

STEPPING OUT OF HER PLACE:  
A NEW LOOK AT WOMEN'S ROLES DURING SELECTED WARS IN U.S. HISTORY

A Thesis

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Nicole Lynn Bowen  
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I dedicate this work to my loving husband, Christopher,  
and my parents James and Rose Jordan.

Thank you Chris for being by my side every step of the way,  
being my partner and my friend,  
encouraging me, and never letting me lose faith.

Thank you Mom and Dad for always believing in me,  
being a constant and steady source of support throughout my education,  
and making me believe that I can do anything I put my mind to.

From the bottom of my heart, I love you and thank you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Women are not included in high school history text books in a meaningful way, thus students are only learning about half of the experiences that shaped our nation. The ways in which history is represented as part of the social studies curriculum in secondary schools must be reconsidered. A history text that does not represent the experiences of women in a meaningful way does not provide a means for young women to “locate themselves in time,” or meet many of the other standards of the National Council for the Social Studies. If young women and men are going to develop an understanding of who they are and how they are connected to the past, it is imperative that they first gain an understanding of women’s experiences historically, so that they may then begin to understand the lives they live today. Young women, as well as young men, respond to the world from a very personal perspective, and if they are to be able to see how they are connected to the past, where their historical roots lie, and how they fit into the larger human story across time, then it is necessary that the various experiences of women throughout time be made available to them in the history classrooms.

In this paper, I explore women’s roles during the American Revolution, the Civil War, and World War I as case studies to illustrate that 1) in each of these three major events in history, women are traditionally not seen as playing roles worthy of mention in major texts on the subject, 2) that women did in fact have varied and important roles during these events, 3) that there is historical evidence of women’s roles through biographies, memoirs, diaries, and other surviving material, and 4) that having an understanding about the roles that women played impacts the ways in which the events are viewed. Women have been a force in shaping the history of the United States in countless ways, and their experiences both complicate and enrich one’s understanding of American history.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“Human beings seek to understand their historical roots and to locate themselves in time. Such understanding involves knowing what things were like in the past and how things change and develop. Knowing how to read and reconstruct the past allows one to develop a historical perspective and answer questions such as: Who am I? [and] How am I connected to those in the past?”

--National Council for the Social Studies

### Problem and Rationale

I recently had the opportunity to teach two lessons on World War I at a local high school. In preparation, I borrowed *The American Journey*, the United States History text book from the classroom teacher, and she instructed me to prepare information about the armistice and the Treaty of Versailles. I studied the chapters on World War I and the outline that the teacher used for her lectures and discovered that there was no discussion of women and the war effort-- no women soldiers, no women on the home front, no women in the workforce, no women activists-- no women, period. One might think that the text was outdated, something from the 1950s perhaps, but unfortunately it was not. It was new, at least as far as the copyright is concerned (2003), but it contained virtually the same history that has been printed and reprinted for decades. I further examined the text to find that there were practically no women in the text at all from the colonization of America to the chapter on World War I. I examined several other American History texts—*America’s Story* (1990); *America: The People and the Dream* (1991); *Exploring American History* (1991); *History of the United States* (1993); *A History of the United States* (2002) and similar results were found. I searched the texts for instances where women were significantly (more than mentioned by name) included in the text as part of the political, social, military, or economic history of our nation during the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and World War I. It became evident after reviewing the texts, that they do not meaningfully

represent women's experiences and their significance to the political, social, military, or economic history of our nation during these three important periods of study for high school students. In two-thirds of the books, there is a separate section, usually at the very end of the discussion of the wars and about a quarter page to half page in length labeled "Women in the War" or some variation, which serves to lump a handful of women, regardless of their varied experiences and roles in the wars, together. The other third of the texts reviewed highlight a token few famous women such as Abigail Adams, Clara Barton, or Harriet Tubman in boxes separate from the rest of the page. Tacking women on at the end of the chapter makes a profound statement, sending the message that women "aided in the war effort" but were not integral, significant participants throughout the course of the event. Also, the token mentioning of women by name in these sections does little to give any insight into the women's experience. The women are labeled as heroines by virtue of the fact that they are actually included in the text, but the reader is given no insight into who they were, what their victories and struggles were, or how they negotiated their places in the world that was governed by men. The textbooks don't tell the stories of ordinary women who rose to the challenges of war just as men did to do extraordinary things, or that they claimed the right and gave themselves the authority to step out of their "places" and into the world set aside for men.

The results from examining the high school texts raised many questions in my mind about what students are learning about history and women's roles in the formation of the nation that we know today. It can be deduced from the absence of women in the texts, that to the writers of these history texts, the experiences of women and their contributions are expendable, and this signals a great problem; students are only learning about half of the experiences that shaped our nation. We must reconsider the ways in which history is represented and viewed as

part of the social studies curriculum in secondary schools. A history text that does not represent the experiences of women in a meaningful way does not provide a means for young women to “locate themselves in time,” as the quote from the National Council for the Social Studies at the beginning of this paper states as part of the standards for the curriculum. How can young women locate themselves if they are absent in history? If young women and young men are going to develop an understanding of who they are and how they are connected to the past, it is imperative that they first gain an understanding of women’s experiences historically, so that they may then begin to understand the lives they live today.

### **The Role of Social Studies**

When I reflect on social studies education and my role in the field, I am forced to confront many complex issues about the influence of the curriculum in the students’ lives. I see social studies as a vehicle for achieving equality, social justice, and democracy in our nation, yet the curriculum creates a barrier to achieving that goal. How can young women as well as young men learn to see themselves as active agents in our society and effectively deal with the conflicts, complexities, and contradictions involved with seeking equality, social justice, and democracy, if they only have access to a single perspective from which the history of the nation can be viewed? A social studies education should be achieved in an environment that promotes a free flow of ideas and allows students to explore the events and experiences that make up the complexities of our past and present in ways that are meaningful for them. These sentiments echo what the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) sees as the role of the curriculum in student’s lives. In 1992, the Board of Directors of NCSS defined the field as the “integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence,” where anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology,

religion, and sociology are seen as appropriate disciplines for achieving the “knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of students to be able to assume ‘the office of citizen’ (as Thomas Jefferson called it) in our democratic republic”.<sup>1</sup> One of the means to achieving the goals of the social studies curriculum is by “adopting common and multiple perspectives” because:

Each person experiences life in an individual way, responding to the world from a very personal perspective. People also share common perspectives as members of groups, communities, societies and nations...Students should be helped to construct a personal perspective that enables them to explore emerging events and persistent or recurring issues...Students should be helped to construct an academic perspective through study and application of social studies learning experiences...Students should be helped to construct a pluralist perspective based on diversity. This perspective involves respect for differences of opinion and preference; of race, religion, and gender; of class and ethnicity; and of culture in general....<sup>2</sup>

NCSS developed ten thematic strands that form the basis of the curriculum and the means to achieving their goals: Culture; Time, Continuity and Change; People, Places and Environments; Individual Development and Identity; Individuals, Groups and Institutions; Power, Authority and Governance; Production, Distribution and Consumption; Science, Technology and Society; Global Connections; and Civic Ideals and Practices. While each of these themes applies to the field of History within the social studies curriculum, I was particularly struck by the role of “Time, Continuity and Change” and how NCSS prescribes that through this theme “Social Studies Programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.” NCSS continues to describe how important it is for human beings to understand their historical roots, what life was like in the past, and how things change and develop. It is clear from the goals and standards of the National Council for the Social Studies that the history curriculum plays an important role in students understanding who

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<sup>1</sup> “What is Social Studies?” *National Council for the Social Studies*, <<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/1.1.html>> (2 February 2004).

<sup>2</sup> “How Do We Achieve Excellence in Social Studies?” *National Council for the Social Studies*, <<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/1.2.html>> (2 February 2004).

they are, how they are connected to the past, and how their personal life experiences “can be viewed as part of the larger human story across time.”<sup>3</sup> If this is the case, and it is important for each student to be able to connect with the past, why are the history textbooks not more in line with achieving these goals? There is a definite gap between the ideal curriculum, one that speaks to all students, and the gendered information presented in the high school history textbooks that young men, primarily young white men, can relate to.

Based on the way high school history texts are organized, the study of history becomes prescriptive and often times oversimplified. If there are no women represented in any kind of meaningful way in the texts, how can female students achieve all that NCSS expects. Young women, as well as young men, respond to the world from a very personal perspective, and if they are to be able to see, from the study of history, how they are connected to the past, where their historical roots lie, and how they fit into the larger human story across time, then it is necessary that the various experiences of women throughout time be made available to them in the history classrooms. If young women and young men are going to develop into responsible, democratic citizens, they have the right, and educators have the responsibility to explore the roles of women throughout United States history.

However, incorporating women in to the high school history curriculum is no easy task because for so long the experiences of women have been invisible and suppressed. It is a challenge, as evidenced by the texts that were reviewed for this project, to avoid simply adding women into history in a very superficial way, and celebrate the experiences of women because it makes history more complex, adds conflict, and disrupts the neatness of the story as it is told in the high school texts. In the following literature review, I will explore how women’s historians

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<sup>3</sup> “Time Continuity and Change,” *National Council for the Social Studies*, <<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/2.0..html>> (2 February 2004).

such as Dierdre Beddoe and Mary Beard, feminist theorists such as Joan Kelley and Joan Scott, and other scholars have, through their efforts, made it possible to look at the absence of women from historical text critically. They take issue with traditional texts for excluding the complexities women's experiences add to history, analyze the implications of the exclusion of women's history from our culture, and shed light on how feminist theory can aid in the rethinking of history, particularly by reclaiming women's experiences.

## **Literature Review**

### **Complicating History**

History is dependent on people's lived experience. Each person throughout history has had both individual and shared experiences that make understanding history very complex. There is never only one side to any particular story, and conflicting viewpoints are a natural part of history. History books that do not illuminate the complexities of history and of life in general offer students no great service. James W. Lowen, author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, critiques history texts:

The stories that history textbooks tell are predictable; every problem has already been solved or is about to be solved. Textbooks exclude conflict or real suspense. They leave out anything that might reflect badly upon our national character....While there is nothing wrong with optimism, it can become something of a burden for students of color, children of working-class parents, girls who notice the dearth of female historical figures, or members of any group who has not achieved socioeconomic success.<sup>4</sup>

Women's experiences are excluded from text books because they complicate the story being told. History in high school texts is traditionally unitary, male, heterosexual, white, and made possible by choosing to celebrate some experiences and ignoring others. The texts are one-sided, and the experiences that are deemed worthy by the elite are included while others' are excluded. Historian and Curriculum Theorist, Petra Munro (1998), comments on history as we know it:

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<sup>4</sup> James W. Lowen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 15.

History's appearance of unity, of coherence, of order is predicated not on any direct correspondence to a reality, but on the suppression of contradictory stories, those of women, people of color, the working class. History as we know it is not possible without silencing...History as we know it limits contradiction, multiplicity, and difference. Remembering this suppression is the memory work which must be done" (265).

The unity, order, and coherence of history must be challenged. The definition of history according to the Oxford American Dictionary is the study of past events, a definition that does not warrant the exclusion of women's experiences. Unfortunately, people, people of power, throughout the years have shaped history as we know it, and authors of school texts would have students believe that what is included in the books is the whole story, the truth of the history of the United States.

History textbooks present a deeply gendered story of the American past, and expresses that which has traditionally been celebrated by white men—president's, generals, war heroes—and leaves out the experiences of women. Leaving certain experiences out ensures that the picture painted stays tidy and prevents certain questions from being asked such as if women did \_\_\_\_\_, then why can they not own property, etc.? Given these omissions, history texts cannot be turned to as a source of truth or representation of past realities. Munro (1998) cautions, "History is not the representation of reality, it never has been"<sup>5</sup> and she embraces "doing history while simultaneously being suspicious of it."<sup>6</sup> Being suspicious of history and learning to question is necessary for students to move toward greater equality and progress. One must take into consideration that reality is subjective, and what seems real and true for one person based on their experiences may be anything but reality for another person. Our realities are based on what we value, and different people value different things. What elite white men see as important history, excludes women's realities. The history represented in U.S. history textbooks, is not the

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<sup>5</sup> Petra Munro, "Engendering Curriculum History," in *Curriculum: Toward New Identities*, ed. William Pinar (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 267.

<sup>6</sup> Munro, 263.

reality of much of the population; it is not the reality of women, the poor, or minorities. What has been lacking in history as we know it is the willingness to engage in conversation about those who have been traditionally devalued and underrepresented, and Mary Beard (1945) writes:

For getting closer to the truth about it, the personalities, interests, ideas, and activities of women must receive attention commensurate with their energy in history. Women have done far more than exist and bear and rear children. They have played a great role in directing human events as thought and action. Women have been a force in making all the history that has been made.<sup>7</sup>

Gerda Lerner (1993), in *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, documents the struggle for women to break out of patriarchal thought and “dare to be different” in a world where they were, in essence, punished for learning, thinking, and achieving. To make her argument that women have been disregarded, obliterated, and marginalized throughout history, Lerner explains the difference between history and recorded history, the latter of which is subject to ordering and interpretation that serves for the advancement of the political and economic interests of the wealthy elite in the Western World. What we are left with as a culture, Lerner argues, is only a partial picture of human experience, and for centuries women have been fighting to be educated, record their own stories, and preserve as a legacy their accomplishments.<sup>8</sup>

### **Implications of the Absence of Women’s History**

One of the greatest implications of the absence of women’s history in high school history texts is that it can lead people to believe that women do not have a history. Deirdre Beddoe, Emeritus Professor of Women’s History and author of *Discovering Women’s History* (1983),

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<sup>7</sup> Mary R. Beard, *Woman as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York: Persea Books, 1946), vi.

<sup>8</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: from the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-20.

remarks that when she first asked herself why women's history should be studied, she did so in the 1970s where some male academics seriously asked, "is there a history of women?" Other scholars, she continued, may have acknowledged that women have a history, but dismissed it as a subject that was impossible to research because there "are no sources."<sup>9</sup> Since then, Beddoe has made it her life's work to prove that women do have a history, and while women have been left out of history books, there are sources that provide great insight into the life of women and a world that has been separated from the public world of men.

Many women's historians have set out to prove that women have a history, and always have. What becomes the issue is the lack of visibility of the works of women throughout history, at least in the arena of traditional histories such as high school textbooks. Scholar Mary Beard (1945) comments:

Trained scholars disciplined in the quest for truth contend that only such generalizations as historic documents warrant are permissible. But, being men as a rule, they tend to confine their search for the truth to their own sex in history. This is in accord, no doubt with the caution of their professional training. Yet the caution which eliminates the quest for truth about women in long universal history may in fact limit the ideas of such scholars about long and universal history. While exaggerating the force of men in the making of history, they miss the force of women, which entered into the making of history and gave it important directions.<sup>10</sup>

When women are left out of histories, it is not only the scholars writing the books who are missing the force of women and their impact on the world as we know it, but the students who read their books are equally affected by their limited scope of what history is. Beard advocates widening the lens through which we view history. She writes that women have had such an extensive role in history that:

Indeed it is hard to miss woman as a force if one keeps one's eyes open and seeks, in the scientific spirit, the truth about women as revealed in a documentation [artifacts, folklore, myths, religious literature, biography, autobiography, memoir, diary, military records,

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<sup>9</sup> Deirdre Beddoe, *Discovering Women's History* (New York: Longman, 1998), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Beard, 272-273.

oral history, etc.] as diverse as it is ponderous, if one is not afraid to know her, if one really wants to know her.”<sup>11</sup>

Based on this statement it can be deduced that because the history of women has been excluded from texts, that there was not a desire to know her and that the means through which she can be known (diaries, memoirs, folklore, etc.) are not seen as valid resources for doing history. This lack of desire to know women, understand their history, and respect their experiences comes from centuries of assumptions about the nature of men and women that have led to a bias against women that has worked to make their intellectual and creative efforts illegitimate.

From the earliest times, women have been viewed as a creative source of human life, intellectually inferior to men, and/or a major source of temptation and evil. Thomas Aquinas, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Christian theologian, said that woman was “created to be man’s helpmeet...since for other purposes men would be better assisted by other men.”<sup>12</sup> Women have for a long time been considered the weaker sex, both physically and intellectually. Christine Farnham (1987) wrote about the doctrine of the “separate spheres” and how man’s appropriate sphere was the world, where he ruled by law and woman’s sphere was the home where she reigned by persuasion. A lady was thought to be inherently nurturing, morally superior to man, self-sacrificing, self-abnegating, submissive, pure, and pious.<sup>13</sup> There have been fluctuating views about the morality of women through history, and Louise Lamphere (1987) wrote about how women were often associated with moral virtue on the one hand and with darkness and evil on the other. Additionally, women were said to be ruled by their emotions and passions, while men were the

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<sup>11</sup> Beard, 274.

<sup>12</sup> “Women’s History in America,” *Women’s International Center* <<http://www.wic.org/misc/history.htm>> (10 January 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Christine Farnham, “Introduction: The Same or Different?” In *The Impact of Feminist Research in the Academy*, ed. C. Farnham, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

embodiment of reason and rationality.<sup>14</sup> These binaries and the myth of the natural inferiority of women has greatly influenced the status of women under the law as well as the representation of women in history. Thus, these stereotypes have worked to keep women's experiences out of history texts, but at the same time the fact that women's experiences have not been represented in history for so many years has only worked to perpetuate these stereotypes.

Gerda Lerner believes that a culture that denies the legitimacy of certain groups' accomplishments and experiences is not one of progress. Lerner (1993) argues:

The fact that women were denied knowledge of the existence of Women's History decisively and negatively affected their intellectual development as a group. Women who did not know that others like them had made intellectual contributions to knowledge and to creative thought were overwhelmed by the sense of their own inferiority or conversely, the sense of the dangers of their daring to be different. Without knowledge of women's past, no group of women could test their own ideas against those of their equals, those who had come out of similar conditions and life situations.<sup>15</sup>

Women did not have the privilege of being strengthened and encouraged by their foremothers, and "for thinking women, the absence of women's history was perhaps the most serious obstacle of all to their intellectual growth."<sup>16</sup> Beddoe (1983) argues that the absence of women results in a culture of misinformation and misunderstanding. She writes:

We had been left out of the history books for so long that we had come to accept what was in reality a male view of history—all about men and men's activities in the public world of war, diplomacy and statecraft. The history of men had been palmed off on us as universal history, the history of all humanity.<sup>17</sup>

Because women were excluded from recorded history, they did not have the means to look at how their past influenced their present and to challenge the status quo. Thus, another implication of the absence of women in history is that if women are excluded because men's public activities

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<sup>14</sup> Louise Lamphere, "Feminism and Anthropology: The Struggle to Reshape our Thinking about Gender," in *The Impact of Feminist Research in the Academy*, ed. C. Farnham, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Lerner, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Lerner, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Beddoe, 2.

of “war, diplomacy, and statecraft” are the focus, then we must actively question what we consider history and redefine it so that women’s experiences are included.

Lerner describes, in *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, women from the Middle Ages to the Modern Women’s Movement, who through writing have preserved women’s history. In their works, women wrote to preserve the history of other women, wrote of the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, and claimed their right to interpret history from a viewpoint that is sympathetic to women. For example, Christine de Pisan, writing in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, included the mythical story of Medea in her book *A City of Ladies*, but stopped the story short of Medea killing her two sons and her husband’s new wife.<sup>18</sup> Lerner notes that Christine does not meet the standards of objectivity demanded by professional historians today because of the liberties she took with her representations of the past, but “what is remarkable is Christine’s consistent insistence on her right, as a woman to interpret the past from a point of view sympathetic to women, and her speaking as their advocate.”<sup>19</sup> Who decides that this work has value? Rather than focusing on what is excluded or included we need to ask questions such as why it is the work written in that way? The work has value for reasons other than its accuracy. It made a statement about the place of women in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the need for women not to be demonized. An important lesson learned from de Pisan’s work is that there are multiple perspectives from which history can be told and understood, and one cannot ignore these diverse perspectives.

### **Impact of Feminist Theory on “Writing/Righting” History**

Feminist theory and feminist historians have provided a way for women’s historical experiences to be reclaimed, and included in our understanding of American culture, but that

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<sup>18</sup> Lerner, 259-261.

<sup>19</sup> Lerner, 260.

information has not yet made into the high school history curriculum. During the last decade, Joan Scott writes, historians have been inspired either directly or indirectly by the women's movement and begun to document the lives of average women in various historical periods, biographies of forgotten prominent women are being written, and the feminist movements are being chronicled.<sup>20</sup> However, merely adding the names of women to the history books does not accomplish the work that must be done. Joan Kelly reminds women's historians that "compensatory history is not enough," and urges them to go beyond inserting female heroines into texts and to use gender as a tool for historical analysis. Kelly writes:

In historical terms, this means to look at ages or movements of great social change in terms of their liberation or repression of women's potential, their import for advancement of her humanity as well as "his". The moment this is done—the moment one assumes that women are a part of humanity in the fullest sense—the period or set of events with which we deal takes on a wholly different character or meaning from the normally accepted one. Indeed, what emerges is a fairly regular pattern of relative loss of status for women precisely in those periods of so-called progressive change.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, when women and their experiences are taken into account, one begins to realize the numerous contradictions between their realities and the rhetoric of progress in American Society. Kelly explains that what feminist historiography has done is to "unsettle such accepted evaluations of historical periods. It has disabused us of the notion that the history of women is the same as the history of men, and that significant turning points in history have the same impact for one sex as for the other."<sup>22</sup> So how does one go about "writing/righting" history?

Joan Scott in "Women's History and the Rewriting of History" discusses the various approaches that women's historians have used in the attempt to include women in history. Scott explains:

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<sup>20</sup> Joan W. Scott, "Women's History and the Rewriting of History," in *The Impact of Feminist Research in the Academy*, ed. C. Farnham, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 34.

<sup>21</sup> Joan Kelley, *Women, History, & Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Kelley, 3.

The first approach writes history as “her-story,” a narrative of women’s experiences either alongside or entirely outside conventional historical frameworks. The assumption here is that women have had different experiences from men and that those differences matter in the writing of history. The aim of this approach is to give value as history to an experience that has been ignored and thus devalued and to insist on female agency in the “making of history.”<sup>23</sup>

The second approach that has been taken to rewrite history is closely associated with social history, or the story about processes and systems. Here the focus is on “women’s work” and its role in political, class and family systems. Scott argues that both the first and the second approach are problematic because “the “her-story” approach assumes that sexual difference creates different histories for women and men, but it does not problematize the construction of sexual difference, it does not ask how the terms of gender difference work. The social history approach in contrast, assumes that sexual difference is a by-product of other factors.”<sup>24</sup>

Scott advocates a third approach, which she admits has been difficult to put into practice. She argues that sex must be as fundamental to historical analysis as other classifications such as class and race and the “point is to examine social definitions of gender as they are developed by men and women; constructed in and affected by political institutions, expressive of a range of relationships which included not only sex, but class and power.”<sup>25</sup> The results, she explains, “throw new light not only on women’s experience, but on social and political practice as well.”<sup>26</sup> It is the inquiries into gender that permit historians to raise critical questions that lead to the “rewriting of history.” Thus, Joan Scott looks for ways to account for gender in history without

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<sup>23</sup> Scott, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Scott, 41.

<sup>25</sup> Scott, 41.

<sup>26</sup> Scott, 41.

always telling the same old story, and that is the challenge I face in attempting to include women's experiences into the high school history curriculum.<sup>27</sup>

### **Incorporating Women's History into the Secondary Social Studies Curriculum**

One cannot simply re-write history to include women. This text would contain the same human fallacies as any work of recorded history. It would be written from my perspective, contain my biases, and cannot possibly include every act of significance, as *every* act is significant in its own right. Thus, my task here is not to rewrite history. Rather, I embark upon a long journey of complicating the one-sidedness, multiplying the perspectives from which we can learn about history, and taking a fresh look at what has long been accepted as historical truth, paying close attention to the absence of women.

In *Stepping out of Her Place*, my goal is to tell "her-story," but not to replace "his-tory," rather to complicate it and open up a conversation about the difference between rhetoric and reality throughout United States history. To look at conventional "his-tory" along with women's roles in these events opens our eyes to a world of activity that we have been missing. I explore women's roles during the American Revolution, the Civil War, and World War I as case studies to illustrate that 1) in each of these three major events in history, women are traditionally not seen as playing roles worthy of mention in major texts on the subject, 2) that women did in fact have varied and important roles during these events, 3) that there is historical evidence of women's roles through biographies, memoirs, diaries, and other surviving material, and 4) that having an understanding about the roles that women played impacts the ways in which the events are viewed.

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Weed, "Introduction: Terms of Reference" in *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Weed, (New York, Routledge, 1989), xxvii.

This paper illustrates the point that women have a history that has been suppressed by highlighting the numerous ways that they were involved in the various wars that have not been included in history texts. Women, in the absence of legal equality, since the beginning of the United States, have found ways to maneuver both within and outside society's prescribed boundaries. Women were wives, mothers, sisters and friends, but they were also soldiers, nurses, activists, patriots, spies, and bread-winners. So many of the experiences of women throughout history have been made invisible, and my work on this paper has revealed a plethora of information about the experiences of women that I never knew existed. There is much more information available than I was expecting, since throughout all of my years of education I had learned very little about women in history. In an effort to make the project manageable, I selected the women that I knew the least about; many of whom I had never heard of at all. This project has been a journey of reeducating my self, opening the doors to broader understanding, and allowing my new knowledge of women's experiences re-shape my understanding of American History.

I chose to focus on three major wars for this study, first because it is a practical approach that follows major areas of study already in place in high school history classes, and second because they are periods in history where gender roles are blurred, which works to highlight the discrepancy between women's involvement in the economy, society, military and politics, and their status as full and equal citizens. Because this project relied heavily on the experiences of women, each chapter is organized slightly differently, which reflects the varying experiences of women at the three very different periods of United States History. The chapters are, however, roughly organized around the traditional themes of economic, social, military, and political involvement during the wars because that is how high school texts tend to be organized. As a

practical matter, I am attempting to complicate the organizational system that is already in place, not change the system itself.

A complete overhaul of the high school history curriculum is much too big of a job to be accomplished here. However, one can work within the existing framework, and re-think the way textbooks are used in classrooms, and be attentive to the overt omission of women's history. It is important to know that women participated in various ways in history both in "women's sphere's" and "men's sphere's" and yet they were not allowed formally into that which was set apart for men. It is important to ask why this is the case, a question that will not be asked if students do not have the knowledge to ask it. We can work within the existing framework because we cannot tell women's history in absence of men's history as they were occurring simultaneously. Women and men live in one world with one another, and as such a series of actions and reactions occur between them.

In the following chapters, I am taking three periods in history, three wars that I thought I had knowledge of, and am taking off the proverbial rose colored glasses to see that life for both men and women is and always has been more complex than what is present in high school history texts. It is impossible to uncover all of the complexities, and I do not try to, rather I am advocating a curriculum that reclaims the experiences of women and embraces the complexities that they add to the history of the United States rather than dismissing them because the story gets too complicated. If young men and young women are going to gain a better understanding of who they are and of the world they live in, they need a fuller, more complicated view of history.

## CHAPTER 2

### IN THE PURSUIT OF LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HAPPINESS: WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

#### Introduction

The American Revolution is of paramount importance to the study of U.S. history. It marks the birth of a new nation and sets the stage for the creation of a government with the potential to secure the liberties articulated in the Declaration of Independence. In one glorious moment on July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress made a powerful statement about the social hierarchy and how it would be rearranged in America after they were free from the oppressive British king. The thirteen colonies unanimously declared:

When in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with one another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to separation.

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness...<sup>1</sup>

In the first two paragraphs of the Declaration, the men of the Second Continental Congress used language with the potential to dissolve social inequalities in America. This set the stage for the American Revolution to be fought for the freedom of all people in America. This revolutionary rhetoric was disseminated throughout the colonies and heard by men and women both free and enslaved; there was a feeling of hope that transcended the political and social hierarchies in Colonial America.

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<sup>1</sup> Second Continental Congress, *The Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776 (Philadelphia, PA).

It was not a vain hope for the women and enslaved to think the American Revolution would secure their rights and liberties—especially not for women. During the first 150 years of colonial life in America, women shared in the work of clearing trees, enduring hardships, and building a new life in a place where the society was anything but fixed and stable. Women handled boats and axes, defended their homes and children from Native American attacks, and learned how to overcome disaster. Historian Paul Engle writes that “from the start women had a stake in the land: they sometimes owned it in all of the colonies; they worked it and were responsible for its management”.<sup>2</sup> Women also owned and managed profitable businesses, advertised their wares in colonial newspapers, and even ran newspapers or printing businesses after their husbands’ deaths.

It is clear that women were skilled in many ways due to their colonial experiences, but this does not mean that they were by any means considered the equals of men, regardless of their capabilities. Historian Mary Beth Norton points out in “Reflection on Women in the Age of the American Revolution,” that the law, economy, and family structured early American white women’s lives in ways that were very different from men.<sup>3</sup> Men were the writers of wills, which gave them complete control over the estate, and colonies adopted intestacy laws, which tended to favor the eldest son over the man’s other heirs. In many cases widows became dependent on their oldest children because they did not have any property or possessions of their own. Women were also absent from the political spheres as the assemblies that were making the laws, such as the intestacy laws among others, were elite white men. Thus, it should come as no surprise that women were as ready as any of the colonial men for independence from Britain

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Engle, *Women in the American Revolution* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1976), xi.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Beth Norton, “Reflections on Women in the Age of the American Revolution,” in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution*, eds. Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 479-493.

because the revolutionary rhetoric signaled hope for greater freedom and liberties for them as well.

Scholar Mary Beard argues that in all great upheavals in American history women have responded as activists and thinkers.<sup>4</sup> Women in Revolutionary America were no exception. However, upon examining the American Revolution in many high school textbooks, I discovered that the War, the founding of the United States, and the drafting of the Constitution is greatly simplified with many omissions—the greatest omission being the role of women. The War is described as a struggle for liberty and a fight for freedom, but that is only a part of the plethora of struggles going on during that time in Colonial America. The War represented something different for virtually every person and there were differing concerns between the poor and the propertied, blacks and whites, slaves and free peoples, and men and women. It is impossible to comprehend what must have been on the minds of these differing groups upon hearing that “all men are created equal” and are entitled to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The American Revolution politicized the colonies and involved more people in politics than ever had been before. Newspapers were instrumental in informing and mobilizing the masses, and people would gather and read them aloud so even the illiterate became politicized. Each and every person had a vested interest in the outcome of the war and the creation of an independent nation because of the promises of freedom and liberty outlined in the Declaration of Independence. The revolutionary period was a time of uncertainty, but it was also a time of hope and anticipation, which caused virtually every person to be interested in politics and the important questions about how far the liberty extends, what is meant by the pursuit of happiness, and what would be the quality of the life to which all men are guaranteed?

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Beard, *Woman as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York: Persea Books), 272.

For white men, the war was about freedom and liberty, defeating an enemy and defending the autonomy they declared. For women it was about those things and more; for women it was also about what was thinkable<sup>5</sup>. The war took place in backyards, in gardens, in fields, and in the streets—the war was in virtually every place women worked and lived. Thus, Engle explains, women were given the opportunity to unite their efforts for a great common cause beyond the scope of their daily lives.<sup>6</sup> The war energized the colonial women to step out of their normative social spheres to be activists and soldiers, and when the war was over they internalized the reasons for which the war was fought and became agents for social change. Wherever women lived, they contributed to the war effort in various ways. The personal became political and the everyday experiences of women took on new meaning. Women crossed over into a world—the military, economic, political, and social world—that was set apart for men, and these stories are left out of the history textbooks. The following pages provide several examples of the female participation in the war and attempts to give a more complex picture of the Revolutionary war beyond Paul Revere’s Ride, the Boston Tea Party, and the Boston Massacre, which are typically the focus in high school texts. We will see what was thinkable for the women of Colonial America by learning about their economic, social, military, and political experiences during the war.

### **Economic and Social Activism of Elite Women**

The American Revolution launched many important changes for free white women in what were formerly the North American Continental British colonies. In *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, Mary Beth Norton writes about how “the war necessarily broke down the barrier which seemed to insulate women from the

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<sup>5</sup> Sue Hemberger, lecture at Georgetown University, 4 July 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Engle, xiii.

realm of politics, for they, no less than men, were caught up in the turmoil that enveloped the entire populace.”<sup>7</sup> Several surviving documents explore that insight further, focusing especially on how elite women mobilized within a political culture that was based on deference to elites and had a profound impact on the economics of the war.

Paralleling the identification of American men patriots as “Sons of Liberty,” women patriots began calling themselves “Daughters of Liberty” in the 1760s.<sup>8</sup> Women were especially prominent in the boycott of English manufactured goods, which attempted to reverse British colonial taxation policies. In this capacity, they often challenged existing laws; when flour merchants drove up prices, crowds of women broke into their storehouses. As a public expression of their support of the boycott, they signed agreements, such as the Boston Ladies Boycott Agreement, that were subsequently published in newspapers. “Spinning bees” were another popular means by which women resisted British policies in a public way. On these occasions women came together in places that were large enough to accommodate them and their spinning wheels, usually the home of a minister but also taverns, and spun thread to demonstrate their commitment to home cloth production.<sup>9</sup> In virtually any way they could, women were joining with one another in their communities to demonstrate their patriotism and their commitment to the war for independence.

In Edenton, North Carolina, women formed the Edenton Ladies' Patriotic Guild, led by Penelope Baker, and met collectively to sign their names to a boycott resolution to stop drinking tea imported from Britain. The Edenton women's proclamation declared:

As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears to affect the peace and happiness of our country, and it has been thought necessary for the publick good to enter

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), 297.

<sup>8</sup> Sally Smith Booth, *The Women of '76* (New York: Hastings House Publishers), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Booth, 214-215.

into several particular resolves, by meeting of Members of Deputies from the whole Province, it is a duty that we owe not only to our near and dear relations and connections, but to ourselves who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do everything as far as it lies in our power to testify our sincere adherence to the same, and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper as a witness of our fixed intentions and solemn determination to do so.<sup>10</sup>

The Edenton Ladies made a clear statement of their motive to be integral parts of the struggle for independence from Britain. Peace and happiness was as much their concern as those physically fighting the war, and they even went so far as to publish their names in the newspaper, which is significant because it showed their sincerity and determination as well as placed them boldly into the public sphere. Fifty-one representatives of the region's most substantial families were present, but ladies known to be loyal to the Crown were not invited. Such a meeting would have severed long-established ties of friendship and placed women who were related to one another on opposite sides of the growing conflict. News of the Edenton Ladies traveled, and gained attention in England as well as in the colonies. Arthur Iredell of London wrote a letter to his brother James, who was living in North Carolina, mocking the work the Edenton Ladies were doing. Iredell wrote:

I see by the newspapers the Edenton Ladies have signalized themselves by the protest against tea drinking. . . . Is there a female Congress in Edenton too? I hope not, for we Englishmen are afraid of the male Congress, but if the ladies who have ever, since the Amazonian era, been esteemed the most formidable enemies, if they, I say, should attack us, the most fatal consequence is to be dreaded. . . . The only security on our side to prevent the impending ruin that I can perceive is the probability that there are few places in America which possess so much female artillery as in Edenton.<sup>11</sup>

As comical and ridiculous as this letter may be at first glance, in the last line, Iredell, knowingly or not, actually validates the work of the Edenton Ladies by alluding to the power of their

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<sup>10</sup> Penelope Baker, *Edenton Ladies Patriotic Guild Proclamation*, quoted in Sally Smith Booth, *The Women of '76* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1973), 12.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Iredell, quoted in Sally Smith Booth, *The Women of '76* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1973), 14.

“female artillery,” and the effect women would have on the American war effort if more such organizations existed.

Innovative as the Edenton Ladies were, they did not blossom into an ongoing organization, nor did their goals reach beyond support of the boycott. In 1780, during the darkest moment of the armed struggle against British imperial forces, a new form of organization emerged among Philadelphia women—one aimed at providing material support for General Washington’s army. The Ladies Association of Philadelphia, active in 1780 and 1781, embodied greater organizational and economic power than any previous organization of women in American history. They did so by creating a public place for women within traditional patterns of political deference. For Loyalist and Patriot alike, American political culture was shaped by “deference”—a hierarchical system of social, political, and economic networks that created obligations between gentlemen and artisans, generals and soldiers, elected officials and citizens. Elites were empowered in these hierarchies not merely because their wealth endowed them with economic power, but also because eighteenth-century Anglo-American political culture valued the presumed “independence” of thought and action that raised elites above the self-promoting needs of middling and poorer folk.<sup>12</sup>

Women’s place within this culture of political deference was unclear because women by definition lacked the capacity to act independently. The exclusion of women from political life was justified on the grounds that women could not be independent—even elite women were legally and economically dependent on their husbands. Under British common law women lost most of their civil rights when they married. As William Blackstone wrote in *Commentaries on the Laws of England*,

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal

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<sup>12</sup> Hemberger, 4 July 2003.

existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover she performs every thing;...and her condition during her marriage is called coverture.<sup>13</sup>

So although elite women “performed” many of the traits associated with elites—wearing silk, lace, and powdered wigs—they lacked the chief attribute of political power: independence of action.

Nevertheless, elite women were fully integrated into Anglo-American political culture because so much of that culture occurred in private homes and consisted of personal relationships. Politics and economics were closely interwoven and both were based in households.<sup>14</sup> In this way elite women benefited from the privileges that accompanied their social status and to some degree shared the power of elite men. They used elite privileges for some of the same purposes as men, but they also used it for different purposes that had innovative political and economic effects. Members of the Philadelphia Ladies' Association carried their private knowledge of politics and economics out into their personal networks and into the public domain.

Women witnessed and, depending on their individual political talents, shaped the political maneuverings of their family members. Esther DeBerdt (1747-1780) exemplified this process. In 1770, she married Joseph Reed, a lawyer in Philadelphia, and became his private secretary to copy his letters. In 1774, when the First Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia, the Reed home became a social center for colonial leaders.<sup>15</sup> Esther wrote her brother, Dennis DeBerdt: “The Congress brought some private pleasure as well as public advantage. It gave us the opportunity of seeing some of our old correspondents, Mr. Cushing,

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<sup>13</sup> William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (London: Saunders and Benning, 1840), 36.

<sup>14</sup> Hemberger, 4 July 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Engle, 31-33.

Mr. Adams, etc., with whom we spent some cheerful hours.”<sup>16</sup> George Washington attended dinners at the Reed home during the Continental Congress of 1775, launching a friendship that greatly assisted Joseph's career. With the outbreak of war in 1775 Joseph Reed joined Washington's troops as a militia officer and quickly became the General's chief aide, secretary, close personal friend and valued adviser, penning and perhaps composing many of the General's important public documents. Martha Washington stayed at the Reed home when she passed through Philadelphia to join her husband in Massachusetts.<sup>17</sup>

Esther followed politics closely and became an enthusiastic patriot. When Esther Reed authored “Sentiments of an American Woman,” first issued as a broadside in 1780, she spoke as the wife of Pennsylvania's highest official since her husband had left the perils of war for a seat in Congress. She wrote as a voice for the women of America saying:

They aspire to render themselves more really useful; and this sentiment is universal from the north to the south of the Thirteen United States. Our ambition is kindled by the fame of those heroines of antiquity, who have rendered their sex illustrious, and have proved to the universe, that, if the weakness of our Constitution, if manners did not forbid us to march to glory by the same paths as Men, we should at least equal, and sometimes surpass them in our love for the public good....<sup>18</sup>

Esther had participated in political discussions in private settings since childhood, and now she stepped more fully into public view. Although the convention of anonymity for women authors required her to veil her identity, her authorship of the “Sentiments” was well known. Her statement did not invoke the modesty of wives in private retirement, but the bravery of women leaders who hastened “the deliverance of their country.” She invoked scripture, Roman history, and the history of European nationalism to justify women's “love for the public good.” Reed

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<sup>16</sup> Esther Reed, *Letter to Dennis De Berdt* (Philadelphia, Nov. 2, 1774), quoted in Paul Engle, *Women in the American Revolution* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1976), 37.

<sup>17</sup> Engle, 38-40.

<sup>18</sup> Esther Reed, “Sentiments of an American Woman,” (Philadelphia, 1780), quoted in Mary Beth Norton and Ruth Alexander eds., *Major Problems in American Women's History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003), 71-73.

appealed to women as “Brave Americans” and urged them to contribute money “for the relief of the armies which defend our lives, our possessions, our liberty.”<sup>19</sup>

Esther Reed knew that the army faced collapse through mutinies. Soldiers had suffered greatly in the winter of 1778-79 at Valley Forge near Philadelphia, and their misery was even greater the next winter at Morristown, New Jersey. Joseph Reed received news of the deteriorating condition of the army from several sources. A Pennsylvania general wrote him in May 1780 that the “Connecticut line” had mutinied and gone home and “Without the most speedy exertions . . . the army must and will disband. Unless the army is at least fed, we must be ruined.”<sup>20</sup> The crisis was immense and Esther Reed was fully acquainted with it.

With her friend, Sarah Franklin Bache (1743-1808), the daughter of Benjamin Franklin, Reed outlined a plan for implementing the “Sentiments,” which was simultaneously published with “Ideas, Relative to the Manner of Forwarding to the American Soldiers, the Presents of the American Women.” Issued as broadsides on June 10, 1780, and published on June 12, “Sentiments” and “Ideas” proposed a plan that paralleled the formal political institutions run by men. In an effort to embrace all women, the “Ideas” called for a “Treasuress” in each county, who would collect money and present it to “the wife of the Governor. . . who will be the Treasuress-General of the State,” and she would present the money to Mrs. Washington. General Washington was to use the funds in any manner he chose, but the women wished that it not be used to supply “subsistence, arms or cloathing” which the government owed them, but to provide “an extraordinary bounty intended to render the condition of the Soldier more pleasant.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Esther Reed, *Sentiments of an American Woman*, 71-73.

<sup>20</sup> General William Irvine, “Letter to Joseph Reed,” *Joseph Reed Papers Vol. 2*, 26 May 1780, <<http://memory.loc.gov>> (7 August 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Esther Reed, “Ideas, Relative to the Manner of Forwarding to the American Soldiers, the Presents of the American Women,” *An American Time Capsule : Three Centuries of Broadsides and other Printed Ephemera*, 10 June 1780, <<http://www.memory.loc.gov/rbpehtml/pehome.htm>> (7 August 2003).

Immediately on the 13th of June women met in Philadelphia to implement the “Ideas.” The next day they set out on foot in groups of three or four to visit each house in the city, which they divided into ten districts.<sup>22</sup>

Sarah Franklin Bache was Esther Reed’s chief partner in the Philadelphia Ladies Association, and of Sarah's efforts, her husband, Richard Bache, wrote to her father in July 1780:

The Females of our City have been interesting themselves in behalf of the soldiers of our Army, by collecting donations, to be applied to their use & comfort; this plan was first set on foot here, and I have the pleasure to tell you, that Sally has had no small hand in it; it is likely to obtain thro' the different States; New Jersey & Maryland have already adopted it --It has put our Soldiery in the highest good humour, & for this end, believe me, something of this sort was necessary.”<sup>23</sup>

Benjamin Franklin replied in October, “I am glad to see the American Spirit rous'd again and I am much pleased with the Subscriptions of the Ladies and Merchants. They have confuted the assertion . . . that Women have not the amor Patrie [love of country] and that Merchants are attach'd to no Country.”<sup>24</sup>

Association members kept exemplary records of donations they received. Their records show that 1,645 individuals contributed from Philadelphia and neighboring communities. The smallest contribution came from Phyllis, described as a “coloured woman,” who donated 7 shillings 6 pence. The largest contribution came from the Marchioness de Lafayette, with one hundred guineas in specie. By early July the collection was completed in Philadelphia and neighboring towns.<sup>25</sup> On July 4, 1780 Esther Reed wrote Washington that she had collected in specie (hard currency that was worth more than paper currency) 200,580 dollars and 625 British

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<sup>22</sup> Booth, 265.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Bache, “Letter to Benjamin Franklin,” (Philadelphia, July 22, 1780), published in Barbara B. Oberg, *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Vol. 33* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 99-100.

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Franklin, “Letter to Richard Bache and Sarah Franklin Bache,” published in Barbara B. Oberg, *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Vol. 33* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 368.

<sup>25</sup> Anonymous, “Account of Donations Receiv’d by the Ladies in their Several Districts for the Soldiers of the American Army,” June 1780, BV Joseph Reed, Vol. 7, #53, New-York Historical Society.

pounds. She awaited his directions for how the money could best be used to help the soldiers.<sup>26</sup> In an exchange of letters with George Washington, Esther Reed debated how the women's donation would be used and found that he expected more of her than she was initially willing to give. Washington asked that the money be used to make linen shirts.<sup>27</sup> In a letter to Washington on July 31, 1780, Reed replied that she did not want to duplicate what soldiers already had coming to them from public funds, and suggested giving hard currency to each soldier to buy what he wished.<sup>28</sup> Washington repeated his request for the shirts, reasoning that the troops would misuse the money and their receipt of specie might create discontent since they were paid with paper currency.<sup>29</sup> Washington had his way.

Esther Reed deferred to Washington's wishes and members of the Association set to work making shirts. Because the Ladies were unwilling to lessen the money by paying people to make them, the ladies were making the shirts themselves. Reed and her associates produced about two thousand shirts (in an era without sewing machines). This was quite an undertaking especially because Esther had five children under ten years of age and a household disrupted by the war, before her home became a shirt-making factory.<sup>30</sup>

Not long later, Esther Reed died at the age of thirty-three in Philadelphia in September 1780 of acute dysentery. Noting that women in Maryland were imitating Reed's successful fundraising, and that her reputation had spread to Europe, the obituary endowed her with the quality most prized in the rhetoric of the new Republic—virtue. A portion of the obituary reads:

Those disposed to lessen the reputation of female patriotism might have said that what our women have contributed, must, in the first instance, have come from the pockets of

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<sup>26</sup> Esther Reed, "Letter to George Washington," *George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, Manuscript Division*, 4 July 1780, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>> (10 August 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Engle, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Esther Reed, "Letter to George Washington," *George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence, Manuscript Division*, 31 July 1780, <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>> (10 August 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Engle, 43-44.

<sup>30</sup> Engle, 44.

their husbands; but, where their own labour is bestowed, the most delicate fingers being employed in the workmanship, it must be acknowledged an effort of virtue, the praise of which must peculiarly belong to themselves.<sup>31</sup>

The obituary also hinted that she injured her health by “imposing on herself too great a part of the task” of making the shirts for the soldiers.

The Ladies Association exemplified women’s ability to mobilize in a fashion that mirrored the male political organizations; it was shaped by the geographic boundaries of counties and run by a hierarchical order of leaders from the top down. Adding to their success was their willingness to work with their hands to maximize their return on the funds they collected. Nevertheless, men did not rise to the challenge of recognizing women as independent public actors. Instead, they continued to identify women with domestic life and as “female patriots” rather than American patriots. In his official thanks to the Ladies' Association, George Washington wrote:

The contributions of the association you represent have exceeded what could have been expected, and the spirit that animated the members of it, entitles them to an equal place with any who have preceded them in the walk of female patriotism. It embellishes the American character with a new trait; by proving that the love of Country is blended with those softer domestic virtues, which have always been allowed to be more peculiarly your own. You have not acquired admiration in your own Country only;-- it is paid you abroad;--and you will learn with pleasure by a part of your own sex, where female accomplishments have attained their highest perfection -- and who from the commencement have been the patronesses of American liberty.<sup>32</sup>

The “softer domestic virtues” of women are focused on more than their assertive entrepreneurship, and their success is only recognized in comparison with other “female accomplishments.” An anonymous poet (a soldier) described the women as “mirrors of virtue” who inspired virtue in men. The poem, entitled “The attempt is praise,” was originally printed in

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<sup>31</sup> “Esther Reed Obituary,” *Esther Reed Obituary, Pennsylvania Gazette, 27 September 1780, Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, <<http://womhist.binghamton.edu/amrev/doc26.htm>> (12 September 2003).

<sup>32</sup> George Washington, *Letter to Mrses. Francis, Hillegas, Clarkson, Bache, and Blair, 13 February 1781*, <<http://womhist.binghamton.edu/amrev/doc27.htm>> (12 September 2003).

the Maryland Gazette on January 5, 1781 and reads:

All hail! superior sex, exalted fair/  
Mirrors of virtue, heav'n's peculiar care!  
Form'd to inspirit and enoble man,  
The immortal finish of creation's plan;  
Accept the tribute of our warmest praise,  
The soldier's blessing and the patriot's bays!  
For fame's first plaudit we no more contest,  
Constrain'd to own it decks the female breast;  
While partial prejudice is quite disarm'd,  
And e'en pale envy with encomium charm'd;  
Freedom no more shall droop her languid head,  
Nor dream supine, or sloth's lethargic bed/  
No more sit weeping with the vet'ran band,  
Those virtuous brave protectors of her land,  
Who nobly daring, stem despotic sway,  
And shine the patriot wonders of the day:  
For lo! these sons her glorious race renew,  
Cheer'd by such gifts, and smiles and pray'rs,  
from--you--/ More precious treasure in the soldier's eye,  
Than all the wealth Potosi's mines supply,  
Or costly gems th' enlivening sun awakes--/  
They prize the offerings for the donors sakes.  
And hence, ye sister angels of each state,  
Their honest bosoms glow with joy elate,  
Their gallant hearts with gratitude ex-pand,  
And trebly feel the bounties of your hand;  
And wing'd for you their benedictions rise,  
Warm from the soul, and grateful to the skies!  
Nor theirs alone: th' historian patriots fir'd  
/ Shall feel the gen'rous virtue you've in-  
spir'd;  
Invent new epithets to warm their page,  
And bid you live admir'd from age to age;  
With sweet applauses dwell on ev'ry name,  
Endear your mem'ries, and embalm your fame/  
And thus the future bards shall soar sub-  
lime,  
And waft you glorious down the stream of time,  
The breeze of panegyric swell each sail,  
And plaudits pure perfume th' encreasing gale;  
Then freedom's ensign, thus inscrib'd, shall wave--/  
"The patriot females who their country save,"  
Till time's abyss, absorb'd in heav'nly lays,  
Shall flow in your eternity of praise.<sup>33</sup>

One of the results of the American Revolution is that virtue became an important aspect of everyday life. And, as the above poem shows, women were to be the greatest bearers of virtue and were responsible for imparting their virtue on their children, especially their sons. These sentiments helped lead to the development of the ideology of republican motherhood, in which the proper role for women in American culture was in the private sphere of the home where they could raise virtuous children, regardless of the fact that they demonstrated a great capacity to work in the public sphere and contribute in great ways to America's economy during the war. These women desired to be a part of the new American society that was unfolding during the war for Independence, and to accomplish that, they made public their private spheres of influence.

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<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, "The attempt is praise," *A Soldier, "The Attempt is Praise," The Maryland Gazette, 5 January 1781*, <<http://womhist.binghamton.edu/amrev/doc28.htm>> (12 September 2003).

Women of less affluent sectors of society also participated in the war effort. Some by spinning linen, others by collecting supplies for the army, but they rarely had the luxury to join associations such as the Daughters of Liberty, the Edenton Ladies, or the Philadelphia Ladies Association. The vast majority of the middle and lower class women performed whatever volunteer roles were necessary at the times when fighting shifted to their communities and they did not receive such praise for their efforts as did the elite women in formal organizations. Their primary objective was to survive, and to accomplish this goal many women aided in the military effort during the war.

### **Women Active in the Military Effort**

#### **American Camp Women**

Women of all social classes played an important role in the American Revolution. They endured all manners of hardship and worked diligently to do their part for the fight for freedom. Historian Walter Blumenthal discusses how women helped make musket balls of their pewter dishes and molten pellets of the leaden statues of Royal George. Angelica Vrooman is one woman credited with sitting calmly in a tent with a bullet mold during the heat of battle with some lead and an iron spoon molding bullets for the rangers.<sup>34</sup> Colonial women also spun and wove cloth for themselves, their children, and the men in the military ranks. They took over the farm work, from planting to harvest, made grain into bread, and carried supplies to the troops. They kept their family businesses and households intact, made hospital supplies, and when the battles were near to their homes, they tended to the sick and the wounded.

However, from the time the first shots were fired at Lexington and Concord in 1775, many women were homeless because the towns were overrun by British soldiers. Some women

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<sup>34</sup> Walter Hart Blumenthal, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: MacManus Company, 1952), 57.

were able to join other family members in more quiet parts of the countryside, while others were forced into hiding with their children in the woods. As months and years went by more and more women began to join their patriot men in the camps. The number of women attached to American forces varied considerably at different times and locations.<sup>35</sup> Molly Pitcher is one of these many women and was with her husband's regiment at the battle of Monmouth in 1778. There is no clear evidence that Pitcher was a real person, and some scholars suggest that her legend is a compilation of several of the camp women who performed heroic actions on the battlefield. Since 1876, she has been identified as a woman veteran of the war, Mary Ludwig Hayes McCauley, who lived in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. As part of the Centenary events of that year, an unmarked grave believed to be hers was opened and her remains were reburied with honors under a plaque declaring her to be the real Molly Pitcher. In any case, the story is told that on the day of the battle of Monmouth it was incredibly hot and many of the soldiers collapsed from heat exhaustion. Molly is believed to have brought water to the men throughout the battle, risking her own life by putting herself in the way of British fire. For this action she was deemed Molly "Pitcher" by the soldiers. She also rescued and nursed wounded men, and when her own husband was injured by the enemy, she took charge firing his cannon until the end of the battle. Molly spent the next 7 years with the army, and never received a special pension.<sup>36</sup>

Margaret Corbin is a "camp follower" who did receive a pension for her military service. Margaret's husband, John Corbin, enlisted in the military as soon as the war broke out, and Margaret went with him. The Continental Army permitted a number of soldier's wives to stay with each company, and they served the company as a whole by cooking, washing and mending

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<sup>35</sup> Blumenthal, 58-60.

<sup>36</sup> Linda Kerber, "'History Can Do It No Justice': Women and the Reinterpretation of the American Revolution," in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 13-14.

the clothes, and nursing the sick and wounded. Margaret was not only exposed to danger, but was constantly busy with camp work. In November of 1776, she was involved in combat as well when enemy troops attacked Fort Washington, where she and her husband were stationed. The Continentals were outnumbered by more than three to one, and Margaret's husband was killed at his cannon. There was no one else to fire it, so Margaret Corbin stepped up to the artillery during the attack on Fort Washington when her husband fell by her side and unhesitatingly took his place and performed his duties. She continued firing until she was wounded by British grapeshot. Margaret was left a disabled widow without a home. The state of Pennsylvania recognized both her heroism and her poverty, and in 1779 they voted to pay her thirty dollars relief and recommended that the Board of War aide her as well. In July of that year, the Continental Congress awarded her a pension at one-half the rate of an active soldier's pay and an annual outfit of clothing. In order to receive the pension, she moved to West Point and enrolled in the invalid regiment where permanently injured soldiers served as instructors and recruiters. She was the only woman in the regiment, and the first woman pensioner in the United States. When the invalid regiment disbanded in 1783 after the war, Margaret lived around West Point until her death in 1800. She was buried in a local cemetery and was later moved to the cemetery at West Point.<sup>37</sup>

### **Women Soldiers**

Women's lives began to change significantly with the American Revolution. Every war means more women taking charge during the absence and after the deaths of their husbands and fathers, but there are several cases of women being actively involved in the fighting of the Revolution. One must remember that during the Revolutionary War, families in their private homes did not have the right to privacy. The war was not being fought in some far off place; the

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<sup>37</sup> Engle, 26-28.

War was in people's backyards and often invaded their homes. In virtually every community, there were committees of correspondence, public safety, and inspection that dominated the political landscape. These committees had excessive and often arbitrary power, and used it to force their ways into the homes of Loyalists and Patriots alike to search the tea canisters, molasses jugs, and even the women's petticoats. Women were left to defend their homes and families while their husbands were away, and Nancy Morgan Hart is one example of a frontier woman who came face to face with the enemy.

Nancy Morgan Hart's background is undocumented, but it is believed by historians that she was born about 1735 in either the North Carolina or Pennsylvania Frontier.<sup>38</sup> By the time of the Revolution, Hart had settled in a small cabin on the Broad River in Georgia with her husband Benjamin and as many as eight children. Nancy is often portrayed as a larger than life heroine, and in many stories, she is said to have been a dedicated patriot who managed to kill British soldiers and loyalist colonists in her cabin in Georgia.<sup>39</sup> One of the first printed stories about Nancy Hart appeared in the *Milledgeville Southern Recorder* in 1825 as follows:

One day six Tories paid Nancy a call and demanded a meal. She soon spread before them smoking venison, hoe-cakes, and fresh honeycomb. Having stacked their arms, they seated themselves, and started to eat, when Nancy quick as a flash seized one of the guns, cocked it, and with a blazing oath declared she would blow out the brains of the first mortal that offered to rise or taste a mouthful! She sent one of her sons to inform the Whigs of her prisoners. Whether uncertain because of her cross-eyes which one she was aiming at, or transfixed by her ferocity, they remained quiet. The Whigs soon arrived and dealt with the Tories according to the rules of the times.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> As with many of the female heroes from the Revolutionary War era, there is considerable debate about the true story of Nancy Morgan Hart's life, and if she in fact ever existed. There has been considerable work done by her family and supporters to uncover documents that confirm her existence and the stories that are reported. Unfortunately, many of the stories have turned to tall tales and make her into a larger than life figure. These accounts take away from her credibility, but there is consensus that she did in fact exist. In 1997, she was inducted into the Georgia Women of Achievement Hall of Fame.

<sup>39</sup> Booth, 205.

<sup>40</sup> "Midgeville Southern Recorder," *Nancy Morgan Hart*, 4 December 1999, <<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Meadows/6651/>> (10 October 2003). This is a website dedicated to the descendants of Benjamin Hart and Nancy Morgan.

Hart also acted as a spy for the local militia, boldly entering the British camp disguised as a man to get information that helped General Elijah Clarke win the Battle of Kettle Creek.<sup>41</sup>

Many women acted as spies like Nancy Hart did, and in some cases, women hid their identities and enlisted in the military with the singular purpose of being a soldier. Historian Elizabeth Ellet wrote about such women, Deborah Samson being one example, in her 1848 (first publication) two volume work on *The Women of the American Revolution*. In October of 1778 Deborah Samson of Plymouth, Massachusetts disguised herself as a young man and presented herself to the American Army as a willing volunteer to oppose the common enemy. She enlisted for the whole term of the war as Robert Shirliffe and served in the company of Captain Nathan Thayer of Medway, Massachusetts. For three years she served in various duties and was wounded twice--the first time by a sword cut on the side of the head, and four months later she was shot through the shoulder. Her sexual identity went undetected until she came down with a brain fever, then prevalent among the soldiers. The attending physician, Dr. Binney, of Philadelphia, discovered her charade, but said nothing. Instead he had taken her to his own home where she could receive better care. When her health was restored the doctor met with Samson's commander and subsequently an order was issued for "Robert Shirliffe" to carry a letter to General Washington. When the order came for her to deliver a letter into the hands of the Commander-in-chief, she knew that her deception was over. She presented herself at the headquarters of Washington, trembling with dread and uncertainty. General Washington, to spare her embarrassment, said nothing. Instead he sent her with an aide to have some refreshments, then summoned her back. In silence, Washington handed Deborah Samson a

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<sup>41</sup> "Nancy Morgan Hart, 1735-1830," *Georgia Women of Achievement 1997 Inductee Nancy Morgan Hart*, 21 March 1997, < [http://www.gawomen.org/honorees/long/hartn\\_long.htm](http://www.gawomen.org/honorees/long/hartn_long.htm)> (10 October 2003).

discharge from the service and a sum of money sufficient to bear her expenses home.<sup>42</sup>

After the war, Deborah Samson married Benjamin Gannett and they had three children. During George Washington's presidency, she received a letter inviting Robert Shirtliffe, or rather Mrs. Gannett, to visit Washington, and during her stay at the capital a bill was passed granting her a pension. In addition, she received certain lands as an acknowledgement for her services to the country in a military capacity as a Revolutionary Soldier, in part thanks to the efforts of Paul Revere.<sup>43</sup>

It has been estimated that there were 30 to 40 women in the militia in Lexington, Massachusetts, and 20,000 women traveling with the Continental Army under military command as nurses, cooks, laundresses, and occasionally soldiers throughout the Revolution.<sup>44</sup> Women helped the war effort in any way they could and their efforts show a strong commitment to patriotism and a desire to be active in defending their homes from the enemy British. Another way that women helped in the military arena is by serving as informants to the army commanders to warn them of impending danger.

### **Unseating Paul Revere: Women Riders of the War**

Paul Engle, a Revolutionary War historian, makes the important point that Paul Revere's horse is more widely pictured in American history than many real women who also rode in the Patriot cause. "Some of them rode longer and farther than he did," Engle writes, "in nights as dark and in equal danger. Yet there is little evidence of the young girls and wives who went off on their own—in their long dresses, on back roads, and through wilderness—to warn the

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<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth F. Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: G.W. Jacob & Co., 1900).

<sup>43</sup> There are several different versions of the story of Deborah Samson. This comes from *The Women of the American Revolution* by Elizabeth F. Ellet.

<sup>44</sup> Sue Hemberger, 4 July 2003.

Continental soldiers of the British; sometimes their own husbands were in those troops.”<sup>45</sup> On April 26, 1777, sixteen-year-old Sybil Ludington rode forty miles to warn militiamen at the patriot base in Danbury, Connecticut that the British were marching toward them with the intention of burning the base. She rode from what is today Ludingtonville, New York, east to Danbury. Thanks to her effort, the militiamen rallied and intercepted the British troops at Ridgefield, but unfortunately were unable to keep them from breaking through to the south and the Royal Navy ships waiting in Long Island Sound.<sup>46</sup> Repeatedly, women “put their lives in the saddle” for the Patriot cause.

Kate Moore Barry of South Carolina was often a messenger to help alert the militia in the battle of Cowpens. Rachel and Grace Martin were sisters from South Carolina who disguised themselves as men and assailed a British Courier and his guards. They took his important dispatches, which they quickly forwarded to General Greene. Rachel and Grace then released the two officers who did not even know they were women. Jane Thomas, also of South Carolina, rode sixty miles to warn a group of patriots, one of whom was her son, that a gang of Loyalists was moving to attack them. This ride, which was much longer than Paul Revere’s enabled the local boys to organize a defense and defeat the British when they came.<sup>47</sup>

The women who rode on horseback during the Revolution to warn the soldiers of impending danger had an incredible amount of bravery and were invaluable to the war effort. With every mile they traveled they were in danger of being captured by the enemy, or worse, killed. The fact that these women endured these risks shows a deep commitment to the war effort and to their family members who were serving in the military. All of the women who performed duties for the military during the war exemplified the same characteristics of honor,

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<sup>45</sup> Engle, xvi.

<sup>46</sup> Engle, xvi.

<sup>47</sup> Engle, xvii.

bravery, and patriotism as did the men they were working beside to ensure the independence of the colonies.

### **Making Statements of Their Own: The Experiences of Slave Women**

The experiences of white women during the Revolution, and the experiences of enslaved women were very different. This distinction must be made because one cannot broadly speak of women's roles during the war without considering the vast differences in the experiences of white women and enslaved African women. Throughout the Revolution, white women, regardless of their class, had the freedom to participate in the war effort through boycotts, collecting and providing supplies, making cloth, and working with the military. These things were of little relevance to the lives of enslaved women.<sup>48</sup> The experience of enslaved women during the war was quite different due to their bondage, and they had different ideas about the meanings of freedom and oppression based on their experiences. The chaos of the war provided enslaved women (and men) opportunities to question their places in the American colonies as the talk of the revolutionary ideals spread. Historian Jaqueline Jones writes that in hopes of the development of a new social structure after the war, free blacks tried to put together family units that would eventually serve as the foundation for this country's African-American culture.<sup>49</sup> For the free and enslaved black population in the colonies, the question of who the revolution was for was very important. In many cases, the military conflict only intensified the physical, economic, and social burdens facing blacks.

Jacqueline Jones writes,

In the period from 1750 to 1800, the nature and extent of these burdens varied according

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<sup>48</sup> Jaqueline Jones, "Race, Sex, and Self-Evident Truths: The Status of Slave Women during the Era of the American Revolution," in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 299.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, 296.

to whether a woman was African- or American-born; whether she lived in the North or the South, in a town or rural area; whether she toiled in the swampy South Carolina low country or on a Virginia wheat farm. This is not to suggest that black women suffered more than black men under the oppressive weight of the racial caste system, only that gender considerations played a significant role in shaping the task assignments parceled out to blacks by slaveholders, and in shaping the way blacks structured relationships among themselves.<sup>50</sup>

Given the experiences of the enslaved, they perceived the revolutionary ideas in different ways from the white men, many of whom owned slaves, who were claiming the war for independence as their own, and the white women who were so “awkwardly suspended between their racial prerogatives on the one hand and gender and class liabilities on the other.”<sup>51</sup> Enslaved women were caught uncomfortably in the crossfire so that on the one hand they contributed to the efforts for liberation during the war and on the other hand they were part of the political economy of slavery that, by its very nature, was in opposition to the revolutionary rhetoric of equality and freedom from oppression. Enslaved women were in essence fighting a war within a war; they were finding ways to gain independence from their masters while at the same time a part of the war effort for the colonies to be independent from Britain.

The roles and duties that slave women performed varied from place to place and ranged from performing household duties (laundry, seamstress, spinning, cooking, cleaning) to what is considered traditional men’s work like clearing the land, cutting timber, burning brush, planting, harvesting, etc.<sup>52</sup> In examining these roles, it appears that the slave women aided the war effort in ways similar to white women; their work aided the economy by providing food and clothing to the soldiers. But, the women were forced to be able to balance all of these duties along with their responsibilities of child-bearing and rearing. The institution of slavery provided a barrier to creating strong family ties, and it was with trying to build these ties that supporting the white

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<sup>50</sup> Jones, 297.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, 298.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, 307.

men's war ended and their personal war against the institution of slavery begins. Because women were responsible for childbearing, childrearing, and other tasks in their own private households, according to Jones, "these women affirmed affective family values in defiance of the slaveholder's crass materialism."<sup>53</sup> Slave women fought to hold on to the fragile family structures they were creating and it became for them an act of resistance to the slaveholders. There are numerous counts of women threatening to commit suicide if the master sold their husband or children away. One slave couple in Boston resolved to end their lives rather than be parted, and followed through with that threat. The man slit his wife's throat with a razor and then shot himself with a gun.<sup>54</sup>

There were also a great number of slave runaways during the revolution. They took advantage of the chaos and confusion, and women fled with their children or husbands to search out and be reunited with other family members. Free blacks often used what money they earned to liberate their loved ones from bondage. Running away was not always an option so the most powerful way to challenge the system in the eighteenth century was to deprive the white masters of their labor. Jones writes:

Short of poisoning her master, torching his house, barn, or crop, or plotting an armed revolt against him, an eighteenth century slave woman could most directly challenge the system of bondage by seizing control of her own person and depriving whites of her labor. Though less spectacular than the shedding of blood or the destruction of property, this act too required (in most cases) advance planning, subterfuge, and a great deal of raw courage.

Whatever the method of challenging the system, women were most often motivated by family interests, and were determined to stay with or be reunited with their loved ones.

Regardless of how slave women felt about achieving independence from Britain, they had more immediate concerns involving their freedom, and authorized themselves based on their

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<sup>53</sup> Jones, 303.

<sup>54</sup> Jones, 315.

interpretation of the revolutionary rhetoric to seek their independence by any means necessary. Some masters found themselves confronted by their own demands for liberty and reacted accordingly by manumitting their slaves, while others were threatened by the abolitionist talk and fought even more tenaciously to enforce black subordination. What is clear is that the Revolution raised many questions about the nature of the new republic and the meaning of “life liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” and that “both black people and white women appropriated the ideas of 1776 for their own purposes.”<sup>55</sup>

### **The Politics of Women during and after the War**

Women, both enslaved and free emerged from the American Revolution more politically engaged than ever and they began asking the questions of whose freedom did we fight for, and what does it mean to be free? In March of 1776, Abigail Adams had admonished John in a letter to “Remember the Ladies” and to offer them legal protection from “the Unlimited power” of their husbands. The inferior legal status of women was clear, and Abigail further declared, “we are determined to forment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.”<sup>56</sup> Abigail may or may not have been serious about that statement, but the sentiment was present among many women during and after the revolution.

Many slaves began petitioning their state legislatures for manumission, emancipation, and abolition. A slave named Elizabeth Freeman (Mumbet) sued for her freedom under the Massachusetts Constitution. A slave named Belinda wrote a petition to own part of her Master’s estate, who died during the war. She writes,

To the honorable senate and house of representatives, in general court assembled:  
The petition of Belinda, an African, Humbly shews...The laws render her incapable of receiving property: and though she was a free moral agent, accountable for her own

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<sup>55</sup> Jones, 337.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, *Major Problems in American Women’s History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 97-98.

actions, yet never had she a moment for her own disposal! Fifty years her faithful hands have been compelled to ignoble servitude for the benefit of an Isaac Royal, until, as if nations must be agitated, and the world convulsed, for the preservation of that freedom, which the Almighty Father intended for all the human race, the present war commenced. The terrors of men, armed in the cause of freedom, compelled her master to fly, and breathe away his life in the land...<sup>57</sup>

Another petition jointly filed by a group of slaves, sent to the Honorable General Assembly of the state of Connecticut in 1779, pleads:

Altho our Skins are different in colour, from those whom we serve, Yet Reason & Revelation join to declare, that we are the Creatures of that God, who made of one Blood, and Kindred, all the Nations of the Earth; we perceive by our own reflection, that we are endowed with the same Faculties with our masters, and there is nothing that leads us to a Belief, or Suspicion, that we are more obliged to serve them than they us, and the more we Consider of this matter, the more we are convinced of our Right (by the Laws of Nature and by the whole Tenor of the Christian Religion, so far as we have been taught) to be free; we have endeavored rightly to understand what is our Right, and what is our Duty, and can never be convinced that we were made to be slaves.<sup>58</sup>

The language of the revolution is present in both Belinda's petition and the joint petition filed in Connecticut, and it raised the issues for both race and gender and pushed the possibilities of the War's outcomes to the limits. The outcomes of these petitions are unknown. What is important, however, is that the Revolutionary war enabled them to be written, giving people who were in an institution of oppression a voice.

White women both poor and elite, also began to petition for property rights, equal rights to earnings, and even divorce. Historian Cynthia Kierner compiled a book of documents that focuses on the stories that Southern women told in their petitions to their state assemblies. Between 1776 and 1800, women in the four southernmost American states (Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia) submitted at least 780 petitions to their state legislatures.

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<sup>57</sup> "Petition of an African Slave, to the Legislature of Massachusetts," in Keetly & Pettegrew, eds., *Public Women, Public Words, Vol. I* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), 121.

<sup>58</sup> "The petition of the Negroes in the Towns of Stratford and Fairfield," in Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of Negro People in the United States, Volume I* (Citadel Trade, 1989), 17.

Most of these petitioners asked for compensation for losses incurred during the revolution.<sup>59</sup> Soldiers' widows requested pensions and back pay. Wives of loyalist exiles sought to reverse their husband's banishment or recover confiscated property. Others sought restitution for property the state seized or destroyed during the war years. Many petitioners included accounts of their wartime experiences when they submitted their claims and grievances to their government. Mary Cumming was a petitioner that had been married for seven years when her husband was banished for being a loyalist, which left her and her daughter Helen in difficult financial circumstances. She was unsure whether her husband was dead or alive, so she sought an exemption from South Carolina's customary law of property, and asked for permission to sell some land that she had inherited from her father. Her husband legally had control over this land by virtue of coverture, but the legislature passed a private bill that allowed Mary to sell the property.<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Whitworth was a petitioner who sought to protect her hard earned wages from her husband, who under coverture was entitled to take them. The North Carolina Assembly granted her petition and allowed for her to have a separate estate for herself and her children.<sup>61</sup>

The Revolution, which transformed colonies into self-governing republics and subjects into citizens, was a turning point in American's relations with their government. For women, who continued to lack most of the rights and obligations of republican citizenship, however, the meaning of the Revolution was problematic. On the one hand, colonial resistance to British imperial authority politicized many women, and the hardships of war, perhaps coupled with rising responsiveness of government, led them to petition in unprecedented numbers. On the other hand, enhanced political consciousness and women's heightened public visibility signaled

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<sup>59</sup>Cynthia A Kierner, *Southern Women in Revolution, 1776-1800: Personal and Political Narratives* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), xix-xxi.

<sup>60</sup> Kierner, 227.

<sup>61</sup> Kierner, 229.

neither a revolution in gender ideals nor a transformation of the former political status of women in America. Petitioning was the only formal political channel accessible to women, and by its very nature, the petition assumed inequality between those who were submitting the petitions and those who were considering them.<sup>62</sup> Women petitioned for debt recovery, debt relief, divorce, military pension, property disputes, emancipation, wills and inheritance, etc. and were at the mercy of the elite white men in power as to the outcome of their petitions.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Women's experiences during the American Revolution have long been invisible in high school history texts, but it is necessary to have an understanding of their experiences to see that there was a lot more going on in Colonial America than a fight for independence from Britain. Including women's experiences during the war complicates the history and provides a valuable framework for the Constitutional Convention and how the issues of gender, race, and class were dealt with (or ignored) in that document. The varying roles of women during the American Revolution present several questions about freedom and equality that must be addressed. Colonial women organized themselves in relief organizations, participated in boycotts, organized fundraisers and produced goods, actively participated in and aided the military, and took the initiative to make political statements through petitions, but aside from some very brief discussion of women's political rights during the debates preceding the writing of the constitution, there was no real reciprocity for their efforts. The gendering of republican concepts of public virtue and liberty positioned women, not as active citizens, but as mothers of citizens, who possessed the morality necessary for producing virtuous free male citizens, but were unsuited for participation in the political realm themselves. Evidence of this line of thinking is seen in Esther DeBerdt's obituary when her hard work in the Philadelphia Ladies Association is

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<sup>62</sup> Kierner, xxii.

assumed to have caused her poor health and her eventual death. Regardless of the women's varying experiences as spies, soldiers, defenders of the homes, they were still seen as delicate creatures who were best suited for the private sphere. Their patriotic efforts were expected and appreciated during the war, but they were seen as temporary, and their skills and talents were not appreciated and accepted as valuable contributions to the everyday political, social, economic, and military life in the new republic.

## CHAPTER 3

### BREAKING CHAINS: WOMEN OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

#### Introduction

Beginning with the writing of the Constitution of the United States, and for more than 70 years thereafter, imaginative statesmen had found compromises that both upheld slavery and preserved the Union. Citizens on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line took enormous pride in the national experiment in republican democracy, and few gave up the experiment easily. But accommodation and compromise had its limits. In 1859, John Brown pushed white southerners to the edge. Lincoln's election in 1860 convinced whites in the Deep South that slavery and the society they had built on it were at risk in the Union, and they seceded. With the shots fired at Fort Sumter, the Civil War began and self-government, individual rights, states' rights, and federalism were all philosophical factors underlying the dispute, along with the pernicious and pervasive issue of slavery.

When the American Civil War broke out, the regular U.S. army numbered fewer than 16,000 men, and many of them were manning forts on the western frontier. Both the Union and the Confederacy were ill prepared for the war they were embarking upon, and they scrambled to suppress factional differences and assemble military resources for what each of them viewed as a "moral conflict" that would decide what form the American Government should take. Individual states were instructed to raise volunteer regiments and supply them with arms and equipment. However, many volunteer regiments reported for duty without uniforms, poorly trained, and with only makeshift weapons in some cases.<sup>1</sup> The lack of soldiers and supplies was

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hall, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1994), xii-xiii.

a great problem for both sides during the war, and meant that men were expected to volunteer and women had to both fill the void left by their absence and contribute to the war effort by collecting the much needed supplies.

Every schoolchild has heard about Fort Sumter, Gettysburg and Appomattox, or General Jackson, General Lee, and General Grant, but relatively few Americans, know much about the activities of women during the Civil War. Women were in the midst of the conflict and for a variety of motives (including patriotism, adventurism, love of family, and a sense of duty), placed their lives on the line from the outset and “braved shot and shell” on the bloody battlefields of the Civil War.<sup>2</sup> Writing shortly after the War, historian Frank Moore (1867) remarked,

The story of the war will never be fully or fairly written if the achievements of women in it are untold. They do not figure in the official reports; they are not gazetted for deeds as gallant as were ever done; the names of thousands are unknown beyond the neighborhood where they live or the hospitals where they love to labor; yet there is no feature in our war more credible to us as a nation, none from its positive newness so well worthy of record.<sup>3</sup>

From the earliest call to arms, many women openly went to war. They were originally thought of as regimental ornaments, guardian angels, nurses, water carriers, cooks and laundresses—whatever circumstances required. Some women went along with their enlisted or officer husbands, and they tended to be “mother figures” who also pitched in as nurses and helped with camp chores. Unlike the women who disguised themselves as men and fought in the ranks, these women did not particularly crave adventure; they wanted to play a supporting role to help the cause.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hall, xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Moore, quoted in Richard Hall, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1994), v-vi.

<sup>4</sup> Hall, 3.

Most historians gloss over the experiences of women who for four years took over men's work on the home front among various other duties. The Civil War has been called "The War to Save the Union," "The War to End Slavery," "A Brother's War," "The Second American Revolution," etc. but the many ways the women impacted the war effort is rarely mentioned. Whether they stayed at home and managed the farms and businesses or whether they went out on to the battlefields as nurses and hospital matrons, the women of both the Union and the Confederacy found their lives profoundly affected by the war. The diaries, letters, and memories of Civil War women present a collage of women's actions and reactions, of joys and sorrows, or failures and accomplishments. They, of course, cannot represent what life was like for all women, but tell their versions of the war from their own perspectives. There are many variants to the views of these women; obvious variations being between Northern and Southern women, wealthy and poor, slave and free. Historian Ella Forbes reminds us also that many of the memoirs and diaries, particularly of southern women are racist and give a distorted view of the lives of African-American women. The true experiences of African-American women have been lost and replaced with mythical images of mammy figures or harlots in many works about the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> The experiences of African-American women, both enslaved and free must also be included because as Forbes points out, "the Civil War was ultimately about race."<sup>6</sup> African-American women were active participants in the war effort, and without an understanding of their experiences a very important perspective on the Civil War is missing.

Both black and white women were fully invested in the war effort and in the following pages I examine some of the various experiences of women during the Civil War from their

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<sup>5</sup> Ella Forbes, *African American Women During the Civil War* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), x-xi.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, xii.

economic and social struggles and contributions on the home front, to their new public role as nurses, to their exploits as soldiers and spies, to the political activism of abolitionist women.

## **Economic and Social Struggles and Contributions of Women on the Home Front**

### **The Experiences of Union Women**

In the north, with more than a million farm men called to the military, farm women faced the responsibility of adding men's chores to their own. Rising production figures during the Civil War era serve as testimony to their success in plowing, planting, and harvesting. The technology of rapid mechanization assisted the women in their multiple roles; Cyrus McCormick sold 165,000 of his reapers during the years of the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> As on the farm, working class women in cities stepped into jobs vacated by men, particularly in manufacturing but also in new occupations such as government civil service. While some women may have been eager to take up these new roles, often they had no choice because it was next to impossible to make ends meet on their husband's army pay. In other words, women went to work to support themselves and their families. Women made up about one quarter of the manufacturing work force in the early years of the war, and about one third of the workforce by the time the war ended.

However, as women entered the work force, employers cut wages. By 1864, fourteen hour days earned New York seamstresses only \$1.54 a day, and a Cincinnati seamstress explained to Abraham Lincoln that their wages were not enough "to sustain life".<sup>8</sup> In general, the absence of husbands, fathers, and male relatives created greater hardships for African-American women than for most Northern or Southern white women. Families of black enlisted men suffered from extreme poverty and starvation as it was nearly impossible to survive on a black soldier's pay of

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<sup>7</sup> James L. Roark et al., *The American Promise* (Boston: Bedford St. Martins Press, 2002), 519.

<sup>8</sup> Roark, 520.

\$7 a month.<sup>9</sup> In an effort to supplement their husbands' salaries, black women would seek work outside the home but many times white factory owners in the north would not hire them, and when they did get a job as a laundress, cook, domestic servant, or seamstress, their pay was far less than that of white women.<sup>10</sup> Often, urban workers resorted to strikes to demand increases in their wages, but they rarely succeeded. Women continued to work diligently, and most workers took pride in their contribution to Northern victory.

Middle-class white women were expected to be home bodies during the War, but they still found various ways to contribute to the war effort. They wrapped bandages, labored for long hours in sewing circles, and sold homemade goods at local fairs to raise money for soldiers' aid.<sup>11</sup> Women's historian Jeanie Attie writes about the fairs:

Inside the fair buildings, New Yorkers were presented with an extensive array of articles, from carriages, furniture, soap, dry goods, boats, and machinery to sewing machines, hats and lingerie. Donations from regional merchants, farmers, artisans, and individuals formed the bulk of the commodities available. The *World* delighted in pointing out that normal market behavior did not apply in a charity market, where the goal was to sell or spend as much as possible.<sup>12</sup>

The New York fair was considered a huge success, and in only two days, the fair raised close to \$700,000, and in May of 1864, a check for one million dollars was sent to the United States Sanitary Commission treasury.<sup>13</sup>

The United States Sanitary Commission (USSC) was a privately run organization “ostensibly founded to ‘inform’ and ‘advise’ the government on hospital procedure, medical personnel, training recruits, and to maximize home front charity by coordinating female war relief through one centralized agency,” Attie writes, and “By calling on unpaid housework to

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<sup>9</sup> Judith E. Harper, *Women During the Civil War: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge University Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Harper, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 202-208.

<sup>12</sup> Attie, 208.

<sup>13</sup> Attie, 213.

serve nationalist purposes, the Sanitary Commission's scheme reignited debates about the relationship between women's domestic economies and the nation's larger political economy."<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, we must keep in mind the financial turmoil felt by many women in the north that either prevented or limited their participation in the "patriotic toils" for the war effort because they struggled to make ends meet to take care of their families.

This unpaid labor by the women was crucial to the war effort. Attie estimates that Northern women produced goods valued at an excess of \$15 million for the Sanitary Commission to distribute, and donations sent by women to local and state agencies as well as to private organizations, women's gifts to the military totaled \$50 million. Countless women-- white, black, middle-class, elite, and poor-- worked to contribute to the war effort.

Forbes writes that African-American women had long been involved in charitable and support societies to aid the elderly and needy, so their work naturally carried over into aiding newly freed slaves who became refugees during the war. Free women used the networking and organizing skills they had gained in other activities to provide assistance to their needy people.

The ladies founded new organizations and expanded on the missions of old ones to raise money and produce goods or medical supplies, school books, clothing, and food for refugees. In true womanly fashion, they formed sewing circles, conducted fairs, gave bake sales, and wrote and sold personal narratives to provide material support.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, the women "published solicitations for and acknowledgements of donations and services in newspapers and journals," Forbes explains, and "these public displays were appeals to the consciences, purses, and ethnicity of the black community."<sup>16</sup> African-American women used all of the skills they possessed and connections they had to organize their efforts and have the maximum impact on the war effort. For example, Sojourner Truth worked with refugees at

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<sup>14</sup> Attie, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Forbes, 66.

<sup>16</sup> Forbes, 67.

the Freedman's Village in Arlington Heights, Virginia and in the District of Columbia as a fundraiser, counselor, nurse and instructor of domestic skills to refugee women. She was friends with Elizabeth Keckley, a former slave and relief organizer, who had personal contact with Mary Todd Lincoln because she served as her seamstress for four years. It was through this network, that Keckley helped to arrange Sojourner Truth's famous meeting with President Lincoln in 1864. Keckley also knew and assisted Maria Stewart while she was in Washington D.C., was instrumental in founding the Contraband Relief Association in 1862, and made countless pleas to the African American population to aid the relief efforts.<sup>17</sup>

Other women worked tirelessly for relief for the refugees as well. African-American women in New York City gave a gala Grand Calico Dress Ball on February 6, 1862 at Mozart Hall to aid the refugees from Beaufort, South Carolina. They raised \$156.31 and numerous articles of clothing. Also in 1862, The Ladies' Union of Brooklyn and New York held a bazaar at which they collected \$1,464.00 to support the Colored Orphan Asylum and Association. In 1864, the Ladies Union Bazaar Association held a fair as a fund-raising campaign where they raised \$3,239.10 for the benefit of the Colored Orphan Asylum. In Philadelphia 1863, The Ladies' Sanitary Association of St. Thomas African Episcopal Church organized itself as an auxiliary to the United States Sanitary Commission and the two joined forces to aid in the relief effort.<sup>18</sup> Even children were active in the relief efforts and the Pennsylvania Freedman's Relief Association reported that a "poor little colored child, Edith Webb [from Philadelphia], collected money penny by penny, ten dollars, which she sent to us."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Forbes, 68-70.

<sup>18</sup> Forbes, 74-77.

<sup>19</sup> *Philadelphia Tribune* (2 August 1913), quoted in Ella Forbes, *African American Women During the Civil War* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 80.

All of the various relief organizations that were founded during the Civil War had a great impact on the war effort and the Union's success. The women were very active and outgoing to accomplish their missions, and their hard work and dedication was influential in the social and economic situation of the North. In many cases, the women turned their every day activities of sewing circles and producing home made goods into a public enterprise, which was a huge fundraising success.

### **The Experiences of Confederate Women**

Hardships were widespread in the South during the war, but the poor were affected the most. Inflation threatened the poor with starvation—salt, necessary for preserving meat, shot up from \$2.00 a bag to \$60.00 a bag during the first year of war and flour that cost three or four cents a pound in 1861 cost thirty-five cents a pound in 1863.<sup>20</sup> The draft for the Confederate Army left yeomen farms without men and made it necessary for women and children to grow what they ate. To make matters worse, a family's crops were left vulnerable to being trampled by rampaging soldiers, drought, disease, or lost or lame mules. When farm wives succeeded in bringing in a harvest against the odds, government agents took 10 percent of it as a "tax in kind" on agriculture.<sup>21</sup> Like inflation, shortages also afflicted the entire population, but while the rich lost luxuries, the poor lost necessities. In the spring of 1863, bread riots broke out in dozens of cities and villages across the South, and in Richmond, Virginia, a mob of nearly a thousand hungry women broke into shops and took what they needed. Sallie Brock Putnam, an elite white woman living in Richmond during the war writes in her memoir, *Richmond during the War: Four Years of Personal Observation*, of the bread riots:

More impudent and defiant robberies were never committed, than disgraced, in the open light of day, on a bright morning in spring, the city of Richmond. The cry for bread with

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<sup>20</sup> Roark, 513.

<sup>21</sup> Roark, 514.

which this violence commenced was soon subdued, and instead of articles of food, the rioters directed their efforts to stores containing dry-goods, shoes, etc. Women were seen bending under loads of sole-leather, or dragging after them heavy cavalry boots, brandishing their huge knives, and swearing, though apparently well fed, that they were dying from starvation....This disgraceful mob was put to flight by the military...and no demonstration of the kind was afterwards made during the war.<sup>22</sup>

It can be seen from her comment that Putman held these women in contempt for their actions, and it can be deduced that her viewpoints are colored by her position as an elite woman.

Virginia Scharff explains in the introduction to Putman's memoir that Putman was brought up in a genteel family where she was taught like everyone else in that society that both sexes, and the races, had their proper places. Certain characteristics such as purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness were proper for women of her class. As one sided as the account is, Putnam does offer an account of how the war transformed life in Richmond from an elite, white woman's perspective. She later comments:

The real sufferers were not of the class who would engage in acts of violence to obtain bread, but included the most worthy and highly cultivated of our citizens, who, by the suspension of ordinary branches of business, and the extreme inflation in the prices of provisions, were often reduced to abject suffering; and helpless refugees, who, driven from comfortable homes, were compelled to seek relief....<sup>23</sup>

However, this viewpoint was not shared by the yeoman families who saw the burden of war being unequally shared between themselves and the rich planters. As a result, poor men began to desert the Confederate Army. Seeing this great inequality of sacrifice, the yeomen called the war a "rich man's war and a poor man's fight."<sup>24</sup> Evidence of this can be seen in the original draft law, which permitted a man who had money to hire a substitute to take his place. Also the "twenty-Negro law", exempted one white man on every plantation with twenty or more slaves. By providing a way for the white planters to avoid military service, the government intended to

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<sup>22</sup> Sallie Brock Putnam, *Richmond during the War: Four Years of Personal Observation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 209-210.

<sup>23</sup> Putnam, 210.

<sup>24</sup> Roark, 515.

provide protection for white women and to see that slaves tended the crops.<sup>25</sup> Yeomen perceived this as rich men evading military service, and a slaveless Mississippi man complained to his governor that the rich stay-at-home planters sent their slaves into the fields to grow cotton, while in plain view, “poor soldiers’ wives are planting with their own hands to make a subsistence for themselves and children—while their husbands are suffering, bleeding, and dying for their country.”<sup>26</sup> In reality, most rich slaveholders did go off to war, but the exceptions, combined with the extreme suffering of the poor was enough to set off class animosity.

Most free African-Americans in the south felt the sting of extreme poverty as well. A very few free blacks in the south owned property, and Harper writes, “Restrictive laws in every Southern state limited the freedoms of black men and women and made making a living a feat of ingenuity.”<sup>27</sup> Making matters worse, in a number of southern states, free blacks were not allowed to worship in their own churches or to form their own mutual aid or benevolent associations, which they were allowed to do before the war. So, African-American women concentrated their efforts on sustaining their communities performing agricultural labor for subsistence.<sup>28</sup>

The experiences of the enslaved African-American women were different and it is estimated that there were four million men and women living in slavery in 1860. Enslaved men were impressed into the Confederate military, slave women were forced to assume a greater share of their labor, and were left on their own to fend for themselves and their children.<sup>29</sup> The Northern blockade of Southern ports caused a great food crisis that caused planters to reduce slave rations. As the women faced increased workloads in the fields and at home, they struggled

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<sup>25</sup> Roark, 514.

<sup>26</sup> Roark, 514.

<sup>27</sup> Harper, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Harper, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Harper, 339.

to nourish their families on an extremely deficient diet. These heavy burdens and immense suffering led many slave women to flee the plantations during the war into the special encampments around Washington D.C. and elsewhere in the Union.<sup>30</sup>

Also an issue in the South was the growing tension between the Plantation Mistresses and their slaves. While their husbands were away, the elite women were in charge of running the plantation and ensuring that the slaves worked. With life disrupted by the War, however, it became more difficult to control the slaves, and Sallie Putnam comments on the “trouble with the negroes”:

Domestic troubles of an irritating nature now arose to vex and annoy us. There was unquestionably an underground agency to decoy away our negro servants, or to assist any who meditated flight from their owners...A lady who lived on Franklin Street, in one of the fashionable and respectable quarters of the city, left her house to attend an early prayer-meeting at the church to which she was attached, and returned about eight o'clock a.m. to find that two of her maids, reared, trained, and belonging to her, missing. Inquiries were made, detectives employed, advertisements issued, and rewards offered...but the whereabouts of the absconding parties could never be discovered.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the course of the war, slave resistance became more and more organized, and female slaveholders were forced to go into the fields themselves and work to produce enough food for themselves and their families. Women's experience at home in the South was one of toil and trouble, and the Civil War devastated the world in which they lived.

### **Nurses, Doctors, and Catholic Sisters**

Most women who served on or near the battlefield during the war did so as nurses. There were regimental nurses who came along with the soldiers, Catholic Sisters who aided in caring for the sick and wounded, and a special category of women known as “viviandieres”—a European word used to describe “female sutlers or canteen women” who supplied food and water

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<sup>30</sup> Harper, 339.

<sup>31</sup> Putnam, 264-265.

to the soldiers.<sup>32</sup> Many of the northern female volunteers worked through the U.S. Sanitary Commission, a civilian organization that bought and distributed clothing, food, and medicine and recruited doctors and nurses. In 1864, the United States War Department issued an order that all general hospitals under their jurisdiction were to hire African-American women as cooks or nurses. They were to receive ten dollars a month and receive one ration.<sup>33</sup> In the South, the idea of women serving as military nurses on the battlefield was frowned upon, and though some units had “viviandieres” their presence was justified by their provision of “motherly” care to the regiment.<sup>34</sup>

Civil War nurses were seen as defying prejudices about female delicacy. Nursing meant working in the midst of unspeakable sights, sounds, and smells, but it brought the profound satisfaction of displaying competence and serving well. Some nurses went on to become paid military nurses. In April 1861, Dorthea Dix, well known for her reform of insane asylums, was named superintendent of female nurses, and eventually around 3,000 women served under her.<sup>35</sup> Harriet Tubman, though well known for her abolitionist role, also served as a nurse during the war.<sup>36</sup> Most nurses worked in hospitals behind the battle lines, but some, like Clara Barton, who later founded the Red Cross, worked in battlefield units.<sup>37</sup> Women who served in the war went on to lead the postwar movement to establish training schools for female nurses, but Civil War nurses who kept diaries are also important for the insights they give into what life was like for them and the impact their experiences had during the war.

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<sup>32</sup> Hall, xiii.

<sup>33</sup> Forbes, 51.

<sup>34</sup> Hall, 78-79.

<sup>35</sup> Roark, 520.

<sup>36</sup> Forbes, 52.

<sup>37</sup> Roark, 520.

## Phoebe Yates Pember (Civil War Nurse)

Phoebe Yates Pember, the fourth of seven children was born into a prominent Charleston family in 1823. Little is known about Phoebe's early years except that she was part of a devout Jewish family, and her letters show literary sophistication leading one to believe she may have attended a Northern finishing school. In 1856, Phoebe married a Christian, Thomas Pember of Boston, but was soon widowed when her husband died of tuberculosis in 1861. In November 1862, Phoebe received a letter from Mary Elizabeth Adams Randolph, the wife of Confederate Secretary of War George Randolph and an acquaintance of Phoebe's, urging her to become the chief matron at Chimborazo Hospital, a large Confederate military hospital in Richmond, Virginia. Phoebe accepted the position and began keeping her memoirs, *A Southern Woman's Story*, almost immediately.

Pember explains that there was a lack of organization in the Confederate hospitals and the sick were not receiving the best care, which led Congress to pass a law whereby matrons could be appointed in an attempt to remedy the problems. The matrons had no official recognition, and the pay was nominal. Pember acknowledges that this was a "rather startling proposition offered to a woman used to all the comforts of luxurious life."<sup>38</sup> She writes,

The day after my decision was made found me at "headquarters"...occupied by the chief surgeon and his clerks. He had not yet made his appearance that morning, and while awaiting him, many of his corps, who had expected in the horror the advent of female supervision, walked in and out, evidently inspecting me. There was at that time a general ignorance on all sides, except among the hospital officials, of the decided objection on the part of the latter to the carrying out of a law which they prognosticated would entail "petticoat government;" but there was no mistaking the stage-whisper which reached my ears from the open door of the office that morning, as the little contract surgeon passed out and informed a friend he met, in a tone of ill-concealed disgust, that "*one of them had come.*"<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Phoebe Yates Pember, *A Southern Woman's Story* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Pember, 3.

Pember did eventually earn the respect of the chief surgeon and other hospital officials due to her competence, efficiency, and tenacity. Her actions proved that women did have a place and a purpose in the hospital environment.

One of the many great virtues of Pember's memoirs is the sympathetic treatment of ordinary soldiers. Her stories of hospital life give voice to illiterate men whose feelings, thoughts, and experiences have generally been lost to history. George C. Rabble, the editor of her memoirs, comments on her "eye for detail and ear for dialogue" and she captures the whole idea of hardship with her graphic detail of what it was like to be a nurse.<sup>40</sup> Pember writes of one of her experiences at the hospital:

There were not as many desperate wounds among the soldiers brought in that night as usual. Strange to say, the ghastliness of wounds varied much in the different battles, perhaps from the nearness or distance of contending parties. One man was an exception and enlisted my warmest sympathy. He was a Marylander although serving in a Virginia company. There was such strength of resignation in his clam blue eye...His pulse was strong but irregular, and telling him that a stimulant might induce fever, and ought only be administered with a doctor's prescription, I inquired where he was wounded. Right through the body. Alas! The doctor's dictum was, "No hope: give him anything he asks for;" but five days and nights I struggled against this decree, fed my patient with my own hands, using freely from the small store of brandy in my pantry and cheering him by words and smiles. The sixth morning on my entrance he tamed an anxious eye on my face, the hope had died out of his, for the cold sweat stood in beads there, useless to dry, so constantly they were renewed. What comfort could I give? Only silently open the Bible, and read to him without comment the ever-living promises of his Maker. Glimpses too of that abode where the "weary are at rest." Tears stole down his cheek, but he was not comforted. "I am an only son," he said, "and my mother is a widow. Go to her, if you ever get to Baltimore, and tell her that I died in what I consider the defense of civil rights and liberties. I may be wrong. God only knows. Say how kindly I was nursed, and that I had all I needed. I cannot thank you, for I have no breath, but we will meet up there." He pointed upward and closed his eyes, that never opened again upon this world.<sup>41</sup>

This excerpt from her memoir shows the depth of her compassion, the sincerity of her service, and her commitment to her position as well as gives a voice to this dying man, and gives us

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<sup>40</sup> Pember, xiii.

<sup>41</sup> Pember, 25.

insight to his experience as a soldier wounded in battle. As the Confederate soldier lay dying, Pember provides us with a glimpse of his internal conflict as he questions whether he was right about fighting the war in “defense of civil rights and liberties.” Pember’s memoir provides another perspective from which the war can be seen.

### **Catholic Sisters**

Sister Mary Denis Maher wrote the story of the role of Catholic Sisters in the Civil War. In *To Bind Up the Wounds*, she tells how the mission of the sisters in the nineteenth century was to carry out the works of Christian charity by teaching, caring for orphans, nursing the sick, and providing spiritual assistance for the dying. Unlike some other female nurses during the war, there were no memoirs left behind to tell the story of the sisters’ participation in the war, so Sister Mary Denis Maher diligently searched through what primary and secondary sources were available to tell the untold stories of the sisters.

The sisters were not just confined to Catholic hospitals during the war. They served on battlefields, on hospital transport ships, at field hospitals, and virtually every other place where there were sick or wounded soldiers. Sister Maher tells of the experience of Cincinnati Sister of Charity Anthony O’Connel:

On a transport ship holding 700 men, that was caught on the shoals at Louisville after the battle of Shiloh in 1862, the captain told the sisters they would have to leave the ship if they wished to live. However, Sister Anthony explained, ‘None would think of doing so. All expressed their determination to remain.’ The doctor, seeing the sisters’ firm resolve, said, ‘Since you weak women display such courage, I, too, will remain.’<sup>42</sup>

The annals of the Holy Cross Sisters of South Bend, Indiana, indicate that the sisters were accustomed to going out to the battlefields and “succor the wounded and dying” after the battles, and explained that it was the religious motivation that helped them endure the situations of

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<sup>42</sup> Sister Mary Denise Maher, *To Bind Up the Wounds: Catholic Sister Nurses in the U.S. Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 101.

seeing the massacred soldiers.<sup>43</sup> This was a task that many groups of sisters undertook. They were instructed to move the wounded and dying men from the battlefields to the transport boats of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which went up and down the Ohio, Mississippi, and other rivers. A Daughter of Charity describes her experience:

When men, sisters, provisions, horses, etc. were all on board, we were more like sinking than sailing...Here misery was in her fullness and her victims testified to her power by the thousand-toned moans of bitter waves....Here our sisters shared with their poor patients every horror except that of feeling their bodily pains. They were in the lower cabins; the ceiling low, and lighted all day by hanging lamps or candles; the men dying on the floor with only space to stand or kneel between them.<sup>44</sup>

In the South, the sisters also shared the responsibility of setting up makeshift hospitals out of facilities that were inadequate in nearly every way. They credit their ability to succeed at those tasks to their experience in setting up schools and shelters out of meager means. They also had to secure supplies by collecting from private donors since the south did not have a Sanitary Commission. Sister Maher, adds, however, that no previous experience could have prepared the sisters for the thousands of soldiers that inhabited the overcrowded government hospitals toward the end of the war. Complicating the situation even more, some of the hospitals were fired upon because it was not clear that they were medical establishments.<sup>45</sup>

The presence and appreciation of the sisters during the war was documented in the official *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion* when Surgeon I. I. Hayes, in charge of Satterlee Hospital, West Philadelphia, said he was “fortunate in being able to engage, as directed when the hospital was first opened, forty Sisters of Charity whose labors have been unceasing and valuable.”<sup>46</sup> In addition to nursing the sick, the sisters cooked, cleaned, visited the soldiers, wrote letters for soldiers to loved ones, and performed baptisms at the soldiers’

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<sup>43</sup> Maher, 101.

<sup>44</sup> Maher, 102.

<sup>45</sup> Maher, 103-106.

<sup>46</sup> Maher, 108.

requests. The sisters' experiences during the war show how complete their devotion to service was, their physical, mental, and moral strength, and shatters any misconceptions that women religious remain behind the walls of a convent separated from the conflicts of the world.

### **Dr. Mary E. Walker**

Mary E. Walker was born and raised on a farm in Oswego, New York and graduated from the Syracuse Medical College in 1855. She practiced medicine in New York state until the war began in 1861, when she traveled to Washington, D.C. to try to convince military officials to allow her to serve as a military physician. When she failed to convince the military officials to allow her to serve as an army surgeon, she volunteered her services at the Indiana hospital in Washington, D.C., where she assisted the head surgeon. She worked to save as many lives as she could after the Battle of Fredericksburg—"Just across the Rapahannock River from Fredericksburg, she labored day and night to aid the thousands of wounded pouring in from the Battle of Fredericksburg, one of the ghastliest slaughters of the war"<sup>47</sup>—and for her service some of her co-workers lobbied for her to be commissioned into the military, but they never succeeded. In late 1863, Walker traveled to Chattanooga, Tennessee, to tend the wounded from the Battle of Chickamauga. The surgeon there would only allow her to perform as a nurse, but she did what she could for the soldiers. Her performance there impressed Brigadier General George H. Thomas, commander of the Army of the Cumberland, and in January 1864, he pushed through her first official appointment, making her a civilian contract surgeon for the 52<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Volunteers stationed in Tennessee.<sup>48</sup> Two months later in April 1864, she was captured by Confederate soldiers while she was en route to treat civilians. She spent the next 5 months in squalid prison conditions before she was released in a prisoner exchange. Following her release,

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<sup>47</sup>Mercedes Graf, *A Woman of Honor: Dr. Mary E. Walker and the Civil War* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 2001), 35.

<sup>48</sup> Graf, 54.

she convinced General Sherman to give her a post at Louisville Female Military Prison where Confederate female spies were incarcerated.<sup>49</sup> With this post she earned \$100 per month, a change from her unpaid labor since the beginning of the war. Even after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Walker didn't give up her quest for a commission as a military surgeon. She and her advocates petitioned President Andrew Johnson after the war, but they were unsuccessful. On November 11, 1865, Johnson presented Walker with the Congressional Medal of Honor for her service during the War, making her the first woman to receive the honor.<sup>50</sup>

### **Spies and Soldiers in Disguise**

It is impossible to know how many women served the military as soldiers and spies during the Civil War. In many histories of the War women are not included even though there is much evidence supporting the fact that women creatively took matters into their own hands to provide service to the military. Hall writes that at Gettysburg a female Confederate soldier was found dead alongside the body of her husband, both killed at Pickett's charge, and many other women were wounded or killed during military action.<sup>51</sup> Many women who fought and died in battle cannot be identified, but the evidence supporting their participation is overwhelming. It is fortunate, though, that a handful of women who served as soldiers and spies kept memoirs detailing their many exploits. Sarah Emma Edmonds, Madame Loreta Janeta Velasquez, Maria Isabella Boyd, and Elizabeth Van Lew are but a handful of the women who were involved in military exploits during the war.

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<sup>49</sup> Graf, 72.

<sup>50</sup> Harper, 405. In 1918, at age 86, the U.S. government withdrew the Congressional Medal of Honor from 910 individuals including Walker, when it decided to issue the medal only for heroic acts involving contact with the enemy. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter reissued the medal to Walker posthumously.

<sup>51</sup> Hall, xiii.

## **Sarah Emma Edmonds (Union Soldier, Nurse, and Spy)**

Elizabeth D. Leonard (1999), historian and editor of *Soldier, Nurse, and Spy*, the memoir of Sarah Emma Edmonds, explains that Sarah was by no means the only woman to join the Union Army disguised as a man during the American Civil War, but was the only one to leave a verifiable memoir of her military career. In 1889, Mary Livermore, a Civil War nurse and soldiers' aid activist, estimated that at least 400 women "bore arms and served in the ranks" of the Union Army, and more recent scholarship has suggested that more than one thousand women disguised themselves and enlisted in the military organizations of the Union and Confederacy.<sup>52</sup> Leonard explains that the women who enlisted were typically poor and agrarian in origin, and Sarah Edmonds was not an exception to this. She was born to a large farming family in New Brunswick, Canada, and was 20 years old in 1861 when the Civil War broke out. It has been suggested by Leonard and other biographers, that Edmonds abandoned not only female dress but also her female identity well before the Civil War, and left home because of an undesirable betrothal and her father's tyrannical ways.<sup>53</sup>

Seeking independence, Edmonds left home, crossed into the United States, and took the pseudonym Franklin Thompson so she could not be found by her father. "Franklin Thompson" took a job as a book seller and publisher's agent, a lucrative position that was not available to women at the time. Thus, when the Civil War began, she was accustomed to independence, had developed many successful ways to pass as a man, and when she arrived in Detroit on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1861 to join the regiment commanded by Colonel Israel B. "Fighting Dick" Richardson, she was not recognized as a woman (any physical exams must have been less than thorough).<sup>54</sup> Her first

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<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Leonard ed., *Memoirs of a Soldier Nurse and Spy: A Woman's Adventures in the Union Army* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), xiv.

<sup>53</sup> Leonard, xv.

<sup>54</sup> Leonard, xvii-xxii.

assignment as a soldier in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan was to hospital duty. Edmonds writes, “I was not merely to go to Washington and remain there until a battle had been fought and the wounded brought in, and then in some comfortable hospital sit quietly and fan the patients, after the surgeon had dressed their wounds; but I was to go to the front and participate in all the excitement of the battle scenes, or in other words, be a ‘field nurse.’”<sup>55</sup>

Edmonds, like other new enlistees spent the first few months of her military service training and learning about the complexities of life as a soldier. She learned about the routines of camp life, became proficient with her weapon, and participated in both fatigue and guard duty. Long before her training was officially complete, Edmonds and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan found themselves face to face with the enemy at the first Battle of Bull Run. In her diary she asks “How shall I describe the scene?” and she reports that

The field was literally strewn with wounded, dead, and dying...Mrs B. [the Chaplain’s wife] was nowhere to be found. Had she been killed or wounded? A few moments of torturing suspense and then I saw her coming toward me, running her horse with all possible speed, with about 50 canteens hanging from the pommel of her saddle. To all my inquiries, there was but one answer: “Don’t stay and care for the wounded now; the troops are famishing with thirst and are beginning to fall back.” Mr. B. [the chaplain] then rode up with the same order, and we three started for a spring a mile distant, having gathered up the empty canteens which lay strewn on the field. This was the nearest spring; the enemy knew it, and consequently had posted sharpshooters within rifle range to prevent troops from being supplied with water. Notwithstanding this, we filled our canteens, while the Minnie balls fell thick and fast around us, and returned in safety to distribute the fruits of our labor among the exhausted men. We spent three hours in this manner, while the tide of battle rolled on more fiercely than before, until the enemy made a desperate charge on our troops, driving them back and taking full possession of the spring. Chaplain B.’s horse was shot through the neck and bled to death in a few moments. The Mrs. B. and I dismounted and went to work again among the wounded.<sup>56</sup>

Edmonds tells the story of the retreat of the Federal Army back to Washington, and how she was urged to leave the dead and wounded soldiers because they could not be carried in their hasty

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<sup>55</sup> Sarah Edmonds, *Memoirs of a Soldier Nurse and Spy: A Woman’s Adventures in the Union Army* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>56</sup> Edmonds, 17-18.

retreat. She loathed the thought of leaving the dead, and learned that the Chaplain and his wife had left with her horse, assuming that she had been captured. Edmonds stayed and placed canteens within reach of as many soldiers as she could before she started back to Washington. She was stopped by the cries of one wounded man who held a gold locket in his hand. He asked her to open it, and she held it so he could see the young woman of “rare beauty” and the young child in her arms one last time. The address of the woman was printed inside the locket, so she took it from the dying man’s hand and started for Washington on the “double quick”.<sup>57</sup>

After the first Battle of Bull Run, there was an extended period of rest and recovery, during which time she continually maintained her male identity. Jerome John Robbins, is the only person who knew she was a woman, and this was only because she confided in him as a friend. After she revealed her identity, however, the friendship was strained for a time, and perhaps to distance herself from him, Edmonds transferred from hospital duty to the more dangerous position of regimental postmaster and mail carrier. This position required her to travel extensively on horseback within range of enemy fire. While holding this position, she abandoned her mail duties to fight in the Battle of Williamsburg on May 5, 1862 and the Seven Days’ battle in June. She writes in her memoir how well liked she was by her officers because of her enthusiastic performance, and that she was selected to serve as an espionage agent in 1862. During her time as a spy she created a number of different personae and could impersonate a male slave, an Irish peddler woman, a female fugitive slave, and a Kentucky male civilian.<sup>58</sup> Also in 1862, while delivering mail and military communications to Union Major general McClellan’s forces in Maryland in September 1862, Edmonds served at the battle of Antietam on September 17<sup>th</sup> by caring for the wounded. She writes,

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<sup>57</sup> Edmonds, 23-24.

<sup>58</sup> Edmonds, 59-66, 83-91, 155-163.

In passing among the wounded after they had been carried from the field, my attention was attracted by the pale, sweet face of a youthful soldier who was severely wounded in the neck...I went to one of the surgeons in attendance, and requested him to come and see my patient. He did so, and after a moments examination of the wound he told me there nothing could be done whatever to save him. He left me, and I administered a little brandy and water to strengthen the wounded boy, for he evidently wished to tell me something that was on his mind before he died. The little trembling hand beckoned me closer...I listened with breathless attention to catch every sound which fell from those dying lips, the substance of which was as follows: "I can trust you, and will tell you a secret. I am not what I seem, but am female. I enlisted from the purest motives, and have remained undiscovered and unsuspected. I have neither father, mother, nor sister. My only brother was killed today. I closed his eyes but an hour before I was wounded. I shall soon be with him. I am a Christian, and have maintained the Christian character ever since I entered the army. I have performed the duties of a soldier faithfully, and am willing to die for the cause of truth and freedom. My trust is in God, and I die in peace. I wish you to bury me with your own hands, that none may know after my death that I am other than my appearance indicates."<sup>59</sup>

Edmonds stayed with her until she died, and buried her with the help of two boys who were assigned to bury the dead. During the Battle of Fredericksburg in December she was chosen to serve as Brigadier General Orlando M. Poe's orderly, and in this role she raced on horseback from the general's quarters to the front and back, dodging bullets while carrying messages and orders to the commanders on the frontlines.

After the 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan was transferred to the Western Theatre, Edmonds contracted a severe case of malaria, and ended up in a hospital in Lebanon, Kentucky. She claims that she was more concerned about her sexual identity being discovered than her illness, and she fled the hospital going AWOL from the army, and traveled to Oberlin, Ohio where she spent weeks recovering her strength. While in Ohio, Edmonds began dressing in woman's attire again, and began writing her memoir.<sup>60</sup> When she finished her book, she volunteered as a female nurse under the auspices of the United States Christian Commission (USCC). The book was first published in 1864 under the title *Unsexed* and again in 1865 under the new title *Nurse and Spy in*

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<sup>59</sup> Edmonds, 161-62.

<sup>60</sup> Harper, 128.

*the Union Army*. Edmonds desperately needed money, but she donated the proceeds from her book sales to various organizations that supplied aid to Union soldiers. Later Edmonds married Linus Seeyle, a carpenter from New Brunswick, and continued to have financial trouble. She petitioned for a pension for her military service and was granted one along with a bounty, a monetary gift given by the government, in 1886, though the money did not relieve the couple's poverty. She died at Fort Scott, Kansas, at the age of 56.<sup>61</sup>

### **Madame Loreta Janeta Velasquez (Confederate Officer and Spy)**

Madame Loreta Janeta Velasquez, also known as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, wrote a colorful (some say sensationalized) and detailed memoir of her experiences during the Civil War, and it was published in 1876. *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velasquez, Otherwise known as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, Confederate States of America* highlights her experiences as a Confederate officer, the numerous battles in which she participated, and her performances as a spy, a bearer of dispatches, and a blockade runner. She also includes information about her travels in Europe after the war, her love affairs, and marriages. While her narrative may be embellished, the basic facts about her military service are supported by press accounts, government records, and the memories of soldiers who served with her.<sup>62</sup>

Velasquez was born in Havana, Cuba, and emigrated to the United States in 1849 to live with an aunt and receive her education in New Orleans. In 1856, she married an officer in the U.S. army, simply identified as William, and five years later he enlisted in the Confederate military. Velasquez describes her childhood passions to be a second Joan of Arc, and these

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<sup>61</sup> Harper 128.

<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth D. Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies* (New York; W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 254.

desires led her to pursue a position in the military as well.<sup>63</sup> She discusses her desire to accompany her husband to the war and she says, “He used every possible argument to dissuade me from my purpose, representing the difficulties and dangers in the darkest colors, and contending that it would be impossible for him to permit his wife to follow an undisciplined army of volunteers.”<sup>64</sup> She could not be dissuaded, so to try to prove the displeasures of masculine life to her, her husband allowed her to dress in one of his suits, assume the identity of a man, and accompany him to bars and other places of “male resort.” This tactic had quite the inverse effect to her husbands desires, however, and Velasquez resolved that “ I made quite as good looking a man as my husband.”<sup>65</sup> Her husband departed for Richmond believing his wife decided to stay behind, and she writes, “He ought to have known better, and to have been assured that a woman of my obstinate temper was not to be prevented by mere argument from carrying out a pet scheme which promised such glorious results as the one we had been discussing.”<sup>66</sup>

Shortly after her husband was gone, Velasquez put on her male attire, went to a tailor and ordered two uniform suits, which she then padded around the inside lining to conceal her feminine shape until she could find a tailor to help her create a complete, more permanent disguise that gave her peace of mind that she would not be recognized. Disguised as Harry T. Buford, she pronounced herself a Lieutenant in the Confederate Army, and in Arkansas, in the first few weeks of the War, she managed to recruit enough men to form a company.<sup>67</sup> Her plan was in motion, and she soon became quite comfortable that she could be in a group of 50 or 60 men and not be recognized. Velasquez writes of Camp Life:

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<sup>63</sup> Loreta J. Velasquez, *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velasquez* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 45.

<sup>64</sup> Velasquez, 53.

<sup>65</sup> Velasquez, 53.

<sup>66</sup> Velasquez, 56.

<sup>67</sup> Velasquez, 70.

The manner in which too many men are in the habit of referring to the other sex in conversation among themselves is, in my opinion, thoroughly despicable; and I really think it would be morally and intellectually beneficial to many of my sex, especially those who are the victims of masculine viciousness, if they could only listen to some such conversations as I have been compelled to listen to, and learn how little respect or real regard any kind of men have for them.<sup>68</sup>

While she found the conversation vile, she knew it would endanger her cover as a man if she made any comment to the contrary, so she refrained from reprimanding their conduct. Velasquez further states:

Many of the time has the subject of women serving in the army as soldiers been discussed at the mess tables and around the camp fires; and officers, who have been in my company for days, and weeks, and months, have boasted with very masculine positiveness, that no woman could deceive them, little suspecting that one was even then listening to them.<sup>69</sup>

On July 16, 1861, "Lt. Buford" assumed command of a company that had lost its officers after the battle at Blackburn's Ford in Virginia. She was present at the First Battle of Manassas (called the Battle of Bull Run in the North) and led a company of soldiers at the Battle of Balls Bluff in October of 1861. She says of her experience at the Battle of Manassas:

The morning was a beautiful one, although it gave the promise of a sweltering day; and the scene was presented to my eyes, as I surveyed the field, was one of marvelous beauty and grandeur. I cannot pretend to express in words what I felt, as I found myself one among thousands of combatants, who were about to engage in a deadly and desperate struggle. The supreme moment of my life had arrived, and all of the glorious aspirations of my romantic girlhood were on the point of realization. I was elated beyond measure....<sup>70</sup>

Velasquez was very satisfied with her performance in Battle of Manassas and the subsequent battles that fall. Feeling she deserved recognition, she petitioned General Jackson for a promotion. She was offered a recruiting commission but responded unfavorably to the offer saying, "This I did not care about, for I thought I did not need his permission or his aid to do

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<sup>68</sup> Velasquez, 59.

<sup>69</sup> Velasquez, 60.

<sup>70</sup> Velasquez, 100.

recruiting duty, and determined to wait and see if something better would not offer.”<sup>71</sup>

Velasquez turned down the position as a recruiting officer because she desired greater adventure, and traveled west to Kentucky where she participated in fighting near Woodsonville, Kentucky that December. She also participated in the Battle of Fort Donelson in western Tennessee in February 1862. In April 1862, Velasquez was struck by shrapnel while she was burying the dead after the Battle of Shiloh. Following all of her other exploits, this defeat caused her to be disheartened and disgusted with armed combat.<sup>72</sup> After her sex was discovered by the surgeon who operated on her arm and shoulder, she assumed her female identity again and worked for the Confederate Secret Service as a spy, sometimes as Mrs. Williams, a name presumably chosen based on her first husband’s name..

After the Civil War, Velasquez traveled in Europe and throughout the South. She was married 3 other times after her first husband was killed in the war, and in 1867, she worked in New Orleans to help establish a community for Confederate exiles in Venezuela. The last that is known about her is that she moved, in 1876 after she published her memoir, to Rio de Janeiro with her son from her fourth marriage, where she had a job as a journalist.<sup>73</sup>

### **Maria Isabella “Belle” Boyd (Confederate Spy)**

Maria Isabella Boyd was born in the village of Bunker Hill in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia in 1843. Most white southern women, in addition to keeping their families fed and safe, served the Confederate cause by sewing uniforms, knitting socks, rolling bandages, and nursing the sick and wounded. While Boyd did participate in these duties, she also became a spy. Only seventeen when the war broke out, she was devoted to the rebel cause. Her first act for the

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<sup>71</sup> Velasquez, 140.

<sup>72</sup> Velasquez, 234.

<sup>73</sup> Harper, 346.

Confederacy came on July 3, 1861, when she shot a drunken federal soldier who barged into her Virginia home and insulted and swore at her mother.<sup>74</sup>

In late 1861 and early 1862, Boyd served as a courier for Confederate Major General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson and Brigadier General P.G.T. Beauregard. In 1862, Boyd was living at a relative’s house in Front Royal, Virginia when Union General James Shields requisitioned the house. Boyd eavesdropped on the general and his officers one night and recorded everything she heard. She then carried the information to Confederate forces stationed 15 miles away by horseback, and returned to Front Royal by daybreak. In May 1862, Boyd gathered more intelligence on the Union Army in Front Royal and deduced that it was the ideal time for the Confederate troops to descend upon the town and drive the Union army out. As she rode to give the information to Jackson, she crossed fields of Union soldiers and through heavy gunfire. Major Henry Klyd Douglas recalled seeing Boyd riding toward the camp: she “seemed when I saw her, to heed neither weeds nor fences, but waved a bonnet as she came on, trying, it was evident, to keep the hill between herself and the village,” and she was nearly breathless as she gave me the message for Jackson, “Go back quick and tell him that the Yankee Force is very small—one regiment of Maryland infantry, several pieces of artillery and several companies of cavalry. Tell him I know, for I went through the camps and got it out of an officer. Tell him to charge right down and he will catch them all.”<sup>75</sup>

Boyd’s information handed Stonewall Jackson an easy victory at Front Royal, Virginia, in May 1862. “I thank you,” the general wrote Boyd, “...for the immense service that you have rendered your country today.”<sup>76</sup> Imprisoned several times for spying at the Old Capital Prison in Washington D.C., during the winter of 1862-1863, Jackson selected her to be an honorary aide-

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<sup>74</sup> Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*, 26.

<sup>75</sup> Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*, 29.

de-camp, assigning her the rank of captain. To support herself, Boyd wrote and published her memoir in 1865 titled *Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison*. Boyd took up a theatrical career when the war ended.<sup>77</sup>

### **Elizabeth Van Lew (Union Spy)**

Historian Peggy Caravantes writes that Elizabeth Van Lew was born and raised a Virginia aristocrat, the daughter of John and Elizabeth, both well-educated intellectuals, who fostered a love of learning in her as well. She is considered to be one of the most skilled, innovative, and successful spies of the Civil War. She never left Richmond, and never crossed any enemy picket lines, instead, she operated out of her family's mansion in Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital, supplying the Union Army with a great deal of useful information.<sup>78</sup> Van Lew supplied information to Generals Ulysses S. Grant, George H. Sharpe, George G. Meade, and Benjamin F. Butler by operating a small espionage ring of about a dozen white and African-American women and men in Richmond. Van Lew was an abolitionist who was devoted to the Union, and while no one is sure why she decided to become a Union spy, historians believe it was due in large part to her loyalty to the United States and her desire for freedom for African-Americans.<sup>79</sup> When John, her father, died, Elizabeth persuaded her mother and brothers to free their nine slaves, and she then used a portion of her inheritance to purchase and then liberate a number of their family members. It was no secret in Richmond that she was an abolitionist, and because of this, she was shunned by most of her neighbors.

Elizabeth wanted to see the Union preserved, and devised many ways to safely and successfully spy in the rapidly changing conditions of Richmond during the war. She secured a

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<sup>77</sup> Harper, 43.

<sup>78</sup> Peggy Caravantes, *Petticoat Spies: Six Women Spies of the Civil War* (Greensboro, NC: Morgan Reynolds Publishers, 2002), 77-89.

<sup>79</sup> Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*, 50.

routing system for her messages which consisted of her home and the homes of four Unionist friends where she was assisted by her former servants among others. She made sure her system was efficient and that her friends were well trained. She even developed her own cipher system for which she used a “colorless liquid concoction to pen her messages, writing between the lines of ordinary correspondence. When the recipient added milk to the page, the invisible writing appeared.”<sup>80</sup> She carried messages in just about everything from hollowed eggs, to book bindings, always careful not to be discovered. Colonel D. B. Barker, a member of Grant’s Staff, explained in an 1883 interview:

Every day two of her trusty negro servants drove into Richmond with something to sell—milk, chickens, garden-truck, etc. These negroes wore great, strong brogans, with soles of immense thickness, made by a Richmond shoemaker....Shoes were pretty scarce in the Confederacy in those days, but Miss Van Lew’s servants had two pairs each and changed them every day. They never wore out of Richmond in the afternoon the same shoes they wore in the city in the morning. The soles of these shoes were double and hollow, and in them were carried through the lines letters, maps, plans, etc., which were regularly delivered to General Grant at City Point the next morning.<sup>81</sup>

From the beginning of the war, Van Lew and her mother would visit the Union soldiers at the Confederate prisons in Richmond, and this activity angered many people. On July 31, 1861, one of her fellow townfolk wrote to the *Richmond Enquirer*:

Whilst every true woman in this community has been busy making the articles of comfort or necessity for our troops, or administering to the wants of the many of hundreds of sick, who, far from their homes, which they left to defend our soil, are fit subjects for our sympathy, these two women have been expending their opulent means in aiding and giving comfort to miscreants who have invaded our sacred soil, bent on raping and murder, the desolation of our homes and sacred places, and the ruin and dishonor of our families.<sup>82</sup>

Some people even assumed her behavior was due to a mental imbalance. She did not correct them, however, and used their ignorance to her advantage. She was able to go and do as she

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<sup>80</sup> Harper, 394.

<sup>81</sup> Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*, 53-54.

<sup>82</sup> Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*, 53.

pleased because people just thought she was crazy. In 1862, Van Lew, and her accomplices began bringing food to the Libby Prison for Union Officers. She habitually brought them coded messages in the spines of books, collected information from the newly captured officers, and sent it back to the appropriate Union officials. In 1864, she and two fellow spies, Abby Greene and Lucy Rice, helped 109 prisoners escape and provided them with safe routes and shelters.<sup>83</sup>

When Union troops invaded Richmond on April 2, 1865, General Grant made sure that Van Lew's home was protected. In 1869, when he became President, he appointed her postmistress of Richmond (for which she was paid \$4,000 annually), a position she held until Rutherford B. Hayes became president and demoted her. She spent the rest of her life with little money because she spent her inheritance to assist former slaves and fund her espionage activities during the war. Several generals tried to obtain payment for her wartime service, but none were successful. She died almost penniless on September 25, 1900 at the age of 82.<sup>84</sup>

### **Civil Rights Activism and Political Activities of Women Abolitionists**

During the Civil War, women, black and white, joined with other social and political reformers in their quest to remold politics and society into a more just and humane system—one without slavery. The abolitionist movement became firmly established in 1833 with the birth of the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia. Across the United States, women were involved in various societies that were dedicated to eradicating the evils of slavery. The first woman led abolitionist organization was the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society in Massachusetts. Abolitionist women were most active during the Civil War years and worked to persuade the public and the federal government to free the slaves and to provide education for the freed people. Northern women wrote and distributed antislavery literature, protested racially

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<sup>83</sup> Caravantes, 80.

<sup>84</sup> Harper, 394.

discriminatory laws and policies, circulated petitions to legislators, delivered public lectures, and raised money to support their activism. Pushing for emancipation, women wrote letters to the editors of their newspapers, to political candidates, and to state and national legislators.

### **Anna Dickinson**

Anna Dickinson (1842-1932) was an abolitionist and women's rights orator who was only 17 when she became a celebrity for her pro-war political speeches. In April 1860, she stood up at a Quaker "Friends of Progress" meeting in Philadelphia and criticized a male speaker who had chastised women for stepping outside of their roles in the domestic sphere. In October 1861 after the Union defeat at the Battle of Ball's Bluff, Dickinson lectured at the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society where leading abolitionists from all over the Northeast had gathered. Throughout 1861 and 1862, she was mentored by William Lloyd Garrison, and had numerous speaking engagements where she honed her oratory skills.<sup>85</sup> In 1863, she entered the male dominated world of party politics when the Republican Party recruited her to campaign for its politicians. In January 1864, she became the first woman to speak within the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., and she became known as the Joan of Arc of the Union Cause.<sup>86</sup> Dickinson drew a crowd wherever she lectured and was met with thunderous applause, and she not only spoke out in favor of abolition rights for freed peoples, she also vilified the South and condemned President Lincoln for bestowing amnesty on Confederate soldiers who would swear an oath of loyalty. The *Chicago Tribune* praised Anna Dickinson for her lectures in Chicago, but they were careful not to encourage women's participation in the public sphere. "Society at large has an honest horror of the assumption by women of the functions which belong strictly to men... it is founded on that high regard for the purity and gentleness of the

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<sup>85</sup> Wendy Hamand Venet, *Neither Ballots nor Bullets: Women Abolitionists and the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 37-41.

<sup>86</sup> Venet, 53.

female sex” according to the *Tribune*, but it went on to say that she was a woman of extraordinary talents worthy of a “Roman matron.”<sup>87</sup> Anna Dickenson became one of the most popular women lecturers of the abolitionist cause and a role model for those who believed in the value of female activism.

### **Sojourner Truth**

Another strong female abolitionist was Sojourner Truth. She was a former slave, preacher, abolitionist, and women’s right’s activist, who was an active supporter of the Civil War from the very beginning. During the 1850s and 1860s she gave countless talks on abolition, and in April 1861, she traveled from her home in Battle Creek, Michigan with her white abolitionist friend Josephine Griffing to lecture in Indiana, a place with a large pro-Confederate sentiment. Truth dressed in a red, white, and blue shawl, sash and apron, and shared her pro-Union, anti-slavery rhetoric to a crowd that mobbed her and threatened to attack her advocates. For this venture, Truth was arrested because Indiana law prevented people of African descent from entering the state. She was detained, but after ten days she was allowed to return home.<sup>88</sup> In the spring of 1864, she traveled to Washington, D.C., to assist freed peoples with several other abolitionists, and was able to secure a visit with President Lincoln. Truth had a great amount of admiration for the president, and though it is unclear exactly what happened during their meeting, she used the fact that she had met with the president as publicity for her future speeches. Throughout the 1860s, Truth’s speeches also carried the message of self reliance, a message that was not always well received, but nonetheless something she firmly believed in.<sup>89</sup> Truth also was an activist for civil rights as she challenged the discrimination she received on the public street cars in Washington D.C. In the fall of 1865 when she attempted to ride on the

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<sup>87</sup> Valet, 52.

<sup>88</sup> Harper, 377.

<sup>89</sup> Harper, 377-78.

streetcar, a racist conductor refused to allow her to ride by physically pushing her off the car. Her right arm was injured in the struggle, and Truth proceeded to have the conductor fired and brought assault and battery charges against him. He was ultimately convicted.<sup>90</sup> After the war, Truth continued to work to better the lives of freed people, mostly by assisting with their education.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I am not accustomed to the use of the Language of eulogy. I have never studied the art of paying compliments to women. But I must say that, if all that has been said by orators and poets since the creation of the world in praise of women was applied to the women of America, it would not do them justice for their conduct during this war. I will close by saying,  
God Bless the Women of America!

- Abraham Lincoln

Women participated in the Civil War heart and soul. From the organization of relief societies, to serving as doctors and nurses, to fighting battles and spying on the enemy, to protesting the status quo through abolitionist efforts, women made use of their individual talents to actively participate in the public activities of the war. The Civil War offered the politically disadvantaged, women and African-Americans, opportunity to contribute to the defense of the state in return for expanded civil rights. For the women of the war, it was an occasion to demonstrate their right to political inclusion by fully participating in the call for personal and economic sacrifices. While the women did participate in the war effort for the more immediate reasons of patriotic duty, aiding the soldiers, belief in the cause of the war, it can be said, at least of the Northern women, that there was an underlying motivation stemming from hopes that the war might permanently alter women's status in society and politics. This perspective was not necessarily shared by those in power during the war. The American government actually capitalized on the women's domestic labor and philanthropic efforts as unpaid labor, and paid

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<sup>90</sup> Forbes, 150-51.

little attention to the fact that the great majority of their war effort was riding on the voluntary work of these capable women. Women were active in the war in every way, yet they were still not seen as competent individuals who could participate in government officially by voting. White women and African-American women worked along side the male abolitionists and yet, following the war freed men were allowed to vote following the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, but women were not. Women's rights activists were gaining ground in some places on the state level, but they were having little success in gaining national recognition for the rights women have to participate as citizens.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY: WOMEN AND WORLD WAR I

#### Introduction

The United States did not enter World War I until April 1917. The war had been raging in Europe since 1914, but President Woodrow Wilson insisted on isolationism and neutrality, though many Americans were interventionist, favoring official U.S. involvement with the war. Wilson did, however push the limits of the international laws of neutrality and engaged in a huge volume of war related trade with Great Britain. For this, in February 1915, Germany retaliated with a submarine blockade of the waters around Great Britain, and proclaimed that any ship in the blockaded area would be subject to attack. To this, Woodrow Wilson responded harshly and made it clear that any loss of American life from an attack on a ship would be regarded as a flagrant violation of neutral rights, and Germany would be held accountable.<sup>1</sup> After the sinking of the *Lusitania* on March 7, 1915, an attack that took 128 American lives, Wilson still desired a peaceful resolution and insisted on America's right to travel unharmed, saying "there is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight."<sup>2</sup> Rather than go immediately to war, Wilson threatened to break diplomatic relations with Germany if any other ships were destroyed, which led to a German apology for the civilian deaths, and a promise that there would be no more submarine attacks without warning and provisions made for civilians. This promise was seen as a huge victory for Wilson, but it unfortunately did not last. In February of 1917, when the United States learned of the so-called Zimmerman Telegram, which promised that in the event of war between Germany and the United States, Germany would see that Mexico regained the territories in the Southwest it lost in the Mexican War if Mexico would declare war on the United States. This

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<sup>1</sup> James L. Roark, et al., *The American Promise* (Boston: Bedford St. Martins Press, 2002), 772-75.

<sup>2</sup> Roark, 776.

German telegram and the subsequent sinking of five American vessels in the British Seas prompted Wilson to accuse Germany of warfare against mankind, and asked Congress to issue a declaration of war on April 6, 1917. Wilson decided to go to war to make the world safe for democracy.<sup>3</sup>

The above describes what is generally included in high school history textbooks about World War I and the involvement of the United States. Our mission as a nation was to make the world safe for democracy. Excluded are all the experiences of women during the war, many of whom participated in the war before official U.S. involvement. Historian Joshua S. Goldstein writes:

The more than 25,000 US women who served in Europe in World War I did so on an entrepreneurial basis, especially before 1917. They helped nurse the wounded, provide food and other supplies to the military, serve as telephone operators (the “Hello Girls”), entertain troops, and work as journalists. Many of these self-selected adventurous women ... found their own work, improvised their own tools ... argued, persuaded, and scrounged for supplies. They created new organizations where none had existed.<sup>4</sup>

Some women were also largely involved in the pacifist movements, and worked throughout the war to seek peaceful resolutions to conflict rather than resorting to violence. Women participated in a wide variety of volunteer organizations throughout the war, and once the United States was formally a part of the war, the women became even more active.

When the war began, the country was ill prepared and did not have the massive amount of soldiers and supplies needed to join the war successfully. Wilson signed the Selective Service Act on May 18, 1917, which authorized the draft of all young men into the armed forces. Eventually 4.8 million men served in the armed forces in Europe which left a huge void in the

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<sup>3</sup> Roark, 779-780.

<sup>4</sup> Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12.

United States work force.<sup>5</sup> The New Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor along with the Women's Trade Union League helped open jobs to women so that the economy could keep moving in a positive direction. At the same time, women were becoming formal parts of the armed forces for the first time in clerical and other kinds of positions to free the young men to go into battle.<sup>6</sup> Over 20,000 women served in France as nurses, and women at home and abroad questioned the politics of the war and advocated pacifism as the true way to achieve democracy. As with previous wars in United States history women mobilized themselves, and had a great impact on the war effort, all the while there was the struggle for recognition as full citizens and the right to vote.

### **Civilian Women's Pro-War Activities at Home and Abroad**

#### **Women in the Work Force**

The armies of twentieth-century total war depended on women in new ways. They were becoming part of the civilian workforce, in addition to the ongoing responsibilities of women for domestic, child-bearing, and child-rearing work. In 1914, feminist Carrie Chapman Catt warned: “[w]ar falls on the women most heavily and more so now than ever before.”<sup>7</sup> Both Britain and the United States mobilized substantial numbers of women into war-related industries, and into the workplace generally to make male workers available for military use. These arrangements, although effective in boosting the war effort, almost everywhere were cast as temporary. They used, rather than challenged, existing gender stereotypes. Eric Leed argues that World War I created for women “an enormously expanded range of escape routes from the constraints of the private family” because the war caused “the collapse of those established, traditional

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<sup>5</sup> Captain Barbara A. Wilson, *WWI: Thirty Thousand Women Were There*, <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvets4.html>> (1 January 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I: They Also Served* (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Goldstein, 14.

distinctions” that had restricted women. Most often, though, the woman war worker had “little in her life now except work and sleep.”<sup>8</sup> Work shifts of 10–12 hours were common and the factory conditions were harsh. Women worked in munitions plants, as auto mechanics, mail carriers, and several other jobs that were reserved only for men before the war.

Additionally, women worked in the home and in the community to support the war effort. They planted gardens, attended canning classes to learn how to preserve their own food, and planned thrifty menus to conserve resources. Jennifer Davis Mc Daid explains that “the front lawn at Richmond’s John Marshall High School was plowed under by the local food administration office for a demonstration garden; vegetable plants also flourished in neighborhood yards” and “women practiced preventative medicine learned from public health drives launched to compensate for the wartime shortage of doctors and nurses.”<sup>9</sup> Women became accustomed to sacrifice for the war effort as much of the economic production they were apart of was set aside for the war effort.

### **Private Relief Agencies**

The American Red Cross (ARC) was founded by Clara Barton in 1881 and was chartered “to furnish volunteer aid to the sick and wounded of the Armed Forces in time of war, and to act in matters of voluntary relief and in accord with military authorities as a medium of communication between the people of the United States and their Armed Forces.”<sup>10</sup> When World War I started in Europe in August 1914 the ARC had 107 chapters, by the time the Armistice was signed in November 1918 there were 3,864 chapters nationwide. The first Red Cross nurses sailed for Europe on September 12, 1914 aboard the chartered mercy ship *The Red*

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<sup>8</sup> Goldstein, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Davis Mc Daid, “Virginia Women and the First World War,” *Records and Resources at the Library of Virginia*, <<http://www.lva.lib.va.us>> (2 February 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Gavin, 180.

*Cross* with a mandate to treat the wounded of all nations regardless of allegiance. Between 1914 and 1916 the ARC shipped more than \$1.5 million of relief supplies with about \$350,000 going to Germany and her allies and raised an additional \$230,000 for the German and Austrian Red Cross.<sup>11</sup> Women were fully involved with the war effort well before the United States formally declared war.

When the U.S. entered the war in April 1917 President Wilson formed an emergency war council to run the ARC in cooperation with the U.S. military. The all-male council made the decisions during the war while the women who had formerly directed most ARC activities were relegated to an advisory committee.<sup>12</sup> Hundreds of ARC nurses were shipped to France almost immediately after the U.S. declaration of war and the base hospitals were mobilized for deployment in Europe. In addition to supplying nurses and hospital units and it's already established programs of first aid training; care and reconstruction of the wounded; services to refugees and displaced persons; prisoner of war relief; and canteen services; the ARC established a line of communication centers throughout France and opened rest and recreation huts overseas. An important new area of activity for the ARC was the Red Cross Home Communication Service which used U.S. women volunteers in hospitals in France as a connecting link between hospitalized soldiers and their families in the states.<sup>13</sup> The volunteers informed a soldier's family when he was hospitalized or released and when possible provide details about his condition, treatment and prognosis. The families of those who died were notified and any personal effects the soldier had brought to the hospital were returned to the family along with information about the death and place of burial. More than 170,000 graves of U.S. soldiers were photographed by ARC volunteers and the photo sent to the family. ARC "searchers" would visit units and

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<sup>11</sup> Gavin, 181.

<sup>12</sup> Gavin, 182.

<sup>13</sup> Gavin, 185.

hospitals to try to obtain information about the wounded, dead and missing. In a number of cases they discovered missing soldiers among the unconscious and unidentified wounded.<sup>14</sup>

Another new and unique wartime service was provided by Anna Coleman Ladd, a U.S. sculptor, whose Paris clinic was funded by the ARC. Some soldiers suffered facial disfigurement as a result of war wounds and the plastic surgical techniques of the time were inadequate to obtain a cosmetically acceptable result in many cases. Ladd sculpted "portrait masks" of thin copper on which the missing portion of the face was modeled, the finished mask was enameled in skin tones and hair was added if appropriate.<sup>15</sup> The masks were both more comfortable and more protective than bandages for those missing facial features or large sections of bone and mitigated to some degree the soldier's sensitivity about his appearance. Ladd completed 60 masks before training another ARC volunteer, Mary Louise Brent, and two French sculptors in her technique and returning to Boston.<sup>16</sup>

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was also an important relief agency during the war. As soon as the United States began mobilizing troops the YWCA opened a visitor's hut at the Army base in Plattsburg, New York, to provide services for families and single women visiting the 5,000 men training there.<sup>17</sup> It proved so successful that the YWCA quickly opened similar huts and programs at other Army training centers, military hospitals and embarkation points. Existing YWCA programs in cities, ports and industrial centers were expanded to provide employment bureaus, emergency housing and traveler's aid for women war workers. Multi-lingual hostesses assisted war workers to communicate with each other and

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<sup>14</sup> Gavin, 202.

<sup>15</sup> Gavin, 207.

<sup>16</sup> Gavin, 208.

<sup>17</sup> Goldstein, 55.

correspond with family members in the U.S. and overseas.<sup>18</sup> When the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) landed in France, the YWCA established programs for women serving with the AEF, including nurses' clubs, hospitality centers and housing assistance for American and French women. After the war the YWCA continued its work providing assistance to foreign born war brides of U.S. servicemen and establishing staffed lodgings for families visiting U.S. military cemeteries overseas.<sup>19</sup>

### **Women Doctors Volunteer Overseas**

Despite serious and continuous shortages of physicians throughout WWI, the U.S. military refused to commission women doctors and dentists, including those who had more experience than their male colleagues in treating combat injuries.<sup>20</sup> Dr. Nellie Barsness was on the staff of Luther Hospital in St. Paul in the electrotherapeutics department, a new field of rehabilitative medicine, when the war began in Europe in 1914. She volunteered to serve with the French Army and was assigned as an ophthalmologist specializing in treating soldiers whose eyesight was damaged by poison gas. She tried to transfer to the U.S. Army when America entered the war but was rejected because she was a woman even though she possessed qualifications and experience that few U.S. physicians had and which the Army desperately needed. Dr. Barsness remained with the French Army for several months after the Armistice and was decorated by the French government before returning to the U.S.<sup>21</sup>

Other women doctors from the U.S. served with the French Army, or with various relief agencies. Smith College sent an 18 member all-female relief unit to France which consisted of two physicians as well as school teachers, social workers, carpenters, a farmer, and six

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<sup>18</sup> Goldstein, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Goldstein, 59.

<sup>20</sup> Mercedes Graf, "With high Hopes: Women Contract Surgeons in World War I," *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military* 2 (2002): 22-37.

<sup>21</sup> Gavin, 161.

chauffeurs. They treated military and civilian casualties, ran mobile clinics for the civilian population and addressed public health concerns in cooperation with the French Army.<sup>22</sup> Dr. Alice Weld Tallant, the director of the Smith College Relief Unit was awarded the Croix de Guerre for her exemplary service during the war.<sup>23</sup>

The American Committee for Devastated France and the American Fund for French Wounded sponsored a number of physicians, both male and female, during and for several years after the war. Anna Morgan, the daughter of J.P. Morgan, founded the American Fund for French Wounded to treat and provide supplies for wounded or sick French soldiers. In March 1918, that organization spun-off the American Committee for Devastated France to provide medical and other services for French civilians in the war zone. Morgan was awarded the French Legion of Honor and the Medaille de la Reconnaissance Francaise for her war work. The Medical Women's National Association (Mwana), which later became the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA), sponsored the American Women's Hospitals in 1917. More than 1,000 women physicians registered with AMWA and many were certified for overseas service by the American Red Cross which also agreed to sponsor AMWA dispensaries and hospitals for civilian or military purposes.<sup>24</sup>

Citizens not affiliated with a particular organization also worked in the medical field during the war. Mary Borden, the daughter of the wealthy businessman, William Borden, was born in Chicago in 1886. On the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Borden set up a hospital unit on the Western Front. In 1929, she published her novel *The Forbidden Zone*, describing her experiences during the war. She writes:

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<sup>22</sup> Gavin, 165.

<sup>23</sup> Gavin, 163.

<sup>24</sup> Gavin, 172.

It was my business to sort out the wounded as they were brought in from the ambulances and to keep them from dying before they got to the operating rooms: it was my business to sort out the nearly dying from the dying. I was there to sort them out and tell how fast life was ebbing in them. Life was leaking away from all of them; but with some there was no hurry, with others it was a case of minutes. It was my business to create a counter-wave of life, to create the flow against the ebb. ...If a man were slipping quickly, being sucked down rapidly, I sent runners to the operating rooms. There were six operating rooms on either side of my hut. Medical students in white coats hurried back and forth along the covered corridors between us. It was my business to know which of the wounded could wait and which could not. I had to decide for myself. There was no one to tell me. If I made any mistakes, some would die on their stretchers on the floor under my eyes who need not have died. I didn't worry. I didn't think. I was too busy, too absorbed in what I was doing. I had to judge from what was written on their tickets and from the way they looked and the way they felt to my hand. My hand could tell of itself one kind of cold from another. My hands could instantly tell the difference between the cold of the harsh bitter night and the stealthy cold of death.<sup>25</sup>

Goldstein comments on the civilian women's support roles during the war, and says that "looking back, the American women exhibited 'contradictory feelings' of sadness about the war, horror at what they had seen, and pride in their own work."<sup>26</sup>

### **Women's Roles within the Military**

#### **Nurse Corps (Female) in the U.S. Army**

On June 20, 1899 the Surgeon General's office, with the approval of the Secretary of War issued the first Army regulations governing the Nurse Corps. Under the new law nurses were appointed to the Regular Army for a three year period. The pay was set at \$40 per month for service in the U.S. and \$50 per month for service overseas. Although they held no rank and had no promotion opportunities within the Regular Army, for the first time female military nurses were eligible for health care while on active duty and were issued uniforms. The law also directed the Surgeon General to maintain a list of qualified nurses who could be called into service in an emergency. A reserve corps of nurses who had served on active duty for 6 months and who agreed to re-enter active service whenever called on was formed with an original

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<sup>25</sup> Goldstein, 67.

<sup>26</sup> Goldstein, 80.

complement of 37 reserve nurses.<sup>27</sup> On Feb. 28, 1901 the U.S. military established the first permanent role for women when 202 of the 220 contract nurses on active duty were inducted into the Nurse Corps (female). The following month, Dita Kinney was appointed the first Superintendent of the Nurse Corps. In 1902, the authorized strength of the Nurse Corps was fixed at 100 nurses, and it had increased to 150 by 1914.

When the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917 there were 403 Army nurses on active duty including 170 reserve nurses who had been assigned to duty with Gen. John J. Pershing's 1916 expedition on the Mexican border. One month later six base hospitals with more than 400 Army nurses sailed for France for service with the British Expeditionary Forces. Edith Ayers and Helen Wood, nurses with Base Hospital 12 from Chicago, were killed en route when a ship's gun exploded aboard their transport ship, the *USS Mongolia*.<sup>28</sup>

In October 1917, General Pershing asked for the immediate appointment of a nursing supervisor and nurses to serve with the American Expeditionary Forces. By June 30, 1918 two thousand Regular Army nurses and 10,186 reserve nurses were on active duty at 198 stations worldwide with 5,350 serving overseas. The next month the Nurse Corps (female) was renamed the Army Nurse Corps and base pay was increased to \$60 per month. Historian Lettie Gavin writes:

The nurses of 1917–1918 could not possibly have guessed the extent and nature of the work ahead of them, nor the conditions of their own service in France: the raw, cold weather; the bundling up in drab, gray uniforms, leather vests, wool sweaters, boots, and knitted hats; the shortage of water for baths and shampoos; the cold dormitory barracks; and the dreary, monotonous food. Nor did the nurses have the authority, prestige, and security of rank and appropriate pay. They were neither officers nor noncommissioned officers during the Great War. Although they were given "relative rank" (rank in name only) in 1920, they did not receive pay, status, and benefits equal with men until 1944.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Captain Barbara A Wilson, *WWI: Thirty Thousand Women Were There*. <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvets4.html>> (1 January 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Gavin, 40.

<sup>29</sup> Gavin, 43.

A U.S. nurse, Laura Frost, had vivid memories of her first encounter with the wounded at a hospital near Paris in the summer of 1918. She said to Gavin in an interview: "If it hadn't been the amputation ward, maybe the shock wouldn't have been so devastating, but helping dress those quivering stumps and hearing the men's laughter and jokes in spite of their misfortune, was too much for me and I cried all that first day."<sup>30</sup> Frost comments on another experience:

When the wounded began to come in, the stretchers were laid on the ground and the corpsmen stripped them of their muddy clothes and deloused them, usually before we received them in the operating tent. I can still hear the sound of a leg being sawed off and remember the boy who had one side of his face blown away, asking: "Do I look bad?"<sup>31</sup>

When the armistice was signed on Nov. 11, 1918 there were 21,480 Army nurses on active duty. More than 10,000 had served overseas in France, Belgium, England, Italy, Serbia, Siberia, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. They had been assigned to casualty clearing stations; field hospitals; mobile, evacuation and base camps; convalescent hospitals; hospital trains and transport ships.<sup>32</sup> African-American nurses had not been permitted to enlist in either the Army or Navy Nurse Corps prior to World War I. During the war the Red Cross certified an estimated 1,800 black nurses as qualified for military duty but despite increasingly desperate calls for more nurses as the war and the influenza epidemic intensified both the Army and Navy refused to accept African-American nurses. Eventually after the Armistice was signed, with the flu epidemic at it's most virulent, the Army Nurse Corps swore in 18 African-American nurses. None were sent overseas and none received any benefits or pensions because they did not serve in war time.<sup>33</sup> Three Army nurses were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (the 2nd highest combat decoration) and 23 received the Distinguished Service Medal (the nation's

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<sup>30</sup> Gavin, 50.

<sup>31</sup> Gavin, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Captain Barbara A. Wilson, *WWI: Thirty Thousand Women Were There*, <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvets4.html>> (1 January 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Gavin, 53.

highest non-combat decoration), numerous others received a variety of citations. More than 100 Army nurses were decorated by the French military including 28 who were awarded the French Croix de Guerre. The British Government decorated more than 90 Army nurses, awarding 69 the British Royal Red Cross and 2 the British Military Medal.<sup>34</sup>

### **Army Signal Corps Women**

Although the Army refused to enlist women other than nurses, it did employ women both in the U.S. and in the war zone. The Army's Central Records Office and Central Post Office requested women clerical workers be sent to France. When the requests were ignored both departments "borrowed" hundreds of women from the British Women's Auxiliary Army Corps and assigned them to the American Expeditionary Force's headquarters in Bourges, France. Most of the "temporary" helpers were not returned to their units until several months after the war ended.<sup>35</sup> In November 1917 General Pershing asked the War Department to send him 100 French-speaking U.S. telephone operators. Both the General and the War Department were aware that all U.S. telephone operators at that time were women. Pershing specified that the operators would not be armed or assigned to combat.<sup>36</sup>

A lieutenant in the Signal Corps was put in charge of recruiting the women. He published an announcement in the newspapers and received an initial response of 2,400 applications from which 150 were selected to begin training and 400 were listed as an "on call" reserve. Training began January 12, 1918 and the first group of 33 operators was sent to France on March 1, 1918. Four more groups eventually followed. By the spring of 1918 more than 7,600 women had applied and when the war ended 450 women telephone operators had completed

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<sup>34</sup> Gavin, 60-62.

<sup>35</sup> Gavin, 77.

<sup>36</sup> Michelle Christides, "The History of a Hello Girl," *Doughboy Center*, <<http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/hello.htm>> (2 February 2004).

training and 223 had served overseas.<sup>37</sup> An *Associated Press* report in May 1918 described the selection process:

Each applicant's character and ability were certified by her previous employer before she was considered. A psychologist gave tests ... using methods employed in judging qualifications of officers. ... Each candidate's loyalty and motive for applying for service were investigated by secret service agents.<sup>38</sup>

The women, many of whom were college graduates and most of whom were experienced operators, received additional training in the largest city exchanges and on international boards as well as training in equipment repair before being sent to Army bases in the U.S. to learn military methods, drills, and terminology. Chief operators were paid \$125, supervising operators \$72, operators \$60 and substitute operators \$50 per month. Each had to pay between \$300 and \$500 to purchase the dark blue wool uniform, black shoes, brown Army boots and other articles of clothing the Army designated.<sup>39</sup> Miss Egan recalled one of her experiences as a telephone operator:

I was soon teaching classes of a dozen or more soldiers how to operate our switchboards, which were of the magneto type found in small Montana towns with which I was familiar. Some of the men were disgusted with a female instructor and greeted me with such remarks as, "Where's my skirt?" I just reminded them that any soldier could carry a gun, but the safety of a whole division might depend on the switchboard. I had no more trouble. Except for one hard-boiled sergeant who refused to report to a woman until he spent a week on K.P. duty and decided that I was the lesser of two evils. In the end, he was my prize student. Just before the Meuse-Argonne offensive in late September, I was given the seemingly impossible job of training 60 men in three days. Those sessions were long and grueling, but the task was accomplished.<sup>40</sup>

Grace Banker, the Chief Operator for the AEF, who served overseas for 20 months, was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. General Pershing personally gave testimonial citations to 12 operators and Meritorious Service Citations to 15 of the women he called "switchboard soldiers."

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<sup>37</sup> Gavin, 78-79.

<sup>38</sup> Gavin, 79.

<sup>39</sup> Michelle Chistedes, "The History of a Hello Girl," *Doughboy Center*, <<http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/hello.htm>> (2 February 2004).

<sup>40</sup> Gavin, 85.

But when the war was over the women were informed that they were not eligible for honorable discharges or veteran's benefits, nor were those who had served in France entitled to wear a campaign medal, because they had been civilian employees of the Army Signal Corps.<sup>41</sup> Their battle with the Army took more than 60 years and saw more than 50 bills introduced and fail to pass in Congress, but they were eventually approved for veterans status under Section 1414 of the GI Bill Improvement Act of 1977. The eighteen surviving operators from the AEF were given their honorable discharges and Victory Medals in 1979.<sup>42</sup>

### **Women in the Navy**

The history of women's participation in the Navy was made public in a press release on July 30, 1942 in conjunction with the creation of the Women's Reserve (as part of the U.S. Naval Reserve). The first women in the Navy were part of the Navy Nurse Corps, which was established by Congress in 1908.<sup>43</sup> At that time, there was no provision made for rank or rating comparable to male personnel in the Navy.<sup>44</sup>

Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels took advantage of the fact that the 1916 law which created the Naval Reserve used the word personnel rather than male when referring to Navy Yeoman and authorized the enlistment of woman as Yeoman (F) on March 19, 1917. Within a month the Navy swore in the first officially recognized enlisted women in U.S. history.

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<sup>41</sup> Michelle Chistedes, "The History of a Hello Girl," *Doughboy Center*, <<http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/hello.htm>> (2 February 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Michelle Chistedes, *The Unsung Women of World War I: The Signal Corps Women*. <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/signal.html>> (2 February 2004).

<sup>43</sup> *Women in the U.S. Navy: Historic Documents*. This information was made available through the Navy Historical Center, Department of the Navy, <http://www.history.navy.mil/index.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Under a congressional enactment approved by President Roosevelt on July 3, 1942, members of the Navy Nurse Corps were granted relative rank. This meant that while they were not actually commissioned officers, they held rank corresponding to that of officers in the Naval service. Sue S. Dauser, of Anaheim, Orange County, California, was named Superintendent of the Navy Nurse Corps and had a rank relative to that of a Lieutenant Commander.

The 11,274 Yeoman (F), popularly known as “Yeomanettes,” who served in WW I were recruited to “Free a Man to Fight.”<sup>45</sup>

In order to enlist women had to be between 18 and 35, unmarried, in excellent health, of good moral character and neat appearance. The Navy preferred women who were at least high school graduates with office experience and superior clerical skills. The women did not attend boot camp but were simply sent to their duty stations where the majority performed clerical duties including typing, stenography, bookkeeping, accounting, inventory control and telephone operation. A few became radio operators, electricians, draftsmen, pharmacists, photographers, telegraphers, fingerprint experts, chemists, torpedo assemblers and camouflage designers.<sup>46</sup> The Navy quickly realized that their women in uniform generated positive publicity, so the Yeoman (F) were taught to march and drill and were often paraded at patriotic rallies, recruiting campaigns, war bond drives and troop send-offs.

Gavin writes that for many of the women, the Navy experience changed their lives. Helen McCrery embarked on her career as a Yeoman (F) in the spring of 1917, just days before the United States entered the European war. Her orders arrived from Seattle, WA, dated April 3, 1917, sending her to duty at the Thirteenth Naval District, Navy Yard, Puget Sound, WA, where she would be in charge of forty young women on the Bremerton base. Thus began one of Helen McCrery’s “busiest and happiest experiences.” She recalled:

Three weeks after I enlisted, I became chief yeoman to Rear Admiral Robert E. Coontz, commandant of the Navy Yard. He was the kindest, nicest man I ever knew. He always wanted me to march right behind him in our parades, because, he said, “I want people to see that we have girls in the Navy.” We marched in all the parades. We took great pride in our marching. We broke our necks never to lose a step. But the thing was, the men marched with a 30-inch stride. That was too long for us and I protested. I showed them

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<sup>45</sup> Gavin, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Gavin, 2-3.

my short step and they decided, “Well, I guess the fellows had better shorten their stride.”<sup>47</sup>

One of the Navy’s first enlisted women, Lou MacPherson Guthrie, was a rural schoolteacher from North Carolina working with the Bureau of War Risk Insurance in Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1917. She clearly remembered the “wildly exciting day when the American Navy called for 100 women war workers to enlist and do accounting work at the Navy Yard. This would release sailors to man the warships.”<sup>48</sup> Lou and three of her friends passed enlistment examinations with high marks and were assigned to the Navy Yard. For a time, MacPherson worked the graveyard shift, midnight to 8 A.M., at the Navy Yard. She says,

We liked it, even though we had to get off the street car at midnight in the worst section of the city and walk down the wharf. Here wharf rats nearly as big as opossums scuttled across our path in the moonlight. But it was quite safe. There was very little crime recorded in the city then. We felt no timidity about walking alone at midnight on poorly lighted streets.<sup>49</sup>

Although patriotism inspired most young U.S. women to join the Navy in 1917, there were other compelling reasons. Jean Cook, a teenager in Connecticut, enlisted as her means of coping with grief. “When America joined the war, my boyfriend enlisted and was sent right overseas,” she said, “He and two friends—they were all machine gunners—were killed when a German shell scored a direct hit on their dugout. I wanted to get even with the German Kaiser, so I enlisted in the Navy. It was my first time away from home.”<sup>50</sup>

At the insistence of Secretary Daniels, the Yeoman (F) received the same pay as male Yeoman, \$28.75 per month, (less twenty cents for hospitalization) and \$1.25 per day subsistence allowance. Most received a housing allowance to secure their own quarters because Naval

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<sup>47</sup> Gavin, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Gavin, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Gavin, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Gavin, 10.

housing for women was not available.<sup>51</sup> The majority of Yeoman (F) served in the U.S. but a few were sent overseas. Five went to France to handle clerical work in Naval hospitals. One worked for Naval Intelligence in Puerto Rico and a few were sent to Hawaii, Guam and Panama.<sup>52</sup>

Some of the Yeoman (F) served as chief petty officers but none were commissioned. Daisy Pratt Erd was made Chief Yeoman in charge of women at the Boston Navy Yard with more than 200 women under her supervision and was recommended for an officer's commission by Congressman James Gallivan but Secretary Daniels explained, "I have no authority to make a woman an ensign and I have given orders that no men shall be made ensigns who do not pass the examinations necessary to qualify them for important duty at sea."<sup>53</sup>

All the Yeoman (F) received honorable discharges and were entitled to wear the Victory Medal and qualified for veterans benefits including veterans preferences in civil service ratings. The women were not offered the option of remaining in the Navy after the war and by July 1919 all Yeoman (F) had been discharged.<sup>54</sup> Fifty-one Yeoman (F) died on active duty between 1917 and 1920, 20 of them before the Armistice was signed. A few were killed in accidents, most died of influenza. All received military funerals.<sup>55</sup>

### **Women in the Marine Corps**

The Marine Corps experienced the same acute shortage of clerical personnel as the Army and Navy but was slower to accept the idea of enlisting or employing women. Finally in the summer of 1918 the commandant, Major General George Barnett, told all Marine departments to report on what work, if any, they believed women could perform. He was surprised to learn that

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<sup>51</sup> Gavin, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Gavin, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Gavin, 12-15.

<sup>54</sup> Gavin, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Gavin, 15-18.

senior Marine Corps officers estimated 40% of the duties then being done by men could be performed by women, although they estimated it would take 3 women to replace 2 men.<sup>56</sup> In August 1918 Gen. Barnett asked Navy Secretary Daniels for authority, “to enroll women in the Marine Corps Reserve for clerical duty at Headquarters Marine Corps and at other Corps offices in the United States where their services might be utilized to replace men who may be qualified for active field service.”<sup>57</sup> Recruiting began on August 13th and within hours Opha Mae Johnson, a civil service employee, was sworn in as the first official woman marine and assigned as a clerk in the office of the Quartermaster. By the end of the war she had been promoted to sergeant.<sup>58</sup>

In the few months before the war ended 305 women were accepted for enlistment in the Marine Corps. All women were enlisted as privates in the Marine Corps Reserve for a period of four years. Their pay was the same as men of their rank, \$15 per month. They also received an allotment of \$83.40 per month to pay for their housing and food since there were no accommodations for them on Marine bases. Once sworn in they were sent directly to their duty stations. The commandant announced that women marines would be referred to as Marine Reservists (F) and posted notices forbidding the use of nicknames such as “Marinette” but the press ignored the commandment.<sup>59</sup>

Conduct, on duty and off, was a serious matter. Colonel McLemore felt constrained to advise the enlistees as he administered the oath that he wanted it “distinctly understood that there was to be no flirtatious philandering with the enlisted men at headquarters on the part of the

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<sup>56</sup> Gavin, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Gavin, 22.

<sup>58</sup> Gavin, 26.

<sup>59</sup> Gavin, 28-31.

female reservists.”<sup>60</sup> The women soon learned, too, that if they expected equal privileges, they would have to assume equal responsibilities. Corporal Shoemaker remembered:

A typical hard-boiled sergeant at Marine Corps Headquarters who ordered us to sweep the floor and wash the windows in our offices. Two pretty girls, from wealthy families, rushed to the colonel's office and refused to undertake such labor. He was very angry with them, reminded them that they had [freely] enlisted, and advised them that they couldn't change their minds about their duties. He ordered them to wash those windows and they did it.<sup>61</sup>

The Marine Corps, like the Navy, saw the women's publicity value and trained them in military drill so they could participate in parades and public appearances. During one war bond rally and parade, 25 women Marines were chosen as bodyguards for President Wilson. One thing the Marine Corps did not publicize, however, was that contrary to their original estimate that it would take 3 women to perform the duties of 2 men, the reverse proved to be true. Two women Marines proved able to perform the clerical duties previously handled by 3 men.<sup>62</sup>

Like their counterparts in the Navy, the Marine Reservists (F) were not given the option of remaining in the Corps. Most had been ordered to inactive status by July 1919. By 1922 the last of the 305 women marines had been honorably discharged from the inactive reserve. All received Good Conduct Medals and the Victory Medal as well as being eligible for veteran's benefits.<sup>63</sup>

### **Pacifism as the Road to Democracy**

During World War I, there was another perspective by which some women viewed the war. For the first time there was an organized anti-war movement and several women's peace organizations amidst all of the other war relief societies. When the United States entered World War I, some feminists remained antiwar activists, but faced difficult challenges as most of their

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<sup>60</sup> Gavin, 32.

<sup>61</sup> Gavin, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Gavin, 32.

<sup>63</sup> Gavin, 35.

colleagues supported the war effort. The YWCA's work supporting soldiers in World War I, Goldstein writes, "strained against – and temporarily overwhelmed – its historic pacifism."<sup>64</sup> In the twentieth century, the Women's Peace Party (WPP), was founded and later renamed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The WPP grew out of the international women's suffrage movement.<sup>65</sup> It was catalyzed by a U.S. tour in the fall of 1914 of a Hungarian woman and a British woman (from enemy sides in the new war). The WPP women "turned a good deal of their energies, in the midst of the suffrage campaign – which they did not abandon – to address the causes and cures of war."<sup>66</sup> The WPP held an International Conference of Women at the Hague (Netherlands) nine months into World War I in 1915 (three months after the WPP's founding). The conference called for mediation to end the war. Jane Addams chaired the conference, and the WPP. In spite of travel problems and government obstacles, 1,136 voting delegates from 150 organizations in 12 countries attended.<sup>67</sup> The conference brought together women from enemy and neutral countries, a feat that one delegate, according to Goldstein, contrasted with the failure of others: "Science, medicine, reform, labor, religion – not one of these causes has been able as yet to gather its followers from across dividing frontiers."<sup>68</sup>

### **Jane Addams**

In *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Jane Addams writes, "We are learning that a standard of social ethics is not attained by traveling a sequestered byway, but mixing on the thronged and common road where all must turn out for one another, and at least see the size of one another's

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<sup>64</sup> Goldstein, 120.

<sup>65</sup> Frances H. Early, *A World Without War: How U.S. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted WWI*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 16-17.

<sup>66</sup> Goldstein, 125.

<sup>67</sup> Goldstein, 126.

<sup>68</sup> Goldstein, 126.

burdens” and argues that resorting to violence is simply the product of a lack of imagination for solving the problems of the world.<sup>69</sup> She argued, based on visits to military hospitals in Europe, that soldiers were not natural killers and were victims of the sheer horror of mechanized war. In her July 9, 1915 address at Carnegie Hall in New York City, Jane Addams spoke out about the conclusions she had drawn from her tour of Europe. She said: “...Just when the younger generation was beginning to take its share in the affairs of the world, and was hoping to counteract the Victorian influences of the older generation, this war has come to silence us...”<sup>70</sup>

Jean Elshtain, in *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy*, says that the bulk of Addams’ speech was focused on her experiences of seeing the warring countries killing one another’s young men in staggering numbers.<sup>71</sup> However, her critics took this to mean she thought men incapable of heroic self-sacrifice. Addams’s efforts to galvanize U.S. opposition to World War I backfired as she “alienated American public opinion by daring to question the ‘heroism’ of war.” She was “instantly accused of besmirching the heroism of men dying for ‘home, country, and peace itself.’”<sup>72</sup> By 1917, Addams was increasingly isolated in opposing the war. After the war, she was branded a traitor, Communist, and anarchist, but in reality she was merely challenging the meaning of democracy. In her eyes, peace, and peaceful relations was the only way to achieve the democracy that so many lives were being spent to protect. Elstein writes, “For Addams, democracy was a form of public action making possible the doing of simple tasks in peace: the daily tasks of tending to bodies, of making a home and a family, of sustaining friendships, of trying to be a decent citizen of the community.”<sup>73</sup> War was not the solution to

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<sup>69</sup> Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 7-8.

<sup>70</sup> Roark 793.

<sup>71</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy*, (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 228.

<sup>72</sup> Goldstein, 128.

<sup>73</sup> Elshtain, 249.

democracy, and for her, true patriotism was found in pacifism. Regardless of the opposition she faced during WWI, she won the 1931 Nobel Peace Prize for her commitment to peaceful solutions and non-violence.

### **Lillian D. Wald**

Lillian D. Wald also sought to create a more just society, and her goal was to ensure that women and children, immigrants and the poor, and members of all ethnic and religious groups would realize America's promise of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."<sup>74</sup> As a nurse, Wald hoped to provide decent health care to residents of New York's Lower East Side tenements. Her work as the founder of the Henry Street Settlement and the Visiting Nurse Service demonstrated her masterful administrative talents, deep regard for humanity and skill at fundraising and publicizing. Championing the causes of public health nursing, housing reform, suffrage, world peace, and the rights of women, children, immigrants and working people, Wald became an influential leader in city, state, and national politics. Her tireless efforts to link the health of children with the health of nations made her a model of achievement, caring, and integrity throughout her lifetime.<sup>75</sup>

Wald was deeply committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. When World War I broke out in Europe in 1914, she marched with 1500 other women down Fifth Avenue in a "women's peace parade" and joined the Women's Peace Party.<sup>76</sup> In 1915, she was elected president of the newly formed American Union against Militarism (AUAM), which argued that war threatened social progress, and ran counter to faith in "civilized relationships between

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<sup>74</sup> Jewish Women's Archive, "JWA - Lillian Wald – Introduction," <<http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/wald/index.html>> (March 13, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> Jewish Women's Archive, "JWA - Lillian Wald – World War I," <<http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/wald/index.html>> (March 13, 2004).

<sup>76</sup> Early, 22.

nations.” Wald worried that as President Woodrow Wilson was increasingly pressured to involve the U.S. in the war, militarism would “march into the schools” and lead to the infringement of individual rights. Wald and other AUAM members, speaking on behalf of women as the “conservers of life,” unsuccessfully lobbied President Wilson and as war fervor intensified, Wald’s anti-militarist position cost Henry Street some of its funding. After the U.S. joined the war, Wald abandoned her anti-militarist stance but remained affiliated with the Foreign Policy Organization and the American Civil Liberties Union, the two daughter organizations of the AUAM.<sup>77</sup>

During the war, Wald spent her time going back and forth between New York and Washington. In New York, she volunteered Henry Street as the headquarters for wartime Red Cross and Food Council drives and spearheaded the New York City arm of the Children's Bureau Baby Saving Campaign. In Washington, Wald served as chair of the Committee on Home Nursing for the Council of National Defense. The Spanish influenza epidemic outbreak of 1918, however, captured Wald's undivided attention so she returned home to New York to recruit and rally support for treatment centers that she established throughout the city.<sup>78</sup>

Wald was labeled a “radical” on many occasions—for her peace work during World War I, for her endorsement of Socialist candidates, for her association with radicals like Emma Goldman, for her defense of immigrant “aliens,” and even for her neighborhood’s celebration of the success of the Russian Revolution. In 1919, however, in the wake of the American reaction to the rise of communism, she, with sixty-one other women and men, was listed in a document presented to the U.S. Judiciary which pointed to those who supposedly supported the German

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<sup>77</sup> Jewish Women's Archive, “JWA - Lillian Wald – World War I,” <<http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/wald/index.html>> (March 13, 2004).

<sup>78</sup> Jewish Women's Archive, “JWA - Lillian Wald – World War I,” <<http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/wald/index.html>> (March 13, 2004).

cause before WWI. The “Who's Who in Radicalism” cited Wald as an “undesirable citizen” who was suspected of “pro-Bolshevik” sentiments.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, she accepted an invitation to see communist Russia for herself. In 1924, she and several colleagues visited Russia as guests of the government to discuss public health and child welfare. She returned with a strong suggestion for the U.S. government to formally recognize Russia, as “a step of vital importance in our hope for better understanding and cooperation between the nations of the world.”<sup>80</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

The thousands of women who served their country from it's founding through World War I not only were denied equal opportunity, rank and benefits in the military, they along with all other women in the United States were denied the most basic right of a citizen—the right to vote for the government they served. By linking their crusade for a constitutional amendment to wartime emphasis on national unity, the crusaders for women's suffrage finally triumphed. Women's wartime services as nurses, factory workers, and patriotic volunteers finally convinced many American men that women could bear the public responsibilities of being full participants in the democracy that they also fought to protect. During the war, women such as Alice Paul continuously picketed the White House and made the suffragist campaign hard to ignore.<sup>81</sup> President Wilson, who had opposed women's suffrage before the war, finally gave his support. He was won over to the suffragists' side in part because of the bravery of women serving on the front and their proven abilities as they replaced men in offices and factories. In September 1918 Wilson addressed the Senate, urging that they follow the House in passing the 19th Amendment.

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<sup>79</sup> Early, 232.

<sup>80</sup> Jewish Women's Archive, “JWA - Lillian Wald – Post-war Activities,” <<http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wov/wald/index.html>> (March 13, 2004).

<sup>81</sup> Roark, 782.

His dramatic plea asked that the Senators recognize the contributions made by American women in the war. Wilson proclaimed:

...Are we alone to ask and take the utmost that our women can give, service and sacrifice of every kind, and still say we do not see what title that gives them to stand by our sides in the guidance of the affairs of their nations and ours? We have made partners of the women in this war; shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right?"<sup>82</sup>

In a speech in 1919, Wilson also argued: "Unless we enfranchise women we shall have fought to safeguard a democracy which, to that extent, we have never bothered to create."<sup>83</sup> In 1919 Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the vote, and by 1920 it had been ratified by the required two thirds of the states.

This was a victory for the women's suffragists, but along with this step forward, the military, after the war took two steps back. Women finally gained the right to vote in 1920, but the two decades which followed WWI were a time of reversal of the slight gains women had made in the military. Anita Phipps, who was director of women's programs for the Army, fought for the creation of a permanent Women's Service Corps, but her idea was rejected by the War Department and her position eliminated in 1931.<sup>84</sup> When the Naval Reserve Act was revised in 1925, women were specifically excluded from enrolling - a ban which continued until 1938 when a new revision to the Naval Reserve Act allowed women to sign-up.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Roark, 783.

<sup>83</sup> Roark, 783.

<sup>84</sup> Captain Barbara A. Wilson, *WWI: Thirty Thousand Women Were There*, <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvets4.html>> (1 January 2004).

<sup>85</sup> Captain Barbara A. Wilson, *WWI: Thirty Thousand Women Were There*, <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvets4.html>> (1 January 2004).

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In 1945, Mary Beard wrote:

...The personalities, interests, ideas, and activities of women must receive attention commensurate with their energy in history. Women have done far more than exist and bear children. They have played a great role in directing human events as thought and action. Women have been a force in making all the history that has been made.<sup>1</sup>

During the American Revolution, the Civil War, and World War I women participated in the war efforts in various ways with great energy. Their personalities, interests, ideas, and activities deserve a great amount of attention in the high school history curriculum. Through writing letters, diaries, memoirs, or telling the story of their experiences to family members and friends (oral history), women preserved their experiences, and left a legacy that gives insight into their perspectives during the wars. The fact that women claimed the right to preserve their memories through writing, but their memories have been lost to many students of history for so many years makes a powerful statement. Women have a history, it is just not being told. The work that I have done and the work that must continue to be done is the process of reclaiming the history that has been invisible in American culture.

#### **Reclaiming Women's History: Women's Experiences during War**

During the American Revolution women were present and active in virtually every sector of society. The Edenton Ladies in North Carolina publicly proclaimed their dedication to the boycott of British tea in Colonial newspapers and the Philadelphia Ladies were successful fund raisers who used their personal connections to become political. Other women were active in the military effort either by their own choosing or because war was upon them—in their streets,

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<sup>1</sup> Mary R. Beard, *Woman as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York: Persea Books, 1946), vi.

backyards, and homes. Enslaved women were also affected by the war. They were aware of the revolutionary rhetoric of freedom and liberty, and many took advantage of the chaos to break out of their bondage and find freedom for themselves. The war energized women to step out of their normative social spheres to be activists and soldiers, and what was ordinary in their daily lives took on new meaning for many women, while others sought after the extraordinary. Women's day to day activities were no longer just important for running their private households; they became important for the success of the war. Following the war, some women internalized the reasons for which the war was fought—freedom, liberty, and independence—and began to agitate for social change. Petitions were the only legal way for women to appeal to the government for their rights after the American Revolution, and several petitions were filed in the individual states. Women sought property rights and other financial restitution for their losses incurred during the war, and enslaved women and men sought legal freedom from their status as slaves.

During the Civil War, women's experiences varied greatly depending upon their positioning geographically and socially. Northern women made great economic and social contributions on the home front by actively participating in relief agencies, collecting and producing goods, and working in factories and on farms. In the south, plantation women were left in charge of the land and the slaves, and poorer women were left to fend for themselves by subsistence farming to grow what they and their children would eat. Enslaved women were the most harshly affected by the war because they were forced to double their work on the plantations after the men were conscripted into the Confederate army. Throughout the war, resistance by slaves became more organized, and they were able to protest the institution of slavery by refusing to work or by fleeing from the plantations to the northern states. Women

also served as nurses and doctors during the war, a position that brought the private activity of caring and nurturing out of the home and into hospitals. Other women participated in the military effort by disguising themselves as men so they could enlist formally in the military and/or by serving as spies, a role that had the effect of aiding in important military victories. Women abolitionists were also very politically active during war. They spoke publicly, and even lobbied President Lincoln to take swifter action in the abolition of slavery.

During World War I, American women were active in the war effort before many men, and before the United States formally declared its participation in the war. On the one hand, women participated in relief agencies both at home and overseas as early as 1914, and on the other hand, women participated as pacifists in antiwar organizations from the beginning of the war as well. The Red Cross and YWCA were important in organizing women's early involvement in the war, and the Women's Peace Party and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom were instrumental in organizing the pacifist movement. After the United States formally entered the war, many women at home entered the workforce and took on jobs that were previously held by men. Other women planted victory gardens, and practiced conservation to allow more of the commercially produced goods to be used for the war effort. For the first time, women were also able to serve in various roles in the Army, Navy, and Marines, as nurses, "hello girls," and/or clerical workers. At the same time, women such as Jane Addams and Lillian Wald, among many others, saw peace as the way to true democracy.

Women's experiences during the American Revolution, the Civil War, and World War I contributed greatly to the economic, social, military, and political situation of the United States. Without women's economic contributions during wars through fundraising, participating in the work force, production of goods, and provision of services, it would be difficult if not impossible

for the country to sustain itself in wartime. Women also offered their political and social support, worked diligently, and participated in the war efforts as patriots for their country's cause, even though they did not have the rights of full citizens. Women did not have the right to vote, did not have a say in their country's leadership, and did not have a say in whether the country went to war. Yet, when war was upon them, they took the opportunity to step out of their places, the private sphere of the home, and brought their skills, talents, and knowledge to the public arena. Sewing, nursing, cooking, and caretaking were valuable commodities during the wars, yet the women were underappreciated and their work undervalued after the wars. As a result of their wartime experiences, it became evident to many women that their rights were not being honored, and they began to question the social and political practices of the United States.

### **Moving Beyond Compensatory History**

Women have been active participants in shaping the United States since colonial times, and since the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement and the second wave of feminism, women's historians have been working to write histories that focus on women and women's experiences, but as Joan Kelley cautions, "compensatory history is not enough."<sup>2</sup> Reclaiming women's experiences is only the beginning of what needs to be done, and the study of women in history needs to move beyond proving that women have a history to the point where one looks at "ages or movements of great social change in terms of their liberation or repression of women's potential, [and] their import for the advancement of her humanity as well as his."<sup>3</sup> Women must be seen as full participants in every way and as a "part of humanity in the fullest sense."<sup>4</sup> Historians must also take on the responsibility of examining "the social definitions of gender as they are developed by men and women; constructed in and affected by political institutions,

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<sup>2</sup> Joan Kelley, *Women, History, & Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Kelley, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Kelley, 3.

expressive of a range of relationships which include not only sex, but class and power” says Scott, and the results “throw new light not only on women’s experience, but on social and political practice as well.”<sup>5</sup> This is also the work that must be done in high school history classrooms.

Women must no longer be absent in history so that young boys and girls in high school can begin to see a more complex picture of the past with all of its contradictions. Knowledge and understanding of women’s experiences is a necessary first step to making history more complex, adding conflicting ideas, and disrupting the neatness of the story told in high school history texts. It is only after this occurs that one can gain the ability to question the past, and be suspicious of it. The goal of social studies education is to empower students to learn how to think critically and become active participants in a democratic society. But, how can students become empowered if their education of human history is biased and prescriptive? Sally Wagner, in *Sisters in Spirit*, writes:

Baby boomers grew up learning a history of the winners, from the winner’s perspective. A history told for the benefit of those in the position to decide how history should be told. This phase of history gave the message that wars are the most important events. Dates had importance in and of themselves, without context. Indirectly, this phase of history also conveyed the message that the only people that matter are wealthy white men and that common people have no influence over the course of events.<sup>6</sup>

This was not just the case of the baby boomers; this is still the case in many history classes today. What students see is that there are elite groups of individuals who have power and through their power and experiences there is progress. Reclaiming women’s experiences shows that it is not the elite white men that have been a force in history, and if it was not for the women’s work during the wars (and throughout human history), there may have been some very

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<sup>5</sup> Joan Scott, “Women’s History and the Rewriting of History,” in *The Impact of Feminist Research in the Academy*, ed. C. Farnham (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 41.

<sup>6</sup> Sally Wagner, *Sisters in Spirit: Haudenosaunee Influence on Early American Feminists* (Summertown, TN: Native Voices Publishing, 2001), 15.

different outcomes. Seeing wars in U.S. history through the experiences of women can help students see that everyday experiences count in the making of democracy, and by valuing the role of everyday experiences, students will begin to see how they can also be active participants in shaping the world in which they live.

Once they have an understanding of women's experiences and perspectives, the students can also become empowered to question the notions of power and progress that are presented to them in their texts. When studying the American Revolution they will be able to ask: "Who was the revolution really for?" "How did the rhetoric of freedom and independence apply to women, African-Americans and the un-propertied?" and "What does Republican Motherhood really mean?" When studying the Civil War students will be able to ask: "Why is domestic labor not privileged?" "Why could women still not vote when they were among the most politically active in getting freed men the right to vote?" and "Why when women wrote so many memoirs, are they not considered good historical sources?" When studying World War I students will be able to ask "If the United States was fighting to preserve democracy, then why were women persecuted for using their First Amendment Right of free speech to speak of the evils of war?" "If women could be in the military during the war, why did they not enjoy the same benefits as men after the war?" and "Why did it take until 1920 for women to receive the right to vote when they have been actively involved in patriotism, politics, the economy, and society since the founding of the nation?" But, students will not be empowered to ask these questions, if they do not have the knowledge of women's experiences to illuminate the contradictions between reality and rhetoric in United States History.

Once students are empowered to question history, it then becomes possible to engage in conversation about the nature of history and the power structure in American society that has

suppressed the history of women relegating them to the private sphere of the home, while at the same time privileging the public sphere over the private sphere. Students will be able to talk about democracy, and what groups democracy best serves. It will become evident that women have not received an equal share of the progress that white men claim in the history books, and students will be able to evaluate history and progress for themselves. By learning how to become critical thinkers, young girls and boys will be able to claim their right to be full and active citizens. Students will hopefully come to see democracy as more than a political system, but as a way of life, in which one values the experiences of every human being and understands that it is human experience that fuels their way of life. Also, focusing on the variety of human experiences will illuminate the contradictions of the past, will help students see contradictions in society today, and will help them to better confront those contradictions with the purpose of achieving greater equality.

Seeing the past differently, and embracing the complexities and conflict will help students to create a different future. Students will have to learn how to sit with a complex and conflicted past, and while they are learning from the past, they must be willing to carry it with them and fold it into the lives they live. Students must carry the past with them into the future. The past must not stay in the past, but be part of the present and the future like a ghostly voice always reminding us of the experiences of those who have shaped the world in which we live. Young people will hopefully seek out the stories of those who are silenced, and always desire to multiply the perspectives from which history can be understood. Human relationships are the basis of history, and human relationships cannot be reduced to a single story.

In the future, perhaps a better way to approach the study and teaching of history is by focusing on human relationships and human experience. This approach disrupts linearity,

ensures conflict and complexity, and provides examples of how men and women live in relation to one another. This approach also provides the opportunity to ask how one individual's or group's actions affects others. The focus needs to be taken away from false notions of universal progress and turned to the lived experience of all human beings. Charlene Haddock Seigfried, in the introduction to Jane Addams' book, *The Long Road to Women's Memory*, comments that Addams' work "exemplifies what Dewey called 'an ideally perfect knowledge,' one that 'would represent such a network of interconnections that any past experience would offer a point of advantage from which to get at the problem presented in a new experience.'" <sup>7</sup> Addams' life work was a "constant practice of reflecting on experience and learning from it, especially experience that was perplexing because it could not be assimilated into her own stock of beliefs," a practice that led her to value the variety of women's experiences and the ways that they contribute to human understanding. <sup>8</sup> For Addams, it is individual human experience and memories that are the "basis for philosophic reflection and socially transformative action." <sup>9</sup> This model practiced by Jane Addams three-quarters of a century ago offers great insight into how social studies educators might approach knowledge and history today. Educators must always remember that there are multiple lenses through which the past can be viewed, and if social studies education is to be a means by which democracy can be achieved, we must work toward realizing the goals of the National Council for the Social Studies and practice adopting "common and multiple perspectives."

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<sup>7</sup> Charlene H. Seigfried, "Introduction to the Illinois Edition," in *The Long Road to Women's Memory* by Jane Addams (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), xxxi.

<sup>8</sup> Seigfried, xviii.

<sup>9</sup> Seigfried, x.

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## VITA

Nicole Lynn Bowen was born to James and Rose Jordan in Mobile, Alabama, on August 20, 1980. She lived in Mobile until she graduated with honors from Murphy High School in May 1998, when she moved to Birmingham, Alabama, to attend Birmingham-Southern College. Nicole was the second in her immediate family to attend college, following her sister, Marirose, who is now a practicing family practice physician. At Birmingham-Southern, Nicole double-majored in history and English, and was inducted into Phi Alpha Theta (the International History Honorary Fraternity) and Sigma Tau Delta (the National English Honorary Society) for her academic achievement. Nicole graduated from Birmingham-Southern College in May of 2002 with her Bachelor of Arts degree, and was awarded a James Madison Memorial Foundation Fellowship to pursue graduate studies in secondary education with a focus on American History. She and her husband Chris chose to attend Louisiana State University for their graduate work, and relocated to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, shortly after they were married. At Louisiana State University, Nicole studied to earn her Master of Arts degree in social studies education from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and worked as the Program Coordinator for the Women's and Gender Studies Program. During the summer of 2003, as a James Madison Fellow, Nicole had the opportunity to study at Georgetown University in Washington D.C., where she spent five weeks studying American constitutional history. Her current research interests are the ways in which history is constructed in American culture, women's history, and United States government and constitutional theory. After receiving her degree in May 2004, Nicole will begin her career in social studies education.