

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY

JUSTICE FLORENCE KERINS MURRAY: A STUDY OF TECHNOLOGY  
AND THE CONTEMPORARY WOMAN

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BY

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The dissertation of Marian Mathison Desrosiers entitled "Justice Florence Kerins Murray: A Case Study of Technology and the Contemporary Woman" submitted to the Ph.D. Department in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Salve Regina University has been read and approved by the Committee:

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines whether technological needs in World War II promoted opportunities for college-educated women to expand their leadership roles in United States society. In 1942, Congress established a Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), attracting educated women to serve as officers. Women organized and administrated war related programs that were once the domain of men. Technology-related leadership roles helped educated women to choose positions that would shape public policy and professional development in the decades after the war.

The dissertation focuses on how technology-related military experiences of Justice Florence Kerins Murray (1916-2004) influenced her post-war self-actualization. When Lt. Col. Murray returned to private life in 1946, she sought local and statewide political office, becoming the second woman state senator in Rhode Island history. In 1956, she became New England's first female trial judge. An exemplar of women in her generation, Murray benefited armed forces experiences, attaining positions of community, political, and judicial leadership.

Educated women army officers attained skills and attitudes that led them into post-war careers. To aid this project, Justice Murray has provided authentic insights in the form of personal recollections and unpublished sources that clarify our understanding of women's leadership roles after World War II, particularly by pioneers, like Murray, who facilitated a series of remarkable changes for women. Thus, this study contributes to an understanding of what it means to be human in an age of modern technology.

PREVIEW

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To my husband, Dr. Arthur Edmond Desrosiers, who supported this endeavor  
To my mother, Genevieve McGlinchey Mathison, and my father  
William Wallace Mathison, who instilled in me the desire for academic excellence

PREVIEW

**Justice Florence Kerins Murray**

**Patriot, Public Servant, Distinguished Jurist**

**And Champion of the Rights and Progress of Women**

**Dedication Plaque on the Portrait of Justice Florence Kerins Murray  
Murray Judicial Complex Newport, Rhode Island**

PREVIEW

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The dissertation is possible due to the graciousness of Justice Florence Kerins Murray, who allowed me into her life, beginning in 1999 with my first set of interviews. It was through the auspices of my mother, Genevieve Mathison, that Florence agreed to share with me a multi-dimensional life story. As we grew in our friendship, Florence shared with me the excitement of her experiences, providing an ongoing commentary of the events and people on the stage of American history. Many were the times that we stopped recording her history and took the time to walk arm in arm from her home on Kay Street along Bellevue Avenue. Whether it was lunch at the Newport Creamery or a stop at Redwood Library, I cherish those special moments with this great lady.

I am indebted to Governor William Weld who appointed me to serve on the board of the Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities from 1990-1996. There I met distinguished scholars. Leo Marx sat next to me on the board and introduced me to his work on technology and the humanities. Sally Deutsch, whose work focused on minority women of the Southwest United States, broadened my understanding of women's political and cultural history. Executive Director, David Tebaldi, and staff scholar, Ellen Rothman, did much to encourage my decision to seek the doctoral degree.

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Kahn-Leavitt, and Susan Rhodes. I was particularly struck by the works we read relating to World War II, and a video “Women in the Wings,” on the singular role of women in Pittsburgh who built glider planes. That summer stirred within me the desire to publish a work of importance.

Another summer institute in 2000, sponsored by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of New York, again provided research opportunities, using the collections of the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library of Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. One of my topics involved women in war, while another focused on civil rights using the Pauli Murray Papers. I am thankful to have met Drew Gilpin Faust, under whose direction we gained a broader understanding of the new scholarship in women’s history and war. Special thanks are due also to research librarians, Ellen Shea, Joanne Donovan, and Giordana Mecagni, who helped locate sources on women in World War II, as well as U.S. culture, politics, and courts. Undoubtedly, this library has one of the finest collections of archival sources on women in our nation.

Closer to home, I benefited from the extensive collections of the Helin library system in Rhode Island that gave me access to the important texts related to my topic found at Roger Williams University, Bryant College, University of Rhode Island, and Rhode Island College. In addition, I would like to thank librarians Gerald Foley, Kathleen Boyd, and Laura Kohl at Salve Regina University Library, Newport, Rhode Island who initially helped me to search for dissertations and journals. Through their assistance I accessed ProQuest, Westlaw and Lexis-Nexis for court cases. Secondly, I would like to state my appreciation of the many librarians at the Newport Public Library and Nomi Krasilovsky at the Providence Public Library. Appreciation is owed to

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Woman has shown equal devotion with man in the cause of freedom and has stood firmly by his side in its defense.  
Susan B. Anthony

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This study examines whether the technological needs of World War II promoted opportunities for college-educated women to expand their leadership roles in United States society. A study of the experiences of Justice Florence Kerins Murray indicates that technological changes did help. In 1942, America's military, Congress, and President Franklin Roosevelt cooperated to pass legislation providing for a Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), establishing procedures to attract educated women to serve as officers. The unprecedented opportunities allowed such women to perform a variety of jobs that were once the domain of men. Using technical and leadership skills, these women organized, directed, and administrated numerous war-related programs.

This research will identify: (1) how the collective experiences and specialized training as WAAC officers motivated individual women; and (2) whether technology-related leadership roles helped college-educated women to choose what were considered male-dominated careers in the post-war era.

#### **Technology Aspects**

Technology involves the "systematic application of scientific or other organized knowledge to practical tasks" (Galbraith 1984, 12). While technology includes inventions and products, it also involves several aspects according to Galbraith, including specialized manpower, organization, and detailed planning (13-17). Technology's allied

systems and organizations mean that each innovation has implications for human relationships that require “managerial and social support systems” (Brooks 1980, 65). Practically speaking, humans organize and manage institutions using the new processes and pioneering informational technologies. While technology includes the technical aspect of invention, in the broader perspective, knowledge is embedded in the activities of people, institutions and their value systems (Pacey 1991, viii). Therefore, our understanding of the technological developments of World War II involves people and procedures, as well as weapons and equipment.

The Second World War occupied the United States for four years on two fronts, mobilizing over 12 million men for battle on land, in the air, and at sea. Almost an equal number of women were needed to produce war equipment, assist with communications, and administer the needs of overseas and stateside personnel. In the number of participants involved, this war was unlike any other that this nation had fought. With the technical demands of combat, women’s lives changed. The U.S. called on women to help assemble diversified equipment including amphibious landing craft, cruisers, battleships, and supply ships. To create a superiority of air power women worked to build bombers, glider planes, and munitions. Logistical support required women to construct and maintain trucks, airfields, and radar equipment, as well as fly transport planes. Once the military planned the enormous land, sea, and air campaigns for North Africa, the Pacific, and Europe, vast numbers of armored vehicles, anti-aircraft weapons, and munitions were needed to support the troops. Women in manufacturing industries also helped meet the demands of food, tobacco, and clothing for the men. In short, women offered our country the complementary components necessary for twentieth century warfare.

Through all this activity, World War II changed women economically, professionally, and socially (Chafe 1972, 136). Before the war “in 1940, the percentage of females at work was almost exactly what it had been in 1910.” During the Depression years (1929-1939) the federal government, unions, and the mass media had discouraged employment of women, who were seen as a threat to the jobs of male breadwinners. World War II employment opportunities increased “the female work force by over 50 per cent” (135). After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, U.S. industries hired thousands of women at ten major defense plants, producing airplanes, parachutes and artillery (140). Women were welding hatches, riveting gun emplacements, and binding keels. They were assembling navigation systems and building fuselages for aircraft (138-139). Both African-American and white women gained occupational mobility, moving from low paying jobs, such as domestics or laundresses, to war plants that provided higher pay (142-144). “By the end of the war 18 million women were in the work force” (Campbell 1984, 193). It was just as likely that women “over forty would be employed as a single woman under twenty-five” (Chafe, 144). The technical production demands of modern war created opportunities for women, breaking down traditional obstacles of class, race, education, age, and marital status.

### **Humanities Focus**

In modern warfare, civilian and military support far from the front line troops facilitates strategic policies and tactical maneuvers. The long-range bomber, for instance, is only as good as the human ground support that assists the pilot in the aerial demands of the mission. Similarly, the capability of a tank commander is viable to the extent that a



team manages the resources to make its maneuvers possible. Even medical care at the front-line hospital is only successful to the degree that communications and supplies connect with personnel. Newly trained women soldiers filled important roles in coordinating “manpower and industrial capacity” through their clerical support. They dealt with equipment specifications, repair manuals, planning documents, payroll slips, medical records, budget summaries, and personnel files (Campbell, 19). In World War II, human resource management became crucial, ensuring that combat troops had technical support to engage the enemy.

For some historians of women’s history, World War II, which involved United States armed forces from 8 December 1941 until 15 August 1945, was “a watershed event” (Chafe, 136). The technological demands of war transformed the position of women in U.S. society by offering them opportunities for leadership in roles previously reserved for men. As more women handled important technical services, exercised professional judgment, and demonstrated competence in making decisions during wartime, women generally developed an awareness that their role in American society was changing. As a result they helped alter the male perception of what a woman could or should do to sustain society. Humanities research in historical, social, and economic aspects help us understand the effects of technology on the values and worth of people.

### **Topic’s Originality**

My study examines whether the technological needs of war that propelled women into military leadership had lasting effects on post-war careers of the officers. The research will focus on the history of a particular woman officer who used her background

and training for the war effort. Justice Florence Kerins Murray (1916-2004), who served as an officer in the army during World War II, credited leadership positions that she held in the Women's Corps with being critical to her post-war career in state politics and judicial responsibility. While in the Army she served with commendation as Adjutant under General Don C. Faith at the Second WAAC Training Center at Daytona Beach, Florida; as Liaison to Congress in Colonel Hobby's office in the Pentagon; as Field Inspector in the Inspector General's office; and as Third Service Commander directing the training of women in five states. Murray affirmed that she was not alone and many women from the 1942 Officer Candidate School (OCS) had similar experiences of leadership that influenced their post-war decisions for careers.

### **Historical Perspective on Women and War**

My initial reading focused on women's service in previous wars. Although their numbers were small in the Revolutionary War, women distinguished themselves by manning the cannon and as spies or messengers for General Washington (Treadwell 1971 [1954], 3). In the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), over ten thousand white middle class women, including hundreds of Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of Charity, served as nurses on both sides (Schultz 1995, 52). Working women, as well as contraband and free blacks, served as cooks and laundresses in hospitals (40). Others were paid by the governments of the Union and Confederacy to work in the War Department, Post Office, Quartermaster Department, and the Treasury Department (Faust 1997, 88-89). However, according to army histories, these women were civilians paid by the government to work with the army, not actually military personnel.

Shortly after the Spanish-American War, Congress established in 1901, an Army Nurse Corps, stating that women could wear the army uniform, but they were not allowed “rank, officer status, equal pay, or Army benefits, such as retirement and veteran’s rights” (Treadwell, 6). Equal status for women was at that time not acceptable to the majority of the American public. Treadwell noted that men and women saw women’s participation in military activities as a threat to the “concept of the feminine role” (5). Views inherited from earlier centuries regarding “the ideology of virtue and social expectations” suggested that jobs appropriate for women should “emphasize their relationships to family” (Kessler-Harris 1986, 13). This traditional view of woman’s role in society soon yielded to developments emanating from industrial organization. In fact, women who served this nation in the first two wars of the twentieth century differed from their non-military peers. Their education tended to be higher and their employment before, during, and after the wars was generally more diverse. Related to these factors were cultural, economic, and legal issues.

In the First World War women took over for army men as typists, clerks, telephone operators, nurses, canteen workers, and cooks, roles often considered as women’s work (Zeiger 1999, 140). Many of these jobs, which were essential to the modern military, involved new technologies in communication, finance, personnel, health care, and social services (33). For example, twenty thousand women served mostly overseas as nurses (20). Twenty thousand others served as Red Cross volunteers (2); tens of thousands served in army offices and hospitals stateside (170). Some of these roles were seen as breakthrough jobs, where women were entering masculine arenas that

involved “speed, strength and power” (Zeiger, 162). The women who served in World War I generally saw mobility and independence as desirable to their lives.

When the war ended, despite their contribution acknowledged by the United States government, these women were compelled by law to return to civilian life without commissions and without rank (146-147). When they demanded benefits and a continued role in the military, the doors were closed (169). Even on returning to the civilian labor force, these women were paid one half on average of the male wage (3). As a result, many of these women, changed by their war experiences, entered civic life pushing for women’s rights.

In the decades between the two world wars, women worked at jobs created by new technologies as well as in jobs related to traditional roles. Laws limited a woman’s entrance into a certain fields such as political office and the courts. Women’s employment was also delimited by custom and the economic situation of the Depression. Although there were more choices in types of work, women still had lower salaries than men doing similar labor. Even graduate school training did not guarantee an improved career option. Slowly, women, who made choices for work and living arrangements that reflected their goals for independence, achieved higher paying positions. While a few thousand women were entering the law and medical fields in 1940, only a few sought political office (Nottingham 1947, 671). The gender constructs restricted what were appropriate “women’s jobs,” and World War I service failed to enhance their economic or professional status (Zeiger, 139).

In the 1930s, at the agitation of women in the Democratic Party, President Franklin D. Roosevelt awarded two-dozen positions to distinguished women as federal

government officials. Some of the most prominent included Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor; Ellen Sullivan Woodward, head of Women's and Profession Projects for the Works Progress Administration; Florence Jaffray Harriman as minister to Norway; and Florence Allen as Justice of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati. Many of these women, who had been active in consumer and labor interests for decades, used networking skills to influence public policy on issues of health, education, and family welfare (Ware 1982, 90-97). However, none of these women had control over major policies of the government towards women's economic occupations.

As acts of aggression occurred in Europe and Asia, U.S. military and political leaders became concerned about the possibilities of America being drawn into war. The staff of Army General George C. Marshall studied possible ways to include women in military service. He supported Edith Nourse Rogers, Congresswoman from Massachusetts, when she introduced H.R. 4906 on 28 May 1941 in the 77<sup>th</sup> Congress. The bill called for the creation of a women's army corps and the establishment of "a school for training candidates for officers of the corps ... the first 750 officers to receive annual pay of \$2000." The Secretary of the Army would determine qualifications before entry into such schools with additional volunteers not to exceed 25,000 women ages 21 to 45. This bill authorized \$25 million to carry out this military service (Rogers Papers "H.R. 4906" 1941).

Educational and technical qualifications for officers would be set "exceptionally high" to create an "elite corps" with the "highest reputation for both character and professional excellence" (G-1 Memo of March 1941 cited in Treadwell, 19). In October 1941, leaders of the 21 largest women's organizations in the country came out in support

of the Corps (Treadwell, 21). After war was declared against Japan in December 1941, President Roosevelt vigorously supported the concept of the corps. Although it took nearly a year, Congresswoman Rogers, General Marshall, and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt were key figures, convincing skeptics in Congress to accept women in this new role. In the meantime, Marshall worked with his potential female director, Oveta Culp Hobby, on recruiting plans, training facilities, uniform specifications, and military regulations (24-44). According to Meyer, the first Director, Oveta Culp Hobby (1905-1995), a lawyer, former Texas legislator, and newspaper publisher, was the model of propriety and achievement, representing the type of woman the army wished to recruit.

The *Congressional Record* reveals a level of rancorous opposition to women in the military from representatives of conservative and Southern states. However, on 14 May 1942, Congress approved Public Law 554 with a narrow margin in favor and 98 abstentions (Meyer 1994, 80-88). A specific type of woman was to be recruited as an officer in the WAAC, one who was “older, better educated, and of certified good character” (Stremlow 1996, 361). “Under the law, the officers were exclusively assigned as administrators, or training officers at the WAAC training centers and schools, as WAAC recruiters, or as officers leading WAAC units” (Morden 1998, 43). On the shoulders of these women would be placed the responsibility of leadership.

According to some authors, the 350,000 women soldiers serving in World War II “received more training, more responsibility and more freedom in the armed forces, than they would ever have received at home or in private industry” (Stremlow, 360). Records show that women trained for 155 different positions in the army, as diverse as flying instruction and machine gun repair (Treadwell, 192). By 1945, the number of women

employed in civilian and military war related work represented 60 per cent of all working women (May 1988, 59). As a result of the war, “almost seven million women joined the labor force for the first time, three out of four of them married.” World War II was “a catalyst” that helped to overcome traditional views about hiring married women (Chafe, 246-247). According to Chafe, government policy makers, radio stations, and periodicals used the wartime needs to promote the hiring of women (146). Working experiences challenged the idea of separate spheres.

Despite the fact that large numbers of women were in the labor force, many still experienced economic discrimination. Women often worked in positions without opportunities for advancement, with few childcare options, and without equal pay for equal work. Nevertheless, the workingwomen of the war years, who combined career goals with family responsibilities, provided role models for their children and liberalized society’s attitudes. Not only did women’s lives change, but also family structure and child rearing (Chafe, 251-254). This trend increased as the female labor force continued to grow throughout the 1950s (195).

Nevertheless, after the war there was a movement to resist economic and legal equality for women (Stewart 2000, 8). Contemporary magazines, such as *McCall’s*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *Atlantic Monthly* ran articles calling for women to return to their greatest honor as wives and mothers (Chafe, 206). Male veterans, who numbered over 12 million and were concerned about jobs, hoped to have the jobs women had been filling. Many women who were forced to resign from work in civilian war factories, then found outlets of personal satisfaction through civic participation in religious, educational, civil rights, and health or welfare organizations (Ginzberg, 53-67). Women veterans

forced to leave the service met with other difficulties. Unlike male veterans, women could not easily receive treatment at the VA hospitals or obtain home mortgages. They were prohibited from marching publicly in uniform, they were refused admission into the Veterans of Foreign Wars organization, and they were denied burial in national cemeteries (Stremlow, 364-365). On the other hand, women veterans took advantage of the “GI Bill” (which offered free education to veterans) to earn college degrees and often returned to the work force. In short, World War II changed the social and economic status of women; many women veterans entered careers they would not have considered possible before their military service.

### **Methodology**

This dissertation focuses on the experiences of educated WAAC officers during the period 1945-1967. This 22-year time frame after the war allowed the women officers, whose average age during the war years was 28 (Treadwell, 767), to have made the choice to raise a family or remain single and to consider career options. Data from the late 1960s or the 1970s, which would take into account a different set of historical events, are thus not included here. By that time, three federal laws would have a rippling effect on equality for women: the 1963 Equal Pay Act mandating “equal pay for women and men doing the same job”; Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which “barred discrimination in hiring, firing, promotions and working conditions” (Stremlow, 358); and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which became instrumental for women’s advancement into public office and judicial careers (Banner 1995, 238).

More specifically, the focus of this research is a study related to the army and post-war experiences of Florence Kerins Murray (1916-2004) of Rhode Island. A