

Conference 1

Gender, War and Culture: From Colonial Conquest, Standing Armies and Revolutionary Wars to the Wars of Nations and Empires (1650s-1910s)

UNC-Chapel Hill • Institute for the Arts and Humanities • Hyde Hall

February 20-22, 2014

Llyod Kramer, UNC-Chapel Hill, Department of History

Comment on

PANEL IV: GENDERING THE HISTORY OF THE WARS OF NATIONS AND EMPIRES

1. **Mobilization for War and Nation: Gender, Culture and Propaganda in Nineteenth Century Europe and the United States**

Robert Nye, Oregon State University, Department of History

2. **Gender and the Wars of Nation-building in Europe, 1830s-1870s**

Mark R. Stoneman, German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.

3. **Gender and the Wars of Nation-building and -keeping in the Americas, 1830s-1870s**

Amy S. Greenberg, Penn State University, Department of History

The papers in this session show how ideas about gender converged with the development of new nationalisms and national states in the nineteenth century. There were important similarities in the nationalisms on both sides of the Atlantic as new nationalist

ideas reinforced evolving conceptions of manhood and womanhood. In fact, the prevailing gender ideologies in nineteenth-century European and American nationalisms provide further evidence to refute older historical arguments for “American exceptionalism” because the descriptions of military service, citizenship rights, human virtues, social hierarchies, and domestic life were remarkably similar in both Europe and the Americas. The identities of soldiers were everywhere connected to the meanings of manliness, and the postwar identities of military veterans were also linked to the domestic tasks of supporting and protecting their families—which had already been a key claim about their work as soldiers. A man’s job was to protect the nation and the family, whereas a woman’s role was to facilitate this manly work by raising future citizens, protecting virtues on the home front, providing civilian labor, and contributing to the national memory of warfare after the battles came to an end. Nationhood provided powerful new cultural and social support to the dominant ideologies of manhood and womanhood, fatherhood and motherhood. These papers by Bob Nye, Amy Greenburg, and Mark Stoneman help us think about these connections, and they provide excellent examples to show how nationalism, military cultures, and gender identities overlapped.

Why then did gender become so important in modern national wars and in the development of nineteenth-century nationalisms? In most general terms, the transitions to modern national states required new affirmations or defenses of social order and social hierarchies in both Europe and America because the older noble hierarchies and privileges were discredited in the age of the Atlantic revolutions. Distinctions based on inherited noble rights and noble birth lineages broke down after declarations of the universal rights of man and citizens and after new national governments and constitutions proclaimed the theoretical legal equality of all national citizens. The collapsing pillars of older social and political hierarchies—which included deference to both noble privilege and the traditions of established churches—had to be rebuilt with other ideologies and institutions, which included national armies that were no longer reserved simply for professional soldiers and noble officers. National governments sought to sustain a stable social order and also place national institutions in the formerly transcendent position of the church. Nationalism and citizenship in the national state provided the much-needed new social-political foundation

for the post-aristocratic, post-religious social order; and people everywhere increasingly connected their personal identities to national identities.

Many of the key citizenship rights such as voting and access to public offices were gradually extended to men in the lower social classes, but women and racial minorities were excluded from equal citizenship rights. This obvious denial of universal human rights was justified with new racist and biological theories that argued for the exclusion of women, African Americans and others on the grounds of inherent biological differences and weaknesses, including an alleged lack of rational thinking skills or an alleged lack of physical qualities that full citizenship would require. Service in the military thus became a good way to define specific qualifications for citizenship rights, and such service was open only to white men. Military service and leadership could no longer be limited to professional soldiers or the old nobility, but it could be limited to certain kinds of men. This male obligation to military service thus became a justification for equal citizenship rights, even when men did not actually become soldiers. Soldiering became linked to national manhood rather than to the nobility, and the honor that once was attributed only to noblemen could now be granted to all male soldiers. The honor of the entire nation (as well as the principle of citizen equality) was thus embodied in the idealized image of male soldiers.

Equally important, armies provided a new model for social discipline and hierarchies. Numerous historians and critical theorists such as Michel Foucault have emphasized the disciplining aspects of modern national military service and the “nationalization” of modern soldiers. The modern military system that dressed men in uniforms, kept soldiers under regular surveillance, and promoted officers on the basis of expert bureaucratic assessments became a social model for other institutions in the modern national state, including schools, prisons, and mental health hospitals as well as sports teams, businesses, and professional organizations. Gender ideologies also entered into these new disciplining and hierarchical national institutions. The new national social order thus incorporated the biological conceptions of gender differences, the military structures of hierarchy, rank, or advancement, and the cultural rituals of medals, uniforms, and commemoration. All of these patterns overlapped in both the military and civilian spheres

of modern nations and nationalisms, which (as these papers note) reshaped nineteenth-century gender relations with new military inflections.

Meanwhile, the older religious conceptions of virtue and sacrifice were secularized in the new militarized, nationalist cultures. Traditional Christian views of personal virtue and sacrifice fused with the modern national views of male soldiers. Men gained a new reputation as virtuous citizens when they served in national armies and when they were later honored as esteemed military veterans. They were especially sanctified as Christ-like figures when they died in national wars, thereby sacrificing their own blood and bodies (like Jesus) so that others might live. They died to protect the lives and freedom of the nation's civilians—men and women alike. This male sacrifice also had a religious parallel in the mothers of deceased soldiers, who were honored somewhat like the classical images of Saint Mary, who had given her son to the wider good of humanity and who was herself a woman of exceptional virtue. The gendered religious meanings of war casualties and their virtuous mothers thus became some of the most emotionally charged aspects of nationalist commemorations, cemeteries, and historical narratives. The classical, gendered symbols of religious virtue converged with the new cultural and gendered symbols of nationalist virtue.

These papers thus show how modern nationalist and military cultures brought gender identities or gendered social roles into the national descriptions of virtuous human behavior. Robert Nye gives persuasive examples to demonstrate that civilian cultures in nineteenth-century Europe drew on military models to organize popular parades, create new military-style bands, build nationalist monuments, support annual commemorations of deceased soldiers, honor civilians with medals or special uniforms, and link local organizations or schools to wider nationalist identities. He makes the interesting claim that the growing presence of civilians in the military helped to militarize civilian life more than to push armies toward civilian behaviors or values. I would suggest, however, that he might expand his paper somewhat by considering how this process of militarizing civilian life might also have merged with religious traditions. Did religious symbolism also influence the descriptions of male soldiers and male casualties as well as the descriptions of grieving parents or the nationalist commemorations that women helped to organize? This question leads to ongoing historical debates about the connections between nationalism and religion, which can also be enriched through a new emphasis on gender history and

symbolism. Also, I wonder if Bob would see any relevance in Foucault's account of "disciplining processes" for his account of how the military culture entered civilian life?

Amy Greenberg emphasizes that the struggles for national sovereignty and nationalist expansion in the Americas were always linked to gender identities. She argues that conscripts were less honored in America than in Europe after the French Revolution, but American war propaganda affirmed the masculinity of soldiers and national citizens as robustly as any of the European nationalisms. Military service and combat experience offered a clear path to manhood and to the rights of national citizenship. In addition, she notes how the experiences of war ultimately reinforced numerous gender hierarchies, even though women could gain somewhat more social or domestic autonomy when men were actually away in Latin American wars of liberation or when Union and Confederate soldiers went off to fight in the Civil War of the United States. She also notes the high number of casualties in the Civil War, but I wonder if the disappearance of these men might have opened up more ways for women to challenge traditional gender hierarchies after the war was over. Do large numbers of male deaths in warfare ultimately weaken or enhance the social position of the female survivors in a generation that has lost so many men? More generally, I wonder if the postwar commemorations in nineteenth-century America evoked the religious images of Christ-like sacrifice or saint-like mothers that were also linked to gender identities. Or was the religious imagery of warfare and gender confined within the reaffirmed domestic system that still denied women their equal rights to citizenship? Could women ever use their sacrifices as a path to national citizenship? Finally, I wonder if Amy could say more about how the emancipation of enslaved people and the service of black male soldiers in the Union army may have affected views of black masculinity after 1865. Did the later 19th-century history of lynching reflect new anxieties about emancipated black men and military veterans?

Mark Stoneman's paper is only beginning to emerge, but his summary of its themes adds another important issue to this discussion. He notes that national enemies receive a gendered identity at the same time that the nationalists were gendering their own soldiers and national sacrifices. The Bavarians, for example, portrayed all French citizens as weak or feminine, and this kind of gendered stereotyping may have been common in many nationalist wars and commemorations. If the national selfhood of Germans, English, and

Americans asserted a virile maleness, then their nineteenth-century French, South Asian, or Mexican enemies had to be defined as weak, unmanly, feminine, and even sneaky. In any case, they lacked the manly honor of the citizens and soldiers of one's own national culture. Military conflicts seemed to contribute to the gendered construction of "national otherness" at the same time that they affirmed the gendered virtues of newly unified or assertive national states. These are the kinds of gender themes that may emerge from Mark's paper, but we can also see the gendering of national differences in the chapter drafts that Bob and Amy have already written.

There is of course much more to say about all of these issues, but I would conclude with the key themes that I take from these papers: the cultural and political constructions of nineteenth-century male citizenship rights were closely connected to the maleness of national armies, and the masculine service in such armies offered a new foundation for gender hierarchies in the nationalist social order that emerged from the demise of older aristocratic-religious hierarchies in both Europe and the Americas. These papers provide perceptive descriptions of the connections between military service, gender identities, and national citizenship, but I think they might say more about how gender identities were also linked to nationalist-religious symbolism, commemorations of military deaths or national sacrifices, white racism, and the stereotypes or memories of national enemies.