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## Riveting Rosie's Riveting Struggles: Women Shipyard Workers in WWII

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## RIVETING ROSIE'S RIVETING STRUGGLES: WOMEN SHIPYARD WORKERS IN WWII

In some ways World War II is perceived as an idyllic, happy time for women. After centuries of “male oppression” and unpaid servitude in the home, a large number of housewives were released from their mundane bondages and allowed to move into the workplace. This sudden shift was caused by the Second World War. As more men joined the ranks, the number of undrafted men became insufficient to keep America’s factories and businesses running, and thus women, who had previously been all but banned from the workforce, were now welcomed with open arms. Most historical accounts of this transition are dotted with images of strong, independent, joyful women who appear proud to be fulfilling their patriotic duty. These pieces talk about “Rosie the Riveter’s” newfound freedoms and adventures, highlighting the stories of those who managed to obtain skillful positions as welders or electricians. And yet the experiences of many women workers during the war were nothing like the manicured portraits which can be found in the grade school textbooks of today; they were much harder and dirtier. This truth is apparent when looking at the thriving wartime industry of shipbuilding. The women who worked in the yards were typical Americans. They had

families to support, loved ones at war, and often struggled to make ends meet. Their experiences during wartime were worlds away from the fairytales of instant gender equality and whistling women cheerfully assembling armaments. Instead, women shipyard workers often found themselves in low-skill, low-paying jobs facing discrimination from both male colleagues and their own spouses, while simultaneously having to balance work with childcare and domestic tasks. Such experiences made it clear that there were still many obstacles remaining before true gender equality in the workplace could be achieved, and the removal of these impediments would continue for decades to come.

The idyllic image of Rosie the Riveter can be largely traced back to government efforts to convince women to join the labor force at the start of the war. As male labor grew increasingly depleted, Roosevelt and his cohorts realized that they must attract a new demographic to fill the void: women. To accomplish this vision, the Office of War Information came up with a Basic plan for Womanpower which stated, "These jobs will have to be glorified as a patriotic war service if American women are to be persuaded to take them and stick to them. Their importance to a nation engaged in total war must be convincingly presented."<sup>1</sup> In essence, the plan called for large-scale dissemination of propaganda glorifying the working woman. The resulting onslaught of favorable media was pervasive and unavoidable. It came in the form of movies, newspapers, radio ads, posters and magazines. Posters entreated women with slogans such as "The girl he left behind is still behind him, she's a WOW" (Women's

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<sup>1</sup> National Archives and Records Administration. "Powers of Persuasion." (accessed 26 February, 2014) available from [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers\\_of\\_persuasion/its\\_a\\_womans\\_war\\_too/its\\_a\\_womans\\_war\\_too.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/its_a_womans_war_too/its_a_womans_war_too.html); Internet.

Ordinance Worker) or “Longing won’t bring him back sooner...Get a War Job.”<sup>2</sup> In September 1943, the Magazine War Guide asked magazine publishers to take part in a “Women at Work Cover Promotion,” pushing for women to join vital war jobs, and it was on one such cover that Norman Rockwell gave birth to the illustrious Rosie the Riveter. The Office of War Information issued photographs and films of working women to urge the hesitant, with captions such as “21 year old Belva Fletcher, handicapped by progressive paralysis, is still able to do a good job for Uncle Sam...she’s painting Y’s for airplane engines” or “Ex-housewife, age 24, filing small parts. Her husband and brother are in the armed service.”<sup>3</sup> These messages were used to convince the cautious that not only were they able to help, but it was their patriotic duty to do so. To make the labor seem less daunting, government propaganda glossed over all of the grittiness and grime of industrial work, sometimes even trivializing the strenuousness of the labor by comparing it to traditional household tasks. Subjects of government publications remained cheerful, feminine and attractive, with no semblance of tiredness on their faces or trace of exasperation over inequality in the workplace showing through their patriotic grins.

The Office of War Information’s depiction of women laborers proved quite successful in generating public approval and support of women workers. When in late 1941 employers began “‘experimenting’ with women in jobs formerly held by men and that in many cases

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<sup>2</sup> National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Orbach Natanson, “Rosie Pictures: Select Images Relating to American Women Workers During World War II: (accessed 2 February 2014); available from [http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/126\\_rosi.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/126_rosi.html)

[were]...jobs vacated by men who have been drafted,"<sup>4</sup> many were still averse to the idea of women working in industrial jobs. Yet as the war progressed and the government's propaganda campaign took root, public opinion shifted in favor of female laborers. Countless articles espoused the competency of women. One such piece in a 1942 issue of the *New York Times* mentioned how at Republic Aviation Corporation the first all-woman drilling team shattered the male drilling record, causing an "official, who [originally] greeted the suggestion that women come into the plant with a curt 'over my dead body,'" to admit "he was now their most enthusiastic champion."<sup>5</sup> Other articles complimented women for "doing a swell job"<sup>6</sup> and claimed that "women in industry will be a mighty force in winning the war."<sup>7</sup> One employer (Consolidated Aircraft Corporation), went as far as to present its first women employees with trophies on the anniversary of their first day.<sup>8</sup> With the war underway there was nary a person who did not laud working women for their patriotic contributions on the home front.

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<sup>4</sup> "Industry Widens Jobs for Women: Placements in Both Defense and Non-Defense Activities Show Rapid Increase Wide Use in Air Plants Federal Security Agency Gets Reports of Entry Into Work Once Open Only to Men," *New York Times*, XCI: 30,578 (October 13, 1941), 14.

<sup>5</sup> "Aircraft Factories in East Deny Women Workers are Frivolous," *New York Times*, XCI: 30,889 (August 20, 1942), 24.

<sup>6</sup> "British, U.S. Workers Hail Women in War: They 'Come Up Trumps' or do a 'Swell Job'," *New York Times*, XCIII: 31,378 (December 22, 1943), 17.

<sup>7</sup> "McNutt Hails Women Workers as Proving Ability in War Tasks," *New York Times*, XCI:30,907 (September 7, 1942), 16.

<sup>8</sup> "Trophies Given Women Workers," *New York Times*, XCI: 30,916 (September 16, 1942), 30.

The depiction of women workers in government publications was governed by an agenda, causing them to focus exclusively on the positive aspects of labor. In order to debunk this manicured image, it is necessary to peer deeper into the realities of daily life faced by those females who ventured into industry. Though the war brought support for working women and an expansion of labor opportunities, the new positions opened to females were often far from glamorous. This was true in Henry Kaiser's Portland and Vancouver shipyards, where rather than working skilled jobs, such as electrician or welder, the vast majority of women found themselves hired on as helpers in low-status, low-paying jobs. These positions were, in the words of the War Manpower Commission report for Kaiser's Swan Island shipyard, "small, mostly light and repetitive tasks which can be handled by women with a small amount of pre-employment training."<sup>9</sup> Such posts consisted of pushing brooms, cleaning tanks, carrying tools for journeymen, working as a key-punch operator or driving trucks, among other things. Only a few lucky ladies were given the opportunity to work in highly skilled areas such as welding or machinery. In 1944, though 27% of workers at Kaiser shipyards were women more than half did clerical work whereas only 2.8% of the 9,755 pipefitters and machinists were female.<sup>10</sup> Women in prestigious positions such as leadlady were even fewer and farther between, though they did exist.

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<sup>9</sup> Karen Beck Skold, "Women Workers and Child Care During World War II: A Case Study of the Portland, Oregon Shipyards" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1981), 42.

<sup>10</sup> Naomi Kaufman Price, "World War II Took Women out of Home, Into Work Force," *The Oregonian*, 141:47,070 (December 4, 1991), A10.

The paucity of desirable jobs available to women was most likely due to the traditional views of women and women's roles which continued to dominate the workplace. This perspective was typified by a state law created by the Wage and Hour Commission for Oregon which forbade women to lift more than 25 pounds or carry more than 15 pounds. The perceived frailty of women was also apparent by the portrayal of women in the *Bos'n'Whistle*, the magazine of the Kaiser shipyards. In earlier volumes the only female employees mentioned were in low-intensity jobs such as nursing or key-punch operating.<sup>11</sup> They were dressed attractively and men were entreated to not "throw your goggles away just to get a chance to meet" the "capable young ladies who spend their days at the First Aid Station."<sup>12</sup> This comment belittled the importance of the women's work, making it seem that they were simply potential distractions that would decrease productivity. The only other women mentioned in the magazine were wives of shipyard workers who led the dedication of the ships, depicted in elegant dresses and hats. This conformed to the more traditional stereotype that women belonged in the home, a view which had grown in popularity during the Great Depression when any woman who worked was viewed as having stolen a job from a man. There was even more opposition to married women working, as evidenced by a 1936 Gallup poll in which a query about whether wives should seek employment was met with such resistance that George Gallup remarked that he had "never seen respondents so solidly united in opposition in any

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<sup>11</sup> *Bos'n'Whistle*, 2:5 (March, 1942), 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Bos'n'Whistle*, 2:3 (February, 1942), 7.

subject imaginable, including sin and hay fever.”<sup>13</sup> Such prejudice continued to linger on into the 1940s.

The deep-seated prejudice against working women meant that when ladies began to funnel into the workplace at the beginning of the war, discrimination was inevitable. This reality was apparent in the shipyards of Portland and Vancouver. In an interview with Karen Skold in preparation for her doctoral thesis on the Kaiser shipyards, Dr. Forest Reike, a physician at said shipyards, summarized the anti-women sentiment when he said “the old construction people that I know, and that were working there, told me that the minute a woman came in, they were leaving. There was a great male resistance, traditional, deep convictions. These guys had their own ideas about what their wives did, and essentially it was not their work. It was at home, keeping house, raising the kids and watering the grass.”<sup>14</sup> To have women working alongside them—in tasks which required manual labor—was, at first, unthinkable. Many of the Kaiser women interviewed by Karen Skold for her dissertation told of this antipathy toward the female employees. Vivian Humphreys, who worked as a welder in the shipyards, recalled that often men would not tell the new ladies their slang names for tools, instead allowing them to struggle.<sup>15</sup> The situation was aggravated even more for women who managed to get prestigious

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<sup>13</sup> Naomi Kaufman Price, A10.

<sup>14</sup> Forest Rieke, interview by Karen Skold, 9 January 1976, transcript, 3.

<sup>15</sup> John and Vivian Humphrey, interview by Karen Skold, transcript, 5.

positions such as leadlady; “there was quite a little friction about that. The men resented it very much. Some of them were old time welders and had to take the backseat for the women.”<sup>16</sup>

Working in the shipyards not only created strained relationships between women and their male co-workers—it was also hard on their families. Many husbands were opposed to their wives getting a job. They viewed their spouse’s role as that of a housekeeper, mother and spouse rather than a source of income. This was true of Verla Russe who moved to Portland with her husband and told her interviewer “I wanted to go to work at the shipyards right away. He said ‘No!’”<sup>17</sup> By the next year, Russe had coaxed her husband to give in and got a job at Kaiser as a welder, however his protectiveness continued when he refused to allow her to join the company’s bowling team. Countless other women faced similar scenarios. Anna Derbyshire became one of Kaiser’s first female electricians despite her husband’s disapproval; Laura Fortier married a man she met in the shipyard, only to find that “he didn’t want me to work;”<sup>18</sup> Vivian Humphrey’s husband would not allow her to go out on the ways (the ramp where the boats were assembled);<sup>19</sup> Stella Vogel continued to weld in order to pay the bills, knowingly rejecting her husband’s express desire that she remain unemployed.<sup>20</sup> This widespread disapproval voiced by the husbands of Portland’s women shipyard workers was not unique. It may have

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<sup>16</sup> Stella Vogel, interview by Karen Skold, transcript, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Verla Russe, interview by Karen Skold, transcript, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Laura Fortier, interview by Karen Skold, transcript, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Humphrey, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Vogel, 12.

stemmed from a number of factors such as a desire to be the bread-winner and fears of getting usurped by their spouse, the violation of their idea of the role of women, or a genuine desire to spare their fragile wives from the rough and tough world of labor. Whatever the reason for their opposition, it was sure to create tension in their marriage.

Adding to the tension was the ever-present reality of separation. This separation came in many forms, whether it was a husband serving overseas, a couple working different shifts or a mother too busy working to spend time with her children. The first form of separation occurred in hundreds of thousands of households across the country, whether they contained working women or not. Each man drafted to serve in the war left behind a family which worried and dreamed about him until he returned. Sometimes these missing loved ones were precisely what drove women into the workplace. Laura Fortier, a widow whose three sons were all in the service, began working at Kaiser in an attempt to help the war effort because she “felt like everybody should be working as hard as they could because the boys were over there fighting. And they needed the help.”<sup>21</sup> By working she hoped to lessen her feelings of helplessness and the stress that came with not knowing if she would ever see her children again. But even after the separation between soldier and loved one had ended, the stress was not over. Often new issues arose in relationships due to the long periods spent apart. Reike recalled that “Many families were sustained by the idea that when my husband gets home, or my boyfriend, we’re going to get married and everything’s going to be back to normal and happy as a clam. And

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<sup>21</sup> Fortier, 2-3.

when they all came home and looked around they said, 'Well, no way.'"<sup>22</sup> The long absences caused families to drift apart and grow increasingly dysfunctional. Rates of female alcoholism were up and a large portion of both men and women did not think that their spouse had been faithful. As a result of this loss of trust and estrangement, the divorce rate skyrocketed. In 1945, more than 500,000 divorces were filed, more than double the amount previous.<sup>23</sup>

Even those whose family members remained at home often faced separation. As women began to get jobs as well as their husbands, couples began to see less of each other. This was especially true in Portland shipyards, where many spouses worked opposite shifts. As a result they only came in contact for a few hours at most every day—a set-up which put great strain on marriages. Reike noticed this tendency and remarked, "There was often a tendency to work on different shifts. The husband would work graveyard shift, maybe the wife would, from midnight to 7 in the morning. She'd come home and he might go to work on the day shift. These were obviously strained situations in which families were under extreme stress, and you'd get into sort of divisive situations...all the interpersonal things were aggravated."<sup>24</sup> Making matters worse, Portland shipyard workers worked seven day weeks before each day off. In order to allow the shipyards to be open constantly, laborers belonged to different groups—A, B, C, D, E, F or G—and members of a group would get the same day off.<sup>25</sup> Thus it

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<sup>22</sup> Rieke, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald H. Bailey, *The Home Front, U.S.A.* Alexandria, Va: Time-Life Books, 1977.

<sup>24</sup> Rieke, 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Bos'n'Whistle*, 2:3 (February, 1942), 8.

was entirely possible for a couple working in the shipyards to not even be able to share their days off with each other. Stella Vogel, a tank cleaner at Kaiser, recalled the tension created by working different shifts and different days and said “At 11:00 I had to fix his lunch and get him ready. We worked different shifts. He worked the midnight shift...on my day off I’d have to do the washing and ironing. And on his day off he went to the movies all day long. I can remember him being there.”<sup>26</sup> Eventually, the couple ended up seeking a divorce.

Interpersonal stress was not the only thing burdening women workers during the war; they were also encumbered by the expectation that they lead a double life. Women always had been the central homemaker and housekeeper, and so even when it became culturally acceptable for them to move into the workplace their traditional role did not disappear. This expectation plagued Oregon’s shipbuilding women as well. Rather than solely fulfilling their patriotic duty by building ships for the war effort, they were expected to accomplish both functions simultaneously: welding, lifting loads and sweeping before going home to clean, bake meals and care for children. This left them little to no time for respite. Mildred Kane, a teacher at Kaiser’s child care center, was a victim of this overwhelming schedule and remembered that “We were just frantic on the seventh day. Sundays we didn’t know whether to clean the house and wash our hair or rush off and go on a picnic or rest.”<sup>27</sup> As a single woman, Kane had more choice in the matter; women with families often had no other option than to tackle chores on their day off.

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<sup>26</sup> Vogel, 10-12.

<sup>27</sup> Mildred Kane, interview by Karen Skold, transcript, 19.

Shopping for groceries was also much more difficult than it had been previously. Women who worked the day shift in the yards ran into issues because most grocers closed in the evening. Even those with shifts that allowed them to shop during the day had to deal with food shortages and long lines. Vivian Humphrey, a welder in the Kaiser shipyards, remarked “it might take an hour to get through the checkstand. You’d stand there and wait.”<sup>28</sup> Rationing protocol made matters even worse. During the war, the Office of Price Administration implemented the system as an anti-inflationary measure—it allowed the government to set prices and distribute scarce goods evenly. Despite its success at preventing inflation, rationing was far from popular in Portland, as noted in a 1944 *Oregonian* article which wrote that “No other single item has so shown up the fundamental...cussedness of the American people as much as rationing.”<sup>29</sup> Around twenty essential items were subject to regulation, including household necessities such as canned food, coffee, sugar, meat, butter and gasoline. In order to purchase these goods citizens were issued books with small square-inch stamps which they were required to use to buy goods rationed by the OPA. The system was somewhat of a headache, as billions of stamps changed hands every month, and the number of stamps necessary fluctuated based on availability.<sup>30</sup>

Finding child care presented shipyard women with yet another challenge. Nearly a third of the women at Kaiser in 1943 had children under the age of six who needed some form of

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<sup>28</sup> Humphrey, 22.

<sup>29</sup> "A Nation of Rations Produces a Divinely Human Comedy," *The Oregonian*, LXII: 2 (January 9, 1944), 96.

<sup>30</sup> Bailey, 110.

supervision. This care was much harder to come by during the war because many women had moved to the area recently and did not have extended family members to assist them. In addition, traditional babysitters, such as teenagers and grandmothers, found that the absence of men had opened a plethora of new, higher-paying jobs in factories and businesses, and were much less likely to watch children. Even nurseries did not provide a viable solution—they cost twice as much as a babysitter yet were not open at all hours, causing one woman to gripe that “the nursery opens at seven, and I have to leave at six. How am I gonna get ‘em there? That nursery’s no good to ANY shift. It ought to be open all twenty-four hours.”<sup>31</sup> The deficit of childcare resulted in an increase in latchkey kids, or children locked in houses while their parents were off at work.<sup>32</sup> Others entrusted their children to strangers, hoping that they would give them proper care, a hope which was often unsubstantiated, as Nona Pool-Goodrich, a Kaiser worker, pointed out in an interview with the *Oregonian*: “We paid strangers to take care of the kids, and of course we got ripped off plenty with that. I had to furnish their food and furnish their washing and everything, and I found them putting the kids to bed without their supper and then eating the kids [sic] food.”<sup>33</sup>

Henry Kaiser recognized the challenges faced by his women employees, especially those with families. Women who were unable to find childcare could not work, which was a pity for Kaiser, as a wartime study in Great Britain had showed that the best women workers were the

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<sup>31</sup> Karen Beck Skold, *Women Workers and Child Care During World War II: A Case Study of the Portland, Oregon Shipyards*. Thesis (Ph. D.)--University of Oregon, 1981, 1985, 124.

<sup>32</sup> Vernetta Kilger, interview by Karen Skold, 7 February 1976, transcript, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Naomi Kaufman Price, A11.

ones with families.<sup>34</sup> And yet even those 7,000 mothers who managed to find a way to work in the shipyards had increased absenteeism rates, whether due to sick children, unfinished chores at home or sheer exhaustion. It was to ameliorate this very issue and thus increase productivity that Kaiser created the child care center. Located right next to the shipyard, the center operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so that workers of all shifts could have access to them and Kaiser could say “Shipyard working momma, put that baby down.”<sup>35</sup> The center was state of the art. Built with government dollars and supported by Eleanor Roosevelt, making money was not an issue. In fact, the center lost over \$640,000 during the 22 months that they were in operation.<sup>36</sup> The buildings themselves were large and comfortable with many windows and child-sized sinks and furniture. They had outdoor play areas complete with wading pools and covered porches for the frequent rain.<sup>37</sup> Children were fed healthy and hearty meals, including fruits, vegetables and juice with cod liver oil, all concocted under the watchful eyes of Dr. Miriam Lowenberg, an authority on child nutrition.<sup>38</sup> The students were supervised by a teaching staff made up of all college graduates being paid handsome salaries, and had access to a wide variety of toys, ranging from tricycles and musical instruments to puzzles.<sup>39</sup> In addition,

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<sup>34</sup> Skold, 119.

<sup>35</sup> Victoria O'Donnell and Paul Monaco, *Women, War and Work Shaping Space for Productivity in the Shipyards During the Second World War* [Bozeman, Mont.]: KUSM-TV Montana Public Television, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Skold, 143.

<sup>37</sup> Kaiser, “A Pictorial Study of the Child Service Centers,” pamphlet, (December 1, 1944).

<sup>38</sup> Skold, 150.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

children were provided with dental care and immunizations, there was a mending service and program which allowed mothers to get pre-cooked meals to reheat at home. And all of these amenities came for the modest price of \$4 to \$5 per week, a true bargain.<sup>40</sup>

And yet, for all of its newfangled ideas and strategies, the child care center was far from solving all of the issues faced by the shipyard's women workers. For one, at their peak the centers served only a quarter of mothers in the shipyard—the vast majority continued to seek care elsewhere. Some women, including Isabella Saunders, had never even heard of them: “Were there any childcare centers around then? I don’t know. I don’t think so.”<sup>41</sup> Others were reluctant to use them due to aversion to group care and disease. These may have been somewhat founded, as one of the teachers, Mildred Kane, noted that there was a shortage of teachers and the children “were in this big group all of the time... They were suffering from unhappy, lonesome mothers. Or, you know, a whole family uprooted. They really were difficult children. And I really think we could have given lots more emotional nourishment if we had more people to a class.”<sup>42</sup>

An even more important factor served to further negate Kaiser’s attempts to assist women workers: when the war ended, their jobs did as well. It had always been somewhat accepted that women were only in the workplace for the duration of the conflict. The same advertisements which had lured women into labor had included lines such as “This job belongs

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<sup>40</sup> Skold, 143.

<sup>41</sup> Isabella Saunders, interview by Karen Skold, transcript.

<sup>42</sup> Kane, 15.

to some soldier, and when he comes home, he can have it.”<sup>43</sup> And yet after all of their labor and effort, women had managed to become a part of the workforce. William Mulcahy, a supervisor of the assembly of sensitive electronic parts recalled that

Unfortunately, when the war ended, despite the skill and patriotism the women had displayed, we were forced to lay them off ...We didn't even allow them in the building, all these women with whom I had become close, who had worked seven days a week for years and had been commended so many times by the navy for the work they were doing.<sup>44</sup>

The same people who had invited women into industry booted them right back out—with no thanks, no ceremony and no sympathy. Despite such injustice, the vast majority of women accepted this change of events silently, returning to the kitchen and the cradle with no complaint. Stella Vogel, previously a tank cleaner, was one of these, remarking “I'd rather see women in their own environment. I don't care to see—it's too tomboyish in my estimation.”<sup>45</sup> Vivian Humphrey, a welder, sided with Vogel, noting that “it seemed for mannish....it really had always been a man's job” and that she would not want to continue after having kids because it “Doesn't seem quite right for a woman to be doing a man's job and have children too, you know.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Naomi Kaufman Price, A10.

<sup>44</sup> Penny Coleman, *Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Home Front in World War II*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1995, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Vogel, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Humphrey, 17.

This shift in attitude toward working women was evident in the content of newspapers. Whereas articles at the beginning of the war had lauded women and praised them for their competency in industries previously staffed by men, later papers were dominated by titles ranging from “Women Workers Lead in Absences”<sup>47</sup> to “Plan Post-War Cut in Women’s Jobs”<sup>48</sup> and “Bridgeport Bars Jobs for Women.”<sup>49</sup> One article talking about the Women’s Advisory Committee’s job plan for women in peace time wrote: “Although predicated on full employment and the right of every woman to work at a paid job if she so desires, this new advisory document leads off with women who work in their homes as the largest category, about 28,750,000 [54%].”<sup>50</sup> The article went on to say that it was important to recognize the activities of a homemaker as a profession. Such statements were directly in line with the shift in public sentiment—now that men were back, it was time for women to return to the home. Their job was done, and their duties as a wife and homemaker beckoned. To make this even clearer, many papers featured ads with taglines such as “Why doesn’t Mommy stay home anymore?; He needs you more than ever in a war-changed world.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “Women Workers Lead in Absences,” *New York Times*, XCIV: 31,699 (November 7, 1944), 20.

<sup>48</sup> “Plan Post-War Cut in Women’s Jobs: A Jap of Olives is Packed in Thirty-Five Seconds,” *New York Times*, XCIV: 31,789 (February 5, 1945), 12.

<sup>49</sup> “Bridgeport Bars Jobs for Women: One-Third of Labor Force in War, They Now Appeal to WLB in Boston,” *New York Times*, XCV: 32,016 (September 20, 1945), 18.

<sup>50</sup> “Women’s Job Plan for Peach Mapped: Advisory Committee of WMC Makes,” *New York Times*, XCIV: 31,869 (April 26, 1945), 20.

<sup>51</sup> Bob Agnew. “A Woman’s Place...’: “Life’s” Portrayal of Women, 1943 and 1945,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 20: 2 (December 2001), 91-97.

And so while the war opened jobs in the shipyards for women, most only lasted for the duration of the conflict and brought many stressors with them. Many of the positions were low-skill, and low-paying and their occupants often faced discrimination, disapproval from family members and the arduous task of balancing work and home life. In addition, issues with childcare, despite Henry Kaiser's valiant attempts, remained largely unresolved. Clearly many women workers experienced something entirely different from the charming depictions of female labor found government propaganda. Yet despite the panoply of hardships, or perhaps because of them, women workers discovered personal strengths which they never knew existed and did things which they had previously not even dreamed they were capable of. Their time in the labor force caused them to come to realizations similar to that of Laura Fortier: that "you could do anything you set your head to do."<sup>52</sup> Though many women returned to the home after the war, they retained this lesson and impressed it upon their daughters—and it was these daughters who would one day spear-head the fight for gender equality.

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<sup>52</sup> Fortier, 8.