

*Cohesion and Disintegration
from the Great War to Vietnam*

Brian M Downing

PHILIPPINE INSURRECTION 1898-1902 • BOXER REBELLION 1899-1901 • GREAT SIEGE OF PORT ARTHUR 1894-1895
1965 • LEBANON 1982-1984 • GRENADA 1983 • PERSIAN GULF 1990-1991 • MIAMI 1994

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You cannot replace the dogma of patriotism, the tradition of courage, and the shrine of honor by the rules of political economy.

Alexander Herzen
Complete Works, vol 5

We've had a lot of people who were supposed to be great heroes, and you know damn well they weren't. But it's good for the country to have heroes to look up to.

John Ford

A philosophy of absolute freedom, based on a denial of any necessary relationship with the past, is usually a philosophy of the absurd; the signs of this freedom are not joy and triumph, but nausea and dread; and its possessors are not creators but Strangers and Outsiders of the universe. Few men, young or old, ordinary or extraordinary, can live contentedly, much less joyously, without some relationship to time other than total freedom.

Kenneth Keniston
The Uncommitted

I think you guys are going to have to come up with a lot of new lies, or people just aren't going to want to go on living.

Kurt Vonnegut
Slaughter-house Five

Preface

Modern war takes place within a context of cultural “modernism” and indeed is one of its causes.

Paul Fussell,
Modern War

W Somerset Maugham observed in *The Razor's Edge*, “For men and women are not only themselves; they are the region in which they were born, the city apartment or the farm in which they learnt to walk, the games they played as children, the old wives’ tales they overheard, the food they ate, the schools they attended, the sports they followed, the poets they read, and the God they believed in.” He went on to describe how the Great War shaped Americans and Europeans and how the confidence and faith of prewar years was undermined.

At a time when military service has little relevance for most except as the lore of grandparents, the idea of wars decisively changing America might sound implausible. Undaunted, I’ve argued that wars brought economic booms, dislocated populations, changed the social structure, altered norms and beliefs, affected nationalist sentiments, helped minorities and women, reduced formalism in life, and opened the doors to new thinking. More to the point, wars propelled America from a traditional past into a postmodern one of atomization, fragmentation, secularization, and normlessness (or anomie). Modernity, the object of so much study in the middle of the last century, was a brief way-station between an structured past and an incoherent present. Traditional beliefs and institutions can be deemed good or bad, fair or unjust, universal or particularistic. I hope to show them more complex than that and to note their vital integrative role. Nothing has emerged to take their place. They cannot be brought back.

Parts of this study might seem to sentimentalize the past. There’s only been an attempt to convey what most Americans felt for their country, as in the lore of grandparents. Any civilization deserves appreciation of its achievements, faults, and sources of decline. Independent thinking did not always sit well in traditional America. Once again Somerset Maugham is helpful. Later in *The Razor's Edge*, a veteran of the Great War, dissociated from his world, looks wistfully to the past: “I’ve come too late into a world too old. I should have been born in the Middle Ages when faith was a matter of course; then my way would have been clear to me and I’d have sought to

enter the order." Somerset Maugham arches an eyebrow: "I think it's just as well you weren't born in the Middle Ages. You'd undoubtedly have perished at the stake."

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2023 Preface

In the twenty years since this book's publication, America has continued to fragment. The pace has quickened. Egocentrism, polarization, racial antagonisms, incivility, and violence have worsened greatly. Violent crime is appalling and often senseless. Suicide rates continue to climb. Politics is increasingly antagonistic, pointless, and ominous. Armed militias are proliferating. Politicians don't feel safe. Generals stand with the Constitution but cannot speak for the rank and file.

Traditional America as presented in the opening here has changed in numbers and temperament. A portion of it has been co-opted by a cult-like populist movement that opposes most changes since the wars. The populist cult courted traditional America to avoid political marginalization. The engagement was short, the marriage regrettable. Licentious cultists force decent traditionalists to perform one degrading act after another. No separation or divorce is in sight, only more degradation and dishonor. They're moving the country toward authoritarianism – unthinkable at the end of World War Two and reprehensible to those still with us who fought in it.

Chapter One

Traditional America

The meaning of the American experience will remain forever opaque to those who, once they see through the most simple-minded version of American idealism, can find only violence and self-interest in its stead.

Robert N Bellah
The Broken Covenant

Rising Glory of the American Republic!

Headline from the War of 1812

Understanding the past as most Americans once regarded establishes a starting point to help understand later changes. The beliefs and sentiments may seem provincial and naive but any traditional society looks that way from a modern or post-modern perspective. America was once a coherent nation based on shared values and faith in institutions. Beginning in the colonial period, and continuing in later centuries, an array of values and institutions – family, community, nationalism, religiousness, and progress – came into being. Though never universally believed in, they were widely believed in – by people of many social and national origins. They had a sacred place in lives, giving critical senses of identity, integration and a basis for judging right and wrong.

Traditional America is now largely gone.

Family

The family was perhaps the most central part of traditional America, playing a decisive role in the lives of settlers, immigrants, and emancipated servants and slaves. It served as a work unit, instiller of values, place of aid in hard times, and source of affection and idealism. In colonial times, the family was closely tied to local

church and community. Its beliefs were often indistinguishable from those around them. By the nineteenth century, however, a measure of separation emerged and borders between family, community, and church were noticeable. Strict discipline, the legacy of Calvinist views of children as wicked and in need of a firm hand, was thought beneficial to all.¹

Prior to industrialization, the family was the basic economic unit. Members worked on farms, in small shops, or engaged in cooperative efforts to eke out a living. It imposed a tough regimen. The workplace was in or near the home so family members, including wives and children, served as overseers, trainees, and hands. Just as the peasant's plot had been dutifully worked by the family in the old country, so too was the family business.² Women may have been relegated to running the household in the traditional family but this had a different meaning than it had in the mid-twentieth century. Women did piecework, raised dairy animals, ran small businesses, and even rode shotgun on treks across the plains.³

Amid the hardship and uncertainty of an unfamiliar land, the family served as a shield. Struggling members could find refuge until better times, as could those laid off or injured. The family was obliged to care for the aged and infirm. Turning to community relief was a last resort and a shameful one, suggesting irresponsibility and failure. Norms drew from old-world traditions of family obligation and mutual help.⁴

The family was an important place of education and socialization. Public schools began in some areas

¹ Helena M Wall, *Fierce Communion: Family and Community in Early America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 86-125; Carl N Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 86-110; Philip J Greven, Jr, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), pp. 72-99.

² WI Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984 [1918-20]), pp. 65-79; WI Thomas, Robert E Park, and Herbert A. Miller, *Old World Traits Transplanted* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1921); Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), pp. 83-105.

³ John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 89-108; Robert D Slayton, *Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 80-89; Ruth B Moynihan, Susan Armitage, and Christine Fischer Dichamp, eds, *So Much to Be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontiers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Marlene Springer and Haskell Springer, eds, *Plains Woman: The Diary of Martha Farnsworth, 1882-1992* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 109-16.

⁴ Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant*, pp. 65-79.

during the first half of the nineteenth century and parochial ones cropped up in later decades but for many rural and small-town dwellers, even by the early twentieth century the family was the main locus of education. The family, usually women members, passed on basic skills. The family conveyed general outlooks and dispositions, perhaps even more valuable at the time than the three Rs. It taught discipline, confidence, and optimism that enabled members to bear up and, with time and a little luck, to prosper. Transmitted by family lore of experiences and deeds, this outlook also conveyed a sense of personal rootedness, generational continuity, and obligation to others.⁵

The family provided a basis of affection. Arranged marriages were found in immigrant communities but were not common outside them. For most, marriage was based on romantic love – commonly reflected in songs, poems, personal correspondence, and diaries. Courtship rituals stressed the gradual revelation of romantic feeling, earnestness, and reliability. Sentimental attachments predominated over egotistical gratifications, to say nothing of sexual ones. Familial warmth charged many other parts of life with romantic sentiment. Leaders, the community, and the nation took on emotional warmth instilled in the home.⁶

Community

America was once a patchwork of communities, seemingly isolated but connected by commerce and sentiments. Main Street, as the expression went, ran down the middle of every town. Well prior to the town's nineteenth-century heyday, dissident groups settled in groups in the colonies. They brought strong ties to one other. John

⁵ See Maris A Vinovskis, "Family and Schooling in Colonial and Nineteenth-Century America," in Tamara Hareven and Andrejs Plakans, eds, *Family History at the Crossroads* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 19-37; Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 75-106; Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), pp. 185-229; Elizabeth H Pleck, "The Two-Parent Household: Black Family Structure in Late Nineteenth-Century Boston," in Michael Gordon, ed, *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective* (New York: St Martin's, 1973), pp. 152-77.

⁶ On immigrant marriage see Slayton, *Back of the Yards*, pp. 65ff. On romantic love see Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization: Life and Thought in the United States Today* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), pp. 582-84; Ellen K Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987); Springer and Springer, eds, *Plains Woman*, pp. 21-60; Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: WW Norton, 1977), pp. 3-4. Lasch and others argue that the affective role of the family grew in importance as the family became less an economic unit and more a "haven in a heartless world." See also Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant*, pp. 94-95; Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, pp. 43-65.

Winthrop professed:

We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same bond. . . . For we must consider that we shall be as a city on a hill.⁷

Many soon grew uncomfortable with these settlements and founded new ones. Roger Williams developed a theory of government based not on a state of nature but on the realities of colonial life – cooperation and consensus were crucial for survival. Local government was a rough democracy in which town members decided matters of common importance such as taxation and magistrates. Many observers, including Samuel Adams, saw the New England town meeting as the purest form of democracy. Others saw it as divinely ordained.⁸ Disdain for it came later.

Towns spread from the coastline throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, driven by dissent from Puritan rigidity, the influx of the Scotch-Irish, and the attraction of free land. New communities spread into woodlands and trans-Appalachian regions. The shared rigors of the trek, the need to provide common protection by building blockhouses and militias, and cooperation in putting up cabins and barns instilled a sense of interdependence. A political community emerged, often based on the town meetings. Common customs and usages enforced by public opinion were far more important than law and contract. This was the America that de Tocqueville saw: a quilt work of towns and settlements, governing themselves through norms and moral pressures, what he called “habits of the heart.” He contrasts these settlements to European villages, where an aristocracy or state handled matters and thwarted local democracy. “I am of the opinion that a centralized

⁷ Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 5-7; Kai T Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: John Wiley, 1966), pp. 33-64; Richard Lingeman, *Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620-the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), pp. 15-62; Winthrop S Hudson, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life* Second Edition (New York: Scribner's, 1973), pp. 10-58.

⁸ Lingeman, *Small Town America*, pp. 25-48; Richard L Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 54-134; Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1685-1800* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 155-205; Vernon L Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), I: 62-75, 118-25, 233-47. Parrington, a progressive historian, saw these communities as democracies that were stifled by the reaction after Shays's Rebellion. Perry Miller found this overstated and typical of progressives: “On this matter there is no middle. Parrington simply did not know what he was talking about.” See *Errand into the Wilderness*, pp. 17-47.

administration is fit only to enervate the nations in which it exists, by incessantly diminishing their local spirit. . . . It may help admirably the transient greatness of a man, but not the durable prosperity of a nation.”⁹

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century millions of immigrants arrived, establishing their own communities, primarily in cities. Again, immigrants brought Old World traditions. The horizon of European peasants had rarely extended past their village. Their character, outlook, and expectations were circumscribed by village boundaries. Beliefs, dress, manners, and idioms reflected local particularities. Rural life in the Old World built a cooperative ethic: tilling the local noble’s lands, scheming to *avoid* tilling the noble’s land, working common pasturage, and periodically redistributing land. From these villages, millions of immigrants streamed into New York, Chicago, and other burgeoning cities.

The prospect of millions of peasants leaving their villages and coming to strange cities thousands of miles away alarmed turn-of-the-century social thinkers. Rapid change, they feared, would surely result in rootlessness, crime, and moral decay. Their concerns proved to be largely unfounded. Community and moral order came into being or persisted from older forms. Immigrants from Europe and the South who came north around the turn of the century often settled with people from the same areas they left, sometimes from the same village, retaining continuities.¹⁰ Unfamiliar and foreboding surroundings encouraged banding together to share news from old homelands, worries of daily life, and information regarding work. They formed mutual-aid societies to help the elderly, the sick, those injured in accidents, and with funeral expenses. Community stores, aware that customers lived close to margins, extended credit until payday when customers felt obliged to settle

⁹ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, I: 53-91; Ray Allen Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), pp. 75-145; Curti, *The Making of an American Community*, pp. 38-47, 297; Gutman, *The Black Family*, pp. 332-34; US Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (New York: Library of America, 1990), pp. 152-53.

¹⁰ Such continuity among rural folk migrating to the city can also be found in early twentieth-century Russia. See Geroid Tanquary Robinson, *Rural Russia under the Old Régime: A History of the Landlord-Peasant World and a Prologue to the Peasant Revolution of 1917* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 107-9; Robert Eugene Johnson, *Peasant and Proletarian: The Working Class of Moscow in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Leicester, UK: University of Leicester Press, 1979), pp. 28-31.

accounts for which they were often thanked with a small gift.¹¹

Immigrants held fast to religion. Sacred artifacts decorated home and workplace. Holy days were important community festivals. Parochial schools, staffed by ethnic clerics, taught the old country's language, history, and customs. In the age before mass media, local theater gave expression to old ways. Neighborhood newspapers figured highly in immigrant communities, often keeping readers better apprised of events in County Cork or Warsaw than those in New York or Washington. In keeping old ways alive, they built communities that unwittingly rooted them in America.¹²

Mutual help led to vital support networks. Welfare was community-based, locally organized, and administered by town notables, churches, lodges, and veteran associations. Rural towns supported the elderly and indigent, often grudgingly, and ever suspicious that some recipients weren't pulling their weight. Since everyone knew everyone else, there was considerable pressure to get off the dole and avoid sanctions ranging from an annoyed glance to irate expulsion. Similarly, in ethnic neighborhoods, religious organizations provided money (often secretly, owing to the shame) to the less fortunate. Settlement houses extended an ethos of mutual help from the prosperous middle class (including the University of Chicago's economics department) to the working poor.¹³

¹¹ Slayton, *Back of the Yards*, pp. 78-80, 115-16; Thomas et al, *Old World Traits Transplanted*, pp. 124-40; David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 96-111; Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1950* (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth, 1991), pp. 116-62; James R Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, pp. 83-105; Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* Second Edition (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), pp. 150-58; John G Clark et al, *Three Generations in Twentieth Century America: Family, Community, and Nation* (Homewood, Ill: Dorsey Press, 1977), pp. 32-33.

¹² Slayton, *Back of the Yards*, pp. 49-52; Handlin, *The Uprooted*, pp. 160-66; Jay P Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Notre Dame, Ind: Notre Dame University Press, 1983 [1975]), pp. 45-86; Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, pp. 50-74; Clark et al, *Three Generations*, pp. 37-39; Morris Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting: The Social Elements of Urbanism* Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). Janowitz notes the gradual disappearance of the community press as the mass media grew. He expresses concern for ethnic communities.

¹³ Curti, *The Making of an American Community*, pp. 111-12; Wolf, *Urban Village*, pp. 236-38; James West, *Plainville, USA*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), pp. 30-31; Slayton, *Back of the Yards*, pp. 49-52; Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York; Free Press, 1962), pp. 160-61; Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America* (New York: Free Press, 1984), pp. 155-78. Charity and welfare remained community efforts until the Great Depression overwhelmed local agencies.

Communities were held together by moral forces. Being part of a town or neighborhood meant abiding by shared norms. In early colonial times, this entailed a rigid and confining theocratic hand but Puritan strictures did not always endure. Dissenters left to found their own settlements that had looser but nonetheless binding norms. Later non-theocratic settlements also needed basic consensus to survive and refusal to live by them could lead to banishment. What today would be considered intrusive and petty was then considered desirable and vital. Breaking norms led to sanctions. One character in Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel* "wilted under the town's reproveful stare." Stronger sanctions were also present. Feigning infirmity to avoid military service led to one Wisconsin man's virtually complete isolation.¹⁴ Ethnic communities, too, had common norms. Helping each other in the day-to-day effort to get by was routine, one of the rhythms of life. Refusal to help a neighbor or violation of a moral expectation would lead to gossip or loss of credit or dwindling social contacts. Community norms were more important than legal systems. Courts were slow and costly parts of the outside world but the court of social custom was free and swift.¹⁵

Community life provided rootedness, identity, and continuity. People felt part of a living whole, satisfying a basic human need. Each community had its sounds, sights, and smells (good and bad) that established a rhythm to life. Train whistles, the cries of vendors, and Angelus bells told people who they were and what was expected. Life was flavored by local folk wisdom and superstitions regarding child rearing, propitious times for planting crops, and the causes and cures of illnesses. Local knowledge and customs were passed on to the young, providing a sense of continuity. There was a distinctiveness in the houses, street signs (or lack thereof), and layout of neighborhoods, which made for a certain homeliness, but perhaps an appealing one,

¹⁴ Wall, *Fierce Communion*, pp. 13-29. The bulk of her book consists of looking at cases of arbitration and litigation that were exceptions to the rule.

¹⁵ Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966 [1954]), pp. 3-64, 183-84; Curti, *The Making of an American Community*, pp. 111-36; Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant*, pp. 87-88; Margaret Jarman Hagood, *Mothers of the South: Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman* (New York: WW Norton, 1977 [1939]), pp. 170-82; West, *Plainville, USA*, pp. 96-99; Robert S Lynd and Helen M Lynd, *Middletown* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929), pp. 3-17. See Colin M Turnbull's discussion of settling disputes among central African communities in *The Forest People: A Study of the Pygmies of the Congo* (New York: Clarion, 1961), pp. 94-125. Turnbull shows drought and famine breaking down communal norms, resulting in an amoral, atomized social structure in *The Mountain People* (New York: Touchstone, 1972), pp. 155-82. I thank Barrington Moore for these references.

as one might prefer a cantankerous eccentric to an amiable but homogeneous person.¹⁶

Community life was relatively ordered and comprehensible. Demands and expectations were defined and well understood. These towns and neighborhoods may now seem confining and narrow-minded, filled with busy-bodies and ethnocentrics, resistant or hostile to change. However, if one thinks back to the short-lived rigidity of Puritan settlements and reflects on the normlessness of modern life, one might wonder if an agreeable wasn't lost.

Nationalism

It might be wondered how so many disparate communities formed national loyalties. It began with the coalescence of the Atlantic colonies in the late eighteenth century. For most of their history, the colonies had only loose ties with each other, though even looser ones to Britain. The American colonies were far less profitable than the spice and sugar growing ones, making Britain's attention more focused on the lucrative Caribbean – a state of affairs that accustomed Americans to their own ways of doing things.

Contacts among colonies were meager but postal systems and newspapers spread information. Increasing trade, professional associations, and masonic lodges provided social networks. Colonists thought of themselves as a hearty new people who built a separate identity by taming a wilderness. Revivalist movements swept the colonies, emphasizing common faith and destiny. British attempts to assert control and taxation after the French and Indian War made colonists think that freedoms and liberties were in danger and cooperation was needed to protect them. John Adams saw “a direct and formal design on foot to enslave America.” Considerable divisions remained, but a sense of interdependence was coming into being.¹⁷

After seven years of war with Britain, victory increased a sense of pride, separateness, and destiny. Revolutionary figures were depicted in classical imagery as if to say America would take its place alongside Rome. A cult of heroes formed into a pantheon. The War of 1812 gave it more niches. America was distinct from

¹⁶ Atherton, *Main Street*, pp. 181-216; Richard D Altick, *Of a Place and a Time: Remembering Lancaster* (Hamden, Conn: Archon, 1991); Dolan, *The Immigrant Church*, pp. 27-44.

¹⁷ Adams quote from Hudson, *Religion in America*, p. 101. See also Merle Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), pp. 53-58, 92-121; Curti, *Growth of American Thought*, pp. 72-74; Carl Bridenbaugh, *The Spirit of '76: The Growth of American Patriotism before Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 40-72.

Europe, more advanced in many ways, but it had to be elaborated upon and impressed into the hearts of former colonists. A generation of thinkers saw their duty. Van Wyck Brooks captured the outlook:

These were the fortunate days of the youthful republic, when the good old Anglo-American sang-froid had solid facts to base itself upon, – when young men, heirs to the Great Event, knew that they had beaten England twice, although they were too well-bred to mention it, and felt, if they were students and men of letters, that they were volunteers in a nobler war, as builders of a great new civilization.¹⁸

A generation of writers, poets, and painters celebrated the virtues of the young Republic, its natural beauty, gallant leaders, and growing accomplishments. Americans wrote histories of Spain and the Dutch Republic that won respect in European universities. Merriam Webster set out to standardize an American form of English with distinctive spellings and usages.¹⁹

Between 1830 and 1860, historical societies sprang up. Civic organizations constructed memorials to George Washington and the heroes of Bunker Hill. The flag and the *Star Spangled Banner* became widespread. Mythic histories of the founding fathers appeared which were rich in romantic imagery, though lacking in documentation. Accounts of dollars tossed across the Rappahannock and a lad owning up to felling a tree needed no basis in fact. The work was intended to inspire and build. As filmmaker John Ford suggested many years later, print the legend.

Early schools taught respect for the new nation's beliefs and institutions. Textbooks were rich in patriotic imagery, telling students who they were, what they were a part of, and what duties they had. America stood for goodness and hope; Europe was mired in despotism and war. The Constitution and its institutions were made by august figures guided from above. Local democracy was the well-spring of the nation's government and everything else good. People had rights and duties. Citizenship meant involvement in community and nation. The frontier had made the American fighting man second to none; the nation would never lose a war. There was a musical dimension as well. School books were filled with patriotic songs. *The Star Spangled Banner*; *Columbia the*

¹⁸ Brooks, *The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865* (New York: Dutton, 1937), p. 86. See also pp. 135-46, 323-42.

¹⁹ Ruth Miller Elson, *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), pp. 166-85; Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, II: 5-474; Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty*, pp. 30-52; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1991), pp. 17-90; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 67-82.

Gem of the Ocean, and *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* fused esthetic experience and patriotic imagery. As waves of immigrants came in, the effort to instill nationalism became more pronounced. More emphasis on patriotic themes was deemed necessary to break down loyalties to the old country and convert immigrants into citizens.²⁰

Military content stands out. As counterintuitive as it sound today, war has had powerful unifying effects and provided an array of events and imagery that shaped generations of Americans. War rivets national attention and requires fearful costs that call for transcendent meaning. A spectacular outcome on the battlefield builds faith in divine favor. Final victory bonds those who contributed. When William James identified the ultimate effort by which others might be gauged, he coined the phrase “the moral equivalent of war.”²¹

Military conflict played a major role in the development of American nationalism. The Revolutionary War, though fought by a population with many ties to Britain, ended with invigorating senses of pride, unity, and destiny. George Washington, Nathan Hale, Francis Marion, Ethan Allen, John Paul Jones, and others became immortalized. Their deeds and words were on the lips of every schoolboy, as the expression went. Figures such as George III, Cornwallis, and Benedict Arnold circumscribed the limits of American identity, beyond which lay despotism, cruelty, and treachery. Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, and Yorktown were emotionally-charged names, infused with passion and reverence.²²

An important part of the American identity was the satisfying knowledge that they had licked Great Britain. The War of 1812 gave a second opportunity. Though divisive to the point of a secessionist drives in the Northeast, the conflict was popular in the rest of the country. Anti-British sentiment surged once more; provincial sentiment declined. A South Carolinian said, “The War has given strength and splendor to the chain of

²⁰ Curti, *Growth of American Thought*, pp. 396-413; Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty*, pp. 127-28; Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character since the 1880s* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 39-48; Bessie Louise Pierce, *Public Opinion and the Teaching of History in the United States* (New York: Knopf, 1926); Bessie Louise Pierce, *Civic Attitudes in American School Textbooks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), pp. 3-67, 102-50; Handlin, *The Uprooted*, pp. 184-268.

²¹ William James, “The Moral Equivalence of War,” in *Writings, 1902-1910* Bruce Kuklick, ed. (New York: The Library of America, 1987), pp. 1281-93. See also Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969 [1953]), pp. 38-44.

²² Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero Worship* (New York: Scribner’s, 1969 [1941]), pp. 1-16, 50-147.

the Union Local feelings are absorbed in the proud feelings of being an American."²³ Schoolhouses began the practice of flying the flag. Accounts of daring naval encounters by Lawrence and Perry thrilled the public, as did Harrison's triumph at Tippecanoe and Jackson's at New Orleans, where only seven Americans fell while repelling Redcoat regiments. The threat of secession ended and the nation celebrated. Victory propelled Jackson and Harrison to the presidency, as earlier victories had for Washington.

The Civil War profoundly affected nationalism. The Union effort was based on patriotism, and a costly victory solidified it, shaping the nation for a half century. The Union was a sacred, living whole. Seceding from the covenant and attacking Fort Sumter were outrages. On Lincoln's call for volunteers, Northern towns debated, formed a consensus, and provided troops for the cause. Grant recalled events in his home town: "As soon as the news of the call for volunteers reached Galena, posters were stuck up calling for a meeting of the citizens at the courthouse in the evening. Business ceased entirely; all was excitement; for a time there were no party distinctions; all were Union men, determined to avenge the insult to the national flag."²⁴ In the course of the war, speeches and sermons bolstered patriotic sentiment; letters and diaries of Union soldiers exhibit increased devotion to the country; women formed local committees and auxiliaries, entering public life for the first time.²⁵

Triumph strengthened the national community, at least in the North. The Union's beliefs and institutions emerged victorious, exalted, and more sacred. The Civil War was a national war, involving the resources and manpower of the country far more than had any previous war. It involved communities and their newly-formed

²³ Curti, *Roots of American Loyalty*, p. 152; Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 283-98; Donald R Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 29-51. Horace Mann, architect of public education, decried the emphasis on war in school books. It served to "cultivate all the dissocial emotions, and turn the whole current of the mental forces into the channel of destructiveness." Quoted in Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: WW Norton, 1993), p. 149. The emphasis remained in texts.

²⁴ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, p. 152. See also Thomas R Kemp, "Community and War: The Civil War Experience of Two New Hampshire Towns," in Maris A Vinovskis, ed, *Toward a Social History of the Civil War: Exploratory Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 31-77.

²⁵ James M McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 14-29; Curti, *The Making of an American Community*, pp. 131-36; Commager, *The American Mind*, pp. 160-72; J Matthew Gallman, "Voluntarism in Wartime: Philadelphia's Great Central Fair," in Vinovskis, ed, *Social History of the Civil War*, pp. 93-116.

civil associations in a way commercial ties and shared literature never could. The journeys of the local regiment, the deeds of local boys, and the changing tides of war fixed attention on the nation-state.

Community involvement continued well after Lee handed his sword to Grant. Cannons that roared at Gettysburg and Chickamauga stood in front of court houses and in public squares, reminders of the noble effort. The fallen, as a period given to mythic language called them, were honored: locally, by inscribing their names on monuments, nationally, by cemeteries, battlefields, and holidays. A Great Event had come into being. It established a new set of heroes, events, and sacred places that formed a climate of expectations, duties, and reference points.²⁶

World War One increased nationalist sentiment, at least temporarily. Owing to the remoteness of European events, more of it was orchestrated than in the past. U-boats occasionally brought the war close to home but the Somme and Verdun were muffled rumblings, the most recent of a long line of European wars. When war came in 1917, President Wilson deployed thousands of “four-minute men” to travel the country, drawing upon martial spirit from an older era and deploying it across the ocean. The government organized Loyalty Leagues in ethnic communities, where support was questioned. Patriotic marches and spectacles were arranged; dozens of ethnic groups filed past Washington’s tomb and swore allegiance. Immigrants were urged to explain America’s aims, in war and peace, to relatives in the old country.²⁷

Wars bring together people from all regions, backgrounds, and outlooks, turning them into defenders of the nation and their families into supporters of the cause. An array of imagery, symbols, and heroes strengthen patriotism, especially among the young. The McGuffey Readers, with which generations of Americans learned to read and become citizens, were filled with inspirational stories of heroism. The literature that schoolchildren read included Emerson’s *Concord Hymn*, Longfellow’s *Paul Revere’s Ride*, and William Cullen Bryant’s *Song of Marion’s Men*. They sang *The Star Spangled Banner*; and *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. Commager recognizes the old spirit: “The phrases, too vital to be trite, entered into the very fibre of their being, gave them self-assuredness and

²⁶ Gerald F Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987), pp. 266-97; Charles William Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), pp. 18-36; W Lloyd Warner’s look at Memorial Day rites in his *American Life: Dream and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964 [1953]), pp. 2-34.

²⁷ David M Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 45-50.

dignity. . . . It was all to seem naïve to a later generation, but it was not lacking in nobility of inspiration and it served its purpose.”²⁸

The cultural current might be seen as evidence of militarism and a wellspring of imperialism and interventionism. However, martial fascination was restrained. The Mexican War and the Spanish-American War triggered powerful reactions: the former was a plot to expand slavery, the latter was a land-grab like the ones Europeans embarked upon. The Civil War’s enormous casualties as well as its internal nature left no thirst for war. The armies of the North demobilized almost as swiftly as those of the South. In 1865, the army comprised about a million troops. A year later it was down to 43,000 troops. America’s military as a percentage of the population in 1875 was one-tenth that of England, one twenty-fifth that of Prussia, one thirty-eighth that of France.²⁹ The casualties of the First World War as well as succeeding diplomatic failures left a bitter taste and led to renewed isolationist sentiment. Huge armies were rapidly raised and rapidly disbanded, as Americans wanted no more of the sordidness of world affairs. America’s military became prestigious and influential, but no more than those of Athens or England.

Religion

One writer observed, “There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America. . . . It must never be forgotten that religion gave birth to Anglo-American society. In the United States, religion is therefore mingled with all the feelings of patriotism, whence it derives a peculiar force.” The words sound like the immoderate oratory of a sect leader or a polished televangelist. The author, though, was Alexis de Tocqueville, a discerning observer of early America whose insights have been appreciated across the political spectrum.³⁰

²⁸ Commager, *The American Mind*, p. 39. See also Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty*, pp. 55-60, 122-27; Kennedy, *Over Here*, pp. 70-83; Pierce, *Public Opinion and the Teaching of History*; Pierce, *Civic Attitudes*; Morris Janowitz, *The Reconstruction of Patriotism: Education for Civic Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

²⁹ C Vann Woodward, *The Future of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 80; John D McDermott, “Custer and the Little Big Horn Story: What It All Means,” in Charles E Rankin, ed, *Legacy: New Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996), p. 96.

³⁰ de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* I: 303; II: 6.

The earliest settlements, as even televangelists know, as even the most secular historian must admit, were religious communities. Puritans and Catholics were the best known but Moravians, Dunkers, and Anabaptists were numerous as well. Intolerance and warfare drove them across the ocean. Colonial administrators saw more economic potential in disciplined religious groups than in freebooters and convicts. A London trade group advised: "A free exercise of religion . . . is essential to enriching and improving a trading nation; it should ever be held sacred in His Majesty's colonies."³¹ By the mid-eighteenth century, America comprised countless religious settlements. Quakers and Baptists splintered from Puritan villages. Catholics landed in Maryland, followed by Presbyterians and Anglicans. Scores of smaller sects planted themselves here and there. Doctrinal and ritualistic differences abounded but a sense of being parts of a New Israel pervaded. Tolerance and virtue would flourish. Leaders followed Scripture rather than prejudice. America had a Destiny.³²

Two religious phenomena grew out of colonial religiousness, the first, a wave of revivalist movements beginning about 1740. The (First) Great Awakening swept the colonies, stressing an immediate, personal religious experience that contrasted with dry, formal religions. Staleness was especially so of the Church of England which had become increasingly bureaucratic and tied to secular authority in Britain. Religious renewal created an idea of being an association of the righteous. Older senses of destiny gained vitality, setting the stage for the independence movement.³³

A second religious phenomenon was the rise, mainly in educated circles, of an amalgam of religion and science, of Enlightenment thought and Christian theology, known as Deism. Followers saw no conflict between science and religion. Knowing science imparted understanding of the divine order. Knowing God brought understanding of the world. Natural law was an aspect of God's mind from which law and rights could be known and brought into a republic for the betterment of mankind.

The convergence of popular fervor and Deist thought came at a propitious juncture. The remote British

³¹ Hudson, *Religion in America*, p. 11.

³² Robert N Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 5-35; Hudson, *Religion in America*, pp. 12-22; Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* Third Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 4-6.

³³ Bridenbaugh, *The Spirit of '76*, pp. 80-84; Paul R. Lucas, "The Origin of the Great Awakening in New England," *The Historian* Vol. 59 (1997): 741-58; Hudson, *Religion in America*, pp. 12-22, 101.

crown sought a greater presence in the colonies and advanced plans to raise taxes, quarter troops, and introduce religious hierarchy. In the history of injustices Britain's demands will not figure highly but at that moment British demands seemed to be sinister machinations. Powerful political and religious opposition followed. John Adams thundered, "Let the pulpit resound with the doctrines of religious liberty. [There is] a direct and formal design on foot to enslave America."³⁴

Politics and religion emerged from the war even closer. Churches brought gifts of praise to the newborn republic, imbuing it with religious sentiments and a sense of destiny. This led observers such as Robert Bellah to refer to an American "civil religion:" a mixture of religious-secular heroes, events, institutions, and expectations, that proved divine guidance, righteousness, and mission. Americans firmly believed that God had aided them during the period by granting patience at Valley Forge, courage at Trenton, mercy at Yorktown, and wisdom at Philadelphia.

A Second Great Awakening came in the first half of the nineteenth century. It's often seen as a reaction to the coldness of Enlightenment rationality and the violence of the French Revolution, but de Tocqueville and Perry Miller suggest that growing materialism and isolation acted upon the need for spirituality. Those who associate such movements with bumpkins will be uncomfortable to learn that principals included Timothy Dwight, president of Yale University, William Ellery Channing, whose religious teachings influenced Max Weber, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose writings spread the anti-slavery gospel.

Renewal fueled abolitionism. Religious fervor found a new crusade and a latter-day Saracen. The writings of Stowe and William Lloyd Garrison alerted the faithful to the evil of slavery, the wickedness of the plantation owner, and the sinful complicity of standers-by. Nat Turner began his slave rebellion in Tidewater Virginia.³⁵ Frederick Douglass's conversion led to dedication to abolitionism. Henry Adams (writing in the third person) recalls from his youth, "Slavery drove the whole Puritan community back on its Puritanism. The boy thought as dogmatically as though he were one of his own ancestors. The Slave power took the place of Stuart

³⁴ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1955]), pp. 352-58, 373-417; Bridenbaugh, *The Spirit of '76*, pp. 84-92, 118-20; Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution: 1759-1766* (New York: Free Press, 1960), pp. 76-86; Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, pp. 4-6; Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*, pp. 235-56

³⁵ John W Blasingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 126-30.

kings and Roman popes.”³⁶ Van Wyck Brooks saw a similar response in rural communities: “There dwelt, unchanged, the spirit of the Puritans and the Friends, the stiff-necked sectaries of Cromwell’s army. . . . The Age of Laud and Charles the First had reappeared. . . .”³⁷

Religion provided a sense of right and wrong that was more convincing than Supreme Court decisions and political compromises. Puritans had left England rather than bow to inequities. Their descendants had broken with Parliament when it became intolerable. John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry and subsequent trial sharpened the debate. Some saw it as a simple criminal case, others sided with Emerson who argued that Brown’s hanging would make “the gallows as glorious as the Cross.” When debate finally erupted into war, the Union saw itself as a terrible swift sword, the Confederacy as a serpent, Union campfires as Pentecostal tongues of flame.

Major universities began as schools of theology where young men attained breadth and depth in their formation to better guide their congregations. Many leading intellectuals from the colonial and early republican periods to the early twentieth century were religious figures. The Mathers, John Winthrop, Timothy Dwight, and Josiah Royce brought religious thinking to bear on issues of the day. The spirituality of Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman drew from religious traditions. Many of the founders of American sociology were ministers or theology students who sought to understand the social bases of morality and its decline, the beginnings of which they saw.³⁸ Most of the characters and dilemmas of American literature from Melville to Steinbeck though not much beyond, came from Biblical passages.

In simpler years, before the advent of radio and television, religious works formed a considerable part of culture. The Bible, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and *The Book of Martyrs* were in most homes. *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which may be described as a stream of metaphors separated by occasional prepositions, was a literary force that shaped values of individual worth, discipline, and faith in the future. Religion gave special meaning to work. It was more than a means of making ends meet; it was a calling, a way of serving God. Success was a sign of approval and salvation.

³⁶ Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Modern Library, 1931 [1918]), p. 48.

³⁷ Brooks, *The Flowering of New England*, pp. 388-89.

³⁸ Arthur J Vidich and Stanford M. Lyman, *American Sociology: Worldly Rejections of Religion and Their Directions* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 22, 75-76.

Diligence and frugality were praised, sloth and extravagance condemned.³⁹

In the colonial period, clergymen were also doctors, lawyers, and other prominent figures. They influenced community life, shaped routines, and established priorities. Throughout the nineteenth century, churches remained central: “They counseled the drinker, rebuked the swearer, admonished all vice, and expelled any persistent wrongdoer. Employers who were churchgoers usually imposed their moral standards upon subordinates.”⁴⁰ Churches in urban neighborhoods ran schools, counseling services, and social clubs. Religious rites flavored life from cradle to grave. Baptisms, first communions, weddings, and funerals were events, integrating the young with the community and its past. McGuffey Readers comprised homiletic stories of children making moral choices, good triumphing over evil, and wrongdoers facing consequences. One reaped what one sowed, pride came before a fall.⁴¹

Progress

Early European settlers sought to live and prosper in a land free of war, intolerance, and caste. America would be pastoral, tolerant, and egalitarian. The New Englander felt that John Calvin’s mission was thwarted in Geneva but would triumph here. John Adams said, “I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scheme and design in Providence for the illumination and emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.”⁴² The War of Independence strengthened belief in progress. Liberty triumphed over despotism and the outcome would inspire the world. Shortly thereafter, the Napoleonic Wars broke out – another internecine bloodletting that confirmed Europe’s dark nature.

³⁹ Obviously, this draws from Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner’s, 1976 [1905]). See also Daniel T Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 1-64.

⁴⁰ Allan Nevins, quoted in Commager, *The American Mind*, p. 426. See also Bodnar et al, *Lives of Their Own*, pp. 74-82.

⁴¹ Atherton, *Main Street*, pp. 65-105.

⁴² Quote from Lerner, *America as a Civilization*, pp. 10, 897. See also Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, I: 3-15; Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*, pp. 1-44; Barry Kosmin and Seymour P Lachman, *One Nation under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993), pp. 21-23; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind* Volume II (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 463-69; Lewis Perry, *Intellectual Life in America: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 4-5; Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty*, pp. 53-55; Hudson, *Religion in America*, pp. 12-22.

Education, Americans believed, could improve their opportunities and those of their children. The interest in education of American rustics astonished de Tocqueville who first read *Henry V* upon finding a copy in a frontier cabin. A thirst for education, he observed, followed from the absence of a rigid class system which limited potential and stifled the desire to improve one's lot. Perhaps owing to the populism of the Jacksonian era and the ongoing revivalism, the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed enthusiasm for self-improvement. Public school systems began in Massachusetts and spread throughout the Northeast. Public libraries cropped up, as did parochial schools after the influx of German and Irish immigrants in mid-century. Many religious groups felt it their duty to raise the educational level of the nation.⁴³

As soon as a forest clearing became a settlement, a newspaper, lending library, and other parts of civilization, appeared. In 1810, Lexington, Kentucky, a hamlet of 4,000, had two bookstores and the first college west of the mountains. Seven years later, it hosted the first American performance of a Beethoven symphony. In 1832, Lincoln's boyhood hometown of New Salem Illinois had fewer than 150 people but it boasted of lending libraries and a debating society all before it was three years old. In 1855, San Francisco had more newspapers than did London. Later in the century, before the advent of mass media, self-improvement took the form of the Chautauqua movement which brought lectures to small towns, often in tent meetings similar to revivalist gatherings. Early women's clubs also felt it their mission to spread literacy and respect for learning. In the early twentieth century, immigrants from Europe and blacks who left the deep South were happy to find elementary school systems in which their children might better themselves.⁴⁴

Puritans Mather and Winthrop were talented men of science, as were Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams – this at a time when science was led by gifted amateurs. Science in America benefited from Enlightenment and Deist thought which held that political freedom would free reason and expand science. The young country felt destined to become the center of scientific inquiry. The Revolutionary War

⁴³ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, pp. 172-209; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Translated by Henry Reeve (New York: Knopf, 1980), Volume II: 33-55; Curti, *Growth of American Thought*, pp. 335-57; Dolan, *The Immigrant Church*, pp. 99-120; Brooks, *The Flowering of New England*, pp. 172-95; Russell Blaine Nye, *The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 150-70; Hudson, *Religion in America*, pp. 150-54.

⁴⁴ Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, pp. 210ff; Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage*, pp. 73-95; Grossman, *Land of Hope*, pp. 246-58.

stimulated scientific research, as public figures reflected on the casualties caused by disease. War, Deism, and the Enlightenment led to the founding of scientific curricula at universities and an academy of arts and sciences – a process that made science into a professional discipline. In the next hundred years, Americans produced the steamship, the telegraph, the light bulb, and airplanes, as well as countless less notable contributions made by unheralded craftsmen and tinkers.⁴⁵

The West provided enduring myths: the spread of homesteaders, law and order, and the railroad. Though banalized by modern media, the settling of the West was once revered. A motley assortment of religious dissenters, rugged individualists, speculators, and freebooters set across the Appalachians through the Ohio valley and across the Mississippi. Trading outposts became farming villages and towns. Railroads replaced trails, civilization replaced wilderness. Though, as we recognize now, the process meant the destruction of native peoples, most Americans saw it as the inevitable triumph of civilization. Law followed the westward movement, replacing a war of all against all with the rough justice of cattle barons and vigilance committees, then with a working legal system. In the tracks of pioneers and homesteaders came shopkeepers and teachers, who brought manners and politesse to the frontier. Townspeople were eager to emulate eastern towns in order to bolster prestige and attract more settlers. National attention fixed on the unfolding drama. America's resources were limitless; Americans could make their own destiny.⁴⁶

There was a practical aspect of the progress myth, one that appealed to a practical people. America was a land of abundance and prosperity, allowing social mobility unimaginable in Europe. Americans could improve their lot. De Tocqueville found them more interested in prosperity than Europeans and looked for a reason. A

⁴⁵ Nye, *The Cultural Life of the New Nation*, pp. 54-95; James MacGregor Burns, *The Workshop of Democracy: The American Experiment* Volume II (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 76-83.

⁴⁶ On the role of the frontier in mythic American thought see Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (New York: Library of America, 1991 [1847]); Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962); Billington, *America's Frontier Heritage*, pp. 1-22; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978 [1950]); Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, pp. 141-60; George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 105-21; William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of General W. T. Sherman* (New York: Library of America, 1990), pp. 35-152; Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992); Perry Miller, *Life of the Mind*, pp. 99-104.

ready answer for many might be Calvinist doctrine which saw success as a sign of being one of the elect.⁴⁷ Perhaps owing to a reluctance to ascribe superiority to Protestantism, de Tocqueville found an alternative explanation. The rigid caste societies of Europe, he reasoned, limited one's potential and created a sense of futility. The American could rise from laborer to yeoman farmer or tradesman. De Tocqueville also cites a related cultural distinction between the new and old civilizations: aristocratic privilege led to indifference toward possessions, while the poor's deprivation led to resignation – the two converging to form an outlook quite different from the American faith.⁴⁸

Material prosperity did not always degenerate into avarice. Sybarites there were but for most it meant an implement to help planting and harvesting, a Billikens doll, or a hat from a Sears-Roebuck catalog. In time, it meant a radio set for the living room or a Model T out front. For most people, religious and community norms prevented the enjoyment of possessions from becoming an all-consuming passion.⁴⁹ Too many belongings turned the diligent into the slothful. Belongings were best thought of as a light cloak that one could shed, easily and without regret. Community norms held that energies should be devoted mainly to endeavors that helped the common good.⁵⁰

Sacredness

American history was not just facts, dates, and names. It was a body of deeds, events, and legends. The idea of America was emotionally charged, imbued with sacred qualities. America was a living whole, its leaders illuminated by a romantic aura. The Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Gettysburg Address were held in awe, preserved in neoclassical buildings. Washington and Lincoln, Boone and Crockett, Fulton and

⁴⁷ See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner's, 1976 [1905]); Edmund S Morgan, ed, *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558-1794* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1965), pp. 35-59; *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 3-12, 65-74; Warren I Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 41-43.

⁴⁸ De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II: 128-33.

⁴⁹ Robert N Bellah and Phillip E Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 16-17.

⁵⁰ David M Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 78-110.

Edison, all attained mythic qualities. The year 1776 was emotionally charged, as were 1812 and 1865. This dimension of traditional America made it more than a list of facts and assertions; it was as Bellah put, a civil religion.

People saw the world in religious terms then. Floods, illnesses, and crop failures might have had bases in material cause and effect but they were also judgments, parts of a divine plan. Leaders were naturally likened to Biblical figures, often Old Testament patriarchs, as Lincoln was called "Father Abraham." His death invited comparisons to Jesus: each led a moral cause, each had a premonition of death, and each died an early death on Good Friday. The nation saw itself as latter day Israelites, its enemies Philistines and Amalekites. Reading national events, one saw messianism, prophecy, and judgment. Government invoked religious symbols to strengthen legitimacy. In God We Trust, opening official acts with prayer, witnesses taking oaths, and belief in God as prerequisite for jurors, all gave rational-legal processes an aura of sacredness.

A powerful means of conveying sacredness was the family. Familial authority passed on heritage and learning, giving it a romantic aura and making politicians into statesmen, policies into deeds, and narratives into sagas. Christopher Lasch noted that nationalism is built on paternal authority and maternal affection, brought together by socialization processes in the family and community.⁵¹ Teachers in towns and neighborhoods could draw upon the fusion of love and authority and convey a sense of sacredness to education, ennobling more than a few deals into compromises, and fiascoes into bold but ill-starred ventures. It was the same process begun by Parson Weems, and even most who saw through them, as an increasingly modern and sophisticated public later would, felt it was nonetheless good for the country to uphold them.

Military conflict focuses national attention, unites people above the routine of daily life. It entails enormous sacrifice. There is anxiety and concern for the lives of loved ones; people look to a higher place. God is asked to protect soldiers, guide leaders, and speed victory. Events are embellished by many returning soldiers, jingoistic newspapers, and government releases that tell of audacious generals and wise statesmen. The experience of victory lifted anxieties and fears, bringing an intoxicating sense of achievement.⁵²

⁵¹ *Haven in a Heartless World*, pp. 3-4.

⁵² On the sacred aspects of war in local ritual see Warner, *American Life*, pp. 5-19. See also Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes toward Death, 1799-1885* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 123-43.

The arts, too, have contributed to the romance of traditions. *The Odyssey* did so for Athens, *The Song of Roland* for France, and Shakespeare's plays for England. There has already been mention of patriotic poems such as *Concord Hymn* and *Paul Revere's Ride*, but perhaps one should now try to imagine their meter and imagery enriching the patriotic message, the effect enhanced by music. Songs praising traditional America abounded – in schoolhouses, lodge meetings, and at national holiday celebrations. *The Star Spangled Banner* and *My Country 'Tis of Thee* served this purpose. *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* conveys this best:

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.*

*I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps.
His day is marching on.*

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.*

Here we have patriotic, messianic, and military themes alloyed with music and imagery. *The Battle Hymn* was sung in churches across the North, bolstering sagging spirits during the long, painful war. It is said to have heartened war-weary Union soldiers on exhausting marches and in Confederate prison camps.

Traditional America gave a sense of identity, impressing upon each generation a sense of who they were, what forebears had endured, and what common aspirations they shared. It satisfied a vital human need for integration. Americans felt they belonged to a whole, that they shared a common past and destiny, that their lives were properly directed toward a purpose. Americans had a common basis with which they could form consensus on right and wrong and on the proper course for the nation.

Traditional America was never completely homogeneous. It was never universally believed in and intensity of belief varied. It was not incapable of wrong, never all sweetness and light. A survey of trends cannot ignore pockets of discontent and social fissures based on class, sectionalism, and race. Beliefs and institutions were made by and for European-Americans, and though proclaimed to be based on reason or at least applicable

to all, non-Europeans did not share in the consensus. Free blacks and emancipated slaves were parts of strong families and communities, had their own churches and rites, believed in personal progress and a better day for their people; but they could not feel part of the national community. The pride and confidence felt by most Americans were hypocrisy to poor sharecroppers in the land of Jim Crow. Native peoples who had been dispossessed of homelands and defeated by the army were another alienated sub-group. Driven into reservations, they lived in impotent rage directed at the numerically and technologically superior settlers, whose consensus had defeated them. These voices, most of which enjoy considerable prominence in modern thought, should not obscure the fact that most firmly believed in traditional America.

Many today will see belief in America (or any country for that matter) as quaint, naive, part of a receding past that people have become a bit too sophisticated to fall for any more. Having established a starting point, imperfect though it may be, the project at hand is to see how wars have changed traditional beliefs, how dissenting outlooks have strengthened and weakened with wars, and whether a country without basic agreements can go on.

Chapter Two

Tradition and Modernity at the turn of the century

The Great War was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful 'history' involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future.

Paul Fussell
The Great War and Modern Memory

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning— So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

F Scott Fitzgerald
The Great Gatsby

By the early twentieth century, there was discontent with the course America was taking. The Civil War triggered a burst of industrialization and urbanization that led many to believe the nation was becoming cold and materialistic. Principles were giving way, institutions were in the wrong hands. The experience of World War One amplified many complaints, put others to rest, but introduced new ones. The aftermath opened the door to modernity, through which some scurried and others were pushed – until 1929, when many looked back.

Discontent in the Gilded Age

There's a passage in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* in which an aging Civil War veteran looks about his town and comprehends the changes. The old fellow takes stock, then runs off wildly, begging for God's mercy. Sources of pride and meaning and identity were gone. The moral order ushered in by Appomattox was surrendering to prosperity. The process was slow and gradual, the realization swift and devastating.

In a more detached manner, Henry Adams, scion of an illustrious family, disliked the changes since his

birth in 1838 under the shadow of Boston State House. Returning in 1904 from a stay abroad, he lamented the lurch into graceless modernity – from “unity” to “multiplicity” as he put it. As his ship neared mooring, he looked at New York City and shuddered:

[T]he approach [was] more striking than ever – wonderful – unlike anything man had ever seen – and like nothing he had ever much cared to see. The outline of the city became frantic in its effort to explain something that defied meaning. . . . The two-thousand-years failure of Christianity roared up from Broadway, and no Constantine the Great was in sight.¹

From the perspectives of a humble old-timer to the descendant of presidents, America had changed too much.

The Civil War laid the foundations for an economic boom that changed the country. The country had once been guided – politically, economically, and scholarly – by elites from the Atlantic seaboard. The opening of trans-Appalachian lands and the rising political influence of backwoodsmen delivered a blow to that world; the postwar boom all but ended it. The learning and judgment of notables once served the country well but they were surpassed in wealth and power by those who had built the railroads, banks, steel mills, and meat-packing houses. The old elite receded to secondary if not tertiary roles in national affairs. Adams withdrew to the study of history, searching for a time of order.

Ostentatious displays of wealth in architecture and fashion replaced traditional tastes. Houses and attire took on forms breaking with previous patterns. Former ferrymen and mechanics made enormous fortunes. Independent craftsmen and farmers were wage-laborers. Charles Francis Adams, Jr, descendant of two presidents, Civil War officer, and head of the Union Pacific Railroad, lived in both worlds:

I have known, and known tolerably well, a good many ‘successful’ men – ‘big’ financially – men famous during the last half century; and a less interesting crowd I do not care to encounter. Not one that I have ever known would I care to meet again, either in this world or the next; nor is one of them associated in my mind with the ideas of humor, thought, or refinement.²

An older America stood beside a new one, neither one having the upper hand. Henry Adams saw the economic crisis of 1893 settling the issue:

For a hundred years, between 1793 and 1893, the American people had hesitated, vacillated, swayed forward and back, between two forces, one simply industrial, the other capitalistic, centralizing, and mechanical. In 1893, the issue came on the single gold standard, and the majority at last declared itself, once for all, in favor of the capitalistic system with all its necessary machinery. . . . The rest was question of gear; of running machinery; of economy; and involved no disputed principle. . . . [T]he whole mechanical consolidation of force . . . ruthlessly stamped out the life of the class into which Adams was

¹ *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Modern Library, 1931), pp. 499-500.

² Quoted in Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 507.

born. . . . [N]othing remained for a historian but to ask – how long and how far!³

Farmers, workers, and shopkeepers felt endangered by industrial forces. The size and power of industrial giants reduced the Jeffersonian ideal of a community of farmers and producers to folklore. Politicians and sharecroppers, journalists and authors, spoke out against manipulated markets, railroad barons, and the conditions in meat-packing plants.⁴ It was all part of an eroding moral and social order which to many was alarmingly advanced.

For most, affluence was allowing leisure and consumer goods – without pangs of guilt from religious beliefs. The work ethic began to slacken, as the Puritan fathers had warned. Cotton Mather saw affluence as a sign of divine favor but feared its consequences: “Away to your *Business*; Avoid all impertinent Avocations. Laudable *Recreations* may be used now and then: But, I beseech you, Let those Recreations be used for *Sauce*, but not for *Meat*.” He also warned, “There is venom in *Riches* disposing our depraved Hearts to cast off their *Dependence on God*.”⁵

The wealthy eschewed the practical and reveled in the unnecessary. Outside privileged enclaves, the work ethic gave way to the pursuit of money – what the old sectaries had called Avarice. Department stores promised comfort and well-being: “[A]s the flood of goods the factories produced flowed into middle-class households, carrying new amenities, overflowing into Victorian parlors overpacked with gewgaws, the values of thrift, diligence, and self-discipline could no more remain unaffected than could the premise of scarcity.”⁶

While most women worked on farms, in households, and in small businesses, those in the middle classes

³ Adams, *The Education*, pp. 344-45.

⁴ On the populist and progressive movements see John D Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the Peoples' Party* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961 [1931]); C Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963 [1938]); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Knopf, 1955).

⁵ Cotton Mather, quoted in Richard L Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 23 and 188 (emphasis original). Paradoxically, an important reason for the Puritans' departure from England was fear of becoming too materialistic. See Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 41-117.

⁶ Daniel T Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 95. See Lewis A Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 33-58; Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966 [1954]), pp. 217-42. And of course Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973 [1899]).

were moving away from day-to-day economic activity. Educated and able, they were nonetheless confined to being adornments. They (like many of their descendants in the 1950s) found themselves in a middle ground between the hold of tradition and the uncertainty of a future. Some formed social movements advocating temperance and women's suffrage but most remained in that middle ground. An almost universal confidence in male authority towered above everything.⁷

Mists of sacredness and myth couldn't always hide the sordidness. As early as 1880, an anonymous novel entitled *Democracy* depicted the capital as dominated by cliques, intrigue, and vendettas – an “ocean of corruption.” The White House was assuming monarchical trappings. An anecdote described George Washington chasing people off his property with his cane. Bosses ruled the bog cities. They got streetcar systems built, controlled the police, and stood next to mayors cutting ribbons at new bridges. Lincoln Steffens observed, “And it's all a moral weakness. The spirit of graft and of lawlessness is the American spirit.”⁸

Such discontent is usually seen as the product of economic growth, discarding old ways and awkwardly adopting new ones but wars often cause jarring economic growth. Conflicts from the Revolution to the world wars triggered economic expansions, some of which lasted decades. The Civil War, in many ways the first modern war, led to iron foundries, meat-packing plants, textile mills, and telegraph lines. Washington tried to give contracts to smaller firms, as might be expected with a backwoodsman in the White House. However, they were inefficient and unreliable and Washington preferred bigger firms, which used profits to increase mechanization and buy out rivals. The Union's bond campaigns modernized the banking system which would fuel postwar growth.⁹

By 1864, the Union army was a behemoth, armed and equipped by growing industrial might. The war

⁷ Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs, 1860-1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987); Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in US Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

⁸ Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities* (New York: Hill and Wang, [1904] 1960), p. 7. The author of *Democracy*, it was later revealed, was Henry Adams. One wonders how this descendant of two presidents got the George Washington story. See also C Vann Woodward, “A Southern Critique of the Gilded Age,” in his *The Burden of Southern History* Third Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1993), pp. 109-40; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Era of Good Stealings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁹ Jeremy Atack and Peter Passell, *A New Economic View of American History* (New York: WW Norton, 1994), pp. 457-88; James L Abrahamson, *The American Home Front: Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, World War II* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1983), pp. 49-51, 69-71.

was a methodical deployment of men and material against an inferior enemy. Rebel generals might have been better than their counterparts but by 1864 that was irrelevant.¹⁰ Appomattox could not halt the momentum, recessions only slowed it. As Bruce Catton put it: "A singular fact about modern war is that it takes charge. Once begun it has to be carried to its conclusion, and carrying it there sets in motion events that may be beyond men's control. Doing what has to be done to win, men perform acts that alter the very soil in which society's roots are nourished."¹¹

The war contributed to the changing moral climate. Prosperity itself brings temptation to cut corners and elide principles, as Mather had warned. Perhaps more importantly, victory created an atmosphere of confidence and sanctimony. In the years following the war, the nation, outside the South, was exultant. Its trials were over, the Union preserved. Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan entered the pantheon of heroes, alongside Washington, Decatur, and Jackson. And when the jubilant parades down Pennsylvania Avenue and Main Street ended and the last regiments furled their colors, people returned to their lives, more confident and assured of their righteousness and place in heaven than ever before. As Merle Curti put it, "the old sense of destiny confirmed by a new sense of military and economic competence."¹²

As the Great Event receded and prosperity spread, some realized the war had regrettable consequences. Soldier and statesman Carl Schurz was one: "Is it really true that our war turned the ambitions of our people into the channels of lofty enthusiasm and aspirations and devotion to high ideals? Has it not rather left behind it an era of absorbing greed of wealth, a marked decline of ideal aspirations?"¹³ HL Mencken thought the Civil War had produced a sense of presumptuousness and infallibility that perverted American values into hypocrisy and

¹⁰ Russell F Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 128-52; Abrahamson, *The American Home Front*, pp. 44-71; Richard Franklin Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹¹ Quoted in Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 10-11.

¹² Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 46.

¹³ Quoted in Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, p. 465. Summers, though seeing the war as contributing to corruption, urges the reader not to exaggerate the influence of the war on public life. See *Era of Good Stealings*, pp. 16-29.

unctuous insincerity, what he called “pecksniffery.”¹⁴ Robert Penn Warren saw the nation governed by “the doctrine of the Treasury of Virtue.” The Civil War, he wrote at the time of its Centennial, was a

consciously undertaken crusade so full of righteousness that there is enough surplus stored in Heaven, like the deeds of the saints, to take care of all small failings and oversights of the descendants of the crusaders, certainly unto the present generation. From the start America had had adequate baggage of self-righteousness and phariseism, but with the Civil War came grace abounding, for the least of the sinners.¹⁵

As the forces of industrialism ran through the country, notables and average people could invoke the Treasury of Virtue. The people who had crushed the serpent and abolished slavery could forgive themselves for eliding laws and norms. Religious strictures could be bent, rendered into rationalizations, reworked until they had little to do with original meanings. The Treasury of Virtue allowed Americans to feel assured of a place in heaven.

The half century after 1865 saw the country stride toward modernity. Literature expressed concerns with big business, corruption, and the plight of women, especially middle-class ones. Populists and progressives mounted spirited but short-lived political movements, before blending into the main parties. But neither in rhetoric nor policy were these voices hostile to basic principles of America. They saw themselves as embodiments of traditional America, its defenders from industrial giants, the faithful believers of Jefferson’s vision of farmers and producers.¹⁶

The Great War

The old order no longer made sense after 1918 and a new one had yet to form. Cynicism and self-indulgence grew. Social change took on a new dynamism, free from restraints. Louis Brandeis observed, “Europe was devastated by war, we by the aftermath.”¹⁷

¹⁴ “Puritanism as a Literary Force,” in George K Anderson and Eda Lou Walton, eds, *This Generation: A Selection of British and American Literature from 1914 to the Present with Historical and Critical Essays* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1939), pp. 118-19.

¹⁵ Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War*, p. 64.

¹⁶ On growing discontent among women see Carl N Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 178ff.

¹⁷ Quoted in Arthur M Schlesinger, Jr, *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1955* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 75.

Myth and Authority War mythology had been central since the Revolution and War of 1812, providing many leaders, beliefs, and symbols. The triumph of 1865 added greatly to it. Northern and Southern notables wrapped themselves in the mantle of glory, building careers and fortunes. Military service was virtually a prerequisite for high office until the turn of the century. Every president from Grant to McKinley (except for Cleveland) had been an officer in the Union army. All but McKinley had been generals.¹⁸

Towns honored veterans a half century after the Confederacy fell. Memorial Day came into being to honor the fallen. Literature abounded with stories of great valor, youths finding courage, and the rising glory of the Republic. Every authority figure, social norm, and institution assumed greater prestige. The Union celebrated itself for a generation; the South sentimentalized a noble but lost cause. Veterans looked back on war service, selectively, as a time of selflessness and honor.¹⁹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, wounded in three battles and left for dead at Antietam, was long reluctant to discuss the war. Later in life he spoke proudly and romantically:

I do not know the meaning of the universe. But in the midst of doubt, in the collapse of creeds, there is one thing I do not doubt, that no man who lives in the same world with most of us can doubt, and that is that the faith is true and adorable which leads a soldier to throw away his life in obedience to a blindly accepted duty, in a cause which he little understands, in a plan of campaign of which he has no notion, under tactics of which he does not see the use.²⁰

It's questionable if General Sherman ever said war is hell. He undoubtedly saw it in Arthurian terms late in life:

Now my friends, there is nothing in life more beautiful than the soldier. A knight errant with steel casque, lance in hand, has always commanded the admiration of men and women. The modern soldier is his legitimate successor. . . . Now the truth is we fought the holiest fight ever fought on God's earth.²¹

America was not an empire, bread and circuses weren't instruments of rule, but it had equivalents of *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*. War was a rite of passage into manhood, the true test of virility and patriotism, a

¹⁸ William James, "The Moral Equivalence of War," in *Writings, 1902-1910* Bruce Kuklick, ed (New York: Library of America, 1987), pp. 1281-93; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. (New York: Free Press, 1996) pp. 70-78.

¹⁹ Gerald F Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987), pp. 290-94.

²⁰ Quoted in Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 759.

²¹ Quoted in John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p. 39.

safeguard against excessive materialism, and a means of winning the hand of a fair lady. Of course, none of this would have occurred to anyone at Shiloh or Gettysburg but over the years cultures and aging veterans romanticize war. To wit Holmes and Sherman.

In 1917, Americans found themselves drawn into the Great War. It went against common sense and provincialism but political and religious exhortations compensated. Involvement would strengthen the forces of democracy, enhance national prestige, and make the world a better a place. Millions of youth enthusiastically went off. Aging Civil War veterans gathered at train stations and embarkation points to cheer them on.²²

The war was inglorious. Modern war ended the days when individual valor, inspired charges, and spirited athleticism determined a battle's outcome, who won and who lost, and who lived and died. Visions of charges across verdant fields and capturing the foe's colors didn't last long in front of machine guns and poison gas. Antietam and Gettysburg were distant events, so sentimentalized over the years by poems, Memorial Day picnics, and GAR parades, that their horror was lost. Chateau-Thierry and the Argonne were at hand and beyond cultural capacities to romanticize. Americans didn't arrive in strength until early 1918 but a year later, over a hundred thousand were dead. One doughboy noted the chasm between official pronouncements and hard realities:

It will never do to let the people at home find out the truth about this war. They've been fed on bunk until they'd never believe anything that didn't sound like a monk's story of the Crusades. Every time I get a paper from home, I either break into a loud laugh or get mad.²³

The people back home never saw the war as he did, but they did see the casualty lists, and many recognized a few names. Political, religious, and military authorities had deceived them. The sacred view of war lost strength.²⁴

The impact was far greater in Europe where myths based on Waterloo and Sedan had long prevailed

²² Edward M Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 54-85.

²³ Quoted in Meirion and Susie Harries, *The Last Days of Innocence: America at War, 1917-1918* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 193.

²⁴ David M Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 144-230.

and where casualties had been far greater.²⁵ Russia and Germany collapsed into anarchy and revolution. Britain and France were badly wounded but managed to limp on. As Churchill put it, “a death knell rang in the ears of the victors, even in their hour of triumph.”²⁶ Kings and nobles could no longer invoke the old way of life. Moral truths that had governed for centuries lost their hold and were referred to ironically and sarcastically. Literary forms, whose meter and imagery once graced paeans to Mars, now turned on him. Wilfred Owen wrote just before the end of the war:

To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

Rudyard Kipling became famous romanticizing the thin red line and Tommies skirmishing on the Empire’s frontiers. He felt quite differently after his son was killed:

If any question why we died,

Tell them, because our fathers lied.²⁷

Siegfried Sassoon threw his Military Cross into the Channel, an unthinkable act to one of Wellington’s lieutenants but an understandable one to one of Kitchener’s.

Toynbee and Spengler saw the centuries-long rise of Western Civilization stalled and in decline.

Toynbee surveyed the history of the world from Mesopotamia to the present and concluded that war was the principal destroyer of civilization:

Militarism has been by far the commonest cause of the breakdowns of civilizations during the four or five millennia which have witnessed the score or so of breakdowns that are on record up to the present date. . . . In this suicidal process, the entire social fabric becomes fuel to feed the devouring flame in the brazen bosom of Molech.²⁸

²⁵ Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), pp. 304-29; Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 276-93.

²⁶ Quoted in David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 1.

²⁷ “Common Form,” quoted in Paul Fussell, *The Norton Book of Modern War* (New York: WW Norton, 1991), p. 104.

²⁸ Arnold Toynbee, *War and Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 130. On pessimism (especially reduced faith in reason) brought about by the destruction of the Napoleonic Wars see Alfred Cobban, *In Search of Humanity: The Role of the Enlightenment in Modern History* (New York: Geroge Braziller, 1960), pp. 214-21.

Military success – “the intoxication of victory” – has been an important step on the path:

Our survey has revealed the suicidal importunity of a sword that has been sheathed after having once tasted blood. The polluted weapon will not rust in its scabbard, but must ever be itching to leap out again – as though the disembodied spirit of the would-be-saviour who first had recourse to this sinister instrument could now find no rest until his sin of seeking salvation along a path of crime had been atoned for by the agency of the very weapon which he once so perversely used.²⁹

Ezra Pound saw Europe as a “botched civilization.” TS Eliot thought the continent had become a wasteland – its Fisher King mortally wounded, no Grail believed in. A half century earlier, Tennyson had turned the loss of six hundred into moving support of traditional Britain; but sixty thousand British soldiers were killed or wounded one morning on the Somme, advancing only a few hundred yards.³⁰ During the war, Freud observed in war trauma patients a compulsion to repeat and began to suspect a dark force in the human mind, a “death instinct.”³¹

The blank stares of millions of disillusioned veterans sent the same message:

Life was less than cheap; it was thrown away. The religious teaching that the body was the temple of the Holy Ghost could mean little or nothing to those who saw it mutilated and destroyed in millions by Christian nations engaged in war. All moral standards were held for a short moment and irretrievably lost.³²

A way of life had been undermined:

For many, Europe died in the valley of the Somme, its beauty enhanced in retrospect but its corruption final. Beside the horror of an ancient civilization destroying its young, the daily life of the family, religion, and career, inspired by the old ideals, had become a macabre jest, recognized only by the surrealists.³³

Simone Weil noted “the schools at the beginning of the century had formed a generation for victory, and that

²⁹ Toynbee, *War and Civilization*, pp. 164-65.

³⁰ See Charles S Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 19-134. The mood is especially clear in literature. See Anderson and Walton, eds, *This Generation, passim*; Paul Fussell *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Malcolm Cowley, *The Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s*. (New York: Viking, 1951 [1934]).

³¹ *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Freud's development of the death instinct concept can be traced in his wartime changes to the “Little Hans” case history.

³² Quoted in Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (New York: WW Norton, 1965), pp. 108-09.

³³ Lancelot Law Whyte, quoted in Herbert J Muller, *The Uses of the Past: Profiles of Former Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 122-23.

those after 1918 turned out a beaten one.”³⁴

The Great War’s effects were less forceful but still substantial across the Atlantic. America emerged chastened and disillusioned, through more coherent than Britain or France, to say nothing of Germany and Russia. We had in some sense won. Crowds cheered the returning boys, yet there was a sense of lost times, disenchantment, and betrayal – more pronounced among cultural elites than in American Legion halls. Trends idling before the war got a green light. Henry Adams’s *Education*, describing America’s unhappy transformation, was published in 1918 and struck a chord with a younger generation. Stearns’s *Civilization in the United States*, a critical and sometimes caustic assessment of American life – religion, politics, arts, norms – was also popular.³⁵

Historians refuted Wilson’s justifications for intervention. Germany was not solely to blame; decades of diplomatic maneuvering and militaristic cultures were guilty. America wasn’t neutral in the early years; it was arming Britain and France. Intervention was to ensure New York banks were repaid the loans extended to allies. Corporations, financial institutions, and other parts of capitalism conspired to reap huge profits. Randolph Bourne saw the exhortations to go to war as lies from a propaganda mill. War led to the manipulation of the “herd” and an ominous growth of state power which was used to squash dissent.³⁶

Mencken went further. In an unrelentingly caustic essay, in which he compared American elites to the recent enemy, he asserted that America has been governed by “moral Junkers.” The Civil War made them increasingly arrogant and intolerant. They assumed a domination mentality (*Herrenmoral*) and directed a passive public onto a course of imperial expansion (*Wille zur Macht*). The common folk, he went on, had adopted a slave mentality (*Sklavenmoral*): “Their moral passion spent most of its force in self-accusing, self-denial and self-scourging. They began by howling their sins from the mourners’ bench; they came to their end, many of them, in

³⁴ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (Boston: Beacon, 1952 [1943]), p. 130. See also Marwick, *The Deluge*, pp. 279-314.

³⁵ Harold E Stearns, ed, *Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922). See also Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer, 1865-1915* (Cleveland: World, 1946), pp. 250-75, 474-90; Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1997), pp. 31-107.

³⁶ Sydney Bradshaw Fay, *The Origins of the World War* Two Volumes (New York: Free Press, 1966 [1928-30]); Randolph S Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays, 1915-1919* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 3-14. See also the antiwar aspects of populism in Woodward, *Tom Watson*, pp. 451-74. For romantic views of the causes of the war see John Jay Chapman, *Deutschland über Alles, or Germany Speaks* (New York: GP Putnam’s Sons, 1914); Christian Gauss, *America in the War: Why We Went to War* (New York: Scribner’s, 1918); Josiah Royce, *The Hope of the Great Community* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967 [1916]).

the supreme immolation of battle."³⁷

It was the beginning of the end for a charmed relationship between government and governed, as well as for mythic history. Reflecting the spirit of the time, and embarrassed by their profession's propaganda efforts, historians began to debunk the romanticism surrounding the past and opening the way to new interpretations.³⁸ The new history actually began just before the war when Charles Beard argued the framers of the Constitution had been motivated by self-interest rather than great principle. The Constitution was an instrument of upper-class domination. Madison and Hamilton had no more moral purpose than Morgan and Rockefeller. They just romanticized better.³⁹

Beard was condemned as a Marxist bent on fomenting unrest. One midwestern newspaper expressed its outrage in a headline:

**SCAVENGERS, HYENA-LIKE, DESECRATE THE GRAVES
OF THE DEAD PATRIOTS WE REVERE⁴⁰**

After 1918, however, voices of patriotic rectitude were less confident and an increasingly literate public was open to new views. A generation of new historians, many of them colleagues and disciples of Beard, looked back on the past and revolutionized the field of history. August figures were exposed as having deluded the public and tricked them into wars from which only notables benefited. The founders broke from England only when it hindered commerce. America had built an empire on the continent all the while developing high-minded justifications. The Civil War resulted not from abolitionism or any moral issue but from a clash between Northern manufacturers favoring protective tariffs and Southern planters benefitting from free trade.

³⁷ Mencken, "Puritanism as a Literary Force," in Anderson and Walton, eds, *This Generation*, p. 118. Ostensibly, he speaks of the Civil War, though with an animus stemming from the recent war as well as an oblique reference to it.

³⁸ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 111-18.

³⁹ Charles A Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1962 [1913]). See also James Harvey Robinson, *The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York: Free Press, 1965 [1912]).

⁴⁰ Quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 96; and Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Knopf, 1969), pp. 212-13.

Alternately, the war was the result of blundering politicians.⁴¹

Literature formed a vanguard of the attack on tradition. The effort was most passionate among a generation of young writers, many of whom had been inspired by the war's idealism. John Dos Passos stands out here. A contemporary said of him: "The excitement which Dos Passos seems to have felt when he conceived of war as a great adventure and crusade has apparently been transformed . . . into an immense energy of denunciation."⁴² His *Three Soldiers* tells of naive youths, initially confident in victory and glory, but dehumanized by military brutality, then pushed into the slaughter. One embittered soldier kills a sergeant with a fragmentation grenade. In *Company K*, William March attacks war mythology as well as government officialdom by parodying a letter of condolence:

Your son, Francis, died needlessly at Belleau Wood. You will be interested to hear that at the time of his death he was crawling with vermin and weak from diarrhea. . . . A piece of shrapnel hit him and he died in agony, slowly. . . . He lived three full hours screaming and cursing. . . . He had nothing to hold onto, you see: He had learned long ago that what he had been taught to believe by you, his mother, who loved him, under the meaningless names of honor, courage, patriotism, were all lies.⁴³

Hemingway, Faulkner, and E E Cummings also weighed in with denunciations of the old mythology of war and manhood. Paul Fussell notes that the language of war changed. Romantic, feudal usages gave way to modern, realist ones.⁴⁴ The novels of this disaffected generation were widely read by an increasingly literate public eager to make sense of the incomprehensible events in Europe and uncomfortable with the residual war cant in popular culture.⁴⁵

⁴¹ See Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Vintage Press, 1959 [1922]); Albert K Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1963 [1935]); Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1931), pp. 196-97; Novick, *That Noble Dream*, pp. 92-132; Gary B Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Knopf, 1998), pp. 36-52.

⁴² Quoted in Kennedy, *Over Here*, p. 223, see also pp. 220-30. See also Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, pp. 667-78; Lewis Perry, *Intellectual Life in America: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 370-76; William E Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-32* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 142-44.

⁴³ William March, *Company K* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989 [1933]), pp. 104-5.

⁴⁴ Fussell, *The Great War*, pp. 21-23.

⁴⁵ See Stanley Cooperman, *World War One and the American Novel* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), pp. 5-13. On differences between high- and low-culture accounts of the war, see Kennedy, *Over Here*, pp. 228-29.

The poems of Owen, Sassoon, and Eliot, as well as the novels of Remarque, Zweig, and March found audiences in the US.⁴⁶ The postwar mood was ably captured in Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* in which characters seek spirituality in eastern mysticism, indulge in self-destructive pursuits, and are absorbed by materialist quests. Filmmakers put books onto the screen – *The Big Parade*, *What Price Glory?*, and of course *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The latter, in conjunction with the book, helped form an international peace movement.⁴⁷

Puritanism Of all the basic influences in traditional America, one of the most important was Puritanism. It pervaded day-to-day life and matters of state. Prewar discontent found voice in Van Wyck Brooks whose *The Wine of the Puritans* (1908) criticized much of traditional America, including its religious foundation. The author saw America as a great civilization though a confining one. Logic and self-denial produced unsurpassed wealth at the expense of creativity and spontaneity. Puritanism molded the American “to feel suspiciously toward ritual, pleasure, light-heartedness – all the things which an established civilization can support, as symbols of opposition to the stern economic world. . . . He doesn't believe in impulses and intuitions, because they interfere with the silent, regular and inexorable grinding of the machine.”⁴⁸ There was insufficient appreciation of art, beauty, spirituality. Soon after settling in the US, immigrants had their spontaneous and lively customs ground down. College students didn't learn to find meaning in life.

A Calvinist president sought to impose his strict principles on Europe and came away empty. His simplistic division of the life into good and evil brought blunder and slaughter. Unwillingness to compromise led to failed peace negotiations and the triumph of the old ways that had brought about the war. Religious thinkers

⁴⁶ Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929); Arnold Zweig, *Education before Verdun* (New York: Viking, 1936). The former's impact on many interwar youths was wholly unintended. It was read as an action novel. See George L Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 142. Hynes notes that the horrors of war described in literature and film were only dimly understood by boys and became an attraction. See *The Soldiers' Tale*, pp. 109-10.

⁴⁷ See Terry Christensen, *Reel Politics: American Political Movies from Birth of a Nation to Platoon* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 24-29.

⁴⁸ *The Wine of the Puritans: A Study of Present-Day America* (Folcroft, Penn: Folcroft Press, 1958 [1908]), pp. 14-15. Had Brooks called for a more relevant curriculum, he might pass for a student activist from the sixties.

reinterpreted scripture and orchestrated public sentiments to suit the purposes of the state.⁴⁹ Mencken mocked Wilson as “the Archangel Woodrow,” “the late Messiah,” and “the deceased Moses.”⁵⁰ He deemed Puritanism a misfortune from the outset. The Massachusetts colony was governed by “sour gatherings of hell-crazed deacons.”⁵¹ Puritanism constituted the basis for a domination mentality; its sanctimonious elders became “moral Junkers,” ordering a subservient herd on a quest for power prestige. One author saw his generation’s duty: “Puritanism is the great enemy. The crusade against puritanism is the only crusade with which free individuals are justified in allying themselves.”⁵²

Progressive historians gave the most systematic analysis, concluding that Puritanism was a “misfortune,” an obstacle to reform that had to be broken down. Behind every high-minded principle lay self-interest and contempt for the masses. Vernon Parrington asserted that misanthropic forebears had instilled in us their dark view of human nature: essentially wicked, needful of constant supervision by harsh secular and religious authority. The Puritan colonies were “tyrannies” that opposed egalitarianism at every turn: “The Saints must not have their hands tied by majority votes.” It was for the better that Calvinism failed in Geneva and England, for in New England, “by virtue of its rigid suppression of free inquiry, Calvinism long lingered out a harsh existence, grotesque and illiberal to the last.”⁵³

Leisure The social changes of the twenties came from weakening moral strictures and rising affluence. The boom of the war years brought consumer goods and free time to large portions of the population, sending America into what Leuchtenberg called “the perils of prosperity.” People put aside large political issues and began to enjoy a measure of the consumer life. Dire warnings of sloth and leisure became less relevant and were as likely to be

⁴⁹ Sydney E Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 877-89.

⁵⁰ “The Archangel Woodrow,” in *The Vintage Mencken*, Alistair Cooke, ed (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 116-20.

⁵¹ Quoted in Esmond Wright, “Historians and the Revolution,” in his edited work, *Causes and Consequences of the Revolution* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966), p. 40.

⁵² Quoted in Malcolm Cowley, *The Exile's Return*, p. 60.

⁵³ Vernon L Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), I: 21, 15.

heeded as another call to arms. There was a green light, signaling all to go ahead.⁵⁴

Since the days of the colonists eking out a living, Americans valued parsimony and saving. By the twenties, productivity and wealth were eroding the ethic. The economy had long depended on thrift to invest and expand. That was turned upside down. An economist warned, "People may ruin themselves by saving instead of spending."⁵⁵ Bankers complained that farmers were taking out their savings to buy cars.⁵⁶ Once considered dangerous or a sign of failure, debt now proved position in the middle classes. Success in one's calling depended less on character – thrift, discipline, and honesty – and more on personality – the ability to persuade, sell, and bargain. As a later salesman put it, success came from a shoeshine and a smile.

Tastes in clothing, housewares, and the like were no longer circumscribed by local customs or what the family could make. Newspaper and radio ads made new things attractive and irresistible. Radio and movies pushed out the old self-improvement societies, jazz won out over folk songs, and automobiles introduced change to self-contained towns. The new advertisement industry learned from the propaganda efforts of the war that the public's thought and behavior could be channeled in desired directions. The business took off.⁵⁷

Women had long been pressing for opportunities to work in more areas, access to education, and the right to vote, but only with the war did they see significant advances. Labor shortages brought them into industrial workplaces and government bureaus, making abilities and importance clear, if only to women. Afterwards, recognition of their efforts mingled with hope that feminine influence would weaken militarism and

⁵⁴ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, pp. 234-35; Mabel A. Elliot and Francis E Merrill, *Social Disorganization* Revised Edition (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), pp. 864-96.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 74.

⁵⁶ James J Flink, *The Car Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1975), pp. 140-51.

⁵⁷ Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, pp. 165-69; David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 166-88; Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, pp. 178-203; Atherton, *Main Street*, pp. 295-99; Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), pp. 23-67; James Lincoln Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 145-61. On similar events in postwar Britain, see Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (New York: WW Norton, 1963 [1940]), pp. 171-90.

better the world.⁵⁸ In a period of deflated male authority, women won the right to vote in 1919. In the following decade, many women became more independent, assertive, and sexually aware.⁵⁹

The ken of young people had been limited to the local community. Few had any opportunity or interest in looking beyond. A Sears-Roebuck catalog, a visiting relative, a promising son returning from college – these were exotic contacts with the larger country. But now, a youth culture was emerging. Radio and film showed new experiences and sensations. Adolescents (“teenager” wasn’t coined until the forties) adopted fads and eagerly learned slang, setting themselves apart from parents. Old styles of courtship on the front porch never far from a watchful adult, gave way to youth clubs, car rides, and consumer outings called “dating.”⁶⁰ The Lynds’ study of Muncie, Indiana noted a trend toward more sexual experimentation, with cars providing a handy means of evading adult supervision.⁶¹

Religion Consumerism appropriated religious language and imagery. Henry Ford proclaimed that “machinery is the new Messiah;” Calvin Coolidge believed “the man who builds a factory builds a temple, the man who works there worships there.” Bruce Barton, the father of advertising, proclaimed that Jesus “picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world,” in part, due to Jesus’ parables which were “the most powerful advertisements of all time.”⁶² Such expressions, which a few years earlier would have been branded blasphemy, convey something about the cult of prosperity. Pursuit of

⁵⁸ Levine, *Defender of the Faith*, pp. 128-31; Stanley Coben, *Rebellion against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 91-111; Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 32, 61-63. Ware notes that wars tend to increase the appointment of women in government.

⁵⁹ Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, pp. 28-29; Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, pp. 158-77; Allen, *Only Yesterday*, pp. 73-101; Preston William Slosson, *The Great Crusade and After, 1914-1928* (New York: Macmillan, 1969 [1930]), pp. 154-61; Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, pp. 159-76. See also Graves and Hodge, *The Long Week-End*, pp. 36-49.

⁶⁰ Ellen K Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 203-44; Elliot and Merrill, *Social Disorganization*, pp. 845-46.

⁶¹ Robert S Lynd and Helen M. Lynd, *Middletown* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929), pp. 110-78; Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, pp. 139-49; Ellen K Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 285-311; Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), pp. 118-25.

⁶² Quotes from Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, pp. 187-89. See also Allen, *Only Yesterday*, pp. 146-50; Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, pp. 23-67.

leisure came at the expense of religious duty. Ministers noted a decline in church attendance by automobile owners and members of sports and social clubs. Many churches became less rigid and more like social gatherings.⁶³

The consciences of Sunday motorists were eased by reappraisals of religion. Invocations of religion in 1917 had been intemperate works of propaganda that harmed both political and religious authority. Religion also suffered from hucksterism. Revivalism had once been based on genuine spirituality and sincere evangelists but by the twenties it had taken on crassness and profit-making. Billy Sunday mixed Christianity with lower-class resentments and pugnacity. Aimee Semple McPherson's tent revivals drew big crowds and large profits until personal indiscretions came to light. Sinclair Lewis lampooned evangelists in his characters Mike Monday and Elmer Gantry. They were more akin to snake-oil salesmen than to latter-day Mathers. Mencken thought that "any literate plowhand, if the Holy Spirit inflames him, is thought to be fit to preach." His theological training was held in a "single building in its bare pasture lot, and its faculty of half-idiot pedagogues and brokendown preachers."⁶⁴ Sunday motorists rarely used rear-view mirrors, they looked at the green lights ahead.⁶⁵

The First World War, adumbrating greater changes during the Second, shook up the country. Mobilization led to population movements and dispersals of neighborhoods and towns, reducing moral pressures they exerted. A looser-knit environment was emerging. Millions of young men were uprooted from upbringings and exposed to the soldierly ethos of hard-drinking and coarse revelry – experiences that upon demobilization would surprise and perhaps affect family members and neighbors.⁶⁶ Rates of murder, robbery, fraud, and prostitution increased. Sexual awareness increased as material from Freudian theory to racy movies found audiences. Ministers and politicians pressed for censorship of the mass media. Movies had to conform to Hollywood's code of morality, though the demand was still there.⁶⁷

⁶³ Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, pp. 146-47.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, pp. 915-16.

⁶⁵ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 19-22; Atherton, *Main Street*, pp. 299-300; Lawrence W Levine, *Defender of the Faith: William Jennings Bryan: The Last Decade, 1915-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 254-60.

⁶⁶ Meirion and Susie Harries, *The Last Days of Innocence*, pp. 135-41, 437-38.

⁶⁷ Allen, *Only Yesterday*, pp. 38-72; Gregory D Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 3-29.

Criticism of consumer society came from non-traditional sources as well. Sinclair Lewis and HL Mencken fired off secular jeremiads against the rise of Babbitry and the Booboisie. The twenties, they lamented, was the decade of amoral egotists who pursued business unrestrained by community or personal values. People plunged into mass-market writings which were churned out in great numbers – “mush for the multitude” as Mencken put it. Americans professed to be religious but they were becoming more secular and egocentric. Church attendance provided the appearance of propriety, as one might decorate a drawing room with a piano that no one played.⁶⁸

Local Life Disaffection with small towns was not unknown before the Great War. One of the first critics was Edgar Lee Masters (1869-1950) who grew up in rural Illinois. His *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) attacked every sentiment attached to towns. The deceased speak from their graves with more candor than they would have dared in life. They express discontent, despair, and delusions. A few regret dying for their country in the Civil War. One character wonders what the inscription *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* on his tombstone means. Others lament hidden shames and infidelities. Only two characters seem to have been happy. A blind girl extols the decency of human nature; we realize her blindness was caused by a disease her father contracted from a prostitute. A man speaks proudly of his father’s guidance; we learn (though he never did) that his mother was a servant his father raped. Toward the end, we see a few who found a measure of meaning in life through eastern religion and philosophy.

Many bases of community had weakened, if not disappeared. The threat of attack and lawlessness once bound them together, but with the closing of the frontier, militias and posses faded into folklore and tall tales. Wartime prosperity brought a four-fold increase in farm machinery, reducing the need for mutual help in planting and harvesting.⁶⁹ New fortunes were made during the world war, eclipsing the wealth of first families. People left, entering the service or seeing opportunity in manufactures.

⁶⁸ See Mencken’s essay in Stearns, ed, *Civilization in the United States*, and also his “Mush for the Multitude,” in Roderick Nash, ed, *The Call of the Wild* (New York: George Braziller, 1970), pp. 132-36; Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, pp. 165-69. See also Graves and Hodge, *The Long Week-End*, pp. 56-63.

⁶⁹ Abrahamson, *The American Home Front*, p. 94.

In 1920, for the first time urban dwellers outnumbered rural ones. In the next decade, six million people left the countryside for cities.⁷⁰ Community composition changed. The town no longer limited tastes and expectations; radio and magazines exposed the prairie to a new, fast-paced world. The town seemed dull, confining, incapable of growth. Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* showed the town as stifling, close-minded, and petty. Homely routines were dreadful mummery. Children fortunate enough to attend college or find better paying work in the city left and hoped never to return.⁷¹

Debunking small-town life came from urban or urbanizing writers, often influenced by the impact of war or an eastern education, whose personal energy and creativity burst out of Springfield and headed for Chicago, bolted from Sauk Centre and beat a path for New York. They could no longer understand anyone who didn't share their cosmopolitan outlook. There was no catastrophic collapse, no boarded-up windows and graffiti-marred walls. Most stayed and lived where they were raised but word of better pay, greater opportunity, and fewer restraints came up in conversations.⁷²

The Family By the late nineteenth century, the family was becoming less important as an economic unit. Family farms were still common but in cities and towns, firms were growing and centralizing, reducing the importance of family businesses. Changes accelerated after the war. The hold of tradition weakened, divorce rates rose. Prosperity reduced the need for parents and children to scrimp and save. They could begin to relax and enjoy a part, maybe just a small part, of the life shown in magazines and movies.

Leisure activities in young and old did not coincide. Each generation pursued its own interests. The advertising world, seeing the weakening of the family and higher divorce rates, proclaimed that the automobile would counter this trend:

Holding the family together is with many families one of the strongest arguments that can be advanced in these days when the divorce mill is grinding overtime. . . . It is an argument that has sold thousands of cars and will continue to sell tens of thousand more, even if salesmen never mention it. Any force that

⁷⁰ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 16-17.

⁷¹ Elliot and Merrill, *Social Disorganization*, pp. 841-43; Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization: Life and Thought in the United States Today* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), pp. 139-55; Richard Lingeman, *Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620-the Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), pp. 396-97.

⁷² Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, pp. 150-54.

makes stronger the family ties is bound to be a potent force; it is bound to be an enduring force. With the middle classes it is a very strong force.⁷³

Uncomfortable though it is to challenge the veracity of advertising copy, the evidence shows different something else. Cars allowed children and parents to spend leisure time away from each other, often quite far away. Family evenings together and supervision of courtship were less common.⁷⁴

Paternal authority declined along with most forms of authority after 1918. Traditional fathers were seen as out of date and unable to accept change. Youth culture made inroads into family solidarity but was not an alternative to family life, nor was it yet cynical or hostile to it. Prosperity and cynicism raised the importance of the individual and reduced that of traditional senses of family duty.⁷⁵ Many younger people moved away from families, either upon returning from France or on seeing opportunity elsewhere. The idea of progress had always had material aspects – getting ahead, obtaining land, acquiring a few consumer items from a mail-order catalog – but religious freedom, education, and civic advancement had been more important. Progress came to mean better pay, a house or a bigger one, a Ford, and so on and so on. Higher meaning receded to the back of the mind where it might nag but could no longer govern.⁷⁶

Politics Despite discontent with tradition, the country became politically conservative. With energies devoted to the war, progressivism took a back seat, a phenomenon Franklin Roosevelt would express in his famous Dr Win the War remark. Vilified as ruthless exploiters at the turn of the century, big business emerged with an improved image. People realized that industrialists and financiers churned out ships, planes, and weapons and were important to the nation. Economic growth continued well after it. Factories expanded and made consumer goods. Farmers benefited from demand for foodstuffs.⁷⁷

⁷³ Quoted in Flink, *The Car Culture*, p. 145.

⁷⁴ Flink, *The Car Culture*, pp. 151-60.

⁷⁵ See Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, pp. 137-38. Contemporary sources include: William Fielding Ogburn, *American Marriage and Family Relationships* (New York: H Holt, 1928); Ernest Groves, *The American Family* (Chicago: JB Lippincott, 1934).

⁷⁶ Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, pp. 113-38.

⁷⁷ On the demise of reform during the Great War see Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, pp. 23-24; David P Thelen, *Robert M La Follette and the Insurgent Spirit* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 125-54.

Conservative politics gained from declining faith in idealism that progressive politics drew from. Wilson professed noble principles, theologians invoked Christian duty, and others promised a war to end all wars. As peace negotiations played out in Versailles, old-regime politics won out. Provinces traded hands, overseas territories were carved up, and the estate of a recently deceased sick man went through probate, where distant and dubious relatives in London and Paris became benefactors. One American statesman left in disgust and headed for the Riviera “to watch the world go to hell in a handbasket.” A British officer observed, “After ‘the war to end all war’ they seem to have been pretty successful in Paris at making a ‘Peace to end Peace.’”⁷⁸ The war “was itself profoundly corrupting, for it transformed citizens into cynics, filled free men with self-loathing and drove millions into privacy, apathy, and despair.”⁷⁹ Americans no longer wanted energetic administrations righting wrongs and ending injustices. They wanted a return to everyday life. Bryan and Roosevelt were replaced by Harding and Hoover.

While much of the nation’s fairly comfortable with change, there were elements of unease, looking backward, and hysteria. Anti-immigration frenzies, a resurgent Ku Klux Klan, opposition to Darwinism, and Prohibition were all short-lived efforts to preserve the past or some conception of it.⁸⁰ Moderate voices, including some who had taken part in the revelry, felt that life was too fast, directionless, reckless. Suicide rates, which had declined during the war, went up fifty percent in the decade after 1918.⁸¹ Fitzgerald saw the best minds of his generation damaged by green lights:

By this time contemporaries of mine had begun to disappear into the dark maw of violence. A classmate killed his wife and himself on Long Island, another tumbled “accidentally” from a skyscraper in Philadelphia, another purposely from a skyscraper in New York. One was killed in a speak-easy in Chicago; another was beaten to death in a speak-easy in New York and crawled home to the Princeton Club to die; still another had his skull crushed by a maniac’s axe in an insane asylum where he was confined. These are not catastrophes that I went out of my way to look for – these were my friends;

⁷⁸ Archibald Wavell (a field marshal in the next world war). Quoted in David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), p. 5. See also Kennedy, *Over Here*, pp. 231-95, 348-69.

⁷⁹ Walter Karp, *The Politics of War: The Story of Two Wars which Altered Forever the Political Life of the American Republic (1890-1920)* (New York: Harper Collins, 1979), p. 325.

⁸⁰ Levine, *Defender of the Faith*, pp. 218-92; Stanley Coben, *Rebellion against Victorianism*, pp. 136-56.

⁸¹ Suicide rates from *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States*, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, 1968, p. 99. See also Pitirim A Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age* (New York: EP Dutton, 1957 [1941]), pp. 206-12.

moreover, these things happened not during the depression but during the boom.⁸²

Fitzgerald sensed an impending fall, a “crack-up” following a long joyride. When the ride was over, people felt confused and defenseless. Many looked backward.

The Depression

Fortunes and savings vanished after the crash in '29 and bank failures that followed. Factories closed and unemployment shot up from four to twenty-five percent. Droughts and plagues of locusts struck the plains. Dust storms kicked up top soil and deposited it far away on eastern cities, even on ships hundreds of miles out to sea. It was an almost preternatural phenomenon. Faces showed hunger, desperation, and fear. The system had collapsed, and there seemed no prospect of restoring it. To many whose outlook was still shaped by religion, it was a Judgment intended to return a sinful people to the right path.⁸³ The downturn brought a reluctant retreat to the past.

Many who'd found new lives in the city had to come home. Hard times placed strains on the family but there were unifying effects as well. The family again became a cooperative unit. Adults and children worked odd jobs, pooled resources, and eked out a living.⁸⁴ Poverty ended many leisure activities, leaving families with more time together. Divorce rates, on the rise throughout the twenties, began to decline.⁸⁵ The small town's virtues were appreciated anew, if only by necessity. Communities gave a sense of belonging and continuity in a bewildering time. The return to the family and hometown was praised in local editorials:

More families are now acquainted with their constituent members than at any time since the log-cabin days of America. And those who are going back to the farms also are returning to homes and home life in a simpler and more direct way than was possible for them so long as they were city dwellers. . . . City folk had grown far away

⁸² F Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack Up* (New York: New Directions, 1956), p. 20.

⁸³ Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, pp. 918-23.

⁸⁴ Glen H Elder, Jr, *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 49-82, 83-117.

⁸⁵ Robert S and Helen M Lynd, *Middletown in Transition* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1965 [1937]), pp. 152-55.

from the soil from which their grandparents wrested a living.⁸⁶

Sentimental themes ran through popular culture. The Andy Hardy, Henry Aldrich, and Deanna Durbin films showed the affection and security of family and community. Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* and Richard Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley* depicted warm havens, held together by norms and rites. Norman Rockwell's depictions of Americana became popular. Even Sinclair Lewis (yes, the author of *Babbitt* and *Main Street*) found much to admire in small-town life after all in his *The Prodigal Parents* and *Home Town*. In a famous film of 1939, a young girl returns to Kansas after a strange journey and concludes there was no place like home.

People went back to religion for solace, meaning, and hope. An Okie recalls, "Did we need the church in the Depression? You bet we did. What else did we have? We had no one else to turn to."⁸⁷ Popular magazines ran stories about rejecting frivolities and getting back to thrift, hard work, and perseverance. The old ways would see you through.⁸⁸ Beginning in 1932, perhaps owing to reacquaintance with family and community, suicide rates fell off sharply.⁸⁹

The Depression should never be known as an event that brought people back to their senses. People went hungry and fell into despair. Not everyone who returned home came to appreciate the old environs. For many, it signified lost opportunity and failure. Many experienced confusion from conflict between the identity they created in the twenties and the one they had to readopt after hopping off the bus.⁹⁰ Men had prided

⁸⁶ Quoted in the Lynds, *Middletown in Transition* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1937), pp. 146-47. This classic study of Depression-era Muncie found a general falling back on earlier values, though also increased social strains. Many community associations declined as people no longer could afford dues; community welfare programs were overwhelmed and were replaced by federal relief agencies. See also W Lloyd Warner, et al, *Democracy in Jonesville: A Study of Quality and Inequality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), pp. 115ff. (The study's research was conducted during the Depression.)

⁸⁷ Dan Morgan, *Rising in the West: The True Story of an 'Okie' Family from the Great Depression through the Reagan Years* (New York: Knopf, 1992), p. 133 (see also pp. 126-33). Morgan's outstanding study of an Okie family finds many differences with Steinbeck's fictional Joad family. Whereas the Joads find religion no longer providing any answers, Morgan's study finds continued if not strengthened faith.

⁸⁸ See Charles R Hearn, *The American Dream in the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1977), pp. 56-80; Emanuel Levy, *Small-Town America in Film: The Decline and Fall of Community* (New York: Continuum, 1991).

⁸⁹ *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States* US. Dept of Health, Education and Welfare, 1968, p. 99. See also Robert S McElvaine, ed, *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

⁹⁰ Elliot and Merrill, *Social Disorganization*, pp. 838-89; Arthur J Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), pp. 11-13.

themselves as breadwinners whose hard work improved the family lot. Laid off from the plant, idled after losing the store, men found themselves at home, a place with connotations of sloth, effeminacy, and failure. No longer able to feel their efforts made a difference, many men fell into despair.⁹¹ Local relief agencies couldn't cope with the numbers. Schools, parks, and other public goods suffered as town revenues fell. The wealthy were resented and local notables were suspected of skimming from the Community Chest.⁹²

Clergymen noticed larger congregations and thought the country was on the verge of a new awakening. But after a few years, it was clear that anecdotes of renewals were plentiful, some fundamentalist churches enjoyed growing membership, but there was no great revival.⁹³ The clergy noted that people came to religious services for consolation but looked increasingly to the government for information and hope.⁹⁴

As the economic crisis deepened, a political and social one emerged. Faith in authority and in basic myths became macabre jests. The Hoover administration and captains of industry assured the public that events on Wall Street affected only a lunatic fringe of speculators the economy was sound and full employment would soon return. Prosperity was just around. . . well, everyone tired of that line. Trust in political and economic institutions wore down as each confident prediction failed to come true.⁹⁵

Political and business leaders were objects of criticism in the past. Twain satirized the Grant administration. Grover Cleveland endured ridicule when suspected of fathering an illegitimate child. The press vilified robber barons and scandals damaged the Harding administration. The Depression was not a transient scandal. Political and economic institutions were questioned. One jab converted a psalm: "Hoover is my shepherd, I am in want, He maketh me to lie down on park benches."⁹⁶

The Beards' popular history, a mixture of scholarship and outrage, argued that business leaders, the

⁹¹ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), pp. 216-221; Elliot and Merrill, *Social Disorganization*, pp. 425-54.

⁹² The Lynds, *Middletown in Transition*, pp. 102-43.

⁹³ Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, pp. 918-31; The Lynds, *Middletown in Transition*, pp. 300-18. Elliott and Merrill noted a decline in church attendance in their "Centerville." See *Social Disorganization*, p. 787.

⁹⁴ The Lynds, *Middletown in Transition*, pp. 317-18.

⁹⁵ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 62-103.

⁹⁶ Quoted in McElvaine, *Down and Out*, p. 34.

“lords of creation,” had invested American money in foreign countries and offered reckless margin policies. Stock swindles, insider deals, and other skullduggery robbed hard-working people of their savings. The lords of creation wielded undue influence in Washington, in domestic and foreign policy. The latter was exploited to build overseas empires. Despite intolerable social injustice, corporate media obediently churned out escapist entertainment, lulling the public into political passivity.⁹⁷ The Beards failed to see the harsh social criticism in popular culture. The Great War converted Dos Passos into a strident critic of American life. The Depression deepened his alienation and anger. In his famous trilogy, he eschews the term “America,” preferring the cold “USA,” in which he presents a bleak look at a soulless land of exploitation and lies. Dos Passos takes his readers into a netherworld of bars, brothels, and menial work – for him, the essence of the country.

The best known novel of the era, John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, is the saga of the Joads, a family of dispossessed Okie sharecroppers. The grandparents (alive at the outset, dead by the close) had settled the land, fought off Indians, and earned a living from uncharitable land. As the Depression worsens, the bank (“the monster”) evicts them in order to build a large mechanized farm. Hearing of work in California, the Joads pack up as much as their truck can hold but must leave behind many things, including the family copy of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. The local preacher has lost faith in God and chooses to accompany them. The westward trip recalls basic myths of opportunity and self-sufficiency, though on reaching the promised land, the Joads find only hardship, lies, and repression. Big ranch owners have lured thousands of Okies to drive down wages. Those who complain or attempt to unionize are beaten or killed. At the end (of the book, not the film), the Joads are split apart and near starvation. A glimmer of hope comes from the suggestion that folk traditions can serve as a basis for an egalitarian future.⁹⁸

In Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* two workers drift from job to job, ever hopeful of saving enough money to start their own business – a lie made up by the economic order to con the poor and keep them in line. Similarly, Erskine Caldwell’s novels depicted characters believing that a bumper crop is coming despite

⁹⁷ Charles A and Mary R Beard, *America in Midpassage* Volume I (New York: Macmillan, 1939), pp. 69-83, 156-91. They also argued the media were drumming up support for another foolhardy war in Europe that would only profit big business. See also Thurman Arnold, *The Folklore of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), pp. 46-82.

⁹⁸ See also Morgan, *Rising in the West*; Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

obviously depleted soil or that a cache of gold lies somewhere on the patch. People cling to delusion to avoid despair. Many of these works became important films, enjoying critical and popular acclaim. Another film looked at the other extreme of the social order, the phenomenally wealthy head of a sprawling publishing empire. In *Citizen Kane*, success entails loss of principles, even if penned and sworn to in the presence of a friend. Pathological dynamics lie behind the pursuit of wealth. It leads to an unmourned death in an opulent castle.⁹⁹

The long-believed belief that hard work would better one's lot was hollow. Work became a desperate struggle to stave off hunger. There were few signs of progress. Unemployment remained high throughout the thirties. Lawlessness was right around the corner. Myths of latter-day Robin Hoods, robbing the rich to help the poor, attached themselves to vicious criminals. Woody Guthrie's "Ballad of Pretty Boy Floyd" told of the eponymous figure paying off mortgages and leaving bundles of groceries. It concludes with:

Some will rob you with a six-gun

And some with a fountain pen.

When bankers threatened to foreclose farm properties, a midwestern governor advised, "Shoot the banker if he comes on your farm."¹⁰⁰

The Hoover administration was reluctant to trim military spending for fear it would "lessen our means of maintaining domestic peace and order."¹⁰¹ When veterans marched on Washington to demand early payment of bonuses, many saw it as the vanguard of insurrection or homegrown Brown Shirts. General MacArthur used the army against them. Colonel Patton led a saber charge. Something had gone wrong if Cossacks were needed to hold up the system.¹⁰² Could current institutions handle the problem? Were new, socialist ones needed? Or

⁹⁹ See Hearn, *The American Dream*, pp. 82-85.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Catherine McNicol Stock, *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 140. See also her *Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 139-42.

¹⁰¹ Quote from Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 256. See also William E Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 1-40; Malcolm Cowley, *The Dream of the Golden Mountains: Remembering the 1950s* (New York: Viking, 1980), pp. 83-93, 149-66.

¹⁰² Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, pp. 67-69; Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, pp. 205-11.

could darker aspects of the past provide a basis for American fascism?¹⁰³

Herbert Hoover, visibly embittered, turned over the presidency to Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. In the first hundred days, his administration embarked on a series of programs to get the country back to work and restore faith in America. Roosevelt called to Washington many of the leaders of the war mobilization effort of 1917. The NRA used the War Industries Board (1917-18) as a model. Fighting the Depression, like the world war, was a matter of redirecting the economy in the appropriate direction. He declared bank holidays, began work programs, and sought to reorganize the economy to prevent future collapses.¹⁰⁴

In a few years, America seemed to be on the move again. The banking system stabilized, factory gates reopened, and many found work. In 1937 though, the economy fell again. Unemployment jumped from fourteen to nineteen percent in a year. Businesses and workers began to grumble.¹⁰⁵ The administration was unable to agree on a new course. Roosevelt expected harsh words from the *Chicago Tribune* but even *The Nation* observed, "FDR now realizes that the New Deal is stopped, that he is not making a dent on the unemployment situation, that the present tremendous spending is doing very little to restore prosperity and that he has lost control of congress."¹⁰⁶ The slump worsened and average people began to refer to this new downturn as the "Roosevelt Recession." The system was once again on trial.¹⁰⁷

In Germany and Japan, the Depression brought portentous changes leading to another world war. German

¹⁰³ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 218-48; Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, pp. 258-63. A contemporary discussion of this political crossroads is found in Lyman Bryson, *Which Way America? Communism, Fascism, Democracy* (New York: Macmillan, 1939).

¹⁰⁴ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 147-48, 177-78; Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, pp. 1-11, 219-29. It might be noted that the TVA, cornerstone of the New Deal, began as a power plant for a nitrate mine near Muscle Shoals, Alabama, deemed essential for explosives production. On social mobilization during war see Walter Lippmann, *The Good Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937), pp. 89-90.

¹⁰⁵ Charles P Kindleberger, *The World Depression, 1929-1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 262-77; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 184-89.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Robert Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 182. See also Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 350-62.

¹⁰⁷ See Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Knopf, 1995), pp. 86-174.

democracy collapsed and the National Socialists took power. Their government expenditures brought full employment, popular support, and a war machine.¹⁰⁸ Japanese leaders, wary of imperial powers in Asia, saw the opportunity to create their own empire.¹⁰⁹ Western powers, they reasoned, were weak and distracted. Their populations looked inward and questioned the morality of colonies. The world was headed for war. The crisis in America was not solved by a handful of policies and soothing chats. The greatest depression the country ever endured was ended by its largest war. America had enough coherence for the immense national effort ahead.

¹⁰⁸ David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany 1933-1939* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), pp. 73-151.

¹⁰⁹ WG Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism, 1894-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 198-219.

Chapter Three

Crosscurrents of War, 1941-1945

Total war sets into motion certain forces tending to unify the nation under the stress of external threat to its existence, although their total net effect is probably less important than those forces making for the interruption of normal social relationships. Total war in general makes for social disorganization.

Francis E Merrill
Social Problems on the Home Front

For those children of the Depression who survived the war with body and mind intact, the experience of seeing the world from the cocoon of Uncle Sam's Army must have left most with a new sense of the wealth and power of the United States. In a new way, they were American and proud of it.

David Reynolds
Rich Relations

Americans thought they could remain distant observers to another world war. Events, however, were moving the country toward involvement and President Roosevelt encouraged it. The war was a tremendous effort, as great a national achievement as any in history. However, it churned through America like a ship's propeller through a school of fish. Most Americans thought changes were only for the duration. They weren't. December 7th is remembered not only because of events in the Pacific but also because it was a watershed before which life seemed fixed and recognizable, after which it was impermanent and new.

America Goes to War

Congress forbade American merchant ships from carrying war materiel to Europe and the navy from escorting British cargo ships. Japanese attacks in China met with strong notes and stern warnings but the public mood allowed for little more. The fall of France in May 1940 altered opinion. When moving against Czechoslovakia

and Poland, Hitler seemed to pose no danger. But when he overwhelmed France and threatened Britain, realities dawned. Roosevelt convinced the nation that lending Britain a fleet of aging destroyers would bolster a line of defense and make American involvement unnecessary. He justified it in the homely analogy of lending a neighbor a garden hose to put out a fire.¹ Sensing the changing public mood (and probably contributing to it as well), Hollywood placed military deeds and moral obligations in *The Fighting Sixty-Ninth* (1940), *Sergeant York* (1941), and *They Died With Their Boots On* (1941).²

Soon thereafter, Congress allowed American ships to transport materiel to England, escorted by American destroyers – a change of policy that would likely result in engagements with German submarines. Shots were fired, ships sunk. By October 1941, over a hundred American lives had been lost in the North Atlantic. Mindful that impassioned responses plunged them into the Great War, Americans held their breath. Roosevelt told the nation their sons and neighbors had been attacked, winning consensus for firing first on Nazi subs. After all, he counseled, using another homely analogy, no one waited for a rattlesnake to strike first. By the fall of 1941, it was the unstated policy to escalate naval engagements until Germany declared war. Meanwhile, relations with Japan deteriorated as its expansion in Asia continued. Warnings grew into embargoes.³

Events and leaders, playing upon extant senses of duty, slowly drew the country back into world affairs. The 1940 election saw no dispute over foreign policy as the Republicans fielded Wendell Wilkie, an opponent of isolationism (and later author of a widely-read internationalist tract). Burton Wheeler warned that Lend-Lease would lead to a war that “will plow under every fourth American boy”⁴ but the public was stepping back from isolationism. William Jackaway, a hundred-year-old Civil War veteran, offered to fight Hitler any time, any

¹ David M Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 426-54, 460-76.

² Clayton R Koppes and Gregory D Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 17-47; Michael S Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1950s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 53-55.

³ On American entrance into the Second World War see Robert Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1952-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 171-313; Joseph P Lash, *Roosevelt and Churchill, 1959-1941: The Partnership that Saved the West* (New York: WW Norton, 1976); Robert E Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), pp. 429-38; WG Beasley, *Japanese Imperialism, 1894-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 198-250.

⁴ Quoted in Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 259.

place, any style. *Life* and other parts of the press asked why the navy hadn't sunk any Nazi subs yet. Seventy percent of Americans wanted to stay out of war but the same percentage felt Germany had to be stopped, even if it meant war. In late 1941, two-thirds felt war with Japan was imminent.⁵

The ambiguous state between war and peace, the debate over a proper course, the discontent of previous years, ended in an instant at Pearl Harbor. Congress declared war the next day and shortly thereafter Hitler, angered by naval exchanges, declared war on the US. Wheeler put it in straight-forward Midwestern terms: "The only thing now to do is to lick hell out of them."⁶ Secretary of War Stimson expressed the same thought as befitting his Brahmin caste: "[I] never doubted that the central importance of the Pearl Harbor attack lay not in the tactical victory carried off by the Japanese but in the simple fact that the months of hesitation and relative inaction were ended at a stroke. No single blow could have been better calculated to put an end to American indecision."⁷ War had come. The ship's propeller was turning.

The Family at War

Families worried about the fate of loved ones overseas and of the nation itself. Members shared the experience of war plants, scrap metal drives, buying bonds, and rationing. Scrimping and saving, harnessing energies for troops instead of personal gain, and following the news became bases of life. Children wrote encouraging letters to GIs, followed events in school, scanned the skies for Messerschmitts and Zeroes (their silhouettes known from cereal boxes), and recreated events in backyard play. Many of them comforted families that suffered real casualties.⁸

⁵ Geoffrey Perrett, *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph: The American People, 1939-1945* (New York: Coward, Mcann, and Geoghegan, 1973), p. 203.

⁶ Quoted in Lawrence S Wittner, *Rebels against War: The American Peace Movement, 1935-1985* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), p. 36. See also midwestern voices in W Lloyd Warner et al, *Democracy in Jonesville: A Study in Quality and Inequality* (New York: Harper, 1964 [1949]), p. 266.

⁷ Henry L Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), p. 393.

⁸ Francis E Merrill, *Social Problems on the Home Front: A Study of War-time Influences* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), pp. 26-63; William M Tuttle, Jr, "Daddy's Gone to War:" *The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 112-47. See also Judy Barrett Litoff and David C Smith, eds, *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

The image of the family as a vital part of the effort became the stuff of army lectures, magazine stories, and more than a few movies, perhaps the most exemplary of which was *Since You Went Away*. Its opening scene is a hearth with a cozy fire blazing, over which appear the words:

*This is a story of an Unconquerable Fortress:
the American Home. . . 1945.*

The Hilton family displays a star in their front window, indicating a family member serving overseas. The mother works in a war plant and a boarder is taken in to help make ends meet. The daughters volunteer in a hospital and on scrap drives. The issue of fidelity is broached on more than one occasion but faithfulness of wives and sweethearts is above question. *Since You Went Away* is a poignant film, conveying the experiences of many families, but in many respects it is pat and may be seen as a rejoinder to enemy propaganda of the “Your-sweetheart-is-seeing-a-4F” variety. There were other effects on households.

Raised in a more orderly world in a midwestern town (and probably still harboring opposition to the war), Charles and Mary Beard saw the family in danger:

[F]amilies were undergoing disintegration; for men were being drafted for war, women drawn into the auxiliary armed forces, war production and civilian defense, children of school age crowding into war industries, adolescents left to roam the streets for excitement, and the energies of parents distracted from the care of homes and children. The fact was indisputable and its social import was recognized by leaders in public affairs. It was discussed in newspapers, in meetings of organizations concerned with public welfare, in journals devoted to surveys of social and economic conditions, and in popular magazines. . . . Yet no generally accepted and workable plans were devised for successfully countering disruptive effects of war activities and war regimentation on the homes and family life of the nation.⁹

The war would take priority but would the country ever return to normal family life as the Beards and much of the country knew it? Mobilization meant unprecedented disruption, transience, uprooting. There was an immense internal migration as 30 million out of 140 million Americans left home, either by entering the military or relocating to war jobs. Fifteen million civilians moved to an entirely different part of the country.¹⁰ Sixteen million served in the military, usually far from home. Sometimes across oceans. Though induction of fathers

⁹ Charles A and Mary R Beard, *The Basic History of the United States* (New York: Doubleday, 1944), pp. 474-75.

¹⁰ Merrill, *Social Problems on the Home Front*, p. 63; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 747-48.

didn't come until 1944, defense jobs and military service combined to bring about a huge number of separations and dislocations.¹¹

Women took part. Over a quarter million served in the armed forces as well as in ferrying planes from plants to port facilities. They were more frequently found in the workplace where by 1943 shortages were felt. World War One saw women in the workforce but involvement was relatively short and social change less pronounced. With the Second World War, their participation was on a larger scale and longer duration. Women found themselves outside the confines of traditional roles and in workplaces that had been male-oriented. In some sectors, women as a percentage of the workforce went from five to twenty-five percent.¹² Work gave women new feelings of independence and efficacy, not simply from working outside the home. They learned that they could make planes and tanks and solve workplace problems, that they possessed abilities they never dreamed of, and that they could do the jobs of men. Women became active parts of an event of overwhelming national and historical importance. The upshot wasn't immediate – after all, most women returned to prewar domesticity – but outlooks would never be the same.¹³

Many women had children. In 1940, there were over eight hundred thousand working women with children under ten. Four years later the number had almost doubled. Although the war gave family members common efforts and aspirations, it reduced time together.¹⁴ Paternal authority disappeared in many households and the role shifted to women. This constituted an unparalleled transfer of roles which many women handled well, though for many others, alone, in new environs, and working long hours, it was burdensome or impossible.

¹¹ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 634-47. Similar effects are described in John Barber and Mark Harrison. *The Soviet Home Front, 1941-1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London: Longman, 1991), pp. 90-96.

¹² For statistics on the automotive and electrical industries see Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp. 49-52.

¹³ See Susan M Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston, Mass: Twayne, 1982); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War with America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984). See also Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain, 1939-1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), pp. 331-35.

¹⁴ Carl N Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 418-35; Geraldine Youcha, *Minding the Children: Child Care in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Scribner's, 1995), pp. 307-35. Youcha points out a number of federal programs that provided child care during the war, many of which evolved from the WPA.

The family was less able to instill beliefs and discipline. Most thought the disruption was just for the duration, like doing without coffee.

The effects on children were significant and lasted decades. Many older children, especially boys, quit school and took factory jobs or split time between school and work. The number of secondary students dropped eleven percent between 1940 and 1944, far more than demographic changes account for. Well paid at a young age, they constituted a prematurely independent group who though still members of families, were less meaningful parts of them. Their workplaces were outside the family and so were their leisure time, consumption habits, expectations, and plans. Magazines and other forms of entertainment came into being that targeted this young group.

Children were left in movie theaters or playgrounds until the parent's shift was over. The term "juvenile delinquency" came into common usage to describe a new phenomenon covering a range of behavior more serious than soaping windows but trivial by today's standards. Most cities, especially the ones with large population influxes, experienced sharp increases in youth crime throughout the war. Young girls sought the attentions of soldiers on leave, often feeling that it was contributing to the war effort. Few GIs argued the matter.¹⁵

Dispersal of Community

Towns held meetings to determine how best to contribute to the war, much as they had on hearing of the firing on Fort Sumter eighty years earlier. Communities found purpose and vigor in scrap drives, blood donor programs, and blackouts along coastlines. The national conscription system had extensive local involvement, in part to deflect potential resentments from Washington.¹⁶ Prominent citizens were charged with the sobering task of determining who was needed back home and who would be sent to war, a decision that of course meant

¹⁵ Merrill, *Social Problems on the Home Front*, pp. 80-162; Richard R Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?: The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York: Putnam, 1970), pp. 88-91; Marc Scott Miller, *The Irony of Victory: World War II and Lowell, Massachusetts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 166-87. On parallel events in Britain, see Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (New York: WW Norton, 1965), pp. 116-19; David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1941-1945* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 267-70.

¹⁶ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 632-33.

sending some to their deaths. Communities found new vitality in volunteer work, USOs, hospitals, and honoring the dead and comforting families.¹⁷

The hometown angle was central to war reporting. Stories about the Screaming Eagle from Orange, New Jersey, the tanker from Cohoes, New York, the nurse from Springfield, Massachusetts, the intelligence officer from Oak Park, Illinois enlivened ties between hometowns and distant fronts. The index of Ernie Pyle's *Brave Men* lists all the towns mentioned in the book as well as the GIs who came from them.¹⁸ News stories took pride in teachers, coaches, and neighbors who had formed the character of local guys. Everyone in the neighborhood knew of others with family members overseas, shared their anxieties on hearing of sharp engagements, and felt part of the same effort: "You just felt that the stranger sitting next to you in a restaurant, or someplace, felt the same way you did about the basic issues."¹⁹

The most important parts of the community were local businesses that had converted from making agricultural implements to tank turret components, from fertilizers to high explosives, from colorful textiles to olive drab issue. Towns enjoyed the prestige of making rifles, mosquito netting, boots, and landing craft. (It's unclear if anyone took credit for C-Rations.) One woman recalls going to work this way: "If you ask me what are my most vivid impressions of the war years, I'd have to go back to the factory, driving down and seeing the anti-aircraft guns on the roof and the lights and the feeling of just being involved."²⁰

Production sometimes had the quaintness of a folk rite. On completing an LST landing craft, the citizens of Seneca, Illinois would all turn out as it rolled into the river on its way to the Mississippi and ultimately to Anzio, Kwajalein, or Normandy. Senecans celebrated their hard work, then after a benediction and speech

¹⁷ Warner et al, *Democracy in Jonesville*, pp. 268-72; W Lloyd Warner, *American Life: Dream and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964 [1953]), pp. 24-30; William Serrin, *Homestead: The Glory and Tragedy of an American Steel Town* (New York: Times, 1992), pp. 234-35.

¹⁸ Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men* (New York: Henry Holt, 1944), pp. 467-74.

¹⁹ Bill Gold, quoted in Roy Hoopes, *Americans Remember the Home Front: An Oral Narrative* (New York: Hawthorn, 1977), p. xii.

²⁰ Quoted in Hoopes, *Americans Remember the Home Front*, p. 93. See also Serrin, *Homestead*, pp. 222-23.

from a wounded GI, returned to work on the next LST. From a bridge over the river, children tossed flowers onto the vessel and offered prayers for those who would go into battle from her.²¹

Migration of over thirty million people had considerable effects. The town had never been completely self-contained. It had known periods of coming and going, though nothing like this. Small towns were hurt as people entered the service or found better paying work elsewhere. The movement was especially pronounced in the interior South and Midwest where businesses could not compete with booming cities along the coasts and in the Northeast. Between 1940 and 1945, the rural population declined by an average of 1.6 million each year.²² Skilled labor and capital fled the Middletowns. Neither returned in large numbers.

Seeing greater efficiency in economies of scale, the government tended to award contracts to large businesses, typically in big cities. (The same was true during the Civil War.) Over half a million small businesses went under. The percentage of workers employed by big business soared – trends that alarmed New Dealers like Adolph Berle and old-line Republicans like Robert Taft.²³ The common man and small town were in danger. A Senate inquiry warned “If we continue destroying America’s small businesses and uprooting small communities, and many of our large ones as well, we shall not recognize post-war America.”²⁴ There was a war on, you know, and national priorities lay elsewhere. FDR listened less to Dr New Deal than to Dr Win the War.

Anti-big business rhetoric thundered from Washington only a few years earlier. That was gone. Captains of industry such as Kaiser, Stettinius, and Knudsen were welcomed in the White House where a newer and more

²¹ See Robert J Havighurst, *The Social History of a War-Boom Community* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1951); John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), pp. 53-64; Warner *American Life*, pp. 26-30; Richard Polenberg, ed, *America at War: The Home Front, 1941-1945* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 11-12; Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (New York: JB Lippincott, 1972), pp. 131-35; Perrett, *Days of Sadness*, pp. 203-35.

²² John L Shover, *First Majority – Last Minority: The Transformation of Rural Life in America* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), p. 6.

²³ James L Abrahamson, *The American Home Front: Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, World War II* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1983), p. 149; Kim McQuaid, *Uneasy Partners: Big Business in American Politics, 1945-1990* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 14-15. Abrahamson notes that the government attempted to help small businesses by allowing them to reconvert to consumer goods ahead of large firms.

²⁴ Quoted in Polenberg, ed, *America at War*; p. 28. See also Blum, *V Was for Victory*, pp. 124-31; John Dos Passos, *State of the Nation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), pp. 24-26.

lasting deal was forged.²⁵ *The Saturday Evening Post* proclaimed, "If Free Enterprise had not flourished here, the cause of world freedom might now be lost for centuries."²⁶

Many small towns had serviceable mills, mines, and foundries that benefited from government contracts, and did not lose population. Others such as Richland, Washington, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Willow Run, Michigan had large new defense industries spring up in the blink of an eye. They became different entities, many of them no longer communities in a meaningful sense. A thriving factory or mine in a sleepy hamlet might attract tens of thousands of new workers, unfamiliar with and resentful of local ways and unrestrained by nearby family. They were making good money for the first time and eager to spend it on Friday night.²⁷

Many places were like boom-towns of the old West. Cacophonous migrations overwhelmed the rhythms of life. Ramshackle housing sprouted up for workers and families. Many workers were single and felt even less need to conform to local usages than did newly-arriving families. Where factories ran two or three shifts, round-the-clock bars sprang up. The impact became clear soon enough:

In some communities the whole system of control that formerly prevailed has ceased to function or has been suspended by outside authority. The influx of population has been so great that the schools can teach but a small portion of the children. The police force is inadequate. The usual recreational life has disappeared to be supplanted by the taxi dance, juke joint, beer hall, and gambling dive. Institutions such as the church and lodge have almost ceased to function. In some towns one can drive through miles of trailer camps and small houses pressed against each other, all recently assembled, where the

²⁵ See Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, pp. 69-80; Blum, *V Was for Victory*, pp. 125-27; McQuaid, *Uneasy Partners*, pp. 12-17; Bruce Catton, *The Warlords of Washington* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948); The Beards, *Basic History*, pp. 478-79; Gerald D Nash, *World War II and the West: Reshaping the Economy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

²⁶ Quoted in Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 47.

²⁷ Warner et al, *Democracy in Jonesville*, pp. 267-69; Everett M Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960), pp. 11-15; Lowell Juilliard Carr and James Edson Stermer, *Willow Run: A Study of Industrialization and Cultural Inadequacy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952).

inhabitants are living in squalid anonymity with, but not of, the thousands around them. They are an aggregate of individuals concentrated in one area, but they are not a community.²⁸

Big cities underwent rapid growth too. Between 1940 and 1944, Mobile grew by sixty-five percent, Norfolk by forty-five percent, San Diego by forty-four percent, San Francisco by twenty-five percent, and Los Angeles by fifteen percent. Neighborhoods lost their identity. Younger men and women went wherever the war propelled them and the old stayed and wondered if the others would ever return once the job was finished. Fewer than twenty percent did.²⁹

Religion and Social Norms

Western civilization has long associated war and religion. It's been impressed on generations of Europeans and Americans who then comprehended new conflicts in that manner. Much of the Old Testament is a narrative of an embattled people seeking God's help in defeating enemies. Many passages read like a war epic with great warriors, martial prowess, and miraculous deliverances. Joshua's horn crumbled the walls around Jericho. Samson was a fearsome fighter – an “ecstatic warrior” as Max Weber noted. The destruction of Pharaoh's army delivered the nation from foreign domination, leading Moses to proclaim “the Lord is a man of war” (Exodus 15:3).³⁰

²⁸ W Lloyd Warner, “The American Town,” in William Fielding Ogburn, ed, *American Society in Wartime* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), pp. 41-42. Carl Bridenbaugh noted a similar process in colonial towns during the wars of the mid-eighteenth century: “During these years of conflict, vastly complicated by wartime abnormalities, ordinary municipal peace officers found it difficult – indeed, often impossible – to ensure quiet and public safety. Large accretions of population, including large proportions of floaters – sailors, soldiers, runaways from the country, immigrants, and rougher elements – exerted more pressure on the feeble guarantors of law and order than they could withstand.” *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971 [1955]), p. 107. Bridenbaugh argues that these wars broke down traditional social patterns and opened Americans to revolutionary sentiments in the next few decades. See also Frederick Lewis Allen's observations on war and social change during the First World War in *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1931), pp. 38-72.

²⁹ Statistics on population growth in cities from Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On*, pp. 69-70. See also Havighurst, *War-Boom Community*; Carr and Stermer, *Willow Run*; Dos Passos, *State of the Nation*, pp. 43-6, 89-95. On demographic shifts in the wartime Soviet Union see Susan J Linz, “World War II and Soviet Economic Growth, 1940-1953” and Alec Nove, “Soviet Peasantry in World War Two,” in Susan J Linz, ed, *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), pp. 11-46, 77-90. For British dislocations see Calder, *The People's War*, pp. 315-17.

³⁰ See Thomas B Dozeman, *God at War: Power in the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 42-70.

Greek and Roman armies carried images of gods on campaigns and looked for auguries of a battle's outcome. Victorious generals became emperors and emperors became gods, commemorated in inspiring arches and enshrined in the Pantheon. Constantine converted to Christianity on the eve of battle. He saw and *in hoc signo* won, creating a myth of divine support for the righteous.³¹ Centuries later, the Crusades strengthened the association between war and religion, as Christendom fought to free the Holy Land (though not always in a Christian manner). Arthurian legends, *The Song of Roland*, the tale of Joan of Arc strengthened the ideas. Händel and Haydn composed religiously-inspired works to bolster wartime morale and with victory wrote moving Te Deums. Countless aspects of culture, high and low, stressed the nobility and sacredness of shedding one's blood for the good of mankind. The link became part of the Western mind, almost as much as life after death. A military historian called Christianity "one of the great warrior religions of mankind."³²

Daily life held uncertainty, even dread, over one's fate, that of loved ones, and that of the nation. Speeches and films could only do so much. David Reynolds captures the moment of soldiers about to assault Normandy: "Although some GIs derided 'fox-hole religion,' the religious services on ship, as in the marshaling areas, were well attended. Young men in their early twenties confronted, often for the first time, the fact of their own mortality."³³ Americans suffered more deaths during World War Two (over 400,000 dead) than in any previous war except the Civil War; almost four times those of the First World War and seven times those of Vietnam and in a shorter period. The sinking of a large ship, an assault on a well-defended beachhead, a bombing mission deep into Germany or Romania sent shock waves back home when telegrams began to arrive. National guard units, groups of friends joining up together, or brothers serving on the same ship meant that death hit certain locales with appalling force.

³¹ Numa Denis Fustel de Coulange, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), pp. 164-67; Ramsay MacMullen, *Constantine* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 65-78. When one of his commanders feared the auguries from a calf, Hannibal replied, "Do you put more faith in a slice of veal than in an old general?" See RM Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (New York: WW Norton, 1969), p. 67.

³² Michael Howard, quoted in John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), p. 24.

³³ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 370. See also Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 67-70, 166-67.

People looked for spiritual comfort and transcending meaning. Individual and nation searched for something after a close call – for the individual, a mortar round hitting close by or a sister ship sent to the bottom, for the nation, an improbable victory or a battle portending a turning point. Providential aid was more convincing than pure chance, as after Midway (1942) where American planes sank three Japanese carriers in less than an hour, including ones that had struck Pearl Harbor. A fourth went down the next day. The tide of war had shifted and victory in the Pacific was all but ensured. Not since Appomattox had the nation been so confident that America was God's nation.

Political and military leaders encouraged religious sentiment. At every juncture, from the declaration of war to V-J Day, leaders called for national prayer and otherwise invoked religious sentiments. Churchill and Roosevelt sang *Onward Christian Soldiers* after forging an alliance against Hitler off Newfoundland. Roosevelt spoke of the nation benefiting from divine help and asked for prayer. On D-Day, he offered a lengthy prayer:

The spirit of man has awakened and the soul of man has come forth. Grant us the wisdom and the vision to comprehend the greatness of man's spirit that suffers and endures so hugely for a goal beyond his own brief span. Grant us honor for our dead who died in the faith, honor for our living who work and strive for the faith, redemption and security for all captive lands and peoples. . . . Amen.³⁴

The invocations were especially meaningful in a war against enemies that could with little if any hyperbole be called evil. Eisenhower saw his task as a "crusade in Europe." MacArthur spoke of his as a "holy mission."

Religion was in speeches, the launching of a ship, magazine advertisements, and battalion aid stations. People, in and out of the military, who had rarely if ever prayed, attended services. The cinema, working closely with the Office of War Information, stressed religious themes in *Since You Went Away*, *A Wing and A Prayer*, and *God Is My Co-Pilot*. An article in *Readers Digest* popularized the expression, "There are no atheists in foxhole." Mothers gave their sons small, iron-plated Bibles to place in their breast pockets. The evidence, admittedly anecdotal, suggests they stopped thousands of bullets. Fortunately, there is more solid evidence of religion among combat soldiers. When asked what helped most during the stress of battle, they mentioned (in ascending order) the rightness of cause, hatred of the enemy, desire to get home, duty to fellow soldiers, but between seventy and

³⁴ Quoted in Debs Myers, Jonathan Kilbourn and Richard Harrity, eds., *Yank – the GI Story of the War* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1947), p. 90. Stalin mobilized Orthodoxy during the war. See John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State, 1917-1950* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1965), pp. 291ff. This of course contrasts with earlier attempts to stamp out religion.

eighty-three percent of respondents stated that “prayer helped a lot.” After the war, seventy-nine percent of combat veterans stated that war experiences had strengthened their faith.³⁵

There were positive and negative consequences for family and community, and, lest anyone think the war was a wondrous moment of renewal, attention should turn to less spiritual aspects. Beneath the religious sentiment, there were far-reaching changes in the country’s norms.

Coarsening Millions of civilians became soldiers. The process is a calculated regimen of hardening and desensitizing which a large portion of a generation went through. Separation, close-cropped haircuts, and uniforms uprooted recruits. Then they were herded through medical exams, chow lines, training programs, embarkation depots, and short-arm inspections. Cadence calls, ribald limericks, and barracks doggerel ridicule sentimentality, disparage women as unfaithful, and joke about killing and dying.

Recruits were reoriented into a new moral environment to reduce individuality, put aside normal behavior, accept harsh realities, and obey. Army life after initial indoctrination continued to be rough and vulgar, wearing down sensibilities and inculcating obedience. The job was at least half done when soldiers called themselves “GIs” (Government Issue) and wore “dog tags.” Paul Fussell ably describes the process: “boys turned by training into quasi-mechanical interchangeable parts. . . . You might as well be an inert item of Government Issue, like a mess kit or a tool, entrenching.”³⁶ Standing up is useless: “Everything broke you down, until in the end you were just a little goddam bolt holding on and squealing when the machine went too fast.”³⁷ James Jones captures the thoughts of a soldier about to assault a ridge on Guadalcanal:

They thought they were men. They all thought they were real people. They really did. How funny. They thought they made decisions and ran their own lives, and proudly called themselves free individual

³⁵ Stouffer, *The American Soldier II*: pp. 173-91. Numbers range among enlisted men in different theaters of operation and were always higher among combat soldiers than non-combat soldiers. Length of combat did not affect responses. For comparable religious dynamics in the Soviet Union see William C Fletcher, “The Soviet Bible Belt: World War II’s Effects on Religion,” in Linz, ed, *The Impact of World War II*, pp. 91-106. See also Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences* (New York: Viking, 1988), pp. 77-79.

³⁶ Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 66, 70. See also TE Lawrence, *The Mint: A Day-Book of the R.A.F. Depot between August and December 1922 with Later Notes* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955); Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany* (Princeton Junction, NJ: The Scholar’s Bookshelf, 1988 [1954]), pp. 94-95.

³⁷ Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* (New York: Rinehart, 1948), pp. 703-4.

human beings. The truth was they were here, and they were gonna stay here, until the state through some other automaton told them to go someplace else, and then they'd go. But they'd go freely, of their own free choice and will, because they were free individual human beings. Well, well.³⁸

Soldiers must distance themselves from family and community to become parts of a vast apparatus of destruction. They are taught to obey a new commandment – *Thou shalt kill*. General Leslie McNair attempted to harden inductees by telling them, “We must lust for battle; our object in life must be to kill; we must scheme and plan night and day to kill.”³⁹ The final episode of Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* series depicts photographs of Axis leaders and exhorted: “If you see one of these men, KILL HIM!” Troops near Admiral Halsey’s headquarters saw his motto in large letters: “Kill Japs, kill Japs, then kill more Japs.”⁴⁰ Millions of GIs steeled themselves to do that. Hundreds of thousands did.

What folks back home read about, soldiers had to endure: endless marching with back-breaking packs, mud, rain, and enemy fire. Many units suffered over fifty percent casualties in a few weeks – those at Tarawa and Omaha Beach, in a few hours. Nervous breakdowns were common.⁴¹ Wounds were not neat incisions. Neither prisoners nor corpses were always treated respectfully. And the dead don’t look like they’re sleeping. Bombs were dropped on cities, bullets shot into enemy soldiers, information extracted from prisoners, satchel charges thrown into caves, and flame-throwers fired into bunkers.

Many soldiers become estranged from the conventions and sentiments of traditional life, no longer parts of a family or community or civilized society. They’re now parts of an immense killing machine, stretching across whole continents and oceans, effective at its work. One of Mailer’s platoon members, Red Valsen,

had been through so much combat, had felt so many kinds of terror, and had seen so many men killed that he no longer had any illusions about the inviolability of his own flesh. He knew he could be killed; it was something he had accepted years ago, and he had grown a shell about that knowledge so that he rarely thought of anything further than the next few minutes. . . . Red had accepted all the deaths of the

³⁸ James Jones, *The Thin Red Line* (New York: Scribner’s, 1964), p. 267. Similar complaints have been noted among Civil War soldiers. See McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, pp. 47-49.

³⁹ Quoted in James T Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 7. Paradoxically, McNair was killed by friendly fire.

⁴⁰ Fussell, *Wartime*, p. 138. See also J Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967 [1959]), pp. 131-69.

⁴¹ Twenty-three percent of medical evacuations were for psychiatric reasons. See Ronald H Spector, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1993), p. 63. By comparison, only six percent of such evacuations from Vietnam were for those reasons.

men he knew as something large and devastating and meaningless. Men who were killed were merely men no longer around; they became confused with old friends who had gone to the hospital and never come back, or men who had been transferred to another outfit. When he heard of some man he knew who had been killed or wounded badly, he was interested, even a little concerned, but it was the kind of emotion a man might feel if he learned that a friend of his had got married or made or lost some money. It was merely something that happened to somebody he knew, and Red had always let it go at that. . . . Guys came and guys went, and after a while you didn't even remember their names.⁴²

Though often read as comedy, albeit a dark one, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* tells of a veteran dissociated from the conventions of daily life. He's become "unstuck in time," continuously drifting back and forth between unassimilable events of the war and welcome escapes into fantasy. He's no longer able to feel horror or sadness or see reason or morality in life. With every random, senseless tragedy, he murmurs, "So it goes."⁴³

In Burns's *The Gallery*, an infantryman, in a moment of introspection afforded by a pass, breaks down and weeps. He weeps for the dead and wounded but also for millions back home who see the war in terms of ideals and are unaware of the slaughter on an incomprehensible scale. Fussell found words that expressed the war's impact in the reflections of a veteran of the Great War:

Life was good and easy, and I called life 'friend.' I'd never hidden anything from him, and he'd never hidden anything from me. Or so I thought. I knew everything. He was an awfully intelligent companion; we had the same tastes (apparently) and he was awfully fond of me. And all the time he was plotting up a mass murder.⁴⁴

Through their experiences of uprooting, standardization, coarsening, and subjection to impersonal forces, GIs formed the vanguard of modern mass society.⁴⁵

Some coarsening took place back home. The fearful resolve that followed Pearl Harbor mobilized dark aspects of inside. A society normally keeps hatred and violence in check but in wartime it reorganizes itself to wage war, an abstraction that obscures the reality of dropping bombs on cities and killing people. However just the cause and noble the intentions, America did not win the war through persuasive arguments, majority votes, scrap drives, and prayer. It convinced large parts of itself to hate and kill, or at least condone hating and killing.

⁴² Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*, pp. 122-23, 708.

⁴³ Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or the Children's Crusade: A Duty Dance with Death* (New York: Delacorte, 1969). See also Gray, *The Warriors*, pp. 97-129; Gerald F Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987), pp. 113-265.

⁴⁴ Wyndham Lewis, quoted in Paul Fussell, *Doing Battle: The Making of a Skeptic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996), p. 63.

⁴⁵ Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 3-13, 129-43; Paul Fussell, *The Norton Book of Modern War* (New York: WW Norton, 1991), pp. 17-25. See also Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers*, pp. 24-55.

Americans hoped and prayed for the violent deaths of millions of the enemy and when those deaths came, they celebrated.

The war legitimized and even honored properly-channeled hatreds. A *New York Times Magazine* article, written by an OWI official (Rex Stout), was titled “We Shall Hate or We Shall Perish.”⁴⁶ It wasn’t hard to develop given the treachery of Japan and the monstrosity of Germany, though only part of the latter was known until late in the war). Common parlance, from the ladies auxiliary to a front-line unit, adopted cruder words for them – Japs and Krauts, often preceded with an expletive that came readily.⁴⁷ Speeches, movies, posters, and returning soldiers described the enemy in sinister light. In many films, to the public’s delight, enemy soldiers (especially the Japanese) were killed by lengthy machine-gun bursts, massive explosions, and spectacular immolations – the latter connoting sanitization and catharsis.⁴⁸ By 1944 complaints were heard that the American people were becoming “mad dogs” and that “perhaps the most marked forms of undemocratic, pro-Fascist mentality are today to be observed in certain traditionally liberal circles when they discuss the treatment of the enemy.”⁴⁹

Woodrow Wilson feared that getting into the Great War would hurt the country and wanted to stay out of it. He held back after the *Lusitania* went down but events two years later forced his hand. He nonetheless retained concern:

Once lead this people into war, and they’ll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be brutal and ruthless, and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fiber of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman on the beat, the man in the street.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Thomas Howell, “U.S. Domestic Propaganda in World War II,” *The Historian* Vol 59 (1997): 806.

⁴⁷ Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 92-95, 254-67. Note the observations of two writers after the Great War: “The habit of continuous obscene language, which a long and miserable war has always induced, persisted four or five years more and had even spread to the younger women.” See Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1959* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963 [1940]), pp. 26-27.

⁴⁸ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), pp. 313-43.

⁴⁹ Quotes from Milton Mayer and Carl Friedrich, found in Howell, “U.S. Domestic Propaganda in World War II,” p. 807.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Meirion and Susie Harries, *The Last Days of Innocence: America at War, 1917-1918* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 293.

The effects were less than he feared. The American experience was relatively brief and the media couldn't present the war as graphically as later technology would allow. Perhaps more importantly, there was a fog of war romance in most Americans that limited their grasp of war to sentimental images of heroic charges and capturing the foe's colors – that is, until the casualties hit home and revealed a chasm between myth and Belleau Wood.

The next world war brought a franker depiction of war. Reporters eschewed the romantic language of previous wars. The public didn't read of noble lads called to the colors. Such romanticization could no longer rally the nation. Ernie Pyle, Margaret Bourke White, Vincent Tubbs, and Richard Tregaskis adopted a writing style drawn from Depression-era realism in which soldiers experienced terror and suffered dreadful wounds. Government censors certainly could have insisted on nothing but uplifting stories but they cleared many blunt accounts and startling photographs in order to brace the public for a long war. Popular books described grisly beheadings and the sickening smell of corpses.⁵¹ One *Yank* story reads less like an exhortation than it does an autopsy:

The rifleman presses the trigger, and the bullet passes through the helmet, scalp, skull, small blood vessels, membrane, into the soft sponginess of the brain. Then a man is either paralyzed or he's blind or he's an idiot with his memory gone, or he's dead. If a medic picks up a man quickly enough there's a surgeon who can pick out the bullet, tie up the blood vessels, cover up the hole in a man's head with a metal plate. Then, sometimes, a man can learn things all over again, whether it's talking, walking, or smelling. But if the bullet ripped through the medulla region in the back of a man's head, or if it tore through a big blood vessel in the man's brain, then he's had it. In Sicily or on New Guinea, it all depends on how a man was holding his head when the bullet hit.⁵²

The usually affable Bill Mauldin learned hard lessons in Italy and tried to convey them to the home front:

Many celebrities and self-appointed authorities . . . say the American soldier is the same clean-cut young man who left his home; others say morale is sky-high at the front because everybody's face is shining for the great Cause. They are wrong. The combat man isn't the same clean-cut lad because you don't fight a Kraut by Marquis of Queensbury rules: You shoot him in the back, you blow him apart with mines, you kill or maim him the quickest and most effective way you can with the least danger to yourself. He does the same to you. He tricks you and cheats you, and if you don't beat him at his own game you don't live to appreciate your own nobleness.⁵³

⁵¹ See Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men* (New York: Henry Holt, 1944); Margaret Bourke-White, *Purple Heart Valley: A Combat Chronicle of the War in Italy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944); Richard Tregaskis, *Guadalcanal Diary* (New York: Random House, 1943); John Hersey, *Into the Valley: A Skirmish of the Marines* (Garden City, NY: Sun Dial Press, 1943); and various others in *Reporting World War II* Two Volumes (New York: Library of America, 1995).

⁵² Myers et al, *Yank – the GI Story of the War*, p. 41.

⁵³ Bill Mauldin, *Up Front* (Cleveland: World, 1945), pp. 12-14.

Ernie Pyle wrote of an ordnance company that rebuilt damaged rifles:

As gun after gun comes off the stack you look to see what is the matter with it. Rifle butt split by fragments; barrel dented by a bullet; trigger knocked off; whole barrel splattered with shrapnel marks; gun gray from the slime of weeks in swamp mud; faint dark splotches of blood still showing. You wonder what became of each owner; you pretty well know.⁵⁴

In the under-appreciated novella *A Walk in the Sun*, a soldier approaches a damaged German half-track. The casualness of the last line is striking:

[The GI] hopped to his feet, his tommy gun at the alert, and trotted out to the armored car. He put the gun in the driver's eye slit and pulled the trigger. Lead smashed against the car's interior as he moved the muzzle up and down. He put about thirty shots into the car. Probably the two men who made up the crew had been alive when he started shooting; if so, they were not alive now. The platoon had no time to take prisoners.⁵⁵

Early in the war, newspapers published a photograph of dead GIs strewn across a New Guinea beachhead, their arms and legs sprawled grotesquely and partially buried in sand. Another photo showed scores of dead floating in the waters off Tarawa – a jarring departure from Matthew Brady's images of the fallen slumbering peacefully. The photographs caused a furor at home. Generals and policymakers received angry letters. Most GIs had seen far worse and ignored the fuss. After a year or so, as casualties mounted and the nature of war became clear, most civilians became inured,⁵⁶ Soon the public would see newsreel footage of countless corpses littering scores of battlefields and a famous still of an incinerated head protruding from a burned-out tank, the remnants of its face frozen in scream. In 1940, Americans were horrified that anyone would Warsaw and Rotterdam. Shortly thereafter, they welcomed the fire-bombings of Hamburg and Tokyo.

Many films dealt with the brutal aspects of war in a surprisingly frank manner.⁵⁷ Powerful depictions of death, wounds, amputations, and nervous breakdowns appear in *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, *Pride of the Marines*, *A Walk in the Sun*, and just after the war in *Twelve O'Clock High* and *The Best Years of Our Lives*. *The Fighting Sullivans* traces the lives of five brothers. We see them playing pirates, sneaking a smoke, receiving their First

⁵⁴ Ernie Pyle, "A Small Assembly Plant," in *Reporting World War II* Volume Two (New York: Library of America, 1995), p. 198.

⁵⁵ Harry Brown, *A Walk in the Sun* (New York: Knopf, 1944), p. 99.

⁵⁶ James L Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 4-7; William Manchester, *Goodbye Darkness: Memoirs of the Pacific War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 242-43; Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁷ See Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, pp. 323-26.

Communion, and growing into young men. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, they all join up and ship out on the *Juneau*. All five are killed when the cruiser is torpedoed and its magazine explodes. The charmed life of Andy Hardy was an early casualty and a world of sentiment and propriety was in retreat.⁵⁸

Mars and Venus Prior The war scattered people across the country and the world. Millions found themselves removed from or freed of moral pressures. They were cast into new environments – cities and boomtowns, military garrisons and surroundings strips, the line and rear areas. Norms regarding decorum and violence were giving way and the same can be said of sexual ones.

The sixties are thought of as the time of sexual revolution. The Second World War contained an opening upheaval that cleared the way for events twenty years later. Separated from loved ones and feeling loneliness, stress, perhaps a sense of doom, many looked for intimacy. One serviceman described a wartime dalliance: “She wasn’t a whore, she was a girl from Toronto and we’d met in London among six million people. We’d found each other.”⁵⁹ Another recalls the fears and need for companionship:

My God, but it was easy to fall in love in those two months before D-Day. . . . There was the feeling that these were the last nights men and women would make love, and there was never any of the by-play or persuading that usually went on. People were for love, so to speak. It was so easy to fall in love. . . . I won’t describe the scenes or sounds of Hyde Park or Green Park at dusk and after dark. They just can’t be described. You can just imagine, a vast battlefield of sex.⁶⁰

Many people sat under apple trees with someone else, perhaps while enjoying the Andrews Sisters.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See Ernest Burgess, “The Family,” in Ogburn, ed., *American Society in Wartime*, pp. 18ff; Costello, *Virtue under Fire*, pp. 73-89; Blum, *It Was for Victory*, pp. 79-80. On parallel cultural coarsening in Germany from the Great War see Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, pp. 159-60.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Paul Fussell, *The Norton Book of Modern War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), p. 458. See also J Glenn Gray, *The Warriors*, pp. 59-95.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, pp. 413-14. For loosening sexual norms in Britain during the First World War see Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (New York: WW Norton, 1965), pp. 108-09.

⁶¹ See Costello, *Virtue under Fire*, passim. On similar changes during and after World War One, see Allen, *Only Yesterday*, pp. 38-72. On the experience in Britain: “It was pretty painful business – the evacuation of children, the life in the shelters, the black-out, the separation of husbands and wives, the frantic embarkation leave marriages, the have-a-good-time-tonight-because-you-may-get-bumped-off tomorrow atmosphere.” David Mace, quoted in Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), p. 7. See also Calder, *The People’s War*, pp. 312-15.

Young couples married hurriedly and many such unions didn't last much past V-J Day. Other moral changes were baser in motivation. Army life, despite or because of isolation from women, was packed with sexual tension. Cadence calls, jokes, limericks, even propaganda broadcasts, were rife with sexual themes, invariably vulgar. Young men away from home for the first time, paid at the end of the month, filled with notions of virility, sought out female companionship. The juke joints and bars helped out. Prostitution flourished around military bases and in war-ravaged areas overseas. A pack of smokes went a long way. Though he didn't scrawl his trademark face there, Kilroy was in the seedy parts of Rome and Manila too. As one wry observer put it: "The effect of wars upon chastity has always been known. That this one will accelerate the abandonment of chastity in those who still possess it is as certain as moonlight."⁶² GIs loosened norms around the world. One Yank boasted, "I like to say the Victorian era in England ended when we arrived."⁶³

Crackdowns led to less organized forms of prostitution which had the unintended result of increasing VD rates. Dr Win the War prevailed over Dr Stamp Out Vice. Military units strived for a modicum of hygiene in local prostitution. Brothels, complete with prophylactic dispensaries and medical exams, were set up. One of the first things done by occupying troops in postwar Japan was to organize brothels. Inasmuch as efforts to prevent VD were not always successful, the father of penicillin may not have been given his due in winning the war. This unheralded chapter in military history, rarely mentioned outside veteran circles, awaits its chronicler.⁶⁴

The point is not that prewar America was genteel and chaste or that the war made it vulgar and promiscuous. Movement along a continuum took place, though it might be more accurate to say that movement was less important than loosening, which allowed the country to move away later.

⁶² Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, pp. 200-37; Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942), p. 68. On loosening sexual norms in Britain during the previous war see Marwick, *The Deluge*, pp. 106-13.

⁶³ Quoted in Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. xxiii.

⁶⁴ See Costello, *Virtue under Fire*, passim; Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, pp. 52-77; Merrill, *Social Problems on the Home Front*, pp. 93-144; Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On*, pp. 88-95; Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 105-14; Edwin P Hoyt, *The GI's War: American Soldiers in Europe during World War II* (New York: Da Capo, 1988), pp. 131, 138-39, 568-69. Bridenbaugh saw sexual norms relaxing during the wars of the mid-eighteenth century. See *Cities in Revolt*, pp. 121-22.

Faith in Progress Restored

As war loomed overseas, European defense orders breathed life into American industry, as did modest domestic defense programs. Unemployment rates, on the rise in 1937 and 1938, began to decline. The outbreak of war in 1941 hauled the country out of depression and pushed it into sustained prosperity. Government expenditures rose eleven-fold between 1939 and 1945, pumping billions of dollars into the economy, the equivalent of thousands of CCCs. GDP rose from \$90.5 billion in 1939 to just over \$210 billion by war's end. Seventeen million jobs were created and unemployment fell from seventeen percent in 1940 to under two percent in 1944. Market forces that had driven wages down, lifted them to unprecedented levels. Crop prices increased a hundred fifty percent, industrial wages eighty-six percent.⁶⁵ Workers could choose from a number of well-paying jobs. Sugar, coffee, and other items were scarce but plenty of food was on the table and many enjoyed a partial return to consumer lifestyles. War is Keynesian economics by other means.⁶⁶

The West has always been important to the myth of progress. It was an open bountiful place where one could get land and build a future. By 1940, the frontier was long closed but the West had a new attraction. Aircraft and shipbuilding industries dedicated to the Pacific war thrived along the coast. Okies fled the dust bowl only to find menial work but when aircraft carriers and bombers were being cranked out, they found good pay with a future. The West would no longer be the supplier of raw materials to the "true" economy back East. Its own industrial power emerged, luring money and talent both during the war and after. Greeley's recommendation rang true again.⁶⁷

Poverty fell to unthinkable levels and the middle classes expanded into a majority. The lowest fifth of families saw their incomes rise sixty-eight percent. The next fifth enjoyed a fifty-nine percent increase, the middle segment thirty-six percent, the next thirty percent. The highest fifth saw a twenty percent increase. (Note that

⁶⁵ Charles P Kindleberger, *The World Depression, 1929-1939* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 278-90; Alan S Milward, *War, Economy and Society, 1939-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 63-74; James L Abrahamson, *The American Home Front: Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, World War II* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1983), pp. 139-53.

⁶⁶Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 645-66; Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*; pp. 69-80; Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On*, pp. 91-101; Blum, *V Was for Victory*, pp. 91-124.

⁶⁷ Gerald D Nash, *The American West in the Twentieth Century: A Short History of an Urban Oasis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 195-216; Nash, *World War II and the West*, *passim*. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*; pp. 71-72.

price controls held inflation down and that over sixteen million adults were in the service, where pay was to say the least low – about sixty dollars a month for most.) Farm income soared, allaying fear that the family farm was vanishing. People could once again see their children’s lives become better than their own.⁶⁸ The nation felt potent and purposeful. People were involved in a crucial historical event. Suicide rates had gone up sharply throughout the twenties and reached a peak in the early thirties before receding. With the beginning of the war, suicides dropped sharply, reaching the lowest levels of the twentieth century.⁶⁹

In 1943, an economist noted that, “In the space of two or three years, you are getting as much scientific progress in this country as you ordinarily get in 40 or 50 years.”⁷⁰ The Garand rifle increased GI firepower. Sulfa drugs, penicillin, vaccines, and pesticides saved countless lives. The computer was developed to calculate artillery trajectories. Radar and sonar tracked enemy craft. Less renowned innovations modernized every factory and mine. Plastics became substitutes for rubber that normally came from the East Indies, then occupied by Japan. The public hailed nuclear weapons as a miraculous breakthrough that brought a swift end to the war and precluded a costly assault on Japan.⁷¹

The war gave unmistakable signs of progress from the tentative offensives on Guadalcanal and in North Africa. The public followed the war in the papers: the Solomons, Gilberts, Marianas, Philippines, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa; Tunis, Sicily, Rome, Paris, the Siegfried Line, and across the Rhine. A shrinking dark expanse on the map and photos of cheering French and Filipino civilians conveyed more than statistics could. Three years into the conflict, Jack Benny quipped that Japan was a group of islands completely surrounded by Nimitz. In early 1945, Joe Rosenthal’s photograph of marines raising the flag atop Suribachi became an enduring symbol of progress, willpower, and victory. Less than four years after Pearl Harbor, it culminated at Ike’s headquarters in Rheims and aboard the *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.

⁶⁸ Statistics on income from Perrett, *Days of Sadness*, pp. 352-56. See also Arthur Marwick, *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France, and the USA since 1950* (Glasgow, UK: Collins, 1980), pp. 256-89.

⁶⁹ *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States*. US Dept of Health, Education and Welfare, 1968, p 99. See also Ogburn, ed, *American Society in Wartime, passim*; Polenberg, ed, *America at War*; pp. 131-53.

⁷⁰ Lionel Edie, quoted in John U Nef, *War and Human Progress: An Essay on the Rise of Industrial Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 167.

⁷¹ On technological innovation during the war see Milward, *War, Economy and Society*, pp. 169-207.

Nation Building and Power Prestige

The response to Pearl Harbor is often seen as a frenzy of flag-waving patriotism. That doesn't capture it. The memory of 1918 and the depressing slide to war since 1939 prevented many from responding in old-fashioned ways. *Yank* told of a soldier scheduled for discharge in a few days who on hearing of the Japanese attack, slumped back in his chair and muttered, "I'm screwed . . . I'm screwed."⁷² Resignation was more common than jingoism. William Manchester remembers, "Unlike the doughboys of 1917, we had expected very little of war. We got less." Robert E Sherwood said of the period, "Morale was never particularly good nor alarmingly bad. There was a minimum of flag waving and parades. It was the first war in American history in which the general disillusionment preceded the firing of the first shot."⁷³

The effort nonetheless entailed a tremendous amount of dedication and sacrifice. The people who fought the war are almost incomprehensible to their grandchildren. At Tarawa, troops waded over seven hundred yards under heavy fire before reaching shore. B-17 crews suffered five percent casualties per mission and were required to fly twenty-five of them. One needn't be an actuary to see the odds weren't good. Eisenhower had estimated that paratroopers would suffer horrendous casualties at Normandy and on the eve of D-Day was reluctant to face them. Nonetheless, he felt an obligation to meet with them – to exhort them of course but also to spend a few moments with them. Hours later, in total darkness, they parachuted into Normandy, where the estimates proved accurate.

The five American divisions that landed on June 6th suffered seventy-five percent casualties in the next few weeks. Ten months later, on the other side of the world, another assault force was told to expect high casualties in the first few hours. They climbed down into amtracs, attacked the beach, and after three months and almost fifty-thousand casualties, secured Okinawa. And there were thousands of nameless hills and crossroads

⁷² Myers, Kilbourn, and Harrity, eds, *Yank*, p. 25.

⁷³ Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 140-42; Manchester, *Goodbye Darkness*, p 375; Robert E Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p 438. See also Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1997), pp 108-15; Cabell Phillips, *The 1940s: Decade of Triumph and Trouble* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p 175.

that were taken at a high cost without ever being noted in a dispatch or history book, remembered only by those who were there. This couldn't be done again.

What motivated them? The myth of glory might occur, but that weakened with the Great War. Though not entirely absent among interwar youth, the idea of glory was an initial motivation that faded during boot camp and vanished on first hearing artillery. Social scientists today would point to incentives. Pay and land have been important at least since the days of Caesar's legionaries and Wallenstein's mercenaries.⁷⁴ A GI couldn't see sixty bucks a month and a souvenir pistol as much, especially when others made much more in war plants. The GI Bill wasn't passed until 1944 and wouldn't have meant much under fire.

The most commonly encountered explanation for combat efficacy is primary-group dynamics, that is, loyalties built into small groups during training and combat. However, casualties mounted swiftly and personnel changed very rapidly, thereby destroying primary-group ties. Many units lost over fifty percent in a few days, but went on. Replacements came in and in a short period became fairly effective members of the unit. If combat efficacy relied on these dynamics, any army, simply by following established methods, could build effective combat troops. Countless examples (including later allies) show this not to be the case.⁷⁵

A study of the motivation behind combat soldiers found that only a small percentage mentioned idealism, patriotism, or revenge; almost none felt their officers' leadership ability was a factor. The most important motivations were based on a general sense of duty: the need "to finish the job" (39%), group solidarity (14%), and a sense of obligation and self-respect (9%)⁷⁶ – much of which, according to many veterans, was based on ingrained traits predating military service. The war relied on a reservoir of duty, drawing from various

⁷⁴ See Ramsay MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1963); JB Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army, 51 BC - AD 235* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 157-203; Fritz Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser and His Workforce: A Study in European Economic and Social History*, Two Volumes (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1964); Richard Severo and Lewis Milford, *The Wages of War: When America's Soldiers Came Home – From Valley Forge to Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), pp 21-118.

⁷⁵ The well-spring of the primary group analysis is Edward A Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (1948): 280-315. See also McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, pp. 77-89; Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivations: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle* (Boston: Kluwer, 1982), pp. 41-58; William Darryl Henderson, *Cohesion, The Human Element in Combat: Leadership and Societal Influence in the Armies of the Soviet Union, the United States, North Vietnam, and Israel*. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1985).

⁷⁶ Samuel Stouffer, *The American Soldier* Volume II, p. 108.

sources in American life. Though dried up in most of the country now, the reservoir in the forties was quite deep. It formed an important basis for bonds among individual soldiers, among them and their leaders, among citizens and statesmen, and among a general and his paratroopers.

One foundation of duty was the family: in routine chores, taking care of an elderly parent or a sick relative, and sacrificing for a child's education. It was also instilled in the community: trusting others in the neighborhood, helping a neighbor during planting and harvesting, and doing volunteer work. Religious principles bolstered this and tinged abrogation with sinfulness. Senses of tradition and honor were embodied in aging veterans of Antietam and Chateau-Thierry who were honored in local Memorial Day services. Traditional views of manhood stressed honor, duty, seeing things through. Scions of the upper crust believed that with privilege came obligation. This translated into service in the OSS, with the air corps, and as infantry officers, which entailed very high casualties.⁷⁷

The twenties witnessed a decline in the sense of duty, as post-WWI cynicism eroded long-standing attitudes regarding war and duty, and as prosperity and mobility took a toll on community and family obligations. The Depression reversed the trend. People had to struggle and help one another to get by.⁷⁸ This raises the question of whether America could have fought four years and suffered over two million casualties had the self-indulgence of the twenties not been reversed. William Manchester offers some thoughts. After several pages recounting the deaths of fellow marines and his own near death on Okinawa, he observes:

To fight World War II you had to have been tempered and strengthened in the 1930s Depression by a struggle for survival. . . . You had to remember your father's stories about the Argonne, and saying your prayers, and Memorial Day, and Scouting, and what Barbara Fritchie said to Stonewall Jackson. . . . And seen how your mother bought day-old bread and cut sheets length-wise and resewed them to

⁷⁷ Warner's study of a small Illinois town found much higher military participation in upper and upper-middle strata. See Warner et al, *Democracy in Jonesville*, pp. 273-74. Reid Mitchell has ably sketched the importance of community norms in the Union army in his "The Northern Soldier and His Community," in Maris A Vinovskis, ed, *Toward a Social History of the Civil War: Exploratory Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 78-92. On this view, societies with "amoral familism," religious and caste divisions, and political divisions would be far less able to field effective, modern armies.

⁷⁸ Glen H Elder, Jr., *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), esp. pp. 28-29.

equalize wear while your family sold the family car, both forfeiting what would be considered essentials today. . . .⁷⁹

Manchester's words may sound trite but amid Depression and war, people clung to them. Less benignly, the Depression also led to senses of frustration, bitterness, and powerlessness that turned into hatred, an emotion that could be channeled. Hatred of landlords and bankers could be redeployed against Japs and Krauts. Senses of powerlessness that nagged during the Depression disappeared on becoming part of a war machine.

National Integration The idea of the nation as one is in speeches and posters and perhaps most often in films. Countless movies depict an assortment of college boys, urban ethnics, and farm boys united by training and experience into a fighting unit – the melting pot at war. The idea of who were real Americans changed.

The mainstream that political, industrial, and cultural leaders came from comprised mainly English and Scottish groups. Outside of it were Irish, Italians, Jews, Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and other people who though contributing to the nation, weren't considered "real Americans." They endured various levels of alienation, ranging from subtle restrictions to overt contempt. The war required mass mobilization which gave the excluded opportunity to prove themselves alongside those real Americans.⁸⁰

Black Americans sought to win a "double victory" against fascism and racism. Their contribution became apparent as early as Pearl Harbor when Dorie Miller, a mess steward on the *West Virginia*, shot down several Japanese planes and earned the Navy Cross. His heroism (and later death off Tarawa), though mentioned in many papers, did not lead to proper recognition of his people's contribution. In 1942, J Saunders Redding, a black Cornell professor, wrote, "I do not like the world's not knowing officially that there were Negro soldiers on Bataan with General Wainright."⁸¹ Government officials, eager to avoid racial conflict, and black

⁷⁹ Manchester, *Goodbye Darkness*, p. 395. Cameron also sees the cynicism of the post WWI era as well as the hard times of the Depression as important in forming the character of marines and soldiers of the Second World War. See *American Samurai*, p. 246. The theme is also conveyed in Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* in which characters from Southern (Croft and Ridges) and Jewish (Goldstein) backgrounds exhibit personal needs to finish the job: to complete an arduous recon patrol and to bring a badly wounded soldier to the beachhead.

⁸⁰ See E Digby Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America* (New York: Vintage, 1964), pp. 22-25, 277-93; William R Hutchison, ed, *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁸¹ Quoted in Polenberg, ed, *America at War*, p. 109. See also letters in *Yank* collected in *Reporting World War II* Volume Two, pp. 470-73.

leaders, eager to advance their cause, began to make them more visible. When naming a parade ground on Fort Knox after a black soldier (Robert Brooks, killed in the Philippines shortly after Pearl Harbor) caused controversy, the post commander took on the issue: "For the preservation of America, the soldiers and sailors guarding our outposts are giving their lives. In death, there is no grade or rank. And in this, the greatest Democracy the world has known, neither riches nor poverty, neither creed nor race draws a line of demarcation in this hour of national crisis."⁸²

Blacks served throughout the war on all its front, though almost always in segregated units. There were two black infantry divisions, the 92nd in the Solomons and the 93rd in Italy.⁸³ The black 2nd Cavalry Division, before ever reaching the front, was judged unreliable and disbanded – by order of General Patton, a descendant of a Confederate officer. However, when later assigned a black tank battalion, he told them: "I don't care what color you are, so long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sonsabitches."⁸⁴ Black fighter squadrons and tank units saw action and won honors and respect. Following the heavy losses of the Battle of the Bulge (winter '44 - '45), black volunteers served in previously segregated infantry units, foreshadowing the desegregation of the services a few years later.⁸⁵

⁸² Quoted in Studs Terkel, *The Good War: 'An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 70n.

⁸³ Hondon B Hargrove, *Buffalo Soldiers in Italy: Black Americans in World War II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1985).

⁸⁴ Quoted in Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, p. 772.

⁸⁵ Stouffer et al, *The American Soldier I*: 530-35; Morris Janowitz, *The Reconstruction of Patriotism: Education for Civic Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 123-28; *American Military History* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History), p. 494; Stephen E Ambrose, "Grant and Eisenhower," in Gabor S Boritt, ed, *War Comes Again: Comparative Vistas on the Civil War and World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 47. Ambrose also notes that, following the heavy losses of the Wilderness Campaign (Summer 1864), Grant began to use more black troops. In 1864, Jefferson Davis, facing superior Union numbers, proposed to his congress that slaves who fought for the South be granted freedom at war's end. The reception was chilly. The governor of Georgia said. "Whenever we establish the fact that they are a military race, we destroy our whole theory that they are unfit to be free." Lee's army was ground down. See Emory Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 290-93. Quote from Joseph T Glatthaar, "Black Glory: The African-American Role in Union Victory," in Gabor S Boritt, ed, *Why the Confederacy Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 140.

Back in the states, the NAACP prevailed upon the White House to make defense jobs open to all.⁸⁶ The Office of War Information made an effort to publicize the importance of black troops in the effort.⁸⁷ The disruptions of the war served to advance the cause as well. Population shifts drew many blacks away from the rural South and into the industrial North, bringing the two races into the same workplace for the first time. Rising wages brought new outlooks and opportunities. As blacks saw need for organization, membership in the NAACP went up ten-fold. They knew they were contributing, and so did many whites.⁸⁸

Newsreels made an effort to show blacks in the service but Hollywood made a stronger one. *Lifeboat* (1944) portrayed various classes, races, and ethnic groups forced to work together after their ship is sunk by a U-boat. They were all in the same boat. *Since You Went Away* and *God Is My Co-Pilot* show blacks following war news and pulling for hometown boys, just as everyone else was. *Bataan* and *Sabara* showed blacks serving and dying in combat, alongside Robert Taylor on Bataan and Bogie in North Africa.⁸⁹

Paul Fussell, not one to sentimentalize war experiences (or anything), recalls that before the war, like most whites, he did not consider blacks as Americans. On seeing black corpses strewn across a French field, he realized, "The lucky among us, black or white, survived; the unlucky, black and white together, died in the open air or under trees or at the bottom of slit trenches. Where it mattered at all, we were quite the same."⁹⁰ When black replacements entered depleted infantry companies in 1945, there was grumbling and concern. But after a few months, seventy-seven percent of white veterans of integrated units stated that their view of blacks had become more favorable. One sergeant from South Carolina said of integration: "When I first heard about it, I said I'd be damned if I'd wear the same patch they did. After that first day when we saw how they fought, I

⁸⁶ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, pp. 764-70.

⁸⁷ Howell, "U.S. Domestic Propaganda in World War II," pp 808-10.

⁸⁸ Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, p. 20; C Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 130-34; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), pp. 13-39.

⁸⁹ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, pp. 179-80.

⁹⁰ Fussell, *Doing Battle*, pp. 123 and 119. After Abe Goldman was badly wounded, Fussell noticed "the anti-semitic innuendoes stopped dramatically."

changed my mind.”⁹¹ Millions of white GIs saw and lived under the bigotry of Southerners, especially those with rank. This at a time when Southerners were significantly overrepresented in NCO ranks. GIs demobilized with new sensibilities that led to support for desegregation in the decades after 1945.

Jewish contributions stemmed from the desire to demonstrate loyalty and worth and also to fight the Nazis. Jews served in many different branches, including combat units, as the Stars of David in cemeteries of Normandy and Okinawa attest. Many other minority groups served as well. The 45th Infantry Division (drawn from national guard units in the Southwest) had American Indians and Hispanics in its ranks. Bill Mauldin, who served in this division, modeled “Joe” of the famous “Willie and Joe” sketches after an American Indian, who was later killed in action in Italy. An awkward but well-intended journalist observed, “A red man will risk his life for a white as dauntlessly as his ancestor lifted a paleface’s scalp.”⁹² As much as one might wince here, the point is that all who serve in the war are real Americans. While their relatives lived in internment camps, many Japanese-Americans served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in Italy and France, and with intelligence units in the Pacific. This is not to say that all served harmoniously, thereby ending a dark aspect of traditional America. There was, however, a gradual if belated realization that America was a more complicated and even a more powerful nation than prewar outlooks had acknowledged.

Regional, ethnic, and class antagonisms declined as well. The integrative effects were more pronounced overseas, where British, French, and other people saw the GIs not as an assortment of separate groups but as a homogeneous bunch of Yanks.⁹³ Southerners, many of whom had lived in brooding resentment since 1865, felt like parts of the American whole. Impoverished Okies had been treated with contempt when they migrated West but found acceptance after the war: “Very few people suggested any more that [Okies] were ‘of the lower fringe of humanity.’ Those that served were simply American veterans – at least those who lived through it were – and

⁹¹ See Samuel Stouffer et al, *The American Soldier*; Volume I: *Adjustment during Army Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 590-99. Racial tolerance was highest in integrated combat units, less so in segregated combat units, and the least in segregated rear-echelon units. Furthermore, soldiers who expressed increased tolerance toward blacks did not necessarily feel integration outside combat zones was desirable. Stouffer’s findings and quotes might well sound like public relation copy but that could be said of many other topics, some of which show marked animosity toward officers and the military.

⁹² Quoted in Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, p. 108.

⁹³ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, pp. 302-34

many of them were heroes."⁹⁴ An Italian who served at Anzio recalled, "When we marched on Rome and I was continually greeted as an 'Americano' like all my buddies, I realized for the first time that I was not a 'dago' or 'wop' but a real American."⁹⁵

This underscores the point that Okies, Irish, Italians, Poles, and others had not been considered real Americans. That this seems odd today shows the integrative effects of the war. No one would claim that prejudices disappeared or that postwar America solved the matter once and for all. The country was late in realizing a problem but where marches and editorials and petitions had failed, the war forced the issue and (as will be argued) put civil rights on the postwar agenda. National beliefs assert America has always been a melting pot. The war stoked the fires beneath it, reducing ethnic and local ways, imposing uniformity, and converting guys into soldiers – American ones.

Norman Mailer's platoon in *The Naked and the Dead* may serve as a useful corrective to (though not a refutation of) the pat image of infantry platoon unity. In the course of a harrowing patrol across a formidable mountain range, the unit is rent by ethnic and personal animosities, at one point to the brink of mutiny. However, on securing the island, they look back on the rugged mountains. Though disillusioned and exhausted and far from the Hollywood image, they experience "a startled pride in themselves." They joke and boast about what they'd done.⁹⁶

Authority The war gave political leadership from town councils running scrap drives to leaders directing grand strategy, enhanced prestige and trust. The Doolittle Raid, Midway, Guadalcanal, and Tunisia reversed the gloomy trend of early '42. Only a year after Pearl Harbor, the Axis powers had been halted on all fronts. Two

⁹⁴ Quoted in Dan Morgan, *Rising in the West: The True Story of an 'Okie' Family from the Great Depression through the Reagan Years* (New York: Knopf, 1992), p. 151.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Baltzell, *The Protestant Establishment*, p. 23; Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, pp. 441-43. See also Bill Mauldin, *The Brass Ring: A Sort of Memoir* (New York: WW Norton, 1971). On the declining significance of ethnicity after the war, see Warner *American Life*, pp. 179-205.

⁹⁶ See Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*, pp. 702-11. Mailer served in a reconnaissance platoon in the Philippines during the war, and his powerful book is in many ways reportage. He asserts he did not change the names of several characters.

years after the fall of Bataan, one could speak confidently of victory in a year or so. It's interesting to speculate on the consequences of a string of early defeats and blunders on morale, institutions, and the war's outcome.

"Dollar-a-year" men from business replaced eager reformers. Ford churned out bombers, Kaiser rolled out ships, and Stettinius made steel at record levels before becoming Secretary of State.⁹⁷ Business leaders were contributing to the war effort and deserving of privileges. They backed the attack by providing the GIs the materiel to do the job. Big shots and average joes were on the same team. The virtues of the old order were appreciated anew. Prosperity and cynicism had once eroded the work ethic until it was the ghost of an old religion. But dedication to one's calling took on new importance when making planes and bullets. In a fight against fascist evil, religious sentiments enlivened work once more.

Adaptability allowed rapid conversion to war-footing, countless innovations, and new technologies. Zeroes and Messerschmitts that had once dominated were by 1944 blown out of the skies by Hellcats and Mustangs. American productivity won the war, a fact visually celebrated in documentary footage of busy assembly lines, crowded marshaling yards, and bustling ports. The US produced more planes, tanks, and ammunition until the war resembled Grant deploying his vast resources against Lee's ragged army. German prisoners brought to rear areas were astonished at the supply lines. Their own logistics were comparatively meager and had to travel at night to avoid air interdiction,

Prior to Pearl Harbor the military was respected, but not especially so. Officers enjoyed standing but enlisted troops were deemed misfits. When war came, the military trained sixteen million men and women, developed strategic plans, and defeated Imperial Japan and the Third Reich. The military from buck private to five-star general emerged victorious and lionized, ascending to the same august position they enjoyed after Appomattox. From the GI perspective, there were formidable numbers of blunders, incompetence, and idiocy. It came across repeatedly and sometimes bitterly in postwar literature. Rapid expansion necessitated promoting the unqualified. Beef-witted corporals became lieutenants, inept captains were granted regimental commands, and so on up the chain of command. Where a civilian saw a stern but intrepid sergeant, many GIs saw an illiterate bigot.

⁹⁷ During the First World War, progressive animus toward big business waned and the Justice Department granted anti-trust immunity to corporations contributing to the war effort. See Ellis W Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 23-24.

Where a civilian praised a bold commander, soldiers recalled a martinet who ordered wearing helmets far behind the front “to keep them on their toes.” As one veteran noted, with lingering acidity, “It was the hired help, not the ‘professionals,’ who won the war.”⁹⁸

Blunders were kept under wraps (there was a war on) or seemed unimportant in the big picture. Miscalculation of Tarawa’s tides forced marines to wade ashore seven hundred yards under heavy fire. American anti-aircraft guns near Sicily killed hundreds of GIs, as did bombers at Saint-Lô. The 7th Infantry Division trained long and hard for jungle warfare, then landed in the Aleutians. Omaha Beach was a catastrophe, the same with airborne drops inland. Utah Beach was relatively easy, in part because troops landed in the wrong area. Sherman tanks presented a high profile – a fact not lost on German eighty-eight crews. They were so prone to fire that crews called them “Ronsons” – “guaranteed to light every time.” Military chiefs determined the invasion of the Palaus was no longer necessary, though planning was too far along to cancel. There were ten thousand American casualties.⁹⁹

Suffice to say the war gave us the word *snafu* and variations such as *tarfu*, *fubar*, and *janfu*.¹⁰⁰ Despite all the martinets and blunders, the military did win the war. Germany and Japan surrendered in a period of time that didn’t leave the public searching for light at the end of a tunnel. Enjoying more prestige than at any time since Grant’s army paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue, the military ascended to prestigious heights from which it influenced the country for decades. Most veterans looked back on all the snafus and incompetents much as Mailer’s platoon looked back upon the mountain range. It was a tremendous accomplishment and they were proud of their parts.

The restoration of confidence in political, business, and military leaders spilled over to what might be called the system. The same one that collapsed in the early thirties was working exceptionally well. In the years

⁹⁸ On resentment toward military authority see Stouffer et al, *The American Soldier* II: 54-81, 362-429. The study shows greater respect for officers in combat units than in support units. R Ernest Dupuy, “Pass in Review,” *The Army Combat Forces Journal* 1954, p. 43; Cameron, *American Samurai*, pp. 54-62. See also Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*, pp. 256-72; Mauldin, *Up Front*, *passim*.

⁹⁹ Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 19-35; Ronald H Spector, *Eagle against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), pp. 420-22.

¹⁰⁰ “Things Are Really Fouled Up,” “Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition,” and, in tribute to inter-service operations, “Joint Army-Navy Foul Up.” Opinion varies on what the “f” stood for.

after the war, school teachers, cops on the beat, parents in the home, business leaders, elected officials from local councils to Commander-in-Chief enjoyed an infusion of prestige from a proud and grateful public which saw in most authority continuities with the ideals and leaders that had won the war.

America forged another Great Event. Those who cheered in Eisenhower's ticker-tape parade on his return from Europe were certain that America had reached its greatest heights and that unlike previous great civilizations, it would stay there. In that proud moment when the American century was assured, many must have felt as the young Arnold Toynbee did:

I remember watching the Diamond Jubilee procession myself as a small boy. I remember the atmosphere. It was: Well, here we are on the top of the world, and we have arrived at the peak to stay there – forever! There is, of course, a thing called history, but history is something unpleasant that happens to other people.¹⁰¹

For Britain, the world wars figured highly in that unpleasantness. The pride and confidence of Victorian Britain dissipated after the Great War, more so when it emerged from the next one victorious but overshadowed by a former colony.

For America, too, there would be a fall but few at Ike's parade looked for historical analogy or thought of hubris or Gibbon or Spengler. Few could see how much of America had changed, how the country had been thrust into modernity, or how change would go on and on. No one thought another war would one day acquaint them with that thing called history. Allusion to later events is as out of place as bringing up Toynbee to a sailor and nurse in Times Square. It's best to say that in 1945, when GIs drank wine in Berchtesgaden and millions knew they'd come home, America had its proudest moment.

¹⁰¹ Arnold Toynbee, *The Prospects of Western Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949).

Chapter Four

The Lid Is Off, 1945-1965

Had they been Tyrian traders of the year B.C. 1000, landing from a galley fresh from Gibraltar, they could hardly have been stranger on the shore of a world, so changed from what it had been ten years before. . . . How much its character had changed or was changing, they could but partly feel. For that matter, the land itself knew no more than they.

Henry Adams, on returning to America after the Civil War

Since the beginning of World War II, American society has been changing continuously. All of the major characteristics of American society and culture are changing so rapidly that it is more and more difficult to recognize older American institutions and life styles. The older styles were defined in the first half of the nineteenth century by, among others, de Tocqueville, and in the first half of the twentieth century by Robert and Helen Lynd. This revolution is so deep and pervasive that all traditional analyses of American society no longer hold.

Joseph Bensman and Arthur J Vidich,
The New American Society

There was little impetus or inclination to return to prewar ways. The economy stood high above the rest of the world's, many of which were in a shambles. Confidence in institutions was high, again in contrast to most of the world. Dynamic change had been set loose. Modernization surged through the country. With a sacred aura of victory, the country felt it could do no wrong. Anyone expecting the country to go back might just as well ask it to become a Puritan colony again.

Break with the Past

Historians talk of the ante-bellum South, Reconstruction, and the interwar period, indicating that wars differentiate periods. Each war brought movement, transition, and dynamism. Victory boosted the economy, opened new opportunities, and invigorated the public. Americans define themselves by change. World War Two

brought considerable redefinition. Enormous campaigns, huge logistical systems, and millions of participants made prewar life seem small and confining. Unskilled workers became engineers; soda jerks became bomber pilots; youths came to command a hundred men or more.¹ Soldiers in their teens or early twenties had enormous responsibilities placed on them, more than they would ever face again or want to face again.

Friends and settings of just a few years earlier seem puerile and many vets could never feel comfortable with them again. They were put off by pat talk of “action” and “heroism” and realized a chasm opened between them and those who’d remained abed. A ditty from the Great War asked if the doughboys would return to the farm after seeing Pa-ree. Reluctance to return to former ways was probably stronger among those who’d seen Chateau-Thierry. It was no less so for those who’d seen Saipan. There’s nothing enchanting about war but there’s something broadening about it.²

Hometowns were different. The close-knit nature wasn’t there. Many veterans resented guys who’d stayed home, made a lot of money, and advanced their careers. Many hometowns were unendearing before induction. Memories of hard times, dust storms, malnutrition, and despair countered family ties and sentimental aspects. Insularity and lack of opportunity compared poorly with what the last few years showed them. Many towns and urban areas had been built around the turn of the century and by the mid-forties were decrepit. Some rural areas still lacked electricity and hot water. Americans had glimpsed a future of prosperity, technology, and modernity. Few pasts, however sentimentalized, could compete with it. As Marx (Groucho, not Karl) once asked, “How ya gonna keep ‘em down on the farm after they’ve seen . . . the farm.”³ Change was in the air. Philip Roth captures the moment:

¹ See W Lloyd Warner et al, *Democracy in Jonesville: A Study in Quality and Inequality* (New York: Harper, 1964 [1949]), pp. 276-77; Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1997), p. 23; J Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967 [1959]), pp. 3-58.

² See Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences* (New York: Viking, 1988), pp. 68-70; Gerald F Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987), pp. 266-97. For a survey of postwar veterans since the War of Independence see Richard Severo and Lewis Milford, *The Wages of War: When America’s Soldiers Came Home – From Valley Forge to Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989).

³ Quoted in John L Shover, *First Majority – Last Minority: The Transformation of Rural Life in America* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), p. 8. See also Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 71-74.

[T]he upsurge of energy was contagious. Around us nothing was lifeless. Sacrifice and constraint were over. The depression had disappeared. Everything was in motion. The lid was off. Americans were to start over again, en masse, everyone in it together. . . . – the miraculous conclusion of this towering event, the clock of history reset and a whole people's aims limited no longer by the past. . . .⁴

Probably at no time in American history had so much of the nation been so eager to break from its past and leap into a bright but unknown future.⁵

The Family in Continued Flux

Extended family networks, which had never been especially strong but which had begun to coalesce before the war, were even less significant. Sociologists, religious authorities, and political leaders were alarmed. During the war, children grew up un-parented, leading to increased teen-crime rates. Returning fathers would be resented. Juvenile delinquency would skyrocket. Respect for authority and the sanctity of the family would fall apart. Some predicted that the family would collapse in a decade or so.⁶

The concerns were overstated. In any case, seeing family changes after 1945 as the consequence of dad's absence for the duration should be regarded with caution. Ties between fathers and children were not irretrievably broken. Most GIs served about two-and-a-half years and most weren't parents. Those who were, found no yawning breach upon return and restored their position in the family. Restoration was all the easier as dad returned with a row or two of ribbons on his chest – the pride of the neighborhood. Of all the discontinuities, this was one of the most bridgeable. Wartime juvenile delinquency might have become more problematic had the war ended in defeat and malaise but with victory, it was contained by respect for authority.

An important discontinuity was caused by accelerating bureaucratization. The previous half century saw an economy of farmers, shopkeepers, and tradesmen giving way, sometimes gradually, sometimes rapidly, to one

⁴ Philip Roth, *American Pastoral* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), pp. 40-41.

⁵ For an overview of postwar changes see Frederick Lewis Allen, *The Big Change: America Transforms Itself, 1900-1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), pp. 139-257. On postwar change in the Soviet Union see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Postwar Soviet Society: The 'Return to Normalcy,' 1945-1953," in Susan J Linz, ed, *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), pp. 129-56.

⁶ Ernest W Burgess and Harvey J Locke, *The Family from Institution to Companionship* (New York: American Book, 1945); Carle Zimmerman, *The Family of Tomorrow: The Cultural Crisis and the Way Out* (New York: Harper, 1949); Ruth Nanda Anshen, ed, *The Family: Its Function and Destiny* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959 [1949]). On the persistence of traditional family patterns in certain areas see Jack E Weller, *Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), pp. 59-68.

based on organization, management teams, and white-collar workers.⁷ The transition began around the turn of the century then slowed and even reversed itself in the Depression. During the war, over a half million small businesses went under as owners donned uniforms or lost contracts to large enterprises. Others had key people inducted or made consumer products such as automobiles and washing machines that were no longer made. These too went under.⁸

The rise of white-collar jobs was most noticeable in the federal government where civilian employment increased from one million to three-and-a-half million between 1940 and 1945 and only declined to two million five years later.⁹ Everywhere there were layers of management, vice-presidents and partners, research and development divisions, regional offices, and legal and personnel sections. People adapted. Individualism betokened egotism, selfishness, and disloyalty. Such people used blackmarkets, sloughed off at the plant, or could not be relied upon under fire. Wartime ideology placed a premium on teamwork, cooperation, and subsuming one's self in the effort.¹⁰

Fathers no longer worked on the farm, downstairs in the store, to anywhere near their homes – a more significant separation than a few years in uniform. Fathers' work became abstract to their children, as did many fathers. Children could hardly relate to work in accounting or personnel as readily as they could to work on the farm or in the shop. Sociologists noted that paternal authority was no longer above question.¹¹ Paradoxically, the

⁷ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), pp. 82-84.

⁸ Richard Polenberg, ed, *America at War: The Home Front, 1941-1945* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 28. See also John Dos Passos, *State of the Nation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), pp. 24-26.

⁹ Allen, *The Big Change*, p. 151.

¹⁰ White-collar work created a sociological boom and many popular novels. Everett Carl Ladd, Jr, *Ideology in America: Change and Response in City, a Suburb, and a Small Town* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 49-52; Joseph Berman and Bernard Rosenberg, *Mass, Class, and Bureaucracy: The Evolution of Contemporary Society* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 255-78; C Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951); William H Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Doubleday, 1957); Louis Galambos, ed, *The New American State: Bureaucracies and Policies since World War II* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

¹¹ On weakened paternal authority, see Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), pp. 184-86; Everett M Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960), pp. 171-205; Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: WW Norton, 1977), pp. 123-28; Robin M Williams, Jr, *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1955), pp. 54-55; Jules Henry, *Culture against Man* (New York: Vintage, 1963), pp. 130-46.

war weakened male identity in ways. Men had focused on the war effort, either in the service or civilian work, but with peace it was gone, replaced by going to work and paying bills. Veterans faced difficulties adjusting to civilian life, where making money was the supreme commander. Limited though it was, the independence that women and children experienced during the war years made men uneasy.¹² Television shows of the fifties, today lambasted as inculcating patriarchy, actually depicted fathers as less than certain, sharing decisions with wives, and bewildered by new environs, though somehow getting through the day. Only in depictions of the past (*Bonanza*, *The Rifleman*, *Gunsmoke*) were men truly in charge. *Father Knows Best* originally had a question mark at the end. Transmitting values to the next generation was less smooth. Popular psychology, magazines, films, and television constructed an idealized model based on traditional family life and modern consumerism.¹³ The disjuncture between a myth manufactured by popular media and a reality of continued weakening would someday become apparent.

Children looked for direction from an array of figures in popular culture. James Coleman expressed it this way:

[A]dolescents today are cut off, probably more than ever before, from the adult society. They are still oriented toward fulfilling their parents' desires, but they look very much to their peers for approval as well. Consequently, our society has within its midst a set of small teen-age societies, which focus teen-age interests and attitudes on things far removed from adult responsibilities, and which may develop standards that lead away from those goals established by the larger society.¹⁴

Even in redoubts of tradition such as rural areas and ethnic neighborhoods, where family, community, and religion were stronger, young people were breaking away.¹⁵ Formerly, one was born at home, educated there, worked there, recovered from illness there, died there, and was mourned there. That was gone. Most families no

¹² Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, pp. 223-58.

¹³ This point, often made rather clumsily, is skillfully presented by Mintz and Kellogg in *Domestic Revolutions*, pp. 179-80.

¹⁴ James S Coleman, "The Adolescent Society," in Derek L Phillips, ed, *Studies in American Society* (New York: Crowell, 1965), p. 113. See also Bensman and Bernard Rosenberg, *Mass, Class, and Bureaucracy*, pp. 107-33; Ruth Nanda Anshen, "The Family in Transition," in her edited work, *The Family*, pp. 3-19.

¹⁵ Herbert J Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: Free Press, 1962), pp. 64-75; Weller, *Yesterday's People*, pp. 68-72.

longer had to struggle to make ends meet. Riesman observed that children no longer did family chores out of a sense of duty. They had to be paid.¹⁶

Families left kinship ties and the influences of old ways and moved to the suburbs. Everything was different – locale, income, status group, outlook – and questions naturally arose regarding the effectiveness or even the desirability of continuing old patterns of family life, including child-rearing customs. David Riesman said, “The loss of old certainties in the spheres of work and social relations is accompanied by doubt as to how to bring up children.”¹⁷ Child-rearing was formerly a quilt work of religious adages, local lore, family tradition, and old-country customs. They enjoyed great respect but now seemed quaint lore from old people who believed in superstition, folk remedies, and Billy Sunday.¹⁸ Traditional practices were as out of place as a horse-drawn cart. Americans, especially middle-class ones, looked to professionals in psychology and sociology for scientific approaches. One sociologist found that “middle-class mothers often mention experts, other mothers, and friends as their sources of ideas about child-rearing. If they mention their own parents, it is usually as a negative reference.”¹⁹ Experts knew how to make children become productive members of society.²⁰ Relying on old ways, according to many experts, could bring harm by undermining children’s confidence and stifling their creativity.²¹ This might have been the first time in history a people doubted something as basic as its child-rearing practices and entrusted the matter to people they never met.

¹⁶ Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, pp. 38-55. See also Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society*, pp. 15-16, 171-205; Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, pp. 162-67; Morris Janowitz, *The Last Half-Century: Societal Change and Politics in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 264-65; Henry, *Culture against Man*, pp. 147-282.

¹⁷ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study in the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 49. See also Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, pp. 71-74.

¹⁸ Bensman and Rosenberg, *Mass, Class, and Bureaucracy*, pp. 93-95. On the retention of traditional child-rearing practices in rural and ethnic neighborhood settings see Moira Komarovsky, *Blue-Collar Marriage* (New York: Vintage, 1962), pp. 33-37; Weller, *Yesterday’s People*, pp. 64-68; Gans, *The Urban Villagers*, pp. 54-64.

¹⁹ Herbert H Lyman, quoted in Komarovsky, *Blue-Collar Marriage*, p. 37.

²⁰ Obviously, the most popular of these works was Benjamin Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946) which sold millions of copies by the end of the forties. See also Williams, *American Society*, pp. 65-66.

²¹ Christopher Lasch notes, unapprovingly, this stance among the new experts. See his *Haven in a Heartless World*, pp. 171-74.

Into the gap between generations streamed agents of change, from low and high culture, from popular media and the academy. Affluence meant greater access to movies and new forms of entertainment such as hit music and television. Andy Hardy, the hard-working judge's son, faithful to family and community, starry-eyed over the girl next door, had his day but by the early fifties, he was out of date. New figures were more appealing. Holden Caulfield, the anomic boy in Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, struck a chord. Perhaps drawing from the archetypes of the disillusioned soldier and swaggering, leather-jacketed pilot, figures such as James Dean and Marlon Brando were loners, victims of circumstance. They were at odds with surroundings and eager to break away (from whatever you got). Yossarian in *Catch-22*'s and McMurphy in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* initially come across as mentally ill, though readers come to see it's the surroundings that are crazy.²²

Affluence brought greater emphasis on education. Parents with high school diplomas or less sent their kids to college. The curriculum was for the most part practical, geared to preparing for a place in society. Numerous complaints notwithstanding, it only rarely criticized American values and institutions. Still, there were aspects that contributed to a distance between young people and traditional orientations. The modern look at society held that every social system from the Trobriand Islands to the United States adopted particular beliefs and customs. Samoans and Middletowners had their rites of passage. One textbook stressed that ethnocentrism was an obstacle to a modern career:

Because we were born and reared in one culture, it is difficult for us to understand the customs and ways of life in another culture. Only one's own way seems right and proper. In many occupations, however, it becomes very important to understand a culture different from one's own. Agricultural missionaries, employees of our government's technical assistance program, Armed Services personnel, corporation employees stationed in foreign lands, all need to understand the culture of the area in which they are located.²³

²² On popular images of the period see Paul Fussell, *The Norton Book of Modern War* (New York: WW Norton, 1991), pp. 23-24; Kenneth Keniston, *Youth and Dissent: The Rise of a New Opposition* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 68-69; Raymond M. Olderman, *Beyond the Wasteland: The American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1972); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), pp. 31-36; Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 165-201.

²³ Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society*, p. 38.

To assert the undisputed superiority of one's culture was provincial, unsophisticated – the sort of thing the elderly and rustics clung to.²⁴

Continuing Loss of Community

Ethnic neighborhoods began to disappear. Suburbs sprouted up around every city but didn't form meaningful communities. Life became more individualistic and less governed by local norms. European visitors were quick to notice the absence of community and the cult of mobility.²⁵ Mechanization of agriculture in previous decades led to greater crop yields but also to less need for cooperative planting and harvesting and more migration to cities. Between 1945 and 1965, net migration from rural areas averaged 874,000 people per year.²⁶

Civic-mindedness was wearing away. The war injected money and vitality into communities but also ended stability and insularity. The composition and rhythms of local life changed suddenly and continued to do so well after V-J Day. The influence of founding families receded in the minds of most townspeople. New wealth had surpassed them. Prosperity let many acquire land and property in their locale, further rooting them there but most looked elsewhere. In one rural New York village studied in the late fifties, only twenty-five percent of the population had been born there.²⁷ Another sociologist estimated that twenty percent of the population changed residence every year.²⁸

Defense spending on the West Coast ensured more people would head there. Lucy and Ricky moved to California, as did a clan from Tennessee. The career paths of many in the new middle classes entailed routine

²⁴ Popular books of this type include Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (New York: William Morrow, 1928); Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934); Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man: Anthropology for Modern Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949); Geoffrey Gorer, *The American People: A Study in National Character* (New York: WW Norton, 1948); Erik H Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: WW Norton, 1950).

²⁵ Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How European Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 166-67; Maurice R Stein, *The Eclipse of Community: An Interpretation of American Studies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), esp. pp. 275-303.

²⁶ Shover, *First Majority*, p. 6.

²⁷ Arthur J Vidich and Joseph Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), pp. 18, 85; James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 18.

²⁸ Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society*, p. 4.

relocations. Eager to broaden their experiences and move up the ladder, they went along. Managers of one corporation joked that its acronym stood for "I've Been Moved," then called the van line, knowing that *not* being asked to go boded ill. The military remained quite large and moved personnel more frequently than did IBM.²⁹ Children went to college in unprecedented numbers, moving to new areas, finding new opportunities, and not always returning home. Senior citizens, whom we might think least likely to move about, left for retirement developments in warmer climes. Affluence of course was a factor but deteriorating community life played a part as well. One study found that seventy-five percent of such people no longer had children in their old hometowns.³⁰

World War One brought a decline in rural population. The next one led to an even more precipitous fall: down twenty-seven percent between 1940 and 1955.³¹ Primary-group relations declined as people left. Local churches and schools closed in large numbers. Shoppers preferred the wares in bigger towns.³² Suburbanization delivered the most serious blow. Young people, often vets with new jobs and GI benefits, left for suburbs. The most famous ones, the Levittowns, were built by developers who'd put up wartime housing around Norfolk.³³ Bright and cheery, offering good schools, nice parks, and the promise of a new way of life, suburbia became the new center of television and film and life.

Criticism of suburbia erupted scarcely before the sod took hold and the first supermarket opened. Much of it was based on snobbery and prejudices. How could suburban tracts compare to genteel images in *Town and Country*? Critics complained of banality and standardization but most older neighborhoods were hardly esthetic

²⁹ On weakened communities in the postwar period, see Vidich and Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society*, esp. pp. 41-2, 290-92; Art Gallaher, *Plainville Fifteen Years Later* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 3-37.

³⁰ Packard, *A Nation of Strangers*, pp. 92-93.

³¹ Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society*, p. 28.

³² Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society*, pp. 129-66, 212-32, 396-422.

³³ Kenneth T Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 234-45.

visions. There were also complaints of conformity but there had certainly been far more pressure to conform in Muncie and Brooklyn.³⁴

More thoughtful criticism of suburbs noted an emptiness out there, something that made them less than meaningful communities. They lacked a sense of organic whole. There was no sense of belonging, continuity, or common effort. Older neighborhoods had a plant, a mill, a stockyard, or a produce market. Factory whistles, freight trains, and produce carts provided rhythms and reminders of who you were. People walked to work. In suburbia, people commuted to work, usually far away and only rarely where neighbors also worked.³⁵ Neighbors once felt free to stop over, especially on Sundays and holidays, without calling first, in many cases without knocking. This gave way to the new value of privacy as suburbanites wished to live without outside impositions.³⁶ Older people were usually absent. Income levels didn't vary much. Whatever links children had with the past came from the proximate experiences of parents or more importantly, from television.

Suburbs were less able to enforce norms than small towns and ethnic neighborhoods. It wasn't improper to discipline the mischievous children of neighbors. Parents felt gratitude for the help and shame for their shortcomings. The old neighborhoods had changed too much, the composition was too different, the primary ties and assumption of trust were weak. Suburbs lacked the intimacy, shared experiences and hopes, and consensus on proper behavior. An observer of suburbia noted increasing reluctance to meddle in the concerns of others, including scolding others' children.³⁷

³⁴ See Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), pp. 482-86.

³⁵ See David Riesman, "The Suburban Dislocation," in Philip Olson, ed, *America as a Mass Society: Changing Community and Identity* (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 283-312; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 265-66, 272-74. On trends away from local community see Morris Janowitz, *The Last Half-Century: Societal Change and Politics in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 264-66; Percival Goodman and Paul Goodman, *Communitas* (New York: Vintage, 1960). Herbert Gans's study of postwar suburbs saw a rise in community associations which gave hope that suburbia would develop strong communities. Such formal organizations, however, are distinct from the moral rooting of the old neighborhoods. See his *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Vintage, 1967), pp. 52-67.

³⁶ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 280-82.

³⁷ Gans, *The Levittowners*, pp. 159-60; Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World*, pp. 123-28. Glen Elder, following Alex Inkeles, argues that the Depression impressed adaptability and openness to change on those who went through it. See *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 3-17. But the present perspective sees the war with all its training, dislocations, and adjustments as more important.

Suburbs were only rarely incorporated and self-governing. Most left matters to county and state governments, relinquishing or never knowing a vital part of community. This was felt in older locales too. The Depression overwhelmed local charities and shifted responsibility to larger, distant agencies. The war saw federal supervision of housing standards and hiring practices. The trend continued after 1945 as new roads, schools, sewage systems and the like had to be built. People shrugged it off. Costs had gotten too high. Let the experts handle things. But an important part of community had been given up. One study called it, “the surrender of jurisdiction.”³⁸

The twenties saw the beginning of mass media. Movies, magazines, and the radio began to draw Americans, especially the young, away from the locale and reorient them to mass culture. The Lynds and numerous others noted an accompanying decline in church attendance, volunteer associations, and other parts of local life. The Second World War saw a large increase in public attention to the mass media and Washington, as people followed events overseas.³⁹ Afterward, the mass media added the new force of television. People once gathered during evenings, to share experiences, play cards, and talk of events – to socialize. Now they watched TV.⁴⁰ Local newspapers, fifty-watt radio stations, theater, clubs, self-improvement societies lost ground. Modern Americans were content to stay home, detached from neighbors, passing away the time with the new medium.⁴¹

Though usually seen only as sentimental holiday fare, *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946) is a look at a town struggling with decline. Bedford Falls feels the strains of demographic change and new wealth from wartime production, especially plastics. It's becoming Pottersville whose raucous juke joints, austere and antagonistic

³⁸ On the decline of local government see Vidich and Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society*, pp. 113-26, 132-36. See also Ladd, *Ideology in America*, pp. 41-43, 82-84; Nisbet, *The Quest for Community*, p. xvi; Samuel Pratt, “Metropolitan Community Development and Change in Sub-Center Economic Functions,” in Olson, ed., *America as a Mass Society*, pp. 220-231; Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society*, pp. 296-98; Shover, *First Majority*, pp. 229-63.

³⁹ James L Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 1-2.

⁴⁰ Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle, and Edwin B Parker, *Television in the Lives of Our Children* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1961); Vidich and Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society*, pp. 84-85, 101-3; Joseph Bensman and Bernard Rosenberg, “Mass Media and Mass Culture,” Olson, ed, *America as a Mass Society*, pp. 166-184; Donald Horton and R Richard Wohl, “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance,” in op cit, pp. 548-68; Rogers, *Social Change in Rural Society*, pp. 8-11; Marling, *As Seen on TV*, pp. 96-97.

⁴¹ Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 99-148; Morris Janowitz, *The Community Press in an Urban Setting: The Social Elements of Urbanism* Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Gallaher, *Plainville Fifteen Years Later*.

social relations, and primacy of the cash nexus, constitute the cold end point of forces put into motion a few years earlier. Small-town community wins out in the end – only through divine intervention.

Another genre from the period, wholly lacking in Capra's nostalgia, drew from earlier criticisms of small-town life made by Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson, but contrasted with the sentimentalization of that life during the Depression and war. Close-mindedness and hypocrisy were once again hallmarks of town life. These themes filtered down from the highbrow literature of *Babbitt*, *Main Street*, and *Winesburg, Ohio*, and reached the mass market with *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Peyton Place*, *The Long Hot Summer*, *Baby Doll*, *Written on the Wind*, *Bad Day at Black Rock*, and *This Property Condemned*. The town's moral pretensions are debunked. It's rife with adultery, unhappiness, and other dark secrets, almost invariably associated with elite families whose upright exterior is revealed as phony. Creativity cannot survive. An outsider arrives and exposes hypocrisy, an aging or dying patriarch is plagued by irresponsible children, an eldest son is incapable of siring an heir, lively night clubs and racy sports cars disrupt old ways.⁴²

Clergymen and sociologists, journalists and old timers all lamented declining community. Volunteer associations lost members; civic mindedness and senses of interrelatedness fell, materialism and a new form of individualism became commonplace. The ability to provide a sense of rootedness and pass on heritage was breaking down.⁴³ For many young people, the small town had to be escaped from – Fairmont to Hollywood, Tupelo to Memphis. Cities and suburbs were the new centers of life, often in California, the state most dramatically affected by the war where the hold of the past was weakest. Openness to change made California an object of derision. It was a cautionary example of directionless change, fortunately confined to a distant coast.

Progress and Plenty

The war raised education levels. Training and defense work acquainted millions with navigation, engineering, oceanography, systems analysis, medicine, and foreign languages. The GI Bill sent millions of vets to trade schools, colleges, and professional schools. Joseph Heller quipped, "If it wasn't for World War Two, I'd be in

⁴² A masterful look at the small town in cinema is Emanuel Levy's, *Small-Town America in Film: The Decline and Fall of Community* (New York: Continuum, 1991).

⁴³ See Ladd, *Ideology in America*, pp. 82-91, 138-40; and Lewis Atherton's eulogy for the small town, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966 [1954]), pp. 353-57.

the dry-cleaning business.” The children followed the lead, often with incentives provided by the Cold War. Conflict called for more emphasis on science and technology and subsidized those fields. The study of defense-related languages such as Russian and Chinese received federal grants.

It was widely feared that peace would mean unemployment back to prewar levels. A gloomy GI rhyme foretold of coming home from a long war only to find another depression:

The Golden Gate in '48

The breadline in '49

GIs are seldom an optimistic bunch and neither prediction came true. The decades following the war saw enormous prosperity and an immense consumer binge. After Depression hardships and war-time shortages, materialism became more important than ever before. It took several years for industry to reconvert to consumer goods. By the late forties, the country was eager to bask in the satisfaction of a job well done and satisfy two decades of pent-up demand. As Averell Harriman put it, Americans simply wanted to relax and drink Coca Cola.⁴⁴

Another impetus to consumerism lay, strangely enough, in wartime propaganda. In the pages of *Life* and *Look*, among the stories of key battles and bond drives, there were prominent advertisements for consumer products. What's remarkable here is that the items couldn't be bought – they weren't being made. Businesses noted proudly the communication gear, bombers, and trucks they were making and promised that victory would bring unprecedented prosperity, technological marvels, and labor-saving devices. The *Saturday Evening Post* thought it hit on an important morale booster when it chided the forces of totalitarianism in a curious way: “Your people are giving their lives in useless sacrifice. Ours are fighting for a glorious future of mass employment, mass production and mass distribution and ownership.”⁴⁵ (Unpersuaded, the Axis fought on.) Electronics firms

⁴⁴ On postwar income levels, see Ladd, *Ideology in America*, pp. 18-52. See also Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade – and After: America, 1945-1960* (New York: Vintage, 1960), pp. 19-28; James Lincoln Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 85-88. On parallel trends in England during the Great War see Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (New York: WW Norton, 1965), p. 109.

⁴⁵ Quoted in John Morton Blum, *Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), p. 101. For some of the crasser wartime advertisements see Michael S Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1950s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 89-91. A truss manufacturer suggested that “freedom from rupture” was one of the great ideals for which the nation was fighting.

promised that every household would have a television, but few believed it. There were some limits to public credulity.

Faith in progress was somewhat diminished by deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union and the start of the Cold War. Five years after Americans and Russians embraced at the Elbe, mistrust intensified and positions hardened. Former allies now pointed increasingly deadly weapons at each other. The effect, at least in the first decade or so, was less to undermine faith in progress than to engage the nation in a new cause, another contest with evil. Throughout the fifties, one could see signs of progress here, too: lifting blockades, forging containment treaties, rebuilding shattered countries, maintaining technological superiority, and leading the free world.

The Korean War broke out in 1950. Fighting moved up and down the rugged peninsula, then stabilized near the old demarcation line where for the next two years fighting raged. Casualties mounted and the public grew restless. This wasn't how our wars should go.⁴⁶ In 1952, Americans placed their trust in Ike who soon brought about a truce. Soldiers, statesmen, and the general public agreed that we would never again wage a land war in Asia.⁴⁷ The Cold War led to competition in outer space which became a showcase for American technology, know-how, and courage. Astronauts were heroes. Several had been fighter pilots in World War Two and Korea. The nation was moving into space.

People bought and bought. If it cost too much, they borrowed. Concern with craftsmanship diminished. If something broke, just buy another. Roadsides and intersections were transformed. Shopping centers shot up in the blink of an eye, unlike anything most Americans had ever seen, unlike anything many older people had ever cared to see. The American idea had once had a rich meaning of political and religious freedoms, wondrous

⁴⁶ The Pentagon in June 2000 revised downward the casualty figures for the Korean War from 54,246 killed to 36,516 (both numbers include combat and noncombat deaths). The higher figure included soldiers and sailors killed world-wide during the conflict, which was the practice in WWII. The higher number is used here because it is the one Americans were familiar with at the time.

⁴⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 103-10.

opportunities, and much more.⁴⁸A popular history written in the mid-fifties saw material abundance as a vital almost defining theme in US history.⁴⁹

Religion and Norms

The war years saw an upsurge in religious attendance and widespread invocation of religion. With the end of the war, after a period of national thankfulness, religiousness declined. The ordeal was over, the dead buried. The triumph over evil had proven the righteousness of Americans, just as it had after the Civil War, and a similar sense of complacency set in.⁵⁰

Postwar Religion Paradoxically, mobilization of religion diluted it. Previously, each denomination erected walls between it and others, underscoring differences in doctrines and rites and often vilifying rivals. Wartime ideology stressed common elements and purposes. Differences seemed parochial and insignificant while fighting Hitler and Tojo. Religions were united, tossed together. Differences couldn't be reasserted after the war.⁵¹

Religion and norms rely on surroundings. They're ethereal parts of culture based on the tangible edifices of family and community. After the war these edifices lost vitality and could no longer ably uphold religious sentiments.⁵² Much of modern life now had a secular tone. The world in all its natural and social aspects was

⁴⁸ Tom Wolfe, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965); Marling, *As Seen on TV*, pp. 87-126.

⁴⁹ David M Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

⁵⁰ Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York: Random House, 1961), pp. 46-64.

⁵¹ See Martin E Marty, *Modern American Religion*, Volume 3: *Under God, Indivisible, 1941-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 330-32. Lawrence W Levine notes blurring during the Great War. See his *Defender of the Faith: William Jennings Bryan: The Last Decade, 1915-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 102.

⁵² Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, pp. 72-73.

governed by scientific laws, cause and effect. The ideas of divine intervention or direction – the stuff of earlier forms of history – were out of date.⁵³

People followed the war and though prayer was in mind, attention riveted on armies, generals, planes, and ships. Sacredness migrated from traditional symbols to the architects of victory. An ancient historian (Velleius Paterculus) noted a similar phenomenon on Augustus's return from a triumph: "Thereafter men could hope from nothing from the gods, the gods could give nothing to men, nothing could be the object of prayer and the gift of good fortune, which Augustus did not bestow upon the Republic and upon the world after his return to the city."⁵⁴ There was greater confidence in political leaders, scientists, experts, and the rational application of resources to solving problems.⁵⁵ History was less the unfolding of divine will than the work of states with powerful armies and navies and air forces.

Statistics showed Americans claimed to be quite religious. Attendance at services was high, churches sprang up in suburbs, and outside of the occasional fashionable atheist, almost everyone professed to believe in God, the Ten Commandments, heaven and hell, and so on.⁵⁶ But observers noted erosions. Congregations were more heterogeneous and people were less involved with one another. Clergy no longer played vital roles in people's lives. Pastoral visits declined in number and became little more than dinner outings. People looked for guidance from psychologists, teachers, and other experts. Ministers preaching the old-time religion irritated congregants and felt a need to change their message, or move on.⁵⁷

Drawing from Freud's 1927 account of religion as an illusion, psychologists held that religion might be based on primitive needs or neuroses.⁵⁸ Fiery certainty, direct relationship to God, inner retrospection, and

⁵³ Marty, *Modern American Religion* III, pp. 130-56; Robert Wuthnow, "Science and the Sacred," in Phillip E Hammond, ed, *The Sacred in a Secular Age: Toward Revision in the Scientific Study of Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 187-203.

⁵⁴ Paterculus quote from AHM Jones, *Augustus* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), p. 47. See also JHWG Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).

⁵⁵ Marty, *Modern American Religion* III, pp. 89-102, 211-30.

⁵⁶ Sydney E Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 951-52.

⁵⁷ Vidich and Bensman, *Small Town in Mass Society*, pp. 234-39.

⁵⁸ Marty, *Modern American Religion* III, pp. 280-2, 313; Peter L Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

search for spiritual guidance no longer filled hearts. Ideas of man's inherent wickedness and need for constant supervision no longer resonated with people who'd just rid the world of evil. Faith in God, as Cotton Mather or Dwight Moody had understood it, was relegated to backwaters but even there, many young people complained that participating in Sunday meetings would make them "old."⁵⁹ Religion was widely replaced by what's called "faith in faith," amorphous beliefs that lack meaningful religiousness.⁶⁰ The spirit that energized the colonies into breaking from Britain, ended slavery, and sustained the nation through Depression and war, lost vitality and became a status symbol, like the automobile displayed out front.

William Dean Howells noted a similar decline among the upper crust of the nineteenth-century:

Religion there had largely ceased to be a fact of spiritual experience, and the visible church flourished on condition of providing for the social needs of the community. It was practically held that the salvation of one's soul must not be made to depressing, or the young people would have nothing to do with it. . . .⁶¹

A diluted variety of religious experience became mainstream. It was all part of the new "other-directed" public that looked to others for cues on opinion, manners, and appurtenances. The wave of religious TV shows and Biblical epics of the period might be cited as evidence of religion's strength but they might be better seen as evidence it was becoming entertainment.⁶² Forces and desires, held in check in earlier generations, began to assert themselves.⁶³

The Acquisitive Society Frederic Wakeman's *The Hucksters* noted the rise of material pursuits. Popular and shocking in its day, it tells of a young man who leaves the Office of War Information for the advertising world – exchanging one form of propaganda for another. After all, the director of the first World War's propaganda

⁵⁹ See Weller, *Yesterday's People*, pp. 121-33.

⁶⁰ Will Herberg, *Protestant – Catholic – Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 74-81.

⁶¹ From *A Modern Instance*. Quoted in Joseph F Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 121.

⁶² Martin Marty makes this point in *Modern American Religion* III, pp. 317-30.

⁶³ Marty, *Modern American Religion* III, pp. 313-15; Bensman and Rosenberg, *Mass, Class, and Bureaucracy*, pp. 459-95; Arthur L Swift, "Religious Values," in Anshen, ed, *The Family*, pp. 313-27; Warren A Nord, *Religion and American Education: Rethinking an American Dilemma* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 1-62. Riesman explores a shift from "morality to morale" in *The Lonely Crowd*, pp. 37-65.

campaign referred to his work as “the world’s greatest adventure in advertising.”⁶⁴ As one observer put it, “The postwar power of ‘the media’ to determine what shall be embraced as reality is in large part due to the success of the morale culture in wartime.”⁶⁵ Though the war is still on, its urgency is down. The agency is seeking to capitalize on the impending close of the war by allying V-J Day symbols with advertising copy for a brand of soap.⁶⁶

The children of the Depression, newly acquainted with disposable incomes, eagerly purchased new goods. Cars were bigger, clothes more colorful, furniture more modern. Americans had once been admonished to regard material things as a light cloak they might easily shed but V-8 engines, kitchen luxuries, televisions, and all the rest were more appealing than cloaks. Much of life became “a bland ritual of competitive spending.”⁶⁷ In the sixties, America reached a critical point. National holidays such as Memorial Day and George Washington’s Birthday were changed from their original dates and moved to Mondays to provide three-day weekends. Consumerism and leisure triumphed over tradition and heritage.

Coarsening and Violence The war itself had coarsened the country and so did the books with which the public came to terms with it. Novels had a disdain for older sentiments and conventions and pushed them back or elided them wherever possible. Literature abounded with themes of the destruction of idealism. In *A Bell for Adano*, a well-intentioned military governor is relieved of his command by a boorish superior. Mister Roberts, whose decency merited portrayal by Henry Fonda, is killed by a kamikaze. The martinet captain lives on. Billy Pilgrim in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an innocent youth until the Battle of the Bulge and the bombing of Dresden.

⁶⁴ George Creel, quoted in Ellis W Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1979), p. 22.

⁶⁵ Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 164.

⁶⁶ Wakeman, *The Hucksters* (New York: Rinehart, 1946).

⁶⁷ Mumford, *The City in History*, p. 494. See also Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, pp. 12-15, 61-81; Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, pp. 116-25; Vance Packard, *The Status Seekers* (New York: McKay, 1959). Reinhold Niebuhr notes the tension between material prosperity and religiosity in *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner’s, 1962), pp. 43-64.

In Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, decency is overwhelmed by the brutality of Sergeant Croft, the embodiment of America's frontier past, and General Cummings, the same of its militaristic future. One soldier in the recon platoon stands up to Croft but backs down when the sergeant levels his rifle at him. Another realizes Croft's murderous nature and knows he's powerless to do anything about it. After expounding his views on the need to keep lower strata in line and America's destiny in the world, Cummings orders the idealistic Lt Hearn to pick up a cigarette butt or face court martial. He picks it up. When Hearn takes over the platoon, Croft arranges his death (as in a way did Cummings). Another character's wholesome traditional upbringing is the object of ridicule ("no apple pie today"), as though Andy Hardy had suddenly been put into a Pacific jungle.

The protagonists of Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* direct inexperienced GIs into a suspected ambush – better them than us. It concludes with a soldier expressing hope for the postwar world, then an embittered German soldier kills him even though he knows the war is all but over. Another GI corners the now disarmed German and kills him. A character in Burns's *The Gallery* observes, "I thought that all humanity had gone from the world, and that this war had smothered decency forever."⁶⁸ Mailer uses his narrative skill to describe, in stunning detail, the reality behind the campaign's end:

It was simple, a lark. [T]he mopping up was comparatively pleasant, almost exciting. The killing lost all dimension, bothered the men far less than discovering ants in their bedding. . . . Certain things were SOP. The Japanese had set up many small hospitals in the last weeks of the campaign, and in retreating they had killed many of their wounded. The Americans who came in would finish off whatever wounded men were left, smashing their heads with rifle butts or shooting them point-blank.

But there were other, more distinctive ways. One patrol out at dawn discovered four Japanese soldiers lying in stupor across a trail, their ponchos covering them. The lead man halted, picked up some pebbles and flipped them into the air. The pebbles landed on the first sleeping soldier with a light pattering sound like hail. He awakened slowly, stretched under the poncho, yawned, groaned a little, cleared his throat, and stretched with the busy stupid sounds of a man rousing himself in the morning. Then he poked his head out from under the poncho. The lead man waited until the Jap saw him and then, as he was about to scream, the American sent a burst of Tommy-gun slugs through him. He followed this by ripping his gun down the middle of the trail, stitching holes neatly through the ponchos. Only one Jap was still alive, and his leg protruded from the poncho, twitching aimlessly with the last unconscious

⁶⁸ Burns's book is also noteworthy for its veiled references to homosexuality – another taboo that could then be broached, albeit cautiously. The film *Crossfire* (1947) in which a bigoted sergeant murders a Jewish veteran was originally written about the murder of a gay GI, later discovered to have been a decorated veteran.

shudders of a dying animal. Another soldier walked up, nuzzled the body under the poncho with the muzzle of his gun, located the wounded man's head, and pulled the trigger.⁶⁹

No editor would have allowed this to see print a few years earlier.

Obscenities are as common in military life as an early wake-up – indeed, they go hand in hand. No honest depiction could avoid rough language. Crude slang found its way into books. Convinced his publisher wouldn't allow the actual words, Mailer used “fug” and “fuggin” in *The Naked and the Dead*.⁷⁰ Perhaps because of public acceptance of Mailer's creative diction, the f-word appeared in James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* in 1951. It soon became de rigueur. As might be expected after so much exposure to unromantic liaisons, depictions of sex changed. For every girl waiting back home, there were three or four on the street corner. Syphilis and gonorrhoea were routine occurrences, whereas before the war they were only in whispers and pamphlets. *The Naked and the Dead* contains numerous references to soldiers getting “a dose of the clap.” *The Gallery* devotes a whole chapter to the travails of a GI who contracts VD and has to serve time for it.⁷¹

More banal coarsening appeared in the western and private-eye genres. Fighting, killing, and prominent display of weapons were everywhere, proclaiming that violence was an essential part of life. Of course, guns and violence had been parts of American culture at least since Cooper's tales of Natty Bumppo fighting Redcoats and Iroquois but the war greatly strengthened the trend. A Ford Foundation study in the early fifties found that television showed almost three thousand acts or threats of violence a week.⁷² Film and television were peculiarly fascinated with weapons: Thompsons brandished in a manful way that made veterans laugh; grenade pins pulled

⁶⁹ Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* (New York: Rinehart, 1948), pp. 718-19. Kurt Vonnegut, too, was struck by the “mopping-up” euphemism: “It is, in the imagination of combat's fans, the divinely listless loveplay that follows the orgasm of victory.” *Slaughterhouse-Five, or the Children's Crusade: A Duty Dance with Death* (New York: Delacorte, 1969), p. 51.

⁷⁰ Carl Rollyson, *The Lives of Norman Mailer* (New York: Paragon, 1991), pp. 40-41. Tallulah Bankhead, on being introduced to Mailer, supposedly said, “Oh, you're the young man who can't spell 'f--.'” Mailer says it's a wonderful story but it never happened.

⁷¹ On postwar literature see, John Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two Wars* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971 [1951]), pp. 133-69. Note also the observations of two writers after the Great War: “The habit of continuous obscene language, which a long and miserable war has always induced, persisted four or five years more and had even spread to the younger women.” See Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1959* (New York: WW Norton, 1963 [1940]), pp. 26-27.

⁷² Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty*, p. 142; David T Courtwright, *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 103-7.

with teeth (it can be done, but most soldiers and dentists advise against it); sidearms prominently displayed to convey virility. Movie and television titles suggest obsession: *Winchester '73*, *Springfield Rifle*, *Colt .45*, *Carbine Williams*. TV stars brandished an array of weaponry such as Buntline Specials, derringers, Bowie knives, Winchesters, Winchester wranglers, sawed-off Winchesters, even a cane that fired bullets. Toy companies cashed in.⁷³

Sexual Norms Academic books, as most professors will attest, rarely enjoy widespread readership but an Indiana entomologist's study of human sexuality swept the nation. Alfred Kinsey interviewed thousands of people over a number of years and published his findings. The public read of previously taboo subjects such as the number of men and women who were virgins at marriage, the frequency of sexual relations by age group, incidences of adultery and masturbation, and the number of homosexual contacts.

Publication of *Lolita*, *The Naked Lunch*, and other "racy" books led to celebrated court cases, most of which ended with decisions upholding free speech over restricting norms. Interest in sex took on less erudite and literary forms. Mainstream magazines of the thirties had sexual content: Vargas girls, spicy stories, and the like. During the war, pin-ups were in lockers, GI magazines, and painted on aircraft. In 1953, Hugh Hefner began publishing *Playboy* which was bolder in depicting the female anatomy, more frank in discussing sex, and targeting the middle classes. It also had a world-view of sorts, a "playboy philosophy" as it was called, advocating a freer approach to sex and critiquing sexual mores imposed by dour Puritans. Countless imitators appeared on magazine stands – or behind the counter.⁷⁴

Rock & roll was based on black music from the South, that is, from a minority distanced from the mainstream. Their music appealed to less inhibited youth of all races. Slang, innuendo, and double entendres abounded. Rock & roll was of course slang for sex. "Ballin'" (Miss Molly's preoccupation) and "one night with you" (Smiley Lewis's hope) were thinly veiled expressions. Search as one might, the "House of Blue Lights" isn't

⁷³ Richard Slotkin notes the "fetish" quality of guns in *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), pp. 379-486.

⁷⁴ See Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 37-44; Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, pp. 355-61; Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System* (New York: Random House, 1960 [1956]), pp. 119-32; Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), pp. 58-90.

in the phone book but a cabby might know it. Performers played before rapt audiences in road houses, juke joints, movie theaters, and eventually on television. Crowds seemed to be electrically charged, like nothing before except oddly enough, a revivalist meeting.⁷⁵ To older people, rock and roll was a threat to norms, adult authority, indeed to authority in general..

In and out of Hollywood, people saw the Production Code Administration as schoolmarmish. The public wanted frankness, sophistication, and freedom. By the late fifties, weighing potential sanctions against likely revenue, Hollywood released a few films without PCA approval, foreshadowing its demise a few years later.⁷⁶ Ministers and politicians could rail against it but they became scolding voices from the past echoing across a yawning gap.

National Community and Power Prestige

Pride in military success and power prestige became more important than ever before, aiding considerably in the coherence of a changing country. Every figure of authority – cops and teachers, corporate chiefs and heads of state – stood taller. The public, or at least a great preponderance of it, thought they could do no wrong and anyone who didn't agree was looked askance at.⁷⁷

Isolationism Newspapers of August 7 1945 ran banner headlines of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Other stories told of continued fighting in the Pacific and hope for a swift end to war. Below the fold, a story noted the passing of Senator Hiram Johnson who vigorously opposed involvement in the war prior to Pearl Harbor. The coincidence of the news from the Pacific and Johnson's death suggests the muse of history has a gift

⁷⁵ Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture*, pp. 68-74; WT Lhamon, Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), pp. 38-97.

⁷⁶ See Gregory D Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 299; Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Media*, pp. 80-83; Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of the Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975), pp. 294-96; Terry Christensen, *Reel Politics: American Political Movies from Birth of a Nation to Platoon* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 99; Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America*, pp. 194-200.

⁷⁷ Quoted in David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1941-1945* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 441. See also Edward Shils's essay on war and authority, "American Society and the War in Indochina," in Anthony Lake, ed, *The Legacy of Vietnam: The War, American Society and the Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), pp. 40-65

for metaphor. In 1948 Charles Beard published a volume arguing that FDR deceived the public about entering the war.⁷⁸ Ably documented and not without foundation, the book was as irrelevant as though arguing for a silver standard. Isolationism had been a guiding principle since the country's inception. George Washington counseled against foreign entanglements. The Mexican War and Spanish-American War led to complaints of expansionism. The First World War soured the taste of military adventure. In the years prior to Pearl Harbor, defense expenditures barely got through Congress. Shortly before December 7th an extension of conscription passed by a single vote. A few years later, America was involved around the world and conscription lasted until 1973.

How did the country move to internationalism so quickly? The war of course began the process. It mobilized traditional senses of morality and duty and deployed them across the globe. News reports, government communiqués, and Hollywood films depicted foreign countries as stalwart allies with people like us and endangered by common enemies. British and Russian armies, French and Filipino undergrounds, Polish and Chinese civilians all played roles. "V for Victory" was an inspiring symbol of international resolve. It was flashed by leaders in public speeches, displayed on posters, and in occupied countries, tapped out in Morse code to annoy German soldiers.⁷⁹

Popular culture took up the cause. A Woodrow Wilson biopic (Best Picture in 1944) held isolationism responsible for the failed peace of 1918. Other films suggested isolationism was tinged with foreign subterfuge or anti-semitism and that American common sense recognized the peril. Beneath the romance, *Casablanca* told of Rick, an average American who claimed he stuck his neck out for no one. We learn he fought in the Spanish Civil War while America was sleeping. Rick puts private concerns aside – they didn't amount to a hill of beans anyway – and helps a resistance leader make it to Lisbon. Afterwards, he joins the French underground – the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Everyone had neighbors and loved ones in the service who were deployed to places few had heard of in 1941 – Guadalcanal, Kasserine, Peleliu, Luzon, and Bastogne. Events far away affected people in the most

⁷⁸ Charles A Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of War, 1941: A Study in Appearances and Realities* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1948).

⁷⁹Fussell, *Wartime*, pp. 149-50.

ethnocentric neighborhood, the most remote Appalachian hollow, and the sleepest whistle-stop. The change was as striking and revolutionary as learning the universe did not revolve around the earth. Americans no longer thought in terms of a self-contained locale. Hardship ended with victory, in contrast to the stalemate and diplomatic failures of 1918. Images of Yanks greeted by Parisians and the flag raised over Suribachi were wondrous sights that no isolationist speech could match. Americans remained across the globe for decades. They trained armies from Greece to Vietnam. America was a world power. It had really been one for decades, but now Americans defined themselves by it. Walter Lippmann put it this way: "What Rome was to the ancient world, what Great Britain has been to the modern world, America is to be to the world of tomorrow."⁸⁰

Militarization In 1938 the US had the world's nineteenth largest military. Three years later, it moved up a few places, in part because of increased defense spending grudgingly allowed by Congress but mostly because Germany had removed the Czech, Polish, and French armies from the list. The war was not without concerns: conscripts resented military regimen, constitutional experts watched in dismay as civil liberties eroded, and many felt uneasy as hatred became an integral part of nationalism. Most felt it was a necessary price for defending the country and saving civilization.

Militarization continued well after the flag was hoisted above Berlin and Tokyo. Millions of GIs were discharged and countless ships decommissioned, yet huge numbers of troops remained around the world. For the first time, conscription continued into peacetime. Servicemen were everywhere – at train stations and airports, in the audiences of television shows and ball games, and on college campuses. They wore their uniforms into town and hitchhiked home in them. It was easier to get rides that way and they got free meals along with a little nostalgic boasting ("I was in the big one, you know"). For many, the service was a bridge between high school and adulthood or between college years and the corporate world. A hitch in the service was part of one's career.

Not many swords were hammered into plowshares. Indeed, countless new ones were made. They were modernized and made more lethal. Propeller planes became jets, Sherman tanks were replaced by Pattons, M-14s took the place of M-1s, Essex-Class carriers gave way to nuclear-powered ones. New equipment came into being: missiles, satellites, infra-red scopes, and so on. A considerable portion of the economy devoted itself to

⁸⁰ Quoted in Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, p. 8. See also Goldman, *The Crucial Decade*, pp. 28-40.

defense. Industry was eager to place retiring generals and admirals on their boards of directors – to gain their managerial experience but also to forge ties with colleagues in the Pentagon. There was some concern with the pace and seeming endlessness of it all, but most felt it necessary. Besides, those with memories of the Depression knew defense spending meant good jobs.

When plans were made to build the Pentagon in the late thirties, critics said its enormousness betrayed the administration's desire to build a huge military and enter the war. The administration countered (disingenuously) that the building would be used by other government bureaus. In just a few years, however, not even the world's largest office building sufficed for the military. It sprawled across the Washington area and elsewhere. The New Deal created an alphabet soup of bureaus (CCC, NRA, WPA) and most of them disappeared. The national security state created a slew of new ones (CIA, NSC, NSA, DIA) and they're still around. Often secret, not even shown on detailed maps of Langley or Laurel, they were seen by most as silent guardians, staffed by alumni of elite universities and service academies. Their work was above question, even above discussion, as had been the planning for the Doolittle raid, Overlord, and the Manhattan Project. Founders of the nation had warned against standing armies and foreign entanglements, however the world was different now and cautions from the eighteenth century had little weight.

The Pentagon gathered the best scientific minds in biology, medicine, engineering, physics, and chemistry and directed their expertise toward weaponry, electronics, and medicines. The Office of Strategic Services performed clandestine operations and also brought together social scientists to study the psychology of fascism and aspects of German and Japanese national characters. Findings were put to use in propaganda. Colleges taught navigation, engineering, foreign languages, and public affairs. Some training was for administrators of occupied territories. A few engaged in secret research on rockets, jet engines, and other innovations.⁸¹

Washington continued to fund research into military projects in the Cold War. The social sciences studied the Soviet system, economic development, nation-building, brain-washing (especially after Korea), and nuclear warfare. Washington charged Michigan State University and the RAND Corporation with solving the

⁸¹ See Adam Yarmolinsky, *The Military Establishment: Its Impact on American Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 302-23.

problems of economic and political development in a new Southeast Asian republic facing a growing insurgency. Nothing was unsolvable. It was simply a matter of allocating enough resources.⁸²

One of the more salient aspects of militarization was the expansion of ROTC. The program existed before the war and grew afterwards. ROTC was often mandatory at land-grant colleges. Drill and ceremony took place on the quads, uniformed students ambled to and from classes, and honor guards performed at halftimes. It filtered down to high schools where Junior ROTC was taught, drum and bugle corps proliferated, military-style haircuts were the fashion, and sports took on martial trappings. The ubiquity of the military at schools reinforced what political rhetoric, church leaders, and scout leaders insisted. At any moment we may be in a shooting war. Many boys looked forward to the day.

Military Culture Memory of the war permeated politics, fashion, films, television, and backyard play. The memory of the fallen and FDR's death added a poignant and tragic dimension that made the memory more spiritual. Military service, both during the war and after, was considered highly desirable in corporations, police forces, and public school systems. Almost every president and serious contender served in the war, as commander of a theater of operations, PT boat skipper, or pilot. The imagery and prestige of war service, even if inflated, were formidable advantages over a candidate who hadn't worn the uniform.

Following World War One, the cinema depicted war in somber tones. Gloom and pessimism, disillusion and death stand out in *What Price Glory?*, *The Big Parade*, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The post-1945 mood was upbeat. Scores of films, most made with Pentagon assistance (gratefully acknowledged in the credits), showed courage, resourcefulness, and sacrifice. They all culminated in the Big Win, usually relatively painlessly. *What Price Glory?* was remade in 1952 and though war was heck, there were enough French girls and hi-jinx to make it worthwhile. *The Naked and the Dead* was transmogrified into war fare in which key aspects of the book were turned on their heads. They all celebrated the American way, though in a manner that turned the effort into entertainment.

⁸² Ronald H Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam 1941-1960* (New York: Free Press, 1985), pp. 219-379; Sigmund Diamond, *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1945-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 111-37.

A notable exception was *Victory at Sea* (1952), the renowned series that used only documentary footage. Week after week, viewers saw U-boat predations in the North Atlantic, destroyers crashing determinedly through heavy seas, broadsides silhouetting huge battleships at night, immense task forces stretching across the horizon, fighters gracefully lifting off carriers to mete out rough justice, and relentless kamikaze attacks off Okinawa. The myths were all there: a peaceful nation stirred to action, average Yanks achieving the extraordinary, the virtues of courage, diligence, and ingenuity, and good triumphing over evil. Each episode ended with calm seas, the famous leitmotif, and victory. A moving score and austere narration conveyed the gravity of the war, the uncertainty of its outcome, and the high costs. Several episodes showed burials at sea, gravely wounded sailors, and shot-up fighters exploding into a fireball on a carrier deck. Americans knew they were on top and sure to remain there forever.

Martial messages were everywhere – film, television, sports, magazines – but also in less formal places, and usually appealing to youth. Almost everyone's father had served. Some would tell stories of the war, others would tell war stories, others would only smile wryly or look away blankly. They had the powerful effect of romanticizing the war in young minds. Many veterans brought back samurai swords, Lugers, helmets, flags, and lighters which when occasionally displayed, were viewed by kids with awe and reverence, as though they were gazing upon a Saracen sword brought home by victorious crusaders.

A considerable portion of boys' time, at least until they were old enough for organized sports, was spent playing war. It was a natural enough response to the victory but it received additional vitality from television programs depicting boys playing valorous roles in wars past. Johnny Tremain did his part in the Revolution, as did the intrepid lad who helped the Swamp Fox. Johnny Shiloh, the Union drummer boy, found courage under fire. They made military service desirable – in some, inevitable. After school or on Saturdays (it wasn't appropriate on Sundays), neighborhood youths would assemble, armed with a panoply of plastic Thompsons and Colts that industry, in a paradoxical reconversion, churned out. Backpacks and divisional insignia could be had cheap at surplus stores whose aisles of artifacts from the war made them practically shrines. Backyards became battlegrounds. Suribachis were made out of small hills. In winter, a few kids in a tool shed became the beleaguered garrison of Bastogne. Nicks and cuts were inevitable but they were borne with the same bravado of a GI in a battalion aid station. Only a Lucky dangling from the lips was missing.

Girls who accepted prevailing gender roles might bandage the wounded. Others, perhaps anticipating later social change, put them aside for the duration and became combatants. Classmates became crack elements of the German army until the sides were changed – a necessity because no one wanted to be the Krauts. Shortly after V-E Day, Patton thrilled a Sunday school class by telling them, “You are the soldiers and the nurses of the next war. There will be another war. There always has been.”⁸³ It was inspiring.

Unifying Aspects The militarization of everything from backyard play to the high councils of government might seem like watching a great ship steaming heedlessly toward an iceberg. And it might appear like a destructive process that led only to a debacle. That might prevent appreciating that war culture had unifying effects.⁸⁴

If the war set into motion forces generally weakening the family, military culture infused parental authority with legitimacy and prestige. Most fathers and many mothers as well served in the war or otherwise contributed. They were parts of a great nation that was now engaged in another contest. An aura from the past and urgency in the present made parents more respected than they might otherwise have been in a rapidly changing country.

Americans, though increasingly atomized, still looked upon each other as having worked and sacrificed together and agreeing on most important things. Even in the most demographically-changed town or in the newest suburb, veterans, no matter their social backgrounds or ethnicity, might notice a lapel pin or slight limp and discover a bond with someone they might have passed by otherwise. Veterans could form ties among themselves, create chapters of local organizations, and establish a measure of primary-group ties.⁸⁵ Communities took pride in members who'd gone off to war, in their industries that built materiel, and in their young now serving overseas. W Lloyd Warner notes the importance of local observations:

⁸³ Quoted in Lawrence S Wittner, *Rebels against War: The American Peace Movement, 1953-1985* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), p. 98.

⁸⁴ Simone Weil saw interwar France as an essentially deracinated country held together only by national myths and symbols. See *The Need for Roots* (Boston: Beacon, 1952 [1943]), pp. 99ff.

⁸⁵ A wartime study found that soldiers were more inclined to be involved in community activities than they were before the war. See Samuel Stouffer et al, *The American Soldier; Volume Two: Combat and Its Aftermath* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 641-43.

Memorial Day is a cult of the dead which organizes and integrates the various faiths and national and class groups into a sacred unity. It is a cult of the dead organized around the community cemeteries. Its principal themes are those of the sacrifice of the soldier dead for the living and the obligation of the living to sacrifice their individual purposes for the good of the group, so that they, too, can perform their spiritual obligations.⁸⁶

The recent memory of over four hundred thousand dead brought new meaning, senses of sacredness, and integration to Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and V-J Day. Those who served under Ike and Nimitz stood alongside those who'd been with Teddy and Blackjack and even a few old-timers who'd stood with Grant and Lee.

Victory culture provided a sense of integration, of being a part of an ongoing historical process. There was a sense of involvement and being part of an effort above individual concerns. Principles of duty and honor might well have receded into the past and the country might have been even more egocentric and antagonistic than it was, but the imperative of continued vigilance countered this. It conveyed a sense of responsibility, especially to the young. Being an American meant certain duties and obligations – this at a time when little else conveyed the message.

⁸⁶ See W Lloyd Warner, *American Life: Dream and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964 [1953]), pp. 8-19. See also Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic, 1994), pp. 125-57; David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 69-70..

Chapter Five

Discontent amid the Celebration

In this period of rapid growth and change, uncertainty and instability rather than calm and security were the norms; men commenced to subject ancient religious and social standards to searching analysis, to evolve new political doctrines, and apply new deductions from the new science to their lives and problems.

Carl Bridenbaugh
Cities in Revolt

The uneasiness, the malaise of our time, is due to this root fact: in our politics and economy, in family life and religion – in practically every sphere of our existence – the certainties of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have disintegrated or been destroyed and, at the same time, no new sanctions or justifications for the new routines we live, and must live, have taken hold. So there is no acceptance and there is no rejection, no sweeping hope and no sweeping rebellion.

C Wright Mills
White Collar

Changes thought unthinkable became common and accepted. Older minds reeled. Some young ones saw it as natural and rolled along. Other youths found modern life sterile and crass. Unable to differentiate between the traditional and the modern, they became discontented. Sub-groups coalesced and sometimes found voice. Nonetheless, a majority of Americans thought of their nation as an intricate and mellifluous musical piece, performed by those faithful to composers and respectful of conductors. Attentive listeners could hear players out of time, out of tune. Some were playing different melodies, others refused to play at all.

Alienation amid Consensus

Though the fifties are usually deemed a period of stability and conformity, many contemporaries feared the country was falling apart. By the early sixties, older and middle-aged Americans decried deteriorating moral standards. In private and open conversation, in films and music, in school subjects and dating patterns, there was

a fascination with addressing subjects previously kept private. Kinsey's study of human sexuality found so much putative deviancy that in some circles the concept of normal sexual habits came into question.¹ There were trends of drug use, juvenile crime, and angry subgroups, none of which seemed overwhelming but which nonetheless worried people. Popular music, fads, and consumer goods inserted themselves between generations. Passing on values was no longer assured.²

America, increasingly modern and rationalized, was losing its aura of sacredness. The mass media played a role. Folklore and fairy tales, handed down to the young by parents and grandparents, instilled senses of enchantment, wonder, and morality.³ They were replaced by film and television and comics that turned historical leaders and events into consumer products. Nathanael West saw it beginning earlier: "Although dreams were once powerful, they have been made puerile by the movies, radio and newspapers. Among many betrayals, this one is the worst."⁴

World War Two was trivialized by a steady output of products depicting the war as action, adventure, melodrama, and comedy. Compensating for Mailer's inability to see the bright side of combat, Hollywood processed *The Naked and the Dead* into a predictable flick with an uplifting ending. It was easy to find courage under fire, stars seldom died (though the Duke bought the farm in *The Sands of Iwo Jima*), and the resourceful Yanks quickly found a way to win. The urgency, immediacy, and agony became a series of clichés that could not inspire, only entertain for a while. The war became as trite as a posse heading 'em off at the pass or a lonely librarian finding love.⁵

¹ Alfred C Kinsey, Wardell B Pomeroy, and Clyde E Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia, Penn: WB Saunders, 1948); Kinsey et al, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia, Penn: WB Saunders, 1953).

²Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System* (New York: Random House, 1960 [1956]), pp. 3-16; Eric F Goldman, *The Crucial Decade – and After: America, 1945-1960* (New York: Vintage, 1960), pp. 187-201, 316-26.

³ See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage, 1977), pp. 3-53; Vigen Guroian, *Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁴ Nathanael West, *Miss Lonely Hearts* (New York: New Directions, 1962 [1933]), p. 39.

⁵ On war movies of the period, see Lawrence H Suid, *Guts and Glory: Great American War Movies* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1978); Craig M Cameron, *American Samurai: Myth, Imagination, and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941-1951* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 241-72.

The Starkweather murder spree and a motorcycle gang's donnybrook in a California town boded ill. The nation had to go back.⁶ Only a half century earlier, revivalist movements emerged and spread like wildfire, rekindling religious commitment and becoming historical forces. However, a people that had been shaken about and rearranged over that last fifty years was unlikely to respond.

David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* saw a worrisome change. Americans were breaking free from traditional moorings and floating adrift, without rudder or compass. They were no longer rooted in religious beliefs or strong convictions. They were "other-directed," looking about to opinion leaders, peer groups, and the media for cues on how to think and act.⁷ Riesman was troubled but did not point where it would lead. Many of his colleagues were more outspoken. Americans had lost ties to the past and community, resulting in isolation, malaise, and dread. Problems were especially pronounced in urban and suburban locales, among white-collar workers, and among those who had experienced high degrees of vertical and horizontal mobility. They were vulnerable to manipulation by demagogues. There would be unrealistic expectations from marriage, leading to disappointments and high divorce rates. Others would languish in despair and isolation or search for meaning in popular religion and social movements. Crime and suicide rates would soar.⁸

A different line of analysis was heard as well – a soothing, optimistic voice. It was heard from legions of social psychologists, school principals, self-help advocates, personnel administrators, and social workers. They preached a secular message of comfort. People needed to change, keep in step, adapt to surroundings. The message was heard in every school, corporation, and rotary club. It was even heard in churches which eager to keep attendance up, looked to new methods. It seemed to be engraved onto the facade of every modern building

⁶ Marty, *Modern American Religion* III, pp. 130-56.

⁷ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study in the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), pp. 3-36.

⁸ William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1959); Robert E Lane, *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does* (New York: Free Press, 1962); Philip Olson, ed, *America as a Mass Society: Changing Community and Identity* (New York: Free Press, 1963); Seymour Martin Lipset and Theodore Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977* Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 209-47; Robert Jay Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (New York: Basic, 1993). Some authors saw it as a sign of decay, others as an opening to a new time.

and proclaimed by every organization man. There was a change on and everyone needed to do their part. But no one knew the duration, what it would cost, or what victory would bring.

Social Protest amid the Celebration

Like the Civil War, World War Two ushered in a Treasury of Virtue. Robert Penn Warren's description of post-Civil War America ably describes the country eighty years later and bears repeating. Each war was a

consciously undertaken crusade so full of righteousness that there is enough surplus stored in Heaven, like the deeds of the saints, to take care of all small failings and oversights of the descendants of the crusaders, certainly unto the present generation. From the start America had had adequate baggage of self-righteousness and phariseism, but with the Civil War came grace abounding, for the least of the sinners.⁹

The Second Treasury of Virtue also pushed social criticism into the back of the public mind. The celebration became a frustrating environment that made critics more alienated and radical than they might otherwise have been. For them, it was complacent, self-congratulatory, and hypocritical – a puerile sentimentalization of a country that no longer existed, if it ever had. Subgroups saw the war as ending progressive politics, militarizing the country, and imposing stultifying standardization. They met in coffee houses, lecture halls, and political rallies. They complained of the sanctimony around them and looked forward to change someday.¹⁰

The mainstream refused to recognize serious problems. Where most saw a land of plenty, others saw an “other America” where many remained ill-fed, ill-clothed, and ill-housed. There were pockets of dire poverty in Appalachia, inner cities, and the South. Meanwhile, postwar prosperity engendered an aberrant concern with buying things. America had become an acquisitive society that was losing its senses of humanity and justice.¹¹

⁹ Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 64. Warren's interpretation of post-Civil War America might have been shaped by the climate following WWII.

¹⁰ See Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1965: The Intellectual As a Social Type* (New York: Knopf, 1965), pp. 286-349; Dwight Macdonald, *Against the Grain: Essays on the Effect of Mass Culture* (New York: Random House, 1962).

¹¹ Popular books on this include JK Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1958); Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); Jules Henry, *Culture against Man* (New York: Vintage, 1963). These voices might not be giving the war its due in bringing important social change. The war ended widespread poverty, created an expansive middle class, gave millions access to college education, and saw the beginning of housing standards, rent control, and child care.

Dissenters asserted themselves by launching third-party runs or garnering support from other sources of discontent. The environmental movement was one such source. Popular books such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* warned that industry was polluting the air, soil, drinking water, and oceans.¹² Factory smoke, petrochemical runoff, power plants, and automobile engines, contributed to the problem, the consequences of which ranged from minor health problems to the possible extinction of life.

Another source lay in disaffection among women. Many had gone to work for the first time in war plants, or did volunteer work, or had served overseas in the military or USO. Most left the work force in 1945 but feelings of accomplishment and independence lingered. Most women moved away from old neighborhoods where norms dictated gender roles and moved to suburbia. Grandmothers and church groups who thought of women as only mothers were far away.¹³ There was a sense of changing times: "Whatever lip service is paid to the importance of the home, the housewife herself notes that social esteem and economic rewards go to women who achieve success in careers outside the home."¹⁴ Many began to seek work, if part-time,¹⁵ or attend college and learned new outlooks and saw new opportunities. A few entered law, medicine, and other professions.¹⁶ Most women stayed in an uncomfortable middle ground between the past and something else.¹⁷

The war brought attention to African American grievances which continued well after it. In 1900, seventy-five percent of blacks lived in the rural South. After two world wars, only fifty percent did. During the

¹² Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

¹³ Joseph Berman and Bernard Rosenberg, *Mass, Class, and Bureaucracy: The Evolution of Contemporary Society* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 93-95.

¹⁴ Moira Komarovsky, *Blue-Collar Marriage* (New York: Vintage, 1962), p. 49.

¹⁵ Komarovsky, *Blue-Collar Marriage*, pp. 49-56.

¹⁶ Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, *Woman's Place: Options and Limits in Professional Careers* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 7.

¹⁷ Berman and Rosenberg, *Mass, Class, and Bureaucracy*, pp. 99-104; Carl N Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 418-35; James T Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 31-38, 361-69. For background, see Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America*; pp. 38-69; William H Whyte, Jr., "The Wives of Management," in Olson, ed, *America as a Mass Society*, pp. 478-91.

Second World War, the number of blacks in industrial jobs went from five hundred thousand to 1.2 million.¹⁸ Black factory workers, in the North and South, listened to labor representatives who underscored long-standing grievances and told of the need to organize. Membership in the NAACP rose from fifty thousand in 1941 to just under a half million by the end of the war.¹⁹ The social climate in the North wasn't benign or pleasant but it was different from the Mississippi Delta. Jim Crow wasn't absent but he was less ubiquitous and brutal. The law provided some protection.

Over a million blacks served in the armed forces, in every branch of the service and every theater of operation. Black soldiers in England found the local people welcomed them as allies, a view rarely shared by townies around US bases.²⁰ In previous wars, they served under white officers but once again war needs brought change. Though integration of all units might have been desired, separate black units, especially infantry, armor, and air units, made the point that they were fighting and dying. The experience led to hope for progress. During the war, forty-three percent of black soldiers were optimistic that their social position would improve after the war.²¹

Black veterans knew they'd contributed more to the war effort than those who stayed home. Farmhands in the deep South were irrelevant to the public, not so veterans of Bougainville and Italy who came home with Purple Hearts and Silver Stars. One vet was barred from entering a restaurant that

was doing a rush business with white civilians and German prisoners of war. There sat the so-called enemy comfortably seated, laughing, talking, making friends, with the waitresses at their beck and call. If I had tried to enter that dining room the ever-present MPs would have busted my skull, a citizen

¹⁸ Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, p. 128; Frederick Lewis Allen, *The Big Change: America Transforms Itself, 1900-1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952), p. 162; Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, p. 19. On black migration to northern cities during the Great War see Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1950* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1991), pp. 116-62; James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

¹⁹ See Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, p. 20; John Dos Passos, *State of the Nation* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), pp. 95-103.

²⁰ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1941-1945* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 302-34.

²¹ See Samuel Stouffer et al, *The American Soldier; Volume I: Adjustment during Army Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 514-19.

soldier of the United States. . . . Nothing infuriated me as much as seeing those German prisoners of war receiving the warm hospitality of Texas.²²

Another noted

I spent four years in the Army to free a bunch of Dutchmen and Frenchmen, and I'm hanged if I'm going to let the Alabama version of the Germans kick me around when I get home. No sirreee-bob! I went into the Army a nigger; I'm comin' out a man.²³

Black soldiers learned the importance of leadership and organization in getting the job done. Upon demobilization, they developed both.

Rosa Parks worked on an airbase in Alabama where executive order integrated public transportation and she sat alongside whites on buses. Off base, buses remained segregated – a daily irritation that contributed to her joining the NAACP in 1943. Following the war, she noted the injustice of black veterans barred from the front of the bus. Eventually, she set into motion an important part of the civil rights movement.²⁴ In late 1945, the Brooklyn Dodgers, whose fortunes had waned in recent years, looked to improve their lot by hiring players from the Negro Leagues. Wartime criticism of segregation provided a somewhat favorable climate for integration but there remained the question of which player to bring into the majors. They selected Jackie Robinson, in part because of his athletic skill, but there were others such as Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson who had more. The Dodgers chose Robinson because as a lieutenant in the war he refused to give up his seat on a supposedly desegregated bus on Fort Hood. He was acquitted in the ensuing court martial, demonstrating the steadfastness the Dodgers knew would be needed. The jury comprised eight white officers.²⁵

Though officially integrated just after World War Two, the brass dragged their feet. Sharp casualties in the first year of the Korean War and serious personnel shortages throughout the military, forced integration, especially in combat units. Practical needs brought change where politics had failed. General Anthony McAuliffe noted, "We didn't do it to improve the social situation. It was merely a matter of getting the best out of the

²² Quoted in Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, p. 443. See also Neil R McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 317-18.

²³ Quoted in Joseph C Goulden, *The Best Years, 1945-1950* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), p. 353.

²⁴ Rosa Parks and Jim Haskins, *Rosa Parks: My Story* (New York: Dial, 1992), pp. 65-94.

²⁵ Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 37-64.

military personnel that was available to us.”²⁶ Integrated units performed well, as they had after the Battle of the Bulge a decade earlier.²⁷

The civil rights movement took on the issues of fully integrating the military, improving access to education and housing, and ensuring equal protection before the law. The Cold War, often seen as having a chilling effect on social progress, was helpful. In 1952, in Supreme Court proceedings on segregation in public schools, the attorney general argued, “It is in the context of the present world struggle between freedom and tyranny that the problem of racial discrimination must be viewed Racial discrimination furnished grist for the Communist propaganda mill, and it raises doubt even among friendly nations as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith.”²⁸

Unease with Militarism

Americans celebrated victory in 1945 and rewarded the military with enormous prestige and unprecedented importance. Many found this disconcerting, even dangerous. It came across in light-hearted satire and dire warning. One source of unease was a number of veterans whose service memories had not softened into nostalgic anecdotes and backslapping at legion halls. Many retained memories of thick-headed NCOs, abusive junior officers, and incompetent senior ones.²⁹ Though proud of their service, they disliked the military institution, its growing influence, and public’s fawning respect for it. Novels, diaries, letters, and remembrances describe

²⁶ Quoted in Goldman, *The Crucial Decade*, p. 185. McAuliffe was the 101st Airborne commander who delivered the famous “Nuts!” response to German demands for surrender at Bastogne.

²⁷ Woodward, *Jim Crow*, pp. 136-39.

²⁸ Quoted in Woodward, *Jim Crow*, p. 132. On the changed postwar atmosphere see Woodward, *Jim Crow*, pp. 130-47; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, pp. 13-39; Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, pp. 20-31, 385-406; Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1950s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 144-51, 208-14; Ira Berlin, “Fighting on Two Fronts: War and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Two Centuries,” in Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *War Comes Again: Comparative Vistas on the Civil War and World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 125-41. Bill Mauldin, the voice of the average GI, conveys the changed racial climate following the war in his *Back Home* (New York: William Sloane, 1947), pp. 154-89.

²⁹ See Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 79-95.

arrogance, prejudice, and incompetence across the chain of command. Military intelligence, they liked to quip, was an oxymoron.³⁰

Reasons for lingering hostility are not long to seek. The army expanded over thirty-fold during the war, the navy twenty, and the marines sixteen, necessitating the rapid promotion of less than qualified personnel, whose prewar numbers were not insignificant. The military churned out young officers almost as rapidly as factories produced Garands but not always with the same quality control. A PFC in '41 might become a platoon sergeant by '43. A young lieutenant before the war might rise to major or lieutenant colonel. A captain in a lackadaisical national guard unit might later command a regiment. Many inept figures were placed in positions for which they had little qualification. In fiction, the skipper in *Mister Roberts* is an unwisely promoted martinet who tyrannizes the crew. A colonel admitted the problem in a nonfiction work: "On the enlisted men's side the stresses of war and the sudden heady blooming of temporary rank produced sufficient injustices and unnecessary hardships to rankle. . . . Some of them found themselves to be better educated than the leaders assigned to them by the fortunes of war."³¹

Eisenhower and Bradley were widely admired as modest and unassuming, the embodiments of Midwestern decency. Ike and Brad looked more like high school principals or hardware store owners than commanders of millions of soldiers. On hearing that a young private from his home town asked to see him, the supreme commander found a few minutes to chat with a fellow Abilenian. He is said to have wept as he watched paratroopers take off before D-Day. Ernie Pyle noted: "Surely America made its two perfect choices in General Eisenhower and General Bradley. They are great men – to me doubly great because they are direct and kind."³²

³⁰ Despite the victory and ensuing celebration, forty-eight percent of veterans interviewed in 1947 answered that the war had made their lives worse. See Samuel Stouffer et al, *The American Soldier*, Volume Two: *Combat and Its Aftermath* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 631-32. Similar resentments can be found in the writings of Civil War soldiers. See James M McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 56-61.

³¹ R Ernest Dupuy, "Pass in Review," *The Army Combat Forces Journal* 1954, p. 43. See also Cameron, *American Samurai*, pp. 54-62.

³² *Brave Men* (New York: Henry Holt, 1944), p. 465. Bill Mauldin had much praise for Ike and Brad in his *Back Home* (pp. 15-16, 95-96) none for many other officers. Bradley's memoirs are none too kind to Patton. See Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Henry Holt, 1951), pp. 52-63. (He once told Patton that his pearl-handled pistols made him look like a pimp in a New Orleans bordello.)

Other generals were haughty, elitist, and lusting for power. MacArthur and Patton preened and strutted like generalissimos in a comic opera. They commanded troops imperiously, sought publicity as though running for office, and threw tantrums when their judgment was questioned. MacArthur was widely (though falsely) said to have lived in luxury on Hollandia during the war. Patton led the Third Army from a ducal palace where he once chastised Bill Mauldin for lacking the understanding of GIs that he cultivated amid so much rococo splendor.³³ Many veterans despised Patton for slapping soldiers hospitalized for battle fatigue. It happened twice.

In John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano*, a general (said to be modeled after Patton) shoots a peasant's horse obstructing his way. James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* and *The Thin Red Line* show authority as inept and arrogant, though first sergeants are presented as exceptionally capable. Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* bristles with hostility. The platoon sergeant tyrannizes his soldiers. The general sees the war as an opportunity to advance his career and for America to establish itself as a world power, where by an ineluctable law of history he has discovered, it will come to blows with Russia. Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions* describes a general who admires power and despises weakness and envisions the historical necessity of America's global power.³⁴

Aversion to the military took on light-hearted tones. The squadron commander in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is a bungling, obsequious, publicity hound. A general orders a man shot for showing disrespect toward his nubile "aide." His life is spared when the general's attaché (by chance, his son-in-law) points out potential repercussions. Other works lampooned military professionals as oafs, blowhards, dilettantes, and sycophants, obsessed with rules and promotions.³⁵ It all conveyed something about the military that the Pentagon would categorically deny but many veterans would salute.

Criticism came from intellectuals and average citizens who felt that militarization had perverted American values. While most looked upon tanks, jets, and even atomic bombs with awe and enjoyed the identity

³³ Bill Mauldin, *The Brass Ring: A Sort of Memoir* (New York: WW Norton, 1971), pp. 353-64.

³⁴ John Hersey, *A Bell for Adano* (New York: Knopf, 1944); James Jones, *From Here to Eternity* (New York: Scribner's, 1948) and *The Thin Red Line* (New York: Scribner's, 1962); Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead* (New York: Rinehart, 1948); Irwin Shaw, *The Young Lions* (New York: Random House, 1948). See also Hersey's *The War Lover* (New York: Knopf, 1959).

³⁵ See Max Schulman's *Rally Round the Flag, Boys!* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), later made into a film. Others include *Sgt. Bilko*, *McHale's Navy*, *F Troop*, *Soldier in the Rain*, and *No Time for Sergeants*.

based on power prestige, others were dismayed. A pastoral nation had become a garrison state. The military was now a power elite:

The military order, once a meager establishment in a context of civilian distrust, has become the largest and most expensive feature of government. Behind smiling public relations, it has all the grim and clumsy efficiency of a great and sprawling bureaucracy. The seemingly permanent military threat places a premium upon high military personnel; virtually all political and economic actions are now judged in terms of military definitions of reality.³⁶

Many Americans were accustomed to hate, take pride in destruction, and see enemies as subhumans. The war stirred a nationalist frenzy that was filled with bluster and cant. It revitalized violent and cruel aspects of the nation. *Hail the Conquering Hero* depicts a town's ebullient welcome for a returning soldier. After being honored with a statue and urged to run for mayor, he lets on he was discharged because of hay fever and never went overseas. Such was the lack of proportion the war ushered in. *The Ox Bow Incident*, though set in the old West, portrayed mob hatreds, similar to those stirred up against enemies. *Bad Day at Black Rock* tells of a Japanese-American murdered by an angry mob shortly after Pearl Harbor. *Crossfire* and *Suddenly* saw the war turning some men into dangerous criminals.³⁷

The Cold War and continued conscription underscored fear of perpetual tensions and militarization. Concern ranged across the political spectrum from progressives like Henry Wallace to Republicans like Robert Taft. Joseph Heller has said that *Catch-22*, with its unending missions and marriage of military and business, is more about the Cold War than World War Two. Too much of the country was under arms, marching to drumbeats, looking forward to the next war. Anyone who expressed opposition was branded disloyal, a threat to national security, or someone of questionable manhood. Some generals indoctrinated their troops with views that came from the John Birch Society. In 1947 four young men burned their draft cards to protest peacetime conscription.³⁸

³⁶ C Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War Three* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1958), p 23. See also Henry, *Culture against Man*, pp. 100-23.

³⁷ For discontent with the cant of postwar America, see Mauldin, *Back Home*, pp. 154-315; Paul Fussell, *Doing Battle: The Making of a Skeptic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996). Cameron, *American Samurai*, pp. 241-72.

³⁸ See Lawrence S Wittner, *Rebels against War: The American Peace Movement, 1955-1985* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), pp. 151-275; Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*, pp. 100-03; Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out the tension between traditional American virtue and the new power realities of the postwar world in *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner's, 1962).

Civilians after Pearl Harbor went into the service reluctantly, disliked the regimen, but did their duty. They were in the army now. Private Hargrove knew that. Postwar boys were eager to become warriors and yearned for their own war. Military training became harsher and more brutal, in part because studies found that training didn't adequately prepare soldiers for combat.³⁹ It also stemmed from a changed culture from which recruits came and the aura surrounding drill instructors who'd won their spurs at Omaha and Iwo. Marines memorized an ode to their rifle and recited it before lights-out:

*This is my rifle. There are many like it but this one is mine.
My rifle is my best friend. It is my life, I must master it as I master my life.*

*My rifle, without me, is useless. I must fire my rifle true.
I must shoot straighter than my enemy who is trying to kill me.
I will.*

My rifle is human, even as I, because it is my life. Thus I will learn it as a brother. I will learn its accessories, its sights, its barrel. I will keep my rifle clean and ready, even as I am clean and ready. We will become part of each other.

We will. . . .

Before God I swear this creed. My rifle and myself are the master of our enemy. We are the saviors of my life. So be it, until victory is America's and there is no enemy but peace!

*Amen.*⁴⁰

Many saw this as adulation of war mixed with messianic psychopathology.

In 1956, six marine recruits drowned while on a disciplinary march on Parris Island. The incident was condemned and the responsible sergeant was court-martialed. Perversely, the "Ribbon Creek Massacre" became an appealing legend. Apparently, it was sweet and fitting to die for one's country even in boot camp. Hazings and beatings became part of youth folklore. Guys on leave boasted to rapt friends of mistreatment at the hands of drill sergeants. It was a rite of manhood, a progression from backyard play.⁴¹

³⁹ See Samuel Stouffer et al, *The American Soldier*, Volume II: *Combat and Its Aftermath* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 228-31. Dave Grossman argues that after the war the military developed greater techniques to break down resistance to killing. See *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), pp. 231-80.

⁴⁰ Major General WH Rupertus, "Rifleman's Creed," quoted in Gustav Hasford, *The Short-Timers* (New York: Bantam, 1980), pp. 22-23.

⁴¹ David T Courtwright, *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 43-45; Hasford, *The Short-Timers*; Adam Yarmolinsky, *The Military Establishment: Its Impact on American Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 324-408; H Paul Jeffers and Dick Levitan, *See Parris and Die: Brutality in the U.S. Marines* (New York: Hawthorn, 1971).

The country was fascinated by its nuclear weapons. The public thought the A-bomb saved lives and ended the war and afterwards compensated for manpower advantages in the Soviet Union and Red China. Nuclear technology spread to naval propulsion, an array of tactical weapons, power plants, and medicine. Surely, thought the public, atomic energy was making life better. However, one early critic observed: “[M]ost Americans looked upon the atom bomb as a self-starting magic lamp; even without being rubbed it would produce their long-sought City on the Hill in the form of a de facto American Century embracing the globe.”⁴² Mushroom clouds were symbols of power and righteousness. Diners, motels, and supermarkets adopted the word “atomic” or the image of a mushroom cloud. Two-piece swimsuits took their name from a recent atomic test at Bikini atoll. Cheerleaders from Richland, Washington (where plutonium was processed) rooted on the home team, the *Atom Bombs*, with cheers echoic of explosions. Countless movies showed nuclear weapons saving civilization from aliens or in a display of ambivalence, from dangerous mutants caused by radiation.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it was countered, were atrocities that needlessly killed tens of thousands of civilians.⁴³ Radiation from tests spread around the world. Rainwater contained an isotope similar to calcium which humans absorbed into bone tissue. Science relegated the bombs of 1945 into virtual firecrackers. Kilotons became megatons. Dissenters could only look on in incredulity as leaders spoke dispassionately of “megadeaths” and developed plans to collect taxes and deliver mail after nuclear war.⁴⁴ Ban the Bomb movements and groups of concerned scientists spread. (Their symbol later became better known as the peace symbol.) The policy of massive retaliation seemed to place the world on the path toward fulfillment of the prophecy of Armageddon.⁴⁵

The military-industrial complex, a term that entered common usage after Eisenhower used it in his 1961 farewell speech, was another source of anti-military sentiment. Government and industry had been at odds

⁴² William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966 [1961]), p. 17.

⁴³ John Hersey’s might have planted the seed of discontent with atomic weapons shortly after the war with his *Hiroshima* (New York: Knopf, 1946), originally published in *The New Yorker*.

⁴⁴ Two of the better known books of this genre are Herman Kahn’s, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960) and *Thinking about the Unthinkable* (New York: Horizon, 1962).

⁴⁵ See Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 3-26; Gaddis, *We Now Know*, pp. 221-59. For anti-nuclear sentiment’s role in the development of the counterculture see Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), pp. 22-26.

during the thirties but during the war they forged a solid and lasting partnership. Close ties between industry and government alarmed many, from average citizens to the commander in chief. During his first term, Ike vetoed a military budget which led to protest, not only from contractors but also from the Pentagon and congressmen whose districts stood to benefit. Despite Ike's opposition, there was little doubt who could mobilize more resources for battle.

For the rest of his presidency, Eisenhower looked on with dismay and often anger as congress funded project after project he knew to be unnecessary or overpriced. There was no end. In a supreme paradox, a young presidential hopeful and former naval lieutenant accused him of allowing the Soviet Union to develop superiority in ballistic missiles. On the eve of handing the torch to a new generation, Ike gave voice to traditional American sensibilities. New generations of missiles, planes, and other armaments meant less spending on schools, hospitals, and housing. He was concerned with the growing power of the military-industrial partnership. It was a threat to American democracy, yet vital to security.

Others saw only a distortion of national priorities. (So did Ike but that's unappreciated.) The complex was said to ensure tensions went on and on.⁴⁶ Some even held that the war partnership had conspired to begin the Cold War in order to prop up a flawed economic system. Roosevelt's death in April of 1945 deprived the nation of a great progressive voice, dedicated to solving social ills and ensuring world peace, and left the nation in the hands of an inexperienced pol, unduly influenced by generals and businessmen. The national security state was obsessed with secrecy, mistrust, and espionage and willing to ally with any enemy of our enemy. Gentlemen opened other gentlemen's mail and covenants weren't openly arrived at.

No one doubted the need for secrecy during the war. Everyone knew what loose lips did. Only a handful of policymakers knew of code-breaking or the Manhattan Project. Truman found out about the bomb only after FDR's death. GIs had their mail censored. Many disasters, blunders, and miscalculations were not fully known until after the war. The kamikaze devastation of ships off Okinawa and the debacle at Slapton Sands were put under wraps.⁴⁷ Pacts were made with unsavory partisan strongmen, South American dictators, and the

⁴⁶ See Mills, *The Causes of World War Three*, pp. 56-67.

⁴⁷ See David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1941-1945* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 363-66; Stephen E Ambrose, *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne, from Normandy to Hitler's Nest* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp. 57-58.

mafia.⁴⁸ Internally, suspect groups of Japanese (as well as some Germans and Italians) were interned. Spies were put in front of secret military tribunals and executed. The state controlled public knowledge of events. Civil libertarians and constitutional experts filed suit but the Supreme Court, which only a decade earlier had struck down many government powers, allowed it to expand virtually unchecked.⁴⁹

Secrecy and pragmatic policies continued. The Central Intelligence Agency grew out of the wartime Office of Strategic Services and engaged in espionage and related matters that old OSS hands would never have dreamed possible or even desirable, most notably the recruitment of the Nazi intelligence network in eastern Europe. The National Security Agency was born but few knew it existed or what it did. Military assistance and counterinsurgency programs were set up around the world, most notably in Greece, South America, and Southeast Asia. U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, which the public was completely unaware of, flew over the Soviet Union and other countries. The CIA was confident that Soviet missiles could not bring one down but in that unlikely event, the public would be satisfied with a cover story of a “weather plane” and the pilot would nobly commit suicide rather than embarrass his country.

Older Americans yearned for a simpler past. Others were less troubled by global commitments than by the sordid regimes Washington allied with. An occasional embarrassing ally is part of the compromises of politics, domestic or foreign, but there was an uncomfortably high number of them. Presidents posed with junta leaders, landowning cliques, and an imperious shah beneath a White House portico. It worsened when a band of guerrillas toppled the Cuban government. Military assistance and counterinsurgency programs received larger

⁴⁸ It's often alleged that the New York mafia secured local support for the US invasion of Sicily (1943) but disparate mafia groups there had long been at odds with Mussolini. Many were mountain-dwelling bandits and eager to act as scouts and intelligence sources. See Christopher Duggan, *Fascism and the Mafia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 53-91.

⁴⁹ Edward S Corwin, *Total War and the Constitution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947) and *The Constitution and What It Means Today* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), pp. 64-68; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, “War and the Constitution: Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt,” in Gabor S Boritt, ed, *War Comes Again: Comparative Vistas on the Civil War and World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 143-65; Cabell Phillips, *The 1940s: Decade of Triumph and Trouble* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 122-34. See also Harold Lasswell, “The Garrison State and the Specialists on Violence,” *American Journal of Sociology* 47 (1941): 455-68.

funding. Soldiers and case officers increased their efforts to train foreign troops, intelligence services, and police forces.⁵⁰

The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) broadened and deepened concerns. The presence of Soviet missiles on the island brought the world perilously close to nuclear war. The growing influence of the military had been easy enough to dismiss when it was mostly rhetoric and posturing. It was a different matter when the world came close to annihilation. Afterward, there was more relief than elation. We'd gotten a reprieve, or better put, a stay, from an execution that might still take place.⁵¹

There was no significant demand for withdrawal or disarmament or defense cuts. There was, however, greater concern with the military's influence. Previous wars had given clear signs of progress. By 1965, the Cold War had been on for twenty years, five times longer than World War Two. Commitment remained but enthusiasm waned. Grumbling was heard in colleges and coffee houses but also in the general public.

Heretofore, films depicted the armed forces as vigilant defenders. A few deviated from the trend (*War Hunt, The Victors*) but did not enjoy popular success. *On the Beach* was set in Australia after nuclear war ended life in the Northern hemisphere. Though daily activities go on, all know they will soon be enveloped by radiation and slowly die. Daring for its time, the film did not address the cause of the war and so held back from blaming politicians and generals. After the Cuban Missile Crisis, reluctance disappeared. In *Seven Days in May*, an impending arms control treaty precipitates an attempted military coup. It mentions by name Douglas MacArthur whose disdain for civilian leadership was well known and Edwin Walker who was recently relieved of his command for teaching Birchite views to his troops.⁵² Both generals, the film says, had aberrant senses of duty and mission that endangered the Constitution.

⁵⁰ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 179-91; HW Brands, *The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 31-58.

⁵¹ David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 108-12; Gaddis, *We Now Know*, pp. 260-80.

⁵² Walker commanded troops charged with integrating Little Rock public schools – a task he performed professionally despite a staunch segregationist disposition. See Fred J Cook, *The Warfare State* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 264-83.

Books and films warned of the danger of systemic error and flaws in the military character. They counterpoised decent American civilians – presidents, doctors, reporters – against caesarist or deranged military officers. Perhaps expressive of concerns with the recent integration of Germany into NATO, perhaps muted commentary on our own military, leaders in these films often have German advisors who had served the Reich. In *Fail Safe*, a computer error sends bombers to deliver nuclear strikes on the Soviet Union. The plan does not allow recall. Humans are no longer in control. Superpower mistrust prevents cooperation to stop the strike, resulting in the annihilation of Moscow and New York.⁵³ In the dark comedy *Dr Strangelove*, based on a non-comedic novel,⁵⁴ General Jack Ripper, convinced a communist plot (fluoridated water) has rendered him impotent, orders a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. Other military figures are sex-crazed buffoons or reckless cowboys eager to go toe-to-toe with the Russkis. *The Bedford Incident* deals with an American destroyer skippered by a high-strung officer who stalks a Soviet submarine in a period of international tension. Annoyed by civilian timidity, he wants to provoke an incident to force their hand. Holding the crew at general quarters leads to strain, nervous breakdown, and accidental attack.⁵⁵

Unease was stronger in Hollywood than in Muncie, at Berkeley more than Ohio State. Apart from the cinema, student groups previously dedicated to social ills and school problems found a more urgent, more passionate cause. But average Americans sensed the unease as well. By 1965, a call to arms, an invocation of the rallying cries and symbols of 1945, would face measures of ambivalence and opposition.⁵⁶

The Counterculture

Disaffection was more pronounced in youth, especially those from the middle classes, suburbia, and private schools. They felt like outsiders, distanced from the mainstream, unable to communicate with those in it and

⁵³ Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler, *Fail Safe* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962). C Wright Mills, sketched this scenario in his 1958 work *The Causes of World War Three*, pp. 44-46.

⁵⁴ Peter Bryant, *Red Alert* (New York: Ace, 1958). The director of *Dr Strangelove*, Stanley Kubrick, began to adapt the novel as a serious drama but found the subject so surreal that he adapted it into a dark comedy.

⁵⁵ Mark Rascovich, *The Bedford Incident* (New York: Atheneum, 1963).

⁵⁶ On growing discontent with militarism see Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, pp. 237-49; Brands, *The Devil We Knew*, pp. 59-85; Lawrence S Wittner, *Rebels against War: The American Peace Movement, 1935-1983* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), pp. 151-275.

increasingly unwilling to try. This was both liberating in that it gave them invigorating freedom but frustrating in that they had no blueprint, coherent belief system, or home. Much of their complaint, largely unbeknownst to them, was with modern aspects that the country had only recently taken on. Knowing little of prewar life, they saw sterility and artificiality and concluded that this was the USA. For the most part, they defined themselves negatively: they were not materialistic, not suburbanites, not future organization men or housewives, not holes in a key punch card, not numbers on a roster, and not creatures in a giant Skinner Box. Their parents had been defined by the Depression and the war, their forebears by the Civil War. They felt an ill-defined yearning for authenticity, a measure of spirituality, and a cause.⁵⁷

Materialism Carl Schurz's Gilded Age lament bears repeating: "Is it really true that our war turned the ambitions of our people into the channels of lofty enthusiasm and aspirations and devotion to high ideals? Has it not rather left behind it an era of absorbing greed of wealth, a marked decline of ideal aspirations?"⁵⁸ Many felt the same had taken place after 1945. A generation that had endured a decade of depression and four years of war felt it sacrificed enough and earned the right to relax. Many young people raised in unprecedented comfort thought material indulgence had become stupefying and relegated spirituality, morality, and social justice into the background.

Money had become the one true god of America and the essence of the USA was hucksterism. Sinclair Lewis lampooned the trend but thirty years later everyone seemed to be acquisitive and pretentious Babbitts. Bending the rules, helping a crony, rising above principle, greasing the wheels, were by-words. That's what makes the world go 'round, and the sooner you learned it the better. If pulled over for speeding, handing over a fiver with your license settled the matter. Quiz shows could be rigged to make for better viewing pleasure. You

⁵⁷ On estranged youth of the period see Kenneth Keniston, *The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965 [1960]), as well as his follow-up study, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1968); Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System* (New York: Random House, 1956). For counterparts among young adults, see Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," in *The Time of Our Time* (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 211-30 (first published in 1959); Charles Webb, *The Graduate* New American Library, 1963).

⁵⁸ Quoted in Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, p. 465.

didn't get that contract simply by giving the lowest bid. And no one knew who wrote the rules but that's how the game was played.⁵⁹

Conformity Suburbia promised a new way of life away from aging cities and towns but many raised there found life stale, homogenous, and stultifying. The houses were made of "ticky tacky" that "all looked the same," as the tune went. One hears fond recollections of urban neighborhoods and small town, places that might have been poor and lacking in opportunity but nostalgic recollections of Levittown or Park Forest, Chevy Chase or Winnetka are much less fond. They're often tinged with sarcasm or are just recitations of schools attended and stores patronized.

To some extent, this simply reflects the spirit of our day. It's also due to the different natures of the neighborhoods. The old communities, for all their material wants, provided an array of experiences, sights and sounds, attire and accents, people and buildings that gave a sense of wholeness and integration. Suburbs were newer and brighter but bland and uninspiring. People don't develop roots in a suburb; there's little sense of inter-relatedness or rootedness. Alienated youth saw life as contrived, lacking integration and purpose, as artificial as plastic and polyester and the new turf.

The unimaginative sameness of tract houses, schools, and office buildings of the period came from a conformist society and went a long way in reproducing it. Schools and office buildings were graceless edifices, devoid of art and vision, as mass produced as items on a store shelf. Inside the suburban house, one found not carefully crafted furnishings of the Victorian or earlier periods but mass-produced, modern furniture or similarly produced pseudo-colonial products. Television, schools, and bureaucracies, drummed into the young that there were standards to accept. Parents were shaped and conditioned by the corporate world for which they worked. For all its talk of rugged individualism, the country really wanted people to shut up and toe the line.

The oft-heard complaint of conformity is puzzling. Surely any society that popularized the Kinsey Reports, rock & roll, *The Village Voice*, Sidney Poitier, Betty Friedan, *Playboy*, *Mad Magazine*, *Catch-22*, Ernie Kovacs, Rachel Carson, Jackson Pollock, *The Twilight Zone*, Beatniks, birth control pills, and Tom Lehrer wasn't

⁵⁹ See Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 11-21; Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, *The New Radicals: A Report with Documents* (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 3-64.

especially conformist. Compared to urban or town life at the turn of the century or to any other part of the world, past or present, America in the fifties and sixties bubbled with dynamism, change, experimentation, weirdness, eccentricities, and a touch of radicalism here and there. Why then the complaint?⁶⁰ Growing hostility toward conformity means that acceptance of governing values and beliefs is dwindling. Such a society is loosening up, fraying, becoming elastic, changing into something else. Conformity isn't prevailing, it's failing.

Many of the objects of complaint were never parts of older America. They were newly created and quickly adopted by people who suddenly found themselves in the middle classes, suburbia, and a modernizing country and searched for new standards of behavior where older ones no longer seemed appropriate. Hence the superficial neighborliness, a need for cues on behavior, an effort to fit into something that no one quite understood. The changes were jarring. Several episodes of *The Twilight Zone* concerned people thrust into the middle classes and far from their small-town upbringings. They're bewildered and confused. The endings aren't always happy.

Weakening traditional values also stemmed from hysterical responses to change. Popular music, according to some, was licentious and lewd and subversive. Other trends were condemned as satanic forces set loose by slackening religiousness or parts of immense Kremlin conspiracies. Phlegmatic ministers, small radio stations, and elders all made such arguments in the hope of restoring order. The effect was often the opposite – discrediting voices of traditional authority and stimulating curiosity for taboo subjects. Amid all the turbulence and hysteria, the idea of an external thing called “society” imposing its values came into question. Individuality meant absence of restraint and distance from tradition.

Disaffected youth rejected popular movies, magazines, hit music, but especially television. They were agents of conformity, marching in step, doing what the system wanted you to do. The media imparted, or attempted to anyway, a saccharine morality in which fathers were impeccable, women and children cheerful, optimism and hard work rewarding.⁶¹ A generation came to learn history through television. The hardships of

⁶⁰ Most studies of the fifties stress conformity. Notable exceptions are John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace, 1941-1960* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988); WT Lhamon, Jr, *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990); Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 1-77; and David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard, 1993).

⁶¹ Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994).

western life and the complexities of historical figures were lost. Legends, folklore, historical works, and a few well-made films conveyed the difficulties of earlier days as well as the less wholesome side of central figures who in addition to admirable qualities, were not without ruthless, vindictive, or mercenary aspects – which made them more interesting. Davy Crockett had a conniving and self-aggrandizing side (one called Crockett a “hero of the Munchausen-Eulenspiegel breed”⁶²). Judge Roy Bean was a cattle baron who ruled with an iron fist. The distinction between justice and vengeance wasn’t always clear in Wyatt Earp’s mind.⁶³

College Life Higher education was an ambivalent experience. The scientific teaching methods of primary and secondary education were created in university laboratories and their influence there was naturally widespread, especially at large state universities. Many classes had over a hundred students, not from student interest but from administrative policy. Registration, testing, and grading were done with punch cards. Science departments worked with the military and ROTC was on many campuses.⁶⁴

Progressive history and society that had flourished in the twenties and thirties fell into disfavor during the war. Though its decline is often attributed to McCarthyism, it was due more to broader postwar trends. The renewed nationalism of the period saw the critical reassessments begun by the Beards as part of their time, not the present one. The skepticism and relativism in progressive history were blamed for preventing an earlier recognition of the danger of totalitarianism. Taking pride in the nation’s past was more in keeping with the times

⁶² BA Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads, and Traditions of the People* (New York: Crown, 1944), p. 6.

⁶³ Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore*, pp. 2-32, 134-50, and *passim*; James Atkins Shackford, *David Crockett: The Man and the Legend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 3-72; Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero Worship* (New York: Scribner’s, 1969 [1941]), pp. 189-93.

⁶⁴ Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s*, pp. 135-36; Lewis S Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), pp. 385-435.

than debunking it.⁶⁵ The system that looked moribund in the thirties had sprung back and was working fine.⁶⁶ Social scientists looked to it as a model of political and economic model for the world.

Many social science courses were for the most part dry and formal, committed to the prevailing schools of systems theory and structural functionalism. They wanted to modernize social science by demythologizing human events and inserting them into flow charts, organizational tables, and equilibrium models. They purported to be value-free and scientific, eschewing passion and moral judgment as though they were medieval dogmas.⁶⁷ There were important exceptions and certain students gravitated to them. Theodore Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse brought few personal belongings when they fled Europe but brought critical theories of modern society. There was also a handful of younger professors such as C Wright Mills, Barrington Moore, Jr, and William Appleman Williams who developed critical lines of thought, complete with passion and moral judgment.⁶⁸

This assortment of European émigrés, progressives, and young mavericks constituted a haven where ideas could be explored: urgent social ills; activism over scholasticism; the military-industrial complex and power elites; the exploitation of the wretched of the earth; repressive sexual mores; conflict and repression as social ordering principles; the conviction that meaning in life was not passed down from the past, it had to be made in the present. University settings gave them the opportunity to meet kindred spirits and develop organizations.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 281-85; Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, pp. 137-64; See Gary B Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Knopf, 1998), pp. 25-74.

⁶⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Knopf, 1969), pp. 437-66.

⁶⁷ Critics of prevailing social science included Barrington Moore, Jr, *Political Power and Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958); William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* Second Edition (New York: Dell, 1972 [1959]); C Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

⁶⁸ Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 25-88; James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 83-93; Diggins, *The Proud Decades*, pp. 247-57; Georg G Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, New Hamp: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), pp. 41-47. Moore and Marcuse served in the OSS together.

⁶⁹ See Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians*, pp. 437-66; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 26-30; Keniston, *Youth and Dissent*, pp. 81-98, 127-42; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor, 1969).

Other Sub-Groups The disaffected gathered in coffee houses and bohemian neighborhoods. They coalesced into ersatz communities, too loose and transient to constitute real ones. Finding fellow free thinkers was like meeting brethren beneath Diocletian Rome.⁷⁰ The best known was the Beats, a group of artists and free-thinkers whose rejection of materialism and conformity was almost total. They avoided a nine-to-five routine, engaged in the arts, and read of socialism and eastern religion. They embraced almost any unconventional experience (marijuana, mescaline, poetry, open sexuality, Zen) and drifted. Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and the rest, attained a cult status. Their writings spread the word to those attracted to the life-style though not yet willing to break away completely.⁷¹

Meaning was found in political activity. They participated in civil rights demonstrations, registered voters in the South, staffed social centers in inner cities, and denounced the waste of resources on the military. They formed campus groups distinct from the Democratic Party and NAACP. The Berkeley Free Speech Movement, Students for a Democratic Society, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee pressed school officials on national issues and protested the absence of democracy on campus. By the early sixties, students formed national organizations, held conferences, and issued manifestoes. They still lacked a defining cause.⁷²

Rock had once been a spontaneous force led by raw performers who transfixed young people and frightened older ones. By the early sixties scandals and corporate management had neutered it. Elvis was in the army then went into the movie business. Music became predictable and devoid of energy, spontaneity, and appeal of the taboo. Many parents thought it harmless. A search was on for music that wasn't played on every hit

⁷⁰ Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth* (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1968), p. 139; Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), pp. 34-67.

⁷¹ See Kerouac's books (*On the Road*, *Big Sur*, *The Dharma Bums*) as well as Alan W Watts, *The Spirit of Zen: A Way of Life, Work and Art in the Far East* (New York: Grove Press, 1958); William Plummer, *The Holy Goof: A Biography of Neal Cassady* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981); David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s*, pp. 113-33; Reece McGee, *Social Disorganization in America* (San Francisco, Calif.: Chandler, 1962), pp. 66-74. Kerouac, unlike most of his fellow beats, admired the American past and felt alienated from the modern country it had become in the postwar years.

⁷² Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s*, pp. 134-66; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 81-170; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981); Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, pp. 1-41.

music station. Folk music had a spirituality hearkening back to rural dwellers and working people. Lyrics involved injustice, constant sorrow, poverty, the plight of workers and farmers. Folk festivals involved audience participation, imparting a sense of community and progress. Blues music was another redoubt. It was earthy, intense, and drawn from the lives of sharecroppers from the Delta and migrants to Chicago's South Side. Guttural voices and bent strings conveyed a world of sorrow and pain alloyed with perseverance and hope of triumph.⁷³

The Beatles reached a much broader segment of youth, including those not dedicated to social change or even attending college but nonetheless eager for change. Their music had complicated chord progressions and clever lyrics. Their long hair countered military-styles of the time. Boys grew their hair and enjoyed reprovewful looks from parents and teachers. Unease with conformity, poking fun at authority, and weariness of the war generation's cant are all in *A Hard Day's Night* (1964). A stuffy businessman reminds the irreverent boys that he fought in the war for their like. One playfully retorts, "I bet you're sorry you won!" British and German soldiers are extras in a stage production of a war story, suggesting a young generation saw it as a hackneyed form of entertainment. The sentiment was later expressed: "I saw a film today, the English army had just won the war." An expert on youth marketing points to stats on teen trends and the boys ridicule him. Managers are outwitted. Youth no longer found the adult world intimidating, creativity and spontaneity could no longer be repressed, youth was a creative force now.⁷⁴

Only rarely was discontent hostile to principles and institutions. People just saw hypocrisy and failure to live up to the promise, though like the progressives of the turn of the century they were nonetheless believers. There were, however, subgroups of almost total disaffection who found the whole system stultifying, absurd, and beyond reform. As long as most people were guided by the Treasury of Virtue, there was nothing to be done.

⁷³ Dickstein, *Gates of Eden*, pp. 188-90; James L Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 132-34; R Serge Denisoff and Richard A Peterson, eds, *The Sounds of Social Change: Studies in Popular Culture* (Rand McNally, 1972); Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 74-77.

⁷⁴ Dickstein, *Gates of Eden*, pp. 205-10; Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture*, pp. 134-37.

They marked time and waited for some event, a cause, a crisis of some sort that would provide the hammer to knock the old edifice down.

They were polar opposites of many of their classmates and neighbors in the broader stratum of youth, with whom they still had something in common in 1965, but not much later. The broader group comprised the boys, many now young men, raised in the postwar celebration who longed for a war of their own. They wanted the experience of hardship their fathers had known. They wanted to know victory as well. Both groups, though on opposite sides of an emerging divide, got what they wanted when America went to war in Vietnam.

Chapter Six

Vietnam and the Fall

How has accelerating historical change altered the nature of psychological experience and the extent and form of human development? And how do young men and women with a new psychological orientation affect the history of their time?

Kenneth Keniston
Youth and Dissent

We're stuck over here God knows how long, just waiting and sweating it out, and finding out things about yourself that, by God, it don't pay to know.

Norman Mailer,
The Naked and the Dead

The country that went to war in 1965 thought it could rely on the assurances of 1945. Unbeknownst to Washington and most of the country, the assurances were giving way. The war in Vietnam went on longer than any previous one. Opposition grew out of pockets of alienation and discontent and spread into the general public. Beliefs and institutions neared collapse. Years of warfare and internal strife ended in defeat. America experienced a thing called history.

The Path to War

Vietnam first figured in Washington in 1940. Germany's defeat of France left its colonies vulnerable, a situation not lost on Japan which quickly occupied Indochina and eyed more opportunities. The Roosevelt administration, already opposed to Japanese aggression in China and worried about nearby American possessions, protested sharply, leading to the attack on Pearl Harbor.¹ Japan demonstrated that Westerners could be defeated – and by

¹ Robert Dallek, *Franklin Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1952-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 269-75.

Asians. Japan also demonstrated that Asians could be ruthless masters. Its occupation caused millions of Vietnamese to starve.² Nationalist movements gained in strength and a guerrilla movement emerged near the border with China. Directed by Ho Chi Minh, the future leader of North Vietnam, the guerrillas forced Japan to allocate resources against them, rescued downed American pilots, and established contact with American intelligence officers.³ By 1945, Ho's movement had considerable organization and confidence. The war had brought a break with the colonial past. Colonization and subordination were gone and would not return.⁴

France, humiliated by defeat and occupation, delegitimized in the eyes of much of its population, sought to regain prestige by restoring empire. Washington pressed for decolonization during World War Two⁵ but when France made American support in Indochina a prerequisite for entering NATO, Washington gave in. The war went on for eight years and support in France flagged. In late 1953, French paratroopers and Foreign Legionaries fortified Dien Bien Phu, a remote valley in northwest Vietnam. It was besieged by tens of thousands of Viet Minh who choked off resupply efforts and neutralized French artillery. When France requested American air support, President Eisenhower sounded out military and political leaders but found little enthusiasm.⁶ "No land war in Asia" had been all but chiseled on Pentagon entrances since the war in Korea ended the previous year. Eisenhower, in a draft of his memoirs, observed:

The jungles of Indochina . . . would have swallowed up division after division of United States troops, who, unaccustomed to this kind of warfare, would have sustained heavy casualties. . . . Furthermore, the presence of ever more numbers of white men in uniform probably would have aggravated rather than assuaged Asian resentments.⁷

² John W Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), pp. 3-14, 203-317; Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1951-1945: A Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 178-80.

³ Ronald H Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam 1941-1960* (New York: Free Press, 1985), pp. 37-50; Archimedes LA Patti, *Why Viet Nam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).

⁴ See Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Dragon Embattled Volume I: From Colonialism to the Viet Minh* (New York: Praeger, 1967); David G Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 327-420.

⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 155-58.

⁶ Spector, *Advice and Support*, pp. 191-214.

⁷ Quoted in Stephen E Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Volume Two, The President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 176.

He deleted the passage shortly before publication in 1964, as the country deepened its involvement.

Policymakers in Washington were confident that aid and military training would place Vietnam on the proper path of development.⁸ By the early sixties, it was clear that the Saigon government and its army (ARVN) were corrupt and unpopular. Much of the population yearned for land reform but received only promises or wasteland. The Viet Cong ran off ARVN garrisons and landowners, then gave out land.⁹ American aid made it unnecessary for Saigon to become popular or even competent. A government that had put together meaningful land reform, a fair civil service, and a professional military might have garnered popular support, thwarted the rise of the Viet Cong, and established a viable alternative to communism. However, the Saigon government was a coterie of isolated dilettantes, out of touch with the times, out of touch with realities. By the early sixties, communist cadres were gaining support and building larger and bolder guerrilla bands.

Thoughtful observers of foreign affairs – Hopkins, Stimson, Kennan, and their generation – might have observed declining fortunes and recommended cutting losses. Let the South fall, make a stand elsewhere. An old saying in Chicago politics goes, “Don’t back no losers” and if its grammatical faults had been overlooked, it might have been invoked here. The torch had been passed to a new generation, a less experienced generation, idealistic and unpragmatic, and willing to pick up any burden and fight any foe.¹⁰

In July of 1965, policymakers confronted a dilemma that Kennedy had hoped to avoid but had lead the country to. Johnson had either to send hundreds of thousands of troops or let the South fall. Opponents of intervention argued that it would be a quagmire and misallocation of resources in the contest with the Soviet

⁸ See Walt W Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); Robert A Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Science* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 59-110; Gaddis, *We Now Know*, pp. 183-85.

⁹ Roy L Prosterman and Jeffrey M Riedinger, *Land Reform and Democratic Development* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 121-26. See also Roy L Prosterman, "Land Reform in South Vietnam: A Proposal for Turning the Tables on the Vietcong," *Cornell Law Review* 53 (1967): 26-44; Robert L Sansom, *The Economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1970), pp. 53-74.

¹⁰ On the rising insurgency see Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); William R Andrews, *The Village War: Vietnamese Communist Revolutionary Activities in Dinh Tuong Province, 1960-1964* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973); Ronald H Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam 1941-1960* (New York: Free Press, 1985).

Union. CIA estimates supported their arguments.¹¹ A consensus in favor of large-scale intervention came. President Johnson told the nation, "America will stand in Vietnam."¹²

Limited Mobilization for a Limited War

There was no Fort Sumter, *Lusitania*, or Pearl Harbor to galvanize support, only attacks on outposts and ships half-way around the world. Nonetheless, many Americans reflexively answered the call. A presidential speech on the matter of war and peace carried honor, integrity, tradition, and near infallibility. There were familiar images: young men lined up outside recruiting offices, boot camp grads home on leave, guys posing confidently with rifles – helmets at jaunty angles and Marlboros dangling from their lips. They'd seen it in newsreels and movies. Now they were trying to bridge the gap between boyhood dreams and what they could only partially conceptualize as "the real thing." Veterans of past conflicts saw it as passing on the baton, a shared duty and heritage. American Legion posts hailed local boys heading off to Parris Island, Bragg, and Vietnam.

Traditional imagery was everywhere. Storied units of the Great Event went over with their guidons and battle streamers: the First Marines of Guadalcanal, the Big Red One of Omaha Beach, the 101st Airborne of Bastogne. Reporting invoked the past as well: marines hitting the beach, a platoon moving down a jungle trail, interviews with a soldier from small towns, medics inoculating grateful villagers, and GIs handing out candy bars to kids. Reporters flew on jets and helicopters, tagged along on ground patrols, and concluded their report with thumbs-up.¹³

¹¹ Harold P Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes, 1962-1968* (McLean, Va: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1998), pp. 25-84.

¹² On the path to war in Vietnam see George McT Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Leslie H Gelb and Richard K Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1979); John C Donnell, Guy J Pauker, and Joseph J Zasloff, "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale in 1964: A Preliminary Report," (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation Research Memorandum RM4507/3-15A, March 1965); JJ Zasloff, "Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960: The Role of the Southern Vietminh Cadres," (Santa Monica, Calif: Rand Memorandum 5163/2-ISA/ARPA, May 1968).

¹³ Daniel C Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 126-58.

Cultural Reflexes A popular song romanticized the Green Berets. Bob Hope called up his troupe and went overseas for a third war. Audiences cheered when houselights came up on TV shows to honor servicemen and when a celebrity voiced support for our boys. However, even at the outset there was ambivalence and opposition. Isolationism persisted in pockets, especially among rural dwellers, the elderly, and those smarting from Korea. Others, including many retired generals, had no quarrel with internationalist policies or fighting communism but intervening in Vietnam wasn't well thought out. It was another land war in Asia and would draw away resources from NATO. Hans Morgenthau, a conservative foreign-policy expert, expressed misgivings: "And what will our prestige be like if hundreds of thousands of American troops become bogged down in Vietnam, unable to win and unable to retreat?"¹⁴

There were also people, neither isolationists nor realists, who simply could see no reason to send troops to an obscure foreign land with no strategic importance. The young who were breaking from the socialization system saw the US as a ramshackle building that had to be repaired or torn down. Vietnam, they hoped, would provide the cause they'd longed for.

Support and Attrition The war never had strong support, in part because most thought the war would be over quickly, a misconception the Johnson administration wasn't eager to correct. In the early months, before substantial fighting had begun, support was sixty-five percent – much of it tepid. Twenty-five percent of the public opposed the war. In early 1966, after a few hundred battle deaths, support fell to fifty percent and opposition climbed to thirty-seven percent.¹⁵

Governments previously went to great lengths to mobilize support for war. In 1917, legions of "four-minute men" deployed to stir popular passions for the war against the Kaiser. Following Pearl Harbor, the government orchestrated news, documentaries, publicity events, and bond drives. It helped keep up morale toward the end when it was feared high casualties would weaken resolve to finish the Pacific war. The Johnson

¹⁴ Hans J Morgenthau, *Vietnam and the United States* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1965), p. 12.

¹⁵ For polling data on support and opposition see John E Mueller, *Wars, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley, 1973). Mueller sees eroding support stemming from mounting casualty figures. My view is that the public would likely have endured casualties if there had been signs of progress and if South Vietnam had been seen as a worthy ally.

administration avoided stirring up passions. It feared public wrath might get out of hand and transform Vietnam from a limited war to a larger one that might draw in China (as Korea had in 1951) or the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it might provide opponents of civil rights and welfare policies a rallying cry. Dr Win the War might prevail over Dr Great Society.¹⁶ A war with only moderate support and firming opposition would have to be over quickly. Alternately, it would have to provide convincing indicators of progress, as Gettysburg and Sherman's March to the Sea had, and Midway and North Africa had. Otherwise, support would deteriorate.

In November of 1965, an air cavalry unit set down in the Ia Drang valley to search for the North Vietnamese units whose detection the previous summer had led to Americanization of the war. A fierce battle raged for several days. It was a close-run thing but American firepower and air mobility dealt a punishing blow to the NVA regiment. It hied into Cambodia to lick its wounds – and rethink tactics.¹⁷ Confident, even elated, the Johnson administration looked forward to a long string of Ia Drangs that would wear down enemy manpower and morale, then force them to call it quits – the strategy of attrition. In the months that followed, however, there were no more large battles, only localized sweeps that drove out the enemy for a month or so, hundreds of minor skirmishes, and countless mines and snipers.¹⁸ Policymakers in Washington were publicly confident but privately dismayed. The enemy was able to determine the time, place, and duration of engagements. They controlled casualty levels, the length of the war, and indirectly, US public support. Hanoi knew it as well as anyone on Washington.¹⁹

¹⁶ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking, 1983), pp. 320-21; Phillip B Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 451-52.

¹⁷ On the early years of the American phase of the war see John C Donnell, "Viet Cong Recruitment: Why and How Men Join," (Santa Monica, Calif: Rand Corporation Research Memorandum RM 5486-1, 1967).

¹⁸ See Bernard William Rogers, *Cedar Falls–Junction City: A Turning Point* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1974); John A Cash, John Albright, and Allan W Sandstrum, *Seven Firefights in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1989).

¹⁹ On the early antiwar movement, see Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 1997), pp. 85-148; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), pp. 242-82; Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 1-179; Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, *The New Radicals: A Report with Documents* (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 65-73; Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 9-114.

Erosion and Crisis, 1967-1968

A half million troops, mountains of supplies, and billions of dollars poured thousands of miles away – a feat only the US could have done. It constructed huge port facilities and logistical centers with everything from jet engines to cases of beer. It built support bases in remote jungles and conducted operations from them the next day. Fire bases sprang up in a matter of hours and artillery rounds whistled into the continent. Formidable achievements, but not victories. Opposition among the young increased and became more confrontational. It wasn't just the young. Average people, true believers in America and veterans of earlier conflicts, became disenchanted. For every image of Vietnamese greeting GIs, there were others showing them dismayed and fearful. When GIs set fire to villages, it was seen not as part of an intelligible counterinsurgency program but as wanton destruction. The use of technologically sophisticated weapons, the enormous expenditure of ordnance, the deployment of an entire battalion to chase a handful of ill-equipped VC, struck many as absurdly disproportionate, needlessly destructive, and even unfair.

Troubling images might not have undermined support had the Vietnamese been worthy allies. There was little doubt about World War Two allies. They had spirited civilians and soldiers, inflicted egregious casualties on the enemy, and took heavy losses themselves. The South Vietnamese government was unstable, unpopular, and untrustworthy. Lacking discipline and fighting spirit, its military gladly let GIs pick up the burden. Nor were there signs of progress as in World War Two, the public's template. By late 1943, the Japanese had been decisively defeated at Midway and the Solomons and were being driven off island after island. Ike had licked Rommel in North Africa, GIs were on the Italian mainland, and convoy losses were way down. Morning papers showed dark expanses centered in Tokyo and Berlin steadily shrinking.

The Pentagon tried to make operations appear to be turning points but the public remained skeptical. The nature of the war was not to take territory and shrink dark expanses on maps. It was to grind down enemy forces until they gave in. Body counts and kill ratios were the indicators of progress. There's nothing heroic or inspiring in statistics, nothing to capture imaginations and lift spirits. Body counts were abstract numbers that in time became doubted. If television played a role in eroding support for the war, it was not by showing the death, suffering, and other realities of war, it was by repeatedly showing straight-forward footage of operation after operation, air strike after air strike, and upbeat briefing after upbeat briefing. Doubts were reinforced by

returning GIs, chastened and often embittered from casualties inflicted by a stealthy enemy and populations indifferent to their sacrifice.²⁰ The sight of veterans criticizing leaders and the wisdom of the war itself was new and troubling.

LBJ responded with reassurances. There'd been doubters during the War of Independence, Madison faced secessionist threats during the War of 1812, and Lincoln wrestled with Northern opposition.²¹ In each case, a victory ensued – Saratoga, Tippecanoe, Gettysburg – that silenced doubters and rallied the nation. By late 1967, the administration itself was beset by doubts. The North wouldn't face manpower problems for decades if then and no one knew how to halt infiltration down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. McGeorge Bundy, the national security adviser, stepped down. Robert McNamara, the analytic secretary of defense, broke down in public and LBJ had to relieve him. With each deployment and invocation of the past, the administration took from a reservoir of trust that in 1945 seemed limitless but that was now draining. There was no prospect of replenishment.²²

Fissures and Opposition Growing discontent deepened problems. Vietnam brought conflict into the home along generational lines. Parents, raised in an era of duty and respect, generally supported the war, while a younger generation, raised in change, generally questioned or opposed it. The older generation was inclined to accept and believe, the younger one to question and reject. Though television filled the air with programs of wholesome families like the Bradys and Partridges, it was more of an attempt to soothe fears than to present reality. Family members argued over the war, often bitterly, making many gatherings unpleasant.²³

²⁰ Christian G Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 206-49.

²¹ For opposition to earlier wars see Samuel Eliot Morison, Frederick Merk, and Frank Friedel, *Dissent in Three American Wars* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970); Roger H Brown, *The Republic in Peril: 1812* (New York: WW Norton, 1971), pp. 131-91.

²² See Mueller, *Wars, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, pp. 23-65. On the inability to stem the flow of supplies from the North see Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Airpower: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989), pp. 123-28.

²³ Philip Roth conveys this atmosphere in his novel, *American Pastoral* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), pp. 93-174. See also John A Clausen, *American Lives: Looking Back at the Children of the Great Depression* (New York: Free Press, 1993), pp. 103-5; Donald Katz, *Home Fires: An Intimate Portrait of One Middle-Class Family in Postwar America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 231-305.

Local community draft boards decided who went off to war and who didn't and came under criticism for protecting guys from families with connections. Public school systems incurred wrath for providing local boards with lists of draft-age boys. Conflicting views on the war strained friendship networks. The passions of the day entered voluntary associations and local boards that decided the contentious issues of jobs, race, housing, schools, and the like. Staid administrators and anyone opposed to change became proxies of Johnson.

Everything was dominated by where one stood on the war. Anything else was easily deduced. Positions hardened and tempers flared. Blue-collar workers ("hard-hats") held lunch-hour rallies, condemned protesters as traitors and cowards, and went after them. Street brawls broke out in cities.²⁴ Poor people saw the burden of the war falling on them, while the rich benefited. Blacks held they were suffering disproportionately high casualties – more proof of the country's racism. Some saw a plot to thin out the newly-assertive black population. Those reluctant to criticize LBJ, a civil rights advocate, lost ground to firebrands with no such reluctance such as Stokeley Carmichael.²⁵ Feminists blamed the war on patriarchal institutions predisposed to use force.²⁶ Many who went to war unquestioningly in 1941 couldn't understand or respect the lack of faith in the nation; those who refused the call to arms couldn't understand blind faith in institutions.

The Spread of the Counterculture A counterculture was developing for years. The war gave it greater numbers and prominence. Its members were usually middle class (often upper-middle-class), suburban, with at least some college. They came from groups that experienced the most disorienting changes over the last few decades: the new middle classes, pseudo-communities in suburbia, and a generation more educated than its parents. Vietnam coalesced them, energized them, and gave them their cause.

Communities sprang up where kindred spirits reinforced each other's beliefs: in college towns (Berkeley, Ann Arbor, Cambridge), in bohemian neighborhoods (Haight-Ashbury, Greenwich Village, Perry Lane), and in

²⁴ Appy, *Working-Class War*, pp. 38-43.

²⁵ Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 154-82; David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 49-83.

²⁶ Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), pp. 203-37; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), pp. 362-76; Ruth Rosen, "The Day They Buried Traditional Womanhood," in D Michael Shafer, ed, *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), pp. 233-61.

rural and urban communes. Using the blueprints of progressives and Beats, they sought to create an alternate culture with its own ideals, leaders, heroes, myths, views of history, tastes, and styles. Old furniture and rugs were preferred in part because it was all they could afford but also because the artifacts had craftsmanship and richness lost in mass production. Worn clothes were preferred over new ones – a violation of the laws of consumerism. They might complement worn attire with a top hat or suit jacket to accentuate the absurdity of convention.

Formal education confined. Better to learn from activism and the arts and humanities. All-night discussions examined aspects of upbringing were, then delineated, deconstructed, and discarded them. They wanted to see through the lies of their upbringings and adopt correct ways of thinking. Though the work ethic was rejected as inculcating denial over enjoyment, the counterculture was not composed of layabouts. Many worked hard in the civil rights movement, in political campaigns, and on communal farms, or learned artisanal crafts. Many dropped out of middle-class trajectories and worked in blue-collar jobs where a more authentic life could be found and where they could forge ties with a class with an historical mission.²⁷

The main work was the movement. The mainstream had nagging doubt about the war, the counterculture had fiery certainty. They defined themselves by inverting mainstream views and everything else: white was black, cops criminals, sinners saints, and heads tails. The good guys wore simple peasant garb and the bad guys had olive drab. The war wasn't a check on communist expansion; it was an attempt to repress people building a progressive society. American troops were racist and destructive. They burned and pillaged across Southeast Asia like a mercenary army of centuries past. Alternately, and with a measure of superiority disguised as pity, they could be deemed the deluded poor of a militarized country.

The interpretation of the war took on themes of alienated youth. The Vietnamese, by defending their ways, could avoid the fate of modern America. In the village banding together to aid guerrillas, make booby traps, hide weapons, and gather intelligence, they saw an egalitarian community – one where women played important roles. The Vietnamese people stood as one in an historically important moment and forward-thinking

²⁷ See Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968); Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972); David Horowitz, *Radical Son: A Generational Odyssey* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), pp. 157-202

Americans were with them. The counterculture built its pantheon. Fidel, Mao, and Ho were men of the people and visionary nation builders. Giap and Guevara were military geniuses who revolutionized warfare and taught the weak how to defeat the mighty and the young how to overthrow the old.

The rightness of the cause made them feel above conventions of civility and propriety. Extremism in the name of justice was no vice. Neighborhoods around draft boards and anything related to the war were attacked. Policymakers were hooted and shouted down by chants branding them murderers and lauding the Viet Cong. They closed off access to administration buildings, ROTC classes, and recruiters from war industries. Military-funded research offices were vandalized. Professors who supported the war were interrupted, driven from the forum, and besieged in their offices. Attempts were made to shut down the command centers of the war in Washington. Every autumn, more young people entered college and assimilated the exciting new ideas there.²⁸ High schoolers followed the lead of siblings.²⁹

Tet

General Westmoreland proclaimed a corner had been turned. Walt Rostow, who'd replaced Bundy as national security adviser, saw light at the end of the tunnel – a phrase used fifteen years earlier by a French general. Buoyancy stemmed from large-scale battles at Dak To and Con Thien in late 1967 which were interpreted as signs the enemy was desperate to turn the tide. High body counts were returning and that meant the attrition strategy would succeed. The battles also meant higher American casualties. Polling showed a crossover point was reached, one the administration dreaded but saw coming. Support fell to forty percent, opposition was up to just under fifty.³⁰

²⁸ See Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts*, pp. 117-48; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 242-82; Wells, *The War Within*, pp. 115-222; Seymour Martin Lipset and Philip G Altbach, *Students in Revolt* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1970); Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching*, pp. 180-204.

²⁹ The passions and confusion of such demonstrations are conveyed in Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (New York: New American Library, 1968); Richard A. Siggelkow, *Dissent and Disruption: A University under Siege* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1991); Roger Rosenblatt, *Coming Apart: A Memoir of the Harvard Wars of 1969* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1997).

³⁰ By contrast, support for World War Two increased each year. See Mueller, *Wars, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, pp. 6, 168-75.

Dak To and Con Thien weren't desperate moves. The NVA and Viet Cong were learning from the large engagements and preparing for a major campaign. The Tet Offensive aimed to shatter the South Vietnamese military, trigger a popular uprising, and set the stage for a decisive battle at Khe Sanh that would knock the Americans out of the war as Dien Bien Phu had the French. Though enemy plans had been detected and US troops redeployed, the offensive was far greater in scope and intensity than anticipated.³¹ On 31 January 1968 coordinated attacks struck every city, district capital, and significant military base. Sappers penetrated the American Embassy in Saigon and fought a sharp firefight before being killed or captured. Most attacks were repulsed in a few days but in some places, notably Hue, fighting raged for weeks.

The offensive made for dramatic news stories but fell short of what the communists had planned. The South Vietnamese army performed surprisingly well. Civilians showed little enthusiasm for calls to rise up. On the contrary, they were appalled by the destructiveness of the attacks and attendant civilian massacres. There was room for optimism, politically and militarily. Many Vietnamese gave half-hearted support to Saigon and even half-hearted support was an improvement. Local militias were organized to defend against further attacks. The Viet Cong lost almost seventy thousand of their best soldiers and were beset by desertions and recruiting difficulties.³² More NVA had to be put into Viet Cong units, leading to regional tensions that hurt cohesion and made the war more like a northern invasion.³³

Nonetheless, Tet underscored the absence of progress and suggested the war would drag on many years. A few months before Tet, fifty percent of Americans saw progress in the war and only eight percent thought the war was being lost. Shortly after it, only thirty-three percent saw progress and twenty-three percent thought the

³¹ American intelligence captured plans outlining a major attack on many cities and bases. The generals canceled operations in remote areas and shifted troops to major cities. When the pope requested that Johnson order a bombing halt, LBJ replied that, because of an impending offensive, he could not oblige. See Phillip B Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 468-70; James J Wirtz, *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 72-84.

³² Forty-seven thousand Viet Cong deserted in 1969; thirty-two thousand the following year. See Douglas S Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U. S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1977), p. 267.

³³ Ronald H Spector, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), pp. 76-78; Truong Nhu Tang, *A Viet Cong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath* (NY: Vintage, 1986), pp. 154-55, 192-93; Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), pp. 26-29; Wirtz, *The Tet Offensive*, p. 252.

country was losing. Opposition had heretofore come mainly from figures easily dismissed. That changed. Walter Cronkite famously said the war might be unwinnable. (He didn't say it was lost, as often claimed.) It was not a question of a liberal media. The *Wall Street Journal* observed:

We think the American people should be getting ready to accept, if they haven't already, the prospect that the whole Vietnam effort may be doomed, that it may be falling apart beneath our feet. . . . We believe the Administration is duty-bound to recognize that no battle and no war is worth any price, no matter how ruinous, and that in the case of Vietnam it may be failing for the simple reason that the whole place and cause is collapsing from within. . . . [E]veryone had better be prepared for the bitter taste of a defeat beyond America's power to prevent.

It was not a question of eastern elites. The *Salina Journal* expressed pained voices from the heartland:

It is hard for a proud nation such as this to admit defeat and error. But if we are a moral, honorable nation with a sense of duty and destiny, we cannot go on killing and destroying to perpetuate an error and deepen it. . . . The only honorable and wise course is to de-escalate the war and prepare to withdraw from Vietnam in the best order and with the fewest casualties possible. If President Johnson finds his personal pride too stubborn, the weight of defeat too grievous, the Congress should reassert its Constitutional authority, if necessary remove him from office, and put this nation back on the paths of peace.³⁴

Tet presented many images that impressed themselves into the national mind. There was footage from Khe Sanh: airstrikes only a few hundred yards outside the wire, cargo planes dropping supplies then taking off before NVA mortars found the range. In Hue, marines fought block by block across acres of rubble. And of course there was Col Loan's infamous execution in Saigon. A less famous report showed a GI, hunkered down as bullets hum overhead, being asked if the war is a good cause. He reflexively replied it is, then pauses, realizing he no longer believes this. His face etched with skepticism, he goes on, "Well, they say it's a good cause . . . but now . . . I just don't know anymore." A lot of people just didn't know anymore.

Paradoxically, and in contradiction to most recollections and accounts, Tet did not reduce public support for the war. In fact it went up slightly though briefly. Tet's impact was elsewhere.³⁵

Reappraisal Elites in and out of government were turning against the war. Bundy and McNamara were gone. Clark Clifford opposed Americanization in 1965. Now the new defense secretary, he asked the generals, how

³⁴ Quotes from Oberdorfer, *Tet!*, pp. 245-46.

³⁵ Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!: The Turning Point in the Vietnam War* (New York: Da Capo, 1971), pp. 245-46; Karnow, *Vietnam*, pp. 545-47.

much longer could the enemy wage war? Would more troops break the enemy's will? Would more bombing cut off supplies from the North? The generals could offer no assurances. Clifford saw his duty. He sought to build consensus for disengagement inside the Pentagon itself.³⁶

Throughout the war, Johnson sounded out a group of jurists, retired generals, bankers, and former statesmen – the Wise Men. Their counsel, based on long experience not public opinion, was supportive. Johnson convened them once more after Tet. They listened to briefings for several days, studied reports, then gave their judgments. Four expressed strong doubts about the war, seven favored fundamental change, and only three backed the current policy. Johnson had withstood flagging public opinion, stacks of letters calling for peace, and jeering crowds, but now the most experienced hands, privy to the best information, the same information he saw, had soured on the war.³⁷

Shortly thereafter, he announced a bombing halt and a new diplomatic effort to end the war. In a few sentences added at the last moment he announced he would not seek re-election. The nation, then between a receding era of pride and an emerging one of cynicism, felt a shared sense of tragedy, perhaps for the last time.

Resurgence and Defeat

The violence of Tet and the end of a presidency were followed by more tragedy. A few days after Johnson's speech, Martin Luther King was assassinated, triggering fierce riots in many cities. Paratroopers were rushed in to guard the White House and Capitol. Many saw the country on the brink of collapse and placed hope in a Kennedy Restoration – a mythic past that ended in Dallas and Vietnam. A month after King's murder, another lone gunman killed Robert Kennedy. The Democratic convention in Chicago was turbulent and divisive. Violent fighting broke out between young demonstrators and city police. Hundreds were injured, hundreds more arrested.³⁸

³⁶ Clark Clifford, "A Viet Nam Reappraisal," *Foreign Affairs* 47 (1969): 601-22; Herbert Y Schandler, *Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam: The Unmaking of a President* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 121-76.

³⁷ Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention* (New York: David McKay, 1973), pp. 202-24; Schandler, *Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam*, pp. 256-65.

³⁸ Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching*, pp. 205-232; Wells, *The War Within*, pp. 223-86.

Malaise and disgust, no longer confined to pockets of students and intellectuals, spread. The romance of America gave way to the view it was a "sick society," plagued by murder, racism, and militarism.³⁹ Vietnam was neither an aberration nor an error. The country's culture and institutional framework, from early encounters with Indians to the present, was geared toward hatred and war. Prominent intellectuals joined in. Richard Hofstadter described the mythic frontier man as "an almost monstrous archetype of aggressive masculinity."⁴⁰ William Appleman Williams observed: "Empire is as American as apple pie. Or as American as the ever westward moving frontier. . . . Or as American as saving the world from the devil. Or as American as the veils that Americans have woven to obscure the harsh reality of their imperial record."⁴¹ A notably harsh criticism came from David Shoup:

I believe that if we had and would keep our dirty, bloody, dollar-soaked fingers out of the business of these nations so full of depressed, exploited people, they will arrive at a solution of their own -- and if unfortunately their revolution must be of the violent type because the "haves" refuse to share with the "have-nots" by any peaceful method, at least what they get will be their own, and not the American style, which they don't want and above all don't want crammed down their throats by Americans.

Shoup earned the Medal of Honor at Tarawa and was later a four-star general and commandant of the marines.⁴²

Nixon and the Faithful By the middle of 1968 public opinion began to swing. Turmoil caused many to reach for anything promising stability. The antiwar movement's excesses brought disgust and yearning for law and order. The Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in August gave credence to warnings of communist aggression. Support for the war increased slightly in the second half of the year.⁴³

³⁹ For contemporary views see Norman Mailer, *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), an odd essay on gun culture, vestiges of the frontier, and virility, woven into a story about a young man about to go to war.

⁴⁰ Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Knopf, 1969), p. 150.

⁴¹ William Appleman Williams, "Rise of an American World Power Complex," in ND Houghton, ed., *Struggle against History: US. Foreign Policy in an Age of Revolution* (New York: Clarion, 1968), pp. 1-19. Quote from the first page.

⁴² Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts*, pp. 148-90; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 285-340; Horowitz, *Radical Son*, pp. 157-202; Richard H. Rovere, *Waist Deep in the Big Muddy* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly, 1968); Robert V. Daniels, *Year of the Heroic Guerrilla: World Revolution and Counterrevolution in 1968* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), pp. 3-147.

⁴³ Mueller, *Wars, Presidents, and Public Opinion*, pp. 164-65.

The Democrats were seen as the party of a disastrous war and brutal police repression orchestrated by a big-city boss. The Republicans presented themselves as the party of unity that would restore faith in America and respect for law. They would end the war honorably, just as Ike had the Korean war – and who better to do it than the general's vice president. Hope was placed in Richard Nixon.

Sympathy is rarely attached to Nixon but some is due anyone becoming president in 1969. There was a war he didn't begin and couldn't continue. Fifty-five percent of the public opposed the war, only forty supported it, and the downward trend was back. Only nine percent would support ending the war if it meant a communist victory, as it surely would have.⁴⁴ A rapid pullout and ensuing collapse would have caused a vicious backlash, damaging the party in power for a decade and poisoning civil-military relations for longer. The public just wanted the ugliness to disappear right away.

The communists had to rebuild after the losses of Tet. That meant fewer engagements and also fewer US casualties. In May 1969, American paratroopers cornered a North Vietnamese force in the A Shau Valley, setting the stage for a ten-day battle that became known as Hamburger Hill. In purely military terms, Hamburger Hill might be roughly compared to Sugar Loaf Hill where a similar number of troops attacked a Japanese position on Okinawa. The casualties at Sugar Loaf were staggering, over seven thousand Americans killed and wounded, but it was seen as necessary. Twenty-five years later, the assault on Hamburger Hill stirred anger back home. Fifty-six Americans were killed and four hundred wounded, but it was seen as unnecessary. After taking the hill, the paratroopers boarded Hueys and searched elsewhere for the enemy. The public was incensed. Nixon ordered a reduction in ground operations.⁴⁵

The administration developed a plan to disengage. The burden of combat would be shifted to South Vietnamese forces, allowing for reductions in American troops, casualties, and draft levies. Vietnamization wouldn't be easy. ARVN soldiers had to build confidence. Coordination between ground and air forces had to develop. Logistical problems would have to be mastered. Time was bought by attacks on communist sanctuaries in Cambodia (1970) and Laos (1971), disrupting supply systems and timetables. Diplomatic efforts weakened

⁴⁴ Spector, *After Tet*, p. 315.

⁴⁵ Guenter Lewy, *America and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 144-47.

support for the North in Beijing. The plan displayed formidable vision but required time and patience, neither of which was in good supply. Events would do nothing to increase it.

Disengagement There had long been rumors of American atrocities. The public didn't believe our troops would do such things. If a Viet Cong were tortured or civilians killed, it was considered one of the unfortunate aspects of war. Members of congress received letters from recently discharged vets about a massacre of civilians in March 1968. Congress asked the army to investigate and a damning report came out in March 1970. An American infantry platoon entered My Lai and without drawing fire, slaughtered hundreds of unarmed civilians, mostly women and children. The army indicted Lt William Calley and several others for murder. The enormity was made clear when *Life* published nightmarish photographs.⁴⁶

Opponents pointed to the massacre as proof the war was immoral, America was racist, and the Vietnamese supported the VC. Many were convinced that My Lai was typical or at least common. Confusion existed among supporters as well. Calley was defended as a patriot doing his duty where friend and foe weren't easily distinguished. Veteran organizations contributed to a defense fund and organized petition drives to free him. A popular ballad portrayed him as doing his job under difficult circumstances. Opponents of the war thought the average soldier was a Calley, supporters thought Calley was an average soldier.⁴⁷

In 1971 newspapers published a series of classified documents spirited out of the Pentagon which outlined the road to Vietnam. The Pentagon Papers showed a pattern of deceptions, half-truths, and lies. Presidents had sanctioned clandestine and often illegal operations, backed a coup d'etat that killed leaders they once praised, misled the public on the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, and manipulated events and opinion to justify escalation. In the next year, books critical of the war became best-sellers.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ It's widely thought the army covered up the massacre and the public only became aware when Seymour Hersh broke the story. Hersh, however, states he never heard of Calley or My Lai until seeing a network news reports of the army's indictment of Calley. Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp. 128-34. Local commanders in Vietnam attempted to cover up the massacre earlier and they too were indicted.

⁴⁷ See Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (New York: Penguin, 1992), pp. 248-357.

⁴⁸ Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly, 1972); David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972).

Demonstrations in Washington and on college campuses brought the cause to the public's attention but achieved little. Johnson was out, the war was still on. The movement had become unwieldy, comprising a mass of disaffected youth opposed to the discipline and organization needed to bring numbers to bear. It had limited access to Democrats, none to Republicans. They had neither the hope nor the inclination to build a third party. Among the intelligentsia, radicalism had become in vogue, part of the affectations at fashionable dinners – it had become “chic.”⁴⁹ The capacity of American culture to absorb, deflect, and co-opt was intact. Madison Avenue used the rebellious spirit of the day to sell Dodges.

The Nixon administration's attacks on the movement, invocations of American values, and public events with supportive youths and preachers was revitalizing the Treasury of Virtue. A portion of the counterculture leadership concluded that revolutionary violence was needed. The *Weathermen* embraced the code and methods of a revolutionary sect to bring the war home. “We've got to turn New York into Saigon.”⁵⁰ They fought street battles, robbed banks, and bombed buildings, including the Capitol. A plan to bomb an army base went awry when a basement lab exploded. A like-minded group detonated a fertilizer bomb outside a military research building at the University of Wisconsin, killing a young physicist and wounding several other people.⁵¹

By mid-1971, opponents of the war were twice as large as supporters, roughly sixty-six percent to twenty-seven. Nonetheless, the movement was falling apart. Many were exhausted – “burned out” as the expression went. Others threw up their hands in despair. There was nothing to be done to end the war. The sense of adventure and romance was gone. The Weathermen caused many to step back and realize that revolutionary talk was thrilling, but ugly when put into practice.⁵²

⁴⁹ See Tom Wolfe's *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970).

⁵⁰ Quoted in Gitlin, *The Sixties*, p. 401. See also Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 269-70.

⁵¹ On the rise of violence in the movement see Tom Bates, *Rad: The 1970 Bombing of the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin and Its Aftermath* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground* (London: Verso, 1997); Howard Zinn, *Disobedience and Democracy: Nine Fallacies on Law and Order* (New York: Vintage, 1968); Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts*, pp. 180-207; Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 384-408.

⁵² On the decline of the anti-war movement see Gitlin, *The Sixties*, pp. 409-40; Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts*, pp. 181-207.

Perhaps the most important reason for the movement's decline was that little more than two years into office, Nixon had reduced troop levels in Vietnam by sixty-three percent. By the end of 1971, the military was relying more on incentives than conscription for manpower.

Troop Levels and Battle Deaths in Vietnam, 1968-1972⁵³

<u>Year</u>	<u>Troop Level</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>American KIAs</u>	<u>% Change</u>
1968	536,100		14,589	
1969	475,200	-60,900 (-11%)	9,414	-35%
1970	334,600	-140,600 (-30%)	4,221	-55%
1971	156,800	-177,800 (-53%)	1,381	-67%
1972	24,200	-132,600 (-85%)	300	-78%

The most surprising figure is the number of Americans deaths. In 1971, the toll was down sixty-seven percent from the previous year and ninety-four percent from 1968. Though not as precipitous as other candidates had promised in the '68 campaign, and not as rapid as many in the public wanted, involvement was winding down fast. Vietnamization was easing turmoil in America. It remained to be seen if it would ensure independence of the South.

Crisis and Defeat

An exhausted country welcomed the peace agreement of January 1973. The last American troops left two months later. Prisoners of war, some held over eight years, came home. A few kissed the ground as they deplaned and exclaimed "God Bless America!" – gestures that unbeknownst to them had not aged well. Polls on the war were irrelevant. Nixon's popularity soared. An outsider might have concluded the turbulence was over, Nixon had restored the faith, and America would resume its comity. There was, however, lingering hostility toward Nixon. The final chapter on South Vietnam was being written.

The administration asserted that the South's army would perform well and maintain independence. Those who had trained and advised them were less confident. The Laos operation in 1971 didn't go well and the

⁵³ Peter Braestrup, ed, *Vietnam as History: Ten Years after the Paris Peace Accords* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1984), pp. 163-69.

communist offensive the following year was blunted only through relentless American air power. In late 1972, a young corporal asked an old hand, who had more combat decorations than the corporal had years, how long the South would last after the last GIs left. The question was not if the South would survive – any corporal could see it wouldn't – but how long it had, how long until the fall. It was a simple question but to a man who'd dedicated his life to training the ARVN, been wounded several times, and once believed in the cause with the faith of a knight, it was painful. He exhaled audibly and gave his analysis.

There were a few good units (the First Infantry, airborne and marine divisions, and ranger units he trained and fought with). Most ARVN units, though, were venal and incompetent. The best would be stretched thin, the others would break. Whole battalions and brigades would disintegrate and then it would be over. There was nothing to prevent it. US ground troops would never return, airpower could only do so much next time. He judged it would take two years. Twenty-four months after the last Americans left, Saigon would fall. The conversation fell off as the two, raised in post-World War Two America but coming of age in Vietnam, pondered the waste of it all – and what defeat might mean.

Between the departure of the last GIs and the fall of Saigon came Watergate, a far-reaching scandal that further damaged beliefs and institutions. Nixon presented himself and his administration as virtuous public servants who would restore faith in America. Family and religion, law and order, honor and devotion were themes of every public event – much to the disgust of a large portion of the public seething over Vietnam. When the war ended, the opposition was disarmed but Nixon gave them a new weapon – evidence of criminal activity. A steady stream of revelations came: break-ins at a psychiatrist's office and the Democratic Party's headquarters, FBI participation in the cover-up, patterns of illegal practices, perjury, and inoperative statements. Public anger shifted from Vietnam to Washington. Debates and demonstrations were over. Indictments and due process were underway. Nixon resigned in disgrace. It's difficult to imagine the scandal had there been no Vietnam. If there hadn't been years of turmoil and deceit, no major paper would have dared accuse a president of a crime and few would have believed the claims of two young journalists.

The war played out to a dismal close. In early 1973, with Watergate stories still under the fold, Congress banned American airpower in Southeast Asia. Sending ground troops back was as unlikely as putting them on the moon. The war would be settled by the two Vietnamese armies, as well it might have been ten years and a

million lives earlier. In the spring of 1975, after years of rebuilding and planning, the North Vietnam launched an offensive. They foresaw a long campaign lasting a couple of years or more. It was soon clear that the best ARVN forces were stretched thin and the others would soon break.

The drama unfolded, as much of it had already, on television. There were long lines of civilians fleeing down congested roads, ARVN soldiers shedding equipment and scurrying to board the last plane out, streets deserted except for looters, and darkened bars with American names. Cities fell one after the other. The airborne division stiffened around Saigon but was worn down. The final act came near the American Embassy where helicopters took the last Americans to ships offshore. The scene of helicopters thrown overboard offered a final metaphor of tragedy and waste. On 30 April 1975, twenty-five months after the last American troops left, North Vietnamese troops took Saigon. The captain was off by five weeks.

Chapter Seven

Defeat – The World Turned Upside Down

*But if the cause be not good,
The King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make
If these men do not die well,
It will be a black matter for the King.*

Henry V 4:1

The world, it seemed, had been turned upside down. Authority no longer commanded respect; 'bad elements' dictated the tenor of public life; respect for hard work and thrift were collapsing with the currency; cavalier disregard for civilized rules of behaviour had replaced pre-war stability; a get-rich-quick mentality prevailed and success came to the unscrupulous rather than the industrious; and the 'strict order of former times' had dissolved in an anarchy in which sound moral values appeared to count for nothing.

*Richard Bessel
Germany after the First World War*

American exceptionalism was Providence's gift to a chosen nation that would enlighten the world and never lose a war. With each victory came further proof of the nation's uniqueness and virtue. The dream and glory ended. The war undermined cherished beliefs and transformed the nation into a postmodern country marked by malaise, weakened family structure, fluid gender roles, atomized social relations, heterogeneous beliefs, mistrust of authority, but also by greater opportunity for women and minorities, openness to innovation in the arts and sciences, and accountability in officials from town councils to corridors of power on the Potomac.

Malaise

Victory brings pride and unity. Defeat leads to free-floating and dimly-understood senses of dread and guilt, confusion, cynicism, despair, and search for lost times. America as a whole knew only victory, unaware that

within its boundaries lived people who had endured defeat and disliked the victors. The South's order withered after Appomattox. Animosity toward elites surfaced. It was a rich man's war that brought devastation to ordinary people. Patent medicines promised to lift spirits. Many thought the end of the world was at hand and found comfort in myths of a halcyon past.¹ Two decades later, the Plains Indians lapsed into despair and millenarianism. They believed that floods and earthquakes would soon destroy the world or that a messiah would restore the natural order of things. Some thought that a Paiute mystic named Wovoka was the messiah and that rituals and attire would make them invulnerable to bullets.²

Americans witnessed defeat while presiding over Japan. Despair pervaded the lives of many, certainties fell away, and suicide rates rose sharply. Revered elites were despised and blamed for the deaths of millions. The country's beliefs and institutions were responsible. Radical reforms were needed to save the country. A popular novel of the period, *The Setting Sun*, inverted the nation's most sacred symbol. An historian noted, "Here was a world turned upside down."³

In the nineteenth century, following a string of humiliating defeats that began with the Crimean War, Russia was swept by waves of discontent. Intellectuals and youths openly despised their country (Turgenev called them "nihilists") and went off to live in peasant villages or join revolutionary and terrorist organizations. Some saw salvation in embracing Russia's past, others in adopting foreign ways.⁴ Following its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1871), France was enervated by pessimism, normlessness, suicide, drug use, crime, deracinated youth, doubt over its place in the world, and chronic divisiveness and directionlessness. Emile

¹ C Vann Woodward *The Future of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 100-14; Charles William Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), pp. 63-65; Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 53.

² See James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and Wounded Knee* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1973 [1896]); Ruth M Underhill, *Red Man's Religion: Beliefs and Practices of the Indians North of Mexico* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 254-69.

³ John W Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: New Press, 1999), pp. 34-253. "Upside down" quote from p. 108. See also Michio Takeyama, *Harp of Burma* Translated by Howard Hibbett (Rutland, Vt: Charles E Tuttle, 1966 [1946]).

⁴ James H Billington, *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp. 360-70; E Lambert, *Sons against Fathers: Studies in Russian Radicalism and Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

Durkheim called it “anomie.”⁵ After defeat in 1898, Spain entered a period of self-loathing epitomized by the “Generation of 1898” which blamed defeat on the country’s traditions. Some claimed that the country had failed to modernize, others that the country had abandoned tradition – contradictory currents suggesting that polarization and fragmentation also follow defeat.⁶ In Vietnam, millenarian cults such as the Hoa Hao appeared after the French conquest. After 1918, the imperial-military edifice of German nationhood collapsed, leaving the country in disarray.⁷ National values and institutions no longer provided meaning or coherence. Familiar surroundings took on alien, Kafkaesque qualities, and malaise spread like a dark cloud.⁸

Americans lived in a charmed world. Leaders were high-minded, noble, and above reproach. The country could accomplish anything. America only reluctantly unsheathed the sword. The American fighting man was the descendant of the Deerslayer, Alvin York, and Audie Murphy, and would always win the day. Behind him was a united people.⁹ Vietnam turned this upside down. Unifying myths were gone or in disarray. Leaders and symbols no longer enjoyed an aura of romance and sacredness. Life became secular and rational-legal. People no longer felt part of a living national community. They related to each other more as strangers, competing interest groups, buyers and sellers, or antagonists who though the quarrel was over, could never reconcile.¹⁰ Teachers and texts once emphasized a coherent social system but they now spoke of the power of the military and corporations, social inequalities, racism, sexism, the flawed justice system, and the powerlessness of

⁵Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1986), pp. 9-26, 105-29.

⁶Raymond Carr, *Spain, 1808-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 473-523.

⁷David G Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885-1925* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).

⁸Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History, 1918-1933* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1974); Alfred Döblin, *A People Betrayed, November 1918: A German Revolution* (New York: Fromm, 1983);

⁹ See Woodward, *The Future of the Past*, pp. 113-14; John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); William W. Cobb, Jr., *The American Foundation Myth in Vietnam: Reigning Paradigms and Raining Bombs* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1998).

¹⁰ See Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), pp. 534-660; Tom Englehardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 175-303.

average people.¹¹ Suicide rates were flat from the late-thirties to the mid-sixties then, rose in the late sixties and seventies, repeating the post-1918 trend. Suicide in post-Vietnam anomie soared to appalling levels.¹²

The cinema became obsessed with monsters and disasters. In one popular genre, orderly life suddenly collapses owing to misdeeds by powerful figures and dreadful forces are set loose. Animals no longer behave as they should. Creatures from the deep and insects from the ground become preternaturally evil and deadly. In horror films of the fifties, science and the military swiftly saved the day. Now the system cannot cope with the problem that arrogance and meddling led to. Banding together and trying new ideas, average people triumph. They come away feeling senses of limitation and respect for forces they failed to understand.¹³ A related genre told of a shipwreck, earthquake, or devastating fire. *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) involved a luxury liner struck by a tidal wave and turned upside down. A defrocked priest and earnest working-class figure convince others that old ways no longer work and lead them in a harrowing escape. In *The Towering Inferno* (1974) wealthy developers cut corners in putting up a magnificent high-rise, resulting in a devastating fire. A maverick builder and earnest fire chief salvage something and promise to make safer buildings.

Malaise was especially strong in Middle America. They'd served in some manner during the Second World War and Korea, believed in America, supported the war in Vietnam, and rallied to appeals for patriotism and law and order. They were undermined and betrayed and could no longer sustain an argument with those who felt that the war revealed the country's true character. Millions of Vietnam veterans, mostly young, had also believed in America, not from long experience but from the promise of glory and honor that war would confer. Movies, backyard play, and television, they thought, had prepared them. More than any other generation, they thought they knew what to expect. Their writings and recollections describe the war's jarring effects. War was

¹¹ See Jerome Skolnick and Elliott Currie, eds., *Crisis in American Institutions* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973); Maurice Zeitlin, ed., *American Society, Inc* (Chicago: Markham, 1970); Larry T. Reynolds and James M. Henslin, eds., *American Society: A Critical Analysis* (New York: McKay, 1973); Gene L. Mason and Fred Vetter, eds., *The Politics of Exploitation* (New York: Random House, 1973). See also Irving Louis Horowitz, *The Decomposition of Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 9-21.

¹² Suicide rates from U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, *Vital Statistics Rates in the United States* 1968, p. 99; Department of Commerce *Historical Abstract of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* Part One, 1975, p. 414; Herbert Hendin, *Suicide in America*. (New York: WW Norton, 1982), p. 31.

¹³ On the relationship between defeat and themes of dread in the cinema see Siegfried Kracauer's classic work, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological Study of the German Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), esp pp. 61-96.

tedium and hardship interrupted by fire and death. In moments of introspection, they looked for something in their past to understand new realities but found only a clutter of stock footage and clichés. They had to purge their minds of that adolescent foolishness, dissociate themselves from their upbringing, and embark upon a hard education.

Returning home brought no respite. In 1945, many veterans returned embittered and alienated though buoyed by victory and gratitude. Vietnam veterans returned to a divided country, neither side having much understanding of the war. People who saw the war in terms of a good cause and heroism were met with vacant stares. On the other side were opponents of the war who were certain they understood Vietnam far better than simple soldiers did. Vacant stares came readily here too, especially when romantic views of the Viet Cong were heard. It was best to avoid the whole subject. And avoiding the subject – avoiding the very word Vietnam – was what Americans wanted. For veterans, the war wasn't a political issue, it was the most meaningful and formative period of their lives. Education there had been more important than all the years of family and school had been. It had to be put away or denied, except for an early appreciation of irony and tragedy. Nagging the minds of many was a sense of having broken faith by losing America's first war.¹⁴

Not everyone felt malaise. A fragmented country could hardly respond to defeat in a homogeneous way. Many opponents of the war celebrated the fall of Saigon and congratulated themselves for their part. One study of the movement ends by describing a V-V Day celebration:

[A]nti-war activists shed tears of joy and relief. "It was a moment that many thought would never come," the radical *Guardian* newspaper observed. "Vietnam has won. And so have we." More than fifty thousand people filled Sheep Meadow in Central Park on May 11 to celebrate the war's end. Colorful streamers and gigantic balloons reflected the festive mood of the crowd, bathed by spring sunshine. A large banner on the speakers' platform proclaiming THE WAR IS OVER was flanked by huge pictures of the 1970 Kent State killings. Many of the celebrants hugged each other. Some reflected on the countless meetings and demonstrations of the past ten years. "There's lots of lumps in lots of throats," one said. "It's unbelievable." But it was true.¹⁵

¹⁴ Pertinent veteran literature includes Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1977); Tim O'Brien, *If I Die in a Combat Zone*; Gustav Hasford, *The Short-Timers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); Al Santoli, *Everything We Had: An Oral History of the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House, 1981). See also Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1997), pp. 177-222; Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Atheneum, 1994).

¹⁵ Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 577-78.

Defeat would lead to a new day of genuine freedom and democracy, a society rid of hypocrisy, conformity, racism, militarism, and other burdens of the past. Others, not so politically engaged or even inclined toward social thinking, didn't feel malaise either. They too saw an opening. The war had freed them from rituals, mummery, and illusions of the old order that had been long out of date but continued to impose a dreary regimen. They got a green light. Life became a festival of leisure, consumption, and pleasure. Anomie can look that way.

The New Family

The family's sanctity, authority, formative nature, and sense of common purpose declined. Parental authority, like every form of authority, deflated and there was less continuity between generations. Nor was the family a center of emotional warmth. By their early teens children lived in a distinct and often antagonistic world of popular culture. Parents could no longer assert decisive influences on children in their late teens.

Parents, especially fathers, enjoyed an infusion of prestige after 1945. They were part of a system that had proven itself. The opposite took place with Vietnam.¹⁶ Parental authority was the most immediate and localized part of the system responsible for the deception, repression, and failure. The "normal" family holds some dark secret: alcoholism, abuse of some sort, or a pattern of neuroses that might be instilled in children. Young people felt more informed and sophisticated than elders trapped in old ways. The media began to depict paternal authority as arrogant and insensitive, hypocritical and bigoted, uneducated and chauvinistic. Studies of popular culture show parental authority has become secondary or even peripheral to the main story of children or teens living in a world of their own, evading or outwitting parents, and freeing themselves of their elders' fears and prejudices. Parents are of little use in solving problems. The answer lies within.¹⁷

Traditional roles of women as only mothers and housewives were changing for years. The world wars brought women into the workforce and postwar prosperity further acquainted them with opportunities outside

¹⁶ See Edward Shils, "American Society and the War in Indochina," in Anthony Lake, ed, *The Legacy of Vietnam: The War, American Society and the Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), pp. 40-65.

¹⁷ See S Robert Lichter, Linda S Lichter, and Stanley Rothman, *Watching Television: What Television Tells Us about Our Lives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991), pp. 80-104; Paul C Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 83-90.

the home. Nonetheless, there was still a cultural current against independence. Vietnam put the assumption of male superiority on trial and found it guilty. Prior to the verdict, many young women were active in the antiwar movement which despite its endorsement of equality and change, had the same patriarchal assumptions of the rest of the country. Resentful, many women left for a new cause. Organizational skills, political styles, and energies were redeployed into a movement which seeing the crisis of beliefs and openness to change, became more assertive and more effective.¹⁸

The idea of manhood changed. The term had long denoted control or repression of emotions, superiority over women, and expertise in a form of violence (war service, contact sports, hunting). Inclination to use force, unwillingness to compromise, and certainty of judgment were prominent in political and military leaders. Popular culture pressed home the message of sharing decisions, compromising, avoiding force, and trying to understand emotions.¹⁹ A new generation of social thinkers reevaluated the function of the family. It was the nuclear family that transmitted the values essential to the military and corporations. The family instilled the infallibility and providentially-ordained nature of institutions and values. It imposed an exaggerated form of discipline that stifled creativity and limited life choices.²⁰

Marriage lost sacredness. From the late-forties to the mid-sixties, divorce rates were stable, between 1966 and 1977 they doubled.²¹ Obtaining a divorce became easier – many were uncontested. Some states no

¹⁸ Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), pp. 203-37; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), pp. 362-76; Ruth Rosen, "The Day They Buried Traditional Womanhood," in D Michael Shafer, ed, *The Legacy: The Vietnam War in the American Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), pp. 233-61. On discontent with women's roles and radical ferment in Russia following the defeat in the Crimean War (1856) see Barbara Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹⁹ See Kay M Tooley, "Johnny, I Hardly Knew Ye: Toward Revision of the Theory of Male Psychosexual Development," in Arlene and Jerome H Skolnick, eds, *Family in Transition: Rethinking Marriage, Sexuality, Child Rearing, and Family Organization* Third Edition (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), pp. 194-204; Mirra Komarovsky, "Cultural Contradictions and Sex Roles: The Masculine Case," in the Skolnicks, eds, *Family in Transition*, pp. 205-16; Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman, *Watching Television*, pp. 80-104.

²⁰ See Dana Mack, *The Assault on Parenthood: How Our Culture Undermines the Family* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), pp. 29-53; Sar A Levitan and Richard S Belous, *What's Happening to the American Family?* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 7.

²¹ National divorce rates from *Vital Statistics of the United States*, Volume III, *Marriage and Divorce*, US Department of Health and Human Services (1986), pp. 2-5; Levitan and Belous, *The American Family*, pp. 28-33; Theodore Caplow, et al, *Middletown Families: Fifty Years of Change and Continuity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 16.

longer required evidence of irremediable damage. Marriage became dating taken to a higher stage. No longer bolstered by familial and community expectations, vows lacked binding force. They no longer fit in a society open to change, accepting of transience, and uncomfortable with commitment. Marriage is a contract that both parties can, with a moderate amount of effort and expense, terminate.²²

The reduced strength of the family has attained the semblance of normalcy and become legitimized by new generations of sociologists. They argue that the family in America has always been undergoing change, the “traditional family” never existed except in the minds of television writers of the fifties, the family has always depended on government programs, work often mandated protracted familial separations, and abuse was rampant. They approve the transfer of functions to schools, the weakening of parental authority, the improvement in opportunities for women, and the claim that the creativity of children is now stimulated.²³

The Eclipse of Community

Vietnam had limited but important effects on local communities, perhaps because they were so profoundly changed since mid-century. Mobilization for the world war scattered people across the country. Community gave way to areas with transient populations or clusters of people with little common engagement. Residential areas lost the moral pressures that thriving communities exerted.

Local authorities suffered loss of prestige and credibility in the seventies, along with those in Washington. With growing cynicism, it was widely believed, sometimes with good reason but often not, that notables kept their sons out of the service while those of the less fortunate were inducted. The impact of a boy's death was more pronounced in small towns than elsewhere. Word spread through neighbors, kin, and former classmates, making it more poignantly felt than in less closely-knit suburbs and cities. Local police attempted to

²² See Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Riane Tennenhaus Eisler, *Dissolution: No-Fault Divorce, Marriage, and the Future of Women* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977). Eisler provides an appendix entitled “Divorce Checklist.”

²³ The late Christopher Lasch skillfully traces the decline of the family in the last hundred years in *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (New York: WW Norton, 1977). For debunkers of the old family see John R Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms With America's Changing Families* (New York: Basic Books, 1998); Viki Wagner, ed, *The Family in America: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego, Calif: Greenhaven Press, 1992).

keep a lid on things by harassing people with long hair and anyone who stood up to the system, suggesting to many that the decaying system had to maintain itself through force. The spirit of the times brought a wave of investigations into local government. Many localities were thought of as rotten boroughs where local big shots were above the law. Local tribunals looked for a Watergate right there in the hometown. Generational conflicts, passions, and incivility, plagued public life. Debate was quarrelsome, consensus elusive.²⁴

Themes from the twenties reappeared as though Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson had come back. Small towns were cultural backwaters, bastions of bigotry, moribund forms of social organization best left to old folk. Movement was the order of the day. Young people fled from the Babbitts who supported the war while making money hand over fist. It was better to keep moving and create a new life somewhere else – California, a Colorado commune, or a bohemian district in a different part of the country. A neighbor's reprimand, a disapproving stare, a letter from a citizens association, and sometimes a cop's rough hand once preserved community standards. Authority and tradition fell apart and anything unconventional and rebellious had appeal. Norms and conformity were archaic concepts, invocations of a discredited past that no longer carried authority. Enforcement could no longer rely on informal pressures from the citizenry. An attempt to exert moral pressure on someone was likely ignored. It might lead to an obscene reply, law suit, or a punch.²⁵

Social control became the responsibility of police and courts – rational-legal mechanisms that had less prestige and were unable to assume the burden.²⁶ An exaggerated form of individualism arose that saw social norms as external impositions that had to be fended off. There was neither the opportunity nor the will to find an agreeable middle between conformity and anomie. People had to learn to tolerate more and more or withdraw as much as possible.²⁷ Feelings of trust and mutual involvement fell away. One could no longer look to another person at a lunch counter and sense much in common. Participation in community life declined. Voter turnout

²⁴ Lynn Eden, *Crisis in Watertown: The Polarization of an American Community* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972).

²⁵ On the decline of informal social controls see Mack, *Assault on Parenthood*, pp. 18-19.

²⁶ Samuel P Huntington notes the increased resort to litigation during this period in his *American Politics: The Promise of Disbarmony* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 1981), p. 183. See also Bryan Wilson, "Secularization: The Inherited Model," in Phillip E. Hammond, ed., *The Sacred in a Secular Age: Toward Revision in the Scientific Study of Religion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 14-15.

²⁷ Christopher Lasch notes this retreat in *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: WW Norton, 1984), pp. 60-64.

went down, as did attendance at town meetings, PTAs, churches, and the like. Community life as described by de Tocqueville and the Lynds was all but gone.²⁸

Ersatz communities arose, filling a human need but never becoming meaningful. The antiwar movement was itself a community. There were shared views, strong social control mechanisms, and common aspirations, activities, and symbols. But it was ad hoc, predicated on college life and the war, both of which came to an end. The commune phenomenon flourished and a few hearty bastions notwithstanding, it too declined. Communards learned that scratching out a living from the soil was not the idyllic lifestyle once imagined and that their upbringings might've instilled a preference for careers and creature comforts after all.

Pseudo-communities cropped up, one of which was the cult of citizen-band radios whose devotees felt a sense of kinship with fellow enthusiasts as they chatted with each other and eluded speed traps. Oddly enough, but befitting the time, CBers usually remained anonymous, preferring pseudonyms when communicating with putative good buddies, few of whom they ever met. Another community of anonymous strangers was based on a shared fondness for particular television programs – an irony of immense proportions. Television, which did so much in the fifties to do away with evening get-togethers and create atomized suburban life, now became a basis for communities as shallow as the programs that inspired them.²⁹

The seventies saw a wave of cults, as people, especially young ones, immersed themselves into total organizations. Cults mandated complete commitment, often requiring members to give up all possessions, embrace their ideology and lifestyle, and revere their leaders. Many cults embraced eastern mysticism and rural folk rituals. Life was joyful and ecstatic, a celebration of a satisfying communal life, which members found a

²⁸ On declining community life, though not necessarily caused by the war, see Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone, Revisited," *The Responsive Community* (Spring, 1995), pp. 18-33. William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in America's Homes and Schools* (New York: Free Press, 1995), pp. 223-46.

²⁹ Morris Philipson imparted this observation to me long ago. On ersatz communities, what Bellah et al call "lifestyle enclaves," see Robert N Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 72-75; Putnam, "Bowling Alone, Revisited." Robert Nisbet saw the trend much earlier. See *The Quest for Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969 [1953]), p. 31.

wondrous alternative to the world outside.³⁰ In many senses, cults are authentic communities. However, whereas traditional communities had been integrated into a larger American whole and instilled beliefs found across the country, cults see themselves as refuges from the country and stress separation from if not contempt for it. If there was any larger whole with which they identified, it was mankind, the cosmos, or something else abstract and spiritual.

Clubs, associations, and organizations proliferated. Support for a sports team, participation in a leisure club, or sending a check to an activist group gives the feel of community but without personal involvement. Social and political causes lure members with appeals to commitment and common effort, though membership calls for little more than paying dues and displaying a decal. There are no common efforts or binding moral ties, though the illusion is comforting.³¹

A more substantive form of community developed among the aging population. Many became detached from kinship ties during the forties and the following horizontal mobility. Children no longer see it their responsibility to take parents into their dwellings. Raised in the old urban or small-town communities and tied by the experience of depression and war, they develop community. Together they face crime, infirmity, and the inevitable.³²

Progress

America's story was the rise of science and innovation, the growth of freedom and justice, expanding prosperity and well-being, better lives, and spreading civilization around the world. Possibilities were limitless. When war came, it was the occasion to help less fortunate lands and place them on the proper path. After 1945 and into the

³⁰ See Eileen Barker, "New Religious Movements: Yet Another Great Awakening?" in Hammond, ed., *The Sacred in a Secular Age*, pp. 26-57; Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968); Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1972); Richard Fairfield, *Communes USA: A Personal Tour* (Baltimore, Md: Penguin, 1972).

³¹ The study of community has fallen significantly from its hey-day around World War One. Useful studies include Putnam, "Bowling Alone, Revisited;" Eden, *Crisis in Watertown*; MP Baumgartner, *The Moral Order of a Suburb* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 72-100. Bellah et al's *Habits of the Heart* is set in a period of lost community and the absence of shared values. See also the late Christopher Lasch's comments in *Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: WW Norton, 1995), pp. 92-128.

³² See Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Unexpected Community: Portrait of an Old Age Subculture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973).

mid-sixties, Americans thought that politically and economically the world was destined to become like them. America determined to land on the moon before the end of the decade, and did.

As Americans set foot on the moon, faith in progress was failing. Confidence that world events would follow the American path fell apart. It was a conceit, an ethnocentric arrogance, a fairy tale – folklore in which only children and rubes believed. Life lacked meaning and purpose. Irony and sarcasm abounded. The novels of Kurt Vonnegut which stressed senselessness and mordancy became popular, as did the surrealism of Escher and Dali which showed illogical continuities, meaningless cycles, and visual absurdities.

Science was sowing the seeds of global destruction. The quest for material improvement had become an end in itself that came at the expense of creative and spiritual aspects of life. Hard work was once the means for bettering one's self and improving the family's lot. Now, it was the denial of the self – becoming a cog in the machine. Two films of Elia Kazan, one made in 1960, the other only nine years later, are telling. *America, America* (1960) portrays the struggle of a young Greek to get into the US and work hard to bring his family over. *The Arrangement* (1969) centers on the aging immigrant's son, now middle-aged. His work is lucrative but unsatisfying, his family has come undone. Breaking the convention of a happy ending, it ends with the father's death and the son's thoughts of suicide. In *Save the Tiger* (1973), a businessman must choose between letting his once profitable business fail or torch it and collect the insurance. As he wrestles with the dilemma, he's haunted by images of guys in his unit who died in the war.

There was little faith in government or anything. The future was bleak, something to be feared. There were parallels in Europe after the Great War. The nations once prided themselves on their advances. Industry made great strides, bringing new wealth and opportunity. Middle classes arose and working classes were better off. Reason was triumphing over superstition. The arts flourished and with a few notable exceptions like Conrad and Hardy, they conveyed confidence and optimism. The Great War ended all that. Postwar culture was filled with nostalgia, a search for lost times, and bleak depictions of the future. A British film, *Things To Come*, foretold of another great war. Fearsome new weapons rain down on cities from immense aircraft, resulting in horrific civilian casualties and the virtual end of civilization. The German film *Metropolis* depicts, in dark expressionist images, a bleak, hyper-rationalized world in which industrial elites rule over a dehumanized working class.

Populist demagogues, industrial tyrants, and malevolent scientists engage in a power struggle. Though both films end in a contrived resolution, they left a sense of foreboding.

America paralleled this decades later. Continuity with the past weakened. Books, magazine articles, and social thinkers proclaimed the end of a charmed past. The economy was no longer dynamic, technology had reached its limits, military spending undercut competitiveness with other countries, especially Germany and Japan whose products were everywhere. In pockets of traditional folk religion, there were dire predictions of Armageddon and the Second Coming. Secular thought was no more optimistic. Pollution had reached a point of no return; human and other life forms were doomed. Economic stagnation would lead to internal strife and breakdown. The sun was setting on America.³³

Pessimism manifested itself in films, replacing the optimism and light-heartedness of the early-sixties. The future is dark and foreboding. *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) depicted a future in which norms had broken down completely. The night is ruled by gangs engaging in random violence. Youths in their early teens have sex with strangers. Attempts are made to hold society together through repression and behavioral modification, but neither works. *Soylent Green* (1973) shows an urban dystopia where food shortages are solved in a dreadful manner. In *Blade Runner* (1982), Japan and Germany dominate the country – the post-1945 world turned upside down.

Uncertain of the present, fearful of the future, many people looked wistfully to the past, appreciating the past's charm, innocence, and simplicity. *American Graffiti* (1973) looked back only ten years but the concerns and usages of 1962 were as distant as those of Huck Finn. It was seen alternately as nostalgia or satire. *The Way We Were* (1973) remembered the romance and unity of the forties. *Gone With the Wind* first played to Depression audiences but was rereleased in the early seventies.³⁴ *The Last Picture Show* (1971) gave an ambivalent image of small-town life, ending with the death of a beloved patriarchal character and the closing of the community movie

³³ See Marvin Harris, *America Now: The Anthropology of a Changing Culture* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981); Paul Blumberg, *Inequality in an Age of Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Paul Erdman, *The Coming Collapse of America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980); Rufus C Miles, Jr, *Awaking from the American Dream: The Social and Political Limits to Growth* (New York: Universe, 1976). A popular religiously-inspired view of imminent apocalypse is Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1970) in which a nuclear Armageddon (foretold in the Bible) signals the return of Jesus.

³⁴John Dower notes the book was translated into Japanese after 1945 and enjoyed considerable readership there. See *Embracing Defeat*, pp. 527-28.

house, marking the end of the past and the beginning of an uncertain future.³⁵ A popular song observed America was looking for Joe DiMaggio, but Joltin' Joe had left and gone away.

There was a resurgence of World War Two movies (*Patton, MacArthur, Midway, A Bridge Too Far*) that's initially puzzling as there was little respect for the military and the quest for revenge in Southeast Asia had yet to make its screen debut. The key to the genre's popularity is probably the nature of the events they depict. A country rent by uncertainty, disunity, and ambiguity over good and evil, looked back on a time of consensus, order, and moral certainty. Amid the confusion, this had considerable appeal – and more importantly, we won.

Twilight of Authority

Success in war makes authority more legitimate and endows it with sacredness. The zenith of Athenian greatness came after victories over Persia and Sparta. Roman generals from Scipio to Justinian won great prestige for themselves as well as for the state and all its pillars. English nobles won honors at Agincourt, Minden, and Waterloo. Prussian force of arms repeatedly legitimized a military-bureaucratic order and also a range of authority from harsh Junker landowners to the stern fathers of the household. Soviet authority, too, won legitimacy – perhaps for the first time – during the Great Patriotic War against Nazi invaders.³⁶

Defeat, devastating casualties, and loss of international standing delegitimize authority and loosen society. After losing the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) Athenians no longer saw their city-state as unique and enchanting. They looked to the virtues of other polities, an orientation they called “cosmopolitanism.” Prussia had to mollify its unruly subjects with political and social reform after Napoleon bested its army, as did Russia following the Crimean War. France suffered a series of losses in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and lurched from one political crisis to another. Imperial Germany disintegrated in 1918. Authority was reviled as a curse from the past. Artists such as George Grosz depicted notables as grotesque swine, an act that would have

³⁵ See Christopher Lash, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: WW Norton, 1991), pp. 82-119.

³⁶ Donald Kagan, *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy: The Triumph of Vision in Leadership* (New York: Touchstone, 1991); JB Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army, 31 BC - AD 235* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 120-56; Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Gerhard Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany* (Princeton Junction, NJ: The Scholar's Bookshelf, 1988 [1954]), pp. 81-84.

lead to imprisonment a few years earlier. Youth became disrespectful toward authority and gravitated toward nihilism and groups of the far left and right.

Britain emerged from the Second World War on the winning side but with its social order weakened. It had its finest hour and contributed significantly to the Third Reich's downfall. It could no longer claim to be a great power. Concern over reduced prestige was expressed in the wartime lament that GIs were overpaid, oversexed, and over here. (GIs retorted that British men were underpaid, undersexed, and under Ike.) Britain was a distant third in the great alliance and the country soon realized it could no longer rule its empire. Aristocracy and monarchy became vestiges of a bygone era. Youths were "angry young men," hostile to their country's tradition and eager to follow trends from across the Atlantic.

Elites Discredited A limited war far away nonetheless hit American authority hard. Official statements were filled with euphemisms, half-truths, and sometimes lies. Popular books criticized military and political leaders from the early years of advising to the fall. The release of the Pentagon Papers (1971) made it clear the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, the justification for deepening involvement, didn't take place as claimed. The government deceived the public to get a blank check.³⁷ The government gathered information on opponents. Dossiers and photographs filled file cabinets. The movement was infiltrated by agents-provocateurs, illegally wiretapped, and subjected to dirty tricks. The government set up pro-war organizations to orchestrate public opinion. Government lies and deceptions were so widespread that the official Pentagon history of the media during the war concluded that news reporting was more accurate than the government.³⁸

Jargon and euphemism enjoyed a golden age. An army operation code-named "Masher" was deemed off-putting and given a cheerful name, "White Wing."³⁹ Unauthorized air strikes were "protective reaction strikes." When "search and destroy" seemed too harsh, "clear and hold" was created. Burning villages was part of

³⁷ Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly, 1972); David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1972); *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of the United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam* Senator Gravel Edition, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); Townsend Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention* (New York: David McKay, 1973).

³⁸ William C Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1988), p. 388.

³⁹ See Guenter Lewy, *America and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 57.

“pacification” and Viet Cong cadre were “terminated with extreme prejudice.” Though in opposition by the late sixties, congress fared little better. It was an assembly of impotent critics who in their moment of courage, repealed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution but kept money flowing to the war.

There was a resurgence of what Richard Hofstadter called a “paranoid style” of politics. Conspiracy rumors spread by word of mouth, through the cinema, and by politicians. Corporations led the country into war to reap bigger profits, the military-industrial complex pulled strings behind the scenes, minorities were disproportionately exposed to combat to reduce their numbers.⁴⁰ LBJ’s family made a fortune shipping materiel to Vietnam. The government maintained a secret system of internment camps across the country in case of unrest. The Apollo moon landing in 1969 was a hoax. Oil company execs, successors to the railroad barons in popular demonology, were villains, creating artificial shortages to gouge the public and suppressing production of a car that got a hundred miles a gallon.⁴¹ When oil was found off the Vietnamese coast, people saw the real reason for the war. Two films of the mid-seventies, *Executive Action* (1973) and *The Parallax View* (1974) depicted the CIA and business elites involved in assassinating progressive politicians. It was widely believed that the CIA assassinated John Kennedy after he decided to withdraw from Vietnam.⁴²

In 1964, twenty-two percent of respondents said they trusted the national government “only some of the time;” eight years later, forty-five percent gave that response. Voter turnout in national elections dropped from over sixty percent to fifty percent. It was much lower when only congressional seats are at stake.⁴³ Corporate leaders were part of the military-industrial complex and adepts in the machinations of government. Scientists created instruments of death. The criminal justice system muzzled lawful protest, failed to bring war criminals to

⁴⁰ On popular culture’s depiction of authority from the early sixties see Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture*, pp. 148-50; the Lichtmans and Rothman, *Watching America*, pp. 115-24, 260-86.

⁴¹ Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), pp. 656-69.

⁴² See a work by former SDS leader Carl Oglesby, *The Yankee and Cowboy War: Conspiracies from Dallas to Watergate* (Kansas City, Mo: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1976). Alfred Döblin notes the prevalence of conspiracy theories in post-1918 Germany in his novel *A People Betrayed*.

⁴³ Samuel P Huntington, “The United States,” in Michael J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 81; Huntington, *American Politics*, p. 201-2; Ruy A Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1992); Norman Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 270-88.

justice, and enforced an unfair system of conscription. A generation of young reporters looked everywhere for another My Lai and Watergate.⁴⁴ Members of congress, police chiefs, and any public official had their lives scrutinized as never before. The discrediting process became a lark, almost pleasurable.⁴⁵

A Farewell to Arms The military became seen as arrogant and inept. Heavy-handed methods led to needless casualties that increased communist support. Incidents of torture, rape, death cards, and mutilated corpses became known. It was difficult to excuse them as media sensationalism or isolated cases, though most were the latter. Military discipline suffered, morale dwindled, and desertion climbed. Stories of mutinies and fraggings made it seem the military was on the verge of collapse. Stateside events added to the problem. A Green Beret murdered his family and attempted to blame it on drug-crazed hippies. NCO clubs were investigated for kickbacks. Cost over-runs plagued military contracts. Then there was My Lai.⁴⁶

Even in moderate parts of the nation, the military's prestige diminished. It was a cold, impersonal machine, devouring resources and lives, living in air-conditioned luxury while the troops humped through jungles. In 1966, sixty-two percent of respondents expressed "a great deal of confidence" in the military. Five year later, only twenty-seven percent felt that way.⁴⁷ The military became the focus of racial and social concerns. It was widely but incorrectly believed that minorities and the poor suffered disproportionately high casualties.⁴⁸ The military no longer had colorful figures such as "Bull" Halsey, "Lightning Joe" Collins, or "Howlin' Mad" Smith, whose plain speaking made for public relations coups during World War Two. Most generals of the

⁴⁴ Samuel P Huntington, "The Democratic Distemper," *Public Interest* 41 (1975): 9-38; James L. Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 165-70, 175-81.

⁴⁵ See Huntington, *American Politics*, pp. 188-96. On similar processes in France after World War One see Weber, *The Hollow Years*, pp. 129-38.

⁴⁶ Michael S Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1950s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 321-23. Cf Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940* (New York: WW Norton, 1968 [1940]).

⁴⁷ Huntington, "The United States," p. 83. As the war wound down, the military enjoyed a measure of increased respect but did not reattain former levels.

⁴⁸ The most authoritative research was done by Charles C Moskos, Jr, "The American Combat Soldier in Vietnam," *Journal of Social Issues* 31 (1975): 25-38. He found black casualties slightly *below* their numbers in the population. The reason for this, paradoxically, might have been racial obstacles to positions such as platoon and company commanders and pilots, who took disproportionately high casualties.

Vietnam period were dully bureaucratic, unable to capture the imagination of the public. Exceptions didn't help. One brigade commander commented that he didn't like war but liked "to see the arms and legs fly." He sent Christmas cards picturing mangled corpses with the inscription, *Peace on Earth*. Though hardly representative of the army, in a period not given to cautious reflection, he came to embody a callous, deranged caste.⁴⁹

Average soldiers, including draftees and national guardsmen, suffered from the deflation of military prestige. GIs once wore their uniforms off-base proudly. The public honored them, picked up their tab in restaurants, gave them rides when they thumbed home. Young soldiers walked down main street the envy of their peers, the pride of the community. By the early seventies, servicemen were mocked and insulted. They kept their uniforms back in footlockers and tried to blend in the civilian world as best their close-cropped hair allowed.

Films of the seventies were hard on the military. The movie version of Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1970) had obvious parallels to the war in Vietnam: insensitive and arrogant leaders, a profitable working relationship between military and business, and a war that dragged on. Perhaps best known were the film and television series *MASH*, situated in Korea but commenting on Vietnam. The establishment is brutal, arrogant, and incompetent, obsessed with communism, nurses, and body counts. Counterpoised to the military stand the young irreverent doctors. Sporting long hair and living in what seems more like a college dorm than a BOQ, they outwit the old guard at every turn.⁵⁰ *Johnny Got His Gun*, a tale of a horribly maimed soldier written in the pessimistic aftermath of World War One, became a film late in 1971. A few years later, *All Quiet on the Western Front* was remade for a public more in tune with post-1918 dismay than post-1945 celebration.

After a period of studied avoidance, Vietnam films debuted. The protagonist typically becomes disillusioned by experiences and breaks from the military. In *Apocalypse Now* (1979), a young captain, after a voyage of self-discovery, cuts off communication with superiors. In *Platoon* (1986), a young soldier kills a sadistic

⁴⁹ Popular anti-military works from the period include, James A Donovan, *Militarism, U.S.A.* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1970); Adam Yarmolinsky, *The Military Establishment: Its Impact on American Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). Note the backgrounds of some authors. Donovan was a career marine officer. The introduction to his book was written by Daniel M Shoup. Yarmolinsky was an assistant secretary of defense in the Johnson administration. For similar dynamics in interwar France, see Weber, *The Hollow Years*, pp. 15-18.

⁵⁰ On popular culture's depiction of the military see the Lichtmans and Rothman, *Watching America*, pp. 268-86.

sergeant before getting out on a dustoff. The veterans in *The Deer Hunter* (1978) are permanently maimed or compulsively repeating brushes with death. One sees the destructiveness of his upbringing and tosses away a once-cherished hunting rifle – a cleansing ritual that allows him to become more human and fit into civilian life.

The American Ideal The country's name "America" was long infused with sacredness. It came to sound antiquated and gimmicky. Phrases such as "liberty and justice for all" and "the American dream" and "the land of the free" were seldom used, except with irony – a literary device, as Paul Fussell notes, that finds greater expression after myths are undermined.⁵¹ The idea of America was once an amalgam of emotions, myths, traditions, and beliefs. America was an ongoing process from the colonial past to the present.

Fewer could still believe that America stood for goodness and acted nobly, providence inspired its leaders, and the past had a moral influence on the present. Defeat was as undermining as learning of a spouse's infidelity. Trust, commitment, and affection suffered. The angry mood searched for the cause of the debacle. The military and politicians were obvious answers, but it wasn't just a blunder by a handful of power elites. There was something deeper. Literature, films, and public discussions looked into the past. America was a botched civilization, a sick society, flawed from its inception. The frontier had indeed formed us but not in the ways Turner and Parkman professed. It made us violent and expansionist.⁵²

Puritanism imposed simplistic notions of good and evil and a zeal to stamp out wickedness in all its guises, from witches and adulterers to nonconformists and progressives. The economic system put constant pressure to expand, seize and exploit resources, and meddle abroad. The term "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant" once referred to esteemed figures but it became a term of abuse. WASPs were economic royalists who ruled the country for their own benefit. They were behind the scenes manipulators, an arrogant power elite that restricted country clubs and political participation.

⁵¹ *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 7-18.

⁵² Early popular indictments include Norman Mailer's allegorical hunting novel *Why Are We in Vietnam?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967); Richard J Barnet, *Intervention and Revolution: The United States in the Third World* (New York: Mentor, 1968). For parallel dynamics see Friedrich Meinecke's look into the Prussian roots of the Third Reich in *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections* Trans by Sidney B Fay (Boston: Beacon, 1963 [1950]).

Social scientists as well as the general public long believed that American beliefs and institutions were models for the world. In some respects, this was the legacy of Puritan myths of America as the shiny City on the Hill that would bring light to darker parts of the globe. Embellished with social science models and statistics, the idea of America as a model reigned in the academy and Washington.⁵³ It was stood on its head. The United States was responsible for damaging foreign economies and backing compliant dictators. Political and economic development in the Third World depended on breaking free of the fetters of US corporations, aid, and hegemony.⁵⁴

Religion and Social Norms

Though church attendance remained high after 1945, religion declined as a meaningful part of life. Consumer lifestyles competed with moral strictures and got the upper hand. Science nicked away at religious explanations and the sense of divine presence in the world. Vietnam had ambivalent effects on religion. It weakened the appeal of traditional religions but also led to new forms of religious experience and compelled many to find spiritual refuge.

Religion and Defeat There's been no state religion in America. One rendered unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's and so on. Still, there are important connections between religion and state. They forged a working partnership during the Cold War. Many religious authorities, especially Catholics and Southern Baptists, preached the evils of communism and the need to fight it around the world. Secular politicians saw a crusade against atheistic forces. True enough, however religious figures figured highly in the antiwar movement. Martin Luther King, William Sloane Coffin, and others argued that the war was immoral. Religious figures were present at every rally, adding insight, respectability, and moderation.

⁵³ Important works in this field include Walt W Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1958); Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," *American Political Science Review* 53 (1959): 69-105; Talcott Parsons, "Evolutionary Universals in Society," *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964): 339-357.

⁵⁴ See Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review, 1967); *Lumpenbourgeoisie, Lumpenddevelopment; Dependence, Class, and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979).

Another explanation lies in the problems facing religion in times of catastrophe or upheaval. People wonder if God exists, why do disasters occur, why did God allow this to happen? This question of theodicy arises throughout history and isn't always answered well. More important though, is religion's integration with traditional authority, ways of life, and conventions. Religion, as Bellah argued, was integral to American institutions since the Republic's founding. God surely guided the nation through wars and crises and blessed it with abundance and greatness. Americans no longer felt guidance. The idea of a charmed nation was one of many delusions. The post-Vietnam climate of cynicism and nihilism undermined faith.⁵⁵ Religion was of no use in dealing with modern complexities, especially foreign policy. More importantly, religion taught Americans to search out and destroy evil, root and branch: witches, savages, communists, and nonconformists. Religion legitimized the conquest of the West, the forcible conversion of the unwilling, and the spread of American might.

Disaffection did not necessarily lead to agnosticism or atheism. Most religions adapted to change. Dietary laws and Sabbath observances became less strict. Interpretation of right and wrong and key texts were allowed. Churches were more lenient in annulling marriages. Sermons became friendlier and less scolding. It was essential in a time of transition to adapt to the new spirit or risk losing membership. New forms of spirituality popped up. The first, already noted, were the cults which imposed strict discipline. Most new forms, however, were loose and undemanding, drawing eclectically from many sources, especially eastern mysticism and ancient cosmologies. Right and wrong were not dogmatically differentiated. There was room for individual interpretation. The answer lies within. Doctrines had an easy-going quality. Indeed, that was a selling point.⁵⁶ They celebrated the individual, the self, and exulted in new freedom and a holistic relationship to the world. It

⁵⁵ See Robert N Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 139-51; Sydney E Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 1091-96. See also Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (New York: Scribner's, 1949), pp. 48-67.

⁵⁶ Bellah et al note this trend toward personal forms of spirituality in *Habits of the Heart*; Bryan Wilson, "Secularization: The Inherited Model," pp. 19-20; Robert Nisbet saw it beginning as a consequence of declining community. See *The Quest for Community*, p. 31. Tom Wolfe noted the beginnings of this amorphous spirituality in his *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, pp. 125-49.

was just what many Americans were looking for – a nontraditional, undemanding, egocentric spirituality. Older forms of religion relaxed.⁵⁷

Between 1963 and 1976, the percentage of Americans who believed in the literal truth of the Bible dropped from sixty-five percent to thirty-eight percent.⁵⁸ Parables and the lives of the martyrs no longer guided life. God no longer figured in the unfolding of history. Perhaps most importantly, religion could no longer provide a widely-recognized standard of right and wrong. The country was too fragmented to form any consensus based on moral values and authoritative interpreters. Determining right and wrong was increasingly a personal choice; disapproval could be dismissed as simply someone else's opinion or an attempt to impose values. As two observers of the country's changing norms put it, "Any attempt to articulate common beliefs and practices is an infringement on individual freedom."⁵⁹ Americans could look within and switch religions to find a moral message in keeping with the day. Alternately, they could find an unguent and supportive moral message in popular psychology, social philosophy, or in personal speculations.⁶⁰

Traditional Americans had been governed internally by a pattern of beliefs and norms – habits of the heart. Embedded in folklore, homilies, schoolbooks, and family stories, they constituted a moral order governing individual behavior, a consensus on matters of right and wrong, based on eternal truths. No longer bolstered by community pressures and religiousness, norms had been relaxing throughout the fifties and sixties. With the decline in respect for authority and conventions of the late sixties, the moral order weakened. Family and

⁵⁷ On declining religiosity see Lasch, *Revolt of the Elites*, pp. 197-246; Stephen L Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 3-101; Barry A Kosmin and Seymour P Lachman, *One Nation under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993); Ronald B Flowers, *Religion in Strange Times: The 1960s and 1970s* (Mercer University Press, 1984).

⁵⁸ William G Mayer, *The Changing American Mind: How and Why American Public Opinion Changed between 1960 and 1988* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1992), p. 31.

⁵⁹ Robert N Bellah and Phillip E Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 36.

⁶⁰ Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp. 181-88; Robert D Heslep, *Moral Education for Americans* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1995), pp. 1-2; James Lincoln Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 231-33.

community pressures, national leaders and symbols, and numerous religious authorities, could no longer preserve the moral order or create a new one.⁶¹

Vanity Fair The nation was never without greed, selfishness, and eccentricity. Moderating pressures restrained much of them but began to disappear in the late-sixties. Consumption and self-absorption became reigning values. People faced a new world with neither meaning nor coherence and like F Scott Fitzgerald's generation that saw all gods dead and all wars over, they went for all they could. Another green light had been given. Like young Europeans of the twenties, they reveled in indulgence, as though in a cabaret mocking a fallen order.

The use of drugs proliferated. Experimentation was part of artistically-inclined subgroups like the Beats, and the early counterculture. They sought insight, inspiration, and spirituality. Drugs became routine parts of life – grasping for sensation, indulgence, and celebration of freedom. Marijuana became too common, heroin had unsavory lower-class connotations, and LSD was too debilitating for routine use. Cocaine became prestigious, the drug of choice among lawyers, stockbrokers, and other high-income groups. Faltering social sanctions allowed for more openness in drugs and their paraphernalia. Once sold only in head shops in counterculture areas, paraphernalia came to be sold in music shops and convenience stores. Shopkeepers were confident that the cops would look the other way, and they usually did.⁶²

Political involvement was frustrating and fruitless and many retreated into careerism, consumerism, and other forms of self-indulgence that arose in what Christopher Lasch called "the culture of narcissism."⁶³ They surrounded themselves with soft, undemanding religions that gave benediction to their lives or told them of greatness in past ones. They read and discussed popular psychology which assured them that they were all okay and getting better each day. Work had little to do with feelings of efficacy or providing a better life for children. It certainly no longer had its old religious significance of identifying the elect over the damned. Work became a

⁶¹ See Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), pp. 221-57; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Defining Deviancy Down," *The American Scholar* (1993): 245-61; Heslep, *Moral Education*, pp. 1-25.

⁶² Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America*, pp. 224-38.

⁶³ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978). See also his *The Minimal Self*, pp. 23-59.

means of self-aggrandizement or ascent to an enviable lifestyle. Marriage, largely devoid of commitment and sanctity, became a transitory coincidence of tastes in food, music, and sex – a contract of mutual gratification. Having a family meant lapsing into tradition, selling-out, or becoming like the parents. Fertility rates fell and remained low for over a decade.⁶⁴

The spirit of vanity ranges far and wide, continuing to dissociate people from a whole and past. Blue Laws once proscribed various forms of business on Sundays but by the mid-seventies they were disappearing. National holidays had once been solemn occasions when Americans recalled sacrifices in war and the remarkable ongoing process of their nation. Today, Veterans Day and Memorial Day might afford a fleeting glimpse of the meaning of tradition and valor but media coverage ensures the public doesn't dwell on it. Programs quickly switch from a wreath-laying ceremony somewhere or another to backyard barbecues and sporting events.⁶⁵ Dates that had once been emblazoned into the national psyche no longer live in infamy or anything else. For the better part of the century, the country vacillated between duty and leisure, between tradition and consumerism. The matter's settled. There is an omnipresent me and now.⁶⁶

After the Sexual Revolution The Puritan heritage meant strict sexual norms. Not all Americans were chaste innocents courting on the front porch and nervously looking forward to wedding nights but important changes have taken place. The Second World War brought long separations, sordid environments, and a sense of contingency that weakened sexual norms. Post-Vietnam society saw the dissolution of sexual norms among people under thirty or so, not only among those in the counterculture but in the mainstream as well. Old sexual

⁶⁴ *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (1997), p. 77; Levitan and Belous, *The American Family*, pp. 37-46.

⁶⁵ Cf W Lloyd Warner's look at Memorial Day rites in his *American Life: Dream and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964 [1953]), pp. 2-34. A Ranger colonel mordantly noted to me that for most people Memorial Day and Veterans Day are occasions for giving thanks no one in their family is in the military.

⁶⁶ See William Damon has made a valuable contribution with his *Greater Expectations*. Paul Fussell's *Class: A Guide through the American Status System* (New York: Summit, 1883), contains a satirical but useful exploration of American consumerism. See also Morris Janowitz, *The Reconstruction of Patriotism: Education for Civic Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) which though coming from a very different political perspective from Lasch's, has a similar concern with social trends away from senses of duty and obligation.

norms were as hollow as calls to the colors. Taboos became areas of exploration and creativeness. Sex became another consumer product, complete with an array of “how-to” books and accoutrements.⁶⁷

Along with changing norms came an attendant decline in the ability to enforce standards and laws. Nudity and profanity became standard in most feature films. Filmmakers avoided a “G” rating for fear it would hurt the box office.⁶⁸ There was acceptance of X-rated films and adult bookstores which formerly were confined to rundown blocks. They sprang up in business districts, suburbs, and small towns – even in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Community efforts to prevent the spread usually failed. People simply shrugged their shoulders. Few felt comfortable invoking old cries of danger to public morals and no one could dispute there was demand out there. Censorship lost out to market forces. Many welcomed a break with dour Puritan strictures.⁶⁹

Peter Bogdanovich captured the context of *Deep Throat*. “That grubby little porno film coupled with its miserable success could almost stand as evidence of the state of the country at that particular time of our lives. There is some deep self-revulsion at work that no amount of legislation is going to stop.”⁷⁰

Incivility and Violence Between impulse and action once stood an internal check. The decades following Vietnam saw its decline. Murder, assault, rape, battery, all skyrocketed. Depictions of violence in popular culture suggest veritable obsession. The public is fascinated by it and demands it in more and more “realistic” presentations. Inasmuch as the war led to widespread revulsion with violence and warfare, there’s paradox here. It might be suspected that news coverage of Vietnam showed napalm victims, summary executions, and scores of similar images and hence deserves a large measure of blame. However, these images led to revulsion and violent

⁶⁷ See Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America*, pp. 225-29; Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), p. 90. Jeffreys, who identifies herself as “a lesbian and a revolutionary feminist,” sees the sexual revolution as having made women more amenable to whatever men wished.

⁶⁸ Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of the Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975), pp. 294-304; Gregory D Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁶⁹ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 99-100.

⁷⁰ Peter Bogdanovich, *Time Pieces: Bogdanovich on the Movies, 1961-1985* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), p. 165. See also the Lichtmans and Rothman, *Watching America*, pp. 25-49; Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture*, pp. 150-52.

television content declined during the war.⁷¹ There was violence in the antiwar movement, in government efforts to stop it, as well as in the Weather Underground's terrorist campaign. Yet all in all, violence was an infrequent aspect of the movement and the destructiveness that there was – Days of Rage, Kent State, bombings – led to a sense things were getting out of hand and passions had to be controlled.

An important cause was the implosion of the moral order. Internal restraints were weakened and could no longer effectively govern behavior and intercede between impulse and action, instinct and deed, urge and crime. Commensurate with its decline came the ascendance of indulgence, less restrictive norms, incivility, and violence.⁷² The murder rate was fairly steady throughout the fifties and early sixties, but from 1965 to 1970 it increased thirty percent.⁷³ Reported rape went up over a hundred eighteen percent in the seventies.⁷⁴ Many crimes are impulsive, done at the spur of the moment, without a plan, without any calculation of potential costs. They're often senseless in terms of obtaining any end – merely a spree or the satisfaction of a sudden whim.

Life is plagued by incivility in public discourse, in stores, and on the road where angry exchanges occur daily.⁷⁵ Sporting events have become arenas for boorish behavior, on the field and in the stands. One stadium contains a courtroom to deal with unruly fans. Crowds roar their approval of fights, taunting, and needlessly hard hits. Sports segments on the local news devote a considerable portion of their limited time to fights and hard hits. Serious injuries have a temporary sobering effect but once the injured player is carted off (oddly, to polite applause), the Diocletian festival returns and the crowd points thumbs down.⁷⁶

In film and television, killing is presented as exciting – something to relish in slow-motion and from several angles. There was no dearth of violence in earlier days but there was a message attached. Killing Nazi soldiers, dangerous criminals, lawless gunslingers, and the like linked violence to proper authority and good

⁷¹ George Comstock et al, *Television and Human Behavior* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 72-74.

⁷² Collier, *The Rise of Selfishness in America*, pp. 258-59.

⁷³ Dept of Commerce, *Historical Abstracts of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Part I*, 1975, p. 414.

⁷⁴ Dept of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (1997), p. 205.

⁷⁵ See Tom Wolfe, *Radical Chic e3 Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970); Stephen Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morality, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

⁷⁶ Sissela Bok, *Mayhem: Violence as Public Entertainment* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1998), pp. 22-45.

triumphing over evil. Violence today is in the hands of unconventional figures, vigilantes, and average people in whom rage has built to the breaking point. It's something anyone can do. There's no restoration of the moral order.⁷⁷ Dark memories of Vietnam manifest themselves in the deranged veteran exacting revenge and the noble veteran ending crime at home or returning to Southeast Asia to settle a score. All too often the country's attention is drawn to someone lost in a fantasy of camouflage fatigues, combat service, and floating senses of vengeance.⁷⁸ By the early eighties the military was sending medical personnel into urban areas to gain experience treating gunshot wounds.

⁷⁷ Comstock et al, *Television and Human Behavior*, pp. 64-83; Mack, *Assault on Parenthood*, pp. 210-17; David T Courtwright, *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 225-69.

⁷⁸ On culture and violence see James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Paramilitary Culture in Post-Vietnam America* (Boston: Hill and Wang, 1994), pp. 17-32; Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), pp. 299-322.

Chapter Eight

Rethinking the Past

America has a history. It is only that the tragic aspects and the ironic implications of that history have been obscured by the national legend of success and victory and by the perpetuation of infant illusions of innocence and virtue.

C Vann Woodward
The Irony of Southern History

It is with these shocking instruments that your great warriors and kings have been doing their murderous work in the world . . . What a number of items of human crime, misery, slavery, to form that sum-total of glory!

William Makepeace Thackeray
Barry Lyndon

A country that's undergone great change no longer looks upon the past as it once did. That was the case after World War One, more so after Vietnam. Americans looked upon established histories with the same mistrust they'd come to regard a statement from the White House. Debunking and deconstructing became by-words. Books, films, and documentaries constructed new understandings of the past. Many of the themes were found in interwar progressivism and in its heirs of the fifties. Defeat has created a new orthodoxy.

Changing Interpretations

Keepers of a nation's memory aren't value-free investigators sifting through archives and correspondences, uninfluenced by myth or passion. Whether they admit it or not, their day shapes their understandings of evidence, the inferences they draw, and the conclusions they reach. Historians rarely have objectivity but they certainly have objectives. They often marshal evidence in a manner that strengthens or undermines partisan

causes: support for the motherland, the evil of enemies, the dangers of concentrated wealth, and helping the downtrodden. Histories bear the unmistakable stamp of their time as much as any other artifact, though most rarely notice.

A *romantic* period of American historical writing began in the heady days after Cornwallis surrendered to Washington. Written by gifted amateurs from the upper crust, romantic history was part demolition of a British colonial identity and part construction of a distinct American one. The colonies were politically independent from Europe but to be a great nation, an independent culture had to be created. School texts were aware of the mission: "They have not yet existed as a nation long enough for us to form an idea of what will be in its maturity, its prominent features."¹ Ideas soon arose. Europe was plagued by tyranny, aristocratic privileges, religious intolerance, and lack of opportunity. The land was blessed with natural beauty. Notables performed valorous deeds. Americans were hardy and industrious, practical and highly moral. Their leaders and institutions were sacred, guided by God to perform an historical mission. Receiving infusions of prestige from the War of 1812 and the Civil War, romantic history pervaded popular texts and college lectures.²

The mandate often led to incautious examination of the evidence, as even one of the heroes of romantic history found. John Adams wryly observed:

My history would so differ from the histories and traditions that I should give offence. I have no great objection to giving offence to people who take offence without just cause; but I have no ambition to be thought a liar by posterity, and I am sure nobody would believe my history who believed any other that I have seen.³

Discontent with romantic history gave rise in the late nineteenth century to the professionalization of history, or at least a considerable portion of it. Influenced by the rising influence of science and often trained in German

¹ Quoted in Ruth Miller Elson, *Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), p. 167, from a geography text by Jedidiah Morse published in 1794.

² See Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Knopf, 1969), pp. 3-43; Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, pp. 166-85 and *passim*; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), pp. 17-100; Esmond Wright, "Historians and the Revolution" in his edited work, *Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966), pp. 20-25.

³ Quoted in Merrill Jensen, "Historians and the Nature of the American Revolution," in Ray Allen Billington, *The Reinterpretation of Early American History* (New York: WW Norton, 1968), pp. 101-2.

universities, new historians stressed causal connections over mythic inferences and sound analysis over stirring endorsement. They were capable of critical lines of thought. Successors would hone that skill.⁴

By the turn of the century, industrial forces had changed not only the economy but also historians. Concentrated wealth in the form of railroads, banks, and other trusts endangered average people. Opportunities had dwindled since the closing of the frontier. In 1913 Charles Beard published a study that saw the founding fathers not as men of reason and faith but as owners of plantations and banks.⁵ Progressivism joined with the skepticism of the post-WWI day. Many historians were part of the war effort, lionizing our allies and the cause, vilifying the Kaiser and his hosts. It was useful in inspiring a generation to fight, but in time it was seen as propaganda.

Many concluded that previous historical works had been only somewhat more objective than wartime sloganeering. The country had long been rent by divisions between common people and property holders: the early colonists and the great trading firms that ruled them, the small farmer and the Bank, slaves and the plantocracy, farmers and railroad barons, workers and industrialists. Years later, amid the more radical period of the Depression, Charles Beard branded the Constitution “the bulwark of every great national sin – from slavery to monopoly.”⁶ The idea of moral certainty, timeless truths, and objectivity, fell away, ushering in a period of cynicism and relativism.⁷ Progressive history gained strength in the twenties and the Depression gave it more cogency. Business elites got by quite well while average folk went hungry And as a new European war loomed in the late-thirties, the same diabolic forces from 1917 were shouting rallying cries.

⁴ See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 47-60.

⁵ Charles A Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1962 [1913]) and *Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1965 [1915]). See also James Harvey Robinson, *The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York: Free Press, 1965 [1912]); Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians*, pp. 167-346.

⁶ Quoted in Novick, *That Noble Dream*, p. 98.

⁷ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, pp. 86-249; Gary B Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Knopf, 1998), pp. 25-52; Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 313-36. Other important works from this period include Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Vintage Press, 1959 [1922]); John D Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the Peoples' Party* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961 [1931]); Albert K Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1963 [1935]).

Despite objections, America did go to war again. Progressives were not immune from the new spirit. During the war, Beard reassessed the founders as wise architects of an optimal middle ground between popular democracy and militaristic aristocracy.⁸ Victory restored consensus that American civilization was ideal, a model of political and economic development for the world. The moral confusion and self-doubt of progressives weakened respect for democracy and slowed the response to foreign dangers. Their tendencies to search for balancing points of view and moral ambiguities were dumbfounded by the Nazis and Auschwitz.⁹ Progressive history didn't vanish. Adherents still held academic positions and found a new band of followers among postwar youth who felt estranged from the society around them. It received new life.¹⁰

Critical history reemerged after Vietnam, not only in academic publications and lectures but also in school texts and popular media. New interpreters see previous works as constructs – systems of beliefs, sentiments, and judgments built by those who benefit from dominant institutions. The task of new history is part demolition of the old, part construction of the new. (The idea that their own histories are shaped by their time rarely occurs.) Several themes stand out: *the primacy of economic forces, discredited elites, greater appreciation of less privileged classes, pervasive racism, and expansionism*. Implicit in post-Vietnam history is effort to right injustices of the past, lift up those who had been held down, win in history books the battles lost in the past.¹¹

Great Men, Common People

Recent history emphasizes less prominent people who were ignored or under-appreciated or held down. The trend began in the twenties and thirties as history began to study craftsmen, peasants, and artisans whose lives lacked the majesty of kings and warlords but whose accomplishments changed the world too. By the early

⁸ Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians*, pp. 220-22. Hofstadter suggests that Beard's reappraisal stemmed from his concern with foreign militarism, opposition to the war, and concern with the growing influence of the military in American life.

⁹ See Novick, *That Noble Dream*, pp. 281-85; Nash et al, *History on Trial*: pp. 53-67; C Vann Woodward, *The Future of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 3-12. Eugen Weber notes that French writings of the interwar period similarly made France less vigilant toward events in Germany. See *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: WW Norton, 1994), pp. 20-25.

¹⁰ Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Knopf, 1969), pp. 437-66.

¹¹ See Herbert Butterfield on this type of history in his *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: WW Norton, 1965 [1931]).

seventies, the idea that great national figures acted out of idealism and far-sightedness simply no longer resonated with experience. Self interest and dishonesty were readily comprehensible and easily placed upon figures in the past.

The time encouraged lampoonery and scorn for leaders and whatever good they did was often buried with them. Early explorers of the New World are seen as slavers, gold-hunters, and freebooters. Faults are pleasurably pointed out. Paul Revere was remiss in his duty during his midnight ride. George Washington took advantage of a generous expense account while his men shivered at Valley Forge and was a military novice who relied on foreign assistance. Thomas Paine profited nicely from privateers, an enterprise varying only a little from piracy. Benjamin Franklin had so many illegitimate children that he could well be called the father of our nation, or at least a goodly portion of it. Henry Clay became wealthy from hemp production, perhaps a point in his favor but for the laborers he used. Andrew Jackson was a brawling bigot whose attempts to exterminate the tribes of the South patterned later events. And most were guilty of owning slaves.

A recently discovered diary of a Mexican veteran of the Alamo claims Davy Crockett did not die a glorious death, immolating himself to prevent the magazine from falling into enemy hands. Taken prisoner, he swore he was on a hunting trip and had the misfortune of taking shelter in the old mission. Unconvinced, Santa Anna had him shot. There was furor among Texans but the story found receptive ears. It fit the spirit of the times as neatly as mythic stories fit theirs and the uncorroborated word of someone on the losing side was good enough.¹² Captains of industry enjoyed enhanced reputations during World War Two. A few decades later, they were once again robber barons, hoarders of wealth, and exploiters of workers. Even Thomas Edison's reputation diminished as texts noted that many of his inventions were collaborations with workers or bought from lesser-known craftsmen.¹³

Beating the British required more than overtaxed merchants and bankers. The energies and talents of craftsmen, artisans, and simple farmers were also brought to bear. The economic boom caused by the French and

¹² The Crockett story is mentioned in Gary Wills, *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), pp. 213-15. Most eyewitnesses asserted that Crockett was killed by Mexican fire early in the siege. See James Atkins Shackford, *David Crockett: The Man and the Legend* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 223-40.

¹³ The account of Edison is from a recent elementary school text, Barry K Beyer, *United States and Its Neighbors: The World around Us* (New York: Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 1991), p. 452.

Indian War created a large working class which became radicalized by an ensuing depression. Without them, the elites would most surely have hanged – together or not. Independence found the rank and file of the Continental army deeply in debt and agitating for reform. Shays's Rebellion (1787) sought to redress their grievances but was forcibly repressed by elites who wanted government by the better sort. Elites ushered in oligarchy which only grudgingly and incompletely eased over the centuries.¹⁴

The struggles of working people are stressed, as even a glance through catalogs and textbooks shows. Women and minorities are especially championed. Women were important laborers in the colonies, contributed their labor in the textile mills of New England, and rode shotgun on wagons headed West. Temperance leagues, abolitionism, and suffrage drives gained from the energies of women and became foundations of later progressive movements. Women have twenty-seven headings in a popular college textbook, more than the Constitution and Civil War combined.¹⁵

Racism brutalized minorities in the social order and obscured them in history books. Slavery was always mentioned in traditional histories. There was no way around it. Southern texts, however, depicted the plantation as almost a community of brothers – until the seeds of disharmony were sown by Northerners.¹⁶ Even in Northern texts, African Americans were described as passive products of history.¹⁷ As dreadful as slavery is in the abstract and from a distance, it's even more so in day-to-day practice. New history takes a closer look at America's peculiar institution. Africans are torn from their homelands and crammed into overcrowded ships where they die in large numbers. Grueling work, brutal whippings, and sale of family

¹⁴ These basic arguments are in earlier Progressive works but find new voice in Gary B Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986); Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982). See also Nash's textbook, Gary Nash et al, *The American People: Creating a Nation and Society* Volume I (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 225-29.

¹⁵ Nash et al, *The American People* I. See also recent editions of Margaret Jarman Hagood, *Mothers of the South: Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977 [1939]); Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975 [1959]); Ruth B Moynihan, Susan Armitage, and Christine Fischer Dichamp, eds, *So Much to Be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontiers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

¹⁶ See Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, pp. 98-100.

¹⁷ Elson, *Guardians of Tradition*, pp. 87-100; Nash et al, *History on Trial*, pp. 58-60.

members awaited them. Resistance is a common theme: courageous escapes, sabotage of plantation implements, and uprisings. Slavery's importance in economic development has been given emphasis. It was surplus extracted in the South that financed the industrialization of the North. The inadequate solution at the end of the Civil War did little to ensure economic or political opportunities.¹⁸

The role of African Americans in wars gets considerable attention. School texts abound with reference to blacks and other minorities serving in conflicts from the Revolution to the Gulf War. Elementary students learn that a black soldier fell at Bunker Hill, that over a hundred thousand former slaves fought in the Civil War, that the all-black Ninth Cavalry patrolled the frontier and served alongside Teddy's Rough Riders, and that black units distinguished themselves in World War Two, Korea, and every other war. Implicit in these narrations is an invocation of a sense of injustice, of serving in the military of a nation that denies them full citizenship.

The Losing of the West

Westward expansion gave the nation enduring myths. There on the frontier, whether the Mohawk valley or the Great Plains, civilization triumphed over savagery, sheriffs won out over desperados, and opportunity abounded for the industrious. It came across in James Fenimore Cooper novels, news reports read back East, and histories by Parkman and Turner.¹⁹ Helen Hunt Jackson and James Mooney were early dissenters. They pointed out a long history of injustice toward indigenous peoples, but had only small readership. Most Americans saw westward expansion as a national birthright, putting the land to proper service, extending democracy, natural

¹⁸ See Thomas C Holt, "African-American History," in Foner, ed, *New American History*, pp. 211-31; John W Blasingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Eugene D Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1976); Herbert G Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976); Douglas R Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). Slavery and its legacy are much discussed in Gary Nash's widely used text, meriting fifty-one headings and sub-headings in the index. By contrast the Revolution gets twenty-six, the Constitution eleven, and Civil War ten. See Nash et al, *The American People I*.

¹⁹ Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail* (New York: Library of America, 1991 [1847]); Frederick Jackson Turner, *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Englewood Cliffs. NJ: Prentice- Hall, 1961); *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962).

growth, and other ideologies of manifest destiny.²⁰ By the early 1960s, these myths had lost much of their power to inspire. The passage of time had made the western epic more distant. The mass media had turned the frontier experience into trite morality plays and insipid melodrama. Nonetheless, the template of righteousness remained.

The Vietnam War invoked western imagery: the Viet Cong held “Indian country,” cavalry units traded horses for Hueys, and Kit Carson Scouts led patrols. It became western mythology’s last stand. The belief that foreign lands would inevitably subscribe to American standards – was shaken. Simplistic views of good and evil could no longer find audiences, except when inverted. American Indians became militant and outspoken. They occupied Alacatraz and other government properties they claimed were theirs by treaty. A sympathetic public saw similarities between the war on the Plains and the one in Southeast Asia, between Custer and Calley.²¹ Books portraying the Indian Wars from their perspective found readership.²²

Before the advent of Europeans, the continent had no history, only superstitions and folklore of Indians who after the first Thanksgiving and rescue of John Smith, receded into obscurity until a brief unpleasant reprise in the 1870s. Newer texts devote many pages and often several chapters to Native Americans. In one textbook, white settlers do not appear until one-fourth of the book has looked at Incan, Mayan, and other pre-Columbine civilizations.²³ The continent wasn’t a howling wilderness; it was inhabited by numerous non-western cultures. They were here first.

Newer texts find rich complexities of Native-American civilizations. Many had written languages and agrarian techniques, the latter freely given to new settlers facing famine. Many tribes had agricultural and social

²⁰ Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor: The Early Crusade for Indian Reform* (New York: Harper, 1965 [1881]); James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and Wounded Knee* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1973 [1896]); George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985 [1915]).

²¹ Brian W Dippie, *Custer’s Last Stand: The Anatomy of an American Myth* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), pp. 137-40; Stanley David Lyman, *Wounded Knee 1973: A Personal Account* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

²² Vine Deloria, Jr, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Avon, 1969); Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971). Merrill D Beal’s *I Will Fight No More Forever: Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966) was made into a television miniseries in the mid-seventies. See also Tom Englehardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 234-303.

²³ Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest* (New York: WW Norton, 1975), pp. 58-127; Beyer, *United States and Its Neighbors*, op cit.

systems featuring periodic redivision of communal land. The Algonquins had a highly developed political system, including a constitution outlining freedoms and liberties. Others had elaborate systems of authority that were far from the familiar images of uncivilized savages. Native Americans typically lived peacefully and in harmony with nature.²⁴

Early contacts between Native Americans and Europeans were not always amicable exchanges of beads and land. Inasmuch as many early Europeans were conquerors and buccaneers, it could hardly have been otherwise. Relations between the two civilizations were established quite early. Settlers pushed Indians aside, went to war with them, and often enslaved them. In a vignette introducing the first chapter of a prominent college text, the Powhatan Indians watch by as “land-hungry settlers swarm in.” They wage war to defend their homelands but lose to the Jamestown colonists. Their leader is taken prisoner then shot in the back.²⁵ The next chapter on the Puritans invokes memory of a recent war:

Captain Mason and his troops approached a Pequot village on the Mystic River. Supported by Naragansett allies, the English slipped into the town. After a few scuffles in the half-light, Mason cried out, “We must burn them,” and his men began torching the Pequot wigwams. . . . As flames engulfed the huts, the Pequots fled the inferno, only to be cut down with musket and sword by the English soldiers who had ringed the community. Most of the terrified victims were noncombattants – old men, women, and children – for the Pequot warriors were preparing for war at another village about 5 miles away. . . . Mason himself wrote that God had “laughed at his enemies, . . . making them as a fiery oven.” Captain John Mason was a God-fearing Puritan and a man highly esteemed by his fellow colonists. His actions . . . testify that the European colonization of America involved a violent confrontation of two cultures. We often speak of the “discovery” and “settlement” of North America by English and other European colonists. But the penetration of the eastern edge of what today is the United States might more accurately be called “the invasion of America.”²⁶

The narrative goes on to assure that many settlers were decent folk.

The French and Indian War and the War of 1812 were cut from the same cloth. Indians sought to regain control of their homeland, sometimes siding with the French, sometimes with the British. They lost out either

²⁴ Beyer, *United States and Its Neighbors*, pp. 68-125. There is an extensive quote from Geronimo stressing harmony with the environment on p. 97. See also Nash et al, *The American People* I: 3-9.

²⁵ Nash et al, *The American People* I: 3-4. See also Francis Jennings, *Empire of Fortune: Crowns, Colonies and Tribes in the Seven Years War in America* (New York: WW Norton, 1990 [1988]), pp. 21-69.

²⁶ Nash et al, *The American People* I: 31-32. See also Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, pp. 128-227; Russell Bourne, *The Red King's Rebellion: Racial Politics in New England, 1675-1678* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); David E Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); John M Murrin, “Beneficiaries of Catastrophe: The English Colonies in America,” in Foner, ed., *New American History*, pp. 3-23.

way. Early narratives chose to ignore Andrew Jackson's ouster of tribes from eastern homelands; the plight of the Five Nations is now a prominent part of American history. The narrative is made more poignant by illustrations of Cherokee families fighting the bitter cold as they trek along the Trail of Tears to the Oklahoma Territory.²⁷

Literature and film romanticized the West. Hardy folk endured tremendous hardships as they crossed the prairie. Individualism, diligence, and family spread civilization and expanded the nation's greatness. The entire process was mythic and sacred, as revered as the wisdom of the Founders and the trials of the Civil War.²⁸ Less emphasis is now placed on individuals and families and more on banks and railroads. Merchants of the mid-eighteenth century pressed into the Ohio valley, triggering the French and Indian War (the Seven Years War in Europe). Speculators bought up huge tracts of land, lured unwary homesteaders, and reaped great revenue while others toiled under debt. Railroad magnates were granted huge rights of way from the Midwest to the Pacific, allowing them to enjoy the bulk of the bonanza. They controlled the arteries through which commerce flowed. Prices were controlled, competitors driven out, opponents quashed by cronies in government – a state of affairs that led to progressive movements and government reform. The cinema took up themes of business interests dominating the West in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (1971), and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* (1973).²⁹

Settling the West, whether by hearty settlers or corporate giants, continued the expropriating of Native American lands begun by the Puritans. The Pequot, Delaware, and Powhatan had all been conquered, the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Shoshone were next. Settling the West meant deploying the cavalry. Enjoying a privileged status in the American mind, the cavalry was admired as gallant warriors on horseback, hard-drinking and two-fisted, arriving in the nick of time to save a besieged wagon train.

²⁷ Beyer, *United States and Its Neighbors*, pp. 354-56; Nash et al, *The American People I*: 438-40; Jack Abramowitz, *American History* Sixth Edition (Boston, Mass: Allyn and Bacon, 1983), pp. 255-57.

²⁸ For a summary, see Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), pp. 1-87.

²⁹ Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, pp. 109-38; Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), pp. 61-77, 82-129; William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), pp. 61-82; Nash et al, *The American People II*: 586-92.

The expropriation of simple tribesmen and herding them into strategic reservations could no longer be defended. Sheridan's famous (and once inspirational) remark that the only good Indian was a dead one, betrayed the racism behind the *Will nach Westen*. Accounts of cavalry attacks on peaceful Indian villages at Sand Creek and the Washita became common.³⁰ Visual reconstructions of these massacres occur in a recent documentary series *How the West Was Lost* and in films from the early seventies *Soldier Blue* (1970) and *Little Big Man* (1970). The latter two, made shortly after *My Lai*, drew parallels to Vietnam. In *Little Big Man* the title character's Cheyenne wife (portrayed by an Asian actress) is shot down by soldiers while she clutches her newborn baby.³¹

Sympathy for Native Americans was not wholly absent beforehand, though this is often lost. John Ford is ordinarily thought of as Hollywood's master of traditional westerns but several of his films were sympathetic toward Indians. In *Fort Apache* (1948) a martinet colonel's contempt for tribes of the Southwest leads to a disaster for his detachment. *The Searchers* (1956) depicts the aftermath of a cavalry massacre in which a central character's Indian wife has been slaughtered. *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) shows cavalry attacks on helpless Indians seeking to return to their homeland.³²

There was perhaps no more mythologized figure than George Custer. Today, there's probably no more vilified one. He was once the bold cavalry commander, a devoted husband, and defender of settlers from rampaging hostiles. He gained immortality when he attacked the encampment along the Little Big Horn, rallied his men into a redoubt, and made his Last Stand. An enduring and vital myth came into being: Custer, clad in buckskins, heroically standing fast and urging his men on until an arrow silenced him. The scene was immortalized by Buffalo Bill's recreations, Hollywood films, and popular paintings adorning many a saloon, in which tipplers saluted the colonel before downing another round.³³ In early 1942 the War Department

³⁰ See "The Second Great Removal," in Nash et al, *The American People II*: 574-78; Abramowitz, *American History*, pp. 388-403.

³¹ The film's director observed, "Although I am focusing on history, I believe the film is contemporary because . . . history does repeat itself." Quoted in Paul Andrew Hutton, "'Correct in Every Detail': General Custer in Hollywood," in Charles E Rankin, ed, *Legacy: New Perspectives on the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1996), pp. 259-60. A French film of the early seventies, *Touche pas la Femme*, used Vietnamese in place of American Indians in its depiction of the Little Big Horn. See also Dippie, *Custer's Last Stand*, p. 139.

³² Ford's *Sergeant Rutledge* (1960) looks at the all-black Ninth Cavalry and the prejudice it encountered.

³³ See Brian W Dippie, "'What Valor Is': Artists and the Mythic Moment," in Rankin, *Legacy*, pp. 208-230; *Custer's Last Stand*, pp. 12-61.

purchased two thousand such lithographs army bases.³⁴ Many a lad imagined himself standing with the 7th Cavalry and turning the tide that day.

The Custer myth was inverted. Custer is seen now as foolhardy, power hungry, and even deranged. His men dashed across the Little Big Horn to perform the same barbarous acts they'd done at the Washita. One grade-school text notes, "Custer was greedy – greedy for glory." Another quotes Custer as "bragging" that his 7th Cavalry "could whip all the Indians on the continent." Then, below an illustration of the last battle, the text asks, "What happened to Custer and his men?"³⁵ A college text contains another illustration of the battle with the caption, "The spectacular Native American victory over General Custer's army in 1876 had little effect on the onslaught of white civilization."³⁶

America at War

Historians looked back on military involvements with new sensibilities. Older history saw the War of 1812 caused by violations of freedom of the seas and impressment of Americans. Newer histories stress practical matters. American merchants wished to trade with all sides in the Napoleonic Wars. Antagonisms with England led to volatile senses of wounded pride among the War Hawks in the South and West that plunged the nation into war. For this, armies clashed across the continent and navies traded salvos on the seas.³⁷ Statesmen such as Hamilton had long dreamed of mastering the continent and transforming the seaboard colonies into a great

³⁴ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, p. 319.

³⁵ Beyer, *United States and Its Neighbors*, p. 442.

³⁶ Nash et al, *The American People II*: 576. Cf the account in Bernard Bailyn et al, *The Great Republic: A History of the American People* Volume Two (Fourth Edition) (Lexington, Mass: DC Heath, 1992), pp. 103-4. On cinematic presentations of the Little Big Horn, see Paul Andrew Hutton, "'Correct in Every Detail:' General Custer in Hollywood," in Rankin, *Legacy*, pp. 321-70. Cf. Robert M. Utley, *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, pp. 534-623.

³⁷ Nash et al, *The American People I*: 318-26; Beyer, *United States and Its Neighbors*, pp. 348-52. Expansionist aspects of American history had been stressed in a few histories written just prior to Vietnam. See Richard W Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960). This line of thinking also benefited from William Appleman Williams's, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York: Random House, 1969), which was written at the height of the Vietnam War, reinterpreting much of American foreign policy in economic terms. A more recent work is Michael H Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 19-45, 125-198.

power. In 1848, President Polk saw the opportunity to seize northern Mexico and dispatched General Zachary Taylor with instructions to provoke war – an order the future president obeyed. The US invaded Mexico, took its capital, and forced the country to cede huge expanses of land that are now the American Southwest. Drawing from recent events, writers note that many Americans protested the land grab and attendant effort to spread slavery into the West. Some were imprisoned for their stands.³⁸

Similar processes continued throughout the century, knocking down Japan's isolationism and seizing the Samoas and Hawaii. Behind this was the need to find export markets for American goods, a need felt more acutely during one of the country's depressions. Economic interests rallied support to the cause by playing upon jingoistic sentiments in the public. America must be a great power and a great power needed a powerful navy. The most splendid acquisitions came from the Spanish-American War (1898) in which a doddering country was forced to relinquish Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines. New histories note Filipino resistance:

In what came to be a guerrilla war with some similarities to those fought later in the twentieth century in Asia and Central America, native nationalists tried to undermine the American will to fight by hit-and-run attacks. . . . In addition to the 18,000 killed in combat, an estimated 200,000 Filipinos (20 percent of the population) died of famine and disease because U. S. soldiers burned villages and destroyed crops and livestock to disrupt the economy and deny rebel fighters their food supply.³⁹

Thus was American stewardship established.

The post-1918 mind had already formed a negative judgment on the war to end all wars. No one held on to romantic views of honor and glory regarding causes, conduct, or consequence. Few statesmen emerged with reputations intact. Perhaps as a result of constitutional infringements in the sixties, newer works focus on the curtailment of civil liberties during and after the war: the arrest of those who spoke out, suspicion of foreigners, and witch hunts after the Bolshevik Revolution. The attorney general said of opponents of intervention, "May God have mercy on them, for they need expect none from an outraged people and an avenging government."⁴⁰

³⁸ Nash et al, *The American People* I: 444-50; Beyer, *United States and Its Neighbors*, pp. 380-81; Charles M. Dollar et al, *America: Changing Times* Volume One (New York: Wiley, 1982), p. 346; Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 32-35.

³⁹ Nash et al, *The American People* II: 659-60; see also pp. 659-85.

⁴⁰ Quoted in David M Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 78. See also Paul L Murphy, *World War One and the Origin of Civil Liberties in the United States* (New York: WW Norton, 1979); Ronald Schaffer, *America in the Great War: The Rise of the War Welfare State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 13-30. Jennings sees the Seven Years War as leading to intolerance toward Quakers and Catholics. See *Empire of Fortune*, pp. 223-47.

Post-Vietnam history has not reinterpreted World War Two. The enormity of National Socialism precludes that. Even the war in the Pacific, though not unrelated to imperialist antagonisms, has yet to be widely reinterpreted in those terms. The role of African Americans and other minorities in the war is presented in a different light. *Yank*, public relations events, and documentaries showed minorities making important contributions, as having shown themselves to be as American as the rest, and as meriting acceptance as citizens. Narratives of today recount segregated USOs and service clubs, harassment on leave (especially in the South), race riots in Detroit and Los Angeles, and courts martial for minorities who protested dangerous or menial labor.⁴¹

The internment of Japanese-Americans in camps receives considerable attention, often taking up more space than the European war. Japanese-Americans, whose loyalty was on the right side of the hyphen, were robbed of their property, without compensation (until recently), by exploitive landholders purporting to be patriots.⁴² Wartime propaganda campaigns against Germany typically distinguished between Nazis and average Germans who were not inherently evil – distinctions seldom drawn for Japanese. The war in the Pacific, as well as its depictions back home, took on a particularly brutal nature. The Japanese feigned surrender then opened fire, sadistically tortured American prisoners, and launched fanatical banzai charges.⁴³

The use of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is considered partially motivated by racism. By the summer of 1945, it's argued, Japan was on the verge of surrender, sending out peace feelers to the Soviet

⁴¹ Nash's treatment notes prejudice but at least as often the opportunities that military service offered minorities. See Nash et al, *The American People II*: 836-41. He is clearly the most sophisticated of the post-Vietnam historians. His work, though left of center, has been attacked by minorities and women for its insensitivity toward them. Such are today's polarizations in the presentation of history, especially in textbooks. See Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), pp. 7-36.

⁴² Beyer, *United States and Its Neighbors*, pp. 509-12; Nash et al, *The American People II*: 832-33, 845-47; Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (New York: JB Lippincott, 1972), pp. 37-72; Studs Terkel, *'The Good War': An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 33-35.

⁴³ See John W Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1987), pp. 77-93; Sam Keen, *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 33, 76, 115. Curators of the National Air and Space Museum, "The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War," in Philip Nobile, ed, *Judgment at the Smithsonian* (New York: Marlowe, 1995), pp. 3-22. Nobile (not a Smithsonian figure) argues in the preface that Truman should be tried posthumously as a war criminal and compares the pilot of the Enola Gay to an SS killer. See op. cit, pp. l-xxxi.

Union and meeting secretly with OSS officials in Switzerland. Such a weapon would never have been used on Germans. Race hatred made the incineration of a hundred fifty thousand Asians easier on American sensibilities. It's also argued that anti-communist sentiment figured. Seeing the inevitability of postwar rivalry, American leaders dropped the bombs to intimidate the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ The Cold War stemmed from mistrust of communism, a newly formed national security state, and disputes over spheres of interest in eastern Europe. This in turn led to costly arms races, unreasoning fears, infringed civil liberties, and an array of alliances with dictatorships around the world, including Southeast Asia.⁴⁵

Nationalism and Internationalism

Instilling patriotism was once the duty of school books and scholarly works, part of the socialization process that made young people into Americans.⁴⁶ Nationalism is now treated with circumspection. At best, it's a provincialism that shows a lack of sophistication. At worst, it's a dangerous malady that fosters racism, militarism, and infringement of civil liberties. Newer histories familiarize students with basic events and processes. Geography texts, reluctant to suggest primacy or superiority, seldom place the United States or North America as the first area to be studied. The word "enemy" isn't encountered much. The reader isn't struck by outstanding moral worth of most major figures. There's nothing exemplary or unique about American history, nor are there transcending ideals running through it. The US is one of many countries that make up the world.

⁴⁴ See Gar Alperovitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb and the Architecture of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 1995). Nash gives four reasons for the use of atomic weapons: the high casualties of Iwo Jima and fear of high casualties from an invasion of the mainland; vindictiveness over the treachery of Pearl Harbor; justification for the huge expenses of developing the bomb; and the desire to intimidate the Soviet Union. See Nash et al, *The American People II*: 849-50. Cf Robert JC Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1954); Pacific War Research Society, *Japan's Longest Day* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1968).

⁴⁵ Robert G Paterson, ed., *The Origins of the Cold War* Second Edition (Lexington, Mass: DC Heath, 1974); Polenberg, *War and Society*, pp. 37-72; Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and the United States Foreign Policy, 1945-45* (New York: Random House, 1968). Elaine Tyler May contends that the Cold War kept women in traditional roles. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

⁴⁶ See Bessie Louise Pierce, *Public Opinion and the Teaching of History in the United States* (New York: Knopf, 1926), pp. 70-131; Pierce, *Civic Attitudes in American School Textbooks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), *passim*. Even later general histories such as those edited or written by Henry Steele Commager, Max Lerner, and Merle Curti, though written in a time less conducive to romantic phrases than earlier times, were generally patriotic.

It's best to appreciate the importance of all nations and cultures and to see America as part of a larger process, without ascribing superiority.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Though a leader of newer trends, Nash sees problems with scholarship based on sub-groups and global perspectives: "Militant multiculturalists . . . have romanticized the history of their particular group, or world regions other than Europe, out of all recognition, and stigmatized Western civilization as the world's oldest evil empire." Nash et al, *History on Trial*, p. 99. See also Arthur M Schlesinger, Jr, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: WW Norton, 1992), pp. 61-138.

Epilogue

Fragmentation and Polarization

*Flags are blossoming now where little else is blossoming
and I am bent on fathoming what it means to love my country.
The history of this earth and the bones within it?
Soils and cities, promises made and mocked, plowed contours
of shame and hope?
Loyalties, symbols, murmurs extinguished and echoing?
Grids of states stretching . . . westward, underground waters?
Where are we moored?
What are the bindings?*

Adrienne Rich, *An Atlas of the Difficult World*

The weakening of traditional America has brought welcome changes and advancements. It's also taken away binding myths, confidence in institutions, and a shared sense of right and wrong. Americans are deeply divided on basic issues. An irreconcilable sic et non has developed. The exchanges take place in Washington, state capitals, school boards, museums, workplaces, Hollywood, and parking lots. There's no dialogue, exchange of ideas, or debate – only the marshaling of forces and voicing of threats. Each side is incredulous at the other's "thinking." Should one side do particularly well in an election or act of legislation, it's due to subterfuge, payoffs, propaganda, or other sinister means. There's no dialog, only cold silence, deepening animosity, and recognition that there's no point in continuing. Opportunistic parties, interest groups, media are gravely worsening matters.¹

Another fissure has developed between the two largest racial groups. African Americans have been excluded from the mainstream, as slaves on plantations and as a free minority too. Emancipation led to formal

¹ On growing polarization see Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996); Arthur M Schlesinger, Jr, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: WW Norton, 1992); Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Morris Janowitz, *Reconstruction of Patriotism: Education for Civic Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Most of the authors died well before polarization reached ominous levels.

freedom but nothing to bring them into the American nation. Blacks remained outsiders at best, a despised sub-caste at worst. The national effort of the Second World War offered an opportunity for integration into America, much as it did for Irish, Jews, and Poles who by and large had also lived outside the Anglo-Saxon mainstream. Recognizing their contribution to the victory in 1945, blacks pressed to become first-class citizens. Most whites also saw their contribution and the injustice of segregation and pressed for integration. A broad-based movement gathered momentum based on shared beliefs, common experiences in the war, and the same hopes for the future. Owing to the turmoil of Vietnam and attendant weakening appeal of American ideals, assimilation became less desirable. As James Baldwin put it, "Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?"² The opportunity afforded by World War Two has slipped away.³ The assimilationist hopes of Martin Luther King, Jr are losing out to the separatist politics of Malcolm X. Of the many consequences of Vietnam, this is one of the more regrettable and portentous.

Recent years have seen the dissolution of numerous countries such as the Russian empire, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia. Zaire, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and others face militant separatist movements. Of course, these were countries with vastly disparate populations that had been held together by authoritarian rule. Nonetheless, several countries with democratic governments also face dissolution of some sort. Scotland is moving away from Great Britain. The northern provinces of Italy no longer see the benefits of continued integration with southern counterparts. In a recent referendum, secessionist forces in Quebec barely missed the opportunity to break away legally from Canada. That country's western provinces talk of leaving Canada and becoming American states.

With institutions losing prestige, romance, and unifying force, with so much of public life being antagonistic and violent, the country's stability and unity are in doubt. We may one day follow the United States not with "is," but with "are" – or perhaps with "was."

² Quoted in Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 166.

³ David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 49-83; Dickstein, *Gates of Eden*, pp. 154-82.

