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Part III: Chapter 21

WAR SOCIETIES, CITIZENSHIP, AND GENDER: THE AMERICAN AND CANADIAN HOME FRONTS DURING WORLD WARS I AND II

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This chapter will analyze the impact and consequences of the First and Second World Wars for the home fronts of the United States and Canada with a particular focus on the definitions of and challenges to powerfully gendered systems of citizenship. Diverse Americans and Canadians on the home fronts of these two conflicts experienced a profound paradox during the war years. Their nations needed their labor, support, and sacrifice, and because of this wartime brought new opportunities for a more complete citizenship for those who supported the nation state at war. This was especially true for members of groups who had experienced discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, and alternative gender roles and sexuality. Many Canadians and Americans were active in claiming these new opportunities.

But wartime also brought imperatives for loyalty and national security that resulted in severe restrictions on civil liberties and citizenship in the name of national security. In the First World War both nations designed programs and propaganda to define citizenship in the narrow confines of “100% Americanism” and Canadian nationalism at the expense of diversity and dissent, and these reflected notions of traditional gender roles and suspicion of those who did not follow such prescriptions. Violence against those deemed disloyal “enemies” and large-scale “Red scares” were part of the home front experiences for both conflicts in the United States and Canada during and after both wars. The apparatus of the surveillance state over citizens and non-citizens expanded dramatically during both conflicts. Opponents of these wars faced powerful consequences during and after the conflicts as nation states reestablished gendered prescriptions for loyalty, proper behavior, and wartime choices.

For Canadians and Americans on home fronts in both the Great War and the Second World War definitions of acceptable and unacceptable citizenship were powerfully gendered. Questions of citizenship hinged on the traditional gendered ideology that categorized men as the protectors and women as the protected in families, communities and the nation. Policymakers in both nations defined

masculinity as the willingness to serve as a “citizen soldier” to protect women and home, or, for men on the home front, working in essential industries or agriculture as the “man behind the man behind the gun,” as a Second World War song had it. Constructions of masculinity in these industrializing nations that focused on men as breadwinners reached into wartime home fronts with the imperative to “work or fight.” In Canada, privileged white men were encouraged to “fight or pay” into a patriotic fund to benefit fighting men’s wives, mothers, and children, enabling them to serve as surrogate protectors. Conscription in both nations for both conflicts complicated this process and privileged white, propertied men for deferments, exacerbating racial, ethnic, and class divisions in masculine citizenship achieved by service to the state. Following the worldwide depression of the 1930s, masculinity and citizenship merged in the idea of being a wartime provider and breadwinner who was loyal to the nation’s war aims in the Second World War. Men who were conscientious objectors, those who avoided the draft, and radicals and opponents of the war were labeled “slackers” ineligible for the manly badge of citizenship through wartime service, and were often disparaged as homosexual in the years when, as Margot Cannady demonstrates, the United States government defined “sexual perversion . . . as inversely related to one’s desirability for citizenship.”¹

Women’s citizenship status was linked to models of approved femininity. Across both conflicts policymakers and propagandists insisted that women could best serve their nation states as active “patriotic mothers” who raised their children to support and defend the nation in time of war and encouraged their sons to fight for the war effort.² Gold Star Mothers, acknowledged and honored because their sons died in wartime service were one symbol of this definition of feminine citizenship. In the First World War, women like Emma Goldman and Marie Equi who were outspoken opponents of the conflict, were labeled as disloyal mothers who forfeited their citizenship rights because they did not conform to the imperative of patriotic motherhood. Emma Goldman was deported after the conflict; Marie Equi was sent to San Quentin prison, her prosecution and persecution heightened due to her overt radicalism and her lesbian identity. Women who claimed the right to bear arms in the United States to defend the state but also to defend themselves from intimate violence were castigated as dangerous, mannish outsiders with no claim to citizenship and safety.

Women in many U.S. states and in some Canadian provinces achieved the right to vote before the First World War and therefore women in both nations experienced the conflict in the context of claims for an expanded female citizenship. Those who supported the war effort experienced some opportunity and rewards. Some historians credit women’s support of wartime goals with the achievement of national woman suffrage in Canada in 1918 and in the United States in 1920. Other activist women saw the war as a violation of social justice causes in which they were

¹ Margot Cannady, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 23.

² Barbara J. Steinson, *American Women’s Activism in World War I* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982); Kathleen Kennedy, *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion During World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

engaged. Many Montreal suffragists, for example, opposed Canada's Wartime Elections Act of 1917 that gave voting privileges to women with husbands and sons in the military because they saw it as linking female citizenship to militarism.³ Members of the U.S. National Woman's Party who protested at the White House were jailed. Other women, including those who were involved in the peace movement, challenged their nation states with the view that war had no place in modern society, that women suffered the violence consequences of war and should organize as citizens to oppose it. Women involved in the Socialist Party and organized labor most often viewed war as an aid to capitalist profits and imperialism that would prevent people from experiencing the benefits of citizenship.⁴

On the home fronts in both conflicts workers in the United States and Canada challenged wartime states to recognize their *economic citizenship*⁵ by claiming access to the industrial and agricultural production essential for victory. Immigrant women, African American and Black Canadians, Latinas, First Nations Peoples and Native Americans also worked for racial and ethnic equality along with men in their communities. They achieved important mileposts but within important limits. Canadian women industrial workers and U.S. women who were "Rosie the Riveter" and "Rosita the Riveter" in the Second World War trod a careful line of sexual respectability in their civic and work roles. Policymakers and industrialists cast the contributions of these women workers as being "for the duration of the war" only and did not invest in infrastructure such as child care facilities that would have expanded women's economic citizenship in a more permanent way at conflict's end. Many women wished to maintain the gains they had made in securing economic citizenship during the conflict. But women were first fired and propaganda emphasized traditional roles of motherhood and homemaking; the baby boom that followed the Second World War in both nations is a tangible result of this process.

These gendered concepts of citizenship across Canada and the United States home fronts in the First and Second World Wars were double-edged swords. By supporting the war effort, linking all actions on the home front to the stated goals of national war fronts, individuals could affirm or expand their claims for a more complete citizenship. Americans of color, women, and immigrants who conformed to masculine and feminine ideals of civic status could find some rewards and some progress on the path to citizenship. But those who did not conform faced the denial of their citizenship rights or the possibility of civic status and equality.

If wartime citizenship in the United States and Canada during the two World Wars was gendered, it was also related directly to home front conceptions of "armed conflict" and "war." By definition, these home fronts were both separate from and connected to war fronts and linked to larger civic wartime goals, thereby

³ Tarah Brookfield, "Divided by the Ballot Box: The Montreal Council of Women and the Election of 1917," *The Canadian Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (December 2008): 473-501.

⁴ Frances H. Early, *A World Without War: How U.S. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted World War I* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997). Erika K. Kuhlman, *Petticoats and White Feathers: Gender Conformity, Race, the Progressive Peace Movement, and the Debate Over War, 1895-1919* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 73-100.

⁵ Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

complicating the concepts of “armed conflict” and “war” for participants and for historians. In both conflicts, Canadian and U.S. governments created powerful rules and propaganda machines to convince or, if need be, force citizens and residents to work in war industries, volunteer their time and donate money and products to support the war. Violence became a way of enforcing the rules for citizenship and loyalty, locating another sort of “armed conflict” on these home fronts.

These home front armed conflicts were enhanced by the expansion of ever more robust state bureaucracies and apparatus for surveillance of citizens and non-citizens. The U.S. Bureau of Investigation (what would become the F.B.I. after the First World War) surveilled Americans of color, women, and pacifists engaged in civil rights activism and those who avoided the draft. The U.S. military borrowed and adapted surveillance and mass examination techniques from the Bureau of Immigration to police queer people. Psychological testing in both conflicts stigmatized people whose sexuality did not conform to a masculine/feminine binary, and challenged their ability to be citizens serving the nation in time of war. The United States and Canadian governments passed legislation restricting civil liberties during the First World War: Canada with the War Measures Act in 1914, and the U.S. with the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Alien Act and Sedition Act in 1918. Groups such as the American Protective League, which for part of the war was armed and funded by the U.S. government, various “red squads” and other armed groups measured the difference between vigilance and vigilante violence against German Americans and German Canadians, organized workers, and immigrant others. Thousands were persecuted and arrested, harassed and several murdered. Governments of both nations responded to fears of radicalism, expanding immigration, and the Russian Revolution with “red scares” in the years directly following the First World War. The U.S. government deported suspected radicals and denied thousands the possibility of naturalized citizenship following the conflict, particularly those who had chosen not to be combatants or who had worked for international peace.⁶ Queer people after both conflicts were also targets of campaigns to deny them citizenship or naturalization rights, even rights to enter the United States. Race riots targeting soldiers of color and their families in major cities like Chicago and St. Louis after the First World War and the Zoot Suit Riots in East Los Angeles where soldiers targeted Mexican Americans benefitting from Second World War defense work, challenged the citizenship of members of communities of color at the same time that they galvanized campaigns for social justice.

In the United States restrictive legislation for immigration and naturalization followed both World Wars, including the category of gender identity and sexuality in the rules. Canadian activists worked to prevent similar legislation following the First World War. But Legislation in the United States created civic status for some peoples who had been denied it. The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 provided for U.S. citizenship for native peoples in the United States, but challenged tribal sovereignty. Asian Americans, barred from naturalization in the 1920s in the United States, achieved naturalization rights during and after the Second World Wars.

⁶ Candice Bredbenner, “A Duty to Defend? The Evolution of Aliens’ Military Obligations to the United States, 1792 to 1946,” *Journal of Policy History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 224-262.

Citizenship in the aftermaths of the conflicts continued to follow gendered prescriptions.

Across the two conflicts Canada and the United States incarcerated “enemy aliens” and suspect citizens such as Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians, with significantly gendered consequences for those involved, further expanding the “armed conflict” on the home fronts and challenging citizenship status. In First World War Canada and the U.S., both governments established registration and surveillance for enemy aliens and incarcerated others. Their actions drew on the growing surveillance apparatus of the state and created new imperatives for citizenship status and new rules for naturalized citizenship. Non-citizen men residing in the U.S. who had their “first papers” for naturalization but who did not register for the draft were denied the possibility of naturalization after the First World War in the U.S. In my recent study of the case of Oregon in the First World War, 3,729 people from across the state, 2,245 men and 1,484 women, registered as enemy aliens in 1917 and 1918. Almost one quarter, 394, were U.S. born women who lost their citizenship because of federal legislation in effect from 1907 to 1922, legislation that required women who were U.S. citizens who married foreign men to forfeit their U.S. citizenship and take on the nationality of their husbands. A significant number of these U.S. born “enemy alien” women resisted registration and the surveillance that accompanied it, with protests, challenges to the denial of their citizenship, and at least one skillfully-developed process of divorce that allowed Grace Reimers to keep her wartime job at the Port of Portland and her citizenship.⁷ Activists worked to gain married women’s nationality protections as part of citizenship rights following the conflict.

The mobilization of enemy alien surveillance, registration, and incarceration in Canadian and U.S. states during the First World War prepared the way for the incarceration of Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, many of whom were citizens, and the increased surveillance and curfews for Italian and German Americans and Canadians. Relocation and incarceration of Japanese Americans and Canadians, insured by the force of arms and policy, magnified the “armed conflict” on the home front and violence against citizens and residents in the name of national security. There were gendered consequences: Japanese American male citizens who agreed to step from incarceration to military service were redefined as masculine citizens; the “No-No Boys” who would not affirm their loyalty to the United States and agree to serve in the military were deemed cowardly and their masculinity questioned and some lost their citizenship. In the camps, fathers lost masculine status when they no longer provided for nor made decisions for family members. Some young women challenged gendered cultural norms by working for wages, attending college, selecting marriage partners and making decisions outside of parental supervision that led to increased economic citizenship and status but with the powerful cost of incarceration.

⁷ Kimberly Jensen, “From Citizens to Enemy Aliens: Oregon Women, Marriage, and the Surveillance State during the First World War,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 114, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 427-442.

For many activists, the First and Second World Wars raised the following civic question: could citizens, male or female, oppose their nation's participation in an armed conflict, without being disloyal or unpatriotic, discarding the very tools by which their nations told them citizenship was to be maintained? Was there another vision of citizenship that created a place for dissent and challenged the gendered prescriptions upon which civic status was based? Conscientious objectors, both men who challenged the draft and women who supported them, pacifists, socialists and others took part in these contests were part of the continuing quest for citizenship, civil rights, and identity in twentieth century Canada and the United States. Transnational activists who embraced a concept of citizenship over and above the nation state, and people of color who navigated the war and postwar years by linking colonial struggles and race relations on a global scale, also challenged gendered and racialized practices of citizenship with alternative models.

These issues suggest many fruitful areas of additional research. Historians of the United States and Canadian home fronts during the First and Second World Wars have often separated the analysis of these two conflicts. There are important comparative studies of the two conflicts that will enhance our understanding of citizenship across these twentieth century struggles and in national and transnational perspectives. This lens also helps us to see that "citizenship" was not a static identity or practice, but a shifting and contested status that had to be achieved again and again in changing circumstances like wartime. By considering and researching the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and class, a more complex and nuanced understanding of citizenship and home fronts will be the result.