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Susan Haycock

The Roles of Women during the Civil War and World War II

Fort Hays State University

Women have been an integral force and helpmate for mankind throughout existence. They have long searched for their place in society. Women have known that the role society has handed them is not necessarily the only role that they are destined to play. At the beginning of the Civil War, many American women had a fragile demeanor, but it would not take long before they showed their courageous side as they took a stand for their country. By the beginning of the Second World War, women had learned that they were more than capable of helping protect the United States by working a man's job while balancing their family and personal life. Women have been ready to do what needs to be done when they have been faced with the need to help the United States during war.

The transformation of women's lives and their roles came to realization through the changes experienced in the American Civil War and World War II. The various settings of females' roles accompanied by definitions and realities of femininity and discrimination framed how women lived their lives through those two wars. For women, it was not just about a war. For them, it was a chance to prove that they were equal with men.

This paper researches the topic of women's roles during the Civil War and World War II. Women during these wars had roles that were similar; however, many were different. Both groups of women held jobs like nurses and spies. Many of the roles that women held during World War II were positions that women would have only dreamed of having during the Civil War but did not because of women's inequality with men. These were jobs like pilots and journalists.

The topic of women's roles during the Civil War and World War II was chosen for research because of the importance for women to understand the hardships and obstacles that women have gone through during these war years in order to have equality with men. The

progress that women have made to have equality in a little over a half a century is phenomenal. Shortly before the Civil War era, women had just started to voice their opinion about their rights as individuals. They worked hard for equality, although much of their work was ignored or shunned. Women during World War II were gladly thrust into the world of employment as wage earners. Their help was needed. Women showed the world that they could do a man's job if they were given a chance. The World War II period sparked an era in women's liberation that made one of the most positive impacts on women's lives in American history. The work that women were allowed to do during this war set the precedent of a capable, working woman that still continues today.

This paper is broken down into two sections: women's roles during the Civil War and women's roles during World War II. Each of these sections contains specific information pertaining to roles that women played during each war. Also included is information relating to women's racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds and how they factored in women's roles. The paper is written chronologically. It begins with the Civil War women and then moves to the World War II women.

The Civil War is also known as the War Between the States. The causes of the Civil War were many and some could even be traced back to the days of American colonization. The principle reasons were slavery, the separate paths of two regions, and states' rights. It did not take long before women were drawn into the war; however, they came from a variety of socio-economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.

True womanhood prior to the Civil War dictated that women should be demure, submissive, pious, and concerned only with bearing and rearing of children. Their home was to be their only concern. Any woman that stepped outside of this traditional role was seen as not

respectable. While social notions of female propriety placed substantial restrictions on women's lifestyles, especially for those in the middle and upper classes, the legal and economic landscape formed even more daunting barriers for all women, regardless of their place on the social ladder.¹

In the South, class structures were abundant. Women were identified as bound or free, independent or dependent, wealthy or not, educated or uneducated, and refined or not. Religion, state residency, and political party choices also played into the classifications. Southerners inevitably thought of themselves first in terms of blackness or whiteness and maleness or femaleness, for these attributes did not just shape identities but dictated life choices and aspirations. Before the Civil War, a southern woman's role was ultimately derived from the white male's protection and support in addition to the slave's domestic work.²

The onset of the Civil War brought about new identities for southern women, particularly those whose families owned slaves. Southern women had to transform their lives by taking on the daily running of businesses, plantations, and slaves that normally were taken care of by men. The society that had once catered to an elite lifestyle was being destroyed, and women were being forced to create new self-definition and self-worth. These women knew how much they had to lose. Thrown together with pupils, patients, or co-workers of lower status, elite females felt impelled to assert a superiority they had seldom before needed to do.³

Motherhood was a tough role for women during the Civil War. Previously, their presence for childbirth and childrearing was of utmost importance because of the lack of support

¹ DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook, *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2002), 3.

² Drew G. Faust, *Mother's of Invention* (New York: Random House, 1996), 4.

³ Faust, 113.

the women felt that they received from their husbands. Confederate women were faced with the possibility of giving birth to and rearing their children without their husbands present. Women quickly had to become the disciplinarians to their own children and to the slaves, too. Women learned quickly to fully embrace a routine system of assertiveness and violence that at one time had been delivered by their husbands. Some women, however, at least found with children the love and intimacy denied them in their disrupted marriage.⁴

Many women became refugees and moved to other cities to live with relatives while their husbands were at war. Some women bunked with other women and children in one or two rooms where they could find safety. Whether these women moved or stayed home, kept their children together or dispersed them to schools or kin, most Confederate women confronted dramatic changes in their domestic environment.⁵

In the South, emergent nineteenth-century feminism even as late as 1861 exerted almost no impact.⁶ Southern women were not typically involved in women's organizations and associations prior to the Civil War. This was because women living in the southern part of the United States tended to live in mostly rural areas where large gatherings for organized meetings were not common. Travel was a logistical hindrance, so those organizations that did exist were in larger cities. Southern women saw themselves connecting with their own families more often than they connected with white women who were outside of their family unit. They bonded more closely with their husbands, children, and slaves. War profoundly changed this as the need

⁴ Faust, 129.

⁵ Faust, 33.

⁶ Faust, 5.

for and creation of women's voluntary organizations began to appear in the South for the first time.⁷

The thousands of women's voluntary organizations that appeared in the South for the first time in response to the demands of war represented significant power of female self-consciousness; here they explored the meanings of gender in a way they had not previously been impelled to do.⁸ For the first time in their lives, Southern women were empowered and defined independently of men.

The Union women's war experience was much like that of the Confederate women's. For the average woman, these were not years of uplifting service or patriotic heroism so much as prolonged suffering.⁹ Elizabeth Bacon Custer recalls how she felt when her future husband went off to war. "When separation came I found myself suddenly matured from girlhood to womanhood, anxiously reading the paper, and no longer laughing and teasing those girls among us who had been watching the mail so intently for letters."¹⁰ They, too, had to learn to become independent women, but their journey to get independence was not as difficult to obtain as it was for the Confederate women.

With few exceptions along the Confederacy's borders, Northern women, unlike men, were not subjected to the ravages of battles, nor were they called upon to make so essential a

⁷ Faust, 33.

⁸ Faust, 24.

⁹ Ellen C. DuBois and Lynn Duménil, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 232.

¹⁰ Arlene Reynolds, ed., *The Civil War Memories of Elizabeth Bacon Custer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 5.

contribution to the war effort or to suffer the material deprivation imposed on southerners by the weakness of the Confederate economy.¹¹ Northern women had more experience in running organizations and voluntary associations than Southern women. This allowed the Union soldier's relief to be better organized. Many Union women worked for the United States Sanitary Commission, which was organized to help aid the soldiers. Others helped organize rallies calling for the emancipation of slaves. More than a generation before the Civil War, the North had already started work toward women's rights and the fight continued throughout the Civil War.¹² The experiences that these women endured turned them into skilled and confident women.

Women felt a need to play a role in the war no matter which side they were on. During the war, some women known as secret Yankees found themselves in enemy territory where they were to prove their new loyalty by providing aid to wounded soldiers or money and supplies if they had any. Union women also experienced pressure to become members of hospital aid committees and other groups that rolled bandages, worked in the Confederate hospitals, or provided support to the families of absent Confederate soldiers.¹³ After the Civil War was over, Northern women received more credit for their help and accomplishments than the Confederate women. Not until much later did the Confederate women get their due accolades. Most of those went to white women.¹⁴

¹¹ Faust, 5.

¹² Thomas G. Dyer, *Secret Yankees* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 76.

¹³ Dyer, 76.

¹⁴ Dyer, 76.

Most African Americans saw the Civil War as an opportunity to end the enslavement of Africans in the United States.¹⁵ Black women had just as important stakes in the outcome of the Civil War as black men. They were committed to the cause and they showed their commitment and support by working as nurses, cooks, seamstresses, laundresses, teachers, relief workers, spies, and entrepreneurs, to name a few occupations.¹⁶

The lives and roles of black females were affected during the Civil War. Work and life for these women had for years been limited to only work done around their respective masters' plantations. Upon hearing the news of freedom in other parts of the United States, black women would gather their belongings and move there. This caused many of the white women to feel betrayed, for they felt that they had cared for them and supplied for their wants.¹⁷ Confederate women depended on the black women for everyday help. Women already frustrated trying to do a man's business and direct slaves now discovered that they often felt equally incompetent executing the tasks that had belonged to their supposed racial inferiors.¹⁸

Like any other community, ideological, religious, social and class differences existed within the African American society. Black women came from various walks of life, which gave them an added benefit in helping to pass along their heritage of benevolence. Black women always took up the debate about race and did so as African Americans and not as women.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ella Forbes, *African American Women During the Civil War* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 4.

¹⁶ Forbes, 14.

¹⁷ Faust, 77.

¹⁸ Faust, 78.

¹⁹ Forbes, 5.

As soon as African American men were to be officially enlisted in the armed forces, black women formed organizations to give them aid and comfort. Relief organizations were formed out of fear that white sanitary relief societies would not welcome black soldiers.²⁰ Black women helped to organize relief organizations. These women gave assistance to other black soldiers and their families by nursing the wounded back to health and writing letters for those who were illiterate or injured.²¹

For many black women, raising money for aid and for the production of tokens of appreciation was high on the list of things to accomplish. They were quick to provide aid to black soldiers. Black women were able to raise money in even the poorest of communities in order to give the smallest yet most appreciated expressions of gratitude. In one small community in North Carolina, money was raised for the purchase of three flags, which were presented in an elaborate ceremony to the African American regiments. The recipients of aid and flags made public expressions of gratitude not only to acknowledge the efforts of the women but as a public relations stratagem to solicit even more support.²² This also promoted competition between black women in different cities who sought to raise the most money, produce the finest flags, or have the most elaborate ceremonies.²³

Some black women were involved directly in the Civil War. Their heroism covered a wide range of actions; they donned uniforms, took up guns, actively solicited African American

²⁰ Forbes, 93.

²¹ Forbes, 94.

²² Forbes, 109.

²³ Forbes, 108.

male participation, and died for principle.²⁴ Three of the countless numbers of women were Harriett Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Susie King Taylor. All of the African Americans who spied for the Union knew the price of their courage: if they were caught, they could be hanged. Tubman's various courageous duties helped the Union with many successful raids on the Confederates. On the brink of the Civil War, Tubman set up and operated the Underground Railroad.²⁵

Susie King Taylor was born into slavery in Georgia and joined the Union Army when she was around thirty years of age. Taylor was secretly educated and she used what she knew to write. Taylor's memoirs of the war are the only published accounts recorded by a black woman. Taylor became a skilled apprentice to Union surgeons, switching from washing bandages to applying them.²⁶ She wrote in her memoirs about the differences in interaction between the doctors and white soldiers versus the black soldiers.²⁷

Many women, black and white, chose domestic work such as chambermaids and cooks as a way to earn money when husbands were away fighting in the war. Pay for such positions did not compare well to jobs traditionally open to men, so it is not surprising that women found the pay offered to a soldier a compelling temptation to abandon their skirts and don uniforms.²⁸ Women felt compelled to serve their country for many reasons. In early 1861, as the Civil War

²⁴ Forbes, 37.

²⁵ Thomas B. Allen, *Harriett Tubman: Secret Agent* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2006), 12.

²⁶ Ann S. Chirhart and Betty Wood, *Georgia Women: Their Lives and Times* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), 139.

²⁷ Forbes, 3.

²⁸ Blanton and Cook, 37.

began, patriotic women served their country by disguising themselves and enlisting in the Union or Confederate armies as fighting men. During this time, recruitment of women into the military was not allowed; however, women made the decision to dress as men and fight.²⁹

Other reasons women joined the military included running away from pre-arranged marriages, a quest for excitement, a sense of duty, a desire to be a part of history, wanting to be with a husband or lover, a desire to receive better pay on a steady basis, and wanting to help support their families. For these women, being away from home for the first time held uncertainties regarding what life had to offer, but it was also an adventure. Civil War women saved thousands of lives because of their dedication to the Confederacy.³⁰

The military experiences of Union and Confederate women soldiers were strikingly similar throughout the war and their experiences opened up new discoveries for them.³¹ Confederate women were less likely to be discharged from their roles as soldiers than Union women. Some were allowed to continue fighting when found out as long as the secret was kept from the commissioned officers.³² Once the word of women soldiers reached the press, some were lauded while others were condemned.³³

Civil War women were tough and were determined to fight. None ever revealed themselves in order to be discharged. Many were tired of the monotonous life that they had led

²⁹ Larry G. Eggleston, *Women In the Civil War: Extraordinary Stories of Soldiers, Spies, Nurses, Doctors, Crusaders, And Others* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003), 5.

³⁰ Eggleston, 2

³¹ Blanton and Cook, 126.

³² Blanton and Cook, 62.

³³ Blanton and Cook, 129.

and were ready to redefine themselves. In essence, the Civil War was an opportunity for hundreds of women to escape the confines of their sex.³⁴ For the first time, women did not have social censure. They took up drinking, smoking, brawling, and swearing and changed how they sat and acted.³⁵

Civil War women soldiers left behind motherhood to serve in the military; however, some women entered the military pregnant or got pregnant during their service. To the other soldiers' surprise, her masquerade would be foiled when she gave birth to a child. Female Confederate and Union prisoners of war gave birth while incarcerated. In one instance, the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac who recorded an incident of childbirth seemed overjoyed by the news of the birth, and they expressed good wishes for the woman and her baby.³⁶ Upon hearing of the births, generals were not happy; however, nowhere in the U.S. Army regulations did it say that soldiers could not give birth.³⁷

Although keeping pregnancy a secret as long as possible was difficult, the toughest challenge for women was to not only play the role of a man but to look like one as well. The main reason that other women soldiers were successful in maintaining male disguises for long periods of time was because the majority of the Civil War women were working-class and farm women.³⁸ Women found it easy to adapt to their new roles because they were accustomed to

³⁴ Blanton and Cook, 5.

³⁵ Blanton and Cook, 52.

³⁶ Blanton and Cook, 104.

³⁷ Faust, 105.

³⁸ Blanton and Cook, 55.

manual labor and living in poor conditions. Women who had worked on farms had strength and endurance beyond measure and were well-versed in working with horses and firearms.³⁹

Some Civil War women changed military roles during their service. Louise Hoffman was an example of a woman who served roles in both the Confederate and Union armies. She was from New York and enlisted in the Confederate Army. After fighting battles at Bull Run she realized that her loyalties were with the Union and she changed sides. She eventually was found out, discharged, and sent back home. Molly and Mary Bell were cousins who joined the Calvary because of their disgust with their uncle becoming a traitor and joining the Union. The Bells decided that the Calvary was not their cup of tea and soon switched to the Infantry.⁴⁰ Amy Clarke went from being a housewife to being a mounted Cavalry soldier to being an infantry soldier and then ending up as a prisoner of war.⁴¹

Some women held combat and noncombat roles during the Civil War. Edmonds was one who was not only a soldier but also a mail carrier and a slave. Once Sarah Edmonds passed both a loyalty test given by General McClellan and also a medical examination, she was ordered to disguise herself as a slave. She used nitrate to darken her skin, wore a black wig, and obtained clothes appropriate for the role from the nearby contrabands. Her closest friends did not even recognize her. Edmonds was detailed as regimental postmaster and mail carrier, a job she retained for more than four months.⁴² She very much enjoyed the freedom and mobility that the

³⁹ Blanton and Cook, 55.

⁴⁰ Eggleston, 69.

⁴¹ Eggleston, 58.

⁴² Blanton and Cook, 12.

mail carrier job gave her, although the jobs could at times be quite dangerous. She would halt her mail duties of carrying orders just long enough to pick up her musket. In addition to these roles, she was also given burial duties.⁴³

Just as women soldiers were found in every facet of military life throughout the war, they also held every rank from musician to major. The women soldiers' appearance led many to believe that they were young boys who were too young to serve. Joining a military band was the only way most women were able to enter into the army. Most all women in the Union at one time had been drummers, and on few occasions they had played bugles.⁴⁴

Adjusting to a life with less wealth and status for many women during the Civil War was tough as they learned to survive and be responsible for themselves and their family. These women continued to look for work in order to provide for their families. Among the many other types of non-combat roles available to women were those of the government worker. These jobs ranged from working in the treasury department to holding clerical jobs. The role of female clerks was not a new innovation during the Civil War. In 1855, the U.S. Patent Office began hiring women to copy documents by hand.⁴⁵ The Secretary of the Interior's reevaluation of the job resulted in males and females being separated while working; therefore, women were made to do the work at home.⁴⁶

⁴³ Blanton and Cook, 12.

⁴⁴ Blanton and Cook, 71.

⁴⁵ Barbara Brackman, *Civil War Women: Their Quilts, Their Roles, Activities for Re-Enactors* (Concord: C & T Publishing, 2000), 95.

⁴⁶ Brackman, 95.

Various other government departments such as post offices and war departments hired Union and Confederate women to work for them, but it was Christopher Memminger's Treasury Girls who gained the most attention. Many of these girls were teenagers. Their job was to sign their names over 3000 times a day to Confederate Treasury notes. Clerks also numbered, clipped, packed, and shipped the paper documents and kept registers of the notes and bonds and of their cancellations.⁴⁷ Because of the experience gained from this type of job, women were able to find employment as clerks in other stores after the war was over. They had a newfound sense of accomplishment.⁴⁸

Nursing jobs during the Civil War era did not require any special training. In some hospitals there were so few nurses that the ones they did have took care of dozens of soldiers each. The only women allowed on the battlefield with experience in caring for the injured were the Catholic nuns. Dedicated to the service of God and humanity rather than the victory of North or South, the sisters attended to both Confederate and Union wounded.⁴⁹ They were graciously welcomed in hospitals all over the North and South, which was especially remarkable given the anti-Catholic prejudice that was occurring during this era.⁵⁰

The care of the sick and injured was traditionally a female skill, and women began to offer their services as the first call for troops was issued.⁵¹ Female nurses were limited in what

⁴⁷ Brackman, 96.

⁴⁸ Brackman, 97.

⁴⁹ DuBois and Dumenil, 256.

⁵⁰ DuBois and Dumenil, 255.

⁵¹ DuBois and Dumenil, 252.

was considered appropriate in their nursing attire. They were prohibited from wearing any dresses that were a color other than brown or black, and they could not wear any jewelry, curls, or hoop skirts. This new role was certainly a change to the life they once led. Confederate women visited soldiers to bring delicious buttermilk custards and fruits, or to supervise the preparation of food on site and sometimes even to wash faces.⁵²

In 1861, the Union's army medical service was particularly lacking in structure and organization.⁵³ The onset of the war ignited a sense of patriotism within Northerners but especially northern women in particular. Northern women began to work to create a volunteer network for the government that reformed the military medical service and also helped assist soldiers that were sick or wounded. These women were offered the opportunity work in management and administration type roles by the government as a result of their efforts in helping the government.⁵⁴

Marie Tepe was one woman who served as a *vivandiere* and nurse. She was one of the thousands of women who held little or no regard for personal safety and served as an inspiration to troops. The women who served as vivandieres took to caring for the troops in hospitable ways, and many times this role coincided with the nurse role. Tepe sold the soldiers goods and

⁵² Faust, 104.

⁵³ Edward A. Miller, "Angel of Light: Helen L. Gilson, Army Nurse," *Civil War History* 43, no. 1 (1997): 21, accessed January 5, 2011, http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.fhsu.edu:2048/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=ITOF&docId=A19507207&source=gale&srcprod=ITOF&userGroupName=ksstate_fthays&version=1.0.

⁵⁴ Miller, 21.

supplies, including whiskey. She also cooked, washed clothes, and mended their uniforms.⁵⁵

Tepe and other vivandieres gave support and encouraging words to soldiers. They also went out onto the battlefields to give soldiers water from their own canteens and help tend to those who were wounded. Tepe had given of her time and service in thirteen battles by the end of the Civil War.⁵⁶

Many women who felt a deep loyalty to their husbands and wanted to be at their side during the great conflict accompanied them and served in their regiment.⁵⁷ By taking on such tasks as vivandieres and Daughters of the Regiment, Civil War women were able to distinguish themselves through their acts of bravery. Bridget Drivers enlisted with her husband in the army. He was a private and she was a Daughter of the Regiment and a *vivandiere*. Regiment life for Drivers was easy because she was accustomed to hunting and foraging. Like other Daughters of the Regiment, Drivers carried the flag into war and when needed would fill in to fight in a fallen soldier's place. She was at times the last person to leave a battlefield.⁵⁸

As in so many dimensions of Confederate women's experience, the unanticipated demands of the ever-expanding war soon began to undermine abstract ideological commitments to notions of appropriate female roles. Not all Civil War women were initially cut out for the

⁵⁵ Eggleston, 138.

⁵⁶ Eggleston, 139.

⁵⁷ Eggleston, 141.

⁵⁸ Eggleston, 142.

role of nurse, and it took a bit of time to get accustomed to the idea of death and dying. Many women fainted at the sight of the wounded and from the exhaustion that they endured.⁵⁹

When elite Confederate women began to offer their labor in the South's military hospitals, they undertook perhaps their most dramatic and frightening departure from traditional female roles.⁶⁰ Some women were unable to find the determination needed to work with the wounded soldiers. It seemed always to be the amputations that were most upsetting, providing the severest challenge to women's dedication and composure. Women who were mentally unable to tend to the wounded soldiers chose less daunting work like feeding the soldiers. Those who did not muster the strength to work with the wounded or had connections with farmers with healthy crops chose to help feed the wounded soldiers instead.⁶¹

Southerner Mary Gay recalled a typical scene with one young soldier in an Atlanta hospital where emotions would run high. "There are looks and tones, which are never forgotten, and never shall I forget the utter despair in the eyes, lustrous and beautiful enough to look upon the glory of heaven, and the anguish of the voice, musical enough to sing the songs of everlasting bliss as he told me he was ready to see a Catholic priest before his demise. In silence I listened and wept."⁶² Gay found a priest to come and console the young soldier who was brave until the end of his life a short time later.⁶³

⁵⁹ Faust, 93.

⁶⁰ Faust, 92.

⁶¹ Faust, 106.

⁶² Mary A.H. Gay, *Life in Dixie During the War*. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 109.

⁶³ Gay, 109.

During the Civil War, the more daring women normally played the role of spy and even traitor. These women were clever in their sabotage techniques. Citizens in large cities were warned to look out for beggars as they might be spies in disguise. Hotel keepers, boarding house proprietors, and restaurant owners were warned to be especially vigilant and to beware of unusual personality characteristics.⁶⁴

Rose Greenhow and Belle Boyd spied against the Union. They were considered patriots in the South and traitors in the North.⁶⁵ Greenhow was the female spy who was given credit for turning over Union plans to the Confederacy for their win at First Battle of Manassas.⁶⁶ Belle Boyd was known as the Siren of the South. Like so many other women of her time, she was tired of living the conventional life of a young lady. Staying within moral boundaries, she would frequently wave at soldiers no matter which side they were on. She developed relationships with Northerners and Southerners in order to gather information. Boyd was a brash woman, but as a spy she played the role of submission as gracefully as she knew how when the time called her to do so.⁶⁷

Elizabeth Van Lew spied for the Union against the South. Lew used a cipher code to encrypt messages so that if the mail carriers were captured their captors would not be able to read them. Codes and maps were also sent in the hollow soles of Negro slaves' shoes as they were sent into areas where messages needed to be delivered. Before she crafted this type of

⁶⁴ Dyer, 57.

⁶⁵ Vincent Buranelli, *American Spies and Traitors: Collective Biographies* (Berkeley Heights: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2004), 5.

⁶⁶ Eggleston, 88.

⁶⁷ Ruth Scarborough, *Belle Boyd: Siren of the South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 34.

code, Lew would tear messages into small pieces and send each piece by a different mail carrier.⁶⁸

Women became factory workers in order to provide for their family while their husbands were away. For many this led to sudden relocation against their will. In 1864, General Sherman ordered hundreds of women and children to be arrested and deported to northern soil. These women and children had worked in the cotton mills in Roswell, Georgia and were torn away to fend for themselves hundreds of miles from home. Food was scarce and so were the jobs. These women and children were not war criminals, nor did they pose a serious threat to the Union army, but nevertheless they were charged with treason for working in mills that supplied cloth to the Confederate government.⁶⁹ These were innocent people who had been swept away by the war.

The dearth of trained nurses in the South, the crying need for medical care, and the energy of women seeking a means to make a contribution to the Cause combined in the early months of war to encourage exceptional and privileged southern women to improvise solutions to the suffering they could not, as women, bear to ignore.⁷⁰ Florence Nightingale inspired new roles for women in institutions. Women's organizations across the Confederacy worked together to help create one of the most innovative and successful traveling infirmaries for those soldiers

⁶⁸ Eggleston, 82.

⁶⁹ Mary D. Petite, *The Women Will Howl: The Union Army Capture of Roswell and the New Manchester, Georgia, And the Forced relocation of Mill Workers* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 1.

⁷⁰ Faust, 95.

that were wounded and on their way home from the battlefield. There were many more wounded soldiers than the nurses were able to care for.⁷¹

In the United States, only a few women had received a medical degree prior to the Civil War. Elizabeth Blackwell was the first women to receive one. Her ability to organize and set up organizations was an invaluable asset in her efforts to further the medical profession in the United States and was especially beneficial during the Civil War.⁷² Her training and forethought led her to recognize that a distribution system of medical supplies was needed for the hospital. She founded the volunteer organization called Women's Central Relief Fund in New York, where donations of medical supplies were collected and sent to hospitals that were in need of them.⁷³ Because prior nursing experience was not required for women to care for the sick and injured, Blackwell organized a program for women to become nurses. This program was integrated into a much larger program called the United States Sanitary Commission.⁷⁴

Prior to the Civil War, women spent much time working to have their rights acknowledged legally. Once the war began, women decided that a much larger issue was at hand that needed attention. The issue was slavery. Women began voicing their opinions against slavery in speeches that they would give in the parlors at their homes. The speeches were called parlor talks. Eventually, women began to feel more confident in their speaking skills and with their agendas and began to fill churches and meeting halls. Realizing their effectiveness,

⁷¹ Faust, 96.

⁷² Eggleston, 181.

⁷³ Eggleston, 181.

⁷⁴ Eggleston, 182.

abolition organizations paid speakers to travel and awaken Americans to the injustices of slavery.⁷⁵

Writing for women was accepted by the majority without any reservations because it was consistent with the ideals behind domesticity. Women compelled by separation to turn to writing as the fundamental vehicle for their most cherished relationships also found themselves composing other sorts of letters for the first time.⁷⁶ It also opened up doors for them to have a public and political voice. Writing directly to political figures about thoughts and attitudes towards the war and what it stood for was an audacious move from typical feminine behavior.⁷⁷

Although women wanted to have their voices heard, many would begin their letters to officials with apologies and disclaimers for the undertones that they were about to read. Women wrote in journals and thought of them as their silent friends. They documented what they saw and how they felt during the war. Many women diarists hoped to claim their part in the national struggle by becoming its chroniclers.⁷⁸ Some women turned their most private thoughts of the war into periodicals, novels, and poetry.⁷⁹

Women helped to spread the war news through their work as newspaper correspondents. Americans in both the North and South devoured columns of print about private armies of free-state militia and pro-slavery troops battling over the question of whether the territory would

⁷⁵ Brackman, 8.

⁷⁶ Faust, 162.

⁷⁷ Faust, 162.

⁷⁸ Faust, 164.

⁷⁹ Faust, 164.

come into the Union free or as a slave state. Failing to claim neutrality, women would rush to new towns to telegraph reports using pen names. For women, writing was a reflection of changed lives and helped to give women a newfound self-awareness.⁸⁰

At the conclusion of the Civil War, soldiers returned home with mental and physical illnesses and broken families. Their land had been destroyed. Women soldiers who served with their husbands and did have homes to return to when the war was over found it easier to resume their former lives.⁸¹ Not all women wanted to return to their previous acceptable and traditional lifestyles. Some felt that after the war was over their clever disguises had built a new identity. They had become their new personas and they had established new friends and a new lifestyle that they wanted to keep. By continuing to live the role of a male they had many more opportunities for work and higher wages.⁸²

Many wives did not publically reveal the military lifestyles that they had lived during the war. Some that did were unable to verify their stories. Women did not receive a pension from the government for their service and even when times got desperate most did not seek any benefits offered by the government for veterans. Sarah Edmonds, also known as Franklin Thompson, was a soldier that petitioned Congress to allow her to draw a pension. Edmonds sought pension because of the mounting doctor bills from her many health problems. Congress allowed her to draw a pension.⁸³

⁸⁰ Brackman, 37.

⁸¹ Blanton and Cook, 164.

⁸² Blanton and Cook, 164.

⁸³ Blanton and Cook, 168.

Women continued after the Civil War to experience a division of labor between sexes and historical subordination of females in the workplace. Jobs continued to be designated as either male or female. At home, the sexual division of labor assigned women primary responsibility for the material and psychological maintenance of the family, and men shouldered the primary responsibility for its economic support.⁸⁴

Many male veterans played a supportive role towards their female soldier counterparts. Men told heroic stories of how women played the part of dancing with danger in the fields while carrying a musket. They actively supported women veterans in times of need, sent female comrades to their final resting places with full military honors, and never seemed to tire of telling war stories about female soldiers.⁸⁵ Many women wrote about their experiences in the war in memoirs. Some women turned their living accounts of the war into autobiographical fiction. In 1868, Mary Bayard Clarke, an upper-class white woman from North Carolina, wrote a series of humorous sketches that depicted gender, race, and social relations in the defeated South. She used plain-folk humor in her writing.⁸⁶

Civil War women were not the only women that had a war story to tell. World War II women did, too, decades later. The role of women was one of the most important aspects of everyday life in the United States during World War II. Just like during the Civil War, women

⁸⁴ Susan M. Hartmann, *The Homefront and Beyond: American Women in the 1940's* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 16.

⁸⁵ Blanton and Cook, 184.

⁸⁶ Jane T. Censer, "Mary Baynard Clarke's Plain-Folk Humor: Writing Women Into the Literature and Politics of the Reconstruction," *Journal of Southern History* 76, no. 2 (2010): 241, accessed January 5, 2011, http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.fhsu.edu:2048/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=ITOF&docId=A226821399&source=gale&srcprod=ITOF&userGroupName=ksstate_fthays&version=1.0.

held jobs that were new to most women. Like the women of the Civil War, the women of World War II held their roles with pride and dignity. Their convictions were strong as they pressed through with getting the job done. Just like in the Civil War, women were put to the ultimate test of helping to preserve America's freedom.

Marriage rates and birth rates declined in the years leading up to World War II. Those that were married were hardened against the idea of working outside of the home. Work outside the home for women was taboo for most families during this time. Those jobs that women did find through women's unions were sometimes unorganized and chaotic. Women that did decide to leave the home in search of work suffered from discrimination that allowed for inferior status and pay. Women did not have influence over any economic policies and decisions. These were only a few reasons why women were economically dependent on men.⁸⁷

After World War II began, wives began to produce their own goods and services by canning, baking, and sewing. While their household production expanded, women's traditional function of providing emotional maintenance likewise increased as they coped with the psychological strains created when husbands no longer could live up to the traditional standard of the provider for the family.⁸⁸ Although the American society clung to these major tenets of the traditional sexual order, and although ideas about sex roles continued to be manifested in actual behavior, the Second World War modified women's position both in the home and in the

⁸⁷ Hartmann, 17.

⁸⁸ Hartmann, 17.

world outside.⁸⁹ The drastic change of women's lives during this time set a precedent for years to come.

Propaganda was used in a wide spectrum of ideas during World War II. One of those ideas was to provoke interest in women's roles. The purpose of propaganda was to help reshape women's roles from that of a domesticated woman to a working woman. This was very different from the propaganda that was issued pre-World War II. That propaganda reinforced the woman's place in the home. During World War II, government propaganda stressed women's critical importance in the current war effort. This was the government's effort to dissolve the mindset that women were too refined and sensitive to endure the troubles of a war. Propaganda did not often portray professional women in advertising. Blue collar workers were frequently featured.⁹⁰

Government propaganda ads featured white women engaged in factory type jobs that typically had belonged to men. Texts accompanying the ads often explained that women had stepped in to fill the void left by male workers who joined the military.⁹¹ The women depicted were young and attractive, indicating that doing men's work did not endanger femininity.⁹² Ads showed women working on machinery and airplanes. Some wartime recruitment posters appealed to women's natural intuition of nurturing. Even when posters encouraged women to participate in war activities by buying Liberty Bonds, supporting the Red Cross, knitting socks

⁸⁹ Hartmann, 16.

⁹⁰ Hartmann, 15.

⁹¹ Dubois and Dumenil, 539.

⁹² Dubois and Dumenil, 539.

for soldiers, or conserving food, the images rarely challenged the traditional ideas of women's proper place as defined by society.⁹³

One of the most famous wartime posters portrayed the typical woman and her role during the war. That was of Rosie the Riveter. Rosie's character, based on Rosie Will Monroe, symbolized a new identity for World War II women. This was a propaganda image generated by the federal War Manpower Commission and the Office of War Information during World War II.⁹⁴ Women who worked a man's job during the war were nicknamed Rosie. Her "can do" spirit and look of determination showed women that there was an important role for them to play as factory workers. To be effective, images of Rosie the Riveter were made deliberately unfeminine as rolled up sleeves, capable hands, flexed arm muscles, a direct gaze, and a determined mouth made no concession to feminine frailty.⁹⁵

Propaganda was used negatively against African Americans. Racist stereotypes in film, radio, popular magazines and other forms of white entertainment distorted African American life, when blacks were not ignored all together.⁹⁶ Almost 600,000 thousand black women were a part of the war; however, they were virtually invisible to the media. Recruitment posters, newsreels, and Hollywood melodramas almost always portrayed white women. A sea of white faces erased the contributions that African American women made to the home-front war on

⁹³ Dubois and Dumenil, 455.

⁹⁴ James Ciment and Thaddeus Russell, eds., *The Homefront: United States, Britain, and Canada in World Wars I and II* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2007), 1011.

⁹⁵ Brenda R. Lewis, *Women in War: The Women of World War II – At Home, At Work, On the Front Line* (Pleasantville: The Reader's Digest Association, 2002), 28.

⁹⁶ Maureen Honey, ed., *Bitter Fruit* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 2.

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.⁹⁷ Black magazines were upbeat in their promotion of war time jobs for women but the reality was that black women encountered obstacles in trying to secure blue-collar or clerical types of work.⁹⁸ It had more to do with the color of their skin rather than their gender.

Women's roles during World War II followed peaceful patterns which were typical for women. Women were needed and they jumped right in to fill in the gaps. The public discourse on women's new wartime roles established three conditions which set limits on social change: women were replacing men in the world outside the home only for the duration; women would retain their femininity even as they performed masculine duties; and the media emphasized women's determination to serve their families.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, women discovered a life that went beyond paychecks. A sense of fellowship with male and female co-workers was a new experience. Women soaked up the opportunity in a wide variety of jobs. While some women worked as mechanics and welders and in other skilled jobs that broke the gender barrier, most filled jobs as clerks, telephone operators, dieticians, and in other routine assignments.¹⁰⁰

The sheer number of women involved in wartime work made shifts in female employment patterns the most dramatic wartime change in women's status.¹⁰¹ As women were

⁹⁷ Honey, 2.

⁹⁸ Honey, 2.

⁹⁹ Hartmann, 23.

¹⁰⁰ DuBois and Dumenil, 508.

¹⁰¹ Hartmann, 53.

trained in their new jobs, the training that they received varied tremendously. It was not uncommon for women to be trained in one area and then move to another area for other training. Many wartime women were given instruction in local high schools and vocational centers that were converted to training centers for the war.¹⁰² Just as many workers were trained at special centers at the work site or were given no preparation and learned on the job.¹⁰³

For other women, understanding the importance of the nation's push to have women help build more ships and planes was downplayed by the idea that they, as women, had already given enough. Matilda Hoffman Havers was one woman who believed that at first. For Havers, her interest in working for a defense program came from a friendly demand of a neighbor rather than from her own will. It did not take long before she became thrilled at the idea of getting the opportunity to learn new things when hearing of all the opportunities she would gain from doing so. The participation in the defense programs broke down sex segregation and that sounded appealing to Havers. She never had a high school education and was happy about attending school to learn how to operate all the machines and to read the blueprints. She said that when she began work in the shipyard the men resented her and she resented them, too. Later, she was hired as a counselor for other women in the shipyard as the men did not like women coming to them with problems.¹⁰⁴

Women made up one half of the new workforce between 1941 and 1944. The work women did during World War II allowed the United States to produce hundreds of thousands of

¹⁰² Nancy Baker Wise and Christy Wise, *A Mouthful of Rivets: Women at Work in World War II* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994), 27.

¹⁰³ Wise and Wise, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Wise and Wise, 35.

tanks, airplanes, and vehicles as part of one of the largest and fastest military buildups.¹⁰⁵ As women dealt with this new work, they quickly learned that the work was harder than they had ever done before. Lucille Blanton Teeters became an expert on rivets of all shapes and sizes and discovered that putting airplanes together was a lot of hard work.¹⁰⁶ The women took this labor-intensive work in stride. Teeters recalled that they had work partners. They would take turns riveting different sides of the airplanes while the men came around collecting time sheets and documenting what the women were working on and how many hours it took them to complete a task. She said that they would work on one part of a plane for a while, become bored, and then move to another part to work on. Their successes were widely touted, but publicity about these Rosie the Riveters emphasized that women had maintained their femininity.¹⁰⁷

Many women were treated with respect in the workplace and had supportive bosses. Not all of the aspects surrounding women's roles in the workplace during the war were positive. Many women encountered discrimination, propositions, catcalls, or derogatory remarks. Women who were told that to be promoted they had to sleep with their boss. Women suffered from practical jokes or sexual bribery. Those that were subject to this type of behavior did not think twice about confronting those who participated in it. Women did not tolerate this type of harassment and they stood their ground. Their solutions to harassment included threatening the men with the tools at hand or telling their supervisors.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Ciment and Russell, 1012.

¹⁰⁶ Wise and Wise, 52.

¹⁰⁷ DuBois and Dumenil, 511.

¹⁰⁸ Wise and Wise, 89.

Hours worked and equal pay was on the minds of women. Women worked long hours and were not paid the equivalent that men were paid. In the fall of 1942, the National War Labor Board ordered equal pay for women who did work of the same quality and quantity as that of men, and the Board enforced the ruling in a series of subsequent decisions. The results were not substantial. There was also a refusal to overturn historical differentials in rates between men's and women's jobs.¹⁰⁹

Another issue brought to the surface was that of working mothers. The War Manpower Commission policy urged employers to uphold the right of each mother to make the decision to work outside the home. They also encouraged employers not to discriminate against women with children. The war did prompt the federal government to respond for the first time to the needs of working mothers by expanding a program of childcare by nearly \$50 million by the end of the war.¹¹⁰

African American women were faced with an assortment of job opportunities and challenges. Defense industries resisted hiring black women until it became absolutely necessary.¹¹¹ They were hired to work jobs that no one else would take and they were denied training. In Detroit in 1943, of the 96,000 jobs that women filled, only 1,000 were held by black

¹⁰⁹ Hartmann, 57.

¹¹⁰ Hartmann, 59.

¹¹¹ DuBois and Dumenil, 511.

women.¹¹² The war jobs that black women were able to find allowed them to escape domestic work. Many war contractors refused to hire them at all.¹¹³

Hate strikes erupted periodically throughout the war when white workers walked off the job over the promotion or hiring of African Americans into previously restricted occupational categories.¹¹⁴ In the summer of 1943, twenty-two white women held one of the largest strikes in a Baltimore Western Electrical plant. The white women walked out over the hiring of black women. The department had been all white. It was an unsuccessful strike. The white women petitioned for separate bathroom facilities which caused an even larger strike later that same year. Federal troops had to be called in to keep the peace and within a few months the management agreed to the racists' demands.¹¹⁵

African American women did make some meaningful gains as a result of wartime labor shortage. In 1941, an executive order banned discrimination in defense industries and civil service type jobs. This order would set a precedent for racial discrimination cases in post-war years. The apparel industry underwent a 350 percent increase in black female employment, and an increasing number of black women left household service for public-sector service jobs that were better paying and had better working conditions.¹¹⁶ As more women were eventually hired

¹¹² DuBois and Dumenil, 511.

¹¹³ Honey, 35.

¹¹⁴ Honey, 37.

¹¹⁵ Honey, 37.

¹¹⁶ Honey, 37.

later in 1943, it created a migration from the South to the North where there were more manufacturing jobs.¹¹⁷

Other women of color found expanded opportunities in the war years and faced less discrimination than African Americans.¹¹⁸ Mexicans in the Midwest had a hard time finding work before the war, but once the war began they found it easy to get jobs. A union in California was able to convince employers to pay employees benefits and childcare. The war helped Mexican American women find jobs in defense industries and in other industrial jobs because of the labor scarcity.¹¹⁹

Native American women were fortunate to find work, too, during the war. About one-fifth of adult women on reservations left to take jobs, and those who stayed behind increased their duties, helping to maintain farming and tribal concerns such as the timber industry.¹²⁰ For the Chinese American women, the war provided opportunities in the garment industries. Chinese American women who worked in the defense industry were young and unmarried, unlike the other female workers.¹²¹

The situation for the Japanese American women was different. Because of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, there was intense anti-Japanese sentiment on the western coast of the United States. An internment of over 110,000 Japanese descendants was mandated. Women continued

¹¹⁷ Honey, 37.

¹¹⁸ Dubois and Dumenil, 513.

¹¹⁹ DuBois and Dumenil, 513.

¹²⁰ Dubois and Dumenil, 513.

¹²¹ Dubois and Dumenil, 513.

to keep up with their family duties despite their new living conditions, though young Nisei women benefitted from the new experience. Internment offered personal liberation for many women.¹²² Women worked in camps as clerks or teachers for the same low wages as their fathers and brothers, giving them some small taste of economic equality and independence.¹²³ Nisei women were not the only women to work in a military job.

Women had edged their way into the United States military for decades. On the brink of World War II the idea of enlisted women was initially resisted but the negativity towards the idea soon changed. Although women were not subject to conscription, World War II afforded them their first opportunity to serve as regular members of the armed forces.¹²⁴ On May 15, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the bill authorizing the formation of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), which would function with the U.S. Army, but not be a part of it.¹²⁵ The purpose of the Corps was to use women in support staff positions while men were away on military duty. The WAAC was the first military service to enlist women and the only one to allow women to perform duties overseas during the Second World War.¹²⁶

After the women completed their training for the WAAC, they were detailed to almost every branch of the army and were cooks, typists, postal workers, telephone operators,

¹²² Nicole Ann Dombrowski, ed., *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted With or Without Consent* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), 227.

¹²³ DuBois and Dumenil, 515.

¹²⁴ Hartmann, 15.

¹²⁵ Olga Gruhzt-Hoyt, *They Also Served: American Women in World War II* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1995), 61.

¹²⁶ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 61.

cryptographic technicians, radio intelligence officers and even tested chemically impregnated clothing.¹²⁷ They were sent to work in North Africa, the Middle East, the Far East, and in the Pacific as well as in the United States. Unfortunately, some of the Women's Army Corps that served in combat zones were killed. Sixteen women were awarded the Purple Heart, sixty-six became prisoners of the Japanese, and one hundred eighty one died. Black women were not sent overseas to work. The excuse used to explain why was because their presence would cause trouble.¹²⁸

Charity Adams was one of the first black women to be accepted for the first officer candidate class at the first WAAC Training Center at Fort Des Moines, Iowa.¹²⁹ Adams recalls being integrated for all the activities in training; however, sleeping quarters were segregated. On becoming an officer, Adams watched over training activities and created new programs. She also eventually acquired the roles of station control officer and work simplification officer. She eventually won the right to work overseas. At the close of the war Adams noted that after spending the entire war gossiping about why women were in the service, the public was now interested in hearing their stories.¹³⁰

The lesbian stereotype was an issue that women had to contend with within the Women's Army Corp (WAC) during World War II. This issue stemmed from the reality of women working in masculine jobs. There were concerns that focused on the masculine mannerisms that

¹²⁷ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 62.

¹²⁸ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 62.

¹²⁹ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 64.

¹³⁰ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 75.

women might adopt, and especially on the disruptive influence the WAC would have on sexual standards.¹³¹ Many were suspicious of a woman's desire to join the military because they believed that a real woman would not want to be a soldier. There were fears that the women's entrance into the WAC would attract or produce lesbians. Lesbians worked to start lesbian communities within the women's corps. Women who were lesbians in the army faced hostility and discharge proceedings. Joining the military was a way for women to find other women who were like themselves and to explore their sexuality. Policies pertaining to lesbian applicants to the WAC did not come to fruition until almost the end of the war.¹³²

The Corps had other areas in which women had a role. Nursing for women during the war was not an uncommon role because it was a typical feminine profession; therefore, little opposition to it arose. The Army Nurse Corps had been in existence since 1901. The women involved did not receive military rank or pay equivalent to that of men, although the Army Nurse Corps was considered a military organization. Once the nation was at war, nurses volunteered for military service at a rate surpassing that of any other profession.¹³³

In World War II, nurses tending to the wounded in makeshift hospitals near the front line lived in constant danger as they worked to preserve life while everything happening around them was designed to destroy it.¹³⁴ It was the closest that women came to the combat zone. They

¹³¹ Dombrowski, 187.

¹³² Dombrowski, 187.

¹³³ Hartmann, 32.

¹³⁴ Lewis, 91.

worked in every theater during the war. When blood supplies for transfusions ran low, nurses gave their own blood to make up the shortfall.¹³⁵

While the military welcomed nurses, it resisted commissioning women as doctors - despite the shortage of physicians - until fifteen months after America's entry into the war.¹³⁶ Women fought tirelessly to be a part of the medical corps but were told that only males were allowed to receive temporary commissions. A campaign was organized to reverse the War Department's policy; however, the American Medical Association did not take part in supporting women physicians in the war. The campaign played an integral part in expanding women's rights as citizens and professional workers. In April 1943, legislation was passed enabling women physicians to join the army and navy medical corps.¹³⁷

Black nurses were not allowed admittance to a large number of the nursing schools in the United States. The American Nurses Association blocked black women in their society in fifteen states. Black nurses were commissioned in the army, and 10 percent of the Women's Army Corps were African Americans, but they lived and worked in segregated units and had less access to training and skilled jobs than white women.¹³⁸ Black nurses were only allowed to care for black patients or to help in areas that did not require them to have a specific skill. By the end

¹³⁵ Lewis, 109.

¹³⁶ Dubois and Dumenil, 508.

¹³⁷ Hartmann, 33.

¹³⁸ Dubois and Dumenil, 508.

of the war in 1945, the number of African American women members of the American Nurses Association had grown to 500.¹³⁹

The U.S. Marine Corps was another branch of the military where women sought out a new role. They were trained at Camp Lejune, North Carolina. These women attended boot camp like those who joined other parts of the military. They learned how to march two-by-two for up to three hours at a time, how to salute, and how to endure six weeks of hard training. Drill instructors were very harsh. Women were not given any special treatment because of their gender. If a woman fainted from exhaustion and a person stopped to help her, then that person was given a demerit. A woman could spend an hour shining her shoes only to have the drill instructor tell her that they were still dirty. A ruler was used to measure the length of hair because there were rules on how long it could be. Women hated their drill instructors but they did as they said, for they learned that a marine always follows orders.¹⁴⁰

The Military Police always accompanied the women at night and checked on their barracks area every hour. Over time the Marine men began to accept the women. They even became possessive of them. The Marine men did not want them to date Navy or Army men, only Marines, which caused many fights to break out amongst the men over who they would date.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Dubois and Dumenil, 508.

¹⁴⁰ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 129.

¹⁴¹ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 130.

The first struggle women had with the Navy in World War II was simply to be allowed entry into it.¹⁴² The Naval Reserve Act of 1938 did not allow women to be a part of the Navy's Reserve. The Navy's ideas of a women's program was different than that of the Army's, so it had the added role of convincing Congress to allow a different path for women.¹⁴³ The Navy was not eager to have women join but it could not fight the war without them. The Navy knew that it had to allow women to join but exactly what role women would play was unknown.

The Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES) was the Navy branch for women and was created in July, 1942. The Navy was determined that if it was to have women in its ranks, they would be the best that could possibly be found.¹⁴⁴ Mildred McAfee Horton, president of Wellesley College, was in charge of finding those women and was selected to be the head of WAVES. McAfee and her advisory council called for some of the most accomplished women in the nation to become naval officers. Excellent candidates were found in the professions of education and business and were exactly what the Navy was looking for. It was primarily the prestige and distinction of McAfee and the council members that persuaded many of these women to accept the Navy's offer of commission.¹⁴⁵

Women in the Navy faced challenges. There were problems of being the first women in the United States to be armed service officers. They often found themselves the objects of curiosity and were met with resentment. This came from men who were not happy that they had

¹⁴² Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (Washington: Brassey's, 1993), 25.

¹⁴³ Ebbert and Hall, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Ebbert and Hall, 39.

¹⁴⁵ Ebbert and Hall, 41.

been sent to sea. The Navy often allowed women to continue in their ignorance of Navy ways. Compounding the difficulties faced by women officers both in the field and in the bureau was the inadequacy of the Navy's mobilization plans, which failed to take account of the sheer numbers of people that would be needed.¹⁴⁶

Black women in the Navy faced racial discrimination as they did in other areas. Because the Navy prohibited African American men from serving in any but menial positions, it also refused to incorporate black women into its ranks until 1944, almost at the end of the war. The Navy had already struggled with having to provide separate living quarters for men and women, and now having to separate races was becoming a difficult task.¹⁴⁷

Eliza Wills, a social worker, and Harriet Ida Pickens, a public health administrator, were in the last class of officer candidates to be trained at Smith College in New Hampshire. Wills taught naval history and Pickens administered physical training sessions in Bronx, New York. Among the Navy's 82,000 WAVES, there were two black officers and 72 black enlisted personnel by the time the Second World War was over. From a larger historical perspective, the relatively uneventful entry of black women into the Navy set a precedent for the later integration of black men.¹⁴⁸

Navy women's uniforms were handled in a different manner than men's uniforms. The Navy was willing to seek the best uniforms for the women that they possibly could find through the advice of McAfee. A noted designer, Mainbocher, was hired to design the women's

¹⁴⁶ Ebbert and Hall, 45.

¹⁴⁷ Dubois and Dumenil, 508.

¹⁴⁸ Ebbert and Hall, 87.

uniforms. The dress uniforms worn today closely resemble those worn by women in World War II. Women were given winter and summer uniforms. The winter uniform was navy-blue wool. They wore white shirts and dark blue ties. They wore skirts, black shoes, a brimmed hat, and black gloves. The summer uniform looked the same but was made of a lighter weight material and was worn with white instead of black shoes. As with the Yeomen uniforms, choice of design was one thing, timely procurement was another.¹⁴⁹

Women serving in the Navy Nurse Corps were known as GI Nightingales. When the war began there were only 942 nurse members of the Corps. There was an urgent need to recruit and train more women. In the event of an air raid on the U.S. mainland, women were trained in first aid. Like the soldiers, women were faced with military style discipline and obedience to orders that were vital in nursing.¹⁵⁰

Not until January 1941 were black women officially accepted into the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. No more than 56 black women were accepted at this time; however, after the war began this number became untenable. Two years later a legislative bill called the Nurse Training Bill went before Congress and was passed. This bill barred discrimination based on race and allowed 2,000 black women to enroll in the Cadet Nurse Corps. Despite these successes in promoting black women, only 500 of them saw service during the war, either at home or overseas.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Ebbert and Hall, 43.

¹⁵⁰ Lewis, 96.

¹⁵¹ Lewis, 107.

Reba Zitella Whittle was the only American nurse captured and imprisoned by the Germans during World War II.¹⁵² She had been taught to use equipment and medical supplies on hospital planes and to handle any type of emergency by herself because it was rare for a surgeon to accompany patients on flights. On September 28, 1944, Whittle's plane was shot down over Germany. Whittle recalls the surprise on the German soldiers' faces as they realized that a woman was on the plane. She and her comrades were taken by the soldiers to a building where they were unsure of what would happen. The German soldiers gave them food and a mattress to lie on. The next day they were taken to a German hospital where they were examined and Whittle was questioned about her role as a nurse. They were taken away again to another location and told they would leave some time that evening for Frankfurt. Whittle said that this was not unusual for a new prisoner of war. In January 1945 Whittle was exchanged for German prisoners and she left her stalag on the evening of January 25, 1945, accompanied by members of the German Red Cross.¹⁵³

Pilots and airplane passengers had a risky role because the possibility of being shot down over enemy territory was great. At the beginning of the war, scores of male pilots were needed to fight overseas and as in the other facets of life and work where men left to fight in the war, women were needed to step up and fill in. This included being a pilot. Nancy Harkness Love and Jacqueline Cochran were the founders of two separate women's pilot groups and they were pilots themselves. Love headed the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron. Soon after Love's group was created, Cochran began leading the Women's Flying Training Detachment. Cochran

¹⁵² Gruhzt-Hoyt, 37.

¹⁵³ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 49.

believed that this was only one part of a larger job that needed to be done. Failing to properly coordinate all the women pilot resources would be wasteful, she claimed.¹⁵⁴ Within a short time and after much tension, Love and Cochran merged their two groups into one and called it Women Airforce Service Pilots.¹⁵⁵

Women Airforce Service Pilots, also known as WASPs or fly girls, made history during World War II. These women made history by being the first females trained to fly military planes on a whole range of missions for the U.S. armed forces.¹⁵⁶ Most of the WASPs had just graduated from high school or were enrolled in college. Others were teachers, nurses, models, writers, engineers, librarians, flight instructors, or office workers, and each gladly stopped what they were doing for a chance in a lifetime.¹⁵⁷ Not many people had even flown in a plane because planes had only been around for a short time, and not many people knew how to fly them. Before the Second World War, women were not used as pilots in the U.S. military because it was thought of as a man's job. At the onset of World War II, nearly 3,000 women had learned to fly airplanes; however, it was not so easy to find pilot jobs.¹⁵⁸ Women had to convince the army that they were capable of piloting war planes.

¹⁵⁴ Sarah Byrn Rickman, *Nancy Love and the Wasp Ferry Pilots of World War II* (Denton: University of North Texas, 2008), 81.

¹⁵⁵ Rickman, 81.

¹⁵⁶ Amy Nathan, *Yankee Doodle Gals: Women Pilots of World War II* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2001), 7.

¹⁵⁷ Nathan, 8.

¹⁵⁸ Nathan, 8.

For women, the role of pilot meant experiencing independence and the exhilaration of soaring through the air. Not many women had experienced that feeling. When Florence Miller was eight years old she took her first airplane ride and recalled that it was exhilarating. An open cockpit with the wind in her face, her hair blowing and her feeling like a bird was unforgettable.¹⁵⁹ Miller said that women turned in their dresses and high heels for huge overalls called zoot suits. They were not allowed to wear official army uniforms because they were not officially in the United States Army, but they were expected to obey army rules. WASPs marched everywhere they went, were subjected to barrack inspections, and participated in exercise drills each day like real soldiers.¹⁶⁰

Becoming a pilot was hard work, not just because people thought it was not ladylike.¹⁶¹ Lessons were high-priced and families were paying only for the necessities because of the Great Depression. Many women worked and saved money while others borrowed money in order to pay for lessons. The United States government decided to fund low-cost classes called Civilian Pilot Training classes for those who were willing to fly in the war. Women took advantage of this opportunity, although only one in ten women was chosen for the classes. This opportunity for women soon ended as it was decided that only those who would be flying combat roles would be allowed to attend these classes.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Gruhzit-Hoyt, 153.

¹⁶⁰ Nathan, 32.

¹⁶¹ Nathan, 13.

¹⁶² Nathan, 14.

Over 25,000 women applied to serve as pilots. Half made it through training to become a pilot. Only 1,012 women were chosen to serve in these new WASP units. The women's skills were impeccable. They flew every type of plane that the army had in its fleet.¹⁶³ For these women, their country was in danger and this was their way of doing their part and showing their pride for the United States.

Jacqueline Cochran pressed the United States government for full militarization of the WASPs, but in June 1944 the legislation was defeated in the House of Representatives. The Army decided to end the WASP program in December 1944, several months before the war was over. After the WASP program ended, many women chose to continue flying out of the sheer passion for it. Congress passed legislation in 1977 that gave military recognition and veteran status to WASPs.¹⁶⁴

Like women of the Civil War era, women of World War II played the role of secret agent but at a more sophisticated level. Women who acted as secret agents were required to have an unusual degree of courage and enterprise and were considered less noticeable and less likely to arouse suspicious attention.¹⁶⁵ This was a natural advantage women had over men in this role. Women learned every potential situation an agent would be faced with as they prepared for this role. They learned to live off of the land and sleep out in the open without being detected. They practiced stalking each other as part of learning to acquire special techniques for evading

¹⁶³ Nathan, 8.

¹⁶⁴ Nathan, 8.

¹⁶⁵ Lewis, 143.

capture. Nerves, presence of mind and alertness had to be of the highest order, for basically what was asked of agents was to set aside civilized instincts and even their own urge for survival.¹⁶⁶

In their role, women had to cheat, lie, kill silently, perform acts of sabotage, use guns and explosives, keep their secrets when under torture and face the very likely chance of an early, violent death.¹⁶⁷ Amy Thorpe, who worked for both the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), was one woman who played this role. In her role as an agent, she had an affair with a French diplomat to gain inside information on the Vichy regime.¹⁶⁸

Virginia Hall also worked for the SOE and then the OSS. Posing as a *New York Post* reporter while the United States was still neutral, Virginia Hall first slipped into occupied France in 1941 to organize a network of SOE agents.¹⁶⁹ She aroused the suspicions of the Germans in France in 1943 and had to leave the country. Sketches of her were posted throughout France, so she had to change her appearance to elude anyone looking for her. She returned to France a year later in her new guise and organized and trained over three hundred other agents for sabotage operations over the next few months. She, like other agents, had to move often so that they could keep their true identity concealed. Despite the descriptions and sketches of Hall, the Gestapo never caught her. In 1945, she received the Distinguished Service Cross from President

¹⁶⁶ Lewis, 146.

¹⁶⁷ Lewis, 146.

¹⁶⁸ Lewis, 146.

¹⁶⁹ Lewis, 148.

Harry Truman and an accolade from a fellow agent, Denis Rake, who called her one of the greatest women agents of the war.¹⁷⁰

Spying was not the only role in which women put their lives on the line for a job. New opportunities for women as journalists and photographers emerged during the war. Women journalists and photographers worked in every theater of war. The intense rivalry between men and women allowed both groups to be individualistic while wagering their lives. Women had to work in a role where they were just as diligent and conventional as the men in competing for news stories. They had to prove that they possessed the mental skills needed to process the information pertaining to the war. Many women were rebels against convention, spurning a woman's traditional, domesticated role for a freer, more exciting and more dangerous life at large in the world.¹⁷¹ This enabled many women to graduate from the periphery – covering fashion, children, cooking and other home based subjects or society pages – to reporting hard news.¹⁷²

As thousands of men left newsrooms to go to war, women filled the empty desks.¹⁷³ During World War II, a total of 127 American women were accredited for their journalism and photography throughout the world. To become accredited, a correspondent had to have the privilege given to her by the United States War Department's public relations office. Elizabeth Phillips was the only woman of color to become an accredited war correspondent during World

¹⁷⁰ Lewis, 151.

¹⁷¹ Lewis, 194.

¹⁷² Lewis, 201.

¹⁷³ Catherine Gourley, *War, Women, and the News* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 90.

War II while writing about how racism had prepared her for combat.¹⁷⁴ The color of her skin was not a racial problem overseas like it was in America. She did not worry about her safety there because she was black, as she did in the United States. Had she been shot it would only be because she was an American enemy, not because of the color of her skin.¹⁷⁵

Margaret Bourke-White was the first female official photographer of the war for the United States Army Corps in 1942. Throughout the majority of her career she worked abroad. The expectations from society back home were not how she wanted to live her life; therefore, her marriage ended after only a few years. Female journalists were pushy, fearless, and single-minded and were often driven by strong political beliefs.¹⁷⁶ Bourke-White was one of the first correspondents who photographed the concentration camps and was the first foreign correspondent to capture footage of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.¹⁷⁷

The most fortunate female correspondents were those unaffected by obstruction because they happened to have based themselves in Europe before World War II began.¹⁷⁸ Women had to stand firm in the midst of the reality and horrors of the war without the shield of chivalrous protectors if they wanted to be treated equally with their male counterparts. They were not allowed to work in combat zones. Instead of dresses and perfume, their suitcases held cameras

¹⁷⁴ Penny Coleman, *Where the Action Was: Women War Correspondents in World War II* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002), 63.

¹⁷⁵ Coleman, 63.

¹⁷⁶ Lewis, 196.

¹⁷⁷ Gourley, 69.

¹⁷⁸ Lewis, 201.

and flashbulbs, typewriter ribbons and sheets of carbon paper.¹⁷⁹ Many donations were made to organizations such as the Red Cross because of the imagery captured by women on film and in print.¹⁸⁰

Keeping morale high during the war was important and crucial for an American victory. Big names in the show business industry gladly gave their services to entertain the troops and civilian audiences in a much needed effort to take the edge off wartime tensions.¹⁸¹ Some commanders in the military did not appreciate the efforts of the women in their quest for providing relaxing entertainment as they saw it too much of a distraction for the soldiers. The women were viewed as temptations. Men needed their attention to be guarded as they constantly needed to be ready for war.¹⁸²

The American Red Cross women serving overseas were vital to the morale of the American troops.¹⁸³ They were sent around the world. The American Red Cross women followed American soldiers into Germany which made them also subject to bombings. Some lived in tent cities, village hotels, and even German prostitution quarters. They set up recreation centers in areas that were safe from war zones. Some Red Cross facilities were elaborate, providing food and drinks, games and music, while others only offered cold drinks and snacks to the soldiers. The American soldiers went months without seeing an American woman, so they

¹⁷⁹ Gourley, 3.

¹⁸⁰ Gourley, 67.

¹⁸¹ Lewis, 221.

¹⁸² Lewis, 227.

¹⁸³ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 220.

were always very welcoming to them. The war was very real to the women of the Red Cross and they all gave of themselves to make the life of the U.S. fighting troops a little bit easier.¹⁸⁴

Women's roles changed again at the end of the war. Social scientists and social welfare experts pinned family instability on working mothers. Social stability quickly came into place at the end of the war. An outpouring of literature concerning the return of veterans to civilian life reinforced the crucial roles that women needed to play in the veterans' social readjustment.¹⁸⁵

At the end of the war, the jobs that had been created specifically for the nation's defense disappeared.¹⁸⁶ Plants closed and jobs were given to the veterans that were returning home from the war. Jennie Fain Folan remembers that on the day that the war was over, she and other women were laid off.¹⁸⁷ Many women freely gave up their jobs to the men without question. They returned to their pre-war life of tending to home and family while others joined in marriage, thus creating the baby boom. For all women, this change was a jolt in their ever changing lives.¹⁸⁸

Other women were angry and frustrated at having to give up their jobs and return to "women's work." They had proven their work capabilities during the war and were now forced into jobs with fewer responsibilities and less pay. The war had not eroded cultural ideas about women's primary role in the home and their secondary status as wage earners, but it had been a

¹⁸⁴ Gruhzt-Hoyt, 221.

¹⁸⁵ Hartmann, 25.

¹⁸⁶ Wise and Wise, 3.

¹⁸⁷ Wise and Wise, 17.

¹⁸⁸ Wise and Wise, 17.

vehicle for sustaining and even accelerating a process of increased female participation in the workplace.¹⁸⁹

Dena Brugioni Johnson recalls that when the war was over and women were asked to give up their jobs for their husbands, many refused. Johnson says that she had three years' seniority in her position. If she had given it to her husband and he had no seniority then he would be last hired and first fired if the company had to get rid of workers. She kept her job and refused to give it up. The union told women that they did not have to give up their jobs and it protected the women.¹⁹⁰ Johnson stayed in her job for thirty years.¹⁹¹

Women had wanted men's jobs and they were finally given the opportunity to prove that they were more than competent for them. Frances Keller Blanchet remembers that working in the shipyard made her think she could always do more as it gave her a lot of self-confidence.¹⁹² Like Blanchet, most women who participated in the workforce during the war considered it one of the highlights of their lives and retained the same pride and sense of accomplishment they felt a half century ago.¹⁹³

Women without children or husbands often were eager to have both, and the years after the war saw a flurry of marriages followed by the infamous baby boom.¹⁹⁴ Some women used

¹⁸⁹ DuBois and Dumenil, 517.

¹⁹⁰ Wise and Wise, 75.

¹⁹¹ Wise and Wise, 75.

¹⁹² Wise and Wise, 204.

¹⁹³ Wise and Wise, 4.

¹⁹⁴ Wise and Wise, 188.

the work that they had learned during the war to pursue further advancements in their careers. For so many women, the jobs that they held during the war built confidence and solidified the paths that they would follow for the rest of their lives.¹⁹⁵

Women throughout the history of the United States have come as loyal comrades to the aid of their country and have sided with the men who defended it. In both the Civil War and World War II, women were cast in both main and supporting roles, and each woman had her own personal reasons for participating. One reason women chose the roles they did was because of the sense of patriotism that women felt for the United States. More importantly, women were making a mark on women's equality through their contributions to two wars. The year 1861 was not just the beginning of women coming to action and the year 1945 was not the end of women's participation. For centuries before and centuries after, women have held and will hold a special place with their roles in history.

¹⁹⁵ Wise and Wise, 188.

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