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Great Job Ladies, Now Give Us Our Jobs Back!

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"The Angel of No Man's Land" is full of conservative themes relating to the experience of women in America during the early 1900s. Women during the early 20th century were expected to follow several guidelines or social norms, mostly revolving around religious piety and caregiving. The so-called "angel" in this image is depicted as a nurse, rising high above the battlefield with heavenly rays of light emanating from her. Despite progress being made by suffragists, images such as this still appeared to the public in an attempt to glorify the traditional woman. Men were afraid that women were going to rise up and demand their rights and freedoms, so they continued to pump out propaganda such as this work in order to reinforce the motherly, loving image of women. The three major themes of religion, motherhood, and domesticity are the driving forces behind this particular piece.

The first major theme that really engulfs this work is that of religion. One of the most noticeable components of the image is the enormous cross behind the nurse. During the early 1900s, men and women in the United States were mostly Christians, and it was a society in which many Americans were encouraged to stick to their religion in a devout manner (DeJong 260). Without much entertainment besides the invention of the radio, many Americans religiously attended church in order to form a sense of community and to have fellow Christians to form friendships with (DeJong 260). The invention of cell phones, television, film, and modern music devices has had a somewhat opposite effect on

religious life in America. They provide almost a sort of synthetic feeling of community without having to leave the home. But without these inventions, Americans had to rely on important community centers such as the local churches and places of worship. So, to draw in potential customers, the folks at Tullar-Meredith Company added a religious tone, apart from the obvious use of the word angel in the title of the song. The rays of light given off by the angel add to this theme. To give her one final touch, the artist made her much, much larger than the soldiers in the battlefield, giving her the appearance of an angel that has magically appeared in the sky. The majority of sheet music produced by the Tullar-Meredith Company was in the form of Christian hymns, which makes the religious theme of "Angel of No Man's Land" even less surprising ("Grant"). By portraying this nurse as an angel, the artist has managed to applaud the nurses for the job they did while maintaining their religious integrity. She is not threatening like some of the young atheists and feminists, but merely a pious woman performing her nursing duties.

Another major theme of this work is motherhood, and the caregiver persona that women were expected to adopt. The job of a nurse was almost exclusively for women in the early half of the 20th century, because women were expected to have the motherly caregiver type of instincts necessary to be a nurse (Wagner 27). Men regarded nursing as a "womanly profession," despite the fact that nurses were so important to all men, especially to the men on the front lines in Europe (Wagner 27). Ironically, the men in the image are very small, almost infantile. The soldiers that are not already dead are sitting or lying on the ground, and a few are reaching up towards the nurse as if they were toddlers reaching for their mothers. This appeals to the patriotic men and women of America, who see this nurse on the front lines tending to the heroic men risking their lives overseas. A few nurses during World War I, such as Helen Fairchild, were even more dedicated to taking care of the soldiers, setting up trauma tents just a few hundred yards away from the battlefield, well within the range of artillery and chemical weapons such as mustard gas (Wagner 33). This work steers the viewer away from the idea of nurses such as Fairchild practically on the battlefield by portraying the nurses as an angel rising above the battlefield, away from the action and danger. It's almost as if credit is being taken away from the actual nurses who were on the front lines by saying that they were merely there in the minds of the soldiers. Rather than showing the

women in tents dressing the wounds of the soldiers, they are represented as a symbol in the sky instead. This maintains the motherly image by not portraying these women as being too independent or too brave. They are simply the caretakers for the courageous soldiers.

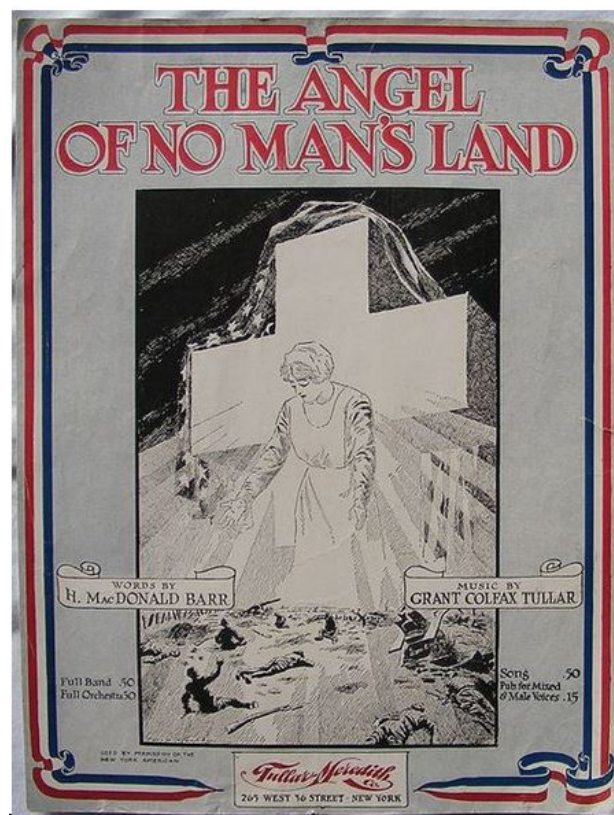
The role of women in America during this period was still mostly one of subservience, despite the fact that some progress had been made during the suffrage movement. Most women were still expected to cook, clean, and take care of the children while the husband was at work. In order for the men to regain their jobs and status as the “bread-winners” of the household, they also had to transition the women back into a life of domesticity. Sheet music and artwork such as this were most likely created in order to implant the ideas of domestic life back into the minds of American women. They wanted to remind the women that before they were working in the factories and supporting the war effort, they were at home cleaning and taking care of the children. In order to achieve this, the artist had to invoke as many aspects of the “ideal woman” as he possibly could. Even the kind features on the nurse’s face seem to suggest that she is a mild-mannered, non-threatening, subservient female that complied with the conservative goals of most American men of that era.

It would seem that despite the new role the women of America had to shoulder during the First World War, they still had not completely made progress. The 19th amendment to the Constitution would be signed shortly after the end of the war, but it would take decades for women to truly begin to be treated more equally. Propaganda such as “The Angel of No Man’s Land” was littered with positive images in order to mask true intentions. While men appreciated the role of women in America during the First World War, many of them felt that women needed to relinquish this new feeling of independence and return to their domestic roles. In order to achieve this, artists and authors used themes such as religion, motherhood, and domesticity to try to convince the women of America to step down from their jobs and return to the kitchen.

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The strip of land between trenches occupied by opposing forces, or “no man’s land,” was considered the most dangerous territory for a soldier to be near during World War I. This drawing depicts an angelic nurse watching over the men on the battlefield. Her status as a caregiver as well as her open-armed posture exemplifies the motherly characteristics of the “ideal woman” of the early 1900s.

The Bachelor Embraces the American Fairytale

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American society has come a long way over the years to a place where all are equal, but gender stereotypes are still very much alive and in some sense even embraced. Despite being constitutionally equal to