



THE NATIONAL
WWII MUSEUM

Working Women of WWII

Primary Documents: The Editorial Cartoon

A Lesson Plan from
the Education Department of the

The National World War II Museum

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Working Women of WWII

Primary Sources: The Editorial Cartoon

American women played a vital role in the Allies victory in WWII. More than 400,000 served in the military and millions worked in defense industries on the home front. WWII gave women new opportunities for work and independence. Some people viewed these changes as positive, some as negative. Many people were ambivalent about the social changes that effected women during the war. This ambivalence can be explored in contemporary images of women from that era.

OBJECTIVE: Students will learn about the social tensions brought about by women entering the workforce during WWII by analyzing portrayals of women in editorial cartoons.

BENCHMARKS: **Grades 5-8:** H-1A-M2; H-1A-M3; H-1A-M4; H-1A-M5; H-1A-M15; H-1B-M17; H-1B-M18
Grades 9-12: C-1A-H3; C-1B-H3; C-1B-H4; H-1A-H2; H-1A-H3; H-1A-H4; H-1B-H17

DIRECTIONS:

1. Present a brief lesson on the women’s experience of WWII. Focus on the experience of large numbers of women going to work to increase war production. Ask students what social conflicts this may have caused.
2. Pass out copies of the “Anything You Can Do” list and give students two minutes to complete the activity. Review their answers. Inform students that women held every one of the jobs on the list during WWII.
3. Pass out copies of the two editorial cartoons. Students may either answer the questions individually or as pairs on a separate sheet of paper, or you may hold a group discussion using the questions. Remind students to pay close attention to details when analyzing editorial cartoons.
4. If students answer questions on paper, end lesson by holding a brief discussion about the activity. Discuss which cartoon students liked best, and why?

ASSESSMENT: Components for assessment include the any written questions and the class discussion.

ENRICHMENT: Have students find editorial cartoons in the newspaper and answer the following questions about them: what is the subject matter of the cartoon? How does the artist feel about the subject? Do you agree with the artist—why or why not?

Anything You Can Do... **World War II Jobs for Women**

During WWII women found jobs that had previously been performed only by men.

DIRECTIONS: Circle the jobs below that women in the United States held during WWII and put an "X" next to the jobs that women were not allowed to do.

aerodynamic engineer
aircraft spotter
architect
astronomer
barber
baseball player
bus driver
butcher
cargo loader
chemist
crane operator
draftsman
drawbridge tender
electrician
fire fighter
flash welder
forest fire fighter
foundry helper
furnace operator
garbage collector
geologist
journalist
keel welder
lumberjack
maintenance worker
mathematician
mechanic

messenger
meteorologist
milkman
oiler
ordnance worker
packer and shipper
physicist
pilot
pipe fitter
postal carrier
radio engineer
railroad track tender
riveter
scientist
shell assembler
shipfitter
steam hammer operator
street cleaner
surveyor
sweetbread puller
taxi driver
telegraph operator
ticket taker
tinsmith
tool machinist
traffic cop
train porter

Women in WWII

Primary Sources: The Editorial Cartoon

Editorial cartoons that appear in newspapers and magazines are meant as entertainment, but also reflect a political or moral stance, or present a critique on a current event or on society as a whole. Study this 1943 cartoon from the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* and answer the questions below.



This cartoon shows *War Manpower Commissioner* Paul McNutt judging a woman in a pageant, not for her beauty, but for her strength.

1. What was the artist's purpose in drawing this cartoon?
2. What characteristics describe the woman?
3. Who was the artist's audience (for whom was this cartoon meant?)
4. Does the artist make the reader feel patriotic, optimistic, and strong? How?
5. How does this cartoon make you feel? Why?

Now compare the first cartoon to this one from the *Des Moines Register*, also printed in 1943. Answer the questions below.



1. What do you think the creator of this cartoon was trying to say?
2. Which characteristics describe the woman? Which describe the man?
3. Is the man in favor of or against women working outside the home?
4. Do you think others shared his opinion? Who?
5. How does this cartoon make you feel? Why?
6. Which cartoon do you like better and why?