



Rosie the Riveter Women Working on the Homefront in World War II

By Penny Colman

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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. 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. While women during World War II worked in a variety of positions previously closed to them, the aviation industry saw the greatest increase in female workers. More than 310,000 women worked in the U.S. aircraft industry in 1943, making up 65 percent of the industry's total workforce (compared to just 1 percent in the pre-war years). In addition to factory work and other home front jobs, some 350,000 women joined the Armed Services, serving at home and abroad. Impact of Rosie the Riveter. The call for women to join the workforce during World War II was meant to be temporary and women were expected to leave their jobs after the war ended and men came home. The women who did stay in the workforce continued to be paid less than their male peers and were usually demoted. Rosie the Riveter was an allegorical cultural icon of World War II, representing the women who worked in factories and shipyards during World War II, many of whom produced munitions and war supplies. These women sometimes took entirely new jobs replacing the male workers who joined the military. Rosie the Riveter is used as a symbol of American feminism and women's economic advantage. Similar images of women war workers appeared in other countries such as Britain and Australia. The idea of Rosie the World War II was strangely unemotional and needed a Writers' War Board to stir things up. Another writer of popular fiction, Clifton Fadiman, agreed, characterizing the Board as "an arm of the government." So enthusiastic was the WWB, in fact, that it failed to follow OWI instructions in October 1944 to cease much of its operations when Germany was defeated, and it picked up the slack left in OWI operations by a budget cut in late 1943 that was imposed by Republicans fearful that Roosevelt's New Deal was being propagandized (Howell, "Writers' War Board," 58-64). For a description of the propaganda specifically directed at working-class women, see my study *Creating Rosie the Riveter, chapter 3, "The Working-Class Woman and the Recruitment Campaign."* *The Women Behind Rosie the Riveter: Working for the U.S. War Effort (Women and War)* by Pamela Jain Dell Paperback \$8.19. In Stock. Ships from and sold by Amazon.com. Verified Purchase. I enjoyed this tribute to American women and the contributions they made to the US victory in World War II. After reading it I bought another copy that the author autographed for me. I gave it to a lady who was actually an aircraft riveter during the War.