

Resource Sheet #23

Student Essay#1

To What Extent Were Women's Contributions in Industries of World War II Valued?

“... Her patriotic duty is not on the factory front. It is on the home front. (Doc. N).”
Women were not valued in Industries of World War II; they were simply needed. Women were not seen as people; women were seen as pawns that could fill a void temporarily in the United States' demolished workforce. Women were not valued socially, politically, and economically.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the United States government told managers that they *must* use women workers (Doc. A). The fact was, women were not being used in the workplace, because women were seen as vulnerable and housewives. The government issued several propaganda posters to encourage women in the workplace. In Document D, the propaganda poster reads “Good job sister” it then continues to say “We never figured you could do a man-size job: America's women have met the test”. This shows that America only saw women as housewives and nothing more. Women had to be put through a test that men automatically passed. Women had to prove their worthiness to America. In Document H, women are welding ship parts while being bothered by children. Women are always related to children, but not all of women workers had children. This propaganda was supposed to show how versatile women were. Women already knew their worth, and the fact that they were only being called upon because men were gone was ridiculous. In Document K, the Maryland Commission of Post-War Reconstruction Program simply calls women and other workers “replacements” until the skilled workers return from war. After the Japanese surrendered, only 2,500 women out of 20,000 women kept their jobs at Baltimore's large aircraft plant (Doc. L). Many other layoffs like this occurred around the nation. The women were slowly becoming more useless as men came back home. In Document N, J. Edgar Hoover claimed that children were being neglected and not cared for. Hoover also continued to say that women's place in society was at home. Slowly, women were forced back into their lives of minimal fun and adventures at home. The women of the WWII era were only used for their hands, because the United States was quickly crumbling without the help of every American. After the government was through with using women, they tried to push the women back into their “place” as housewives.

Politically, women were portrayed as strong and urged to help the needy American workforce. Women were primarily buttered-up by the American government. In Document D, women were complimented for doing a task that no one thought they could complete. Women were treated like small children that no one could depend on, until they were dearly needed. In Document H, children are seen hanging off their mothers as they work. The government also issued Maryland Women's Division of the Council of Defense to help women find work in Maryland (Doc. E). Before the war, women were always seen as weak and home-keepers, but now the government was urging women to work. People – especially politicians- do not change their opinions within a matter of a few years. The fact that the government kept on producing propaganda to encourage women is very fishy. The only reason that can be conjured up is that women were the cure to all of the men workers that had gone off to war. After the women were coerced into working, the government issued 3,000 day-care centers to be put in place in major cities (Doc.G). In Maryland, a similar act was put into place for working mothers for day-care centers in the work place (Doc. F). The government coerced many women to work while the men were gone, but as men returned the government tried to ease women back into the “mother” role.

The government was quick to push women to the workplace, but employers didn't view women as equal. During the war, women received forty percent less pay than men. The War Labor Board said that women *could* receive the same wages as men, but few employers complied (Doc. J). While women were working, The Maryland Women's Division of the Council of Defense was created to help women find work (Doc. E). In 1942 and 1943, the United States government and Maryland government both issued that day-cares be built for working women (Doc. F and Doc. G). Although it seemed as if women were finally being respected, this was back-handed. Without the help of all American citizens, the Allies could've very well lost WWII. The government was profiting from the workers help and looked nice in the eyes of many women. By giving the women economic help during the work day, many more women could now work. However, the women's luck soon ran out after men returned home. About two months after VJ Day, women took up over half of the unemployed workers in the city of Baltimore (Doc. L). Yet again, the women were only useful for awhile.

"Approximately one-third of all defense workers were married women and of those women half wished to continue working after the war. (Doc. O)". The working women of the WWII era only wanted to be equal. During the war, women were used. After the war, women were disposed of. Women's contributions were not valued socially, politically, and economically during WWII.

Student Essay#2

Women of WWII

During the years of World War II, men were called off to fight and the United States developed a large gap in its workforce. Women were called on to fill in this gap and by 1943; fourteen percent were working in non-agricultural positions. Many women were able to receive pay close to or exactly the same as men and were valued as hard workers. This was a huge leap for women who were previously thought not fit to work in the factories and men's jobs. Following the increase of women in industrial jobs, they were valued socially, politically, and economically.

Women of WWII were valued economically due to increased salaries, rewards, and promotions. Meda Montana was a woman working in Baltimore as a welder. Her work was valued so much that she was given a raise and awarded for her work (Doc. C). Mae Graybill was also valued for her work in the industry. She worked on airplanes during the war and was given a certificate of achievement for her work (Doc B). Mae was valued so much, actually, that she was able to retain her job after the war (Doc. B). These examples show that the industry recognized women's value and gave raises and rewards, but the numbers also show they were valued. During the war, 47% of women made of \$50 a week (Doc. M) and only 1% were ever paid beneath \$30 a week (Doc. M). Women made great economic leaps and were only rarely not paid accordingly.

Women of WWII were also valued socially due to the increased status of good reliable workers. In a propaganda poster promoting women in the workforce, it showed a man commenting that he's surprised women actually could do men's work (Doc. D). This shows he realized and praised the quality of their work. Britain reported that women could do 80% of men's jobs (Doc. A) which shows they knew that they could fill in these jobs. Mae Graybill (Doc. B) and Meda Montana (Doc. C) both reported working with men successfully and even being given special rewards for their service. It's true that women gained almost equal service as men in WWII. Women were taught skills that their male

counterparts also were taught and received equal amounts of work (Doc. I). Women gained recognition and their value was almost that of a man's in WWII.

Finally, women gained a lot of recognition politically because of their rise in the workforce. Paul McNutt was chairman of the War Manpower commission and a large supporter of females in the workforce (Doc. A). His political position would've made him more recognized and gave females a lot more power. The Maryland Women's Division of the Council of Defense was created to emphasize that women can take up men's jobs successfully (Doc. E). Also in cooperation with the aforementioned council, the Federal Works Progress Administration (W.P.A) provided care for any women that had children they could not take care of (Doc. F). These programs and others around the country helped women get jobs and have their kids taken care of. Also, there were acts like the Lanham act (Doc. G) which allowed women to place their children in federally funded daycare centers. These acts and others were supported throughout by agencies such as the W.P.A. and various state departments (Doc. F). It is shown that women were valued by the support of government agencies.

Women became more respected and valued during the war years. Their role was large and important since they had to fill in for all the men who went off to war. Their contributions were valued by the rest of the workforce and they received equal work and good pay. Women were even valued in almost all the propaganda about them and it shows how far they came in such a short time. Women had almost no role in industry before the war, but during it they made huge leaps socially, economically, and politically.