WOMEN DURING WAR:

A look at women's roles during the Civil War and World War I

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Civil War

Women worked tirelessly during the Civil War to support the war effort. Unable to officially join the Confederate or the Union Armies (although some disguised themselves as men and joined anyway) women did what they could to help soldiers.

Many women accomplished these tasks through organized activities. One such activity was the Philadelphia Sanitary Fair. During the summer of 1864 women gathered together to raise money, sew clothing and bedding, and knit socks. About 29,000 people visited the fair each day during the three week festival. By the end of the Fair over a million dollars was raised for the United States Sanitary Commission.

Another example of women's organized activities is the Union Volunteer Refreshment Saloon. This organization was responsible for supplying passing soldiers with food, drink, a bath, and shelter. The Refreshment Saloon, like the Sanitary Fair, was organized and run by women.

Many women also worked and volunteered for the many U.S. Army Field Hospitals. In these hospitals women worked nursing the sick and wounded. Nursing jobs, however, were much different than nursing jobs today, especially for women. For women in the field hospitals, nursing included cooking, washing floors and cloths, and general care for soldiers. During this time professional nursing had not been developed, and army nurses were more likely to be male than female.

Winning the war required much more than soldiers. Food, clothing, and shelter were also needed. Though providing these services was not the most glamorous job, women nonetheless filled these positions and did whatever they could to help win the war.

When the First World War began women aided the Allied war effort through participating in both domestic and non-domestic jobs.

Similar to the Civil War, domestic style jobs were popular occupations for women during World War I. These jobs were commonly done through large organizations. Two such organizations were the National League for Women Services, and the Liberty Loan Drive. Both organizations were driven by female volunteers. Specifically, the National League for Women Services dedicated their time helping soldiers sewing uniforms, cooking for returning soldiers, and general care for veterans. Similar to women's charities of the time (which was a common middle and upper class domestic duty), the Liberty Loan Drive depended on women to help raise money for the United States and Allied War Effort. Domestic jobs for women were both encouraged and essential for the American war effort.

World War I, however, also marked many new changes for women. During this time, for example, women were allowed to enlist in the U.S. Navy for the first time in American history. Before, women were forbidden to join, because people believed a women's place was in the home not on a battlefield. World War I created a huge demand for sailors and workers. For this reason the United States Navy decided to enlist women. Though women were allowed into the Navy they were not sailors. Women occupied noncombat jobs such as yeomen, radio electricians, pharmacists, chemists, draftsmen, accountants, and telephone operators. Though the Navy targeted women so they could "Free a Man to Fight," they were nonetheless treated and paid the same as men. Though many people believed that it would take two women to do the same work as one man, women quickly proved their strength, determination, and skills. This determination was wide spread. By the time the war was over more than 11,000 women of all classes had volunteered in the Navy. These pioneering women paved the way for future generations to have equal pay and new occupational opportunities.

Another change that occurred during World War I was the increased participation of professional female nursing. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the number of female professional nurses increased and it became a much more acceptable field for women. When the war hit America more than 12,000 nurses from the Army Medical Service and the U.S. Navy were called onto active duty. By the time the war ended in 1918 the Army Nurse Corps had 21,480 registered nurses. Despite the fact that nursing was not a glamorous job, many women nonetheless jumped at the chance to help their countrymen.

Though the Army Nurse Corps, the Army Medical Service, and the U.S. Navy employed many female nurses, the American Red Cross supplied the majority of nurses during World War I. By the time the Great War hit the Red Cross added more than 3,000 chapters and membership grew from 17,000 adults in 1914 to over 20 million adults in 1918. Additionally, the Red Cross recruited 20,000 registered nurses to serve the military. By 1919 the Red Cross continued to service social aid programs for refugees and victims. It is estimated that 3,953 volunteers worked in these programs, and of those 2,503 were women. Due to the scale of the First World War, the Red Cross provided the allied war effort with a constant stream of trained women nurses. This not only helped the war effort, but it also aided women

in their push for equality. Despite the fact that nursing is a domestic job that has traditionally been assigned to women, the fact that nursing became a paid professional occupation marks an important change for women.

This time period also witnessed more women working in organized non-domestic jobs on the home front. For example, the Woman's Land Army gathered women from across the country and put them to work as farmers and agricultural laborers. Though many women worked in their families' farm during the Civil War, there was no organized or supported institution dedicated to women farmers. Land Army farmers also came from a variety of economic backgrounds including middle and upper classes. The Land Army was unique in the fact that it encouraged women to do hard labor and work outside their domestic sphere.

Another example of women entering non-domestic jobs during war was the women who worked in industrial factories. Due to the demands of a modern war and a lack of male employees, females were encouraged to take industrial non-domestic factory jobs. For example, women worked manufacturing automobiles and mechanical auto parts. The Allied forces depended on the technology of the automobile to easily mobilize troops. Because of this there was huge demand for workers to become trained mechanics and industrial workers. With so many men fighting in Europe women stepped up and filled these much needed positions.

Women dedicated volunteerism and hard work during war enabled American forces to help defeat the axes powers. When their country was called to arm women employed both domestic and non-domestic jobs. For this reason, The Great War also helped set the stage for women to work outside the traditional domestic sphere and push for equal rights. During the war women proved that they could do the same work as men. Their contributions to war effort not only helped the Allied cause, but also helped themselves.