Ideas about women, health care, and healing in Western cultures have religious and cultural origins reaching back to ancient times. Nursing as a profession began about 150 years ago led by social reformers, like Florence Nightingale, in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Hygeia, the Greek goddess of health, is often thought of as the first nurse. Daughter of Asclepius, the god of medicine, Hygeia was in charge of cleanliness and preventative medicine in the religious cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world.

A career in nursing offered new opportunities for women such as economic independence and freedom from constricting domestic lives.

Add a black eye to whatever he's already got! England, 1950s
This card uses two common British nurse stereotypes, the older 'battle-axe,' a frustrated spinster and strict disciplinarian, and the young 'sexy' nurse, to create comic effect. Sexy nurses were frequently shown as worldly wise, working class blonde women, who were 'fair game' for their male patients' unwanted advances.

Promotional postcard commemorating Florence Nightingale shortly after her death, ca. 1910
Florence Nightingale's nightly care of the wounded during the Crimean War (1853-1856) led to her epithet 'the Lady with the Lamp.' Afterwards, Nightingale established the first modern school of nursing at St. Thomas's Hospital in London.

The Real Angel of Mons, ca. 1915
Produced by Inter-Art Co., London

Armed intervention. I like your cheek! United States, 1917
Trained nurses administer the Finsen Light Treatment at the London Hospital, ca. 1900
A career in nursing offered new opportunities for women such as economic independence and freedom from constricting domestic lives.

Nursing recruitment postcard, 1999
Produced by Suburban Hospital, Bethesda, MD

The Real Angel of Mons, ca. 1915
Produced by Inter-Art Co., London

Operating team, 1951
Produced by US Army Nurse Corps

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As the 20th century progressed, advertising images of nurses frequently featured increasingly saucy, sexualized representations of women. Since the 1980s, nurses have become far more aware of their public image and are keen to update the archetypes that have dominated in the past.

Popular art during the 19th century favored a sentimental use of nursing archetypes such as the 'angel' or 'mother.' As the 20th century progressed, advertising images of nurses frequently featured increasingly saucy, sexualized representations of women. Since the 1980s, nurses have become far more aware of their public image and are keen to update the archetypes that have dominated in the past.

The National Library of Medicine developed and produced this exhibition. Guest curated by Julia Hallam, PhD. Exhibition design by The Design Minds. www.nlm.nih.gov/picturesofnursing
THE POSTCARD is a fleeting art form influenced by popular ideas and fashions in visual style. Nurses and nursing have been frequent subjects for over one hundred years. In fact, no other art form has illustrated the nursing profession so profusely and in such variety.

These images of nurses and nursing are informed by cultural values; ideas about women, men, and work; and by attitudes toward class, race, and national differences.

*Pictures of Nursing* investigates the hold these images exert on the public imagination—then and now.

**THE ZWERDLING COLLECTION**

The History of Medicine Division Zwerdling Postcard Collection is a unique archive of 2,588 postcards featuring images of nurses and the nursing profession from around the world produced between 1893 and 2011.

FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS, men have undertaken aspects of nursing work often in all-male institutions such as religious organizations and the military. Yet, their contributions are largely invisible.

Children learned that nursing is women’s work through games, toys, and stories. Girls were brought up to be nurses, while boys were raised to be soldiers and doctors.

**SOCIAL REFORMERS** in the mid to latter half of the 19th century believed that White, middle-class respectability should form the basis of the “ideal” nurse.

In countries where missionary women worked as teachers and nurses, these hierarchies of class and race became entrenched. For people from the area, segregation and second-class status were consequences of this ordering of human worth and value.