

Core Curriculum

**Directions:** Read the text that follows and highlight the key information you will be using to write your essay. The theme of your essay will be the social, political and economic changes for women caused by WWII.

**TEST TIPS**

- ◆ Be sure to read all of the directions.
- ◆ Plan your time.
- ◆ Read each question carefully and think about the answer before choosing your response.

# The Changing Roles of Women in World War II



*America's women took on a new role during World War II. Women embraced and fought for the continued responsibility and freedom after the war, forever changing women's rights in the United States and around the world.*

The early 1940s were full of change and advancement, fresh beginnings, and new opportunities, especially for women. The nation was still recovering from the Great Depression, and times were hard. Times ahead were not going to get easier, although the economy would be booming in this decade. Government programs had families back on their feet, and things were looking up, but a drastic change was in store. The United States got involved in the war after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, and soon the draft plucked men out of their jobs and placed them into battle. It was up to the men of the United States Military to fight the good fight, but they soon realized that the women that were working back at home were just as important to victory as the soldiers. The women of America stepped up in a time of need, and the traditional roles of women changed dramatically throughout World War II.

Women had joined the war efforts in World War I, and then returned to their domestic work, for the most part. Housework was often not considered real work because it did not earn money, so women were not given much credit for their non-stop jobs at home. Men were supposed to be the most respected members of the family, and treated almost royally. An unknown textbook from a 1940s home economics class told just what a wife should do to keep her husband happy. Always have the house clean and quiet when your husband arrives home, and offer to take off his shoes or get him a pillow (The Good Housewife). This royal treatment came to an unexpected halt for unexpected reasons.

When the men of the family were called off to war in Europe and Asia, women had to fill their shoes in the workplace, and then some. Prior to this time, women were discriminated against when applying for employment. Some employers were still reluctant to hire women because many employers did not have a reference to a woman's quality of work. Some employers needed workers so badly that they welcomed women employees and hired women without hesitation.

Before long, company officials realized that jobs could get done equally as well by female employees. New professional opportunities were available to women that were previously available exclusively to men (Women Come to the Front). Women were able to get jobs that they would not have been able to acquire if there would have been enough men to do them. Women realized the importance of helping out, and right away there were women on their way to financial independence and liberation, who were just trying to help with the war to bring their men back home.

Even when thousands upon thousands of women had been employed, the need for workers was still growing as the need for supplies, aircraft, and ammunition grew. Propaganda was distributed to encourage women to join the workforce. "Rosie the Riveter" was the name given to the women depicted on many of the propaganda posters. In the most famous one, she is wearing a red and white bandana to cover her hair, and she has rolled back the sleeve of her blue coverall to expose a flexed bicep. The expression on her face was confident and determined. The caption above her head reads "We Can Do It!" (Rosie the Riveter).

Women took over any job that needed to be filled, no matter how "manly" it may have been. They were mechanics, railroad workers, taxi drivers, factory laborers, millwrights, heavy machinery operators, truck drivers, construction workers, and aircraft assemblers, just to name a few. Women took over the family farms and large farms that were responsible for producing food for troops and civilians. The war gave women the opportunity to prove themselves at work.

Although the times were hard, many women continued to join the workforce, and adjust their lives accordingly. "Most of the women employed...had to adjust not only to working outside the [home,] but had to accustom themselves to working under conditions that would have tried the stamina and patience of experienced male industrial workers" (Redstone). A lot of the work was demanding, but women were working hard to help bring their husbands, boyfriends, brothers, uncles, nephews, friends and neighbors home. The numbers of women working continued to rise throughout the war. It was not at all uncommon to see production lines made up of fifty percent women.

Working women were proud of their jobs and tried to keep up their morale while on the job. Women's uniforms were not at all feminine, but they wore them as proudly as a soldier would have. Sometimes they added some feminine touches, like a pretty headscarf to cover their hair. They added some personal touches to their job, too. They had sing-alongs, brought special meals to share with co-workers, and organized company picnics.

World War II opened many doors for female photographers and journalists. Since World War I, women photographers and journalists were not that common. These were good, respected jobs that were reserved for the men. "[Before the war] Eleanor Roosevelt instituted a weekly

women-only press conference to force news organizations to employ at least one female reporter. During World War II, many of the news-women in the First Lady's circle served as war correspondents" (Women Come to the Front). By the end of the war, more than 127 women "had secured official military accreditation as war correspondents." (Women Come to the Front).

Although women were needed and accepted into about all work fields imaginable, there was still an obvious discrimination between the working men and women. The higher paying jobs at a given company were given to the men, and the women were hired for the low paying jobs. Many times, when a woman would take a man's place at work, they would get paid less than the man who was doing that job prior to them. A man and a woman working side by side on an assembly line doing the exact same job would get paid different salaries. In one example of assembly line workers (a man and a woman), the woman's salary was thirty-one dollars per week, and the man's salary was almost fifty-five dollars per week. The more dangerous a job, generally, the more it paid, but women still received less.

Opportunities arose for black women, too. There was still very distinct discrimination between white Americans and African-American, but the need for workers was so high that many companies accepted African-American applicants. Huntsville Arsenal recruited one hundred black women students from Atlanta University to be production line workers, with very satisfying results. The workers well exceeded the expectations of the arsenal's authorities (Redstone). The African-American women were usually paid even less than the white women, and were the first to be fired when a position was no longer in need.

Women were not just working here in America, there were also many women in the military. There were more than 6500 female nurses on duty in the Air Force alone by 1944. Nurses were exposed to just as much danger as soldiers. Flight nurses were in planes that were enemy targets. There was often random stray fire around hospital units. On the front lines of battle there were nurses present to give first aid and help evacuate wounded soldiers to get life saving medical attention.

There were also the non-combat military related positions filled by women. One organization, the Woman's Air Force (WAF) performed duties like testing aircraft and flying planes from the factory to different Air Force bases. WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots) performed similar tasks. Jackie Cochran and General Arnold submitted a bill to Congress in 1943 that was proposing that WASP be militarized, and led by a woman with the rank of colonel, but the War Department opposed (Women at War). So the women in this organization never got military benefits or recognition for their services. Thirty-seven WASP pilots died while on the job, and several more received injuries.

The role of women had shifted, but they could not just give up their responsibilities at home, or forget their worries about the war. Some conservatives thought that women might get so caught up in the independence that they would neglect their housework and families. This was not the case, however. Women held down their jobs and took care of their previous duties in the home. Along with taking on the extra responsibilities, women also had to comfort and calm their children when planes would fly over, due to the worries of an air raid. Moms had to comfort the children who worried when their daddy, brothers, or uncles would be home, and try to assure them that they were safe.

Not all women went to work during the war, but almost all women did something to help with the war efforts. Some started sewing circles to help the Red Cross make supplies to send overseas. The linens for hospital beds, underclothing for soldiers, aprons for surgeons, and many other sewn items were always in need overseas. Some women volunteered to wind bandages to be sent to the battle zones. Women helped cut back on supplies that could be sent to the soldiers. They used less rations, and planted victory gardens to grow their own food. The less that was used, the more that could be sent to the troops. Some women and men at home began riding bicycles where they needed to go in order to cut back on gasoline, oil, and rubber tires, which were in high demand for American troops overseas.

Women were expected to give up their jobs when the men returned home from the war, but that wasn't the case in all situations. There were disabled men who were unable to return to their jobs, so the women in the house continued working. Some women did not want to lose the independence that they had gained during the war, and continued working. Some women left work to start a family then went back to work. Employers were trying to give the men back their jobs, and had to fire women. Would companies want to spend the time and money to train men or would they rather keep the experienced women as employees? Women didn't settle with this decision like they did after World War I. "The war created employment for women [while] liberated them [and] changing their traditional roles" (Women at War).

It was the beginning of a new era in women's history. Women were given a chance to create their own lives and sense of self, and to prove themselves just as capable as men. "[World War II] was a time where women [when] women were no longer forced into the roles society had created for them." (Women at War). It was a time when women did not have to ask their husbands for money; they made it themselves and could spend it any way that they pleased. Naomi Craig, a working woman in the 1930s, said, "Women did change. They had gotten the feeling of their own money. Making it themselves. Not asking anybody how to spend it" (Hartman and Wood).

It was also a new era for home life. Now that women were working outside of the home, men needed to help out with chores at home that were before considered women's work. Now, if things were going to get done efficiently, men had to chip in, too. This was a time that men had to acknowledge that what the women had been doing all day long at home was in fact actually work although they didn't earn money. The adjustments for men were perhaps just as drastic as they were for women when they began working outside the home for the first time.

Since World War II the number of women in the workforce has continued to rise, and changes have been made to ensure equality between men and women. In 1947, in *Fay versus New York*, the United States Supreme Court gives women equal qualification to serve on juries, but they are not required to (Timeline). In later years it was made sure that men and women got paid the same amount for the same job. The “glass ceiling” (difficulty to get promoted because of gender) is still something that women struggle with today. Since World War II, strict sexual harassment and equality codes have been put into effect that help protect the rights of women.

Recognition has been given to the women who served in World War II since the end. In 1994 the United States Army Missile Command honored *Easter Posey*, the first woman killed in the line of duty at Redstone Arsenal. They renamed the former military recreational area after her, and unveiled a plaque that dedicates the area to the women workers from Redstone Arsenal and Huntsville Arsenal who gave their lives in service to their country (Redstone). Women are included in many other World War II tributes around the country. Stories of working in the factories making ammunition, guns, planes, and ships are passed on from generation to generation, a tribute in itself.

In just five short years, the world changed forever. Women and men changed forever. People learned how evil people can be, and how much can get done with teamwork, both good and bad. “World War II enabled people to learn about each other and themselves. People of different cultures, backgrounds, ages, and especially genders... experienced massive changes in their lives; changes that would continue in their hearts long after the end of the war” (Women at War).

In conclusion, the roles of women before, during, and after World War II were drastically different. Before the start of the war, women worked outside of the home, but it was not that common. Most women were homemakers, or more commonly referred to as housewives. Their work was not really considered to be work, and they were metaphorically imprisoned in their expected roles. When they were needed and felt like they were helping, they broke their chain that was attaching them to their mop and broom. Knowing that they held just as important of a job as the soldiers liberated them. Their men were not around to keep tabs on them, and suddenly they were able to explore new areas that were only open to men. If the need for female workers would not have come about, I wonder how long it would have been before women got tired of being the housekeeper and demanding equal treatment in employment. Thankfully a change in expectations took place and women were able to follow their hearts and go to college, join the professional world, and make their own livings.

**Directions:** After you have read the text, you will answer the following questions. All of the questions are based on the text you read.

1. Read the sentence from the passage. (2)pts.

“Women had joined the war efforts in World War I, and then returned to their domestic work, for the most part.”

The word “domestic” means about the same as

- A. Industrial
- B. Agricultural
- C. Household
- D. Technological

2, Read the sentence from the passage. (2)pts.

“WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots) performed similar tasks. Jackie Cochran and General Arnold submitted a bill to Congress in 1943 that was proposing that WASP be militarized, and led by a woman with the rank of colonel, but the War Department opposed (Women at War)..”

Now read the dictionary entry below

Bill: (noun)

- 1. a statement of money owed for goods or services supplied: He paid the hotel bill when he checked out.
- 2. a piece of paper money worth a specified amount: *a ten-dollar bill*.
- 3. Government a form or draft of a proposed statute presented to a legislature, but not yet enacted or passed and made law.
- 4. A written or printed public notice or advertisement.

Which definition **best** fits the meaning of the word bill as it is used in the sentence above.

- A. 1
- B. 2
- C. 3
- D. 4

3. In the passage, the author states how World War Two “opened doors” for females. Based on the information in the passage, “opening doors” **most likely** refers to (2)pts.

- A. Allowing women to enter segregated areas
- B. Men holding doors open to women because they are gentlemen
- C. Provided new jobs for men after WWII.
- D. Provided opportunities for women that were previously inaccessible

4. Read the sentence from the passage. (2)pts.

“In 1947, in *Fay versus New York*, the United States Supreme Court gives women equal qualification to serve on juries, but they are not required to.”

The phrase “equal qualification” means about the same as

- A. More rights than men
- B. The same right as men
- C. Segregated
- D. Denied

5. Read the sentence from the passage. (2)pts.

“Their work was not really considered to be work, and they were metaphorically imprisoned in their expected roles.”

The word “metaphorically” ***does not mean*** the same as

- A. figuratively
- B. symbolically
- C. literally
- D. emblematically

6. Read the sentence from the passage. (2)pts.

“Huntsville Arsenal recruited one hundred black women students from Atlanta University to be production line workers, with very satisfying results.”

The word “Arsenal” ***does not mean*** the same as

- A. Government
- B. Armory
- C. Magazine
- D. Weapons store

7. Read the sentences from the passage. (2)pts.

“[Before the war] Eleanor Roosevelt instituted a weekly women-only press conference to force news organizations to employ at least one female reporter. During World War II, many of the newswomen in the First Lady’s circle served as war correspondents”

The word “correspondents” means about the same as

- A. spies
- B. journalists
- C. Pen-pal
- D. Soldiers

8. Which sentence from the article best reflects the authors thesis statement?: (6)pts.

- A. Women had joined the war efforts in World War I, and then returned to their domestic work, for the most part.
- B. Even when thousands upon thousands of women had been employed, the need for workers was still growing as the need for supplies, aircraft, and ammunition grew.
- C. “Rosie the Riveter was the name given to the women depicted on many of the propaganda posters.
- D. The women of America stepped up in a time of need, and the traditional roles of women changed dramatically throughout World War II.

## Part II. Essay 80 Points

### THEMATIC ESSAY QUESTION

*Directions:* Write a well-organized essay that includes an introduction, several paragraphs addressing the task below, and a conclusion.

**Theme: The Changing role of the American Women**

United States participation in wars has resulted in political, social, and economic changes for various groups of Americans. These changes have had varying impacts on American society both during and after each war.

**Task:**

Identify how women in America were affected by the U.S. participation in WWII.

- Describe the social, political and economic changes women experienced because of World War II.
- Discuss the extent to which the changing role of women affected American society.

Use the attached reading to give details and examples to help support your essay. You must make specific references to the reading.

**Guidelines:**

**In your essay, be sure to:**

- Develop all aspects of the task
- Support the theme with relevant facts, examples, and details
- Use a logical and clear plan of organization, including an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme. You must have a thesis statement that is concise and takes a position.