

Movie Review: "The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter"
reviewed by Melissa Sorgen

This 1980 documentary video is about women who entered American defense industries during World War II. It includes interviews with five former "Rosies" combined with footage from old newsreels and recruiting films and posters, pictures and music from the 1940s. It is in both color and black and white. Running time is 65 minutes.

According to the interviews, women faced widespread discrimination in the defense plants, especially lower pay rates, and African American women were paid even less than their white co-workers. One African American woman reported that she was repeatedly passed over for a job assignment that was given to less qualified white women. She was finally given the job when they were unable to do the work.

One of the most interesting parts of the documentary is its discussion of child care. During the war, children were left with relatives or at day care facilities. After the war, these facilities were closed, forcing many women to stop working outside of the home.

While they worked in the plants, many of the women joined labor unions that protected their job rights. However, when the war ended, the unions did not fight for them to keep their jobs. The documentary explains how difficult it was for many women to return to domestic roles after the war. Paid work was challenging and helped them feel powerful, independent, and successful.

"The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter" is an excellent documentary for classroom use. It shows the problems faced by women workers and that women are capable of skilled physical labor when given the opportunity.

Movie Review: "Swing Shift"
reviewed by Jennifer Evans

This is the Hollywood version of the home front during World War II. Goldy Hawn plays a "typical" 1940's woman, a newly wed housewife whose husband enlists after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Christine Lahti, her neighbor, is a lounge singer. At the start of the movie, Hawn's husband discourages her from working, but once he leaves, she gets a job at the local airplane manufacturing plant. Lahti also works there so they become friends.

Too much of the movie centers around a love affair that Hawn has with Kurt Russell, a male co-worker at the plant. They are eventually caught by Hawn's husband when he returns home on leave. Hawn is forced to rethink her relationships and eventually decides to resurrect the marriage. Hawn and Lahti are also laid-off when the war ends.

Factory scenes show male supervisors harassing the new women workers. I thought this was interesting because rarely do we learn that anyone was "uncooperative" during World War II. However, I was surprised when Hawn was promoted to a supervisory position. I wonder if this was really a typical experience for a woman worker. I also think the movie exaggerates efforts by women to achieve equal rights at that time.

A movie like "Swing Shift" could be important in the classroom if it helped students understand what people felt and experienced. Unfortunately, I do not think the movie succeeds at capturing the American home front during World War II. The scenes with factory workers building the planes are really only a small part of the movie. We miss the problems women face as they single-handedly try to balance home, family and work with the demands of rationing and recycling.