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CHAPTER 7

**THE GOLD STAR MOTHER PILGRIMAGES:
PATRIOTIC MATERNALISTS AND THEIR CRITICS
IN INTERWAR AMERICA**

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Scholars typically view the late 1920s as marking the decline of maternalist politics in the United States, but this interpretation obscures both the persistence of maternalism in the interwar period and the various reasons why different groups of Americans came to revile it.¹ In fact, maternalism – loosely defined as the belief that motherhood represented a civic role that entitled women to make claims upon the state – remained a powerful force in American political culture, but one that was increasingly appropriated by patriotic and right-wing women’s groups. As progressive women struggled to reposition themselves within a post-suffrage context and politically conservative climate, many moderated or abandoned sentimental appeals to motherhood and female moral superiority. At the same time, a growing number of conservative and patriotic women unhesitatingly employed such rhetoric, even as they adopted overtly political lobbying tactics and strategies.² In part because of these women’s highly visible and often controversial activities, a growing number of Americans began to view maternalist appeals as an illegitimate form of political discourse that masked anti-democratic attitudes. By the time the nation entered World War II, maternalism had been significantly discredited as a basis for women’s political activism.

This essay attempts to demonstrate the continued viability of maternalism in the late 1920s and to enumerate the reasons for its subsequent decline by analysing a largely forgotten episode in American history:

the gold star mothers' pilgrimages of 1930 to 1933.³ Enacted in March 1929, during an era noted for its fiscal conservatism and limited conception of government, the legislation that provided for these government-run pilgrimages stands out as a remarkable departure.⁴ During the worst years of the Depression, it allowed more than 6,600 women to travel to Europe to witness the graves of loved ones who had perished in the Great War.⁵ Housed in first-class hotels, the pilgrims spent a full two weeks in Europe, shepherded through detailed itineraries that included sightseeing and shopping excursions, as well as visits to cemeteries and battlefields. Although unmarried widows also took part in the programme, mothers constituted the overwhelming majority of the pilgrims, and policymakers justified the trips almost exclusively in maternalist terms.⁶ Yet while the campaign for pilgrimages, and the government's conduct of them, reveal the enduring potency of a highly sentimental and nationalistic conception of motherhood, the programme also drew criticism as it progressed over time, and indeed long after its conclusion. Because the pilgrimages so dramatically exemplified a certain strain of maternalism, they provoked some Americans to question the beliefs and assumptions that lent motherhood its political and symbolic capital. To that extent, the programme also served as an agent of change, helping to discredit the very ideas and images it sought to reaffirm.

The success of the pilgrimage legislation suggests that the 1920s did not witness the demise of maternalism *per se*, but rather that 'progressive maternalism' came to be challenged, and to some extent supplanted, by 'patriotic maternalism'.⁷ In June 1929, less than three months after passing the pilgrimage bill, Congress effectively killed the Maternity and Infancy Protection Act (otherwise known as the Sheppard-Towner Act), the first federal programme designed to improve maternal and infant health. Passed by a wide margin in 1921, the legislation had initially enjoyed the support of nearly all women's groups, including the Daughters of the American Revolution. Yet by 1926, in a shift that reflected the growing polarization of organized womanhood, the D.A.R. and other conservative women had joined the American Medical Association in calling for its termination. Women's historians have therefore rightly linked the Sheppard-Towner's repeal to the splintering of the broad-based coalition of women's groups that had previously lent support to maternalist initiatives.⁸ Yet they have not discussed the near-simultaneous passage of the pilgrimage bill, which established a federal programme, designed explicitly for mothers, that required roughly the same level of annual expenditure over a period of four years.⁹ Even as progressive maternalists encountered bitter defeats, conservative women succeeded in shaping public policy by emphasizing the civic dimensions of motherhood.

Although historians have generally defined the term ‘maternalism’ more narrowly, there are compelling reasons for considering the activities of women like those who campaigned for the pilgrimages under its rubric. Like progressive reformers, the organized war mothers who lobbied for the pilgrimages held that motherhood was not simply a private, familial role: mothers who raised soldier-sons, they claimed, fulfilled a civic duty as crucial as soldiering itself. And like their progressive counterparts, they cast the state in the role of a benevolent caretaker, insisting that war mothers deserved consolation (in the form of pilgrimages), and, if needed, material compensation (in the form of pensions).¹⁰ The two constituencies differed fundamentally, however, in their use of motherhood as a political platform. Whereas progressive maternalists argued that all mothers made a civic contribution by rearing *citizens*, organized war mothers based their claims on the fact that they had reared and sacrificed *soldier-sons*. And whereas progressive maternalists strove to improve material conditions for poor, working-class and rural mothers, patriotic maternalists stressed the emotional and symbolic aspects of motherhood by privileging a select group of elderly women no longer actively engaged in maternal work. In 1929, when Congress passed the pilgrimage legislation and yet refused to renew funding for the Sheppard-Towner Act, it signalled that the psychological needs of bereaved war mothers had gained precedence over the material needs of practising mothers.

When ‘maternalism’ is defined to encompass its appropriation by conservative and patriotic women, its downfall must be dated later and attributed in part to its growing association with a host of controversial political positions. As criticism of the pilgrimage programme reveals, in the minds of many politically liberal Americans, paeans to American motherhood came to connote not only retrograde gender roles, but also narrow-minded bigotry, disregard for social and economic inequality, and lockstep patriotism and militarism.¹¹ Commentators wary of the type of nationalism that had prevailed during World War I began to denounce maternalist rhetoric as incompatible with modern democracy – a notion that appeared borne out in 1939, when a sprawling coalition of reactionary mothers’ groups, some overtly fascist, emerged to protest U.S. intervention in World War II.¹² To be sure, the history of maternalist politics cannot be viewed as simple story of its appropriation by the far right, for some progressive women, most notably peace activists, continued to employ maternalist arguments and rhetoric in the interwar period and beyond.¹³ But to a significant extent, patriotic and conservative women’s groups usurped maternalism, making it more difficult to employ for progressive aims.

The story of the gold star mothers’ pilgrimages also illustrates how an assault on sentimental ideals of motherhood helped to erode the cultural foundation of maternalist politics.

Increasingly after World War I, psychological experts, writers, filmmakers and other cultural producers derided the Victorian notion of ‘mother love’ as a selfless and benevolent force, insisting that women’s attachments to their children could be narcissistic and potentially pathological.¹⁴ Historians of maternalism have not fully contended with these attacks on moral motherhood, perhaps because social welfare history and cultural history tend to be conceptualized as separate enterprises. But anti-maternalist cultural criticism played a crucial role in shaping the larger climate within which policymaking occurred. Unlike equal rights feminists, who rejected maternalism as inimical to women’s quest for equality, popular writers and others who debunked American mothers did not advance a politically coherent critique of maternalist ideology. Yet whether they rejected the self-sacrificing mother as a worthy ideal, or simply lashed out at modern mothers for falling short of it, cultural producers and critics railed tirelessly against the image of mothers as morally superior and politically disinterested. In the process, they helped to deflate the longstanding ideal of motherhood that lay at the heart of maternalist politics.

This study of the gold star mothers’ pilgrimages highlights a transitional moment, allowing us to explore how the long-standing tradition of Republican motherhood, inflected by Victorian sentimentalism and Progressive Era maternalism, played out in the post-suffrage era. Whereas some proponents justified the pilgrimages as a gift bestowed by a benevolent and paternal government, others portrayed them as compensation due to citizen-mothers. But by the time the next cohort of American women found their sons called up for service, both arguments had begun to wear thin. Although war mothers would again be venerated during World War II, they would never recapture the privileged status they held during World War I and its aftermath.

* * *

The archetypal war mother embodies the enduring conflict between the individual and the state; between personal desire and public duty. Her plight is an agonizing one: she must overcome her maternal impulse to nurture and protect, relinquishing her child for the greater good of the whole. The impossibility of this charge renders the war mother a potential subversive, for what mother would willingly consent to such a sacrifice? At the same time, the ardently patriotic war mother – like the legendary Spartan mother who exhorted her son to return with his shield or upon it – evokes even deeper ambivalence. Publicly lauded, her patriotism is

privately dreaded. For if she becomes the enforcer of the patriarchal law – if the mother and the state close ranks – then there is no private realm, no respite for a man seeking relief from the hard demands of the public world. The image of the ever-loyal war mother, anxiously awaiting her son's return, is thus shadowed by a counter-image: the punitive war mother who willingly surrenders her son to the state.

Yet if the war mother is an inherently fraught figure, cultural representations of war mothers and the political influence accorded to them have varied according to time and place. Prior to World War I, the term 'war mother' was not widely used in the United States, nor did American women claim the identity as grounds for mobilization. The Mother celebrated in Civil War literature, poetry and songs bore her suffering in solitude and silence, never calling attention to her sacrifices and pain.¹⁵ She appeared less frequently as a subject in her own right than as the focus of contemplation, as in the famous letter that Abraham Lincoln allegedly wrote to Lydia Bixby, a woman believed to have lost five sons in battle:

I have been shown in the files of the War Department that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save. I pray heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.¹⁶

Here, the bereaved mother appears only in a dim outline, as the object of Lincoln's tender feelings and noble sentiments. She did not come forward to proclaim her losses or demand compensation; a third party brought her tragic case to Lincoln's attention. Such self-effacing passivity was no minor detail, but rather part of what made her worthy of presidential consolation.

The organized war mothers of the interwar period present a striking contrast to this image of the solitary and apolitical war mother. While their rhetoric resembled that of their Victorian predecessors, they politicized the ideal of sentimental motherhood by appropriating the Progressive Era notion of motherhood as a form of civic service. During World War I, as historian Susan Zeiger has shown, government officials and producers of popular culture, alarmed by the flourishing women's peace movement and worried that mothers might oppose conscription, promoted an ideal of patriotic motherhood that deemed a woman's willingness to 'sacrifice' her son as the ultimate

expression of female fealty.¹⁷ Self-identified war mothers carried this ideal forward into the post-war period, eventually establishing two main national associations, the American War Mothers, founded in 1919, and the American Gold Star Mothers, founded in 1928. The former, open to any mother with a son who had served in the war, had a predominantly Anglo-Saxon constituency but included a small number of Jewish and African American members. The latter, composed of women whose sons had perished in the war, admitted only women of the 'Caucasian race'.¹⁸ (It should be noted, however, that the terms 'war mother' and 'gold star mother' were already in general use and thus did not necessarily imply an organizational affiliation.) Whereas American women had long engaged in voluntary activities to support servicemen and memorialize wartime sacrifices, these groups represented a new departure: never before had the mothers of veterans and deceased servicemen formed their own, separate organizations and collectively asserted their right to influence U.S. policymaking.

Though ostensibly non-partisan, war mothers' organizations advocated military preparedness and consistently aligned with the forces of anti-radicalism, as historian G. Kurt Piehler has shown.¹⁹ Their emergence should be viewed as part of a larger trend, the rise of the nation's first broad-based conservative women's movement. Historians have been slow to appreciate the scale and import of this movement, but it played a crucial role in fracturing the coalition that had supported maternalist initiatives prior to the war, as Kirstin Delegard and Christine Erickson have demonstrated.²⁰ Fuelling the polarization of organized womanhood were sharply divergent views on questions concerning militarism and international relations. In 1925, a group of right-wing women, determined to counter the influence of the Women's League for International Peace and Freedom, established the Women's Patriotic Conference for National Defense, an umbrella organization that aimed to coordinate the activities of conservative and patriotic women. By the late 1920s, as many as one million women, associated with some forty organizations, had coalesced under the WPCND's rubric.²¹ Such women challenged maternalist peace advocates by depicting a commitment to military preparedness as a maternal duty. 'As the mother of an only child who lies under a white cross in France', demanded one gold star mother who protested cuts to the Navy's budget in 1928, 'have I not the right to demand that the Nation shall provide every mechanical device possible to protect the living bodies of other sons who volunteer for service?'²² Conservative women thus both drew upon and departed from Victorian gender ideology: although they jettisoned the idea 'separate spheres' by addressing 'masculine' issues like defence allocations, they held tight to a belief in female morality superiority and a highly sentimental conception of motherhood.

The history of the pilgrimage legislation, which unfolded over a ten-year period beginning in 1919, reflects the growing influence of conservative and patriotic women's groups in general and war mothers' organizations in particular. The idea of government-funded pilgrimages to European gravesites did not, in fact, originate with war mothers, nor did the initial proposal privilege maternal grief. In 1919, the decorated war veteran and congressman Fiorello LaGuardia devised a bill that would have subsidized trips for fathers, mothers or widows, so long as the family consented to having the body interred in one of the eight American military cemeteries scheduled to be built in Europe. But the bill failed to receive a hearing. As LaGuardia subsequently explained, 'Everything was concentrated on getting those bodies back'.²³ Organized war mothers subsequently began to call upon the government to provide trips for mothers who had allowed the bodies of their sons to remain in Europe and could not afford to travel there to witness the site. In 1924, Congress held hearings on such a bill, but it floundered due to disagreements over logistical issues. The third bill, introduced in September 1927 and enacted in March 1929, succeeded primarily because organized war mothers had persistently lobbied Congress, supported after October 1928 by the powerful American Legion.²⁴ By restricting eligibility to those who had not previously visited their loved one's grave, the legislation retained the basic idea of a needs-based programme, but government officials waived this provision once the pilgrimages got underway.²⁵ As will become clear, what began as a proposal to serve poor war mothers ultimately evolved into a programme that showcased the American wealth and governmental munificence.

Although the pilgrimage bill owed its eventual passage to their exertions, the war mothers who provided congressional testimony tended to downplay, even obscure, their political influence. They declined to speak as representatives of a newly enfranchised constituency; in fact, at no point during the hearings did they even implicitly acknowledge the recent change in women's political status. Instead, they spoke as bereaved mothers and benevolent ladies, repeatedly differentiating themselves from both special interest pleaders and the poor women whom they hoped to assist. 'We have no paid lobbyists', the National Representative of the Gold Star Mothers, Mathilda Burling, declared in 1928. 'We have but ourselves and our hearts to crave a favor our country should grant.'²⁶ The fact that nearly all those who testified had already visited their sons' graves, some on multiple occasions, was repeatedly noted by congressmen and the women themselves, for it attested to the selflessness of their motives. As Mrs Frederick C. Guderbrod explained in 1924, 'I do not have to go over there; I have been. But I do hope we can send the other mothers over that can

not go. There is nothing that would comfort them so much'.²⁷ Situating themselves within the longstanding tradition of female benevolence, and appealing to the congressmen as honourable gentlemen who held the power to grant them a special favour, the war mothers appeared to deny that they were even engaged in a political process.

Yet as they appealed for benevolence, the war mothers also claimed entitlement. Fluctuating between these two modes, they articulated a gendered conception of citizenship that historian Linda Kerber has done much to illuminate. Long after suffrage, Kerber has shown, white women's rights as citizens continued to be subordinated to, or even defined as, the 'right' to enjoy special *privileges* (especially exemption from onerous civic duties).²⁸ In other words, for white women, the denial of rights has historically been linked to the granting of exemptions and privileges, which could in turn come to be misconstrued as 'rights'. This helps to explain why leading war mothers often used the terms 'privilege' and 'right' interchangeably, and how they could shift so quickly from a stance of supplication to one of reproach. 'May I ask you gentlemen why all of this discussion is here to-day or at any time in the House or Senate on this bill?' Burling demanded at the end of one hearing in which some objections to the pilgrimages had been raised. 'It is something that we mothers should not be pleading for ... The Government should have considered this long ago ... Please, I beg of you ... console these mothers.'²⁹ The war mothers felt at liberty to press their case in large part because their status as respectable ladies, combined with their willingness to accept hierarchical gender relations, produced a strong sense of entitlement. They had fulfilled their prescribed civic role, even at its most cruelly demanding. They had not challenged male authority. From their perspective, the government simply could not refuse them.

Such feelings of entitlement also derived from a particular conception of the maternal role. The women who testified at the hearings viewed motherhood as an experience of unparalleled emotional intensity, rooted in physical suffering and self-sacrifice. Men could never understand the pain of maternal loss, they argued, because men never experienced such strong feelings of identification and attachment to another human being. 'I want to begin by telling you that you are all men and you have not and cannot feel the way a mother feels,' Effie Vedder stated at the outset of her testimony in 1924. 'It is part of her body that is lying over there. She spent 20 years, anyway, in bringing up that boy; she gave her time, both day and night, and none of you can realize what a mother's loss is.'³⁰ Emphasizing the pain that they had endured in childbirth and the care that they had expended in raising their sons to adulthood, the mothers presented their losses in a highly possessive manner: the bodies

that fell in Europe were *their* bodies – the bodies that they had produced and sustained. ‘It was the mothers who suffered to bring these boys into the world, who cared for them in sickness and health,’ Mathilda Burling stressed, ‘and it was our flesh and blood that enriched the foreign soil.’³¹ Such rhetoric not only privileged maternal suffering almost to the exclusion of fathers and wives, but effectively blurred the boundary between mother and son, thereby equating the mother’s sacrifice with that of her fallen son.

A few women, who viewed the love between mother and son as more pure and enduring than that between husband and wife, felt that widows should not be allowed to participate in the programme. The final bill ensured that the pilgrimages would honour women’s undying devotion by barring widows who had remarried, even if the subsequent marriage had ended due to death or divorce. Yet these parameters did not satisfy Ethel Nock, who warned that including the widows might transform the sacred pilgrimage into a ‘junket’ or ‘pleasure trip’. ‘You must remember’, she testified, ‘that many of these widows are girls whom the boys would never have met had it not been for the contingency of camp life ... Many of these widows are not worthy’. When pressed by a senator, she turned the question back to him, asking if he knew of any wife to whom the words of Kipling’s poem ‘Mother o’ Mine’ could apply. (The senator conceded that he did not.) No wife, Nock insisted, could love a man as much as his mother did:

I think that mother love is greater than anything in the world. The widows, those who have not remarried, perhaps it is the result of circumstance and not wish. The mother lets no one take the place of that boy, and we mothers are carrying on, but there are times in the night when it is hard, when we think we ought to have him back.³²

According to Nock, the mother alone should be entitled to make the pilgrimage, because she alone could be trusted to remain true to ‘her boy’.

As for fathers, the legislation excluded them entirely.³³ Because fatherhood lacked the civic meaning and emotional intensity attributed to motherhood, paternal claims carried less weight.³⁴ Fathers did not usually speak of ‘giving’ their sons to the nation, in part because men did not define their relationship to the state through their paternal role, and in part because cultural norms barred fathers from adopting such a possessive stance toward their sons. During the hearings, several people testified on behalf of gold star fathers, but even those who argued for their inclusion readily acknowledged the superiority of maternal claims. For example, the Veterans of Foreign Wars proposed an amendment that would have al-

lowed gold star fathers to make the journey if no mother or wife survived. The father 'probably feels not quite, but almost as keenly the situation as the mother', the VFW representative noted, hastening to add that his organization would not press for the amendment if it in any way imperilled the legislation for the mothers.³⁵ Similarly, a Connecticut resident argued for fathers' inclusion on the grounds that their presence would facilitate the trips for mothers, since most women were 'not used to travel alone'. Only then did he assert his claim as a father, recounting how he had encouraged his younger son to enlist after his firstborn had been killed. 'It seems that gold star fathers deserve some consideration', he ventured.³⁶ Even in their grief, men tended to speak and behave in accordance with the assumption that their wives had suffered a still greater loss.

In contrast to their more reticent husbands, gold star mothers who testified at the hearings openly proclaimed their anguish, justifying the pilgrimages as a salve for their mental and physical distress. In their testimony, they drew on both medical and religious language to convey the healing effects of their own personal pilgrimages. Jennie Walsh explained that the news of her son's death had left her 'struck deaf', like a shell-shocked soldier; she believed that her trip to Europe, taken on her doctor's advice, had 'saved' her 'reason'.³⁷ Relating a similar story in 1929, Ethel Nock concluded, 'I have tried to show you, through my own experience, how greatly a mother may be improved mentally and physically by the pilgrimage'.³⁸ Nock urged the congressmen to act with haste, noting that statistics gathered by the American War Mothers indicated that gold star mothers were dying at twice the rate of women whose sons had returned home uninjured.³⁹ Only the experience of witnessing the actual gravesite, she argued, would help to restore these mothers' debilitated bodies and minds.

In the face of these emotional appeals, the pilgrimage bill proved, in Piehler's words, 'impossible to resist politically': the House of Representatives paid homage to the mothers by passing the bill without debate, and without a single dissenting vote.⁴⁰ Maternalist claims not only served as the pilgrimages' primary justification, but also stood essentially unchallenged, even by those who opposed the bill's passage. Indeed, the only notable group of dissenters were those who believed that the funds would be better spent caring for living, disabled veterans – or *their* mothers and wives. 'What's the idea of giving the gold-star mothers a trip to Paris and doing absolutely nothing for the mothers of the disabled soldier ...?' demanded one woman who wrote to Senator Hiram Bingham to protest the proposed legislation. 'They had to witness those promising lads, the fruit of their life's work, returned wrecks'.⁴¹ But in the flush economic times that still prevailed in 1928, most Americans, and virtually all politicians,

seemed disinclined to weigh the mothers' claims of worthiness against those of others who had suffered because of the war.

This seeming unanimity, however, masked significant differences of opinion as to the fundamental meaning of the pilgrimage programme and the form that it ought to assume. Most leading war mothers viewed the pilgrimages as a social provision designed to meet the special needs of a uniquely deserving group of citizens. But some of the women, along with a number of congressmen, also imagined the pilgrimages as a grand commemorative gesture, akin to the 1921 entombing of the Unknown Soldier.⁴² Although pilgrimage advocates rarely perceived these two visions as incompatible, they in fact entailed strikingly divergent conceptions of the programme and the pilgrims themselves.⁴³ Defined as a form of compensation, the pilgrimages cast each war mother as an individual beneficiary, and the emphasis fell on the emotional catharsis that she would presumably experience at her son's gravesite. Defined as an act of commemoration, the pilgrimages cast the war mothers as American icons, and the emphasis fell on the reactions they were designed to evoke in a national and international audience. In the end, the pilgrimage programme reflected elements of both models, never resolving the contradictions between them. Yet whereas an emphasis on compensation predominated during the congressional hearings, the idea of a grand patriotic gesture ultimately proved more crucial in determining how the pilgrimages unfolded. In particular, three important decisions – to have the War Department oversee the pilgrimages, to portray the programme as an unprecedented and exceptional form of social spending and to segregate the black gold star mothers – all reflected and furthered the government's nationalist aims.

The War Department's oversight of the programme represented a significant victory for those who believed that the pilgrimages should affirm an alliance between the military and the nation's mothers. Reflecting the pervasive antimilitarist sentiments of the 1920s and 1930s, a number of congressmen had promoted a very different vision of the pilgrimage programme, construing it as an internationalist gesture that would promote the cause of world peace. Representative Thomas Butler, who introduced the 1927 bill, proposed that the American Red Cross should run the programme, since such 'missions of mercy can be better attended by keeping the soldiery out of it'. The pilgrims, he added emphatically, 'are not to be taken on a parade'.⁴⁴ But leading war mothers opposed Butler's proposal, no doubt because it threatened to associate them with women peace activists who had framed some of their own initiatives as 'pilgrimages'.⁴⁵ In keeping with the war mothers' wishes, responsibility for the programme ultimately fell to the Quartermaster Corps, which conducted the pilgrim-

ages as quasi-military ventures, steeped in patriotic ritual. For instance, at the ceremony marking the first group's departure, brass bands played old wartime favourites like 'Over There' and dozens of Navy fighting planes roared overhead when the ship disembarked.⁴⁶ Just as Butler had feared, the gold star mothers found themselves in the spotlight of a highly choreographed nationalist spectacle.

The pilgrimage programme also came to be represented as an incomparable and sacred undertaking that ought to be exempt from standard political vetting and fiscal concerns. Again, this particular conception of the programme was by no means inevitable, and in fact represented a significant departure from ideas articulated in the 1924 hearings. When Representative Samuel Dickstein introduced his bill, he compared it to measures on behalf of disabled veterans and to the World War Adjusted Compensation Act (the Soldiers' Bonus Act), enacted by Congress that same year.⁴⁷ The mothers who testified requested brief, no-frills 'tours' for women who could not afford to pay their own way; the language of 'pilgrimage' had yet to be adopted. Effie Vedder stated that the women would need only four nights in France, explaining that they did not 'care about the fine things of Europe'. And Mathilda Burling suggested that the government could use one of its own ships, assuring the congressmen, 'We are not asking to be sent across as a pleasure trip'.⁴⁸ But this emphasis on economising appeared more muted in the 1928-9 hearings and wholly vanished in the publicity leading up to the first pilgrimage. Instead, congressmen and journalists extolled the lavish accommodations that the pilgrims would enjoy. An article in the Quartermaster Corps' official publication promised that each pilgrim would feel 'as though some "influential" friend, with "means," had invited her to take a trip to Europe, which is exactly the case'.⁴⁹ Letters from the pilgrims bear out this prediction – many appear to have been quite stunned by unanticipated courtesies extended to them. 'It was a trip so far beyond my expectations that my gratitude can hardly be expressed in words', wrote one woman, 'I can only say that my heart swells with pride at the consideration shown me by my government'. Another pilgrim, who had fallen ill during the trip, wrote to President Hoover, 'had I been a queen no better attention could have been given me'.⁵⁰ Yet another woman, whose doctor had judged her health 'much improved' by the pilgrimage, attributed the change to the 'millionair [sic] treatment' she had received on what she described as 'the most wonderful tripp [sic] I ever had in my life'. Rather than running the pilgrimages like a social programme for poor women, the government instead went to great lengths to treat the gold star pilgrims in a grand style.

Unless, that is, the women were black. Although the pilgrimages had been championed as a manifestation of the nation's democratic spirit, in

which poor and rich alike would be accorded equal honours, in March 1930 the War Department announced that African American women would be required to travel separately.⁵¹ This decision reflected the institutionalized racism of the day, but it also manifested the conflict that inhered in the pilgrimage programme's dual justification. When viewed as an act of commemoration, what seems remarkable about the programme is that it included black women at all, considering the extent to which they were either excluded or demeaned in the national iconography of the time. Only a few years before enacting the pilgrimage legislation, the Senate had passed a bill that would have resulted in the construction of a national monument, on the Washington mall, commemorating the 'faithful colored mammies of the South'.⁵² Although the legislation ultimately stalled in the House, its popularity in Congress provides some indication of how resistant many whites would have been to the idea of honouring black women as American war mothers. Yet when the pilgrimages are viewed as a form of compensation, the black pilgrims' inclusion appears less surprising, for in the realm of social provision, there was some at least precedent for recognizing black women's civic status. Despite intense opposition from southern elites, black servicemen's wives received allotments during World War I, which many had used to free themselves, at least temporarily, from the very jobs that the mythical mammy so contentedly performed.⁵³ By providing for segregated pilgrimages, the government tried to compensate black mothers while simultaneously upholding the racial construction of the all-American war mother – an utterly contradictory undertaking.

African Americans responded to the government's decision with predictable outrage, viewing the decision as one of a series of instances in which the government had egregiously betrayed wartime ideals and reneged on wartime promises. Throughout the spring and summer of 1930, black journalists and civil rights leaders devoted much attention to the issue.⁵⁴ In May 1930, the NAACP sent President Hoover a petition signed by fifty-five African American gold star mothers and wives declaring that they would boycott the programme if forced to travel in segregated groups. But Hoover refused to address the matter, and the War Department simply released a statement asserting that segregation was in 'the interests of the pilgrims themselves' and promising that all would receive 'equal accommodations, care and consideration'.⁵⁵ In fact, arrangements for the 280 black women who participated in the programme would differ significantly, at least prior to their arrival in France: whereas the white pilgrims stayed at Manhattan hotels and travelled on luxury liners, the black pilgrims stayed at the Harlem YWCA and sailed on second-tier passenger ships.⁵⁶

Many black journalists and activists criticized the pilgrims in strikingly harsh terms, portraying their decision to participate in the programme as a maternal failure – a betrayal of their sons and the ideals for which they had sacrificed their lives. The charges they levelled reflected African Americans' distinctive appropriations of maternalism, which held mothers responsible for instilling and cultivating racial pride, as well as the rising influence of black nationalism.⁵⁷ 'Surely the dead will rise up to undo the wrongs of these mothers who accepted the morsel of the honor due a mother of one who died for his country', the Chicago *Defender* thundered when the first group of pilgrims sailed in July 1930. The paper went so far as to print the pilgrims' names and hometowns, prefaced with the stinging rebuke: 'Their Sons Died for Segregation'.⁵⁸ In the same issue, the celebrated sportswriter Frank A. Young accused the pilgrims of having 'set back' the entire race.⁵⁹ Another leading black paper, the Baltimore *Afro-American*, captioned a photograph: 'War Mothers Waving the Flag which allows them to be Jim crowed'.⁶⁰ Having failed to measure up to the ideal of the proud 'race mother', the pilgrims found themselves accused of complicity with a racist state and all but blamed for segregation.⁶¹

White liberals also denounced the segregation of the black pilgrims, but their critiques at times seemed inspired less by outrage over institutionalized racism than by antagonism toward the American Gold Star Mothers and other patriotic women's groups. Thus, whereas African American critics focused their attacks on those who had the power to reverse the decision – President Hoover and the War Department – their white counterparts appeared equally intent on deriding organized war mothers as hypocritical and self-righteous prigs. An editorial in the *Nation*, for example, argued that those women 'so delicately constituted that they could not endure to travel on the same ship with a black woman whose son or husband were killed in France' should have cancelled their passages.⁶² This tendency to depict racism as a form of feminine snobbery gained strength over the course of the decade, as evidenced by the uproar that ensued in 1939, when the D.A.R. barred Marian Anderson, the famous African American contralto, from performing in Constitution Hall. According to a Gallup poll, most Americans supported Eleanor Roosevelt's decision to rebuke the organization by resigning her membership, but this result probably revealed more about populist scorn for the D.A.R. than it did about white Americans' commitment to ending segregation.⁶³ Similarly, although the controversy surrounding the black pilgrims reinforced negative perceptions of organized war mothers as small-minded and elitist, such sentiments did not reliably translate into a principled stance on racial issues.

If relatively few whites criticized the pilgrimages for perpetuating racism, however, a growing number did denounce the programme as an unjustifiable use of federal resources. The idea of sending gold star mothers on 'first-class' European pilgrimages initially attracted little dissent, but by the early 1930s, many viewed such a display of governmental largesse as insupportable. The fact that the programme tended to efface the class status of the white pilgrims only exacerbated matters. Elderly women in truth suffered disproportionately high rates of poverty, and many, if not most, of the pilgrims were poor: as one eye-witness observed, the trips afforded the majority of women, both black and white, 'their first real taste of luxury, and perhaps their last'.⁶⁴ But when crafting the pilgrimage legislation, congressmen had been reluctant to acknowledge this economic reality. For instance, they refused to consider a separate bill that would have granted cash bonuses of comparable worth to those impoverished gold star mothers who were too frail to travel.⁶⁵ By privileging emotional over material needs, the pilgrimage programme refashioned the gold star mothers as 'ladies' worthy of 'first-class' treatment, making them easy targets of resentment once the Depression took hold.

As economic conditions worsened, impoverished veterans and their advocates emerged as some of the most outspoken critics of the pilgrimage programme. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, veterans had been deemed particularly deserving recipients in U.S. political culture, as historian Theda Skocpol has shown.⁶⁶ But negative perceptions of the bloated and graft-ridden Civil War pension programme led many policymakers to resist the demands of the Great War's veterans. Though Congress did pass the World War Adjusted Compensation Act, or Soldiers' Bonus Act, to compensate veterans for lost wages, the law stipulated that no monies could be disbursed until 1945. Thus, it did nothing to lessen the impact of the Depression, which hit veterans with particular severity.⁶⁷ Underfunded programmes for disabled veterans also aroused resentment; critics accused government officials of treating veterans in a callous, 'hard-boiled' manner.⁶⁸ The wife of one such veteran, exhausted from pounding the pavement in search of work, exploded with fury in June 1932 after reading about the pilgrimages in the *Los Angeles Record*. 'I can hardly hold myself – just feel like shouldering a gun and going on the war path', she wrote to the editor. 'Think what all that money could have done for the men who were disabled for life and who cannot, even on their knees, get the sum of \$50 a month for all the horror they went through overseas'. Vehemently repudiating the role of the patriotic war mother, she pledged that she would 'kill a son of mine with my own hands rather than let the government ruin him for life, then turn him loose like a whipped cur to beg, steal or commit murder in order to

live'.⁶⁹ To many who believed that the government had failed to meet its obligations to the nation's veterans, the pilgrimage programme was an indefensible use of federal funds.

Anger over the government's treatment of veterans boiled over during the spring and summer of 1932, when thousands of destitute 'bonus marchers', some accompanied by family members, converged on Washington, D.C. The bonus marchers demanded immediate payment of the adjusted compensation that they were scheduled to receive in 1945. Although the amount due to each veteran differed according to the particularities of his service, the certificates' average value would have been around \$1,000 in 1945; by way of comparison, the government was spending an average of \$850 on each gold star pilgrim.⁷⁰ Tensions mounted following the defeat of the so-called Bonus Bill on June 17, when some 8,000 men refused to leave their shantytown in Anacostia Flats. On July 28, the stand-off erupted in violence, as U.S. troops commanded by Douglas MacArthur routed the veterans and destroyed their makeshift dwellings – a shameful display of force that epitomized the government's imperviousness to the prevailing desperation.⁷¹ That very same day, members of the Quartermaster Corps ferried a contingent of gold star pilgrims about on sightseeing excursions outside of Paris.⁷²

Given the striking contrast, it is easy to understand why the pilgrimage programme, which proponents had championed as above all financial consideration, aroused resentment.

Still, the fact that many critics directed their anger toward the pilgrims themselves, rather than the congressmen who had enacted the legislation, suggests that they were not critiquing government policy alone – they were also levelling charges of maternal failure and betrayal. One woman who wrote to the *New York Times* in April 1932 professed amazement that gold star mothers could even 'think of accepting a trip abroad, increasing the expense from an already depleted Treasury' and 'lessening their sons' sacrifice'. 'Cannot they see,' she wondered, 'that giving them the trip abroad was simply a gesture of politicians who were not at all patriotic but simply thought a scheme like that would draw votes for them at the next election?'⁷³ In January 1933, another *Times* reader complained, 'Many of us are actually hungry, and insufficiently clothed; yet, through taxes, we are compelled to pay for these expensive trips to European countries. It does not seem human, or even possible, that these "War Mothers" would expect or could enjoy this visit to the graves of their loved ones which would add to the burden of suffering in the country for which their boys gave their all'.⁷⁴ These Americans believed that a truly patriotic war mother would never have allowed herself to be used as a pawn by craven politicians; she would have considered the nation's plight and selflessly declined the offer.

Similar criticism emanated from peace advocates, who tended to view the pilgrimage programme as a publicity stunt designed to silence criticism of the government's wartime activities. The pilgrims served as a target for mounting anti-militarist sentiment as numerous Americans, outraged by revelations concerning the munitions industry, retrospectively questioned the nation's participation in the war. The publisher George Palmer Putnam, for instance, claimed that the War Department employed the ruse of 'protecting' gold star mothers in order to censor materials that would expose the true nature of modern warfare. He quoted an official who, upon denying his request for graphic wartime images, had instructed him to 'Think of the Gold Star mothers' who 'carried home in their minds beautiful pictures of ... well-kept resting places'.⁷⁵ Other commentators portrayed the gold star pilgrims as unwittingly complicit in the government's attempts to whitewash the war. The *San Francisco Examiner*, for instance, ran an anti-interventionist editorial in 1938 that derisively characterized the pilgrims as 'a pathetic little band of American mothers' who had 'shed futile tears ... over little white crosses'.⁷⁶ Although such critics stopped short of denouncing the gold star pilgrims, they strongly implied that the women had been duped, and that the government had cynically used them as props and decoys in order to pursue its militarist agenda.

The reaction to one renegade student group in the mid-1930s illustrates the public's tendency to associate criticism of the gold star pilgrims with support for the broad-based peace movement. In 1936, after Congress finally passed a Bonus Bill (over President Roosevelt's veto), some cheeky Princeton undergraduates expressed their dissent by founding an organization called the Veterans of *Future Wars*.⁷⁷ Students at Vassar College joined the hoax by establishing a women's auxiliary, the Association of Gold Star Mothers of the Veterans of Future Wars.⁷⁸ Striking a pose of dead seriousness, the students demanded \$1,000 bonuses for every man under 36 who expected to be drafted, along with government-financed trips to Europe for every woman in the same age bracket. The soldiers of the next war, they reasoned, ought to be given money *before* they met their 'sudden and complete demise', just as future war mothers should be granted the opportunity to visit their sons' future burial sites *before* war ravaged the landscape. Staunch fiscal conservatives, the founders of the Veterans of Future Wars intended to ridicule Americans who used lofty patriotic rhetoric to pursue self-interested ends. But to their chagrin, critics and supporters alike interpreted their gesture as an anti-war statement.⁷⁹ Apparently, in an era notable for its pacifist sentiments, irreverent attacks on veterans and war mothers appeared to most observers synonymous with critiques of war and militarism.

Thus, by the mid-1930s, the pilgrimage programme had been criticized by disgruntled citizens on numerous grounds – for its discriminatory practices, its consumption of scarce national resources and its uncritical patriotism. The most hostile attacks on gold star mothers, however, appeared not in political discourse but in popular culture, and they attempted to expose not only those who betrayed the ideal of maternal self-sacrifice but the spurious nature of the ideal itself. Echoing leading child-rearing experts of the era, these authors expressed a profound suspicion of sentimental or domineering mother love and intense anxiety about male autonomy. For instance, the 1933 John Ford film *The Pilgrimage* features an overbearing mother, Hannah, who sends her son Jim to war – and ultimately to death – simply because she disapproves of the girl he hopes to marry. ‘I know her kind,’ she carps in an early scene. ‘She’d take you away from me. She’d poison your mind against me.’ When the young lovers refuse to part, she instructs the local recruiter to draft Jim, who is soon thereafter killed overseas. On her pilgrimage, Hannah repents her actions and mourns her loss, returning home to embrace Jim’s former girlfriend and illegitimate child. But the sentimental narrative of intergenerational reconciliation fails to efface the disturbing image of a mother bent on either possessing or banishing her son.⁸¹

Even more monstrous images of gold star pilgrims appeared in satirical works that conflated fears of maternal aggression, masculine vulnerability and the power of the modern state. In 1935 the new men’s magazine *Esquire* published a particularly biting piece, subtitled a ‘monologue in the true spirit of sacrifice by one who proudly gave her sons to the slaughter’ and written in the voice of a pilgrim recounting her experiences to a women’s group. To underscore their dimwitted nature, the women are literally portrayed as sacred cows – Mrs Holstein, Mrs Jersey, etc. The speaker is both ignorant (she makes many grammatical errors) and bigoted (she disdains the ‘great black cow’, Mrs Guernsey). But above all, she is bloodthirsty, mouthing platitudes about the ‘Spirit of Sacrifice’ while exalting in the mechanized killing of ‘Our Dear Boys’: ‘They never stopped, but only whimpered a little for their mothers, and marched straight head of them, their eyes open, to make the Supreme Sacrifice before their Maker. And when the twenty-pound sledge fell and their front legs collapsed and the blood spurted I thought: How morvelous [sic]!’ Clearly, elements of this dark satire – its debunking of racial bigotry and antimilitarist sentiment – echo earlier critiques of the gold star pilgrims, but the piece ultimately devolves into something far less rational. Appealing to the deepest of human fears – the fear the mother will fail to nurture and protect – it evoked a new and nightmarish vision: that of organized war mothers who enthusiastically applauded the state’s attempts to sanitize the deaths of their own sons.⁸²

A similarly hostile and satiric view of gold star pilgrims appeared as late as 1942, even as a new generation of American mothers confronted heartbreaking losses. In *Generation of Vipers*, the popular writer Philip Wylie introduced the term ‘momism’ to denote what he regarded as the distinctly American tendency to grant middle-aged, middle-class mothers excessive influence in both public and private life.⁸³ Women’s historians have often referred to Wylie’s book and quoted its many outrageous passages, but they have typically described the momism critique as an anti-feminist screed, failing to note that Wylie focused much of his wrath on conservative women’s organizations, including those that represented war mothers.⁸⁴ In fact, the very image that inspired Wylie to coin his provocative neologism – an aerial shot of an infantry division of soldiers forming a giant ‘MOM’ in honour of Mother’s Day – suggests that anxiety over Americans’ reverence for war mothers played a major role in fuelling his critique.⁸⁵ The gold star pilgrimages must have made a similarly powerful impression, for nearly a decade after the fact, Wylie referred to them with undiminished outrage:

I have seen the unmistakable evidence in a blue star mom of envy of a gold star mom: and I have a firsthand account by a woman of unimpeachable integrity, of the doings of a shipload of these supermoms-of-the-gold-star, en route at government expense to France to visit the graves of their sons, which I forbear to set down here, because it is a document of such naked awfulness that, by publishing it, I would be inciting to riot, and the printed thing might even rouse the dead soldiers and set them tramping like Dunsany’s idol all the way from Flanders to hunt and haunt their archenemy progenitricies – who loved them – to death.⁸⁶

In hyperbolic fashion, Wylie portrayed the pilgrims as revelling in the accolades and prestige that their sons’ deaths afforded them; beyond this, he went so far as to imply that they had somehow murdered their own sons. No longer the self-sacrificing figure whom soldiers fought to defend, the American war mother had become the self-aggrandising figure from whom they needed defending.

Of course, Wylie’s views were hardly representative; probably no large-circulation magazine would have printed such a slur against war mothers during World War II. But letters from Wylie’s fans suggest that his sensationalist attack struck a chord with readers who had already come to view self-identified war mothers with deep scepticism. In 1943, an ‘ex-soldier’ declared that he was ‘most grateful to see a capable writer ... fan the hell out of the self-pitying gratification found in the current momism of the blue and gold star cult’.⁸⁷ Another reader reported that she had been

‘ranting for years ... against Gold Star mothers who “give” their sons to their country’.⁸⁸ Even a correspondent who took issue Wylie’s momism critique seemed prepared to make an exception in the case of gold star mothers: ‘I don’t know about the gold star mothers. I can’t understand anyone ever claiming to be one.’⁸⁹

War mothers’ claims had not rankled so much during World War I, when issued within a cultural context that still assumed a harmonious mutuality between mothers and sons, and a political context in which women’s exclusion from power remained more formal and complete. But by the 1940s, the rhetoric of patriotic maternalism had begun to resonate differently. The assault on mother love in popular culture and psychological literature gradually made Americans less comfortable with effusive rhetoric that valorized maternal sacrifice. This is reflected in the declining role of the middle-aged mother within popular culture and patriotic iconography: during World War II, the glamorous pin-up girl usurped the mother as the primary representative of American femininity, and romantic and sexual yearning surpassed mother love as the primary affective tie linking men to the homefront.⁹⁰ Increasingly, women defined their civic and political identities in ways that complicated or challenged the old separate spheres model. And once women could vote and even serve in the military, war mothers who defined their civic identities and wartime contributions in exclusively derivative and relational terms began to strike some Americans as anachronistic, even parasitic.

At the same time, political developments in the 1930s and 1940s contributed to a growing wariness of maternalist politics. By the time the U.S. entered World War II, events had demonstrated the ease with which maternalism could be retooled to serve anti-democratic purposes. In Germany and Italy, fascists constructed a special cult around the middle-aged war mother as the nation’s officially recognized mourner.⁹¹ And within the U.S., an anti-interventionist mothers’ movement staged sensational and well-publicized protests in 1941, merging maternalist appeals with nativism and fundamentalist Christianity.⁹² Although this movement waned following Pearl Harbor, popular magazines ran articles about ‘The Menace of “Mothers”’ as late as 1944 and respected commentators warned of the dangers of mixing motherhood and politics.⁹³ To be sure, maternalism never disappeared from the political landscape. Indeed, in the second half of the twentieth century, a variety of women’s groups, from both sides of the political spectrum, would embrace a maternalist orientation.⁹⁴ But broadly speaking, American women who came of age in the 1940s and thereafter would be far less likely than their predecessors to view their maternal and civic roles as inextricably intertwined.

Conclusion

American women continued to join war mothers' organizations during and after World War II and many local communities continued to revere them, but the mothers of the war dead would not be honoured on a national scale in a manner comparable to that of their predecessors. During the 1920s, organized war mothers had succeeded in promoting the pilgrimage programme in part because they could still draw upon a sentimental and Victorian ideal of motherhood, and in part because many Americans had become receptive to the notion that mothers performed a civic duty that should be duly recognized by the state. But by the end of World War II, the assault on sentimental mother love in popular culture and the discrediting of patriotic maternalism in political discourse had rendered a gesture like the pilgrimage programme virtually inconceivable. Too closely associated with a possessive maternal stance now deemed pathological, with ethnocentric and racist views increasingly attacked as anti-democratic and with ritualized forms of patriotism that struck many as foolish or even sinister, the American war mother had been diminished as a symbol of national unity. Americans would continue to praise women for rearing citizen-soldiers, but most ceased to believe that the war mother who 'gave' her son to the nation made a unique and unparalleled sacrifice, entitling her to special compensation and acclaim.

Notes

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1. The concept of 'maternalism' was introduced in: S. Koven and S. Michel. 1990. 'Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880–1920', *American Historical Review* 95(4), 1076–108; and S. Koven and S. Michel (eds). 1993. *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, New York and London: Routledge. Works that focus on maternalist politics in the U.S. include: M. Ladd-Taylor. 1994. *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890–1930*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press; T. Skocpol. 1992. *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; L. Curry. 1999. *Modern Mothers in the Heartland: Gender, Health and Progress in Illinois, 1900–1930*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press; L. Gordon. 1994. *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890–1935*, New York: Free Press; and G. Mink. 1995. *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917–1942*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
2. For discussions of conservative women's activism in the interwar period, see: N.F. Cott. 1987. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, ch. 8; K.

- Delegard. 1999. 'Women Patriots: Female Activism and the Politics of American Anti-Radicalism, 1919–1935', Ph.D. diss., Duke University; Christine Kimberly Erickson. 1999. 'Conservative Women and Patriotic Maternalism: The Beginnings of a Gendered Conservative Tradition in the 1920s and 1930s', Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara; and idem. 2004. "'So Much for Men": Conservative Women and National Defense in the 1920 and 1930s', *American Studies* 45(1), 85–102; F. Morgan. 2005. *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; and K. Nielson. 2001. *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism and the First Red Scare*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
3. Prior scholarship on the gold star mothers pilgrimages has tended to focus on their significance in regard to the memory and commemoration of World War I. See G.K. Piehler. 1994. 'The War Dead and the Gold Star: American Commemoration of the First World War', in J. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 168–85; idem, 1995. *Remembering War the American Way*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, ch. 3; L.M. Budreau. 2008. 'The Politics of Remembrance: The Gold Star Mothers' Pilgrimages and America's Fading Memory of the Great War', *Journal of Military History* 72(2), 371–411; idem. 2009. *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919–1933*, New York: New York University Press; J.W. Graham. 2005. *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland; and L.L. Meyer. 2003. 'Mourning in a Distant Land: Gold Star Pilgrimages to American Military Cemeteries in Europe, 1930–33', *Markers* 20, 31–75.
 4. Private organizations in Europe, Canada and Australia also arranged for pilgrimages to battlefields and cemeteries in the 1920s and 1930s, but in no other instance did a government assume responsibility for organizing and financing such a venture. D.W. Lloyd. 1998. *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919–1939*, Oxford: Berg.
 5. According to John Graham, 6,654 women made the pilgrimage, while 9,812 declined the government's offer, many no doubt because of advanced age or ill health. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s*, 11–12.
 6. According to Lotte Larsen Meyer, more than 95 per cent of the pilgrims were gold star mothers. 'Mourning in a Distant Land', 34.
 7. Molly Ladd-Taylor has distinguished between 'progressive' and 'sentimental' maternalists, or mainstream clubwomen. She argues that the former supported women's participation in the public world, stressed 'justice and democracy' over 'morality and social order' and embraced science and professionalism. Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 75. Christine Kimberly Erickson has defined 'patriotic maternalism' as a 'fusion between a militant patriotism that defended American values and institutions against subversive forces and a sense that motherhood provided women with the unique ability to safeguard American ideals'. Erickson, 'Conservative Women and Patriotic Maternalism', viii.
 8. The Sheppard-Towner Act focused on improving maternal and child health by providing matching federal grants to the states to disseminate educational materials and to establish clinics and visiting nurse programmes. Works that discuss the Sheppard-Towner and its downfall include: Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, ch. 6; Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, ch. 9; Delegard, 'Women Patriots', 262–84; J.S. Lemons. 1973. *The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in the 1920s*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, ch. 6; and R. Muncy. 1991. *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890–1935*, New York: Oxford University Press, chs 4 and 5.
 9. Congress appropriated \$5.38 million for the four-year pilgrimage programme, whereas allocations for the first four years of the Sheppard-Towner Act (1921–5) totaled \$5.23 million. For funding of the Sheppard-Towner Act, see Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 175. For details of the pilgrimage programme's budget, see Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s*, 66–8.

10. In 1936 and 1937, the American Gold Star Mothers campaigned for the passage of a bill popularly known as the 'Gold Star Mothers Bill', which extended and increased monthly payments to dependent mothers and fathers of deceased veterans. 'House Passes Gold Star Mothers Bill', *Washington Post*, 5 August 1937, 1.
11. For an illuminating discussion of the relationship between mother-blaming and the rise of racial liberalism, see R. Feldstein. 2000. *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930–1965*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
12. For background on the right-wing mothers' movement, see L. McEnaney. 1994. 'He-Men and Christian Mothers: The America First Movement and the Gendered Meanings of Patriotism and Isolationism', *Diplomatic History* 189(1), 47–57; K. Frederickson. 1996. 'Catherine Curtis and Conservative Isolationist Women, 1939–1941', *Historian* 58(4), 825–39; G. Jeansonne. 1996. *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and J.M. Benowitz. 2002. *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right-Wing Politics, 1933–1945*, DeKalb, IL: Northeastern University Press.
13. Works on women's contributions to the interwar peace movement include: H.H. Alonso. 1993. *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights*, New York: Syracuse University Press; idem. 1989. *The Women's Peace Union and the Outlawry of War, 1921–1942*, New York: Syracuse University Press; C.A. Foster. 1995. *The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1914–1940*, New York: Syracuse University Press; N. Berkovitch. 1999. *From Motherhood to Citizenship: Women's Rights and International Organizations*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 58–74; L.K. Schott. 1997. *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom before World War II*, Stanford: Stanford University Press; and S. Zeiger, 1990. 'Finding a Cure for War: Women's Politics and the Peace Movement in the 1920s', *Journal of Social History* 24(1), 69–86.
14. For an evocative portrait of the 1920s assault on the 'late Victorian matriarch', see A. Douglas. 1995. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. Works that discuss mother-blaming in psychological and social scientific literature and popular culture include: M.J. Buhle. 1998. *Feminism and its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, ch. 4; Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, chs 1–2; and M.L. Margolis. 1984. *Mothers and Such: Views of American Women and Why They Changed*, Berkeley: University of California Press, ch. 2. See also M. Ladd-Taylor and L. Umansky (eds). 1998. *'Bad' Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America*, New York: New York University Press.
15. For discussions of sentimental representations of mothers in the Civil War North, see: F.M. Clarke. 2011. *War Stories: Suffering and Redemption in the Civil War North*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and Alice Fahs. 2000. 'The Sentimental Soldier in Popular Civil War Literature, 1861–65', *Civil War History* 46(2), 107–31.
16. In point of fact, two (rather than five) of Bixby's sons died in the war, and she herself sympathized with the Confederate cause. Moreover, most scholars now believe that Lincoln's personal secretary, John Hay, actually wrote the Bixby letter. M. Burlingame. 1999. 'The Trouble with the Bixby Letter', *American Heritage* 50(4), 64–7.
17. S. Zeiger. 1996. 'She Didn't Raise Her Boy to Be a Slacker: Motherhood, Conscription, and the Culture of the First World War', *Feminist Studies* 22(1), 6–39. The cultural construction of motherhood during World War I is also analysed in M.T. Coventry. 2004. "'God, Country, Home and Mother": Soldiers, Gender and Nationalism in Great War America', Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University; and K. Kennedy. 1999. *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion during World War I*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
18. Piehler, 'The War Dead and the Gold Star', 175–7.

19. Ibid. Among the pilgrimage programme's enthusiasts was Lucia Ramsey Maxwell, author of the infamous 'Spider Web' chart, which accused numerous women reformers and women's organizations of alliance with an international socialist movement. Lucia Ramsey Maxwell to George Akerson, n.d. President's Subject Files, Box 165, Gold Star Mothers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, IA (hereafter HHPL).
20. Delegard, 'Women Patriots'; and Erickson, 'Conservative Women and Patriotic Maternalism'.
21. Delegard, 'Women Patriots', ch. 2. Thanks to Christine Erickson for sharing information about the American Gold Star Mothers' participation in the WPCND's annual conventions.
22. 'From a Gold Star Mother', *Washington Post*, 22 December 1928, 6.
23. House Committee on Military Affairs, *To Authorize Mothers and Unmarried Widows of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe to Visit the Graves: Hearing before the Committee on Military Affairs*, 70th Cong., 1st sess., 27 January 1928, 27. The U.S. government urged servicemen's next-of-kin to grant permission to have the bodies interred in American cemeteries in Europe, but it covered the expense of repatriating for those who refused. The Graves Registration Service returned 45,588 bodies to the United States, whereas some 30,000 remained buried in Europe. Mark Meigs. 1997. *Optimism at Armageddon: Voices of American Participants in the First World War*, New York: New York University Press, ch. 5. See also Piehler, 'The War Dead and the Gold Star', 171–4.
24. Lisa Budreau has argued that the passage of the final bill also owed much to timing, for by then work on the American military cemeteries in Europe was nearly complete. Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 198.
25. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s*, 69. Graham provides a detailed discussion of the pilgrimage programme's legislative history.
26. Senate Subcommittee on Military Affairs, *To Authorize Mothers and Unmarried Widows of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe to Visit the Graves: Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs*, 70th Cong., 1st sess., 14 May 1928, 3.
27. House Committee on Military Affairs, *To Authorize Mothers of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe to Visit the Graves: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs*, 68th Cong., 1st sess., 19 February 1924, 21.
28. L.K. Kerber. 1998. *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship*, New York: Hill and Wang.
29. Senate Subcommittee on Military Affairs, *To Authorize Mothers and Unmarried Widows of Deceased World War Veterans Buried in Europe to Visit the Graves: Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs*, 70th Cong., 1st sess., 14 May 1928, 29.
30. 1924 House Hearings, 15.
31. 1928 House Hearing, 22. See also 1928 Senate Hearing, 4.
32. 1928 Senate Hearing, 10. Mrs Charles Haas, New York State President of the War Mother's Association, seconded Nock's position, claiming: 'We have also a great many mothers who object very much to the widows going over ... We have in our own city a great many wives of soldiers who are divorced, and a great many of those who have remarried a short time after the boy was gone'. Ibid., 27.
33. In February 1930, Sen. Henry Allen introduced a bill that would have provided funds for fathers to make pilgrimages, but nothing came of the measure. 'Asks Trips for Fathers', *New York Times*, 14 February 1930, 15.
34. For histories of fatherhood that cover the interwar period, see: R. Griswold. 1993. *Fatherhood in America: A History*, New York: Basic Books; and R. LaRossa. 1997. *The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
35. 1928 Senate Hearing, 21–2. Likewise, one newspaper story reported on fathers who attempted to change the law by asserting they 'certainly' had 'as much claim to such a trip as a woman who was merely a guardian for a soldier killed in France'. (The law permitted

- a woman who had acted *in loco parentis* to the deceased to make the pilgrimage.) The men did not, however, argue that a father had as much right to a pilgrimage as a biological mother. Unidentified newspaper clipping, Newspaper Clippings, Box New York, 1930–33, American Pilgrimage of Gold Star Mothers and Wives, Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, MD [hereafter RG 92, NARA].
36. *Ibid.*, 18.
 37. 1924 House Hearings, 20; see also 1928 Senate Hearing, 5–6.
 38. 1929 Senate Hearing, 7.
 39. 1929 House Hearing, 18.
 40. Piehler, ‘The War Dead and the Gold Star’, 377.
 41. 1928 Senate Hearing, 19.
 42. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier became associated with gold star mothers in 1925, when they began to make annual Mother’s Day pilgrimages to the site. For background, see: Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, 116–25.
 43. A report prepared for the Senate on the constitutionality of the proposed legislation clarified these dual justifications by pointing to two types of precedents for the pilgrimage programme – those which established the government’s power to ‘grant relief to soldiers and their dependents’ and those which recognized the government’s power to enact legislation that would ‘further patriotic sentiment’. ‘Memorandum Upon Constitutionality of Use of Federal Funds for Gold Star Mothers’ Pilgrimages’, 1929 Senate Hearing, 11–15.
 44. 1928 House Hearing, 2. Long associated with the relief of suffering caused by war, the American Red Cross relied heavily on maternal imagery during World War I and the interwar period, representing itself as ‘The Greatest Mother on Earth’ in its fundraising campaigns. Foster Rhea Dulles, *The American Red Cross: A History*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950, 150.
 45. For instance, in 1926, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom led a ‘Peace Pilgrimage’ to London, calling for a World Disarmament Conference and urging the British government to sign the Optional Clause of the International Court of Justice.
 46. ‘Gold Star Ship Sails with 235 on Pilgrimage’, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 May 1930, 5; ‘Gold Star Mothers Honored at Sailing’, *New York Times*, 8 May 1930, 3; ‘New York Pays Its Homage as Gold Star Mothers Sail’, *Washington Post*, 8 May 1930, 3.
 47. 1924 House Hearings, 4.
 48. 1924 House Hearings, 16, 19.
 49. Maj. L.C. Wilson, ‘The War Mother Goes “Over There”’, *Quartermaster Review* May–June 1930, 21–25. See also: William A. Du Puy, ‘Pilgrimages of Mothers to Europe’s War Graves’, *New York Times*, 23 February 1930, sec. IX, 8.
 50. Mrs C. Durkin to Pres. Herbert Hoover, 23 September 1930, President’s Subject Files, Box 165, Gold Star Mothers, HHPL.
 51. ‘Capital Rebuffs Gold Star Negroes’, *New York Times*, 30 May 1930, 12; and ‘Gold Star Mothers Balk at Jim Crow Move’, *Chicago Defender*, 7 June 1930, 2.
 52. M.P. McElya. 2007. *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
 53. K.W. Hickel. 2000. ‘War, Region, and Social Welfare: Federal Aid to Servicemen’s Dependents in the South, 1917–1921’, *Journal of American History* 87(4), 1363–91.
 54. R.A. Serrano, ‘Poignant Protest’, *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 15 September 2002, I.16.
 55. ‘Capital Rebuffs Gold Star Negroes’, 12.
 56. The most complete account of the African American pilgrimages appears in: Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s*, ch. 6. See also Budreau, *Bodies of War*, ch. 22.
 57. Linda Gordan discusses a type of ‘black maternalism’ that differed in significant respects from that promoted by white welfare reformers. See Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, ch. 5. Eileen Boris argues that ‘womanist’ is a more apt term for describing the politics of

- motherhood that black women advocated. E. Boris. 1993. 'The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the "Political"', in Michel and Koven (eds), *Mothers of a New World*, 213–45.
58. 'Gold Star Mothers Sail for France on Freight Steamer', *Chicago Defender*, 19 July 1930, 1.
 59. 'The Gold Star Turns to Be One of Brass', *Chicago Defender*, 19 July 1930, 13.
 60. 'Many Gold Star Mothers Cancel Jim Crow Trip', *Afro-American*, 19 July 1930, 1, 19.
 61. Many black journalists and activists, however, softened their tone after witnessing the attentive care that the black pilgrims received during their journeys, and the overwhelmingly positive reception that the women received in Paris. See, for example: 'Paris Fetes War Mothers: France Seeks to Make up for U.S. Jim Crow', *Afro-American*, 26 July 1930, 1; 'Gold Star Mothers Wildly Greeted on Arrival in Paris', *Chicago Defender*, 26 July 1930, 4; 'Gold Star War Mothers Talk for the *Afro*', *Afro-American*, 9 August 1930, 1, 17.
 62. Black and Gold Stars', *Nation* 131, 23 July 1930, 86.
 63. On the Anderson episode, see: Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America*, 153–5; and S.A. Sandage. 1993. 'A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory', *Journal of American History* 80(1), 143–51.
 64. J.A. Rogers, 'War Mothers in France Got First Taste of Liberty', *Afro-American*, 23 August 1930, 5.
 65. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s*, 52–6.
 66. Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*.
 67. For a discussion of the Depression's impact on veterans, see J.D. Keene. 2001. *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 180–84.
 68. For background on disabled veterans, see S. Gelber. 2005. 'A "Hard Boiled Order": The Reeducation of Disabled World War I Veterans in New York City', *Journal of Social History* 39(1), 161–80; and K.W. Hickel. 2001. 'Medicine, Bureaucracy, and Social Welfare: The Politics of Disability Compensation for American Veterans of World War I', in P. Longmore and L. Umansky (eds), *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, New York: New York University Press, 236–67.
 69. 'The Other War Mothers', *Los Angeles Record*, 24 June 1930, sent to Pres. Herbert Hoover by Richard P. Yockisch, 25 June 1930, President's Subject Files, Box 165, Gold Star Mothers, HHPL.
 70. The average cost of a pilgrimage is cited in Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s*, 55. For historian Jennifer Keene's computation of the average bonus, see <http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/bonusm.htm>.
 71. For accounts of the Bonus March, see R. Daniels. 1971. *The Bonus March: An Episode of the Great Depression*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1971; P. Dickson and T.B. Allen. 2004. *The Bonus Army: An American Epic*, New York: Walker and Co.; and Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America*, ch. 8.
 72. Graham, *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s*, 140.
 73. Letter to the Editor, 'War Mothers Pilgrimage', *New York Times*, 17 January 1933, 18.
 73. L.F. Henry, 'Letters to the Editor', *New York Times*, 15 April 1932, 18.
 74. Quoted in 'Editorial Paragraphs', *The Nation* 134, 23 March 1932, 327.
 75. Scrapbook, Box 7, American Gold Star Mothers Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
 76. "'Future Veterans" Seek a Bonus Now', *New York Times*, 17 March 1936, 24; and 'Future Veterans', *Time* 27(13), 30 March 1936, 38.
 77. Vassar president Henry N. MacCracken rebutted claims that a Future Gold Star Mothers chapter existed at Vassar, insisting that the college had not chartered the organization. 'Vassar Head Protests', *New York Times*, 27 March 1936, 46. By time he issued his disclaimer, the Princeton students had already bowed to pressure from the American Gold Star Mothers.

- ers and renamed the women's auxiliary the 'Home Fires Division'. 'Future Veterans Bow to Criticism', *New York Times*, 21 March 1936, 19. See also: Lewis Gorin to Marys Austin Converse, 21 March 1936, Box 6, Folder 'Gold Star Mothers/Home Fires Division', Veterans of Future Wars Collection, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.
78. D.W. Whisenhunt. 1994. 'The Veterans of Future Wars in the Pacific Northwest', *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 85(4), 134–6; and J.P. Lash and J.A. Wechsler. 1936. *War Our Heritage*, New York: International Publishers, 135–42. See also the group's manifesto: L.J. Gorin, Jr, *Patriotism Prepaid*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott.
 79. For instance, the left-wing pacifist Oswald Garrison Villard rushed to the students' defence, enquiring acidly, 'Do the Gold Star Mothers wish to reserve for themselves the precious patriotic experience that is theirs of having given their sons at their country's behest in the most futile of wars, or are they willing to have others ennobled by this experience?' O.G. Villard, 'Issues and Men', *Nation* 142, 8 April 1936, 450.
 80. Zeiger, 'She Didn't Raise Her Boy to Be a Slacker'.
 81. The film is based on a short story that portrays the conflict between mother and son in more ambiguous terms – the son is more culpable and the mother less blameworthy. I.R.A. Wylie, 'Pilgrimage: A Story', *American Magazine* 114, November 1932, 44–7, 90–96.
 82. P. Stevenson, 'Gold Star Mother', *Esquire* 3, December 1935, 205.
 83. P. Wylie. 1942. *Generation of Vipers*, New York: Farrar & Rinehart.
 84. On Wylie's momism critique, see: Buhle, *Feminism and its Discontents*, ch. 4; Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*; and Rebecca Jo Plant. 2010. *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 85. P. Wylie, 'More Musings on Mom', *The Saturday Review* 29, 7 December 1946, 21.
 86. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, 192–3.
 87. [N.p.], 5 June 1943, Scrapbook, box 285, Philip Wylie Papers, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ [hereafter PWP].
 88. [Lafayette, IN], 29 June 1943, folder 4, box 232, PWP.
 89. [Akron, OH, no date], folder 4, box 235, PWP.
 90. R.B. Westbrook. 1990. "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, 587–614.
 91. E. Heineman. 2001. 'Whose Mothers?: Generational Difference, War, and the Nazi Cult of Motherhood', *Journal of Women's History* 12(4), 139–64; and A.M. Wingenter. 2003. 'Le Veterane del Dolore: Mothers and Widows of the "Fallen" in Fascist Italy', Ph.D. diss., Loyola University of Chicago.
 92. McEnaney, 'He-Men and Christian Mothers'.
 93. R. Whelan and T.M. Johnson, 'The Menace of the "Mothers"', *Liberty* 137, 24 July 1944, 18–19, 72–3; P. Lochridge, 'The Mother Racket', *Woman's Home Companion* 71, July 1944, 20–21, 71–4; and H.M. Jones, 'Mother Love Is Not Enough', *Saturday Review of Literature* 27, 28 October 1944, 16.
 94. See, for example, A. Swerdlow. 1993. *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and M.M. Nickerson. 2011. *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and Postwar Right*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.