

Negro Women

War

Workers.

# NEGRO WOMEN WAR WORKERS

Bulletin  
No. 205



WOMEN'S BUREAU

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,  
WOMEN'S BUREAU,  
*Washington, April 6, 1945.*

MADAM: I have the honor to transmit to you a report that brings together what seem to be the most significant of the very limited data on Negro women workers in the war period. There is a constant demand for material on this important subject.

The study is the work of Kathryn Blood, of the division of public information.

Respectfully submitted,

FRIEDA S. MILLER, *Director.*

HON. FRANCES PERKINS,  
*Secretary of Labor.*

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## FOREWORD

"Negro Women War Workers" attempts to assemble material currently available to show what contributions Negro women are bringing to the war work of the United States.

While no recent Women's Bureau survey has been made specifically to study Negro women's employment, general occupational surveys made by the Bureau in the last two and a half years show some of the new jobs that have opened for the Negro woman worker which may be considered typical. Such examples, together with a number from other sources, are presented in this bulletin as a series of vignettes of Negro women's work in munitions plants; in steel mills, foundries, shipyards, aircraft plants; on the railroads and in the canneries, in laundries and restaurants, as well as in many other jobs.

What this report tells is a story of ways in which Negro women have helped to bridge the manpower gap. Working together with men and women of every other national origin, their contribution is one which this Nation would be unwise to forget or to evaluate falsely. They are an integral part of America's prospect. Not only have they helped to produce the weapons of war, but their labor has been a large factor in preventing a major break-down of essential consumer services.

No Nation-wide statistics later than those of the 1940 decennial census are available for either the number or the occupations of Negro women workers. However, valuable data on Negro (nonwhite) employment were secured by the Census Bureau's Monthly Report on the Labor Force for April 1944, and these statistics are analyzed and compared with 1940 census data in the following pages.

Census statistics for 1940 give the basic picture of Negro women's occupational pattern before the war. This information, with the census data from earlier decades, shows clearly that even before the war the Negro woman worker had an important place in the American economy, and in some occupations formed a very large part of all workers. The figures will be of value to persons who must deal with postwar employment policies.

Larger proportions of Negro than of white women, both in 1940 and in 1944, were in paid employment. Nearly 1 in 3 Negro women were employed in 1940, in contrast to 1 in 5 white women. By 1944 the proportion of employed Negro women increased to 2 in 5, while the employed white women increased to almost 1 in 3.

*"I have a job to do in this great scheme of production."*

These are the proud words of a Negro woman—a welder in a shipyard.

*A job? What does a job mean?*

It means *security*—individual—national—world. *Security*—the best weapon against poverty and disease—against defeat at home and on the battlefield.

Negro women need—

*Jobs*—with no bars erected because of color, creed, or sex—jobs not only today but in the postwar world.



**Welder in a shipyard.**

*Courtesy U. S. Navy*