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### **Wives, Warriors, and Womanhood: A Study of Women's War Roles**

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Wives, Warriors, and Womanhood: A Study of Women's War Roles

A Thesis Project by

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Chapman University

Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in War, Diplomacy, and Society

May 2023

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April 2023

Wives, Warriors, and Womanhood: A Study of Women's War Roles

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by Megan Lee

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## ABSTRACT

Wives, Warriors, and Womanhood: A Study of Women's War Roles

by Megan Lee

Since starting the War, Diplomacy, and Society program, my interests have included a focus on the soldier's experience in war, women's changing roles in war, and the study of war journalism, ranging from World War II, the Cold War, to the Vietnam War. This thesis project is a culmination of these themes. The first article examines the crucial nature of a soldier's connection to the Home Front by analyzing a collection of letters between a soldier and his fiancé during World War II. Filled with declarations of love and occasional expressions of insecurity, these letters reveal the importance of a strong relationship to one's morale, indicating that the ultimate responsibility for maintaining morale fell mainly on the individual soldier themselves. In the second article, I explore women's critical roles in civil defense programs of the Cold War period, utilizing promotional material from the Federal Civil Defense Administration to demonstrate that their policies emphasizing home protection and nuclear preparedness were specifically constructed to appeal to American housewives. As the article argues, women proved integral to civil defense programs and embraced these policies to escape, if only metaphorically, from the restraints of domesticity, instilling a deeper sense of meaning and patriotic responsibility to their existing responsibilities. Finally, the third article includes an annotated syllabus for a 300-level class over a 15-week semester focused on the evolution of women as war correspondents from their experiences in World War II to the Vietnam War. Utilizing a variety of primary sources including letters, newspapers, and memoirs, as well as secondary sources, the syllabus aims to provide students with an understanding of women's war

correspondence work, including women's changing roles in war, and their contributions to the field of journalism. A comprehensive study of these topics will enable students to situate women's war correspondence work within a wider historical framework and recognize the significance of war in shaping the development of women in the professional sphere, their social standing, and their war roles.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Article 1 – Keeping Hope Alive: Love Letters and Morale during WWII.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Definition and Importance of Morale.....	8
Adjustment to Army Life.....	10
Maintaining Morale Overseas.....	13
No Mail, No Morale.....	21
Conclusion.....	28
Bibliography.....	30
<b>Article 2 – Atomic Housewives: Women in Civil Defense during the Cold War.....</b>	<b>33</b>
The Atomic Housewife.....	40
Women’s Organizations.....	46
“Domesticating” the Bomb.....	48
Community Mothers.....	55
Conclusion.....	57
Bibliography.....	59
<b>Article 3 – The Evolution of Women War Correspondents: Annotated Syllabus.....</b>	<b>62</b>
Class Schedule.....	64
Women and War.....	71
Women and Journalism.....	77
Women as War Correspondents.....	82
Bibliography.....	86



## **Introduction**

As a defining feature of human history, war has been responsible for shaping society and culture, its impact on our values and institutions are still prevalent to this day. Throughout my experience in the War, Diplomacy, and Society program at Chapman University, we have explored the close, symbiotic relationship between war and society, their influences on each other evident in each period of history. In each course, my interests focused on women's experiences in war, their changing roles and stereotypes, and their contributions to global conflicts. This thesis project is a culmination of such topics. In each project, I delved into the motivations and perceptions behind women's involvement in war, analyzing how they feature prominently even when not the central focus of a topic, and the existing connections between their domestic and patriotic duties. In conducting my research, I observed a common thread across these three projects – in each period of war, a distinct set of gender roles and expectations emerged as a product of prevailing sentiments of patriotism and militarism. These expectations were then thrust upon women, who became responsible for upholding practices and values that contributed to concepts such as morale maintenance and national security, in addition to furthering their own personal and professional aspirations.

For William LeNoir, Ada, his fiancé, served as a primary motivator for his morale as explored in the first article. Although Ada's letters are unfortunately missing from the collection, her connection to LeNoir's morale is an indication of how women were assigned the role of motivators and sources of hope. His yearning for this future with Ada became his prime motivation to correspond with her as a way to have her be present with him consistently through her letters. In the midst of Cold War nuclear paranoia, American housewives were targeted by the Federal Civil Defense Administration, appointing them responsible for their family, their

community, and ultimately even the nation's level of preparedness and mental capacity for withstanding an atomic attack. This second article highlights the prevalent nature of gender expectations in American society that extended into policies of national security during the Cold War. Finally, the third project investigates women's war correspondence work from World War II to the Vietnam War. As war correspondents, women have continually been subject to prejudicial attitudes based on their gender, prompting several to embrace or reject militarized versions of femininity in order to obtain coverage of conflicts.

Collectively, this thesis project seeks to illustrate how women's roles in war are intricately tied to deliberate constructions of militarized gender roles and expectations, shaping their wartime experiences and opportunities. By analyzing these gendered constructions, it emphasizes the critical connections constantly developing between war and society, leaving indelible imprints on the cultural, political, and social frameworks of each era.

## **Keeping Hope Alive: Love Letters and Morale during WWII**

“Knock-knock – who’s there? Private! Private who? Private Bill! Private Bill who? Private Bill LeNoir, who did you think it was?” Such a greeting was customary in William LeNoir’s many letters to his fiancé, Ada Ketterlinus, as he served in the United States Army Air Corps in the Finance Department during World War II.<sup>1</sup> His daughter, Dr. Nina LeNoir, fondly remembers him as a quiet, wise, and loving father whose witty one-liners provided their family with constant laughter throughout the years after the war.<sup>2</sup> His unique sense of humor and zeal for life lives on thanks to his collection of letters which contain, amongst numerous jokes and romantic declarations of love, his time in war, immortalizing his experiences. The significance of war letters, as revealed in LeNoir’s case, are their ability to “bring to life the individual voices and stories that might otherwise be lost in the blur of history.”<sup>3</sup> LeNoir’s letters, once kept and cherished by Ava for decades, now serve as crucial artifacts to the historical record, preserving individual and collective memories, as well as offering a glimpse into the lives of those who experienced war firsthand.

While stationed in various stateside air bases and during his overseas deployment in England and France, LeNoir wrote diligently to his beloved. His letters chronicle everything from his initial excitement to participate in the war effort, difficulties adjusting to army life, song recommendations, to his growing frustration and disillusionment toward military service.

Although he managed to maintain a cheerful attitude in most of his letters, it is clear from his

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<sup>1</sup> William A. LeNoir to Ada Ketterlinus, 20 May 1942, LeNoir (William A.) Second World War Correspondence (2017.054.w.r), Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA. (hereafter LeNoir Correspondence).

<sup>2</sup> Nina LeNoir, interview by author, Chapman University, November 2, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Carroll, American author and historian, founded the Legacy Project in 1998 to preserve American war correspondence and collected approximately 100,000 letters from every war in U.S. history. Since donating this entire collection to Chapman University, the project has been renamed to “The Center for American War Letters,” now archived at Chapman’s Leatherby Libraries. Andrew Carroll, “Afterword,” in *Behind the Lines: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars*, ed. Andrew Carroll (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 487.

constant expressions of jealousy, insecurity, and homesickness that he struggled immensely being separated from his loved ones. Above all, his letters reveal a deep yearning for the end of the war so he could reunite with Ada back in the States and resume the life that had been put on pause. Despite his difficulty adjusting to army life, LeNoir found moments of respite by staying connected to the Home Front through radio, films, dances, and camp shows organized by the United Service Organizations (USO). Nonetheless, organized entertainment distracted only momentarily, its overall effect on a soldier's morale temporary at best.

Despite its fleeting nature, these activities did contribute in many ways to strengthening a soldier's mental wellbeing. LeNoir spoke highly of the USO in his letters, attributing lifts in his mood to their efforts. However, his letters suggest that the most efficient, long-lasting morale boost was a strong and solid connection to the Home Front, indicating that the ultimate responsibility for boosting and maintaining morale fell mainly on the individual soldier themselves. This proved especially true in LeNoir's case. As he details in his letters, LeNoir deliberately sought out activities that would distract himself while simultaneously upholding his own morale, determined to make the most out of his time served in the war. Camp conditions, job satisfaction, recreational activities, camaraderie with his fellow soldiers and furloughs and day passes, all contributed greatly to the maintenance of LeNoir's morale. However, one factor reigned supreme – his relationship with Ada. Receiving a steady flow of letters from Ada was all LeNoir wished for during his time in the army, and these letters served as his biggest motivator to remain in good spirits. Whenever this connection to Ada was threatened, whether due to a delay in mail or a lack of letters, LeNoir suffered a dramatic dip in his morale. Recognizing the crucial nature of Ada's letters, LeNoir constantly encouraged Ada to write often, praising her efforts whenever she wrote more than one letter a week. Ada quickly became a beacon of hope

for LeNoir, offering him a glimpse into a future where they could finally be together. Without Ada, LeNoir's experience in the war would likely have been drastically different, highlighting the essential role that letters played in maintaining morale amongst U.S. soldiers during World War II.

Current scholarship on the significance of war letters and morale such as *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women* (1991) has largely placed the responsibility of morale on the shoulders of those at the Home Front, rather than on the soldiers themselves. By citing popular magazines, propaganda posters, and advertisements that focused on the importance of letter writing, scholars have mostly attributed the burden of morale to the girlfriends, wives, and mothers at the Home Front, but in doing so, disregards the many ways in which soldiers upheld their own morale. This paper seeks to illuminate this discrepancy and explore the different methods and motivations behind a soldier's commitment to his own morale.

The evidence of such a significant connection between soldiers stationed overseas and the Home Front is one of the many merits of what can be discovered through letters. Although a noncombatant, LeNoir still directly experienced the war in terms of being separated from his family and loved ones, being transferred constantly by the demand of the Air Corps and having to put his life on pause while he served. His letters offer readers insight into not only the intimate, emotional tolls of war, but a soldier's inner-most thoughts. Using LeNoir's letters as an example of how soldiers coped with the war also provides historians with the ability to recognize similar perspectives, creating a deeper, comprehensive overview of the soldier's experience during World War II.

The historical value of war letters should not be overlooked. Letters from each war provide scholars with a unique glimpse into the mindsets of entire generations. As Thomas

Rodgers notes in his article, “Civil War Letters as Historical Sources,” in reference to letters from the Civil War, “they are useful in the study not only of battle experiences and camp life but also the general political and social history of the middle nineteenth century.”<sup>4</sup> He also contends that diaries and memories, alongside letters, “provide a unique opportunity for historians to read what large numbers of mid nineteenth-century common men and common women thought about the issues of the day.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, LeNoir’s letters provide historians with a glimpse into how most drafted and enlisted men thought and felt during World War II.

Echoing Rodgers’ perspective, Alice Hickey, asserts in, “The Need for War Letters?” that letters from World War II “are especially valuable because the sheer number that have survived give historians a vast range of experiences from which to draw conclusions. Written in the face of uncertain and daunting odds, they illuminate human voices in a war that could be easily reduced to a series of campaigns and grim statistics. The letters give a tiny glimpse into the experience that defined a generation around the world.”<sup>6</sup> She emphasizes that the “ability of letters to capture the thoughts of a moment and record a continuum of evolving ideas is invaluable.”<sup>7</sup> The evolution of LeNoir’s moods, thoughts, and character can be clearly traced through his letters, lending credence to Hickey’s statement.

Despite the historical value of letters as primary sources, they do pose certain risks. Given that they are not official government documents or scholarly articles that have been peer reviewed, it is important to acknowledge that the information contained within such letters may include embellishments and false statements by the letter writer to portray themselves in a better

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas E. Rodgers, “Civil War Letters as Historical Sources,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 93, no. 2 (June 1997): 105, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27792001>.

<sup>5</sup> Rodgers, “Civil War Letters as Historical Sources,” 106.

<sup>6</sup> Alice Hickey, “The Need for War Letters?” *Undergraduate Humanities Forum 2007-2008: Origins*, 6 (2008): 1, [https://repository.upenn.edu/uhf\\_2008/6](https://repository.upenn.edu/uhf_2008/6).

<sup>7</sup> Hickey, “The Need for War Letters?” 4.

light. While this risk should be taken into careful consideration when utilizing letters as a source, it does not warrant its complete exclusion as a historical source. Scholars have also questioned the integrity and validity of letters as soldiers were prone to self-censorship in their letters to family and friends. Whether it be for fear of worrying their loved ones, soldiers would deliberately leave out certain details of their experiences in war. However, the act of omitting such details also does not automatically negate the validity of these letters as a primary source. Instead, by reading between the lines, it could potentially provide a deeper glimpse into the psyche of a soldier and their relationships with the letter-writer, prompting further analysis on the reasons behind certain gaps of information.

Letters were also heavily censored by the military during World War II to prevent sensitive information such as locations and strategies from being leaked to the enemy. After being deployed to Europe, all of LeNoir's letters contained a censor's stamp. In several of them, specific words and sentences were cut out with scissors. Since he was aware that his letters to Ada were being read by his ranking officer, he made sure to avoid including overly intimate details, and he frequently joked about censorship: "I can't tell you why now. It's a secret between the censor and me."<sup>8</sup> As the end of the war neared, censorship relaxed, to the delight of LeNoir: "I guess censorship of mail will probably stop now probably by the next letter I send you. It seems lots easier to write to you when I know that only you will read it. Crazy idea, isn't it."<sup>9</sup>

It is the responsibility of the historian to read between these lines, and to form a comprehensive construction of the soldier's experience while keeping these limitations in mind. This can be achieved using supplementary sources, such as primary sources including official

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<sup>8</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 30 October 1943, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>9</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 15 August 1945, LeNoir Correspondence.

army documents which contain an analysis of the data collected through conducted surveys by the Research Branch of the Information and Education Division, providing a glimpse into a soldier's psyche and experience. Additionally, soldiers writing into YANK, a weekly magazine published by the U.S. military, suggest LeNoir's experience was representative of general trends amongst troops during World War II. To not utilize letters as a primary source would be to rob the soldiers who wrote them of their voices and their stories. While it is important to consider the potential risks of using letters as a source, the risk of dismissing the stories contained within the letters is even greater.

### **Definition and Importance of Morale**

The issue of morale and its maintenance has long been recognized as a crucial factor among military leaders and organizations. During World War I, under the Military Intelligence Branch of the General Staff, the Military Morale Division was organized on the recommendation of Medical Corps Colonel Edward L. Munson, who pushed for the establishment and integration of a systematic morale program. As Thomas Camfield contends, such a program was “a logical product of the modernization of American society brought on by U.S. participation in World War I.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, as historian Jennifer D. Keene noted, like Munson, many other army officials also believed “the challenge of absorbing millions of drafted civilian soldiers had brought with it distinct problems of motivation, discipline, and leadership unlike anything experienced in the

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas M. Camfield, “‘Will to Win’ – The U.S. Army Troop Morale Program of World War I,” *Military Affairs* 41, no. 3 (October 1977): 125, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1987166>.



peacetime Regular Army.”<sup>11</sup> As LeNoir himself was drafted, it is clear this sentiment rang true as he struggled with adjusting to army discipline and routine.

In Munson’s initial memo of 1918, he stressed the critical nature of morale, stating “the efficiency of an army as a fighting force... depends on the willingness of its component individuals to contend... We give the ability to fight, and let the will to fight look out for itself. This is neither logical nor practical. Few are born fighters.”<sup>12</sup> Although LeNoir did not actively participate in combat, Munson’s statement can still be applied to LeNoir’s situation, if the “will to fight” is interpreted as a “will to persevere.” Instilling this will permanently within a soldier’s mentality ultimately placed the responsibility of persevering upon the soldiers themselves.

The issue of morale in the military is well-defined by Stephan Motowidlo’s 1976 study in *Motivation, Satisfaction and Morale in Army Careers*, which lists three specific categories for morale maintenance:

1. Motivation (goals, determination, persistence, tenacity, progress)
2. Satisfaction (cheerfulness, contentment, freedom from worry, satisfaction of physical needs for food, water, rest etc.)
3. Group cohesiveness (solidarity, cooperation, self-sacrifice for the group, esprit de corps, traditions).<sup>13</sup>

By applying these principles to LeNoir’s own experience, it is evident through his letters that his relationship with Ada served as his primary motivator, his essential goal, and the promise of their future together provided him with a sense of purpose. His satisfaction with his job, recreational

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<sup>11</sup> Jennifer D. Keene, “Intelligence and Morale in the Army of a Democracy: The Genesis of Military Psychology During the First World War,” *Military Psychology* 6, no. 4 (1994): 244, [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327876mp0604\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327876mp0604_3).

<sup>12</sup> Keene, “Intelligence and Morale in the Army of a Democracy,” 245.

<sup>13</sup> Stephan Motowidlo, Dowell, Borman, Johnson and Dunnette, *Motivation, Satisfaction and Morale in Army Careers* (Minneapolis: 1976), 49.

activities and camp conditions served as secondary motivators, with the sense of camaraderie with his fellow soldiers following closely behind. As Jonathan Fennell suggests in his article, “In Search of the ‘X’ Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy,” “individual factors such as a person’s disposition, background, coping strategies, relationship with home, experience and levels of fear, confidence, fatigue and rest cannot be discounted either.”<sup>14</sup> Due to LeNoir’s prioritization of his relationship with home and with Ada, his ‘X factor’ was Ada herself, as he wrote from England – “You have no idea how much a letter from you would mean to me right now. I’ve often heard that fellows overseas would rather have a letter than a good meal and I always discounted it, but believe me, it’s really true.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Adjustment to Army Life**

LeNoir was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on April 13, 1916, to William D. LeNoir and Marie K. LeNoir.<sup>16</sup> After graduating high school, he worked as a file clerk and accountant at General Accident Fire and Life Assurance Corporation, where he met Ada, before being drafted into the Army on January 7, 1942.<sup>17</sup> His letters in the collection span from his initial training in 1942 to his discharge in 1945. He completed his basic training in Albuquerque Air Base in New Mexico, where he trained with rifles, and went on marches and overnight camps in the mountains. He first mentions the USO while at this base, and their impact seems minimal: “The

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Fennell, “In Search of the ‘X’ Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37 (2014): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2013.846856>.

<sup>15</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 17 November 1943, LeNoir Correspondence

<sup>16</sup> Ancestry.com, *1920 United States Federal Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010, Images reproduced by FamilySearch, accessed October 4, 2021, [https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/6061/images/4384847\\_00058?usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&pId=89186022](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/6061/images/4384847_00058?usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&pId=89186022).

<sup>17</sup> Ancestry.com, *U.S., World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947*, Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011, accessed October 4, 2021, [https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/2238/images/44033\\_10\\_00232-01429?usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&pId=9144518](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/imageviewer/collections/2238/images/44033_10_00232-01429?usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&pId=9144518).

USO is pretty good though. They have dances every Wednesday and Saturday night. I've been to a few of their dances, but I don't seem to get much kick out of them."<sup>18</sup> Even after the war, Albuquerque remained a special place for LeNoir, which he later visited again with Ada for one of their last vacations together.<sup>19</sup> In late 1942, he was transferred to Oklahoma, where he mentions, somewhat more favorably, that "they have dances here every night but Sat and Sunday and they're really pretty good and good music too except that they're always too crowded. They bring about 10 truckloads of girls in town (chaperoned, of course)."<sup>20</sup> His improved opinion of the dances could be largely attributed to his dislike of the new air base, which he describes as "a god-forsaken hole," as on his arrival, "all we had was a mattress and one blanket in an unheated barrack, not even a pillow to put on a cot."<sup>21</sup>

In September 1942, LeNoir began his position as an accountant with the Finance Department, which he describes as "doing practically nothing but sit around and look wise. That's the darndest office I ever saw. They come in anytime they please, sit around and gossip, go out when they please, but as long as the work gets done nobody kicks. Some army!"<sup>22</sup> Only a week later, he writes, "things here are very quiet right now. Hardly anything to do. I'm in the Finance Office now and like the work very much when there is work to do. About the fifteenth of the month things pick up they tell me though."<sup>23</sup> Although LeNoir enjoyed his work, it was not, as sociologist Arnold Rose has argued, "the keystone of their morale." Instead, his sentiment toward his work reflects Rose's statement, "the main thing which kept the American soldier at his job was the habit of mind of getting a job done. This is especially true when there is the

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<sup>18</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 29 September 1942, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>19</sup> Nina LeNoir, interview by author, Chapman University, November 2, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 22 October 1942, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>21</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 19 October 1942, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>22</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 21 September 1942, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>23</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 29 September 1942, LeNoir Correspondence.

reward of ending the war and going back home.”<sup>24</sup> This proved especially true for LeNoir: “Gee – will this damn war never end so we can be together again? We’ll just have to keep on hoping, I guess – if you have something to keep on looking forward to, the time passes quickly.”<sup>25</sup>

As he settled into his position, his job satisfaction did not improve: “Oh – what a madhouse the office is now! We are now a parent group and have absorbed about 3 other groups into ours. There are now 57 men in the Finance Office for training and almost no work to do. And we’re supposed to look busy at all times. I have 15 men under my wing and am slowly going crazy.”<sup>26</sup> Without any work to do, LeNoir found himself lacking distraction and the mounting stress clearly affected his mental wellbeing. In Walter Rundell’s article, “Troop Life – The Finance Department in World War II,” he suggests that most “enlisted men eagerly sought their assignments because the skills gained would transfer easily to such civilian pursuits as banking, bookkeeping, accounting, and management.”<sup>27</sup> Given his pre-war experience as a clerk with accounting skills, it made sense for LeNoir to be assigned to the Finance Department. Confirming Rundell’s theory, LeNoir continued working as an accountant for insurance companies after the war with skills gained working in the Finance Department, such as being highly proficient with large sums of numbers and a keen attention to detail.<sup>28</sup>

As LeNoir adapted to his military job and army routines, he formed friendships with his fellow soldiers, which provided him with welcome distractions, including birthday celebrations: “The boys at the office found out it was my birthday and decided to take me out and show me a time!” Then a few weeks later, “We had a birthday party here in the barracks tonight. They’re a

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<sup>24</sup> Arnold Rose, “Bases of American Military Morale in World War II,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1945-1946): 412, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2745554>.

<sup>25</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 27 Jan 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>26</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 19 July 1943, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Rundell Jr., “Troop Life, The Finance Department in World War II,” *The Historian* 41, No.1 (1978): 96, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24444444>.

<sup>28</sup> Nina LeNoir, interview by author, Chapman University, November 2, 2021.

pretty nice bunch of fellows here.”<sup>29</sup> Alongside social events, LeNoir wrote enthusiastically of swimming, playing tennis, and attending film screenings, all of which helped perpetuate the illusion that he was leading a normal, civilian life in his off-duty hours. This fantasy, however, was soon disrupted.

### **Maintaining Morale Overseas**

LeNoir was transferred overseas in October 1943 to England, and France in September, 1944. Being his first time out of the country, his excitement is palpable: “This is really quite an experience though and I wouldn't have missed it for the world. It's even more exciting than I anticipated in more ways than one.”<sup>30</sup> However, his excitement dissipated as he soon found himself in an unfamiliar environment, thousands of miles away from his home country and his loved ones.

Recreational events and activities organized by the USO proved incredibly beneficial to his morale, providing a brief remedy to his homesickness. While in England, he praised the productions put on by USO Camp Shows, Inc.: “Saw a very good U.S.O. traveling stage show last night here in camp. One of the best I've seen so far. We have about 3 shows here a week and they go a long way toward relieving the monotony.” He also had high praise for the Red Cross: “The Red Cross is quite active over here and are doing a wonderful work.”<sup>31</sup> While the USO and the Red Cross did not completely cure LeNoir's homesickness, they provided him with a fleeting glimpse of the American Home Front which he so desperately missed. He wrote of his deep appreciation for these efforts: “I was lucky though today - the Red Cross girls came around to

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<sup>29</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 13 April 1943 and 19 March 1943, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>30</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 30 October 1943, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>31</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 22 November 1943, LeNoir Correspondence.

visit our camp and I was lucky enough to get a sweater out of the deal. They're sure doing a lot for the fellows over here and don't think they aren't. Remind me to increase my annual contribution to them when I get home."<sup>32</sup>

From LeNoir's letters, it is evident that entertainment and recreation played an important role in the maintenance of his morale and overall mental wellbeing. This was true for the rest of the men serving in the army as well. Recognizing the importance of keeping spirits high within the armed forces, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to combine several service organizations to provide such opportunities. As a result, in 1941, six organizations including the Salvation Army, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, National Jewish Welfare Board, National Travelers Aid Association and the National Catholic Community Services united to form The United Service Organizations Inc. (USO). Similarly, in 1942, the War Department established the Armed Forces Radio Service to boost morale by providing entertainment and news to soldiers across the globe through the most popular medium of the time, radio. The fundamental goal of these efforts aimed to keep troops connected to the Home Front. By immersing them in American popular culture, these morale-building efforts brought idealized concepts of the American Home Front into overseas camps.

Morale maintenance in the military by showcasing the Home Front has been the subject of much study, and three works offering critical interpretations are Sam Lebovic, "'A Breath from Home': Soldier Entertainment and the Nationalist Politics of Pop Culture during World War II," (2013); Matthew Seelinger, "A Touch of Home: The Armed Forces Radio Service, 1942-1945," (2013); and Meghan Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun* (2008). These works serve as examples of how scholars have interpreted the different ways in which concepts

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<sup>32</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 25 December 1943, LeNoir Correspondence.

of the Home Front were infused within morale-building activities, and they differ in their interpretation of the impact and success of such efforts.

Sam Lebovic's article, "'A Breath from Home': Soldier Entertainment and the Nationalist Politics of Pop Culture during World War II," focuses on the administration of shows put on by USO-Camp Shows, Inc. (CSI) which were carefully constructed through strict censorship policies and deliberate selections of popular culture. He argues that the image of the Home Front brought over by CSI was not an entirely accurate representation, but rather, served as "a centralized cultural apparatus that displayed very particular images of 'home' to a mass military audience – images that were particular in their gender politics, their racial politics, and in their very vision of apolitical consensus."<sup>33</sup> Lebovic concludes by noting that "although the shows no doubt contributed in some small way to the morale of the soldiers...they were simply too infrequent and brief to matter much,"<sup>34</sup> as demonstrated in LeNoir's case, who expressed appreciation for these shows but still gained the most effective morale boost from Ada's letters.

Female performers were the most important component of the shows. They were intended to remind the troops of American girls back home, attractive and appealing, but still pure. Other soldiers found a boost in morale from posters of pin-up girls. As one soldier wrote to YANK magazine in a letter titled "Pin-Ups for Morale," "Dear YANK: Just where does Pfc. Joseph H. Saling get the idea that YANK should stop its pin-up girls? There are quite a few GIs thousands of miles from home who enjoy YANK and its pin-ups of American girls. After 10 or 15 hours of work every day it is good to find a few pin-ups of the most beautiful women on earth hanging on our barracks walls."<sup>35</sup> In LeNoir's case, he constantly encouraged Ada to send

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<sup>33</sup> Sam Lebovic, "'A Breath from Home': Soldier Entertainment and the Nationalist Politics of Pop Culture during World War II," *Journal of Social History* 47, No. 2 (2013): 265, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43305915>.

<sup>34</sup> Lebovic, "A Breath from Home," 265, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43305915>.

<sup>35</sup> Pfc. Jesse C. Grim, "Mail Call - Pin-Ups for Morale," *Yank, The Army Weekly*, September 22, 1944, 14.

pictures of herself, writing that since they could not be together, he wanted to look at her picture on his shelf before he went to bed and when he woke up in the morning. Having Ada's picture up also allowed him to show her off to his colleagues, instilling within him a sense of pride:

“Received your letter yesterday and thanks very much. I set it up on my shelf and everybody wanted to know who the glamor girl was!”<sup>36</sup>

In “A Touch of Home: The Armed Forces Radio Service, 1942-1945,” Matthew Seelinger concentrates on the deliberate integration of radio programs into military life. He discusses the use of radio as an integral tool, not only for military communications, but for the news and entertainment it provided troops. In 1941, as the U.S. became involved with the war, Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall prompted the use of radio, “believing it the best way to educate the nation’s men and women in uniform as to why they were fighting.”<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) was established by the War Department in May 1942.

As more American servicemen were deployed overseas in 1942, significant effort was put into establishing radio stations around the globe to ensure troops had access to American broadcasts. The variety of programming included news broadcasts, live shows, music recordings, and quiz shows, which were, as Seelinger notes, “very popular and greatly improved troop morale in the theater.”<sup>38</sup> During the holidays, Christmas programs on the radio served as a “sonic morale booster for the troops overseas, when the juxtaposition between holiday cheer and dangerous lived realities must have been even more palpable. In such times, radio programming

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<sup>36</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 11 March 1943, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Seelinger, “A Touch of Home: The Armed Forces Radio Service, 1942-1945,” *On Point* 19, No. 2 (2013): 39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26363324>.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Seelinger, “A Touch of Home: The Armed Forces Radio Service, 1942-1945,” *On Point* 19, No. 2 (2013): 41.



can and was used to connect and create a sense of community despite physical and psychic distance from home, and to combat loneliness.”<sup>39</sup> As LeNoir himself stated, “There’s something about good music that sort of soothes the jangled nerves and smooths over the rough ends, if you know what I mean.”<sup>40</sup>

From its inception in 1942 to the end of the war, AFRS emerged as a global radio network and as Seelinger argues, “their contribution to American wartime morale, to bring ‘a touch of home’ to the troops, was immeasurable.”<sup>41</sup> In comparing Lebovic’s and Seelinger’s arguments, it is clear that Seelinger attributed the use of radio as integral to soldiers’ morale, whereas Lebovic notes the Camp Shows as important, but not as essential to their morale apart from a brief break from soldering.

Meghan Winchell’s *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun* explores the work of USO hostesses, female volunteers who provided servicemen with companionship and emotional support during WWII. Serving as surrogate girlfriends and maternal figures, junior and senior hostesses provided soldiers with entertainment through dance clubs and organized games, alongside homemade food and sewed uniforms. These efforts were largely enacted to maintain soldiers’ morale, but the goal of protecting soldiers from “negative influences,” including alcohol and sexually transmitted diseases, was also of primary concern. Therefore, soldiers were steered toward USO club events, which were heavily chaperoned with stern dating restrictions. The pent-up sexual frustration experienced by soldiers in camp can best be displayed in Figure 1 below, which LeNoir included with one of his letters, playfully commenting: “How do you like

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<sup>39</sup> Tanja B. Spitzer, “Christmas on the Air – Wartime Radio Programs Revisited,” *The National WWII Museum, New Orleans*, December 25, 2020, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/christmas-wartime-radio-programs>.

<sup>40</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 20 January 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>41</sup> Seelinger, “A Touch of Home,” 43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26363324>.

this little cartoon? Cute? Yes?”<sup>42</sup> The cartoon depicts a soldier checking into a room at the Red Cross, holding behind his back a bag clearly shaped as a woman, implying he is attempting to sneak a woman into a room with him.



Figure 1

In order to preserve the integrity of the USO, volunteers were required to go through a strict screening process in order to be accepted. Winchell contends that these processes were class and race-based, working on the notion that “presumed middle-class white women were innately feminine and sexually respectable.”<sup>43</sup> This concept is arguably similar to Lebovic’s argument that depictions of women in the Camp Shows “were supposed to remind the boys of

<sup>42</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 20 January 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>43</sup> Meghan K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses during World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 45.

American girls back home and discourage immoral sexual behavior.”<sup>44</sup> LeNoir expressed his approval of USO hostesses in only one letter, noting that “the USO is still in the formative stage but from the way it looks it should be pretty nice when it’s finished. The hostesses are mostly high-school girls and there are just not enough to go around.”<sup>45</sup>

It is important to note that despite the USO’s efforts, it proved difficult to stir up enough patriotic fervor to secure every single soldier’s full commitment to the war, let alone maintain their morale for an extended period of time. In one issue of YANK magazine, one soldier poked fun at the notion of enforced army morale, sending in a joke bulletin which stated: “1. Morale will be high. Candidates who have not been issued morale will borrow or obtain some from the post exchange. a) Spontaneous singing required between 5 and 7 p.m. b) Smiles will be worn 1 ¼ inch above the chin with 14 teeth showing in a parallel line. Teeth will be shined with Brillo. Blitz-cloth is recommended for gold teeth.”<sup>46</sup> It is clear that the idea of exhibiting constantly high morale was regarded as a somewhat ridiculous notion to many soldiers.

Furthermore, data collected by the Research Branch of the Information and Education Division through anonymous questionnaires demonstrated that “except for a limited number of men, *little feeling of personal commitment to the war emerged*. The war was accepted passively as a national necessity, but this acceptance was not internalized as a sense of personal responsibility.”<sup>47</sup> This sentiment was prominent throughout LeNoir’s letters. While writing optimistically of the news signaling the end of the war, he states: “It means that the day I come back to you will be that much sooner - selfish reason isn't it, but I guess that's the one thing that

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<sup>44</sup> Sam Lebovic, “‘A Breath from Home’: Soldier Entertainment and the Nationalist Politics of Pop Culture during World War II,” *Journal of Social History* 47, No. 2 (2013): 274, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43305915>.

<sup>45</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 11 March 1943, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>46</sup> O.C. James Jordan, “Orders for O.C.’s,” *The Post Exchange, Yank, The Army Newspaper*, October 7, 1942, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel A. Stouffer, et al., *The American Soldier: Adjustment during Army life*, vol. 1 of *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949): 449.

keeps me going - that keeps all of us going - not the stuff that flag-waving politicians keep drooling about - but to start life again where it was rudely interrupted and make all our plans and hopes and dreams come true."<sup>48</sup> His passive acceptance of the war is demonstrated through this statement, and it is clear he did not feel much of a sense of personal responsibility toward the war at all. Rather, his yearning for life back at the Home Front served as his largest motivator for persevering.

An additional contributing factor towards morale introduced in Rundell's article is the importance of leaves: "an accurate morale gauge with finance troops was the amount of time a man could claim as his own, the surest way for a man to have time of his own was to take a pass and get away from the base."<sup>49</sup> While stationed in Europe, LeNoir seized any opportunity to take a day off and venture into the nearby town. This chance to explore cities such as Paris and London provided LeNoir with unique cultural experiences, widening his worldview. "It's such a wonderful education, seeing how other people live, learning their language and customs, visiting places that only used to exist in story-books. I wouldn't miss it for the world. I only wish you could visit all those places with me though. Then it would be perfect," he wrote.<sup>50</sup> The boost these cultural experiences provided to his morale is obvious in the pictures included below, his joy radiating through.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> William LeNoir to Ada Ketterlinus, August 11, 1944.

<sup>49</sup> Walter Rundell Jr., "Troop Life, The Finance Department in World War II," *The Historian* 41, No.1 (1978): 103, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24444444>.

<sup>50</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 31 July 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>51</sup> Photo provided by Nina LeNoir and LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 26 April 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.



*Figure 2: France, 1944*



*Figure 3: "Strolling along the avenue!" – Bill (England)*

### **No Mail, No Morale**

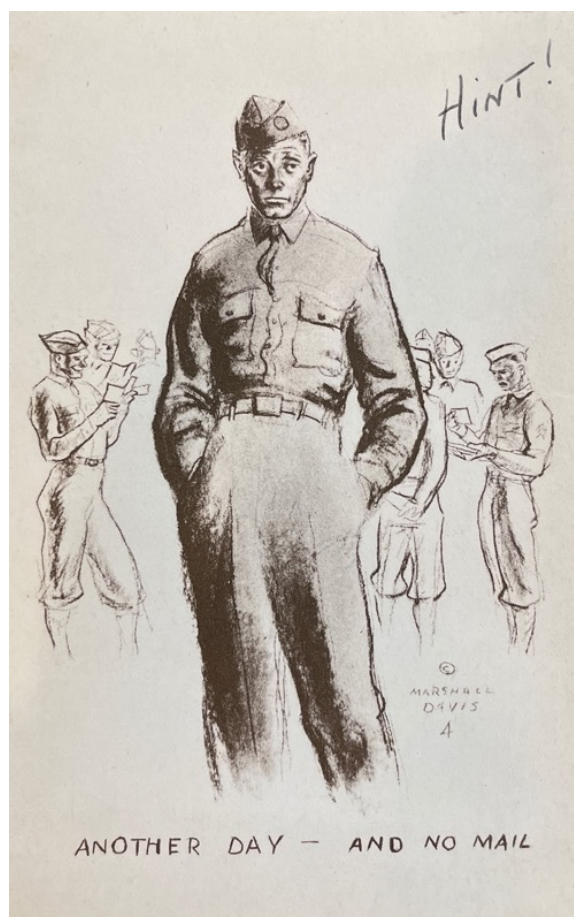
Despite these enjoyable jaunts, it was the connection that he fostered with Ada through their letters that sustained him throughout the war. As Rundell notes “finance men, like other soldiers away from home, depended on correspondence to maintain ties with family and friends. Any time mail service was disrupted, morale took a sharp dip and men thought more longingly of home.”<sup>53</sup> This proved true in LeNoir’s case. Throughout his letters, his main complaint was not receiving enough mail or the delay in mail: “Haven’t heard from you in quite a while. I look

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<sup>53</sup> Walter Rundell Jr., “Troop Life, The Finance Department in World War II,” *The Historian* 41, No.1 (1978): 105, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24444444>.

for your letters every day - when I don't get one it just seems as though something's missing."<sup>54</sup>

Enclosed with a letter from July 31, 1944, a cartoon depicts a forlorn soldier with the caption "Another day – and no mail," of which LeNoir had scribbled "HINT!" at the top, a not-so-subtle hint for Ada.<sup>55</sup>



*Figure 4*

Although mail proved essential to a soldier's morale, a consensus emerged on the dislike of V-mail. In an attempt to reduce cost and free up cargo space, V-mail letters were copied to film and printed to paper after their arrival. However, many soldiers disapproved of the impersonal nature of V-mail, including LeNoir, who pleaded with Ada: "Darling - please don't

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<sup>54</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 10 July 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 31 July 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.

send V-mail. Even if the letters do come in a little later, I'd much rather have them 'real.' There's something lacking in V-mail somehow. The personal touch I guess. There's something extra in knowing that you actually wrote it, held it in your hand - licked the stamp etc. That makes it lots nicer. Do you feel the same way, I think you do. Any letters but yours, ok - but not yours.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, another soldier wrote to YANK magazine, stating "We don't get mail very often but when we do get a letter, we want the real thing, not some impersonal, mass-produced photograph. We know V-Mail is easier to handle but, dear sir, while you are trying to save cargo space with V-Mail, you're tearing down the morale of thousands of soldiers. How many V-Mail letters do you get? If you were on an island thousands of miles from home and women, you wouldn't like V-Mail."<sup>57</sup>

The critical role that mail played in uplifting soldiers' morale was widely recognized by citizens at the Home Front, journalists, and even the U.S. Post Office. In Judy Litoff and David Smith's article, "Will He Get My Letter? Popular Portrayals of Mail and Morale During World War II," the authors claim that "it was the mail, in its almost unimaginable qualities, that held American dreams together in this time of separation and great trial."<sup>58</sup> Ernie Pyle, a famous American journalist and war correspondent recognized "good mail service" as the top priority of a soldier's needs.<sup>59</sup> As much as LeNoir enjoyed music, whether heard on the radio or attending USO shows, its effect was incomparable to receiving a letter from Ada. As Litoff suggests, "as important as Glenn Miller's music was for the troops, it took second place to letter writing in

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<sup>56</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 19 March 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>57</sup> Sgt. Randall and Cpl. Jack Greene, "Mail Call," *Yank, The Army Weekly*, July 16, 1943, 15.

<sup>58</sup> Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, "Will He Get My Letter? Popular Portrayals of Mail and Morale During World War II," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 23, iss. 4 (1990): 39, [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1990.2304\\_21.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1990.2304_21.x).

<sup>59</sup> Ernie Pyle, *Here Is Your War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943), 35.

building morale.”<sup>60</sup> In one instance, the impact of Ada’s letters on LeNoir’s mood is striking: “Today, I’m really in the clouds – received 3 letters from you today. For the past week or so I’ve been awfully depressed at not hearing from you – it was really noticeable too – everybody kept saying “What’s eating you?” But today the birds are singing, the sun was shining, it’s wonderful!”<sup>61</sup>

The Post Office recognized the importance of mail in a 1942 Annual Report, noting that “frequent and rapid communication with parents, associates, and loved ones strengthens fortitude, enlivens patriotism, makes loneliness endurable, and inspires to even greater devotion the men and women who are carrying on our fight far from home and friends.” Although receiving letters from Ada certainly made LeNoir’s loneliness somewhat endurable, there is a noticeable lack of any mention of patriotic sentiment in his letters.

To further encourage wives and girlfriends to write letters to their loved ones overseas, magazines and journals targeted to women emphasized the crucial task of letter-writing in their articles, stressing that “the right kind of letter from you means everything to that man in uniform.”<sup>62</sup> The content of the letters themselves was also significant. *Ladies’ Home Journal* advised women against writing to their husbands and boyfriends when they were melancholy, instead urging them to “take your tears to a stirring movie where you can really let yourself go. Then when you have got it all out of your system, go home and write your husband the swellest letter you can compose, with not a hint of a sob in it.”<sup>63</sup> Although Ada’s letters to LeNoir are missing from the collection, his usual cheerful nature in his letters suggest that Ada followed the

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<sup>60</sup> Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, “‘Will He Get My Letter?’ Popular Portrayals of Mail and Morale During World War II,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 23, iss. 4 (1990): 26, [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1990.2304\\_21.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1990.2304_21.x).

<sup>61</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 2 September 1945, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>62</sup> Anne W. Buffum, “Up Goes Morale,” *Woman’s Home Companion*, April 1943, 108.

<sup>63</sup> Louise Paine Benjamin, “Safe Conduct: The Dos and Don’ts of Keeping Him Loving You Always,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* (January 1943): 90.



advice of these magazines, and refrained from writing to LeNoir when she was feeling blue, knowing that it would negatively affect his morale.

However, when LeNoir failed to receive any mail from Ada, he automatically assumed the worst. In a heated letter from August 31, 1944, his insecurity got the best of him: "It's been over a month since I've had a letter from you and have been wondering just what has happened to make you stop writing. I'm hoping and praying that nothing has come between us but if there has you could at least write and let me know instead of letting me suffer weeks of torment and wondering and waiting." Since he was still receiving letters from his parents and his friends, LeNoir knew a lack of letters from Ada was not due to the fault of the mail service. "I know the mail is coming through because I've received a number of letters from Mother and Dad so I can only assume that the reason I'm not getting any from you is that you're not writing any to me. And I'm going crazy wondering why, why, why!" His first suspicion, as he finds difficult to even put into words, was Ada being interested in someone else: "As far as I can see there can only be one logical explanation and I try to keep myself from even thinking of that reason, much less put it into writing. Please write and tell me it isn't true."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 31 August 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.

He immediately apologizes for his dramatic outburst in his next letter, as he ends up receiving her delayed letters. However, his feelings of doubt and jealousy were not entirely unfounded. Even though LeNoir and Ada ultimately did end up getting married, according to his daughter, during the war, Ada was engaged to three other men, to whom she was also writing letters. LeNoir might have sensed this, which explains his constant expressions of suspicion and insecurity with their relationship. In a letter from December 14, 1943, LeNoir includes, without context, a clipping of a poem.<sup>65</sup>

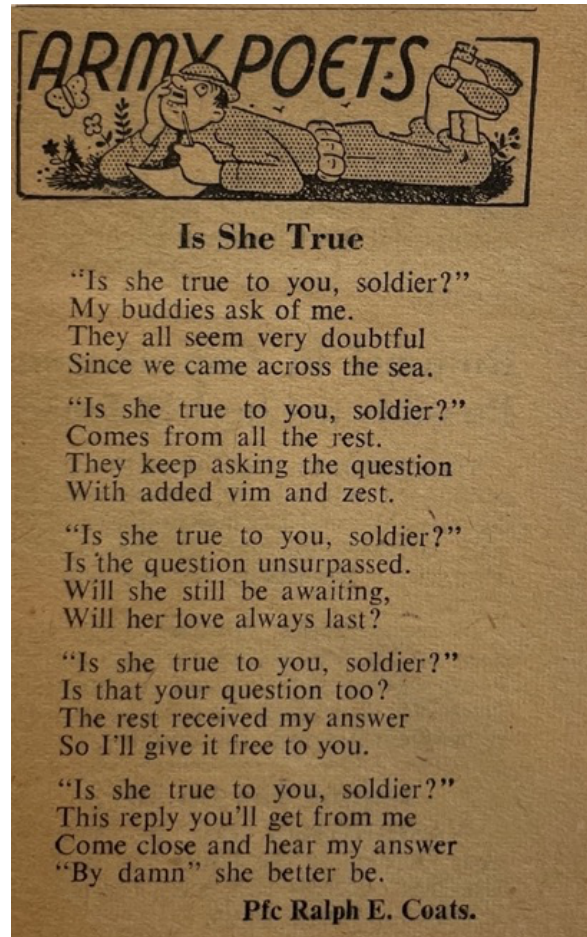


Figure 5: Poem from 14 December 1944 letter

This poem, as LeNoir likely intended, served as a subtle warning for Ada to “remain true” to him. The sentence “they all seem very doubtful, since we came across the sea,” insinuates that the more distance between a couple, especially between different countries, the harder it will be for “love to always last.” With LeNoir in Europe and Ada in the States, his fear of losing her to another man due to the distance is evident. In the last stanza, in response to the repeating question, “Is she true to you, soldier?” LeNoir’s own sentiment is clearly echoed with “By damn, she better be.”

<sup>65</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 14 December 1943, LeNoir Correspondence.

It was crucial for troops stationed away from home to remain connected to their loved ones, but this connection was also vital for those on the Home Front. Separated from their partners and husbands, American civilians had to adapt to a lifestyle with a distinct missing piece. In most of his letters, LeNoir would mention a song that he had heard on the radio that reminded him of Ada, noting: “Music is really wonderful isn't it. You never realize what it means 'till you don't hear any for a while. After we got our radio, our morale went up 1000 percent. Listening to songs that we've heard together and liked together seems somehow to bring you a little closer.”<sup>66</sup> For each song that LeNoir mentioned, Ada bought every single record.<sup>67</sup>

Although separated by hundreds and thousands of miles, the couple found a way to remain connected by listening to the same songs. In one of the songs he recommends, “Light A Candle in the Chapel” by Frank Sinatra, the lyrics clearly reflects his desire for Ada to remember him: “Light a candle in the chapel, at the closing of each day, keep it burning while you’re yearning, for the one who went away.”

Music played an essential role especially during the holidays, when soldiers yearned to be home with their families to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas, a time when families are supposed to be together. This sentiment can best be expressed in another song LeNoir recommended, “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” by Bing Crosby, which “touched a tender place in the hearts of Americans, both soldiers and civilians, who were then in the depths of World War II.”<sup>68</sup> The song exploded in popularity, becoming one of the most requested songs at Christmas USO shows. Written by lyricist Kim Gannon, the song is sung from the perspective of a soldier stationed overseas during World War II, who writes a letter to his family expressing his wish to

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<sup>66</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 8 February 1944, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>67</sup> Nina LeNoir, interview by author, Chapman University, November 2, 2021.

<sup>68</sup> “I’ll Be Home for Christmas,” *Library of Congress*, Washington DC, 2002. <https://loc.gov/item/ihas.200000010>.

return home for Christmas. The hopeful lyrics of “I’ll be home for Christmas, you can count on me,” stands in direct contrast to the somber last few lines, “I’ll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams.”

## **Conclusion**

The issue of morale proved integral to LeNoir’s will to persevere and contributed greatly to his overall experience of World War II. Although organized events by the USO helped distract LeNoir from the realities of war, their effects were temporary. They did little to stir up patriotic fervor and failed to provide LeNoir with a legitimate reason to persist in his duties. Ultimately, LeNoir had to assume responsibility for his own morale. His primary motivator was Ada. His love for her and his envisioning of their future together provided him with a sense of purpose. It is difficult to imagine how LeNoir would have survived the war without Ada and her letters. Similarly, it is also difficult to imagine how other soldiers would have survived wars without a strong connection to their loved ones. It is important to understand the reasons behind a soldier’s morale as it enables prioritization of their connection with the Home Front, which will hopefully improve morale on a greater scale.

In his last letter of the collection, LeNoir writes, “Our love for each other must be the real thing to last for two and a half years of separation from each other.”<sup>69</sup> On June 16, 1946, his dream finally came true. Bill LeNoir and Ada Ketterlinus were wed in a simple but elegant ceremony in Philadelphia, after which they continued to live a happy life together. They had four children, and eventually LeNoir’s experience in World War II faded into memories. He never spoke of his experiences in the war with his daughter.<sup>70</sup> His letters in this collection serve as one

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<sup>69</sup> LeNoir to Ketterlinus, 4 February 1947, LeNoir Correspondence.

<sup>70</sup> Nina LeNoir, interview by author, Chapman University, November 2, 2021.

of the only remaining pieces of evidence of his experience in the war, an intimate and poignant reminder of the value of love, relationships, and a strong connection to the Home Front in the midst of a crisis such as World War II.



*Figure 6: "6/16/46 Bill + Ada"*

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## **Atomic Housewives: Women in Civil Defense during the Cold War**

“Five...four...three...two...one!” counts the narrator as three houses shown on screen are blown up by an atomic blast, a billowing smoke column rising to the skies. As the fire and dust settles, it is revealed that the house in the middle stands completely intact, while the houses on the edges lie in blazing ruins. Rewinding the tape, the narrator examines the state of the houses prior to the explosion – the houses on the edges have “all the earmarks of untidy house-keeping,” desperately needing repairs, with debris in the yard and clutter strewn about the living room. The house in the middle, however, has a “clean, unlittered yard, tabletops are tidy, and trash has been thrown away.” The shot of the blast is repeated in stop motion, as the narrator argues: “beauty, cleanliness, health, and safety are the four basic doctrines that protect our homes and our cities. The dingy house on the left, the dirty and littered house on the right, or the clean white house in the middle? It is your choice. The reward may be survival.”<sup>71</sup> These ominous lines conclude the 1954 short film titled *The House in The Middle*, produced by the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA). This film was part of a series of informational videos released by the FCDA in response to the growing fear of nuclear warfare during the early Cold War. Although never explicitly stated, the implication is clear: the cleanliness and tidiness of a home, a responsibility mostly assigned to housewives, was an essential aspect of civil defense.

On August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union successfully tested its first atomic bomb, triggering a wave of panic amongst the American government and its population. After the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, many Americans believed that they held nuclear monopoly as the superior power in the developing Cold War with the Soviet Union and were

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<sup>71</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *The House in the Middle*, 1954. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGJcwaUWNZg>

convinced that it would take many years for their rival to catch up. Consequently, when President Harry S. Truman solemnly informed the American public that the Soviets had successfully detonated a nuclear bomb, all semblance of superiority and security slowly began to crumble. As the threat of nuclear warfare shifted into the realm of possibility, Americans feared an atomic apocalypse with little to no chances of survival. U.S. officials recognized the dangers of a demoralized population, worried that a lack of hope and belief in their country would make them appear weak to the Soviets. As such, American defense planners set out to institute policies that would mitigate mass panic and instill confidence in the security of their families, their homes, and the nation during the Cold War.

The Federal Civil Defense Administration, established in 1950 by President Harry S. Truman, aimed to encourage American citizens to take charge of their own survival, to mobilize the home front in an effort to combat the threats of nuclear warfare and communism. In addition to films such as *The House in the Middle*, the concept of civil defense was promoted through various entertainment mediums such as informational videos, advertisements, radio broadcasts, television shows, and booklets. They urged Americans to build fallout shelters in their homes, stockpile emergency supplies, and learn duck-and-cover techniques, which encouraged them to remain in a constant state of preparedness. Distributed pamphlets also included detailed information on the immediate steps to take in the event of an atomic bomb detonation, how to cope with nuclear fallout, and instructions on radioactive decontamination. By participating in civil defense, the FCDA argued, the American population would be ensuring their own survival. Initial government programs also focused on mass evacuation, but this idea was soon dismissed as impractical. The FCDA turned their focus toward local and private efforts, emphasizing concepts such as home protection and preparedness.

In doing so, the FCDA realized that the skills required to prepare for an atomic attack aligned almost perfectly with a housewife's existing duties. Since most housewives and mothers stayed at home while their husbands left for work, women were deeply involved with their neighborhood and therefore were key to community welfare. Both of these insights about women clearly informed the design and implementation of the FCDA's civil defense policies. Women's centrality in U.S. civil defense programs during the Cold War, hitherto unexplored, raises several questions. How did the FCDA advertise civil defense policies to women? Were there any specific areas they focused on? How did stereotypical gender norms of the 1950s and 60s affect the development of such policies, and how did this affect women's motivation to participate? This article aims to reveal the ways in which these policies were constructed around gender specific rhetoric to entice women to participate in civil defense.

Traditional gender stereotypes in 1950s and 60s America were comparatively constrictive – men were expected to be the head of the household, the sole provider, while women were expected to embrace domestic roles of housewife, mother, and homemaker. The restrictive nature of such stereotypes and its consequences are clearly demonstrated in Betty Friedan's bestselling book, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, which challenged the dominant attitude that “fulfillment as a woman had only one definition for American women after 1949 – the housewife-mother.”<sup>72</sup> Often considered as one of the main catalysts for Second Wave Feminism, Friedan's ground-breaking publication addressed women's growing dissatisfaction with their domestic roles, labeling it as “the problem that has no name.” “Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity,”<sup>73</sup> Friedan argues. The book's opening lines

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<sup>72</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), xi.

<sup>73</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 15.

resonated with housewives all over America: “the problem lay buried, unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – “Is this all?”<sup>74</sup> These prevailing attitudes surfaced around the same time civil defense programs and policies emerged, many of which were targeted to housewives, encouraging them to contribute in the only ways in which they seemingly knew how to – through their homes and their families.

Importantly, these discussions shed light on how the “home front” of the Cold War correlated with traditional gender roles. Historians have approached the intersection of gender roles and the “home front” of the Cold War in different ways. In *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, Elaine Tyler May traces the connection between Cold War policies of containment and the domestic values of average American families, arguing that these ideologies were interwoven. In the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II, May argues, many Americans desired stability and security, embracing traditional gender roles. By examining the ways in which “public policy and political ideology are brought to bear on the study of private life, locating the family within the larger political culture, not outside it,” May demonstrates “cold war ideology and the domestic revival as two sides of the same coin: post-war Americans’ intense need to feel liberated from the past and secure in the future.”<sup>75</sup> U.S. officials recognized this desire for security in the future, and through programs such as civil defense, encouraged the public to simultaneously embrace policies of containment and combat

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<sup>74</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1963), 15.

<sup>75</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 12.

communism for the protection of their families and for the nation. When analyzing the role of women in civil defense, May suggests that although “a major goal of these civil defense strategies was to infuse the traditional role of women with new meaning and importance, which would help fortify the home as a place of security amid the cold war,” the constraints of 1950s and 60s gender stereotypes ultimately still meant that “even in the ultimate chaos of an atomic attack, appropriate gender roles would need to prevail.”<sup>76</sup>

Andrew Grossman directly challenges May’s argument in *Neither Red nor Dead: Civilian Defense and American Political Development during the Early Cold War*, of which he states: “May argues that the central state reproduced the traditional domestic role for women in its civil defense program; in fact, just the opposite is the case. The state’s line agency, the FCDA, produced numerous training guides that envisioned women as firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and members of the transportation corps.”<sup>77</sup> With these representations of women as strong, capable, and essential members of the community, “this was anything but the “homemaker” at war.”<sup>78</sup> Echoing Grossman’s perspective, Laura McEnaney in *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* also contends that by participating in civil defense, women were given the opportunity to break out from their restrictive gender roles. For what she defines as the “feminization of preparedness,”<sup>79</sup> the FCDA’s focus on privatizing civil defense brought such policies to the average American home and neighborhood, areas where women spent the majority of their time. As such, McEnaney declares, “what emerged from this feminization of civil defense was no less than a militarist-

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<sup>76</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 101.

<sup>77</sup> Andrew D. Grossman, *Neither Dead nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development during the Early Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 103.

<sup>78</sup> Grossman, *Neither Dead nor Red*, 103.

<sup>79</sup> Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 89.

maternalist women's movement that worked both collaboratively with and independently of government planners to spread the gospel of home protection, anticommunism, and "woman power." This militarized maternalism was a strange hybrid of Cold War militarism, domesticity, and female reform traditions."<sup>80</sup> This interpretation of female-focused civil defense strategies is also apparent in Michael Scheibach's *Protecting the Home Front: Women in Civil Defense in the Early Cold War*, who claims that "these women, very simply, chose to make a positive contribution to the nation's defense during an era when it seemed, to them at least, that protecting their families, their homes, and the home front was a very serious and important endeavor."<sup>81</sup> However, he does not share either May or McEnaney's assertion that women were respectively "contained" or "militarized." Instead, Scheibach argues that women's participation stemmed from a genuine interest in civil defense as an opportunity to get involved for the greater good and participate in something other than mundane housework.

Considering the different scholarly approaches that illustrate the intersection of traditional gender roles with developing civil defense policies, Grossman's and McEnaney's arguments offer the most compelling arguments. In addition to providing an explanation for the motivations behind women's participation, their assertions connect to emerging attitudes on feminism of that period. Nonetheless, they lacked a close analysis of the intentions behind such policies in regard to how they were specifically developed for and marketed to a particular stereotype: the American housewife-mother, as defined by Betty Friedan. Could it have been possible that agencies such as the FCDA recognized the "problem that has no name" even before

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<sup>80</sup> Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 89.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Scheibach, *Protecting the Home Front: Women in Civil Defense in the Early Cold War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2017), 203.

Friedan's publication, and with such insight, used it to their advantage when strategizing the promotion and dissemination of civil defense? This article tackles this question and examines the ways in which the FCDA developed and distributed certain programs with the assumption that women felt restricted by their roles. By intentionally employing gender specific rhetoric, they persuaded housewives that they could be free of the shackles of domesticity if they dedicated their lives to civil defense. As such, this paper embraces both May's pessimistic outlook on Cold War domesticity and McEnaney's hopeful concept of disrupted gender norms to reveal how the FCDA took advantage of this dichotomy to tout their policies. To further demonstrate this notion, this article will be drawing from a variety of primary sources, including a collection of pamphlets, booklets, advertisements, and short films produced and distributed by the FCDA, speeches and oral histories with Katherine Graham Howard and Jean Wood Fuller, women's affairs director for the FCDA, radio broadcasts and magazine articles promoting civil defense and annual reports from 1951 to 1954 of the FCDA.

Women featured heavily in civil defense materials which built on stereotypical gender norms that placed the burden of maintaining a secure home front for American families on their shoulders. The U.S. government expected them to function as model, militarist housewives, volunteers, and nurses, serving as symbols of hope and comfort, not only for their own families but also for the nation, in the face of potential nuclear annihilation. To quell fears about nuclear warfare, the FCDA employed rhetoric to "domesticate" the bomb, making it seem less threatening by assuring families that if they lived in a constant state of preparedness, they would have no reason to panic. The FCDA also realized that the domestic responsibilities of an average American housewife, typically seen as mundane and repetitive, could be reframed and utilized to serve as a powerful incentive for women to participate in civil defense. Feeling constricted by

their roles of housewife and homemaker, women embraced civil defense as one of their only opportunities to escape the restraints of domesticity, to contribute to national security, and to ultimately participate within society in a meaningful way.

### **The Atomic Housewife**

During World War II, as American men fought in the war, women at the home front found themselves thrust into jobs and positions previously held by men, disrupting long-standing traditional gender roles. According to one scholar, however, “in the long run, these alternatives were viewed as temporary measures caused by unfortunate circumstances, rather than as possible outcomes of the crisis.”<sup>82</sup> This disruption in gender roles during World War II and the Great Depression, therefore, represented to many Americans an unwelcome reminder of their bleak past. Striving to return to the status quo after the war, the majority of men and women returned to their traditional areas of duty, with “postwar women, many of whom had lowered their expectations, came to accept their domestic role as the center of their identity.”<sup>83</sup> To individuals such as Katherine Graham Howard and Jean Wood Fuller, who both at separate points served as women’s affairs director of the FCDA, this acceptance of domesticity as identity was embedded in their development and promotion of civil defense. However, instead of suggesting that women fall completely back into their prewar domestic roles, they took several cues from World War II’s defense mobilization of the home front, emphasizing that since women were able to offer their services in factories and primarily male dominated positions, they could do the same during the Cold War, but in an arena that they were more suitably familiar with – the household. By reframing the opportunity to participate in national security through traditional domestic roles,

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<sup>82</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 52.

<sup>83</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 85.



Howard and Fuller were able to convince women that their participation, as demonstrated in World War II, could still carry on in the postwar era, but in their own domestic realm. As Kristina Zarlengo notes in her article, “Civilian Threat, the Suburban Citadel, and Atomic Age Women,” “under the protection of their husbands and within the safe confines of their shelter-equipped homes, exemplary housewives could realize great ambitions.”<sup>84</sup>

Both Howard and Fuller, who came to hold high positions in the FCDA, believed that women were uniquely suited to deal with atomic war due to their already existing household expectations. Therefore, the majority of nuclear preparedness duties, in their eyes, were simply an extension of a housewife’s existing duties. If a housewife was already providing food and comfort to their families, it only made sense to infuse nuclear preparedness within these responsibilities. In addition, Fuller and Howard recognized the potential for housewives to feel overwhelmed and powerless when confronted with the staggering concept of nuclear warfare and encouraged them to transform their worries and anxieties into action. In a 1953 speech titled “A Great Light,” Howard discusses civil defense duties to “prepare people to live through an atomic attack, not to die in one; to keep their homes, not to lose them; to hold and work at the jobs of their breadwinners; not to give them up; to survive and win over any attacks that may be launched against our home communities; not to collapse under them in abject helplessness.”<sup>85</sup>

These attitudes were already developed, as seen in a 1951 article titled “Let’s Talk It Over: A Word to the Women...” for *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, the front cover displaying the civil defense logo, alongside the title “What To Do If A-Bombs Fall.” The author appeals to the reader to enlist in their local Civil Defense councils, since “there is a great deal

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<sup>84</sup> Kristina Zarlengo, “Civilian Threat, the Suburban Citadel, and Atomic Age American Women,” *Signs* 24, No. 4, Institutions, Regulation, and Social Control (Summer, 1999), 943.

<sup>85</sup> Zarlengo, “Civilian Threat, the Suburban Citadel, and Atomic Age American Women,” 944.

that women can do NOW.” He continues to plead, “if you will only think about some of the problems I am going to suggest, you will be helping to build a firmer foundation under the unit without whose whole-hearted support and intelligent cooperation the best civil defense plan ever written will fail. That unit is the family – and you, the housewife, are its Chief of Staff. There are a number of problems you can solve now by calm, quiet planning which may save time and confusion and tragedy later on.” He concludes by assuring readers that “fortunately, they are not very different from the problems you wrestle with every day.”<sup>86</sup>

*Women in Civil Defense*, a pamphlet published in 1952 by the Federal Civil Defense Administration, presented the same values in a more stern, official manner. It not only suggested that a woman’s responsibility lay in their homes and in their communities, but it was part of their duty as an American citizen to participate in civil defense. Opening with “the home is the basic unit of the community – and the basic unit on which defense of the home front must be built,” it points a finger directly to women reading – “unless you, as a responsible American woman, take action, you are gambling with the safety of your family, your friends, your community, and your country. You would hardly blame others for failing to provide food, clothing, and shelter for your family. That is your family responsibility. And so is family civil defense.”<sup>87</sup> In a 1954 pamphlet titled *Georgia Women in Civil Defense*, this approach is reiterated by labeling American women as “traditional guardians of the home,” even defining their strength and courage as “one of the nation’s greatest resources.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> John M. McCullough, “Let’s Talk It Over: A Word to the Women...,” in “What to Do If A-Bombs Fall,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine*, February 11, 1951. URL: <https://civildefensearchivesdotorg.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/philadelphia-a-bomb.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Women in Civil Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Civil Defense Administration, 1952), 1. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvcwnh7v.17>

<sup>88</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Georgia Women in Civil Defense* (1954), 43.

Similarly, Katherine Howard and Jean Fuller based their civil defense campaigns on the traditional notions of women as housewives. Prior to her position at the FCDA, Howard served as a member of the Republican National Committee from 1938 to 1952, her political experience earning her a position with President Eisenhower's campaign team in 1952. The next year, President Eisenhower appointed Howard as women's affairs director at the FCDA, where she served as a powerful advocate for women's participation in civil defense programs. Howard promoted civil defense by connecting its policies with the established, traditional responsibilities of a woman as housewife and homemaker. In an address before the National Encampment of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Wisconsin on 1953, Howard stressed, "the responsibility for doing a great deal of what can be done lies in the hands of the average American woman. I'd like to repeat that reminder, if I may, because it is important to our security as a nation. It is in the hands of the American housewife and mother that the defense of our home front must lie, in very large part."<sup>89</sup> In an article for *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, Howard explains her reasoning for her stance on women for civil defense, stating, "civil defense begins at home, and women are particularly important because they are home during the day-light hours when we expect that an attack might come."<sup>90</sup>

In 1954, Jean Fuller took over Howard's role as women's affairs director of the FCDA. Prior to the FCDA, Fuller worked with the Red Cross and the Home Service Corps and served as president of the California Federation of Republican Women from 1950 to 1954. In 1955, Fuller was given the opportunity to witness an atomic bomb test in the Nevada desert, which left her in

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<sup>89</sup>Address by Katherine G. Howard, Deputy Administrator, FCDA, before the National Encampment of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, at the Municipal Auditorium, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at 11:00 A.M. Wednesday, August 5, 1953. (Retrieved from Alabama City Defense, Assorted Papers, Civil Defense Archives, URL: <https://civildefensearchivesdotorg.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/land-of-the-free-speech.pdf>.

<sup>90</sup> Katherine G. Howard, "Wife Urged To See Home A-Shelter, Stock Food, Water," *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 12 Oct 1953, 19.

awe. Instead of feeling fear, Fuller was excited, proclaiming, “we women set a precedent this morning by being in the trench and the Civil Defense Administration can be proud of the way it handled our end of the show,” as well as recognizing that “my experience this morning shows conclusively that women can stand the shock and strain of an atomic explosion just as well as men... It also proved that with the proper precautions, entire communities can survive an atomic bombing, but only if the proper precautions are taken.”<sup>91</sup>

Inspired by the blast, Fuller began developing programs concerning home protection and preparedness, the most publicized being “Grandma’s Pantry” – an official government brochure with the slogan “Grandma’s pantry was always ready. She was ready when the preacher came on Sunday or she was ready when the relatives arrived from Nebraska. Grandma’s Pantry was ready – Is Your Pantry Ready in Event of Emergency?”<sup>92</sup> The brochure featured a drawing of an old-fashioned stove in a kitchen well-stocked with essential foods and supplies, evoking a sense of nostalgia and comfort. Included beside the drawing was a long list of specific foods, first aid kits, candles, and other useful items, with the concluding message suggesting, “with a well-stocked pantry you can be just as self-sufficient as Grandma was. Add a first aid kit, flashlight, and a portable radio to this supply, and you will have taken the first important step in family preparedness.”<sup>93</sup> In a 1956 newsletter, the concept of “Grandma’s Pantry” was updated to “Grandma’s Pantry Goes on Wheels,” which depicts a woman loading a survival kit into the trunk of the family car, shown below in Figure 7.<sup>94</sup> As the title of the newsletter states, “By, For, And About Women in Civil Defense,” the responsibility for having not only a well-stocked

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<sup>91</sup> Jean Wood Fuller, “Los Angeles Woman in Trench at A-Blast,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 May 1955.

<sup>92</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, “Grandma’s Pantry Belongs In Your Kitchen,” *By, For and About Women in Civil Defense*, (U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1953).

<sup>93</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, “Grandma’s Pantry Belongs In Your Kitchen,” *By, For and About Women in Civil Defense*, (U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1953).

<sup>94</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, “Grandma’s Pantry Goes on Wheels,” *By, For and About Women in Civil Defense*, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956).

pantry, but an essential, portable survival kit readily available in their family car, fell primarily on the shoulders of mothers and housewives.

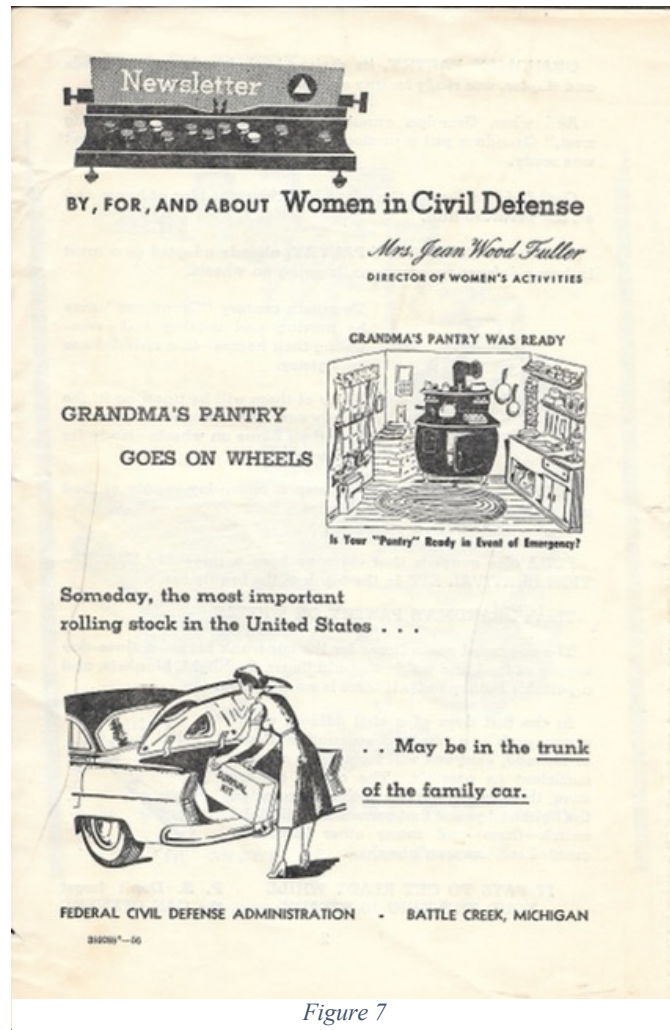


Figure 7

This new significance placed on previously mundane household chores is a clear representation of the FCDA's deliberate method to instill policies of civil defense within the private spheres of domesticity. As May points out, "a major goal of these civil defense strategies was to infuse the traditional role of women with new meaning and importance, which would help

fortify the home as a place of security amid the Cold War.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, in her section aptly titled “Atomic Housewifery,” McEnaney contends “that housework was now an integral part of paramilitary defense reveals how far Cold War diplomatic and military concepts had seeped into the everyday life of civilians.”<sup>96</sup>

### **Women’s Organizations**

Realizing that women invaluablely contributed to civil defense, the FCDA acted swiftly to enlist more women, offering opportunities in leadership and participation. In an annual report from 1952, the FCDA notes, “recognizing that women play a key role in civil defense, FCDA has developed a widespread program of women’s participation, primarily through 70 national women’s organizations, with memberships totaling many millions.”<sup>97</sup> Women’s organizations were encouraged to establish civil defense committees which would work closely with local civil defense offices, combining their efforts to promote civil defense programs through speeches, forums, press, exhibitions, and activities. The FCDA also appointed assistant regional directors to appeal to women’s organizations at the local and regional stages. In 1952, the FCDA also established the National Advisory Committee on Women’s Participation to foster greater cooperation between leaders of women’s organizations, as well as motivating women to volunteer for services such as communications, transportation, nursing, and warden services. As emphasized in the *Women in Civil Defense* pamphlet from 1952, “at least 60 percent of civil

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<sup>95</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 101.

<sup>96</sup> Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 108.

<sup>97</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Annual Report for 1952*, 62.

defense volunteers must be women serving in hundreds of specialized civil defense jobs.”<sup>98</sup> At the second annual convention of the National Women’s Advisory Committee in 1954, President Eisenhower himself gave the opening speech, emphasizing: “every woman, every child, has practically the same duties in war as does any man, no matter where he is.” On volunteerism, he stresses, “the strength of the United States is represented first of all, then, in the spirit that you women show, not only in your comprehension of what this thing is about, and what you must do, but your readiness to do it – another attribute of free nations – volunteering to do these things. That in itself makes us stronger.” To conclude his speech, he expresses his approval of the committee, “I am sure that you understand this: any man that has been married as long as I have, doesn’t underrate the persuasive powers of a lady. And so I am particularly pleased that this is the Women’s Advisory Committee, and there are the groups of State directors, regional directors, that are doing this work, meeting together and getting all the techniques and plans that you are going to use.”<sup>99</sup>

In an oral history interview conducted in 1971, Katherine Howard looks back on her position with the FCDA, reflecting: “the national heads of all the women’s organizations were on the Women’s Civil Defense Advisory Council. Therefore, they could include education in civil defense in their national programs, and this was part of the program of increasing public awareness and also of home protection.” By 1953, the FCDA had established a women’s division and developed a family preparedness program marketed to housewives. A housewife’s reign over her house was a key factor stressed by FCDA employees like Howard, as she notes, “we

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<sup>98</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *Women in Civil Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Civil Defense Administration, 1952), 2. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvcwnh7v.17>

<sup>99</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, Remarks at the Conference of the National Women's Advisory Committee on Civil Defense. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/233086>

were stressing the necessity for a shelter in every home. Well, who's going to fix the shelter and maintain it and buy the canned goods and see that it's there except the women?"<sup>100</sup>

This trend of civil defense policies focusing primarily on women was noted by McEnaney, who attributes this dynamic to the growing attention paid to family preparedness, stating, "the FCDA's decision to make preparedness a family affair brought women to the center of the militarizing project. Fathers were important, but the increasing family orientation of civil defense gradually pushed paternal rhetoric to the background as it accentuated women's maternal proactive role."<sup>101</sup> By appealing to a woman's presumed instincts of maternity, the FCDA hoped to further incentivize housewives to promote and participate in civil defense. In addition, since the FCDA focused their efforts on the home front, it made sense to prioritize women's roles rather than male dominated rhetoric, for in the event of an outbreak of war, the men would be expected to be shipped off to fight, while the women were expected to hold down the fort at the home front.

### **"Domesticating" the Bomb**

One major strategy practiced by the FCDA included the process of "domestication" in regard to atomic fears. Since the very idea of nuclear annihilation was overwhelming to many, the FCDA attempted to make the nuclear bomb appear less threatening by emphasizing the many ways in which they could be prepared at the local, domestic level. As Katherine Howard stressed in a 1953 speech, "we are taking in too much territory in our global worrying. The important

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<sup>100</sup> Katherine G. Howard, "Oral history interview with Katherine G. Howard," Interview by John T. Mason. Columbia University, Oral History Research Office, 1971. 208.

<sup>101</sup> Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, 77.



thing is to get away from those overwhelming figures, and down to home facts.”<sup>102</sup> By busying and familiarizing themselves with preparedness, they would have no time or need to fear the prospects of nuclear warfare. American psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton regards “domestication” as a factor of “nuclear numbing,” the process of suppressing or denying the harsh realities of nuclear war in his book, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life*.<sup>103</sup> By transforming global anxieties to accessible “home facts,” families would be able to familiarize themselves with nuclear concepts and prepare themselves for atomic fallout. As McEnaney points out, “family-based civil defense offered a private solution for a public-military problem; the costs of nuclear attack would be borne by family units, a family-style self-help.”<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, by encouraging family preparedness, they were also supporting national security by establishing a powerful stance against not only nuclear warfare, but against the threat of communism. If families could demonstrate to the Soviets that they were immune to their atomic intimidation tactics, they could also prove that their nation would prevail against all odds, even nuclear ones. In essence, to “domesticate” the bomb, “FCDA planners made the bomb familiar by making it *familial*.”<sup>105</sup> “Domesticating” the bomb, in effect, also militarized the family, by encouraging them to participate toward the war effort from the familiar realm of the home front. As Zarlengo notes, this militarization effect on the family framed patriotism as a “domestic duty,” as “women and children, in essence, formed a new class of soldier – deterrence

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<sup>102</sup> Katherine Howard, “The Land of the Free,” speech presented to the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 5 August 1953.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 1979).

<sup>104</sup> Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 69.

<sup>105</sup> McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 69.

soldiers – that reshaped peacetime behavior to complement the requirements for preventing war.”<sup>106</sup>

Attempts to “domesticate” the bomb can be seen through the rhetoric employed in federal pamphlets, advertisements, and programs. One of the first few pamphlets that advertised the family’s responsibility to prepare within their own homes was *Survival under Atomic Attack*, produced by the National Security Resources Board in conjunction with the Civil Defense Office in 1950. On its very first page, “You Can SURVIVE” is printed in large letters, with the following caption: “You can live through an atom bomb raid and you won’t have to have a Geiger counter, protective clothing, or special training in order to do it. The secrets of survival are: KNOW THE BOMB’S TRUE DANGERS. KNOW THE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO ESCAPE THEM.”<sup>107</sup> In addition to technical and scientific information about the bomb and radioactivity, the booklet also promoted “fire-proof housekeeping,” as they believed that potential fires set off from the blast, instead of radioactivity, posed more of a danger to families and their houses. Echoing the same message from the FCDA’s *House in the Middle* film, the *Survival* booklet also associated a clean, well-kept house with a higher chance of survival, in contrast to a cluttered, dirty home that acted as a hazardous firetrap. The booklet even goes as far to imply that radioactivity could be combated by basic housekeeping methods, such as dusting – “radioactive particles act much the same as ordinary, everyday dust.”<sup>108</sup> As characterized by McEnaney, by domesticating the bomb, they “literally cleaned up the language of nuclear

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<sup>106</sup> Kristina Zarlengo, “Civilian Threat, the Suburban Citadel, and Atomic Age American Women,” *Signs* 24, No. 4, Institutions, Regulation, and Social Control (Summer, 1999), 951.

<sup>107</sup> Executive Office of the President, National Security Resources Board, and the Civil Defense Office, *Survival Under Atomic Attack* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 1.

<sup>108</sup> Executive Office of the President, National Security Resources Board, and the Civil Defense Office, *Survival Under Atomic Attack* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 14.

warfare; it sanitized the images and rhetoric in a desperate attempt to prevent the panic, fatalism, and resistance that the FCDA's social scientists had predicted."<sup>109</sup>

Since housekeeping responsibilities were mainly assigned to the women of the family, there is a direct implication that these duties would fall solely on mothers and housewives. However, young girls were not left out of the picture, as their potential services as messengers during an atomic attack were also targeted. In a radio broadcast from February 28, 1951, Bill Leonard interviews Adelaide Healey, Special Assistant to the Director of the New York State Civil Defense Commission about women's efforts in civil defense at the state level. In response to one listener's question on how their troop of girl scouts could be of assistance to civil defense, Healey states, "girl scouts can be of tremendous service to the civil defense program if they will volunteer as messengers. Messengers may be a very important means to keeping the lines of communication happening in the event of an emergency."<sup>110</sup> By involving the participation of girl scout troops, it conveyed the idea that if young girls could play a part in civil defense, the threat of nuclear warfare was not as daunting as one might believe it to be.

Similarly, as JoAnne Brown notes in her study of civil defense through public education in "'A is for Atom, B is for Bomb:' Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948 – 1963," the process of domestication was also evident in schools. For example, "certain school subjects such as home economics lent themselves particularly well to the domestication of the Bomb. The FCDA published a pamphlet in 1957 outlining civil defense activities for high school girls in home economics classes. The pamphlet included directions for furnishing and decorating a bomb

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<sup>109</sup> Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 74.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Adelaide Healey, conducted by Bill Leonard. "Women in Civil Defense," February 28, 1951. NYC Municipal Archives, *WNYC* Collection. URL: <https://www.wnyc.org/story/women-in-civil-defense/>

shelter and for stocking it with provisions such as home-canned water.”<sup>111</sup> With Howard’s assumption that the responsibilities of maintaining and stocking a shelter fell on the women of the household, it is clear she adopted this approach through FCDA promotional material and programs.

Furthermore, the responsibility to educate children about nuclear concepts along with preparedness information fell largely on the teachers, and as noted by Scheibach, “what is often not discussed is the fact that by the end of the decade, 71 percent of elementary and secondary school teachers – the ones ensuring that school-aged children and youth were informed about and prepared for the atomic threat, and kept safe during an atomic attack – were women.”<sup>112</sup>

Additionally, at a 1954 speech in Georgia, Jean Wood Fuller announced, “a mother must calm the fears of her child, make a game out of it: playing civil defense,”<sup>113</sup> placing the responsibility of quelling fears on the mother’s shoulders. It is clear that the responsibility to educate, as well as to mentally inform and prepare children, primarily fell on women. As Brown notes, “educators domesticated the bomb for the sake of their children’s mental health; they tamed its most fearful aspects and put it to work on their favorite projects.”<sup>114</sup> Since the majority of elementary and secondary school teachers were women during that period, coupled with the fact that women stayed home while their husbands were at their offices, the children’s only opportunity to learn about nuclear concepts and bomb preparedness came from their teachers or their mothers. In addition to coping with their own fears and anxieties about the bomb, teachers and housewives had to manage and soothe their children’s distress toward increasingly

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<sup>111</sup> JoAnne Brown, “A Is for Atom, B Is for Bomb”: Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948-1963,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 84.

<sup>112</sup> Michael Scheibach, *Protecting the Home Front: Women in Civil Defense in the Early Cold War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2017), 18.

<sup>113</sup> Jean Wood Fuller, “Wisdom Is Defense,” speech presented to the State Meeting of Women in Civil Defense, Augusta, Georgia, 10 November 1954.

<sup>114</sup> Brown, “A Is for Atom, B is for Bomb,” 84.

unfamiliar notions of nuclear annihilation, a duty that should not be overlooked when considering women's role in civil defense.

To further encourage home preparedness and distribute more resources to families, the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM) was established in 1958, combining the functions of the already existing Federal Civil Defense Administration and the Office of Defense Mobilization. *Family Fallout Shelters*, released in 1960, was a filmstrip presentation produced by the OCDM for use in Home Preparedness Workshops held in local communities. These filmstrips were targeted toward average American housewives to prepare their households for nuclear fallout. The narrator provides detailed instructions on the specific types of food to stockpile, what sort of clothing to store, and the importance of first aid. When discussing these factors, the majority of the filmstrips shown displays a woman – the mother, the housewife, as shown below in Figure 8.<sup>115</sup> There is a clear implication that these crucial responsibilities fell almost solely on the woman's shoulders. As Zarlengo notes, the American housewife “controlled a sphere that was consistently portrayed as essential to national priorities,” with “the playacting of preparation for future war was serious, and the playful and decorative housewife's role was the doll's mask on deterrence soldiers.”<sup>116</sup> The importance of “deterrence soldiers,” represented through women and children, was critical, but had to be covered by a veil of playful domesticity to limit nuclear anxieties and mass panic.

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<sup>115</sup> FCDA, *Family Fallout Shelters*, 1960. URL: <https://archive.org/details/FamilyFalloutShelters--CivilDefenseHomePreparednessWorkshopFilmstrip2>

<sup>116</sup> Kristina Zarlengo, “Civilian Threat, the Suburban Citadel, and Atomic Age American Women,” *Signs* 24, No. 4, Institutions, Regulation, and Social Control (Summer, 1999), 942.



Figure 8

In addition to these filmstrips, the OCDM distributed educational pamphlets, such as the one being read by the housewife in Figure 8, “Family Fallout Shelters,” which included comprehensive instructions on shelter construction, such as detailed construction blueprints and a shelter checklist. In its introduction, Leo Hoegh, Director of the OCDM during that period, opened with a harsh warning: “in an atomic war, blast, heat, and initial radiation could kill millions close to ground zero of nuclear bursts. Many *more* millions – everybody else – could be threatened by radioactive fallout.” However, he offers a message of hope, claiming, “but most of these could be saved. The purpose of this booklet is to show how to escape death from fallout.” He continues to stress that “everyone, even those far from a likely target, would need shelter from fallout,”<sup>117</sup> seemingly referring to women and children living in the suburbs as the least likely targets of war, thereby implying that shelter preparation should be a shared responsibility between both parents.

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<sup>117</sup> Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, *The Family Fallout Shelter* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959), 1.

In the 1954 annual report for the FCDA, it is evident that the agency centered several of their programs based on what they presumed would appeal to women, as it states, “as most programs most representative of women’s interests, responsibilities and activities special emphasis during 1954 has been placed on: Home Protection Exercises, Home Nursing, Youth Program, Emergency Mass Feeding, Warden’s Services.”<sup>118</sup> It is clear the FCDA were cognizant of the crucial role that women played in civil defense by focusing on these programs.

### **Community Mothers**

In addition to providing for their own families, women were also expected to assume maternal roles for their communities and neighborhoods in the event of an atomic attack. As previously noted, the FCDA placed special emphasis on home nursing, emergency mass feeding and warden’s service programs, specifically targeted to women. During the early postwar period, as specified by traditional gender stereotypes, the roles of nurse, cook, and warden were primarily assigned to women, as men dominated the business world. According to the study, “Counting Nurses: The Power of Historical Census Data,” which used census data to create a demographic profile of early twentieth century nurses in the U.S., an overwhelming 98% of women identified as professional nurses.<sup>119</sup> As such, with the FCDA encouraging nurses to sign up for civil defense services, they were primarily targeting female nurses. In a 1952 article of *The American Journal of Nursing*, they state the urgent need for volunteer nurses: “the volunteer nurse’s aide group is an especially significant group in planning and operating civil defense

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<sup>118</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, Annual Report for 1954. URL: <https://training.fema.gov/hiedu/docs/historicalinterest/fcda%20-%201954%20-%20annual%20report%20for%201954.pdf>

<sup>119</sup> Patricia D’Antonio and Jean C. Whelan, “Counting Nurses: The Power of Historical Census Data,” *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 18 (2009), 2717. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2009.02892.x>

nursing service, since this group will carry a major share of responsibility for providing nursing service during a national disaster.”<sup>120</sup> Another responsibility that was almost automatically assigned to women was the task of providing mass feeding to their communities in the event of disaster. Developed jointly by the Federal Civil Defense Administration and The American Red Cross, the Basic Course in Emergency Mass Feeding Pocket Manual booklet provided knowledge and skills needed to conduct large feeding operations in the event of natural disaster or enemy attack. Although intended for both genders, it is implied that the target audience is for housewives, as it includes detailed recipes for meals, and according to traditional gender stereotypes of that era, women were predominantly in charge of the kitchen.

Furthermore, as Katherine Howard had pointed out, if an atomic attack were to occur during the day, with husbands out at work and housewives at home, it would be up to the housewives to ensure not only the safety of their families, but their immediate communities. In a 1951 booklet, *This Is Civil Defense*, women are encouraged to volunteer for their community’s warden service, of which they would be expected to guide and assist people to safety before an emergency and in charge of restoring order after. The booklet stresses, “housewives especially play an important role in the warden service. Most women are at their home posts day and night. Usually, they know their own neighborhoods better than men can ever know them. Women should interest themselves in the warden service as a first step in the organization of civil defense for their neighborhoods.”<sup>121</sup> Similarly, in the 1951 interview with Adelaide Healey for WNYC focused on women’s role in civil defense, in response to a listener’s question on what women

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<sup>120</sup> Frances C. Nabbe, “The Nurse’s Role in the Federal Civil Defense Administration,” *The American Journal of Nursing* 52, No. 3 (March 1952), 332. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3468606>

<sup>121</sup> Federal Civil Defense Administration, *This Is Civil Defense* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1951), 21-22.



should be expected to do within civil defense, she states, “A compelling need exists throughout the state for volunteers in a large number of categories, the great need at the moment is for 250,000 women to be assigned to welfare services. Homeless people will be directed to mass shelters, clothing stations staffed by women volunteers must be ready to sort and distribute.” In concluding her broadcast, Healey appeals to the audience, “unless every able-bodied American citizen, and that means every woman, as well as every man, takes on a job in civil defense, there may come a day when there won’t be any homes or families for anyone of us to go home to.”<sup>122</sup>

## **Conclusion**

A close analysis of the materials distributed by the Federal Civil Defense Administration, as well as the efforts of Katherine Graham Howard and Jean Wood Fuller, provides insights into the belief that a housewife’s domestic disposition, coupled with women’s desires to participate toward a meaningful cause, informed the development and implementation of FCDA civil defense policies targeted toward women. During the postwar period, as men returned to their traditional jobs, women were ushered back to their domestic spheres, encouraged to embrace their femininity by encompassing themselves within their households. As threats of nuclear warfare emerged, civilian mobilization efforts similar to that of World War II arose, but this time, instead of taking over positions predominantly held by men, women were pressured to contribute to national security from their traditional domestic realm. Although gender roles still prevailed, as Elaine Tyler May noted, their duties became instilled with patriotic significance. Furthermore, by “domesticating” the bomb, the FCDA attempted to assuage fears of the bomb while also militarizing the family unit to participate in national security against threats of nuclear

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with Adelaide Healey, conducted by Bill Leonard. “Women in Civil Defense,” February 28, 1951. NYC Municipal Archives, *WNYC* Collection. URL: <https://www.wnyc.org/story/women-in-civil-defense/>

warfare and Soviet communism. As Laura McEnaney suggests, “what unified this constituency of female civil defense volunteers was a quirky blend of postwar political ideologies: anticommunism, maternalism, and feminism.”<sup>123</sup>

Through a simultaneous process of militarizing feminism and perpetuating gender stereotypes, the FCDA deliberately appealed to women’s innate instincts of maternity and womanhood, convincing large groups of women that it was not only their patriotic responsibility, but also their womanly duty, to participate in civil defense. As defined by Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, women in the postwar era felt constricted by their traditional roles of housewife and homemaker, yearning to participate within society in a way that extended beyond the scope of the household. With influential women like Howard and Fuller asserting that a housewife’s already existing duties could be easily transposed toward civil defense policies, it is evident that women embraced these roles as one of their only opportunities to escape from the restraints of their domestic domain. Ultimately, women played a crucial role in civil defense programs, the responsibility to maintain a secure home front falling primarily on their shoulders as symbols of hope, comfort, and courage, not only for their own families, but for the nation as a whole, in the face of potential nuclear annihilation.

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<sup>123</sup> Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 93.

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**HIST 329**  
**The Evolution of Women War Correspondents:**  
**From WWII to the Vietnam War**  
Syllabus

**Course Description:**

This course traces the evolution of women as war correspondents from their experiences in World War II to the Vietnam War, examining how their roles as journalists, photographers, and broadcasters have progressed over time. In the male-dominated field of war journalism, several women emerged as prominent and respected war correspondents, their coverage ranging from military strategy, the soldiers' experience, to human-interest stories from the front lines. Throughout their careers as war correspondents, they were confronted with issues of discrimination, sexual harassment, and an overall air of skepticism on their abilities as journalists. Social, cultural, and economic factors such as mass mobilization during WWII and later, the women's movement, prior to and during the Vietnam War influenced many women to defy long-established gender stereotypes, breaking through barriers to earn the right to report on these conflicts and have their voices heard. This course will explore the following themes:

- History of women in journalism
- Women's roles in war (pre-1945)
- Women's mobilization and war work for WWII
- Women's work in post-WWII (Korean/Cold War)
- Women's Movement (2<sup>nd</sup> wave)
- Vietnam War
- Post-Vietnam (Recent wars)

**Course Learning Outcomes**

- Students will demonstrate expertise evaluating the roles of women in war, their occupations in various fields, focusing specifically on their work as war correspondents from WWII to the Vietnam War.
- Students will analyze primary sources to formulate a comprehensive argument that utilizes the assigned readings in a thesis-driven essay which examines the experiences of women war correspondents.
- Students will identify key similarities and differences in the experiences of women war correspondents, comparing between WWII and the Vietnam War.
- Students will use appropriate research methods, develop their analytical abilities, hone their writing skills, and accurately apply citations.

**Assignments and Grading:**

- |                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| ▪ Participation           | 15% |
| ▪ Primary Source Analysis | 20% |
| ▪ Paper Proposal          | 15% |

- Presentation 15%
- Final Paper 35%

Participation:

This course will include a combination of lectures and discussion sections. Students are expected to attend classes weekly, prepared to participate in class discussions based on the assigned readings for the week.

Primary Source Analysis:

Each student will critically analyze provided primary source materials, summarizing its content, style and argument in a short 2 page essay.

Paper Proposal: October 20<sup>th</sup>

Each student will write and submit for approval a proposal detailing a research question they aim to answer based on any of the assigned primary sources throughout the course, discuss the methods they plan to use, and include a brief description of at least three external secondary sources that will supplement their research.

Presentation: November 29<sup>th</sup> & December 1st

Each student will present their paper in a 10–15-minute presentation, summarizing their research questions, main argument, and research methodologies in a concise manner to develop their oral and presentation skills.

Final Paper: December 8<sup>th</sup>

Each student will write a final research paper assessing a primary source of their choice as provided in the course, craft a research question, and use secondary sources provided in the course, as well as external secondary sources, to support their argument and analysis. The final paper should be 6-8 pages in length, double-spaced in 12pt Times New Roman font.

**Required Texts**

Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004)

Catherine Gourley, *War, Women, and the News: How Female Journalists Won the Battle to Cover World War II* (New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2007)

Virginia Elwood-Akers, *Women War Correspondents in the Vietnam War, 1961-1975* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988)

Mary Cronk Farrell, *Close-Up on War: The Story of Pioneering Photojournalist Catherine Leroy in Vietnam* (New York: Amulet Books, 2022)

**Additional primary and secondary source readings (journal articles, book chapters) will be posted on the Canvas course site in PDF form.**

## **Class Schedule:**

### **Week 1: *History of Women in Journalism***

#### **08/30 – Course introduction**

- Overview of Syllabus

#### **09/01 – History of Women in Journalism**

- Read: Deborah Chambers, *Women and Journalism*
  - Introduction, pg 1-13
- Read: Beasley, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*
  - Overview, pg 1-51 (Chapter available on Canvas)

Takeaways: Students will go over the course syllabus, familiarize themselves with the assignments, and learn about the history of women’s professional integration into the field of journalism to better understand the background of women’s evolution as journalists.

### **Week 2: *History of Women in Journalism II***

#### **09/06 – Stereotypes and Discrimination**

- Read: Deborah Chambers, *Women and Journalism*
  - Chp 1: Early women journalists: 1850-1945, pg 13-30
- Read: Beasley, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (Chapters available on Canvas)
  - Chp 7: Suffrage Newspapers, pg 81-87
  - Chp 10: Stunt Reporters and Sob Sisters, pg 111-123
  - Chp 14: Racial Discrimination, 147-157

#### **09/08 – The Women’s Pages**

- Read: Beasley, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*
  - Chp 17: Women’s Pages, pg 175-185 (Chapter available on Canvas)
- Read: Julie A. Golia, “Courting Women, Courting Advertisers,” *The Journal of American History* 103, No. 3 (December 2016), pg 606-628.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48560225>

Takeaways: Students will learn about the progression of female journalists from the first women who reported on the suffrage movement, their typecasting into stereotypical sexist roles, and the racial discrimination they encountered. They will also explore the feminization of certain sections of newspapers, magazines, and advertisements, focused on appealing to female audiences by centering discussions on housewifery, fashion, and family.

### **Week 3: *Women’s War Roles***

#### **09/13 – Women’s Roles in War (Civil War)**



- Read: William A. Strasser, “Our Women Played Well Their Parts”: Confederate Women in Civil War East Tennessee,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 59, No. 2 (Summer 2000): 88-107. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42627536>
- Read: Juanita L. Jensen, “Their Essential Roles During the Civil War,” *Military Images* 35, No. 1 (Winter 2017): 38-40. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/24865793>

#### 09/15 – **Women’s Roles in War (WWI)**

- Read: Cynthia Brandimarte, “Women on the Home Front: Hostess Houses during World War I,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 42, No. 4 (Winter 2008): 201-222. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/592789>
- Read: Susan Pycroft, “British Working Women and the First World War,” *The Historian* 56, No. 4 (Summer 1994): 699-710. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24449074>

Takeaways: Students will examine the early roles women played in the Civil War and World War I, noting the differences or similarities in their contributions to war, as well as public attitudes toward their changing roles.

#### Week 4: **WWII**

#### 09/20 – **Changing Status of Women**

- Read Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Chapters available on Canvas)
  - Chp 1: World War II and the Changing Status of American Women, 3-23
  - Chp 2: Woman’s Place is in the Home – and in the Factory, Too, 23-30

#### 09/22 – **Women’s Mobilization**

- Read D’Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Chapters available on Canvas)
  - Introduction, 1-17
  - Chp 3: Volunteer, Worker, or Housewife? 63-101
  - Chp 4: Making Way for Rosie, 101-139

Takeaways: Students will learn about the mass mobilization of women during World War II, as they transitioned from the domestic realm to the public sphere, volunteering and working toward the war effort. Studying this period will help students better understand the historical context that encouraged more women to pursue war reporting as a professional career.

#### Week 5: **WWII Correspondents**

#### 09/27 – **Progresses and Challenges**

- Read: Catherine Gourley, *War, Women and the News*
  - Introduction, 1-29
  - Chp 4: Attack of the Rising Sun, 75-103

Read Candi S. Carter Olson, "This Was No Place for a Woman": Gender Judo, Gender Stereotypes, and World War II Correspondent Ruth Cowan," *American Journalism* 34, No. 4 (2017): 427-447. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.2017.1382296>

09/29 – **Dudley Harmon and Helen Kirkpatrick**

- Read: Catherine Gourley, *War, Women and the News*
  - Chp 5: The Yanks Are Coming! (And the Women, too!), 103-143
  
- Read: "BBC Broadcast by Dudley Harmon on May 10, 1943, at 2 a.m. London Time," (Primary source)  
Read: July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1943, letter from Dudley to father (Primary source)  
Read: March 9, 1943, letter from Dudley to father (Primary source)

OR

Read: "Window on the World: Paris after a month of liberation, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1944," (Primary source)  
Read: July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1944, letter from Helen to family (Primary source)

Takeaways: Students will be introduced to a few prominent female war correspondents including Dickey Chapelle and Ruth Cowan, learning about their experiences and challenges as they reported on WWII. Students will then choose one of the provided primary source material, and analyze its content and scope, summarizing their findings in a written assignment due the following week.

Week 6: ***Women's Work Status – Post WWII***

10/04 – **Cold War Domestic Ideologies**

- Read: Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Chapters available on Canvas)
    - Introduction, 1-19
    - Chp 1: Containment at Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth, 19-39
    - Chp 3: War and Peace: Fanning the Home Fires, 58-89
- Read: Jessamyn Neuhaus, "The Way to a Man's Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology, and Cookbooks in the 1950s," *Journal of Social History* 32, No. 3 (Spring 1999): 529-555. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3789341>

10/06 – **Post-war Journalism**

- Read: Deborah Chambers, *Women and Journalism*
  - Chp 2: Women journalists in the post-war period, 30-55

ASSIGNMENT: ***Primary Source Analysis due***

Takeaways: Students will explore women’s transition back to the home in the postwar period, as men returned from war and women were expected to embrace domesticity once again. By analyzing the changing shifts in gender roles, students will gain an understanding of how this affected female journalists in the postwar period as well.

### Week 7: *Korean/Cold War Correspondents*

#### 10/11 – **Marguerite Higgins (Korean War)**

- Read: “Marguerite Higgins Told To Leave Korea,” *The New York Times*, July 18, 1950, [https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1950/07/18/84666241.pdf?pdf\\_redirect=true&ip=0](https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1950/07/18/84666241.pdf?pdf_redirect=true&ip=0) (Primary source)  
Read: Marguerite Higgins, *War in Korea: The Report of a Woman Combat Correspondent* (Chapters available on Canvas)
  - Chp 1: Journey Into War, 13-23
  - Chp 7: Newsman Higgins, 93-111

#### 10/13 – **Pauline Frederick (Cold War)**

- Read: Marilyn S. Greenwald, *Pauline Frederick Reporting: A Pioneering Broadcaster Covers the Cold War* (Chapters available on Canvas)
  - Introduction, xvii – xx
  - Chp 6: Perils of Pauline, 102-129Read: Linda J. Lumsden, “The Essentialist Agenda of the “Woman’s Angle” in Cold War Washington,” *Journalism History* 33, No. 1 (2007): 2-13.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00947679.2007.12062723>

Takeaways: Students will learn about two prominent female journalists during the Korean and Cold War Periods, including Marguerite Higgins and Pauline Frederick, noting the similarities or differences in their war experiences, how they were treated and regarded by their colleagues and the public, and their methods to overcome such challenges.

### Week 8: *The Women’s Movement*

#### 10/18 – **Second-Wave Feminism**

- Read: Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*
  - Chp 1: The Problem That Has No Name, 15-32 (Chapter available on Canvas)Read: Jessica Weiss, *Liberty and Justice for All? Rethinking Politics in Cold War America*, Kathleen G. Donohue, ed.
  - Chp 4: “Fraud of Femininity”: Domesticity, Selflessness, and Individualism in Responses to Betty Friedan, 124-157 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vk2h9.7> (Chapter available on Canvas)

#### 10/20 – **Feminism and Journalism**

- Read: Deborah Chambers, *Women and Journalism*
  - Chp 8: Women’s alternative print journalism of the ‘second and ‘third’ waves, 141-158

## ASSIGNMENT: *Paper Proposal due*

Takeaways: Students will learn about the rise of second-wave feminism through Friedan's influential work, as well as critiques in response to her publication. Students will also examine how this movement influenced female journalists to alter the content and style of their work, catering to the emerging feminist mindset of the period, which emphasized gender equality and consciousness-raising.

### Week 9: *Vietnam War*

#### 10/25 – “Living Room War”

- Read: Michael Mandelbaum, “Vietnam: The Television War,” *Daedalus* 111, No. 4 (Fall 1983): 157-169. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20024822>
- Read: Joyce Hoffman, *On Their Own: Women Journalists and the American Experience in Vietnam*
  - The War on Television, 238-280 (Chapter available on Canvas)

#### 10/27 – **Gender and Vietnam**

- Read: Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (Chapters available on Canvas)
  - Introduction, 1-17
  - Chp 4: Gender and America's “Faces of Domination” in Vietnam, 142-183

Takeaways: Students will examine how technological advancements in broadcast television led to live coverage of the Vietnam War, shaping public opinion and influencing American involvement. Students will also learn about how gender roles were both reinforced and challenged in the Vietnam War.

### Week 10: *Vietnam War II - Correspondents*

#### 11/01 – **Dickey Chapelle**

- Read: Beasley, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*
  - Chp 20: Vietnam Reporters, 223-235
- Read: Virginia Elwood-Akers, *Women War Correspondents in the Vietnam War, 1961-1975*
  - Introduction, 1-15
  - Chp 1: “With the Paratroops,” by Dickey Chapelle, 29-36

#### 11/03 – **Catherine Leroy**

- Read: Mary Cronk Farrell, *Close-Up on War: The Story of Pioneering Photojournalist Catherine Leroy in Vietnam*
  - Chp 1: A Man's World, 13-21
  - Chp 2: On the Ground in Vietnam, 21-34

Read: “Letters from Vietnam” – Catherine Leroy’s letters to family,  
<https://dotationcatherineleroy.org/en/biography/letters-from-vietnam-about/letters-from-vietnam/> (Primary source)

**Takeaways:** Students will be introduced to two prominent female photojournalists of the Vietnam War, Dickey Chapelle and Catherine Leroy, reading their own accounts of how they proved their capabilities as a war correspondent, challenging traditional gender stereotypes. Students will also read Leroy’s letters home to her family, learning about her experience with the Marines as one of the few female correspondents in Vietnam.

#### Week 11: *Post-Vietnam (Recent wars)*

##### 11/08 – **Middle East Conflicts**

- Read: Canny Kennard and Sheila T. Murphy, *Media and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, Philip Seib, ed.  
- Chp 6: Characteristics of War Coverage by Female Correspondents, 127-140

##### 11/10 – **Gender and News Coverage**

- Read: Lindsay Palmer and Jad Melki, “Shape Shifting in the Conflict Zone,” *Journalism Studies* 19, No. 1 (2018): 126-142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1161494>
- Read: Dustin Harp, Jaime Loke, Ingrid Bachmann, “More of the Same Old Story? Women, War, and News in Time Magazine,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 34, No. 2 (2011): 202-217. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2011.619470>

**Takeaways:** Students will explore how female journalists’ war reporting differ in comparison to their male counterparts, and study how they switch between gender performances, embracing feminine or masculine traits in order to obtain coverage of recent conflicts in the Middle East.

#### Week 12: *Post-Vietnam II*

##### 11/15 – **Gender and Journalism**

Read: Janet Harris, Nick Mosdell and James Griffiths, “Gender, Risk and Journalism,” *Journalism Practice* 10, No. 7 (2016): 902-916.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1166449>

##### 11/17 - **Female Journalists more at risk?**

- Read: Sally McLaren, “Women Reporting Conflict: Reflections on No Woman's Land: On the Frontline with Female Reporters,” *Feminist Media Studies* 13, No. 1 (2013): 164-170. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2013.761775>

**Takeaways:** Students will learn about the increased risks associated with war correspondence as a woman, including safety issues and sexual harassment and assault.

#### Week 13: Thanksgiving Break

#### Week 14: *Presentations*

11/29 – **Student presentations**

12/01 – **Student presentations**

Week 15: *Finals Week*

12/08 – ASSIGNMENT: *Final paper due*

## **The Evolution of Women War Correspondents: From WWII to the Vietnam War**

### Historiography Section

Since this course traces the progression of women's work as war correspondents and their experiences ranging from World War II to the Vietnam War, it is important to study the historical background of not only women as war correspondents, but also women's changing roles in war, as well as their progression and contributions to the field of journalism. A comprehensive study of all these topics will enable students to situate women's war correspondence work within a wider historical framework and recognize the significance of war in shaping the development of women in the professional sphere, their social standing, and their war roles. Upon the course's completion, students should have a solid understanding of how women's experiences as war correspondents were impacted by social movements, economic and political policies, and the unique circumstances of each war. As such, students in this course will explore the following themes:

- History of women in journalism
- Women's roles in war (pre-1945)
- Women's mobilization for WWII
- Women's work in post-WWII (Korean/Cold War)
- Women's Movement (2<sup>nd</sup> wave)
- Vietnam War
- Post-Vietnam (Recent wars)

### **Women and War**

Historically, women's roles in war have often been minimized due to certain gender stereotypes based on essentialist beliefs that women are innately peaceful in comparison to men, who are more prone to aggression. As Jean Bethke Elshtain defines in *Women and War* (1987),

these perceptions are instilled within our cultural memory, the myth of Man as “Just Warriors” - inherent violent fighters, and Woman as “Beautiful Souls” – symbols of peace and compassion, virtues inextricably tied to our genders. The result of these classifying tropes, Elshtain contends, does not indicate what “men and women *really* are in time of war,” but rather serve to “secure women’s location as noncombatants and men’s as warriors,”<sup>124</sup> which puts at risk of overshadowing both men and women who prove as exceptions to the rule. In addition, with the onset of mass female mobilization during World War II, Elshtain questions if “in a post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima world, can Beautiful Souls and Just Warriors retain their luster? Has the emergence of the woman as a mobilized war worker...or the prime victim of total war shattered our notion of Beautiful Souls or Just Warriors?”<sup>125</sup> Many historians agree that such notions have indeed been shattered, but their opinions mostly differ on the significance and permanence of such changes over the past few decades.

William Chafe’s *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Political and Economic Roles, 1920-1970* (1972) was one of the first works to argue that the unique circumstances of World War II helped propel women into the professional world with unprecedented numbers, signaling a lasting change in American society’s relationship with gender and the workforce. Chafe claims that due to the very nature of war, the traditional systems of gender and labor “forced an adjustment in the patterns of national living,” even suggesting that “many of the most overt forms of discrimination against women were eradicated.”<sup>126</sup> He also points out that the most significant change to occur from such a disruption was the age and marital status of a new worker to the labor force, noting, “it was important that Rosie riveted, but far more critical was

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<sup>124</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 4.

<sup>125</sup> Elshtain, *Women and War*, 6.

<sup>126</sup> William Chafe, *The American Woman, Her Changing Social, Political, and Economic Roles, 1920-1970* (Oxford University Press, 1972), 150.



the fact that she was married and over thirty-five years old,” citing that the percentage of married women who were employed rose from 15.2 percent in 1940 to more than 24 percent by the end of 1945.<sup>127</sup> Before the war, the employment of married women was frowned upon, as it was seen as a threat to traditional gender roles and the stability of family life. However, during the war, the public’s patriotic mindset shifted toward acceptance out of necessity to maintain the country’s economy, and as such, many merely tolerated this rise in married working women, regarding it as a “temporary necessity, but not as a permanent reality.”<sup>128</sup> Chafe argues against this perception, stating that the impact of the war on female employment was far-reaching and significant enough to break down the long established barriers that kept women out of the labor force, creating an environment that coincided with the feminist movement of the 1960s. Despite this dramatic transformation, Chafe recognizes that women’s economic status remained relatively unchanged, revealing that inequality between the sexes in the labor force still inevitably existed, and would require a radical shift in public opinion and attitude, as well as an increase in opportunities for female workers to address this issue.

A decade later, historians Leila Rupp and Karen Anderson challenged Chafe’s assertions in their publications, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (1978) and *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (1981), respectively. In her analysis of both prewar and wartime mobilization propaganda targeted to women in Nazi Germany and the United States, Rupp finds that the popular images and mobilization policies utilized to motivate women to contribute to the war effort were molded around already existing gender roles, emphasizing femininity and

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<sup>127</sup> William Chafe, *The American Woman, Her Changing Social, Political, and Economic Roles, 1920-1970* (Oxford University Press, 1972), 144.

<sup>128</sup> Chafe, *The American Woman*, 150.

maternalism. As such, the public image of women as maternal figures and housewives was able to adapt to wartime issues without challenging established gender norms. Although crucial, many regarded this adjustment as temporary, a sentiment previously noted by Chafe. Rupp also attributes this mindset to explain the absence of lasting progress in women's economic and social positions after the war, stating, "the postwar image of women did not have to make tremendous adjustments. Rosie simply stepped out of her overalls, still wearing her apron underneath."<sup>129</sup> In direct opposition to Chafe, Rupp points to the general increase in female work force numbers from 1890 to 1960 as evidence that the rise in female employment during the war "had nothing to do with these long-term changes and had no permanent impact on the female labor force."<sup>130</sup> She also continues to argue that Chafe's theories could be applicable to the United States in the 1960's and 1970's "to explain shifts in attitudes as the employment of women became commonplace, but the war did not set the process of social change in motion."<sup>131</sup>

In a similar manner, Karen Anderson's *Wartime Women* examines the social, cultural, and economic impact that the Second World War had on American women and their families, focusing specifically on the three main defense production cities of Baltimore, Seattle, and Detroit as her case studies to determine just how much the war was responsible for enacting social change. Anderson closely analyzes the female labor force during wartime, revealing that the circumstances of war allowed large groups of women to break out from the fields of domestic service to obtain jobs in government and the war industry. In response to the rise in female employment, the National War Labor Board established the equal pay principle in 1942, but as previously noted by Chafe, economic inequality remained during and after the war due to deeply

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<sup>129</sup> Leila Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton University Press, 1978), 175.

<sup>130</sup> Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War*, 177.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

ingrained notions of gender roles. In comparison to Chafe's argument, Anderson contends that using labor-force statistics to explain the social impact of war cannot be sufficient as a means of analysis, since "a reliance on labor-force statistics as barometers of the social consequences of war is too simplistic an approach."<sup>132</sup> In order to fully comprehend the war's influence, Anderson suggests, it is important to explore women's daily lives at home with their family, at work, and the public's reactions to women taking on unconventional roles, as "the question of the war's effect on women's consciousness of themselves as women and as workers must be addressed, along with the extent to which war-induced innovations promoted an erosion of sexist prejudices."<sup>133</sup> Anderson also makes sure to focus on the experiences of black women as workers, highlighting the racial discrimination that they faced during wartime employment. In her final analysis, Anderson concludes that although women enjoyed a moderate improvement in status during the war, "the working woman would find that her relative position within the American economy and its ideological concomitants remained unaltered by the wartime experience."<sup>134</sup>

In considering all three works, it is clear that Chafe's initial observations on the lasting impact of the war on women's positions lacked a comprehensive evaluation of other important factors, such as the effects of mobilization propaganda on the public perception of women, and the significance of women's daily lives with their family and work, as emphasized by Rupp and Anderson. Although they disagree on their approaches to understanding the relationship between war and women, all three authors acknowledge that World War II served as a catalyst for temporary changes regarding American women and their status and roles in society.

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<sup>132</sup> Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 11.

<sup>133</sup> Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 11.

<sup>134</sup> Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 65.

Historians have also explored the evolution of women's war roles in the post-WWII era, such as the Cold War and the Vietnam War. In *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988), Elaine Tyler May examines the close connection between Cold War policies of containment and domestic values of traditional American families, arguing that these ideologies were intertwined. After WWII, American women were expected to return to their domestic realms as men returned to work – the formation of a female labor force seen as a necessary but temporary facet of war. While the U.S. was embroiled in an ideological conflict with the Soviet Union, traditional gender roles became paramount to the public image of American values against communism. As May notes, “these strategies were to infuse the traditional role of women with new meaning and importance, which would help fortify the home as a place of security amid the Cold War.”<sup>135</sup> Similarly, Heather Marie Stur's *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (2011) analyzes the Vietnam War through the lens of gender, arguing that “American Cold War ideas about manhood and womanhood shaped relations between U.S. military bases and surrounding Vietnamese communities,”<sup>136</sup> as popular home-front beliefs on traditional gender roles affected U.S. policies toward Vietnam. As May and Stur have demonstrated, women's roles in war also extend beyond their involvement, and are simultaneously shaped by, and shape, the development of social and military policies.

Ultimately, one aspect that most scholars can agree on is the importance of taking the issue of gender into consideration when studying war. As Miriam Cooke notes in her chapter, “Wo-Man, Retelling the War Myth,” from *Gendering War Talk* (1993), the documentation of women's involvement in war is “crucial in order to counteract some of the distortions that have

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<sup>135</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 101.

<sup>136</sup> Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

always been necessary to construct the age-old story of war as men's business,"<sup>137</sup> an issue as previously pointed out by Elshtain. Both Elshtain and Cooke contend that by centering any study of war through the lens of gender, we can then be able to dispute the myth: "the mystique of the unquestionable masculinity of soldiering, of the essential femininity of peace advocacy."<sup>138</sup> By beginning to question this myth, new analysis of women's roles can be taken into consideration to include a comprehensive understanding of their participation, irrespective of how they are expected to act according to conventional gender roles. It is important for students to study these dynamics at play to comprehend the impacts of war on women's social and economic standing, which directly influences their roles in the professional world, including journalism and war correspondence work.

## **Women and Journalism**

As more women ventured into the working world, the profession of journalism appealed to many as an opportunity to report on stories they deemed important and to have their voices heard. However, from its inception as a professional career, the field of journalism was and still to some extent remains a male-dominated sphere. Male editors of newspaper organizations were hesitant to hire women as writers based on prejudicial attitudes deeply embedded and prevalent in society. In *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (1993), Maurine Beasley and Sheila Gibbons noted that a lack of women's participation within journalism and the media was reflected in the coverage of women, "depicted in news, advertising, and entertainment as wives, mothers, sex objects, or - even more significantly - not

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<sup>137</sup> Miriam Cooke, "Wo-Man, Retelling the War Myth," in *Gendering War Talk*, ed. Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (Princeton University Press, 1993), 177.

<sup>138</sup> Cooke, "Wo-Man, Retelling the War Myth," 178.

at all, women were not portrayed as individuals capable of independent contributions to the world.”<sup>139</sup> Despite these hurdles, countless women sought to become accomplished journalists by writing about and reporting on “serious” topics such as politics, business, and world events, commonly referred to as “hard news,” for major news networks and organizations.

However, this was no easy feat. Traditionally, female writers were usually assigned to cover topics that were considered “soft news,” such as fashion, lifestyle, and entertainment, centered around “human interest” stories with a “magazine-style” of reporting, that would appear in the “women’s page” section of a newspaper.<sup>140</sup> The compensation for these sections typically paid less than other more “serious” sections, usually reserved for male journalists, keeping women out of direct competition with their male colleagues. According to Beasley and Gibbons, “women’s pages reinforced the idea of separate spheres for men and women. Men ran the world: the news of their conflict, power, and influence dominated the front pages. Women took care of homes and children: the news of noncontroversial domestic and social pursuits appeared on the women’s pages.”<sup>141</sup> Although the creation of these pages provided an opening for many women to launch their careers as journalists, many felt pigeonholed, limited to certain topics. Margherita Hamm, one of the first female journalists to report on a war from the front lines, remarked, “the average managing editor or city editor will not believe that a woman is capable of handling anything but the latest parties, the latest dresses, the newest bonnets, the latest weddings.”<sup>142</sup>

Echoing Beasley and Gibbons’ argument, Alice Fahs suggests in *Out on Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space* (2011), that the women’s page, “was not the

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<sup>139</sup> Maurine Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (Washington, D.C.: The American University Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>140</sup> Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

<sup>141</sup> Beasley and Gibbons, *Taking Their Place*, 3.

<sup>142</sup> Margherita Arlina Hamm, “Among the Newspaper Women,” *Journalist*, May 28, 1892, quoted in Alice Fahs, *Out on Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4.

invention of newspaper women, after all, but instead was the creation of male editors seeking an expanded female readership,”<sup>143</sup> confining female writers to a limited space from which they found difficult to distance themselves.

In efforts to break free from these standards, several early women reporters from the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to be characterized as “sob sisters,” reporters who feigned tears to gain the sympathy and stories of their interviewees, and “stunt girls,” as they strove to get their stories from the women’s page to the front page. Elizabeth Cochrane, known by her pen name Nellie Bly, was well known for her daring stunts – feigning insanity to write an exposé on the horrifying conditions of a mental asylum, getting caught stealing on purpose to find out how women were treated in jail, and famously, Bly made headlines for her record-breaking expedition around the world set by Phileas Fogg, a fictional character from Jules Verne’s *Around the World in 80 Days*.<sup>144</sup> Although a few female journalists managed to get their stories on the front pages, it was seemingly often only achievable through dramatic and risky acts to distinguish themselves as worthy reporters who deserved to be on the front page.

To report on significant topics that were considered “hard news,” female journalists had to break through barriers and overcome major stereotypes and prejudices to earn that opportunity. An example of one such stereotype was the preconceived notion that an important topic covered from a “woman’s angle” would be overly emotional and sensationalistic.

Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming in *Women and Journalism* (2004) attributes this stereotype to the notion that “women journalists are signified as gendered: their work is routinely defined and

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<sup>143</sup> Alice Fahs, *Out on Assignment: Newspaper Women and the Making of Modern Public Space* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>144</sup> Kay Mills, *A Place in the News: From the Women’s Pages to the Front Page* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1988), 24.

judged by their femininity,”<sup>145</sup> making it difficult for newspaper editors and their audiences to perceive certain stories objectively, whether it be consciously or subconsciously. Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming also explores the challenges that women faced as they built their reputations as journalists, investigating the various strategies utilized to combat marginalization in the male-dominated industry of news and media, as well as the many ways in which women have changed and shaped their own roles within journalism. The book aims to “show how news processes have been largely shaped by gender and how the organization of the news and of the newsroom, as well as assumptions about gender and women, have affected women’s performance and potential as journalists.”<sup>146</sup> Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming find that by transforming certain news agendas, women journalists have expanded the definitions of news – since women were “likely to report on a wider range of social issues with an emphasis on the human-interest angle,” including important topics impacting women’s lives that had previously been seldomly discussed, such as workplace sexual harassment, the difficulties of balancing work and family, and discourse on sexuality.<sup>147</sup> However, by focusing on such subjects, they are typecast, often exclusively assigned to cover “lower-status” topics such as fashion, lifestyle, and entertainment.<sup>148</sup>

Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming conclude their analysis by acknowledging that despite such challenges, many individual women have still managed to establish themselves as credible reporters covering serious topics, from Margaret Fuller, credited as the first female foreign and war correspondent in the United States, to Christiane Amanpour, Chief International Anchor for CNN, considered one of the leading war reporters of the past few decades. As such, they note,

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<sup>145</sup> Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

<sup>146</sup> Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, 1.

<sup>147</sup> Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, 203.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*



“femaleness is no longer an automatic disadvantage in the reporting world.”<sup>149</sup> However, although there has been a considerable rise of women in journalism, they “have not yet reached a critical mass in ‘serious’ news beats,” remaining a minority in upper management positions in news corporations, “where a glass ceiling continues to limit women’s promotion to key decision-making positions,”<sup>150</sup> making it still considerably difficult for women to advance in their careers and establish themselves as accomplished and credible journalists.

Kay Mills, in *A Place in the News: From the Women’s Pages to the Front Page* (1988), poses the question of how to break through this glass ceiling, suggesting a possible solution: “how will women advance? Part of the answer lies with women themselves; they must prepare themselves better to tackle management jobs,” also stating, “women who are already in the executive ranks must not be reluctant to promote other women.”<sup>151</sup> An increase in the presence of women in higher management positions, Mills contends, will lead to a subsequent rise in the number of women being hired and interviewed, as well as an increased focus on women’s issues. To some extent, Mills suggests, this has already been demonstrated through the close interactions between the women’s movement of the 1960’s and 70’s and the presence and coverage of women by American newspaper organizations. She claims that “the presence of more women in the newsroom has changed some attitudes of their male editors, the presence of more women covering stories has led to more women being interviewed.”<sup>152</sup> To this point, Beasley and Gibbons argue that there is insufficient evidence to support this claim, referring to the 1989 Women, Men and Media Conference which found that women were still underrepresented in

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<sup>149</sup> Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 203.

<sup>150</sup> Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, 2.

<sup>151</sup> Kay Mills, *A Place in the News: From the Women’s Pages to the Front Page* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1988), 337, 346.

<sup>152</sup> Mills, *A Place in the News*, 10.

major newspapers and were still limited to lower-paying positions.<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, they contend that it would be unreasonable to completely “discount the impact of the women’s movement on the media,” since “it opened the way for many more women to be hired and for some to move into responsible positions and moved stories about issues of special interest to women onto the front pages, at least to some degree.”<sup>154</sup> It is important for students to learn about women’s historical progression in the field of journalism to understand how social prejudices and gender stereotypes influenced hiring practices, writing expectations, and their struggle to report on serious news, issues that are also prevalent in the employment of women as war correspondents.

### **Women as War Correspondents**

Soon after the onset of World War II, women discovered that there was a significant gap to be filled within news organizations as many men were away in the military. This offered new and exciting opportunities for women to move into the overwhelmingly male-dominated sphere of journalism. Previously excluded from participating independently, women proved to be more than capable of reporting on major issues, including writing and editing feature articles while under high pressure deadlines. Many also obtained jobs in radio programming, broadcasting, and photojournalism. Approximately 125 women became accredited as war correspondents during World War II despite a reluctance on the end of U.S. officials to issue them.<sup>155</sup> Throughout their careers as war correspondents, women experienced blatant discrimination, sexual harassment, and were commonly perceived with an air of skepticism as to their ability to withstand and tolerate the grisly and perilous realities of being in a war zone. As

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<sup>153</sup> Maurine Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (Washington, D.C.: The American University Press, 1993), 31.

<sup>154</sup> Beasley and Gibbons, *Taking Their Place*, 34.

<sup>155</sup> Lilya Wagner, *Women War Correspondents of World War II* (New York: Greenwood, 1989), 152.

Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming note, on top of the constant harassment that they encountered, “in the form of sexist innuendoes and jokes - the lack of toilet facilities for women was used as an ongoing excuse by successive governments and the military to systematically bar women correspondents from the key events that needed to be reported on.”<sup>156</sup> Nevertheless, they persisted and proved themselves competent by displaying courage and tenacity in the face of danger while conducting extensive coverage of the war. Examples of such individuals include Margaret Bourke-White, photojournalist for *Life* magazine, and Marguerite Higgins, reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune*, the first female war correspondent to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize for her coverage on the Korean War.

In *Women of the World: The Great Foreign Correspondents* (1988), Julia Edwards argues that women correspondents secured their positions by convincing their bosses that they could provide a “woman’s point of view,” but as soon as they were overseas, they “took off their kid gloves, put on their helmets, and raced the men to the front and back to the cable desk.”<sup>157</sup> However, according to Maurine Beasley in, “Women and Journalism in World War II: Discrimination and Progress,” some women “took pleasure in maintaining their feminine identity at the same time they displayed their professional competence,” such as Margaret Bourke-White, who was described to be very diligent about keeping up her appearance, intending to combine her femininity with her professionalism.<sup>158</sup> Catherine Gourley takes a slightly different approach in *War, Women and the News: How Female Journalists Won the Battle to Cover World War II* (2007). She suggests that female journalists neither took advantage of or rejected their feminine

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<sup>156</sup> Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 177.

<sup>157</sup> Julia Edwards, *Women of the World: The Great Foreign Correspondents* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988), 5.

<sup>158</sup> Maurine Beasley, “Women and Journalism in World War II: Discrimination and Progress,” *American Journalism* 12, no. 3 (1995): 328, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.1995.10731746>.

qualities, arguing, “they were journalists, first and foremost, and as journalists, their responsibility was to get the story. Most women said they had done nothing extraordinary in being a war correspondent and were writing about the war for the same reasons that men did.”<sup>159</sup> Evidently, there have been varying perspectives on the strategies employed by female war correspondents to obtain coverage, as well as their motivations for pursuing a career in war reporting during WWII.

As the Vietnam War unfolded from 1961 to 1975, women war correspondents made significant progress in their statuses as credible journalists. This was largely due to two main factors – the advancement of broadcasting technology, which meant that news could be transmitted in “real time,” “allowing women to contribute to a period of journalistic innovation,”<sup>160</sup> and the guerrilla form of combat, which did not consist of distinct front lines, as well as a limited amount of strict military restrictions. Special permission was also not required to travel to Vietnam, and reporters could easily book their own tickets for commercial flights. Due to these factors, “easy access to the war, rather than changed attitudes towards women, was probably the major reason such a large number of women reported from Vietnam,”<sup>161</sup> according to Virginia Elwood-Akers in *Women War Correspondents in the Vietnam War, 1961-1975* (1988). By the end of the war, the U.S. military had accredited 267 American female correspondents.<sup>162</sup> In a similar manner to Gourley, Elwood-Akers also found that there was little difference in reports written by male and female journalists, as “women wrote the so-called ‘human interest’ stories which have traditionally been expected of the woman reporter, but male

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<sup>159</sup> Catherine Gourley, *War, Women and the News: How Female Journalists Won the Battle to Cover World War II* (New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2007), 4

<sup>160</sup> Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 180.

<sup>161</sup> Virginia Elwood-Akers, *Women War Correspondents in the Vietnam War, 1961-1975* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988), 8.

<sup>162</sup> Maurine Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism* (Washington, D.C.: The American University Press, 1993), 223.

reporters in Vietnam wrote ‘human interest’ stories as well. Both male and female reporters wrote of the complexities of the political events that shaped the history of the war.”<sup>163</sup> In fact, many female reporters avoided writing coverage that could have been characterized as “women’s stories,” as they refused to be confined within a stereotype, mirroring the attitudes of early female journalists regarding the “women’s page.” Furthermore, Elwood-Akers notes that female journalists tended to shy away from or completely avoid the women’s movement of that period. She deduces that due to the struggles that women already faced in dealing with their male colleagues and the military, showing support for the women’s movement, although they might have believed in its cause as individuals, might detract from how they were viewed as professional journalists.

In comparison to their predecessors from World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War, contemporary women war correspondents face fewer prejudices and barriers, thanks to the trailblazing efforts of the female journalists who paved the way for them. Despite this achievement, women war correspondents “continue to evoke highly gendered attention and curiosity, in part because they are engaging in dangerous forays, but also because they disrupt still-lingering stereotypes of women’s conventional roles in journalism and the wider society,”<sup>164</sup> a complex issue that will likely still be prevalent in the years to come. With this syllabus, students will acquire a thorough and historical understanding of women’s changing roles in war, their contributions to journalism, and the impacts of social movements and gender stereotypes on such developments. This knowledge will enable students to effectively comprehend the evolution of women as war correspondents and their experiences from WWII to the Vietnam War.

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<sup>163</sup>Virginia Elwood-Akers, *Women War Correspondents in the Vietnam War, 1961-1975* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1988), 2.

<sup>164</sup> Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 173.

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