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Mobilizing Mother: From Good Mother to Patriotic Mother in World War I

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Abstract

The American press played a key role in the Wilson administration's effort to craft an image of the Patriotic Mother of the Great War. The Patriotic Mother of a soldier was encouraged to assume the mantle of the Spartan Mother. This monograph contrasts the Spartan Mother archetype used by the government and the press to another wartime maternal archetype, that of Thetis, the mother of Achilles, who objected to her son's participation in the Trojan War. U.S. mothers of soldiers were socially and politically positioned to assume the role outlined by the Wilson administration and advocated by the news media.

Keywords

mothers of soldiers, World War I, media, patriotic mothers

On August 18, 1917, the Connecticut state police, U.S. marshals, and federal agents from the Justice Department raided the Hartford home of Mrs. Mary Balaski. They seized Mrs. Balaski for “brandishing a revolver and shouting she would kill the first officer that tried to enter the house to get her son for the army.”¹

In contrast, Mrs. Rose Mangini was upset when the military rejected one of her sons for active service because of poor eyesight. Mrs. Mangini marched into military headquarters at Camp Dix and told a commanding officer that her son could “handle a dozen Huns.” She said she would spend her last cent on new glasses for her son if it meant he could join her other sons already in France.²

Mrs. Mangini reflects the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother, routinely appearing in World War I (WWI) news, who willingly sacrifices her child for her nation’s sake; Mrs. Balaski reflects the peacetime archetypal image of the Good Mother who tries to keep her child safe from harm. Wartime culture demands that a soldier’s mother adapt to the expectations of patriotic motherhood since the archetypal Good Mother fails to meet the nation’s needs. When mothers like Mrs. Balaski do appear, news accounts suggest that they are punished for their efforts.

Understanding the subtle but profound cultural shift in maternal archetypes during wartime helps to answer a question: How does a culture mobilize its mothers of soldiers to sacrifice their own children in wartime? We draw on more than one thousand World War I news stories, editorials, letters to the editor, and poems in three regional newspapers—*The New York Times*, the *Oakland Tribune*, and the *Wisconsin State Journal*—and data from local and regional archives in the state of Wisconsin to determine the role of the press in shaping the nation’s wartime perceptions of the mothers of soldiers. World War I is of interest because the American government mounted a major propaganda campaign to educate all citizens of the need for war and their role in it, including mothers of soldiers. Even though public relations was in its infancy, the magnitude of the propaganda campaign shaped the way the government has communicated about subsequent wars. Our analysis indicates that the wartime press, in tandem with other cultural institutions and mothers themselves, mobilized mothers to systematically send their children into harm’s way, a practice unthinkable in peacetime. The transition between the archetypal image of the Good Mother and that of the Patriotic Mother appeared seamless. This monograph examines the cultural shift and offers insight into what it means to be the mother of a combat soldier in war.

Importance of This Monograph

This monograph is important for several reasons. First, it adds to a research tradition that positions journalism as a repository for cultural narratives and a vehicle to transmit them.³ News narratives convey an ongoing “story of human activity,” with each story contributing to the larger cultural narrative.⁴ News narratives draw on mythic story forms that have always been part of the human storytelling repertoire.⁵ They use taken-for-granted interpretations about society, create recognizable story structures, use a limited range of character portrayals, and make their depictions appear real and natural.⁶ Myths, news stories, and the like have identifiable rhetorical structures,⁷ and while there is no single narrative formula that myths or news stories follow, there must be archetypal “heroes and villains” and a triumph of good over evil.⁸

Mythic stories are often rooted in the past, but their use in news helps to carry them forward and give them a modern appearance.⁹ News stories, like other mythic stories, are not limited to reality judgments.¹⁰ News stories are never completely objective,¹¹ as journalists are influenced by news values, rituals, and ideologies, and also by the organizational and conventional pressures of news work.¹² Journalists, “[t]hrough experience and interaction with others in the news organization, develop a mental catalogue of news story themes,”¹³ or “little tacit theories” about people and the world that are used to guide what information is gathered and included in stories.¹⁴

Because they are “written against the backdrop”¹⁵ of similar stories, news narratives become part of a larger symbolic system that acts “both as a model of and as a model for a culture.”¹⁶ In this way, news embodies cultural values.¹⁷ The values, ideals, beliefs, and ideologies transmitted in stories appear natural and beyond the reach of question.¹⁸ Two values reflected in news that are important to this monograph include the need for social order and leadership in maintaining that order.¹⁹ Because society is constructed around symbolic complexes (e.g., government, education, religion, art, etc.), any perceived threat to the social order is newsworthy.²⁰ In times of crisis, people seek reassurance, and one site they go to is the press. Like myths, news stories provide comfort,²¹ resolve contradictions,²² and work as force for conformity,²³ as they impose and help maintain social order and existing power structures.²⁴

In sum, journalists, like other storytellers, shape stories to make them work or resonate with the audience; they actively negotiate how the news story will be told.²⁵ News stories, as myths, are meant to be “passed on, commented upon, and recalled as individually appreciated public resources.”²⁶ This monograph examines the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother of a soldier that emerged in the news narrative during WWI and, in doing so, contributes to our knowledge of news as cultural narrative.

Second, this monograph expands a line of emerging research that has focused exclusively on news coverage of mothers of combat soldiers.²⁷ While most war news narratives focus on the military, the battlefield, and the government,²⁸ scholars have begun to examine the wartime roles of mothers of soldiers as portrayed in the press. For example, an analysis of network morning television shows, aired during the Iraq war, showed that mothers were positioned as the “link between militarism and motherhood”; they served both as justification for the war and as war supporters and caregivers. The media presented dissent by pairing the few mothers who opposed the war with those who voiced support, ensuring that dissenting voices were marginalized.²⁹

Other scholars have pointed out that the moral authority of antiwar mother Cindy Sheehan forced the media to treat her as newsworthy.³⁰ One rhetorical analysis revealed the press attributed Sheehan’s effectiveness to her status as a mother. She regularly wore images of her son, who died in combat, on either a talisman or her T-shirt. The image of motherhood was reinforced when news accounts contextualized stories of Sheehan, and others like her, within family relationships. The news media thereby gave mothers “a socially-defined role in the affairs of war and national policy.”³¹

More recent studies suggest that the press image of the wartime mother of soldiers has changed over time depending in part, perhaps, on the nature of the war being waged. A study of World War II (WWII) news coverage revealed that the press helped socialize wartime mothers of soldiers by emphasizing their role as citizen and drawing on the archetype of the Patriotic Mother to reposition mothers as willing to stoically and silently sacrifice their soldier sons rather than protect them.³² Other studies reported that while most national news accounts of the U.S. war in Iraq portrayed mothers of combat soldiers as patriotic, a small subset of stories included mothers who broke the mold by speaking to the personal cost of war and openly criticizing the government and its war policies, while also expressing support for the soldiers. These mothers were not criticized in or by the press for their antiwar positions, as they had been in the past, raising questions about a possible shift in the cultural archetype of the Patriotic Mother.³³ To date, no one has examined the portrait of mothers of U.S. soldiers in the First World War news media.

Third, this monograph contributes to the scholarship related to motherhood and war, where the debate surrounding the relationship continues.³⁴ Some scholars argue that the relationship is unclear,³⁵ because women relate to wars in different ways.³⁶ The concept of mother has been used to support arguments for and against pacifism.³⁷ Sara Ruddick, for example, has argued that maternal work, which lends itself to a specific type of moral and political reasoning, appears to be a natural resource for peace politics.³⁸

Other scholars argue that cultures use maternal symbolism to facilitate war. Mothers' "resistance to war" is dampened by wartime culture's focus on protection of the home front and the mobilization of mothers into organizations that contribute to the war effort. Alternative voices are silenced so the nation appears unified.³⁹ During wartime, motherhood is militarized because the nation must have consent of mothers and sons, who must also be trained and socialized, because fighting is not "natural" for many men.⁴⁰ Militarization of mothers includes using the "womb as a recruiting station"; women are encouraged to give birth to children who will serve as the nation's soldiers.⁴¹

Ideological practices and historical, social, and political circumstances also work to promote the idea of "women as sacrificing mothers and men as heroic sons" as natural roles for patriotic citizens.⁴² In some cultures, a mother's call to arms is portrayed as patriotic not violent; she is committed to a utilitarian, aggregate good of unifying her country and protecting her race and religion.⁴³ Some mothers accommodate conflict, even though they hate the idea of war, because their "public thoughts are so rarely solicited" in patriarchies and their "maternal values and thinking count for little."⁴⁴ In addition, they are socialized to accept their children's "horrible deaths"⁴⁵ as "inevitable, acceptable, and meaningful,"⁴⁶ thus, allowing the wartime processes to move forward.⁴⁷ The mass media and other social institutions further the socialization.⁴⁸

Scholars also note that women have a long history of participating in America's wars and war work dating back to the years before America's independence.⁴⁹ More recently, some mothers themselves have volunteered to serve in the U.S. military with the understanding that they will help to defend the country in the U.S.–Middle East conflicts.⁵⁰ Some scholars have argued that no predictable or natural relationship between mothers and war exists since the concept of motherhood itself is both a biological and social construction.⁵¹ By analyzing the news media's portrayal of the mothers of combat soldiers in the Great War, we shed further light on the relationship between mothers of soldiers and war.

Method

This monograph draws on textual analysis to identify the cultural narrative told in the WWI press about mothers of combat soldiers and historical method to situate that narrative in the broader political and cultural context. We chose to examine newspaper accounts for a variety of reasons. First, newspapers were growing in number, readership was up, and papers were targeting specific audiences, especially women. For instance, news editors, including Joseph Pulitzer, recognized the need to broaden the audience to include women because advertisers and department stores sought to attract women who increasingly controlled domestic spending.⁵² Second, scholars have examined women's magazines and the prescriptive role they played in women's lives, including during the First World War,⁵³ but no one has examined the role of the news media in crafting the wartime role of mothers of soldiers. This monograph fills that gap. Finally, the Wilson administration introduced a propaganda campaign intended to socialize the entire nation. Since the government was instructing members of the broader reading public, not just readers of women's magazines, on the proper wartime role of mothers of combat soldiers, we believe a study of general news media coverage of mothers of soldiers is warranted.

We examined news coverage of mothers of combat soldiers from the day the United States formally entered the war, April 6, 1917, until the day the war ended, November 11, 1918. We analyzed coverage in *The New York Times* in the East, the *Oakland Tribune* in the West, and the (Madison) *Wisconsin State Journal* in the Midwest. The selection of papers was based on geography and availability of complete sets of each newspaper.⁵⁴ We recognize that the country could be divided into other regions, but we chose to divide the country into thirds, East, Midwest, and West, and selected a paper from each region for which we were able to access complete data sets. We chose a saturation sample of all the stories related to mothers of soldiers that appeared in these newspapers. The word *mother* was used to search all news stories. Only stories wherein the mother was clearly identified in relation to her son or daughter serving in the war were selected for analysis. Stories in *The New*

York Times accounted for two-thirds of the sample, totaling 725. The *Oakland Tribune* had 229 stories and the *Wisconsin State Journal* 97 stories where mothers were mentioned. There was no noticeable difference in the news coverage between the papers beyond the publication of casualty listings containing mothers' names as next of kin. *The New York Times* regularly featured such lists, whereas the other two papers published them less frequently.

We analyzed the more than one thousand news stories, editorials, poems, and letters to the editor to uncover how the press depicted mothers of soldiers during wartime. To discover "latent" themes and patterns embedded in the text, it is necessary to engage in several readings.⁵⁵ To that end, the authors individually read and reread each story to identify the themes and patterns latent in the text. We looked specifically for key words, metaphors, phrases, and sentences as they related to maternal work, voices, and roles during the war. Attention was also paid to who was speaking and the context of the story. The authors collated themes and recorded interpretations and their relationship to archetypes, literature, and historical records. After working individually, the themes and interpretations were analyzed collectively to identify the myth the press told about mothers of soldiers in WWI. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and rereadings of the texts.

It is important to note that our analysis drew heavily on the concept of mythology because, as Lule and others noted, news serves the process of myth making in a culture. Myths are composed of archetypes. Myths related to war that have been handed down through the ages offer us examples of archetypes of mothers of soldiers that have appeared in history; thus, we drew on mythic archetypes to guide our analysis. They served as a focusing lens for the data. We used the themes uncovered in the analysis to bring forth the features of the archetypal image of the mothers of soldiers that dominated the World War I news coverage. The image that dominated the war coverage in this monograph, as we will show, most closely resembles the archetype of the Spartan Mother, the mother who sacrifices her son for the nation's war effort. Our analysis revealed the World War I government and press actively tried to suppress maternal behavior most closely associated with the archetypal Good Mother as celebrated during peacetime but of limited value when a nation is at war.

The press both served as a means of socializing mothers into their proper wartime behavior and as a conduit for telling the story it helped to shape. In an effort to determine how closely the stories in the press reflected the actual activities of mothers of soldiers during the war, we drew on archival collections related to the Council of National Defense at the state and local levels in Wisconsin in an effort to confirm our findings.

As we will explain in the next section, the government created the Council of National Defense to organize and mobilize citizens for war work in every state, county, city, and town in the nation. The press coverage in the papers we examined accurately reflected the day-to-day activities of mothers of soldiers as recorded in the archival records of the wartime apparatus set up to mobilize citizens. We examined archival collections related to the Council of Defense for Madison and Dane County, which derived strategies for civilian engagement in war work from the Council of National Defense, and which are housed in the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. As an additional check for similarities, we examined the records of the Milwaukee County Council of Defense housed at the public library in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The records are documents, including letters, minutes, and reports, detailing the activities of thousands of volunteers engaged by the government in the nation's war work. The archival evidence reflected governmental efforts to direct Wisconsin mothers of soldiers to engage in wartime activities that were consistent with those reported in the press accounts used in this monograph. Since the government's strategy was the same in all forty-eight states in the nation, it was no surprise that the press in other parts of the country reported stories about mothers of soldiers in wartime that were similar to those reported in the Wisconsin media. A survey of archival listings in other states also indicates similar war-related activities as those recorded in the state and local Council of Defense archives analyzed here.⁵⁶

This monograph makes three arguments. The first is that the image of the archetypal Patriotic Mother that dominated press coverage of mothers of soldiers during World War I reflected the mythic archetype of the Spartan Mother, a mother who fully supported her nation's war efforts. The second is that the press was instrumental in helping the government shift mothers of soldiers from the normative role of peacetime Good Mother who protected her child to the Patriotic Mother who would cheerfully give her child to the nation, knowing that he would be put into harm's way. In aiding the government with this wartime task, the press served as a conduit for and participant in the socialization of mothers of soldiers into their wartime roles. Third, the persuasive effort we saw in the record indicated that the Spartan Mother archetype required reinforcement to prevail, suggesting that mothers are indeed a natural resource for peace politics.

Because mothers of soldiers were expected to make the shift from peacetime motherhood to patriotic motherhood almost overnight, the following question naturally arises: How was that shift engineered? To answer that question, an understanding of several key ideas and concepts is necessary, and they will be explicated further in the literature review in the next section. The first is the concept of maternal work, which is at the heart of child rearing and offers the foundation of maternal attitudes and feelings. Ruddick, as we will discuss, points out that maternal work leads to maternal thinking, a philosophy about the meaning of motherhood to those engaged in the practice. Maternal work, she argues, is grounded in preservative love. Furthermore, a mother is judged by the quality of her maternal work, and part of that assessment involves how well she protects her child.

The second concept is that of maternal archetypes that populate myths and, by extension, journalism since news stories play a role in cultural myth making. For this monograph, we draw on two important maternal archetypes as they relate to war stories. One is the Spartan Mother, the idealized Patriotic Mother, and the other is Thetis, the mother of the Greek warrior Achilles, who can best be described as an example of a Good Mother who finds the threat of war to her child an unimaginable horror. These two maternal archetypes, as will be shown, were in conflict in the story told about mothers by the World War I press. The government and the news media made every effort to foreground the Patriotic Mother and background the Good Mother.

Third, the government took advantage of mothers' social, political, and maternal histories to make the acceptance of patriotic motherhood seem logical and natural. We pay special attention to mothers' experiences in earlier U.S. wars, and we also examine the movement of their maternal work from the private sphere of the home into the public sphere, as women organized themselves politically and socially to do maternal work in the public arena. At the same time, as mothers began emerging in the nation's public arena, they began to lose their authority and status as expert mothers. We walk the reader through the evolution of this process to situate mothers at the beginning of World War I, so we can help the reader understand the position that mothers were in when the Wilson administration went to great lengths to mobilize mothers, in particular, to support the war effort. We also describe the war apparatus the Wilson administration created, including the Committee on Public Information and the Council of National Defense, whose purpose was to mobilize citizens, including mothers, to support the war effort. This government machinery, with the support of the press, pushed mothers to accept their new wartime role.

In sum, the literature review that follows outlines the concepts of maternal work and maternal archetypes, along with the social, political, and historical context of motherhood and the government's World War I propaganda and mobilization efforts. We argue that all set the stage for the evolution of the image of the archetypal Patriotic Mother as she appeared in the World War I press.

Situating Mothers: Maternal Work, Myth, and History

Maternal Work

Mothers have been doing maternal work since the beginning of humankind, but until the twentieth century the discipline of philosophy largely ignored the problem of mothering. In the late 1980s, Sara Ruddick argued that the work that a mother does in raising her children provides the foundation for a mother's moral and political thought. She noted that while males can also meet the demands of maternal labor, in most cultures females and mothering "are conceptually and politically linked."⁵⁷

Maternal work, which is grounded in preservative love, involves three primary tasks. First, a mother protects and nurtures her child physically to keep the child alive. Mothers develop a "watchful eye" in that they scrutinize the environment for threats of danger. Mothers learn when to intervene and to protect children when protection cannot be assured. As such, maternal care moves from the home into the neighborhoods and larger communities. Ruddick posited that if the world itself were "under siege and if that siege holds any community and all children hostage, the effort of world protection may come to seem a 'natural' extension of maternal work."⁵⁸

Second, mothers nurture their children spiritually, attending to emotional, cognitive, and sexual development. They learn when and how to intervene in the child's intellectual and emotional growth. A mother is aware of where her child is in terms of psychological development; effective protection requires that she "ward off distortions and inhibitions that beset their developing spirits."⁵⁹ The child's cognitive and psychological development requires that a mother be open to and aware of change and its challenges, which, in turn, leads mothers to a "special kind of learning" that is relational in nature.⁶⁰ Changing psychological attitudes demand that the mother communicate with the child in an effort to understand what the child is thinking. Mothers must also learn to allow the child privacy and "the self respect that comes with having a private life."⁶¹ The balance is not easy to reach; while the child needs private space, the mother also needs to talk and to share thoughts. In developing herself as trustworthy, a mother lets her child know that she is trying to understand.

One virtue of maternal thinking is good cheer. Mothers draw on cheerfulness as a way of protecting the child in large or small circumstances that are threatening to the child physically and emotionally. Such cheerfulness can be challenging in the face of despair. Ruddick noted that mothers engage in maternal cheerfulness in helping their sick children "die well" and "sustain seriously damaged children in hopefulness."⁶² Good cheer becomes degenerative, however, when it is false, encouraging children to deny reality as they know it.

The third major challenge of maternal work involves training the child socially and morally, work that is performed in the "gaze" of others who judge a mother's success in raising a child whom others accept as socially valuable. The socialization process can be confusing for mothers, sometimes riddling them with self-doubt. Social training sometimes means that a mother must work against the natural disposition to comfort and rescue her child.

The maternal thinking and way of knowing that arises out of the process of doing maternal work is nuanced and complex, and maternal work, which is grounded in preservative love, is a site for peace politics. Ruddick says that women or mothers are not necessarily pacifist, but rather, given the nature of their maternal work, they know the vulnerability and cost of human flesh, the threat of human violence, and the importance of the lives of the children to other mothers like themselves.

However, Ruddick noted that mothers are often without power in many public and private, social and political circumstances; mothers must constantly struggle to make their voices heard when they live in cultures that undervalue maternal work and maternal thinking. In patriarchies, mothers face the "Law of the Father." The father is often considered the final authority in determining discipline in his child's life, in both the public and

private spheres. This male-dominated authority determines, finally, the “policies about what freedoms ordinary folk are allowed, when and whom they are required to kill, or what conditions of work and what dispensation of its products are just.”⁶³

The role that the mother plays in raising her child requires trust, but trust is threatened when a mother abdicates her maternal authority, which occurs when she hides her true feelings about how she feels about situations related to power, as she herself is aware of them. Some mothers manage to speak their feelings despite the pressure to remain silent, while others acknowledge the struggle but stop fighting. Inauthentic maternal thinking results when the struggle is denied and thus “rendered invisible” by mothers who train their children to accept the judgment of authority figures without question.⁶⁴ Authority figures are allowed to dictate the values mothers must teach their children and appropriate their children “for tasks of their devising,” including war.⁶⁵

At the same time, abdication of maternal authority is often presented as necessary for the proper separation of the child from his or her dependence on the maternal figure. Yet there are cultural implications in deciding what constitutes appropriate terms of separation, particularly for a nation preparing for, or in the throes of, an actual conflict. World War II mothers, for instance, were blamed for failing to raise men fit for the service by refusing to cut their “apron strings,”⁶⁶ leading to what was then called “shell shock.”⁶⁷

In summary, maternal work focuses on caring for the child’s physical well-being, fostering intellectual and emotional growth and training the child socially and morally. Demands to foster growth and development may be culturally and historically influenced, but physical preservation of the child is not. Without protection, infants fail to thrive.⁶⁸ A mother’s successes and failures are judged through the “gaze of the other,” and while maternal authority is “earned by care,”⁶⁹ in patriarchies, mothers are expected to submit to the “Law of the Father.” As we shall see, patriotic mothers of the Great War continued some of the maternal work that mothers do in peacetime as good mothers. The patriarch in the WWI news narrative, that is, the government and the military, assumed responsibility for the rest.

Myths of Archetypal Mothers

To understand the two maternal archetypes that appear in wartime news coverage, namely the Good Mother and the Spartan Mother, it is necessary to understand the archetype of the Good Mother, as she appears in peacetime news coverage. According to Lule, she offers protection, comfort, care, nourishment, and nurturing. She embodies the goodness that is reflected in her “kindness, gentleness, selflessness, and compassion” and serves as a role model for others.⁷⁰ Good mothers in news stories can be associated with both birth and death, that is, having oversight of “passage from this life to the next one.”⁷¹ In short, she embodies Ruddick’s concept of maternal work. Lule offers Mother Teresa of Calcutta as an example of the Good Mother appearing in the modern press. News media emphasized her maternal qualities, even though she was childless, depicting her as nurturing and caring, tending both orphans and the unwanted sick and dying of India. In addition to stories about actual mothers themselves, stories about Mother Teresa, or those who aid disaster victims, for example, are reflections of the archetypal image of the Good Mother in news stories; the portrayal is to be understood as real and natural, rather than as myth.⁷²

The opposite of the peacetime Good Mother in news narratives is the Bad Mother. News narratives depict her as destructive, selfish, uncaring, deceptive, cunning, and sometimes even sexually promiscuous. An example of the Bad Mother, as positioned in news accounts, is Susan Smith, a South Carolina mother who was convicted of drowning her two children after her boyfriend refused to marry her. The murders garnered massive amounts of press attention. The press reported that after she was charged she was jeered by mobs that called her a “baby killer.”⁷³

While the press generally depicts mothers as either good or bad, feminist scholars have argued that, as a practical matter, most mothers live their lives somewhere in between.⁷⁴ In the press, good mothers are exemplary in their nurturing and willingness to sacrifice all for their children and family; they are mythologized as “all knowing, all-loving and all-powerful.”⁷⁵ Society insists on such maternal behavior. Often refusal to conform to the norms reflected in the myth of the Good Mother invites reprisal, including social and/or cultural ostracism.⁷⁶

However, the Good Mother archetype is not a good fit for a culture during wartime. The Good Mother is unwilling to stand by as her children are injured or killed; she actively seeks to protect her children (Figure 1). Yet the wartime culture needs her to willingly send them into harm’s way. Thus, the culture needs another maternal archetype that better fits its goals. Turning away from one archetype toward another is natural when one considers the purposes archetypes serve. For instance, they appear when we face a problem that needs resolution. According to Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, archetypes reside in our individual or collective unconscious. Archetypes are primordial images or motifs, that is, innate psychological structures or aptitudes that allow us to become aware of parents, spouses, children, death, the unknown, and the like; humans recognize them “because of their typical nature.”⁷⁷ They rise to the level of consciousness in an individual or collective when called on to perform essential functions. Archetypes become manifest at the conscious level as archetypal images, that is, as concrete representations of archetypes. The images occur in dreams for individuals, while in cultures they take shape through communication. Our perceptions of archetypal images are colored and shaped by our own existence and experiences. Thus, while specific details of an archetypal image in various cultural stories differ based on the time and place in which the stories emerge, the underlying structure remains the same.⁷⁸ Archetypes offer us ways to think about things; embedded within the archetypal images are values and behaviors.

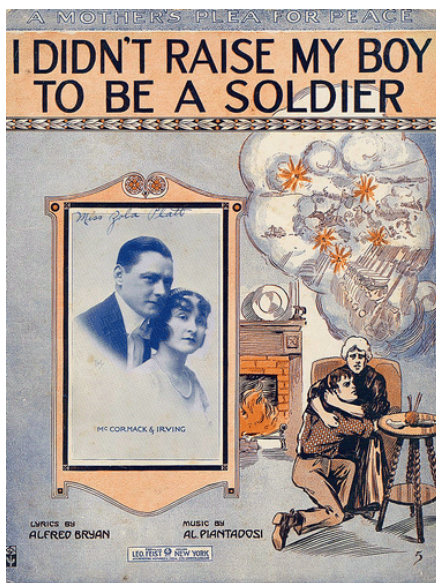


Figure 1. Courtesy of the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Two years before America’s involvement in World War I, the 1915 cover illustration for the sheet music, “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier,” by composer Al Piantadosi and lyricist Alfred Bryan, shows a “good” mother who interrupts her knitting to desperately clutch her son while imagined terrors of war—military formations, aerial bombardments, and charging horses—fill her mind with worry. The chorus of the tune includes the words “I didn’t raise my boy to be a soldier, I brought him up to be my pride and joy, who dares to place a musket on his shoulder, to shoot some other mother’s darling boy?” The song is also “respectfully dedicated to every mother—Everywhere.”

Archetypes are hierarchical. Those designated as primary reside in the deepest level of the unconscious and cannot be further reduced, such as Archetypal Feminine or Masculine.⁷⁹ These primary archetypes are open to a broad range of representations and serve as foundations for more archetypes. For instance, the Archetypal Feminine gives rise to the Great Mother archetype, among others. The Great Mother archetype, in turn, gives rise to the Good Mother and the Bad Mother archetypes of peacetime and the Patriotic Mother and Good Mother of wartime. The Good Mother of wartime is the logical extension of the peacetime Good Mother in that she finds war threatening because it poses the possibility of threat or injury to her child.

With this in mind, we now turn our attention to two examples of wartime archetypes of mothers of soldiers, the Patriotic Mother and the Good Mother. The Patriotic Mother is reflected in the myth of the Spartan Mother, and the Good Mother appears as Thetis, the mother of the Greek warrior Achilles in Homer's epic poem the *Iliad*. While the Spartan Mother reflects the mother of a soldier as a citizen, Thetis reflects the mother of a soldier as a mother. Mothers qua mothers work to keep their children whole and alive, while mothers qua citizens willingly give children to war for the nation's sake. These two exemplars, Thetis and the Spartan Mother, as we will later see, offer us a way of organizing the data examined for this monograph of World War I press coverage of mothers of soldiers. We now turn to brief descriptions of the behaviors of these two archetypes.

I Have Endless Grief in My Heart.
—Thetis

Homer's poem, the *Iliad*, describes behavior by Thetis that offers evidence of maternal work by the Good Mother. The river goddess tried to protect her son physically. She also nurtured him emotionally and attended to his image among the mortals. The divine Thetis knew that her son was mortal and, like most mothers, wanted to preserve his life. Shortly after he was born, she tried to make him immortal by dipping her infant son in the River Styx. Because she held the infant by his heel, he was not completely immersed and, thus, was vulnerable in that spot.⁸⁰

Through a prophecy, Thetis learned that Achilles would die in battle, so she secluded her son on the island of Scyros to be raised as a girl among other maidens. Achilles was probably an adolescent when the sly Ulysses, who was trying to raise a Greek army to go to war with Troy, stopped by to lure Achilles into joining him. Achilles made a life choice when he agreed to go; he traded his secluded life, symbolized by Homer as effeminate, for one of battle and heroism. In making this choice, his mother's worst fears were realized.⁸¹

Homer painted a portrait of Thetis as a mother who struggled to protect her son from injury on the battlefield. At one point in the story, Achilles's armor was lost. With a heavy heart, Thetis appeared at her grieving son's side and, although she was aware that he would die in the conflict, she promised to get him replacement armor (Figure 2). Before she left, she cautioned her son to stay out of battle "till you see me return hither; tomorrow at break of day I shall be here, and will bring you goodly armour from King Vulcan."⁸² He heeded her advice and stayed out of the battle until she returned. The new shield, created by Vulcan, contained a message. It depicted the story of Greek life in images, cities at war and peace, scenes of farming, and other human activities including dancing and marriage, suggesting that war disrupts the peace and pleasures of daily life.⁸³ Thetis delivered the armor to her son. Wearing it, he drove the Trojans back toward their city.



Figure 2. Courtesy of Marie-Lan Nguyen Leroy.

The black-figure painting style is used on a Greek vase from about 550 b.c.e. to depict Thetis (center) handing replacement armor to her son Achilles.

Thetis also emotionally nurtured her warrior son in Homer's poem. For instance, she offered Achilles comfort on two occasions during the war when he suffered great emotional distress. The first instance involved losing the woman Briseis, whom Achilles had won as part of the spoils of war and whom he had grown to love. Angry and hurt, Achilles stood near the sea, according to Homer, weeping, and "raised his hands in prayer to his immortal mother."⁸⁴ Thetis heard her son crying and went to him immediately. When she appeared, she asked, "My son, why are you weeping? What is it that grieves you? Keep it not from me, but tell me, that we may know it together."⁸⁵ When she heard the story, according to Homer, she wept with her son. In the second instance, when Achilles wept over the death of his friend Patroclus, Thetis again heard her son's cries and appeared to comfort him. Laying her hand on his head, she asked, "What sorrow has now befallen you? Tell me; hide it not from me."⁸⁶

Achilles died in battle while pursuing Trojans outside of the city. He was fatally injured when an arrow lodged in his heel. His mother and other sea nymphs were among the mourners at his funeral, described as a "magnificent affair."⁸⁷ Following his death, the heroism of Achilles was honored and his memory kept alive through, among other things, the armor that had been given to him by his mother.

Homer chose to immortalize Thetis, who had a reputation for coupling with young men, in her role as a vulnerable mother of a vulnerable hero. Scholars note that she was "characterized by helplessness and by impotent grief . . . the epitome of sorrow and vulnerability in the face of her son's mortality."⁸⁸ In the *Iliad*, she dressed in a dark cloak, of which Homer said, "there is no blacker garment."⁸⁹ Homer's Thetis served as "a paradigm for the image of bereavement" experienced by the anguished parents of each of the dead warriors in Homer's poem.⁹⁰ She expressed her sadness publicly as well as to the gods. She pleaded to Jove for help. Homer indicated, however, that Achilles's destiny was not up to the gods; rather, it was in the hands of the fates.

Before turning to the Spartan Mother, it bears noting that Thetis, the wartime Good Mother, continued her maternal work on the battlefield by securing new armor for Achilles and by tending to his emotional needs. Similarly, mothers of soldiers during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars also went into the battlefields to tend to their sons. As we shall see later, however, the WWI government did not want mothers of soldiers on the battlefields of Europe.

. . . [A]bsolve yourself at once, or cease to exist.
—Spartan Mother

If ancients told stories of goddesses making a supreme effort to protect their mortal warrior sons, the later tales of Spartan mothers painted a picture of quite another approach to mothering soldiers. These tales serve as the

paradigm for a more contemporary image of patriotic motherhood. The image of the Spartan Mother can be traced to the fourth century b.c.e. Homer's poem had appeared earlier between the fourth and sixth centuries.

Sparta, a Greek city-state, was often under threat of invasion by neighbors. The purpose of the Spartan social structure was combat. Spartiates, the males of Sparta, were so practiced in military drilling, discipline, and withstanding pain and privation that they were unbeatable in combat for centuries.⁹¹ Women were expected to raise soldier sons and daughters who were healthy, were fit, and would become Spartan mothers. Parents did not have a say in whether a newborn would be reared; a Council of Elders made that determination. Should the infant be deformed or deemed unfit, it was exposed, that is, left to die. Baby boys who made it past the elders lived with their mothers until they were six or seven, when formal martial training by the state began; many of the fathers were still living with their own army groups when their sons' formal military training started.⁹²

Given the men's military obligations, Spartan women were charged with managing their own property and with raising children to be patriotic, that is, loyal to the state. As a result, Spartan mothers received attention from the state that was not paid to women elsewhere. Since wives were principally involved in creating Spartan citizens, they were expected to be well educated, healthy, and knowledgeable about Spartan values. Spartan women were expected to scold and humiliate cowards and bachelors.⁹³

Historians have turned to Plutarch's *Sayings of Spartan Women* for insights into the cultural expectations of mothers of Spartan soldiers. One mother reportedly handed her son his shield and told him to return "either with this or on this."⁹⁴ One mother killed her son who had deserted his post, declaring, "He was not my offspring . . . for I did not bear one unworthy of Sparta."⁹⁵ Another mother, according to Plutarch, called her cowardly sons "wretched runaway slaves," asking them, "Do you plan to steal back in here whence you emerged?" Pulling up her clothes, she exposed herself to them.⁹⁶

While Plutarch's sayings of the Spartan women suggest a certain psychological distance between military sons and their mothers, at least one of his stories suggests that mothers in general might be expected to mourn the loss of sons not in the military. A shabbily dressed older woman reportedly approached a woman burying her son and remarked, "You poor woman, what a misfortune!" The mother of the dead son replied, "No, by the two goddesses, what a good fortune," she replied, "because I bore him so that he might die for Sparta, and that is what has happened for me."⁹⁷ The old woman's comment points to a response that most would expect in the death of a child. The soldier's mother, however, indicated there was no reason to be sad.

Historians suggest that cultural pressure determined at least some of the Spartan mothers' reactions to the deaths of their children. Women were ordered not to mourn following the Spartan defeat at Leuctra but to suffer in silence.⁹⁸ Rather than anguishing over the loss of a soldier son, mothers celebrated the bravery that led to his fate. It is noteworthy that the behavior evidenced by Spartan women as mothers of soldiers during this historical period was not the norm for the rest of Greece. At the same time, the Spartan Mother, as will be shown, is reflected in the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother who dominated the news coverage during the First World War. To better understand how the government was able to successfully transition mothers of draft-age sons from their peacetime role as Good Mother to their wartime role as Patriotic Mother, it is important to understand historically how women emerged as citizens in the culture, albeit with limited political voice.

Next, we briefly review American women's relationship to motherhood, war, and politics, highlighting the factors that bear most directly on this monograph.

Mothers' History: Child-Rearing Experts, Wartime Participants, and Organizers

The U.S. government during World War I capitalized on three facets of women's history, using them to its own advantage when encouraging mothers of draft-age children to shift from peacetime to wartime motherhood. These included the mothers' willingness to participate in wars and conflicts, their experience in organizing to gain social and ultimately political powers, and their willingness to accept outside authorities as experts on what counted as quality child rearing. We begin the discussion of these three factors with a brief review of motherhood in the early days of American history.

Early American mothers

The lives of colonial women centered on the home, where mothers were regarded as sole experts on child rearing and housework that included cooking, cleaning, spinning, soap making, weaving, and the like.⁹⁹ On average, women gave birth to seven children,¹⁰⁰ and most breastfed, which was said to imbue children "with an aura of maternal love and self-sacrifice."¹⁰¹ Children born during this period were subject to disease and accidents,¹⁰² so motherhood often "involved loss and grief."¹⁰³ Mothers were concerned for their children but not inclined to dote.¹⁰⁴ As mothers were seen as the experts on child rearing, the few existing advice books for women focused primarily on household duties, not on the care of children.¹⁰⁵ These colonial women had no political standing. They were allowed to own property if single but forfeited rights to their name, property, and money to husbands once they married.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, they worked as demand dictated: they plowed fields, slaughtered animals, and fought Native Americans, and soldiers who were trying to take their homes or their children.¹⁰⁷ Most of these actions were accepted and encouraged as necessary to help build and protect the homestead and/or communities from unwelcomed invaders, that is, native or foreign (English).

These activities failed to strengthen the political power of women, who lacked full citizenship.¹⁰⁸ Still, women held formidable social power, as daily work involved overseeing childbirths, funerals, and the selling and buying of homemade products. Unfortunately, their privacy was minimal. These activities enabled women to exert considerable influence over their communities through social power and the use of gossip.¹⁰⁹ As more women became educated, they also began to read and write about their concerns regarding motherhood and raising virtuous citizens.¹¹⁰ The Revolutionary War brought them into the public sphere again and further awakened their desire for a public voice.

During the Revolutionary War era, women discovered their political value and abilities; they participated in the Stamp Act protests in the 1760s, the consumer boycotts in the 1770s, and the military conflict between 1775 and 1781.¹¹¹ Some took up guns and joined the war against the British. Others made cartridges and food for the troops. Some followed the soldiers into battle and provided cooking and laundry services as well as solace to the injured. Still others, formed women's organizations "to raise money for the troops."¹¹² Many women dealt directly with the enemy when the places in which they lived became the sites of war.

The American Revolution prompted questions about women's role in the new republic. The republic's leaders shared Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy that the public realm belonged to men; women's participation in civic affairs would upset the natural order of both women and politics.¹¹³ Some women decried this lack of citizenship. Abigail Adams wrote to her husband in 1776 that "if particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice, or representation."¹¹⁴ John Adams dismissed her concerns, though they foreshadowed events to come. Meanwhile, other events, which had begun before the Revolution, laid the groundwork for women's expanding social roles.

The Republican Mother

The Great Awakening, a religious revival movement of the 1730s and 1740s, had encouraged women's participation in public activities (e.g., sewing circles) and voluntary associations (e.g., charitable organizations connected with the churches).¹¹⁵ These associations created a larger sense of civic duty for women, and together with the struggle for political identity, the ideology of republican motherhood emerged. The Republican Mother lacked the vote and citizenship but still served a "political purpose"¹¹⁶ by assuming her patriotic duty to raise sons who were "moral and virtuous citizens,"¹¹⁷ the country's future soldiers. This ideology wove together the women's family commitments with the new sense of civic duty and individual possibility.¹¹⁸

The second Great Awakening, occurring after the Revolution (1798–1826), built on women's earlier successes at organizing groups and associations. The goal was intended "[t]o carry out the mission of republication motherhood," by moving "beyond kinship networks and into public organization."¹¹⁹ These associations served as the foundation for the temperance, suffragist, and labor organizations that caused President Wilson concern in the years leading up to WWI.

Opposition to the expansion of women's rights and roles in the public sphere played out as the years progressed. Some opposition came from women themselves, who believed in the "power of domesticity." They believed women's authority resided in motherhood and the home and that they could use that power to exert indirect "gentle influence" on the public sphere.¹²⁰

Connected to the battles over the ideology of domesticity and women's rights were battles over whether women should work outside the home. Most married women worked in the home, but as the industrial era blossomed, lower- and working-class women began working in the textile industry.¹²¹ The ideology of domesticity ensured that women's labor in the factory or in the home as "piece" workers would be undervalued and under paid.¹²² Women workers, concerned with conditions of labor and wages, organized and participated in the first labor uprising prior to the Civil War. While unions had yet to be formed, the uprising foreshadowed women's activism to come.

Republican mothers were also concerned with infant mortality. Infant death was no longer seen as an act of God. Mothers, not God, were now held responsible. One physician reportedly decried the "ignorance and false pride of the mothers" who killed their children by "the manner in which they are dressed, and by the food that is given them."¹²³ In addition, society now viewed children as "unsullied innocents"; if a child went astray it was the mother's fault.¹²⁴

Writings about domesticity flourished between 1830 and 1860. Written primarily by men, medical doctors, educators, popular writers, and poets, domesticity articles appeared in women's magazines and self-help books and promoted the idea that mothers were no longer the experts on child rearing but needed the advice of the medical and scientific communities to be successful as mothers.¹²⁵ At their core, the domesticity texts promoted traditional hierarchical gender roles,¹²⁶ and touted a strong emotional bond or "knot" between mother and child, especially mother and son. While celebrated, the "knot" was also a site of worry; many writers (men and women alike) feared a tight bond would leave children, especially boys, unable to successfully move from the home into society. Tales of overly emotional, sensitive men who succumbed to depravity, drunkenness, and physical weakness as a result of the "knot" were popular in the domesticity literature.¹²⁷ These texts foreshadowed the "leave it to the experts" approach in the WWI public discourse on maternal work.¹²⁸

The Civil War

As the Revolution had, the American Civil War changed women's lives. Women in the North and South pledged patriotism to the war effort and began war work. While their reasons for supporting the war effort may have

differed, women of the Civil War were models of patriotic motherhood within the Spartan Mother tradition. They were ready to forfeit sons and husbands “on the altar of patriotic necessity.”¹²⁹ Southern mothers publicly proclaimed their pride of sacrifice in the local papers, speaking of the need “to shut up my griefs [*sic*] in my own breast” and grudgingly accepted their son’s decision to enlist in a manner that foreshadowed the patriotic motherhood of World War I.¹³⁰

Some women participated in the war itself, disguising themselves as men and enlisting,¹³¹ while others served as spies. Still others went into the battlefields searching for injured sons and husbands.¹³² But most war work for women included the formation of aid societies that raised money for supplies, folded bandages, and made soldiers’ clothing.¹³³ The war also dictated that women assume jobs their husbands left behind, including oversight of farms, businesses, and plantations.¹³⁴ For southern women, who considered working outside the home debasing, doing war work required a considerable cultural shift.¹³⁵

At the same time, support for the war effort was not universal, nor was the opposition silent. Southern women chafed under the demands for their labor both in the fields and in the house.¹³⁶ Newspapers in the South even commented on their lack of support.¹³⁷ Northern women, especially working and lower class, protested the Draft Law of 1863 that enabled rich men to buy themselves out of the war while their own husbands and sons were forced to fight. Hundreds of women were “arrested, convicted and jailed” during the Draft Riots.¹³⁸ Women’s rights groups, however, were effectively silenced during the Civil War when they began to fear that continued petitions and/or protests would be viewed as unpatriotic.¹³⁹ As will be seen, suffragists took this same approach during WWI.

The Progressive Era

After the Civil War, some women continued to work outside of the home and others entered the labor market as jobs became available.¹⁴⁰ Those jobs included teaching, clerking in department stores or for the government, and working as switchboard operators, librarians, or pieceworkers in the garment trades.¹⁴¹ As the century unfolded, more women became college educated and more worked outside of the home. However, women represented only a small part of the labor force.¹⁴² Most were single women helping to support their families. For working mothers, however, being a “two-job” wife was a matter of public debate. The *Ladies Home Journal*, for example, published articles on the need to balance work and motherhood, noting there was no way to adequately do both, especially motherhood.¹⁴³

At the same time, the movement toward scientific motherhood and household management continued to gain strength,¹⁴⁴ as reflected in expanding home economics programs at colleges and universities and in the mass media.¹⁴⁵ Child care specialists instructed mothers on how to strictly manage the schedule of children and to avoid smothering them with love. Even the government actively discouraged mothers from playing with their children.¹⁴⁶ Mothers were told about the latest in scientific discoveries and how they could be used to solve health problems and protect against future ones. Both physicians and social critics continued to blame mothers for the mortality and morbidity issues of children.¹⁴⁷ The culture inserted itself into the process of shaping the nature of maternal work yet held mothers responsible for the outcome.¹⁴⁸ This opened the door for others, such as the Wilson administration, to determine how mothers would engage in maternal work during the First World War. The administration was successful, in part, because mothers were no longer universally considered the experts at child rearing.

The Progressive Era meant that women’s lives were also moving into the public sphere in some unexpected ways. The “new woman” not only rode bicycles and wore bicycle clothes that showed her legs, she demonstrated independence, which advertisers embraced and others fretted over.¹⁴⁹ Women continued to create associations whose purpose was to extend republican motherhood and maternal ideals to civic and philanthropic work under a shared belief that they had a responsibility to promote virtue and morality outside

the home.¹⁵⁰ The outgrowth of continued movement of women into the public arena was the ideology of redemptive motherhood.

Redemptive motherhood

The ideology of redemptive motherhood developed and coincided with the rise of the Industrial Revolution. Like the Republican Mother, the Redemptive Mother was nurturing, loving, and unselfish. Unlike republican mothers, however, redemptive mothers actively moved into wider society believing the Industrial Revolution had damaged the country's moral health. They assumed responsibility for restoring public morality, in addition to caring for their husbands and children. Their public agenda was viewed as a part of "municipal housekeeping and [a] political extension of motherhood."¹⁵¹ Children needed schooling, the poor needed help, and the health of both women and children needed attention. Some organized unions to address labor issues such as the Women's Trade Union League; others set up settlement houses to aid the poor or campaigned against drinking. The work of the settlement houses, the labor unions, and the women's clubs resulted in legislation regulating wages and work for women and children, prison reforms, and the Children's Bureau.¹⁵² Furthermore, suffrage organizations gained strength, as did organizations for peace.¹⁵³ The peace movement, based on the idea that war was destructive, cruel, and wasteful, gained ground in the United States in the two decades leading up to WWI. Many suffragists played a role in its development, believing that if they could advance peace and save lives, they could show the nation the importance of having women engaged in the affairs of the country.¹⁵⁴

In summary, historical evidence shows that women and mothers participated in the nation's wars prior to World War I. They moved their maternal work beyond the home into the public sphere and began taking direction on that maternal work from outside experts. Some women drew on the social power they earned by participating in organizations and associations to pursue political power. As noted, there was a division between those who sought full rights of citizenship, including the vote, and those who believed in the power of domesticity to influence social change. As will be shown next, the Wilson administration was able to use the ideological division among women to its advantage in shifting the definition of mothers of draft-age men from that of the peacetime Good Mother to that of the wartime Patriotic Mother.

World War I

. . . [D]uring these days that are to try men's souls.
—Woodrow Wilson

When the war broke out in Europe after Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo in 1914, the United States, isolationist during the Progressive Era, continued its neutral stance. Even though the United States and European nations had signed treaties designed to maintain the world's balance of power, most Americans believed the conflict "over there" had nothing to do with them. President Wilson officially spelled out the country's stance in a proclamation of neutrality in 1914.

With the outbreak of the war in Europe, the voices of those in favor of a strong national defense became louder. Among the most vocal were former President Theodore Roosevelt and Leonard Wood, the men who spearheaded the preparedness movement and drew the backing of powerful politicians, industrialists, and major newspapers. The movement also appealed to women in philanthropic and charitable organizations, with experience in activities like organizing luncheons, bazaars, and balls, and women related to industrialists, politicians, and military men who were pushing for a stronger defense. Their willingness to join the preparedness movement indicated that not all women were pacifists. Some were offended by the popular pacifist slogan "I didn't raise my son to be a soldier,"¹⁵⁵ saying it was shameful that some mothers failed to raise

sons to serve the country. Others strongly advocated that preparation for war offered the best means of ensuring the safety of the home, sons, and country.¹⁵⁶

Peace versus Preparedness

The conflict between the peace and preparedness movements was reflected in the nation's popular culture. The film industry was one site where the nation's neutrality was initially expressed.¹⁵⁷ The motion picture industry discouraged audiences from taking sides while viewing films about the European conflict. The National Board of Censors of Motion Pictures asked filmmakers to add a five-foot leader to the front end of war movies asking theatre patrons to refrain from cheering and clapping for one side or the other to avoid inciting bad feelings and melees among supporters of countries on either side in the war. One such incident had erupted in San Francisco.¹⁵⁸

The antiwar films that emerged between 1914 and 1917 examined the horrors of war for those who do the fighting and for those left at the home front.¹⁵⁹ Not all antiwar films featured mothers in the plot structure, but women as mothers and caregivers offered filmmakers an obvious symbol that could easily make the connection between motherhood and peace. The 1916 film *Civilization*, for instance, advocated pacifism and drew on the concept of motherhood in its promotional materials. The story was about a king and a count, whose country was at war, and their conversion to pacifism; suffering mothers of soldiers conscripted by the king appeared in the storyline. Described as "Thomas Ince's anti-war opus," the film was nearly three hours long and successful in all regions of the country. Ince hired people to ride motorcycles across country distributing literature and advertisements that billed it as "dedicated to the vast pitiful army whose tears have girdled the universe—The Mothers of the Dead."¹⁶⁰ President Wilson met with Ince to congratulate him on his project in the summer of 1916, and Ince included scenes of the meeting in movie trailers. Representatives of the Democratic National Committee later credited Wilson's success at the polls that year to the film.¹⁶¹

Pacifist themes in films and elsewhere in the culture began to fade as the European war continued to unfold and the preparedness movement gained traction; the country had been pushed in that direction when a German submarine sank the *Lusitania*, a British ship, in 1915, killing 1,195, including 123 Americans. Preparedness became part of America's moviegoing experience; films like *I'm Glad My Son Grew Up to Be a Soldier* and *The Eagle's Wing* advocated the wisdom of getting ready for war.¹⁶² The movie *A Man Without a Country* vividly reflected the shift in wartime sentiments.¹⁶³ Of interest in this film was the depiction of pacifists as mothers. In one scene, at a meeting of pacifists, a mother stood next to her pudgy son, telling another guest that she "did not raise my boy to be a soldier." In another scene, the pudgy boy befriended another child; wearing a suit and large horned-rimmed glasses and seated at a piano bench, he was presumably another mother's overprotected son. The central character in the story, a patriotic woman, rejected her pacifist boyfriend, who then had to come to terms with the fact that he would have to be a good citizen and soldier before he could marry his sweetheart. She was depicted in the film as a mother-like figure in that she cared for the sick and wounded soldiers.

During 1916, the push toward preparedness gained additional ground. The Democratic and Republican conventions had both neutrality and preparedness planks that year. While the slogan "Wilson kept us out of the war" served as a public reminder of the importance of neutrality, the pendulum continued to swing toward rather than away from war. The shifting tide was also reflected when the suffragists argued that they too were patriotic citizens, loyal and ready to serve their nation should war occur. In early April 1917, the Germans sank several U.S. merchant marine vessels and President Wilson released the Zimmerman Telegram, a wire from Germany to Mexico inviting Mexico to join Germany in the likelihood that the United States would join the war over the German submarine warfare. Germany, in return, promised to help the Mexicans recover Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico, the territories lost to the United States in the Mexican-American War.

The United States Enters the War

On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. The Wilson administration instituted the draft, choosing conscription over voluntary service, two months later to ensure that the United States had the necessary troops to successfully fight the war. The Wilson administration viewed activists who opposed the draft, including the peace activists, suffragists, and mothers, as a threat to the nation's morale. Wilson further recognized that neither the German assaults nor the draft were enough to guarantee the public's patriotic support over the long haul. To that end, Wilson and his administration believed an "outraged public" was needed to foster patriotism and engage people in making necessary wartime sacrifices.¹⁶⁴ Particularly noteworthy is the effort of the Wilson administration to position itself as having an "increased stake in carefully defining and enforcing patriotic motherhood."¹⁶⁵

Propaganda and mobilization

The government put powerful mechanisms in place to create the necessary public outrage and support for the war. Besides enacting federal laws to discourage antiwar activity,¹⁶⁶ the government created two federal agencies to mobilize public opinion and action: the Committee on Public Information (CPI) and the Council of National Defense (CND). The CPI, which was in planning stages before the war, was chartered a week after the war started, and mothers, like all other civilians, could not escape its reach. Journalist and progressive George Creel, who headed the office, believed that the public would make rational decisions with the proper information; therefore, the CPI blanketed the nation with publicity about the need to preserve American idealism.¹⁶⁷ Some of the nation's best writers, advertisers, and promotions experts, including Edward Bernays, an early theorist in the field of public relations, helped CPI to shape its campaign to promote the principles of democracy, the need to protect America from a depraved enemy, and the need to restore global order.¹⁶⁸ The CPI, which also oversaw voluntary press censorship, generated propaganda that touched every aspect of American life, much of it drawing on emotion to influence public opinion.¹⁶⁹ Propaganda took the forms of war news stories and newsletters, public school bulletins, Four-Minute Men speeches at movie theatres,¹⁷⁰ and pamphlets, signs, cartoons, and posters.¹⁷¹ The CPI used every communication medium available at the time to send its message to America and its allies.

While the CPI's propaganda campaign shaped public thinking about the war, the CND successfully organized citizens to actually participate in the war effort. The Herculean endeavors to mobilize the citizenry, industries, and resources reached far and wide into the daily activities of the populace,¹⁷² and went a long way toward fostering an environment in which the archetype of the Patriotic Mother could flourish. Council offices were created in each state, which, in turn, oversaw the creation of local Councils of Defense in counties, cities, towns, and rural areas. The state and local councils conducted a massive and highly effective campaign to organize every aspect of the civilian war effort. Areas covered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for example, included, but were not limited to, manufacturing, commerce, finance, public welfare, churches, schools, real estate, food production, war materials, transportation, and recruitment of pen pals for soldiers.¹⁷³ Each council included subcommittees of volunteers who oversaw this war work done by citizens.

The value of women's participation

The federal government recognized the value of women's participation in the war effort, and the CND established its Committee on Women's Defense Work (Women's Committee) on April 21, 1917, just fifteen days after the United States entered World War I.¹⁷⁴ The committee chair was Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, the immediate past president of the National Woman Suffrage Association. From the start, the Women's Committee aimed to avoid confusion and duplication of effort among women's groups and individuals throughout the nation. At the time the Women's Committee was created, and thereafter throughout the war, a welter of local, state, and national women's volunteer organizations were engaged in supporting America's war effort. The committee's

key role was to suggest what needed to be done and keep the separate groups from stepping on each other's toes.

At its initial meeting, the Women's Committee appointed, from the public-minded women's community, temporary chairs of forty-eight state divisions, plus the District of Columbia, and charged them with calling together "representatives of all women's organizations having state-wide scope, state branches of women's national organizations, and such individuals as they cared to select to represent the state at large and unorganized women."¹⁷⁵ By tapping into this existing network of women's organizations, many of which had participated in the preparedness effort, the newly established Women's Committee was able to make immediate progress toward its goal of "seeing that all necessary forms of patriotic service or of defense programs, as outlined by the National Women's Committee, were actively carried forward by organizations or individuals."¹⁷⁶ The job of the Women's Committee, in large part, was to encourage state, regional, and local volunteer activities while at the same time harmonizing those initiatives to avoid conflict and wasted effort.

The state divisions of the Women's Committee elected a slate of officers who, in turn, set up a number of specialized departments. It was recommended that the following departments be established by each state division: Registration, Food Production and Home Economics, Food Administration, Women in Industry, Child Welfare, Maintenance of Existing Social Service Agencies, Health and Recreation, Education, Liberty Loan, and Foreign Relief, along with Finance and Publicity committees. The state chairs of the Food Administration, Women in Industry, and Liberty Loan divisions were to be appointed with input from the National Women's Committee because those leaders were expected to coordinate directly with established committees at the national level.¹⁷⁷

The enlistment of volunteer women in support of the war extended to the city, village, and ward levels. Once state divisions of the Women's Committee were established, the next step was to appoint leaders at the local level, who in turn organized meetings of local women's organizations. Ward organization conferences followed, "the idea being to reach all women of every class and make the defense program comprehensible to them."¹⁷⁸ Mothers, and others, engaged in activities that ranged from going door-to-door to raise money for Liberty Bonds and Thrift campaigns, organizing parades and service flag pageants, planting war gardens, housing soldiers passing through, creating comfort kits, arranging military balls, banquets, band concerts, and theatre parties, training mothers how to conserve food as well as working to Americanize foreign-born women, looking for spies, and searching for and reporting on slackers, that is, those who evaded the draft or war work.¹⁷⁹ These activities were under way all over the country (see note 56), and, as will be shown, stories of these activities were pervasive in the press.

Snapshot: Wisconsin

By virtue of its demographics, the state of Wisconsin was an intense public opinion battleground throughout World War I. A significant proportion of its population was made up of foreign-born or first-generation German and Prussian immigrants, who still regarded Germany as *der Vaterland*, the wellspring of language, faith, and cultural traditions to which they remained intensely loyal.¹⁸⁰ In counterpoint to its pro-German population, Wisconsin also had legions of ardent supporters of the war and of the Allied Powers, so much so that the state compiled an exemplary war record in the eyes of officialdom.

Records of the Wisconsin Council of Defense in both Milwaukee and Madison offer detailed insights into the volunteer work of legions of the state's women. We offer three anecdotes from the archival records that offer a closer look at the war fervor that gripped the state. These tales provide additional context for what life was like for the women living in Wisconsin during WWI. While we focus on Wisconsin, it is important to remember that the efforts of the CPI and CND were nationwide, and as we will demonstrate below, the news coverage reflected similar efforts in the three regions we analyzed.

Local Council of Defense organizers mobilized a complex network of volunteer women's organizations to support food conservation. For instance, when a call was issued for Madison-area volunteers to work as food demonstrators in Dane County, forty women showed up. The organizer, Mrs. Alice Gerune, chair of the Committee of Volunteer Food Demonstrators, reported that a county extension agent explained the process to this "body of housekeepers" in a donated office on South Pinckney Street, complete with stoves and chairs, although the housewives were asked to bring their own utensils. Once trained, and in costumes provided by the U.S. Army to make them look "businesslike," the volunteers blanketed the city of Madison and Dane County, offering presentations to thousands of other women on baking bread with wheat substitutes, preparing meatless dishes, and canning. The demonstrators appeared at fairs, churches, PTA meetings, and Ladies Aid groups, in private homes, and the like.¹⁸¹

Meanwhile, Mrs. L. M. Hobbins was asked to work on the task of putting the needs of the administration's food conservation program before the public "in such a way that it makes an impression on the buyer and consumer." Mrs. Hobbins said the idea of store window displays came to mind. Armed with no more than statistics and lists of food substitutes, and in need of a committee of her own, later named the Window Display Committee, Mrs. Hobbins said that she chose Mrs. Eugene Byrne to help her organize because she was "a woman of good ideas and absolutely dependable as a worker." Together they enlisted volunteer home economists and designers from the University of Wisconsin's Home Economics Department and the School of Design, an architect, and members of the Madison Art League. With their help, the housewives oversaw the creation of storefront-sized dioramas and displays that traveled between grocery stores, drug stores, and furniture stores in the city of Madison and other stores in Dane County cities and towns. They published a booklet complete with photographs and lists of items needed to create the displays, for every county food chairman in Wisconsin. Then, according to Mrs. Hobbins, requests from other states for the booklet "came pouring in."¹⁸²

Equally enthusiastic in her war work was Mrs. Walter Ayers, chair of the Special Committee on the Food Pledge Card Campaign. Women who signed the cards agreed to support the war campaign to conserve food. Disappointed in the city of Madison's showing in the first pledge campaign, Mrs. Ayers decided on a full-court press to ensure the second was a success. Prior to the campaign, for instance, she wrote to area ministers and clergy asking each, "as a soldier of the Gospel, to urge every housewife in church on October 25 to sign a card when asked to do so." On the last day of the campaign, she and her committee arranged an "automobile parade that went through every street in Madison, and at every house where the Food Pledge Card was not seen in the window, an automobile stopped, and one of the women from the automobile went into the house and got the housewife to sign." She noted that there was "scarcely a house in Madison at the end of the campaign that did not display a food pledge card."¹⁸³

Perhaps as a consequence of these kinds of tactics, Wisconsin gained, in official circles, a sterling reputation for patriotic zeal. The "automobile parade" demonstrated the use of a carrot and stick strategy to encourage participation in the war effort, particularly the Liberty Loan drives, in which women were heavily involved. The public responded favorably, in Wisconsin as elsewhere in the nation; the state was oversubscribed for the first Liberty Loan sale (meaning that demand for the bonds was greater than the supply). The second, third, and fourth bond campaigns were increasingly sophisticated, with posters, full-page and double-page newspaper advertisements, movies, parades, brass bands, and patriotic sing-alongs to encourage the masses to buy bonds. There was even an exhibition train, loaded with war trophies and other exhibits, that toured Wisconsin and other states, accompanied by a squad of uniformed military guards.¹⁸⁴

This campaign, like the previously mentioned auto parade in the food conservation campaign, was accompanied by some overt arm-twisting of recalcitrant participants where necessary. Bond quotas were set by local committees on the basis of an individual's perceived ability to pay. Those who met their quota had their names

posted on a public honor role. Those who refused to buy a fair share of bonds sometimes had their names posted on an equally public “slacker board.” In Monroe, Wisconsin, for example, the board was decorated with a German dummy and posted next to it were the names of those who refused to buy bonds. The pressure did not stop there. Employers threatened to fire workers who did not respond positively to bond drives. Coworkers might douse them with yellow paint. A farmer who refused to buy his quota of bonds received an official-looking summons, bearing the name of the Treasury Department and ordering him to subscribe in full or show cause “for delinquency and obstruction to war finance.” The document had no legal standing but was no doubt persuasive to the uninitiated.¹⁸⁵

Similarly, an Outagamie County, Wisconsin, man swore in an affidavit that he was confronted at his kitchen door at 12:30 in the morning by a crowd demanding that he sign up for \$500 worth of liberty bonds. When he declined, they allegedly threw a rope around his neck and jerked on it. Still he refused, at which time they apparently gave up. A Wisconsin farmer plowing his field in Milwaukee County was confronted by a crowd, which included two deputy sheriffs, demanding that he buy his quota of bonds lest his property be posted with a placard stating that “the occupant of these premises has refused to take his just share of Liberty Bonds.”¹⁸⁶ These examples reflect the extent to which citizens, including mothers, were pressured into supporting the war effort.

While some of these stories evidence strong-arming by the men in the state, most of the state’s women, as depicted in the archival records, depended on good will, and that did not always work. A woman charged with collecting signatures in the Dane County town of Berry reported she was discouraged because women there refused to sign food pledge cards and she was worried “nearly sick” over it. She noted that it was “absolutely impossible to do a thing in Berry that pertains in any way to the war,” adding that the bitterness had gotten worse since the draft was instituted. Another volunteer experienced similar problems with the German American population in Dane, Wisconsin. She noted that when selecting people to make war-related speeches, organizers should take care to find speakers who could show some sympathy for the German Americans there who did not trust the Red Cross.¹⁸⁷

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the national government’s wartime propaganda and mobilization machinery was well oiled and far-reaching to the most local levels. Archival evidence indicates that while the Council of Defense effort was not 100 percent successful, by and large most of the public participated in the war effort. News reports suggested similar mobilizations patterns occurred elsewhere. The North Dakota Council of Defense, for instance, declared idleness a crime in that state and called for “every male between the ages of 15 and 54 [to] do at least 54 hours of work each week.”¹⁸⁸ Overlaid on top of all this was the work of the CPI. Archival evidence shows that CPI propaganda, including posters, pamphlets, and weekly news bulletins from CPI headquarters, regularly blanketed the communities and the press. Archival evidence also shows that the press was closely aligned with the efforts of the CPI and CND. For example, members of the press sat on the Board of Milwaukee County Council of Defense,¹⁸⁹ and the *Milwaukee Sentinel* offered space to the Milwaukee County Council of Defense for “a number of articles on the various phases of Milwaukee’s war problems.” The Milwaukee County Council of Defense, in turn, asked its members to generate articles to appear in the paper.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, the *Oakland Tribune* suggested that it was receptive to news generated by the state’s Council of Defense when it printed an article written by Ethel Moore, a member of the Woman’s Committee, describing the work of that Council of Defense.¹⁹¹ Against this backdrop of the Wilson administration’s campaign to mobilize Americans for war and generate patriotic fervor, we turn to the discussion of how the press portrayed mothers of U.S. soldiers in its wartime narrative. The results of our analysis follow.

Newspaper Coverage of Mothers of Combat Soldiers

Our analysis shows that the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother, with roots in Spartan and republican motherhood, served as a role model for mothers of soldiers in the WWI press ([Figure 3](#)). She was one of three archetypes appearing in the WWI news narrative. The other two were the Good Mother, the wartime mother who, like the peacetime Good Mother, tried to protect her son, and the Patriotic Father. The Patriotic Father, also known as Uncle Sam, was created through the CPI and the press. For the purpose of this monograph, we define Uncle Sam as the final authority on the nation's war effort with the ability to reward and punish citizens for their war-related activities. His decisions were manifest in laws, such as the Alien and Sedition Acts, the draft, and domestic wartime policies (e.g., food and fuel conservation). The rules defined the work of the military, the CPI, the CND, the Councils of Defense at the state and local levels, and civic organizations, that is, anyone and any entity that helped the government execute the war. The Uncle Sam figure in this myth served to reinforce the culture's existing patriarchal authority and power structures.



Figure 3. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. From a poster created by the well-known American artist Charles Dana Gibson, a “patriotic” mother shakes hands with Uncle Sam and delivers her son to the U.S. Navy.

The mythic tale in which the Patriotic Mother appeared, as told in the wartime press, can be summarized as follows: With the nation at war, Uncle Sam needed all citizens, including the Good Mother who had draft-age sons, to participate in the war effort. Knowing that she may try to preserve her son's life, he pressed her to embrace the values and behaviors of the archetypal Patriotic Mother, who was willing to sacrifice sons in the conflict. Shifting mothers' attention away from peacetime motherhood and toward patriotic motherhood was done in two ways. First, with the help of the press, Uncle Sam created a threat to the peacetime mother and her country that she would perceive as greater than the one that the war posed to her son. Second, Uncle Sam used rewards and punishments to encourage her to publicly embrace the nation's cause. He accomplished his goal with the help of carefully crafted propaganda composed by the CPI and mobilization machinery of the CND. Throughout the nineteen months of the war, the Patriotic Mother continued to do her maternal work on the home front and performed wartime tasks assigned to her. In turn, Uncle Sam assumed responsibility for much of the care she normally did for her son as well as care for her if she needed it. When she complained, the Law of the Father prevailed.

We begin this section by describing the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother as it appeared in the World War I news narrative. We then deconstruct the mythic account that appeared in the press to explain how the government, the press, and the larger culture drew on the nation's wartime apparatus to situate mothers into their wartime role. As will be shown, mothers themselves were part of this apparatus. In addition, we detail how the government actively worked to prevent mothers of soldiers from embracing the model of the wartime Good Mother as outlined in Homer's poem, the *Iliad*, and represented by the goddess Thetis, mother of Achilles. We will also show that occasionally, and perhaps unintentionally, the press coverage afforded glimpses into the interiority of mothers' hearts, wherein resided the searing pain and brutal grief that was associated, as Thetis well knew, with the injury or loss of a child. The evidence for this mythic narrative as created in the press, and to which we now turn, also suggests that mothers of soldiers had little choice in assuming the wartime role that the government and the culture insisted they play. The news stories and events described below are not presented sequentially; rather, they are related to the recurring themes that appeared in the news accounts that, when taken together over the nineteen-month war, create the myth of the ideal Patriotic Mother of World War I.

The Image of the Archetypal Patriotic Mother: Overview

The press accounts revealed that the wartime archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother of soldiers had its roots in the Spartan motherhood of Greece and republican motherhood of the United States. The attributes of the ideal Patriotic Mother of soldiers appearing in World War I news stories included loyalty, a willingness to sacrifice her son and herself, an intolerance of slackers, limited emotions, and an interest in learning more about her new role.

The Patriotic Mother raised her children to do patriotic work, instilling virtues of obedience and self-control,¹⁹² and took credit for her efforts. One mother said, "[I]f it were not for me these three clear-eyed boys with their straight backs, their flushed, damp faces and their passionate young idealism would not exist. Because of me, there are three soldiers serving the colors."¹⁹³ Press accounts noted that just as Greek mothers told their sons to "come home with their shield or on it,"¹⁹⁴ American mothers were told to "be like a Spartan mother"¹⁹⁵ as they sent their sons to war. One journalist noted, "Patriotism begins in the home, at the mother's knee."¹⁹⁶ According to another account, the republic of Rome did not know of "nobler mothers"¹⁹⁷ than those of the United States.

The first loyalty of the Patriotic Mother was to help safeguard freedom and democracy; she considered herself a warrior in the process. Hardships were expected, but the patriotic mothers responded by consecrating themselves "with increasing devotion to the sacred cause" for which their children died or suffered injury.¹⁹⁸ A mother in one story noted that the Red Cross served as her training camp, her work there her military duty. She added that it gave her a chance to be a soldier like her sons, adding that the work made "motherhood go deeper."¹⁹⁹ The Patriotic Mother also expected to share credit for winning the war. One son wrote to his mother that regardless of what happened to him, she should "glory in your large share of whatever credit the world may give me."²⁰⁰ In these accounts, World War I mothers of soldiers put the nation's interests before their own. They viewed themselves as one with their soldier children and, in doing so, solidified their participation in the war of the nation state.

The WWI Patriotic Mother was willing to sacrifice both herself and her sons to the cause. Said one mother, "I would enlist myself if they would take me and fight hard to kill the Kaiser or catch him alive."²⁰¹ While she could not enter into combat, the ideal Patriotic Mother, as she appeared in the press, offered her sons for the fight to rid the world of the "Hun menace." If the Patriotic Mother had one regret, it was that she could not sacrifice more sons for the war. Said one Madison, Wisconsin, mother, "Would that I had ten that I could give them all,"²⁰² while another claimed that she wished she had "a hundred sons to give to the cause of

democracy.”²⁰³ Patriotic mothers also reportedly competed with one another in terms of sending sons into combat. For example, the mother of an only son envied another mother “whose only son would be at the front sooner than [her own].”²⁰⁴ One woman reportedly told the press “that she wished her eight daughters could go over and fight.”²⁰⁵ Of their sacrifices, a mother observed, “True love sacrifices and does not count the cost.”²⁰⁶

The Patriotic Mother wanted others to know that she was willing to give more than children to the cause. She gave her time when she engaged in the nation’s war work, and she was also willing to sacrifice financially. Some mothers refused to accept life insurance money from the government. Others used the insurance checks to pay for war bonds, liberty bonds, or thrift stamps.²⁰⁷ The additional sacrifices reinforced their positions as patriotic mothers, the highest status they could achieve in the wartime culture.

The Patriotic Mother of WWI had no tolerance for slackers, that is, young men who avoided military service. Reflecting the attributes of Spartan mothers before her, one mother said that she “would be happier to have my son dead in France, sleeping in a soldier’s grave beyond the sea, than to have him alive and safe, shirking his duty in a bullet-proof job at home.”²⁰⁸ Another said she would rather see her “two sons dead with the honor scars of battle than to see them safe and secure, whole and healthy,—slackers.”²⁰⁹ Furthermore, the Patriotic Mother was not a slacker herself. Upon learning that her son was reported missing in action, one mother observed, “We encouraged him to enlist. Somebody has to go to war and somebody has to be killed and captured. We aren’t shirking our duty.”²¹⁰ Other mothers actively discouraged slacker behavior. One refused to harbor her son after he deserted camp,²¹¹ another reported that she would never speak to her son if he did not enlist,²¹² while still another told the draft board to deny her son’s claim of exemption because she could manage without her son’s support.²¹³ Slacker sons also exacted a toll on the Patriotic Mother in these stories. One report said that a mother was beaten by her son after she turned him into the authorities for failing to register,²¹⁴ and still other patriotic mothers got physically ill because their sons were slackers.²¹⁵ By refusing to harbor slackers, including her own sons, the Patriotic Mother demonstrated that she embraced the values and behaviors expected by the wartime culture to which she was accountable.

The Patriotic Mother of WWI limited the emotions she expressed in public to cheerfulness and pride. Her cheerfulness required that she be stoic and silent about her apprehension or sadness; she neither cried nor mourned in public. One press account quoted a mother who encouraged other mothers to “send our boys with cheers and as few tears as possible. When one of our boys stands on lonely guard duty at night, thinking of home, let us be glad to have him say, as he remembers how mother cheered his going: ‘Gosh! Wasn’t mother a great old sport? Didn’t she buck up fine?’”²¹⁶

If the Patriotic Mother of WWI suffered pain and apprehension when facing the prospect of a child’s death, she did not express it. Rather, the press depicted patriotic mothers as having Spartan-like responses. For instance, upon learning her son was missing in action, one mother told a reporter, “If this is my sacrifice for a victory, I am perfectly satisfied.”²¹⁷ Another mother of six sons fighting in France and one about to set sail said she felt like she had done her part. She said worrying did not help and asked rhetorically, “Why talk about it?”²¹⁸

Furthermore, the Patriotic Mother of WWI viewed the death or injury of a child as “honorable”²¹⁹ and a cause for pride. One mother told the press that she was proud of her severely wounded son, adding, “I only hope that he recovers and can go back with his comrades.”²²⁰ Another expressed similar pride when she said, “I am proud to be the mother of a boy who died for our flag.”²²¹ The Patriotic Mother who faced her son’s death refrained from crying or mourning in public. The mother of the first soldier to die in France said, “let us wear no mourning.”²²² The phrase “no weeps” was described in another news account as a “feminine expression of patriotism.”²²³ Former President Roosevelt observed that it was the Patriotic Mother’s “place to bear [her] burdens cheerfully . . . to make it easy for the boys over there.”²²⁴ The ideal Patriotic Mother of WWI understood that a sacrifice counted only if it was a “cheerful sacrifice.”²²⁵

Finally, the Patriotic Mother of WWI sought out and shared information on culturally appropriate wartime maternal behavior. For instance, one story reported that women needed more war-related information because “they send their sons and husbands but they don’t know why.” The chairwoman of the Women’s Committee of the CND said the government should release more information about the war to “arouse the women of the nation to the highest pitch.”²²⁶ The press recommended books that patriotic mothers should read, including *Whistling Mother*, *Altar of Freedom*, *The Glory of the Trenches*, *First Call Over the Top*, and *My Boy in Khaki: A Mother’s Story*.²²⁷ The *Oakland Tribune* also recommended the book *Letters to the Mother of a Soldier*, written by the editor of the magazine *Home and Garden*,²²⁸ and papers regularly featured patriotic poems written for and about mothers of soldiers.

In summary, the archetypal Patriotic Mother of WWI in the news narrative, like the Spartan Mother, viewed her ultimate duty as loyalty to the country. By assuming the behavior and attitudes consistent with this image, the patriotic mothers in effect agreed to put their sons into harm’s way. Unlike the Good Mother of wartime who appeared in Homer’s epic, the Patriotic Mother in these stories did not reveal the emotions that one might reasonably expect of a mother who faced the prospect of losing a child and having the efforts of her maternal work destroyed. In this press narrative, she showed, instead, cheerfulness and pride in her sacrifice mirroring Ruddick’s observation that a mother draws on cheerfulness as a way of protecting children during times of crisis; furthermore, her public cheer offered hope to the culture during moments of despair.

According to Jung and others, we call on archetypal images when we face a problem that needs resolution. The archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother was inserted by the government, press, soldiers, and other mothers themselves into the national consciousness as a means of solving a problem: the need to align mothers uniformly behind the war effort. The Good Mother would not have served the nation well during wartime. The archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother, on the other hand, worked as a force of conformity for the mothers of soldiers while also offering a source of comfort for the country, as well as her soldier sons.

How the Archetypal Image of the Patriotic Mother Came into Being

Prior to the war, as noted earlier, women had been drawing on their social power to gain political power and the vote. The combination of suffragism, pacifism, maternalism, and isolationism, in play before 1917, served as a threat to those who intended to go to war. To ward off that threat, the government engaged in a propaganda effort that would, in part, seamlessly transition mothers from their protective peacetime role into their wartime role as patriotic mothers, willing to sacrifice children for the nation’s good.

As a practical matter, the government could have chosen not to address these women as mothers and pointed out, instead, that young men of draft age were among the nation’s adults and responsible for their own obligations. Rather, the government treated mothers of soldiers as a force to be reckoned with,²²⁹ and created the image of patriotic motherhood in the public’s consciousness where the image of good motherhood might have otherwise prevailed. The ideology of patriotic motherhood, as crafted in World War I, was expected to resonate with mothers because it drew on their historical tradition of organizing for work in the public sphere and on the maternal work that they had always done in the home. As will be shown, the World War I press helped shape the news narrative about mothers of soldiers in a way that reflected familiar gender roles in a patriarchy.

Motivating mother

To discourage the emergence of good mothers who would try to protect their children, the government used the propaganda and mobilization efforts of the CPI and the CND to motivate mothers to support the war and give their sons over to the nation. To accomplish this, the government generated a threat that mothers would perceive as more severe than that posed by sending their children into a serious, life-threatening situation. The CPI worked to create the “outraged public” desired by Wilson, by drawing on the perception of Germans as

barbarians who ultimately intended to invade the United States. The press wrote of German wartime atrocities, warning, "A mad beast ravages the Earth, [it] would befoul all motherhood, would make all men mere brutes and human happiness the hopeless plaything of greed and power; a beast that says to mothers: 'Your sons are but fodder for my guns!' to sons: 'Your mothers are but brood sows for my power!'"²³⁰ Such rhetoric was reinforced by stories that promised an assurance of victory if all mothers gave not only their sons but also their hearts to the nation. In these accounts, mothers of combat soldiers who joined the cause were fighting for freedom, the defense of humanity and righteousness, to avoid the fate of Belgian mothers and citizens and to kill the Kaiser.²³¹ The *Wisconsin State Journal* let a retired farmer say it all when it quoted him as asking, "Do you want your wives, daughters and mothers treated the same as were the French and Belgium women?"²³² This threat, as suggested, was larger in scope than the loss of a son in combat; it included the rape and murder of women.

In addition to creating a threat to mothers, the government also highlighted the contribution of mothers to winning the war. Franklin D. Roosevelt, assistant secretary of the Navy, for example, said, "It is the mothers of the men of the army and navy who are going to win the war on the soil of Europe, who are giving the greatest contribution to the war."²³³ Similarly, Major General John J. O'Ryan said that he believed "that the fullest measure of sacrifice in war is made by the mothers."²³⁴

At the same time, the concepts of mother and motherhood appeared in news stories as justification for the nation's wartime policies and practices. Mothers of soldiers were cited in arguments related to draft legislation, including the Espionage Bill and the rejection of the German peace proposals in 1918.²³⁵ They were cited as reasons to buy liberty bonds, to launch ships, to demand loyalty from laborers and unions doing war work, and to condemn war profiteering by companies providing goods and services to the war machine.²³⁶ Similarly, mothers were in the "hearts" of soldiers as they marched into France,²³⁷ and were the last thought on a soldier's mind before death.²³⁸

To help ensure participation in the war effort, the government promised mothers of soldiers that they and their sons would be taken care of during the war. The government, through the military, assumed responsibility for a limited amount of the care mothers normally provided for their sons. The military's care of the sons was primarily utilitarian and was not directly conveyed to the readers and mothers in news stories; rather, mothers were given hints of the care soldiers received. Regarding physical care, for instance, the military's view that physical fitness was important to a soldier's well-being was publicized in stories that included statements such as, "In Army athletics every mother's son plays."²³⁹ Such statements served to assure mothers that their sons were being well cared for and were having a bit of fun. The government demonstrated care for emotional needs of soldiers when it promoted letter-writing campaigns described in the press. The military encouraged soldiers, for instance, to write letters home through such slogans as, "Mother is thinking of you; write to her often."²⁴⁰ Even the social status of soldier's received some attention from the government. The Women's Committee of the CND aided in hero-building efforts for the nation's sons by creating an "honor roll of heroes" who had died in the war.²⁴¹ It is interesting that most information about the soldier's physical, emotional, and social care by the government came in the government's response to concerns raised by mothers of soldiers. These will be discussed later.

The government also set up financial and relief systems to support dependents of soldiers and alleviate soldiers' worries about those left behind. Exemption boards, according to news accounts, were "besieged by wives, mothers and other grades of dependents tearfully proclaiming that if their men are sent to the front they will succumb to starvation or be sent to the poor house."²⁴² Congress passed a War Risk Insurance bill that provided support of dependents, including widowed mothers,²⁴³ so that soldiers would stop using dependents as an excuse for exemption. The care of widowed mothers, wives, and children did not always come directly from the government or military. Next-of-kin groups aligned with the Army or Navy were formed to aid in this task. Even

the Red Cross set up a Home Service section to “render aid and comfort to the families”²⁴⁴ by providing necessary medical care as well as legal, mortgage, and insurance guidance to families.²⁴⁵

In summary, the government crafted propaganda and mobilization mechanisms that served to motivate the soldier’s mother by promoting the threat of the Hun on the U.S. doorstep and stressing the need for her involvement in defense, including sending her son into combat. If left unchecked, the press accounts suggested, the Germans posed the same threat to American mothers as they posed to their soldier sons. When read this way, supporting the war effort might seem like the only sensible thing for mothers to do. At the same time, the government said it would financially care for dependent mothers while their sons were away and assured them that their sons would be taken care of as well. History indicates that the ideologies of domesticity and scientific motherhood had already established the idea that mothers were no longer the experts nor the final authority in maternal work. So the government was able to step in without it appearing unnatural. Meanwhile, the CND acted to organize citizenry for defense work. Mothers were accustomed to working in groups, but in this instance they did not use their social power for political gain; instead, the government pushed them to redirect their energies to support the war.

Mothers pick up the gauntlet

From the beginning of the war, the press reported on efforts of women, including mothers, who were organizing on behalf of the nation at war. The Women’s Branch of the CND oversaw women’s war work at the federal, state, and local levels. During the war, the women’s organizations offered sites where caring work, ordinarily done by individual mothers, was extended to all of the nation’s soldiers. The range of groups was breathtaking. Some were directly connected to the state and local Councils of Defense. Many were more independent but still connected their work to the overall war effort. Some were auxiliaries, related to individual infantry units and often headed by mothers of soldiers in those units.²⁴⁶ Groups such as the Catholic Soldier’s Welfare Association, women’s clubs, and parent–teacher organizations served multiple functions, such as supporting mothers and their morale, easing mothers into their new roles as Patriotic Mother, coordinating war work duties, and “strengthening patriotism and creating bonds of sympathy.”²⁴⁷

One notable mother’s group was the War Mothers of America, a national organization with state and local chapters.²⁴⁸ It was identified as a “patriotic society,” and its membership was limited to mothers and wives of soldiers and sailors and its goal was to provide support to soldiers’ families and to gain a national presence for itself.²⁴⁹ The society publicly declared the importance of working in groups to defeat Germany by stating, “No doubt the Kaiser wishes the War Mothers of America would give up their idea of organizing and uniting their war efforts. . . . [But] the War Mothers of America have learned that no great work can be done without organization.”²⁵⁰

In sum, women from the Women’s Committee of the CND, the Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Federation of Mother’s Clubs, and so on all stressed the need for women, especially mothers of soldiers, to be “self-mobilized, self-conscripted” and patriotic.²⁵¹ As will be shown, mothers, as individuals or in groups, worked to meet the physical and emotional needs of all sons when possible. They also engaged in hero building, that is, creating images of their sons as good children and citizens. When they were not doing maternal work, they were working directly to support the nation’s war machine.

Mothers Engage in Wartime Maternal Work

Physical care: “At least 7,000 pair.”

The press regularly reported on the maternal work the patriotic mothers did to support the physical needs of soldiers. The Wool Committee of the 305th Infantry, for example, reportedly knitted socks, “at least 7,000 pair” per month for the Red Cross for distribution.²⁵² Knitting socks and sweaters was a common activity for these

groups,²⁵³ as was sharing with the press letters from sons who wrote home about the Red Cross sweaters they wore.²⁵⁴ Some groups, such as the “Mending Mothers,” visited training camps to mend and repair army clothing.²⁵⁵ The Militia of Mercy hosted a tea where “mothers of the boys in naval service” spent “several hours of work on garments [and] the rest of the afternoon” discussing their sons.²⁵⁶

Patriotic mothers also collected sweets for soldiers and raised funds to give the boys “some of the comforts not otherwise obtainable, while in camp and at the front.”²⁵⁷ They started canteens, which provided games, showers, and “home-made pies and cakes, just ‘the kind mother baked.’”²⁵⁸ The press singled out some mothers for their superior maternal efforts, their maternal work making each of them a “warrior” for the cause.²⁵⁹

The Patriotic Mother also tended to wounded soldiers. The Red Cross, officially identified as the “Greatest Mother in the World,”²⁶⁰ assured them at home that their wounded sons overseas were well cared for.²⁶¹ While most Red Cross nurses were single women, some mothers also joined the Red Cross as nurses tending to the physical needs of wounded soldiers in Italy, France, and elsewhere.²⁶² The care of the physical needs of soldiers by patriotic mothers did not end with the tending of live bodies; it extended to care of the dead and their graves from a distance, as mothers sent American flags to France for their sons’ graves.²⁶³

Sometimes mothers tried to preserve the lives of their sons who had engaged in wrong doing. For example, the Federation of Mother’s Clubs of San Francisco sent a telegram to President Wilson, asking him to show leniency to four privates who were condemned to death by General Pershing for sleeping on sentry duty. While acknowledging the seriousness of the breach, they asked Wilson for “clemency to those so accused,” stating, “the mothers of America will applaud your leniency.”²⁶⁴

Clearly the maternal work mothers could do, in terms of physical care of their soldier sons, was quite limited. While they couldn’t keep their sons alive, they could keep them warm with knitwear, feed them when possible with cookies and candies, and make them as physically comfortable as was likely from a distance. The news accounts made it clear that mothers spent countless hours trying to meet this need. In addition to physical care, patriotic mothers also worried about their sons’ emotional well-being.

Emotional care: Putting a “motherly” arm around him

Maternal work included caring for the soldier emotionally and intellectually whether he was still on American soil or in Europe. This area of maternal work received the most attention from patriotic mothers as the morale of both soldiers and their mothers was of the upmost concern. One way the Patriotic Mother worked to ensure good morale of both soldiers and mothers was through the establishment of the home hospitality movement that connected stateside soldiers to homes around them, effectively giving soldiers “an echo of home life” and mothers an opportunity to “treat the soldiers as they hope other people are treating their own sons or nephews.”²⁶⁵ Others set up camps, canteens, or hostess houses as places soldiers could come for a bit of mothering should they need it.²⁶⁶ A woman working in the houses and canteens was called “mother” even if she looked “more like a kid sister than a matron.”²⁶⁷

Patriotic mothers helped soldiers write letters to their own mothers,²⁶⁸ urged them to write home,²⁶⁹ hosted parties, and worked to entertain other mothers’ sons.²⁷⁰ As recounted in a soldier’s letter, one such mother “devoted all her time to singing to the soldier boys in the United States. She travels all over the entire country singing at Army YMCA. . . . She showed us a picture of her boy, ‘Bill’ who is over in France.”²⁷¹

Patriotic mothers made Christmas presents,²⁷² secured information about soldiers’ locations so mothers could write,²⁷³ helped the wounded soldier “regain control of the bawl” by putting a “motherly” arm around him,²⁷⁴ and did their best to tend to the soldiers’ “need of companionship and enjoyment.”²⁷⁵ Patriotic mothers also ensured intellectual support by working with libraries to gather books that could be donated to the soldiers who desired them.²⁷⁶

To further boost morale, many others “mothered” soldiers who did not have one at home. Madison mothers, for example, identified “motherless boys” in the service that they could “adopt” for the war. The *Wisconsin State Journal* reported, “The ‘mothers’ have pledged to send them good, wholesome motherly letters weekly, to remember them with tokens on special days, to send them a box of sweet meats or cookies of some sort occasionally and to furnish them with such knitted articles as they can afford.”²⁷⁷ Other mothers formed “the Mothers’ Correspondence Club,” and each pledged to write their orphaned soldier regularly and to invite him to stay “at her home as her ‘son.’”²⁷⁸ The War Mothers League of America, not to be confused with the War Mothers of America, was established to meet just this purpose,²⁷⁹ so the “boy no longer feels that he is giving up his life for a country in which no one cares for him.”²⁸⁰

In sum, supporting their sons emotionally meant worrying about their morale. By creating the meeting places near training camps across the country and providing gift packages, mothers worked to ensure that their sons’ spirits were kept as high as possible. To put less stress on their sons, mothers put on the face of cheerfulness in their letters and visits. In worrying about their sons’ emotional care, these mothers were doing what Thetis did when she went to her son twice during the Trojan War to ask him what was wrong. The WWI mothers were not able to directly comfort their own sons on the battlefield, but they did what they could. At the same time, the emotional care offered by WWI mothers had patriotic limits. By holding their emotions in check, they were enacting the requirements of the archetypal Patriotic Mother.

Hero building: He chased “a bunch of Huns five miles.”

Patriotic mothers and the press worked together in the hero-building process, touting the strengths, good works, and heroic deeds of mothers’ sons. The press served as the primary voice of the hero building of soldiers, often reporting what mothers heard through letters or telegrams. There were news stories in which mothers spoke directly about their sons, and these were primarily next-of-kin stories in which mothers were listed as having been notified about a son’s injury or death. In these few stories, it was clear that mothers took the opportunity to promote their sons as good citizens and heroes. Mothers reportedly described their sons as giving “every ounce” to defeat the enemy,²⁸¹ or as having chased “a bunch of Huns five miles,”²⁸² or as having been wounded “twenty times.”²⁸³

The press also announced when mothers’ sons received honors,²⁸⁴ or commissions,²⁸⁵ when their sons shot down the enemy,²⁸⁶ or their sons escaped from death and received subsequent recognition for conduct under fire.²⁸⁷ A champion bowler, wounded in war, was recognized by the press,²⁸⁸ as was a son who saved a man who fell out of a lifeboat after the sinking of the *Tuscania*.²⁸⁹ A Texan who received the French War Cross for bravery was praised,²⁹⁰ as was a son who died while saving the horses of his artillery so his battalion could advance.²⁹¹ Sometimes, the press promoted the idea of heroism through stories about life on army bases and ships. Mess cooks, for example, were described as peeling potatoes and “gouging the eyes out of them with a vengeance,” in a manner that would make mother proud.²⁹² The implication was that mothers’ sons were taking a warrior-like approach to the most menial of tasks.

On the few occasions when sons were accused of improper behavior, mothers reportedly spoke up on their sons’ behalf. For instance, when a soldier was accused of kidnapping four men, his mother tried to explain his behavior by saying that he had been working under stress and may have had a breakdown.²⁹³ Another mother was described as having written a letter to the court when her son was charged with possessing deadly poisons. Her letter was said to have “impressed the court,” and her son was exonerated.²⁹⁴ In these cases, mothers were depicted as working to convince the larger society that their sons were socially acceptable and decent human beings.

In sum, by hero building, the mothers in this wartime narrative could be seen as working to convince the broader society that their sons were good soldiers and citizens and that they were good mothers who had raised

their children well. Like the Good Mother of peacetime, who is aware of public scrutiny regarding her ability to successfully raise children who fit within the community, the Patriotic Mother needed to meet the requirements of the Spartan Mother. By promoting her son as a good soldier, a citizen of whom a warrior mother could be proud, and one the nation would be willing to claim as its own, the Patriotic Mother was establishing her cultural worth not only as mother but also as citizen. In addition, she strengthened her position as citizen by taking on more specific war-related tasks assigned by Uncle Sam, thus actively supporting the war effort.

Mothers Support the War Machine

As noted earlier, archival evidence indicates the government pressed citizens to focus on meeting the nation's war needs, whether efforts involved conserving fuel, organizing neighborhood canvasses, overseeing victory gardens, or turning slackers in to the authorities. Everyone was expected to support the war effort or explain why he or she could not and the press reflected this norm. There were at least four Liberty Bond drives during the course of the war. The press reported that the Women's Liberty Loan committee of Madison, for example, worked through churches to ensure the success of the third loan, arguing that women could be heroines by buying bonds within thirty days, and that not doing so would help the enemy.²⁹⁵ Liberty bond fund-raising also involved the airing of such films as *Mothers of Liberty*,²⁹⁶ and the use of mothers' images on Liberty Bond placards.²⁹⁷ Mothers who wanted to give money directly to their sons were told, "Don't send him money! He'll get along! Buy Liberty bonds and leave the rest up to Uncle Sam!"²⁹⁸

Patriotic mothers worked with the State Councils of Defense to raise money for stamps and printing and "other prosaic needs of propaganda."²⁹⁹ They raised money for the Salvation Army war work fund,³⁰⁰ the Red Cross,³⁰¹ and "a community hall where at least 10,000 of the [Camp Upton] division could assemble."³⁰² Promoting the idea that mothers were warriors too, the press reported that "the mothers have tin coffee pots, symbolic of the work the Salvation Army is doing on the battlefield."³⁰³

Patriotic mothers also inspected gas masks,³⁰⁴ and learned to do x-rays, bacteriology, and wireless telegraphy as part of their "Patriotic offering[s]."³⁰⁵ One area that garnered a lot of their attention was Herbert Hoover's food conservation campaign.³⁰⁶ The *Wisconsin State Journal* observed that mothers not only gave their sons for the war but also sent help, cheer, and conserved food.³⁰⁷ The National and State Councils of Defense ensured mothers were well schooled in food conservations methods "[f]or the end of the war lies within the hand of women and her kingdom of the kitchen."³⁰⁸ The *Oakland Tribune* noted that "[t]here is no sacrifice which a woman would not make for her son," and this included taking and enacting the Food Pledge to save wheat, meat fats, and transportation fuel, to accept the gospel of the "clean plate," and to increase her use of corn, buckwheat, rice, rye, and all vegetables.³⁰⁹ The latter were presumably grown in her Victory Garden. Patriotic mothers also aided in the grim tasks of collecting their sons' fingerprints so they could be identified if they did not return.³¹⁰ Whether it was turning in slackers, including their own sons, or just doing their part to keep the "army fit to fight,"³¹¹ patriotic mothers expanded their war work beyond maternal care of all mothers' sons to assignments from the government.

In sum, by doing the additional work Uncle Sam demanded, mothers who supported the war effort made it clear that expectations of the Patriotic Mother included more than maternal work. She helped finance the machine that took her son, and she helped keep it going by creating war supplies and providing additional soldiers by turning in slackers. In so doing, the soldier's mother demonstrated her loyalty to the nation and democracy. She was also reinforcing the social structure and obeying the dictates of the existing power structure, namely, the U.S. government.

All of these efforts suggest mothers, whether intentionally or not, helped to co-construct the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother that appeared in the WWI press. The bulk of this news coverage focused on the work

mothers did in groups. The press also paid attention to the watchful eye of mothers. It is to that coverage that we turn next.

Mothers Keep a Watchful Eye

Ruddick argued that mothers keep a watchful eye on their children's environments to head off potential threats or dangers. While mothers, as individuals or in groups, cannot always keep their children from harm, they try to learn about their whereabouts and activities. This was true for mothers of soldiers during World War I. Patriotic mothers were depicted as relying on news accounts, the government, or other individuals for information about their sons.³¹² Some mothers reportedly searched draft lists trying to find long-lost sons, while others contacted the military to find out whether their sons would be drafted.³¹³ One mother identified her son, captured by Germans, when she spotted a newspaper picture of him facing his captors.³¹⁴ Another mother, fearing that her son was on the ship *Tuscania* that sank, reportedly sent a telegram to her congressman, "appealing to him for information."³¹⁵ Mothers were also depicted as waiting for sons to come home.³¹⁶

In an effort to learn more about the conditions in which their boys lived, a great many mothers traveled to training camps and naval stations to see their children in uniform for the first time and look over the facilities.³¹⁷ Mothers stayed in hostess houses near the camps that were run by organizations and volunteers or moved into temporary housing if their sons were ill.³¹⁸ Most had to count on visits home for news about their sons,³¹⁹ but one Massachusetts mother reportedly avoided the entire problem as her son was assigned to "a fort next door." According to the news story, his mother could now "sit at her parlor window and watch her son drill."³²⁰

One of the primary means that the wartime mothers had of keeping a watchful eye on their son's whereabouts was through letters and telegrams that they often shared with the press.³²¹ Most mothers were depicted as routinely writing to their sons and receiving letters in return. Even the government, in this news narrative, was aware of the importance of this process, as it encouraged soldiers to write to their mothers on the first national Mother's Day in May 1918.³²²

In summary, Ruddick reminds us that the watchful eye of mothers serves as a means of warding off harmful threats to their children. While mothers could do little in this regard, once their sons were in the military, the evidence shows that they were constantly scanning the environment for news about their sons. They shared with other mothers the physical and emotional details insofar as they knew them. This worked to create a sense of community with other mothers and served as a way of knowing or learning about the contexts in which their children were operating. Because they were monitoring the war and their sons' role in it, mothers were able to keep a vigilant eye on Uncle Sam and the work he was doing. When they deemed his efforts to be substandard, they complained. We turn to those complaints next.

Calling Out Uncle Sam

Complaints by mothers were a manifestation of the watchful eye. Mothers expressed three major complaints during the war. They reportedly worried about the physical care their sons received and the morale and morals of their sons. All three reflected the maternal care mothers had provided to their children and mothers wanted assurance that their efforts were not being undermined while their boys were in service. As will be shown, the government and the press worked to tamp down these concerns.

Physical care: The soldiers are being taken care of

The concern regarding physical care started at a very basic level—mothers wondered whether their sons were being "properly safeguarded by land and sea."³²³ As one mother wrote to the *Oakland Tribune*, "WE [sic] mothers are willing to give our sons to our country, but we are not willing that they should be offered up, useless sacrifices, on the altars of inefficiency."³²⁴ Many mothers worried about more specific issues, such as

whether or not a son had regained his strength after a bout of typhoid fever,³²⁵ whether badly cooked food was being served, whether soldiers had a sufficient supply of winter clothing or warm blankets, and whether the government was going to investigate the treatment of American prisoners in German prison camps.³²⁶ Mothers were also concerned about the treatment of their sons at stateside camps and hospitals run by their own government.

Camp and hospital conditions stateside were reportedly bad enough that one writer, commenting on an earlier news story, wrote that “[t]housands of fathers and mothers who read the account cannot help but feel resentment toward our Government for permitting such conditions to exist.”³²⁷ One mother, with two sons serving, called for “a superior war council [to be] appointed to manage the affairs of this war,”³²⁸ and another wanted to know why senators with “knowledge of the neglect in one or more of the camps” did not cut the “red tape, acquaint Secretary Baker with the facts, first hand, and give him an opportunity to correct, punish, and make right these conditions, publicly enumerated, and thus so comforting to our enemies.”³²⁹ In each case, mothers publicly called out the government for how their sons were being treated. They did not stop there. Some went to check out the camps for themselves.

Some mothers said they were impressed with the camps. One mother, for example, took it upon herself to write about the camps she visited, and she also reported back to Secretary Baker on the conditions. About a camp where a young man had died, she was quoted in the press as saying she felt the “deepest grief and sympathy with the parents” but that the soldiers had the best of care.³³⁰ She also reassured mothers who were anxious about conditions at military hospitals. She said that, while there was a serious shortage of nurses, “ninety-nine out of a hundred boys are receiving better care than they could afford at home.”³³¹ These actions suggest two things: First, mothers were keeping a watchful eye by investigating camp and hospital conditions themselves. Second, by praising the conditions of the camps and reporting these conditions back to other mothers, they were effectively supporting Uncle Sam while working to calm other mothers. How did Uncle Sam respond to the mothers’ complaints?

The chairman of the Committee of Medicine and Surgery of the CND implicitly acknowledged the mothers’ watchful eye when he told them they could learn about conditions surrounding military camps and hospitals by checking the daily press.³³² Major J. M. T. Finney of Johns Hopkins, head of the surgical unit of the expeditionary force, assured parents that their sons would receive the best medical and surgical care if injured.³³³ Admiral McGowan, head of the Purchasing Department for the Navy, was quoted in *The New York Times* as saying, “I hold myself personally accountable to every father, and every mother . . . that the men I have any supervision and care over are as well clothed and as well fed as it is possible for them to be.”³³⁴ Furthermore, the press admonished readers that “[a]ny mother who worried because her boy in the United States Army is not getting good food to eat, and plenty of it, is nourishing a delusion.”³³⁵ The press also assured readers that sleeping quarters were comfortable and that the troops had plenty of bedding, “white bread,” and “real American grub.”³³⁶

Furthermore, Uncle Sam and the press promoted the idea that boys would come back to their mothers as “sound men,”³³⁷ both stronger and better.³³⁸ The government and relief agencies were reportedly doing more for “doughboys” than could be done by mothers themselves.³³⁹ Some mothers even appeared to endorse the idea that Uncle Sam did a better job than mothers at disciplining and training their sons. In one letter to the press, a mother wrote, “Many are the pros and cons in regard to universal military training for the youth of our country, but the verdict of mothers, friends, workers and spectators seems to be universal improvement in manners, character, and naturally (by no means the least beneficial effect) carriage.”³⁴⁰

The rhetoric used by both Uncle Sam and the press aimed to reassure mothers that their concerns either were unnecessary or were being tended to by the military and related relief organizations. The response suggests that

Uncle Sam was not turning a deaf ear to mothers. He was trying to convince them that their worries were needless. News stories implied that they were being listened to and were allowed to participate in the care of their sons. These assurances may have assuaged some fears, but mothers were also concerned about their children's emotional well-being.

Emotional care: "Every possible effort."

For mothers of soldiers one means of ensuring that the emotional needs of their sons were being met was through the exchange of letters. Uncle Sam also recognized this through the admonitions to soldiers to "write home." Thus, it was not surprising that mothers complained when they perceived a problem with the mail service.

One mother wrote *The New York Times* asking if the paper or "the administration" could "give any reason or account for the mail sent abroad not reaching the soldiers."³⁴¹ She detailed how she had sent her Christmas package by the deadline only to learn that her son had not received the package, her Christmas letter, or any other packages. Other mothers asked the press to investigate "why mothers should have to wait a whole month between letters coming from France."³⁴² Or they wrote letters to the editor complaining that "Poor Ned has not received a single package of the many we have sent him and only one letter in two months. He is very blue over it,"³⁴³ or asking, "Where do the packages go?"³⁴⁴ Mothers also wrote congressmen complaining that letters sent to sons had not reached them,³⁴⁵ and the press reported the disappointment of the mothers of the 307th Regimental Unit when they all failed to receive Mother's Day letters from their sons.³⁴⁶

The *Wisconsin State Journal* published parts of letters that sons wrote to their mothers complaining about the mail.³⁴⁷ One wrote to his mother, "I might write more, but as only one of about fifteen of my letters ever reach the United States. I do not care to wear my arm out and rack my brains for the benefit of the fish in the bottom of the ocean."³⁴⁸

The government's response to the public laments and disappointments suggested awareness that these letters were important to the morale of both mothers and soldiers. One congressman stated, "In my opinion there is nothing quite so important for Congress to do in order to keep the American boy, 3,000 miles away from home, his mother and other relatives content and happy as the maintenance of adequate mail facilities."³⁴⁹ The Army Post Office announced that it had "decided to make every possible effort that every mother in America whose son is in France shall receive tidings from her boy,"³⁵⁰ and the War Department made public an order by General Pershing that the American forces should keep up their correspondence since parents would "suffer if they do not hear often from sons fighting in France."³⁵¹

The press coverage made it clear that keeping the Patriotic Mother happy was critical to the government's war effort. It also revealed the concern the Wilson administration had regarding mothers' position vis-à-vis the war. Unhappy mothers could and would cause problems; they needed to be calmed down and placated.

Moral care: ". . . [A]n army free from commercialized vice."

In addition to concerns about their sons' physical and emotional care, mothers also complained about their sons' social well-being. Part of maternal work, according to Ruddick, involves training children morally. Mothers in this news narrative worried that the moral training they had done was being undermined by life in the military. Press accounts indicated "hundreds of mothers" asked the governor of Kansas to intercede with President Wilson on "behalf of their sons" and "establish a national policy of an army free from commercialized vice."³⁵² The press reported that one mother, who recently returned from France, was asked whether sons, when they disembarked, were "met by the women of the streets, the vilest of the vile. Is this so?"³⁵³ One mother with the Massachusetts Woman's Christian Temperance Union reportedly caused a stir with mothers when she worried that the khaki uniform of soldiers would lead to moral problems because of "the fascination it exerts on

young and un-poised girls.”³⁵⁴ The National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teachers’ Association took a “stand for morality” and supported the government’s message of “clean manhood.”³⁵⁵ President Wilson’s wife Edith and Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, chairman (*sic*) of the Women’s Committee of the CND, wrote an open letter to the women of allied Europe, urging the protection of the morals of American soldiers and workers. The letter, published in *The New York Times*, said, in part, “In all our countries, mothers are willing and proud to give their sons to defend the ideas which underlie this supreme sacrifice which their Government demands of them. . . . But they shrink from the greater sorrow which comes from the loss of moral fiber that robs them of health and manly vigor.”³⁵⁶ The letters implied that patriotic mothers were willing to lose their sons to the war effort, but they were unwilling to see their moral fiber eroded.

Uncle Sam and his representatives heard the mothers and offered repeated proclamations that their sons were being protected. Secretary of the Navy Daniels acknowledged the nation would hold the military responsible for damage to the soldiers’ morality. He urged “vigilance” against “the gambling, liquor, and harpies at the Naval training station.”³⁵⁷ According to press reports, Daniels linked morality with morale, saying, “There can be no high morale in any service whose officers and men do not lead clean lives, do not put upon themselves the self restraint to walk straight . . . [so that] when they return to their home [they can] look their mothers in the eye and make them feel they have been true to their training and inheritance.”³⁵⁸

The press wrote that General Pershing responded to charges made by temperance leaders and others that American forces were not “living clean lives and indulging too much in strong drink.”³⁵⁹ He told American mothers “that their sons are a credit to them and to the nation.”³⁶⁰ The chaplain of the National Guard reassured mothers, who believed the military would exert a “pernicious influence on young men,” that they should not worry that their sons would be surrounded by bad influences. “Let him come to the National Guard,” he told them. “It will develop her boy into a man.”³⁶¹ Finally, Secretary Baker, speaking in Washington to an audience that included the president and Mrs. Wilson, tried to reassure mothers when he said that he “never saw an American soldier living a day’s life which he would not willingly have lived under his mother’s eyes.”³⁶²

In summary, the response from the government to each of these concerns was similar. In each case, Uncle Sam’s response suggested mothers of soldiers had no reason to worry. The exchanges between the Patriotic Mother and Uncle Sam, in the news narrative, revealed two important points. First, the mothers’ complaints indicated to the larger public that they perceived problems with the U.S. war effort. The government, in their view, was not handling the war all that smoothly. Second, unless properly handled, these complaints would allow the archetypal image of the Good Mother to gain a foothold in the nation’s consciousness. The Patriotic Mother would prevail only if the Good Mother was silenced. By appearing to listen to and assure mothers he had every thing under control, Uncle Sam effectively silenced criticism. In this way the Law of the Father prevailed, and he continued his authority.

Mothers of Soldiers in the Gaze of the Patriotic Other

A “splendid example of patience and bravery.”

In the WWI news narrative, Uncle Sam used his authority to praise mothers of soldiers who embraced patriotic motherhood and punish those who did not. Patriotic mothers of soldiers were reported as receiving public admiration from the military and government, heads of organizations and civilians, other mothers, and the press itself. For instance, President Wilson thanked mothers,³⁶³ and encouraged all citizens to pay homage to “American mothers so patriotically offering their sons to the nation’s needs in the present crisis.”³⁶⁴ When he met a mother of eleven, former President Theodore Roosevelt called her a “glorious apostle of that army of American women who are opposed to race suicide.”³⁶⁵ Another mother received Roosevelt’s homage to her dead son when he wrote that he had two small sons and he “would be proud if they lived and died the death of your son.”³⁶⁶ General Pershing praised the “splendid example of patience and bravery which American mothers

have set for their sons” and thanked them for “this courageous spirit.”³⁶⁷ Even the press praised mothers for doing war work and for raising sons, as one editor told a gathering of women, who were “high-minded” and “heroic-hearted.”³⁶⁸

Patriotic mothers also received other plaudits. They were given places of honor at speeches and block parties and asked to preside at war-related exhibits.³⁶⁹ Mothers of soldiers regularly marched in Liberty Loan, loyalty, Red Cross, and service parades wearing service buttons and carrying service flags.³⁷⁰ Organizations sought mothers with the most sons in the service to lead the parades. They were described in the press as marching with “courage and resolution and triumph”³⁷¹ and as having earned the cheers and shouts of admiration from a grateful public. They won the “applause and tears” of mothers without sons, who envied them “the glorious sacrifice.”³⁷² News accounts also recognized mothers for watching their own sons march in drills and farewell parades and joining their sons in some of those marches.³⁷³

The government also feted patriotic mothers by instituting a formal Mother’s Day.³⁷⁴ Sons reportedly sent them the spoils of war, including helmets and rifles, pistols, gas masks, bayonets, and respirators taken from the enemy, which one mother proudly put on display.³⁷⁵ Other mothers were depicted as having received liberty bonds, as well as their sons’ war citations and decorations.³⁷⁶ Mothers who lost sons in the war were given a gold star by the government, thus earning the status of a Gold Star Mother.³⁷⁷

Civic and women’s organizations also honored mothers. The War Mothers Association, for instance, designated a mother who gave four or five sons to the military as a “champion war mother.” Those mothers were invited to speak at a meeting in Wisconsin on the topic of “How I Raised My Boy to Be a Soldier.” Mothers were told that they could begin at any point in the child’s life and describe how “the lads were trained, mentally, physically and morally.”³⁷⁸

Mothers who initially opposed the war but then experienced a change of heart were also praised as patriotic mothers.³⁷⁹ For example, many suffragists and the mothers among them, who had objected to the war, were depicted as dropping their political militancy to support the war effort.³⁸⁰ They were described as aiding the nation’s recruiting drive,³⁸¹ and as favoring a plan to draft women to relieve the nurse shortage in hospitals.³⁸²

In summary, mothers of soldiers who embraced their wartime role earned praise from those in the culture who supported the war. Uncle Sam, social institutions supporting the war machine, other mothers, sons, and the press all fixed a gaze on mothers. Mothers earned social status as evidenced in honorary places in parades and celebrations of their sacrifices, especially if they gave the country more than one son. In this way they were embraced as being among the nation’s finest citizens. Like their hero sons, mothers were given a hero’s welcome into the culture. Mothers of soldiers avoided isolation and public alienation by shedding the role of protective Good Mother.

Just as the government had a system of rewards in place to encourage mothers of soldiers to assume the mantle of the patriotic motherhood, the government created incentives to discourage and punish mothers who refused to cheerfully surrender their children for the nation’s war effort. Mothers who failed to live up to the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother and, like Thetis, mourned or tried to change the courses of their sons’ destinies risked public censure, shame and ridicule, fines, and imprisonment.

“ . . . [N]either breeding nor brains.”

The press criticized mothers for interfering with the war effort, even when the mothers’ actions were unintentional. Mothers who were dependent on sons for physical and financial support were not above press criticism. Columnist Winifred Black wrote that she pitied a son who was drafted but returned to care for his mother and wondered if he hated his job.³⁸³ This observation in the media seemed particularly harsh since the government had been making an effort to care for mothers who were dependents.

One mother merited ridicule in the press because she wrote to the exemption board saying that her son would likely pose a threat to the army if he enlisted because of his terrible cough. "Why, if he started coughing in the trenches the enemy might hear him and 100 Americans might lose their lives because of it," she wrote.³⁸⁴ Others were accused of encouraging sons to overstay their leaves.³⁸⁵ One mother wrote a letter to the editor excoriating such mothers, saying they were the same mothers who embarrassed their sons with disgusting farewell speeches and clinging at train stations, "fairly shouting to the world that they have neither breeding nor brains."³⁸⁶

The anxious mothers in these news stories were scolded for making extra work for the military. An officer had to be assigned to the task of corresponding with fearful mothers who wondered if their sons' washing was being done or if their sons were likely to be shot. The officer was to "mollify and comfort mothers who fail to understand just what the navy is doing for boys who, before enlisting, were 'tied to their apron strings.'"³⁸⁷ Others were criticized for expressing anxiety or foreboding.³⁸⁸ One woman called writing depressing letters to soldiers "criminal."³⁸⁹ In another article, mothers were berated for writing letters describing their sad feelings that should have been kept private. Disclosing them in letters, wrote *The New York Times*, "is about the meanest and lowest form of selfishness that could be imagined."³⁹⁰

According to press accounts, mothers who wept in front of their children, particularly when they were leaving for combat, ran the risk of getting on their sons' nerves and impairing "the morale of a whole company,"³⁹¹ putting the boys "under a rather severe strain."³⁹² One mother said her son asked her to "tell every mother never to write one unhappy word to her son, even if the mother is chewing a corner of her handkerchief to keep back the tears as she writes. . . . Encourage your sons always and if he writes he is losing courage, write him to live up to the standard of an American soldier."³⁹³ Mothers were also admonished to make sure their sons were physically fit to bear arms and raise daughters who were physically fit to "become mothers of men,"³⁹⁴ echoing the efforts of Spartan mothers. Similarly, mothers were criticized for coddling their children, refusing to expose them to cold baths or hard beds, thus depriving them of many masculine qualities and "preventing them from becoming men."³⁹⁵ Mothers who struggled with their sons' enlistments also received attention from the press.³⁹⁶ For example, the *Oakland Tribune* reported that a mother had a suicide pact with her son if he should be drafted. When the authorities found the son hiding after he failed to register, the boy was "clasped in his mother's arms and the pair had to be separated by force."³⁹⁷

The WWI press singled out pacifists, some of whom were mothers and who had gained political strength before the war, as particularly deserving of vitriol, ridicule, and public contempt. Pacifists were criticized as overly emotional and anti-intellectual. For instance, the press ridiculed Montana Representative Jeannette Rankin, the nation's only woman in Congress, questioning her motives when she voted against going to war.³⁹⁸ Pacifists were criticized and ridiculed for failing to "see and feel that even for a mother there can be more to this war than the 'horrors.'"³⁹⁹ One editor made a point of making fun of a woman who criticized his editorial that lashed out at feminist pacifists. "Evidently you have never been a mother," she had written to him, to which he replied that he was guilty of the charge.⁴⁰⁰

Former President Theodore Roosevelt was particularly vocal about his contempt for pacifists, saying that the nation could not "endure" such mothers. "The woman who does not raise her son to be a soldier for the right and the man who has not been raised to be a soldier for the right, are neither of them fit for citizenship in a free republic," he told one crowd.⁴⁰¹ In another speech, he acknowledged that it was hard for parents to send their sons to war, adding that, "it would be harder for those who are worth their salt not to send them when they are needed."⁴⁰² During another speech, he said he honored mothers above soldiers, but called mothers who failed to raise their sons as soldiers "as despicable as the boy who runs in battle."⁴⁰³ In an editorial in *The New York Times*, Roosevelt called the war a "Great Adventure" and referred to those who participated in it as "torchbearers." Mothers and fathers who flinched from the role deserved disdain, according to the nation's

former president. In his opinion, “the man who is not willing to die, and the woman who is not willing to send her man to die, in a war for a great cause, are not worthy to live.”⁴⁰⁴

The press accounts also reported that mothers of soldiers who directly interfered with the government’s war effort were arrested, charged, fined, and even imprisoned. For example, about a dozen New York mothers were arrested during a march to present an antidraft petition to city hall. As they passed a group of supporters of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, who were being arraigned for circulating anticonscription writing, the mothers were goaded into fighting with the police. They reportedly attacked police with “hatpins, bites and kicks.”⁴⁰⁵ Another story reported that a mother was fined for sending a telegram with more war-related details than permitted. She apologized, telling the war department that mothers with sons in France should be forgiven for anxiety “for what we have to go through, no one knows.”⁴⁰⁶ The press also reported that one mother with pro-German views was charged with violation of the Espionage Act, and letters from her son got him thrown out of Annapolis.⁴⁰⁷ An antiwar activist who said that mothers should not raise sons for “cannon fodder” and that those who did were no better than “brood sows” was sentenced to five years in prison.⁴⁰⁸

One mother was reportedly held on charges of conspiracy to violate the draft law,⁴⁰⁹ and authorities held another mother because her son was a draft dodger and had been in constant contact with her as he traveled around the country.⁴¹⁰ In other draft-related cases, a mother was held because she helped her son file a false exemption claim,⁴¹¹ and another mother was held on \$10,000 bail for reportedly aiding her son in a draft dodge.⁴¹² Mrs. Balaski, described at the beginning of this monograph as waving a gun at Connecticut authorities and threatening them if they tried to take her son, was arrested under the Registration Act. The paper reported that she “was considerably less bellicose” at her arraignment. Her American-born son told authorities he failed to register because his Austrian mother used terrible threats to make clear that she did not want him to fight against Austria-Hungary.⁴¹³

These news accounts offer evidence that the government took direct steps to silence some of its critics by simply removing them from the public arena. Mothers who failed to obey Uncle Sam and embrace the image of the archetypal Patriotic Mother were ostracized and sometimes even jailed. In the larger war news narrative, the press directly aided the government in the public shaming and served to remind mothers of soldiers that the Law of the Father prevailed. The actions of mothers who were punished were indications that not all mothers embraced the war or the ideal of patriotic motherhood. By giving us these accounts of mothers who failed to live up to the ideal, the press, perhaps inadvertently, gave us hints about the true feelings of these mothers of soldiers. It is to that we now turn.

Interiority of the Heart

In the myth of the Spartan Mother, the maternal emotions are limited to pride and cheerfulness. The tale is silent on whether the Spartan mothers felt the overwhelming grief and sorrow that consumed Thetis. The poet Homer alluded to the emotions that Thetis felt when faced with the prospect of losing a child in war. He described her as fearful and sad throughout the story of the *Iliad*, and according to the myth, Thetis made no attempt to hide her feelings. In her actions and deeds, she was clear in her opposition to her son’s role in the Trojan War. The news accounts in this monograph indicate that while the majority of mothers appeared to fit the Patriotic Mother archetype, there was a conflicting image of mothers of soldiers. This image revealed that some mothers shared the feelings that Homer attributed to the goddess Thetis in the *Iliad*.

Most news accounts of the wounding and deaths of soldiers did not address the feelings these mothers might have had in any depth. Yet even the shortest stories suggested that the mothers may have experienced bone-crushing grief. For instance, one story reported that only “[t]en minutes after Mrs. O’Flaherty received the news of the death of her eldest son the postman arrived with a mobilization card for her youngest son, Martin, ordering him to report for duty with the National Army.”⁴¹⁴ The very juxtaposition of these facts hints at a pain

that was no doubt sharp. Yet, in the main, the terror and grief that mothers faced was only occasionally mentioned and not the subject of discussion.⁴¹⁵ In this way, the press aided the government in helping to control mothers' emotions, allowing the image of the stoic and silent Patriotic Mother to prevail.

Sometimes the news media reported that mothers were puzzled about the status of their sons. They would receive word that a son was missing, wounded, or dead, but then receive letters written by the son after the date of the reported incident.⁴¹⁶ For instance, one mother was told her son was killed in action on September 7, 1918, but later received a letter from him dated on September 12.⁴¹⁷ Another mother received a telegram that her son was missing in action but received a letter from him ten days after he was reported missing. She said, "the whole situation is confusing."⁴¹⁸ The confusion allowed mothers to hold out a desperate hope.

Sometimes the press made passing references to the effects of the profound stress that the war had on mothers who feared losing their sons. One mother reportedly died of a heart attack when she learned that her son was drafted,⁴¹⁹ while another "dropped dead in the street" as a result of the worry over the possibility that her son might be drafted.⁴²⁰

One source of stories containing references to mothers and emotion were the next-of-kin stories. In addition to hero building, mothers in the accounts sometimes revealed how they felt when they reacted to the news, but the press noted it in only the briefest way. One mother collapsed,⁴²¹ another was described as "very much affected,"⁴²² and yet another "broke down and wept."⁴²³ One mother was reportedly "prostrated" with grief,⁴²⁴ another became hysterical "when informed that her son's name appeared in the casualty list,"⁴²⁵ and one was "overcome with grief."⁴²⁶ Two other mothers were reported as "overjoyed" and "hysterical" with thanks when they learned their sons were alive.⁴²⁷ Clearly, in the next-of-kin stories in which emotion was expressed, a journalist had talked to either the mother or someone close to the mother of the wounded or dead soldiers. These stories were sites in which the press could have offered in more detail the range of emotions experienced by mothers of soldiers. Instead, the press chose not to elaborate in most of the accounts, thus creating and maintaining the impression of maternal stoicism and silence.

Despite the fact that nearly a half million American men died in the First World War, the press rarely included news of mothers at funerals or memorial services. In fact, only four such references appeared. One story referenced the mother of the former mayor of New York who died in combat.⁴²⁸ In another story, the "whole town of Florence, NJ turned out for the memorial services,"⁴²⁹ and the mother later learned her son was not dead. In still another story, a mother was at her son's memorial service, her "head bowed in grief," when her cousin rushed into the service waving a letter from the boy saying he was wounded and recovering. The press described the cousin at that moment, "her countenance beaming with gladness," but said nothing of the mother's response.⁴³⁰ The number of news stories about mothers and funerals or memorials is noteworthy when compared to the sheer number of deaths of soldiers that occurred in the war. Spartan mothers did not mourn in the tales that have been handed down to us. We know from other press accounts that the first American mother to lose a son in France publicly announced her intention to refrain from mourning. The myth demanded that the press downplay a mother's grief. The absence of stories of mothers in attendance at funerals and memorials as the war unfolded suggests that the press complied. If mothers did mourn for their dead or lost sons, the myth of the Patriotic Mother created in the WWI press gave it little attention.

“. . . [S]ecret chamber of those two arching hearts.”

While few reports of funerals and memorials appeared in this sample, the press told other stories that offered hints of maternal emotions beyond the normative wartime emotions of pride and good cheer. Unexpressed emotion could become intensified during war, one reporter observed, writing, "Love grows keener, grief more dreadful."⁴³¹ In one story a mother was described as choking "back the blinding tears" as she tried to look proud at a neighborhood block party.⁴³² One columnist acknowledged that "these are troublesome days for the

mothers of sons who are in uniform.”⁴³³ Another writer told of a mother and soldier son saying goodbye but keeping the farewell cheerful, “neither would let the other look into the secret chambers of those two aching hearts.”⁴³⁴ One mother described her conflicting emotions in a letter to a friend. On the one hand, she wrote, “I feel I am in a tightening grip, almost beyond human endurance” while on the other, she was “seized with pride of his going.” She added that the “storm continues to rage, but it is controlled by force of mind.”⁴³⁵ Another account of a train leaving with soldiers for Camp Upton described the men as happy and anxious to get into uniform, “a fact that kept even mothers from breaking down, as has been so often the case during the mobilizations of drafted men.”⁴³⁶ It is interesting to note that this is the only mention in more than a thousand articles used for this monograph that some mothers of soldiers routinely broke down emotionally at train stations when saying goodbye. Other stories may have referenced such occasions, but this is the only story that states that the displays were familiar, thus raising the question of whether parades, receptions, and other events surrounding departures were intended to distract mothers and help manage maternal emotion.

The press routinely printed poems written for or by mothers of soldiers. The poems referenced the mothers’ “tears,”⁴³⁷ “blinding tears,”⁴³⁸ “anguished sorrow” with hearts on the verge of breaking,⁴³⁹ “hearts . . . forlorn,”⁴⁴⁰ and “pain.”⁴⁴¹ Yet most of the poems, like most of the news stories themselves, countered the grief that the mothers felt with the attendant pride of having a son in the service.

One story also suggested that mothers might have been prompted about the need to respond with appropriate feelings. The news media told a follow-up story about the mother of the first American soldier to die in France, discussed earlier, who refused to wear mourning clothes. The mother of eleven was described in the story as “bending over a washtub at her little home” during the interview. According to the account, she said that she was proud of her son but said it was “awfully hard to have him gone.” The reporter wrote that she was then asked, “Don’t you think any mother would be glad to have her boy give his life for a cause like that?” to which she replied “Yes,” with a smile.” The mother was then described as breaking down and saying, “God help me to endure!” adding, “Yes he’s a hero, and for his sake I ought to be brave. But I’m not a hero, I’m just a mother.”⁴⁴² This story reveals that the soldier’s mother was asked a question that suggested a bias. Her answer was appropriate given that she was depicted as the ideal Patriotic Mother in earlier press accounts. The difficulty of that position was revealed in her later comments suggesting she was not brave. This account suggests that balancing the public persona of the Patriotic Mother with the private emotions involved with losing a son was difficult at best. This story is a rare example of this conflict; most stories did not even hint at it.

In summary, the press reported that mothers were sending to France sons “whom they loved better than life itself,”⁴⁴³ yet the press depicted them as stoic and silent upon learning of their sons’ injuries or deaths.⁴⁴⁴ While the news narrative inferred that most mothers were willing to conform to the demands of patriotism, it remains unclear whether mothers were routinely offered opportunities by the press to speak their hearts. As noted, the government recognized that mothers could and would be emotional about the loss of or harm to their sons and was wary of the potential problem that could result. Uncle Sam circumvented the problem, in part, by creating propaganda that downplayed the effects of the war on their sons. Uncle Sam had help from the press, the soldiers themselves, other mothers, and the church. We turn to their efforts next.

Persuading Mothers to Keep Faith

“Dugouts are roomy, warm and comfortable.”

The press played a key role in the government’s propaganda effort by reporting items produced by the military, the National Council of Defense, and State Councils of Defense that supported the view that the war was not as devastating as mothers feared. *The New York Times*, for example, published a report from a military newspaper that proclaimed a person lived longer in the army than in civilian life, stating that “[a]ccording to these calculations, more soldiers will return from the war than many mothers imagine.”⁴⁴⁵ The *Wisconsin State*

Journal, citing the Wisconsin Council of Defense statistics, told mothers that there were fewer casualties in Europe than generally supposed,⁴⁴⁶ and they should receive comfort in the fact that only eleven in every one thousand men die in the war.⁴⁴⁷ The *Oakland Tribune* followed suit by telling mothers that the “dugouts are roomy, warm and comfortable. The men are well provided with food which is brought up nightly after having been cooked in the reserve lines.”⁴⁴⁸ One *Oakland Tribune* reporter told mothers that he could “certify that everything possible has been done to make [the trenches] bombproof.”⁴⁴⁹

Finally, there was an effort to ease mother’s concerns about their sons’ roles in the destruction caused by war. An editorial in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, for example, addressed parents who worried about sons they raised “not to hurt a fly” having to bayonet enemies. The editorial intoned that the use of bayonets was constructive, not destructive, telling mothers that when a son killed the enemy using a bayonet, he was freeing the German’s “soul from what we consider a terrible bondage to wrong.”⁴⁵⁰ In this way, the press served to assure mothers and other loved ones that sons and husbands were safe “over there” and they should not worry. The accounts also reflected Uncle Sam’s effort to keep mothers focused on supporting the war and worry free about the status of their sons.

“What good times we have here in camp.”

Soldiers supported the government in this mission by writing cheerful letters to their mothers, urging them to remain calm. One soldier wrote to his mother that he was “having the times of his life,”⁴⁵¹ and another told his mother that she could “never imagine what good times we have here in camp. We are all feeling fine, and we are glad we are fighting for so good a country as the U.S.A.”⁴⁵² Sons told mothers “do not spend any time worrying about us, because we shall be having a good time and you should be having just as good a one,”⁴⁵³ and the “men were having ‘wonderful times’ in the dugouts,”⁴⁵⁴ and that the “trench experience was having a good effect on the soldiers.”⁴⁵⁵

Letters from injured soldiers, in whole or part, conveyed similar sentiments. One injured soldier, for example, wrote to his mother, “Everything in the base hospital ‘was simply great—real honest-to-goodness American nurses, beautiful resting country and plenty of good food. If a fellow doesn’t get fat and well in a place like this, he never will.’”⁴⁵⁶ Another injured son wrote that he was “feeling fine,”⁴⁵⁷ and another wrote that his mother should buy “Uncle Sam’s next Liberty Loan . . . [as] [t]he doctors and nurses of the Red Cross are wonderful and do all that is in their power for us.”⁴⁵⁸

Combined, these news narratives conveyed the idea that mothers should not fret about the war and their sons’ role in it. War was not that fatal after all and their sons were having a good time in the trenches. At the same time, some of these comments appeared in next-of-kin stories announcing injuries and deaths, having apparently been taken from letters shared by mothers. No one commented on these odd juxtapositions. The news narratives covering Uncle Sam’s position on the war and the corresponding letters from soldiers were not the only propagandistic efforts to promote both maternal cheerfulness in the face of adversity and maternal stoicism.

Ignore the Germans

In addition to generating its own propaganda, the government and others told mothers to ignore German propaganda. The press warned readers of the “Teutonic enemies residing among us” who were “spreading the blackest and most alarming news among the mothers of American soldiers”⁴⁵⁹ and cautioned mothers that German propaganda was being used as a weapon against them. The National Association for Mothers of Defenders of Democracy cautioned mothers that they were the subject of a “whispering” campaign by the Germans and pledged to fight it by bringing “home a clearer realization of democracy, and through the sympathy of one woman for another to keep the home morale at a high pitch.” In short, German propaganda

was viewed as a threat to keeping mothers cheerful in the face of adversity. As such, mothers were encouraged to ignore it.

“God loves the boy who fights for his mother.”

According to the WWI news narrative, the government received support for its propaganda efforts from religious leaders who played a role in keeping mothers’ emotions in check, thus reinforcing the image of the Patriotic Mother. Whether it was from the pulpit or at community meetings, religious leaders, according to press accounts, heaped praise on mothers for their cheerful sacrifice, prayed for their continued support, and gave them solace in the face of their sons’ deaths. At a patriotic rally in Central Park, Cardinal Farley said, “Mothers and young wives have sent the sons and husbands with a cheerfulness and a fortitude found only in a strong and virile people.”⁴⁶⁰ Mothers were also praised as being the “equal of the soldier in the trenches”⁴⁶¹ and were lauded for their “bravery and nobility”⁴⁶² and for having given the “chief sacrifice of this war.”⁴⁶³ The *Wisconsin State Journal* told mothers they would feel a “thrill of joy” to read the words of the army chaplain who reportedly said, “All else being finished the soldier remembers the words and voice of his Mother—and the Mother knows at last the fruits of her love, and her prayers” because most men’s last prayer was one she taught them, “Now I lay Me Down to Sleep.”⁴⁶⁴ The praise by religious leaders supported mothers and the war effort by recognizing and stressing the importance of maternal sacrifice. In addition to praise, religious leaders and other groups offered prayers and pleas for support of mothers. As with other aspects of the war, these too were duly covered by the press.

Religious leaders in these news accounts also offered both solace and admonitions to mothers as they faced the cold fact of their sons’ deaths. One bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church “urged mothers and fathers not to feel that their sons had been lost if killed on the battlefield.” Rather, he said, “they are found.”⁴⁶⁵ Another advised parents that they should feel nothing less than happy that their sons had passed as heroes. He asked, “Would you have them back and German tyranny here and they and you its slaves? If some fathers’ and mothers’ sons must die, can you offer any valid reason why yours should not?”⁴⁶⁶

It is interesting that through sentiments such as these, uttered in the pulpit and restated in the press, religious institutions and leaders supported the work of Uncle Sam. They reinforced the justification for the war. They promoted the Patriotic Mother archetype whose roots in Spartan motherhood stressed dead heroes over live sons who were cowards. And they promoted the ideal of passive, stoic acceptance of a son’s death.

While the role of religion in the World War I press narrative is beyond the scope of this monograph, it is worth noting here that the clergy discouraged patriotic mothers of World War I soldiers from revealing their sadness and pain. As reflected in the news stories, those mothers who may have needed the comfort of the church were cut off from that institution as a source of solace.

In summary, the government created wartime propaganda and the mechanism needed to motivate all citizens to engage in the nation’s war effort, and the press reported on the results. The propaganda arm of the government told mothers of soldiers that the threat of war to themselves and the nation was worse than the threat of war to their sons. The government’s CND organized women and mothers to help provide soldiers and matériel needed to successfully execute the war. The government addressed complaints of mothers when they talked back. At the same time, mothers of soldiers were publicly lauded when they participated in the war effort and were punished if they did not.

Day in and day out, the press chronicled the stories of mothers of soldiers in stories that described their war-related activities and behaviors, their thoughts and words, their rewards and punishments. The definition of a Patriotic Mother emerged through the daily stories about what the nation’s mothers of soldiers were doing and who was celebrated or punished and under what conditions. The stories could be absorbed into the public’s

consciousness once they appeared in the public discourse via the press. In this way, the news media helped to construct the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother in the nation's mind. The press, as cocreator of this cultural narrative, drew on familiar archetypal images to tell its story. The evidence reveals that the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother, as it appeared in the World War I news narrative, was consistent with the image of the Spartan Mother and served as a model for the ideal mother of a soldier. The image of the Good Mother archetype, represented by the mythic Thetis, was largely missing from this wartime narrative. When the Good Mother did appear, she was punished.

Conclusion

In this monograph we examined the press portrayal of mothers of soldiers in World War I to gain additional insight into what it means to be a soldier's mother during wartime. We examined the press narrative to determine how mothers were mobilized to sacrifice their own children during war. We drew on the principle that the press is a repository for cultural narratives. As noted earlier, Lule and others have argued news narratives reflect more than facts and figures; they also tell us how our cultural world is constituted and how it should function. In this sense, news stories serve a mythic purpose. Through this lens, we examined the role of the mothers of soldiers in the country's wartime news narrative. Since myths are peopled with archetypes that tell cultures what to believe and how to behave, we looked to the mythology of archetypal wartime mothers for insight into their values and behaviors as they watched their sons march off to war. The ideal Patriotic Mother of World War I, as she appeared in these news narratives, most closely resembled the image of the Spartan Mother. In fact, the Spartan Mother image dominated the press coverage of mothers of soldiers. She was depicted as actively encouraging her child to play a role in the conflict. She was also portrayed as speaking publicly and forcefully about her willingness to raise soldiers for her nation. Press coverage revealed that mothers, who in the years before the war were expected to protect their children from harm, were required to withhold comment when their sons were sent to war, directly into life-threatening situations.

Refusal to endorse or to participate in the nation's battle plans meant mothers would be ostracized and judged by others as failing to live up to the cultural standards set for mothers of soldiers. The ones who did object most closely resembled Thetis, the mythical mother of the great soldier Achilles. The poet Homer described Thetis as expressing emotions that one would normally associate with the archetype of the Good Mother facing the threat of losing a child—frantic anxiety, white-hot pain, and howling grief, the sort that lacerates the soul. According to Homer, Thetis did everything in her power to preserve her child's life and protect his well-being. The news narrative of the First World War demonstrated that the government, the military, the culture, and mothers themselves worked hard to rid the culture of the "Thetis effect." The press downplayed these mothers' efforts to protect their children from harm. We note that the Good Mother who found herself horrified by her wartime role would never be rewarded for sending children directly into danger during peacetime. Only in wartime, and under the mantle of patriotic motherhood, would she be rewarded for such behavior.

The results of this monograph establish that the press played a key role in the nation's effort to craft an archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother of the Great War. The press served as both a conduit for the government and a participant in the process. In addition to reporting on the activities of mothers, and the government's response to mothers, the press engaged in its own shaping of patriotic motherhood by giving special attention and accolades to mothers who fit the ideal. The press also participated in the activities of the state and local Councils of Defense. Together, the government's manipulation and the news media's participation served as a hegemonic device by which those in power were able to maintain their positions and authority. Mothers themselves contributed to this process by using the media to mobilize other mothers.

We argue, then, that the archetypal image of the Patriotic Mother of WWI offered an exemplar of the ideal soldier's mother and that the press celebrated and encouraged soldiers' mothers to embrace this image. Some

scholars have argued that women in general and mothers in particular are inclined toward peace, while others have pointed out that women and mothers have historically fought and voluntarily continue to engage in combat. While the findings of this monograph cannot settle that debate, we believe that mothers are a resource for peace politics in that the government and the press worked harder than they should have had to if, in fact, mothers were not such a resource. The evidence presented here indicated that some mothers were and remained pacifists throughout the war but that others were socialized into supporting the war; that is, they publicly stated that they reconsidered their unwillingness to sacrifice their children to the nation's war effort. And while some mothers, according to press accounts, supported the war from the start and were willing to look the other way while their own children were injured, maimed, or killed for the cause, we cannot say with certainty that they were speaking from their own hearts. Clearly, the government-posed threats of social ostracism and even imprisonment may have been significant motivators.

Furthermore, we believe it is worth noting that the press coverage of mothers in World War I does not convey the extensive reach of the government and its wartime policies into its citizens' lives as described in the detailed war records housed in government archives and libraries. The breadth and depth of the government's influence are beyond the scope of this monograph, but the archival records helped us determine that newspapers were instrumental in the efforts by the defense councils at the national, state, and local levels to rally mothers to the nation's battle cry. As a result, we are willing to conclude that most mothers in this wartime narrative had little choice but to shed the image of the Good Mother and embrace patriotic motherhood; the threat of punishment for failing to toe the line was both real and severe. The data do not say how much of the participation by mothers was voluntary or how much was coerced. All we are left with is evidence that the government and press went to great lengths to ensure cooperation, forcing us to wonder what the mothers' positions might have been without the pressure.

The larger goal of this monograph was to understand what it means to be a mother of a soldier in wartime. The results suggest that because the nation must depend on patriotic mothers rather than good mothers to help fight a war, mothers of draft-age sons may be targeted in campaigns to ensure that their thinking is closely aligned with that of the government that is executing the war. Mothers of young men, according to Wilson and his administration as told in the World War I news narratives, were a necessary part of the government's wartime apparatus. The government mobilized the World War I mothers of soldiers by claiming a significant threat to mothers *and* their sons and firmly established in the press the ideal of the Patriotic Mother as the mother to all sons who willingly engaged in the nation's war work. The government used praise, blame, and punishment to convince mothers to assume their wartime roles. The government's efforts were trumpeted in the press. In other words, the press supported, and could still support, a government's targeting efforts.

Second, archetypal images of mothers in the wartime press can be used to manipulate mothers, suggesting a more complete understanding of the archetype is in order. Understanding archetypes allows us to begin thinking about how they are used to get mothers to engage in some sorts of behaviors and not others. We do not say that all wars are unnecessary; as a practical matter, there appear to be times when the only way to ward off an act of aggression is through violence. But that should be the last resort. To that end, mothers and other citizens would do well to protect themselves through education about the media and its use in manipulation. The stakes are too high to ignore the problem.

The results of this monograph indicate that the image of the Patriotic Mother of World War I soldiers closely mirrors the image of the Patriotic Mother of soldiers as she appeared in the World War II press. As noted earlier, previous research examining WWII news coverage found that the press helped to socialize mothers of soldiers into their wartime roles. WWII news accounts also drew on the archetype of the Patriotic Mother and stressed her duty as citizen to stoically and silently give her sons to the nation's war effort. However, the results of studies of press coverage of mothers of soldiers in more recent wars suggest that the archetypal image of the Patriotic

Mother may be changing. The image of the soldier's mother appearing in the press during the U.S. war in Iraq, while still reflective of the Spartan ideal for the most part, indicates that some mothers were publicly unwilling to be cheerful, stoic, or silent about the cost of the war to both them and their children. The shift may be the result of a variety of factors. During the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, the government did not impose laws or sanctions directed against those who disagreed with the nation's war policies. The technology of today differs vastly from the technology available during World War I; mothers then depended on letters from their sons for news, letters mostly cleansed of the grim reality of the day-to-day soldier's life. Now, given the Internet, mothers can communicate with their soldiers online in real time and get a sense of the actual conditions in which their sons and daughters live and fight. In addition, mothers received the vote in the years following World War I, are today more likely to be educated, and have moved into the public sphere, continuing the trajectory interrupted by the First World War. As a result, they may be more willing to speak their minds publicly about the personal costs of conflict. Finally, the values of the press itself may have changed. Additional work needs to be done to determine when and how the image of the mothers of soldiers began to shift in the press and why.

Understanding how the news media work to rally around the nation's cause during wartime, as revealed in this monograph, underscores the need for mothers to be politically engaged during peacetime. The wartime apparatus put into place during WWI ensured that citizens turned their efforts toward winning the war once the nation declared its involvement. The voices of those who had opposed the draft and the war itself were, in effect, silenced. The lesson offered by this news narrative is that once the bullets fly, it is too late to effectively argue the case against war. For mothers to be an effective resource for peace politics, they must be vigilant and politically active when the nation is not at war.

Finally, we argue that understanding how the press is used to target other groups of citizens during wartime is critical if we are to educate ourselves against manipulation by government and others for the purpose of war. We bracketed the coverage of mothers of soldiers in the Great War but note the observation of one father in the press who lamented, "We hear a great deal, though not too much, of the sacrifice our boys are making, and a great deal, though not too much, of the heroic patriotism of their mothers. We do not hear much of the father."⁴⁶⁷ Our data suggested that fathers, as well as newspaper boys, teachers, laborers, farmers, businessmen, and single women, also were targeted by the government in its effort to drum up support for the conflict. Understanding the role of the press in a culture's efforts to garner support for war from all of its citizens would go a long way toward discerning when and under what circumstances such sacrifice is necessary, if ever.

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Notes

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99. Gail Collins, *America's Women: Four Hundred Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates and Heroines* (New York: William Morrow, 2003); Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Smith, *Women's Roles*. Evans notes that the amount of work done, and its nature, was very much influenced by social class, geography, and race. Rural women, for example, did the labor themselves. Women who lived in the cities, however, relied more on the trading of goods to meet domestic needs. Wealthy women had servants or slaves. Slaves, of course, did their own work and that of their owners.
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101. Smith, *Women's Roles*, 13.
102. Collins, *America's Women*; Smith, *Women's Roles*.
103. Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 30.
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108. Bacon's Rebellion is an early example of frontier wives in Virginia joining their husbands as rebels against the government of William Berkeley in 1676 (Collins, *America's Women*); the Salem witch trail is seen as another, as it had women as both accusers and accused. According to Evans, it reflected the social and political conflict that centered around women as they "illustrate the strains introduced by the Protestant emphasis on spiritual equality in a society based on female subordination" (Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 31).
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136. *Ibid.*; Evans, *Born for Liberty*.
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139. *Ibid.*
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