American ARTIFACTS

From Exhibitions and Collections at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History

6 Label on Milk Bottle

This label conveyed the message that conserving resources was every American's patriotic duty.

7 Sleeve for U.S. War Bonds

The government borrowed an incredible $135 billion from individual Americans to finance the war effort.

ON THE HOME FRONT

During World War II, colorful posters papered the windows of American businesses. Pleas rang out across the radio, urging Americans to sacrifice and band together. Everywhere there were reminders that the nation was in a life-or-death struggle against totalitarian dictatorships. *See* 1 *and* 2.

Every life was affected by the war. If you didn't have a family member in the armed forces, you knew someone—a neighbor or friend—who was serving in the armed forces or working in a defense plant. Even the family dog was a possible recruit. The army used dogs as sentries on the battlefront and in other ways. *See* 3.

The steady stream of patriotic messages kept Americans focused on the job at hand—putting individual disagreements aside to work together for the good of the country. People showed their support by wearing victory buttons, marked by the letter "V." *See* 4.

Supporting the war effort also meant putting up with shortages. The government rationed certain items that were scarce or needed by the armed forces. Ration books restricted things like gasoline and sugar. Conserving and recycling were also necessary. The recycling effort included hundreds of everyday products. *See* 5 *and* 6.

In addition to working hard, Americans contributed their own money to pay for the war effort. They did this by purchasing war savings bonds. Savings bonds gave thousands of Americans a personal and financial stake in the outcome of the war. *See* 7.

VIEWING HISTORY

1. ***Summarize*** What do the objects tell you about daily life during the war?

2. ***Connecting to Today*** In peacetime as well as wartime, government and other organizations conduct public relations campaigns to persuade people to support some policy or change their behavior. Report on the following to your class: (a) examples of recent campaigns; (b) what, in your view, makes such campaigns successful or unsuccessful.

3 Women and the War

SECTION PREVIEW

Objectives

1. Explain why new kinds of jobs opened up for women in World War II.
2. Compare the benefits and problems that women workers experienced.
3. Describe what happened to women workers at the end of the war.
4. *Key Terms* Define: Rosie the Riveter; seniority.

Main Idea

During World War II, more American women went to work in nontraditional, war-industry jobs, but they were discouraged from keeping those jobs after the war ended.

Reading Strategy

Outlining Information As you read this section, create an outline that includes the headings from the section. Fill in at least two main ideas for each heading.

The motto of the women's Auxiliary Reserve Pool (ARP) during World War II was Prepared and Faithful.

A popular song in 1942 told the story of a fictional young woman called **Rosie the Riveter,** who worked in a defense plant while her boyfriend Charlie served in the marines. The government used images of Rosie the Riveter in posters and recruitment films of the 1940s to attract women to the work force. The government image of Rosie was young, white, and middle class. Patriotism was her main motive for taking a war job—she wanted to do her part on the home front while her boyfriend was fighting. In reality, American women of all ages and ethnic and economic backgrounds went to work in the wartime economy. Patriotism was only one of many reasons they took new and different jobs.

Changes for Working Women

Before the war, most women who worked for wages were single and young. Even during the hard times of the Depression, most people disapproved of married women working outside the home. Social disapproval was reinforced by the fear that working women would take jobs away from unemployed men. According to a poll taken in 1936, 82 percent of Americans believed that a married woman should not work if her husband had a job. Nonetheless, by 1940 about 15.5 percent of all married women were working.

New Kinds of Jobs Except for teaching and nursing, few women entered professional careers. They often had to take low-paying jobs such as sales clerks or household servants. Women with factory jobs usually worked in industries that produced clothing, textiles, and shoes, while men dominated the higher-paying machinery, steel, and automobile industries. Almost everywhere, women earned less than men.

Like World War I, World War II brought women into different parts of the work force. As men were drafted into the armed forces, many factory jobs fell vacant. News of these better-paying job openings attracted women who were working in traditional women's jobs. They moved into manufacturing, particularly the

…ıse industries. Like the fic-…ıal Rosie, women worked in …ırplane plants and shipyards as riveters, steelworkers, and welders.

Recruiting Women Workers Still there was a labor shortage. To fill those jobs, the Office of War Information launched a recruitment campaign. It was aimed at women who normally would not have considered working outside the home: older and married women.

Posters and advertisements told women that it was their patriotic duty to work for their country. "An American homemaker with the strength and ability to run a house and raise a family . . . has the strength and ability to take her place in a vital War industry," one ad declared. As a result of this campaign, the number of working women rose by almost one third, from 14.6 million in 1941 to about 19.4 million in 1944. (See the graph on the next page.) Women at one point made up about 35 percent of the total civilian labor force.

The campaign brought married women workers into the labor force. They soon accounted for almost three quarters of the increase. For the first time in American history, they outnumbered single working women. More than 2 million women over the age of 35 found jobs, and by the end of the war, half of all women workers were over age 35.

VIEWING HISTORY

These women welders at the Kaiser shipyard in Richmond, California, are working on the Liberty ship *S.S. George Washington Carver.*
Economics *How did wartime job recruitment change the kinds of jobs women filled?*

Benefits of Employment

Despite their resistance in the past, employers were usually pleased to have women workers during the war. Some of their reasons seem misguided today. Employers assumed, for instance, that women could do simple, repetitious tasks more effectively than men. They thought that women were better suited for certain welding jobs because they could squeeze into smaller places.

Women and Work On the whole, women were pleased to be employed. The money they earned made a difference in their lives. For example, Josephine McKee, a Seattle mother of nine who worked at the Boeing Aircraft Company, was able to pay off debts from the Depression. Leola Houghland, also from Seattle, used her shipyard earnings to pay for her family's home.

Other women found the work more interesting and challenging than what they had done before. Evelyn Knight left a job as a cook to work in a navy yard. She explained, "After all, I've got to keep body and soul together, and I'd rather earn a living this way than to cook over a hot stove." Many women took jobs for patriotic reasons. One rubber plant worker declared, "Every time I test a batch of rubber, I know it's going to help bring my three sons home quicker."

Women were eager to prove that they could do whatever their jobs required. Beatrice Morales Clifton, a mother of four, had never worked outside the home. At first, she found that other workers at Lockheed Aircraft in

Main Idea CONNECTIONS

What benefits did women experience as a result of wartime employment?

Los Angeles resented working women. Her confidence grew, however, as she mastered one skill after another:

AMERICAN VOICES **"I felt proud of myself and felt good [because] I had never done anything like that. I felt good that I could do something, and being that it was war, I felt that I was doing my part. I went from 65 cents to $1.05 [an hour]. That was top pay. It felt good and, besides, it was my own money. I could do whatever I wanted with it."**

—Beatrice Morales Clifton

Clifton left her wartime job after the war, then returned to Lockheed in 1951. By the time she retired in 1978, she was a supervisor for about 50 other workers.

Jobs for African Americans Black women had long worked in greater proportion than white women. Generally, though, only domestic work such as cleaning and child care was open to them. When they applied for defense jobs, African American women often faced both gender prejudice and racial discrimination. Some women fought back. Through lawsuits and other forms of protest, African American women improved their chances in the work force. Between 1940 and 1944, the proportion of African American women in industrial jobs increased from 6.8 percent to 18 percent. The number working in domestic service dropped from 59.9 percent to 44.6 percent.

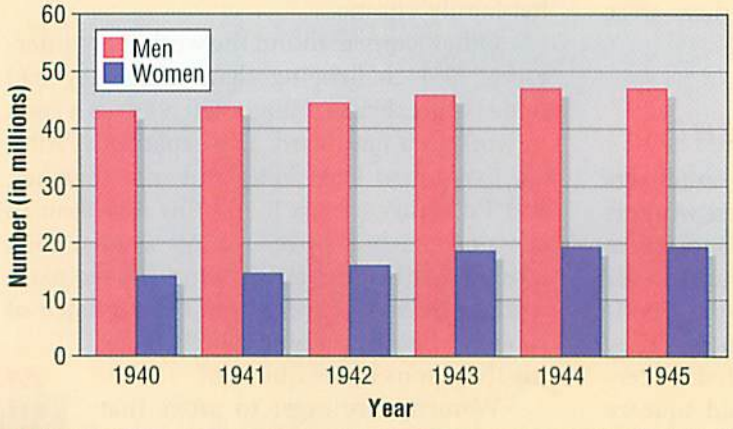
Problems for Working Women

In spite of the benefits of working, women faced a number of problems in the workplace. Some faced hostile reactions from other workers, particularly in jobs previously held only by men. Many managers were uneasy about mixing the sexes, and so set up strict rules. General Motors, for example, fired male supervisors and female employees found "fraternizing," or socializing with one another.

Working women also worried about leaving their children alone. More than half a million women with children under the age of 10 worked during the war, and day-care centers were scarce. Even when care was available, most women preferred to have family members or friends care for their children. This often required making complicated arrangements. Women were encouraged to work, but at the same time they continued to also be responsible for their children and their homes.

Women also earned much less than men doing the same jobs. The National War Labor Board declared in the fall of 1942 that women who performed "work of the same quality and quantity" as men should receive equal pay. This policy was widely ignored. Women began at the bottom, with the lowest-paying jobs. Because they had less **seniority,** or status that is derived from length of service, they commonly advanced more slowly. Their wages reflected these patterns. At the Willow Run plant in 1945, women earned a yearly average of $2,928, compared with $3,363 for men. Conditions improved toward the end of the war, but the gap never disappeared.

Labor Force, 1940–1945



Interpreting Charts Wartime production created a demand for workers, both male and female. ***Economics*** *Compare the overall trend in women's employment during World War II with the ratio of women to men in the labor force during the war.*

After the War

The government drive to bring women to defense plants assumed that when the war was over, women would leave their jobs and return home. War work was just "for the duration." While many women wanted to continue working at the war's end, the pressures to return home were intense. Returning servicemen expected to get their jobs back. They also longed

Sisters under the apron—Yesterday's war worker becomes today's housewife.

What's Become of Rosie the Riveter?

VIEWING HISTORY

Government campaigns aimed at women did an about-face once the war was over. Posters such as this one tried to persuade women to give up their factory jobs and return to full-time homemaking. ***Culture*** *Why were women being urged out of the work force?*

to return to the kind of family life they had known before the war. A new campaign by industrialists and government officials now encouraged women to leave their jobs. Articles in women's magazines changed their emphasis after the war, too. They focused on homemaking, cooking, and child care, starting a trend that would continue into the 1950s and 1960s.

As the economy returned to peacetime, twice as many women as men lost factory jobs. Some women were tired of their defense jobs, which in many cases were not very fulfilling once the wartime sense of urgency ended. They looked forward to returning home. Others, however, had discovered new satisfactions in the workplace that made them want to keep on working. As one woman stated, "For the first time in their lives, they worked outside the home. They realized that they were capable of doing something more than cook a meal." Some women also continued to work part time to bring in additional income.

SECTION 3 REVIEW

Comprehension

1. ***Key Terms*** Define: (a) Rosie the Riveter; (b) seniority.
2. ***Summarizing the Main Idea*** How did employment patterns for women change during World War II?
3. ***Organizing Information*** Make a two-column chart comparing the benefits of war work for women with the problems and disadvantages they faced. Label one column *Benefits*, the other *Drawbacks and Problems*.

Critical Thinking

4. ***Analyzing Time Lines*** Review the time line at the start of the section. Choose one event and relate it to present-day conditions for working women.
5. ***Recognizing Bias*** Although women workers were recruited during the war, once it ended they were pressured to leave their jobs and return to domestic work. What underlying beliefs does this series of events suggest?

Writing Activity

6. ***Writing a Persuasive Essay*** How would you prepare an all-male work force to accept women workers? Write a short guide that will convince the workers to accept the newcomers as equals.

Identifying Assumptions

Identifying assumptions means recognizing the unstated beliefs that may underlie a statement or action. An assumption is an idea that a person takes for granted as true. In fact, it may prove either true or false, but in order to determine the accuracy of an assumption, you must first be able to recognize it as such.

Editorials, opinion pieces, and illustrations frequently contain many assumptions. Magazine covers, such as the one shown here, are often excellent sources of information about public attitudes toward historical events. At the same time, illustrations may be drawn in such a way that they also reveal assumptions of the artist.

By the time artist Norman Rockwell's portrayal of "Rosie the Riveter" appeared on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1943, American women by the thousands were already making history. They were working in nontraditional factory jobs, assembling ships and airplanes for the country's war effort.

To examine the accuracy of the image portrayed in this illustration, use the following steps to identify and evaluate the assumptions on which it may be based.

1. ***Determine the subject of the cover illustration.*** Study the illustration carefully and answer the following questions. (a) What is the woman in the illustration doing? (b) Who is "Rosie the Riveter" supposed to represent? (c) What general subject or issue does the illustration address? (d) What is the overall message of the illustration?

2. ***Define the artist's point of view.*** To help determine if the artist is presenting a particular viewpoint, answer the following questions. (a) What seems to be the artist's purpose in creating this illustration? (b) How would you describe the artist's attitude toward the subject? (c) What aspects of the illustration clearly express this point of view? (d) Are there any elements in the illustration that seem to contradict each other? If so, what might the artist be trying to convey through these contradictions?

3. ***Identify the assumptions on which the artist's viewpoint is based and decide whether they are valid.*** To help decide if the artist's assumptions can be supported by facts, answer the following questions. (a) What assumptions, if any, does the artist make about the nature of the work performed by the woman in the illustration? Does the artist make any assumptions about why she holds this job? (b) What assumptions, if any, does the artist make about the women who work in nontraditional jobs? (c) Can any aspects of a person's physical appearance, such as clothes or posture, be reliably linked to his or her occupation? Explain. (d) How can you find out if the artist's apparent assumptions are valid?

TEST FOR SUCCESS

Choose an advertisement from a current magazine and analyze it by determining (a) the assumptions made by the advertiser about the audience for this product; (b) the purpose of the ad; and (c) the artist's or photographer's point of view.