

CHAPTER 4

The Spectre of “Divide and Conquer”

On December 7, 1941, Japanese warplanes attacked the U.S. Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, bringing the U.S. into World War II. The following day, the *CIO News* ran a cartoon contrasting “The American Way” with “The Hitler Way” (figure 4.1). One panel depicted Uncle Sam presiding over the table of “Voluntary Agreement,” flanked by pleasant-looking men representing “Labor” and “Management.” The other panel pictured “Shackled Labor” being whipped by a storm trooper wielding “Anti-Labor Bills.” The second image contained resonances of the sharp antibusiness rhetoric that had characterized the industrial labor movement since its coalescence in the mid-1930s: the picture indicted not only Nazi Germany but also implicitly those in the U.S. who sought to hogtie organized labor. The first image, however, suggested an alternative that had been largely missing in previous *CIO News* cartoons: an “American Way” of collective bargaining and harmonious business-labor relations, with Uncle Sam playing a powerful mediating role.¹

The appearance of this cartoon in part reflected leadership changes within the CIO, but it also foreshadowed developments in the United States during World War II. The bombing of Pearl Harbor and the entry of the U.S. into the war brought the federal government fully into the act of promoting national cohesion. It also provided an opening to a variety of private groups who sought to use the calls for social and ideological unity to their own ends. During the mid- to late 1930s, industrial unionists, their allies in the left wing of the New Deal coalition, and at times even the president himself,

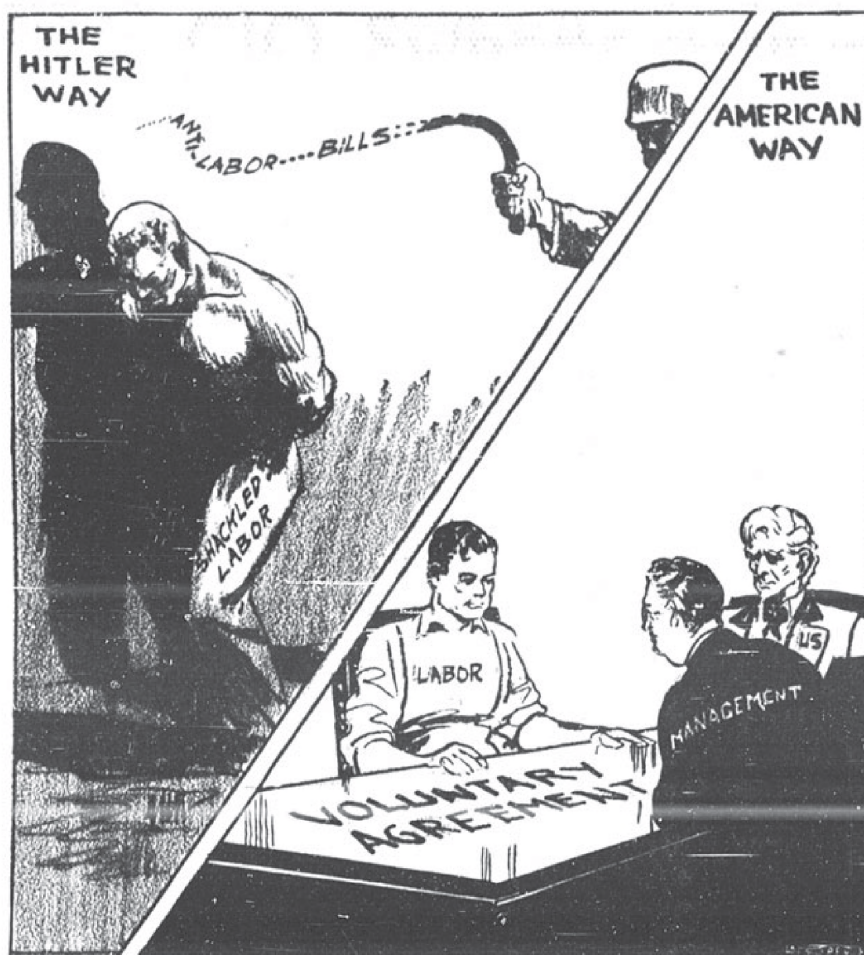


Figure 4.1. This cartoon appeared in the *CIO News* the day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. While the cartoon continues to equate “antilabor bills” with Nazism, it also envisions an alternative “American way” marked by harmonious agreement between labor and management (courtesy of the AFL-CIO; reproduced by the Wisconsin Historical Society).

had argued that selfish and undemocratic business elites posed the greatest threat to America’s civic institutions and values. At the same time, a variety of right-wing populist movements combined hostility to corporate America with racist and anti-Semitic appeals.² With the U.S. now fully engaged in the war, this populist rhetoric largely disappeared. Instead, groups and individuals across the political spectrum warned of the Nazi tactic of “divide and conquer” and promoted harmony and cooperation between various subgroups

in U.S. society. Consensus—a consensus defined by a common enemy—came to be seen as the *sine qua non* of the “American Way.”³

Beneath this broad canopy of consensus, however, sharp ideological differences remained. Many liberal and leftist intellectuals, labor organizers, and others who had joined the Popular Front coalition during the late 1930s saw the war above all as a worldwide battle against “fascism,” a term they employed expansively to cover evils ranging from anti-Semitism to economic exploitation. These Americans hoped to use the struggle to promote an “anti-fascist” consensus at home and abroad and to bring about a more democratic and egalitarian social, political, and economic order. Casting the war as an all-out contest between “freedom” and “slavery,” they argued that Hitler and his minions were using racism and red-baiting to divide Americans. From their positions in federal propaganda agencies and a variety of private groups, they sought to extend the economic agenda of the New Deal and to promote ethnic, religious, and racial equality.

These promoters of a broad antifascist consensus were countered from the beginning by others who used calls for national harmony to shore up the corporate order and to reinforce existing power relations in U.S. society. Some of these Americans viewed the war as a fight among nations or peoples rather than a battle of ideas; they sought to unite all Americans in a pro-American coalition against the Germans, Italians, and Japanese. Others, particularly conservatives, portrayed the nation’s enemy as totalitarianisms of both right and left. The latter view had wide appeal during the twenty-two months of the Nazi-Soviet pact, but it was complicated by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Rather than openly condemning America’s wartime ally, many who favored this approach focused on promoting civility and “selling America to Americans.”⁴

As this suggests, the emphasis on national unity and consensus during the war was a double-edged sword: Red-baiters, union busters, and purveyors of ethnic, religious, and racial hatred could be cast as Nazi agents, but so too could those who forcibly advocated social change. In the end, groups on both ends of the political spectrum were forced to curtail the vitriolic rhetoric they had deployed during the late 1930s. This was particularly apparent in the economic arena. The CIO largely abandoned its “militant idiom” during the war, opting to ally itself with the federal government in a bid to expand its membership.⁵ Business groups also moderated their tone. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and even the National Association of Manufacturers backed away from frontal assaults on unions and the New Deal. Instead, they and

their allies worked to recapture cultural authority by convincing Americans that all would benefit from a harmonious, highly productive, and consumer-oriented postwar society, one in which business rather than government took the lead.

The Infrastructure of Consensus

The U.S.'s involvement in World War II produced an infrastructure of institutions devoted to publicly defining for Americans their common ground. While some of these organizations predated the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, most were spawned or greatly strengthened by the nation's war effort. Some would continue to operate into the postwar years, becoming crucial vehicles for promoting or shaping a cold war consensus on American public values. During the war, however, the range of competing voices meant that battles to shape America's wartime consensus proceeded on many fronts.

The federal agency officially charged with defining the meaning of the war to Americans on the home front was the Office of War Information. Eager to avoid the "calculated hysteria" that had marked federal propaganda efforts during World War I, FDR initially opposed the formation of any such agency. Pressured by key advisors, he eventually established an Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) in October 1941 and charged it with disseminating "factual information on the defense effort." Archibald MacLeish, the Librarian of Congress who was brought in to head the new agency, mapped out a "strategy of truth" that called for providing hard facts to the media, often with little accompanying interpretation. This approach, however, left the business of interpretation entirely to the private press, radio networks, and Hollywood. Public opinion specialists argued that "the separation of data from inspiration was both artificial and crippling"; and by May 1942, MacLeish himself agreed. The "key to unity in fighting this war," he wrote Roosevelt, is "[a] full knowledge of what we are fighting for, coupled with assurance that we can win our goals." The following month FDR took MacLeish's suggestion and folded the OFF into a new agency with broader powers, the Office of War Information (OWI).⁶

The OWI was hardly the only federal agency working to build a wartime consensus among Americans. In fact, the Treasury Department undoubtedly reached at least as many civilians through its war bond campaigns as did the writers and artists of the OWI. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr., the only Jew in Roosevelt's cabinet, was an early opponent of the Nazi regime. Even

before the U.S. entered the war, he had decided “to use *bonds* to sell the war, rather than *vice versa*.”⁷ The administration continued to emphasize defense bonds’ ideological—as opposed to simply economic—role, even after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. By offering all Americans a stake in the war effort, by linking personal financial security to national defense, federal officials hoped to buttress national morale and create a “channel for unity” behind the war effort. Such considerations shaped all aspects of the wartime bond campaigns. In an effort to ensure that all Americans could buy bonds, the Treasury Department created “Series E” bonds, which were sold only to individuals, and saving stamps, which even children and the poor could afford. The department mobilized the national media as well as Hollywood celebrities into its selling campaign, but it also worked with groups representing virtually every segment of the American population: farmers, workers, women, schoolchildren, black Americans, and a variety of religious and ethnic groups.⁸

While the consensus-building messages of the OWI and the Treasury Department reached virtually all American civilians, the sixteen million men and women who served in uniform during the war received their instruction on the nation’s unifying values and wartime aims primarily from the armed forces. In 1940, the army instituted an orientation course for new recruits, which consisted primarily of pamphlets prepared by scholarly experts and lectures delivered during basic training. By mid-1941, Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall had decided that something further was called for. Filmmakers and artists ranging from Frank Capra to Theodore S. Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss) were recruited to make morale-boosting documentary films under the auspices of the United States Army’s Information and Education Division. In 1943, both civilian and military leaders began to worry that the lack of a common enemy after the war might lead to widespread social unrest. Working with the American Historical Association, the army produced a series of *G.I. Roundtable* pamphlets designed to educate troops on the nature of the enemy, the reasons they were fighting, and the shape of the postwar world.⁹

Working alongside these branches of the federal government was a multitude of private groups. One of the most central to the politics of consensus both during and after the war was the War Advertising Council. The very existence of the Council testified to the resurging power of business during the war. In the fall of 1941, many Madison Avenue executives had been “running scared.” The advertising industry’s profits had been hard hit by the Depression, and, with companies increasingly switching production from consumer durables to armaments, the future looked bleak. Moreover, rising popular suspicions of

Madison Avenue had led in 1938 to the first federal regulations on advertising; many in the industry feared further consumer-driven attacks. They worried particularly that the federal government might not consider advertising “a legitimate business expense for the purpose of corporate taxes and war contracts.” In November 1941, more than six hundred advertising, industry, and media executives gathered in Florida to brainstorm ways to head off government controls. Taking their cue from James W. Young of the J. Walter Thompson agency, the conferees settled on a plan to burnish the industry’s image by embracing “public service” advertising; this step would have the additional benefit of allowing advertisers to defend free enterprise in the name of the public interest.¹⁰

The bombing of Pearl Harbor less than a month later derailed those initial plans but opened new opportunities to the ad men. The Roosevelt administration now sought to use advertising to sell its domestic programs to the public. Both before and immediately after Pearl Harbor, however, administration officials met resistance when they approached media organizations directly about donating advertising space for critical wartime campaigns.¹¹ When Madison Avenue executives organized the War Advertising Council in early 1942 and offered their services to the federal government, their offer was quickly accepted. The federal government increasingly relied on the quasi-private Council: between 1942 and 1945, it orchestrated scores of “information campaigns” on behalf of a wide variety of federal agencies. It promoted war bond sales, military and womanpower recruitment, good nutrition, and blood donations; fought inflation, absenteeism, employee turnover, and “loose talk” about the military; and urged the conservation of everything from rubber and fuel to tin cans and kitchen fats.¹² In the process, the Council helped boost public support for business and impressed federal officials with advertising’s power. It forged a link between the White House and Madison Avenue that would prove vital to the politics of consensus long after the war had ended.

If the War Advertising Council was one important quasi-private conduit of information, Hollywood was another. The director of the OWI, Elmer Davis, recognized that films were the “easiest way to inject propaganda ideas into most people’s minds” because moviegoers were so absorbed in the on-screen action they did not realize their views were being shaped.¹³ In early 1942, Davis established a liaison office in Hollywood to help shape and vet studio films. Hollywood did not always follow the OWI’s script. Nevertheless, it generally proved a staunch ally in the federal government’s overarching campaign to unify Americans behind the war effort.

While the War Advertising Council and the Hollywood studios were two of the most important private channels of wartime meaning, they were hardly

alone. Virtually every institution and organization that had entered the contest to define America's core national values in the late 1930s maintained their efforts during the war. Many stepped up their activities, couching their appeals in terms of consensus and unity. In late 1942, for example, the Council Against Intolerance began publishing a monthly guide for educators entitled *American Unity*; it continued issuing the publication throughout the war. With federal approval, the National Conference of Christians and Jews carried its message of interfaith harmony into hundreds of U.S. army camps; its message was further reinforced by the newly instituted United Service Organizations. Meanwhile, dozens of colleges and universities across the country instituted programs in American studies or American civilization. These groups and many others realized that, in defining the meaning of the war for Americans—in defining the grounds on which Americans should unite—they were in fact helping shape the postwar world.

"Divide and Conquer"

The message that Americans got from every quarter during World War II was encapsulated in the phrase "divide and conquer." This was the strategy, they were told, that Hitler had used to gain power in Germany and later to topple France. Now, the Nazi regime would attempt to foment social division in the U.S. as well. Thus, defeating the Axis depended above all on national unity.

During the war, this message became a staple of the federal government's domestic propaganda campaign. In his State of the Union message, delivered one month after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt warned Americans to "guard against divisions among ourselves" and to be "particularly vigilant against racial discrimination in any of its ugly forms." A few months later, the Office of Facts and Figures issued a pamphlet entitled *Divide and Conquer*, which charged that Hitler and his agents were "sow[ing] seeds of hate and disunity" among Americans. The theme also showed up in speeches by Justice Department officials; in pamphlets, "fact sheets," and movie shorts produced by the OFF and the OWI; in war bond advertisements and other public service messages produced by the War Advertising Council; and in Frank Capra's famous morale-boosting films that became known collectively as the *Why We Fight* series.¹⁴ When the OWI launched a "Stop That Rumor!" campaign in 1943, it noted that "hate rumors" were the most common and dangerous type. The OWI identified Jews, Catholics, and Negroes as common targets of such rumors, but it also listed blood banks, draft boards,

business, unions, the Russians, and the British. Hate rumors, the OWI clarified, are “the ones that express prejudice, animosity or hostility for religious, racial, social or economic groups other than the enemy.”¹⁵

A similar theme emanated from a range of Hollywood films. The low-budget picture *Hitler's Children*, which became a “sleeper” sensation in 1943, showed how the Nazi tactic of divide and conquer could destroy the family. So too did the Broadway hit-turned-screenplay *Tomorrow the World* (1944).¹⁶ The 1944 thriller *Lifeboat*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock and based on a story by John Steinbeck, transferred the drama to the North Atlantic. As the film opens, a German U-boat torpedoes a luxury ocean liner and is in turn sunk by the stricken ship. A small group of survivors—including a socialite reporter-photographer, a radical Czech American merchant seaman, a business tycoon, a Cockney radio operator, a nurse from Kansas, a badly wounded German-American stoker, and a black steward—find themselves adrift in a lifeboat. When they rescue the lone survivor of the submarine, the Nazi captain, he ruthlessly tries to divide and conquer the fractured group. He almost succeeds, taking the helm of the lifeboat after the others are unable to agree on a leader and steering them toward a mid-ocean rendezvous with a German supply ship. The Nazi quietly eliminates one of the Americans, pushing the wounded and delirious stoker overboard while the others sleep. Only in the final moments of the film are the remaining occupants of the lifeboat able to overcome their differences and kill the German in what the *New York Times* described as “a rush of horrified rage.” The fragile unity of the Allied survivors is symbolized and cemented by two blossoming romances—one between the Kansas nurse and Cockney radio operator, another between the wealthy socialite and the radical seaman.¹⁷

In underscoring the need for Americans to surmount their divisions of class, politics, ethnicity, and race, *Lifeboat* dramatized what Lary May has called the “conversion narrative” of World War II films. In the 1930s, studios turned out pictures that promoted what one screenwriter called the “spirit of the New Deal broadly defined.” “To overcome social and economic corruption,” May writes, “heroes commonly shed their loyalty to the rich” and allied with the lower classes, thus realigning cultural and political authority. This story line was particularly apparent in movies starring Will Rogers and in Frank Capra films such as *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). World War II produced a very different conversion narrative. Increasingly, heroes and heroines reached across class and cultural lines, not to challenge official institutions and expose greedy businessmen and corrupt politicians, but to save the nation from a foreign enemy. In movies

ranging from *December 7* (1942) and *Casablanca* (1942) to *Lifeboat*, consensus became “the nation’s core value, whereas distinct ethnic as well as class interests [were] now seen as alien to public life.”¹⁸

May and other historians have suggested that the emphasis on overcoming divisions during the war—on uniting in a consensus defined by a common enemy—was inherently conservative. Certainly, the NAM and other business groups sought both before and during the war to counter the demands of labor and the continuing threat of the New Deal by arguing that “dictatorships breed on misunderstandings between groups and classes.”¹⁹ But the language of “divide and conquer” was used by those on the left as well as those on the right: a variety of liberal and left-leaning organizations used it to discredit everything from ethnic, religious, and racial prejudice to union busting and red-baiting.

The slippery political nature of “divide and conquer” rhetoric is clearly revealed in a wartime episode involving Frank Capra’s famous *Why We Fight* series. When the army recruited the famous filmmaker to produce the series in early 1942, Capra quickly assembled a team of Hollywood writers. He soon fired most of them, charging years later that their scripts were filled with “Communist propaganda.” In fact, Capra’s correspondence at the time suggests that he fired the men, not because of his own convictions, but because he was being pressured by the army and by members of the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities. The Special Committee, forerunner to HUAC, had been headed since its formation in 1938 by the Texas Democrat and virulent red-baiter Martin Dies. Dies repeatedly decried the “purveyors of class, racial and religious hatred” and argued that communism (like fascism) was an “alien force tearing at American unity.” According to Capra, members of the Dies committee who were also on the House Appropriations Committee had threatened to cut off funding for the project because some of Capra’s chosen writers were too “red.”²⁰

If anticommunists on the Dies committee charged leftists with turning Americans against one another, those they targeted simply reversed the allegation. When screenwriter John Sanford learned of his dismissal from the project, he sent Capra a letter of warning. The war “can be lost if we are divided against ourselves,” he wrote:

It can be lost if Gentile is played off against Jew, black against white, rich against poor, labor against capital, hammer-and-sickle against stars-and-stripes.... To spike one anti-fascist voice today (whether it be the voice of a communist, a reputed communist, or no communist at all) is to spike one gun at a time when all guns—good,

poor, and obsolete—should be shooting till their barrels get too hot to be held.²¹

Sanford was a member of the Communist Party, and in the 1950s, he was blacklisted for taking the Fifth Amendment before HUAC. In 1942, however, he too could deploy the language of “divide and conquer,” drawing on rhetoric that had been used by antifascist leftists for several years.

Antifascism versus Pro-Americanism: Competing Visions of Consensus

During the war, leftists, liberals, moderates, and conservatives could all use the language of national unity and social division for one simple reason. “Divide and conquer” was a strategy used by the enemy. It said nothing about *who* or *what* that enemy actually was.²² In fact during the early years of the war, the precise nature of America’s enemy—and thus of the consensus defined by that enemy—was a matter of considerable debate.

Many on the liberal left saw the war as a global battle against fascism in all of its myriad manifestations. Although they virulently condemned the actions of Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito abroad, they did not limit their vision of fascism to Germany, Italy, and Japan. As Daniel Geary has observed, antifascism during the 1930s and early 1940s was “a political posture that called for radical reforms toward economic reconstruction and racial equality in a democratic constitutional order.” Many antifascists applied the “metaphor of fascism” to a wide range of domestic evils, including lynching, nativism, anti-Semitism, union busting, capitalist exploitation, and red-baiting.²³ Viewing the war as a cataclysmic battle between ideologies and ways of life, they sought to shape an antifascist consensus both at home and abroad.

The most eloquent and prominent spokesman for this position during the war was Roosevelt’s hand-picked vice president Henry A. Wallace. In a speech delivered six months after Pearl Harbor, Wallace cast the war in phrases borrowed from Lincoln’s famous “House Divided” speech. The war was a “fight to the death between the free world and the slave world,” Wallace declared, establishing an analogy that within a few years would assume a very different meaning. “Just as the United States in 1862 could not remain half slave and half free, so in 1942 the world must make its decision for a complete victory one way or the other.” The previous 150 years, Wallace suggested, had been a “long-drawn-out people’s revolution,” designed to give “the common man”

everywhere a better standard of living, the skills and time to read and write, and the ability to “think and work together.” According to Wallace, this “people’s revolution” had begun in America in 1775, but it had spread around the world—to France in 1792, to Latin America in the Bolivarian era, to Germany in 1848, and to Russia in 1917. The current war was a Nazi-led “counterrevolution” by which “Satan now is trying to lead the common man of the whole world back into slavery and darkness.” The effort, Wallace predicted, would not succeed. Not only would the Allies win the war, but also “the common man will smoke the Hitler stooges out into the open in the United States, in Latin America, and in India. He will destroy their influence.” The war would usher in a “century of the common man,” in which the values embedded in the New Deal and invoked in FDR’s Four Freedoms address to Congress would be extended both in the U.S. and around the globe.²⁴

Wallace’s “Century of the Common Man” speech was a direct response to another vision of America and the postwar world offered some fifteen months earlier by the publishing magnate Henry R. Luce. In a famous *Life* magazine editorial entitled “The American Century,” Luce envisioned a postwar Pax Americana in which the U.S., like Britain before it, presided wisely over the world, remaking the globe in its own image. America, Luce argued, should become in the twentieth century “the dynamic center of ever-widening spheres of enterprise,” “the training center of the skillful servants of mankind,” the “Good Samaritan” feeding the world’s hungry, and the “powerhouse of the ideals of Freedom and Justice.” America had flirted with collectivism under the New Deal, but its devotion to self-reliance, independence, and equal opportunity remained strong. The “promise of adequate production for all mankind, the ‘more abundant life,’” was a “characteristically American promise,” Luce argued, despite the fact that it was often made by “demagogues and proponents of all manner of slick schemes and ‘planned economies.’” “It is for America and for America alone,” Luce concluded, “to determine whether a system of free economic enterprise—an economic order compatible with freedom and progress—shall or shall not prevail in this century.”²⁵

The visions offered by Wallace and Luce shared certain similarities. Both invoked the language of freedom, and both envisioned a postwar world in which the promise of abundance would be extended to all.²⁶ Both also saw the U.S. and its values as engines driving this postwar change around the globe. Here, however, the parallels ended. Wallace cast the war as a struggle to the death against fascism everywhere and portrayed the American and Bolshevik revolutions as advancing the same cause. Luce implied that communism was at least as alien to the American Way as fascism. Wallace displayed a deep commitment

to economic democracy and suggested that government action might well be needed to achieve freedom from want. Luce, like the NAM and other economic conservatives, depicted free enterprise and political democracy as inherently intertwined. Wallace did not attack the wealthy per se, but he emphasized the march of the “common man” and warned against men of means who sought to secure their fortunes by “lur[ing] the people back into slavery of the most degraded kind.”²⁷ Luce, by contrast, privileged stability, order, and established hierarchies of power. Above all, Wallace—like Louis Adamic, Gunnar Myrdal, and many others on the liberal left—believed that the U.S. had fallen short of its noble goals. Luce, by contrast, saw the pre-New Deal U.S. as a perfected model for the world.

Luce’s editorial was written in February 1941, four months before Hitler invaded the Soviet Union and severed the alliance that had helped popularize the notion of a “totalitarian” bloc. Nevertheless, many commentators continued to counterpose the U.S. to a totalitarian—rather than a fascist—“other” during the war. A few on the left used the term “totalitarianism” to emphasize their disagreements with Stalin. Many more on the right applied the term more broadly to condemn not only Soviet-style communism but also the encroachment of the state into economic, religious, and interpersonal affairs. When Walt Disney produced an anti-Nazi cartoon short, *Chicken Little*, in 1943, animators originally used the word “fascism” to describe the beliefs held by the evil and conniving Foxey Loxey. Disney, a staunch anticommunist who had suppressed a strike within his own studio, insisted that the word be changed to “totalitarianism,” despite the expense and time required to reanimate the sequence. Although the Soviet Union was never explicitly mentioned in the film, the point, one of the animators later explained, was to “make it sound like we’re condemning Russia too.”²⁸

Within the government, the antifascist viewpoint was most strongly represented by the liberals and leftists associated with the OFF and the OWI. These included writers and artists such as Archibald MacLeish, Malcolm Cowley, Robert Sherwood, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Henry Pringle, Ben Shahn, and Francis Brennan, as well as members of the Foreign Language Division like Alan Cranston. Like Henry Wallace, these men generally cast the war as a fight “for freedom and against slavery,” a “people’s war” that would lead to the extension of “freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, [and] freedom from fear.”²⁹ They worked to convince Americans that the nation’s enemy was the ideology of fascism, even as they tried to sideline those Americans who appeared to subscribe to fascist beliefs. Extending their antifascist argument into the domestic arena, they argued that the best way to recruit diverse

Americans into the war effort was by actively combating “discrimination of any sort due to race, color, creed, or national origin.”³⁰ At every turn, however, they encountered opposition from others both within and outside of the government who had a different view.

The OWI progressives, for instance, argued repeatedly during the war that America’s enemies were fascist ideologies and their proponents—the Nazis, the Italian Fascists, and the Japanese warlords—rather than the German, Italian, or Japanese people. The vast majority of people living in the Axis countries, the OWI contended, were simply “dupes”—dupes who had to be “liberated” from their “despotic rulers” and eventually welcomed into the postwar “brotherhood of man.”³¹ This distinction, however, proved too subtle for many Americans, including some within the administration. Many sided with Robert Maxwell, the director of the children’s radio show *The Adventures of Superman*. When an OWI official in 1943 encouraged Maxwell to tone down the program’s virulent attacks on the Germans and Japanese, the director responded:

I control the destinies of three juvenile radio programs with audiences running into the millions. I can, in some small way, formulate ideologies for these youngsters.... I am, at the moment, teaching this vast audience to hate.... And, unfortunately, there is no cleavage between the individual and the state whose ideology he defends. A German is a Nazi and a Jap is the little yellow man who “knifed us in the back at Pearl Harbor.”

To argue otherwise, Mr. Maxwell concluded, was simply to “make for confusion.”³² In the case of the Japanese, many in the government and the media went further still: despite evidence to the contrary, they cast not only Japanese but all Americans of Japanese descent as potentially traitorous.³³ Although the OWI repeatedly protested such portrayals, it did not have the means to enforce its approach.

If OWI staffers could not convince other opinion molders of the innocence of enemy civilians or Japanese Americans, they also had trouble when they tried to marginalize potential fascists at home. Many Italian-American *prominenti*, members of the community’s conservative leadership, had supported Mussolini up until the moment the U.S. entered World War II. Alan Cranston, the head of the OWI’s Foreign Language Division, noted that his group had tried to “abolish the long-established leadership of the pro-fascists by ignoring them.” Their efforts were thwarted, however, by the Treasury Department, which appointed many of the *prominenti* to Italian-American war

bond committees. Cranston complained that the Treasury Department had appointed Generoso Pope, an Italian-language press baron who had been a staunch Mussolini supporter, to head a key war bond committee. When anti-fascists in the Italian-American community refused to serve with Pope, the Treasury Department appointed a dozen more Italian-American conservatives, to the dismay of Cranston and others on his staff. By early 1943, the OWI had largely abandoned its efforts to undermine the *prominenti* and settled instead for trying to unite all Italian Americans—and eventually Americans of all nationality groups—in a broad “Americans All” coalition that “stressed pro-American themes.”³⁴

Even as liberals and leftists in the OWI tried to convince Americans that fascism was the enemy, they worked to further the goals of the broader anti-fascist campaign—strengthening and extending the goals of the New Deal and combating discrimination at home. A leaflet entitled *How to Raise \$16 Billion* advocated withholding taxes as a means of spreading the burden of paying for war. *Battle Stations All*, a pamphlet dealing with inflation, supported price and rent control, increased taxation, and other steps designed to “tak[e] the profit out of war.” It also called for guaranteeing people at least their minimum essentials of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and recreation. *Negroes and the War* not only lauded the contribution that black Americans were making to the war effort but also described the educational and economic advances they had made under the New Deal. The pamphlet praised the role of the Works Progress Administration and the National Youth Administration and described the New Deal as ringing “like a pleasant bell in the ears of the American Negro.” The OWI manual *When Radio Writes for War* urged the authors of radio programs not to portray Negroes as “the Stepin Fetchit type, the minstrel man, the stooge, the dumb domestic, the guy always being chased by ghosts.”³⁵

Outraged conservatives saw in such booklets—with their support for economic redistribution and greater racial equality—evidence of totalitarian tendencies on the part of the administration. Moreover, such materials did not represent the only voice of the OWI. Many of the liberal writers, artists, and researchers in the agency had joined the OFF when it was headed by Archibald MacLeish, the poet laureate of the Popular Front. When the OFF was merged into the OWI in June 1942, Gardner Cowles Jr., a Midwestern newspaper publisher, was appointed to head the domestic branch. A liberal Republican and staunch supporter of Wendell Wilkie, Cowles backed Roosevelt’s foreign policy but opposed many aspects of the New Deal. He also believed that the OWI’s principle role was to coordinate government campaigns on the home front.

He established the Bureau of Campaigns within the agency and strengthened the OWI's ties to the advertising industry. As a result, the antifascists increasingly found themselves competing for influence and resources with staffers drawn from Madison Avenue. These men and women showed little interest in portraying the grimmer aspects of the war or in promoting domestic reform. Instead, they sought to rally support for specific government programs by "selling America to Americans."³⁶ They oversaw sentimental, patriotic, and upbeat campaigns that generally reinforced the nation's corporate order. The liberal chief of the OWI's graphics bureau complained that such Madison Avenue techniques had "done more toward dimming perception, suspending critical values, and spreading the sticky syrup of complacency over the people than almost any other factor."³⁷

The growing tensions within the OWI came to a head in the spring of 1943. Cowles reorganized the domestic branch, bringing its writers, artists, and researchers under the direct control of several men who favored the "advertising technique."³⁸ Price Gilbert, a former Coca-Cola executive who had been appointed to head the Bureau of Graphics and Printing, shelved vivid posters of Nazi brutality created by Popular Front artist Ben Shahn, replacing them with folksy American scenes by magazine illustrator Norman Rockwell. (Shahn and a colleague responded by producing a poster of the Statue of Liberty carrying four bottles of Coke in her upraised hand. The motto on the poster declared "The War That Refreshes: The Four Delicious Freedoms!") Meanwhile, William Lewis, a former vice president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, curbed the work of the writers, telling them they could write "only to specification" and killing a proposed pamphlet on the nation's food supply.³⁹ In April, some fifteen men and women resigned from the OWI en masse. In a letter to the *New York Times*, they charged that the agency was becoming an "office of war ballyhoo."⁴⁰ One of the resigning writers, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., went further in a private letter to literary critic Bernard DeVoto. "The advertising men have been striking out for more and more power over the whole domestic information policy," he wrote. "It has meant an increasing conviction that any government information campaign likely to affect a vested business interest should first be approved by that interest. It has meant a steady replacement of independent writers, newspapermen, publishers, mostly of liberal inclination, by men beholden to the business community for their livelihood and thinking always as the business community thinks."⁴¹

The mass resignation was the beginning of the end for the OWI's domestic branch. By early 1943, the agency was under intense fire from conservatives in Congress, who controlled both houses after the fall elections of

1942. Republicans and southern Democrats both saw the agency as promoting the agenda of FDR and the New Deal. The public release of Frank Capra's *Prelude to War*—despite the dismissal of much of the original screenwriting team—only fueled such attacks. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall intervened personally to direct congressional anger away from the Capra films. The OWI, however, was not so lucky. Conservatives attacked the pamphlets on taxation and inflation and argued that *Negroes and the War* was both partisan pleading and an attempt to force an “alien” philosophy—racial equality—on the South. The ranking Republican on the House Appropriations Committee declared that OWI films, radio scripts, and publications were “partly drivel, partly insidious propaganda against Congress and for a fourth term,” and occasionally “along communistic lines.” In June 1943, a coalition of Republicans and southern Democrats slashed funding for the domestic branch of the OWI.⁴²

The resignations and funding cutbacks at the OWI in mid-1943 silenced the staunchest and best-positioned advocates of a progressive, anti-fascist consensus within the federal government. In so doing, they effectively amplified the voice of the business community. Many corporate, advertising, and public relations executives hoped to use the war to reestablish their cultural and political authority. America's new role as the “arsenal of democracy”—together with surging wartime production—gave them the opening. The war revived corporate profits, restored national prosperity, and allowed those who had once been dubbed “industrial Tories” to wrap themselves in the mantle of patriotism. Still, many businessmen realized that such developments would pay few political dividends in the postwar period unless they were brought to the attention of the American public. Many corporations also worried about keeping their names in the public eye at a time when they had few or no consumer goods to offer. They solved both problems by taking the advice of the Young & Rubicam advertising agency, which instructed potential clients to “serve the company” by “serv[ing] the nation.”⁴³

The War Advertising Council orchestrated such efforts. Federal agencies, often working through the OWI's Bureau of Campaigns, funneled requests for support to the Council. The Council ranked requested campaigns by relative importance, then assigned them to volunteer ad agencies, which developed campaign themes and compiled supporting facts. The resulting “campaign guides” were distributed to companies and industry associations for use in privately sponsored advertisements. (Companies were free to select the campaigns and themes they wished to use.) In some cases, the Council itself provided free advertising mats and other materials, for which the print media and

outdoor advertisers donated space. The Council also supervised the presentation of public service announcements on the radio by creating and supervising a radio allocation plan. Finally, it forwarded “fact sheets” on important topics to various media outlets. Both the print and broadcast media drew on these fact sheets when drafting editorials or assigning and reporting stories.⁴⁴

The War Advertising Council took its cues from the federal government; nevertheless, this system transferred a great deal of control over wartime propaganda from the public to the private sector. Although the federal government selected the issues addressed in public service advertising campaigns, Madison Avenue increasingly framed the messages Americans received. Not surprising, messages conceived by the War Advertising Council and disseminated by the Council or corporate advertisers had more in common with the vision of Henry Luce than with that of Henry Wallace. In aggregate, these campaigns equated the American Way not with greater equality or security but with the freedom of individuals to consume. They suggested that U.S. industry, not the federal government, was best able to guarantee Americans’ “freedom from want.”

During the war, Americans had only to open their newspapers or magazines, turn on the radio, or walk through the streets of their city or town to see or hear messages that linked brand names or corporate logos to the war effort: the consumption of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer or Pepsi-Cola to stepped-up wartime production, a gift of Charles-of-the-Ritz cosmetics to the purchase of war bonds, or Cannon percale sheets to the donation of blood.⁴⁵ OWI writers had condemned such efforts to tie “commercial plugs in with war messages,” warning that such linkages represented a tasteless effort to “capitalize on the gravity of the war.”⁴⁶ By contrast, it was precisely this strategy—intertwining “sacrifice and self-interest”—that the War Advertising Council and private advertising agencies recommended when persuading corporate clients to run public service ads. A 1943 ad for Chesterfield cigarettes featured a smiling female solderer, Chesterfield dangling from her lips, and urged female readers to contact the U.S. Employment Service Office.⁴⁷ Bendix Home Appliances emphasized its patriotic contribution in an ad showing a woman singing as she hung out the wash: “My Bendix lies over the ocean, my Bendix lies over the sea, my Bendix does wash for the navy, instead of the laundry for me.”⁴⁸ Many ads touted awards that companies had received from either the military or the Treasury Department for achieving wartime production or bond sales goals.

Such ads suggested that individual companies were going all out for the war effort. Many also reminded Americans of how good they had it—not only compared to the nation’s fighting men, but also compared to civilians in other

countries. “Sure you’ve got the money... So have lots of us,” declared an anti-inflation ad prepared by the War Advertising Council. (The ad went on to urge Americans to save, rather than spend, the money they had.) An anti-inflation ad sponsored by the Bowery Savings Bank of New York noted that “old-fashioned thrift” was “one of the reasons why we have more to eat and more to wear—and pay less for necessities—than men and women in many other countries.”⁴⁹ “We were Spoiled... and Thank God for it!” Chrysler exclaimed in a *Saturday Evening Post* ad promoting war bonds. “We bought things that only the very rich could afford in other countries. Shop girls dressed as well as the smartest women in Paris.” Chrysler added that this “American way of living” was not only “the envy of the world,” but “probably saved the world”: “To meet your demand for more and still more cars at the prices you wanted to pay, you made us at Chrysler, for example, build the production system that was later to pour out weapons to our fighting men.”⁵⁰

Such ads conveniently overlooked the ravages of the Depression and the war-wrought devastation of other lands, while crediting corporate America for Allied successes. Government defense spending was fueling the nation’s economic boom, but ads generally ignored this fact. Instead, they attributed the nation’s prosperity—both past and present—to “old-fashioned” American values, harmonious business-labor relations, and the prowess and ingenuity of American business. “Hardships taught our forefathers the virtue of self-reliance and the need for cooperation,” Budweiser proclaimed, under a picture of New England Puritans. Those same values would win the war, and “in peacetime that same unity of effort will keep America strong and prosperous.”⁵¹ In a remarkable ad entitled “Strange Fruit,” Wyandotte Chemicals Corporation recast the title of the antilynching ballad that Billie Holiday had popularized a few years earlier. The tree in the ad was adorned not with African-American bodies but with the products of an abundant consumer society: a magazine, a rayon dress, photographic film, an airplane, and a bottle of perfume. All these, the ad copy suggested, were derived from wood using a chemical manufactured by the company. “Money may not grow on trees,” the ad declared, “but miracles do.”⁵²

Both the War Advertising Council and corporate advertisers acknowledged that many products were not immediately available to home-front consumers. At the same time, most linked appeals for wartime sacrifice to the promise of postwar consumption.⁵³ This was particularly true of the many ads that urged Americans to purchase war bonds or to save money in order to head off inflation. “Buy an Extra War Bond for You—and Me,” a

soldier instructed his wife in a 1944 ad placed by the Eureka Vacuum Cleaner Company in *McCall's*:

I want you to buy an extra War Bond and put both our names on it. And when you've bought that extra Bond...I want you to buy yourself a dress...something soft and something blue. Because *out here* that's how I think of you—and thinking of you I think of all the fun we'll have together when I come home...buying things for the most wonderful house in all the world....our house, the house I'm going to build for you.

Such ads suggested that Americans were fighting not for freedom of speech or religion but for a right to buy toasters, refrigerators, and Cadillacs. These goods and many others “had marched away to war,” but they would return after Victory Day when America would “meet its destiny of peace and plenty.”⁵⁴ In fact, many ads suggested that the right to purchase such goods—and the system of free enterprise that produced them—were core American values. “How *American* it is...to want something better!” proclaimed ale-maker P. Ballantine & Sons in an ad showing two female war workers pocketing war bonds.⁵⁵ The makers of Sparton radios envisioned a father talking to his young son. “We have so many things, here in America, that belong only to free people,” he said.

The right to free speech and action.
Warm, comfortable homes.
Automobiles and radios by the million.
Electrical machines to keep and cook our food; to wash and clean
for us.⁵⁶

The Stewart-Warner Corporation struck a similar note in an ad urging Americans to observe reduced speed limits and to buy war bonds. “Will you *ever* own another car? Another radio? Another gleaming new refrigerator?” the manufacturer of auto parts and appliances asked. “Those who live under dictators merely dream of such possessions.” Although a picture of a dark swastika topped the ad, the reference to “dictators” suggested a broader interpretation of the enemy.⁵⁷

In the meantime, all Americans needed to do their part. Materials produced by the antifascist writers and artists in the OWI had praised New Deal programs and often advocated government solutions for pressing wartime problems—for instance, price and rent controls as an antidote to inflation.

By contrast, campaigns orchestrated by the War Advertising Council generally emphasized the responsibility of individual citizens. In one Council ad, “the PATRIOTIC Mrs. Jones” fought inflation by continuing to use a chipped tea-cup and by “wearing her clothes for another year—and another.” In a second, “us little guys—us workers, us farmers, us business men” fought inflation in part by foregoing purchases and price hikes and by not “ask[ing] higher wages for our work.” A third ad showed a fish labeled “John Q. Public” enticed by the baited hook of “depression.” “Don’t get hooked again!” the ad declared. “To avoid the kind of depression we had after the last war—WE MUST HEAD OFF INFLATION NOW! And the best way to do that is to save your money.” “If you don’t [keep prices down], who will?” a fourth ad asked rhetorically. “Uncle Sam can’t do it alone.”⁵⁸

Some ads were explicitly political, sounding the same themes used by the NAM and other business groups in the late 1930s. An ad sponsored by Liberty Motors & Engineering Corporation played off FDR’s “Four Freedoms,” declaring the “U.S. System of Free Enterprise” to be “The Fifth Freedom.”⁵⁹ A series of ads run by the Nash-Kelvinator Corp. in 1943 and 1944 showed American servicemen dreaming about the country to which they would eventually return. “The future *I’m* after is so big nobody’s ever going to hand it to me on a silver platter!” declared one sailor stranded in a lifeboat. Another, being carried out of a Pacific jungle on a stretcher, thought of the men who had come before him. “And all I ask is the chance *they* had, the chance of an individual fighting man when the chips are down...and the opportunity to go ahead in a land where nothing and nobody cuts great men down...where no false power builds little men up...where every man and woman and child is a free *individual*.”⁶⁰

The Politics of Moderation

In 1943, the celebrated muckraker George Seldes self-published a book entitled *Facts and Fascism* that explicitly linked fascism abroad and at home. “There are many powerful elements working against a greater democracy,” Seldes argued, “against an America without discrimination based on race, color and creed, an America where never again will one third of the people be without sufficient food, clothing and shelter, where never again will there be 12,000,000 unemployed and many more millions working for semi-starvation wages while the DuPont, Ford, Hearst, Mellon and Rockefeller Empires move into the billions of dollars.” Seldes argued that the National Association of Manufacturers and

the business empires it represented were “the center of American Fascism,” the U.S. equivalent of the industrialists who had funded Mussolini and Hitler. His attack, however, did not stop there. “When it comes to relating foreign Fascism with native American Fascism there is a conspiracy of silence in which the OWI, the American press, and all the forces of reaction in America are united,” Seldes wrote. “Victory over foreign Fascism is certain,” he predicted, but the job at home remained “unfinished.” Partly because of the unwillingness of American liberals and leftists to take on corporate conservatives, American civilians would “have to continue to fight native Fascism for many years.” Otherwise, Seldes warned, “we will stupidly have dropped the victory won in Africa, in Italy, in Germany and in Japan.”⁶¹

Facts and Fascism was a highly unusual wartime tract. What made the book so exceptional was not Seldes’s antifascist vision but his unstinting attack on other Americans. Although many liberals and leftists shared Seldes’s hopes for a more egalitarian future, most believed that the first step toward securing that future was defeating the Axis powers, a step they believed required national unity. Moreover, the stress on social cohesion during the war—as the essential countermeasure to the Nazi tactic of “divide and conquer”—opened both purveyors of prejudice and promoters of protest to charges that they were aiding the enemy. Both factors contributed to what Seldes dubbed a “conspiracy of silence.” Most Americans who saw fascism as a global concern moderated their tone on the home front during the war. Although some in the OWI and elsewhere sought to sideline profascist groups, they generally shunned all-out attacks on domestic enemies. Instead, they focused on unifying Americans behind the war effort and using the war to promote egalitarian values.

This strategy can clearly be seen in the wartime activities of the labor movement, particularly the CIO. Although the CIO represented only one-third of all organized workers during the war, it dominated key industries such as steel and automobiles that were at the heart of the defense buildup. Moreover, its energy and vision had driven labor’s mobilization during the late 1930s. In those years, CIO officials and the *CIO News* regularly joined Seldes and other leftists in launching blistering attacks on the NAM and its political and business allies; they dubbed their domestic enemies “economic royalists,” “industrial Tories,” and increasingly “American fascists.” These rhetorical salvos were matched by militant on-the-ground tactics. As Robert Zieger has observed, “To be for labor meant marching on picket lines, facing police truncheons, and fighting for workers’ rights.”⁶²

The CIO’s retreat from this approach began in late 1940, when the soft-spoken Philip Murray replaced the fiery John L. Lewis as president of the

organization. Lewis was an isolationist who viewed developments abroad through the lens of 1917: he believed that British imperialists were trying to drag the U.S. into a European “bloodbath” that would ultimately endanger the labor movement, and he saw FDR’s defense policies as misguided, if not dishonest. Murray and his supporters, by contrast, believed that Hitler had to be stopped. They remained committed to bolstering labor’s power and to improving the living standards of workers, but they argued that the best way to do this was by standing by the president who already had helped labor achieve unprecedented gains. Moderating their antibusiness tone, they threw their weight behind the accelerating defense buildup, arguing at the same time for increased labor participation in managerial decision-making and national planning. In essence, the CIO leadership moved away “from raw, class-conscious politics” to “a view of workers as participants in a broad civic coalition.”⁶³

The U.S.’s entry into World War II accelerated this strategic shift, a move that was reflected in *CIO News* articles and cartoons like the one contrasting the “Hitler Way” with the “American Way.” It was also evident in an influential book published in early 1942 by two of Murray’s longtime associates on the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. In *The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy*, Clinton Golden and Harold Ruttenberg argued for collective bargaining, a union shop, and “the participation of organized workers in management.” These steps, they argued, were critical to both “the establishment and maintenance of industrial peace” and the “attainment of full production.” Moreover, collective bargaining represented “the extension of the basic practices and principles of democracy into industry.” Although Golden and Ruttenberg continued to call for radical reforms and to liken industrial citizenship to political citizenship, their tone was hardly confrontational. This was underscored by the fact that Russell W. Davenport, chairman of *Fortune*’s Board of Editors and a former speechwriter for Wendell Wilkie, agreed to write the book’s forward. “When you read this book you move from a crazy world into a rational one,” Davenport wrote. “You leave behind the world of the last ten years, in which strikes, lock-outs, and riots marked the inability of men to recognize a common interest or a common goal.” Golden and Ruttenberg, he suggested, had mapped out “a new world in which a common interest binds men together and a common goal is in some measure achieved.”⁶⁴

If U.S. involvement in the war delegitimized organized labor’s “militant idiom,” it also undermined unions’ most potent weapon—the strike.⁶⁵ Within weeks of the declaration of war, the CIO and other labor organizations had agreed to a “no-strike pledge” promulgated by FDR. Many workers did engage

in work stoppages during the war, but most were short and triggered by the “day-to-day indignities” suffered in “hectic wartime workplaces”; many involved only a single department or shift. Meanwhile, polls conducted by the Gallup organization between 1942 and 1944 showed that four out of every five Americans favored some form of antistrike legislation. Such views extended to union members, who were for the most part strongly patriotic. CIO vice president Sidney Hillman noted in 1943 that workers would defend their own strikes, while condemning those of others in the labor movement.⁶⁶ Indeed, when John L. Lewis led a half million coal miners on an extended strike that year, polls showed that he was the most unpopular man in America—with an “unfavorable” rating that put him on the same plain as Hitler and Hirohito.⁶⁷

The approach of the CIO’s leadership during the war involved a calculated bet—a bet that if organized labor abandoned its militancy at least temporarily, it could solidify its alliance with the federal government and emerge from the war in a better position to make its voice heard. In some respects, this bet paid off. Despite strong opposition from the NAM and other business groups, FDR established the National War Labor Board (NWLB) vested with a broad range of powers.⁶⁸ The NWLB quickly instituted a “maintenance of membership” clause that swelled union ranks at a time when millions of new workers—teenagers, housewives, migrant farm workers, and others with little historic commitment to the labor movement—were flooding into defense plants. Instead of collapsing, the CIO’s membership more than doubled between 1939 and 1944, despite the departure from the organization of six hundred thousand members of Lewis’s United Miner Workers union.⁶⁹ Longer hours, overtime provisions, incentive pay plans, and vacation benefits (often taken in the form of double-time pay) led to a 27 percent rise in real earnings during the war for workers in the manufacturing sector.⁷⁰

If the war bolstered organized labor’s numbers and swelled the pocket-books of individual workers, it nevertheless reduced unions’ cumulative power. Over the course of the war, the NWLB increasingly shifted from a “prestigious forum for the presentation of [labor’s] interests” to an “inflation-fighting agent” interested primarily in limiting wages.⁷¹ Although workers’ average weekly earnings soared 65 percent during the war, this reflected overtime hours more than wage gains. At the same time, the profits recorded by corporations almost doubled.⁷² Meanwhile, the implied linkage between labor’s “no-strike pledge” and the government’s “maintenance of membership” guarantee effectively transferred union power to the federal government. “The wartime ‘contract’ that emerged” between organized labor and the national government was markedly different from the “bold visions of shared decision-making” laid

out by Murray and others at the start of the war, Alan Brinkley has written: “Instead of an active participant in the councils of industry, the labor movement had become, in effect, a ward of the state.”⁷³

If the wartime emphasis on national unity prompted labor leaders to abandon their militant tone, it had a similar effect on America’s business community. This was not because corporate America had decided it was out of the woods. The war restored the prestige and profitability of U.S. industry, but it also greatly expanded the federal government’s role in the economy. Federal defense contracts kept war plants humming, while federal regulatory agencies oversaw everything from pricing to wage rates. Many corporate, advertising, and public relations executives believed that their efforts to “sell” the public on the abstract concepts of free enterprise and individual liberty had been generally successful. But what did “free enterprise” mean in practice? The real issue facing industry was no longer “private enterprise versus collectivism,” a top NAM staffer told the War Congress of American Industry in December 1942, but “private enterprise versus ‘modified enterprise’”—“*to preserve individual initiative in the management of property; not merely the right of the individual to own property.*”⁷⁴ Such concerns were widely shared and remained strong throughout the war. As Thomas D’Arcy Brophy, president of the Kenyon & Eckhardt advertising agency, wrote investment banker Prescott Bush in August 1944, “Regardless of the outcome of the [upcoming presidential] election, free enterprise is in for a fight.”⁷⁵

Nearly all members of the business community feared expanded federal control of the economy after the war, as well as a resurgence in the political power of organized labor. They were not, however, of one mind about the scope of the danger. “Traditional or practical conservatives” viewed unions as “illegitimate,” distrusted the federal government, and called for the “dismantling” of most New Deal programs. By contrast, moderates and “more sophisticated” conservatives believed that business should work to curb rather than to destroy the New Deal. They sought to preserve corporate and managerial prerogatives but saw a role for the government in promoting economic growth and preventing “wild economic fluctuations.” They also believed that unions—properly contained—could make workers allies, rather than enemies, in the drive for greater production and “industrial stability.”⁷⁶ The emphasis on national unity and consensus during the war gave moderates the upper hand and forced even traditional conservatives to modulate their tone. Instead of launching all-out attacks on unions and the federal government, many in the business community emphasized what they argued was the natural harmony of interests produced by modern American capitalism.

One example of this shift was the wartime transformation of the nation's largest business group, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s, the Chamber of Commerce's leadership had been almost as fanatical as the NAM in its opposition to the New Deal. In the spring of 1942, however, a group of young, mostly Western, members revolted against this old guard and installed as president a youthful and energetic Spokane entrepreneur, Eric Johnston. Johnston quickly reoriented the organization, making peace with FDR, urging businesses to learn to live with unions, and praising America's wartime economy—with its emphasis on teamwork and massive production—as a model for the future. In hundreds of interviews, speeches, op-ed pieces, and other forums, Johnston urged Americans to embrace the politics of cooperation, consumption, and economic growth.⁷⁷ He quickly became the most prominent spokesman for business's new consensus-oriented approach.

Johnston most fully explicated his vision in a 1944 manifesto entitled *America Unlimited*. America, Johnston declared, was “a civilization of abundance.” All Americans were capitalists “in their psychology” because they did not accept “the status into which birth and fate have cast them.” During the economic catastrophe of the Depression, however, Americans had lost sight of this common ground. Although Johnston was critical of certain aspects of the New Deal—its attempt “to legislate by administrative decrees,” its tendency to centralization, and its emphasis on “defeatist ideas” such as make-work programs and “plowing under”—he argued that the greatest evil of the period was its “spirit of vendetta and class warfare.” That spirit had been fueled by both New Dealers and those who opposed the administration. The war, Johnston believed, had rescued the nation from this spiritual morass by reminding Americans of “a fact which has been true all along, but concealed from sight—that the areas of agreement transcend by far the areas of conflict.” Business, labor, and the government were now working together to put the economy into overdrive, in the process benefiting all. Johnston argued that this spirit of consensus and teamwork should be extended into the postwar period. Business should recognize labor's right to bargain collectively (although not the union shop), while labor and government should work to remove “physical, political, and psychological obstacles to the free flow of enterprise capital.” If more was produced, there would be more to divide. The result, Johnston enthused, would be “an economy of the people, by the people, for the people”—a “people's capitalism” of high productivity and high consumption that would contrast sharply with both the “capitalism of private monopoly and special privilege” and with the “bureaucratic capitalism” of Moscow and Berlin.⁷⁸

Johnston's approach was widely embraced by more moderate or pragmatic members of the business community, including those associated with groups such as the Business Advisory Council, the Committee for Economic Development, and the Advertising Council. But even businessmen who did not share Johnston's desire to reconcile with organized labor and the New Deal were forced during the war to reckon with his vision. The NAM, for instance, underwent a turbulent internal battle, as hard-line members tussled with pragmatists in the organization and particularly on the professional staff over the association's public relations approach.

For most of the previous decade, the NAM had tried to convince the public that, in the words of one staff memo, "the continuance of [all government] regulation will lead the country into collectivism." The pragmatists argued that this approach wasn't working: "Even if true, that contention cannot be sold to the public." Most Americans, they continued, believed firmly in "the symbol of free enterprise," but they also attributed the debacle of 1929 to "shortsighted selfishness and a lack of vision on the part of businessmen." The public "felt that the nation's economic leadership had failed, and it transferred this leadership to government because government was the only agency that offered to help us out of the mess." Given this history, the pragmatists argued, it would be nearly impossible to convince the public that government controls were illegitimate. Instead, the business community should argue that such controls were unnecessary. Rather than taking a negative approach—"oppos[ing] *unsound* proposals to promote security, higher living standards and enlarged opportunities"—the NAM and its allies should emphasize a positive message: They should "convince the public that businessmen have such sound motives and so much economic vision that there is no need" for government intervention.⁷⁹ The business community, in other words, should present itself as best able to provide those things Americans most wanted: jobs, consumer goods, economic security, and opportunity.⁸⁰

This approach meant convincing the public that the business community had "come of age" since the 1920s, when it "occasionally used its economic freedom sincerely, but mistakenly, against the general welfare."⁸¹ The NAM pragmatists contended that the best way to do that—to convince the public "that business men are both *eager* and *competent* to achieve the nation's goals"—was "to associate the postwar problems facing America with a successful *accomplishment* in which industry *already* has demonstrated its eagerness and capacity to solve the nation's problems." That accomplishment was "obviously" wartime production. The public needed to be convinced that high productivity—achieved through the harmonious cooperation of consumers,

investors, workers, and managers in a free enterprise system—was the best way to achieve “full employment, reasonable economic security, higher living standards, opportunity for progress, economic justice, personal liberty, and other legitimate postwar desires of the American people.”⁸² High productivity could also be achieved through “regimentation and compulsion,” as Hitler had shown, but the price of productivity thus achieved was “religious, civil, political and economic freedom.”⁸³ (Here NAM pragmatists hearkened back to a theme pioneered during the “Tripod of Freedoms” campaign in 1939 and 1940.)

Many conservatives in the NAM were leery of the approach the pragmatists proposed. Nevertheless, NAM staffers took steps during the war to refocus the organization’s efforts. At the association’s urging, companies ranging from the Aluminum Company of America to Boeing Aircraft held “Soldiers of Production” rallies during which NAM speakers linked high productivity to high standards of living and urged “partnership” between workers and managers; hundreds of thousands of employees attended such rallies, and radio carried them to millions more. The NAM also stepped up its efforts to reach “opinion moulders” in agriculture, women’s organizations, education, and churches. At NAM urging, for instance, business groups in dozens of cities held local and regional conferences with religious leaders, designed to reduce or eliminate “the misconceptions of motive and interest known to exist toward organized management in this influential group.” Business attendees at such meetings stressed that industry had seen the light—that it had acquired “an enlarged social vision developed out of ten years of economic tribulation and depression.” They also noted that the two groups had a common interest in “seek[ing] a state of society in which the worth, dignity, and potential of the individual are primary considerations.” Such a society, the business representatives emphasized, required that all forms of freedom—“political, religious, and economic”—be preserved. Finally, they argued that the best way to achieve higher living standards, economic justice, and the “maintenance and extension of our American freedoms” was “through one basic method—*greater production*.”⁸⁴

These themes were also at the heart of an advertising campaign commissioned by NAM staffers and developed in late 1944 and early 1945 by the Kenyon & Eckhardt advertising agency. The campaign was designed to promote a “progressive free-enterprise, free-market” model for the economy and to portray business as “forward-looking” and “dynamic” rather than as “Bourbonistic.”⁸⁵ Although “ostensibly” addressed to “Mr. and Mrs. America,” the campaign was actually intended to “sound a keynote for some thousands of other business men to repeat” in luncheon speeches and interviews.

Organizers also hoped “to reach the wholesalers of public opinion—editors, educators, and the like.”⁸⁶ Ads in the campaign emphasized the sense of common ground that Americans had rediscovered during the war and portrayed high production as the key to postwar prosperity. “Government handouts” would “result only in more and more debt,” but high productivity would allow Americans to “earn more, buy more, have more.” Such a high-production, high-consumption economy required the cooperation of both business and the public. Business needed to make “full use of the technological ‘know how’” it had acquired during the war and to pledge itself to “a just and enlightened wage policy.” The public’s role was political. It needed, among other things, to work for lower taxes and “labor policies that establish the responsibilities of both labor *and* management.” Ads encouraged readers to write for a free booklet that provided more information.⁸⁷

Fearing that the campaign would appear partisan and thus be discredited, the NAM held it until after the 1944 presidential election.⁸⁸ The Kenyon & Eckhardt ads began appearing in mid-December, and dozens of other large corporations prepared to tie their own advertising to the effort.⁸⁹ By late January, however, the NAM’s campaign was under fire. Conservatives on the NAM’s board, led by Chrysler finance chairman and former Liberty League member B. E. Hutchinson, attacked the free booklet, challenging its assumption that “everyone should have a job.” They also argued that it offered unrealistic examples of what employees could expect to earn and that it “tacitly accept[ed] a growing labor movement.”⁹⁰ Although many board members supported the campaign, it was ultimately scuttled.⁹¹ Many of its key themes, however, would reemerge after the war in campaigns organized by Kenyon & Eckhardt’s president Thomas D’Arcy Brophy on behalf of a reconstituted Advertising Council.

The deadlock between pragmatists and conservatives within the NAM was finally broken in the late spring of 1945, when Eric Johnston and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce joined the CIO and AFL in promulgating a “Labor-Management Charter.” The charter committed organized labor “to respect managerial rights” and “eschew the nationalization of industry,” but it also recognized the “fundamental rights of labor to organize and engage in collective bargaining.” Praised by FDR as well as prominent Republicans, the charter was ultimately endorsed by the *Wall Street Journal* and such industry leaders as Charles E. Wilson of General Electric and Winthrop Aldrich of Chase National Bank. Although the stunned NAM refused to climb on board, key members of the leadership now joined most of the association’s staff in calling for a more pragmatic public relations approach. The NAM’s positions remained

very conservative—it continued, for instance, to lobby against the Wagner Act and for antistrike legislation—but it increasingly portrayed these positions as promoting the public interest and thus placed “the onus of industrial discord on unions for refusing to accept reasonable reforms.” In late 1945, the NAM hired a top public relations firm to insert its message—“management serves the public interest”—into a wide range of radio entertainment and news programs. The NAM’s refocused “moderate” strategy helped it torpedo a national labor-management conference convened by Truman just after the end of the war. More broadly, it helped transformed the NAM into “a potent political force” in the postwar years.⁹²

Business groups were by no means alone in learning to deploy the language of shared values during the war. The language was also used by those arguing for greater religious, ethnic, and racial inclusion. Ultimately, no group would benefit more from the combined emphasis on unity and pluralism during the war than those who argued that America was a tri-faith nation.