

Podcast: The Pig War and Pelican Girls Companion Podcast
Episode: 02
Title: Red Defiance (Red Lipstick)
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Breaks: No breaks

[Hazel Bishop commercial clip]

As commercials and educational films of the 1940s will tell you, makeup was important to enhance a woman's appearance, boost confidence, and highlight desired features.

[Theme up and under]

[Lipstick tips clip]

But as the United States entered World War II, lipstick, particularly shades of dark red, was not only used to make a woman more attractive, but it was also used as a form of protest.

Welcome to "The Pig War and the Pelican Girls: Forgotten Stories from American History." I'm Joe Cuhaj.

[Theme fade]

This series is a companion podcast to my latest book published by Prometheus Book titled, "The Pig War and the Pelican Girls," which recalls long forgotten tales of American history and today, of how women "fought fascism with style" during World War II.

[Lipstick tips clip #2]

For centuries, red lipstick has played a role in world history. It's believed that its use dates back to 3500 BC when Mesopotamian women including Queen Puabi would crush white lead and red rocks together and stain their lips with it. The ancient Egyptians, including Cleopatra, followed suit using crushed bugs and resin to create a red waxy substance that they painted their lips with.

And it wasn't only the women who used the red lip concoction. Men did as well as a sign of power and status.

By the 16th century and the reign of Queen Elizabeth the 1st in England, a mix of egg whites, gum Arabic, fig milk, and other ingredients started a trend where her subjects believed that painting their lips with the red mixture repelled malevolent spirits.

With the founding of the United States, our founding fathers and preachers across the land considered red lipstick or paint blasphemy, making American women look Oriental.

It wasn't until the early 20th century and the Suffrage Movement that red lipstick became a symbol of protest. Famed makeup manufacturer, Elizabeth Arden, was a staunch supporter of the movement to gain women the right to vote. She inspired women in the movement to wear red lipstick as a badge of courage and began distributing the product to activists in 1912.

The most famous use of red lipstick as a means of protest came during World War II. As Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini rose to power in Europe, they declared that women should not wear makeup and dress in plain clothing. They also made it known that they detested red lipstick.

[Military Film clip under to post]

As America entered the war, Elizabeth Arden and her competitor, Helena Rubenstein, were recruited by the U.S. Army and Marines to create a line of makeup for the Marine Corps Women's Reserve and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. What they came up with was a bright red lipstick that would compliment the women's uniforms. But it also had a secondary, subliminal message – it was a slap in the face of the Axis leaders. Arden and Rubenstein said the lipstick was designed “fight fascism in style.”

The women of America loved the symbolism and took up the call and shades of red lipstick like “Victory Red”, “Regimental Red,” and “Tussy's Fighting Red,” became all the rage.

World War II propaganda posters sprang up almost overnight across the country featuring women wearing red lipstick, even Rosie the Riveter. The lipstick was a moral booster for women not only in America, but in allied countries as well, so much so that the government declined to ration the ingredients to make the cosmetic, saying that women needed to “maintain their femininity while working in factories and on the front lines of the war effort.”

[Theme up and under]

Even today, red lipstick still symbolizes power, strength, and solidarity. In 2018, the Soy Rico Rojo campaign began in Nicaragua where both women and men wore red lipstick to protest the nation’s dictator, Daniel Ortega, and in 2019, thousands of women in Chili picked up their tubes of red lipstick to denounce sexual violence proving once and for all that bold red lips never go out of style.

I’m Joe Cuhaj and thank you for joining me for “The Pig War and the Pelican Girls,” a companion podcast to my latest Prometheus book of the same name that recalls long forgotten tales of American history, available at your favorite local and online book store.

You can view the 1940s educational films used in this episode by visiting our website, joe-cuhaj.com/podcast (Cuhaj is spelled “C-U-H-A-J”) and click on the PIG WAR link.

Our theme song is called “Creative Minds” by Benjamin Tissot and is courtesy of BenSounds.Com.

If you liked this obscure tale of American history, then please, share it with a friend. I hope you’ll join me again next time for another forgotten tale from American history.

[Theme out]