

“Better Speech for Better Americans: Manhood, Citizenship, and the Section of Defects of Hearing and Speech after World War I”

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The Disability History Association Graduate Student Travel Award made possible my attendance at the conference titled *No End to War: Cultures of Violence and Care in the Aftermath of the First World War* on January 24th, 2019 in Manchester, UK. *No End to War* was a joint conference between the University of Manchester, the University of Leeds, Manchester Metropolitan University, the Society for the Study of French History, the Society for the Social History of Medicine, and the Royal Historical Society. It included prominent scholars in the fields of disability history, history of medicine, and histories of colonial violence and offered a cross-disciplined approach to viewing the immediate postwar years.

I presented my paper titled, “Better Speech for Better Americans: Manhood, Citizenship, and the Section of Defects of Hearing and Speech after World War I” on a panel with Marjorie Gehrhardt and Justin Fantauzzo, with Ana Carden-Coyne as the chair. The paper is a chapter of my dissertation, which more broadly examines the sensory dynamics of post-war American rehabilitation. Gehrhardt, a scholar of facially wounded veterans presented her work on veteran’s organizations and blinded veterans in France, and Fantauzzo spoke on malaria and insanity among wounded British soldiers.

In “Better Speech for Better Americans” I investigate the program to correct speech and teach lip reading to veterans at US Army General Hospital No. 11, Cape May, New Jersey. The Section for Defects of Hearing and Speech was a relatively small program – consisting of fewer than one hundred and fifty men with numbers increasing consistently in the 1920s. I argue that its importance should not be lost in larger conceptions of government rehabilitation. Instead,

military efforts to survey and send all deaf and speech patients to Cape May, and their policy of continued observation in the 1920s signifies the importance the American state and society placed on communication in the rehabilitation process.

My chapter positions the program within broader early twentieth century debates surrounding citizenship, deafness, and speech, and shows how state and non-state actors infused moral assumptions into communication standards in seeking to re-integrate First World War veterans to civilian life. Speech was a critical component of American citizenship. And finally, this chapter is part of my broader attempt to explore the histories of rehabilitation through the senses, within the walls of the hospitals and clinics between 1918 and 1930.

The Disability History Association travel grant was critical to my ability to travel to Manchester for the conference. I had a tremendous opportunity to get constructive feedback from scholars like Ana Carden-Coyne, John Horne, and Jessica Meyer, and had the opportunity to listen to and engage with the work of historians in and outside my field at evening events. I also enjoyed my off time exploring the city's long history, including Chetham's Library where Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels frequented, and benefitted from the proximity of Liverpool, which proved to be a good day trip. The Disability History Association's generous support went a long way toward helping further my project toward completion through attending the *No End to War* conference, and for that I am truly grateful.