

Women and the Great War

Please try to do the reading by Tuesday, as it will be a combined lecture-discussion class since we are seeing a film on Thursday

Laura Lee Downs, Women's Strikes and Politics of Popular Egalitarianism in France

According to Downs, how did the fact that it was women rather than men who went on strike in the spring of 1917 influence later historians to dismiss the importance of these strikes, preferring to see the mostly male strikes of 1918 as more a more important moment in the history of the French labor movement?

How did commonly accepted ideas about sexual difference influence both syndicalist and management's reactions to the women's strikes?

Why were French officials (Police, employers, the state) as well as the organized male labor movement reluctant to see the women's strikes as "political"? How did they explain the women's motivations for striking?

More Minerva than Mars, Steven Hause

Why did French feminists think that the war would be a major turning point in their fight for legal equality?

Why, according to Hause, was the war actually a setback to feminist aspirations? Explain the social, cultural and economic reasons that Hause gives for the failure of the feminist movement to win any kind of lasting victories during the war years.

What do you think explains the gap between feminists' optimism and the reality that ensued?