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Character, Crafts, and Physique: American Men and the Meaning of Masculinity in World War I and Its Aftermath

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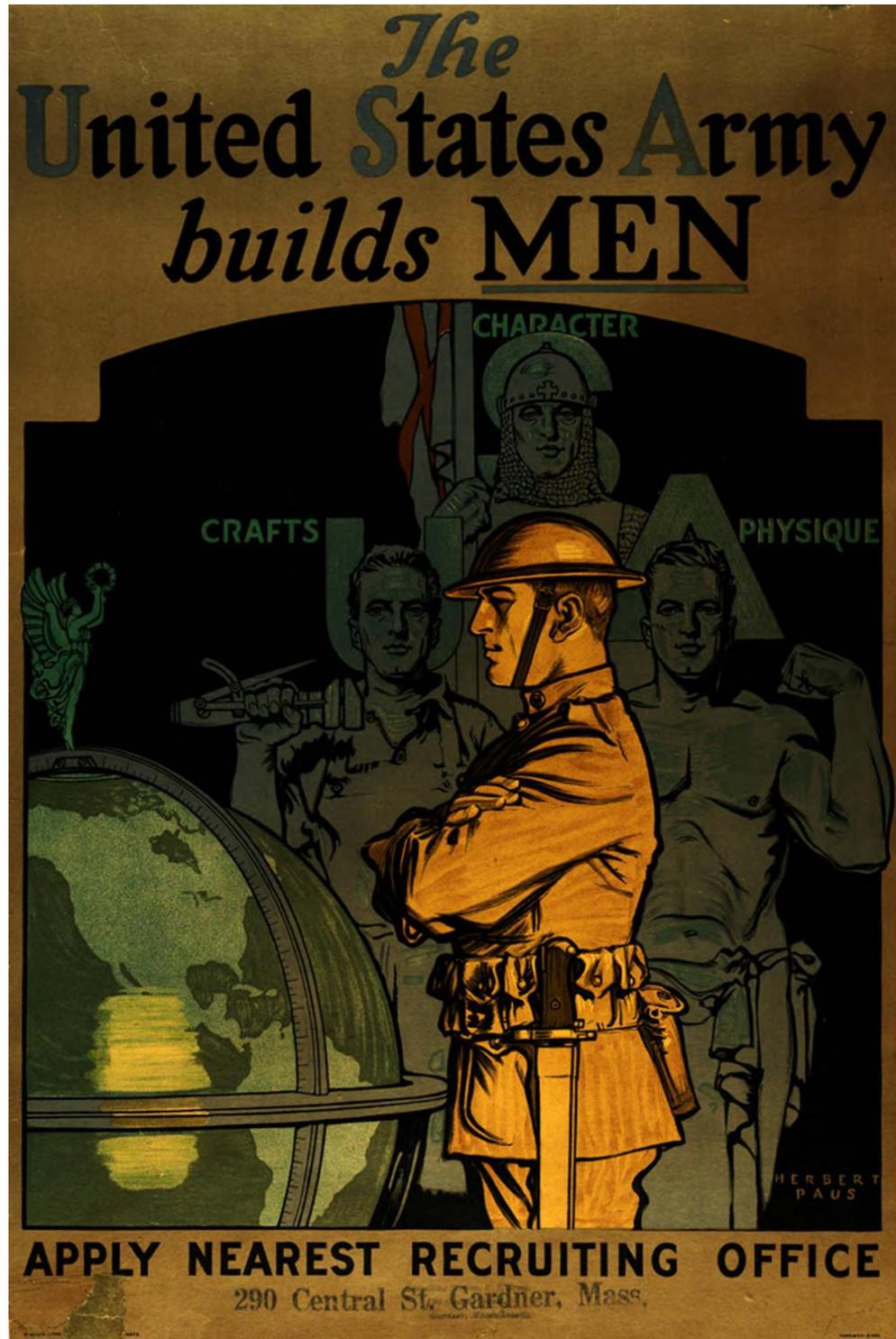
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Character, Crafts, and Physique: American Men and the Meaning of Masculinity in World War I
and Its Aftermath

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Primary Reader: Professor Jensen
Secondary Reader: Professor Doellinger

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¹ Herbert Paus, "The United States Army Builds Men. Apply Nearest Recruiting Office," in the *Niagara Lithograph Co.* (Buffalo, NY: 1919), from the Prints and Photographs Online Catalogue, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94514699/>.

Character, Crafts, and Physique: American Men and Ideas of Masculinity in World War I and Its

Aftermath

In 1919, just after the end of the First World War, an American lithograph was published with the title “The United States Army Builds Men. Apply Nearest Recruiting Office.” The image shows a golden-colored U.S. soldier with his eyes fixed on a globe, surrounded by three distinct figures: one labeled *character*, one labeled *crafts*, and one labeled *physique*. During one of the world’s most significant conflicts, these three virtues: character, crafts, and physique, defined a model constructed by national leaders and organizations of necessary qualifications for being a soldier, and even further, as innate characteristics of American manhood. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, national leaders and organizations used these traits as subjects by which to discuss national concern over a perceived corruption and feminization of men, and in turn a concern for the future of what would become of American masculinity.

These three specific characteristics, namely character, crafts, and physique, became necessary components of what defined an American soldier. The figure representing character in this image is dressed as a crusader, contributing to the comparison made by Woodrow Wilson between the crusaders of medieval history and the American troops of World War I.² This figure is also clutching a flag which bears a Christian cross. This is an allusion to the traditionalist values that took the form of Victorian chivalry and servitude, a practice praised by Theodore Roosevelt, which the Army expected its soldiers to conform to.³ The craft figure is dressed in

² Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering During the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 18.

³ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 171-172.

coveralls, holding a pair of locking pliers, a reference to hard and grueling work as masculine; contextually, this was a powerful message to working class men, as they felt domestic displacement and disenfranchisement at the rise of industrialization and the large-scale entrance of women into the workforce.⁴ The physique figure is shirtless and flexing, an obvious statement about the military's standard of physical fitness and health as being masculine. Lastly, one obvious characteristic of the soldier in the lithograph is that he is unmistakably Nordic in appearance. Although it was desirable for non-white American men to assimilate and conform to traditionally white American values, the question of where the line was drawn on who could or could not be considered genuinely masculine by American standards is highlighted through this image. Further, organizations such as the Commission on Training Camp Activities and the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, as well as national leaders such as Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, General John Pershing, and General Leonard Wood, used the American Army, and those who served in it, as a means to construct a model of what American men should strive to be, and to inform the population of how to view soldiers, and men in general, in how they measured up to this standard of manliness. These three virtues, although distinct from one another, overlap in many ways, at times demonstrating inconsistencies between these various views held in America.

By applying these three distinct characteristics, this paper will explore various themes, such as shell shock, venereal disease and other physical "defects," race and eugenics, and post-war reconstruction. In doing so, I will demonstrate how these concepts were used by leaders, organizations, and the media to impose these conceptions of masculinity on American men. I

⁴ Erika Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy after the Great War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 171-172.

will also demonstrate the interconnected nature of these traits, as well as some of the inconsistencies they present, ultimately highlighting the breakdown of this model of American masculinity for the First World War and its aftermath.

First, I will provide historical context and give some background on the development of these characteristics within American conceptions of manhood, as well as establish how national leaders and organizations used propaganda and coercion to force men into wartime service. This will be done primarily through discussion of historiography. Then I will explain how mandatory service, as well as propaganda, served to establish these characteristics of manhood not only as standards for soldiers, but for men in general. I will use primary sources to help establish the importance of these three characteristics and what they looked like in application during and after World War I. This will be done by analyzing each characteristic distinctly. Finally, I will reflect on these three characteristics in the context of World War I and its aftermath and discuss how this model ultimately broke down in its application. Many historians have discussed these characteristics of World War I-era masculinity in the United States, often utilizing similar terminology. However, my analysis is unique because I will be using distinct language from the “US Army Builds Men. Apply Nearest Recruiting Office” lithograph. I will use this poster’s definition of American manhood as the basis for how I will look at various wartime themes and social issues, and then I will draw on these comparisons among the characteristics, highlighting their contradictions and deconstructing the model as a whole.

The U.S. Army as a Maker of Men

These underlying characteristics of what was considered manliness during World War I and its aftermath were not new inventions. They were, of course, developments of ideas about traditional gender roles that had previously existed. Historian Kristin L. Hoganson demonstrates

the development of these ideas prior to World War I in her book *Fighting for American Manhood*. Therein she discusses the “Jingoist spirit of the late 19th century” in which American jingoists believed war was beneficial to the nation because it would build manly character in the nation’s male citizens.”⁵ There were different aspects of this manly character, but three distinct manifestations of it were in how American men demonstrated work, moral fortitude, and physical power, another way of describing crafts, character, and physique.

According to Hoganson, these jingoists promoted “martial ideals,” placing “greater emphasis on physical power.”⁶ An example of this can be seen in the Spanish-American War, wherein jingoists promoted greater emphasis on physical capacity and power as manly, as leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and Leonard Wood won awards as “representatives of ‘the highest type of the American citizen.’” This “solidified the belief that citizens were those who could fight.”⁷ Regarding the development of men’s crafts as masculine, Hoganson writes that these martial ideals of power “can be traced in part, to the urbanization, industrialization, and corporate consolidation of the late 19th century.”⁸ Industrialization and urbanization as a means for the loss of men’s masculinity will be discussed later.

Theodore Roosevelt’s opinions were highly regarded as a distinct leader and veteran of the Spanish-American War. Seen as a national war hero, the concepts of masculinity that he promoted had a lot of power. When the arbitration movement came to counter the jingoist mindset, he regarded its popularity “as a sign that American politics was losing its manly

⁵ Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 16.

⁶ Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 17.

⁷ Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 110.

⁸ Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 200.

character.”⁹ As a solution to this feminization of manly character, Roosevelt contended that holding colonies could prove to be longer-term solution to “modern civilization’s seemingly dangerous tendency to make young, middle-class, and wealthy men soft, self-seeking, and materialistic.”¹⁰

Part of what made these concepts of masculinity powerful and effective, however, was the timing of World War I itself, which helped to develop the status of what, to this day, stands as the nationalized regular U.S. army. Through this development of the regular army, its reputation as a maker of men was established. With the rising need for troops on the ground at the European war front, the federal government was forced to come up with a solution on how to satisfy this demand. This came through the implementation of the Selective Service Act in 1917, which demanded the registration of 13,000,000 American men. As historian Jennifer D. Keene writes, “The World War I generation served in the country’s first national mass army, of which 72 percent was conscripted.”¹¹

This mandatory military service was supported by Major General Leonard Wood in his 1917 publication *Universal Military Training*. He argued that this conscription was constitutional, writing “the principle of the draft, which simply is involuntary or enforced service, is not new. It has been practiced in all ages of the world...well known to the framers of the Constitution as one of the ways to raise an army...shall we shrink from necessary means to maintain our free government? Are we degenerates? Has the manhood of our race run out?”¹²

⁹ Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 21.

¹⁰ Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 139.

¹¹ Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 2.

¹² Leonard Wood, *Universal Military Training* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, Inc., 1917), 987.

These challenging words, such as “degenerates” and “manhood of our race” were not unique to General Wood. Rather, Theodore Roosevelt, was very vocal in his support for this ideology. According to Jon Robert Adams, “his [Roosevelt’s] articulation of American national identity linked the century’s initial masculine ideal to a healthful, secure state and convinced Americans of World War I as a stay against the degeneration of American manhood.”¹³ A similar analysis is given by Gail Bederman in the fifth chapter of her book *Manliness and Civilization*. Therein, she explains how Theodore Roosevelt contended to “prove their virility as a race and nation, American men needed to take up the ‘strenuous life’ and strive to advance civilization through imperialistic warfare and racial violence if necessary.”¹⁴ Concepts such as “virility” and the “strenuous life” are clear indicators of the health of the body and manly physical power as contributing to the characteristic of masculine physique. She also provides insight into Roosevelt’s upbringing, being influenced by his father in accepting the traditionalist view of men’s role to be honorable and chivalrous, as well as tough and violent: “TR learned that male power was composed of equal parts kindhearted manly chivalry and aggressive masculine violence.”¹⁵

This “degeneration” of manhood, as described by Jon Robert Adams, came in many forms, namely sexual immorality, alcoholism, laziness, and feminization. The evolution of what it meant to be a true man in World War I America was largely an answer to this growing concern among national leaders and organizations of the overall degeneracy of American men. The war served as the perfect means of fixing this problem by making men fit the model of a common,

¹³ John Robert Adams, *Male Armor: The Soldier-Hero in Contemporary American Culture* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 12.

¹⁴ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 171.

¹⁵ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 172.

disciplined, uniformed soldier. In the second chapter of Nancy Bristow's *Making Men Moral*, she analyzes a 1918 presentation given by Woodrow Wilson to American military forces in which, relying on the imagery of a crusade, he directed troops to "Show all men everywhere not only what good soldiers you are, but also what good men you are."¹⁶ This reveals the usage of character in a very clear way, utilizing the imagery of moral responsibility of American men to fight for the nation, and in doing so prove not only their worth as soldiers, but prove themselves as men altogether.

Character as Masculine

In "Chastity, Masculinity, and Military Efficiency: The United States Army in Germany," Douglas F. Habib describes the intent of the United States Third Army under General Pershing to control the behavior of soldiers. This was part of an attempt to make American soldiers moral, another aspect of full realization of wartime American masculinity. As the "representative of a righteous but powerful nation," men were to remain "detached, professional honorable, righteous, unemotional, dignified and firm, yet not oppressive." Fulfilling their expected roles as loyal protectors, men were expected to live above reproach as strong and moral soldiers. Forbidden acts included any sexual immorality, both heterosexual and homosexual, fraternization with the Germans, and alcoholism. This was part of maintaining a "posture of restrained superiority toward the German population."¹⁷ This "posture of restrained superiority," however, was not always maintained as demonstrated through the first chapter of Erika Kuhlman's work *Reconstructing Patriarchy after the Great War*, in which she writes "sex

¹⁶ Bristow, *Making Men Moral*, 18.

¹⁷ Douglas F. Habib, "Chastity, Masculinity, and Military Efficiency: The United States Army in Germany, 1918-1923," *The International History Review* 28, no. 4 (December 2006): 5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40109812>.

between soldiers and German women increased, prompting the military to acknowledge the failure of the anti-fraternization order.”¹⁸ Kuhlman further contends that due to a rising number of women in the workforce in Progressive era-America, American men had begun to lose job security and felt the loss of their own masculinity as what once was a clear line representing American patriarchy began to take a different form. Thus, she claims, the German warfront offered a new frontier for imposing patriarchy, this time on German women.¹⁹ This phenomenon is reflective of the experience American men had in the Philippine-American War as discussed by Kristin L. Hoganson, in which imperialists portrayed Filipino women as eager for “virile suitors,” a role that Filipino men could not fill due to their lack of manly character capacity.²⁰ This was an answer to the domestic concern over men’s status alongside women.

Much of what behavior was accepted behavior and practice for U.S. soldiers according to the army came through the Commission on Training Camp Activities, which promoted health and morality as necessary to the “great heroic enterprise,”²¹ as well as a way of preventing the spread of venereal disease found in U.S. soldiers, both overseas and domestically. Despite the incapacitating nature of syphilis, the U.S. Army overseas under Pershing was concerned about not only the implications venereal disease had to men’s health, but also what it revealed about their character. In 1919, *Defects Found in Drafted Men*, published by Albert G. Love and Charles B. Davenport, for the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, contains a section on venereal disease which helps to inform what made a man physically fit to be a soldier, as well as whether he was morally fit. According to *Defects Found in Drafted Men*, prior to December of

¹⁸ Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy*, 11.

¹⁹ Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy*, 21-22.

²⁰ Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 137.

²¹ Bristow, *Making Men Moral*, 19.

1917, all draftees visibly suffering from syphilis were barred from military service. This changed in December, when due to the need for more soldiers vastly increasing, the Senate Committee on Military Affairs ordered that medical examiners were “to accept syphilis except when permanently incapacitating.” A drafted man being physically incapacitated and visibly affected by venereal disease obviously did not contribute to the concept of soldiers as being healthy with good physiques, but even those not entirely incapacitated could still be forced to undergo training and join the war effort. It was, however, the undermining of these men’s character that concerned medical examiners. *Defects Found in Drafted Men* records that about 3.5 percent of men suffered from venereal diseases, which was “much less than many of the propagandists in the field of sex hygiene have asserted to be present in our population of young, unmarried males,”²² a clear statement of propaganda attempting to preserve the reputation of young American men’s character regarding sexual health and purity.

The introduction of *Defects Found in Drafted Men*, however, provides even another insight into American masculinity, namely from a racial perspective. In discussing the significance of the records of conditions preventing draftees from service, Love and Davenport claim that the study had “a biological and eugenic significance,” shedding light on the “influence of military selection on the breeding stock of the next generation.”²³ They used these points to provide grounds for discussion on eugenics and resistance to accepting minorities due to their negative effects on the development of character and physique while questioning the future of manhood and the military.²⁴ The study asserts that while the rate of venereal disease was high

²² Albert G. Love and Charles B. Davenport, “Defects Found in Drafted Men,” *The Scientific Monthly* 10, no. 1 (January 1920): 73-74, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/6885>.

²³ Love and Davenport, “Defects Found in Drafted Men,” 27.

²⁴ Love and Davenport, “Defects Found in Drafted Men,” 27.

among drafted men, it was higher among blacks than whites, explaining why states “immediately south of the Mason-Dixon line,” including “Missouri, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Georgia.”²⁵ had higher rates of venereal disease. Further, Love and Davenport argued that tuberculosis rates were higher in southwestern states such as Arizona, New Mexico, and California because of “immigrants.”²⁶ Venereal disease was discussed under the section “vices” along with alcoholism, which included charts comparing rates of venereal diseases among other vices across the states.²⁷

TABLE 11.—Grand total for venereal diseases (all) with ratio per 1,000 men, second million men.

State.	Number of cases.	Ratio per 1,000.	State.	Number of cases.	Ratio per 1,000.
Florida.....	1,966	163.32	Nevada.....	32	32.96
Georgia.....	3,377	135.64	Nebraska.....	348	30.97
Mississippi.....	2,302	132.46	Kansas.....	575	30.07
South Carolina.....	2,364	131.32	Iowa.....	816	29.87
Louisiana.....	2,414	121.40	New York.....	2,496	29.77
Alabama.....	2,592	114.67	Washington.....	300	28.93
Texas.....	5,099	112.08	California.....	529	27.58
Arkansas.....	2,156	105.28	Rhode Island.....	125	27.56
Oklahoma.....	2,101	85.15	Connecticut.....	265	26.55
District of Columbia.....	369	80.57	Colorado.....	213	24.60
Delaware.....	143	77.21	Minnesota.....	580	24.20
Virginia.....	1,575	71.21	Maine.....	182	23.74
North Carolina.....	1,625	69.56	Massachusetts.....	695	23.58
New Mexico.....	231	67.43	Wyoming.....	83	23.37
Maryland.....	847	66.73	Idaho.....	123	22.45
Missouri.....	2,234	65.24	Oregon.....	177	22.28
Tennessee.....	1,473	65.16	Alaska.....	14	21.28
Illinois.....	2,949	52.69	Wisconsin.....	494	20.28
West Virginia.....	933	52.67	Utah.....	71	19.38
Arizona.....	103	48.20	North Dakota.....	115	18.64
Indiana.....	1,206	47.07	New Hampshire.....	68	18.49
Michigan.....	1,305	44.54	South Dakota.....	146	15.60
Ohio.....	1,938	41.34	Vermont.....	38	13.03
Kentucky.....	856	39.53	State not specified.....	570	6.00
Pennsylvania.....	2,478	36.48			
New Jersey.....	811	34.99	Total.....	54,843	56.69
Montana.....	341	34.49			

28

Love and Davenport also cite Southern Italian immigrants as contributing greatly to the statistics of men drafted who were identified as being unfit for service due to being under height.²⁹ This characterization of non-white and, in the case of southern Italians, white but non-Nordic men expressed a clear eugenic agenda within the Senate Committee on Military Affairs

²⁵ Love and Davenport, “Defects Found in Drafted Men,” 31-32.

²⁶ Love and Davenport, “Defects Found in Drafted Men,” 31.

²⁷ Love and Davenport, “Defects Found in Drafted Men,” 85.

²⁸ Love and Davenport, “Defects Found in Drafted Men,” 85.

²⁹ Love and Davenport, “Defects Found in Drafted Men,” 30.

to promote the Nordic phenotype as the full expression of the physically fit soldier, which could not be achieved by drafted men not belonging to this group. These conceptions of race in relation to the nation and manliness were similar to the views espoused by Theodore Roosevelt, as he insisted that white Americans, a distinct and unique race from other Europeans from “the same superior Germanic and Celtic races that had long ago formed the British race,” were superior to African Americans. Although Roosevelt believed that black Americans “could live peacefully with the superior whites,” he certainly did not acknowledge any potential for them to attain the same level of masculinity.³⁰ These numbers were presented by Love and Davenport for the Senate Committee on Military Affairs as a case for eugenics, suggesting that the states with less racial diversity had lower rates of physical defects and vice than the states with higher populations of non-whites.

Considering the same national crisis of physical defects and vice found in young men facing the nation, Esther Lovejoy, M.D. made a different kind of criticism in “Democracy and Health.” Rather than blame non-whites for these concerns, she criticized the nation for failing to properly educate its young men and keep them healthy prior to the war, calling it a “defective social system,” which resulted in many young men willing to fight but being unable to due to venereal disease and other physical defects, which she believed could have been avoided. She blamed the prior generation for failing to make these men fit for service and as true realizations of masculinity. This reveals the concern that medical experts such as Lovejoy had about the future of American masculinity due to the nation’s failure to provide all willing men the opportunity to fulfill this role of masculinity.

³⁰ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 179-180.

Aside from national leaders and organizations, American men were bombarded by the media with a variety of war propaganda as a commentary and criticism of their manhood through many facets of everyday life, even in popular music. “It’s Time for Every Boy to be a Soldier” was an American song published in 1917 by Jerome H. Remick & Co. It was written by Alfred Bryan and Harry Tierney, and performed by Charles Hart. It further played on the burden expected from men to be the chivalrous protectors of American values and womanhood. The lyrics read:

Most ev’ry fellow has a sweetheart
 Some little girl with eyes of blue
 My daddy also had a sweetheart
 And he fought to win her too
 There’ll come a day when we must pay
 The price of love and duty
 Be there staunch and true

Boys of America get ready
 Your motherland is calling you
 Boys of America be steady
 For the old Red, White, and Blue
 When Yankee Doodle comes to town
 Up on his little pony
 Be there staunch and true

It’s time for ev’ry boy to be a soldier
 To put his strength and courage to the test
 It’s time to place a musket on his shoulder
 And wrap the Stars and Stripes around his breast
 It’s time to shout those noble words of Lincoln
 And stand up for the land that gave you birth
 That the nation of the people by the people for the people
 Shall not perish from the earth³¹

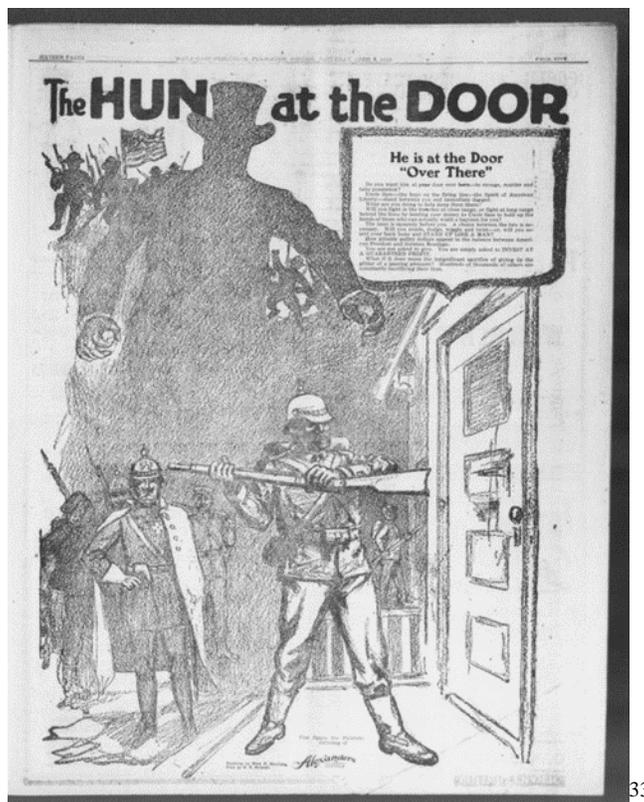
³¹ Mississippi State University Libraries, “It’s Time for Every Boy to Be a Soldier,” *Charles Templeton Sheet Music Collection*, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SheetMusic/id/27674>.

This clearly shows the pressure put on men to fill this role of protectors of America through courageous character. The song is a call for all young men, “boys,” as the text reads, to become soldiers in order to protect the nation, and to uphold the country so it “shall not perish from the earth.” Language such as “...we must pay the price of love and duty” reinforces the responsibility these men had, with no power to contest it. This song also subtly references the racial aspect of American masculinity, specifically the ideal of Nordic appearance, by protecting blue-eyed American womanhood. This is a significant source because it is a unique way in which young men were reached with the call to take up military service. Alongside newspaper articles and lithographs, it shows another way in which propaganda was used to promote wartime service as a realization of manly character.

Another piece of propaganda, an article from the *East Oregonian* on April 6th, 1918 shows a similar point of persuasion regarding character as masculine as it reads:

Uncle Sam – the boys on the firing line – the spirit of American liberty – stand between you and immediate danger, what are you doing to help keep them there? Will you fight in the trenches at close range, or fight at long range behind the lines by lending your money to Uncle Sam to hold up the hands of those who can actually wield a bayonet for you? The issue is squarely before you. A choice between the two is necessary. Will you evade, dodge, wiggle and twist – or, will you assert your backbone and STAND UP LIKE A MAN?³²

³² “He is at the Door ‘Over There,’” *East Oregonian*, April 06, 1918, daily evening edition, page 5 from *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/pages/results/?state=Oregon&date1=1918&date2=1918&proxtext=he+is+at+the+door+over+there&x=0&y=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&rows=20&searchType=basic>.



33

Language such as “those who can actually wield a bayonet for you” and “STAND UP LIKE A MAN” relied heavily on guiltting young men into taking a stand for their country to avoid being emasculated. Beyond the text, the image used in this article itself is extremely powerful in its persuasion tactic as it portrays a German soldier attempting to break into a door, with Uncle Sam and American forces in the distance coming to stop him. The picture implies that the Germans are on the very doorstep of defeating the Allied Forces, leaving it up to the United States to thwart their efforts. This article reveals the emphasis placed on young men nationwide to offer

³³ “He is at the Door ‘Over There,’” *East Oregonian*, April 06, 1918, daily evening edition, page 5 from *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/pages/results/?state=Oregon&date1=1918&date2=1918&proxtext=he+is+at+the+door+over+there&x=0&y=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&rows=20&searchType=basic>.

themselves as a physical sacrifice for the cause of the First World War. Here the image of Uncle Sam, ultimately a representation of America itself, was used to motivate, if not threaten, men across the country to take a stand and to show what it truly meant to be a “man.” This was to be done namely through exercising their chivalrous character by protecting American women and America.

Crafts as Masculine

Much of this concern over the loss of masculinity in the United States can be traced to the deconstruction of the national belief in self-made men. With the rise of industrialization, and the rapid disappearance of the independent rural farmer and the “heroic artisan,”³⁴ historian Michael Kimmel analyzes the workplace as “a site of uneasiness.” Kimmel notes, “What had formerly been the central arena in which self-making men had made themselves had now become unreliable, tenuous. Changes in the nature of work itself and changes in the composition of the workforce combined to make these self-making men uncertain of their futures.”³⁵ While American men, who had previously bought into the self-made man ideology, found new ways to express and experience masculinity at the turn of the century, such as through sport and recreation, it was through service in WWI that they developed their craft as soldiers and were conditioned to fit the American warfighter model of manhood.

Another substantial example which demonstrates how American men were forced into this role was through the implementation of stricter training and discipline, a further development of their craft. Jennifer D. Keene uses General Pershing as an example when he “emphatically demanded that civilian recruits meet the same disciplinary criteria required at

³⁴ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 84.

³⁵ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 118.

West Point.” He believed this was necessary to avoid desertion, citing the Civil War as proof that “the American is not above desertion.”³⁶ While manly craft was developed through wartime service and strict training and discipline, crafts as a realization of masculinity were developed into the aftermath of the war as well. Part of this came through how soldiers were treated for shell shock, a neurological disorder caused by exposure to the horrors soldiers faced in modern warfare. Shell shock as a medical disorder contributing to the discussion of manly physique will be discussed later. In this section, however, shell shock will be used to discuss the development of crafts as masculine.

One of the single most revealing visible depictions of shell shock available comes from a 1917 film from the English Netley Hospital, featuring various patients suffering from war neurosis, and the process they underwent to recover from the disorder. Although the true nature of these patients’ health and recovery can never be known, one thing is certain: the British used this film as a propaganda piece to promote their methods of treatment. The most common way this was done was through putting the men to work during their periods of recovery. If a man was not able to perform physical labor on the hospital’s farm, he was to make baskets. Of course, working on the hospital farm was deemed manlier than basket-weaving, but even still, the film portrayed basket-weaving as more reflective of manliness than not working at all. This method of treatment used at the Netley hospital created a hierarchy of work, which is revealed in viewing the film in its entirety. As the film progresses, there is also a progression in the hierarchy of work. The more shell-shocked a patient was, the less masculine a task he was assigned. For example, basket-weaving was the least masculine, performing physical labor on the farm was masculine, and military training was the most masculine (pictured below). The most revealing

³⁶ Keene, *Doughboys*, 63.

element of the recovery process for soldiers at the Netley Hospital was the military training men underwent once they were deemed healthy enough, and thus masculine enough.



37

The shell shock patients at the English Netley Hospital in the picture above were in the early stages of recovery as they performed basket-weaving, a task deemed by the film as feminine.



38

³⁷ “War Neuroses: Netley Hospital (1917), pt. 1 of 5,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AL5noVCpVKw>.

³⁸ “War Neuroses: Netley Hospital (1917), pt. 2 of 5,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mrM--tXIeE>.

The patient in the picture above performed physical labor on the hospital farm, deemed by the film as manlier than basket-weaving, as he was further along in his recovery.



39

The patients pictured above were shown forming up for field training all while still at the hospital. They were portrayed by the film as performing the most masculine task, namely military training.

It was the goal of the British Army to have these men back into battle as soon as possible by regaining their soldiering craft. Medical examiners saw shell shock as a legitimate disorder, but in some cases viewed it as an excuse men used to get out of war. In viewing the propaganda film, one cannot help but note that the concern for men is not so much about their health, as much as it is about their ability to regain their masculinity by progressing through the hierarchy of work and back into their craft as soldiers. Although this source is British, its attitude toward shell shock, specifically seeing it as an obstacle preventing men from regaining masculinity, as well as expecting men to be using it as an excuse to get out of fighting on the front, was just as prevalent in the United States, and even influenced the thinking of American doctors.

³⁹ “War Neuroses: Netley Hospital (1917), pt. 5 of 5,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aF66sla4iXI>.

On October 23, 1918, the *Evening Missourian* undermined the severity of shell shock when it declared to its readers that “war neurosis,” another term used to describe shell shock, was “not very serious.” The article explained how doctors of the day believed war neurosis to be comparable to what a nervous man experiences when proposing to his girlfriend, but is at a loss for words. According to the text, the best remedy for those experiencing war neurosis was to put their minds to “practical and concrete work,” such as “making toys, building boxes, boats, or making designs.” This statement, implying that a man’s strength could be rebuilt through labor, or a development of his craft, concludes with the claim that after men experiencing war neurosis had an opportunity to focus on such menial tasks for a while, “most of the boys go right back to the trenches and never get it [shell shock] again.” Using the same method of rebuilding craft through work, this American newspaper popularized these criticisms of soldiers and their struggles with shell shock as weakness, which questioned their masculinity.

American men and the development of their craft continued into demobilization. The end of the war saw millions of men returning home with little to no support or rehabilitation back into civilian life. Many of these men brought back with them the pain and hardship acquired overseas. Historian Kimberly Jensen analyzes this process of men making the transition from soldier to citizen and the social problems it presented in “Danger Ahead for the Country,” in her book *Mobilizing Minerva*. Jensen highlights the national concern over the high rates of crime among veterans, stating “investigations suggested a high percentage of crime among veterans of the world war, an indictment of ‘military habits’ as well as institutional and judicial failings” and “in addition to presenting information about veterans as criminals during and after the war, the popular press advised that the postwar world would feature a large percentage of soldiers who

had been traumatized and disabled by their wartime experiences.”⁴⁰ Further strengthening people’s concerns, Jensen writes “the popular press presented Americans with the prospect that all returning soldiers might be volatile shell-shock victims with unpredictable and violent behavior.”⁴¹ This inevitably left officials and policymakers to find a solution on how to rebuild men’s place within the nation. Regarding the treatment of shell shock, Jensen states that within the U.S. “shell-shock cases were overwhelming the few institutions prepared to deal with those suffering from the disorder.”⁴² However, by far one of the most difficult obstacles for veterans returning home during demobilization was, as Jensen states, “the negative impact of the war on marriage, the family, and gender roles.”⁴³ Having lost their soldier’s craft, as well as their sense of chivalrous character, men were frustrated at the limited work opportunities, low wages, and loss of status as the protector of the family. Through reconstructing these concepts of marriage, the family, and gender roles, it was thus the goal of policy makers to rebuild the concept of the “Protector and the Protected.”⁴⁴

Birthered out of the demobilization of millions of men from wartime service, this period of social reconstruction sought to reassert preexisting gender roles and standards, despite much of the progress for women which had been achieved through the war. Although suppressing the equality of opportunity in the workplace previously achieved during wartime seems backward in hindsight, the concern of experts over the dire economic state of the nation at that time cannot be overstated. As written by Harold G. Moulton in 1919, “It is enough to note that leading students

⁴⁰ Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 146.

⁴¹ Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva*, 147.

⁴² Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva*, 147.

⁴³ Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva*, 151.

⁴⁴ Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva*, 143.

of the problems of demobilization and reconstruction, both in Europe and America, have reached the conclusion that the period of readjustment following the War is fraught with the gravest dangers.” Despite the beliefs of some of his contemporaries that the nation was about to enter a period of “unparalleled prosperity,” he identifies several of the biggest red flags which prompted him to advocate for employment reform on behalf of returning veterans, citing disorganization of world trade and markets, great fluctuations in price, a demoralized spirit of business and enterprise, an impoverished Europe with reduced purchasing power, and “disrupted social and political life that has reached the stage of open revolution in a considerable portion of the civilized world.” It was this within this context that worldwide war demobilization that led to the restructuring of American men’s roles within society. In “Capital and Labor,” Moulton argues that public labor jobs must be created to avoid “social disorder,” as private industry cannot absorb the “entire flow into the labor market.”⁴⁵ For public labor jobs, he suggests railroad and canal building and state projects.⁴⁶

Physique as Masculine

Another necessary characteristic for a good soldier and a good man was physique. Although there were many clear physical “defects” outlined in *Defects Found in Drafted Men* that disqualified men for service based on their lack of health and physique, such as being underweight, under height, or not having properly developed genitals, one physical defect above all others was used by the media to exploit men in the name of wartime masculinity, namely shell shock. U.S. involvement in World War I was relatively short-lived compared to many of

⁴⁵ Harold G. Moulton, “Demobilization and Unemployment,” in *Democracy in Reconstruction*, ed. Frederick A. Cleveland and Joseph Schafer (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1919), 295.

⁴⁶ Moulton, “Demobilization and Unemployment,” 296-298.

the nations that were geographically much closer to the conflict; American troops fought in the war from April of 1917 to November of 1918, but nevertheless the effects of modern warfare took their toll on American troops. Many were stricken with mental illness commonly referred to as shell shock after experiencing the various horrors of trench warfare. While shell shock was a nervous disorder, and to some may be more easily associated with the mind than the body, when looking at images or film of shell shock victims, one can clearly see how badly a war-damaged nervous system was able to affect the physique and appearance of a shell-shocked individual.

Historian Ben Shephard writes “the general view was that ‘new conditions of war’ – high explosives, trench warfare and gas – had ushered in a new world, taking things much further toward ‘the saturation level of human nervous resistance.’” Chapter nine of Shephard’s *A War of Nerves*, titled “Skirting the Edges of Hell” gives an extensive background on the history of shell shock as a topic of study in America, as well as the collaborative relationship between England and the U.S. in the study and treatment of shell shock. According to Shephard, the United States had “some claim to be pioneers in the field” as the American Civil War helped to produce a relatively extensive body of literature on the “effects of warfare on the nervous system,” then known as soldier’s heart.⁴⁷ Annessa C. Stagner provides a similar analysis, writing: “...policy makers saw few links between the traumas of the Civil War and the war occurring in Europe. Only a handful of publications existed on Civil War soldiers with mental and nervous injuries...Perhaps more importantly, US doctors, like many of their European counterparts, came to believe that shell shock was unlike traumas created by previous wars.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 123.

⁴⁸ Annessa C. Stagner, “Healing the Soldier, Restoring the Nation: Representations of Shell Shock in the USA During and After the First World War,” *The Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 2 (April 2014): 259, 10.1177/0022009413515532.

Another doctor, named Dr. William Townsend Porter, a member of the American Psychological Society and faculty of the Harvard Medical School, described shell shock as “a sober, serious disease” in his 1918 book *Shock at the Front*. Detailing the physical symptoms, he wrote: “In traumatic shock the patient is utterly relaxed, pale as the dead, with eyes like those of a dead fish; he is apparently, but not really, unconscious; his breathing is shallow and frequent, his heart-beat rapid and feeble, and his pulse scarcely to be felt at the wrist.”⁴⁹ According to Porter, prior to his work in the field of shell shock treatment, one of the most commonly used treatments was a form of shock therapy. Porter was not critical of this method of treatment. Rather, he claimed that after this shock therapy, “the malign spell was broken.”⁵⁰ Porter attested that the treatment was neither dangerous, nor painful.⁵¹

Since 1918, shock therapy as a legitimate treatment of any type of mental illness or neurosis has been entirely abandoned by the mainstream medical community in America. However, ignorance in the American study of psychology and medicine during and immediately after the First World War shows just how unprepared doctors in the U.S. were for properly caring for soldiers returning from the European war front. Due to propaganda and this unpreparedness in the medical community, the general American population grew to view shell shock as nothing more than a soldier’s failure to toughen up and be a real man. Taken from a speech given by Sir Robert Armstrong Jones, another definition of shell shock was provided by the Minnesota newspaper the *Bemidji Daily Pioneer* on November 18, 1918. The text reads:

This is the definition of shellshock given by Maj. Sir Robert Armstrong Jones, an eminent mental specialist, in a recent lecture on the strange affliction that comes to hundreds of wounded men, including many of high mental qualifications and model

⁴⁹ William Townsend Porter, *Shock at the Front* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1918), 5.

⁵⁰ Porter, *Shock at the Front*, 6.

⁵¹ Porter, *Shock at the Front*, 5.

physique. Though real sufferers from shellshock receive the most sympathetic treatment, once they arrive in the quiet hospitals where specialists are restoring disordered minds, the authorities of all armies have become skeptical in dealing with many cases. This is because cowards have faked shellshock symptoms in the hope of being discharged as mentally unfit.⁵²

This content, which was taken from a British military source, not only demonstrates the collaborative nature of the study of shell shock across nations such as England, France, and the U.S., but it also reveals how heavily influenced the American population was of the English perspective of shell shock. This speech by Sir Robert Armstrong Jones was published in newspapers across the country, which helped the usage of the term “cowards” to influence the American people’s idea that there was a high probability if a service member of the military were exhibiting shell shock symptoms, he was actually a deceitful coward.

Shell shock victims’ symptoms varied greatly, but common symptoms included “hysteria” and bizarre “gaits.” A shell shock patient (pictured below), noted for having “Hysterical pseudo-pseudohypertrophic muscular paralysis,” can be seen collapsing on the ground after struggling to walk, as if his legs are physically crippled.



53

⁵² “Fear’s Sense of Duty is Equal to Shellshock,” *The Bemidji Daily Pioneer* (November 1918), <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063381/1918-11-18/ed-1/seq-1/>.

⁵³ “War Neuroses: Netley Hospital (1917), pt. 4 of 5,” *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah2f9VabEYE>.

There was of course opposition to these concepts of masculine physique. For example, the image, “At Last a Perfect Soldier!” was published in the radical left-leaning magazine called *The Masses*. It reveals the disapproval shown by some during World War I of the concept of a perfect soldier being based heavily on masculinity as defined by a strong physique, rather than an understanding of manhood being based on intelligence or critical thinking. The soldier in the image is large, with bulging muscles, but is missing a head. The suggestion being made is that the military easily controlled men by valuing their physical strength while not attributing the ability to think for themselves any kind of value. This image shows that not all Americans bought into the overbearing masculinization of young men to be used at the war front.⁵⁴



Reflecting on the Meaning of Masculinity in World War I and its Aftermath

While these ideas of what defined masculinity prior to World War I, throughout the war, and during its aftermath were popularized by the media, national leaders, and national

⁵⁴ Robert Minor. “At Last a Perfect Soldier!” *The Masses* (July 1916), https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/visual_arts/satire/minor/minor2.htm.

organizations, these views were not universally accepted. In fact, in many cases these ideas of masculinity contradicted each other and were inconsistent. For example, regarding hard work as being uniquely masculine, it was actually women who, to quote Oregonian physician Esther Lovejoy, “lifted the burden of labor from the shoulders of men” while they were away at war.⁵⁵ Also, the emphasis placed on sexual purity and chivalry as a demonstration of manly character was a clear expectation, but this standard stood in contradiction to the notion of manhood being proved through virility and violence, as promoted by Theodore Roosevelt. Regarding the ideas of racial supremacy promoted in the aftermath of the war, as Charles Davenport perceived non-whites as a threat to moral masculinity, it was the same non-white male citizens that in many cases were drafted, as well as volunteered, that demonstrated the ideal of manly character. As far as the treatment of shell shock as an indicator of femininity, it was only because of these men’s courage and exercising of manly character that they were even stricken with shell shock through facing the horrors of trench warfare.

Although the imposition of masculinity as characterized by men’s character, crafts, and physique was not universally accepted in World War I-era America, through the usage of propaganda and coercion, the United States succeeded in turning millions of young men into warriors, generating a vast and burdensome stipulation to fulfill this role as America’s resilient protectors against all adversities overseas. This was done through emphasizing the development of their character, crafts, and physique as the necessary components of what made up not only all soldiers, but all men also. Ultimately, the effects of the development of this role men were forced into were long-lasting. As Jon Robert Adams asserts in reference to this idea of American

⁵⁵ Esther Lovejoy, “Democracy and Health,” in *Democracy in Reconstruction*, ed. Frederick A. Cleveland and Joseph Schafer (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1919), 179.

masculinity during World War I, “such conceptions of heroic masculinity persist to this day.”⁵⁶ National leaders and organizations influenced the American public and fundamentally changed the way men saw themselves in light of their nation by creating an environment where young men were forced to choose between exerting their full potential as protectors and warriors, or bringing disgrace to themselves and all they held dear. By striving to make men masculine through character, crafts, and physique, however, the nation also succeeded in suppressing men’s liberties and life choices. The nation did not, however, achieve its ultimate goal. In the immediate aftermath of the war it was clear that the American public was afraid of these men returning from war, and understandably so, as they returned with high rates of alcoholism and crime, returned to a nation unable to provide them with jobs, and returned to a medical field unprepared to treat the war-caused damage to their mental health. It was through the imposition of this model of what defined a man, developed prior and during the war, which ultimately led to the destruction of this model in the aftermath of the war.

⁵⁶ Adams, *Male Armor*, 12.

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