**Women in World War I**

Women have long been involved in the military during times of war, though not always in a capacity that we might recognize as “traditionally” military. For centuries women have followed armies, many of them soldiers’ wives, providing indispensable services such as cooking, nursing, and laundry—in fact, “armies could not have functioned as well, perhaps could not have functioned at all, without the service of women.”

With the onset of World War I, women took on these same roles and newer ones, but their service during this conflict was significantly different from that of earlier wars. Thousands of women in the United States formed and/or joined organizations that worked to bring relief to the war-torn countries in Europe, even before official American entry into the war in April 1917. After the United States joined the Allies, women continued to join these organizations and dedicate themselves to supporting and expanding the war effort. These groups were highly organized, much like the military, which helped women garner respect from their fellow citizens and have their patriotic endeavors taken seriously.

**Red Cross Hold Up Your End**

Aside from their mass involvement in these voluntary organizations and efforts, a key difference between women’s service during World War I and that of previous wars was the class of women involved. Typically women who followed armies were from the working classes of society, but during the Great War, women from all classes served in many different capacities. Upper class women were the primary founders and members of voluntary wartime organizations, particularly because they could afford to devote so much of their time and money to these efforts. Middle- and lower-class women also participated in these organizations and drives, although they were more likely to be serving as nurses with the military or replacing men in their jobs on the home front as the men went off to war. For the first time in American history, women from every part of the class spectrum were serving in the war in some capacity.

Another significant change to women’s service during the Great War is that American civilian women donned uniforms. The uniforms allowed women to look the part and claim credibility for their services, as well as to be taken seriously by others; many women saw their wartime service as a way to claim full citizenship, and the uniforms symbolized “their credentials as citizens engaged in wartime service.” 2

Other women donned uniforms because of their association with the military—World War I was the first time in American history in which women were officially attached to arms of the American military and government agencies. Yeomen served with the Navy and the Marine Corps, while the Army Nurse Corps was attached to the Army. In France, 223 American women popularly known as “Hello Girls” served as long-distance switchboard operators for the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

**Women's Uniforms**

The Great War saw tens of thousands of women, American and otherwise, don uniforms to take on their war work. What is so striking about the uniforming of American women during World War I, is that it occurred in all parts of women's war efforts. Whether attached to the military or to voluntary organizations, working in factories, on farms, or filling in other occupations as men left for overseas service, women wore uniforms. Women's uniforms of World War I fall into three main categories: suits (including jacket and skirt), breeches or overalls, and dresses and aprons. These uniforms could be handmade or store-bought. The design of these uniforms was influenced greatly by men's military uniforms, American and Allied, as evidenced by the strikingly military style of the women's uniforms. Other influences included Allied women’s uniforms and women's civilian dress in the United States.

The motivations behind the adoption of uniforms and their specific styles are varied. For women attached to the armed forces, such as the Navy's Yeomen, uniforms were part and parcel of military life. For others, especially factory workers and motor corps drivers, the change from traditional female garb to uniforms was simply a matter of practicality—women needed to wear clothes that were less restricting but still respectable, so uniforms modeled on military styles were a perfect option. Wearing uniforms also created and bolstered morale among organizations and groups of women, as well as engendering a feeling of self-worth and an established identity. Perhaps most importantly, the adoption of uniforms demanded attention and respect from the women’s fellow citizens. Women felt that the uniforms visibly validated their volunteer work and their accomplishments as actively engaged citizens, thus pushing the agenda of equal rights and the vote for women. This push for equal recognition was further aided by the uniforms’ echoes of men’s military dress, which helped suppress gender distinctions by aligning women more closely to the masculine values of the military. Women's highly visible and recognized wartime service, facilitated by their adoption of uniforms, ultimately contributed to their attainment of the right to vote in 1920.

**Music**

American popular music in the early 20th century was centered in New York City, specifically in an area known as "Tin Pan Alley." Tin Pan Alley initially referred to a precise location: 28th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues. However, as the popular music industry blossomed and attracted more and more songwriters and publishers, the name shifted to refer to these New York City songwriters and music publishers, rather than the original location. The musicals on Broadway, a popular venue for American music in the early 1900s, often pulled from the songs written in Tin Pan Alley, which helped increase the popularity of Tin Pan Alley composers. Some of the most popular of these composers are Irving Berlin, George and Ira Gershwin, Scott Joplin, and Harry and Albert Von Tilzer. Notable publishers from Tin Pan Alley include Leo Feist; M. Whitmark & Sons; Waterson, Berlin & Snyder, Inc.; and Shapiro, Bernstein & Co. Most of the sheet music in this section was published in New York City, some under predominant Tin Pan Alley publishers like Leo Feist and Shapiro, Bernstein & Co.

World War I music, much like other cultural creations such as books and TV shows, is an illuminating product of its time, providing insight into the various popular sentiments prevailing in America during the war. These sentiments and themes include antiwar feelings, reluctance, loss, patriotism, inspiration, and dedication to the war effort.

The role of women in the sheet music is varied. Some of the pieces feature a female songwriter and/or vocalist. However, many of the pieces feature women on the covers, showing them either as passive or active agents in the war. Pieces in which women seem passive and helpless tend to be more sentimental and show women being left behind or reluctantly saying goodbye as the men go off to war (see, for example, "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier"). Then there are the songs where women are depicted as taking an active role in aiding the war effort, such as "I'm Going to Follow the Boys" and "(And Then She'd) Knit, Knit, Knit." In addition to showing women in active and passive roles during the war, the songs highlight circumstances in which many women found themselves, whether it was having a father, son, or husband go off to war or taking part in the home front war efforts.

**War Posters**

The use of posters as propaganda took off during World War I, and some of the most iconic images from this era are still in use today. For example, the image of Uncle Sam pointing at viewers and saying, "I WANT YOU," created by James Montgomery Flagg, dates from 1916 and was subsequently used throughout the rest of World War I, repurposed for World War II, and is still identifiable to many people today. The popularity of posters during World War I speaks to how effectively they could reach and influence the American people, conveying information while attempting to affect behavior.

Many of the posters were commissioned by the Committee on Public Information's Division of Pictorial Publicity. George Creel, chair of the committee, felt strongly that posters would be extremely important in influencing Americans’ feelings: "I had the conviction that the poster must play a great role in the right for public opinion. The printed word might not be read; people might choose not to attend meetings or to watch motion pictures, but the billboard was something that caught even the most indifferent eye . . ."

Other organizations heavily involved in the war and war relief efforts, such as the U.S. Army, the YMCA, and the Red Cross, also commissioned their own posters from artists. The proliferation of posters put out by the government and other organizations served to motivate and influence the American people in a variety of ways. Some simply aimed to promote patriotism and to encourage public support of the war. However, many took this aim a step further by encouraging enlistment, promoting Liberty Bonds, and recruiting volunteers for a variety of work on the home front. Posters attempted to reach these goals by speaking to different audiences in a variety of ways. For example, to promote enlistment a poster could tell men that Uncle Sam wanted them for the U.S. Army; it could play on feelings of guilt for men who did not enlist; it could convince mothers and wives that they needed to tell the men in their lives to enlist; or it could show enticing, heroic action on the battlefield.

The depiction and usage of women in World War I posters varied, depending on the goal of the organization that commissioned them. In some posters, women appeared in distress or seeking help as victims of the war. Prior to American entry, these posters functioned to sway American public opinion in the direction of joining the Allies by cultivating outrage that a country, particularly its women, had been attacked. After the U.S. entered the war, the posters depicting women as victims played on the traditionally masculine role as a protector of women in order to convince men to enlist in the armed forces.

In other posters, women were portrayed as seductresses, inducing men to enlist in the military through their sexualization. A prime example of a war poster using women to seduce men to enlist is the U.S. Navy's "I Want You" poster, created by Howard Chandler Christy. An attractive young woman dressed in nautical garb angles her body toward the viewer, giving a sultry gaze as her hair wisps away. The poster says, "I Want You for The Navy," but the girl seems to be the one saying "I want you," instead of the poster itself.

Unlike the posters that portray women as victims, passive observers of the war, or seductresses, many of the World War I posters show women taking a much more active role in contributing to war efforts. For example, many of the Red Cross posters (oftentimes soliciting donations or seeking more volunteers and nurses) show nurses in the thick of the conflict, carrying stretchers with wounded soldiers, caring for the soldiers, and attending to families displaced by the war. These women are portrayed as strong, courageous, and patriotic, thus promoting the work of nurses and the Red Cross and prompting other Americans to likewise lend their support.

Posters showing active, patriotic women were also used on the home front to promote and recruit for war efforts in America. These posters, like one from the Woman's Land Army, show women in their home front jobs, typically appearing enthusiastic and further promoting the home front efforts. Additionally, the women are usually depicted as "'ordinary' women . . . in order to set an example for potential participants in war-related activities" in America.

**Correspondence**

With American entry into World War I in April 1917, the country's postal service underwent a number of changes. To accommodate the heavy costs of waging war, the price of a stamp for domestic mail was raised from 2¢ to 3¢, effective November 2, 1917, until July 1, 1919, when the stamps returned to their pre-war rate. Likewise, the rate for postcards was raised from 1¢ to 2¢ during the same time period. World War I also saw the popular rise of picture postcards printed with white borders, thus enabling companies to save money by using less ink.

Changes also came in the carrying of mail during the war, particularly in American cities. Prior to World War I, women had served as mail carriers in some rural communities, but none served in cities. However, with so many American men entering the armed forces during the war, the Post Office Department experimented with appointing women as mail carriers to replace the men. The "experiment" began in December 1917 in eight cities with the largest post offices—by the war’s end, several other cities had also appointed women mail carriers. Most of these women gave up their positions to returning veterans once the war was over.

The postal service also experimented with airmail during the Great War. On May 15, 1918, the first airmail service between New York and Washington, D.C., began. The U.S. Army Signal Corps lent its planes and pilots for the airmail service, recognizing the valuable flying experience that its pilots would gain.

World War I brought other changes to the distribution of mail in the United States. Under the provisions of the Espionage Act of 1917, the Postmaster General could block the distribution of materials in the mail that he felt interfered with the military and/or supported U.S. enemies. In October 1917 the Censorship Board, comprised of the Post Office Department, Departments of Navy and War, the War Trade Board, and the Committee on Public Information, was formed to regulate mail, cable, radio, telegraph, and telephone communications between the United States and foreign nations. Under this board, the Postmaster General was responsible for the regulation and censorship of mail. Items that passed censorship were stamped to indicate so.

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