CULTURE, GENDER, AND FOREIGN POLICY: A SYMPOSIUM

He-Men and Christian Mothers: The America First Movement and the Gendered Meanings of Patriotism and Isolationism

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The America First movement was a mostly female social movement that emerged between 1939 and 1941 amid the national debate over American neutrality. Not to be confused with the America First Committee, the mainstream conservative anti-interventionist organization that attracted politicians, business leaders, and the famed aviator, Charles Lindbergh, the America First movement was a vast network of right-wing mothers' groups opposed to American involvement in World War II.[1] Joining these groups in their crusade against intervention in Europe was the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith, an evangelical preacher turned right-wing populist politician in the 1930s. Together, this loose coalition comprised a particularly conservative

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[1]The America First Committee grew out of a small, anti-interventionist group started by a Yale law student in September 1940 and grew to be one of the most influential anti-interventionist lobbies of its time. The committee advocated a strong military defense and the preservation of American democracy in the face of European communism and fascism. Its leadership was decidedly conservative on most economic and diplomatic issues, and it attracted a significant number of prominent industrialists and politicians, who both financed and lent credibility to the isolationist cause. It is possible that it, too, advanced a social issue agenda, but no study has suggested this. Because it was one of the most credible conservative anti-interventionist organizations, extreme right groups, such as the German-American Bund and Father Coughlin's Christian Front, were attracted to its brand of conservative isolationism. The committee disbanded with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, but the isolationist cause was resurrected by the vast network of isolationist mothers' groups and by Gerald L. K. Smith. For a more detailed history of the America First Committee see Wayne Cole, *America First: The Battle against Intervention, 1940–1941* (Madison, 1953). See also idem, *Charles A. Lindbergh and the Battle against American Intervention in World War II* (New York, 1974). For an analysis of the ideological connections between conservatism and isolationism see Ronald Radosh, *Prophets on the Right: Profiles of Conservative Critics of American Globalism* (New York, 1975).

strand of a large and ideologically diverse isolationist movement that flourished in the years immediately before Pearl Harbor.[2]

The America First Committee and the America First movement shared some of the same anti-interventionist principles, but the America First movement's isolationism was more conservative and more broadly defined than that of the committee. Indeed, I have termed this markedly conservative brand of isolationist activism a movement because its leaders and supporters advanced an agenda for social change that went well beyond the narrower foreign policy platform of the America First Committee.[3] Specifically, the America First movement defined patriotic duty not as involvement in a foreign war to "make the world safe for democracy," but as isolationism in the service of preserving home, family, and "good old-fashioned Americanism."[4] The protection of these ideals was the basis of America First's isolationist campaign. Patriotism and isolationism, America First-style, was fundamentally a defense of the nuclear family structure and the conventional gender roles that made this movement's vision of social and sexual purity possible and sustainable. America First, therefore, infused the traditional political and diplomatic meanings of isolationism with a social meaning.[5]

The America First movement coalesced between 1939 and 1941, as some fifty to one hundred mothers' groups formed in major cities across the country to protest American involvement in the European conflict. Initially independent of Gerald Smith's isolationist campaign, these groups organized self-consciously as a female antiwar movement dedicated to keeping sons and husbands out of the developing European war. Although most active in the Midwest, mothers' organizations also formed on both the east and west coasts. Mothers' groups varied in size and style of activism, but their racial, class, and

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[2]The terms "isolationist" or "isolationism" have negative connotations, but I do not use them in a pejorative sense. Isolationism between 1939 and 1941 did not mean apathy about foreign affairs or an interest in severing trade relations with other countries. Nor was isolationism a monolithic political position; isolationism had proponents on both the organized right and left and in both the Republican and Democratic parties. For a general overview of the isolationist debates of the World War II era see Wayne Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932–1945* (Lincoln, NE, 1983). Geoffrey Smith offers a more in-depth analysis of isolationist thinking after World War I in "Isolationism, the Devil, and the Advent of the Second World War: Variations on a Theme," *International History Review* 4 (February 1982): 55–89.

[3]I use the term "social movement" here to describe sustained, extrainstitutional, organized group activity dedicated to promoting or resisting societal change. Theoretical definitions of social movements differ, but most include a recognition "that social movements are marked by collective actions that occur with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional channels with the purpose of promoting or resisting change in the group, society, or world order of which they are a part." See David A. Snow and Pamela E. Oliver, "Social Movements and Collective Behavior: Social Psychological Dimensions and Considerations," in *Sociological Perspectives on Social Psychology*, ed. Karen Cook (New York, 1993); and Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Social Movements," in *Handbook of Sociology*, ed. Neil J. Smelser (Newbury Park, CA, 1988), 695–719.

[4]*The Cross and the Flag* 1 (August 1942): 11.

[5]This essay highlights the gender and family politics of America First's campaign, but conservative racial and populist politics were integral elements of the America First agenda. For an expanded version of the arguments in this essay see Laura McEnaney, "Defending the Family Altar: Gender, Race, and Family Politics in the America First Movement, 1940–1945" (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin—Madison, 1990). At present, there is no study of the social politics of the America First movement. Glen Jeansonne, author of a biography of Gerald Smith, is currently working on *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and the Coming of World War II.*

age composition was consistently white, middle class, and middle aged. This active network of women, according to one liberal political watchdog, formed "the organizational nucleus" of the America First movement.[6]

The mothers' isolationist cause found an ally in Gerald L. K. Smith, a right-wing preacher and politician from rural Wisconsin who in the 1930s had aligned himself with conservative populists such as Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin.[7] In early 1942, Smith began publishing *The Cross and the Flag*, a "patriotic, crusading journal" that provided a forum for his own and a variety of other conservative anti-interventionist perspectives. Just over a year after Pearl Harbor, Smith organized the America First Party, claiming his "nationalist" organization would perpetuate the anti-interventionist spirit of earlier mainstream isolationist groups (which by that time had disbanded) while leading the fight against Roosevelt's domestic policies. Smith and the mothers' groups functioned independently, but their isolationist credos were the same, and they often campaigned with one another.[8] Together, they

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[6]*The New Republic* 109 (August 1943): 130. It is difficult to construct a demographic profile of the mothers' groups, but judging from newspaper and periodical accounts of their activities, *The Cross and the Flag* and the *Women's Voice*, and Glen Jeansonne's study of Smith, the profile of America First's female membership as white, middle aged, and middle class seems accurate. Mothers' groups self-consciously identified themselves as the "middle class mothers of fighting men." A Chicago mothers' group, for example, said it was "supported solely by women—middle-class women." The America First movement in general embraced a conservative class politics that celebrated small business, farmers, and "the average working man" against an entrenched eastern elite. See, for example, *Women's Voice* 2 (27 April 1944): 2. Religious composition is harder to discern. Glen Jeansonne's study of Smith suggests that female members of America First were overwhelmingly Protestant, but some of the periodical literature and exposés of the mothers' movement claimed that the mothers were former followers of Father Coughlin. See Jeansonne, *Gerald L. K. Smith: Minister of Hate* (New Haven, 1988), 112; John Roy Carlson [Avedis Derounian], *Under Cover* (Philadelphia, 1943), 211–36; idem, *The Plotters* (New York, 1946), 163–91; and idem, "Inside America First," *American Mercury* (January 1942): 7–25. Cole describes isolationists in the 1930s as mainly Catholic and Lutheran, due to the ethnic composition of isolationist constituencies (Irish-American, German-American, and Italian-American) rather than to theology. See Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 6–8. The possibility of Protestants and Catholics transcending, or at least tolerating, religious differences to fight New Deal politicians and economic elites is suggested in Smith, "Isolationism, the Devil, and the Advent of the Seond World War," 74–75. For further documentation and analysis of the activities of women in America First, as well as their class, racial, age, and religious composition, see McEnaney, "Defending the Family Altar," 35–76.

[7]Two of the most insightful accounts of Smith's political career are Jeansonne, *Gerald L. K. Smith*; and Leo Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia, 1983).

[8]To understand the relationship between Smith, the mothers' groups, and other right-wing isolationist organizations, I have relied upon newspaper and journal accounts and various historical studies of the far right. See, for example, Jeansonne, *Gerald L. K. Smith*, 85; idem, Wisconsin Public Radio (WHA), "Women Demagogues of the Far Right in the World War II Era," 11 March 1991. Leo Ribuffo discusses the links between Smith and Elizabeth Dilling, one of the most active women in the mothers' movement, and between Dilling and other right-wing activists. See Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right*, 178–215, 216–17; *The Nation* 160 (26 May 1945): 597–98; *New York Times*, 24 July 1942; *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 5 January and 13 February 1944; Patricia Lochridge, "The Mother Racket," *Woman's Home Companion* (July 1944): 20–21, 72–73; and H. G. Nicholas, *Washington Despatches, 1941–1945: Weekly Political Reports from the British Embassy* (Chicago, 1981). I have also used sparingly some data from John Roy Carlson's widely read exposés on American isolationism to understand the relationship between Smith and the mothers' groups. Carlson, a worker for a liberal watchdog group, Friends of Democracy, and then an FBI informer for several months in 1942, wrote several books linking isolationism with pro-Nazi activism. His works were part of a larger genre of popular literature that tried to discredit isolationism in the early phases of the war. Significantly, Carlson detailed the activities of the mothers' groups within the larger right-wing isolationist movement, but he

comprised a mostly female movement that by mid-1942, according to one estimate, claimed almost one million followers.[9]

America First's crusade on behalf of "good old-fashioned Americanism" advanced definitions of patriotism and political obligation that in many respects ran counter to the dominant definitions of the war era. Patriotism meant a vocal defense of the family based on isolationism, not involvement in a foreign war. Political obligation demanded citizen vigilance and activism *against* a national military mobilization. An examination of the activities of some of the largest mothers' groups, such as Chicago's We, the Mothers Mobilize for America, Detroit's Mothers of the U.S.A., and Cincinnati's Mothers of Sons Forum, reveals how the America First movement came to define patriotism as antiwar and isolationism as profamily.

The mothers' anti-interventionist campaigns can be characterized as a right-wing version of a peace movement. Their political platforms resembled those of progressive women's peace groups: they critiqued a defense policy based on military intervention, emphasized the carnage and overall human costs of war, and suggested that women, as mothers, were uniquely qualified to keep nations at peace. Yet, the leadership, political affiliations, and underlying social agenda of the mothers' groups were ostensibly ultra-conservative, making their brand of antiwar activism markedly different from that of groups like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Women Strike for Peace.[10]

Women in the mothers' groups opposed American involvement in the unfolding European war for a number of reasons. First, like most American women, they had draft-age sons or husbands who would certainly be called to serve if war was declared. But the mothers' interpretive framework for understanding the specific causes of the conflict distinguished them from other reasonably fearful wives and mothers. In essence, women in the mothers' movement believed that New Deal Democrats (financed by Jewish international bankers) were steering the United States into an internationalist foreign policy that would lead inevitably to permanent cycles of global war. Sustained armed conflict overseas, they argued, would take men from

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incorrectly assumed that these women were "politically manipulated instruments" of male leaders. See Carlson, *Under Cover*, 211–36; idem, *The Plotters*, 163–91; and idem, "Inside America First," 7–25. Ribuffo questions, quite rightly, whether historians should take these exposés at face value, because they often overestimated the power of the Right. He argues that they must be looked at as part of a "countersubversive canon" that was more a product of the social tensions of the 1930s and 1940s than an accurate depiction of the right-wing threat. Still, it is possible to use some portions of such works with careful qualification and newspaper corroboration.

[9]This figure is a rough estimate of the numerical strength of the America First movement, and it assumes that membership can mean a range of participatory behaviors, from subscribing to a newsletter to participating in a rally or march. It is based on newspaper and periodical accounts of America First's activities, an analysis of *The Cross and the Flag* and *Women's Voice*, and on Jeansonne's study of Smith. See Jeansonne, *Gerald L. K. Smith*, 69, 76, 85. In a radio interview about his upcoming study of the mothers' movement, Jeansonne suggested that total membership in the mothers' groups was nearly ten million in 1941. See WHA, "Women Demagogues."

[10]For a perceptive analysis of the gender politics of women's peace activism see Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC," *Feminist Studies* 8 (Fall 1982): 493–520. Two collections that survey women's peace politics are Daniela Gioseffi, ed., *Women on War: Essential Voices for the Nuclear Age* (New York, 1988); and Adrienne Harris and Ynestra King, eds., *Rocking the Ship of State: Toward a Feminist Peace Politics* (Boulder, CO, 1989).

families, creating a society of female-headed households. It would accelerate what they believed were New Deal trends toward intrusive, centralized government and concentrated executive branch power. And war would create unprecedented opportunities for unregulated, extra-familiar sexual activity. In sum, war and internationalism would disrupt the private, autonomous nuclear family, which America First members believed was the most fundamental institution of democracy.

To spread their anti-interventionist profamily message, the mothers typically blended patriotic celebrations of motherhood and family with political organizing. For example, to raise funds and recruit new members, We, the Mothers Mobilize for America, a Chicago-based organization of over twenty thousand women, arranged a "My Country 'Tis of Thee" pageant, a reenactment of what members believed to be the history of the first Christian mothers to come to the shores of the United States.[11] Songs, readings, prayer, and socializing were regular features at We, the Mothers "get together parties," where women would gather in each other's homes to raise money for their lobbying activities, educate one another on foreign policy issues, and plan public forums against American intervention.[12] Mrs. Lyrl Van Hyning, president of We, the Mothers, successfully recruited Chicago women by emphasizing the educational, patriotic, and maternal value of isolationist activism. No doubt keenly aware of the gender codes that highly circumscribed female behavior in the 1930s and 1940s, Van Hyning was careful to emphasize that housewives had an obligation to understand and act against American involvement in the unfolding global war. She editorialized regularly in *Women's Voice*, the organization's monthly newsletter, that women's participation in the anti-interventionist cause was central to the maintenance of "a happy prosperous home life," not a fundamental disruption of it. Internationalism, she cried, was "globaloney thinking," and thus it was up to female patriots to prevent the Roosevelt administration from snatching sons and husbands away from families to fight in foreign wars.[13]

The necessity of framing isolationist activism as maternal duty becomes understandable when we examine some of the more militant political activities of several mothers' groups in the year before Pearl Harbor. On 22 August 1940 a loosely organized coalition of mothers' groups, which called itself the Congress of American Mothers, converged upon the nation's capital to protest the Roosevelt administration's support for financial assistance to Britain and a peacetime draft. Detroit's Mothers of the U.S.A. hung from a tree an effigy of Senator Claude Pepper of Florida, a supporter of conscription and aid to

[11] *Women's Voice* 1 (24 June 1943): 6.

[12] For additional examples of how We, the Mothers blended the social and political see *Women's Voice* 1 (27 August 1942): 2–3; 1 (19 November 1942): 4; 1 (22 April 1943): 1; 1 (20 May 1943): 4; and 2 (23 September 1943): 2, 4. Although the mothers' groups defined themselves as Christian and their rhetoric was rife with religious metaphor, neither they nor Smith seemed to have the New Right's dependence on churches as an organizational infrastructure for their political activism. On the religious content of the America First movement's isolationism see McEnaney, "Defending the Family Altar," chaps. 2, 3. For analyses of the role of churches in New Right campaigns see Allen Hunter, "In the Wings: New Right Ideology and Organization," *Radical America* 15 (Spring 1981): 124–27; and Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "AntiAbortion, AntiFeminism, and the Rise of the New Right," *Feminist Studies* 7 (Summer 1981): 211–20.

[13] *Women's Voice* 1 (18 March 1943): 5; and 2 (27 April 1944): 2.

Britain, chanting, "We'll hang Claude Pepper to a sour apple tree!" The next day nine mothers dressed in black staged a "death watch" outside the Senate chambers as elected officials debated the merits of peacetime conscription. The "middle-aged women," as the *New York Times* called them, argued that a draft was "un-American" because it threatened the safety of sons and husbands (and therefore families) by escalating the chances for war.[14]

In February and March 1941, as the House and Senate conducted hearings on President Roosevelt's lend-lease proposal, the mothers' groups intensified their anti-intervention campaign by capitalizing upon the symbolic and patriotic meanings of motherhood. Identifying themselves as the Mothers' Crusade to Defeat Bill 1776 (the House version of lend-lease), over three hundred women participated in a series of protests that would disrupt business as usual in the House and Senate chambers for two weeks. The mothers picketed the Capitol grounds daily, carrying American flags and signs that read, "Kill Bill 1776, Not Our Boys." They again tried to hang in effigy a public figure, this time Dorothy Thompson, a newspaper columnist who supported lend-lease. Elizabeth Dilling, one of the most vocal leaders of the mothers' movement, staged a sit-down strike outside the office of Senator Carter Glass of Virginia, a supporter of military intervention. Dilling was arrested for disorderly conduct, and Glass called for an FBI investigation of the mothers' groups. Significantly, competing definitions of motherhood framed the verbal battle between Glass and Dilling that appeared in the *New York Times* over the following few days. Glass charged the women with creating "a noisy disorder of which any self-respecting fishwife would be ashamed," adding later, "For the sake of the race, I devoutly hope [they are not mothers]." Invoking the rhetoric of maternalism, Dilling called Glass an un-American "overaged destroyer of American youth."[15]

Chicago's We, the Mothers employed an antiwar tactic that exploited the institution of motherhood to an unprecedented degree. In November 1941, We, the Mothers organized a letter-writing campaign aimed at the parents of sons who had died on an American destroyer sunk by a German submarine the month before. The letters extended "sincere sympathy" to the parents but emphasized that the "needless slaughter" was caused by "the real murderers of your loved one, the men who violated the Constitution of the United States by sending him into the war zone." The navy was outraged by the mothers' tactics. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox made the letters public and charged We, the Mothers with undermining "civilian morale and the morale of the armed forces." Grace Keefe, secretary of We, the Mothers, pledged to continue the campaign, arguing that "we have a right to do so, as mothers and as citizens seeking to keep our country at peace."[16]

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[14]*New York Times*, 22 and 23 August 1940. For an overview of the congressional and presidential debates regarding peacetime compulsory military service and aid to Britain see Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 363–82; and J. Garry Clifford and Samuel R. Spencer, Jr., *The First Peacetime Draft* (Lawrence, KS, 1986).

[15]*New York Times*, 19 and 24 February and 1, 2, 7, and 10 March 1941. For an analysis of the lend-lease debates see Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 409–22.

[16]*New York Times*, 30 November 1941; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 November 1941.

Keefe's comments reflect the tendency of the mothers' groups to conflate motherhood with the rights of citizenship to wage their isolationist battle. The mothers' use of flags and other patriotic symbols was a conscious linkage of political obligation with maternal protection of the family. Indeed, the female isolationists' deliberate use of the word "mother" in their organizations' titles reflected their belief that it would appeal to the patriotism of American women and prove useful as an organizing tactic.[17] Framing patriotic duty in this way made female activism in a social movement that enshrined traditional family roles—that is, man as breadwinner and head of household and woman as full-time wife and mother—not only acceptable but mandatory. Because the male-headed nuclear family was the most basic of the regulatory institutions that could ensure the mothers' vision of democracy, and because war had the potential to disrupt that family-democracy equation, isolationist activism took on extreme political significance and urgency for these women. Isolationism was to them much more than a foreign policy position. It was a philosophy that defended the rights of families and especially validated the insight and experience of motherhood as a political force for the public good.[18]

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declaration of war, however, isolationism became an unpopular—even treasonous—political philosophy. Well before the Japanese air strike, President Roosevelt, with the help of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, had been campaigning quite successfully to discredit isolationism by equating it with fascism.[19] With

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[17]Patricia Lochridge's *Woman's Home Companion* article on midwestern isolationist mothers' groups sharply criticized America First women for "making political capital of the name mother." See Lochridge, "The Mother Racket," 72–73. The isolationist women's use of the institution of motherhood to make patriotic appeals, along with their fusion of family ideals with democracy and national defense, were part of a mainstream discourse in the 1940s that linked the nuclear family with national security. Historian Sonya Michel calls this the "discourse of the democratic family" and analyzes how politicians, educators, and social workers linked traditional notions of motherhood and family with the maintenance of a democratic society. See Michel, "American Women and the Discourse of the Democratic Family in World War II," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al. (New Haven, 1987), 154–67.

[18]There are important similarities here between the maternalist philosophies of the isolationist mothers' groups and nineteenth-century women's social purity movements. The phenomenon of women justifying their political activity in the name of motherhood and family protection has a long tradition in women's political activism. It must be emphasized, however, that the mothers' movement was rooted in a more extreme social conservatism than that of some of the more progressive women's movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, there are striking parallels in ideology and rhetoric between America First mothers' groups and women's organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union. See, for example, Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, "For God and Home and Native Land," in *Women in New Worlds*, ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville, 1981), 310–27, 423–25. Similarly, America First employed the rhetoric of female difference used by women's peace movements to justify female activism in international affairs. See, for example, Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol," 493–520; and Steven B. Burg, "The Program of the Woman's Peace Party" (M.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin—Madison, 1991). Finally, there are noteworthy continuities between the ideology and rhetoric of this "old right" mobilization and the New Right campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s. See, for example, Rebecca Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia, 1987).

[19]Roosevelt labored to build a broad consensus for his interventionist foreign policy views, but he faced a sharply divided American public, skeptical of deeper involvement in the Allied mobilization. A July 1940 Gallup Poll, for example, showed that while most Americans approved of economic aid to France and England, 86 percent still opposed direct American military action in Europe. See George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971* (New York, 1972), 230–31. Nevertheless, within the next year, Roosevelt was able to sway public opinion in

American public opinion strongly on the side of the president by the time of Japan's attack, America First's anti-interventionist message had to change if the movement wanted its broader conservative social agenda realized. In response to the full-scale U.S. mobilization, the mothers' groups and Smith, in particular, wisely shifted their emphasis from isolationism to anti-internationalism. In other words, their prewar isolationist battle cry became a critique of an anticipated postwar internationalism that seemed inevitable, given the intricate economic and military alliance necessary to win the war. Both Smith and the mothers' groups acknowledged the need for the United States to fight aggressively "the twin evils" of communism and fascism, and both were careful to articulate support for the men fighting overseas so as not to alienate their constituencies or potential recruits. Throughout the war, however, America First members continued to use social issues as a way to critique Roosevelt's international objectives, insisting that a United Nations-type internationalism would perpetuate and exacerbate war's detrimental effects on family life.

In a sense, America First's perception that war fundamentally disrupted the home front was accurate. Absentee fathers, husbands, and sons, unprecedented numbers of married women with children in the wage labor force, a perceived increase in juvenile delinquency, housing shortages, and rationing all signaled that the war had—at least temporarily—reordered gender and family relations.[20] Many Americans were strained by the military mobilization and expressed great uncertainty about the shape of the postwar world. Despite its contradictions and conspiratorial tone, America First's anti-internationalist message addressed people's anxieties quite directly. Its simplistic rhetoric and symbolism identified enemies and invoked a nostalgic, harmonious view of America that promised stable families as the basis of national strength. This vision was in sharp contrast to the uncertainties and conflicts that plagued the wartime home front and was likely the reason that many found America First's socially conservative brand of isolationism so appealing.

Smith's writings in *The Cross and the Flag* most vividly reveal the social conservatism that underpinned America First's anti-internationalism. America First's profamily prescriptions for the nation could be found in political tracts

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his favor by labeling isolationists of every political stripe dangerous subversives. For an analysis of the Roosevelt campaign to discredit isolationist activism see Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*; and Smith, "Isolationism, the Devil, and the Advent of the Second World War."

[20]There is considerable debate over just how fundamental these social changes on the wartime home front were. For an analysis of some of the home front transformations, specifically those related to women's work, gender roles, and family life, see Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, 1981); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, MA, 1984); William Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Role, 1920–1970* (New York, 1972); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York, 1984), 235–38; and Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston, 1982). To some degree, mobilization also necessitated a change in race relations. Smith was especially concerned with the racial implications of the northward migration of over 1.5 million African-Americans for defense industry jobs, as well as with African-Americans' political activism to secure fair labor opportunities and rid the military of its Jim Crow policies. For an analysis of the racial politics of the America First movement see McEnaney, "Defending the Family Altar," 12–29, 77–135.

that, at first glance, seem quite unrelated to gender and family concerns. Yet each issue of *The Cross and the Flag* contained discussions of topics ranging from government corruption to rubber rationing that invariably included preachments about appropriate gender roles. For example, patriotic paeans to manhood often appeared in Smith's editorials about President Roosevelt's diplomatic policy. "God give us men!" he wrote. "A time like this demands strong minds . . . Men who have honor; men who will not lie; [m]en who can stand before a demagogue."[21] Federal civilian defense programs also provided Smith with an opportunity to define proper manhood. He often criticized the laxity of the federal government in assisting neighborhood defense efforts by calling for a "he-man Civilian Defense Program."[22]

Significantly, Smith regularly assailed Eleanor Roosevelt as a way to express his overall discontent with presidential policies. Given Mrs. Roosevelt's activism, it is not surprising that she became the embodiment of family and gender disorder on the home front. Smith and various mothers' groups attacked her for violating the gender codes befitting a nation's first family. In a poetic parody of Poe's "The Raven," for example, Smith accused Mrs. Roosevelt of "Never sitting, never quitting, [n]ever tending her own knitting."[23] He consistently used Eleanor Roosevelt's active political life outside the White House as a measure of President Roosevelt's performance inside the White House. He blamed the president for the first lady's activism, implying that he was somehow not manly enough to regulate her behavior. He made this clear in an editorial entitled, "What Kind of Man Do We Want for President?" in which he listed fifteen characteristics of a model president. One of the criteria was "A man with a wife who will live in the White House and stay home at least one-half of the time."[24] At a demonstration against intervention in Minneapolis, the Mothers of Minnesota similarly questioned Eleanor Roosevelt's political activism and the president's manhood, carrying placards that read, "Who is President, Eleanor or Franklin?"[25]

In essence, Smith and the mothers were arguing that President Roosevelt's inability to control his wife's activities meant that he was a weak husband and thus an incompetent national and international leader.

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[21]*The Cross and the Flag* 1 (September 1942): 15. Virtually the same poem, entitled "Oh God, Give Us Men," also appeared in *Women's Voice* 4 (30 August 1945): 12. The repeated emphasis on "standing" before a dictator in this poetry and in other editorials is possibly a reference to Roosevelt's physical handicap. Remarks about the president's physical condition could have served as a backhanded way for America Firsters to attack Roosevelt's masculinity and his domestic and foreign policy decisions. Thanks to Brett Barker and Steve Burg for offering this reading.

[22]*The Cross and the Flag* 1 (April 1942): 9. Mothers' groups echoed these tributes to masculinity. In *Women's Voice*, Lyrl Van Hyning criticized supporters of New Deal economic and social programs as "yes men," not "He men." "He men," she contended, stood on "their own good American feet" (again, a reference to Roosevelt's manhood and physical handicap). Members of We, the Mothers demanded a president who would "become a man." See *Women's Voice* 1 (24 September 1942): 2; and 2 (27 April 1944): 2.

[23]*The Cross and the Flag* 3 (April 1944): 372.

[24]*The Cross and the Flag* 2 (February 1944): 348. The demand for Eleanor Roosevelt to stay at home "at least one-half of the time" indicates that Smith understood that the first lady did have some political obligations to fulfill outside the White House. Smith and the mothers would have preferred, however, that Eleanor Roosevelt occupy herself with the kind of charity activities traditionally performed by first ladies.

[25]*New York Times*, 8 June 1941.

Manliness—meaning in this context patriarchal control over women and children—was equated with presidential competence, and thus President Roosevelt was not fit for his job. Ultimately, almost every America First discussion of a foreign policy issue contained an implicit prescription about family and gender relations that functioned as a morality tale about the potentially disruptive effects of war and postwar liberal internationalism. America First leaders depended upon their family ideal to define presidential competence, national strength, and international stability.[26] In this sense, the nuclear family, and the conventional gender roles that sustained it, assumed considerable national and international political significance. Isolationism, therefore, was at once a foreign policy position and a social prescription for right living.

These case studies of the isolationist politics of the America First movement offer evidence for two larger points about the gendered meanings of patriotism and international politics. First, the America First movement shows how extraordinarily useful gendered symbols, rhetoric, and ideology can be in defining patriotism and framing national debates about national security interests. America First revised the ideals of patriotism that we usually associate with World War II and manipulated the meaning of motherhood and family to redefine wartime patriotism as the entrenchment of traditional gender roles, not the temporary subversion of them for some ambiguous international cause. Un-American meant interventionism, and interventionism meant antifamily. Roosevelt's interventionist policy was therefore not only unpatriotic but a deliberate attack on the family as well. The point is not that America First was exceptional in its dependence on gender and family ideologies to define patriotism. Indeed, these isolationists drew from the same set of gender and family ideologies as those who supported and fought in the war. Rather, the importance of the America First campaign is that it reveals how politically expedient gendered rhetoric and symbolism can be in framing popular understandings of foreign policy initiatives such as lend-lease and conscription. Significantly, playing on gender anxieties proved a useful mobilization tactic for interventionists and isolationists alike.[27]

The case of America First suggests, too, that isolationist debates, and therefore other foreign policy issues, are often intertwined with broader social issues. America Firsters understood clearly that diplomatic policies were made in the rarified atmospheres of the executive office and defense bureaucracy, so

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[26]Again, this equation of family with democracy and national strength was part of mainstream discourse in the war era. See Michel, "American Women and the Discourse of the Democratic Family," 155–56.

[27]Several studies analyze the ways in which the federal government, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue manufactured explicitly gendered definitions of patriotism to mobilize home front support for the war. See, for example, Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst, 1984); and Leila Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939–1945* (Princeton, 1978). Robert Westbrook analyzes the gendered meanings of the state's definition of political obligation, arguing that liberal states mobilize citizens for war based on an appeal to defend "private" interests, such as family members—especially females—or some idealized notion of "the American way of life." See Westbrook, " 'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James': American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II," *American Quarterly* 42 (December 1990): 587–614. America First's isolationist message consciously appealed to these same "private" obligations, but toward a different end.

they mobilized to make visible to politicians and the public the far-reaching social consequences of diplomatic decisions. The movement's isolationist philosophy was a politics of social conservatism concerned equally with home front gender and family relations and the conduct of the United States abroad. Indeed, in America First's isolationist lexicon, foreign policy and social issues were inextricably linked. Members used isolationism as a forum for a family protection movement and thus added a social dimension to the traditional diplomatic meaning of isolationism. Although not always expressed explicitly, concerns about gender and race relations have underpinned many other national discussions of U.S. foreign policies.[28]

America First's linkage of family and gender issues with one of the United States's most important foreign policy debates proves the usefulness of applying a gender analysis to the study of diplomatic history. Historians and political scientists, such as Emily Rosenberg and Cynthia Enloe, have argued convincingly that colonialism, concepts of dependency, military mobilizations, and diplomatic relationships have all been—and continue to be—shaped by a complex set of gender ideologies and social relations. As Enloe points out, international politics is about the uses of power, but historians have not yet analyzed how ideas about masculinity and femininity have informed those uses of power. Scholars of foreign policy and women's history are just beginning to understand how "private" gender relations are linked with "public" international relations, and traditional theoretical and disciplinary distinctions between gender and diplomatic history are slowly beginning to blur. This essay illustrates how gender analysis, with its emphasis on the interrogation of socially constructed relationships of male and female power, can recast and expand traditional readings of foreign policy histories.[29]

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[28]The most recent example of this point is the contemporary debate over whether to allow gays and lesbians to carry out U.S. foreign policy objectives through service in the military. Works that explore the racial or gender dimensions of U.S. foreign relations include, for example, Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals," *Signs* 12 (Summer 1987): 687–718; John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986); Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, 1987); Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, 1989); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988); Michael Paul Rogin, *Ronald Reagan the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley, 1987); and Geoffrey Smith, "National Security and Personal Isolation: Sex, Gender, and Disease in the Cold-War United States," *International History Review* 14 (May 1992): 221–40. Two recent essays stress the importance of ideological and cultural approaches to the study of diplomatic history. See Michael H. Hunt, "Ideology," and Akira Iriye, "Culture," *Journal of American History* 77 (June 1990): 108–15, 99–107.

[29]Theoretical discussions of the application of gender analysis to the study of foreign relations include Sarah Brown, "Feminism, International Theory, and International Relations of Gender Inequality," *Millennium* 17 (Winter 1988): 461–75; Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley, 1990); V. Spike Peterson, ed., *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)visions of International Relations Theory* (Boulder, 1992); and Emily Rosenberg, "Gender," *Journal of American History* 77 (June 1990): 116–24.