

War as Watershed: The East Bay and World War II

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Since historians first examined the domestic impact of World War II back in the 1970s, they have debated what I call the war-as-watershed issue. From the earliest general studies by Richard Polenberg and John Morton Blum to the more recent studies of labor, women, racial minorities, and economic and regional development, these home-front historians have reached conflicting conclusions about the significance of the war as an agent of historical change. While some argue that World War II was a critical turning point in United States history, others find it merely accelerated existing social and economic trends.¹

This debate, like many historical controversies, has been artificially polarized and has blinded historians to more im-

1. General studies include John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York, 1976); Gerald D. Nash, *The Great Depression and World War II: Organizing America, 1933-45* (New York, 1979); and Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia, 1972). In recent years, there has also been a proliferation of more specialized social history studies such as Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relationships, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport, Conn., 1981); Dominic Campeci, *Race Relations in Detroit* (Philadelphia, 1984); Susan M. Hartman, *The Homefront and Beyond* (Boston, 1982); Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York, 1982); and Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana, Ill., 1987). For state and regional treatments, see Alan Clive, *State of War: Michigan in World War II* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1979); Marc Scott Miller, *The Irony of Victory: World War II and Lowell, Massachusetts* (Urbana, Ill., 1988); C. Calvin Smith, *War and Wartime Changes: The Transformation of Arkansas, 1940-1945* (Fayetteville, Ark., 1986); and Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985).

portant questions regarding the impact of World War II. Few events in history are wholly unprecedented; the effects of war and other cataclysmic events occur within preestablished social systems and usually augment longstanding historical trends. On the other hand, wars often vastly accelerate the *pace* of social change, producing emergency responses that can potentially transform the status quo. Rather than tallying the forces of change and continuity in a fruitless effort to resolve the watershed debate, historians would do better to identify exactly *where* and *how* specific changes occurred and in what ways World War II then reshaped longterm historical trends.

There is perhaps no better locale for this endeavor than urban California. By nearly every measure of wartime influence, from militarization to urban migration, California cities topped the list. Historian Gerald Nash has argued that these wartime influences transformed the American West, bringing new industry, expanded population, and rampant urban development. In his most recent book, *World War II and the West*, he concentrates on the economic aspects of this transformation, arguing that the war ushered the West out of a provincial, colonial past into the mainstream of modern industrial life.

My own research in the East Bay region of the San Francisco area does not support Nash's economic views. In the East Bay, where shipbuilding dominated the wartime economy but disappeared just as quickly after 1945, the economic revolution was shortlived. Furthermore, as Roger Lotchin has shown, the California "metropolitan-military complex" did not emerge suddenly with World War II but developed gradually over the course of the twentieth century. As economist Paul Rhode suggests, the transformation of the state's economy was well underway before 1941. In labelling World War II an economic watershed for California, Nash has invited some well-warranted criticism of his "transformation" thesis.²

The most compelling part of Nash's work concerns the social and cultural by-products of this wartime upheaval, topics

2. Gerald Nash, *World War II and the West: Reshaping the Economy* (Lincoln, Neb., 1990); Roger W. Lotchin, *Fortress California, 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (New York, 1992). Critical reviews of Nash's economic transformation thesis include James N. Gregory, *Reviews in American History*, XIX (1991), 249-254; Daniel Cornford, *California History*, LXX (1991), 117-119; and Paul Rhode's essay elsewhere in this special issue of *PHR*.

he examined more closely in his earlier book, *The American West Transformed*. My research pursues these and other themes in a more in-depth fashion, focusing on the issue of defense migration and its impact on Oakland, Richmond, and other East Bay communities. Unlike the emergency shipyards that disappeared shortly after the war, many of the half million migrant workers who flooded the San Francisco Bay area from 1940 to 1945 settled in the region permanently. Their presence reshaped, to varying degrees, the social, cultural, and political relations of East Bay cities. This article will briefly survey three examples of this transformation: demographic change, cultural development, and urban political reform.

Demographic Shifts

During the war, the influx of hundreds of thousands of migrant defense workers caused explosive urban growth that permanently altered the composition of the East Bay population. Predominantly a region of white ethnics and midwestern transplants before the war, the East Bay saw a dramatic influx of young white and black southerners during the 1940s. The social diversity of the new population would have a profound impact on the social and cultural development of East Bay cities.

Prior to the war, East Bay cities were predominantly white working-class and middle-class communities with a significant percentage of foreign-born residents and their children. In Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond, and Alameda—the East Bay's four largest cities—ethnics comprised an estimated twenty-five to thirty percent of the population in 1940. Italians constituted the single largest ethnic group, along with significant numbers of British islanders, Canadians, Germans, Scandinavians, Portugese, and Asians. Compared to northeastern cities, the percentage of African-Americans in these communities was relatively small—4.0 percent in Berkeley, 2.8 in Oakland, 1.1 in Richmond, and 0.7 in Alameda.³

As for the white, native-born population, the largest source of migration were the northern midwestern states that had been

3. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population*, Vol. 3: *Reports by State*, Part I, *California* (7 vols., Washington, D.C., 1931–1933); *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population*, Vol. 2: *Characteristics of the Population*, Part I, *California* (Washington, D.C., 1943).

sending a steady stream of emigrants west since the end of World War I. While the depression-spawned Okie migration brought thousands of Texans, Oklahomans, and Arkansans to California in the 1930s, only nine percent of these southwestern migrants had moved to the Bay area by 1940. On the eve of World War II, then, the East Bay hosted an overwhelmingly white population drawn originally from Europe and the northern Midwest.⁴

With a relatively homogeneous population, social segregation was not especially rigid in the prewar period. Although black settlement was concentrated in the flatland neighborhoods of west Oakland, south Berkeley, and north Richmond, these areas were generally multiethnic communities that also housed Mexican, Italian, and Portuguese immigrants. Likewise, because of their small numbers, white southwesterners blended into East Bay cities fairly easily in the 1930s. Unlike agricultural communities in the Central Valley where squatter camps and “Little Oklahomas” sprung up at the edge of town, East Bay communities generally welcomed the Okies as they did other white newcomers.⁵

These demographic patterns were noticeably altered by the wartime shipbuilding boom and the subsequent influx of migrant defense workers. Although defense contractors initially hired local workers, the relentless demand for labor soon prompted them to look further afield. With the aid of the federal War Manpower Commission, shipyard employers scoured the country, recruiting workers from every state. In contrast to prewar migration patterns, the greatest number of out-of-state war migrants to the Bay area—97,790 or twenty-nine percent—came from the West South Central states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. There were also uncounted thousands

4. Marion Clawson, “What It Means to Be a Californian,” *California Historical Society Quarterly*, XXIV (1945), 139–161; James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York, 1989), 40.

5. Harry and Marguerite Williams, “Reflections of a Longtime Black Family in Richmond” (Oral History Conducted in 1985 by Judith K. Dunning, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1990), 41; Lee Hildebrand, “North Richmond Blues,” *East Bay Express*, Feb. 9, 1979; Shirley Ann Moore, “The Black Community in Richmond, California, 1910–1963” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1989), 72–73; Gregory, *American Exodus*, 6–13.

of Depression-era Okie migrants who now relocated from the Central Valley to Bay area defense centers.

Furthermore, there was a significant proportion of black migrants from these same states. Between 1940 and 1944, the black population of the Bay area grew from less than 20,000 to over 60,000. East Bay communities showed some of the greatest gains—80 percent in Berkeley, 157 percent in Oakland, and over 1,500 percent in Alameda and Richmond. The vast majority of these black newcomers came from the South, with over sixty-five percent from the West South Central states. Chain migration from these same areas continued unabated after the war so that by 1950 the black share of the total population reached 12.4 percent in Oakland, 13.4 percent in Richmond, and 11.7 percent in Berkeley. As a result of war migration, then, the East Bay became more black and more southern than ever before.⁶

Because the newcomers arrived in such great numbers, federal and local governments worked together to build some thirty thousand units of public war-housing in the East Bay. The housing projects concentrated war migrants into “shipyard ghettos” near the waterfront, and biased placement practices resulted in clear-cut patterns of racial segregation. In older black settlements like west Oakland, racial segregation also increased as black defense migrants moved into spare rooms and newly subdivided apartments. In the six census tracts that constituted the heart of west Oakland’s African-American community, the percentage of blacks in the total population jumped from 16.2 percent in 1940 to 61.5 percent in 1950. In the census district that encompassed north Richmond, the black share of the total population increased from 7.3 percent in 1940 to 39.1 percent in 1950.⁷

6. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Population, Series CA-3, *Characteristics of the Population, Labor Force, Families and Housing, No. 3, San Francisco Bay Congested Production Area, April 1944* (Washington, D.C., 1944); and U.S. Census of Population: 1950, Vol. 2: *Characteristics of the Population* (Washington, D.C., 1952), Pt. 5, pp. 97, 101, 102; Commonwealth Club of California, *The Population of California* (San Francisco, 1946), 127–128.

7. The term “shipyard ghettos” was coined by Hubert Owen Brown in “The Impact of War Worker Migration on the Public School System of Richmond, California, 1940–45” (Ed.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1973), 137. Black population percentages are based on calculations from Oakland census tracts 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 21, and Contra Costa County census tract CCC-3. U.S.

At the same time, federal loan programs in nearby suburbs underwrote the construction of defense worker subdivisions available only to white, out-of-town war workers. Thousands of defense worker homes sprung up in East Oakland, San Lorenzo, San Pablo, and other suburban areas, beginning a trend in government-sponsored mass suburban development that would accelerate in the postwar era. Such measures transformed the social geography of East Bay cities, concentrating newcomers in federal war-housing areas and increasing segregation in the private market. Even after the temporary war-housing projects were torn down in the 1950s, wartime patterns of racial segregation tended to reproduce themselves in these areas.⁸

The population shifts in the East Bay during these years mirrored those of other California cities. The dramatic influx of war migrants into San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego resulted in significant increases in the southern-born and African-American populations. Newly built war-housing segregated these newcomers into war-worker ghettos near shipyards and aircraft plants and introduced new patterns of racial segregation in south central Los Angeles, the Los Angeles harbor area, and the Fillmore and Hunter's Point districts of San Francisco.⁹ In all of these areas, the effects of war migration were profound and permanent.

Cultural Transformations

The settlement of black and white southerners also served

Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Reports on Population, Vol. 5: Supplementary Reports—Statistics for Census Tracts, Population and Housing, Oakland-Berkeley, Calif. and Adjacent Area 4* (Washington, D.C., 1943); and *U.S. Census of Population: 1950, Vol. 3: Census Tracts Statistics, Bulletin PD-49, Selected Population and Housing Characteristics, San Francisco-Oakland, California, 15* (Washington, D.C., 1952).

8. For a more detailed account of war housing and social change in the East Bay, see Marilyn S. Johnson, "Urban Arsenals: War Housing and Social Change in Richmond and Oakland, California, 1941-1945," *Pacific Historical Review*, LX (1991), 283-308.

9. For more detailed information on California migration and housing patterns, see L. D. Reddick, ed., "Race Relations on the Pacific Coast," *Journal of Educational Sociology* XVIII (1945), 166-172; Lawrence B. de Graaf, "Negro Migration to Los Angeles, 1930-1950" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1962); and U.S. Census Bureau, *Population, Series CA-3, Characteristics of the Population, Labor Force, Families and Housing, No. 2, San Diego Congested Production Area, March 1944; No. 3, San Francisco Bay Congested Production Area, April 1944; and No. 5, Los Angeles Congested Production Area, April 1944* (Washington, D.C., 1944).

to enrich the cultural life of the East Bay and other California defense centers. During the war years, southern entrepreneurs offering evangelical religion, country and blues music, and other down-home traditions plied their trades in public housing areas and other migrant settlements. After the war, southern migrant subcultures were institutionalized, becoming part of the fabric of California urban culture.

Evangelical religion was the most obvious manifestation of an emerging migrant subculture during the war. In public housing areas in Oakland and Richmond, observers from the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) reported that storefront evangelical churches had “grown like weeds.” Although there are no comparable statistics on church membership before and after the war, the FCC counted forty churches in the Richmond area in 1944. More than half of these churches were established after 1940 and many were “sectarian and somewhat variant in temper and method.” Roughly half of the ministers surveyed by the FCC in 1944 had moved to the area in the past three years; many of these ministers—both black and white—were “worker-preachers” who had followed their congregations to the Bay area and split their time between the shipyards and the ministry. Itinerant preachers from the Southwest also toured East Bay defense centers, holding mass tent revivals near migrant housing areas.¹⁰

In the postwar era, migrant-founded churches like the Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church in Richmond, and Christian Cathedral and Mount Zion Spiritual Temple in Oakland established permanent homes in East Bay cities. In suburban Contra Costa County, where many white migrants settled after the war, Southern Baptist, Pentecostal, and Holiness churches soon dotted the landscape.¹¹

10. H. Paul Douglass *et al.*, *San Francisco Bay Area Church Study* (San Francisco, 1946), 96, 105–107; H. Paul Douglass, *The City Church and the War Emergency* (New York, 1945), 19; J. Harvey Kerns, “Study of the Social and Economic Conditions Affecting the Local Negro Population” (Oakland, Council of Social Agencies, 1942), 20, copy in vertical files, Oakland History Room, Oakland Public Library); for information on itinerant preachers, see articles and advertisements in the *Oakland Tribune*, Feb. 12, March 17, 1944, April 13, 1945; *Richmond Independent*, May 13, June 3, July 15, and Aug. 13, 1944; and *Fore 'N' Aft*, Oct. 19, 1945.

11. Gary Moncher, ed., *Bebe Patten: Her Ministry, Then and Now* (San Francisco, 1976), 4–12; Moore, “Black Community in Richmond,” 55.

Migrants also imported secular traditions to the East Bay, most notably country and blues music. While white Okie migrants first introduced country music to California in the 1930s, it was the Second World War which popularized this genre in urban defense centers. In Richmond and neighboring San Pablo, southern and midwestern migrants organized bands, rented halls, and sponsored "Victory Barn Dances" for local shipyard workers. In Oakland, country music performers became nightly fixtures in downtown clubs that catered to migrants. The musicians, many of them southwesterners themselves, relied on regional loyalties to attract migrant audiences. Bands such as Ray Wade and his Rhythm Riders, Elwin Cross and the Arizona Ramblers, Dave Stogner and the Arkansawyers, Bill Woods and the Texas Stars, and Leo Stevens and the Ozark Playboys used western and cowboy themes to play up their southwestern roots.¹²

With the mercurial growth of country music during the war, nearly every Bay area radio station added a cowboy or hillbilly show to its format. Like the performers, country radio announcers adopted western personas and program names to underscore their southwestern heritage. Programs such as Eddie the Hired Hand's "Hillbilly Hit Parade" (KLS-Oakland), Foreman Bill's "Rhythm Rodeo" (KYA-San Francisco), and Long Horn Joe's "Cowboy Hit Parade" (KROW-Oakland) filled the airwaves during the war years, connecting migrant listeners with an emerging southwestern subculture in the Bay area. Such programming helped build a mass audience for professional western swing bands from the Southwest that toured and in many cases relocated to California cities during and after the war.¹³

Black migrants also developed a distinctive musical sub-

12. Gregory, *American Exodus*, 226; Janie B. Hamilton, "West of the Mississippi," *Tophand* (March 1945); (June 1946); (Sept. 1946); and (Oct. 1946); interview with Helen Vaughn by author, June 12, 1990; Viola Stogner, liner notes from LP *Dave Stogner: The King of West Coast Country Swing*, Cattle Records, Mono LP 63. For examples of local honky tonks and barn dances, see advertisements in the *Oakland Tribune*, Sept. 26, Oct. 2 and 23, 1942; *Richmond Independent*, Jan. 27, May 11, and June 28, 1944; and *Richmond Record-Herald*, June 25, 1944.

13. Hamilton, "West of the Mississippi," *Tophand* (June 1946); and (Sept. 1946). For more on southwestern bands touring the East Bay, see Charles R. Townsend, *The Life and Music of Bob Wills* (Chicago, 1986), 241; and advertisements in the *Oakland Tribune*, Jan. 18, Feb. 22, May 5, 22, Sept. 4, 1944.

culture that differed from both prewar urban black music and from the dominant white culture. For black newcomers, the blues—a southern black musical form derived from slave work songs and spirituals—had a powerful appeal, helping to reinforce a sense of racial and cultural identity. Unlike the sophisticated urban blues singers who appeared in local jazz clubs in the prewar era, black migrants favored a raw country-style blues rooted in the rural southern black experience. During the war, migrant musicians such as Oklahoma-born Lowell Fulson and Missouri-born Jimmy McCracklin introduced this style of blues to the East Bay, playing at local honky tonks and parties.

Before long, an enterprising Texas migrant named Bob Geddings established a record-pressing business in his west Oakland storefront to record Fulson and other blues performers. Such recordings sold well among black newcomers and helped sustain a clientele for new blues clubs springing up in west Oakland, north Richmond, and other black commercial districts. In later years a growing cadre of blues performers learned to blend the raw intensity of the country blues with a more modern electric guitar sound, creating a distinctive type of “Oakland blues.” The Bay area, like Los Angeles, Chicago, and other World War II defense centers, thus became one of the premier regional blues centers in the country.¹⁴

Urban Political Reform

In addition to its demographic and cultural impact, World War II also influenced the course of urban politics in the East Bay. For labor, black, and progressive forces, the war presented an opportunity to unseat the conservative business machines that had long controlled East Bay cities. The most dramatic and sustained challenge occurred in Oakland where a labor-led movement, cemented by a general strike in 1946, waged a mass electoral revolt against the powerful Joseph R. Knowland ma-

14. Music critic Lee Hildebrand has done some of the most important research on Bay Area blues. See, for example, “Oakland Blues: The Thrill Goes On,” *Museum of California* (Sept.–Oct. 1982), 5; “North Richmond Blues,” *East Bay Express*, Feb. 9, 1979; and liner notes for LP *Oakland Blues*, Arhoolie 2008. See also interview with Lowell Fulson by Bruce Iglauer, Jim O’Neal, and Bea Van Geffen, *Living Blues* (Summer 1971), 25; interview with Bob Geddings by Tom Mazzolini, *Living Blues* (Sept.–Oct. 1977), 19–20; and Arnold Shaw, *Honkers and Shouters: The Golden Years of Rhythm and Blues* (New York, 1978), 247–260.

chine. Although similar upheavals occurred in Richmond and other Bay area cities, the Oakland case provides the best example of this war-born political reform movement.

Historians have generally ignored the subject of wartime urban politics. In *The New Urban America*, one of the few works that address this issue, Carl Abbott argues that political change in southern and western cities occurred mainly after the war at the hands of middle-class, business-oriented reformers.¹⁵ The Oakland experience, however, suggests that labor and working people could also effect change and that postwar political upheavals had direct roots in the war experience. Their activism in the 1940s, though shortlived, constituted labor's first successful electoral mobilization in Oakland since the Progressive era.

Since 1911, when a Socialist party candidate narrowly lost the mayoral election in Oakland, the city's business elites had effectively diluted working-class political power through a series of charter reform measures establishing a council-manager government elected under nonpartisan, at-large elections. By 1930 Joseph R. Knowland, publisher of the *Oakland Tribune* and a standpat Republican stalwart, was firmly in control of the city through a business-oriented machine headquartered in the *Tribune* tower. Even during a bitter maritime strike and a massive CIO organizing drive that served to galvanize labor forces, Knowland forces held sway by co-opting conservative AFL leaders onto the city council and supporting their efforts to thwart the rival CIO. Although some local AFL members worked with Labor's Non-Partisan League, a CIO political action group, the national and county AFL leadership staunchly opposed any political cooperation between the two federations. Labor forces thus remained internally divided and politically ineffective.¹⁶

The war, however, presented labor with potential new organizing issues and constituencies. In the East Bay, the war boom and the migrant influx severely strained housing, transportation, education, law enforcement, and other city services. The resulting housing shortages, overcrowded transportation,

15. Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981), 120-142.

16. Edward C. Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Politics: Who Rules in Oakland* (New York, 1972), 10-14, 17-18.

inadequate social services, and increased racial tensions affected newcomers most acutely. To address the needs of new workers, the CIO and their AFL allies focused considerable attention on these community issues. In the process, newcomers might be mobilized politically, providing a potential new source of support for Oakland's embattled labor movement.

Before labor could truly benefit from this new constituency, however, AFL and CIO forces had to cease the destructive internal battles that had undercut working-class political activism in the late thirties. The war provided just such an opportunity. In response to wartime antilabor measures such as the Smith-Connally Act and a California right-to-work initiative, local labor forces pulled together to support Franklin D. Roosevelt and local pro-labor candidates in the 1944 elections. The newly formed CIO Political Action Committee (PAC) became the main vehicle in this effort, staging mass voter registration drives among migrant defense workers in East Bay shipyards and housing projects. While working for change on federal and state levels, the local PAC also laid the organizational groundwork for future progressive challenges to local Knowland conservatives.¹⁷

More importantly, the war altered existing political arrangements of the city by stressing social unity over class conflict. Specifically, the rhetoric and ritual of wartime unity offered labor, black, and other progressive forces an opportunity to participate on citywide committees and debate public policy issues. Following the example of federal agencies like the War Labor Board, local officials invited a wide range of community representatives to serve on ad hoc committees dealing with issues such as defense employment, housing, mass transit, public health, childcare, and rationing. Left-leaning AFL and CIO members and black officials of the railroad brotherhoods welcomed the opportunity to participate in this new experiment in urban corporatism. Although the committees were heavily business-dominated, as historian Carl Abbott has pointed out, they did offer labor experience with and exposure to urban policymaking. During the war, then, labor moved from a narrow

17. Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 172-73; Robert H. Zeiger, *American Workers, American Unions, 1920-1985* (Baltimore, 1986), 115; James Foster, *The Union Politic* (Columbia, Mo., 1975), 14; *CIO Labor Herald*, June 20, Oct. 6, 20, Nov. 3, 1944; *Daily People's World*, Oct. 23, 24, Nov. 4, 9, 1944.

focus on workplace organizing to a more broadly based community orientation.¹⁸

Union leaders were especially concerned with long-term urban planning issues and became active participants on the city's Postwar Planning Committee established in 1943. In an effort to prevent a postwar recession and help attract future industry to the area, business and labor representatives on the committee agreed to a long list of public works projects including new roads, schools, parks, pools, libraries, and a multimillion dollar civic center. When defense employment dropped off sharply in late 1944, however, the city council made no effort to implement these measures.

The growing disillusionment with the Knowland machine prompted labor to organize its own slate of candidates in the spring municipal elections of 1945. Calling itself the United for Oakland Committee (UOC), the labor-led coalition grew directly out of the CIO-PAC network and included key PAC members such as Ruby Heide, J. C. Reynolds, C. L. Dellums, Earl Hall, and William Hollander. With the CIO-PAC as its core, the UOC forged alliances with liberal business interests, black unions and civil rights groups, progressive religious leaders, and local veterans' organizations. Reflecting this diverse constituency, the UOC campaigned for expanded industry and jobs, public works, a civic unity committee, and charter reform measures such as district elections and an elected mayor.¹⁹

The split between labor and the city's business-dominated

18. *Labor Herald*, April 16, 1943, Dec. 12, 1944; Carl Abbott, "Planning for the Home Front in Portland and Seattle, 1940-45," in Roger Lotchin, ed., *The Martial Metropolis* (New York, 1984), 163-189. For the shifting priorities of labor from the work place to the wider community, see back issues of the *CIO Labor Herald* for the war and prewar years.

19. Oakland Postwar Planning Committee, *Oakland's Formula for the Future* (Oakland, 1945); Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 145-146; Joseph James, "Profiles: San Francisco," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, XIX (1945), 175; *Oakland Tribune*, April 18, 1945; *Labor Herald*, Dec. 22, 1944, Feb. 16, March 2, 1945; *Daily People's World*, Nov. 10, 1944; March 15, 17, April 9, 13, 1945. The organizational affiliations of the 1944 campaign coordinators were as follows: Ruby Heide, secretary of the Alameda County CIO Council; J. C. Reynolds, chair of the Alameda County Central Labor Council; William Hollander and Earl Hall, directors of the county Democratic and Republican campaigns to reelect Roosevelt; and C. L. Dellums, an official in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and president of the Alameda County NAACP.

leadership was not as sudden as it seemed; the rhetoric of wartime unity had merely obscured the long-standing animosity between the two groups. This is not to say that wartime rhetoric was entirely false, but rather that labor and business understood the meaning of the war experience differently. For much of the old-time business community, the war boom brought an unprecedented expansion of business, population, and economic growth accompanied by a temporary, but necessary dose of federal government intervention. Although excited about the economic potential of an expanded population, conservatives expressed concern that migrants had become dependent on government social programs. Business hoped to encourage continued economic growth in the postwar era, but under private sector control.²⁰

For labor, the collectivist experiments of the war years had a very different meaning. The mass mobilization of resources, personnel, and government services seemed to prove that business and government were capable of creating a humane capitalism that provided jobs, a decent standard of living, and fair treatment for all Americans. Wartime social programs such as health insurance, public housing, and childcare were not just temporary expedients, but models for the postwar future. Labor's vision, then, was not one of radical anticapitalism, but of more moderate social democratic reform based on the war experience.²¹

In the spring 1945 elections, however, the UOC failed to turn out the vote, and virtually all incumbent candidates won reelection. Part of the problem was poor outreach; without the lure of Roosevelt and other high-profile national candidates, only twenty-six percent of the city's registered voters cast their ballots. In all likelihood, however, labor's message was as much a problem as its weak campaigning. By appropriating the pro-

20. For a more detailed articulation of this view, see William C. Mullendore, *What Price Prosperity?* (Oakland, 1946), copy in the Institute for Governmental Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley; and Abbott, "Planning for the Home Front," 163-189.

21. For statements on labor's vision, see articles concerning the 1945 campaign in *Daily People's World*, April 6, 13, 20, 1945; and *Labor Herald*, Feb. 16, 1945. My argument on labor's wartime vision has been influenced by Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York, 1990).

growth rhetoric of their opponents, liberal candidates were at times indistinguishable from machine incumbents.²²

With the end of the war, however, labor forces began to rethink their strategy as deteriorating economic conditions and growing labor unrest in 1945–1946 provided new opportunities for political mobilization. Most crucially, rising unemployment and declining real wages and bargaining power led to a retail store workers' strike in downtown Oakland in 1946 that mushroomed into a three-day general strike that December. When city leaders repeatedly used police to protect scab workers and break the strike, labor forces retaliated in the electoral arena in 1947.

Building on the wartime CIO-PAC network, the United for Oakland Committee reorganized as the Oakland Voters League (OVL) and renewed its efforts to build a unified urban movement. In the May elections, the OVL ran a slate of five candidates for city council with a platform reminiscent of the earlier UOC campaign. As it had in 1945, the OVL dubbed the Knowland machine "obstructionist" and demanded the immediate initiation of the promised public works projects.

The 1947 platform also added some new planks, giving the OVL a more radical edge. Specifically, the OVL called for city council neutrality in all labor disputes; repeal of anti-picketing and anti-handbill ordinances often used against labor; investigation of police brutality against black residents; the restoration of rent control; repeal of the sales tax; and more equitable tax assessment procedures. The OVL also gave top priority to building public housing, establishing a city fair employment commission, and constructing new school facilities. In contrast to 1945, though, Oakland progressives talked less about attracting new business (most of which, they argued, ended up in the suburbs); their main thrust was employment, community services, and social justice.²³

22. *Labor Herald*, April 13, 20, 1945; *Daily People's World*, April 19, 1945; *Oakland Tribune*, March 25, April 15, 18, 1945. Despite the moderate tone of the labor campaign, the pro-incumbent *Oakland Tribune* did not hesitate to redbait the UOC, highlighting the fact that the local Communist Party supported the progressive slate. Such attacks, however, did not reach lethal potential until the peak Cold War years of 1948–1952.

23. Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 21–22; *Labor Herald*, April 22, 29, May 6, 1947; *Oakland Voters Herald*, May 9, 1947; and Oakland Voters League circular, March 24, 1947 (copies in election files, Oakland History Room, Oakland Public Library).

To combat the low turnout which hampered the UOC in the 1945 elections, the OVL established a grass-roots community network organized around neighborhood precincts. OVL precinct workers canvassed Oakland neighborhoods in the weeks prior to the election, distributing thousands of copies of the *Oakland Voters Herald*, an OVL newsheet designed to counter the highly partisan coverage of the *Oakland Tribune*. In west Oakland, the United Negro Labor Committee sponsored a street dance and other activities to help turn out the vote. The campaign culminated in a dramatic torchlight procession on the eve of the election in which hundreds of OVL supporters marched down Broadway demanding “municipal housecleaning” and an end to machine rule.²⁴

On election day, the OVL’s organizing efforts paid off. With a record turnout of 97,520 voters—sixty-five percent of the city’s registered voters—OVL candidates Vernon Lantz, Raymond Pease, Joseph Smith, and Scott Weakley defeated the Knowland-backed incumbents despite a bitter redbaiting campaign by the *Tribune*. The other OVL candidate, former shipyard worker Ben Goldfarb, lost by less than a thousand votes. Although no precinct voting records have survived, local newspapers agreed that the OVL’s strongest support came from the working-class districts of east and west Oakland. The latter, inhabited predominantly by blacks and migrants, contributed the strongest support, with residents voting three-to-one in favor of the OVL.²⁵

Once in office, however, OVL councilmembers found themselves outvoted by a five-to-four majority. Many of their liberal initiatives concerning public housing, civil rights, and public works thus languished. Although the OVL hoped to win a council majority in the coming elections, a pervasive climate of Cold War anti-Communism strengthened the hand of machine forces beginning in 1948. Most significantly, anti-Communist loyalty oaths and the bitterness of the 1948 presidential election

24. *Labor Herald*, April 9, 1947; *Oakland Voters Herald*, May 9, 1947; *Daily People’s World*, May 2, 6, 9, 12, 1947; for examples of the redbaiting campaign by Knowland forces, see April, 1947, issues of the *Oakland Tribune*.

25. *Oakland Tribune*, May 14, 1947; *Labor Herald*, May 20, 1947; *Daily People’s World*, May 14, 1947; Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy*, 21. The *Labor Herald* attributed Goldfarb’s narrow defeat to the misplacing of his name under the incumbents’ column on the 1947 ballot. Alternately, Hayes suggests that anti-semitism contributed to Goldfarb’s defeat in this predominantly Protestant city.

led to destructive in-fighting within the labor movement and the political isolation of CIO progressives. This divisiveness carried over into the OVL, where a conservative AFL contingent took control of the coalition, lessening the group's appeal among blacks and other community groups. As OVL unity dissolved, Knowland forces used redbaiting tactics and recall elections to drive their rivals out of office. By 1951 Knowland forces had regained all nine council seats, and the OVL challenge was effectively over—with little to show for its efforts.²⁶

In its political style and content, however, the OVL foreshadowed the urban liberalism of the 1960s and '70s. In Oakland and other Bay area cities, labor demands such as civil rights legislation, district elections, rent control, public housing, and other urban social programs were eventually implemented. Although many of these issues dated back to the New Deal or before, it was World War II that served as a springboard for political mobilization on the municipal level. Likewise, the OVL's broad-based community orientation foreshadowed the political style of the Oakland Community Organization and other grassroots mobilizations of recent years. War-born coalitions like the OVL thus formed a bridge between the class-based movements of the 1930s and the cultural or community-based social movements that have emerged since the 1960s.

Labor's role in forging a progressive coalition was not limited to Oakland; labor forces in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Berkeley, and Richmond also spearheaded the organization of progressive political movements in the 1940s. The Allied Berkeley Citizens, the Richmond Better Government Committee, and the San Francisco and Los Angeles Voters Leagues all grew out of wartime labor activism, with many of their leaders drawn from the same unions.²⁷ Although further research is needed on labor politics in California cities, the early experience of the Oakland

26. For more information on the defeat of the OVL in the early fifties, see Edward C. Hayes, "Power Structure and Urban Crisis" (Ph.D dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1968), 56–60; *Labor Herald*, May 22, 1951; *Daily People's World*, May 18, 1951.

27. For information on other progressive labor-led coalitions in California cities, see Richard Baisden, "Labor in Los Angeles Politics" (Ph.D dissertation, University of Chicago, 1958), 309–314; James, "Profile: San Francisco," 175; and William Issel, "Liberalism and Urban Policy in San Francisco from the 1930s to the 1960s," *Western Historical Quarterly*, XXII (1991), 431–450.

Voters League suggests an innovative experiment in grass-roots democracy and urban coalition-building growing out of the war.

Political reform, cultural transformation, and demographic change are just a few examples of how the Second World War affected urban life in the East Bay and other California communities. One could easily add to the list—the transformation of the work process in wartime shipyards, environmental degradation, increased preoccupation with crime and public order, and the controversial postwar redevelopment schemes that reshaped migrant settlements in the late 1940s and early '50s.

To be sure, all of these developments had precedents in the prewar era; some of them would have occurred even without the war. But the accelerated pace of wartime events and the sudden influx of new residents produced concentrated centers of social change that would not have developed in the same manner over a longer period. Far more than the economic changes that brought them, the wartime newcomers had a lasting impact on the social and cultural life of California cities. In addition, they contributed to a war-born political mobilization that seriously challenged urban business leadership and constituted a dress rehearsal for urban liberalism of the 1960s and '70s. As contemporaries of these communities were quick to note, World War II was like a “second gold rush”—an event that disrupted and ultimately transformed twentieth-century urban life.