

CFP: Intercontinental Cross-Currents
“Transatlantic Women at Work: Service in the Long Nineteenth Century”
Virtual Conversations (June through July 2021)

The current dual crises of the global CV-19 pandemic and the (also global) renewed struggle for racial justice have turned our attention to women worldwide whose critically important service roles bring to mind and expand on their similar occupations in the long nineteenth century. Women comprise the majority of the workforce that has been deemed “essential” during the pandemic--from healthcare and social services to retail and other service sector jobs. Women have been disproportionately affected by the loss of employment, whether through involuntary lay-offs or voluntary resignation due to the need to provide “essential” care at home, most significantly as teachers of their now virtually-schooled children. Across various service horizons today, we also observe that women, especially those of color, continue as in the past to confront institutionalized discrimination, subordination, and marginalization.

Both this troubling contemporary reality and its historical precedents make clear the inherent ambiguity of women’s service. On the one hand, as Hannah Branch and Melissa Wooten have shown, service occupations may offer fields of action that enable new paths of social mobility for women; on the other, as with today’s virtual mother-teachers, such service often perpetuates domestic stereotypes, race conflicts, and class affiliationⁱ, while also severely impacting career progression, lifetime earning potential, and ongoing emotional stress.

Studies on women and service largely focus on three main research areas: 1) women and domestic service, 2) women and service in an entrepreneurial context, and 3) women and military service. Kristina Booker, in particular, conceptualizes women in service as either engaging in such work from a humanitarian “spiritualized sense of ‘duty,’” or actually working for wages in a servant capacity.ⁱⁱ

Not as well examined, however, is the complexity of women’s service as an enabling or a disabling factor within a transatlantic context. Throughout the long nineteenth century, women in the transatlantic world were engaged in a range of service roles, including nursing, teaching, and reform causes. Many served in menial jobs with no glory or recognition, while some held leadership roles in various movements, such as antislavery, temperance, workers’ rights, woman’s rights, and community service. Several served openly with the respect of family and society, while other women were forced to disguise themselves in order to serve their chosen cause.

For a virtual workshop series, the Intercontinental Cross-Currents Network solicits considerations of the contributions of women in wide-ranging service roles in the transatlantic world during the long nineteenth century. We are interested in presentations that engage with the following broad topics:

Spheres of Service

- Women's wartime service and aid to the resulting populations displaced by wars
- Red Cross Societies and their important role in women's service

Politics of Service

- Service in which women covertly participated
- Social criticism directed at women who served away from home
- Women's strategies to promote their serving publicly
- Colonialism and women's service
- Rhetoric of separate spheres and women's service
- Societal value of and respect for (or lack thereof) women's service

Representation(s) of Service (literary and otherwise)

- Artistic representations of service (literary, visual, musical etc.)
- Effects of service on women's writing, art, rhetoric, and other creative endeavors
- Intertextual notions of service in a transatlantic context
- Life writing

Intersectionality and Service

- Women and race in service
- Women, wealth, and class
- Service and shared space across class, national, gendered, or racial boundaries
- Women's service as propaganda
- Notions of service in women's, sexuality, and gender studies

Scholarship of Service

- Women's service in historiography and narratives of women's service
- Archives of women's service
- Examples of women's service that has gone unacknowledged or unidentified
- Advantages and dangers of looking at women's history through the lens of service

These 90-minute conversations will take place via Martin Luther University's virtual conference system, MLUConf, in June and July 2021 (specific dates to follow). The series will launch on **Monday, June 7, at 11:30 am (EST)** with keynote speaker, **Jake Wynn**, from the Missing Soldiers Office in Washington, D.C., whom we're honored to welcome. He will discuss the humanitarian work of Clara Barton, who founded the American Red Cross in 1884.

We welcome panels, roundtables, and individual papers. For individual presentations, please provide a 300-word abstract; to propose a panel or a round table, please send a brief description of the topic and a 300-word abstract for each presenter. Email these materials to **crosscurrents@amerikanistik.uni-halle.de** by **March 15, 2021**.

Virtual conference organizers:

Laura-Isabella Heitz, MLU Halle-Wittenberg

Khristeena Lute, SUNY Adirondack
Julia Nitz, MLU Halle-Wittenberg
Sandra H. Petrulionis, Penn State University, Altoona

ⁱ Enobong Hannah Branch, and Melissa E. Wooten, “Suited for Service: Racialized Rationalizations for the Ideal Domestic Servant from the Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century,” *Social Science History* 36.2 (2012): 169–89. JSTOR. Accessed 11 Nov. 2020.

ⁱⁱ Jennifer Aston, and Catherine Bishop, *Female Entrepreneurs in the Long Nineteenth Century: A Global Perspective* (Palgrave, 2020); Carmen Birkle, and Justine Tally, “Introduction: Waging Health –Women in Nineteenth-Century American Wars” *European Journal of American Studies* (2015): n. p. Web. 11 Nov. 2020; Janet Henshall Momsen, ed., *Gender, Migration, and Domestic Service* (Routledge, 1999); and Kristina Booker, *Menials: Domestic Service and the Cultural Transformation of British Society, 1650–1850* (Bucknell UP, 2018), 4.