



MOBILIZING THE WOMEN

Britain mobilized not only men but also women to contribute to British victory. Propaganda posters merged women's domestic duties with national duty, transforming domestic femininity into a form of patriotic service.

From 1914 to 1918, a woman's role changed from that of dependent to patriotic recruiter and, finally, to heroic factory worker. Recruitment propaganda characterized national defense as a form of familial duty, merging domestic life with national sacrifice.

Propaganda posters also used women and children to define masculine protection of the British family as patriotic duty. That protection extended to the women of Belgium, who, like Belgium, were seen as violated by Germany's ignoring Belgian neutrality.

Women were also viewed as active recruitment agents or barriers to British victory. A poster to the women of Leeds links women who "keep back a son or sweetheart" to "prolonging the war and adding to the peril of those who have gone."

The posters also depicted women as emblems of patriotism and a national conscience. The propaganda poster, "Women of Britain say—'Go'" addresses both female and male viewers, calling on women to command men to fight. A poster to recruit Irish men uses a heroic female figure holding a rifle to challenge the passive male with the question, "Will you go or must I?"

Large numbers of women entered the workforce in war-related industries as well as other positions traditionally occupied by men such as bus drivers or train operators. Paid women workers increased from 5,966,000 in July 1914 to 7,311,000 in July 1918, with munitions factories being the most highly paid and most popular field of work.

Whereas some propaganda posters depicted women as active, heroic figures, wartime propaganda for the Ministry of Food projected a different image. Calling for food conservation, these posters honored women as the central figures of the home front and thus, as instrumental to the war effort as the soldiers in action.

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