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Gender of a Nation: Propaganda in World War II and the Atomic Age

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Gender of a Nation: Propaganda in World War II and the Atomic Age

Abstract

This paper explores the shifting presentations of gender in U.S. wartime propaganda aimed at the American public during World War II and the early Eisenhower Era. Through the images and texts produced during these times, a clear portrait of an idealized national portrayal of gender emerged, showing a more masculine overall image during WWII and a more feminine overall during the early 1950s. Gender roles were far less rigid in the war years than in the Cold War, as illustrated by the propaganda shown.

Keywords

gender, propaganda, World War II, Atomic Era, Cold War

Disciplines

Cultural History | English Language and Literature | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Gender and Sexuality | Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication | History | History of Gender | Military and Veterans Studies | Military History | Social History | Social Influence and Political Communication | Women's History

Comments

Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies Senior Thesis

Gender of a Nation: Propaganda in World War II and the

Atomic Age

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WGS-400

Professor Batza

1 May 2014

I hereby affirm that I have upheld the highest standards of and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

Since its beginning, the United States has idealized a shifting image of the perfect American man and woman. The early U.S. had the Founding Fathers, men of Enlightenment principles and courage in the face of tyranny, and Republican Mothers, women who kept their husbands devoted to the good of the country and raised the first generation of proper American citizens.¹ As the U.S. grew and developed, the heroes and ideals of the nation grew and adapted with it. The iconic image of "Uncle Sam" first appeared in 1916 as a way to encourage the nation to support World War I, and the next generation of propagandists adapted it for World War II.² More famously associated with World War II is "Rosie the Riveter," a figure who graced several different posters including the most famous version, "We Can Do It!" But these were simply two figures among many used to show the nation just what the American man or woman was supposed to be in wartime. As World War II ended and the Cold War began, Rosie the Riveter and G.I. Joe became the parents in the perfect nuclear family, showing the world the blissful life of capitalism and sheltering their children from the impending nuclear war. While the physical realities of World War II led to broader gender roles for men and women, the shift to a largely ideological war in the 1950s led to a narrowing of gender roles and focus on the 'nuclear family.'

While all of these ideals were meant to show the lives of everyday Americans, they were less concerned with matching reality than with creating it. As is usually the case with popular media, the people portrayed and idolized are usually benefit from privilege: they are white, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class, able-bodied, and Christian.³ Wartime propaganda usually addressed an audience made up of that fraction of society, at least implicitly. This was the image

¹ Rosemarie Zagari, "Morals, Manners and the Republican Mother," *American Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1992): 192.

² "The Most Famous Poster," *American Treasures of the Library of Congress*, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm015.html>

³ While all of these qualities have been privileged throughout U.S. history, Christianity was particularly emphasized during the Cold War, as atheism was a central part of Soviet Communism. Other qualities took on a new light in the face of Communism, which will be discussed in later sections.

that the United States wanted to project to the world, which had unfortunate implications and consequences for those who did not quite fit into these ideals. By constructing an “American” way to be a man or woman, people following any other path of gender would consequently be labeled un-American. This, then, was the “gender of a nation”: a fusion of patriotic symbolism and gender expression.

On both a national and individual scale, people perform gender by attempting to emulate an unreachable perfect ideal of masculinity or femininity. Judith Butler explains that much of gender, even on a personal level, is a performance done with human bodies:

such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. . . This also suggests that if reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body.⁴

Gender is not so much a state of being or an identity as it is a series of gestures, images, and symbols all creating the concept of 'male' or 'female.' People create gender using their bodies, but social portrayals of gender around them also influence them greatly, because society does not accept gender expressions that are outside of acceptable norms. Nations create and enforce gender portrayals as well, based upon the image that a nation wants its people and the rest of the world to have. Both World War II and the early Cold War are iconic periods in American culture, particularly with regards to ideals of how various Americans should embody femininity and masculinity, and are thus suited to a conversation about national gender. During the war, America needed strong, powerful, masculine citizens, male and female, to defeat the Nazis and Japanese. Once the fighting was over, however, the U.S. wanted to portray the American family,

⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw Hill, 2013), 441.

with the perfect American citizen as part of that family. Communist ideals featured the individual worker in a happy, equal workforce, with little difference between male and female workers. American ideals, in contrast, emphasized gender roles and gender relations in society, with feminine women and masculine men.

History defines twentieth century America largely by its wars: World War I begins the modern era, World War II begins as the Depression ends, and the Cold War dominates every area of life until 1991. Popular culture and historical consensus refer to the ideological conflict between democratic and communist nations as the “Cold War.” The Cold War featured very few official U.S. military wars, hence the title ‘cold,’ but the constant barrage of talk about a potential U.S.-Soviet war and the intense amount of propaganda made it as encompassing as the war that had just ended.⁵ This is particularly true for the early years of the Cold War, colloquially known as "the Fifties," where schoolchildren practiced duck and cover drills and Senator Joseph McCarthy hunted down communists. By 1952, the U.S. had established ideological and military conflict with the Soviet Union: in 1947, the "Truman Doctrine" declared that the U.S. prevent communist expansion at all costs; in February 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy gave his famous speech on secret communists in the U.S. government, and in June 1950, the Korean War began.⁶

While the United States had allied with the Soviet Union a few years before, now they were deadly enemies fighting for ideological domination of the globe. President Dwight D. Eisenhower took office in 1952, and throughout his presidency used a tactic called the “New

⁵ In fact, the last official U.S. war was part of WWII: years before the Cold War officially began. United States Senate, *Declaration of War with Rumania, 1942*, 77th Congress 2d. sess., 1942
http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/image/HJRes321_WWII_Rumania.htm

⁶ Shawn J. Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945-1955* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publisher, 2002), 13; "Enemies Within: Joseph R. McCarthy's Accusations of Disloyalty," *George Mason University*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6456> accessed 19 November 2013; "The Korean War," *US Department of State Office of the Historian*, <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/korean-war-2>, accessed 19 November 2013.

Look” to change U.S. military policy. Rather than fighting battles with large armies, he instead focused on stockpiling nuclear weapons, and gave the impression to all that he would be willing to use them. He kept peace, therefore, by using the constant threat of war: no one could afford to start a military conflict with a nation that could annihilate them within hours.⁷ The U.S. shifted its primary warriors from hearty soldiers and strong factory workers to clever psychologists and subtle spies, from a full charge toward the enemy to a delicate balance between war and peace. While the physical realities of WWII led to broader gender roles for men and women, the shift to a largely ideological war in the 1950s led to a narrowing of gender roles and focus on the 'nuclear family.'

World War II

Transforming a nation barely out of the Great Depression into a machine capable of winning a global war was not easy. World War II was clearly a total war: a war in which the entire nation, including all aspects of civilian society, had to be geared toward the war effort. Factories needed to produce ships, airplanes, and weapons for the military to send overseas, regardless of what they had produced in peacetime. Millions of Americans left home to fight and die abroad, and those who remained behind had to manage the homefront on their own. Every aspect of American life had to be beneficial to the war effort in order for the U.S. to win the war and have a country to which they could return. The government had to convince an entire country to undergo rationing, military service, dangerous factory jobs, and the financial burden of a war. In many ways, they succeeded: even by early 1942, over half of the U.S. population believed that “after finding out what each person can do. . . the government [should] have the

⁷ For information on Eisenhower’s New Look policy and his relationship with nuclear weapons, see Evan Thomas, *Ike’s Bluff* (New York: Black Bay Books, 2012).

power to tell each citizen what to do as his part in the war effort and require him to or her to do it.”⁸

In order to mobilize the country for total war, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Office of War Information (OWI) as a method for spreading wartime propaganda. The office, formed "in recognition of the right of the American people and of all other peoples opposing the Axis aggressors to be truthfully informed about the common war effort," would provide information and advertising for the U. S. war effort. The OWI used all available media to "adequately and accurately" deliver news of the war to the public, though it also had the power to alter and censor other media coverage of the war if secrecy was necessary.⁹ Furthermore, the OWI worked to convince the nation that every citizen, regardless of gender, should devote themselves to wartime service. Posters, radio messages, newspaper and magazine articles, and cartoons urged listeners to join military groups, take factory jobs, adjust their own lifestyle, and convince those around them to do the same.¹⁰

These messages appealed to people's patriotism, showing them the perfect American man or woman and challenging them to become that ideal. Because gender played a huge role in deciding what particular part a person would have in the war effort, propaganda usually emphasized gender roles and attributes. The classic text on women and gender in World War II is Maureen Honey's *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II*. Her study focused on popular magazines and images of the time, including popular figures like Rosie the Riveter, with an emphasis on the difference between images aimed at

⁸ George H. Gallup. "Total War Mobilization." 11 March 1942. *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1932-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 326.

⁹ Executive Order no. 9182, *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 1942.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16273>

¹⁰ Donna B. Knaff, *Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in Popular Graphic Art* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 28-9.

middle-class women and those aimed at their working-class counterparts.¹¹ Donna B. Knaff's approach to the issue of gender in World War II expands Honey's approach, with particular emphasis on "female masculinity," the fear of alternative sexualities, and the relationship between female and male roles in society. Both of these scholars provide excellent examinations of gender and women during World War II. By furthering their research, we can examine the ideals of women in propaganda in terms of national gender. These standards for women embodied the proper American woman of the day, the woman that the U.S. needed to win the war.

The OWI had to engage its audience without alienating them, which meant that its portrayals of men and women could not stray too far from the acceptable notions of femininity and masculinity. At the same time, the OWI had to expand gender roles, particularly for women, in order to staff factories and military units. The United States was at war, a very masculine endeavor, and so the citizens had to become as tough and manly to support it. For men, this was merely an exaggeration of existing standards, made all the more difficult by the sudden influx of women into traditional male spheres. If women were to be in factories, operating dangerous machinery and hauling heavy building materials, or in the military, working as drivers or nurses, then that would have to be the minimum standard of masculinity which men would need to surpass.

¹¹ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). For similar approaches, see Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, "American Women in a World at War," *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 3 (2002): 9-12, and Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, The War, and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987).

Becoming G.I. Joe

Because the U.S. needed a military capable of fighting in two theatres of battle at once, wartime propaganda needed to convince American men that they wanted to fight in war. Military leaders needed to increase their troop numbers and thus would have to train new recruits for battle. This meant that a lot of the American soldiers fighting in World War II were part of the “selective service” program, drafted into military service by the government. The U.S. needed to convince the country that men ought to be off fighting, that ‘real’ men took up arms to defend their country. In a pamphlet titled “The Army and You,” given out to recently drafted men, the narrator portrays military service as the embodiment of American freedom:

Your country has selected you for a most important part in the national-defense program. You are to receive training as a soldier in the Army of the United States. Ours is an army of free men joined in a common effort to preserve those human liberties and dignities which were brought for us by the blood and sweat of earlier Americans. From village and city, from farm and office and factory, hundreds of thousands of young Americans have been selected for military service— without distinction of class, or creed, or color. The aim has been to choose those American men who have the best physical and mental qualifications to become efficient soldiers.¹²

The American soldier is healthy, hearty, and devoted to preserving freedom— an ideal that applied, theoretically, to all American men regardless of race, class, or religion. As a country, the U.S. has always taken pride in the fairness of the American system, where all men are created equal and have the same chance of achieving success through hard work. Obviously, this was not a reflection of reality: during World War II, the U.S. government maintained segregation among troops and operated internment camps for Japanese-Americans.¹³ However, this was the vision that the government wanted people to believe, especially men eligible for military service.

¹² “The Army and You.” U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941, 1.

¹³ For a further examination of race realities in the U.S. during World War II, see Matthew M. Briones, *Jim and Jap Crow: A Cultural History of 1940s Interracial America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.)

“American” men loved freedom above all else, and so the U.S. workers writing the pamphlet drew on this patriotic ideal to convince its audience that freedom-loving men would join the army and fight proudly. By adapting an existing nationalistic gender ideal, the U.S. created a version of manliness that best suited the country’s needs at that time.

Propaganda emphasized American male masculinity as a contrast to enemy soldiers. They fought “in a world agonized by men made mad with the lust of conquest, [while] the United States of America stands free, strong, and unafraid. . . The great nation we have built, our high standards of living, our political and religious liberties are an inspiration and an idea to free men everywhere.”¹⁴ American men were strong and unafraid to fight, but unlike the German and Japanese soldiers, they were not “mad” with “lust of conquest.” While war consumed their enemies’ minds and bodies, these soldiers remained dignified, powerful, and firmly self-controlled, because that was how the defenders of democracy and freedom ought to act. American soldiers controlled their emotions and destructive tendencies the way truly masculine men ought to do, and so American men must be masculine men.

In contrast to the masculine American men, popular depictions of enemy leaders and soldiers emphasized their feeble and pathetic nature. Artists emasculated both Hitler and Emperor Hirohito, as the example in Figure 1 displays. The soldier in the middle appears nearly twice as large as the enemy leaders, smiling with pride and confidence while the other two tremble in fear and spit in rage.¹⁵ These portrayals connect directly to the ideals of masculinity. The American man is self-confident, dressed in a military uniform, and standing in a wide-legged pose that makes him seem even larger. As a soldier, actively risking his life in a physically taxing battle of strength and wit, this man is the embodiment of masculinity, which

¹⁴ “The Army and You,” 1-2.

¹⁵ Southern New England Telephone Company. “When It’s Over, Over There,” 1945. Courtesy of the Bristol Public Library, Bristol, CT.

gives him and the soldiers he represents more room to defy traditional norms if he so wishes. No one would question the masculinity of a man fighting back two enemies and triumphing. The enemy men, in contrast, seem almost childlike in comparison, like tiny little boys who have been caught misbehaving and now face the terrifying prospect of the principal's office. While the artist did not present them in a precisely feminine manner, neither man could qualify as 'masculine' in their current physical and emotional condition.

While artists portrayed Americans as manlier than both enemy leaders, contrasting the depictions of Emperor Hirohito with that of American men show that American masculinity contained heavy racially coding. In the previously-referenced drawing, the artist used racial caricatures in the portrayal of Hirohito that are absent in Hitler. The emphasis on racial features in images of Japanese enemies began early on in the war. In late December 1941, *Life* magazine even ran an article explaining how to distinguish between the Chinese (allies) and the Japanese (enemies) based largely on distinctive facial features.¹⁶ But radicalized portrayals of enemy masculinity appeared in other types of media. The OWI released a series of three films about "Our Enemy: The Japanese" that attempted to explain the enemy to the American public. The Japanese army, whose "primitive moral code" inspired their moral code, needed a full two years simply to "learn how to take care of [themselves]." The narrator noted with disdain that Japanese men were, on average, shorter and lighter than American men and thus need to "compensate for [their] small size with fanaticism."¹⁷ These statements contrast with those about American men,

¹⁶ "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese," *Life* (Dec. 22, 1941): 81-82.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=Y04EAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=en&sa=X&ei=3whOU6vjHeLF0gGf2IDYBA&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false> The article was written after American ignorance on the subject brought great harm to Chinese-American residents. The Chinese consulate was reportedly "prepared to tag their nationals with identification buttons" out of frustration. The morality of attacking actual *Japanese-American* citizens was not addressed by the article.

¹⁷ Office of War Information. *Our Enemy: The Japanese*. 1943. <https://archive.org/details/OurEnemy1943>

as portrayed above, who fought for ethical principles with a rugged individual spirit and great courage.

While America supposedly chose men for selective service without regard to race, the country tied race and masculinity tightly together. Wartime propaganda depicted men of color, particularly Asian men, as silly, weak, and foolish. It portrayed Japanese men in a very feminine light, as delicate individuals who could not take care of themselves, much like a damsel in distress or a silly little girl. Most American soldiers shown in propaganda were white, drawn with distinctly Caucasian features. These were the men who were masculine and tough, the proper embodiment of American manhood, and they were certainly not men of color. Because the American national male ideal implied whiteness, gender and race became inherently linked.

Accepting G.I. Jane

While women could not fight in combat units, plenty of women served in the U.S. military during the war. Groups like the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAC/WAAC) and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services (WAVES) allowed women who wanted to join the military. People found female military participation highly controversial, particularly at the beginning of the war. Military service has always been a masculine endeavor, and women traditionally did not serve in those roles. However, the U.S. needed every helping hand in wartime, and so wartime propaganda set about making female military members respectable. One such poster (Figure 2) shows a respectable-looking grey-haired mother holding her son and daughter, declaring that she is "proud of her *two* soldiers."¹⁸ The artist depicts her in uniform, both looking equally like upstanding members of the military and as devoted children. Even this ordinary, kindly-looking mother can support her son *and* her daughter in the military, the poster

¹⁸ Office of War Information. WAC recruitment poster, 1942-1945. *National Archives Online Public Access*

implies, so other parents can safely send their daughters into military service without worrying that she will lose all social respectability and shame them. Female soldiers could make even the most traditional mother proud by joining the army and remaining a dutiful daughter at the same time. This line of propaganda suggested that they would be serving both family and country at once, and nothing could be more American than that.

Female soldiers had to walk a fine line between their status as inherently masculine military personnel and the feminine persona that proper women needed to embody. Knaff argued quite convincingly that World War II brought the concept of female masculinity to the forefront of discussions on gender roles, though the term ‘female masculinity’ came later. People feared that the images in wartime propaganda, especially those concerning women in the military, “[had] a certain ‘queerness,’ as having encouraged a ‘butch’ quality in women, revealing or perhaps pushing them towards lesbianism.”¹⁹ While contemporary society never accepted openly gay women, it could tolerate women who preferred a more masculine dress or attitude because such traits matched the atmosphere in the military and war factories. The poster “Do Your Part, Join the WAC” (Figure 3) displayed the contrast between gender presentations. It shows a WAC member standing proudly in a stiff military stance, gazing sternly off into the distance as troops march behind her in the background. The artist portrayed her in the same manner that male soldiers traditionally posed, and no less masculine than the male soldiers behind her. Both genders are fighting the war together in the armed services, but this woman, with her fitted jacket, skirt, and stockings, remains visibly female. The poster does not suggest that women must try to become men to fight, but rather that there is a place for female bodies in masculine areas: that American women have a place in the military.

¹⁹ Donna B. Knaff, *Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in Popular Graphic Art* (Kansas,: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 21.

Active Duty on the Homefront

Because the military was the most patriotic way to serve their country, American civilians tried to transform their homefront service into a mirror of the military roles. For men who either could not or did not join the military, and for the majority of women, who remained civilians during the war, homefront operations became part of American defense. One of the foremost duties of a civilian wanting to help the country was to join the various volunteer services, particularly those that helped to fund the war through the sales of war bonds or other fundraising organizations.

Fundraising groups often paralleled the jobs of their workers with those of soldiers fighting abroad. The National War Fund, a government-endorsed group working in accord with the President's Relief Control board, sent out a guide to workers entitled "Marching as [sic] to War." Workers, the guide said, should "think of the American fighting man, as you start your job for your War Fund. . . what makes the American fighting man what he is, what wins battles, is his pride in himself, his outfit, and his cause. You're not out begging. You're not out on any casual mission. You're a leader. . ." ²⁰ Though male workers for the National Fund did not do the same fighting as the soldiers, they still maintained their masculinity. Men who could not fight in the war in a traditional manner could still be tough and manly, fighting the war back home with similar traits. Civilians could be proud leaders out on serious missions, just like the soldiers they idolized during wartime. They could embody the same American maleness that government officials lauded in the soldiers despite remaining in a more domestic environment.

For civilian women, homefront activism embodied the patriotic struggle of the nation while providing a domestic setting that reinforced their feminine nature. Women, too, could

²⁰ "Marching as to War: What Every Campaign Worker Needs to Know." *National War Fund*. 1944-1945. Courtesy of the Bristol Public Library.

embody the masculine aspects of the military even on homefront, working for an entirely respectable cause. They would fight like the soldiers abroad, but focusing on a domestic war for their loved ones in battle, often their husbands and sons. One example of this is the poster displayed at the War Bond Rally (Figure 4). The woman in the poster scolds viewers as she cradles her infant, declaring that she gave a man, surely the viewer could buy war bonds.²¹ Another federal publication focused on the importance of fixed prices for certain foods during wartime, telling “every housewife” that “it is up to you as a good wartime shipper to call any mistake in a price to the attention of your storekeeper.”²² In both cases, the patriotic duty of every American woman is heavily associated with domesticity and family, showing that national duty applied to even the most feminine of realms. The women off in the military used female masculinity to show their patriotism, but women at home could use more traditional fields to show theirs. The possibilities of the proper American women expanded far beyond the traditional realms, but they did not exclude those areas when it came to national gender.

Rosie the Riveter

While the iconic "Rosie the Riveter" poster is ubiquitous today, contemporary portrayals of factory women in propaganda were far more varied. J. Howard Miller created the original version of Rosie and her slogan “We Can Do It!,” the one most famous today, as part of a Westinghouse factory campaign to encourage female workers. Workers at the Westinghouse factories knew the poster well, but the outside world saw little of it.²³ The more famous image at

²¹ Metropolitan Museum of Art. “War Bonds Rally.” 1945.

https://archive.org/details/mma_war_bonds_rally_287581

²² OPA Ceiling Price Lists, "Your Retailer Displays OPA Ceiling Price Lists For Your Information and Protection." U.S. Government Printing office 1944 16-40595-1. Courtesy of Bristol Public Library.

²³ James J. Kimble and Lester C. Olson, "Visual Rhetoric Representing Rosie the Riveter: Myth and Misconception in J. Howard Miller's 'We Can Do It!' Poster," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (2006), 247. Kimble and Olson provide a good analysis of the "We Can Do It" poster both during the war and during the second half of the

the time was Norman Rockwell's cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*, picturing a muscular woman with a sandwich and rivet gun stepping on a copy of *Mein Kampf*. The model for Rockwell's Rosie, a woman named Mary Doyle Keefe, told the press many years later that the picture was largely fictional: she had been a petite and thin teenager, holding a lightweight fake gun, and Rockwell had actually "called and apologized for making [her] so large."²⁴ These posters were unrelated, just part of a whole series of Rosie the Riveter types— the woman crying "We can do it!" is not explicitly named Rosie, like Rockwell's version is— but the stock figure of a female factory worker during World War II tended to be nicknamed "Rosie the Riveter" because of the famous 1943 song by that name.²⁵

Artists portrayed female factory workers with a mix of feminine and masculine characteristics as evidence that these women could perform masculine duties while remaining proper women. 'Rosie' was a muscular woman in her portrayal, even when the model was not. She was, as the song went, a "little girl [that] will do more than a male will do."²⁶ But in the song Rosie had a boyfriend Charlie she was trying to keep safe, and many of the posters explicitly gave the woman a husband. In one such poster (Figure 6), the artist appeals to both patriotic women and men. The proud factory worker, dressed in overalls but with a face full of makeup, declares that her husband supports her in the war effort, a fact which makes her proud. Because many men felt uneasy about respectable women working in factories and dressing in trousers, posters like this were used to show that factory work was still acceptably feminine and heterosexual.

twentieth century. For further elaboration on the chronology of "Rosie the Riveter," see Sheridan Harvey's exploration of Rosie the Riveter at the Library of Congress, transcript at <http://www.loc.gov/rp/program/journey/rosie-transcript.html>

²⁴ Marcy Kennedy Knight, "Rosie the Riveter," *Saturday Evening Post* (July/August 2013) <http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2013/07/01/art-entertainment/norman-rockwell-art-entertainment/rosie-the-riveter.html>

²⁵ For a recording of the song "Rosie the Riveter," see <https://archive.org/details/RosieTheRiveter>

²⁶ Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb, "Rosie the Riveter," 1943. <https://archive.org/details/RosieTheRiveter>

As with the portrayal of military women, artists and writers promoting female factory workers made certain to emphasize the workers' utter respectability in every other aspect. As Knaff explains, "a woman who worked was now her country's patriotic sweetheart."²⁷ Women could justify their masculine behavior with a distinctly feminine role, keeping the homefront for their soldier overseas as they had kept house for their husband at work. For example, the woman in the poster (Figure 6) has a husband for that she works. Once again, the most respectable women in that particular category were chosen to represent the group: the women shown in factory posters emulated proper standards of femininity, class, and race. Posters advocating female wartime workers did not portray women of color and certainly did not address the incredible amounts of discrimination that women of color faced in wartime plants.²⁸ Women who transgressed social norms in one area but fit the ideals of American womanhood in every other respect could most easily justify their divergence from the norm with patriotism. This aberration, they could claim, was merely a temporary expansion of female roles to meet the needs of the country, and thus they remained true American women.

Transitioning from World War to Cold War

As the battles ended and the soldiers returned home, the U.S. needed to adjust to the huge changes in population demographics and economic priorities. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Relief Act of 1940 promised male soldiers overseas that their jobs would be waiting for them when they returned. In the handbook for recently drafted men, the author reassured his audience, saying

²⁷ Knaff, 36.

²⁸ Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (1992): 82-83. This article provides an excellent overview of the struggles faced by people of color, particularly black women, during WWII. For an example of the exotification of Middle-Eastern and Asian women of color, see the turban fashions illustrated in Stephen R. Patnode, "Keep it Under Your Hat': Safety Campaigns and Fashion in the World War II Factory." *Journal of American Culture* 35, no. 3 (2012): 231-243.

“your civilian job is protected; if you complete your training satisfactorily, your employer must restore you to your previous position, or to a position of the same security status and pay, unless circumstances make your restoration unreasonable.”²⁹ This meant that the women who had entered factory work or other male-dominated fields during the war, urged on by wartime propaganda, now occupied jobs that had been promised to men. For the U.S. government, the whole situation was a logistical nightmare.

To resolve the battle of the sexes over jobs, the U.S. government turned to its propaganda machine to undo the messages of the war. Advertisements and campaigns emphasized the wonders of household appliances and the need to create a lovely home for the returning soldier. Knaff explains that “women were no longer experiencing ‘savage elation’ at their competence, skill, and patriotism. What materialized instead were attempts to maneuver women out of the workforce and back into the home. Once the U.S. needed to have job opportunities for returning soldiers in order to maintain economic success for the nation, the proper American woman suddenly became one who was not taking up a man’s job. Again, the ideal role for women reflected the needs of the country at the time: first to go to work and to war, and then to retreat to a more domestic, peaceful setting.

Establishing the Atomic Age: 1953-1957

The Cold War changed the way Americans thought about their country and its place in the world. Instead of an isolationist country that only entered into World Wars well after they had begun, the U.S. was a proactive leader in the fight against communism and Soviet Russia. No one wanted to get into another war, certainly, but people felt it was vital to appear ready should another war happen. Once the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb in 1949, full-out

²⁹ “The Army and You,” 6.

nuclear warfare seemed utterly inevitable to the vast majority of Americans, reflected in the Gallup polls of the era.³⁰ To many Americans, sitting in their Levittown houses, surrounded by manicured lawns and enjoying the luxury of peacetime, wartime seemed unthinkable. However, they were all too certain that if the Russians were to expand their power, every bit of their new lives would disappear. Americans viewed communist countries with horror, and so feared the possibility of a communist U.S: the family car would be taken away to be used only by the most powerful, the overflowing shelves of the grocery stores would turn into long food lines for a little bit of bread, and their newfound freedom in civilian life would be replaced by an establishment more regimented than even the Army. In the worst-case scenario, Soviets would bomb American cities, turning sprawling urban landscapes and blissful suburbs into craters and mass graves.

American fears of another war seemed to be confirmed when the U.S. became involved in the Korean civil conflict. Unlike the nuclear war that dominated the American imagination, the Korean War seemed ordinary: just like in WWII, the U.S. instituted a draft for young men and fought a war using the usual military forces, rather than the new nuclear weapons.³¹ When President Eisenhower took office, he quickly ended the war, with heavy support from the American people, and turned to his New Look strategy. His focus on nuclear weapons allowed him to shrink the size of the U.S. standing army and end the draft. Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, elaborated on this new focus with his term 'massive retaliation.' Instead of fighting out every war on the ground with traditional military force, the U.S. would rely on an arsenal of nuclear weapons, set to fire at any country who attacked first— a massive

³⁰ "Race for the Superbomb Timeline." *PBS American Experience*. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/timeline/>; George H. Gallup. "Atom Bombs." August 2, 1950. *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1932-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 929.

³¹ "The Korean War," *US Department of State Office of the Historian*.

retaliation.³² While this was a much cheaper strategy, it did change the image of American military might. No longer was America represented by muscular men in uniform protecting their nation, gun in hand. Instead, the new image of power was a man in a three-piece suit at a desk in the Oval Office, ready to call for a nuclear strike anywhere in the world.

The U.S. government fought a war of international prestige in the 1950s, attempting to sell the idyllic American way of life to those abroad. To help prevent nuclear war, the U.S. set about convincing the world that the American way of life was worth protecting and emulating, thus putting enough pressure on world leaders to avoid the use of nuclear weapons. With the "atomic age" underway, President Truman created the Federal Civil Defense Administration to help ordinary citizens train for a nuclear war. The FCDA and its later incarnation, the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM), created civil defense programs, organizing 'duck and cover' drills, fallout shelters, and emergency evacuation plans. To convince countries and peoples overseas, programs like Voice of America and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) worked tirelessly to show an idealized version of what capitalism and American industry could offer people. Because racial inequality tarnished the American image, the US had a vested interest in promoting diversity in publications. The USIA "sought to prove to all audiences that the United States was addressing the problem of civil rights for American minorities, that capitalism benefited all Americans, that workers share in the fruits of their labor, and that women lived full, happy lives as mothers and homemakers."³³ The important ideological aspect was that everyone, regardless of race, class, or gender, was involved in their country and content with their status as capitalist American citizens.

³² Thomas, *Ike's Bluff*, 11, 113.

³³ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda War at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 254.

The All-American Family

The new nuclear family stood alone in the suburbs, ready at every moment for a nuclear attack that might destroy the rest of the world and prepared to send their children into a new and terrifying future. Elaine Tyler May, for example, looked at the effects of Cold War propaganda on the idolization of “the family” during the 1950s. The family was central to the American way of life, both in the need to shape a society that could fight the Cold War and the need for an American culture to sell abroad to countries who might be considering communism.³⁴ People who had been traumatized by a recent war and faced the prospect of a new, more terrible one felt comforted by the construction of the new peacetime society where every citizen had their proper place and role to play.

The dreamlike vision of a perfect family living in a peaceful America appealed to wide audiences. The 'nuclear family' concept attracted even those who did not fit the white, suburban aspects of the ideal family. Elaine May cites a popular black magazine, *Ebony*, that published an article expressing the hope that in this new era of prosperity and trained workers, black mothers would finally have the option to become housewives and stay home with their children.³⁵ Cold War concerns were not only about the threat of death, but about exploring and expanding the American dream. In this new postwar era of American prosperity and a healthy family life, the American dream was to have a nuclear family where each member had strict but vital roles to play. In order to achieve the American dream, people attempted to recreate the ideal nuclear family in their own lives, which involved strict adherence to gender roles.

³⁴ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 25; 130. For a further examination of the relationship between nuclear war and nuclear family, see Guy Oakes, "The Family under Nuclear Attack: American Civil Defense Propaganda in the 1950s," in *Cold-War Propaganda in the 1950s*, ed. Gary D. Rawnsley (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999): 67-84 and Sarah A. Lictman, "Do-It-Yourself Security: Safety, Gender, and the Home Fallout Shelter in Cold War America," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (March 2006): 39-55. For additional information on Cold War Propaganda, see, Larry Ceplair., *Anti-Communism in Twentieth-Century America: A Critical History* (Santa Barbara: Praegar, 2011)

³⁵ May, 27.

Proper American men and women, therefore, were ones who could fit into this ideal image and interact with one another in the way that good American citizens would. Instead of focusing on the power and strength of American men and women in the military, or in a corresponding civilian role, U.S. ideals promoted the wonders of civilian life in a capitalist society. Andrew L. Yarrow, in his examination of Cold War propaganda, notes the emphasis placed on Americans' ability to provide for their families. These portrayals of American luxuries and prosperity tended to be highly gendered: men discussed how they had good jobs and fine housing, while women showed off kitchen appliances and nutritional diets.³⁶ The pride and joy of American men was different than that of the American woman: while men took care of the public sphere at work and made it possible to have a quiet family home in the suburbs with their G.I. Bills, women focused on the domestic front with their new kitchen appliances and focus on the children. Each would contribute their part to the family, and raise children who would learn to do the same thing, enabling their society to function smoothly and happily for generations to come.

However, the Cold War ideology also required nuclear families to play specific roles in the event of a nuclear war. Though never particularly successful, the FCDA campaigned relentlessly to promote civil defense efforts, including the family bomb shelter. As Sarah A. Lichtman points out, bomb shelter efforts used heavily gendered divisions of labor:

In safeguarding the nuclear family from nuclear attack, men assumed the role of capable protectors and providers. They did so at a time when masculinity was in considerable flux, and an emphasis on domesticity as well as certain masculine behaviours appropriate to corporate conformity replaced the wartime emphasis on the super-masculine military man. For women, do-it-yourself security relied on informed consumption and gender normative domestic duties.³⁷

³⁶ Andrew L. Yarrow, "Selling a New Vision of America to the World," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 34-36.

³⁷ Sarah A. Lichtman, "Do-It-Yourself Security: Safety, Gender, and the Home Front Fallout Shelter in Cold War America,"

With the end of World War II, the inherently masculine image of the soldier lost its place as the dominant role of men. Bomb shelters, and the apocalyptic mentality they embodied, offered men an opportunity to regain that manliness, that sense of protecting one's family from a world turned violently mad.

Nuclear war never actually occurred, but the United States used that preparation to show how true American citizens would react. In 1955, machinist John Christmas and his family volunteered to test a new H-Bomb shelter by spending three days below ground. The *Life* magazine article on the subject described Mrs. Christmas working at the stove while Mr. Christmas exerted himself over a hand-operated air pump to ensure their survival. Pictures illustrating the article showed the couple with their young children, forming the image of the perfect all-American family.³⁸ This family embodied the ideals that Americans wanted to portray to the world: a relatively young couple, caring for the next generation through even the toughest of adversity, using their gender-based roles to ensure the smooth operation of a post-Armageddon plan. The U.S. would not go to pieces if the Soviets used nuclear technology. Its citizens would remain calm and dignified, and above all, they would stick to their places in the ordered society they so prized.

The Return of G.I. Joe

There was a perceived lack of masculinity in the early Cold War era of "The Fifties," when the ideal man became the retired battlefield hero, home from the wars to work a civilized office job and live in suburbia. James Gilbert's *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in*

³⁸ "H-Bomb Shelter Tests Texas Family," *Life* (July 11, 1955): 69-70
<http://books.google.com/books?id=olYEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=life+july+11+1955&hl=en&sa=X&ei=zy9OU8OHLexI0QGcjYHQBw&ved=0CDgQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=life%20july%2011%201955&f=false>

the 1950s is a thorough examination of the acceptable— and forbidden— expressions of masculinity during this time.³⁹ He notes that what is today called 'male panic' of a real or imagined 'feminization' of men was "typical of the 1950s. . . they were mustered in the anxious 'techno language' of atomic Armageddon as well as in the more benign parades of President Eisenhower's patriarchal platitudes."⁴⁰ The threat of nuclear war and the Cold War attitude that America, under Eisenhower, had to embody characterized the 1950s. The idea that men were in danger of becoming emasculated was prominent in debates of social scientists, journalists, and advice columnists, and most of them had the same answer about who to blame: American women.⁴¹

Masculinity was under strict scrutiny, and 'true men' had to fit an increasingly narrow set of criteria. Even sexual behavior became publically scrutinized, as the Kinsey reports started years of discussion and debate on the nature of sex and the sexual practices of American men and women.⁴² In a 1956 edition of *The Reader's Digest*, famous writer Phillip Wylie declared that "American Men are Lousy Fathers," blaming delinquency on fathers who "gave [their sons] everything. . . except [themselves]." Yet the *Los Angeles Times* publicized noted anthropologist

³⁹ For further examinations of masculinity during this era, see Jesse Berrett, "Feeding the Organization Man: Diet and Masculinity in Postwar America," *Journal of Social History* 30, no. 4, Robert L. Griswold, "If Not Ward Cleaver, Then Who?" *Journal of Women's History* 13, no. 3 (2001):160-163, Stella Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), Mike Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America: Masculinity, Family, and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006).

⁴⁰ James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3. For a further exploration of masculinity and the Cold War, see Suzanne Clark, *Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West* (Carbondale, Ill : Southern Illinois University Press, 2000) and Michael Snyder, "Crises of Masculinity: Homosocial Desire and Homosexual Panic in the Critical Cold War Narratives of Mailer and Coover," *Critique* 48, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 250-277.

⁴¹ Gilbert, 10-11. For a further look at the pressure and impact of the Cold War America image, see Andrew L. Yarrow, "Selling a New Vision of America to the World." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 3-45. and Shawn J. Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945-1955* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publisher, 2002).

⁴² Gilbert, 86-88. For a further exploration of the impact of the Kinsey reports, see Miriam G. Reumann, *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). For additional information on sexual norms in the postwar era, see Eric Schaefer, "The Obscene Seen: Spectacle and Transgression in Postwar Burlesque Films," *Cinema Journal* 36, no. 2: 41-66.

Margaret Mead's assertion that American men had, unfortunately, "retired into domesticity," and were "too family conscious."⁴³ For the good of the country, American men had to spend more time focusing on their children and family, so as to reduce delinquency levels. But, simultaneously, American men concentrated too much on family responsibility, which prevented them from properly performing their civic duties. With social pressure both encouraging a certain set of attitudes and behaviors and other pressures condemning those same traits, men in the 1950s had a difficult time living up to gender roles. Because the postwar narrative centered on the new, domestic ideal of American manliness, American men had to prove their masculinity in a traditionally feminine sphere, which narrowed their options considerably.

Domesticating Rosie the Riveter

While there were multiple versions of acceptable American womanhood, American women lacked the freedom of expression that wartime standards had allowed them. Certainly not every woman in the 1950s embodied the stereotypical housewife, concerned with her washing machine and the latest recipes. In her splendid essay on traditional postwar narratives on gender, including the silently-suffering housewife immortalized in *The Feminine Mystique*, Joanne Meyerowitz challenged the idea that the only option for women was this narrow role. Women during this time read magazines that praised working women or public figures like Eleanor Roosevelt, though the articles rarely encouraged any activist sentiments.⁴⁴

⁴³ "American Men are Lousy Fathers," *Milwaukee Journal*. March 6, 1956. <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1499&dat=19560306&id=WnUfAAAAIABAJ&sjid=WSUEAAAAIABAJ&pg=5988,3273653> ; "American Men Termed Too Family-Conscious," *Los Angeles Times* March 27, 1957 http://search.proquest.com/cv_1485734/docview/167070987/D7EFE1E8396543D8PQ/4?accountid=2694

⁴⁴ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," in *Not June Cleaver: Woman and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 235.

There were exceptional female figures of the 1950s like Brownie Wise, a divorced, single mother who single-handedly revolutionized the idea of sales industries. Wise used her considerable public speaking skills and the close female relationships in the new suburban neighborhoods to set up a respectable female sales-industry revolving around Tupperware. Americans seemed to prove her success— she became the first woman on the cover of *Business Week* in 1954 (Figure 7). With her perfectly coiffed hair and lovely jewelry, Wise’s image carefully maintained her feminine appeal even as she appeared in a very masculine space. Wise might have worked in a male-dominated industry, but her army of workers were always very feminine women, working for pin money among the neighborhood women. These women, called ‘Tupperware ladies,’ had to be quite careful that they kept up a respectable female image, wearing skirts and nylons as they went to their house parties and taking care to never let the housework pile up.⁴⁵ With the new ideal American woman occupying a very feminine and domestic role, women who stepped out into the workforce, particularly a traditionally male field like sales, had to take extra care that they did not cross social boundaries.

When the nation needed to become more masculine, the limits of acceptable femininity had expanded. Once the nation could return to domestic concerns, the proper female sphere shrank to allow men to take over the masculine half of the domestic sphere. Meyerowitz convincingly argued that the tension between career and family so prevalent today was very close to the surface of the 1950s discussions of gender roles. Brownie Wise’s salesforce exemplifies this concept, where women who were quite successful saleswomen still had to ensure that they could not be justly accused of abandoning their domestic responsibilities. One saleswoman remembers trying to do her sales within a few days of the week so that her husband

⁴⁵ American Experience. “Tupperware!” PBS. 2003. Transcript located at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/transcript/tupperware-transcript/> ;

would not complain about her lack of housekeeping.⁴⁶ *Life* magazine dedicated an entire issue to “The American Woman: Her Achievements and Struggles,” with a front cover showing a happy “working mother” and her son. The issue included a variety of photos featuring “All-American Girls” in a wide variety of styles and places, as well as an article on a husband who liked that his wife worked— something *Life* deemed a controversial issue.⁴⁷ Acknowledging the complexity of media narratives is vital to both examining influences of those images and even to considering how the ideals affect the real women and men who see them. National gender embodies a range of acceptable ideals for American men and women, but when people are expected to fill more and more ideals as citizens, that range shrinks rapidly. Women outside of the highest of ideals might still be proper American women, but they had more standards to meet in the process.

Conclusion

World War II changed American society completely, and thus by the early Eisenhower era, the country was interested in stabilizing a new, peacetime country. Because wartime is always a desperate situation, social norms expand and diversify to include activities and roles called for by the new circumstances. Women could wear trousers and work in factory jobs because the U.S. needed ships, but once there were plenty of men to do that job, it was back to dresses and housework, with a few acceptably feminine professions. This attempted return to normal characterized the 1950s, where a country that had survived war and the Great Depression

⁴⁶ Meyerowitz, 239. She also states that the task of balancing work and power existed particularly in media aimed at women of color, because women of color were more likely to be working fulltime while trying to raise a family. For a further examination of the career vs. family debate with relation to the Cold War, see Susan M. Hartman, “Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years,” in *Not June Cleaver: Woman and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 84-100 and Babette Faehmel, *College Women in the Nuclear Age: Cultural Literacy and Identity, 1940-1960* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012); “Tupperware!”

⁴⁷ *Life* (December 24, 1956)

<http://books.google.com/books?id=00EEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=life+1956&hl=en&sa=X&ei=i3B MU-CjLPGX0gHWq4HADQ&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=life%201956&f=false>

had to understand what a healthy, peacetime American society should look like. To do so, U.S. propaganda leaders depended on gender stereotypes and a careful look at what image would best benefit the country in a new ideological conflict. National portrayals of gender always depend on the current circumstances of the country, shifting to fit the tasks that need to be most urgently performed and avoid any social upheaval. The ideal American man and American woman in any era are those who will best help the country's current needs, and thus these ideals change as the nation develops further.

With the end of a war, and with a new set of changes enveloping the nation, the U.S. needed to set up a brand new society, free of economic depression or war. The country needed a new image to project to the world in order to defend the American way of life, and that image was not as forgiving of nontraditional gender roles or traits as the wartime standards had been. In a country that frequently looks at the 1950s with nostalgia, longing for a time when the economy was booming, America was on top of the world, and American standards and morality were points of pride, it becomes easy to assume that 1950s America had the best of everything, including gender ideals. When review these decades, historians and readers should understand how much of gender is circumstantial, particularly when comparing it to modern day.

Appendix

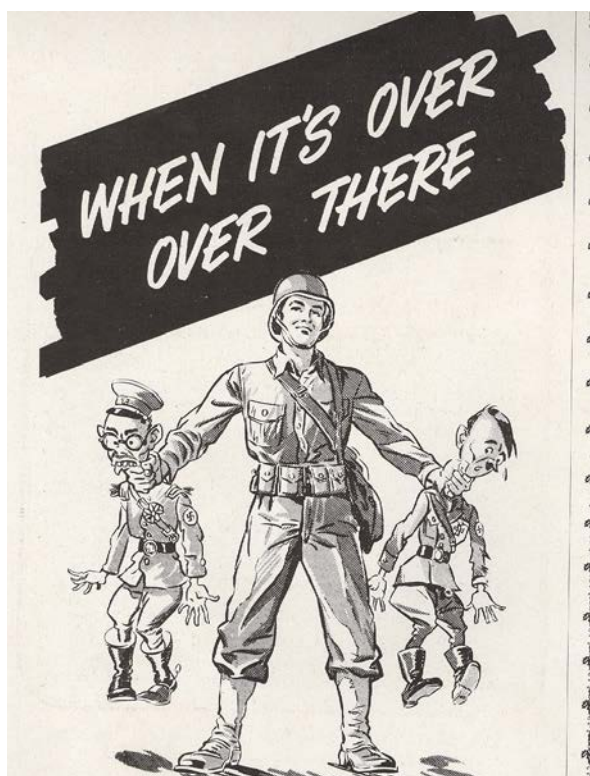


Figure 1 When It's Over, Over There (Courtesy of Bristol Public Library)



Figure 2 I'm Proud of My Two Soldiers (U.S. Government, 1941-45)



Figure 3 Do Your Part, Join the WAC 1941-1945



Figure 4 War Bond Rally (Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Figure 4 Rosie the Riveter Poster, J. Howard Miller, 1942



Figure 5: Rosie the Riveter, Norman Rockwell for the Saturday Evening Post, May 29, 1943



Figure 6: "I'm Proud... my husband wants me to do my part" by John Newton Howitt, 1944

Figure 7 Business Week 1954 Featuring Brownie Wise. Courtesy of PBS.org



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