

Part III: Women on the United States Home Front During World War II

During World War II, the United States played a key role in the manufacture and distribution of the materials and supplies essential to the Allies' winning of World War II. Because many American men were overseas fighting the war, the United States' industry was forced to turn to non-traditional sources for labor in manufacturing such as women. Traditionally women in the U.S. were relegated to household chores and to raising children or in non-manufacturing industries. Despite manufacturing companies' labor shortages, many corporations were reluctant to hire women in the early stages of the war because of the stereotype that a woman's place was in the home. As time went on, however, industry turned more and more to women to meet its labor needs. Women that worked during the World War II period performed a variety of jobs such as welding, riveting, and operating cranes. Although many women worked outside the home, they were still faced with taking care of household duties when they returned from work. One problem that these women faced while fulfilling their household responsibilities was the scarcity of supplies. This lack of resources was the result of war rationing that took place in the United States during World War II. Items such as wool, silk, and cotton were rationed by the government because these items were needed to manufacture parachutes, clothing for soldiers, and other military related goods. Food items such as tea, coffee, butter, and meat were also rationed. To make matters even more difficult gasoline was also rationed because of the high demand for it in the military. Thus, with these difficulties life was anything but easy for women on the U.S. home front during World War II.

1. Students will understand the role of women on the United States home front during World War II through class discussion.

- a. Why were women working during World War II?
- b. What obstacles did women face during this time period?

Click here for posters concerning women working during World War II
http://www.olive-drab.com/gallery/description_0136.php

From Library of Congress

[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?pp/ils:@filreq\(@field\(NUMBER+3b45153\)+@field\(COLLID+cph\)\):displayType=1:m856sd=fsac:m856sf](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?pp/ils:@filreq(@field(NUMBER+3b45153)+@field(COLLID+cph)):displayType=1:m856sd=fsac:m856sf)

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2. Students will understand the ramifications that rationing had on United States women during World War II.
 - a. Why did rationing occur during World War II?
 - b. What are some examples of rationing that occurred during World War II?

c. How do you think that rationing affected families during World War II?

Click here for poster concerning rationing in World War II.

<http://www.lib.niu.edu/ipo/1995/ihy9504641.jpg>

Click here for a sugar rationing book.

<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/fsa/8b12000/8b12900/8b12941u.tif>

Click here for students in Washington, DC learning about rationing.

<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/fsa/8b05000/8b05800/8b05892u.tif>

3. **Play Clip C [2:33 minutes]** from the Paul McGilvra Oral History
 - a. McGilvra speaks of food rations that he ate while on duty. Why did the soldiers have rations of food?
 - b. Why did McGilvra have to eat the food without being able to heat it up?
 - c. What role do you think that the home front played in supplying the troops with food?

4. Students will write a play depicting the life of a typical U.S. woman that worked on the U.S. home front during World War II. The play should emphasize the stereotypes that women were up against early in the war period and it should emphasize the various rationing problems that women faced during this time period.