AMERICAN BEAUTY:
A HISTORY IN ADVERTISEMENTS AND PROPAGANDA, 1940-1945

By

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Abstract

This honors thesis explores the intersection between total war and American female beauty—namely, how advertisers and the War Board used the female image to not only garner support for the war, but to reinforce certain moral standards in a time where women found more personal freedom in their everyday lives. Additionally, advertisers used the war machine to promote their own beauty products, creating a direct link between true Americanism and cosmetics—lipstick, especially. The work is broken into three principal parts: a brief history of cosmetics use in the US, the development of the connection between female beauty and patriotic duty during the Second World War and, finally, an analysis of advertisements and propaganda using the lens of beauty and patriotism. It focuses largely on single, middle class, white women—the focus of many of this images—but I have included discussions of women othered by these images, and the impact these images had on those othered women.
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Introduction

It was a warm spring day in Las Vegas, Nevada, 1952. People were gathered from all corners of the States to see something that only a handful of Americans had seen. The tourists had been flocking to Las Vegas for almost two years now, taking up penthouses suites that overlook a vast and empty desert. On the docket for the day was a picnic to be followed by a beauty pageant staged by the girls of the Last Frontier Hotel. Most picnic goers, however, were probably unenthused by the pageant. That’s not what they had come to see, exactly. The showgirls, the pageant contestants, were excited nonetheless—the girl crowned queen would embody modernity, American ingenuity and, if subtextually, power—she would be Miss Atomic Blast.¹

This is actually where the story ends. Many factors had brought American culture to this point: the end of the Second World War, the assertion of unflappable American military dominance, a flurry of consumerism, disposable cash and marketing. But why a “Miss Atomic Bomb”? What did that have to do with anything? There is nothing really cute or sexy about radiation poisoning or being vaporized—so why?

Even before the First World War, female beauty has been manipulated to make war not just palatable, but marketable. The credit and consumerism boom of the 1920s only helped to fuel this conflation which culminated in a total war strategy for the 1940s that really meant total war. This thesis explores just that: the connections between the American female beauty standards and war, how

¹ Image: This is not Miss Atomic Blast, but rather Mis-Cue from the 1955 Operation Cue, which tested the impact that atomic weapons had on civilian populations. There are four known atomic themed pageants that had occurred in Las Vegas in the late 1940’s, early 1950’s.
various female images were deployed by advertisers to garner support for the war AND their products/services, and finally whether or not women adopting these standards embodied conformity or self-expression—or something in between.

When we take Miss Atomic Blast as our starting point, many other cultural phenomena of the Second World War era stand out--what did it mean that tubes of lipstick that women carried with them literally looked like ammunition shells or that compacts were literally shaped like hand guns? What are the connotations of the Victory Roll, or of the lipstick shade dubbed “Uniform Red”? Where do women draw the line in fulfilling their sense of national duty?

This study relies on the familiar to make its argument--the culturally conscious know what wartime advertisements and nose art mean intrinsically, but perhaps without knowing specific examples or those phrases specifically. In the interest of specificity, I mean cosmetic and beauty advertisements geared toward factory workers and service women, victory rolls and pin-ups. My secondary works present analyses on the intersections between war, femininity, beauty and duty. Historical background and analysis on beauty culture comes from Kathy Peiss’ Hope in a Jar. Information on women as wartime propaganda comes from Maureen Honey’s Creating Rosie the Riveter. Women, Sexuality and War, by Philomena Goodman is an interesting exception--Goodman’s focus is on the experience of British women-- but nonetheless offers a great discussion on the paradox that war presents to culturally understood notions of womanhood and how beauty, morale and morality work together (or not).

One major issue with the source material and therefore this thesis is the distinct lack of diversity in these advertisements. These advertisements were targeted at largely single women who could choose to work in the factories or enlisted as service women—and thus had their own disposable
income. There was simply “no room” for women of color, married women, working class women, disabled women, non-cis women, lesbians and so on that, given the discourse and image making “would not” give the men something to want to come home to, a toxic but very real line of rhetoric. While I note some issues of representation of women othered by these advertisements, I have not been able to complete an “exhaustive” study (if that’s even possible) of the experiences of these women.

2 "The Predominate media portrayal of women war workers was that they were young, white and middle class: furthermore, that they entered the labor force out of patriotic motives and eagerly left to start families and resume full-time homemaking." – Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 19.

Pretty Face: A Brief History of American Beauty Culture

Makeup was a dirty word. Women did not make themselves up--following the play on words, they were real, not playing pretend, not fabricated. They never “painted”, as it was called before the consumer revolution that was the 1920’s. If one was a naturally beautiful woman, they were blessed by God, obviously in good health and had a beautiful soul. If one was an ugly woman, the Lord was testing her or she was a bad person, end thought. If one painted they were a liar, a prostitute, a succubus.

Naturally, the statement above is simply wishful thinking on the part of: Who? The fabrication of cultural standards cannot be attributed to a single, despised group: the misogynists, The Older Generation, men, religious folk and so on. What is perhaps most interesting about beauty culture is the dividing lines. Should feminists (or whichever term is relevant to the particular time period under consideration) make themselves up? Are people who use cosmetics lying? How does consumerism play into or against cultural ideals? Why do we need to keep asking ourselves these questions? Beauty is policed from the outside, but also self-policing.

The paradigm expressed the external-yields-internal beauty myth was unrealistic-- of course women attempted to boost their own beauty with products. Like all things that were both shameful and associated with women, makeup made its debut in the home. In the middle of the Nineteenth Century every social group had its own concoctions for skin lightening, hair straightening and wrinkle preventing. These secret home remedies were passed down or around before they were eventually recorded in diaries, ladies’ magazines, and even cookbooks. However, they were not the disreputable paint. They were simply lotions, for protecting, promoting or creating lily white skin because a “fundamental

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4 The historical background for this section is provided by Kathy Peiss, Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998).
distinction” existed between “skin-improving” and “skin-masking” products. Soon, but in small doses, druggists and “doctors” (read: quacks) began to sell their own preparations to women who dared be caught with such a product. Still, women tried their best to hide the fact that their beauty was not “natural” to their own peril—this was well before the Food and Drug Administration, and many of these preparations were full of harmful poisons. Women were maimed or killed by their own products, ironically dying in a state of severe facial disfigurement. Regardless of the secretive nature of using these skin-improving products, women were expected to know how to make them, and, more importantly, use them. They were expected to be respectable, middle class women, and to do so meant one had to look the part.

The expansion of globalization in the late nineteenth century meant that women had access not only to more items to add to their potions, but also actual commercialized cosmetics recognizable today. The nomenclature shifted, and all beauty aids were now considered cosmetics, instead of just the aforementioned skin-improving ointments. The expansion of transportation in the US, in addition to consumerism, allowed increasing numbers of women to have access to these products. Cheaper “drugstore” brands made their way into the hands and kits of shop girls, mill girls, and other blue-collar working women who wanted to “express their newfound sense of independence and urbanity.” There was a true “regression to the mean” as more and more women got to play “middle class lady” instead of “lowly mill girl.” However, this left many women who could not be middle class Victorian ladies on the outside looking in: largely, poor women and women of color. It seems that poor women had no time for such frivolity or, worse, would be considered prostitutes if they dared to rouge. Middle class and upper-

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5 Peiss, Hope, 10.
6 Ibid, 14
7 Ibid, 18.
8 Ibid, 21.
working class black women were faced with a completely different situation: the products were simply not for them and never had been. If lily white skin was the ideal, the black woman’s face was made out to be the pinnacle of ugliness, inside and out. Stories of light-skinned black women tricking white men into marrying them fill the American social conscious.\(^9\) Largescale debates among great black thinkers tackled beauty aids as they related to assimilation into white life and whether or not that was desirable. Moreover, it would be another couple of decades before dependable chemical relaxers and brown colored powders made their way onto the market and even longer for black entrepreneurs to break into the beauty industry.

Not everyone welcomed the expansion of cosmetics. Many doctors warned their patients against commercial and chemical preparations, as they contained dangerous chemicals. These doctors made begrudging recommendations to their female patients of the least harmful preparations, knowing full well they would never stop using the products. The financially savvy thought the whole thing laughable, as many of these products were simply marked up snake oil. Legislation was passed prohibiting the use of cosmetics in more rural, conservative towns as a kind of protection against “false impressions.”\(^10\) Consumer-ready cosmetics were also associated with “social climbers,” “urban sophisticates” and, ultimately, those not living a moral life.\(^11\) Beauty, it was believed, was chastity, motherhood, and general goodness befitting a woman, not how pale her face was or red her lips--but that didn’t hurt, either.

Women in the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries, however, changed their own feelings and attitudes toward cosmetics. As previously mentioned, many disenfranchised women embraced cosmetics as a way into the middle class--but even middle and upper class women began to change their

\(^9\) Ibid, 39.  
\(^{10}\) Ibid, 55.  
\(^{11}\) Ibid, 22.
minds. Making up had become a “part of their own daily performances.”  This had to do, in part, with female independence as women more notably joined the work force, but also with the permanence of the photograph and the invention of the electric lightbulb. Advertisement also took off in earnest in this time period, so women were inundated with images of their possible perfect selves. Department stores rethought their entire lay out, putting cosmetics at the very front to lure in female customers. This in itself was shocking, as middle class women had not shopped themselves before now, but now lined up to purchase, publically, beauty aids. Before the First World War, women had really embraced the notion that beauty was only skin deep, so what did it matter if they painted? Could you really cover up the real you to the point where you could actually make yourself up, that is, reinvent yourself? Moreover, wasn’t America, for many people, a place where you could reinvent yourself for the better? It was in this moment when women had begun to detach their understandings of what “women who painted” were like and reattach them to part of their patriot duty.

The First World War and the years immediately before and after provoked major changes for women, especially when considering beauty as a patriotic act. For the first time, women cut their hair-- the bob was “created” in the 1920s and a fashion and therefore political statement, the short hair of the nineteen-teens, while still political, was practical. Women joined the work force in earnest and could not risk injury over vanity. These women were “doing their bit” as we would come to

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12 Ibid, 44.
13 Ibid, 47-49.
say, in factories, as nurses or as military drivers. In the interwar period, beauty as patriotism dropped off as the need for patriotism dropped off. Following the First World War, isolationism, escapism, and consumerism set in, meaning that for the majority of American women, their own beauty was their own business, and theirs alone.\textsuperscript{14} While flapperism was much less popular than we are led to believe, the vote and other political opportunities for white, middle class women changed how they were viewed in society. For the rest of the female population, it was more of the same. In the 1920s makeup among the in group became more and more obvious—the Cupid’s bow lipstick styling, dark, smoky eyes, and finely drawn eyebrows were all the rage. In the 1930s longer hair styling came back, but dark and bold eyes and lips were still popular. However, as American women began to take more of an interest in what was happening overseas, the idea that their beauty could be used to promote patriotism and therefore the war machine, became more and more urgent.

\textsuperscript{14} There are ongoing issues of “consent” with the need to use make up—how much of this desire is the individual, and how much is social norms?
Beauty as Patriotism: Women and World War Two

One of the most iconic and permanent images of World War Two is the woman as a member of the work force--she sacrifices her own fulfillment as a mother to step in when the men are gone, ensuring their safety as soldiers and the safety of the US as a capitalist power. She is strong, savvy, and beautiful--but to an extent that men at home and abroad can 1) manage and 2) profit from. But why? Where did this image come from? As previously stated, the female form has been used in phases of mobilization and militarization but never before or since to the same level as during the Second World War. Largely it was the glorification of necessity--women (read: middle class white women) had to work in the factories simply to keep the economy and themselves afloat. But these women were stuck in a space between two contradictory realities--family and motherhood and working life. The other, almost sacred image of women from the time is the enlisted women, who transcended her womanliness to lay her life down for her country. While some women were allowed to serve in a capacity that was “actually” meaningful, most just did clerical work and “kept up male morale” in a way that as entirely non-threatening.\(^{15}\)

Patriotic femininity comes, “naturally,” from patriotic masculinity--and as the demands on one increase, so do that demands on the other.\(^{16}\) It’s simply, really; create a system based on the alleviation of shame--men feel ashamed that they are not protecting “their women” and enlist; women feel

\(^{15}\) It would be many years (and many more to come) until these women got the credit they deserved (commendations, medals, etc). instead of being reduced the sexualized characters of patriotism.

\(^{16}\) Both terms are drawn from Philomena Goodman, *Women, Sexuality and War* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
ashamed that they are not serving “their men” and start “doing their bit,” which meant different things for different groups of women.\textsuperscript{17} Some women raised victory gardens, others enlisted, and others still worked—but whatever their contributions were still framed as “women’s work,” the importance of which men had attempted to ignore. It’s a historical myth that women had never participated in warfare, and those that did were named everything to supportive mothers to closeted lesbians—never simply Americans doing their patriotic chore and always, always gendered. While the homespun movement of the American Revolution, the spying of the Civil War, and the hair cutting of the First World War could easily be swept under the rug, the total mobilization of the US in the late 1930s and early 1940s meant that women’s efforts could not be ignored—but needed to be contained.\textsuperscript{18} Through advertisements and the policing of female beauty for factory workers and service women, social relations between men and women were “retained” in an older sense of the separation of influences.\textsuperscript{19}

Images of women varied depending on the message being sent. Working women were presented as glamorous, semi-skilled, and dying to return to their kitchens and families (or dreams of kitchens and families, as many of these women were single). They were done up, just enough, to remain pretty but not overdone or sexy.\textsuperscript{20} The service woman was presented as much the same: doing a job that is necessary but overly willing to go home. While their makeup was still quite understated, it was

\textsuperscript{17} Goodman, \textit{Women, Sexuality and War}, 17.

\textsuperscript{18} It is interesting to note, however, that many WW2 propaganda ads used women’s previous war work as fuel for this new generation of “women warriors”, see Honey, \textit{Creating}, 110-112.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} While still remaining \textit{sexualized}.
still quite present, utilizing brighter shades and high pigment levels, perhaps due to their proximity with the men and the role as direct morale boosters (in addition to doing the jobs they were assigned as soldiers). There are two more negative images of women, also used in propaganda and advertisement: the pin-up and the spy.

The pin-up is interesting, when considering the image of women during war time. Women are presented as motherly, the protectors of American morality and morale, but also for the consumption of men to boost morale.21 The women in these images were caricatures of working women and service women--very made up, very venerable, very sexually available.22 Typically they were comically bad at their jobs, which underlined their inferiority.23 Service women, however, were not permitted any male pin-ups, sexual, celebrity or otherwise, as women “were not” sexual.24 Female spies presented a serious transgression to patriotism and femininity--they were loose, driven, uninterested in traditional female fulfillment and highly skilled. These women were sexual, and used their sexuality to lure men into divulging military secrets. In propaganda and advertisements, as women who painted in the eighteenth century, these women were heavily painted and this “overdone” look reflected their inner treachery. The truth of this is shaky, considering cultural fears about “unnaturally” beautiful women, and the nature of spy work itself, but it was a persisting image, especially considering Japanese internment and German persecution on the home front. Sexually transmitted disease was also a worry for servicemen.

21 Ibid, 110.
22 Ibid, 111.
23 Ibid, 113.
24 Ibid, 114. This presents an interesting question about lesbians that served who would have access to “the only” erotic material. Many lesbians who had been in the military during the war say that while there was some persecution and much elimination of their identity, they had a relatively easy time in the military. In many battalions, it was said (by “outed” lesbians) that lesbians counted for “half” (or at least a majority) of female soldiers. For further reader, consult Lilian Faderman’s Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America and Charles Kaiser’s The Gay Metropolis: The Landmark History of Gay Life in America.
especially from loose women.\textsuperscript{25} It was as if the enemy at engaged in biological warfare against allied soldiers—which is a ridiculous but terrifying notion.

These architypes were directed at a large audience and naturally women understood “their place” and role as a patriotic female from the symbolism within, but what about advertisements directed at working or service women, specifically? These were much more nuanced, as they had to communicate to women their dual role in society and reinforce the connected standards of beauty and morality.

\textsuperscript{25} Who were also spies? Wartime masculine fears were deeply irrational.
Archetype 1: The working woman. Notice how she is the “girl” he left behind—they’re not married. She longs for him to come back and her position is only temporary.

Archetype 2: The service woman. She is very put together with curled hair and the classical red lipstick. That, paired with the tagline “Good solider” creates the paradigm of the made up service woman.
Archetype 3: the pin-up. This is a panel from the British comic *Jane*. As previously stated, Jane is comically bad at her job as a service woman and is typically in varying stages of undress. The comic did not do as well in the US, because of the graphic nudity therein.

Archetype 4: the spy. While this is also an English image, the notion of the spy was just as terrifying to Americans, possibly because of both the idea that women who were vary made up were hiding something and women’s roles in pervious wars as spies.
Additionally, there was a fear that so-called loose women were disease ridden, and agents of the enemy. A statistic used by different branches of the US military suggested that more than 90% of available women carried venereal disease. The Victorian notions of beauty, health and cosmetics is obviously at play.
The Face in the Mirror: Advertisements for Women

Up until the start of the Second World War, a women’s personal routine was “her own business”, but marked with issues of “female frivolity” and selfishness. Like the “sudden” involvement of the US in the European and Pacific theaters, it seems that overnight a made up women was acceptable, if not preferred—but why? Obviously, this change was not overnight, but rather a complicated and well-planned ploy by advertisers to support both the war and themselves. A “‘red-blooded, red-lipped’” woman would be at the center of the American response to terror, a statement about her poise under fire and her respect for men. Beauty product advertisers used the same old ploys, but changed setting and costume, relating them to the war creating a “conscious message [that] emphasized women’s part in winning the war.” Even the federal War Production Board saw this shift in consumerism suspicious, accusing the makers and advertisers of beauty products of artificially inflating the market--however, that was not always the case. When voluntary rations were called for a beauty products, companies and their younger consumers applied pressure on the war broad to life the ration: “Many women stated their willingness to ‘give up wrinkle eradicators, nail polish and what not’” as a measure of wartime support, but not lipstick, which had become synonymous with the national identity.

Working women were stuck between many fronts: not just the home front versus the Axis, but between the prescribed “need” to beautify and the demands of their jobs. The suggestion created by advertisers was that women could still be womanly (read: beautiful, desirable) but could do as much as a man (but only as long as the men were gone, they would eventually and gladly return to their sphere

26 Peiss, Hope, 239.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid, 244
29 Ibid, 244-245
of influence). This creates a very complicated form of rhetoric and it is little wonder why many women fought with themselves, other women, and society at large about “a women’s place” following the war.

The beautiful working women was only an ideal, used to recruit women into their workforce and create models for behavior—the reality was much grimmer, as assault and harassment were extremely common, in addition to work related accidents.\textsuperscript{30} What was publicized, however, were beauty routines and other priming techniques vital to the working woman.

\begin{center}
\textbf{BEAUTY ON THE JOB}
\end{center}

- No matter how busy you may be, don’t overlook these simple rules which are so vital to health and your good looks.

\begin{center}
By MARY ROSE, our Beauty Expert
\end{center}

Always make the most of short rests in the day. If you have as a rest pause at work, sit down—don’t lean against a wall. Put your feet on something if you can, and relax completely.

Try to find a working position that supports you. Don’t sit on the edge of the seat, all well back and all straight, so that your body is not strained. If you stand, straighten your weight or change your posture. If you find your back or arm getting tired or aching, stop and stretch, then get up and continue work.

Take care of your feet

YOU as a factory worker are putting extra strain on your two feet, and you might be treating them with extra care. Wear sturdy shoes at all work. A strong lace-up pair with wide square heels will give you need support. Keep them in good repair. A worn-down heel puts unusual strain on your legs. Do little exercises to keep your feet strong. Exercise the muscles in your legs and arms when you get home. Take time to work on your feet, and push them a little backward, and forward, with your hands to keep them supple.

Don’t get so tired or over-tired, or you may get over-tired, or over-tired, or over-tired, or over-tired. Get up early enough to have breakfast in peace.

Drink a glass of water or lemon juice and wash your hands.

Watch your diet. Eat more green vegetables and fruit, and walk a little of the way to work. Keep your skin supple and nice; don’t depend on going to bed without cleansing your face and mouth; and at least three times a week take a warm bath with cold streams and massage it really well.

Be done after your hair. During hot weather shampoo it every six or seven days. After the washing brush it dry in the sun. Brush twice daily the night before sleeping and bed. This little habit will keep your hair neat and tidy. Keep your scalp protected, keeping your hair clean and healthy. It’s a good way to keep your scalp.

Remember that you have to wash your hair. As soon as your hair becomes oily, it will lose its luster and become dull and lifeless. Be sure to wash it well, and keep it clean and healthy.

YOU WHO WORK IN factories probably know better than most how closely women are used up with work, and that your health is often neglected because you are too busy. The best way to recognize your health is to pay attention to it. There are various signs of progress which are a guide and one of them is the consistent increase in weight, but it is sometimes possible to have great gains in weight without proper development.

\begin{center}
Baby’s development
\end{center}

By SISTER MARY JACOB

PARENTS should have a thorough understanding of the normal development of their children and understand their growth. This will show in the child’s health and development.

In the first six weeks, the baby’s reflexes are becoming more pronounced. They will exhibit themselves by crying and not sleeping. In the first six weeks, the baby’s head will be turned, but in the second and third months, it will be turned to the right and left. In the fourth and fifth months, the baby will exhibit itself by laughing and smiling.

CLEANSE your skin nightly, and for beauty’s sake, rub on some cold cream like Lotion Almilion, Unscented oil, lavender oil, and massage it gently into the skin.

\textsuperscript{30} Honey, \textit{Creating}, 42, 77.
Because of exposure to chemicals, potential burns, nail breaking, hair ripping-out tasks, these routines (read: warnings) became essential to working women and, in a roundabout way, protected them from the dangers of their new workplace. When examining perhaps the most iconic image from the Second World War, Rosie the Riveter, we see certain safely and moral reminders:

This Rosie is still definitely “feminine” --she is done up, has clean arms and hands and carefully manicured nails. She is svelte and not particularly muscular (which one would imagine a riveter would be). For safely, her long, but still styled hair is pulled back and her sleeved are rolled. Her shirt is fitted,
also for safety reasons. This image invites (or shames) other women into the workforce, reminding them that they can still be beautiful while “doing their bit.”

Worktime and wartime beautification was understood to be a young, single woman’s idea, so naturally it was met with backlash, both reasonable and unreasonable. As mentioned earlier, there were safely concerns with long hair, which women tied back. Women also traded in their dresses and heels for pants and flat shoes for safety reasons and to avoid workplace harassment. However, companies dictated that women applied some kind of makeup to support morale. Yet men that remained in factories found this abhorrent, but also found their beautification on the clock equally abhorrent--for these women there

31 Compare this Rosie to Normal Rockwell’s 1943 Rosie to see the different between and ideal and reality.
32 The idea was a single woman; married women would only be called to the workforce as a last resort (which is unrealistic, considering the financial situation these women and their families were placed in; many married women had to work outside of their homes). Very few advertisements feature women of color or women who had to work before the war. For more information on these women’s experiences, consult Honey, Creating, chapters 3 and 4 and pages 20, 54-55, 83.
33 For an interesting note on Women’s Wartime Baseball teams, see Peiss, Hope, 240-242.
was no winning. However, these women still made themselves up--whether because the company or an advertisement told them to, because it was their patriotic duty, because they were expressing themselves like people who live in a free country can--and clocked in, day in and day out.

The experience of service women was much the same, but on a much grander scale--which is odd, considering service women made up a small percent of the total population of women. Perhaps this discrepancy comes from the nobility of military service and novelty of the servicewoman--it was the ideal of ideals, just as the male soldier is the ideal of ideals. Because of her proximity to the men, she is stunning, never without her beautiful red lips and cheeks. She is clean and well groomed, therefore healthy and well composed. Her beauty underlines her understanding of her role: she is not subversive in anyway; she’s not looking to crave a new niche for women; she is simply doing her part in a womanly capacity.
A particularly aggressive camping for the beauty of female solders was Tangee, who largely sold lipstick in bullet tubes. Tangee underlined the notion of remaining feminine while doing a “man’s job”, but from very interesting angles. The first angle is that cosmetics provided women with a feeling of comfort in a time that was very uncomfortable. The second angle follows that age old our-women-are-prettier-than-yours rhetoric: women who could still wear makeup were free to do so because they came from a superior nation.

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34 This discussion on Tangee was informed by Peiss, *Hope*, 240 and their advertisements.
War, Women and Lipstick

by CONSTANCE LUFT HUHN
Head of the House of Tangee

For the first time in history woman-power is a factor in war. Millions of you are fighting and working side by side with your men.

In fact, you are doing double duty—for you are still carrying on your traditional “woman’s” work of cooking, and cleaning, and home-making. Yet, somehow, American women are still the loveliest and most spirited in the world. The best dressed, the best informed, the best looking.

It’s a reflection of the free democratic way of life that you have succeeded in keeping your femininity—even though you are doing man’s work!

If a symbol were needed of this fine, independent spirit and this courage and strength—I would choose a lipstick. It is one of those mysterious little essentials that have an importance far beyond their size or cost.

A woman’s lipstick is an instrument of personal morale that helps her to conceal heartbreak or sorrow; gives her self-confidence when it’s badly needed; brightens her loneliness when she wants to look her loveliest.

No lipstick—ours or anyone else’s—will win the war. But it symbolizes one of the reasons why we are fighting…the precious right of women to be feminine and lovely—under any circumstances.
After Tangee launched their campaign, other companies began to pick on the trend, using loaded words in conjunction with their products to convey patriotism to service women. Red had always been a popular color, but coupling the red of red-white-and-blue with Uniform Red, Auxiliary Red or Servicewomen Red drove home the message that beauty and duty were connected.  

Today these images seem overdone—we can see the falseness, the aggressive advertisement in these images. No doubt women in the 1940’s did, too but the conflation between their identity as free-thinking and acting Americans was tied up in their identity as feminine women. There is no doubt that these women understood this as a power play, but decided (or “decided”) to concede their own power for some greater good.

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35 It is interesting to note that Victory Red was commissioned by the Marine Corps to coordinate with the green of their uniforms and to help create a more uniform look for service women. This holds true today, as military approved makeup styles are not to clash with the uniforms.
Conclusion: A question of choice

Beautification is a tough question for feminists and feminist history because of its long history as something frivolous or male dictated, but considering the beauty habits of women during the Second World War challenges that—women choose to make themselves up. Modern feminist thought, which relies heavily on the idea of freedom of choice, struggles with this idea just like other waves of feminism did before: is it actually a choice? One must then question this choice—is it something that she decided for herself and for herself only, like women who blew their disposable income on the only non-rationed goods: make up? Was she expressing her freedom? Did she do it for a lover? For her country? For her employer? Can we judge them? Where did they draw the line in fulfilling their duty and where did they break though that line and propose new ideas for themselves? When one takes in to consideration the role of advertisements and propaganda as a sort of morality police, this question becomes more difficult to grapple with. As this thesis has shown, women have been and are as patriotic as men, and just as men “must” (due to issues with toxic masculinity) express their patriotism through soldiering, so “must” women express their patriotism through beauty.

All of the images present an unachievable state of womanhood—many women had to work, did not want to leave their jobs when the man came back, felt conflicting feelings toward the regulated cosmetics companies made them wear—and those are just the women who saw an image of themselves in their advertisements. How could a woman with C4 kinky hair hope to ever wear victory rolls? How could Japanese women, who already had a strike against them, express their patriotism through their beauty when women that were too beautiful were considered spies? What use were Ivory suds if you couldn’t feed your family? As with all things in US history, the years after the war answered these questions with swift backlash. Feminists, a sisterhood that had been dysfunctional since Seneca Falls,
were further divided between two (and more!) different camps: Freidan and Schlafly. Women of color began to express their ethnicity through their dress and beauty choices--Pacheco movements, *Cholas* and *Chongas*, natural hair movements, Yellow Power, Harajuku and so on. Toxic masculinity, the other side of the coin, has also been discussed, but, unfortunately, to a lesser extent.

Victorian notions of female beautification are with us now more and ever--the “no-make-up” make-up looks, articles discussion which makeup looks men “hate”, the “take her swimming on the first date mentality” --all part of our modern consciousness. Total war is something that Americans will probably never experience again but the impact of total war is also with us. When people think of women in the factories they still conjure up ideals like Rosie or other made-up workers who were champing at the bit to return to their kitchens, gladly giving up their jobs for men returning home. Her effort is excluded from historical record and she’s represented in the media--the effort of under- or misrepresented women is completely ignored.
Bibliography


Further Reading


Image Credits

Page 1: Miss Atomic Blast


Page 7: Navy Girl

Chandler-Christy, Howard. *Gee! I wish I were a man*. 1917. Color Lithograph. 105 cm X 68 cm. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.

Page 10: Japanese Threat


Page 13:

Top: She’s a WOW


Bottom: The WAC


Page 14:

Top: Jane (an English pornographic comic)


Bottom: “Keep Mum” Espionage Propaganda

Unknown. *Keep mum-- She’s not so dumb*. 1942. Charcoal, gauche, ink and pastel on board. The National Archives, Kew.

Page 15: Loaded Woman


Page 17: Beauty on the Job


Page 18: Rosie the Riveter

**Page 19:**

Left: Woman Magazine

*Woman Magazine*. October, 1943. United Kingdom.

Right: Doing your Bit and a Little Bit More?


**Page 20:** Keep Your Beauty on Duty


**Page 21:** Uniform Lipstick

Tangee. Circa 1941-1945. “Uniform Lipstick for individual loveliness”.

**Page 22:** War, Women and Lipstick


**Page 23:**

Left: Victory Red

Elizabeth Arden. Circa 1941. “Victory Red”.

Right: Auxiliary Red
