INDUSTRIAL WARFARE AND LABOR IDENTITY

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Victory in the Great War of the early twentieth century necessitated complete loyalty among workers, whose labor fueled the industrial power of the United States. Those individuals whom the federal government did not perceive as cooperative in the nation’s wartime efforts faced various forms of cultural and physical suppression. These restrictive measures impacted the self-identity of the American working class, motivating workers in the post-war world to prioritize their identities as loyal members of the nation over their membership within their gender or class. This shift in identity appears clearly in illustrations by artists sympathetic to the labor movement. In this paper, I analyze the works of these artists as published within newspapers and magazines prior to, during, and following the Great War in order to analyze shifting notions of identity present within the post-war American working class.

The Great War demonstrated the destructive potential of modern nation states, both within and outside of their own borders. Memories of past quarrels between Western empires shattered as the industrial titans of the new century bludgeoned each other to death over the course of years. These states sacrificed lives and armaments on a hitherto incomprehensible scale in order to achieve victory, leading to an unprecedented level of industrial demand. The United States in particular became a vital source of war materials, exporting munitions across the Atlantic to the front lines. Achieving victory in total war necessitated the full coordination between the social, economic, and military organs of the American industrial juggernaut. This machine-state increased its influence over the working class in order to achieve internal unity through the suppression of anti-war activities and the circulation of nationalist propaganda. As a result of this increased state management of the labor ecosystem, the United States witnessed drastic changes in the self-identity of workers, reflected through a shift in the working class’s visual narratives. Specifically, the post-war labor environment featured a softening of class and gender barriers as well as growing resentment towards political and economic influence by foreign powers as part of a new identity based upon one’s duty to the nation.

In this paper I argue that these changing attitudes, expressed by artists sympathetic to American Labor, directly resulted from the national government’s emphasis on one’s loyalty to the state as the defining feature of citizenship. To accomplish this goal, I analyze the common motifs contained within pre-war labor illustrations, the circulation of propaganda and restriction of anti-war activities by the federal government, and the shift in self-perceptions of laborers evident in post-war labor illustrations. By American Labor, I refer to the collective American working class within this historical setting, regardless of other social distinctions such as race or gender. The term “labor identity” functions to characterize the self-perceptions of these workers, as often demonstrated through visual illustrations by labor-sympathetic artists. These artists, while often distinct from American Labor due to their occupations or socio-economic status, were influenced by activities within the labor
movement and worked to reflect the interests and plights of the working class in their illustrations. Through wartime propaganda and restrictions on activities perceived as opposed to the war, the federal government popularized a new definition of citizenship based upon one’s loyalty to the state. Examining papers and other journalistic publications from the American Midwest, Sara Egge notes that the Great War caused suffragists to adopt this notion of citizenship, casting off social divisions such as gender or class in favor of a distinctly merit-based American identity.¹ My work centers upon the emergence of this viewpoint within the illustrations of artists sympathetic to the labor movement following the end of the Great War.

Merit-based citizenship, by which I mean a notion of one’s worth as a citizen defined by his or her contributions to the nation, appears in a number of features within post-war labor illustrations. These images often encourage cooperation between American Labor and Capital in order to achieve mutual benefits, while pre-war visual narratives almost entirely lack collaboration between these two groups. Labor cartoonists villainized corporations both prior to and following the Great War; however, the nationalist narratives furthered by the federal government in wartime encouraged individuals to think of themselves as primarily loyal to the state rather than their class. Gender distinctions similarly dissolved under nationalist pressure. Women began to appear as equal and even dominant members of labor households in illustrations following the war. While still placing women primarily within the domestic sphere, post-war labor illustrators possessed a growing notion of women as valuable members of society, validated by their efforts in wartime. Racial barriers would remain prominent across class barriers during the remainder of the twentieth century, particularly in the decades following the war’s end. However, illustrations following the end of the Great War reveal an adoption of this same nationalist imagery by African American labor publications. Nativist fears of economic and political influence by foreign states also arose within illustrations created by labor-sympathetic artists. In each of these changes, the working class as a whole adopted viewpoints popularized through the federal government’s issuing of propaganda and restriction of activities viewed as opposing the war effort. These perspectives reflect a shift in American Labor’s identity from one defined by social distinctions, such as class and gender, to one centered around a group’s contributions to the nation.

Pre-War Labor Illustrations

Visual media created before the war’s inception reveals a labor ecosystem deeply divided along barriers of class, gender, and race. This particularly appears in the illustrations widely circulated throughout the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A serial published in 1892 features an illustration of hell by the labor artist Art Young. This image depicts the devil in a fashion noticeably resembling a businessman in his private office.² “Mr. Satan” holds a cigar in one hand and a telephone in the other, with lines connecting to New York and St. Louis.³ This motif of government officials bowing to corporate interests routinely appears in labor publications in the years leading up to the Great War. In a cartoon from Puck Magazine in 1904, John Pughe depicts President Theodore Roosevelt stopping the cutting down of trusts in order to maintain federal funds.⁴ These illustrations reveal a belief among pre-war labor sympathizers of a symbiotic relationship existing between

¹ Sara Egge, Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest, 1870-1920 (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2018), 154.
² Art Young, “Mr. Satan’s Private Office,” illustration, Hell Up To Date, 1892.
³ Young, “Mr. Satan’s Private Office
⁴ John S. Pughe, “Woodman, spare that tree, touch not a single bough. Funds would be scarce if we should ‘run amuck’ just now,” illustration, Puck Magazine, 1904.
the national government and large corporations. Other images depict American Business as dominating government officials. Figure 1 presents the United States Congress and President Woodrow Wilson as puppets controlled by the hand of John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil.5 Throughout the early decades of the American Progressive Era, artists used their illustrations to depict corporations as maintaining a dangerous hold over the United States government. These images reveal a deep understanding of class barriers in the pre-war labor environment among labor illustrators, manifested in the villainization of corporate and governmental officials.

Illustrators furthered this understanding of class divisions through the depiction of conflict between corporations and labor unions. An illustration in Industrial Pioneer by the artist “A. Slave” shows a corrupt policeman and other figures of capitalist society as unable to stop a bell reading “I.W.W. The One Big Union” from ringing.6 The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a radical labor union founded in 1905, appeared prominently within early twentieth century visual media, portrayed both as a bastion of workers’ rights by some and a menace to societal order by others. In his work discussing the use of printed images by the IWW, Tom Juravich notes that this union often used images to motivate fellow workers to take actions for their own benefit at the expense of business interests.7 Certain cartoons, such as “Mr. Block”, were created to lampoon workers who attempted to reconcile their differences through words with their supervisors rather than disruptive action.8

The visual narratives of labor unions in illustrations created prior to the Great War largely center around an inevitable victory over capitalist interests through organization. Richard Battle’s cartoon for The Masses shows the history of capitalism ending with a laborer rising up to kick back the dogs of governmental and corporate oppression.9 These images reveal the use of visual media by labor illustrators to mobilize laborers against common enemies, similar to later practices by wartime government propagandists. However, while government propaganda focused on one’s duty to the nation, pre-war labor illustrators sought to inform workers of their duty to serve their class and oppose the interests of corporate oppressors. In these illustrations, the American labor force appears largely centered around its class identity and opposition to the interests of American Capital rather than an underlying loyalty to the nation.

When artists sympathetic to the working class depicted its female members,

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6 A. Slave, “They Can’t Keep It from Ringing,” illustration, Industrial Worker, November 12, 1912.
8 Juravich, “Representing Labor,” 144.
they largely rendered these women as guardians of the domestic sphere that were holding back the forces of capitalism. These types of depictions reveal gender barriers present within the pre-war labor force. One cartoon reveals this gender-based division by depicting children attempting to flee Lawrence, Massachusetts following a textile worker’s strike. A large policeman attacks a procession of women and children attempting to flee towards the female embodiment of sympathy, who beckons them into the homes of other cities.  

Figure 2, appearing in *Industrial Worker* in 1913, displays a working class woman within her home, holding her child away from a personified “death” in the garb of a Roman soldier. These images depict women as guardians of their homes and children, rather than co-laborers with their male counterparts.

Racial barriers remained similarly well entrenched within the working class throughout the pre-war years. Cedric de Leon describes the origin of this racial divide within labor unions during the Reconstruction and Gilded Age periods. He characterizes the rise of this division through episodes such as the exclusion of Lewis H. Douglass, son of leading abolitionist Frederick Douglass, from the Columbia Printer’s Union in 1869. Such sentiments continued into the early twentieth century. In an edition of the *International Socialist Review* from 1903, leading Socialist politician Eugene V. Debs states his belief that the Socialist Party has “nothing special to offer the negro” and “cannot make separate appeals to all the races.” These words reveal the presence of colorblind ideology among prominent members of the working class during this time period, as labor leaders made little effort to assist in the plights uniquely faced by African American laborers in the years following Reconstruction.

Most prominent labor publications from the pre-war period lack depictions of cooperation between white and black labor. However, the absence of these depictions reveals as much about the presence of racial barriers as does the villainization of corporate and government officials or the domestic depictions of working-class women by labor artists. The pre-war working class largely viewed racial and class-related issues as separate problems. Prominent labor publications reflect this viewpoint by displaying cartoons that relate primarily to white laborers rather than their black counterparts. These illustrations demonstrate the pre-war American working class as divided along the social distinctions of gender and race rather than

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united in devotion to the nation as a whole.

Anti-Militarist Visual Narratives

Visual narratives opposed to warfare abounded among the working class at this time, with many labor illustrators arguing against the military buildup occurring in the years prior to the Great War. For many labor-sympathizers, the nation’s role in producing munitions for other world powers presented war as a tool used by the upper class to increase profits at the expense of workers’ lives and labor. However, the flood of government propaganda circulated in the minds of the public during the war largely drowned out these narratives. Additionally, any actions taken by laborers in response to heightened militarism would result in strict punishment by the wartime government. This restriction of the public’s activities and the circulation of propaganda combined to subdue class and gender distinctions within the workforce, redefining citizenship as a measure of “civic responsibility” to the nation.\footnote{Egge, \textit{Woman Suffrage}, 154.}

The United States would not officially enter into the Great War until 1917. However, the industrial juggernaut served to supply many European powers with their means of destruction prior to the United States’ direct involvement. In the early years of the conflict, the large American banking corporation J.P. Morgan & Co. began to finance and manage war material purchases for the British, French, and Russian Empires.\footnote{Michael A. Martorelli, “Mobilizing US Industry for the Great War,” \textit{Financial History} 123 (Fall 2017): 17.} This corporation distributed contracts to the top manufacturers in particular industries, such as the Winchester and Remington Companies for rifles and the DuPont Company for TNT and picric acid.\footnote{Martorelli, “Mobilizing US Industry,” 17.} Cooperation of American banking and armaments companies with European powers allowed the captains of industry at the helms of a relatively small number of powerful American businesses to profit heavily from the onset of the Great War, fueling anti-war sentiments among workers.

The federal government also increased its influence over the national economy in order to better manage the production of war materials. In his analysis of munitions production in the Great War, David Rogers notes that, as the war progressed, governments realized that they could not rely upon market forces to regulate munitions production.\footnote{David Rogers, \textit{Bullets, Bombs and Poison Gas: Supplying the Troops on the Western Front 1914-1918} (Solihull, England: Helion & Company, 2017), 45.} Victory in total war required the expansion of national governments into their economic spheres. Following this theory, the United States government increasingly managed munitions production and trade with foreign nations over the course of the war. The Anglo-American Purchasing Treaty, passed in August 1917, established a government committee responsible for overseeing all purchases of armaments by the British Crown.\footnote{Rogers, \textit{Bullets, Bombs and Poison Gas}, 44.} The American and British governments used this policy to place political officials over the purchasing of armaments, rather than relying upon businesses to single handedly manage the munitions trade. These changes to the
economic climate in the United States simultaneously ballooned the profits of a select
number of munitions corporations while also increasing the federal government’s hold
over the production of war materials.

Anti-war visual narratives developed within the labor force largely as a
backlash against this ever-expanding power of the United States government and the
heightened profits of armaments corporations during wartime. Proponents of
American military buildup cited the prevention of aggressive imperial expansion and
tyrranical rule by European powers as justifying the growth of their own armed forces
and the nation’s involvement in the Great War. However, anti-war thinkers believed
militarism would lead to these same dangers appearing within American institutions.
Fears of expanded government influence over society appear in the visual media
created by working class thinkers prior to the outbreak of war. Robert Minor’s
illustration in a 1916 issue of The Blast displays a number of men in suits worshipping
“The God of Dynamite.” This image reflects working class opposition to the
government’s interest in expanding the nation’s military might through the armaments
industry. Figure 3, an image by Boardman Robinson appearing in The Masses,
presents a grotesque combination of the various world powers of the time holding a
sword above the caption “God.” Such illustrations relay a perceived idolatry of
military might by the national government. As the war continued in Europe, supplied
largely by American corporations, labor illustrators within the United States began to
express a view of warfare as a capitalistic endeavor conducted by the wealthy at the
expense of laborers’ work and livelihood.

Propaganda, Government Suppression, and the Rise of a National Identity

The national government’s extensive circulation of propaganda and restriction of
activities perceived as opposed to the war effort effectively subdued these anti-
militarist narratives. The onset of the Great War saw a dramatic increase in state-
produced visual media, much of which opposed the goals of labor activists in favor of
one’s duty to the nation at large. Examining the use of nationalism by the combatant
states of the Great War, L.L. Farrar notes that most combatant governments viewed
propaganda as crucial to mobilizing their populations for total war. The success of
the state in wartime required a united force. Propaganda furthered this goal by, in the
words of Johnathan Auerbach, “bringing the state to the doorsteps of ordinary
Americans as never before.” Through bringing workers face to face with the
nationalist visual narratives of the state, propaganda suppressed devotion to social
categories such as class and gender in favor of a stronger duty to the nation.

The visual narratives created by the United States during the Great War
sought to unite the workforce under a national identity by reflecting the vital role
laborers played in achieving victory. Examining posters containing these narratives,
Pier Paolo Pedrini argues that one of propaganda’s most consistent goals was to
portray the work of laborers as another form of military service. Posters circulated
by the American government specifically displayed munitions workers as equally vital

21 Cohen, “Imagining Militarism,” 93.
to the war effort as soldiers on the front. One image created by Adolf Triedler explicitly conveys this notion of reciprocal roles, depicting an American soldier side by side with a munitions worker as “the combination that will win us the war.”

Other pieces of propaganda demonstrate the vital role that workers played in supplying the nation’s allies in an idealized fight for global democracy. Figure 4 displays a poster created by the National Industrial Conservation Movement in 1917. This image shows the cannon of “American Industry” firing supplies and munitions across the Atlantic Ocean to the Allies as part of the “War for Democracy” while also calling laborers to cooperate with the war effort, as their compliance will prove “more profitable” than strife.

Through these posters, the national government popularized a notion of workers’ identity as loyal citizens of the nation rather than members of their particular class.

Propaganda similarly dissolved gender distinctions by emphasizing the role of women in achieving victory. Despite female laborers’ comprising a significant portion of the industrial workforce, American propaganda typically portrays women in the agricultural sphere or as nurses in the Red Cross. The relegation of women to jobs outside of the factory in these images reflects traditional notions of jobs suitable for women. However, propaganda’s abundant depiction of female labor in these roles still served to dissolve traditional gender distinctions within the working class, as seen in post-war labor cartoons. Through posters demonstrating the efforts of women for victory, the United States government popularized a merit-based notion of citizenship as being earned through service to the nation. As Deborah Thom notes, the Great War saw a shift from mere toleration of female labor to its celebration as “constructive for families, desirable for the nation, and healthy for women.”

This shift largely resulted from the global increase in demand for industrial labor to produce war materials. This increased need translated to a heightened demand for laborers, which American women swiftly moved to fulfill. Sara Egge notes that Woodrow Wilson cited the vital role which women played in the workforce in an address to the Senate in 1918 arguing for women’s suffrage.

Indeed, the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in part resulted from the changing notion of citizenship that working women furthered during the war effort.

The propaganda circulated by the federal government during the Great War furthered the notion of citizenship as a “measure of civic responsibility” at a time in which American women filled a number of jobs vital to the success of the nation.

30 Egge, Woman Suffrage, 152.  
31 Egge, Woman Suffrage, 154.
Government programs such as the War Garden Commission encouraged many working class women to grow their own food, allowing the nation’s food production industry to focus on feeding the front lines. Maginel Enright, a prominent female illustrator working for the commission at the time, depicts one such woman shoveling vegetables from her war garden “over the top” of a trench in Figure 5. The phrasing used in this poster intentionally reflects the movements of soldiers over the edges of trenches into battle. Through this depiction, the War Garden Commission attempts to portray women’s agricultural efforts as similarly vital to the success of the nation as soldiers’ fighting on the front lines.

In addition to agricultural labor, American propaganda also depicted women working in the Red Cross. One poster by A.E. Foringer depicts “The Greatest Mother in the World” in a nurse’s uniform cradling her injured son. Images such as these echo traditional gender roles of women as the nurturing force within the home, serving their greatest purpose through motherhood. However, the circulation of images showing women in these traditional, yet vital roles demonstrates these loyal servants of the state as deserving of the same degree of participation in national activities afforded to men. Propaganda helped fuel the rise of merit-based citizenship in the working class that combined with the efforts of women in wartime to contribute largely to the success of the women’s suffrage movement.

In addition to the circulation of propaganda, the United States government also furthered a merit-based notion of citizenship through suppressing the activities of certain groups perceived as opposed to the war. Anti-war efforts by labor unions such as the IWW and the federal government’s restrictions on the ethnic activities of German Americans illustrate this trend. Many members of the IWW in the Western United States refused to register for the draft, with others choosing to flee the nation entirely. The IWW also circulated stickers and leaflets urging others to refuse to support the war effort. Through such activities, radical labor groups sought to take drastic actions against conscription. However, these movements ultimately served to fuel the government’s control over American Labor. Tammy Proctor notes that the fear of anti-war activities by labor groups led to the creation of internment camps, such as Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City. These camps demonstrate a growing view

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of anti-war individuals as not fully citizens due to their active decision to not support the goals of the nation. Federal agencies also sought to censor many forms of visual media perceived as contrary to the war effort. Steven Ross describes efforts by the national government to monitor and restrict films depicting labor strikes and other workers’ movements, noting that censorship appeared most severe in areas where “class conflict was most pronounced.” While notions of class conflict abounded in the pre-war visual narratives, such messages faced intense opposition from the state during the Great War, as they might incite workers to refuse to support the industrial war machine. Internment and censorship served to subdue the activities of individuals that may distract from or directly oppose the efforts of the state.

While the government suppressed many groups for openly opposing the war, others faced such persecution due to mere speculation about their disloyalty to the state. German Americans in particular grew to make up a significant portion of internment camp populations as a result of fears regarding their potential loyalty to the German Empire. Families emigrating from the lands that would come to form the nation of Germany in the nineteenth century comprised a large fraction of the United States’ population in certain regions by the early twentieth century. Many German Americans living in the American Midwest moved to this region half a century or more before the war. However, under fears of disloyalty to the nation in wartime, government policies imprisoned or culturally suppressed many of these families, ultimately forging a uniquely nationalist identity in the minds of many citizens. Egge notes that laws against “un-American” activities became common within the Midwest, such as a ban on the public speaking of foreign languages in Iowa or the confiscation of radios from German families. Notably, suffragists passionately participated in “Americanization”, which encouraged conformity in various behaviors such as the sewing of American clothing styles and eating American dishes rather than those customary eaten in families’ nations of origin. In this example, suffragists demonstrate a public uptake of the nationalist, merit-based citizenship popularized within the United States at this time. Through propaganda and the restriction of activities perceived as opposing the war effort, the federal government drowned out anti-militarist narratives and furthered a notion of citizenship as defined by one’s support of the nation.

**Post-war Visual Media**

These practices resulted in the softening of class and gender barriers within working class visual narratives in favor of a stronger devotion to national identity. While many of the labor publications popularized in the pre-war era ceased operations over the course of the Great War, other artists continued to reflect the sentiments of the working class in their own publications. Laborers began to view themselves as a force whose worth derived from its loyalty to the state rather than its mere ability to oppose the aims of the wealthy, and artists sympathetic to labor reflect these ideas in their illustrations. Additionally, the workforce came to present its female half in an equal position to male labor largely as a result of women’s contributions as part of the labor force during the Great War. African American labor publications would employ these same narratives, using their support of the state in wartime as a justification for why they should be recognized as equal citizens. Nationalist sentiments against foreign

influence within the United States, popularized by the federal government during the war, also emerged within working class visual narratives. These developments in labor illustrations represent the rise of “merit-based” citizenship within the minds of the postwar labor force.

The softening of class barriers in the post-war world did not result in an end to class distinctions. The American upper class certainly retained a large majority of the wealth circulated within the United States in the decade following the war’s end, helped in no small part by the war industry itself. Indeed, fears of heightened militarism, driven by captains of industry, continued to flourish within labor illustrations following the war’s end. These images demonstrate a fear of a government dominated by an interest in mechanized, large scale munitions production resulting from the heavy emphasis placed on the mass production of armaments by the state in the Great War. Figure 6, an illustration by Art Young from 1921, depicts munitions workers from Allied nations constructing battleships, munitions, poison gas, and other war materials. The workers of each nation are shown competing with one another for the benefit of their particular state, representing the division of the global working class along national borders. Through such images, one gains a view of the post-war American labor force as maintaining a primary loyalty to the state itself rather than class identity.

![Illustration of munitions workers from Allied nations constructing battleships, munitions, poison gas, and other war materials.](image)

Figure 6: “Who Said Disarmament?” *Good Morning*. Art Young. 1921.

The visual narratives of labor illustrations also notably demonstrate a softening of both gender and class distinctions through depictions of cooperation between the working class and American businesses, as well as an increasingly powerful image of women in labor households. These images reflect a large shift in the role of women within the visual narratives of laborers resulting from the vital role of female workers in the nation’s war effort. Women within the workforce of many combatant nations were expected to return to the domestic sphere following the war’s end. As a result, pre-war gender barriers resurfaced in the post-war labor ecosystem.

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42 Thom, “Gender and Work,” 58.
to some degree following their brief suspension in wartime. However, while many female laborers in the United States did return to the domestic sphere after the war, they also gained a large degree of societal importance due to their service in the wartime economy.

While post-war labor illustrations still largely relegated women to the domestic sphere, the softening of gender distinctions within the self-identity of workers appears in these images as well. Post-war depictions of women display them as much more powerful figures within the home than the women of pre-war publications. The archetype of the strong, working class woman features prominently in depictions of interactions between American Labor and Capital. An illustration by I. Swenson from the Seattle Union Record in 1919 depicts a worker side by side with his wife outside of a factory, challenging the factory boss to “see what you can do” without their support.43 This image takes the working-class woman out of the home and shows her supporting her husband’s activism in the workplace.

Figure 7, an illustration by E. A. Bushnell depicts a working class woman looking up a ladder leading from “Slavery” to “Presidency.”44 This image appeared in nationally circulated publications, including the New York Times Company’s Current History journal.45 While many of the larger pre-war labor publications ceased operations during the Great War, the circulation of such images in journals with a broad-reaching audience reflects a positive view of increased agency for working class women in the post-war labor ecosystem.

Other images directly compare American Labor to a woman in a troublesome marriage with American Capital. An illustration by “Ding” Darling from 1919 depicts this archetypal couple peering over a fence to see their neighbors of “Capital” and “Labor” having destroyed their house through lockouts and strikes, resulting in their child, “Prosperity,” becoming pinned underneath the debris.46 One might argue that the association of U.S. Labor with women at the time would implicitly place this institution under the patriarchal rule of U.S. Capital. However, such a notion ignores depictions of American Labor such as Figure 8, in which a small and weak American Capital is easily struck by his “wife.”47 These images of women within the labor household reflect a tumultuous, yet mutually beneficial, relationship between the working and upper classes of the United States. Post-war illustrations depict a softening of class and gender barriers resulting from propaganda’s emphasis specifically on the efforts of women and the working class in support of the war effort.

44 A. E. Bushnell, “The Sky is Now Her Limit.”
45 A. E. Bushnell, “The Sky is Now Her Limit.”
47 Jay N. Darling, “There Are Moments When Married Life Seems Quite Endurable Even to a Man Who Thinks He’s Henpecked,” illustration, The Des Moines Register, June 14, 1919.
Nativism and fears of foreign influence expressed through the policies and practices of the state in wartime continued to appear in post-war labor illustrations. An image created by Carey Orr in 1921 echoes the previously mentioned archetype of a marriage between American Capital and Labor, this time depicting the couple arguing over the other’s inviting labor and goods in from “cheap foreign” sources. While the United States emerged from the Great War as an industrial superpower, fears of foreign nations’ influence within domestic markets abounded across class boundaries. Businesses feared profit losses while American industrial workers feared the loss of already sparse employment opportunities to foreign labor. These tensions may largely be seen as an extension of nativist sentiments popularized within the wartime visual narratives through propaganda and the internment of minority groups believed to be acting in opposition to the state.

Additionally, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 expounded nativist fears within the minds of American business leaders and moderate labor sympathizers. This Red Scare resulted in images designed to further encourage cooperation between businesses and the working class. “Ding” Darling’s illustration within the Des Moines Register from June of 1919 depicts U.S. Labor as a strong woman kicking the “Reds” out of her house, declaring that she can handle her small husband, “Capital”, on her own. Cartoons from larger publications echo this nationalist narrative, such as F.T. Richards’ illustration from Life magazine in 1920, shown in Figure 9. This image portrays the personified American Federation of Labor striking at Bolshevism with a knife reading “Loyalty.” Such images reflect a call for nationalist unity among prominent labor unions of the time as well as a perceived need for cooperation between American Labor and Capital in order to avoid

Figure 8: “Married Life,” Des Moines Register. ‘Ding’ Darling. June 14, 1919.

Figure 9: “Kill It NOW!” Life. F.T. Richards. May 6, 1920.

49 Darling, “There Are Moments When Married Life Seems Quite Endurable Even to a Man Who Thinks He’s Henpecked.”
influence by foreign powers in domestic markets and political revolutions. This notion largely echoes the nativist sentiments popularized within the United States in wartime through propaganda and restrictions on activities perceived as anti-war.

In contrast to gender and class, racial barriers remained well entrenched in the post-war identities of the working class. Illustrators for African American publications demonstrated their frustration at the lack of cooperation between white and black labor in the years following the Great War. An image by Leslie Rogers in *The Chicago Defender* from 1924 shows a man representing “Negro Labor” knocking on the door of The American Federation of Labor on two occasions twenty years apart, with Samuel Gompers, President of the AFL, only taking notice of him in the latter situation. Although the man represented grows in size in the years between these occasions and gains the attention of a powerful union leader, he remains outside the door in both images. This cartoon reflects the continuation of precedent set by prior white labor leaders to treat issues of race and class as entirely separate. Although racial barriers remained strong in the post-war labor ecosystem, advocates for African American labor adopted the same merit-based notion of citizenship demonstrated within other labor publications at the time. As Jeanette Keith notes, black political leaders attempted to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation and right to be treated as equal citizens through support for the war effort, similarly to the actions of American suffragists. While their efforts would not reach the same result, both African American and suffragist political leaders adopted a notion of citizenship as earned from one’s efforts in support of the nation in wartime.

![Figure 10: The Afro-American. John Good. November 11, 1921.](image)

This sentiment would continue in illustrations of black labor following the war’s end. Figure 10, an illustration from *The Afro-American* in 1921 depicts the struggle of an African American veteran looking for work in the post-war economy. Illustrations such as this echo the same nationalist definition of citizenship popularized in state propaganda and practices in wartime. According to this view, black laborers ought to be granted the same degree of citizenship as white laborers earned through their loyalty to the state in the Great War. This merit-based notion of

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53 Good, “Untitled.”
citizenship also expresses itself in images demanding black labor’s inclusion as a vital force in the working class’s efforts against American Capital.

In a cartoon for The Messenger, W.B. Williams depicts two capitalists on the backs of black and white laborers, attempting to prevent their cooperation by citing racial divisions.\(^{54}\) By placing these individuals on the backs of both white and black laborers, this illustration demonstrates African American labor as equal to other members of the working class as a result of their similar work in struggling to support the nation. Through these illustrations, African American publications adopted the same merit-based notion of citizenship developing within the rest of the working class at the time in order to secure the full privileges of citizenship that they believed their work for and loyalty to the nation demanded.

**Conclusions**

As a result of the issuing of nationalist propaganda and the suppression of actions perceived as anti-war by the federal government, labor identity in the United States shifted following the Great War to focus upon a devotion to the nation at large rather than social distinctions such as class and gender. This shift in identity most noticeably involves the rise of merit-based notions of citizenship within post-war working class visual narratives. The softening of class and gender distinctions in labor illustrations, growing nationalist opposition to foreign states by these same images, as well as the simultaneous rise of merit-based notions of citizenship in African American labor publications each testify to the rise of a nationally based identity in the post-war American workforce.

This example of a shift in the identity of particular individuals allows historians to study the nature of group identity under specific social and geopolitical circumstances. The industrial demand created by the Great War led to the need for internal cohesion within combatant states, resulting in the circulation of propaganda and suppression of activities perceived as a threat to the nation. Under these pressures by the United States government, certain aspects of laborers’ self-identity softened, such as devotion to one’s class or gender. The social distinction of race stands in contrast to these, remaining entrenched within the minds of many laborers even under pressures for national unity. However, as reflected in the images created by members and allies of the labor movement, merit-based citizenship to the nation became a core aspect of American Labor’s identity as a result of nationalist government policies during the Great War. The rise and fall of aspects of labor identity allows historians to understand the nature of groups’ self-perceptions under certain circumstances. The data presented here illustrates the rise of a strengthened nationalist identity within a particular group due to efforts by the federal government to create internal cohesion in the face of global industrial warfare. Further studies may illustrate the collapse of loyalty to the nation within a particular group under different circumstances. Observing these trends allows for greater understanding of how certain historical factors affect the adoption and rejection of various aspects comprising a group’s self-identity.

References


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