



THE NATIONAL
WWII MUSEUM
NEW ORLEANS

The Working Women of WWII Analyzing Editorial Cartoons

A Lesson from
the Education Department

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Working Women of WWII

Analyzing Editorial Cartoons

American women played a vital role in the Allies victory in WWII. More than 400,000 served in the military and millions worked in defense industries on the Home Front. WWII gave women new opportunities for work and independence. Some people viewed these changes as positive, some as negative. Many people were ambivalent about the social changes that effected women during the war. This ambivalence can be explored in contemporary images of women from that era.

OBJECTIVE: Students will learn about the social tensions brought about by women entering the workforce during WWII by analyzing portrayals of women in editorial cartoons.

GRADE LEVEL: 7-12

STANDARDS: History Thinking Standard 4—the student interrogates historical data by uncovering the social, political, and economic context in which it was created. Historical Thinking Standard 5—the student identifies issues and problems in the past and analyzes the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those involved in the situation.

Content Era 8 (1929-1945) Standard 3C—the student understands the effects of World War II at home.

TIME REQUIREMENT: One to two class periods.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Present a brief lesson on women’s experiences of WWII. Focus on the fact that large numbers of women went to work to increase war production. Included in the lesson is a Fact Sheet on American Women in WWII that is helpful. Ask students what social conflicts this may have caused.
2. Pass out copies of the “Anything You Can Do” list and give students two minutes to complete the activity. Review their answers. Inform students that women held every one of the jobs on the list during WWII.
3. Pass out copies of the two editorial cartoons. Students may either answer the questions individually or as pairs on a separate sheet of paper, or you may hold a group discussion using the questions. Remind students to pay close attention to details when analyzing editorial cartoons.
4. If students answer questions on own their own, end the class with a group discussion. Discuss each question as a group.

ASSESSMENT: Components for assessment include the written questions and the class discussion.

ENRICHMENT: Have students find editorial cartoons in the newspaper and answer the following questions about them: what is the subject matter of the cartoon? How does the artist feel about the subject? Do you agree with the artist—why or why not?

Anything You Can Do...
World War II Jobs for Women

During WWII women found jobs that had previously been performed only by men.

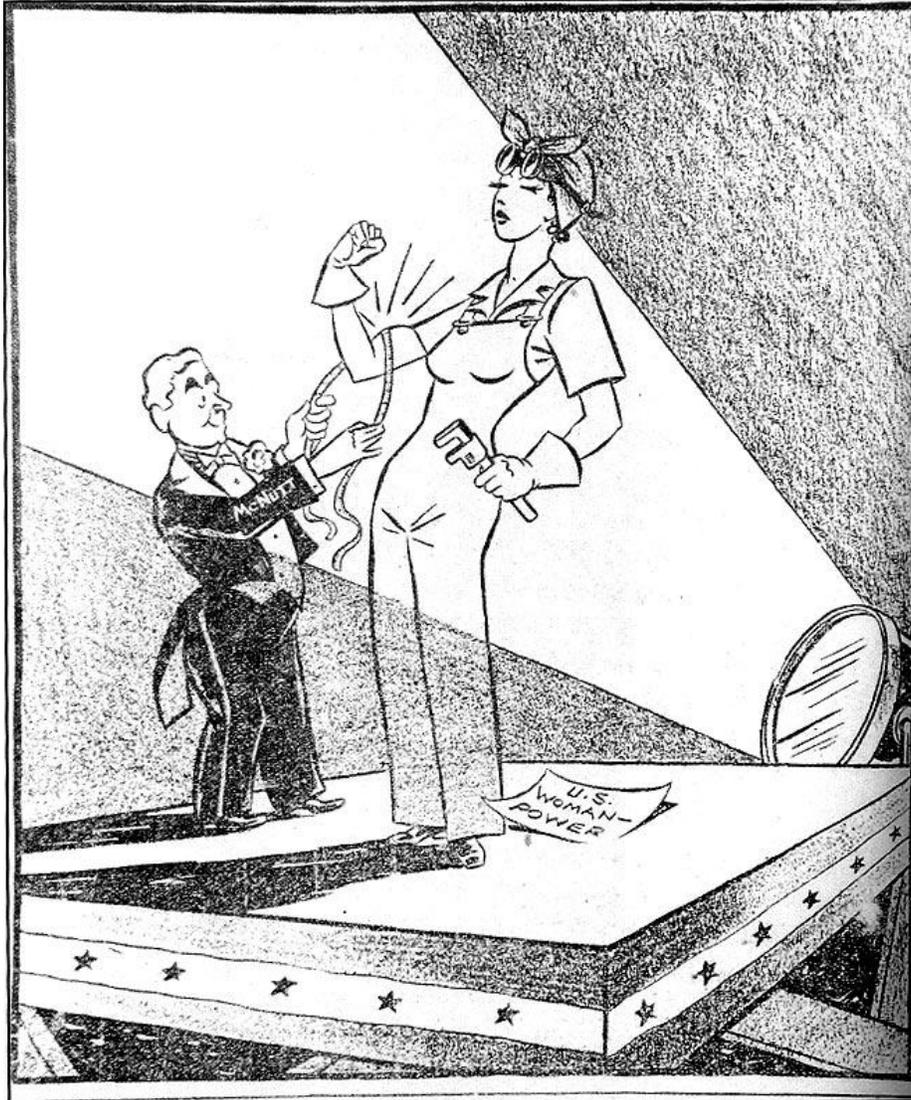
Directions: Circle the jobs that women in the United States held during WWII and put an "X" next to the jobs that women were not allowed to do.

aerodynamic engineer	ordnance worker
aircraft spotter	packer and shipper
architect	physicist
astronomer	pilot
barber	pipe fitter
baseball player	postal carrier
bus driver	radio engineer
butcher	railroad track tender
cargo loader	riveter
chemist	scientist
crane operator	shell assembler
draftsman	shipfitter
drawbridge tender	steam hammer operator
electrician	street cleaner
fire fighter	surveyor
flash welder	sweetbread puller
forest fire fighter	taxi driver
foundry helper	telegraph operator
furnace operator	ticket taker
garbage collector	tinsmith
geologist	tool machinist
journalist	traffic cop
keel welder	train porter
lumberjack	
maintenance worker	
mathematician	
mechanic	
messenger	
meteorologist	
milkman	
oiler	

Women in WWII

The Editorial Cartoon

Editorial cartoons that appear in newspapers and magazines are meant as entertainment, but they also reflect a political or moral stance, or present a critique on a current event or on society as a whole. Study this 1943 cartoon from the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* and answer the questions below.



This cartoon shows *War Manpower Commissioner* Paul McNutt judging a woman in a pageant, not for her beauty, but for her strength.

1. What was the artist's purpose in drawing this cartoon?
2. What characteristics describe the woman?
3. Who was the artist's audience (for whom was this cartoon meant?)
4. Does the artist make the reader feel patriotic, optimistic, and strong? How?
5. How does this cartoon make you feel? Why?

Women in WWII The Editorial Cartoon

Now compare the first cartoon to this one from the *Des Moines Register*, also printed in 1943. Answer the questions below.



1. What do you think the creator of this cartoon was trying to say?
2. Which characteristics describe the woman? Which describe the man?
3. Is the man in favor of or against women working outside the home?
4. Do you think others shared his opinion? Who?
5. How does this cartoon make you feel? Why?
6. Which cartoon do you like better and why?

AMERICAN WOMEN IN WORLD WAR II

On the Home Front and Beyond



American women played important roles during World War II, both at home and in uniform. Not only did they give their sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers to the war effort, they gave their time, energy, and some even gave their lives.

Reluctant to enter the war when it erupted in 1939, the United States quickly committed itself to total war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. That commitment included utilizing all of America's assets—women included. The Axis powers, on the other hand, were slow to employ women in their war industries. Hitler derided Americans as degenerate for putting their women to work. The role of German women, he said, was to be good wives and mothers and to have more babies for the Third Reich.

When the war began, quickie marriages became the norm, as teenagers married their sweethearts before their men went overseas. As the men fought abroad, women on the Home Front worked in defense plants and volunteered for war-related organizations, in addition to managing their households. In New Orleans, as the demand for public transportation grew, women even became streetcar “conductorettes” for the first time. When men left, women “became proficient cooks and housekeepers, managed the finances, learned to fix the car, worked in a defense plant, and wrote letters to their soldier husbands that were consistently upbeat.” (Stephen Ambrose, *D-Day*, 488) *Rosie the Riveter* helped assure that the Allies would have the war materials they needed to defeat the Axis.

Nearly 350,000 American women served in uniform, both at home and abroad, volunteering for the newly formed Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs, later renamed the Women's Army Corps), the Navy Women's Reserve (WAVES), the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, the Coast Guard Women's Reserve (SPARS), the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs), the Army Nurses Corps, and the Navy Nurse Corps. General Eisenhower felt that he could not win the war without the aid of the women in uniform. “The contribution of the women of America, whether on the farm or in the factory or in uniform, to D-Day was a *sine qua non* of the invasion effort.” (Ambrose, *D-Day*, 489)

Women in uniform took office and clerical jobs in the armed forces in order to free men to fight. They also drove trucks, repaired airplanes, worked as laboratory technicians, rigged parachutes, served as radio operators, analyzed photographs, flew military aircraft across the country, test-flew newly repaired planes, and even trained anti-aircraft artillery gunners by acting as flying targets. Some women served near the front lines in the Army Nurse Corps, where 16 were killed as a result of direct enemy fire. Sixty-eight American service women were captured as POWs in the Philippines. More than 1,600 nurses were decorated for bravery under fire and meritorious service, and 565 WACs in the Pacific Theater won combat decorations. Nurses were in Normandy on D-plus-four.

At the war's end, even though a majority of women surveyed reported wanted to keep their jobs, many were forced out by men returning home and by the downturn in demand for war materials. Women veterans encountered roadblocks when they tried to take advantage of benefit programs for veterans, like the G.I. Bill. The nation that needed their help in a time of crisis, it seems, was not yet ready for the greater social equality that would slowly come in the decades to follow.

The National WWII Museum recognizes the contribution that women played in the success of the Allied victory in World War II and explores that contribution in depth in its Home Front gallery.

