

**DBQ 11****The Changing Roles of American Women, 1933–1945**

**Directions:** Answer the following question by writing an essay that includes your interpretation of Documents A–J as well as your own knowledge of the history of this time period.

**How did national and international events shape the roles played by American women during the Great Depression and World War II? In what ways did their experiences vary because of race, socioeconomic position, and marital status?**

Answer this question using the documents and your knowledge of Chapters 24 and 25.

**Document A**

Source: Letter from Frances M. Kubicki to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1933

I am thirty-seven years old, and for fourteen years held the position of assistant bookkeeper in a large department store in Kansas City. Recently, this company changed hands, the new president bringing in an efficiency engineer. This man put in a new system in the office, which required bookkeeping machines and calculators. So far, there has been eight of us to lose our jobs.

No consideration was given as to who needed jobs, in fact it seemed that those who needed them most, were fired. Not one married woman in that office was fired, and each and every one of them has a husband employed. This deplorable condition seems to be prevalent in this city and other cities of this country. Everywhere I go to look for a job I find these women, some of them my friends, working—and I have found that nine cases out of ten their husbands have good jobs.

**Document B**

Source: Phyllis Lorimer, recalling her early 1930s experiences in an oral history interview.

When it happened, I was in a boarding school which I loved. At Glendora. It was the best boarding school in California at that time. A beautiful school in the middle of orange trees. I was about to be president of the student body and very proud of myself. Suddenly I couldn't get any pencils and went to the principal to find out why. She was embarrassed because we were old friends. She said "I'm sorry, [your] bills just haven't been paid." She complimented me, saying, "Were there scholarships, you could have it." And, "I couldn't be sorrier."

I was mortified past belief. It was hard for the principal. I called my mother and said, "Come and pick me up." Which she did.

**Document C**

Source: Molly Dewson, chair of Women's Division, Democratic National Committee, recalling her experiences during the first Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, in her memoir, "An Aid to an End."

I would work to get worthwhile government positions for Democratic women who had demonstrated the capacity to fill them adequately. There were some sixty-five on my list of "key women" whose political work deserved recognition either by the federal or the state government and whose assistance in future party work was essential. . . .

Many additional and important, although temporary, appointments were made in the New Deal agencies created to meet the national emergency, to move the country off its dead center, to end certain deplorable practices, to care for those wiped out by the Great Depression and to give people a basic modicum of security. Skilled executives, trained specialists and lawyers were necessary to develop and administer these agencies. . . .

In three years Roosevelt had set a new trend. At last women had their foot inside the door. We had the opportunity to demonstrate our ability to see what was needed and to get the job done while working harmoniously with men.

**Document D**

Source: Nico Rodriguez, recalling events of the mid-1930s in an oral history interview.

They won't let me work on WPA. I have to fight. The place where I went to put my application, they tell me that I cannot work because I'm not citizen. I say, "How come I not citizen? I born and raised here and my father and mother. What else do you want?"

The lady call a man who say, "But you lost your citizenship when you married your husband. He is a citizen of Mexico." . . .

I am mad and I say back to him: "Then explain it to me how my kids gonna eat? How I'm gonna feed them?" . . .

Then—two, three days later—they sent me a card to report to work. He wrote to Dallas or something, and they send papers for me to sign. I go to work in the sewing room and get thirty dollars a month, and I make so many pants that they give me a raise to forty dollars a month.

**Document E**

Source: Peggy Terry, recalling her experiences in the late 1930s as a married teenager in an oral history interview.

I was pregnant when we [Peggy and her husband] first started hitchhiking, and people were really very nice to us. Sometimes they would feed us. I remember one time we slept in a haystack, and the lady of the house came out and found us and she said, "This is really very bad for you because you're going to have a baby. You need a lot of milk." So she took us up to the house. . . .

We told her we'd beat the rugs for her giving us the food. She said, no, she didn't expect that. . . . We said, no, we wouldn't take it until unless we worked for it. And she let us beat her rugs. . . . Then we went in and she had a beautiful table, full of all kinds of food and milk.

**Document F**

Source: Charity Adams Earley, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC*.

Graduation day, 29 August 1942. . . . I was very happy that day. The fact that I had been the first Negro woman to receive a commission in the WAAC [Women's Army Auxiliary Corps] was nearly as important as the fact that we had "arrived." Whatever doubts we might have later, that day we knew ourselves as members of the great fraternity of officers. . . .

Two weeks after we were commissioned, we received the assignments we had wanted. Two Negro companies were formed—a Basic Training Company and a Specialist Training Company. . . . My assignment was as company commander of the Basic Training Company. . . .

Because we had some difficulty getting uniforms in the correct sizes for our troops, sometimes the company made a strange appearance when in formation. . . . Every woman in the service was issued an enlisted man's overcoat. . . . I was five feet, eight inches, and although my coat reached my knees, the sleeves struggled to approach my wrists. The small people were completely lost in their coats, which reached the ankles and covered the hands.

**Document G**

Source: Isabel Kidder, letter to her husband Maurice Kidder, an army chaplain, 1942.

My darling, I call this the first day, for it is the first day in which I do not know where you are. If your ship slipped out into the wideness of ocean last night, tonight, or tomorrow I shall not know until after the war probably. Maybe there will be many details which I shall never know, and that seems hard to bear. It must seem equally hard to you to feel that there are things which are going to happen to "we three" [Isabel and her two young children] which you cannot know. But I shall attempt to write as many of them down as possible.

If you could see me now, pleased as punch because down in the cellar the fire is burning [in the furnace] and it is of my creating. . . . My coal came this afternoon and I got a fire built. . . . But it got away from me. The house got so hot I shut all the radiators and opened the front door. . . .

**Document H**

Source: Monica Sone recalls her experiences in an internment camp with her parents and brother, c. 1943, in her book, *Nisei Daughter*.

Camp Minidoka was located in the south-central part of Idaho, north of the Snake River. . . . When we arrived I could see nothing but flat prairies, clumps of greasewood shrubs, and jack rabbits. And of course the hundreds and hundreds of barracks, to house 10,000 of us.

Our home was one room in a large army-type barracks, measuring about 20 by 25 feet. The only furnishings were an iron pot-belly stove and cots. . . .

The momentum of change carried me along into a job at the camp hospital as ward secretary. . . .

During our spare hours, we confiscated scrap lumber, piece by piece, from a lumber pile. Tables and chairs gradually made their appearance in our tiny apartment. Rows of shelves lined the bare walls. We bought gallons of shellac, and white paint, yards of white organdy for curtains and blue damask for the cots and clothes closet. . . . It [their room] had everything except the kitchen sink and privacy.

**Document I**

Source: Photo of picketers outside Glenn Martin aircraft plant in Omaha, Nebraska. (See text p. 788 for full-size photograph.)

**Document J**

Source: Virginia Snow Wilkinson, "From Housewife to Shipfitter," *Harpers Magazine*, 1943.

The great need was for experienced workmen, men or women; and time on the job, doing this and a little of that adds up finally to experience. I was given more and more to do. . . . Six weeks from the date of my arrival at the yard I was given a unit to handle by myself. I guess it was not so much but it was my own.

I measured for and located the steel material which was to go on this unit. I labeled it with chalk and engaged the riggers to lift it. I asked a flanger and a tacker to be on hand to put the steel in place and to tack [weld] it up. And then I stood while the crane—one of those beautiful gray cranes which trail steel through the air with a motion as graceful as the soaring of a hawk on an upcurrent of air—picked up the material and sped it to our unit. It wasn't so much more than anyone could have done, but I felt the keen exhilaration of getting under way. It was good, I thought, this working together on a ship.