

U.S. History Inquiry: Is War Good for Women?

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Rosie the Riveter Inspired Women to Serve in World War II
March 21, 2019

<https://www.war.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/article/1791664/rosie-the-riveter-inspired-women-to-serve-in-world-war-ii/>

Supporting Questions

1. What opportunities did women have in wartime America?
2. What was the war's economic impact on American women?
3. How did wartime changes continue to shape women's lives after World War II?

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Social Studies Standards	§113.41.d.7 - History. The student understands the domestic and international impact of U.S. participation in World War II.
Staging the Compelling Question	After brief WWII background, examine 6-8 wartime images and classify each as harmful, empowering, or both. Use the classifications to establish criteria for judging whether war can be "good" for women.

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
What opportunities did women have in wartime America?	What was the war's economic impact on American women?	How did wartime changes continue to shape women's lives after World War II?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Create an Evidence Map: (1) duties/opportunities, (2) descriptive language, and (3) emotions recruiters tried to evoke.	Create a T-chart of economic evidence showing benefits and costs of wartime change for women.	Complete a Policy Pathway Chart: what each policy did, the problem it addressed, and why the change was needed.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
A. Cornelia Fort, At the Twilight's Last Gleaming B. Mildred Darlene Axton video C. Elaine Harmon video D. If Hitler Came to Mobile E. U.S. Employment Service recruitment poster, 1944 F. Longing Won't Bring Him Back Sooner... Get a War Job!, 1944 G. Rosie the Riveter recruiting ad	A. Women and WWII: The Lasting Societal Shift B. The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women's Employment C. World War II in America: Spending, Deficits, Multipliers, and Sacrifice	A. G.I. Bill Improvement Act of 1977 (Public Law 95-202) B. Women's Armed Services Integration Act C. Public Law 78-49 - Lanham Act Childcare Amendments (1943)

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT: Construct an evidence-based argument answering, "Is War Good for Women?" Make a clear claim, use evidence from multiple sources, and acknowledge a competing viewpoint.
	EXTENSION: Investigate a more recent conflict and compare ways it has benefited or harmed women.
Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND: Identify organizations that support women affected by war. ASSESS: Compare their missions and determine where student action could be useful. ACT: Create informational materials, organize a donation drive or awareness event, or interview a representative and share the findings.

**Featured sources are suggested and links are provided. It may be that these links are broken and we apologize in advance for the inconvenience.*

Overview

Inquiry Description

This inquiry asks students to investigate a deliberately provocative question: Is war good for women? World War II brought destruction, separation, and loss, yet it also opened forms of work, military service, public responsibility, and economic participation that had often been restricted to women before 1941. Students examine that tension rather than treating wartime change as simply progress or simply hardship. Across three supporting questions, they consider opportunities available to women, the economic consequences of wartime mobilization, and the longer-term effects of wartime changes on policy and women's public roles.

This inquiry centers on the following social studies standard:

- §113.41.d.7 - History. The student understands the domestic and international impact of U.S. participation in World War II.

Students will benefit from basic background knowledge of World War II, U.S. mobilization on the home front, and prevailing expectations for women before and during the war.

Note: This inquiry is designed for approximately six or seven 40-minute class periods. Teachers may expand or compress the sequence depending on the amount of source analysis, discussion, and writing students need. The inquiry also lends itself to modeling source analysis and differentiating the featured sources and performance tasks for individual learners.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question, students move through three related lenses. They first investigate wartime opportunities and the messages used to recruit women into new roles. They then weigh evidence about the economic benefits and costs of wartime employment. Finally, they examine laws and policies that show how wartime changes continued to affect women after World War II. Together, the supporting questions prepare students to make a nuanced claim about whether expanded opportunity can make war "good" for women.

Staging the Compelling Question

Begin with brief background on World War II and then present 6-8 photographs representing different wartime experiences, such as women in factories, women serving in military support roles, farewells, Red Cross work, the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, prisoners of war, and images of peace or combat. Ask students to classify each image as harmful, empowering, or both. Use the discussion to surface the criteria students are using to judge the word "good" and to introduce the tension at the center of the inquiry.

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question - What opportunities did women have in wartime America? - focuses students on the new roles women assumed during World War II and on how those roles were presented to the public.

Students examine first-person accounts, videos, and recruitment materials, then complete an Evidence Map that records specific duties or opportunities, descriptive language in the sources, and the emotions recruiters tried to evoke. The task helps students distinguish between the opportunities women actually experienced and the persuasive messages used to encourage wartime participation.

- Featured sources include Cornelia Fort's *At the Twilight's Last Gleaming*; videos featuring Mildred Darlene Axton and Elaine Harmon; *If Hitler Came to Mobile*; U.S. Employment Service recruitment posters from 1944; and a Rosie the Riveter recruiting advertisement.

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question - What was the war's economic impact on American women? - asks students to weigh economic evidence rather than assume that increased employment automatically meant lasting economic progress.

Students use the featured sources to create a T-chart that identifies economic benefits and economic costs or limits. In doing so, they consider the rise of women's employment alongside broader wartime spending, sacrifice, and the temporary nature of some wartime opportunities.

- Featured sources include *Women and WWII: The Lasting Societal Shift*; *The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women's Employment*; and *World War II in America: Spending, Deficits, Multipliers, and Sacrifice*.

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question - How did wartime changes continue to shape women's lives after World War II? - shifts the inquiry from immediate wartime experience to longer-term policy and recognition.

Students read legislative excerpts and complete a Policy Pathway Chart. For each source, they summarize what the law or policy did, identify the problem it addressed, and explain why the change was needed. This work helps students see that wartime participation did not erase discrimination and that later policy changes were often necessary to secure recognition, status, benefits, or support.

- Featured sources include the G.I. Bill Improvement Act of 1977 (Public Law 95-202), the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, and the Lanham Act childcare amendments of 1943.

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined wartime opportunity, economic change, and the longer-term policy consequences of women's World War II experiences.

Students should use evidence from multiple sources to construct an argument answering the compelling question, "Is War Good for Women?" The final product may take the form of an outline, poster, essay, or podcast. Regardless of format, students should make a defensible claim, support it with specific evidence, and acknowledge a competing or qualifying viewpoint.

Possible arguments include:

- World War II expanded opportunities for women, but the gains were uneven and often limited; war cannot be considered "good" for women simply because it created opportunities within a larger context of loss, discrimination, and pressure; or World War II accelerated social and economic change for women while revealing how much inequality remained.

To extend their arguments, students can research a more recent conflict and compare the ways war has opened opportunities for women, intensified hardships, or done both.

Students can Take Informed Action by identifying an organization that supports women affected by war, assessing its mission and needs, and acting through informational materials, a donation drive or awareness event, or an interview with a representative.