Chapter 9

﻿The Japanese bombing of American warships at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, brought the United States into a series of wars that had been under way in Asia and Europe for nearly a decade. In 1931, the Japanese Imperial Army began a program of conquest that eventually reached from the far north of China down to the tropical jungles of southern Indochina. The United States criticized Japanese aggression, but neither it nor the League of Nations took action. Then, in 1933, Adolf Hitler seized dictatorial power in Germany. He planned to restore Germany by eliminating “parasites” within the nation (Jews), putting “inferior human material” (Poles, Russians, and other Slavs) to work, and seizing neighboring nations for the enlargement of the Third Reich (Third Empire). Hitler allied with Imperial Japan and fascist Italy in a “Triple Axis,” and began expanding outward. With England and France’s compliance, he first annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia. The western powers drew the line at Poland, however, and declared war when Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939. The next spring, Hitler’s massive army and air force attacked Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and France. Western Europe collapsed within a few weeks and remained under Nazi occupation for four years. The bombing of Pearl Harbor finally brought the United States into the war on the side of Britain and Russia, the last nations with the will and capacity to resist. The United States, Britain, and Soviet Russia formed the nucleus of a worldwide, fifty-nation Grand Alliance, which eventually forced the Axis Powers to surrender. The war culminated in the discovery of Nazi death camps, where six million Jews and millions of Slavs had been murdered, and with the dropping of atomic bombs by the United States on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The war transformed America and the world. Great Britain and France witnessed assaults on their overseas empires. The Soviet Union found itself in control of nations hostile to Russian communism, and used the process of liberating them from the Nazis to impose favorable governments and create a security zone in Central Europe. The United States, which had entered both world wars late, emerged as the most powerful and wealthy nation on earth in 1945, blessed with the opportunity and burdened with the responsibility of stabilizing the world economy and preventing future wars. The Grand Alliance created

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﻿the United Nations to mediate subsequent conflicts. The task was Herculean, but the effort to find rational alternatives to global self-destruction had begun. The war reinforced American liberalism. Franklin D. Roosevelt announced at the start that Americans were fighting for elemental human rights—the “four freedoms.” Hitler’s deliberate slaughter of peoples who did not belong to the Aryan “race” stirred revulsion toward racism. Japan’s horrific treatment of Chinese civilians and Allied prisoners of war (one out of three died in captivity) fueled new definitions of genocide and war crimes. Another unforeseen consequence was to highlight the extent to which the “land of the free” violated the dignity of citizens who were not from European or Protestant backgrounds. Advocates for civil rights became more vocal, women entered the workforce in greater numbers than before, and the Great Depression ended. Henry Luce, the publisher of Time and Life magazines, dubbed this period the beginning of “the American Century.” QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT In what ways did World War II differ from World War I, and what were the consequences of these differences? How did the second conflict change Americans’ expectations of their nation’s role? Why did they fight? DOCUMENTS The documents in this chapter reflect the global character of the war. What people said and did thousands of miles away from the United States mattered deeply. Japanese and German actions not only brought America into the conflict, but they also cast new light on human rights violations in the United States. Document 1 contains eyewitness accounts of the first large-scale massacre of civilians for which World War II became infamous. American missionaries in China protested the genocidal warfare undertaken by Japanese soldiers during the 1937 “Rape of Nanking” and tried to alert the world to the scale of Japanese aggression. Four years later, navy and army nurses on duty at Pearl Harbor were among the first Americans to experience the shock of direct attack on December 7, 1941. Document 2 shows not only their fears, but also their determination to resist. In document 3, British prime minister Winston Churchill recalls the moment when he learned of the assault on Hawaii. It marked the end of a lonely and desperate vigil for Great Britain, almost the only western European nation not yet conquered by Nazi Germany. The alliance with Britain proved crucial to Allied victory, and the final campaign was launched from England’s shores. Roosevelt declared that the United States was fighting on behalf of “four freedoms.” His statement in document 4 raised expectations that the nation struggled to meet in subsequent decades. Document 5 reveals the ways in which the war curtailed freedom even in democracies, especially for first- and secondgeneration Japanese immigrants who found themselves the target of suspicion and discrimination. Like the United States, Canada evacuated persons of Japanese

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﻿background from the West Coast and imprisoned them in camps as a security measure. In this selection, a Vancouver woman tells her brother who is safely on the other coast of Canada, studying medicine in Toronto, about her fears. Document 6 is a painting by Norman Rockwell, a popular American artist who helped rouse patriotic sentiment. “Freedom from Want” was one of four Rockwell illustrations for the cover of Saturday Evening Post that the Office of War Information used to sell war bonds. Document 7 shows the connection that African American citizens drew between Roosevelt’s goals for the world and their own aspirations for greater freedom. Blacks stationed at segregated bases and consigned to non-fighting units complained about a “lack of democracy” right at home. Document 8 shows the sacrifices of the common soldier. Twenty-two-year-old Joseph Hallock feared his luck was running out—as it did for 400,000 Americans who died in battle. Document 9 tells the story of one such casualty: Private Felix Longoria. When a Texas funeral parlor refused his family the use of its chapel because they were Mexican American, an affronted congressman arranged for Longoria’s burial with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery. Senator Lyndon B. Johnson went on to become a champion of minority rights. 1. American Missionaries Speak Out About the Rape of Nanking, 1937 December 17: M. Searle Bates to the Japanese Embassy in Nanking The reign of terror and brutality continues in the plain view of your buildings and among your own neighbors. 1. Last night soldiers repeatedly came to our Library buildings with its great crowd of refugees, demanding money, watches, and women at the point of the bayonet. When persons had no watches or money, usually because they had been looted several times in the two preceding days, the soldiers broke windows near them and roughly pushed them about. One of our own staff members was wounded by a bayonet in this manner. 2. At the Library building, as in many other places throughout this part of the city last night, soldiers raped several women. 3. Soldiers beat our own unarmed watchmen, because the watchmen did not have girls ready for the use of the soldiers.… We respectfully ask you to compare these acts, which are small samples of what is happening to large numbers of residents of Nanking, with your Government’s official statements of its concern for the welfare of the people of

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﻿December 19: James McCallum to His Family It has been just one week now since the collapse of the Chinese Army in its Nanking defense. Japanese soldiers came marching down Chung Shan road past the hospital on Monday and Japanese flags began to appear here and there.… It is a horrible story to relate; I know not where to begin nor to end. Never have I heard or read of such brutality. Rape: Rape: Rape: We estimate at least 1,000 cases a night and many by day. In case of resistance or anything that seems like disapproval there is a bayonet stab or a bullet. We could write up hundreds of cases a day; people are hysterical; they get down on their knees and “Kotow” any time we foreigners appear; they beg for aid. Those who are suspected of being soldiers, as well as others, have been led outside the city and shot down by hundreds, yes, thousands.… December 19: John Magee to His Wife The horror of the last week is beyond anything I have ever experienced. I never dreamed that the Japanese soldiers were such savages. It has been a week of murder and rape, worse, I imagine, than has happened for a very long time unless the massacre of the Armenians by the Turks was comparable. They not only killed every prisoner they could find but also a vast number of ordinary citizens of all ages. Many of them were shot down like the hunting of rabbits in the streets.… 2. Nurses Rush to Aid the Wounded on the U.S. Naval Base in Hawaii, 1941 Lenore Rickert, U.S. Navy Everybody wants to know if we were afraid. Fear never entered into it. Most everyone who was there says the same thing. We never even gave it a thought, never worried about our personal safety. I was making rounds with the Medical Officer of the Day at the Pearl Harbor naval hospital when we heard a plane right overhead. Because of the patients, our aircraft never flew over the hospital…. We ran to look and the plane was coming in between the two wards. We knew right away what was happening. I ran to the nurses’ quarters to sound the alert, and that’s when the actual bombing started…. The ambulatory patients immediately left the hospital to get back to their ships. One patient, whose eyes were both bandaged, got out of bed, crawled underneath, and pulled a blanket down to lie on, so we could use the bed for the wounded. Everyone was worrying about the others and not themselves.

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﻿Sara Entrikin, U.S. Army Hearing the explosions, I ran outside and saw the red sun on a plane that was coming in so close that I could see the faces of the pilots. One of them looked at us and smiled. I rushed to the hospital. Casualties were coming in fast and furious because the barracks were right along the runway and that’s where the bombs hit first. Our hospital was close to the runway also, and we had a lot of noise and smoke from shells ricocheting over to it. There were only seven of us nurses, and we couldn’t possibly begin to take care of all the wounded and dying men…. Not too far from the hospital there was an American flag flying, and after the Japs dropped their bombs, one plane came back and circled, shooting until the flag was torn to shreds. That night we put up blackout window covers; we were told that if captured, to only give our name, rank, and serial number…. Mildred Woodman, U.S. Army Loud explosions awakened me and I heard planes overhead. I opened the door and saw planes coming through the pass in the mountains between Honolulu and Schofield. The large bright insignia of the rising sun was boldly on the side of each plane. They flew so close I could hear the radio communications between the pilots.… The hospital was hit, even though the hospital building had a large red cross painted on the roof, according to the provisions of the Geneva Convention. Casualties were arriving on stretchers as I reported to the operating room, with ambulance sirens wailing in the background.… Patients had arms and legs amputated, severe chest and spinal wounds, abdominal and cranial wounds. Many wanted to go out and fight back…. Sometime near early morning following the attack, several of us had the opportunity for a quiet moment to talk to each other and exchange our limited knowledge of what happened. We talked quietly since there was a rumor that the Japanese had eighty transports off Diamond Head and were landing parachute troops in the nearby cane fields. The subject of being captured and becoming prisoners of war came up and each voiced her plan. Two indicated they would walk into the sea, others would hide in caves, some would go with their friends to prison, while others of us would fight to the death and never be captured alive. 3. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill Reacts to Pearl Harbor, 1941 It was Sunday evening, December 7, 1941. Winant and Averell Harriman were alone with me at the table at Chequers. I turned on my small wireless set shortly

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﻿after the nine o’clock news had started. There were a number of items about the fighting on the Russian front and on the British front in Libya, at the end of which some few sentences were spoken regarding an attack by the Japanese on American shipping at Hawaii, and also Japanese attacks on British vessels in the Dutch East Indies. There followed a statement that after the news Mr. Somebody would make a commentary, and that the Brains Trust programme would then begin, or something like this. I did not personally sustain any direct impression, but Averell said there was something about the Japanese attacking the Americans, and, in spite of being tired and resting, we all sat up. By now the butler, Sawyers, who had heard what had passed, came into the room, saying, “It’s quite true. We heard it ourselves outside. The Japanese have attacked the Americans.” There was a silence. At the Mansion House luncheon on November 11 I had said that if Japan attacked the United States a British declaration of war would follow “within the hour.” I got up from the table and walked through the hall to the office, which was always at work. I asked for a call to the President. The Ambassador followed me out, and, imagining I was about to take some irrevocable step, said, “Don’t you think you’d better get confirmation first?” In two or three minutes Mr. Roosevelt came through. “Mr. President, what’s this about Japan?” “It’s quite true,” he replied. “They have attacked us at Pearl Harbour. We are all in the same boat now.” I put Winant onto the line and some interchanges took place, the Ambassador at first saying. “Good” “Good”—and then, apparently graver, “Ah!” I got on again and said, “This certainly simplifies things. God be with you,” or words to that effect. We then went back into the hall and tried to adjust our thoughts to the supreme world event which had occurred, which was of so startling a nature as to make even those who were near the centre gasp. My two American friends took the shock with admirable fortitude. We had no idea that any serious losses had been inflicted on the United States Navy. They did not wail or lament that their country was at war. They wasted no words in reproach or sorrow. In fact, one might almost have thought they had been delivered from a long pain…. No American will think it wrong of me if I proclaim that to have the United States at our side was to me the greatest joy. I could not foretell the course of events. I do not pretend to have measured accurately the martial might of Japan, but now at this very moment I knew the United States was in the war, up to the neck and in to the death. So we had won after all! Yes, after Dunkirk; after the fall of France; after the horrible episode of Oran; after the threat of invasion, when, apart from the Air and the Navy, we were an almost unarmed people; after the deadly struggle of the U-boat war—the first Battle of the Atlantic, gained by a hand’s-breadth; after seventeen months of lonely fighting and nineteen months of my responsibility in dire stress. We had won the war. England would live; Britain would live; the Commonwealth of Nations and the Empire would live. How long the war would last or in what fashion it would end no man could tell, nor did I at this moment care. Once again in our long island history we should emerge, however mauled or mutilated, safe and victorious. We should not be

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﻿wiped out. Our history would not come to an end. We might not even have to die as individuals. Hitler’s fate was sealed. Mussolini’s fate was sealed. As for the Japanese, they would be ground to powder. All the rest was merely the proper application of overwhelming force. The British Empire, the Soviet Union, and now the United States, bound together with every scrap of their life and strength, were, according to my lights, twice or even thrice the force of their antagonists.… Silly people, and there were many, not only in enemy countries, might discount the force of the United States. Some said they were soft, others that they would never be united. They would fool around at a distance. They would never come to grips. They would never stand bloodletting. Their democracy and system of recurrent elections would paralyse their war effort. They would be just a vague blur on the horizon to friend or foe. Now we should see the weakness of this numerous but remote, wealthy, and talkative people. But I had studied the American Civil War, fought out to the last desperate inch. American blood flowed in my veins. I thought of a remark which Edward Grey had made to me more than thirty years before— that the United States is like “a gigantic boiler. Once the fire is lighted under it there is no limit to the power it can generate.” Being saturated and satiated with emotion and sensation, I went to bed and slept the sleep of the saved and thankful. 4. Roosevelt Identifies the “Four Freedoms” at Stake in the War, 1941 … There is nothing mysterious about the foundations of a healthy and strong democracy. The basic things expected by our people of their political and economic systems are simple. They are: Equality of opportunity for youth and for others. Jobs for those who can work. Security for those who need it. The ending of special privilege for the few. The preservation of civil liberties for all. The enjoyment of the fruits of scientific progress in a wider and constantly rising standard of living. These are the simple, basic things that must never be lost sight of in the turmoil and unbelievable complexity of our modern world. The inner and abiding strength of our economic and political systems is dependent upon the degree to which they fulfill these expectations. Many subjects connected with our social economy call for immediate improvement.

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﻿As examples: We should bring more citizens under the coverage of old-age pensions and unemployment insurance. We should widen the opportunities for adequate medical care. We should plan a better system by which persons deserving or needing gainful employment may obtain it. I have called for personal sacrifice. I am assured of the willingness of almost all Americans to respond to that call. A part of the sacrifice means the payment of more money in taxes. In my Budget Message I shall recommend that a greater portion of this great defense program be paid for from taxation than we are paying today. No person should try, or be allowed, to get rich out of this program; and the principle of tax payments in accordance with ability to pay should be constantly before our eyes to guide our legislation. If the Congress maintains these principles, the voters, putting patriotism ahead of pocketbooks, will give you their applause. In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way— everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world. That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation. That kind of world is the very antithesis of the so-called new order of tyranny which the dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb. To that new order we oppose the greater conception—the moral order. A good society is able to face schemes of world domination and foreign revolutions alike without fear. Since the beginning of our American history, we have been engaged in change—in a perpetual peaceful revolution—a revolution which goes on steadily, quietly adjusting itself to changing conditions—without the concentration camp or the quicklime in the ditch. The world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society. This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of millions of free men and women; and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose. To that high concept there can be no end save victory.

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﻿5. Canadian-Japanese Mother Writes About Her Coming Internment, 1942 Dear [Brother] Wes: We are Israelites on the move. The public is getting bloodthirsty and will have our blood Nazi-fashion. Okay we move. But where? Signs up on all highways … JAPS KEEP OUT. Curfew. “My father is dying. May I have permission to go to his bedside?” “NO!” Like moles we burrow within after dark, and only dare to peek out of the window or else be thrown into the hoosegow with long term sentences and hard labour. Confiscation of radios, cameras, cars and trucks. Shutdown of all business. No one will buy. No agency yet set up to evaluate. When you get a notice to report to RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] for orders to move, you report or be interned. “Who will guard my wife and daughters?” Strong arm reply. Lord, if this was Germany you can expect such things as the normal way, but this is Canada, a Democracy! And the Nisei [Canadian-born citizens], repudiated by the only land they know, no redress anywhere. Sure we can move somewhere on our own, but a job? Who will feed the family? Will they hire a Jap? Where can we go that will allow us to come? The only place to go is the Camp the Government will provide when it gets around to it.… As for Eddie and us, the Bank [her husband’s employer] is worried about us. At any rate, there is so much business that he has to clear up for the removees that no hakujin [white person] can do, so though we don’t know for certain, he may have to stay till the last. We may stay on with him or move first to wherever we have to go, either to Camp or to some other city where there is a Branch big enough to let Ed do routine work behind the counter, but never at the counter as he is doing now.… I hope that by the time we go the twins will be big enough to stand the trip in some discomfort. But again I don’t know. I may have to cart 12 bottles and 6 dozen diapers. By myself or with Ed, I don’t know.… Don’t you dare come here!!! I’ll lose you for sure if you do, then where will we be? You sit tight [on the East Coast] and maybe if Ed isn’t transferred, he may find a job where you are, even as a house-servant if he has to. At least we will be together. The Nisei would have been so proud to wear the King’s uniform! Even die in it. But not as Helots, tied to the chariot wheels of Democracy. “Labour within or without Canada”… who knows but the ‘without’ may be the hot sands of Libya, hauled there as front-line ditch-diggers. And you know that most of the people here call this a ‘damned shame,’ this treatment especially of the Canadian-born? It’s just the few antis who have railroaded Ottawa into this unfairness.… Was there ever a better excuse for them to kick us out lock stock and barrel?

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﻿6. Office of War Information Shows What GIs Are Fighting for: “Freedom from Want,” 1943

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﻿7. An African American Soldier Notes the “Strange Paradox” of the War, 1944 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt DAVIS-MONTHAN FIELD White House Tucson, Arizona Washington, D.C. 9 May 1944. Dear President Roosevelt: It was with extreme pride that I, a soldier in the Armed Forces of our country, read the following affirmation of our war aims, pronounced by you at a recent press conference: “The United Nations are fighting to make a world in which tyranny, and aggression cannot exist; a world based upon freedom, equality, and justice; a world in which all persons, regardless of race, color and creed, may live in peace, honor and dignity.”… But the picture in our country is marred by one of the strangest paradoxes in our whole fight against world fascism. The United States Armed Forces, to fight for World Democracy, is within itself undemocratic. The undemocratic policy of jim crow and segregation is practiced by our Armed Forces against its Negro members. Totally inadequate opportunities are given to the Negro members of our Armed Forces, nearly one tenth of the whole, to participate with “equality”…“regardless of race and color” in the fight for our war aims. In fact it appears that the army intends to follow the very policy that the FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] is battling against in civilian life, the pattern of assigning Negroes to the lowest types of work. Let me give you an example of the lack of democracy in our Field, where I am now stationed. Negro soldiers are completely segregated from the white soldiers on the base. And to make doubly sure that no mistake is made about this, the barracks and other housing facilities (supply room, mess hall, etc.) of the Negro Section C are covered with black tar paper, while all other barracks and housing facilities on the base are painted white. It is the stated policy of the Second Air Force that “every potential fighting man must be used as a fighting man. If you have such a man in a base job, you have no choice. His job must be eliminated or be filled by a limited service man, WAC, or civilian.” And yet, leaving out the Negro soldiers working with the Medical Section, fully 50% of the Negro soldiers are working in base jobs, such as, for example, at the Resident Officers’ Mess, Bachelor Officers’ Quarters, and Officers’ Club, as mess personnel, BOQ orderlies, and bar tenders. Leaving out the medical men again, based on the section C average only 4% of this 50% would not be “potential fighting men.”… How can we convince nearly one tenth of the Armed Forces, the Negro members, that your pronouncement of the war aims of the United Nations ﻿means what it says, when their experience with one of the United Nations, the United States of America, is just the opposite?… With your issuance of Executive Order 8802, and the setting up of the Fair Employment Practices Committee, you established the foundation for fighting for democracy in the industrial forces of our country, in the interest of victory for the United Nations. In the interest of victory for the United Nations, another Executive Order is now needed. An Executive Order which will lay the base for fighting for democracy in the Armed Forces of our country. An Executive Order which would bring about the result here at Davis-Monthan Field whereby the Negro soldiers would be integrated into all of the Sections on the base, as fighting men, instead of in the segregated Section C as housekeepers. Then and only then can your pronouncement of the war aims of the United Nations mean to all that we “are fighting to make a world in which tyranny, and aggression cannot exist; a world based upon freedom, equality and justice; a world in which all persons, regardless of race, color and creed, may live in peace, honor and dignity.” Respectfully yours, Charles F. Wilson, 36794590 Private, Air Corps.

8. A Gunner Fears His Luck Is Running Out, 1944

My first raid was on December thirty-first [1943], over Ludwigshaven. Naturally, not knowing what it was going to be like, I didn’t feel scared. A little sick, maybe, but not scared. That comes later, when you begin to understand what your chances of survival are. Once we’d crossed into Germany, we spotted some flak, but it was a good long distance below us and looked pretty and not dangerous: different-colored puffs making a soft, cushiony-looking pattern under our plane. A bombardier sits right in the plexiglas nose of a Fort [Boeing B-17 “Flying Fortress”], so he sees everything neatly laid out in front of him, like a living-room rug. It seemed to me at first that I’d simply moved in on a wonderful show. I got over feeling sick, there was so much to watch. We made our run over the target, got our bombs away, and apparently did a good job. Maybe it was the auto-pilot and bomb sight that saw to that, but I’m sure I was cool enough on that first raid to do my job without thinking too much about it. Then, on the way home, some Focke-Wulfs showed up, armed with rockets, and I saw three B-I7s in the different groups around us suddenly blow up and drop through the sky. Just simply blow up and drop through the sky. Nowadays, if you come across something awful happening, you always think, ‘My God, it’s just like a movie,’ and that’s what I thought. I had a feeling that the planes weren’t really falling and burning, the men inside them ﻿weren’t really dying, and everything would turn out happily in the end. Then, very quietly through the interphone, our tail gunner said, ‘I’m sorry, sir, I’ve been hit.’ I crawled back to him and found that he’d been wounded in the side of the head–not deeply but enough so he was bleeding pretty bad. Also, he’d got a lot of the plexiglas dust from his shattered turret in his eyes, so he was, at least for the time being, blind. Though he was blind, he was still able to use his hands, and I ordered him to fire his guns whenever he heard from me. I figured that a few bursts every so often from his fifties would keep the Germans off our tail, and I also figured that it would give the kid something to think about besides the fact that he’d been hit. When I got back to the nose, the pilot told me that our No. 4 engine had been shot out. Gradually we lost our place in the formation and flew nearly alone over France. That’s about the most dangerous thing that can happen to a lame Fort, but the German fighters had luckily given up and we skimmed over the top of the flak all the way to the Channel. We had a feeling, though, that this [next] Augsburg show was bound to be tough, and it was. We made our runs and got off our bombs in the midst of one hell of a dogfight. Our group leader was shot down and about a hundred and fifty or two hundred German fighters swarmed over us as we headed for home. Then, screaming in from someplace, a twenty millimeter cannon shell exploded in the nose of our Fort It shattered the plexiglas, broke my interphone and oxygen connections, and a fragment of it cut through my heated suit and flak suit. I could feel it burning into my right shoulder and arm.… The German fighters chased us for about forty-five minutes. They came so close that I could see the pilots’ faces, and I fired so fast that my gun jammed. I went back to the left nose gun and fired that gun till it jammed. By that time we’d fallen behind the rest of the group, but the Germans were beginning to slack off. It was turning into a question of whether we could sneak home without having to bail out. The plane was pretty well shot up and the whole oxygen system had been cut to pieces. The pilot told us we had the choice of trying to get back to England, which would be next to impossible, or of flying to Switzerland and being interned, which would be fairly easy. He asked us what we wanted to do. I would have voted for Switzerland, but I was so busy handing out bottles of oxygen that before I had a chance to say anything the other men said, ‘What the hell, let’s try for England.’… The twenty-eighth [mission] was on Berlin, and I was scared damn near to death. It was getting close to the end and my luck was bound to be running out faster and faster. The raid wasn’t too bad, though, and we got back safe. The twenty-ninth mission was to Thionville, in France, and all I thought about on that mission was ‘One more, one more, one more.’ My last mission was to Saarbrücken, One of the waist gunners was new, a young kid like the kid I’d been six months before. He wasn’t a bit scared—just cocky and excited, Over Saarbrücken he was wounded in the foot by a shell, and I had to give him first aid. He acted more surprised than hurt. He had a look on his face like a child who’s been cheated by grownups. That was only the beginning for him, but it was the end for me.

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﻿9. Senator Lyndon Johnson Defends A Mexican American Killed in Action, 1949

WASHINGTON, Jan. 12—A soldier’s funeral and burial were arranged today by the Government of the United States for Felix Longoria, late private, Infantry, Army of the United States, who died in action on Luzon in the Philippines. He will receive full military honors, in Arlington National Cemetery, where lie some of the more illustrious dead…. Private Longoria’s widow, Beatrice, and such of his friends as live in his little town of Three Rivers, Tex., had reported some difficulty in having funeral services there for him. Dr. Hector P. Garcia informed Senator Lyndon D. Johnson of Texas, in fact, that the manager of the one undertaking parlor in Three Rivers had refused the use of his facilities with the explanation: “Other white people object to the use of the funeral home by people of Mexican origin.” Dr. Garcia is president of a veterans’ organization known as the American GI Forum. “In our estimation,” he telegraphed to Senator Johnson, “this action in Three Rivers is in direct contradiction of those same principles for which this American soldier made the supreme sacrifice in giving his life for his country and for the same people who now deny him the last funeral rites deserving of any American hero regardless of his origin.” Mr. Johnson telephoned to old friends in South Texas and, he said, found that the case in its substance had been correctly reported. As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee he got in touch with the high military authorities and made arrangements for a different sort of burial. He sent then to Dr. Garcia a telegram of his own, which said in part: “I deeply regret to learn that the prejudice of some individuals extends even beyond this life. “I have no authority over civilian funeral homes, nor does the Federal Government. “However, I have today made arrangements to have Felix Longoria reburied with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery here at Washington where the honored dead of our nation’s wars rest. Or, if his family prefers to have his body interred nearer his home, he can be reburied at Fort Sam Houston National Military Cemetery at San Antonio (Tex.). There will be no cost.” Mr. Johnson then asked Private Longoria’s widow to indicate her preference “before his body is unloaded from an Army transport at San Francisco on Jan. 13.” Mrs. Beatrice Longoria, in a telegram to the Senator, then closed these exchanges. From The New York Times, January 13, 1949 © 1949 The New York Times. All rights reserved.

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﻿“Humbly grateful,” she said, “for your kindness in my hour of humiliation and suffering. Gladly accept your offer for reburial of my husband at Arlington National Cemetery. Please arrange for direct shipment to Washington. Forever grateful for your kindness.”… Private Longoria was born on April 19, 1919. He began active military service on the anniversary of an old armistice, Nov. 11, 1944. He fell less than a year later—on June 16, 1945, in the last months of action in the Philippines. This is all that could be learned from the War Department records available here. “I am sorry,” Mr. Johnson said, “about the funeral home at Three Rivers. But there is, after all, a fine national funeral home, though of a rather different sort, out at Arlington.”

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﻿ESSAYS

World War II is sometimes called “the good war”—even though it is widely recognized that all war is “hell.” The bombing of Pearl Harbor created a broader consensus of support for this war than for any other conflict in the nation’s history, including the Revolution. The ferocity of Japanese and German aggression makes plain why the United States got involved. Historians have thus tended to debate the consequences and paradoxes of the war more than its origins. The following two essays look at the experience of the war from different vantage points: that of officials who understood it as a fight for civilization, and that of soldiers fighting for their own survival and for “home.” Ira Katznelson of Columbia University won the Pulitzer Prize for his book on the subject, which explores the moral compromises made in order to save democracy. Japanese internment, government secrecy, Allied atrocities, and the segregation of African Americans all pointed to the imperfections of America—and yet also the enormous gap between it and its enemies, who abandoned democracy and slaughtered civilians as a matter of national policy. The late historian John Morton Blum of Yale University depicts combat soldiers as largely disconnected from the geopolitical goals articulated by President Roosevelt. When they said they were fighting for America and apple pie, they were mostly thinking about pie—in other words, about getting home. Place yourself in their boots: how might the war have affected that generation’s view of life afterward, and of their nation’s role in the world? Katznelson and Blum both end on cliffhangers. After all the destruction, no one could foresee how the world would ever be truly normal again.

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﻿Fighting Fear—and for Civilization Itself IRA KATZNELSON

﻿PUTTING THEIR OCTOBER ISSUE to bed on Thursday, August 31, 1939, the editors of Fortune were startled to learn that Hitler’s forces were moving into Poland. ﻿“All night long the teletype rattled out the unbelievable news,” they reported. “Little groups of writers and researchers stood in the editorial offices reading the long streamers of tape, stumbling for the first time over the strange Polish names.” Finishing their shift, the staff “walked out among the gray, deserted buildings of the city with the feeling that they had closed, not an issue of a magazine, but an era in human affairs.” Identifying ideological stakes, “more striking than any since the medieval crusades,” the October supplement [of Fortune] confronted readers with a startling map: “Europe 1939.” This image underscored the geopolitical advantages now attending an engorged Germany, which was colored in red, having already swallowed Austria in 1938 and Czechoslovakia in 1939. With the exception of Britain, France, and Poland, the Third Reich’s only active adversaries, which were tinted in blue, the remaining countries were highlighted by a bright shade of yellow.… One country, however, was glaringly absent. Nowhere to be found was the United States, the globe’s most important neutral country, whose capital lay some 4,200 miles west of Berlin.… The world’s big conflicts were producing “less a war between nations than a war between ideologies.” Either by omission or commission, the United States would have to choose what stance to take. Assistant Secretary of State Francis Sayre pressed the American people in June 1938 to understand that “events have taken place which challenge the very existence of the international order,” threatening “international anarchy.”… The chances for such policies of engagement did not seem promising. There were no guarantees that the United States would prove equal to “the cruel necessities” by which the balance of democracy and dictatorship would be decided. Ideas about isolation, which later came to seem cranky, were based on historical traditions, global agreements, and an idealistic wish never to repeat the carnage of 1914–1918. Over the course of American political development, geopolitical isolation from European affairs arguably “formed our most fundamental theory of foreign policy.”… It was just this view that former president Hoover articulated upon returning from a fourteen-nation tour of Europe in March 1938, when, speaking to the Council on Foreign Relations, he urgently warned the United States not to join the formation of any democratic alliance with Britain and France against the Fascist dictatorships. “We should have none of it,” he cautioned, adding that “the forms of government which other peoples pass through in working out their destinies is not our business.” Events would now make Hoover’s position untenable. The Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937 had been designed to keep the United States out of war.… Ironically, it was the three powers—Germany, Italy, Japan—that had joined to form an Axis in 1937 which were most favorably disposed to U.S. laws on neutrality, because the provision for an automatic embargo on shipments of arms and ammunition sharply favored those who had militarized and who already possessed facilities to manufacture weapons.… The United States had steered itself, with good intentions, into a dead end. If a U-turn was required, its execution would not be easy.…

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﻿Now an alternative course to strict neutrality had to be considered: quarantining aggressor states. At a press conference on March 7, the president “expressed the belief that neutrality legislation enacted in recent years had encouraged war threats instead of contributing to the cause of peace.”… Germany’s lightning attack on Poland transformed legislative possibilities. Noting how “the unbelievable has become reality,” and how “the outcome … for everything we hold most dear is utterly unpredictable,” the Washington Post’s pageone editorial of September 2 argued that neutrality was no longer possible. This war, it claimed, differed from the prior global conflict “not only because it threatens to be even more horrible” but even more because “it is essentially an ideological war” Not long thereafter, this once-contentious view became common wisdom. Fortune’s projection that public opinion would shape what Congress would do was borne out. “The neutrality act of 1939,” the historian Robert Divine observed, in fact “was a perfect expression of the contradictory mood of the American people. They strongly favored the cause of England and France, yet they did not want to risk American involvement in the European conflict.” Combining a softer version of cash and carry with an end to the arms embargo was something of a contradictory policy, and the other limitations that had been elements of earlier laws remained present. Still, this legislation provided a huge boost to Britain. The repeal, Neville Chamberlain told his country, “reopens for the Allies the doors of the greatest storehouse of supplies in the world.” As Britain fought for survival, steady consignments of ships, aircraft, tanks, and self-propelled guns began to cross the Atlantic. A remarkable national consensus developed among political leaders and the mass populace to build American strength. This policy was supported not just by those who backed energetic, direct help to the Allies but also by isolationists who had not, who were now worried about the country’s abilities to protect its own shores and its own hemisphere. “I was astounded to learn,” John Carl Hinshaw, a Republican isolationist, reported to the House, “that there were only three antiaircraft guns in the whole of southern California, and that those were accompanied by antiquated auxiliary equipment…. We are 3,000,000 people in Los Angeles County with practically no defense against hostile attack if our fleet is disposed elsewhere.”… If military preparedness elicited wide support, the same was not the case with respect to neutrality. Even after the end of tine arms embargo, the United States faced barriers in its wish to help the British war effort, most notably the restriction on sending armed ships into combat zones. On October 7, 1941, President Roosevelt wrote to Winston Churchill to explain why he was about to ask Congress to legislate “sweeping amendments to out Neutrality Act,” because “the Act is seriously crippling our means of helping you.” Two days later, he asked Congress to remove existing shipping prohibitions. The 50–37 November 7 vote in the Senate, exactly one month before Pearl Harbor, and the 212–194 vote that followed on November 13 in the House were uncomfortably close, the smallest majorities on war-related roll calls since the German invasion of Poland.… RAISING QUESTIONS about consent and obligation at the most fundamental level of life, the issue of conscription was a good deal less abstract to most Americans

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﻿than neutrality or Lend-Lease. How to organize an army in a manner appropriate to a liberal democracy and to citizens guaranteed the right to be free from arbitrary coercion by political authorities had been long-standing puzzles.… Mandatory military service was closely identified with the dictatorships. In August 1930, the Soviet Union had adopted a sweeping compulsory military service law, which extended liability to women, …. Italy had adopted a deep program of militarization, specifying that boys and girls at six should begin premilitary training; … Germany had also made all citizens eligible and had entered teenagers into a rigorous training program.… Not surprisingly, the Selective Service Act of 1940 was the subject of intense debate on Capitol Hill and beyond. Though the Republican Party’s presidential candidate, Wendell Willkie, was to endorse the draft in mid-August and call for national unity even as he conceded the election, the party platform adopted in June rejected the idea of compulsory military service as unnecessary with the country at peace, and even the news headlines of the country’s largest Republican paper called it the “Dictator-Draft Bill.”… … Its sponsors thought it no less than prudent to get ready to confront the militarized dictatorships, especially that of Nazi Germany, whose forces were storming through Europe and murdering civilians as they went.… Southern members [of Congress] also insisted that the draft was fairer than any other way to raise an army. They noticed that the rate of voluntary enlistment was highest in their region; approximately half of the seventy thousand young men who had enlisted from January to June of 1940 came from the South. Southern members clearly believed their constituents had been more than adequately satisfying their patriotic duty but that the rest of the country had been shirking.… The 1940 act was both revolutionary and limited. It was revolutionary because it broke with American traditions, …. It was limited because it stipulated that no more than 900,000 men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-six, of a cohort of 16,500,000, were to be drafted annually; each would be required to serve only a year… By mid-1941, global desolation was accelerating. The tyranny and bloodshed inside occupied Poland included the erection of the Warsaw Ghetto. The German occupying force and the Vichy government presided in France. Japan controlled roughly half of China, occupied the strategic ports of French Indochina, and closed the Burma Road. Massive air raids persisted in Britain…. In light of these ongoing events, the impending truncation of service in mid-1941 by recently trained men unnerved the Department of War and frightened the White House. War was everywhere, and the fledgling U.S. Army was threatened with dissolution. With Japan increasingly astride East Asia and much of the Pacific, with almost all of Europe under Nazi domination, and with the Soviet Union reeling, and thus with Britain at ever more risk, this hardly seemed a good time to return to a pre-1940 military.… When the time came to vote on the bill itself on August 7, the Senate voted 45–30, a reasonably comfortable margin, buttressed once more by southern solidarity. The House, by contrast, approved conscription five days later by just one

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﻿vote, 203–202, “in an atmosphere of hushed tension alternating with clamorous uproar…. By that narrow margin,” the Los Angeles Times conveyed; the House “saved the administration from a devastating defeat.” With fully sixty-five Democrats joining almost every Republican in voting no, only a nearly united South, voting 123–8 in favor, rescued the draft. Lacking the 100-vote majority provided by the South, the measure would have failed. On December 7, what the Japanese called the Hawaii Operation launched a successful attack at Pearl Harbor. One day after the event, Franklin Roosevelt reported to Congress that “the casualty list … included 2,335 servicemen and 68 civilians killed, and 1,178 wounded,” and he conveyed to a stunned nation how “over a thousand crewmen aboard the USS Arizona battleship were killed after a 1,760 pound aerial bomb penetrated the forward magazine causing catastrophic explosions.” “Overnight,” [journalist Walter] Lippmann wrote on December 9, “we have become … at long last a united people … an awakened people— wide awake to the stark truth that the very existence of the Nation, the lives, the liberties, and the fortunes of all of us are in the balance.”… “WE ARE DETERMINED that before the sun sets on this terrible struggle,” declared Gen. George C. Marshall, addressing a West Point graduating class in May 1942, “our flag will be recognized throughout the world as a symbol of freedom on the one hand and of over-whelming power on the other.” Liberty and might, America would soon learn in the decade that followed, did not always go comfortably hand in hand. The powerful crusade Marshall helped to lead stemmed from a global cause so compelling that more than one kind of compromise with the values and institutional conduct it was advancing seemed allowable, even necessary. With the ability of democracies to marshal might and wage war brought in question both by friends and foes, the fight against rampant militarism and oppressive dictatorships provoked decisions about allies, cruelty, and liberal democracy that often violated the very norms for which the global struggle was being waged. It would be facile simply to denounce, or even regret, such compromises. Nonetheless, it is important to assess their character and implications, especially because the challenges and questions posed by the requirements of the world war—a war in which, on average, 23,000 persons died every single day—did not end with the Allied victories in Europe and Asia. THE SHOCK of Pearl Harbor was still fresh when Franklin Roosevelt addressed the nation from the Oval Office by radio on December 9, 1941. Casting the confrontation in principled terms, he explained why this would not be a traditional war between states about contested territory, but a fundamental battle between different ways of living and governing. Japan, which had come to possess virtually all the coastal areas of China, and had extended its control from Russia to French Indochina, had shown itself ready, the president reported, to embrace the “international immorality” and “international brutality” of the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis.…

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﻿Even at the beginning of hostilities, World War II came to be seen as a crusade that pit decency and freedom against malevolence.… The scope of this struggle both demanded and justified a new balance between its imperatives and the values for which the war was being waged. From the very start, President Roosevelt warned the country that pursuing the battle could not but restrict freedom. His fireside speech two days after the hammer blow at Pearl Harbor explained that Washington would provide information to the public only when it “will not prove valuable to the enemy directly or indirectly…. It must be remembered by each and every one of us that our free and rapid communication these days must be greatly restricted in wartime.”… What is clear is that Roosevelt’s assertions of entitlement extended well beyond those claimed in wars by Abraham Lincoln or Woodrow Wilson. But also striking is the acquiescence of the legislature, which was not always the case during the Civil War. Roosevelt’s wartime powers were not simply proclaimed; many were explicitly delegated by Congress. The first such instance came a week after Pearl Harbor, when Congress passed the sweeping War Powers Act by voice vote, after only two hours of debate in each chamber… … Title XIV authorized the executive branch to carry out “special investigations and reports of census or statistical matters as may be needed in connection with the conduct of the war” and repealed the confidential status of census data, “notwithstanding any other provision in law.”… [It] underpin[ned] the policy of Japanese internment that had been announced on February 19. Arguing that “the successful prosecution of the war requires every possible protection against espionage and sabotage,” Executive Order 9066 established military areas in Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington from which every person with Japanese ancestry—112,000 in all, 79,000 of whom were citizens—was purged, notwithstanding the absence of treason or subversion.… …Placed under a curfew from 8:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M., then expelled from their homes, they were first moved, starting on March 23, 1942, to overcrowded and rudimentary temporary centers located at racetracks and fairgrounds whose functions had been suspended during the war. Sanitation was poor, privacy minimal. Books and articles written in Japanese were banned. Transfers followed in antiquated and packed passenger trains to ten austere and isolated “relocation centers” built hastily in remote and inhospitable locations in the interior of the country.… Until the order excluding persons with Japanese ancestry from the Pacific coast was lifted in January 1945, when the threat to U.S. security clearly no longer existed, Congress remained largely quiet but complicit. By voice vote in each chamber on March 21, 1942, it passed legislation that backed Executive Order 9066 by making it a federal crime to violate “the restrictions laid down by the President, the Secretary of War, or designated military subordinates.” Throughout the war, Congress continued to appropriate the funds, without debate, that made the camps possible.… THE FIRST and Second War Powers Acts delegated to President Roosevelt more power over American capitalism than he had achieved even during the New Deal’s radical moment.…

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﻿Placed on a war footing, the American economy, in short, was directed by a system of planning and control that “managed almost every area of what effectively became a state-capitalist system.” This second radical moment froze prices, capped profits, and rationed commodities, crops, and commercial goods. Government agencies and policies also controlled wages and limited maximum salaries after taxation to $25,000, starkly reduced consumer credit, and, in 1942, utterly banned the sale of new automobiles. A transformation of public finance was ushered in by the Revenue Acts of 1941 and 1942, which dramatically increased income-tax rates and expanded the tax base by reducing exemption levels.… …In all, the means that were utilized to propel the wartime effort to confront “the militaristic totalitarianism of the Roosevelt period” spurred the economy, brought about remarkable advances in weaponry, and established a tightly constrained civil capitalism and a firmly directed national security state, which reinvigorated the early New Deal’s emphasis on planning. The Soviet armed force was larger at the close of the war—the largest ever in global history—but America’s was “the mightiest in the world.” The war, however, did not simply challenge traditional democratic and constitutional rights and ideas. Central aspects of American democracy persisted. A robust press carried on. The House and Senate continued to meet, legislate, and, frequently clash with the president, especially after the 1942 elections produced significant Republican gains (the party won a majority of votes cast for the House, but a minority of seats, 209 of 435, and gained 8 Senate seats, thereby increasing to 38 members). There was nothing in the United States that came close to the degree of mobilization, repression, and murder practiced over the course of the war by the governments in Berlin and Moscow. Total war in the United States was a good deal less total. The assaults on the civil liberties of Japanese-Americans, African-Americans, and persons tried under the Smith Act were not the rule, but targeted exceptions. The broad assaults on freedom of assembly, speech, and person in the name of loyalty and security that had characterized the Civil War and World War I were not reprised.… … Unlike Britain, moreover, the United States cancelled no elections.… Soviet agony dominated Allied suffering. The Red Army’s resistance was achieved at an appalling price. After just seven months of fighting, the Soviet Union had lost 2,663,000 soldiers, with 3,000,000 captured. This was a ratio of twenty Soviet soldiers killed for every German. By war’s end, fully 84 percent of the 34.5 million persons the USSR mobilized for war service, of whom 29.5 million were soldiers, had died or endured injury or detention. By contrast, of the 16,112,556 people who had served the United States during the course of the war, 405,399 died… Comradely amnesia succeeded in putting out of mind the regime of terror the USSR imposed on Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, which led to the deportation of more than 120,000 and the murder of thousands after 500,000 Soviet soldiers entered in June 1940. There was no Allied commentary on the growing Gulag prison camp network and its brutal conditions of wartime forced labor…

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﻿democracies, and to pursue the war aims first announced in their Atlantic Charter, Britain and the United States could proceed only by ignoring, even shielding, the full range of action by their most important ally… THE CAMPAIGNS AGAINST Japanese militarism, Italian Fascism, and German Nazism turned the war into what a history of American bombing rightly recalled as “a crusade” in which “America tended to justify its actions in universal terms and pursue its goals with idealistic zeal. There was,” it concluded, “no limitation in the American way of fighting.” It would be folly to expect that normal market practices and democratic procedures would carry on as usual during this kind of struggle. What, though, would happen when the fighting stopped? Unrestricted wartime mobilization was coordinated from the new, fourmillion-square-foot Pentagon building, situated just outside Arlington Cemetery. Opened in March 1943 after a crash construction effort that took just sixteen months, this massive structure was designed to be temporary. Even as American troops spanned the globe, active planning was being conducted to ascertain how best to demobilize the armed forces, return the country to a prosperous peacetime economy, and recover normal democratic processes. With a fierce war being fought on two fronts, broad and detailed prescriptions for military discharges, readjustment centers, job placement, and veterans benefits were being developed in many federal agencies. So, too, were designs for terminating war contracts, disposing of stocks of supplies, scrapping weapons, and returning factories owned by the government to private ownership, control, and use. …[Congress] voted to bar any effort by the federal government to ask the armed services to hold on to its soldiers as a means to prevent postwar unemployment. The frantic pace of all this planning and legislation was propelled by anxiety. If the war had brought an end to Depression conditions of investment and employment, what would happen when this unprecedented federal investment and spending, not to mention price controls and active manpower policies, were finally withdrawn? The memory of the dire prewar economy lingered, … The American people, Walter Lippmann wrote at the start of June 1939, had once believed “with Roosevelt that they were organizing securely an abundant life for all the people.” With those hopes dashed, “the generation to which we belong is now frightened.” G.I. Joe: Fighting for Home JOHN MORTON BLUM On September 21, 1943, War Bond Day for the Columbia Broadcasting System, Miss Kate Smith spoke over the radio at repeated intervals, in all, sixty-five

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﻿times, from eight o’clock in the morning until two in the morning the next day. Her pleas to her listeners, some 20 million Americans, resulted in the sale of about $39 million worth of bonds. The content of her messages, according to a convincing analysis of her marathon, was less important than her person. [Smith was a popular singer best known for her rendition of “God Bless America.”] Her listeners responded as they did in large part because for them she symbolized, in heroic proportions, values they honored: patriotism, sincerity, generosity. In that, of course, she was not alone. Edward L. Bernays, the premier public-relations counselor in the United States, accepted a commission during the war from the Franklin Institute “to give Benjamin Franklin greater fame and prestige in the hierarchy of American godhead symbols.” As Bernays went about his business of persuading local communities to name streets, buildings, even firehouses after his subject, he found his task easy, for, as he put it, “our society craves heroes.” War accentuated that craving, especially for those at home who sought symbols on which to focus the sentiments they felt or were, they knew, supposed to feel—symbols that would assist the imagination in converting daily drabness into a sense of vicarious participation in danger. The battlefield provided a plenitude of such symbols, of genuine heroes who were then ordinarily clothed, whether justly or not, with characteristics long identified with national virtue. The profiles of the heroes of the war followed reassuring lines, some of them perhaps more precious than ever before because they had become less relevant, less attainable than they had been in a simpler, more bucolic past. Some others, less sentimental, were no less reassuring, for they displayed the hero as a man like other men, not least the man who wanted to admire someone whose place and ways might have been his own, had chance so ruled. No leap of a reader’s imagination, however, could easily find believable heroes in the Army’s official communiqués. Though they sometimes mentioned names, those accounts supplied only summaries of action that generally obliterated both the brutality and the agony of warfare. Robert Sherrod, who landed with the marines at Tarawa and wrote a piercing description of that ghastly operation, deplored the inadequacy of American information services. “Early in the war,” he commented, “one communiqué gave the impression that we were bowling over the enemy every time our handful of bombers dropped a few pitiful tons from 3,000 feet. The stories … gave the impression that any American could lick any twenty Japs.… The communiqués … were rewritten by press association reporters who waited for them back at rear headquarters. The stories almost invariably came out liberally sprinkled with ‘mash’ and ‘pound’ and other ‘vivid’ verbs…. It was not the correspondents’ fault…. The stories which … deceived … people back home were … rewritten … by reporters who were nowhere near the battle.” Bill Mauldin, the incomparable biographer of the GI, made a similar complaint about reporting from Italy. Newspapers, he recommended, should “clamp down … on their rewrite men who love to describe ‘smashing armored columns,’ the ‘ground forces sweeping ahead,’ ‘victorious cheering armies,’ and ‘sullen supermen.’” W. L. White, who interviewed the five survivors of Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron 3, the group that evacuated MacArthur from Corregidor, quoted Lieutenant Robert B. Kelly to the same

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﻿point: “The news commentators … had us all winning the war.… It made me very sore. We were out here where we could see these victories. There were plenty of them. They were all Japanese.… Yet if even at one point we are able to check … an attack, the silly headlines chatter of a victory.” The resulting deception was not inadvertent. While the Japanese early in 1942 were overpowering the small, ill-equipped American garrisons on Pacific islands, the armed services invented heroic situations, presumably to encourage the American people, who might better have been allowed to face depressing facts. So it was with the mythic request of the embattled survivors on Wake Island: “Send us more Japs.” That phrase, which the motion pictures tried later to immortalize, had originated merely as padding to protect the cryptographic integrity of a message from Wake to Pearl Harbor describing the severity of the American plight. So, too, in the case of Colin Kelly, a brave pilot stationed in the Philippines, who died in action when the Japanese attacked. The Army exploited his valor by exaggerating his exploits, a ruse soon exposed to the desecration of Kelly’s memory. His heroism, like that of the marines on Wake Island, deserved better treatment than it received. It deserved the truth. The truth about American soldiers, heroic or not, centered in their experience in the Army, in training, in the field, under fire. In contrast to the official communiqués, the best independent reporting revealed that truth, which was often comic or poignant when it was not triumphant or glorious. It was harder to find out much about the men themselves, their lives before they had become soldiers, their homes and parents, rearing and calling, character and hopes. About those matters even the best reporters had ordinarily to work from partial evidence and had to write, given the wartime limits of time and space, selectively. In the first instance, from among all the men in arms, the heroes selected themselves. Their bravery, self-sacrifice, and sheer physical endurance earned them a martial apotheosis. Usually that was the end of the story, except for a parenthesis identifying the hero’s home town. But on occasion, moving to a next stage, correspondents at the front used what data they had to endow the soldiers they knew with recognizable qualities of person and purpose. In the process, truth became selective. Whether consciously or inadvertently, the reporters tended to find in the young men they described the traits that Americans generally esteemed. Those in uniform shared with their countrymen a common exposure to values dominant in the United States and to the special circumstances of the Great Depression, just ended. They had a sameness that in some degree set them apart from servicemen of other countries. But the necessarily selective reporting about them, governed as it was by the comfortable conventions of American culture, made the GI’s and their officers more than merely representative Americans. It freed them from the sterile anonymity of official communiqués, but it also made them exemplars of national life, heroic symbols that satisfied the normal social preferences and the wartime psychological needs of American civilians…. “The range of their background was as broad as America.” Robert Sherrod wrote of the marines at Tarawa, but his “hard-boiled colonel,” he noted, was “born on a farm” and his bravest captain came from a small town. Ira Wolfert,

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﻿in Battle for the Solomons, provided background information about only two of the dozens of men he mentioned. One was an accountant who loved the blues; the other “a farm boy out in Wisconsin.” Of the relatively few heroes whom Time chose for special attention in 1944, one was a sharecropper, another “a big, silent farm hand.” The strains in American culture that related the virtuous to the rural or the outdoors or the gridiron recalled the images of the early twentieth century, of the Rough Riders and Theodore Roosevelt’s “strenuous life.” Similarly, Life and the New York Times, commenting upon the long odds against victorious GI’s, evoked the cult of the underdog, the sentiments that in times of peace had often given an allure to the antitrust laws or, for the apolitical, to the Brooklyn Dodgers. The victory of character over hard work, over the long odds of the society or the economy, had provided, too, the stuff of the folklore of success, the scenario for the poor boy whose struggle to overcome the handicaps of his background won him fortune and fame. That kind of struggle, though rarely successful, had particularly marked American experience and consciousness during the 1930’s. It was a part of the civilian past of most soldiers, and, naturally enough, a part frequently remarked by war correspondents. The habit of joyful hard work, one ingredient of the cult of success, had always beguiled The Saturday Evening Post, which build its circulation not the least upon continual publication of updated [Horatio] Alger stories. The Post found an illustrious example of its favorite theme in Dwight David Eisenhower. As a boy in a household of modest means, he had “always had plenty to do. They had an orchard, a large garden, a cow, a horse, and always a dog. The boys did all the outdoor work, milked the cow and … helped with the housework.… They also all found additional jobs….” Dwight pulled ice in the local ice plant, or helped near-by farmers. “It taught them a lot,” their mother said. By implication, Sherrod and Hersey said as much about their young heroes on the Pacific islands who had faced the vicissitudes of the Depression as they faced the ordeals of the jungle. There was, for one, “Hawk,” a marine captain, promoted from the ranks, killed at Tarawa. Before the war, “he … was awarded a scholarship to the Texas College of Mines.… Like most sons of the poor, he worked.… He sold magazines and delivered newspapers.… He was a ranchhand, a railroadhand, and a bellhop.”… Aviators, when they won attention as heroes, shared many attributes of the foot soldiers but also represented uncommon qualities, those of a glamorous elite. The pilots and navigators, bombardiers and gunners were special men. They had to pass rigorous physical and mental tests. They received rapid promotion and high hazardous-duty pay. Instead of mud or jungle heat or desert cold, they enjoyed, at least part of the time, the amenities of an air base and always the romantic environment of the sky. There, exploring a vertical frontier, operating complex, powerful machinery, they flew into sudden and explosive danger. As Ernie Pyle observed: “A man approached death rather decently in the Air Force. He died well-fed and clean-shaven.”… Of all the war correspondents, Pyle, Hersey, and Mauldin wrote most intimately and extensively about the men they knew, about their hopes and dreams in the

﻿context of their fright and hardship. “In the magazines,” Pyle wrote, “war seemed romantic and exciting, full of heroics and vitality … yet I didn’t seem capable of feeling it.… Certainly there were great tragedies, unbelievable heroism, even a constant undertone of comedy. But when I sat down to write, I saw instead men … suffering and wishing they were somewhere else … all of them desperately hungry for somebody to talk to besides themselves, no women to be heroes in front of, damned little wine to drink, precious little song, cold and fairly dirty, just toiling from day to day in a world full of insecurity, discomfort, homesickness and a dulled sense of danger. The drama and romance were … like the famous falling tree in the forest—they were no good unless there was somebody around to hear. I knew of only twice that the war would be romantic to the men: once when they could see the Statue of Liberty and again on their first day back in the home town with the folks.” The GI’s shared, in Pyle’s words, “the one really profound goal that obsessed every … American.” That goal was home. Before the landing in Sicily they talked to Pyle about their plans: “These gravely yearned-for futures of men going into battle include so many things—things such as seeing the ‘old lady’ again, of going to college … of holding on your knee just once your own kid … of again becoming champion salesman of your territory, of driving a coal truck around the streets of Kansas City once more and, yes, of just sitting in the sun once more on the south side of a house in New Mexico.… It was these little hopes … that made up the sum total of our worry … rather than any visualization of physical agony to come.”… Soldiers in the armies of all nations in all wars have yearned to go home, but the GI’s sense of home was especially an American sense. “Our men,” Pyle wrote, “… are impatient with the strange peoples and customs of the countries they now inhabit. They say that if they ever get home they never want to see another foreign country.” Home for the soldier, according to the New York Times, was “where the thermometer goes below 110° at night … where there are chocolate milk shakes, cokes, iced beer, and girls.” The GI had had enough of crumpets and croissants: “Tea from the British and vin rouge from the French … have only confirmed his original convictions: that America is home, that home is better than Europe.” Even the sophisticated missed homely American fare. Richard L. Tobin, a correspondent for the New York Herald Tribune, had arrived in London only a few days before he complained, like the GI’s, about English food: “What wouldn’t I give right now for a piece of bread spread with soft butter, heaped with American peanut butter, and accompanied by a big glass of ice-cold milk!” Food, of course, was metaphor. Its full meaning was best expressed when John Hersey went into that Guadalcanal valley with a company of marines. “Many of them,” Hersey wrote, “probably had brief thoughts, as I did, of home. But what I really wondered was whether any of them gave a single thought to what the hell this was all about. Did these men, who might be about to die, have any war aims? What were they fighting for, anyway?” Far along the trail into the jungle, “these men … not especially malcontents” gave Hersey his answer. “What would you say you were fighting for?” he asked. “Today, here in this valley, what are you fighting for?”

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﻿… Their faces became pale. Their eyes wandered. They looked like men bothered by a memory. They did not answer for what seemed a very long lime. Then one of them spoke, but not to me. He spoke to the others, and for a second I thought he was changing the subject or making fun of me, but of course he was not. He was answering my question very specifically. He whispered: “Jesus, what I’d give for a piece of blueberry pie.” … Fighting for pie. Of course that is not exactly what they meant… here pie was their symbol of home. In other places there are other symbols. For some men, in places where there is plenty of good food but no liquor, it is a good bottle of Scotch whiskey. In other places, where there’s drink but no dames, they say they’d give their left arm for a blonde. For certain men, books are the things; for others, music; for others, movies. But for all of them, these things are just badges of home. When they say they are fighting for these things, they mean they are fighting for home—“to get the goddam thing over and get home.” Perhaps this sounds selfish.… But home seems to most marines a pretty good thing to be fighting for. Home is where the good things are—the generosity, the good pay, the comforts, the democracy, the pie. Hersey, a decent man, listed democracy, but soldiers usually talked about creature comforts, secure routines, even affluence. There were three sailors Ernie Pyle knew. One wanted to build a cabin on five acres of his own in Oregon. Another wanted to return to earning bonuses as a salesman for Pillsbury flour. As for a third, a photographer before the war: “His one great postwar ambition … was to buy a cabin cruiser big enough for four, get another couple, and cruise down the Chattahoochee River to the Gulf of Mexico, then up the Suwannee, making color photos of the whole trip.” A marine lieutenant colonel in the South Pacific had simpler fancies: “I’m going to start wearing pajamas again.… I’m going to polish off a few eggs and several quarts of milk.… A few hot baths are also in order.… But I’m saving the best for last—I’m going to spend a whole day flushing a toilet, just to hear the water run.” Home spurred the troops to fight. Even the self-consciously reflective soldiers, who linked the real and the ideal as Hersey did, stressed the palpable. The Saturday Evening Post ran a series by GI’s on “What I am Fighting For.” One characteristic article began: “I am fighting for that big house with the bright green roof and the big front lawn.” The sergeant-author went on to include his “little sister,” his gray-haired parents, his “big stone church” and “big brick schoolhouse,” his “fine old college” and “nice little roadster,” his piano, tennis court, black cocker spaniel, the two houses of Congress, the “magnificent Supreme Court,” “that President who has led us,” “everything America stands for.” It was a jumble: he mentioned “freedom” one sentence after he wrote about “that girl with the large brown eyes and the reddish tinge in her hair, that girl who is away at college right now, preparing herself for her part in the ﻿future of America and Christianity.” The jumble satisfied the Post and its readers, who would have liked less the findings of the Army Air Corps Redistribution Center at Atlantic City. Returnees there in 1944, a representative group of men, “surprisingly normal physically and psychologically,” in the opinion of the physicians who examined them, felt contempt for civilians, distrusted “politicians,” and resented labor unions. According to the Assistant Secretary of War for Air, “there is very little idealism. Most regard the war as a job to be done and there is not much willingness to discuss what we are fighting for.” The Assistant Secretary thought indoctrination lectures would help. On the basis of his own experience, Ernie Pyle would probably have disagreed: Awhile back a friend of mine … wrote me an enthusiastic letter telling of the … Resolution in the Senate calling for the formation of a United Nations organization to coordinate the prosecution of the war, administer reoccupied countries, feed and economically reestablish liberated nations, and to assemble a … military force to suppress any future military aggression. My friend … ordered me … to send back a report on what the men at the front thought of the bill. I didn’t send my report, because the men at the front thought very little about it one way or the other.… It sounded too much like another Atlantic Charter.… The run-of-the-mass soldiers didn’t think twice about this bill if they heard of it at all.… We see from the worm’s eye view, and our segment of the picture consists only of tired and dirty soldiers who are alive and don’t want to die… of shocked men wandering back down the hill from battle … of … smelly bed rolls and C rations … and blown bridges and dead mules … and of graves and graves and graves.… The mood of the soldiers conformed in large measure to the mood of Washington. There was, as Henry Morgenthau had said, “little inspirational” for young men and women. The President, deliberately avoiding talk about grand postwar plans, concentrated on victory first and almost exclusively. So did the GI, for he knew that he had to win the war before he could get home, his ultimate objective. He felt, the New York Times judged, “that the war must be finished quickly so that he can return to take up his life where he left it.” There was not “any theoretical proclamation that the enemy must be destroyed in the name of freedom,” Pyle wrote after the Tunisian campaign; “it’s just a vague but growing individual acceptance of the bitter fact that we must win the war or else.… The immediate goal used to be the Statue of Liberty; more and more it is becoming Unter den Linden.” Winning the war, his intermediate goal, turned the soldier to his direct task, combat. There impulses for friendship and generosity had to surrender to instincts for killing and hate. “It would be nice … to get home,” one pilot told Bob Hope, “… and stretch my legs under a table full of Mother’s cooking.… But all I want to do is beat these Nazi sons-of-bitches so we can ﻿get at those little Jap bastards.” The hardening process of training and danger, in Marion Hargrove’s experience, made “a civilian into a soldier, a boy into a man.” “Our men,” Pyle concluded, “can’t … change from normal civilians into warriors and remain the same people.… If they didn’t toughen up inside, they simply wouldn’t be able to take it.” The billboard overlooking Tulagi harbor carried the message: “Kill Japs; kill more Japs; you will be doing your part if you help to kill those yellow bastards.” Bill Mauldin was more reflective: “I read someplace that the American boy is not capable of hate … but you can’t have friends killed without hating the men who did it. It makes the dogfaces sick to read articles by people who say, ‘It isn’t the Germans, it’s the Nazis.’… When our guys cringe under an 88 barrage, you don’t hear them say ‘Those dirty Nazis.’ You hear them say, ‘Those goddam Krauts.’” Mauldin understood hate and hated war: Some 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 Queensberry rules. You shoot him in the back, you blow him apart with mines, you kill or maim him… with the least danger to yourself. He does the same to you … and if you don’t beat him at his own game you don’t live to appreciate your own nobleness. But you don’t become a killer. No normal man who has smelled and associated with death ever wants to see any more of it.… The surest way to become a pacifist is to join the infantry. War, Bob Hope thought, made “a lot of guys appreciate things they used to take for granted,” and Pyle believed that “when you’ve lived with the unnatural mass cruelty that man is capable of … you find yourself dispossessed of the faculty for blaming one poor man for the triviality of his faults. I don’t see how any survivor of war can ever again be cruel.” Mauldin put it more bluntly: “The vast majority of combat men are going to be no problem at all. They are so damned sick and tired of having their noses rubbed in a stinking war that their only ambition will be to forget it.” Consequently Mauldin was not much worried about the adaptability of the veteran: I’ve been asked if I have a postwar plan for Joe and Willie. I do.… Joe and Willie are very tired of war.… While their buddies are … trying to learn to be civilians again, Joe and Willie are going to do the same.… If their buddies find their girls have married somebody else, and if they have a hard time getting jobs back, and if they run into difficulties in the new, strange life of a free citizen, then Joe and Willie are going to do the same. And if they finally get settled and drop slowly into the happy obscurity of a humdrum job and a little wife and a household of kids, Joe and Willie will be happy to settle down too. They might even shave and become respectable ﻿Indeed they might. The GI, a homely hero, naturally decent and generous, inured slowly to battle and danger, would be in the end still generous, still trusting, wiser but still young, dirtier but still more content in his office or factory or on his sunswept farm. He was as plain, as recognizable, as American as the militiamen of the past, he was the conscript citizen—competent enough but fundamentally an amateur, a transient, and an unhappy warrior. He was the essential republican, the common good man. He was the people’s hero. Like them, he had little visible purpose but winning the war so that he could return to a familiar, comfortable America, to what an earlier generation meant, more or less, by “normalcy.”

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