World War II: Women, Minorities and Social Change

Main Idea
The evolving role of minorities and women in American Society was one of the major social changes of the 20th Century. While these changes have been gradual and spread over the nation’s entire history, a major catalyst for change was World War II. During these desperate years, the nation was compelled to use all of its human resources - both in the armed forces and in the civilian labor force - to survive. This demand coupled with clearly state war aim of defeating Fascism and totalitarianism abroad helped create an environment at him that was especially receptive to social change at home.

World War II neither initiated nor completed the struggle for civil rights in America. It did, however, accelerate change and opened the door for even more dramatic progress in the years that followed.

This lesson will explore some manifestations of this evolution particularly as it relates to changes driven by the need for workers in war industries. While this was a nationwide phenomenon, the automobile industry – including the fledgling United Auto Workers union - was in the midst of this transformation.

Objectives
1. Students will recognize the impact of World War II on American society.
2. Students will recognize that social change is typically achieved and is manifested through small steps.
3. Students will analyze contemporary information to develop and support historical generalizations.
4. Students will summarize of contemporary data into meaningful historic observations.

Materials
Document Set A - Women
1. Group 1
   • “Occupation: Housewife”
   • “City Prepares to Hire Bus Drivers”
   • “U.S. Will Pay Half the Cost of Nurseries”
   • “Curb on Domestic Service Hampers Women in Job”
2. “Equal Pay for Women in War Industries”
3. Group 2
   • Ads
   • Female Labor Force: 1930 -1955
   • Letters from the Home: Edith
4. “Cherchez La Femme”
5. “Getting Rid of the Women”

Document Set B – African Americans
6. Group 3
   • Pittsburgh Courier – Double V Announcement

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- *Pittsburgh Courier* – Double V Poster
- *Pittsburgh Courier* – Editorial

7. Joseph Billups Talks About the Packard Strike
8. Joseph Billups Talks About Victory Committees
9. Hodges Mason: Bringing African-American Women into Bohn Aluminum, 1942
11. Executive Order 8022

*Note: Groups 1 and 2 of Document Set are the least complex items.*

**Teaching Activity**

1. Opening the activity – 25 Minutes
   
   Divide the class into an even number of groups of four to six students. If possible, there should be at least two groups working with each document set.

   Tell the students that the increasing integration of African-Americans and women into full participation in all aspects of American society is arguably the most important social achievement of 20th Century America. While this has been an evolutionary process, many historians believe that the demands of World War II dramatically accelerated the process.

   Discuss why this might be so. Record suggestions on the board using a brainstorming technique – no challenges; all suggestions are regarded as valid. Possible answers may be:
   - The interaction of men and women of all races in the armed forces reduced prejudices;
   - Resistance to tyranny abroad heightened awareness of undemocratic institutions at home;
   - The demand for workers resulted in a relaxation of discriminatory employment practices;
   - Expectations of women and African-Americans were raised during WWII and could not be suppressed in the post-war years.

   Tell the class that in this lesson they will be given a series of documents to review. They are to examine these and develop historical generalizations on how the wartime labor shortages served as a catalyst for advancing the interests of African-Americans and women.

   Distribute one document set (either Set A or Set B) to each student group. Each student should be responsible for one document/document group.

   *Note: There should be at least one document/document group for each student. This may require the distribution of duplicate documents. Also, if the groups are small, some students may have more than one document assigned. The teacher may need to monitor document allocation.*
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Give the students approximately 10 minutes to read the available documents. While they will not be able to review each document in the Set, they should have time to review several in addition to the one they are primarily responsible for.

2. Developing the activity – 20 Minutes
At the end of this time distribute the appropriate Student Worksheet to each student. Each group should select a scribe to complete a single worksheet for the group. The group worksheet will be collected.

Each person should report to the rest of the group on the document/document group they were assigned. They should describe the document and recommend an answer to the worksheet question:

- How do each of the documents/document groups support the hypothesis that the demand for labor during World War II resulted in advancing women’s rights or African-American rights.

- Select a brief quote from each document/document group that reinforces this hypothesis. (A few opening and closing words should be noted on the worksheet, but not necessarily the entire quote.)

While the assigned student should make an initial report, other group members may suggest additions or modifications.

If groups are unable to complete the worksheet in class, advise them that they will be given a few minutes to consolidate information before presenting their information at the next class.

In addition, assign each student to complete the “World War II: Women, Minorities and Social Change, Worksheet II” as homework for. It will be necessary for students to take their assigned document home in order to complete the assignment.

Note: Students are to develop a meaningful question that derives from the assigned document, hypothesize the answer to that question and imagine a possible contemporary document that would provide information to prove or refute their hypothesis. For example,

a) Did wage gains from the War years for women hold in the post-war period? 
b) No. The wage gap between men and women returned to levels comparable to the pre-war years.

c) Census data on average wages 1940, 1945 and 1950.

Optionally, students may gather primary or secondary material that supports or refutes the questions they developed;

3. Concluding the activity (day 2): Part 1 - 25 minutes
As necessary, allow groups 5-10 minutes to finalize Worksheet I. Review the results.
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- Rotate from group to group asking for response and quotation from the appropriate document/document group. It is not necessary each group to respond separately to each question.
- Allow the group(s) responsible for the same Document Set to challenge the answer, while encouraging the group responsible for the other Document Set to ask questions. The teacher should challenge the responses, as necessary, for factual accuracy and sound reasoning.

Following this review of the Worksheet, ask students to generalize on the relative significance circumstances on the home front, particularly the labor demands during World War II had on the evolution of women and minority rights.

Collect the group worksheets.

4. Concluding the activity: Part 2 – 20 minutes
As time permits, review the homework assignment (Worksheet II). Allow a maximum number of students to identify the historical questions they developed. On a selective basis, discuss the hypotheses developed and the possible sources to explore.

Leave time at the end of class to give those students who completed the optional assignment to talk about their findings.

Collect the homework.

Optionally, assign students to prepare a single paragraph designed for inclusion in their history next book on the general subject of how the demand for labor during World War II impacted both (or either) women and African-Americans.

Extending the activity
1. Search local newspapers or the major Detroit papers for women and minority issues between 1941 and 1945. Produce and display relevant articles.
2. Research and report their findings from the employment pages in a newspaper on one day in each of the following time periods: 1936-1939; 1941-1945 and 1946-1955.
3. Examine employment data on African-American and female employment between 1920 and 1960 (total, by industry, by profession, average wages, etc.) noting trends. The date can be presented graphically. Specific reference to pre and post war difference should be made.
4. Discuss the impact of the union in the dealing with women and minorities. Pay particular attention to the interviews with Joseph Billups and Hodges Mason.
5. Visit the “Arsenal of Democracy” exhibit at the Michigan Historical Museum in Lansing. A large section is devoted to the home front during World War II and includes elements directly related to the role of minorities and women.
Assessing the Learning
1. Students will participate in the completion of the group prepared Student Worksheet.
2. Students will complete the Homework assignment
3. Students will participate in small group discussions.
4. Students will contribute as appropriate to the large group discussion.
5. Optionally, students will write a one paragraph summary on the impact the demand for labor had on women and African-Americans.

References and Resources
Books

Web Sites
1. Rosie the Riveter - Women in the Factories of World War II – World War II Posters of Women
   womenshistory.about.com/cs/rosie/

2. Rosie the Riveter and Feminism- ROSIE-THE-RIVETER AND THE GENDER WARRIORS.
   www.dadi.org/rosie.htm

3. African Americans at War
   liberationcommunity.stanford.edu/clayarticles/frican%20Americans%20at%20War.htm

4. Rearview Mirror -- Willow Run and the Arsenal of Democracy
   www.clanfowler.com/articles/Willow%20Run%20and%20the%20Arsenal%20of%20Democracy.htm
Social Studies Standards

Strand I – Historical Perspective
Benchmark SOC.I.1.HS.2
Describe major factors that characterize the following eras in United States history: The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900), The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930), The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945), Post War United States (1945-1970) and Contemporary United States (1968-present).

Benchmark SOC.I.3.HS.1
Use primary and secondary records to analyze significant events that shaped the development of Michigan as a state and the United States as a nation since the era of Reconstruction.

Benchmark SOC.I.4.HS.1
Identify major decisions in the history of Michigan and the United States since the era of Reconstruction, analyze contemporary factors contributing to the decisions and consider alternative courses of action.

Strand II – Geographic Perspective
Benchmark SOC.II.1.HS.1
Describe how major world issues and events affect various people, societies, places, and cultures in different ways.

Benchmark SOC.II.1.HS.2
Explain how culture might affect women’s and men's perceptions.

Strand V – Inquiry
Benchmark SOC.V.1.HS.3
Develop generalizations pertaining to a specific social science topic by interpreting information from a variety of sources.
How do each of the following documents/document groups support the hypothesis that World War II was a catalyst in advancing women’s rights. Select a quote from each Document/Document Group that best highlights this hypothesis.

1. **Group 1**
   - “Occupation: Housewife “
   - “City Prepares to Hire Bus Drivers”
   - “U.S. Will Pay Half the Cost of Nurseries”
   - “Curb on Domestic Service Hampers Women in Job”

2. “Equal Pay for Women in War Industries”

3. **Group 2**
   - Ads
   - *Female Labor Force: 1930 -1955*
   - *Letters from the Home: Edith*

4. “Cherchez La Femme”

5. “Getting Rid of the Women”
How do each of the following documents/document groups support the hypothesis that World War II was a catalyst for advancing African-American rights. Select a quote from each Document/Document Group that best highlights this hypothesis.

1. Group 3
   • Pittsburgh Courier – Double V Announcement & Pittsburgh Courier – Double V Poster
   • Pittsburgh Courier – Editorial

2. Joseph Billups Talks About the Packard Strike

3. Joseph Billups Talks About Victory Committees

4. Hodges Mason: Bringing African-American Women into Bohn Aluminum, 1942

5. Michigan Chronicle – “Jim Crow Must Go”

6. Executive 8022
Name____________________

Based on the document(s) you have been assigned, complete the following.

Required Assignment:

1. Write a historical question that derives from your assigned document(s).

2. Hypothesize on a possible answer to that question.

3. Imagine two contemporary (i.e., circa 1941-1945) items that might provide information related to answering this question. Be as specific as possible. Do not worry whether or not the item can be found or even if it ever actually existed.

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Optional:

4. Research actual sources in order to verify or refute your hypothesis. Identify the sources you reviewed. Identify the material as contemporary/primary or secondary (i.e., written subsequently by an history or other non-participant.)

5. What were your findings?