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AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE UNITED
STATES DURING BOTH WORLD WARS

By
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The Progressive Movement

At the end of the eighteenth century and into the beginning of the nineteenth century in the United States and indeed in much of the Western world, a woman's life "was largely confined to the care of family members and home."¹ Women were the housekeepers, the clothes makers, they grew the gardens, and they were the family nurses, but were treated like second class citizens. Having all those responsibilities meant that women had little time to work outside of the home. There was also no reliable contraception and they never knew when they would become pregnant. A woman could not vote. A married woman could not own property and any property or money that she owned before her marriage, became her husband's property once she married him. Although, around the middle of the nineteenth century, some states had enacted laws granting married women the right to own their own property. Also, during the middle of the nineteenth century, "despite a movement to increase women's economic liberty, most states continued to reinforce patriarchal authority within the home by restricting women's ability to engage in the economic world beyond their households."² Due to increased industrialization during the late nineteenth century, women began to land jobs outside of the home. Most of these women who worked outside the home were still domestic servants for other people, but a growing number of women were working in factories. Even though women were gaining these opportunities, they faced a wage gap even when they were performing the same jobs as men. A lot of women worked in tenement sweatshops with grueling work hours for very low pay. But

¹ "To the Life of the Victorian Woman," Victoria's Past, accessed March 19, 2017, <http://www.victoriapast.com/LifeofVictorianWoman/LifeofVictorianWoman.html>.

² Ibid.

most women were hired to do the jobs that required little skill, reserving the higher paying skilled labor for men only.

Purpose

This paper will argue that prior to World War I, women's roles in the workplace were limited and so were their legal rights within and outside of the workplace. It will show how women began to take on new roles during World War I, which led to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, and laid the path for women's opportunities and legal rights in the workplace and military during World War II as well. The paper starts out covering the time period of the late 1800s, and then the paper covers the time period of the early 1900s to give an overview of what the lives of women looked like before the onset of World War I. The paper then discusses the time period during the war from 1917-1918. The paper will go on to discuss the events of the 1920s and 1930s, including the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the Great Depression. The paper concludes by covering the time period of World War II in the early to mid-1940s. The evidence used in this paper was collected from a variety of sources including historical books, reputable websites, and a video documentary.

The New Woman

By the turn of the twentieth century, the "new woman" had emerged. The term "new woman" was used to describe a woman who simply "exercised control over their own lives be it personal, social, or economic."³ By 1900, ten percent of the workforce outside of farm work was comprised of women. This was up from the 6.4 percent 30 years prior. Many women were

³ "New Woman," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, February 28, 2017, accessed March 23, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Woman.

working in canneries, textile mills, and clothing factories. They also worked as teachers, nurses, and clerical workers. Most women were still staying at home, taking care of the home, having children and taking care of them and their husbands as well. But technology helped relieve some women of jobs in the home. "Electric service, indoor plumbing, central heating, and the small power motor revolutionized homemaking. The growth of commercial laundries and expanding factory production of clothing, processed foods, and other household items relieved women of many tasks and created hundreds of jobs for them outside the home."⁴ Women were being given jobs that had always been held by men. In the clerical field for example, in 1880, 94 percent of all clerical workers were men. By 1910, the percentage had dropped to 65.8 percent as more employers were hiring women to do the work. Even though women were being employed outside of the home, they were still being paid considerably less than men and many women faced miserable working conditions. Since women were not allowed membership into the labor unions that benefited men, women formed their own labor unions. They participated in strikes, demanding that working conditions and pay improve. Florence Kelley, who was a social and political reformer in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, established the National Consumers League in 1899. "Under Kelley's leadership, the League established labeling certifying that products were made under fair working conditions, protected workers from exploitation by employers, promoted food inspection and advocated for child labor restrictions, the limiting of work hours and establishing minimum wage laws for women."⁵ There would be

⁴ Miriam B. Murphy, "A Look at Working Women in the Early 20th Century," Utah History to Go, November 1995, accessed March 22, 2017, http://historytogo.utah.gov/utah_chapters/statehood_and_the_progressive_era/lookatworkingwomenintheearly20thcentury.html.

⁵ "National Consumers League," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, January 10, 2007, accessed March 22, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Consumers_League.

other organizations formed in the twentieth century that continued the fight for women's rights in the workplace. The spirit behind this fight went together with the women's suffrage movement.

Women Suffragists

There were several women suffragists in the United States who continued the fight for women's rights that had previously been fought by women such as Olympia Brown, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In 1884, Brown served as the president of the Wisconsin Woman Suffrage Association until 1912. She succeeded in winning the right for Wisconsin women to vote in any election that pertained to school matters. Anthony and Stanton were partners in the fight for women's suffrage, together forming the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) which eventually merged with the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in which Stanton was the President and Anthony was the Vice President. The NAWSA focused on pushing for state suffrage amendments in the hopes of eventually forcing Congress to enact a federal amendment. "Its membership, which was about seven thousand at the time it was formed, eventually increased to two million, making it the largest voluntary organization in the nation. It played a pivotal role in the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution."⁶ Brown, who had previously been Vice President of the NWSA, founded the Federal Suffrage Association after the merging of the NWSA and the AWSA because she did not agree with the

⁶ "National American Woman Suffrage Association," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, March 18, 2017, accessed March 19, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_American_Woman_Suffrage_Association.

NAWSA's focus on state suffrage. Anthony and Stanton both died in the early part of the twentieth century.

In 1911, Jane Addams became the Vice President of the NAWSA. "She first got involved in the suffrage movement in 1897, when she gave a speech for women's suffrage and she attended her first meeting of the National American Women's Suffrage Association in 1906 and from then on, she became quite active."⁷ Before her work with the NAWSA, in 1889 Adams founded a settlement house located in Chicago called the Hull House. The Hull House consisted of a group of mostly women who would go out into the neighborhoods and try to improve the conditions that the poor and immigrant families faced during the time of expanding urban industrial life. Improving the lives of those who were struggling, whether through teaching them about public health, offering things such as different classes and clubs they could participate in, showed the government that there was a need for women to be involved in social reform through professions like social work and public health. Addams had also previously founded the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) in 1903. The WTUL was established to improve working conditions for women, encourage them to form unions or join existing ones, and also established the eight-hour work day and a set minimum wage for women workers.

In arguing for women's suffrage in the Ladies Home Journal in 1910, Jane Addams appealed to her middle-class readers by pointing out that women in modern society no longer performed the functions of producing for their families all the goods that they would consume at home; if they cared about the health and safety of their own families – the food they ate, the water they drank, the diseases they might catch – they ought to care

⁷ Faiza Elmasry, "Honoring Unsung Hero of Women's Rights Movement," VOA, August 26, 2010, accessed March 19, 2017, <http://www.voanews.com/a/honoring-unsung-hero-of-womens-rights-movement-----101641753/162127.html>.

about the conditions all around them, and they ought to want the ability to vote on these public concerns.⁸

Addams knew that the right of women to vote would mean that women could vote for those who would enact legislation that aligned with her views on social issues, such as broadening the roles of women in the workplace and providing them safe working conditions and fair wages.

Suffragists Alice Paul and Lucy Burns were American activists who met one another in London, and they were both heavily involved in the women's suffrage movement that was occurring in Britain during the same time. Upon their return to the United States, Paul and Burns began participating in the NAWSA. Paul was asked to speak at the 1910 NAWSA convention. "After this major opportunity, Paul and Burns proposed to NAWSA leadership a campaign to gain a federal amendment guaranteeing the vote for women. This was wholly contrary to NAWSA's state-by-state strategy. Paul and Burns were laughed at by NAWSA leadership; the only exception was Jane Addams, who suggested that the women tone down their plan."⁹ With the support of the leaders of the NAWSA, Paul and Burns organized a parade in support of women's suffrage that was to be held on the eve of Woodrow Wilson's inauguration as President of the United States in 1913. On inauguration day, 5,000 women showed up to march in the parade. This led Paul and Burns to form a new organization called the "Congressional Union". This organization continued the fight that Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had started in the nineteenth century; the push for a federal suffrage amendment. Paul created yet

⁸ Miriam Cohen, "Women and the Progressive Movement," The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, accessed March 20, 2017, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/essays/women-and-progressive-movement>.

⁹ "Alice Paul," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, March 13, 2017, accessed March 21, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alice_Paul.

another women's suffrage organization called the "National Woman's Party" (NWP), in 1916. Eventually, in 1917, the Congressional Union and the NWP merged to be known only as the NWP. The focus of Paul and the NWP was to place pressure on the political party of the President and of those in control of the house, which were the Democrats. This meant that Paul and those involved within her organization held all Democrats personally responsible for failing to come up with a women's suffrage amendment. This was at odds with the strategy of the leaders of the NAWSA, but the aggressive style in which Paul operated the NWP helped keep their purpose a focus of public attention, whereas the message of the NAWSA tended to be more restrained. Meanwhile, Burns was involved in nearly every single facet of the NWP. She basically took on the responsibility of all of the ins and outs of the organization, including teaching other women about conducting campaigns and how to influence politicians and the general public.

"Pressure for new direction and leadership in NAWSA grew with the challenge from Paul and the subsequent loss of state referenda in four key eastern states in 1915: New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. The election of Carrie Chapman Catt to the presidency of NAWSA, however, pointed in a new direction."¹⁰ Although Catt had previously already served as the President of the NAWSA, her re-election was extremely important for the cause of a women's suffrage amendment. She was known as a brilliant strategist. Whereas Paul was still focused solely on suffrage at the federal level, Catt was focused on both. She had an approach that was called the "Winning Plan". This plan entailed focusing on suffrage at both the federal and state levels. Catt determined that it would be best to concentrate on pushing the issue in states where the vote for women's suffrage could be won. Then her plan on the federal level

¹⁰ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1989), 168.

was to put pressure on politicians in the states where women were already allowed to vote, to fight for a federal amendment. As far as the states that were highly unlikely to ever pass a state amendment, Catt had suffragists in those areas concentrate on winning the fight for “partial suffrage”, allowing them the vote in various local elections. She figured that if she could win at least one southern state and one eastern state, doing so would help them gain a momentum that would be vital to an eventual federal suffrage amendment.

The plan worked like clockwork, taking only four years instead of the six Catt had predicted. Arkansas broke the barrier in the south in 1917 and New York, where activists had continued to work without missing a beat after their 1915 defeat, contributed to an east coast victory. The ‘suffrage noise’ of the National Woman’s Party pickets surely aided the cause as well.¹¹

Even with all of that momentum in 1917, the country’s overall focus shifted to America’s entrance into World War I. But the war would prove to be advantageous to American women and their fight for equality.

World War I

When the war began in 1914, even though the United States was not yet involved, it caused a cut off in immigration numbers. This caused a shortage in the workforce. In 1915, the United States started getting war orders from Europe. At that time, the United States was still neutral in the war, but Europe needed more ammunition, small arms, shrapnel shells, and armored cars. The companies that would perform this work allowed for the hiring of women due to the already existent shortage in the workplace. Women started leaving the textile mills, corset factories, and department stores that they had been working in and started working in the armament factories. By the summer of 1915, there were 5,000 women working at the Remington Union Metallic

¹¹ Ibid., 170.

Cartridge Company in Connecticut. These women went from making six dollars a week to making ten dollars a week. Upon America's entry into World War I in 1917, there was an even higher demand for industrial labor. American men being sent overseas left even more opportunities for the jobs to be filled by women instead. But at first, the government tried to keep the jobs filled with the men that were available to work them. This proved to be insufficient as the demand was just too high. "World War I has been credited with causing unprecedented numbers of women to enter the labor market. However, though it is true that 1 million women took up war work in the expanding munitions industries, aircraft factories, and shipyards, only 5 percent were new hires. The real change occurred in the type of employment."¹² They began to work jobs where they operated machinery and used hand tools. Besides shipyards, aircraft factories, and munitions industries, they worked in places like lumber mills, steel mills, machine shops, railroads, and oil refineries. They worked as chauffeurs, ticket sellers, street car conductors, and railroad track workers, to name a few. But they also continued to work the traditional jobs normally held by women. They made the clothing and food, and other necessities for the men fighting over seas. They also performed jobs such as "inspecting and packing underwear, socks, shirts, mosquito netting, and other small articles."¹³ Women were also working in peanut processing plants, wooden-box factories, and tobacco plants, and were found working in lumberyards, and working making items for the Army such as awnings and tents.

One industry that saw a sizeable increase in women employees was, of course, the manufacturing industry. "At the close of the First World War, women constituted some 20

¹² "United States, Homefront during World War I," What-when-how, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://what-when-how.com/women-and-war/united-states-home-front-during-world-war-i/>.

¹³ Carrie Brown, *Rosie's Mom: The Forgotten Workers of the First World War* (University Press of New England, 2013), 102.

percent of the working force in all manufacturing industries in the United States.”¹⁴ Even though there were one million women working in the munitions industries, there were another two million women employed in factories that had nothing to do with munitions. These jobs ranged from transport systems, fabricated textiles, and metal products. “Further, female hands would play an essential role in providing sufficient food, clothing, and housing to equip the 4 million men in service at domestic installations and on overseas battlefields.”¹⁵ In 1917, the Committee on Women in Industry was formed. Two women by the name of Mary Van Kleeck and Mary Anderson were members. Together they made some discoveries. The Brooklyn Navy yard had contracts with factories to make Army and Navy uniforms. Women home workers were doing most of the sewing, and the homes were licensed and inspected. The work that was being done in some factories provided satisfactory working conditions. But there were a lot of factories that were anything but satisfactory.

In Brooklyn, thousands of women worked on uniform shirts in dark and dirty factories, where the work areas were crowded and cluttered and the rest rooms were piled with broken furniture. The workers here were the young and the desperate: girls under sixteen, and Jewish, Italian, and Polish immigrants, mixed in with a few black migrants fresh from the exhausted tenant farms of the south. These shops also sent sewing out to home workers, who helped keep the hours long and the wages low for the women in the factories.¹⁶

In Jeffersonville, Indiana, the Army had contracted work out to make Army shirts. A woman by the name of Amy Hewes, who was the Secretary of the Committee on Women in

¹⁴ "Employment of Women in War Production," Social Security Administration, July 1942, accessed March 29, 2017, <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v5n7/v5n7p4.pdf>.

¹⁵ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labor Movement From World War I to the Present* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1980), 4.

¹⁶ Carrie Brown, *Rosie's Mom*, 102.

Industry, went to Jeffersonville to investigate the working conditions. When she arrived, she discovered that a ferryboat was going back and forth across the Ohio River every 30 minutes, delivering the sewing work to women who were living in very poor conditions along the river. Some of the women were also working amongst chickens and pigs. “Hewes noted that the women sewed with ordinary domestic sewing machines, which were slow and produced low quality work, while in the established clothing centers, workers were still being laid off.”¹⁷

One of the most notable jobs in the industry was a job in the aircraft industry. Airplanes were still a relatively new invention and America only had 16 aircraft plants that employed 211 workers. In 1918, the industry in America had changed due to the war and by that time, had 40 aircraft plants that employed 27,000 people, 6,000 of those were women. During this time, airplanes were still mostly made out of wood.

Women in the woodworking shop helped shape the wooden parts, bored holes where one wing part needed to pass through another, and operated a machine that nailed wooden parts together. With bare hands and arms, women dipped the light wooden parts into varnish and hung them on a rack to dry. Another group shaped and smoothed the propellers, then finished them with oil and varnish.¹⁸

Not only did the women help shape the parts and dip them in varnish, they also helped the men assemble the rudders and tails, the wing panels and ailerons, and fasten them all together. The parts of the airplanes were all put together with metal parts that were made at the plant by machinists who were mostly women. They helped the men assemble major parts of the airplanes including the fuselage. And after the frames were built, the women laid the flooring and then installed all of the lighting. The airplanes manufactured back then had heavy linen that had been

¹⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸ Ibid., 143.

sewed together and draped over the wings. The women then stitched this linen to the ribs of the wings. After that work was done, the women then put more varnish on the wings which made the linen airtight and helped the plane gain more lift as it was flying. Throughout the entire process of making the airplanes, women were involved in every step, also as inspectors. “With micrometers and calipers in hand, they made sure that each bolt and screw matched the blueprint specifications for length and width, and for the number and spacing of the threads. Where the ends of cables had been wound into place, the exact number of wraps had to be counted by inspectors.”¹⁹ The inspectors also inspected other cables and mechanisms that were vital to the operation of the airplanes. The final step in the process was to put the final coat of paint on the airplanes. The women also did this as well as putting the insignia on the airplanes.

Another industry that saw one of the biggest rises in female employment was the railroad industry. There was an increase of 321 percent in women railway workers from 1917 to the end of 1918. A total of 101,785 women worked for the railroad by October 1918. “Most women railway workers performed clerical and semiclerical tasks. Of the 101,785 women employed on October 1, 1918, 72 percent (73,620) worked as clerks of all kinds, stenographers, typists, comptometer operators, accountants, ticket sellers, and information agents.”²⁰ The remainder of the 28,000 women worked in jobs such as laborers who cleaned train stations, offices, and the inside of the trains. They worked in the laundry, as matrons, nurses, and as telephone and telegraph operators. Though most of the women performed traditional women’s work for the railroad industry, some women worked in non-traditional roles.

¹⁹ Ibid., 148.

²⁰ Maurine Weiner Greenwald, "Women Workers and World War I: The American Railroad Industry, a Case Study," *Journal of Social History* 9, no. 2 (1975), accessed March 28, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3786250>.

They labored as turntable operators, packers of journal boxes, and attendants in toolrooms and storerooms. They worked as level adjusters in signal towers, checkers in freight houses, and as car clerks. Other women became operators of bolt-threading, nut-tapping, and car-bearing machines as well as turret lathes, angle-cock grinders, hammers, and cranes. Women also widened their employment by becoming air-brake cleaners, repairers, and testers as well as electric welders, oxy-acetylene cutters and welders, and core makers.²¹

Most women working for the railroad received equal pay for equal work, most except for black women. Florence Clark, who was one of four field agents for the Women's Service Section, discovered that some black women had recently staged a walkout and would not come back to work unless they received a pay raise. These women had the title of laborer and had been performing the job of cleaning the inside of the rail cars for 12 years without a raise. After the walkout, they were given a raise that amounted to three-fourths of a cent per hour and were then making 33 cents per hour. This was still less than the 35 cents per hour that white women and men were making doing the same job. Clark also discovered a woman who was working inside of the repair shops, testing and repairing brake valves, along with cleaning them, who was being paid the hourly wage of the white laborers, while the men in the repair shops doing the testing and repairing work were being paid 50 cents per hour. At the Mount Clare railroad shop in Baltimore, Maryland, there were 15 women who were working as welders, drill press operators, and blacksmith's helpers. "Outside in the repair yard, three or four other women did oxyacetylene welding, lugging their sixty-five-pound tanks of oxygen and acetylene around the yard to get close to the work."²² These women faced great adversity from their male coworkers and as much as they tried to scare the women off into not coming back, they could not. So, the men started refusing to work with them.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Carrie Brown, *Rosie's Mom*, 169.

Even with the obstacles that women in industry faced, industries who hired women to take the place of men remarked how in a lot of cases, women performed the jobs better than the men had been performing them, and that they produced more product. They were producing more product than the men had been producing because women were used to working at a fast pace to meet quotas in previous work. They did not work at a slow pace like the union men did. They immediately made a good impression and it became quite obvious that women were perfectly capable of working these blue collar jobs previously reserved for men only.

Women's Equality in the Workplace

Even though employers were hiring women to do jobs previously reserved for men, employers were paying the women less than they paid the men to do them, and without union protection, the employers could get away with it. Also, women workers were classified as “helpers”, being that they were helping fill the gaps for the war effort. Classifying the women as “helpers” was a way for an employer to justify paying them lower wages. Even though male employees strongly opposed the women being allowed to become union members, the government stepped in and requested that the unions accept women. “The federal government had requested that national and international unions admit women where contracts included closed or union shops, and where the unions excluded women or blacks as a rule.”²³ The unions that did begin to accept women members did so with contempt.

In some unions you could get thrown out or fined if you taught skill to a woman because the men were afraid that the women would come in and lower their wages because women had always worked for less money than men. There was a lot of gender conflict in the shops, a lot of hostility. There were places where men would insult the women, they would use the restroom and leave the door open to embarrass them, they wouldn't

²³ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American*, 59.

give them privacy for changing their clothes, and they would cat call as they walked in. Some factories had to set up different doorways and different arrival times for the men and women so that the men wouldn't harass the women.²⁴

Some unions pushed a "necessity clause" that only allowed women membership for the duration of the war. And others accepted women only if the women still worked traditional female jobs while the men continued to work jobs only reserved for them. They used the union membership of the women to strengthen their bargaining power and that was all they wanted them for. And there were some unions who just flat out refused to employ women.

In 1918, the Department of Labor created the Women in Industry Service (later known as the United States Women's Bureau) to resolve the issues that women workers were facing to prevent a disruption in wartime production. "Its function was to advise the Secretary of Labor on all matters affecting the employment of women. The Women in Industry Service was also represented on the War Labor Policies Board, organized to represent those departments of government concerned with production for the war, and concerned therefore with labor problems as a fundamental aspect of production."²⁵ Mary Van Kleeck was named as Director of the Women in Industry Service, and Mary Anderson was named Assistant Director. Their boss at the Department of Labor asked them to do something for him:

They were asked to establish a list of industries where it was safe for women to work. Well, Mary Anderson and Mary Van Kleeck were rather subversive women and they didn't really want to do that. They realized we have this opportunity in this crisis to change working conditions not just for women, but for everyone. So they said to their

²⁴ *Rosie's Mom: Forgotten Workers of the First World War*, perf. Carrie Brown, Vimeo, accessed March 29, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/177114352>.

²⁵ Kimberly Jensen, "Women's Mobilization for War (USA)," *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, October 8, 2014, accessed March 23, 2017, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1014421?seq=2#page_scan_tab_contents.

boss: No. We won't give you a list of industries that are safe for women; we're going to make the industry safe for everybody. We will give you a list of things that people have to do and if they can satisfy those criteria, then they can hire women.²⁶

Also in 1918, Resolution 92 was adopted by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Basically, what Resolution 92 stated was that the AFL stood for equal pay for equal work and that the unions should continue to make an effort to admit women. But even with the words of Resolution 92, Samuel Gompers, the President of the AFL, was hesitant about women workers. "Women activists struggled to win support and encouragement from an AFL deeply biased against women workers."²⁷ In 1917, Gompers made vocal his opinion about the trend of women entering the new jobs because he was concerned about what would happen to American motherhood. Gompers had a "Don't Sacrifice Womanhood" message that he placed "in the hands of the secretary of every local union of women wage earners throughout the country to influence them not to abandon their traditional occupations and seek to enter those primarily suited for men."²⁸ Gompers, obviously feeling threatened by women workers, did all he could to try and ensure that men didn't have to compete with women for any job. The beliefs of Gompers led to many disagreements between the AFL and the WTUL. Even though there were unions that either refused to admit women or regrettably admitted them, there were unions who accepted women with open arms and the women ended up making many important and positive contributions to them. "Mary Van Kleeck wrote that 'industry, not feminism, opened the way' for women to enter new areas of the work experience, and that 'the war appears to have released

²⁶ *Rosie's Mom: Forgotten Workers of the First World War*, perf. Carrie Brown, Vimeo, accessed March 29, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/177114352>.

²⁷ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 158-9.

²⁸ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American*, 61.

the power of women's industrial processes more effectively than all the preaching of economic independence during the past fifty years.'"²⁹ Before the end of World War I, nearly ten million women found themselves employed at some point during the war.

Women's Military Contributions During World War I

Even though women military nurses existed prior to World War I, it marked the first time women military nurses in the Army and Navy were allowed to serve overseas in the Army and Navy Nurse Corps which were created in 1901 and 1908. They did so without any rank as the military would not recognize it. "And the first time, women who were not nurses could enlist in the Navy and Marine Corps. The U.S. Army refused to enlist women officially, but relied on them as civilian volunteers and two women were permitted in the Coast Guard."³⁰ There were only 563 active duty nurses at the beginning of World War I, but by war's end, there were 22,000 nurses that had served. None of the women that had served in the Army Nurse Corps received any military recognition. But those who served with the Navy Nurse Corps did, as they had been enlisted as "Yeoman". There was a lot of negativity surrounding the idea of women having roles in the U.S. military, but the implementation of using women to fill specific roles meant that men could go out to the battlefield and fight rather than perform jobs that could be performed by women instead. The Army also provided other jobs to women. These jobs included "clerks, fingerprint experts, journalists and translators. The Army Signal Corps also utilized women, enlisting 700 women, 332 of whom served overseas as bilingual French-speaking

²⁹ Ibid., 5.

³⁰ "Women in the US Military - World War I Era," Women in the US Military - World War I Era, accessed March 26, 2017, <https://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/rr/s01/cw/students/leeann/historyandcollections/history/lnmrewwi.html>.

telephone operators.”³¹ One of the most notable jobs was the job of telephone operator. These women became known as the “Hello Girls”. These women operated the switchboards that carried the conversations of Americans while abroad at war. Many were even operating on the front lines and under fire while working. None of these women would receive any official military service recognition upon war’s end. In the Navy, due to a manpower shortage, the Naval Act of 1916 was created. This act drafted men into the Navy or called on them to volunteer. The language in which the act was written inadvertently opened the door for women to volunteer for the Navy Reserve Force. Because of this, women were used for jobs other than just nursing. They were also used to fill roles such as chauffeurs, messengers, stenographers, and radio operators. “A large number of these young women were assigned to posts away from home. Because the Navy had no protocol for women on naval bases, the female yeomen had to make their own arrangements for living quarters. Some were lucky and could find a place to stay with family or friends nearby. Many yeomen roomed at the YWCA or shared other apartments.”³²

The YWCA (Young Women’s Christian Association) had been created in the mid-1800s and one of its purposes, as a women’s campaign, was to help women with the issues they faced during the war, this included helping provide them housing. Another thing that the YWCA did during World War I was lobby for a woman’s corps. In Britain, thousands of women in the military were part of the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). Unfortunately, the lobbying that they did was unsuccessful and the WAAC would not exist until World War II. “While the

³¹ "How women helped win the Great War," [www.army.mil](https://www.army.mil/article/14061/How_women_helped_win_the_Great_War), accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.army.mil/article/14061/How_women_helped_win_the_Great_War.

³² "The Story of the Female Yeomen during the First World War," National Archives and Records Administration, accessed March 26, 2017, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/fall/yeoman-f.html>.

YWCA's largest contribution to the war effort was its work among female workers in war industries, the association also operated Hostess Houses in military training camps. These Houses served as 'homes away from home' designed to entertain wives and mothers who came to visit their husbands and sons."³³ But the support of women wasn't their only purpose. There were a number of other organizations that formed a coalition with the YWCA to create the United War Work Campaign, Inc. The goal of this campaign was to raise \$170,000,000 for the providing of entertainment to the American troops overseas during World War I. One of the groups involved in this successful effort was the Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army came to America in the late 1800s when the daughter of the founder came to America from England. Her name was Evangeline Booth. Salvation Army officers from America went to France in 1917 and immediately got to work assisting in the war effort. The group consisted of approximately 500 volunteers, of which the women volunteers were called "lassies". The "lassies" provided a clothes-mending service, they baked cakes and pies for the men, and they also made them lemonade. One of the most popular foods that the women made for the men were doughnuts. In a 1919 article written for the Kalamazoo Gazette, "Stella Carmichael, a Salvation Army 'lassie,' recalls that what she and her fellow women volunteers did 'no woman in the United States thought of doing.' She notes in the article that they would work 18 to 20 hours 'constantly baking doughnuts and filling coffee.'"³⁴ The Salvation Army also conducted Bible classes for different denominations, they provided entertainment such as

³³ "Young Women's Christian Association," For the Boys Over There, July 2015, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://unitedwarwork.com/groups/young-womens-christian-association/>.

³⁴ Gena Philibert-Ortega, "World War I Articles Recall Memories of Doughnuts & Lassies," Genealogy Bank, February 18, 2013, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://blog.genealogybank.com/world-war-i-articles-recall-memories-of-doughnuts-lassies.html>.

concerts, and also offered the soldiers a money-transfer system. This system allowed the soldiers to have their paychecks transferred home and hand delivered to family members by a local Salvation Army corps officer. Officers in the Salvation Army also served as chaplains and nurses. Booth became the organization's first woman General and "was awarded the prestigious Distinguished Service Medal by President Woodrow Wilson in 1919 for her wartime assistance."

³⁵ The contributions that the Salvation Army made to the war effort further showcased the importance of women's roles at war and in the workplace.

Another notable organization where women made major contributions to the war effort was the American Red Cross. Members of the Red Cross had already been overseas since the start of the war in 1914. Membership numbers were limited and funds were scarce, but when the United States declared war against Germany in 1917, membership numbers soared. Women served as nurses and many even lost their lives on the battlefield while trying to save the lives of soldiers, or due to contracting diseases from patients. "The work nurses performed in France was typically emergency work, lasting many hours in fairly poor conditions. Red Cross nurses treated infections, terrible wounds, mustard gas burns and exposure, and other severe war traumas."³⁶ After the war ended, there was a horrible flu outbreak that quickly became a pandemic. Red Cross nurses worked tirelessly to assist those who were sick and/or dying. Even though nearly 500,000 American citizens would die from the flu, thousands more were saved by these women.

³⁵ "Salvation Army in World War I (Auxiliary Corps)," What-when-how, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://what-when-how.com/women-and-war/salvation-army-in-world-war-i-auxiliary-corps/>.

³⁶ Jacob Downs, "The American Red Cross," Home Before the Leaves Fall: The Great War 1914-1918, November 14, 2014, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://wwionline.org/articles/american-red-cross/>.

The End of World War I

World War I came to an end on November 11th, 1918. After the war ended, thousands of women were let go from their employers within a few days and thousands more by the end of the year. This angered women because the government had urged these women to take the jobs in the first place, and now the women were being discarded like they never even mattered. There were women who got to hold on to their jobs longer if their household's main provider was still overseas. "The shorter hours and higher wages did not last beyond the end of the war and certainly the access to those more skilled jobs did not last beyond the end of the war."³⁷ By the end of 1919, most of the women who found themselves working for the railroad during the war, had been driven out of their jobs. Women were being replaced with men wherever available men could be found. The War Labor Board had been established upon America's entrance into World War I at the request of President Woodrow Wilson. The board endorsed collective bargaining units within the workplace and encouraged companies to allow their workers to organize unions. The government had a policy that let them fulfill their contract work with union labor. Because of this, the AFL would see their memberships swell by over three million people. When the war was over, the Wilson administration did away with the War Labor Board.

Within three months of the Armistice, the American economy entered a recession brought about by the transition from war to peacetime production. When normal production resumed, employers were determined to operate without unions and with much lower wages than they had granted to workers under government pressure and as a patriotic gesture to win the war.³⁸

³⁷ *Rosie's Mom: Forgotten Workers of the First World War*, perf. Carrie Brown, Vimeo, accessed March 29, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/177114352>.

³⁸ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American*, 101.

This created a lot of hostility and as a result, during 1919 alone, there were 3,630 strikes that involved 4,160,000 workers. Women participated in the strikes as well. The opportunities in the workplace that the war had brought to women raised their awareness to the oppression they had been facing before America's involvement in the war. They realized that they could do the jobs that men did and that they could survive without solely depending upon the wages of a man. They also realized that they had been exploited by the government and by the companies that hired them. At the annual AFL convention in 1918, one of the main topics for workers was going back to the eight-hour work day and the right to organize. But noticeably, the only proposal made on behalf of women was that they receive equal pay when doing a man's work and that any unskilled worker should be paid a livable wage. "The only concern expressed over the possibility of postwar unemployment dealt with returning servicemen, who, it was stated, should be aided by the government in finding work, provided with sustenance while unemployed, and given the opportunity for easy and ready access to the land."³⁹

Passage of the Nineteenth Amendment

Because of the way these women, who had accomplished so much during America's short involvement in the war, were treated following the end of the war, women began to wonder what difference they had even made. These women influenced working conditions, by means of safety and health, for all employees, not just women. They changed what had always been acceptable or unacceptable for women to do. These women helped win the war with their overseas work and their work on the home front. Without them, the soldiers wouldn't have had the medical care that they needed overseas, the morale boosting that they needed, nor the weapons, ammunition, and

³⁹ Ibid., 124.

so many other things made by women on the home front, in order for them to be as efficient as possible on the battlefields.

In the midst of a national crisis, more than a million women had moved boldly into war jobs, where they proved their adaptability and their grit. They pushed heavy trucks, mixed chemicals, assembled airplanes, and learned to weld and rivet and operate machine tools. They died in explosions and lost fingers and hands in machinery. They inhaled noxious fumes and faced down prejudice. They struggled to establish their own rights, and they helped win the war.⁴⁰

By the time World War II came along, the conditions for letting women into the factories were much better. The women during World War II did not face all of the struggles nor as much gender discrimination. Because of the contributions of the women workers of World War I, and also with the influence of Carrie Chapman Catt, President Woodrow Wilson changed his stance when it came to women's suffrage in October of 1918.

As reported in *The New York Times* on October 1, 1918, Wilson said, 'I regard the extension of suffrage to women as vitally essential to the successful prosecution of the great war of humanity in which we are engaged.' However, despite Wilson's newfound support, the amendment proposal failed in the Senate by two votes. Another year passed before Congress took up the measure again.⁴¹

In May of 1919, the "Susan B. Anthony Amendment" was again proposed in the House of Representatives. After making it through the House with a 304-89 vote, it then went on to the Senate where this time, it passed by two votes over the two-thirds required majority. After that, it was sent to each state for the approval of ratification and 35 states had approved the amendment by March of 1920. But in the southern states, the issue of ratification wasn't so popular. Seven

⁴⁰ Carrie Brown, *Rosie's Mom*, 197.

⁴¹ "19th Amendment," History.com, 2010, accessed April 3, 2017, <http://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/19th-amendment>.

states rejected the amendment. Approval in two-thirds of the states in America was required in order for the ratification process to proceed. It was left up to Tennessee to make the deciding vote, and even though so many southern states had said no, Tennessee said yes. And with that, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified on August 26, 1920. "On November 2 of that same year, more than 8 million women across the U.S. voted in elections for the first time. It took over 60 years for the remaining 12 states to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. Mississippi was the last to do so, on March 22, 1984."⁴²

The Great Depression

After World War I ended, there was a short depression that lasted until 1923. Women, especially black women, suffered the most due to suddenly finding themselves unemployed after the war. After the economy rebounded from the short-lived depression, Americans started buying stocks in record numbers. Even so, the American economy went into a recession. More goods were being produced than being sold, which in turn slowed down production. The price of stocks continued to rise, but the lack of production meant those companies earned a lot less than they were expected to earn.

On October 24, 1929, the stock market bubble finally burst, as investors began dumping shares en masse. A record 12.9 million shares were traded that day, known as 'Black Thursday.' Five days later, on 'Black Tuesday' some 16 million shares were traded after another wave of panic swept Wall Street. Millions of shares ended up worthless, and those investors who had bought stocks 'on margin' (with borrowed money) were wiped out completely.⁴³

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "The Great Depression," History.com, 2009, accessed April 3, 2017, <http://www.history.com/topics/great-depression>.

For the next three years, every week 100,000 workers lost their jobs. However, women fared better than the men because women were already working for extremely low wages. When it came time to lay people off, men took the biggest hit because of the fact that it was the heavy industries that were impacted the most. This left a lot of women, who were employed in lighter industries, with jobs while the men were on the unemployment line, which caused a lot of anger.

In 1931, one man wrote his congressman and said this:

If less women were employed it would make room for the employment of many of the idle men in our country... in the last analysis woman's true place is her home where she can see to the proper raising of her children while the man earns the living. This... is nature's decree... and I do not believe we are going to have normal and prosperous times until women do return to their homes.⁴⁴

Legislation was introduced on the state level, as well as in cities and school boards, to either prohibit or limit the employing of women. Due to Section 213 of the 1932 Economy Act, women employed by the government soon found themselves out of a job if they had a spouse employed by the government as well. And just because many women were able to retain employment, it doesn't mean that women weren't impacted by layoffs. During the Great Depression, over four million women lost their jobs. Because of the Depression, many schools closed and this resulted in teachers losing their jobs, and most teachers were women. But even so, it was these types of jobs and also the light industrial work that recovered a lot faster during the Depression than the heavy manufacturing jobs did. "Aside from finding work in manufacturing, women had more wage-earning opportunities in non-industrial work such as teaching, nursing, domestic service, and work from the home, and office work than men."⁴⁵ Although most Americans still thought

⁴⁴ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 201.

⁴⁵ "The Depression and World War II (1930-1945)," NWHM.org, 2007, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.nwhm.org/html/exhibits/industry/12.htm>.

that the woman's place was in the home, women worked out of necessity during the Depression. Unemployed women only meant more household destruction. And once the husband of a married woman found work, she did not simply stop working. She continued to work as well because both incomes were needed. But the face of the unemployed man was the one most often seen during the years of the Depression. The unemployed woman was invisible and due to cultural norms, it didn't matter that they were unemployed because they shouldn't have been working in the first place. "It was not acknowledged that such women were most often concentrated in particularly marginal and vulnerable groups: older women and widows, minorities, single women, and the very young. In 1934 there were seventy-five thousand homeless single women in New York City."⁴⁶

The New Deal

In June of 1933, Congress held a special session in which they enacted 15 major bills, one of which was the Federal Emergency Relief Act. This bill provided relief in the form of jobs to the unemployed through agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Public Works Administration (PWA), and the Work Project Administration (WPA). Also included in these bills was a bill for an employee's right to organize labor unions, and also bills for shorter work hours and higher pay. President Roosevelt appointed a woman to the Secretary of Labor position and her name was Frances Perkins. While this was good news as far as more opportunities for women in government, Perkins did not focus on women's rights in the workplace, regardless of the previous fight that she had fought for women's suffrage and social reform legislation. When she served on the New York State

⁴⁶ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 203.

Industrial Commission during the beginning of the Depression, “she called women who worked for ‘pin money’ a ‘menace to society’ and urged those who did not need jobs to devote themselves to motherhood and the home. She called for an increase in the wages of men in order to relieve women who did need jobs of the necessity of working and to enable them to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers.”⁴⁷ Perkins role as Secretary of Labor was important to the development and implementation of the New Deal Programs. The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) became law in 1933. “The aim of the NIRA, Roosevelt’s key plan to get the country out of stagnation and depression, was to reduce unemployment and stimulate business through industrial self-regulation under government-supervised codes of fair competition for each industry regulating wages and hours.”⁴⁸ President Roosevelt appointed a woman by the name of Rose Schneiderman to the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and with the support of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt; she got to work on establishing equal pay for equal work for women. Mrs. Roosevelt was heavily involved in women’s rights before and during her husband’s presidency. The NRA codes that had been established for industrial workers still provided for lower wages for women that were doing the same work as men. When a luncheon occurred at the White House in August of 1933, Mrs. Roosevelt discussed this issue with Perkins and General Hugh S. Johnson who was the head of the NRA. The outcome was that the previously adopted codes that allowed the pay discrepancies were eliminated and new codes were written. Afterwards, 75 percent of the industrial worker codes allowed for equal pay. This meant that there were still instances where women were not being paid an equal wage.

⁴⁷ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American*, 278-9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 279.

The electrical code, which covered 48,855 women, specified a maximum thirty-six-hour workweek and a minimum wage of 40 cents an hour, but with one major exception: any worker who had earned less than 40 cents an hour before July 15, 1929, was to be paid 32 ½ cents an hour. This exception, the Women's Bureau noted, 'struck largely at women.' To complicate matters, a woman who had been laid off prior to the code's institution often found it impossible to return to work, precisely because of the NRA rules, which provided that inexperienced workers could be paid 80 percent of the minimum wage for experienced help.⁴⁹

Also at a disadvantage were black women. Because of the NRA wage codes, many employers decided to fire them and hire white people instead because they considered the wages set by the NRA were wages too high for black people.

In 1934, Mrs. Roosevelt had a conference for women at the White House. She urged for the creation of the female equivalent to the agencies that were created to provide relief to the unemployed, such as a women's version of the CCC, and a women's division of the WPA. Mrs. Roosevelt, along with Ellen Woodward, who was head of the women's division, "made sure that WPA staff at all levels of government designed programs for women. Women were trained not only in such traditional areas as sewing and domestic service but also in educational, library, clerical, musical work, as well as in welding and shipbuilding."⁵⁰ Even with the women's division in the WPA, only 13 percent of workers at the WPA in 1938 were women. And though the WPA had a wage code in place to ensure equal pay for equal work, most of the jobs that women held within the WPA were lower paying jobs anyway. But Mrs. Roosevelt wanted a women's equivalent to the agencies that had been created by the New Deal because, for example, the CCC employed millions of men. The National Youth Administration (NYA) had also been

⁴⁹ Ibid., 280.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 293.

created but provided jobs that were almost exclusively male. Mrs. Roosevelt also urged for the creation of NYA camps for unemployed girls. Even with all of the work that Mrs. Roosevelt and women such as Schneiderman and Woodward accomplished, women still faced frustrating inequality in the workforce.

The Depression saw little advancement for the women's movement. The pay differential between men and women working the same job remained at 60 percent, while the average salary for women was half that of men. The percentage of women in the paid workforce, which had steadily been rising, stalled at one in four workers. However, the number of careers open to women and the pay they received would expand in future decades, thanks to the number of women who joined the labor movement during the 1930s. The number of union women grew 300 percent during the decade as 800,000 women joined organizations such as the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union.⁵¹

The creation of the new agencies as a part of President Roosevelt's New Deal, and the jobs that they created, tremendously helped unemployment numbers, but at the end of the 1930's, 25 percent of Americans were still unemployed. Then World War II came along and America finally clawed its way out of the grips of the Great Depression.

World War II

Even though World War II began in September of 1939, America's involvement didn't begin until December of 1941, when Japan attacked a fleet of American ships that were stationed in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. American men were shipped overseas by the millions with an average deployment time of 16 months. American women had been booted out of the workforce in large numbers at the end of World War I and were discouraged from working during the Great Depression. In fact, before America's involvement in World War II began, America was already

⁵¹ David J. Trowbridge, A History of the United States, vol. 2, 2017, accessed April 5, 2017, http://catalog.flatworldknowledge.com/bookhub/2044?e=trowbridge2_1.0-ch07_s02.

producing materials for others involved in the war effort, and tens of thousands of women were losing their jobs as the materials they were working with were being taken from them and used in war production instead. But that quickly changed after the events at Pearl Harbor. Just as what happened in World War I, women found themselves faced with the task of picking up the pace, filling the jobs that were left open on the home front as men mobilized overseas, and also mobilizing overseas with them. With a rise in labor demands for the war effort, and because of the draft, a large number of women were needed in the workplace, including the military. In a 1943 article in *Fortune* magazine, it was said that America's success in the war depended upon working women. It also said that during war, working is a woman's way.

During the Great Depression, it will be remembered, much attention was devoted to convincing women that their place was in the home, not in the office or on the assembly line, where their presence might deny work to men supporting families. Now, government agencies and special wartime committees launched massive campaigns to convince women to enter new defense jobs or take up old positions abandoned by drafted men.⁵²

On the Home Front

As during World War I, employers did all they could do to prevent having to hire women. But they soon found themselves unable to find enough men to fill the jobs left open by the men away at war. At the start of the war, employers had a set percentage of jobs that could be filled by women, and it started out at 29 percent. In January through July of 1942, it had been raised to 55 percent. "If employers and co-workers were reluctant, so were many women. Although large numbers of women were clearly eager for well-paying jobs, many—especially those with children—faced practical obstacles. Some were unsure about the social ostracism they might

⁵² Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American*, 336.

encounter for crossing the boundary from acceptable female to decidedly male domains.”⁵³

Because of the hesitation by some, the government launched a recruiting campaign through the Office of War Information (OWI), using the media and even Hollywood, to get women to join the workforce. Even though there were some who were hesitant, there were plenty of women who were eager to get to work. Mary Anderson, who was now head of the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor (previously known as the Women in Industry Service), informed the Department of Labor that there were two million women ready to be employed in the defense industries. There were also 20,000 girls who had been participating in the programs offered by the female equivalent of the NYA that had been formed at the end of World War I, that were learning how to weld and repair radios. The War Manpower Commission (WMC) was responsible for providing the labor force needed due to supply and demand. This also meant that they could determine how extreme the need was for women in industry and when they started their recruiting campaign, the War Labor Board (which had been started up again by President Roosevelt in 1942) decided that they would pay the women the same rate of pay that the men had been earning. Once this was decided, previously hesitant women answered the call to go to work.

“Rosie the Riveter” was one of the biggest propaganda tools used during World War II in the recruitment of women. Rosie depicted an accurate image of the millions of women who entered the workforce during the war. Women were not only working in the textile, apparel, and food industries, for example, as they were before the war, but they were now constituting a large number of the people employed in the durable-goods industries. They made “communications equipment, small-arms ammunition, electrical equipment, rubber products, and weapons under 20 millimeters in size. Women became welders and shipbuilders; they built airplanes and

⁵³ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 221.

produced ammunition; they made complicated electrical equipment and riveted the sides of tanks.”⁵⁴ They worked in lumber yards, steel mills, and foundries. They also worked as mechanics and boilermakers. They drove buses, tractors, taxis, and streetcars. They worked as engineers, physicists, and chemists. Women found opportunities to become police officers, lawyers, and journalists. They took over farm operations and did everything a farmer normally did; planting crops, taking care of animals, and doing the harvesting. And two million women were employed as clerical workers. “In addition, three million women served as Red Cross volunteers. Millions of women worked for the Civilian Defense as air-raid wardens, fire watchers, messengers, drivers, auxiliary police. They also devoted hours to scanning the sky with binoculars, looking out for enemy planes.”⁵⁵

An industry that saw a big rise in the number of women employed was the aircraft industry. President Roosevelt wanted 60,000 war planes to be built. Very few women worked in the aircraft industry before World War II, but during the war, depending upon location, as many as 45 percent of the employees at West Coast plants were women. The numbers were around 30 percent in the Midwest and East Coast. The head of the WMC, Paul McNutt, told the press in May of 1943, that making airplanes “was rapidly becoming a ‘woman’s industry. In many warplane plants, 70 to 80 percent of the new employees being hired are women, and they are doing nearly all the jobs that used to be considered men’s work.”⁵⁶ Women were making aircraft such as the B-17 bomber, the type of plane that carried bombs into enemy territory. The

⁵⁴ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American*, 338.

⁵⁵ Penny Colman, *Rosie the Riveter: Women Workers on the Home Front in World War II* (NY: Crown Publishers, 1995), 19.

⁵⁶ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American*, 341.

B-17 could carry numerous bombs, amounts that outnumbered any bomb carrying airplane of the past. These airplanes also featured the first gunner turrets, where a gunner would be able to fight off any enemy aircraft that approached them. A woman by the name of Lee Turner Foringer, from Texas, worked as a riveter at the Douglas Aircraft plant in Long Beach, California. “Lee’s job was to take the rivet—a metal pin or bolt with a head at one end—and drive it with the rivet gun through pre-drilled holes in the airplane body. Then a bucker would use a metal bucking bar to bend the other end of the rivet into a second head that secured the plane parts together.”⁵⁷

Other women like Lois Wolfe and Barbara Walls would work in aircraft plants located in Chicago and New York, for example. They would help build the B-24 bombers and the Grumman Avenger torpedo bombers. During World War II, auto manufacturing plants were converted to aircraft plants, such as the ones these women worked in. Wolfe, working in Chicago, inspected and tested the engines for the B-24 bombers. Walls was a riveter, like Foringer in California. These were just some of the women who worked in the aircraft industry, but there were thousands more. “By the fall of 1942, the aircraft industry as a whole had added 63,000 women to its roster, mostly in aircraft assembly plants. By November 1943, aircraft industry employment peaked at 2.1 million workers, with more than 486,000 women accounting for an astounding 37 percent of the industry labor force.”⁵⁸ And at the end of World War II, 296,429 airplanes had been built.

Women accounted for 40 percent of all the employees in the munitions industry by March of 1943. Women were preferred by many munitions factories because they had excellent

⁵⁷ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2004), 48.

⁵⁸ "Sustainability," Rosie the Riveter · Lockheed Martin, accessed April 08, 2017, <http://www.lockheedmartin.com/us/100years/stories/rosie-the-riveter.html>.

fine motor skills. These skills were necessary for the work that they did, like wiring the fuses for the bombs and rockets they made, and for making bullets. Women made the mechanisms for the guns and they greased gun barrels in preparation to be shipped overseas. They also painted the bomb casings and stenciled them before they were loaded with wiring and explosive material. They worked in ammunition plants across the country. The Army alone built over 60 munitions plants. Other branches of the service also built their own plants. Susan B. Anthony II, niece of Susan B. Anthony, was an ordinance worker at the Washington Navy Yard. Anthony II said of the women working in the munitions plants at the time: “Today they are making and loading powder bags, assembling and loading shells and cartridge cases, and assembling small parts such as fuses, boosters, primers and detonators... Weighing smokeless powder for fixed ammunition and pouring powder into the cartridge cases is dangerous work. But it’s got to be done.”⁵⁹ After they made the ammunition, they inspected it as well and ensured that the military weren’t sent any “duds”. The manufacturing process exposed these women to hazards that weren’t really questioned at the time.

Peggy Terry helped fill artillery shells with a powder. ‘I pulled a lot of gadgets on a machine. The shell slid under and powder went into it. Another lever you pulled tamped it down... You did this over and over.’ According to Terry, ‘It [the powder] turned you orange. Just as orange as orange. Our hair was streaked orange. Our hands, our face, our neck just turned orange, even our eyeballs. We never questioned. None of us ever asked, ‘What is this? Is it harmful?’ We simply didn’t think about it. That was just one of the conditions of the job.’⁶⁰

By the time World War II ended, American women had helped make over 44 billion rounds of small-arms ammunition, and over 47 million tons of artillery ammunition.

⁵⁹ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers’ War*, 62.

⁶⁰ Penny Colman, *Rosie the Riveter*, 87.

Equality in the Work Place at Home

Even though at the onset of the war, the War Labor Board had promised women equal pay for equal work, this was not always the case as equal pay for equal work was not made into law. It largely depended upon where the women were employed. For example, in the munitions industry, the women were paid the same as men. But for women in other jobs, such as riveting and welding, women were paid the salary for entry-level jobs. They were not given the opportunity to work their way up into the higher paying jobs like the men were given after a few months of working an entry-level job. Even when women were doing the exact same job as men, they were given a different job title. This helped employers justify the pay difference. “For instance, in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, women were called ‘helper trainees’ and men were called ‘mechanic learners’ for the same job. But helper trainees made less money.”⁶¹ There were several states that passed laws guaranteeing equal pay for equal work, but it was written in such a vague manner that it was hard to enforce those laws. Also, the laws didn’t apply to people who were under union contracts. During the war, union membership numbers skyrocketed from 7.3 million to 12.6 million, of which 3.5 million were women. Unions were much more accepting of women members during World War II than they were during World War I, but there were still some unions that were opposed to accepting women members. On average, in 1944, women employed in war production work earned around \$31 per week while the men, working the same jobs, made \$54 per week.

In newly opened war plants, women started at the same rate of pay as men, or only slightly lower. Likewise, in older plants where women took over jobs formerly assigned to men, the pay differentials were zero or small. The sharpest discrepancy in wages came

⁶¹ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers’ War*, 64.

in factories that had traditionally hired women for rigidly defined ‘women’s jobs,’ which paid twenty to thirty cents an hour less than roughly comparable jobs assigned to men.⁶²

Even the women who were not being paid the same as their male coworkers were still making more money than they had ever made before in their lives, and therefore a lot of them didn’t complain or put up much of a fight when it came to equal pay.

Women’s Military Contributions During World War II

During World War II, branches of the United States military decided to create women’s branches within the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard. In the Army, women could volunteer for the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) which eventually became known as the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). The Navy accepted women volunteers into the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), the Coast Guard accepted women volunteers into the Semper Paratus (SPARS), and the Marines accepted women volunteers into the Marines. They were not given a nickname. In all branches, even though men only had to be 18 years old to join, women had to be 20 years old. But no longer was nursing the only job available to women in the military. And no longer would their services go unrecognized. These women would be officially recognized as having served in the United States military. Even so, not all the women could serve overseas. Members of the WAVES, SPARS, and women’s Marines either had to serve in the United States or in American owned territories like Hawaii and Alaska. Only members of the WAC could serve anywhere overseas.

Enlisted WACs performed a variety of duties in the Army, either with the Army Air Forces, the Army Service Forces, or the Army Ground Forces.

⁶² D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984).

Forty percent were assigned to the Army Air Forces in such jobs as weather observers and forecasters, radio operators and repairwomen, control tower operators, and aerial photograph analysts. Another 40 percent of WACs went into the Army Service Forces, working as cryptologists, photographers, telephone operators, mechanics, medical lab technicians, and other more clerical jobs. And 20 percent became part of the Army Ground Forces, which was the area of the Army most reluctant to deploy women. The WACs assigned to the ground forces mostly worked in secretarial jobs and motor pools.

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The main purpose of the WACs was to fill the roles previously held by men. More and more men were needed on the front, and since there was already an available workforce in women, it only made sense for the Army to utilize them instead of spending the time and money training more men in those jobs. Not all women who volunteered for service with the WAC were simply considered “enlisted” women. Many women enlisted as officers. “Applicants had to be U.S. citizens between the ages of 21 and 45 with no dependents, be at least five feet tall, and weigh 100 pounds or more. Over 35,000 women from all over the country applied for less than 1,000 anticipated positions.”⁶⁴ By the end of 1943, 60,000 women had enlisted in the WAC.

In 1942, the Army Chief of Staff, General George Marshall, decided to conduct an experiment with the Army Ground Forces. Participating in his experiment were two WAC units that included ten officers, and 200 troops. They were assigned to an antiaircraft tactical unit in Washington D.C. Their purpose was to track enemy planes using three methods; radar, height finder, and searchlight machinery that was attached to antiaircraft guns. The women were not allowed to fire guns, so the men chosen for the experiment were the gunners. In early 1943, an Army general came to observe the women doing the simulated tracking. When one of the

⁶³ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War*, 116.

⁶⁴ Judith A. Bellafaire, "The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service," *The Women's Army Corps*, February 17, 2005, accessed April 09, 2017, <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/WAC/WAC.HTM>.

spotters announced that a plane was in range, the gunner would fire. The time between when the plane was spotted and when the anti-aircraft gun was fired was measured using a stopwatch. What also mattered was whether the gunner hit his target. These forms of measurement determined how efficient they were. When the observing general looked at the stopwatch, he deemed the performance “impossible”. Lieutenant Elna Hilliard was present, as she was one of the WAC officers assigned to the experiment. She asked the general what he thought was “impossible” and he told her “the mixed-gender WAAC test crew had just equaled the top time of the best male anti-aircraft crew on the entire East Coast. He asked the crew to repeat the test twice more, and both times they performed faster and more accurately than his best male crew.”⁶⁵ Despite the success of the experiment and the achievements of the women involved, the anti-aircraft experiment was discontinued in mid-1943.

Other WACs served overseas in places like North Africa, Europe, and various places in the Pacific. One woman, Grace Porter, was sent to England to work as a cryptographer for the WAC. She worked in the basement of a castle, as the work she performed was extremely top secret.

We worked around the clock in shifts with two people always there to receive and send secret messages... We decoded or encoded them and sent them on to the proper persons. Many of the codes were in long series of five-letter groups: MCMOD RFVLO CDRMA, and so on. Accuracy was essential. One letter wrong, and the meaning of the whole message could be lost. It was work that took a great deal of patience and concentration.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War*, 120.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

In France and Germany, WACs served with the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) in preparation for D-Day, handling highly classified material while working long hours in often dangerous situations. Ruth Blanton was one of the stenographers serving with the WAC that was assigned to SHAEF. Her job as a stenographer was to record and translate reports from the French underground. The reports came in through short-wave radios and after they were decoded, they were dispersed to those who were planning the D-Day attack. The information that she collected was vital. "The information detailed the number and location of bridges and railroad facilities sabotaged; the movements and strength of the German troops occupying France; and the activities of German officers."⁶⁷ Since plans for the invasion were always changing, Blanton worked long hours to ensure that the critical changes were presented to those who needed to know.

There were 86,000 women who volunteered for service with the WAVES in the United States Navy. By the end of the war, over 8,000 women had been commissioned as officers. Officers had to be between the ages of 20-49 and either had to have a college degree, or at least two years of college with two years of work experience. The 86,000 women helped free up over 70,000 men for combat duties. The women received six weeks of training at college campuses located around the United States. After their training they worked at 900 different shore stations within the continental United States and American owned territories.

The women performed routine jobs such as:

Navy storekeeping, clerical work, stenography, the Navy's women were at least as competent as the Navy's men. In addition they have taken over jobs which no one had thought anyone could do but men. They weather-briefed Navy pilots, made weather

⁶⁷ Judith A. Bellafaire, "The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service," The Women's Army Corps, February 17, 2005, accessed April 09, 2017, <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/WAC/WAC.HTM>.

observations and forecasts, directed air traffic from flying field control towers. They instructed Navy pilots in instrument flying... taught Navy airmen to shoot. They had become metalsmiths, radio-men, aviation machinist's mates, truck drivers, laboratory technicians, decoders, and cooks.⁶⁸

Aside from all of those jobs, they also inspected, repaired, and packed parachutes, they were photographers, they worked in the personnel departments, in administration, and in health care, even as doctors and dentists. Women were mathematicians, engineers, attorneys, and chaplains as well. "As the war drew to a close the greatest need for women was in the hospital corps, where highly trained WAVE hospital apprentices and pharmacist's mates were needed to help battle-scarred Navy veterans back to health. They assisted nurses and doctors in the wards, were X-ray and laboratory technicians, cared for medical supplies and filled many other duties."⁶⁹

Women saw these opportunities as adventures of a lifetime that they would never have another chance to fulfill. It made them aware of the limitations they had been facing in their lives, and made them aware of the freedom and individuality that they could have. No longer did they have to live their lives doing what women were expected to do, while men got to experience another world. Lillian Pimlott was a Lieutenant in the WAVES in 1945. She was stationed in Pearl Harbor to work in Personnel at the Navy Yard. She wrote a letter home to her mother and in it she said: "As long as they fight on, I have no desire to return home, for I feel I belong here... I have learned so much in these 3 brief months about life and living. And I know I have

⁶⁸ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War*, 138-9.

⁶⁹ "Women's Reserve, U.S. Navy," Old Magazine Articles, 2008, accessed April 10, 2017, http://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/WW2_Navy_Women#.WOupwk0o670.

already changed in many ways and many viewpoints... It is truly a most broadening experience and I shall never out live it!"⁷⁰

Enlisted women in the SPARS had to have completed at least two years of high school, and also were required to show record of employment after they had left school. Officers had to have earned a college degree, or if not, had to have attended at least two years of college with two more years of work experience. These women trained at colleges around the United States and even at a hotel in Florida. To kick start the SPARS, 15 officers and 153 enlisted members of the WAVES volunteered to be discharged from the WAVES and become the first SPARS, and they then began a recruiting campaign. After 25 months of recruiting, 11,000 women had volunteered for the SPARS and were responsible for the following duties:

SPAR officers held general-duty assignments, working in administrative and supervisory roles throughout the Coast Guard. They also served as communications officers, pay officers, supply barracks officers, and recruiting officers. A large percentage of enlisted SPARS served as yeomen (secretaries) and storekeepers (bookkeepers). However, others received assignments as chaplains' assistants, boatswains' mates (people who help with the ship's hull maintenance), ship cooks, vehicle drivers, pharmacists' mates, and medical assistants. A select few were parachute riggers, air control tower operators, flight instructors, and radio operators.⁷¹

There were a select few SPARS who were chosen for a top-secret mission. This mission was called, LORAN, which stood for long-range aid to navigation. During World War II, lighthouses were disabled to avoid enemy attack. LORAN was a system that transmitted radio signals in order to guide ships on the water. The signals that were sent would be received on the ships

⁷⁰ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War*, 141.

⁷¹ "SPARS," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, April 5, 2017, accessed April 10, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SPARS>.

“which then calculated the ship’s exact location by measuring the amount of time each signal took to reach the ship.”⁷² The signals were sent from LORAN monitoring stations. One such station, located in Massachusetts, was staffed by SPARS only. Marion Withe and Anita Freeman Eldridge were both SPARS involved in the top-secret mission. Withe said: “All our class work, paperwork, and notebooks had to be confiscated every day, and secured.”⁷³ Eldridge said that the SPARS “were told not even to mention the word ‘LORAN’ outside the Coast Guard station. ‘Everybody hated us,’ she said. ‘They thought we were snobs because we couldn’t talk to anybody.’”⁷⁴ Even so, the women enjoyed the work. Though it was tedious, they were excited to be a part of something so top-secret that was helping the United States win the war.

Female Marines were not given a nickname because the Marines said that they did not need one. The requirements for an enlisted female Marine was that she had at least two years of high school, have good vision, good teeth, and if she were married, she could not be married to a Marine (this rule would later change). The requirements for officers were that she had to have a college degree, or two years of college plus two years of work experience. Nearly 20,000 women would volunteer for the Marines; over 800 of them were officers. They started out being sent for training alongside WAVES and SPARS in New York, but were soon moved to the Marine training base in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. This was the first women’s branch of the military that had been allowed to train at the same location as men.

The women were assigned to over 200 different jobs, among them: radio operator, photographer, parachute rigger, driver, aerial gunnery instructor, cook, baker, quartermaster, control tower operator, motion picture operator, auto mechanic, telegraph

⁷² Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers’ War*, 144.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

operator, cryptographer, laundry operator, post exchange manager, stenographer, and agriculturist. They would serve as the trained nucleus for possible mobilization emergencies.⁷⁵

Kathryn Wilson Schroeder joined the Marines in 1943 just ten days after the Marines opened up the ranks to women. She was a Link Trainer operator at the Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station and at Bogue Air Field, both in North Carolina. She also served in Vero Beach, Florida. Link Trainers were aircraft simulators. These simulators would train male Marine pilots. "My job was sitting outside the trainer at a desk. The pilot sat in the trainer. I'd give them radio signals, and they would be sitting in there and trying to figure out where they were."⁷⁶

The motto of the women's Marines was "Free a Marine to Fight." Because of the women who volunteered for service, a division of Marines, known as the 6th Marine Division, was able to be created due to the women taking over their jobs for them so that they could go and fight. The 6th Marine Division would end up spearheading the attack on Okinawa, Japan in 1945. The Battle of Okinawa was the bloodiest battle of the war in the Pacific.

There was another organization of women that were not officially recognized by the United States military during World War II. The Army Air Force found itself with a shortage in pilots and decided to utilize women civilian pilots. These women would become known as Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). The women were to fly planes from aircraft

⁷⁵ "United States Marine Corps Women's Reserve," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, April 7, 2017, accessed April 10, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Marine_Corps_Women%27s_Reserve.

⁷⁶ Beccy Tanner, "Kansas WWII Marine Women's Reserve Veteran Was Among First to Serve," Military.com, March 18, 2016, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/03/18/kansas-wwii-marine-women-reserve-veteran-was-first-serve.html>.

manufacturers to United States military bases. Not only did they do that, but they trained male combat pilots, they risked their lives as test pilots for airplanes that had just been through repair, and they also helped train anti-aircraft and combat gunners by flying planes with targets towing behind them for the men to shoot at. They also learned to fly bombers such as the B-17 and the B-26, for the purposes of being able to train men to fly them. In 1944, the B-29 bomber rolled off of the assembly line for the first time. The B-29 was the biggest bomber that the United States military had ever manufactured. It looked so intimidating that the male pilots were hesitant about training in them. Paul W. Tibbets, who was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Air Force decided to have women train the men how to fly them, because he figured that if the men saw women piloting the planes, that they would be less reluctant to do so. "Women who flew for the military in World War II defied more than just gravity when they took to the skies in military training planes, fighters, and bombers. They defied the prevailing social mind-set that said women were not capable of making their own decisions and taking full responsibility for their own fate. A pilot must do both."⁷⁷ The WASPs trained in Sweetwater, Texas at Avenger Field. This training center was the first and only all-female pilot training base in the United States. The women flew planes called Basic Trainers (BTs) and would fly cross-country by themselves. The training program was tough. Only 50 percent of the trainees graduated. Adaline Blank was one of the women who trained at Avenger Field. In 1943, she wrote a letter home to her sister. In it she said: "It was a real thrill to set out in a BT entirely on my own for a long flight. It is a mighty sweet ship; after you get her trimmed right you can relax and cruise along beautifully. There really isn't anything in this world that compares with the contentment that comes with flying.

⁷⁷ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War*, 149.

Sis, it even beats horseback riding.”⁷⁸ Blank was one of the 50 percent that made it to graduation day where she earned her wings. She had completed 210 logged hours of flying time over the course of 30 weeks. During the three years of the WASPs existence, they ferried over 12,000 airplanes from aircraft manufacturers to United States military bases, and they also flew more than 60 million miles.

Army and Navy Nurse Corps

The Army and Navy Nurse Corps both existed during World War I. Women continued to volunteer their services during World War II. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Army Nurse Corps only had 1,000 nurses. After the attack they had 12,000. But the Army still needed more. They wanted to have at least 60,000 nurses on hand. The duty of recruitment was given to the American Red Cross and by the time their recruitment campaign was over, 43 percent of civilian nurses had enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps. The Navy Nurse Corps had a few hundred nurses before the war began, but after the United States entered the war, over 11,000 women had enlisted. Even with the high number of nurses that had enlisted, there was still a nurse shortage. As an incentive, Congress passed a bill that would give women who wanted to train to become nurses, free tuition to the Cadet Nurse Corps. Once they got out of school, they joined the military. There was a large number of Army and Navy Nurse Corps who served overseas but more than half of the Army nurses and the majority of the Navy nurses served in United States military hospitals. In these military hospitals they cared for injured men who had come back from the war. Women in the nurse corps had many responsibilities, one of which was “to train

⁷⁸ Ibid., 153.

the male medical corpsmen who would perform as assistants to nurses in the field and would tend to troops in areas where women were not allowed, such as aboard battleships.”⁷⁹

When Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, there were a total of 119 military nurses stationed at Navy, Army, and civilian hospitals across the island. Page Cooper was a nurse in the Navy Nurse Corps and was working at the Navy hospital in Pearl Harbor on the day of the attack and tended to the men who were brought in to the hospital that day.

Most of them were from the ships in the harbor; boys with flesh torn by gunshot wounds, arms and legs blown off by bomb fragments, and above all, bodies covered with burns foul with thick black oil. All morning the work went on. Occasionally a nurse rested her tired back by stretching and looking out at the ships blazing in the harbor, took a deep breath to clear away the stench of charred flesh, then returned to the job.⁸⁰

The day after the attack at Pearl Harbor, other United States military bases were attacked in Midway, Guam, and Wake Island. In Guam, the Japanese took five Navy nurses as prisoners. They also took prisoner two Army nurses north of Manila, and 11 more Navy nurses were taken prisoner in Manila in January of 1942. In May of 1942, 54 Army nurses were taken prisoner. There were a total of 77 Army and Navy nurses who were prisoners of war until February of 1945, when they were finally freed by Allied forces. Madeline Ullom was one of the Army nurses who had been taken prisoner. She said that as time passed in the prison camp, the conditions worsened for the prisoners, who were a mix of nurses and soldiers. “Our rations were cut back whenever the U.S. took over another island. Many people were dying of malnutrition and starvation. I remember one twenty-four hour period when we had seven deaths. Dead bodies piled up for days, and footlong rats ate their toes off. The cemetery in camp grew bigger and

⁷⁹ Ibid., 182.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 184.

bigger.”⁸¹ Margaret Nash was a Navy nurse who had been held prisoner as well. By the time she was rescued, she was very sick. On the day that they were rescued, she said that they found out that the Japanese had planned to kill all of the prisoners that same morning. Nash also said that “during her captivity she had suffered jungle rot, typhoid, the plague, and beriberi, a disease caused by malnutrition.”⁸² She continued to suffer from health problems due to captivity for the rest of her life.

Army and Navy nurses also served on hospital trains, hospital ships, and in airplanes. Some of the hospital ships that the nurses were stationed on were bombed or torpedoed. On the USS *Comfort*, a Japanese suicide plane crashed into it, killing six nurses. Airplanes were used to evacuate wounded soldiers and since the planes were also used to transport cargo, the planes were targets of enemy fire. During the attack on Okinawa in March of 1945, Navy flight nurses found themselves in the midst of a mortar attack as they loaded wounded men onto the planes. “The success rate among the 500 Army and Navy nurses who worked in the thirty-one air transport squadrons worldwide was impressive. Of the 1,176,000 patients evacuated by air to a medical facility during the war, only forty-six died en route.”⁸³ In 1945, Army nurses were present as Allied forces made their way into Germany. It was then that they experienced the horrors of the concentration camps. Army nurse Esther Edwards was one of the nurses who witnessed the horrors at the Dachau concentration camp in Germany. “We saw the horrible

⁸¹ Ibid., 188.

⁸² Ibid., 189.

⁸³ Ibid., 191.

barracks and the crematorium, where there was a room filled almost to the ceiling with bodies, waiting to be burned. Bodies were everywhere, hundreds of them. It was unbelievable.”⁸⁴

These women risked their lives daily while stationed at places across Europe and the Pacific. They worked on the land, either on the front lines or near them in field hospitals and they worked in the air and at sea. The workweek for a nurse could be at least 84 hours long. The soldiers that they treated contracted all kinds of diseases that the nurses were susceptible to every day. The nurses also had to care for German prisoners of war, the soldiers who had created the horrors that nurses had witnessed at the concentration camps. By the end of the war, 230 nurses had died in service and more than 1,600 nurses received war medals.

The Red Cross

Most of the volunteers for the American Red Cross were women. Over 3.5 million women volunteered during World War II. They not only helped recruit Army nurses during World War II, but they began a Blood Donor Service at the request of the United States government in 1941. The government was anticipating America’s involvement in the war and therefore wanted to have a large supply of blood available. This would prove to be helpful after the attack at Pearl Harbor. The volunteers worked both overseas and at home.

At home, millions of volunteers provided comfort and aid to members of the armed forces and their families, served in hospitals suffering from severe shortages of medical staff, produced emergency supplies for war victims, collected scrap, ran victory gardens, and maintained training programs in home nutrition, first aid, and water safety. Overseas, Red Cross workers served as field directors providing compassionate support for the troops they accompanied, operated clubs and clubmobiles for the armed forces, and were attached to military hospitals, hospital ships, and hospital trains.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid., 197.

⁸⁵ "World War II and the American Red Cross," American Red Cross, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.redcross.org/about-us/history/red-cross-american-history/WWII>.

The women also relayed news from home to the servicemen and women. They provided them news such as births and weddings and informed them of the deaths of loved ones. Red Cross volunteers also relayed news on the home front to families with loved ones overseas who had been wounded and kept them updated on their status while they recovered in hospitals. During World War II, the Red Cross communicated more than 42 million of these types of messages. The Red Cross had various divisions, one of which was the production division. One of their responsibilities was “rolling bandages for use in military hospitals at home and abroad. During World War II, Red Cross volunteers were said to have produced 2.5 billion of these surgical dressings. Volunteers also put together food packages and shipped them to POWs in Europe and the Far East, at one point assembling 1.4 million packages per month.”⁸⁶ The volunteers in the production division also provided comfort packages to soldiers at home and abroad. There were over 71,000 certified nurses who volunteered for the Red Cross during the war, over 13 million pints of blood were collected, 1.7 million families received aide, and the Red Cross operated in more than 50 countries throughout the war. A total of 52 women volunteers died during their service.

The End of World War II

World War II ended on September 2, 1945. And just as what happened in World War I, women who were employed across the country soon found themselves losing their jobs either due to being replaced by the men returning from overseas, or because the war industry they were working in was no longer needed. The job loss wasn't as drastic as it was after the end of World War I. In 1946, the female labor force had dropped a little over two million, with industrial

⁸⁶ Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War*, 168.

workers seeing the biggest cuts. “In the Detroit auto industry after the war, the proportion of women in the work force fell from 25 to 7.5 percent and women’s share of work in durable goods industries throughout the nation dropped 50 percent.”⁸⁷ But in 1947, the female labor force started rising again and continued to increase. By 1948, women workers “constituted about 29 percent of the nearly 60 million people who were employed.”⁸⁸ Even so, after the war, many women were demoted and had no choice but to accept lower wages. The women were shocked that the jobs that were available to them after the war only paid half of what they were making during war time performing skilled industrial labor. They had to return to jobs that were traditionally deemed as “women’s work.” But even with the job loss, the work force was forever changed because of World War II. Women employment numbers never returned to the numbers of prewar employment.

The women in the United States military soon found themselves being discharged from service as the women’s branches of the military demobilized. The WAVES demobilized in 1946. The SPARS were all discharged by mid-1946. The women Marines disbanded in 1946 but were later reestablished in 1948. The WASP was disbanded in 1944. None of the WASP ever received recognition for their military service, even though they had been responsible for training so many male military pilots. The women in the military who faired the best were the WACs. By 1946, the number of WACs had dropped below 10,000, but in 1948, the WAC became a permanent part of the Army. Of course, the Army and Navy Nurse Corps would continue, but the number of nurses dramatically decreased as the women completed their assignments at the end of the war.

⁸⁷ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 231.

⁸⁸ Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American*, 394.

Conclusion

Over 35,000 women served in military roles during World War I. At least ten million women went to work during World War I in both traditional women's work and work that had always been considered men's work. There were over eight million women who volunteered with organizations such as the American Red Cross during World War I. In World War II, over 350,000 women would serve in the military. The female labor force would grow by 6.5 million during World War II, for a total of over 18 million women employed during the war doing both women's work and men's work. Over four million women would volunteer with organizations such as the American Red Cross during World War II. Women suffragists worked tirelessly to ensure that women gained the right to vote. Feminists fought for women to be able to gain union membership, and fought hard for equal pay and overall equal treatment in the workforce. Contributions made by women during both world wars ensured United States victories. Without women doing their part, the duties overseas and at home would not have been able to have been performed, resulting in a much different outcome. The women who answered the call of duty, whether in the military or on the home front, forever changed what were deemed traditional women's roles, and no doubt paved the way for the women of today. Women became emboldened and throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, women found themselves immersed in the continuous fight for their rights in the workplace including equal pay and equal employment opportunities. They continued to fight for everything that came along with their sexuality; their right to birth control, abortion rights, for the creation of battered women's shelters, and demanding domestic violence laws in each state. Women like Rosa Parks fought for their civil rights during the Civil Rights Era. Women fought to be accepted into military academies and they won the right to be admitted into all five of them. Women became

astronauts, CEO's, Supreme Court Justices, four-star generals in the military, and the breadwinners of the family. Today, in the twenty-first century, more than half of America's workforce is comprised of women. The "stay-at-home dad" is not an uncommon occurrence. Thirty percent of the time, wives are out earning their husbands. Women are, on average, more educated than men, earning fifty-seven percent of all bachelor degrees earned in the United States. It is easy to discern that without the accomplishments of women during both world wars, women today wouldn't have all of the opportunities that they have. The voice that women of the past were given ensured a voice for American women of the future.



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Some telephone operators known as the “Hello Girls” after their arrival in France in 1918.

⁸⁹ Hilary Parkinson, "The Hello Girls Finally Get Paid," The National Archives Pieces of History, June 24, 2015, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2015/06/24/the-hello-girls-finally-get-paid/>.

Photo # NH 53175 Yeomen (F) at Portsmouth Navy Yard, Kittery, Maine, Oct. 1918

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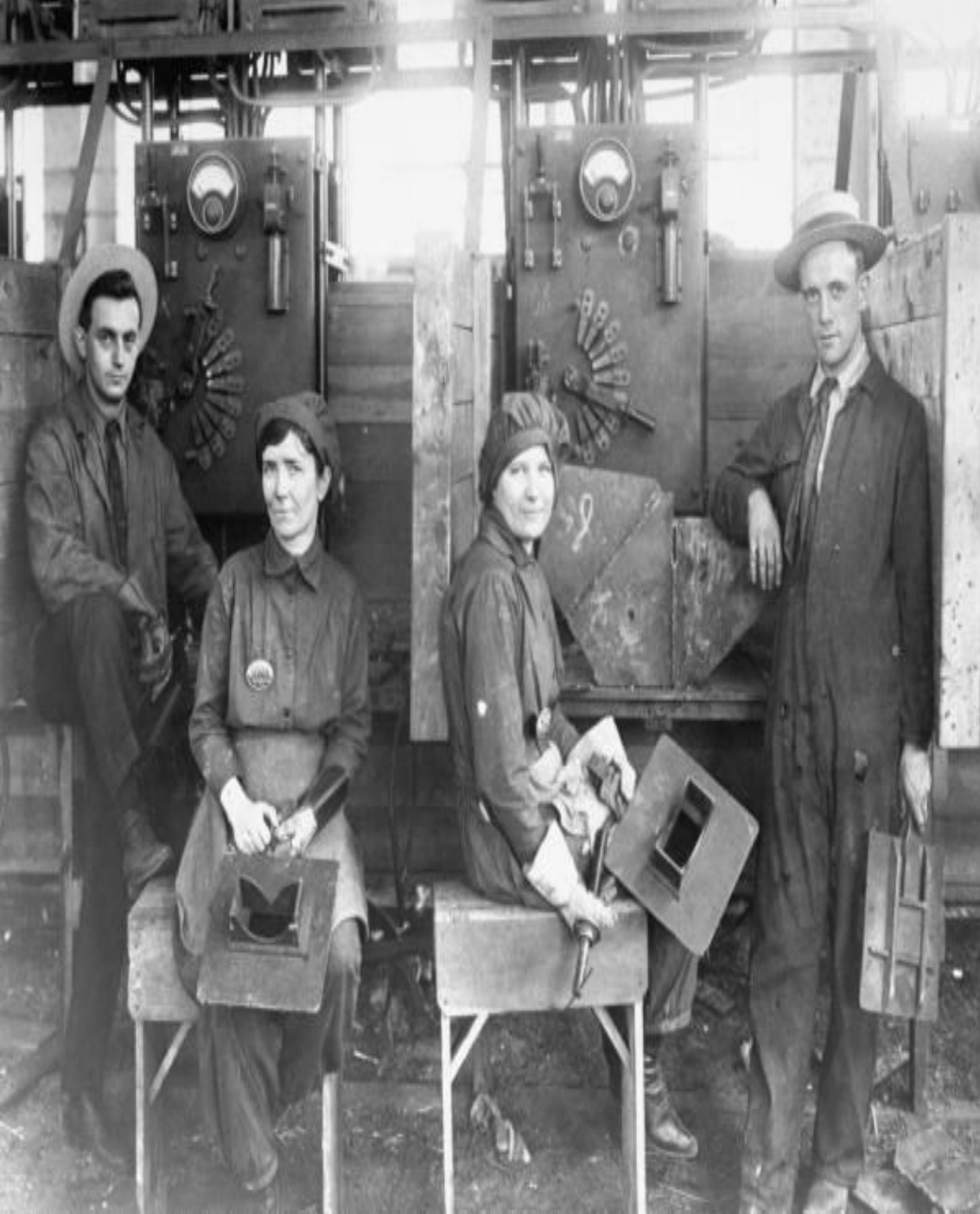
Members of the Navy Nurse Corps, known as “Yeomen” in Kittery, Maine in 1918.

⁹⁰ "World War I Era Yeoman," Naval History and Heritage Command, April 20, 2000, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/OnlineLibrary/photos/prstpic/females/yeoman-f.htm>.



Women working on the Great Northern Railway in Great Falls, Montana in 1918.

⁹¹ Zim, "Women Working on Train, 1918," History by Zim, February 28, 2014, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://www.historybyzim.com/2014/02/women-working-on-train-1918/>.



American women welders building ships at Hog Island in Pennsylvania during 1917-1918.

⁹² "Hog Island Shipyard: Context and Discoveries," *The Necessity for Ruins*, December 03, 2008, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://ruins.wordpress.com/2008/12/03/hog-island-context-and-discoveries/>.



WASPs at the Lockbourne Army Air Force Base in Ohio.

⁹³ Susan Stamberg, "Female WWI Pilots: The Original Fly Girls," NPR.com, March 9, 2010, accessed April 3, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/2010/03/09/123773525/female-wwii-pilots-the-original-fly-girls>.



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A riveter working at an aircraft plant during World War II.

⁹⁴ Noll, J.G. "These 26 photos show what the real Rosie the Riveters looked like." MilitaryOneClick. March 13, 2017. Accessed April 08, 2017. <http://militaryoneclick.com/heres-real-rosie-riveters-looked-like/>.



WAVES at the Naval Air Technical Training Center in Norma, Oklahoma in 1943.

⁹⁵ "Photos of WWII Navy WAVES - Page 2," Women of World War II - Photos of Navy WAVES, 2016, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.womenofwwii.com/navywaves2.html>.



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WAC telephone operators at their switchboard in Babelsburg, Germany in 1945.

⁹⁶ "Photos of WWII Army WACS," Women of World War II - Photos of Army WACS, 2016, accessed April 10, 2017, <http://www.womenofwwii.com/armywacs.html>.

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