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Historical Overview

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The period from 1929 to 1945 was marked by a series of traumatic events that shook the very foundations of American society. An economic cataclysm which began in autumn 1929 ushered in an era of deprivation, anxiety and despair that lingered for more than a decade. Developments in Europe during the 1930s led to the possibility of a world controlled by a group of tyrants whose authoritarian, racist philosophy inspired them to commit the most heinous acts of the twentieth century. The Nazis ignited World War II and came frighteningly close to winning it. But America's entrance into the conflict in late 1941 brought an end to the country's economic problems and helped assure the final victory of the Allies. By the end of 1945, the United States was clearly the world's most powerful nation, having triumphed over its own economic difficulties as well as the enemies of freedom and tolerance. After years of focusing almost exclusively on life within the US, American leaders widened their purview and accepted a leadership role in a new world, now complicated by the existence of atomic weapons.

Major Historical Events

The years that preceded the Depression were filled with contradictions and excess. In many ways a reaction to the Puritanistic origins of the country, the repressive Victorian atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the horrific bloodshed of World War I, the 1920s were marked by the emergence of a "consumer culture" and bold rejection of past beliefs. Lured by abundant job opportunities and dazzled by the enticements of urban life, approximately six million rural Americans moved to cities where they were introduced to such technological marvels as automobiles, radios, telephones and movies, and to an animated life that rarely slowed its pace. People who had

been taught to work hard and save their earnings were now encouraged by the rapidly emerging world of advertising to spend money on the new technological wonders. They were likewise persuaded to loosen up, dance the Charleston, wear snappy suits or short skirts, smoke and have a few drinks. One of the era's most glaring contradictions was Prohibition, which made the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages illegal beginning in 1920. This unpopular law backfired on its ascetic sponsors who watched in horror as hundreds of thousands of Americans frequented speakeasies, trafficked with bootleggers and, in other ways, flagrantly disobeyed the law.

Underpinning the optimistic liberation of the 1920s was a general prosperity and a growing sense that riches were within the reach of anyone smart enough to grab them. The stock market became the obsession of many would-be millionaires. Buoyed by the steady rise of the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJI), they borrowed money, bought shares of stock (often on margin) and watched euphorically as the market broke into a bullish charge in 1928, which carried over to 1929. Stocks worth $27 billion at the beginning of 1925 had grown in value to $87 billion on October 1, 1929. The run up of certain securities was spectacular. Radio Corporation of America rose from $85 per share to $420 in one year; American Telephone and Telegraph climbed from $209 to $303 in a matter of months, Wright Aeronautical gained $34.75 in one week.

Blinded by the uninterrupted good news, most investors completely missed the danger signals: the overexpansion of major industries, the weak banking structure, the swollen credit balloon, the unsound and unregulated policies of the market itself. In September 1929, stocks began to fluctuate alarmingly. In October, the market collapsed, causing many to lose fortunes much faster than they had made them. It struck bottom in June 1932. At that point, US Steel had fallen from $262 to $22, General Motors from $73 to $8, Montgomery Ward from $138 to $4. The entire stock market declined 86.2 percent between September 1929 and June 1932; it would take more than 22 years to recover the losses. But the biggest loser was not the stockholder, it was America itself: its capitalistic economy had suddenly plunged into a state of near meltdown.

One year after the stock market crashed, six million American workers were looking for jobs. Many plants were operating at a fraction of capacity, many others had closed down. President Herbert Hoover, a Republican who had defeated Democrat Al Smith in 1928, believed the problems were temporary and called on local government initiative and private charity to alleviate the suffering. But the situation proved to be anything but temporary.

By 1932, one-third of the workforce was unemployed. In the large industrial centers of the northeast and midwest, the figures were even worse. Chicago

had 600,000 jobless, New York one million. Fifty percent of the workers in Cleveland had no employment; in Akron, the figure was 60 percent; in Toledo, 80 percent. Farmers were also devastated. They saw wheat fall from $1.05 per bushel in 1929 to 39 cents in 1932, cotton from 17 cents a pound to 6 cents, corn from 81 cents a bushel to 33 cents. Many lost their farms and equipment when they failed to make their mortgage payments. A multitude of city dwellers suffered the same fate, evicted from their homes or apartments because they were broke. (Figure 1.1)

The homeless often built their own shelters out of packing crates and pieces of metal on the outskirts of large cities. These pathetic domiciles came to be known as "Hoovervilles" and symbolized the growing disaffection that Americans felt for their President. When Herbert Hoover became the nation's leader, he stated, "we shall soon with the help of God be in sight of the day when poverty shall be banished from this nation." He further promised, "two cars in every garage, a chicken in every pot." Few political promises have ever been buried so completely by the avalanche of historical change.

In fairness, it should be emphasized that Hoover was not an American Nero, fiddling while Washington fell apart. His administration did back legislation designed to ease the crisis, helping to create the Reconstruction Finance Corporation which was set up in 1932 to loan money to such businesses as banks, railroads, insurance companies and farm mortgage associations and thereby restore confidence in the country's beleaguered finance and credit institutions. It was spending $500 million in public works projects by the end of the year. But the President, a great believer in "rugged individualism," was more given to encouraging platitudes ("prosperity is just around the corner") than to bold action. And some of his administration's legislative initiatives actually made things worse. The Hawley-Smoot tariff bill of 1930, for example, was especially ill timed; it hastened the collapse of the European economy and caused a trade war to break out between the US and its international trading partners.

Hoover's reputation was further tarnished by his handling of the "bonus march" of 1932. Requesting payment of bonuses promised for their service in World War I (but not collectable until 1945), some 15,000 unemployed veterans congregated in Washington, DC. After the Senate denied their petition, many of the "forgotten men" stayed on, camping in and around the Washington area. In July, Hoover dispatched the Army, under the command of Douglas MacArthur, to scatter the veterans and destroy their "Hoovervilles." This method of "thanking" Americans who had risked their lives for their country left a bitter taste in many voters' mouths.

They expressed their contempt for the incumbent at the polls, electing



Figure 1.1 A breadline made up of hundreds of hungry men snakes down a New York street during the Depression. Courtesy of the USC Doheny Library Department of Special Collections.

Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt by a landslide in 1932. Roosevelt carried all but six states. When he took control in March 1933, the new President immediately declared a national bank holiday, feeling that the battered American

banking system represented the greatest cause for alarm. Five thousand banks had failed during the first three years of the Depression, wiping out the life savings of many and causing a panic run on financial institutions throughout the country. FDR promised Americans that each bank would be examined and allowed to reopen only when the government was certain it was a safe haven for depositors. The stratagem worked, people relaxed and started to put funds back into the vaults, rather than rushing to pull them out. This decisive action alerted the populace that Roosevelt would act, in all the necessary ways, to subdue the national emergency.

Act he did, bringing, for example, a quick end to Prohibition. Roosevelt and his "New Deal" colleagues never developed a clearly defined, systematic plan to eradicate the deep-seated problems they faced, but they were not afraid to experiment. "It is common sense to take a method and try it," he said. "If it fails admit it frankly and try another. But above all do something."

Soon enough the American government had erected a virtual alphabet city of federal acts, programs and offices to attack the major predicaments of the Depression. Among the more famous were: the Civil Works Administration (CWA), the Public Works Administration (PWA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA), all of which created government jobs for the unemployed; the Glass-Steagall Banking Act, which set up the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), thus insuring all deposits up to $5,000 and restoring people's faith in America's banking institutions; the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which began to monitor Wall Street activity and assure investors that the irregularities that contributed to the crash of 1929 would be prevented in the future; the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) and the Resettlement Administration (RA), which were designed to subsidize farmers and enable them to earn an acceptable living; the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which built dams and power plants to improve the lives of Americans living in one of the country's most backward areas; the Social Security Act, which provided old-age pensions; and the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and the National Recovery Administration (NRA), which were supposed to help business and labor by establishing industry-wide codes that would include minimum wages and maximum hours for workers and formulating production and price agreements. In 1935, the Supreme Court declared the NRA unconstitutional, but its basic agenda remained in place throughout the Roosevelt presidency. Indeed, the Wagner Act, passed by Congress in that same year, encouraged the growth of trade unionism by banning unfair labor practices and guaranteeing the right to organize, to bargain collectively, to picket and to strike. It also created the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

Franklin D. Roosevelt was a master politician who used the newly established mass medium of radio to full advantage. His "fireside chats" personalized the battle against the Depression "wolf," giving Americans a sense that order and stability would return to their lives. In the 1936 election, he easily defeated his Republican opponent Alf Landon, carrying every state except Maine and Vermont. And yet the New Deal could not make the Depression disappear. While life in America clearly improved after the terrifying 1932–33 period, the prosperity that many had enjoyed a decade earlier stubbornly refused to return.

Roosevelt's second term was much more difficult and vexing than his first had been. Angered because the Supreme Court had declared both the NRA and the AAA unconstitutional, FDR attempted a "court packing" gambit which would have given him more control over a body that he believed to be obstructionist. Howls of protest came from many corners (including some that had always supported the President before), and he was forced to abandon his hopes for court reform in July 1937. A similar attempt to deal with perceived enemies, his effort to "purge" the Democratic Party of conservative senators who had criticized aspects of the New Deal, backfired in 1938, further tarnishing the President's reputation. Walter F. George of Georgia, "Cotton Ed" Smith of South Carolina and Millard F. Tydings of Maryland, plus several other independent-minded Democrats, were all re-elected despite FDR's vigorous campaigns against them. But Roosevelt's greatest miscalculation was his decision to cut back sharply on relief programs in June 1937. Soon, the nation was mired in the "Roosevelt recession": stock prices plunged, unemployment rose by two million within three months, steel production fell by 75 percent, auto production by 50 percent.

Now a regular target of criticism from both the political left and the political right, FDR responded by pushing through new public works legislation as well as new agricultural initiatives. Roosevelt's deteriorating credibility was reflected in the 1938 elections where the Republican Party made a comeback, gaining seven Senate and 80 House seats. And the grip of the Depression was still firm: 10 million people, fully 15 percent of the workforce, remained unemployed in 1939. However, the disaffection did not mushroom – voters elected FDR to an unprecedented third term in 1940. Hesitant to change leadership in the face of continuing crises, the populace gave Roosevelt a solid victory over Wendell Willkie.

By that time the crises included World War II. While the United States wrestled with its formidable economic problems, Europe had witnessed the rise of National Socialism in Germany and Fascism in Italy. The German Nazi Party, led by Adolf Hitler, came to power in 1933 and immediately set about revital-

izing a country that had been brought to its knees fewer than 15 years earlier by the First World War. Hitler espoused a pseudo-Nietzschean ideology based on the supposed superiority of the "true" (Aryan) Germans, the need to purify the race, the ill treatment that Germany had allegedly received as a conquered nation and the importance of reclaiming lands that had been taken from her in 1919. Openly violating the Versailles Treaty that ended World War I, the Nazis began to rearm and rattle their sabers. In 1935, they reclaimed the Saar Basin; in 1936, they moved into the Rhineland, and in 1938, they occupied Austria and the Sudetenland and made them part of the "Third Reich." Meanwhile, Benito Mussolini, Hitler's ally and leader of the Italian Fascists, had invaded and conquered Ethiopia in 1935, and both the Germans and Italians had aided the victory of Francisco Franco's Falange (Fascist) Party over the Loyalists in the bloody Spanish Civil War of 1936–39.

As Europe moved inexorably toward another conflagration, the United States remained stubbornly neutral. Many Americans believed their leaders had made a grave error in allowing American participation in World War I, and they were committed to keeping the country out of all future "foreign" wars. Evidence of this "isolationist" attitude, which took hold shortly after the end of World War I and remained strong for more than 20 years, included America's refusal to become a member of the League of Nations in 1920, despite the enthusiastic endorsement of that body by President Woodrow Wilson, and the passage of a series of Neutrality Acts in the 1930s which prevented the government from selling arms or making loans to belligerent nations. A 1937 public opinion poll showed that 94 percent of the populace felt US foreign policy should be directed at keeping the country out of all foreign wars.

In September 1939, the Nazis, having already taken control over much of Czechoslovakia without significant resistance from other European powers, overran Poland. England and France then honored their mutual protection pact with the Poles, declaring war on Germany. The Second World War had begun. The Nazis proved to be a frighteningly effective war machine, conquering Denmark, Belgium, Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and France within a year.

"I have said this before, and I shall say it again and again and again. Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars," Roosevelt assured Americans in 1940, but he and his advisors were clearly as alarmed by the German victories as they were suspicious of the Nazis' ultimate ambitions. In 1940, FDR signed an executive order leasing 50 over-age destroyers to Great Britain for 99 years. In return, the US was given several strategic naval bases from Newfoundland to British Guiana. The country had begun to sell arms to both

England and France the year before when Roosevelt convinced Congress to repeal the arms clause of the Neutrality Acts. A new approach was offered in 1941; the Lend-Lease Act gave the government the right to sell, lend, lease or give war materials to any nation resisting aggression. This included, of course, Great Britain and eventually the USSR. The Russians and Germans had signed a non-aggression treaty in August of 1939, but Hitler reneged, ordering his troops to attack Russia in June 1941. By that time, the US was, for all intents and purposes, involved in an undeclared war with Germany. (Figure 1.2)

Most Americans sided with their President and approved the assistance being provided to the perceived allies, but vociferous advocates of isolationism stepped up their attacks on FDR and others who, they claimed, were attempting to maneuver the country into the war. The Committee to Defend America First, led by famous aviator Charles Lindbergh and Robert E. Wood of Sears, Roebuck, plus powerful press baron William Randolph Hearst and congressional voices Burton K. Wheeler, Gerald P. Nye and Hamilton Fish, argued passionately against US intervention. A multitude of Americans agreed; as late as August 1941, 74 percent of the populace still opposed involvement in the battle with the Germans.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and stilled the isolationist voices for good. This "unprovoked and dastardly attack" (as Roosevelt called it) on the American Pacific fleet was devastating. It destroyed or damaged 21 warships, demolished 188 aircraft and damaged 159 additional planes, killed 2,433 military personnel, wounded 1,178 more and, in its way, highlighted how strong the isolationist sentiment had been in the country up to that time. Despite the passage of the Selective Service Act in 1940, which enabled the government to draft young men into the armed forces, the US had only 1.5 million soldiers (approximately two-thirds of whom were only partially trained) on what Roosevelt labeled the "day that will live in infamy." The Japanese force, by contrast, numbered 2.4 million trained soldiers and 3 million trained reserves.

Japanese militarists, who had embarked on a policy of conquest and subjugation in Asia in 1931 and grown more and more vexed with the United States for openly opposing their objectives, took full advantage of America's obsession with non-involvement in their surprise attack upon Pearl Harbor. However, America's Pacific aircraft carriers were not at Pearl on December 7, and the attacking Japanese pilots overlooked massive amounts of fuel that were stored there. They also failed to attack dry docks where a number of the damaged ships would eventually be repaired. These strokes of American good fortune soon proved crucial in the Pacific conflict. Shortly after Roosevelt and



Figure 1.2 President Franklin D. Roosevelt broadcasts from the Oval Office of the White House in 1940. Courtesy of the USC Doheny Library Department of Special Collections.

Congress committed the nation to war on Japan, Germany and Italy honored their agreement with their Axis partner by declaring war on the United States. World War II had finally engulfed America.

Pearl Harbor and contemporaneous attacks on American troops in the Philippine Islands united the country in a way that no other event in American history ever had. Young men and women rushed to join the military, swelling its ranks to almost 3.9 million by the end of 1942 and to more than 9 million by the end of the following year. The Depression came to an abrupt end, laid to rest by the immediate need to build the machines of war and the determination of American industry to fill this need. Within six months of the Japanese attacks, 6 million workers found new jobs, many in the defense plants that manufactured tanks, aircraft, battleships, submarines and other machines of war. During the same period, federal procurement officers placed orders for $100 billion in equipment – more than the American economy had ever produced in a single year.

The first six months of the war were trying for the American military, but a breakthrough came in June 1942 when US forces engaged a large portion of the Japanese fleet near Midway Island. When the battle ended, the Japanese had lost four carriers, two large cruisers, three destroyers, several auxiliary craft and 300 airplanes. The Battle of Midway tipped the Pacific balance of power in the American direction.

In Europe, Hitler was finding his Russian enemies every bit as tough as the British to defeat. Frustrated at Moscow and the Caucasus and defeated and forced to retreat at Stalingrad, the Nazis were made to endure similar disappointments in North Africa, where they were beaten by the British at El Alamein.

With the United States contributing enormous amounts of war materials and manpower to the European theater of operations, the Allies took the offensive in 1942. From newly won bases in North Africa, they attacked Sicily in the summer of 1943 and, by September, had succeeded in knocking Italy out of the war. The Germans responded by sending troops to hold and defend the land of their principal ally, but American, British and Free French forces fought their way slowly up the Italian peninsula. Meanwhile, the Russians began to move westward, pushing the Nazis back toward their own borders.

In June 1944, the Allies launched the massive "D-Day" assault, landing troops on the Normandy coast of France and beginning the final phase of the European campaign. After withstanding a last counterattack by the Germans at the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, they were able to bottle up the enemy troops inside their homeland which had been decimated by aerial bombing. On May 7, 1945, the Nazis surrendered.

The war in the Pacific would drag on for a few more months. The Philippines had been retaken from the Japanese in the spring of 1945 and Okinawa fell shortly thereafter. This cleared the way for a full-scale invasion of the main Japanese islands, which were already partially devastated and cut off from crucial raw materials. Despite their extreme vulnerability, the Japanese leaders refused to surrender. New American President Harry S. Truman, who had taken over when the country's only four-term President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, died in April 1945, contemplated his options. They were essentially two: either a full-scale invasion, which would undoubtedly cost many American as well as Japanese lives, or the employment of a fearsome secret weapon recently invented by American scientists. Truman decided to use the atomic bomb, ordering the Army Air Corps to drop one on Hiroshima on August 6. Following the first test explosion of the bomb, one of the weapon's inventors, J. Robert Oppenheimer, was reminded of a passage from the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a Sanskrit poem integral to the Hindu religion: "Now I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds." The attack on Hiroshima was certainly shattering to the Japanese who lost 78,000 people and endured a second A-bomb blast on Nagasaki on August 9. The country surrendered on August 14.

A few days after the surrender, British leader Winston Churchill said, "America stands at this moment at the summit of the world." His statement was accurate from a variety of perspectives. As historian Godfrey Hodgson has pointed out, the US had the world's most powerful economy. At its wartime peak in late 1944, American industry was working at a rate that would have enabled it to equip a power equal to the USSR in no more than a few days. The gross national product of the US, which settled at $56 billion in 1933, moved beyond $210 billion in 1945. During the war years, national income, national wealth and industrial production all doubled or more than doubled. The war also cost other countries much more than it had the US. American battle losses totaled fewer than 300,000, significant enough but small compared to the 50 million Asians and Europeans who perished. In fact, more Americans died of pneumonia and tuberculosis during World War II than were killed in combat. Furthermore, no one could contest the military might of the United States in 1945 since it, and it alone, had nuclear weapons.

Most significantly, the United States emerged from the war with a very different attitude toward the rest of the world than it had exhibited on Pearl Harbor day. Hanging up the cloak of isolationism, Americans accepted the challenge of leadership in the new world. This commitment was signaled by the country's willingness to admit tacitly that it had been wrong in disassociating itself from the League of Nations; it now strenuously supported the League's evolution into

the United Nations. That body took shape in meetings at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC between Great Britain, the USSR and the US in August and September of the same year. During a San Francisco conference that lasted from April to late June 1945, the representatives of more than 50 countries hammered out the charter of the organization which officially came into force on October 24, 1945. The General Assembly held its first meeting in London in January 1946, where it was decided that UN permanent headquarters would be in the United States. The construction of the UN buildings on the East River in New York City became a fitting, concrete representation of America's movement from a passive to an active posture with respect to world affairs.

Economic Situation

US economic history between 1929 and 1946 was bracketed by two periods of relative tranquility surrounding a long, nightmarish ordeal of hardship and uncertainty. Explosive technological growth during the 1920s changed American lives in a variety of ways. By the end of the decade, 70 percent of US homes had electricity, and more than half contained telephones and phonographs and had an automobile parked outside. Charles Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927 fired the imagination of his countrymen; if Americans could pull off such feats, some reasoned, they were capable of anything – utopia was truly within reach. The breakthroughs of technology and the dizzying run up of stocks near the end of the "roaring" era made the economic free fall which began in the last three months of 1929 seem totally shocking and unfathomable.

Economists generally view the stock market crash of October 1929 as the beginning of the Depression. The performance of the market during the remainder of the period ignited few celebrations. After reaching a high of 381.17 on September 3, 1929, the DJI bottomed out at 41.22 on July 8, 1932. The market, like most economic indicators, did improve during the war years, but it would not approach its pre-crash level again until 1954. It was hardly a time for the faint-of-heart to be dabbling in stocks; of the 10 worst single days in the twentieth-century history of the DJI, six occurred between 1929 and 1937.

The Depression was not confined to America; soon enough it became a worldwide phenomenon. Kreditanstalt, Austria's biggest bank, collapsed in 1931, marking the beginning of an economic calamity that soon engulfed Europe and spread to other continents. The aforementioned Hawley-Smoot Tariff, signed into law by President Hoover, exacerbated the situation, freezing for-

eigners out of the American market and making it nearly impossible for US businesses to sell their products overseas. The worldwide Depression also provided a fertile atmosphere for the growth of dictatorships in Germany, Italy and the USSR.

Although millions of Americans suffered during the Depression, surprisingly few seriously questioned their country's basic political and economic systems. The American Socialist Party, for example, which had polled 879,000 votes in the 1912 election and seemed a plausible answer to Depression woes in the early 1930s, had totally fallen apart by 1938. The American Communist Party did grow to perhaps 80,000 members by 1939, but the signing of the Soviet–German non-aggression pact by Stalin and Hitler in August of that year split the membership, leaving the Party in disarray and causing its ranks to decline.

Likewise, the efforts of individuals offering radical solutions to the hard times never developed significant momentum. "Kingfish" Huey Long, the often outrageous governor of Louisiana, concocted a "Share-Our-Wealth" scheme which promised to buy every family a house, a car and other basic items by taxing income over $1 million a year at 100 percent and confiscating fortunes of more than $5 million. By 1935, nearly 5 million Americans had grown sympathetic to Long's ideas, but an assassin's bullet felled him in September of that year and his famous slogan, "Every man a king," soon faded into history.

Father Charles Coughlin, a Catholic priest with a substantial radio following, began to promote the "National Union for Social Justice" in the mid-1930s. His sensationalistic broadcasts were filled with vituperative attacks on a wide range of targets including bankers, labor unions, Jews, Communists, President Roosevelt and, of course, the New Deal; they implied that an American Fascist state might be the proper medicine for a sick nation. An effective rabble rouser and fundraiser, Coughlin formed the National Union Party and threw his support behind the candidacy of William Lemke of North Dakota in the 1936 election. However, Lemke attracted only 892,000 votes, deflating the Coughlin movement. The "radio priest" did, however, remain on the air into the next decade, spouting even more inflammatory rhetoric and ultimately endorsing the anti-Semitic ideology of Adolf Hitler.

Less demonstrative but ultimately more effective than either Long or Coughlin was Dr. Francis E. Townsend of California. Shocked by the spectacle of many penniless, aged Americans living as hobos, Townsend called for the creation of old-age pensions, proposing that every person over 60 receive a monthly stipend of $200, so long as the individual agreed to spend the entire amount each month and earn no other income. According to the retired physician, this plan would revitalize the economy, as well as help the elderly, because

their purchases would stimulate the job market. Soon more than 5 million people had joined Townsend Clubs. Roosevelt and his advisors paid attention to these geriatric voters; in 1935, the Social Security system became law.

Throughout FDR's first administration, he believed, like Herbert Hoover before him, that balancing the federal budget was one of the keys to pulling the country out of the Depression. But early in his second term, he began to listen to such advisors as Harry Hopkins of the WPA and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes who were fascinated by the theories of British economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynes hypothesized that deficit spending would stimulate factory production, create jobs and put enough money into people's pockets that they would pick up their level of consumption. In short, Keynes reasoned that governments could spend their way out of economic tailspins. Following the disastrous decision to curtail federal spending programs in 1937 and the resultant recession, Roosevelt finally agreed to heavy deficit spending and, in April 1938, the New Deal pushed a $3.75 billion public works bill through Congress.

The work projects developed and funded by the government were spectacular in their variety, from the building of hospitals, roads and schools to the composing of songs, the writing of plays and the painting of murals. It was a time when a multitude of artists, as well as bureaucrats, teachers, unskilled laborers and scientists, picked up paychecks from Uncle Sam.

One of the most volatile relationships of the 1930s and 1940s involved labor and management. Generally speaking, the Roosevelt administration supported the union movement. The New Deal put an end to child labor, established minimum wages and maximum hours and guaranteed the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (called the "Wagner Act" after its sponsor, Senator Robert Wagner of New York) and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 formalized these rights and stimulated the growth of union membership. Approximately 3.6 million workers belonged to unions in 1934; that number had grown to more than 9 million in 1941.

Despite these laws, the gains of organized labor did not come without recalcitrant, often angry, opposition from management. The first "sit down" strikes were called by the United Auto Workers against General Motors in 1936. Refusing to bargain, GM executives expressed outrage over the disruption of their assembly lines and the illegal seizure of their property. There were also episodes of violence during the 44-day shutdown, but the union eventually won. Much bloodier battles were fought before the steel industry finally acquiesced to unionization and collective bargaining. President Roosevelt, shocked

by the bloodshed and stung by critics from the business world who accused him of "creeping socialism," retreated, refusing to support labor's 1937 drive to organize new industries.

Internecine strife also affected labor's own house. In 1935, John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers and officials of the garment trade unions formed the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) and began to organize unskilled laborers into a union that would disregard craft lines. This move was in direct defiance of the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL), the large "roof organization" under which a number of different unions cohered. Unions supporting the CIO were suspended by the AFL in 1936; they soon came together in their own umbrella structure, one which represented the automobile, steel, rubber and other industries. By 1938, the CIO had changed its name to the Congress of Industrial Organizations, its unions had fought some of the most violent and successful battles with intransigent managements and its membership had skyrocketed, making it a formidable rival to the hidebound AFL.

Perhaps America's most important group of workers – its farmers – had no large labor organization to help them through a period of continuing difficulties. While the 1920s were an exciting and prosperous time for many Americans, they were anything but happy years for those who earned their livings from the soil. Even though agricultural prices declined rapidly after the close of World War I, the Republicans in power at the time made almost no effort to aid agrarian interests. It is little wonder that so many rural Americans abandoned their farms for city life during the decade.

The onset of the Depression brought further price erosion and continuing inaction from the Hoover administration. The New Deal, of course, did implement a number of initiatives, including the controversial Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 which attempted to boost crop prices by requiring farmers to curtail output and subsidizing them for their cooperation. In a public relations gaffe, Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace decided to pay farmers to destroy crops and slaughter swine in 1933. Many jobless individuals, worried about the source of their families' next meals, were outraged by the tactic.

Although the Supreme Court declared the AAA unconstitutional in 1936, the New Deal continued to assist one of Roosevelt's most loyal political constituencies. It gained Congressional approval for the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, which accomplished a lot of the same things that the AAA had, and both the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) helped farmers obtain cheap electricity and other benefits. For many, this support was still not enough. A horrific drought afflicted the midwest from 1934 to 1936, forcing thousands to abandon the

"Dust Bowl." Their migration westward became a journey of disappointment for farmers who believed they would find a better life in California. Many found, instead, a world almost as bleak as the one they had left behind.

The war finally turned things around for farmers, as it did for so many others. Agricultural output and income both doubled between 1941 and 1945, in response to heavy demand for products from both the military and civilian sectors. By the end of World War II, farmers' incomes had reached an all-time high.

A triumphant time for the advocates of Keynesian theory, the World War II era saw the national debt balloon from $49 billion in 1941 to almost $260 billion when the Japanese surrendered in 1945. This money and more, much of it spent on superheated production of combat machinery, helped create millions of new jobs. Unemployment was quickly banished from the American scene, and the Depression, an unwelcome guest who had stubbornly refused to depart for more than a dozen years, was suddenly booted out of the national door. As President Roosevelt put it, "Dr. New Deal" had become "Dr. Win-the-War." The medicine dispensed by the latter proved to be far more popular and effective than any of the prescriptions offered by the former.

The industrial output of the United States during the war years was extraordinary. Henry J. Kaiser's shipbuilding company, for example, required 355 days to produce a Liberty ship in 1941. Before the war's conclusion, Kaiser workers had cut the average delivery time of these basic cargo vessels to 56 days; they even managed to complete one Liberty ship in two weeks. During this period, US factories built 71,000 warships, 300,000 aircraft, and 2.4 military trucks. Without question, America won World War II in the plants at home as well as on the battlefields abroad.

Deficit spending could not pay for everything. Taxes, which had risen throughout the Depression, especially on corporations and upper-income Americans, were increased substantially during the war. By 1945, yearly incomes over $200,000 were being taxed at a rate of 94 percent and excess profits at 95 percent. In addition, taxes were imposed for the first time on many lower-income workers. In 1939, only 4 million people earned large enough salaries to pay taxes; in 1945, 42.7 million belonged to the tax-paying ranks. Since the money was going to the defense of their country, few spoke out against the levies. The implementation of the payroll deduction system, which required employers to withhold a portion of each individual's yearly assessment from his or her paycheck, helped the treasury collect the needed revenues and made the process more palatable to most wage earners. More than 40 percent of the cost of winning the war was covered by taxes.

Government and private enterprise formed a remarkable partnership that was responsible for the leap in productivity during the war. Labor contributed mightily as well. There were few strikes during the initial period, though work stoppages did escalate as time went on and it became clear that the US would be victorious. In 1945, 38 million production hours were lost to strikes, whereas they only consumed a bit more than 4 million hours in 1942. Union membership continued its propulsive growth. By the end of World War II, 15 million Americans belonged to labor organizations, setting the stage for a highly aggressive post-war movement on behalf of workers.

The years between Pearl Harbor and Nagasaki provided a multitude of challenges to America's creative scientists. These inventive minds delivered radar, synthetic rubber, new plastics, new vaccines, DDT, high frequency shortwave radio, jet airplanes, atomic energy and a host of other breakthroughs that would help to hasten the war's end and affect life after 1945 in profound ways.

When V-J Day finally came, Americans were producing half of the world's goods and had the highest standard of living on the planet. Despite these facts and the spirit of unity and achievement that animated the times, life at home during World War II was not without its hardships. Many items, including gasoline, tires, shoes and various foodstuffs, were rationed, severely limiting opportunities for vacation travel and other forms of pleasurable relaxation. Inflation began to rise early in the era; although the government attempted to keep it in check through the imposition of wage and price controls, it remained a reality, taking a solid bite, along with the income taxes, out of disposable income. Additionally, a numbing fear hovered over the nation throughout the war – the fear that the Depression would return to America as soon as the conflict concluded. While the post-1945 world would contain a number of unpleasantries, this dire scenario, thankfully, would not be among them.

Societal Issues

The "Lost Generation" of American writers began publishing messages of angst and disillusionment in the 1920s. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Ezra Pound and others, most of them residing in Europe, expressed outrage over the brutal carnage of World War I and cheerlessly predicted an even more difficult and inhumane future. Their works would become cornerstones of twentieth-century literary and intellectual history.

At home, however, these apocalyptic warnings were lost on the majority of their countrymen and women. Proud to have been on the victorious side in

the war and dazzled by a world filled with rapidly expanding possibilities, most Americans viewed their lives to come with optimism.

One of the greatest social changes of the decade was wrought by the automobile. Heretofore considered a luxury item, cars became affordable in the mid-1920s when Henry Ford's innovative mass production methods reduced the cost of a Model T to $280. The rapid development of the auto as a consumer product caused the government to embark on a highway building program that resulted in the creation of more than 750,000 miles of blacktop by 1929.

The social impact of the "automobile culture" was wide-ranging. In addition to stimulating a variety of industries (petroleum, glass, rubber, trucking, insurance, travel, etc.) and creating thousands of jobs, it provided a new and special sense of freedom for Americans. Rural areas were no longer isolated, leisure time activities were enlarged and the courting habits of teenagers were changed forever. The 1920s migration from farms and small towns to the metropolis was partially inspired and accomplished by the bracing mobility that cars provided. By the end of the decade, 26.5 million vehicles cruised through the landscape.

The love affair between Americans and their cars was just one aspect of the rapidly developing consumer consciousness already mentioned in earlier sections. This, like many other aspects of life in the 1920s, was a rebellion against the Victorian repression and self-denial which had dominated society before World War I. Other visible manifestations of the replacement of the old temperance by a new pleasure ethic included falling church attendance, the emergence of jazz music, increasingly frank approaches to sexuality, a fascination with Freud's revolutionary ideas about the unconscious mind and its effect on human behavior and, of course, the flagrant defiance of Prohibition by many Americans.

The fervent embrace of change was perhaps best reflected in the appearance of the "new" woman. This "flapper" now had the right to vote (she had won that right in the suffrage amendment of 1920), but she appeared more interested in the right to party – to smoke cigarettes, drink bootleg liquor, wear silk stockings and knee-length, loose-fitting dresses and dance the Charleston and Black Bottom in urban speakeasies. Her devotion to hedonistic pursuits, combined with similar predilections on the part of many males, took a toll on traditional family life; by 1929, the divorce rate was triple its 1890 level.

Another flamboyant indication of the new order was the sudden appearance of the criminal-as-celebrity, as larger-than-life embodiment of overnight success. For many gangsters like Al(phonse) Capone of Chicago, Prohibition was the most wonderful constitutional amendment ever enacted in the coun-

try's history. They made millions supplying the needs of alcohol-consuming Americans who had no intention of obeying this particular legal deterrent. Many members of the "bathtub gin" crowd viewed Capone and his ilk as Robin Hood figures who took the risks and deserved the rewards of their dangerous profession. They seemed no worse than the corrupt politicos who were unmasked in Washington during the same era, profiting from such scandals as Teapot Dome and Elk Hills. Romanticized views of Capone and other criminals overlooked the brutal methods that they used to establish and hold their respective turfs and the more unsavory activities that complemented their distribution of illegal booze. Nevertheless, many members of the public marveled at the ability of big-time mobsters to avoid prosecution and the government's inability to thwart their unlawful businesses.

Not everyone approved, however, of the flapper with her bobbed hair or idolized the bejeweled gangster, nor was every American persuaded to join the new army of consumers and acquire all the new gadgets on display in their local department stores. Millions of more conservative citizens watched the changing social scene in utter dismay. Members of this traditionalist constituency had fought for Prohibition in the first place and continued to support it, despite its evident failure.

Protestant fundamentalists, repelled by most of the new ideas and fads, were especially disturbed by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin's belief that humans evolved from lower life forms, rather than being created by God as detailed in the Biblical book of Genesis, caused an uproar, especially when teachers began tentatively to discuss Darwin in their classrooms. The battle between fundamentalists who believed only in "divine creation" and progressive thinkers who accepted Darwin's theories climaxed in the famous Scopes trial of 1925. The trial in Dayton, Tennessee turned into a fascinating philosophical debate between former Presidential candidate and Biblical scholar William Jennings Bryan and liberal attorney Clarence Darrow, with a technicality allowing both sides to claim final victory. The actual outcome forbade John Thomas Scopes and other Tennessee educators from presenting the evolutionary doctrine to their students. Fundamentalist Christians would perhaps be the least surprised members of their society when the Depression enfolded America; to them, the economic crisis represented a fitting punishment for the repudiation of formerly cherished beliefs and values by their fellow Americans. Although far removed from the "Lost Generation" in practically every way, these bedrock conservatives viewed the future with the same degree of trepidation as the expatriate authors.

The 1930s brought widespread disillusionment to the country. The Great

Depression was obviously catastrophic from an economic standpoint, but its psychological impact was every bit as acute. "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," said Franklin D. Roosevelt in his first inaugural address. The line may seem rather facile when one considers the homes, possessions, savings and livelihoods that many Americans had lost by the time FDR uttered these famous words in 1933. But Roosevelt intuitively understood the level of fright that afflicted so many lives when he became President and recognized that one of the New Deal's primary missions would be to restore his people's confidence and their hopes for the future. Americans had to believe there would be a happy ending to all this hardship.

Roosevelt's "brain trust" of university-educated advisors set about creating an active and visible government that soon began to touch individual citizens in many tangible ways, while the President spoke regularly and reassuringly to them over the radio. The "fireside chats" were part information and part politics, but mostly they were therapy – psychological counseling for a nation suffering through a collective nervous breakdown. Studs Terkel's oral history of the Depression, *Hard Times*, is replete with the memories of people ashamed of their inability to handle the contemporary difficulties. Although bewildered about the causes of the crisis, they often seemed to feel personally responsible for their plight, as if they had brought it on themselves and were the only ones incapable of restoring order to their lives. Roosevelt had to help these people overcome their feelings of inadequacy and shame, and he did it the best way he could – by putting as many of them as possible to work. Once individuals were productive again, once they were able to provide for themselves and their families, their psychological dejection began to lift.

Many of the New Deal programs were innovative and quite radical compared to legislation enacted by previous administrations. But this was not a time for indulgence or risk-taking by most members of society. The spirit of the 1920s had been individualistic, iconoclastic and animated; the spirit of the 1930s was communal, conformist and tempered. Trying times practically demanded a return to traditional family values, to abstinence and thrift. People indulged their dreams of wealth and power by playing "Monopoly," one of the most popular board games of the era, instead of the stock market. They studied Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which taught them to stifle their own egos and make others feel important as a means to achieve personal success. They became "joiners" – of clubs, groups, teams, unions. Being part of a collective was reassuring; it provided a sense of identity, of belonging, and it separated them from the period's most wretched individualists, its hobos and vagabonds.

The nation's most obstreperous entrepreneurs – its high-profile criminals – continued to make headlines. Prohibition was over by the end of 1933, but legal liquor could not immediately cancel the Robin Hood image of the racketeer. The Capone mob, for example, set up soup kitchens to feed hungry Chicagoans during the worst days of the Depression. It was difficult to condemn a group who seemed to care more about your welfare than anyone else did.

Another bunch of nonconformists who amazed the public with their recklessness – the itinerant bank robbers – represented the most extreme solution to Depression want. John Dillinger, "Pretty Boy" Floyd, "Baby Face" Nelson, Bonnie and Clyde and the "Ma" Baker gang all gained notoriety by seizing the assets of the country's most disliked white-collar genus – the banker. Floyd is reputed to have burned mortgages whenever he knocked over a bank, thereby earning the gratitude of local farmers and homeowners.

Vying with these outlaws for public attention was the emerging Bureau of Investigation (later the Federal Bureau of Investigation/FBI). Although the Bureau had been in existence since 1908, its agents were not allowed to carry guns until 1933. As soon as his troops were armed, Bureau chief J. Edgar Hoover began a public relations campaign to glorify the crime fighter and deglamorize the criminal. He established the "Public Enemies" list, plastering miscreants' pictures in public places and loudly celebrating whenever one of his most wanted crooks was brought to justice. At the end of 1935, Capone was in prison and Dillinger, Floyd, Nelson, Baker and her son Fred and Bonnie and Clyde were all dead, most killed by the G-Men. By that time, Hoover had succeeded in turning his agents into national heroes, while the concept of the law breaker as Robin Hood seemed as dead as the legendary British outlaw himself.

Even though the Civil War had ended more than 60 years earlier, African Americans continued to live as second-class citizens throughout the 1930s. Segregated housing, schools, restaurants and public transit were the norm in the southern US and commonplace in other parts of the nation as well. For blacks, the Depression was even more devastating than it was for other segments of the population; the level of black unemployment consistently exceeded that of white unemployment, and blacks who did work were generally forced to accept a lesser wage than that earned by whites for identical toil. New Deal programs carried on this discriminatory practice, as well as excluding blacks from some of the advantages of the agricultural initiatives and segregating those who were hired by the CCC, the TVA and other agencies.

President Roosevelt's record on civil rights was basically a blank page, yet African Americans venerated him and became enthusiastic members of his political coalition. Deserting the Republican party of Abraham Lincoln, which

had been responsible for their liberation from slavery, they supported FDR and the Democrats because they believed the New Deal was doing more for them than the previous succession of Republican administrations ever had and because of the outspoken advocacy they received from Roosevelt's wife, Eleanor.

Mrs. Roosevelt championed the rights of African Americans throughout her years in the White House and afterwards. Her efforts almost certainly did have a positive impact on the hiring and advancement of blacks by the government and helped to elevate their status throughout the society. One incident is telling: in 1939, the Daughters of the American Resolution (DAR) refused to allow Marian Anderson to give a concert in Washington's Constitution Hall. Mrs. Roosevelt resigned from the organization and arranged for the black singer to perform on federal property near the Lincoln Memorial. A few months thereafter, the First Lady presented Anderson with the Springarn Medal, an award for achievement given by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). While her politically astute husband, ever mindful of the votes of white southerners, tempered whatever feelings he had for black causes, Eleanor Roosevelt was persistently vocal on their behalf.

African Americans became more militant during World War II. Although expected to contribute wholeheartedly to the unified effort, they still faced discrimination at every turn. This fundamental irony was not lost on them – they were being asked to commit themselves to a crusade against a blatantly racist enemy in order to protect a society that gave only lip service to the cherished belief that "all men are created equal." Examples of the discriminatory practices of the time: the military welcomed black soldiers, then funneled them into their own segregated units; black blood plasma was distinguished from white plasma, even though there was no medical reason for this and the process for storing the life-giving component had been discovered by black doctor Charles Drew; blacks found new jobs in the defense plants, but rarely received training in highly skilled positions or were promoted to supervisory posts.

Some positive change did occur over time. The CIO, which had begun enrolling black members in the 1930s, added thousands to its ranks during the war. The Navy integrated the crews of 25 vessels, the Air Corps commissioned some 600 black pilots and the Army ordered its training camps desegregated in 1944, though not all of them were. Still, these and other efforts to give a fair shake to African Americans and additional minority groups (such as Hispanics and Native Americans) were halfhearted at best. Angry, emphatic calls for change, foreshadowed by the enormous growth of the NAACP and by violent race riots in Detroit, New York and Los Angeles during the war years, would come after America's enemies had fired their final shots.

The battle against the Axis provided a positive psychic antidote to Depression anxiety for most Americans. Whether they were in uniform or not, worked in a defense plant or some trade unrelated to the war effort, all Americans were made to feel part of the great crusade. War bonds, the Red Cross, the United Service Organizations (USO), union no-strike pledges, rationing, newspaper reports of combat developments, FDR's radio chats, posted reminders that "loose lips sink ships" and innumerable other cues combined to create a wartime consciousness that challenged every individual to contribute to the victory team. Moreover, as the great battles began to be won and Uncle Sam's factories began to outstrip even the government's optimistic production estimates, a feeling of noble accomplishment and satisfaction spread through the land. The fact that most people had jobs and spending money in their pockets didn't hurt either. The war gave Americans back their self-confidence.

This self-confidence was reflected in a striking increase in marriages and births. The US population, which had grown by only 3 million during the 1930s, shot up by 6.5 million during the first half of the 1940s. Unfortunately, the divorce rate also rose markedly, perhaps as a result of many rushed and ill-advised unions prompted by the departure of soldiers for the combat zone.

World War II made an especially powerful impact on American women. In response to the predominantly male military buildup and the need to boost production, approximately 8 million females entered the workforce between 1940 and 1945. Many labored in defense plants that built submarines, tanks and fighter planes and a number proved they could handle jobs that had previously belonged only to men, such as riveting, welding and heavy machine operation. At first, many members of the "Rosie the Riveter" brigade viewed their efforts as just another sacrifice for the cause; they had no intention of continuing to work when the war ended. But as time went on, more and more came to enjoy the blandishments their salaries bought them, as well as the feeling of independence and achievement that work added to their lives. By 1945, the thought of giving up their positions and incomes for a return to the domestic sphere was not so appealing to many women workers. They had tasted liberation and liked its flavor (see Figure 1.3).

An unfortunate byproduct of the entry of thousands of mothers into the labor force was the growing absence of supervision for their children. During the war, many youngsters came home from school to an empty house or apartment. Lacking guidance and discipline from their elders, they were soon on the streets with predictable results. Juvenile delinquency soared, especially in cities like San Diego where defense plants operated 24 hours a day.

Another disturbing aspect of World War II was the nation's venomous



Figure 1.3 A female worker tightens down the engine cowling of a P-38 fighter plane at the Lockheed plant in the Los Angeles area, 1943. Courtesy of the USC Doheny Library Department of Special Collections.

hatred of the Japanese. Although the US was also at war with Germany and Italy, Americans were infinitely more tolerant of people with German and Italian blood than they were of the Japanese enemy. Much of the loathing had

its roots in the "sneak" attack on Pearl Harbor, but it was also a racist response to a culture that few understood or cared to understand. The Japanese were consistently stereotyped as sub-human by the media; the most popular incarnation was the buck-toothed, slant-eyed monkey, apparently spawned by the devil.

Sadly, Japanese Americans were not exempted from the vicious propaganda. General John L. DeWitt, head of the West Coast Defense Command, put it this way: "A Jap's a Jap . . . It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen or not. I don't want any of them . . . There is no way to determine their loyalty." Similar thinking prompted the government to order the relocation of more than 100,000 Japanese Americans to 10 camps in seven western states where they were kept under guard. The similarities between these camps and the concentration camps of America's enemies remain among the war's crueler ironies. Despite the fact that no proof of their disloyalty was ever offered, these people lost their jobs, their homes, most of their possessions. Many were psychologically traumatized by the experience. Even the achievements of the 442 Regimental Combat Team, a Japanese American unit that fought valiantly during the Italian campaign, had little impact on prevailing attitudes. Antagonism toward the Japanese and Japanese Americans would continue, even after the war ended and the camps were cleared. Given the fact that World War II was fought, at least partially, to smash the contemptible racist beliefs of the Nazis, the ugly Japanese stereotyping and unjustified relocation seem especially ill-conceived. They are, perhaps, the most lamentable aspects of this generally unified and laudable period in American social history.

Hollywood Responds to the Crises

Buoyed by the novelty of sound movies, movie companies enjoyed fulsome profits in 1929 and 1930. Indeed, early in 1930 some of their leaders began to believe that their business was "Depression-proof." By the end of that year, however, it was clear that the troubled economic situation was going to have a significant negative impact on theater attendance. The years 1932 and 1933 were terrible for Hollywood, as well as for the rest of American commerce. Studios responded by dismissing many employees, cutting salaries, closing theaters and reducing the average cost of their productions. But even these measures could not prevent RKO and Paramount from falling into receivership. The accounting ledgers of other major studios were also glutted with red ink.

Many studies of Hollywood during the Depression suggest that its product

was overwhelmingly "escapist," i.e. designed to provide a couple of hours of mindless relief from the miseries of the decade. On one level this is true; very few feature films depicted the "hard times" in realistic or penetrating fashion. But it would be wrong to infer that Hollywood filmmakers pretended the economic convulsion didn't exist in their creations. In fact, the Depression was a major shaping force on many 1930s motion pictures.

These efforts were remarkably varied. The gangster films offered characters who refused to accept the limited prospects of the period but paid dearly for their decision to take a shortcut to success. Similarly, the "fallen woman" pictures of the early 30s featured protagonists who compromise their virtue and reputations for money. Money was also a near obsession in many contemporary comedies. *We're Rich Again* (RKO, 1934), which focused on a family desperately scrambling to return to the realm of the millionaires, was a typical title. *My Man Godfrey* (Universal, 1936) attempted to suggest a strategy whereby the well-to-do could help the poor without resorting to charity. Musicals such as *Top Hat* (RKO, 1935) were among the most escapist pictures of the time, but some, like *42nd Street* (Warner Bros., 1933) and other backstage stories did dramatize contemporary realities. They suggested that unity, teamwork and perseverance were viable solutions to the challenges of the time. More radical ideas, from American acceptance of a political dictatorship (*Gabriel over the White House*, MGM, 1933) to a socialistic approach to land management (*Our Daily Bread*, Viking/United Artists, 1934), were greeted with considerably less enthusiasm by the public. Much more palatable was the benevolent altruism proposed by Longfellow Deeds in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (Columbia, 1936).

All the major studios survived the worst days of the Depression. As the decade drew on and tickets sales slowly began to increase, most of the studios began making profits again. But their leaders had not forgotten the dark days of the early 30s. They kept costs under control and continued to feed the public a steady diet of uplifting, reassuring motion pictures. In the romantic realm of 1930s Hollywood entertainment, heroes triumph, villains are punished, love conquers all, benevolent political leadership is assured and dreams come true. Even though surely confounded and disillusioned by the staying power of the Depression, movie patrons never stopped going to the movies and never stopped believing in these movie myths.

The transition from a public obsession with the Depression to a public obsession with the war took place in the late 30s and early 40s. In February 1939, Pandro Berman, head of production at RKO, sent a telegram to director George Stevens informing him that corporate president George Schaefer had

vetoed his request to make *The Mortal Storm* or *Address Unknown*. Since both literary works were anti-Fascist, Schaefer's reasons were politically motivated. As Berman told Stevens, the president was "afraid [to] commit us to any picture that is propaganda against anything."

George Schaefer's attitude was shared by most of the other studio executives. Fearful of the isolationist convictions of most of their domestic customers and determined to protect their foreign markets, the men who made the movies had no enthusiasm for screen stories dealing with the rapidly deteriorating European situation. The industry's self-censorship apparatus, the Production Code Administration (PCA), also actively discouraged the production of such pictures (see chapter 4).

Nevertheless, a few Hollywood insiders managed to fashion films that bucked the trend. The leaders in this regard were Harry and Jack Warner of Warner Bros. Appalled by the Nazis' anti-Semitic policies, the Warners stopped exporting their films to Germany in 1936. In 1939, they made the first true anti-Nazi picture, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, which opened four months before the outbreak of World War II. Following their lead came such titles as *Escape* (MGM, 1940), *The Mortal Storm* (MGM, 1940), *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin/United Artists, 1940), *Four Sons* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1940), *The Man I Married* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1941), *Underground* (Warner Bros., 1941) and a handful of other unflattering portrayals of Hitler and Mussolini and their followers. With the exception of *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, none was particularly realistic or hard-hitting, though *The Great Dictator* was a major success at the box office.

Even though the progress of the war had cost Hollywood most of its European markets by the end of 1940, the studio heads remained reticent to dramatize the biggest story of the day. Acutely aware that a majority of Americans were determined to keep their country out of the conflict, they cranked out hundreds of features that contained no reference to Europe or to war at all.

Despite the industry's timidity, a few politicians became upset by the films that did depict the European "problem." Senators Gerald P. Nye from North Dakota, Burton K. Wheeler from Montana and Bennett (Champ) Clark from Missouri, egged on by the isolationist America First Committee, interpreted these movies as an overt effort to steer the United States into World War II. Calling Hollywood "a raging volcano of war fever," Nye prodded Congress into conducting an investigation into "pro-war" propaganda in motion pictures.

The Senate Subcommittee on War Propaganda began its "preliminary hearings" in September 1941. In addition to the anti-Fascist productions, it also focused on films that it considered "pro-war" such as *I Wanted Wings* (Para-

mount, 1941), *Sergeant York* (Warner Bros., 1941) and *Dive Bomber* (Warner Bros., 1941). The industry mounted a spirited defense, based primarily on free speech issues and spearheaded by former Presidential candidate Wendell Willkie. This defense, combined with the disorganized and poorly presented government case, caused the hearings to fall apart in October. Though the investigation could technically have continued at a later date, it was emphatically put to death by the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Signaling the beginning of a new period of unprecedented cooperation between the government and Hollywood, President Roosevelt stated shortly after the Japanese attack, "The American motion picture is one of our most effective mediums in informing and entertaining our citizens." By that time, studio heads had begun to rethink their production plans. They instinctively recognized that the public, as well as the government, would expect to see movies that foregrounded the war effort, underlining the importance of the battle against the European and Pacific enemies and the necessity for all Americans to unite and contribute to the effort. (Figure 1.3)

And in a remarkably short time, the studios came through. The 1942 and 1943 release years were crowded with topical dramas and comedies. Formerly moribund genres, such as the war film and the espionage drama, came roaring back to life and nearly every genre found ways to accommodate the nation's overarching obsession with the conflict (see chapter 6). This was a time when everyone from Sherlock Holmes (*Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon*, Universal, 1942), and the invisible man (*The Invisible Agent*, Universal, 1942) to cowboys (*Riders of the Northland*, Columbia, 1942) and gangsters (*Seven Miles from Alcatraz*, RKO, 1942) battled the Germans and Japanese on theater screens.

The number of war-themed pictures began to decline in 1944. Audiences indicated a growing weariness with the topic and a desire for more movies that would take their minds off contemporary events. Still, perhaps to keep the government happy, the studios continued to produce a significant number of combat films and home front stories. The Hollywood executives were richly rewarded for their efforts. With spending money in their pockets and few entertainment alternatives, stateside workers flocked to their local theaters. Consequently, several of the studios posted record profits during the war years.

This is not to suggest that the period between 1942 and 1945 was without difficulties for studio executives. Production units were hit hard by the rationing of set building materials and raw film stock. This forced industry leaders to cut back on their productions and re-jigger their release patterns. By the end of the war, the studios were turning out about 30 percent fewer films than they had been at its beginning. But audiences did not seem to mind; films stayed

in theaters longer than they had in previous years, and some members of the audience watched their favorites again and again.

A more formidable problem was the loss of hundreds of studio employees who enlisted or were drafted into the military. Even though motion pictures were considered an essential industry by Selective Service, a majority of male studio workers eschewed deferments and put on uniforms. These included such top-ranked talents as actors Clark Gable, James Stewart, Henry Fonda, Tyrone Power, Mickey Rooney and Robert Montgomery and directors Frank Capra, John Ford, William Wyler, John Huston and George Stevens. While the actors were certainly missed, the studios responded by making good use of the male stars who remained in Hollywood (Errol Flynn, Cary Grant, John Wayne, Gary Cooper, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Humphrey Bogart) and introducing some fresh new faces who were quickly embraced by the public (Gregory Peck, Van Johnson, Dana Andrews, Gene Kelly, Alan Ladd, Robert Walker). The production heads also gave opportunities to a number of inexperienced directors; some, like Vincente Minnelli, Fred Zinnemann, Billy Wilder, Robert Wise and Mark Robson, made the most of those opportunities.

The industry's commitment to the war effort stretched far beyond the creation of patriotic, morale-boosting movies. Hollywood professionals made training films and public service shorts. Its newsreel subsidiaries dispatched reporters and cameramen to the battle zones; their reports, screened in theaters on a regular basis, provided the only visual record of what American soldiers were accomplishing. Many stars, including Bob Hope, Dorothy Lamour, Bing Crosby, Marlene Dietrich and Hedy Lamarr, toured the country selling war bonds and were ubiquitous on radio broadcasts, hawking the bonds and exhorting the folks at home to contribute to the war effort in a multitude of ways. They also staffed the "Hollywood Canteen," where off-duty soldiers lucky enough to be stationed in southern California could dance with Joan Leslie or eat a meal served by Bette Davis. Hollywood personalities also traveled overseas to entertain the men and women in uniform. Even if soldiers never made it to the Hollywood Canteen or to a USO show featuring their favorites, they received a psychological boost from the pin up photographs provided by the studios. Sent out by the millions, these cheesecake pictures of Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth, Jane Russell and others were treasured by the men at arms who hauled them along to their foxholes and painted facsimiles of the American beauties on the noses of bomber planes. For many GIs, these gorgeous women epitomized what they were fighting for.

The government responded in kind, providing military advisors and, sometimes, military equipment and personnel to upgrade the quality and "realism"

of the studios' battle pictures. It also set up an office in the movie capital (the Office of War Information Bureau of Motion Pictures) to help screenwriters fashion scripts that would strengthen the war effort (see chapter 4). And it suspended its investigation into the alleged monopolistic distribution practices of the companies that owned theater chains. Hollywood and Washington, in effect, were "married" for the duration of World War II. The union would not endure, but it would certainly benefit both parties while it lasted.

Other Leisure Activities

Moviegoing was a highly popular activity between 1929 and 1945, but there were other forms of entertainment that actively competed with Hollywood for the public's money and leisure time. Some of these involved minimal costs; crossword puzzles, for example, were a fad in the 20s and jigsaw puzzles became fashionable in the frugal 30s. Throughout the period, participation in swimming, tennis, softball and other sports became increasingly commonplace.

Much more closely related to film were such entertainment alternatives as radio, vaudeville, popular music, popular fiction and nonfiction, comic strips and comic books, live theater and spectator sports. These forms often intersected with Hollywood, affecting the film business and being affected by it. The following is a brief survey of developments in each of these leisure industries.

Radio

By the end of the 1920s, radio was well on its way to becoming the mass medium of American life. Dating from November 2, 1920 when station KDKA in Pittsburgh presented the first public program, radio broadcasting grew at a breathtaking pace during its formative years. Hundreds of stations popped up across the nation and hundreds of millions of consumer dollars were spent to acquire home receivers. Beginning in 1927, one could even have a radio installed in the car, and many drivers did.

The problem of how to turn radio into an income-generating enterprise was solved by the introduction of "commercials" – sponsored advertisements for products and services interjected into program content. That content was mostly music at first, but soon widened to encompass news, sports, comedy and drama. RCA, a leader in the production and sale of radio sets, also became a pioneer in the networking of stations. In the last half of the 20s, RCA strung together two national chains, known as NBC-Blue and NBC-Red; increased penetration meant better programming and the creation of a broad-based,

homogenized listening audience that clicked on its favorite programs nearly every day. The end of the decade saw three major networks, as CBS emerged to compete with the two NBC aggregates.

By that time radio had its first "blockbuster" show: "Amos 'n' Andy." Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, two white dialect comedians who played a variety of black characters on their NBC program, took the nation by storm. Though its popularity would level off in the 1930s, "Amos 'n' Andy" remained a staple broadcast offering for more than 20 years. Other early shows that developed enthusiastic followings included "The Rise of the Goldbergs" (later, "The Goldbergs"), an ethnic comedy set in the Jewish ghetto of New York City, and "The Rudy Vallee Show," a breakthrough variety program that featured crooner Vallee, his "Connecticut Yankee" band and appearances by top comedians, actors and vocalists.

The Depression affected radio, though much less harshly than it impacted most other US industries. Sales of sets declined in the early 1930s and so, apparently, did the size of the listening audience (audience measuring devices at this time were so primitive that it is impossible to be sure). However, radio's dog days were short-lived. By 1934, NBC was grossing more than $28 million and CBS almost $15 million. In that year a fourth network – the Mutual Broadcasting System – joined the competition.

Radio prospered by offering a varied menu of programs that appealed to every class, sex, age and ethnic group, and by introducing a flock of new stars whose shows attracted huge followings. Kids thrilled to the adventures of "Buck Rogers in the 25th Century," "Jack Armstrong," "Frank Merriwell," "Rin-Tin-Tin," "Superman," "Captain Midnight" and "The Lone Ranger." Mom followed the tribulations of her favorite soap opera characters on "One Man's Family," "The Romance of Helen Trent," "Stella Dallas," "The Guiding Light" and "Ma Perkins." Dad tuned in to the exploits of such smart, tough crime fighters as "Ellery Queen," "Bulldog Drummond," "The Shadow" and "Mr. District Attorney." The whole family was likely to gather round for favorite comedians Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Bob Hope, Fibber McGee and Molly, George Burns and Gracie Allen and ventriloquist Edgar Bergen and his acerbic dummy, Charlie McCarthy. Equally popular were variety shows hosted by Eddie Cantor, Bing Crosby, Kate Smith, Al Jolson and George Jessel, and the serious dramatic offerings of "The Lux Radio Theatre" (hosted by Cecil B. DeMille), "Mercury Theatre of the Air" (hosted by Orson Welles), "The Columbia Workshop" and "Campbell Playhouse."

When new trends arose, radio embraced them enthusiastically. The popularity of "Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour," introduced in 1935, prompted a

number of similar programs on both network and local stations. The nation's infatuation with swing music, beginning in 1936, resulted in the creation of new shows featuring the big band sounds of Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Glenn Miller, Guy Lombardo and others. Quiz programs were the hottest fad of the late 30s; they ranged from "Information, Please!" with Clifton Fadiman and "The World Game" with Max Eastman to musical puzzlers such as "Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge" and "Beat the Band" with Ted Weems. There were even satirical parodies: "It Pays to be Ignorant" and "Can You Top This?"

Americans also became heavily dependent on radio for news of world affairs. As mentioned, President Roosevelt used the medium to provide New Deal updates mixed with psychological reassurance from 1933 on. The kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh's baby in 1932, the abdication of British King Edward VIII in 1936, the tragic explosion of the German dirigible "Hindenberg" in 1937, the outbreak of World War II in 1939 and other momentous events of the time were reported and analyzed by such newsmen as Robert Trout, Lowell Thomas, Gabriel Heatter, Edward R. Murrow and H.V. Kaltenborn. Indeed, by 1938 the public was so conditioned to accept the veracity of radio news that the "Mercury Theatre of the Air" dramatization of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, presented as a fast-breaking radio "scoop," created a panic throughout a sizable portion of the northeast. Many actually believed that Martians had invaded their planet.

In May 1938, *Billboard* estimated that 26,666,500 American families, some 82 percent of the nation's total, owned radios. While no one could argue with its success as a medium of entertainment and information, radio was hardly daring or socially progressive. With a few notable exceptions, the networks evaded the pressing societal problems of the 1930s. Depression realities were certainly conveyed by the news reports and by the outlandish oratory of Long, Coughlin and others, but they were rarely addressed in the era's dramatic shows. These preferred to focus on the achievements of principled heroes and heroines capable of overcoming any criminal or romantic difficulty; in this respect radio's output was similar to the romantic style and approach of the Classical Hollywood film. Similarly uplifting were the comedy and music shows, which suggested that people could laugh or sing away Depression blues, and the amateur contests and quiz programs, which gave every person a chance to win money or prizes and, thereby, rise above the gloom. Radio thus played its part in the confidence-building project that FDR and the New Deal turned into a priority during the decade.

Two days after Pearl Harbor, 90 million Americans listened to Roosevelt

discuss the crisis over approximately 800 stations. Like so many other aspects of American life, radio was instantly transformed by the US entry into World War II. Patriotic messages became part of every broadcast. It was not enough for established shows to encourage the purchase of war bonds, whole new programs were created for the same purpose: "Treasury Star Parade," "Music for Millions," "Millions for Defense." Established heroes (Tom Mix, Captain Midnight, Jungle Jim, The Hornet, Superman, Jack Armstrong), new heroes (Hop Harrigan), and resurrected heroes (Terry and the Pirates, Don Winslow of the Navy) battled the enemy abroad and at home. "The Army Hour," "The Navy Hour" and "Stage Door Canteen" entertained servicemen, as well as sending personal news from the home front to the front lines and back again. "Command Performance" granted the wishes of lucky soldiers – one might receive words of encouragement from his favorite movie star while another could listen to the cries of his newborn child. And there was the news, breathlessly reported from the world's most dangerous locales by Charles Collingwood, Eric Sevareid, Cecil Brown, George Hicks and Edward R. Murrow, among others.

Through it all, the stars of radio continued to prosper. Bob Hope's globe-trotting tours to entertain the troops made him even more popular than before. Fibber McGee and Molly, Rudy Vallee, Jack Benny, Bergen–McCarthy and Amos 'n' Andy retained their loyal listeners while a new star emerged – the disc jockey. With radio stations relying more on popular records than ever before, the DJ, who had been around since the 1930s, became a celebrity. By war's end, nearly 1,000 stations were broadcasting in the US, and more than 56 million sets maintained prominent locations in its homes. Although radio's position as a fixture in the life of the nation would never completely disappear, its importance eroded quickly during the post-war era because of the rapid development of its natural heir, television.

Vaudeville

Vaudeville entertainment – diversified programs of song, dance, comedy and novelty acts – enjoyed its last hurrah in the 1920s. The Keith and Albee chain and the Orpheum circuit included hundreds of theaters throughout the US where audiences applauded such stars as Will Rogers, Bert Lahr, Al Jolson, Ed Wynn, Fannie Brice, Ray Bolger and Eddie Cantor, and sometimes even stage luminaries like the Barrymores and the Lunts. The mecca for vaudeville performers was the Palace Theater in New York, which posted a profit of $500,000 in 1923.

However, the increasing popularity of film and radio began to erode vaudeville attendance in the mid-20s. Feature-length films were integrated into many variety bills, and soon it seemed that customers came mainly to watch the picture rather than the acts. Radio not only kept people at home, it lured the top performers away. A raft of the fledgling medium's earliest stars – Cantor, Benny, Wynn, Rogers, Burns and Allen, Jolson, etc. – had developed their talents and personas in front of vaudeville crowds.

In 1926, Keith-Albee somewhat arbitrarily declared 1926–27 "vaudeville's centennial year" and promised an "epoch-making period" in its history. Sadly, the only "epochal" aspect of vaudeville's performance would be its decline. To streamline operations and gain greater control over the marketplace, Keith-Albee merged with Orpheum, giving the combine 75 percent of the nation's variety theaters. Ominously, Keith-Albee-Orpheum was taken over by the newly formed film company RKO in 1928. National vaudeville grosses dropped by 70 percent from 1927 to 1932. In July 1932, two-a-day performances ended at the Palace and, in January of the next year, the legendary house converted to a straight film policy.

By the end of 1939, RKO had only one vaudeville theater left, the Golden Gate in San Francisco. A few other theaters in big cities continued to offer mixed film–vaudeville programs into the 1940s, but the glory days of this exuberant form of show business were clearly past. The public's appetite for more technologically-based diversions – movies and radio – and the chilling effects of the Depression caused vaudeville to disappear from the American scene in a relatively short time.

Popular music

Phonograph records, introduced in the first decade of the twentieth century, had become a thriving business by the early 20s with sales topping $100 million per year. The rapid development of radio, however, convinced many music lovers to curtail their purchases. Why buy recordings, they reasoned, when one could listen to the latest songs over the airwaves for free? By 1925, sales had fallen to $59 million per year. Technical improvements in recording and playback equipment, introduced in 1925, did provide a boost in sales; they climbed back to $75 million in 1929.

The energy, spontaneity and optimism of the 1920s were reflected in its jazz music, dance crazes (particularly the Charleston) and in its popular songs. People sang, "Ain't We Got Fun?," "Runnin' Wild," "I'm Sitting on Top of the World" and "Great Day," as well as such wacky nonsense tunes as "Yes, We

Have No Bananas," "Who Ate the Napoleons with Josephine When Bonaparte Was Away?" and "Does the Spearmint Lose Its Flavor on the Bedpost Overnight?" It was a time of high hopes and high spirits, captured wonderfully in the musical creations of Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, Vincent Youmans, George and Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, among others.

The mood changed rapidly after October 1929. Record sales plummeted, hitting bottom in 1933 when only $5 million worth of discs were purchased. The public continued to listen to songs over the radio; now, however, they heard "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?", "Ten Cents a Dance," "I've Got Five Dollars," "I Found a Million Dollar Baby in a Five-and-Ten Cent Store" and "Pennies from Heaven." Many songwriters tried to hoist up people's spirits, putting a hopeful spin on the lyrics of "Wrap Up Your Troubles in Dreams," "Now's the Time to Fall in Love" and "On the Sunny Side of the Street." Two of the era's biggest hits were "Happy Days Are Here Again," which was appropriated by the Democratic Party as the theme song of FDR's 1932 Presidential campaign, and "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?", composed for a 1933 Disney cartoon. It became the optimist's favorite lyric of Depression defiance.

Record sales began to rise slowly in the mid-1930s. The proliferation of juke boxes in restaurants, cafés and bars had a good deal to do with the improvement, as did the introduction (by Decca) of discs that cost 35 cents, less than half the price of most other companies' offerings. America's love affair with the Big Bands also helped; soon every audiophile identified "Moonlight Serenade" with Glenn Miller, "Begin the Beguine" with Artie Shaw, "I'm Getting Sentimental over You" with Tommy Dorsey and "You're Driving Me Crazy" with Guy Lombardo. In 1938, record sales moved past the $25 million mark again.

European developments did not go unnoticed by composers of the 30s. Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," first sung by Kate Smith as part of her 1938 Armistice Day show, was enthusiastically embraced by Americans concerned about escalating Nazi militarism. "God's Country" and "This Is My Country" also underscored the public's swelling sense of patriotism. After the World War broke out, "There'll Always Be an England" and "The White Cliffs of Dover" were often heard as sympathy with the British cause increased, and "The Last Time I Saw Paris" by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern became a well-loved, affecting lament following the German occupation of France in 1940.

The entrance of the United States into global hostilities brought an immediate musical response. "Remember Pearl Harbor," "We Did It Before" and "Goodbye Mama, I'm Off to Yokohama," conveyed the nation's determination to win, as well as its rambunctious spirit. A dose of divine intervention was conjured up in Frank Loesser's immensely popular "Praise the Lord and Pass

the Ammunition" and in "Say a Prayer for the Boys over There" and "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer." This period of heartrending separation also turned a bevy of sentimental ballads into big hits: "You'll Never Know," "I'll Be Seeing You," "I'll Walk Alone," etc. Even Irving Berlin's "White Christmas" took on a special poignancy when heard by soldiers fighting in the steamy jungles of the South Pacific.

Prior to the war years, radio and the recording industry had generally been at odds. Record company executives blamed radio for lessening the public's appetite for home discs, and they bristled at radio's refusal to pay fees for broadcasting recorded music. This animosity lessened in the 1940s, thanks to the growing popularity of "Your Hit Parade," a program that helped create a pop music consciousness, plus the pervasive influence of the disc jockey. Capitol Records, a new company launched in 1942, quickly grew successful by wooing DJs and thereby gaining greater airtime for its artists. Largely because of radio, record company grosses began to skyrocket. The two industries would become intensely (some might argue incestuously) symbiotic after the war ended.

The Big Bands, devastated by Uncle Sam's call to arms, lost many of their members and their dominant position in the world of pop. Taking their place were individual singers, most former vocalists for one or more of the bands. Frank Sinatra led the way, becoming king of the "bobby sox" crowd. In 1943, some 30,000 fans showed up to squeal their way through his performances at New York's Paramount Theater. Among the other star singers in 1945 were Doris Day, Perry Como, Peggy Lee, Dick Haymes, Jo Stafford, Kay Starr, Dinah Shore and veteran Bing Crosby, whose public adulation peaked during World War II.

Popular fiction and nonfiction

American readers in the 1920s embraced Sinclair Lewis' satirical dissections of midwestern life (*Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Elmer Gantry*), the detective stories of S.S. Van Dine (*The Green Murder Case*, *The Bishop Murder Case*), fictional tales of adventure set in exotic locales (*Beau Geste* and *Beau Sabreur* by P.C. Wren, *The Sea-Hawk* by Rafael Sabatini), nonfiction tales of adventure set in exotic locales (*White Shadows in the South Seas* by Frederick O'Brien, *Revolt in the Desert* by T.E. Lawrence, *Trader Horn* by Alfred Aloysius Horn and Ethelreda Lewis) and two books about the life of Christ, one of which (Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows*) presented Jesus as the ultimate salesman and father of "modern business." Naturally, the public devoured stories about

rebellious "modern" characters, especially if they contained forthright discussions of their sexual activities. Edith M. Hull's *The Sheik*, Gertrude Atherton's *Black Oxen*, Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat*, Percy Marks' *The Plastic Age* and Vina Delmar's *Bad Girl* described titillating behavior heretofore unrecorded in popular fiction. Numerous biographies also became bestsellers of the 20s, among them Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria*, Emil Ludwig's *Napoleon*, André Maurois' *Disraeli* and Francis Hackett's *Henry the Eighth.*

Surprisingly, the public also made time for such heady books as *The Outline of Science* by J. Arthur Thompson, *The New Decalogue of Science* by Albert E. Wiggam and *The Story of Philosophy* and *The Mansions of Philosophy*, both by Will Durant. Two popular works that left their readers pondering were H.G. Wells' *The Outline of History* and Hendrik Willem Van Loon's *The Story of Mankind*. Wells conceived human development as a steady ascendance, inspired movement toward a utopian state, whereas Van Loon believed that "modern" men and women were not far removed from their caveman ancestors. There was plenty of evidence in this decade to support both positions.

The 1930s fostered a passion for historical fiction (*Cimarron* by Edna Ferber, *Anthony Adverse* by Hervey Allen, *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, *Northwest Passage* by Kenneth Roberts). Stories imbued with religious inspiration also captured a substantial readership, with former clergyman Lloyd C. Douglas (*Magnificent Obsession*, *Green Light*, *White Banners*, *Disputed Passage*) being one of the most successful authors of the period. Seeking answers to the tribulations of Depression life, many people turned to self-help books. By far the biggest seller was Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, but Vash Young's *A Fortune to Share*, Walter B. Pitkin's *Life Begins at Forty*, Edmund Jacobson's *You Must Relax*, Dorothea Brande's *Wake Up and Live!* and Marjorie Hillis' *Live Alone and Like It* also attracted enthusiastic readers.

John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* was the only bestseller to deal realistically with the tragic consequences of the Depression; instead, most popular books featured reassuring stories about characters whose faith and perseverance enable them to overcome near-insurmountable odds. Scarlett O'Hara in Mitchell's phenomenally successful *Gone with the Wind* was one example; others included O-Lan in Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, Ada Fincastle in Ellen Glasgow's *Vein of Iron*, Langdon Towne in Roberts' *Northwest Passage*, Gilbert Martin in Walter D. Edmonds' *Drums Along the Mohawk*, even Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The strength and tenacity of the human character became a favorite inspirational theme during these troubled times.

The increasingly problematic world situation began to intrude in popular works from the mid-1930s on. Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* dealt with

the threat of homegrown Fascism, while Phyllis Bottome's *The Mortal Storm* depicted a family torn apart by Nazism. Nora Wain's *Reaching for the Stars* was an eyewitness account of the moral deterioration of Germany under National Socialism, and *Escape* by Ethel Vance (a pseudonym for Grace Zaring Stone) concerned the rescue of a woman from her captors in the land of Hitler. Even the Führer himself cracked the bestseller lists in 1939 when a complete, translated version of *Mein Kampf* showed up in bookstores.

Still, perhaps because of the country's determined commitment to isolationism, few "war" books attracted mass sales until the bombing of Pearl Harbor. From that point until the end of the war, the nonfiction lists were glutted with them. Personalized descriptions of men at war included W.L. White's *They Were Expendable*, Richard Tregaskis' *Guadalcanal Diary*, Quentin Reynolds' *The Curtain Rises* and two highly popular books by beloved reporter Ernie Pyle, *Here Is Your War* and *Brave Men*. Those anxious to find a little humor in the life-and-death world of the military grabbed Marion Hargrove's *See Here, Private Hargrove*, Bob Hope's *I Never Left Home*, Juliet Lowell's *Dear Sir* and cartoonist Bill Mauldin's *Up Front*. The more serious-minded could ruminate upon the strategic and political analyses of Major Alexander P. de Seversky's *Victory Through Air Power*, Walter Lippman's *US Foreign Policy* and Sumner Welles' *The Time for Decision*. Former Presidential candidate Wendell Willkie fired the imagination of many optimists in *One World*, calling for the end of colonialism and a new unity among nations once the war was over.

A few bestselling fictional works dealt with the war, such as Steinbeck's *The Moon is Down*, Pearl Buck's *Dragon Seed* and John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano*, but most readers during the period clearly preferred religious novels (A.J. Cronin's *The Keys of the Kingdom*, Franz Werfel's *The Song of Bernadette* and Lloyd C. Douglas' *The Robe*), historical romances (*Green Dolphin Street* by Elizabeth Goudge, *Forever Amber* by Kathleen Winsor, *Captain from Castile* by Samuel Shellabarger) and a variety of other stories that provided some relief from the intense wartime fixation. The best and most popular World War II novels would be published several years after the culmination of hostilities.

Comic strips and comic books

Newspaper comic strips were a popular and well-established form of American cultural expression by the early years of the twentieth century. The first strips – "The Katzenjammer Kids" by Rudolph Dirks, "Alphonse and Gaston" by Frederick Burr Opper, "Krazy Kat" by George Herriman, among others – were primarily humorous in intent. During the 1910s and 20s, a blending of comedy

with the domestic life became modish, as evidenced by such series as George McManus' "Bringing Up Father," Sydney Smith's "The Gumps" and Frank King's "Gasoline Alley."

Just before the arrival of the Depression, action/adventure established itself as the dominant comic strip genre. "Tarzan" (by Harold Foster, based on the books by Edgar Rice Burroughs) and "Buck Rogers" (by Philip Nowlan and Dick Calkins) made the initial breakthrough in 1929. Soon, "Dick Tracy" (by Chester Gould), "Terry and the Pirates" (Milton Caniff), "Charlie Chan" (Alfred Andriola), "The Lone Ranger" (Charles Flanders), "Prince Valiant" (Harold Foster, after he turned over "Tarzan" to Burne Hogarth in 1936), plus "Secret Agent X-9," "Jungle Jim" and "Flash Gordon" (all originally drawn by Alexander Raymond) were competing with one another in a race to create the most intriguing characters and suspenseful situations. Air adventures, at least partially inspired by the exploits of Charles Lindbergh, were also well received: "Scorchy Smith" (Frank Robbins), "Tailspin Tommy" (Hal Forrest), "Ace Drummond" (Clayton Knight and Eddie Rickenbacker), "Barney Baxter" (Frank Miller), etc.

Comic books were introduced in the mid-30s, but did not gain wide popularity until the end of the decade. Recognizing the public preference for adventure, the most successful pioneer authors offered hyperbolized protagonists who were, by and large, godlike and indomitable. "Superman" (by Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster) appeared in 1938 and quickly became the first megastar of the new form of publishing. Following the "Man of Steel" into the hearts of America's youth came "Batman" (Bob Kane and Bill Finger), "Captain Marvel" (Bill Parker and C.C. Beck) and "Wonderwoman" (William Moulton Marston and Harry Peter).

While the adventure strips and comic books featured heroes to cheer in cheerless times, the comics also included more mundane characters who, nevertheless, provided a tonic to Depression audiences. "Little Orphan Annie" (by Harold Gray) debuted in 1924, but her self-reliance, courage and spunk made her an ideal 30s heroine. Likewise, Walt Disney's ever-optimistic "Mickey Mouse" and "Chic" Young's Dagwood Bumstead (of "Blondie"), who never lost his positive attitude despite an unending series of minor catastrophes (mostly self-induced), kept readers amused and hopeful.

Most of the adventure heroes of 30s comics battled the criminal underbelly of American society, though some took on foreign troublemakers as well. A few of the more politically-minded artists openly challenged the fervent isolationism that prevailed in the US before Pearl Harbor. In 1937, Milton Caniff pitted his stalwarts against the treacherous Japanese in "Terry and the Pirates." "Secret

Agent X-9" (drawn by Austin Briggs, the successor to Alexander Raymond) concentrated his efforts on a group of spies whose nationality was never specified but whose leader, the arrogant Captain Ludwig, was clearly coded as German. In May 1940, Ham Fisher's "Joe Palooka" passionately called his fellow Americans to arms against the Axis.

In 1941, Joe Palooka enlisted in the Army. After Pearl Harbor, he would be joined in his battle against the enemy by characters from almost every strip and comic book. Dick Tracy, Superman, Charlie Chan, Captain Marvel, even Tarzan took up the cause, as did new military heroes "Buz Sawyer" (by Roy Crane) and "Johnny Hazard" (Frank Robbins). The era gave birth to other strips conceived for the men in uniform: "G.I. Joe" (by Dave Breger), "The Sad Sack" (Sergeant George Baker) and "Male Call" (Milton Caniff).

Consumers of comic books welcomed Will Eisner's "Blackhawk" series, about a group of guerrilla fighters determined to sabotage the foes of the Allies, and "Captain America" (by Jack Kirby and Joe Simon), a red, white and blue-costumed good guy who thwarts the enemy at night and on weekends. During regular working hours, he is just another G.I. named Steve Rogers. "The Young Allies," a spin-off from "Captain America," focused on a group of kids and their contributions to the winning of the war.

Like so many other visible aspects of American culture during the World War II period, comic books and strips conveyed the national obsession with contemporary events and the all-consuming hunger for victory. Indeed, they were so popular that during a New York newspaper strike in 1945, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia invited his constituents to gather their families around the radio and then broadcast a dramatic reading of the strips that would have run on that day.

Theater

The 1920s were a rousing, fertile period for the American stage. While regional theater declined somewhat, Broadway boomed, mounting a record number of new productions. Comedies and dramas and musicals of all kinds were introduced, as well as provocative experiments like Elmer Rice's expressionistic *The Adding Machine* and 13 probing, psychological plays by Eugene O'Neill, including *The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape* and *Desire Under the Elms*.

The czars of Broadway were the Shuberts, who owned 30 New York theaters and 50 more in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and other cities. Millions of dollars in profits flowed into Shubert accounts before the business suddenly turned sour at the end of the decade.

The biggest hit of the 20s was the sentimental comedy *Abie's Irish Rose* by Anne Nichols which attracted enthusiastic playgoers for six consecutive seasons. Other notable successes ranged from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with John Barrymore and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* with Bela Lugosi to Ferenc Molnar's *The Guardsman* with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings' *What Price Glory?* and Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's *The Front Page*. While an abundance of popular musicals appeared, such as *Lady Be Good!* starring Fred and Adèle Astaire, *The Cocoanuts* featuring the Marx Brothers and *Whoopee* with Eddie Cantor, the most important of them was *Show Boat* by Edna Ferber, with its landmark Jerome Kern–Oscar Hammerstein II score. It lasted for two years at the Ziegfeld Theater and moved the form toward a more unified integration of music and story elements.

In 1927, 280 shows opened on Broadway, setting a record that has never been equaled. However, the growing popularity of radio and movies soon affected theatrical attendance and decline set in even before the onset of the Depression. Many Broadway theaters closed after 1930, others converted to film programs. The once mighty Shubert organization lost more than $3 million in 1931 and plunged into receivership. Actors' Equity estimated that 5,000 performers and 15,000–25,000 directors, designers, costumers, stagehands and other support personnel were out of work in the early 30s.

One revitalizing force was the Group Theatre. Formed in 1931, this leftist collective of actors and directors modeled itself on the Moscow Art Theatre and popularized the Stanislavsky method of inner-driven acting that would prove to be so important to American film in the post-World War II period. Such influential figures as Elia Kazan, Clifford Odets, Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman, Franchot Tone and Morris Carnovsky would emerge from the group, and it would produce important plays by Sidney Kingsley, Maxwell Anderson, Irwin Shaw, William Saroyan and, most notably, former actor Clifford Odets.

Another altogether extraordinary effort to rejuvenate American drama was the Federal Theatre Project, organized in 1935. As part of the WPA, it succeeded admirably in achieving its goal of putting unemployed theater people back to work. Between 1936 and 1939, the Federal Theatre staged 63,000 performances of 1,200 different productions for audiences that totaled nearly 30.4 million. Among its most famous presentations were T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, a dramatized version of Sinclair Lewis' novel *It Can't Happen Here*, Paul Green's *The Lost Colony* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, produced by Orson Welles and John Houseman and set in Haiti with an all-black cast.

The Federal Theatre was eventually brought low by politics. Conservatives

such as North Carolina senator Robert Reynolds, who smelled Communist propaganda in some of the productions, marshaled enough votes to cut off the project's funding in the summer of 1939. Although the Federal Theatre did have a radical wing, most of its efforts were rather subdued compared to the hard-edged social commentary and heated agitprop that characterized a good deal of 30s drama. At a time when other forms of leisure entertainment charted a safe course around the period's desperation, the stage confronted it with surprising boldness. The Depression spawned a theater of ideas, messages, even occasional calls to arms.

Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* was one example. A 1935 multi-scene play, it dramatized the exploitation of cab drivers by their brutal employers and, in its finale, urged all workers to strike. The yawning gulf between society's haves and have-nots was examined in Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End*. Marc Blitzstein's anti-capitalist musical *The Cradle Will Rock*, which the Federal Theatre attempted to suppress and ultimately disavowed, was a blunt call for revolution. Other overtly ideological plays included *The Last Mile*, John Wexley's indictment of American prison conditions; *Winterset*, Maxwell Anderson's blank verse tragedy about the injustices visited upon the nation's poor and ignorant; *Idiot's Delight*, Robert Sherwood's warning against Fascism and plea for peace in a deteriorating world; and *The Little Foxes*, Lillian Hellman's withering dissection of capitalist greed.

Though Depression realities (*Face the Music*), political commentary (*I'd Rather Be Right*) and glorifications of trade unionism (*Pins and Needles*) even popped up in some of the musicals of the time, theater in the 1930s was not devoid of escapism. More traditional musical hits included Fred and Adèle Astaire in *The Band Wagon*, Ethel Merman in *Anything Goes*, Bob Hope in *Roberta*, Jimmy Durante in *Billy Rose's Jumbo* and Ray Bolger in *On Your Toes*. The public appetite for comedies was satisfied by Noel Coward's *Private Lives*, George F. Kaufman and Edna Ferber's *Dinner at Eight*, Kaufman and Moss Hart's *You Can't Take It with You*, John Murray and Allen Boretz's *Room Service*, Philip Barry's *The Philadelphia Story* and *Hellzapoppin'*, a surrealistic farce written by and starring former vaudeville performers Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson. Jack Kirkland's sensationalistic adaptation of Erskine Caldwell's novel *Tobacco Road* proved to be the longest-running play of the period. This melodramatic tale of Jeeter Lester and other denizens of the Georgia backwoods held on for seven and a half years.

World War II brought prosperity back to Broadway, which witnessed a steady increase in the number of produced plays during the first half of the 40s. Although serious works about the war were mounted (none, however, with an

anti-war theme), the public clearly preferred stage versions of contemporary events to be delivered in quixotic packages, e.g. the farcical (*Strip for Action*), the sentimental (*Winged Victory*), the romantically humorous (*Jacobowsky and the Colonel*). One of the biggest hits was Irving Berlin's all-soldier revue, *This Is the Army*, which eventually raised more than $10 million for the Army Relief Fund.

"That's entertainment!" was also the motto of the period's other successes. Far removed from 30s social protest drama, these shows offered patrons a few hours of total relief from their turbulent world. The premiere musical triumph of the decade, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, was one example; other escapist musicals included *By Jupiter*, *One Touch of Venus*, *Song of Norway* and *Carousel*. The black farce *Arsenic and Old Lace*, the fantasy *Harvey*, the homespun portrait *I Remember Mama* and the domestic comedy *Life with Father* (which opened in 1939 and played until well after the war ended) were also highly popular. Thornton Wilder's Pulitzer Prize-winner, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, provided just the right note of reassurance; its fractured narrative asserted that the human species is indestructible, despite its multiple faults and foibles. Finally, in 1944 and 1945, the chill breeze of topical realism began to blow again in such productions as *Soldier's Wife* and *Foxhole in the Parlor*, which dramatized the psychological impact of the war on both soldiers and civilians.

Spectator sports

Babe Ruth, Red Grange and Jack Dempsey were three of the heroic names that induced many Americans to become sports fanatics in the 1920s. Attendance rose throughout the decade, as radio and newspapers provided greater coverage of athletic events. Colleges went on a stadium-building spree to accommodate their football crowds. When the University of Illinois opened its new stadium in 1924 against Michigan, 67,000 showed up to watch Fighting Illini running back Grange score four touchdowns in the first 12 minutes. Seasonal attendance for the New York Yankees climbed from a previous high of 600,000 to over one million a year after the baseball team acquired slugger Ruth in 1920. And an incredible 104,000 people jammed Chicago's Soldier Field in 1927 to witness the heavyweight fight between Dempsey and Gene Tunney. Gate receipts totaled more than $2.5 million.

The Depression brought a quick finish to the exhilarating expansion. Professional baseball attendance, which reached 10.2 million in 1930, fell back to 6.1 million in 1933. Managers and players, even the big stars, took salary cuts.

An All-Star game between the two leagues became an annual event in 1933, the Cincinnati Reds introduced night baseball in 1935, the Hall of Fame was established in 1936, but these and a raft of promotional gimmicks at the ballparks had minimal impact on the downward trend. Weaker franchises like the St. Louis Browns were especially hard-hit. Attendance at Browns' games fell below 100,000 in 1933, 1935 and 1936. Even their more successful National League counterparts, the St. Louis Cardinals, only managed to attract 325,000 fans in 1935 when they finished in first place.

College football weathered the 30s fairly well. While there was some initial decline in attendance, especially in the east and midwest, it returned to pre-crash levels in 1935 when *Time* magazine estimated that 20 million fans were showing up for gridiron contests. Jay Berwanger of the University of Chicago, Sammy Baugh of Texas Christian, Don Hutson of Alabama, Byron "Whizzer" White of Colorado and Tom Harmon of Michigan became the biggest names of the era.

Professional football was forced to fight for its life. The National Football League (NFL) contained more than 20 teams in 1926; only eight were left in 1932. The refusal of collegiate stars Berwanger and Harmon (at first) to play pro ball diminished the League's stature, but tenacious owners like George Halas of the Chicago Bears, Timothy J. Mara of the New York Giants, George Preston Marshall of the Washington Redskins and Curly Lambeau of the Green Bay Packers held on. By 1940, the game had become more innovative and exciting, business had risen and the NFL was positioned for further growth and success.

Even though boxing attracted no 100,000-plus crowds during the Depression, it remained popular and produced a great champion: Joe Louis. This black heavyweight from Detroit won 27 consecutive bouts before losing to Germany's Max Schmeling in 1936. A lot was riding on the Louis–Schmeling rematch, including Nazi pronouncements about the supremacy of the "Aryan" race. These racist notions had already been challenged when black American track star Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics, hosted by Hitler himself in Berlin. Louis provided additional proof of the fallacy of Nazi ideology by pummeling Schmeling into submission in the first round of their June 1938 battle. Called the "Brown Bomber," Joe Louis became a legitimate hero of both black and white Americans in the 1930s.

In some ways, World War II upset the world of sports even more than the Depression had. Travel restrictions and player shortages caused upwards of 300 colleges to give up football, including perennial powers Alabama, Stanford and Fordham. After Joe Louis entered the Army, the heavyweight championship

was placed in suspended animation, pending completion of his military obligations. And, even though President Roosevelt stated that baseball "provided relaxation for the hard working populace" and supported the continuation of professional play, he would not offer deferments to its players. Consequently, more than half of the major leaguers were wearing military uniforms by the end of 1942; in 1945, the figure had risen to 90 percent.

The sportsmen who donned baseball uniforms during World War II were a motley assortment of 4-Fs, old-timers (most of whom had retired years before) and imports from Cuba, Puerto Rico and other countries south of the US border. Even a one-armed outfielder, Pete Grey, could find a spot on a big-league roster; he appeared in 77 games for the St. Louis Browns. The level of play was hardly major league caliber (owner Alva Bradley of the Cleveland Indians called it "a low form of comedy"). Nonetheless, the public retained its enthusiasm, mainly because of the aura of patriotism that enveloped the sport. Teams admitted servicemen free, sponsored salvage drives and publicized the fact that players had pledged a percentage of their salaries to purchase war bonds. Despite being jampacked with embarrassing plays, the 1945 World Series between the Detroit Tigers and Chicago Cubs drew almost 335,000 fans and set a record for gate receipts.

The NFL situation paralleled that of baseball. With more than 600 professional football players entering the service, the League carried on by reducing its rosters, bringing former stars like Broncho Nagurski out of retirement and finding "day jobs" in essential industries for many of its performers. Pro football also raised money for the war effort, and its attendance posted substantial gains from 1942 on.

Basketball was the one college sport whose popularity rose dramatically during the war. Its smaller squads were not seriously affected by the military buildup, making basketball especially attractive to crowds of alumni who had few other games to cheer. Teams like Stanford, Utah, Kentucky, Oklahoma A & M and DePaul dominated intercollegiate play. *Time* named basketball America's number one sport in 1945, with an estimated attendance of 75 million. Yet there was still no professional league; that would come soon enough in the post-war era.