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**Title: To What Extent Did The WWI Contribute To The Advancement Of Women's Rights In The United States?**

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Discipline: History

## Identification and Evaluation of Sources

**Jensen, Kimberly.** “Women’s Mobilization for War (USA).” *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (2014). DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10279.

The first source used is a secondary source. The source is an article written by Kimberly Jensen in 2014 and posted in the *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. The **origin** of the source is **valuable** because it was written by Kimberly Jensen, the former chair of the history department at Western Oregon University. Furthermore, Jensen has authored many other articles and books on the history of women in the US, which makes her an authority in the field. However, the origin of the source is limited in that it is a secondary source, and the author does not have a first-hand experience of the events.

The **purpose** of the source was to provide an analysis of how women played a role in WWI and how they took the chance to increase their calls for equal rights. The article discusses how women exploited opportunities provided by WWI to increase their activism and calls for female suffrage. This **content is valuable** because it provides more insights into how WWI shaped or influenced the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment. The **limitation** of the content is that it only focuses on how WWI supported women to fight for their rights but does not provide an analysis of how WWI could have also slowed the lobbying process that had been going on for years.

**Hicks, Daniel L.** “War and the Political Zeitgeist: Evidence from the History of Female Suffrage.” *European Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 31, Sept. 2013, pp. 60–81, 10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2013.04.003.

The second source used is also a secondary source. The source is a research article by Daniel L. Hicks and posted in the *European Journal of Political Economy* in 2013. The **origin** of the

source is **valuable** because it was written by Daniel L. Hicks, a director of graduate studies at the University of Oklahoma. Although Hicks is an economist, he focuses on the intersection of economics and gender, which makes his contributions valuable. However, the origin of the source is limited in that it is more of an economic analysis and does not utilize any historical analysis methods.

The **purpose** of the source was to analyze how external conflicts such as WWI contributed to the expansion of female suffrage across the globe. The article investigates how WWI and other international conflicts link to women's suffrage. This **content is valuable** because it validates the claim that WWI provided an opportunity for more women's rights. The **limitation** of the content is that it does not exclusively discuss women's rights and is also focused on other conflicts besides WWI.

### **Investigation**

WWI and its consequences allowed the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment of the US constitution to give women suffrage in the United States. Women activists in the US had struggled for more than 70 years to petition for the right of women to vote but had not been successful in many states (Jensen 8). However, the occurrence of WWI gave women a chance to prove their patriotism and also allowed them to increase pressure on the government to grant them the right. According to Hicks, during WWI, many women's suffrage movements converted or changed their tones to support the war efforts in the hopes that it could increase their leverage in the form of increased political support (p 72). Accordingly, women movements in the US, such as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), took advantage of the war by volunteering in different areas that supported US war efforts which increased the popularity of women leaders and gave them leverage over the male politicians as franchise momentum continued to rise (Jensen 8). As the WW1 continued, women leaders found a way

to pressure the government to grant them suffrage. For instance, the leader of NAWSA, Carrie Catt, came up with a plan that brought together state-by-state efforts to fight for women's voting rights through a constitutional amendment (Jensen 8). Although Catt was a Pacifist, she took the opportunity presented by WWI to be neutral by allowing the members to pursue or work towards the war efforts and woman suffrage.

NAWSA contributed to the war efforts by having its members volunteer on many fronts, such as contributing to the red-cross drives (Graham 93). On the flip side, the women volunteers took the opportunity to campaign for suffrage by combining political activism with acts of patriotism. These acts of volunteering while advocating or discussing the importance of women's suffrage were replicated across the country in the communities (Enstam 821). On the flip side, other women's organizations, such as the National Women's Party (NWP), took the opportunity to criticize the government for being hypocritical in that it was fighting for a safe world that could facilitate democracy while back home, there was no democracy since women could not vote (Jensen 8). Unlike the NAWSA, NWP did not contribute to the war efforts and only focused on suffrage activism.

Consequently, in 1917, the NWP started picketing the white house for participating in the war and ignoring female suffrage in the US. The picketing led to the arrest of many women activists at the time. As a result, it is argued that the picketing made the white house negotiate or listen to the NAWSA, which was more moderate, contributing to the support for women's suffrage by the state and the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment.

However, some scholars also argue that the actions of the NWP created enemies among the leaders and the public; therefore, the acceptance of women's suffrage was delayed (Graham 99). Furthermore, some scholars may also argue that the fight for women's suffrage had persisted for a long time; therefore, the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment would have been made with or

without WW1. However, evidence shows that across the world, international wars and conflicts paved the way for or gave momentum to franchise movements. According to Hicks, wars and conflicts provided an avenue for the expansion of suffrage rights across the world. According to his analysis, Hicks shows that many countries provided women suffrage during or immediately after the war. For instance, during WW1, more than 20 countries were involved in external conflicts, and accordingly, more than 15 countries granted women the right to vote (Hicks 63). However, the number of countries granting female suffrage declined after WW1 and increased again during and after WW2 (Hicks 63). The increase and expansion of female suffrage during WWI can be attributed to the change in political sentiment due to the increased participation of women in supporting war efforts. Furthermore, it can be argued that WWI and other conflicts increased interactions between countries, leading to the spillover of reforms from one country to another.

Besides granting female suffrage, WWI also expanded the opportunities for wage work for women in the US (Jensen 7). Although women were allowed to work for wages even before WWI, there were fewer opportunities for them and were mostly available to unmarried women (Yellen). The involvement of the US in WWI increased the number of women on work wage by more than a million (Jensen 7). Furthermore, it increased the areas where women could work, including in manufacturing. Also, WWI provided an opportunity for women to be organized into labor unions which increased their demands for equal pay and workplace safety. African American women also started to migrate from the southern states to the northern states in search of work. As a result of the war, some African American women got the chance to work in positions only preserved for the whites, and some even became supervisors (Brown 149).

Additionally, WWI led to the recruitment of women into the army for the first time to cover for the men that had left for war. The recruitment started in 1917 by the navy and then later by the marines (Hacker and Vining 127). More than 20,000 women in the state joined the military to fill the gap left by the male soldiers at home, while others were recruited to support the military overseas (Jensen 6). At the time of the war, the women physicians and nurses pushed for their recognition in the army and the review of laws to allow them to leave for childcare (Jensen 5). Although more women physicians were allowed to join the Army medical corps, they were not granted full identity as professionals in the military. Although women did not get equal treatment to men and did not manage to push for equal rights at work and in the army, they managed to increase their presence in the labor force, which was an important step toward more work rights and freedoms.

WWI also created an opportunity for women in minority groups to make claims for increased civil rights and citizenship. The period WWI period created an unusual political environment through which African American women increased calls for their recognition as citizens due to their years of service and support for the war efforts (Jensen 4). During the war, African American women established the Negro war relief to support the African American men participating in the war (N. L. M. Brown 9). They also worked in other roles that provided support to the military, such as nurses and physicians. Their participation made them more visible in society which emboldened them to increase their efforts toward civil rights. The African American women groups also filed a lawsuit to call for an end to racial segregation even during the war (N. L. M. Brown 15). There was high segregation during WWI, where organizations such as the Red Cross and the YMCA were organized into groups according to the ethnicity of the volunteers. Furthermore, despite all women providing equal support to the war troops, African American women were not treated equally. However,

although WWI provided an opportunity for African American women to highlight their plight, their efforts did not bear many fruits after the war.

WWI created a different and unique political environment in the US where much focus was on the war efforts, and the government sought a unified country to support the troops participating in the war. Accordingly, the environment provided a chance for the increased involvement of women in the war. Although many women groups and their members in the US were pacifists, WWI provided an opportunity for them to support the war efforts and push for woman suffrage. As a result, the women groups supported the participation of women in the war to create the image of patriotic mothers. Consequently, their increased participation made the women leaders popular, which gave them an advantage over the male legislators. As a result of their participation in the war, it was difficult for the state to deny women their rights. Therefore, WWI created an avenue for the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment that gave female suffrage in the US. Besides women's suffrage, WWI increased opportunities for wage work for women to replace men who had gone to war. It also opened doors for women to join the army.

Furthermore, the environment created by WWI encouraged women of color and the minority to seek citizenship and civil rights on the ground of their service to the country during the war. Although WWI may have slowed down lobbying that had been going on in Washington for female suffrage, it created an environment that changed political sentiments on the topic and hence contributed to the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment. Therefore, WWI largely contributed to the advancement of women's rights in the United States.

### **Reflection**

Conducting the research provided me an opportunity to explore one of the major historical events in the world and how it influenced changes in society. The evolution of women's



rights is another important topic in history, and the research provided an opportunity for me to demonstrate how WWI helped advance women's rights in the US. One of the investigation methods used by historians that I applied in conducting the research was the use of counterfactual analysis. For instance, the analysis shows that WWI allowed or increased pressure for the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, and a counter analysis is provided to show that WWI also slowed down the lobbying process.

While using the counterfactual analysis method for analysis, I realized that historians are faced with the difficult task of finding relevant sources that provide different perspectives. For instance, many of the sources found provided a one-sided view that WWI encouraged or provided an opportunity for women's suffrage, and none of the sources claimed the opposite or mentioned how WWI could have delayed the female suffrage efforts. Therefore, using the counterfactual analysis was a challenge. The other major challenge was the lack of primary sources with adequate information. For instance, the research did not rely on any primary sources, which highlights a challenge faced by historians when trying to develop arguments.

However, I ensured that I used credible secondary sources by researching more about the authors to establish whether they have knowledge and authority in the field of history. Unlike other subjects such as economics and science, in history, there is no absolute truth, and therefore different people can give different opinions and arguments after analyzing the same primary source. Therefore this means that not all opinions are true. Accordingly, as a historian relying on secondary sources, I had to countercheck several sources to ensure that the opinions are similar and well-defended. In essence, the investigation has allowed me to learn new research skills and also to have a first-hand experience of the challenges that historians face in their research.

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