

MOTHERS RAISE THE ARMY: WOMEN'S POLITICS, POPULAR CULTURE AND THE GREAT  
WAR IN AMERICA, 1914-1941

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **Abstract**

Mothers Raise the Army: Women's Politics, Popular Culture and the Great War in America, 1914-1941

by

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In April 1917, after America's declaration of war on Germany, pro-war women began to lobby Congress to pass a military draft. Presenting themselves as true mothers of the nation, these women described their sons as patriotic, naturally drawn to military service in wartime. They were attempting to combat two groups: the maternal pacifists who argued that women should oppose war, and the immigrants they feared would not enlist. Even after Congress passed conscription, the heroism of mothers of soldiers and sailors captured the imaginations of pro-war artists. Sheet music, short stories, journalism and film praised mothers willing to support their sons' enlistment.

The nation's largest and most influential women's voluntary associations supported the war. Claiming to act as mothers to the nation, officers and members pressed for suffrage and morals reforms. African Americans used patriotic motherhood to remind whites of the history of black sacrifice for the nation. But while it could be used for a variety of causes, patriotic motherhood was an essentialist, conservative vision of a woman's role. As clubwomen adopted the role of mother to the nation's soldiers, they pushed for anti-prostitution measures that hurt working-class women and women of color. Clubwomen and reformers ignored their own studies showing that women engaged in prostitution because of poverty, not moral weakness. Their intense focus on the nation's soldier "boys" helped blind them to the needs of its daughters.

After the war, organizations for mothers of world war servicemen kept ideals of patriotic motherhood alive. They took part in commemorations and holiday rituals and enjoyed the status of national heroines. Starting in the early 1920s, organizations such as the American War Mothers joined antiradical causes and pursued a politics that linked a strong military defense system with nativism and antiradicalism. The mothers appeared above the political fray until in the 1930s opponents exposed their racist practices, and a new student antiwar movement attacked patriotic motherhood as a perversion of a mother's love. Debates over the Second World War exploded the patriotic motherhood of the Great War generation but did not end Americans' fascination with mothers of soldiers.

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## Introduction

In fall 1917, a few months after the U.S. declared war on Germany, the nation's largest suffragist organization devoted an issue of its journal to the "mothers everywhere who have given their sons to democracy." The issue profiled a number of mothers, including Mrs. James Z. Moore of Washington state, whose only son, a captain in the state's militia, helped recruit and organize a machine gun battery for the war. Mrs. Moore explained, "Far from 'feminizing' the community, woman suffrage gives women a greater feeling of responsibility toward the state, a deeper sense of the meaning of democracy." As evidence, Mrs. Moore claimed that the suffrage states had filled their quotas of military volunteers the fastest. "I have only one son to give and son-giving is the greatest sacrifice that any woman can make for her country. . . . I could not bear it if my boy had been a slacker."<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Moore's pride in her son—and her willingness to sacrifice him for the nation—encapsulated the sentiments that pro-war Americans wished every American mother to adopt, a message repeated across every genre of popular culture for the duration of the war. Stories, songs, parades and poems honored mothers of soldiers. Politicians, ministers, authors, and voluntary organizations praised them, and mothers of servicemen organized into voluntary associations. Even childfree women and women without children in the military could participate in this wartime mothers' politics. The

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<sup>1</sup> "A Voting Mother," *The Woman Citizen*, 29 September 1917, 328.

nation's largest women's organizations focused their efforts on aiding "other mothers' sons" in the military, thereby earning praise for acting as mothers of the nation.<sup>2</sup>

The rhetoric of pro-war motherhood was intended to counteract the force of widespread antiwar sentiment in many groups, especially among women. Before the U.S. joined what many Americans still called the "European War," female pacifists and most women's club leaders—including suffragists—condemned the war as murder and thievery on a grand scale. To reach a female constituency, Americans who supported U.S. intervention in the Great War began to create and propagate ideals of feminine nationalism that historians have labeled *patriotic motherhood*. According to pro-war propagandists, the ideal female citizen not only bore and reared sons, but she raised them to willingly sacrifice themselves for the nation. This was a revival of ideals of republican motherhood dating to the eighteenth century. Adding a twist suited to early twentieth century America, however, female authors and activists argued that in return for the sacrifice of their sons, mothers had the right to demand significant government and military reforms. Unlike their forebears, women of the Progressive Era expected not only to be heard, but to be heeded.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation dissects the origins of patriotic motherhood propaganda and traces its diffusion through popular culture and politics from 1914 to 1941. It is the only

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase "other mothers' sons" comes from "Illinois," *Child Welfare Magazine* (July 1917): 345; Zeiger pointed out that mothers were to the First World War what pin-up girls were to the Second, "Slacker," 7.

<sup>3</sup> Zeiger, "Slacker," 7-8; Kathleen Kennedy, *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion During World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1999), 3; Barbara J. Steinson, *American Women's Activism in World War I* (New York: Garland Pub.), 1982, 179-181; Barbara J. Steinson, "'The Mother Half of Humanity': American Women in the Peace and Preparedness Movements in World War I," in *Women, War and Revolution*, Carol Berkin and Clara M. Lovett, eds., (NY: Holmes & Meier, 1980), 259-283; Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 194-7; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: the Revolutionary Experience of America's Women, 1750-1800* (NY: Harper Collins, 1980); Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001).

study to look at patriotic motherhood as a construction used by a wide spectrum of individuals and groups, with cultural, political, and material consequences. Taking inspiration from a growing literature on varieties of mothers' activism across time and space, it traces the way mothers themselves defined their place in the nation, and analyzes how they designed political programs aimed at inspiring larger mothers' movements.<sup>4</sup>

Patriotic motherhood proved especially useful to conservatives in the 1920s and 1930s, helping to undermine pre-war women's coalitions and leading to the rise of what one scholar has called "patriotic maternalism." By looking at both the war and the following decades, this dissertation is able to analyze a significant founding moment in the development of American conservatism. Ultimately, it shows that essentialist wartime ideals have far-reaching consequences, and it challenges scholars to integrate studies of the Great War—and other wars—into their studies of peacetime culture, society and politics.<sup>5</sup>

Patriotic motherhood presented women in a reassuringly traditional role at a time when a woman's place was the topic of contentious debate. In contrast to some early twentieth-century feminist and suffragist leaders who remained unmarried and worked in the public sphere, the patriotic mother was located at the center of heterosexual reproduction and domesticity. Propaganda always presented the patriotic mother as concerned first and foremost with her sons and family. According to clubwomen, the

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<sup>4</sup> Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, Diana Taylor, eds., *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997); Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, eds., *"Bad" Mothers: the Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America* (NY: NYU Press, 1998); Sharon M. Meagher and Patrice DiQuinzio, eds., *Women and Children First: Feminism, Rhetoric and Public Policy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005); Nicole Cooley and Pamela Stone, eds., *Women's Studies Quarterly* 37 nos. 3 & 4 (Fall/Winter 2009: Special Issue: "Mother").

<sup>5</sup> Christine K. Erickson, "Conservative Women and Patriotic Maternalism: The Beginnings of a Gendered Conservative Tradition in the 1920s and 1930s" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1999).

nation functioned as an extension of this family, with a mother's nurturing and sometimes controlling attitudes extended especially to men in the military.

During the war, this traditional image of the nation's womanhood had the power to unify large numbers of men and women across class, ethnic and political boundaries. Political organizers used mothers of soldiers to gain attention for a variety of causes, some progressive. Mothers of soldiers marched for war bond campaigns, presented themselves as evidence that women deserved the vote, and reminded audiences of African American contributions to the war. But relying on patriotic motherhood also strengthened essentialist conceptions of the female. This influenced the lives of women and girls on the homefront, contributing to generational, racial and class tensions, as shown by a wartime anti-prostitution campaign that violated women's civil rights and hurt the nation's most vulnerable women and girls.

After the war, isolationists and cultural traditionalists, especially those who supported a stronger military, adopted patriotic motherhood rhetoric to attack Progressive reformers active in the movements for international peace and arbitration. In the 1920s and 1930s, groups such as the American Gold Star Mothers and American War Mothers joined campaigns to oppose woman pacifists, stamp out radicalism in the schools, and to increase military appropriations. There was a bitter irony in this development. The rhetoric of patriotic motherhood that female suffragists embraced and propagated in their efforts to win suffrage later became an effective tool against former woman suffrage leaders, the largest international women's organizations, and all who smacked of radical "isms" to red-baiting opponents.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kim E. Nielsen has noted the involvement of gold star mothers and the American War Mothers in this movement, though she does not treat patriotic motherhood as a major theme, see *Un-American*

My first chapter presents the fight over the proposed Selective Service Act of 1917, restoring the gendered dimensions of debates held in Congress, presented in newspapers, and acted out on city streets. This chapter focuses on setting a framework for understanding the need for patriotic motherhood propaganda. It emphasizes the unique importance and authority of mothers in the 1910s, and examines maternal pacifists, their opponents the preparedness and pro-conscription women, and a short-lived working-class mothers' campaign against the draft.

Then I venture into the pro-war propaganda of wartime, looking especially at the way that textual, visual and material culture reinforced patriotic motherhood and underscored perceptions of wartime unity. In Chapter Two, I look at the invention of the service flag, its association with mothers of soldiers, and the creation of the gold star as the symbol of a fallen soldier. These patriotic symbols were trumpeted especially by merchants, elites and the Wilson administration, but found new life as they were adopted by ordinary people and activists. Pro-war mothers of soldiers, suffragists and African Americans used the service flag and gold star armband to bring attention to their chosen causes.

The war provided some women with new opportunities for leadership, but this did not mean advancement for all women. Before the war, the nation's leading women's clubs had fought for reforms meant to halt the spread of venereal disease and prevent prostitution. War gave these groups a new cause for concern—and new leverage with the federal government. My third chapter discusses the far-reaching anti-prostitution

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*Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), 59, 108, passim.

campaign clubwomen launched to protect “other mothers’ sons,” and pursued at the expense of young, impoverished women, many of them women of color.

In Chapters Four and Five, I follow patriotic motherhood into the post-war period. In the 1920s, the ideal was well-suited to the uses of self-styled patriots, who bemoaned the end of nationalist unity after the war. In my fourth chapter, I look at the founding of the American War Mothers (AWM), the nation’s largest organization for mothers of world war service members, and follow it through the decade. In 1928, capping off a decade of patriotic politics by mothers’ and veterans’ groups, Congress passed legislation creating the Gold Star Pilgrimages, in which the U.S. government sent mothers of fallen soldiers and sailors to visit the graves of their sons in Europe. It was the most expensive and elaborate war commemoration in the country’s history, and it was a grand celebration of patriotic motherhood.

My fifth chapter analyzes the conflicts that tore apart the ideology of patriotic motherhood and paralyzed organizations for mothers of world war soldiers during crucial conflicts of the 1930s. When the Hoover administration decided to segregate the Gold Star Pilgrimages, this move exposed all gold star mothers to criticism by racial liberals and equal rights activists. Then a growing antiwar movement targeted gold star mothers as representatives of unthinking nationalism, mocking their combination of sentiment and militarism. Finally, and most importantly, the beginning of World War II in Europe created a massive isolationist mothers’ movement.

Isolationist mothers imitated some of the rhetoric and strategies of World War I-era patriotic mothers’ groups but vehemently opposed involvement in another conflict. Claiming to speak for all mothers, their representatives used appeals to protect American

sons. This new mothers' movement fell into disrepute, however, after pro-fascists and anti-Semites infiltrated their leadership. Pearl Harbor made isolationism look even more suspect, and in hindsight, disloyal. All mothers' groups suffered as a result of the tremendous publicity that was devoted to the isolationist mothers; members of the public and even the Roosevelt administration could not keep the different mothers' organizations straight. It was a short step from the 1930s repudiation of patriotic motherhood by antiwar activists, to the scorn heaped on isolationist mothers by interventionists, to the post-war hostility manifest in the book *Generation of Vipers*, which blamed "good old Mom" for every problem in society.<sup>7</sup>

Each generation invents its own female heroines, and by World War II the silver-haired, bespectacled mother of a soldier was passé. The heroine of World War II-era propaganda combined a movie star physique, an industrial worker's skills, and a mainstream femininity. She was the mother of young children, the wife of a soldier, and the attractive defense worker in lipstick and coveralls. Due to a growing emphasis on female youth and sexuality, and new opportunities for women's work, the patriotic mother was never again such a prominent symbol as she was in the 1920s and early 1930s. The American War Mothers and American Gold Star Mothers continued as

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<sup>7</sup> Historians of motherhood are unanimous on the 1940s and 1950s as a high point for mother-bashing by psychiatrists, authors, and politicians. See David M. Levy, *Maternal Overprotection* (NY: Columbia UP, 1943); Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (NY: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942); Edward Strecker, *Their Mothers' Sons; the Psychiatrist Examines an American Problem* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1946). For an analysis of the intersection of fears of Communism and deviant sexuality with criticism of mothers, see Jennifer Terry, "'Momism' and the Making of Treasonous Homosexuals," in *Bad Mothers: the Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, eds. Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 169-190. For the way liberals along with conservatives rejected femininity in political language, see K.A. Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis of American Masculinity, 1949-1960," *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (Sept. 2000): 515-545; for the role of the American home and family in American nationalism during the Cold War years, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (NY: Basic Books, 1988). For an accomplished new synthesis that deepens our understanding of the culture of mom-blaming and mother-worshipping, see Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: the Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 2010).

organizations, doing important work for wounded veterans of the Second World War, and participating in anticommunist crusades. But in politics and culture they were overshadowed by new icons of nationalist womanhood. In World War II, women had the new opportunity to prove their patriotism directly in the Women's Army Corps (WAACs) and Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service in the Navy (WAVES), and after the war media attention focused on young mothers in the post-war baby boom.

Yet the door was not entirely closed on questions of motherhood, war and nation. Great War-era symbols such as the gold star and the service flag have proven useful to opponents in every debate over America's military deployments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Gold star mothers protested both for and against the Vietnam War, creating so much publicity that even their pro-war gestures caused problems for President Richard Nixon and his advisors, whose attempts to control the mothers backfired. In the midst of the First Gulf War, President George H.W. Bush quoted Lincoln, praising American mothers' willingness to sacrifice their sons on "the altar of Freedom." More recently, Cindy Sheehan organized a gold star parents' campaign against the Second Gulf War. Her status as the mother of a fallen soldier brought her significant media attention when she camped out near George Bush's Texas home in the summer of 2005. She received sympathetic coverage at a time when most major media outlets were downplaying the importance of the domestic anti-war movement and the huge marches it inspired. And in a final example, in her run for Vice President in 2008, Sarah Palin was

rarely seen without her service flag lapel pin, reminding viewers that not only did she support America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but her son served in Iraq.<sup>8</sup>

Whenever Americans argue over the nation's place in the world, and question whether foreign policy objectives are worth the sacrifice of American lives, motherhood again serves as a unique qualification for those who would speak out on foreign affairs. Understanding ideals of patriotic motherhood in the Great War era and the interwar years helps us better understand not only our history, but our present.

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<sup>8</sup>Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2002), 195; Evans, 161; "Soldier's Mom Digs in Near Bush Ranch," CNN, last modified August 7, 2005, accessed Oct. 27, 2011, [http://articles.cnn.com/2005-08-07/politics/mom.protest\\_1\\_bush-ranch-joe-hagin-texas-ranch?\\_s=PM:POLITICS](http://articles.cnn.com/2005-08-07/politics/mom.protest_1_bush-ranch-joe-hagin-texas-ranch?_s=PM:POLITICS); John Berman, "Is Sarah Palin Politicizing Son's Military Service," ABC News, last modified Sept. 11, 2008, accessed Oct. 27, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Politics/story?id=5779927&page=1>.

## Chapter One

### **Mothers at War: Maternal Pacifism, Patriotic Motherhood and the Battle Over Conscription, 1915 to 1918**

“Perhaps only God knows what a terrible thing it was to do, or how it haunts me now,” the bestselling author Mary Roberts Rinehart confessed to the readers of her memoir. The source of her regret was an article she wrote after the U.S. declared war on Germany in April 1917; in it, she told mothers it was their duty to send their sons into the military. Rinehart was not prone to sharing her self-doubts with the public who consumed her exceptionally popular plays, novels and magazine stories. But looking back over a decade after the end of the war, she seems to have felt true remorse for her part in the intense media blitz designed to persuade women, especially mothers, to support the war. She remembered the follow-up letters she received from mothers who had lost their sons, called gold star mothers by contemporaries. “[T]hose gold star women; never bitter, accepting the empty chairs, the empty beds, the terrible emptiness of their hearts.” So powerful was these women’s conviction in the righteousness of their cause, Rinehart remembered, that one mother had supported her son’s decision to volunteer for the army even though she was dying of cancer and she knew that she would never see him again.<sup>9</sup>

Rinehart was one of many women--authors, club leaders, and private individuals--who stepped forward in the early days of America’s Great War to argue that it was a mother’s duty to support both the war and military conscription. Rinehart and her peers were attempting to counter many Americans’ apathy towards the war in Europe and to fight the popular and perhaps self-fulfilling belief that all mothers were anti-war and

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<sup>9</sup> Rinehart, *My Story* (NY: Farrar & Rinehart, 1931), 220-221.

would oppose sending their sons to fight. Thanks to their alliances with powerful men in publishing and government, pro-war women's words reached millions of Americans. The result was an oft-repeated formula, a vision of female self-sacrifice and wartime heroism focused on mothers of soldiers and sailors, or more broadly, on all women as mother figures nurturing the nation's "boys" in military service, and by extension, the nation itself. During the war, this vision of a patriotic motherhood that combined tender nurture, stern nationalism, and political activism came to dominate popular culture, and it also shaped women's volunteer work and lobbying efforts.

The war began at a time when mothers held a unique importance in the family, community and polity. Women's growing politicization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries rested on the successful alliances of female activists who sought special protections for mothers and infants; they framed women's activism in terms of a motherly moral authority. War challenged these cross-class coalitions and posed a difficult ethical dilemma. Did women's unique understanding of the value of human life mean that they should ignore appeals to national loyalty in wartime?

The outbreak of war in Europe crystallized three competing views of a woman's duty to the nation. First, according to philosophies of maternal pacifism, all women were inherently anti-war because they faced such great risks in giving birth and they sacrificed so much in carefully tending to the physical, mental and spiritual needs of the young. Only mothers, proponents claimed, could truly understand the human costs of war, and so only they could assess whether a war was just. This philosophy was most influential in

America from roughly 1915 to 1916, though its effects lingered in activism and the wider culture for far longer.

Once the U.S. declared war on Germany in April 1917, pro-war men and women understood that they needed to consolidate women's support in order to win the war. They believed that mothers would exercise an important influence on their sons, and so mothers' attitudes were seen as key to enlistment, both voluntary and conscripted. Pro-war and pro-conscription mothers, stimulated by the atmosphere of national emergency, co-operated with publishers and politicians, articulating prescriptions for patriotic motherhood that they could present to a public hungry for information and analysis about women's perspective on the war. The pro-war press published news stories, features, and letters designed to create the illusion that all patriotic women and mothers would reject pacifism in a time of war, and enthusiastically supported both intervention and conscription. Like maternal pacifists, they rested their arguments on the belief that mothers had a unique capacity to judge the justness of a war; unlike pacifists, they could demonstrate their commitment with their son's military service.

Once conscription was passed, anarchist and socialist radicals attempted to invoke a third vision of motherhood-- the mother determined to protect working-class youths from capitalist exploitation. Though initially successful, extralegal intimidation and federal prosecutions destroyed the possibility of a successful anti-war mothers' movement.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, "Motherhood and War," *Harper's Weekly* 59 (December 5, 1914), 542, reprinted in Margaret R. Higson, ed. *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I* (New York: Plume, 1999), 22-4. An excellent example of the history of women's pacifism is Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1993); Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1993); Harriet Hyman Alonso, *The Women's Peace Union and the Outlawry of War, 1921-1942* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1989); Carrie A. Foster,

Looking back at the war from the perspective of the 1930s, Mary Roberts Rinehart regretted her role in promoting enlistment in a war she had come to believe futile. But her words also played a role in changing conceptions of a woman's nature and restructuring women's politics. Maternal pacifists had argued that a mother's love for her children yielded a broader love for mankind, but in 1917 American mothers fought ferociously—and publicly—to protect the sons of their own class. Turning maternal pacifism on its head, they appealed to mothers' love for their sons, not to save humanity from the ravages of war, but in order to ensure that their own class did not bear the heaviest burden of fighting. Fought in the pages of newspapers, magazines and even on the streets, this open breach gave the lie to the claims of maternal pacifists and enflamed passions that would later contribute to the break-up of the maternalist coalition.

#### **American Motherhood and the European War: January 1915 to April 1917**

In October 1914, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence boarded a transatlantic liner sailing from London to New York. She was inaugurating a lecture tour designed to enlist America's women in the fight for peace, especially in attempts to force Great Britain and Germany to negotiate a peace settlement. A radical suffragist and an anti-war socialist, she was no stranger to conflict and controversy. But Pethick-Lawrence had three powerful weapons at her disposal: contacts among America's most prominent suffragists and settlement house workers, an oratorical style that would captivate audiences hungry

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*The Women and the Warriors: the U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1995); Linda K. Schott, *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts: the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Before World War II* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997). Authors studying patriotic motherhood in women's activism, film and the prosecutions of radicals are the following: Barbara J. Steinson, *American Women's Activism in World War I* (New York: Garland, 1982); Susan Zeiger, "She Didn't Raise Her Boy to Be a Slacker: Motherhood, Conscription, and the Culture of the First World War," *Feminist Studies* 22 (Spring 1996), 6-39; Kathleen Kennedy, *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion during World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1999).

for information and analysis of the European war, and finally, a philosophy of maternal pacifism that drew from the most powerful currents in Victorian culture.<sup>11</sup>

Pethick-Lawrence's arrival sparked a media sensation, not least because of her pithy denunciations of the "war vampire." When she told women to stop bearing babies during wartime, as they were only producing more "cannon food," it made headlines across the country. Calling Europe's Great War a "great dog fight," she blamed the war on men and men's exclusion of women from politics.<sup>12</sup> The American press was largely receptive to her ideas and presented her in a sympathetic light.

Pethick-Lawrence was convinced that women's politics were "spiritual and religious," unlike men's, because women understood the value of human life. This placed her within a transatlantic culture of maternalism, in which women argued that their gender made them more concerned with women, children, morality and a wholesome community life than men were. U.S. maternalists lobbied for protective welfare legislation for women and children, including minimum wages for female workers, maximum hours for female workers, and state aid to impoverished mothers. They succeeded on many counts, and so were responsible for some of the first significant state-sponsored protection for workers and the poor in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Obviously, Pethick-Lawrence did not achieve her goal of creating a European peace, but she did succeed in influencing the course of American culture and politics. She was one of the most articulate theorists of a connection between motherhood and

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<sup>11</sup> "Mrs. Lawrence to Rouse Women," *New York Times*, 27 October 1914, 11; for information on the route of the Minnehaha, Jonathan Kinghorn, "The Atlantic Transport Line, 1881-1936," <http://www.geocities.com/jckinghorn/ATL/atlhome.htm>, accessed 12 July 2008.

<sup>12</sup> "Says Babies Are 'Cannon Food,'" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 November 1914, 3; "She Urges All Women Not to Bear Children Until War Peril Ends," *Washington Post*, 26 November 1914, 4; "Mrs. Lawrence to Rouse Women," 11.

<sup>13</sup>"Mrs. Lawrence to Rouse Women," 11.

pacifism, and her philosophy's broad-based appeal shaped American popular culture and women's activism from 1914 to 1916 and beyond. Pethick-Lawrence, the well-known settlement house leader Jane Addams, suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt and other famous woman activists founded the Woman's Peace Party in 1915 based on maternal pacifism, and more mainstream women's clubs accepted and repeated the connection between womanhood, motherly nurture and opposition to war. Filmmakers, journalists and songwriters followed suit.<sup>14</sup>

The 1915 conference that organized the Woman's Peace Party included leaders from a diverse sampling of women's voluntary associations. Calling women the "mother half of humanity," the Preamble to the group's platform argued that women's work had built homes and the world in which industry was based. Women served as "the custodians of the life of the ages," and women had a special and innate dislike of war's "cruelty" and "waste."

The WPP demanded that women's opinions be considered in all of the "courts of high debate—within the home, the school, the church, the industrial order, and the state."<sup>15</sup> In their platform, the delegates asked for profound changes in the national government and economy. They wanted the manufacture of armaments to be nationalized; since many contemporaries suspected arms manufacturers of agitating for war, this would be a preventive measure. Apparently suspecting the federal government of subverting the people's wishes, the organization asked for "Democratic control of

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<sup>14</sup> Barbara J. Steinson, *American Women's Activism in World War I* (New York: Garland Pub.), 1982; Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1993); Susan Zeiger, "She Didn't Raise Her Boy to Be a Slacker: Motherhood, Conscription, and the Culture of the First World War," *Feminist Studies* 22 (Spring, 1996), 6-39; *Addresses Given at the Organization Conference of the Woman's Peace Party, Washington DC, January 10, 1915* (Chicago: Woman's Peace Party, 1915).

<sup>15</sup>*Addresses*, 4-5.

foreign policies.” They also advocated for much stronger international law. They supported a “Concert of Nations” and an international police force to enforce order, preventing the use of military force by individual countries.<sup>16</sup>

While these ideas seem quite radical today, in 1915 they were embraced by the representatives of a wide number of American women. The most famous women in America formed the officers and speakers at the group’s foundation, including the most powerful woman in the federal government, Julia Lathrop, the head of the Children’s Bureau. Representatives of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Women’s Trade Union League and even the Spanish-American War Nurses attended. Women of every section and social class had representatives there.<sup>17</sup>

Individual women at the convention differed on the source of women’s pacifism. Jane Addams tied women to pacifism through their socialization as nurturers and caretakers. This may have sprung from her own experience. She was not a mother herself, but she was a guardian to her nieces and nephew, and her reform activities centered on aiding poor adults and children. Addams used theories of the progress of civilization to argue for a woman’s special role in society. In her version of the history of mankind, religions based on human sacrifice failed only after a female-led rebellion. Addams said that women defied priests’ calls on patriotism and tradition to end the killing of innocent children—the parallels with modern war were obvious.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2-3. There was no representative from the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, however.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

Pethick-Lawrence argued for a more innate gender difference. Women's biological destiny as the "mother half of humanity" made them opposed to war. Pethick-Lawrence used images of women's sacrifice of their blood and lives in giving birth to argue that women had a greater understanding of life's worth, and thus the authority to call for an end to war.

Anna Howard Shaw, a suffrage leader who would later play a top leadership role in wartime federal government, revived Civil War images of a suffering, martyred womanhood. She described the pains of previous generations of women, who cried as men went to war, and who faced their own mental and spiritual death agony when their male kinfolk died in battle. A bullet killed not one, but two people in this Civil War trope. Shaw argued that modern times called for modern women, who would reject the passive suffering of earlier generations and fight for peace.<sup>19</sup>

The leadership of the WPP was an elite group, with a high level of education and many transatlantic contacts. Yet the WPP seems to have had a wide appeal. It gained nearly 40,000 members in its first year. Its most active branches were in New York and Massachusetts, but sections existed across the country, including some in the South and West. Local members set up booths at state fairs to distribute peace literature, invited speakers to their frequent meetings, and wrote letters to Congressmen and Senators.<sup>20</sup>

In 1915, mainstream women's clubs endorsed the WPP vision of a pacifist American motherhood. The Women's Christian Temperance Union and the National Congress of Mothers and Parent and Teacher Associations presented women as Christ-like figures of self-sacrifice, whose morality set the tone for their homes and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 6-7, 14-5; Alice Fahs, "The Feminized Civil War: Northern Popular Literature and the Memory of the War, 1861-1900," *The Journal of American History* 85 4 (March 1999), 1474-8.

<sup>20</sup> Zeiger, 9; Steinson, *American Women's Activism*, 139, 161-2.

communities. Both presented their opposition to the war in Europe as maternal *and* Christian; the National Congress of Mothers went further, blaming the war on improper European childrearing techniques.<sup>21</sup>

The National Association of Colored Women's Clubs also endorsed the Woman's Peace Party, noting the popularity of the WPP among "hosts of women across the country." Author Jennie Campbell Douglass said that historically women had helped their men in war, perhaps even joining them "shoulder to shoulder" along defenses and firing a rifle against their enemies. Douglass said that such warlike behavior may have been necessary at one time, but that the nurturing work of nurses made a superior model for women of the twentieth century. Like nurses, true heroines were women who "knit, and stitch, and deprive themselves" to send items to refugees and victims of the Great War. Douglass called on American women to teach their sons to be morally upstanding, to be above race prejudice as well as to honor peace over war. Her article ended with a prayer asking God to give women "true motherhood" which "aims at universal good."<sup>22</sup>

Outside of the women's clubs, popular culture equated motherhood with pacifism in a variety of genres, most famously in the controversial 1915 song "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier." That the song inspired numerous parodies demonstrates its importance to contemporaries. The 1916 film "War Brides" told the story of women who refused to bear children to protest the policies of their warlike king. And in the country's

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<sup>21</sup> Susan Zeiger, "Finding a Cure for War: Women's Politics and the Peace Movement in the 1920s," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1990): 71-3; Winifred Sackville-Stoner, "War the Result of Improper Child Training," *Child-Welfare Magazine* IX, no. 7 (March 1915): 232.

<sup>22</sup> Jennie Campbell Douglass, "Women and the War Spirit," *National Association Notes* 18, no. 2 (November 1915), 11.

most popular magazine, the *Saturday Evening Post*, author Will Irwin presented readers with “War Madness,” an article describing the state of Europe at war.<sup>23</sup>

Irwin blamed the war on an out-of-control masculinity that sought ecstasy and release, an “intensification of life,” in warfare. Women did not need war, he reasoned, as they had the experience of giving birth which presented them with natural, and far more constructive, “stimuli to the senses.” Irwin reported that women do not like war, as a rule; “. . . only that kind of woman who lets her men do her thinking for her seems to get thoroughly infected with the masculine madness of conflict.” According to Irwin, a war of the sexes thus followed every actual war, and in each case woman’s pacifism was morally superior to man’s belligerence. True women opposed war.<sup>24</sup>

### **Defining the Patriotic Mother: Women, Preparedness and the Campaign for Conscription, 1915 to 1917**

Maternal pacifism inspired defiance and even outrage among a second group of women: those who believed a strong military was necessary to protect the nation. These women shared the belief that mothers should teach their children to honor military service, and many proudly cited the military records of their fathers and grandfathers. Before the U.S. declaration of war, hundreds of thousands of women took part in the preparedness movement, urging the Wilson administration to enhance the nation’s defenses. After the declaration of war, many more women chose to celebrate male military service and support both voluntary enlistment and the Wilson administration’s

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<sup>23</sup> Susan Zeiger, “She Didn’t Raise Her Boy to Be a Slacker,” 11-12; “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier,” words by Alfred Bryan, music by Al. Pantiadosi, online at the New York Public Library Digital Gallery, <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm>; accessed January 15, 2007; Craig Campbell, *Reel America and World War I* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1985), 35; Will Irwin, “War Madness,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, 26 February 1916, 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* Irwin cited feminist author Beatrice Forbes-Robertson Hale as the origin of this theory of the birth experience intensifying life.

proposal for a military draft. Even members of the Woman's Peace Party switched positions, explaining that they believed that it was a citizen's duty to support the president and the nation in wartime.<sup>25</sup>

One of the most prominent of the pre-war women's preparedness groups was the Woman's Section of the Navy League, which was founded in the fall of 1915 as a part of the male-led Navy League. The Woman's Section grew popular quickly; it had 25,000 members after only three months and by August 1916 it bragged of having 400,000.<sup>26</sup>

Advocates of preparedness sometimes publicly connected their position to motherhood. An example was Mrs. Annie Cothren Graves, who told the *New York Tribune* that a mother should support a stronger navy if she did not want her children to go "like sheep to the shambles to be slaughtered in unpreparedness . . . ." Likewise, the Woman's Section of the Navy League was happy to reprint a San Francisco editorial entitled "I Will Not Raise My Boy to Be a Craven." The article responded to the popularity of the song "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier," by pointing out that peace was an unrealistic goal, and that just as it was a mother's duty to teach sons to fight back against schoolyard bullies, so they must accept a son's military obligation to his country. In this vision, the world was just a larger schoolyard and fighting a masculine obligation.

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<sup>25</sup> WPP correspondence cited is from the New York Branch, Woman's Peace Party, "The Collected Records of the Woman's Peace Party, 1914-1920," ed. by the Swarthmore College Peace Collection Staff, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA (Wilmington, DE : Scholarly Resources Inc., 1988), microfilm; examples of resignations include Janette Boynton to Secretary of the WPP, New York branch, March 30, 1917 and Harriet Chapell to Mrs. Lane, Feb. 12, 1917.

<sup>26</sup> Steinson, *American Women's Activism*, 181-2; "Women Ready to Help in Mexican Crisis," *Sea Power* 1, no. 3 (August 1916): 33. Preparedness cannot be equated to a pro-war movement. Some advocates of preparedness wanted America to join the European war; others were more concerned about other threats, for example from Japan or Mexico, and opposed U.S. involvement in the Great War.

Overall, however, these articles connecting motherhood to support for a stronger military were the exception, not the rule. The majority of stories published by the Woman's Section of the Navy League idealized an active American womanhood who proved their patriotism in military support roles.<sup>27</sup>

The woman's section in the Navy League's glossy monthly magazine dwelt again and again on the details of its four women's training camps, called National Service Schools. In addition to crash courses in skills such as nursing, food preparation and telegraphy, the women camped, rose early, ate wholesome foods, wore uniforms, used military titles, and participated in physical drills and calisthenics. While the Woman's Section of the Navy League frowned on teaching women to shoot rifles, their camps cultivated an active corps of women who could serve their country alongside men.<sup>28</sup>

According to historian Barbara Steinson, attendees were mainly young and affluent; a few poorer women attended on scholarship. This underscores the women's links to men's preparedness organizations, which were dominated by an industrial elite from New York and Chicago. One such male organization, the Military Training Camps Association, was devoted to training future military officers in camps. They excluded African Americans who wished to attend. The camp's elite participants were called Plattsburghers, after the first camp's location. One Woman's Section of the Navy League member called her organization's camps "the woman's Plattsburgh," indicating the way

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<sup>27</sup> "Women to the Front," *New York Tribune*, 22 August 1915, 36, as quoted in Steinson, *American Women's Activism*, 179-181; "I Will Not Raise My Boy to Be a Craven," reprinted from the *San Francisco Call*, *Sea Power* 1, no. 2 (July 1916): 41.

<sup>28</sup> Steinson, *American Women's Activism*, 185-204; William Atherton Dupuy, "When Woman Prepares," *Sea Power* 1, no. 1 (June 1916): 5; "Women Ready to Help in Mexican Crisis," *Sea Power* 1, no. 3 (August 1916): 34; Dorothy Potter, "And then the Women," *Sea Power* 1 no. 12 (May 1917).

preparedness activities could satisfy women's hunger for equality and meaningful activity.<sup>29</sup>

The Woman's Section of the Navy League was a relatively new and specialized group; an examination of the Daughters of the American Revolution shows that a larger and more established women's club would also turn to preparedness, and in so doing jettison the motherhood rhetoric of pacifism altogether. Representatives of the national organization of the Daughters of the American Revolution had attended the founding of the Woman's Peace Party in January 1915; by their national convention in 1916, however, the group had officially embraced preparedness. A small number of women—including Quaker members—tried to protest at their annual convention, but were effectively silenced by president Daisy Allen Story. She not only promoted a stronger American military but was rumored to have lent DAR funds to support the founding of the Woman's Section of the Navy League.<sup>30</sup>

Like the women of the Navy League, the DAR spurned a rhetoric of motherhood. Though they took part in maternalist activities such as "better baby" contests, baby weeks, and other publicity efforts connected to public health campaigns for babies and children, the group did not emphasize a mother's heart as central to their worldview. Instead, the organization's intense focus on past American wars, particularly of course the Revolutionary War, lent itself easily to a patriotism focused on praising military

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<sup>29</sup> Chambers, 74-5; Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (NY: Macmillan, 2005), 30; Steinson, *American Women's Activism*, 195-6, 185-205; Dorothy Potter, "And Then the Women," *Sea Power* 1, no. 11 (May 1917): 15-17.

<sup>30</sup> *Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Continental Congress of the Daughters of the American Revolution* (New York: The Carey Printing Company, 1916), 10-11; Steinson, *American Women's Activism*, fn 20, 176-7.

service, the glories of an American ancestry, and the role of the United States as a beacon of democracy.<sup>31</sup>

In 1915 and 1916, tying motherhood to the military seems to have been a tough sell. In fact, to a critic like Emma Goldman, women's support for preparedness seemed perverse. She wrote, ". . . [N]aval leagues with women in their lead have sprung up all over the country, women who boast of representing the gentler sex, women who in pain and danger bring forth life and yet are ready to dedicate it to the Moloch War." Though in other avenues Goldman opposed traditional Victorian gender roles and dichotomies based on sex, here she reinforced the popular, even clichéd, connection between women, childbearing and pacifism.<sup>32</sup>

President Wilson ran for re-election in 1916 on a promise to keep the nation out of the war, and some commentators credited his victory to anti-war women in Western states where women could vote. But Americans were increasingly divided over their possible role in the war. Over 1916 and 1917, Americans' anti-German sentiment coalesced around atrocity stories depicting Germans as brutal rapists and murderers, the threat to American sovereignty contained in the Zimmerman telegram, and the sinking of American ships and killing of civilians in submarine warfare. Like many in the general public, the leaders of mainstream women's clubs began to retreat from their wholesale condemnations of the war. In February of 1917, after Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, Wilson broke off diplomatic relations and took steps to strengthen American defenses. Women rallied to his side, including former pacifists such as the

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<sup>31</sup> "Some Results of Baby Week," *The Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine* XLVII, 5 (May 1916): 342. Based on a reading of *The Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, 1916-1917, and also the proceedings of the organization's annual conferences, 1914-1918.

<sup>32</sup> Emma Goldman, "Preparedness, the Road to Universal Slaughter" *Mother Earth*, 10, no. 10 (December 1915): 333.

National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) president, Carrie Chapman Catt, who pledged that her organization would support the administration in case of war.<sup>33</sup>

When Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war on April 2, 1917, the Senate passed it that same day. The House debated the measure for a total of sixteen and one half hours, and by April 6 it had passed, though the nation's first female Representative, Jeanette Rankin (R-MT) created a media sensation by voting against the war. The next task for the emergency session of Congress was to hammer out the details of how Americans could break the stalemate in Europe's trenches. Some contemporaries believed that the country would contribute only food and arms and not troops to the conflict, while others urged immediate manpower mobilization and a full military commitment.<sup>34</sup> Secretary of War Newton D. Baker presented a conscription bill to Congress the day after the declaration of war, spurring debates in the Capitol--and the nation's editorial pages--that lasted for over three weeks.

The declaration of war effectively destroyed the Woman's Peace Party. More conservative members, especially the Massachusetts chapter, believed it was disloyal to oppose one's own government in a time of war. The more radical New York wing disagreed, and attempted to continue publishing anti-war tracts and presenting anti-war speakers. They were not effective in spurring an opposition movement, however, and faced significant challenges. Their speakers kept a low profile and were shut down by police, the federal government pressured them to stop publishing, and their membership

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<sup>33</sup> Marlene Springer and Haskell Springer, eds., *Plains Woman: the Diary of Martha Farnsworth, 1882-1922* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1988), 258; David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (NY: Oxford UP, 1980), 284.

<sup>34</sup> "Debate Lasted 16 ½ Hours," *New York Times*, 6 April 1917, 1.

and budget were eroding. Letters written to the NYWPP testify to members' conviction that they needed to remain silent or become actively supportive of the war once it was declared. Finally, president of the WPP Jane Addams could not bring herself to support the war, but neither would she offer open opposition. She cooperated with the government in food conservation campaigns designed to aid the allies. The organization that best represented maternal pacifism had proven unequal to the pressures of transforming itself into a wartime opposition movement.<sup>35</sup>

Yet even as women's anti-war leadership fell apart, Congress was debating legislation that threatened to reach directly into every American home, taking husbands and sons into the military for service on foreign soil. Proponents saw the proposed Selective Service legislation as a modern and scientific form of conscription that avoided the loopholes that allowed the wealthy to avoid service in the Civil War North and South. Opponents condemned the measure as a violation of American men's traditional right to choose to volunteer for the military and as a harmful disruption of young men's development that would damage the nation's future.

Debates over conscription in Britain and the Commonwealth countries had been long-lasting and ugly; many were loath to abandon traditions of voluntarism. In early 1916, the British Parliament finally passed a conscription law. There, female patriots including many suffragists had supported a draft while organized labor opposed it until a

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<sup>35</sup> Steinson, *American Women's Activism*, 255; Zeiger, "Slacker," 13. WPP correspondence cited is from the New York Branch, Woman's Peace Party, "The Collected Records of the Woman's Peace Party, 1914-1920," ed. by the Swarthmore College Peace Collection Staff, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA (Wilmington, DE : Scholarly Resources Inc., 1988), microfilm; examples of resignations include Janette Boynton to Secretary of the WPP, New York branch, March 30, 1917 and Harriet Chapell to Mrs. Lane, Feb. 12, 1917; On anti-war and anti-conscription meetings among union members, see Marion Tilden Burritt, to Mrs. Lane, April 18, 1917; also, for other evidence that the working-class was seen as the most fertile ground for opposition to the war, see Mrs. Margaret Lane to Mrs. L.B. Blau, March 21, 1917, both in New York Branch, "Collected Records of the WPP."

final compromise was reached. In Australia in 1916, when conscription was put to popular referendum, it was defeated. According to contemporary comment, women and labor had provided key opposition to the legislation.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps drawing on this example as well as on American clubwomen's anti-war stance of the past few years, anti-war Senators and opponents of conscription argued that mothers would oppose a military draft. The measure's supporters responded with an outpouring of stories of mothers who wanted a draft and saw their sons' military service as a patriotic duty.

Because women's suffrage was limited before the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920, anti-war congressmen could present mothers as a group of silenced constituents who needed men, especially men in power, to speak on their behalf. Women were so strongly associated with pacifism before the war that invoking a suffering and silenced American motherhood must have been an obvious choice of strategy for anti-war, anti-conscription politicians. This tactic could appeal to both the emotions and political instincts of their audience; Congressmen knew American mothers had powerful lobbying groups through their women's voluntary organizations, including the National Congress of Mothers and the General Federation of Women's Clubs.<sup>37</sup> The anti-war Congressmen were bluffing, however. Female constituents' letters to Congressmen showed that women, just like men, were divided over the declaration of war and the possibility of a draft. Women's clubs, faculty at women's colleges, and individual

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<sup>36</sup> John Whiteclay Chambers III, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (NY: The Free Press, 1987), 153-177; Nicoletta F. Gullace, *"The Blood of Our Sons:" Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 110-3; "Australia and Conscription," *Times of London*, 22 December 1917, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Not all anti-conscription politicians were anti-war, but the most radical were, and they were the ones most likely to bring up mothers.

women wrote and petitioned to express their opinions; no single factor could be used to predict women's stance toward intervention.<sup>38</sup>

Pro-war, pro-conscription Congressmen responded to claims of a pacifist American motherhood with disgust. They were well aware of the existence of pro-conscription, pro-war women and mothers. Already caught up in the air of crisis surrounding the war, they expressed the view that mothers who opposed conscription were unpatriotic, and even traitorous.

An exchange between opponents in the Senate illustrates two dominant views of a mother's duty, one held by an anti-war Progressive and another by a pro-war conservative. It also highlights the importance of mothers' letters to Congressmen and introduces a primary theme in the debates over conscription—social class.

Senator Robert LaFollette [R-WI] opposed U.S. entry to the European war, as did his wife and eldest daughter, who were involved with the Woman's Peace Party. LaFollette entered the debate over the declaration of war on April 4 by reading a letter to his colleagues. Written by "A North Dakota Farm Woman," as she signed herself, the letter opposed sending American youths to war. She asked the Senate to consider the mother of "the poorer, thrifty classes," who had lain awake with her son as an infant, and who had skimped on food and clothing for herself in order to feed and clothe her child. This mother did not deserve to see her son sent "to a slaughterhouse to be butchered," on the front lines of Europe. In reading the letter, LaFollette was supporting an anti-war argument made earlier by Senator James K. Vardaman, a Democrat of Mississippi.

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<sup>38</sup> This conclusion is based on reading the large number of petitions and letters entered into the Congressional Record by anti-war and pro-war Congressmen, and by reading the constituent letters preserved in the papers of Senators Robert M. LaFollette and John Sharp Williams in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

Vardaman had said that mothers and children were the greatest victims of all wars, and they would oppose U.S. entry to Europe's Great War. The speeches of both Vardaman and LaFollette positioned the anti-conscription Congressmen as the protectors of women, children and the working class.<sup>39</sup>

A strong supporter of U.S. entry to the war, and of conscription, Senator John Sharp Williams [D] of Mississippi rebutted LaFollette's assertions point-by-point. A planter, Williams had a conservative vision of a woman's role. He mocked the letter from "some female farmer out in the Dakotas," and her complaints that "she had patched her boy up, and she had been taking care of him for I don't know how long," saying in all that her antiwar stance was simply "cowardly nonsense." Opposed to the letter writer's melding of motherly role and antiwar politics, Williams mentioned the popular song of 1915: "'I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier' and all that nonsense. If you raised your boy right, you raised him to do whatever he had to do for his own honor or for his country's honor." Finally, Williams criticized the author's "false motherly love" for turning her boy into a coward, unwilling to stand up for any principles. To Williams, this mother's love was itself a dangerous substance, corroding her loyalty to the nation and endangering her son's manhood.<sup>40</sup>

Looking to his own family history, Williams presented an alternative mother-son relationship. He told the Senate that his grandmother had wanted her son, his father, to

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<sup>39</sup> Harriet Hyman Alonso, "One Woman's Journey into the World of Women's Peace History," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1995): 171; Steinson, 132, fn 19; 65<sup>th</sup> cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record*, 223; 209 (4 April 1917). Vardaman's warnings that the war would "destroy the virility of the race" should be seen as both part of a transatlantic eugenic critique of the war shared by many pacifists and feminists, who believed war killed the fittest young men, and also part of Vardaman's virulent white supremacy. Vardaman was positioning himself as a protector of the working-class, but his contemporaries would have understood this to include only whites. Here and throughout, I use "working-class" to include farmers and agricultural workers as well as industrial workers.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 237. This may remind readers of "momism" of the 1950s; each world war created fears about national strength, the masculinity of recruits, and mothering styles.

sit out the Civil War. After all, his father was a Southern Whig and had resisted secession. In her view, the secessionists should be the ones to fight as Confederates. Williams' father rejected his mother's advice, reportedly saying, "Mother, the time has passed for a gentleman to determine whether he shall fight or not. The only question is which side shall he fight on." The statement encapsulated the class, race and gender of its speaker—a man who was educating his mother on military duty and patriotism. A "gentleman" understood that these responsibilities outweighed the ties of family—he had decided to join the Confederates, even if it meant he would be fighting against his wife's family, who were Northerners. Senator Williams used this example of his father's disregard for his mother's opinions and wife's family loyalties because he believed in a masculine superiority to the feminine dislike of war. The implication of the story was that women simply did not understand manly duties and honor, which were superior even to family ties.<sup>41</sup> Williams was defending a traditional value system in which a virtuous woman supported her husband and son—a mother's sacrifices for her child were simply her duty, not the basis for a political program.

Other members of Congress echoed Williams' attack on pacifism, mothers who opposed conscription and the war, and the song "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier." Congressional debates on conscription over the following weeks were laced with stories about the Congressmen's own mothers, mothers from their districts, and mothers who had written letters declaring their support for their sons' military service.

Two more Congressmen's statements on mothers are worth considering for the insight they provide into contemporary understandings of a mother's role. Representative William J. Fields, a Democrat from Kentucky, used the mother-son bond to argue against

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 236.

conscripting young men aged 19 and 20. At that age, he said, a young man was a child who “by divine right belongs to the mother.” At age 21, the child became a man, and “His mother yields him, because it is his duty to go.” At both sides of this age divide, Fields perceived mothers as powerful figures in their sons’ lives, even using words that denoted ownership rights.<sup>42</sup>

Representative Clarence Dill [D] of Washington saw a mother’s power a different way. He warned his colleagues that conscription would negatively affect the American family and the larger population. As part of a family unit, along with her husband and her son, a mother could support her son’s voluntary enlistment with pride and be part of a family that would be one of many such “fountains of patriotism.” Or, she could resent conscription, influencing her husband and son, and their home would become a “festering sore” on the body politic. Dill feared that the most defiant families would even arm themselves to resist agents of the law coming to force their son to register for the draft; the violence that followed would only further undermine support for the war. In Dill’s anti-conscription view, mothers, fathers and sons made up a political, or even a military unit, and mothers’ political opinions influenced male relatives and the wider community.<sup>43</sup>

Women’s words provided ammunition in the Congressional debates, and women responded with a campaign of letters, telegrams and petitions to Congress. Mothers’ views on conscription became newsworthy, and newspapers and magazines began to print articles on pro-conscription mothers, especially mothers whose sons had volunteered for the military. Ruth B. Slack of LaGrange, Georgia wrote to her U.S.

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<sup>42</sup> Rinehart, “The Altar of Freedom,” 6; on Slack letter, see fn 14; *Congressional Record*, House, 65<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., April 24, 1917, 1031.

<sup>43</sup> House, 65<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* (27 April 1917): 1410-11.

Representative on April 19. Spurred by her reading of newspaper accounts of the Congressional debates on the draft, Slack commended her congressman's pro-conscription stance and offered her own story. Slack's letter is an early example of a woman defining patriotic motherhood.

She condemned the U.S. Representatives who explained their opposition to conscription by saying that they had promised the mothers of their state to keep their sons out of the war. If these young men would not enlist, that meant that other young men, other mothers' sons, would have to go fight in their place. Slack did not consider this fair. "No mother ever had two finer, dearer boys than mine," she said, explaining that she "flew" to see one son in Baltimore so they could have a "love feast" before his enlistment. Expressing a mother's love in such passionate terms was not uncommon in this pre-Freudian era. But despite her desire to keep her sons safe, she supported their decisions to serve in the military. She went on to connect those who were volunteering with superior citizenship; she contended that the draft was necessary in order to get "shirkers" to serve. A proud mother, she recited her sons' achievements in civilian life—including degrees from Harvard and Johns Hopkins and professional contributions in medicine and engineering. In contrast, she saw other young men, even doctors and former college athletes, who did no useful work but were a burden to their parents. Conscription was necessary in order to get them to do their share. A volunteer military would be unfair to the patriots who would feel obligated to volunteer, and the mothers who had raised them to be virtuous citizens, while benefiting the less honorable.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Congress, House, 65<sup>th</sup> cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* (23 April 1917): 984. Representative William Adamson [D-GA] had the clerk read the letter aloud.

Slack was repeating conceptions of republican motherhood going back to the American Revolution, but the pride she took in her family's long history in America was especially suited to her own era of mass immigration and prejudice against the newest immigrant groups. Slack explained that honorable behavior was a tradition in her family, as if her bloodline itself dictated her behavior. Her ancestors had never "shirked," whether they were "Covenanters" standing up to religious prosecution in colonial days, patriots in the American Revolution, or Confederates fighting in "glory" for the Lost Cause.<sup>45</sup>

Slack's letter stood in opposition to the North Dakota Farm Woman's, and to the contention of all pacifist women that mothers would, and should, oppose their sons' military service. At the same time, however, it also undermined Senator Williams' argument that women did not properly understand war and should leave military policy to men. Slack clearly took credit for raising her boys to be nationalists and dutiful military volunteers, and she used this position to justify her call for conscription.

Slack did not openly embrace class interest, unlike the North Dakota Farm Woman, who spoke on behalf of the women of the "poorer classes." Slack's own class identity was clear, however. She was the wife of a doctor, with sons who had attended top universities and even studied in Europe. She was a member of an old-stock, educated and at least relatively affluent elite. Together with her distrust of the wider public that led her to call for men to be forced into military service, this made her a typical participant in the pro-conscription mothers' publicity campaign. What made her less typical was her Southern heritage, and it is worth noting that unlike the Northerners who supported conscription with nativist arguments, Slack saw "shirkers" as including

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

professionals and college graduates. Some southerners supported conscription as a way to get “city slickers” who sponged off their parents to serve their country. Southerners, without the large number of immigrants living in Northern cities, likely perceived shirkers differently.<sup>46</sup>

Race complicated Southern responses to manpower mobilization as many whites feared a population of armed African American men with military training. In one newsletter, the largely Northern, pro-conscription Navy League questioned whether conscription would be opposed by Southern politicians due to their fears of arming African Americans, but they backtracked in the following issue. They assured readers that in case of war African Americans would serve in the military under white officers just as they had in previous wars. It was an accurate prediction. African Americans were drafted and served in segregated units during the war. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s publication *The Crisis* supported African American enlistment and conscription, portraying military service as a citizenship right and duty, as well as a way to prove that men of color deserved full equality.<sup>47</sup>

### **Patriotic Motherhood in Print: Womanhood, Patriotism and the Press, April-May 1917**

As Congressmen anticipated mothers’ response to the draft bill, some women around the country began a campaign for the draft using petitions, letters, telegrams and

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<sup>46</sup> “An Open Letter to the Mothers of Men,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, 4 May 1917.

<sup>47</sup> “Universal Training and the Negro Problem,” *Sea Power* 2, no. 3 (April 1917): 6; “Universal Service and the Color Lines” *Sea Power* 2, no. 4 (May 1917): 6; “The Perpetual Dilemma,” *The Crisis* 13, no. 6 (April 1917): 270-1; Gerald Shenk, *Work or Fight!: Race, Gender and the Draft in World War I* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). The attitudes of African American leaders toward military service and the war are still the topic of debate among historians, see William Jordan, “‘The Damnable Dilemma’: African American Accommodation and Protest During World War I,” *Journal of American History* 81 no. 4 (March 1995): 1562-1583. I do not know how the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs stood on conscription as it was being debated, because its newsletters from these months are not on microfilm, and may not be extant.

the press. Of these, women in Chicago and New York cooperated with local newspaper editors to create the impression of a large-scale mothers' movement.<sup>48</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune* was solidly supportive of the war and conscription. The paper's owners, from the McCormick and Patterson families, were Republicans loyal to Theodore Roosevelt and his vision of an expanded U.S. military. Both of the papers' young co-publishers, Robert R. McCormick and Joseph Medill Patterson, volunteered for military service during the war. The *Chicago Tribune*, then, was hardly disinterested when it announced the appearance of a new "movement" among mothers, many with sons who had already enlisted, who were pushing Congressmen to support a draft. The *Tribune* presented an array of pro-conscription quotations from leading clubwomen and socialites; the women emphasized that they knew many others who agreed with them. Influential philanthropist and suffragist Louise de Koven Bowen said she had fifty pro-conscription signatures on a petition she was circulating. Alice Bradford Wiles said that all of the clubs she belonged to supported conscription. Wiles was active in the General Federation of Women's Clubs, an umbrella organization for all of the largest and most significant women's voluntary groups, as well as the small and exclusive Daughters of 1812. Former head of Chicago's Civic League Mrs. B.L. Engelke said every woman had a "duty" to send a telegram to her Congressmen in support of conscription, and Mrs. Heaton Owsley said she had "induced" her female friends to join her in doing so.<sup>49</sup>

While Chicagoans were probably aware that the *Tribune* would support the Roosevelt Republicans as they joined the campaign for conscription, those outside the

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<sup>48</sup> Katherine S. Johnson, "Personal Insurance," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 April 1917, sec. II, 21; "Won't Send Sons to Save Slackers," *Washington Post*, 17 April 1917, 2; see fn 9 on Slack's letter, and below.

<sup>49</sup> Jerome E. Edwards, *The Foreign Policy of Col. McCormick's Tribune, 1929-1941* (Reno, NV: U. of Nevada Press, 1971), 10-12; "Mothers Urge Congressmen to Order Draft," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 April 1917, 5.

city may not have known. When the Associated Press picked up the story of a Chicago pro-conscription mothers' movement and sent it across the country, it lent greater credence to the paper's claims. When the pro-war and pro-conscription *New York Times* and *New York Tribune* each printed a story of a New York mother's support for conscription, they further contributed to the impression of a widespread movement. Though in fact only a small number of women were quoted as supporting the draft, the wording of headlines and stories indicated a much larger movement, and through these papers the women's voices reached large, urban audiences. The *Chicago Tribune's* daily circulation was 329,483; the *New York Times's* was 340,904; the *New York Tribune's* was 101,611.<sup>50</sup>

The newspapers that printed these reports were refuting the philosophies of maternal pacifism with each example they provided of mothers who supported conscription and their sons' enlistment. Each story was peppered with short sketches of the women and mothers quoted; these stories accumulated into an impression of proof. The sketch of Mrs. Lyman A. Walton was particularly telling. She explained that she had been a member of the "peace party" and considered herself a pacifist before the declaration of war. Now her only son had volunteered to serve as a pilot. She quit the peace party and was working with a "large number" of women—she implied they were former pacifists also—to telegraph and write letters to their Congressmen in support of the draft.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "Volunteers' Mothers Indorse Conscription," *San Jose Mercury News*, 15 April 1917, 38; "New York Mother Urges Conscription," *New York Tribune*, 15 April 1917, 12; "Mrs. Genet for Draft," *New York Times*, 22 April 1917, 15; *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual & Directory* (Phil.: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1917), 193, 673-4.

<sup>51</sup> "Mothers Urge Congressmen," 5.

The newspapers emphasized the standing of the women they quoted as “social and civic leaders.” The *Chicago Tribune* mentioned names its readers would know: the mayor’s sister, the wife of the president of the University of Chicago, prominent suffragists and reformers. When the *New York Times* profiled a Mrs. Genet’s support for conscription, readers already knew that Mrs. Genet was part of a family stretching back to the American Revolution. Newspapers made her a household name when her eldest son became the first pilot flying the American flag to be killed in France. When she was quoted as supporting the draft, she showed herself to be a true Spartan mother, part of a long line of patriotic Americans.<sup>52</sup>

Many of the women explained their support for conscription in terms of fairness and equality, but in fact they were attempting to use suspicion of immigrants to mobilize native-born Americans. The mothers were drawing on widespread reports that in Britain the volunteer system had killed the country’s best and brightest young men first, as they had volunteered in the early days of the war, leaving the cowardly and disloyal men at home. A few of the mothers referred openly to British casualties; others only hinted. Mrs. C.F. Millspaugh said, “If this is a democratic nation the sons of all should go and serve alike. It is not right that only the bravest should go first.” New York mother Mrs. Henry A. Peckham said she expressed “the woman’s point of view” in supporting conscription as the only way to avoid sacrificing “the flower of the country” on behalf of “slackers.” Mrs. Wallace Winter, a mother of three sons with two already in military

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<sup>52</sup> “Mrs. Genet,” 15; “Genet First to Die in France Under U.S. Flag,” *New York Tribune*, 19 April 1917, 1.

service or training, said a volunteer army would allow “the nation’s selfish and less useful citizens to remain at home in comfort and security.”<sup>53</sup>

Editors pushed readers to suspect immigrant and working-class men of being slackers. Next to the first *Chicago Tribune* story on pro-conscription mothers, editors placed the headline “2500 ‘Bos Dodge Work and War in Slacker Lane.” ‘Bos was short for hobos; the article described unemployed men as lazy, angry, and unwilling to support themselves. Readers could make their own decision—the sons of “social and civic leaders” were volunteering—should they go to war to protect America’s hobos? Similarly, the April 22 issue of the *New York Times* juxtaposed Mrs. Genet’s support for conscription—even after her eldest son had died in the war—with the story “Alien Slackers May Not Escape Service.” The *New York Tribune* alerted readers to a supposed rush among “Aliens” for “War Brides” in the hope that married men would be exempt from conscription due to the need to support their wives. The same day it published the pro-conscription letter from mother Mrs. Henry A. Peckham.<sup>54</sup>

The women named in articles on the pro-conscription movement ranged from the professional class to the extremely wealthy. Of the seventeen from New York and Chicago, nine were listed in their city’s *Social Register*, which included only high society residents, and at least nine appeared in their newspaper’s society pages. Six were active

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<sup>53</sup> “Mothers Urge Congressmen,” 5; “Chicago Mother of Three Sons Demands Draft,” *Chicago Tribune*, 18 April 1917, 1; “Chicago Women in Draft Appeal to Congressmen,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 April 1917, 1; “New York Mother,” 12.

<sup>54</sup> “2500 ‘Bos Dodge Work and War in Slacker Lane,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12 April 1917, 5; “Alien Slackers May Not Escape Service,” *New York Times*, 22 April 1917, E3; “Rush for War Brides Wavers,” *New York Tribune*, 13 April 1917, 16.

in the fight for suffrage. These were women used to wielding their money and social status for causes they supported, and women who understood the value of publicity.<sup>55</sup>

At least five of the women traced their ancestry back to early America; three were members of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Daughters of 1812 or the Colonial Dames. Tying white American bloodlines explicitly to American values, these organizations placed great value on men's military service and after 1917 supported an expanded American military. Their members were self-consciously exclusive.<sup>56</sup>

A further important influence on the women may have been their connection to America's educational elite. Seven of the seventeen New York and Chicago women had husbands or sons connected with the University of Chicago or the Ivy League; so did pro-conscription letter writer Ruth B. Slack of Georgia and author Mary Roberts Rinehart. Once war was declared, many American universities offered military training to students, including Harvard and the University of Chicago. In this respect, the American elite followed in the footsteps of the British aristocracy; Cambridge and Oxford had served as active recruiting grounds. Robert R. McCormick, the co-publisher and president of the *Chicago Tribune*, had attended Yale in the early 1900s. He fondly recalled singing patriotic songs there, including Spanish-American War songs. In America, top colleges and universities were centers of pro-war activity, and alumni networks connected

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<sup>55</sup> *Social Register, Chicago, 1916*, vol. 30, No. 4 (NY: Social Register Association, 1915); *Social Register, New York, 1914*, vol. 30, No. 4 (NY: Social Register Association, 1915); Albert Nelson Marquis, ed., *Who's Who in America, 1916-1917*, vol. IX, (Chicago: AN Marquis & Co., 1916). Other biographical research was conducted using the ProQuest Historical Newspapers searchable database of the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Times*, and other papers.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

powerful editors and publishers, Wilson administration officials, politicians, and their wives—many of them leaders in the fight for conscription.<sup>57</sup>

Members of the Woman's Peace Party provide a useful contrast to the pro-conscription women. Both groups had members descended from America's oldest families and connected to top colleges and universities, but the pacifists had a determinedly internationalist orientation. Many of the WPP's leaders worked in the maternalist movement to help poor mothers and children, and a few even advocated socialism and communism. Thus education, schooling and income cannot be seen as causative in women's attitudes toward conscription.

The most noticeable difference between the two groups of women lay in the glittering social activities of the pro-conscription women. This supports the conclusions of historian Barbara Steinson, who found that female supporters of a stronger American military linked the cause to their round of charity balls, luncheons and events.<sup>58</sup> In peacetime, the social whirl of the pro-conscription women was the most visible manifestation of the remarkable sense of class consciousness evident in their rhetoric. In wartime, they explicitly and implicitly indicted the patriotism of immigrant and working-class men.

Rather than allowing men to make the choice to enlist individually, they wanted to use the coercive power of the state against the unknown "slackers." For many of the mothers, their own sons had already enlisted; other pro-conscription women had no sons

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<sup>57</sup> Edwards, 6; Jan Cohn, *Improbable Fiction: The Life of Mary Roberts Rinehart* (Pittsburgh: U. of Pittsburgh Press, 1980), 111; "Rookie," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 April 1917, 5; Rinehart, "Altar," 6; "Hand Grenades," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 April 1917, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Steinson, 212, 289.

to enlist. They promoted conscription not to keep their own sons from the risks of military service, but to benefit their class of elite, old-stock Americans as a whole.

### **Mary Roberts Rinehart and the “Altar of Freedom”: A New Politics of Motherhood**

Mary Roberts Rinehart, a bestselling author and literary celebrity, added to the chorus of women’s voices demanding conscription with her article “The Altar of Freedom,” which was published in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Rinehart used a variety of strategies to persuade her readers, whom she addressed as mothers, to support their sons’ military enlistment and the draft. By presenting her own story of her son’s voluntary enlistment, and her reaction, Rinehart formulated a prescription for patriotic motherly behavior that was repeated in print media throughout the war, in fiction and non-fiction stories, songs, and poems. Her article reached millions through its initial publication in the *Post* and more through later reprints. The hundreds or even thousands of letters Rinehart received from mothers testified to the impact of her words.<sup>59</sup>

Yet Rinehart originally had no intention of writing an article addressed to mothers. In her memoir, she said that soon after giving her son permission to enlist, “. . . almost immediately, came a request that I write something in *The Saturday Evening Post* to encourage other women to give up their sons.” She omitted to tell readers who exactly had asked her to write such an article. In her private papers, telegrams from the end of March 1917 show that it was her literary agent and the publisher of many of her books, George H. Doran, who first suggested it. Since he did not publish the article, he seems to have suggested that she write it for purely political reasons. Doran was a Canadian, a nation that had taken heavy losses in the war. Furthermore, he had extensive business contacts in London. In the U.S., his company published material for the National

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<sup>59</sup> Rinehart, *My Story*, 220-1.

Security League, an extremely nationalistic and even militaristic group that enthusiastically supported the war.<sup>60</sup>

Rinehart's editor at *The Saturday Evening Post*, the powerful George H. Lorimer, applauded the idea of a pro-war article for mothers, telegraphing: ". . . hope you will carry out George Doran's suggestion for patriotic article for [us] at this time it would be a splendid thing to do." As Rinehart recalled it, writing an article urging women to send their sons into the military was an ordeal. She locked herself into her office and cried and wrote without stopping for twelve hours in order to meet her tight deadline. Lorimer's response after receiving the story on March 28? It was "splendid." It had arrived at the very last moment, and, revealing the importance he placed on it, Lorimer said "we had to double rush it" to the printers to fit it into the issue. Her article appeared in the magazine's April 21 issue—in the midst of Congressional debate over the conscription bill. It was true to Rinehart's pro-war politics, for she blamed the Germans for the tragedies she had witnessed as a war correspondent on the Western front, but perhaps it never would have been written without the prompting of her editors.<sup>61</sup>

Rinehart's title quoted a famous letter from Abraham Lincoln to Mrs. Bixby, a mother who had lost five sons in the Union cause during the Civil War. In the letter, Lincoln assured Mrs. Bixby that her sons' lives had been sacrificed on "the altar of freedom." With this title, and then by reprinting the Lincoln letter on the same page as

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<sup>60</sup> Rinehart, *My Story*, 220-1; "Business & Finance: Book Publishing," *Time*, 3 October 1927, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,731043-1,00.html> (accessed February 28, 2010); "Business & Finance: Deals and Developments," *Time*, 11 August 1930, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,740088,00.html> (accessed February 28, 2010). Doran's company printed wartime material for the pro-war, pro-conscription National Security League, see fn 38.

<sup>61</sup> George H. Lorimer telegram to Mary Roberts Rinehart, 26 March 1917; Rinehart, *My Story*, 221; Lorimer to Rinehart telegram, 28 March 1917; Lorimer letter to Rinehart, 30 March 1917. All of Rinehart's private correspondence cited here comes from the Mary Roberts Rinehart Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh Library System.

her article, Rinehart's editors were presenting her as one of a long line of American women willing to sacrifice their sons for the nation.<sup>62</sup>

Rinehart posed American mothers themselves as a threat to the war effort. She described America as composed of three types of mothers: those proud to send their sons to serve their country, those reluctant but willing to send sons, and finally those "mothers who cannot find the strength to give up to the service of the country the boys who will always be little boys to them." She portrayed military service as simply one more step on a boy's journey to adult manhood, and mothers who opposed their sons' enlistment as selfish.<sup>63</sup>

Rinehart offered her own story of her son's enlistment as perhaps "helpful" to her readers. Rinehart said that when her son asked both parents if he could enlist, "womanlike," she had asked him to give her some time to consider it. Her son then sent a telegram to his parents asking them if they wanted him to be "a quitter." The message surprised her; "I came to my senses then, and the necessary permission to enlist was signed and sent." She said that it was the most difficult decision she had ever faced, but also said that her son, by discarding her advice to wait before enlisting, had earned her respect. In a curious turn of phrase, she said she would "never have forgiven him" if he had not enlisted, but she recognized that her own lack of support had undermined him in this key moment.<sup>64</sup> Her example instructed mothers not to trust the impulse that told them

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<sup>62</sup> Today this letters' origins are disputed, but I'm treating it as it was used in the World War I-era. Rinehart, *Altar*, 38; Suzanne Evans, *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs: World War I and the Politics of Grief* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2007), 161-2.

<sup>63</sup> Mary Roberts Rinehart, "The Altar of Freedom," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 21 April 1917, 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 37. Today, scholars question whether Mrs. Bixby had really lost her sons to the Union cause, and even whether Abraham Lincoln was the author of the letter. See Evans, 161-2.

to keep their sons safe and suggested that all mothers secretly hoped that sons would enlist.

Rinehart had seen the front lines in Europe. Her words held a special authority, then, as she told readers of her struggle with “black days” of fear for her son, and reassured mothers that for many men military service did not mean death, but meant a variety of experiences including camaraderie, hard work, adventure and small pleasures. This summation did not entirely reflect her own experiences at the front, however. Her war diaries record not only admiration for the determination and gaiety of British troops and officers, but also an awareness of the despair, disillusion and hunger that affected so many enlisted men. Furthermore, Rinehart had visited and stayed at several military hospitals in Europe, and she had seen the war’s mangling of young men’s bodies, faces and minds.<sup>65</sup>

In many traditional formulations, including the Civil War-era Bixby letter, a patriotic mother’s role was one of passive suffering, but Rinehart used her motherhood as a platform from which to demand political change. She encouraged other mothers to do the same. After reminding her audience that it was “the mothers who raise the nation’s army,” she began to ask mothers to work to reform the American military. First, she worked to persuade readers that military conscription was necessary.

Rinehart clearly identified immigrants as potential slackers. She told her readers that “for every high-spirited lad like yours and mine who goes out to fight,” thousands more would remain at home. She called them “men who have no country, but only a refuge from the oppression of Europe.” She appealed to her readers’ values as

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<sup>65</sup> Rinehart, “Altar,” 6; Rinehart’s journals from her January 1915 visit to the European front are in the University of Pittsburgh Library System, see fn 37. See entries for January 27, 28 and 30.

Americans, saying that if only the “few” men fought who had volunteered for the military, then America might win the war but would lose its “democratic ideals.”<sup>66</sup>

Rinehart’s was presenting an appeal of “us” against “them,” and it rested on both nativism and classism. She warned female readers that it was their responsibility to ensure that America avoided the wholesale destruction of its “college boys” who volunteered for the military. As a reporter covering the war in Europe in 1915, she said she had seen the “gallant little first army of England” go to war against the larger, better-trained Germans. Today, she said, these men who had been “the best England had,” were gone, almost entirely killed, because “the mothers of England had not insisted that every man in the empire bear his share.”<sup>67</sup> She dangled a nightmare vision before her female readers, in which their sons were killed along with all of their peers. The only men left at home would be those who had not volunteered.

Beyond the draft, Rinehart used the position of patriotic mother to ask for other military reforms—she wanted mothers to demand changes including adequate training for their sons and the restriction of officers’ positions to professional soldiers. She feminized the business of war, telling mothers that just as once they had insisted on the best doctors for their sons, so now they must demand the best military officers.<sup>68</sup>

The article was a publishing success—it was reprinted in *Current Opinion* magazine in December 1917 and as a 3-page pamphlet by Houghton Mifflin. As a pamphlet, the *New York Times* gave it a glowing review, and the National American Woman Suffrage Association excerpted the article in its newsletter. Later, a U.S. government pamphlet selling war bonds to women also printed an excerpt. The

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<sup>66</sup> Rinehart, “Altar of Freedom,” 6.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Rinehart, *Altar*, 37-8.

nationalist and pro-military organization, the National Security League, named it as one of three publications all women should read about the war. Publisher George H. Doran had urged Rinehart to write the piece in the first place; now he tried to ensure the highest possible readership for it. The other two books suggested for women by the National Security League (NSL) included a recipe book and a book for children; it appeared that NSL editors and officers believed Rinehart's article contained all a woman needed to know about her role in a nation at war.<sup>69</sup>

“The Altar of Freedom” passionately and succinctly described patriotic motherhood, neatly overturning pre-war conceptions of peace-loving mothers. The prescription for pro-war motherhood that Rinehart presented in its place was well-suited to the needs of a mobilizing federal government, pro-war nationalists, and female political activists willing to support the war.

Rinehart reaped material rewards for creating such successful propaganda. She developed a close relationship with the Secretary of War and the Adjutant General, and through them she requested improved military assignments for her husband and son. The Secretary of War gave her special access to military training camps, and she published stories praising them—and reassuring the recruits' mothers—for *The Saturday Evening Post*. At the same time, she secretly wrote more realistic and critical reports for the War Department. When she tried to publish some of her criticisms, her editor told her that as a woman she could not be trusted as a military expert. She had trapped herself in writing

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<sup>69</sup> Mary Roberts Rinehart, “One Woman's View of War,” *Current Opinion*, Dec. 1917, 3; Mary Roberts Rinehart, *The Altar of Freedom* (NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1917); “The Altar of Freedom,” *New York Times*, 20 May 1917, BR 3; Albert Bushnell Hart, *America at War: A Handbook of Patriotic Education References* (NY: George H. Doran Company, 1918), 64; Rinehart, *My Story*, 220-1.

from the position of patriotic motherhood for at least the duration of the war.<sup>70</sup> Later the U.S. Secretary of the Navy said that her articles had been of “untold value in the stimulation of public opinion.” He estimated that they reached about 12 million weekly readers through *The Saturday Evening Post*. He likely based his estimate on the then-popular practice of sharing magazines between family members, friends and neighbors; actual circulation of the Saturday Evening Post hovered at close to 3 million.<sup>71</sup>

“The Altar of Freedom,” published nearly two weeks after war was declared, was an early and prominent example of a prescription for feminine nationalism distributed by a strongly pro-war mass media. Throughout the war, publishers, filmmakers, illustrators and writers—as well as women’s leaders and politicians—saturated the country with praise for patriotic motherhood. In a wartime culture and legal structure that demanded patriotic unity, pro-war nationalists worked to stifle criticism and opposition.

### **Radical Working-Class Activism, Mothers and the Federal Suppression of Dissent, May to June 1917**

By early May, conscription had passed both houses of Congress, and only the most radical activists in America were willing to speak against it. Socialists had split over the issue of the war, with many deciding that loyalty to country and opposition to German militarism should supersede class struggle. Others staunchly maintained that the war was a fight between capitalists over access to markets, and that the poor were serving

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<sup>70</sup> Cohn, 113-7; George H. Lorimer to Mary Roberts Rinehart, July 6, 1917; George H. Lorimer to Mary Roberts Rinehart, June 8, 1917. Rinehart’s relationships with Adjutant General Enoch Crowder and Secretary of War Newton Baker are part of her private papers held at the University of Pittsburgh Libraries, Special Collections. See Enoch Crowder to Mrs. Slocum, with Mrs. Slocum to Mary Roberts Rinehart attached, July 12, 1917; Enoch Crowder to Mary Roberts Rinehart, August 3, 1917; Newton D. Baker to Mary Roberts Rinehart, July 23, 1917; Newton D. Baker to Mary Roberts Rinehart, July 11, 1917; Newton D. Baker to Mary Roberts Rinehart, July 19, 1917.

<sup>71</sup> Cohn, 82; Rinehart, *Kings, Queens and Pawns*, 56; Josephus Daniels quoted in Cohn, 113, from Josephus Daniels to Admiral Mayo, May 8, 1917, copy in Rinehart papers; *N.W. Ayer & Son’s American Newspaper Annual & Directory* (Phil.: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1917), 858.

as cannon fodder. Famous opponents of the war included Socialist labor leaders Eugene Debs and Kate Richards O’Hare, the syndicalist labor union the International Workers of the World, and anarchist Emma Goldman. A few of the most radical members of the Woman’s Peace Party attempted to organize mothers, farmers and workers into a grass-roots anti-war movement rooted in People’s Councils, an alternative democratic framework modeled on the Russian soviets.<sup>72</sup>

It was the anarchists who were responsible for the most immediate and open calls to resist conscription. Departing from their previous organizing tactics, the anarchists around Emma Goldman attempted to use working-class mothers’ opposition to the war to foment rebellion. On May 9, Goldman, Alexander Berkman and their colleagues created the No-Conscription League. Goldman was a Russian Jewish immigrant with decades of experience in radical political organizing. A popular speaker and passionate writer, Goldman had a gift for attracting audiences. Goldman planned to print hundreds of thousands of copies of an anti-conscription manifesto, and to conduct a series of public rallies.<sup>73</sup>

In retrospect, Goldman’s activism seemed almost designed to trigger the greatest fears of native-born, pro-war Americans—particularly government officials. Her partner Berkman had attempted to assassinate industrialist Henry Clay Frick in 1892, severely wounding him in the process, and the press claimed that presidential assassin Leon Czolgosz was inspired by Goldman to the murder of President William McKinley. As an organizer, Goldman addressed audiences of all social classes and types, but a major base

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<sup>72</sup> Kennedy, xi, 18-38, 54-68, 142, n79; Steinson, 268-282.

<sup>73</sup> Zeiger, “Slacker,” 13-15; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 2 (NY: Dover Publications, 1970; reprint, NY: Knopf, 1931), 598; Emma Goldman to Agnes Inglis, May 12, 1917, Correspondence: July 1, 1916 to December 31, 1917, *The Emma Goldman Papers: A Microfilm Edition*, ed. by Candace Falk, Ronald J. Zboray and Daniel Cornford (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey Inc., 1991).

of her support was immigrant, working-class and often Yiddish-speaking. In this time period, Eastern European Jews were some of the most militant labor organizers in East Coast cities; many had brought radical ideas from the old world to the new. In the years before the Great War, Jewish women in New York had not only protested poor working conditions and wages as union members, but also led bread strikes and rent strikes as homemakers. With the No-Conscription League, then, Goldman was tapping into an audience that was receptive to her class-conscious message, which perhaps even shared her early childhood experiences of resenting military conscription in Russia. Not only was Goldman a foreign-born radical in a time of growing nativism, she threatened to create resistance to the draft among other immigrants.<sup>74</sup>

Goldman wanted to see revolution in America, and she saw the passage of the conscription bill as an opportunity. The size of the crowds come to hear her lecture seemed proof; she bragged to the assembled thousands at the No-Conscription League's first rally that given the organization's lack of money and time to properly publicize the meeting, the turnout indicated a huge, untapped resistance to the draft in America.<sup>75</sup>

After this first rally, and the official signing of the conscription law, Goldman noticed a curious phenomenon in the offices of the No-Conscription League—not only

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<sup>74</sup> A rich body of work describes working-class, immigrant culture in New York in the 1900s; for an example of the types of labor organization and radical politics women could bring from Eastern Europe to their lives in America, see Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1995); Goldman said her anti-militarism dated to childhood exposure to conscription of convicts by agents of the tsar in Russia, Emma Goldman, lecture, transcript by Charles Daniel Frey, “[Report to] Department of Justice,” August 27, 1917, *The Emma Goldman Papers: A Microfilm Edition*; “Speech That Prompted Murderous Assault on the President,” reprinted from *Chicago Tribune* in The Emma Goldman Papers Online; available from <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Exhibition/assassination.html>; accessed 27 April 2011.

<sup>75</sup> Emma Goldman, “Address to the Jury,” New York City, July 9, 1917; The Emma Goldman Papers Online; available from <http://sunsite3.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Writings/Speeches/170709.html>; accessed 17 July 2008. Emma Goldman, “We Don’t Believe in Conscription,” speech delivered at the Harlem River Casino, New York City, May 18, 1917; The Emma Goldman Papers Online; available from <http://sunsite3.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Writings/Speeches/170518.html>; accessed 17 July 2008.

were young men coming to find out how to resist or avoid the draft, but so were their mothers. “By the hundreds they came, wrote or telephoned,” Goldman recalled. Though her speeches were usually pitched to appeal to both men and women, and Goldman generally spurned the maternalist rhetoric of her Progressive peers, this marked a turning point in the anarchists’ battle against the draft.<sup>76</sup>

After this, Goldman began to tune her anti-draft appeals to mothers. Speaking in Philadelphia on June 2, Goldman delivered her well-known lecture “Victims of Morality” in Yiddish, but according to a government transcript, it was spiced up with commentary on current events. Improvising on her usual critique of private property, Goldman noted that the war would benefit owners of capital at the expense of workers, and challenged the audience as to whether they wanted to be killed for the benefit of “the Ruckerfellers, Morgans and Wall Street.” She then challenged women to resist the draft. “. . . [She] said that if you mothers would go out and say ‘No! we will not give our sons to be killed for the Ruckerfellers and Morgans it would make the lawmakers s[h]iver . . .’” It was at this point that she was told by Sergeant Hogan of the local police that any more speaking on conscription would result in her arrest. In her memoir, Goldman remembered police threatening to break up the meeting with their clubs, and said that afterward she and fifty local supporters went to a private place to start a Philadelphia branch of the No-Conscription League.<sup>77</sup>

For their next meeting, the No-Conscription League organized a “Mothers’ No-Conscription Demonstration” to be held on June 4<sup>th</sup>, the day before the nationwide

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<sup>76</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, 600.

<sup>77</sup> Emma Goldman, “Victims of Moral,” transcript of lecture by J. Gassel for the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, June 4, 1917, from *The Emma Goldman Papers: A Microfilm Edition*; Goldman, *Living My Life*, 601.

registration for the draft. The timing of this meeting made it an open challenge to government authority.<sup>78</sup>

The June 4<sup>th</sup> mothers' meeting differed from the organization's other rallies in including two women who spoke out as mothers against conscription. Since Goldman and her comrades had not relied on motherhood rhetoric in their other efforts, and the most active women in the movement were not mothers, the inner anarchist circle turned to their female relatives to address the rally. Goldman asked her close friend and niece, Stella Ballantine, to speak. Ballantine had a toddler son. The other mother who spoke was No-Conscription League Secretary Leonard D. Abbot's mother-in-law; she was a Romanian known in the social circle of Village bohemians as Mother Yuster. Mother Yuster addressed the crowd as a mother and grandmother.<sup>79</sup>

The June 4<sup>th</sup> meeting was the group's largest—with 5,000 attending inside the hall and 30,000 massed outside, according to Goldman. Men and women, old and young attended, as did the usual crowd of police and hecklers, including newly enlisted soldiers and sailors. Newspaper coverage of the event did not relate that it was framed as a mothers' meeting, emphasizing instead negative aspects such as conflict within the crowd, the potential for a riot, and Mother Yuster's foreign-born origins. Stella Ballantine's part in the rally was not noted by the press.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Emma Goldman, form letter for the No-Conscription League [mailed to Frank P. Walsh], May 25, 1917, *The Emma Goldman Papers: A Microfilm Edition*. This letter announced the meeting as "A Mothers' No-Conscription Demonstration" to take place "on the eve of registration day."

<sup>79</sup> Robert Schulman, *Romany Marie: The Queen of Greenwich Village* (NY: Butler Books, 2006); "Meeting of No-Conscription League, Hunts Point Palace, New York City, June 4, 1917," in *The Emma Goldman Papers Online* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Digital Library SUNsite, accessed 1/31/2007); available from <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Writings/Speeches/170604.html>. Transcript by Charles Pickler, hired by the No-Conscription League itself.

<sup>80</sup> "Meeting of No-Conscription League, Hunts Point Palace, New York City, June 4, 1917," in *The Emma Goldman Papers Online*.

Ballantine told the assembled crowd that she was grateful her son was not of draft age, and quoted a letter from a French soldier describing the conditions in the trenches. “Have I to give my son for that? I would rather he die,” she told the crowd. Considering that her healthy son might someday make a soldier, against her will or his own, she said “. . . I think I may have committed a crime against humanity,” in raising him.<sup>81</sup>

Ballantine’s words—especially wishing her toddler son dead rather than a grown-up soldier—were exceptionally radical, breaking powerful taboos. Yet because newspaper coverage focused on the police, potential riots, and disloyalty, her impassioned anti-war speech was not quoted in the mass media and did not reach a wider audience.

Mother Yuster spoke against conscription from a grandmother’s perspective. Saying her heart was full of sorrow, she spoke on behalf of all mothers; echoing the claims of the North Dakota Farm Woman, Yuster said that mothers’ sacrifices had made their sons healthy and strong, but not in order to make them “murderers and slaughterers.” She threatened the government with mass disobedience from mothers who would resist the draft. “I know that I voice the feeling of plenty of other members . . . that we will never allow our sons to be conscripted.” Having already faced death in childbirth, Yuster said mothers would bravely face death again to save their sons. She exhorted mothers to “wake up” to the threat of the draft.<sup>82</sup>

The No-Conscription League’s next rally was much smaller than the Mothers’ Meeting had been because the larger New York area venues would no longer admit them.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> “Meeting of No-Conscription League, Hunts Point Palace, New York City, June 4, 1917,” in The Emma Goldman Papers [database on-line]; “Anarchists Awed by Police Clubs,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1917, p. 1; Zeiger, 13-15; on the date of the registration for the draft, Jeanette Keith, “The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance, 1917-1918: Class, Race, and Conscription in the Rural South,” *The Journal of American History* 87 (March 2001), 1344. Keith’s article is useful in its discussion of strategies for resisting the draft, and its emphasis on debunking the standard interpretation of World War I’s popularity among the American public.

Goldman blamed police harassment, a sign of increasing government pressure on the radicals, for the other venues' refusals. Even so, their rally at the the small-scale Jewish Socialist meeting hall of the Lower East Side was packed and overflowing with thousands of people. Only a few days later, Goldman and Berkman were arrested on the federal charge of conspiracy to resist conscription. The arrests effectively prevented the spread of their movement from New York to other cities and warned radicals of the price to be paid for dissent. Both Goldman and Berkman were sentenced to federal prison terms and eventually deported to the Soviet Union.<sup>83</sup>

The No-Conscription League's attempt to tap into mothers' resentment of conscription demonstrates that Congressmen were right to understand mothers' power as a potential threat to military policy. Like Representative Dill of Washington, who feared that fathers and mothers might hoist their rifles to resist government agents come to conscript a son, so agents of the federal government feared resistance to conscription from the working-class, immigrants and mothers of draft-aged young men.

### **Conclusion**

Through their public statements and activism, women framed the draft as not only a military but also a family policy. Thus the debates over conscription became a forum for women's politics, especially those women seen as most affected by military policy—mothers. The fight over conscription divided mothers along lines of class and ethnicity, pitting a conservative elite against the radical working-class. Gone was the earlier cooperation in the cause of a maternalist peace, which had briefly united representatives of labor and representatives of elite, old-stock America in the Woman's Peace Party.

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<sup>83</sup> Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 2, 607.

This chapter focused on pro-war women's creation of a prescription for women's role in wartime, patriotic motherhood. Based on common conceptions of all females as inherently motherly, patriotic motherhood was invented and propagated by supporters of the war and the Selective Service Act. They encouraged women to embrace a nationalism powerful enough to overcome the mother's love that sought to keep a son safe from war. Politicians, female nationalists, and working class radicals believed mothers' love could create a significant opposition to enlistment and the draft, especially in view of mothers' influence over their sons, families and communities.

The chapter also suggested what might have been. It explored the diversity of women's opinions on war, and the different ways women could bend arguments about a mother's identity to influence debates on military policy and international relations. It highlighted the power of media figures in promoting war and conscription and quashing radical critique. The nation's most powerful publishers and editors were eager to print stories to support the war effort, for example soliciting Rinehart's account of her son's enlistment. Rinehart and other well-connected pro-conscription women had a disproportionate representation in mass media; they had the opportunity to present their ideas to millions of readers. On the other hand, the federal government's crackdown on dissent, particularly the case of Emma Goldman, showed how seriously its prosecutors would take opposition to mobilization. The arrests and harassment of radicals narrowed the scope of women's politics and the discussion of mothers' perspectives on the war.

Used in fiction, journalism, film, songs, poetry and even parades, mothers of soldiers served as primary symbols of American nationalism in the homefront popular culture of World War I. This must be understood not as an inevitable outgrowth of

popular feeling, but as a distorted reflection of reality that best suited the purposes of government, a pro-war media, and even many activists. The iterations of patriotic motherhood in wartime popular culture—and instances of dissent and disagreement—are the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter Two

### **Inventing the Gold Star Mother: Mothers and the Performance of Patriotism in America's Wartime Popular Culture**

In December of 1917, newspaper columnist Elia W. Peatty, writing for the *Chicago Tribune*, described her conversation with the mother of a soldier. The mother was initially hesitant to hang one of the new service flags from her home. The service flag—a blue star or stars on a field of white, enclosed by a rectangular border of red—was first used by Americans during World War I. It told passers-by that one or more members of the household was in military service. This Chicago mother and her family had long preferred to “keep our affairs to ourselves.” But as neighbors on “every side” began to hang the service flags, the mother decided to join them; she said she flew the flag on behalf of her son.<sup>84</sup>

Peatty's printed response sheds light on the way many Americans understood a mother's patriotic duty during World War I—as not only a private practice but also a public performance for the benefit of the community. “It is no time for chilly proprieties or for reticence,” the author scolded. “No family may keep to itself now. At least, it has no right to do so. Only cooperation can save us, and if we have given that most precious token of our cooperation, a son, shall we not let the world know? Not for vain glory, but to hearten others and to do honor to him who has gone . . .”<sup>85</sup>

Peatty's column was one of hundreds, if not thousands, of wartime writings exhorting mothers to support the war in public performance as well as private action.

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<sup>84</sup> Elia W. Peattie, “Service Flags,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 December 1917, D5. Please note that the ProQuest database of historical American newspapers has been used for the following newspapers in this chapter: the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the *Chicago Defender*, the *Philadelphia Tribune*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Washington Post*. Titles given to articles and advertisements in these papers are ProQuest's.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

How women received such prescriptions, however, is much more difficult to discern. An examination of service flags, mourning practices, and parades in World War I will explore the way commerce, culture and politics met and mingled in symbols of pro-war patriotism. Using texts to reconstruct the visual and material culture of wartime reveals the agency of American women in adopting and adapting the role of patriotic mother for diverse purposes, including the sale of war bonds, the advancement of woman suffrage, and the promotion of African American equality.

This study of the gendered performance of patriotism in World War I highlights the strength of traditional formulations of a woman's duty to the nation through bearing soldier sons and cheerfully serving the wartime state. It also shows how activist women could clothe themselves in such traditional virtues, the better to campaign for modern rights. Mothers' participation in pro-war marches and tableaux shows that patriotic motherhood was not foisted on women by men, but was defined by female writers and perpetuated by women's speech and actions, even those of Progressive woman leaders and suffragists. During the war, American women on the home front proved themselves indispensable to the government by excelling in positions previously held by men: they worked in war industries, medicine, and in the sale of millions of dollars in war bonds, sold to pay for the costs of the war. Yet older ideals of feminine wartime sacrifice and motherly duty dominated the content of pro-war songs, parades and rallies.

Mothers could serve as unifying symbols at a time when women's equality was a particularly divisive issue, and mothers of soldiers evoked strong emotions as stand-ins for their absent soldier sons. Mothers of soldiers became symbols of national service closely tied to new icons of patriotism such as the service flag and gold star armband, and

marching mothers became the focus of massive rallies meant to raise money and unify the public behind the war effort.<sup>86</sup>

As visual symbols, service flags communicated multiple messages, varying according to the perspective of the viewer. Contemporary sources, both published and unpublished, reveal the most common or obvious interpretations, and anthropological theory can add another layer of meaning. Each star at the center of a service flag stood for one absent American, and so the flags were literally placeholders, telling viewers of those who had gone but who might yet return. Seen in terms of anthropological theory, service flags marked households in a liminal state: not yet grieving, but still deprived for the time being of at least one member. The flags made public what had been private, and so communicated a family's situation to all passers-by. Writing about Christmas during the first year of war, suffragist Anna Howard Shaw asked American women to extend special care to soldiers' families, saying that service flags showed that a home had "laid upon the altar of our country the greatest gift within its power," and concluding, "This war makes us all kin." The flags reminded Americans—in a prosperous country thousands of miles from battle—that their nation was at war.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> From this point on, I will most often call these women "mothers of soldiers" for the sake of brevity. This term accurately reflects the preoccupation of contemporaries with these mothers, who were considered mothers of "boys over there," or mothers of soldiers and sailors. I hope the reader will understand that in using a shortened term I indicate mothers of all military service personnel. Women did serve in the Army, Navy and Marines in World War I, for the first time, in small numbers, almost entirely in clerical positions. Their families were entitled to fly service flags. Mothers of military nurses whose daughters died while in service were entitled to wear gold star armbands and fly service flags with gold stars. On women in the military, see Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I: They Also Served* (Niwot, Col.: University Press of Colorado, 1997).

<sup>87</sup> Anna Howard Shaw, draft of *Ladies' Home Journal* column, Oct. 2, 1917, 2, in Women's Studies Manuscript Collections from the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College Series 1: Woman's Suffrage Part A: National Leaders, ed. Anne Firor Scott (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1990); Christine Bouchier, "Rituals of Mourning: Bereavement, Grief and Mourning in the First World War," *Gateway: An Academic Journal on the Web* (Summer 2001), <http://grad.usask.ca/gateway/archive13.html>, accessed on Oct. 7, 2007. This use of the liminality is borrowed from anthropological theory on rites of passage, especially funeral customs, in the work of Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Maurice Bloch.

As framed by pro-war writers and speakers, the flags were also a mark of pride, and to the many Americans swept up in nationalism and an enthusiasm for all things military, they served to enhance a family's social status. Given the repression of wartime opposition and criticism, the flags reinforced the feeling imparted by popular print, film and song that Americans were united in supporting the war. The service flags arrayed around cities and towns spoke of a patriotic, pro-war sentiment that could seem universal since the passage of the Espionage Act in 1917 had outlawed open opposition to the war and the Sedition Act of 1918 outlawed criticism or disrespect toward symbols such as the American flag or military uniform.<sup>88</sup> Evidence suggests that service flags were popular among military families. Institutions such as churches, schools, clubs and places of business also flew large service flags, with anywhere from several to hundreds of stars. Enterprising merchants created small metal service flag pins so that family members could wear this marker on their clothing. These iterations had the effect of multiplying the perceived number of Americans serving in the military, as now each service member could be represented on numerous flags.<sup>89</sup>

The origins of the service flag were commercial. Only two months after America joined the war, retailers and manufacturers began advertising a flag consumers could fly from the home to represent a family members' military service. George H. Taylor on New York's West 19<sup>th</sup> Street told readers that flying a service flag would show honor to family members in the military; the flag could be sold with one or more stars. Taylor's version of the flag was large, at three feet by five feet, and was available at "Leading

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<sup>88</sup> Kennedy, *Disloyal Mothers*, xiii.

<sup>89</sup> On the service pins, see Metal Arts Co., Advertisement, *Boys' Life*, July 1918, 61; Frederick May Eliot to Mrs. Christopher Rhodes Eliot (his mother), 1 Nov. 1918, Letters, 19, Frederick May Eliot Additional Papers, 1889-1958, bMS 111, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA.

Retail Stores.” An August 29, 1917 advertisement offered service flags from Gimbels for \$2.00 each, with anywhere from one to five stars. Its rippling service flag illustration stood next to a headline advising readers to prepare themselves for “Send-off Day” by purchasing flags. “And we have not put a premium on Patriotism—prices are very fair,” Gimbel Brothers promised.<sup>90</sup>

The service flag was an early success. Robert L. Quiesser, a former military man who had served in Mexico, invented the service flag; he got a patent for its design in November 1917. After the war, he bragged to a group of Ohio businessmen that he and his wife had begun the craze for service flags with a six-month marketing campaign. Whether due to their marketing, or to Americans’ desire to show their family connections to the military, the flags were popular, flown from tenements, cottages, farms, suburban homes and even a Vanderbilt mansion.<sup>91</sup> The service flag gave rise to the symbol of the gold star for a fallen service member and the silver star for an injured one. Though businesses and institutions soon began to fly their own service flags highlighting the number of employees and members who had left for war, popular culture sources associated the service flag predominantly with families and mothers.

Merchants’ protests against Quiesser’s patent in November 1916 pointed both to the popularity of the flags and the relationship of mothers to the war. The flags were apparently a profit-maker for merchants; one protested the patent as creating a “private monopoly.” Further, the merchant argued, since he sold his service flags “mostly to

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<sup>90</sup>‘Display Ad 80—No Title,’ *New York Times*, 26 June 1917, 18; ‘Display Ad No. 27—No Title’ *New York Times*, 29 August 1917, 5.

<sup>91</sup>“Tells of Service Flag,” *New York Times*, 30 November 1919, 4. The United States was involved in conflicts with Mexico and deployed National Guard troops there in 1916.

mothers whose sons are in the service,” the new patent would raise prices for the most deserving of consumers—patriotic mothers.<sup>92</sup>

In popular culture such as songs and poems, writers underscored the association of service flags with mothers and sons.<sup>93</sup> The poem “The Service Flag,” published in the *Indianapolis News*, connected the flags directly with women’s emotions at a soldier’s departure. A repeated verse told the reader the flag was “Hung with a tear and a woman’s prayer.” The flag was identified most strongly with the soldier’s mother. “I am the flag of the Service, sir;/ The flag of his mother—I speak for her/ Who stands by my window and waits and fears,/ But hides from the others her unwept tears.” The poem also described the flag as belonging to “wives who wait,” “sisters, too,” and finally returns to mothers. “I am the flag of a mother’s son/ And won’t come down till the victory’s won.” Other female relatives played a role in the song, but the primary role was the mother’s.<sup>94</sup>

Another newspaper poem was in the form of a dialogue between a father and his young son. The young son asked about the meaning of the service flags and noticed that a neighbor had a flag with only one star. “Poor Widow Jones has only one--/ I saw her crying, too,” the boy says. The father instructed the son on how to feel on viewing a service flag. “So when you see a lot of stars/ Lift up your heart with Joy,/ And when you see a single one/ Pray for some mother’s boy.” His reference to “a lot of stars” was likely to the flags of businesses and institutions. When he was not evoking mothers, the father

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<sup>92</sup> “Patent Monopoly on Service Flag,” *New York Times*, 22 Nov. 1917, 24.

<sup>93</sup> John W. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2005), 14-15.

<sup>94</sup> William Herschell, “The Service Flag,” reprinted in W.D. Eaton, ed. *Great Poems of the World War* (Chicago: T.S. Denison & Company, 1922), and put online by Emory University’s library at [http://beck.library.emory.edu/greatwar/poetry/view.php?id=eaton\\_Eaton129](http://beck.library.emory.edu/greatwar/poetry/view.php?id=eaton_Eaton129), accessed on 30 September 2007.

interpreted the flags using the language of pro-war enthusiasm—the soldiers were “gallant lads” and “glorious boys.”<sup>95</sup> In contrast, Widow Jones stood for a mother’s public pride in her son, but also her private sorrow and helplessness in the face of war.

In 1917, prosperous individuals and families could enjoy music from albums played on Victrolas and other early record players, or they could play sheet music themselves on a piano at home. Singing along to the piano in the parlor played an important role in American culture, and during the war the military made use of men’s singing skills to arrange frequent mass sing-alongs to keep up morale. At home, music publishers quickly adapted the popular “mother song” genre to the coming of war. Common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these songs were sentimental, even maudlin, odes to the power of a mother’s love. While the infamous mother song “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” had joined mother’s love to anti-war sentiment, pro-war mother songs used devices such as the service flag to express nationalism and pride.<sup>96</sup> A survey of the sheet music collected by two individuals over 1917 and 1918 shows that at least 53 wartime songs reinforced prescriptions of patriotic motherhood [see Appendix A]. Songs such as “The Message That Never Came” and “With Every Thought I Breathe A Prayer to You, My Boy” explored mothers’ feelings of separation and loss, reinforcing conceptions of a mother’s endless, long-suffering devotion to her son. Other songs, such as “So Long, Mother” presented young men’s encouragement to their mothers to remain stoic and cheerful.

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<sup>95</sup> J.E. Evans, “The Service Flag,” reprinted in W.D. Eaton, ed., *Great Poems of the World War*, 1922, accessed online, see fn 10. This poem was originally published in *The Sovereign Visitor*, a publication of the fraternal order The Woodmen of the World.

<sup>96</sup> Howard Husock, “American Music: Popular Song,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1988), 52; “Flood of War Songs,” *The Washington Post*, 16 August 1917, 6; Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering During the Great War* (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 42-3.

Numerous songs presented straightforward prescriptions for patriotic motherhood. In one song a mother told her son, “Your Country Needs You Now,” and in the song “We’ll Do Our Share (While You’re Over There)” a mother reassured her son that though she missed him, she prayed for him and supported his efforts to “do [his] share” and fight for a victory that “must be won.” Through such sentiments, mothers apparently earned the praises heaped on them in songs such as “Mothers of America: You Have Done Your Share!” and “You’re the Greatest Little Mothers in the World (Mothers of America).” Completely reversing the common pre-war conception of a natural motherly pacifism, one song even anointed American mothers “the greatest little General[s] of them all!”<sup>97</sup>

Songs about mothers’ service flags provided contemporaries with one way to interpret the meaning of the service flags they could see flying on local buildings; in this way, printed propaganda could help shape viewers’ interactions with the physical world around them. The sheet music for the song “There’s a Service Flag Flying at Our House,” from 1917 joined mothers to the service flag both visually and verbally. The lyrics, composed by Thomas Joier and Bernie Grossman, did not focus solely on mothers. They called soldiers “sons” and “brothers,” and focused on both the father’s and mother’s emotions. “Father is so proud of what his boy has done, there’s a tear in mother’s smile and she murmurs ‘my son’ . . .” The lyrics said that the soldier would go forward to “fame and glory,” and if “we lose him in the fight,” there will be a “new star in Heaven

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<sup>97</sup> Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996); Michael T. Isenberg, *War on Film: The American Cinema and World War I* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1981); Nicholas E. Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley: American Popular Song, 1866-1910* (NY: Schirmer Books, 1990); Howard Husock, “American Music: Popular Song,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (Summer 1988), 52; Roy L. McCardell, “Roy L. McCardell Visits ‘Tin Pan Alley,’” *The Music Trade Review*, 12 Sept. 1908, 21. The two collections studied are: the Samuel DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music at The National Museum of American History, The Smithsonian Institution, and the Harry and Sara Lepman Collection housed in Special Collections in the Music Division, the Library of Congress.

that night.”<sup>98</sup> The song framed the soldier’s death as a Christian martyrdom. It promoted a patriotic sentimentality dwelling on the mixed feelings of pride and sorrow of the parents and the possibility of a noble death for the soldier, motifs borrowed from pro-war propaganda in England and Canada.<sup>99</sup>

Though mothers did not predominate in the lyrics, the cover art for this sheet music emphasized the mother’s closeness to her son and used the symbol of the mother to mark the psychological cost of war. The cover showed a line of young, cheerful soldiers marching down the street. A fashionable crowd of men and women on the sidewalk watched them go by; some took their hats off or raised their arms in the air in enthusiastic salute. But up above, looking over the parade from large brownstone dwellings, probably apartment buildings, were families in the windows. They looked prosperous but somewhat forlorn; some of the people huddled together as if for support, others had faces in shadow. Three service flags rippled from the buildings, each with a single star. The viewer could see inside the window above the closest service flag. There stood a single figure—a grey-haired woman with erect posture, her hair in a bun, wearing a grey, unornamented dress, her hands clasped at her waist. The grey hair in a bun commonly signified a mother in other posters and illustrations from the war. That she stood alone implied that she had no husband or other children; wartime fiction often focused on widows with only one son as the most self-sacrificing of all mothers. The composition called attention to her as her window was placed above a tall doorway, and above the

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<sup>98</sup> Albert W. Brown, composer, Thomas Hoier and Bernie Grossman, lyrics, “There’s a Service Flag Flying at Our House” (New York: Joe Morris Music Co., 1917). This sheet music and cover art is available online from the Library of Congress, Music Theater & Dance collection, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.100004339/default.html>, accessed 8 October 2007; Graham, 14.

<sup>99</sup> Suzanne Evans, *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs: World War I and the Politics of Grief* (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2007).

center-most service flag. Over all the cheering and marching of the youthful crowds below, this older woman waited by her window as a reminder of the separations, fears and grief that accompany war. Seen in terms of nineteenth-century moral motherhood, the unspoken implication was that if mothers supported mobilization even at such a cost, it was a just war.<sup>100</sup>

The service flag held meaning for mothers, families and men in military service, acting as a sign of pro-war support in their communities. Ella Babson was a Maine widow and schoolteacher whose son David was enlisted in the 104<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. His unit served in several important battles on the Western front, including the Marne, Saint-Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne, and David managed to preserve his mother's letters through troop movements and battles. The letters documented the way that entire communities—even remote ones—became involved in the war through networks of families, churches, friends and acquaintances. Ella read her son's letters out loud to her pupils, and she found that the letters had an almost miraculous power of silencing the most unruly children. She told students the story of her son's passage to Europe on a troop ship, a journey fraught with danger from unseen U-boats. In this way, Ella's schoolroom became a locus for the dissemination of information about the war, and a place where students could become more emotionally involved in the conflict. At Christmas, Ella's students pooled their money and bought her a service flag. She did not have much money for inessentials, but told her son: “. . . I'm going to try to get a flag staff, one of the kind to be attached to the side of the house and long enough to take my

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<sup>100</sup> Brown, “There's a Service Flag Flying at Our House,” 1917.

service flag with a small American flag ahead of it. When I get that flying I shall be the proudest person in Essex County.”<sup>101</sup>

Ella Babson frequently mentioned in her letters her regret that David had quit school as a teenager to help support his mother and sisters. In contrast, another supporter of service flags, Frederick May Eliot, came from a distinguished family of Unitarian ministers. He attended Harvard as an undergraduate and a divinity student. An urbanite, Eliot grew up in Boston, preached part-time in Cambridge, and later got his own church in Saint Paul, Minnesota. There he worked as a pro-war speaker. At one point, he traveled to a Minnesota community of Swedish and Norwegian farmers, where he had been warned to expect anti-war feeling but actually encountered “intense loyalty.” Eliot imagined that the war was uniting Americans across class and ethnicity. He wrote his mother: “The service-flags and red-cross cards in the windows bind pretty much every house in the land together. That is a wonderful thing, isn’t it? All sharing the sacrifice, and thus brought together as never before. It touches and thrills me, more than I can express. Whittier’s line—‘their fellowship of suffering’—has new meaning.”<sup>102</sup>

Frederick was anxious for his mother Mary’s approval for the pro-war sermons he delivered to his church in St. Paul, and for his decision to join the army as a chaplain. He anticipated her disapproval of anything too “warlike” in the church services he designed, and he knew his aunt Anna disapproved of the war altogether. Just before leaving for Europe, Frederick begged both his parents for a sign of confidence in him and his

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<sup>101</sup> Ella M. Bailey Babson to David Frederick Babson, 30 October 1917, Correspondence, 1917, folder 1, David Frederick Babson Papers, 1903-1984, MC 361, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass; Ella M. Bailey Babson to David Frederick Babson, 6 January 1918, Correspondence, 1918, folder 2, in the Babson papers.

<sup>102</sup> Ella M. Bailey Babson to David Frederick Babson, 1 November 1917, Correspondence, 1917, folder 1, Babson papers; Frederick May Eliot to Mrs. Christopher Rhodes Eliot (his mother), 8 April 1918, 2, Letters, 18, Frederick May Eliot Additional Papers.

decision to serve with the troops. So when his mother began to wear a service-flag pin for him, he reacted effusively. “I am so glad you wear a service-pin for me—honestly, Mother, that means just everything; and I can think of you in a way that will make it easier for me to do my share over here.” In the case of this elite family of Unitarian ministers and intellectuals, including at least one Boston abolitionist ancestor, Mary’s decision to wear the pin showed not only support and pride in her son but also served as a declaration of her loyalties among a social set in which the war remained controversial.<sup>103</sup>

In 1918, the U.S. developed a second visual symbol of war support: the gold star armband as a sign of mourning. Its gold star derived directly from the symbolism of the service flag; families were directed to cover the flag’s blue star with a gold one if their loved one died in military service. Clothing retailers, nationalists and President Wilson himself attempted to persuade women to abandon all-black mourning for a family member killed in military service. They deemed it too depressing, with potential negative effects on society as a whole. Instead they suggested that women wear only an armband with a gold star as a distinctive form of mourning costume that expressed pride in their loved one’s national service.<sup>104</sup> Because mothers were popularly perceived as the most loving and important relatives of the soldier “boys,” mothers served as key advocates and targets for this campaign. Though this top-down attempt to change long traditions of mourning-wear was not entirely successful, the armbands were very popular.

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<sup>103</sup> Frederick May Eliot to Mrs. Christopher Rhodes Eliot, 25 Feb. 1918, p. 4-5; 1 Nov. 1918, p. 5-6; Elizabeth Eliot to Mrs. Christopher Rhodes Eliot, 8 July 1918, p. 2-3; all in Letters, 19, Frederick May Eliot Additional Papers; Alan Seaberg, “Frederick May Eliot,” *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography* online, <http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/frederickmayeliot.html>, accessed on 17 March 2011.

<sup>104</sup> Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (NY: NYU Press, 2010), 95-9; John W. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s* (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005), 12-13.

Perhaps it was natural that the first Americans to publicly connect wartime with casualties and mourning-wear were clothing retailers and dry goods merchants. Only four months after the U.S. joined the war, in August 1917, the merchants' main trade publication, the *Dry Goods Economist*, began a campaign to persuade Americans to change women's traditional black mourning costumes for the anticipated war dead. The editors expected thousands of casualties for each day of engagement, along the lines of British and French losses. The retailers and clothing manufacturers could not know that American strategies would keep most troops out of the war until the spring and summer of 1918, and that total U.S. casualties for the war would reach 116,516, over half of those resulting from illness and infection.<sup>105</sup>

America's wartime culture was informed as much by fear as reality, however, and the declaration of war led a variety of writers and public figures to preach the value of the collective over the individual good. Many embraced repression of anti-war speech and negative emotions as necessary strategies. It is significant that during the war authors employed the term morale to describe the civilian population's attitudes, when originally this term was applied only to a fighting force.<sup>106</sup> Looking at France, Britain and Germany as examples, many Americans concluded that modern war required thorough mobilization and zeal on the homefront as well as the front lines. Women's bodies—the bodies that were traditionally swathed in black to show a family's mourning—thus became key signifiers and women's choice of clothing a source of conflict over how the

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<sup>105</sup> "Our Dress May Be a Powerful Factor in the War," *Dry Goods Economist*, 18 August 1917, 5-6; "Shall We Be Patriots or Conventionalists?" *Dry Goods Economist*, 1 September 1917, 8; Department of Veterans Affairs, "America's Wars," available online at [http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs\\_americas\\_wars.pdf](http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs_americas_wars.pdf), accessed 14 February 2010.

<sup>106</sup> G. Stanley Hall, *Morale: The Supreme Standard of Life and Conduct* (New York: D. Appleton, 1920), 22.

war would be discussed and understood at home. In discussions of mourning, just as in previous debates over conscription and enlistment, patriots framed women's unruly emotions as a threat to the nation.

Fearful that a country facing huge casualties would don mourning en masse, the *Dry Goods Economist* used patriotic rhetoric to persuade readers of the need to reject traditional mourning for relatives of fallen servicemen. Instead of all-black attire in traditional mourning fabrics such as crape, the magazine proposed that women wear a black armband to show their mourning, as men customarily did, with the addition of a gold star in honor of the military service of their lost loved one. In its first editorial on the subject, the *Dry Goods Economist* sounded themes that continued to shape discussions of mourning for the duration of the war. First, the trade magazine labeled the wearing of mourning a luxury in time of war, a self-indulgence that might reflect an individual's emotions but that would depress the country's morale. By psychologically undermining the determination of the populace, the wearing of mourning might even prolong the conflict and lead to the bereavement of "many thousands more of our friends and neighbors." As evidence, the editors cited Great Britain, where citizens had reportedly ceased the wearing of black mourning for this very reason. Instead of wallowing in sadness, mourners must "maintain a high heart, to vitalize the fighting spirit," and help keep "our country in trim." Wearing of mourning would encourage pacifists and internal enemies.<sup>107</sup>

The magazine also argued that women's demand for new mourning outfits would endanger the nation's low supplies of textiles needed for war industries, as women wearing mourning would throw away their ordinary clothing. This makes little sense with

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<sup>107</sup> "Our Dress May Be a Powerful Factor in the War," 5-6.

what we know of Victorian mourning practices. Author John Morley has said that Victorians usually threw away their black crape mourning clothes once they were finished with the required period of mourning, as keeping them was seen as bad luck. No evidence suggests that American women would throw away their ordinary clothing to embrace their mourning, particularly as new wartime thrift campaigns encouraged women to restyle and re-use old clothes or share them with the needy.<sup>108</sup>

The *Dry Goods Economist's* true reason for opposition to mourning-wear was concern for profits. Editors at the trade publication and the retailers who subscribed to it feared that adoption of mourning would create a slump in sales for other clothing and fashionable accessories. In fact, “many branches of business” could be hurt by mourning, the magazine argued. P.A. Conne, the vice president of Saks & Co., objected to the wearing of mourning as “depressing,” and warned that if adopted it “would result in great harm to business and general conditions.” Sigfried Blumenfeld, the general manager of a skirt manufacturer, said that Canada had stopped the wearing of women’s mourning after a year of war after seeing the damage it had done to their economy. Numerous other merchants and manufacturers confined their statements on mourning to anticipating its effects on business, and they equated patriotism with maintaining Americans’ good cheer—and demand for clothing, hats, shoes, gloves and ribbons.<sup>109</sup>

In the wartime craze for all things patriotic, however, several newspapers and well-known political figures adopted the *Economist's* argument. Using the most nationalist of language, the *New York Herald*, *New York Tribune*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Atlanta Constitution*, *Montgomery Advertiser* and smaller papers across the American

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<sup>108</sup> John Morley, *Death, Heaven, and the Victorians* (London: Studio Vista, 1972), 66.

<sup>109</sup> “Shall We Be Patriots or Conventionalists?” 8-9.

North and South repeated the two main arguments: group psychology in wartime required suppression of mourning and wartime economies called for the rejection of mourning costumes. Well-placed members of the Wilson administration's cabinet endorsed their position, including the Secretary of Commerce, Secretary of the Interior, several U.S. Senators and Representatives, as well as the president of the nation's largest women's voluntary organization, the General Federation of Women's Clubs.<sup>110</sup>

In November 1917, the wealthy Chicago reformer Mrs. Louise de Koven Bowen, at one time a vigorous advocate of conscription, asked American women to adopt gold star armbands in place of all-black mourning clothes. The *New York Times* quoted Bowen as saying that ". . . the glory of the death should be emphasized rather than its sadness." She argued that Germany forbade the wearing of traditional mourning-wear and soldiers of all nations disliked it because of its negative "psychological effect." Mrs. Bowen was a prominent member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and she was the Illinois chairman of the Woman's Committee of the State Council for Defense. The Council for Defense was the most powerful civilian entity during wartime, in which government appointees coordinated civilian war work efforts. Speaking from such a lofty position, Bowen's voice held the ring of authority.<sup>111</sup>

Mourning practices remained a topic of discussion. The *New York Times* and other papers ran letters to the editor on the subject, and the national Woman's Committee of the Council for National Defense received many letters on the topic and discussed it frequently. By the summer of 1918, Rep. William S. Vare (R-PA) had proposed a bill

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<sup>110</sup> "Shall We Be Patriots or Conventionalists?" 8-9, 19; "Cut Out Mourning Garb During the War," *Dry Goods Economist*, 15 Sept. 1917, 7-8; "President Against Mourning," *Dry Goods Economist*, 1 June 1918, 5.

<sup>111</sup> "Gold Star As Mourning," *New York Times*, 13 November 1917, 7; Graham, 13.

that would allow the Secretaries of War and the Navy, with presidential support, to select a mourning badge for the families of fallen servicemen. The American Red Cross, officially charged by the U.S. government with aiding the families of soldiers, began to formulate plans to make and distribute mourning armbands to widows and mothers of fallen servicemen. They framed the adoption of the armbands as a move sympathetic with the poor, for whom purchasing full mourning outfits would be expensive, and as a sign of the equality of rich and poor “consonant with the times.” The charity explicitly noted that the badge would distinguish between military deaths and civilian ones. Such “equality” thus had a nationalist function; it obliterated certain class distinctions in dress while emphasizing the unique status of military families.<sup>112</sup>

The bill in the House and actions of the Red Cross may have finally prompted President Wilson to act. He wrote a letter to Anna Howard Shaw—his appointee as head of the Woman’s Committee—presenting his preference for an armband to signify women’s mourning.

My own judgment is that the English are treating it more wisely than the French [who wore traditional all-black mourning]. It may be that service badges, upon which the white stars might upon the occurrence of a death be changed into stars of gold, would be a very beautiful and significant substitute for mourning.<sup>113</sup>

In his message to Shaw, the president enclosed a letter from a bereaved mother, Mrs. William A. Read of New York, who supported the mourning armbands. She was an

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<sup>112</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee, 17 December 1917; Minutes of Meetings, May 1917 to February 1919; Council of National Defense, Committee on Women’s Defense Work, Record Group 62; National Archives II, College Park, MD; “President Against Mourning,” *Dry Goods Economist*, 1 June 1919, 5; Enclosure in letter, W. Tumulty, Secretary to the President, to Henry P. Davidson, American Red Cross, 11 July 1918; American Red Cross, I8; Central Correspondence, January-December 1918; Council of National Defense, Committee on Women’s Defense Work, RG 62; NARA II.

<sup>113</sup> Woodrow Wilson to Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, 16 May 1918, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur Link, 69 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1966-94), 48:28.

extremely wealthy and socially prominent widow with four sons in military service or training; one had been killed in France in March 1918. Shaw's committee voted to recommend the adoption of a black armband with one gold star for each family member lost in the war as a substitute for women's all-black mourning and for men's plain black armbands. *The Dry Goods Economist* celebrated Wilson's stand on the issue, and newspapers across the country publicized the proclamation.<sup>114</sup>

The Woman's Committee entered negotiations with the Red Cross to make and distribute the armbands for free to soldiers' mothers, fathers and widows. The charity volunteered to distribute the armbands through its numerous local groups. Faster than the charity, however, were department stores. By the end of July, only a month after Wilson's directive was published, Wanamaker's in New York offered black silk mourning armbands, under a sign proclaiming Wilson's endorsement. B. Altman & Co. sold black ribbons in the "flag ribbon" section of the department store, with a gold star and an American flag woven into them. Their price was \$1 each.<sup>115</sup>

Newspaper publicity reached mourning families, but many remained confused about the details of these new armbands and how to get them. Mrs. Clarence Egbert of Staten Island, NY was one of a number of mothers who wrote to the Woman's Committee on Defense with questions. She clipped a newspaper announcement on the Red Cross' offer of armbands, and she asked for two, one for her daughter-in-law and one for her husband, with the implication that she already had her own armband. ". . . [W]e lost our dearly beloved boy when the President Lincoln sunk and which will never

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<sup>114</sup> Shaw to Wilson, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, 48: 111; "President Against Mourning," 5;

<sup>115</sup> Henry P. Davison, Chairman of Red Cross War Council, to Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, 16 July 1918; American Red Cross, I8; Central Correspondence, January-December 1918; Council of National Defense, Committee on Women's Defense Work, RG 62; NARA II; "Selling Mourning Bands," *The Dry Goods Economist*, 27 July 1918, 5.

be forgotten by us he died for his country and a good boy was he, name of boy Arthur Stanley Egbert,” she explained, thanking the committee in advance. Her letter’s spelling and grammar imply that while wealthy women had campaigned for the armbands, some women of the middle and working classes were also eager to wear them. Indeed, the armbands proved popular. The Red Cross ordered an initial 5,000 to test demand; by mid-October 1918, the charity had taken orders for 20,000 and could not keep up with requests for more.<sup>116</sup>

It seems that most women used the armbands in addition to their full mourning costumes, however, rather than as a substitute for the traditional all-black. In New York City, a reporter noted that on the street several women wore mourning as well as armbands, with only one wearing the armband alone, as Wilson had intended. The reporter said the women in all black appeared to be “in humbler circumstances.” Yet even New York society’s gossip paper, *Town Topics*, noted that in October of 1918 Mrs. I. Tucker Burr wore a gold star armband as the only relief to her “deep mourning.” Burr was a Massachusetts member of the Colonial Dames and a speaker who promoted the sale of war bonds; surely she was versed in the government recommendations for wearing the armbands.<sup>117</sup>

Proponents of the armbands wanted pride to substitute for sorrow in mourning dress, but these women apparently would not give up one for the other. As Charles Roth

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<sup>116</sup> Mrs. Clarence Egbert to “Women,” 28 September 1918; Central Correspondence File, January-December 1918, C52; Committee on National Defense, Committee on Women’s Defense Work, RG 62; NARA II; James G. Blaine to Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, 16 October 1918; Central Correspondence File, January-December 1918, C52; Committee on National Defense, Committee on Women’s Defense Work, RG 62; NARA II.

<sup>117</sup> “Mourning Goods Will Be Sold,” *New York Times*, 12 October 1918, 17; “Saunterings,” *Town Topics*, New York, 3 October 1918, 6; *Register of the Massachusetts Society of the Colonial Dames of America* (Boston: Society of Colonial Dames, 1909), 513; “Massachusetts,” *The Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* 59, no. 6 (Dec. 1917), 366-68.

of the Randa Hat Company, which specialized in the manufacture of mourning hats, told the *Dry Goods Economist*, “I believe in being patriotic, but personally I don’t see how a widow or a mother whose son has been killed is going to the funeral in a colored hat and with only a band on her arm to show her great grief.” Mrs. Cordelia Powell Odenheimer, President of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, concurred, saying that while she supported all wartime measures, her own feelings were strongly in favor of wearing full mourning.<sup>118</sup>

Despite the dire predictions of concerned patriots, the wearing of black mourning clothes in the summer and fall of 1918 did not undermine the nation’s fighting “vitality”; nor did it cause a depression in the retail industry. The story of World War I’s gold star armbands is a story of top-down attempts to change women’s dress for nationalist and profit-driven purposes. These efforts call our attention to the importance of women’s bodies as signifiers of social meaning. In this case, politicians and female nationalists hoped to contain the public’s potentially unruly demonstrations of grief, and the possibility of accompanying anti-war sentiment, by converting women’s mourning into a celebration of a patriot’s sacrifice rather than grief at a son’s death. Their success was partial at best, as female mourners adapted the armbands to fit the long-established practice of full-black mourning as a sign of grief and respect for the dead.

On the grass-roots level, American mothers quickly adopted the term “gold star mother” for their own uses. Already in August 1918, an Evanston, Illinois mother proposed the founding of a group called “The Gold Star Mothers” to her town’s Council of Defense. She had lost her son in the fighting in France. The club’s membership was initially composed of ten local women who had lost children—sons and one daughter,

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<sup>118</sup> “Shall We Be Patriots or Conventionalists?” 9, 19.

likely a nurse—in the war. The organization was intended to “lend comfort to the mothers and relatives of other war victims.” This mother and many like her used the gold star symbol for purposes its proponents had not envisioned: to find psychological support for a uniquely traumatic form of loss, forging new social networks among military families. A number of gold star mother organizations formed around the country from 1918 to 1928, with the majority either disbanding or merging into a politically active national organization by the late 1920s.<sup>119</sup>

Invented during America’s First World War, the service flag and gold star armband signified the upsurge in nationalism that led to enhanced social status for military servicemen and their families. But as used by individuals and organizations, the service flag and gold star were not only potent but also flexible symbols that could be put to many uses. The second half of this chapter will focus on the ways that contemporaries used mothers of military servicemen, service flags and gold star armbands to create tableaux of mothers’ patriotism to promote particular political objectives. This section will focus on three: selling war bonds, winning woman suffrage, and achieving African American equality. This evidence reframes America’s “super-heated” wartime patriotism as the product not only of propaganda generated by the federal government and elite nationalists, but also as the product of well-meaning reformers who borrowed patriotic themes in order to promote their own causes, often with mixed results. It highlights the way the war interrupted and transformed domestic debates, driving Progressive activists to present their work in terms of an ascendant militarism.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “The Gold Star Mothers,” *Chicago Tribune*, 24 August 1918, 6

<sup>120</sup> David M. Kennedy uses the term “super-heated patriotism,” *Over Here*, 106. I’m using the term militarism to denote popular enthusiasm for a strong, growing military, approval of individuals’ military service, and the expanding influence of military officers, training, institutions, symbols, and ideals in

The Wilson administration's decision to pay for the war through the sale of special government bonds had unforeseen consequences on America's home front culture. The decision reflected Wilson's commitment to ideals of voluntarism as well as his desire to avoid controversy over taxes. There were four "Liberty Loan" bond offerings during the war, and one "Victory Loan" in 1919. In addition, the Treasury offered small denominations in "Thrift Stamps" in an effort to ensure that every man, woman and child had invested in their country and the war. Loan officials framed the sales of thrift stamps and bonds as a way to support values of self-sacrifice and economy. Like the war itself, the bond and thrift stamp sales campaigns seemed to offer a chance to unite Americans behind higher values including Revolutionary-era republican virtues such as self-denial for a greater good.<sup>121</sup>

What actually happened, however, was that the loan drives sold the war to each American through the most emotional of appeals. Wilson had initially hoped to wage a principled, Progressive drive for a war for democracy and civilization, and he encouraged Americans to hate the militarism of the German leadership rather than ordinary Germans. Instead, as numerous scholars have established, Americans at war showed a pro-American jingoism and anti-German paranoia that led to violence and intimidation of actual and perceived opponents of the war, including workers, immigrants and African-

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civilian life. While pacifists have condemned militarism, here the word is an objective summation of the way war influenced American society; many civilians believed their role was to celebrate and support the military at this time.

<sup>121</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here*, 16-17, 97-106; Minutes of the Meeting for the Inauguration of the War Savings Campaign in Connecticut, pp. 15-16, 25; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Federal Reserve Districts; General Files Relating to Liberty Loans and War Savings Bonds, 1917-1925; Records of the War Savings Division; Records of the Bureau of the Public Debt, RG 53, NARA II, College Park, MD.

Americans. The advertising campaigns helmed by regional Liberty Loan committees contributed to this atmosphere.<sup>122</sup>

The First Liberty Loan drive focused on educating consumers about the opportunity to invest in the country and earn interest through buying a bond. Most Americans were unfamiliar with bonds; Secretary McAdoo joked about one patriot eager to buy a Liberty bond who asked how much interest he would have to pay. One federal committee estimated that only 350,000 Americans had bought bonds before 1917 while the first issue of wartime bonds amounted to \$2 billion and was purchased by about 4 million people. After this first campaign in summer 1917, the Liberty Loan staff felt they could concentrate less on financial education and more on patriotism to motivate sales. While claiming that they kept a “very close check on the effect of this [patriotic] copy,” they responded to the demands of regional and local sales staffs by supplying more and more patriotic messages to motivate consumers, finally estimating that by the end of the Second Liberty Loan “almost a purely patriotic note was taken.”<sup>123</sup>

Local bond committees made great efforts to exceed previous sales records each time a new bond was issued. National policymakers set quotas for each region’s and city’s sales; newspapers and loan committee members were eager to meet them, or as they often called it, go “over the top,” a phrase borrowed from trench warfare to mean a successful charge forward. Like many other initiatives during the war, the Liberty Loan drives were organized by a national committee, with regional, state and local committees carrying out its objectives. Each loan drive had its own theme and slogans, which seem

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<sup>122</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 105-106.

<sup>123</sup> “Advertising the Third Liberty Loan: Suggestions for Writers of Advertising to Promote the Sale of Liberty Bonds,” Liberty Loan Committee 2<sup>nd</sup> Federal Reserve District, pp. 4-5; 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Federal Reserve Districts; Records of the War Savings Division, General Files Relating to Liberty Loans and War Savings Bonds, 1917-1925; Records of the Bureau of the Public Debt, RG 53, NARA II.

to have been set by regional committees guided by the national committee's advice. The loans benefited from centralized advertising support from the Committee for Public Information, the nation's chief propaganda bureau, but relied extensively on cooperative local newspapers to supply friendly publicity and editorials urging readers to buy bonds. Ministers presented sermons urging their flocks to buy bonds, women's clubs joined the push, and even children such as Boy Scouts joined the sales drives in some cities.<sup>124</sup>

The Liberty Loan campaigns, like much other wartime propaganda, depicted the Allies as defenders of wholesome family life. They contrasted happy mothers and children in Allied nations with the deranged rapists of enemy armies. One pamphlet designed to sell U.S. government bonds featured the drawings of Dutch artist Louis Raemakers. His powerful illustrations of alleged German atrocities were widely circulated by the British and helped shape British and Canadian perceptions of the war. In their sales pamphlet, the Liberty Loan Committee of the Mid-Atlantic region reprinted a number of Raemaker's drawings that focused on mothers and the separation of young children from their parents. The text implied that Germans' systematic program of rape was destroying French and Belgian families and society. The Women's Liberty Loan committee joined male writers and artists in presenting the war as a male project to protect women from rape. One of their pamphlets instructed consumers to buy as many bonds as they could afford "over and above actual necessities," asking "How much do you value the lives of your sons and the honor of your daughters?" They lent the authority of moral motherhood to the war with illustrations as well, presenting readers with a cover image that showed determined men from each branch of military service

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<sup>124</sup> Kennedy, *Over Here*, 105-106. This understanding of the loan drives' structure is gleaned from the pamphlets, public bulletins and letters contained in the National Archives' Records of the Public Debt, Records of the War Savings Division specifically relating to Liberty Loans.

marching beneath “The Spirit of America,” a beautiful woman holding a small child in her arms. It is no wonder that loan officials admitted that the Liberty Bond drives succeeded in making sales “by the force of an intensive campaign” that pushed people to an “emotional pitch.”<sup>125</sup>

Over the course of the war, the Liberty Loan drives increasingly relied on the images and rhetoric of patriotic motherhood to engage audience emotions and make sales. This coincided with women’s growing influence as sellers and buyers of the bonds. From Secretary McAdoo down to regional committees, the loan’s administrators seem to have discovered women’s usefulness in the earliest bond campaigns in the spring and summer of 1917. National women’s leaders agreed that in the first and second loan campaigns woman volunteers had proved their worth to their male colleagues. By the third war bond offering in spring 1918, Liberty Loan committees for women formed on the national, state and local levels, and pamphlets informed local workers that women were responsible for nine-tenths of the nation’s purchasing power. Secretary McAdoo traveled the country on a speaking tour to rally bond sales and arouse patriotism, and in each city his Director of Publicity attempted to prod local organizers to ensure that his audience contained special sections for female relatives of military servicemen. If there was time, McAdoo addressed a separate women’s meeting. Parades greeted McAdoo,

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<sup>125</sup> “The Atrocities of Germany,” by Newell Dwight Hillis, illustrations by Louis Raemakers, Liberty Loan Committee, 2<sup>nd</sup> Federal Reserve District; “The Spirit of America,” Women’s Liberty Loan Committee, 2<sup>nd</sup> Federal Reserve District; Minutes of the Meeting for the Inauguration of the War Savings Campaign in Connecticut, p. 30; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Federal Reserve Districts; all from the General Files Relating to Liberty Loans and War Savings Bonds, 1917-1925; Records of the War Savings Division; Records of the Public Debt, RG 53, NARA II; Evans on the place of Raemakers in Canadian and British propaganda, 60-6.

and newspapers covered his appearances at local rallies, frequently emphasizing the attendance of soldiers' mothers.<sup>126</sup>

Women's leaders also took action to ensure the success of the Third Liberty Loan; in one Washington, D.C. meeting, representatives from women's clubs as diverse as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the National Federation of Settlements, the Council of Jewish Women, and the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae pledged to meet sales goals. The most important women's groups to support the bond campaigns were the National American Woman Suffrage Association and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. These massive groups used their experiences in organizing, especially in canvassing and circulating petitions, to sell bonds; they introduced innovations such as sales booths in shopping areas near department stores. The bonds' female sales staff was aimed at the powerful female consumer, who was considered fundamentally different from a male consumer. The male Liberty Loan Committee of the New York region directed advertisers for the spring 1918 bond sales campaign to make a "heart appeal" that would attract women.<sup>127</sup>

The dichotomy of violated womanhood and moral motherhood was always a theme of Liberty Loan campaigns but was especially important in the Third and Fourth

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<sup>126</sup> "Selling the Third Liberty Loan," Liberty Loan Committee, 2<sup>nd</sup> Federal Reserve District, p. 3; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Federal Reserve Districts; General Files Relating to Liberty Loans and War Savings Bonds, 1917-1925; Records of the War Savings Division; Records of the Bureau of the Public Debt, RG 53; NARA II; Minutes of a Special Meeting, Advisory Council to the National Woman's Liberty Loan Committee, March 20, 1918, p. 2; Liberty Loan 117; Central Correspondence File, January-December 1918 L (J-K-116) M (D-E-123); Committee on Women's Defense Work 13A-A2; The Council of National Defense, RG 62; NARA II. See the letters and clippings in File 2 of 2; Secretary McAdoo's Papers; General Files Relating to Liberty Loans and War Savings Bonds, 1917-25, Records of the War Savings Division; Records of the Bureau of the Public Debt, RG 53; NARA II.

<sup>127</sup> Minutes of a Special Meeting, Advisory Council to the National Woman's Liberty Loan Committee, March 20, 1918, pp. 3-5; "Advertising the Third Liberty Loan," 7.

Liberty Loan drives, the drives addressed specifically to female consumers. Patriotic mothers served almost as mascots for these drives. The Third Liberty Loan, opening in April 1918, was the first to feature mothers of soldiers consistently in parades across the country. The slogan for the Mid-Atlantic states in the last two weeks of this loan campaign was “Liberty Bonds: Save Lives, the Lives of Our Own Sons.”<sup>128</sup> By the Fourth Liberty Loan in September and October 1918, the federal government directed local women’s Liberty Loan Committees that a parade unit of female relatives of soldiers was strongly suggested parade content. The Fourth Liberty Loan was called the “Mothers’ Loan” in some regions; the official song for this bond drive was “For Your Boy and My Boy.”<sup>129</sup> There was no better way to illustrate these themes than to present mothers of men and women in military service. Across the country, mothers of military servicemen marched in publicity parades holding service flags or wearing gold star armbands. At a publicity event in Chicago, a gold star mother opened the county’s third sales drive by ceremoniously purchasing the first bond. Presenting the public with patriotic mothers allowed local sales staffs to carry out the regional committee’s directions to stage “stunts and features” to help audiences “visualize the realities of war,” “humaniz[e] the loan,” and emphasize “the dependence of the soldier on the productive power of money.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> “Advertising the Third Liberty Loan,” 9.

<sup>129</sup> On the federal direction to local committees, “Will Honor Duluth Wives of Fighters,” *Duluth (Minn.) Sunday News Tribune*, 25 September 1918, 7; on Fourth Liberty Loan as the “Mother’s Loan,” “Half Day, 3 Million the 6-Day Bond Drive Gets Away to a Flying Start,” *The Kansas City Star*, 7 October 1918, 1; on song, “Loan Campaign Will Start This Morning,” *Dallas Morning News*, 28 September 1918, 6; “City Allotment is Not Known,” *Grand Forks Herald*, 27 September 1918, 12.

<sup>130</sup> “Liberty Loan Committee Second Federal Reserve District: Report of the Publicity Committee on Work Done in Connection with the Flotation of the First United States Government Liberty Loan of 1917, amounting to \$2,000,000,000,” New York City, July, 1917, 15-16; 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Federal Reserve Districts; General Files Relating to Liberty Loans and War Savings Bonds, 1917-1925; Records of the War Savings

The Third and Fourth Liberty Loan parades were awesome spectacles, counting up to 100,000 participants in large cities, and presenting a microcosm of each city and town. They were lauded by newspapers as the biggest parades that their cities had ever seen, and parade organizers reached out to African Americans and different immigrant groups to be sure the parades showed the diversity of Americans' support for the war. Marching in their own units, military men, veterans, clubs, school children, boy scouts and girl scouts marched. The inclusion of so many different groups showed off the numbers and the range of the war's supporters on the homefront.

As historian Mary P. Ryan explained in her study of late nineteenth century public ceremonies, officially-sanctioned parades showed a society an "ideal pattern of social life," or took values present within a society and gave them a concrete form, often emphasizing continuity and harmony. While these values may have been contested, the official municipal parade itself can be seen as contributing to a vision, if not a reality, of consensus. Planners frequently emphasized gendered order in public ceremonies, despite or even due to actual disorder in traditional gender roles.<sup>131</sup> The high status given military mothers in the Great War's patriotic parades presented a particular vision of mothers' service to the nation as if it were a majority or consensus view.

The parade opening Chicago's Third Liberty Loan on April 26 exemplified a common pattern. Mothers marched as a separate group with their service flags; a division of "sweethearts" of soldiers marched behind them, as did other groups representing support for the war—including 20,000 students, 5000 women's club

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Division; RG 53, Records of the Bureau of the Public Debt, RG 53; NARA II; "In Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, 6 April 1918, 1; "Selling the Third Liberty Loan," pp. 15-16..

<sup>131</sup> Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992), 20.

members, 4000 teachers, 800 firemen and 200 Red Cross nurses.<sup>132</sup> The reporting on the parade emphasized women's participation and focused particularly on mothers. The headline trumpeted "Mothers Here March for the Sons Over There," while the first sentences read simply: " 'The Mothers.' This was the most conspicuous group in yesterday's Liberty parade. It was the least ostentatious in formation, but as the lines of quietly dressed women, most of them elderly, passed by the throngs, the cheering became roars." Behind them came a wide array of other women, including those who had worked for the loan, society women, and professional women.<sup>133</sup> In the order of the parade itself, its newspaper coverage, and in the roars of the crowds, the mothers of sons in the military, marching with their service flags, were honored above all other women, including those of great wealth, civic leadership and important pro-war work.

Far from Chicago, in San Jose, California, in another Third Liberty Loan parade, mothers of military men "walked the hard pavements unmindful of the sacrifice they had made; cheer upon cheer greeted them as they passed along between lines of men who, often in tears, bared their heads in honor of American motherhood."<sup>134</sup> In this case, men made a traditional gesture of respect toward mothers of soldiers. The mothers' marching bodies, and the article describing them, was a reminder to a general audience of others' sacrifices for the war effort.

These examples demonstrate the utility of mothers of soldiers as unifying figures. These women came from both the wealthiest and poorest of backgrounds; placing them ahead of affluent clubwomen who dominated the administration of local war work could help to defuse the potential for a class-based critique of the war. Crowds honored

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<sup>132</sup> "Parade to Mark Liberty Day and Boost the Loan," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 April 1918, 4.

<sup>133</sup> "Mothers Here March for the Sons Over There," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 April 1918, 3.

<sup>134</sup> "A Great Achievement and a Great Parade," *San Jose (Calif.) Mercury Herald*, 25 April 1918, 6.

mothers of soldiers for performing traditional woman's work as praised in sentimental mother songs and Mother's Day festivities. On both sides of the Atlantic, pro-war writers framed mothers of soldiers and sailors as actively sacrificing their child to the war and thus putting the nation's welfare above their own. Honoring them on this account could unite Americans divided over feminism and woman suffrage. Unlike the activities of female doctors or Liberty Loan sales organizers, many of whom were active in civic affairs and NAWSA, these mothers did not threaten male dominance in the professions or politics.<sup>135</sup>

Mothers of military personnel also prompted an emotional response in the viewer. Early advertising commonly relied on emotions such as fear and guilt to provoke an audience into buying products. When mothers marched with the banner "We gave our sons—they give their lives—what do you give?" the message was clearly meant to shame viewers into buying government bonds—it was the least they could do. A fall 1918 advertisement from John Wanamaker sounded the same emotional note. The advertisement asked Philadelphians if they could pass over the latest bond offering and still have the self-respect to look a mother of a soldier in the face. It is likely that mothers' units in the parades were meant to inspire guilt in the viewer.<sup>136</sup>

There were exceptional cases of cities that did not present units of marching mothers of soldiers. For example, it is unclear why Boston, New York and Chicago featured military mothers in parades, and Philadelphia did not. In Philadelphia Liberty Loan parades had space for young women in costume but not the female relatives of

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<sup>135</sup> On propaganda depicting mothers in Canada and Great Britain as actively sacrificing their sons, see Evans, *Mothers of Heroes*; Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*; Gullace, "The Blood of Our Sons."

<sup>136</sup> "Soldiers' Mothers March in Fifth Av. In Liberty Parade," *New York Times*, 27 April 1918, 1; Advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 12 October 1918, 11.

soldiers; the city held a separate parade composed only of female relatives of soldiers. In another example, Western cities like Dallas and San Jose, California featured mothers of soldiers in the Liberty Loan parades, but Los Angeles did not. Los Angeles' Salvation Army did call on mothers of soldiers, however, especially gold star mothers, to march in its fundraising parade. Thus even those exceptional cities which did not highlight mothers of soldiers in their bond drives saw a focus on the military mothers expressed in other public events.<sup>137</sup>

As in the case of Philadelphia above, many cities and small towns presented not separate units of mothers, but mothers of soldiers marching alongside other female relatives. In Macon, Georgia, for example, grandmothers, mothers, sisters, sweethearts and even friends of soldiers marched, likely because the small town had too few soldiers' mothers to make a substantial showing. In Miami, Florida, female relatives including wives, mothers and sisters marched for the Fourth Liberty Loan. In Miami, however, mothers got the most publicity, and headlines such as "Mothers to Parade" highlighted mothers' special role. In city after city, even when a mix of female relatives marched with service flags, mothers got the most attention. Sometimes this emphasis on mothers even resulted in the use of the word "mothers" as a label applied to all female relatives of a soldier.<sup>138</sup> Advertisements and news stories mentioned mothers first, and then clarified

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<sup>137</sup> "McAdoo Will Start Glorious Campaign Here for Freedom," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 April 1918, 4; Advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 13 May 1918, 7; "Men, Women and Children Join in Greatest Celebration that Boston Ever Witnessed," *Boston Herald*, 7 April 1918, 1; "The City and Environs," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 1918, 110.

<sup>138</sup> "Women Plan Great Parade to Launch Fourth Bond Sale," *Macon Daily Telegraph*, 22 September 1918, 2; "Miami Launches Its Fourth Liberty Loan Drive in Usual Miami Manner," *Miami Herald*, 29 September 1918, 1; examples of mother as designating all female relatives marching: "Mothers of Soldiers to Be Honored Saturday," *Ft. Wayne (Indiana) News and Sentinel*, 4 April 1918, 18; "Many Societies in Great Parade," *San Jose (California) Mercury Herald*, 21 April 1918, 3; "Mothers March in Parade," *The Chicago Defender*, 25 May 1918, 13; "Women Invited to March in Liberty Loan Parade Sat.," *The Chicago Defender*, 12 October 1918, 6.

later that this category included other women. This slippage itself suggests the disproportionate emphasis placed on mothers of soldiers.

Mothers could symbolize the nation in a way that sisters or wives could not. Bishop M. J. Curley, of St. Augustine, Florida, equated the nation with a mother in a speech promoting government bonds in Miami. “We are here to answer the call of a mother in distress. What child is there who would not respond to such a call?” he asked. “What would you think of a son who would refuse to give such aid to his mother. Fellow Americans, we are children of one mother, America . . . .”<sup>139</sup> In a more divisive example, the Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina told his audience that “Your mother has been insulted,” and the response of every person “who has a right to live” was to fight in her defense by buying bonds.<sup>140</sup>

In both North and South, locals wove the Great War’s patriotic mothers into traditions memorializing the Civil War. In the North, parades sometimes grouped marching soldiers’ mothers next to Civil War veterans. In the South, a columnist calling himself “an old Confed” called for women to participate in the Liberty Loan drive, depicting Southern women’s wartime sacrifices as a tradition passed from mother to daughter over generations.<sup>141</sup>

No evidence more clearly demonstrated the wartime value system than the instances in which mothers were honored for having the most sons in the military. In San Jose, E.A. Mansfield wrote a letter to the editor to point out that a service flag with five

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<sup>139</sup> “Miami Launches Its Fourth Liberty Loan Drive In Usual Miami Manner,” *The Miami Herald*, Sept. 29, 1918, Miami, FL, 1.

<sup>140</sup> “Mecklenburg To Do Full Share,” *Charlotte Sunday Observer*, April 7, 1918, Charlotte, NC, 32.

<sup>141</sup> “Judge Terrell Launches Chicago Liberty Loan Drive,” *The Chicago Defender*, 5 October 1918, 1; “Liberty Day Parade is Ready for Action,” *Belleville (Illinois) News-Democrat*, 4 April 1918, 1; “Just ‘Twixt Us,” Bridges Smith, *Macon Daily Telegraph*, 27 September 1918, 6, Macon, GA.

stars had gone unnoticed in a previous article praising parading mothers with one to four service stars on their flags. Mansfield said the five-star flag was “silent testimony of the love and devotion to the cause of liberty displayed in that household and the patriotism manifested.” New York’s Third Liberty Loan parade honored especially two mothers, each with six sons in the military. A reporter said that of the twelve sons of these mothers, four were family men who could have honorably excused themselves from military service and would not have been eligible for the draft. Instead, they volunteered.<sup>142</sup> These mothers of multiple sons in the military were honored not only for their fertility and the bearing of healthy male children, but also for teaching these boys nationalist values. This way of thinking was redolent not only of republican motherhood, but also of pronatalism and later European fascism, and it highlights the swift transformation of American culture from peacetime to wartime.

Patriotic motherhood proved a useful tool not only for pro-war propagandists, but also for woman suffrage advocates. The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) became a major source of pro-war activism among women, and its leaders quickly adapted the rhetoric of patriotic motherhood and the symbol of the service flag to their own campaign for the vote. Like so many other women’s organizations, NAWSA was anti-war until February 1917, when the U.S. broke off diplomatic relations with Germany due to that nation’s resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. Anticipating war, NAWSA president Carrie Chapman Catt led the organization’s executive council in a vote that resulted in a pledge to support the

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<sup>142</sup> “Communications,” *San Jose (Calif.) Mercury Herald*, 28 April 1918, 13; “30,000 in March Here for the Loan Today,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1918, 5. Other examples of honoring mothers with the most sons in the military include: “Aviators’ Gold Stars Glisten at Mothers’ Meeting,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 October 1918, 14; “East Side Parades in War Stamp Drive,” *New York Times*, 31 May 1918, 16.

government in case of war, though anti-war feeling led some members to protest. Wilson later rewarded the suffragists' loyalty by choosing former NAWSA president Dr. Anna Howard Shaw to be the President of the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense, a group created to organize all women's war work. In this way, Shaw became the highest-ranking female appointee in the country during the war. She became a de facto representative of American women to their government, as the head of the Woman's Committee received letters from concerned women on every imaginable topic and responded to the letters by meeting with military and civilian leaders. Wilson also appointed Catt to the Woman's Committee. Anti-suffragists greeted these appointments with outrage, understanding that the offices provided an endorsement for the suffragists, and even implicitly for suffrage itself.<sup>143</sup>

Shaw, Catt and suffrage leaders across the country threw themselves into war work. British suffragists' pro-war work had given their cause a tremendous boost; by the end of March 1917 Prime Minister Lloyd George and other cabinet members told the House of Commons that they supported granting women the right to vote "as a result of their war sacrifices and services."<sup>144</sup>

Historians of woman suffrage in the U.S. and Great Britain have long neglected a serious consideration of the war years, considering them an anomaly in the long history of women's campaign for the vote. Nicolletta Gullace's pioneering history of suffrage in Great Britain changed the field by arguing that the war was integral to the suffrage campaign there. By concentrating on female patriots' pro-war activism and propaganda, Gullace found that suffragists successfully redefined citizenship during the war. The

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<sup>143</sup> Barbara Steinson, *American Women's Activism in World War I* (NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982), 237-240, 308-310

<sup>144</sup> "Lloyd George Won to Women's Cause," *New York Times*, 29 March 1917, 1.

circumstances of total, modern war allowed women to point out that their work—whether in bearing children or in manufacturing munitions—was essential to national security and put their lives at risk. Both the press and female activists argued that women’s war work was equal in value to men’s soldiering. In this way they nullified the traditional claim that men’s soldiering meant that only men should have the privilege of voting. During America’s briefer engagement with Germany and its allies in 1917-1918, American women made similar arguments, and the press trumpeted women’s contributions to the war effort. As a result, President Wilson and the leaders of NAWSA could frame the woman suffrage amendment as a reward for wartime service and an acknowledgment of women’s contributions to the nation. Adopting patriotic motherhood rhetoric and symbols, NAWSA’s suffragists would use marching mothers with service flags as one display meant to convince a doubtful public of women’s right to vote.<sup>145</sup>

Like their British counterparts, NAWSA had long relied on parades to create publicity, and its members also used a variety of badges, illustrations, and other visual media to communicate their message. To convince their members and the public that NAWSA members were patriotic mothers, they used parades, banners, photos and the text of their newsletter. A few months after the war began, the organization restyled its publication from *The Woman’s Journal* to *The Woman Citizen*, a title with particular resonance in wartime, and dedicated its September 1917 issue to the “MOTHERS EVERYWHERE WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR SONS TO DEMOCRACY.” In the fall of 1917, NAWSA was engaged in a fierce battle to win suffrage in New York State, and its leaders and members were also actively working to sell government bonds. This

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<sup>145</sup> Nicoletta Gullace, *“The Blood of Our Sons”*: Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); David M. Kennedy, *Over Here*, 284.

special motherhood issue profiled NAWSA members who had sons who had volunteered for military service, and it included graphics and poems emphasizing mothers' nationalist sacrifices. While it also included nods to female industrial workers and professional pioneers like Clara Barton and Florence Nightingale, the majority of the text and photos were devoted to mothers of sons in the military.<sup>146</sup>

The editors found a number of patriotic motherhood motifs especially suited to the suffrage cause. They reprinted the poem "The Mother on the Sidewalk," which described the poignant scene of a mother watching her son marching away to war, concluding that American mothers were truly the mothers of "Old Glory," or the nation itself. They also excerpted Mary Roberts Rinehart's article "The Altar of Freedom," highlighting its argument that mothers "raise the army." Rinehart was not a suffragist, but her article's consideration of women's role in wartime made it the most important—and widely circulated—prescription for patriotic motherhood. Rinehart and other patriots, including Theodore Roosevelt, praised American mothers as heroines equal to soldiers for courageously facing death in childbirth, an argument the *Woman Citizen* faithfully repeated. Finally, the issue presented numerous profiles of NAWSA members with soldier sons, emphasizing that the sons had volunteered rather than being drafted. In a remarkably pronatalist gesture, women with multiple sons in the military were given special attention and praise. The pro-war, patriotic text and these biographical sketches situated NAWSA members not only as patriotic mothers, but also as part of a long tradition of American mothers who had sacrificed sons in wartime.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *The Woman Citizen*, vol. 1, no. 18 (29 Sept. 1917).

<sup>147</sup> "The Mother on the Sidewalk," p. 328; "The Double Task," p. 328; "Has Four Sons in Army," p. 329; "They Raise the Army," 329; "Sons of Suffragist Mothers," pp. 330-331; all from *The Woman Citizen*, vol. 1, no. 18 (29 Sept. 1917).

The patriotic motherhood issue allowed the suffragists to refute a variety of their opponents' arguments. First, it served as an important repudiation of NAWSA's past anti-war stance. This would take one weapon from the anti-suffragists, who attempted to depict suffragists as radicals. They accurately connected suffrage leaders with pacifism and accused them of being unpatriotic. Both past president Anna Howard Shaw and current president Carrie Chapman Catt had been founding members of the Woman's Peace Party, along with the country's most prominent female reformer and suffragist, Jane Addams. During the war, Addams remained committed to peace, unlike Shaw and Catt.<sup>148</sup>

Countering the criticism that suffragists were masculine and unnatural women, Mrs. James Z. Moore, a voting mother from Washington state with her only son in military service, explained: "Far from 'feminizing' the community, woman suffrage gives women a greater feeling of responsibility toward the state, a deeper sense of the meaning of democracy. That has been demonstrated in the promptness with which the suffrage states filled their [draft] quotas." She declared her gratitude that her son had not turned out to be a "slacker," echoing the song "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Slacker," itself an angry response to the popular anti-war song "I Did Not Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier" (1915). In its mothers' issue, NAWSA accepted and propagated patriotic motherhood ideals for its own purposes: to support the war and to ride the crest of nationalism to suffrage victory.<sup>149</sup>

Soon after they published the special issue, at the end of October 1917, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was one of the first

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<sup>148</sup> Steinson, 317-318.

<sup>149</sup> Steinson on anti-suffragists' criticism, 238; on Addams and pacifists during the war, 251-298; "A Voting Mother," 328;

organizations to ask the female relatives of soldiers to parade with their service flags.<sup>150</sup>

The parade consisted of several sections; the first group showed off the signatures of a million women asking for the vote. The patriotic section later in the parade was inaugurated with young girls marching in white dresses, holding miniature American flags; presented as virtuous maidens, they symbolized the nation itself in a tradition dating back to parades of the Early Republic. Following these young women, a group of about 500 male supporters of woman's suffrage marched.<sup>151</sup> Finally, behind these two groups marched hundreds of female relatives of soldiers carrying service flags. One banner read: "Our sons are fighting for democracy, in the name of democracy give us the vote."<sup>152</sup>

The marching position of this group of mothers and female relatives of soldiers was not at the start of the parade. Yet the female relatives of soldiers marched ahead of women industrial workers, professionals, and even a female medical unit. This implies that parade organizers were emphasizing their service to the wartime state above that of the other women following behind. For these female relatives, their wartime service was the "sacrifice" of a son, husband, or brother to military service. Even in this pro-suffrage, woman-run parade, women were being honored as patriots primarily for their relationship with soldiers.

Suffragists were not the only advocacy group who used service flags and patriotic motherhood in their fight for justice. To counter prejudice, display their patriotism, and to highlight their important role in American history, many African Americans found

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<sup>150</sup> "20,000 March in Suffrage Line," *New York Times*, 28 October 1917, 1; on the nationalist symbolism of white-clad young women in parades, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: the Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1997).

<sup>151</sup> "20,000 March in Suffrage Line," 1.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

service flags and mothers of servicemen to be useful symbols. Though there were significant exceptions, many African American newspaper editors, leaders and clubwomen embraced American involvement in World War I, hoping to use this “war for democracy” as an opportunity to advance the cause of equality at home.<sup>153</sup>

Across the country, African American churches, universities and clubs raised service flags, often with special ceremonies. As in the white community, the flags reminded viewers of the absent and served as the basis for patriotic marches and celebrations. But for African Americans the flags held important additional meanings. Surviving accounts show that speakers treated the service flag as a symbol of the long history of African American wartime sacrifices, from the Revolution onward. Black leaders’ insistence on reciting the history of African Americans’ military sacrifices offered a significant re-telling of American history at a time when popular and scholarly histories of the U.S. written by white academics excluded African American contributions and perpetuated racist stereotypes. After all, in 1915 the well-known film *Birth of a Nation* had portrayed Reconstruction as a time of African American corruption and both literal and figurative rape of the white South. Woodrow Wilson screened the film at the White House, and director D.W. Griffith quoted Wilson’s history of Reconstruction at the start of the film, giving it the appearance of a presidential

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<sup>153</sup> “National Negro Press Convention Meets in Annual Session,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, 23 February 1918, 1; “NAACP Securing Names for Service Flag,” *The Chicago Defender*, 31 August 1918, 1; “Federation of Women’s Clubs to Hold Celebration,” *The Chicago Defender*, 10 August 1918, 12. African American leaders’ and soldiers’ embrace of the war—their true motives, the extent of their enthusiasm, and the differences between various individuals and groups—is still the source of scholarly exploration and debate, see William Jordan, “‘The Damnable Dilemma’: African American Accommodation and Protest During World War I,” *Journal of American History* 81 no. 4 (March 1995): 1562-1583; Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2010).

imprimatur. Southern politicians relied on these skewed versions of the region's history to justify Jim Crow laws and lynchings.

Histories of black military sacrifice for the nation challenged such racism. Judge William H. Harrison spoke on "The Negro and the War" at the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. According to an audience member, "His description of the American flag and the black man's part in it, and the right of it—his reference to a service flag hanging in the church—lifted the audience to their feet in wonder and astonishment." At Wilberforce University in Ohio, Col. Charles Young, the nation's highest-ranking African American military officer, spoke at a ceremony dedicating the school's 71-star service flag. The flag "represent[ed] the loyalty, willingness, and the patriotic spirit of black Americans who have never produced a traitor to the stars and stripes, but have always stood with their backs to the wall, facing death in defending the stars and stripes." As African American leaders spoke at similar dedications, and speakers and journalists connected black efforts in the World War directly to the fight for equality at home, the service flag itself became an argument for racial equality.<sup>154</sup>

On a more fundamental level, by flying service flags African Americans could hope to remind whites of their common cause. In Atlantic City, the Knights of Pythias defused racial tension by marching with their 926-star service flag, showing "that the colored folks were human and not at all to be feared." In the wake of Philadelphia's 1918

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<sup>154</sup> "Pensauken Briefs," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 16 February 1918, 2; "Geo. W. Castine Club Raises Service Flag," *The Chicago Defender*, 16 March 1918, 7; "Present Service Flag," *The Chicago Defender*, 30 March 1918, 9; "Church Service Flag Has Eighteen Stars," *The Chicago Defender*, 29 December 1917; "Service Flag Has 200 Stars," *The Chicago Defender*, 2 February 1918, 1; "Alabama," *The Chicago Defender*, 13 July 1918, 13; "Tennessee," *The Chicago Defender*, 17 August 1918, 15; "Judge Harrison Stirs the Nation's Capital," *The Chicago Defender*, 31 August 1918, 2; "Wilberforce Service Flag is Dedicated," *The Chicago Defender*, 11 May 1918, 7; "Presentation of Service Flag to the Y.M.C.A.," [Baltimore] *Afro-American*, 26 April 1918, 4; Ralph W. Tyler, "'Every Ounce,' the Call," *The Chicago Defender*, 27 July 1918, 16. On history as a weapon for racist whites, see M. M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: the Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville, Va.: U. of Virginia Press, 1998), 20-24.

race riots, a service flag failed to protect John R. Evans' home from a white mob, who attempted to set the house on fire. In the process the group "mutilated" his two-starred service flag and sent bullets through the American flag. In response, the local African American newspaper proclaimed: "Mob Shoots Up Flag: Emblem No Protection to People Here." Though the service flag had failed to inspire a sense of nationalist kinship in Philadelphia's violent mob and negligent police force, the papers' outrage over this aspect of the incident reveals much about the hopes and ultimate disappointment of pro-war African Americans. From 1917 to 1919, race riots broke out in cities across the country, frequently featuring white-on-black violence that historians have attributed to growing African American competition with whites for limited housing and jobs.<sup>155</sup>

The African American press did not trumpet patriotic motherhood quite as loudly or frequently as the white press did, but when the Liberty Loan campaigns adopted strong motherhood themes, public ceremonies in the African American community honored mothers of soldiers as mothers of the nation. Many of these events revolved around the Wilson appointee Emmett J. Scott, the highest-ranking African American in the cabinet, who served as Special Assistant to the Secretary of War on African American issues. He visited multiple East Coast cities that summer to encourage pro-war sentiments, and it is likely that Scott's assistants, like Secretary McAdoo's, purposefully sought mothers' participation as a way to rally women's support for the war. One harried writer in the African American *Chicago Defender* told readers that she had been asked to gather as many African American women as possible, especially gold star mothers, to march in the

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<sup>155</sup> "Pythian Convention," [Baltimore] *Afro-American*, 29 August 1919, 4; G. Grant Williams, "Irish Mob Shoots Up Flag!" *Philadelphia Tribune*, 24 August 1918, 1; "The Conscientious Objector—Today, Yesterday" *Four Lights* I no. 16 (25 Aug. 1917), 2-3; Kennedy, *Over Here*, 281-282; see Adriane Lentz Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009), Ch. 2 "Fighting the Southern Huns."

largest parade in the city's history for the Fourth Liberty Loan. Regretting that she had "so short a time," to organize the women, the writer reminded her readers: "as all other races will be represented, it will not do for us to be behind." In both African American and interracial parades in Chicago and Philadelphia, African American mothers of soldiers marched with their service flags to provide visual evidence of their contributions to the war effort.<sup>156</sup>

For African Americans in Chicago, just as for Americans across the country, the Fourth Liberty Loan drive was a celebration of patriotic motherhood. The *Chicago Defender's* description of the black community's parade drew explicitly on American history to portray mothers of military servicemen as mothers of the nation. The parade opened with the mothers and fathers of soldiers marching alongside veterans of past American wars.

No unit of our group was absent. The father of the son who crossed the seas was present, the mother who sat with abated breath watching over him and nursing him in his infancy and who made the first sacrifice of her blood on the altar was present, the 'fathers of 61-65,' though few in number and with shaking limbs and feeble steps, their souls made glad by the martial strains of music [sic]. Then to those who bore their breast in the rain of shells on the hill of El Carney and made it possible for victorious results in the Spanish-American war, they too were there.<sup>157</sup>

Here the mothers of soldiers were counterparts to the "fathers of 61- 65." Though fathers did march in this parade, the writer described them as merely "present" while vividly evoking mothers' sacrifices on behalf of their sons. Uniting the mothers and the veterans was the sacrifice of blood. The altar mentioned here was a reference to the altar of freedom, the phrase invoking both Lincoln's praise for mothers' sacrifices for the

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<sup>156</sup> "Patriotic Rally of AME Churches at the Academy of Music," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 6 July 1918, 1; "Mothers March in Parade," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 25 May 1918, 13; "Women Invited to March in Liberty Loan Parade Saturday," *The Chicago Defender*, 12 October 1918, 6.

<sup>157</sup> "Mothers March in Parade," *The Chicago Defender*, 25 May 1918, 13.

Union in the Civil War and Rinehart's popular formula for patriotic motherhood. Patriotic motherhood clearly held multiple layers of meaning for African American reporters and activists, who not only fought against stereotypes of black women as "oversexed Jezebels" and "loyal Mammies," but who also struggled to remind both whites and blacks of their race's important role in American history and society.<sup>158</sup>

This chapter has focused on two key artifacts in the visual and material culture of the homefront, the service flag and the gold star armband. Evidence suggests that large numbers of Americans adopted these symbols, though they also adapted their use to suit their own preferences and purposes. In songs, poems, illustrations, and advertisements for the Liberty Loans, the service flag and gold star armband were frequently connected to patriotic mothers. Thus, we can imagine that an individual's experience of daily life in wartime cities and towns was peppered with reminders of the war. If the individual was also a consumer of popular songs, magazines or newspapers, or went to a church with a pro-war pastor, these symbols likely evoked the suffering mothers of American "boys" fighting abroad. This aspect of wartime culture was most explicit and dramatic in the huge urban Third and Fourth Liberty Loan parades and their smaller counterparts across the country. In these loan drives, themes were set by regional committees under national guidance, and so their celebrations of patriotic motherhood should be seen as top-down phenomena that nonetheless tapped popular feeling. After all, the parades depended on the active participation of marching mothers, the positive responses of parade-goers, and on parade planners' understanding of their audience.

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<sup>158</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), see Ch. 1; Manning, 21-54.

When used by marginalized groups seeking equal rights, however, the visual symbols of patriotic motherhood took on new meanings that subverted traditions of white male dominance. Service flags allowed women and African Americans to celebrate and publicize their contributions to the nation. Furthermore, by parading the patriotic mothers of one or more soldiers, suffragists and African Americans could present themselves as properly gendered according to wartime ideals, defying the critics who depicted them as deviant.

Patriotic motherhood emphasized a woman's duty to bear and rear sons, and to follow the nation's leadership in times of war. While this philosophy was ultimately conservative, creative activists and clubwomen could borrow its language and symbolism to work toward progressive goals for a more equal society. Patriotic motherhood was founded on difference feminism, drawing on contemporaries' belief that certain qualities united all women and differentiated them from men. Patriotic motherhood could be used to divide as well as unite, however, as we shall see in the next chapter, which explores the class and ethnic antagonisms underlying clubwomen's wartime anti-prostitution campaigns.

### Chapter Three

#### **Patriotic Motherhood and “the Girl Problem”: Sex, Soldiers and Clubwomen’s Wartime Purity Crusade**

In July 1917, Mrs. J. J. Manning of North Dakota wrote an open letter addressing the six million members of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, an umbrella organization bringing together the largest number of clubwomen in the nation. She addressed her readers as mothers of soldiers, asking them to write their Congressmen to demand a nationwide prohibition on alcohol sales during wartime. After all, the conditions of the saloon could hurt a soldier son by causing “death to his manhood,” something she considered a “greater danger” than even his death in the trenches. This was a reference to venereal disease and the prostitutes who frequented saloons. Manning said the U.S. government “because of its indebtedness to American mothers at this terrible time” had an obligation to create laws to enforce soldiers’ moral behavior and prevent a public health crisis.<sup>159</sup>

Pressure from the GFWC and other politically active women ensured that the federal government took a forceful approach to preventing prostitution and alcohol sales to soldiers. Articles, letters and petitions portrayed America’s womanhood as an army of patriotic mothers eager to vanquish both the Germans and domestic threats to their sons’ morality and health. Responding to the demands of women and voluntary organizations around the country, Wilson’s top female appointees to the Council on National Defense spent much of their time and energy on this issue. Clubwomen in the GFWC, the Young Women’s Christian Association, and the National Congress of Mothers channeled their volunteer work and funds into efforts to prevent soldiers from having sex outside of

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<sup>159</sup> Mrs. J. J. Manning, “Prohibition and War,” *The General Federation of Women’s Clubs Magazine* 16, no. 6 (June 1917): 9.

marriage. This dovetailed with federal and military goals to keep soldiers free from venereal diseases. Whether out of a desire to defend the traditional family, preserve the health of future generations, or simply keep fighting forces fit, clubwomen, military leaders and federal appointees cooperated to prevent soldiers from having sex with prostitutes and promiscuous women in order to keep the men free of venereal disease. The result was one of the most sweeping moral reform campaigns in U.S. history.<sup>160</sup>

Patriotic motherhood was an essential theme of this wartime campaign. It served as a persuasive rhetoric aimed at mothers, the American public, and even military servicemen. But patriotic motherhood was also a role idealized by many people in positions of national and local authority and as such it helped shape wartime reform efforts. Understanding military servicemen as wholesome boys, clubwomen cast themselves as mothers to “other mothers’ sons.” They built clubhouses for servicemen that imitated that refuge of feminine culture and comfort, the parlor, while they pursued prostitutes and promiscuous young women using every legal and extra-legal tool available to them. While ideals of patriotic motherhood did not cause the wartime morals campaign, they did complicate it. In a transatlantic phenomenon, the Great War revived stereotypes of woman’s nature as chaste or promiscuous, selfless or selfish, mother or whore. The prevalence of patriotic motherhood propaganda was one symptom of continuity in gender beliefs even as U.S. women simultaneously broke new ground in their wartime work as professionals, industrial workers and citizen-volunteers.

Clubwomen’s anti-prostitution crusade showed that women themselves contributed to a

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<sup>160</sup> For excellent histories of these efforts, see Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering During the Great War* (NY: NYU Press, 1996); David J. Pivar, “Cleansing the Nation: The War on Prostitution, 1917-1921,” *Prologue* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 28-40; David J. Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene: Women, Prostitution, and the “American Plan,” 1900-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002).

conservative and stereotyped view of woman's nature that among other ill-effects, inhibited the possibility of enacting constructive measures to prevent prostitution.<sup>161</sup>

Clubwomen's wartime role in promoting morals campaigns has not been adequately discussed in the historical literature. Examining the records of women's clubs and federal agencies, among other sources, allows us to see the primary role women played. Furthermore, it reveals the way an atmosphere of wartime crisis and celebration of the soldier exacerbated divisions between different classes, races and ages of women. Patriotic motherhood was based on the philosophy of difference feminism, in which women argued for equality with men based on their unique contributions to the state as mothers and nurturers. The major shortcoming of difference feminism, its basis in the false understanding of essential feminine traits, was exposed by this anti-prostitution campaign. Those women who did not appear to embody moral motherhood faced harsh repression at the hands of not only federal agents and local police, but also clubwomen.<sup>162</sup>

This chapter will begin by setting the stage with a general discussion of sexuality, motherhood and the military in the 1910's. This context helps explain the functions of patriotic motherhood propaganda in terms of two audiences: servicemen and politically active women. The chapter will then proceed to analyze women's clubs' wartime

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<sup>161</sup> Margaret and Patrice Higgonnet, *The Double Helix*, 31-47; Grayzel, 121-156.

<sup>162</sup> Nearly all of feminist theory attempts to grapple with the question of woman's difference, or lack of difference, from man. In the last few decades, Carol Gilligan's work is most strongly identified with theories of innate feminine difference, see *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982). Sara Ruddick followed by insisting that motherhood made women more inclined toward pacifism, repeating the arguments of Progressive-era thinkers in her book *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989). Their opponents, who insist on the essential equality or even sameness of men and women, are numerous and currently ascendant in government and academia. They include Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (NY: Columbia UP, 2008) and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (NY: Routledge, 1990). Using numerous examples of women who passionately supported war, Jean Bethke Elshtain resoundingly countered Ruddick's attempts to position women-as-mothers as inherently pacifist, see *Women and War* (NY: Basic Books, 1987). For a discussion that historicizes the development of US feminism away from difference, maternalism and toward a philosophy of equality and equivalence with men, see Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1987).

activities, especially the establishment of clubhouses for servicemen, the enforcement of anti-prostitution regulations, and the creation of curfews. Throughout, clubs' activities and distribution of resources will be understood as a means of social engineering and a reflection of club members' values.

### **Mothers and Morals: Safeguarding America's "Clean, Red-Blooded" Youths**

America's entry into the Great War came in the midst of ongoing conflicts at home over the legality and legitimacy of sexual behaviors ranging from close dancing in public to prostitution to the age of consent. Traditionalists recoiled at working girls' apparent predilection for flamboyant dress and provocative styles of dance; so-called purity reformers haunted dance halls to spot girls engaged in improper behavior and investigated their homes. They complained about the problem of "charity girls," or young women who exchanged sexual favors for dinner, drinks or gifts. At the same time, intellectuals and Bohemians increasingly attacked traditional marriage in writing and spurned it in their personal lives. And the battle over birth control brought the well-heeled and well-connected head-to-head over an issue deeply connected to class, ethnicity and women's rights. Historians have isolated the teens and twenties as the era of the twentieth century's first sexual revolution, led by the very charity girls that reformers sought to control. Over these decades, many Americans began to accept more sexual experimentation and heterosocial activities among youth, and mainstream experts began to frame heterosexual desire, among both men and women, as healthy and natural. Yet the remnants of nineteenth-century attitudes also remained powerful, and purity reformers framed sexual desire as dangerous and sex outside of marriage as a vice.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn of the Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986); Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent*

The war years should be seen as a key moment of historical change—and open conflict—over acceptable norms of sexual and social behavior. Historian Nancy K. Bristow has provided an in-depth look at how the Wilson administration created the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) to prevent the spread of venereal disease among the troops. The CTCA oversaw prohibitions on the sale of intoxicating beverages to men in uniform and the creation of prostitution-free zones around military camps in the United States. The CTCA appointed professional women active in anti-prostitution reform and corrections work to run the Committee on Protective Work for Girls to prevent prostitution by offering girls constructive, patriotic activities. Bristow saw the activities of the CTCA as an example of a fully realized Progressive reform movement because it joined almost unlimited federal government powers with access to huge funds. Not only did it raise millions of dollars for its associated charities in several fundraising cycles, but it cooperated closely with the American Social Hygiene Association, funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Bristow charged that the reformers of the CTCA were attempting to “remake American culture in their own white, urban, middle-class image,” and were practicing “a form of cultural nationalism.” The behaviors the CTCA promoted included abstaining from alcohol and having sex only within marriage. Central to the committee’s “white, urban, middle-class” culture was a vision of motherly

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*Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1995); Nancy Milford, *Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (NY: Random House, 2001); Desley Deacon, *Elsie Clews Parsons: Inventing Modern Life* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1997); Leila J. Rupp, “Feminism and the Sexual Revolution in the Early Twentieth Century: The Case of Dora Stevens,” *Feminist Studies* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 289-309; Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983); Rebecca L. Davis, “Not Marriage at All, but Simple Harlotry”: The Companionate Marriage Controversy,” *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 4 (March 2008): 1137-1163; Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene*.

morality that was shaped by the organization's reliance on women's clubs as partners in the wartime fight against vice.<sup>164</sup>

The CTCA was a federal agency run almost exclusively by men, but it relied heavily on women's support. On the local level, it is unlikely that its reforms would have succeeded without the work of women's clubs, and the symbiotic relationship between the CTCA, the local police powers it harnessed, and women's clubs will inform much of the second half of this chapter.<sup>165</sup>

At the federal level the women's leaders of the Woman's Committee of the Council on National Defense acted as a mouthpiece for the country's women and for all reform organizations concerned with sexual behavior and venereal disease. WCCND leaders exerted pressure on military officials to be sure that the CTCA's morals regulations were enforced. The founding of the CTCA has long been credited to men, but women's role should also be acknowledged. Already in 1918, top male and female federal appointees told conflicting versions of the agency's origins. In a wartime exchange printed in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Raymond B. Fosdick took credit for inspiring Woodrow Wilson and Secretary of War Newton Baker to create the organization with his exposé of U.S. soldiers' relations with prostitutes on the Mexican border in 1916. A few pages later in the same issue, Mrs. Eva

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<sup>164</sup> Bristow, *Making Men*; she acknowledged the CTCA's favorable attitudes toward women's anti-vice work, but her main focus is the agency itself and how it handled its wartime powers, 47; Pivar on Rockefeller, "Cleansing," 30.

<sup>165</sup> Jane Deeter Rippin, "Outline of Organization and Methods, Section on Women and Girls, Law Enforcement Division, War and Navy Department Commissions on Training Camp Activities," 12-15, 1 July 1918, Folder 381, Box 24, Ethel Sturges Dummer Papers, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University; Frederick H. Whitin to Raymond B. Fosdick, 28 May 1917, Committee on Training Camp Activities [24<sup>th</sup> research]; Mrs. Elmer Blair, "Public Health Department: An Emergency Service," *General Federation of Women's Clubs Magazine*, 16, no. 11 (November 1917): 18; on the curfew campaign, Mrs. Julius Andrews, Vice-Chairman on Legislation, "The Protection of Young Recruits and Girls," *General Federation of Women's Clubs Magazine*, 16 no. 11 (November 1917): 33. See also newspaper articles discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Perry Moore claimed that it was women's letters, petitions and political activity had led to the creation of the CTCA. Moore was the head of the National Council of Women and former head of the GFWC, and she served as a Wilson appointee on the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense. In this capacity, she coordinated a federal committee on "Safeguarding Moral and Spiritual Forces" aimed at servicemen.

The Woman's Committee recognized the need of protective work in and around the camps before the War Commission on Training Camp Activities was appointed, writing to President Wilson, urging him to use his authority in regard to the sale of liquor and moral protection from the resorts of the towns,—writing also to the Secretaries of War and Navy, who in each case assured us everything possible would be done.<sup>166</sup>

In fact, Wilson appointed Fosdick and created the CTCA a few weeks before the Woman's Committee passed its resolutions on morals reforms, so Perry's version cannot be correct. Yet if one sees the Woman's Committee as a group of women's club leaders who represented millions of women and thus were powerful long before Wilson chose them as appointees, Perry's "herstory" begins to appear more authoritative. The nation's most powerful women's clubs worked to prevent prostitution and the spread of venereal disease before the war, and mobilization prompted an outpouring of letters and petitions from individual women and clubs on the subjects of prohibition and eliminating prostitution. [See Appendix B for a list.] Fosdick's all-male history of the CTCA was typical of the way powerful male administrators wrote women out of their histories of

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<sup>166</sup> Raymond B. Fosdick, "The War and Navy Departments Commission on Training Camp Activities," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79, Special Issue on War Relief Work (Sept. 1918): 130-142; Mrs. Philip North Moore [Eva Perry Moore], "Health and Recreation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79, Special Issue on War Relief Work (Sept. 1918): 245-6.

wartime work by concentrating on men in top leadership positions, even when female volunteers formed the bulk of their workers.<sup>167</sup>

The government's wartime powers to regulate vice originated in the Selective Service Act's Section Twelve. As discussed in Chapter One, congressmen's debates over the draft were filled with discussions of soldier "boys" and their mothers, and the anti-vice clause should be seen in this context. Legislators wanted military service to be a wholesome, not corrupting, influence on young men, and they wanted mothers' support for the measure. Congressmen rejected the administration's original proposal of a draft targeting young men aged 18 to 25; Representative William J. Fields (D-KY) was one member who opposed the measure out of a belief that such early service would harm the mental and physical health of such young men.<sup>168</sup>

Both Congressmen and feminists framed the draft as a measure with a profound effect on future generations. At a time when many contemporaries understood national strength in terms of a Darwinian competition of races, they believed that if the healthiest young men were sent to war to die, the nation's "stock" would be irreversibly weakened. In addition to the death toll on the battlefield, many clubwomen and anti-prostitution reformers feared the possible toll of venereal disease on future generations. The National Congress of Mothers had close to 100,000 members during the war, and was a part of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Both organizations supported laws requiring that couples get tested for venereal disease before they could be issued a marriage license.

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<sup>167</sup> During the war, the American Red Cross was the most popular venue for women's volunteer war work. Women sewed bandages and knitted hats and socks for the soldiers, in addition to other work. Yet the official history of the organization's war work focuses chiefly on its male leadership, only thanking female volunteers in later pages, see the pamphlet by Frank M. Chapman, "One Year with the American Red Cross, June 1917 to June 1918, A Record of How the American People Came to the Support of Their Country at War," Washington, D.C. (July 1918).

<sup>168</sup> Rep. William J. Fields on conscription, House, 65<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* (24 April 1917), vol. 55, pt. 1, 1031-1032.

The National Congress of Mothers also supported “better baby” contests designed to educate mothers on the proper feeding and care of infants. During the war, the NCM and GFWC worked to stop prostitution and casual sex out of the belief that infection with venereal disease led to “wounds worse than those received in battle” that would infect innocent wives and new babies. Devoted to defense of the traditional family in their pre-war activities, their wartime work was part of their larger commitment to eugenics and the use of public health measures to create an improved society and stronger nation.<sup>169</sup>

Syphilis and gonorrhea were the most widespread sexually transmitted diseases of the day. While these diseases were curable in 1917, the cures were not immediate but required both a proper diagnosis and ongoing treatments for up to a year. Public health reformers especially dreaded the effects of syphilis on future generations, including blindness and “imbecile and defective children.” In an ideology only one-step removed from nineteenth-century Lamarckian theories of criminality, Progressive-era public health reformers, including maternalist women’s groups, hoped that by preventing venereal disease they could prevent the creation of future generations of criminals and wards of the state. Government posters warned servicemen that if they acquired a venereal disease they would be losing their opportunity to have healthy children and disappointing their fathers, mothers, wives and even siblings.<sup>170</sup>

Class prejudices informed the way a middle-class audience of readers, theater audiences and clubwomen viewed sexual commerce and social diseases; a growing class

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<sup>169</sup> Mrs. Elmer Blair, “Public Health Department,” *General Federation of Women’s Clubs Magazine* 16, no. 5 (May 1917): 28; Mrs. Frederic Schoff, “President’s Desk,” *Child Welfare Magazine* 11, no 2 (Oct. 1917): 20; Elizabeth Harrison, “War Work of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations,” *Child Welfare Magazine* 12, no. 2 (Oct. 1918): 68-69; Mrs. Frederic Schoff, “President’s Desk,” *Child Welfare Magazine* 14, nos. 11-12 (July-Aug. 1920), 336; David J. Rothman and Sheila M. Rothman, eds., *National Congress of Mothers: The First Conventions* (NY: Garland Publishing, 1987; reprint, various publishers, 1897-1899).

<sup>170</sup> Pivar, “Cleansing,” 31; Bristow, see figs. 2-5;

of independent female wage-earners exacerbated long-standing class and ethnic tensions in the U.S. The popular pre-war play “Damaged Goods,” first performed in France, then in Britain and finally the U.S., communicated traditional prejudices about poverty and disease. The play tells the story of a young, affluent man who spreads venereal disease to his unsuspecting wife and innocent baby. The play advocated greater sex education for young women, an important movement in this time period, but it also implied that venereal diseases filtered up from impoverished prostitutes and the urban working-class into middle-class homes. In the decades before World War I, factories and department stores employed increasing numbers of young women, who created a highly visible new class of worker. The number of women in the workforce multiplied quickly from 1870 to 1910, rising from under 2 million to just over 7 million. In the pre-war period, reformers discussing a “girl problem” saw young, working women as at once both resistant to authority and vulnerable to exploitation. Poet Anna Hampstead Branch published a poem in the GFWC magazine that expressed a combination of envy and pity toward these working-class girls. The poem condemned the frills and feather boas of their costumes, which were vulgar and showy by middle-class standards, and the women’s “defiant” eyes and “insolent” attitudes. Yet it also acknowledged the work and sacrifice the young women had put into buying the clothes they considered beautiful. The author chided readers to pity rather than scorn the girls, as they would soon lose their beauty due to the hard work and difficult conditions they faced on the job. The poem’s sentiments conveyed the mingled envy, fear, empathy and pity that observers could feel at the sight of young, attractive working girls parading on the city streets.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Pivar “Cleansing,” 33; Emma Goldman, *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1914), 158-9; Odem, 21; Anna Hampstead Branch, “To a New York Shop-Girl Dressed

Responding to the rising numbers of working women and the creation of new entertainments in the urbanizing North, Progressive-era reformers organized to prevent prostitution in the ASHA, Travelers' Aid Society and in other clubs. Women's Christian Temperance Union members led campaigns to make sex with girls under ages 18 or 16 a crime; new statutory rape laws were enacted across the country from 1885 to 1920. Using these and other laws, reformers and some parents in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York attempted to use the court system to force young women to conform to norms of modesty and chastity.<sup>172</sup>

Concerns about sexual immorality and disease were not isolated to whites. African American newspapers criticized promiscuity and women's groups worked to prevent prostitution. African American reform groups in this period emphasized uplift in their work, and African American clubwomen supported urban purity campaigns. Many blacks hoped that by adopting strict norms of respectability, they could defy racist expectations. One common, harmful stereotype in this era cast all African American women as sexually tempting and available; historians have called this role the black Jezebel. In the South, beliefs in an inherently debased black womanhood were used to excuse rape and the sexual abuse of black women by white men.<sup>173</sup>

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for Sunday," *The General Federation of Women's Clubs Magazine* 16, no. 7 (July 1917): 11.

<sup>172</sup> On the campaign to enact statutory rape laws, see Odem, 8-37; on the role of working-class parents in prosecuting these laws, see Odem, 37-62 and passim.

<sup>173</sup> Key books on African American women's history of resistance to sexual stereotyping, violence and exploitation include: Gerda Lerner, ed. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1972) and Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (NY: Basic Books, 1985). Recent books exploring the Jezebel myth and its repercussions include M.M. Manring's *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville, VA: U. of VA Press, 1998), interesting for the way it posits the Jezebel and the Mammy as necessary opposites to one another, and Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (NY: Knopf, 2010).

Given these conflicts over sex, class and race, it should not surprise us that proposals to modernize the American military provoked heated discussions about young men's character formation and sexual behavior. In the early twentieth century, European nations increasingly required young men to undergo stints of military training and service. Americans considered adopting similar programs, and the beginning of the Great War in 1914 lent urgency to these discussions over what proponents called universal military training [UMT]. Debates over UMT raged between two factions. Supporters envisioned a stronger role for America in the world and believed in a Darwinian world politics of competition over limited resources. Influential leaders of this movement included Theodore Roosevelt and General Leonard Wood. Their opponents, including pacifists and many educators, believed that military training would teach young men to obey without thinking. Likewise, they believed that valorizing the heroic soldier or general would lead to more wars and that boys should be taught to respect the quieter heroism of the men who improved civilian life, including scientists and scholars. The Woman's Peace Party and the more mainstream National Congress of Mothers fell into this second camp.<sup>174</sup>

Many early 20<sup>th</sup> century Americans looked down on the military as a career option. Concern over the morality of training camps helped to shape some of the opposition to UMT programs. An article entitled "The Average Man and the Army," published in 1916 in the *Saturday Evening Post*, treated mothers as a significant group likely to oppose their sons' military training. Author Herbert Quick acknowledged the need to persuade "the average man," "the average business man," and also "the average

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<sup>174</sup> John Whiteclay Chambers II, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: The Free Press, 1987); "The Detroit Child Welfare Conference," *Child-Welfare Magazine*, April 1916, No. 8, Vol. X, 276, and passim.

mother” of the merits of military service for young men. “The average mother—and, make no mistake about it, the average mother is going to have a good deal to say about this preparedness program—will ponder far more on the effect of army life on her boy . . .” than on other factors. Quick analyzed the problem of vice and military camps, which had a long association in people’s minds through the Civil War, Western armies, and troops stationed abroad. He rooted soldiers’ misbehavior in having too much spare time once training exercises were complete.<sup>175</sup> Quick listed common soldiers’ vices including drinking beer, playing cards, and otherwise getting into “mischief and the guard house,” perhaps hinting at sexual promiscuity. Quick proposed to satisfy mothers’ concern with morality, as well as the concerns of the business man, by including education for the men as a part of their required military service.<sup>176</sup> General Leonard Wood also saw America’s mothers as a significant obstacle to the passage of required military training. He attempted to convince them that military training would be beneficial to young men’s health, work habits, and morals—“because of the discipline which teaches them to respect the laws and the rights of others.”<sup>177</sup>

On the other side of the issue, members of the Woman’s Peace Party were dedicated opponents of UMT. One member attempted to raise concerns about morality and venereal disease to rally parents against New York State’s proposed Welsh-Slater Bill of 1916, which required military training for young men sixteen to nineteen years old. Cora L. Hartshorn wrote to the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), the

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<sup>175</sup> Bristow, 3-4.

<sup>176</sup> Herbert Quick, “The Average American and the Army,” *Saturday Evening Post*, March 4, 1916, 8; Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” in *Dimity Convictions* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1977). Bristow relies on Welter, on ideals of womanhood in Progressive era and wartime, 45-50.

<sup>177</sup> Leonard Wood, “The Duty of Parents,” in Albert Bushnell Hart, ed., *America at War: A Handbook of Patriotic Education References* (NY: George H. Doran Co., 1918), 308-9, excerpted from Leonard Wood, *Universal Military Training* (NY: Collier, 1917).

most prominent American group working to monitor sexual promiscuity and prevent sexually transmitted diseases, to ask their opinion on whether boys in military training would be exposed to “grave moral and sanitary dangers.” In a carefully worded response, James H. Foster, Assistant Secretary of the organization, said the issue would require further study before any conclusions could be drawn.<sup>178</sup> It is likely that Hartshorn was inspired to turn to the ASHA because its leader, Raymond B. Fosdick, had exposed vice conditions among troops along the Mexican border.

Dismayed by Foster’s refusal to cooperate, Cora Hartshorn then wrote to the secretary of the New York WPP, Margaret Lane, confiding that her plan had been to attack the Welsh-Slater bill by attacking the fitness of military men to oversee the training of boys. “I also asked them [ASHA] to give me any reports on the moral and sanitary conditions of the National Guard, Army and Navy thinking such official reports from that society might serve to back up the contention that the military men were not a fit element to entrust the supervision of such boys camps to [sic].” The ultimate goal was to reach parents who might otherwise be apathetic or supportive of the bill. “I think that many parents would be impressed by such a statement when the military aspect of the question would not arouse their opposition.” [Underline in the original] Lane encouraged Hartshorn to follow up on her initial idea with letters to individual members on the board of the American Social Hygiene Association who were also pacifists—prominent Progressives like Jane Addams, David Starr Jordan and others.<sup>179</sup> While no more correspondence indicates that the WPP pursued this issue further, and the Welsh-Slater

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<sup>178</sup> James H. Foster to Cora L. Hartshorn, 23 May 1916, Series B 2 “A,” 1915-6 to “E,” 1915-1919, *The Collected Records of the Woman’s Peace Party, 1914-1920*, Swarthmore College (Wilmington, DC: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1988), microfilm.

<sup>179</sup> Letter from Cora L. Hartshorn, to Margaret Lane, New York, May 24, 1916; letter from Margaret Lane to Cora L. Hartshorn, May 29, 1916, *ibid.*

bill did pass into law in New York state, it is clear from these opposing examples that American parents, especially mothers, were central to discussions over young men's military service and its moral effects.

The labeling of the soldiers and sailors as boys, as discussed throughout this dissertation, continued through the war and for years afterward.<sup>180</sup> The image of youthful soldiers proved a useful one for fundraising, and advertisers used it in campaigns for the Liberty Loans and Red Cross. They drew on the image of the soldier as a youth, representing a national son.<sup>181</sup> This image had several possible benefits to pro-war causes. As discussed in Chapter 2, portraying soldiers as national sons allowed the government and fundraising agencies to tug on the heartstrings of Americans in order to access their wallets. Repeating the theme of the nation as family helped to buttress nationalism, and it had the potential to give Americans a feeling of involvement in the war, even if their own sons or blood relatives were not participating. As sons, the soldiers could be framed as vulnerable and needy without completely sacrificing their soldierly strength and manliness. This framework also allowed morals reformers to attempt to regulate and influence soldiers' behaviors without challenging their masculinity, which was seen as key to their success in battle.

Furthermore, presenting the soldiers as boys who loved their mothers helped to separate them from the image of the marauding German soldier, the "Hun," whose wartime atrocities were infamous in Allied nations. The soldiers of the Germans and

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<sup>180</sup> Mr. Gallinger, April 21, 1917, Senate debate, 915 and passim, *Congressional Record*, US, on Microfilm, Reel 133, vol. 55, parts 1-3, 65<sup>th</sup> Congress, parts 1-3, Sessions Special and 1, 1917. The potential American soldiers are called boys by Congressmen on both sides in debates over the war and conscription.

<sup>181</sup> Michael T. Coventry, "God, Country, Home and Mother': Soldiers, Gender and Nationalism in Great War America," (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2004), 249-262 and passim; the previous chapter's ad from John Wanamaker for the Liberty Loan is a good example, Advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 12 October 1918, 11.

their allies were represented in print, posters and film as violent rapists, sadists and murderers, and writers and speakers framed the German nation as an example of militarism run amok. These were the flaws of a masculinity that raged out of control, and the presentation of the American soldier as morally upstanding, a chivalrous knight or a dutiful son, differentiated them from the enemy.<sup>182</sup>

Newspaper and magazine stories emphasized the soldiers' good health and high spirits in the military camps, often focusing on the soldiers' boyish qualities and their love for American mothers. Author Rheta Childe Dorr visited her son in France. *A Soldier's Mother in France* was published as a book in 1918, and an excerpt of her account was published in the *Chicago Tribune*. As she described it, her son was overjoyed to see her on her surprise visit to his military canteen in France. He cried out "Mother! Mother!" and rushing to her side, hugged her. "Instantly at the word [mother] the noisy talk and laughter stopped dead, and every man in the room sprang to his feet. It was not a tribute to me, but to their own mothers at home. Right there I adopted the American army." Dorr emphasized that on their leave time the soldiers climbed mountains, rode bicycles and socialized under YMCA supervision. She claimed never to have seen a drunken soldier in France and did not mention that prostitution was legal there. The American press generally ignored the French government-regulated brothels, though historians have found that prostitution was a growing business there during the war. In Dorr's account, the American army was a group of great big boys who wished to be "adopted."<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Coventry on chivalry, see Ch. 2, 82-141; Michael C.C. Adams, *Male Adventure and the Coming of World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990).

<sup>183</sup> Rheta Childe Dorr, "A Soldier's Mother in France," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 May 1918, B2; Rheta Child Dorr, *A Soldier's Mother in France* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1918).

Numerous American women believed that military servicemen required protection from the corruptions surrounding military camps. Gertrude Atherton reflected the attitudes of many in a letter to the *New York Times*. “Most of these young men that come East or North from country and mountain districts are as sound as their own forests, and it is essential to the safety of the country that they remain so.”<sup>184</sup> Secretary of War Newton D. Baker assured one concerned mother that the majority of army recruits were young men of “fine, clean red-blooded stock.” This assumption was so widespread that the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense was flooded with letters demanding moral protections for the soldiers. They received so many that they simply sent digests along to the Secretary of War. For example, on one September day in 1917 they sent a letter listing 53 organizations, including women’s groups, patriotic societies and churches. They ranged geographically from New York to California, North Dakota to Hawaii, and included at least one African American organization.<sup>185</sup> [See Appendix B for list]

Upon mobilization, women around the country rushed to care for the soldiers as “the son[s] of some devoted mother.” The General Federation of Women’s Clubs called on members to have soldiers from nearby camps into their homes for dinner. Countless women performed similar work, especially at holidays. They also created chaperoned dances and events for soldiers’ entertainment. A handful of women attempted to start a

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<sup>184</sup> Gertrude Atherton, “Outside the Camp,” *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1917, RE12.

<sup>185</sup> Newton D. Baker to Mrs. Bunker, 7 July 1917; Alabama 3; Reports Relating to Training Camp Activities, 1917; War College Division and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices-Education and Recreation Branch, Commission on Training Camp Activities; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165; National Archives, College Park; Alice H. Wood to Newton D. Baker, 11 September 1917; Alabama 22.2—WCCND; Reports Relating to Training Camp Activities, 1917; War College Division and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices-Education and Recreation Branch, Commission on Training Camp Activities; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165; National Archives, College Park.

charity in which women could adopt a soldier as a sort of “godmother” and serve as his pen pal, but the military put a stop to it. In France a similar charity had resulted not only in the spread of motherly love but also in romance, and there was no way for American authorities to monitor the men’s and women’s relationships to ensure they remained chaste. The supporters of the program were disappointed by the War Department’s resistance. Similarly convinced of mothers’ inspirational value, one chapter of the National Congress of Mothers printed calendars with pictures of themselves that they gave as gifts to servicemen departing for the front.<sup>186</sup>

It is tempting to assume that the sentimental rhetoric of soldier boys and patriotic mothers was a sop to women’s sensibilities rather than a way to engage soldiers’ emotions. The *Trench and Camp*, a weekly printed by cooperating local newspapers for the Young Men’s Christian Association, was intended for distribution to the American Expeditionary Forces. It did not focus as many articles on mother love as it did on other topics, including wives’ love and loyalty to their servicemen husbands. But it did not neglect mothers entirely, printing articles on mothers’ pride in the courage of servicemen sons. Other evidence points to the military’s reliance on patriotic motherhood rhetoric in the fight against prostitution; officers appear to have judged the rhetoric of mother-love an effective way to influence the troops.<sup>187</sup>

Sergeant Mattson of Omaha, Nebraska, stationed in France, made a speech to his fellow servicemen on the subject of mothers, and in so doing won praise from his

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<sup>186</sup> “Editorial,” *General Federation of Women’s Clubs Magazine* 16, no. 7 (July 1917), 5; May Lamberton Becker, undated proposal, after Sept. 26, 1917 minutes; Minutes of meetings, May 1917-February 1919; Committee on Women’s Defense Work; Council of National Defense; Record Group 62; National Archives, College Park; Grayzel, 124; “New Jersey,” *Child Welfare Magazine* 12, no. 5 (January 1918), 82.

<sup>187</sup> This is based on my survey of *Trench and Camp* issues published from July to November 1918. For an in-depth treatment of publications aimed at soldiers, and frequently produced by them, see Coventry, “God, Country, Home and Mother.”

superiors. He framed military service as a sudden and dangerous freedom for young men used to the constraints of family and village life. “[T]he one human factor that will influence and control him is the thought of mother and home.” Whether the mother was one’s own mother, or the mother of one’s children, Mattson said a man’s conscience was called awake by the word “Mother” just as his body was called awake by the command “Attention!” Reciting a common formulation, Mattson reminded soldiers that they had once been nurtured within their mothers’ bodies. For her lifetime, he said, a mother experienced her son as an extension of her self. Thus she had sacrificed a part of her life and a part of her body for her country in sending her son into the military. A soldier would spend his final ounce of energy and determination for his mother. Mattson said, “Do away with the home life and all that surrounds it, the foundation of the nation itself will be undermined and it will not last. The home centers around mother. It is mother, boys, whom we are fighting for.” Though Mattson’s speech obviously offered a rationale for fighting, it also implicitly reminded soldiers to stay away from prostitutes. Why else would he first establish that the word “Mother” should awaken a man’s conscience? Through posters, speeches, pamphlets and films, the Army’s anti-venereal disease campaigns told servicemen that only by staying disease-free could they hope for the normative “home life and all that surrounds it” that Mattson envisioned.<sup>188</sup>

Mattson’s speech was a small part of a larger effort. The Army turned Mother’s Day, 1918 into a massive celebration. General Pershing ordered soldiers to write home to mother that day; for troops posted in Southern France, the Army thoughtfully offered pre-printed postcards that said “I SEND YOU MY HEART’S DEVOTION.” In military

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<sup>188</sup> Sgt. Mattson, “Tribute to Mother,” delivered in France in wartime, published in *The American War Mother* 1 no. 2 (April 1924): 9. See the posters published in Pivar, “Cleansing,” 31; Bristow, see figs. 2-5.

camps across the U.S. and Europe, special events were held to mark the holiday. At their camp in Southern California, for example, the “Sunshine Division” honored their mothers with special ceremonies; several hundred of their mothers attended as guests. Soldiers sang mother-themed songs, such as the popular sentimental ballad “Mother Machree.” The Third Battalion, 160<sup>th</sup> Infantry, formed the living word “MOTHER” by standing in groups arranged to form each letter. An officer’s wife asked the soldiers to write home to their mothers at least once a week. Such efforts were typical. In historians’ analysis, this effort was part of a propaganda campaign aimed at persuading military men to fight and kill for the sake of their mothers at home. Propaganda provided mothers as the “hot,” or emotionally resonant, reason to fight rather than the cooler, more abstract reason of fighting a war for democracy. Scholars have correctly pointed out that female virtue and the traditional family, especially as symbolized by mothers, formed the core of many Western nations’ appeal to fight. But sex, or rather abstaining from sex, was also an important dimension of the mother-centered propaganda aimed at servicemen.<sup>189</sup>

In her role as pro-war publicist, Mary Roberts Rinehart printed an open letter to servicemen in the *Saturday Evening Post*, urging them to maintain a “clean slate” for the sake of their families at home. This was a common wartime refrain, but Rinehart’s fiery patriotic and motherly rhetoric imbued it with special persuasive power. In response, Rinehart received a fan letter from Ivan Nock, an American who had been serving with French troops since January 1916. He told Rinehart that after years at the front and three stints in medical hospitals, he had lost faith in traditional morality. “I’ve seen all my

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<sup>189</sup> Zeiger, “Slacker,” 31-33; *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1918, ‘Pay Homage to Mothers’—p. II 1; Coventry, 49-73, esp. 53-54; Robert B. Westbrook, “‘I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James’: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II,” *American Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (Dec. 1990), 587-614; Grayzel, *Women’s Identities*; Gullace, “*The Blood of Our Sons*”; Evans, *Mothers of Heroes*.

friends go one by one, or several together, you see—the very ones who should have been spared it seemed.” Checked into a medical hospital yet again, he had planned on conducting a sexual affair in Paris once he was released. Then he read Rinehart’s appeal.

. . . it’s such a letter as my Mother would write to me, I think, were she alive. And it seems to have readjusted my values for me. The “clean slate” good to bring back if you can, better to take with you if you go Over There. There’s an idea worth keeping. So I’ve cut out the letter I promise to read it from time to time.

Since Nock was already “Over There” in France, he used the term “go Over There” to signify death. It was one of the few fan letters that Rinehart preserved in her files, indicating the special pleasure she took in getting validation from a war hero. Nock died on January 18, 1918 after receiving the Croix de Guerre and other honors for his service in the French Foreign Legion.<sup>190</sup>

Concerned for soldiers away from home, but also caught up by the urgent nationalism of the war emergency, numerous women’s clubs aimed wartime charity work at servicemen. The Young Women’s Christian Association was arguably the most important, as it was the only one recognized by the government as officially affiliated with the CTCA. This meant that along with the YMCA, Knights of Columbus, Jewish Welfare Board, Salvation Army, War Camp Community Service (a wartime offshoot of the American Playground and Recreation Association), and the American Library Association, the YWCA shared in national fundraising drives nearly as intense in pitch and broad in scope as those for war bonds. As a result, the YWCA’s wartime budget leapt into the tens of millions. The organization’s war work was twofold. First, and considered most important by the national leadership and the military, the organization

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<sup>190</sup> Ivan F. Nock to Mary Roberts Rinehart, Sept. 20, 1917; John Dix Nock to Mary Roberts Rinehart, March 24, 1918; both in World War I, folder 2 of 2; Correspondence; Mary Roberts Rinehart Collection; Special Collections; University of Pittsburgh Libraries.

provided “hospitality houses,” clubhouses where soldiers could relax, enjoy music and snacks, and meet female guests under the supervision of a matron. Second, the YWCA worked with young women, especially industrial workers, to provide activities and services meant to keep them from pursuing sex with soldiers. The following section will discuss both strands of wartime work: clubwomen’s efforts to offer servicemen motherly hospitality, and their cooperation with government efforts to police the sexual activity of women and girls.<sup>191</sup>

### **A Mothers’ Influence: Rewards and Punishments in the Fight Against Venereal Disease**

One of the most puzzling types of wartime charity work for the soldiers, at least from the perspective of today, was also one of the most common. The creation of matron-led clubhouses for servicemen, frequently called “hostess houses,” was an innovation in the fight against prostitution unique to the World War I era, according to CTCA head Raymond Fosdick. The YWCA was the government’s partner in creating hostess houses near military camps in the U.S. and abroad. By September 1918, there were sixty-one already built and twenty-five more under construction at locations throughout the country. The hostess houses and similar retreats offered men a place to receive their female family members since regulations forbade the men from having women in their tents or barracks, but reformers also believed that they offered men a needed respite from the male atmosphere of an army camp. There, soldier-visitors could retreat into a sphere of femininity that included music, snacks, games, materials for letter-

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<sup>191</sup> Bristow, 36; “Minutes of Special Meeting, War Department Commission on Training Camp Activities,” Washington, DC, July 12, 1918,” ledger book, 82; Minutes of Meetings of the Commission, April 27, 1917-February 19, 1919; War College Division and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs; Record Group 165; National Archives, College Park.

writing, and comfortable furniture. Staff provided hospitality and sometimes even traditionally feminine services such as darning and dancing.<sup>192</sup>

The idea of the hostess house held such appeal for contemporary clubwomen that the National Congress of Mothers adopted a program very similar to the YWCA's. With its more limited funds, the NCM built a handful of clubhouses and boarding houses in major cities as a way to prevent soldiers and sailors on leave from visiting brothels. This section will provide an analysis of both programs. The mothers' hostess houses have not been discussed by previous scholars, yet the club's officers provided extensive commentary on their purpose and even some evidence of servicemen's reception. Because the Congress of Mothers' program was small and not affiliated with the federal government, club officers' discussion of the houses was particularly frank and open. It provides a view into the clubwomen's understanding of motherly duty—and opportunity—in wartime.

The head of the NCM believed that her members could become a new form of camp follower. Why shouldn't "good" women cater to soldiers rather than simply allowing the "bad" women to do so, she asked her members. Her statements revealed the dichotomized mindset of many contemporaries, and also the belief that men's need for women's company—not simple sexual desire—led them to seek out prostitutes.<sup>193</sup>

Many clubwomen and some men believed this. For example, one proponent of military reform wrote to the CTCA to support the YWCA's program to build hostess houses. He said that in military service in Panama, servicemen had sought out brothels

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<sup>192</sup> Raymond B. Fosdick, "The Commission on Training Camp Activities," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* 7, no. 4 (Feb. 1918): 164; Bristow, 58.

<sup>193</sup> Mrs. Frederic Schoff, "Need of Mothers Near Mobilization Camps," *Child Welfare Magazine* 11, no. 10 (June 1917): 281; Elizabeth Harrison, "War Work of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations," *Child Welfare Magazine* 12, no. 2 (Oct. 1918): 68.

purely out of a need for feminine company. The club house would act as a vaccine against vice by injecting a dose of “decent femininity” into the camps. CTCA head Raymond Fosdick echoed this sentiment; he believed that soldiers needed “feminine society of the right kind” and many wanted a “bit of mothering.” In a third example, a Massachusetts YWCA worker justified her own work in terms of this theory. She described her local branch’s work in providing the men with local activities and “homey” hospitality. “This connecting link with home is one of the biggest factors in keeping the men straight.” These examples show that a cross-section of Progressive era reformers, ranging from military reformers, to powerful men in moral reforms, to local women concerned with the female working-class, agreed on the basic function of hostess houses as a purer alternative to the brothel.<sup>194</sup>

The NCM established “Mothers Headquarters,” or “Universal Service Clubs” as they were later called, in Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Waukegan, IL, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors and tens of thousands of lodgers from nearby military encampments.<sup>195</sup> The club houses offered servicemen a variety of wholesome activities, and thanks to the cooperation of wealthy donors, the converted mansions offered some deluxe entertainments. In Philadelphia, the club house had a pool and roof garden, and an annex for mothers from other cities visiting their soldier sons. In the

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<sup>194</sup> Sinclair Kennedy to Miss Elizabeth Boies and Mr. M.J. Exner, 1 June 1917; Folder 6 Exner; Reports Relating to Training Camp Activities, 1917, Alabama 1.3-7; Commission on Training Camp Activities; War College Division and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices-Education and Recreation Branch; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs; RG 165; National Archives, College Park, MD; Fosdick, “The Commission on Training Camp Activities,” 165; Julia P. Richardson, “Summer Recreation Work,” Worcester, MA, Sept 2, 1918, handwritten; Folder 171, Reports 1918-1919; Carton 4 Departmental Reports; Young Women’s Christian Association of Cambridge, MA, Records, 1881-1981; Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

<sup>195</sup> Elizabeth Harrison, *Child Welfare Magazine* (October 1918): 68-69; “Pennsylvania,” *Child Welfare Magazine* (July 1918): 246.

Great Lakes area club, there were “victrolas, a piano, a pool-table, books, writing materials, magazines, games of all sorts and plenty of easy chairs.”<sup>196</sup>

The “matron” who ran the Waukegan, IL club house had a son in the army, and said she “loves to help other mothers’ sons.” Two other “mother-hostesses” were there to “contribute whatever service may be desired.” In the hot summer months of 1918, the hostesses baked and cooked, offering naval trainees from a nearby camp “hundreds of cookies and doughnuts” as well as “coffee, chocolate, or tea.” The “mother-hostesses” offered a measure of supervision—one soldier recalled that in his camp’s YWCA hostess house the presence of the matron prevented the men from swearing.<sup>197</sup>

Many men apparently enjoyed the hostess houses. The Philadelphia branch of the National Congress of Mothers published a note signed by over one hundred enlisted men, thanking the women for creating a “*HOME*” at their clubhouse, and for preventing the soldiers from “getting lonesome.” The servicemen signed off by saying that they hoped to win the war to make the women proud. It was exactly the sort of praise the club wanted.<sup>198</sup> Other evidence points to men’s enjoyment of the YWCA hostess houses; military officers who were initially skeptical later pestered officials when their camps did not have clubhouses built promptly enough. African American soldiers, who faced persistent discrimination in the military, had separate hostess houses built much later than those for whites. African-American chaplains pressured the CTCA to provide them.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> “Illinois,” *Child Welfare Magazine* (July 1917): 345.

<sup>197</sup> “Illinois,” *Child Welfare Magazine* (July 1917): 345; “Illinois,” *Child Welfare Magazine* (Oct. 1918): 49; Bristow, 49.

<sup>198</sup> “Patriot Service of Mothers to Enlisted Men,” *Child Welfare Magazine* 12, no. 7 (March 1918): 115.

<sup>199</sup> Fosdick, “The War and Navy Departments’ Commission on Training Camp Activities,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79 (Sept. 1918): 136; Bristow, 59, 146-47.

The Waukegan matron's desire to help military servicemen as "other mothers' sons" was an emotion the country's largest women's clubs drew on in their war work. Clubwomen saw themselves as patriotic mothers to soldier-sons, and they articulated this sentiment over and over. The war work motto of the NCM/PTA was: "To do for these boys what we want some other mother to do for our boys." The statement, along with a description of the group's anti-vice war work, drew applause at a meeting of the presidents of national women's organizations convened by the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense. In a separate example, the GFWC printed the letter of a member in Indianapolis, who explained her hospitality work with soldiers by saying, "In looking at a soldier boy the average club mother looks upon that boy as the son of some devoted mother." Finally, the Salvation Army's Mother Burdick, stationed at a hospitality club for the troops in France, said that she sought to care for the soldier boys as she thought their mothers would want.<sup>200</sup>

Yet no matter how hard they tried to spread mother-love to men in uniform, the clubwomen did not succeed in preventing prostitution. One frustrated mother in Greensburg, Pennsylvania reported that when the "truck trains" filled with recruits stopped in their area, and 200 men poured off the train to find overnight lodgings, the women served the men "something good and wholesome to eat" in the local First Presbyterian church. They did not have the money to build lodgings for the young men, but they said they gave the boys the "same atmosphere of healthfulness" the clubhouses could offer. "It has been greatly appreciated by the boys." Over 9000 soldiers were fed, and the volunteer women also offered the men "little personal kindnesses," receiving

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<sup>200</sup> "President's Desk," *Child Welfare Magazine* (July 1917): 307; "Editorial," *General Federation of Women's Clubs Magazine* 16, no. 7 (July 1917): 5; Don Martin, "'Mother Burdick' Ministering Angel to Men in France," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 April 1918, 1-2.

many thank you notes from the mothers and friends of the soldiers. “But, my dear, as you know the bad women are always at work and some have even followed the men here from Pittsburgh—so that several times there was a little bad flavor mixed in with the good.”<sup>201</sup>

When clubwomen used words like “bad” and “good” to signify the difference between themselves and prostitutes, they were presenting themselves as entirely asexual—neither desirable, nor desiring. This motherly distance from sexuality, according to the NCM’s newsletter, gave members the freedom to associate with soldiers without giving rise to gossip or any accusation of immorality. They were not the only ones who framed mothers of soldiers and grown children as asexual. Magazine covers and sheet music covers presented mothers of grown children as distinct from younger women. The mothers of soldiers and sailors in these illustrations often wore white or gray hair in a bun, little spectacles, and old-fashioned dark-colored dresses that covered their entire bodies. In contrast, contemporary illustrations on magazine, sheet music covers and posters presented young women with an emphasis on their hair—red, dark or blonde—and especially their exposed skin of throat, arms, and sometimes their backs or ankles.<sup>202</sup>

Photography helps us to see that these dichotomized images of youthful and aged women did not reflect the fashions or realities of daily life. The *Chicago Tribune* presented the story of a 36-year-old mother so young and attractive that she had to bring documentation to prove her identity when she accompanied her 18-year-old sailor son to

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<sup>201</sup> “Pennsylvania,” *Child Welfare Magazine* (October 1918): 53-4.

<sup>202</sup> The covers of the *Saturday Evening Post* are a study in the contrast of youth and age. While the cover was commonly used to display a youthful female image, only two covers focused on older women during the war. Each showed the mother of a soldier: the 7 September 1918 issue and the 10 November 1917 issue.

the courthouse to marry his fiancée. Photos show her in a fashionable ensemble, gazing at the camera like a movie star. Likewise, in New York City, society matrons visited soldiers in their camps and directed soldiers' amusements without any hint of impropriety, but photos show us that society matrons could be youthful-looking and chic. A photo of the wartime hostess and fundraiser Mrs. Charles Cary Ramsey displays her fashionably exposed back and arms, and frames her pale neck and throat.<sup>203</sup>

While the rhetoric of federal government officials, print media, and women's clubs framed these social roles as stable--soldiers as boys, mothers as nurturing and asexual, and as we shall see, girls as a source of sexual trouble-- in reality these positions were not so clear and well-defined. Women who came from affluent backgrounds were more likely to be seen as respectable, a term that joined class standing to perceptions of modesty and chastity. It took political and cultural work to create the rules and regulations that divided the proper from the improper, the sexual from the non-sexual, and the slippery path from the upright road. Clubwomen, local and federal officials legislated and regulated the types of heterosexual socializing which would be allowed, shut down, or monitored for the duration of the war.

The CTCA was the chief federal instrument for enforcing wartime moral regulations. An entirely male-led organization, it appointed female social workers, reformers and corrective workers to the Committee on Protective Work for Girls in September 1917. The new committee was organized to work to prevent prostitution through constructive activities with young women. Many contemporaries in the U.S. and Britain believed that wartime inspired young women with an excess of nationalist

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<sup>203</sup> "For Early Marriages," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 August 1918, 13, photo of Mrs. Gertrude A. Pike; "Women Differ With General on Armory Dances," *New York Times*, 9 December 1917, 74, photograph of Mrs. Charles Cary Ramsey, Campbell Studios.

enthusiasm that attracted them to men in uniform and military encampments. The Committee on Protective Work for Girls was meant to work with local clubwomen, especially in the YWCA, to help channel these energies into constructive war work such as knitting, gardening or patriotic activity. Working with young women and girls turned out to be particularly important, as the average age of the arrested prostitute in one Western district was seventeen. But as historian Nancy Bristow noted, after several months of operation, a change in the name and leadership of the Committee on Protective Work for Girls signaled a major transformation in its purpose and methods.<sup>204</sup>

In April 1918, it was renamed the Section on Women and Girls of the Law Enforcement Division. The committee's new leader, Jane Deeter Rippin, explained the reason for its change of focus in a confidential report: "Six months' work on the basis of protecting the supposedly good girl proved that the problem was really with the delinquent girl. Good girls cannot be regarded as individual social problems. They naturally fall into groups under recreational leadership." The Section on Women and Girls would work only with those Rippin called "sex offenders." The Section's purpose was first to help law enforcement stop the sale of alcohol and sex to soldiers, then to prevent the spread of venereal disease, and only third to work with girls to curb the "source of supply" of prostitutes.<sup>205</sup>

Social worker Jessie Binford was working for the Committee on Protective Work for Girls when its focus changed from prevention to law enforcement, and she was

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<sup>204</sup> Ethel Sturges Dummer, "Introduction to Round Table on the Delinquent Girl," *Papers and Proceedings of the American Sociological Society* 16 (Dec. 1921): 185; Bristow, 114-126.

<sup>205</sup> Jane Deeter Rippin, "Outline of Organization and Methods, Section on Women and Girls, Law Enforcement Division, War and Navy Department Commissions on Training Camp Activities," 1 July 1918, p. 1; Folder 381, Box 24, Ethel Sturges Dummer Papers, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

concerned about the appointment of Rippin as its new head. Binford's travels on behalf of the committee were being funded by the wealthy philanthropist and reformer Ethel Sturges Dummer. Dummer was an official advisor to the CTCA, and when Binford told her patron of her unease with the changing focus of the committee, Dummer dismissed her concerns. Dummer believed that Rippin, as the committee's new leader, was a "big, strong woman" and a feminist who could get things done in Washington, DC.

Nonetheless, Dummer said she hoped that Rippin could guide the CTCA toward work on "attracting forces" that "saves energy and prevents waste," rather than the "impelling forces." Dummer had a tendency to use a mystical language when speaking of sexuality, which she saw as natural and springing from a combination of physical, mental and spiritual factors. It seems that she hoped the CTCA would focus not just on punishment but also on the prevention of prostitution and the guidance of women, once arrested, into constructive pursuits. In other articles from this time period, Dummer proposed that women arrested for prostitution should get counseling to enable them to heal from the stigmatization and trauma she believed caused them to embrace such an illicit trade. Though in peacetime Dummer emphasized prostitutes' need for counseling and reform, it is clear that in wartime she closed her eyes to the dark side of CTCA policy.<sup>206</sup>

The CTCA's actual wartime work violated women's civil rights and imparted the same type of stigmatization and trauma that Dummer criticized in peacetime. According to federal officials, over the course of the war law enforcement arrested 35,000 women as

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<sup>206</sup> W.F. Dummer to Miss Jessie F. Binford, 17 Dec. 1917; Ethel Sturges Dummer to Miss Jessie Binford, 3 May 1918; both from Folder 402, Jessie Binford Correspondence with E.S. Dummer Re: Committee on Protective Work for Girls, Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago; Box 25; Mrs. W.F. Dummer, "Foreword" to 'The Unadjusted Girl: With Cases and Standpoint for Behavior Analysis' by William I. Thomas, Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1923, i-xvii; folder 240; Box 16; all from the Ethel Sturges Dummer Papers, Schlesinger Library.

suspected prostitutes, and 15,520 were then incarcerated over a period ranging from ten weeks to one year. It seems likely that this federal tally did not take all local arrests and detentions into account. Departing from the best practices urged by social workers and reformers, these women did not receive counseling or education in a trade, but were simply put in ordinary jails with other female offenders. Any woman suspected of prostitution was forced to undergo medical exams for venereal diseases, and then her fate rested in the doctor's hands. The tests did not always give positive or negative results but were open to interpretation. A doctor's subjective judgment lay behind diagnoses of disease, and thus which women were labeled prostitutes and kept imprisoned. Prostitution itself was a slippery category; arrested women included girlfriends of soldiers who had followed the men to their camps.<sup>207</sup>

According to officials' surveys, most of the arrested women and girls lacked education and had started working in mills or factories at ages ranging from eight to fifteen, with many on the early side of this range. Arrested girls included thirteen-year-old Marie Gosnell of South Carolina, who became a prostitute at age 11; others jailed with her had begun prostituting themselves at 14 to 19. Most lacked education, with many unable to read or write. Henrietta Additon considered a "typical" case for the Committee on the Protection of Women and Girls to be a young, uneducated prostitute, who had begun industrial work at an early age. Authorities labeled some of the girls "feeble-minded," "insane," and from "degenerate" or "immoral" families.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Pivar, "Cleansing," 38, 32; Bristow, 129; Maude E. Miner to Raymond B. Fosdick, "A Brief Report for Mr. Fosdick's Information: Committee on Protective Work for Girls," Exhibit B, 21 February 1918; Commission on Training Camp Activities, General Correspondence, 1917-1921; Education and Recreation Branch; War College and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs; RG 165; National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.; Henrietta Additon provided other figures in "Work Among Delinquent Women and Girls," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79 (Sept. 1918): 157. Unfortunately, her sample

It is likely that given Ethel Sturges Dummer's wealth, connections, and stature as a reformer, she could have helped raise a public outcry against the more draconian policies of the CTCA. She later admitted that the "justice" of the arrests and forced medical examinations was "questionable," but she justified the policy as an "emergency" measure that yielded valuable information to reformers investigating the sources of prostitution. This rationale offers a chilling insight into the way even a politically progressive reformer could view working-class girls as fodder for study, disregarding the effects of arrests on their future lives.<sup>209</sup>

Dummer was not alone, of course, in cooperating with the CTCA. Former Hull House resident and the head of the Children's Bureau Julia Lathrop also advised the commission, and leading suffragists Anna Howard Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt worked on the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense without speaking out against the CTCA's treatment of suspected prostitutes. In fact, Shaw herself used patriotic motherhood language to urge the government to regulate soldiers' morals and protect them from vice. Of suffrage leaders, only Alice Stone Blackwell publicly criticized the enforced medical exams and the treatment of women as guilty until proven innocent. She published her objections in the leading suffragist journal, *The Woman Citizen*. But that one article was not part of a larger movement, likely because most suffragists were busily cooperating with the war effort in order to prove their fitness as citizens. A few other American women protested against anti-prostitution policies during

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size varied and so it is difficult to make an assessment of her findings. Based on the surveys I've seen, it seems likely that local officials were inconsistent about which information recorded about each girl, i.e. most include age and age of first work experience, but not all include age of first sexual experience or the age of becoming a prostitute.

<sup>209</sup> Ethel Sturges Dummer, "Introduction to Round Table on the Delinquent Girl," *Papers and Proceedings of the American Sociological Society* 16 (Dec. 1921): 185

the war, but they were not well-known and lacked followers. After the war, Alice Stone Blackwell published a number of articles condemning policies that punished only women, and Jane Addams also publicly criticized policies that allowed women and not men to be jailed as carriers of venereal diseases. This post-war activism only highlights the women's relative silence during the war. The atmosphere of nationalist conformity stifled criticism; it is likely that the reaction against women's pacifism complicated matters for women like Addams who might otherwise have spoken out. Furthermore, many clubwomen's eager adoption of the role of patriotic mother, and the prevailing belief in soldiers' wholesome and boyish qualities, cast sexually active women in the role of seducers and corrupters.<sup>210</sup>

In contrast, in Britain a number of women's groups and reform organizations protested against forcing suspected prostitutes to undergo tests for venereal disease. This movement built on the legacy of Josephine Butler's late nineteenth-century campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts. Quakers were especially active in this movement, and they criticized not only their own government's policies but also America's. Ironically, men and women working for the Wilson administration looked to British methods of fighting prostitution for inspiration and ignored the activity of the policies' opponents.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Anna Howard Shaw and Edith Galt Wilson, "War Plea to Women," *Chicago Tribune*, 6 Feb. 1918, 7; Pivar, "Cleansing," 33-36; Alice Stone Blackwell, "State Regulation of the Social Evil," *Woman's Journal* 3, no. 12 (1918): 227, 235; Alice Stone Blackwell, "Catherine Breshkovsky's Last Word," *Woman's Journal* 3, no. 24 (1918): 492; Jane Addams, "The Importance to America of the Josephine Butler Centenary," *Social Service Review* 2, no. 1 (March 1928): 10-23; Jane Addams, *Peace and Bread in Time of War* (NY: Macmillan, 1922): 132-151.

<sup>211</sup> Pivar, "Cleansing," 33-34; Untitled, undated draft of speech; Folder Alabama 1.3; Commission on Training Camp Activities, Reports Relating to Training Camp Activities, 1917, Alabama 1.3-7; War College Division and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices—Education and Recreation Branch; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs; RG 165; National Archives, College Park, MD .

The federal agents supervising anti-prostitution efforts showed intense fear and hostility toward sexually active women and girls. As noted by numerous sources, CTCA authorities grew frustrated after their first few months of anti-prostitution work. Initially, they cooperated with, and sometimes coerced, local authorities to shut down red-light districts in 250 cities around the country. Yet this successful crusade only scattered prostitutes, who took to streetwalking, meeting clients in bars and cafes, and using hotels, autos and even public parks for rendezvous. This made them much harder to find and monitor. Officials' frustration found its object in American women. Assistant Director of the Section on Women and Girls of the Law Enforcement Division Henrietta Additon explained that the CTCA was formed to aid the soldier and sailor, but also worked with "those women and girls who are making this task difficult." She said that even if it were possible to "apprehend all the diseased women in the country and lock them up . . . other prostitutes would doubtless take their places, who would soon become infected." Apparently, her experiences in law enforcement had convinced her that unknown legions of American women were simply awaiting the opportunity to become prostitutes.<sup>212</sup>

For many reformers and government agents, working-class women seemed a particularly unruly and sexually active group. While propaganda campaigns in World War II attempted to persuade the public to look up to female industrial workers as war heroes, publicity in World War I reflected suspicions of female workers as promiscuous. In fact, some contemporaries used the phrase "girl problem" interchangeably both as a code for prostitution and as a shorthand for the problems associated with girls going into industry. The girls occupying positions formerly occupied by men, the Fitchberg, MA *Sentinel* explained, posed a threat to the military servicemen in nearby camps. This was a

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<sup>212</sup> Pivar, "Cleansing," 36; Bristow, 102-112; Additon, 156, 154.

threat that society women in leading voluntary organizations would work to contain.

Mrs. Endicott Peabody, a descendant of a wealthy, historic Massachusetts family, held a meeting of local clubwomen in her home in Groton to decide what to do about the issue.

The YWCA fundraising campaign that followed relied on scare tactics. *The Boston Post*, for example, warned readers that woman workers constituted a “menace to our fighting forces” that would only be ameliorated if new dormitories and cafeterias could be built for them. The YWCA itself ran an advertisement in several Boston newspapers that told readers the war would result in a “wrecked womanhood” and a “diseased manhood” unless donations were made to the charity.<sup>213</sup>

Female workers in wartime industry and on military camps faced prejudice and suspicion not only in publicity drives but also in federal investigations and policies. The Committee on Protective Work for Girls investigated young women working near military camps, and at Camp Sherman in Ohio, officials dismissed several for being found “immoral.” The first head of the CTCA’s committee on work with girls, Maud Miner, suggested that all female workers around the military camps be tested for venereal diseases, and the head of the CTCA, Raymond Fosdick, asked for a report on the situation at a camp where women were employed as both telephone operators and laundrywomen. He anticipated that “serious conditions” might arise as a result of their being housed on-site. In response, an assistant to the Secretary of War assured him that the telephone operators were not allowed in the camp at night but were instead bussed in

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<sup>213</sup> Clipping from *Fitcherg Sentinel*, 10 Nov. 1917; clipping of advertisement, YWCA, “Is Wrecked Womanhood to Be Toll of Victory?” run in *Boston Post*, *Boston Transcript*, *Boston Globe*, *Boston Herald*, *Boston American*, 4 Dec. 1917; “Plea for Girl War Workers,” *Boston Post*, 3 Dec. 1917; all in scrapbook entitled “Publicity Campaign, 1917”; Folder 63v, 1917-1932, clippings; Carton VI; Boston Young Women’s Christian Association Papers; Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

and out of camp in a group, traveling back-and-forth from the nearest large city. In a separate example, an officer of New York's Committee of Fourteen, an anti-prostitution organization, reported to the CTCA that in Middletown, New York, half of the 71<sup>st</sup> Regiment was suffering from venereal disease as a result of encounters with "farmers' daughters" and later the "factory girls who were fairly throwing themselves at the soldiers." In their prejudices toward working-class women, the U.S. again followed British example. In Great Britain, female police officers, hired to combat prostitution, took special care to patrol areas around factories employing women and those neighborhoods well-known for an atmosphere of "lawlessness."<sup>214</sup>

If the working girl really leveled such a threat to the nation's fighting forces, one would expect that money would be spent to keep her from being tempted by the quick profits of sexual commerce. After all, as discussed above, social workers' surveys of girls arrested as prostitutes showed that many were illiterate and had begun working in factories at very young ages. Like many of her nineteenth-century counterparts, the arrested prostitute Alina S., age nineteen, explained to would-be reformers that she took up prostitution because it seemed like an easy way to make money compared to the factory work she had been doing since age ten.<sup>215</sup>

The YWCA was the lone national organization tasked with preventing prostitution via work with young women. Examining national and local records shows

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<sup>214</sup> Maude E. Miner to Raymond B. Fosdick, "A Brief Report," 4; Raymond B. Fosdick to Newton D. Baker, 24 Sept. 1917; Mr. Bliss to Mr. Fosdick, 25 Sept. 1917; both from folder Alabama 3; Frederick H. Whitin to Raymond B. Fosdick, 27 June 1917; Alabama 37 Folder 1 of 2; H.S. Braucher to Raymond B. Fosdick, 21 June 1917, enclosure "Suggestions Regarding Police Women and Volunteer Patrols," 1; Alabama 26 File 1 of 2; all from Commission on Training Camp Activities, Reports Relating to Training Camp Activities, 1917; War College Division and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices-Education and Recreation Branch; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs; RG 165; National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>215</sup> Additon, 157;

that the organization consistently favored the creation of hostess houses over the creation of working girls' dormitories, however. Boston and Cambridge, MA were 30 to 40 miles from Camp Devens in Ayer, MA. This meant that twenty to forty thousand servicemen were an auto or train ride away. Cambridge also had a school for military recruits being trained in radio operations that held 3000 young men. In addition to these population changes, factories in Boston and Cambridge handled large wartime orders and had to hire new workers to replace military servicemen. In Cambridge, approximately 200 local factories manufactured a variety of items including candy, rubber goods, pianos, clothing, soap, ink, book binding, and valves. While a local officer reported that there was a "great demand" for housing at the YWCA and the local boarding houses it recommended to young women, she also said that "No definite work [was] being done," to meet this demand. Their annual report showed that in their fiscal year 1918 they provided housing for 65 women, temporary housing for 490, and turned 1000 women away. Far from making more housing available for the young women flocking to cities to get wartime jobs, the Cambridge branch raised housing prices during the war to keep up with inflation. They were able to help 2800 women find jobs, but this left 1360 still looking for work. The Cambridge YWCA supplied needed services to working women, but demand always outstripped what it could supply.<sup>216</sup>

During the war, the YWCA organizations in Boston and Cambridge did not significantly alter their peacetime patterns for working with young women. They continued to send club leaders to meet factory women on their lunch breaks, and to lead discussion and reading groups, knitting circles, or dance and exercise classes at their local

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<sup>216</sup> "Industrial Work," Questionnaire on War Work for National Organization, April 1919, 2; "General Secretary's Report, 1918-1919," 4; February 1918, "Records of Committee, Margaret Fuller House, 1916-1923," 384v; YWCA Cambridge papers, Schlesinger Library.

club. The Boston YWCA also allotted money for a new girls' recreation center, a woman police officer, patriotic activities, and entertainments for visiting servicemen, but it did not create the dormitories originally framed as solutions to the prostitution problem. On the national level, the YWCA budget was a small fraction of that for the men's organizations affiliated with the CTCA. For example, the estimated YMCA budget for one fiscal year of war service was approximately \$100 million; for the YWCA, it was \$15 million. Of the \$15 million, \$2.4 million was to be spent on Hostess Houses and \$3 million on "war work in other countries"; this was work that benefited men in the military. Only \$1 million of this budget was allotted for emergency housing for working women. A total of \$4.8 million was earmarked for girls' recreational work and activities, but no evidence suggests that such work prevented prostitution. Women of color and foreign-born women received the least funds and attention. Only \$830,000 was budgeted for work in these communities.<sup>217</sup>

The money spent by these official affiliates of the CTCA reflected the wartime belief that men in military uniform were the country's most valuable assets. Though domestic propaganda campaigns posed prostitutes and promiscuous women as a dire threat to national security, reform work aimed at them did not address the root causes of prostitution: women's need for adequate housing and employment opportunities. While a few YWCA leaders did attempt to address these issues, their efforts were undermined

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<sup>217</sup> "Industrial Work," Questionnaire on War Work for National Organization, April 1919, 2; YWCA Cambridge; Carton 23, Board of managers reports, 1918-1920; Boston YWCA Records; "Minutes of Special Meeting, War Department Commission on Training Camp Activities," Washington, DC, July 12, 1918; Minutes of Meetings of the Commission, April 27, 1917-February 19, 1919; Education and Recreation Branch Commission on Training Camp Activities; War College Division and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices; Records of the War Department general and Special Staffs; RG 165; National Archives, College Park, MD.

by their limited budgets and their own organization's commitment to creating Hostess Houses for servicemen.

A major factor preventing effective anti-prostitution work was the pervasive belief that women and girls were at best irrational and at worst evil. The speeches and internal memos of CTCA agents show that they viewed America's young women as sexually out-of control, consumed with "khaki-fever" at the sight of men in uniform. Agents from the Committee on Protective Work for Girls apparently believed prostitutes' claims that they saw having sex with soldiers as a patriotic duty. Henrietta S. Additon told audiences that "[t]he peculiar charm and glamour which surrounds the man in uniform" was a cause of prostitution. She told the story of a girl who informed authorities that "she had never sold herself to a civilian but she felt that she was doing her bit when she had been with about eight soldiers in a night." Other arrested prostitutes said they felt they could not do enough for the pilots in training camps who faced death for their country every day.<sup>218</sup>

It is important to note that such explanations came from young women who had already been arrested. What reasoning were they most likely to offer in an interview with authorities? It seems logical to assume that they wished to curry favor, and so offered a patriotic rationale in order to appear sympathetic rather than incorrigible. Additional evidence of patriotic prostitution came from British authorities, who found that during the heady first months of war young women flocked to military camps to flirt with the

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<sup>218</sup> Additon, 154-155. The phrase "khaki-fever" comes from British sources, see Angela Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, No. 2 (Apr. 1994): 325-347. This concept is a popular one among historians of sexuality. Marilyn Hegarty has further explored these concepts in *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (NY: NYU Press, 2008).

soldiers. One American Red Cross official concluded that the British example taught that a family with its man gone would “face immorality among its younger women and insanity among its older.” While individual girls may have received better treatment from social workers and police if they gave patriotic explanations for their sexual activities, they made young women as a class appear ignorant and ungovernable. Both American and British authorities believed that any woman having extramarital sex with a soldier was likely to give that soldier venereal disease, and so no matter what her motivations, she was undermining the health of the troops and committing an act that bordered on treason.<sup>219</sup>

Officials and reformers considered African Americans an especially dangerous and sexually immoral group. Historians have noted that many whites considered syphilis an African-American disease in the early twentieth-century, despite the fact that the venereal disease was also widespread among whites. The Executive Secretary of the CTCA, William B. Kelsey, reported to his superiors that once the problem of immoral women in Waco was “settled,” they would “still have the larger problem of the colored women who will persistently hang around the camp and open up opportunity. Ordinary restriction will not cover it and it is impossible to provide a [police] force large enough to cover it.” Due to the “social conditions” among African Americans, he said, they could not substitute “worth while activities” for prostitution as they did among white women and girls. Waco’s white women’s voluntary organizations blamed African American women for prostitution, as did the local newspaper, which used headlines such as “Want

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<sup>219</sup> “The ‘Home Service’ Section”; Conference on Home Service Training Courses, minutes of Sept. 27, 1918 meeting at National Headquarters, Washington, DC; 140.1 Civilian Relief, Dept. of Training for Home Service Bureau 1917-1921; Records of the American National Red Cross, 1917-1934; RG 200 National Archives Gift Collection; National Archives, College Park, MD.

Negro Women Kept from Camp of 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry” to scapegoat African American women as agents of sexual corruption and disease. Perhaps it was not coincidental that the motto for Texas women’s clubs’ anti-vice crusade was “A White Zone for Texas,” a reference to the five-mile zone around the camps in which morals regulations were enforced. Racist attitudes were not isolated to the South. In New York state, an agent used especially vitriolic language to describe prostitution among African Americans; he cited an “absolutely rotten” brothel run by an African American woman catering to black and white soldiers near West Point. Thus people in some cities and certain agents of the CTCA saw promiscuity and prostitution as problems endemic to the black community that threatened white soldiers and their families.<sup>220</sup>

It seems likely that these prejudices slowed the agency’s efforts to combat prostitution and the spread of venereal disease among African Americans. As noted above, black troops received hostess houses later than their white counterparts. Even in the summer of 1918, programs for African Americans lagged behind. The highest-ranking African American in the Wilson government, Dr. Emmett J. Scott, served as a Special Assistant to the Secretary of War to consult on African American issues and rally the African American community behind the war. In June he was still urging the CTCA to hire an African American woman to work with young women of color to prevent

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<sup>220</sup> Pivar, *Purity*, 191; Frederick H. Whitin to Raymond B. Fosdick, 17 Aug. 1917; Alabama 37, 2 of 2; William B. Kelsey to H.S. Braucher, 11 Aug. 1917 and newspaper clipping, “Want Negro Women Kept From Camp of 24<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry”; both from Alabama 26. All of these are from the Commission on Training Camp Activities, Reports Relating to Training Camp Activities, 1917; War College Division and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices-Education and Recreation Branch; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs; RG 165; National Archives, College Park, MD; “Texas,” *Child Welfare Magazine* 12, no. 2 (Oct. 1917): 34.

prostitution around Camp Sherman, and officials were claiming they did not have the necessary funds.<sup>221</sup>

Women of color also faced harsher treatment than whites arrested for prostitution. While local authorities may have initiated these practices, federal officials did not intervene to alter them. In Washington D.C., authorities put African American women in an older jail while whites were moved to a newly built facility. The reformers and social workers in the Committee on Protective Work for Girls knew of this plan and did not object to it.<sup>222</sup> Being a woman of color could also mean facing greater suspicion from authorities, and thus a greater likelihood of being labeled a prostitute. Juanita Wright, a 20-year-old café waitress arrested in Spartanburg, South Carolina, was categorized as an “Indian girl” by authorities; she was not accused of prostitution but instead of “living with a soldier.” She was detained and held, first in a local South Carolina facility and then in the Sherborn Reformatory for Women in Massachusetts. Her case caught the attention of Maude Miner, the first head of the Committee on Protective Work for Girls, but Miner was interested in her background for sociological study and did not question her arrest or detainment.<sup>223</sup>

Before the war, women’s clubs had emphasized a sisterhood and motherhood to humanity that provided the basis for their community activism and clubwork. This

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<sup>221</sup> Manager, Washington Office, CTCA to Dr. Emmett J. Scott, Special Assistant to the Secretary of War, 19 July 1918 and 22 June 1918; file 34886-34912; Commission on Training Camp Activities, General Correspondence, 1917-1921; War College and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices, Education and Recreation Branch; War College and War Plans Division; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs; RG 165; National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>222</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee on Protective Work for Girls, Feb. 13, 1918; folder 377; Box 24 “Committee on Protective Work for Girls, Correspondence” 1917, Sept-Dec.; Ethel Sturges Dummer Papers, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>223</sup> Maude E. Miner to Raymond B. Fosdick, “A Brief Report for Mr. Fosdick’s Information: Committee on Protective Work for Girls,” Exhibit B, 21 February 1918; Commission on Training Camp Activities, General Correspondence, 1917-1921; Education and Recreation Branch; War College and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs; RG 165; National Archives, College Park, MD.

maternalist philosophy had also provided the basis for women's pacifism, which for many slowly turned to pro-war sentiment over the course of 1916 and 1917. Once the country had joined the war, mainstream clubwomen's maternalism took on a powerfully nationalist tinge—they took on the mother-work for a national family. This was seen most clearly in the anti-vice campaign, which included hospitality toward soldiers in private homes, community centers and specially-built clubs and boarding houses, and yet also expanded into policing and punishment of young women.<sup>224</sup> Numerous women's historians have noted that the conditions of wartime ignite age-old concepts of woman's nature. By embracing the persona of the patriotic mother, clubwomen embraced a position of virtue and so enjoyed a position of power relative to the “bad” women and girls involved in sexual commerce.

### **Wild Girls and Angry Men: The General Federation of Women's Clubs and the Curfew Campaign**

The curfew is an important part of the story of World War I-era morals reforms. It shows how the federal government's initial efforts to prevent the spread of venereal disease eventually expanded into broad police powers and led to local attempts to force parents and children into normative patterns of behavior. The curfew campaign was highly sensationalistic; CTCA agents told stories and provided statistics to demonstrate the instability and promiscuity of seemingly ordinary girls. Many churches and newspapers cooperated with the curfew campaign, further spreading these damaging

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<sup>224</sup> Untitled front matter, *The General Federation of Women's Clubs Magazine*, July 1917, 5; Minutes of Meeting of Presidents of National Organizations of Women, June 19, 1917, 13, in the Council of National Defense, Committee on Women's Defense Work, Minutes of Meetings, May 1917 to February 1919, box 570, RG 62, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Applause was recounted in “President's Desk,” *Child Welfare Magazine*, July 1917, 307.

reports. Numerous editorial writers bemoaned the neglectful parenting that resulted in daughters who were on the streets after hours. Mothers bore the brunt of this criticism. But the campaign for the curfew also showed the limits of the CTCA's influence. Though local units of the GFWC worked hard to ensure that their communities passed curfews, in numerous cities its passage was delayed or rejected by local governments concerned with its invasion of traditional privacy rights. At issue was the question of a parent's right to decide how their children should behave, and how far motherly clubwomen could impose their values on local communities. Morals reformers finally met their match in the opponents of the curfew.

One of the most sweeping morals regulations enacted during the war years was the curfew for children and teens. From April of 1917 to November of 1918, and even after the Armistice, towns and cities across the country passed curfew ordinances in the name of safeguarding nearby troops and protecting girls from their own "[w]ildness and indiscretion" and "ignorance and folly."<sup>225</sup> The CTCA urged cities near military camps to adopt curfews, and their agents promoted the regulations with lectures. The General Federation of Women's Clubs operated at the state and local levels to urge municipal officials to adopt curfews, and they frequently found an ally in local newspapers.<sup>226</sup> Women's clubs followed up by ensuring that the curfews were adequately enforced. In city after city, the GFWC and other clubs provided key organizing and grass-roots political support to the CTCA, which had gained many enemies among businessmen and

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<sup>225</sup> "Ought to Try It," *The Miami Herald*, 30 March 1918, 10; "Curfew Law for Atlanta Girls?" *The Columbus Ledger*, Columbus, GA, 17 September 1917, 3.

<sup>226</sup> Mrs. Julius Andrews, "The Protection of Young Recruits and Girls," *The General Federation of Women's Clubs Magazine*, November 1917, 33. Newspaper articles across the country noted that the local and state branches of the General Federation of Women's Clubs took the initiative in calling for the curfew, publicizing it and following up with municipal government.

politicians for its strictness in shutting down red-light districts. GFWC members appeared at city and county council meetings to advocate for a curfew and watch votes on the issue. They also petitioned their members and helped CTCA officials campaign by arranging local venues for their speeches.

Proponents of the curfew presented it as a way to buttress lax parental supervision. In many towns, the curfew regulations punished parents instead of their children, resulting in stiff fines or jail time if daughters were apprehended near the military camps at night. In all towns considering curfews, the upper age limit was set between 14 and 18, and the forbidden nighttime hours between 9 or 9:30 pm and about 4 am. It appears that with special notes from their parents, or permits from local government, working teens and children such as newspaper boys could get permission to move about at night as necessary. While curfews were also enforced against young men and the regulations contained gender neutral language, newspaper coverage showed that girls' out-of-control sexuality was the true focus of the curfew campaigns.<sup>227</sup>

The curfew's supporters believed that young girls needed a form of moral control that their mothers should provide; if not, the community would step in and furnish appropriate control and guidance from other adult women. Internal CTCA memos and some newspaper editorials suggested that clubwomen and professional women should work with the girls who broke curfew, perhaps by counseling them. One of the goals of the CTCA's Section on Women and Girls was to train adult women in each community

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<sup>227</sup> "Ask Curfew Law For Children Here," *The Washington Post*, 20 November 1917, 12; "Protect Girls from Danger," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 November 1917, 111; "Curfew Will Not Ring in Biloxi Tonight But Will Very Soon," *The Daily Herald*, Biloxi, Mississippi, 10 July 1918, 1; "Bulletin of Women's Committee, National Council of Defense," *The Duluth News Tribune*, Duluth, Minn., 7 July 1918, 4; "Council Meets Monday Night," *Idaho Statesman*, Boise, ID, 29 May 1918, 6; "One Way Out," *Miami Herald*, 1 April 1918, 4. These are just a sample of the articles available on the passage of teen curfews in wartime.

to patrol the streets and places of amusement to find loitering girls, take them home, and then “interview” their mothers. The GFWC campaigned to raise money to hire female police officers to enforce the curfew and patrol the streets. If the war had lasted longer and taken a steeper toll on the country, perhaps clubwomen’s attempts to influence girls and control their sexual behaviors would have expanded further.<sup>228</sup>

The campaign for the curfew presented an image to the public of a girlhood gone out of control. Officials and newspapers portrayed girls as either sexually experienced seducers of soldiers, or a dangerous combination of naïve and bold in their pursuit of relationships with servicemen. Miss Virginia Murray, an agent of the Law Enforcement division of the CTCA, began her work in New Orleans, where the federal government struggled with locals to shut down the red light district, and then went to Biloxi, Mississippi. Campaigning for the curfew in Biloxi, she presented her experience in working with girls in wartime to an overflow crowd in the local federal courtroom.

The way she began her speech was revealing. Her major concern was the health of the servicemen, who she portrayed as innocent and youthful. “For the first time many of these young men have come in contact with the vices of illicit relations, and evil effects of liquor,” she told the crowd. On the other hand, she provided examples of girls with lax morals, ranging from the clueless to the skilled seducer. “I have met girls in three different states following soldiers about wherever they go,” she said, and she said

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.; “Curfew Will Not Ring In Biloxi Tonight But Will Very Soon,” *The Daily Herald*, Biloxi, Mississippi, 10 July 1918, 1; “Committee on Protective Work for Girls,” undated report, 1, Folder 377, Box 24 “Committee on Protective Work for Girls, Correspondence” 1917, Sept-Dec.; Ethel Sturges Dummer Papers, Schlesinger Library; Moore, “Health and Recreation,” noted that female police officers had been hired in twenty states, 251-2. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters*, Ch. 5, described the way Progressive women sought a female-run justice system for young girls being tried for sexual offenses in order to put the girls at ease and avoid male judges at odds with reform policies.

that “little girls” were known to have married up to four soldiers each.<sup>229</sup> Such a wife would presumably be rewarded by allotments from each of her four husbands’ salaries as the federal government sent a portion of a serviceman’s wages directly to his dependents. Miss Murray also presented startling statistics, saying that out of 30,000 nearby servicemen in Biloxi, over 4400 were found to have venereal disease. In a maternity hospital in New Orleans, Miss Murray found 626 girls and 237 women. The numbers, though lacking context for comparison, were meant to impress on her audience the combined dangers of venereal disease and sexually promiscuous young girls.<sup>230</sup>

Apparently, her use of anecdotes and statistics successfully shocked at least one audience member. The next day Biloxi’s *Daily Herald* ran an editorial telling readers of the girl married to four soldiers, and said this was simply one among other examples of “the depravity of human nature.” Hearing the number of men “rendered unfit for serving their country on account of disease,” was a “hard blow.” The writer rebuked families for lacking the discipline and togetherness of past times, and asked plaintively, “And the girls who hang around on the streets—why?”<sup>231</sup> This article generated additional publicity for Miss Murray’s cause. Though it lacked the details of her speech, it was possibly more damning as a result. The reader could only imagine what depravity, and what numbers of diseased servicemen, there could be. The link between disobedient girls, promiscuity and venereal disease had been made for the reading public in Biloxi.

With similar articles and speeches as part of the federal government’s and women’s clubs’ anti-vice campaign, local governments across the country considered passing curfew laws. It is clear that many Americans had come to connect young women

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<sup>229</sup> “Give Them A Chance Is Plea For Girls,” *The Daily Herald*, Biloxi, Mississippi, 3 October 1918, 2.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> “Family Life,” *The Daily Herald*, Biloxi, Mississippi, 4 October 1918, 2;

with sexual danger, if not a sexual threat. The nation's most popular evangelist, Billy Sunday, addressed a sermon to the issue. He supported the curfew, blaming parents for children who ran wild on the streets. He singled out the nation's girls for a special attack: "Any little street running sissy knows more about evil than her old grandmother . . . More evil can be picked up off the street between noon and 10 o'clock at night than any preacher could imagine . . ." <sup>232</sup> In many communities, church groups were particularly likely to sign petitions in support of curfews, to hear speeches on curfews, and in one community, pious women visited girls' Sunday school classes to preach about the evils of immodest dress. Christian beliefs in abstinence and modesty meshed easily with the opinions of Progressives campaigning against prostitution. <sup>233</sup>

Despite the power and rhetoric of the Progressive reformers and traditional moralists who united behind the curfew campaign, a number of local officials, individuals and newspapers rejected and criticized it. Political resistance centered on two main issues: the federal government's encroachment into traditional privacy rights, and the curfew's violation of women's equality. Girls' violation of the curfew was a third form of resistance that can be read as a refusal to obey authorities in the name of an officially-sanctioned patriotism.

Some city officials who refused to support curfews suggested that the laws presented such an invasion of traditional privacy rights that they would be struck down. In Miami, the local newspaper questioned whether parents could rightfully be punished for something their children had done, and reporters noted that the curfew seemed to lack

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<sup>232</sup> "Sunday Pictures Home, Mother in Passionate Call," *Duluth News Tribune*, Duluth, Minnesota, 7 June 1918, 1.

<sup>233</sup> "Ask for Curfew Ordinance," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 4 December 1917, 17; "Women Take Part in Reformation" *The State*, Columbia, SC, 15 July 1917, 27; "Family Life," *The Daily Herald*, Biloxi, Mississippi, 4 October 1918, 2.

the support of the Miami city council. In Dallas, local officials refused to pass it, stating simply that they did not think the curfew would stand up to higher court review. Perhaps these officials would have agreed with the assessment of an angry editor from Waco, Texas, who framed the curfew as part of a “Bolsheviki” tendency in the federal government to remove choice and free agency from Americans’ lives. As geographically diverse as they were, and however they phrased their opposition, these examples show opponents rejecting the government’s incursion into the traditional rights of parents to discipline their children.<sup>234</sup>

A few people took aim at curfew regulations for eroding women’s rights. In Los Angeles, city officials had created a new regulation to keep all women out of bars and restaurants at night unless they entered the establishment accompanied by a man. Probably aimed at prostitutes who used these public spaces to pick up clients, the move brought resistance from local women. “Woman will do what she is dared to do and dared not to do,” *The Los Angeles Times* reported, and noted that women, putting on their “most attractive war paint,” were purposefully defying the regulation as sexist.

They might be able to get away with it in Dahomey or Arkansas, but in Los Angeles law and custom have accorded women practically all the rights accruing to man and any unthinking police commissioner who thinks he can keep a skirt out of a café just because it does not care to be linked up with a he person has another think coming.  
Magna charta, what?

The piece simultaneously claimed a modern distance from traditional “Dahomey or Arkansas,” and referred to the time-honored rights of Englishmen as the basis of its

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<sup>234</sup> “Ought to Be Framed Properly,” *Miami Herald*, 27 April 1918, 8; “Decide Not to Pass Curfew Ordinance Here,” *Dallas Morning News*, 15 August 1917, 6; “The State Press,” *Dallas Morning News*, 6 December 1917, 10.

rebellion. Similarly, self-proclaimed “modernist” women in Evanston, IL rejected the curfew as “medieval” and as opposed to both “personal liberty” and the economy.<sup>235</sup>

Working girls resented the curfew’s restriction of their freedom of movement. Daisy Sides, a worker at Ivey’s, a local department store in Charlotte, North Carolina, wondered how she would get home at night if the curfew was adopted. Her co-worker Mary McCall said, “its going to be a deuced nuisance having a chaperon tagging along every time you come uptown after supper—with ‘a friend.’”<sup>236</sup> Here working girls sounded themes of independence and pleasure; to them the new curfew would constitute an unwelcome interference in their affairs.

Local girls had their own defenders in the wealthy suburb of Wake Forest, IL, where efforts to instate a curfew followed a scandal over the “unconventional courtships” of some area young women and nearby naval trainees. James G. Welch, the state’s attorney of Lake County, noted for his “vigorous” prosecutions of delinquent girls, asked nearby towns to create a 9 o’clock curfew. Mayor Keene H. Addington of Lake Forest responded, “It has not been brought to my attention that our young women are heedless or in need of espionage. On the contrary they are laudably self-possessed and prudent.” After a vote defeated the curfew measure, Mr. Welch went home.<sup>237</sup> It is worth noting that the *Chicago Tribune*, a paper committed to supporting the war, the draft and patriotic motherhood, printed this and other stories of opposition to the curfew and women’s forced medical exams for venereal disease. The examples of the *Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and many local city councils show that important pro-war

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<sup>235</sup> “Skirts and Cafes,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 4 August 1917, II4; “Curfew Shall Not Ring in Evanston, Women Say,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 October 1918, 15.

<sup>236</sup> “Advertisements,” *The Charlotte Observer*, Charlotte, NC, 17 September, 1917, 5.

<sup>237</sup> “Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight in Lake Forest,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 August 1917, 1.

constituencies—newspaper men and local elites--were beginning to resist the expanding reach of the CTCA, clubwomen and maternalistic morals reforms.

Ultimately, the curfew campaign could not succeed, despite the impassioned campaigns of clubwomen and CTCA officials. Not only did curfews face the silent and secretive opposition of servicemen and young women who refused to obey regulations, but they began to face open, political opposition from editors, local officials and educated women. The campaign's greatest weakness lay in its scapegoating of young women as the cause of sexual disorder. The *Idaho Statesman* made a one-line joke about the curfew that summed up its failure. "What a great many towns need is a 9 o'clock curfew for married men."<sup>238</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The wartime morals campaign and the propaganda surrounding it show that wartime conditions in the U.S. resembled those of Europe, where historians of gender have concluded that "the double helix" is a useful model for understanding the effects of war on women's advancement. Though modern war has created conditions in which women can prove their equality with men, societies that value the male soldier frequently cast women in inferior roles as either helpmates or subversives. These contradictory wartime developments can have highly unpredictable effects on post-war culture, including especially the legal status of women and the success of women's reform movements.<sup>239</sup>

During the war, the position of patriotic mother was highly malleable. As we have seen, different activist groups could adopt it in order to agitate for a variety of

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<sup>238</sup> "Pointed Paragraphs," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, 22 Oct. 1918, 4.

<sup>239</sup> Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet, et al. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987), 31-47.

causes. Ultimately, however, patriotic motherhood was based on a conservative view of woman's function, in which motherhood to male soldiers was a female's most important contribution to the state. Suffragists attempted to exploit patriotic motherhood during the war, but they abandoned it as soon as they won the vote. Progressive reformers also adopted patriotic motherhood in wartime, but after the Armistice most abandoned nationalism as a means of winning public interest, votes and funds. Instead, anti-suffragists, anti-radicals and proponents of a stronger military found the symbolism and rhetoric of patriotic motherhood to be politically useful. Thanks to the activism of a select group of mothers of servicemen, with self-consciously conservative views, the propaganda of patriotic motherhood stayed relevant into the post-war decades. Mothers of soldiers in groups such as the American War Mothers and American Gold Star Mothers shaped prescriptions for feminine patriotism into the 1920s and 1930s, contributed to 1920s battles over domestic radicalism, and took an important symbolic role in 1930s debates over isolationism and entrance to another world war.

## Chapter Four

### **Patriotic Motherhood, Women's Conservatism and World War Commemoration in the 1920s: the American War Mothers**

Anti-suffrage leader Mrs. James W. Wadsworth had heard a disturbing rumor: suffragists might represent American women in the official peace talks at Versailles. So only five days after the armistice of November 11, 1918, she launched a letter campaign to newspaper editors to smear the patriotism of suffrage leaders Carrie Chapman Catt, Anna Howard Shaw, and suffragist and reformer Jane Addams.<sup>240</sup>

Wadsworth attacked the suffrage leaders as un-American in comparison to the patriotic mothers who'd sent sons to fight in the war. She contrasted mothers of soldiers and sailors, supposedly happy to allow Wilson and other male leaders to represent them in peace negotiations, with these "politically ambitious" women. She argued that any woman appointed to the peace commission should be able to represent "womanhood, motherhood and 'actual war service'"—apparently not including the work of Catt and Shaw, who had served as leaders on the Women's Committee for the Council of National Defense. Even the determinedly pacifist Jane Addams had agreed to help advertise the food saving campaign, a voluntary war measure. Wadsworth presented a few women's groups as truly patriotic—including the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the Confederacy—along with the War Mothers of America, also called the

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<sup>240</sup> Copy of letter from Mrs. James W. Wadsworth, Jr., Nov. 16, 1918; Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt file 32; Central Correspondence File, January-December 1918; Committee on Women's Defense Work; Council of National Defense, Record Group 62; National Archives II, College Park, MD.

American War Mothers, a new organization for mothers of sons and daughters in the military.<sup>241</sup>

Wadsworth's emphasis on motherhood was an implicit attack on the many prominent progressive women, including Shaw and Addams, who had chosen to remain unmarried and childless, and who had based their vision of women's politics on what they said was a motherly desire to expand the welfare state and pursue pacifism. At issue was a fundamental question: who represented America's mothers? Wadsworth celebrated the nationalist motherhood of wartime, based on the production of soldier-sons, that emphasized the mother as the center of the private home and family. The Progressive women's leaders had seen a different vision of motherhood, at the center of reforms in municipalities, nations and even the globe, based on a sisterhood among women and a moral authority stemming from a mother's nurture. In the confusion following the Armistice, no one knew how women's politics would take shape in the future.

Wadsworth's newspaper campaign indicated that patriotic motherhood would not fade away after the war, and indeed conservative women, military officials, and nationalist politicians maintained an emphasis on the honor and importance of mothers of soldiers in the post-war years. Yet mothers of world war soldiers were not passive symbols; they organized into groups and campaigned for political change. The American War Mothers was the largest and most prominent organization for mothers of world war

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 1-3. Just over 10,000 women were allowed to serve in the wartime Army, Navy and Marines, mainly as clerks, see Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I: They Also Served* (Boulder, CO: UP of Colorado, 1999). This chapter emphasizes sons' service, following the practice of politicians, journalists and activist women in glorifying servicemen's role and forgetting or eliding that of servicewomen. Likewise, following the practice of contemporaries I sometimes use "soldiers" to represent servicemen of all military branches. Though I try to avoid this, it is sometimes too wordy to do otherwise.

soldiers in the 1920s. The AWM raised money, incorporated and used their popularity to advantage as they entered the political fray.

Frequently represented as silver-haired, bespectacled and kindly, mothers of world war soldiers were postwar icons of American womanhood alongside the flapper and the New Woman. At a time when changes shook American society, the women seemed to embody a combination of Victorian-era motherhood and Revolutionary-era grit; until the early 1930s, their status as sentimental, patriotic heroines went largely unquestioned in print and politics. The American War Mothers took the bully pulpit of patriotic motherhood and proved adept at joining culture and politics. Though their membership numbered only in the tens of thousands, they influenced the celebration of national holidays, bringing a military element to Mother's Day and an emphasis on motherhood to Armistice Day. Gold star mothers and mothers of surviving veterans attended national and local memorial ceremonies and joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion in both lobbying and patriotic rallies. They ensured that the voices of nationalist, conservative women were heard, even as the late 1920s brought increasing support for military disarmament and prominent calls for international cooperation through the World Court and League of Nations. Finally, organizations for mothers of soldiers cooperated with other conservative women's groups in attacking mainstream women's organizations, splintering them over pacifism. These splits helped to cripple women's efforts at reform and had the long-term effect of isolating left-wing women's leaders.

Looking at women's use of patriotic motherhood in politics illuminates important aspects of women's activism in the 1920s and 1930s. Much of the history for these years

has focused on female maternalists, pacifists, and feminists, women who fought for Progressive reforms after the war.<sup>242</sup> The literature on the conservative women who challenged them is growing, but it is still incomplete. Recent histories of conservative women have concentrated on their activities in domestic politics, especially in defeating child labor laws, attacking left-leaning reformers, and leading racist and nativist movements.<sup>243</sup> This chapter will focus on mothers of soldiers as a key conservative women's group whose main interest was international and military affairs and whose political power was based on their cultural prominence.

This chapter's focus on the mothers of world war soldiers in culture and politics will expand our understanding of the contradictions and conflicts plaguing women in the 1920s. Mothers of world war soldiers will serve as a case study to further historians' understanding of the women who stood for a patriarchal, nationalist social order against pacifism, internationalism, and feminism, and their case will highlight the way war can

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<sup>242</sup> Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920," *American Historical Review* 95 (Oct. 1990): 1076-1108; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Politics of Social Provision in the United States, 1870s-1920s* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Chicago: U. of Illinois Press, 1994); Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987); Harriet Hyman Alonso, *The Women's Peace Union and the Outlawry of War, 1921-1942* (Knoxville: U. of Tennessee Press, 1989); Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: a History of the U.S. Movement for Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1993); Carrie A. Foster, *The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1946* (Syracuse: Syracuse U.P., 1995); Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution* (NY: Oxford UP, 1978).

<sup>243</sup> Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State U., 2001); Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1991); Joan M. Jensen, "All Pink Sisters: The War Department and the Feminist Movement in the 1920s," in *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940*, ed. Lois Scharf and Joan M. Jensen (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983): 199-222; Christine K. Erickson, "Conservative Women and Patriotic Maternalism: The Beginnings of a Gendered Conservative Tradition in the 1920s and 1930s" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1999); Kirsten Delegard, "Women Patriots: Female Activism and the Politics of American Anti-Radicalism, 1919-1935" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1999).

both revive conservative views of womanhood and work to the advantage of conservatives in politics.<sup>244</sup>

### **Establishing Patriotic Motherhood in Peacetime: the Foundation of the American War Mothers**

The end of the war inaugurated a period of intense social conflict. During the war, federal, state and local governments as well as private citizens had worked to unite Americans through propaganda campaigns, and to further ensure cooperation they had restrained freedom of speech and freedom to strike. When these pressures were released, labor unrest and political disunity reappeared in force. To many tradition-minded Americans, the years from 1919 to 1922 brought a sense of social instability and grave threat to the country. After the war, the communist Third International's rhetoric of a worldwide war on capitalism, the reality of widespread labor unrest in America, fears surrounding soldiers' postwar unemployment and readjustment, and the growing

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<sup>244</sup> War has been seen as both promoting women's equality and retarding it. For an author who has emphasized war's retrograde effects, see Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1999); Kathleen Kennedy, *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion During World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1999). For authors who see both progress and retrenchment resulting from war, see Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix," in Margaret Randolph Higonnet and others, eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1987): 31-47; Nicoletta F. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). This last discusses both woman suffrage, women's politics, and briefly discusses the conservatism and nationalism of the Pankhursts in post-war politics. Authors who emphasize a conservative turn in response to war's advancements for women include: Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993); Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1994); Erika Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy After the Great War: Women, Gender, and Postwar Reconciliation Between Nations* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

likelihood that women would achieve the vote created a nationwide sensation—the First Red Scare.<sup>245</sup>

The events of 1919 to 1920 convinced many Americans that their nation faced a serious threat of communist subversion. 1919 was a year of strikes; an estimated one in five American workers walked out on their jobs that year. Major strikes included the Seattle general strike in February, the police strike in Boston, and by the end of the year, a steel workers' strike in Indiana. It was a year of race riots—in Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Omaha, as well as other cities where wartime booms had created both jobs and racial tensions, including competition over limited housing stock. Employers, newspapers and committees of government investigators charged that Bolshevism had caused both the strikes and riots. They blamed radicals for sowing dissatisfaction among workers and African Americans. The U.S. Senate's Overman Committee investigated domestic subversion, accepting anti-Semites' testimony that Jews led the Bolsheviks and threatened revolution in America. In New York state, the Lusk Committee investigated the same phenomenon, eventually issuing a report that warned Americans of subversion in their local institutions: churches, schools, reform groups, and newspapers.<sup>246</sup> 1919 was also a year of bombs. On June 2, eight blasts in cities across the nation pointed to a conspiracy of violence against Americans. When one of the June 2 explosions took place in his own house, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer initiated investigations into left-wing activities and started the "Palmer raids," seizing the papers of known Socialist and

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<sup>245</sup> David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (NY: Oxford UP, 1980), Ch. 4 and 5; Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus, OH: Ohio UP, 2001), Ch. 1; Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: the Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (NY: Henry Holt & Co., 2005), Ch. 13 and 14.

<sup>246</sup> Slotkin, 386-94, 412-3, 437-443; Nielsen, 14-16; David M. Kennedy, 287-292.

communist organizations, making arrests and even arranging deportations of some radicals.<sup>247</sup>

Unemployed soldiers created a potential force for further disorder. Close to two million soldiers were demobilized after the war; used to carrying arms and freed—at least temporarily—from the constraints of family and community life, some Americans understood the threat to order they could pose. Some of the men faced brutal poverty after their release from military service. In February 1919 ex-soldiers in Massachusetts asked a local Army post if they could borrow blankets, mattresses and cots for the use of homeless and unemployed veterans; the local officer in charge of supplies wrote to the War Department asking for advice on how to handle such requests, which he was not authorized to allow. Many veterans faced a challenging homecoming in the midst of a post-war recession; Woodrow Wilson’s administration chose to demobilize rapidly and with minimal government intervention in the economy, creating a slump without a social safety net for returning service members. Anticipating demobilization and hoping to harness the political energies of veterans, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. and Hamilton Fish, Jr., both scions of Republican political families, helped create the American Legion in early 1919. The Legion’s founders supported a strong U.S. defense system and opposed political radicalism.<sup>248</sup>

Legionnaires quickly lent their energies to support for military preparedness, a tough stance on former opponent Germany, and opposition to everything “un-American,”

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<sup>247</sup> Nielsen, 15.

<sup>248</sup> Letter to Director of Purchase & Storage, with request from Q.M., Springfield Armory, Feb. 21, 1919; Veterans of the World War; General Correspondence, 1917-1922; RG 92 Office of the Quartermaster General; National Archives II, College Park; Kennedy, 217; Slotkin, 432-4; for a full treatment of the American Legion as a social movement, see Jennifer D. Keane, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001). Older books on the Legion emphasize its antiradical politics, see William Pencak, *For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston, Northeastern UP, 1989).

a term often used against pacifists and left-wing activists. In fact, Legionnaires took their fight against radicals seriously, and were involved in some of the ugliest cases of vigilante violence in 1919. Through the rest of the decade, as dissatisfied soldiers agitated for better benefits and a bonus, the American Legion channeled veterans' energies into a politics of Americanism, and Legionnaires cooperated with the Military Intelligence Division in tracking suspected radical activity.<sup>249</sup>

The Red Scare did more than exacerbate the conflicts between employers and workers, self-appointed patriots and suspected radicals, and whites and blacks. As historian Kim E. Nielsen has shown, it was also profoundly gendered. The 1920s had the potential to revolutionize women's place in society, and in that decade conflict over proper roles for women was particularly fierce. 1919 was the year that a Constitutional amendment allowing women to vote passed Congress and made it to the states for ratification, and in which women's approximately 100-year-old battle for temperance brought Prohibition. Contemporaries saw women's vote as a massive disruption to American politics, including a threat to the two-party system. In the 1910s, major women's organizations had supported maternalist policies, including government protections for women workers, improved housing and sanitation in cities, as well as public health measures to benefit babies and children. Suffragists had promised that women's vote would create a cleaner, less corrupt form of politics as well as an alignment of American legislation with moral, humanitarian values. The role of

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<sup>249</sup> Nielsen, 18-20; Kennedy, 217-8. See the summaries of correspondence with men in the American Legion in the microfilm guide M-1194, Roll 6, Military Intelligence Division Correspondence, Records of the War Department General Staff, RG 165, National Archives II, College Park, MD. The very useful microfilm includes one to two sentence summaries of the correspondence.

government in American life was at stake, as was the role of women in American society.<sup>250</sup>

Women's equality was a hot topic for people from all walks of life. In August 1917, Ladies' Garment Workers Union member Ida Schurman said that the "general talk" among women workers considered women's position in the postwar world.

How are women likely to cut up after this terrible war? There are so many opinions. Some say that women are now in it for good; that in future they will do everything the same as men. Others think that when the millions of men will come back from the war they will again crowd the fields and factories, and that we shall have to go back to the home and kitchen and lose our hold on industry.<sup>251</sup>

About 1 million women had entered America's war work, including heavy industry. While by 1919 50% of those women who'd entered heavy industry during the war had left it, they had at least shown their potential. Women could do men's work if given the chance. Advertisements showing women in manufacturing publicized their contributions, as did numerous articles about British and Frenchwomen taking over the jobs men had left when they headed to the front. Yet the war did not encourage a permanent change in American labor patterns; in fact, the war was part of a decade in which women left the workforce in greater numbers than they entered it. The American statistics, tepid as they are, do not accurately indicate the public mood in the early 1920s, which was influenced as much by what women could do as what they did do, as much by examples of women in armaments-making and even at the front as by examples of women whose work had not changed one bit during the war.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Nielsen, 2-4; see fn 3 on the extensive literature on women's maternalism.

<sup>251</sup> Ida Schurman, letter to the editor, "Our Free Forum," *Ladies' Garment Worker*, August 1917, 28.

<sup>252</sup> Kennedy, 285. Americans, for example, were fascinated by the Russian women in the so-called Battalion of Death; they had held combat positions before the Russian revolution.

Conservative thinkers like Theodore Roosevelt and Colgate psychology professor G. Stanley Hall reacted to the war's potential for feminist change by urging American women to return their attention to motherhood. In a collection of lectures delivered during the war, Hall defined "morale" as the most essential quality of "every race, nation, class, or group" rooted in its members' sense of energy, inspiration and drive. To foster American morale, Hall counseled women to turn away from the male workplace and higher education, where their competition with men was detrimental to both sexes and to society. Motherhood was a woman's duty according to "patriotism and religion." To refuse to bear children was to be selfish or fearful, even fastidious, it was "slackerdom," while mothers showed "heroism."<sup>253</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, too, emphasized that patriotic motherhood, the raising of brave, selfless sons who understood their duty to serve in the military, was woman's most important national contribution. In an essay published after his son Quentin had been killed in the war in France, and that he published just before the end of the war, Roosevelt wrote that men must be willing to die fighting for their country; women must be willing to die in childbirth. Each sex had its duty to the nation. Only the selfish remained childless, just as the cowardly dodged the draft. In Roosevelt's vision, men and women were ennobled by their national service.<sup>254</sup>

More pragmatically, soldiers worried about what changes they'd find when they returned home. Charles H. Dickey, with the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, wrote an essay explaining that the ex-soldiers would be a force for "clean" politics,

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<sup>253</sup> G. Stanley Hall, *Morale: The Supreme Standard of Life and Conduct* (New York: D. Appleton, 1920), 1-2, 102, 254-5.

<sup>254</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Only Those are Fit to Live Who Do Not Fear to Die," *Child Welfare Magazine*, October 1918, 62-3. Here Theodore Roosevelt and G. Stanley Hall show a remarkably similar mix of nationalist, pro-war and pronatalist sentiments. Gail Bederman initially compared the two in *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

“genuine” religion and wholesome values after the war, including respect for labor. He devoted a full page to discussion of woman’s place, saying that soldiers saw women’s place in the world differently after their wartime experiences. Now, soldiers would not be satisfied with the “idle” girls who socialized, but wanted girls who worked—in the home. “Not simply to cook, sweep, and sew but to be a companion—to beautify the home—and to adorn it with her presence. To laugh when we are gay, to sing when we are wearied . . .” and otherwise to serve as the perfect helpmeet, nurturing her husband. “We want an American girl who can make for us an AMERICAN HOME, perhaps humble but where love is; and where our children can be reared under the influence of a real woman.” Dickey’s “real woman” of 1918 was not unlike the “true woman” outlined in prescriptive literature of the mid-nineteenth century. Feminists, and all women who saw a meaningful role for women in public life, would have their work cut out for them in the 1920s.<sup>255</sup>

Amidst this turmoil over politics, labor, race and gender—and the potential for great social change—organizations for mothers of soldiers adopted agendas for reform and looked for new members. The largest and most prominent of these organizations was the American War Mothers. The group got its start in Indiana, where in 1917 the state’s male Food Administration officials needed to reach out to rural homemakers in food conservation efforts. They were discouraged by the initial resistance and apathy they found. Newspaperman Don Herold, working on publicity for the state’s Food Administration, came up with the idea of having what he called “war mothers,” or

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<sup>255</sup> Charles H. Dickey, “When We Come Home”; Military Memos—Copies of Communications, Tours, etc.; Mary Roberts Rinehart Collection, Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh Libraries, 4; see Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1976), 21-41. See also the material on women, war and conservative gender roles cited in fn 7.

mothers of servicemen, campaign for the project. Herold and his supervisor spoke to women in Indianapolis, and their ideas appealed to Alice M. French, the mother of a soldier. The daughter of a state senator and merchant from Trafalgar, Indiana, the sister of an attorney, she was a widow whose husband had worked for the railroads. She enjoyed all of the advantages helpful in a woman leader of a voluntary association. Her connections and status helped her lobby; her money allowed her the time and energy to travel and work for the organization.<sup>256</sup>

French offered to write an appeal to the mothers of Indiana on behalf of the Food Administration. The state agency then tried to find one war mother in each county who could organize other mothers; they succeeded in 90 out of 92 counties. According to the official history of the American War Mothers, head of the national Food Administration Herbert Hoover himself praised Indiana's unique plan. The Indiana war mothers met first in December 1917; over 250 women attended. In their next meeting of April 1918, they adopted a tentative constitution; membership was restricted to "mothers of the flesh" of sons or daughters who had served in the U.S. military between April 7, 1917 and November 11, 1918. The women called themselves the Indiana chapter of the American War mothers--though no other states were yet part of the organization.<sup>257</sup>

The president, actually titled the "National War Mother," Alice M. French may have based plans for national growth on the letters she'd begun to receive from women interested in the club. For the next conference coming up in August, she obtained the help of the Indiana governor in sending letters to the governors of the 48 states, asking that each appoint a war mother to attend the conference. This was an unusual way for a

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<sup>256</sup> Marguerite H. White, *American War Mothers, Fifty Year History, 1917-1967* (Indianapolis: American War Mothers, 1981), 3, 6-7.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

woman's voluntary organization to obtain new members. Instead, French was following the organizational patterns of wartime organizations such as the Woman's Councils of Defense, which were filled by politicians' appointments. This suggests that she saw a leadership role for the American War Mothers in wartime, though after the war the group opened itself to membership through more usual means of volunteers willing to pay dues. Though strongest in the Midwest, by the end of the war the AWM had two national officers from the Northeast. One was Mary Roberts Rinehart, who served as the official historian of the organization.<sup>258</sup>

Rinehart quickly dropped off the list of officers, but her initial involvement indicated the organization's politics and potential. She was a Republican frustrated with Democrats' handling of the war, an advocate for a stronger American military and early U.S. intervention in Europe's war. Apparently, as suited the author of one of the most important wartime articles on patriotic motherhood, she also believed that mothers of world war soldiers should form their own organization. Rinehart's career as a best-selling author, and her wartime work writing propaganda for the War Department, show that she had both an understanding of the public's moods and appetites, and how to work the levers of power in American society. Rinehart may have left the organization because of her need to avoid obligations that took her away from her writing desk; an extremely prolific writer, she generally avoided club work. Nonetheless, her initial involvement provided good publicity for the organization in its drive for new members in 1919. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that any mother who joined the organization would be in the company of that "most noted" of American women, the famous Mary

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid.; Myra Nye, "Women's Work, Women's Clubs," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 June 1920, sec. III, 18.

Roberts Rinehart, and gushed that the organization embodied “patriotism pre-eminent and a love of country that has already been expressed in the supreme way.”<sup>259</sup>

The organization had local chapters across the country in 1919, though it did not publish its membership numbers until 1929, when its total membership was 13,283, including 1,711 gold star mothers. The national association accepted Native American and African American chapters, though evidence suggests these were separate from white groups and few in number. The American War Mothers was small in part because its membership was limited to biological mothers of world war military service members, but this limitation also gave the group a special status based on their patriotic credentials. Each member had proven that they were willing to give up a child for their country, and in the 1920s the group enjoyed popularity and even reverence from many Americans as a result.<sup>260</sup>

After the war, a popular fascination with gold star mothers created a demand for their statements and appearances. Businessmen and artists used this phenomenon to get publicity. Under the bold title “Mother of First Soldier Killed in France,” Mrs. Alice Gresham Dodd appeared in advertisements endorsing the patent medicine “Tanlac,” swearing that it had restored her to health after grief had weakened her digestion and joints. The Bethlehem Shipbuilding Corporation named one of its new ships, a 7500-ton cargo carrier, the ‘Gold Star’ in honor of the country’s gold star mothers. And Chicago

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<sup>259</sup> Mary Roberts Rinehart, “The Altar of Freedom,” *Saturday Evening Post*, April 21, 1917, 6, 37-8; Rinehart, *My Story*, (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1931), 194-227; Rinehart in “American Novelists: Cox or for Harding?” *The Outlook*, 13 October 1920, 281-2 in file “Interviews with, articles about, to 1929,” MR Rinehart Papers; copy of letter from Rinehart to Lord Northcliffe, February 6, 1917; file Northcliffe; MR Rinehart Papers; Rinehart’s personal secretary to Miss Cocroft, December 18, 1917; World War I, file 2; MR Rinehart Papers; Nye, “Women’s Work,” 18.

<sup>260</sup> White, 17; “White War Mothers Honor Mrs. Hettie B. Tilghman,” *Chicago Defender*, 29 June 1929, A1; “Calway Chapter of Colored Mothers (Centralia, IL)” *American War Mother*, March 1928, 14; “Wyoming,” *American War Mother*, December 1928, 9; “Indian War Mothers,” *The Indianan*, March 1921, 21.

sculptor Sigvald Asbjornsen created a sculpture “The Gold Star Mother,” and another called “The Kiss,” in honor of “the mother love of the world,” inspired by Mrs. Mary Belle Spencer, who’d served as a guardian for hundreds of soldiers and sailors in Cooke County during the war. The sculpture featured a mother holding a baby. Many local businesses treated gold star mothers to free goods or services, whether movie tickets or transportation to memorial ceremonies; such charity brought headlines and free publicity for the businesses and the gold star mothers.<sup>261</sup>

Politicians, of course, had been relying on gold star mothers to rally the public since the Third Liberty Loan Campaign. After the war, politicians continued to use them as political symbols to show their own patriotic values and try to gain an audience’s approval. Furthermore, with millions of demobilized veterans at the polls—and millions of newly enfranchised women—honoring patriotic motherhood made for smart politics. In the presidential election of 1920, Democrats tried to associate gold star mothers with the League of Nations in order to channel the energies of wartime patriots toward votes for their party. For example, at a campaign stop in Ohio, Democrat James M. Cox “brought tears to the eyes of some of his hearers,” when he read a letter from a gold star mother—four of her sons had fought in the war, two had been killed, another disabled by poison gas—who asked him to support the League and sent him a “widow’s mite” for his campaign.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> “Mother of First American Soldier Killed in France,” advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, 14 May 1920, II, 2; “War Mother Names Ship Gold Star,” *New York Times*, 6 June 1920, 24; “The Kiss,” *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1920, 14; “Gold-Star Mothers to See ‘Old Nest,’” Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 15 September 1921, 18; “Tree Dedicated As Memorial to Chicago Heroes,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6 August 1919, 5.

<sup>262</sup> “Cox Opens Drive for Vote of Ohio,” *New York Times*, 27 October 1920, 1-2.

The *Washington Post* reported that the “enigma” of women’s politics in Indiana was causing headaches for Republican party officials that year. War mothers were understood to oppose a separate peace with Germany, while German Americans supported it. Both parties took out full-page ads in the Indiana War Mothers newsletter. The Republican ad featured a large photo of Warren G. Harding; the Democratic ad was a page-long letter addressed to the war mothers, reminding them of the Democrats’ wartime work to keep the soldiers safe—in body and in morals—and asking mothers to support the League of Nations as the path to world peace. The American War Mothers’ national board in 1920 said that it supported the League of Nations, but they did not emphasize the issue in their publications, nor did they get much publicity for their stance.<sup>263</sup>

Mothers of soldiers began to recognize that they could use their status to gain publicity and possibly adherents for diverse political causes. Gold star mothers in Anaconda, Montana issued statements supporting Irish independence. In Chicago, the “War Mothers of 1917,” claiming 7000 members, supported mayoral candidate Robert M. Sweitzer (D), and tried to contest the election when instead the anti-war “Big Bill” Thompson won. Mary J. Lamb said the mothers’ action was meant to make Chicago safe for Americanism.<sup>264</sup>

The American War Mothers was also quick to involve itself in post-war politics. The organization’s work in the 1920s and even the 1930s was rooted in its ideology of

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<sup>263</sup> Robert G. Tucker, “Politics of Women Enigma in Indiana,” *Washington Post*, 12 September 1920, 15; Republican State Central Committee advertisement, *The Indianian*, August 1920, inside cover; Democratic State Central Committee advertisement, “An Appeal to the Mothers of Indiana,” *The Indianian*, August 1920, 2; “Among the Veterans,” *Washington Post*, 31 October 1920, 52.

<sup>264</sup> “Gold Star Mothers of Anaconda,” *Anaconda Standard* (Montana), 12 June 1921, 3; “War Mothers Plan Contest of the Election,” *Chicago Tribune*, 2 April 1919, 3; William M. Tuttle, Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 200.

patriotic motherhood, based on both nurturing and fiercely protective aspects of a mother's love. Just as in the debates over the draft, in the immediate post-war period mothers of soldiers credited their sons' ancestry or "race" for their bravery, and they exhibited a hostility toward outsiders, including wartime enemies and suspected subversives within the United States.<sup>265</sup> On many issues, their stance remained consistent from the early 1920s through the late 1930s.

The War Mothers were conservative in their understanding of gender roles, but progressive in adopting aggressive political tactics. Adopting the language of social housekeeping to their antiradical campaign, they said their political work was part of a great post-war "sweeping up" of the United States. As a "basic principle" of the organization, the newsletter's editor explained, "Women are never so happy as when cleaning up after some unusual happening." Though they did cooperate with women who had served as nurses or who had otherwise served in the military, they justified their own political activism in terms of traditional femininity, especially a mother's duty to support and protect her children. The War Mothers urged their members to vote, even if they had once been opponents of woman suffrage. They published charts so that members would know which of their Congressmen supported favored bills. The officers lobbied Congressmen directly, testified in Congressional hearings, and took part in political actions such as rallies.<sup>266</sup>

The War Mothers were innovative in using popular culture to reach large audiences and in taking an active role as a pressure group on international relations and military policy. Unlike most other women's groups, for example, the War Mothers paid

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<sup>265</sup> Martha J. Stubbs, "Editor's Greeting," *The Indianian*, August 1920, 7.

<sup>266</sup> "Editor's Page: Basic Principles American War Mothers," *The Indianian*, December 1920, 21.

little or no attention to questions of child welfare or advice on childrearing, traditional concerns of women's voluntary organizations. Illustrations in the *American War Mother* newsletter underscored the contradiction: the war mothers saw themselves as powerful, their role as vital, but ultimately in service to sons and the state. In the War Mothers' logo, the War Mother sits calmly on a throne-like chair, with a smaller sailor and soldier standing behind her; she is clearly taking the role of greater power and importance. In a separate illustration, designed by the War Mothers' president and illustrated by a former soldier, a petite War Mother is pictured as guiding a tall Uncle Sam. She is his necessary helpmeet. The War Mothers believed that military men and politicians needed female guidance and help, but they also believed that women could offer this help from their traditional position as wives and mothers. Like conservative women before and since, the War Mothers supported normative gender roles even as they followed in the footsteps of female radicals—feminists, pacifists and suffragists—in their assertive political tactics.<sup>267</sup>

In the first years after the war, the War Mothers did not oppose maternalist welfare reform. The War Mothers of Indiana, at the group's national headquarters, supported child labor legislation and criticized parents who "exploited" their children's labor. One Indiana War Mother wanted taxpayers to help parents defray the costs of mothers' medical care for childbirth and other costs of raising children in order to ensure the nation's population did not fall or become "composed of people inferior in mind and heart." The national organization changed positions to oppose child labor laws and public health care for mothers and children after they allied themselves with other

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<sup>267</sup> Cover illustration, *The American War Mother*, March 1924; F.C. Kubicki, untitled illustration, *The American War Mother*, September 1924, 16.

conservative women's groups in the mid-1920s, a time in which women's organizations split as opponents attacked left-leaning women for suspected Bolshevism. The War Mothers, however, always maintained their main focus on issues of nationalism, veterans' welfare, and military defense. They allied themselves with the anti-maternalist Daughters of the American Revolution as part of their commitment to a stronger military defense and resistance to pacifism, as discussed further later in this chapter.<sup>268</sup>

The War Mothers were happy to cooperate with the various post-war veterans' groups, especially the largest, the American Legion. The organization gave the War Mothers their stamp of approval in a 1924 advertisement illustrated by Norman Rockwell. The illustration's slogan, "Every Son a Member of American Legion/ Every Mother a Member American War Mothers/ Every Wife and Daughter a member of the Auxiliary/ ALL AMERICANS" situated the American War Mothers in a constellation of organizations that rotated around men's military service. The Legion had started the Auxiliary as an organization open to any female relative of a Legionnaire. The War Mothers remained independent of the Legion and Auxiliary but saw cooperating with them as part of their motherly duty to look after the interests of veterans. They often worked in concert with the American Legion Auxiliary, though tensions did arise around the War Mothers' greater public profile. The Auxiliary was a much larger organization than the War Mothers, with membership close to 200,000 in 1927.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Mrs. Edward Franklin White, "72<sup>nd</sup> Session General Assembly," *The Indianian*, March 1921, 16-7; Mrs. Mabel Battsford Cooper, "Our Homes," *The Indianian*, March 1921, 11; Resolutions of the Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense, No. 18, *The American War Mother*, March 1928, 12.

<sup>269</sup> Normal Rockwell, American Legion advertisement, *The Indianian*, April 1921, back cover; Dwight F. Davis, Secretary of War, to Miss Maude Wetmore, Chairman, National Civic Federation, Exhibit A: List of Important Women's Organizations; 9835 Women in War; Numerical File 1921-1942; G-1 (Personnel); War Department General Staff, RG 165; NARA II, College Park, MD; Mrs. O.D. Oliphant to Honorable Dwight W. Davis, Acting Secretary of War, April 23, 1925; File 2045-929 to 2045-936; Military

The Legion advertisement's reminder that members and their families were "ALL AMERICANS" hinted at a major aspect of the Legion's and War Mother's work: fighting those they deemed un-American. In the immediate aftermath of the war, for example, the American War Mothers saw German culture as an insidious threat to Americans, and they blamed not only German leaders but the German people for the war. They opposed the sale of German goods in the United States, and they wanted the teaching of German taken out of the public schools. They joined the American Legion in protesting against a separate peace for Germany and in rejecting German claims that the French occupation of the Rhineland was humiliating and harmful because it was being carried out by African troops. War mothers of the Service Star Legion in Baltimore protested the visit of a German opera company, "[i]n the name of our beloved soldier dead and their families," a move even the local American Legion did not support. At a time when female pacifists were recognizing the war's devastating impact on the German people, and trying to ameliorate their starvation and disease, the mothers of soldiers' groups took an opposite approach. The mothers' actions must be seen in the context of the punitive nationalism that led to the international mishandling of the post-war peace. Furthermore, because the women had enjoyed a wartime status as patriotic heroines, their public statements may have further legitimated a punitive stance toward Germany among the wider public.<sup>270</sup>

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Intelligence Division Correspondence, 1917-1941; Records of the War Department General Staff, RG 165; NARA II, College Park, MD.

<sup>270</sup> "German Propaganda," *The Indianian*, March 1921, 12; "Great Americanism Meeting," *The Indianian*, April 1921, 11-3; "Against Separate Peace," editorial reprinted from *Indianapolis News*, 18 March 1921, in *The Indianian*, April 1921, 20; "Legislation," *The Indianian*, March 1921, 10; "War Mothers Protest," *New York Times*, 27 January 1923, 16; "Sell German Toys to Mexican Firm," *New York Times*, 29 May 1919, 13; Erika Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy After the Great War: Women, Gender, and Postwar Reconciliation Between Nations* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 4, 40.

The War Mothers identified not only Germans, but also immigrants, radicals, pacifists and Progressives as threats to American society. From 1920 to the start of the Second World War, the War Mothers and the American Legion lobbied for restricting immigration to the United States. The Indiana War Mothers printed poems that accused a “hostile host” of immigrants of hoping to “swallow all within a crimson tide,” a reference both to bloodshed and communism. The War Mothers consistently identified immigrants with radicals, and in the 1930s supported American Legion claims that deporting millions of immigrants would solve the Depression’s unemployment problem. The War Mothers saw Progressives who supported immigration as “their country’s most insidious foes!”. The War Mothers’ newsletter also mocked a “Chicago settlement house worker” for opposing compulsory English education as a “hardship” for adult immigrant workers; the War Mothers supported such education as essential to Americanization. Year after year, the War Mothers lobbied to shrink the quotas that allowed immigrants to enter the United States and to find ways to expel immigrants who had been arrested, jailed or were otherwise considered undesirable.<sup>271</sup>

The War Mothers were conservative, nationalist and also populist. Like many veterans returned home from the war, they held contradictory opinions about the government in Washington, D.C. They demanded loyalty to it, but at the same time criticized it bitterly for neglecting unemployed, sick and disabled veterans, especially in Congress’s repeated rejections of the “bonus,” a monetary reward for returned veterans

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<sup>271</sup> Robert E. Farley, “The Apologists,” *The Indianian*, December 1921, 7; Annie Edwards Crain, “Americanization,” *The Indianian*, November 1920, 21. “Unrestricted Immigration a Menace,” *The American War Mother*, April 1924, 12; “National Patriotic Conference,” Resolution Number 5, *The American War Mother*, March 1928, 11; Resolution No. 16, *Summary of Proceedings: The Eighth Women’s Patriotic Conference on National Defense, Mayflower Hotel, Washington DC, Jan 30, 31, Feb. 1, 1933*, 49. The other meetings of the Women’s Patriotic Conference had similar resolutions, see 1934 and 1939, for example.

rewarding them based on their time in military service. Supporters of the bonus pointed out that many soldiers had forfeited lucrative civilian positions in going to war, and had often returned to find these positions filled. The War Mothers consistently supported the bonus, which was a divisive political issue from the end of the war until the men finally received their money in 1936. The American War Mothers and American Gold Star Mothers believed in U.S. government support through money and medical benefits for veterans and their families. They also supported measures to improve the quality of life for enlisted men. One activity of local units of the War Mothers and gold star mother groups was guiding local veterans and their mothers through the extensive and confusing paperwork necessary to receive government benefits. The local groups also gave direct aid—in money or other help—to impoverished veterans and gold star mothers. The poverty and unemployment among veterans was an ongoing irritant to veterans' and mothers of soldiers' groups, and it exacerbated their anti-immigrant, anti-government rhetoric. Having sacrificed so much during the war, these men and women felt misunderstood and undervalued by the civilian leadership of the country after the war.<sup>272</sup>

As Kim E. Nielsen has pointed out, America's conservatives in the 1920s held the contradictory position of opposing the expansion of the federal government into public health and welfare, while supporting the expansion of the government in training young men for military service and increasing military expenditures. Once seen in the context of patriotic motherhood and veterans' politics, this contradiction makes more sense. The

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<sup>272</sup> They self-identify as conservatives in "National Patriotic Conference: Resolutions," Resolution No. 4, *The American War Mother*, March 1928, 10-11; "Jobless Soldiers," *The Indianian*, February 1921, 21; on helping veterans and mothers with paperwork, see "First Clinton Chapter, Centralia, IL" *The American War Mothers*, May 1929, 15; "Our National President," *The American War Mother*, April 1938, 2; Eve Sherrer, "Mothers and Suffrage," *The American War Mother*, August 1924, 15; Ellen B. Hayslip, "God Forbid! Can We Forget?" *The American War Mother*, April 1936, 7; Mrs. J.E. Barcus, "A Call to Service," *The Indianian*, November 1920, 10.

War Mothers pushed for a nationalist maternalism—a continuation of wartime social priorities that privileged military men and their families. Such policies not only helped their own interest group, but fit into their broader agenda for an American society that would always be prepared for war, with a plentiful and well-trained officer corps, an adequate standing army and navy, and a male citizenry that had received military training in school and stood ready to fight. Medical benefits and financial support for men in military service, veterans and their families would undergird this system, just as in wartime the federal government’s system of soldiers’ pay and life insurance had supported their families and ensured many women’s support for their breadwinner’s enlistment.<sup>273</sup>

Aid to veterans in hospitals was the most common activity undertaken by local War Mothers’ clubs and gold star mother organizations in the 1920s. The women visited sick and disabled veterans, provided them with gifts and special foods, entertainment, and if the men were mobile, excursions. Some War Mothers--and other volunteers from organizations for female relatives of soldiers--did necessary “women’s work” for disabled veterans, including laundry and cleaning. This supplemented the care offered the veterans in their local hospitals or provided needed services the veterans could not afford otherwise. The mothers’ organizations did not try to avert their gaze or sidestep difficult issues; for example, a committee of War Mothers in Washington, DC met with hospital administrators to obtain permission to interact directly with the veterans living at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital, many of whom suffered from shell shock.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Nielsen, 6.

<sup>274</sup> “War Mothers Aid Injured Soldiers,” *Washington Post*, 12 July 1920, 12; “Calway Chapter of Colored Mothers (Centralia, IL)” *American War Mother*, March 1928, 14; “Illinois,” *The American War Mother*,

The women's aid to veterans was necessary because the U.S. government's healthcare measures were inadequate. Though the federal government distributed funds to hospitals to pay for veterans' care, the system was rife with corruption and incompetence, especially in the early 1920s. During the Harding Administration, corruption led the head of the Veterans' Bureau to step down after it was found that bribes had influenced his decision-making in awarding contracts to hospitals caring for veterans. Aside from high-level corruption, the quality of care for veterans depended on local circumstances, including the will and capacity of administrators, doctors and staff. Veterans could be challenging patients, requiring round-the-clock supervision in cases of severe shell-shock, lung problems after gassing, or physical disabilities due to wounds. Some of these men would never be able to live independently again. One mother who cared for her disabled son called it "care far worse than that of raising a baby," and worried that after their mothers died or could no longer care for them, such veterans would face "more hospitals to graft them."<sup>275</sup>

The War Mothers' first piece of advice for mothers visiting hospitals was to refrain from criticizing the hospital to the veterans who resided there; it would just upset them. They were less reticent about informing the public of problems with veterans' medical care and lobbying for improved veterans' benefits. Mothers of soldiers played an important role in exposing corruption and incompetence in the veterans' healthcare system, in working with authorities to improve veterans' care, and in providing aid to

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September 1928, 15; "Organized Women," *Over Land Monthly and Out West Magazine*, November 1926, 352; Mrs. J.E. Barcus, "A Call to Service," *The Indianian*, November 1920, 10.

<sup>275</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs, *To Enable the Mothers and Unmarried Widows of the Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines of the American Forces Interred in the Cemeteries of Europe to Make a Pilgrimage To These Cemeteries*, 70<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 14 May 1928, 20.

augment hospital care. They called press attention to problems including substandard housing, bedding and clothing; tubercular patients housed alongside the healthy; abusive or neglectful guards and nurses; and hospitals where patients waited hours to see a doctor during emergencies. In hearings in New York and Indiana, War Mothers cooperated closely with disabled veterans, nurses and the American Legion to corroborate hospitalized veterans' testimony and to publicize their plight.<sup>276</sup>

The public at large seems to have paid attention to veterans' care only when shocking news stories emerged, and apparently many suspected veterans' own testimony while trusting gold star mothers and mothers of veterans as more impartial observers. When gold star mothers testified in a New York City hearing that they were happy their sons had died in the war rather than return to be neglected so terribly, this testified to the depths of the problem and made headlines. The War Mothers and gold star mothers' groups also acted as advocates to pressure Congress for more money for veterans' healthcare and to streamline the men's extensive paperwork. Thanks to the pressures of veterans' groups and the American War Mothers and gold star mothers who worked with them, politicians enacted ongoing reforms to the Veterans' Bureau, culminating in the 1930 creation of the Veterans' Administration to oversee the Bureau and other veterans' care administrations.<sup>277</sup>

In addition to caring for veterans, the War Mothers worked for "Americanization," or the encouragement of Americans' sense of national belonging,

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<sup>276</sup> "Mother Machree's Corner: the Art of Hospital Visiting," *The American War Mother*, September 1924, 15; "Veterans in Fox Hills Drugged, Says Woman," *New York Times*, 20 April 1921, 3; Untitled brief on legislation committee, *The American War Mother*, March 1924, 5; "North Carolina Annual Meeting," *The American War Mother*, July 1929, 12; "Here and There," *The American War Mother*, October 1929, 3; "Care of Ex-Service Men," *The Indianian*, July 1921, 21; "American Women's Overseas Service League," *The Indianian*, July 1921, 23. "Mrs. Barr Encourages Mothers," *The Indianian*, August 1921, 13; see also fn 40.

<sup>277</sup> "Gold Star Mothers Weep at Inquiry," *New York Times*, 6 April 1921, 17; see also fn 39.

patriotic duty, and respect for military service. Daisy Douglass Barr, the first Vice-War Mother of the Indiana chapter in the early 1920s, said that the war had brought Americans closer together and spoke of “the need of perpetuating the war by mothers’ organizations,” to maintain the bonds of nationalism. In this spirit, the War Mothers gathered signatures to make “The Star Spangled Banner” the new national anthem, promoted legislation for proper treatment of the American flag, and publicized the American’s Creed, which ended with an oath to defend the United States. They maintained an active Americanization committee on the national level, and local members visited schools to speak to students about patriotism. Branches of the War Mothers also distributed patriotic song lyrics through the schools, and the national organization sponsored Mother’s Day essay contests on patriotic subjects for federal prisoners.<sup>278</sup>

The War Mothers were part of a constellation of organizations that promoted patriotic ritual in order to reinforce the nation’s military strength. In 1928, as the Secretary of War established a short-lived panel of female civilian advisors, he corresponded with a woman representing twelve women’s patriotic organizations, including the American War Mothers, about their patriotic work. The Secretary of War did not see such work as essential to the promotion of the military’s interests, but the women did. The chairwoman explained that the women’s groups considered patriotic ritual and publicity essential to winning the “understanding and complete cooperation of

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<sup>278</sup> “Mrs. Barr Encourages Mothers,” *The Indianian*, August 1921, 13; “The New Flag Code,” *The American War Mother*, March 1924, 2; “National Patriotic Conference,” *The American War Mother*, March 1928, 11; “The Story of the American’s Creed,” *The American War Mother*, July 1924, 12; Mrs. Charles Haas, “Are You Doing Your Bit,” *The American War Mother*, March 1928, 6; “The National Flag Code,” *The American War Mother*, October 1924, 24. “Kentucky,” *The American War Mother*, March 1928, 22; “Bulletin No. 1,” *The American War Mother*, May 1928, 4; “Report on the Lost Battalion,” *The American War Mother*, September 1928, 5-6.

the civilian” with national defense efforts. For the women’s groups, promotion of patriotism was equivalent to promotion of the military, and their efforts would help obtain “real cooperation” from both men and women [underline in original].<sup>279</sup> The War Mothers would prove expert at gaining patriotic publicity from the 1920s through the more contentious 1930s.

### **The Political Uses of Mourning: Mothers of Soldiers’ Activities in Popular Culture and Politics, 1921 to 1928**

While the first section of this chapter focused on establishing a picture of the American War Mothers, their origins, local activities and their ideological positions on certain key issues, the final half will focus on the War Mothers’ public role in post-war politics and culture, especially on the national level. After the war, in the U.S. and abroad, gold star mothers served as symbols of the nation’s mourning in ceremonies of world war commemoration. This role reinforced the high status of mothers of soldiers—and mothers more generally—as potential or actual “mothers of the nation” in postwar Germany, Australia, Great Britain and other nations.<sup>280</sup> In the U.S., national commemorative ceremonies and committees regularly excluded fathers, wives, and the female professionals who had worked to aid soldiers at the front. The American War Mothers took advantage of their role in memorialization to create publicity tying American motherhood to support for the military and opposition to pacifists. Over the

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<sup>279</sup> Campbell King, Assistant Chief of Staff to Secretary of War, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, Subject: Director of Women’s Relations, includes analysis of letter from Miss Wetmore to Secretary of War of March 26, 1928; File 9835 Women in War; G-1 (Personnel); Numerical File 1921-1942; Record Group 165 War Department General Staff; NARA II, College Park, MD.

<sup>280</sup> Grayzel, Ch. 7; Kuhlman, 3-4, 6; Piehler, 102; Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (NY: Cambridge UP, 1999), Ch. 2. Interestingly, Damousi finds that bereaved mothers were excluded from mourning ceremonies in Australia in the 1930s and declined in cultural power over this decade. It is possible that organizations like the War Mothers and gold star mothers’ groups in the U.S. kept patriotic motherhood politically and culturally relevant where otherwise it would have atrophied.

1920s, the stronger women's pacifist organizations became, the more determinedly the War Mothers and allied organizations opposed them.

The first major national ceremony of world war mourning in the United States was the Burial of the Unknown Soldier held on November 11, 1921. Scholars recognize the burial of an Unknown Soldier as a key moment in the development of modern nationalism. Honoring an Unknown signifies an acceptance of national bonds as similar to the bonds of kinship, requiring mourning and respect for the dead. It also recognizes an interchangeable quality among male citizens; honoring the Unknown honors all men who risk their lives in war or who are willing to give military service in case of war. Finally, ceremonies for the unidentifiable dead draw power from the recognition of a horrific aspect of modern warfare, the capacity for weapons to annihilate the individual's identifying physical features. Following the First World War, Britain and France in 1920 and the United States in 1921 created ceremonies to salve the public's grief for the fallen and lost, and to celebrate the bonds the war had inspired. A detailed analysis of the planning and execution of the ceremony shows that a patriotic public expected gold star mothers to have an important role in the burial of the Unknown, and highlights the way gold star mothers symbolized a conservative vision of womanhood amidst post-war conflicts over woman's equality and the women's pacifist movement.<sup>281</sup>

One might expect that the War Department would be a vocal advocate of a ceremony that celebrated wartime heroism, but public interest pushed them to act.

Following the British and French ceremonies held on Armistice Day in 1920, Americans

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<sup>281</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1999), 229; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 7, 9, 143; G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way, 1783-1993* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 117.

began to write letters asking that their own country follow suit. The editor of the *Delineator* told the Army Chief of Staff that the magazine's readers demanded a ceremony for America's Unknown; she assured him that rather than "sob-sister stuff" or "sentimental hogwash" such a ceremony would express "the essence of democracy" and "the soul of a people." At the time the *Delineator* had a circulation hovering above 930,000 and was one of the country's most successful women's magazines. Chief of Staff General P.C. March wrote back to say that creating a memorial and ceremony was up to Congress. In the absence of a federal ceremony, people in cities across the country, including New York, began to plan their own Unknown Soldier ceremonies, and they asked the War Department how they could obtain the remains of unidentified servicemen to bury with honor. Congressman Hamilton Fish III (R-NY), a veteran and one of the founders of the American Legion, responded to the public demand by proposing legislation to provide for a national ceremony. Congress passed the bill into law, and the War Department rejected the possibility of numerous Unknown Soldiers to be buried around the country.<sup>282</sup>

The process of planning the Unknown Soldier's entombment ceremony took months of work for the Adjutant General's Office. The staff's work focused intensely on choosing which military men and veterans should serve as pallbearers or march alongside the casket on its way to Arlington Cemetery from the U.S. Capital. They designed the ceremony along the lines of past military funerals, and nothing in their records indicates

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<sup>282</sup> Marie M. Maloney, Office of the Editor, *The Delineator*, Butterick Building, New York, to General P.C. March, Chief of Staff, US Army, War Department, Washington, DC, Nov. 13, 1920 and P.C. March, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army to Marie M. Maloney, Editor, Nov. 16, 1920; 293.8 (1-4-21); Central Decimal Files, 1917-1925; Record Group 407 The Adjutant General's Office; National Archives II, College Park, MD; *N.W. Ayer & Son's American Newspaper Annual & Directory*, (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1920), 663; Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 117.

that they considered inviting women who had contributed to the war effort to participate. They invited only two women: an American representative of gold star mothers, Mrs. R. Emmett Digney, president of the American War Mothers, and a British representative of that country's gold star mothers, Mrs. Amelia McCudden.<sup>283</sup>

Over 90,000 Americans filed past the Unknown Soldier's body as it lay in state at the U.S. Capitol before the funeral, and newspapers around the country described the burial ceremony in front page stories. It began with the transport of the Unknown Soldier from the U.S. Capitol to his tomb at Arlington National Cemetery. Leading the casket-bearers on horseback, General John J. Pershing appeared before a military contingent of servicemen and officers representing each state and each branch of military service. Following the Tomb were the President and Vice President, members of the House and Senate, and even the Justices of the Supreme Court. The former President Woodrow Wilson, so closely associated with the war, followed in an open, horse-drawn carriage; crowds along the sidelines broke into cheers at the sight of the wartime commander-in-chief.<sup>284</sup>

In an unofficial parade following the official casket-bearers and their company, groups of ordinary citizens proceeded behind these notables, including African American leaders from around D.C., and a parade organized by women's groups. Two thousand women marched, including woman war workers, professional and volunteer, and the two

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<sup>283</sup> This is based on my reading of the files on the 1921 burial ceremony; 293.8; Central Decimal Files, 1917-1925; Record Group 407 The Adjutant General's Office; National Archives II, College Park, MD.

<sup>284</sup> Piehler, 118; "Solemn Journey of Dead," *New York Times*, 12 November 1921, 1. My analysis of the ceremony and its meaning is based on the idea of a civic ceremony as a creative representation of society, usually one that diminishes conflict, see Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP), 1992.

gold star mothers the War Department had invited to participate in the entombment ceremonies.<sup>285</sup>

The women's march highlighted their contributions to the war effort and constituted an assertion of women's importance to the nation. Representing women who had worked in Europe with the American Expeditionary Forces, three Salvation Army workers, each decorated for honorable war service records, led a group of nurses and workers for the Red Cross, Y.W.C.A., and American Library Association. Likewise, women marched who had worked on the home front for the Y.W.C.A., Red Cross, and motor corps, among others. The gold star mothers—American Mrs. R. Emmett Digney and Briton Mrs. Amelia McCudden—marched among the other women, carrying the wreaths they would lay on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Fifty members of the American War Mothers also participated. *Washington Post* reporters trivialized their description of the march by ending it with several paragraphs describing the women's fashion choices, but it is clear that these women marched with a serious purpose. They formed an honor guard for the gold star mothers and the wreaths that would decorate the tomb of the Unknown Soldier.<sup>286</sup>

What message would it have sent if the Arlington ceremonies had included a woman doctor or a nurse who had served with the military in Europe? Such women had risked their lives for their work and had cared for many dying men, the Unknown Soldier's comrades. During the war, female doctors working for the American Expeditionary Forces had come into conflict with the military over fair recognition of their work, for example whether female doctors should be given the military rank

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<sup>285</sup> Piehler, 120; "Women March Six Miles as Tribute," *The Washington Post*, 12 November 1921, 4.

<sup>286</sup> "Women March Six Miles as Tribute," *Washington Post*, 4; note that the *Washington Post* persisted in calling her Julia McCudden but all other sources refer to her as Amelia.

awarded their male peers. Their exclusion from the ceremony seems one more way in which male officials ignored or obscured their importance to the war effort. Or alternatively, what if the most powerful women of the home front, the Wilson appointees of the Woman's Committee of the Council on National Defense, had been included in the official burial ceremonies? These women represented millions of American clubwomen who had raised money, entertained soldiers, knitted socks, preserved food and otherwise supported America's mobilization. The Liberty Loan fundraisers, for example, had first proven women's capacity to raise money, and once officially included in the Loan drives, they had devoted themselves to meeting ever-higher sales quotas. Government advertisements assured them that the money they raised bought the bullets, rifles, uniforms and blankets the American Expeditionary Forces needed to win the war. When the military and Harding administration honored gold star mothers but not other female war workers in the Arlington ceremonies, they made a conservative statement about women's contributions to the war effort and thus their place in the nation.<sup>287</sup>

After the procession to Arlington, the Amphitheater's seating for the ceremony was limited. The Quartermaster Corps, in charge of organizing the funeral rites for the War Department, had reserved 1,000 of the 5,000 seats for relatives of fallen soldiers, including Gold Star Mothers. Inside the apse, closest to the Tomb, sat about forty notables. In the first row sat the President and Vice President, their wives, and the two gold star mothers who would play a role in the ceremony. Seated behind them were foreign dignitaries representing world war allies.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Chicago: U. of Illinois Press, 2008), see xi, 88 and especially Chapter 5.

<sup>288</sup> John W. Weeks, Secretary of War, to Honorable Carl Hayden, House of Representatives, Nov. 30, 1921; Burial of The Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery, November 11, 1921, Section 13:

President Harding's eulogy was the centerpiece of the day. He relied on a rhetoric of gender and family role to emphasize the unity of the American people. Harding said that though they did not know the Unknown Soldier's name and particulars, the nation could be sure that "Some mother gave him [to the military] in her love and tenderness, and, with him, her most cherished hopes." Harding presented the ceremony as giving solace to all mothers of fallen soldiers and sailors, especially those whose sons' remains were unidentified or still missing. Perhaps the nation honored her own son, "one she bore to live and die, if need be, for the Republic." Whether the soldier was a "native" or an "adopted son," whether the home flying his service flag was a "cottage" or a "mansion," had not mattered when the soldier went to war, and now such differences were dissolved in death. All classes, Harding argued, had sacrificed alike. Elected in a campaign premised on a "return to normalcy," his speech emphasized a gendered, cross-class harmony that many Americans desired but feared they could not achieve in the midst of the Red Scare. It also excluded minorities, however. Harding's speech and the burial ceremony implied that the Unknown Soldier was a white Protestant.<sup>289</sup>

After his speech, the President, representatives of foreign allies, and top military officers pinned medals of valor and laid flowers—each symbolizing a separate virtue—on the tomb. Finally, at the end of the prayer service, three people laid wreaths on the tomb. Congressman Hamilton Fish, Jr., a veteran, one of the founders of the American

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Correspondence with individuals, etc., re miscellaneous matters, considered of minor importance; 293.8; Central Decimal Files, 1917-1925; Record Group 407 Office of the Adjutant General; National Archives II, College Park, MD; Seating in the Apse, Memorial Amphitheatre- Arlington National Cemetery, November 11, 1921; 293.8 (1-4-21) (1) Sec. 5 Burial of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington, National Cemetery, Nov. 11, 1921--Official Guests and Mourners; Central Decimal Correspondence File, Bulky Packages; Record Group 407 Office of the Adjutant General; National Archives II, College Park, MD.

<sup>289</sup> "President Harding's Address at the Burial of an Unknown American Soldier," *New York Times*, 12 November 1921, 2; Piehler, 120-1. Nielsen noted that antiradicals claimed the traditional, patriarchal family as the basis of Americanism, see pp. 11-13 on Ole Hanson and throughout.

Legion, and the sponsor of the legislation creating the Unknown's burial ceremony, laid the first. Next, representing American gold star mothers, the president of the American War Mothers and gold star mother Mrs. R. Emmett Digney laid a wreath. Third, Mrs. Amelia McCudden put down a wreath on behalf of British mothers of soldiers. She had been chosen to represent her country in a contest sponsored by the British media; the bravery of her fallen sons, and the fact that she had lost three sons and her husband in the war, had made her famous at home. The Pilgrim Fathers Association, an organization devoted to cultivating close relations between the U.S. and Britain, had helped pay for her trip. Finally, an American Indian, the Chief Plenty Coups of the Crow Nation laid a war bonnet and coup stick on the tomb. He represented the military service of Native Americans and his presence associated the Unknown Soldier with the warrior traditions of native cultures.<sup>290</sup>

The place of gold star mothers in the ceremony was a concern for some Americans. Before the ceremony, several San Francisco clubs including the Elks, Masons and Native Sons of the Golden West, as well as the mayor, telegraphed the War Department asking what was being done for gold star mothers. After the ceremonies, Representative Carl Hayden of Arizona, at the prompting of a Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Phoenix, asked the Secretary of War to justify the government's "neglect" of "War Mothers" during the ceremony. The Secretary of War defended his department's planning, describing the participation of Digney and McCudden and the presence of gold star mothers and other relatives in the audience, but clearly the ceremony had failed to

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<sup>290</sup> Piehler, 120-1; "Solemn Journey of Dead," *New York Times*, 12 November 1921, 1; Constance Drexel, "She Gave 3 Sons to Save Britain," *The Washington Post*, 9 November 1921, 5.

meet some Americans' expectations.<sup>291</sup> These expectations can be gauged using the poems that writers around the country, many of them amateurs, sent to the War Department in honor of the Unknown Soldier. Of 35 such poems the War Department chose to release to the press, about a quarter treated the theme of a mother's unique and powerful grief, as did many other poems and songs that were submitted but not selected for the published volume. Gold star mothers were central to these Americans' understanding of the war and the Unknown Soldier.<sup>292</sup>

The public's fascination with gold star mothers extended to the women who represented mothers at the Unknown's burial ceremony. Newspaper reporters saw a story in the women and told the public where they went, what they did, and what they said. On November 12, the U.S. was hosting a major disarmament conference in Washington, D.C. Immediately after Mrs. McCudden's arrival in the U.S., a *Washington Post* reporter asked her whether she was interested in military disarmament. Mrs. McCudden's eyes "flashed" as she answered, "Who should be more interested than a mother who has lost three fine sons and a daughter's husband in war?" Mrs. McCudden

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<sup>291</sup> John W. Weeks, Secretary of War, to Honorable Carl Hayden, House of Representatives, Nov. 30, 1921; Burial of The Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery, November 11, 1921, Section 13: Correspondence with individuals, etc., re miscellaneous matters, considered of minor importance; 293.8 (1-4-21) to 293.8 (5-14-19); Central Decimal Files, 1917-1925; Record Group 407 Adjutant General's Office; NARA II, College Park, MD; War Department Telegram, Oct. 20, 1921, from William Lassiter, Brigadier General, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3 to the Adjutant General; Burial of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery, November 11, 1921, Section 5: Ceremonies Incident to Lying in State at the Capitol and Interment at Arlington—Official Guests and Mourners; 293.8 (1-4-21); Central Decimal Files 1917-1925; Record Group 407 The Adjutant General's Office; NARA II, College Park, MD.

<sup>292</sup> "Poems Submitted in connection with the Ceremonies attending the Burial of an Unknown and Unidentified American Soldier who lost his life during the World War, Submitted to the Press," n.d.; Burial of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery, November 11, 1921, Section 7: Submission of Poems and Songs & suggestions as to inscriptions for tomb; 293.8 (1-4-21); Central Decimal Files 1917-1925; Record Group 407, The Adjutant General's Office; National Archives II, College Park, MD. Other documents in this file include poems and songs that were not included.

explained that those “who know the sorrows of war” had the responsibility to act immediately to protect their children and grandchildren from future wars.<sup>293</sup>

In the days following the ceremony, Mrs. Digney and Mrs. McCudden visited cities up and down the East Coast, where women’s clubs, veterans’ organizations and local citizens toasted and feted them. About two weeks after the ceremony for the Unknown Soldier, a scandal blew up around the two mothers, showing that mothers’ pacifism remained an explosive issue in America two years after the end of the war. “Official War Mothers of U.S. and Britain Take Pledge to Give No Aid in Future Wars,” the *Boston Daily Globe* reported, with similar stories appearing in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and distributed over the wires by the Associated Press. By mentioning a “pacifist vow,” the story associated the gold star mothers with an explosive pamphlet, “America Menaced by Militarism,” that was circulating the country. Written by an officer of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, formerly the Woman’s Peace Party, the pamphlet asked women to promise to resist future wars by forsaking all war work, including knitting, rolling bandages, and nursing soldiers. Wartime propaganda had idealized each of these activities, and each had been a major component of women’s war work during America’s Great War. Even many pacifists had taken part in Red Cross bandage rolling and knitting projects. Military intelligence had a copy of the pamphlet, and they interpreted its vow of nonresistance to war as a serious

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<sup>293</sup> Drexel, “She Gave 3 Sons,” 5; “Britain’s Gold Star Mother Says Women Must Make War Impossible,” *Boston Globe*, 10 November 1921, 12; “Bereaved Mothers Grateful, She Says,” *Washington Post*, 12 November 1921, 4; “Mrs. McCudden Will Come Tomorrow,” *Boston Globe*, 6 December 1921, 1.

threat; through the 1920s, they closely followed reports of pacifist vows among women.<sup>294</sup>

American gold star mother Mrs. Digney immediately tried to put a stop to the story. She said she and McCudden had made a promise that was much more limited-- never to support a war between Britain and the United States. Furthermore, Mrs. Digney said she had made the promise as an individual, not in her position as the president of the American War Mothers. In her letter to the press, Digney said the American War Mothers was a patriotic organization of mothers who “gave their sons to their country.” Many were Gold Star Mothers. “It is not a pacifist organization and it would be most unfortunate to connect it in any way with pacifist propaganda.”<sup>295</sup>

Whether the scandal blew up on the basis of truth or rumor, mistake or malicious intent—Digney denied even being present at the meeting where the pacifist vow supposedly took place—the controversy’s conclusion indicated that American mothers of soldiers would not be joining forces with female pacifists to support disarmament. They still supported the righteousness of the world war and the government’s right to wage further wars. The scandal pushed Mrs. Digney to make public statements disavowing pacifism and disarmament while she was still newsworthy, and while she enjoyed a semi-

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<sup>294</sup> “Official War Mothers of U.S. and Great Britain Take Pledge to Give No Aid in Future Wars,” *Boston Globe*, 23 November 1921, 13; “War Mothers Take Pledge Not to Aid Future Conflicts,” *Washington Post*, 23 November 1921, 2; “War Mothers Make Pledge Against War,” *New York Times*, 23 November 1921, 3; William Hones, Captain, 8<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry, Publicity Officer, to the Publicity Officer, Hdqrs. 27<sup>th</sup> Division, Municipal Building, New York City, April 12, 1923, clipping from *Walton Reporter*, Walton, NY; 2045-721 to 2045-836; Military Intelligence Division Correspondence, 1917-1941; Record Group 165 Records of the War Department General Staff; NARA II, College Park, MD; “America Menaced by Militarism: An Appeal to Women,” by Harriet Connor Brown, Reprinted from *The Searchlight*, price ten cents, copyright 1921, The Searchlight Publishing Co., Washington DC; folder 10110-1935 (1 of 3); Military Intelligence Division Correspondence, 1917-1941; Record Group 165 Records of the War Department General Staff; NARA II, College Park, MD, 25-7.

<sup>295</sup> “Explains Non-War Pledge,” *Washington Post*, 29 November 1921, 6; “War Mothers Pledged Friendship,” *The Indianian*, December 1921, 12.

official status as the federal government's chosen representative of the nation's gold star mothers.

Mrs. Digney continued her fight against pacifism behind the scenes as well. In 1922, she wrote J. Mayhew Wainwright, Assistant Secretary of War, to introduce him to Mrs. Haviland H. Lund. Digney explained that she and Lund wished to speak to Wainwright about "a matter in which we are both greatly interested and which I feel sure will appeal to you as being vital to the interests of our country." Lund and Digney wanted the War Department to intervene in the Chicago convention of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Raymond Robbins was going to address the convention on "The Outlawry of War." According to Lund, Robbins was "one of the prize Bolshivists of the Republican party [sic]", and Lund wanted the War Department to send Brigadier General Amos A. Fries, head of the Chemical Weapons Service, to speak after Robbins on the topic of "Club Women in the Home." Fries was a devoted antiradical, and like many of his peers he saw pacifists as paving the way to a communist takeover of the U.S. The women believed that only "high government officials" could make a change to the club's program at this late date, but the change was essential because "Our women are being deceived and the words which entice them are 'peace, welfare, and education.'" Lund told the Assistant Secretary of War that she believed "propaganda" was shaping the attitudes of clubwomen and thus affecting American politics more broadly, and she urged the War Department to get involved in creating what she called a "right" rather than a "wrong public opinion."<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Mrs. R. Emmet Digney, National War Mother to the Honorable J. Mayhew Wainwright, May 24, 1924; AG 080 "War Mothers" (5-22-18) to "Women's Motor Corps" (10-1-18); Central Decimal Files, 1917-1925; Record Group 407 The Adjutant General's Office, NARA II, College Park, MD; Haviland H. Lund to Hon J. Mayhew Wainwright, Assistant Secretary of War, June 2, 1922; AG 080 "War Mothers" (5-22-

Lund was the head of an organization called the Institute of Government that she hoped would educate women thoroughly in their duties as citizens and even prepare them for positions within government, for example in the State Department. Lund was also an avid antiradical, however, who believed that international conspiracies of socialists, pacifists and communists threatened American democracy. Her organization's board was made up of many prominent men and women including one national officer from each of the following: the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the former president of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent Teachers' Association. Three officers of the American War Mothers sat on the board, including the editor of the group's magazine.<sup>297</sup>

Lund's organization looked impressive on paper, but the War Department was reluctant to get involved, and the men dodged her suggestion that they intervene in the women's convention. Mrs. Lund may have had the last laugh, however. She introduced Mrs. Lucia Ramsay Maxwell, the librarian of the Chemical Weapons Services division, to several individuals who had been investigating pacifism and Socialism within the United States. She bragged that the result was a "very interesting accumulation of data at their disposal." In 1923, Mrs. Maxwell and General Fries would distribute this data in the form of the "Spider-Web Chart," a chart that linked prominent members of women's organizations with pacifism and socialism, and then linked pacifism and socialism to "International Socialist" and "Red" conspiracies to undermine the United States

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18) to "Women's Motor Corps" (10-1-18); Central Decimal Files, 1917-1925; Record Group 407 The Adjutant General's Office, NARA II, College Park, MD; Nielsen, 117.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.; African American club leader Mary Church Terrell, who was also a member of the radical pacifist Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, served on the "Committee on Education for Colored People," though since these organizations would seem to be antithetical, one wonders whether Terrell was an active member.

government. One of the women named on the chart was Mrs. Raymond Robbins, whose “prize Bolshivist” husband had addressed the General Federation of Women’s Clubs on peace.<sup>298</sup>

The Spider-Web chart was political dynamite; it created trouble for everyone involved with it. For the organizations and prominent women whose names appeared on the chart, it was an insult to their patriotism and a threat to their activism. Some wrote angrily to the War Department asking them to retract the chart and also wrote to the antiradical publications that printed it for public consumption. The chart incriminated leaders of the most powerful and mainstream women’s organizations—the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers’ Association, the American Association of University Women, and the Women’s Joint Congressional Committee, women’s most powerful Progressive lobby in Washington. The chart was part of a larger anti-radical movement of the mid-1920s that helped to isolate left-leaning leaders, and it tarnished women’s largest and most powerful organizations as dangerously subversive. Lucia Ramsay Maxwell, the chart’s creator, made use of the fact that many Progressive-era women activists had been interested in peace and maternalist causes before the war—causes only later labeled subversive and Socialistic—and also exploited the fact that leadership in women’s voluntary associations belonged to an elite group who often served as officers in a number of such organizations. To opponents, the women’s activities might well suggest conspiracy;

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

antiradical Margaret C. Robinson said the women's clubs were dominated by "interlocking directorates," like the Gilded Age businesses criticized by muckrakers.<sup>299</sup>

The poem that was published underneath the chart illustrated its creators' bias against educated, well-heeled women and also acknowledged that culture was a key arena of political struggle. The poem centered on "Miss Bolsheviki," a member of women's clubs who wanted to "disarm America"--both to charm America and to weaken its military. Miss Bolsheviki ensured that military appropriations were cut, and she used movies, lyceums and textbooks, pulpits and pews, to spread her dangerous "propaganda." While her male counterpart fomented violent class rebellion with "the bomb and the firebrand," her threat lay in her charm and influence—a woman's weapons. The Spider-Web Chart's publication inaugurated greater controversy in women's clubs over the meaning of Americanism and national loyalty.<sup>300</sup>

The War Department was caught in a contradictory position that it occupied for the rest of the 1920s. On the one hand, it was trying to win support from women's organizations for the existence and maintenance of the peacetime military. To this end, they created a new position in 1920: the Woman's Relations Director of the Army General Staff. The Army created the position in an acknowledgment of women's new power in society. Women had won the vote, and they had proven themselves of "material benefit" to the military through their war work, especially in the field of soldiers' welfare. Anita Phipps held the Director's position after 1921; she was no fan of woman pacifists but was irritated by the divisive effects of antiradicals' campaigns

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<sup>299</sup> Nielsen's discussion of the Spider-Web chart is unparalleled, see Ch. 4; on the WJCC, Nielsen, 68; Margaret C. Robinson, "An Open Letter to 18 Organizations Said to Have Endorsed the Labor Amendment," *Woman Patriot*, January 15, 1925, 32 in Nielsen, 68;

<sup>300</sup> Nielsen, 76-7.

against clubwomen. She noted that the women named in the Spider-Web chart and maligned by anti-radicals as unpatriotic, Bolshevik, and communist dupes would now be even less likely to support military funding and programs. Yet a few key personnel in the War Department were active antiradicals, especially Maxwell and Fries of the Chemical Weapons Division. They had the right to engage in political activities as private citizens, but their actions also reflected on the War Department and gave their words a ring of authority. Phipps found herself apologizing for their actions to prominent women's club leaders. Finally, the Military Intelligence Division was highly suspicious of women's pacifism, and not only kept watch over pacifists' activities and publications, but also attempted to counteract women's pacifism, though they had to act subtly because they were not supposed to interfere in the country's domestic politics.<sup>301</sup>

After the publication of the Spider-Web chart, the so-called "patriotic" women's clubs—the Daughters of the American Revolution, American Legion Auxiliary and American War Mothers, for example—worked closely with the War Department and Military Intelligence to promote women's support for national defense, while pacifist women continued their work in opposition to military training in the schools and in support of disarmament. The largest women's organizations were moderate in their politics; in the mid-1920s many officers and members split into factions contemporaries called "pacifists" and "patriots".<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Director of Women's Relations, December 11, 1923; 9835 Women in War; Numerical File 1921-1942; G-1 Personnel; Record Group 165 War Department General Staff; NARA II, College Park, MD, 1-2; Nielsen on the War Department, 84-8; Anita Phipps, Memorandum for the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2; PF 51440; Military Intelligence Division, 1917-1941; Record Group 165 War Department General Staff, NARA II, College Park, MD.

<sup>302</sup> Nielsen, on splits within the DAR, 57-9, on struggles within the General Federation of Women's Clubs, 117; Schott, on difficulties of WILPF in working with other women's organizations, 86-90; Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1987), 248-251.

In the first few years after the war, the War Department and antiradical women were concerned about the activities of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), other pacifist groups formed out of the radical remnants of the Woman's Peace Party, and the so-called "slacker's oath" circulating the country. When Carrie Chapman Catt created the National Conference on the Cause and Cure of War (NCCCW) in 1925, they had something new to worry about. Designed to appeal to mainstream women, and attracting membership from the largest women's clubs, the NCCCW led to a strong reaction from antiradical, antipacifist organizations, who set up a rival conference for women focused on "National Defense as Peace Insurance," as the title of their first conference proclaimed.<sup>303</sup>

Catt had been a founding member of the Woman's Peace Party, but as president of the country's largest suffrage organization, in February 1917 she had assured President Wilson that the nation's women would support war with Germany. During the war she served as a Wilson appointee on the national Woman's Committee of the Council on National Defense. She remained a critic of war, however, and also a supporter of American membership in the League of Nations. With her creation of the NCCCW, she cleverly managed to sidestep the problems plaguing openly pacifist groups, including WILPF, by devoting the new organization to an inquiry—how to prevent war—rather than declarations of resistance to war. The conference's press materials pointed out that no pacifist organizations had been invited to attend. Perhaps for this reason, and for its inaction in comparison to WILPF, historians of the peace movement have not focused much attention on the NCCCW. Its founding, however, created a political sensation, as on its very first day its speakers denounced war and promoted the League of Nations and

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<sup>303</sup> Nielsen on Women's Patriotic Conference, 59-61.

World Court. Judge Florence Allen of the Ohio Supreme Court, famous for being the most prominent woman in the U.S. judiciary, told women that it was up to them to prevent war, and that because of their sense of ethics—common to both men and women—they had all the knowledge they needed to feel secure in seeking to influence foreign policy. Other speakers included Great War military officers and university professors, including a member of the British ministry on air defense and the young John Foster Dulles of the Foreign Policy Association.<sup>304</sup>

The NCCCW had the potential to bring massive numbers of women into the peace movement. Representatives at its first meeting in January 1925 claimed to represent five million women in member organizations. Delegates attended from the American Association of University Women, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the Young Women's Christian Association, the National League of Woman Voters, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Woman's Trade Union League—in short, the most important and largest women's organizations of the time. One hundred delegates from each organization attended.<sup>305</sup>

The following month women who supported a stronger peacetime military held the first Women's Conference on National Defense as Peace Insurance—later shortened to the Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense (WPCND)--in Washington, D.C. One hundred women attended, representing fifteen national patriotic women's organizations. Patriotic motherhood served the WPCND as a symbol, rhetorical device,

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<sup>304</sup> “Women Open Quest for a Cure for War,” *New York Times*, 19 January 1925, 4; Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue*, 106-9. Much of the literature on American women's pacifism is devoted to WILPF and other more radical successors of the WPP, see Harriet Hyman Alonso, *The Women's Peace Union and the Outlawry of War, 1921-1942* (Knoxville: U. of Tennessee Press, 1989), 74, ; Carrie A. Foster, *The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1946* (Syracuse: Syracuse U.P., 1995); Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: the Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997).

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

and a key to their membership. According to the group's founder, Mrs. O.D. Oliphant of the American Legion Auxiliary, the conference was attended by women who were, like the "colonial mothers" of 1776, "not afraid to raise sons to be soldiers." Another founding member said she had attended the previous month's NCCCW meetings, where she had become "fed up with idealism." After noticing a gold star mother sitting next to her who was growing "wrought up" by the speakers, she was inspired to help start an opposing conference to prove to politicians that American women were not all pacifists. The American War Mothers attended the first Women's Patriotic Conference, where their president was photographed with Mrs. Oliphant, President Coolidge and the First Lady. The War Mothers later claimed that they were co-founders of the conference. The American Legion Auxiliary maintained the presidency of the group throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, while the American War Mothers and Daughters of the American Revolution rotated through other top offices. Gold star mothers' organizations such as the Service Star League, American Gold Star Mothers, and Gold Star Mothers of the World War joined the conference over the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>306</sup>

At the first conference, Secretary of War John W. Weeks, Assistant Secretary of War Dwight Davis, and a handful of high-ranking military officers addressed the women. One example serves to underscore the way the Military Intelligence Division promoted women's antiradicalism, despite their protestations that they remained outside domestic politics. The organizers of the patriotic conference asked the Inspector General of the

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<sup>306</sup> "Lack of National Defense Criminal, Women Are Told," *Washington Post*, 23 February 1925, 2; Nielsen quoted Adalin Wright Macaulay from the *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Conference of Post Commanders and Post Adjutants*, Iowa Department, American Legion, February 22, 1927, 48-50, in Nielsen, 59-60; "For an Enduring America," *The American War Mother*, March 1938, 5; *Summary of Proceedings: The Eighth Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense*, Mayflower Hotel, Washington DC, Jan 30, 31, Feb. 1, 1933, 46.

Army, Major General Eli A. Helmick, to address the women on “Undermining the Youth of the Nation.” Helmick admitted to Military Intelligence that he needed their help to get information on the subject, and they supplied him with the material he used in his speech. Helmick told the women in attendance that Socialists, Communists, Anarchists and Syndicalists were alike in that each group wanted to “destroy all existing government.” He noted that radical movements in history had threatened the existence of the family and religion, and he warned the women that Communists wanted to start children’s groups that would undermine the authority of classroom teachers and convert their parents to Communism.<sup>307</sup>

The Woman’s Patriotic Conference on National Defense met each year in Washington, D.C. throughout the interwar period. It was a leading force in anticommunism and antifascism, and it pushed the American War Mothers’ domestic politics further to the right. After they joined, the War Mothers denounced maternalist legislation and showed a greater interest in domestic anticommunism, supporting campaigns against suspected subversives. In their magazine, the American War Mothers reprinted the conference’s speeches, which consistently focused on increasing military funding.<sup>308</sup>

The Women’s Patriotic Conference on National Defense might seem the complete opposite of the most important woman’s pacifist organization of the period, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and of course the two

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<sup>307</sup> “Lack of National Defense Criminal,” 2; Major General Eli A. Helmick, “Undermining the Youth of the Nation,” February 23, 1925; Folder 10110-2525 to 10110-2546; Military Intelligence Division Correspondence, 1917-1941; Record Group 165 Records of the War Department General Staff; NARA II, College Park, MD, 1, 10; Major Walter O. Boswell to Lieutenant Colonel William B. Graham, Feb. 7, 1925; Folder 10110-2525 to 10110-2546; Military Intelligence Division Correspondence, 1917-1941; Record Group 165 Records of the War Department General Staff; NARA II, College Park, MD.

<sup>308</sup> They appeared in the March issues of the *American War Mother*, see for example, “President’s Activities,” and “National Patriotic Conference,” March 1928, 2, 7-13.

organizations were in open conflict with one another. Historians have dismissed the Patriotic Conference as militaristic while seeing WILPF as revolutionary. Both organizations, however, promoted women's intellectual development and activism in military policy and international affairs at a time when women's presence within the military and diplomatic corps was negligible. Leaders in each organization were passionate and gifted in grass-roots organizing, lobbying, and working with the press to cultivate publicity.

WILPF was a pacifist organization; the Patriotic Conference could be considered part of the realist tradition in 20<sup>th</sup> century international relations. WILPF and Patriotic Conference speakers agreed that competition over scarce resources caused war, but they disagreed about how to approach this problem. While WILPF worked to ameliorate poverty, end racism, and cope with the thorny conflicts presented by imperialism, the Patriotic Conference took a simpler approach. Mankind's greed and violence was ineradicable; national loyalty was a virtue; and a strong national defense was a people's bulwark against aggression by outside states.<sup>309</sup>

This is not to equate the two groups. The Patriotic Conference's politics were paranoid and sometimes hateful. Speakers promoted anticommunist fears that seem absurd in retrospect, but when member organizations promoted teacher loyalty oaths or tarred Progressive woman leaders with allegations of subversion, it was no laughing matter. The Patriotic Conference and its members promoted narrowing quotas for immigration, and even, in the 1930s, opposed allowing German Jews refuge within the United States. While WILPF allied itself with legislators who were willing to buck

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<sup>309</sup> On WILPF, non-violence and racial justice, see Schott, Ch. 6; see also Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: the Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997). On the WPCND, see their published conference proceedings.

majority opinion, the Patriotic Conference and its member organizations worked behind the scenes with other antiradical organizations, the War Department and Military Intelligence. The Military Intelligence Division kept a close eye—and a fat file—on WILPF.<sup>310</sup>

While on a national level the American War Mothers spurred controversy through their anti-pacifism and antiradicalism, more locally, they were known for their work with disabled veterans and participation in commemoration ceremonies and patriotic rallies. This may explain the success of their most important fundraising activity: the sale of Mother's Day carnations. The Kansas City, Missouri War Mothers discovered the potential profits in flower sales in 1923; their 200 members sold 100,000 carnations that year, though the population of their city was approximately 425,000. Other Midwestern chapters followed suit: the Omaha War Mothers ordered 50,000 carnations the following year, and the Milwaukee chapter ordered between 80,000 and 100,000, helped by a decree from the mayor and city council. Such flower sales became the most important source of funds for the War Mothers for over a decade. National officers expected each chapter to sell the flowers to fund the national convention; the money also supported the national organization and the printing of the magazine. Associating themselves further with the holiday, and perhaps looking for additional revenue, the American War Mothers published a book on the meaning and rituals of Mother's Day in 1927. While the founder of Mother's Day, Anna Jarvis, furiously opposed the War Mothers as "carnation peddlers" who exploited Mother's Day for profits, she was fighting a losing battle. Not

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<sup>310</sup> Resolution 17, *Summary of Proceedings: The Eighth Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense, Mayflower Hotel, Washington D.C.*, Jan 30, 31, Feb. 1, 1933, 49; Resolution 1 and 5, "National Patriotic Conference," *American War Mother*, March 1928, 10; Resolution 1, *The Ninth Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense, Jan 24, 25, 26, 1934, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C.*, 53.

only had Mother's Day already become thoroughly commercialized—a day for sales of candy and flowers—it would also become, from the mid-1920s through the 1930s, thoroughly intertwined with patriotic motherhood and military service.<sup>311</sup>

In 1925, Mother's Day coincided with the International Council of Women's meeting in Washington, D.C. The holiday became part of the struggle between nationalist and pacifist organizations that belonged to the Council, including the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the American War Mothers, and the Daughters of the American Revolution. The Military Intelligence Division, noting the importance of the conference, decided to use the holiday to encourage women to support the peacetime military. In doing so, they followed a strategy the War Mothers had selected.<sup>312</sup>

The War Mothers had already obtained permission to hold a Mother's Day ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and they'd invited the women of the ICW to attend. The ceremony would feature a speech by the War Mothers' national president and by the Secretary of War, music from military bands, and an honored contingent of gold star mothers. National radio would broadcast key speeches.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> This is combining the Missouri and Kansas state populations, *N.W. Ayer & Son's Newspaper Annual and Directory, pt. 1* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer & Son, 1922), 538, 351; White, *American War Mothers, a Fifty Year History*, 2; "Carnation Day and Mothers Day!" *American War Mother*, March 1928, 3; American War Mothers, *Mother's Day: Its Origin and Ways of Observing* (1927), the only extant copy is held in the Kentucky Historical Society Library, and I have not been able to see it for myself; Anna Jarvis, President and Founder of Mother's Day International Association, Inc., to Secretary of War Weeks, June 1, 1925; File 2045-929 to 2045-936; Military Intelligence Division Correspondence, 1917-1941; Record Group 165 Records of the War Department General Staff; NARA II, College Park, MD, 1-2; on Mother's Day rituals, flower sales and commercialism, see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: the Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995), Ch. 5.

<sup>312</sup> Nielsen on the ICW, 119-1920.

<sup>313</sup> James H. Reeves, Colonel, General Staff, to Chief of Staff, Memorandum, Subject: Observance of Mothers' Day, April 6, 1925; Document 2045-931; File 2045-929 to 2045-936; Military Intelligence Division Correspondence, 1917-1941; NARA II, College Park, MD.

Military Intelligence was aware that anti-pacifist women had initiated a struggle over the ICW convention. Labeling the International Council of Women “partially pacifistic,” Military Intelligence persuaded the General Staff that Mother’s Day should become part of the military’s broader attempt to win women’s approval. In the analysis of Colonel James H. Reeves, “If steps can be taken to indicate in a general, nationwide and concrete manner the consideration the War Department has for the mothers of the soldiers of America, it will result in favorable good-will publicity and assist in recruiting activities.” Colonel Reeves praised the War Mothers’ ceremony as giving “a good defense angle to the day,” and he pushed the Army to gain even greater publicity by pushing each post, camp and station to hold Mother’s Day ceremonies. These would include a “review without arms in honor of the mothers of the soldiers of America,” placing flowers on any graves of mothers of soldiers in post cemeteries, and inviting the press and local soldiers’ mothers to attend the ceremonies. All gold star mothers who lived nearby Army posts were also invited.<sup>314</sup>

The ceremony at Arlington that year attracted 6,000 people, and a great deal of press attention, as did the local ceremonies held by the Army across the country. The opera star Madame Schumann-Heink sang; she was famous for her sons’ wartime military service and her work in wartime fundraising. Planes dropped tens of thousands of white carnations and tiny flags over the graves of world war dead. In his speech at Arlington, Acting Secretary of War Dwight Davis praised all mothers for their love and self-sacrifice on behalf of their children, and he praised gold star mothers for their patriotic sacrifice and silent suffering on behalf of the nation. He took the opportunity to warn the audience of the threat of un-American communists, and he declared that while

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

no one wanted war, America should arm itself so that it could defend against invasion. The ceremonies included a short statement from the “father” of Mother’s Day, Frank E. Hering of South Bend, Indiana. He likened mothers to a “pure, clear light” that could guide mankind to “the stars,” even after disappointment and cynicism clouded a man’s enthusiasm for other areas of life.<sup>315</sup>

Pacifist women, who were keen to detect the encroachment of militarism in education and government, seem to have been silent on the military’s use of Mother’s Day publicity. They had bigger concerns during the early days of May 1925. They found the International Council of Women under concerted attack by military officers and women from the American Legion Auxiliary, Daughters of the American Revolution, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the American War Mothers, among others. The first indication of trouble was the DAR’s refusal to let the conference use their Constitution Hall. Then, only two days before the international meeting was to begin, a group of clubwomen created a new group they called the National Patriotic Council, remarkable for having three top military officials as officers, including Brigadier General Amos A. Fries of the Chemical Warfare Service, Major General Eli A. Helmick, Inspector General of the Army, and Rear Admiral William A. Moffett of the Navy Air Service. The National Patriotic Council, its board said, would provide information to concerned patriots and organize the efforts of women’s patriotic groups. They explained to the press that they’d received inquiries from women who were eligible to attend the ICW but would not want to attend a gathering that lacked the “highest ideals of patriotism and loyalty, or which has any ulterior political motive, or which will advocate

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<sup>315</sup> “First Lady to Pay Honors to Mothers of Unknown Dead,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 May 1925, 8; “Honor to Mothers is Paid by Capital at Many Shrines,” *Washington Post*, 11 May 1925, 1.

in particular a reduction in the necessary armaments of our country on sea and land and in the air, or which is ultrapacifist in its ideals.”<sup>316</sup>

The National Patriotic Council issued a challenge to America’s National Council of Women, asking their president pointed questions, such as whether any members of their organization had been labeled “ultra-pacifist” in antiradical books. Had any defended Soviet Russia? Why had the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to let the conference use their Constitution Hall for the gathering? Did any WILPF members serve as officers in the organization? Would the ICW distribute pacifist literature including the “slacker’s oath”? Would they “fail to open any session with prayer”? The *New York Times* said the letter’s purpose was to link the International Council of Women to the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.<sup>317</sup>

Leaders of the American section of the ICW did not answer these charges, perhaps hoping to restore a sense of order and decorum for the ten days of the actual conference. As planned in advance, the women of the ICW’s peace committee attempted to pass resolutions supporting world disarmament and the League of Nations. The *Washington Post* reported rumors that the “patriotic” women’s groups—including the American War Mothers and American Legion Auxiliary—would withdraw from the conference if such resolutions were passed. This intense pressure led the American delegates to abstain from voting on these issues. This did not mollify the patriotic women’s organizations; they staged a walkout from the conference on its second-to-last day. They rallied across the street from the ICW convention, where Brigadier General Amos A. Fries stood ready to give them a patriotic speech on avoiding foreign

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<sup>316</sup> “Scores Propaganda in Women’s Clubs,” *New York Times*, 30 April 1925, 9; “New Attack is Made By Women Critics on World Council,” *New York Times*, 3 May 1925, 1;

<sup>317</sup> “New Attack is Made,” 1-2.

entanglements and honoring the legacy of Washington, Franklin, and Jefferson. The *Post* noted snidely that the ICW's calls for world peace were "refuted by disturbances within its own ranks." Though they represented a vocal minority of women's clubs, the women of the American War Mothers, American Legion Auxiliary, Daughters of the American Revolution and other conservative allies had managed to silence the Progressive American women seeking peace through greater international cooperation.<sup>318</sup>

From 1925 through the rest of the interwar period the American War Mothers held Mother's Day services at Arlington, complete with speeches by top military officials, music from a military band, and newspaper and radio coverage. In 1926, they inaugurated another new holiday tradition: the raising of a national service flag over the Capitol on Armistice Day. The War Mothers revived the use of the service flag as part of the nation's Sesquicentennial celebrations. They asked Americans to fly their world war service flags again, and their newsletter explained that the flags held a dual message: they reminded the public "not to forget" the war while also sending "a big 'thank you' to every mother," presumably for sending her sons to war. That year the War Mothers' national convention featured the unveiling of a national service flag. Its top half was emblazoned with a big blue star and the number 4,693,039 for the country's world war military servicemen and women; the bottom half had a gold star and the number 60,672 for America's wartime casualties. Congress granted the War Mothers the right to fly this flag over the Capitol building along with the U.S. flag; it was the only flag allowed in this position. The hoisting of the service flag became an annual ceremony on the steps of the

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<sup>318</sup> "Women Convene World Council," *New York Times*, 5 May 1925, 20; "World Peace Issue Threatens Discord in Women's Council," *Washington Post*, May 9, 1925, 1; "One League for All is Urged by Women," *New York Times*, 10 May 1925, 19; "Women Outline World Peace Steps," *New York Times*, 13 May 1925, 3.

Capitol. In the early 1930s, radio broadcast the AWM president's speech at the flag-raising.<sup>319</sup>

In their participation in the Burial of the Unknown Soldier, and then with their creation and use of the U.S. service flag, the AWM succeeded in presenting themselves as representative of the nation's mothers of soldiers. This is all the more remarkable considering that their membership hovered below 15,000—much smaller than the hundreds of thousands of mothers eligible to join. Politicians and the press continued to honor the American War Mothers as symbols of patriotic motherhood despite their small numbers and their increasingly visible right-wing political activity.

### **The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages: a Pageant of Mourning and Nationalism**

The special place of the patriotic mother in 1920s American culture and politics is shown most clearly in the creation of Gold Star Mother pilgrimage legislation, in which Congressmen voted to send the unmarried widows and mothers of fallen servicemen to visit their loved ones' graves in European cemeteries. The bill, finally passed in 1929, resulted from a decade of lobbying by gold star mothers' groups and a consensus among Congressmen that mothers of fallen world war soldiers deserved honor and any solace the government could provide them. In 1928 and 1929, the Congressmen who offered key support to the pilgrimage legislation were otherwise split over the United States' military and domestic policies. Not unlike the First World War itself, the pilgrimage proposal held a variety of meanings for different people.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> White, 2, 13-5.

<sup>320</sup> The literature on the Gold Star Mother pilgrimages includes: John W. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s: Overseas Grave Visitations by Mothers and Widows of Fallen U.S. World I Soldiers* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2005); Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York: NYU Press, 2008); Lisa M. Budreau, "The Politics of Remembrance: The Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimage and America's Fading Memory of the Great War," *Journal of Military History* 72 (April 2008): 371-411. To try to understand the motivations of

In 1924, a pilgrimage bill first made it into and through a Congressional committee. The bill's sponsor, Congressman Samuel Dickstein (D-NY), framed the pilgrimages as nationalistic and patriotic while also reinforcing America's ties with its European allies. In 1928, the second, and more successful sponsor of the bill, Congressman Thomas H. Butler (R-PA), portrayed the pilgrimages as a powerful argument for international peace; many of his peers supported this view. The American War Mothers did not play much of a role in lobbying for the pilgrimages compared to other women's organizations, but their input did promote an important change in the final shape of the legislation, a change that emphasized the benevolent, paternal aspects of the U.S. Army. This alteration was important because the gold star mother pilgrimages became the largest, longest-lasting ritual of public mourning for war in U.S. history. At government expense, approximately 6500 mothers and unmarried widows traveled to Europe over the course of three years, making headlines and receiving honors from British, French and other Allied leaders. The pilgrimages created an extravaganza of publicity for gold star mothers and the military that conducted their trips.<sup>321</sup>

Representative Samuel Dickstein (D) of New York City sponsored the first pilgrimage bill to make it through a Congressional committee—the House's Committee on Military Affairs—in 1924. Dickstein had lost his brother in fighting near the Argonne

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Congressmen who supported the pilgrimages, I looked at the records of eight Congressmen who either spoke on behalf of the pilgrimage bill or who Representative David J. O'Connell (D-NY) thanked in his March 2, 1929 speech on the passage of the bill. They were Congressman Fiorello LaGuardia (R-NY), Congressman Samuel Dickstein (D-NY), Congressman Thomas Butler (R-PA), Congressman John J. Boylan (D-NY), Senator Henry Bingham (R-CT), Senator William H. McMaster (R-SD), and Senator Robert F. Wagner (D-NY). They varied in their opinions on a bill proposing to build more cruisers for the Navy (H.R. 11526), and in their positions on a bill that would alter the enforcement of Prohibition (S. 2901). I chose these issues as indices of attitudes toward disarmament and pacifism, and toward Victorian moral values and a traditionally women's issue. For O'Connell's speech, see U.S. Congress, S. 5332, 70<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record*, pts. 3-5 (2 March 1929), 5163.

<sup>321</sup>Graham, 1.

in October 1918, and he had helped his mother fill out the paperwork that had brought his brother's body back home as part of the federal government's offer to repatriate servicemen's bodies to their loved ones in 1920. Seventy percent of servicemen's families elected to have the bodies returned. Dickstein believed that the pilgrimages would help soothe the grief of mothers whose illiteracy or other circumstances had prevented them from requesting the return of their sons' bodies.<sup>322</sup>

Dickstein saw the pilgrimage bill as a political winner. Though he lacked the seniority that would guarantee him allies to help push the bill through Congress, he told the Military Affairs committee that he believed Congress would pass the pilgrimage legislation unanimously. Who could vote against a bill benefiting "the finest type of Americans" and creating a commemorative event that could have an immeasurable "moral effect" upon the country and the "whole civilized world"? Congressman Cordell Hull (D-TN) agreed; he predicted that no one would vote against the bill. Mrs. Mary Hallberg, a Gold Star mother, may have articulated the politicians' calculations when she declared that no "100-per cent American" could vote against it.<sup>323</sup>

On the other hand, Secretary of War John Weeks had written the House committee a short, clear letter spelling out the War Department's objections to the bill. Each was based on the War Department's meager budget and staffing, and the potential for the pilgrimages to create overwhelming logistics, costs, safety concerns and a need for a devoted staff to ferry the thousands of mothers—some presumably elderly and undergoing both grueling travel and profound grief—back and forth across the Atlantic.

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<sup>322</sup> Budreau, "The Politics of Remembrance," 377-8; Piehler, 94-7; Congress, House, Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearing To Authorize Mothers of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe To Visit the Graves*, 68<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 19 February 1924, 3-4.

<sup>323</sup> *To Authorize Mothers*, 1924, 3, 13, 25-6.

At a time when General John J. Pershing reported that the Army budget had been cut to “rock bottom,” Weeks resisted passing the pilgrimages, though the following year he would prove sensitive to the Army’s public image when he pushed for expanded Mother’s Day celebrations on the Army posts—a much cheaper and less complicated way to get publicity.<sup>324</sup>

During the 1924 hearings, those testifying on behalf of the bill argued chiefly in terms of the combination of nationalism and Victorian sentiment that characterized patriotic motherhood. Dickstein argued that the mothers deserved these pilgrimages, just as the veterans deserved their bonuses and benefits, for the mother had experienced the pains of war “right down deep in her heart.” The politicians who supported the bill repeatedly referred to the debt the nation owed these women as immense; “nothing is too good for any mother who surrenders her child in defense of the old flag,” Charles Stengle (D-NY) told the committee.<sup>325</sup>

The gold star mothers who testified emphasized mothers’ uniquely powerful emotions. Mrs. Effie B. Vedder of the Gold Star Association assured the Congressmen that they could not understand a mother’s experience. “It is a part of her body that is lying over there.” After devoting themselves to raising their sons for approximately 20 years, the bereaved mothers experienced their grief as a “shock,” after which their minds “wandered off.” Mrs. Jennie Walsh of Brooklyn testified that she went to Europe to visit her son’s grave on the advice of her physician: “I was losing my mind.” The sight of his

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<sup>324</sup> Weeks, *To Authorize Mothers*, 1924, 22-3; “Final Report of General John J. Pershing, as Chief of Staff of the United States Army,” September 12, 1924, File 2045-929 to 2045-936; Military Intelligence Division Correspondence, 1917-1941; Record Group 165 Records of the War Department General Staff; NARA II, College Park, MD, 1.

<sup>325</sup> *To Authorize Mothers*, 1924, 4, 2. A large number of New York Congressmen supported the 1924 and 1928 bills. New York state gold star mothers’ groups were particularly active in campaigning for the legislation, and of course New York City was the country’s largest port, meaning that federal money for the pilgrimages would likely benefit the city’s tourist industry.

grave provided her with some solace, and she believed it had helped to cure her. Each woman testifying before the committee told her own story of loss and offered the pilgrimages as a way the government could help the mothers heal their grief. Congressmen accepted that visiting a loved one's burial place was an essential aspect of grieving.<sup>326</sup>

A few of Dickstein's statements suggested that he also saw the pilgrimages as a grand public gesture. As discussed above, Dickstein had touted the pilgrimages' "moral effect" on the nation and the world; he went on to criticize "our officials," presumably in the War Department, who had not understood the bill's "importance." Later, when Representative Joseph L. Hill (D-AL) suggested that perhaps the government should pay private tour companies to take the mothers to Europe—circumventing the War Department—Dickstein replied that it would "take the effect away." Hill repeated, "You think it would take the effect away?" and Dickstein said yes. He never spelled out what "effect" he wanted, and Hill did not prompt him to explain. Clearly the private tour companies could accomplish the stated goal of the bill: to allow the women to visit their sons' graves and thus have an opportunity to bring their grief to closure. It seems likely that Dickstein wanted something more; he wanted the U.S. military itself to welcome the gold star mothers onto ships, and to shepherd them through the military cemeteries of France. At a time when the War Department was under siege by the concerted actions of pacifists, proponents of disarmament and a public who believed the last war had been fought and won in order to end war itself, the Army faced shrinking appropriations, with attendant problems in personnel and armaments. While Dickstein may have wanted to cast military men as heroes in the drama of the mothers' pilgrimages, the War

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<sup>326</sup> *To Authorize Mothers*, 1924, 15, 20, 21.

Department balked at taking a golden public relations opportunity—just as they had at the idea of creating an American Unknown Soldier.<sup>327</sup>

The pilgrimage bill did not succeed in 1924. Opposition in the House Military Affairs committee hearing swirled around the cost of the pilgrimages, the open-ended wording of the bill as proposed, and the War Department's opposition. The head of the Military Affairs Committee, John C. McKenzie (R-IL), and committee members John J. McSwain (D-SC) and Cordell Hull (D-TN) questioned the wisdom of the proposed legislation—even as they praised gold star mothers. The bill was reported out of committee but never came to a vote in the House.<sup>328</sup>

In 1928, a new pilgrimage bill proposed by Congressman Thomas S. Butler (R-PA) succeeded where the bill in 1924 had failed. Its success can be credited to three main factors. First, Butler had sidestepped potential opposition from the War Department by asking the Red Cross to conduct the pilgrimages. Second, newspapers across the country had begun to run stories praising the pilgrimage proposal. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Butler had been a Congressman for twenty years, and he had acquired the clout and allies necessary to see the bill through the House and Senate. Just as in 1924, in 1928 and 1929 no politician wanted to go on record as opposing the bill, and this time no pressure from the War Department stymied its passage.<sup>329</sup>

Butler saw the pilgrimages as a way to honor the gold star mothers above all other citizens; he pointed out that the women would be the guests of the United States government as no other group had been before. He saw their trip to Europe as a reminder

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<sup>327</sup> *To Authorize Mothers*, 1924, 3, 17.

<sup>328</sup> Congress, House, Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearing To Authorize Mothers and Unmarried Widows of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe to Visit the Graves*, 70<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 27 January 1928, 2, 24.

<sup>329</sup> *To Authorize Mothers and Unmarried Widows*, 1928, 2, 24-5.

to all that war brought grief and destruction in its wake, and he believed it would show Europeans that Americans “do not forget.” In Butler’s bill, the Red Cross would undertake the task of organizing the women’s trips, shepherding them across the Atlantic and through the cemeteries, and seeing them safely home. These logistics included not only accommodations, transportation, and food, but also nursing, as the War Department’s study on the logistics of the 1924 bill had predicted that mothers would be both elderly and overwrought. The Red Cross had already helped organize an American Legion trip to Europe, and so had proven they were capable.<sup>330</sup>

Butler cast the reliance on the Red Cross as an improvement over the older legislation. The pilgrimages were to be “a mission of mercy,” and so it would be better to “keep the soldiery out of it.” He implied that were the military to undertake the pilgrimages, they would become a “parade” or a “junktet,” a nationalist publicity trip. He did not want any “standards to be thrown into the air” announcing the gold star mothers’ presence or emphasizing their “standing at home with us.”<sup>331</sup>

In the bill’s second major change, Butler included unmarried widows of the fallen world war servicemen in the pilgrimages, a group that Dickstein had excluded. No one at the hearing questioned why only those widows who had remained single in the ten years since the end of the war would be rewarded with pilgrimages; this may have been because legal precedent defined only unmarried widows as widows. A widow who had remarried had become a wife to her new husband, and so was ineligible. Some mothers disagreed even with this limited inclusion of widows. Two officers of the American War Mothers attacked widows as unworthy, highlighting their commitment to Victorian ideals

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<sup>330</sup> *To Authorize Mothers and Widows*, 1928, 3, 2-4.

<sup>331</sup> *To Authorize Mothers and Widows*, 1928, 2.

of the supremacy of a mothers' love and the importance of sexual propriety. Mrs. Charles Haas, the New York state president of the organization, said that many of the mothers she knew objected to the inclusion of widows, as so many wives of New York City soldiers were divorced while others had remarried shortly after their soldier or sailor husband had "gone." Mrs. Ethel Nock, head of the American War Mothers' gold star committee, said the wives of servicemen were "not worthy," and had married under impulse. They had met their future husbands in the military camps, which implied that they were prostitutes or loose women, as the military had created tight regulations to keep women out of the camps. When Representative Sol Bloom told Nock that his wife loved him just as much as his mother did, Nock disagreed. "I take exception to that," Nock explained. "I think that mother love is greater than anything in the world." Just as in 1924, no widows testified to ask to be included in the pilgrimages; the organized mothers' groups dominated the hearings. Though unmarried widows were added to the bill, politicians' speeches and the press coverage of the trips emphasized mothers.<sup>332</sup>

As in 1924, testimony in the hearings centered on mothers' grief, their devotion to their sons, and their loyalty to the nation. In 1928, however, Congressmen also emphasized that the pilgrimages would be a grand gesture of peace, and in a Senate subcommittee's review of the legislation, Senators called the pilgrimages "a heart thing" and a "holy mission." When Congressman O'Connell said that no other group or person had made a greater sacrifice for the nation than the gold star mothers, he showed the

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<sup>332</sup> E.A. Kreger, Assistant to the Judge Advocate General to the Adjutant General of the Army, Dec. 10, 1919; Folder 293.8 (10-1-19) to 5-14-19; Central Decimal Files 1917-1925; Record Group 407 The Adjutant General's Office, NARA II, College Park, MD; Congress, Senate, Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs, *To Enable the Mothers and Unmarried Widows of the Deceased Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines of the American Forces Interred in the Cemeteries of Europe to Make a Pilgrimage to Those Cemeteries*, 70<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess, 14 May 1928, 27, 9-10.

strength of the ideology of Victorian motherhood—in which a son was a mother’s “all”—and also showed how thoroughly the gold star mothers had become identified with their dead sons, many of whom, after all, had endured a treacherous passage to Europe, trench warfare and poison gas attacks, and all of whom had died for the country. Disabled veterans had undergone similar trials and survived—only to come back to a country unprepared to give them the funding they needed to live independently and with dignity, at least according to some critics, who believed the money spent on sending mothers to Europe could be better used at home on behalf of veterans with disabilities.<sup>333</sup>

Some members of the American War Mothers had been agitating for pilgrimages since 1921, but gold star mothers’ groups from New York state took the lead in lobbying Congressmen to create and pass the legislation. The testimony of the American War Mothers, however, helped lead to changes in the 1928 bill so that the U.S. Army, and not the Red Cross, would conduct the pilgrimages.

Mrs. Ethel Nock of the War Mothers rejected Red Cross involvement in the pilgrimages; she wanted the U.S. Army to conduct the trips. She made her argument in terms of logistics—the Quartermaster Corps already knew the names of the war dead’s nearest relatives—and in terms of nationalism. “This is a strictly Government proposition . . .” she said. She then raised the emotional intensity of her argument by attacking both the Red Cross and widows at one time, saying that were the Red Cross to conduct the pilgrimages, the widows would turn them into pleasure trips. “I can not talk against them, but I do fear that many of the widows are going over with the thought of Paris,” she testified. A second American War Mother also told the committee that the Army should undertake the pilgrimages. The Senate version of the bill was changed and

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<sup>333</sup> *To Enable the Mothers and Unmarried Widows*, 1928, 10, 2, 19-20.

passed it into law; the Army would organize and conduct the pilgrimages. President Herbert Hoover sent the pen he used to sign the legislation to the American War Mothers.<sup>334</sup> For better or worse, the pilgrimages put patriotic motherhood at the center of public attention over the spring and summer of 1930-1933, years of tumult and conflict.

### **Conclusion**

Mothers of Great War servicemen, both surviving and fallen, held an important role in post-war culture. The American War Mothers was the largest organization claiming to stand for these mothers, and its officers consciously touted the importance of patriotic motherhood. All of its members were the biological mothers of servicemen; some were gold star mothers. Locally and nationally, officers of the American War Mothers cooperated with government and the press, acting as symbols of patriotic motherhood and stand-ins for their fallen sons in mourning ceremonies and patriotic holiday celebrations. They flew their service flag on the U.S. Capitol building, and Presidents and First Ladies received their officers in the White House. Their successful fundraising through carnation sales to tens of thousands of individuals show that many Americans wanted to give funds to their organization, and few questioned the penetration of military ideals into Mother's Day in the group's fundraising efforts or the American War Mothers' annual Mother's Day ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Gold star mothers stood as figureheads in the antiradical campaigns prosecuted by larger groups such as the American Legion Auxiliary and the well-connected Daughters of the American Revolution, and officers of the American War Mothers played a key role in major antiradical activities such as the creation of the Spider-Web chart, the break-up

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<sup>334</sup> *To Enable the Mothers and Unmarried Widows*, 1928, 8, 10, 23; White, 20.

of the International Council of Women, and the creation of the Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense. Locally, American War Mothers appeared in schools to tout Americanism and attempted to ensure that radical "isms" did not enter the educational system. When their officers appeared in testimony before Congress, they had the luxury of being able to attack pacifists and disarmament plans without fear of retribution. In the 1920s, patriotic motherhood and its representatives, the gold star mother and war mother, managed to appear so virtuous as to be above politics, despite their sometimes aggressive conservative campaigns. As one mother said in a hearing over the Gold Star Mother pilgrimages, no "100% American" would dare publicly oppose them, and though that bill did not pass, Congressmen killed it quietly by letting it languish without coming to a vote on the floor of the House or Senate.

In the 1930s all of this would change. Faced with fascism in Europe, anti-war activists attacked patriotic motherhood with a vitriol unseen in pacifist politics since the Great War itself. Gold star mothers were forced to go on the defensive. And as U.S. support for Great Britain was tested by international events, patriotic motherhood exploded into disarray as new mothers' organizations, older mothers' groups, and female politicians made conflicting claims about a mother's love and duty in wartime.

## Chapter Five

### **Kicked Off the Pedestal: Patriotic Motherhood in Conflict, 1928-1941**

In honor of Mother's Day, 1941, movie producer Cecil B. DeMille published an essay on the state of motherhood in America. His theme was simple: he wanted Americans to return to the practice of honoring their mothers. DeMille said he was disturbed when a mother of his acquaintance told him "the pedestal had been kicked out from under maternity—that the name 'Mother' had lost its magic." In sum, mothers were "going out of fashion." DeMille was shocked; he saw mothers as responsible for inspiring and maintaining civilization itself. He reminded readers of the famous Americans who had honored their mothers and the famous classical and Biblical mothers who had sacrificed all for their children. DeMille revealed that his own mother had not only kept his family together after the death of his father, putting himself and his brother through college despite lack of funds, but was responsible for Cecil's own successes in life. It was she who had pushed the young Cecil away from the world of theater and toward movies, a field that would make him famous.<sup>335</sup>

While DeMille mourned mothers' fall in status, he did not believe it could be permanent. With war raging in Europe, he predicted that all Americans would soon be valuing their mothers again. The death and destruction would remind Americans of the importance of home, and war would provide mothers with the opportunity to prove their self-sacrificing love for their children. While men fought, women would preserve the home front and make plans to rebuild the post-war world. Mothers, DeMille concluded, borrowing from Coleridge, would always be "the holiest thing alive."<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>335</sup>Cecil B. DeMille, "The Holiest Thing Alive," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 11 May 1941, B2.

<sup>336</sup>Ibid.

DeMille was correct in understanding his own day but very wrong in predicting the future. He showed remarkable sensitivity in detecting a shift in the ideology of motherhood noted by some of his female contemporaries and cited by many scholars today. In the late 1920s and 1930s, sentimental motherhood, including its corollary patriotic motherhood, was increasingly under attack by social scientists and writers. More than just a trend, the critical revision of traditional motherhood had powerful effects on fields such as psychology, social work, and education, with very real consequences for people's lives. At the same time, Americans re-assessing their country's role in the Great War and critical of the American status quo began to criticize and mock gold star mothers, who now faced condemnation instead of praise as female symbols of wartime loyalty. Gold Star mothers faced public attacks for racism, unthinking nationalism, and poor mothering.<sup>337</sup>

DeMille was also correct in seeing that war and crisis had the power to restore mothers to their pedestals, even if only temporarily. From 1938 to 1941, the sense of national emergency generated by ongoing Nazi victories and American mobilization revived women's anti-war activism and the associated rhetoric of sentimental

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<sup>337</sup> Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); on patriotic motherhood, see Ch. 2, "Mothers of the Nation: Patriotic Maternalism and its Critics," pp. 55-85. On experts' attacks on mothers and eclipsing of mothers as authorities on childrearing, see Elizabeth Rose, "Taking on a Mother's Job: Day Care in the 1920s and 1930s," in *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, eds. Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umanski (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 67-98; Kathleen W. Jones, "'Mother Made Me Do It': Mother-Blaming and the Women of Child Guidance," also in *"Bad" Mothers*, eds. Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umanski, 99-124; Julia Grant, "A 'Real Boy' and Not a Sissy: Gender, Childhood and Masculinity, 1890-1940," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 4 (Summer, 2004): 829-851; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana, U. of Illinois Press, 1994). Ladd-Taylor's *Mother-work* is particularly interesting for its combination of political, social and cultural history. She notes the way expert attacks on mothers as a whole contributed to the declining position of female administrators in the Children's Bureau, and she discusses the disintegration of the maternalist coalition in the 1920s as a factor in the decline of a "women's politics"—important in its real and perceived power—in the 1920s and 1930s.

motherhood. Despite newfangled theories condemning mothers' love as dangerous, politicians, publishers and women's leaders used descriptions of mothers' love for their sons to move political audiences against war. Gold star mothers, war mothers, and mothers of draft-aged sons found that once again they could use motherhood as a bully pulpit from which to pronounce on American foreign policy. In print and over the radio, in countless speeches, editorials, and poems, mothers presented opposing views of America's role in the world and what constituted a just war, demonstrating yet again that motherhood was not enough to create political unity among women.

Scholars have not attempted to reconcile this period of resurgent motherhood politics with the growing revisionism of the 1930s, perhaps because it was only a temporary phase. This reversal is important, however, as it sheds light on a central question about the politics of motherhood. Feminist scholars comparing mothers' political movements over time and around the world have theorized that women often turn to motherhood as a rationale for political activism in particularly conservative social environments. Theorists have also noted that modern wars have advanced women's equality in some ways while at the same time reviving conservative gender stereotypes and creating very unequal conditions for women. Margaret and Patrice Higonnet have called this a "double helix" structure for gender in wartime, in which gender equality can advance and retreat at the same time.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>338</sup>Annelise Orleck, "Tradition Unbound: Radical Mothers in International Perspective," in Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, Diana Taylor, eds., *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right* (Hanover, NH: U. Press of New England, 1997), 4-9; Margaret R. Higonnet and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix" in Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al., eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1987), 31-47; Lisa D. Brush, "Review: Love, Toil, and Trouble: Motherhood and Feminist Politics" *Signs* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 429-454.

This chapter considers how fears of impending war at the end of the 1930s prompted both isolationists and interventionists to embrace a rhetoric of traditional motherhood. The looming crisis in foreign relations inspired vicious domestic strife, and this exposed continuities in gender ideology hidden in more peaceful times. This finding suggests that in the United States, patriotic motherhood provided such a useful set of images and ideals that men and women could revive them as needed. Thus we see that even in times of advancing feminism and innovation in women's roles such as the 1930s, crisis can provide opportunities for women to creatively rework and re-imagine traditional female roles for their own political purposes.

This chapter will begin with a brief description of the gold star mother pilgrimages, the largest celebration of patriotic motherhood in U.S. history. This nationalist spectacle represented an apex of legislative success and publicity for the mothers' groups in the post-war period. The chapter will then trace the patriotic mother's fall from her pedestal in the 1930s, paying special attention to three areas of controversy: race, antiradicalism, and veterans' politics. In its final, third section, the chapter will examine the debates over intervention in the European war in 1939-1941, with attention to the way interventionists and isolationists presented gold star mothers, war mothers, and mothers of draft-aged sons as symbolic mothers of the nation. This section will highlight mothers' political agency and creativity, while also noting those times that mothers served as silent symbols supporting another's political program. It will conclude with a brief examination of the changing face of patriotic motherhood in the 1940s and succeeding decades.

## **Celebrating Gold Star Mothers, Celebrating a White Nation: The Politics of Commemoration**

The gold star mother pilgrimages of 1930-1933 should have been the capstone to a decade of triumph for patriotic motherhood, and a contemporary might have expected them to introduce another ten years of positive publicity for mothers' groups. Instead, the pilgrimages brought controversy and criticism that highlighted the political rather than sacred aspects of the mourning ritual. Designed to underscore consensus and national pride, the pilgrimages actually revealed deepening divisions in American life: conflicts over racial inequality, a backlash against the Victorian sentimental mother, and the early stirrings of an anti-war movement that would question the purpose and methods of the Great War. The pilgrimages presented gold star mothers as embodiments of feminine nationalism, but rather than making them heroes, this made them targets for activists unhappy with the American status quo. This section of the chapter will describe the initial publicity surrounding the pilgrimages, focusing on issues of national identity. After the Hoover administration decided to segregate the pilgrimages, African American activists and their white liberal allies succeeded in making the first substantive criticism of the gold star mothers that made it into the national press. As such, they were the first to expose the clay feet of these patriotic idols.<sup>339</sup>

The pilgrimages did succeed on one and perhaps the most important level: they pleased many of the participants, both black and white. A number of the widows and mothers who traveled to Europe to take part in the mourning rituals considered them a success. Mothers wrote heartfelt thanks to the Army officers who had conducted them, saying that the trips to their sons' and husbands' graves helped them heal their unresolved

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<sup>339</sup> Plant, 68-70.

grief. For these women, the pilgrimages functioned just as the Congressmen, veterans' groups, gold star mothers' and war mothers' organizations had hoped.<sup>340</sup>

Excellent books describe the experiences of the pilgrims and examine the pilgrimages in terms of social history. This chapter will focus on the pilgrimages in terms of pageantry and spectacle, the better to understand the visions of nation they communicated. For example, while both gold star mothers and widows went on pilgrimages, the press coverage highlighted mothers' participation and often ignored the presence of the widows. This resulted from the lingering effects of Great War domestic propaganda, which depicted the American Expeditionary Forces as wholesome "boys" supported from afar by their loving mothers. After the war, the gold star mother organizations helped perpetuate this version of events. Because it is concerned with nationalist beliefs, this chapter will follow the conventions established by the contemporary press and emphasize the mothers' participation.<sup>341</sup>

In 1928, the House sponsor of the pilgrimage legislation, Thomas S. Butler, opened his arguments for the pilgrimage bill by saying that he wanted the government to honor gold star mothers as no other group had ever been honored before. After the bill became law, the War Department took over the planning for the pilgrimages, and they followed this intention with one notable exception. They created separate pilgrimages for African American gold star mothers. The press learned of this development in the late

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<sup>340</sup> Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 216 on African American gold star mothers and widows; 237-9 on gold star mothers and widows as a whole; John W. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s: Overseas Grave Visitations by Mothers and Widows of Fallen U.S. World War I Soldiers* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005), 21-4; 114-5; on African American gold star mothers, 130-1; G. Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 102-105.

<sup>341</sup> See Budreau, Graham, and Piehler, fn 6. Piehler's book provides an overview which puts the pilgrimages in a larger context.

spring of 1930, just as the first pilgrimage groups—composed entirely of white women—were preparing to leave for Europe. Reading their newspapers, contemporaries would understand that the celebrations created in honor of the gold star mothers were celebrations of white America.<sup>342</sup>

The pilgrimages were a revival and celebration of World War I-era values. Though they no longer wore their gold star armbands, the pilgrims were given special gold star badges to wear on their journeys. Merchants including Tiffany's created and donated the badges. The badges set the women apart, informing locals and fellow passengers of their special status, but they also had a practical role. The federal government was responsible for paying for the women's meals and any gratuities, so they were meant to be useful to railroad porters. In preparation for the pilgrimages, hometown papers printed the names of women eligible to go and sometimes retold the stories of their sons' military service and death. Local units of veterans' organizations often organized special lunches and fetes for the gold star mothers preparing to go on pilgrimage or returning home.<sup>343</sup>

Each pilgrimage over 1930-1933 included the same basic itinerary, and the press covered the progress of each group of pilgrimages. The first group, leaving in May 1930, inaugurated the pilgrimages and received the most publicity. New York City officials and residents cooperated to create a spectacular send-off for the first pilgrimage group. The spectacle they created underscores the esteem that many contemporaries felt for gold

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<sup>342</sup> U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearing To Authorize Mothers and Unmarried Widows of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe to Visit the Graves*, 70<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 27 January 1928, 3, 2-4; Budreau, 210.

<sup>343</sup> George S. Cuhaj, "Gold Star Mothers—Their Voyages and Their Medals," *TAMS Journal: Official Organ of the Token and Medal Society* 20 (December 1980) online at [http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/gsm\\_kelly\\_pil\\_cuhaj.htm](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txmatago/gsm_kelly_pil_cuhaj.htm) (accessed November 22, 2009)

star mothers and the ideals of patriotic motherhood they embodied. Prior to the women's departure, "virtually all" the city's churches presented sermons on the subject of the gold star mothers and asked their congregations to pray for the pilgrims. Broadway stars volunteered to entertain the women, and military leaders and politicians made speeches praising them. Once the women were safely on board their ships and beginning their voyage, ship captains across New York harbor sounded their horns as a signal of respect. Fire ships saluted them by shooting water from their multiple fire hoses, creating feathery cascades. Airplanes dropped poppies onto the deck of the gold star mothers' ship, and a tugboat filled with waving gold star mothers from the New York area accompanied the larger ship partway out of the harbor into the open Atlantic.<sup>344</sup> The groups who publicly saluted the mothers indicate the women's popularity. Politicians, Broadway entertainers and ministers depend for their livelihoods on an understanding of trends and public opinion; their involvement hints at a broad level of support.

For this first pilgrimage, and to a lesser extent on later pilgrimages, a contingent of newspaper reporters accompanied the mothers on their voyage and reported details to the readers at home, including the women's three-course meals and first-class accommodations on board ship. These details evoked a measure of grumbling from Americans at home, who were not only suffering through the early years of the Depression but were also deprived of alcohol thanks to Prohibition. For the thrifty, the \$5 million cost of the pilgrimages, with approximately \$840 spent per pilgrim, seemed an exorbitant waste of money. For those aware of the continued suffering and poverty of the

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<sup>344</sup> "Gold Star Mothers' Vanguard in N.Y. for Trip to Europe," *The (Baltimore) Sun*, 6 May 1930, 11; "232 War Mothers Sail for France," *The (Baltimore) Sun*, 8 May 1930, 23; "Today's Programs in City's Churches," *New York Times*, 4 May 1930, N4; "Gold Star Ship Sails with 235 on Pilgrimage," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 May 1930, 5.

disabled veterans, or critical of the government's inadequate relief for the unemployed, the pilgrims were especially galling.<sup>345</sup>

Critics' voices were still quiet in 1930, however, as the first group of pilgrims took part in ceremonies of mourning in France. Each group of pilgrims repeated these ceremonies, including a trip to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc d'Triomphe. There French world war heroes and officials addressed the visiting Americans; French veterans and their relatives also attended. A representative of the American gold star pilgrims laid a wreath on the Tomb. Such ceremonies celebrated French and American cooperation despite the tensions that had arisen between the two nations' governments over war loan repayments and rearmament.<sup>346</sup>

General John J. Pershing addressed several groups of American pilgrims on their visits to the Tomb. In one such speech, he told the mothers that their childrearing had made the Allied victory over Germany possible. They had raised sons of courage and fortitude, he said, and this had been the most significant factor in the war. Pershing was still a hero to many Americans, and newspapers repeated his ideas to audiences across the country. His words highlighted the continuing relevance of patriotic motherhood to a generation of nationalists, especially veterans. The U.S. Ambassadors to France used very similar themes in his speeches to gold star pilgrim groups. Though in the 1930s such sentiments began to seem old-fashioned, they remained a part of the larger culture thanks to the press and influential leaders of an older generation.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Budreau, 207, 218-219; Plant, 71-3.

<sup>346</sup> Graham, 159, 163.

<sup>347</sup> "Pershing Thanks Gold Star Group," *The (Baltimore) Sun*, 18 May 1930, 13; "Paris Welcomes New Gold Star Unit," *New York Times*, 2 Aug 1930, 6; Graham, 168. The Associated Press covered Pershing's speech and so his words were sent to papers nationwide.

After a few days in Paris, the women then proceeded to nearby military cemeteries where they visited the graves of their loved ones. A few of the pilgrimage groups proceeded to Britain, where memorials had been erected for sailors lost in offshore waters. In the farthest pilgrimage, one mother traveled to Romania, where her son had died while working in a relief mission for locals infected with smallpox. There she was the personal guest of the Queen of Romania; in Britain the Prince of Wales met with 36 mothers and presented them with autographed, vellum-covered diaries. Honored by royalty, ambassadors and generals, provided with fine meals and accommodations, the pilgrimages temporarily elevated the gold star mothers to a special status where they served as representatives of the United States, of their fallen sons, and of virtuous, traditional motherhood.<sup>348</sup>

But if the first and many following pilgrimages treated the mothers as honored guests, a second set of pilgrimages for a smaller group of pilgrims created unequal conditions and invidious distinction. Just before the first pilgrimage group left New York, the Hoover administration announced its decision to segregate the women by race. The cruise ship companies' own segregation policies further complicated the issue. The U.S. Shipping Lines, which had federal contracts to transport the white pilgrims, refused to carry African American pilgrims in the same first-class accommodations that the white pilgrims enjoyed. Instead, the cruise line's administrators wanted them to stay in special cabins reserved for African American use. Apparently attempting to follow the mandate of "separate but equal," the Hoover administration refused to allow the African American pilgrims to be housed in these inferior accommodations. The federal government instead

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<sup>348</sup> Graham, 18-22; "Gold Star Group Arrives in London," *New York Times*, 25 May 1930, 9; "Mother to View Son's Grave Kept Up By a Queen," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 June 1930, 13; "Prince Sees War Mothers," *New York Times*, 12 July 1930, 30.

rented smaller ships for the use of the African American pilgrims. These smaller ships took longer to make the transatlantic voyage. At least two of these ships, the S.S. American Merchant and the S.S. American Banker, took the African American women to Europe, and then took white pilgrims home on their return voyage. In New York, African American pilgrims did not stay at the same hotels as whites; in fact, they did not stay at a hotel at all but were housed in the YWCA. The Hoover administration clearly floundered on the impossibility of creating “separate but equal” treatment for the races, but above and beyond the issues of status and comfort, civil rights protesters focused on the sting of humiliation and sense of injustice that the segregation created. Creating separate pilgrimages for African American women sent a public message that the federal government would enforce racial hierarchies even among the heroic mothers of the world war dead.<sup>349</sup>

To understand the shock and anger of black activists and their white allies, it’s helpful to review the context of black contributions to the war effort in 1917 to 1919. When war was declared, many African American activists and writers urged young men to volunteer to serve in the military as a way to prove that they deserved equal citizenship. While historians still discuss the ambiguities and contradictions of this position, to many African Americans it seemed that war would provide an opportunity to erode racial prejudices and create a new era of race relations. The military maintained segregated units, however, and African American troops labored under extremely difficult circumstances. Discrimination and interracial violence led to national scandals exposing the ill-treatment of African American enlisted men in Southern training camps. In Europe, due to the prejudices of military leaders, most African Americans were

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<sup>349</sup> Budreau, 210-15.

assigned to the difficult, physical labor of supporting the fighting troops. Of those who made it into combat, notable African American units distinguished themselves. For example, the Harlem Hellfighters (369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment) became well known for their bravery. They spent more time in battle than any other American troops, participated in Chateau Thierry and Belleau Wood, and were among the first Americans to win the French award for bravery, the Croix de Guerre. At home, many African American leaders organized successful efforts in their communities to raise money for war bonds, participate in patriotic parades, and volunteer for the military or cooperate with the draft. African American women wrote to national women's leaders to volunteer to help promote the war and sell war bonds (see Chapter 2).<sup>350</sup>

The most important African American newspaper of the 1910s through 1930s, *The Chicago Defender* was a staunch advocate of African American support for the Great War. After Congress adopted pilgrimage legislation in 1928, the *Defender* urged eligible African-American women to participate. The paper suggested that the government would finally be making up to them for the loss of their loved ones—and the unfulfilled promises of equality that had motivated many servicemen and their families. Editors wrote that it was the “sacred duty” of all eligible African American widows and mothers to go on pilgrimage. Ten years after the end of the war, they may have held onto the hope that publicizing African American bravery in wartime would prove to recalcitrant whites that men and women of “the Race” deserved equality.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>350</sup> Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010); Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (NY: Henry Holt & Co., 2005); William Jordan, “‘The Damnable Dilemma’: African American Accommodation and Protest During World War I,” *Journal of American History* 81 no. 4 (March 1995): 1562-1583.

<sup>351</sup> “A Trip for War Mothers,” *The Chicago Defender*, 20 July 1929, A2; “Attention, War Mothers!” *The Chicago Defender*, 16 November 1929, 14; “Judge Terrell Launches Chicago Liberty Loan Drive,”

The War Department's announcement of their plan to segregate the pilgrimages brought a swift response from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), who called it a "gratuitous insult." The NAACP's statement referred bitterly to the disappointed hopes for African American equality that was one legacy of World War I. The NAACP asked African American mothers and widows to reject the invitations to the pilgrimages rather than accept second-class status, and the group began a petition campaign. The *New York Times* estimated that out of 151 African American women invited to join a 1930 pilgrimage, 55 signed the NAACP's petition protesting the segregation. According to the leading historian of the pilgrimages, Lisa M. Budreau, women lodged hundreds of protests with the War Department over the three-year course of the pilgrimages.<sup>352</sup>

The War Department did not budge in its policies. Budreau has found that not only President Herbert Hoover but also Quartermaster General John L. DeWitt, the highest military official in charge of organizing and overseeing the pilgrimages, supported the plan to segregate. Hoover did ask for one modification, however. He asked General DeWitt if the white pilgrims could be given a choice of ship so they could travel in an integrated company or an all-white company. According to Budreau, Hoover did this not to promote integration, but in an attempt to shift the blame for segregation onto the white gold star mothers and widows. General DeWitt rejected the president's idea. He pointed out that if the plans for the pilgrimages were changed, it could create

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*The Chicago Defender*, 5 Oct. 1918, 1; "Mine Eyes Have Seen," Alice Dunbar Nelson, *The Crisis* 15, April 1918, 271-5. W.E.B. DuBois is the most famous proponent of this position, but evidence suggests that other African Americans, including some voluntary enlistees, also supported it. See James P. Finley, "Buffalo Soldiers at Huachuca: Racial Awareness After the War," *Huachuca Illustrated: A Magazine of the Fort Huachuca Museum*, Special Issue: The Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Huachuca 2 (1996), <http://net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/comment/huachuca/HI2-10.htm> (accessed July 2, 2010).

<sup>352</sup> Budreau, 210-11; "Capital Rebuffs Gold Star Negroes," *New York Times*, 30 May 1930, 12; 'Decline Jim Crow,' NAACP Tells Gold Star Mothers, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 May 1930, 3.

more bad press for the federal government and would perhaps cause problems with contracts with the shipping companies.<sup>353</sup>

Though Hoover's proposal was never carried out, the administration did change the tone of its announcements to place more responsibility for the segregation on the participating women. The War Department's earliest press statements had stressed that all accommodations would be perfectly equal and said that the segregation was the only way to provide "suitable accommodations for all."<sup>354</sup> A few months later, the Secretary of War expanded on his earlier statements, telling reporters that the War Department "did not want to disturb the natural contacts of the pilgrims." He also said that they would allow any African American pilgrim to join a white group if the white group unanimously welcomed her—clearly a way to shift blame for the segregation onto white women.<sup>355</sup> The Secretary of War and Quartermaster General were likely confident that this would not happen, as the shipping companies would have refused to transport an integrated group.

The NAACP did not respond to the government's attempt to shift responsibility onto white women. Rather than pressuring the gold star pilgrims to integrate, the organization continued to pressure the federal government to change its policy. Its second strategy—urging African American mothers and widows to reject the invitations to go on pilgrimage—did not result in any conclusive victory. Though a number of eligible black women lodged petitions and protests, this did not indicate their intention to withdraw from the pilgrimages. While some African American women did withdraw,

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<sup>353</sup> Budreau, 211-217.

<sup>354</sup> Article 1--No Title, Associated Press, *Washington Post*, May 30, 1930, 3, in Proquest Historical Newspapers Database (accessed November 22, 2008).

<sup>355</sup> "Ship Companies Exclude Negro War Mothers," *The (Baltimore) Sun*, 11 July 1930, 1.

this number was not out of proportion when compared to the number of white women who also withdrew at the last minute, usually due to family, health or other emergencies at home. The NAACP and War Department disagreed about the meaning of the African American women's withdrawal, with the NAACP citing the women as protesters and the War Department emphasizing more mundane explanations. Out of 233 African American women invited to go on pilgrimage in 1930, 102 accepted; 122 refused. Only seven of the refusals included a protest against segregation. This rate of refusal was about equal to that of white women, approximately 50%. After reviewing the totals in her book on the pilgrimages, Lisa M. Budreau concluded that for African American mothers, the opportunity the pilgrimages presented to women to see the places their sons had last seen, and to visit their graves, was simply too valuable to pass up. By signing petitions and sending letters, they protested on behalf of their race, but they also took the journey to the European cemeteries out of the desire to honor their sons' memories and to gain peace in their mourning.<sup>356</sup>

This account has emphasized the negative without also recognizing the unique benefits that African American identity and community brought to the pilgrimage experience. Once in Paris, for example, the African American mothers were welcomed and feted by the African American expatriate community there, especially artists, entertainers and restaurateurs. This lent a special festivity and sense of both racial and national pride to their arrival. One historian of the pilgrimages has even contrasted this reception with the distinct lack of enthusiasm for the pilgrimages expressed by white American expatriates in the artistic and literary communities. Finally, despite the segregation and attendant controversy, the pilgrimages seem to have brought satisfaction

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<sup>356</sup> Budreau, 215-17, 239.

to the African American mothers and widows who participated. African American pilgrims wrote to thank the military officers and nurses—white and black—who had conducted them. The women recorded their satisfaction with having finally visited their loved ones' graves. Mrs. G.A. Buckley of Michigan expressed gratitude to the federal government and wrote to thank the officer who had conducted her pilgrimage, saying, "I feel that a gap has been filled, and that now I have seen my dear son's resting place, and know that it will be forever kept beautiful, I am more contented."<sup>357</sup>

In the United States, the segregation of the pilgrimages inaugurated a larger discussion of race and national belonging, and it was a turning point in discussions of patriotic motherhood. In May 1931, just as the second year of pilgrimages began, the Illinois House of Representatives passed a resolution asking President Hoover to order the War Department to group all Illinois mothers and widows on the same ships, regardless of race. The proposal originated with African American legislator George W. Blackwell and passed unanimously. During the legislature's discussion of the bill, African American Representative William E. King spoke of the segregation as offending his "whole moral being." He emphasized the heroism of the gold star mothers and widows. "I call upon you . . . in the name of American justice, in the name of motherhood, and as a tribute to those heroes who lie beneath the sod of France, to send to the nation and its president your protest against an act which reeks with injustice."<sup>358</sup>

For the American War Mothers, racial differences and conflicts could not be swept under the rug in the 1930s as they had been during the 1920s. In May 1931, one of the most famous and popular war mothers in the country publicly scolded a California

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<sup>357</sup> Mrs. G.A. Buckley, originally quoted in Connie Potter, "World War I Gold Star Mothers Pilgrimages, Part II," *Prologue* 31 (Fall 1999), 215; quoted in Graham, 131; Budreau, 213-5; Graham, 127-30.

<sup>358</sup> "Pass Resolution to Prevent Segregation of War Mothers," *The Chicago Defender*, 9 May 1931, 13.

chapter of the War Mothers for their racial intolerance. Occurring so close in time to the inauguration of the second group of pilgrimages, and Illinois' demand for their integration, the story made national news.

Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink was a popular opera singer who had been born in Germany before moving to the U.S. During the war, four of her sons fought for the U.S.; one fought for Germany. In wartime she took a prominent role in promoting the war and selling war bonds, speaking and singing to assembled crowds, and she became one of the most famous and popular "war mothers" of the era. After the war, she does not seem to have joined the American War Mothers, American Legion Auxiliary or any other patriotic motherhood organization, but she remained a favorite celebrity of many veterans and mothers of soldiers.<sup>359</sup> Schumann-Heink came into conflict with the Sacramento, CA chapter of the American War Mothers when the group protested the singer's mixing of black, white, and Asian children onstage in her local concert. Rather than changing to an all-white cast, Schumann-Heink stood up to the organization. When the children entered the stage, she turned her back on the audience to sing to them. First, she sang them a lullaby, emphasizing their status as vulnerable innocents. She then asked the children to join her in singing "America" to the audience. She turned and addressed the audience directly.

As a war mother, I know what it means to suffer. I gave five sons, four to Uncle Sam and one to his old fatherland. It is up to the war mothers to teach their children a love of law, and not make a difference between

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<sup>359</sup> To understand her popularity, read her obituaries. The 1936-1938 national historian for the American Gold Star Mothers, Emma G. Christensen of Tustin, CA, collected a number in her scrapbook, which she entitled the "National History" of her organization, indicating how members of the AGSM, Inc. identified with Schumann-Heink as a patriotic mother. Veterans honored her in ceremonies at her funeral. See page with "Homage Paid at Bier of Madame Schumann-Heink," *Los Angeles Examiner*, 21 November 1936; and James Lee, "Body is Sent South for Last Rights," clippings in scrapbook, American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. collection; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

black, or yellow, or brown or white skins. You make war among yourselves through your children.<sup>360</sup>

The Associated Press picked up the story and it was widely distributed. Given its timing and topic, it is likely that contemporaries would have read the story as a reproach to all of those who supported the segregation of the pilgrimages.<sup>361</sup>

The American War Mothers had been, from its beginnings in Indiana, a largely white organization that thrived on its members' nostalgia for a white, Protestant American past. In the 1920s, the Indiana War Mothers had asserted that old-stock American bloodlines brought men the courage that pushed America to World War I victory, just as they had brought the North victory in the Civil War. One of the organization's early state officers later gained fame as a leading female Ku Klux Klan organizer, and the War Mothers in Oklahoma cooperated with the Klan politically in the 1920s. As late as 1941, the War Mothers' newsletter continued to praise Anglo-Saxon racial stock as the source of positive American traits. The organization allowed African American women to join, but they remained in segregated units that got little or no coverage in the organization's official publications. Nonetheless, in the Chicago area especially, but also in Washington D.C., Oakland, CA, and Kentucky, African American women established active chapters of the War Mothers. It is worth noting that the American Legion, which worked closely with the American War Mothers from the early 1920s, followed a states' rights policy on race in this era, allowing Southern whites to exclude blacks from membership. In the North, black Legionnaires usually established separate "posts," or local units. It is likely that the American War Mothers followed their

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<sup>360</sup> "Audience Rebuked by Schumann-Heink," *New York Times*, 24 May 1931, N8.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*; "Schumann-Heink Rebukes Mothers," *Washington Post*, 24 May 1931, M16; "Madame Schumann-Heink Flays War Mothers," *Chicago Defender*, 30 May 1931, 10.

example. According to one historian the American Gold Star Mothers of the 1920s and 1930s—a national organization for mothers of fallen soldiers and sailors that frequently worked with the War Mothers—did not allow black members even in separate units.<sup>362</sup>

The War Mothers' national organization remained silent on the issue of the segregation of the pilgrimages. When the chairman of the Gold Star committee, Ethel Nock, praised the Quartermaster Corps' conduct of the pilgrimages, saying "[e]very contingency has been provided for in the splendid plans," the implication was clear. Segregation was not a problem—at least for the white officers of the War Mothers.<sup>363</sup>

African American members of the War Mothers, however, kept pushing the organization to confront its racism, and the *Chicago Defender* followed their efforts. Just by participating in state and national conventions, the African American war mothers forced white mothers to consider policies on integration and office-holding. In California in 1929, Mrs. Hettie B. Tilghman became the first woman of color to be elected to state

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<sup>362</sup> Elizabeth S. Carr, "Why the Indianian?" *The Indianian* 1 no. 1 (August 1920): 5; "Women to March with the Legislators Today," *Boston Daily Globe*, 26 September 1923, 2; "National Project No. 2," *American War Mother* 18 no. 6 (Sept. 1941): 12; Budreau on American Legion and race, 168. Daisy Douglass Barr was First Vice-War Mother and Associate Editor for the Indiana War Mothers, see *The Indianian* 2 no. 1 (Sept. 1921), 5, and also a major Klan figure in Indiana, see Kathleen M. Blee, "Women in the 1920s' Ku Klux Klan Movement," *Feminist Studies* 17 no. 1 (Spring 1991), 9-10, 12, 20-1 and Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1992). Evidence of African American units of the War Mothers is available from: "Ask War Mothers to Condemn War," *The Chicago Defender*, 12 October 1935, 4; "American War Mothers," *The Chicago Defender*, 21 December 1935, 7; "White War Mothers Honor Mrs. Hettie B. Tilghman," *The Chicago Defender*, 29 June 1929, A1; "A Scrap Book for Women in Public Life," *The Chicago Defender*, 23 May 1931, 6; "Calaway Chapter of Colored Mothers, Centralia, IL," *American War Mother* 5, no. 1 (March 1928), 14; Mrs. Louise A. Pinckney, President, Lincoln Chapter American War Mothers (Colored), Washington DC, December 29, 1935 to Mr. McIntyre; President's Official File: American War Mothers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers; "Inventory of the American War Mothers, 1915-1953," July 31, 2007. Finding aid at the Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY: <http://history.ky.gov/sub.php?pageid=94&sectionid=14>. See pages 8, 13, 14. On AGSM and race, see Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: the Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 61. I have not been able to find this information elsewhere. Nor have I found any mention of African American AGSM units, however. A variety of gold star mother organizations and veterans' auxiliary organizations existed, so African American gold star mothers likely joined alternative groups, and many gold star mothers did join the AWM's segregated units.

<sup>363</sup> Ethel Nock, "The Gold Star Pilgrimage," *The American War Mother* 7 no. 5 (July 1930), 7. Nock lived close to Washington, DC.

office in the organization. She served as Historian. In 1930, Mrs. Laura Leake of Centralia, Illinois, attended the national War Mothers' convention held in Louisville, Kentucky. She was the only African American woman to do so. She reported herself very pleased with the other mothers' courtesy and even her treatment by locals. While she knew that the local cab driver and bell boy were reluctant to provide her with the same services they accorded whites, and ordinarily refused to blacks, she said that once they knew her credentials they "HAD to recognize me as a war mother." This quote suggests the hope that some African Americans pinned on national service—that it could trump racial prejudice, forcing whites to acknowledge black equality. For this reason, the segregation of the pilgrimages must have been a bitter disappointment to the nation's black servicemen, veterans and their families.<sup>364</sup>

Unlike the 1930 convention, however, the 1935 Washington, D.C. national AWM convention was segregated, and African American War Mothers from northern Illinois and New York protested. It seems that the organization's policies on segregated meetings were inconsistent, despite or perhaps because of increasing pressure to recognize African American equality. African American women created a letter writing campaign to President Roosevelt; Mrs. M.C. Lawton of Brooklyn asked if he intended to ignore the treatment of African American gold star mothers who had been denied entry to the War Mothers' banquet. Roosevelt forwarded her letter to the War Department. Apparently, he did intend to ignore the protests, just as he dodged other questions of racial equality. In 1935 the NAACP also urged the War Mothers to support an anti-

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<sup>364</sup> "White War Mothers Honor Mrs. Hettie B. Tilghman," *The Chicago Defender*, 29 June 1929, A1; "A Scrap Book for Women in Public Life," *The Chicago Defender*, 23 May 1931, 6. The story recounted the author's experiences at the previous year's convention.

lynching bill and to condemn Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. There is no record of the War Mothers' response to the NAACP or activity on either issue.<sup>365</sup>

African American War Mothers were often clubwomen active in other groups and devoted to "uplift for mankind," as the *Chicago Defender* described it. Profiles of their meetings show that the women felt close bonds with one another. For example, they recited the Mispah—"May the Lord watch between me and thee while we are absent from each other"—before ending their meetings. Such bonds between members harked back to the original purpose of the local war mothers' and gold star mothers' groups, which had grown based on mothers' desire to talk to women who could understand their wartime experiences. In the interwar years, such groups may also have drawn on the mothers' shared concern with veterans' and military issues.<sup>366</sup>

It would be naïve to dismiss the African American mothers' groups as apolitical, however. As Mrs. Hettie B. Tilghman explained, she had founded the Maria Baldwin branch of the War Mothers in Oakland, CA as part of her belief "that every contact with other groups helps to create better understanding."<sup>367</sup> African American war mothers and gold star mothers stood for a tradition of heroism that many whites would just as soon have forgotten. Their attendance at national and state meetings and participation in public events brought them into confrontation with the whites-only nationalism that the federal government and patriotic groups promoted in the memorialization of the First World War—explicitly or implicitly—since the Burial of the Unknown Soldier in 1921.

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<sup>365</sup> "American War Mothers," *The Chicago Defender*, 21 December 1935, 7; Mrs. M.C. Lawton, Brooklyn, NY to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 11/19/35; Official File: Gold Star Mothers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers; "Ask War Mothers to Condemn War," *The Chicago Defender*, 12 October 1935, 4.

<sup>366</sup> "A Scrap Book for Women in Public Life," *The Chicago Defender*, 23 May 1931, 6; "Gentle War Mother Heads Clubwomen's Peace Program," *The Chicago Defender*, 19 February 1938, 17; "War Mothers Hold Summer Closing Meet," *The Chicago Defender*, 27 August 1938, 17.

<sup>367</sup> "A Scrap Book for Women in Public Life," *The Chicago Defender*, 23 May 1931, 6.

Ultimately, the agitation of the NAACP, *Chicago Defender* and African American women showed that they perceived patriotic motherhood as an important role and a symbol linked to both nation and citizenship.<sup>368</sup>

The NAACP, Madame Schumann-Heink and the black press were the first to publicly chastise the gold star mothers and war mothers as flawed individuals rather than simply praising them as nationalist heroines. To black activists and their white allies, the women's tacit or active support for segregation cast doubt on their reputation for motherly morality and disinterested patriotism.

Race proved to be an enduring theme of the 1930s critique of the gold star mothers. As the decade advanced, published attacks on the gold star mothers grew more common and increasingly vicious. In 1935 the men's magazine *Esquire* published a satirical piece in which author Philip Stevenson depicted the gold star mothers as cows who celebrated the butchery of their sons. Stevenson took patriotic motherhood propaganda and inverted it; he portrayed the mother-cows as unthinking conformists lacking any true mother love or morality. Filled with high self-regard, the cows enjoyed the special status of gold star mothers rather than grieving for their lost children. As a final satirical touch, the author depicted the mother-cow narrator as particularly ignorant, unthinking and prejudiced against the black cow, Mrs. Guernsey.<sup>369</sup>

### **“Mother is the Menace”: Rethinking a Mother's Role in a Democratic Society**

1933 was the last year of the gold star mother pilgrimages; it was also the year that Hitler took control of Germany. As American newspapers told readers of the mounting tensions in Europe and described rearmament along the French and German

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<sup>368</sup> On white nationalism, see Piehler, 104-5, 121.

<sup>369</sup> Plant, 75-6; Philip Stevenson, “Gold Star Mother,” *Esquire*, December 1935, 47.

border, more than one author concluded that the “war to end all wars” had been futile. In this atmosphere, the well-known American literary critic Herschel Brickell reviewed a British author’s First World War memoir and meditation on current events. First he echoed the author’s disgust for the “brutality of the old phrases, including ‘I gave my son.’” Then Brickell asked his readers, “[I]s there anything more genuinely sickening than the shiploads of Gold Star Mothers holding small American flags and making the roundtrip at Government expense?”<sup>370</sup>

Though the pilgrimages had provoked some grumbling, this was one of the first outright attacks on gold star mothers printed in the 1930s. It was to be the first of many. Patriotic motherhood ideals had been so important to Great War culture that as more Americans began to reevaluate that conflict, questioning its purpose and methods, they also began to criticize patriotic motherhood and its primary symbols, the gold star mothers. After 1933, a growing anti-war movement and a backlash against the politics of “professional patriots”—veterans’ groups and their allies—animated an irreverent and angry rebellion against gold star mothers and the patriotic motherhood of the Great War generation.<sup>371</sup>

While some authors have blamed the public criticism of gold star mothers on the post-war backlash against everything Victorian and sentimental—including older models of motherhood—this explanation is only partial. It is true that when social scientists, intellectuals and writers attacked sentimental motherhood, they made it not only

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<sup>370</sup> Edmond Taylor, “War Hates Rise Amid Graves of Soldier Dead,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 November 1933, 1; Herschel Brickell, “The Literary Landscape,” *The North American Review* 236 No. 3 (Sept. 1933): 287.

<sup>371</sup> This phrase is Norman Hapgood’s. His book, *Professional Patriots* (NY: Boni, 1927), criticized a number of organizations for exploiting Americans’ patriotism. He did not criticize the patriotic motherhood groups, a sign that in the 1920s they were still considered to be above politics.

acceptable but even fashionable to criticize mothers. And new prescriptions for modern motherhood provided some of the themes for attacks on gold star mothers. It was the anti-war movement, however, that truly energized protests against patriotic motherhood and satires of the gold star mother. Ultimately, the activists and writers who attacked ideals of patriotic motherhood hoped to prevent war by freeing the younger generation from the influence of its elders.<sup>372</sup>

Idealizing mothers had deep roots in American culture and the larger Anglophone world. Starting in the nineteenth-century, ministers and writers praised mothers as the center of the family, ruling the home through love and influencing their husbands and children through their superior morality. The moral mother remained a middle-class ideal closely tied to the gendering of women as pious, pure, domestic and submissive. Numerous popular sources compared the warmth, strength, and self-sacrifice of a mother's love to that of Jesus—quite an example for women to live up to. Of course, not every woman could or wanted to conform to this image, nor did every American idealize it, but through the long nineteenth-century public discussions of motherhood remained stable around this set of ideas. From “mother songs” to memoirs, evidence suggests that many Americans did look on their mothers as saintly and loving, and that many mothers exercised great power over their children even into their adult lives. In the Progressive era, advocates of women's rights used these conceptions of moral motherhood to argue for a larger woman's role in politics, including the maternalist reforms that would offer

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<sup>372</sup>See Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* for an insightful analysis of changing ideas of motherhood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Plant sees the reevaluation of sentimental motherhood as the causative factor behind attacks on gold star mothers and what she calls patriotic maternalism.

women and children special public health protections and welfare support. These ideas of a mother's role also flowered into the maternalist peace movement.<sup>373</sup>

Over the 1920s and 1930s, however, there was a major change in public discussions of motherhood. Professionals, intellectuals and artists increasingly depicted mothers in terms of a dangerous, smothering love that endangered their children, especially sons. Critic Rachael O. Kallen explained to readers that the new theories of motherhood stretched across disciplinary boundaries, "The discovery that Mother is the menace to her baby's future is not limited to psychoanalysis." Indeed, new ranks of professional childrearing experts, including social workers and kindergarten teachers, questioned mothers' capacity to know what was right for their children. They assumed the role of correcting mothers' methods of disciplining, teaching and even feeding their children. While Progressive-era social workers had previously criticized and examined working-class and immigrant parents' childrearing, the spread of such scrutiny to middle and upper-class parents was a new phenomenon. Many of the people questioning mothers' expertise were other women; at the heart of the 1930s reevaluation of motherhood lay a generational conflict.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Ruth H. Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815," *Feminist Studies* 4 (1978): 101-126; Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: the American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1976); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: the Family in Oneida County, New York: 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge, UP, 1981); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978); for discussions of maternalism and the maternal peace movement, see Ch. 1.

<sup>374</sup> Rachael O. Kallen, "Bringing Up Mother," *The Bookman: A Review of Books and Life* (Aug. 1928): XVIII-XX; Elizabeth Rose, "Taking on a Mother's Job: Day Care in the 1920s and 1930s," in "*Bad* Mothers: *The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, eds. Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 67-98; Kathleen W. Jones, "Mother Made Me Do It": Mother-Blaming and the Women of Child Guidance," in "*Bad* Mothers: *The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, eds. Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umanski, (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 99-124; John B. Watson, *Psychological Care of Infant and Child* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1928); David M. Levy, *Maternal Overprotection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1943). Levy was a Freudian while Watson rejected Freud. Levy's 1943 book was based on research conducted by Smith College social work students in the late 1920s and 1930s.

Short stories, plays and films frequently presented love triangles between a mother, a son and his sweetheart. Mothers were the villains, presented as manipulative monsters out to limit the freedoms of their sons and destroy youngsters' good times. Such storylines closely resembled Great War propaganda films that vilified anti-war mothers as clinging, but it is likely that they were also influenced by writers' fascination with Freudianism. In the 1920s and 1930s, Freudian psychologists questioned mothers' love for their sons while encouraging young people to express a normative heterosexuality. Increasingly, authors celebrated the erotic elements of heterosexual relations and marriage. Modern times inspired a new attitude toward heterosexual socializing among more affluent youth. College students embraced the petting and dating that Victorians had labeled immoral, and a growing number of psychologists and other adults considered this healthy. In the 1920s and 1930s, American society as a whole grew more accepting of sex as a natural part of life, a development reflected in skimpier fashions, a fascination with the risqué behavior of female celebrities, and experts' emphasis on sexual satisfaction in marriage. Sweethearts were eclipsing mothers as the appropriate female influence in a young man's life.<sup>375</sup>

This early twentieth century sexual revolution may have empowered individuals by acknowledging sexual desire as natural, but it also had a destructive side, as experts instructed women on their need for male influence. The psychologist John B. Watson, for example, not only condemned mothers' love as dangerous, but also wrote that

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<sup>375</sup> Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1995), 217-246 and 43-8; Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 260-290; Rebecca L. Davis, "'Not Marriage at all, But Simple Harlotry: the Companionate Marriage Controversy,'" *Journal of American History*, 94, no. 4 (March 2008): 1137-1163. Class was a significant variable in sexual behavior; see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986) and Ch. 3.

feminism resulted from an imbalance in women's sexual lives. This comment was a not-so-subtle attack on the many pioneering suffragists, maternalists, and maternal peace activists in the 1910s who were involved in long-term female partnerships—whether platonic or sexual. Though thriving homosexual communities existed in many cities in the 1910s through 1930s, in the 1920s and 1930s authors celebrated heterosexuality as psychologically healthy.<sup>376</sup>

Politically, a new generation of young women grew up comfortable with heterosexual socializing and uninterested in separate women's organizations. As described previously, by the late 1920s the maternalist movement for government protections and benefits for mothers and children was largely moribund. In a related development, the women's peace movement suffered from a lack of interest by young women. On college campuses young women joined peace groups where they worked with young men. Such organizations were unlikely to base their peace activism on a woman's unique identity as a mother. Maternalism and maternal pacifism—ideologies based on women's unique identities as nurturers—grew weaker.<sup>377</sup>

Parenting experts put a new, much larger emphasis on the role of the father in raising children. Reflecting this change, in 1924 the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers Association dropped Mothers from its title, continuing with the more gender-neutral moniker of the PTA. The organization welcomed and celebrated fathers' participation though it was still run largely by women. And while unmarried women had

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<sup>376</sup> John B. Watson, "The Weakness of Women," *The Nation* 125 (6 July 1927): 9-10; Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1999), 105-129; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (NY: Basic Books, 1995); .

<sup>377</sup> Susan Zeiger, "Finding a Cure for War: Women's Politics and the Peace Movement in the 1920s," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 1 (Autumn, 1990): 69-86.

been allowed, even encouraged, to adopt children in the 1910s, this policy began to change in the interwar decades, when social workers began to express a preference for heterosexual couples in which the father was available to balance the influence of the mother. Mothers removed from male influence, experts such as psychiatrist David M. Levy believed, were too emotional and clinging to raise their children to be healthy psychological adults.<sup>378</sup>

Adopting these modern attitudes, sometime between September 1933 and May 1934, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt wrote a magazine column for *Parents* advising readers that both mothers and fathers were responsible for the character formation and discipline of their children. Like so many other commentators, however, Roosevelt spent much of the body of her text advising mothers on their numerous responsibilities and warning them against common mistakes. Roosevelt praised fathers' involvement with their children but gave them far fewer instructions and criticisms. In this case the First Lady reflected a growing consensus about fathers' importance, but also the drawback with much contemporary childrearing literature. Mothers did the lion's share of the work, while getting most of the criticism and little of the credit.<sup>379</sup>

Connections from the realm of childrearing advice to that of patriotic motherhood might seem tenuous, but new beliefs in a diminished role for mothers and an enhanced role for fathers did affect people's thinking. Eleanor Roosevelt can again serve as a useful example, as her responses to trends and events were well documented in her

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<sup>378</sup> Ehrenreich and English, 185; Julie Berebitsky, *Like Our Very Own: Adoption and the Changing Culture of Motherhood* (Lawrence, KS: U. Press of Kansas, 2000), 114-127. Levy's *Maternal Overprotection* theorized that strong fathers could check the pathological tendencies of mothers' love; though published in 1943, the research for the book was conducted in the 1930s.

<sup>379</sup> Two Untitled Articles *Parents*, Speech and Article File, Sept. 1933-May 1934, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY.

voluminous writings and interviews. Just as she believed in emphasizing fathers' role in childrearing, she believed that gold star fathers deserved honors alongside gold star mothers. In 1939 she agreed with a gold star mother who had written her to suggest that celebrations for gold star mothers be replaced by celebrations for both gold star parents. Mrs. William Henning of Montevideo, Minnesota wrote on behalf of those she called the "forgotten fathers" of the world war dead—"Aren't their sons just as dear to them as they are to the mothers? I have been thinking about it for years but do not know what to do about it . . ." Eleanor wrote back to express her agreement, and she sent Mrs. Henning's letter on to the President for consideration, though he did not act on it.<sup>380</sup>

To Eleanor Roosevelt and Mrs. Henning, and increasing numbers of other women in this era, motherhood lacked the mystique it held for the proponents of sentimental and patriotic motherhood. In 1924 and 1928 gold star mothers had argued for their pilgrimages on the basis of a mother's uniquely intense and unending love for her child. In their testimony to Congressional committees, gold star mothers emphasized the continuing bond between a mother and child based on the bodily connection of pregnancy, birth and the intensive nurture of the very young. World War I-era propaganda had also frequently referred to this connection. Eleanor's uncle, Theodore Roosevelt, argued in 1918 that mothers, who risked their lives in childbirth, were equal in valor to the soldier. Theodore Roosevelt saw male soldiering and female mothering as noble callings necessary to support society. Eleanor rejected this vision of gendered nationalism and the Victorian formulation of motherhood it rested on. Eleanor represented a newly ascendant way of thinking about a woman's capacities that centered

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<sup>380</sup> Mrs. William Henning, Montevideo, MN to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Sept. 18, 1939; Official File: Gold Star Mothers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

on her work outside the home. She believed women had much to offer society, not because of their capacity to nurture, but because of their essential equality with men.<sup>381</sup>

As more and more authors, professionals and intellectuals criticized sentimental motherhood, they opened up a space for writers to denounce patriotic motherhood. This represented a significant change from the previous decade. In the 1920s, despite their very public antiradical agenda, the patriotic motherhood organizations seemed immune from political attack. Gold star mothers and the American War Mothers accused women's peace organizations of being communist dupes, for example, but women's peace organizations did not attack them in kind. Gold star mothers campaigned for special privileges such as the pilgrimages, but even Congressmen reluctant to approve the program praised the mothers effusively. The combination of nationalism and motherhood made gold star mothers politically untouchable for much of the decade. In the 1920s and 1930s, motherhood was no longer sacred; now, only their status as nationalist icons remained to keep gold star mothers immune from political attacks.<sup>382</sup>

In the 1930s, a growing British literature condemning the Great War and agitating against militarism and nationalism began to influence American writers and readers. As briefly discussed in the introduction to this chapter, in 1933 Knopf published Margaret Storm Jameson's wartime memoir and antiwar essay *No Time Like the Present* in New York and London. The book earned positive American reviews even though, or perhaps because, it blamed an older generation's faith in patriotic clichés for the war's brutality

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<sup>381</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Only Those Are Fit to Live Who Do Not Fear To Die," *Child-Welfare Magazine*, October 1918, 62-3; Jeansonne, 66; "First Lady to Face War 'If Necessary,'" *New York Times*, 20 Feb 1941, 8. My understanding of Eleanor Roosevelt is shaped by my reading of Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 1: 1884-1933* (NY: Viking, 1992) and *Eleanor Roosevelt, Vol. 2: The Defining Years, 1933-1938* (NY: Viking, 1999).

<sup>382</sup>See Ch. 4 on patriotic motherhood politics in the 1920s.

and millions of casualties. Jameson wrote, “In 1932, what lying, gaping mouth will say that it was worth while to kill my brother in his nineteenth year?” Jameson had been young in 1914-1918; now middle-aged, she had a seventeen-year-old son when she wrote her book. She looked on mothers’ role in supporting war with special bitterness. She excused the mothers of the Great War generation as simply too ignorant of war to know what they were doing in sending their sons. The destruction of modern, total war was new and unknown to them. But in 1933, she said, “any mother who thinks she serves her country by letting her son go without protest is either [intellectually] wanting or a murderess. And beside that she has betrayed him she has done as much for succeeding generations.”<sup>383</sup>

Jameson attempted to destroy the conventions of patriotic motherhood. A key document in the American pro-war publishing blitz at the start of the war in 1917 was Abraham Lincoln’s letter to Mrs. Bixby. Publishers in the Northern states reprinted the letter, in which Lincoln had consoled Mrs. Bixby for the loss of four sons in the Union army by saying they had been “sacrificed on the altar of freedom.” Mary Roberts Rinehart had used the phrase “altar of freedom” to great effect in an article designed to persuade mothers to send their sons into America’s Great War military and to support a military draft. Looking back from 1933, Jameson believed the phrase “the altar of freedom” could only evoke “discomfort” for the modern reader. Jameson compared the “altar of freedom,” with its requisite sacrifices of innocent blood, to the stone altars of primitive peoples, which she imagined performing human sacrifices. Jameson

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<sup>383</sup> Storm Jameson, *No Time Like the Present* (NY: Knopf, 1933), 283; “Books: Class of 1914,” *Time*, 26 June 1933, accessed January 10, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,882184-1,00.html>.

condemned modern nationalism as bloody, irrational, and arbitrary—no different from any “savage” religion.<sup>384</sup>

Jameson rebelled against mothers’ role in maintaining the illusions and hypocrisy that made the war palatable to those on the home front. Words like “sacrifice,” she says, “were faintly revolting,” but what really horrified her was the expression “I gave my son.” While she knew grief lay beneath it, she refused to believe that a parent had any right to “give” a son, especially to die in the horrible circumstances modern technology created, with its shrapnel wounds, mustard gas, field hospitals and wire entangled front lines. In a final repudiation of patriotic motherhood, Jameson swore that she would tell her son to refuse to go to war, and to understand that war was never worthwhile.<sup>385</sup>

American critics praised Jameson’s unstinting look at the last war and picked up on her criticism of patriotic motherhood. *Time* noted her refusal to raise her son to be a soldier, and as noted earlier, critic Hershel Brickell turned her analytical tools to the American situation with his criticism of the gold star mothers as “sickening” with their flag waving and reliance on government funds.<sup>386</sup>

Many later critics and activists would agree with Jameson and Brickell in condemning the mothers, but the John Ford film *Pilgrimage*, which also came out in 1933, provided a more ambivalent portrayal of patriotic motherhood. The film was popular with audiences and critics, and so should be understood as at least palatable to the public, if not necessarily an indication of public opinion. His mixing of old and new ideas of mother and nation helped him create a profitable film with a special appeal for

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<sup>384</sup> Mary Roberts Rinehart, “The Altar of Freedom,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, 21 April 1917, 6-7, 37; Jameson, 284-7.

<sup>385</sup> Jameson, 259, 287-8.

<sup>386</sup> “Books: Class of 1914;” Brickell, 287.

women. Ford's film featured a gold star mother who was both heroine and villain. The film managed to condemn the nationalist spectacle of the pilgrimages while portraying the gold star mothers as representatives of American virtue.<sup>387</sup>

With obvious Freudian overtones, the first half of the film focused on a mother's possessive, destructive love for her son; it should be understood in the context of the professional and popular revision of motherhood ideals in the 1930s. In this decade, psychologists, social workers and many educators published studies criticizing the passionate mother-love so idealized at the turn-of-the-century. The film's main character Hannah Jessop was a hard-working farm owner who not only kept house but worked the fields alongside her son Jim. She denied Jim independence by refusing to allow him to join the army and go to war, and by refusing to allow him to marry his girlfriend. "You want to keep me tied to your apron strings. You've hated every girl I've ever looked at," he raged. Confirming his accusations, his mother told him, "All right, if you love her you can't love me." After finding out that he intended to marry his girlfriend, Jessop ensured her son was drafted into the army. He was sent to France, where he was soon killed. In *Pilgrimage*, the war was no noble endeavor; it was a destructive monster with an appetite for young men. The son's death was doubly cruel, because the viewer learns that his girlfriend was pregnant with his child, who would now be born illegitimately and without a father. If only Jessop had been a modern mother who encouraged her son's independence and trusted his judgment, the film implies, this tragedy would have been averted.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> John Ford, dir. *Pilgrimage*, DVD, (Fox Film Corporation, 1933). For short discussions of the film, see Plant, 75; Graham, 195-7; Joseph McBride, *Searching for John Ford: A Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 194-99.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

In the second half of the film, Hannah Jessop was redeemed, but only through a path of immense pain. She began to earn the sympathy of the viewer by showing her deep grief over her son's death, and she revealed her integrity by refusing to capitalize on her status as a gold star mother. In fact, she was impatient with her neighbors' condolences, which they couched in patriotic terms, and with the patriotic pieties articulated by the organizers of the mothers' pilgrimages. Jessop considered herself unworthy to go on pilgrimage but was pressured into going by her local mayor. To him, the existence of a gold star mother in their small Arkansas town was a point of local pride.<sup>389</sup>

Despite her initial reluctance, going on pilgrimage offered Jessop a chance to heal. On board ship, she confessed to the other mothers that she had caused her son's death; rather than shunning her, the women offered her compassion. Jessop could not allow herself to move on after her son's death until in Paris she came to the aid of a young man considering suicide. She prevented him from jumping off a bridge and then helped him by persuading his snobbish upper-class mother to accept his love for his French sweetheart. On returning home from the pilgrimage, Jessop acknowledged her son's child and his mother as her family. The closing scenes implied that she would use her farm's earnings to help them out and that they would bring love and affection back into her life.<sup>390</sup>

A few key characteristics made Jessop sympathetic rather than a caricature. First, she did not enjoy the status of gold star mother but attempted to avoid any special treatment. Her impatience with hypocrisy gave Hannah Jessop integrity and

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

distinguished her from the vilified patriots depicted by authors like Jameson and Brickell. Second, by the end of the film Jessop was able to rise above her possessive love for her son and to accept and even support the sexual and romantic pairings of the younger generation.

*Pilgrimage* indicated the continued power of older motherhood ideals even in the midst of change. Jessop's love for her son may have been misguided, but it was still powerful and never-ending. Motherhood was her most important role. She was extremely hard working and after her son's death she was able to expand her farm's holdings, but she was only redeemed when she nurtured the young man she met in Paris. Then she was able to return home to the promise of new, loving family relationships. Finally, director John Ford portrayed Jessop and the other white gold star mothers on her ship as good people—loving to one another, grieving for their sons, and ordinary, not pretentious.<sup>391</sup>

Ford presented Americans with a sort of anti-nationalist sense of national identity. Disdaining the pomp and circumstance of the pilgrimages, he portrayed the pilgrims' organizer and military escort as well-shod but ineffectual or even deluded. Ford still saw the gold star mothers as admirable women and symbols of American virtue, however. A short piece of dialogue between an unnamed politician, probably the mayor of New York, and a reporter made this clear. Both men were watching the pilgrims board their ship for Europe.

**Reporter:** "Why, no speech today, your honor?"

**Politician:** "Not today. That's [the sight of the mothers boarding ship for the pilgrimage] the most eloquent speech this country's ever made, Marty, it would take Abe Lincoln to top it."

**Reporter:** "That's the best speech you ever made, I'll quote that."

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

Ford's film particularly focused on mothers from hardscrabble rural backgrounds that recalled the American frontier. In one of the film's most lighthearted scenes, Jessop and a gold star mother from Kentucky used the toy rifles at a French carnival stall to display their perfect marksmanship, awing a group of French onlookers, other gold star mothers and their military escort. Proud of her skill yet down-to-earth, Jessop explained that she used to have to shoot her own breakfast.<sup>392</sup>

*Pilgrimage* allowed its audience to condemn the flag waving, clichéd patriotism of the pilgrimages' organizers while also providing viewers with a sense of national pride in gold star mothers who were resourceful, earthy, good-humored, and loving. As portrayed in this film, the pilgrimages presented ordinary American women with a precious opportunity to reach a sense of closure in their grief. Ford used the pilgrimages to present his audience with a nationalism suited to those suspicious of war propaganda and caught in one of the worst years of the Depression.<sup>393</sup>

When the film opened, *Los Angeles Times* critic John Scott noted that it had a "terrific appeal to women," with few dry eyes remaining in the theater at its close. Scott predicted the film would succeed commercially due to this feminine appeal. The critic at the *Wall Street Journal* was less positive. He criticized the film's "almost overpowering sentimentality." This interpretation showed he perceived Jessop's redemption as the film's most important theme and strongly implied that he categorized it dismissively as a woman's film. The movie succeeded in the box office because it drew on the contemporary interest in Freudianism, mixed it with elements of sentimental melodrama familiar from women's literature, and added affection for the gold star mothers.

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid. The screenwriters given credit for the film are Philip Klein, Barry Connors and Dudley Nichols.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

*Pilgrimage* reveals how contemporaries could enjoy irreverent criticism of the clichés surrounding patriotic motherhood at the same time that they felt affection and respect for actual gold star mothers.<sup>394</sup>

The last of the gold star mother pilgrimages took place in the summer of 1933, but the growing antiwar movement in the U.S. ensured that gold star mothers remained important symbols of American nationalism through the rest of the 1930s. By mid-decade, Americans watched as European nations prepared for war by rearming and forming new alliances, and they reacted by adopting the first of the decade's series of Neutrality Acts, designed to keep the U.S. out of war. Intellectuals and activists turned to humor as a weapon against nationalism and militarism.

The harshest critics of the gold star mothers accused them of putting their love for the nation above their love for their sons. Communist intellectual and world war veteran Philip Stevenson wrote a devastating satire to this effect printed in the men's magazine *Esquire*. The narrator of the piece was a gold star mother describing her pilgrimage to Europe. The mother was not human, however, but a cow. Her companions were Mrs. Holstein and Mrs. Jersey; the narrator was prejudiced against the black cow, Mrs. Guernsey. No cow could be more complacent and self-regarding, perhaps even more ignorant, than the narrator Stevenson created. She praised the pilgrimages as "morvelous" and likewise thought it "morvelous" that not a single mother had cried during her trip to the European cemeteries. She understood the innocence of the youths who had died in the war, describing "their morvelous big soft eyes and their sturdy young legs, and their dear little budding horns." Stevenson depicted the military cemeteries not

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<sup>394</sup> John Scott, "'Pilgrimage' Under Way," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 September 1933, A6; H.V.H., "The Theater," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 August 1933, 3.

as burial grounds with white crosses, but as modern slaughterhouses where the soldier-cows had been killed and chopped into gleaming pink cuts of meat. Having toured them, the narrator explained:

It burst upon me as a great truth, that to Give Peace you must Endure Slaughter. And I thought of all the comfort I had created by my act of Sacrifice [of a son]. I thought of how people all over the world had loosened their belts and grunted with satisfaction and belched from full bellies. And I wept for joy!

This mother-cow pledged that she would never resist sending a son to war, or rather the slaughterhouse. To Stevenson, civilians all over the world had benefited from the war, as if at a great feast, but the gold star mothers had made this feast possible and were too stupid to mourn that their own sons were the main course.<sup>395</sup>

In a similar vein, author Warden LaRoe printed a grotesque poem in *Life* magazine in which mothers cared for their babies only out of the hopes that they would grow up to be soldiers. “Milk builds huskier bones to rot/ On fields where death strikes quickly,” the mothers explained. But girl children were also valued: they might grow up to be the mothers of soldiers. LaRoe’s and Stevenson’s attacks on the gold star mothers as ultra-nationalists were not unheard of—pacifists had depicted pro-war American mothers in a similar style in 1917—but they were important. Unlike earlier criticism, their work was printed in mainstream magazines. It is clear that by the middle of the 1930s, only a few years after the end of the pilgrimages, critics of American nationalism

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<sup>395</sup> Larry Ceplair, “Albert Maltz, Philip Stevenson, and ‘Art is a Weapon,’” *Minnesota Review*, no. 69 (Fall/Winter 2007), <http://www.theminnesotareview.org/journal/ns69/ceplair.shtml>, accessed on 3 February 2011; Philip Stevenson, “Gold Star Mother,” *Esquire*, December 1935, 47.

had made gold star mothers into scapegoats for American interventionism and militarism, and editors were unafraid to publish their most scathing attacks.<sup>396</sup>

In this atmosphere, a small group of Princeton University seniors formed the Veterans of Future Wars as a humorous way to protest the power of veterans' groups. It was the spring of 1936, and the students both resented the passage of the so-called "Bonus"—a federal payment to all world war veterans as a reward for their service—and feared the coming of another world war. Mocking what they saw as the greed of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, the Veterans of Future Wars demanded an immediate payment of \$1000 from the federal government to all men between the ages of 18 and 36. They explained that since a new war was inevitable their generation deserved to get a bonus while they could still enjoy it. When Vassar friends wanted to join, the Princetonians added a female auxiliary they called the Future Gold Star Mothers of America. The women of the auxiliary asked to be sent on all-expenses paid trips to Europe to view the "future graves of our future sons"; as future wives of future soldiers, the co-eds asked for pensions of \$50 a month. Members of the new groups and their older allies found their antics hilarious; veterans' groups, gold star mothers, and their sympathizers did not.<sup>397</sup>

The organization might have remained an Ivy League and Seven Sisters prank, far removed from the lives of ordinary Americans, but it stood at the intersection of

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<sup>396</sup> Warden La Roe, "Training Camp," *Life*, July 1936, 12; for World War I-era depictions of pro-war women as monstrous, see *Four Lights*, published by the New York Woman's Peace Party.

<sup>397</sup> Plant, 73-4; Piehler, 116; Mrs. Marjorie Messner to Lewis J. Gorin, March 19, 1936; Administrative Files, Regional Files Correspondence, Mid-Atlantic, New York (March 17-19, 1936); Veterans of Future Wars Collection; Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library; Princeton University Archives; Princeton, NJ. On the Bonus, see Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001); Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007), 282-5, 329-30. For examples of opposing opinions, see the files for Correspondence—Congratulatory (1936) and Correspondence—Contributions (1936); Veterans of Future Wars Collection; Princeton University.

important political forces. First, many Americans—including Presidents Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt—had opposed paying veterans their Bonus on the basis of fiscal conservatism and disdain for rewarding patriotic service with cash. They rightly blamed veterans’ groups for the bill’s passage; the American Legion was one of the strongest political interest groups in the nation. Second, many American ministers, clubwomen, and students, among other groups, were cooperating to build a rapidly growing antiwar movement. Finally, the Veterans of Future Wars and Future Gold Star Mothers drew power from Americans’ knowledge of the growth of fascism abroad; Princeton founder Lewis J. Gorin openly compared American veterans’ movements with the fascist movements led by veterans in Europe. In their personae as Veterans of Future Wars and Future Gold Star Mothers, undergraduates acted to warn Americans about a dystopic future in which militarism and nationalism grew to dominate American culture. Like the Billionaires for Bush movement during the presidency of George W. Bush, students were able to laugh and use their creativity to sweeten their bitter criticism of the state of the country.<sup>398</sup>

When reporters at *Time* magazine, the *New York Times* and other major media outlets heard of the creation of the Veterans of Future Wars and Future Gold Star Mothers, they found they had a hot story on their hands. The early media stories caught students’ interest, and students across the country wrote to Princeton asking to how to form their own chapters. Within weeks there were 20,000 members, then within a few months there were 50,000. The organization appealed to students at both private colleges and also public universities, and units were begun in every region and nearly every state.

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<sup>398</sup> Jean Edward Smith, *FDR* (New York: Random House, 2007), 282-5, 329-30; Harriet Hyman Alonso, *The Women’s Peace Union and the Outlawry of War, 1921-1942* (Knoxville: U. of Tennessee Press, 1989), 170; Lewis J. Gorin, *Patriotism Prepaid* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1936), vii-xi.

Students created their own groups riffing on the original theme, such as the Association for the Protection of Prospective Profiteers, based at the University of Pittsburgh. Some high school students also organized units. Once on campus, many units became so popular that they could not keep enough membership blanks and buttons in stock. Congressman Maury Maverick (D-TX) said he'd sponsor the group's bonus bill in the House; Congressman Herman Koppelman (D-CT) gave a radio address praising the organization for its antiwar stance. When asked about the Veterans of Future Wars by reporters, Eleanor Roosevelt told journalists she thought the organization was amusing, and that it achieved a "grand pricking of lots of bubbles." Well-known peace activist Oswald Garrison Villard used his column in *The Nation* to portray the students as serious antiwar activists; he and other veterans of the antiwar movement—male and female—were delighted to see young people skewering the activities of veterans' groups so adroitly.<sup>399</sup>

A Philadelphia publisher offered a book deal to the founder of the original Princeton unit of the Veterans of Future Wars, and he planned a second book on the Future Gold Star Mothers. Warner Bros. inquired into obtaining film rights for the book

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<sup>399</sup> From the Veterans of Future Wars Collection, Princeton University, see "Over Here," *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, 24 April 1936, clipping; Printed Material (March 16-April 30, 1936) and "Youth's Scorn of War" in "Topics of the Times," *New York Times*, clipping; Printed Material (May 1, 1936 to Feb. 23, 1948). On buttons, see Robert G. Barnes, Special Relations, to James & Spencer Co., Philadelphia, 8 April 1936; Administrative Files—National Council—National Secretary Turner—Buttons, uniforms, etc.; Administrative Files. On international appeal, see the group's Administrative Files—Regional Files—Correspondence—Territories. An example of anti-war message over anti-Bonus message, see talk by U.S. Representative Herman P. Koppelman (D-CT), "After Nineteen Years," transcript of a radio talk arranged by the National Council for the Prevention of War as part of program "Congress in World Affairs," 2 April 1936, clipping; Printed Material (March 16-April 30, 1936); for older anti-war allies of the movement, see Roger N. Baldwin to Miss Winsor, President, Friends of the Veterans of Future Wars, 2 June 1936; Zona Gale to Miss Winsor, 2 June 1936; Administrative Files—Auxiliary Organizations—Friends of the Veterans of Future Wars—Members; see also Frank P. Frazier, Publicity, JB Lippincott Co. to Lewis J. Gorin, Jr., 1 May 1936; Administrative Files—National Commander Gorin—Patriotism Prepaid—Lippincott; on Eleanor Roosevelt, see *Washington Post*, "Future Veterans Amuse First Lady," 3 April 1936, X1; Oswald Garrison Villard, "Issues and Men" *Nation*, 8 April 1936, 450.

on the movement; Columbia Pictures contacted the founder to express interest in making a similar movie. The newsreel company the *March of Time* went to Princeton to film the group in action, and so reenactments of their founding and meetings were broadcast to moviegoers across the country. Through film, radio, magazines, newspapers, and a book, the Veterans of Future Wars and their auxiliary, the Future Gold Star Mothers, seem to have achieved tremendous media saturation.<sup>400</sup>

The Veterans of Future Wars and Future Gold Star Mothers undermined the heroic status of patriotic groups by making them the objects of fun. The Veterans of Future Wars' stationery was printed with nationalist slogans such as "America for Americans!" and "America has a moral obligation for all whose sons are going to die for her!" These slogans were virtually indistinguishable from the actual positions of patriotic groups. The Veterans of Future Wars and Future Gold Star Mothers mocked patriotic organizations' titles, uniforms and ceremonies. In the Veterans of Future Wars, officers held quasi-military titles, and the founders invented a special greeting. It was the Nazi salute of a raised right arm, but instead of a fist at the end, members held their hand cupped as if to ready to receive government benefits. The salute made a mockery of the veterans organizations' pretensions to a lofty, disinterested patriotism, implying a kinship between their politics and those of the fascists.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> James W. Lippincott, of J.B. Lippincott Co., Publishers, Philadelphia to Lewis J. Gorin, Jr., Veterans of Future Wars, 30 March 1936; Lewis J. Gorin to Mr. Lippincott, 23 April 1936; Lewis J. Gorin to Frank P. Frazier, Publicity, J.B. Lippincott Co., 18 April 1936; Administrative Files—National Commander Gorin—Patriotism Prepaid—Lippincott; for press clippings and media coverage, see folders Printed Material and U.J.P. Rushton; all from the Veterans of Future Wars collection, Princeton University.

<sup>401</sup> Alexander Black, Jr., Regional Coordinator, South Atlantic States to Miss Aileen Sigler, 21 March 1936; Administrative Files, Regional Files; and Lewis J. Gorin, Jr., National Commander, to Mr. S.P. Weinberg, President S. Abrahams & Co., Inc., 19 May 1936; Administrative Files—National Council—National Secretary Turner—Buttons, uniforms, etc.; both from the Veterans of Future Wars Collection, Princeton University.

Members of the Future Gold Star Mothers came up with their own ways to criticize ideologies of gender and nationalism. At Bryn Mawr, where just under half of the student body had joined the organization, female students presented a wardrobe of baby clothes to a visiting officer of the Future Veterans. The gesture was a “token of the preparedness” of the group, apparently showing that as Future Gold Star Mothers they were ready and willing to reproduce a new army. It was a pointed critique of the way militarism encouraged pronatalism, and it showed the undergraduates’ awareness that ultra-nationalists would value them for their capacity to reproduce over their other qualities.<sup>402</sup>

Bryn Mawr students also mocked the red-baiting of patriotic motherhood groups. In the 1920s and 1930s, the American War Mothers and American Gold Star Mothers had joined the Daughters of the American Revolution in calling for loyalty oaths for teachers and investigations into teachers’ loyalty to the United States. An editorial in the Bryn Mawr student newspaper suggested that just like teachers, the Future Gold Star Mothers should be required take national oaths of loyalty. They should repeat the oath “once for themselves, once for their as yet unacquired and soon-to-be-dead husbands, and once for every unborn son.” Furthermore, the mothers should ensure that their future sons’ first words were an oath of allegiance. The editorial mocked the concept of an obligatory patriotism while also making fun of the sentimental, nineteenth-century

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<sup>402</sup> Aileen Sigler, Bryn Mawr, PE to Alexander Black, Terrace Club, Princeton, NJ, 24 March 1936; Alexander Black, Jr. to Miss Eileen Sigler, 14 April 1936; Administrative Files—Auxiliary Organization—Gold Star Mothers/Home Fire Division; “Home Fire Mothers Rally With Torches,” Bryn Mawr *College News*, 29 April 1936, 1.

ideology in which mothers were understood to shape the values of their husbands and children.<sup>403</sup>

Vassar students organized the first unit of the Future Gold Star Mothers, and campus leaders there seem to have been enthusiastic about the group's potential. The editor of the Vassar newspaper said she knew many at her college who would be happy to participate if the movement became "a real attack on the Veterans," praising the Veterans of Future Wars as "a masterful strike of satire on just about everything that should be satired." The Vassar College president was unhappy with the group's growing fame—or infamy—and quickly forced it to disband, however.<sup>404</sup>

The organization certainly outraged as much as it amused. Social conservatives, veterans and their allies objected to the group, and especially its mockery of gold star mothers. Angry letters to the founders of the Veterans of Future Wars maligned the manhood of the Princeton founders. Some letters addressed the young men as "Miss" or said they were "making up to look like a chorus girl." Others accused them of childishness, saying they belonged in "3 cornered pants" or diapers. One hateful letter writer accused the Vassar Future Gold Star Mothers of foolishness and suggested that if they met some world war veterans they would learn what real men were. These opponents, some of them angered to incoherency by the mockery of their military service, were expressing disdain for the students in terms of a gendered worldview popularized during the Great War. According to these hostile letters, military servicemen had proven their manhood, and their feminine admirers, young or old, had proven their

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<sup>403</sup> "Constitutional Mothers," Bryn Mawr *College News*, 8 April 1936, 2.

<sup>404</sup> Mary Banning, News Editor, Vassar Miscellany News, to Mr. Gorin, 19 March 1936; Administrative Files—Regional Files Correspondence—Mid-Atlantic—New York; Marys Converse to Lewis J. Gorin, telegram, 19 March 1936; Administrative Files—Auxiliary Organization—Gold Star Mothers/Home Fires Division; Veterans of Future Wars collection, Princeton University.

femininity. Political opponents, especially pacifists, were abnormal, improperly gendered, and even monstrous.<sup>405</sup>

Traditional notions of the reverence due gold star mothers—and the chivalry due to mothers more generally—meant that of all their offenses, opponents most often criticized the veterans of Future Wars for their satire of patriotic motherhood. Radio host and veteran D.A. Chapin of Arroyo Grande, California said the young men seemed to indicate that gold star mothers were worthy of “no respect whatever,” and he called their club a “travesty on decency.” An angry “Wounded World War Veteran” from Trenton, New Jersey told the Princeton Future Veterans that “We Vets pity the mothers of you and your kind.” As a result of such criticism, the founders of the Future Veterans renamed the female auxiliary the Home Fires Division, but the original name was so catchy that many news outlets continue to refer to the auxiliary as the Future Gold Star Mothers, or even Future War Mothers. Princetonian U.J.P. Rushton said that the original name was objectionable only to “sentimentalists,” a term used to denigrate those holding Victorian-era values.<sup>406</sup>

One such “sentimentalist” was Representative Claude Fuller (D-AR), who made a ten-minute speech in the House of Representatives outlining his understanding of the connections between war mothers, veterans, and the order of society, including racial and ethnic hierarchy. Fuller accused the Veterans of Future Wars and Future Gold Star

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<sup>405</sup> Anonymous, East Orange, NJ to “Miss? Or Mr.? Gorin,” Future War Wets, undated; Anonymous to Wets of Future Wars, 4 April 1936; A Veteran to Dear Sir, 17 March 1936; Adm. Files—Correspondence—Crank (1936); Veterans of Future Wars Collection; Princeton University.

<sup>406</sup> D.A. Chapin, Editor, *Vets Broadcast*, Arroyo Grande, CA to Editor, *Daily Princetonian*, 25 March 1936; A Wounded World War Veteran to Commander Gorin, Future Veterans, 27 March 1936; Administrative Files—Correspondence—Crank (1936); Lewis J. Gorin, Jr. to Major Henry H. Curran, Director, National Economy League, 27 March 1936; Administrative Files—National Council—National Commander Gorin—National Economy League; “Laugh and World Laughs With You,” *Birmingham News Age-Herald*, 4 October 1936; clipping in file U.J.P. Rushton (1936-47); Veterans of Future Wars Collection, Princeton University.

Mothers of every hated form of radicalism—communism, fascism and pacifism—saying their strategy was a “boring-from-within against our form of government and national defense.” He portrayed the Future Gold Star Mothers as fools who had been “misled and unduly influenced” by young Communist men. He got laughter from his audience by saying that the young women were no doubt too concerned with “cosmetics, society and birth control” to concern themselves with the patriotic duties of a woman intending to raise a soldier son. The student movement, he said, was simply “an assault on sacred motherhood.”<sup>407</sup>

Such an assault was akin, Fuller said, to a communist parade he had seen recently in which he saw “white women walking arm in arm with Negro men,” and each group of marchers followed “a Russian Jew singing their un-American and communistic songs.” He concluded that veterans, their families and supporters were America’s best defense against communism and the sorts of “hybrids” who wanted to spread it. While it would be easy to dismiss Fuller for his evident bigotry, he seems to have been a skillful speaker, as the *Congressional Record* noted that the House twice broke into laughter during his speech and there was applause at its completion.<sup>408</sup>

The American War Mothers’ printed response to the establishment of the Future Gold Star Mothers was more thoughtful. Gold star mother and Massachusetts state president Mrs. Archer W. Ives connected the student group with broader attacks on motherhood and American tradition. She noted that contemporary youth seemed callous to the traditions that had once made parents “congenial and sought-for-friends” and that “made home a desirable place to live.” Repeating phrases that echoed New Deal-era

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<sup>407</sup> *Congressional Record* (1 April 1936), 74<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., Vol. 80, no. 5: H4741-42.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*

slogans, she said that by attacking gold star mothers, the students were attacking the “Women of the War,” the “Mothers of Men,” and the “Forgotten Women”—in other words, the everywoman. She was likely hinting at a class dimension to these conflicts. While opponents assumed the Princeton undergraduates of the Veterans of Future Wars and their Seven Sisters counterparts were from wealthy, secure backgrounds—and founder Lewis J. Gorin certainly was—the same could not be said of veterans and gold star mothers, many of whom depended on government pensions for survival. One Princeton graduate, also a veteran, had attempted to remind the undergraduates of their relative privilege, asking them not to “twit” those who were suffering. This exchange suggests that elements of elitism and populism underlay the cultural and political arguments of this student movement.<sup>409</sup>

Finally, Ives engaged with the movement on its most important point. While the Future Gold Star Mothers satirized gold star mothers as grasping for government benefits and serving as pawns for militarists, Ives said the mothers of world war soldiers were the country’s greatest advocates of peace. They promoted peace through preparedness, not disarmament, as the most realistic method to keep the nation secure. The Veterans of Future Wars and Future Gold Star Mothers did not address this issue, missing the chance to join the debates between older generations of pacifists and nationalists on how best to achieve peace and security.<sup>410</sup>

The 1930s were not a complete loss for the patriotic motherhood organizations. Evidence suggests that among veterans and their families, and among men and women in

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<sup>409</sup> Mrs. Archer W. Ives, “Is it Possible?” *The American War Mother* 13, no. 4 (May 1936): 8; Frank B. Fox, Princeton Class of ’05 to the Editor, *Daily Princetonian*, March 23, 1936; Administrative Files; Regional Files, South Atlantic, Pennsylvania 2 of 4, March 21-28, 1936; Veterans of Future Wars Collection, Princeton University.

<sup>410</sup> Ives, 8.

Congress, gold star mothers continued to command respect and affection. In 1936 the Gold Star Mothers of the World War persuaded Congress to create a new federal holiday in their honor, Gold Star Mother's Day, to be held on the last Sunday in September. The Roosevelt administration declined to sponsor a bill for the new holiday, explaining to the mothers that it would be redundant. Officials pointed out that gold star mothers already held central roles in the celebration of Mother's Day—when the American War Mothers held services at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier—and Armistice Day, Memorial Day and Independence Day. Congressmen proved more amenable to the forceful Mathilda Burling, president of the Gold Star Mothers of the World Wars, and her supporters in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The Congressional Resolution creating the holiday called the home “the fountainhead of the state” and said mothers were “the greatest source of the country's strength and inspiration.” Thanking mothers for their work in the “uplift” of the nation and the world, the resolution recognized gold star mothers for making “the supreme sacrifice of motherhood.” Once passed in 1936, gold star mothers and veterans organizations celebrated the holiday with special ceremonies and radio broadcasts. Gold Star Mother's Day is still celebrated on the last Sunday in September, and is traditionally recognized by a presidential proclamation.<sup>411</sup>

More concretely, in 1937 Congress awarded the surviving Great War gold star mothers and fathers a continuation of the monthly pensions of \$45 to \$50 per month that were set to expire 20 years after the end of the war. The bill's passage was a victory for

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<sup>411</sup> Mathilda Burling to President Roosevelt, 7 August 1933; Secretary of War to Louis McH. Howe, Secretary to the President, 24 August 1933; Louis McH. Howe to Mathilda Burling, 30 August 1933; Telegram, Mathilda Burling to President Roosevelt, 20 September 1934; Edward M. Smith Jr., Commander, VFW Post 2264, to President Roosevelt, 17 May 1935; F.P. Feiler, Queens County Council of VFW, 2 June 1935; Official File Gold Star Mothers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers; U.S. Senate, Committee on Military Affairs, *Designating the Last Sunday in September as “Gold Star Mother's Day,”* (to accompany S.J. Res. 115), (S. Rept. 1981), Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1936. See also Budreau's characterization of Burling, 198-201; 223-7.

the American War Mothers and American Gold Star Mothers, who spent the summer of 1937 lobbying Congress for the payments. After signing the bill, President Roosevelt sent the pen he'd used to the American Gold Star Mothers as a tribute.<sup>412</sup>

These pieces of legislation indicate that no matter how popular or acceptable it had become to mock the gold star mothers, the women remained politically powerful when allied with veterans' organizations. The rhetoric surrounding the holiday and pensions show that despite the Freudian revisions of sentimental motherhood and the anti-war satires of gold star mothers, the country still retained those "sentimentalists" who believed in mothers' moral influence and idealized gold star mothers. From the initial criticism and grumbling around the pilgrimages to the outright hostility of the antiwar movement, this evidence suggests that the public was beginning to divide over the status of the patriotic mother. To a younger generation and critics of the Great War, patriotic motherhood was part of a flawed system of values that had led to war. By attacking it, and its symbols the gold star mothers, they hoped to rid society of militarism, nationalism, and even pronatalism. To Americans fond of tradition and reverent toward military service, mothers of veterans and fallen service members deserved celebration, respect, and federal pensions.

### **Patriotic Mothers and Two-Fisted Sons: How Debates over Intervention Revived a Mothers' Politics, 1939-1941**

With the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Nazi Germany effectively declared war on America's chief Great War allies, France and Great Britain. A few

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<sup>412</sup> "Aid for Mothers May Be Granted," clipping in scrapbook; "'Gold Star Mothers Bill' is Approved"; clipping in Scrapbook; Mrs. Horace B. Blake, "President's Report, June 12, 1936 to May 10, 1938"; each in American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. collection; Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; *Congressional Record* (4 August 1937), 75<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., Vol. 81, no. 7: H8225-8239; *Congressional Record* (9 August 1937), 75<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., Vol. 81, no. 8: S8550-1.

weeks later, three mothers in California founded the National Legion of Mothers of America to try to keep their draft-aged sons out of war. With the newspaper empire of William Randolph Hearst promoting membership and publicizing their efforts, the group grew quickly. Ten thousand women joined in the National Legion's first six days of existence; the organization ran out of membership cards. Over the next two years, they claimed to have grown to include hundreds of thousands and even millions of members.<sup>413</sup>

The National Legion of Mothers of America (NLMA) was the largest of several isolationist women's groups that revived public discussions of a mother's duty to the nation in wartime. Others included We, the Mothers, the Mothers of American Sons, and the Blue Star Mothers of America, the latter clearly named in imitation of the gold star mothers' groups. Thanks to such organizations—and their backing by influential isolationist newspaper publishers—mothers' opinions on the war became an inescapable part of the public discussion over mobilization and America's role in the world. When the *Chicago Tribune* featured gold star mother Ethel Nock calling on “patriotic mothers” to keep American boys at home, and an infuriated mother saying isolationist women surely lacked the “two-fisted sons” needed to defend the nation, they showed that traditional ideas about motherhood had again infused debates over foreign policy and war. Motherhood was politically useful again. By this point, commentators were not analyzing the mothers' love for their sons as possibly pathological; both isolationists and

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<sup>413</sup> Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1996), 21.

interventionists were too busy trying to marshal arguments for why mothers should support their cause.<sup>414</sup>

In the end, the women's debates did not revive patriotic motherhood but exploded it. Individual gold star mothers, war mothers and mothers of draft-aged sons publicly divided over mobilization and intervention in Europe's war. Patriotic motherhood organizations, so clearly united against the nation's supposed internal enemies, could not come together behind a policy for facing the international crisis. Though they had long held a symbolic leadership position in women's struggle for military preparedness, they missed their opportunity to influence public debate over intervention, probably due to significant internal divisions. Individual gold star mothers and war mothers acted and spoke out for either isolationism or interventionism, as did individual units, but this lacked the impact of a concerted campaign by the national organizations. Thus the mothers of those who'd fought in the Great War did not use their unique experiences and authority to shape the public debates over the new war. At the same time, isolationist women claimed to be the true patriotic mothers, and their words and actions undermined older conceptions of patriotic motherhood. The brief revival of sentimental motherhood in politics in 1939-1941 ended during World War II, and the post-war period saw different forms of motherhood and nationalism emerge. The peculiar combination of mourning, nationalism, and sentimental motherhood that women used to promote homefront unity and domestic reforms during the First World War, and defense spending and Americanism in the interwar years, was finally transformed beyond recognition.

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<sup>414</sup> Jeansonne's is the authoritative history of this movement and its many organizations and leaders. See also Laura McEnaney, "He-Men and Christian Mothers: The America First Movement and the Gendered Meanings of Patriotism and Isolationism," *Diplomatic History* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 47-55. On McCormick, see Jeansonne, 15, 37; "More Mothers Join War Bill Fight," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 February 1941, 3; An American Mother, "The Mothers' Lobby," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 March 1941, 10.

The American War Mothers and American Gold Star Mothers, the largest organizations for mothers of Great War service members, did not unite behind either intervention or isolationism. Dating to their founding in the 1920s, the groups had tended toward isolationism paired with a strong military defense in the hope that these strategies would lead to peace. The mothers stressed the nobility of their sons' military service, but they also condemned unnecessary bloodshed. The second global conflict in twenty years paralyzed and splintered their national officers and local units. In the American War Mothers, the stridently anticommunist Ethel Nock, former national chairman of the gold star committee, proposed starting a new isolationist mothers' group. The editor of the *War Mother* newsletter supported a Constitutional amendment that would require a referendum before America could join a foreign war. This isolationist and pacifist-backed measure enjoyed the support of many gold star mothers and war mothers in the late 1930s. Yet the president of the American Gold Star Mothers made a strong stand for peacetime draft legislation in 1940, allying herself with President Roosevelt and Congressional interventionists. Local units acted as they saw fit.<sup>415</sup> Clearly, internal divisions prevented the war mothers and gold star mothers from using their experiences and identities to influence foreign policy. Given the media attention focused on their statements, and the desire of groups like America First to recruit gold star mothers, it is

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<sup>415</sup> "More Mothers Join War Bill Fight," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 February 1941; "Gold Star Mother Vies With Draft 'Mourners,'" *New York Times*, 29 August 1940, 10; Sen. Claude Pepper to Edwin M. Watson, Secretary to the President, 26 August 1940; President's Personal File American Gold Star Mothers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers; Carrie L. Root, "Fanfare," *American War Mother*, December 1941, 4 (because of publishing lag it appeared before editors knew of Pearl Harbor attacks). "Lindy Assured He Can Speak in Oklahoma," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 27 Aug. 1941, 2; "Honor A.E.F. Dead Amid War Debate," *New York Times*, 29 Sept. 1941, 10; "Service Star Legion Hears Report of State Convention," *The Atlanta Constitution*, 19 May 1941, 13; "Protest Against War Staged by Women," *New York Times*, 11 May 1941, 7.

likely that if they had united they could have made an impact on the debates over America's role in the world.<sup>416</sup>

Starting in late 1939, isolationist mothers organized rapidly in grass-roots organizations that stretched from coast to coast, though their number was concentrated in the Midwest. The first and largest of the isolationist mothers' groups was the National Legion of Mothers of America. From 1939 to early 1941, it claimed to grow from tens of thousands to four million members. The group did not require dues, a likely factor in its astronomical membership, and leaders said a majority of its members were women with draft-aged sons. The newspapers of William Randolph Hearst praised the organization as patriotic and composed of ordinary mothers of "the type familiar in story and song"—presumably a reference to mother songs and sentimental motherhood.<sup>417</sup>

The National Legion of Mothers had members and officers from a wide variety of ideological backgrounds who shared only their isolationism and motherhood in common. It was strongest in the Midwest but was also strong in California. Publisher Robert McCormick's committed isolationism, and his use of the *Chicago Tribune* to trumpet his favorite causes, provided plenty of free publicity to the National Legion as well as other isolationist groups, surely helping the groups recruit readers within the region the paper dominated. Hearst's *Chicago Herald-American* also praised the National Legion, as did his other papers.<sup>418</sup>

Hearst's role in the founding of the National Legion of Mothers of America is murky. In addition to providing the organization with positive press, and going so far as

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<sup>416</sup> "War Vets Urged to Lead Attack on Dictator Bill," *Chicago Tribune*, 11 February 1941, 5.

<sup>417</sup> Jeansonne, 45-6; 49.

<sup>418</sup> Jeansonne, 24, 49, 87. For more on McCormick and the *Tribune* during the First World War, see Chapters 1 and 2.

to print membership cards for it in his newspapers, one historian has suggested that he “inspired” the organization’s founding and helped to fund it. Donations were of primary importance to the group, because it relied on private funding and not membership dues for survival. The president of the San Francisco unit of the National Legion praised Hearst, thanking him for showing the same “foresight” his mother had shown when she founded the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, implying that she saw him as the organization’s founder.<sup>419</sup>

The National Legion of Mothers of America revived political organizing among mothers and the use of motherhood rhetoric to move audiences of both sexes. Like the maternalists of the Progressive era, the National Legion of Mothers’ leaders and members believed that motherhood created a political common ground for women, and they used these identities as a basis for appealing to new members. Hearst’s Los Angeles *Herald-Express* quoted the organization’s first member saying it had been too difficult to bring her son into the world to let him go easily to fight and die in a foreign war. This commonly-used theme of antiwar womanhood repeated the argument made by the North Dakota Farm Woman quoted by Robert M. LaFollette in 1917 in his anti-war Senate speech. Another mother quoted in the *Herald-Express* explained that she believed that women could stop America’s joining the war, because determined women could always accomplish their goals. Yet belying these appeals to a common womanhood, the isolationist mothers’ groups did not revive maternalists’ concern for the health and welfare of mothers and children across social classes. In fact, the leaders of many mothers’ groups opposed the New Deal’s creation of a larger federal government, albeit one that could offer aid to impoverished families. As single-issue organizations, the

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<sup>419</sup> Jeansonne, 45.

National Legion and later anti-war mothers' groups seemed predicated on the idea that mothers were so focused on their own families that they could be relied on to oppose any measure that could threaten their family's security.<sup>420</sup>

Members and officers of the National Legion varied in their political allegiances, though most opposed Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. Historian Glenn Jeansonne has painted a convincing portrait of the isolationist mothers' movement as dominated by right-wing radicals who were anti-communist, anti-Semitic, and sometimes even Nazi sympathizers. The isolationist mothers' movement had a broad appeal, however, until at least the spring of 1941. In its earliest months, it attracted women with mainstream or even progressive politics.

In the Midwest, the National Legion of Mothers relied on women's clubs for some of its remarkable growth. Mrs. Henry W. Hartough became the group's regional director; she was also the president of the Chicago and Cook County Federation of Women's Organizations. The Federation of Women's Organizations was by definition a mainstream group; it operated as an umbrella organization for a variety of clubs. Hartough recruited large numbers of women, likely using her club connections to set up speaking dates. A Milwaukee women's organization with 50,000 members voted to affiliate, and so did the Child Conservation Club of Huntingdon, Indiana. These women were not all right-wing radicals. Hartough herself had long served the Chicago area as a social welfare reformer, and President Herbert Hoover had appointed her to a committee devoted to improving housing for the poor. After the war began, she supported women's work in war industries, though as a gender traditionalist she disapproved of women's assignments overseas in the newly formed Women's Auxiliary Army Corps. In the

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<sup>420</sup> Jeansonne, 45, 87, 7, and see chapters on individual women's leaders, esp. Chapters 2, 5, 7.

1950s she remained active with the Federation of Women's Organizations, an avenue that would have been closed to her if her peers had perceived her pre-war isolationism as un-American.<sup>421</sup>

The famous novelist Kathleen Norris served as the president of the National Legion of Mothers of America from 1940-1941. Norris was a pacifist and reformer who supported Prohibition and opposed capital punishment. One of the highest-paid writers of her generation, she was prolific and extremely popular, though her style of sentimental fiction had fallen out of critical favor by the 1920s and 1930s. It was no coincidence that Norris engaged with foreign affairs through a motherly perspective. Not only was she a mother, she was an author who had reinforced prescriptions for sentimental motherhood. For example, in 1911 she wrote the novel *Mother* about an ambitious, urban secretary who came to realize that her mother's choice to have a large family and keep house in small-town America was superior to her own shallow dreams of success. At a time when Americans such as Theodore Roosevelt feared falling birth rates among native-born women and worried that young women would choose career over family, such a novel was not politically neutral but reinforced conservative visions of a woman's role.<sup>422</sup>

Norris was a member of the pacifist Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, a successor organization to the Great War-era maternalist peace organization, the Woman's Peace Party. At this time, key leaders and members of WILPF chose not to pursue antiwar work because of their knowledge of Hitler's persecution of Jews, other minorities, and political opponents, including pacifists. Norris was a committed

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<sup>421</sup> Jeansonne, 49-50; "Mrs. Hartough Elected Head of Federation," *Chicago Tribune*, 1 May 1938, F3; "Women Enlist in Army? Reply Is Yes and No," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 March 1942, 1; "Federation to Conclude Its Season," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 May 1954, E5.

<sup>422</sup> Jeansonne, 47-52, 55; Kathleen Norris, *Mother* (NY: Macmillan, 1911).

isolationist, however. In addition to her work with the NLMA, she became an important female figurehead for the America First Committee, appearing at rallies with the famous aviator and isolationist Charles Lindbergh. Not incidentally, she was suspicious of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, and she supported his Republican opponent in 1940.<sup>423</sup>

Norris was able to create strong arguments against war that appealed to her audience by bringing the war home, that is, by showing how families and women were the foundation of any war effort. At an America First rally held in Madison Square Garden in New York City, she addressed a crowd of 22,000 people. Relying on an essentialist vision of women as inherently antiwar, Norris claimed to represent the majority of American women—not only the hundreds of thousands in the National Legion of Mothers of America and those in other mothers' groups, but also those women who had not affiliated with these organizations. She said five million young men stood at risk of being called to war, and so she addressed their wives and mothers, asking them to act to stop Lend-Lease because it would bring the U.S. into the European conflict. She then said that American mothers and fathers had dug America's Great War cemeteries themselves. Through this metaphor, she made it explicit that she saw parents' support as crucial to the Great War and thus held parents responsible for their sons' deaths. She

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<sup>423</sup> Jeansonne, 47; Ruth Sarles, *A Story Of America First: The Men and Women Who Opposed US Intervention in World War II* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 184. Chief among the former pacifists alert to Hitler's threat and reluctant to oppose intervention was Carrie Chapman Catt, leader of the huge National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War, see Margaret Paton-Walsh, *Our War Too: American Women Against the Axis* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 25, 151, 186. A huge literature on female pacifists in the interwar years discusses the women's responses to Hitler and the fascist threat. For a deft summation, see Melissa R. Klapper, "'Those By Whose Side We Have Labored': American Jewish Women and the Peace Movement between the Wars," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (December 2010): 636-658.

blamed propaganda, flag-waving and “martial music” for inciting Americans to support the war in 1917; her audience responded with shouts of “Never again!”.

Norris presented herself as a figure of motherly protection. In another speech she said that Americans must never sacrifice “five million splendid, trusting and innocent boys” to pursue and kill “one unbalanced man,” a reference to Adolf Hitler. Norris told the audience that she had a British refugee child in her home, probably attempting to show that sympathy for the British did not drive her to embrace an aid program that could bring the U.S. into war. Interventionist papers such as the *New York Times* regularly published profiles of British women in America who painted powerful pictures of the destruction of British homes and families in German bombing attacks. The stories were meant to raise charitable contributions and likely also gain support for aid to Britain.<sup>424</sup>

Norris had her critics, both within and without the isolationist movement. They objected in part to her use of sentimental motherhood arguments. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, the wife of the aviator, was a committed isolationist and supporter of America First. In private, she criticized Norris for relying on the “sob stuff”—sentimental stories of motherhood—instead of using other types of anti-war arguments. Anne Lindbergh noted, however, that Norris’ approach seemed popular with her audience. Committed interventionist paper *PM* attacked Norris more harshly. “Her bearing was what passes for motherliness. Her exploitation of the emotion of grief for the dead, in her speech, is a trick the Nazis perform superbly too.” Though sentimental motherhood provided a useful

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<sup>424</sup> William Fulton, “Crowds in NY Cheer Lindy,” *Chicago Tribune*, 24 May 1941, 1; William Fulton, “Fears of Few Peril Millions, Kathleen Norris Warns U.S.,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 April 1941, 1; Carolyn McKenzie, “War Saddens ‘Little Mother’ of Doughboys,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 April 1941, 2; Harold Martin, “There’s Iron in Soul of England, Says Former Atlantan,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 May 1941, 1; “Funds Asked to Aid British Children,” *New York Times*, 23 February 1941, 9; Malvina Stephenson, “British Women Send Gratitude By Lady Halifax,” *New York Times*, 23 Feb 1941, D4; “American Mother, Here for Honor, To Aid Campaign for War Victims,” *New York Times*, 10 May 1941, 17.

appeal to emotions, interventionists occasionally drew on the criticism of sentimental motherhood of the 1920s and 1930s in attacking the isolationist mothers.<sup>425</sup>

The first major battle between interventionist and isolationist women was over the 1940 conscription bill, which would create the first peacetime draft in U.S. history. Its proponents believed that America should begin to train and mobilize soldiers in the face of military threats from Europe and Asia, but when they first proposed the plan they were far ahead of popular opinion. The legislation was so controversial that President Roosevelt did not favor it publicly until close to the end of the legislative debates. The bill's origins are storied: a group of lawyers, financiers and publishers attended a series of meetings at New York's Harvard Club in spring of 1940, where they drafted the outlines of a conscription measure and planned a pro-conscription campaign. They cooperated with Army General George C. Marshall and three of his subordinates to create the proposal that U.S. Representatives Edward R. Burke (D-NE) and James W. Wadsworth, Jr. (R-NY) introduced in Congress later that year. *New York Times* publishing heir and general manager Julius Ochs Adler was one of the originators of the legislation.<sup>426</sup>

Kathleen Norris campaigned to defeat conscription in the summer of 1940; a representative of the National Legion of Mothers of America testified against the conscription bill before a Congressional committee. But it was a more radical mothers' group that made headlines and so appeared to stand for all isolationist mothers'

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<sup>425</sup> Wayne S. Cole, *America First: The Battle Against Intervention, 1940-1941* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953), 108; he is citing *PM*, 25 May 1941; on Anne M. Lindbergh's response, see Jeansonne, 51-2. On the politics of *PM*, which was funded in part by the interventionist movement's Dorothy Thompson, see Thomas E. Mahl, *Desperate Deceptions: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939-1944* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1998), 64.

<sup>426</sup> Smith, 464.

opposition. In August, close to one hundred women from the Mothers of American Sons, based in Detroit, arrived in Washington, D.C. to demonstrate their opposition while Congress debated the bill. The Mothers of American Sons was a much smaller organization than the National Legion of Mothers. It numbered its membership in the thousands, and its leadership was more extremist than the National Legion's. Its Vice President Rosa Farber believed that Jews had a plot to take over the world and were somehow using the Nazis to accomplish this end. She also called the Roosevelt administration part of a "Satanic plot." It is unclear how much the group's membership knew of her philosophies. Of several thousand members, attendance at weekly meetings was about 300. In Washington, the mother activists, named as members of Mothers of American Sons and affiliates in the Congress of American Mothers, arrived on Capital Hill to persuade Congressmen to oppose conscription.<sup>427</sup>

Their efforts at lobbying got out-of-hand quickly, however. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, about 75 mothers were speaking with an advocate of the bill, Senator Claude Pepper (D-FL), when one of the mothers gave him what the paper variously called a "whack," "poke," or "tap" on his neck. A photo shows Pepper surrounded by a sea of women. Rosa Farber blamed the incident on Pepper, saying that he had told them, "You women have no business in the capital. Women don't know anything about laws and government. Those things should be left to men." Farber hinted grimly that after the poking incident the women were not finished with the Senator. "There were a lot of things we would like to have done," she told a reporter.

Farber and her fellow activists were relying on their identities as mothers and women to rally followers, but they had broken decisively with traditions of patriotic

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<sup>427</sup> Jeansonne, 110-112.

motherhood, in which women deferred to men in power and at most criticized particular policies as mistaken. It is hard to imagine a patriotic mother from the American Gold Star Mothers, American War Mothers or American Legion Auxiliary striking a legislator. A political operator through-and-through, Farber explained the incident with Pepper as the women's defense of their suffrage and political judgment. It was a rationale likely calculated to appeal to women more than twenty years after suffrage was passed. Pepper glossed over the incident in public statements. "The ladies got pretty excited and were pressing close around me, so I just excused myself," he explained.<sup>428</sup>

The following day, the mother-activists found a way to vent their emotions on Pepper: they hung him in effigy from a maple tree on the grounds of the Capitol building. "We're hanging Claude Pepper from a sour apple tree," the women chanted, "so our husbands and sons can live on and be free." The *Chicago Tribune* described the mock hanging in an admiring tone, noting the women's resourcefulness in making the figure, and reporting on their defiant exchanges with Capitol police and passers-by. The paper claimed that a crowd of 500 gathered in appreciation of the faux-hanging. The photo the paper ran looked eerie, however, resembling a photo of a lynch mob, except all the attendees were females in proper hats, heels and skirts. The *Tribune* even described the event using terms then associated with lynching, calling the women a "posse" and saying they had "strung up" the effigy [quotation marks in the original]. The mothers were taking the role of protector of the home to a level seldom seen in national politics.<sup>429</sup>

The women's activities seem to have provoked a response from the president of the American Gold Star Mothers, Mrs. M. Jennie Williams. Williams contacted Senator

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<sup>428</sup> "Draft Fighting Mothers Give Pepper A Poke," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 August 1940, 1.

<sup>429</sup> "Mothers Hang Pepper Effigy on Capitol Hill," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 August 1940, 6.

Pepper to ask how she could help campaign for the conscription bill, and a week after the mock lynching she spoke with reporters from the *New York Times* to criticize the isolationist mothers. Since the 1920s, her organization had supported military training for all young men; like many other defense-oriented groups, the AGSM saw conscription and universal military training as proceeding hand-in-hand. The gold star mothers maintained that such training would not only enhance America's defense, but would improve young men's health and morals. This and other groups of Great War-era patriotic mothers were divided over questions of mobilization and aid to Britain, but their long-term support for building up America's defenses made them natural allies for the interventionists' efforts to mobilize.<sup>430</sup>

The gold star mothers' president challenged the isolationist mothers, nine of whom were wearing black crepe for mourning and standing on "death watch" outside the Senate floor. "Why are they wearing mourning? Do any of them have sons that fought in the last world war?" she asked reporters. The loss of her son in the First World War gave her the authority to criticize the women and contest their claim to represent American mothers. The pro-conscription *New York Times* was happy to highlight this angle of the mothers' conflict, though the isolationist *Chicago Tribune* does not appear to have covered Williams' activities at all.<sup>431</sup>

Senator Pepper arranged a photo opportunity to highlight the gold star mothers' support for conscription and President Roosevelt. Pepper predicted that photos of Mrs. Williams congratulating Roosevelt on his strong stance on American defense would

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<sup>430</sup> Sen. Claude Pepper to Edwin M. Watson, Secretary to the President, 26 August 1940; President's Personal File American Gold Star Mothers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers; "Gold Star Mother Vies With Draft 'Mourners,'" *New York Times*, 29 August 1940, 10.

<sup>431</sup> "Gold Star Mother Vies With Draft 'Mourners,'" *New York Times*, 29 August 1940, 10.

“give favorable reaction to the passage of the Bill.” Pepper and Roosevelt’s military aid Major General Edwin M. Watson arranged a photo and press opportunity, but it later fell through.<sup>432</sup>

Though initially the conscription bill had seemed so unpopular as to be a political albatross, it passed the House with a vote of 232-124 and the Senate by 47-25. It passed with two amendments reassuring to isolationists, however. Drafted men were to be held in service for only one year and had to remain in the Western hemisphere. Conscription was debated in August of 1940—a presidential election year. In their campaigns, both Republican candidate Wendell Wilkie and Roosevelt promised to keep the U.S. out of war, often phrasing their promise in terms of keeping American sons safe for the sake of their mothers.<sup>433</sup>

Roosevelt believed that a fighting Great Britain was essential to America’s defense against the Third Reich, however, and after his electoral victory he had greater scope to risk controversial positions. He famously came up with the idea of Lend-Lease—a program of aid to Britain—while staring out at sea on a break from the White House; also well-known is the homey metaphor he used to present Lend-Lease to the public. “[S]uppose my neighbor’s home catches fire, and I have a length of garden hose . . . if he can take my garden hose and connect it up with his hydrant, I may help him to put out his fire.” While interventionists such as the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies supported the measure, it incited isolationists to their greatest efforts. They understood that vital materials such as planes and aircraft carriers were not equivalent to

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<sup>432</sup> Sen. Claude Pepper to Edwin M. Watson, Secretary to the President, 26 August 1940; President’s Personal File American Gold Star Mothers; Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers.

<sup>433</sup> Smith, 466; Paton-Walsh, 117; Philip Kinsley, “Willkie Tells Mothers He’ll Maintain Peace,” *Chicago Tribune*, 5 November 1940, 3.

a garden hose, and they saw the risk of inciting German attacks on American shipping that could lead to a repeat of the events that led to war in 1917.<sup>434</sup>

To fight Lend-Lease, major isolationist groups like America First rallied and organized women in greater numbers, even creating a committee of gold star mothers. The issue mobilized activists across a wide political spectrum. For example, Harriet Vittum had a reputation as Chicago's "second Jane Addams"; she was a settlement worker and was active in numerous municipal reforms and charities. She founded the Roll Call of American Women to encourage women to stand up and be counted as opponents of intervention; the group later merged with America First.<sup>435</sup>

Other new mothers' groups had right-wing radical influences from the start, including The Mothers' Crusade to Defeat Bill 1776 and We, the Mothers, Organize for America. Elizabeth Dilling, founder of The Mothers' Crusade, was a professional anticommunist who became more anti-Semitic and sympathetic to fascist politics over the late 1930s. Nazis praised her criticism of the United States and recirculated her work in Germany; in the U.S. her books on communist conspiracies won her readers and admirers ranging from the FBI to Father Charles Coughlin. Founders of We, the Mothers included anti-Semitic radicals Lyrl Clark Van Hyning and Grace Keefe. Van Hyning believed that Jews wanted to destroy America; she blamed them for causing both the Civil War and both world wars. Both Dilling and Van Hyning remained opposed to American

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<sup>434</sup> Gloria J. Barron, *Leadership in Crisis: FDR and the Path to Intervention* (Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, Kennikat Press, 1973), 44; Franklin D. Roosevelt, Press Conference #702, December 17, 1940, in Samuel Rosenman, ed., *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt IX* (NY: Macmillan, 1941), 607, cited in Barron, 85.

<sup>435</sup> "Mothers Rally in Drive to Shun Overseas Wars," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 July 1940, W1; Rita Fitzpatrick, "Harriet Vittum, Pioneer Social Leader, Retires," *Chicago Tribune*, 2 November 1947, 18; "20 New Chapters," *Chicago Tribune*, 1 February 1941, 2.

involvement in the world war even after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Both faced government investigation for sedition during the Second World War.<sup>436</sup>

During the battle over Lend-Lease, however, the radical women's affiliations were not necessarily obvious to their followers, newspaper reporters, or Congressmen. The Mothers' Crusade and We, the Mothers sent hundreds of members to Washington, D.C. to meet with lawmakers and demonstrate their opposition to the bill. At one time they had 350 women in the Capitol, and Chicago-area clubs set a goal of sending another 20 to 30 women each day. They raised funds to help poor women afford the trip and accommodations. In addition, women around the country sent letters, telegrams and petitions to lawmakers, and some organized local demonstrations.<sup>437</sup>

As isolationist women made a powerful effort against Lend-Lease, interventionist women responded. Not only did they organize lobbying and petition drives, but they also began to counter isolationist claims that a mother's duty was to protect her own family first. Addressing students and faculty at New York City's Hunter College, Eleanor Roosevelt responded to an audience member who asked her whether she would support war if it were necessary to save Great Britain from defeat. "I have four boys and I don't want to see them go to war anymore than any other mother would. Two of them are in the Navy, which would be the first in the war. But perhaps there are some things you would rather die than see happen," she responded. Roosevelt offered a steely alternative to the isolationist mothers: her commitment to principles she valued more highly than her own life or her sons'. Another interventionist woman directly refuted isolationist

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<sup>436</sup> Jeansonne, on Dilling, see his Ch. 2; on van Hyning, 87-96; on Keefe, 92; on Dilling and readers, 21-2.

<sup>437</sup> Jeansonne, 28; "More Mothers Go to Capital in Anti-War Drive," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 February 1941, C5; "Mothers' Group Asks Filibuster to Kill War Bill," *Chicago Tribune*, 27 February 1941, 5; "Mothers-Senators," *Chicago Tribune*, 2 March 1941, C1; "Mothers Protesting War Bill Will Leave Tuesday for Capital," *Chicago Tribune*, 9 February 1941, C2.

women's claims of an inherently antiwar womanhood. Alice Hixon represented the Midwest in a Committee to Defend America radio broadcast. "The great majority of women with whom I have talked are 100% for aid to England," she said. "Possibly women, with their love of home and security, feel the necessity of giving all possible help more closely than many others . . ." Interventionist women were beginning to turn the isolationists' model of motherhood on its head.<sup>438</sup>

Despite the efforts of isolationists, the House of Representatives passed Lend-Lease on February 8, 1941 with a vote of 260 to 165. Its advocates' position that aid to Britain was actually an anti-war measure—because supplying the British would keep war from American shores—had proven a winner.

Isolationists redoubled their efforts in opposing the bill during Senate debates in February. The isolationist mothers' groups had already been putting great effort into their lobbying. Now some of the women became more confrontational. Elizabeth Dilling was a fervent Christian; it is probably no accident that her mothers' organization was called a "Crusade." She was deeply opposed to the New Deal and believed Roosevelt a pawn of communists and Jews. It should not be surprising, then, that her lobbying efforts in Washington were overtly aggressive and thus ineffectual. She did not respect political opponents or believe in the efficacy of democratic political processes. "We'll have those senators' teeth chattering so loud, the folks back home will be able to hear them," she told the *Chicago Tribune* before her followers set off to D.C. When Senator Scott Lucas of Illinois successfully avoided the mothers' groups in the Capitol

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<sup>438</sup> "First Lady to Face War 'If Necessary,'" *New York Times*, 20 February 1941, 8; Transcript of broadcast on CBS, February 9, 1941, Folder: Committee to Defend America, Jan-Feb 1941, Box 24, FFF Papers; quoted in Paton-Walsh, 144.

for days on end, Dilling compared him to a gazelle, frightened by the prospect of meeting with his female constituents.<sup>439</sup>

If Lucas was a gazelle, Dilling was a lion. She was evicted from the Senate and arrested for disorderly conduct. She then led a group of mothers in attempting to hang an effigy of the interventionist journalist Dorothy Thompson from a White House gate. Thompson was probably the most famous of the interventionist women, alongside Eleanor Roosevelt, but she was much more vehement in campaigning for American aid to the British. A literary celebrity, Thompson used her thrice-weekly newspaper column and frequent speaking engagements to insult isolationists and present her case for intervention. She was the mother of a young son, but she did not use motherly identity or rhetoric in her discussions of the war, relying instead on her experience as a reporter in Central Europe and her keen analyses of world politics. The Mothers' Crusade attached a rhyme to the effigy of Thompson: "Eleanor R and Dottie T too/ With the greedy Sol Bloom-Hillman crew/ Are shouting to spend for war again/ A million boys' lives in blood and pain." The Associated Press carried this story, and it was reported in interventionist papers that otherwise ignored the Mothers' Crusade. The result was bad press for the isolationist mothers, who appeared fanatical and out-of-touch.<sup>440</sup>

The mothers' insults had also pushed the Senators too far. Not only were the mothers failing to win converts to their cause, they were exciting open hostility. After being hung in effigy in the battle over conscription, Senator Pepper accused the mothers

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<sup>439</sup> "Mothers Plan Capital Trip to Rip Dictator Bill," *Chicago Tribune*, 6 February 1941, 2; "Crusading Mothers Deflate Sen. Pepper; He'll See Only One," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 February 1941, 6.

<sup>440</sup> "Effigy of Writer Seized in Capital," *New York Times*, 24 February 1941, 7; "Arrest Mrs. Dilling in Senate Lobby as She Asks for Pepper," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 February 1941. Dilling's life story and political activities are discussed in Glenn Jeanson's *Women of the Far Right*, and in Christine M. Erickson's dissertation, "Conservative Women and Patriotic Materanlism: The Beginnings of a Gendered Conservative Tradition in the 1920s and 1930s."

of being communists. Senator Carter Glass (D-VA), angered by Dilling's disruptions of the Lend-Lease debate, asked the FBI to look into the Mothers' Crusade's finances, with the implication that they were funded by radicals. He also said that even a "fish-wife" would be ashamed at the "noisy disorder" the women had caused on the Senate floor. He wondered whether the women really were mothers, saying "For the sake of the race, I devoutly hope not." Not one to be intimidated by authority, Dilling denounced Glass on the Senate floor, earning a \$25 fine.<sup>441</sup>

Like the symbolic lynching of Senator Pepper over conscription, during Lend-Lease the Mother's Crusade and Dilling created a scandalous political theater that made headlines around the country. Actions so far outside the political civility of Washington politics hurt the mothers' isolationist movement and possibly even the isolationist cause more broadly. Unable to comport themselves decorously, Dilling and her mother-followers lost a key strategic advantage: they no longer appeared as virtuous women but rather as fanatics or lower-class nags, "fish-wives." This undercut their only claim to authority in speaking on foreign affairs: their status as sentimental mothers who loved and sought to protect their sons. The *New York Times* and *Atlanta Constitution*, both interventionist papers, presented stories on the women's arrests. Even the isolationist *Chicago Tribune* distanced itself from the Dilling, running an anonymous quote from another isolationist: "I think this circus has been harmful and unpleasant. I think it has done the cause and our work a great deal of harm."<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> "Two Women Are Fined for Senate Disorder," *New York Times*, 7 March 1941, 22, quoted in Paton-Walsh, 148.

<sup>442</sup> Marcia Winn, "Mrs. Dilling and Her Followers Have a Quiet Day in Court," *Chicago Tribune*, 4 March 1941, 2.

Interventionist Senator Hattie Caraway's speech during the debates over Lend-Lease indicated the failures of the isolationist mothers' campaign. They had failed to win her vote, though she was a mother, just as they had failed to win the votes of the majority of Congressional representatives. At the same time, Caraway's short but eloquent speech demonstrated two winning tactics women used in the increasingly successful interventionist movement. First, Caraway refuted the connection between motherhood and isolationism directly. She said that as the only female Senator, she had received many letters against the bill "that would not otherwise have come to me"; they appealed to her on the basis of her sex. Though she had two sons already in the military and thus at risk if America entered the war, she supported Lend-Lease as a way for America to stay out of the war. She noted that many of her male colleagues also had sons in military service, and she defended her fellow Senators. She said many of them were fathers with sons in the military who cared as much for peace as she did. Finally, Caraway concluded: "As a representative of a sovereign state, as an American mother, as one who has been a constant advocate of peace, as one who believes that humanity is at stake and that some measure must be taken to safeguard it, I will cast my vote for the Lend-Lease bill."<sup>443</sup>

Lend-Lease was seen by many contemporaries and is seen by many historians today as the centerpiece of intervention, a law that put the U.S. into the war, if at first as a non-combatant. Its passage showed that the greatest efforts of the isolationist movement were still not enough. Secondly, and significantly in terms of mothers' politics, Caraway's speech indicated that interventionist women could tap into different but also

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<sup>443</sup> "Speech of Mrs. Hattie Caraway," February 27, 1941, Folder: Subject Files: Lend-Lease—Correspondence, Box 8, Committee to Defend America Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, quoted in Paton-Walsh, 149.

powerful beliefs about gender: that both sexes were fundamentally equal and similar, with mothers and fathers loving their children equally. Furthermore, Caraway's behavior was perfectly within the bounds of polite political discourse. Women would win more support by following the norms of behavior expected of them than by flouting them.

Increasingly over the course of 1941, President Roosevelt and his interventionist supporters relied on gold star mothers and war mothers to symbolize the traditional mothers of the home front—the patriotic mothers who supported their sons' soldiering as a duty, even an honor. On Gold Star Mother's Day, Roosevelt praised the "supreme self-sacrifice" of the gold star mothers as an example meant to inspire all Americans. On Armistice Day, only a month before Pearl Harbor, he addressed a group of American Legion and Auxiliary members at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where he said that Americans must fight again to maintain the freedom that world war soldiers had died to protect. Before this point, Roosevelt had avoided appearances at Arlington and with veterans and patriotic motherhood organizations. Also on Armistice Day, Representative Wright Patman (D-TX) addressed the American War Mothers, praising their support for the administration's efforts at preparedness and their leading role "on the home battle front, holding the line for 'God and Country.'" He contrasted them with other groups "bearing similar names" who were opposing preparedness and aid. Perhaps more optimistically than realistically, Patman praised the War Mothers' "'one hundred per cent' cooperation with government in this time of emergency." Overhead, the War

Mothers' service flag flew over the capital, its 60,672 gold stars serving as a reminder of America's losses in its last war.<sup>444</sup>

The bombing of Pearl Harbor united most mothers, including the majority of isolationists, to support America in a war on Japan and its ally Nazi Germany. Though they sometimes recited maternal pacifist slogans, isolationist women were not pacifists; they had always argued that a man should do his duty in defending his country. Except for a radical fringe of Nazi sympathizers, isolationist mothers joined the interventionists to volunteer, work in war industries and support military recruiting, among other home front activities.<sup>445</sup>

In the crisis years of 1939-1941, isolationist mothers mobilized millions of women, and both male and female isolationists used a rhetoric of sentimental motherhood to move audiences to oppose involvement in the war in Europe. Groups such as the Mothers of American Sons, Mothers' Crusade Against Bill 1776 (Lend-Lease), and We, the Mothers Mobilize for America created powerful political theater in the Capitol by dressing in mourning clothes and holding a "death watch" during Congressional debates or by hanging effigies of their interventionist opponents. Isolationist women succeeded so well in their claims to represent all American mothers that General George C. Marshall blamed mothers for antiwar sentiment in Congressional testimony, and White House aides became confused about the difference between the new isolationist mothers' groups and the Great War-era patriotic motherhood groups for gold star mothers and war mothers. After all, their organizations' names could sound very similar. In under two

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<sup>444</sup> "Hails Gold Star Mothers," *New York Times*, 29 September 1941, 3; "President Warns Nation is Facing World War Again," *New York Times*, 12 November 1941, 1 "The Address of Honorable Wright Patman, M.C., to the American War Mothers," *American War Mother* (December 1941), 2, 4.

<sup>445</sup> Jeansonne, 2, 46, 49.

years of activity, the new mothers' groups had eclipsed two decades of work by the Great War-era patriotic mothers' organizations. The older women's patriotic standing, earned by sending their sons into the First World War, was now obscured by the new war and its quickly unfolding events.

### **Conclusion**

Over the 1930s, three major movements undermined the standing of the Great War's patriotic mothers of military servicemen. First, civil rights activists protested the segregation of the gold star mother pilgrimages, and this reflected badly on the white mothers who participated. It also helped expose the racist practices of patriotic motherhood organizations. Though certainly many Americans supported segregation in the 1930s, this early criticism was significant. At least to Northern liberals, it exposed flaws in the women whose "sacred motherhood" had made them politically untouchable since 1917. It created a division between white gold star mothers and those critical of an American nationalism that perpetuated unjust social hierarchies.

In the mid-1930s, new European conflicts convinced many Americans that the First World War had achieved neither peace nor democracy; Congressional investigations publicized charges that international bankers had manipulated the U.S. into joining the war in 1917. As an anti-war movement grew, intellectuals and students blamed gold star mothers for their role in the patriotic pageantry of the Great War, and a few authors reserved a special vitriol for them, resenting the way they seemed to gain social approval and material rewards for their sons' deaths. Thanks to a rapidly growing student movement called the Veterans of Future Wars and Future Gold Star Mothers, a previous generation's martyred mothers became laughingstocks.

Finally, the crisis years of 1939 to 1941 created a new mothers' politics that exploded the patriotic motherhood of the interwar years. Thanks to effective grass-roots organizing, mothers joined isolationist groups in numbers reaching the hundreds of thousands or even millions, and major isolationist newspaper publishers were happy to report on the women's opinions and activities. But right-wing radicals' infiltration and eventual takeover of isolationist mothers' groups brought the larger mothers' isolationist movement into disrepute. Furthermore, during the Lend-Lease debates in 1941 interventionist women began to use motherhood rhetoric effectively, arguing that both morality and common sense steered them toward aid to Britain. They acted with the civility expected of women in national politics, and they argued that some principles were worth dying to defend. The gold star mothers and war mothers of 1917-1918 took only a minor and mainly symbolic role in the major battles over intervention. In debates over America's role in the world, it was unclear exactly what constituted a "patriotic" position, and mothers' evident divisions over this question undermined the image of a united, harmonious patriotic motherhood that World War I-era mothers' organizations had cultivated.

During World War II, propagandists reconfigured patriotic motherhood to fit the new wartime society created by rapid and thorough mobilization. In popular depictions the most important mother-heroines of this new war were the wives of servicemen with small children. A 1944 advertisement for the film *Tender Comrade* made this clear, presenting star Ginger Rogers as a representative of "America's newest, truest kind of heroine—the 'Chin Up' Girl!" who was one of millions of "sweethearts and Furlough Wives." In the film, Rogers was an industrial worker, a soldier's wife, and finally the

mother of an infant. Whether a pin-up girl inspiring soldiers or a “Chin Up Girl” inspiring women at home, the dominant feminine ideal of the Second World War was young and attractive, no longer the grey-bunned, bespectacled patriotic mother of 1917. This was due in part to the sexual revolution of the interwar years that emphasized a healthy heterosexuality and the accompanying backlash against the Victorian moral mother, that symbol and enforcer of sexual purity.<sup>446</sup>

This change must also be seen in the context of the thorough, rapid mobilization required by the Second World War, a much longer and more intense conflict for the U.S. than the First World War had been. Women who craved an active role in the war had new opportunities. They could not only serve as nurses, but could also join new units such as the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (later simply Women’s Army Corps) and the Navy’s Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, or WAVES. Women’s opportunities reflected civilian women’s advancements in the workforce in the interwar years and built on the service of the small numbers of women allowed into the military in 1917-1918. WAACs and WAVES served as examples of nationalist self-sacrifice and courage once provided by mothers of soldiers, women kept on the sidelines by virtue of their sex. Women could now serve the nation directly rather than contributing second-hand through the bravery of their sons.

Perhaps less glamorously, but in far greater numbers, American women worked in industry to create the war materials so essential to victory. By 1943, when the federal government decided to devote a section of its propaganda bureau to recruiting women into industrial jobs, images and stories focusing on female war workers in magazines and advertisements concentrated especially on youthful women who could serve as romantic

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<sup>446</sup> Advertisement for *Tender Comrade*, printed in the *Woman’s Home Companion*, January 1944, 13.

heroines. The image of Rosie the Riveter provides a famous example of the type of young, sexy war worker the government promoted in cooperation with mass media. Women of adult sons also worked in industry, but they were not often the heroines of visual or textual propaganda. Of course, older women were not the only ones underrepresented; though African American women were key war workers, they were not often depicted as such.<sup>447</sup>

The American War Mothers and American Gold Star Mothers amended their Congressional charters to accept new members during World War II. Their budgets and membership grew, and they were responsible for doing important volunteer work with returning disabled veterans. But the political importance of patriotic mothers was on the wane. Mothers of servicemen and gold star mothers were still powerful symbols, but they were no longer the primary embodiment of patriotic American womanhood. Men and women of the 1940s and 1950s were famously uncomfortable with mothers' power in the home and family, as Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers* made clear. Wylie invented the term "momism" to describe how nearly every social problem in America could be traced to mothers' power. Intellectuals of various backgrounds joined him in his condemnations. Only after the growth of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s would a new generation of activists re-imagine motherhood and reclaim it as an inspiration for political change.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst, MA: U. of Massachusetts Press, 1984).

<sup>448</sup> Marguerite White, *The American War Mothers: A Fifty Year History* (Published by the American War Mothers, 1981), 31, 33; "History," American Gold Star Mothers, Inc., accessed March 6, 2011, <http://www.goldstarmoms.com/WhoWeAre/History/History.htm>; Plant on Wylie, Ch. 1; Alonso, 173-9.

## Conclusion

From Sparta to Canada, the U.S. to Iraq, peoples throughout time and across the world have idealized mothers' sacrifices of their soldier sons. Stories and myths present mothers' willingness to suffer bereavement as a measure of the justness of a war and the importance of a nation's survival. But mothers' support for war, and the propaganda of pro-war motherhood, is neither inevitable nor natural. It is manufactured. This study has grounded the cultural and intellectual history of the nationalist mother—frequently called the patriotic or the Spartan mother—in a specific setting and milieu. By focusing on cultural “makers and users,” it has traced the process by which a variety of Americans adopted a rhetoric of patriotic motherhood from 1914 to 1941, and gauged their purposes and impact on wartime and interwar culture. The result shows that wartime politics has profound effects on peacetime society, and it foregrounds a conservative and nationalist element in women's politics that can be traced from the Great War to today.<sup>449</sup>

Maternal pacifism was the radical starting point of this history. Without the founding of the Woman's Peace Party in 1915, there would have been no patriotic motherhood propaganda. Just as “I Did Not Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” spawned “I Did Not Raise My Boy to Be a Slacker,” so the strong connection of motherhood with peace spurred a reaction from opponents. Before the war, only a few female advocates of a stronger military used a rhetoric of motherhood, for example saying that women as mothers should act to protect their children from the threat of foreign invasion. Once the U.S. declared war on Germany, however, and especially as Congress debated legislation

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<sup>449</sup> Suzanne Evans, *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs: World War I and the Politics of Grief* (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's UP, 2007). In “makers and users” I'm referring to creators and audiences as engaged in a creative dialogue, borrowing a model from material culture studies, see Ann Smart Martin, “Makers, Buyers and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 28, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1993): 141-157, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1181525>, accessed on 15 Nov. 2011.

for military conscription, women began to articulate and propagate a vision of motherly heroism revolving around a willingness to sacrifice sons for the nation. Pro-war, pro-conscription publishers were eager to print these women's opinions, and even solicited them.

Unlike their forebears in previous wars, these women reflected their Progressive environment by demanding that government respond to their sacrifices with reform—for example, by modernizing the military, giving women the vote, creating stringent morals reforms, or recognizing the wartime contributions of African Americans. While American women in the Civil War and other conflicts had praised the stoic and self-sacrificing mother of soldiers, the powerful women's club movement in the early twentieth-century created the conditions for wartime mother-heroines to combine the passive suffering of separation and loss with active, public campaigning.

My analysis has shown that the women who deployed a rhetoric of patriotic motherhood were motivated by a variety of goals, love of country being only one of them. For example, the elite women who participated in the pro-draft campaign feared that native-born "college boys" would be decimated by the war if a military volunteer system remained in place. Rinehart and other Northern, pro-conscription women tried to warn middle-class and elite mothers that without a draft immigrant men—"men without a country"—would not fight at all, but would enjoy American prosperity and democracy at no personal cost.<sup>450</sup>

Rinehart had an additional motivation: her book publisher and close personal friend, George Doran, was asking her to write an article "urging other mothers to give up their sons," and her magazine publisher, George H. Lorimer, seconded the request.

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<sup>450</sup> Rinehart, "Altar," 6.

Though Rinehart had achieved tremendous success as a writer, she was a woman who had dragged herself up from poverty. She never felt secure in her wealth and prestige. When two of the most powerful men in her life asked her to write the article, she did. And afterward, she enjoyed the fruits of a close, cooperative relationship with the U.S. government in wartime.

But Rinehart's article would have been meaningless if patriotic motherhood had not touched a chord in a wide range of Americans, among them a number of women's club leaders and activists. The women of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), National Congress of Mothers (NCM), and General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) framed their wartime work as motherly and praised mothers of military servicemen and servicewomen.

NAWSA paraded its mothers of soldiers through city streets to prove that suffragists were patriotic, and members turned their formidable organizing skills to selling war bonds, especially to other women. NAWSA reprinted sections of "The Altar of Freedom" and presented readers with suffragists' own prescriptions for patriotic motherhood. The GFWC and NCM used the persona of the patriotic mother in promoting curfews for teenaged girls around military camps and in offering hostess houses to soldiers on leave. They implicitly and explicitly posed the patriotic mother as the virtuous opponent of the disease-ridden prostitute, whose actions were presented as a threat to both the war effort and the health of the American family. The prostitute, then, was an enemy of the nation just as the Germans were. Over the course of the war, authorities' inability to put a stop to prostitution led both federal officials and women's clubs to present teenaged girls as a sexual threat equal to the prostitute. The arrests,

forced medical exams and incarceration of tens of thousands of women—an estimated number that is likely too low—must be seen as one of the fruits of patriotic motherhood. Though Progressive-era women had the sociological studies to show that prostitution resulted from poverty and need, wartime women’s leaders focused their energy and funds on nurturing soldiers and allowed the nation’s disorderly daughters to face punishment rather than opportunities for reform.<sup>451</sup>

The Great War was a particularly pivotal event for African Americans. A number of race leaders hoped that by participating enthusiastically, whether in military or civilian capacities, people of color could prove their courage, self-sacrifice and superlative citizenship. For African Americans, the gendered culture of wartime could seem an opportunity to disprove negative stereotypes. A man could prove his manliness by soldiering, and soldiering well; a woman could prove her womanliness by acting as a patriotic mother. The service flag, municipal parade, and the mother of military servicemen were key pro-war symbols that African Americans used to highlight their race’s long history of sacrifice for the nation and so present arguments for equal citizenship.

After the war African American members of the American War Mothers persisted in organizing chapters despite ongoing tensions with the national organization because, as one mother explained, she believed every contact between the races would improve their relations. Local African American War Mothers’ clubs must be understood in the context of the reigning culture of white supremacy; simply by existing, the African American War mothers were refuting the popular and academic versions of American history that excluded African American contributions. Thus when the Hoover administration decided

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<sup>451</sup> Pivar, “Cleansing,” 38, 32.

to segregate the Gold Star Mother pilgrimages, they outraged the NAACP and the activist black press, managing to offend even white liberals. In trying to please Southerners, the president hewed to a line established in 1921 in the rituals surrounding the burial of the Unknown Soldier, in which national mourning celebrations were nearly all-white.

The protests against the pilgrimages' segregation by the NAACP, the Illinois state legislature, and others showed the progress that had been made in the intervening decade. When famous singer Madame Schumann-Heink scolded the white supremacy of a local California War Mothers' unit, and when a satirist used the pages of *Esquire* to lampoon gold star mothers as bigots, it indicated that public opinion was changing. The virulent racism woven into the popular culture of America's 1910s would no longer go unchallenged. In this way, the Great War generation's hopes did bear fruit: the African American gold star mothers served as symbols of virtue and victimization that enlisted white liberals in a protest against segregation.

In contrast, during the 1920s, white gold star mothers and war mothers were patriotic heroines for a wide swathe of Americans, as advertising, fundraising efforts, contacts with top politicians, and mourning rituals showed. Yet the women held a special importance to antiradicals, who relied on the gold star mother to stir patriotic emotions they could use in campaigns against their political enemies, including socialists, anarchists, communists, pacifists and all those suspected of involvement with radical "isms". Mothers of soldiers founded the American War Mothers and the American Gold Star Mothers in the 1920s, and by 1925 they had allied themselves with the Daughters of the American Revolution and American Legion Auxiliary in the Woman's Patriotic Conference on National Defense (WPCND). This organization was founded to oppose

the pacifist women's movement. WPCND conferences issued resolutions seeking ever-smaller immigration quotas, larger budgets for the military, and domestic policies such as loyalty oaths for educators. While both mothers' organizations contributed to Red Scare hysteria, they also did important volunteer work with wounded veterans. Gold star mothers' outrage at veterans' neglect helped to fan public scandals, and this would eventually lead to the reorganization of the Veterans' Bureau.

The 1920s should be seen as a peak for the prestige and power of patriotic motherhood. Though the American War Mothers and American Gold Star Mothers never had membership greater than the tens of thousands, their power as symbols meant that their officers took a leading role in war commemorations and patriotic holidays, including Mother's Day, Armistice Day, Independence Day, and other patriotic holidays. Their leaders issued political statements and willingly served as figureheads for antiradical women's attacks on mainstream women's organizations, but they somehow appeared above the fray. As the women campaigned for all-expenses-paid trips to Europe to visit their sons' graves, Congressmen and mother-activists acknowledged that no "100 per-cent American" politician would wish to be seen voting against them, either out of sincere respect or a desire to remain popular with voters. But if the passage of the pilgrimage legislation was a triumph, it also put the mothers in a precarious position. By the first year of pilgrimages in 1930, the stock market had crashed and the economy was in a tailspin. The 1930s would be a decade of rambunctious, radical politics, and the old-

fashioned virtues touted by patriotic motherhood organizations would become not only passé, but distasteful to a variety of authors and activists.<sup>452</sup>

The segregation of the gold star mother pilgrimages revealed the prejudices of white gold star mothers and war mothers, exposing them as idols with feet of clay. Over the 1930s, antiwar activists in student movements and the arts proceeded to portray gold star mothers as symbols not of nobility but of foolishness. Opponents argued that their unthinking patriotism and obedience to authority was a perversion of a mother's love and was one factor in the deaths of millions of young men in the Great War. Attacks on the mothers offended the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and their allies in Congress and society. Patriotic motherhood had become a polarizing issue, with gold star mothers applauded as heroines or reviled as dupes, depending on the attitudes and alliances of the speaker.

The threat of a Second World War both recalled the Great War-era rhetoric of pacifist and patriotic motherhood and scrambled these categories beyond recognition. Isolationist publishers, no doubt recalling the effective uses of motherhood rhetoric in the First World War, both publicized and fomented an isolationist mothers' movement. Leaders claimed to be superior patriots, but as mothers of the nation they called for peace, or at least an armed neutrality. Mother fought mother in the court of public opinion. Mothers of draft aged sons, gold star mothers, and mothers of world war veterans spoke to newspaper reporters, demonstrated in the nation's capitol, and spoke in Congress. Though isolationists were first in connecting motherhood to their position, interventionists increasingly used a motherly identity to argue for supporting Great

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<sup>452</sup> Letter from Mrs. Mary Hallberg of Brooklyn, printed in Congress, House, Committee on Military Affairs, *Hearing To Authorize Mothers of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe To Visit the Graves*, 68<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 19 February 1924, 25.

Britain in its struggle with Germany. Pearl Harbor ended their debates. A broad consensus for war, even among former isolationists, made antiwar motherhood disreputable, just as it had been in 1917 to 1918.

The coming of the Second World War made the patriotic motherhood of the Great War era seem fusty and passé. It was a different war, with different demands. Pin-up girls were the new female heroines for military men, and even mother-heroines in women's magazines were usually young and attractive, mothers of small children rather than soldiers. A few authors wrote mother songs focusing on the suffering, grey-haired mother of enlisted sons, but most wartime songs focused on romance. The length and intensity of the Second World War also offered women new opportunities to serve their country. Working in war industries, watching the children of female war workers, or even joining the military themselves, women of the 1940s might experience the same emotional suffering as women of previous generations, but new forms of meaningful activity were available to them.

This study has highlighted the centrality of women, mothers and the family to public debates over war and military preparedness from the 1910s into the 1940s. Despite the impact of Freudianism and women's ascendance in the workforce, this analysis suggests that in politics and public life, mothers remain powerful symbols of hearth, home, self-sacrifice, and love. When they choose to speak as mothers, female activists, politicians and authors amp up the emotions in any debate and wield a unique authority on questions of public good. Mothers of soldiers and especially gold star mothers command the attention of politicians and the press, as we have seen in debates over Vietnam and both Iraq wars.

Mary Roberts Rinehart's statement that "mothers raise the nation's army," remains as true today as it was in 1917. As the U.S. remains embroiled in distant conflicts, there is no denying the vital role of mothers and families of military service members in supporting the nation's fighting forces and both supporting and questioning its foreign policy. Yet as this study has shown, despite the overheated claims of wartime propaganda, there is no single role that is natural for mothers in wartime, nor even one position that can be called traditional.<sup>453</sup>

In the late 1930s, Rinehart wrote an article for *Good Housekeeping* questioning whether the Great War was worth fighting and apologizing for her pro-war activities. She asked readers to join her in supporting an amendment to the Constitution that would require a popular referendum before troops could be committed to fighting on foreign soil. In doing so, she was allying herself with her old ideological enemies, the maternal pacifists.<sup>454</sup> Rinehart's story highlights the extreme social pressures individuals can face during wartime mobilization, and the way a person's politics can change over time. It reminds us that there are no true mother-villains and no true mother-heroines in wartime, only individuals uncertain what the future holds.

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<sup>453</sup> Rinehart, "Altar," 5.

<sup>454</sup> Cohn, 225; Rinehart, "Before the Drums Beat," *Good Housekeeping*, January 1938, 158-59.

## Appendix A: Pro-War Mother Songs Published in the U.S. in 1917-1918

This sheet music is from the Sam DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music, held in the Archives Center of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. Each song emphasizes patriotic motherhood in its lyrics or artwork.

### 1917

- "America Here's My Boy: The Sentiment of Every American Mother," words by Andrew B. Sterling, music by Arthur Lange, published by Joe Morris Music Co., 1917
- "America Needs You Like a Mother (Would You Turn Your Mother Down?)" words by Grant Clarke, music by Jean Schwartz, published by Kalmar Puck & Abrahams, 1917
- "Don't Forget Your Dear Old Mother," words by H.H. Schultz, music by Courtney & J.E. Allemong, published by Imperial Music Company, 1917
- "God Send My Boy Safe Home Again," words by Clara S. Armstrong, music by Henry S. Sawyer, published by Frank K. Root & Co., 1917
- "I Wonder What He's Doing Tonight," words by Joe Goodwin, music by James F. Hanley, published by Shapiro Bernstein & Co., 1917
- "If I Had A Son for Each Star in Old Glory (Uncle Sam I'd Give Them All to You)," words by J.E. Dempsey, music by Joseph A. Burke, published by Leo Feist Inc., 1917
- "I'm Going to Be a Soldier and Fight for the U.S.A.," words and music by Haller and Stafford, published by Haller and Stafford, 1917
- "So Long, Mother (Al Jolson's Mother Song)," words by Raymond Egan and Gus Kahn, music by Egbert Van Alstyne, published by Jerome H. Remick & Co., 1917
- "The Dream of a Soldier Boy," words by Alfred Dubin, music by James V. Monaco, published by M. Witmark & Sons, 1917
- "The Greatest General of Them All," words by Robert F. Roden, music by A. Fred Phillips, published by Maurice Richmond Music Co., 1917
- "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle is the Hand that Rules the World," words by Jeff Branen, music by Evans Lloyd, published by Jeff Branen, 1917
- "There's A Vacant Chair in Every Home To-Night," words by Alfred Bryan, music by Ernest Breuer, published by Meyer Cohen Music, 1917
- "Your Country Needs You Now," words by Al. Dubin, music by Rennie Cormack and Geo. B. McConnell, published by M. Witmark & Sons, 1917

### 1918

- "A Mother's Prayer," words by Carl Avery Werner, music by Gustave Ferrari, published by Boosey & Co., 1918
- "A Soldier's Dream," words and music by Byron Gay, published by Byron Gay, 1918.
- "A Soldier's Rosary," words by J.E. Dempsey, music by Jos. A. Burke, published by A.J. Stasny Music Co., 1918

- “Baby Memories,” words and music by E.L. Whelan and W.J. McIntosh, published by Daniels & Wilson, 1918
- “Bring Me A Letter from My Old Home Town,” words by A.G. Delamater, music by Will R. Anderson, published by M. Witmark & Sons, 1918
- “Cheer Up, Mother,” words and music by Mary Earl, published by Shapiro Bernstein & Co., 1918
- “Each Stitch Is a Thought of You, Dear,” words by Al Sweet, Music by Billy Baskette, published by Leo Feist, 1918
- “For Your Boy and My Boy,” words by Gus Kahn, music by Egbert Van Alstyne, published by Jerome H. Remick & Co., 1918
- “God Be With My Wandering Boy Tonight,” words by Eddie Dorr and Bob Schafer, music by Lew Porter and Jim Quigley, published by Crown Music Co., 1918
- “Goodbye, Mother Machree,” words by J. Keirn Brennan, music by Ernest R. Ball, published by M. Witmark & Sons, 1918
- “If I’m Not at the Roll Call Kiss Mother Good-Bye for Me,” words and music by George Boyden, published by Leo Feist, 1918
- “Just a Mother’s Dream (When the Shadows Fall),” words by Bernie Grossman, music by Frank Magini, published by The Joe Morris Music Co., 1918
- “Mother, I’m Going Over,” words and music by Jas. O. Scott, published by Jas. O. Scott, 1918
- “Mothers of America: You Have Done Your Share!” words by Harry Ellis, Music by Lew Porter, published by Jos. W. Stern & Co., 1918
- “Mothers of France,” words and music by Leo Wood, published by Meyer Cohen, 1918
- “Oh, Moon of the Summer Night (Tell My Mother Her Boy’s All Right),” words and music by Allan J. Flynn, published by Al Piantadosi & Co., Inc., 1918
- “Place A Candle in the Window Till Your Laddie Boy Comes Home,” words by Fern Glenn, music by Maxwell Goldman, published by Buck & Lowney, 1918
- “She is Going to Raise Her Boy to Be a Soldier,” words by Dr. C. F. Conrad, Music by Dell Lampe, published by Dr. Charles F. Conrad, 1918
- “She’ll Miss Me Most of All,” words by Will J. Hart, music by Ed Nelson, published by A.J. Stasny Music Co., 1918
- “Take Care of Mother for Me,” words and music by Frances Cater, published by Frances Cater, 1918
- “Tell Mother the World War is Won,” words by Borum S. Baggs, music by Dale H. Baggs, published by G.S. Baggs, 1918
- “The Message That Never Came,” words and music by Clayton Calhoun, published by Shapiro Bernstein & Co., 1918
- “There’s a Battlefield in Every Mother’s Heart,” words by Howard E. Rodgers, music by M. Kay Jerome, published by Waterson, Berlin & Snyder Co., 1918
- “We’ll Do Our Share (While You’re Over There),” words by Lew Brown and Al Harriman, music by Jack Egan, published by Broadway Music Corporation, 1918
- “While You’re Away” Pack Up Your Cares in a Bundle of Joy,” words and lyrics by L. Wolfe Gilbert and Anatole Friedland, published by Gilbert and Friedland, 1918
- “When the Little Blue Star in the Window Has Turned to Gold,” words by Paul B. Armstrong, music by F. Henri Klickmann, published by Frank K. Root & Co., 1918

“Will You Say to My Dear Mammy,” words and music by Senator M.C. Thornton,  
published by M.C. Thornton, 1918

“With Every Thought I Breathe a Prayer to You My Boy,” words by J. Will Callahan,  
music by Blanche M. Tice, published by Blanche M. Tice Music, 1918

“You’re the Greatest Little Mothers in the World (Mothers of America),” words by Joe  
Young and Sam M. Lewis, music by Archie Gottler, published by Waterson  
Berlin & Snyder Co., 1918

## **Appendix B: Sample Digest of Organizations Petitioning the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense for Morals Regulations**

This is a sample of the huge total number of groups petitioning for strict moral regulations designed to protect soldiers from the temptations of liquor and prostitution by establishing specially policed zones around the camps. The WCCND sent this list of petitions to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker on September 11, 1917.\*

Sons and Daughters of Liberty, Ilion, New York  
Parent-Teachers' Association of Ilion, New York  
Wednesday Morning Club, Rome, New York  
Langhorne Sorosis, Langhorne, Pennsylvania  
Rochester Branch of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae  
Chapter B.P.E.O., Dickinson, North Dakota  
Woman's Club of East Moline, Illinois  
Nevin Club of the Plymouth Congregational Church, East Moline, Illinois  
Household Science Club, Pesotum, Illinois  
Political Equality Club of Holland, Patent, New York  
Woman's Club, Rome, New York  
Womans' Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the First Utica Presbyterian Church,  
Utica, NY  
Consumer's League, Utica, New York  
General Marion Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, Canon City, Colorado  
Daughters of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii  
New Hampshire Equal Suffrage Association, Concord, New Hampshire  
Woman's Auxiliary, Standing Rock Episcopal Mission, South Dakota  
Ladies' Aid of the First M.E. Church of Rialto (state unknown)  
Violet Rebekah Lodge, No. 198, Ilion, New York  
Woman's Club of Camargo, Illinois  
Woman's Christian Association of Utica, New York  
History and Shakespeare Club of Farmer City, Illinois  
Ladies' Aid Society of the First Baptist Church, Ardmore, Pennsylvania  
First Baptist Church, Lansdale, Pennsylvania  
Civic Club, Binghamton, New York  
W.C.T.U., Clinton, New York  
Tuesday Club, Cynwyd, Pennsylvania  
Chapter F. of P.E.O., Bismarck, North Dakota  
Maui Branch of Woman's Board of Missions, Maui, Hawaii  
W.C.T.U., Lansadle, Pennsylvania  
Chapter H. P.E.O., Bismarck, North Dakota

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\* Alice H. Wood, Executive Secretary of the WCCND, to Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War, 11 September 1917; Alabama 22; Alabama 14-32, Entry 395; Commission on Training Camp Activities, Reports Relating to Training Camp Activities, 1917; War College Division and War Plans Division Subordinate Offices-Education and Recreation Branch; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs; RG 165; National Archives II, College Park, MD.

Woman's Suffrage Party, Lansdale, Pennsylvania  
Monday Study Club, Rock Island, Illinois  
Utica Chapter, American Red Cross, Utica, New York  
Hawaiian Allied War Relief Association (no city and state listed)  
W.C.T.U. of Boonville, New York  
Connecticut Branch of Collegiate Alumnae, Waterbury, Connecticut  
W.C.T.U. of Cupertino (no state listed)  
Young Woman's Christian Association, Utica, New York  
Council of Jewish Women, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
W.C.T.U. of Rome, New York  
Decatur Woman's Club, Decatur, Illinois  
Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Knoxboro, New York  
Woman's Club, the Mothers' Club, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of  
Ridley Park (no state listed)  
Emerson Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
San Bernardino Woman's Club, San Bernardino, California  
Monticello Woman's Club, Monticello, Illinois  
L.H.D. Crane Relief Corps, No. 49, Beloit, Wisconsin  
Woman's Guild of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Honolulu, Hawaii

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Frederick May Eliot Papers and Frederick May Eliot Additional Papers

#### **Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library**

Eleanor Roosevelt Papers

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Papers

#### **Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**

Gold Star Mothers, Inc. Collection

Robert M. LaFollette Papers

John Sharp Williams Papers

#### **Special Collections, Music Division, Library of Congress**

The Harry and Sara Lepman Collection

#### **National Archives and Records Administration**

RG 53: Records of the Bureau of the Public Debt

RG 62: Council of National Defense

RG 92: Office of the Quartermaster General

RG 165: Records of the War Department General Staff

RG 200: Records of the American Red Cross

RG 407: The Adjutant General's Office

#### **The National Museum of American History, The Smithsonian Institution**

Sam DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music

#### **Princeton University Archives, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library**

Veterans of Future Wars Collection

#### **Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University**

David Frederick Babson Papers

Ethel Sturges Dummer Papers

Young Women's Christian Association of Cambridge, MA Records

Boston Young Women's Christian Association Papers

#### **University of Pittsburgh Library, Special Collections**

Mary Roberts Rinehart Papers

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*The Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine*, 1914-1917.

*Four Lights* (New York Woman's Peace Party), 1916-1917.

*The General Federation of Women's Clubs Magazine*, 1917-1918.

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*Proceedings of the Continental Congress of the Daughters of the American Revolution*, 1914-1917.

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### **Newspaper and Magazine Research**

A majority of my newspaper research was conducted via electronic databases ProQuest Historical Newspapers and America's Historical Newspapers, available at the New York Public Library and assorted university libraries.

On ProQuest, I was able to search the following publications:

*The [Baltimore] Afro American*

*Atlanta Constitution*

*Boston Globe*

*The Chicago Defender*

*The Chicago Tribune*

*Los Angeles Times*

*The New York Times*

*Philadelphia Tribune*

*The Pittsburgh Courier*

*Times of London*

*Washington Post*

*Wall Street Journal*

The ProQuest database skews toward surviving publications in major media markets. I have tried to off-set this problem by researching and pointing out the political allegiances of writers, editors and publishers whenever possible. In researching the mothers' conscription campaign, I also read the *New York Journal American* and *New York Tribune* on microfilm for April to June 1917. The women's club newsletters also provide context for the newspapers, as the female editors usually provided commentary on current events.

The America's Historical Newspapers, Series III (1829-1922) database allows a researcher to conduct word searches of the contents of over 1000 newspapers. This incredibly rich database also presents the context surrounding a specific article, giving viewers a look at the newspaper page as it was originally printed and listing neighboring headlines.

I cited stories from the following publications available through The America's Historical Newspapers database:

*Anaconda Standard* (MT)  
*Belleville (Illinois) News-Democrat*  
*The Charlotte (NC) Observer*  
*The Daily Herald (Biloxi, MS)*  
*Dallas Morning News*  
*Duluth (Minn.) News Tribune*  
*Ft. Wayne (Indiana) News and Sentinel*  
*Ft. Worth (TX) Star Telegram*  
*Grand Forks (ND) Herald*  
*The Kansas City Star*  
*Macon (GA) Daily Telegraph*  
*Miami Herald*  
*San Jose (CA) Mercury News*

Other print sources were searched on microfilm, including:

*Bryn Mawr College News*, 1936  
*Dry Goods Economist*, 1917 to 1918  
*The Saturday Evening Post*, 1914 to 1919  
*Trench and Camp*, 1917

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