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The Anatomy of Patriotism: The Commodification of American Gender Roles and the Female Body in World War II Print Media

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THE ANATOMY OF PATRIOTISM:
THE COMMODIFICATION OF AMERICAN GENDER ROLES AND THE
FEMALE BODY IN WORLD WAR II PRINT MEDIA

Addy Beals

“Females carry the marks, language and nuances of their culture more than the male.
Anything that is desired or despised is always placed on the female body.”

Wangechi Mutu

“‘What may be the end of the world will be marked by a nice thigh, the beginning of
chaos by the lift of a pretty hip.’” This was the explanation offered by the New Yorker in January
of 1941, as the magazine pondered the obsession of a world at war with Alberto Vargas’s pen-
and-paper dream girls.¹ The drawings were hyper feminine, unrealistic, and impractical—
seemingly out of place amongst concerns over bombs, fascist dictators, and the state of the free
world as it was known. When the United States joined the war less than a year later, women
would re-enter the discussion, this time to define their function in the war effort. With a host of
new work opportunities, time-honored gender roles were challenged and the associations of
traditional female duty—such as nurturing others—were drafted into service as well. How, then,
are gender roles a reflection of a culture, and how are they utilized in crisis? During World War
II, images of the American female body appeared in a variety of print media; they capitalized on
cultural connotations of body parts and femininity to create content that simultaneously sold the
war effort and the new female roles that resulted from it.

Scholarship from a span of thirty years presents a spectrum of interpretations of the
physical side of female experience during World War II. It arcs from a peppy narrative that
champions feminine power expressed in styling, to a harsher critique of how society wanted to
view women. Historians disagree whether the patriotic beauty trends of war years reflect
independence and agency, or socially-imposed symbolism for the sake of the war—not the
woman—creating a dichotomy between the classic narrative of liberation and a newer theory that
argues that women were bound by stricter, symptomatic beauty standards.

Published in 1983, Lois W. Banner’s American Beauty presents the traditional narrative
of women in World War II: liberation followed by retraction. Her presentation of the 1940s
strengthens the idea that it was an era of women taking center stage, laced with looser physical
expectations. Banner lists the iconic Rosie the Riveter, dressed in “trousers and shirts,” and
actress Rosalind Russell, who wore “extreme man-tailored suits,” as “the feminine film ideals of
the time.” She cites American designer Claire McCardell as additional evidence, describing her
“revolutionary costumes” as “consciously intended to offer women physical ease.” The 1950s, in
contrast, saw a return to male dominance, epitomized in the influence of Christian Dior. Banner
points out the irony of a male designer creating clothing “that recalled Victorian modes” and

¹ Rachelle Bergstein, Women from the Ankle Down: The Story of Shoes and How They Define Us (New York:
stressed traditional femininity; Dior’s rise in the postwar world closely paralleled the social
temperature of the decade, which pushed women out of masculine occupations and back into
their traditionally expected role as nurturer.2

On the more radical end of this ideology is Melissa McEuen’s Making War, Making
Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945, written nearly thirty
years after American Beauty. While she does not oppose any specific historians, McEuen does
dispute many popular conceptions of the women of the Greatest Generation as she explores the
relationship between women, their physical appearances, and patriotism. Even though
contemporary audiences associate these women with the ever-popular Rosie the Riveter, she
reveals that images of capable-looking workers, epitomized by Rosie, were much rarer in
advertising and media, which was actually populated by “thousands of hyper feminized women.”
The contradiction between these two images parallels the author’s underlying theme, which
defies the ingrained belief that women were liberated by the Second World War. While they did
fill traditionally masculine roles, their other function in the war effort was to be “something
worth fighting for,” which is blatantly less empowering. She argues that the female body was
another theatre of battle, used in propaganda, to boost morale, and to project changing American
values. McEuen replaces the liberation narrative with her own, stating that women might have
been released from accepted socio-economic expectations for a few years, but they were held to
arguably more restrictive physical standards, resulting in a partial freedom.3

Manipulating Images: World War II Mobilization of Women through Magazine
Advertising, by Tawyna J. Adkins Covert, picks up McEuen’s questioning of the liberation
narrative, specifically focusing on female portrayals in printed media. Just as women’s roles
changed, images of them also “were altered to address the conditions of war both in the economy
and the larger culture;” part of the purpose of these new representations was to “encompass and
encourage acceptance of women’s new roles.” Adkins Covert contradicts Banner’s themes of
feminine and masculine social synthesis, suggesting that while advertisements did show women
in non-traditional roles, they described them in “traditional, gender stereotyped language.” This
was a subtle way of preserving accepted femininity; it emphasized how inherently unsuited the
woman was to her wartime duties. Its goal did not reflect liberation; in reality, it was to “modify
and expand rather than abandon representations.”4

Magazine advertisements focused on “women’s roles in the family” and rendered them
“as sexual objects.” The depiction of women in popular culture was “an expression of larger
political and economic forces,” adding a further layer of expectation on female lives. The female
body was politicized into a vehicle for changing values and needs, and essentially was used to
sell the war effort. Adkins Covert contends that media “commodified women’s beauty as
currency,” echoing McEuen’s statement that women were encouraged to support the war effort
by being physically attractive and appealing to soldiers.5

3 Melissa A. McEuen, Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945
4 Tawyna J. Adkins Covert, Manipulating Images: World War II Mobilization of Women through Magazine
5 Adkins Covert, Manipulating Images, 42, 43, 44.
McEuen and Adkins Covert form the basis of an argument which this paper expands with increased focus on gender expectations: the presentation and representations of female bodies, influenced by gender roles, were used as social and political tools. Traditional rhetoric surrounding World War II describes it as an era of liberation for women, matched by freer styles of dress and less elaborate makeup routines. However, while fashions for working women did take cues from masculine styles and makeup routines became simpler due to rationing, the emphasis placed on physical presentation became much more significant, intended as a weapon against both masculinization and the Axis Powers. Social and economic freedom was not matched by a relaxing of beauty standards; rather, more pressure was applied to them. Looks became an expression of patriotism, and women were encouraged to be personifications of the war effort. Therefore, while her traditional feminine roles were challenged and her clothing consequently became more masculine, the wartime woman’s beauty routine became all the more specific, to preserve her femininity and reflect her national pride. Ultimately, social and economic liberation was not matched in appearance, which continued to reinforce gender roles to stabilize the tumult of American society.

This paper examines the intersection of femininity and war through an anthropological lens, focusing on how the former became a tool of the latter. To best study the corporeal side of history, it will employ the anthropological method of treating the body as an instrument of study. Through this approach, the body becomes “a component of visual culture and in relation to the use of visual material in anthropological research.” One method of studying the body, known as discourse about the body, treats it as a “biological, cultural, or social object,” one which is observed, classified, written about, and represented visually.” Another approach, discourses of the body, emphasizes the “‘I feel/experience’ the subjective, lived body.” Lastly, discourse from the body studies physical action as an expression of identity. The body is inextricably tied to culture; it is both an influence on and a product of it. Physical appearance is a form of expression and identification, and applying its study to culture is known as “embodiment.” The theory of embodiment deems appearance as a physical manifestation of society, which when analyzed can reveal cultural traits. While this study draws on each method, discourse from the body is the approach most specifically suited to analyzing appearance: it directly links corporeality as an expression of culture. In World War II America, this was certainly the case: the presentation and representations of women’s bodies were a direct reflection of anxieties about changing gender roles during the war.

Considering “visual phenomena such as masking, clothing, costuming, body ornaments and decoration, and notions of beauty” as possible reflections of lifestyle, class, and beliefs elevates them beyond superficial concerns. This makes them a legitimate component in historical research. Expression through physical appearance is a characteristic central to humanity, though varied in form between cultures. Essentially, modified physical appearance is an “a vehicle for collective and personal identities,” acting as a “signal of what [a person considers] themselves to be.” By this logic, fashion and beauty trends are valid historical tools, which reveal the identities of a culture, as well as the values that influence their creation.

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7 Farnell, “Theorizing ‘the Body’ in Visual Culture,” 138, 139; Banner, American Beauty, 3.
The first step toward a more complete understanding of women in World War II is establishing the role of sexuality and gender in the United States. This requires identifying the country’s defining cultural values, as well as how they inform its construction of gender roles. At its most basic level, the United States is inherently patriarchal and reveres military service. It is historically male-centric, a characteristic epitomized in its power dynamics. The emphasis on male or paternal guidance is evident from its colonial origins: the Protestant pilgrims honored God the Father and encouraged the obedience of wives to their husbands; the Founding Fathers intended it as a place of freedom for “all men;” suffrage remained exclusively male until 1920, and the Presidency continues to be occupied by men. Masculine leadership is a consistent characteristic of America, and one that shapes the power relationships in the country’s social structures as well.

More broadly, conflict itself is similarly gendered. Men have long been generalized as aggressors, and women as peacemakers. In Greek mythology (a civilization whose government heavily inspired American democratic ideals), the primary god of war is Ares, while the goddess of love is Aphrodite. Even roles within combat have pitted men as warriors and women as the spoils of war; the two exist in separate spheres, one reflecting cause and the other, consequence. This is paralleled in Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America, Esther Newton’s analysis of American gender constructs: “One can just be a woman; it is a passive state. But one must achieve manhood. All a woman has to do is ‘open her legs’ (a passive act), but a man has to ‘get it up’ (that’s ‘action’).” The American connotation of the military as a man’s space is based on the idea of achievement, both through conquering or winning, and as a way to prove oneself. Culturally, the Armed Forces have long been revered as “the ultimate test of ‘masculinity.’" Ultimately, it is these foundational values that dictated the characteristics that are assigned based on gender, and created the basis of American gender binaries. In a cyclical pattern, these expectations influenced both the culture and social structure, therefore rendering the United States heavily dependent on distinct differences between men and women.

Though created in relation to a completely separate matter, Newton’s Mother Camp provides a framework for understanding the American construction of gender via its perception of the relationship between masculinity and femininity. National tradition glorifies machismo, which is tied to achievement and prowess. Anything outside of the classically American ideal—“free, white, male, and twenty-one”—is stigmatized, and the peak of this divergence is homosexuality. Mainstream American masculinity is aggressively heteronormative and therefore associated with sex between men and women, with the former dominating; homosexuality does not conform to this dynamic, and its subversive nature is most fully realized when “symbolized…by transvestism.” Using dated language, Newton’s mid-century explanation lists “drag queen”—a gay man wearing women’s clothes—as the “homosexual term for a transvestite,” situating it as the ultimate personification of homosexuality and un-American dissent within its broader field. Given this explanation, the hazily gendered roles and appearances of enlisted women in World War II were particularly alarming. It is this fear of homosexuality, regarded as the utmost violation of gender roles and reflected in a transgression

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9 Newton, Mother Camp, 1, 2, 3.
of gendered apparel, which ultimately underpinned contemporary fears about women participating in the military; dressing in masculine Army uniforms was perceived as a gateway to masculine behavior—such as engaging sexually with women—as well. The added violation of gendered expectations within a quintessentially American space—the masculine military—made it all the more disruptive.

One consequence of these blurred behaviors was the fear that women would start to act like men. Nineteen forties America largely equated gender with performance. Men worked outside the home; women worked within it. Men were inherently dominant; women were inherently submissive. Men had sexual appetite that could not always be controlled; women upheld standards of chastity and sexual respectability. As the lines separating these domains softened, the American public shuddered at the prospect that “women’s right to ‘behave like a man’ by joining the workforce or the military meant also their ‘right to misbehave as he does,’ especially sexually”—whether imitating men through sexual promiscuity, or through sex with women.\(^\text{10}\) This would violate both the modesty and heteronormativity associated with women, and therefore undermine broader gender expectations. Americans took gender roles as indicators of sexuality, and both of these helped to uphold their already threatened, androcentric social structure. By encouraging classically feminine beauty standards, it reinforced traditional femininity, effectively preserving America’s time-honored social order that is so reliant on gender roles.

To explore this phenomenon, this paper will examine three female archetypes that emerged during the war years—the home front woman, the uniformed woman, and the pinup—via their portrayals through body parts in specific areas of media: propaganda, advertisements, and graphic images. Analyzing the trend of hands in propaganda, lips in advertisements, and legs in pinup art sheds light on a unique aspect of the female wartime experience: her corporeality. First, propaganda that featured the home front woman’s hands emphasized her practical contributions to the war effort, drawing on connotations of them as tools for care and work. Secondly, the perfectly-painted lips of servicewomen in cosmetic advertisements theorized that women could be both a lady and a soldier, disproving fears of masculinization. Finally, pinup photographs and art consistently featured long, bare legs, formally enfolding scandalous feminine sexual displays into the arsenal of acceptable patriotic duty. Each body part reflects a facet of expected femininity: laboring, ladylike, and sexually compliant.

The explicit emphasis on feminine characteristics was aimed at both male and female audiences, serving as a general reminder of the impermanence of war time roles. For men, it emphasized the security of their masculine positions. For women, it reinforced maintaining appearance as an element of patriotism, as well as an indicator of their true position in the social landscape. Pinup culture, social shifts, and adapting beauty trends are all oft-discussed aspects of World War II. However, analyzing them through a different lens—one of body, symbolism, and commodification—offers a more complex, comprehensive insight into the experience of the wartime woman. Her physical existence was transformed into a vehicle of the war effort, politicizing the body into propaganda and infusing her presentation with a new, more calculated layer of significance.

\(^{10}\) Meyer, ”Creating G.I. Jane,” 583.
A Woman’s Touch: The Upkeep of Hands and Nails in Propaganda

The hand is significant for both its biological and social function. Physically, it is deemed by many as what separates man from beast. The opposable thumb enables creativity and the production of material culture, supporting the development of a collective identity. Culturally, hands are recognizable symbols: they connote assistance and connection. A 1955 anthropological study outlined their more conceptual relationship to humanity, stating that regardless of era or culture, they represent “cultural behaviors, values, and beliefs.” Alongside the face, they are the primary articulators of emotion, feeling, and thought, rendering them “symbolic of human sentiment.” Their role in creativity is not limited to production; within artistic works, they are used as synecdoche--a part that represents a whole--and to indicate feelings and motivations that the face may not. From the haunting Cueva de las Manos (11000-7500 BCE) in Argentina to the nearly-touching fingertips of Michelangelo’s The Creation of Adam (1512), hands have long been present in humanity’s art (see Appendix--Figure 1 and Figure 2).11

This artistic tradition was reincarnated during World War II, when limbs became a recurring image throughout print media; specifically, women’s hands. Consistent with the blurred genres of print media, commercial advertisements, and propaganda of the war years alike reflected this preoccupation with cared-for hands. They appeared in everything from soap advertisements to notices for wartime employment. Historically, the ideal feminine hand has been soft, small, and fair; working in factories for the war effort roughened them, leading to an increase in focus on care. Nail polish was one way of maintaining femininity. Moreover, hands were essential tools for more traditional female positions within the war effort, such as typists or clerks, shifting even more attention to their appearance.12

One advert from 1942, for Ivory Soap, promised to transform hands “rough and red from dishpan drudgery” to “smoother, whiter” (Fig. 3). It paired the incentives of “[keeping one’s] hands lovely and get speedy dishwashing.” Another from the same year, still for Ivory Soap, declares that “Minneapolis War Knitter Says Nice Looking Hands Important” (Fig. 4). The knitter in question, Mrs. F. P. Barlow, emphasizes the importance of feminine hand care: the text quotes her as saying, “Like lots of people I always notice a woman’s hands. So I think it’s important to keep them looking nice.” The “beauty suds” promised to be “baby’s pure,” gentle enough for even “a lady’s hands.” In 1943, Lava Soaps offered a product for “war workers—men—women—housewives—everybody!” but was quick to reassure that “women workers sure do ‘go’ for LAVA!” (Fig. 5). The advertisement guaranteed improvement in the skin’s appearance “really clean—dainty—quick!”13

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12 McEuen, Making War, Making Women, 58-59.
13 Procter & Gamble Co., "12 Days from Today Your Hands Can Be Lovelier” advertisement, Better Homes and Gardens, 1942; Procter & Gamble Co., "Minneapolis War Knitter Says Nice Looking Hands Important"
All of these advertisements pair women’s work—whether housekeeping or in service of the war—with the maintenance of their hands’ appearance, as well as mundane labor with beauty. Moreover, the constant pairing of “soft” or passive-connoting qualities like “baby,” “pure,” “white,” and “smooth” indicate the domestic sphere that women were expected to remain in, as well as the docile traits they were supposed to exhibit. Visually, this stressed the white dominance of mainstream America. Light skin was the pinnacle of beauty for women, pitting women of color as undesirable and unfeminine. This theme had a historical presence in soap advertisements since the mid-nineteenth century; Pears Soap, a UK brand popular in the States, showed black children using their soap to become white-skinned (Fig. 6). This was a symptom of the United States’ well-established acceptance of white supremacy and racism. During the war years, as the obsession with the preservation of femininity increased, dark skin, whether from labour or genetics, was further polarized as unrefined, unladylike, and un-American—as well as something to be combated through a beauty routine. The war effort re-formulated the emphasis on fair skin to include patriotism, in the form of preserving delicate femininity for home front women. Additionally, the advertisement’s language paralleled the home front woman’s adaptation of her new wartime responsibilities with the added emphasis on her physical appearance as an indication of patriotism. Throughout the war years, beauty was a duty equal to that of washing dishes.14 The following three examples each reflect a subdivision of the home front woman—war worker, housewife, and sweetheart—and how their feminine “helping hands” contributed to the war effort.

For the purposes of propaganda, the hand’s function as an “organ of perception” makes it an ideal representation of even “the most abstract concepts.” The classic notion of lending a “helping hand” obviously underpins every image, and the explicitness of the reference to the hand ranges between pieces. In one, a call for government stenographers insisted that “Victory Waits On Your Fingers” (Fig. 7). Spreading encouragement to “Keep ‘Em Flying, Miss U.S.A.,” the poster featured a smiling young woman saluting from behind a typewriter. Her clothing referenced the colors of the flags of the Allied nations: a white shirt, red and blue hair bow, and red lips.15 This presentation not only emphasized her national spirit, but also her femininity: she is working, but she is very much female.

Though only one hand was visible, it was well-kept with smooth skin and red nails. Moreover, it was the focal point of patriotism in the image. While her styling and employment indicated her commitment and service, her hand lifted in salute created an unmistakable picture of national loyalty—a cornerstone American value throughout the war years. A salute is undeniably associated with the masculine sphere of the military, and when executed by a young female civilian, it bridged the gap between the two separate realms while also presenting home

-advertisement, Minneapolis Star Journal, 1942; Procter & Gamble Co., "Hello Lava! Goodbye Grime--in 30 to 50 Seconds!" advertisement, Baltimore Sun, 1943.


front jobs as a female equivalent of military service. The synthesis presented in this image elevated the work of female civilians to be equal to that of enlisted men, reinforcing the idea that everyone—regardless of gender—needed to contribute to the war effort. A very specific type of hand—clean, well-manicured, middle class, female—epitomized these values.

A second poster from 1944 that aimed to combat inflation spotlighted “The chipped teacup of the PATRIOTIC Mrs. Jones” (Fig. 8). According to the text, the worn teacup indicated that “Mrs. Jones has her nation’s welfare at heart” as she modeled a thrifty attitude. The poster continued on to remind readers to make do with what they already had. The titular teacup—plain except a modest trim and the famed chip—is filled with steaming liquid, with its owner’s fingers wrapped elegantly around its handle. Even though her dishware may have seen better days, Mrs. Jones’ hands were in their prime. The black-and-white artwork still conveys their smoothness, and her nails are painted and shining. This presents an interesting dichotomy, and one of the central themes of the female experience of the war. Wear on products indicated commitment to the war effort, and the opposite in bodily presentation; a chipped teacup was a sign of patriotism, but chipped nails were not. Instilling the sense that pride came from appearance was a way of encouraging the physical presentation of femininity, which would in turn preserve the foundation of established gender roles and make the postwar return to them easier. Ultimately, expressions of patriotism took on different forms: while material goods were expected to be in use until they were retired out of absolute necessity, physical appearance was still to be immaculate. The “chipped teacup”—and Mrs. Jones’ well-manicured hand—“[stood] for all that…for a sound, secure U.S.A.”

The first two pieces of propaganda reference hands through synecdoche: they are the most important part of the woman, whether through textual or artistic reference. However, their presence could also be more subtle, making use of their cultural associations. A 1944 notice from the Office for the War Manpower Commission drew on the tenderness of touch and contact that hands provide, as well as their emotional expressiveness (Fig. 9). A young woman, stylishly groomed and dressed, held letters to her chest. Behind her hung a service flag with a blue star; the context of the ring on her left ring finger revealed that she has a husband serving overseas. Beneath the art, the text called women to service, reminding them that “Longing won’t bring him back sooner…Get A War Job!” Though the young woman wore a bittersweet look, it was her hands that convey the most poignant emotion. They were long, fair, and graceful; tipped with red nails and graced by a gold wedding ring, they pressed the letters to her heart. Her hands are the nucleus of the image, both visually and emotionally. Their lighter color stood out against her red coat, and they held the catalyst of the scene: the letters that triggered such longing. They both expressed and created the emotion in the poster that would have inspired viewers to seek war work, as well as to stand by their husbands serving as romantic partners.

The symbol of the wedding ring itself is a manifestation of the American reverence for marriage. The European practice of wearing rings as a symbol of marital commitment on the fourth finger of the left hand is rooted in the ancient belief that a vein in the digit runs directly to

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the heart, making it an outward point of contact for personal emotion. Invoking this imagery, which is inextricably paired with hands, reminded married women that they had a duty not only to their country out of patriotism, but to their husbands through their wedding vows. This was a double-edged sword: it included married women in the war effort, therefore growing the potential workforce, and encouraged marriage, a traditional practice that upheld the American social system and its gender roles. It was a wife’s job to care for her husband; when he was overseas fighting, this could no longer be performed in a physical way of cleaning and cooking for him. Wifely duties therefore evolved to include working in war jobs. This was simultaneously a breach of gender roles and a preservation of them; though middle-class wives were now in the masculine sphere of employment, it was presented as an altered form of family care, as opposed to breadwinning. Therefore, when the home front woman took a job outside of the home, she was not necessarily eschewing her expected responsibilities or stealing those of her husband; rather, she was performing her own, which had a new, temporary face during the war years. When paired with imagery of traditional femininity as in the poster, this clearly reinforced the popular expectations of womanhood, striking the balance between the war effort and subversion.

The recurring image of hands emphasizes the female role in the home front: she was a war worker, a homemaker, and a sweetheart. Her hands carried out her duties, which ranged from typing for the government to keeping a practical home to writing letters to overseas troops. Despite all their labors, they were immaculately cared for: nail polish and lotion ensured the preservation of their delicate touch. By invoking the comfort of human contact and presenting it in undeniably feminine package, propaganda portrayed women on the home front as contributing to the war through their domestic sensibilities. The primary role of a woman in the home was that of caregiver; wartime roles simply transferred motherly touch to a different sphere, that of conflict. By emphasizing the practical application of female tenderness through propaganda, the government was able to reconcile wartime needs with social anxieties about loss of femininity. The gentleness and care associated with women was not being lost; it was merely being commodified as a tool to aid the war effort. This simultaneously preserved their traditional roles as caretakers and made their new wartime responsibilities more palatable.

**The Capable Hands of Rosie the Riveter**

The most well-known symbol of the home front woman’s experience is Rosie the Riveter. The name has become a catch-all for female war workers of the era, and a modern icon of feminine power. However, the legend of Rosie the Riveter oversimplifies and glamorizes the experiences of wartime women. It erases their reality, in which unequal pay, internal racism, and pressure to quit in favor of returning servicemen challenged single, working-class women—not just middle-class housewives. Moreover, many were working out of economic necessity, not selfless patriotism. Continued acceptance of this myth perpetuates an untruthful understanding of

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women in World War II. However, to leave her undiscussed would be irresponsible in an analysis of American women in war, especially given her cultural legacy.

The Riveter personifies the adaptation and blending of new roles for women; however, her image is not singular. Two Rosies exist in the public eye: one in J. Howard Miller’s “We Can Do It!” poster (1942), and the other in Norman Rockwell’s Saturday Evening Post cover, released on May 29, 1943 (Fig. 10 and Fig. 11). Though they share traits, the two present two very different representations of femininity. The former is the now-feminist icon, modelesque with a red bandana, flexed arm, and cartoon speech bubble; the latter is the brawny, red-haired factory worker eating a sandwich as she looks over a factory floor.

J. Howard Miller’s “We Can Do It!” poster features a WOW—Woman’s Ordnance Worker—distinguishable by the red polka-dot scarf tying her hair back. Though now a major symbol of female empowerment, the original poster received little attention; a note in the bottom left-hand corner instructed the commissioning Westinghouse Electric Corporation to “Post Feb. 15 to Feb. 28”—not even a full two weeks. Despite her limited contemporary exposure, Miller’s WOW was the ideal embodiment of the working home front woman. This Riveter was a sculpted, imposing beauty: her makeup was appropriately simple for wartime, but still glamorous enough to present a “brave face,” framed by neatly styled hair and the uniform bandana. Her thoroughly feminine appearance was paired with a clear declaration of power: arm folded to flex her bicep, strengthened through factory work, under a speech bubble declaring “We Can Do It!” The spotlighted muscle was revealed as a graceful hand—complete with one shining fingernail—rolled up her shirt sleeve. Her two hands present a dual message: the clenched fist is a masculine, emphatic pose, and the well-manicured finger one of refined womanliness. Miller’s Rosie neatly pairs aggressive femininity with aggressive war effort, suggesting that one can bolster the other.

Sheridan Harvey, Women’s Studies Specialist for the Library of Congress, tracked the creation of the Rosie narrative. The release of the two images was separated by a lesser-known aspect of her creation: a song by Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb, the title of which seems to have introduced the name “Rosie the Riveter.” Appearing in early 1943, it predated Rockwell’s Rosie, who crowned that year’s Memorial Day issue of the Saturday Evening Post, and likely was her namesake. The lyrics of “Rosie the Riveter” reflect the ideal female war worker: “‘All the day long./Whether rain or shine,/She’s a part of the assembly line./She’s making history,/Working for victory,/Rosie the Riveter.’” The musical Rosie is unflaggingly committed to her work, which is acknowledged to transgress historical expectations of women. These lines stress home front efforts and the participation in masculine spheres—the “assembly line”—as essential to “victory.”
The next verse foreshadows Rockwell’s depiction: “‘Keeps a sharp lookout for sabotage./Sitting up there on the fuselage./That little girl will do more than a male will do.’” His Rosie is also physically elevated, and appeared to cast her gaze over the factory floor, despite being on her lunch break. Both recall the watchful gaze of a mother over her children, feeding the war worker-caretaker hybrid that emerged. Her work never ends: even on her break, she chooses to perform her duties, be they in service of country or family. Moreover, it enforces the necessity of female participation in the war effort. The efforts of “that little girl” in a factory produced the materials that servicemen would need for battle; her work underpinned physical combat, making it indispensable.

However, referencing Rosie as a “little girl” is a symptom of the emphasis placed on keeping women feminine. Having not yet reached complete maturity or adulthood, little girls have less active power than full-fledged women, and certainly men; while their contributions were vital, “girls” themselves did not have personal agency, still dependent on familial guidance and care. This passivity again connects to the framework of gender dynamics that supported the American social structure. Finally, the end of the song cements her patriotism as thoroughly American: “‘There’s something true about./Red, white, and blue about./Rosie the Riveter.’” This color imagery is present in both artists’ incarnations, but also recalls the styling of the typist previously referred to in the “Victory Waits On Your Fingers” poster. It reinforced the overarching message that for the home front woman, physical presentation was an act of patriotism, further linking Americanism with appearance.

The visual imagery of Rockwell’s Rosie expanded on the themes of the song, and seems out of place amongst the previous media discussed. She was not the prim, graceful woman that was idealized throughout the 1940s. Dressed for function with little thought to form, she wore overalls—a historically male, working class article of clothing—trimmed with pins that indicate all of the ways she was involved in service. Her patriotism was further accentuated by the copy of Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf wedged under the sole of her work loafer. A delicate halo crowned her lifted facial shield, recalling the historic morality that women have lent periods of conflict as nurses, family members, or campaigners: they were the caregivers. This perpetuates the theme of other hand-centric propaganda, underscored by the notion that women were the human touch of the war effort. Because the feminine home front was not directly involved in combat, women were beyond moral reproach and always rightfully intentioned. They were the “angels” of both spaces of combat, either as the nurses on the battlefield or as the morale bolsterers of the home front.

Additionally, Rosie’s evident physical strength can be epitomized by her hands: they are large and strong, one gripping a sandwich and the other resting on an imposing riveting gun, indicating her dual role of domesticity and war effort. Notably, she does not wear a wedding ring. Her rounded fingers are a direct contrast to the long, delicate ones of most propaganda posters, including the Miller Rosie. However, despite these “masculine” qualities, her appearance is still heavily feminized. Her hair is curled, her lips are flushed, and a hint of red

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22 Harvey, "Rosie the Riveter."
23 Harvey, "Rosie the Riveter."
24 Harvey, "Rosie the Riveter."
polish hovers over the ham sandwich. These physical indicators preserve her femininity against the backdrop of a very physically powerful—and therefore unwomanly—body.

If isolated, Rosie’s arms and hands could be believed to be those of a man. They were the most subversive aspect of her corporeality; however, their boundary-defying appearance is subdued by the presence of red nail polish. It was this blend of commanding and feminine color, plus the distinctly female association of polish, that made red nail varnish popular during the war years, and actually revived its popularity. An article published in the *Los Angeles Times* on April 15, 1941 declared that the “Vogue of Red Nails Fades in Style Cycle.” Author Lydia Lane reported that women seemed to be moving toward more natural varnish shades, as “the novelty of seeing [their] fingertips stained crimson has worn off.” She backed this claim with somewhat vague evidence that when asked, only one beauty salon did not see a shift in interest towards pastels. She closed her argument with the recommendation that “If you have become bored with the loud polish and just haven’t got around to doing anything about it…try using a beautiful carnation pink that flatters your nails but still leaves them on the natural side.”

Lane lists red nail polish and padded shoulders as two styles on the wane; interestingly, both of these would become hallmarks of 1940s fashion. Strong shoulders in women’s garments gave a more masculine silhouette, reflecting the more aggressive roles they were taking on, and red polish was a popular compliment to Allied-inspired red lipstick. Another article, this one from *The Washington Post*, declared on August 7, 1941 that “Scarlet Nail Polish [Was] Going Out,” with “a ‘true pink’” taking its place. It is unclear exactly how widely shared this prediction was, but it does present an interesting phenomenon. Lane’s article was published almost eight months before the attack on Pearl Harbor; perhaps these more aggressive trends would have fallen out of favor, in accordance with the columnist’s prediction, if not for the United States’ entry into the war. Lane’s advocacy for more “natural” and “delicate” shades at the beginning of the decade reflects a movement away from the drama of 1930s cosmetics. “Light-colored polishes” were dainty, while red is bold and daring.

According to these two articles, gentler hues were gaining favor until American society went to war, when red became a popular color again. The bright shade was revived for its feminine, assertive, and patriotic qualities. It bolstered spirits and blared the national cause while still marking femininity. The natural sheen of seashell pink was not aggressive enough to stand up to a world at war. Red nail polish—widely accepted as a strictly feminine cosmetic—synthesized the need for bolder femininity in its color, while still preserving physical femininity in working hands. The re- adoption of the color indicates how red nail polish was specifically suited to wartime needs. It blended power and patriotism into a physical marker of distinct femininity; it was the ultimate cocktail for balancing preservation with adaptation. Rosie the Riveter is a physical incarnation of this synthesis, as well as of the more active femininity that

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was necessary; the power of her participation could not have been matched, nor subdued, by carnation pink polish.

In the case of the home front woman, the Rockwell Riveter’s hands are perhaps the fullest realization of the preservation of femininity in the face of controversial roles: the connotation of the polish presents a direct contrast to that of her well-muscled arms and hands, subduing their incendiary possibilities. An epitomization of those working at home, her hands were her tools for the war effort; they produced the weapons that would allow the military to win and protect democracy. The challenges to structure hinted at in the song are fully realized in the Rockwell Riveter. The campaign that engendered her creation was branded with the slogan: “The More Women at Work the Sooner We Win.” She was the fruition of the song’s central theme that female participation, specifically in masculine occupations, was essential to the war effort. Despite her unconventional appearance, the Rockwell Rosie was well-received by Americans.28 The public knew they were in good hands—her strong, capable, well-polished hands, which marked her as a thoroughly patriotic safeguard of the home front.

**Cosmetic Courage: Lipstick Advertisements and the Servicewoman**

For American women, the defining beauty trend of the war years was red lips. They were worn by everyone from factory workers to celebrities, and became synonymous with patriotism for several reasons. Red was present in each of the Allied nations’ flags; it was bright and pigmented, meaning not much was required to make an impact and therefore could be used sparingly, conforming to wartime rationing and practicality. This more pragmatic aspect also bolstered the notion that “beauty was duty:” that women could display bravery and commitment by keeping up with their physical appearance, even through the uncertainty of war.29

Female involvement in combat took the form of the Women Marines, the WAC (Women’s Army Corps), the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), and the WASPs (Women Air Force Service Pilots). Despite the need for female service, the new organizations were met with much backlash from the public. War has been a traditionally masculine environment. Women participating directly in it, beyond the home front war effort, raised fears about the loss of femininity and the threatening of traditional gender roles in an already tumultuous society. The social order of the United States in the 1940s rested on a culture defined by gender conventions, forged and ingrained through centuries. By perceiving the adoption of masculine roles and jobs as a gateway to emboldening women to take on male sex roles alongside them, female enlistment became a threat to their social imposed values of purity and sexual respectability—one that needed counteraction.30

The overwhelming fear was that by integrating into a masculine sphere, women would take on male behaviors, both socially and sexually. Neither sexual laxness nor gender non-conformance was favorable. The most frightening scenario was that once women breached

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28 Harvey, "Rosie the Riveter."
heterosexual promiscuity, the next step in service-induced masculinization would be homosexuality, reflecting a transition from exhibiting male attitudes toward sex to taking on masculine sexual roles. Public anxieties about female sexual activity cannot be underestimated within the context of the United States. While the country had gone through a period of female and sexual liberation in the 1920s, its Puritanical roots, which championed sexual purity and shame, remained dominant well into the twentieth century. Combined with Victorian era sensibilities about the woman’s role as a mother and homemaker, Americans had a firm picture of what was appropriate for a respectable woman—and military service was not part of it. Her participation in a sphere outside of the home triggered concern that she was eschewing her predetermined domestic responsibilities. Women in uniform were a tangible expression of this fear, and physical transgression of gender roles. Most damagingly, military service would threaten her femininity—an underpinning of traditional American values—and transform her into a “mannish woman”—or possibly a lesbian. For women, masculinity could be acquired through dress or sexual activity, and popular American belief contended that one could lead to the other. Mattie Treadwell, WAC historian, observed that the “‘public impression [was] that a women’s corps would be the ideal breeding ground for [homosexuality],’” as “‘any woman who was masculine in appearance or dress’” was not straight.\(^31\) To again reference Newton, homosexuality was deemed un-American as it corrupted accepted notions of masculinity. Moreover, it further destabilized the patriarchal order that was already shaken by the physical absence of men who were overseas. New measures were needed to reinforce traits of the binaries; with the new acceptance of makeup in American culture, a solution presented itself.

The presence of makeup was not visible in the mainstream United States until the 1920s; even then, it was associated with rebellion and sexual promiscuity. The 1930s continued its journey toward respectability via the Great Depression, which actually encouraged the use of makeup as a cheap morale bolster. This theme was fully realized in the war years of the 1940s. As a kind of ladylike war paint, lipstick showed the wartime woman’s resolve to not let standards slip. This included a preservation of femininity. Cosmetics had already undergone an ideological makeover in the previous two decades, but the years of World War II cemented their use as not just acceptable, but respectable—precisely because of their association with the war effort and the new ideal of femininity. Ironically, the US Army expected servicewomen to be morally irreproachable, which was accomplished through heavily regulating their sexual lives. The use of cosmetics could have contradicted this; in employing such strongly sexual signals, it became essential to sterilize the whorish connotation of makeup. Sexual respectability was another strategy to motivate mainstream America to accept female service in the armed forces: chastity was a core value of the WAAC, but women were still encouraged to wear red lipstick—once a marker of its absence.\(^32\) This time, however, makeup was the marker of respectability, not her immorality, and actually combated her subversive role instead of indicating it.

Bright red makeup drew attention to the lips, which have long been markers of femininity. Contrast between skin tone and lip color is a subconscious, biological sign of womanhood, making lipstick an enhancer of it. Their yonic shape and swelling from arousal parallel female genitalia; large, flushed lips are an indicator of fertility. As lips shrink with age, fullness marks youth, strengthening the connection with a higher chance of reproductive success. Moreover, they are an expression of sexuality, promising kisses and sexual favors. Physically,

the layer of skin that covers them is thinner than that over the rest of the body, and host a high concentration of sensory neurons, making them especially sensitive. With this in mind, the psychology behind the focus on the feature becomes clear: 1940s America’s population was being threatened by loss of life overseas, the looming threat of possible Axis invasion, and a disturbance of the gender roles that buttressed their social order. Though a small detail, full red lips—signaling fertility, bravery, and femininity—were a visual combatant of all these fears.

The juxtaposition of military uniform and makeup reflected the ideal for the previously unheard of servicewoman: capable of service to her country, but also conscious of her foremost role as a woman. While makeup advertisements pitching every type of cosmetic featured servicewomen, a particularly intriguing division was those for lipstick. Infusing military imagery into makeup advertisements was an effective way of bridging the gap between serviceperson and civilian, as well as spreading the war effort to a more removed audience. This also paralleled their synthesis of women into the military, as well as of feminine and masculine spheres. Elizabeth Arden’s wartime reds were quick to capitalize on the vibrant contrast they created against military uniforms. A 1942 advertisement featured an ink-sketch of an elegant woman wearing a WAC uniform (Fig. 12). From behind her leans a young man, his eyes trained on the only color in the image: red, which dominates her lips and nails. The accompanying text urges women to coordinate their lip makeup with their clothing, particularly uniforms; in reference to the woman pictured, the shade Burnt Sugar is “most effective with khaki,” while her friends “complement their uniforms of blue with the youthful vigor of Redwood.” The woman in question is a model of blended roles; she is uniformed but perfectly made up, and still attracting the attention of men, which reassured viewers of her heterosexuality. She had adapted her new responsibilities while conforming to traditional expectations, with her lip makeup honoring her commitment to her femininity.

Another advertisement touted the shade “Montezuma Red” (Fig. 13). Specifically formulated to stand out against military uniforms and “inspired by the brave, true red of the hat cord, scarf and chevrons of the Women in the Marines,” its emperor namesake calls to mind fierce warriors as “a tribute to some of the bravest men and women in the world.” Thus, lipstick became part of the servicewoman’s uniform. Lipstick was a physical expression of femininity and its gendered, socially-ascribed expectations. If military service was a hot bath, makeup was the tepid water that society eased into first; it helped Americans adjust to new wartime roles by branding uniformed women with a trace of physical familiarity. A headline from a 1942 issue of The New York Times proclaimed that “Women Aim Rifles Handily as Lipstick,” followed with the byline “Security Corps Applies Both ‘Weapons’ at Shooting Range,” implying their equal


34 Peter Darman, Uniforms of World War II: Over 250 Uniforms of Armies, Navies, and Air Forces of the World (New York: Chartwell Books, 2016), 67; “Frankly, he was fascinated…” Advertisement, Elizabeth Arden, Duke University Libraries Digital Repository, 1942. https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r4g737r35
necessity to service women.\textsuperscript{35} The very act of applying cosmetics has historically been a female practice, in this case indicating a feminization of the military (rather than a masculinization of servicewomen). Red has an undeniably sexual connotation as well; highlighting a woman’s lips pantomimed arousal and emphasized her femininity. By pairing the feminine and sexual connotations of lips and the color red, makeup advertisements encouraged a trend that reinforced feminine imagery amongst a sea of khaki and olive, in a landscape that was classically masculine territory.

\textit{Marlene Dietrich Unites Glamour and Controversy}

Lips were a central part of the persona of one of the most controversial—and patriotic—figures of the era, who also epitomized the lipsticked woman in uniform. Seen in an array of men’s clothes—from top hat and tuxedo to captain’s hat and shoulder boards to, later, garrison cap and Army uniform—Marlene Dietrich was no stranger to the masculine closet. Established as a film star in the 1930s, she was notorious for her gender-bending dress and sexual nonconformance; yet, controversy subsided as she became the poster child of celebrity patriotism. Cheekily dubbed “the patron saint of cheesecake” by the \textit{Los Angeles Times} in 1943, she “wowed the soldiers on the western front by wearing opaque winter woollies” as she entertained them overseas with the USO.\textsuperscript{36} The actress quickly became the celebrity emblem of patriotism, using her entertaining skills for the benefit of the troops.

Beyond her wardrobe, Dietrich’s history was littered with rebellion; she was a cabaret performer, appeared in sexually-charged film roles, openly ambiguous about her sexual orientation, and renounced her German citizenship in favor of American in 1939.\textsuperscript{37} This last act, of course, made her immensely popular in the States, and a prime tool for propaganda; even a beloved German celebrity—a child of the Fatherland and one of its cultural icons—turned on the Third Reich, proving the integrity of the Allied cause. Her evolution from a controversial icon of gender subversion to the embodiment of wartime patriotism is ironic, especially as the act was particularly contentious during the war. This controversy—wearing men's clothes—was still divisive, but now it was also useful; though their beauty routines stressed femininity, working women were starting to wear more masculine fashions for the sake of fabric rationing. Dietrich’s flexibility made it easy for her to adapt to life in a theatre of battle. Her nonconformance could be overlooked because it fit with a temporary, serviceable trend. What once was taboo now fit into the social landscape; her deviation was not as out of place, and could be shifted to conform to wartime needs. The controversy was now acceptable as it served the cause, echoing the theme of the forbidden made acceptable in the name of the war effort.

Dietrich spent time with servicemen outside of the performance hall and became a favorite among them, all while presenting a fusion of glamour with service regardless of setting. On March 13, 1945, she attended a paratrooper practice jump in France. A photograph

\textsuperscript{35} Marsh, \textit{Compacts and Cosmetics}, 135; 

from the visit shows her in uniform; behind her, a storm of paratroopers cloud the sky (Fig. 14). A garrison cap topped her curls, and she smiled candidly at the photographer with made-up lips.

Another snapshot from May of the same year captures a performance in Pilsen (Fig. 15). The stage is bare except a piano; Dietrich’s microphone is elevated by a piece of plywood. In stark contrast to the dim room, the actress stands in a white gossamer gown. Her bowed head and blond hair accentuated her ethereal appearance, reminiscent of an angel and recalling the trend of painting women as morally incapable of being in conflict. This glimpses how a soldier might have seen her: some otherworldly symbol from the far-removed home front, so out of place in the carnage and hardship of the front lines. In both photographs, Marlene is a vehicle for femininity in a masculine realm; in the first, she presented as a physical fusion of the two, while in the second she was purely feminine. In a uniform, she exhibits an aggressive femininity that was involved in warfare; in a gown, she presents the tenderness that reminded men of what they fought for. The former is an example of adapted femininity, and the latter of preserved; both served the purposes of the Allied cause.

One spectacular photograph shows Marlene Dietrich changing from her Army clothes into a performance costume (Fig. 16). Taken in approximately 1942, Dietrich sat on the edge of a bunk bed, still in a military sweater and cap, to remove her GI boots. The material juxtaposition of martial and ornamental is astounding: inches from the scuffed toe of her boot sits a satin, high-heeled pump, and a sequined gown rests behind her on the dilapidated bunk. Dietrich is physically shifting spheres; she moved from practical masculinity to glamorous femininity. Most interestingly, both of these benefitted the war effort: the glitz of her USO act was not frivolous, but rather a morale booster and reminder of the comforts of home. Her gender subversion and patriotism—the things that respectively damned and redeemed her—enabled her to be a link between worlds, and to move between the two easily. She was a star that was eager to dirty her hands, and an overseas volunteer that oozed glamour. Dietrich’s face could be on both sides of the coin.

This adaptability was born from years of practice, as Dietrich had been wearing men’s clothes, on screen and off, long before they were part of women’s wartime fashions. A photograph from the early 1930s epitomizes her synthesis of gender expectations (Fig. 17). The star’s face is a Hollywood picture of celluloid glory, a dramatic chiaroscuro of luminous smooth skin and cavernous bone structure. Her eyes are clear and bright, gazing moodily out of the frame. Her made-up lips have a softly blurred quality to them; full and slightly shadowed, they add a sense of gentleness to the otherwise melodramatic image. The close-up cuts off just at her

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collarbone, leaving the top of a button-down collar and cravat visible. Accompanied by a tweed coat and vest, her femme fatale face is offset by a resolutely masculine ensemble.\textsuperscript{40}

The most famous example, however, is Dietrich’s costume for \textit{Morocco} (Joseph von Sternberg, 1930). The film was her introduction to Hollywood, and would cement her position in the industry. A publicity shot shows the actress seated on a stool: clad in a tuxedo and top hat, Marlene put a feminine face on classic masculinity (Fig. 18). Leaning forward with a cigarette, the star’s posturing—legs crossed ankle to knee, rather than thigh over thigh—is undeniably powerful and expected of men. A man smoking in a tuxedo is typically placed against a backdrop of glittering parties or shadowy offices: places that reaffirm his social status and influence. From clothes to body language, she presents a picture of masculine hegemony, challenging the most consistent sphere of Western authority—the patriarchy.\textsuperscript{41} Dietrich’s adoption of masculine trends was not just for the purposes of war; rather, it was war that neutralized her controversy.

Conforming to the wartime fascination with legs, Dietrich’s were famed. However, her lips were a central element in her physical contributions to the war effort, and sometimes the physical contribution. Their appearance alone was the era’s ideal: rounded and full, with a fashionably wide, low cupid’s bow known as the “Hunter’s Bow” (Fig. 19).\textsuperscript{42} A real-life counterpoint to the uniformed women in lipstick advertisements, her red lips were a constant overseas, whether she was in uniform on the drill field, or a gown to perform in the evening.

On a practical level, lips are physical shapers of sound and integral part of singing, which was the basis of Dietrich’s USO shows. Her participation transcended the stage, however; she interacted with the men in casual settings as well, and was keen to help them in more functional ways. In 1945, she told the \textit{Los Angeles Times} that she wanted “to go abroad and do what [she could] for the boys,” remarking that as she spoke both German and French, she “wanted to be with them when they enter France.” This sentiment was echoed in a snapshot from 1945; a sequined Dietrich sat laughing with a soldier atop a tank in Germany (Fig. 20). A handwritten note from the 1980s captioned it, “Trying to keep them smiling,” emphasizing her commitment to supporting them as well as her ability to blend the spheres of masculine and feminine, battle and home front, and combat and performance. She even waited to greet returning troops; when the 44th Division arrived in New York, Dietrich was at the Harbor to receive them. When the


press speculated her appearance might be for a uniformed beau, she corrected them: "‘They
couldn’t believe…that I was in love with a division.’"43

Another encounter exemplifies her commitment to the servicemen: the Times reported
that “Marlene was spotted by a soldier she had met in Aachen. ‘You promised me a kiss when
the war was over!’ he reminded her. He got it—on Sunset Blvd.” There are multiple accounts of
her kissing servicemen—perhaps the most direct realization of her lips’ patriotism. One
photograph shows her peeking over a makeshift fence to kiss a soldier, painted lips pursed
against his cheek; another features her lifted by a group of soldiers to kiss one of their
companions, leaning from a porthole (Fig. 21 and Fig. 22). Dietrich’s participation went beyond
singing safely out of reach; she went directly to the front lines, forged friendships with outfits,
and even kissed soldiers. She referred to divisions as “her boys” and was openly "‘lonesome for
them’” when in the States.44 Her participation was active, which, coupled with her flouting of
convention, should have rendered her unacceptable; however, her patriotic efforts made her
invaluable, and her nonconformance actually strengthened them.

Marlene was a corporeal manifestation of the war effort; as “the shapeliest Government
Issue of all,” her lips both enabled this and reflected her place in the wartime landscape, despite
her subversive history.45 In parallel of women taking on masculine roles, the “opposing” spheres
of performance and combat became fused together. Marlene Dietrich was a physical embodiment
of this amalgamation, as well as an example of how subversion was commodified and subdued in
the war years. If she had performed overseas in a top hat, her efforts would not have been nearly
as well-received. The lipstick and evening gowns masked Dietrich’s subversion, putting the
spotlight on her most laudable performance: her emotional value to troops.

Patriotism Grows Legs: Legs in Pinup Images

Women’s legs are a uniquely eroticized body part, which has been apparent in American
culture since its colonial roots. Until the 1920s, they were hidden behind layers of skirts and
stockings. Puritanism deemed ankles as promiscuous; Gilded Era prostitutes bared stockings to
entice customers; even in 1934, Claudette Colbert’s flash of leg was enough to stop a car on the
silver screen. Their censored history stems from what lies between them: a woman’s legs are the
gateway to her sexual ability. This distinguishes them from other sexualized body parts: they

45 Scheuer, "Marlene Dietrich Wins G.I. Hearts.”
directly lead to, and therefore imply, female sexual activity. To conceal legs was to simultaneously limit exposed skin and a visible reminder of her sexuality, both of which de-emphasized her inherent sexual ability.

Historically, in a sort of visual balance, this has shifted the more revealing parts of women’s clothing to the décolletage, emphasizing her breasts. These secondary sex characteristics are a distinctly female feature and are part of a woman’s most basic biological functions: childbearing. However, as they are not actually part of the mechanics of sexual intercourse, the attention on them does not enable active sexuality. To recall Newton’s theory of active and passive sexuality as framework, breasts hint at a woman’s biological abilities, but do not allude to actual sexual action. By her formula, visible cleavage alludes to passive sexuality, while exposed legs can visually lead the eye up to the genitalia, imbuing their owner with more sexual ownership. Therefore, the sexualization of breasts gave women less agency than that of legs. By this logic, exposing one’s legs is asserts ownership of sexuality—a subversive act throughout most of history.

In the 1940s, however, their prescribed sexual nature became useful, repurposed as a method of pitching the war effort. A distinctly female way of attracting male attention was exposing the legs, which were eroticized by their scandalous association; the United States government recognized this, and capitalized on the fervor they could create, making this act of sexual insurrection acceptable. Sex, or allusions to it, became respectable, and it donned its tin hat too—in the form of the pinup girl. Pinup images were not an invention of the era, but World War II did give their circulation an opportunity to flourish in a government-sanctioned way. Though she took many forms, she always had long, beautifully-shaped legs, either bare or coyly covered in stockings. This classically feminine mystique—now exposed for men overseas—emphasized the pinup’s role as a sexual motivator. However, her significance is more complex than pleasure alone, and she became a symbol of patriotic femininity.

The most iconic pinup of World War II was Betty Grable, and her most famed feature was her legs. To paraphrase TIME magazine, Helen of Troy “had nothing on Betty Grable of St. Louis.” The craze over her legs even raised money for war loans: a photograph from 1943 shows the actress, beaming and enthusiastic, auctioning her stockings in Long Beach (Fig. 23). In the same year, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times described her as “the Nation’s No. 1 Pin-up Girl” whose fame as a performer was augmented because “everybody’s always talking about her legs.” Hers was the most popular image for overseas servicemen; specifically, the famed over-the-shoulder shot (Fig. 24). Her legs are fully exposed from hip to heel, and elevated by a pair of high heels. The photograph is a minefield of sexuality: her bottom faces the camera, the

46 Lauren E. Smith, A Leg Up For Women? Stereotypes of Female Sexuality in American Culture through an Analysis of Iconic Film Stills of Women’s Legs, senior thesis (Hartford, CT: Trinity College, 2013): 2.
47 Smith, A Leg Up For Women?, 6.
entirety of her bare leg is shown, her pumps are well-heeled, and she gazes teasingly over a bare shoulder.

While they were certainly a portion of it, Betty Grable’s appeal went beyond legs and sex. Pinups were intended to comfort sexually frustrated servicemen overseas. However, they evolved into a symbolic reminder of women back home. While this is not to imply that every GI looked at Grable’s legs and thought of his mother, she does present an intriguing blend of wholesome American looks and overt sexuality. According to a 1955 study that examined Americans’ collective perception of Hollywood stars, Grable represented “a world of buoyancy, cheerfulness, and happy endings.” She was “just an American girl;” clean and wholesome, the kind of girl they would like to marry. She was a symbol of goodness, hope, and opportunity. Beyond her popularity, it is this contradiction that makes Grable the embodiment of the wartime pinup. This point is significant: a woman could be sexualized, and still be “good.” Her sexuality was in the name of service, which redeemed it. The addition of charming American packaging to an erotic entity made its lewdness more palatable, marking a break in national tradition of equating female sexual expressiveness with disreputableness. It transformed one of women’s historically sexual roles in war—prostitute—into a respectable contribution to the war effort.  

Beyond photographs of actresses, artwork of scantily-clad women also accompanied soldiers overseas. Alberto Vargas emerged as one of the dominating pinup artists of the era. His work colored the pages of *Esquire* magazine, a popular publication amongst troops. One of his images, “Peace, It’s Wonderful!”, appeared in the April 1943 issue (Fig. 25). A cartoon redhead holds a bugle delicately in one hand, and offers a red-manicured “V” sign for victory with the other. Her patriotic presentation is completed by a modified Army uniform: the khaki olive, pockets, and patch are unmistakably militant, but it is tailored into a fitted, short-legged jumpsuit. She is seated on her knees, her legs tucked underneath her. Though open at the neck, her costume is long-sleeved, relegating exposed skin to her legs.

The dissonance of female wartime sexuality is personified in her: a fusion of masculine and feminine, of militant and sexual, of covered and bare. This contradiction toes the line between respectability and impropriety, stabilizing its position by subduing the subversive and radicalizing the expected. She is positioned in a feminized version of masculine attire, paralleling her inverted place in gender spheres. What ultimately compensates for the allure of her tight uniform and bare legs is the obvious femininity that underpins the masculine signs of warfare. Her styling—complete with red nails and lips—assures the viewer of her social role: she is a woman in a man’s territory. The male aspects that she has taken on have been feminized, or are clear symbols of patriotism, reinforcing the true purpose of her risqué presentation—for the sake of the troops. Despite her provocative appearance, these visual cues place her still within social gender norms.

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Essentially, pinups like Grable were not just used as sex appeal to keep troops motivated. What started as a sexual motivator took on a deeper, more emotional meaning. While some pinups did remain purely sexual, the types of consolation that they engendered—physical and sentimental—were reliant on their femininity. The United States government made use of that feminine reassurance by encouraging the circulation of pinups as a way of keeping enlisted men happy, instead of banning them on grounds of morality. They also represented femininity in a largely womanless, unfamiliar landscape, calling to mind the mothers, sisters, and sweethearts waiting for them at home. Commodifyng the erotic nature of legs was only the tip of the iceberg (or perhaps in this case, the toe of the stocking). The appeal of the pinup girl was ultimately rooted in her references to connotations of comforting femininity, whether they be sexual or more emotional. Grable embodies this pairing of respectable femininity with sexuality in service of the war effort, as well as the propriety that the former afforded the latter.

Legs went from symbols of promiscuity to pillars of patriotism, and the commodification of sexuality for the war effort was precisely what made it acceptable. This is not to say that pinups were not still controversial for their explicitness; however, their appearance and acceptance during World War II does indicate a shift in the historic treatment of women’s sexuality. Now, demonstrations of erotic femininity had a purpose, making them almost all-American. By reframing wartime female sexuality from the misconduct of prostitutes to part of the war effort that indicated patriotism, traditional battlefield gender roles were reorganized to suit the needs of the military.

As previously mentioned, Americans in the 1940s feared that women taking on men’s jobs would result in their behaving like men. This concern could have been manifested in the pinup; however, her sexuality was still compliant. Though her legs were consistently highlighted—an expression of aggressive sexuality—she remained in the feminine, passive sphere of sexuality. Active sexual activity—the threat that pinup hinted at but did not realize—was realized in the woman of the venereal disease poster. While the pinup was overtly appealing, the VD girl’s looks fell into two extremes: she was either a picture of wholesome cleanliness, or a tragic reminder of diseased disgrace.

One such poster warned “She may look clean—But pick-ups, ‘good time’ girls, prostitutes spread syphilis and gonorrhea,” reminding troops that “You can’t beat the Axis if you get VD” (Fig. 26). The woman in question does indeed seem “clean,” looking the picture of ideal wartime beauty with minimal eye makeup, red lips, and fair, even skin. Three tiny cartoon men—a sailor, a suited civilian, and soldier—gaze up at her gentle face. Another poster took the more traditional route of using looks as an indication of character (Fig. 27). The close-up artwork is alarming: the woman’s eyes were obscured by overly thick eyelashes, closed from their mascara-coated weight. With overly-blushed cheeks and sunken cheekbones, smeared red lipstick and a cigarette crown her unappealing look. The text reinforces what seems obvious: “She may be…a bag of TROUBLE,” ominously followed with “Syphilis - Gonorrhea.” The first one has the same apple-cheeks and red lips as her pinned-up counterparts, but her air is

52 Westbrook, “"I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James,"
decidedly more demure. The second is a gross caricature of wartime beauty trends. Both shared physical traits with the pinup, but each type of woman twisted them slightly: the pinup is glamorous, the “clean” girl is lightly polished, and the woman who spelled “trouble” was messy and overdone.

While the pinup blended respectability with sexuality, VD girls embodied either one or the other—suggesting that disease could be masked by either. This damned both approaches to female sexuality, and somehow further sanctioned the pinup by comparison. Visually, pinups resided in between the two distinct categories of female VD carriers: they possessed the former’s charming blitheness, and the latter’s sexual intrigue. However, what ultimately separated them was the lack of initiative on the pinup’s behalf. The women in VD posters had irrefutably taken part in sexual intercourse; the punishment for such disregard of propriety was an almost biblical plague of sexually transmitted disease. The pinup, however, might look the part of the seductress, but there was no indication that she was actually sexually active. This is what redeemed her in comparison to the “clean” VD girl, who appeared as more acceptable; though the VD girl might not dress as provocatively and wore less makeup, she did not actually preserve her virtue, as evidenced by her afflicted state. She was condemned because of her sexual participation, which proclaimed agency and assertiveness. It was fine to tease for the sake of the troops, as evidenced by the pinup; but to actually engage in casual intercourse—a violation of the chastity and sexual passivity required of women—was unacceptable, and a cardinal sin against the expectations of American womanhood that could not be redeemed through physical modesty.

Additionally, though the pinup wore makeup, it was never overdone, further reaffirming her patriotism through adherence to wartime rationing, as well as separating her from the “painted lady” stereotype associated with prostitutes; the expected woman that appeared in the posters reflected this. The overarching, redeeming theme of the pinup was that her sexualized performance was not for personal pleasure, but rather for that of the troops. She used the appearance of her body to bring troops comfort, but did not use the body itself; in the most basic physical way, she was upholding the centuries-old expectation of female purity.

The pinup’s sexual display was acceptable for three key reasons: it was in the service of the war effort; it was created by and for men; it presented in a recognizably feminine way. Just as manicured hands and red lips maintained the appearance of femininity in classically masculine roles, the pinup’s all-American intent, origins, and appearance made her sexuality less threatening, barring her from masculine sexual prowess and preserving some form of submissive, feminine sexuality. Therefore, female sexuality became acceptable because of the role it occupied—not because of a cultural shift in the American view of it.

Women could bare their legs in the name of patriotism because they were of practical use; the historic role that their sexuality had played in war, that of camp follower or prostitute, was made mainstream by men, for men. Their sexual appeal finally served the interest of a masculine sphere, legitimizing and paring down the stigma that surrounded it. Female sexual roles were used to emphasize the patriarchal norms that they still reflected, as well as to enforce contemporary gender roles and serve military interests. Though the pinup was more assertive and explicit than much of what was considered decent in mainstream America, she still upheld her prescribed gender role through male-centered, passive sexuality.
**Pinups of Color: Layered Projections of Ideology**

Thus far, this paper has been focused on women as a projection of mainstream American culture. However, the same principle applies to subcultures and marginalized communities. In the 1940s, pinup images of black women emerged alongside their white counterparts, often in response to a demand from black servicemen, and were laced with the same themes of enticing taboo and patriotic sexuality. Within the context of American gender roles, pinups of color emphasize two important points: their removal from the accepted definition of femininity reveals how ingrained female fragility is, and that female bodies, regardless of culture, era, or race, act as symptoms of social concepts.

While the white-centric nature of this discussion is partially due to the volume of scholarship available, it is also a reflection of what was “mainstream” in 1940s America; print advertisements and propaganda perpetuated the culture of white dominance by circulating images that were nearly exclusively Caucasian. If a person of color was present, they were typically used as a foil to the ideal; the “before” counterpart to the desired lily-white “after,” or a representation of a foreign, invading threat. Therefore, they are not part of the image created through mainstream American print media. This thesis rests on the idea that cultural ideals are a projection of popular anxieties; women of color were excluded from this standard, therefore eliminating their corporeality as a point of analysis for projection of mainstream America’s values. The exclusion of images of people of color reflected the white American ideal, making the white woman the only female vehicle of ideology. Additionally, as previously mentioned, dark skin was outside of the accepted definition of female attractiveness. Since physical presentation became equated with a patriotic act, black skin—already marginalized throughout Western history—was placed even further beyond the picture of American beauty, far outside of the show of national pride. Pinup images, which though government-sanctioned were largely non-institutional in origin, were one contradiction to this trend.

Femininity and sexuality for black women specifically has consistently been stigmatized throughout American history, making their embodiment of these traits inherently subversive. From the country’s founding, exploitation and fetishization of them has been present, starting with the rape of female slaves. Their representation in national media has consistently been degrading; they have been portrayed as barbaric, undesirably masculine, savagely hyper sexual, and animalistic. This stands in unrelenting opposition to the depiction of respectable or appealing women, who are always white. As esteemed feminist scholar bell hooks explains, “Since woman was designated as the originator of sexual sin, black woman was designated as the embodiment of female evil and sexual lust.” During the colonial era, perpetuating the notion that African slaves were hyper sexual reinforced their barbarism and lack of place in a Christian society, further cementing their social inferiority. Additionally, the endurance and capability of enslaved women challenged what was expected of white women and threatened patriarchal power structures, leading to a white explanation that black women were “masculinized sub-human creatures.” Such “masculine” ability was not natural to the fairer sex, and therefore made women of color “not ‘real’ women.” These racist tropes would form the foundation of the perception of black people in the United States, imbuing the country with anti-blackness from its origination.  

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This adds another piece to the American ideological puzzle: it idolizes whiteness in an extreme, damaging manner.

As the official publication of the NAACP, the *Crisis* encouraged the idea that exhibiting white, middle-class behaviors would help people of color advance their marginalized position in the United States. The magazine ran pageants to showcase the beauty of black women and then published images from the competitions, which would create the foundation of the black pinup. From 1942 until the end of the war, a notice appeared next to the table of contents, advising readers “‘When you have finished with this copy send it to a boy in camp.’” This promoted the circulation of photographs of black women that would become pinups. Actress Dorothy Dandridge, gracing the cover of the magazine, was one such woman. Appointed the official sweetheart of a regiment of the California State Guard, her image’s popularity as a morale booster dispels the idea that only white pinups were popular. Moreover, her cover features classic pinup characteristics: styled hair, big smile, and long, exposed legs (Fig. 28). Her white shorts and heels foreshadowed Betty Grable’s signature look, which appeared a year later in 1943.55

The most recognized pinup of color from the war years was Lena Horne. Since her childhood, she was a popular model for covers of black magazines. She was a favorite of *Crisis* magazine, as she fit with the white-informed ideal of a respectable black woman: cultured, light-skinned, and well-groomed. This notion was especially popular during the war years, as it encouraged morale amongst black troops and minimized the disturbance of black beauty in a Eurocentric culture. While as an individual she was not nearly so complacent about accepting white-dictated standards, Lena Horne’s representations throughout World War II made her the ultimate icon of patriotic black femininity.56

Labelled in Hollywood as the African American glamour girl, Lena Horne also performed with the USO overseas, and formed a particularly close bond with the Tuskegee Airmen. A photograph from January 1, 1945 shows the actress with a group of the servicemen at their base in Alabama (Fig. 29). They are dressed in uniform, sporting an array of flight goggles and pilot’s jackets. She wore a similar coat and sat in a plane, smiling as the men posed around her. The image emphasizes the parallels of her hands-on contributions with those of Marlene Dietrich, though the latter is much more widely associated with the celebrity war effort. Despite being popular with both black and white troops, Horne’s status was heavily segregated and often only publicized in relation to the black community’s patriotism. This did not negate the impact that she had on troops of color, however. Roscoe Brown Jr., who had been stationed at the Alabama base, recalled the impact of the star’s presence at her funeral: “‘This wonderful, beautiful lady, Lena Horne, came to visit us. She sang, she talked with us and she made us all her boyfriends. The men took her picture and put it on our barracks, on our planes, and she became our pinup girl.’” Again, this is reminiscent of the previously discussed account of Dietrich being

56 Williams, “The *Crisis* Cover Girl,” 208.
“in love with a division.” Horne provided comfort for servicemen as well, but in keeping with the trend of disregarding black service during the war, her efforts are largely undiscussed.

The black pinup was subversive not just for her display of female sexuality, but also for her black sexuality. The intersection of these characteristics—female and black—and the culturally-sanctioned challenges that came with it further removed black women from the cultural ideal, and therefore from representation in white media. The tractability and purity that was assigned to white women defined accepted American femininity. Thus, the definition of the “White woman’s reality as the universal norm of womanhood” was reflected in the picture of America that print media presented. Black pinups were a notable crack in the white facade. While Caucasian pinups perpetuated popular American imagery despite their controversies, pinups of color—who shared all the same traits except skin color—opposed the mainstream. One embodied the dominant and the other, the marginalized; in either case, respective cultural demands were written on each of them. Moreover, they both ultimately served patriotism through feminine and sexual allusion, emphasizing the transcendent cultural function of the female body.

As all branches of the American military resisted black enlistment in the early years of the war, and then segregated them when they were finally admitted, World War II became a battle against both foreign fascism and American racism for the black population. Again, women were a materialization of thought. Black women like Lena Horne and Dorothy Dandridge became embodiments of black respectability, as well as a reminder for black troops of their own cause. Their bodies were imbued with representations of pride and strength, transforming them into instruments of activism. White women were physical displays of the war effort—and the racism—of mainstream America, and black women served the same function for people of color in their fight for equality. Despite race, pinups during World War II were presented in the same style and ultimately had the same function of representation, though not always for the same ideals. Just as the white pinup’s legs supported the Allied cause, so did the black pinup’s—with the added intention of steeling troops of color in their own fight against racism.

A Growth Spurt for Women?

The legacy of women in World War II is complex. It is an irrefutable milestone in the evolution of gender dynamics, though not quite as permanent as “liberation.” Women who had not worked before began working, and there was a transgression of dress and task; however, they still were expected to present femininely. This beauty trend—often oversimplified as an outward manifestation of strength and patriotism—would be fully realized in the decade following the war. If the 1940s are famed as years of liberation for women, the 1950s are notorious for a different kind of response to the war—a conservative retraction. The femininity of appearance

59 Williams, “The Crisis Cover Girl,” 208-09.
during World War II was simple but unmistakable; the post-war period inflated it into a caricature. The various reds of nails and lips shattered into a vibrant kaleidoscope of coral, rose, fuchsia, and orange, and were paired with precisely lined cat-eyes instead of simple mascara. The 1947 debut of unheard-of designer Christian Dior featured cinched waists with long, full skirts: elements that defied the boxy silhouettes and scarcity of wartime clothing, and that would define the aesthetic following decade. It was dubbed “The New Look,” and was the fullest realization of the backlash to the transgressive gender roles of the war years. Reminiscent of Victorian Era styles, it paired magnified fertility traits—slim waists, full busts and hips—with indulgent types and amounts of fabrics. The result was a coquettish, romanticized picture of womanhood; the traditional femininity of the wartime woman became the New Woman’s exaggerated femininity, fantasized where her predecessor’s had only been emphasized. Their social roles paralleled the transition, as working women were encouraged to give up their jobs for returning servicemen and focus on their duties as homemakers and child bearers.

When analyzed, the women portrayed in the media of World War II America betray an obsession with femininity and health—the epitomization of female gender roles. These two things would preserve their social order in a time of major upheaval. Femininity would help women maintain their traditional social roles, and health would allow them to fulfill the biological one of reproducing to repopulate the war-torn world. These images also reaffirm just how Eurocentric American beauty standards are, as well as how they inform the expected behavior of women. For example, white women are expected to be points of morality, which manifests itself both in appearance (the obsession with obvious femininity and physical purity) and in action (participating in the war effort). Women and physical appearance serve as a projection of anxiety, but also as a currency. The government and advertisers alike capitalized on traditional female gender roles, and the characteristics that connoted them, to sell the war effort. Every woman portrayed in propaganda and advertisements fits the same physical mold—Caucasian, red lips, big smile, red nails, curled and styled hair—whether she is a housewife or a servicewoman or a pinup. She was a tangible embodiment of patriotism. Despite the span of roles she could and did embody, she looked the same no matter what—a picture of idealized womanhood. Chock-full of femininity, her appearance branded her as non-subversive, even if her role was the opposite.

While it is not surprising that female depictions reinforced traditional femininity, it does contradict the idea that World War II was an era of complete liberation for women. When her form was used to sell the war, the body of the American woman was no longer her own. Though she might be socially or economically liberated, she physically belonged to causes of morale. This paper is governed by the question: what is the relationship between gender roles, culture, and crisis? Studying the portrayal of women in World War II media provides one answer: in times of upheaval, female bodies and their depictions become another theater of battle. They are a battleground of conflicting ideologies and a vehicle to advance causes, as well as a manifestation of social ideals and anxieties. In World War II, female appearance was used to help Americans adjust to a world at war. Woman herself not only labored; her image did too. Her hands, lips, and legs all played out the conflicts of patriotism and practicality, and reflected the desire for stability in a changing world.
Appendix

Figure 1: Cueva De Las Manos, Río Pinturas, 11000-7500 BCE. Mineral pigments on rock. Patagonia, Santa Cruz, Argentina. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/936.

Figure 2: Michelangelo, The Creation of Adam, 1512. Paint on plaster, 9 ft. 2 in. by 18 ft. 8 in. Vatican City, the Sistine Chapel.
Figure 3: Procter & Gamble Co. "12 Days from Today Your Hands Can Be Lovelier." Advertisement. Better Homes and Gardens, 1942.

Figure 5: Procter & Gamble Co. "Hello Lava! Goodbye Grime--in 30 to 50 Seconds!" Advertisement. *Baltimore Sun*, 1943.
Figure 6: "Pears' Soap." Advertisement. Pears Soap, The Advertising Archives. 1890s.

Figure 7: “Victory Waits On Your Fingers.” Propaganda Poster. Office of War Information. National Archives Catalog, 1941-1945.

Figure 9: Wilbur, Lawrence. “Longing Won’t Bring Him Back Sooner…Get a War Job!” Propaganda Poster. Office for the War Manpower Commission. National Archives Catalog, 1944.
Figure 10: Miller, J. Howard. "We Can Do It!" 1942. In *The National Museum of American History*.

Figure 12: “Frankly, he was fascinated…” Advertisement. Elizabeth Arden. Duke University Libraries Digital Repository, 1942.

Figure 14: Norton, George. Marlene Dietrich on a paratrooper practice jump with the 82nd Airborne Division, Soissons in northern France, 13 March 1945. Digital image. Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin. 1945.

Figure 15: Křen, Mirko. Marlene Dietrich during a performance in Pilsen, in liberated Bohemia, where the US troops met the Red Army in May 1945. Digital image. Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin. 1945.
Figure 16: Silk, George. Actress Marlene Dietrich, 40, sporting Army sweater, knit cap & long wool underwear, sitting on bunk bed as she takes off her GI boots while preparing to don her sequined evening gown & gold pumps to perform onstage during USO show for a US Army. Digital image. Getty Images. 1942.

Figure 17: Richee, Eugene Robert. Portrait photo of Marlene Dietrich with cravat. Digital image. Marlene Dietrich Collection Berlin. Early 1930s.
Figure 18: Richee, Eugene Robert. “Smoking Amy.” Digital image. Getty Images. 1930.


Figure 21: CORBIS. "Marlene Dietrich Kissing Soldier." Digital image. Getty Images. 1944.

Figure 23: “Actress Betty Grable Auctions Stockings.” Photograph. Getty Images, 1943.
Figure 24: "Betty Grable: 100 Photographs, The Most Influential Images of All Time." Photograph. Time, 1943.

Figure 26: US Government. "She May Look Clean--But." Digital image. Venereal Disease Visual History Archive.

Figure 27: US Government. "She May Be...a Bag of TROUBLE." Digital image. Venereal Disease Visual History Archive.
Figure 28: June 1942 *Crisis* cover, found in "The *Crisis* Cover Girl: Lena Horne, the NAACP, and Representations of African American Femininity, 1941-1945." (Megan E. Williams, *American Periodicals* 16, no. 2 (2006): 208).

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