

# Introduction

**ROGER W. LOTCHIN and  
MARTIN SCHIESL**

*Roger W. Lotchin is a member of the history department in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.*

*Martin Schiesl is a member of the history department in California State University, Los Angeles.*

Few periods in the urban development of California deserve more attention and analysis than do the World War II years. Massive federal spending on military contracts in the Los Angeles area stimulated an extraordinary expansion of manufacturing activity and created a vast network of new jobs in various local industries.<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of thousands of workers and their families poured into the Golden State and changed the cultural and social fabric of its urban centers. Their arrival brought city authorities many serious problems and a heavy burden upon municipal departments.

Much of the recent literature on wartime California deals with these developments. Some scholars have closely examined the contributions of public and private capital to economic growth and discussed the expansion and reorganization of military and industrial facilities, particularly in aircraft production and shipbuilding.<sup>2</sup> Both industries offered remarkable employment opportunities for low-income white and nonwhite migrants, whose previous chance for skilled jobs had been restricted. Other historians describe the occupational experi-

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1. John and LaRee Caughey, eds., *Los Angeles: Biography of a City* (Berkeley, 1976), 359.

2. Mark S. Foster, *Henry J. Kaiser: Builder in the Modern American West* (Austin, 1889), chap. 5; Gerald D. Nash, *World War II and the West: Reshaping the Economy* (Lincoln, 1990); Roger W. Lotchin, *Fortress California, 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (New York, 1992), 173-188.

ences of minority workers and their struggle against prejudice on the job and in the community. Large numbers of women from different social classes were also hired to work in war industries and their experiences have been chronicled in several studies.<sup>3</sup> Still other historians have devoted considerable attention to widespread deterioration in living standards in various cities and discussed the effort of local and federal agencies to provide blue-collar populations with adequate services and decent housing.<sup>4</sup>

Most of these topics are covered in the essays of this special issue on the California homefront during World War II. The authors also break new ground in their narratives and give an insightful and informative account of social, economic, and political changes in metropolitan regions. They represent a new school of writing on western urban history that demonstrates the important role of California cities in the development of the American West in the twentieth century.

One troublesome issue in wartime Los Angeles was racial exclusion. Arthur Verge relates that aircraft companies refused to hire black migrants, even those who had skills the firms needed. African-American leaders, with the support of federal labor officials, organized a protest movement against this discrimination and put continual pressure on aircraft executives to employ black people. Huge labor shortages also helped break down the barriers of racial discrimination in the industry. The living environment of black laborers and other war workers was another serious problem. Verge points out that in their communities there was overcrowded housing, the threat of contagious

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3. Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington, 1985), chaps. 6 and 7; Rudolph M. Lapp, *Afro-Americans in California* (2nd ed., San Francisco, 1987), 62–68; Sherna Berger Gluck, *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change* (New York, 1987). Several scholars have also written about the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast and their imprisonment in detention camps. See, for example, Donald Teruo Hata, Jr., and Nadine Ishitani Hata, *Japanese Americans and World War II* (St. Charles, Mo., 1974); Roger Daniels, “The Decisions to Relocate the North American Japanese: Another Look,” *Pacific Historical Review*, LI (1982), 71–77.

4. Nash, *American West Transformed*, chap. 4; Martin J. Schiesl, “City Planning and the Federal Government in World War II: The Los Angeles Experience,” *California History*, LIX (1980), 126–143; Charles Wollenberg, *Marinship at War: Shipbuilding and Social Change in Wartime Sausalito* (Berkeley, 1990); Marilyn S. Johnson, “Urban Arsenals: War Housing and Social Change in Richmond and Oakland,” *Pacific Historical Review*, LX (1991), 283–308.

diseases, inadequate sewage control facilities, and other hazards. This grim situation was overshadowed to some extent by impressive gains in manufacturing and technological development. Los Angeles enjoyed marked economic growth, partly as the result of federal contracts, and came out of the war with a racially diverse labor force and a highly productive business system.

Wartime changes in East Bay cities proceeded along different lines. Marilyn Johnson writes that the residential geography of the region consisted mostly of white lower-class and middle-class communities. A great number of black and white migrants entered new jobs in local shipbuilding and drastically altered these living arrangements. Newly constructed public housing confined the workers to areas near shipyards and brought extensive class and racial segregation. There was also much ferment in local political affairs, especially in the city of Oakland. Johnson relates that Oakland labor leaders, seeking to wrest power from an entrenched, business-dominated machine, organized a coalition of liberal whites and black activists, promoted a variety of social and political programs, and sponsored reform candidates for legislative offices. Much of this political activity persisted into the early 1950s and served as a model for liberal reform movements in the city during the next decade.

Abraham Shragge finds the meaning of San Diego's wartime experience by looking at the stream of San Diego history since 1870. The war brought the same adventures to the Border City that it did to other heavily impacted cities. Women marched into the factories; an African-American community emerged; Japanese Americans disappeared into the camps at Manzanar and other sites; war industries boomed. Yet unlike other places, the municipality itself often benefited. The immediacy of war was much greater in San Diego, and therefore the government did not neglect the city's needs as badly as elsewhere. For example, when the U.S. Navy overwhelmed the water resources of the city, that service helped San Diego build an aqueduct to Riverside to tap the waters of the Colorado River. Despite all this change, the Border City seemed to be traveling a course predestined by its earlier efforts toward becoming a "Federal City."

The essay by Paul Rhode goes beyond conditions in specific localities and treats the overall impact of wartime mobilization

upon major areas of California's economy. He challenges and revises Gerald Nash's influential thesis on the economic experience of western America in the war years. Nash argues that wartime mobilization transformed California and other parts of the West from a colonial fiefdom of the industrial East into an independent and mature manufacturing complex.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation, as Rhode points out, heavily undervalues earlier trends and progress. In the period from 1910 to 1940, California greatly augmented its share of the nation's personal income, attracted many different manufacturing companies, and saw a substantial rise in the number of industrial workers. Rhode relates that the war improved on these accomplishments and increased employment and industrial output. Wartime expansion thus resulted less from military mobilization than from the state's past economic performance.

Roger Lotchin presents a similar perspective in his comparative study of the state's three largest cities and sees no revolutionary transformation taking place in them. Some of the wartime changes were transitory, such as civil defense work. This activity and other community programs were discontinued immediately after the conflict. The large population influx disrupted governmental operations and strained essential municipal services. City administrations relied on many volunteers to provide fire and police protection, stood by helplessly as overloaded sewer systems dumped raw sewage along shorelines, and postponed the implementation of detailed plans to improve various public facilities. The advance of manufacturing was partly due to connections with earlier industrialism and did not alter California's standing among the nation's industrial states. Lotchin reveals that Los Angeles and San Francisco added fewer manufacturing jobs than did eastern and midwestern cities and lagged behind them in expenditures for plants and new equipment. Political decision making also changed little during the war. White male representatives maintained control of local government and left few opportunities for members of minority groups to enter municipal offices. So the war impacted California in complex ways. Yet to date, the literature on war and society has not captured the full complexity of the war experience for either California, the West, or the United States.

5. Nash, *American West Transformed*, 5, 15; Nash, *World War II and the West*, xii.

War is one of the most important elements in the history of the twentieth-century United States. Therefore, its influence is profoundly important, especially for the American West. In the West, national defense and sectional growth have long been allied, so the question of the impact of the Second World War on the West is aptly framed. Fortunately, this influence of war on the West has been frequently discussed by historians. There are studies of particular locales, like Leonard Arrington's investigations of Utah cities, and broader perspectives on the entire West itself. In recent years, Gerald Nash and Carl Abbott have contributed several major works dealing with war and the West.<sup>6</sup>

Because of all this, the subject of war has been indelibly typed onto the western historiographical agenda. This literature has great merit. It has opened up the scholarly debate on the question; it has laid down crucial interpretive guidelines, and it has investigated important subjects and geographic arenas. Scholars of war and society owe much to those who have pioneered in this field. However, much remains to be done both to cover the geographic areas of the West and the United States and to test the hypotheses that have been advanced. The gaps are perhaps as important as the testing.

Although the literature of war and society in the United States has been narrowly conceived and concentrated around a small number of major topics, enough has been written about the general subject to assure us that it is a very complex one. There were hundreds of American home fronts and many western ones, and they often differed radically. For example, the war provided only a reprieve for Lowell, Massachusetts, which at the conclusion of the conflict continued its economic decline.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, places like Huntsville, Alabama, and the Utah cities hit the takeoff point because of the clash.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, American universities were initially hard hit by the conflict. Only because the military agreed to recycle its trainees

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6. Carl Abbott, *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in Sunbelt Cities* (Chapel Hill, 1981), 37-40.

7. Marc Scott Miller, *The Irony of Victory: World War II and Lowell, Massachusetts* (Urbana, 1988), 192-213.

8. Leonard J. Arrington, Thomas G. Alexander, and Eugene A. Erb, Jr., "Utah's Biggest Business: Ogden Air Materiel Area at Hill Air Force Base, 1938-1963," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXXIII (1965), 9-15.

through the colleges and universities were many of them able to keep their doors open.<sup>9</sup> Mobile, Alabama, had a different experience with war. The conflict almost overwhelmed that city with migrants, pollution, racial and intramural white tensions, children needing education, and demand for housing.<sup>10</sup> Yet Birmingham, Alabama, was by no means overpowered by the conflict, registering only slight growth. Detroit, Michigan, almost choked on federal contracts and ultimately became the single leading producer of war materials. It fared in much the same way as Mobile, except worse; the worst race riot of the war occurred in the Motor City. Michigan farmers escaped the riots and found their products in great demand, but the draft and war industry left them without a labor supply to produce their crops.<sup>11</sup> Although the stereotype of the congested war center is still the dominant one, many places suffered from decline rather than from an explosion of growth. For example, nine out of ten North Carolina counties lost population during the war despite the conflict's reputation for tonic effect.<sup>12</sup>

What was true of localities was also true of groups. Working-class women often went into factory or other defense work, yet middle-class women preferred voluntary work. Even the public appeals to the two classes of people differed. War propagandists and mobilizers implored the former with public patriotic entreaties and the latter with personal, individualized ones.<sup>13</sup> And every group had a slightly different version of the African-American Double V Campaign. Labor would help win the war and let management run production, but in return workers wanted to advance union interests and membership.<sup>14</sup> Catholic leaders wanted to help win the conflict, but did not want Catholic

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9. Louis E. Keefer, "Students, Soldiers, Sailors: Trainees on Virginia College Campuses during World War II," *Virginia Cavalcade*, XXXIX (1989), 22-35.

10. Mary Martha Thomas, "The Mobile Homefront during the Second World War," *Gulf Coast Historical Quarterly*, I (1986), 55-75.

11. Alan Clive, "The Michigan Farmer in World War II," *Michigan History*, LX (1976), 1.

12. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *County Data Book* (Washington, D.C., 1947), 278-291.

13. Maureen Honey, "The Working Class Woman and Recruitment Propaganda during World War II: Class Differences in the Portrayal of War Work," *Signs*, VIII (1983), 672-687.

14. Nelson Lichtenstein, "The Making of the Postwar Working Class: Cultural Pluralism and Social Structure in World War II," *Historian*, LI (1988), 42-62.

women to go into the factories. They felt that Catholic women could make a greater contribution to the defeat of fascism by holding families together than by welding ships together or putting rivets into airplanes.<sup>15</sup> African-Americans wanted to win the war, but steadfastly refused to follow their World War I strategy of putting civil and economic rights on the back burner for the duration.<sup>16</sup> Japanese Americans were thrown into relocation camps while the patriotism of Chinese Americans was thrown into bold relief. Not everyone had exactly the same experience. This variety should heighten our sensitivity to the fact that World War II created many different home fronts, often in the same towns. It also highlights our need for further studies to eliminate the gaps. We probably will never fill them all, but we definitely need to eradicate more than we have.

Among the most important of these is the gap in the urban historiography of big cities, or the "arsenals of democracy." Astonishingly enough at present, there is virtually nothing on the history of the major places like New York City, San Francisco, or Philadelphia during the war and only four studies of a really important big-city defense center. They are Alan Clive's *State of War*, which is ostensibly about Michigan but focuses mainly on Detroit; Perry Duis and Scott LaFrance's *We've Got a Job to Do: Chicagoans and World War II*, a volume prepared to accompany an exhibit on the war by the Chicago Historical Society; Marilyn Johnson's *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland & the East Bay in World War II*; and Arthur Verge's *Paradise Transformed: Los Angeles during the Second World War*.<sup>17</sup> A chapter of Carl Abbott's *New Urban America* deals with several medium-size cities, but the major ones have been largely ignored.<sup>18</sup>

This extraordinary omission in the literature is in large part due to the narrow focus of historians who have written about

15. Thomas R. Greene, "Catholic Thought and World War II Labor Legislation," *American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, XCV (1984), 37-55.

16. Harvard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," *Journal of American History*, LVIII (1971), 661-682.

17. Alan Clive, *State of War: Michigan in World War II* (Ann Arbor, 1979); Perry Duis and Scott LaFrance, *We've Got a Job to Do: Chicagoans and World War II* (Chicago, 1992); Arthur Verge, *Paradise Transformed: Los Angeles during the Second World War* (Dubuque, 1993).

18. Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War II* (Austin, 1983), 1-30, treat the war perceptively, but as a background to their main story.

the conflict in the last three decades. Most have concentrated on groups, and very few groups at that. For example, if one were to extract the literature on the response of the American government and Jewish Americans to the Holocaust, on women in factories, on Japanese Americans, and on African-Americans, the result would be a Grand Canyon-size gap in the literature. Add Hollywood and Axis prisoners of war to the list, and one would have eliminated virtually half of the war and American society literature for World War II. This emphasis leaves nearly every subject disproportionately emphasized, positively or negatively. For example, although Axis prisoners numbered only some 425,000, and not all of them worked in the United States, there is more literature about them than about the rest of the male work force *in its entirety*.<sup>19</sup>

These topics are important, and indeed critical to our understanding of World War II; yet by concentrating so overwhelmingly on this short agenda, we have managed to exclude most of the history of everybody else. We could hardly conceive of a state in which too much was written about the calamity of the Holocaust or the various American responses to it, or even the less tragic but still dreadful incarceration of the Japanese Americans. However, even if we have not written too much about these subjects, it is clear that we have not written enough about dozens of others. It is important to know about Japanese Americans, but also about Chinese Americans; to know about the contributions of Hollywood to the Second Great War, but also about those of other industries; to understand about the Jewish response to the Holocaust, but also to appreciate the other experiences of Jewish Americans; to be sensitive to the history of blacks, but also to that of the other, much more numerous ethnic groups; and to appreciate the importance of Axis prisoners, but also that of the rest of the masculine and much of the female labor force.

The contributions to this special edition of the *Pacific Historical Review* on World War II are ideally designed to combat these shortcomings. Each article attacks the dearth of big-city

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19. Clive, "Michigan Farmer," 308. The assessment of World War II historiography is based on a comprehensive search of *Writings on American History* (Washington, D.C., 1890-1993) and *America: History and Life* (Santa Barbara, 1973-1993).



studies while making crucial individual contributions as well. Arthur Verge addresses the war experience of the rest of Los Angeles, including its civil defense, urban growth, and ethno-cultural, gender, cultural, and, above all, economic history. The economic history of World War II cities is yet to be written, but Verge provides a good start for one of the most important arsenals of democracy. Marilyn S. Johnson writes the history of the much maligned, yet very significant metropolitan area of Oakland and the East Bay. And she does so in such a way as to lay down more diverse lines of inquiry into the subject of war and society. She attacks the war from the perspectives of demography, politics, and popular culture, three of the most neglected aspects of the conflict.<sup>20</sup> Paul Rhode labors in the even more exotic garden of World War II urban economic history and, in particular, tries to place the economic development of California cities into the stream of California history. The results are surprising. Abraham Shragge highlights the experience of one of America's most important, but still relatively under-appreciated cities, San Diego. Unlike the vast majority of students of the war, who concentrate upon the immediate war years, Shragge puts the wartime experience of San Diego into a much more extended time framework. This perspective demonstrates that the war was a culmination of the Border City's long experience as a federal colony. Roger Lotchin looks at government, politics, community, economics, and demography and places much of his discussion into a more national context than is usually the case with California war history.

Yet perhaps the most important contribution of the pieces in this volume is that they attack cities per se rather than piecemeal. There are many investigations of the parts of cities during the war. These generally focus on the interests of some group, as do those studies of World War II women which, like Cynthia Enloe's, ask "Was It a 'Good War' for Women?" These works are all to the good, but they do not look at the larger query of how all the groups fit together. That question is even more neglected than any other topic of World War II and society. If we accept "the view that an organic or integrated whole has

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20. Verge, *Paradise Transformed*; Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993).

a reality independent of and greater than the sum of its parts," then urban history is ideally suited to address this point.<sup>21</sup> We could debate whether cities are organic, but they clearly are integrated in perhaps millions of ways. These articles are incontestably consistent with this holistic approach.

Necessarily, much of the discussion is addressed to the "transformation hypothesis," the notion that World War II transformed California from a colony of the rest of the country into a pacesetter for it. Obviously, this is Gerald Nash's theory of western development, applied specifically to California cities. The transformation hypothesis has been very influential over the years, but it has not been extensively tested. It is the purpose of this special edition to test it. Unfortunately, we could not persuade Professor Nash to participate in this venture, when it first began as a session at the 1992 Western Historical Association meeting in New Haven. However, as the reader will note, Professor Nash's views are well represented in our articles.

Significantly, Frederick Jackson Turner's ideas are still vigorously disputed in the field of western history today, long after he was declared irrelevant. That is especially true of those who seek to advance competing paradigms. Yet even when historians reject Turner's interpretations of western development, they still debate his questions. Like the assessments of Turner, those of Nash are honored even when we object to them because his notions of war and society are the starting point for anyone interested in the western American version of the subject. One could imagine a much worse fate for one's intellectual legacy.

As might be expected, our perspectives on the transformation hypothesis are as diverse as we are. Paul Rhode holds that the transformation had already occurred before the war began. Arthur Verge concludes that the transformation happened during the war, just as Nash contended. Marilyn Johnson believes that the transformation failed in the economic realm, but came true in the political and social one. Abraham Shragge holds that the war markedly changed many of the details of San Diego's existence, but not the larger reality of its role as a federal colony. And Roger Lotchin argues that the transformation came

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21. David B. Guralnik, ed., *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (2nd ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970), 669.

both before and after the war, and that in some realms, there was not much change at all. During the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, Bret Harte and a friend stood overlooking their stricken city and at the same time noticed the sister, but competing, city of Oakland, which lay relatively undamaged across the bay. The friend turned to Harte and wondered why San Francisco had been destroyed and Oakland spared. Bret Harte's answer illustrated both his own humor and the hauteur of San Franciscans about their neighbors. He thought about the seeming natural inconsistency for a moment and then answered, "Well, perhaps there are some things that even the earth cannot swallow." We think that the same will be true of some of our own efforts, but hope that it will not be true of all.