

## **Using Primary Sources in the Classroom: World War II Unit**

This lesson was created by educators working with the Alabama Department of Archives as part of the “[Using Primary Sources in the Classroom](#)” project in 1996.

### **Lesson 3: WACS - Women in the War**

#### **Background information for teachers:**

As American casualties mounted during World War II, more soldiers were needed to fight. Women were called upon to do their part at home to release men for frontline service in Europe and the Pacific. The Women's Army Corps utilized women in a variety of military support roles and many more women took jobs in the ordnance industries and even on the farm. For many women, it was their first entry into the work force out of the home. These war-induced changes had tremendous implications on the traditional gender role assigned to women in Alabama and the nation.

#### **Content Standards:**

Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies (2010)

- 4<sup>th</sup> Grade:
  - 13. Describe the economic and social impact of World War II on Alabamians, including entry of women into the workforce, increase in job opportunities, rationing, utilization of Alabama’s military installations, military recruitment, the draft, and a rise in racial consciousness.
    - Recognizing Alabama participants in World War II, including the Tuskegee Airmen and women in the military
    - Justifying the strategic placement of military bases in Alabama, including Redstone Arsenal, Fort Rucker, Fort McClellan, and Craig Air Force Base
- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade:
  - 6. Identify causes and consequences of World War II and reasons for the United States’ entry into the war.
    - Locating on a map Allied countries and Axis Powers
    - Locating on a map key engagements of World War II, including Pearl Harbor; the battles of Normandy, Stalingrad, and Midway; and the Battle of the Bulge
    - Identifying key figures of World War II, including Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sir Winston Churchill, Harry S. Truman, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Michinomiya Hirohito, and Hideki Tōjō
    - Describing the development of and the decision to use the atomic bomb
    - Describing human costs associated with World War II Examples:the Holocaust, civilian and military casualties
    - Explaining the importance of the surrender of the Axis Powers ending World War II

- 7. Identify changes on the American home front during World War II.
  - Example: rationing
    - Recognizing the retooling of factories from consumer to military production
    - Identifying new roles of women and African Americans in the workforce
    - Describing increased demand on the Birmingham steel industry and Port of Mobile facilities
    - Describing the experience of African Americans and Japanese Americans in the United States during World War II, including the Tuskegee Airmen and occupants of internment camps
- 10<sup>th</sup> Grade:
  - 10. Describe the impact of World War II on the lives of American citizens, including wartime economic measures, population shifts, growth in the middle class, growth of industrialization, advancements in science and technology, increased wealth in the African-American community, racial and ethnic tensions, Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (G. I. Bill of Rights), and desegregation of the military.
    - Describing Alabama's participation in World War II, including the role of the Tuskegee Airmen, the Aliceville Prisoner of War (POW) camp, growth of the Port of Mobile, production of Birmingham steel, and the establishment of military bases

#### National Standards for History

- Era 8 The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)
  - Standard 3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs:

#### National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- Standard 2 – Time, Continuity, and Change
  - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy
- Standard 3 – People, Places, and Environments
  - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments
- Standard 5 – Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
  - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions
- Standard 6 – Power, Authority, and Governance
  - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

#### Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Describe the duties of women in the military in World War II.
2. Compare and contrast the duties of women currently serving in the military and those who served in World War II.

3. Discuss the changes in gender roles from the World War II era and the present

### **Suggested Activities:**

1. Make copies of the newspaper articles (Documents [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), and [6](#)), *The Skirted Soldier*, and the [letter from the Alabama Defense Council](#) for each student.
2. After reading the documents, ask the students to list the jobs that the WACS performed in the military.
3. Have the students write a letter to the commander at Fort McClellan or to the committee of the Alabama State Defense Council explaining why they want to join this group of women in the military. The talents and prior training of the applicants should be included in the letter as well as marital status and care responsibilities, such as children or aging parents.
4. After the letters have been written, the students should, as a class, create a list of qualifications that applicants should have in order to be considered for selection.
5. The students (or teacher) should read their letters aloud to the class. Upon completion of each letter the students should discuss whether or not the person is an acceptable applicant.
6. Ask the students the following questions:
  - a. What are the present requirements for serving in the military for men and women?
  - b. Are the requirements different for women and men in the military of today?
  - c. In your opinion, were the WACS an essential part of the military in World War II? What kind of training was given to the WACS? What kind of training would you have given to the WACS if you had been the commander?
  - d. What other kinds of war efforts were available to the applicant who had too many family obligations to be accepted as a WAC?
7. Allow the students to read the documents dealing with day care for the women who were working in the factories and the guidelines for female labor on farms. Ask the students to find similarities and differences between the working woman's concerns or abilities during World War II and the woman of today.

### **Primary Sources:**

- [Document 1](#): Johnston, Marguerite. "Wacs Take Over Soldiers' Work at Ft. McClellan." *The Birmingham News*, 14 May 1944. ADAH Public Information Subject File - General Files, SG 6993, Folder 1645, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.
- [Document 2](#): Van der Veer, Virginia. "Weaker Sex? Not Any More, Brother." *The Birmingham News*, 10 June 1942. ADAH Public Information Subject File - General Files, SG 6993, Folder 1645, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

- [Document 3](#): Mills, George S. "WAAC [*sic*] Officer Candidates Told Glamor Stuff is Strictly Out." *The Birmingham News*, 19 June 1942, ADAH Public Information Subject File - General Files, SG 6993, Folder 1645, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.
- [Document 4](#): Aldridge, Charles Collins. *The Skirted Soldier*. Alabama State Council of Defense (1941-1946), Program Administrative Files, SG 19859, Folder 24, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.
- [Document 5](#): Paterson, Haygood, Montgomery, Alabama, to Mr. Z. Scogin, Piedmont, Alabama, 28 September 1943. Alabama State Council of Defense (1941-1946), Program Administrative Files, SG 19859, Folder 24, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.
- [Document 6](#): "Five More Nursery Schools Planned to Aid War Workers." *The Mobile Register*, 26 August 1942. Alabama State Council of Defense (1941-1946), Program Administrative Files, SG 19882, Folder 26, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.
- [Document 7](#): U.S. Department of Labor. Women's Bureau. *Guide for Wartime Use of Women on Farms* ([Washington, D.C.]: U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1942). Alabama Council of Defense (1941-1946), Program Administrative Files, SG 19882, Folder 38, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.
- [Document 8](#): The National Commission for Young Children. *Children's Centers Vital to Victory* (Washington, D.C.: The National Commission for Young Children, 1942). Alabama Council of Defense (1941-1946), Program Administrative Files, SG 19882, Folder 28, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

# Five More Nursery Schools Planned To Aid War Workers

## Expansion Of Facilities Here Announced In Order To Provide Care For Tots While Their Mothers Hold Defense Jobs

Provision for five new nursery schools and expansion of the services of the four already in operation in the Mobile area are planned to release women for employment and at the same time assure them of good care for their children.

This expanded nursery school service is under the supervision of Mrs. Lea Cowles, state supervisor, WPA nursery school program, who was in Mobile yesterday to make preliminary arrangements for the enlarged service.

WPA, which has operated nursery schools for the past several years, has been designated by Congress to administer the \$6,000,000 appropriation for increased nursery school service for the especial benefit of children of employed mothers and for children of men in the armed forces and industrial workers living in crowded conditions.

With 1,300 Mobile women already employed in defense work as shown by a recent survey, the WPA program, under the direct guidance and sponsorship of the state department of education, plans increased enrollment in nursery schools already set up, which are Christ Church, Oakdale, Social Center and Orange Grove Homes schools, and the establishing of five new schools, one of which will be at the Preventorium building on Washington Avenue to serve the Brookley Field area.

Other schools are to be at Trailer City on Houston Street and the housing project at Chickasaw. These schools will charge only a nominal fee for food for the children while they are in school. Personnel will be furnished by WPA.

The Mobile County nursery school board, organized last December, is composed of representatives from all organizations and groups

in the county interested in the nursery school program here. Organizations co-operating under the WPA leadership are the farm security agency, OCD, the department of public welfare, P.-T. A., the national housing and health authority, AAUW, the Bureau of Catholic Charities, and the National Council of Jewish Women in Mobile.

These organizations are giving aid to the program by interpreting the expanded WPA activity to the community, surveying conditions of need in the Mobile area, helping to find housing and sponsorship for furnishings and utilities, helping to secure volunteers and helping to register children needing care.

Mrs. Cowles said teachers to meet the increased needs of the new program are now in training in Birmingham. When the schools open volunteer workers will be needed. The Mobile Civilian Defense Volunteer Office will aid in recruiting volunteers and in planning the course. It is expected that this training will begin in the fall.

