

# “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier”: Singing Against the War

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By 1915, Americans began debating the need for military and economic preparations for war. Strong opposition to “preparedness” came from isolationists, socialists, pacifists, many Protestant ministers, German Americans, and Irish Americans (who were hostile to Britain). One of the hit songs of 1915, “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier,” by lyricist Alfred Bryan and composer Al Piantadosi, captured widespread American skepticism about joining in the European war. Meanwhile, interventionists and militarists like former president Theodore Roosevelt beat the drums for preparedness. Roosevelt’s retort to the popularity of the antiwar song was that it should be accompanied by the tune “I Didn’t Raise My Girl to Be a Mother.” He suggested that the place for women who opposed war was “in China—or by preference in a harem—and not in the United States.”

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Ten million soldiers to the war have gone,

Who may never return again.

Ten million mothers' hearts must break,

For the ones who died in vain.

Head bowed down in sorrow in her lonely years,

I heard a mother murmur thro' her tears:

*Chorus:*

I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier,

I brought him up to be my pride and joy,

Who dares to put a musket on his shoulder,

To shoot some other mother's darling boy?

Let nations arbitrate their future troubles,

It's time to lay the sword and gun away,

There'd be no war today,  
If mothers all would say,  
I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier.

*(Chorus)*

What victory can cheer a mother's heart,  
When she looks at her blighted home?

What victory can bring her back,

All she cared to call her own?

Let each mother answer in the year to be,

Remember that my boy belongs to me!

*(Chorus)*

Source: Al Pianadosi and Alfred Bryan, "I Didn't Raise My Boy To Be a Soldier." Recording: Edison Collection, Library of Congress.