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Giora Goodman. "'Only the Best British Brides': Regulating the Relationship between U.S. Servicemen and British Women in the Early Cold War." *Contemporary European History* 17.4 (2008): 483-303.

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In April 1936 the *New York Daily News* offered a cartoon commentary on Europe's descent into another war by the late 1930s. The illustrator C. D. Batchelor drew a skeletal figure of a prostitute, labeled "war," luring a scrub-faced, uniformed boy to her chamber. "Come on in," the woman whispers, "I used to know your Daddy." The drawing illustrates the generational connection between the First and Second World Wars, the allure of war as an introduction to manhood, and the subtle blame women endure for causing the world's sorrows. Giora Goodman's article on sexual relations between GIs and British women during the early Cold War illustrates the ways in which post-World War II occupations presented the same problems that had converged in November 1918, problems that also involved manhood and control of female sexuality.² In addition, Goodman's work points out the blurriness of the line dividing war from peace, the ways in which matters usually considered "private" bleed into international relations, the postwar reconfirmation of patriarchal control over women's sexuality, and the intersections between class, race, and gender.

Some 45,000 U.S. Air Force servicemen were stationed at 43 bases and installations situated throughout England by 1950. The U.S. Air Force commanders conspired with the British government to regulate social contact between U.S. servicemen and British girls

¹ Reprinted in Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons* first edition (New York: MacMillan, 1968), p. 155.

² Erika Kuhlman, "American Doughboys and German *Fräuleins*: Sexuality, Patriarchy, and Privilege in the American-Occupied Rhineland, 1918-1923," *Journal of Military History* 71, no. 4 (October 2007): 1077-1106.

(one of the primary complaints about such liaisons was that the females involved were frequently underage). The Cold War produced a tension in both societies that rippled into social interactions between soldiers and locals. British leaders angling for close U.S.-Anglo relations worked to secure a U.S. commitment to the defense of Britain and Western Europe against Soviet threats. U.S. advocates of containment hoped to keep the Soviet Union isolated behind the iron curtain. Illicit relations between U.S. soldiers and British girls occasioned such difficulties as illegitimate births, interracial tensions, and underage marriages; these were interpreted as threats to the common defense against Soviet communism. Smooth relations between soldiers and civilians could, from the British perspective, help secure U.S. commitments to the realm.

The British Labour and Conservative Parties both supported the Anglo-American Cold War alliance, leaving the small but vocal British Communist Party to exploit anti-American sentiment. Goodman uses a report from the communist *Daily Worker* to demonstrate the sense of shame provoked by the foreign presence. In addition to the offense of corrupting British girls, a drunken GI had vandalized an old church in Surrey that had once been the coronation site of the Saxon Kings of England, according to the report. In this, the anti-U.S. propaganda sounded similar notes to the Germans' attempts at ridding their nation of French colonial occupation forces after the Great War.

Problems arising between U.S. servicemen and British citizens replicated those experienced during post-World War I occupations. GIs earning hefty paychecks released their cash in public houses, causing public drunkenness and bitter resentment among their less well-off hosts, in addition to the shame the British felt at their dependency on the United States. The "loss" of British girls to American men drove the resentment deeper. This scenario, of course, brought certain advantages to some in the local economy (pub owners and taxi drivers, for example), and on the U.S. side, soldiers were wary of opportunists seeking to strip them clean of their earnings. In any case, while the occupation of Germany after both world wars was to be temporary, the U.S. presence in Britain had no termination date.

The existence of the air bases multiplied the numbers of prostitutes in the area. Coming to rural Britain from London, the sex workers were quickly deemed "haystack queens" for their use of barns for sheltering their clients. As had been the case during the Rhineland occupation after the Great War, only the prostitutes—not their clients—faced fines or imprisonment for vagrancy. As vexing as the problems posed by increased prostitution were, the public seemed more concerned with the rise of casual sex, interpreted as a decline in morals. Citizens also decried the high rate of illegitimate births in areas that included air force bases. However, the rates were much lower than had been reported in the U.S.-occupied zone of the Rhineland after the Great War (six out of 120 illegitimate births were fathered by GIs in one year, compared to four-fifths of such births in the U.S. zone of the occupied Rhineland in 1921).³ The easy availability of contraceptives may have

³ Kuhlman, 1100.

caused the decline, although birth control was also blamed for encouraging casual sex. As had been the case in the previous war, when an American soldier denied paternity, the mother had no legal recourse to obtain child support. The U.S. military could only promise to apply “moral suasion” to convince the father to provide for his child. Keeping mothers closely tethered to their offspring offered the nation-state another means by which it could control women while freeing men.

To combat these problems, Her Majesty’s government enlisted the forces of Lady Reading, director of the Women’s Voluntary Service (WVS), an organization dedicated to the welfare and entertainment of British troops during the war. Reading’s task was to find “appropriate” entertainment for soldiers; the goal was to encourage Americans to form a high opinion of the British people. This represents a departure from the practice in Germany, where the U.S. military in both postwar occupations led efforts at channeling soldiers’ leisure time. The WVS hosted dances for GIs at U.S. air bases. Maintaining racial segregation, the organization provided a quota of chaperoned “coloured” girls to attend the events as well. Volunteers transported the “right kind of girls” to the bases and then shipped them back home when the dance was over. Lower class women—the wrong kind of girls—were deemed promiscuous and “easy.” However, the “good girls” also faced criticism for their unwillingness to have sex with their dance partners. Thus, females were damned if they did, and damned if they didn’t. It wasn’t so much the sex that bothered British officials, but the class of the partner. The overall goal of such social engineering was to insure that Americans had a good impression of “what the British people are like” (493).

For impending U.S-British marriages, both bride and groom had to undergo medical testing for syphilis, and the groom had to prove that his finances were in order. In a rare departure from the WWI precedent, the British government took pains to guarantee that the U.S.-bound brides were not only medically and socially but also ideologically acceptable to the American public. The women were screened for any possible communist, fascist, or other subversive connections in their backgrounds.

Giora Goodman’s work, based on rich archival research in the United States and Great Britain, adds to the growing body of scholarship on the intersection between citizens, their organizations, and their nations’ foreign relations. His research may encourage further explorations of postwar factors, such as military occupations and control of soldiers’ and citizens’ sexuality, that transcend the traditional boundaries drawn between war and peace in the aftermaths of armed conflict between nations.

Erika Kuhlman is Associate Professor of History and Director of Women Studies at Idaho State University. Her first book *Petticoats and White Feathers* was published by Greenwood Press in 1997. Her article “American Doughboys and German /Fräuleins/: Sexuality, Patriarchy, and Privilege in the American-Occupied Rhineland, 1918-1923” appeared in the *Journal of Military History* in October 2007, and she is the author of *Reconstructing*

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Patriarchy after the Great War: Women, Gender, and Postwar Reconciliation between Nations_ (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). She and Kimberly Jensen of Western Oregon University are editing an anthology of essays titled _Women and Transnational Activism in Historical Perspective_, under contract with Brill Publishers.

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