

ESSAY

A War Generation?: The Radcliffe College Community in the Great War Era, 1914–1926

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Abstract

Over 2,000 Radcliffe College students, administrators, and alumnae irregularly involved themselves in World War I (WWI) activism. While most matriculating and matriculated Radcliffe members collectively contributed to war work, their individual records illuminate peculiar paradoxes that challenge historical concepts of America's WWI culture. Radcliffe females generally assumed war tasks untethered to their professional experiences and political aspirations. Many undergraduates and graduates contended that they chose, circumscribed and concluded war-connected work at their discretion—not Radcliffe's and/or America's. Moreover, domestic efforts designed to awaken Americans' war patriotism and activity encountered a decidedly dormant and indulgent Cambridge college compound. Not until fall 1918—over a year into U.S. belligerency—did Radcliffe's campus completely mobilize for 'selfless' war service. Radcliffe's WWI-related chronicles—including its members' post-hostilities humanitarian activity—suggest that "coercive voluntarism" and "complete citizenship" were not ubiquitous forces in WWI America.

Keywords: First World War; Radcliffe College; humanitarian activity; coercive voluntarism; complete citizenship; foreign relations; American women's war work

In late 1917, the *Radcliffe News* had become exasperated at its college's tepid, languid World War I (WWI) mobilization. Since April, millions of stateside American women had assumed tasks deemed complementary to America's war effort against Germany.¹ At fellow all-female northeastern colleges like Smith, Wellesley, and Barnard, presidents and faculty had effectively encouraged students' active war service.² Radcliffe's war record trailed that of American women and American women's colleges. Radcliffe president LeBaron Russell Briggs ignored patriotic calls to inspire vigorous war vocations. Radcliffe's 574 students proved no better. By November, only thirty-nine undergrads at the Cambridge, Massachusetts, institution had joined Radcliffe's American Red Cross (ARC) chapter, only seventy-two had assumed war work, and merely 115 had subscribed to America's Liberty Loan or rolled bandages.³ One student insisted she had "done enough" simply by buying Liberty bonds and giving to the ARC.⁴ In frustration, the *Radcliffe News*' December 4 headline asked "Does Radcliffe Know ... Our Country Is at War?"⁵

Radcliffe's sluggish, fickle WWI activity refutes dutiful framings of students' and alumnae's war service. Despite 1918 graduate Helen Bacon's recollections, Congress'

April 6, 1917 war declaration never made her cohort “a war generation” that loyally “rolled bandages ... [and] zealously knitted.” On-campus activity proved capricious until victory appeared certain.⁶ Alumnae acted slightly more patriotically. A majority—over 1,300—reported assuming war tasks; twelve graduates also participated in Europe’s post-Armistice and postwar reconstruction. Yet domestic currents that framed women’s patriotic war labors as socially foisted or as gateways to legal and professional equality imperfectly explain graduates’ actions. Many alumnae disagreed with War Work Committee chair Christina Baker that war service was apt “work ... [for American] women and ... college women.”⁷ Instead, they latently self-determined their war tasks and tenure regardless of national or professional concerns. Most importantly, no Radcliffe affiliate suffered sanction for cavalier attitudes toward war relief. Radcliffe’s erratic relationship with other American women’s World War I experiences posits that gendered notions of duty and equality never truly ruled wartime American culture.

Radcliffe’s WWI history challenges two historical frameworks created to explain Americans’ war service: coercive voluntarism and complete citizenship. The first grew from Frederick Luebke’s 1974 claim that declaring war inspired America’s “Self-appointed guardians ... [to] demand ... citizens conform to narrowed [patriotic] standards.”⁸ Twenty-five years later, Cecilia O’Leary concluded that U.S. wartime propaganda cultivated “coercive ... Americanism” and “Undivided loyalty” to harvest a “white-hot mass instinct’ for war.”⁹ In 2002, Christopher Capozzola asserted that multitudinous American “officials ... tolerated and encouraged” citizens’ 1917–18 notions that they had a “duty of vigilance” to police others’ conduct and ensure that “mobilization effort[s] ... pervaded nearly every facet of ... life.”¹⁰ Two years later, Jill Frahm asserted that stateside patriotic “fervor” compelled women’s overseas service in American Expeditionary Force (AEF)–affiliated entities.¹¹

In 2008, Capozzola deployed the term “coercive voluntarism” to distinguish pre- and post-1917 American notions of duty. Before belligerency, he and other sages thought that progressive nationals constrained civic responsibility to military and jury service, tax payments, and societal activism. Americans fulfilled these vocations via “voluntary associations” that ameliorated political, economic, and social concerns and cultivated interpersonal “bonds” and “political obligations.”¹² Capozzola contended that America’s war declaration rapidly formed a “culture of coercive voluntarism” that made supporting the war effort a good deed and national duty. Self-styled patriots particularly coerced women’s activity by threatening nonparticipants with “serious [adverse] consequences,” including violence, shunning, and arrest.¹³ Elaine Weiss concurred, insisting that following U.S. Food Administration conservation guidelines became “the epitome of the patriotic American woman’s [war] duty.”¹⁴

Subsequent scholars applied—but never questioned—coercive voluntarism to explain America’s WWI cultural history. Petra DeWitt and Julia Irwin asserted that American belligerency made patriotism “a duty” that subordinated “personal rights and needs to [America’s] welfare and survival,” and compelled support of war relief organizations like the Junior Red Cross.¹⁵ David Bettez and Sara Egge noted how self-proclaimed inspectors forced Kentuckians and Midwesterners to grow food, buy Liberty bonds, support the ARC, and conserve foodstuffs and fuel or suffer “opprobrium.”¹⁶ Kimberly Jensen, Manfred Berg, and Axel Jansen wrote that coercive voluntarism empowered American women’s leaders to demand that their followers “take on war work” and patriotically “self-mobilize.”¹⁷ Only Lynn Dumenil disagreed, calling it “highly unlikely that many [socially active women] ... found themselves ostracized or punished for un-American [wartime] sentiments.”¹⁸

Complete citizenship's historiography is briefer. It developed from Robyn Muncy's 1990 insistence that Progressive Era female reformers "used World War I to advance their [maternity and infancy welfare] programs."¹⁹ Six years later, Kimberly Jensen claimed that most of America's 6,000 wartime female physicians sought Medical Reserve Corps officers' commissions on par "with male colleagues" to gain "full citizenship" and "professional equality."²⁰ Susan Zeiger subsequently noted that AEF-associated American women considered "their labor an entrée to equal citizenship."²¹ A decade later, Jensen held that American physicians like Caroline Purnell patriotically treated AEF servicemen to attain "complete [legal] citizenship"—particularly suffrage—and equal military commissions and "access to educational, professional, and organizational opportunit[ies]."²² Subsequent scholarship has reified but not queried complete citizenship's rationale. Jensen's 2012 biography of Dr. Esther Pohl Lovejoy attested that she and other WWI-era female doctors used their stature to champion "women's complete citizenship ... [and] postwar ... progressive public health [programs]."²³ Dumenil recently concurred that female war participants framed their labors as America's "second line of defense" to legitimize "their claims to loyal [equal] citizenship" and their pursuit of postwar progressive "reform agendas."²⁴

Radcliffe's collective war experience casts doubt upon the supremacy of both theories. Radcliffe community members' marginal, irregular pre-1917 activism supports contentions that contemporaneous Americans experienced "very different ... mobilizations"²⁵ and questions whether Radcliffe mirrored America's alleged "uneasy neutrality in 1915 and 1916" and "determination in 1917 to fight."²⁶ *Radcliffe Alumnae Quarterly* missives from 1917–18 and fall 1918 *Radcliffe News* articles framed Radcliffe women patriotically and implied their total mobilization. Yet beneath this rhetorical veneer, many students, administrators, and alumnae willfully assumed, restricted, and stopped war service with limited or no regard for citizenship, career, or consequences. Radcliffe's post-Armistice activity likewise had tenuous links to feminist struggles or participants' professions. The Radcliffe community dictated its assistance activity far more than it negotiated with or submitted to coercive wartime forces.

Pre-Belligerency Radcliffe

Radcliffe had humble origins. In 1879, it began as the twenty-seven student "Harvard Annex"; Harvard faculty taught all the courses. Renamed the Society for Collegiate Instruction of Women, Elizabeth Agassiz became its first president in 1882. By 1890, it possessed several buildings and a \$75,000 endowment. Yet Agassiz worried that the Society "was untenable." Its graduating certificates lacked diplomas' gravitas, and students had unpredictable access to Harvard-led curricula. In 1894, it gained an independent charter as Radcliffe College, named after a Harvard colonial benefactress. Agassiz welcomed Radcliffe students' activism in social work organizations like the Radcliffe Guild, which placed undergrads in Boston and Cambridge settlement houses to "enrich [their lives] ... and help [them] in [their] appointed or chosen work." Still, Harvard's influence remained strong: its instructors exclusively taught Radcliffe's largely middle-class students, and Harvard's president had to countersign Radcliffe diplomas.²⁷

Before America entered WWI, Radcliffe students and alumnae generally eschewed war sacrifices. In November 1914, Briggs—who succeeded Agassiz in 1903—informed Harvard professor and Allied sympathizer Barrett Wendell that "Radcliffe girls" had "contributed all they could" to alleviate war suffering.²⁸ Radcliffe seniors concurred.

In December, they rejected Elsa Stone's and Martha Noll's proposed use of prom-allocated funds—\$82.00—to subsidize an ARC nurse's "innocent" war victim relief effort. Noting that Wellesley College's seniors had foregone their formal dance for war sufferers, Stone asked that "Radcliffe [not] be out-done."²⁹ Five classmates quickly lambasted the idea as ineffective—only twelve females envisioned attending—and injurious to juniors, whose prom utilized seniors' facilities. Three upperclasswomen favored fighting war "depression and sorrow"—provided "standard ... [social] functions" continued.³⁰ In December, seniors voted "almost unanimously" to have prom "as usual."³¹

Radcliffe students similarly ignored Great War-related humanitarian appeals the following academic year. In October 1915, senior Elizabeth Lazenby established Radcliffe's War Relief Committee to roll bandages for Harvard medical units in Western Europe. Junior Penelope Noyes, who also volunteered at the ARC's Boston sewing room, served as its treasurer.³² Three months later, senior Hannah London and junior Bertha Pizitz solicited contributions for "millions of Jews ... in ... peril."³³ By March, students had donated only \$44.64 for Jewish aid³⁴ and produced 1,350 hospital items. Lazenby and sophomore Eleanor Lee castigated students' callous consideration of charitable activity as "quite outside [their] ken."³⁵ They ephemerally shamed Radcliffe into greater service: by mid-May, the War Relief Committee's weekly output—1,103 medical articles—approximated five months' prior labor.³⁶ Still, students' 1915–16 activism vastly trailed Elsa Stone's and Martha Noll's hopes of demonstrating Radcliffe's "heart-felt sympathy" for war sufferers.³⁷

Alumnae concurrently undertook greater war work within various humanitarian agencies. By June 1916, 106 of Radcliffe's 232 pre-U.S.-belligerency expat volunteers had begun their tenure.³⁸ A premiere recipient of graduates' attention was the American Fund for French Wounded (AFFW). Run by affluent women like its treasurer Anne Morgan, the daughter of financier J. P. Morgan, the 1915-established entity dispersed medical supplies among Gallic military hospitals.³⁹ Radcliffe grads self-determined their AFFW activity. Before June 1916, only two alumnae—Gertrude Stein and Katherine Key—chose to distribute hospital supplies in France. Twenty-one other grads volunteered preparing medical dressings in eastern and Midwestern AFFW workrooms. As the AFFW trumpeted its pre-1917 "independent" status and never championed suffrage, its participants did not advance U.S. policies or complete citizenship.⁴⁰

Radcliffe alumnae's AFFW voluntarism mirrored graduates' simultaneous war tasks. By mid-1916, only seventeen Radcliffe women addressed overseas war suffering. Six of that cohort relieved combatants and noncombatants. Four alumnae, including Newnham College (U.K.) botany researcher Ruth Holden, exclusively abetted Allied civilians. In November 1914, Holden postponed her research until the end of the war. She received medical instruction and later treated British munitions workers and Polish refugee children in Russia. Seven, including Gertrude Stein and Helen Homans, succored only Allied servicemen.⁴¹ Eighty-nine stateside Radcliffe expats in local branches of war-related national charities likewise largely favored combatant relief. Only seven alumnae focused on noncombatant assistance. The remainder preponderantly joined military aid societies like ARC chapters or sections of the Special Aid Society for American Preparedness (SAS). Formed in October 1915, SAS guided hundreds of affluent Massachusetts women in clothing drives, making surgical dressings, and food production to maintain "National Defense."⁴² Alumnae's voluntary, pre-July 1916 war service advanced diverse societal aims—not specifically America's, suffragettes', or Radcliffe's.

Developments in the 1916 presidential election and the Great War prompted greater Radcliffe student and graduate involvement in war programs. The political contest between Republican Charles Evans Hughes and Democrat incumbent Woodrow Wilson elicited “popular pacifism that [temporarily] ... restrain[ed] war-prone elites.” Democrats bemoaned the war’s “enormous cost of life” and threats to U.S. sovereignty via German submarines and British blockades and blacklists. Republicans wanted “strict and honest neutrality” and asserted America’s “rights as a neutral without fear or favor.” Wilson responded by supporting military preparedness, particularly naval expansion.⁴³ Mid-1916’s extraterritorial hostilities also increased Americans’ vigilance. Britain’s loss of six cruisers at the Battle of Jutland inspired Washington’s authorization of massive naval construction. German submarine action, U.S. pursuit of Pancho Villa, Japan’s perceived Pacific prowess, and a million casualties in the Verdun and Somme campaigns precipitated domestic calls to defend civilization’s “innocents.”⁴⁴ Even the majority of Americans who wanted to avoid war conceded its encroaching perils.

Radcliffe responded with slightly greater voluntary war-related service. Throughout October 1916, the college’s War Relief Committee composed 800 medical dressings per week.⁴⁵ In December, the sophomore, junior, and senior classes each donated \$36.50 to sponsor a Parisian orphan.⁴⁶ Still, most undergraduates ignored tales of innocuous European noncombatants’ sufferings, and recent graduate Eunice Allen’s call for students to assume “the duty of [self-]sacrifice.”⁴⁷ Helen Bacon’s class spent six times more on its junior prom (\$237.85) than on “its” French waf;⁴⁸ the senior formal was presumably equally expensive. Students’ pre-belligerency, war-related contributions compared poorly with the Radcliffe Guild’s “womanly philanthropy” and “fellowship,” which annually financed “some girl of value to the college as a whole.”⁴⁹ It also paled next to graduates’ accelerated war activism. Between June and December 1916, fifty further alumnae joined war-related charities⁵⁰—including three expats in the AFFW, two in British hospitals, and two relieving Anglo-French noncombatants.⁵¹ Students’ strong preference for pleasure over war philanthropy suggested that not all leisured women were, as Mrs. Russell Sage insisted, “eager to ... achieve” good works.⁵²

Subsequent international events intensified Radcliffe war activism along distinctly generational lines. By late March 1917, Germany’s unrestricted submarine warfare and Zimmermann Telegram made belligerency appear imminent. Eight women’s college presidents—including Briggs—immediately offered reelected President Wilson their “loyal service” and “whole-hearted support.”⁵³ As Congress debated Wilson’s April 2 war declaration request, SAS President Mrs. Barrett Wendell exhorted Radcliffe students to enhance America’s security by devoting “part of their time” to war relief. Radcliffe’s Civics Club, which stimulated intramural “interest in current problems,” asked undergraduates to state publicly what they “could do for their country.” The *Radcliffe News* praised both overtures, but insisted students could display “loyalty [via] a ready self-denial” of “time, money, and effort” for war-related projects and sustain their social activities.⁵⁴ Radcliffe undergraduates again defined war service as an elective subordinate to societal norms.

While students reconciled looming war work with college celebrations, more alumnae assumed diffuse war tasks. Between January and March 1917, eighty graduates joined American and foreign war-related agencies.⁵⁵ Many, like Marion Bowler, joined indigenous groups preparing America for the war. These included the ARC, the SAS, and Bowler’s Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), which provided “moral” recreation to U.S. soldiers.⁵⁶ However, graduates’ augmented war activism never exclusively benefited America. In February 1917, Alice Canfield elected to assist Harvard

doctors treating combatants in France.⁵⁷ Rising German-American tensions likewise never convinced Ruth Holden that her Polish refugee ministrations would soon reverberate with U.S. statecraft. The day after Wilson received a copy of Zimmermann's intercepted telegram, Holden warned her family that Washington lacked "the backbone to do the right thing" and declare war.⁵⁸

Before America's belligerency, matriculating and matriculated Radcliffe women largely considered Great War involvement optional and apolitical. A fraction of Radcliffe's community joined relief agencies. A still smaller section of alumnae traveled overseas to aid war sufferers. Most undergraduates and graduates in domestic and extra-territorial war charities saw their discretionary labors as separate from America and suffrage. Campus officials and residents especially subjugated WWI service to Radcliffe festivals. Junior Eleanor Lee's October 1916 encouragement of student ARC enrollment was an outlier.⁵⁹

Wartime Radcliffe

Congress' war declaration intensified Radcliffe's hostilities work along generational and gendered lines. Alumnae quickly portrayed their growing war philanthropy nationalistically. In mid-April, New York's Radcliffe Club gave Harvard's medical unit \$25 to show its "deep interest and sympathy" for its fraternal institute's humanitarianism. Twenty-two club alumnae also echoed Briggs's prior letter and "respectfully offer[ed]" Radcliffe their "loyalty and ... [war] service as opportunity may be given us to perform."⁶⁰ The *Radcliffe Alumnae Quarterly* claimed that Ruth Holden's April 21, 1917 sudden passing from typhoid fever gave the college "the honorable privilege of sharing directly in the sacrifice by which the world is paying for the establishment of ideals"⁶¹—a clear nod to Wilson's April 2 assertion that American activity would make the world "safe for democracy." Alumnae appeared ready for mobilization.

The class of 1917's graduation catalyzed graduates' preparedness. The June 20 commencement speaker, Harvard Professor—and incoming Smith College president—William Neilson pronounced that Radcliffe women had a "duty" not to "shirk [war] obligations on the grounds of personal liberty." Neilson suggested that robust alumnae should assume "sacrifice[s] and ... services" analogous to European female farmers, mechanics, and tramway conductors; "frailer" ladies could safeguard "national spirit[s] ... from hatred" and conceit. Neilson warned that women's failure to bolster "[n]ational policies ... boldly framed on altruistic bases [for mankind's] ... higher welfare" would "abolish the [progressive physical and moral] force[s] buttressing] ... our courts."⁶² His insistence that American women's war service was obligatory paralleled Americans' patriotic framings of belligerency work. Like New York alumnae soliciting "loyal ... service," Neilson situated Radcliffe women's war labors as a "political obligation to the federal government" equally within Washington's purview as the month-earlier Selective Service Act. Still, it was unclear whether Neilson believed that Radcliffe's "elite women" would work as "a pleasant and diversionary hobby" or an "inclusive form of voluntarism."⁶³

Ensuing commencement festivities encouraged alumnae to enact Neilson's vision. Following graduation, Radcliffe's Alumnae Association, which had connected ex-pats to college events since 1887, and its Union, which had guided student government since 1905, met jointly to consider what war-related actions they might encourage. One attendee proposed wholesomely entertaining stateside servicemen. Another favored mirroring Smith College's plan forming their own version of the Smith

College Relief Unit (SCRU) “to relieve ... distress[ed refugees] in ... recaptured [French] territory.” The groups forged the War Work Committee to “plan [Radcliffe’s] ... war service” under Christina Baker’s leadership. The commencement’s Alumnae Dinner—an “informal” event “dictated by motives of war economy”—included brief remarks by Briggs and an address by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul Azan, a Gallic veteran then guiding Harvard students’ training. Azan encouraged Radcliffe Francophiles seeking to display their “keen sympath[ies]” to remain in America, where there would be “more than enough for them to do.”⁶⁴ Luminaries, alumnae, and some administrators all championed Radcliffe women’s assumption of dutiful war labor.

Graduates’ aggregate actions between April 1917 and November 1918 echoed but never emulated Azan’s, alumnae’s, and Neilson’s sentiments. By the Armistice, 362 Radcliffe women led war-relief ventures—a sixfold increase—and over 500 additional alums staffed 130 war-affiliated agencies. Most heeded Azan’s advice and served stateside.⁶⁵ This was particularly true for sixty Radcliffe alumnae in governmental posts. Three ex-students became Navy “yeowomen” in Boston.⁶⁶ Fifty-five toiled for the War Industries Board, the War Department, the War Trade Bureau, and other federal agencies managing war assets.⁶⁷ Elizabeth Putnam’s and Mary Lee’s mid-1917 enlistments as “Historian[s]”—nurse’s aides—at AEF French hospitals proved exceptional. Putnam insisted she only left her “Historian” placement in September 1917 when a U.S. Major convinced her that she “had ... to [fill]” an Air Service clerical vacancy. She later returned to “Historian” duties at Neuilly-sur-Seine (May–June 1918) and Limoges (June–August) before opting to return stateside in September 1918.⁶⁸ Lee likewise deemed her presence optional, but disparaged “some darned general” for tardily “look[ing] over” her infirmary in December 1917. Four months later, she insisted she could leave France “in the summer [and] get back ... whenever I wanted.” Lee instead joined the AEF’s First Air Depot, where she remained until the Armistice.⁶⁹ Like millions of American men, such Radcliffe women’s stateside and continental activity advanced America’s wartime agenda. Unlike AEF troops, Lee and Putnam treated their posts as discretionary diversions.

Official and semiofficial relief organizations became Radcliffe graduates’ greatest vehicles for determining whether and/or how they aided America. The war charity they chiefly selected was the American Red Cross. After Congress declared war on Germany, President Wilson designated the ARC “the official volunteer aid organization” qualified to concentrate and streamline U.S. war relief.⁷⁰ A Wilson-appointed council of financiers and industrialists directed its activity to maximize its humanitarian “efficiency and energy.”⁷¹ Between April 1917 and November 1918, 121 Radcliffe expatriates directed ARC programs; 102 women domestically produced needed war garments and medical supplies or aided servicemen and their families.⁷² Fifteen others headed military relief sites in Canada and Western Europe.⁷³ Only three alums steered parts of the ARC’s vast civilian relief work in France.⁷⁴ Radcliffe women’s war work under U.S. oversight arguably advanced alumnae’s “personal, civic [i.e., dutiful] ... goals” and those of their federal agencies.⁷⁵ However, graduates’ governmental synopses eschewed framing their tasks as furthering their careers or as facilitating women’s complete citizenship.

Private agencies aligned with the “wartime” ARC gave other alumnae a recognized medium for advancing America’s war effort. In autumn 1917, the AFFW became an ARC associate, allowing thirteen Radcliffe graduates to depict their domestic dispatch of medical dressings patriotically. Radcliffe’s two post-April 1917 enlistees in overseas

AFFW work—Beatrice Robinson and Lucy Stockton—soon transferred to ARC posts.⁷⁶ Ten former students joining the “wartime” SAS comparably insisted their food and medical stockpiling, troop provisioning, and medical aide training benefited America.⁷⁷ Twenty-two alums in the Wilson-created Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense, founded in April 1917, appointed “qualified” women to oversee “critical” war nursing, farming, factory, and child welfare work. One, Dr. Grace Jordan, joined Dr. Lovejoy in overseas military medical work.⁷⁸ Like their 180 “sisters” in federal organizations, forty-eight Radcliffe graduates in semiofficial war relief agencies often successfully settled when, where, and how they fulfilled their belligerency “obligations.”

Alumnae’s wartime YMCA tenure slightly deviated from graduates’ records in official and semiofficial entities. Fourteen of the sixteen Radcliffe women entertaining troops in YMCA canteens served overseas; all but one of these extraterritorial expats managed YMCA huts in France.⁷⁹ One graduate, Edith Stedman, periodically embodied coercive voluntarism. She accepted the YMCA’s “very strict” discipline and forsook smoking for the “hard and monotonous” work of provisioning American troops in Parisian (December 1917–January 1918 and April–May 1918) and French Alps (February–April 1918) refectories. Yet Stedman did not think her service obligatory. She considered leaving the YMCA “some time this summer” (February 1918) and “coming home” (March and April 1918)—provided war events were not “at their worst”; Stedman left France in July 1918. Notably, her unpublished correspondence never framed her overseas actions as a patriotic duty, as validating her complete citizenship, or as representing Radcliffe.⁸⁰ Like Lee and Putnam, Stedman considered her duty disposable.

The War Work Committee found many alumnae similarly unwilling to tender war service at Radcliffe’s discretion. In autumn 1917, Christina Baker recommended replicating Wellesley’s proffered and Smith’s active assistance to French noncombatants. The SCRUs’s sixteen members—including ex-Radcliffe student Marion Bennett—had garnered transatlantic fame for their embryonic relief of 2,000 war-devastated villagers. Smith successes inspired Wellesley to amass \$30,000 to send France a similar unit. Wellesley offered to include a Radcliffe alumna, if the college paid \$4,000 for her expenses. Several graduates opposed Wellesley’s proposal, arguing that U.S. servicemen held “greater claim” upon Radcliffe. Baker demurred, insisting that Wellesley offered a most “useful” service venue, and that France’s difficult reconstruction task was “essentially ... American college women[’s work].” The Radcliffe Alumnae Association quickly contributed \$3,000; Baker solicited the remainder.⁸¹

Baker’s War Work Committee later found graduates disinterested in any war service. Its March 1918 poll of 324 alumnae found only 30 percent—one-tenth of all graduates providing service during belligerency—had begun war tasks. Committee member and SAS volunteer Penelope Noyes found graduates’ apathy eleven months into war “disappointing.” The survey convinced her and Baker that forming any distinct Radcliffe war service unit was impractical. Two months later, insisting that Radcliffe had “all [the war work] ... it c[ould] undertake,” the committee declined participation in an intercollegiate YMCA canteen unit.⁸² Both decisions denied Radcliffe recognition that Smith, Wellesley, Vassar, and other women’s colleges garnered from wartime humanitarian and patriotic service.⁸³

Baker, Noyes, and their colleagues even found Radcliffe’s Wellesley unit representative unwilling to dutifully shoulder her “bit.” In March 1918, they awarded the post to Dr. Augusta Williams, head surgeon at Vincent Memorial Hospital in Boston. Five

hundred alumnae donations ensured her fully funded April departure for work with Wellesley under ARC oversight.⁸⁴ Williams arrived in Lyon in May and began treating French refugees. She quickly sought reassignment as an anesthetist to treat American troops wounded in Germany's final June 1918 offensives. Williams' hopes grew from similar recent ARC reallocations of noncombatant personnel—including most SCRUM members and both Wellesley unit nurses. Instead, the ARC sent her to a French Army children's dispensary, which Williams complained ill-fitted her skills. Against Baker's wishes, Williams secured a July transfer to a servicemen's hospital at Évreux, where she sedated patients, fixed fractures, and amputated limbs. Williams arbitrarily asserted that Radcliffe supported her decision to do more "for our ... soldier[s]." She prejudicially insisted that French refugees—then numbering 330,000—generally did "not need American [aid]," as sewing, cooking, and gardening jobs paid them "more than ever," and as truly "needy" Gallic migrants could be assisted "later."⁸⁵ Like American medical practitioners in the Women's Oversea Hospital, Williams wanted equal service opportunities to care for wounded soldiers.⁸⁶ Unlike her sisters-in-treatment, Williams disparaged equally vital noncombatant actions, and acted subversively when denied opportunities afforded to some ARC women.

Radcliffe's yearlong administrative and undergraduate torpor made Augusta Williams look like Ruth Holden. An April 1917 *Radcliffe News* editorial asserted that Radcliffe women's first war duty was to live "as normal[ly] ... as possible," and to preserve "justifiable" senior festivities by eliminating "extravagance and waste."⁸⁷ President Briggs agreed. In March 1917, the National Emergency Food Garden Commission petitioned him to spur students to "do their bit" by planting food gardens to augment America's resources. Three weeks later, the Intercollegiate Bureau of Occupations asked Briggs to inaugurate "war emergency course[s]" preparing undergraduates for war service. He denied both requests. Briggs insisted that students needed no further extracurricular war tasks as they did enough war work "as individuals in [on-campus] organizations ... or in Boston."⁸⁸ Initial undergraduate activity poorly fulfilled Briggs's platitudes. The *Radcliffe News* encouraged loyal purchases of Liberty bonds and crop cultivation in a "Radcliffe Farm Army" similar to Barnard College Dean Virginia Gildersleeve's New York "farmerettes."⁸⁹ Yet by May 1917, only the sophomore class's \$25 ARC donation appeared voluntarily coerced.⁹⁰ Radcliffe undergraduates' spring behavior presaged *Ladies' Home Journal's* summer predictions of the "home front" "Woman 'Slacker'—consum[ed] in social frivolity" and unwilling to "surrender ... comforts."⁹¹

While campus war service increased in the 1917–18 academic year, shirkers suffered no clear consequences. Briggs inaugurated, yet marginalized war emergency courses. He and Harvard President Lawrence Lowell decided that these classes would "not ... count toward a degree," and that nearby women's colleges—not Harvard—would award MDs to women completing a full medical curriculum.⁹² Students shared Briggs's sentiment that individuals' war work was supplementary to their collegiate experience. Officers in the Radcliffe Union and the college's ARC chapter insisted that students began the year "splendid[ly] ... responding to present needs" by choosing twice-weekly war tasks to undertake, by perusing "War Emergency Courses" in surgical dressings and first aid, and by donating to servicemen's libraries.⁹³ College associations also proudly suspended their status quo ante bellum. The Radcliffe Guild forsook its sewing bee and Christmas sale. Radcliffe's theatrical, musical, and civic societies reduced their schedules. The *Radcliffe News* ended its tea parties. Senior and junior class officers purchased fifty-dollar Liberty bonds and forty-dollar "bricks" in the Student Friendship Fund for

YMCA servicemen's war work." Juniors also voted to keep financing "their" Gallic waif, Marcelle Georgelin, and sent her family funds for Christmas.⁹⁴

The college's fall 1917 war activism was a gilded triumph. Despite October discussions of war training, starving neutrals, and Quaker noncombatant relief, by month's end only fifty-seven students had engaged in war work.⁹⁵ November's surgical dressing production trailed Smith's and Wellesley's output and Radcliffe's own yield a year prior.⁹⁶ Radcliffe's collective contribution to the YMCA's intercollegiate Friendship Fund—\$1,756—trailed Wellesley's \$15,600.⁹⁷ Prom preparations underscored undergrads' wish to preserve the status quo. Senior and junior officers voted to "have as simply and inexpensive a [formal] as possible." The classes of 1918 and 1919, respectively, aggregately allocated more for the Liberty Loan, the ARC, and the YMCA (\$115 and \$110) than they expended on prom (\$75 and \$59). However, the formals' expenses exceeded contributions to any individual entity.⁹⁸ As the *Radcliffe News*' December 4 front page implied, Radcliffe appeared indifferent to America's war effort.

Greater 1918 patriotic forces and WWI experiences gradually increased Radcliffe administrators' war work without fully entangling the campus in coercive voluntarism or complete citizenship. In January, Food Administrator Herbert Hoover and Barnard professor and Woman's Land Army of America (WLAA) executive Delia Marble petitioned Briggs to enable "some or all [graduating] women" to augment food production. A month later the Women's National Farm and Garden Association, a YMCA-aligned body, solicited 187 Radcliffe "girls" for paid regional farm work. Briggs's quick "welcome" of Hoover's suggestions—his gendered, archived reply to these missives—prompted Radcliffe's March launch of a farm unit for "agricultural work ... where labor [was] scarce." The unit's "Chairman," junior Priscilla Ring, believed it would inspire "young women and remind Harvard men of their duty." Treasurer Ezra Baker's April 1918 public joint search with the suffrage-friendly WLAA for a farmstead fortuitously overshadowed Briggs's private refusal to give the Wilson-created Committee on Public Information (CPI) "a brief ... sketch" of the wartime campus. Radcliffe's latent imitation of Wellesley's, Smith's, and other college women's agrarian work linked it with America's concurrent, societally compelled food conservation.⁹⁹ Still, Briggs's situational reticence suggested that he only urged war activity when high-level national figures intervened.

Students' spring 1918 war service followed the *Radcliffe News*' and Briggs's lead. In January, 135 new undergraduates joined Radcliffe's ARC chapter, quadrupling registration; sixty-three others enrolled in nearby ARC branches.¹⁰⁰ Still, the new enlistments only had two-fifths of students enrolled in America's official war charity. A February appeal from Briggs increased weekly surgical dressing production to 2,400 by mid-March, which workroom manager Dorothy Manks insisted exemplified Radcliffe's "true ... spirit of loyalty."¹⁰¹ A concurrent appeal from Andover Seminary professor Albert Fitch prompted undergrads to collect 600 pounds of garments for threadbare French civilians.¹⁰² In mid-May, seniors Priscilla Thorp and Hilra Stewart organized a "large patriotic ... meeting" to remove remaining war "indifference" and inaugurate students' "total" devotion "to ... war [activity]."¹⁰³ Their gambit succeeded: by commencement in 1918, undergraduates had donated more than \$400 for the AFFW and generated over \$2,100 and 33,317 surgical dressings for the ARC, the last contribution despite "serious" gauze shortages.¹⁰⁴

Radcliffe mobilized more fully in the summer months. Between June and September 1918, the farm unit's twenty-five students cultivated ten acres at Dummer Academy, a Massachusetts preparatory school. The cohort intersected with and deviated from

WLAA behavior. Like WLAA volunteer farmerettes, “unskilled” unit laborers obtained equal net hourly wages to men—\$0.04—for their 2,300 hours of “patriotic” harvesting. Like regional WLAA workers, undergraduates impressed local agriculturalists by farming “better than ... many men.” Unlike the New York farmerettes, Radcliffe students enjoyed Dummer’s “golf, tennis, canoeing, and other sports” facilities for \$1 per week, and never framed their task as advancing women’s full citizenship.¹⁰⁵ Near the apex of American WWI activity, some undergrads still sustained their prewar normality.

Fall 1918’s convocation “fully” catalyzed on-campus war activity. All medically cleared undergraduates weekly served in branches of loyal institutions. By the Armistice, senior class president Edith Smith trumpeted Radcliffe as “an educational institution [and] ... supply station of [war] volunteer[s.]” She praised all students’ forsaking of “teas, parties, and receptions” for “war essentials.” Smith insisted that undergraduates’ war service immersed them in a culture that simultaneously inculcated loyalty to America and to Radcliffe, and encouraged “working for others.”¹⁰⁶ Yet as matriculating and matriculated Radcliffe women appeared more fully mobilized on their and America’s terms, President Briggs still shirked similar labors. In September 1918, the CPI again asked him to “enlist ... [Radcliffe administrators] in the national Four Minute Men Organization” delivering patriotic war messages to cinema audiences. By mid-November Briggs had not replied.¹⁰⁷ Whether entering, enduring, or evading war work, Radcliffe community members asserted their right to define if, when, and how they served.

Postwar Radcliffe

The November 11, 1918 Armistice prompted an unscheduled “day’s vacation to celebrate” for Radcliffe¹⁰⁸ and obliterated rationales for dutiful service. November entreaties for Radcliffe’s “long and trying” postwar reconstruction toil—including inaugurating an SCRU-like entity—fell on disinterested ears.¹⁰⁹ Most community members no longer considered war-related labors patriotic obligations. In January 1919, Radcliffe voided prior “war work pledges.” By April 1, while New England’s ARC division solicited garments for 1.5 million European refugees facing “increasingly worse” privations, the college’s War Board stopped directing war activity.¹¹⁰ Even undergraduate humanitarians subdued their agendas. In November 1919, senior Janet Evans asked Radcliffe students to continue sewing “for [France’s] children.” One month later, she accepted that her peers preferred “more trivial pursuits” like “countless teas” and a “full number of plays” over relieving refugees.¹¹¹ Administrators similarly accepted Radcliffe’s war work conclusion. In January 1919, Dummer Academy principal Charles Ingham sent Radcliffe his farm’s final food shipment—thirteen bushels of beans. The legumes and Ingham’s thanks for students’ “desire to be of service” to Dummer “completed” the institutions’ “arrangement.”¹¹² Radcliffe’s agricultural demobilization notably predated America’s and the WLAA’s. In August 1919, the Department of Labor suggested that the WLAA demobilize; it did so two months later.¹¹³

Alumnae analogously thought the Armistice ended war work’s dutiful dimensions. The *Radcliffe Alumnae Quarterly* excluded post-Armistice activity from its service list—even labor ameliorating war suffering—as it was “not strictly ... WAR SERVICE” and would continue “long after peace [was] declared.”¹¹⁴ The ARC’s decision to stop sending workers to France after November 11 supported the *Quarterly*’s contentions that post-hostilities labor was not patriotic. Dr. Williams concurred. She

objected to her post-Armistice reassignment—preserving Paris-based ARC “women workers”—as “absolutely inconsiderate of [her] time.” Williams insisted that she could no longer work gratis, and harried the ARC and the War Work Committee to hurry her return. Christina Baker assented and considered Williams’ impending departure an omen of her committee’s waning “usefulness.”¹¹⁵

Some Radcliffe women sustained belligerency-era humanitarian ventures. On November 2, 1918, the class of 1919 voted to continue supporting Marcelle Georgelin; it annually remitted \$36.50 on her behalf until 1926, when she turned sixteen. It also gave \$25 to the United War Drive after the Armistice. Still, the same class resurrected the status quo ante bellum and made certain its senior prom was “more elaborate” than its predecessor.¹¹⁶ In 1919, the class of 1917, which as undergraduates had previously adopted a Gallic “orphan,” began two years’ sponsorship of Blanche Lapeyere, whose father had died in the war.¹¹⁷ Both cohorts subsidized Gallic orphans when Francophile philanthropy lacked patriotic luster.

Other alumnae sympathetic to war “innocents” forged the Radcliffe Unit. In December 1918, Lucy Stockton solicited five female drivers for six months’ labor in *Le Village Reconstitué* (VR). The French Red Cross–affiliated society needed supplies and people transported among the shattered villages it restored. The ARC barred its women drivers from VR conveyance, and the State Department opposed issuing American women passports for work in France. Both decisions separated VR relief from U.S. statecraft. Radcliffe’s War Work Committee decided to select interested, healthy alumnae with “knowledge ... [and] experience in social ... work, or nursing, or dietetics,” and to provide \$500 for “traveling expenses, equipment and an emergency fund” for this task. Under its aegis, Mary Burrage, Julia Collier, Anna Holman, Hester Browne, Catharine Huntington, and Katherine Shortall became VR chauffeurs in “a Radcliffe Unit in aid of France.” Holman, Burrage, Collier, and Browne sailed on April 29; Huntington and Shortall followed in June and July 1919, respectively.¹¹⁸

Unit women’s voluntarism and experiences diverged from wartime analogs. Alumnae in U.S. war agencies often served substantially and framed their presence patriotically. Augusta Williams pledged at least six months’ work and labored a year at posts she and/or the ARC considered dutiful. Radcliffe Unit women, by contrast, largely left after four months (Collier and Huntington) or strongly considered doing so (Stockton, Burrage, and Holman).¹¹⁹ Radcliffe’s seven representatives also lacked “loyal” wartime service outlooks. Beyond Stockton’s AFFW/ARC posts, only Burrage and Collier acknowledged prior belligerency work gathering garments and dressings.¹²⁰ Only two Unit references—Burrage’s doctor and Holman’s principal—insisted that their candidates would “unquestion[ably]” represent America. Lucy Stockton even unpatriotically advised Christina Baker how to subvert State Department visa restrictions.¹²¹ Unit women largely operated voluntarily and apolitically.

They were also comparatively underfunded and underqualified. The War Work Committee disbursed \$4,000 for Augusta Williams’ professionally relevant, yearlong French labors. By May 1920, Christina Baker had expended \$2,030 on all Unit members’ European expenses and material relief—one-eighth of Williams’ prorated monthly assets.¹²² Most women Baker appointed were also ill-prepared. Burrage, Browne, and Collier applied without completing nursing or automotive courses. Anna Holman had no medical, social work, or automobile experience.¹²³ Julia Collier had no stamina: despite a physical attesting her “sound health,”¹²⁴ she suffered a mid-July “breakdown” from domestically detected chronic fatigue. An ARC physician diagnosed her with

“heart trouble and a long standing neurasthenia” and advised her return. Collier instead whimsically chose to “assist” Burrage. The imposition infuriated Burrage and her VR supervisor. It precipitated Burrage’s “horrible ... headaches,” and led all to regret Collier’s arrival. Collier’s ensuing ephemeral stint at another VR site ended when successive “hysterical attack[s]” forced her September homecoming.¹²⁵ Few Radcliffe Unit members’ preceding professions strongly pertained to their postwar work.

Despite these limitations, most Unit women fulfilled Anna Holman’s hope of being “much more” than chauffeurs.¹²⁶ Over eleven months (May 1919–April 1920), Holman transported people and products over 12,000 kilometers, vended affordable general merchandise, and provided adolescents around the Marne village of Bouzy with games and contests as alternatives to “drink[ing] and smok[ing].” Among twenty-eight villages near the Aisne town of Vermand, Mary Burrage also sold low-cost household wares, drove extensively, and offered wholesome alternatives for youths who “smok[ed], teas[ed] the girls, and [acted] ... objectionabl[y].” Hester Browne delivered foodstuffs among twenty-three villages to people “who [had] nothing but their legs.” Huntington chauffeured, safeguarded merchandise, and choreographed a children’s pageant in the Aisne town of Vendeuil. Katherine Shortall provided material resources to German POWs and French aid workers and inhabitants around Noyon, a town in the Oise province.¹²⁷ By 1920, French Red Cross societies had gratefully conferred war service medals on Burrage, Holman, and Shortall for their womanly philanthropy, and the French Foreign Ministry similarly honored Holman and Lucy Stockton with silver Medals of French Recognition.¹²⁸ The cordial tributes diverged from concurrent contentious Franco-American relations,¹²⁹ thereby disentangling the titles from larger emerging historical constructions of Americans’ Great War era (1914–31) overseas humanitarianism.

Conclusions

Radcliffe’s WWI record imperfectly intersected with accepted historical frameworks of Americans’ war service. Students’ varying activism paralleled and surpassed pre-belligerency and belligerency Americans’ sparse “interest ... in the war.”¹³⁰ Alumnae’s war participation likewise resonated with distinct local, regional, and national Progressive Era aims, attitudes, and associations. Devotees’ unfavorable comparisons of Radcliffe activity with other women’s college communities indicate that some members thought all their “sisters” should assume the responsibilities of complete citizenship through greater war service. Entangling Radcliffe women in wider war webs ensconced them in national and humanitarian contexts. Undergraduates’ “full” fall 1918 mobilization and alumnae’s French honors show that the effort partially succeeded.

Notable incongruences between this veneer and over 2,000 Radcliffe College community members’ WWI-related records have since limited the community’s historicized participation in the conflict. Matriculating and matriculated women worked “largely as individuals” whose mercurial, dutiful, and/or professional activity in disparate charities embodied diverse ideas about appropriate WWI involvement.¹³¹ Students’ and graduates’ self-enrollment during U.S. hostilities often invested their labors with patriotism and divested it from Radcliffe. Administrators’ yearslong endorsement of undergraduates’ irregular war service and graduates’ peculiar self-mobilizations and self-demobilizations also deviated from national trends before, during, and after U.S.

belligerency. Students, faculty, and alumnae treated war service more as an elective than a duty required for full citizenship. They neither endured nor imposed sanctions on community members who shirked or suspended war work. The fundamental schism of Radcliffe's "war generation" from national trends in and historicized explanations of Americans' WWI mobilization both explains the college's overlooked history in the conflict, and suggests that a reevaluation of coercive voluntarism's and complete citizenship's omnipotence is warranted.

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