Introduction

In 1995, as the United States celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, and in 2004, as it celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day, the country remembered and honored the heroism, hardship, and sacrifice that characterized the war years. For the most part the retelling focused on men and military matters. The story of World War II has not, however, been entirely gender blind. The historical record has been enriched by the work of numerous scholars who have delineated women’s contributions to the war effort.\(^1\)

While the contributions of women in the armed services and in defense work have been studied and analyzed, we have less knowledge of the ways that civilian women experienced the militarization of their everyday lives. Over time, women, across the globe, have provided numerous support services for the state and more particularly for the armed forces of their respective countries.\(^2\)

This book offers a different account of women in the United States during World War II that makes visible part of a troubling chapter in the history of American women in wartime. It is not a comfortable story to tell. From exploration of the ways that the apparatus of the state manipulated female sexuality across lines of race, class, and ethnicity, a darker story emerges of a process by which some women became “patrioutes.” This term, a blend of *patriot* and *prostitute* coined by the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) physician Otis Anderson to describe women who entertained the troops in order to maintain morale, stigmatized numerous young women who had responded to their nation’s call to support the war effort.\(^3\)

Archival records contain a complex story of thousands of women who supported the war effort not only by providing labor power but also by providing morale-maintaining services to the military, such as attending dances at military bases and servicemen’s clubs. Inevitably, the latter sexualized services raised public and private fears regarding the
present and future impact of the wartime disruption of the gender system. At a time when the state had initiated a campaign to protect the nation from prostitutes carrying venereal diseases, female sexuality seemed particularly dangerous. While Rosie the Riveter became a national icon, many other women who served their country received no commendations but were branded, in a sense, with a scarlet letter.

This account of the militarization of women plays out against a backdrop of a complex and often contradictory morals campaign launched by the apparatus of the state during the Second World War. The story revolves around official policies and practices, as various government and social agencies attempted to control venereal disease, particularly in the armed services, through the repression of female prostitution. On the surface, then, this seems like an account of an official program to repress prostitution and to protect national health from venereal disease. Underneath the public discourse, however, the story is far more complex. On one level, federal agencies found female sexuality disturbing, even dangerous; on another level, official wartime discourse included plans to use female sexuality in support of the war effort. Stereotypical images of wartime women and men, full of assumptions about male and female sexuality, were commonplace in official discussions. The wartime state's interpretation of sexuality produced a monolithic discourse regarding both male and female sexuality. It valorized a militarized type of masculine sexuality, reinforcing a persistent notion that “manly” soldiers would regularly seek out women for sex. The same process operated to cast female sexuality as threatening not only to the war effort but also to the larger society and therefore justified the repression of potentially dangerous and diseased female sexuality. Such discourses often served to minimize complex and critical issues of race, class, and ethnicity, which in reality were significant factors in the repression campaign. I do not attempt to resolve the numerous contradictions inherent in the policies and practices of the wartime state but rather aim to illuminate the complex relationship between women and the wartime state and to show the ways that complexities, contradictions, and ambiguities influenced American women’s (and men’s) lives during the Second World War.

While this account focuses on women in the United States, their experiences are part of a larger international story. Important scholarship has uncovered numerous wartime sexual support systems that served military forces in other countries’ systems, such as the enslavement of
women as comfort station prostitutes that the Japanese high command deemed “necessary to the war effort.” Other scholarship considers the experiences of wartime women in Germany, where, for instance, prostitutes (and lesbians) were sent to concentration camps and exterminated or forced to work in bordellos at the camps. England, France, Portugal, and many other nations involved in the war had their own militarized policies for prostitutes and for women more generally.

Moreover, military reliance on women’s service, especially sexual service, has a long history: the 1860s British Contagious Diseases Acts required compulsory examination of prostitutes and suspected prostitutes in selected military areas to limit the spread of venereal diseases. Focusing on “poor outcast women,” plainclothes police could identify a woman as a “common prostitute” and force her to submit to venereal disease tests. If she tested positive, she was remanded to a lock hospital. In Italy in the 1860s, the Cavour Act regulating prostitution required prostitutes to register with police, undergo twice-weekly vaginal examinations, and be hospitalized if they were venereally diseased; the act remained in effect until 1958. During the First World War both the United States and Great Britain established policies to control female sexuality in order to reduce venereal disease. In the United States, the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) was charged with controlling venereal diseases in the military. Great Britain’s “war within a war” operated on different levels depending on geographical location.

Whatever their circumstances, women during wartime could not escape the militarization of their respective societies and the means by which the state “maneuvered” to both mobilize and control female sexuality, although their experiences varied greatly, depending on factors such as race, class, and ethnicity. The complexities of women’s relationship to the wartime state also became more evident when women’s public presence increased as the United States mobilized for war.

The joining of women’s patriotism and their sexuality in the term *patriotute* is not surprising given the various forces that operate on women’s lives. The close connection between the concept of citizenship and military service (the citizen-soldier) complicated, from the start, perceptions of women’s wartime contributions. Linda Kerber explains the relationship between citizenship and (historically male) military service by pointing out that “the word ‘citizen’ carried military overtones and permeated the concept of citizenship since its origins.” Leisa D. Meyer concurs that “the military is a critical bastion of state power and
service within it is a determinant of the rights of citizens." Over time women and men have had different relationships to the state; the question of citizenship also depends on factors including, but not limited to, race, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality.

During World War II, many citizens who fulfilled their wartime obligations were not, however, recognized as entitled to all the rights of citizenship. For example, when the American Red Cross initiated a national campaign to encourage everyone to give blood as a sign of "a new kind of democratic citizenship," race discrimination denied full citizenship to African Americans. The Red Cross segregated and marked black blood and "reinstantiated Jim Crow." For second-generation Japanese American citizens (Nisei), state officials in charge of internment created "a kind of conditional citizenship," reflecting an assumed lack of loyalty to the United States. Male Japanese citizens could try to reclaim their citizenship by shedding blood for the United States in the armed forces. African American women saw military service, despite segregation, as a step toward gaining full citizenship rights. Women, during times of war, have participated in many ways to meet the obligations of citizenship, but seldom has their wartime service been defined or respected as such.

Existing scholarship has documented the stories of the millions of women who agreed to do their part to support the war effort in factories, shipyards, and defense plants. While these deviations from normative gender roles challenged the sex/gender system, a gendered process of redefinition that contained female labor power in a discourse or language of domesticity and femininity mitigated the threat. As a 1940s newsreel exclaimed: "Instead of cutting the lines of a dress, this woman cuts the pattern of aircraft parts." Media images and messages informed the public that under every working woman's clothes remained a feminine body attired in silk and lace.

Sexualized services, however, were less easily redefined in acceptable terms. The sexual innuendo that often framed female sexualized mobilization is strikingly illustrated in a perfume advertisement featuring a seductively clad woman accompanied by the caption "Spell ‘IT’ to the Marines." Even the Women's Army Corps came under attack as rumors spread that they were prostitutes or lesbians. Many other women have left records that tell of the sexual harassment they endured during this period. Articles such as "Public's Health: Program to Prevent Young Girls and Women from Involvement in Prostitution and Promis-
“Patriotude” typified a parallel discourse that evolved in response to perceived dangers that surrounded female sexuality.\(^{22}\) This type of article, and there were many of them,\(^{23}\) suggested in unsubtle ways that by peeling away the layers, the overalls, the feminine attire, one would find a body with the potential to spread disorder. The discourses that circulated around wartime women engendered suspicions that problematized wartime women’s responses to the war effort. Such varied but gendered discourses operated to keep women positioned at or beyond the borders of patriotic citizenship.

The state called upon women to serve their country while simultaneously denying them credit as they met the needs of wartime. While the national interest demanded total mobilization for war, deeply embedded attitudes toward female sexuality served to complicate the issue of women’s place in wartime society. One senior official, Charles Reynolds, illustrated how intensely emotional these attitudes were when he equated prostitution with treason.\(^{24}\) The category of “prostitute” quickly became unstable, stretching to include so-called promiscuous and potentially promiscuous women. This instability is well illustrated by the gendered term *patriotude*, which combined both positive and negative connotations and produced a symbol of a potentially subversive female individual.

This study examines, in part, wartime constructions of female and male sexualities. Female sexuality was represented by both the sexually dangerous (female) individual and the sexually alluring (female) morale builder, who became conflated with each other. Masculinity/manliness and war/soldiering have a longtime connection. Following R. W. Connell, I suggest that we consider servicemen as located at various sites of “institutionalized masculinity.”\(^{25}\) During wartime the iconic soldier was manly, heroic, the protector. While the public image of the servicemen may have been “masculine in a particular way,” not all servicemen qualified for iconic status. The hierarchical structure of the military made distinctions based on race and class. Race-based attitudes circulated throughout the wartime campaign against venereal disease. Government officials tended to focus on an allegedly high rate of venereal disease among blacks. As Alan Brandt points out, “[H]igh rates of infection were attributed to the premise that blacks were promiscuous.”\(^ {26}\)

The state had jurisdiction over a complex structure that reached into diverse social spaces and established a plethora of wartime policies. By examining official records, this study traces the emergence and evolution
of wartime policies, particularly toward women in the United States. In considering such “techniques of power” as they operate through various state institutions, one can gain some understanding of the complex ways that the state exerts and maintains control over individuals and groups. Within this power structure are also strategies of dissent and resistance. We will see, as the story progresses, that wartime women spoke back to power in a variety of ways, even though the space within which to resist was constrained. During the period of mobilization and continuing throughout the war, numerous ambiguities and paradoxes, both in government and in social policies and practices, not only created tremendous pressures in the everyday lives of individual women and men but also made concerted resistance difficult.

General Reynolds, with his charges of treason, along with other officials who had concerns that wartime women could subvert the war effort, proceeded to wage an all-out war on prostitutes and so-called promiscuous women, who came to personify venereal disease. In the years before Pearl Harbor, the army and navy, the Federal Security Agency (FSA), state health departments, and the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) formulated the Eight Point Agreement (see Appendix 1) regarding venereal disease control through, in part, the repression of prostitution and contact reporting. These eight points mark the official start of wartime sociopolitical efforts to control female sexuality. In 1941, the May Act (see Appendix 2) made prostitution within specified areas around military bases a federal crime. The federal government then created the Social Protection Division (SPD) to serve as a watchdog over women’s morals. American women became a suspect category, subject to surveillance for the duration of the war. In the following years, as many more women became visible in areas previously closed or forbidden to them, sociosexual tensions heightened.

By focusing on the complex series of government and social interventions regarding female sexuality in the World War II period, one can trace the evolution of a discourse concerning a female potential for immoderate sexuality that resulted in an imposition of the labels prostitute or promiscuous on numerous wartime women. Lauren Berlant notes that often “extravagant sex is a figure for general social disorder” and can “create panic.” In imagining any woman, particularly any young woman, as “hypersexualized,” the state strengthened its rationale for policing female sexuality. As the United States prepared for war, the apparatus of the state, in an attempt to deal with the recurrent wartime
problem of venereal disease, launched a campaign to suppress prostitution and to curtail the activities of so-called promiscuous women. Prostitutes have historically been depicted as carriers of venereal diseases, and the World War II campaign to preserve national (male) health enmeshed numerous women, some who were prostitutes as well as many who were not, in a web of criminality, deviance, and disease. As the country moved closer to war, female sexuality was in a sense nationalized, and a discourse of obligatory sensual patriotism circulated around American women. Magazines and newspapers featured stories, articles, and advertisements that encouraged women to do their part.

The media operated as a crucial locus of support for both mobilization and control of female sexuality. The policies of government propaganda agencies, such as the Office of War Information (OWI), its Magazine Bureau, and the War Advertising Council, indicate the close working relationship between government and media. Popular magazines, for example, urged wartime women to support the war effort in a variety of ways. The United Service Organization (USO) recruited respectable young white women for recreational activities and encouraged them to be friendly and open with servicemen. But at the same time many women had to be wary about appearing to be too intimate. As women became visible in new ways to the gaze of the public, their behavior came under close scrutiny. The state’s claim that women’s bodies were necessary to the war effort in both factory and dance hall clashed with more traditional ideals about women’s proper roles and confounded women’s wartime service. Consequently, state and social authorities, while mobilizing women to depart from their assigned spaces and provide diverse wartime services, also spoke of their concerns that women in public would become sexualized and masculinized. Such contradictions provoked fear and confusion in the public mind. Paradoxically, many women who responded to wartime mobilization did not appear as patriotic citizens; instead, the female body came to represent a threat to the national welfare. Rooted in the past, a notion of the female body as essentially disordered began to circulate, exacerbating social anxieties related to impending war.

During World War II, women’s bodies were nationalized and their sexuality militarized: women’s laboring and sexual bodies were, in a sense, drafted for the duration. The draft called men to serve their country, and women likewise received their orders: to be patriotic and support the war effort, in part by maintaining servicemen’s morale.
As numerous women volunteered to entertain—to provide pleasurable companionship for—the troops, the already unclear boundaries between acceptable and transgressive female sexuality grew even more nebulous. It became difficult to separate acceptable morale-maintaining sexuality from dangerous promiscuous sexuality at a time when female sexuality was simultaneously needed and feared. All too often, the distinction between the “good girl” and the “bad girl” collapsed. Women’s contributions to the war effort, subject to rumors of promiscuity and colored by sexual innuendo, became tainted with charges of sinful and transgressive sex. Growing perceptions that the new wartime woman would spread contagion and disrupt the social order through her promiscuous sexuality led to policies for more stringent control of women. Prostitutes, promiscuous women, and their inevitable consequence—venereal disease—became the enemies on the homefront.

Chapter 1, “The Long Arm of the State,” takes us directly into the heart of the campaign to control venereal disease by repressing prostitution. It presents an overview of the institutions and agencies of the state
apparatus that participated in the campaign. We see how quickly the campaign to repress prostitution expanded to include so-called promiscuous and potentially promiscuous women. The intention in this chapter is to illuminate the sweep of the state’s interventions in the realm of female sexuality. I subsequently look back in time to identify some salient factors that laid the foundation for attitudes and policies toward women in the war years.

Chapter 2, “Prelude to War,” deals with the months and years immediately before Pearl Harbor. To illuminate many of the issues and events that provided an infrastructure for the officials involved in the World War II repression campaign, this chapter examines venereal disease policies during World War I and in the interwar years. In the early twentieth century, charity girls, flappers, and the “New Women” had challenged gender norms and provoked concerns regarding female sexuality. Progressive reform focused, in part, on prostitution and produced several prostitution studies that served as sources of information for state officials in the late 1930s and 1940s. During World War I a link between prostitution and venereal disease in the military led to the establishment of the CTCA. In this early period, state intervention in everyday life was quite visible, more so than in the past. As the United States mobilized for war once again, state officials gathered to discuss expected problems regarding female sexuality. They looked back in time and reviewed past records and reports as sources to draw from in shaping the emerging campaign to repress prostitution and prevent venereal disease in the current crisis. The persistence of attitudes toward, and interpretations of, female and male sexuality are evident from a comparison of the earlier records and reports with the emerging dialogue during the Second World War.

Chapter 3, “‘Reservoirs of Infection’: Science, Medicine, and Contagious Bodies,” illuminates the tensions between two concepts of venereal disease: contagious disease and moral failing. This chapter excavates the roots of a persistent negative discourse focusing on female sexuality through an analysis of historically specific representations of women in sociocultural and medico-scientific sources. Over time, such representations produced a powerful discourse of dangerously deviant female bodies that ultimately contributed to the wartime measures to control and contain female sexuality during the Second World War. Not only women (nonwhite and white) but also black men were affected by sociopolitical discourses that marked them as sites of venereal infection
while simultaneously rendering them invisible in terms of contribution to the war effort.

Chapter 4, “‘A Buffer of Whores’: Military and Social Ambivalence about Sexuality and Gender,” discusses how programs to regulate prostitution were juxtaposed with military reluctance to repress prostitution. In the larger society, responses to repression were also complicated by support for regulated prostitution. This chapter considers the effects of militarized sexuality on servicemen and on women, as well as military prophylaxis policies that supported the notion that men, especially servicemen, need sex. I suggest that the constant attention paid to sex, including safe sex, in the military also served as an incitement to sex, as a way to prove one’s manliness.

Chapter 5, “Spell ‘IT’ to the Marines: The Contradictory Messages of Popular Culture,” explores two strands of sexual discourse in print media of the 1940s. The first strand, found in a wide range of periodicals, from mass-circulation popular magazines such as Look, Life, Newsweek, and Reader’s Digest to professional journals such as Probation, Federal Probation, and the American Journal of Public Health, focuses on the condemnation of prostitutes and promiscuous women as vectors of venereal disease. The second strand, found in three types of periodicals—homemakers’ magazines (such as Woman’s Home Companion, Ladies’ Home Journal, and Good Housekeeping) targeting middle-class women, romance magazines (such as True Confessions) targeting working-class women, and magazines targeting African Americans (The Crisis, Negro Digest)—consists of more general portrayals of female sexuality and tends to militarize sexuality as a female wartime obligation.

Chapter 6, “Behind the Lines: The War against Women,” examines specific wartime measures intended to control female sexuality and discusses several ways that the female body was marked as deviant. It includes a section on the professional women who participated in the campaign and troubles the notion of protection. The consequences for women charged with criminal and/or moral transgression emerge from case studies and statistical reports. This chapter also presents several instances of overt resistance to the policies and practices of the repression campaign.

In my conclusion I argue that the 1950s emphasis on family and domesticity is, in part, a response to wartime disruption of the sex/gender system. Wartime women should not, however, be seen as passive or as mere victims of the state apparatus. In spite of the persistence of sex/
gender ideologies, women experienced change; and through their wartime services, these women invariably challenged, though at great expense, the sex/gender system. Complex forces operated to mobilize and control women’s sexuality during World War II; an analysis of the process helps us understand the consequences of the war for women in the United States, both for the duration and in the postwar years.