

AN AMERICAN AND NOTHING ELSE: The Great War and the Battle for National Belonging



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When the United States entered World War I, the call of mass mobilization permeated every aspect of American life. Americans answered this call—for service and sacrifice, money and time, life and loyalty—with deep ambivalence; an ambivalence reflecting the divisive and singular nature of the conflict, but reflecting too the conflicting interests of emerging populations in a rapidly changing nation.

The war raised new issues and exacerbated old ones already cleaving the country, adding strain to the question of national ideals and national identity—of what it meant to be an American. Military and civilian campaigns alike relied on oppressive and exclusionary tactics to uphold these urgent patriotic projects. As President Woodrow Wilson vowed to make the world safe for democracy, home-front battles for basic rights and liberties belied the integrity of that pledge.

An American and Nothing Else: The Great War and the Battle for National Belonging explores this moment of paradox at its centennial, as reflected in speeches, pamphlets, photographs, posters, popular songs, and other examples of propaganda and protest from the period. “100% Americanism” marginalized innumerable civilians and soldiers, even while soliciting their uncritical support. Their manifold response of dedication and dissent cast criticism on American hypocrisy and energized debates about belonging and inclusion. This intense period of cohesion and tension fundamentally shaped American society in the century that followed.

Tuesday, February 13, 4–6 pm

Opening reception and discussion with exhibition curator Anna Duensing, Graduate Student.

Thursday, February, 15, 4–6 pm

Keynote address by historian Adriane Lentz-Smith, reception to follow

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