

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

Author: Tracy Mai, Howard High School, Howard County Public School System

Grade Level: High

Duration of Lab: 3 days

Overview: The Second World War brought significant changes to the American labor market. With men fighting overseas, women assumed jobs in wartime industries – much of it in heavy industry. In addition to outside work, women’s responsibilities in the home increased. In this History Lab, students will investigate primary source materials, including cartoons, statistics, interviews, and government documents to develop an understanding of women’s experiences on the home front during the war. In doing so, students will consider the extent to which women’s work was valued by the greater society, as well as what this work meant to women themselves.

National History Standards

Content Standard: Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)

Standard 3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs

Historical Thinking Standards:

Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation:

A. Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative.

D. Consider multiple perspectives.

Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities:

A. Formulate historical questions.

B. Obtain historical data.

C. Interrogate historical data.

Construct an historical interpretation

Maryland State Curriculum Standards for United States History

Expectation 3: Students will demonstrate understanding of the cultural, economic, political, social and technological developments from 1929-1945.

Topic A: The United States in a Time of Crisis

Indicator 3: Evaluate the economic, political and social impact of World War II on America’s home front (5.3.3).

Objective E: Describe the changing roles of women, African-Americans and other minority groups during the war years, such as access to education and jobs (PS, PNW, G)

Howard County Public School System Curriculum Objective

Conclude the impact of events on people at the home front, including the internment of Japanese-Americans, the role of women in military production, and the role of growing political demands of African-Americans and other ethnic groups. (907.06) 1.1.8, 1.2.3

Purpose

The purpose of this History Lab is to understand the social, political, and economic impacts of the Second World War on women working in the wartime industries of Maryland.

- Students will begin by reading a background essay to get a general sense of the context.
- Next, they will read a series of primary source documents and answer guided questions.
- Then, students will complete a chronological graphic organizer to identify trends that occurred over time.
- Students will then complete a thematic graphic organizer to list documents that represent strong social, political, and economic examples (both positive and negative).
- Once the thematic organizer is complete, students will rank the examples using a synthesizing information guide.
- The final step in this research-based investigation is to write a well constructed 5-paragraph essay, based on the information organized in the synthesizing information worksheet.

History Lab Objectives

- Students will analyze primary and secondary documents to determine how women workers were valued in WWII.
- Students will organize primary and secondary documents chronologically and thematically.
- Students will write a well-constructed essay arguing the extent to which women's contributions in wartime industries were valued.

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.”

-- J. Edgar Hoover

Women were needed as workers in the industries of World War II, but they were not valued in the same manner as men. Women were seen as necessary to fill a void temporarily in the United States' demolished workforce. Despite these contributions, women lacked social, political, and economic status in American society.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the United States government told industrial managers that they *must* use women workers. Women were not being used in the workplace because they were seen as vulnerable and better suited for housework. The government issued several propaganda posters to encourage women in the workplace, but these were often dismissive of the value of women. They were often depicted as simply replacements for male workers until they returned from the war. The government was quick to move women into 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. The Maryland Women's Division of the Council of Defense was created to help women find work. In 1942 and 1943, the United States government and Maryland government both indicated that day care facilities be built for working women

After the Japanese surrendered, only 2,500 women out of 20,000 women kept their jobs at Baltimore's large aircraft plant. Many other layoffs like this occurred around the nation. About two months after VJ Day, women constituted over half of the unemployed workers in the city of Baltimore. The women were slowly seen less useful in these factory jobs as men came back home. Some claimed that children were being neglected and not cared for and that women's place in society was at home. Slowly, women were forced back into their lives as caretakers of the home, although many wished to continue working after the war.

Teaching Procedures

Day 1

Motivation: Hand students the 1943 Guide to Hiring Women (RS #01). Ask students to describe women's roles in society based on what they read in the 1943 guide.

What are examples of social, political, and economic changes women faced in World War II industries?

Modern Day Connection: How would women today react to specific guidelines like those addressed in this 1943 guide? Are women generally treated differently at work today?

Transition: It was rare for women to become employed in jobs traditionally filled by men. Labor unions even balked at supporting women workers during World War II.

State: "Today you are going to organize your notes using graphic organizers in preparation for writing an essay."

Development/Procedures:

1. Place students into groups of three either randomly or intentionally by mixed abilities.
2. Have one representative from each group get three sets of questions for their group mates and also 1-2 sets of documents (RS #02-#16, Documents A-O).
3. Inform students that the group member with the colorful sheet of paper is the group leader and must speak for the group.
4. Students are asked to quietly read the Student Background Paragraph (RS #19). Next, students are asked to quietly view the interview with Meda Brendall (RS #04 media) and respond to the related document questions (RS #04, Document C).
5. Next, have students analyze each document by answering the guiding questions with their group members.

Transition: "How well were women valued during the war?"

Day 2-3

Development/Procedures:

Transition: "Now we are going to organize our documents chronologically and then thematically before working on our outlines."

1. Distribute RS #20 Chronological Graphic Organizer, RS #21 Thematic Graphic Organizer, and RS #22 Synthesizing Information Guide.
2. Have students list the documents in the appropriate dated column. Next have students explain the intent of the content in the document (positive or negative for women).
3. Finally, once students have organized all of the documents by date, ask students to reflect on the pattern from year to year. Are women valued more or less for their contributions?
4. Ask students to begin working on the thematic organizer.
5. Ask students the meaning of "social," "political," and "economic." Find examples of each with the class. Ask students if the examples are positive or negative. Inform students that they do not have to fill-in all boxes, but must simply have three (standard) to five (honors) examples for each theme.

6. Finally, ask students to rank their examples for each category (social, political, and economic) using the synthesizing information worksheet.
7. Have students respond to the essential question as their thesis statement.
8. Inform student that they are now ready to begin the writing phase of the research-based investigation. They must include an introduction and conclusion paragraph as well as all of the evidence incorporated into their synthesizing information worksheet. Two possible examples of how the final essay should look are provided as Resource Sheet #23. Focus questions and some suggested conclusions for each of the Documents can be found in RS#17.

Transition: "Many women felt liberated by their wartime jobs. Would most women be OK with losing their wartime occupation accepting lower pay instead?"

Summary/Closure: Discuss:

- Did many women work in wartime factories?
- How did the government support women?
- How did government efforts fall short?
- How did businesses treat women during the war?
- How did society's view of working women change near the end of the war?

Homework/Enrichment: Complete the essay assignment

Document A - Chairman of the War Manpower Commission, Paul V. McNutt's speech in Baltimore, MD. McNutt, P. V. (1942, October). War and manpower [Special section]. *Baltimore*, 11.

Document B - Interview with Mae Graybill. Graybill, M., & Sopronyi, J. (2007, August). A real rosie [Special section]. *America in WWII*.

Document C - Electronic Interview with Meda Montana Hallyburton Brendall Experiencing war: Stories from the veterans' history project [Video file]. (2007, May 29). Retrieved from <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.04951/>

Document D - Victory Builder's Propaganda Poster. Victory Builders. (1944, May). [A propaganda poster illustrated by Packer for Victory Builders during World War II]. *Good work, sister : we never figured you could do a man-size job! America's women have met the test!* Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/126_rosi.html#posters

Document E - Objectives of the Women's Division of the Maryland Council of Defense. Engle, E. M. (1943). Industry Committee. In Women's Division - *Maryland Council of Defense*.

Document F - Maryland Council of Defense on Child Care Provisions. Patterson, J. M. (January 1943). Maryland state program for care of children of working mothers. In *Maryland Council of Defense* (pp. 1-7).

Document G - Secondary Source Commentary on the Lanham Act of 1942. Jeffries, J. W. (1996). *Wartime America: The World War II home front*. Chicago: The American Ways Series.

Document H - Office of War Information political cartoon titled, "And in my spare time..." Office of War Information. (1943). [Woman talking to another woman on deck of a ship, while

riveting with one hand, holding a baby with the other; small children cling to her legs.] “*And then in my spare time ...*” Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/126_rosi.html#posters

Document I - Farm Security Information-Office of War Information Photograph. Siegel, A. (1943, May). *Bethlehem-Fairfield shipyards, Baltimore, Maryland*. [Woman welder working on bent pipe]. Retrieved December 28, 2009, from Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection database. (LC-USW3- 025864-D)

Document J - Secondary Commentary on the War Labor Boards 1942 Resolution. Kurtz, M. L. (1986). *The challenging of America: 1920-1945*. Arlington Heights, Illinois: The Forum Press, Inc.

Document K - Post-war Intentions of the Maryland Commission of Post-war Reconstruction and the Department of Labor’s Post-war Layoffs Assessment. Program and activities of the Maryland Commission of Post-War Reconstruction and Development, 1943-1944. (n.d.). In *Maryland Commission on Post-War Reconstruction and Development*.

Document L - 1946 Employment Status and Occupations Compared with 1944 War Plant Occupations. *Baltimore women war workers in the postwar period*. (1948). Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Labor.

Document M - Comparison of Gross Earnings in Fall of 1946 with Wartime Earnings. *Baltimore women war workers in the postwar period*. (1948). Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Labor.

Document N - Secondary Commentary of J. Edgar Hoover’s article titled, “Mothers Our Only Hope.” May, E. T. (1999). *Homeward bound: American families in the Cold War era*. Perseus Books Group: Basic Books.

Document O - Women’s Perspectives on the Social Impact of Wartime Work. Gluck, S. (1987). *Rosie the riveter revisited: Women, the war, and social change*. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers.