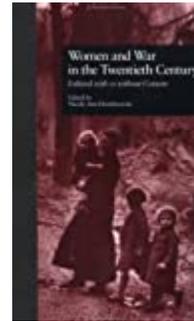




Nicole Ann Dombrowski, ed. *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted with or without Consent*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1999. x + 377 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8153-2287-0.



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Only Connect

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In *Women and War in the Twentieth Century*, editor Nicole Ann Dombrowski has gathered an interesting body of articles on this very broad topic. The collection, which grew out of New York University's conference on "Women and War," offers many thought-provoking pieces on women's wartime roles from the First and Second World Wars, through the Chinese Revolution, to the more recent conflicts in Central and South America as well as Rwanda and Bosnia. The volume has much to offer on individual topics but suffers, as do so many conference collections, from its lack of a tighter thematic focus.

Consisting of fifteen essays and organized into three sections (1914-1939; 1940-1945; and 1946 to the present), the collection begins with Dombrowski's "Soldiers, Saints, or Sacrificial Lambs: Women's Relationship to Combat and the Fortification of the Home Front in the Twentieth Century." As the title suggests, the essay examines popular cultural depictions of women during wartime as well as attempts to explore commonalities among the pieces in this work. Dombrowski explains her goal: "The complexity of women's relationship to war

raises the questions this volume endeavors to confront" (p. 3). Here lies one of the collection's problems. Indeed *Women and War in the Twentieth Century* does raise questions regarding the complex relationship of women to war, it just doesn't provide many answers. Dombrowski also laments the lack of historicity in many current studies about women and the military, arguing that "historical trajectory and global perspective get lost in presentist debates about women's place in the military" (p. 4). Instead this work is meant to anchor "women in time and geography, examining their universal as well as particular interests in relationship to war and peace" (p. 4). The work's chronological organization does provide some limited historical trajectory, but merely as a matter of arrangement.

There is no intervening discussion to demonstrate how the "complex relationship of women to war" changes over time and place. The essays instead stand alone. Although the chronological arrangement is traditional, these articles might have been better grouped thematically. Barbara Alpern Engel's work on women in the WWII Soviet Army speaks more to Helen Praeger

Young's article on women fighting with the Chinese Communists than it does to other WWII essays on the flight of French civilians during the German invasion or the internment of Japanese-American women. Similarly, Atina Grossman's excellent piece on the rape of German women by Soviet soldiers in WWII could benefit by being paired with Rhonda Copelon's survey of the rape debate in international law today. Rather than the current overarching attempt to tie these disparate essays together in the first piece in the volume, perhaps a dialogue between the essayists or deeper analysis of the relationship between the subjects would have given this volume a more cohesive feel. The two back-to-back articles on the Great War experiences of French women (Annette Becker's "Tortured and Exalted by War: French Catholic Women, 1914-1918" and Mindy Jane Roseman's "The Great War and Modern Motherhood: La Maternité and the Bombing of Paris") offer the reader focused critiques of specific aspects of French culture which would be made more valuable by a discussion between the two writers. Many of the other essays are concerned with women's silence, voice, and testimony which pose larger questions that should be more meaningfully addressed together. Although the initial essay contains a section titled "Piecing Together the Shrapnel of Women's Experience," the book too often fails to accomplish that goal. Because the topic of women and war in the twentieth century encompasses so broad a scope, readers may struggle to make connections between women's experiences in so many different cultures and times.

This lack of all but the broadest connections between some of the contributions does not detract, however, from the quality of many of the essays themselves. The body of scholarship on Western women during the two world wars continues to attract more interest, particularly as it concerns sexuality. Susan Grayzel's work on British women's sexuality during WWI and Leisa Meyer's article on perceptions of lesbianism in the WACs both add insight to this topic. Exploring less well-known

facets of women's war experiences, Elizabeth Thompson examines the struggle of Syrian and Lebanese women during WWII, while Antonella Fabri looks at the life of a Mayan woman and the Mayan people during the civil war in Guatemala. Carol Andrea's article on the role of the PCP or "Shining Path" in Peru is explicitly supportive of their position. The best essays, particularly the ones by Engel, Young, and Grossman, and Ivy Arai's article on Japanese-American women's internment experiences, combine their subjects' personal narratives with thoughtful analysis from the authors. Others are less successful, including the introductory piece by Dombrowski which poses questions that remain unanswered, giving the essay and the volume the oral feel of a conference opening rather than the more finished quality that these collected essays deserve.

The book suffers from other problems. Many of the essays would benefit from a careful editing; spelling and other typographical missteps are all too frequent. Minor factual errors are also troubling such as Dombrowski's contention that the First World War "opened doors to education, as was the case for Vera Brittain" (p. 7) which ignores Brittain's winning of a Somerville College exhibition months before the war began. The construction and typesetting of the volume is also distracting. Many of the photographs are inadequately labeled, and excessive white space surrounding block quotations affects the flow of the work.

These criticisms aside, the essays included in this volume add to the growing body of information on the relationship between war and gender. However, readers who expect a collection of essays to provide more to current scholarship than the just the individual essays may be disappointed by the lack of new analysis that could tie these articles together. More theoretical work needs to be done to help enhance the understanding of women's wartime experience and to make connections between women of different times and cultures.

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