

## **What was it like to live in the US during World War II (WWII) and its aftermath?**

The first part of this discussion involves the social and economic impact of war production on the United States (US) population. The second part is more aligned with the war's effect on personal lives.

### **Manufacturing**

WWII made the US a world power and an economic world leader, with war production propelling the United States (US) economy from Depression era levels to a robustness that hadn't ever been seen. After the events of December 1941 put the US at war with Japan and Germany, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) set staggering goals for the nation's factories: 60,000 aircraft in 1942 and 125,000 in 1943; 120,000 tanks in the same time period and 55,000 anti-aircraft guns.

Prior to that time, America's military preparedness was not that of a nation expecting to go to war. In 1939, the United States Army ranked only thirty-ninth in the world, with a cavalry force of 50,000 and horses to pull the artillery. Americans were reluctant to participate in the conflict that had spread throughout Europe and Asia; we were still recovering from the ten-year ordeal of the Great Depression. FDR did what he could to coax an unwilling nation to focus on military preparedness. The contention was that, although the American military wasn't yet equal to the Germans or the Japanese, American workers could mobilize to build ships and planes faster than the enemy could sink them or shoot them down.

When the time came, mobilize we did: companies already engaged in defense work expanded. Factories that had previously made everything from automobiles to waffle irons were now producing munitions, bombs, planes, ships and other war material exclusively.

This was the likely scenario for Joe and Steve's plant. In the final pages of the script, George asks Joe what the plant is manufacturing now. Joe replies, "A little of everything. Pressure cookers, an assembly for washing machines. Got a nice, flexible plant now", attesting that his factory had returned to manufacturing the metal goods and types of machinery it had made before the War, before they had been engaged to make the airplane engines. Because of the growth they experienced because of the war, they are much more than the machine shop they used to be.

The automobile industry was transformed completely. In 1941, more than three million cars were manufactured in the United States. Only 139 more were made during the entire war. Chrysler now made fuselages; General Motors made airplane engines, guns, trucks and tanks. Packard made Rolls Royce engines for the British air force. In its massive Willow Run plant in Ypsilanti, Michigan, the Ford Motor Company performed something like a miracle 24/7. The average Ford car had some 15,000 parts. The B-24 Liberator long-range bomber had 1,550,000, yet one came off the line every 63 minutes.

Willow Run wasn't the only factory that ran around the clock. Factory workers put in

seven day weeks, clocking twelve-hour days Monday through Friday, ten hours on Saturday, and eight hours on Sunday. Money was the least of the concerns—workers were incentivized to produce material that would win the war and bring US soldiers home.



Rows of airplane propellers, ready for shipment, from a Hartford, CT plant.  
Sign in the background reads "Every Minute Counts."

American factory output was responsible for the US building more planes in 1944 than the Japanese did from 1939 to 1945. Shipyards turned out tonnage so fast that by the autumn of 1943, all Allied shipping vessels that had been sunk since 1939 had been replaced, and the US launched more vessels in 1941 than Japan did in the entire war.

Increases in manufacturing due to wartime production can be seen on the charts on p. 6 of this document: <http://www.taphilo.com/history/WWII/Production-Figures-WWII.shtml>

Before I read about the scandal involving government inspectors and the factory in Lockland, Ohio, I situated the Keller household outside of Detroit. As I wrote in the glossary, Miller was careful not to identify a specific town as the play's setting to maintain its ubiquity; like the title, it was meant to illustrate our commonality and universalism. An exact location was irrelevant to Miller, yet there are clues in the play and in his other writing that pinpoint possible locations. In his introduction to his *Collected Plays* (New York: Viking, 1957), he wrote about the "pious lady from the Middle West" who "told of a family in her neighborhood which had been destroyed when the daughter turned the father into the authorities on discovering that he had been selling faulty machinery to the Army".

Why did I first think of Detroit? As the center of automobile manufacturing in the US, its factories were enlisted to manufacture huge volumes of aircraft and aircraft parts both for the UC and the Allies during WWII. Joe Keller identifies himself as “the guy who sold cracked cylinder heads to the Army Air Force ... the guy who made twenty-one P-40s crash in Australia.” (p. 28). As I mentioned in the glossary, engines for the P-40s, 21 of which crashed in Australia in 1945 because of the cracked cylinder heads that Joe’s factory shipped out, were manufactured by the Curtiss-Wright Corporation. Curtiss-Wright was best known for the Curtiss P-40 Warhawk (Kittyhawk or Tomahawk to the British), which were built between 1940 and 1944. During the first year of American participation in WWII, the aircraft came to symbolize the United States Army Air Corps. Wright Aeronautical, based in Dayton, Ohio, built the engines for the Curtiss P-40 Warhawk.

The Curtiss P-40 Warhawk was not the only P-40 model, however. Rolls-Royce Merlin aircraft engines were also installed in the P-40s. Before WWII, they were made exclusively in the UK. Once England entered the War, the British aviation industry expanded greatly and contracted the manufacture of the engines to the Packard Motor Car Company, based in Detroit. Rolls-Royce and the Packard Motor Car Company sealed the deal in September 1940 with a \$130,000,000 order, the equivalent of \$2,241,868,571.43 in 2017, to manufacture the Merlin under license. The first Packard-built engine, designated V-1650-1, ran in August 1941.

Not only was the engine licensed to expand production of the Rolls-Royce Merlin for British use, it also filled a gap in the U.S. at a time when comparably powered US engines were not available.

When the US entered the War, the heavy demand for the Packard V-1650 engines required Packard to contract out some of the manufacture to smaller companies that were equipped to produce automobile engines. If Joe’s factory had been one of them, and since Packard was based in Detroit, it would make sense that the Keller’s home be on the outskirts of Detroit.

Kate talks about Ann living 700 miles away in New York. The distance from Detroit to NYC is 655 miles. Kate talks to Chris about seeing Larry fly overhead while in training. George Army Airfield, a World War II military airfield, was located 5 miles east-northeast of Lawrenceville, Illinois. It operated as an advanced pilot training school for the United States Army Air Forces from 1942 until 1945. It is 348 miles from Detroit, and would have taken about an hour to fly there at that time, so it is conceivable that Larry could have flown over the family home while training.

The Ohio Penitentiary in Columbus, where George is visiting his father (on page 34, Kate says, “He’s been in Columbus since this morning with Steve”), is 207 miles from Detroit. George tells Ann he will be taking a train to see her at the Keller’s, “On the seven o’clock” (Ann, p. 34). A train traveling directly from Columbus to Detroit would take about five hours today, and more in those days. (“We’ve been waiting for you all

afternoon,” Chris says on p. 43 of the script.) This fits neatly into the time frame of the play, as George would need the additional time to leave the prison and get himself to the train station.

On page 18 of the script, Chris suggests that all of them, “maybe go dancing out at the shore”. If the setting is the outskirts of Detroit, Michigan, Chris could be talking about the shores of either the Detroit River or Lake Saint Clair.

So, yes, a case could be made for another Midwestern town, and possibly others, attesting to the play’s universal message

### **Other Wartime Manufacturing**

US economic and industrial growth wasn’t limited to the materials of war: by the time both Germany and Japan had surrendered, the US, with about 5 percent of the world’s population, was producing half of the world’s manufactured goods.

The US was also supplying the Allies with food. In 1944, American farms produced 324 million more bushels of wheat and 477 million more bushels of corn than in 1939.

Garment factories were enlisted to make uniforms for military personnel, sew heavy overcoats, assemble parachutes, and make blimp envelopes. Increased production saw a gain in growth for those companies as well, which in turn made their proprietors wealthier. It also increased their vulnerability: the prosperity of these companies put them in danger of being overtaken by a conglomerate once the war ended.

### **Employment**

As described above, US workers played a vital role in the production of war-related materials. US citizens flocked to meet the demand for labor in industrial production, relocating within the country in search of defense jobs, often for more pay than they previously had ever earned. Ethnic groups such as African Americans and Hispanics found job opportunities as never before. Women also began securing jobs as welders, electricians and riveters in defense plants. Until that time, such positions had been strictly for men only. Before the war young women typically worked for a few years, then left their jobs when they married and had children. But when the war broke out and millions of men left factory jobs to fight overseas, the government encouraged women to enter the workforce, often to do jobs they had never done before.

The entry of so many women into the workforce led to an unintentional revolution, not only in women’s rights and gender roles but also in our society’s views on sex. The changes in attitudes that came about would endure—there was no turning back. The first women to respond to the call in 1940 became blue-collar workers. Many were working-class wives, widows, divorcees, and students who needed income to make ends meet. Industrial jobs, which often paid three times more than cleaning and food service jobs, drew both white and African American women into factories.



Female welders labor at Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company

In 1943, a mythical woman, Rosie the Riveter, emerged from the lyrics of a song and was immortalized in the May 29, 1943, *Saturday Evening Post* cover artwork by renown illustrator Norman Rockwell. A softer more feminine, less beefy, muscular version of Rosie appeared soon afterward on government-commissioned posters, accompanied by "We Can Do It" in bold type.



"We Can Do It!" poster for Westinghouse, picturing the cultural icon, Rosie the Riveter



Geraldine Doyle at 17, posing as Rosie the Riveter. Propaganda imagery from that time often pictured women holding factory tools like one would hold a gun

*LIFE* magazine identified Rosie the Riveter as “neither drudge nor slave but the heroine of a new order.” Geraldine Doyle (pictured above) posed for the government posters and for photographs of Rosie at work.

Female industrial workers could not keep up with demand as the war progressed and more men left for the war. The September 6, 1943, issue of *Newsweek* reported that 3.2 million new workers were needed for industry—primarily in munitions—in the next two months. Although the government, at the suggestion of Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady of the US, considered following the British example of drafting women into industry, it refrained, and relied on public relations to recruit more female labor. To promote their cause (and counteract any sexist objections), the government launched its “Victory” campaigns. Posters served as Public Service Announcements (PSAs) to instill a sense of patriotic duty in women, getting them out of the house and into the workforce. These women were told they were supporting their country’s success during wartime, leading to the term “Victory Gals” (V-Gals).

Campaigns like the one pictured in three parts below, which was sponsored by Kleenex, appeared in magazines and newspapers. They challenged traditional beliefs that a woman’s place was in the home. Wives were encouraged to describe their jobs to their disapproving husbands as a way to help the nation win the war. Society considered men the family breadwinners, and men identified with that role, investing their status, purpose and pride in it.

The campaigns succeeded: in 1943 and early 1944, the height of wartime industrial production, almost 50 percent of all adult women were employed, many in industrial jobs.

# What to tell your husband

if he objects  
to your getting  
a war-time job

[envisioningtheamericandream.com](http://envisioningtheamericandream.com)



**1. ANSWER:** It isn't a question of pride! Millions more women *must* take jobs or our war effort will bog down! It means winning the war—saving the lives of our boys! It's up to each husband to help his wife get a job.



**2. ANSWER:** Just as fighters need weapons, so civilians must have restaurants, stores, laundries, buses, etc. to keep going. That's why housewives, who take vital *civilian* jobs, help speed victory just as much as girls in war plants!



**3. ANSWER:** A wife's job does not, in itself, affect her husband's draft status in any way. And isn't it better for you to get a *job* now... if he's to be called anyway...and have a definite plan to support yourself and your family?

[envisioningtheamericandream.com](http://envisioningtheamericandream.com)





**WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT SOME OTHER TIME!**

**BUT HOW CAN YOU FIND A JOB?**

**4. ANSWER:** Right now is the time to discuss it! Because your country needs women *at once!* Millions of them! With or without experience! Full time or part time! In war plants and in civilian jobs.

**5. ANSWER:** Easy! The want ads in your newspaper show the kind of jobs in *your town.* And you can get free advice at your local U. S. Employment Service Office. "*The More Women at Work—The Sooner We'll Win!*"

Published in the interest of the war effort by \*Kleenex Tissues

Paper, too, has a war-time job . . . that's why there's not enough Kleenex to go around. But regardless of what others do, we are determined to maintain *Kleenex quality* in every particular, consistent with government regulations.

(T. M. REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.)

envisioningtheamericandream.com

Society's traditional roles for women—as wives, mothers and homemakers—and for men—to be the family breadwinners, are very much the roles that Kate and Joe have fully invested in. They not only give them identity and purpose, but provide their reason for being. Kate is the consummate wife and mother; even those outside her immediate family are taken under her wing. For Joe, there is “nothin’ bigger” than the family. His role as patriarch and provider governs all of his actions—“that's all I ever lived for”—and it doesn’t end there. He sees his life’s efforts as providing for his family even after his death: “Chris... Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. I'm sixty-one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty-one years old you don't get another chance, do ya?”

There was a downside to this new prosperity. Gains had been brought about during the Great Depression (TGD) that encouraged workers’ hopes for the achievement of economic justice. However, in this new economic climate, tensions were often high between labor unions, which in spite of no-strike pledges, felt the need to continue to protect worker’s rights. Therefore, they could not stop strikes altogether. US citizens, who believed that any slowdown in production would cost American lives overseas, were outraged to hear of any work stoppages. In one instance when the United Mine Workers



went on strike in 1943, newspapers condemned the miners as traitors. On June 25, 1943, Congress passed the War Labor Disputes Act (Smith-Connally Act), authorizing the President to take over plants needed for the war effort or where war production had ceased because of a labor dispute. It was a far cry from the government's social/economic programs and support of unions during TGD.

### Conservation

In an attempt to coordinate government war agencies, Roosevelt created the War Production Board in 1942 and the Office of War Mobilization in 1943. To raise money for defense, these agencies relied on a number of techniques: calling on the American people to ration certain commodities, generating more tax revenue by lowering the personal exemption, and selling government war bonds to individuals and financial institutions. All of these methods served to provide the government with revenue and at the same time keep inflation under control.

Consumers were issued ration cards to limit their purchases of groceries and gasoline. A gasoline ration card is pictured below.

Form OPA R-504

BUY UNITED STATES WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION

**GASOLINE RATION CARD**

**Nº 4078174**

**B-3**

THE ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF THIS CARD CONSTITUTE AN AGREEMENT THAT THE HOLDER WILL OBSERVE THE RULES AND REGULATIONS GOVERNING GASOLINE RATIONING AS ISSUED BY THE OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION

OWNER'S NAME James H. Lockwood

STREET ADDRESS St. Vincent's Hospital

CITY OR POST OFFICE Jacksonville STATE Fla.

MAKE Mercury BODY STYLE Sedan

VEHICLE REGISTRATION NO. 2D-6881 STATE OF REGISTRATION Fla.

READ INSTRUCTIONS ON REVERSE SIDE OF THIS CARD

ONE UNIT ONE UNIT ONE UNIT ONE UNIT ONE UNIT ONE UNIT ONE UNIT ONE UNIT ONE UNIT

*James H. Lockwood, M.D.* (SIGNATURE)

Rationing gasoline had nothing to do with fuel shortage—America had plenty of gasoline. What it lacked was rubber. Both the Army and Navy were in desperate need of rubber. Imports had fallen off markedly because many of the traditional sources were now in Japanese hands. Synthetic rubber factories were only just undergoing construction.

Meeting the military's enormous needs would be nearly impossible if the civilians at home didn't cut out nonessential driving to conserve on tire wear. The best way to achieve that was to make it more difficult for people to use their cars, and the best way to do that was to limit the amount of gasoline an individual could purchase.

Mandatory gasoline rationing had been in effect in the eastern US since May 1942, but a voluntary program in other parts of the country had proven unsuccessful. So, backed by government procurement agencies and military leaders, FDR ordered gasoline rationing to begin on Dec. 1, 1942 and to last "the duration."

Americans soon became acquainted with the ration card, which had to be presented on every trip to the filling station.

The enormous demands for other materials, particularly anything with metal, needed for the manufacture of weapons and munitions, as well as all kinds of food, created tremendous wartime shortages. The US had total responsibility for feeding and clothing its own military during the war, as well as handling food shortages in some Allied countries, like Britain and Russia. Mandatory rationing began on sugar in May 1942; it gradually expanded to include many other foods: some dairy products, red meat, and canned food. Lard replaced butter. Households juggled the accommodation of shortages and rationing while keeping family members nourished with healthy foods. In 1943, to assist in coping with scarcity, the Home Service staff at General Mills published a Betty Crocker cookbook entitled *Your Share: How to Prepare Appetizing, Healthful Meals with Foods Available Today*. The scarcity of certain foods led families to grow their own food. The government encouraged people to plant fruits and vegetables on any square patch of land available. These became known as Victory Gardens. In 1944, families planted seven million acres that yielded eight million tons of vegetables.

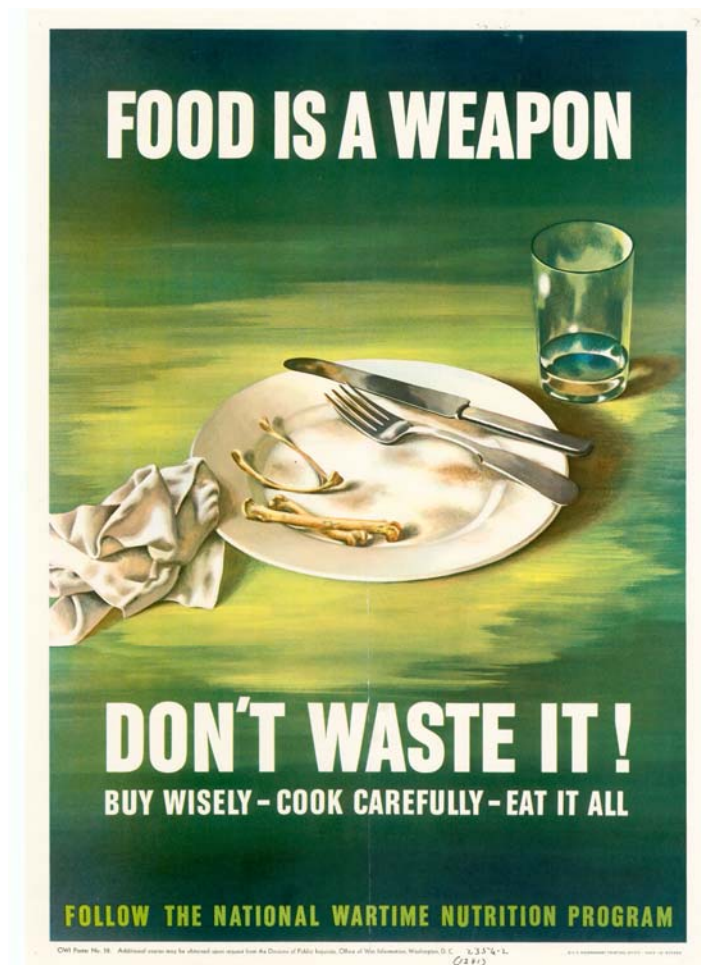


Victory garden poster (USA), 1940s

As discussed on p.9 of this document, tires, many rubber products, and gasoline were rationed. As a result, travel to purchase goods had to be carefully planned. Families also participated in recycling drives to collect metal, waste paper used to make fuses, and bones made into explosives. Despite a coal shortage, which created a severe chill across the northern states, families were able to manage.

The diversion of fabrics to the military dictated civilian fashion: long evening gowns went out, along with style embellishments like cuffs, pleats, vests, patch pockets, and wide padded shoulders, which used extraneous material. To the moral alarm of many, women began to wear skimpy two-piece bathing suits. Posters reminded Americans of the reasons for the shortages and asked them to make do by conserving, by avoiding the black market, and by generally becoming more self-reliant.

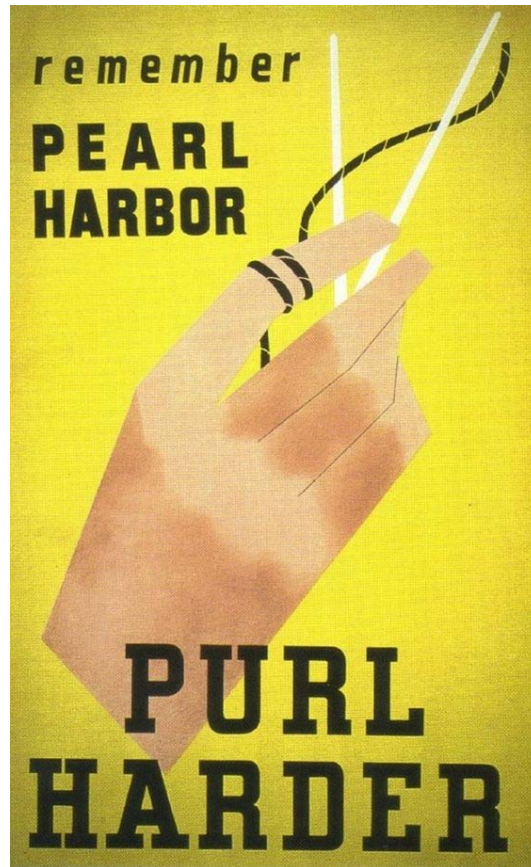
Nowhere is the totality of the war effort seen more clearly than on posters that connect the campaigns overseas with cleaning one's plate, or saving bacon grease. (Glycerin in recycled fat was used for ammunition and for some medicines.)



WWII Food Conservation Poster 1943

Another poster, seen below, encouraged the making of one's own clothes with a pun on

Pearl Harbor and the purling stitch in knitting: “Remember Pearl Harbor. Purl Harder”.



Selling bonds to the poorest Americans was good for the war effort because it helped to reduce inflation. It also tied the interests of a large group of citizens to that of the national government.

Bonds helped to reduce inflation by redirecting demand away from consumer goods, most of which were in short supply due to the shift to wartime production and the decreased availability of certain strategic raw materials (more about this later).

Bonds also decreased the likelihood of civil unrest, which can be heightened during wartime, by making the government a debtor to as many people as possible. By doing so, they capitalized on the difficult financial lessons learned by US citizens during TGD. Bondholders were determined to protect their investment, disdaining anything that would threaten the security of their principal and interest, from the Führer himself to the neighbor trying to circumvent the rationing system. Widespread ownership of bonds also decreased perceptions that the poor were being taxed to support wealthy investors.

Bonds cost \$25, or the equivalent of \$389.41 in 2017, an amount out of reach for low-income Americans. In 1942, production workers averaged only 86¢ (\$13.40) per hour; even by the war's end they averaged only \$1.06 (\$14.40). However, people often had the



means to purchase a 25¢ stamp (\$3.89) that they could paste into a book like the one shown below.



WWII War Bond Stamp Book

Seventy-five stamps, for a total of \$18.75, purchased a \$25 savings bond. Savings bonds, like those of the famous Series E, were of the discount variety. In other words, the \$25 was the payment made to the bondholder when the bond matured years afterward; the \$6.25 difference between the face (\$25) and purchase price (\$18.75) was the interest.



WWII Ration Stamps & War Bonds Poster

### Propaganda

World War II propaganda posters like the ones pictured above helped to mobilize a nation. Inexpensive, accessible, and ever-present, the poster was an ideal vehicle for making war objectives the personal mission of every citizen. Government agencies, businesses, and private organizations issued an array of poster images linking the military front with the home front—calling upon every American to boost production at work and at home. Posters conveyed more than simple slogans. Posters expressed the needs and goals of the people who created them.





The well-known and beloved illustrator, Norman Rockwell, made a series of four paintings (shown above) illustrating the "Four Freedoms" – freedom from fear, freedom of speech, freedom from want, and freedom of worship – that had wide appeal to American sentiments. They were widely reproduced and collected.

Another form of propaganda was the playing of newsreels, which were the forerunner of TV news, before every film in the movie houses. The Office of War Information (OWI) had control over the content of films that were distributed. Nearly 100 million people went to the movies weekly during World War II. That was three out of every four men, women, and children in the country.

Well aware of how many people flocked to the movie houses, the government positioned itself to take advantage of the captive audience. The OWI, established in June 1942 to promote the war effort, distributed a manual that advised film studios to make movies that would help win the war. In case there were any questions about how to do that, the OWI reviewed screenplays and offered rewrite suggestions. Though the OWI had no power to censor films, it leveraged all the clout it needed by working with the Office of Censorship, which controlled what movies the studios could ship to the lucrative foreign markets.

So, due in part to what interested a people at war and in part to the strong-arming of the OWI, movies of the early Forties focused on fostering a patriotic atmosphere that encouraged people to make sacrifices for the war effort. About 30 percent of movies released during this time related directly to the war. "That was very important to people who had someone overseas ..." recalled actress Kitty Carlisle Hart in an interview published at [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org). "Everyone cared about those war movies."

At the OWI's insistence, movies presented an idealized war that America always won. America was presented at her finest, Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin's brutal history was glossed over, and the British class system disappeared. Nazis were sinister and the Japanese were unfailingly depicted as myopic devotees of a warmongering emperor. The enemy was always presented in Hollywood war movies as sneering and sadistic barbarians, causing audiences to hate the people of an enemy country, not just their leaders.

*Since You Went Away* was the epitome of the utopian wartime film. Produced by David O. Selznick of *Gone with the Wind* fame, and loaded with stars, it had Dad joining the military, Mom taking a job in a war-production factory, and the African American housekeeper working overtime for the family for no extra pay. It ended with Dad returning home after the war on a snowy Christmas Eve and everything returning to normal, only better.



A movie still from *Since You Went Away*, with Shirley Temple (left) and Jennifer Jones

By war's end Hollywood, with the help of the OWI, could boast that its participation in the propaganda machine built morale, supplied an essential escape, and still managed to produce some classics, *Casablanca* being a notable one.

### **Popular Culture**

WWII impacted all areas of popular culture, including movies, radio, sports, music, dancing and fashion.

Movies didn't cost much, which is why it was such a popular pastime for such an overwhelming majority of Americans. It cost a total of 25¢ (\$3.89 now) to go out to the movies: 5¢ (78¢ now) each way on the streetcar, 10¢ (\$1.56 now) for the movie, and 5¢ (78¢) for concessions.

Radio was the chief form of news and entertainment, with almost 80% of the households in the US owning a radio. Listening, especially to news broadcasts, increased during wartime. Most Americans first heard about Pearl Harbor when a news flash broke into a music program on the radio networks. Large numbers of Americans also tuned in to FDR's "fireside chats". From March 1933 to June 1944, Roosevelt addressed the American people in some 30 speeches broadcast via radio, speaking on a variety of topics from banking to unemployment to fighting fascism in Europe. Millions of people found comfort and renewed confidence in these speeches.



A noticeably fatigued FDR gives his fireside chat on the Tehran Conference and Cairo Conference, December 24, 1943

Roosevelt was not actually sitting beside a fireplace when he delivered the speeches, but the moniker, coined by a journalist, stuck. It perfectly evoked the comforting intent behind Roosevelt's words, as well as their informal, conversational tone. FDR began many of the nighttime chats with the greeting "My friends," and referred to himself as "I" and the American people as "you" as if addressing his listeners directly and personally.

In many of the speeches, Roosevelt invoked memories of the Founding Fathers, Abraham Lincoln or other inspirational figures from America's past. "The Star-Spangled Banner" was played after each chat ended, underlining his patriotic message. The president appealed to God or Providence at the end of almost every speech, urging the American people to face the difficult tasks ahead with patience, understanding and faith. Through depression and war, the reassuring nature of the fireside chats boosted the public's confidence.

Sports continued in wartime. Although America's entrance into World War I (WWI) had ended the 1918 baseball season, fears that the war would jeopardize baseball again in 1942 were quashed when FDR declared, "I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going" and added that he would like to see more night games that hard-working people could attend. Roosevelt, himself a fan, also noted that baseball could provide entertainment for at least 20 million people, and added that although the quality of the teams might be lowered by the greater use of older players replacing young men going into military service, this would not dampen the popularity of the sport. He was right—when white male ballplayers were drafted into the military, the Negro Baseball Leagues grew quite popular.



1942 New York Black Yankees Negro League

Chicago Cubs owner and chewing gum magnate Philip K. Wrigley established the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, which became a popular attraction during the war, inspiring the movie *A League of Their Own*.



First AAGPBL players signed in 1943

Songs captured the emotions of the war. Some spoke of the longings that loved ones felt for each other when they were separated by events, and many of these songs have endured. The lyrics of "I'll Walk Alone" promised to walk alone "til you're walking beside me," and ask the loved one to do the same. Other songs of longing included "Shoo-Shoo Baby" where the Andrews Sisters told a young one not to cry "because your papa's off to the seven seas". They sing, "Papa's gotta be rough now / so that he can be sweet to you another day."



The Andrews Sisters in WWII Uniform

The lyrics for "I'm Making Believe" said, "You're in my arms though I know you're so far away." "I'll Be Seeing You" reminisced about the familiar places, including, "that small café/the park across the way/the children's carousel/the chestnut trees/the wishing well". The singer ends with, "I'll find you in the morning sun/And when the night is new/I'll be looking at the moon/But I'll be seeing you."

In 1943, "I'll be Home by Christmas" struck a bittersweet note when it finished with "... if only in my dreams." The song was at the top of charts for 11 weeks, and the original Bing Crosby version along with countless others have been popular sellers ever since.

Jazz was the most popular form of music during the war, but there were audiences for country music, western swing, blues and R&B (rhythm and blues).

It was hard to keep bands together: by October 1942, the jazz magazine *Down Beat* was running a regular feature called "Killed in Action," listing musicians who had been lost. At one point, there were over 60 bandleaders who enlisted. Others, like Benny Goodman, who couldn't qualify because of health or age, volunteered to play for the troops through the USO (United Service Organizations) or made special "V-Discs" (Victory discs) that were distributed to troops.



*Down Beat* magazine, 1942

Jazz also became a part of the cultural war that raged alongside the fighting war. Because Jazz was rooted in African-American music, the racist Nazi regime had branded it "the art of the subhuman." Yet, the music stayed alive in Nazi-occupied Europe. When Germans banned the playing of American music in Paris, local musicians simply changed the titles from English to French.

A group of young German jazz and swing lovers, mainly in Hamburg and Berlin, known as "Swing Kids" (Swingjugen) met in secret, defying the Gestapo, and played the forbidden records. They also tuned in to Allied radio and danced. Jazz Kids would listen to American jazz records and feel a tie to America even when Allied bombers were overhead. While the enemies of the US were being presented in Hollywood war movies as sneering and sadistic barbarians (p. 15 of this document), German youth were connecting to the people of the US through music. They would pay a cruel price for it.





Swing Kids in Hamburg, Germany in the late 1930s

On 18 August 1941, in a brutal police operation, over 300 Swingjugend were arrested. The measures against them ranged from cutting their hair and sending them back to school under close monitoring, to the deportation of the leaders to concentration camps. The boys went to the Moringen concentration camp while the girls were sent to Ravensbruck. This mass arrest encouraged the youth to further their political consciousness and opposition to National Socialism. They started to distribute anti-fascist propaganda.

On 2 January 1942, Heinrich Himmler ordered a clampdown on the ringleaders of the swing movement, recommending a few years in a concentration camp with beatings and forced labor. In January 1943, 19-year-old Günter Discher, one of the ringleaders of the Swing Kids, was deported to the youth concentration camp of Moringen. He was liberated by Allied troops in May 1945 and returned to Hamburg. He suffered chronic health problems as a result of his imprisonment and had to undergo several operations.

The USO was established in February 1941, before official US entry into the war. Its purpose was to provide wholesome recreation for servicemen in their off-duty hours, with a primary goal to keep them away from bars and brothels since venereal disease had historically been a problem for the military.

Women made up the core of USO volunteers, serving as senior and junior hostesses. During the war era, the government and the public at large believed that women, more so than men, could lift servicemen's morale.

USO service was appealing to young women because they wanted to do something to contribute to the war effort and they wanted to meet servicemen. Many of the men their own age were in the service, so Saturday night USO dances were the only dances available. Because the USO fashioned itself as a respectable organization, young women could feel safe socializing with male soldiers and sailors in a chaperoned environment like the USO dancehall.



Dancing at a USO dancehall

Senior hostesses were usually over the age of 35 and acted as "mothers" to the servicemen by giving them advice, baking, and sewing for them. Senior hostesses also chaperoned junior hostesses at USO dances. Junior hostesses acted as companions for servicemen inside USO clubs – they danced with them, chatted and played games like Ping-Pong with them. Junior hostesses were around the same age as servicemen and helped to distract them from the war for a little while.

Fashion was also impacted by the war. Wartime austerity led to restrictions on the number of new clothes that people bought and the amount of fabric that clothing manufacturers could use. Women working in war service adopted trousers as a practical necessity. The US government requisitioned all silk supplies, forcing the hosiery industry to completely switch to nylon. In March 1942, the government then requisitioned all nylon for parachutes and other war uses, leaving only the unpopular cotton and rayon stockings. The industry feared that not wearing stockings would become a fad, and advised stores to increase hosiery advertising. When nylon stockings reappeared in the shops there were "nylon riots" as customers fought over the first deliveries.

Most women wore skirts at or near knee-length, with simply-cut blouses or shirts and square-shouldered jackets. Popular magazines and pattern companies advised women on how to remake men's suits into smart outfits, since the men were in uniform and the cloth would otherwise sit unused. Eisenhower jackets, named after Dwight D. Eisenhower, a five-star general whom FDR made Supreme Allied Commander in Europe,



US women in Eisenhower jackets during WWII




became popular in this period. Influenced by the military, these jackets were bloused at the chest and fitted at the waist with a belt. The combination of neat blouses and sensibly tailored suits became the distinctive attire of the workingwoman, college girl, and young society matron. Ann would likely have dressed this way.

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THE EUREKA NEWS BULLETIN

**THE WRONG WAY**



HAIR LOOSE  
OPEN COLLAR  
NECKLACE  
ARMS EXPOSED  
RINGS  
LONG FINGERNAILS  
LOOSE SLACKS  
HIGH HEELED, OPEN-TOED SHOES  
CUFFS

**WAR FASHIONS**

Hard work is here and glamour is out as women take men's jobs in building ships. And men's jobs they really are; with all of the grime, discomfort and hazard. Miss Shipbuilder has learned too, that war is mighty serious business, that ships aren't being built for fun and that peace-time glamour along with spare tires and breakfast in bed is out for the duration.

Taking a tip from the men on the job, the wise feminine shipbuilder wears working clothes for comfort and safety. She wears a man's type shirt with a close fitting collar

**THE RIGHT WAY**



HAIR UP, TIGHTLY COVERED  
MAN'S JACKET OF LEATHER OR HEAVY MATERIAL  
NO JEWELRY  
BLUE JEANS OR OVERALLS  
NO CUFFS  
LOW-HEELED WORK SHOES

### FOR FEMININE SAFETY

for protection, her hair is up, closely covered to protect it against sparks and machines. She wears strong serviceable jeans or overalls without cuffs, heavy low-heeled work shoes and a closely fitting jacket for comfort.

She will leave her necklace and rings at home along with her high-heeled open-toed shoes and inflammable cellulose or silk slacks and jackets. For these are downright dangerous. Preferred colors are dark and subdued.

The safety record of women in the Higgins yard is excellent. Proper work-wear will help to keep it this way.

A page from Women's Work Safety Fashion Bulletin, October 1942.

Purchasing new clothes was a rare occurrence in wartime America because of scarcity of fabrics for the non-military population. Fabrics had to be requisitioned for military uniforms and other war materials, and women were instructed to dress to suit their newfound employment in the factories, as seen in the advertisement above.

Because of the war, current European fashion was no longer available to women in the United States. In 1941, hat makers attempted but failed to popularize Chinese and Native American-inspired designs. As with hosiery, hat makers feared that bare headedness would become popular, and introduced new designs such as "Winged Victory Turbans" and "Commando Caps" in "Victory Gold" to appeal to the prevailing patriotic and nationalistic attitudes. American designers, who were often overlooked in favor of European designers, became more popular with American women.

Austerity also affected men's civilian clothes during the war years. The "Victory Suit" was made of wool-synthetic blend yarns, without pleats, turn-up cuffs, sleeve buttons or patch pockets; jackets were shorter, trousers were narrower, and double-breasted suits were made without vests. Men who were not in uniform could, of course, continue to wear pre-war suits they already owned, and many did.

### **Emotional Impact**

It's not hard to imagine the emotional impact of the war. Despite the propaganda, the sense of unity, the gains in combat, and the comfort of the fireside chats, disheartening news and strict austerity measures had to have been difficult to bear. Many people had relatives in Europe who perished or whose lives were threatened. Jews had to contend with the rumors of the annihilation of their overseas families, friends and brethren, as well as the US government's failure to investigate or act. Everyone had friends and/or relatives who were fighting overseas, and some had lost loved ones. The lengthy work hours in the factories and disruption to the equilibrium of the home while women spent long hours working outside of it brought no small measure of challenges, even though it meant more income and steady work.

The war brought with it an uncertain future for the country as a whole. Would we be defeated, and have to succumb to Japanese and/or German rule? A 1963 novel, *The Man in the High Castle*, which Amazon made into a TV series that debuted in 2015, imagines an alternative history. Japan and Germany win WWII, with Japan establishing the "Pacific States of America" from the former Western United States, with the remaining Rocky Mountain States now a neutral buffer zone between the P.S.A. and the Nazi-occupied former Eastern United States. It is terrifying, as it must have been for US citizens who imagined a similar outcome.

The war also brought with it an uncertain future for individuals. Would young men live to realize their dreams? Would young women realize their dreams with their husbands or boyfriends? Would parents see their young sons and daughters parent their grandchildren? In the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, a squad of American Army Rangers conduct an enormously difficult mission through the battlefields of WWII to retrieve Private First-Class James Francis Ryan. They mean to return him to his family, as he is the last-surviving brother of four servicemen. The movie speaks to the value of life and the devastation of loss.

PBS.org interviewed several people who had been children on the home front during

WWII for Ken Burns' documentary series *The War*. One of them, Burt Wilson, talked about his loss of innocence as he grew to realize what war truly meant:

"We couldn't wait for the next war film to come out because it was filled with heroism and everybody sacrificing for the war and everybody who died, died for a cause," Wilson said. "One I particularly liked was a Ronald Reagan film with Errol Flynn called, 'Desperate Journey,' they were always wisecracking to the Nazis, and we loved to see that, you know. The biggest audience response came like from a movie 'Flying Tigers' with John Wayne, and when he shot down Japanese planes, and the Japanese pilot would hold his hands to his face and the blood would come out of his fingers, we would jump up and cheer because the good guys were winning.

"All kids played war when we were, you know, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 – those ages," Wilson said. "But it's interesting the way we played war because nobody ever died. If you got shot, somebody came to your aid and fixed you up and then you could rise up and shoot again. And there was no stopping. You could hit five or six times and they'd come and fix you up and you would rise up and shoot again."

Sometimes, even children had to come face to face with the true cost of the war.

"What amounted to a surrealistic feeling about the war came to an end one day when our neighbors, put a gold star [a service flag representing the loss of a loved one in combat] in the window and pulled all the blinds down. Their oldest son had been killed in Italy," said Wilson. "I really grieved for the whole family. And in Sacramento in those days, the way you dealt with something like that was pulling all the shades down and never coming out of the house. And so every time you walked past that house, the whole idea of death was brought home to you because of the shades drawn and the gold star in the window."





Service Flag Placed in Window of War Hero

The original caption for the photo above is: "Mrs. John Gagne of Lynn, Massachusetts, proudly places the gold star service flag in the window in her home following news of the death of her son, a member of the U.S. Army Air Corps, who was killed in action during a bombing of Hickam Field in Hawaii, by Japanese bombers. She is the first Gold Star Mother in this city in World War II. December 14, 1941"

292,000 Americans died in the war. 11,000,000 veterans returned home, many with permanent injuries, crippling disabilities, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and uncertain job prospects.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, suspicion of and prejudice toward Japanese-Americans increased, leading to their internment in War Relocation Camps.

Japanese Americans experienced a range of psychological effects related to their incarceration. These effects stemmed from multiple stressors that occurred over time. Some emerged soon after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Others emerged during the incarceration itself, and still others extended decades after the war ended and the camps had closed.

Long-term health consequences included psychological anguish as well as increased cardiovascular disease. Survey information found former internees had a 2.1 greater risk of cardiovascular disease, cardiovascular mortality, and premature death than did a non-interned counterpart.

There are two You Tube videos I highly recommend that give tremendous insight into the home front experience of WWII. The first, entitled “The Century: America's Time - 1941-1945: Homefront” is part seven of a 15-part series of documentaries produced by the American Broadcasting Company on the 20th century and the rise of the United States as a superpower.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPP0ae2zrXY#t=1326.975026589>

Of note the start of a section on USO dance halls at 22.06 and 29.00, where you'll see Gold Stars in the windows of the homes of families that had lost a loved one.

The second video, called “The Town”, shows life in the town of Madison, Indiana, and “explains the democratic characteristics of the social and civic life of the people”.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38XspG2i6l8>

## POST-WAR

Arthur Miller began writing ALL MY SONS in 1945, as WWII was beginning to look like it was coming to a close. The play opened at the Coronet Theater in NYC at the beginning of 1947, when the experience of WWII was still fresh in people's minds. In *A Critical Companion to Arthur Miller*, Susan C. W. Abbotson writes about the mood of the country at the time that is reflected in the play: “Fathers and sons were dislocated from their homes by the draft, some never returning. Those who returned either found that the world had changed in their absence or felt a need to change it in the light of their experiences”. This was especially true for Chris, who explains to his father, and then to Ann (in context of losing the men in his company) how his perspective on the world has changed coming home. Abbotson continues:

Their efforts met great resistance, but the mood was change was in the air, however hard that some chose to ignore it. Both change and resistance served to deepen the gulf between father and child; this is tellingly portrayed in Miller's tale of the Kellers.

World War II drove an ideological wedge between those who fought and those who stayed at home. Men like Chris and Larry Keller who had gone to fight were changed by their experience; affected by the sacrifices that they saw their comrades make, they developed a heightened sense of social responsibility. This leads Larry to kill himself for shame for what his father has done and leads Chris to set him almost impossible standards by which to live. Shaken by the horrors of World War II, society recognized the need for change, but the soldiers who fought often held different views from those who stayed home as to how to initiate that change.

For those at home, such as the older generation of Kellers, a return to the prosperous twenties, with its emphasis on work and individual family units, offered greater security. But men like Chris, who by their service had experienced a new community-based society of mutual help where one's “family” was society

itself, found themselves at odds with such an introverted concept. This socialist spirit, which had been growing in the United States since the Depression, was at odds with the selfish capitalistic spirit that had captured the country in its postwar economic boom. But Chris, despite his newfound socialism, is still a product of the more traditionalist generation and is reluctant to throw away his old values. While he dislikes his father's capitalism, he still loves and admires his father, and he is confused as to what he should do.

Like so many young men of the time, Chris finds he needs a strong father figure to allow him to make sense of the changing world, a figure who would remain unchanging and inviolate, from whom he could derive stability for himself. Joe Keller, like so many fathers of his time, cannot possibly live up to such an ideal given that those same social pressures affecting Chris are also affecting him. Keller tries to offer Chris the only stability that he knows in the form of his business, but Chris is looking for a moral stability rather than this material one. Keller, for all his faults, tries to be the best father that he can be, given the constraints of the time and his own nature and beliefs (themselves products of that time). But having successfully tapped into the ever-flowing stream of US materialism and competitiveness that was so prevalent in the 1940s, he is faced with offspring who have formed value systems that are totally alien to him.

As I was writing the glossary for Acts I and II of ALL MY SONS, it struck me how many expressions the characters used that had their basis in Christianity, so I did some research on the post-war state of religion. The PBS program, "God in America," devoted an episode to the religious resurgence in the US after the war ended. Non-believers were viewed as anti-American. PBS.org describes the changes:

In the postwar era, Americans flock to church in record numbers, swelling the growth of traditional denominations -- Methodists, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Lutherans and Presbyterians. Church building booms; Bible sales skyrocket. Amid the prosperity, the United States and the Soviet Union face off in the Cold War, a spiritual struggle that pits Christian America against "godless communism." In 1952, President-elect Dwight Eisenhower famously says, "Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is." This statement is taken as an admission that the nonreligious, be they atheist or socialist, are fundamentally anti-American. Because of the anti-communist views espoused by the church, Catholics gain greater acceptance in American society.

The moral ideology described by Susan Abbotson that the returning servicemen espouse is reflected in the books that Americans were reading after the war. A list of popular books in 1946 includes *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Viktor E. Frankl, a memoir by the author, a psychiatrist, of his experiences in Nazi death camps and its lessons for spiritual survival. *Man's Search for Meaning* still ranks among the ten most influential books in America.

Other books of this nature that Americans read in 1946 were *Gravity and Grace*, the first book by the spiritual thinker and activist, Simone Weil; *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* by Erich Fromm, where the author explores "what man is, how he ought to live, and how the tremendous energies within man can be released and used productively"; *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda; and *Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi* by Mahatma Gandhi, where Gandhi addresses the issues he felt most directly affected the spiritual lives of common people.

Servicemen brought back with them an expanded world view, which woke people's interest in other cultures. They read books like *The Discovery of India* by Jawaharlal Nehru, who was as instrumental as Gandhi in the Indian independence movement. Other popular books in 1946 that exposed Americans to other cultures were *Pavilion of Women: A Novel of Life in the Women's Quarters*, a story by Pearl S. Buck of the wife of the head of the powerful Wu dynasty of Chinese who gains her independence; and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* by Ruth Benedict.

Americans read books in 1946 that educated them about the horrors of the Holocaust: *The Pianist: The Extraordinary Story of One Man's Survival in Warsaw, 1939–45* by Władysław Szpilman, which was made into a movie in 2002; *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account* by Miklós Nyiszli; *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz* by Olga Lengyel; and *Nine Suitcases: A Memoir* by Béla Zsolt, which is one of the first memoirs of the Holocaust ever written. Originally published in Hungary in weekly installments starting in 1946, it tells the harrowing story of Béla Zsolt's experiences in the ghetto and as a forced laborer in the Ukraine.

To learn more about the Nazi dictatorship and other totalitarian governments, they read *The Man Outside (Draußen vor der Tür)* by Wolfgang Borchert and *The President* by Miguel Ángel Asturias, the story of a ruthless Latin American dictator that was acclaimed for portraying both a totalitarian government and its damaging psychological effects.

They read about the war from the American perspective in *War as I Knew It* by George S. Patton Jr. and *Company Commander: The Classic Infantry Memoir of World War II* by Charles B. MacDonald. They read *Resistance: A French Woman's Journal of the War* by Agnès Humbert, a riveting diary by a key female member of the French Resistance in WWII.

The movies that Americans watched in 1946 also reflected their desire to make sense of the changing world. *The Best Years of Our Lives* was about three World War II veterans who return home to small-town America to discover that they and their families have been irreparably changed. *Till the End of Time* was a drama about former WW2 soldiers readjusting to civilian life and dealing with their mental and physical traumas. Other movies related to the war's aftermath were *The Stranger*, about an investigator from the War Crimes Commission who travels to Connecticut to find an infamous Nazi; *Somewhere in the Night*, about a soldier who returns from WWII with amnesia. Back home in Los Angeles, while trying to track down his old identity, he stumbles onto a three-year-old murder case and a hunt for a missing \$2 million; *Paisan*, which is six

vignettes that follow the Allied invasion from July 1943 to winter 1944, from Sicily north to Venice; *The Blue Dahlia*, about an ex-bomber pilot suspected of murdering his unfaithful wife; and *Cloak and Dagger*, where the Allies race against time to persuade two nuclear scientists working for the Germans in WWII to switch sides.

Young America's heightened sense of social responsibility spawned *It's a Wonderful Life*, which condemned capitalism while lauding the power of community.

Women left the factories and returned to their roles as homemakers, and America set about rebuilding their family lives after the disruption of the war. With their new prosperity, they could loosen their belts, drive their cars, buy new clothes and engage the factories in manufacturing appliances for the new homes that couldn't be build fast enough for their mass migration to the suburbs, where they were relocating in large numbers to raise their families.

President Roosevelt, who led the country through three terms during the most tumultuous years of our history, died on April 12, 1945, less than a month before the war in Europe ended. Roosevelt's declining physical health had been kept secret from the general public, so his death was met with shock and grief across the US and around the world.

Harry S. Truman, FDR's vice-president, succeeded him. On January 6, 1947, he reported on the State of the Union to a joint session of Congress, which was carried on a nationwide radio broadcast. His speech was a snapshot of the post-war US. "As the year 1947 begins", he said, "the state of our national economy presents great opportunities for all. We have virtually full employment. Our national production of goods and services is 50 percent higher than in any year prior to the war emergency. The national income in 1946 was higher than in any peacetime year. Our food production is greater than it has ever been. During the last 5 years our productive facilities have been expanded in almost every field. The American standard of living is higher now than ever before, and when the housing shortage can be overcome it will be even higher."

He talked about having "removed at a rapid rate the emergency controls that the Federal Government had to exercise during the war. The remaining controls will be retained only as long as they are needed to protect the public. Private enterprise must be given the greatest possible freedom to continue the expansion of economy."

He cautioned against "an important present source of danger to our economy", the "possibility that prices might be raised to such an extent that the consuming public could not purchase the tremendous volume of goods and services which will be produced during 1947."

He also talked about the labor-management strife that occurred in 1946, comparing it to what happened the year after the first World War. "Despite this outbreak of economic warfare in 1946", he said, "we are today producing goods and services in record volume". He renewed his commitment to collective bargaining and private enterprise. He addressed the concerns of the 14,000,000 WW II servicemen who returned to civil life,

and pledged to provide them with every benefit they had been promised. He announced the establishment of his President's Committee on Civil Rights to study and report on the whole problem of federally-secured civil rights, with a view to making recommendations to the Congress.

In terms of foreign affairs, he supported the existing peace treaties and declared, "During the long months of debate on these treaties, we have made it clear to all nations that the United States will not consent to settlements at the expense of principles we regard as vital to a just and enduring peace. We have made it equally dear that we will not retreat to isolationism. Our policies will be the same during the forthcoming negotiations in Moscow on the German and Austrian treaties, and during the future conferences on the Japanese treaty". He pledged to continue to aid in international relief, saying "We have shipped more supplies to the hungry peoples of the world since the end of the war than all other countries combined!" However, he felt that The US had not done its part in helping refugees. "Only about 5,000 of them have entered this country since May 1946," he said, and urged Congress to "turn its attention to this world problem, in an effort to find ways whereby we can fulfill our responsibilities to these thousands of homeless and suffering refugees of all faiths".

In regard to international trade, atomic energy, and US military policy, Truman said, "we have a higher duty and a greater responsibility than the attainment of our own national security. Our goal is collective security for all mankind.

If we can work in a spirit of understanding and mutual respect, we can fulfill this solemn obligation which rests upon us.

The spirit of the American people can set the course of world history. If we maintain and strengthen our cherished ideals, and if we share our great bounty with war-stricken people over the world, then the faith of our citizens in freedom and democracy will be spread over the whole earth and free men everywhere will share our devotion to those ideals."

Twenty-three days after Truman's State of the Union address, ALL MY SONS opened on Broadway. It was a last-ditch effort by Miller to produce a commercially viable play, following the disastrous, four-performance run of *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, his first play to be mounted on Broadway. If ALL MY SONS failed, he intended to give up playwriting altogether.

ALL MY SONS closed on November 8, 1949, having run for 328 performances. It won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and won both the Tony Award for Best Author and the Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play. The play was adapted for films in 1949 and 1987. Miller's next play was DEATH OF A SALESMAN, one of the most studied and performed plays in the world.