

THE TRIUMPHANT PARTNERSHIP

California Cities and the Winning of World War II

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By Roger Lotchin

“Riders were very appropriate to a western war, but these horsemen were a diverse bunch, some looking like remnants of the Old West and others like modern cosmopolitan gentlemen. One group patrolled the ocean-front of San Francisco after dark. While the residents of the nearby Sunset and Seacliff districts huddled around their radios, blinds lowered and curtains pulled, listening to war news or to *One Man's Family*, other residents rode the beaches. Mounted on their own ponies, the men of the San Francisco Polo Club labored through the sands of China Beach, Baker Beach, and [Ocean Beach], looking for Imperial Japanese intruders. Far to the south, guns on their hips, another group of riders wound along the paths of the ‘famed Green Verdugo Hills, lying between La Crescenta Valley and the aircraft production area of Glendale and Burbank.’ These cowboys from the Onondarka Ranch, ‘realizing the ever-increasing threat of sabotage’ in the hills, served as the night patrol against sabotage for the county sheriff and the forestry department. Still farther south, the celebrated Buffalo Soldier horse cavalry of the United States Army rode the trails along the Mexican border. They carried guns with the triggers lashed down and barrels stuffed shut to avoid incidents with the Mexican troops across the international boundary. Anywhere else these riders would have seemed out of place and time, but in the West they seemed fitting.¹

“With the news of . . . Pearl Harbor, the border troops were ordered to Camp Lockett to reinforce the defenders there.” In and around San Diego, “everything was apprehension and uncertainty. Thousands of people streamed out of” the city over the mountain road, fleeing the beleaguered port. “They had been told that all nonessential civilian personnel had to leave, . . . but they certainly meant to come back. As the mobile columns met on the mountainside, the white occupants of the retreating family caravans leaned out their car windows, yelling to the advancing horse-borne black troops, ‘Go get ’em, Boys. Go get ’em!’”²

The interaction of these two groups, Caucasian and African American, emphasizes the fundamental reality of World War II. It brought together disparate and often hostile groups in a common endeavor. With the perfection of the airplane bomber, homefronts became battlefields in such places as Leningrad, Stalingrad, London, Manchester, Coventry, Berlin, Cologne, Antwerp, and Hamburg. No one needed to remind these urban residents of the reality of war; they heard it nightly in the air raid sirens and saw it in a hundred burning cityscapes.³ With a few exceptions, American cities were never attacked, so they had to imagine the war.

Civil defense and homefront activities stimulated those imaginations with a vengeance. Defense and civil defense preparations proceeded on the assumption that the cities could be attacked and must be mobilized. Historians have often believed that the outbreak of war made Californians hysterical. However, that is a psychological term that would be hard to pin onto seven million people. It seems clear that Californians were afraid, perhaps panicked, but most of the fear and panic stemmed from the actions and statements of federal, state, or local politicians. An invasion seemed far-fetched, but a raid on coastal cities from aircraft-carrier planes was a possibility. People had some reason to be afraid, but hardly hysterical. Mary Jean Potts, in an oral history, remembered that she was afraid when an air-raid alert stopped auto and rail traffic on the San Francisco Bay Bridge. “However, instead of rushing out of the trains and autos onto the bridge and running, in a movie-style mob, for the Yerba Buena Island tunnels for shelter, the passengers stayed put. Soon the conductor passed through the cars, saying ‘Don’t be alarmed, everybody. This is a black-out. Roosevelt has said to practice.’”⁴

San Francisco learned of the magnitude of the Pearl Harbor defeat when ships carrying the wounded and refugee civilians streamed through

the Golden Gate in full view of the city. People rushed to the harbor to find loved ones or just to witness a historic moment. The police set up barricades and people waited. The cabbies and ambulances carrying the wounded and the refugees soon spread the word that the defeat had been serious. The people at the docks did not riot, tear their hair, assault the police barricades, or run about hysterically. They waited patiently in the drizzle. Their vigil could end in grief or relief, but either way they calmly took military and civilian refugees into their homes and institutions to care for them.⁵

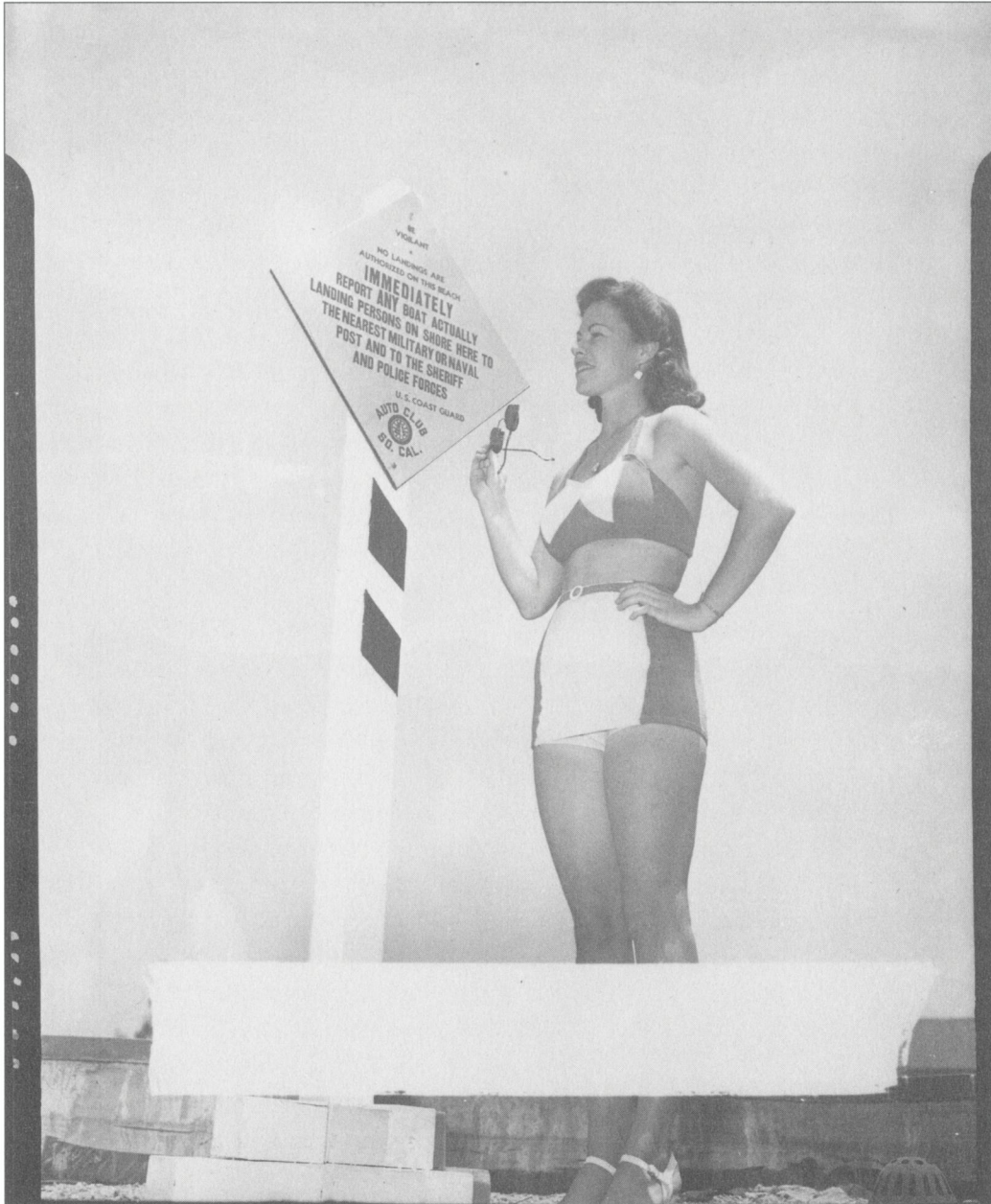
Then, for the most part, they and their counterparts in Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego buckled down to the task of organizing the home-front for production and civil defense.⁶ In doing so, they helped stimulate a remarkable sense of community. The various groups in society still had their differences, but these were not over the war. Various large-scale events encouraged this unity. In San Francisco the networks shut off outside broadcasting to allow people to participate in a five-minute mass radio prayer. In L.A., the city, by way of radio, staged a mock attack on Pearl Harbor to commemorate the one-year anniversary. The military created sham battles in Kezar Stadium, the L.A. Coliseum, and other sports arenas. Not everyone observed the blackouts, but they brought together whole metropolitan areas. In the first Bay Area blackout, "From San Jose in the south to Napa in the north and from the breakers on the Great Highway in San Francisco many miles into the East Bay, most lights went off, the power went out, civilian transportation ceased, and people settled in somewhere in the great metropolitan region. . . . Seldom do urbanites share such experiences."⁷

At sea, gentlemen's yachts and Catalina flying boats patrolled for enemy craft; spotters sat atop the hills of San Francisco and San Diego; volunteers backed them up in their private planes; and filter centers plotted all aircraft until identified. Civil defense wardens instructed people on how to douse magnesium incendiaries, and an army of air wardens, initially 33,000 in L.A., 20,000 in San Francisco, and 10,000 in San Diego, watched for fires, enforced the dim-outs, and backed up the firemen. First aid and damage clearance groups stood ready if needed. Schools practiced evacuation drills into slit trenches on the grounds and dog tagged the children. In L.A., famed for its pet cemeteries, civil defense even provided anti-anxiety drugs for the pets and dog tagged the canines too. Sand bags went up around key buildings, like the San Francisco telephone building.

San Diego thought evacuation was not feasible, but San Francisco, apparently inspired by the British, disagreed. They actually staged an evacuation drill of 1,500 people from the Marina and Aquatic Park to Pier 60, using private boats, as a “readiness test.” This “Dunkirk at the Marina” never had to be carried out under wartime conditions, but it indicated how organized civil defense was. Someone proposed that Alcatraz also be evacuated, but that suggestion promptly created a Bay Area NIMBY consensus against these desperadoes.⁸ The threat of air war banished the 1942 Rose Bowl to Duke University, shut down nighttime recreation department activities, and closed the famed Santa Anita racetrack. Since loose lips could sink ships, urbanites were told to zip them, and bartenders and cosmetologists were encouraged to monitor compliance. The radio and the newspapers, especially the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Oakland Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *San Diego Union*, faithfully broadcast the civil defense message, as did clubs, schools, vets’ organizations, billboards, and, in San Francisco, even parks, where residents learned how to cope with incendiaries. “Los Angeles, with its proximity to the dramatic influences of Hollywood, went them one better by staging civil defense pageants in the playgrounds, employing children as actors.”⁹

Remarkably, most of this activity functioned through the city governments, the schools, and the extraordinary network of urban clubs and voluntary organizations. When the spotters needed models to help identify enemy planes, the Oakland Cloud Dusters Club leader turned his house into a workshop to fabricate model planes and then persuaded the public schools to mass produce them. When baby sitters were needed to free Upper Mission District mothers for civil defense, the Vickies, Volunteers for Victory, a group of young San Francisco girls, sprang up to tend the kids. And when Los Angeles needed casualty stations, a laundry list of volunteers stepped up—the Brentwood Golf Club, UCLA, Union Station, Blessed Sacrament School, the Elks, Wilshire Methodist Episcopal Church, and sundry high schools.¹⁰

Urbanites were almost diabolically clever in encouraging participation. Cities could finance a ship (and L.A. financed five, including a cruiser), if not that, a plane, if not that, a PT boat, and if not that, a torpedo. The press publicized these activities and also the more negative ones by publishing draft dodgers’ names. Alhambra Junior High School took the high road with an honor roll, by which students were regularly paraded as the list of



ON THE LOOKOUT FOR SABOTEURS ON CALIFORNIA'S BEACHES.
The sign reads, "Immediately report ANY boat actually landing persons on shore here to the nearest military or naval post and to the sheriff and police forces."
The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

its servicemen grew. In short, civil defense activists found ingenious ways to encourage participation. The emphasis on disruption and hysteria fails to comprehend this reality. Californians were not running around in psychological circles. A power failure and blackout in New York City in 1977 triggered widespread looting and rioting.¹¹ By contrast, wartime urban Californians organized for defense in a cool, tough minded way.¹²

And it should be said that the United States was very fortunate to be a nation of cities. Americans have historically been skeptical of their cities, perhaps none more than L.A. Yet every city has a mostly unused capacity that can be more fully exploited in case of emergency. Theaters often run half empty; football stadiums are seldom used; many streets are utilized only intermittently; open spaces are largely unoccupied, except during weekends and holidays; many housing and business structures are occupied only partially; and buses and subways run half empty after peak hours. *We might justly call these latent military resources.* During the Forties War, this excess capacity was a priceless asset for a beleaguered government. None was more important than the surplus labor supply.¹³

And none was stranger than the prisons. As the labor shortage mounted, it brought the prisons into the war effort. At San Quentin, a reporter discovered one of "the Nation's Strangest Assembly Lines," which manufactured the third US ration book. "The convicts all were volunteers; they completely organized and supervised their own work, and they guarded the finished product." Even the warden needed permission to enter the storage area at night from the convict guarding it. Prison band director "Major" John Hendricks, "doing the book [a life sentence] for a murder rap," ran the venture. As *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist J. Campbell Bruce put it, "Hendricks . . . had put together 'the strangest roster of employees a personnel manager ever saw—murderers, thugs, robbers, burglars, embezzlers, bad check artists, swindlers, and thieves of every category.'"14

Hendricks organized one thousand men into specialized sections, like an auto assembly plant minus the mechanization. Each convict performed one task, "opening request letters, stuffing, and licking envelopes." The seals on the ration book envelopes sent to an unsuspecting public must have contained the largest concentration of criminal DNA in the history of American law enforcement. San Quentin also manufactured the anti-submarine nets that stretched across the Golden Gate Strait, textiles for the

Vallejo Navy Yard, mattresses, metal desks, and even landing craft. Alcatraz seemed to specialize in laundry, doing the wash from incoming merchant ships and many of the bases around the bay. We don't know if Al Capone, "Public Enemy Number One," cleaned anyone's socks, but his inmate "associates" certainly did. City jails countrywide, beginning with those in San Francisco, also paroled convicts to work in defense. Although San Quentin and Alcatraz were a state and a federal prison, respectively, their experience and that of the San Francisco city jail "reminds us that metropolitan areas are vast repositories of underutilized resources, which can easily be turned to some other account."¹⁵

The heavy concentration of defense activities in the urban areas demanded even more workers, who could be either imported workers or underused labor in cities. The latter eventually made up 40 percent of the work force and was much more valuable than in-migrant labor, upon whom historians have concentrated. City dwellers already had housing, food, transportation, schools, and recreation. As the young men left, single and married women, Okies, high school boys, retirees, the elderly, African Americans, Chinese Americans, civil prisoners, POWs, and the handicapped stepped in. For example, Lockheed and Douglas Aircraft "pioneered in hiring the blind," using seeing-eye dogs to "guide their masters to their work benches." Migrants made up a larger percent of the work force, but they used up train space, gasoline, and tires getting to California and, once there, required the fresh services indicated. Local workers did not require that tradeoff and contributed much more per capita.¹⁶

Others met spot markets. In Los Angeles, 5,000 temporary volunteers of married women, high-school boys and girls, and retired postal clerks, a number equal to the regular postal staff, turned out to cope with the Christmas mail rush. Nearly 100,000 other urbanites, usually young girls and housewives, appeared in "rolled-up jeans, tied-up shirtwaists, and bandanna-knotted hair" to pick the Sonoma apple or the Central Valley tomato harvests in 1945. When the army needed to reinforce Australia just after Pearl Harbor, the transport ship bunks were not ready. The Oakland public schools furloughed "sea scouts," who spliced together 140 miles of rope berths in seventeen days. Someone always seemed to step up.¹⁷

Some assets seemed most unlikely. Much of the L.A. and San Francisco municipal transit was sadly run down. Initially, most workers rode to the plants in their cars. Yet as tires wore out, many shifted to carpooling and

enough switched to streetcars and buses to create a transit renaissance.¹⁸ By war's end, even the limping L.A. system carried 1,000,000 persons daily; and in San Diego, where carpooling thrived, transit hauled 353,000 daily, or 129,000,000 per annum. Despite all the talk of auto commuting, a Bay Area conductorette remembered people actually fighting to get on the streetcars. A scarcity of cars and transit might have seriously restricted output. Instead, the work force of Fortress California could commute in a great variety of ways. For example, by war's end, one could drive from San Francisco to the Marinship yards in Sausalito, bus to the Richmond yards or to Moore in Oakland, take the ferry to the Kaiser yards in Richmond, ride the trolley from Oakland to Richmond, and walk to the yards in East Oakland. Cities never completely solved the transportation problem, but they coped well enough to keep production rolling.¹⁹

And well enough even to turn urban sprawl into an asset. Although politically fragmented, the metropolitan areas were economically integrated, tightly bound by highways, rails, light rails, telephones, bridges, and countless human connections. Sprawl has been almost universally denounced, but plants and bases required lots of room. Greg Hise notes that some aircraft factories were decentralized for exactly that reason. Sprawl allowed defense facilities to utilize suburban space and the infrastructure and services of suburban towns such as Riverside, Burbank, or Inglewood. The horizontal morphology and its economic integration allowed cities to function more effectively as both a military organization and a defense production unit.²⁰

Airports and harbors were another public transportation asset. Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Diego turned over most of their airports and harbors to the war effort. The government built docks and piers of their own but profited enormously from these urban facilities.²¹

Another precious urban gift to the war effort was water, a significant booster achievement. By 1941, Los Angeles received water from both the Owens Valley and the Colorado River; San Francisco had opened its Hetch Hetchy system in 1934; Oakland and the East Bay cities had opened their new works in 1923, and other places bought from these or built their own.²² Unlike today, they had a lot of excess capacity, which the military desperately needed. The government built bases all over California and, as elsewhere in the United States, often used municipal water to supply instant military cities of 10,000 to 20,000 men. The Desert Training Center, in the

high Mojave Desert east of L.A., dwarfed even these. Designed to train men to fight in the North African Desert, the center became the largest base in the world, training over a million men and women and housing 191,620 at one time in 1943. Created and commanded by a Californian, General George Patton, the site was chosen because it was adjacent to the Colorado River Aqueduct running to metropolitan L.A. Mass water systems could not be improvised overnight, like barracks, streets, or temporary wartime housing in small southern towns. Without this urban water, the war probably could not have been fought out of these desert locales.²³

Since the 1870s, cities had built impressive public parks: Griffith in L.A., Golden Gate in San Francisco, Balboa in San Diego, and East Bay Regional partly in Oakland. Each city lent a part of its parks and playgrounds for tent colonies to house servicemen. In addition to its zoo, San Diego volunteered its magnificent Balboa Park to become Marine Corps Camp Kidd. Schools served as well. Victory gardens sprouted in residents' yards, school and junior college grounds, and park lands.²⁴ Much of the training that turned housewives into Rosie Riveters and Wanda Welders, that taught other women to be draftspersons, and that remade high-school boys into mechanics, took place after hours in the public school systems.²⁵ Other schools administered the rationing system and lent their buildings for various purposes. San Diego led in this effort. San Quentin lent a hand, too, training cooks for the Merchant Marine. "Prison cuisine for the merchant marine" did not make a good wartime slogan, but evidently it ate well.²⁶

Housing was yet another latent war resource and the biggest problem in war production. Shipbuilding and aircraft jumped from 10,000 and 20,000, respectively, to 280,000, and 244,000. This crunch transformed public housing from reform housing, designed for the poor, into war-workers' housing. In Vallejo and Richmond, true shock cities of the war, federal agencies constructed massive new housing projects. By 1945, these two cities had perhaps 50 percent public housing, an astounding figure for American cities. Los Angeles and Oakland got much less, and San Francisco and San Diego received something in between. Still, in the big cities the authorities did not build nearly enough housing to shelter these expanded populations. The latent resources of cities made up the difference.²⁷

Conversion provided some respite. Some let spare rooms, basements, and back porches. Others told horror stories of migrants sleeping in chicken coops; many slept in Balboa or Golden Gate parks. Cities allowed tent



Even starlets contributed to the war effort, here promoting rubber collection.
The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

colonies in the parks. The Catholic Church gymnasiums and the San Francisco Laguna Honda Home for the elderly indigent took in weekend guests. Spaces for another 60,000 in L.A. came from the ill-fated Japanese. San Diegans in general and working-class housewives in East Oakland were especially eager to rent. "The city manager of Oakland claimed that 30 percent of the workers in Richmond and 20 percent of all Bay Area shipyard workers lived in Oakland," where not much public housing existed. By hook or crook, the great California cities transformed themselves into vast dormitories for defense laborers or weekendening servicemen.²⁸

The shortage caused great distress, though not as much as the Asian jungles that GIs inhabited. Still, the problems could not be fully solved without taking men, machines, and materials from the war effort; and despite the discomfort, the housing crisis did not seriously undermine production.

Scrap was another urban asset. Betty Smith, in the novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, and, later, historian David Nasaw have reminded us that cities are world-class junkyards.²⁹ War transformed this urban trash into a martial asset. Los Angeles alone collected 13.8 million tons of scrap in the first half of 1943. An Essex Class aircraft carrier required only 27,000 tons of steel, so L.A. could have built a few. Amusingly, the largest source of junk came from the "vast quantities" in the "auto graveyards" of this oft-reviled car culture.³⁰

Historians have not agreed on how much additional capital plant and equipment were built to win the war.³¹ However that debate comes out, cities made a singular contribution as well. To an extraordinary degree, boosters built California cities much larger than they needed to be. Without the boosters who helped produce the outsized urbanization of California, the Second World War military would have needed to build endless miles of roads, highways, bridges, sanitary and storm sewers, open spaces, docks, berths, breakwaters, aqueducts, power plants, housing, educational plants, recreational venues, and other requirements of war. "Expending those resources would have made industrial production much less efficient." In the American South, where urbanization was retarded, the government did have to invest in many of these assets. Americans have often been skeptical of or hostile toward their cities, but World War II California was lucky to have them. Bigger was better.³²

The story of ethnocultural and gender groups is also mainly positive except for the tragedy of the Japanese Americans.³³ Surprisingly, Pearl Harbor did not cause an immediate backlash. For a month, most people and the press defended the Japanese, but due to a complex mix of circumstances, their situation began to worsen. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an executive order to allow the military to move both citizens and non-citizens away from sensitive areas on the West Coast. In March the order was used to relocate Japanese Americans to ten camps in the West and South. This well-adjusted and progressive minority was not guilty of either espionage or sabotage, and none of the intelligence services thought it necessary to remove them. Nor did any serious observer fear a West Coast invasion. Historians have called this ordeal one of the worst civil rights violations in American history, and it also injured the economy, strapped as it was for labor for food production. But a lobby of growers, nationalists, labor unions, immigration restrictionists, politicians, and federal military and civil bureaucrats, ostensibly concerned about national security, eventually prevailed. My only disagreement with the Japanese American story is that it usually overemphasizes racism. These Americans were not a race; they were Asians of Japanese descent. It was nationalism and the weakness of federal officials, especially Attorney General Francis Biddle and General John De Witt, head of the Western Defense Command, that victimized them. One hundred and fifty thousand Hawaiians of Japanese descent, as well as other Asians, were not relocated, so it is not plausible to blame relocation of West Coast Japanese Americans primarily on race. This is not to deny that many Californians and federal bureaucrats were racists but rather to assert that the government singled out the Japanese primarily because of nationality.³⁴ Nor is it accurate to call the camps concentration camps.³⁵

Fortunately, the war impacted other groups in a modestly positive way. Blacks invented the slogan of the Double V. They wanted not only to win the war but also to enhance their place in American society.³⁶ Yet every other group had a similar Double V. They wanted to win the war and enhance their place in American society. Time does not permit a full discussion, but several groups are illustrative.

Although the Chinese Americans were the same race as the Japanese, their fate was strikingly different.³⁷ Like the Nisei, second-generation Chinese were Americanized. They wore bobby sox, listened to the radio,



An apple provides scant comfort for a Japanese American child en route to a relocation camp. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.*

danced to the big bands, attended schools, played sports, and coveted cars. However, mainstream Americans did not accept them. Although they revered their ancestral land, China was ravaged by war from 1937 on. These Americans were torn between two cultures. They could not get in over here nor return over there. Though they paid in blood, the war solved their dilemma.

Before 1937, discrimination had restricted Chinese American activities mostly to Chinatowns. The Imperial Japanese invasion of China in 1937 changed that. Chinese Americans responded with boycotts of Japan-

ese goods and stores, fund raising for the war in the homeland, and protests against sending US scrap iron to Japan for use against their already tortured mother country. From the time that they ventured down to the docks in Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles to protest the export of scrap, the Chinese never looked back. When Pearl Harbor drew the United States into the conflict, Chinatowns merely broadened their commitment to affirm both countries. The war made Chinese Americans a valuable ally and lessened bias. They now got jobs in the shipyards which paid better than did curio stores or garment shops. They began to learn the ways of politics, and they entered the services and served in integrated units. The uniform opened public places to them and qualified them for VA loans and the GI Bill. Men fared better than women, but both progressed. The war began to lead them out of Chinatowns. It did not reverse their status overnight, but as K. Scott Wong has noted, it laid the foundation for striking postwar advances.³⁸

Italian Americans were much more numerous and integrated, so they could not be relocated. General De Witt toyed with the idea but then decided against it.³⁹ Unfortunately, the government did classify first-generation Italians as "enemy aliens," a decision that was fundamentally wrong because these Italians were not enemies. Nonetheless, the decision injured Italians in many ways. Fortunately, Washington lifted the stigma on Columbus Day, 1942, just in time for the election. Otherwise, Italian Americans prospered. They renounced Mussolini, worked in defense and civil defense, fought with distinction, left North Beach and the Lake Temescal District of Oakland, and other neighborhoods, got GI benefits, intermarried, and moved into the mainstream.⁴⁰

African and Mexican Americans made significant progress, too. Although they never overcame the problem of housing discrimination, they usually progressed in journalism, set up their own political institutions, gained good jobs, created a middle class, and founded cultural institutions like newspapers and churches. They made uneven progress in the unions and even in GI benefits but advanced there, too. Mainstream acceptance lagged, but toleration grew. Blacks remained segregated, but 500,000 Mexicans served in integrated military units.⁴¹ In her classic study of the Moore Shipyard in Oakland, Catherine Archibald characterized the place as a "seething cauldron," brimming with talk of lynching, where people worked "amid the dissonance of hatred."⁴² Yet no hanging occurred, nor even sig-

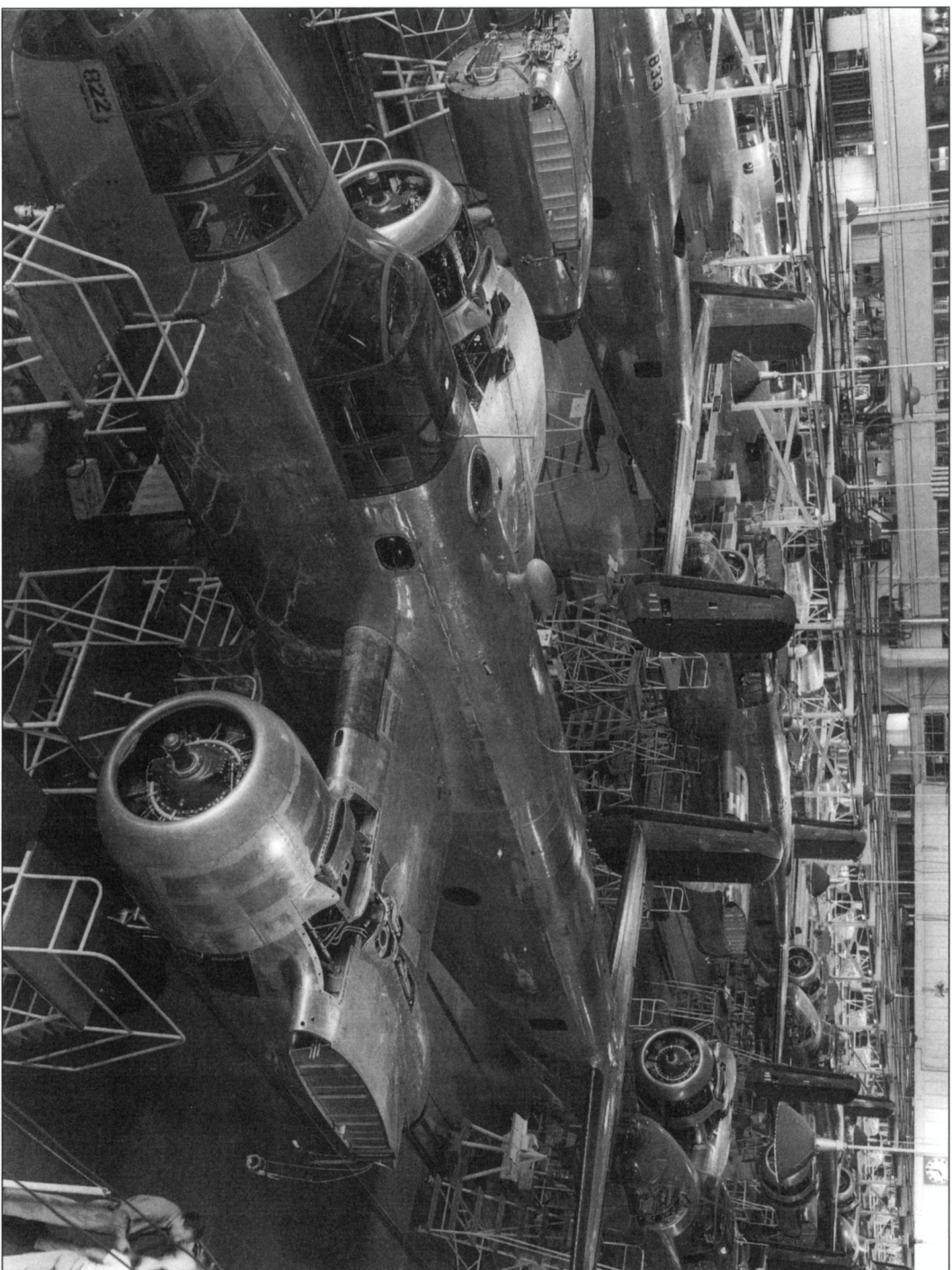


The explosion of jobs in defense industries meant an expanding role for women in the workplace.

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

nificant riots, despite the Zoot Suit/sailor brawl of 1943, and there were relatively minor work stoppages.⁴³ These tensions did not seem to slow war production. This allegedly “seething” work force turned out ships at a record rate.

Women gained, both in self-esteem and economically. As the labor shortage grew, women moved into formerly all-male positions immediately, and as the scarcity became acute, they worked their way up the occupational ladder. Before long employers were begging for women. Charles Wollenberg put the breakthrough at Marinship in the summer of 1942, and by year’s end, women worked in an impressive variety of trades. In aircraft



B-25 bombers being assembled in one of California's giant airplane manufacturing plants.
Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection.

and shipbuilding their numbers eventually reached 20 to 50 percent. They were also employed as railroaders, blacksmiths, grease monkeys, radio broadcasters, draftspersons, welders (especially in the North Bay shipyards), as well as in the traditional secretarial trades.⁴⁴

Women made a signal contribution to the war effort and specifically to the maintenance of capitalism and democracy. Although Rosie the Riveter is the inevitable and partially mistaken symbol of female labor, many made contributions in white-collar and non-paid work as well. Political parties, the stock exchanges, newspapers, juries, and rationing boards found women doing either paid labor or voluntary work. The L.A. League of Women Voters even tasked itself to watchdog the system of rationing in the same way as the Truman Committee oversaw the larger war effort. Women organized and sustained bandaging manufacture in their homes so completely that the regular industry ceased for the duration, a kind of de-industrialization. Women drove officer transport vehicles and ambulances, carted materiel to the docks, brought coffee to the sentries on the bridges, drove taxis, steered convoys through the cities, and took over the platform work on the streetcars and buses. They staffed the USO with dancers. When major battles flooded the coastal cities with the wounded, women drove the men to hospitals, collected blood, served as nurses' aides, wrote letters home, and took the recovered men to the trains for the trip home or back to the front. They were omnipresent and indispensable. Historians focus on wage-earning women, but volunteer work was just as crucial to the war and more important in creating female self-esteem and independence.⁴⁵

All of these groups suffered discrimination and abuse, from unions, management, white men, and workers' wives opposed to women at work. They also gained something from the war, but to some, not enough. Cynthia Enloe voices this disappointment by querying whether the conflict was a good war for women. She does not think so, and many others have agreed that the impact of the war was not transformative enough.⁴⁶ Still, the most important question is not what these groups got out of the war but what they put into it. The war created a need for greatly expanded production, but since there was not enough skilled labor, nor time to train it, business had to rely on an unskilled work force for mass production. Unskilled Black, Hispanic, female, Chinese, and Italian workers were the only labor available. Their presence and willingness to work, even under conditions unsatisfactory to them, enabled the miracles of production to continue.⁴⁷

These miracles supplied US, British, and Russian forces with planes, tanks, trucks, jeeps, shoes, food, and explosives. Providing these prosaic necessities was not as heroic as fighting tank battles in Lorraine or pushing supplies through the murderous Greenland Gap in the North Atlantic. Nonetheless, the homefront achievements were breathtaking.

These are often attributed to a growing, powerful, and increasingly competent nation state. The American state certainly was a large part of the story, as Paul Koistinen and Keith Eiler have shown,⁴⁸ but another substantial part was the accommodation of millions of individuals to the requirements of war. The state could only give orders; someone else had to carry them out. Fortunately, business, labor, and others were able to do so. Their feat was one of organization, mass production, adaptation, and scale. Californians created huge organizations out of small ones and sometimes out of thin air; they developed means of production to cope with unskilled workers; they reoriented their production from familiar products to vastly unfamiliar ones, and they found ways to operate on a prodigious scale.

Politicians at the time and historians since have often observed that the war benefited big business too much.⁴⁹ Indeed, the conflict helped American big business a lot, but this paradigm does not fit the major California industries: aircraft and shipbuilding. Before the war, each was a small industry. Douglas Aircraft, one of the largest firms in aircraft assembly, employed only some 7,589 persons. Yet the war forced all of the firms to operate on an immensely larger basis. Within a year or two, firms like Lockheed employed as many as 90,000. The Joshua Hendy firm of the Bay Area, which built engines for Liberty and Victory ships, entered the war with 60 employees but by war's end employed 11,500. California shipbuilders worked some 8,000 men in 1939, but by 1943 employed perhaps 282,000.⁵⁰ Creating huge organizations in a year or two, out of tiny or nonexistent ones, was one of the great feats of the war.

Sometimes the scale problem worked in reverse. Due to labor or material shortages some businesses simply became dormant, and government had to downsize radically. By mid-war city governments were imposing a stretchout, to do more with less—15 to 20 percent fewer people.⁵¹

Dealing with the unfamiliar was daunting too. Before the war, the United States had only a small defense industry. Much of it was contained in the government arsenals and in the US navy yards like the one at Vallejo. Private contractors held developmental contracts and built some

materiel, but there was no huge arms industry like Krupps in Germany, Vickers in Great Britain, or Schneider-Creusot in France.⁵² The arsenals and navy yards could not cope with the huge new wartime demand for equipment, so private enterprise had to. In shipbuilding, modest-sized Bay Area firms like Bechtel, Kaiser, and the other partners of the famous six companies turned out thousands of Liberty, Victory, and other ships. Yet before the war none had ever manufactured a ship. They had built Hoover and other dams, highways, the Bay Bridge, and irrigation works, but not ships. Yet they overcame the organizational problems of scale and the intimidating ones of unfamiliarity and mass-produced ships in record times, including one Liberty ship in just over four days.⁵³

Switching from motor cars to tanks, as one L.A. plant did, was also a stretch, but at least tanks were wheeled internal-combustion land vehicles.⁵⁴ Hollywood mobilized directors, actors, and cartoonists to make training films that showed such things as the ravages of syphilis or those of an improperly managed hand grenade. When audiences tired of war movies, the Dream Factory reinvented the newsreel to keep the public engaged.⁵⁵ Colleges changed from educating undergraduates to teaching culture, language, and history to servicemen going abroad. Many other conversions were more alien.⁵⁶

Overnight, the YMCA, YWCA, Salvation Army, National Travelers Aid Association, National Catholic Community Service, and the National Jewish Welfare Board merged their recreational efforts to form something out of nothing and create the United Service Organizations, or USO, the largest entertainment organization in the world.⁵⁷ They ran camp, hospital, troopship, and jungle shows all over the world of war. The San Francisco Stage Door Canteen, opened in 1943, the famous Hollywood Canteen, where stars and starlets mingled with GIs, and local canteens in other cities ran other large-scale operations. A starlet tap dancing on a submarine deck or the Andrews Sisters leading the men and their loved ones in mournful singing as a troopship slipped away from the piers into the mists was a familiar image of war.⁵⁸

The workforce was often as unfamiliar as the work. The services eventually claimed 12.5 million men and 150,000 to 200,000 women from the labor force.⁵⁹ Industry needed to replace these employees and add another 6 million.⁶⁰ Women left the homes, boys quit high school, and industrial veterans left retirement to help. Douglas Aircraft alone employed 12,000



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Newspaper headlines on VJ Day.
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disabled veterans, many of whom had never seen an airplane factory. Others were sightless or handicapped in cultural ways. Many hailed from the hills and mountains of the Ozarks or from Tennessee and Kentucky and had previously lived a heavily subsistence existence, only partially removed from the level of hunting and gathering. (I employ the phrase heavily subsistence existence to catch the nuance. The people referred to had little contact with the outside market and produced most of what they used but not all of what they used.) Most had to be trained from the ground up. Mass production was the only option. For example, it took four years to train a skilled shipwright, and shipbuilders simply did not have that kind of time. So they deskilled the jobs into the simplest of tasks to accommodate people with the simplest of skills. Somehow, industrialists transformed this disparate collection of housewives, single females, old men, schoolboys, furloughed soldiers, hunters and gatherers, prisoners, the blind, the halt, and the lame into an efficient labor force. The common sight of a seeing-eye dog leading his master to his workspace was an icon of both the extraordinary achievement of the industrial managers, engineers, and foremen and a symbol of the humanity of the Allies. The Nazis, after all, were killing their handicapped and employing slave labor instead.

World War II was the most momentous military conflict since 1618 [Editor's Note: since the Thirty Years' War, 1618–1648].⁶¹ For the United States, it was not about territory, glory, or colonies. It was about the balance of power, the only war in over three centuries in which civilization hung in the balance. Hitler and Tojo threatened the bases of western *and* eastern civilizations.

And that is why the principal story of the homefront should be about winning the war, not primarily about social gains and civil rights. *Principally*, it should be about the battle for production more than the battle of the sexes; it should be chiefly about civilization rather than civil rights; it should be more about workers' contributions than their conflicts with management or unions. It should be about both V's of the Double V. Viewed in this manner, it was obviously a good war.⁶²

Still, one must respect the convictions of those historians who have argued the civil rights and social perspective of the Second World War. Civil rights and equality of opportunity are fundamental to successful democracies, and we should never make light of them. The impact of the war on race, class, gender, and ethnicity was important, as I have argued.

Still, which was the greatest civil rights victory: one of the smaller gains won by a particular group, or the larger gain by society as a whole? Was there a greater civil rights triumph in the last four hundred years of western civilization than the defeat of Hitler and the containment of Stalin, two regimes unalterably opposed to the very idea of civil rights? US POWs in Japanese prison camps, who built clandestine radios and risked their lives to listen to the broadcasts from San Francisco, certainly knew what the stakes were. They thought of the broadcasts as the voice of freedom. World War II ended in a stunning victory for democracy and capitalism, and California cities made a remarkable contribution to it.

NOTES

- ¹ Roger W. Lotchin, *The Bad City in the Good War: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 1–2.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ For an overview of World War II see Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *A History of the Second World War* (London: Cassell, 1970); and Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort, 1941–1945* (London: Penguin, 1998).
- ⁴ Lotchin, *Bad City*, 31.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 26–27.
- ⁶ For civil defense see Arthur C. Verge, *Paradise Transformed: Los Angeles During the Second World War* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1993), 21–38; and Lotchin, *Bad City*, 27–50.
- ⁷ Lotchin, *Bad City*, 38–40.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 43–44; Verge, *Paradise Transformed*, 21–38.
- ¹⁰ Lotchin, *Bad City*, 45.
- ¹¹ Frederick F. Siegel, *Prince of the City: Giuliani, New York and the Genius of American Life* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005), 10.
- ¹² For a defense of the hysteria thesis, see Merry Ovnick, *Los Angeles: The End of the Rainbow* (Los Angeles: Balcony Press, 1994), 266–67.
- ¹³ Lotchin, *Bad City*, 52–53.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *Bad City*, 52.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, *Bad City*, 57–59.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Bad City*, 59–60.
- ¹⁸ Ovnick, *Los Angeles*, 265, 273.
- ¹⁹ Verge, *Paradise Transformed*, 110–12; Lotchin, *Bad City*, 61.
- ²⁰ Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth Century Metropolis* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 117–52.
- ²¹ L.A. officials were angry that the government did not use their port even more fully, up to its capacity. Subcommittee of the Committee on Naval Affairs, House of Representatives, 78th Congress, 1st Session, *Investigation of Congested Areas Hearings*, Part 8 Los Angeles–Long Beach, Calif. Area (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1944), 1874–83; Lotchin, *Bad City*, 62–63.
- ²² Norris Hundley, *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, 1770s–1990s* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 119–200; Sarah S. Elkind, *Bay Cities and Water Politics: The Battle for Resources in Boston and Oakland* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 42–172).

- ²³ Captain James W. Hamilton and First Lieutenant William J. Bolce, *Gateway to Victory: The Wartime Story of the San Francisco Port of Embarkation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 39–46; Lotchin, *Bad City*, 62–65.
- ²⁴ Lotchin, *Bad City*, 65.
- ²⁵ I. L. Kandel, *The Impact of the War Upon American Education* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 84–85.
- ²⁶ Lotchin, *Bad City*, 67.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 214–21; Ovnick, *Los Angeles*, 257–61; Verge, *Paradise Transformed*, 108–10.
- ²⁸ Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 89; Lotchin, *Bad City*, 54–57, 214–21; Verge, *Paradise Transformed*, 108–10.
- ²⁹ Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), 12–13; See also David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 88–100.
- ³⁰ Lotchin, *Bad City*, 68.
- ³¹ Paul A. C. Koistinen, *Arsenal of World War II: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1940–1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 54–55; Harold G. Vatter, *The U.S. Economy in World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 16. Vatter argues less new plant was built, Koistinen more.
- ³² Lotchin, *Bad City*, 73.
- ³³ For a summary of the Japanese American experience, see Ovnick, *Los Angeles*, 262–66.
- ³⁴ Here my interpretation follows that of Stephen C. Fox, “General John DeWitt and the Proposed Internment of German and Italian Aliens during World War II,” *Pacific Historical Review* 57, no. 4 (1988): 407–38; and Beth Bailey and David Farber, *The First Strange Place: Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
- ³⁵ There are many studies of the Japanese American experience in the camps. See, for example, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973); and Sandra Taylor, *Jewell of the Desert: Japanese Internment at Topaz* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993). For the experience of the real European concentration camps, see Rab Bennett, *Under the Shadow of the Swastika: The Moral Dilemmas of Resistance and Collaboration in Hitler's Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1987); and Joseph R. Mitchell and Helen Buss Mitchell, *The Holocaust: Readings and Interpretations* (New York: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2001).
- ³⁶ The term “Double V” appears frequently in the literature of World War II, but see Maureen Honey, editor, *Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 257–316.
- ³⁷ For the Chinese American story, I have relied heavily on the work of a new generation of Chinese American historians. See K. Scott Wong, *Americans First: Chinese Americans in the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Judy Yung, *A Social History of Women in Chinatown* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 114–17; Xiaojian Zhao, “Women and Defense Industries in World War II” (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1993), throughout.
- ³⁸ Wong, *Americans First*, 193–212.
- ³⁹ Immediately following Pearl Harbor, the FBI rounded up the small number of Italian, German, and Japanese American aliens considered dangerous, and they were interned for longer or shorter periods. Mass Japanese American relocation came several months later. See Stephen Fox, *The Unknown Internment: An Oral History of the Relocation of Italian Americans during World War II* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990).
- ⁴⁰ For a more detailed coverage of the Italo-American experience during the war see Gary R. Mormino and George Pozzetta, “Ethnics at War: Italian Americans in California during World War II, in Roger W. Lotchin, ed., *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second Great War* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 143–63; Fox, *Unknown Internment*; and various works by Gloria Ricci Lothrop: “A Shadow on the Land: The Impact of Fascism on Los Angeles Italians,” *California History* 75, no. 4 (1996–97); and Lothrop, “Unwelcome Aliens in Freedom's Land: The Impact of World War II on Italian Aliens in Southern California,” *Southern California Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (1999).
- ⁴¹ Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 121. For Mexican Americans see Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in California: A History of Mexican*

- Americans in California* (San Francisco: Boyd and Fraser Publishing Company, 1984), 65–84; Camarillo, "A Research Note on Chicano Community Leaders: The G. I. Generation," *Aztlan: Chicano Journal of Social Sciences and the Arts* 2, no. 2 (1971); Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1948); Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women: Cannery Lives, Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950*; Eric Mosier, "The Impact of World War II on the Mexican American Community in San Diego" (master's thesis, San Diego State University, 1998); Mario T. Garcia, "Americans All: The Mexican American Generation and the Politics of Wartime Los Angeles, 1941–1945," *Social Science Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (June 1984); Rodolfo Gonzalez, "The Psycho-Historical and Socioeconomic Development of the Chicano Community in the United States," *Social Science Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (March 1973): 920–42; Fernando Penalosa, "The Changing Mexican-American in Southern California," *Sociology and Social Research* 51, no. 4 (July 1967): 405–17; and Stuart Cosgrove, "The Zoot Suit and Style Warfare," *Radical America* 18, no. 6 (1984): 39–52. There are a host of studies of blacks in wartime California. For a start, see Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles From the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Albert Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900–1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910–1963* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000); and Delores Nason McBroom, *Parallel Communities: African Americans in California's East Bay, 1850–1963* (New York: Garland Publishing Company 1993).
- ⁴² Catherine Archibald, *Wartime Shipyard: A Study in Social Disunity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1947), 236. For a similar study of prejudice see Dorothy W. Baruch, *Glass House of Prejudice* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1946).
- ⁴³ Although California historians have made much of the Zoot Suit Riots, compared to other American riots the Zoot Suit Riots were minor indeed both in property damage and human lives lost (none). The Zoot Suit Riots are seldom discussed in the context of the literature on the history of American collective violence. Historians' fascination with the Zooters and sailors remains a puzzle. For the Zoot Suits see Mauricio Mazon, *The Zoot Suit Riots, The Psychopathology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); and Luis Alberto Alvarez, "The Power of the Zoot: Race, Community, and Resistance in American Culture, 1940–1945." (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2001).
- ⁴⁴ For women in Los Angeles, see Ovnick, *Los Angeles*, 253–76.
- ⁴⁵ There is a staggering amount of historical literature on American women on the homefront. For a sampling, see Lotchin, *Bad City*, 74–103; and for book length treatments, see Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); D'Ann Campbell, *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); Sherna Berger Gluck, ed., *Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, the War and Social Change* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987); Sheila Tropp Lichtman, "Women at Work, 1941–1945: Wartime Employment in the San Francisco Bay Area." (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 1981); Natalie Marie Fousekis, "Fighting for Our Children: Women's Activism and the Battle for Child Care in California, 1940–1965." (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000); and Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).
- ⁴⁶ Cynthia Enloe, "Was it a 'Good War' for Women?" *American Quarterly* 37 (1985).
- ⁴⁷ For a view that the overall expansion of the economy was not miraculous, see Vatter, *The U.S. Economy in World War II*, 22. However he does admit that the "war effort was prodigious," which occasioned "an enormous increase in the production of military goods." 19–21.
- ⁴⁸ Keith E. Eiler, *Mobilizing America: Robert P. Patterson and the War Effort, 1940–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Paul A. C. Koistinen, *Arsenal of World War II: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1940–1945* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004).
- ⁴⁹ Gerald D. Nash, *World War II and the West: Reshaping the Economy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 12–17; Koistinen, *Arsenal of World War II*, 341.
- ⁵⁰ Lotchin, *Bad City*, 160, 162, 167.
- ⁵¹ *Congested Areas Hearings*, Part 8, 2057–58; 1920–23; 1770–73; 1889–91; 1916–20; 1809–16; 1910–14; Lotchin, *Bad City*, 182–211.

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- ⁵² Mary Kaldor, *The Baroque Arsenal* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 29–34.
- ⁵³ For The Six Companies, see Mark Foster, *Henry J. Kaiser: Builder in the Modern American West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989); for general World War II shipbuilding, see Frederic Lane, *Ships for Victory: A History of Shipbuilding Under the U.S. Maritime Commission in World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1951).
- ⁵⁴ Ovnick, *Los Angeles*, 273.
- ⁵⁵ For Hollywood at war, see Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 227–65 and throughout; and Bernard F. Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1985). For an imaginative discussion of the impact of Hollywood and the movies on L.A. and the military personnel during the war, see Ovnick, *Los Angeles*, 253–76.
- ⁵⁶ Kandel, *Impact of the War*, 123–71; V. R. Cardozier, *Colleges and Universities in World War II* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993).
- ⁵⁷ L.A. alone had thirty-four USO “posts.” Ovnick, *Los Angeles*, 271.
- ⁵⁸ Julia M. H. Carson, *Home Away from Home* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1946); Maxene Andrews and Bill Gilbert, *Over Here, Over There: The Andrews Sisters in World War II* (New York: Kensington Publishing Company, 1993), 35; Ovnick, *Los Angeles*, 269.
- ⁵⁹ Vatter put the number in service at 11.4 million. Vatter, *U.S. Economy in World War II*, 19.
- ⁶⁰ Vatter, *U.S. Economy in World War II*, 19; Koistinen, *Arsenal of World War II*, 390; and Lotchin, *Bad City*, 87.
- ⁶¹ For warfare in the last 300 years, see William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 117–384.
- ⁶² The term “Good War” was first popularized by Studs Terkel, *“The Good War”: An Oral History of World War II* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984).