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Section 3: Reflection

This investigation has allowed me to gain an insight into some of the methods used by historians, as well as to the challenges that historians face when carrying out historical investigations. I feel I have developed a skill that is fundamental in the study of history, that of carefully analyzing sources, often presenting different points of view on a same subject, to reach a justified conclusion. In order to carry out the investigation, I read books by renowned historians on the subject, analyzed statistical evidence, read government documents and public addresses concerning the subject of this study, all of which are methods often used by historians.

When comparing evidence provided by different types of sources regarding my research question I also became more aware of the challenges facing historians. As I began reading about this subject, I was initially surprised that the main theses of the sources that I was using differed significantly from each other. On the one hand, some, such as Blackwelder in her book *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* and Anderson in the address "The Postwar Role of American Women", argued that the incorporation of women in the workforce brought about a dramatic change that would have far-reaching consequences in the post-war era. Others, for example Claudia D. Goldin in her article *The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women's Employment* stated that the effects of the war had been modest, and the incorporation of women in the workforce was reversed shortly after its conclusion.

Although I initially found it difficult to reach a conclusion, as I continued the investigation I began to understand the work of the historian better. In history, unlike mathematics or science, there is no "absolute truth". However, this does not

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mean that all versions of an event are equally acceptable. It is the task of the historian to find the most 'acceptable version', which often involves assessing the values and limitations of the sources at hand to find a version that is more closely aligned with the truth. I personally found this a challenge during my investigation. However, by considering the limitations of the sources I was employing I was able to reach a conclusion. For example, I regarded the evidence presented by the extensive article by Claudia D. Golding more valuable than that of Julia K. Blackwelder's book because the former focused specifically on women's employment in the World-War II and post-war period, while the latter evaluated nearly a century of developments in the workforce. This meant I that I tended to side with Goldin's view as I found that her 'version' of events was probably more accurate and well-researched than Blackwelder's, who only devoted a few chapters to the World War II period in her book. I also employed a similar method to assess the reliability of primary sources, in particular, Mary Anderson's address. Anderson defended that the war had far reaching consequences for women in the workforce. Although providing an interesting insight, I deemed this primary source as only partially valuable for my investigation, due to the fact that it was a piece of persuasive writing, and it was delivered in 1944, before the effects of the war could be fully assessed.

All in all, this investigation has provided me with a valuable insight into the tasks and challenges facing the historian, and has allowed me to understand the importance of assessing the reliability of historical sources when forming an opinion.