

## INTERVIEW WITH AN AMERICAN INDIAN DEFENSE WORKER.

Faith Feather Traversie, a twenty-five-year-old Yankton Lakota Indian, moved with her husband from South Dakota to Vallejo, California. She left her two older daughters with her mother, and took the youngest child with her to California. Her husband joined the Navy, and Traversie remained in California because of the work opportunities. In this interview excerpt, Traversie relates the circumstances of her employment.

Finding no “American Indian” race on the job application form at Mare Island Navy Yard, Traversie checked “other,” and returned the form to the secretary. “Lady,” the secretary asked, “if you’re not one of these nationalities, what in the world are you?” “American Indian,” Traversie responded, and the secretary appeared agitated and excused herself.

“So I stood there and waited while she went to this office. Pretty soon she went to another office – several, two or three followed her into it. Then, finally she came back to me and said, ‘Will you sit down, have a chair – we have to go see the officer of the day.’ So they – she and two others – went into this office and then finally, they had a consultation in there, and she finally came to me and said, ‘We’ll get to you as soon as we can. But we’re calling Washington, D.C.’ Well, she came and she said, ‘Well, we’ll have to classify you as White. Since you’re a ward of the government,\* we’ll have to put ‘W’ on your badge for White.’”

Accordingly, “I was White on the base,” Traversie recalled.

\*Have students research and discuss this term, “ward of the government.”

Grace Mary Gouveia, “We Also Serve’: American Indian Women’s Role in World War II,” *Michigan Historical Review* 20:2 (Fall 1994): 172-74, copyright Central Michigan University.

### QUESTION TO CONSIDER:

1. How was “race” determined in Faith Feather Traversie’s hiring, and what does that say about the meanings of race?