



From Empowerment to Domesticity: The Case of Rosie the Riveter and the WWII Campaign

María Cristina Santana*

Women's and Gender Studies Program, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA

During WWII, American women were asked to join in producing the “vital machinery of war” by working in factories building planes, by being nurses, and by being pilots among other jobs. Getting women to work in industries was a tremendous sales proposition as stated by Paul McNutt, the director of the War Manpower Commission in 1943. The war posters and magazine ads of the time reinforced the duty women had toward the war effort. Although women at the time were mostly occupying the private space, the war campaign of Rosie the Riveter inspired many of them to take their work to the public. This descriptive paper tried to answer the following two questions of inquiry: How did women’s employment during WWII become a temporary empowerment and what short and long-term changes in women’s lives were brought about by the war campaign of Rosie the Riveter. While the short-term changes brought women back to the private space and domesticity, some of the conclusions of the long-term changes in women’s lives dealt with variations in the workspace, salary, and military benefits. The influence of how empowered women felt following Rosie the Riveter is an inconclusive collection of the voices of those women during and after WWII.

OPEN ACCESS

Edited by:

*Kath Woodward,
Open University, UK*

Reviewed by:

*Nicole Farris,
University of West Alabama, USA
Nicola Naismith,
Auckland University of Technology,
New Zealand*

***Correspondence:**

*María Cristina Santana
santana@ucf.edu*

Specialty section:

*This article was submitted to Gender,
Sex and Sexuality Studies,
a section of the journal
Frontiers in Sociology*

Received: 01 May 2016

Accepted: 12 December 2016

Published: 23 December 2016

Citation:

*Santana MC (2016) From
Empowerment to Domesticity:
The Case of Rosie the Riveter and
the WWII Campaign.
Front. Sociol. 1:16.
doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2016.00016*

Keywords: Rosie the Riveter, WWII, domesticity, women’s empowerment, war campaign

INTRODUCTION

The war campaign marketed to women during WWII made a significant contribution to gender roles in the United States. The campaign depicted women as loyal supporters of the “Boys” in the military by conserving resources, by keeping quiet, and by taking jobs with new skills. At the time of WWII most women, particularly married women, stayed at home taking care of their home and children. The gender roles of the time were divided between private and public space. Most women controlled and managed the private (home) space, while men easily navigated the public space. Nevertheless, not all women followed this pattern of domesticity since many poor and unmarried women had to work in the public space from an early age. Any improvement in working conditions and salary were a welcoming sight. Up to 6 million women joined the workforce between 1942 and 1945. This amazing number was a direct effect of the massive war campaign.

Duty and love for country were two very moving reasons for women to answer the call to work defending the United States. Betty Jeanne Boggs worked in a plant making planes at age 17. She describes her experience performing her patriotic duty as “*I worked on a war plant and it was one of the things you did when your country was at war, and it had been an enjoyable experience. Even today,*

I am very proud of that (war) job. I can always say, 'Hey, I was a riveter during World War II' (Gluck, 1987).

This descriptive paper is trying to answer the following two questions of inquiry:

- How did women's employment during WWII become a temporary empowerment?
- What short- and long-term changes in women's lives were brought about by the war campaign of Rosie the Riveter?

DEFINITION OF WOMANHOOD

In the latter part of the nineteenth century women in the United States strived to be true by following the definition of womanhood at the time. Women tried to be pious, chaste, domestic, and subservient. Historian Welter (1966) defines womanhood and places women on the verge of perfection when she explains that any sensible woman would follow the four pillars of true womanhood (piety, chastity, domesticity, and subservience). If we were to examine each one of those pillars, we could see that each one was tied to the relationship a woman had with the church, her husband or father, and later with her own children. These pillars restricted woman on choice and on destiny while, at the same time, giving a false sense of achievement and belonging.

The definition of womanhood was not only dependent on women's ability, choice, or skills but also on rules of behavior. As a child is guided on how to behave, women were also instructed on what to do in order to be respectable. The issue here is not that the norms were spelled out but that any infraction was considered deviant. Averting from the expected behavior paid a very high price. At the time, women had no legal standings to inherit, own property, retain child custody, or maintain full wages. The same rules of engagement did not apply to men of any social class.

PROBLEM

This inherited behavior for respectable women lingered into the twentieth century. Albeit women had many advances, including the right to vote in 1920 with the 19th Amendment, they continued to occupy most of the private spaces.

BACKGROUND

In the United States, 1848 marks the beginning of the fight for Women's rights with the Seneca Falls convention in New York. The now famous "Declaration of Sentiments" was drafted at the convention. Local feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton planned this convention with women and men of similar beliefs. Some of those present included Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony's sister Mary Anthony, and their father. In this convention at the Wesleyan Church, local citizens and anti-slavery leaders met to proclaim women's rights. This marks the beginning of the First Wave of Feminism, and the social revolution it fueled until the 1970s when the Second Wave of Feminism started.

This First Wave had two main issues that proved to be a dividing force for most female leaders: women deserved rights as citizens of the United States and women should be granted the

right to vote. Education was perhaps the stronghold of Stanton's argument for women's rights. Stanton was an advocate for all women to be educated in other matters besides home keeping and entertaining (Stanton, 2007). In her essay "*The Solitude of Self*," Stanton speaks of self-reliance for all individuals because "we come into the world alone." Furthermore, Stanton says, "No matter how much women prefer to lean, to be protected and supported, nor how much men desire to have them do so, they must make the voyage of life alone..." (Stanton, p. 34). Just a few miles away, Harriet Tubman was busy safeguarding slaves into freedom and taking in many of the local aging residents. It is a matter of class division that prevented them to know one another and build coalitions. Instead, Elizabeth Cady Stanton became friends with the most prominent woman of the times, anti-slavery advocate Susan B. Anthony.

Anthony and Stanton built a long career as activist for women's rights. Anthony did most of the traveling in speaking circles, while Stanton wrote speeches and corresponded with Anthony from home. In May 1869, Stanton and Anthony formed the National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA). Their vision was to lead an association comprised solely of women, since they believed that "men in the anti-slavery movement had consistently betrayed women's interests" (Dicker, 2008, p. 40). Although the organization was created for women's rights, the NWSA's efforts were too slow and widespread among the nation for leaders of the National Women's Party organization. Activists of the National Women's Party Alice Paul and Lucy Burns took different approaches and fought President Wilson's refusal to hear women's messages by concentrating on Washington, DC and pursuing a federal amendment. The members of the National Women's Party picketed silently outside of the White House gates for months, paraded through the streets of Washington, DC, and were harassed by the public and the police (Dicker, 2008). Arrested, imprisoned, and force fed, Alice Paul endured very difficult conditions. But she was able to see her triumph in 1920 with the nineteenth Amendment of the United States granting the right to vote for all women of the land. Susan B. Anthony was unfortunately unable to witness this event as she passed a few years earlier.

WOMEN AND DOMESTICITY

During the 1940s, factory work introduced hourly rate wages that gave better-paying jobs than domestic positions. Domestic help was a very popular job for poor women at the turn of the nineteenth century. Live-in domestics still regularly worked 72 or more hours a week, and "those who lived out often worked that much or more to make ends meet" (Coble, 2006, p. 55). But working in a factory for 44–55 h a week gave twice the amount of wages to women. It is a matter of economic benefit that working in a factory or laundry was seen as a more suitable election.

Women like Marye Stumph enjoyed the mechanical work they did during the war but understood that those jobs were men's jobs that were only temporarily hers and by 1945 after massive layoffs, she then took a traditional lower paying women's work (Gluck, 1987). Marye was not the only woman to leave her factory job or fight the layoff. Many women would have rather stayed in a higher paying job but understood the cultural code

of accommodating men back in their jobs. The First Wave of Feminism completed a cycle with the right to vote and the right for education. Competitive wages with men would later be a topic during the Second Wave of Feminism. Women's work in the war industry was seen as an extension of their domestic duties. The number of marriages surged, and women were getting married at earlier ages. Scholar Ruth Milkman from CUNY says, "If there was a dominant ideology, it was patriotism. There was a real gap between the actual lifestyles and ideology for women at that time" (Mudd, 1985, p. 16).

War jobs found women anywhere. Margarita Salazar McSweyn found out about war jobs through her customers at the beauty salon in her Latino East Los Angeles neighborhood (Gluck, 1987). The stories about women working in the defense effort told while at the shop complemented the billboards and articles in the Spanish-language paper *La Opinión*.

As most men went to war, many women did too but as nurses, pilots, and factory workers—"and everyone went cheerfully, nobody had to be pushed" was the impression of flight nurse Ivalee (Lee) Holtz from Texas (Barger, 2013).

During the war, female masculinity provided for an expansion of people's ideas of what women should be and how they might look and behave "leaving a canon of images to inform future versions of feminism" (Knaff, 2012). One article in the Navy shipyard newsletter counseled women to "be feminine and ladylike even though you are filling a man's shoes" (Anderson, 1981, p. 60). Women were receiving confusing messages, such as their instruction in charm courses at Boeing airplane plants. This temporary empowerment allowed women to dress differently, behave in different ways, and allow for different career choices.

One of the jobs most transformed by war was that of the nurse. Their sense of improvisation and resourcefulness aided their work in less than ideal situations. Some army nurses opted for a 4-week training to become flight nurses. "Ideal situations don't exist in wartime...you don't have all the equipment...and you work with what you have" were some of the comments collected by author Judith Barger in her book *Beyond the Call of Duty* (Barger, 2013, p. 212). Other jobs included clerical jobs and farming. More than 2 million new female workers entered clerical jobs (Chafe, 1972). But yet the most remarkable leap was in farm workers. Women made up 8% of total workers in agricultural work in 1940 and 22.4% of total workers in 1945, a 14.4% increase (Yellin, 2004, p. 66).

Women were asked to join in producing the "vital machinery of war" by performing hard labor contrary to their treatment during the 1930s, when they were told they had no right to take jobs from the men who needed to support a family (Yellin, 2004, p. 39). The recruitment of women to war work was an open tactic enforced by newspaper ads using language inclusive of women such as, "Army ordinance, hiring inspectors, male or female. No high school education necessary." This is one of many similar messages women like Pennsylvania native Bessie Stokes read in the paper. Bessie worked at a steel mill inspecting bombshells with a pay around 75 cents an hour (more than three times from what she was making cleaning houses) (Yellin, 2004). Getting women to enter the industry was a tremendous sales proposition as stated

by Paul McNutt, the director of the War Manpower Commission in 1943 (*The Margin*, 1943). The war posters and magazine ads of the time reinforced the duty women had toward the war effort.

ROSIE THE RIVETER

In 1943, a popular song by a male quartet gave birth to the fictional character of Rosie the Riveter. The fictional Rosie was a riveter, that is, she would push a metal pin through holes in two or more plates or pieces to hold them together mostly while building bomber airplanes. The song by the Four Vagabonds talked about Rosie making history and not sipping dry martinis and munching caviar like other girls at the time. Rosie the Riveter was "everything the government wanted in a female war worker—she was loyal, efficient, patriotic, compliant and even pretty" (Yellin, 2004, p. 43).

J. Howard Miller from Westinghouse created the "We Can Do It" war campaign and in 1942 created the iconic image of Rosie the Riveter. The Miller image had no copyright restraint and was reproduced in all sorts of formats and materials. That image of Rosie the Riveter is the one we are most familiar with today. Another Rosie image created by Norman Rockwell from 1943 illustrated the Saturday Evening Post Memorial Day weekend issue. This image is less known and captures, Mary Doyle Keefe, a telephone operator, who recently died in April 2015 at the age of 92 (Izadi, 2015). Norman Rockwell, the most famous illustrator of the time, painted the name *Rosie* on Keefe's lunch box. It is very possible Rockwell heard the song for Rosie before he painted his version. Rockwell and Keefe were neighbors back in Arlington, Vermont. She was paid \$10.00 to pose twice. Rockwell's image was reproduced during the war but afterward copyright issues did not allow it.

The war campaign glamorized war work, always showing that woman maintained their femininity while working in the plants. One aspect that researchers mentioned about this era is how women adapted to factory work without uniforms or safety equipment. Women shoes with metal tips were first manufactured in 1943 as a direct result of women becoming factory workers. Never before was there a need to produce such shoes on women's sizes (*Rosie the Riveter*, 2009). Women welders suffered chest burns because they wore regular attires without protective aprons or gear. "We had to wear our hair in a certain way" Betty Jeanne Boggs, who worked making planes, described her working hat as one with a large brim so in case the hat would hit the machinery it would hit the brim first and alert the woman (Gluck, 1987). An interesting fact is that women began wearing pants socially, and this movement managed to spread to factory attire. Betty Jeanne Boggs recalls "Pants were just becoming fashion for women and I felt like, gee whiz, it made me look like I was different" (Gluck, 1987, p. 111).

Assuming a different role, the woman plant worker continued using their makeup and nail color perpetuating the established femininity of the time. Advertisers such as Hold-Pin Bobs assured the public: "*Beauty is her badge of courage. It's a tonic to the war-torn nerves of those around her*" (Delano, 2000). Surveys during wartime explained that beauty products served women not only esthetically but also psychologically. Mercedes Rosebery

writes, “If deprived of face powder; that they could be brave only if allowed, in addition, their lipstick, rouge, face creams, and deodorants” (Delano, 2000). We now have photographic evidence of women welders working the torch without protective gears or aprons but wearing their lipsticks.

The war effort also confronted an issue when it came to the “unnatural” female soldier. The enlistment of women provoked a dispute over the “naturalness” of certain behaviors for women (Knaff, 2012). This “unnatural” state as author Donna Knaff describes, happens when woman feel too comfortable assuming a “male” role in any number of areas, including the workforce and sexuality. This “unnatural state” also affects the civilian and the military lifestyles (Knaff, 2012). “It was felt that a woman entering the formerly all-male military was assuming a more masculine identity, and this ‘deviant’ female masculinity became associated with lesbianism; unfeminine or ‘mannish’ women were therefore widely assumed to be lesbian or otherwise ‘abnormal’” (Knaff, 2012, p. 59).

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women had chances to meet and befriend outside of their neighborhoods and regular social circles. For example, Margarita Salazar McSweyn was introduced to other people and other social circles different from their pre-war friends. For example, Salazar McSweyn, a Latino woman from East L.A., dated non-Latino servicemen and frequented the Hollywood Canteen with the Civilian Defense Corps (Gluck, 1987).

Women were able to take newer risks within their profession. The flight nurses, for example, strived to follow their Nurse Creed “*I will be faithful to my training, and to the wisdom handed down to me by those who have gone before me*” (Barger, 2013). The Aerial Nurse Corps of America (ANCOA) only allowed single women of 21–35 years old to join. In addition, volunteers had to belong to their state nursing organization and pass a physical examination (Barger, 2013). ANCOA nurses served on active duty for 3 years and agreed to work in any aircraft. The flight nurses followed the same initial rank as nurses assigned to ground medical work. With very little supplies nurses stood by their patients in flight and cared for the wounded and sick. One of those women was Elsie Ott who nursed five patients on a flight from India to Washington, DC. Her devotion and courage won her an Air Medal in 1943 and another in 1944. Ott reflected, “They (soldiers) did not know it, but it was all aspirin.” Due to the altitude and various conditions, men did not receive particular medication but only aspirin (Barger, 2013, p. 35). Ott accepted her flight wings in 1943 shortly after receiving her first Air Medal. In 1943, the first class of flight nurses was created and composed of 39 army nurses. While waiting to be sent on flight, flight nurses continued working on land, in hospitals, and in laboratories. Their work was significant to the war campaign, but it was not until 1944 that a presidential executive order named flight nurses United States Army commissioned officers, and awarded them the rights and benefits given to male officers.

Scholar Emily Yellin states that there were 11.5 million women working prior to 1940 with an additional 6.5 million who joined the workforce during the war. For a brief moment, American

society considered women as fitting alternatives to men in all sorts of jobs, including building planes. Although not all jobs were working in plants, 2.5 million women went into wartime industrial jobs (Yellin, 2004). At the height of the war in the years 1943 and 1944, 50% of all adult women were employed in this country (Hartman, 1944).

In 1942, President Roosevelt ordered the construction of 60,000 war planes. Douglas Aircraft, one of the largest aircraft manufacturers, employed 22,000 women during the war to build bombers. The massive barracks in Southern California and in Seattle covered their rooftops with camouflage netting as well as with residential areas painted on them to simulate living spaces.

Plane building and finding pilots became an urgent necessity. Women were surprisingly called to serve as military pilots. American Ann Baumgartner Carl was a bomber test pilot in Ohio, conducting refueling tests and off-center flying in an XP-82 twin Mustang. She also conducted weight and distance tests in a B-29 in preparation for the later atomic bomb mission in Japan (Merry, 2011). Once her children were school aged, Carl returned to aviation as a flight instructor. Other women like Teresa James from Pennsylvania never got used to flying and had no desire to return to the field. “The fear never left me to the point where I said I can be sure I can go up there and get back down. I was always on top of flying: I was fright conscious. Some people I talked to were never afraid. Maybe I was an oddball, but I was absolutely terrified” (Merry, 2011, p. 174). The Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP) both trained women pilots. Teresa James was a WAFS and was featured in the cover of *Look* magazine on February 6, 1943, as well as serving as the inspiration for the film *Ladies Courageous*. Teresa James was also interviewed for the film *Women Combat Pilots* where James said, “people’s jaws dropped whenever she exited a plane at every base she flew during the war” (Merry, 2011, p. 174). Later in life, James was denied work in American domestic airlines because she was a woman. She earned the rank of major in the Air Force Active Reserve in 1950, retiring later in 1976. Her WAFS uniform was donated to the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution. Brave women served the United States as pilots and 38 of them died while in service as a WASP (Merry, 2011). Their positions were those of conflict, as they were needed and respected but still irrelevant when posed against male pilots.

WOMEN AND DOMESTICITY

After the end of the war, the home front became once again the place for women. The definition of *family* was in jeopardy. Factors such as increased youth independence, women’s labor force participation, and military service gave a sense of freedom never felt before by the young generation (Levy, 2001). Once again, domesticity was celebrated in the postwar years as it had been in the Victorian Era. Women were asked to forget the skills they learned and the wages they earned, to once again make their families and homes the center of their lives. Magazines gave advice on laundry and preparing meals to women already burdened by raising children at home (Dicker, 2008). Ads of shiny washing machines, dishwashers, and refrigerators enticed women to buy goods that

supported their new domestic life. This was an orchestrated celebration to convince women of their renewed family obligations, taking away any dreams of moving up the ladder at work or even continuing working outside of the home. “American women also were under immense pressure from their country to protect and defend steadfastly the very idea of traditional home and family, and their central place in it, that was transforming so quickly” (Yellin, 2004, p. 36).

Although the message was of submission, Scholar Sheila Tobias wrote in 1974 how the women working in the war effort were furious when they were forced out of the industrial work in favor of men returning from WWII (Tobias and Anderson, 1974).

The 6 million women who worked during World War II did not return home to take care of their families but instead remained in the workforce, according to Tobias. Many left the factories for lower pay jobs. The war campaign of putting women to work outside of the home inevitably made a significant change in American women. The domesticity campaign once again used mass media to capture the attention of the population. If before, women were supporting the “boys” in war, now it was time to take care of them at home. An outpouring of psychological literature concerning the return of veterans to civilian life “reinforced women’s crucial roles in the social readjustment of the veterans” (Knaff, 2012, p. 137). Images, television shows, and advertising from the 1950s picture women back in their kitchen and taking care of children. Where are the images of women at work? Those images, while depicting reality, were not the popular messages necessary to sell kitchen appliances, new homes, and cars to the returning GI and his family. Women were “simply and utterly grateful to see their men back again, when roughly 360,000 American men had died,” often happily embraced the return to traditional values (Knaff, 2012, p. 136).

Men returned from battle to settle and marry. Many couples bought into the “American Dream” purchasing new homes and cars. Living communities utilizing concepts, such as Levittown planning, gave most White men and women a chance to own homes. Women began marrying younger and having an average of 3–4 more children than they had been in the 1930s. Additionally, the home buying market was at a relative peak. In the south of the United States, racial discrimination divided the country with segregated schools and services. The “American Dream” was not an attainable option for Black families at this time, even for Black service men returning home from the front. Scholar Bettina Berch from Barnard College talks about the experience of Black women during the war. “Often, Black men and White women were seen as equally undesirable to employers and were in competition for jobs,” she said. Black women suffered the most severe discrimination, filing more than half of all suits to the Fair Employment Practices Commission during that time (1942–1945) (Mudd, 1985). It was during the war years that most minority women shifted to blue-collar jobs with higher wages. After the war, they left less jobs compared to White women (Mudd, 1985).

A look at the Black press at that time, according to Berch, did not show a preoccupation with the war. These publications were filled with news about the Black community; winning awards, and fighting discrimination/mistreatment of Blacks. Black women favored the movement for racial justice over the women’s

movement Berch said, furthering the tradition of identifying with race rather than with sexuality.

DISCUSSION ON ROSIE THE RIVETER EFFECTS

There were several short-term effects conveyed by the Rosie the Riveter war campaign. In naming a few, one should start with salary increase. Women made three times the amount per hour working in an assembly line than as a domestic or clerk worker. Women would never again consider domestic jobs as the only choice for work. Society would adapt to these choices. These simple actions brought changes in transportation, home building, and living spaces. Through their work in factories, women gained respect from their families, from other working men, and even from their spouses by taking a paying job and developing new skills. Women administered money, many for the first time, and were able to create budgets for the family to follow. During the time of war and in most of the new factories built for plane assembly, women gained a more relaxed gender role with more physical and emotional freedom (Fields, 1980). Their labor extended patriotism as a direct contribution to the war effort. Women were doing their share and felt proud of it.

One of the long-term changes Rosie the Riveter’s image and campaign brought to the women’s movement is the fact that women became a powerful force in the public space. In scholar Joanne Meyerowitz’s words, “women appropriated, transformed and challenged the stereotype and the competing voices” on the domestic stereotype constructed after WWII (Levy, 2001). The war effort to bring women to work produced a change in home dynamics that would forever change women (Meyerowitz, 1994). The majority of war jobs, despite being high paying jobs, were reduced due to lack of demand and therefore lost. Women who took on jobs during the war did not go back to working at home but took on lower paying jobs. Many of those women became clerks and worked in offices after the war, creating a tremendous impact on the connotation of being a secretary. This shift turned it into a gendered job, that is, more women were secretaries than men after this point. Such phenomena continue in today’s workforce and are a direct result of those “after war” days.

How did 6 million women adapt to lower salaries? Women workers would not refuse their high paying jobs without complaints. It was in this act that women again were targeted for a mass communication campaign, calling them to take care of their homes. It is no coincidence that marriage licenses and birth certificates increased during the 1950s. Domesticity might have made a comeback completely if it was not for those brave women who changed their roles during the war. For instance, after the war, women veterans were not given military benefits because they were considered dependents and not providers (Knaff, 2012). A decade after the war ended women pilots were pinned with stars and medals. Military women today receive all the same benefits as men. Their participation in WWII allocated them into a separate category, although not fighting on the front with the Army, women became a part of the war effort as nurses, pilots, and engineers.

Another long-term effect of the war campaign of Rosie the Riveter was the fact that gender roles and reconversion took

a social backseat to the needs of the veterans returning home. Although the women's movement was not dead, it was definitely not in the minds of thousands of women living during this time period in the United States. The hard lesson to be learned was that women had to relinquish the jobs and the new opportunities they experienced during the war to reward men.

Yet, a long-term effect for women came as traditional femininity. Scholar Donna Knaff discusses how the gender reconversion took place and took away any masculinity given to women during the war period. The temporary empowerment of using men's tools and wearing men's trousers was gone. Women went back to the skirt and petticoat keeping their hair long and their lipstick on. Normalcy for women meant a return to the home and domesticity as dependents and not providers. Although women were given the message of empowerment by taking powerful work positions as a patriotic stand, now their patriotic duty was to contribute to the return to all things "normal" and their place back at home (Knaff, 2012).

In the workforce, Rosie the Riveter and the rest of the WWII war campaign urging to bring women to work, provoked massive changes in work regulations—from shifts, to clothing, to bathroom space. Women working outside of domestic life were accepted, encouraged, and looked upon as patriotic during a short period in time. But it opened the possibilities for married and single women, young and old, poor and rich, White or Black, to work and become providers for their homes. Those women interested in the military joined the armed forces and received military benefits like men did during WWII. It took longer for women than men in this process of recognition of merit and benefits, but without the Rosie the Riveter campaign it would have taken longer.

Some women went to other low-paying jobs, others went back to the home, while others fought to keep their work. No matter how you see it, the women of the pre-WWII era were transformed into a new type of women (Kerber, 2002). The Second Wave of Feminism was two decades away waiting for homemakers to understand their feelings of unfulfilled existence. A middle class woman would awaken the public discussion on gender roles when she wrote "The Feminine Mystique."

Betty Friedan, although not a perfect feminist, was a strong activist for the educated woman turned mother and homemaker. She found a point of tension between a woman's life—lived for others—and her individual pursuit of happiness. She became a symbol of empowerment and, although her efforts were neither inclusive nor diverse, she gave a voice to the growing concern of the Women's Movement. This movement would go on to be seen as a struggle against sexual harassment, reproductive freedom, work rights, and sexual preference acceptance. Friedan brought feminism back into the mainstream discussion and in politics. It was never dormant, it never died, and it was only alive in the minds of many activists who continued fighting in unions, state and local governments and in the fields of education. The Rosie the Riveter campaign showed women the way to change and improve their lives, not as wives or daughters but as individuals. Once that revolution started, nothing remained the same. Publicity, mass communication, popular media, and even television shows incorporated the same message of protecting

family structure and the future of a whole nation. The women who worked in those factory lines building ships and planes still remember the feeling of achievement after finishing work. Their voices and comments were shared in this paper. Many are dead today but their story is alive, their contribution is remembered and their legacy continues.

FURTHER STUDIES

Although some literature has been written about the every day lives of women living in the United States during WWII more academic work should be published on the subject. The timing is of primary importance since many women who witnessed those days die annually without leaving their stories. Their sacrifices, lifestyles, and gender roles can guide a whole generation on the implications of gender roles and what it means for a nation to be at war.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

This researcher read accounts of WWII women's stories given by them to other authors. No original interviews were conducted for this paper. The author is aware that it is imperative to save their stories. Perhaps an idea for another study could be comparing WWII women to other war period women (Cold War, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and Iraqi Freedom) and to shed some light into the changing roles of women in the military and during war times. In light of recent violence against women in the military by military personnel, a study of women in the military continues to be of importance to the fight for equality.

CONCLUSION

War campaigns are usually dismissed as propaganda instruments. While war posters and propaganda messages are not exclusive to the United States or WWII, the campaign of Rosie the Riveter gave face to a timely change in gender roles. It portrayed a woman figure dressed as a riveter and showed physical strength. Both symbols of physical strength and factory work are a commodity of the times. It remains unusual to see women doing mechanical work. Despite the country's need for workers in the assembly line, women made a conscientious decision to better their financial situation and to contribute to the war machine. It was not an easy task. Women had to look for outside support in the case of raising children and keeping house. Others had to adapt to a work schedule and changes in their lifestyle. Women factory workers were not even dressed properly, leaving them at the mercy of work accidents. Many women never worked side by side with men. Others were new to higher salaries and new developed skills. It is not coincidence that some women felt rancor by leaving their high paying factory work for less pay once men returned from the war.

A temporary empowerment gave birth to a massive war effort to bring women to the workforce—not in all capacities but in areas needed by the war machine. During WWII, their involvement moved them a step closer to equality. Women were flight nurses, pilots, riveters, builders, and educators. It is unfortunate that women during WWII had to wait on benefits and accolades.

Some women have only recently been given the commanding stars they deserved. But their legacy is irrevocable. The women of today would be unable to imagine serving in the military without having the precedence of so many other “Rosies” and of their work and sacrifice.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr. Santana is the Director of the Women’s and Gender Studies program at the College of Arts and Humanities. Her area of

teaching is First and Second Wave Feminism. She presented this paper in the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow in May 2015.

FUNDING

The author would like to thank the reviewers of the conference “Zverev Conference on War” (2015) at the Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, for their insight and comments to this manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, K. (1981). *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II*. Westport, CT: Greenpoint Press.
- Barger, J. (2013). *Beyond the Call of Duty: Army Flight Nursing in World War II*. Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press.
- Chafe, W. H. (1972). *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles, 1920–1970*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Coble, A. E. (2006). *Cleaning Up: The Transformation of Domestic Service in Twentieth Century New York City*. New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Delano, P. D. (2000). Making up for war: sexuality and citizenship in wartime culture. *Fem. Stud.* 24, 33–68. doi:10.2307/3178592
- Dicker, R. (2008). *A History of U.S. Feminism*. Berkley, CA: Seal Books.
- Fields, C. (1980). *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*. Los Angeles: Direct Cinema.
- Gluck, S. B. (1987). *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, The War, and Social Change*. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers.
- Hartman. (1944). The home front and beyond: manpower – fade out of the women. *Time*, 78.
- Izadi, E. (2015). *Model for Norman Rockwell’s “Rosie the Riveter” Dies at 92*. Washington, DC: The Washington Post.
- Kerber, L. (2002). I was appalled: the invisible antecedents of second-wave feminism. *J. Womens Hist.* 14, 90–100. doi:10.1353/jowh.2002.0047
- Knaff, D. B. (2012). *Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in American Popular Graphic Art*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Levy, J. A. (2001). Imagining the family in postwar popular culture: the case of the egg and I and cheaper by the dozen. *J. Women Hist.* 13, 125–150. doi:10.1353/jowh.2001.0069
- Merry, L. K. (2011). *Women Military Pilots of World War II: A History with Biographies of American, British, Russian and German Aviators*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Meyerowitz, J. (1994). *Not June Clever: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Mudd, K. (1985). *Contradictions in Women’s Culture in the Days of Rosie the Riveter*. Washington: Off Our Backs.
- Rosie the Riveter. (2009). *Rosie the Riveter: Real Women Workers in World War II with Sheridan Harvey, Women’s Studies Specialist in the Humanities and Social Sciences Division and Senior Editor of “American Women”*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress Film.
- Stanton, E. C. (2007). *The Solitude of Self in E. B. Freedman. The Essential Feminist Reader*. New York: Modern Library.
- The Margin Now is Womanpower. (1943). *Fortune*, 101.
- Tobias, S., and Anderson, L. (1974). *What Really Happened to Rosie the Riveter? Demobilization and the Female Labor Force, 1944–47*, Vol. 9. New York: MSS Modular Publications, 1–36.
- Welter, B. (1966). The cult of true womanhood: 1820–1860. *Am. Q.* 18. doi:10.2307/2711179
- Yellin, E. (2004). *Our Mothers’ War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War II*. New York: Free Press.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright © 2016 Santana. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) or licensor are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

APPENDIX



Mary Doyle Keefe was the model for the May 29, 1943, cover of the Saturday Evening Post. She died on April 22, 2015 at the age of 92.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS.