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The Government's Moral Crusade: America's Campaign against Venereal Diseases at Home during World War I

Abstract

During World War I, the American Government with the help of non-profit organizations waged an internal and external campaign against venereal diseases. With the creation of the Committee of Training Camp Activities, the Federal Government identified venereal diseases as a threat to the war effort. Internally, the government restructured the atmosphere of training camps by offering intellectual and athletic activities that stimulate the mind rather than sexual desires. Externally, the government used its prestige and power to eliminate factors that caused venereal diseases, including prostitution and red-light districts. Although the internal and external reforms succeeded in restricting the potentiality of venereal diseases, it, nevertheless limited an individual's freedom and inspired negative connotations that women struggle to evade today.

Keywords

Venereal Diseases, Red-Light Districts, Raymond Fosdick, World War I

World War I infiltrated every aspect of American society. Americans restructured their lives to cooperate with the war effort. At the precipice of the Progressive Movement, the United States witnessed a regulation revolution that transformed how the government interacted in the personal lives of Americans. After President Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war, the nation's mobilization efforts uncovered an imperceptible menace that shattered the public moral conscience. The appearance of syphilis and gonorrhea in American society was not a new occurrence, but the high frequency of infection in newly conscripted men staggered the draft boards, progressives, and the government.

The United States campaign against venereal diseases diverged from other European nations, due to their desire to eliminate the issue rather than merely containing the threat.¹ The campaign occurred simultaneously in the military camps and the public sphere. Through the work of Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker and the Commission of Training Camp Activities (CTCA) figurehead, Raymond Fosdick, the federal government waged an internal and external campaign against venereal diseases. Internally, the commission restructured the atmosphere of the training camps by offering activities that stimulated the mind rather than sexual desires. During the internal campaign, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the CTCA offered forms of entertainment and recreation to offset the temptations that lurked within the confines of the training camps. Externally Baker and the CTCA used their prestige and power to eliminate factors that caused venereal disease including red-light districts and prostitution. Through the CTCA, Baker and Fosdick used their enhanced power to terminate red-light districts within five miles of military bases, making prostitution a non-issue. Although the reforms succeeded in restricting the potentiality for venereal diseases, it, nevertheless, restrained an individual's freedom, encouraged a resurgence of misogyny, and disrupted long-term gender dynamics within the urban setting.² Although their internal and external reforms both witnessed success, they did infringe on the freedoms Americans cherished and inspired negative connotations that women struggle to evade today.

To understand America's campaign, one has to first understand the seriousness of the diseases on the common soldier. Venereal diseases can cause sterility and irritability of the pelvic regions in its early stages. *Neisseria gonorrhoea* (gonorrhea) is the common cause of urethritis and cervicitis in young males.³ If left untreated, gonorrhea can cause significant morbidity, pelvic inflammatory disease, arthritis, meningitis, and peritonitis.⁴ Lesser-diagnosed but widely known, syphilis is capable of producing life-long infections that can lead to disfigurements, cardiac difficulties, and neurological complications. Before World War II, syphilis was the fourth leading cause of death, only behind tuberculosis, pneumonia, and cancer.⁵

The issue of venereal diseases during war was not a new phenomenon, but rather a familiar manifestation throughout American military history. During the American Revolution, the prevalence of venereal diseases was such an issue that men hospitalized with a sexual

¹ Allan M. Brandt: *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 55.

² Mara Laura Keire, *Studies in Industry and Society: For Business and Pleasure: Red -Light Districts and the Regulation of Vice in the United States, 1890-1933*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 109.

³ Maj Mark S Rasnake, "History of U.S Military Contributions to the Study of Sexually Transmitted Diseases", *Military Medicine* 170 4-61, (2005.): 1.

⁴ Brandt: *No Magic Bullet*, 10.

⁵ Rasnake, Venereal Diseases, 2.

infection had their pay curtailed.⁶ In the Civil War, syphilis and gonorrhea ran rampant, with over 20 percent of those fighting infected. To avoid the influx of infection during the Civil War, the army implemented prostitute-licensing programs in numerous cities. In Charleston and Nashville, prostitutes were given medical checkups to verify their cleanliness. If they tested negative, the prostitutes were licensed and put on a list of acceptable clientele.⁷ Prior to the Spanish-American War, army admission rates for venereal diseases averaged 70.6 per 1000 men.⁸ Although the statistics appear high, most venereal cases went undiagnosed. With whispers of war in Europe apparent, the United States prepared militarily and morally.

To understand the intensity and morality behind the campaign against venereal diseases, one needs to comprehend the Progressive era and its importance. The moral campaign during World War I was not a new concept, but rather a continuation of progressive ideology. After the Civil War, the United States morphed into an industrial power and developed the same social ills as European nations, including corruption, poverty, and immorality. The Progressive era authorized political and economic reform. The era also required a social transformation that occurred through settlement houses, churches, and schoolrooms.⁹ Progressive ideology brought on a desire for a rigorously-defined moral order and a growing reliance on technical expertise.¹⁰ Although progressives demanded economic and political reform, they also required social reform. During the era, a crisis of the family emerged, thus causing intense activism against alcohol, divorce, and prostitution.

Although vice was a debated issue, venereal diseases were often subjected to silence, and the education on the issue was nonexistent. Progressive physicians viewed venereal diseases as a way to produce a race of inferior human beings.¹¹ The original effort to eliminate syphilis and gonorrhea ensued not to protect American soldiers, but to protect the family. As a result of prostitution, red-light districts, and venereal diseases, the progressives and political elites strove to moralize the nation and protect the family from the dangers that lurked in society. The biggest hurdle physicians dealt with was silence. Prostitution and the prevalence of venereal diseases were known, but remained silent due to the sexual promiscuity it espoused.

With President Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war, progressives viewed it as an opportunity to show an international audience the superiority of American morals.¹² The presence of the National Guard on the Mexican border forewarned the reformers of the moral depravity that still existed. The presence of syphilis and gonorrhea was expected, but the army's regulation of brothels near the camps surprised government officials. Secretary of State Newton Baker sent Fosdick to determine the truth of the rumors of drunkenness and sexual revelry on the border.¹³

Newton Baker and Raymond Fosdick were both individuals who esteemed the moral and ethical values of the progressive movement. Baker served as the progressive mayor of Cleveland and became a close friend of Wilson. The President made an unusual choice for Secretary of

⁶ James R. Arnold, *Health Under Fire: Medical Care during America's Wars*, (Greenwood: Santa Barbara, 2015), 7.

⁷ Thomas P. Lowry, "The Army's Licensed Prostitutes," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 41: 4 (Aug 2002), 30.

⁸ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 97.

⁹ Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (Free Press: New York, 2003), xv.

¹⁰ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹² Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 52.

¹³ Keire, *Studies in Industry and Society*, 105.

State, since Baker was not a military man, but rather a pacifist.¹⁴ With his lack of military experience, he used his expertise with the law and his rationality to excel in the Wilson administration. Similar to Baker, Fosdick modeled the reformist tendencies Wilson desired in his administration. He exemplified the strain of urban progressivism with his professionalism, pragmatism, and educational experience.¹⁵

Before World War I and in effect during the Mexican border clash, the army had a set of ineffective regulations aimed at combating venereal diseases. A chief regulation dealt with the ban of alcohol near army bases: "The sale of alcoholic drinks within government reservations was forbidden."¹⁶ Bi-monthly inspection of enlisted men was required, including inspection of the feet and the pelvic region.¹⁷ The fourth regulation mandated that any man exposed to a venereal disease must report to camp for a prophylactic treatment. Outside of the army, many local bodies including the American Society for Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis mandated for a combination of sexual continence and the repression of prostitution.¹⁸ Regulation aside, military traditions regarding vice were hard to undo: "In the military tradition, vice was seen as an inevitable concomitant of soldiery."¹⁹ Although the regulations regarding venereal diseases were light, Fosdick's report from the Mexican border eventually transformed and remodeled military procedure.

With the mobilization of the National Guard to the United States southwest border, vice followed suit. A new progressive organization, the American Social Hygiene Association, received unsettling reports among the troops encamped along the border.²⁰ Incidents of drunken brawls, long lines escalating from brothels, and the prevalence of venereal diseases were reported from the lines. After Fosdick visited the front, he reported the situation as much more dire than first expected. Border towns already heralded a reputation for infamous red-light districts, but the vice quarters of El Paso, Texas and Columbus, New Mexico far exceeded the worst expectations of vice consumption.²¹ Fosdick saw the transient saloons and brothels just outside the vicinity of military camps, in some instances, almost encircling the camp.²² He witnessed the nightly migration of American troops to the brothels and saloons. In some instances, the army regulated the brothels and sponsored their own red-light districts.²³

For success in moralizing the armed forces, Wilson and his administration had to eliminate certain stereotypes the army embraced. Progressives were appalled at the traditional army response that men required sex to be a good soldier.²⁴ For troops stationed near San Antonio, Texas, over 288 per 1000 tested positive for a venereal infection.²⁵ With over thirty percent of troops infected with a social disease in several camps across the southwest, President Wilson and Baker implemented a strategy to educate the troops and prepare the American

¹⁴ "Wilson Appoints Newton D. Baker War Secretary," *Chicago Daily Tribune* Mar 7, 1916, 3.

¹⁵ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 53.

¹⁶ Col E. L. Keys, "The Management of Venereal Diseases by the United States War Department during the past Two Years," *Canadian Public Health Association* 10:6 (June 1919), 253.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

²¹ Keire, *Studies in Industry and Society*, 105.

²² Raymond B. Fosdick, "The Commission on Training Camp Activities," *The Academy of Political Sciences* 7:4 (Feb, 1918), 163.

²³ Brandt, 54.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Expeditionary Forces for the temptations of Europe, while externally eliminating the issue of venereal diseases in society.

Internally, the Wilson administration created the CTCA with Fosdick as its commissioner. According to Fosdick, the commission “represent[ed] the solicitude of the War Department in connection with the environment of the troops, and the dire of the War Department that all activities in connection with social organizations of the troops inside of the camps be closely coordinated.”²⁶ Fosdick quickly realized that the occurrence of prostitution and venereal diseases stemmed from the monotony the troops experienced. To eliminate vice, the army had to provide positive recreational facilities and mind-enriching activities to the troops.²⁷ He believed that once healthy recreational options were created immorality amongst the troops would cease.

From libraries, music, and athletics, the CTCA attempted to dissuade the troops from their daily visits to the local brothel. The commission relied on the YMCA, the Knights of Columbus, and the Jewish Board of Welfare Work to provide the machinery needed for recreation.²⁸ Each camp was provided a YMCA athletic director, and the American Library Association (ALA) assumed the responsibility of providing literature for the troops.²⁹ For Fosdick and Baker, the implementation of athletics into the camps would solve the issue of boredom and terminate venereal diseases.³⁰

For progressives, the monotony of drill day after day was not adequate recreation.³¹ They believed that severe muscular activities would repress a conscript’s sexual impulse.³² For the 32 training camps around the United States, the CTCA introduced an athletic curriculum that consisted of soccer, football, and boxing. The implementation of athletics was meant to cease immorality amongst the troops, but also to prepare them for the struggles that may appear overseas.³³ Progressives believed that sports, including football and boxing, improved a man’s fighting efficiency. Within weeks of the CTCA’s athletic curriculum, the camp’s social and geographical layout changed. In one western containment, sixteen baseball diamonds were inserted, while some camps added football fields with a seating capacity of 18,000.³⁴ Walter Camp, the father of American football, served on the commission and created a hand-grenade game.³⁵ Reports of soccer games in which 400 men participated occurred repeatedly, thus underlining the popularity of athletics. Although examples of athletic participation and recreational facilities may be trivial, it, nevertheless, emphasized the desire of the progressives to change the army’s mentality. Many sports were introduced in the camps, but boxing remained the most popular and necessary for the troops.

The CTCA was particularly interested in developing boxing as a popular recreation for the troops. Due to the popularity of boxing, the CTCA placed a boxing instructor in every camp.³⁶ In some camps, boxing lessons comprised up to seven hundred men at once, being

²⁶ Fosdick, “The Commission on Training Camp Activities”, 819.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Fosdick, “The Commission on Training Camp Activities,” 820.

²⁹ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 60.

³⁰ Ibid., 59.

³¹ Fosdick, “The Commission on Training Camp Activities,” 823.

³² Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 60.

³³ “Army is Making Athletes of all Soldiers in Camp,” *Washington Post* Feb 1, 1918, 8.

³⁴ Ibid., 8.

³⁵ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 60.

³⁶ Fosdick, “The Commission on Training Camp Activities,” 823.

directed by a lone man on a high stand.³⁷ For Fosdick, boxing was a beneficial tool in that it distracted men from vice and it made them better bayonet fighters.³⁸ The similarities of boxing and bayonet fighting were widely applied by the CTCA and the army brass. The "thrust blow" in boxing was similar to the bayonet jab in full force, and it trained the men to aim for the fleshy part of the body. Although recreational activities provided distractions from vice, the CTCA also implemented the arts to stimulate the troop's morality and mind.

Fosdick wanted to curtail vice by providing athletic comradery and by enhancing the soldiers' intellect. By using the occurrence of libraries to singing, the CTCA tried to educate and moralize its constituents. Due to the assistance of the ALA, each camp contained a well-equipped library building with popular fictional and travel literature.³⁹ The libraries doubled as educational facilities due to the illiteracy rampant in the troops. Fosdick emphasized the surprised occurrence of illiteracy, "They come down from Kentucky or Tennessee mountains, unable to read or write. In the Syracuse camp there was a regiment of men who could not understand the commands given them; for they knew no English."⁴⁰ To prepare the trainees for the European experience, they were required to take classes in spelling, writing, reading, and French. Along with the presence of libraries, the act of singing became an important non-athletic recreation.

Fosdick was also a proponent of the idea of a singing army. Inspired by the singing of German regiments, he regarded the exercise as a stress reliever and a unifier.⁴¹ The CTCA placed a carefully selected song leader in every training camp to emphasize the importance of song and its correlation with unity. The singing raised the morale and the relationship between officer and soldier.⁴² A consensus on the implementation of singing in the camps did not occur, but the occurrences of mass choruses slowly converted the "old guards" in the War Department.⁴³ Through the internal policies, the troops were acclimated to new hobbies and activities.

Externally, the Federal Government and the CTCA employed a merciless and extreme strategy to end the presence of venereal diseases within the army. Where the internal changes focused on occupying the troops with proper recreation, the external policies fixated primarily on eliminating the venereal threat. Baker and Fosdick concentrated predominately on the external policies since that is where the impact of the diseases was most widely felt. Early reports of the newly conscripted troops awakened progressives and the Wilson administration to the enormity of the venereal situation. As of 1919, over 225,000 troops tested positive for a social disease and 200,000 of those were contracted during civilian life.⁴⁴ The CTCA and political officials realized that the venereal epidemic was not just a military problem, but also an American problem that had to be curtailed.

The campaign against venereal diseases became a campaign against all vice. To terminate the venereal problem, progressive reformers had to eliminate the source, which included prostitution and red-light districts. With powers given by the Wilson Administration, the CTCA

³⁷ Fosdick, "The Commission on Training Camp Activities," 823.

³⁸ "Coaches Assigned For Army Athletics," *New York Times*, Oct 6, 1917, 9.

³⁹ Fosdick, "The Commission on Training Camp Activities," 822.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ E. Christina Chang, "The Singing Program of World War I: The Crusade for a Singing Army," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 23:1 (October 2001), 21.

⁴² Fosdick, "The Commission on Training Camp Activities," 824.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Major Raymond W. Pullman, "Police and the Public Health," *Journal of Social Hygiene* Volume 5 (1919), 134.

successfully eliminated the most notorious red-light districts. Although the CTCA did not eliminate the presence of prostitution, they, nevertheless, made it more difficult to engage in the act. Progressives understood that to eliminate the vice district, the presence of prostitution would disappear, thus minimizing the potentiality of venereal diseases. The external policies the government and CTCA instigated produced results, but they overreached their power and unleashed an underlying misogyny in the process. To understand the negative consequences, it is important to understand the external policies including the elimination of the red-light districts.

There is a sense of irony that existed between progressives and their efforts to eliminate the red-light district since they were the individuals that created them in the first place.⁴⁵ In the 1890s, good government elites and municipal reformers (mugwumps) proposed the establishment of a 'vice district' as a way to isolate working-class politicians from their immoral constituents. The mugwumps "offered reputational segregation as a pragmatic solution to the social and political ills of urban life."⁴⁶ Red-light districts made the surveillance of the city's criminals easier while forcing men to travel out of their neighborhood if they wanted to engage in disreputable activities.⁴⁷ In the early twentieth century, it was the reformers who cemented the "tenderloin" as a part of the American landscape. Districts of vice, including San Francisco's Barbary Coast, New Orleans's Storyville, Chicago's Levee, and Seattle's Skid Row, became more than immoral zones, but quasi-tourist destinations. When the progressives appeared, their goal was the elimination of all red-light districts in America.

Due to the state and local government statutes, the closure of some vice districts occurred in the early 1910s. The first step that Baker and the CTCA finalized revolved around the closure of any red-light district within eight to ten miles of any training camp.⁴⁸ This radius was known as the protective zone, which barred the use of any vice, including alcohol.⁴⁹ Numerous cities reacted in protest, including Philadelphia, where Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, called the marines to monitor the negative reaction.⁵⁰ The most infamous case of a red-light district closure occurred in New Orleans.

Storyville epitomized the immorality that existed in the early twentieth century. After Baker ordered the closure of any vice district near a military camp, New Orleans fought for Storyville's existence. Mayor Martin Behreman protested the ruling, but to no avail. Daniels warned Behreman that if he did not close Storyville, the military would.⁵¹ On November 12, 1917, the city adopted an ordinance outlawing the operation of any brothel within city limits. The day before the ordinance came into effect, the police were ordered to maintain the peace if things spiraled out of control.⁵² On the night of the closure, Storyville witnessed a migration of harlots, pimps, and prostitutes with their belongings as they left for more favorable conditions. The police searched every house and warned the prostitutes that stayed to take down their red lights or they would be arrested. The events that occurred at Storyville appeared throughout the

⁴⁵ Keire, *Studies in Industry and Society*, 5.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8-10

⁴⁸ John V. Denson, ed. *The Costs of War: America's Pyrrhic's Victory.* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 266.

⁴⁹ "To Keep Vice Away," *The Topeka State Journal* May 21, 1918, 8.

⁵⁰ Denson, *The Costs of War*, 277.

⁵¹ Troy Taylor, *Wicked New Orleans: The Dark Side of the Big Easy*, (New York: The History Press, 2010), 104.

⁵² Ibid.

nation with over 110 red-light closures.⁵³ Although numerous high-profile districts were weakened years before World War I, the CTCA succeeded in ending the vice districts as a visible component of the city landscape. Similar to the red-light district, progressives and the Wilson administration waged a social war on prostitution.

After the closure of the many red-light districts, venereal disease rates in new conscripts still occurred. Through the first million draftees examined, three percent were tested with a venereal disease. After the second million draftees examined, the figure climbed to five percent, with some states, including Florida, Iowa, and Alabama doubling their number.⁵⁴ With the rise of syphilis and gonorrhea in newly conscripted troops, Baker and the CTCA reexamined their policies and implemented an even more oppressive strategy targeting prostitution.

Progressives viewed prostitution as the source of the venereal epidemic, thus explaining the heated campaign against the ancient occupation. As recently as late nineteenth century, prostitution was viewed as a form of white slavery. Prostitutes were the victims, and the pimps were regarded as the enemy. With the rise of the Progressive movement and the occurrence of World War I, prostitutes became the source, not the victim.⁵⁵ This was due to the enhanced value of the soldier. If the soldier contracts a venereal disease, then his value decreased thus affecting the larger army. During the war, the soldier was rarely blamed for the infection and often seen as the victim.

By August 30, 1918, the Surgeon General of the Army reported 126 venereal cases per 1000.⁵⁶ To curtail this insurgence of immorality, the Wilson administration and the CTCA started interning suspected frivolous women. Progressives and the CTCA "stopped describing prostitution as an institutional problem based on the economic exploitation of innocent women and started blaming women for men's sexual adventuring."⁵⁷ An intense misogyny occurred that was exemplified in the internment of suspected prostitutes and the negative connotations that developed during this era. States enacted policies that stipulated the arrest of any women suspected of carrying syphilis or gonorrhea. These arrested women were interned and separated from the populace until the war's end. In Keokuk, Iowa, the sheriff had the authority to apprehend any women resembling a prostitute or acting under the suspicion of a venereal disease.⁵⁸ Reducing women to disease carriers ultimately legitimated a misogyny that allowed the government to treat women with a disregard of their civil rights.⁵⁹

With the suppression of legalized prostitution, the CTCA ordered the creation of the Committee on the Protective Work for Girls to address the issue of "young girls" in the vicinity of military camps.⁶⁰ Specifically, Fosdick created the commission to "guard young women and girls against the 'lure of the uniform' in the neighborhood."⁶¹ The commission extended the idea of protection by securing facilities to accomplish the goal.⁶² The CTCA established places where young women were held temporarily. President Wilson saw the importance in the detention, and allotted \$250,000 to the CTCA for renovation or construction of new buildings. In July 1918,

⁵³ Denson, *The Costs of War*, 277.

⁵⁴ "Venereal Diseases and War," *The United States Public Health Services*, Washington D.C (1917), 2.

⁵⁵ Kiere, *Studies in Industry and Society*, 112.

⁵⁶ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 77.

⁵⁷ Denson, *The Costs of War*, 107.

⁵⁸ "Stamp Out Social Disease is Aim," *The Daily City Gate and Constitution-Democrat* May 13, 1918, 7.

⁵⁹ Denson, *Costs of War*, 107.

⁶⁰ Kiere, *Studies in Industry and Society*, 107.

⁶¹ "Protective Work For Girls," *The Social Hygiene Bulletin* Vol 5, 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 2.

Congress passed the Chamberlin-Kahn bill that made four million dollars available for the venereal campaign in civilian communities.⁶³ It is interesting to note that brothels made the ideal houses for detained women. To renovate a brothel to fit the requirements, contractors only needed to add an infirmary and a high wall topped with barbed wire.⁶⁴ In the Midwest, state health boards renovated abandoned county homes to house "suspected" women.⁶⁵ When the campaign against venereal diseases accelerated, the CTCA used draconian severity to suppress women's sexual urges and intern them.

Although the government concentrated on the issue of prostitution, soldiers participated in sexual relations with not just prostitutes but adventurous and patriotic women. Most women or "charity girls" interned were prostitutes; others were simply young girls drawn to the glamour of men going off to war.⁶⁶ These women, increasingly in the South, were attracted to the appeal of men in uniform. These women, denoted as "patriotutes" were a new class of twentieth century women who emphasized their individuality, hedonism, and materialism.⁶⁷ They questioned once-held social mores but received "conflicting messages about the virtues of virginity."⁶⁸ They yearned for heterosocial interaction through dancing and drinking. Charity girls pursued popularity, and they accomplished this by their clothes, including high-heeled shoes, costume jewelry, and cosmetics.⁶⁹ Charity girls were similar to prostitutes in that they at times traded "sexual favors of varying degrees for gifts, treats, and a good time."⁷⁰ They differed from the typical prostitute since charity girls did not accept money in their sexual encounters with men.⁷¹ This new type of woman broke the sexual mores of its time and presented the CTCA with the unfortunate role as radical enforcer.

The government's internment of young women during the war remains one of the most understudied and controversial policies. Baker, Fosdick, and the CTCA viewed venereal disease not only as a threat to the troops, but viewed women as the culprit. Members within the CTCA and the government saw the detention houses as a way to protect young girls from sexual temptation and also a way to eliminate prostitution. According to the commission's Law Enforcement Division, both military and civilian police could apprehend any women suspected of carrying a venereal disease.⁷² In one instance, a mother and daughter were both arrested for suspicion of a venereal disease.⁷³ Any women arrested for a sexual related offense underwent a medical examination. If a woman tested positive for a social disease, she would be rehabilitated with treatment within a detention house. During the war's tenure, the CTCA interned 15,520 women in federally-funded reformatories and detention houses.⁷⁴ Women averaged a year in the reformatory and around three months in a detention house.

The detention of women suspected of carrying a venereal disease solicited negative reaction from feminists and a small group doctors. Some doctors found the diagnostic procedure

⁶³ H.H Moore, "Four Million Dollars for the Fight against Venereal Diseases," *Journal of Social Hygiene Bulletin* Vol 5 (January 1919), 15.

⁶⁴ Kiere, *Studies in Industry and Society*, 109.

⁶⁵ "County Home to House Disease," *The Daily Gate City and Constitution-Democrat* May 17, 1918, 3

⁶⁶ Kiere, *Studies in Industry and Society*, 110-111.

⁶⁷ Katy Peiss, "Charity Girls," *OAH Magazine of History* (July 2004), 15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Kiere, *Studies in Industry and Society*, 109.

⁷³ "County Home to House," May 17, 1918, 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

itself immoral, "you cannot appreciate how a woman feels to have her person exposed to the masturbating hand of a vile doctor."⁷⁵ Other reformers noticed the double standard and criticized the misogyny prevalent within the government. Others mandated the military to punish soldiers for visiting saloons and brothels.⁷⁶ A call for the army to keep tabs of their men was suggested but to no avail. Criticism of the government's internment of scandalous women did exist, but they only represented the minority.

The final consequence of the government's external policies resulted in the disruption of established gender dynamics within the urban setting and the negative connotations it produced on the female. During the war and the policies implemented by the CTCA, men started referring to charity girls or social women by their sexual anatomy. The campaign unintentionally created negative connotations that still occur today: "when men in the dance hall lumped all the women around them under the category of cunt, they followed the lead of the Commission on Training Camp Activities."⁷⁷ The terminology of "whores" or "dirty sluts" became widely used and popular due to the regulated misogyny. It would be naïve to correlate all the negative connotations involving women today to the policies of the CTCA, it, nevertheless, did create a negative stereotype that still exists today.

After the war, millions of Americans tried to assimilate back into society. Progressive reformers and government employees viewed the campaign as a triumph. Externally, the CTCA and the Wilson administration successfully limited the existence of vice districts, while prohibiting prostitution in the urban setting. Positives aside, venereal diseases did affect the army. Venereal diseases accounted over 6.8 million work days lost and the discharge of 10,000 men serving in the army.⁷⁸ Syphilis and gonorrhea were second in lost duty days only to the Spanish Influenza outbreak of 1918-1919.⁷⁹ Although the campaign in many ways was repressive, the statistics justify the urgency in which the government operated.

During World War I, America declared a social war on venereal diseases. With reports of widespread army-regulated brothels, the Wilson administration conducted a moral, social, and medical campaign against the problem. The government waged a campaign that was focused internally and externally. Internally, the government created the CTCA to moralize the troops and provide them with proper recreation to distract the new conscripts. They implemented recreational activities including boxing and soccer, while providing literature and music to enrich the troops' minds. The activities were two-fold since they supplied intellectual activities and provided them with recreational sports, which positively affected their military prowess. The internal policies were aimed at addressing the male side of the venereal disease issue. To stop males from contacting syphilis or gonorrhea, they replaced sexual activity with physical activity.

Externally, the government waged a campaign against venereal diseases. The CTCA focused on women and unintentionally limited their freedom. They sought to eliminate prostitution and the red-light districts. Through the process of moralization, the government created some policies that treated the female as the culprit. This misogyny effected social dynamics by inspiring negative connotations to describe a liberal or a sexually-active female. On the home front, venereal diseases never disappeared and in some states doubled. Often forgotten,

⁷⁵ Allen Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 86.

⁷⁶ "Clean Up for Public's Sake," *El Paso Herald* March 5, 1918, 10.

⁷⁷ Kiere, *Studies in Industry and Society*, 112.

⁷⁸ Krzysztof Korzeniewski, "Sexually Transmitted Infections Among Army Personnel in the Military Environment", *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* (March 2012), 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

America's campaign against venereal diseases displayed the importance of progressive reform during the war effort and it highlighted the forgotten effects on women. This combination not only resulted in the CTCA, but it also changed the urban landscape and social dynamics between the sexes.

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