

2015

GI Jive: US Soldiers' Writings and Post-World War II America

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GI JIVE: US SOLDIERS' WRITINGS AND POST-WORLD WAR II AMERICA

A thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts
in
History
by

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Marshall University
May 2015

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ABSTRACT

This work is a comprehensive study of American soldiers' writings during World War II as they related to personal and national postwar aims. The paper uses military and domestic publications along with a selection of memoirs and diaries published during and immediately after the war to create an overview of soldiers' ideological and material desires of postwar America.

INTRODUCTION

“Historians eager to find out what GI Joe has on his mind need only look into the hundreds of letters addressed daily to *YANK*, the Army’s virile weekly magazine.”

Beatrice Oppenheim, “GI Joe Wants to Know,” *New York Times Magazine*, 7 January 1945, 47.

With the close of the First World War, American soldiers were discharged with \$60 and a train ticket home as virtually the only tokens of gratitude from an appreciative nation. When these measures proved unsatisfactory, veterans of the Great War spent the first half of the 1920s lobbying for the bonus compensation they felt was their due. Finally, in 1924, Congress passed the World War Adjusted Compensation Act, essentially a trust fund to be payable to veterans in 1945. The stock market crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, however, led many impoverished veterans to demand immediate payment on those insurance policies, a demand that finally culminated in the so-called “Bonus Army” march on Washington in mid-1932.

Approximately 20,000 ex-servicemen set up camp in the nation’s capital to protest what they perceived to be deliberate slights, and while it was a remarkably peaceful demonstration, these veterans were nonetheless driven out of Washington by a heavily armored unit of the regular army led by future war hero Douglas MacArthur.

A decade and some years later, the next generation, many of them sons and nephews of World War I veterans, renewed that fight in a very different and much more vocal context. While popular mainstream magazines like *Life* and *Time* to more “high-brow” journals like *American Mercury* and *Atlantic Monthly* claimed to speak for the American soldier, few actually bothered asking that soldier himself. As such, thousands of GIs during World War II took to expressing themselves in very public ways on a scale unseen in American military history. In particular, it was popular media and Army-specific publications that gave soldiers the forum to express their opinions on existing legislation as well as the hopes, fears, complaints, and suggestions they had for any future laws that might directly affect them and their country. In

examining the editorial pages of any given magazine of the time, one can find an astonishing variety of topics that occupied the soldiers' minds, which ran counter to the traditional notion that all servicemen were naïve country boys who fought only for Mom, baseball, and apple (or blueberry, or cherry) pie. While the majority of soldiers' letters in editorials addressed issues of immediate concern, typically financial matters and postwar veterans' benefits, there is still an abundance of evidence to suggest that many soldiers also spent a good deal of time thinking about not only their own fortunes, but the fate of their country and even the world after World War II. This thesis, then, concerns itself primarily with this obvious preoccupation with the postwar world as expressed by many of the vocal millions of Americans who fought to make that world something worth dreaming about in the first place. The intent is not to present the picture of starry-eyed idealists fighting strictly to democratize the world, nor to discount the notion that much of the Army was comprised of draftees who might well have wanted a better world after the battles were over, but who more than anything simply wanted to return to their normal lives. Rather, this thesis takes aim at the idea of the "thoughtless" American GI that has, until very recently, gone unchallenged. The world of soldier newspapers and even domestic periodicals teems with lively debates that have inexplicably fallen into the cracks of World War II historiography; this project is but a small step toward a solution that will, with any luck, be taken up by other historians more interested by the human bodies of war than the mechanical or political.

Unfortunately, the image of the American GI as an entity concerned only with his own survival was cemented thoroughly enough during World War II to extend into modern historiography. Even after nearly seventy years, in a field in which seemingly every minute detail of the war has been documented, analyzed, reevaluated, and debated to the point of

exhaustion, veterans studies have thus far been reduced to footnotes in military histories. Social and cultural historians have begun looking at the American soldier of WWII as a human being rather than a serial number only relatively recently, an interest possibly kindled by the multiple sociological studies of Vietnam War participants. According to historian Robert Francis Saxe, the popular image of veterans depends greatly on the popular image of the war they fought; Vietnam, being the “unpopular” war fought for apparently esoteric (and even “immoral”) reasons, cast its veterans in a negative light, which historians have treated accordingly in the focus upon veterans’ real and perceived psychological, economic, and social problems. Conversely, the Second World War was a “good” war fought for reasons Americans could easily understand (retaliation for the attack on Pearl Harbor, to stop evil and maintain the political status quo, etc.), and its soldiers, too, have typically enjoyed the same goodwill with which the war itself was and is regarded. Saxe takes this a step further by hypothesizing that just as the Cold War era consensus mentality stifled signs of veteran unrest in the 1950s, the turbulent, often uncertain atmosphere of the 1960s and ‘70s lent itself to a conception of veterans as restless at best, psychologically damaged misfits at worst. Furthermore, Saxe claims, any discontent or nonconformity World War II veterans showed was not only downplayed immediately after the war; politicians and historians alike outright ignored those signs to draw a starker contrast between the World War II and Vietnam generations.¹

Mark D. Van Ells is another historian interested in World War II veterans who, like Saxe, tends to focus on the process of demobilization and veterans’ impact on society immediately after the war. Again, like Saxe, Van Ells makes claims that can just as easily be applied to the soldier in combat as his postwar civilian incarnation. To him, it is as though a sizeable portion of

1. Robert Francis Saxe, *Settling Down: World War II Veterans’ Challenge to the Postwar Consensus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2-3.

the United States population simply “slipped through the cracks of the historian’s standard disciplinary categories.”² Just as Van Ells does not agree that the war receded into the past as soon as the military uniforms were removed, it is also shortsighted to believe that the thoughts, hopes, and fears of the GIs were similarly discarded.

Even Dixon Wecter, a literary and American political historian, lamented these same problems in his 1944 work, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*. By examining the demobilization histories of the American Revolution, Civil War, and World War I armies, Wecter attempted to forecast how World War II veterans would be received. In the introduction, Wecter pointed out a flaw in veterans’ historiography that was just as prominent in 1944 as it is today: the process of returning to civilian life is not incidental to military history, but a crucial part of it. “Between times that try men’s souls in battle and the piping times of peace,” Wecter wrote, that transition period “is the dead center which has generally escaped notice or been the subject of glib misstatements.”³

In general, Wecter’s implied hopes for increased interest in the shift from soldiers to civilians have proved to be in vain. As already pointed out, military history still tends, almost exclusively, toward discussions about tactics and weapons, and when interest is shown in the human combatants, it is usually either only in the form of variously ranked commanders or broad histories that generalize very large groups of people into simple, easily understood tropes. There is nothing wrong with either approach, of course, but both leave out the human element from their war stories, and neither goes to great lengths to address the mind of the individual inside the tank. While the intense interest in Vietnam veterans led many historians, sociologists, and

2. Mark D. Van Ells, *To Hear Only Thunder Again: America’s World War II Veterans Come Home* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), vi.

3. Dixon Wecter, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1944), 7.

psychologists to finally begin to look past the machine and to the man himself, it was still several more years before sincere interest trickled down to the World War II generation.

Given the increasing historiographical emphasis on the connection between the media and America's wars since Vietnam (although the trend toward faster, less sentimental reporting had certainly begun long before that conflict), it makes sense that scholars would tend to focus primarily on the past four or five decades when they wish to delve into the pictures, videos, words, and even the thoughts of those who fought in these more media-conscious wars. However, as historian Andrew J. Huebner notes in his recent monograph, *The Warrior Image*, World War II may have become known as "the censored war" but it was still the first to bring the war home in ways never before attempted, or even possible. Periodicals with news stories and vivid photographs, radio programs, and Hollywood all introduced millions of Americans to the literal image of the typical infantryman. After the war, this constant visual reminder persisted in their previous forms, as well as taking on new ones, such as in museum exhibits and television.⁴ Few historians, it seems, have taken the time to look past how the GI was represented and truly analyze how the GI represented himself. Civilian journalists of the 1940s failed to understand the important changes occurring in American citizen-soldiers' self-perceptions and the world around them, and this almost insultingly simplistic view has been perpetuated virtually without reservations to the present day.

Perhaps it is not so surprising, then, that whereas the civilian press took this naïve motif at face value, GIs carried out a lively debate amongst themselves over the validity of the GI's popular reputation as a simpleminded souvenir hunter. Some criticized their peers as being unintelligent automatons who cared only for their own safety and gave little or no thought to

4. Andrew J. Huebner, *The Warrior Image: Soldiers in American Culture from the Second World War to the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 7.

international affairs or the postwar world, while others adamantly denied these accusations and made convincing arguments about the difficulty of forming and sharing one's opinion while in the Army. Numerous surveys conducted by the War Department, as well as letters from GIs themselves in multiple periodicals, directly counter the notion that soldiers were entirely devoid of any ideological motivations. Chapter One will examine this debate and illuminate why some soldiers and civilian writers alike had little faith in the intellectual capacity of the average Joe and the counterarguments they faced.

Among the most vehement ideological debates in which soldiers engaged was the matter of two enormous and yet long-ignored segments of the American population: women and minorities. Chapter Two addresses two of the most pressing issues that troops struggled with in their musings about postwar America: how would wartime experiences both at the front and at home alter the status quo for ethnic minorities, particularly African-Americans? And, perhaps even more distressing to veterans looking for stability after the war, how would American women be changed by their experiences in industrial jobs previously closed to them? In general, the typical serviceman wanted a freer, more democratic future both in contrast to the dictatorships he helped to dismantle and compared to the economically depressed and socially stagnant culture he had left behind in the U.S. Contemporary civilian journalists and sociologists, on the other hand, appeared to urge a return to pre-1941 mores and ideas, ostensibly to give the returning veterans the "normalcy" and "familiarity" they craved, while ignoring their own insecurities over the drastic societal changes they had noticed as women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers and minority groups began to assert themselves as potent forces of change. By looking at the GIs' own ideas and those of their contemporary social

thinkers, Chapter Two attempts to both synthesize the two separate worlds and, when possible, to draw attention to and explain points of divergence.

The letters that appeared in *Stars and Stripes*, *YANK*, and many other publications show that when GIs were not actively working out their own solutions for domestic problems they expected to find in civilian life, they spent a good deal of time outlining what America's place should be in the postwar world. Unlike the previous generation that returned from the trenches and the insulating safety of two vast oceans, the World War II generation knew that America's longstanding tradition of isolationism was not only foolish, but impossible. For most servicemen, this was above all a political issue to be solved by political means, most notably in the form of a stronger, more decisive League of Nations or similar body through which the U.S. would lead (or at least participate in leading) the world to a place of peace and understanding. Not only did many GIs realize that the United States could only achieve peace through closer international cooperation, but they also had articulate ideas about how to maintain that peace. Chapter Three demonstrates how some authors focused on the more political aspects of such an endeavor, namely the process of building and sustaining an international governing and police force, as well as soldiers' thoughts on America's postwar military policies and how the defeated nations should be managed after the war.

Finally, no matter how much time and excellent scholarship has been devoted to the creation, passage, implementation, and effects of the GI Bill, no scholarly examination of World War II veterans' affairs would be complete without some form of discussion about the bill.⁵

5. See for example: Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The GI Bill: A New Deal for Veterans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books Inc., 1999); Edward Humes, *Over Here: How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006); Sar A. Levitan and Joyce K. Zickler, *Swords into Plowshares: Our G.I. Bill* (Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing, 1973); Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Theodore R. Mosch, *The G.I. Bill: A Breakthrough in Educational and Social Policy in the United States* (New York: Exposition Press,

Chapter Four examines the bill not from hindsight, as most other historians' work has done, but instead attempts a more immediate interpretation of the bill's provisions, promises, and shortcomings as expressed by the servicemen most directly affected. Much has been made about the GI Bill's effect on the rapid expansion of the American middle class in the 1950s and '60s, but very little, if anything, has been said about how veterans themselves felt about the opportunities being extended to them. Some soldiers publicly declared their appreciation, others resented the implication they were receiving a handout for performing what they felt was their patriotic duty, but most who wrote about the bill seemed indifferent and were more interested in a straight cash bonus and secure employment. This chapter, in an obvious departure from the rest of this work's more ideological approach, is meant to address the more pressing, materialistic worries soldiers expressed and to provide another perspective to the vast body of scholarly work about the GI Bill.

Due to time and space constraints, this thesis necessarily limits itself to a certain methodological system. Obviously an in-depth look at all sixteen million members of the armed forces during World War II is impossible, so the first limitation placed on the essay is that, with a few noted exceptions, all cited examples and statistics refer to the Army, with attempts made to specify Army Air Force troops where possible. Far from suggesting that any one branch deserves study over another, this is merely a logistical choice; of those sixteen million soldiers, over half served in the Army. Moreover, in the interests of gathering as wide and representative a sample as possible, the Army seemed the logical branch to choose also because of its widespread global presence during the war. Whereas the Navy and Marines served primarily in

1975); Keith W. Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974).

the Pacific, the Army sustained a sizeable presence in every theater of operation, thus leading to, one would hope, more diverse experiences and ideas to share.

Secondly, again in the interests of time, space, and conciseness, and to obtain the broadest possible scope, this thesis depends almost exclusively on the testimony of “average” soldiers. In general, this means young white men, mostly privates and non-commissioned officers. Specifically, according to a 1943 demographic study that appeared in one of the many War Department surveys conducted during the course of the war, the typical Joe was between twenty and twenty-four years old (42%), from the northern U.S. (61%), single (67%), and had at least a partial high school education (54% overall, roughly split between graduates and non-graduates).⁶ Yet again, this is not in any way meant to imply that others’ contributions to the war efforts were somehow less significant, or that their own thoughts and opinions are any less valid than those of the composite GI this essay seeks to piece together. Unfortunately, in a work of this length, there is simply not enough adequate space to dedicate to America’s many cultural groups who each have very important stories to tell, and to attempt to shoehorn them into this project would be doing them a great disservice. The current trend in more culturally-oriented military history is leading to greater understanding of those all but forgotten participants, and there are many excellent histories already available to readers wishing for more specific, in-depth accounts.⁷

6. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, “Who is the American Soldier?” in *What the Soldier Thinks: A Monthly Digest of War Department Studies on the Attitudes of American Troops*, vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 105-112.

7. For monographs on African-Americans in the U.S. military during World War II, see Phillip McGuire, *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1983); Christopher Paul Moore, *Fighting for America: Black Soldiers--The Unsung Heroes of World War II* (New York: Random House, 2005); and Maggie Morehouse, *Fighting in the Jim Crow Army: Black Men and Women Remember World War II* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000). For books about women in the military, see Olga Gruhzt-Hoyt, *They Also Served: American Women in World War II* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Pub. Group, 1995); Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Book Sales, Inc., 2008); and

In the interests of a more socially-aware approach to World War II military history, then, the proceeding chapter introduces the “average” enlisted man in the U.S. Army at the time and the basic debate that underpins the rest of the work. Did the typical soldier care or even know why he was fighting?

Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004). Other minorities have received less attention, but among others worth exploring, see Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Maggie Rivas-Rodríguez, *A Legacy Greater than Words: Stories of U.S. Latinos & Latinas of the WWII Generation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008); Kevin Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese-Americans and the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Bill Yenne, *Rising Sons: The Japanese American GIs who Fought for the United States in World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007).

CHAPTER ONE: GIS AND APPLE PIE

Who was the “average” GI? According to a 1943 demographic study that appeared in one of the many War Department surveys conducted during the course of the war, the typical Joe was between twenty and twenty-four years old (42 percent), from the northern U.S. (61 percent), single (67 percent), and had at least a partial high school education (54 percent overall, roughly split between graduates and non-graduates). One of the few editorial remarks made in the survey noted proudly that “The American Army is the best-educated army in history. Two-fifths of the enlisted men are high school graduates, and one man in eight has attended college.”¹

Ostensibly the “best-educated army” the world had ever seen, GIs had a reputation as voracious readers, with books in camp libraries often being read over forty times before finally being thrown out from excessive wear. What they read, though, was often a point of contention not only among civilians worried about the mental and moral health of “our boys” overseas, but also among soldiers themselves, who were likewise concerned with the perceived lack of intelligence and reasoning they claimed to see in their peers. Columnists at home could almost be forgiven the clichés they perpetuated of the wholesome American boys going off to war to fight for democracy and to preserve their country exactly as it was, flaws and all. Living in one of the few nations fortunate enough to escape direct and prolonged battle on its own soil, columnists found it deceptively easy to maintain the belief that John Smith from down the street was the very same person he was before he left. The popular image of fresh-faced Yanks reminiscing about baseball and their sweethearts back home is not a modern invention, but in fact can be traced to the earliest days of the war. An anonymous columnist in *Life* wrote that

1. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, “Who is the American Soldier?” in *What the Soldier Thinks: A Monthly Digest of War Department Studies on the Attitudes of American Troops*, vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 105-112.

“The GI is dreaming in the mud about the peaches and cream and the pin-up girls of peace,” while a staff sergeant wrote in *New York Times Magazine* that every soldier dreamed about home, and home itself was “Mom, apple pie and his girl.”² In a letter published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in May 1945, Lieutenant W. H. Long of the Naval Reserves lamented that many of his friends in the U.S. believed that the veteran had only four desires: get home, get his old job back, go back to his old girlfriend, and “forget about the whole damned, dirty business of war.”³ Master Sergeant Joe McCarthy (unrelated to Senator McCarthy) summarized the home front’s opinion of soldier wishes as wanting “nothing more significant than a dish of his mother’s blueberry pie and nothing more democratic than his right to boo the umpire.” Combat outfits, McCarthy continued, eventually turned the cliché into a running joke, claiming they were only about to face lethal enemy fire so that they were free to yell at baseball officials over bad calls.⁴

Harder to understand is how other soldiers, fully aware of the radical changes they and their peers were undergoing, were able to make accusations that the regular serviceman had no idea what he was fighting for, and that he was probably too uneducated to understand anyway. In the August 21st, 1943 edition of *The Nation*, a private first class stationed in Canada who identified himself only by his initials, E. W., touched off a series of letters in the magazine's next several issues. In his original letter, the private laments the fact that pitifully few of his fellow soldiers seem to take the war as seriously as they should. Post-war plans on a national and international scale are overlooked and instead give way to idle gossip and lurid stories about sexual encounters. In his barracks, he writes, only one—presumably himself—is “interested

2. Anonymous, “Soldiers and Civilians: Good Soldiers Have Always Made Good Citizens in America,” *Life*, 25 September 1944, 36; Staff Sergeant Ralph G. Martin, “What the Soldier Thinks About,” *New York Times Magazine*, 24 October 1943, 8.

3. Lieutenant W. H. Long, “Ten Veterans Plan for Peace,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 26 May 1945, 17-18.

4. Master Sergeant Joe McCarthy, “GI Vision of a Better America,” *New York Times Magazine*, 5 August 1945, 10.

enough in political and social matters to read anything more progressive or politically mature than *Life* magazine.”⁵

The real trouble was not precisely that GIs failed to give proper time and thought to important matters, but that these very same men were going to be expected to carry the world on their shoulders as soon as the war ended. They were the ones who were going to be charged with keeping the peace, but evidently they knew very little about the peace they were being asked to keep or the world they were helping to build. The following month, private “G. C.” of Kansas scolded his fellows for their “cultural and educational impotence,” and just as bitterly chastised America itself when he wondered “what kind of nation, what kind of civilization” could produce such an intellectually bankrupt Army.⁶ Continuing the trend, a “bewildered Seabee” stationed in California asked the following month how the same men who wasted their time “bragging about their amorous conquests and their staggering capacities for liquor” could ever be expected “to have a moment for sober and serious reading.” Stunned, he wondered how soldiers could spend countless hours complaining about missing their families while huddling in foxholes, and yet still “give no thought as to why all this has happened, or why so many must die.”⁷ Three weeks later, the magazine published yet another letter in a similar vein, this time from an anonymous engineer in Tennessee who bitterly complained that his outfit’s reading material consisted mostly of comic books and dime novels and that his peers did not seem to understand that “democracy must be fought for after the last bomb is dropped.”⁸

5. PFC E. W., “What Soldiers Think About,” *The Nation*, 21 August 1943, 222.

6. Private G. C., “To Make the Angels Weep,” *The Nation*, 18 September 1943, 335.

7. A Bewildered Seabee, “What’s Wrong?” *The Nation*, 2 October 1943, 391.

8. Anonymous, “Soldiers and Democracy,” *The Nation*, 23 October 1943, 482.

The Nation may have been described as “the flagship of the left,” but the next set of letters clearly shows that this was not a complaint restricted to the educated liberal side of the political spectrum. *YANK: The Army Weekly*, was arguably the most popular publication among US soldiers during the war. Though not actually published by the Army, and while the paper was granted more editorial freedom than its competition, *Stars and Stripes: The Official Newspaper of the United States Army*, *YANK*'s publishing staff still had to go through official military channels. Its views were generally more moderate than the status quo of *Stars and Stripes*, but it could hardly have been termed a liberal publication. Regardless, the magazine still saw its share of debates fought out in its editorial pages, the longest-running and most heated of which was touched off by Sergeant Irving Cohen in June 1944. “The majority of soldiers all over the world,” according to Cohen, “do not know why they are soldiers . . . [or] why the war started, nor have they any concrete ideas of a post-war world,” and instead care only for “their own miserable selves.”⁹ Private First Class S. P. Ostiller, also stationed in Iran, resented Cohen's condemnation of the regular Army man as “ignorant and selfish,” but agreed on the point that the only thing anyone seemed to be fighting for was to shed their uniform and go home. Despite the fact veterans would be the ones who had the biggest say in how the postwar world would operate, Ostiller complained that they could not prevent another war if this was all the interest they were capable of showing in world affairs.¹⁰ In that same letters column, Sergeant Hugh McGilvery, yet another GI serving in Iran, recalled the lost battle of the peace following World War I. American doughboys “fought for the privilege of going home and taking their shoes off,” but by not concerning themselves with the world as it would exist after the war, they “went home to unemployment, rampant racism, a nation confounded by world upheavals and, finally, another

9. Sergeant Irving Cohen, “Thinking Soldiers,” *YANK*, 23 June 1944, 14.

10. Private First Class S. P. Ostiller, “Thinking Soldiers,” *YANK*, 1 December 1944, 14.

and greater war” that their sons would have to fight. McGilvery further criticizes the enlisted man and officer alike for interpreting the war as “a gigantic conspiracy” with the explicit purpose of personally ruining his life.¹¹

Naturally, such bold claims did not go unchallenged, and angry letters to the contrary appeared for weeks afterward in each new issue of both *The Nation* and *YANK*. The most effective rebuttals were those which pointed out the lack of access to current news, and the stifling of dissident opinion in *YANK* and *Stars and Stripes*, the two most widely read publications wherever the U. S. Army existed and the two most likely to obtain soldiers’ contributions.

Whereas the criticisms launched in *The Nation* were all from soldiers still in the U. S., letters defending the supposed lack of intelligence among troops typically came from active areas of operation. This seems to suggest two conclusions: first of all, one could both easily excuse and just as easily blame soldiers still in the U.S. for not worrying too much about postwar issues or for reading too much popular literature. They had yet to serve in any fighting capacity and, still being on American soil, sometimes not far from their hometowns, their thoughts and habits would naturally remain similar to what they always had been. On the other hand, also for the very reasons just listed, some soldiers resented that their peers did not take the opportunity to learn more about the war or what would happen in its aftermath. After all, GIs still in the U.S. did not have the constant threat of battle to weigh heavily on their minds, and they had far more readily available access to current news. Their overseas counterparts, meanwhile, were generally far more eager to prove their understanding of their country’s war objectives and their own awareness of problems facing the postwar world, just as they were far less likely to criticize their fellow troops for not thinking seriously about those same issues. So, too, were they likely to

11. Sergeant Hugh McGilvery, “Thinking Soldiers,” *YANK*, 1 December 1944, 14.

offer not only their own thoughts, but the reasons why it may have appeared to cynical civilians and U.S.-based troops that they had no greater concerns than their own safety.

Navy Lieutenant Jerome H. Spingarn chronicled the long list of obstacles facing anyone hoping to keep abreast of international affairs: letters from home typically arrived in about ten days, but newspapers and “other second-class matter” were transported by ship, were usually one to two months old by the time they arrived, and were frequently out of order, as any given mail shipment might be divided among different ships. The Post Exchange, often the only place servicemen could buy publications from home, tended to stock only “the most popular magazines and comic books.” This scarcity of adequate reading material was especially galling and demoralizing, Spingarn continued, precisely because the fighting man’s primary motivation was the “thought that he is fighting to make possible a progressive and democratic America in a progressive and democratic world.”¹²

Spingarn was not the only one who shed light on the difficulties with which servicemen abroad had to contend just to stay in the know. Staff Sergeant Haig R. Harotunian complained to the North African edition of *Stars and Stripes* that since landing in Africa nearly a full year earlier, at no point had he seen books “or any form of literature” forwarded to his unit. Cynically deriding the War Department’s claims that the current army was the “readingist bunch of boys” ever mustered into service, he concluded that all of that reading must have taken place in recreation centers either far from the front or still inside the U.S. Those actually fighting in the field, it seemed, had been forgotten, even while they were the most eager to learn what was happening on other fronts and what plans were being made for their eventual return to

12. Navy Lieutenant Jerome H. Spingarn, “Don’t Call Us G. I. Joe,” *The Nation*, 19 August 1944, 203-205. Although obviously not a part of the Army and therefore somewhat outside the perimeters assigned earlier in this essay, Spingarn’s explanation remains valid for the Army’s experience of acquiring printed material as well. As for the type of reading material someone like Spingarn might have preferred, one can presume that any major domestic newspapers and magazines would have been appreciated over cheap dime novels and comic books.

America.¹³ Even in Allied territory, news could be frustratingly hard to come by, as one anonymous sergeant noted in *The Nation*. While stationed in England, the sergeant's unit frequently expressed interest in holding discussion groups wherein they could go over the Allies' progress worldwide as well as what the political climate back home in America looked like. "So many fellows are starved for an opportunity to get some information on day-to-day political maneuverings as well as the plans shaping up for the post-war world," the sergeant wrote, that he took matters into his own hands by organizing an informal discussion group with his men. Though it was originally planned to seat only fifty guests, the event drew enough interest that the sergeant could only find room for an additional fifty of the hundred extra interested soldiers who showed up to the meeting. Inspired by his initiative, other sergeants and lieutenants, sometimes on their own and sometimes at the behest of their men, organized similar talks throughout the camp to counteract the sense of detachment and ignorance that was disheartening many GIs lacking other news outlets.¹⁴

One staff writer for the Mediterranean edition of *Stars and Stripes* described the regular soldier's ceaseless quest for news: "In any bivouac area anywhere, you can always find a bunch of guys straining their eyes in the darkening dusk rereading months-old magazines, papers, letters, anything." If they were lucky enough to have a functional radio, news broadcasts automatically trumped popular music, radio plays, comedians, even sports. Most importantly, the GIs were not merely passive listeners; nearly every night ended with idle conversation and discussing the news of the day, what it meant for the next day, and how it made sense in a

13. Staff Sergeant Haig R. Harotunian, "Appeal," *Stars and Stripes*, Mediterranean ed., 9 October 1943, 4.

14. Anonymous, "Army Education," *The Nation*, 11 December 1943, 714.

national and international context.¹⁵ Of course servicemen gossiped and joked about inconsequential matters, but claiming that they spent all their mental energy on such inane chatter is as inaccurate as suggesting that every man in uniform was a philosopher who devoted every waking moment to intellectual pursuits.

Lack of access to news of current events and even fewer outlets and opportunities to publicly discuss this news combined to create a distorted sense of the average fighting man's ability and willingness to articulate his opinions about anything of real significance. While it is obviously incorrect to assume that every serviceman in the war would have written diplomatic treatises if given the chance, one can also see how the clear hardships working against them created a gap in servicemen's literature that seems larger than it actually is. Quite naturally, soldiers themselves had more than a few points to make in their own defense.

Private Dale Kramer, in his article "What Soldiers Are Thinking About" in the December 1943 issue of *Harper's*, took exception to the idea that GIs lacked any kind of ideological or political motivation. While he conceded that "probably a majority . . . read little besides the comic strips, pulps, the sports page, and gossip columns," this is not quite the damning indictment it appears to be on the surface. As he aptly brings to the reader's attention, not only did servicemen have to contend with a lack of quality, up to date reading material, but those who enjoyed reading might well have taken the opportunity in the Army to put aside their books for the moment and learn firsthand about those around them, while those who had never shown much interest in reading could "hardly be expected to become Phi Beta Kappa candidates by the mere donning of a uniform."¹⁶ What was more, Kramer argued, servicemen had a natural

15. Staff Sergeant Ralph G. Martin, "Unit Papers Fill Void for 'Readingest' Soldier," *Stars and Stripes*, Mediterranean ed., 18 September 1943, 4.

16. Dale Kramer, "What Soldiers Are Thinking About," *Harper's*, December 1943, 68-75.

tendency to romanticize their past because even the dullest sort of life seemed desirable when one was freezing in a water-filled foxhole. But just as the GI reminisced about the life he left behind, he was also able to analyze that life from a literal and mental distance previously unavailable to him. Thus, Kramer concluded, this new penchant for critically evaluating one's life and the surrounding world had to directly influence "the soldier's attitude toward economic and political problems" of his country and the world at large.¹⁷

Statistically, a cross-sample of men serving in the European Theater of Operations also challenged the idea that GIs believed themselves to be totally ignorant in regards to global affairs and America's place in the world. Of the 1,824 men queried in this particular survey, 1,289, or about 70.6 percent, said that after the war they would be more interested in "reading and following the news about what the government is doing" and "what problems and issues are being discussed in Congress" than they were previously as civilians.¹⁸ Another survey, this time meant to be representative of the Army as a whole, surveyed 2,997 servicemen stationed in the United Kingdom. When asked if they had a clear idea why the U. S. was in the war, about 47 percent (1,414) answered that they had a "very clear idea," while another 39 percent (1,175) said they had a "fairly" clear idea, meaning 86 percent of respondents claimed to have at least some notion of the gravity of the conflict.¹⁹ An overwhelming majority of 68 percent (2,045) answered yes when asked if they believed they had a personal stake in the war, a blatant reflection on the amount of thought servicemen had given to both the war itself and the results

17. *Ibid.*, 74.

18. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, *The American Soldier in World War II: Attitudes Toward Post Hostilities Problems* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945), 30.

19. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, *The American Soldier in World War II: Attitudes Toward Army Life* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 17.

that might follow.²⁰ Approximately 72.6 percent (2,177) of the men surveyed expressed positive opinions of whether or not the men in their outfits were genuinely interested in “knowing more about why we are fighting, and what our aims in the war are.”²¹ Over one-third of the replies indicated an increased awareness of current events; 36 percent (1,079) GIs said they followed the news more closely while in service than they had as civilians, but in an echo of arguments previously made, that news was sometimes hard to come by. Soldiers deemed it “reasonably easy” to buy or borrow a copy of *Stars and Stripes* or English newspapers every day (2,381 and 1,919, respectively), but unofficial reports were harder to come by. Newspapers and news magazines from the U. S. never came close to the 79 percent acquisition rate of *Stars and Stripes*, with only about 48 percent of those surveyed claiming such items could be found with relative ease. News on the radio was apparently even harder to come by, as the percentages dropped further: around 45 percent regularly had success with receiving broadcast news not filtered first through Army channels.²²

Another problem commonly cited was the nature of the military itself. Corporal Carl E. Ennings of Alaska laid the onus of soldiers’ ignorance not on the actual soldiers themselves, but on the Army. To him, the Army “takes intelligent men and practically trains them to be unthinking and ignorant” of anything not directly related to weaponry and strategy. “They are told to keep quiet and obey orders . . . warned not to discuss the progress of the war, or pre-war or post-war problems,” and their camp newspapers are barred from discussing “controversial subjects” and thus sanitized beyond reason.²³ An anonymous sergeant in England made a similar

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 18.

22. Ibid., 21-22.

23. Corporal Carl E. Ennings, “Thinking Soldiers,” *YANK*, 19 May 1944, 14.

claim by pointing out that, officially, servicemen were prohibited from expressing themselves in “any manner that can be interpreted as political,” because he would then be acting as an extension of the U. S. government in his capacity as part of the Armed Forces. While the GI was permitted to “express opinions privately and informally” about whatever he wished, his freedom did not always extend to “any efforts so formal as the writing of articles for publication,” including editorials.²⁴

Even *YANK*, the perennial favorite reading material of choice among American soldiers, occasionally came under attack from its readers, especially early in its run when the publication was trying to find a proper balance between news and entertainment. While sport reports and photos of pin-up girls were fine, wrote Staff Sergeant W. Dresher while in Hawaii, the magazine was too shallow in its editorial content. The average GI had many questions and social concerns he wanted to address, but inadequate supply of news sources and lack of outlets for discussion ultimately proved frustrating and left soldiers without a way to enter into an intelligent discourse with one another. Dresher offered a sampling of questions that GIs wished to have answered, or at least wanted to chance to discuss:

We want to know what kind of America is awaiting us on our return. What is the concrete plan to absorb the millions of soldiers and war workers after victory is won? What are the merits and demerits of the Beveridge plan?²⁵ Do we have a corresponding government plan or is the 'dole' our basis of planning? What are we going to do to prevent another war? Are we intending to rule European countries by AMG?²⁶

24. Anonymous, “Where Do We Go?” *The Nation*, 28 October 1944, 542.

25. The Beveridge Plan, formally known as the “Social Insurance and Allied Services” report, was a social welfare program proposed by British economist William Beveridge in 1942. When the Labour Party won the 1945 general election, they implemented many of Beveridge’s suggestions such as welfare payments to impoverished families, nationalized insurance and health programs, and rent control, to name a few. For the full text of the plan and an American perspective, see Frederick Joseph Scheu, *British Labor and the Beveridge Plan* (New York: Island Press, 1943).

26. Staff Sergeant W. Dresher, “Pin-ups or Philosophy?” *YANK*, 29 October 1943, 18.

While it is impossible to know if such criticism was actually rare or if this rarity is a false byproduct of *YANK*'s editorial process, other GIs were more than happy to jump to the magazine's defense. In doing so, they not only defended their preferred outlet for expression but also the idea that they had thoughts to share in the first place. Jack Heller, a particularly verbose GI stationed in Newfoundland, wrote that *YANK*'s "Mail Call" feature gave him hope for the future. He appreciated that there was a space for everyone to discuss anything, but what truly impressed him was that many GIs used those pages to "contribute something significant toward the solution of the world's ills." These social commentators' points, whether they were defending American ideals or criticizing hypocrisy at home, "perpetuate[d] a tradition that is a hell of a lot more American than apple pie." After all, Heller continued, there were many injustices on both a domestic and international level against which soldiers should raise their voice, "lustily and loud, in vigorous support of those institutions we are engaged in fighting to maintain to the bitter end."²⁷ Despite its overzealous tone that borders on jingoism, Heller's point remains valid. As homesick as they may have been and as badly as they undoubtedly wished to return home, exposure to and sometimes immersion in multiple foreign cultures gave many GIs the physical and mental distance they needed to think of their homeland in a more critical way.

Skeptical soldiers frequently accused their allegedly less intelligent peers of naively "longing for some miraculous end to the war" so that they could live happily ever after without any problems whatsoever, a desire strong enough to tempt them to "quit the army tomorrow if they could get away with it."²⁸ Sergeant Joseph Lash wrote to *YANK* that same month, disappointed by newspaper reports attributing "our passionate desire to return home as our war

27. Private First Class Jack M. Heller, "Thinking Soldiers," *YANK*, 23 June 1944, 14.

28. Anonymous, "Soldiers and Democracy," *The Nation*, 23 October 1943, 482.

aim,” and with his letter he included an informal survey he conducted at his camp. He posed a hypothetical question to his comrades, giving them the option to leave the Army and return home within a month, but with one condition: “everything reverts back to 1939 with the constant threat of war hanging over [them].” Not surprisingly, Lash continued, their unanimous response was “Nothing doing—this time it’s for keeps.”²⁹ A year and a day later, Master Sergeant Herman E. Surdan wrote from Germany that it was hardly fair to take from soldiers the one comfort they had in their thoughts of home. “We’re Americans,” he said, “and by God, America is home and that’s where we all want to go when this Godforsaken mess of mud, blood and mosquitoes is over,” but he made sure to point out that under no circumstances would the Army be content to go home before the peace was properly secured.³⁰

If servicemen were so confident in their personal goals and their country’s war aims, what, then, did they actually believe they were fighting for? Some soldiers, like Corporal Samuel Lerner in Belgium, were not especially forthcoming with their ideas of why they fought, but they certainly knew what they were not fighting for. Lerner wrote to *YANK* in protest of the media’s interpretation of the wholesome GI whose only wish was to return to some romanticized ideal. “Our dreams for the future,” he noted, “don’t consist solely of strawberry ice-cream [sic] sodas and pretty girls.”³¹ For Edgar L. Jones, an American who enlisted with the British Eighth Army as an ambulance driver, the fight for democracy and the American way of life took the form of economic imperialism. Americans should “make democracy something to live by and not just a slogan to die for,” which he saw possible through accepting the role as a global leader

29. Sergeant Joseph Lash, “Going Home,” *YANK: The Army Weekly*, 15 October 1943, 18.

30. Master Sergeant Herman E. Surdan, “Home—When We’ve Won,” *Stars and Stripes*, 16 October 1944, 4.

31. Corporal Samuel Lerner, “More than Ice-Cream Dreams,” *YANK*, 4 May 1945, 8.

and helping the less privileged rather than exploiting them. The American way of life, such an oft-repeated but rarely understood war aim, did not really mean democracy at all, but rather “the fact that we have more radios, more autos, more education and leisure than any other peoples,” a status Americans wanted to hold onto no matter the cost.³² Other soldiers took issue with the suggestion that they were fighting merely to maintain the status quo. Senior Sergeant Paul Cropman wrote in *YANK* that “We are not satisfied simply to ‘go back;’ we hope to have the guts to ‘go forward.’”³³

In an October 1943 issue of *YANK*, Sergeant John Rogers wrote from Oklahoma that before the U.S. could hope to aid other Allied nations in policing the world after the war, it had to first address its own internal issues. “Is there not some way we can secure for ourselves the tolerance and belief in democratic principles we find lacking in our enemies?” Rogers asked; if not, America's outlook was very grim indeed. Without reestablishing America's democratic foundations, “we will live to see the rise of beer-hall demagogues in our own country, if indeed these demagogues are not already in the saddle plotting to force an American *Mein Kampf* upon a people upset by the same type of disorders and disillusionment common to pre-Hitler Germany.”³⁴

The myriad problems at home were seen with new eyes, and soldiers were not shy about addressing the more unsavory parts of American life they hoped to change after the war. Private J. A. Grulich wrote in early 1944 that while the regular GI on the field still believed in and earnestly wanted the “Four Freedoms” touted by President Roosevelt, he was by no means content to simply return to an unchanged America with its “dog-eat-dog way of life” and the

32. Edgar L. Jones, “Letters from North Africa,” *The Atlantic*, 21 November 1942, 55.

33. Senior Sergeant Paul Cropman, “Post-War America,” *YANK*, 18 February 1944, 14.

34. Sergeant John C. Rogers, “Fix America First,” *YANK*, 22 October 1943, 22.

“phony prosperity of the Harding-to-Hoover era, which produced the decade of economic gloom and misery and want for millions of Americans.” Repeating the constant refrain heard all throughout the war, Gruelich proclaimed that the first and most pressing issue for veterans would be securing stable jobs with adequate pay and working conditions. “He wants more than what he left behind,” he continued, warning that veterans would be looking for “a square deal . . . which will eliminate the ill-housed, ill-clothed and the ill-fed.”³⁵

One of *YANK*'s most popular features, judging from its increasing page space and occasional run-over into the regular “Mail Call” pages, was a section called “The Soldier Speaks.” In it, soldiers were given a specific discussion question and asked to send in their thoughts for publication the next time the feature ran. On 4 May 1945, *YANK* published several responses to its previous question, “What changes would you like to see made in post-war America?” Over two full pages, GIs from around the world pointed out what they believed needed to be improved in the U.S., some of them more elaborately or articulately than others, but all of them surprisingly consistent. While this could be interpreted as a result of *YANK*'s method of choosing which letters to print, the fact that so many of the answers correlate with the same broader ideals explored in chapter three suggests that, whatever the selection process the *YANK* editorial staff used, the published opinion pieces here were just as relevant on a domestic scale as an international one.

By far the most frequently expressed desire in this section was for better education that was simultaneously more accessible. Corporal Charles Beverly in the Marianas wanted to see a National Board of Education to raise educational standards, eliminate vast discrepancies in teachers' salaries, and provide communities around the country with “excellent buildings and

35. Private J. A. Gruelich, “Post-War America,” *YANK*, 18 February 1944, 14.

equipment for their schools.”³⁶ Corporal Lerner wished to see free education and federally funded vocational programs aimed at “giving people a chance to increase their skills and better serve society.”³⁷ From Alaska, T-5 Alva Zimmerman wrote that “any person wanting an education should have a chance and not be hindered through lack of funds.”³⁸ The inability to afford a proper education galled Sergeant Ralph Stridal as well, prompting him to suggest state or Federal programs wherein a defined portion of school taxes would go toward a merit-based scholarship fund to reward promising young scholars.³⁹ Later that month, as *YANK* published more postwar plans in its regular “Mail Call” section, Sergeant Joseph Edelman agreed with Stridal that the “ability to learn must be substituted for ability to pay.” Considering that “only a minute percentage of American youths finish college,” anyone with the intelligence and sincere desire to learn should be given that opportunity.⁴⁰

The GI preoccupation with the quality and, moreover, the availability of education is both a product and a symptom of their lingering doubts about the stability of the nation to which they would be returning. Many prominent economists warned that, without the war industry to sustain it, the American economy might slide back into another depression once the country was at peace. For the GI overseas, this was a very real and dire threat. They had read and heard stories, no doubt exaggerated but still fundamentally true, about American war workers being paid outrageous wages and about labor unions encouraging strikes for yet higher pay. Having spent weeks, months, in some cases even years in foreign territory, many American servicemen

36. Corporal Charles Beverly, “Education and Eyesores,” *YANK*, 4 May 1945, 8.

37. Lerner, 8.

38. Technician Fifth Grade Alva E. Zimmerman, “Rights and Benefits,” *YANK*, 4 May 1945, 9.

39. Sergeant Ralph J. Stridal, “Scholarships and TVA,” *YANK*, 4 May 1945, 9.

40. Sergeant Joseph S. Edelman, “Post-War Plan,” *YANK*, 18 May 1945, 14.

worried that their civilian counterparts were getting rich at their expense, and the worst insult would be that none of that wealth would be available to the very people who had made it possible in the first place once they returned from battle. Education, whether it was the acquisition of a degree or the learning of a new trade, was one way to try to stave off the financial problems GIs thought they would inherit.

Public works projects were another popular change suggested for postwar America, and the calls for urban renewal echo the similar pleas for access to education. Both were essentially meant to create or at least lead to jobs, but aside from the obvious desire for employment, soldiers' wishes for altered cityscapes revealed the powerful, if subtle, effect the Great Depression had on the psyches of men who reached their formative years in the 1930s. Most soldiers couched their argument in practical terms, such as Corporal Beverly who saw these works programs as helping to “improve the appearance of the nation and provide employment for returned servicemen.”⁴¹ Corporal Robert Hayd, stationed in Dutch New Guinea, also wanted to see a “Federally financed slum-clearance and permanent-housing program.”⁴² More telling, however, are those soldiers who focused on the aesthetic aspects of such programs. Beverly, for instance, though he focused on the economic advantages to reinstating public works programs, also thought it necessary to “erase those grotesque eyesores some cities have for courthouses and other public buildings.”⁴³ Corporal Lerner hoped to see new design plans which would give American cities “a feeling of space and beauty,” which would also involve slum-clearance and reasonably spacious, affordable homes for the soldiers who would no doubt be eager to settle

41. Beverly, 8.

42. Corporal Robert I. Hayd, “Notes for Some Changes,” *YANK*, 4 May 1945, 9.

43. Beverly, 8.

down and start their lives properly after the war.⁴⁴ Sergeant Edelman wanted to see all of this but especially the transition from “trailer towns” and “stovepipe fabrications” to suitable, comfortable housing. “Real-estate profiteers and owners who can’t bear the noise of soldiers’ children” would have no place in America following the war.⁴⁵ All of these expressed desires for urban renewal point toward a need to eradicate the reminders of a crippling economic slump as well as a kind of new beginning for the “new” America that would ultimately emerge from the war. If the U.S. meant to help the world rebuild after years of destruction, it could not do so at the cost of ignoring its own demoralizing blemishes.

Even more than physical structures, the most glaring of those blemishes was the treatment of two long-suffering population segments which were becoming increasingly difficult to ignore: women and African-Americans. The ongoing debate among GIs as expressed in their published letters reveals a curious dichotomy: many soldiers seemed willing to extend civil liberties toward African-Americans, at least theoretically, but at the same time they also tended to insist that women should return to the private sphere following the war. Both groups, as usual, were considered “equal but separate,” but the conclusions opinionated GIs drew were, at times, both consistent with and contrary to their own expressed desires for a more democratic America

44. Lerner, 8.

45. Edelman, 14.

CHAPTER TWO: MINORITIES AND MOTHERS

The “Negro problem,” as American sociologists and laymen alike called it, did not disappear just because of the war. Heightened socioeconomic tensions led to a series of race riots during the war years, primarily in urban areas, where African-Americans were beginning to take industrial jobs vacated by departing soldiers. Despite strictly segregated units in the army, the problem followed servicemen overseas as well. In the event that an all-black platoon was broken up whether through casualties or furloughs, those remaining soldiers were often absorbed into larger regular (i.e., white) units. Thus, men who had never had the inclination or opportunity to interact were suddenly thrust into a position in which their very lives depended on their cooperation, and many (though by no means all, or even most) white GIs began to reconsider their previously held conceptions about African-Americans, whether those notions were acquired through negative experience or inherited as cultural baggage. Even those who did not actually serve with African-American GIs were driven to question the dichotomy which faced them every day: what business did the U.S. have touting equality and democracy when a large section of its own population did not enjoy those same rights?

Just as pressing was the question of what roles American women would fill after the war, and in some ways soldier-authors were even more ambivalent about that than they were about African-Americans. As the labor force was rapidly drained by enlistment and drafting into the service, large numbers of women were called upon to enter the workforce on a scale unimagined up to that point. Much like African-Americans, women who had previously been relegated to low-paying, menial jobs began to take on comparatively high-paying factory and even professional jobs, while other women entered the workforce for the first time in their lives. Many American women, though still paid less and more subject to termination than their male

counterparts, experienced a sense of both financial and personal independence as never before, a freedom over which social commentators and GIs alike fretted. Some sociologists and psychologists wondered if the humble farm boy would ever be content with his rural life again after having seen Paris or London while in the service, but others wondered just as anxiously if American women would ever happily return to the home after being exposed to the working world to a greater extent than they ever had earlier. There were no foregone conclusions: an optimistic few dared to suppose that both oppressed social groups would simply return to the status quo after the war and do so without a fight, but the GIs' own vocal protests about returning to a postwar America indistinguishable from its prewar state assured that no such peaceful, permanent return was possible.

For African-Americans, that dream of a peaceful return could be emboldened or destroyed by their experience in the armed forces, as their experiences with fellow soldiers provided a certain degree of foreshadowing for the hurdles they would encounter once they reentered civilian society. In March 1943, a representative survey of 4,793 enlisted men painted a bleak picture for better race relations among servicemen. A majority of the GIs surveyed (2,677, or about 56 percent) believed that most African-Americans were "pretty well satisfied" and would have the same rights and privileges as they had before the war.¹ Of the small percentage (1,373, approximately 29 percent) of soldiers who indicated their belief that black Americans would actually receive greater liberties, nearly half (669, 49 percent) believed those rights would not necessarily be earned on the basis of civil rights but as compensation for fighting in the war, or because African-Americans had already taken advantage of white soldiers' deployment by taking their jobs at home. Meanwhile, the most popular answer given for why

1. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, *The American Soldier in World War II: Attitudes of Negroes and Attitudes toward Negroes* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 25.

those rights would remain the same was a blunt desire for maintenance of the status quo. An overwhelming majority (4,001, or 83 percent) of the respondents agreed with a question asking if segregated service clubs were a good idea; while most declined to comment on the follow-up question as to why they thought this, the two most common answers were that “there would be trouble, fights, etc.” and “separation is right in principle—they are different, races should be kept separate).”²

Later that year, two men identified only as Sergeant Nolan and Corporal Hitner stationed at Fort Ord, California, wrote a viciously racist letter to *YANK* in which they lamented the fact that “The Negroes will think they are equal to the whites because they have fought in this war.” They went on to avow that they did not consider black soldiers (or indeed any black Americans) as equals, but veterans who should be “rewarded” with a portion of the country “for their own use,” where they could be “taken care of” by their white governors. *YANK* editors made a rare interjection and responded to the letter with a short, sharp reply: “*YANK* takes its views on the post-war ‘race’ problem from the founders of the United States, who believed that all men were created equal. No man should talk about ‘giving’ any American that which he already has by inalienable right.” The rebuttal went on to list the numbers of African-American soldiers in various branches of the military, honors black troops had received, and a reminder that African-Americans were already in powerful positions on local, state, and national levels and were in fact governing over that letter’s authors.³

Just two months earlier, an unnamed private stationed in Texas wrote into *The Nation* that a crisis was facing postwar America in the form of a “vigilant minority . . . determined to

2. Ibid., 28-30. For a more detailed look at the question, see Appendix, Table 1.

3. Sergeant Nolan and Corporal Hitner, “Negro Soldiers,” *YANK*, 12 December 1943, 18.

support the Negro in his struggle for recognition.”⁴ The anonymous author did not give much indication whether he personally considered this turn of events to be good or bad, but he did provide some valuable insight based on his own experiences in the service: soldiers were thinking about these and other domestic issues they wished to resolve, and they would not stop thinking of them even after the war ended and they returned home. The private ended his letter with an obvious but still important point: while those thoughtful soldiers might not bring solutions with them, they would at least have recognized and considered the problems facing them and their country, and that was what truly mattered.

Private Arthur Feldman certainly felt that new appreciation for thoughtful reflection about the U.S. in light of what he had seen overseas. “The man in uniform,” he wrote in the *New York Times Magazine*’s soldier letters section, “has become a very tolerant person” by virtue of being exposed to many different regions of the world, many different cultures and languages that he may never have even heard of, much less actually dealt with in civilian life. Somewhat irrationally, given that American civilians had not experienced the same rapid cultural exchanges as servicemen had, Feldman asserted that GIs would expect “a tolerant class of people at home, irrespective of race, color and creed” and which was “devoid of petty prejudice.”⁵

Understandably, not everyone agreed with this idealistic scenario, not least of which were African-Americans themselves. Sergeant James Lucas wrote a lengthy assessment of America’s deep-rooted prejudice, concluding with the warning that “Democracy for us will not come, cannot come, until we are seen, not as a competitor, but as ordinary citizens” instead of the intellectual, economic, social, and political threats the collective American psyche had built the black population up to be. Further, “the Negro fighting man who hopes for a turnover in

4. Anonymous, “Soldiers and the Rights of Negroes,” *The Nation*, 9 October 1943, 418.

5. Private Arthur Feldman, “Tolerance,” *New York Times Magazine*, 3 December 1944, 20.

American traditions in dealing with him indulges in wishful thinking. There are few people, indeed, who fight for a cause as unrealized or with such dismal prospect of realization as does the American Negro!”⁶ In a letter to the influential presidential advisor Truman Gibson, Private Bert Barbero explained that while he had entered the war because of “patriotic duty,” his actual service in the military and his experience with the discrimination involved even in a war for democratic principles had made him “indifferent to the whole affair.”⁷

James Bernard “Bunny” Rucker, an African-American who served in a medical unit in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, wrote to his wife from his post at Fort Bragg about his frustrations over being transferred to a maintenance crew. After having battled Fascism in the Spanish Civil War, Rucker was proud that he had “acted on the basis of [his] hatred against Hitlerism at all times,” and he had accordingly hoped that “[he’d] be given by [his] own country even a limited opportunity to express that hatred through some measure of participation in our armed forces.” Instead, he was transferred to a non-combatant role in an already heavily segregated army.⁸

This constant disappointment led to a deep cynicism that ran through many of Rucker’s letters; on D-Day the following year, while stationed in Arizona, he described how a theater full of African-Americans booed a newsreel clip. In that clip, a white soldier from Oklahoma had just been released from a German prisoner of war camp. Allegedly, he told his Nazi captors of America’s equality and freedom, a statement which only incited those in the theater to jeer with

6. Sergeant James Lucas, “A Racial Group,” *Stars and Stripes*, Mediterranean ed., 12 May 1945, 4.

7. Private Bert B. Barbero, quoted in Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1976), 29.

8. James Bernard Rucker to Helen Rucker, March 12, 1943, in *The Good Fight Continues: World War II Letters from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, eds. Peter N. Carroll, Michael Nash, and Melvin Small (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 130.

open scorn. “Does this soldier call Oklahoma Jim Crow—equality?” Rucker asked his wife. “Is that the support which Negroes will expect from a Postwar America?”⁹

When Rucker was due to ship out for combat the following month, he wrote again to his wife of his excitement at leaving the United States—and his ongoing disillusionment with its professed ideals of liberty and democracy. “Here I have endured and seen as much of fascism as I’d ever expect to see in Germany or Spain,” he wrote, bewildered as to how America could presume to “impose liberty on people all over the world. God help such peoples if it’s the liberty of the South and of Negroes,” which in his estimation amounted to “liberty to ride the back of the bus” and “liberty to be last class citizens in the life of the country.”¹⁰

No other letter so poignantly captured the attitude of the thinking soldier quite like “Democracy?” by Corporal Rupert Trimmingham. Trimmingham, a wounded African-American soldier who wrote to *YANK* from the Fort Hauchuca Hospital in Arizona, asked very plainly, “What is the Negro soldier fighting for?” Before he and his eight fellow servicemen reached the hospital, they were delayed at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, where Trimmingham was first shocked to find that even as uniformed members of the U.S. Army, no restaurant would serve them, and they only finally succeeded in obtaining coffee from the kitchen of a railroad station. What bothered him more, however, was then seeing about two dozen German prisoners of war and their two American guards enter the station lunchroom. There, sworn enemies of the United States were allowed to sit at a table like any other citizens, be served their meal, smoke, talk and laugh with one another, all while Trimmingham watched from inside the kitchen. “If we are

9. Rucker to Helen Rucker, June 6, 1944, in Carroll, et al, “The Good Fight Continues,” 136.

10. Rucker to Helen Rucker, July 14, 1944, in Carroll, et al, “The Good Fight Continues,” 138-139.

fighting for the same thing, if we are to die for our country,” Trimmingham wrote, “why does the Government allow such things to go on?”¹¹

Trimmingham's understated but devastating portrait of life as an African-American soldier touched off a number of responses in the months that followed, to the point *YANK* editors noted in July that they had received hundreds of letters of outrage from soldiers in every theater of operations. Corporal Henry Wootton, Jr., stationed at the Fairfield-Suisun Army Air Force base in California, noted his disappointment and even shame at being a “Southern rebel” precisely because of the incident Trimmingham recounted. Not only was such blatant racism disgraceful, but it was entirely counterproductive to American ideals of freedom and equality that were supposedly driving the war effort. He sarcastically wondered what the “Aryan supermen” must have thought when their own propaganda about American prejudice actually turned out to be true. “Are we not waging a war, in part, for this fundamental of democracy?” he asked before adjoining all his fellow southerners to “cast the beam out of our own eyes before we try to do so in others, across the seas.”¹²

Arthur J. Kaplan, a staff sergeant writing from Bermuda, complimented *YANK* on having the courage to print not only Trimmingham’s letter, but the follow up letters from outraged soldiers. Echoing Wootton, he wondered if anyone had stopped to consider how “those Boche prisoners must still be laughing . . .” Though Kaplan admitted that it seemed incredible that German prisoners would be treated better than American soldiers, it was an unfortunate reality and just further proof of an ugly, often ignored problem in American society. Thus, he reasoned, this “festering sore” needed to be “cut out by intelligent social surgeons once and for

11. Corporal Rupert Trimmingham, “Democracy?” *YANK*, 28 April 1944, 14.

12. Corporal Henry S. Wootton, Jr., “Democracy?” *YANK*, 9 June 1944, 14.

all.”¹³ Otherwise, what was the use in fighting, regardless of one’s skin color? Certainly the African-American man had little to embrace about American life, but white soldiers would find their own participation in the war undermined if the democratic ideology that led them to war was hollow and insincere all along. Private Joseph Poscucci, while stationed in Burma, offered a quick but suiting response: “I think it is a disgrace that, while we are away from home doing our part to help win the war, some people back home are knocking down everything that we are fighting for.” More importantly, if incidents like those Trimmingham experienced continued, Poscucci wrote, “We the white soldiers will begin to wonder: what are *we* fighting for?”¹⁴

The final letter about Trimmingham’s ordeal came, appropriately, from Trimmingham himself. After thanking *YANK* for publishing his letter despite his unit’s doubts that the magazine would do so, he described the overwhelming show of support he had received; in the three months since his letter had first appeared on 28 April, Trimmingham had received 287 letters, but what surprised him most of all was that 183 were from white men and women in the armed services. Like most of the letters *YANK* had printed itself, Trimmingham expressed his amazement that most of those self-identified white authors also confessed to being from the deep South. They were proud of their heritage, he explained, but they were simultaneously ashamed that their family, friends, and neighbors in the South still “[played] Hitler’s game” by discriminating against African-Americans. Rather than becoming disheartened by the reaffirmation of his nation’s deep prejudices, however, Trimmingham found new hope thanks to the multiple letters he received daily:

. . . There are doubtless thousands of whites who are willing to fight this Frankenstein that so many white people are keeping alive. All that the Negro is asking for is to be

13. Staff Sergeant Arthur J. Kaplan, *ibid.*

14. Private Joseph Poscucci, “Democracy?” *YANK*, 28 July 1944, 14. Emphasis in original.

given half the chance and he will soon demonstrate his worth to his country. Should these white people who realize that the Negro is a man who is loyal—one who would gladly give his life for this, our wonderful country—would stand up, join with us and help us to prove to their white friends that we are worthy, I'm sure that we would bury race hate and unfair treatment.¹⁵

Such incidents as Trimmingham experienced were not, unfortunately, isolated events. Another African-American GI wrote that while he was turned away from a Kansas diner, he noticed with astonishment and disgust as a group of German prisoners of war were served directly at the counter. He had thought that such stories were fictional or at least exaggerated, but now he saw with his own eyes how his own country spoke from both sides of its figurative mouth. "This was really happening. It was no jive talk," he complained. "The people of Salina [Kansas] would serve these enemy soldiers and turn away black American GIs."¹⁶

The army itself was likewise a source of humiliation and demoralization for black troops. Besides most African-American units being forced to serve in non-fighting capacities, even those black soldiers who had fought bravely alongside their white fellow GIs were reformed into all-black units after Germany's surrender.¹⁷ Official military orders reinforced strict segregation, leading to resentment, disappointment, and anger among many GIs on both sides of the color line. As an additional insult, these newly reformed black units were often also kept longer than their white comrades when it came time to demobilize the army. Private John Wright, a black quartermaster soldier stationed in Munich, wrote to *The Pittsburgh Courier* to complain that even though he was eligible for discharge, he had yet to be mustered out.

15. Trimmingham, *ibid.*

16. Lloyd Brown, as quoted in Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.: America during World War II* (Arlington Heights, IL: H. Davidson, 1986), 58.

17. Wynn, 28.

The race to get back to the United States was a common problem for both white and black soldiers, so in Wright's particular case, he might simply have been one of the millions of soldiers still awaiting transportation home. Where his letter raises concerns, though, is when he goes on to describe others in his all-black unit: the entire group had been overseas for three years, and many GIs had racked up over 100 points, and one even had 144 points, more than one and a half times the minimum required for eligibility. Perhaps even more surprising to Wright was that during his extended stay in the service, he found that discrimination against African-Americans looked more and more like a peculiarly American practice. After serving in North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany, Wright concluded that "the majority of people here admire a colored man" and that his peers' prejudice had made him ashamed to admit to being American at all.¹⁸

During its four year run, *YANK* published many letters from white GIs praising their black comrades, a surprising number of which were from self-identified southerners abandoning, even if only in a service capacity, their lifelong prejudices. Technical Sergeant Willie Jones for example wrote that as a Mississippi native, he had always "hated Negroes." It was nothing personal, he insisted, as no African-American had ever actually done anything to bring about this hatred; it was just an inherited part of southern culture. Then he entered the army and fought alongside black units, despite strict racial segregation, and was even rescued by one of those same African-Americans he had always irrationally hated; Jones had been shot twice in a foxhole and was saved only by a black soldier doing what he could with a first aid kit and then carrying him to safety, all while under heavy enemy fire. That soldier later died, and though it is unclear from the letter whether that was from wounds sustained during the rescue or a different battle,

18. John R. Wright, "But It's Just the Other Way Around," as quoted by Phillip McGuire, ed., *Taps for a Jim Crow Army: Letters from Black Soldiers in World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 236.

Jones still made it abundantly clear that changes that had already been going on in his mind were cemented that day. “Many Negro soldiers have died on the front for American soldiers who thought Jim Crow was right,” Jones concluded, so if Germans were going to be granted freedom after having plunged the world into an utterly devastating war, there was no reason at all why African-Americans should still be treated as lesser beings.¹⁹

In that same letters column, Private David Icheson, also stationed in Germany, recalled that he and some friends had passed the time recently by having a “jam session” with a nearby black quartermaster trucking crew. Very soon thereafter, to his surprise, they received orders that they were not to associate with black troops “except on business.” Conveniently, Icheson went on, they had never received such orders during the war itself, were never told not to fight alongside black soldiers and had indeed done exactly that across Central Europe. It made little sense then to reinforce outdated notions of racial superiority, especially in the heart of Germany where similar ideas had led directly to untold millions of deaths.²⁰

Black soldiers would find few supportive sociologists to give them hope of a peaceful yet equal status after the war. Willard Waller, a jaded and cynical sociologist whose work revolved around education, family, and war, warned that black veterans were “certain to be a storm center of trouble” upon returning to the U.S., primarily because they had been “taught to kill, and to kill white men.” He went on to claim that there would be “fierce and terrible men among the Negroes who come back from the war,” all of whom would make “good revolutionaries.” Meanwhile, southern white soldiers, on the whole convinced that racism was correct as a guiding

19. Technical Sergeant Willie Jones, “Negro Soldiers,” *YANK*, 14 September 45, 19.

20. Private David Icheson, “Negro Soldiers,” *YANK*, 14 September 45, 19.

principle, were “among our best soldiers.” The only result Waller could foresee was a great racial conflict that would erupt as soon as the mediating force of war was removed.²¹

Benjamin Bowker, a World War I veteran who wrote *Out of Uniform* for World War II veterans and their loved ones, saw no reason to fear Waller’s dire prediction of civil unrest; social disorder was to be expected after any major war, as the race riots of the postwar era in 1918 proved, and minority agitation would be no different this time “unless goaded by increased activity of prejudiced groups or by extreme economic depression, and organized by an inspiring, militant leader.”²²

Bowker’s conception of the African-American soldier was far more complicated than his apparent support might suggest. The army, he noted, was more concerned with winning the war than acting as an “instrument of social reform,” thereby justifying its policy of segregation in Bowker’s eyes, but the far graver problem was that of the soldiers themselves.²³ African-Americans, due to the mental and physical conditions suffered in the prewar era, were not “as good material for the services on the average as was the white recruit.” Despite this harsh judgment, Bowker qualified his argument by pointing out that lack of education and poor physical health were not the natural results of the “inferior” black existence, but products of a deeply prejudiced society that led to disproportionate gaps between black and white soldiers.²⁴ Thus it was that Bowker recommended that, because the U.S. could not afford to lose fully ten percent of its population to physical weakness and ignorance, “every effort [should] be made in extending to Negroes fair opportunities for attaining higher standards.” Integration of some

21. Willard Waller, *The Veteran Comes Back* (New York: Dryden Press, 1944), 110-111.

22. Benjamin C. Bowker, *Out of Uniform* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1946), 213.

23. *Ibid.*, 203.

24. *Ibid.*, 211-213.

white and black units in Europe had helped ease some white GIs' reservations about African-Americans' inherent human rights. And, just like several other GIs mentioned elsewhere, both national prestige and domestic peace depended on how well the U.S. could handle its "color situation" on a fair, democratic basis.²⁵

Decidedly more constructive and informative was the section on race relations in the U.S. in *While You Were Gone*, a large anthology of articles written by specialists in various fields to help returning veterans learn the basics of domestic affairs during the war years. This section's author, Carey McWilliams, was a respected historian of racial minorities in America. One of McWilliams's first acts in "What We Did about Racial Minorities" was to reassure anxious GIs that, despite frequent reports of race riots in major industrial centers, America's social fabric was still intact. Axis propagandists, particularly in Japan, consistently drew explicit connections between American domestic policy regarding minorities and its international policy toward the Japanese. Soon after the U.S. formally entered the war, a Japanese radio broadcast ridiculed the gulf between American ideology and action: "Democracy, as preached by Anglo-Americans, may be an ideal and a noble system of life, but democracy as practiced by Anglo-Americans is stained with the bloody guilt of racial persecution and exploitation."²⁶

While unwilling to lend credence to Axis claims of hypocrisy, if only on purely patriotic grounds, McWilliams nevertheless repeated a familiar refrain that had already sounded over and over in the soldiers' own periodicals. First, the length of the war and the level of ideological

25. Ibid., 215.

26. Carey McWilliams, "What We Did about Racial Minorities," in *While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States*, ed. Jack Goodman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 91. This is in stark contrast to Bowker's remark on the same issue of propaganda aimed at African-American troops: "They were much more easily swayed by enemy propaganda, especially the type that asked Negroes what they were fighting for. 'Why should a black man kill a yellow man for the supremacy of the white man?' was a common propaganda theme that confused the Negro's motivation for service. To this extent, it made him a poorer soldier or sailor." Bowker, 212. McWilliams sought to alleviate fears that enemy propaganda had successfully turned African-Americans against their own country, whereas Bowker clearly intended to undermine black soldiers' loyalty and conviction.

commitment asked of the American people led to an “increasingly embarrassing and progressively indefensible” dichotomy between stated democratic aims and actual prejudicial practices.²⁷ Second, beyond this inescapable paradox that continued to weigh on Americans’ minds, their understanding of the problem itself began to shift. Whether it was in response to instinctual and visceral rejection of the Nazis’ policy of racial superiority or because of more frequent and prolonged interaction among normally segregated groups, many Americans had come to understand prejudice and discrimination as learned social constructs rather than biological imperatives.²⁸

Again, however, much like African-American soldiers themselves had feared in their editorial remarks, their peers’ successes on the home front were tenuous and most likely temporary. McWilliams warned his readers that black civilians had made their greatest gains in the same industries which would suffer the most cutbacks after the war, and not coincidentally, those industrial centers were also hotbeds of racial tension that would only be exacerbated once millions of job-seeking GIs returned.²⁹ Despite the dire tone, McWilliams reflected the opinions of black soldiers in stressing the need to prepare for immediate disappointment but hope that the change toward greater racial integration, however slight, would continue into the postwar world.

The anonymous Texan private who said soldiers were thinking about racial issues was ultimately correct, but he failed to give credit where it was due. In his estimation, GIs would only see the problem on a superficial level, and once they had formed an opinion, they would simply push the issue onto someone else to solve. By and large, this might well have been true, but there was still a very vocal, articulate minority dedicated to seriously considering the

27. McWilliams, 94-95.

28. *Ibid.*, 97-98.

29. *Ibid.*, 106.

problems at hand and possible solutions. Four days before VE Day, *YANK* published an issue in which its popular “The Soldier Speaks” section asked GIs to write letters describing what changes they would like to see in America after the war. Nearly every letter included a hope for resolution of the racial problem that had long plagued the United States. Corporal Samuel Lerner wrote from Belgium that he wanted to see a land of equality for all, without discrimination between black and white, Christian and Jew, “where no select group has the right to lord over others because of any inherent birthright.”³⁰ Sergeant Ralph J. Stridal of France was blunter, stating, “If the Negro soldier is good enough to fight and die over here he is good enough to share in the opportunities and privileges of his country.”³¹ Finally, Sergeant Andrew G. Paschal, stationed in Italy, doubted the traditional American mindset that the “race and color problem” was so deeply entrenched that it could never be solved. Only “congressional enactments and executive orders” were going to prove effective in the long run, but eradicating the issue of racism in America was not only crucial to domestic peace. The U.S. now had a duty as the dominant global power to encourage justice and peace by example, but its blatantly racist agenda would doom it right out of the gate. Racism was a very integral part of fascism, Paschal argued, which would be just as fatal to the U.S. as it had been to the European nations that embraced it. The solution, then, was to fix the problems at home first; only then would America be in the position to help guide the rest of the world into a peaceful postwar era.³²

Private J. T. Woolsey wrote *YANK* while in India that President Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” were all well and good, but there were many more “freedoms” he wished to see

30. Corporal Samuel Lerner, “More than Ice-Cream Dreams,” *YANK*, 4 May 1945, 8.

31. Sergeant Ralph J. Stridal, “Scholarships and TVA,” *YANK*, 4 May 1945, 9.

32. Sergeant Andrew G. Paschal, “A Problem to be Solved,” *YANK*, 4 May 1945, 9.

eradicated in America when he got home.³³ Among those were the “freedom” to “speak viciously from public platforms against Catholics, Jews, Negroes; to deny the right of franchise to Negroes; to juggle finance and stock markets into another economic collapse; to receive a hungry lot of bonus-seeking veterans at the White House with tear gas; to use the press as a weapon against labor and progressive social reform,” and so forth.³⁴

At times, the connection between America’s own contentious relationship to its fabled melting pot history and the ethnic struggles in Europe reached a bit too close to home for some soldiers. In a letter to his parents, Technical Sergeant Lee Merson wrote from North Africa of the German propaganda he heard broadcast over the radio. As was typical in much Axis propaganda, explicit comparisons were drawn between Germany’s racial policies and America’s less institutionalized but just as dangerous beliefs and practices with regards to its own minorities. The broadcaster in this case “said that we in America could no more understand their Jewish problem (The European) than they can understand our ‘inhuman’ treatment of the American Negroes,” Merson wrote, and he initially rejected the claim outright. However, the broadcaster “went on to prove his point by citing some painfully true examples of Negro conditions in this country” in an effort to show that “an unjust people in its relations to its own citizens had no right to speak of justice to others who were working out their own problems.”³⁵

What ruined the illusion for the sergeant was when the broadcaster began to “exaggerate” by claiming that Americans had no right to castigate Germans for their treatment of Jewish

33. In his speech to Congress on January 6, 1941, Franklin Roosevelt defined the “Four Freedoms” for which America fought. These freedoms would later be embodied in a series of iconic Norman Rockwell paintings and included the freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

34. Private J. T. Woolsey, “Thinking Soldiers,” *YANK*, 1 December 1944, 14.

35. Lee Merson, September 21, 1941, in *Letters Home*, edited by Mina Curtiss (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944), 209.

minorities “when our aristocrats in the south think nothing of going out of an evening and shooting a few Negroes just as tho [sic] they were hunting ‘possum! Did you ever hear of anything so ridiculous?” While that was a hyperbolic example, the underlying message remained valid, but the seeming exaggeration was enough for Merson to consider the entire broadcast as little more than baseless propaganda meant to divide the enemy’s already segregated forces.³⁶

Other soldiers were not so easily swayed when confronted with the uncomfortable realities of hypocrisy. Howell Iglehart, a private first class on police duty with the 8th Infantry in Germany, wrote just prior to Germany’s official surrender that Nazis appeared to make up a minority of the overall German population. There were likely some citizens who were strongly opposed to Nazism and who had to be suppressed, but the majority were everyday people who felt it was someone else’s responsibility to run (and monitor) the government. In the average German, Iglehart saw a reflection of a typical American, with only strong party members supportive of the Nazi campaigns of terror and mass murder. “I do not suppose that the American people can be expected to learn a lesson from this war,” he concluded, lamenting that his fellow citizens would likely be content to say “It can’t happen in America.” As he warned, though, “propaganda and indifference have certainly made it happen here in Germany.”³⁷

Corporal Kenneth Connelly, shortly after his unit took an unidentified area in Germany in early March, 1945, happened across a German citizen that he immediately mistook for a member of the fearsome secret police. A tall, strong, blond German man who appeared to have stepped right out of a Wehrmacht recruiting poster approached him, warning him to rescue some

36. Ibid.

37. Howell Iglehart, Germany, May 5, 1945, in *Lines of Battle: Letters from American Servicemen, 1941-1945*, edited by Annette Tapert (New York: Times Books, 1987), 269-270.

incriminating documents from a building before any Nazis left in the town had a chance to retrieve or destroy them. It was only after several minutes of conversation that Connelly learned the young man was not a member of the SS, but rather a Jewish youth who had been in hiding for months and only emerged once the Allied forces arrived. After discussing the atrocities they had both seen and heard about, Connelly wrote that he simply could not fathom how an entire nation could fall prey to such depravity and cruelty. At that point, the young man looked directly at Connelly and asked, “Can you honestly say that the same thing could not happen in the United States? If what anti-Semitism that is there were given political direction, do you think that such a program would be impossible in America?” Ashamed, Connelly “remembered a thousand and one remarks that [he] had heard passed at cultured dinner parties, in class rooms, and among business men.” When he thought of an answer at last—an answer he was not prepared to find and even less prepared to give—“[He] didn’t want to look that boy straight back in the eye.”³⁸

The issue of African-Americans’ rights, then, was not a singular problem but only the most visible of America’s discriminatory practices, and as such it could only be solved alongside, not outside, of those same problems.

In comparison, the transition that women would also face in peacetime was in some ways even more disorienting, even while it was far less of a contentious issue among soldier-authors. For the average American as well as the average GI, it seemed a foregone conclusion that women’s ventures into the workplace were only temporary moves to relieve a drastic labor shortage. American women have never been as disassociated with national war efforts as is commonly assumed, but World War I dramatically altered the overall composition of the workforce, while World War II turned that composition on its head and forever changed the way both men and women understood and conformed to traditional gender roles in the labor market.

38. Kenneth Connelly, Germany, March 11, 1945, “Lines of Battle,” 240.

By July 1944, 19 million women were officially part of the labor force, a 47 percent increase over the prewar high in March 1940.³⁹ Contrary to modern popular culture's beliefs about the "Rosie the Riveter" myth, most women who entered the workforce during the war were not the middle-class housewives volunteering as part of their patriotic duty. Rather, these women primarily came from the same areas as always, in that they were largely students, divorcees, widows, and working-class wives, all of whom continued the trend of financially independent women workers since the turn of the century. The media's portrayal of middle-class women freeing themselves from the bondage of housework and scorning home and family, a fear which soldiers themselves picked up on and used to justify their own sexism, was unnecessarily misleading. In 1944, the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau studied the female employees of ten major war production areas and found that only one quarter of those women had less than two years' work experience. Nearly half had been working for at least five years, while about 30 percent had been working for at least ten. In other words, the majority of the female workforce even during the height of American war production was still made up of the same women who had always sought work outside the domestic sphere, but the much graver need for workers allowed their numbers to swell, thereby creating a somewhat distorted picture of women's involvement in the labor market.⁴⁰

In addition to the obvious worry about whether there would be enough jobs for returning male veterans, GIs were also troubled by reports such as another 1944 Department of Labor survey which found that 75 to 80 percent of women employed in war production industries not

39. Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 4.

40. Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 19.

only planned to stay employed even after the war, but they also hoped to keep their current jobs in areas previously off-limits to women, such as construction, welding, and other labor-intensive careers.⁴¹ Equally as alarming to soldiers overseas who were already anxious about their postwar employment opportunities were popular American magazines which frequently played up the issue of female workers. In her history of the multiple roles women fulfilled throughout the war, Doris Weatherford provided a quick survey of magazine titles to illustrate the sense of unease regarding women's postwar status: women's magazines, always eager to promote the ideal of domesticity, began preparing women for the return of the peacetime status quo earlier than other publications, such as a 1943 *Women's Home Companion* article titled, "Give Back the Jobs." As the number of women workers increased, so too did the media's cautionary and even reprimanding tone, as evidenced by a 1944 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* in which an article boldly warned, "Watch Out for the Women." After VE Day in May 1945, as Americans were finally forced to confront the perceived monster they had been fearfully creating for the past several years, the media became even more inflammatory; even publications such as *Atlantic*, a traditionally liberal source, found cause to run an article bluntly titled, "Get Rid of the Women."⁴²

As hyperbolic as the home front media could sometimes be, Americans' worries about women in the labor market after the war were justified, to an extent. Anderson, citing multiple Women's Bureau reports about interviews conducted with thousands of female war workers, described how an aircraft hand driller in Baltimore took the job after needing a diversion when her husband enlisted, and she quickly found that "staying at home—emotionally and

41. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Women in Industry," *Monthly Labor Review* 59 (September 1944), 585-91.

42. Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York; Oxford: Facts on File, 1990), 306.

temperamentally does not suit me.” Another woman in Baltimore quit her war production job at her husband’s request, but after experiencing life on the outside, she became so irritable and nervous that her doctor ordered her to return to her job to maintain her mental health. A government secretary in Detroit summed up the feeling of many women when she stated simply that “[she] would just die if [she] had to stay home and keep house.”⁴³ Nor is the modern interpretation of women’s cheerful renunciation of the public sphere entirely correct. Undoubtedly, many women only take on war jobs out of a sense of patriotism and the need to supplement the income they received from their enlisted husbands’ allotments, and they honestly did want to go back to the privacy of the home where they could tend to their families without the additional burden of fulltime employment. The problem is that those women—engaged or married and typically in their mid-twenties—made up a minority of the female workforce, but the drive to push women out of the labor market forced many to take on domestic roles for which they were ill-prepared. Within a year and a half after the end of World War II, the proportion of women in the workforce had nearly returned to its prewar level, and the Labor Department’s Women’s Bureau found increasing resentment among female workers who were fired from their war jobs and expected to either submit to the prewar domestic status or to more “feminine” jobs. One survey reported that these women were “reluctant to return to household work, and also to other services, and to the more unattractive and low-paid clerical and manufacturing jobs as well.”⁴⁴

Even Margaret Mead, an anthropologist who contributed the section on women workers in *While You Were Away*, downplayed the individual significance of women’s work during the war. Rather than coming away from the experience with a greater sense of responsibility and

43. Anderson, 28-29.

44. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Women Workers and Recent Economic Change,” by Mary Pidgeon, *Monthly Labor Review* 65 (December 1947), 667.

self-worth, greater independence on both a social and economic level, or even just relieved for a socially sanctioned reason to evade housekeeping duties, female workers only gained a better understanding of the hardships their husbands, fathers, and brothers endured and would thus be more sympathetic in the future. Those women who took over farming duties would “go back into their kitchens and vegetable gardens, but with increased understanding of why their husbands need the new tractor,” while women who returned from factory work would “understand more of what their husbands are talking about,” which in turn would lead to them being less confused by and more sympathetic to their husbands’ union activities. Women who worked in small businesses would “know more about the agonies of filling out government forms,” and women everywhere, regardless of their chosen occupation during the war, would “understand more about money, how hard it is to make, as well as how hard or easy it is to spend.”⁴⁵ Though labor experience undoubtedly did help many women communicate more effectively with their husbands in regards to household finances and similar problems, Mead and other authors made no attempt to promote a sense of pride and personal accomplishment among women who returned from the labor market.

Even the plethora of psychological self-help books that flooded the market in the latter part of the war continued the idea that only a return to the status quo—not the disruption of it through greater gender equality—would help returning veterans adjust as healthy, productive members of society again after the war. Despite the candid tone in many of these works, such as the ubiquitous section about sexual dysfunction and inadequacy that might strain what was once a happy marriage, women were nonetheless discouraged from upsetting their newly returned veterans by displaying the supposedly aggressive, more “masculine” qualities they had assumed

45. Margaret Mead, “The Women in the War,” in *While You Were Gone: A Report on Wartime Life in the United States*, ed. Jack Goodman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 282-283.

in the workplace. Dr. Howard Kitching was fairly typical of the self-help authors who meant well, but who adamantly stressed the need for a return to traditional gender roles for no less a purpose than to prevent the very establishment of the American family from tearing apart. “In the normal household,” Kitching wrote in *Sex Problems of the Returned Veteran*, “the woman’s job is primarily a dependent one, and it is right that it should be so. . . . Her role is not primarily to go out and struggle with the world. She is not fitted emotionally or physically to do so,” regardless of how well women as a whole helped carry the burden of the American war machine for several years. Rather than acting as an equal partner to her husband and exhibiting the same strength and rationality that had served her well during her time as a laborer, “her greatest asset is her weakness and her capacity for love.”⁴⁶ Dr. Herbert Kupper, staff psychiatrist for the U.S. Marine Hospital at Ellis Island, New York, echoed Kitching’s advice that women should retain their domesticity and femininity in order to help GIs transition from soldiers to civilians. While dating, women are “intuitively” shy and nonthreatening, and naturally “will flatter a man, accede to most of his desires, and conform to his masculine notion of womanhood.” Wives, particularly those who entered the workforce once their husbands joined the military, needed to relearn how to properly submit to traditional gender roles and expectations that they may well have already abandoned. Kupper urged veterans’ wives to place “few demands on the man in either the sexual or economic sphere.” More to the point, “she must submerge her feelings and drives” if she finds that her own needs are temporarily incompatible with her husband’s: “His sexual demands may vary. Hers must attempt to conform to his.” It was up to the husband to slowly regain the “tenuous strings of an adequate sexual existence,” and a wife’s threatening demands, Kupper warned, could render the husband completely incapable. Though Kupper elsewhere

46. Dr. Howard Kitching, *Sex Problems of the Returned Veteran* (New York: Emerson Books, Inc., 1946), 67.

displays some sympathy for the woman in such a relationship, he never fails to remind her that everything from her husband's sexual performance to his earning potential to his very sanity depended more than anything on her willingness to return to a prewar and pre-employed status.⁴⁷

All of this professional opinion was not, of course, created or understood in a vacuum, but was rather both a contributor to and the product of soldiers' own anxieties about the danger working women allegedly posed to American society. In addition to frequently publishing articles about women in the workplace, in 1944 *YANK* printed two lengthy segments on soldiers' opinions about whether or not women should keep their jobs or return to the domestic sphere once the war was over. Of the numerous GI letters *YANK* published on the matter, only one from a Private Ralph Friedman at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri indicated that the decision should be entirely up to the women directly concerned. Echoing the frequent call for a lower voting age by repeating the slogan that "If a guy is good enough to fight, he's good enough to vote," Friedman wrote that "If women are good enough to turn out planes, tanks and guns in wartime, they're good enough to turn out refrigerators, stoves and tractors in peacetime." Naturally, women would also be free to decide to return to the home, but only on their own terms and as "an individual decision rather than a mass edict."⁴⁸ The debate over who should get which jobs after the war was, for Friedman, a pointless one, as it completely overshadowed the much more productive question: would there be enough jobs for both men *and* women in postwar America?

Friedman was not the only one to voice concerns about maximum employment during peacetime, but other GIs took a much different approach to his same basic suggestion: women should only be allowed to remain in the labor force so long as there was ample employment

47. Dr. Herbert I. Kupper, *Back to Life: The Emotional Adjustment of Our Veterans* (New York: American Book-Stratford Press, Inc., 1945), 183.

48. Private Ralph Friedman, "It's Up to Them," *YANK*, 22 December 1944, 13.

opportunities for both sexes; if not, then men were unquestionably the preferred candidates for employment. Private First Class R. McKinley and two unnamed signers saw no issue with women remaining at their industrial jobs after the war only if there were enough jobs to accommodate the millions of returning male veterans as well.⁴⁹ Staff Sergeant Kenneth Anders agreed, claiming that he would only even consider listening to arguments in favor of women's employment "if you could tell me how the heck they will find enough jobs for veterans . . . and, at the same time, keep women in industry."⁵⁰ Corporal Sidney Gross was even blunter. More than 10 million Americans were employed when he wrote in December 1944 than the prewar average, and a sizeable proportion of that surplus consisted of women workers. The only way to accommodate the increased number of workers, obviously, was for industry itself to expand to a point it could absorb them and returning veterans. But because prospects for maximum employment seemed grim to many GIs fearing a postwar depression, Gross wrote that "no woman, unless it is absolutely necessary, should work in industry while a man remains idle."⁵¹

As these comments suggest, there was a deeply pervasive sense that men were expected to be the only (or, at the very least, the primary) breadwinner in the home. Norman Roberson, a PFC writing from an unidentified locale in the South Pacific, hoped that the onset of peace would allow men to "acquire jobs themselves and support their families and dependents," and that female workers should "go back to their homes, for husband, son and brother will take over thereafter."⁵² Private First Class George H. Vaughan wrote to the *Stars and Stripes* that "no woman should work at a public job while her husband is also working for the public," and

49. Private First Class R. McKinley, "Women in Industry," *YANK*, 23 February 1944, 14.

50. Staff Sergeant Kenneth W. Anders, "Release Men's Jobs," *YANK*, 22 December 1944, 12.

51. Corporal Sidney Gross, "Women Should Go Home," *YANK*, 22 December 1944, 12.

52. Private First Class Norman Roberson, "Women in Industry," *YANK*, 23 February 1944, 14.

justified his decision with the claim that “Every woman realizes that Man is head of labor and has been since the beginning of time—this is no time, nor the place, to change.” For Vaughan, the threat women posed manifested as a fear that allowing women to remain at their jobs would somehow enable them to take over the democratic practice, though Vaughan likewise denies that women either know about or desire this turn of events. Rather, their mere presence would set off a chain reaction whereby they would “accidentally” gain a great deal of power, presumably over the same men whose jobs they had taken over during the war. “I don’t believe women want to take over democracy,” Vaughan wrote, “but if they are let to take over labor they then rule the democratic way, for head of labor is head of the state.”⁵³ Anders seemed to worry about an entirely different brand of emasculation, making it clear that “we will not want [women] coming home with a wrench in one hand and a hammer in the other and then raising hell about supper not being ready.”⁵⁴

Some soldiers decided that humor, a frequently employed method to counteract fear, could be just as easily applied to their anxieties about women workers. Sergeant Nathaniel Rogovoy, stationed in Georgia, wrote a satirical poem about the contentious issue of female workers which *YANK* published in March 1945:

There seems to be some fine hair splitting
About women working or quitting
When the war is ended and our men
Return and want their jobs again.
Some feel that the ladies, having tasted
The fruits of labor, will think wasted
The time spent parboiling hubby's stew.
I hope they're right in this point of view.
I do not plead for the status quo,
When I earned and women spent my dough.
My manly instincts might be outraged,

53. Private First Class George H. Vaughan, “About Women,” *Stars and Stripes*, London ed., 15 March 1945, iii.

54. Anders, “Release Men’s Jobs,” 12.

But I think that they could be assuaged.
I'd learn to loaf in easy stages
For a trim gal who earns good wages.⁵⁵

Bernard Drimal, a PFC stationed in Texas, also had a tongue-in-cheek response when he suggested that “after two more years of KP, making beds, mopping and dusting, we’ll be capable of keeping house while the women work. As the new saying goes, ‘Mama does the work, Papa gets the pay.’”⁵⁶ Sometimes, however, the humor gave way to bitter and insulting remarks essentially scolding women for seeking financial independence either for “real” work outside the home or for her domestic duties that continued to be taken for granted. “Just as the Army contributes a dependency allowance to a soldier’s wife,” wrote Corporal S. Tanenbaum in a February 1944 edition of *YANK*, “so either the employer or the Government should contribute an allowance to a married man's salary for a nonworking wife. To that add a substantial increment for the support of minor children. . . .” This seems especially strange given Tanenbaum’s own earlier admission that he did not wish for a working wife, but nevertheless felt entitled to compensation for one who was unemployed.⁵⁷ McKinley was even more dismissive of the emotional and psychological reasons many women chose to work when he warned that “if [men] can’t get their job just because some woman thinks she needs a little more money, there will be trouble.”⁵⁸

Vilifying women as greedy opportunists or otherwise ridiculing them was not typical of soldier letters. Most GIs, in fact, even those who most staunchly upheld prewar gender roles, made certain to preface their complaints and concerns with an expression of appreciation and

55. Sergeant Nathaniel Rogovoy, “Post-War Employment,” *YANK*, 2 March 1945, 15.

56. Private First Class Bernard Drimal, “Women in Industry,” *YANK*, 23 February 1944, 14.

57. Corporal S. Tanenbaum, “Women in Industry,” *YANK*, 23 February 1944, 14.

58. McKinley, “Women in Industry,” 14.

admiration for the women who helped form the backbone of the American war industry. To recount only a few of the constant refrains from soldiers: “All the fellows appreciate what the girls are doing,” “I admire our women for the work they have done for us fellows overseas here,” “The women have done and are doing a fine job in war industries and my hat is off to them. They have taken over jobs that were considered strictly men’s jobs and have proved to us GIs and to the world that they can do them,” “Our war production would have suffered had it not been for the American Woman. . . . She has had to learn man’s work in order to succeed with his job. . . . She has done a wonderful job and the country owes her a lot,” “I admire our women for the way they have pitched in to help produce war goods in an effort to shorten the war. . . .”⁵⁹

GIs were quick to praise women workers, but at the same time they were just as quick to remind them that their ultimate duty lay not in the shipyards and factories, but in the home, and soldier-authors did this in no uncertain terms. There were some who offered no real explanation for their opinions besides what they considered the self-evident truth that women simply belonged in domestic settings, such as PFC Roberson when he said that “women should take care of the home work” and provide a “satisfactory home” for returning veterans, or the nineteen-year-old private Mike Lucenti who wished the women would “take a powder” and give up their jobs because, for him, “the old saying that ‘a woman’s place is in the home’ still goes.”⁶⁰ Private Body, stationed in France, wrote that “women should stop and go back to their families and take care of their homes,” implicitly contrasting the supposedly “easy” life of the female factory worker to the much harder working GIs who had “had a real tough time over here with the

59. McKinley, “Women in Industry,” 14; Private Wallace Body, “Women in Industry,” *YANK*, 23 February 1944, 14; Anders, “Release Men’s Jobs,” 12; Technician Fifth Grade Alva E. Zimmerman, “Not Unless Necessary,” *YANK*, 22 December 1944, 12; Staff Sergeant J. W. Grooms, “Fulfill GIs’ Dreams,” *YANK*, 22 December 1944, 13.

60. Roberson, “Women in Industry,” 14; Private Mike Lucenti, “Women in Industry,” *YANK*, 23 February 1944, 14.

Germans.” Indeed, women were to return to the home not for their own reasons, but, as Body repeatedly states, to “make all the fellows feel lots better” by “[giving] her husband the things he desires from a wife.”⁶¹ Corporal Gross, though he correctly identified two of the major motivations for women who entered the workforce (“to escape the monotony and drudgery of housework and for financial independence”), nevertheless urged women to “take care of their homes and raise their families,” and to rely only on their husbands for support.⁶² Staff Sergeant Grooms took a more sentimental approach when he played on women’s desires to show both their patriotism in general and their appreciation for their husbands. “Let them go home after the war and make a job and a happy home for men returning from battlefronts all over the world,” Grooms wrote, for “these men have been dreaming of that job and that happy family.”⁶³

By far, the most frequently given reason revealed the extent to which American soldiers had internalized the “Republican Mother” ideal, both as a result of longstanding gender norms and the unprecedented wartime focus on women’s increasingly multifaceted roles. “Mother, home and heaven are to me the three most beautiful words in the English language—all of which only woman is fully representative,” Sergeant George Arnold wrote in early 1944. “With her we fall or rise. With her we perish or prosper as a nation.”⁶⁴ For most of the soldiers who complained about women remaining in industry (and to some extent in the labor market in general), more disturbing even than the prospect of being without jobs themselves was the idea that the very fabric of American society would tear at the seams without a strong feminine presence in the home. PFC McKinley feared that a woman holding a job instead of her husband

61. Body, *ibid.*

62. Gross, “Women Should Go Home,” 12.

63. Grooms, “Fulfill GIs’ Dreams,” 13.

64. Sergeant George Carlton Arnold, “Women in Industry,” *YANK*, 23 February 1944, 14.

would lead to increased theft and other crimes as had followed the previous war. Private James Motin was more concerned with the family-specific effects of female employment. Fearing that the children of the 1940s and future generations lacked parental guidance and control, he insisted that only mothers could provide the necessary guidance to mold them into useful, responsible citizens. For reasons he did not elaborate, mothers could not fulfill this crucial role and remain in industry simultaneously.⁶⁵

T-5 Alva Zimmerman, although he praised American women for their valuable contributions to the war effort and upheld their right to employment in cases of absolute necessity, still warned against women who worked only for supplemental income. These women were guilty of “robbing some single girl or family head of her or his right to win a livelihood,” when their primary functions as wives and mothers needed to be paramount to all other concerns: “American civilization needs homes and the woman is the foundation of the home.”⁶⁶ T-4 J. R. Young, stationed in France, wrote to *YANK* that no less than the peace itself hinged on the removal of women from industrial work. Women should be allowed to remain at their wartime jobs, he answered sarcastically, only if one wished for the United States to become a “second-rate power within the next twenty years,” a return of the 1920s and its attendant degradation of social values, and “the largest juvenile delinquency problem the nation has ever faced.” The only solution for Young, and the only fair course of action for “the American family and its democracy-loving people” was to immediately remove all married women from industrial jobs, and then further weed out any woman lacking a classified skill. The point Young explicitly

65. McKinley, “Women in Industry,” 14; Private James A. Motin, “Women in Industry,” *ibid.*

66. Zimmerman, “Not Unless Necessary,” 12.

made, then, was that in the industrialized workforce, marital status was an even more crucial element of women's employability than even their skill and job-related qualifications.⁶⁷

Few people, regardless of sex, race, or level of involvement in the war effort, seemed under the impression that the changeover from war to peace would be a swift, abrupt event rather than a transition that would take time and cooperation. For working women and ethnic minorities, of which African-Americans comprised the largest but still only one segment, this transition was fraught with even more questions and apprehension than the average white serviceman. The typical GI worried about job availability, but not the validity of his claim to gainful employment. He sometimes expressed concern that the normal officer-soldier relationship as it existed in the Army would be replicated in the postwar world, but unlike African-Americans and other ethnic veterans, he did not worry that this discrepancy in rank was racial in nature. He did not fear the loss of his independence as many working wives did when faced with the very real threat of being forced back into the domestic sphere; rather, he relished the idea of regaining the independence he had lost while part of the services and acting on another's orders. This is not meant in any way to diminish the legitimate anxieties that plagued returning servicemen; their fears about the world they would face after leaving the service were every bit as real and immediate to them as were those faced by the other population segments discussed in this chapter. But, as the following chapter will discuss, GIs unburdened by these very specific concerns were able to devote ample attention to and consideration of a multitude of problems they believed would need to be addressed in postwar America and even the postwar world, with the intention of not only bettering themselves, but the entire international community.

67. Technician Fourth Grade J. R. Young, "Yes, But—," *YANK*, 22 December 1944, 13.

CHAPTER THREE: TO WIN (AND KEEP) THE PEACE

When the “war to end all wars” failed to earn its lofty moniker after 1918, the reality of frequent and increasingly brutal wars began to take hold. Rather than surrendering to the idealism that even four horrific years in muddy trenches could not take from the last generation, those who fought World War II seem to have been convinced that another, even more devastating war was not only possible, but likely. Most of all, they worried about the idea that they might return home as many of their fathers and uncles had thirty years earlier, pat themselves on the back for having made the world safe for democracy once again, and then forget all about the war and what had driven them to fight in the first place. Many GIs seemed to feel that unless they approached this war with the determination to follow through to the very end, their own children would have to march off to another war in twenty or thirty years to become the third consecutive generation to fight a world war. Their letters sound this constant refrain and fervent desire to keep their children from experiencing the same horrors that they had, because the previous generation had failed to capitalize on its success. Sergeant James Keeley, stationed in the South Pacific, wrote to *YANK* in mid-1944 that “My dad fought in the last war. . . . He came back from France convinced that the United States had fought its last war. So did most of the rest. Obviously they were wrong, and a lot of their sons are wondering why.”¹ Later that year, Private Alex Siodmak wrote a bit more succinctly that “above all, we want the kind of a post-war world that will not . . . make it necessary for our children to fight World War III.”² Corporal George M. Coater, whose letter appeared one week after Siodmak’s, expressed an even greater sense of cynicism and disillusion with the older generation which had

1. Sergeant James Keeley, “The Way a Soldier Sees It,” *New York Times Magazine*, 16 July 1944, 23.

2. Private Alex Siodmak, “What We Fight For,” *New York Times Magazine*, 26 November 1944, 27.

doomed his to fight. “Let the older generations at home wrestle with the problems—they tied the Gordian knots, and when they can’t undo them we cut ‘em.” As for the younger generation at home, Coater wished them to know, as he has found, that “wisdom is old-fashioned and stuffy and impotent. You have to be ingenious and smart, and learn to love machines . . . because machines win wars and answer the problems of power. You cut the knots with ‘em, and you kill hundreds and hundreds of people with ‘em.”³

Beneath the cynicism and sarcasm, there is a deep sense of not only regret at their youth spent in such violent fashion, but also hope that maybe this time, with enough determination, the world might actually be able to enjoy some measure of peace. “We have enough common sense and intelligence to make this a warless world,” Private Leo Newman wrote from North Africa in early 1944. What soldiers—indeed, what the world needed—was “the fierce desire, the unrelenting determination that there shall be peace.”⁴

The only way this could be achieved was if the United States, already the undisputed global superpower by the end of the war, made a serious effort to abandon its traditional isolationist policies and help maintain the peace that was so dearly paid for with millions of lives in practically every part of the world. There were, naturally, some skeptics who were so inured to the idea of recurrent wars that not even the strongest global policy could convince them another greatly destructive war was avoidable. Harold Wagoner, a PFC in the China-Burma-India theater, saw little hope of securing a lasting peace for the world no matter what approach was taken. Internationalists, as he labeled those who yearned for the U.S. to take a stronger stand in global politics, hypocritically demanded freedom for all the world’s people, provided those people were white, relatively wealthy, and of some Judeo-Christian faith. Internationalists

3. Corporal George M. Coater, “Gordian Knot,” *New York Times Magazine*, 3 December 1944, 20.

4. Private Leo Newman, “League Leaders,” *Stars and Stripes*, Mediterranean ed., 15 January 1944, 9.

were all for equality “until somebody insists that they sit in the same Pullman with a Negro . . .” Isolationists, on the other hand, saw every reason to pick a fight with Great Britain and the Soviet Union, but not Germany, and in fact were “so busy raising hell with Roosevelt that they never [got] around to damning Adolf Hitler.” The only solution then, as far as Wagoner was concerned, was for the U.S. to build and maintain a military capable of defeating any nation in the world, cooperate with other countries when possible, but most importantly “always expect a great war every 20 years or so.”⁵ In a War Department-sponsored survey of 1,824 enlisted men in the European Theater, conducted in August 1945, the anxiety over future wars was also readily apparent. When asked if the United States would be involved in another large war within the next twenty-five years, about 40 percent of those who responded (714 out of 1,796, or 39.7 percent) said they did not believe this was a possibility. While only about 20 percent admitted to expecting another major conflict (353 of 1,796, or 19.6 percent), the “undecided” category outweighed both, with 41 percent of the total men surveyed unable to commit to either a positive or negative answer (729 of 1,796, or 40.59 percent).⁶

5. Private First Class Harold Wagoner, “A Nationalist U.S.,” *YANK*, 2 June 1944, 5.

6. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, *The American Soldier in World War II: Attitudes Toward Post Hostilities Problems* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945), 18.

Do you think the United States will get into another big war within the next 25 years?

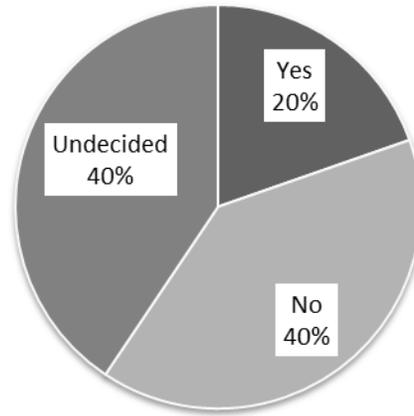


Figure 1: Soldiers on the likelihood of future war

It appears that those same democratic principles GIs exalted in domestic terms were also expected to apply internationally. Sergeant Joseph Lash, writing to *YANK* from Guadalcanal, insisted that the United States use its newfound status as a global superpower to aid the less fortunate, not only because the country had the ability and philanthropy to do so, but for security reasons as well; after all, the chaotic aftermath of a devastating war had led directly to the rise of fascism and the eventual slaughter of tens of millions of people after 1918, and poor, hungry populations would be the most vulnerable to those who preached prosperity while planning for war.⁷ Edgar L. Jones, an American ambulance driver for the British Eighth Army, echoed this sentiment. The U.S. had both the chance and the duty to stand behind its own principles and “make democracy something to live by and not just a slogan to die for.”⁸ It was the country’s responsibility to help the less fortunate rather than exploit them for America’s own selfish aims.

7. Sergeant Joseph Lash, “A Program from Guadalcanal,” *YANK*, 22 October 1943, 22.

8. Edgar L. Jones, “Letters from North Africa,” *The Atlantic*, 21 November 1942, 56.

Similarly, PFC Gil Harrison in Colorado urged readers to understand that winning the war was only one stage of a much larger battle. After the guns stopped, there would still be millions of people around the world who were homeless and starving, and of course those Axis-controlled populations who would need to be sustained and monitored until they were “cured” of any lingering fascistic ideas. Anticipating the criticism such a plan was likely to receive, Harrison assured his fellow GIs that the “old crowd” who still thought in isolationist terms would have to give way to a new, enlightened breed of veterans who had seen firsthand the results of inadequate attention to the world's needs.⁹

Sergeant Bernard Bellush, though he acknowledged the task facing postwar peacekeepers was by no means easy, hoped that Americans in general and soldiers in particular would “be consistent and outspoken in our struggle for democracy, and for the Four Freedoms, which are our most potent weapons.”¹⁰ Staff Sergeant Paul Cropman, stationed at an Army Air Base in Portland, Oregon, was even more adamant about standing behind the supposedly universal principles of justice. “We’ve heard plenty about the Four Freedoms,” he wrote. “If any one of them is abused anywhere, by anybody, and that abuse goes unpunished, we’ll not only have lost the peace, we’ll have lost the war. And every guy who died will have died in vain.”¹¹ For him, it was not nearly enough just to fight for a free world and to sweep away the tyrants who threatened global peace; America had to be willing and able to defend those war aims even long after the war itself was over, or else all of the fighting, the dying, the starving and suffering and destruction, meant nothing. At the end of *YANK*'s run, the magazine published a letter from Corporal Ackerman J. Michaels of Korea that emphasized these points in what was perhaps a

9. Private First Class Gil Harrison, “Put in a New Team,” *YANK*, 22 October 1943, 22.

10. Sergeant Bernard Bellush, “For More Democracy,” *New York Times Magazine*, 11 March 1945, 2.

11. Staff Sergeant Paul Cropman, “Post-War America,” *YANK*, 18 February 1944, 14.

more reflective manner than others. He and his peers had fought “if only indirectly and sometimes unconsciously” so that peaceful people everywhere, not just in America, could continue their own “pursuit of greater liberty and happiness.” America's stake in the war, moreover, was not only to maintain its own way of life, but to help rid the world of tyranny that did not respect oceanic boundaries and would “subjugate not only our minds and bodies but those of the whole human race.”¹² Like Cropman, Michaels implored readers not to lose the ultimate battle that would follow the actual war; to do so would be to have cost so much misery and death for no purpose.

Julian Friedman, Technician Fifth Grade, suggested that only empathy would have any chance of bringing about a sustained peace. Educators alone would bring about progress, “through a complete understanding of [their] fellow men.”¹³ Though Friedman did not suggest just what kind of educator could accomplish this, First Lieutenant William A. Jones took a cue from the enemy when his unit arrived in Germany. Specifically, he advocated a thorough use of propaganda to convince the entire global population that war simply did not pay. “Before people can be made to fight,” he reasoned, “they must be made to think that . . . war is the best solution to their national problem.” If “the greatest showmen and advertising geniuses” could “put a cigarette in every mouth” and sell gadgets that no one had ever wanted but suddenly could not live without, then surely they could convince everyone on the planet that war was not only a bad solution, but that it was not a solution at all. It could only lead to more war, more suffering, more injustices, which would in turn lead to more wars out of retribution, on and on until eventually there was no one left to fight. Hitler managed to “make a nation of fanatic fighters in

12. Corporal Ackerman J. Michaels, “Lest We Forget,” *YANK*, 28 December 1945, 21.

13. Technician Fifth Grade Julian Friedman, “No War Machines,” *Stars and Stripes*, London ed., 8 March 1945, iii.

ten years,” and unless America was willing to admit that either Hitler was smarter or his cause was better, it could do the reverse and on a much, much larger scale.¹⁴

Just as idealistic was Technical Sergeant Milton Lehman's extended metaphor in which he imagined the world as a giant house that needed to accommodate everyone equally. While waiting to “splinter the old house, crash in its weak rafters, [and] rip up its rotten floorboards,” Lehman noted that not only would the people of Allied and neutral countries need to be taken care of, but eventually even the citizens of Axis nations would need to be “brought once more into the house.” The metaphor continues: America would be the sole provider of the firm foundations needed for such a house, its steadfastness providing the concrete, its benevolence and firmness providing the lumber, its tolerance represented by the stream water to mix the cement, its strength and toughness embodied by its quarries for brick, and all of it would finally be set and protected by the “warm and overseeing sun.” None of this, though, was possible without a proper blueprint, one which, Lehman added, “must be drawn to the right proportions this time.”¹⁵

Not all soldier authors were motivated by such ideological notions; many advocated a more internationally responsible role simply because isolationism had proved to be a completely inadequate method by which to secure national peace. Private Leo Newman, mentioned earlier in the chapter, pointed out that not only was total isolation from the rest of the world impossible, but to continue to believe it was to start the cycle of aggression all over again.¹⁶ “If we look at the bitter and sordid pages in the history of the past two decades,” wrote Sergeant Dave Golding

14. First Lieutenant William A. Jones, “Simple Solution,” *YANK*, 2 February 1945, 14.

15. Technical Sergeant Milton Lehman, “Letter to America,” *Stars and Stripes*, Mediterranean ed., 12 June 1943, 6.

16. Newman, “League Leaders,” 9.

in mid-1944, “we can well realize to what extent our withdrawal to the sidelines weakened the will of the smaller nations to resist the growing demands of the aggressor nations.” The “spectator approach to international affairs” that was so lauded by isolationists had certainly not ensured that the U.S. remained safe and unbothered by global politics, and more damning still was that the U.S. watched “with amused and muddled tolerance” as one nation after another fell under the control of dictators and plunged the world into a gruesome war that touched every hemisphere.¹⁷ Sergeant Keeley was even more graphic in his description of how spectacularly isolationism had failed not only the United States, but the entire world:

We minded our own business when they formed the League of Nations at Versailles; we closed our eyes when the Japs marched into Manchuria; we beat our chests for ‘neutrality’ when Mussolini sent his thugs to Ethiopia; we shouted ‘propaganda’ when anyone suggested that it was Hitler and Mussolini who were directing the Spanish war, and we whistled ‘Yankee Doodle’ when Austria fell and Czechoslovakia was carved up for Adolf’s breakfast. And right up to Pearl Harbor we were trying to pretend what the Japs did to the Chinese was none of our affair; they’d never to it do us if we just kept them supplied with scrap iron and oil.¹⁸

Keeley was but one voice in a chorus of GIs who ardently argued for an international governing agency to maintain peace in the world after the war was won. Proving once again that the World War I generation had tragically underestimated the threats posed by angry, defeated, war-torn nations, World War II soldiers were overwhelmingly positive that a new League of Nations or similar body, led by the United States, was the only force capable of ensuring that World War III did not erupt in another decade or two. In a fairly early War Department survey conducted in November of 1943, 2,997 enlisted men stationed in the United Kingdom offered very consistent answers regarding whether or not the U.S. should consider joining a new League of Nations after the war. In vague terms, GIs were incredibly supportive of the idea of a global

17. Sergeant Dave Golding, “Cooperation Will Win,” *YANK*, 2 June 1944, 5.

18. Keeley, “The Way a Soldier Sees It,” 23.

governmental system. When asked if “the nations of the world” should set up a “strong international organization” following the war, without any reference to either the League of Nations or the United States in particular, a vast majority (2,463, roughly 87 percent of the 2,824 recorded responses) agreed. The follow-up question, which asked if there should be “an internationally controlled army to police the world,” received great support as well, though not the powerful majority of the previous question: of the 2,793 recorded responses, 1,825, or about 65 percent, of the GIs surveyed agreed that a global police force was necessary.¹⁹

Once the U.S. began to factor into questions of international policy, the survey answers began to show more fluctuation, but the general preference for greater global awareness and control remained. When asked to check one of several options given for how the U.S. could stay out of war in the future, well over half (1,622 of the 1,820 responses, or about 67 percent) responded that the country’s best hope would be to “join a strong organization of nations.” Isolationists were still present, naturally, as the second most popular answer was “stay out of world affairs” (446, or about 9 percent), but the trend toward greater global cooperation had obviously taken hold.²⁰

19. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, *The American Soldier in World War II: Attitudes Toward Army Life* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 14.

20. *Ibid.*, 14.

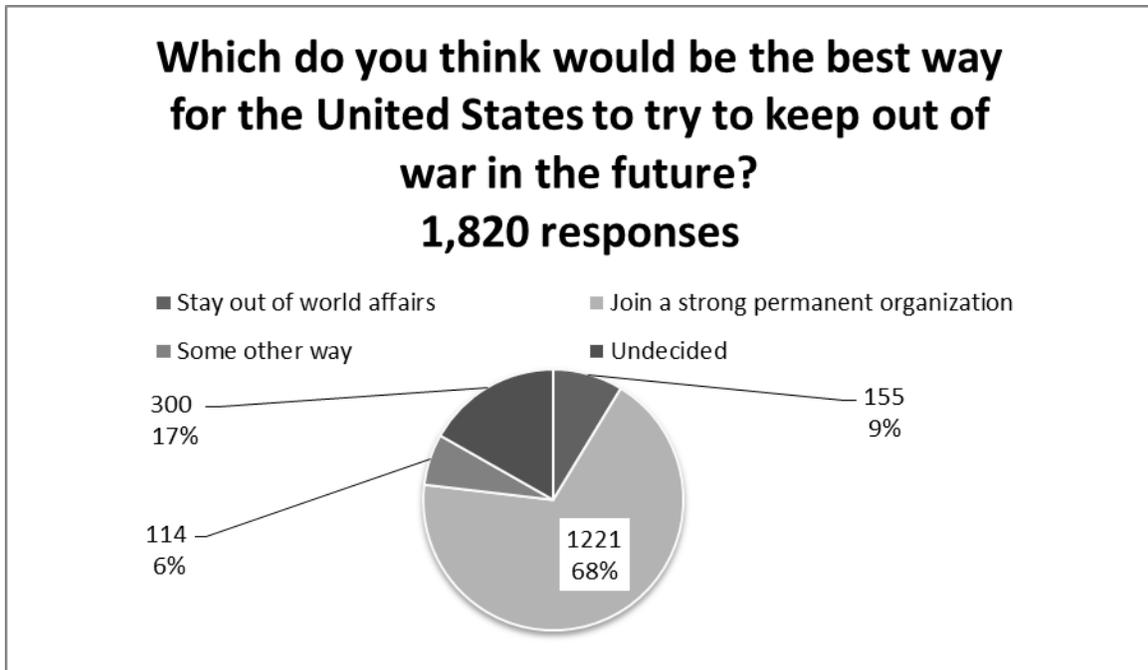


Figure 2: Soldiers on how to keep the US out of future wars

One could interpret this hesitancy as a sign that GIs wanted another League of Nations, but still did not wholeheartedly believe that the U.S. should be a constituent. The problem with such a theory is that, though more divided than when asked only if there should be some kind of international agency with or without an American presence, troops still showed a definitive preference toward American involvement. When asked their thoughts on the issue of American versus global issues (“After the war, the United States should stay out of world affairs and stick to the problems we have in our own country”), a majority disagreed; 2,802 soldiers answered the question, and 1,795 (64 percent) of respondents said that the U.S. should still maintain a firm presence internationally, regardless of its internal problems.²¹

Once again, this data could be interpreted to mean GIs feared that the U.S. would somehow be overruled by the other member nations, or that there would be some loss of power

21. Ibid., 15.

after the U.S. had just established itself as the leading global power. And, once again, this theory is complicated by the fact that lack of power never seemed to be much of an issue. In fact, this survey, which the War Department designed to be representative of the Army as a whole, has two questions arranged specifically to gauge this fear, and both are telling indicators of the average soldier's intolerance for any sort of dictatorship. In response to the statement that "After the war the United States should control and dominate the world," of the 2,847 logged answers, 2,412 (about 85 percent) disagreed.²² This is not surprising, given the repeated Allied message that individual nations should be free to govern themselves and not be reduced to mere puppet regimes. More interesting is the follow-up question, in which those surveyed were asked to agree or disagree with this statement: "After the war, the United States should join a strong international organization of nations even if it meant that this organization would have some control over how the United States deals with other countries." 2,802 responses were recorded, of which around 63 percent (1,758 responses) agreed.²³ Clearly, the average GI did not seem to fear a lack of national prestige or power brought on by America's participation in an international governing agency.

Predictably, there are some individual exceptions. While still agreeing that an American-led international league was the only way by which another even more destructive world war could be prevented, some soldiers were of the opinion that might really did make right, as long as that "might" was used in the name of democracy. Unlike their more sentimental counterparts who sought peace through understanding of global politics and conflicts, some soldiers thought their country's allies were so inept that America's guidance would be the only thing to keep them from plunging the world straight into yet another war. PFC Thomas M. Rees effectively blamed

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

Europe for practically every major American conflict: the French and Indian War and, by extension, the American Revolution, were both ultimately caused by the Hundred Years' War. The Napoleonic Wars sparked the War of 1812. Both World Wars were European affairs that eventually dragged the U.S. into participating because, as Rees lamented, the U.S. has always tried to convince itself that it is immune to European politics, even though it never has been and never will be. The European system of balancing out power had never been effective, Rees argued, having caused an endless succession of wars for centuries. Therefore, the U.S. had to be certain that it made up for its incompetent allies by putting into practice Theodore Roosevelt's "Big Stick Diplomacy" policy. Along with a strong foreign policy and the willingness to play power politics, the U.S. had to embrace the earlier President Roosevelt's theory and carry – and use, if need be – their big stick. As Rees pointed out, that stick was an extremely big one, consisting of the world's largest Navy, a massive Army, and an all-encompassing industrial complex.²⁴

PFC K. C. Hollhagen, writing from North Africa not long after V-E Day, followed Rees's lead and chastised Great Britain and France for lacking "either the inclination or the power to maintain any semblance of peace in Europe." Hollhagen saw but one solution: despite how much "Uncle Sam" disliked interfering in other nations' business, his only choice was to join whatever postwar Allied league formed "wielding a large and ready stick."²⁵

Precisely how that stick was to be wielded, and by whom, were points of contention that soldier-authors appear to have taken very seriously. For all their hopes and suggestions for how to prevent another war, the fear of World War III was never far from many soldiers' minds.

24. Private First Class Thomas M. Rees, "International Big Stick," *YANK*, 16 March 1945, 14.

25. Private First Class K. C. Hollhagen, "Ready Stick," *Stars and Stripes*, Mediterranean ed., 19 May 1945, 4.

Thus when victory seemed within reach, Army publications began to run pieces devoted to the state of the postwar military, and GIs were never hesitant to share their opinions about what form that military should take. In this regard, conscription was by far the most divisive element that reappeared time and again during the final year of the war. *YANK* launched the opening salvo in the debate in September 1944, when its editorial section ran several letters from servicemen concerned with a possible postwar draft, along with their reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with such a measure. The need to be ready for another war, big or small, was by far the most frequently cited reason for a large standing Army. T-5 Steve Killilea advised that maintaining a strong, sizeable Army was primarily a defensive act in nature because it would serve as a deterrent to potential aggressors, but it would not only be for show; all branches of the armed services, even in peacetime, needed both the willingness to “stand up for the rights of all free people” and the strength to “strike any one [sic] that tries to deny us that right.”²⁶ Private First Class Gerald Setterlund repeated this argument in *Stars and Stripes*, writing that to be taken seriously as the dominant global power after the war, the U.S. would need to “have the force at our fingertips to back up our democratic ideas” if they should become endangered anywhere.²⁷ Keith Frame, an apprentice seaman stationed in Arizona, compared the U.S. to a prize fighter who needed to constantly train so that he could defend his title at any time. A properly trained military ready to rush to the nation's defense whenever necessary would serve as an “ominous warning to any and all who dare to threaten our freedom.”²⁸

26. Technician Fifth Grade Steve Killilea, “Compulsory Military Training,” *YANK*, 1 September 1944, 14.

27. Private First Class Gerald T. Setterlund, “Force by Force,” *Stars and Stripes*, London ed., 22 February 1945, iii.

28. Seaman Apprentice Keith S. Frame, “Compulsory Military Training (Continued),” *YANK*, 2 March 1945, 14.

For many servicemen advocating mandatory military training, however, the specter of the Great Depression seemed to heavily inform their opinions. Anticipating another depression and mass unemployment after the war, GIs who encouraged peacetime conscription frequently conflated an earnest desire for national security with their reasonable concerns about their own status in postwar America. T-5 Donald Hartman wrote from Italy that young men fresh out of high school could benefit from the “historical and geographical education” that overseas service would provide, while simultaneously performing occupation duty. Those soldiers they replaced would return to the U.S. to take the newly opened industrial jobs, thereby curbing the unemployment and associated economic problems they thought awaited them.²⁹ Private George Eisenbach, though stationed in Washington, also thought that enlisted men deserved to be released from occupation duty in Europe and Japan by young men in their twenties. Those young, fresh recruits would receive a better practical education than a university could provide while serving in a critical military capacity, while newly released veterans would take up the jobs left behind.³⁰

Private Jimmie Grant and Corporal Edwin Ernest wrote what was perhaps the most complete summation of these myriad interests. Their letter was published in *Stars and Stripes* in March 1945, and in it they outlined essentially every point their peers had already made concerning the necessity and desirability of mandatory peacetime military service: young men entering the service could be stationed in Germany as part of the army of occupation, while the men who were discharged from the military took the jobs subsequently vacated. As a further incentive, the new draftees would remove a considerable burden from an already overtaxed

29. Technician Fifth Grade Donald C. Hartman, “Compulsory Military Training,” *YANK*, 3 November 1944, 14.

30. Private George A. Eisenbach, “Army of Occupation,” *YANK*, 16 March 1945, 14.

economy not only by surrendering jobs to new veterans, but also by keeping war-related industries thriving by providing clothing and assorted supplies to the occupying force in Europe. In addition, Grant and Ernest claimed that because every youth desired to go abroad at some point, giving them that chance in a productive manner would solve at least two problems simultaneously.³¹

Servicemen opposed to compulsory military training, beyond pointing out that the U.S. would emerge from the war as the most powerful force on Earth and would therefore not need a strong military for defensive purposes, relied almost exclusively on ideological reasons for support.³² The most frequently cited of these reasons reflected the GIs' oft-repeated wishes for lasting peace and the prevention of yet another world war. As several letter writers pointed out, peace talks and the formation of the U.N. were pointless as long as America also continued to plan for war. "My morale would be a lot lower over here if I had to envision a post-war America preparing for another war," complained Sergeant Pete McGovern in New Guinea. War preparations, of which a large standing army would be a crucial part, revealed a distrust of the United Nations and "automatically [made] wastebasket material of the Atlantic Charter and the various other declarations we are fighting for."³³ Sol Bender, a private stationed in India, agreed that a draft aimed at strengthening the peacetime military was "a stab in the back to the efforts

31. Corporal Edwin C. Ernest and Private Jimmie Grant, "Four Ideas," *Stars and Stripes*, London ed., 8 March 1945, iii.

32. Private Simon Schatz, stationed in France, asked, "Against whom will we have to defend ourselves once we lick the Axis? Britain and Russia will be the only countries which can possibly threaten our security, and neither of them shows the slightest intention of wanting to do other than remain friends with us." Staff Sergeant Gilbert Stevenson likewise asked, "Against whom are we to be armed to the teeth? Certainly not 'aggressors,' for after this one, we were told, there weren't supposed to be any more aggressors." Private First Class Simon Schatz, "Compulsory Military Training," *YANK*, 2 March 1945, 14; Staff Sergeant Gilbert W. Stevenson, "Gasoline in the Cellar," *YANK*, 9 November 1945, 7.

33. Sergeant Pete McGovern, "Compulsory Military Training," *YANK*, 1 September 1944, 14.

made for permanent peace at the Dumbarton Oaks conference.”³⁴ Staff Sergeant Stevenson continued his invective against conscription with the same logic. “Gen. Patton said that you do not prepare for fire by doing away with the fire department,” he acknowledged, “but neither do you prepare for a fire by storing gasoline in the cellar and dynamite in the attic.” Peaceful cooperation, not the embrace of militarism, was both more humanitarian and efficient to Stevenson. Rather than continue to talk of a “better fire department,” the nations of the world, led by the United States, could “fire-proof” the world by simply removing the explosive elements from the metaphorical house and living as peers instead of enemies.³⁵

Another popular explanation was that mandatory service and a large peacetime army were inconsistent with some of the most fundamental reasons given for entering the war in the first place. “Big armies, large stores of arms and equipment are preparations for war, not peace,” wrote Sergeant Carl Davis while stationed in Colorado. “Didn’t the German, Italian and Japanese people rely upon arms for security? Now look at what tragedy is their lot.”³⁶ Staff Sergeant Munio Podhorzer placed even more emphasis on the hypocrisy in what he perceived to be the beginnings of American militarism: “. . . Isn’t one of our objectives to fight and defeat militarism? Was not German militarism always a thorn to peace in Europe, next to many other factors?”³⁷ S/Sgt Stevenson continued, “To destroy the militaristic system in Europe and Asia, only to end up with the same kind of deal ourselves, seems a pretty sorry return for the hell our boys went through.”³⁸

34. Private Sol Bender, “Compulsory Military Training (Continued),” *YANK*, 2 March 1945, 14.

35. Stevenson, iii.

36. Sergeant Carl Davis, “Compulsory Military Training,” *YANK*, 1 September 1944, 14.

37. Staff Sergeant Munio Podhorzer, “Training Youth,” *Stars and Stripes*, London ed., 8 February 1945, iii.

38. Stevenson, iii.

The only solution to ensure world peace, therefore, was to plan for exactly that: peace. By working towards “mutual understanding and good will,” wrote Staff Sergeant Podhorzer, the United States could enjoy long-term prosperity and peace rather than constantly “prepare for another war, for misery, more unhappiness.”³⁹ Podhorzer went on to suggest that the key to peace and international understanding was education. Rather than send young men just entering adulthood into the military, they would be much better served taking place in exchange student programs and fostering good will from and toward America wherever they went.⁴⁰ Private Schatz, too, thought that government-funded scholarship or vocational training would be considerably more beneficial than conscripted service. Besides being more cost efficient to fund a year's worth of education, according to Schatz, these young would-be soldiers “would get more out of a course in English literature or Diesel engines than from studying the tactics and technique of policing the area.”⁴¹ Sergeant McGovern, mentioned previously, advised that American youths should “do their warring against war in classrooms instead of foxholes and with books for weapons.” His reasoning for this return to education as both a means and an end was that the war and, ultimately, the fate of the world were placed in the hands of the common man “off the shore of Pearl Harbor, in the bomb-torn streets of London and in the trenches before Moscow.” That same peace with which the common men had been entrusted, the same truce for which they so relentlessly fought, could just as easily be taken from them if they were given only more weapons and more nationalistic propaganda after the war. The peace they struggled to

39. Podhorzer, iii.

40. Ibid.

41. Schatz, 14.

achieve could slip through their hands, but not if they were allowed to “[learn] through education, to mold it [the war's outcome] into a lasting peace and a new free world.”⁴²

Though GIs insisted that forging and maintaining international ties through education would lead to a better, more peaceful global culture, they did not seem to include the defeated nations in their plans. As discussed in chapter one, American soldiers were acutely aware of how important it was to rehabilitate the Axis powers and eventually welcome them back into the international community, but until those powers could be trusted again, there was still the matter of what to do with them when the war ended.

Obviously, after witnessing such widespread death and destruction, American soldiers (and likely their Allied cohorts) were not content merely to win the war. Beyond their earnest desire to prevent another war from erupting in two or three decades, there was also an unmistakable air of revenge.

In a March 1943 War Department survey, designed to be representative of the Army as a whole, 4,384 men were asked to consider the following question: “If Germany and Japan were to offer to stop fighting now and to give up the countries they have taken over, do you think we should talk peace with them or not?” Fully 80 percent (3,511) flatly rejected the hypothetical truce, answering instead that they would keep fighting until the Axis was completely destroyed.⁴³

42. McGovern, 14.

43. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, *The American Soldier in World War II: Attitudes of Negroes and Attitudes toward Negroes* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 24. Indicative of this widespread desire for total victory, President Roosevelt announced at the Casablanca Conference in January, 1943, that the Allies would pursue “unconditional surrender” of their enemies, a proclamation that even Prime Minister Churchill was apparently not expecting. British policy had long been one of “wearing down” the German military machine and inspire anarchy within to bring about a regime with which the Allies could cooperate; historians continue to debate whether this policy was an indication of Britain's uncertainty in its ability to withstand German military might, or whether Britain hoped to add Germany as an ally against rapidly building Soviet power in Eastern Europe. Whichever one is the case, as historian Brian Farrell has noted, collaboration was hardly a realistic plan, given that “German resistance circles were seen in Allied eyes as weak, unreliable, and so tainted with militarism as to be little more palatable than Hitler.” Brian P. Farrell, “Symbol of Paradox: The Casablanca Conference, 1943,” *Canadian Journal of History* 28, no. 1 (April 1993): 36.

The following month, a similar survey was conducted among infantrymen and line officers. When asked if the Japanese people should “suffer plenty for all the trouble” they had caused, even with no distinction made or implied between punishing the military or civilians, just over half of the 2,211 respondents agreed (about 55 percent, or 1,207). Meanwhile, the Germans fared considerably better; asked the same question but in regards to Germans instead of Japanese, the majority of the 2,192 responses disagreed (59 percent, or 1,295).⁴⁴ It must be noted, however, that both these surveys, although they claimed to represent the Army as a whole, were given exclusively to soldiers stationed in the United States. Given the small number of those polled, one can reasonably speculate that many, if not most, of those answers came from men either still in training or who had as not yet seen service outside the U.S. This observation does not diminish their opinions, of course, but it does lead to some curious conclusions when one then looks at similar questions asked of overseas troops.

One such survey, published in August 1945, asked 1,824 enlisted men in the European Theater a series of questions related to how they felt about Germany and her citizens, and what postwar measures could be taken to prevent another war. When asked explicitly to consider German soldiers against German civilians, GIs repeatedly indicated a stronger active dislike of the military, but they were also somewhat more apt to forgive German soldiers over civilians in terms of doing what was thought necessary. Asked to check a single statement that most closely represented how they felt about German soldiers, American servicemen vacillated between strong hatred (21 percent, or 379) and strong dislike but not outright hatred (35 percent, or 614). Inconsistency in feelings (“Sometimes I have strong feelings against them, sometimes no particular feelings”) and grudging respect for fellow military men (“I feel they are like us and

44. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, *The American Soldier in World War II: Attitudes of Enlisted Men and Officers* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 38-39.

have done what they thought was their duty”) both tied at around nineteen percent each of the total survey, while only about 6 percent (100) claimed to not have any strong emotions regarding the German military at all.⁴⁵ In response to the same question, but asked to consider only the average German citizen this time, the respondents indicated that they felt much less hatred (11 percent, or 192) and were overall more conflicted in how they felt when there were no clear-cut enemies. While there was a one-percent increase in the “great dislike” category for civilians as compared with soldiers, this could also be because twenty-six more answers were recorded for the survey about soldiers than what were recorded for civilians, which could imply a small proportional shift. Still, many more GIs responded ambivalently when asked about the common German: 25 percent (445) answered that they sometimes had strong feelings and sometimes felt none, while 12 percent (205) denied having any particularly strong feelings at all.⁴⁶

This ambivalence about the culpability of the average German permeated the entire survey. When questions were limited to punitive concerns, GIs usually encouraged at least some degree of punishment, though the ambiguous phrasing of the questions clouds the previously distinct lines between soldier and civilian. Generally, American troops favored the operating procedure in postwar Germany as outlined in JCS 1067⁴⁷, at least in theory: both the official document and the soldiers’ survey responses advocated the partitioning of Germany into smaller states, deindustrialization especially of the steel and chemical plants, and firm, uncompromising

45. United States War Department, Research and Education Division, *The American Soldier in World War II: Attitudes Toward Post Hostilities Problems* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945), 21.

46. *Ibid.*, 22.

47. *Directive JCS 1067 to the Commander in Chief of U.S. forces in Germany*, given to General Eisenhower in April 1945, was the first official document outlining how leaders in the U.S. Zone of Occupation were to conduct military government in postwar Germany. A slightly amended version was signed by President Harry Truman on 10 May, 1945, but the document itself was not released to the public until after the Potsdam Conference that August. The directive was essentially a revised and less permanently crippling version of the so-called “Morgenthau Plan” eponymously named after U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Henry J. Morgenthau. At its core, the Morgenthau Plan was meant to reduce Germany to a pastoral state incapable of ever producing war material—or any other industrial product—in the future. For more information, see Henry J. Morgenthau, *Germany is Our Problem* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945).

military government for as long as necessary. According to the same survey, GIs tended to agree that Nazi leaders, whether major or minor, should be executed or at least be imprisoned for life, educational facilities would need to be regulated for many years, and German labor should be used to rebuild areas of neighboring countries that had suffered damage as a result of German aggression.

Where the respondents differed from the official directive, however, betrayed their overall reluctance to punish Germany as a whole. JCS 1067, though a somewhat more lenient policy than Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau's before it, still discouraged active involvement in improving or even maintaining Germany's collective welfare after the war. The directive and its related legislation expressly forbade foreign relief efforts and food shipments, reflecting the policy outlined early in the document that "It should be brought home to the Germans that Germany's ruthless warfare and the fanatical Nazi resistance have destroyed the German economy and made chaos and suffering inevitable and that the Germans cannot escape responsibility for what they have brought upon themselves."⁴⁸

The survey responses, meanwhile, indicate far less willingness to exact undue harsh punishment. Asked if German citizens should be given emergency relief in the form of food, clothing, and medical attention when they could not provide as much for themselves, 64 percent (939) of the 1,470 respondents agreed that such measures were necessary.⁴⁹ In another discontinuity between the official directive and the soldiers' opinions, whereas JCS 1067 implicated the entire German population in the devastation wrought across Europe, 46 percent of the 1,726 GIs surveyed claimed to have at least a "fairly favorable" opinion of the German

48. U.S. War Department, *Directive JCS 1067 to the Commander in Chief of U.S. forces in Germany* (April 1945), under "4a," <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/ga3-450426.pdf> [accessed February 9, 2011].

49. War Dept., *The American Soldier in World War II: Attitudes Toward Post Hostilities Problems*, 24.

people; this response, moreover, was also the majority answer, with “rather unfavorable” coming second at 37 percent (637) and the two extremes (“very favorable” and “very unfavorable”) representing 3 percent and 14 percent of the remaining answers, respectively.⁵⁰ In any event, U.S. soldiers were reluctant to write off Germany as a lost cause; they remained skeptical that the country could be trusted politically, but the German people themselves could, for the most part, be redeemed and taught to reject Nazism in favor of democracy.

Echoing the conciliatory tone reflected by the survey responses, soldiers’ individual letters followed a similar trend in their cautious optimism about the future of the Axis nations, particularly Germany. Among the most obvious (and therefore most common) suggestions were the dissolution of the German military and the reeducation of the German people. Education would prove especially crucial in the postwar era according to many soldiers, as the process of erasing Hitler’s influence would take tremendous effort and time. Sergeant Bert Dunn, writing from Great Britain, saw education as intrinsically linked with future German government: only through proper, supervised education would “honest world cooperation” take the place of Germany’s traditional reliance on power politics, and that education would then necessarily have to help “transpose rabid German nationalism into channels of liberal self-government.”⁵¹ Private Helmut Levi, also in Britain, advocated military government and supervision of both textbooks and teachers to ensure the Prussian mentality was finally stamped out.⁵² Private Isodore Yohaj rejected all talk of breaking Germany into smaller states by pointing out that democratic education would lead to democratic government, and in any case an economically viable (and

50. Ibid.

51. Sergeant Bert Dunn, “Germans and Japs,” *YANK*, 29 September 1944, 14.

52. Private Helmut Levi, *ibid.*

thus unified) Germany was essential to European and global economic stability after the war.⁵³ Splitting up the country and punishing regular civilians would accomplish nothing except bitterness and animosity between victors and vanquished, a point Donald R. McNeil, stationed in New Guinea, took up as well. Any form of military government would have to be strong but just, and the political and ideological components to such oversight would need to be delivered peacefully and helpfully, not dictated and harshly enforced. The key to a lasting peace was not to drag the defeated peoples down the path of righteousness, but rather to demonstrate principles that would assure respect, admiration, and eventually belief and adoption.⁵⁴ In a similar vein, Sergeant Fred W. Gillies took exception to strict anti-fraternization orders being put in place. “Has silence and no exchange of thoughts ever produced anything but misunderstanding and bitterness without reason?” he asked, noting that avoiding interaction with instead of attempting to reach the civilian mind was counterproductive at best, dangerously subversive at worst. “Respect is not a thing coincidental with force,” and is not won by inducing fear and resentment; rather, “it is something slowly earned by commonplace, humanistic . . . actions.”⁵⁵

Though most servicemen’s letters which appeared in the publications studied here bore the same sentiment, it is not this paper’s intention to present this as the only argument. Not every letter written to *YANK* and *Stars and Stripes* urged respect and compassion for the enemy. Indeed, many GIs made it perfectly clear that they thought nothing short of total decimation would prevent Germany from launching World War III. Sergeant Joseph DiMaria blamed German sympathizers and their propaganda for leading otherwise intelligent people to consider

53. Private Isodore Yohaj, *ibid.*

54. Donald R. McNeil, *ibid.*

55. Sergeant Fred W. Gillies, “Superman Actions,” *Stars and Stripes*, North Africa ed., 27 January 1945, 5.

“Nazi misdeeds as distinct from those of the Germans,” while another serviceman sought to reduce Germany to a pre-modern, medieval existence.⁵⁶ Second Lieutenant Russel Gordon suggested that every piece of machinery, down to the sewing machines and telephones in every home, should be destroyed. “Thus deprived of his radios and newspapers, he would be isolated from the world. His immediate concern would be a struggle for his own mere existence.” The result, after several generations of such a meager lifestyle, would be the restoration of the “simple-living, gently devout Herr” of a bygone, heavily idealized era.⁵⁷ “E. J. S.” of the Air Technical Service Command Europe went further still. To him, even regular German civilians were “so hardened toward sin that they [had] no desire to even know right.” Re-education would make no difference to a population thoroughly ruined by Hitler's influence; rather, he laments that “shooting is too lenient for all of them” and, even more cynically, “Too bad we do not believe in race extermination en masse.”⁵⁸

Of course, E. J. S. did not acknowledge that his solution to the German “problem” was uncomfortably similar to his stated reason for being so vehemently anti-German in the first place, namely the “diabolical atrocities” that were being uncovered in Germany's eastern territories. Racial issues were in fact a recurring theme in many soldier letters regarding how to handle the defeated Axis powers. Despite the fact that most Anglo-derived peoples had a deeply Germanic heritage, modern Germans came to represent almost as much of an identifiably foreign “race” as did the Japanese. Technical Sergeant J. Frank Klimek, among others, urged *Stars and Stripes* readers not to repeat the mistakes of 1918 and turn a suitably crushing defeat into a

56. Sergeant Joseph DiMaria, “German Guilt,” *New York Times Magazine*, 19 November 1944, 18.

57. Second Lieutenant Russel Gordon, “Peace Terms,” *ibid.*

58. E. J. S., “Atrocities,” *Stars and Stripes*, London ed., 26 May 1945, iii.

rebuilding project for the enemy. This time, he stressed, there was no room for sympathy. The defeated would not be the civilized enemy that might be expected in Western culture; rather, they were the “Hun race,” a barbaric and brutal tribe which understood nothing but destruction. For Klimek, there seemed to be no distinction between German soldier and German civilian; they were all the same inheritors of a culture steeped in war and conquest and should be treated accordingly.⁵⁹ Captain Leonard S. Ellenbogen, stationed in the Netherlands East Indies, suggested a reduction of the German birthrate to “help restore the biological balance in Europe,” ostensibly only because the German population was disproportionately healthy when compared to other European nations. This imbalance would, he feared, create a situation in which even a defeated Germany could quickly rebound and take advantage of its severely weakened neighbors.⁶⁰

Though Ellenbogen offered no advice as to how such a balance was to be achieved, another GI provided a detailed account of how the German population could not only be controlled, but utterly annihilated. Private First Class M. L. Brandt wrote to *YANK* in August 1945 to outline his program for the “destruction of the German people in 25 years.” First, German children up to age fifteen were to be taken from their parents or guardians and placed in democratically-minded schools, the implication being that those schools would be located outside of Germany itself. Anyone older than fifteen would spend the remainder of his life rebuilding all foreign areas affected by the war, with the further suggestion that they also be sterilized; if that was too much to bear, Brandt made a concession that any child born is be taken away immediately to one of the schools mentioned earlier in his letter, so that the parent would

59. Technical Sergeant J. Frank Klimek, “Atrocities,” *Stars and Stripes*, London ed., 26 May 1945, iii.

60. Captain Leonard S. Ellenbogen, “Two Problems,” *New York Times Magazine*, 7 January 1945, 38.

in no way have influence over the child. As for the country itself, it would be divided into many smaller nations similar to what had existed prior to 1871, with those nation-states remaining under strict military control until such time as they proved themselves capable of responsible and independent government. Brandt finally admitted that the rest of his squad thought his plan was too harsh, but that they nevertheless agreed that it was the “most complete solution to . . . an eternal problem.” He ended his letter with a plea for permanent resolution to the persistence of German aggression with, “Let's not have any more Germans or Germany to worry about.”⁶¹

Lawrence Cane, a member of a combat engineering unit, wrote from an unidentified location in Germany in mid-November, 1944, that “Up at the front, we're all full of hate, and our first reaction is pretty much summarized by the phrase, ‘Kill the bastards!’” As he immediately pointed out, however, such a short-sighted reaction was neither rational nor sustainable. “You can't just practically destroy 43,000,000 Germans and expect it to stick.” And more than that, he continued, such a drastic response seemed out of place in a war supposedly fought for democratic reasons. On a more poignant note, after venting his frustration with the enemy, Cane admitted that no matter his hatred for Nazis, his faith in humanity remained unshaken. “I believe that Germans can be like you and I, some day,” he confessed, and “I believe that they can take their place in humanity's march to progress.”⁶²

As the war drew to a close and GIs began to see firsthand the evidence of German brutality, however, these more hopeful letters began to turn cynical, even hateful. Sergeant Bill

61. Private First Class M. L. Brandt, “Half-Baked Solutions,” *YANK*, 27 August 1945, 18. Directly beneath this letter, *YANK* also printed a letter that was cruder in execution but carried the same genocide masked as eugenics intent, this time aimed at the Japanese: “Problem: What to do with all the Japs after the war? Solution: Put all the male Japs on one island and all the females on a different one, three thousand miles apart.” Seaman First Class T. E. Bussey, “Jap Disposal,” *ibid.*

62. Lawrence Cane, Germany, November 15, 1944, in *The Good Fight Continues: World War II Letters from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, edited by Peter N. Carroll, Michael Nash, and Melvin Small (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 207.

Susman, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War, wrote from Germany in late March that “This world will never be safe until rivers of German blood have wet the soil.” His hatred, he explained, ran deeper than the typical feelings one would expect of enemy soldiers. To begin with, he saw no redemption for Nazis or Germans alike. “Reeducation is a crock of nonsense. You could cut them into little pieces, and the pieces would still heal.” Further, he confessed that after seeing Spanish civilians suffer at German hands a decade earlier, he had no sympathy at all for German civilians suffering the same fate. “The sight of a hungry German child” had no more effect on him, he wrote, “than the sight of an infant rat.” If the child had been ailing while under Nazi rule, that might have changed Susman’s feelings, he wrote. But what little sympathy even that may have garnered was lost in the face of evidence that “this child was eating well till we got here while millions of children were starving—their lives and health permanently affected by malnutrition so this little Nazi bastard could eat.”⁶³

David Mark Odds, who served in a radio intelligence unit, wrote from the German/Czech border in mid-July, 1945, that he feared that the anti-fraternization rules were already being broken down. The danger was greater than American GIs exchanging food or other necessities in exchange for sex with German women. The real danger, Odds warned, was an ideological one. With increased contact between Americans and Germans, “the disarming friendliness and cleverness of the Germans will make us doubt if they are so bad. ‘After all, they are a civilized nation, they have great men, etc.’” Later in that same letter, he described an ordeal in which German citizens were forced to visit a concentration camp at Volarv. “Only few of them showed either remorse or sickness,” he wrote. “They stood there, hard and sullenfaced, muttering and obstinate.” Had such atrocities been visited upon their own kind, they would have reacted with

63. Bill Susman, Germany, March 27, 1945, “The Good Fight Continues,” 213.

outrage and sorrow, Odds reasoned, “but what if it happened to inferior people, to Jews, and Russians, and Poles? A shrug of the shoulders, too bad, it had to be done.”⁶⁴

If such opinions could be expressed about the Germans, with whom many American soldiers shared cultural and even biological heritage, the same could rarely be said of the Japanese. As Japanese historian John Dower has pointed out, Allied troops and civilians alike tended to perceive the war in the West as more civilized than that in the Pacific and Asia for two distinct but related reasons. For one, the Germans carried out different types of warfare on different fronts, and their most horrific acts were perpetrated upon ethnic groups that, generally speaking, were of less concern to Americans than their counterparts in England and Western Europe. These groups were largely comprised of Eastern Europeans, Slavs, and Jews, whom Dower points out were, along with Asians, “the target of America’s own severe immigration restrictions dating back to the 1920s.”⁶⁵ In addition, the Germans were (again, generally speaking) more lenient with their Allied prisoners than their prisoners of other races, particularly those among their national pogroms’ targets. Dower cites a figure of 5.5 million Soviets detained in German prisons and prison camps, of whom a staggering 3.5 million, or 63 percent, died by mid-1944. Conversely, of the 235,473 Allied prisoners reported to have been captured by both Germany and Italy, only four percent (9,348) of them died in captivity.⁶⁶

The more insidious rationale behind the overwhelming hostility toward Japan and its people, however, is that the war in the Pacific was the ultimate and unfortunate end to the West’s long-brewing stereotyped notions of the Japanese. Again and again, both in official and

64. David Mark Odds, July 12, 1945, in *Lines of Battle: Letters from American Servicemen, 1941-1945*, edited by Annette Tapert (New York: Times Books, 1987), 284.

65. John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 34-35.

66. *Ibid.*, 48.

unofficial contexts, the Japanese were referred to as savages, brutes, sub-humans, and frequently likened to vermin in need of extermination—the same rhetoric used in Nazi propaganda against undesirable ethnicities and minority groups. “The Japs are man-monkeys and they run around considerably,” wrote Master Gunnery Sergeant R. M. Fowle in one official document about the Marines’ experience in Guadalcanal.⁶⁷

Lieutenant Colonel William Dyess described a Japanese captain he met as “a gnarled, misshapen creature, as grotesque as anything supposedly human I ever have looked upon,” and later went on to state in *The Dyess Story* that “the Jap always feels inferior in the presence of the American. If for no other reason, it is because Americans are white, are taller, usually, and better looking.” When a young man in his squadron jokingly asked how he could tell which shadowy figures in the trees were Japanese and which were monkeys, a sergeant answered, “Just kill ‘em all, son. . . . We can eat the ones that ain’t got uniforms on.”⁶⁸ Jack Hawkins, another Lieutenant Colonel, was stricken by the “ugly little devils” that made up the Japanese forces, “odd creatures” who were “not very impressive or terrifying” and who were “short and bowlegged.”⁶⁹ Robert L. Scott, author of the popular autobiography *God is My Co-Pilot*, dismissed the Japanese as “little, warped-brained savage animals with the complex of suppression.”⁷⁰

Lieutenant Donald Keene, who attended the U.S. Navy Japanese Language School and later became a professor of Japanese at Columbia University, was stationed in Guam in late

67. Infantry School, *Close-Up of Guadalcanal, October-November 1942: Verbatim Statements of Participants*, <http://cdm16635.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16635coll14/id/56024> (accessed January 2, 2014).

68. William E Dyess, *The Dyess Story: The Eye-Witness Account of the Death March from Bataan and the Narrative of Experiences in Japanese Prison Camps and of Eventual Escape* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1944), 98, 138, 42.

69. Jack Hawkins, “Corregidor Falls,” in *Semper Fidelis: The U.S. Marines in the Pacific, 1942-1945*, edited by Gene Cook and Patrick O’Sheel (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1947), 6.

70. Robert L. Scott, Jr., *God is My Co-Pilot* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), 255.

September, 1945. In a letter to a friend in Okinawa, he wrote that even while his captain was displeased by graphic stories of American souvenir hunters who pried gold teeth from dead and dying Japanese soldiers' mouths, he nonetheless wished death on every Japanese "and would let out exclamations of disgust at the fact that Japanese prisoners seen mending roads here on Guam are permitted to remain alive." In fact, Keene continued later in the letter, that same captain called for the extermination of all Japanese due to their "innate wickedness." Such souvenir hunting would be a completely foreign concept on the Western front, Keene wrote, where GIs might keep a German soldier's helmet or weapon, but would not go so far as to take his teeth, ears, or other body parts as gruesome reminders; that, he reasoned, was because "Americans are unable as yet to appreciate the Japanese as human beings."⁷¹

Indeed, homefront literature both reflected and influenced the same opinions Marines and soldiers alike frequently expressed regarding the Japanese as a less-than-human species. *Asia and the Americas* referred to the Japanese as "a kind of freak survival in the modern world," while *Reader's Digest* considered them "creatures of the jungle." The Japanese operated under a system of "brutal desires still fresh from the dark period through which all races must pass to the light of civilization," as the *American Legion Magazine* phrased it, a sentiment General Marshall echoed in an internal memorandum when he wrote that "the future of Japan as a nation—in fact, of the Japanese race itself—depends entirely and irrevocably upon their capacity to progress beyond their aboriginal barbaric instincts."⁷²

In a letter to his parents in early 1945, one lieutenant wrote from Luzon that "the Japs live like rats, squeal like pigs and act like monkeys." As many others did, he referred not to killing

71. Donald Keene to Ted de Bary, Guam, in *War-Wasted Asia: Letters, 1945-46*, edited by Otis Cary (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1975), 38.

72. As quoted in Dower, 141.

them as was a regrettable consequence in any war, but to “exterminating” them instead, a process that caused him no psychological turmoil. “As far as we’re concerned,” he explained, employing the animal imagery once more, “they’re to be hunted down and put away like gophers.”⁷³

Lieutenant Eli Bernheim with the 11th Airborne wrote to his mother in a similar vein, saying that the Japanese were to him “dogs and rats.” Although he claimed to be unable to describe the intense hatred he felt for the Japanese, his letter betrayed the depth of that hatred anyway. “We love to kill them—to me and all of us killing Nips is the greatest sport known—it causes no sensation of killing a human being but we really get a kick out of hearing the bastards scream.”⁷⁴

Nor did close encounters with the enemy in non-combat situations help alleviate Americans’ deeply-held notions of Japanese racial inferiority and inhumanity. In a poll of three Pacific infantry divisions in November 1943, only 20 percent of the respondents agreed that seeing Japanese prisoners made them reevaluate their conceptions of the Japanese. Forty-two percent, meanwhile, answered that these meetings made them feel “all the more like killing them.”⁷⁵ Journalist Ernie Pyle experienced the same phenomenon upon arriving in the Pacific. “In Europe, we felt that our enemies, horrible and deadly as they were, were still people,” he wrote in one of his last dispatches before his death. “But out here I soon gathered that the Japanese were looked upon as something subhuman and repulsive; the way some people feel about cockroaches or mice.” Far from shying away from this sentiment, however, Pyle came to express the same scorn as many of the men around him. When he observed a group of Japanese

73. Unknown, January 26, 1945, quoted in Peter Schrivers, *The GI War Against Japan: American Soldiers in Asia and the Pacific During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 218, 222.

74. Eli Bernheim quoted in Schrivers, 207.

75. Schrivers, 167.

prisoners in a fenced-in area, he was amazed to find that they acted “just like normal human beings.” All the same, he went on, “they gave me the creeps and I wanted a mental bath after looking at them.”⁷⁶

Not even the uncovering of German atrocities could sway Americans to alter their relative views on the individual Axis powers. In June 1945, one month after the first news reels of German concentration camps were released in American theaters, the *Los Angeles Times* ran the surprising results of a Gallup poll, in which the Americans polled largely excused German war crimes as the product of Nazi leadership rather than seeing them as an indictment of the German people as a whole. However, fully 63 percent of those polled claimed the Japanese people—with no distinction made between civilian, government official, or soldier—were wholly responsible for Japanese war crimes. The Japanese, according to this survey, were five times “intrinsicly more cruel” than Germans. “In short,” the article concluded, “most Americans apparently think of the Japanese people as a barbaric lot, beyond the pale of civilized behavior, but consider the German people less so.”⁷⁷

Official military releases reinforced the discrepancy between how the members of its armed forces perceived the Japanese and Germans when faced with occupation duty. Throughout the war, the Government Printing Office issued multiple brief handbooks, called “Pocket Guides,” to military personnel moving into foreign territory. These booklets typically contained short histories of the country in question, notes on geography, and useful phrases occupying troops could use while in the area to communicate with locals. The two “Pocket Guides” for Germany and Japan, published in 1944 and 1945, respectively, reveal the very sharp differences

76. Ernie Pyle, *Last Chapter* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1945), 5.

77. Los Angeles Times, “Public Thinks Germans Less Cruel than Japs,” June 10, 1945, quoted in John D. Chappell, *Before the Bomb: How America Approached the End of the Pacific War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 24.

in how the defeated Axis powers were to be treated. While a full comparison between the documents is highly illuminating, such an undertaking is outside the intended scope of this paper. That said, some comparisons deserve to be included here for the sake of illuminating the servicemen's opinions found throughout this chapter.

To begin with, the tone of the *Pocket Guide to Japan* is overwhelmingly punitive. “The Japs,” the guide promises, “are going to be taught a lesson they will never forget,” and “the Allies’ interest in Japan is to fix it so that the Japanese can never again become a menace to the whole world.”⁷⁸ Meanwhile, as written in the *Pocket Guide to Germany*, the primary goal of the peaceful world following the war would be “to make certain that the German people [would] take their place as law-abiding, useful citizens in the family of nations.”⁷⁹

Both guides, naturally, stress the dangers of fraternization, but the parameters of acceptable interaction with civilians in enemy territory could hardly be more different between the two guides. In the *Pocket Guide to Germany*, occupation soldiers are told repeatedly to remain aloof but courteous in their dealings with Germans. Acknowledging that conversations between occupier and occupied were inevitable, the authors of the guide inform GIs that when asked about aspects of America and American life, they could give “a glimpse of life in a Democracy” within the constraints of their instructions regarding fraternization.⁸⁰

If Germans were merely curious about American life, the Japanese were diabolical fiends looking for anything to use against the American enemy. The authors of the *Pocket Guide to Japan*, though they admit that “some” Japanese might ask questions out of the same curiosity

78. U.S. Army Service Forces, Special Service Division, *Pocket Guide to Japan* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1945), 3, 79.

79. U.S. Army Service Forces, Special Service Division, *Pocket Guide to Germany* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), 1.

80. *Ibid.*, 2-3.

expressed by the Germans, warn that “every scrap of information they can squeeze out of you will be reported by them to a higher authority.”⁸¹

Over and over again are references to the inherent treachery of the Japanese, to their eagerness to “lie openly and without conscience,”⁸² to the utterly incomprehensible way their minds worked—as though they were not actually human at all. They did not show emotion, whether pain or joy, according to the *Pocket Guide to Japan*, and that was why the mind of “the grinning, bowing little man” met in Japan could never be known.

Germany, as one might guess, fared much better in its own “Pocket Guide.” Whereas little good could be found to say about Japan, other than a passing remark about the natural beauty of Mount Fuji, the authors of the *Pocket Guide to Germany* went to great lengths to remind occupying soldiers of why Germany deserved a place of honor in international culture. With her assortment of “great writers, philosophers, scientists, artists, and musicians,” the guide lamented, Germany’s history included a long list of contributions that demonstrated a national capacity for “great energies which at times have been used to benefit rather than destroy mankind.”⁸³

As well, far from the diminutive and insulting terms heaped upon the Japanese in the Japanese guide, the *Pocket Guide to Germany* stresses the similarities between Germans and occupying troops. “The German youth is a nice looking chap, much like the average fellow you grew up with back home.” But how could such a normal (that is, American) looking man take part in the Nazi regime of terror? “The difference is inside him—in his character. . . . Never for

81. U.S. Army Service Forces, Special Service Division, *Pocket Guide to Japan*, 6.

82. *Ibid.*, 5, 9.

83. U.S. Army Service Forces, Special Service Division, *Pocket Guide to Germany*, 32.

an instant forget that he is the victim of the greatest educational crime in the history of the world.”⁸⁴

With such blatant differences between how enlisted men and civilians alike perceived their German and Japanese enemies, one could reasonably expect that news of the atomic bombs which devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki would have been received gladly. In many instances, of course, it was, as Japan’s surrender meant the end of the war and a return to peaceful activities. But the dropping of the bombs also brought with it a tremendous amount of ambivalence and anxiety for what type of world the postwar community would inherit and what type of war might be fought in the future.

When soldier-authors thought to write about the dropping of the bombs at all, they had a tendency to do so only in passing, often including a line or two about it in a diary entry or a letter to a friend or loved one amidst other mundane details of daily life in service.

The sheer enormity of what the bombs meant and the destruction they could cause was often overlooked, if these matters were comprehended at all. At times, authors seemed only vaguely aware of the historical moment they witnessed. Joseph McNamara, a machinist’s mate with a destroyer division of the Navy, wrote the following in his diary on August 8, the date the first atomic bomb was dropped over Hiroshima: “Arrive Buckner Bay. ATOMIC BOMB DROPPED ON JAPAN—two billion dollars—greatest discovery in recent times. 300,000 dead at Hiroshima.”⁸⁵

Some, whether they knew the bomb’s true potential or not, advocated even more raids being conducted. On August 9, the day after the first atomic bomb was dropped over Hiroshima,

84. *Ibid.*, 9.

85. Joseph McNamara in *American Diaries of World War II*, edited by Donald Vining (New York: The Pepys Press, 1982), 175.

Jack Savage, an infantryman stationed in the Pacific, expressed his amazement at the “destructive monstrosity” of the bomb, writing that “with enough of these bombs, Japan could be wiped completely off the map. That would be fine then all of us could come home.”⁸⁶ Arild Nielsen, a member of a military police battalion stationed in Okinawa at the time of the surrender, wrote in a letter to his parents that he felt the Japanese were too defiant even after capitulating. “Maybe we should have dropped a few more atomic bombs before we talked turkey with them,” he mused in a letter just two days after Japan’s formal surrender.⁸⁷

Weeks, months, and even years after the fact, some soldier-authors expressed in their writings their opinions that the nuclear attacks were in fact merciful options to shorten the war. Hisashi Kubota, a Japanese-American interpreter serving in the army, visited Hiroshima in mid-December, 1945, to fulfill his parents’ wish that he light incense at his grandparents’ graves. While there, he encountered firsthand the results of the atomic strikes, both in terms of environmental and human damages. However, in a letter to a friend, he complained that Hiroshima civilians portrayed themselves as “martyrs” and sought sympathy from the rest of the world. “I suggested to some of them that one atomic bombing might have been more merciful than repeated fire bombings in the long run,” he wrote, “but they chose to ignore this possibility altogether.”⁸⁸

86. Jack Savage, *A Signal Corpsman’s Letters, 1943-1946*, under the Jack W. Savage Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00487/pageturner?ID=pm0001001> (accessed January 2, 2014).

87. Arild Nielsen, August 17, 1945, under Arield E. Nielsen World War II Letters, 1942-1945 (selections), Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Call Number: M2006-091, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1634> (accessed January 2, 2014). This was an opinion the general public echoed even months after the war. In “War Without Mercy,” Dower cites a Fortune magazine poll from December, 1945, in which 22.7 percent of civilian respondents wished the United States had used “many more of them [atomic bombs] before Japan had a chance to surrender.” Dower, “War Without Mercy,” 55.

88. Hisashi Kubota to Otis Cary, Hiroshima, December 14, 1945, in Cary, “War-Wasted Asia,” 250.

Preston John Hubbard, whose memoir published decades after the war described his experience in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, reached a similar conclusion. The massive and repeated raids carried out by B-29s carrying large quantities of incendiary bombs had managed to destroy much of Japan's infrastructure and morale, Hubbard wrote, so much so that "by July 1945, the major Japanese cities already resembled post-atomic Hiroshima." Not only did the dropping of the atomic bombs prevent the invasion of the Japanese mainland and the inevitable deaths of hundreds of thousands of fighting forces on both sides, but Japanese civilians were spared the ongoing nightmare of the large-scale firebombing that had been carried out for months by the time Japan surrendered.⁸⁹

For those who thought to mention it the bomb as anything more than a footnote in a diary or a letter, the general expression was one of cautious optimism that was nonetheless tainted by fear of the unknown and only rudimentary knowledge of what nuclear weaponry was capable of achieving. Denton W. Crocker, a biologist in a malaria survey unit serving in the Pacific, wrote in a letter to his wife on August 10, 1945, that "news of the atomic bomb [had] affected [him] deeply." He had yet to come to reconcile his pacifism with the occasional necessity of war, he admitted, and whether or not the means always justified the ends, however noble those ends might be. "It seems to me," he added in a cynical fashion, "that man knows so precious little

89. Preston John Hubbard, *Apocalypse Undone: My Survival of Japanese Imprisonment during World War II* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1990), 210-211. Although these opinions may be open to dispute, it is true that the U.S. had carried out an intensive (and largely indiscriminate) firebombing campaign of Japan since March, 1945. On the night of March 9 through the 10th, a large-scale firebomb raid left sixteen square miles of Tokyo destroyed, nearly 100,000 civilians dead, and more than 1 million homeless. Major General Curtis LeMay described the effects as civilians and the environment alike as being "scorched and boiled and baked to death." "By May," writes Dower, "incendiaries comprised 75 percent of the bomb loads" over urban areas, leading to an estimated civilian death count (including those killed in the atomic raids of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) of nearly 400,000. Dower, 40-41.

about what ends are good for him, he had better be mighty careful about the means he uses to attempt to reach them.”⁹⁰

A bomber crew turret gunner named Harry Fisher, stationed in France at the time the first bomb was dropped, wrote to his wife of his disbelief over nuclear power’s capabilities for what seemed to him unfathomable creation and destruction. “I once had a talk with Dr. Birnhardt about the atom,” he wrote. “He was telling me of its potentialities [and] I thought he was exaggerating, but he wasn’t.” After expressing his hopes that Japan would surrender quickly, he returned to the idea of atomic power as a force of good in the world, rather than simply as a weapon. “I suppose it could be used as the main source of energy—taking the place of fuel, coal, water.”⁹¹

Meanwhile, Barrie Greenbie, a private with the Sixth Army and stationed in the Philippines, wrote to his wife as well with a combination of hope and pessimism about humanity’s ability and willingness to use this new technology wisely. He described the entire world’s reaction to the news of the atomic bomb as “a sort of awesome fear at its utterly terrible potentialities for mankind,” likening it to “getting a first-hand look at hell or a preview of the end of the world.” With the dark humor soldiers often hone in battle, he added that World War II would by necessity be the last great war of freedom, “because after the next there won’t be any world left to free.” If nothing else, he continued, some good could be found in such a fearsome amount of power. With Hiroshima (and later, Nagasaki) serving as testimony to the bomb’s

90. Denton W. Crocker, *My War on Mosquitos, 1942-1945*, under the Denton W. Crocker Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00392/pageturner?ID=pm0001001> (accessed January 2, 2014), 228.

91. Harry Fisher to Ruth Fisher, France, August 7, 1945, in *The Good Fight Continues: World War II Letters from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, eds. Peter N. Carroll, Michael Nash, and Melvin Small (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 238.

potential, other world leaders who might have been inclined to follow in Japan's footsteps might think twice before committing "world suicide."⁹²

No other work so vividly captures the dual sense of excitement and terror at this new power as Abe Spitzer's *We Dropped the A-Bomb*, an autobiographical account of his service as a radio operator on the *Great Artiste*, the only bomber which participated in both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks. The book describes in great detail the pre- and post-mission briefings, as well as the missions themselves and the awe and horror he and his peers felt upon witnessing the bombings from such close range. Like others referenced here, Spitzer expressed doubt that humanity could hope to contain the energies it had unleashed.

Following the "bombs away" signal that led to the attack on Hiroshima, the silence was finally broken on the *Great Artiste* by an unknown member of the crew, whom Spitzer recorded as saying only, "I wonder if maybe we're not monkeying around with things that are none of our business." Spitzer wrote that he decided on the flight back to base that he agreed with his teammate, that "maybe we had gone too far. We might have made winning a war too easy. Or too hard. Or too awful."⁹³

The sensation of disbelief and fear was not one that could be made familiar through repeat experiences, as immediately after an even larger bomb was dropped over Nagasaki, Spitzer wrote that his flight commander was the one to interrupt the silence. "'I've never seen anything like it,' said the commander. He paused, shuddered as if he'd had a sudden chill, then added, speaking with a strange, hesitant emphasis, 'and I hope I never do again.'"⁹⁴

92. Barrie Greenbie to Meg Greenbie, August 9, 1945, in *Lines of Battle: Letters from American Servicemen, 1941-1945*, ed. Annette Tapert (New York: Times Books, 1987), 287.

93. Merle Miller and Abe Spitzer, *We Dropped the A-Bomb* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1946), 45, 48.

94. *Ibid.*, 114.

In the post-mission debriefing following the first raid on Hiroshima, Spitzer remained sullen and awe-struck, much like the rest of the crew, and he had little to say to officers and reporters alike who questioned him. He could not, he wrote, tell them his true opinions, that he felt that “we were seeing a thing that man should never see, that was too big for the human mind really to understand and . . . that even in a war . . . we had unleashed a force too great to be understood and properly feared. That we had, in short, learned how to kill too many thousands too quickly.”⁹⁵

This disillusionment with the war efforts and the fear brought on by ever-deadlier weapons echoed throughout soldiers’ writings in the last moments of the war. With the end of hostilities rapidly approaching, GIs understandably found themselves increasingly occupied by thoughts of home—and what sort of home to which they would like to return, and even the one they would like to create. The fight for that postwar world not only depended on battlefield tactics and weapons, but on the very different tactics and weapons used to secure a peace that would prevent the next generation from fighting World War III. The constant thread running through nearly every published letter was that one way or another, democratic, internationally-minded education was the fundamental point around which all future peace efforts would pivot. The regular civilians of the Axis nations were not inherently evil and beyond redemption; supervised education would go far in reversing their defeated leaders’ propaganda. Neither did America, a relatively young country just beginning to embrace its role as a dominant superpower, need to resort to its enemies’ nationalistic and militaristic ways to assure its future prosperity; education there, too, would be just as beneficial to American youths as to German and Japanese civilians being retrained into democratic thinkers.

95. *Ibid.*, 49.

As the next chapter points out, however, the seemingly endless possibilities offered by the acquisition of knowledge did have a limit: somewhat ironically, that limit was the veterans who adamantly prescribed education for the rest of the world but not, in large part, for themselves. Taking a cue from this professed and apparently earnest desire for education, the GI Bill of Rights and all its provisions for university scholarships seemed expressly designed to appeal to veterans of the Second World War. Those same veterans, if they had gotten their way, would have gladly welcomed such an academic opportunity for their younger counterparts just leaving high school; for the war-weary veterans, they had already received enough of an education through their service. A grateful nation wishing to bestow gifts upon its returning heroes would be asked to loosen its purse strings before offering any additional schooling, because while that education was an excellent investment for the youths fortunate enough to just miss the war, GIs returning from the front would have rather traded diplomas for dollars.

CHAPTER FOUR: NOT ALL IN THE SAME GRAVY BOAT: THE BONUS QUESTION

Ask not that you be given special gifts,
Or treated in an extra-special way;
Although today a grateful nation lifts
One voice in thanks, you soon may see the day
When gratitude is spent; the very men
Who thank the loudest now may then forget
The blood you spilled. If so—I warn again—
Expect no mention of a special debt.
Instead of asking to be kept in mind
For payment of a very special kind,
Ask only for those things that all men ought
To have—the very things for which you fought:
A decent job, a busy world at peace;
And ask that free men’s progress never cease.¹

Staff Sergeant Morton Brooks wrote “Sonnet for Veterans,” which appeared in the November 2, 1945 issue of *YANK*. Brooks was part of the small but vocal minority of American GIs during World War II who wrote to the magazine in opposition to the more prevalent calls for postwar bonuses. On the page opposite the sergeant’s poem were half a dozen letters submitted to the magazine’s popular “Mail Call” feature, all of them suggesting various means of compensation for veterans in addition to or in place of the benefits allowed under the GI Bill of Rights enacted in 1944. For every one soldier who claimed that no concessions other than a peaceful return were necessary, there were three more who offered surprisingly detailed plans for what they considered fair remuneration for their time spent in the service. None of these men were shy about voicing their opinions, as both major military publications during the war, *YANK* and *Stars and Stripes*, surrendered more and more page space over time to editorials and other opinion pieces written by every soldier who was convinced he had *the* solution to every problem facing those planning for the troops’ return. The most common solution was not to use the benefits allowed under the GI Bill as had been previously assumed, but rather to give an outright

1. Staff Sergeant Morton Brooks, “Sonnet for Veterans,” *YANK*, November 2, 1945, 15.

bonus to soldiers upon discharge. This chapter aims to address a question that has largely eluded historians of both World War II and the postwar era: Were servicemen even that interested in the Bill itself, or were they looking instead for something much more immediate? While many troops defended the GI Bill from arguments made against it, and many more would take advantage of its various benefits over the years, the initial response, while not outright hostile, fluctuated between irritation and indifference. The solution according to many troops was not the more economically useful GI Bill designed to keep the country from slipping back into a Depression, but rather a flat bonus as the one their fathers' generation had received a quarter century earlier.

Prior to 1941, World War I was the single largest engagement of troops in American history, which obviously meant pressing veterans' issues on an unprecedented scale. Rather than wait for veteran groups and their political sympathizers to pressure Congress into passing sweeping legislation after the war, in 1917 the government passed a series of acts designed to anticipate and curtail the major complaints that had traditionally been levied by veterans of previous wars.²

Ostensibly to help the returning serviceman get back on his feet, a sixty dollar mustering-out payment was granted for the majority of veterans who did not require disability compensation, but the act providing this compensation was passed three months after the

2. Briefly, the acts were as follows: married privates would see an automatic fifteen dollar deduction from his monthly pay to be combined with another fifteen from the government, and the sum would be allotted to his wife along with additional funds of varying amounts if the couple had children; moreover, this payment would be continued in the event of the soldier's death or disability; life insurance would remain priced at peacetime rates; medical care, rehabilitation, and artificial limbs (if necessary) would be provided for the war disabled. Knowlton Durham, *Billions for Veterans: An Analysis of Bonus Problems—Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Brewer, Warren & Putnam, 1932), 41-43.

Armistice and after almost one and a half million men had already been discharged.³

Increasingly frustrated by evidence of war profiteers, veterans agitated for some form of bonus that did not become law until the Adjusted Compensation Act of 1924. The Act established a bonus of one dollar per day of service in the U.S. during the war, and one dollar and a quarter per day of service abroad. Rather than getting the bonus immediately, payments would be deferred for twenty years to be released at a doubled rate. In the meantime, veterans received Adjusted Compensation Certificates to be payable in 1945.

Following the stock market crash of 1929, however, disgruntled, impoverished veterans operating through the powerful political bloc of the American Legion began to demand immediate payment on their certificates. They were reluctantly awarded a compromise in 1931 when Congress voted to loan veterans 50% of their bonus payments, to be paid back at 4.5% interest by 1945.⁴

As the Great Depression worsened, so did the mood of veterans who felt they had been abused by an ungrateful nation, culminating in the so-called “Bonus March” which by July of 1932 saw roughly 20,000 disgruntled ex-soldiers encamped in Washington. Although well-behaved, some government officials became increasingly nervous about large numbers of angry veterans crowding Pennsylvania Avenue, and so on July 28, District of Columbia Commissioners ordered the buildings evacuated and called on President Hoover to bring in regular Army troops to send the veterans packing. Hoover complied, sending in chief of staff General Douglas MacArthur with eight full companies, a mounted machine gun squadron, and

3. John C. Sparrow, *History of Personnel Demobilization in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), 453.

4. Durham, 92-95.

six tanks.⁵ Despite this embarrassing setback and repeated vetoes from not only Hoover but President Roosevelt after him, the fight for a bonus payout continued until 1936, when a bill presented by the American Legion allowed for the exchange of Adjusted Compensation Certificates for savings bonds of equivalent amounts; most of the bonds were immediately cashed upon receipt, thereby undermining the reasoning for delayed compensation in the first place.⁶

In the end, no one emerged from the nearly twenty-year-long struggle unscathed. The American Legion abandoned its proclaimed status of political neutrality. The veterans meanwhile appeared to the average citizen as entitled bullies, and citizens appeared to the average veteran as stingy and manipulative. The reputations that took the hardest hits, though, were undoubtedly those involved in the military actions against the veterans; politicians and the common American might have balked at the idea of paying able-bodied veterans in the midst of an economic depression, but that hardly meant they wanted to turn the army against its own. Newspapers around the world already had too many frightening stories about the consequences of such actions, not least of which were in places like Italy and Germany. It was this fear of violent reaction—along with, perhaps, shame brought on by hindsight in a considerably better economic climate the following decade—that encouraged politicians during World War II to plan far in advance for the veterans’ return and to give them more than train fare home three months too late.

5. David R. B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans during World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 16-17.

6. Ross, 19. For more on the “Bonus Army” and the fight for a postwar bonus, see Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army: An American Epic* (New York: Walker & Company, 2004); Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Stephen R. Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill: How Veteran Politics Shaped the New Deal Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

The GI Bill's creation for the World War II generation, if not precisely the Bill itself, can in some ways be seen as the literal result of the general soldier will. John Stelle, former Illinois governor and American Legion regional head, received a letter from his son that outlined the basic desires of other men in uniform for what they wished to see in postwar legislation. All they wanted, the letter said, was the opportunity to make good on the time they had lost while in service, "an opportunity to get education or training, and to find work." Later that year, in November 1943, Stelle offered his son's suggestions to the American Legion's Executive Committee, and these rudimentary wishes turned into the basis for what soon became one of the most lauded pieces of legislation in twentieth-century American history.⁷ The bill was introduced to Congress two months later in January 1944 by Senator Joel Bennett Clark of Missouri as a much grander version of the Roosevelt administration's proposal that had just recently gone through hearings.

YANK and *Stars and Stripes* both mentioned periodically during the first half of 1944 that a new piece of veterans' legislation was making its way through Congressional channels, but if the full-length articles they ran and the opinion pieces they published are any indication, soldiers took very little notice during this critical phase of the Bill's life. The most pressing concern of the previous year seemed to be how veterans could reclaim their jobs or go about acquiring new ones once they were returned to civilian life. This was understandable enough; as a generation that had grown up during the Depression, acquiring and maintaining livelihoods would necessarily seem to be the greatest single challenge anyone could face after leaving the army. As one serviceman put it, he and his peers wanted "more than what [they] left behind; [they want] a

7. John Stelle, as quoted by David Camelon, "I Saw the GI Bill Written," Part I, *American Legion Magazine*, September 1949, 47.

square deal. [They want] a deal which will eliminate the ill-housed, ill-clothed and the ill-fed.”⁸

If soldiers allowed themselves the indulgence of imagining the postwar world at all, it was usually in an abstract manner, such as offering suggestions for how diplomatic ties could be established with the defeated nations or, even more vaguely, what the definitions of the “Four Freedoms” they were supposedly fighting for even were.⁹

Half a world away, thanks in large part to the Legion’s massive publicity campaign organized to sway opponents and the undecided, President Roosevelt signed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 into law on June 22, 1944, and the Act very quickly became popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights. The Bill’s major benefits revolved around unemployment insurance, home and business loans, and paid education. Unemployed veterans were eligible to receive \$20 a week for fifty-two weeks. Loans were granted for the purchase or repairs of homes, businesses, and farms, with the government guaranteeing up to \$2,000 or fifty percent of the amount of the loan, whichever was less. The education provisions granted up to four years of paid schooling at a college or university of the veteran's choosing, along with a \$50 a month stipend (\$75 if the veteran had dependents), provided that the soldier was under the age of twenty-five when he entered the service.¹⁰

8. Private J. A. Gruelich, “Post-War America,” *YANK*, February 18, 1944, 14.

9. During an address to Congress on January 6, 1941, President Roosevelt proclaimed the “four essential human freedoms” to be freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The *Saturday Evening Post* ran a series of paintings by Norman Rockwell that were meant to illustrate these points; the paintings were subsequently incorporated into advertisements for war bonds and used so often to explain America's part in the war that more cynical observers began taking aim at what they saw as overly sentimental propaganda. Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Message to Congress,” January 6, 1941; available from http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/word_document/pres_roosevelts_address.txt; Internet; accessed 23 November 2009.

10. The reasoning for this cutoff age was that policy planners held that it was easier to justify that a soldier’s education had been interrupted by joining the military if he was still of college age. For more in-depth scholarly analyses of the GI Bill of Rights, see Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin, *The GI Bill: The New Deal for Veterans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Theodore R. Mosch, *The G.I. Bill:*

The Bill's significance was immediately recognized, as newspapers and magazines throughout the United States began running stories about every conceivable aspect of the Bill, printing everything from general overviews of its major provisions to detailed analyses of its lesser-known benefits. Though the Bill's exact details remained sketchy to foreign correspondents, military publications frequently ran small pieces describing the primary features of the GI Bill while awaiting details of further benefits. Soon afterward, as if now given explicit permission to focus on material gains to be received after the war, those same publications' opinion columns exploded into arguments over who should be given what, and if anyone was entitled to anything at all. *Stars and Stripes* ran its first major article about the GI Bill in its August 10th issue, and from there it seemed as though every edition introduced at least one new opinion into the ever-growing body of suggestions for postwar policy.

The opening salvo against the presumed generosity of the GI Bill, at least as far as the actual servicemen are concerned, was launched by Corporal Thomas M. Edmundson on September 2, 1944. "Personally," he complained, "I feel the Army has never seen fit to give me a decent pay check. . . . What I want is to get out as soon as possible. And what I need when I get out is *money*. Not peanuts doled out in small installments, but a decent amount in a lump sum!"¹¹ Nearly two weeks later, a letter signed by two sergeants, a corporal, and a private backed up Corporal Edmundson by railing against what they felt was an undue emphasis on the Bill's educational provisions: "Many of us plan to return to schooling after the war. In this respect the GI Bill of Rights is very considerate and favorable. However, those of us that, for

A Breakthrough in Educational and Social Policy in the United States (New York: Exposition Press, 1975); Keith W. Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974).

11. Corporal Thomas M. Edmundson, "Money, Not Peanuts, After War," *Stars and Stripes*, September 2, 1944, 2.

many reasons, will not be able to take advantage of the education part of the Bill, will certainly face an altogether different situation.”¹²

The educational provisions, in fact, comprised the most contentious part of the new Bill. Nearly every complaint lobbied against the Bill, regardless of whether the actual concern had to do with loans or unemployment insurance, began with an assault on the educational benefits provided. Many soldiers evidently felt that they were being explicitly discriminated against because of their age, as a common complaint was that only the youngest servicemen would need or even want to take advantage of the opportunities allowed for free education, while everyone else was left to fend for themselves. “Congressmen can have no illusions of complete fairness when they offer one group a free education and another the mere privilege of borrowing money for a home, business, etc.”¹³ Said one soldier, “the GI Bill of Rights offers excellent opportunities to young fellows, young enough to be able to devote four years more of their lives to study. But what about the rest of us in our late twenties and thirties?”¹⁴ Even for those who were young enough to take advantage of the educational benefits, there was still the fear that their time in service had changed them beyond being able to adjust to what should have been an ordinary existence for a young man. “After a five-year war,” lamented Second Lieutenant John Walsh, “only a small percentage will be able to sit in a classroom for four years.”¹⁵ Others cited the fact that those “with families and jobs waiting can’t afford to take advantage of the

12. Sergeant Philip A. Thibodeaur, Sergeant Ralph H. Johnson, Corporal Abram C. Steele, Private First Class William J. Billings, “Post-War Lettuce,” *Stars and Stripes*, September 14, 1944, 2.

13. Sergeant Lester Row, “Equal Rights for All Vets,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 11, 1945, 2.

14. Private First Class H. S., “The Bonus Question,” *Stars and Stripes*, March 29, 1945, iii.

15. Second Lieutenant John Walsh, “Bonus Talk,” *Stars and Stripes*, January 18, 1945, iii.

educational program.”¹⁶ This is not so surprising as it is a reflection of the life the average World War II serviceman had experienced before entering the service: having typically come from middle- and working-class families and having come of age during the worst years of the Great Depression, no doubt the common soldier had a sound appreciation for a stable, reliable home life – which naturally required an equally reliable home.

If servicemen grew irritated over the educational provisions of the Bill, they became very nearly infuriated with the troubles associated with acquiring loans. According to the Bill, veterans having anything other than a dishonorable discharge could apply for a loan to purchase, build, or repair a home. Additionally, farm and business loans could be provided to purchase land, buildings, and necessary equipment, with the Veterans’ Administration guaranteeing up to fifty percent of the loan up to a maximum of \$2,000. Notwithstanding the actual monetary limitations (“We can’t build a home with \$2,000, and the guarantee of 50 per cent by the government is a joke.”¹⁷), actually acquiring a loan could range from difficult to impossible. One soldier stationed at Fort Devens in Massachusetts claimed that the GI Bill “is like the mirage of a water hole seen by a dying man in the desert” due to its supposed existence but lack of actual substance. “Sure, a serviceman can get credit or a loan, but before he gets it his credit risk will be evaluated in the cold light of sound business, and if it isn't a good risk, no credit. Heck, we can do that without the GI Bill.”¹⁸ Another soldier in the same feature had already encountered some of the difficulties in obtaining a loan. “The GI Bill of Rights now provides nothing for the average GI and benefits only those who are well enough off so that they do not

16. Corporal J. C. Colman, “On Pulling Strings,” *Stars and Stripes*, March 15, 1945, iii.

17. *Ibid.*

18. T-4 Henry Scheier, “A Mirage,” *YANK*, October 5, 1945, 10.

need it anyway.” Further, he complained, “there is no need for the stringency of the law, or the present stringency of its administration. Any farm or home loan is automatically secured by the property itself. . .”¹⁹ Yet another soldier lamented that “the great majority of veterans applying for a loan will find out that they can't get one [because] either they never had a business reputation before their induction or they were too young to get one, or they have no security to put up for a loan.” Once again, it seemed, the system was arranged to benefit the haves over the have-nots, as “a man with some social standing previous to his military service is about the only veteran who might be able to obtain a loan, and he is the one vet who doesn't need one.”²⁰

One of the most creative complaints about the GI Bill (and the clamor for bonuses in general) appeared in *YANK* on June 29, 1945. Technical Sergeant Thomas Logue, while stationed in Great Britain, penned a tongue-in-cheek satire of the many complaints levied on the GI Bill. In it, he suggests that the government underwrite his “modest expenses” for the rest of his life, which was a legitimate request because loans caused stress. The stress of borrowing five British pounds the previous month had weighed so heavily on him that he “was forced to spend the entire amount on gin.” A debt of thousands of dollars would lead to his ultimate breakdown, which in any event was a poor welcome home gift from a thankful nation: “Is that the way the people of the United States intend to show their gratitude to their war veterans—by oppressing them with debt, forcing them into mental institutions, and possibly even goading them on to self-destruction?” All was not lost, though, as the GI Bill offered useful benefits like free education, which he wasn't even aware he needed or wanted prior to his time in the army. Rather than pursue his prewar career as a butcher, Logue discovered while looking at his drab barracks walls that his true passion was in fact interior painting. One year of study would hardly be sufficient,

19. Private First Class L. J. Wiegand, “The GI a Good Risk,” *YANK*, October 5, 1945, 10.

20. Private First Class Charles Van Messel, “Elusive Benefits,” *YANK*, October 5, 1945, 10.

so he would need at least three or four years, possibly with some post-graduate work after that. Naturally, to keep a “spiritual rift” from developing in his marriage, he requests that his wife be given money to study as well, but that would in turn necessitate the hiring of a governess for their young daughter. If left to her own devices, “she may roam the streets and become a delinquent,” a disaster that Logue thinks “the people of the United States would not want to have . . . on their collective conscience.”²¹

The GI Bill did have its defenders in uniform, though they were often drowned out by the much more common complaint about this or that provision. Technician Third Grade Herbert Menzel agreed with the phrase commonly repeated in popular magazines at home that nothing was too good for “our boys,” as “no adequate wage for the sacrifices of the dead, the wounded, the uprooted is possible.” The GI Bill of Rights, further, was not to be seen as a panegyric but as one of many tools soldiers would need to use to reintegrate into civilian society. It could, in the end, “try no more than to restore financial opportunities . . . lost through military service.”²² Similarly, Private First Class Charles Schneeberger scolded his peers for being selfish and expecting “a dole or a prize” for simply being in the war. The GI Bill could not solve everyone’s problems immediately, and servicemen needed to quit looking to it for such a purpose. Instead, Schneeberger advised fellow soldiers to “look at the ultimate outcome of the provisions of the Bill of Rights, instead of condemning the measure because it does not immediately benefit them.”²³

This sense of urgency and anxiety over immediate payment reappears time and again as a major concern for GIs at war’s end. While some could say that this is a manifestation of the

21. Technical Sergeant Thomas Logue, “Who Wants to go back to Work, Anyhow?” *YANK*, June 29, 1945, 19.

22. Technician Third Grade Herbert Menzel, “No Adequate Wage,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 12, 1945, 2.

23. Private First Class Charles E. Schneeberger, “The Bill of Rights,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 4, 1945, 2.

American desire for immediate gratification, the historical context suggests a much deeper need than mere impatience. The generation that fought in World War II was by and large born in the 1910s and 1920s, meaning that its formative years were marked by both the dazzling heights of prosperity and the misery of the Great Depression. A large portion of the fighting men of the Second World War had grown up watching their fathers compete for jobs in an ever-tightening market throughout the 1930s, and so they were naturally eager to be the first ones home and thus the first to secure a suitable job to ensure they would not repeat their fathers' experiences. Though the United States had made a remarkable recovery out of the Depression, many economic experts predicted a postwar slump that further frightened soldiers already anxious about providing for themselves and their families. In a June 1945 study conducted by the Research and Education Division of the War Department, fully 56% of soldier respondents believed a widespread depression would follow the war.²⁴ The ideal plan, then, was to get out of service as quickly as possible and obtain a good job, but the next best thing, far from going into debt with a loan or wasting even more productive years in school, was to receive a lump sum payment from the government upon discharge.

GIs used a variety of justifications to this end, but ever present was the specter of the disgraced, impoverished veteran marching on and being driven from Washington by its own government, and GIs did not fail to use their fathers' and uncles' experiences to arouse fears of a second, larger Bonus March. Second Lieutenant John Walsh wrote in January 1945 that it makes little sense to not have a bonus for World War II veterans, as a considerable sum was given to veterans of the previous war. "This war is five times as long and hard." In response to those critics who claimed a massive bonus program would be too heavy a strain on the Treasury, he

24. Samuel A. Stouffer, et. al., *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath, Volume II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 598.

states that it is peculiar that a country that had spent \$500 billion over the course of the war “would suddenly become ruined by paying three billion or so to those who deserve it most.” Ending his letter on an ominous note, Walsh calls up fears of the postwar worsening of the Depression as well as the vague threat of another organized veterans' movement. “There are lean years ahead. Let's not get too modest now, and have to have a bonus march later.”²⁵ An anonymous sergeant likewise asked, “We don't want to encourage bread lines, do we?”²⁶

In the War Department's series of anonymous surveys, soldiers had the ability to write additional comments in a designated section that is frequently rich with dramatic imagery. Wrote one such soldier, “the post-war adjustment period has some fears in us as fear of repetition of 1929-1932—unless more definite foresight planning is made than we hear about now.” For another, he could do little else but offer a “fervent prayer” for “no corner apple vendors after the war” because he could not stomach the idea of “suffer[ing] the same fate as the Bonus Army.”²⁷ Others were much more willing to remind their countrymen of the shameful treatment of the last war's veterans. Another anonymous soldier commented that his father “had a sad experience in the last war, as did most of the other men who went to the wars the last time. While they were away, they were great men who were giving their all for their country, but when they came back they were the poor suckers who were left holding the sack. . . .” All he allegedly wanted, he said, was “to be assured that [he was] worth more than that after the war,” but in the event postwar planning did not prove as beneficial as necessary, “there are too many of us concerned

25. Second Lieutenant John Walsh, “Bonus Talk,” *Stars and Stripes*, January 18, 1945, iii.

26. Anonymous, “Bread Lines Red-Lined,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 12, 1945, 2.

27. Anonymous soldiers quoted in Robert Francis Saxe, *Settling Down: World War II Veterans' Challenge to the Postwar Consensus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 30.

in this one and we (the fighting generation) will fight, if necessary, to assure ourselves that it *WILL NOT* (emphasis in original) happen again to us, as it did to our fathers!”²⁸

Although the fear of being bought off with worthless certificates as the World War I generation had been was real enough, the preceding quotation also highlights an especially prominent point in veterans’ arguments for immediate bonus payments. The average age of U.S. servicemen during World War II was twenty-six, and GIs never tired of pointing out that they were sacrificing the best years of their lives to serve their country.²⁹ “Most of us have given the best years of our life serving Uncle Sam,” said Technical Sergeant Leo Topolski, “years that can never be replaced, so why not give us a half decent break when we get home?”³⁰

Civilians, meanwhile, lived in relative comfort and enjoyed the economic boom provided by war production, which further made GIs resentful of their lot in the military. Civilians working in war industry jobs typically did get paid well, averaging \$100 to \$150 per week, which the typical private scornfully compared to his \$21 per month salary (\$50 per month if serving overseas after 1942). Of course, those soldiers usually did not take into account that their civilian counterparts had to pay for food and lodging out of those wages, or that inflation had made the cost of living skyrocket, but even \$400 per month seemed an exorbitant amount of money to troops who were already plagued by rumors of civilian war profiteers amassing fortunes while others fought and died half a world away.

28. Anonymous soldier as quoted in Saxe, “Settling Down,” 38.

29. This average is based on 1941 figures; over the course of the next several years that average dropped to between twenty-three and twenty-four-years-old. Robert S. Rush and Ian Palmer, *US Infantryman in World War II: European Theater of Operations 1944-1945* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 8.

30. Technical Sergeant Leo D. Topolski, et. al., “Wrongs of Bill of Rights,” *Stars and Stripes*, March 27, 1945, 2.

Therefore, many of the justifications made for a bonus payment relied on both on real and imagined difference in earnings between civilians and soldiers. Twenty-four soldiers signed a letter published in *YANK*, claiming that “all we want is a little sum to even us up with the man that was lucky enough to stay out.” The reasoning behind this was that “we will have to help pay for this war on even terms with him, so why shouldn't we get a bonus to even our bank accounts with theirs?”³¹ According to Technician Grade Five Donald Huddleston, “the greatest loss to an enlisted man has been time . . . which might have been used in building up the useful pursuits of life.” Accordingly, bonuses should be granted to the veteran “in exchange for the time which he gave so freely in the service of his country.”³²

At times the argument took on a decidedly classist tone, particularly when officers wrote in objection to any legislation authorizing bonus payments. In an early April issue of *Stars and Stripes*, a Captain S. H. O. implored soldiers to dismiss all thoughts of bonus payments, and in return experienced a hailstorm of criticism from irate servicemen in the next several editions of the paper. One soldier, who identified himself only as Corporal E. S. C., accused the captain of deliberately wanting to set the ordinary veteran back in civilian life so that the existing power structure could be continued. After all, the corporal noted, officers such as Captain S. H. O. had been paid well and could afford to set back money to resume their lives upon discharge. “But if they give the same opportunity to millions of others who have done an equal or greater share, it lessens or hampers your own opportunities, doesn't it?”³³ Another corporal, this time choosing to remain completely anonymous, complained that “The Army is forcing millions of men to 'do

31. Corporal John H. Byrd and Sergeant Milton S. Ruble, et. al., “To Even Bank Accounts,” *YANK*, April 12, 1945, 2.

32. Technician Grade Five Donald C. Huddleston, “Tax Exemption, Too,” *YANK*, November 17, 1944, 18.

33. Corporal E. S. C., “The Bonus Issue,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 16, 1945, 2.

their part' for a number of years at such low pay that they will emerge from the Army broke into a world of wealthy ex-war workers, ex-war contractors and ex-Army officers." He goes on to take aim at Captain S. H. O.'s remarks by promising that a bonus would go into effect eventually, at which point the former officers would find themselves stripped of authority out of uniform and at the mercy of those more enterprising veterans who had once been under their command.³⁴

What, then, were the suggestions soldiers actually made regarding their preferred form of bonus payment? Most simply advocated an unspecified amount to be paid upon discharge from service, but some took the time to offer detailed (if overly fanciful) ideas in the public forum provided by the two largest military publications during the war. Three technicians and a private suggested to *Stars and Stripes* a bonus program similar to that which had been planned for World War I veterans, with the exception that this one was to be paid immediately upon discharge rather than as an insurance policy twenty years later. According to their pay scale, bonuses would be granted at the following rates: fifty cents for every day served in the United States, one dollar for every day spent overseas, and \$1.50 for every day in combat.³⁵ Corporal Fred Friedman upped the ante by championing a \$3 per day payment for service in the U.S. with an additional dollar paid per day of service overseas. Payments were to be spread over a period of five years "so as not to endanger the economic balance," but in no event was the bonus to be under \$2,000.³⁶

Another popular suggestion was the lowering or outright waiver of income taxes for veterans, though the relevant years ranged from just those years spent on active duty or for

34. Corporal, "Bonus Views," *Stars and Stripes*, April 20, 1945, 2.

35. Technicians Fourth Grade Joseph Stankovich, Morris Oppenheim, Leonard D. Grenier, and Private First Class John D. Fazio, "We Propose . . ." *Stars and Stripes*, February 15, 1945, iii.

36. Corporal Fred Friedman, "Even Up Incomes," *YANK*, November 17, 1944, 19.

several years after the war's end. Technician Fifth Grade Donald Huddleston, the same enterprising soldier who played on his peers' sympathies related to his lost years in uniform, wanted to see a lifetime exemption from income taxes for veterans. They would pay a share, but it would either be "a definite amount each year or a certain percentage based on the percentage of the tax dollars expended the previous year in payment of expenses of the war," though Huddleston also freely admits that World War II would not be paid off in the veteran's lifespan.³⁷ Another technician, Julian Friedman, suggested in *Stars and Stripes* that veterans' income tax levels should be fixed at the 1939 level, as "it would be the height of injustice to expect those who fought this war to have to pay for it when they return."³⁸

Despite the occasional protest that a tax-based bonus would only benefit those in the highest tax brackets and would not benefit younger veterans who had no back taxes to worry about, the push for some kind of exemption continued to gain steam. Private Guy Hall, seeing the government as "unwilling to help us fellows return to civilian life without a debt hanging over our heads," offered a sarcastic bargain to Congress: if they cancelled his taxes, he would give up his right to GI Bill benefits. With the money saved from income taxes and the \$300 mustering-out pay he was allotted, he promised "not to go to school or borrow money on a proposition that is so bad the government would have to guarantee the loan."³⁹ Corporal C. A. Skarr saw no need for tax exemptions, but instead desired an outright bonus in the amount of \$10,000, which, adjusting for inflation, was the 2009 equivalent of handing each discharged

37. Huddleston, "Tax Exemption, Too," 18.

38. Technician Fifth Grade Julian Friedman, "Who'll Pay for It?" *Stars and Stripes*, December 28, 1944, iii.

39. Private Guy S. Hall, "Wrongs of Bill of Rights," *Stars and Stripes*, March 27, 1945, 2.

soldier nearly \$120,100.⁴⁰ Signing his letter only as “one of the boys,” another soldier offered an even more vague suggestion of between \$5,000 and \$10,000 paid to each man as he was mustered out. With this money, the veteran would “be made independent—to buy a farm, start a business or any other thing he'd like to do.”⁴¹

Servicemen constantly exploited the hyper-patriotic atmosphere of the war by playing on the quintessentially American need for independence. They were eager to deny accusations that they were looking for handouts or special treatment. While stationed in Egypt, Private First Class William Green summed up the attitude of many of his peers when he wrote that “most men in the service are sensitive about their financial position. They want no charity. They do want fair treatment.”⁴² While simultaneously claiming they did not want to be considered a separate class from their civilian counterparts, GIs nevertheless frequently reminded the home front that a bonus was “the least a grateful Government can do for those who sacrificed that it might be preserved.”⁴³ The same anonymous sergeant who earlier warned about postwar bread lines did not believe that the bonus was “for helping protect the way we want to live and the country we

40. Corporal C. A. Skarr, “10,000 Bucks Worth,” *Stars and Stripes*, December 21, 1944, iii. Real dollar amounts are as calculated by the Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator, available at <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>, accessed November 29, 2009. Of the 11,260,000 soldiers in the army, 318,274 were killed during the war. From there, if we assume that the remaining 10,941,726 soldiers returned home and were granted the \$10,000 bonus payment Skarr proposed, the total sum in 1945 dollars would have been 109,417,260,000, or about \$109.5 billion, just over the sum the U.S. spent on total war efforts in a single year. In 2009, this would be the equivalent of spending \$1,295,653,791,093.34, or just under \$1.3 trillion, more than double the total expenditure of the U.S.’s military involvement in the war. The numbers become even more staggering when taking into account this is only to fund the largest branch of the Armed Forces; an additional 4.8 million served in the Navy and the Marines. The figures for number of soldiers serving in each branch, as well as the numbers of casualties, is from Anne Leland and Mari-Jana Oboroceanu, “American War and Military Operations Casualties: Lists and Statistics,” Congressional Research Service, September 15, 2009, 2. Available from <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32492.pdf>, accessed December 1, 2009.

41. Anonymous, “Mustering-Out at \$5,000,” *Stars and Stripes*, August 1, 1945, iii.

42. Private First Class William J. Green, “Loans Instead,” *YANK*, November 17, 1944, 19.

43. Senior Sergeant B. H. Rappaport, “Don't Repeat 1920s,” *YANK*, November 17, 1944, 19.

wish to live in,” but rather to compensate for years of wages lost while in service.⁴⁴ Just as many resented being called heroes – “the heroes are resting under little white crosses,” according to Private First Class Roland J. Smith⁴⁵ – they also felt it necessary to justify why they deserved bonus payments, which was an argument that frequently was described in terms of honor and personal duty. “It is an honor and a duty of each man to defend his country,” according to Corporal Fred Friedman. At the same time, though, “it is the duty of the people who stayed behind to make up to the servicemen the difference in their earnings.”⁴⁶ For Private First Class Roland Smith, no amount of money in the world could adequately pay for his time in the war, and moreover, “the word ‘pity’ is not in [his] vocabulary and [he is] not a self-styled hero.” The postwar world, he continued, did not owe him or his peers a living, but some compensation would be necessary.⁴⁷ The same anonymous soldier who proposed a bonus between \$5,000 and \$10,000 explained himself in somewhat coarser terms, denying that he was “socialistic” or looking for any kind of welfare or payment for not working. “But if we can cancel billions of dollars of foreign debts, if we can spend money faster than water can flow down a perpendicular hill for—idiotic things—then I say we can stabilize a future for the men who MADE that future—and don't think they didn't.”⁴⁸

Naturally, there were also a number of soldiers who chaffed at the implication that they either needed to rely on others' charity or that they were in any way looking for more than what was their due. Private Lindell Bagley angrily rejected efforts to secure a bonus for veterans,

44. Anonymous, “Bread Lines Red-Lined,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 12, 1945, 2.

45. Private First Class Roland J. Smith, “The Bonus Question,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 12, 1945, 2.

46. Friedman, “Even Up Incomes,” 19.

47. Smith, “The Bonus Question,” 2.

48. Anonymous, “Mustering-Out at \$5,000,” iii.

writing that “patriotism is not for sale at any price” and that “loss of income while in the armed forces is not a valid excuse for selling patriotism and loyalty at so much per day.”⁴⁹ Indeed, the effort to use patriotism as a legitimate claim to compensation came under fire more than any specific amounts or exemptions suggested. An anonymous “disgusted infantryman” reduced the bonus suggestions as simply cries to “gimme something for nothing because I’m a soldier.” He went on to lament that “patriotic” GIs who had probably been drafted in the first place wanted to spend the rest of their lives as “semi-public charges and enjoy all kinds of special dispensations.”⁵⁰ Corporal Richard Handley saw bonus pleas as “a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul,” as “you and your kids, and my kids and their kids, are going to have to pay for this war.”⁵¹ In that same letters column, Technician Grade Five David E. Singer agreed that veterans should expect hospital care for the injured and assorted rehabilitation to help troops reenter civilian life, but “having served to protect what belongs to us and having successfully thwarted another assault on America’s basic principles” did not justify “a mass raid on an already overburdened pocketbook.”⁵² Captain William Savin’s letter to *Stars and Stripes* earned him a stream of bitter replies for weeks in the following issues. As far as he was concerned, “nothing in the world could induce [him] to live permanently in any country other than the United States,” so it seemed absurd to get a bonus for helping protect that country and way of life.⁵³ Others took a much more scathing approach in scolding their fellows, such as Corporal Robert Hancock who wrote, “Hail to the era of the Glorified Bum!” He continued to berate his peers, urging them to “start

49. Private Lindell F. Bagley, “Not for Sale,” *YANK*, November 17, 1944, 19.

50. Anonymous, “Something for Nothing,” *Stars and Stripes*, January 25, 1945, iii.

51. Corporal Richard Handley, “Veterans’ Bonus?” *YANK*, February 9, 1945, 14.

52. Technician Grade Five David E. Singer, “Veterans’ Bonus?” *YANK*, February 9, 1945, 14.

53. William A. Savin, “No Bonus,” *Stars and Stripes*, March 22, 1945, iii.

putting forth a little initiative toward earning a livelihood” instead of “coming to the Government with their hands out.”⁵⁴ Private Dale Vogler was even more antagonistic, deriding “Pfc. Pay Day,” “Corporal Day Room,” “Sergeant Joe Footlocker,” and “Private Steady KP, who had all his teeth pulled trying to keep out of the Army but was drafted anyway,” and who now “wants the Army to replace them with gold ones.” He ended his letter as viciously as he began, asking “why don't you guys who write this stuff . . . stop your crying?”⁵⁵

The GI Bill of Rights rightfully deserves its status as one of the landmark pieces of legislation in twentieth-century history. However, historians have tended to distort its reputation by assuming in grand teleological fashion that because the Bill ultimately proved to be a great success, it was also initially received as such. As it turns out, even a brief glance at period literature reveals the flaws in this argument. When soldiers were not busy asking about postwar jobs or how their position in the discharge pool was going to be determined, when they took notice of the GI Bill at all, they were typically either unclear about its provisions or critical of them. Far from accepting the Bill as the comprehensive answer to every postwar problem, as has been the argument in nearly every monograph about the Bill practically since its inception, the most vocal soldiers were either indifferent or critical of it. Instead of benefits they might receive months or years later and incurring debts from loans, they advocated outright bonuses payable on discharge to help them regain their footing in civilian life. Their reasoning for compensation varied from vague ideas of national obligation to specific instances of lost income opportunities, but the biggest fear, it seems, was that the country would sink into another depression like the one that had shaped the GI's youth. If they could secure money for themselves and their families immediately, they would be better suited to weathering the economic storm that experts feared

54. Corporal Robert Hancock, “Anti-Bonus,” *YANK*, November 23, 1945.

55. Private Dale L. Vogler, “Gimme, Gimme, Gimme,” *YANK*, March 23, 1945, 18.

and publicized. Very near the front of their minds also was the suspicion that they would be discarded as their fathers' generation had been after World War I. As a result, they agitated constantly and publicly for a resolution to their concerns and problems. Their fathers, said Technical Sergeant Leo Topolski, "were forgotten before they even set foot on home soil."⁵⁶ It was their duty, then, to make sure the same did not happen to them, and there was no more public way to do it than to send their written fears, warnings, and wishes to be seen by millions of readers.

Too often, historians of America's involvement in World War II are content to constrain themselves to December 1941 through August 1945. When the guns stop, so too does the historical record as far as the Second World War is concerned. The victorious heroes of the largest American military force in history returned home to Mom, blueberry pie, and baseball, picked up their lives right where they left them, and helped to create a robust and powerful middle class society that ushered the United States into the prosperous fifties and its first decade as an acknowledged global superpower. The existing monographs either stop with Japan's surrender, or they briefly follow the soldiers back along tickertape parade routes. If the narrative continues, they focus on either the problems of policing conquered nations, or the creation of the civic generation of the 1950s. Only recently has scholarship begun to turn toward more serious discussions of veterans' issues, whether they are problems in readjustment in general or the tension between returning soldiers seeking the same jobs their wives and sisters had taken in their absence. The future of World War II historiography, it seems, lies in more of a social

56. Topolski, "Wrongs of Bill of Rights," 2.

history approach to understanding the motives of the men and women who fought in it rather than the overarching meta-histories of multiple nations and multiple years.⁵⁷

That said, there still seems to be a curious lack of serious academic work regarding the transition from military to civic duty, a lack made even stranger by the fact that so many sources remain mostly overlooked. Of course, engaging in theoretical history benefits no one; we should not, as historians, say that based on this group of new data or on this assessment of previously unexamined sources, that this is what *should* have happened. In this case, it is of little use to say that because more soldiers publicly advocated bonuses than the GI Bill that the course that was actually taken was a mistake; certainly the GI Bill improved the prospects for millions of returned soldiers and their children, and to try to suggest otherwise would be both counterfactual and counterproductive. But that does not mean that the troops' opinions are any less important or any less relevant to the historical narrative simply because those wishes did not come true in the desired form. Regardless of the outcome, the servicemen of World War II still participated in the democratic processes for which they left to fight in the first place, and their opinions still form a cogent piece of the emerging historiographical subfield of veteran studies. One can read about the servicemen's thoughts as interpreted by historians living decades after the fact, but the best way to get inside the veterans' minds, especially when the sources are there, is to read what they have to say and to interpret their wishes in light of what we know came before—and what came after.

57. To name but a few examples, see Thomas Childers, *Soldier from the War Returning: The Greatest Generation's Troubled Homecoming from World War II* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2009); Michael D. Gambone, *The Greatest Generation Comes Home: The Veteran in American Society* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2005); Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); Robert Francis Saxe, *Settling Down: World War II Veterans' Challenge to the Postwar Consensus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Mark D. Van Ells, *To Hear Only Thunder Again: America's World War II Veterans Come Home* (New York: Lexington Books, 2001).

During that transitional period between soldier and civilian, “Joe” did not just sit idly by and let others dictate his future for him; he was vocal in his wishes, even if they were not always met, and in this way he and millions of others in his situation worked to influence the America to which they would return. Judging from the letters they sent in by the dozen to major army publications like *YANK* and *Stars and Stripes*, the GI Bill of Rights that was constructed with them in mind and supposedly from their wishes was not, in fact, as firmly influenced by their wishes as has been commonly presumed. Of course, one must keep in mind that it tends to be human nature to only be moved to announce public complaints rather than compliments, so it only seems natural that more soldiers would write to complain about an issue than to glorify it. That does not, however, immediately discount the very real concerns and complaints many servicemen lobbied against not only the GI Bill in general, but what they perceived to be a lack of real monetary relief they felt due them after years of service.

The GI Bill has traditionally and deservedly been seen as a watershed piece of legislation in American political history, but it may not be the end-all cure to servicemen’s wishes as many historians have argued. In the short term, many soldiers likely would have been more content with a flat bonus instead of the long-range plan offered by the GI Bill. Whether they or the country as a whole would have prospered both economically and socially if the soldiers had attained their bonuses rather than the Bill, one can only speculate, just as one can only guess as to whether or not they too would have marched on Washington twenty years later as their fathers had. Whatever the real or imagined results, whatever the path history took, understanding the problems servicemen faced (or in some cases only thought they would face) and their suggested methods for solving those problems is still a fundamental step toward improving the overall picture of veterans studies.

CONCLUSION

Why?

All throughout writing this work, that question has persisted. Why should so much time be spent on exploring and analyzing World War II soldiers' opinions? Did they matter? Did they have an indisputable effect on US or global policy? Were they truthful wishes expressed by men who had seen the worst the world had to offer and yet still hoped for a better existence for their families? Or were they no more than the idle navel gazing of bored, disgruntled soldiers?

Admittedly, research for this work began on the premise of exploring a cause-and-effect relationship, working under the assumption that soldiers called for a certain provision or benefit that the government then either approved or denied. Of course, *proving* such a direct connection is a very difficult (if not completely impossible) task, so the scope of the work narrowed from a procedural and political approach to something else entirely. Thus, this paper is not concerned with what *did* happen, but what did the soldiers *want* to see happen?

Likely the most persistent image of the regular GI at the time was that he was only fighting for his right to enjoy Franklin Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms." He had no political or ideological concerns beyond returning home to his sweetheart and picking up his life where he had left it. Nor is this a completely modern invention borne of nostalgia; even while the war was going on, government and civilian press, as well as Hollywood, acted as though every Joe was a simpleminded bumpkin who didn't know or care why he was fighting, outside of the occasional feeling of revenge over Pearl Harbor.

There were two diametrically opposed views of how the GI would want to return home. He would either want everything to be exactly as it was when he left, with his hold job waiting for him in his old town, or he would want to move on to bigger and better things after having

seen more of the world than he probably ever expected to see. No one, though, has ever really addressed *why* this was or what those “bigger and better” things might be. Even when servicemen tried to articulate their feelings, with varying degrees of success, media and government officials alike seemed not to take them seriously. This isn’t to say that no one was listening; the US Government especially was still haunted by the image of what a disaster it faced during and following demobilization after World War I, when the Army was less than 1/8th the size it was during WWII. Even of that small number, only about 20,000 disgruntled, impoverished WWI veterans finally gathered in Washington in 1932 in a peaceful protest of withheld bonus payments, only to be driven out by regular Army.

So naturally, the big fear was that such a massive military force (approximately 12 percent of the total US population) could cause serious political damage if its members were to return to the US and find matters not to their liking. It had been, after all, unemployment and lingering hostility that had encouraged ex-soldiers to back fascist regimes in Italy, Germany, Austria, and other European states. The US was not willing to take that chance, and the officials in charge of demobilization and the reintroduction of soldiers into civilian life went to great lengths to try to accommodate overseas troops. When it came to more concrete, material demands, the government listened. There were ongoing debates about whether or not GIs should receive a mustering-out payment upon discharge and how much it should be, as well as what its conditions would be (i.e., would it be a loan or a grant; would men serving overseas receive the same amount as those who had remained in the US; would it come out of any other veterans’ benefits).

As well, the decision-making process of the creation of veteran benefits was not entirely one-sided, as officials also listened to the earliest gripes about the GI Bill; its educational

provisions originally only applied to those under the age of 26, but enough older soldiers spoke out that the benefit was extended to anyone who felt their education had been interrupted by the war or who wanted to learn a new trade. The War Department explicitly sought servicemen's input for help in shaping the demobilization plan that eventually resulted in the points system, just as they sought input on what to do with surplus equipment left after the war's end.

But when it came to more ideological matters, the GI's opinion suddenly counted for much less. The Army was largely made up of young men in their early to mid-20s from the working or lower-middle class who, for the most part, had only a partial high school education. Despite acquiring a simplistic reputation as a country bumpkin, the majority of Army soldiers came from urban or suburban areas. A cynical interpretation might well be that the perceived ignorance of these men was a convenient excuse to dismiss their sometimes radical opinions (radical, at least, in the sense that they failed to adhere to the "Mom, baseball, and apple pie" motif ascribed to them by homefront media). More likely, however, is that soldiers were sent to win a war against a clearly defined enemy that was clearly in the wrong; they weren't expected to frame their experiences in the larger context of their own lives back home, and they certainly weren't expected to come out of the war with a desire to change fundamental aspects of their own country.

As discussed in Chapter One, soldiers probably were not expected to challenge the narrative that had been constructed about and for them but without their assistance. They were simple boys with simple needs, so the story went. This was not an argument divided cleanly between domestic publications and soldiers; in fact, letters and editorials published in several different publications show a discourse among the soldiers themselves over their roles and whether or not they truly understood the stakes of the war.

With civilians eager to know everything there was to know about the soldier abroad, magazines and newspapers such as *Publisher's Weekly*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, and others ran frequent pieces about what could be found in a “typical” camp library at any given site, either in the States or elsewhere. As such, there was a fairly intense interest in what soldiers were reading and thinking about. A common complaint voiced over and over in a series of editorials in *The Nation* in late 1943 was from more politically-minded soldiers who felt their peers were rotting their brains with comic books, westerns, and cheap romance novels. They were worried about what state the victorious Army would return in, having won the war without ever realizing why it was fought in the first place. On the other side were soldiers who claimed (and often proved) they were well aware of what was happening around them as well as back home, as well as what they could expect in civilian life.

To be fair to the dissenters, the average GI probably was more concerned with how much he would owe in back taxes or how many repairs he would have to make to his home when he returned, rather than lofty, abstract political matters. That said, it is a great disservice to completely dismiss the insightful and thoughtful opinions many servicemen expressed, both about the current state of affairs and what they hoped (and sometimes feared) would occur once the war was won.

With the preliminary job of proving these opinions existed on a large scale, Chapter Two moved on to discuss two of the biggest issues facing soldiers, at least in terms of the sheer volume of letters and editorials published, and that was the matter of race relations and the woman's place in the public sphere. As many GIs pointed out, there was a glaring and troublesome disconnect between the democratic ideals espoused by the US propaganda machine to motivate overseas troops and the much grimmer reality within the country's own borders.

Stories abound of African-American soldiers who experienced discrimination in the form of segregated units and gross displays of racism from their supposed brothers in arms. One black soldier lamented that at his camp, there were two water fountains, as was, unfortunately, common in the US at the time. What riled him, however, was not that there was a separate fountain for African-Americans, but that German prisoners of war were allowed to share the fountain designated for white soldiers. Another infantryman pointed out that his base's kitchen allowed white GIs and German POWs to eat together, but black soldiers were expected to remain in the back.

Black soldiers were not the only ones to point out the inherent hypocrisy of such violations of basic human rights. White soldiers, too, wrote into newspaper and magazine opinion columns, and they typically followed a familiar pattern: an African-American soldier, through whatever means, somehow was incorporated into a small unit of white soldiers. The letter then serves as testimony to the black soldier's bravery and skill, and the author usually goes out of his way to deliver praise. Of course, most letters from white soldiers made few or no suggestions about how to remedy the obvious discrepancy between ideals and reality; it was enough for them to voice their disappointment and frustration.

Interestingly, the trend in *YANK* for letters of this nature was for the author to admit that he had been a "typical" Southerner before the war, whose views on African-Americans had changed dramatically as a direct result of shared service. One of those Southern soldiers, though, made the mistake of sending in a letter to *YANK* complaining that because black men had fought in the Army, they were going to start demanding rights at home after the war. His solution was to keep them thoroughly subjugated at home and granted no additional civil liberties, or even deport them to Germany once the Third Reich had been defeated. Not only did this soldier

inspire a series of angry rebuttals from white and black soldiers alike that appeared in the next several issues, but he even received a stern rebuke from the *YANK* editorial staff, which rarely ever remarked on letters in its pages unless addressing a question explicitly addressed to the staff.

For many servicemen, the women at home presented an even larger dilemma than did African-American and other minority soldiers. Naturally, there were those stubborn men who insisted that women belonged at home with their children and had no business holding down a job, but the typical response was an admittedly awkward balance between outright refusal and total acceptance. In general, women were expected to surrender their jobs when the man who originally held that position returned, but that did not necessarily mean they were then to be pushed back deep into the domestic sphere. Most men who wrote into *YANK*, especially, seemed to have no objection to women working outside the home—so long as they held “usual” female jobs and left manual labor and skilled professional work to the men.

After having addressed the bigger immediate threat of domestic unrest, Chapter Three details how soldiers thought the US should conduct itself on an international stage once the war was over. Retreating from global politics was no longer an option, as far as many GIs were concerned. The fear was understandable; after World War I, the “war to end all wars,” the US returned to its traditional stance of isolation, only to become embroiled in a far more devastating war less than 30 years later. Would the war have gone differently, had the US intervened sooner? That is an impossible question to answer. What soldiers could and did address (and often in very articulate ways) was how the US could not afford to isolate itself from the rest of the world again.

This was not pure jingoism, either, as soldier-authors frequently pointed out that, having emerged from the war as the world's great superpower, the US had a responsibility to protect the investment it had made overseas, both in terms of actual money and, more importantly, in blood. Indeed, a frequent concern voiced by servicemen was that they did not want to see their own sons go off to World War III in another 20 or 30 years, just as the World War I generation had watched with their own loved ones.

The only way that could be accomplished, it seemed, was through cooperating with and mediating between other nations, because it was clear by that point that the US could not remain neutral if another war actually did break out. The general consensus, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, was that the US would have to use a carrot-and-stick method of global policing. By all means, the ultimate goal was to defuse conflicts before they erupted into total war, most likely through an international body like the League of Nations (now reimagined as the United Nations), while at the same time building up its military so that it would be prepared in the event of another large-scale war.

But what about the vast majority of men and women who had had quite enough of life in the battlefield and who didn't wish to supply the military with more manpower in the postwar era? What was their return to civilian life going to look like—or, more accurately, what did they *want* it to look like? Because no study on World War II veterans would be complete without a look at the GI Bill of Rights, Chapter Four closes out this thesis with an examination of the Bill, but from a very different angle than most historians have taken. Given the sweeping scope of the Bill and the benefits it gave to a large portion of the American population, it is very easy to interpret it as a glowing success from the very start. Indeed, as shown in this chapter, even

contemporary publications hailed it as practically the greatest piece of legislation since the Constitution was ratified.

The reality, as usual, is much more complicated. For the most part, at least judging by the letters and editorials of soldier-authors, the Bill was initially received with indifference or outright scorn. In its original form, it was very much a legislative act created for young, single men, aimed at letting them achieve or finish an education that would serve them as productive members of society. As many GIs pointed out, what was the use of a paid trip to college when they had already spent months or years in service, and when they already had jobs to work and families to support? It was fine for the youngest GIs to take advantage of the Bill, but what about the older men who had no desire to return to school?

In this, just as in the worries of America's postwar political future, were echoes of World War I. The "Greatest Generation" was only one removed from the "lost generation," after all, and they either remembered or knew how the previous world war's veterans had been treated upon returning to the US. After much agitation and debate, in 1924, WWI veterans were finally promised a bonus in the form of an insurance policy to be cashed in full in 1945. After even more unrest, the Adjusted Compensation Act was amended in 1927 to allow World War I veterans to borrow against the amount due them. Unsatisfied with the long future date of the so-called bonus, combined with the effects of the Great Depression, some 20,000 World War I vets encamped in Washington D.C. in protest, only to be driven out by the regular Army.

Understandably, World War II veterans were concerned that the US Government was attempting the same perceived sleight of hand with the new war's servicemen. Rather than being promised an education they either did not need or want, or a small home or business loan, many GIs advocated a flat bonus payment to be made upon discharge from the armed forces. That,

they said, was the fairest way for the nation to express its gratitude without making useless or even empty promises.

Obviously, this is not to suggest that veterans did not come around to the Bill. To the contrary, it proved to be a great success and played a major role (perhaps even the largest one) in forming the large middle class that dominated American society in the 1950s. The outstanding effects of the GI Bill have never been in doubt; rather, they have been lauded to the point of obscuring the very real concerns that soldiers expressed near the war's end, before they had a chance to fully take advantage of the Bill's provisions. Those concerns do not in any way diminish the Bill's deserved legacy in US cultural, political, and military history, but they do shed light on a mostly overlooked aspect of the Bill's earliest months.

From all these issues, some conclusions can be drawn. First, the vast majority of letters complaining about soldiers' lack of interest in international affairs and postwar reconstruction efforts came from men still stationed within the United States. It is doubtful that the letter writers were lying, but it is equally doubtful that the same camp dynamics existed on an Army base in friendly territory as in an encampment in Germany or Italy. Of course GIs who had never set foot on foreign soil were not going to be especially concerned with global politics to the same extent as those who served overseas. The experience of the war and the meeting of people from all over the country—indeed, all over the world—was absolutely crucial in shaping the young serviceman's mind and piquing his interest in issues that were not always of immediate concern to him.

Second, the vehemence with which soldiers responded to letters doubting their motivations, and the intricacy with which many of them detailed their plans, flies in the face of accusations that they were disinterested and fighting only for the right to go home. There was

never a truly definitive answer as to whether they wanted to return to exactly the same life they had left behind or whether they wanted to reshape the postwar world to better fit their new attitudes, but the fact remains that they were thinking and planning after all, one way or another. Whether sweating in North African deserts or freezing in icy, mud-filled dugouts in Germany, GIs still found the time to think and write about what the American dream meant to them—and what they hoped it would mean to the rest of the world when the guns finally stopped.

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APPENDIX A



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Institutional Review Board

April 23, 2015

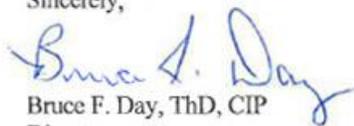
Amanda Stevens
6 Preston Court
Huntington, WV 25704

Dear Ms. Stevens:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled "*GI Jive: US Soldiers' Writings and Post-World War II America.*" After assessing the abstract it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,



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