



Who were the Black Rosies?

The year was 1941 and the United States was faced with a major shortage of workers as able-bodied men were called up to serve in WWII after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The nation turned to its women and by the end of the war nearly 3 million were employed working in defense plants. In 1943 Norman Rockwell was commissioned to create a portrait honoring these women and the icon of Rosie the Riveter was born. We have all seen this image many times in history books, but did you know that there were over 600,000 black women employed in these plants as well? They signed up to build airplanes, tanks and ships to fuel the war effort even though they were denied union membership or the free childcare that had been offered to white women. Many of the Black Rosies weren't employed until 1944 when a committee led by Mary McLeod Bethune, A. Philip Randolph, and Eleanor Roosevelt lobbied the President to sign Executive Order #8802 which required plants who received government funds to employ both women and people of color. Before the war many black women had been employed on farms or in domestic work and this experience opened the door for different opportunities, forever changing the face of the American workforce.

