the war spotlights their unequal legal status; women were able to “fight” for their country but did not share political equality. An article in *Good Housekeeping* asked, “Do Women have equal Rights?”⁴⁰ The anonymous author answered No, despite women’s century long battle for equality, Congress failed to grant it to women.⁴¹ The author pointed out the hypocrisy of the U.S. signing the charter of the United Nations calling for “universal respect for, and observance of, human rights for all without distinction as to . . . sex,” since women are “still an inferior under many laws [in the United States].”⁴² Despite women’s wartime service to their nation during the war, there was no reward other than an “ataboy.” Motherhood, the duty of every Republican Mother, remained a woman’s main occupation, whether they worked outside the home or not. The desire to return American society to its ideal,

³⁹ Dratch, “The Politics of Child Care,” 186.

⁴⁰ The use of capital letters is in the original copy.

⁴¹ Some words in the title are not capitalized per the original. Morton Sontheimer, “Do Women have equal Rights?”, *Good Housekeeping* 127, no. 6: 38-39, 264-268, 38.

⁴² The author also pointed out that in 1865, when Congress debated the Fourteenth Amendment, granting citizenship to Blacks, women were asked to curb their demands for greater rights, specifically jury rights. When the amendment passed, a clause contained to “male inhabitants and “male citizens,” when the amendment passed, it was determined that “it was unconstitutional to exclude Negroes from jury panels [and] added that a state may ‘confine the selection to males;” once again preventing women from access to juries. Sontheimer, “Do Women Have Equal Rights?,” 38, 264. <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/wma/docview/1846766543/4A1D0D3A99AC430FPQ/1?accountid=7090&imgSeq=1>.

the republican mother in the home raising their children to be patriotic citizens with the father as breadwinner and head of the family meant a return to normalcy after four long years of war offered evidence that historic American values persisted after the war.

By the 1950s, concerns over jobless or poorly paid working women faded into the background. It appeared the majority of women had left the workforce and their focus returned to the ideal: home and motherhood. However, Joanne Meyerowitz argues that was not necessarily true. In her review of popular magazines printed after the war, Meyerowitz argues, “Post war magazines, like their prewar and wartime predecessors, rarely presented direct challenges to the conventions of marriage or motherhood but they only rarely told women to return to or stay at home. They included stories that glorified domesticity, but they also expressed ambivalence about it, endorsed women’s nondomestic activities, and celebrated women’s public success.”⁴³ Historian Rebecca Jo Plant, in her study of the meaning of “motherhood,” traces the changes in society’s expectations of mothers coming to fruition in modern times during the Second World War, arguing the late 1940s into the 1950s saw the transition from the nineteenth-century ideal of the Republican Mother to the ideal of the Modern Woman.

Whereas historically society revered mothers as the virtuous woman “with a love so powerful, enduring, and selfless as to border on the divine,” we don’t know if Jane Amberg, the Republican Mother featured in the article “Operation Housewife,” in the September 1941 issue of *Life Magazine*, left her home, like so many others women, to take a war job. Or returned home to resumed the role of a traditional republican mother, but chances are high that she tied on an apron and cooked and cleaned for her husband and children at the end of the war.⁴⁴ We know

⁴³ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Post War Mass Culture, 1946-1958,” *Journal of American History* 79, no. 4, (March 1993), 1480.

⁴⁴ Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 6.

women disappeared from the front lines of production, married, gave birth, and began raising their children in a new age of prosperity, their memories lingered and fed a new revolution in gendered relationships a generation later.

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VITA

Catherine Cunningham Murtagh was born in Hartford, Connecticut on September 22, 1951, to Edmund Cunningham and Catherine Fagan Cunningham. Catherine grew up in East Hartford, Connecticut with her two sisters, April and Jane, and a brother, Edmund. Growing up in New England and surrounded by history, she found her first love, American history. Catherine graduated from East Catholic High School in Manchester, Connecticut in 1969 and Annhurst College, in Woodstock, Connecticut, where she graduated with her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology in 1973 and received her master's degree in history from Western Connecticut State University in 1978.

After teaching history in middle school in Windsor, Connecticut for a year, she married John Murtagh and moved to Dutchess County, New York where she taught Social Studies for six years at St. Mary's School in Wappingers Falls. After moving to West Hurley, New York, Catherine and John started a family. Her first two children, Caroline and Mark, were born in New York. After moving to Tucson, Arizona, she spent her free time volunteering in the public schools and actively participated in the League of Women Voters, and the Junior League of Tucson. Her third child, Alanna, was born in Tucson and the next year the family moved to Keller, Texas. Catherine participated in various groups including the Girl Scout leader, PTA president, and U.S. Swimming official and secretary for the North Texas Swimming. Catherine served on several Keller Independent School District committees and attended Texas Women's University taking the courses required for permanent teacher certification in Texas, becoming certified as an elementary and secondary history teacher. After Alanna entered intermediate school, Catherine returned to teaching history for the Keller School District, in middle school and Keller High School where she taught Advanced Placement U.S. History and became a grader for the College Board Educational Testing Service . She actively participated in summer programs including history programs offered by the Hatton Sumners Institute, the Gilder Lehrman Institute, National Endowment for the Humanities, and "Leadership and Life in Revolutionary America" sponsored by the University of Virginia. After nine years of teaching, Catherine left teaching to become a student at Texas Christian University to earn a doctoral degree in History. During which time she taught as a graduate instructor for the university and served on the Graduate Student Senate. She currently belongs to the Southern Association of Women Historians.