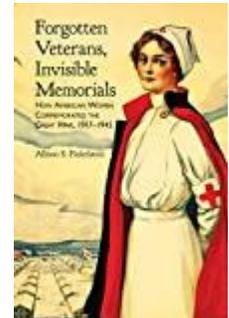


Allison S. Finkelstein. *Forgotten Veterans, Invisible Memorials: How American Women Commemorated the Great War, 1917–1945.* War, Memory, and Culture Series. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2021. Illustrations. 288 pp. \$54.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8173-2101-7.



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In *Forgotten Veterans, Invisible Memorials*, Allison S. Finkelstein argues that American women pursued forms of memorialization rooted in community service in the interwar period. Specifically, women sought to highlight and legitimize their patriotic contributions during the Great War. Inherently gender based, this practice allowed American women who were barred from other veterans' groups to participate in cultural memory making in ways that went beyond traditional monuments. This book importantly shifts the lens of analysis from men to women's experiences of the First World War for a different perspective of memorialization. The author challenges readers, also, to expand their definition of the term "veteran" to include all people—including women and civilians—who were voluntarily or involuntarily affected by the war.

Finkelstein coins the term "veteranism" to describe the many activities women, or "veteranists," used to memorialize the war. Veteranism refers to "any type of community service, philanthropy, relief, welfare, donation, charity, aid, or

advocacy work," including helping disabled veterans, supporting military families, and advocating peace efforts (p. 3). Finkelstein describes this form of service as "a changeable ideology, adapted to suit the needs of different women in various contexts" (p. 96). She importantly identifies that veteranist memorializations were intangible, significant in impact but short-lived in cultural memory, contributing to their historical silence. Crucially this work had a political dimension, as veteranist women actively debated, advocated, and lobbied for military policy, national defense, and veterans' affairs.

As the senior historian of Arlington National Cemetery, Finkelstein herself is engaging in veteranist work by combining scholarship with memorialization. *Forgotten Veterans, Invisible Memorials* delineates the many ways women contributed to the war effort but ultimately focuses on their activities in the interwar period. Organized thematically, the book addresses several organizations and events, including the Women's Overseas Service League (WOSL), the American War Moth-

ers (AWM), the “Reconstruction Aids,” the construction of the American Red Cross Memorial Building, and the Gold Star pilgrimages embarked on by mothers and widows. Each of the five chapters could be independently applied to coursework on gender history, the world wars, and reform in the twentieth century. The book draws on scholarship on historical and collective memory.

Finkelstein describes the external challenges faced by these women to achieve recognition for their work and access government resources. Importantly, the book also examines the internal conflicts within these various organizations. Debates included how best to apply funds and highlight wartime contributions but also fascinatingly which women counted as “veteranists” and deserved membership in the first place. One interesting note was that the AWM disqualified non-blood mothers from their organization, as well as tacitly fathers and brothers. Finkelstein addresses how segregation and discrimination barred many Black women from participating in overseas service but also how organizations like the WOSL, which advocated inclusive membership, maintained racially segregated chapters. Although Finkelstein does not ignore debates over race that crippled these organizations, she could have done more to highlight the impact of largely excluding Black women from mainstream “veteranist” activities. It is not insignificant that members were largely white and upper class—and that resources and support were distributed largely to white women. As the goal of many veteranists organizations was to preserve the history of women’s wartime contributions, we can wonder how Black women continue to be excluded from the history of the Great War and denied the identity of “veteranist.” However, Finkelstein dedicates ample space to Black women’s continued engagement in veteranist activities despite this exclusion and the significant impact of Black women’s grassroots organization.

What is most striking about Finkelstein’s book may be the application of her expanded definition of “veteranism” in the analysis of other US conflicts. Finkelstein touches on this subject by arguing that the careful accounting of the American Civil War dead established expectations for the Great War. The term “veteranists” raises interesting questions about the modes of memorialization engaged in by both Northern and Southern women, in particular how women attempted (or failed) to leverage their wartime contributions for political gain in the nineteenth century. In particular, the efforts of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) come to mind. Although the UDC spent significant resources on erecting traditional monuments and cemeteries for the Confederate dead, the organization also wrote textbooks, established essay contests and scholarships, and engaged in lobbying and public speaking. Although mainly advocating for the memory and vindication of Confederate men, the activities of the UDC also cemented the contributions of Confederate women into the cultural memory of the South. It is interesting to contemplate how the UDC, an organization that decidedly supported a white supremacist agenda and continues to exist today, engaged in “veteranist” activities to support those ends. Finkelstein thus presents an innovative framework for reevaluating the political nature and legacy of American women’s wartime contributions.

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