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Their Day In The Sun: Women Of The Manhattan Project (Labor And Social Change)

Ruth H. Howes, Caroline C. Herzenberg

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The public perception of the making of the atomic bomb is yet an image of the dramatic efforts of a few brilliant male scientists. However, the Manhattan Project was not just the work of a few and it was not just in Los Alamos. It was, in fact, a sprawling research and industrial enterprise that spanned the country from Hanford in Washington State to Oak Ridge in Tennessee, and the Met labs in Illinois. The Manhattan Project also included women in every capacity. During World War II the manpower shortages opened the laboratory doors to women and they embraced the opportunity to demonstrate that they, too, could do "creative science." Although women participated in all aspects of the Manhattan Project, their contributions are either omitted or only mentioned briefly in most histories of the project. It is this hidden story that is presented in Their Day in the Sun through interviews, written records, and photographs of the women who were physicists, chemists, mathematicians, biologists, and technicians in the labs. Authors Ruth H. Howes and Caroline L. Herzenberg have uncovered accounts of the scientific problems the women helped solve as well as the opportunities and discrimination they faced. Their Day in the Sun describes their abrupt recruitment for the war effort and includes anecdotes about everyday life in these clandestine improvised communities. A chapter about what happened to the women after the war and about their attitudes now, so many years later, toward the work they did on the bomb is included. Author note: Ruth H. Howes is George and Frances Ball Distinguished Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Ball State University. She is Vice President of the American Association of Physics Teachers and President Elect of the Indiana Academy of Science. She is also co-editor of The Energy Sourcebook and Women and the Use of Military Force. Caroline L. Herzenberg, a physicist at Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois, is past president of the Association for Women in Science. She is author of Women Scientists from Antiquity to the Present.

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