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War and Peace

It seems simple and obvious enough. Unlike the 1930s—the decade of the Great Depression—and unlike the 1950s—the decade of the Eisenhower “equilibrium”—the 1940s seems not a decade at all. It might easily, and reasonably, be understood as two half-decades, neatly separated in 1945 by the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt (12 April) and the laying to rest of the New Deal, the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (6 and 9 August), and the end of World War II (7 May in Europe, 15 August in the Pacific). Seen in these terms, the first half of the forties was a culture of war: public, nationalistic, pragmatic, and realistic; championing the group and its political equivalent, democracy; committed to production and to the new roles for women it required; and, torn by the inevitable separations, sentimental. The second half was a culture of peace: private, familial, characterized by a dawn-of-the-new-day idealism; favoring the individual and its political equivalent, freedom; committed to consumption and the consequent reversion to traditional gender roles; and, the far-flung populace brought back together, blissfully domestic.

Provided that one does not take these categories as sacrosanct or chronologically precise, they can be useful in isolating several of the dominant axes of the age. The transition from the public, institutional climate of a nation at war to the private tone of a people living in peace (even in the shadow of cold war) was real enough. So was the wartime focus on democracy and the group, the culture of sentimentalism, and the movement from production to consumption. Women spent the decade meeting the needs of men and capital; filling the factories as producers, then, after the war, soothing the fragile male ego, doing housework, and heading the family's department of con-

summer affairs. And, as we shall see in later chapters, the postwar turn inward toward aspects of the self—characterized by renewed interest in psychology and psychiatry, by the anxiety of the lonely, fragmented individual, by a philosophic posture that favored freedom over egalitarianism and social democracy, and individualism over state, community, and the group—would be in full swing by midcentury.

During the war years, American culture was decidedly democratic—at least on the surface. Just as they had in the First World War, Americans fought the Second in the name of democracy. From the Library of Congress, where Archibald MacLachlan furnished the “Democracy Allowed” with the works of John Stuart Mill and John Locke, to the public schools, where students were urged to participate in newly created student governments and in school clubs that taught democratic behavior, Americans understood the war as a struggle between the American way of life, labeled “democracy,” and absolute tyranny, known as “totalitarianism.”¹

Beginning in the mid-1930s, when Nazism and fascism first appeared as serious threats, Americans indulged in a frenzy of democratic institution making. At every level of the culture, they looked to democratic systems of governance and decision-making to draw the line between the United States and Hitler’s Germany and, during the war, to demonstrate that American values remained intact despite the military draft (1940), government price-fixing (1942), the evacuation and relocation of West Coast Japanese into interior “concentration” camps (1942), government censorship of Hollywood films, and other examples of wartime coercion. Radio-listening discussion groups, first used in England in the 1920s, numbered an estimated fifteen thousand in the United States in 1941. Using such groups, wrote Emory Bogardus in *Democracy by Discussion*, “the whole nation could participate in national affairs in a truly intelligent manner. Democracy could come into its own in a new and vitalized way.” Beginning in 1942, the Office of Civilian Defense orchestrated a series of supposedly spontaneous Saturday “Town Meetings for War,” whose purpose was to give the mobilization for “total participation for Victory” a democratic gloss.²

Though much of the economy was regulated by law during the war, the Department of Agriculture experimented with democratic methods of increasing production and modifying patterns of consumption. The University of Iowa social psychologist Kurt Lewin helped the government by designing an experiment that used group-discussion leaders and other “democratic” methods to convince housewives to contribute to the war effort by serving their families kidneys, brains, and other odd cuts of meat. Even those in the service, whose lives were necessarily highly regimented, came into contact with democratic methods. Hundreds of United Service Organizations (USO) facilities presented democracy in the form of group singing led by a social worker with a baton in one hand, a booklet called “Music: USO” in the other.

“Singing,” the booklet said, is “primarily a weapon, a medium through which men march straighter, give better commands, fight harder, work longer and move more coordinately.” Unfortunately, none of this happened naturally; the “right leader” was required to “develop the habit of group singing” and to “encourage general participation.” Even the relocated Japanese were subject to democratic community activities programs, designed to ensure a proper “adjustment” to “life on the outside.”³

One purpose of the wartime emphasis on democratic systems was to demonstrate the absolute necessity of sublimating the self to the larger whole, of melding the individual into the life of the group. Signals of this sort were everywhere. In selecting George Marshall as Man of the Year for 1943, *Time* magazine applauded the chief of staff for a recently released report that did not contain a single “I”—“*The Team* is General Marshall’s concern.” Readers of the popular comic strip “Terry and the Pirates” opened the 17 October 1943 Sunday paper to find their usually active hero, who has just earned his wings as a flight officer in the army air force, passively listening to his superior officer dispense the folk wisdom of the day: “It wasn’t you who earned those wings. . . . A ghostly echelon of good guys flew their hearts out in old kites to give you the know-how”, and Terry’s skills as a pilot are useless without the transport pilots who delivered every bullet and gallon of gas. Children learned about the value of the group in books such as *Sixie Cuzumber* (1944), which features a dog, squirrels, and neighborhood boys and girls engaged in a letter-writing campaign that involves division of labor, mass production, and the cooperation of all in the achievement of a common goal. In the back of the book was an envelope, and the reader was invited to exercise a democratic right (or was it an obligation?) by writing his or her own letter.⁴

Hollywood elevated the group and downplayed individualism in several wartime genres. The combat film narrated a shift from the individual and pluralistic heterogeneity to the heroic unified group, headed in *Bataan* (1943), for instance, by a “natural leader” (Robert Taylor). The message of *Bataan*, as film scholar Jeanine Basinger explained, is that

we are a mongrel nation—ragtag, unprepared, disorganized, quarrelsome among ourselves, and with separate special interests, raised, as we are, to believe in the individual, not the group. At the same time, we bring different skills and abilities together for the common good, and from these separate needs and backgrounds we bring a feisty determination. No one leads us who is not strong, and our individualism is not set aside for any small cause. Once it is set aside, however, our group power is extreme.⁵

“Commitment” films described the process through which individuals sloughed off the old skin of the self for a new, more responsible, social outlook. *Casablanca* (1943) features Humphrey Bogart as Rick, an isolated and

cynical saloon-keeper who more than once spurns requests for his help in the effort against the Germans with the line, "I stick my neck out for nobody."⁵ However, as the film ends, Rick finds the strength of commitment, sacrificing a lifetime love for the cause. Gary Cooper plays the reluctant hero in *Sergeant York*, a story loosely based on an actual Appalachian pacifist who saw the light in time to kill some twenty German soldiers in World War I. Eleanor Roosevelt and other luminaries at the film's 1941 premiere witnessed York dispensing with a deep-seated, highly personal, Biblical pacifism to participate in a national cause: a "whole people's struggle to be free."⁶

Music proved an especially fertile ground for the cultivation and dissemination of the group values that were so central to American culture in the first half of the 1940s. Wartime film musicals often developed the theme of group unity around a vaudevillesque, family-based group such as the Four Cohans in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942). The breakup of such a troupe, usually precipitated by the selfish ambition of one member, signaled a general moral collapse and stood for the consequences of anything less than complete commitment to the whole. Marching bands experienced a substantial revival in high schools and colleges, attracting eminent classical composers such as Samuel Barber ("Commando March" [1943]). In 1942, the Music Educators' National Conference issued a new version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" pitched in A-flat so that "the melody is now within the reach of all."⁷ A 1943 report of the education faculty at Stanford University noted the prominence in Germany of a concept of harmony that "subordinates the individual to the mass" and approvingly cited the American dance band for its revival of "harmonic group improvisation."⁸ The Stanford scholars also mentioned a means to unity called "alteration of group activity," through which each element of a symphony orchestra would, in turn, give up "some of its 'sovereignty' in order to achieve a balance or ensemble."⁹

In *Made in America: The Arts in Modern Civilization* (1948), John Kouwenhoven applied ideas of the group and the individual to the dominant popular music of the war years: the dance music of the big bands of Benny Goodman, Woody Herman, Tommy Dorsey, Les Brown, Jack Teagarden, and hundreds of lesser lights. According to Kouwenhoven, big band jazz was something of a folk art; it arose out of a culture both technological and democratic. He argued that big band music reconciled the demands of individual expression (the solos) with group performance (the arrangement). Kouwenhoven probably overemphasized the elements of freedom and individualism and overlooked the elements of pattern and coercion, not just in jazz but in other cultural forms, including modern architecture. The solos offered within the big band framework were anemic displays, circumscribed by a highly choreographed musical presentation not far removed from the regimentation of the marching band. In fact, big band jazz hardly deserved to be called "jazz."¹⁰ But perhaps it expressed all the individualism a nation at war could afford.¹¹

As much as the war had to be understood and marketed as a group endeavor, millions of Americans experienced it as intensely isolating and individualizing. Indeed, soldiering not only meant denying the willful self to ensure the survival of the company, the platoon, and ultimately the nation, but it meant separation from home, family, friends, and community—a wrenching uprooting similar to what turn-of-the-century immigrants experienced. For those who were left behind—wives and lovers, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers—separation imposed a different but equally compelling set of emotional demands. The churning chaos of wartime affected even those whose relationship with the conflict was less direct. "There were no apartments to be had anywhere," recalled Alfred Kazin, who in 1942 had become an editor of the *New Republic*.

It was all homeless now—a series of "transient" hotels: West Side, East Side, Brooklyn Heights, the Village—surrounded by that unending wartime crowd I had seen being pushed out of Washington's Union Station, or waiting around the clock to get on a train. War-crowded New York threw back my splintered image from every store window. I could not stop walking the streets, round and round, looking for myself. It was not just my old reasons for everything, my sense of home that I missed; it was a world in which the old invisible connections still existed.¹²

Of the numerous strategies for dealing with the problems of separation—what Kazin described as a lack of "the old invisible connections"¹³—two stand out. The first, typified by war correspondent Ernie Pyle, was to put one's emotions on the back burner. In a syndicated column and several best-selling books, Pyle presented the war in a gray prose that avoided the precise descriptions and narratives that might have made the war a vivid emotional experience for those on the home front. Pyle wrote about the ever-present reality of death, but real soldiers did not die on his pages; he wrote about suffering men without presenting their agony; he wrote about "insecurity, discomfort, [and] homesickness," but without getting much beyond the words themselves. Pyle's soldiers approached the war with the author's cold and mechanical fatalism. In *Here Is Your War* (1945), Pyle described the reaction of pilots to the virtual disintegration of a plane on a bombing run over a Tunisian port—the victim, apparently, of a direct hit on the craft's load of bombs: "Yellow fliers of the ill-fated American crew were naturally pretty blue over the incident. But, as they said, when anything as freakish as that got you your number was just up regardless. And they went on with the war as usual." Pretty blue. Number was just up. As usual.¹⁴

The other way of dealing with separation was sentimentality. The sentimental, no more realistic than Pyle's prose, was just as surely a way of avoiding contact with aspects of the wartime experience that were too difficult for most people to confront. Where Pyle sidestepped tragedy or potential tragedy by ratcheting down the emotions, the culture of sentimentality did the

same by inflating emotion—making emotion into spectacle, if you will—thereby bypassing or displacing genuine experience. Like the Currier and Ives prints that hung in the parlors of nineteenth-century homes, the wartime sentimental culture presented hearth and home as a fortress and sanctuary, a compelling emotional space capable of overcoming separation and, metaphorically, of transcending death itself. Director David O. Selznick's *Since You Went Away* (1943) opens on the empty leather chair of advertising executive Tim Hilton, gone to war; it closes with a Christmas Eve phone call announcing Tim's safe return, another shot of the chair, and, to the music of "Adeste Fideles," an exterior shot of the snow-covered house and the final caption: "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." When, as in *Tender Comrade* (1943), a boyfriend or husband fails to return, grief is momentary (Get on with your life! Set the table!) and soon displaced by a different and more positive set of emotions, with death as a field of triumph for a new generation and the values of freedom and democracy.¹¹

Children had their own sentimental tales. Robert McCloskey's *Make Way for Duckings*, winner of the Caldecott Medal for best children's book of 1941, features Mr. and Mrs. Mallard and their eight ducklings, searching for suitable housing and otherwise trying to make a go of life in the Boston area. Like Tim Hilton in *Since You Went Away*, Dad departs ("One day Mr. Mallard decided he'd like to take a trip to see what the rest of the river was like, further on"), vaguely promising to return and wishing Mom success in the task of raising the ducklings as a temporary single parent. "Don't you worry," Mrs. Mallard replies, "I know all about bringing up children." When she has finished teaching her brood how to avoid bikes and scooters and to stride in step behind her (many wartime children's books had a marching scene that emphasized coordinated group activity), they make their way to the Public Garden, where the waiting father is reunited with the family.¹²

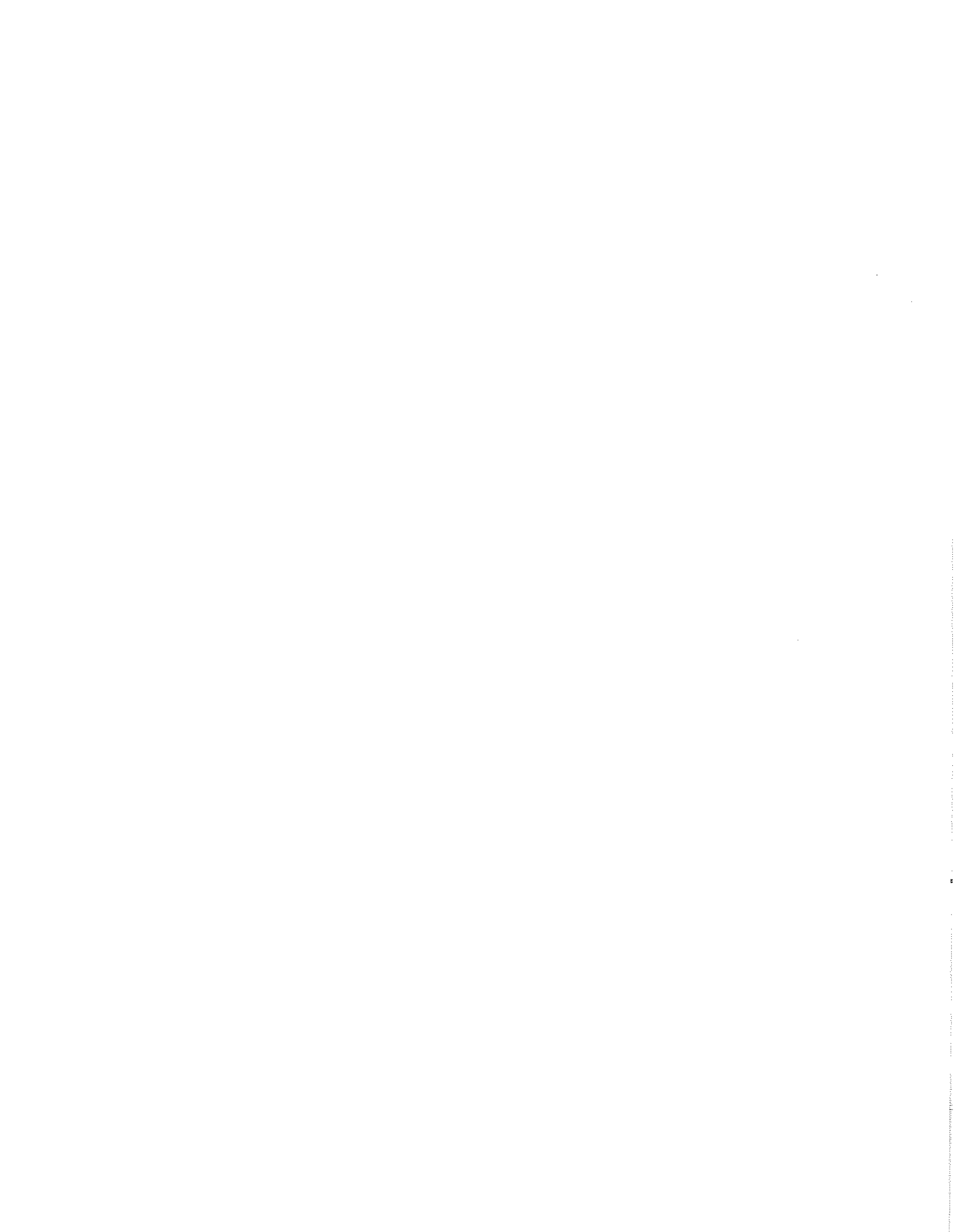
Wartime music was often sentimental, a fact that irritated the federal Office of War Information's music committee, which would have preferred to have Americans humming energetic, nationalistic songs on the order of the World War I hit, "Over There." Americans were not in the mood. What they wanted—and got—was what historian John Costello has called "sentimental bullets": mawkish, nostalgic ballads that played on the themes of separation, anxiety, and loneliness. The isolated self experiencing these feelings was apparent in the many wartime song titles that began with "I" or—projecting the self into an uncertain future—"I'll": "I Love You," "I'll Be Seeing You," "I'll Get By," "I'll Walk Alone" (all 1944), and "I'm Making Believe" (1945). Another set of titles posed the problem of separation in the vocabularies of time and space: "Sunday, Monday, or Always" (1943), "Long Ago and Far Away" and "Together" (both 1944), "It's Been a Long, Long Time," "Till the End of Time," and "It Might as Well Be Spring" (all 1945), and "Sentimental

Journey," a funeral and perhaps ironic ballad from the summer of 1945 that obliquely raises the chilling possibility that a dead man is taking the journey described ("I'll be waitin' up for Heaven").¹³

The war brought another change, no less dramatic than separation. For the first time in decades, Americans understood themselves as producers, as part of a supply-based economy whose function was to produce useful goods rather than to generate wages for the purpose of consumption. Since the turn of the century, the economy had spawned huge advertising and public relations industries, the former designed to create demand (i.e., to foster consumption), the latter to facilitate public acceptance of the corporation by shaping it into easily consumable images. In the midst of the prosperous 1920s, theorists of the "new leisure" bemoaned an economy whose technological prowess had overreached consumers' pocketbooks. By the mid-1930s, with the country mired in the Great Depression, most approaches to recovery—from Keynesian economics to the old-age revolving pension plan of the Townsend movement—involved getting more money into the hands of those who would spend it, whether government bureaucrats or consumers.

Cutting against this long-term trend, the early 1940s reprised the nineteenth-century economy of production. After an uneven start, a mobilized wartime economy produced three hundred thousand airplanes and one hundred thousand tanks and armored cars. Most industries operated seven days a week, around the clock, and factories flew banners proclaiming, "This is one part of the arsenal of democracy." At San Quentin, prisoners demanded and won the right to bid on war contracts; they were soon producing submarine nets and nightsticks for the National Guard. With labor in short supply, women replaced men in shipyards, ordnance plants, and aircraft factories, contributing to the boom and generating the image of Rosie the Riveter. *Time* called the results "the miracle of war production," and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin agreed, in 1943 toasting American accomplishments with the words, "To American production, without which this war would have been lost."¹⁴

One can overdo the "production" theme, of course. Wartime prosperity provided many Americans with the money to buy not only necessities but some luxuries. And the experience of women—who might have been called upon to produce during the conflict but were expected to return to the sphere of consumption when the war came to an end—suggests that the production mania was not intended to bring any basic alteration in the shape of the society and in its culture. Nonetheless, the production mania made its mark on U.S. culture, if only temporarily. Michael Curtiz's *Mildred Pierce* (1945) plays the modest producer desires of the protagonist Mildred against the insatiable consumer passion of her daughter Veda; film theorist Mary Ann Doane has described Veda as a "consumer vampire" whose excesses—both economic and sexual—threaten the production economy of scarcity. In the theater, Arthur Miller's play *All My Sons* (1947), first produced at the Coronet



Theater in New York City, was close enough to the war and its issues to establish the protagonist as a producer—the owner of a factory making airplane parts—and to ground the dramatic action in a moral dilemma involving the quality of the parts. (From Coca-Cola to ball bearings, just about every product was sold during the war with the claim that it was a well-produced, “quality” item.)

In contrast, the postwar years of the late forties featured a renewed interest in consumption. Miller’s 1949 play, *Death of a Salesman*, features Willy Loman as a salesman occupying a space between production and consumption—making a living by selling himself (by turning himself into a commodity to be consumed). Cheesecake changed, too. The wartime ideal, representing the collective desires of American fighting men, was the leggy Betty Grable, whose pinup was a portrait of activity: upright, full of potential energy, ready to move on those long legs, ultimately a producer. But Grable was replaced by an altogether different ideal: the bosomy, supine, postwar female, foregrounded during the war in Jane Russell’s performance in *The Outlaw* (1943), seems incapable of producing anything but milk and babies (that is, more consumers).¹⁵

Separated by time and space and uncomfortably engaged in new roles as producers, wartime Americans indulged in another form of the sentimental: they dreamed—Bing Crosby’s dream of a “White Christmas” (1942); George Bailey’s (Jimmy Stewart) dream of college, a life of adventure, and escape from Bedford Falls in Frank Capra’s classic film, *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946); the American male’s “impossible dream” of the Varga girl; the dream that Superman (1938), Wonderwoman (1941), or even God might see fit to intervene and bring a measure of order to a chaotic universe. In 1942 and 1943, magazine advertisements featured the simplest of all dreams: the dream of a future that would someday arrive, despite what seemed an interminable present. “This is an American child,” read an advertisement for Ipana toothpaste. “This is an American home. Lucky young American. No child in the World has so bright a future.”¹⁶

Most often, Americans dreamed the capitalist dream of the postwar world as a consumer paradise. As early as 1943, David Cushman Coyle was “Planning a World of Plenty” for the readers of *Parent’s Magazine*, anticipating a “brave new world . . . made possible by the speeded-up production of [the] war years.” Revere Copper and Brass struck a similar note, suggesting in 1942 that the “new machines and new metals” required for the war effort would lead to “the unbounded promise of the years that begin with X-DAV.” In 1944, Libby-Owens-Ford offered housewives the glistening modernism of the “Kitchen of Tomorrow.” And from 1941 through 1946, *Ladies’ Home Journal* published designs by nationally known architects for their “dream houses.”¹⁷

When the postwar world finally arrived, it brought with it a reversion—half-hearted in some ways, and incomplete, to be sure, but a reversion nonetheless—from wartime emphases on the group and democracy to an emphasis on the individual and freedom. The change was perhaps most noticeable among postwar intellectuals, who found one reason or another to pull away from a variety of leftist political sympathies—Marxism, communism, socialism, the industrial unionism of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)—that had been highly attractive during the Great Depression. Some had been repulsed by Stalin’s vicious purges in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Others became disenchanted with Marxism and communism when the Soviets signed a nonaggression treaty with Hitler’s Nazi Germany in 1939, or when aggressive postwar Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe seemed to have unilaterally brought on a cold war. The relative prosperity of the postwar years seemed to many Americans to reduce the need for the militant policies of the more radical labor unions; some also felt that the aggressive social and economic policies of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal were no longer appropriate. Many intellectuals, disturbed by the growth of bureaucracy, by cultural homogenization, and by the dangers they perceived in a burgeoning mass culture, were much more interested in challenges to individual autonomy than in making critiques, as they had in the 1930s, of the unequal distribution of wealth and the condition of the working class under capitalism. While old-age security, unemployment insurance, the minimum wage, and other New Deal innovations were not eliminated by future Democratic or Republican administrations, the ameliorative fervor of the depression decade for the most part disappeared during the war and afterwards.

For a time during the presidential campaign of 1948 it seemed that Henry Wallace and his Progressive party had the potential to reunite radicals and old-line New Deal liberals in a revitalized alliance of the political left. The self-proclaimed candidate of the “common man,” Wallace called for a more vigorous and far-reaching welfare state. He also continued to hold out the possibility of working with the Soviets on an international level (in the foreign trade sphere, for example) and with American Communists domestically. In the end, the cold war proved fatal to his candidacy; a “vote for Wallace,” wrote James Burnham in a typical smear, “is a vote for Stalin.” In 1947, ex-New Dealers like Hubert Humphrey and Eleanor Roosevelt, labor leaders like Walter Reuther and David Dubinsky, and writers and intellectuals like economist John Kenneth Galbraith and theologian Reinhold Niebuhr announced their opposition to Wallace’s politics with the formation of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), an organization that combined liberal reformism in domestic policy with an unremitting anticommunism at home and abroad. Based on an acceptance of the cold war, their decision to abandon Wallace for Truman’s modest reformism signaled the death knell of

postwar radicalism and marked the emergence of a new breed of cautious, quiescent liberal that would remain dominant until the mid-1960s.¹⁸

Cultural signs of the new, more conservative and individualistic perspective were everywhere: in the postwar vogue of psychiatry and psychoanalysis; in the novels of Raymond Chandler and Mickey Spillane, with their isolated, private-eye ("I") heroes, calculating survivors in a corrupt and dangerous world; in the genre of film noir, whose existential protagonists could seldom do more than attribute their downfall to a bizarre contingency; in the bursts of enthusiasm for entrepreneurship and a creative avant-garde; in the comic strips, where "Steve Canyon" debuted on 13 January 1947 as a worldwide, free-lance troubleshooter; and in the paintings of the abstract expressionists, who abandoned the social realism of the 1930s for a focus and reliance on the self.¹⁹

Consistent with their declining enthusiasm for wartime values, postwar Americans threw aside the group-based culture of production—of assembly lines, factories, coworkers, and union activity—for a culture of consumption whose central activities could be pursued by individuals or, at most, by families. But this is not to say that everyone ran for the stores the moment the war ended. Hundreds of thousands of rank-and-file workers went on strike in 1946 and 1947, not simply for higher wages that would allow greater access to consumer goods, but over a variety of producer issues: better working conditions, control of the work process, independence on the job, and fellowship with coworkers. Only after 1947, when the Taft-Hartley Act brought militant workers under the control of management, and when the United Auto Workers (UAW) and other major unions agreed to trade off production demands for pensions and increased wages, did the movement toward a consumption-based economy approach full stride. Irreconcilable differences between workers and owners over production were displaced into the realm of consumption, where issues of ownership and class were softened and attenuated. Postwar elites, disturbed by class divisions, new political parties, and other signs of a divided and confused society that together threatened to prevent the creation of a "national political economy," used consumption as a cultural "cement."²⁰

One sign of the emergence of a culture of consumption was the disappearance of those wartime advertisements that featured the workplace; most postwar advertisements hardly recognized that a production process existed. Instead, Coca-Cola became a product to be consumed while consuming—one postwar advertisement pictures two women with packages stopping at a soda fountain, along with the slogan: "Shop Refreshed . . . Have a Coca-Cola." A 1949 advertisement for Chevrolet commingled the idea of purchasing with the automobile as an irresistible spectacle: "Look . . . Ride . . . Decide . . . it's the most Beautiful BUY of all!"²¹

The mass media also helped to sell the idea of consumption with programs such as "Queen for a Day": the desperate women who participated competed for a cornucopia of consumer goods by describing the conditions of poverty, ill health, and misfortune under which they and their families lived. Television missed nary a beat during its first full season in 1948, conjoining consumption and entertainment in "Kelvinator Kirchen" and "Missus Coes A-Shopping," the latter a customer participation program broadcast from supermarkets. Postwar situation comedies such as "The Honeymooners" and dramas such as "I Remember Mama" often revolved around the purchase of consumer goods for the home, encouraging Americans to spend rather than save and presenting consumerism as a mechanism of assimilation in a classless and family-centered way of life.²²

By midcentury, Americans were weighing the costs and benefits of a society that seemed on the verge of eliminating hard and serious work altogether. Such was the world of the comic strip "Pogo," where a surplus of goods and leisure made possible poetry contests, baseball games, and the regular celebration of holidays. In "Pogo," the situation rankles Bun Rabbit, who announces his readiness to take his complaint to the Oval Office: "Put down that piano! An' fix our holiday situation. Every time a man wants to work he got a vacation staring him in the face." Even the depression-era world of "I'll Abner" yielded to postwar consumerism, captured by cartoonist Al Capp in a white bottle-shaped creature called a Shmoo. Introduced in 1948, the Shmoo is consumer utopia incarnate, capable of bypassing the factory and the production process by laying cartoned eggs and giving bottled milk. Depending on how one cooks it, the Shmoo tastes like steak, chicken, or pork. As a popular recording put it, succinctly summarizing postwar consumerism, "A Shmoo can do most anything." The Shmoo mentality was apparent in late-1940s home design: the phrase "home of tomorrow" had ceased to connote avant-garde style or mass production and had come to refer only to a container for consumer goods and gadgets.²³

The high consumerism of the postwar years was more than an economic phenomenon; it influenced and shaped questions of morality. In two Hollywood films of the mid and late forties—*Good Sam* (1948) and *Miracle on 34th Street* (1946)—moral inquiries were launched from the consumer Elysium of the department store. In both films, store employees engage in what are presented as acts of high morality by sending customers elsewhere to locate a particular product, but it is a morality grounded only in the consumer's right of access to the entire marketplace. *Miracle on 34th Street* narrates the journey of a little girl from cynicism to faith; her breakthrough to true religion is achieved in a final, heart-rending scene in which she, her mother, and her mother's fiancé happen upon a house in the suburbs that is for sale and ready for immediate occupancy. In short, she can believe in Santa Claus

(and, in a larger sense, in God, progress, and the goodness of man) only when he can deliver the ultimate postwar consumer good. The willingness of Mom—an ana-retentive personnel manager at Macy's—to go along with the big purchase represents her decision to shed a veneer of production-based (wartime) values and to acclimate to a new, consumer-based (postwar) domesticity. In the terms of feminist theory, acquiescence in consumption of a product (the house) signifies the woman's acquiescence in her own objectification; in the act of consuming, she agrees to become a commodity.²⁴

Consumerism also helped disguise the strongly capitalist, elitist, and patriarchal dimensions of postwar society. The central argument was contained in a 1947 *March of Time* segment on the fashion industry, whose title "Fashion Means Business" implied that "fashion" was the cause of "business," rather than the reverse. Denying the power of the fashion industry and capitalism to influence style and shape social patterns, the newsreel program described fashion as the product of a perfect female democracy—"of fifty million determined consumers," each entirely independent of all but personal desire ("What every woman wants, no one in the business can foretell with certainty"). As *The March of Time* conceptualized the process, these female desires are translated into high fashion, and then into mass-produced garments suitable for ordinary people, a point at which "fashion becomes big business."²⁵ Thus, women were held responsible not only for the "New Look" designs of the late 1940s that accompanied their return to the domesticity of the kitchen and boudoir; they were also the first link in the chain of mass production. The ideology of consumerism elevated women into veritable captains of industry.

Because consuming was the essential act of the good citizen, to save—let alone hoard one's money—was at best anachronistic, at worst an invitation to social upheaval. Scrooge McDuck, who first appeared in Disney comic books in 1947, was for the most part a throwback to an earlier capitalism of acquisition and hard work, a fowl willing to forgo consumption for the accumulation of money itself—mountains of greenbacks and gold coins, stored in an enormous vault—and the sensuous pleasure of rolling around in it. Radio comedian Jack Benny was another famous miser. He, too, had a vault—the site of an annual pilgrimage—as well as a pay phone and a cigarette machine, should friends drop by. Amid the automobile craze of the late 1940s, Benny denied himself the quintessential postwar commodity—a new car—refusing to part with an ancient Maxwell.²⁶

By 1948 American society had entered a postproduction phase of consumption and abstract wealth and, under pressure, was beginning to come apart. The perils of hoarding and the pitfalls of consumerism were explored, along with other aspects of conduct in a hyperconsumer society, in *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* (1948), which earned John Huston Academy Awards for writing and directing. The film starred Walter Huston (John's father), Tim

Holt, and Humphrey Bogart as western adventurers who discover and pan a rich lode of gold dust, only to have it vanish in the wind after a disastrous falling out on the trip back to civilization. On one level the film is a parable of unrequited consumerism, about the consumption that never takes place and to which all else is secondary. Postwar audiences, itching to see how the protagonists would spend their winnings, must have found the film enormously frustrating. On another level, it is a parable of a society that has given up production for the burden of abstract wealth (a raw material to which no value has been added, a wealth that bears no relation to any product or real system of production and whose only use is the potential one of consumption). In this sense, the film is related to the pyramid friendship clubs that were so popular in the winter of 1948–49: thousands of people engaged in chain letter schemes, desperately trying to make instant fortunes. On still another level, the film found the postwar money mania responsible for the destruction of the wartime world of male companionship; under the influence of the gold and what it will buy, Bogart descends to a hysterical paranoia, denying the values of friendship and trust and the existence of human decency. By the same token, *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* would seem to argue for the moral superiority of the wartime world, when the requirements of production served as a kind of social glue; as long as the miners maintain some marginal relationship with production (as long as they labor at the mining process) they—and by implication the society—remain intact as a social unit.²⁶

As Huston's film reveals, the emergence of an economy and culture of consumption brought anxieties and doubts. Perhaps, after a decade and a half of economic depression and war, Americans were too accustomed to thinking in terms of production and saving to feel entirely secure in their new roles as consumers and spenders. Despite their newfound access to automobiles, television, and a panoply of other consumer wonders, Americans were—as *Time* and *Life* seemed to relish, pointing out—unhappy. Postwar affluence was a key ingredient in the guilt felt by the surviving son in *All My Sons*: "I felt wrong to be alive, to open the bank-book, to drive the new car, to see the new refrigerator." The exasperation of the moment was captured by far Westerner Richard L. Neuberger in an essay in *Harper's* on Americans' uncomfortable relationship with the wilderness: "Our patron saints are no longer Lewis and Clark, but Abercrombie & Fitch."²⁷

Just as the mentality of production gave way to the postwar culture of consumption, so the wartime culture of separation and sentimentality yielded to one of reunification and domesticity. According to the standard postwar mythology, weary GIs trudged home to the accepting arms of wives and girlfriends, went to college on the GI Bill and took out a VA home mortgage, moved the new baby-boom family to the suburbs, and, of course, lived happily ever after.

There is no doubt that the culture of the late 1940s was profoundly shaped by domesticity, or that Americans were, in the title of historian Elaine Tyler May's recent book, *Homeward Bound*. Yet differences of opinion exist over the meaning of the turn to domesticity. According to May, the "family-centered culture" of postwar America signified neither a simple return to familiar pre-war social patterns nor an optimistic celebration of the end of conflict. For May, the postwar family was a mechanism of "containment" in an age of profound insecurity—a fortress protecting its members from the potential decadence of consumer capitalism, from the anxieties of the atomic age, from an unpredictable economy, from perverse and promiscuous sexuality, from the freedom and rootlessness of modern life, and, most of all, from cold war communism, which intensified every other threat. Obsessed with security from the middle of the war years through the 1950s, Americans—both men and women—willingly surrendered independence and autonomy for the certitude of a stable future. From this perspective, domesticity was pessimistic rather than optimistic, defensive rather than forward-looking.²⁸

While granting this perspective on the family, the 1940s should also be understood as a relatively unstable period in the long history of domesticity. It was a time when domesticity could still be feared, resisted, and deflected. That is the theme of Todd Webb's "Welcome Home" series of postwar photographs. Following his discharge from the Navy in November 1945, Webb took to the streets of New York City, training his camera on doorways and the signs that beckoned to returning servicemen: "Welcome Home, Leo," "Welcome Home, Jim & Henry," "Welcome Home, G.I. Joe." Reviewing a 1946 exhibition of these and other Webb photographs at the Museum of the City of New York, critic Beaumont Newhall praised Webb for his "warmth of appreciation" and for bringing out "the human quality even when people are absent." The photographs, however, suggest something quite different. Not only are they peopleless, but they present the home as a black hole, an abyss of darkness guarded by the sort of doorway that threatens detective Philip Marlowe in the film noir production, *The Lady in the Lake* (1947). Similarly, the best known of Hollywood's postwar films about returning veterans depict the moment of homecoming—that is, the founding moment of postwar domesticity—as awkward, traumatic, or disappointing. In *Till the End of Time* (1946), Cliff Harper (Guy Madison) arrives home to an empty house; his father is out playing golf. In *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), Al Stephenson's distance from the domestic is confirmed when his daughter reveals that she has taken a course in "domestic science"; as a site of expertise, Al feels the home moving beyond his old-fashioned ways.²⁹

These and other films also suggest that the culture of domesticity was in its own way imperial, forged over and against a surprisingly powerful male subculture produced by the war. In both *The Best Years of Our Lives* and *Till the End of Time*, the male-female bond of the new domesticity is rendered

problematic by a preexisting male bonding. Indeed, in contrast to the dynamic, natural, and familiar interaction of the male subcultures that open these films, domesticity is usually presented as a self-conscious experience in which real men only reluctantly participate. *The Men* (1950), a late entry in the genre, starred Marlon Brando (in his first film) as Ken, a moody, introspective, paraplegic veteran, and Teresa Wright as Ellie, his pre-injury girlfriend, who still loves the guy and wants to marry him. After an initial bout of deep and general disillusionment, Ken settles into the hospital routine of male camaraderie, group sports, and determined (upper) body building. He eventually agrees to see Ellie, and then, after considerable coaxing, to marry her. But Ken and Ellie have only to cross the threshold of their marital abode to find themselves locked in a paired isolation so intense that their fragile relationship breaks down. That same night, Ken returns to the male world of the hospital, determined to stay. When, for his own good, a committee of the "self-governing" Paraplegic Veterans Association votes to require his discharge, Ken, having now given up all illusions about his physical condition (as well as the possibility of his remaining in a male world), and having come to grips with "reality" (the reality of his body and of the necessity of hearth and home), appears as the supplicant before the shrine of domesticity, a single-family, suburban house. As he drags his broken body (and soul) up the walk, the ever-helpful Ellie appears. "Do you want me to help you up the steps?" she asks. And Ken replies, "Please." If one interprets the paraplegic theme as a metaphor, and Ken's reluctance as the reluctance of all veterans—or even of all postwar men—one can see postwar domesticity as a fear-inducing experience of isolation and confinement, an ideology of contentment screening an arena of discord.

Postwar domesticity was a powerful social and cultural force from which few Americans were completely free. Yet despite its strength, it was also depicted in the 1940s as a fragile frame, as vulnerable and besieged as the cold war-engaged nation itself. One source of that vulnerability was the desire and sexuality of the female, usually signaled in film by scenes in which the female protagonist appropriates the gaze—that is, looks too long and hard at the male protagonist, thus committing the primal sin of turning him into an emasculated subject. In *Humoresque* (1946), it is the gaze of wealthy society woman Helen Wright (Joan Crawford)—a gaze signaled by Wright's eyeglasses—that tempts working-class violinist John Boray (John Garfield) to deny the values of his own community and family, represented by his mother and a sign, "Home Sweet Home," in the stairwell of the family homestead. From *Rebecca* (1940) to *Caught* (1949), the forties was also the period of female gothic or paranoid women's films in which the home—the woman's space of domesticity—becomes the site of suspense, dread, and horror, usually as the result of some exterior menace.³⁰ The threat from without is especially obvious in a film such as *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948): a bedridden Leona

Stewenson (Barbara Stanwyck), linked to the world beyond her apartment only by a bedside telephone, gradually discovers that the city outside her open window is hatching a plot that will result in her murder that very evening.

The incipient hegemony of the domestic was threatened by another sort of invasion in 1948, when television arrived in the American home. Like cigarette smoking in the 1960s, television in the late forties was the subject of studies and counterstudies, each heightening or allaying anxieties over the new technology's impact. While research carried out in southern California presented television viewing as an activity that monopolized energies and decreased time spent on everything from pleasure driving to family conversation, a 1948 CBS-Rutgers University survey emphasized the "new family interests" that developed in TV homes after six months of ownership, including 32 percent of respondents who reported "new interest in each other" (half of whom said that the new interest in each other revolved around "television itself"). In his important book, *Radio, Television, and Society* (1950), Charles A. Steppmann lamented the decline of privacy in a "gregarious" and "noisy" world too often given over to collective, mass experiences, yet found television a "more private, intimate, and personal" medium than radio or cinema, and one ideally suited to the exploration of psychological themes.³¹ Early advertisements for television reveal the society's need to conceptualize television as a social instrument consistent with domesticity and to otherwise contain its disruptive potential. In one advertisement a mirror was pointedly used to multiply the number of people pictured, apparently to emphasize that television was compatible with, and even encouraged, social activity; in another, to optimistically emphasize television's ability to function in the traditional home, the set was placed in a colonial-style room beneath a collection of mounted antique plates; in others—in which television's role in generating images of spectacle with enormous mass appeal seemed to be denied—the intruding technology was surrounded with encyclopedias, books, framed art, potted plants, and other signs of civilization, culture, learning, and elitism. Still another approach, designed to assuage concerns about the medium's hypnotic qualities as well as its impact on sociability and activity, was to present at least one viewer turned partially or completely away from the instrument, sharing with others some television-inspired thought or, in the case of children, acting out an image displayed on the screen.³²

The separation of the forties into half-decades—the first half characterized by World War II, the group, democracy, sentimentality, and production, the second half by the cold war, the individual, freedom, domesticity, and consumption—provides the most basic sort of outline for understanding some of the era's major themes and developments. But the differences between the

first and second halves of the decade were neither complete nor unqualified. In contrast to the "we" imperative of the war years, popular song of the time rang with a litany of "I," "I," "I," and the frequent mention of "slackers" in wartime films and newsreel serials such as *The March of Time* belied the assumption that the war had produced an easy consensus on the value of productivity.³³ Granting the far-reaching domesticity of the postwar years, the culture of domesticity was, as we have seen, a contentious one whose ability to absorb postwar social tensions and fissures was something less than complete. As the mass strikes of 1946 revealed, the production-centered culture of the war years did not yield at once or fully to the imperative of consumption. One might interpret the Taft-Hartley Act, which contained several measures to discourage strikes, as an effort to redirect the energies of workers away from the still-vital arena of the workplace and toward the developing ideology of consumption.

Nor do other data fit as neatly as one might wish into the wartime-peace-time framework. Although the arrival of commercial television, the Polaroid Land camera (a commercial success in 1949), and xerography (the Xerox copier appeared in 1950) would seem to make a strong case for the late 1940s as a newly visual culture, other elements of the period's heightened visual sensibility, including *Life* magazine and *The March of Time* newsreels, date to the mid-1930s. If one demarcates the decade by the wide and wild ties worn by men of all ages, then the forties began in late 1943, when the bold cravat was first introduced, and ended in 1951, when the Red Scarf, the Korean War, and concern about the Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb (1949) led to a more sober and conservative male look.³⁴ Similarly, the creative spark that produced the excitement, energy, and individual virtuosity of bebop jazz was struck in 1939, two years before the United States entered the war against Japan and Germany. While hard-boiled detectives seem a perfect representation of the decade, Raymond Chandler's famous protagonist, Philip Marlowe, was introduced in 1939, and Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade dates to the late 1920s. Scholars have most thoroughly studied the intellectual life of the forties through the prism of politics, focusing on the death rattle of Marxism and the decline of ideology as the decade's most salient themes; yet disaffection with radicalism was under way in the mid-1930s—when word of Stalin's purge of his political opponents reached the United States—and had taken another step forward in 1939 with the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact. If one used cinematic trends to mark major turning points, the forties might begin rather sensibly in 1941, with Orson Welles's exploration in *Citizen Kane* of multiple narrators, the flashback, chiaroscuro cinematography, and other techniques that would characterize the new genre of film noir. But the end of that era would not arrive until 1958 when another Welles film, *Touch of Evil*, proved to be the last contribution to the genre.

Divided the forties surely were, but the decade just as surely had its own

essence: doubt. This doubt was rooted in the forebodings of an age that had witnessed a war that left sixty million persons dead; the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust; the development and use of the atomic bomb; the Great Depression, which seemed always on the verge of reappearing; and the cold war, which ironically matched the nation against the Soviet Union, its wartime ally. Against the backdrop of these events, Americans questioned the central assumptions of their culture: the essential goodness of man; the immutability of progress; the worthiness of democracy; the feasibility of freedom; the beneficence of science. Although this questioning continued into the next decade—fueled by the fall of China to communism in 1949, the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, and the fervor of Sen. Joseph McCarthy's campaign against internal subversion—by the mid-1950s Americans had repressed, modulated, or put to rest most of the concerns over which they had agonized just a few years before.

The asking of fundamental questions in the forties produced a culture that was more pessimistic and cynical than before, but it did not—at least not at the time—create anything resembling a new, more negative cultural consensus. Instead, ambivalence held sway. Culture took the form of disparate and conflicting responses to the central problems of forties existence. At the deepest level of their culture, Americans simply did not know whether to smother their anxieties with pension plans and the security of domesticity or celebrate chance as a way of transcending the controlling structures and institutions of modern society. They could not decide whether to embrace the science that had produced wonder drugs and radar or deny the cold rationalism that had brought forth the bomb and engulfed the emotional side of the human psyche. They could not be sure whether the hope of the future lay in the international arena of Wendell Willkie's "one world" and the United Nations or—in the other side of the spectrum, bypassing the sphere of politics and society—in the unconscious mind of the individual self. Americans of the forties lived their lives in a present that was every bit as uncertain as the depression-ridden past they were fleeing and the atomic-age future they feared.

Chronology

- 1939 Inspiration for bebop strikes Charlie Parker.
- 1940 Germans conquer France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Norway, and Romania. First peacetime draft in U.S. history 29 October.
- 1941 Rachel Carson's *Under the Sea-Wind* is published. *Time* and *Life* publisher Henry Luce proclaims the "American Century." *Citizen Kane* named best film of 1941 by New York Film Critics. Japanese attack Pearl Harbor 7 December.
- 1942 Irving Berlin's "White Christmas" becomes best-selling song ever. Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* opens on Broadway, 18 November. Margaret Mead's *And Keep Your Powder Dry* is published. Battle of Stalingrad turns tide of war on Eastern Front.
- 1943 John Cage directs percussion program at Museum of Modern Art. Popular Library, publisher of paperback books, founded. Pentagon completed 15 January. Roy Stryker begins Standard Oil of New Jersey photography project. Norman Rockwell paints *Four Freedoms for Saturday Evening Post*. Wendell Willkie's *One World*, based on forty-nine-day tour of Allied fronts, is published. D-Day—Allied troops land at Normandy beaches 6 June. Kate Smith raises \$39 million in marathon radio war-bond drive 21 September.
- 1944 Committee on Research in Economic History outlines entrepreneurship as field of study. Dwight Macdonald founds the journal *Politics*.

- 1945 "Sentimental Journey" is no. 1 popular song 13 June. Vannevar Bush confirms new role of federal government in science in report to the president, *Science: The Endless Frontier*, July. The United States drops an atomic bomb on Hiroshima 6 August. World War II ends in Europe, 8 May, and in the Pacific, 14 August. *The Last Weekend*, a film about alcoholism, is chosen the year's best film by the New York Film Critics. *Red Pyramid*, an Alexander Calder mobile, exhibited.
- 1946 Dr. Benjamin Spock's *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* is published. ENIAC computer developed at University of Pennsylvania. John Hersey's *Hiroshima* is published. Jean-Paul Sartre visits New York City, January. William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* is universally declared best picture of the year. French critic Nino Frank coins term *film noir*.
- 1947 Courses in "Western civilization" are popular on college campuses. Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* opens at Coronet Theater in New York City 29 January. Jackie Robinson, first black major-league baseball player, signs with Brooklyn Dodgers. Sex-crime "panic" begins. Ferdinand Lundberg and Maryna F. Farnham's *Modern Woman* describes woman as "the lost sex." Lionel Trilling's novel *The Middle of the Journey* is published. Mickey Spillane introduces detective Mike Hammer in *I, the Jury*. Laura Hobson's *Gentleman's Agreement*, about anti-Semitism, is a nonfiction best-seller. Truman Doctrine, to aid Greece and Turkey against communism, outlined 12 March. Christian Dior introduces the "New Look" for the "womanly woman," April. *Life with Father* sets record with 3,183 consecutive performances at the Empire Theater in New York City, 14 June. UFO scare, July. Suburban development of Levittown opens on Long Island, October. Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* opens on Broadway 3 December. Bing Crosby is the nation's top money-making performer for the fourth straight year. Actor's Studio, reaching "Method" acting, opens. Bernard Baruch coins the phrase *cold war*.
- 1948 Television becomes a major industry. Jackson Pollock begins his "action" paintings, pioneering abstract expressionism. Alfred C. Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, the first volume of the Kinsey Report, is published. B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* is published. Architect Eero Saarinen wins Jefferson National Expansion Memorial competition with design for parabolic arch, to be constructed in St. Louis. Ted Mack's "The Original Amateur Hour" premieres 18 January. Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" is published in the *New Yorker*. State of Israel proclaimed 14 May. Premiere per-
- formance of Samuel Barber's cantata, *Knoxville, Summer of 1915*, with text by James Agee. *Life* roundtable, "The Pursuit of Happiness," July, Rye, New York. Berlin airlift begins 15 July. R. Buckminster Fuller builds his first geodesic dome. Robert Flaherty's documentary film *Louisiana Story* premieres 28 September. Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and Dale Carnegie's *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* are fiction and nonfiction best-sellers, respectively. Jack Kerouac travels the country, his adventures to be described in *On the Road* (1957). Richard Hofstadter's *The American Political Tradition* is published. Arthur Godfrey's relaxed style makes him radio's biggest star. Garry Davis emerges as leader of the world citizenship movement. Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics* is published. *Time's* Man of the Year is Harry Truman, "Fighter in a Fighting Year."
- 1949 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Vital Center* and Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* are published. Ezra Pound wins Bollingen Prize for *The Pisan Cantos*. Hank Williams becomes country star with "Lovesick Blues," released in February. First performance of Leonard Bernstein's symphony, *The Age of Anxiety*, April. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) created 4 April. Evangelist Billy Graham opens his first crusade, in Los Angeles, September. Soviets detonate atomic bomb. Pyramid friendship clubs are national rage. *Billboard* changes "race" music category to rhythm and blues. George R. Stewart's *Earth Aides* is published.
- 1950 Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society* and L. Ron Hubbard's *Dianetics* are published. Muzak Corporation has 10,000 customers in 150 cities. David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* presents concepts of "inner-directed" and "other-directed." Theodor Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* is published.
- 1952 Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Irony of American History* is published.

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