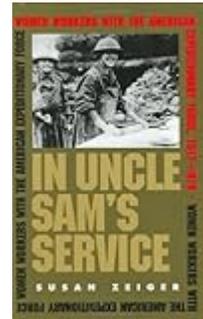




Susan Zeiger. *In Uncle Sam's Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999. x + 211 pp. \$37.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-3166-1.



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Women's Military Contribution to World War I

Susan Zeiger's historical examination of women's military related roles during World War I provides an in-depth look at women's experiences, along with the controversies that accompanied these roles. The main chapters of the book divide women's roles into three categories: auxiliary workers (including canteen workers and "doughnut girls"); office workers and telephone operators; and army nurses. Each of these chapters discusses how women were recruited into service, and then progresses on to explore the activities and obstacles they faced.

This setup allows Zeiger to compare the differing expectations and experiences of the three groups, while tying them together through well-developed introductory and concluding chapters. According to Zeiger, an overall purpose of the book is "describing and analyzing the ways in which the state contained the challenge of women's enlistment in World War I by reinscribing it in a subordinate status" (p. 6-7).

While other books on women's roles during the Great War exist, Zeiger's proposed twist is two-fold; first, her emphasis on lower middle-class, wage-earners rather

than the wealthier women volunteers; second is her attention to primary sources, such as army files, veterans' questionnaires, and oral histories. From her comments, it is clearly evident that she knows these materials and that the book is well-researched; unfortunately, her reliance on them is not as apparent in the actual accounting. For one thing, the bulk of the evidence actually presented in the book seems to come from secondary sources, as evidenced by the plethora of footnotes that accompany her analysis.

Additionally, Zeiger's book cannot escape the paradox that the use of personal accounts as evidence frequently brings up. She often generalizes how "many" or "most" women felt in particular situations, but offers only one or two examples to support these statements before returning to her own analysis. Generally, the book lets the reader know that women expressed their thoughts and feelings over their experiences articulately, but it leaves the reader hungry to hear from additional women's voices. Overall, the most interesting portions of the book are when she does utilize these primary sources because it turns the book's focus to how women per-

ceived themselves and their roles.

Zeiger returns often to the comparison between how women perceived the importance of their roles and their place within the American Expeditionary Force and the efforts by the government to control not only the women's perceptions, but the general public's, as well. Of course, the story of the state working against the efforts of women to create a new place for themselves is not a new one, but Zeiger does a nice job of placing women's enlistment among the other activities occurring in the early twentieth-century context.

Where this comparison suffers is within each of the middle chapters in which a separate set of women is studied. Each of these chapters provides interesting facts and plenty of historical background, but the tension between the women's efforts to define their role as crucial to the United States and the state's efforts to keep women's roles in a subordinate status becomes lost at times. These chapters seem to contain several different themes, in fact. For instance, chapter five comments on how army nurses caring for German soldier-prisoners came to personalize the enemy and thus "had the potential to undermine one of the basic underpinnings of war" (p. 136). While each one of these themes has the potential to inform readers, as a whole, these middle chapters appear, at times, disjointed and unconnected.

Ultimately, however, the strength of the book rests in the concluding chapter in which she pulls the separate strands together. Zeiger returns fully to exploring the central tension of women's military experiences as she discusses what awaited the women after the war was over, both personally and at the national, societal level. She comments that "[t]he war heightened and thus made visible the underlying contradiction between prevailing definitions of womanhood on the one hand and women's increasing participation in the waged labor force on the other" (p. 173). While not unduly optimistic or pessimistic, Zeiger points out the complicated, emerging relationship between work and citizenship that underscored women's lives in the early part of the century, placing military service well within that context.

The book is an interesting historical read, even if sometimes the varied ideas taken up in each chapter seem too numerous to keep track of. For scholars of women's military service, Zeiger's book contributes a useful tracing of the origins of some of today's debates over women's roles in and contributions to the armed forces.

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