



# **In Uncle Sam's Service: Women Workers with the American Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919**

*Susan Zeiger*

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During World War I, the first U.S. war in which women were mobilized by the armed services on a mass scale, more than sixteen thousand female personnel served overseas with the American Expeditionary Force. Elite society women—the so-called heiress corps—have dominated the popular perception of women's service ever since. But Susan Zeiger shows that the majority of these female nurses, clerical workers, telephone operators, and canteen workers were wage-earners whose motives for enlistment ranged from patriotism to economic self-interest, from a sense of adventure to a desire to challenge gender boundaries.

In exploring women's experience of war, Zeiger draws from a wealth of diaries, letters, questionnaires, oral histories, and memoirs, as well as army records. She analyzes the ways women's wartime service brought to light contradictions in prevailing gender relations at the height of the campaign for women's suffrage, and she places the stories of servicewomen in the broader context of women's employment in the early twentieth century. At a time when women sought to expand their personal opportunities, Zeiger argues, the government, determined to contain the disruption to the gender status quo, created a separate, subordinate status for women in the military, attempting to "domesticate" and reinscribe them within conventional roles.

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