



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

**Humanities**

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

## **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative and bibliography of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <http://www.neh.gov/grants/research/summer-stipends> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and bibliography, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Northern Women, Work, and the U.S. Civil War, 1861-1867

Project Director: Judith Giesberg

Institution: Villanova University

Grant Program: Summer Stipends

## Narrative

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### DESCRIPTION

Late one evening in April 1865, "Mrs. Derry" boarded a Philadelphia street car, paid her fare and took a seat among the other paying customers. Fully aware of car company policies prohibiting African-Americans from riding in the cars, Derry nonetheless entered one about eleven o'clock, on her way home from church "where, with others of her race, she had been engaged in providing comforts for the wounded soldiers." After several stops, the conductor asked her to leave. Derry declined, pleaded the lateness of the hour and the almost empty car, and "asserted her right to remain." The conductor became increasingly agitated, called two men off the street to his aid, and "seized hold of [Derry], struck, kicked and finally ejected her from the car with great violence, tearing her clothes and inflicting some personal injuries." A civil court in Philadelphia found in Derry's favor and instructed the conductor to pay her fifty dollars in damages for the injuries she incurred when she was wrongfully ejected from the train. With Pennsylvania's black soldiers serving in many theaters in the U.S. Civil War, Judge Allison explained that "the men who have been deemed worthy to become the defenders of the country should not be denied the rights common to humanity." A number of women followed Derry into Philadelphia's streetcars, and as their stories were widely reported, women's acts of resistance initiating a wave of popular criticism against street car companies. As a result, car company policies were reversed in a series of laws and court cases granting equal access to whites and blacks, developments that, as Judge Allison had reasoned, seemed consistent with the progress of wartime emancipation and the valor of black military service.

The dramatic appeal of personal stories like Derry's make this project a particularly good fit for the National Endowment for the Humanities' "We the People Initiative." The principal goal of this project is to understand how the war was fought in the spaces of everyday life, where women like Mrs. Derry worked to affect its outcome abroad and to give it meaning at home. Engaging in the politics of the streets, women- black, white, and immigrant- brought home-front concerns to bear on local administration and focused the big political questions at stake in the Civil War onto local conditions, confounding the notion that what happened at home was separate from what was occurring at the front. As I did in my first book -- "Civil War Sisterhood: The United States Sanitary Commission and Women's Reform in Transition"-- I explore the connections between women at home and men at the front and seek to understand how women understood their responsibilities to their families, communities, and their nation during wartime. Women working to serve soldiers and care for their own families created alternative and unorthodox sites for political engagement. I examine a number of these sites-- Philadelphia's streetcars; the streets of Boston's Irish North End community; county courthouses in rural Pennsylvania; relief offices and almshouses; and the grounds of U.S. Army arsenals in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Out of conviction or necessity, women moved into many public spaces and challenged the ways in which the war was popularly understood. Contemporary music, poetry, and sentimental fiction drew a line separating the northern home from the battlefield and encased women and children safely in the fanner, but women regularly crossed this imaginary boundary as they worked to provide for their families and to serve their communities.

### SIGNIFICANCE

This project will advance our understanding of the Civil War in two ways. First, it will reach deep into northern society to uncover the lives of a broader spectrum of women than have previous studies. Second, "Northern Women, Work, and the U.S. Civil War" moves beyond a regional divide among historians that has resulted in the mistaken assumption that only middle-class white women engaged in politics in the north and that the politics of the streets -- disruptive behavior and wartime protest-- was unique to

southern women, both black and white. Until now, most scholarship on northern women has focused on white middle-class women who, chafing against the limitations imposed by domesticity and eager to become engaged in the great political and social debates of the day, parlayed their wartime work as relief agents, nurses, and teachers of freedwomen and men into postwar careers in temperance, suffrage, and urban reform. This project seeks answers to a number of questions about how the war influenced gender relations and public policy in the North, chiefly: When and where did women compel wartime communities to confront social questions the war had raised? What were the consequences --cultural and political-- of women taking their concerns to government offices and to the streets? And finally, how did women's street politics compel northerners to consider the consequences of waging a war in which battlefield and home-front became one?

## METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

Diverse secondary works form the theoretical basis for this study of the U.S. Civil War. Because the central point of this project is to locate women's agency in how they positioned themselves in the wartime landscape, this study begins by engaging the work of David Harvey and Mary Ryan, who have explored the meanings of public spaces and the geography of gender, respectively. For my understanding of politics, I turn to the political anthropology of James Scott, who shows how disfranchised groups resort to every day acts of resistance as expressions of their informal political culture, or "infrapolitics." Another anthropologist, Mary Douglass, has helped me understand how northern fears about their rapidly changing society were often encoded in conversations about women's bodies. Finally, this project examines what historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has termed "the politics of respectability" in which black women engaged in independent civil rights projects while negotiating gender relations within the black community.

These studies--many of them borrowed from anthropology--have helped me to identify the primary source materials for this project. These materials tend to be extensive rather than intensive, like those documenting the lives of middle-class women. At the Pennsylvania State Museum and Historical Commission Archives in Harrisburg, I located hundreds of letters from rural Pennsylvania women and state officials describing rural conditions and farm labor strategies, records of local relief organizations, and widows' applications for state money to retrieve their dead husbands from southern battlefields. Here I also found one exchange of letters between a rural husband and wife that has proven invaluable in considering the long-term consequences of the withdrawal of male labor from the nation's farms during the war. I have created databases of admissions data on women seeking temporary shelter at urban institutions in Boston and Philadelphia from materials at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Massachusetts State Archives, and the City Archives of Philadelphia. Data from shelters and almshouses are allowing me to understand how army recruitment, the state bounty system, and the draft resulted in the displacement of numbers of women and children. An explosion at a federal arsenal in Pennsylvania and charges of mismanagement of an arsenal in Massachusetts resulted in federal investigations of women's work conditions at these wartime facilities; these records are housed the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Regional Offices in Philadelphia and Boston. And, finally, I located materials documenting women's street car battle in a number of collections: in the records of black women's wartime relief organizations, local newspapers, and in the published records of the court of common pleas and the state supreme court. My archival work is nearly complete, and the findings support the chapters as described below.

## ORGANIZATION AND PLAN OF WORK

"Northern Women" is organized into five chapters, three of which are completed. Chapter One examines women's lives in rural northern communities, far removed from the battlefield and seats of local power,

and shows how women renegotiated domestic relations based on the temporary or permanent absence of male farmers. Chapter Two maps the patterns of women's displacement, analyzes the material conditions of this displacement, and shows how women's attempts to provide for themselves and their children brought them into conflict with city officials who tried to keep order. Based on data collected from almshouses and wartime shelters, this chapter will highlight the experiences of largely immigrant working-class women who became the war's refugees. I shall complete the writing of Chapter Two in summer 2006.

The final three chapters move closer to the war. Chapter Three compares contemporary reactions to women as makers of war to women workers' opinions of their work. Chapter Four explores women's street car battle, as elite women involved in war relief fought to ensure black veterans an appropriate welcome home. Chapter Five follows women as they travel to southern battlefields to retrieve the bodies of loved ones. Along the way, widows negotiated with U.S. army soldiers and civilian residents of southern towns for transportation, shelter, and help with the sad and at times gruesome work of identifying and collecting remains, a task that was complicated by the hasty and indiscriminate burial of corpses following the cessation of battle. In Chapter Five, I consider the cultural consequences of widows grieving in railroad cars and a variety of public spaces, where their appearance stood as a sharp critique of how the war objectified male bodies and how it blurred the boundary between home and war. I shall complete the research and writing of Chapter Five in summer 2006.

Chapters One, Three, and Four are currently in draft and under consideration at the University of North Carolina Press, where an editor solicited the manuscript and has given the chapters a favorable review. With NEH funding, I shall complete the two remaining chapters and submit the entire manuscript to the press by September 2006.

## OUTCOMES

With its focus on the Civil War and appeal to local interest, this book is well-placed to reach a wide audience and a variety of readers. "Northern Women" will be a scholarly work, but I shall make it accessible and interesting for students and enthusiasts by minimizing academic jargon and maximizing the drama of individual women's stories, such as Derry's. These stories of wartime courage and perseverance have a particular contemporary resonance in a time when Americans are once again struggling to give meaning to war and to make sense of sacrifice. I am presenting my preliminary research at the Pennsylvania Historical Association, American Historical Association Meeting, and Organization of American Historians. While these venues will ensure that the project receives the imprimatur of academia, I am also engaged in a number of projects that will ensure that "Northern Women" has wide impact and helps in the ambitious NEH work of combating what Bruce Cole has described as our "collective cultural amnesia." I am working as a consultant on the Pennsylvania Humanities Council Civil War Sesquicentennial, planning for a series of statewide events celebrating the 150th anniversary of the war. Additionally, I am participating in a Teaching American History Grant at the State Museum of Pennsylvania. And, I am working with archivists at the Civil War and Underground Railroad Museum in Philadelphia in an ambitious plan to update the museum. Through these collaborations, this project will help to interest more people in the history of the Civil War and deepen the understanding of those who are still convinced that the history of the battlefield and the home front are two different things and distinct pursuits. These public outreach activities make this project an appropriate candidate for funding through the "We the People Initiative."

## Bibliography

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