

“It’s up to the women”: Women’s Peace Songs for Eleanor Roosevelt

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Abstract

Eleanor Roosevelt’s papers in the FDR Presidential Library contain approximately seventy musical works calling for world peace, the lyrics and/or music of which were created by women. Women’s peace songs from the 1930s were often a response to the First Lady’s press and radio statements about peace. They were also influenced by calls for cultural change by activists in the women’s peace movement, represented by the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, groups with which Roosevelt was involved. Compositions about peace typically either featured march-like music and nationalistic imagery or were religious choral works and hymn-like expressions of women’s collective action. Writers sometimes parodied well-known hymns or patriotic songs, providing them with less militaristic texts. Musical offerings for the First Lady reflected women’s desire to assist Roosevelt in her peace efforts, their growing concern about the onset of World War II, and a strong belief in the power of music to help achieve a better world.

In November 1939, Eleanor Roosevelt received a copy of Alta Vera Arnold’s song, “Not over there,—Over Here!” with a card stating that it had “been composed for a worthy cause; to help keep America out of war.”¹ Arnold wrote to Roosevelt: “What with Europe in a turmoil and an overwhelming majority of the people over here in this grand and glorious country of ours helping and praying to keep out of war, I have composed this song, which may, I hope accomplish, in some measure, this great need.” The song’s title, march tempo, and arpeggiated fanfares recall George M. Cohan’s popular World War I song, “Over There”; yet the verse ponders, “What did it get us in 1917?” and the chorus’s “Yanks” aren’t coming but are “staying to protect the U.S.A.” In contrast to the numerous anti-war songs published before World War I, John Bush Jones identified only twenty-two commercially issued songs from the pre-World War II years advocating isolationism.² However, American women had been sending Mrs. Roosevelt compositions they had written calling for an end to war from her first year in the White House. This article explores the nature of the peace songs created by women, the bulk of them unpublished, found in Roosevelt’s papers from her years as First Lady. It explains why women were most often the lyricists and/or composers of peace songs and the ways in which their offerings to Roosevelt responded to her activism and public statements advocating world peace. In exploring the attitudes of members of women’s peace organizations between the two World Wars, particularly the U.S. branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the article shows how peace songs were primarily a byproduct of these groups’ desire for widespread transformation of American cultural attitudes towards war rather than linked to specific political events or an international agenda. The lyrics and music of women’s peace songs, based in religious and patriotic sentiments, reflected their vision of the better world that women united in peace initiatives could create.

American citizens sent music to Eleanor Roosevelt because she was a far more public figure than the

¹ Alta Vera Arnold, letter accompanying “Not over there,—Over Here!,” November 2, 1939, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, FDR Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York.

² John Bush Jones, *The Songs That Fought the War: Popular Music and the Home Front, 1939–1945* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 58.

women who had preceded her in the White House. Roosevelt took an active role in political affairs, creating a new understanding of the public woman.³ She gave almost 350 press conferences, was paid for her radio broadcasts,⁴ and penned books and articles, including a newspaper column entitled “My Day” that reached 62 newspapers and 4 million readers.⁵ Much of Roosevelt’s rhetoric was aimed at educating the public, particularly women, about contemporary political issues and civic responsibility.⁶ However, American citizens were led to feel that their engagement with the First Lady was a conversation and that she was listening to them. In August 1933, Roosevelt published an article in *Woman’s Home Companion* titled, “I want you to write to me,”⁷ and letters documenting people’s Depression-era difficulties poured into the White House, some three hundred thousand that year alone. By 1941, one correspondent, Polly Stone Buck, acknowledged that “Writing to Mrs. Roosevelt about it” had become “one of the great American indoor sports.”⁸

During her tenure, the First Lady also received poems and musical compositions, now held in 38 boxes in the FDR Presidential Library in Hyde Park, New York.⁹ Although the ca. 1,800 compositions in the collection include instrumental music, mostly often in the form of piano pieces or works for band, the bulk of the music is songs, from handwritten manuscripts to sheet music by professional songwriters. The songs’ subject matter is wide-ranging—holidays and patriotic occasions, geographical regions of the country, FDR’s election campaigns, or government programs such as the National Recovery Administration—but also topics considered appropriate for women, such as motherhood, children, or religious sentiments. Christopher Reynolds has documented that approximately twenty thousand English-language songs were published by women between 1890 and 1930. Although the number of women’s songs dropped substantially in the 1920s due to the rise of the radio and phonograph, women represent the composers and/or lyricists of more than half of the music sent to Roosevelt.¹⁰ Songs by a few professional female composers, such as Mana-Zucca or Mary Carr Moore, appear in her papers;¹¹ however, women’s songs are more often in manuscript or self-published, or consist of lyrics put to music by “song-poem” publishers, who charged fees

³ Betty Houchin Winfield, “Anna Eleanor Roosevelt’s White House Legacy: The Public First Lady,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (June 1988): 342.

⁴ Winfield, “Anna Eleanor Roosevelt’s White House Legacy,” 332.

⁵ Alf Pratte, “My Day,” in *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia*, ed. Maurine H. Beasley, Holly C. Shulman, and Henry R. Beasley (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 355.

⁶ Lisa R. Barry, “Eleanor Roosevelt: A Rhetorical Reconstruction of First Ladydom,” in *Leading Ladies of the White House: Communication Strategies of Notable Twentieth-Century First Ladies*, ed. Molly Meijer Wertheimer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 22.

⁷ Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, “I Want You to Write Me,” *Woman’s Home Companion* (August 1933): 4, quoted in Frances M. Seeber, “I Want You to Write to Me: The Papers of Anna Eleanor Roosevelt,” *Prologue* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 95–105, <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/erprolog.html>.

⁸ Polly Stone Buck, April 8, 1941, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁹ A similar collection exists for FDR. See Patrick Maney, “They Sang for Roosevelt: Songs of the People in the Age of FDR,” *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 23, no. 1 (March 2000): 85–89, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1537-4726.2000.2301_85.x; and Donald W. Whisenhunt, *Poetry of the People: Poems to the President, 1929–1945* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996).

¹⁰ See Christopher Reynolds, “Documenting the Zenith of Women Song Composers: A Database of Songs Published in the United States and the British Commonwealth, ca. 1890–1930,” *Notes* 69 (June 2013): 671–87, <https://doi.org/10.1353/not.2013.0059>; “Growing the Database of Women Songwriters, 1890–1930,” *Musicology Now* (September 21, 2015), <https://musicologynow.org/growing-the-database-of-women-songwriters-1890-1930/>; and “Completing the Women’s Song Database,” *Women’s Song Forum* (August 27, 2021), <https://www.womensongforum.org/2021/08/27/completing-the-womens-song-database/>.

¹¹ Mana-Zucca, *Brother Love*, op. 162 (New York: Paull Pioneer Music, 1939); Mary Carr Moore, *My Country* (San Bruno, CA: Wesley Webster, 1939).

for composers’ settings.¹² Some musical works were composed for the President, and his wife was merely intended to be the agent of transmission; nonetheless, the letters accompanying the music sent to Eleanor reveal that most pieces were clearly meant for her. Numerous writers requested the First Lady’s assistance in promoting their songs so that they might reach radio listeners or enter the repertoires of vocalists such as Marian Anderson or Kate Smith.¹³ Other pieces, scrawled crudely in pen or pencil, are simply humble offerings for her enjoyment. Margaret Hennigh from Louisberg, Kansas (population ca. 600), sent Roosevelt *The First Lady of the Land March*, because she seemed “to understand and sympathize with the problems of ‘just plain folks.’”¹⁴

Peace is a consistent theme of the songs sent to Roosevelt during the 1930s. There are approximately a hundred songs and choral works in some way critiquing war or calling for peace, over two thirds of which were created all or in part by women. The songwriters sometimes mention having encountered Roosevelt’s remarks on the subject, as she frequently discussed peace in her publications and broadcasts. Eleanor’s attitudes had been shaped by seeing the post-war devastation of Europe firsthand, and when FDR was elected in 1933, his wife had already been working on behalf of peace for a decade. Beginning in the 1920s, the years she referred to as her “intensive education,”¹⁵ Eleanor was politically engaged with the two largest women’s peace organizations, both founded by former suffragists: Carrie Chapman Catt’s National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War, and the U.S. branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom founded by Jane Addams. In 1923, Roosevelt was one of several women in charge of the controversial Bok Peace Prize, funded by *Ladies Home Journal* editor Edward Bok, which resulted in hearings into their possible “unAmerican activity.” She also lobbied on behalf of the League of Nations and the World Court. As Roosevelt transitioned into her new role as First Lady, some of her political associations were left behind, but she continued to speak to the two women’s peace organizations. A chapter of her 1933 book, *It’s Up to the Women*, emphasized the important role women could play in “settling disputes between nations.”¹⁶ The bulk of Roosevelt’s earnings from appearing on commercial radio went to the American Friends Service Committee, and she spoke to meetings of its Emergency Peace Campaign in 1935 and 1936. Roosevelt’s efforts to have the United States join the World Court culminated in a radio broadcast to mobilize women’s support before a congressional vote in January 1935. Though the legislation failed, Roosevelt continued her activism. Along with Catt and Addams, she contributed a chapter for the book *Why Wars Must Cease*; in it she labeled war “obsolete” and condemned those who profited financially from it.¹⁷

In various writings, Roosevelt stressed the importance of women’s role in advocating for peace. She also described the need to prepare children for the problems they would inevitably face in the world; she believed that children should be educated to peace rather than presented with models of military heroism,

¹² Francesca Inglese, “Watch Out for the Sharks”: Gender, Technology, and Commerce in the American Song-Poem Industry,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 7, no. 3 (August 2013): 295, 300, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196313000230>. The practice continued into World War II, and many self-published patriotic songs were composed by female amateurs. See Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War*, 34–37, 52–53.

¹³ Anderson had sung at the White House in 1936, and she and Kate Smith both performed on a 1939 concert for the King and Queen of England. See Elsie V. Kirk, *Music at the White House: A History of the American Spirit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 242–4.

¹⁴ Margaret Hennigh, letter accompanying *The First Lady of the Land March*, February 8, 1935, ER Papers, FDR Library.

¹⁵ Blanche Wiesen Cook, “‘Turn toward Peace’: ER and Foreign Affairs,” in *Without Precedent: The Life and Career of Eleanor Roosevelt*, ed. Joan Hoff-Wilson and Marjorie Lightman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 109.

¹⁶ Eleanor Roosevelt, *It’s Up to the Women* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1933), 237.

¹⁷ Eleanor Roosevelt, “Because the War Idea is Obsolete,” in *Why Wars Must Cease*, ed. Rose Young (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 20, 28.

and she frequently critiqued the influence of military toys on boys.¹⁸ Nonetheless, Roosevelt described herself as a “realistic pacifist,”¹⁹ and as the United States’ entry into World War II became imminent, she made clear that valuing peace was not in conflict with armed preparedness.²⁰ In her 1938 book *This Troubled World*, Roosevelt wrote that in order to have peace, America must “pay for it in our behavior and in material ways,”²¹ though in a 1940 broadcast, she continued to stress disarmament as an ideal.²² Roosevelt’s public persona as the First Lady, encouraging personal communication from the American people and working on behalf of various political issues, led songwriters to see her as the appropriate recipient of their musical efforts in support of peace. However, the music sent to Roosevelt not only reflects her activism but that of the American women’s peace movement before World War II.

Music and the Women’s Peace Movement

How many of the composers of the songs sent to the First Lady considered themselves peace activists cannot be determined; yet given that millions of women were members of organizations involved in peace efforts, it is likely that many were. After World War I, many women saw it as their responsibility to help put an end to war, because both biology and social conventions inevitably led men to fight. In 1921, Carrie Chapman Catt wrote, “war is in the blood of men; they can’t help it,” and Grace Hankett insisted, “It has evidently got to be the women who must stop war—men are too steeped in tradition to brave such a break.”²³ There were four national women’s peace organizations between the World Wars, including two small organizations, the Women’s Peace Union and the Women’s Peace Society. The largest group was the National Committee on the Cause and Cure of War (NCCCW), a coalition of eleven women’s groups that included the League of Women Voters, the American Association of University Women, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (which had been involved with peace efforts since the nineteenth century). With some five million members, the NCCCW demonstrated the breadth of the pro-peace movement after World War I, yet the coalition did not expect consensus or take any positions that might create controversies with affiliate members.²⁴ The Women’s Peace Party, which soon after its founding became the United States Branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), had stronger roots in the suffrage movement and was considered more radical. At its early height, it had some forty thousand members but had to be rebuilt after women abandoned it during World War I.

Not surprisingly, given the number and scope of women’s peace organizations, the letters that accompany songs in the Roosevelt collection hint that at least some of the songwriters were directly involved with them. Lillian Lawrence Nelson sent verses entitled “The Call to Peace,” set to the *Blue Danube Waltz*,

¹⁸ For example, her press conference of December 27, 1938, quoted in *The White House Press Conferences of Eleanor Roosevelt*, ed. Maurine Beasley (New York: Garland, 1983), 66.

¹⁹ Cook, “Turn toward Peace,” 108.

²⁰ Such as during her press conference preceding passage of the Naval Expansion Act on February 14, 1938, quoted in *The White House Press Conferences of Eleanor Roosevelt*, 48, though she admitted, “I would love to be able to use the money for other things.”

²¹ Eleanor Roosevelt, *This Troubled World* (New York: H.C. Kinsey, 1938), 46.

²² “Peace, Democracy, and Ideals,” Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program, July 4, 1940, in *The First Lady of Radio: Eleanor Roosevelt’s Historic Broadcasts*, ed. Stephen Drury Smith (New York: The New Press, 2014), 154.

²³ Quoted in Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women’s Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women’s Rights* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 86.

²⁴ Alonso, *Peace as a Women’s Issue*, 108.

when requested by “ladies of the peace movement” after writing it for their “fellowship.”²⁵ In 1934, Florine Folsom provided Roosevelt with a booklet of materials she had arranged for the program of an unnamed organization to which she belonged.²⁶ While it is difficult to link the individuals who wrote to the First Lady to specific political groups, the demographics of female peace activists can reveal something about the songwriters. Due to their roots in the suffrage movement, women’s peace organizations were overwhelmingly made up of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant women; only the New York branch of the WILPF contained numerous Jewish members. Although the WILPF supported intra-racial initiatives and tried to recruit African American women, they were not especially successful because they did not confront the racism of their chapters or their individual members.²⁷ Thus, women who had the training, time, and inclination to create peace songs were probably white and middle- or upper-class. It is not possible to determine how many peace songs were created by women of color. Nonetheless, Roosevelt did receive songs of various kinds from African Americans, including Madeline Bush’s “Hymn of Peace,” which was forwarded to her by activist Mary McLeod Bethune in 1938.²⁸

The women of the peace movement recognized that political and legal efforts would be insufficient to end war without large-scale cultural transformation. Many activists believed that the arts needed a new focus in order to serve as a force for change. The Women’s Peace Party had a “Committee for the Encouragement of Artists, Musicians and Writers to Productions Promoting Peace,” later simply called the WILPF’s Arts Committee.²⁹ The Massachusetts branch, based in Boston, was large and active, and in the teens had a Music Committee. Elisabeth Johnson, chairman of the WILPF’s Arts Committee, expressed the need for new artistic expression when she complained to Jane Addams that “we allow art to go on weaving romance about war, and oppose dry formulas to the glamour that wins young blood. . . . And so I pine for pageants, plays, poems, postcards, posters, songs, movies, dances, statues, stained glass, any medium that will first of all make peace seem ALIVE, and then heroic, beautiful.”³⁰ California activist Alice Locke Park (some of whose activities led her to be targeted by authorities³¹) likewise pointed out that that music served to rouse emotions, inspire action, “allure” soldiers, and create future soldiers among children. The result was the necessity of using songs to teach children—and adults—the benefits of peace. Park complained that it was difficult to locate peace songs in standard collections, which merely met the need for war songs, but she believed that peace education could be “intelligently and profitably cultivated.”³²

From its earliest years, the League circulated lists of peace materials, including books, pamphlets, plays, pageants, and music. Along with other organizations, such as the National Council for the Prevention of War, the WILPF served as a clearinghouse for clubs, schools, and churches that wanted to host peace events,

²⁵ Lillian Lawrence Nelson, June 15, 1937, ER papers, FDR Library.

²⁶ Florine Folsom, January 4, 1934, ER papers, FDR Library.

²⁷ Alonso, *Peace as a Women’s Issue*, 101–4, 142.

²⁸ Mary McLeod Bethune, letter accompanying Madeline Bush, “Hymn of Peace,” April 7, 1938, and Mrs. J. M. [Madeline] Bush, letter to Bethune, April 2, 1938, ER papers, FDR Library.

²⁹ Wendy B. Sharer, *Vote and Voice: Women’s Organizations and Political Literacy, 1915–1930* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 2007), 72–74.

³⁰ May 15, 1924, letter from Elisabeth Johnson to Jane Addams, *Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom: United States Section, 1919–1959*, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, in *Women’s Studies Archive*, Gale Primary Sources. All materials cited in the Swarthmore Peace Collection are located in this digitized database.

³¹ Eunice Eichelberger, “‘Hearts Brimming with Patriotism’: Katherine Edson, Alice Park, and the Politics of War and Peace, 1914–1921,” in *California Women and Politics from the Gold Rush to the Great Depression*, ed. Robert W. Cherny, Mary Ann Irwin, and Ann Marie Wilson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 328–30, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1df4g9d.18>.

³² Untitled clipping, *Portland Oregonian*, July 20, no year, Correspondence of the Women’s Peace Union, 1921–1931, Swarthmore Peace Collection.

celebrate Memorial Day or Goodwill Day on May 18, or host pageants.³³ The first list of materials, published when the WILPF was still the Women's Peace Party, included classical choral works by German composers, such as Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Wagner.³⁴ These rapidly disappeared from their publications, perhaps because of the backlash against German music and German-ness more generally in the United States during World War I, but more likely because they were not works that could be easily performed by the amateur musicians of a local branch organization. Peace events organized by various groups often featured music, mostly communal singing of patriotic music or hymns, the two genres most frequently represented among the works women sent to Roosevelt. Though clearly stretching a point, Carrie Chapman Catt described "America," often sung at such events, as an "international song" due to its tune, which she had heard sung with different words by British, Canadian, American, and German women.³⁵ Katherine Lee Bates's "America, the Beautiful," with its emphasis on liberty and natural beauty, was also sometimes sung. The Massachusetts branch officially adopted Louise Souther's "Our Flag," published in Boston in 1916, but it did not gain wider popularity.

Some peace activists felt that the occasions they sponsored needed new musical material to more clearly express their goals. Women sometimes sent new peace songs to the WILPF—its digitized papers include at least thirty songs by women—yet there is almost no overlap between these songs and those offered to the prominent figure of Roosevelt.³⁶ The song that most frequently appeared in early WILPF publications was based on a favorite poem of Jane Addams, originally published in the London *Nation* in 1915 and entitled, "Five Souls." The Women's Peace Party had it set to the Allegretto from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and published in sheet music form.³⁷ Each of its five verses presented the voice of a working man forced into war, concluding with the refrain: "I gave my life for freedom—This I know; / For those who bade me fight had told me so." Although Addams wrote that the song "poignantly expressed what many of us felt in those first months of war,"³⁸ not only was it about how European men were forced to fight, not Americans, it did not express women's specific positions on war in any way, as frequently occurred in the later songs with lyrics penned by them. In addition, the emphasis of "Five Souls" on the common working man, more typical of artistic content related to a later Popular Front aesthetic, was not typical of women's peace songs. Some leaders of the WILPF were victims of the "Red Scare" during the 1920s, most notably as a result of the War Department's 1923 "Spider Chart" linking the group to "international socialism"; many members were hesitant to associate their movement with any organizations related to communism, in part due to the communist belief in class warfare.³⁹ Given the controversies in the WILPF in the 1930s over alliances with groups that contained communists and the more conservative nature of the NCCCW, it is

³³ "Peace Day" or "Goodwill Day" commemorated the first international peace conference at the Hague in 1899.

³⁴ The Woman's Peace Party, *Lists for Distribution, Prepared by the Committee for the Encouragement of Artists, Musicians and Writers to Productions Promoting Peace* [April 1915], Swarthmore Peace Collection.

³⁵ Public Meeting, Belasco Theater, Sunday, December 5, 1926, 2:30 pm, in *Report of the Second Conference on the Cause and Cure of War Held in Washington, D.C., December 5–10, 1926* (Washington, DC: s.n., 1926), 32.

³⁶ Roosevelt's papers contain WILPF art chairman Elisabeth Johnson's *Song of the Unknown Soldier* (Philadelphia: E. Johnson, 1941), and Anita Gray Little's "We can have Peace!," which is also found in the WILPF's papers, Swarthmore Peace Collection.

³⁷ *Five Souls as Sung by the Fuller Sisters: Adapted to the Allegretto from the 7th Symphony [by] Beethoven*, words by W.N. Ewer; arranged by Frances Frothingham (Chicago: C. F. Summy, 1915), Brown University Libraries Digital Repository, <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:90455/>. Dorothy, Rosalind[e], and Cynthia Fuller sang British folksongs in Victorian dress accompanied by harp. Crystal Eastman, who was a major figure in the Women's Peace Party from 1915 to ca. 1919, married their brother Walter.

³⁸ Jane Addams, *The Second Twenty Years at Hull House, September 1909 to September 1929, with a Record of Growing World Consciousness* (New York: MacMillan, 1930), 122.

³⁹ Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue*, 111 and 129–34.

not surprising that the peace songs sent to Roosevelt did not reflect the ideals of the Popular Front; focused on anti-war sentiments, they ignored the economic hardships of 1930s workers, often a topic of the poetry the First Lady received, and most maintained a patriotic optimism about the future of the United States.

Peace movement members, like Roosevelt’s correspondents, sometimes expressed a belief in the power of art to help change people’s political opinions. Elisabeth Johnson was one of the few activist songwriters to articulate aesthetic opinions about how to give a song an “emotional effect” and make it easily graspable “without being too preachy or mechanical.” Johnson wrote to Addams that the peace movement should have an emotional as well as intellectual appeal, emphasizing that emotion was part of women’s nature. However, she worried that activists would force unappealing propaganda songs on others: “Here, this is a song. We must sing it because it Portrays our Principles Properly and will make Peace Popular.” Johnson felt that the peace movement’s musical offerings needed to appeal to the ordinary man and woman not yet convinced of its goals. She told Addams:

It is of course necessary to define our position, but what fruit will such definition bear if we cannot get a hearing for it on a large scale in the world outside? . . . sometimes I felt we’re in danger of trying prematurely to use an influence we haven’t got. . . . Why cannot we send out to masses of people brief, lively, picturesque presentations of our perspective from their viewpoint, with enough of sentiment and self-interest to make the appeal a dynamic one?⁴⁰

Johnson’s belief that songs should be stylistically appropriate for a broad audience, whether or not they presented specific political principles, drew her to styles from musical comedy and vaudeville. Emily Balch, then vice-chair of the U.S. branch of the WILPF, agreed with Johnson that songs in popular genres might be utilized, recalling the influence of the Tin Pan Alley song, “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to be a Soldier,” before World War I.⁴¹ The resulting lighthearted lyrics of Johnson’s 1926 song, “All o’ the Word a Home,” referenced the Olympic games and described international interchange between “The German and the Hollander, the Swede and Pole and Finn” as well as Africans and Asians, and wanting to “play in a sporty way with ev’ry one o’ the Folks.”⁴² However, her approach was not typical of the serious tone of the lyrics of most women’s peace songs. Nonetheless, some of the songs women produced for Roosevelt were more in keeping with the popular music styles that Johnson favored, in contrast to the classical choral works that had appeared in lists of peace music in the 1910s.

Emphasis on international cooperation came to influence the music presented during women’s peace events. In the 1930s, stress on better international relations inspired many of the League’s branches to host events that had folk songs and dances in costume rather than the communal singing of peace songs; the 1936 national meeting of the WILPF in Minneapolis combined both approaches in an “International Fiesta” with a Negro Spiritual and Russian, Ukrainian, Swiss, and Norwegian folk songs, concluding with a peace hymn, Josephine Bacon’s new words for Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy,” from his Ninth Symphony. It may be that so many songs were sent to the First Lady in the 1930s in part because national women’s peace organizations like the WILPF were no longer promoting the sorts of songs for which Johnson had advocated a decade before; a great deal of the song repertoire that continually appeared in the League’s publications originated in the WWI era, while many of the songs in Roosevelt’s papers resulted from the rising tensions that led to

⁴⁰ May 15, 1924, letter from Elisabeth Johnson to Jane Addams, WILPF, Swarthmore Peace Collection.

⁴¹ May 21, 1924, letter from Emily Balch to Elisabeth Johnson, WILPF, Swarthmore Peace Collection.

⁴² Elisabeth Johnson, *All o’ the World a Home* (Philadelphia: Globe, 1926), in *Re-Envisioning Japan: Japan as Destination in 20th-Century Visual and Material Culture*; Joanne Bernardi, Project Director; University of Rochester, River Campus Libraries, <https://rej.lib.rochester.edu/viewer/5426>. This site also has a recording of the song.

WWII. Nonetheless, as the number of songs sent to Roosevelt increased in the final years of the decade, the WILPF's Education Committee's 1938 "Kit" featured the longest list of music the League had ever issued, though much of it was not by women.⁴³

Peace Songs for the First Lady

Roosevelt's standing as First Lady made her an inspiring potential advocate for the peace songs composed by American women. During her years in the White House, she made only occasional comments specifically about music. Nonetheless, she was aware of the power of the arts to make political statements about race, class, and gender. Perhaps the most famous example was her support of Marian Anderson, when Roosevelt resigned from the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1939 after it forbade the African American soprano from singing at Constitution Hall, leading to her recital before thousands at the Lincoln Memorial.⁴⁴ Roosevelt's "My Day" column published on November 14, 1940, highlighted African American music she had heard, including Spirituals and Florence Price's third Symphony, as important contributions to American music.⁴⁵ Depression-era politics influenced Roosevelt's support of the arts projects of the Works Progress Administration, inspiring her image as their official godmother.⁴⁶ She also promoted folk music, attending the White Top Music Festival in Virginia in 1933, and the large entertainment for the King and Queen of England held at the White House in 1939 featured Spirituals, cowboy ballads, folk songs performed by the Coon Creek Girls from Kentucky, and an Appalachian square dance team, alongside opera singers.⁴⁷ Camelia Lenart has explored the relationship of Martha Graham's dancing in East Room of the White House in 1937 to Roosevelt's possible desire to highlight the anti-Fascist content of her performance.⁴⁸ The First Lady's association with women's issues sometimes led female artists to seek her support. The National League of American Pen Women promoted the two recitals by its composer members held at the White House for Roosevelt as historic events, hoping to generate recognition of women's musical accomplishments, including those of Amy Beach.⁴⁹ Numerous other renowned musicians appeared at the White House during FDR's presidency; however, most of them were there simply to entertain rather than to make political statements.

The First Lady's occasional comments on the arts typically did not highlight artistic professionals but stressed the importance of the arts in American life for all citizens. In a 1939 article for *Educational Music Magazine*, she espoused the idea that music could be useful in cultural relations, writing, "I wonder as we develop a greater understanding of music if it will not help us to a better international understanding."⁵⁰

⁴³ *Education Committee Kit, 1938*, WILPF Field Secretarial Work and Committees, Swarthmore Peace Collection.

⁴⁴ Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, vol. 3: The War Years and After, 1939–1962* (New York: Viking, 2016), 32–36.

⁴⁵ Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day, November 14, 1940," *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Digital Edition* (2017), <https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?v=1940&f=md055735>.

⁴⁶ Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935–1943* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972; reprint ed., Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 8.

⁴⁷ David E. Whisnant, *All That Is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 192–3; Kirk, *Music at the White House*, 242–3.

⁴⁸ Camelia Lenart, "Dancing Barefoot and Politicizing Dance at the White House: Eleanor Roosevelt and Martha Graham's Collaboration During the Rise of Fascism in Europe," in *Eleanor Roosevelt's Views of Diplomacy and Democracy: The Global Citizen*, ed. Dario Fazzi and Anya Luscombe (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 128, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42315-5_7.

⁴⁹ Marian Wilson Kimber, "Women Composers at the White House: The National League of American Pen Women and Phyllis Fergus's Advocacy for Women in American Music," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12, no. 4 (November 2018): 488, 490, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196318000378>.

⁵⁰ "Eleanor Roosevelt Says," *Educational Music Journal* 18 (January–February 1939): 6.

Roosevelt criticized the banishment of German music from concert halls during WWI, claiming that musical genius transcended nationality. Her typical emphasis was not on Americans’ musical creations, such as those that were sent to her, but on music education as a means to understanding people of other nations, thus making America less likely to turn against them when provoked.

While Roosevelt spoke or wrote about music infrequently, many of her most widely circulated ideas about peace can be found in the songs sent to her, sometimes in direct response to her comments on the radio or in the press. Women’s texts about peace often adopt patriotic and religious imagery; thus, their songs draw heavily on either of two styles: that of stirring, march-like patriotic music marked by dotted rhythms, or hymns consisting of step-wise, singable melodies accompanied by four-voice piano arrangements. Less frequent are elaborate choral settings or solo songs closer to art songs in their complexity. In a 1938 radio interview about peace, Roosevelt stated that “if all of us lived according to the doctrines of Christ, many of our internal problems would solve themselves.”⁵¹ Choral works and peace hymns, most often in the form of a prayer, were a musical expression of the religious foundation of peace that Roosevelt articulated, but they also implied the need for women’s collective action.

The first World War, which had led former suffragists to found peace organizations, lingers in some songs, often paired with resolutions never to repeat its traumas. Celia Klein’s lyrics state, “we’ve paid the price, now let’s be wise.”⁵² Dorothy Herbert’s choral work, “No Blackout of Peace,” written in response to FDR’s “fireside chat” after the 1939 invasion of Poland, presents World War I imagery that Americans now reject: soldiers’ tramping feet, sandbags, sirens in the dark, tear-stained citizens, poison gas and gas masks, and fields run with blood.⁵³ Adel Fink’s “Dreaming of Homeland,” originally from 1922, does not obviously relate to the Great War, though its final refrain for four-part male chorus suggests homesick soldiers. Fink’s letter described how she had originally written the piece crying with her baby on her knee. She didn’t want her grown son, now a teacher, “snatched from a future,” adding, “And I know all mothers feel about their sons just as I do about mine.”⁵⁴

The gender of the songwriters is frequently reflected in the content of the peace songs that women sent to Roosevelt. The idea that women’s biological capacity to bear children led them toward pacifism served as a longstanding justification for women’s organizations’ opposition to war, especially during World War I and into the 1920s.⁵⁵ Some leaders also found that motherhood could be of political use; the WILPF’s Emily Greene Balch stated, “I see value in sentimental appeals to ‘the mother heart.’”⁵⁶ Roosevelt’s position as First Lady led her to be perceived as First Mother as well and thus a fitting recipient of such sentiments.⁵⁷ One press report of her criticism of war characteristically noted that “In her scorn for the superficiality with

⁵¹ “Eleanor Roosevelt Interviewed on the Causes and Cures of War,” January 9, 1938, in *The First Lady of Radio*, 119.

⁵² Celia Klein, untitled song, August 30, 1939, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁵³ Dorothy Herbert, *No Blackout of Peace* (Boston: C.C. Birchard, 1939), October 23, 1939, ER papers, FDR Library. See FDR’s Fireside Chat from September 3, 1939, in John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project*, UC Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15801>.

⁵⁴ Adel Fink, letter accompanying *Dreaming of Homeland* (Union, MO: L.J. Fink, 1922), October 14, 1939, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁵⁵ See Barbara J. Steinson, “‘The Mother Half of Humanity’: American Women in the Peace and Preparedness Movements in World War I,” in *Women, War, and Revolution*, ed. Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980), 259–64.

⁵⁶ Emily Balch to Elisabeth Waern-Bugge, December 12 [1934], reel 2, WILPF Papers, quoted in Leila J. Rupp, “Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women’s Organizations, 1888–1945,” *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (December 1994): 1584, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2168389>.

⁵⁷ For modern reworkings of this treatment see Nancy G. Isenberg, “Eleanor Roosevelt: Joseph Lash’s ‘Eternal Mother,’” *Biography* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 107–15, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2010.0461>.

which the men of power are treating the problem, Mrs. Roosevelt spoke for all womanhood—for sorrowing mothers and wives and sweethearts whose loved ones are the living sacrifices on the altar of man’s stupidity.”⁵⁸ The theme of maternal feelings often occurs in the songs sent to Roosevelt but does not dominate them; it is often mentioned in a single line or verse.⁵⁹ Mana-Zucca’s “Brotherhood” laments that “a million mothers lose a son,” and Myrtle Govan’s “Song of Peace” describes how “Mothers to God are silently praying to save their boys from death’s dark door.”⁶⁰ Related to mothers’ rearing of their offspring, Roosevelt’s often repeated idea that military toys educated children to expect war does not appear in women’s music; however, it shows up in the correspondence of women in agreement with her. In 1934, Kathryn Peck thanked her “for your stand on so many things that, like the abandonment of military toys, seem small, but are far more fertile seeds of Armageddon than more obvious and immediate causes.”⁶¹ Such attitudes were considerably more controversial than might be imagined. In 1924, after reading the WILPF’s flier, “Disarm the Nursery,” a report by an agent for the War Department’s Military Intelligence Division warned that the organization was communist and was deliberately trying to undermine patriotism and working to destroy civilization and Christianity.⁶²

Like Roosevelt, many authors saw women’s combined efforts as central to achieving peace, and they hoped that their music would serve to represent the groups’ missions. Their songs reflect the approach of many social protest songs in that they reinforce the idea that women share collective values, and their texts support solidarity between the members of the peace movement.⁶³ Gertrude Garrett of Ocean City, New Jersey, felt that “federated clubs and women’s organizations should have a National Peace Song” and offered her composition, “Women of the U.S.A.” to portray women’s work, their patriotism, and their religious faith.⁶⁴ Multiple songs stress women working together for peace as well as their overall goal of making life better. Marjory Titus Greene of Linton, Indiana, wrote to Roosevelt that her song, “Womanhood United,” reminded her of the First Lady. Its lyrics envision triumph through female unity—“And as we lift one voice to sing, the follies of the world succumb”—and the inevitability of change brought about by women: “O, arm in arm, banded we come, What can withstand our righteous host?”⁶⁵ A few texts go so far as to envision female political dominance. In Lillian Lawrence Nelson’s “The Call to Peace,” not only “When women shall unite in peace / Men will cease to fight,” but ultimately, “For the hand that rocks the cradle / Must rule in love, and peace.”⁶⁶

Roosevelt often critiqued the idea that war was a means for men to build character and to engage in heroism, asserting that its supposed military glories had overshadowed its actual horrors. Women’s peace songs rarely feature violent imagery but instead present utopian visions of a peaceful future. Roosevelt and peace organizations propagated the idea that women must present young people with alternatives to war: engaged citizenship, work solving the world’s problems, or the attractions of the arts and humanities.

⁵⁸ “The Wisdom of a Woman,” newspaper clipping from *Daily Times*, no city, ER Papers, FDR Library.

⁵⁹ Alonso, *Peace as a Women’s Issue*, 10–12.

⁶⁰ Myrtle Govan, “Song of Peace,” June 3, 1938, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁶¹ Kathryn Peck, letter accompanying “Millionaire in a Masquerade,” January 12, 1934, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁶² Alonso, *Peace as a Women’s Issue*, 110.

⁶³ R. Serge Denisoff, *Sing a Song of Social Significance* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1983), 2.

⁶⁴ Gertrude Medary Garrett, letter accompanying “Women of the U.S.A.,” November 2, 1939, ER papers, FDR Library. Garrett’s reference to clubs that were members of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs suggests her association with more conservative members of the peace movement that made up the Committee on the Cause and Cure of War.

⁶⁵ Marjory Titus Greene, “Womanhood United,” January 5, 1938, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁶⁶ Lillian Lawrence Nelson, June 15, 1937, ER papers, FDR Library.

Songwriters’ cooption of familiar patriotic and militaristic music, transforming the songs with new lyrics that as vigorously praise peace as war, was their means of achieving this alternative in music. Flora Bullock wrote to Roosevelt that “we should honorably retire our war songs and war marches, and sing no less valiantly in the cause of peace.”⁶⁷ In “The Song of Peace,” “Onward Christian soldiers / marching as to war” is transformed to

Forward, all ye faithful
 Seeking love and peace
 Hast’ning on the era
 When all strife shall cease.

Likewise, “America” became “Angel of Peace,” its patriotism tempered into a prayer:

God grant us now thy peace
 Bid all discussions cease
 God, send us peace.
 Peace in thy liberty
 Peace in equality
 Peace in fraternity
 God send us peace.⁶⁸

Fleur Conkling’s new text for George W. Warren’s “God of Our Fathers,” recast as “Hail Peace Victorious,” seems to have been inspired by the original third verse of the hymn, which begs for God’s protection from “war’s alarms” and to “nourish us in peace.” Her reworking was published both as a hymn and in an arrangement for four-part chorus by Wallingford Riegger.⁶⁹ This sort of transformation of the lyrics of well-known songs was not new for women, as it was typical of earlier suffrage songs. The addition of original texts made it easy for women who were not trained in music to create an effective vehicle for their political expression. Peace activists such as those in the WILPF provided new lyrics to “Onward Christian Soldiers” on multiple occasions, and member Katherine Deveaux Blake’s 1914 version of the “Star-Spangled Banner” with a pacifist text had been adopted by the New York City Board of Education for use in public schools.⁷⁰ In general, the transformations of known works by women that appear in Roosevelt’s papers lack the principal element of “parody” as defined by Linda Hutcheon, an obvious “ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity.”⁷¹ Their approach, undertaken between the wars rather than during wartime, differs from soldiers’ common parodic reworkings of pro-war lyrics into songs that reveal war’s grim realities.⁷² Women’s goal was not political satire, but rather to offer a new, idealized vision of peace within standard religious and patriotic musical settings, or, as Thierry Coté has described, “to transmit a

⁶⁷ Flora Bullock, letter accompanying “A Song for Peace,” January 6, 1937, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁶⁸ Both texts were sent to Roosevelt by Florine Folsom, January 4, 1934.

⁶⁹ Fleur Conkling, “Peace Hymn,” [excerpted from *Music of Many Lands and Peoples*, ed. Osbourne McConathy, John W. Beattie, and Russell V. Morgan (New York: Silver, Burdett, and Company, 1932), 254, where it appears under the heading, “Our Homeland,” a section of religious and patriotic songs]; and *Hail, Peace Victorious*, arr. Wallingford Riegger (New York: G. Schirmer, 1933), February 15, 1934, ER papers, FDR Library. Fleur Conkling was the pen name of Mrs. Jefferson Kiel Barnekov.

⁷⁰ Alonso, *Peace as a Women’s Issue*, 100.

⁷¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), xii.

⁷² See Les Cleveland, *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 19–20; and Robert J. Kodosky, “Musical Mélée: Twentieth-Century America’s Contested Wartime Soundtrack,” in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, ed. Jonathan C. Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2013), 74–76.

message of hope to listeners, paint a picture of the world as it is and as it should be, and help them envision a better future.”⁷³

Though women’s songs were often a response to Roosevelt’s commentary, the poetic and rhetorical strategies used in their lyrics provided little opportunity for explaining in any detail the means by which peace could be achieved. For example, Roosevelt’s belief in rational solutions to world conflict through cooperative structures such as the League of Nations or an international police force was not a source of musical or poetic inspiration for women. James Garratt notes that many commentators find that protest songs are incapable of providing “detailed analysis of social problems,” and women songwriters were similarly more inspired by peaceful ideals than political specifics.⁷⁴ Although the primary leaders of the women’s peace movement, such as Addams, Catt, and numerous others, were deeply involved in collaboration with female leaders in other countries and saw themselves as world citizens,⁷⁵ most amateur songwriters from across the country did not, and thus their songs contain little or no sense of women’s international activities. In addition, Roosevelt’s oft-stated idea that economic stability and justice help to prevent war likewise occurs rarely in the songs, though one anonymous prayer for the end of international strife includes the refrain: “Thou hast bless’d our America with a plentiful store / why couldn’t man share ’t with some neighbor next door[?].” Women’s patriotic songs more often treated national programs that had directly touched Americans’ lives during the Depression, such as the National Recovery Administration, and their peace songs suggested that the issues surrounding war were specifically American problems.⁷⁶ In contrast, Roosevelt believed that peace would come from international engagement, a theme she stressed when she spoke to a meeting of the NCCCW in 1938.⁷⁷ The increasing tensions in Europe strengthened her attitude; during a 1939 press conference, she stated that women’s organizations could achieve more by becoming international, stating, “women who live in a country which is not menaced by war cannot achieve a great deal by talking by themselves and passing resolutions.”⁷⁸

Later songs reflected the First Lady’s growing emphasis on increasing armaments in preparation for a possible war. For example, Winifred Mae Heckman’s aptly titled, “We don’t want war but our land’s worth fighting for,” from 1940 was a direct response to the Pittsburgh press reporting Roosevelt’s comment, “anyone who is not sure now that the United States is worth fighting for is never going to be willing to fight for the United States.”⁷⁹ Though penned earlier, Mrs. Dale Cogswell’s song, “War No More,” reflects the careful negotiation of Roosevelt’s position; in spite of its title, it is actually a song calling for marine recruitment while assuring mothers that their sons’ enlistment will ensure the world’s peace:

You mothers, now need have no fear
To let the son you hold so dear

⁷³ Thierry Coté, “Popular Musicians and Their Songs and Threats to National Security: A World Perspective,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 44, no. 4 (2011): 736, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00860.x>.

⁷⁴ James Garratt, *Music and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 133, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139505963>.

⁷⁵ Carrie A. Foster, *The Women Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915–1946* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 6.

⁷⁶ Peace songs were sent to Roosevelt from individuals. There is no indication that they had any relationship to government programs, such as the Federal Music Project or the Works Progress Administration.

⁷⁷ Jessie Ash Arndt, “U.S. Must End Isolation to Act for Peace, Mrs. Roosevelt Asserts at Conference on War,” *Washington Post*, January 20, 1938.

⁷⁸ October 10, 1939, quoted in *The White House Press Conferences of Eleanor Roosevelt*, 130.

⁷⁹ Mrs. Winifred Mae Heckman, “We don’t want war but our land’s worth fighting for,” September 30, 1940, ER papers, FDR Library. Heckman sent Roosevelt a newspaper article entitled “U.S. Worth Fighting For’ First Lady Tells Women,” published three days earlier.

Join the Marines; an education
That’s the finest in the nation,
For we’ll have war no more.

Cogswell wrote that her song had cheered up a forty-year-old pregnant and ill military mother, who had been disturbed by the image of battleships on military postcards.⁸⁰

Women’s motivation for sending their music to the White House most often stemmed from their heartfelt desire to help Roosevelt in working for peace and from a genuine belief in the power of their music to influence others. In 1939, Ruth Prindle wrote to Roosevelt, “Having read in last evening’s paper that you would like to know in what way the women of this country might help to prevent war, I am enclosing a song . . . the lyrics and music of which I have composed myself with the hope that it might do some good at the present time with war threatening in Europe to preserve peace and inspire peace in the minds of people here and abroad as well.” Prindle assured Roosevelt that she was free to use the song “if you think it will be of any help in the present crisis.”⁸¹ Cora Gladish breathlessly penned an entreaty to promote her peace song, “Stars on the Blue,” assuming that the First Lady would share her enthusiasm for it: “You would not miss a glorious opportunity to start this . . . song from the White House if possible. . . . The music is good. Everyone hails the words. Anything you can do will be for our country and the world.”⁸² Many women envisioned that their works would unite people in what Roosevelt and other activists called “the will to peace.” A 1934 speech by the First Lady suggests that she believed in the worth of art for national development, if not specifically for peace, and in a radio address the same year she praised peoples’ choruses as part promoting the happy spirit of community life.⁸³ Peace song composers likewise envisioned the power of their output sung collectively within American communities. Conkling hoped that her “Peace Hymn” would be “sung in the churches of the land,” and Herbert had heard a performance of “No Blackout for Peace,” with a band and a chorus of four hundred, and declared, “This song will do good for Peace.” Women had faith that the music itself had the power to effect change and wrote that renditions of their offerings would unite all American citizens; Heckman described writing “We Don’t Want War” “with the hope of the whole nation singing it.”

Kate Firth’s song, “Women,” sent to Roosevelt in 1938, expresses many of the themes in her writings about peace.⁸⁴ Firth enjoyed hearing Roosevelt’s radio broadcasts and mailed her song when she heard on “Women in the news’ that you were trying to show the world what Democracy can do.” Clearly an amateur songwriter, Firth had tried to have her work published through Songmart and complained that “men do not want to publish a women’s song, but maybe you can use it to help the cause of Peace.” Like the other composers of peace songs, she told the First Lady that “It is my desire to help in my small way,” and her letter summarizes the position of peace groups who highlighted women’s traditional roles: “We women suffer so much in war so we women ought to stop it. There are plenty of us if we only get together and work together for every mother’s son.” Firth’s simple song, written somewhat crudely in pencil on pages from a manuscript book, begins by supporting women’s domestic duties, such as raising children and serving meals.

⁸⁰ Mrs. Dale Cogswell, letter and “War No More,” May 3, 1934, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁸¹ Ruth Prindle, letter accompanying “Try Living Each Day With a Smile,” September 29, 1939, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁸² Cora Gladish, letter accompanying “Stars on the Blue (Song Memorial),” music by H. O. Wheeler, 1934, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁸³ “The New Governmental Interest in the Arts,” *American Magazine of Art* (September 1934), in *Courage in a Dangerous World: The Political Writings of Eleanor Roosevelt*, ed. Allida Black (New York: Columbia University, 1999), 26–28; and “Music and American Youth,” Radio Speech, February 3, 1935, speech and article file, ER Papers, FDR Library.

⁸⁴ Kate M. P. Firth, letter and “Women,” September 28, 1938, ER papers, FDR Library.

But by the end of the first verse, the lyrics assert that women “Could rule the nation and all creation / Make peace in the world a realization.” The second verse describes women’s leadership, bringing a new day of “green fields, not battle fields.” The chorus posits women united, ruling in power:

Women, Women, the nation’s defense
 Must stand together in every sense
 Women must use an iron hand
 Women must learn to rule the land.

Although the text focuses on American women, the cover design that Firth supplied for her song consisted of women cut out of magazines labeled American, English, French, Spanish, Russian, Italian [sic], and German around an American flag (see Figure 1). She explained, “This is to be women of all nations. . . . Women to clasp hands around the world.” Both Firth’s music and her imagery reflect the goals of the American women’s peace movement as well as the international outlook expressed by its leaders and by Roosevelt herself.



Figure 1: Kate M. P. Firth, cover design for “Women,” archival photocopy (original no longer extant), in Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, FDR Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York.

The largest number of peace songs were sent to Roosevelt in the years 1938 to 1940. After the United States entered World War II, peace songs almost entirely vanished from Roosevelt’s correspondence, replaced by the hundreds of pro-victory songs she received. The disappearance of peace music parallels the decline in membership in women’s peace organizations during the War. By 1943, sixty branches of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom had disbanded, and its membership dropped from

fourteen thousand to less than four thousand by the War’s end.⁸⁵ The NCCCW likewise waned, and in 1943 became the Women’s Action Committee for Victory and Lasting Peace. Songs sent to Roosevelt describing international cooperation in the early 1940s were typically about countries uniting to achieve military dominance; this approach is aptly captured in Jane Oliver’s 1942 “United Nations Anthem,” which calls for freedom for all nations, righting the indignities of allies, and “peace on earth in victory.”⁸⁶ Mentions of peace were often merely in reference to envisioning the time after the War or linked to stereotypical longing for soldiers to return home.

In spite of the optimistic beliefs of the songwriters, their peace songs did not delay World War II or become a lasting part of American culture; as Allan Moore has noted, “To sing a song is not, in itself, to land a blow.”⁸⁷ Eleanor Roosevelt did not endorse any specific song sent to her, and within her voluminous correspondence, the songwriters made little or no immediate impact other than receiving an official reply from her dutiful secretarial staff. Given the seriousness of their global concerns and that peace songs generally did not articulate specific actions beyond female unity, leaders of the peace movement seem to have felt that artistic representations of their goals were insignificant in contrast to more direct political efforts.⁸⁸ At the first Conference of the NCCCW in 1925, Carrie Chapman Catt expressed disdain for the naïveté of similar sorts of offerings sent to its program committee: “We have received many plans whose authors believe they have pointed out the only way to perpetuate peace. They have come in the form of poetry, song, prayer, books and legal documents. The weakness of most them is indicated by their apparent failure to have made converts.”⁸⁹ Yet in 1940, Tess Helburn, in engaging the WILPF’s Dorothy Detzer for a “Keep America Out of War Congress” in Chicago, noted that she had also arranged for “a song leader for peace songs” and an organist, suggesting that music continued to be an expected part of women’s peace events despite the decrease in production of new songs by women that Roosevelt’s papers might suggest.⁹⁰

As the songs sent to Eleanor Roosevelt demonstrate, the women’s peace movement between the two World Wars influenced the production of lyrics and musical compositions by women, most of them amateur songwriters, who shared the belief that cultural change could be brought about through both female unity and artistic means. Roosevelt served as a highly public representation of women’s desire for world peace. Women found her political activism inspirational, and they put their creative responses to her speeches and writings about peace into their music. Their songs and choral works for her capture the ideals of the women’s peace movement and its response to World War I, women’s growing wariness of the dangers brewing in Europe, and a deep belief both in Roosevelt’s influence and in the power of women and music to help transform the violent course of history.

⁸⁵ Alonso, *Peace as a Women’s Issue*, 146.

⁸⁶ Jane Oliver, “United Nations Anthem,” September 20, 1942, ER papers, FDR Library.

⁸⁷ Allan Moore, “Conclusion: A Hermeneutics of Protest Music,” in *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, 387.

⁸⁸ Scholarship on the women’s peace movement in the first half of the twentieth century rarely considers the arts. For example, the WILPF’s Arts Committee receives no mention in Foster’s *The Women Warriors*.

⁸⁹ *Report of the Conference on the Cause and Cure of War Held in Washington, D.C., January 18–24, 1925* (Washington, DC: s. n., 1925), 28.

⁹⁰ Letter from Tess Helburn to Dorothy Detzer, May 3, 1940, WILPF, Swarthmore Peace Collection.

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