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Arthur Miller’s

ALL MY SONS

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Making War, Making Peace
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Contents

section 1:

All My Sons

page 2 Arthur Miller Before He Became Arthur Miller | Ellen MacKay

page 3 All My Sons: Success and Controversy | Ellen MacKay

page 4 Feeling All My Sons | Amy Cook

page 5 Miller’s Wives and Mothers | L. Bailey McDaniel

Wives and Mothers in Wartime and After
Marilyn “Rosie” Monroe

page 7 “Before the ‘Good War’ Was Good”: All My Sons and its Postwar Milieu | John Bodnar

Racism and World War II

section 2:

The Bloomington Home Front and World War II

page 10 Stories that Matter | Ellen MacKay

page 11 The War and the American University | Ellen MacKay

IU Goes to War: A Timeline
The Future of the Humanities
Reading for Victory

page 16 IU in Wartime: Putting Women in the Fight | Ellen MacKay

The WAVES Come to Bloomington

page 18 An Indiana Woman Goes to War | James Madison

page 20 War Production in Bloomington: RCA’s “Super Secret Weapon”

Bloomington and the Atom Bomb

page 22 Bloomington High School and the War | Brought to you by the editors of the 1943 Gothic

page 23 Bloomington in the Occupation: the Story of Faye Ahrell | Ellen MacKay

section 3:

Doing History

page 25 The Monroe County History Center and World War II: The Objects of History Tell Their Stories | Elizabeth Schlemmer

Artifact, Photograph, Propaganda, and Testimony: Forms of History and the Fat Vat | Ellen MacKay


page 31 Before the Home Front. An Interview with Mary Favret

Reading War Between the Lines

page 33 The US Home Front during World War II: An Annotated Book List | Compiled by the Teen Services Staff at the
Monroe County Public Library

Photo courtesy of the Monroe County History Center. For a discussion of it please see page 10.
The College of Arts and Sciences at Indiana University is pleased to welcome you to the Cardinal Stage production of Arthur Miller’s first major play, *All My Sons*. This revival of one of the American stage’s most enduring tragedies is produced in connection with the College’s 2011 Themester initiative, “Making War, Making Peace.” As we have said before and never tire of repeating, the College is pleased and honored to be teaming up once again with our talented friends at Cardinal Stage. Indeed, drama and theatre play an even more significant role this year than ever before, as Cardinal Stage, the IU Department of Theatre and Drama, the Bloomington Playwrights Project, and the Jewish Theatre of Bloomington are all actively involved in this collaborative intellectual and cultural adventure.

Themester, a semester-long initiative launched by the College of Arts and Sciences in 2009 and offered each fall, is intended to engage students and the entire community in a unique learning experience about a timely and critical issue. And, as America collectively remembers this fall the tragic events of September 11, 2001 that catalyzed our involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, no issue could be more relevant. Themester combines academic courses, public lectures and exhibits, film showings, and other events that spark discussion about and collective responses to a contemporary question or issue. Indiana University students will have the opportunity to enroll in relevant classes and attend dozens of inter-related events on the Bloomington campus in subjects ranging from the American Civil War to discussion of “Biomedicine and Nuclear Science during the Cold War,” from the report of the 9/11 Commission to art and art propaganda in the Third Reich; and many, many more. Equally important, members of the community are urged to attend a range of events including a semester-long film series at the IU Cinema, a public lecture by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, a reading from acclaimed novelist Tim O’Brien, and much more.

To access a Calendar of Events, please visit the Themester home page at [http://themester.indiana.edu/](http://themester.indiana.edu/)

Stephen Watt  
Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Indiana University

Our theatres, our plays are lighthouses for our common future.  
—Vanessa Redgrave  
Tony Awards Acceptance Speech, June 12, 2011.

Cardinal Stage Company believes that a production is only as good as the impression it makes. We put this belief into practice in two ways: first, by making sure people who want to come can get in the door, and second, by providing as rich an experience as possible once they get here. Our Community Ticket Initiative and Student Ticket Initiative make the theatre accessible to low-income families and students. Our Educational Outreach programming provides context and promotes discussion of our shows for students, educators, and lifelong learners.

We are delighted that *All My Sons* represents our third collaboration with the IU College of Arts and Sciences’ Themester. Our Student Companion Playbill on this year’s theme of “Making War, Making Peace” puts Arthur Miller’s play up against the backdrop of our own Midwestern homefront. Our aim is to give our readers a view of the America Miller is writing about—one in which change, labor and sacrifice were borne by the whole citizenry, across all walks of life. We hope you find the stories we relate as fascinating as we did, discovering them.

Now for some well-deserved thank yous. We are enormously grateful to all the contributors who provided essays: John Bodnar, Amy Cook, Mary Favret, James Madison and Bailey McDaniel. Carrie Schwier and Brad Cook at the IU archives pulled marvelous materials for us to use. Jeremy Stoll deserves special thanks for conducting and transcribing the oral histories found herein. The Teen Services Staff at the Monroe County Public Library assembled a terrific reading list. And Elizabeth Schlemmer, of the Monroe County History Center, not only contributed thoughtfully to this document, but gave us open access to the Center’s remarkable resources, some of which she has brought on site for our audiences to explore first hand (go check them out at intermission!). Finally, our deep thanks to the people at the College of Arts and Sciences who have made Themester a thriving initiative that reaches far beyond the campus walls—including Steve Watt, Tracy Bee, Karen Hanson, and this year’s Themester faculty committee.

Now, enjoy!

Randy White  
Artistic Director  
Ellen MacKay  
Director of Educational Outreach
Arthur Miller Before He Became Arthur Miller
by Ellen MacKay

Arthur Miller is a playwright who needs no introduction. His best-known play, *Death of a Salesman*, not only won the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony and Drama Critics' Circle awards for 1949, its two Broadway revivals went on to win Tonys for best remount (in 1984 and 1999). *Salesman* is the most taught play in the public school curriculum and one of the most produced American dramas around the world. Which is why it is nearly impossible not to know Arthur Miller. He is, as one fellow playwright said, "a literary Mount Rushmore."

But what of Miller before *Salesman*, before he became the national monument we now hail? When *All My Sons* was produced to critical acclaim in 1947, Miller was 32 years old and still a creature of flesh and blood. Little about his childhood or early adulthood suggested the success in store for him.

Miller was born in 1915 in Harlem, then a leafy, suburban borough of New York City. Though his father was an illiterate refugee from the pogroms, he had risen to great heights in the schmatte or clothing business. Until the Depression, the family lived very well. But the crash of 1929 was disasters: Miller’s father lost his store and the family was forced to relocate to a small house in Brooklyn. In his early teens, Miller drove a bread truck every morning to help support the family. As the nation’s average income fell to half its pre-Depression amount and his father declared bankruptcy for the third time, Miller became interested in Marxism, an economic philosophy that was gaining a lot of ground among immigrants and the unemployed.

After graduating high school in 1932, Miller eagerly sought a university education, but his lackluster academic record posed a problem. He had heard that the University of Michigan gave financial awards for strong writers so he set his sights on Ann Arbor. But to gain admission he needed to prove he had $500 in savings—enough money to prevent him from becoming a burden on the state. Since his family couldn’t help him, he looked for work. In the depths of the Depression, this was not an easy task. Not only were positions scarce, many were closed to Jewish applicants. In the Help Wanted section of the *New York Times*, Miller noticed that ads asked for "Gentiles," "Chr." (Christians) or "Protestants only." A father of a friend who had hired him as a delivery boy helped him secure a job at an auto parts manufacturer. He worked until he had $512 dollars saved, then boarded a bus for Ann Arbor. Miller had persuaded the University of Michigan to accept him by twice petitioning admissions officers to reconsider their rejection. His last effort finally worked when he pointed out that he had worked in a factory cutting asbestos to make brake pads for two years straight with no other goal than to gain a college education.

Miller was nineteen when he began his studies as a journalism major, slightly older than the average freshman, but infinitely more experienced. He chose journalism because it was a writing major that came with the promise of a job. Major authors like John Steinbeck slipped easily between journalism and fiction-writing, and Miller imagined he could too. He joined the student paper, the *Michigan Daily*, where he covered issues like the investigation of campus communists, a topic that would remain an active concern in his work. At Michigan he also wrote his first play, *No Villain*, which was so enthusiastically received by his English professor that Miller was persuaded to join a playwriting class taught by Kenneth Rowe. The play went on to win the 1936 Avery Hopwood Award, Michigan’s student writing award, and netted Miller $250—a substantial sum given that tuition was $65 and rent was $2.75 per week. A revised version that Miller sent to the Theatre Guild won its 1937 New Play award along with a cash prize of $1250. *No Villain* was transparently autobiographical: in it a young man, returned from college for winter break, must decide whether to break a strike at his father’s clothing factory or stand with the workers who seek fair working conditions. A second play, *Honors at Dawn*, won the Hopwood Award in 1937. It features another strike, this time with two brothers taking opposing views of it.

Miller graduated in 1938 and headed back to New York with a letter from Rowe in his pocket recommending him for employment at the Federal Theatre. He turned down his first job offer, from Twentieth Century Fox, because he saw the film industry as a sell-out. But the theatre world proved harder to break into than he expected. Partly subsidized by the Federal Theatre and partly by his rent-free room in his parents’ basement, Miller embarked on a play about Montezuma, but it was sprawling and still unfinished when, in 1940, he married his college girlfriend, Mary Slattery, in her hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. This brief immersion in Midwestern America informed much of his later drama, including *All My Sons*, though Miller was eager to quit the place as soon as possible, finding it deeply anti-Semitic. The couple had no money but great ambitions; for the first years of their marriage, they got by on Mary’s salary as an administrative assistant and whatever Miller could scrape together writing and taking odd jobs.

Miller was working as a radio scriptwriter when the attack on Pearl Harbor happened. He attempted to enlist in the Navy but was declared 4F due to a bum knee and a stiff wrist (from an old football injury). His FBI file suggests that his pro-labor political commitments may also have kept him from military service. To contribute to the war effort, Miller volunteered to build warships at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He wrote patriotic radio plays for the *Cavalcade of America*. Later, he was commissioned to turn Ernie Pyle’s war columns into a film, but the censorship of the military’s top brass was ultimately too much for him and he quit the project. In 1944, he finally got his chance on Broadway when his play, *The Man With All the Luck*, debuted. It closed four days later after universally bad notices, losing investors $55,000. Miller was crushed. He left the theatre to try his hand at fiction; his novel *Focus*, an allegory about prejudice and insight set in an anti-Semitic corporate culture, was quite well received. But he was not satisfied. *All My Sons* was his second Broadway play, and it was an immediate success. His reputation as a playwright now established, Miller followed it up with *Death of a Salesman* in 1949.
Miller remained a prolific playwright, novelist, screenwriter, essayist and public intellectual until his death in 2005. Other well-known works are The Crucible (1953), A View from the Bridge (1956), The Misfits (a film starring Marilyn Monroe, 1961) After the Fall (1964), Incident at Vichy (1965), The Price (1968), Ride Down Mount Morgan (1991), and Broken Glass (1994). Read off in a list, his accomplishments are daunting. But his poor high school record, his financial challenges, his jack-of-all-trades work history, and his rocky transition from college to work remind us that before Arthur Miller became Arthur Miller, he struggled and doubted and flailed. Writing about Montezuma in the basement of his parents' Brooklyn home, his future seemed no more assured than anyone else’s. And that’s what makes his story worth remembering.

Ellen MacKay is Associate Professor of English at Indiana University, where she specialized in Renaissance Drama (including Shakespeare), theatre history and performance theory. She is also Director of Educational Outreach at Cardinal Stage. Her book, Persecution, Plague and Fire: Fugitive Histories of the Stage in Early Modern England,” was recently published by The University of Chicago Press.

All My Sons: Success and Controversy

by Ellen MacKay

As Miller tells it, All My Sons was the last ditch effort of a failed playwright. In 1944, Miller’s first play, The Man Who Had All the Luck, was produced at New York’s Forrest Theatre. In four days the production folded, and Miller was so stricken by its failure that for a while he abandoned the theatre. He turned instead to his novel, Focus, about American anti-Semitism; but when it was published in 1945, he returned to a script he had tabled to give playwriting one last kick at the can. He resolved that if the new play did not succeed he would quit writing for the stage. When All My Sons opened in 1947, it was immediately hailed as a major work by an important new voice (in fact, the title of Atkinson’s review in the New York Times was “Arthur Miller’s All My Sons Introduces New Talent to the Theatre”). The play went on to win the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for best drama of the year. It is odd to think that had it not done well, there would be no Death of a Salesman: the first of his two well-known works are The Crucible, about American anti-Semitism, but when it was published in 1953, the play Miller wrote in response to McCarthyism and the naming of Communists before HUAC (House Committee on Un-American Activities). As is often the case with Miller, he makes his own moral position very clear: the sacrifice of citizens to stanch the fear of perversion or subversion is unconscionable and undermines the principles the nation was built on. It is therefore interesting that according to Miller, All My Sons was born of a real-life story in which a daughter turned in her father for defrauding the military during wartime. Miller’s mother—law brought an article on the subject to the playwright’s attention, and “it stuck in [his] head that a child would be able to do so, that she would have the moral courage to do that.” This admiring view of an informant clashes with the malevolent picture Miller paints of them in The Crucible (not to mention Eddie in A View From the Bridge), and brings out one of the anomalies of All My Sons; whereas Miller is usually a proponent of the free-thinking individual and a critic of those who unquestioningly follow political doctrines, this play upholds a widely advertised tenet of the American war effort: that “knowingly producing or passing inferior work” is sabotage, “sabotage is treason,” and “treason is punishable by death.” Were it not for the fact that it was produced two years after the war ended, All My Sons comes close to being war production propaganda, for it seems devised to dramatize the image on a famous war production poster of a pilot strapped in a defective plane.

It is therefore interesting to discover that All My Sons was not hailed for its patriotic sentiment. Quite the opposite, for it was taken to task by the HUAC investigators trying to root out any hints of communism in American arts and culture. Soon after it won the Drama Critic’s Circle Award, All My Sons was denounced as “the most unfounded smear upon the American business
community... of our post-war days.” Brooks Atkinson reported the accusation in the Times and offered a smart rebuttal, pointing out that at least one airplane manufacturer, the Wright Aeronautical Corporation of Lockland, Ohio, was accused of passing defective motor components along to the military. The Commission charged with investigating the accusation came to the conclusion that the management at Wright had done what management usually did in “a situation where it was trying to maintain large-scale production on a fixed-price contract”: it “ruthlessly slash[ed] quality” to maintain profits. Joe Keller was no monster, said Atkinson, but a rather prosaic representation of American business. But Atkinson’s strongest statement came at the end of his article, when he warned the anti-communist watchdogs that attacks on All My Sons suggest that “American tolerance and flexibility, over which we have been thumping our chests internationally for some time, have been getting a little thin. Either a playwright has or has not the freedom to choose his own subjects without first making sure that he does not tread on touchy toes. The only alternative to this freedom is a censor.” And censorship, wrote Atkinson, is the hallmark of the Soviet system.

When Miller went on to write Death of a Salesman, he did not let up on his critique of capitalist ideology—although the damage this time was to an undistinguished family, and not to 21 pilots fighting in the Pacific. But it was in The Crucible that Miller directly addressed the fallout from All My Sons, by turning his accusers into witch-hunters and charlatans. The two plays, so seemingly dissonant in their themes and politics, turn out to be much more closely related than they appear. They are, in a way, father and son.

During the war years, there was a huge propaganda campaign about the importance of keeping production in line with the military’s needs. Workers were warned of the many ways they could sabotage the war effort: by coming to work sick, by horseplay on the job, by “borrowing” factory tools or assets, by failing to get a good’s night’s rest, by gossiping when they should be working. The pilot struggling with a malfunctioning plane was one poignant representation of the price of this sort of negligence. The image is also eerily evocative of the plot of All My Sons.

First let me state the obvious: this play asks its audience to care about its characters by imagining the actor onstage really is the father of a missing son, and it works only insofar as we feel something for the performers acting out the story in front of us. It is not an action adventure thriller in which much of the pleasure comes from watching the spectacle unfold or guessing what’s coming next. What compuls us is our understanding of what Joe Keller is going through, the drama lies inside the characters, in the clicking of their brains and hearts as they (and we) figure out what has happened and what will happen. It wouldn’t be nearly as interesting if we, as audience members, did not have the power to imagine what another person is thinking. It wouldn’t be nearly as effective if we didn’t feel something in response to their feeling.

What I think about when I watch a performance of All My Sons derives from my own research interests in empathy and performance. This process of imagining the mental state of others and feeling for others is profoundly important to our enjoyment of theatre, yet as obvious as that may be, it is not at all obvious how we as humans do it. Other animals don’t; thesmartest computers can’t. Before the characters onstage begin talking, we must have the capacity to understand that they are representing something, they are going to play “as if” they are the characters in the story they tell. A child’s ability to conceive of alternate realities, project perspective, suspend objective truth in the service of a fictional narrative, evoke and modulate emotions in this alternate space, and process relationships between a real world and an imaginary one, is a sophisticated and important development that relies on the same imaginative faculties adults use when making sense of fiction or processing the performance of an actor. It depends on our ability to juggle symbols; in other words, to project traits from one mental space to another creating new meaning all the while. In my research, the example I return to again and again is Hamlet’s confidence that a play can do something to its audience (in his case, cause his uncle to reveal his guilt), and his utter confusion as to how it goes about doing that.

Although Hamlet is something of a theatrical connoisseur, it is not at all clear to him how a player can feel something for the character he is playing. It strikes him as “monstrous” that the Player King can turn pale, cry, and seem distracted “And all for nothing! / For Hecuba! / What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, / That he should weep for her?” It is clear to Hamlet that the player is feeling something for another character and it is clear to the audience of Hamlet that Hamlet is feeling something for the player. The same question Hamlet asks about the player, though, I want to ask about Hamlet—that is, how is it that the actor playing Hamlet can feel for Hamlet? What’s Hamlet to him or he to Hamlet that he should weep for him? And what about me? Why am I moved watching actors feeling for the characters they play? Why should I feel for Joe Keller? Or Chris? Or Kate?

Watching Arthur Miller’s play, we call on some extraordinary cognitive skills to follow the storyline, to attend to the drama. We have to be able to process what the character is saying while holding recent conversation in mind as context as we attempt to construct what might be coming next. On a basic level, when Kate says to her husband “You above all have got to believe, you…” we have to be able to recall the last few exchanges in order to know who “you” is and what must be believed. A keen auditor will also wonder why Kate singles Joe out with the phrase “above all” and why she feels believing is something he has got to do. Even if we don’t understand what she was talking about, we sense that Kate—or the actress playing Kate—felt something particularly urgent when she said it. Miller was writing plays during an especially potent period in the development of the American “Method” school of acting; he was writing for actors who trained...
very hard to be able to feel something at the right moments, assuming that when actors felt something onstage, the audience would feel something in response. Research on emotions and cognition in the sciences has (to my mind) challenged some of the strategies or assumptions of Method acting, but Miller’s play brilliantly weaves a complicated emotional web that ensnares many of us.

Like Hamlet, All My Sons is a play about the power fiction has over feeling. Kate can stave off despair by clinging to the story that her son is temporarily lost in action. Though in real terms, nothing actually changes when Chris and Joe stop acting like he’s not coming back, for Kate, the threat of exposing her fable is deadly: “if he’s not coming back, then I’ll kill myself.” This is true as well for Joe, who can manage his emotions only as long as he can maintain the façade of the dutiful dad who does what is necessary for his sons. As soon as he is forced to recognize that other boys may count as “his” sons too, the moral horror is too much for him to bear. Similarly, reading or watching this play I feel sad for Joe even though I am aware that his actions make him deplorable to me. To paraphrase Hamlet, I find myself wondering what Joe is to me, or me to Joe, that I should weep for him. I should feel for Larry, the son who died in a plane crash. Or I should remember that his is a made up story and that there’s no logical reason to feel anything for any of these people and instead I should pick up the newspaper and feel sad for the millions of people suffering all across the world right now.

But we don’t, do we? We feel for the story—not the abstract fact of hunger or child labor conditions, but the story about a particular, fictional kid. Empathy is a contested term across the academy right now. In fact, over the last couple of years here at IU the Institute for Advanced Study and the Poynter Center have brought faculty together from across the disciplines for an Empathy Workshop. Reading the work of scholars from fields that range from neuroscience to literature, history to religious studies, we have been complicating our understandings and probing the stakes of this vexed term. Empathy is often thought of in terms of that 90’s cliché: “I feel your pain.” And, indeed, research on nociception has produced the clearest indication that we do feel one another’s pain. A recent study using fMRI machines has shown that when a subject is shown a video of a person who accidentally cuts her own finger it causes cells to fire in the region of the brain that registers pain. Since the perception of pain involves some of the identical neurons responsible for registering actual pain, knowing the other person is in pain means, on some level, feeling the pain she is in. This is extraordinary information for people interested in performance and spectatorship.

Of course, even though I may feel your pain, I do not forget that I am me and you are you. The recognition that the aversive act is not happening to the self, but to another, is what makes it “empathy” and not “pain.” Empathy would be a very dangerous quality in an emergency room doctor; such doctors must be very good at turning off or disinhibiting empathetic responses to the pain of others so that they can take the actions necessary to alleviate that pain—even when it means causing more pain temporarily. And perhaps that is what makes watching All My Sons so moving: as human beings we need to see the connection between ourselves and the other (Keller must expand his responsibility to “all” his sons) but we also need practice recognizing ourselves in a maestrom of emotions so that we can maintain the ability to stop the pain of the other, to do something about it.

This theatrical genre is great practice for that. The psychological realism (sometimes called subjective realism) of Arthur Miller relies on the conventions of Ibsen’s realism—real people seeming to have real conversations in a real environment—but focuses on the psychological changes and shifts within the characters. Although the pressures of money and community impact the course of the plot, how the characters feel about and make meaning of their environment is the play’s dramatic core. There are symbolic elements (the fallen apple tree, the times of day) that amplify the drama. Yet Miller’s nods to a heightened style invite the spectators to recognize the theatrical nature of the events taking place without ever losing their connection to Joe, Kate and Chris. These characters have made their decisions and are living with the emotional and psychological consequences of them, but our feeling their feelings—even just in part—allows us to make different decisions in our life, in our war. Miller’s play shows us there’s still time for that.

Amy Cook is an assistant professor in the Department of Theatre and Drama. She specializes in the intersection of cognitive science (particularly cognitive linguistics, theories of embodied and embedded cognition, and empathy), and theories of performance and early modern drama. She has published Shakespearean Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance through Cognitive Science, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and essays in Theatre Journal, TDR, SubStance, and several edited volumes. She was a Mellon Fellow in dramaturgy, directing, and dramatic literature at Emory University in Atlanta and received her Ph.D. at University of California, San Diego and her B.A. at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Miller’s Wives and Mothers
By L. Bailey McDaniel

Arthur Miller’s position as one of the most respected, prolific dramatists of the twentieth-century is a given for anyone familiar with American drama. His five-plus decades of critical and commercial success render Miller one of the most prominent voices (along with Eugene O’Neill) of American dramatic realism. Yet the description is deceptive, particularly when some of Miller’s female characters are taken into account: All My Sons’ Kate Keller, Death of a Salesman’s Linda Loman, and After the Fall’s Maggie, with the latter heavily inspired by Miller’s wife from 1956 to 1961, Marilyn Monroe. For those familiar with All My Sons’ Kate and Death of a Salesman’s Linda, several similarities emerge that run through many of Miller’s female creations. Both are wives and mothers who subordinate any personal desires or beliefs to serve the men (that is, the husband and sons) of the household. To some critics, these women function as passive supporting characters at best or uncomplicated martyrs at worst. Most agree that they are not realistic
human beings but symbolic representations of the American family; they embody ideals that can never be lived up to.

Part of what makes Joe Keller so captivating and his inner struggles so compelling is the fact that like Willy Loman (who wants to be well-liked), this Everyman is cursed with a fatal flaw that will eventually bring him down. As in Classical tragedy, this flaw (or “hamartia”) and the danger it portends to the world is eventually outed, the protagonist’s wrongdoing is punished and with his suicide the world is put back in order. Like other tragic heroes, Joe’s hamartia and the eventual “justice” his actions generate speak to big issues—for instance, the definition of success, the ethics of capitalism, the responsibilities of fatherhood. Later iterations of Keller, including Willy Loman and The Crucible’s John Proctor, are men dealing with complex personal and cultural conflicts. In these age-defining plays, the lead characters collided with the Levittown anomic and the witch hunts that characterized their milieu in plays of great emotional realism. These were characters that were recognizable and familiar, and their deaths therefore inspired profound catharsis. As a result, Miller’s plays, their (male) protagonists, and Miller himself were praised for their “universal” appeal; plays like Sons and Salesman, Crucible and Fall are frequently said to transcend their cultural and historical specificity. One example is Death of a Salesman’s success among non-Western audiences, particularly with the celebrated 1983 Miller-directed Beijing production.

Wives and Mothers in Wartime and After

Do you realize how for the world of industry and the world of management, of education, has come to depend on, and we hope to appreciate, the women workers? How the thinking and planning of the post-war world are being pushed forward by individual women and organized groups of women? If you do realize these things, perhaps you ought not do so much talking about it while the men are around. Women have often done their most effective work without man’s being fully aware of their efficiency.

—Kate Hever Mueller, Dean of Women at IU. WAVES Commencement speech, Bloomington, Indiana, May 28, 1943.

This poster by Gordon K. O’Dell was issued in Canada in 1942 to bolster the purchase of war bonds. The ploy of using a mother and child to rouse patriotic—and jingoistic—feeling began in 1915, when Fred Spear depicted a drowned woman clutching her dead baby deep beneath the waves to commemorate the sinking of the Lusitania. At the base of the poster was one word: “ENLIST.”

Normal Rockwell’s portrait of Rosie the Riveter graced the cover of the Saturday Evening Post in May of 1943. She sits with Hitler’s Mein Kampf under her foot and a halo around her head—a nod to Michelangelo’s depiction of Isaiah (God’s strong right arm) on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. A popular song, “Rosie the Riveter,” gave the picture its name. It includes a verse that demonstrates just how profoundly the war impacted gender norms:

Rosie’s got a boyfriend, Charlie ... 
Charlie, he’s a Marine ... 
Rosie is protecting Charlie ... 
Working overtime on the ... riveting machine

As the war came to an end, the roles open to women narrowed suddenly and drastically. The war effort had created a contradiction in the way American womanhood was understood. In Allied propaganda, beautilic mothers and young ingénues were depicted under German or Japanese threat (in the latter case, racism contributed to the bestial depiction of the enemy). But at the same time, women undermined the representations of their helplessness by heading to work in unprecedented numbers, often occupying jobs previously considered beyond their strength or skill. When victory brought the men back from overseas, the conflict between these two visions was resolved by the rapid dissolution of the female workforce.

Not only were women told to relinquish their positions to men, their achievements were quickly erased from public memory because they were deemed demoralizing—strong women like Norman Rockwell’s ‘Rosie the Riveter’ were so self-sufficient they undermined the vision of home, mom and apple pie that the GIs had fought for. Instead, the country set about reinstalling women at the heart of the home. At IU, the enrollment in the Home Economics major shot up as female students flocked to the Practice House to try their hands at dishwashing, sewing, and meal-preparation. Beyond the campus, the idealization of motherhood became particularly conspicuous as Gold Star Mothers (mothers who had lost a child in military service) assumed a central place in the popular vision of the American family.

War mothers became central to the war’s mythology by demanding a conflict good enough to deserve their children’s sacrifice. But they also were themselves mythologized. Women like Alleta Sullivan, whose five sons (the “Fighting Sullivans”) were killed by a torpedo attack at Guadalcanal, were not merely living memorials to the heroism of the conflict; they represented motherhood as a kind of total surrender of private self. (As President Roosevelt wrote in his letter of condolence, Sullivan’s “unselfishness” was his own “inspiration”). Given this milieu, Kate Keller’s character becomes more comprehensible. She is a victim of the cultural imperative that makes mothers the living memorials of their sons.

Alleta Sullivan reading Roosevelt’s letter confirming the death of her sons. The picture is staged—there were no photographers on hand to snap this stroke of grief as it happened—but the interest in images of maternal sacrifice outweighed the commitment to verisimilitude.

A convening of an Indiana chapter of the Mothers of World War II club in 1953 at Riley Hospital’s rehabilitation center, where the women often volunteered to visit patients. These four women, known as Gold Star Mothers, each lost children in the conflict. Courtesy of the Monroe County History Center.

This American poster from 1942 depends on a time-worn analogy between the violation of national boundaries—for American purposes, the attack on Pearl Harbor—and the violation of a nation’s women.

Part of what makes Joe Keller so captivating and his inner struggles so compelling is the fact that like Willy Loman (who wants to be well-liked), this Everyman is cursed with a fatal flaw that will eventually bring him down. As in Classical tragedy, this flaw (or “hamartia”) and the danger it portends to the world is eventually outed, the protagonist’s wrongdoing is punished and with his suicide the world is put back in order. Like other tragic heroes, Joe’s hamartia and the eventual “justice” his actions generate speak to big issues—for instance, the definition of success, the ethics of capitalism, the responsibilities of fatherhood. Later iterations of Keller, including Willy Loman and The Crucible’s John Proctor, are men dealing with complex personal and cultural conflicts. In these age-defining plays, the lead characters collided with the Levittown anomic and the witch hunts that characterized their milieu in plays of great emotional realism. These were characters that were recognizable and familiar, and their deaths therefore inspired profound catharsis. As a result, Miller’s plays, their (male) protagonists, and Miller himself were praised for their “universal” appeal; plays like Sons and Salesman, Crucible and Fall are frequently said to transcend their cultural and historical specificity. One example is Death of a Salesman’s success among non-Western audiences, particularly with the celebrated 1983 Miller-directed Beijing production.
But what happens when the plays so celebrated for their universal appeal reflect gender identity in less-than-flattering ways? For Kate Keller and for Linda Loman, tragedy does not arise from an inner condition of men but from the struggle between the individual and the state, or even from the contradictions inherent in the ideologies of American womanhood, but from the decisions made by a male counterpart. Reactors and never actors, Miller’s women deal only with the problem of how to navigate the conflict between the demands of being a wife versus those of being a mother. All life-altering decisions, and indeed all quotidian ones too, are determined by their duties as family caretaker. If part of the value of Miller’s work is its appeal to a universal human experience, what does it say about women and their role in that universe that wives/mothers are represented primarily as quiet sufferers and tortured submissives to their husbands/sons?

Defenders of Miller are quick to point out that he is a product of his time. In the war years and after, the cult of American womanhood was at its height, and Miller can hardly be expected to have remained immune to it. But it is worth remembering that Miller’s strongest influence was the 19th century Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, widely hailed as the inventor of dramatic realism. Ibsen regularly examined themes similar to those explored by Miller; for instance, Ibsen’s The Wild Duck involves a business partner taking advantage of another in a questionable moral landscape. And Ibsen also established the dramatic form that Miller would repeatedly turn to (as with All My Sons) of the Well-Made Play. Yet Ibsen created women characters with remarkably complex problems, and often gave them leading roles. Two of Ibsen’s most famous female characters, Hedda Gabler and Nora from A Doll’s House, are not only the protagonists of their dramas, but their struggles culminate in sharp critiques of middle class misogyny. Moving forward half a century, some of Miller’s contemporaries also populated their realistic dramas with mothers/wives of great individuality and autonomy. Tennessee Williams is often mentioned in tandem with Miller as a mid-century American playwright who established American drama’s international reputation, yet Williams is perhaps most famous for his female protagonists, including A Streetcar Named Desire’s Blanche DuBois, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof’s Maggie, and The Glass Menagerie’s Amanda Wingfield.

If part of Miller’s vast influence in the canon of American drama comes from his ability to offer protagonists experiencing inner struggles with which audiences can identify, it might be interesting to consider what it would look like if those conflicts were experienced more explicitly by the women in his plays. What would be involved, for example, in Miller’s exploration of war profiteering and individual egotism if they were examined primarily from Kate Keller’s perspective? What might the rich (if often dark) mid-century father–son relationships between Joe and Chris Keller or Willy and Biff Loman look like if they were contrasted with mother–daughter relationships? And how might the idealistic Chris Keller deal with his parent’s moral failure if that parent were his mother, particularly in a Cold War culture that relegated mothers to such a narrow, symbolic role?

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"Before the 'Good War' Was Good": All My Sons and its Postwar Milieu

By John Bodnar

Today Americans generally look back upon World War II as a "good war" that demonstrated the essential virtue and bravery of the nation in defeating evil in the world. Attitudes in the 1940s, however, were not so affirmative and were actually infused with a complex set of emotions. Many were simply intent on getting revenge against the Japanese for the bombings at Pearl Harbor. Others welcomed the unexpected opportunity to get jobs and cash that war production brought to the home front after years of high unemployment. Thousands were leery of any military effort that pushed America into foreign wars again so soon after the last one in 1918.

Critical assessments of World War II were actually quite common just after it ended in 1945. There were many reasons for this. Millions grieved over the 400,000 dead Americans or over the millions who returned home plagued with injuries or nightmares that would never go away. Less appreciated is the fact that the war came at a time when there was a strong left-wing political movement—often
Racism and World War II

The Second World War is routinely held up as a rare example of moral clarity in government policy. Because the Axis powers were regimes of undeniable evil (particularly in the case of Nazism), the Allied forces that defeated them were therefore undeniably good. This narrative was revised somewhat during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union metamorphosed from ally to “evil empire.” But in the US (as well as Canada, Australia and the UK), the greatness of the conflict and of the generation that rose to meet its challenge is virtually incontrovertible. However, American domestic policy in World War II is a different story.

For decades, African Americans and Japanese Americans have tempered the tale of righteous victory by shining a light on the racism of the war years. In the Spring of 1945, released in 1947, confronted the issue of racial injustice in America. In the feature, actor Robert Ryan performed the role of a drunken GI who beat a man to death because he was Jewish, despite the fact that the man had fought for his country. The 1949 movie Home of the Brave told a story of racial injustice in America.

Here in Indiana, the internment of Americans of Japanese descent was a distant practice since it happened mostly out West and in Hawaii; the easternmost “Relocation Centers” were in Arkansas. Nevertheless, IU administrators faced the question of how to cope with any Japanese-American students or faculty, and whether it would be proper to add any new ones. To the first question, the answer came directly from the War Department: according to a classified memo, “No person of Japanese ancestry may attend or be employed by an educational institution important to the war effort until the Provost Marshal General has approved such attendance or employment.” To the second, President Wells argued that applicants from any background should be accepted, provided that they cleared the security check and that their safety could be guaranteed. The problem, he anticipated, was not the risk of sabotage from a foreign enemy, but the danger of jingoism run rampant at home.

Since African Americans made up only about 2% of the student body at IU, racial prejudice was likewise a problem with a stronger presence in other regions, especially the South. But in the photographic archive of the period, this is seen in the Spring of 1945, this cartoon illustrates the increasingly broad recognition that American segregation is irreconcilable with the Allied mission.
story of a black soldier who suffered emotional stress from encountering racism both in the military and on the home front.

Arthur Miller’s 1947 play, *All My Sons*, joined this postwar project to critically evaluate both America’s war effort and its turn toward patriotic and capitalist values. Miller’s story of corporate corruption in the vast wartime production process was designed not only to expose immoral business behavior that actually led to the deaths of some U.S. airmen in the war itself but was also intended to remind audiences that the war was a time of moral ambiguity where no one side could easily claim the high ground of virtue. When the play was presented on stage, it was directed by another artist with Popular Front sensibilities at the time, Eli Kazan, who shared some of Miller’s outlooks. In fact, Kazan had also directed the play and movie version of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a drama that featured an unflattering portrayal of a war veteran who beat his wife. Miller’s critique in *All My Sons* was not against the military but against greedy corporate interests that could not be trusted even in wartime to govern their basic instincts. Taken together, however, the artistic output of artists like Mailer, Kazan and Miller very much advanced tenets central to the Popular Front and its effort to question storybook renditions of American power and enterprise. Such outlooks were widely articulated in the thirties and forties but were now challenged by the glow of a national victory. By 1946, there was certainly a sense of relief that the war was over but also a feeling that its implications were not all positive and that a return to a free-market system after years of government regulation could lead once again to hard times or at the least vast inequality.

Miller’s willingness to critique capitalism and later the power of American officials to search for enemies in his play *The Crucible* got him into trouble with the House Un-American Activities Committee. The committee’s postwar crusade against communism was also part of a campaign to uphold romantic views of America itself and an ideal memory of the last war. In such an atmosphere the political dreams and war remembrance of the Popular Front faced stiff opposition, and its influence on the nation’s culture waned. As it did, America moved closer to the vision that Mailer imagined. Few were left to recover the arguments of the forties, and recollections of the war itself moved steadily into the realm of myth.


IU’s war-era ROTC and military training are two photographs of “Colored Units” at Camp Atterbury (located just North of Columbus). In keeping with the general military policy of assigning African-American servicemen support jobs, they are performing menial tasks: chopping wood and stoking a fire. Before the war ended the injustice of segregation in the military, seen in images like these, became a public embarrassment. A powerful letter in *Yank* magazine (in April 1944) opened with the question “What is the Negro soldier fighting for?” The author, Army Corporal Rupert Timmingham, wrote that when he and his fellow GIs were sent to Texas to await redeployment, they couldn’t get so much as a coffee at a restaurant. The lunchroom manager at a railroad finally allowed them back to the kitchen for a sandwich. As they went, “about two dozen German prisoners of war, with two American guards, came to the station. They entered the lunchroom, sat at the tables, had their meals served, talked, smoked, in fact had quite a swell time. I stood on the outside looking on, and I could not help but ask myself why are they treated better than we are? Why are we pushed around like cattle? If we are fighting for the same thing, if we are to die for our country, then why does the Government allow such things to go on?” The Government had no good answer to Timmingham’s questions and in 1948 President Truman ordered the full integration of the military. By 1951, ROTC training at IU looks very different than it did a decade earlier, though the hard work of the civil rights movement had hardly begun.

IU ROTC training in 1951. The Korean War (June 1950-July 1953) was the first American conflict to involve an integrated military. In this shot, an African American IU student is being readied for the fight.
My high school Russian teacher survived the Holocaust. A Polish Jew, she hid in cellars and in makeshift shelters in the woods until the liberation. How did she possibly manage this? I don’t know. Though we all supposed that she had come through the war in Europe, she never spoke of her experience until the last day of my senior year when one among the small handful of students in my class asked her to tell her story. It was surprising to me that she acquiesced. She was generally a tough customer, highly suspicious of any distraction from grammar review, but on this day she launched into a story that I won’t ever forget.

I say that I remember this story, but what I mean is that I cannot shake the sight of the scenes it conjured up in my mind’s eye. I still see my teacher’s father with his toddler grandson in his arms, the child serenely babbling while his grandfather is stricken with the dawning recognition of the catastrophe that tightens around them. My teacher, Mrs. Rogowsky, told us that the men and boys of the family had been told to report to a Nazi office to be “registered”; when they arrived they were rounded up, loaded onto trucks and never seen again. Members of the family had argued about whether they should comply with the order. Mrs. Rogowsky, then a girl of sixteen, had tried to convince her father, grandfather and brothers (some of whom had young sons) not to go. When they obeyed the occupying army, she followed at a distance and saw her relatives dispossessed of their belongings and herded like cattle. Even more harrowing, she saw her father holding her nephew, looking like a monument carved from grief and guilt, and he saw her, so that the last shared glance of a father and daughter became his wordless command not to follow him into the abyss.

She didn’t. Unable to convince anyone except her little sister to join her, she fled and hid. The sisters were soon separated and lost touch with one another. Isolated and in desperate conditions, Mrs. Rogowsky survived under the protection of friends of friends who risked their lives to keep her concealed. I wish I could say more about the heroism of those years underground, but here my memory fails me. Possibly Mrs. Rogowsky told us little about it. What I do remember is that after the Russian liberation, my teacher searched unsuccessfully for any trace of her large family. A year of arduous and soul-crushing effort yielded nothing. Then one night in 1946, she dreamt that her little sister would cross the Russian border into a Red Cross Camp more than a hundred miles from her home. By jeep, bus, and train she got herself to the site just as a crowd of Polish refugees was being repatriated. In the midst of it, she was her sister. This too is a scene that I cannot help picturing, though what comes to mind is a scene from a movie—specifically, from Europa, Europa, a great film I won’t spoil by describing further here—and a line from Orthelia: “I cannot speak enough of this content. / It stops me here. It is too much of joy.”

My teacher’s is a story that silences. When it was over, we filed out of her classroom into a sunny June afternoon without saying a word. During the war, the stories of European refugees had a similar effect. In the home front melodrama Since You Went Away (1944), a mother who is trying to soldier through tough wartime circumstances—a husband who is missing in action, a drastic drop in income, the death in action of her daughter’s fiancé—chides herself for self pity after meeting a Russian woman who has escaped from the German invasion. Embarrassed by her relative comfort, she stops grousing and gets to work, taking long shifts in a war factory. The history of World War II, as we tend to picture it, reflects this dynamic too: we think of the heartbreaking suffering of Hitler’s victims and the heroic sacrifice of the men who fought fascism in two theatres, European and Pacific. The stories of the women, men and children who stayed behind seem awfully ordinary by comparison, especially to the women, men and children who experienced them. Most lived through the war thinking that they had no war story to tell.

Nevertheless, it is the home front that is my subject here. Arthur Miller’s play, All My Sons, is about a great shift in the consciousness of a population that has come through the war and is caught blinking in the sunlight of the new peace. His tragic protagonist, Joe Keller, wants to believe that things have returned to normal. But the long fight for victory has changed the way America thinks about itself. With all citizens mobilized to do their part, family bonds have been loosened; loyalty is first and foremost to the nation and the ideals for which it stands, and not the family business. Roles that were long strictly defined by inviolable, if unspoken hierarchies—wife, son, mother, child, fiancée—are being lived very differently in this new atomic age.

This remarkable photo from the Monroe County History Center archive is a perfect distillation of home front iconography. On the mantle is the photo of the husband and father who is missing from this holiday scene; his army portrait reminds us who this home fire is burning for. The single Christmas stocking and the stoic-looking mother figure suggest wartime austerity, but the smiling girls (one holding a cat), along with a dark shadow at the base of the chair that I think is a dog, are unperturbed. They represent the joyous reception that awaits America’s returning servicemen.
The declaration of war brought a lot of uncertainty to universities across the country. With men of college age subject to the draft (and many volunteering for military service) and faculty recruited to serve in all corners of the war effort, administrators worried that higher education would suffer a steep economic decline, or worse. Like many other universities, IU responded by compressing the time it took to achieve a degree. Faculty taught a 6 day week and added a full summer semester so that a BA could be earned in under three years. The aim was to provide America with well-educated future servicemen and women in crucial fields like foreign languages, military science, and engineering, as President Roosevelt declared, "young people should be advised that it is their patriotic duty to continue the normal course of their education, unless and until they are called, so that they will be well prepared for the greatest usefulness to their country." Still, for most men the call came sooner than even an expedited degree could accommodate. Once the deferral year for college students was suspended and the draft reached its height, male undergraduates became increasingly scarce. This sharp decrease in students was relieved by the war department, which used colleges and universities as centers for military training. The undergraduate men who left the campus in droves were largely offset by scores of new recruits enrolled in the military’s Specialized Training Programs. But though this influx of servicemen helped keep the University afloat, their curricula had little to do with the pursuit of higher learning. As one journalist wrote, "it may be that most courses in the humanities and in the social sciences will have to go to make room for the greatly increased classes in mathematics, physics, chemistry, meteorology, geology, and such specialized courses as navigation and radio. Many teachers are already changing over to new courses—a psychology teacher becomes a physicist, and English teacher a mathematician."

The War and the American University
by Ellen MacKay

The declaration of war brought a lot of uncertainty to universities across the country. With men of college age subject to the draft (and many volunteering for military service) and faculty recruited to serve in all corners of the war effort, administrators worried that higher education would suffer a steep economic decline, or worse. Like many other universities, IU responded by compressing the time it took to achieve a degree. Faculty taught a 6 day week and added a full summer semester so that a BA could be earned in under three years. The aim was to provide America with well-educated future servicemen and women in crucial fields like foreign languages, military science, and engineering, as President Roosevelt declared, "young people should be advised that it is their patriotic duty to continue the normal course of their education, unless and until they are called, so that they will be well prepared for the greatest usefulness to their country." Still, for most men the call came sooner than even an expedited degree could accommodate. Once the deferral year for college students was suspended and the draft reached its height, male undergraduates became increasingly scarce. This sharp decrease in students was relieved by the war department, which used colleges and universities as centers for military training. The undergraduate men who left the campus in droves were largely offset by scores of new recruits enrolled in the military’s Specialized Training Programs. But though this influx of servicemen helped keep the University afloat, their curricula had little to do with the pursuit of higher learning. As one journalist wrote, "it may be that most courses in the humanities and in the social sciences will have to go to make room for the greatly increased classes in mathematics, physics, chemistry, meteorology, geology, and such specialized courses as navigation and radio. Many teachers are already changing over to new courses—a psychology teacher becomes a physicist, and English teacher a mathematician."
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

LIFE takes a farewell look at doomed campus folkways

The title and leading image of Life Magazine’s misleading depiction of life on IU’s campus, where students were “still living cozily in a world of fantasy, with no awareness of the war.” The article came out in the November 23, 1942 issue. After a firestorm of negative reaction, it was retracted on February 1 of 1943, when Life apologized and ran an article that "set the record straight."

Around the nation, college presidents and college students wondered about the fate of university in the midst of total war.

They had good reason to worry. In an address at Yale, the special assistant to the Secretary of War, Harvey Bundy, said that the “loan of young men to the colleges [would] be justified” only if the colleges cease “to retain any of the aspects of the country club which have been painfully evident in the past.” The view of universities as ivy-clad retreats from reality was also a frequent claim of the popular press. IU took particular offense at a campus profile that appeared in Life Magazine that used staged pictures of student ‘folkways’ to warn of a grim wakeup to come. But the universities stood fast.

One editorial, in the Journal of the College of the Holy Name, argued that “not enough attention is being paid to what the college—in a qualitative way, of course—is doing for the war.” For although the war has disturbed the even tenor of American college life and revised curricula with a blunt, imperative finger, higher education is having a powerful share in shaping the war potential. The colleges today are the training grounds for thousands of future officers in all branches of the armed forces. They are also training—and this is a job for them alone—scientists and technicians for vital military and civilian tasks.

Curiously enough, the liberal arts college is here making a contribution out of all proportion to the numbers involved. … ’Give us men who can think, who have a backbone of cultural values, and who have developed habits of incisive reasoning,’ say the Army and Navy leaders.”

In fact, statistics from the period proved that all things being equal, servicemen with college educations had a much better chance of making it back.

Even as debates raged about the usefulness of education in wartime, the nation rushed to learn about the overlooked regions, new technologies, and forgotten histories that the war brought to light. Radio programming like Words at War and recommended reading lists (circulated nationally to Victory Corps) offered rich accounts of all sorts of topics, from "China Today" to “Modern Man: Master or Slave,” to “Colonies and Peace”—a surprisingly sharp overview of the risks to peace posed by European colonialism in...
Africa and Southeast Asia. Another illustration of the indomitable wartime spirit of inquiry is the publication of 1,322 books in Armed Service Editions. These small-format, unabridged paperbacks (4 in. x 5.75 in.—they were designed to fit easily into the pockets of service uniforms) were distributed to overseas troops to be read, passed around, and discarded; among the titles chosen were Melville’s Moby Dick, Plato’s Republic, Virginia Woolf’s The Years, and Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath, along with studies of foreign policy, human cognition, emerging science and aviation.

When the war ended with Emperor Hirohito’s surrender on August 15th of 1945, the men and women serving abroad returned home to a changed America. The tremendous efforts of the war industry had led to great strides in science and technology, but the sudden onset of the nuclear age left many Americans bewildered. A Time Magazine article from December of 1945 lists the year’s ten most significant developments, many of which came with unsettling implications:

1. The atomic bomb—and the practical release of nuclear energy (in which IU’s Physics department and Cyclotron played a key part)
2. Verification of the transuranium chemical elements 93, 94, 95 and 96.
3. Use of the drug streptomycin.
4. The Army & Navy’s proximity fuse (which was developed and manufactured at the Bloomington RCA Plant)
5. LORAN, an aid to navigation based on timed radio signals.
6. Psychological warfare methods which speeded the Japanese surrender.
8. The rodent poisons 1080 and ANTU.
9. The Russians’ successful transplantation of hearts in warm-blooded animals.
10. Steps toward establishment of a National Science Foundation.

Organ transplants, remote warfare, mind control, nuclear energy—by 1946, it seemed as if the science fiction of earlier generations had become a reality. And it wasn’t just the tech sector that experienced the shock of the new. In the wake of the Holocaust and the atom bomb, the shape of history itself had changed.

Not all changes were for the worse. The wholesale enfranchisement of women in the workforce and the promotion of African Americans caused by wartime labor shortages shook up the social structure for the better. But to the witnesses of the time, it seemed as if all truths held to be self-evident were now subject to reappraisal. The ground was moving beneath their feet.

In this scary milieu, Congress passed one of the most transformative pieces of legislation in American history: a guarantee of free access to university education for all veterans. The GI Bill, signed into law on June 22 of 1944, was designed to stave off a second Depression by preventing returning servicemen and women from flooding the job market. (It also secured them government-backed loans for the purchase of a house or a business, leading to a huge rise in home ownership and small business growth.) But as Wendell

August 16, 1943. Men enrolled at IU’s Army Specialized Training Program arrive at the Bloomington train station. The ASTP was instituted at IU and at other regional universities to train junior officers and technicians for war service.

August 22, 1943. President Wells dedicates the IU Service Flag. The number 52, beneath the gold star, is the number of IU students and alumni killed in action. The number 5,344, beneath the blue star, is the number in active service.

July 30, 1942. A parade through town in support of the second war bond loan. War bonds were the means the US government used to raise money for war expenditures. The public essentially loaned the government its money for a ten year period, at which point the investment was paid back with interest. An added benefit of the bond system was that it kept surplus cash out of circulation, thereby driving down inflation—a big risk during wartime. When the bonds paid out, the money provided a stimulus to the post-war economy.

November 13, 1943. Sports persist at the University, but in waning numbers. In this photo, WAVES (literally, Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service; the Navy’s women’s unit) act as cheerleaders for IU at the Great Lakes Football Game.

December 16, 1943. WAVES trim a Christmas Tree in the Memorial Union. The WAVES were enrolled in IU’s Navy Storekeeper School, one of three WAVES training schools in the US.
Willkie wrote, “even sound economics cannot define the aim of the peace”:

To discover that aim we must go deeper. We must establish beyond any doubt the equality of men. And we shall find this equality, not in the different talents which we severally possess, nor in the different incomes which we severally earn, but in the great franchise of the mind, the universal franchise, which is bounded neither by color, nor by creed, nor by social status. Open the books if you wish to be free.

The GI Bill turned the postwar period into a great age of learning; by its expiration in 1956 nearly 8 million veterans undertook or resumed university coursework. Historians often describe the resulting gains in terms of upward mobility: thanks to their educations, veterans with low-income backgrounds were able to ascend to the middle class, transforming the US into a nation of picket fences and automobiles. (Though this rising tide did not float all boats: Hispanic and African American GIs were often denied their right to study or settle where they wished by racist banks, neighborhood associations and colleges). But it is likewise true that the huge surge in student enrollment transformed the American university. Some of the changes were obvious and

Married student housing in 1946, at the height of GI Bill enrollments. Woodlawn Court—more commonly known as Trailer Town or, after heavy rainfalls, The Swamp—housed 650 people, including about 50 children born to returning servicemen.

These Trailer Town residents (Ruth Richardson McConnell, AB ’46, and Thomas McConnell, BS ’46) arranged their class schedules to make sure the baby was always tended by one parent or the other. This co-parenting arrangement, not uncommon in these quarters, now looks ahead of its time.

Reading for Victory

The effort to educate Americans about the new realities of their global role was partly taken up by the Council on Books in Wartime, a collection of professors, librarians and publishers who not only got books into the hands of servicemen, they also created monthly reading lists for the American public, “designed to give a well-balanced background for the interpretation of the daily news and radio reports.” Their recommendations make for fascinating reading. Some have not aged so well: a list keyed to the theme of “Your World Tomorrow” includes Your Personal Plane, a prophecy of the future of air travel that is bit off the mark. But in general, the lists are distinguished by the remarkable range and thoughtfulness of their selections.

A widely distributed poster promoting the power of books in the “War of Ideas.” Nazi book-burning is countered by this quotation from President Roosevelt: “Books cannot be killed by fire. People die but books never die. No man and no force can put thought in a concentration camp forever. No man and no force can take from the world the books that embody man’s eternal fight against tyranny. In this war, we know, books are weapons.”
immediate. The lack of housing for the overflow of returning GIs led to the creation of a trailer city on IU's campus; the alumni magazine from 1946 shows married students making the best of their tiny, plumbing-free quarters. Only a little less conspicuous were the academic effects of this new demand for knowledge. An influx of mature students eager to understand the period's scientific, political and global upheaval made college campuses across the country vital to the reshaping of the American outlook. Knowledge became newly relevant and necessary, not just to the wealthy elite but to the broadest spectrum of the population. IU President Herman Wells fed this appetite for learning by aggressively recruiting new faculty—many from nations ravaged by the war. He also fought to protect professors' rights to pursue their research without constraint, for postwar patriotism was sometimes used as an excuse to infringe upon open inquiry; unpopular ideas could put scholars at risk of being denounced as un-American. At IU there were calls for the resignation of Alfred Kinsey, the biologist who wrote the first studies of human sexuality, but Wells stuck fast to the principle of academic freedom. In the next decades, the most powerful strains of innovative thinking and dissent spread from the campuses of the nation's universities.

The Future of the Humanities

If the humanities, or the humanistic temper which they promote, are permitted to lapse now, we shall have lost the peace before we have gained it, and the real victory after the war will be to the way of life, inhuman, tyrannical, mechanical, of those whom we shall outwardly have conquered.

—Irwin Edman, American philosopher, 1943.

In 1942 and 1943, as American universities were being converted into specialized military training centers, many humanists worried that the liberal arts—disciplines like literature, arts, music, history and philosophy that cultivate knowledge for its own sake—would become obsolete. University presidents, professors and public intellectuals were eloquent in their warning that the arts and humanities should be protected and preserved, none more so than IU alumnus and presidential candidate Wendell Willkie (BA 1913), from whose essay "Freedom and the Liberal Arts" the following passages derive:

"The onrush of what we call modern civilization has obscured this essential truth of history. People—some of them in very high places—have openly disparaged the liberal arts. You are told that they are of little help to a man in earning his living or in making a contribution to his fellow man. The thing to do, you are told, is to get trained; learn an occupation; make yourself proficient in some trade or profession. Of course, this advice is sound, as far as it goes. But the inference, and sometimes the outright declaration that frequently follows it, strike at the very roots of our society. The liberal arts, we are told, are luxuries. At best you should fit them into your leisure time. They are mere decorations upon the sterner pattern of life which must be lived in action and by the application of skills. When such arguments gain acceptance that is the end of us as a civilized nation."

... "Freedom is of the mind. Freedom is in the library, around which a university is built. When you range back and forth through the centuries, when you weigh the utterance of some great thinker or absorb the meaning of some great composition in painting or music or poetry; when you live these things within yourself and measure yourself against them—only then do you become an initiate in the world of the free. It is in the liberal arts that you acquire the ability to make a truly free and individual choice."

... "Is not this worship of leaders, this willingness to be told what to think, this unquestioning acceptance of unnecessary restrictions on our freedom of speech, not all this part of the same trend—the trend away from self-reliant judgment; the little towns, the trend away from the dignity of the common man, the trend away from liberal education, by which men achieve equality in fact as well as in law? We have seen these impulses take root in other countries, which are now our enemies. We have seen them carried to dreadful conclusions. We have seen the exaltation of government, the abasement of culture, and the resulting violation of all that civilization cherishes. We have seen the evolution of human aspiration. It is a tragedy as great as men have ever witnessed. And it is our task, a task in which we shall be engaged for the rest of our lives, first to stop it, and then to repair it."

A rare introduction to a CBW reading list organized on the theme of Atomic power. Among the recommendations: Modern Man is Obsolete by Norman Cousins; about the challenge to discipline science to support the peace, and Immanuel Kant's Perpetual Peace; a famous philosophical treatment of the subject from 1795.

A special themed entry on children's books is twice the length of other Reading Lists. Especially striking is the attempt by the committee to broach racial prejudice; the selection listed here is of books that give history and dignity to American minority cultures.
Wartime at IU: Putting Women in the Fight

by Ellen MacKay

Universities across the country recognized that there was no way to carry on as usual during wartime. As college deferments, which offered men of draft age the opportunity to continue their studies for a year, became increasingly scarce, all men deemed fit to serve were called up. But college as we know it did not stop; instead, and for the first time in history, advanced learning became the province of young women. IU recognized that in order to maintain its academic programs it would need to recruit far more female students than had previously attended the university. A particularly innovative strategy on this front was IU’s WATCH program—the first female military training program in the nation. The idea originated with law professor Frank Horack, the head of the University’s Office of Military Information. In a memo from July of 1942, he wrote to President Herman B Wells and Kate Hevner Mueller, IU’s Dean of Women:

At the present time we are way ahead of our competitors in setting up the Army Enlisted Reserve Corps Program. The job is well advanced. Let’s scoop the field on Military Training for women. So far as I know, no Women’s R.O.T.C. unit has been contemplated, but I think the idea could be sold to Washington. Fortunately an Indiana man is in charge of Women’s Auxiliary Corps. He should assist us in getting a campus program.

Within a couple of weeks the Women’s Auxiliary Training Corps was created, and papers across the country took note. Its purpose was to train officers for the emerging women’s branches of the armed forces: the WACS (Women’s Army Corps), WAVES (Women’s Naval Reserve Corps—the acronym stands for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), SPARS (Coast Guard Women’s Reserve Corps), WASPS (Women Airforce Service Pilots), and the Women Marines. The press recorded this development with some ambivalence; on the one hand, recruitment was a national priority and journalists did their part to spread the word. On the other, they often let slip their own misgivings about women’s fitness for war service. Consider, for instance, this excerpt from US News published in May of 1942:

The American woman is going into the Army through the service entrance. For the first time in America’s history, a woman other than a nurse may walk into any recruiting station after this week and enroll in a branch in the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps neither to fight nor to provide a glamorous setting for beauty.

She will wear the uniform to do hard, unromantic work with the American Army all over the world… Those whose motives are frivolous and who hope to dazzle their friends with a WAAC uniform are being forewarned by Director Ovetta Culp Hobby that they may be sent anywhere in the world and they can’t quit with ease. Their work will not be easy. Their evenings won’t be spent flirting with soldiers. They will be subject to rigid Army discipline. And they will be too tired to go dancing.

Ironically, the false image that this author was seeking to dispel was a product of the press’s own making. When IU’s training program began in August of 1942, the papers gave their greatest attention to the “slenderizing” cut and vivid colors of the cadets’ outfits. Here is the Indianapolis Star:

The girls in the advanced corps lend a gay note to the campus. Their uniforms are the same as those formerly worn by the girls’ drum and bugle corps—short pleated white skirt and blouse; red tunic with the IU monogram in white on the left sleeve; tan four-in-hand tie, red socks, white shoes and white overseas cap.

In one of the accompanying photographs staged for the press photographer, a WATCH (as these women were called in this acronym-loving period) is shown applying lipstick with the caption "a little make-up before going out on parade." This fuss over women’s appearance was particularly galling to Dean Mueller, who had to field an angry phone call from the Women’s Dean at Purdue, IU’s chief rival. Her Purdue cohort was miffed that the women’s army corps wore IU’s school colors; “a bunch of girls in red skirts and white shirts,” said the rival Dean, was a “nasty crack” against the idea of national solidarity. But more fundamentally, Mueller recognized that the parading of WATCHes before the press was merely for “glamour and showmanship” and had little to do with the specialized training they undertook. To Mueller, the real story was the contribution IU’s women would make to the war effort and not how cute they looked in their uniforms. The trouble, however, was that women’s contribution was partly a function of their attractiveness; as films featuring servicewomen demonstrate (Here Come the Waves, So Proudly We Hail, Cry Havoc, Keep Your Powder Dry, To the Shores of Tripoli) young women in uniform made the war look good.

The contradictions swirling around women’s military service continued when the Navy began converting IU’s yeoman training school into an academy for WAVES. The Storekeeper’s School, which provided special training for Naval women in subjects including bookkeeping, typing, accounting, and English composition, opened in the fall of 1942. The school was one of only three WAVES academies in the nation, and it, too, received a lot of press coverage. But the novelty of women sailors often eclipsed the useful, if unglamorous, work IU WAVES did procuring and maintaining Navy supplies. In another Indianapolis Star article, the author praises the patriotism of the WAVES: “No one who observes those
women, officers and enlisted alike, who have given up home, civilian comforts and civilian identity for the dangers of war, can possibly doubt their honor and pride and integrity.” But he precedes it with a description of them receiving their new uniforms like children on Christmas morning, concluding that “when it comes to new clothes, Navy women are no different from civilian women.”

The fact remains that women in the service were expected to be two very different things: as pretty symbols of America’s commitment to victory, they were paraded about to boost morale. But as members of the naval corps, they were meant to disappear into the blur of the military machine, working deep behind the scenes to keep the men in the fight. The result of this contradiction was sometimes disdain. The father of one WAVE wrote to Herman Wells to complain that some “female students” were dismissive of the women naval corps, regarding them as mere window dressing, it “BURNS me,” he wrote, that they “act with disrespect toward the Naval uniform just because it is on a girl instead of a boy.” But the problem of unequal treatment reached far beyond IU. The celebrated war cartoonist, Bill Mauldin, picked up on it in a panel mocking WACs as darlings of the press with no real understanding of the brutalities of army life.

The complexities of women’s role in the military have yet to be resolved. In the wake of the war, Mildred McAfee Horton, the
An Indiana Woman Goes to War

by James H. Madison

Most of the women who graduated from IU’s military training programs—particularly the WAVES Storekeeper School—served their county at home. IU History professor James Madison tells the story of one Indiana woman who was stationed close to the front and kept a poignant record of her experience.

It was a sunny day in France. I was walking quietly through the American Cemetery that sits above the Normandy D-Day beach. Buried there are 9,387 Americans who died fighting the Nazis. As in military cemeteries at Gettysburg, Shiloh, and elsewhere the Normandy grave markers list the home state of the dead. In such places I always look for the boys from Indiana. I found lots of them at Normandy. But then I spotted a marker that made me stop: “Elizabeth A. Richardson, American Red Cross, Indiana July 25 1945.”

Why would a woman be buried there? What did she do to deserve a place in this sacred soil? War is about men—young, brave, strong, masculine. Women stay home, take care of children, and wait for the warriors to return. Such has been the traditional definition of war.

I returned to Bloomington, curious, and began to follow the trail of historical documents that led me to Liz Richardson’s growing up in Indiana, to her college and career years in Wisconsin, to her service in the American Red Cross in England and France in 1944 and 1945. I learned not only about her remarkable life but about this war and women’s roles in it.

World War II was a total war. It changed everything, including traditional definitions of gender roles. The goal of victory required all-out commitment from men, women, school kids, old, young. Women went to work in factories and took other jobs that had often been considered appropriate only for men. They put on uniforms and joined military units, not in combat usually, but sometimes given the opportunity. Army nurses serving close to the front were called on to carry out their work under fire, and more than 200 lost their lives before the war was over.

Mauldin’s unvarnished take on army life came from his own experience in the 45th Division of the infantry; a year into his service his pictures of life “Up Front” earned him a regular spot in Stars and Stripes, the Army’s in-house magazine. In January of 1945, Ernie Pyle (the IU alumn and famous war journalist) wrote a column praising Mauldin as “the finest cartoonist the war has produced. And that’s not merely because his cartoons are funny, but because they are also terribly grim and real.” Soon after they were syndicated and published across the nation, despite General Patton’s objections that they were insubordinate.

This cartoon by Bill Mauldin, the war’s most popular cartoonist, picks up on the sentiment that women’s military service was little more than a grand tour of Europe. Though WACs did receive a disproportionate amount of press attention doing work that was largely administrative, some showed great valor, given the opportunity. Army nurses serving close to the front were called on to carry out their work under fire, and more than 200 lost their lives before the war was over.

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Such was the experience of Liz Richardson. Liz was fun-loving and full of energy, at times a party girl, but also very smart and thoughtful. The war deeply affected her. She wanted to do her part and learned that the American Red Cross sent women overseas to help American soldiers. Liz joined up and in the summer of 1944 crossed the Atlantic to London just as the Nazi V-1 rockets were dropping on the beleaguered city. Liz immediately experienced
the horror of bombed building and dead civilians. That fall she joined up with the 82nd Airborne, the paratroopers who had jumped on D-Day. From these combat veterans Liz learned about war.

Liz’s Red Cross job description was to serve coffee and doughnuts to GIs overseas, refreshments that symbolized the America they had left. Her real job was to talk and to listen. American GIs in Europe were far from home, most for the first time. They were young, many only eighteen or nineteen. They missed family and friends and the comforts of familiar food, music, and fun. And they sure missed American girls.

For many GIs in England, the sight of an American woman was so unusual, Liz wrote, that “you feel sort of like a museum piece—Hey, look, fellows! A real, live American girl!” Liz and her fellow Red Cross workers knew the right slang, knew how to make a wisecrack, and knew how to talk about baseball, Glenn Miller, and apple pie. They encouraged banter. They’d yell out to a truckload of GIs, “Hi, soldier. What’s cooking?” and the guys would yell back, “Chicken! Wanta neck?” They usually took time to put on lipstick, nail polish, and perfume. These smart women quickly came to see that such small feminine connections to the girls back home meant worlds to homesick boys. Red Cross women could sing slightly bawdy songs, respond to off-color jokes, deflect a sexual advance, and yet remain respectable women the guys loved to be near.

In a windswept tent camp or on a nighttime dock near a troopship, Liz smiled and wisecracked with the guys, laughed at their jokes, listened to their gripes, and, more quietly, sympathized with their frustration, loneliness, and hurt. They told her stories not reported in newspapers; tales of combat and brutality, of choices grimly made, of fears and deep regrets—stories that a GI might not write home to a wife or girlfriend, not tell children or grandchildren in the years to come, and sometimes not even confide to a best buddy. “I’m used to the men going over every minute on the line,” Liz wrote her parents. In another letter home she wrote that “If you only knew what combat does to these boys—not in the physical sense, although that’s bad enough—but mentally.” Without firing a weapon Liz Richardson came to know war far better than Americans at home and even better than many men overseas.

Liz’s wartime letters and especially her diary reflect a growing weariness and homesickness shared by all who had seen too much war. In one letter she reminded her mother about a dress left hanging in her bedroom closet in Indiana. “You might as well give the dress away, as well as anything else that’s in there. When I get home, I’m going to start from scratch and I think it will be Bonwit Teller’s. No—Lord & Taylors. Well, anyway, I’m going to blow my top. You can’t imagine how we dream about clothes.” In another letter she wrote “If only I could tell you all about this . . . I’ll have to talk for a week straight when I get home in 1946.”

Liz never returned to her Indiana home. She died on July 25, 1945, in a military plane crash near Rouen, France. She was twenty-seven. Despite the homesickness and the hardships, she never regretted her choice to serve in World War II. She had written her parents in September, 1944, “I consider myself fortunate—can’t conceive of anything else. It’s a rugged and irregular and weird life, but it’s wonderful. That is, as wonderful as anything can be under the circumstances.” To her best friend from college days she had written that fall, “I wouldn’t trade this for anything else and it has more satisfaction in the doing than anything Auntie has ever done.”

Today, at the American Cemetery in Normandy, perfectly aligned white markers stand in green grass to form row upon row of war dead. The calm order above the quiet beach obscures the horror of war. Sometimes there are flowers resting at the base of the marble cross at Grave 5, Row 21, Plot A—as there are sometimes at the markers of the Indiana boys interred above Omaha Beach.

James H. Madison is Thomas and Kathryn Miller Professor of History at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is the author of several books, including Slinging Doughnuts for the Boys: An American Woman in World War II, which tells Liz Richardson’s story.
The responsibility of American industry to meet the military’s production demands was a challenge to all citizens. The Depression proverb, “use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without” was put to new use as people contributed their car tires, nylon stockings, and bacon fat (to say nothing of their newspapers, tin foil, scrap metal and manpower) to war factories. Some of these plants produced items so vital to national security that their contents were a closely guarded secret. In Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where the atom bomb was constructed, the factory buildings had no windows at ground level and guards in watchtowers made sure the town was free of prying eyes. Right here in Bloomington, RCA (the Radio Corporation of America) was at work developing a weapon that was nearly as consequential in the eyes of military historians, but whose story is much less familiar.

RCA settled in Bloomington in 1939. After converting a defunct kitchen cabinet factory for its use, the company produced its first radio in June of 1940. A little more than a year later, the millionth set had rolled off the assembly line. With a reputation for innovation, quality and speed, the company was contracted by the Navy to work on a project with a name right out of a spy novel: “Madame X.” (Around the plant, people called it the "vacuum cleaner."). The nature of RCA’s undertaking was only revealed once the war was over, when the Bloomington factory was recognized with a Navy “E” flag for its accomplishment. At a rate of approximately 18,000 a day, RCA produced VT fuses, or variable timing fuses, that used radio waves to automatically detonate artillery shells only when they were within ideal range of their target. The device was mainly used against Japanese aircraft, but in the last months of the war it was also used in combat with German forces, where it earned General Patton’s praise. The Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, wrote of it that, “without the protection this...
ingenious device has given the surface ships of the fleet our westward push could not have been so swift and the cost in men would have been immeasurably greater.”

Most employees had no clear notion what the fuse was since its manufacture was separated into isolated components. However, they did know that their labor was singularly important to the war effort, and by all accounts, the spirit of patriotic industry was strong at the plant. One picture from the period shows a huge crowd of women—for most of the workers were women—attending a rally celebrating Doolittle’s raid on Tokyo, the first and much-celebrated American counterattack after Pearl Harbor. Another picture, this one featuring models and not workers, was used by the RCA’s in-house magazine to advertise the company’s Victory Gardens—like IU, RCA set aside land for employees to cultivate their own produce. Perhaps most emblematic of the period, though, is the photo of all the War Mothers at the plant “helping to supply their sons and daughters with equipment to fight the Axis.” The women, sedately sitting or standing in front the plant’s brick wall, hardly seem like the agents in charge of a military super weapon called “Madame X.” But as is often the case in World War II, significant contributions come from unexpected sources.

**Bloomington and the Atom Bomb**

After the war, RCA was eager to advertise its role in producing the second most important invention of the war (as the Navy claimed); but did you know Bloomington’s involvement in the development of the weapon that tops the list? This story, issued in 1989 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of World War II, describes the crucial involvement of IU’s Physics department in the development of the Atom Bomb, and the role of Lawrence Langer in getting Little Boy off the ground.

The first IU cyclotron was under construction when war began in 1939. Nuclear physics had begun at IU in 1938 with the arrival of Allan C.G. Mitchell, Emil J. Konopinski, Franz N.D. Kurie and Lawrence M. Langer. Kurie led the cyclotron-building effort, and the first beam was achieved on April 10, 1941.

In 1942, the U.S. Government set up a laboratory at the University of Chicago under the direction of Enrico Fermi to develop a nuclear reactor. This was the work that would make possible the Manhattan Project.

“That first nuclear reactor was a graphite and uranium pile,” recalled Langer, “for that they needed to study the diffusion of neutrons through graphite, and they decided to use the IU cyclotron because it could provide a good source of neutrons. They sent two of their people down to Bloomington to conduct the study. It was a contribution to what later became the Manhattan Project.”

In 1942, Langer was called to Los Alamos, N.M. to participate in the Manhattan Project and spent the rest of the war there. “I was involved in the development, testing and delivery of the Hiroshima bomb,” he said. “Eventually I went to the island of Tinian to be in charge of the final assembly of the bomb. But when we got to Tinian, we discovered that about 400 planes a day were taking off from the island to bomb Japan, and about 1 percent of those planes crashed on takeoff.

“We figured that under those circumstances, the bomb might explode and the island would be lost. The island was valuable to the war effort, and the Army wasn’t about to risk losing it.”

“So the plans changed. The final assembly of the bomb would have to be done in the plane after takeoff. This required a special tool, and the officer assigned to do the final assembly put the tool in a special tool box and tied it to the side of the bomb bay. The officer came in about six times during the last day to make sure the tool was in the box, and everyone was going off to dinner. But he was so worried about that tool that I decided to stay with the plane.”

“We decided that we had to get the tool box out of the bomb bay and tie it to the side of the bomb. The officer was so worried about that tool, I decided to stay with the plane.”

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Bloomington High School and the War
Brought to you by the editors of the 1943 Gothic

IU’s wasn’t the only campus that changed during World War II. For students in Bloomington High School, the war was equally transformative. The 1943 Gothic (the name of Bloomington High School’s annual yearbook) begins with an extended account of the changes the war brought to everyday life. Oddly enough, this sort of attempt to acknowledge and account for the exceptional circumstances of life in wartime is a rarity. The 1942 Gothic barely acknowledges the war at all, though it includes a shot of two women reading the giant headline in the Bloomington Herald Telephone “War Declared / Smash Japan.” It is easy to imagine why editors might have chosen not to make the effort. How can one possibly describe the impact of the war upon a whole school full of students, teachers and employees? Whose experiences deserve documentation? And how does one find the words to express feelings that are so new and raw, and that suit the form of a keepsake book, to be read years hence? The section on “Ideas and Ideals” is perhaps the best evidence of the difficulty of finding language that rises to such a complex and unprecedented occasion.

War Brings Changes to Classes and Activities
This Year B.H.S. High School life moved out of the old groove of constant hilarity and took on the appearance of a studious crowd of individuals at work.

We were constantly aware of the loss of people whose faces we had been accustomed to seeing in our halls. The first called from our faculty into war service was our own principal, Dr. Simon, who is now a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Corps. Soon after we were called upon to give Mr. Wonnell and Mr. Cuddy. Adding a note of sobriety to the many prized awards in our trophy case was our Service Honor Roll, a grim reminder of those boys from our own ranks who have made the supreme sacrifice.

Our curriculum took on a new picture with the addition of war courses. We began to offer aeronautics, welding, machine tool operation, photography, trigonometry, and the course that our sore bodies will never forget—physical fitness.

Following the wishes of the leaders of our nation, we organized a Victory Corps. A rousing patriotic convocation started off the Victory Corps membership drive.

Yes, 1943 was a different type of year for B.H.S. students, but with surprising speed and accuracy, the new war roles were filled.

New Classes—New Trades Taught.
Old familiar courses were supplemented by new classes and trades in direct preparation for war work.

Pre-flight aeronautics and radio prepared boys for duty in the armed forces.

Pan-American relations having become so important, Spanish was added to the foreign language curriculum.

The Home Economics Department undertook two new projects this year. During the first semester two classes in nutrition were offered to parents of children whom the health department found undernourished. The second semester an exchange unit went into effect with the girls being taught how to make Victory Gardens, and the boys being tutored in nutrition.

Annual physical examinations were required, and one of the contributing factors of the physical fitness program was calisthenics.

The Industrial Department offered classes from four o’clock in the afternoon until midnight, in blueprint reading, machine tool operation, welding, drafting, and precision instrument reading.

War geography and current events came to the fore in the social sciences, and new war developments were discussed in science classes.

Keyed to new and better methods of learning, students of B.H.S. graduate into the definite positions for which they have been prepared.

Our Part in the Victory Program
Knitting and purling, buying stamps and bonds, collecting scrap, caring for war workers’ children, and performing Victory Corps duties; we did our part, too.

We knitted sweaters, helmets, wristlets, and afghans, which the local Red Cross chapter distributed to servicemen.

Attempting to achieve 100% participation in the bond-selling drive, we saved our nickels and dimes and bought our small shares of America. No complete account of the sales was kept, but we did reach the five-hundred dollar mark for one week.

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A photograph from the 1942 Bloomington High School yearbook taken December 8, 1941—the day after Pearl Harbor.

A boy scout, a girl scout and two elementary-aged children read the honor roll of Bloomington High School. Beneath the title “Gold Star Boys of B.H.S.” there are five hand-written names.

BHS women in their physical education class. The high school’s new emphasis on physical as well as mental instruction changed postwar curricula too.

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We pestered our neighbors for can lids in the hope that we might win a free airplane ride. We salvaged 695 pounds of metal from old engravings, brought in 140 pounds of old keys, and collected 1500 pairs of worn-out silk stockings which were given to the Monroe County Salvage Committee.

Those of us who were members of the Silver Triangle and the Senior Girl Scouts helped to care for the children at the Bloomington Day Nursery.

Working together on the home front, students and teachers of the Bloomington High School achieved a closer and more co-operative relationship.

Ideas and Ideals
We watched our ideas and ideals shatter or materialize as the mood of the school changed with the everyday happenings of the outside world.

The appreciation of music and that realization of all that it can mean to us became more apparent as we sang our patriotic songs with a greater feeling of devotion.

The need for scientific knowledge caused many of us to enroll in chemistry, biology, physics, and general science.

We who have close friends and relatives stationed at the fighting fronts of the world anxiously scanned the globe from day to day as we watched the headlines for war developments.

In the new radio studio in 203, we discovered what it meant to be “On the Air” as we gained valuable experience in radio work.

Bloomington in the Occupation: the Story of Faye Abrell
by Ellen MacKay

When the war in Europe ended, General Patton’s Third Army remained overseas to preside over the occupation and reconstruction of Germany. Since the job promised to be a long one, servicemen and women were encouraged to relocate their families. American schools were formed and the word went out that teachers were needed to staff them. Among the many who applied was Faye Abrell.

Born in Freedom, Indiana in 1909, Abrell earned a Bachelor of Science degree followed by a Masters of Science at Indiana University, and remained in Bloomington thereafter to teach at the newly established Hunter Elementary School. When she was selected to join the faculty of the Army Dependents School System, she packed her bags and left her Grant Street home to embark on the voyage of a lifetime. It was October of 1946 when her boat docked at Bremerhaven and Germany was in a desperate state. Suffering keenly from food shortages, its cities war-torn and crumbling, its population devastated (approximately 10% died in the war), the nation was wracked with grief and shame. Abrell’s archive is a rich record of a moment that few non-military personnel witnessed, for Germany was closed to tourists at the time and any travel was strictly limited by the occupying armies of the US, England and the Soviet Union (as Russia was then called). After getting situated in an apartment on a heavily shelled Frankfurt block, Abrell’s first European experience was a trip up the Rhine river on Hitler’s yacht, now decommissioned for American servicemen’s use. Abrell’s time abroad ping-ponged in this way between hardship and luxury. On the one hand, amenities were scarce. During the coldest winter for half a century, the wind whistled through her

Faye Abrell on board the SS George Washington at Bremerhaven in October of 1946. An interesting fact: on April 14 of 1912, the captain of the George Washington radioed all ships in the area that there were large icebergs afloat in the Grand Banks, off Newfoundland. The RMS Titanic failed to heed these warnings and sank in those waters the following day.

The school bus that took Abrell’s students to school passing a heavily shelled corner of Frankfurt.

Cruising up the Rhine on Hitler’s yacht.
schoolhouse and boots and coats were virtually unobtainable. On the other hand, travel was cheap. Army accommodations and food were excellent, and cigarettes and candy could be bartered for almost anything. Abrell made the most of the opportunity to see, learn, and do as much as possible. She befriended the director of the Goethe Museum, a local cultural treasure, and brought her fourth grade class to visit. She took in performances of all sorts, including theatre, ballet and opera. She traveled widely across Europe and snapped photos of some key sites of the recent war, including Berchtesgaden, where Hitler’s vacation home was located, and Dachau, the first German concentration camp. Also in her scrapbook are a sprig of Edelweiss, the Alpine flower that would inspire Oscar and Hammerstein’s famous song, a chip of marble from Hitler’s hearth, and a program from “Tribunal One” of the Nuremberg trials. Abrell met a court interpreter on her voyage out, and when her new friend got married, Abrell stayed after the wedding to take in the Allied prosecution of Nazi war criminals.

The war reconfigured the world for Americans. Countries oceans away were now bound together with the US in the fight against fascism. In the postwar period, safeguarding the peace meant building upon this new ethos of international alliance, inquiry, respect, and tolerance. Abrell pursued this new internationalism with gusto, then brought home what she learned to generations of Bloomington students, first at Hunter and then at Batchelor Middle School. For decades after her year abroad, she retraced her journey in the imaginations of the girls and boys she taught. (And in 1967 she actually retraced her footsteps and returned to a Germany almost entirely rebuilt). The images that follow come from the rich array of materials Abrell bequeathed the IU archives after her death in 2003. They are well worth a visit.

Abrell’s fourth grade class visiting the Goethe House in Frankfurt am Main. The building was all but destroyed during the war but is now fully restored to its original condition when Johann Wolfgang Goethe lived there with his family. Goethe is generally recognized as Germany’s greatest literary figure; he is the author of Faust, The Sorrows of Young Werther, and from his foray into the field of natural science, The Theory of Colors.

Abrell’s program from “The Doctors Trial” (The United States vs. Karl Brandt, et al), the first of the twelve trials the United States conducted for war crimes in Nuremberg (the first and most famous Nuremberg trial was conducted by an international consortium). From the visitors’ gallery, Abrell watched the testimony of a Nazi nurse who was accused of participating in a broad program of Nazi ‘euthanasia.’ Among the doctors charged in the trial were the medical chiefs of the Buchenwald and Ravensbrück concentration camps.

Abrell’s snapshot of the furnaces at Dachau. The concentration camp had yet to be turned into a postwar tourist site, so handwritten remarks supplied by survivors provided the only testimony of the atrocities committed there. Above the oven on the left is a laurel branch with a French inscription: The Survivors of Dachau.

A souvenir photograph of Hitler’s mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian mountains. The crumbling building shows extensive allied bombardment.

Faye Abrell leaving Frankfurt by train, August 17 of 1947. Abrell had spent the summer of 1947 touring Northern Europe before starting up the school year in Bloomington.
The Monroe County History Center and World War II: 
The Objects of History Tell Their Stories

by Elizabeth Schlemmer

In this section, we examine the complexities of doing history by looking at different kinds of evidence. We begin with Elizabeth Schlemmer’s discussion of three objects from the Monroe County History Center.

The Monroe County History Center is where local history lives. Over 40,000 artifacts and archives have found a home in our collection. Hundreds of area residents have donated their photographs, books, clothing, antiques, and mementos, and faithfully placed them under our guardianship. These items speak for the people who used them, and together they tell Monroe County’s stories—from every era and representing many varied perspectives.

The World War II era is represented by more than 250 artifacts in the museum’s collection. Among these are ration books, military uniforms, scrapbooks filled with newspaper clippings, and oral histories of veterans on audiotape. Beyond these items earmarked in the museum’s catalog with the keywords “World War II,” there are probably hundreds more artifacts on our shelves that are not directly war-related, but nonetheless express the lives and pastimes of people who lived in and around Bloomington while war raged across the oceans.

Here are three local WWII stories told through artifacts: an exhibit, an object, and a document.

Complete Army Uniform and Accessories
Military uniforms and accessories are relatively common donations to the museum, but no soldier’s collection has been nearly as complete as a recent donation from Vernal Snyder. His entire WWII uniform, down to his GI issued glasses, socks, and boxers, are currently on display in a case exhibit at the History Center. We at the Historical Society appreciate the care he took in saving all his things in excellent condition, and for his and his family’s generosity in giving them for display. Technical Sergeant Snyder served from 1942 to 1946, servicing communications equipment in England, France, Germany, and Belgium. He has been a lifelong resident of Bloomington, apart from his time in the army, and spent his career working for RCA. Mr. Snyder recently celebrated his ninetieth birthday and is proud to say that he can still fit into his uniform.

This exhibit is free to the public and will remain on display through the end of the College of Arts and Sciences’ Themester.

Lard Strainer
This ceramic jar is not just a collector’s item for pig lovers. It is a functional, and cleverly decorated, lard strainer. Its provenance is unknown—in other words, we don’t know its donor and it may or may not have been used during the war. But it is typical of the time.

1940s housewives usually saved their leftover bacon grease, straining it into a container probably kept near the stove, ready to be reused for future cooking or to be turned in for defense purposes. National propaganda urged Americans to save grease to be deposited at local meat dealers and other collection centers. The grease was used to make nitroglycerine, a key ingredient in explosives. One pound of grease could produce a half-pound of dynamite. Oral histories reveal that many Monroe County mothers saved the grease for their own family, resorting to household economy during a period of rationing. Frugal cooks still practice this today.

While the History Center has collected a lot of military uniform parts and pieces, this jar (or “fat vat” as we have nicknamed it) is our only donated lard strainer. Sometimes it’s the most common items of everyday life that are not commonly preserved. And while we do not want, nor have the resources, to accept every minute piece of local history, if an object represents a local story that can be communicated through an exhibit, we will collect it.

Bloomington Schools V-E Day Plans
As the History Center’s librarian, I sometimes come across marvelous historical documents even without seeking them. My personal favorite is a paper I found tucked in a research file for the history of schools that is also quite revealing of wartime history. This mimeographed announcement from Superintendent of Bloomington Schools H. E. Binford details the precise plans for celebration of the expected Allied victory in Europe. Cheerful lettering at the top of the sheet proclaims “V-E MEANS VICTORY IN EUROPE!” The opening lines instruct:

School pupils please take this bulletin home for parents to read and then keep it where you can find it when that moment of VICTORY comes, because this bulletin explains just what the school children of Bloomington will do when “V-E” is officially announced. Please read this entire bulletin.
Each following paragraph describes school closings for public celebrations on the courthouse square, according to the time when victory might be announced. There are separate instructions if the good news of German surrender comes before noon, after noon, during noon lunch hour, at night, or over a weekend. The specificity of the plans shows striking confidence.

But what really caught my eye about this bulletin was the date, “9-19-44,” nearly eight months before the actual V-E Day! What could account for that kind of confidence, especially so premature? A little research was enlightening. At the time this bulletin was sent home with Bloomington children, Allied military forces were initiating Operation Market Garden in Europe. This Allied invasion of the Netherlands was the largest airborne operation up to that point, even larger than D-Day.

The airborne part of the operation, called Market, consisted of dropping Allied troops near selected bridges and canals in order to cut off German movement and supply. The ground portion, called Garden, would support the airborne troops.

The Germans were able to fend off the attack, and the Allies’ push towards Germany was thwarted. As this document shows, though, public perception of the war before this point was that it was only a matter of time before the Allies won. The glowing confidence in Superintendent Binford’s announcement is a remarkable piece of evidence that demonstrates how members of the Bloomington community believed in this perception and were reacting locally to national news from the warfront.

Artifact, Photograph, Propaganda, and Testimony: Forms of History and the Fat Vat
by Ellen Mackay

The Monroe County History Center’s recent acquisition of a fat storage jar (with a strainer nestled inside and a cute black pig on the lid) brings out the complexity of recovering the past. In many places and periods, historians struggle to draw as much information as they can from spotty evidence. Day to day behavior, which we sometimes call social history, is particularly hard to retrieve since few people thought to write down the meals they ate, the clothes they wore, the toys they played with, the jokes they told, and so on. What they preserved instead were war stories and royal chronicles. The Second World War presents us with a different problem: a field of evidence that is enormous. With so much information, some of it is bound to be contradictory.

So, returning to that fat vat. This wartime artifact is a great example of the changes women (for most home cooks were women) made in their everyday routines during wartime. Food conservation was nothing new; in 1941 America was just emerging from the Great Depression and families had long been practicing frugality in their kitchens and elsewhere just to keep afloat. But the conservation of fat takes on new importance in the war years because the War Production Board launched a national campaign asking women to return any kitchen grease to their local butcher (or Official Fat Collecting Station) to fuel the war effort. The fat drive was deemed so important, in fact, that Walt Disney studios were commissioned to produce a cartoon, Out of the Frying Pan into the Firing Line, urging families to collect their drippings so that they could be turned into nitroglycerine.

Out of the Frying Pan, which you can watch on You Tube, was one of many films that the US Government distributed free to university campuses, schools and other community organizations for public screening; in a catalogue of offerings that include a newsreel about “a record catch of red herring off the coast of British Columbia” (to ease the meat shortage) the story of Pluto and Minnie turning a “skillet of bacon... A vivid reminder to “housewives” to store and donate fats. Because imports from the Pacific were entirely cut off, about 60% of the fat sources used in American soap were no longer available. After Pearl Harbor, when the country’s production of munitions shot up, those fats were needed to generate the nitroglycerine in explosives.
Another notice from the superintendent was stapled to the first when I pulled it from its filing cabinet. This second sheet refers to the earlier bulletin, announcing to schoolteachers that:

THOSE PLANS ARE NOW VOID. The latest plans call for sticking to the job in shops and factories and schools, when Victory in Europe comes. There is to be no work holiday and no school holiday.

The thinking today all over the county seems to be that Victory in Europe alone does not justify or call for a planned celebration or program. The task will not be finished, and millions of boys will still be risking their lives that day in other parts of the world….Every pupil and employee is expected to remain at his post.

The sober tone of this second memorandum is especially apparent in contrast to the first. The page is undated, but we might take a guess. Superintendent Binford uses language that suggests the new memo was posted in 1945, but before the actual V-E Day. The shift in tone corresponds with the bloody fighting of the Battle of the Bulge. This battle took place during December 1944 and January 1945. Allied deaths were in the tens of thousands. This battle served as a reminder that after Europe, the Allies still had to fight a war in the Pacific, a fact Superintendent Binford emphasizes in his memo.

How dramatically the mood had changed! What amazes me when looking at these documents is how that simple little staple attaching the two brought so much more to both stories as we read them now. The collection of the two pieces of paper, the fact that someone saved them both and brought them to the History Center for safekeeping, is what preserved this surprising story for me and my volunteer researchers to parse out, marvel at, and now share with others.

The Monroe County History Center operates a museum, gift store, genealogy library, and education room. We are located on the corner of Sixth Street and Washington, in Bloomington’s former Carnegie library. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For more information about visiting, volunteering, making a donation, conducting research, or hosting an event at the History Center, please contact us at 812-332-2517 or at www.monroehistory.org.

Article by Elizabeth Schlemmer, Genealogy Library Manager, Monroe County History Center. The Genealogy Library serves patrons who research both genealogy and local history; it is operated by the library manager and dozens of volunteers who carefully organize and study materials related to the county’s past. Elizabeth is a 2010 alumnus of Indiana University and holds a B.A. in History and Anthropology. She has been a resident of Bloomington for five years and is a lifelong Hoosier.
Oral Histories: World War II from a Kid’s –Eye View

The Boys
Conducted by Jeremy Stoll

We continue our discussion of primary sources by looking at the recollections of eyewitnesses. Jeremy Stoll, a PhD student in IU’s department of Folklore, conducted live interviews (or oral histories) with two Bloomington residents who were young boys during World War II. In this preface to both narratives, he describes that process and explains what oral history contributes to our understanding of the past and the present.

Telling an oral history starts with finding the people who have tales to tell. As a folklorist and researcher, the first step for me providing you, dear readers, with Jim Mclay and Jim Mahan’s experiences of the home front in World War II was finding both of them. Once they’d volunteered their stories, the next step was meeting with them, introducing myself and my project, and then leading a conversation with them where they shared their stories from that time. My job was to take the audio recording of and my notes from our conversation, and cut both down to the most interesting parts. Once I’d found the strongest sections, I had to cut down the full experience of their storytelling to a moment that would evoke in a reader, who could not possibly talk to either Jim themselves, a reflection of their sense of what life was like then.

Oral history is not just a means to communicate how people lived; it is also a means to understand how people live their lives today. For my own research on the relationship between folklore and comic books in India, the oral histories that artists and writers share with me help me to understand how comics came about there. More importantly, the stories and details they give help me to expand my research. This past July, I went to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. to find both accounts and collections of early Indian comic books and cartoons. The interviews that I had performed with comics authors in New Delhi helped me to find more sources than I would have been able to on my own. More importantly, their words and stories gave me a way to organize what I did find, a way to understand how one image could be turned into three and then into several on each page of a longer book. Reading about comics in India was not enough; I had needed to talk to people about them.

One of the most important things about oral history and storytelling is its ability to enrich history. The focus of my research in the past was one comic book in particular, The River of Stories by Orijit Sen, which tells the story of villagers in Northern India whose lives were forever changed by the building of a dam that flooded their land. While media focused on the importance of the dam for city-dwellers, Sen’s comic shows that the dam was not all good and, in fact, probably harmed more people than it helped. He draws on folklore and local, village accounts of the dam being built to raise questions about what most people would call history. Was the building of the dam the right thing to do? Or did it seem that way because the people being harmed were poor and far away? Oral histories help us remember that history can never be singular because we are each of us a part of it.

Jim Mclay was born in October of 1929 to Scottish parents living in Northern New Jersey, in Bridgewood. While his brother served on active military duty in the Pacific, participating in the battles at Okinawa and Iwo Jima, Jim was helping his father, the local school system’s chief engineer, run their family’s dog kennel.

What memories do you have of life at the beginning of the war? I raised chickens myself, I peddled magazines door to door. And I made Christmas decorations – literally made them – in the woods, I’d cut down trees and I made and sold them door to door. I worked in a pony ring… I set up pins in a bowling alley. I was constantly doing something, looking for some way to make money actually. But I never contributed to the family, it wasn’t necessary. It was more a case of me making money to save, than it was that we needed money. We were not well to do, but comfortable, I guess you’d call it. I never even thought of it actually.

How did life change during the war? Once we got involved in the war, I remember the rationing, and the resentment over the butcher who was selling on the side, you know, without the stamps. I remember the stickers you’d get for how much gas you were entitled to put in your car. And my father I think had a C, with A being the lowest, he had a C due to his work. We didn’t go that far anyway, but it was never a problem. I remember when it was an imposition of 35 miles per hour as a being the maximum that you were supposed to drive. You’d be going 38 mph and be looking over your shoulder.

The big difference from today, and from decades now, was that everyone was involved in one way or the other, in the war. It was really an all out effort, as opposed to now, you know, with lip service to soldiers and marines and whatever servicemen overseas. It’s almost as if you’re on parallel tracks; life goes on. You worry about things over here and they’re over getting shot at. But that wasn’t true. We kept informed I guess by radio and I guess with television. Radio and the newsreels.

How did things change once everything was coming to an end? Things were just, uh, a whole lot better. I can’t think of saying, back then, saying, oh boy things are really great now. But the war was over and we had won. Not on that subject, but atomic bombs, of course, are a very contentious thing now. Not then. I doubt if you could have found anybody who would have objected to them except scientists. The common person was thrilled that we could end the war. Think about it and the whole thing, as far as we’re concerned, was only 4 years. We’ve been in Afghanistan for 10 years. It’s a major event in world history and yet, from America’s standpoint, it wasn’t that long.

Jim Mahan was 12 years old when Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941. During the war, he lived and worked on his family’s 150-acre farm outside Syracuse, New York, alongside his father, who gained a well-paying military guard job on a local air storage base.

What do you remember of the events leading up to Pearl Harbor and World War II? Real close to December 7, I remember one night going upstairs to my bedroom and hearing the radio talking about some of the
ambassadors from Japan to Washington D.C. leaving for home, and that this was a very, very, very, very serious business with the possibility of war. And at that young age of 12, I just couldn’t believe it. I thought this will all get worked out, and it didn’t. When December 7th hit, I was sitting at the living room table, playing checkers with my dad when it came over the radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. And that of course was a tremendous surprise to everybody. I remember Roosevelt’s speech the next day and this Day of Infamy Speech that he made.

What changes do you remember coming with the war?
Next to our one room school, there was a huge tree and on that tree, some governmental agency had put up a sign, saying this is an official scrap dump, please deposit iron and that sort of thing here. So…we’d carry iron down to school and throw it by the tree…we thought they’d get melted down and get turned into bullets for Hitler. I remember saving tin foil; tin foil was wanted. And I think we were saving tin cans and items of rubber.

In summer of 40 or 41, we had big thrashing machines come and we thrashed. The young men from all around, from a 5 mile radius or so would come and provide a work force to do the thrashing…We shared work. So it was sort of like the Amish do today. That was how things were done before the war. Well, when the war hit, there wasn’t any of these extra men around, anybody 18 years old to 30 years old ended up drafted. The only people left on the farm was the 60 year old father and no extra help to draft, so you could hardly thrash. Fortunately, this friend had got the combine and could run it by himself, and a kid, a teenager could gather the thrashing.

Coming off the farm, we had wheat, we had vegetables. We had fruit, we had wood for heat. The two things that were important were sugar and gas. Sugar was rationed…It was always a battle to get the sugar you needed. I don’t remember what was allowed. But you had to save on the sugar for the things that it was really needed…As a farmer, all my dad had was a car. We had no tractor. As a farmer, my father had more allowance for gas. But the car got used as a truck, for fuel, for carrying meat, for going and getting the seed, for getting fertilizer. It wasn’t good for the car, but it was good for the war effort. So we always seemed to have enough gas. But there was no extra driving.

How did things change as the war came to a close?
In the summer of 45, and into the fall of 45, I was starting my senior year of school. And we just went back to, I think, the pre-war rather quickly. The school began to play its regular round of basketball games. We began to have a bus to take us there. The rationing stopped. Uh, I don’t remember very much dramatic in terms of changes. We just dropped the things that had been hugging us…The major, major change in our family was obviously this federal aviation storage facility at the fairgrounds in Syracuse where my dad worked wasn’t going to stay open much longer…We had more money in the last couple years of WWII than we had, than we’d ever had before. So we actually were cut back in money, because we had to get it all out of the farm, and that never was easy.

Oral Histories: World War II from a Kid’s –Eye View

The Girls
Conducted by Ellen MacKay

To get a sense of how the war was experienced by young women and girls at home, Ellen MacKay interviewed some of the volunteers at Opportunity House, the non-profit resale shop on West 11th Street. Her narrative is a summary of all contributions since some participants wanted to keep their recollections anonymous.

All of the women reported an unspoken wartime discipline: silence reigned during adults’ discussion of war matters. Some topics were never broached. One interviewee had a friend whose father was killed in action on Iwo Jima, so “you couldn’t talk about the Japanese.”

Neither could you mention where friends or family members were stationed or what actions they might be undertaking; as the popular line went, “loose lips sink ships.” Finally, you certainly couldn’t talk during President Roosevelt’s radio addresses, called “Fireside Chats,” to which parents listened intently.

Children were also expected to follow the safety protocols of the day. More than one subject remembers being terrified by the Air Wardens who would patrol towns during air raid drills to make sure that everyone complied with the blackout order. Walking home for lunch, one subject was caught in an alarm halfway between her house and her school, and had to knock on the door of a stranger’s home in order to clear the street. Another subject’s father was the town’s warden; he was one of many men whose family responsibilities or medical circumstances disqualified him from fighting abroad, but who performed war service at home.

Meals—which is to say, whatever concoctions made it to the table—were eaten without complaint. Vital ingredients were hard to come by, none more so than sugar and meat, particularly by late 1943 and 1944. To compensate, home cooks devised a lot of casseroles and stews that disguised the small amounts and low grade cuts of beef and pork they used. They also grew their own vegetables and fruits and bartered with neighbors to diversify their stock.

Canning was big; one subject remembers her mother stockpiling vegetables and even meat for the winter. All the women interviewed remember ration books; some remember being sent
with money and coupons to the local grocer to pick up the family’s staples like milk and butter. Finally, in this period of tightened belts and reduced waste, they all agreed that you cleared your plate. No whining allowed, no matter what you thought of your dinner!

With relatives serving overseas, the war years were a great age of correspondence. Copious letters, typed on onionskin (a very thin kind of paper since paper was being conserved), were written by parents week after week. Reciprocally, trophies and treasures from the front were occasionally delivered by post—for instance, an uncle serving in Patton’s Third Army sent back a pair of German army helmets that gave one woman, then a little girl, nightmares of Nazi troops attacking her house. Her older brothers, for whom the helmets were prized toys in their daily play-battles, laughed at her, but she remembers being terrified not just of the helmets but even of the closet where they were kept. Also scary: the grim-faced poster of Uncle Sam that commanded young men to “Enlist Now.” This image was everywhere, and reminded one subject of an angry Santa.

Children were not insulated from the grim realities of the war. All subjects said movies were a popular wartime activity. Saturday matinees, which were programmed specifically for children, included cartoons, a chapter of a serial (such as Flash Gordon or Buck Rogers), and a double feature which often included at least one, and sometimes two Westerns. But like adult fare, these mattinees always included newscasts with frank depictions of the gains and losses at sea, in the air and on the battlefield. Some subjects also recall racing to their school libraries every week to read Ernie Pyle’s dispatches from the front. Pyle, an IU-trained journalist, was the country’s most popular war correspondent, beloved for describing the war in plain terms from a GI’s point of view. Many remember war banners as ubiquitous reminders of former friends and neighbors who had joined the forces (blue stars) or who had perished in action (gold stars).

Because of the military’s need for metal, rubber and wood, new toys became a rarity; one interviewee remembered the thrill of receiving a new baby bed (for a treasured doll) as a birthday gift from her Grandmother in 1946. But children didn’t play as much as they used to: many described participating in newspaper or rubber-collecting drives; the shortages of rubber and the rationing of fuel meant that bicycles and footpower were the main means of transportation.

Another shortage that children noticed was a lack of doctors, though this sometimes created opportunity. One subject remembered that a younger sibling was delivered by a woman doctor, the sister of the family GP who was now serving abroad. The unavailability of medical men also meant that parents took precautions to keep their children from falling ill, and that schools celebrated perfect attendance (no sick days) as a patriotic achievement.

After the victory celebrations, the onset of the Cold War was for one subject a period at least as unsettling as World War II. She remembered atomic bomb drills, emergency shelters and fallout provisions, and wearing dog tags to school with an identifying number on them for ready identification of her remains in the case of a nuclear attack.

Many thanks to Nancy Lumbley, Carol Peterman and others for sharing their memories with me.

A hard-hitting depiction of the price of loose lips. The dog pines for an owner who will never return, as the gold star of loose lips. The image was everywhere, and reminded one subject of an angry Santa.

One of Bloomington’s most impressive Victory Gardens was tended by Anna May Weatherwax, who was married to Paul Weatherwax, a professor of botany. While Paul spent the war years experimenting on different plants that might help supply the US with much needed rubber, Anna May raised corn for the community. IU cordoned off nine acres of land at Third and Jordan for faculty and employees to grow their own produce.

Children in the New York City school system hold up their dog tags, a precaution against nuclear annihilation.

A ration book and a gas mileage sticker (front and back). To purchase groceries customers needed to present their identification, ration book and appropriate coupons. This example includes the trace remains of blue tickets, used to purchase processed foods (red tickets were for meat and butter). The gas mileage sticker was to be displayed in the window of the owner’s car. ‘A’ was the lowest ranking classification and qualified consumers for no more than four gallons of gas per week. On the back, drivers are told to keep within the speed limit of 35 miles per hour—roughly half of what it is today. These items came from a scrapbook donated to the Monroe County History Center from a family that spent the war in Ohio and Oklahoma.

One of Anna May Weatherwax’s Victory Gardens grew enough food to keep her family fed throughout the war, and to send provisions to friends and neighbors who had joined the forces (blue stars) or who had perished in action (gold stars).
Before the Home Front
An Interview with IU Professor Mary Favret

The previous essays and images have been about war’s obvious and transforming effects upon the nation, not just in the places we would expect to see them, but in the kitchen, the schoolyard, even in the popular understandings of education and femininity. The Second World War is unique in this respect—not other conflict has been so pervasive, globally and domestically. This last contribution, from IU English professor Mary Favret, is about war’s forgotten traces and wars hidden in plain sight. Her book, *War at a Distance* (Princeton University Press, 2009), looks to the Napoleonic era to explain how conflicts kept in the background of day-to-day life nevertheless shape the way people think, paint, and write.

**What impulse or insight or event got your started on your recent book, War at a Distance?**

I used to believe that these questions—about what it feels like to live through a war, but never experience it first hand—came to me during the first Gulf War, in the early nineties. That war was hard to apprehend except as televised event. The reality of it was somehow subordinated to the media spectacle. Realizing this left me—and not only me—very uneasy: something enormous and destructive was happening, it involved me insofar as it was authorized by my government and supported by my tax dollars, and yet my assigned role seemed merely to be spectator, even couch potato. When there were rallies on campus to protest the fighting, students told me they could not attend because they needed to check CNN in order to know what was happening—as if watching CNN was the one valid response to being at war.

Of course, the more you think about it, the more you realize that war for most U.S. citizens in the twentieth century, with the exception of military personnel, had nearly always been at a distance and mediated by newspapers, radio, newsreels, and television. My parents had grown up during WWII; I had grown up during Vietnam (the first televised war). These historical and biographical facts must shape the way we think and feel about war.

In the fall of 2001, I was teaching a large freshman lecture course on the literature of war. On the first day of class I asked the students, most of whom were at least 17, if they had lived through a war. Of the 140 students, only one said he had lived through war (he was Israeli). But in fact, in those seventeen years prior to 2001, the United States had participated in at least a half dozen wars. How could they not know they had been at war? It seemed important to me to probe the many sides to this question. Two weeks later, planes flew into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center and the question only became more urgent.

**Was there such a thing as a home front in the period you discuss? Or was war supposed to be kept at a distance?**

Two hundred years ago, the term “home front” had not yet been coined and there was no concerted effort by the state to coordinate the citizenry, the economy, and industry in something called a “war effort.” France during the Revolution and under Napoleon did have something like a “war effort” which included citizens and military, home and battlefield; but France then—much like Germany in the twentieth century—was not insulated from the fighting.

Great Britain probably makes for a better comparison with our situation; there, in the late 18th century and early 19th century, we can find the seeds of a modern “home front” mentality. Britain successfully kept the fighting at a distance during the twenty years it was at war with France in Europe, the Caribbean, North and South America, Africa and South Asia. Because of the severe economic hardship accompanying the long war, Britain developed new ways to raise revenues through taxes (after several failed efforts, they finally hit on income tax—the first ever). This period also saw the first great flowering of propaganda: when support for the war flagged, the British state mobilized a robust print media to re-ouze its increasingly literate population. On the one hand, media deliberately sought to increase the level of fear and alarm at home: invasion by the enemy was sometimes a real and sometimes a hyped-up fear. On the other hand, the media was quick to trumpet British victories and moral superiority. And, notoriously, civil liberties were severely restricted: critics of the administration were imprisoned and tried under new Treason and Sedition Acts, the right to assembly was denied, and *habesas corpus* suspended.

In this case, the creation of a home front entailed a strained political, economic and moral climate, intimately linked to the on-going wars.

**How did literature help the public process the first Global war?**

Written texts—whether poems, plays, novels, sermons or periodical writing—were probably the main form most people turned to in order to process or reflect upon the war. That processing, however, was never straightforward. What it meant to be at war kept shifting, along with the rationales for fighting, with the result that some writers who began quite opposed to the war in the 1790s wound up strong advocates a decade later. Censorship also made reflection on the war difficult. The government curtailed the response of most literary efforts: many of the more outspoken radical poets and essayists of the time were jailed or harassed into silence.

One major way literature stepped in to direct the wartime response was to displace conflict into the past. Walter Scott’s historical poems and novels were phenomenally popular, for instance, in part because they recreated Britain’s violent conflicts in the distant past, their outcome already resolved. Gothic novels, full of dark confusion and threatened violation, flourished at this moment, mirroring the psychological stresses of wartime, especially for women. Literary works dealt with the on-going wars in quieter ways as well. I was especially interested in how a poem or novel could, through a series of metaphors or a fleeting figure, suffice a comfortable, domestic scene with intimations of distant violence. War was a distant reality that nevertheless permeated everyday life. We think of a poet like William Wordsworth or a novelist like Jane Austen as celebrants of a simple domesticity.
and everydayness, but their works and the very sense of home they convey are rich in images of loss, waiting, and sudden, unexplained injuries. These are the ways they understand a world at war.

**Can you recount a particularly poignant discovery you experienced made while researching this book?**

Every year during the two-decade-long war with France, and sometimes twice a year, the British king would ask his subjects to undergo a day of fasting and humiliation.” That the king, the head of the Anglican Church, would require his people to pray for the success of his armies and navies is not very remarkable. Britain recognized no separation of Church and State. But somehow “humiliation”—a self-abasement and acknowledgment that the nation had committed grave wrongs—strikes me as quite foreign to the responses of a modern nation at war. It’s difficult to imagine what it would mean to face our own on-going wars through an attitude of what they called “general humiliation.”

**In what ways did Romanticism pave the way for our modern understanding/experience of war?**

The sense of being at war but not in war, or having military conflict filtered through media in ways that makes its violence both omnipresent and unreal: this is the primary way Romanticism prepares for a modern recognition of war at a distance. Romanticism also begins to articulate the very complicated sense of time we experience in a distant war. Repeatedly you find scenes of waiting: waiting for the news, waiting for someone to return from afar, waiting for a change, crisis or disaster. In such waiting, dread is wed to desire. That limbo of waiting runs up against other senses of time. Romantic literature formulated the thought that war opens up time, throwing us back to prior times and conflicts. The poet Byron wandered through war-torn Spain, recalling medieval battles; think now of how the war in Afghanistan calls up for us Vietnam and even earlier wars. At the same time, Romantic literature also formulated the sense—sometimes celebratory, sometimes pragmatic, sometimes despairing—that war will never end. Romantic writers came to understand time as the very register of war: in very direct ways, they gave us modern wartime.

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**Reading War Between the Lines**

We asked Mary Favret for an example of a text whose reflections on wartime are too submerged to be generally noticed. She offered this account of the Robert Frost poem, “Snow”:

One of the surprising discoveries for me, as I researched this topic, was the importance of the weather, not only for those fighting wars but also for those writing about it. During this first period of modern total war, poets turned to a long tradition in poetry, dating back to the *Iliad*, which represents warfare as a blanketing, obliterating snowfall. Some of the most famous writers of the Romantic period give us scenes where individuals assemble around the hearth or fireplace, often in convivial groups, while a fierce snowstorm annihilates the world outside. This stark depiction of home in wartime lives on: the most recent version I’ve found is “The Hearth,” a 2003 poem by the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet C. K. Williams. But I’ll highlight another poem in this vein by an earlier American poet, Robert Frost, writing during World War I. Most students are familiar with Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (1922) but he wrote elsewhere about snowy evenings, in the tradition that I’ve been tracking.

In his recently discovered poem, “War Thoughts at Home” (1918), Frost focuses on a woman looking out her window at a “bird war” in the snowy landscape. More powerfully, his earlier “Snow,” also written during World War I (1916), takes place at night in a Vermont farmhouse, during an obliterating snowstorm. “Snow” centers on a debate about whether Meserve, the narrator’s neighbor, ought to venture outdoors: “Hear the soft bombs of dust,” he says; “It bursts against us at the chimney mouth.” True to his name, he does serve, going outside:

> “Well, there’s—the storm. That says I must go on. That wants me as a war might if it came. Ask any man.”

But before he enters into this warring weather, he notices a wavering page in an open book and this prompts him to reflect on some of the things that preoccupied me as I concluded my research.

> “That leaf there in your open book! It moved Just then, I thought. It’s stood erect like that, . . . Trying to turn itself backward or forward. . . . Never mind, Things must expect to come in front of us A many times—I don’t say just how many— That varies with the things—before we see them. . . .”

Snow, uncertainty, and the peculiar play of time provide the texture of this wartime meditation. Frost, attentive to a long poetic tradition, discovers in the winter evening images for what we see and what we fail to see. In so doing he suggests to readers the difficulties that lie in bringing the truths of wartime home.

The dustcover to Frost’s calendar of poems, *From Snow to Snow*, features an illustration of the sort of landscape evoked in the poem “Snow.”
The U.S. Home Front during World War II
An Annotated Booklist Compiled by the Teen Services Staff at Monroe County Public Library

The African American Experience During World War II by Neil A. Wynn (2010, Rowman & Littlefield): A narrative look at the discrimination and segregation in the defense industry and armed forces faced by African Americans, and how key groups like the NAACP and the black press fought for equality, laying the groundwork for the civil rights movement. [940.53 Wyn]

Best Friends Forever, A World War II Scrapbook by Beverly Patt (2009, Marshall Cavendish): In this fictionalized scrapbook, what it means to be American is examined. Louise is devastated when her best friend Dottie, a Japanese American, is relocated to an internment camp. She decides to keep a record of their correspondence, adding newspaper clippings, photos, and journal entries. [J Patt]

City of Spies by Susan Kim (2010, First Second): When Lia moves to New York City's German district to live with her wealthy but eccentric aunt, she meets the poor son of the building's superintendent. The two unlikely friends stumble upon a Nazi spy ring in this thrilling, graphic novel about class and war-time New York. [Graphic Novels Kim]

Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston (1973, Houghton Mifflin): This first-person account of the Manzanar internment camp in desert-country California details the fear and anger, as well as dignity and resourcefulness, of the thousands of Japanese American citizens forced to "relocate" during World War II. [J 940.5317 Ho]

Flygirl by Sherri L. Smith (2009, G. P. Putnam's Sons): During the war, women were recruited to fly non-combat missions in the U.S. Ida Mae is an African American whose desire to help in the war effort is at odds with her need to pass as white in order to join the program. Once she makes the decision, she risks trouble with the government and alienation from her family. [Y Smith]

Friends and Enemies by LouAnn Bigge Gaeddert (1999, Atheneum): Patriotism conflicts with religious belief in a small Kansas town shortly after Pearl Harbor in this novel about William, a Methodist, and his friend Jim, a Mennonite and pacifist. [Y Ga]

The Green Glass Sea by Ellen Klages (2006, Viking): In 1943, Dewey Kerrigan lives with her scientist father in Los Alamos, New Mexico, as he works on a top secret government atomic program, and befriends an aspiring artist who is a misfit just like her. [Y Klages]

The Hoosier Community at War by Max Parvin Cavnes (1961, Indiana University Press): This somewhat academic survey is jam-packed with info on the creation of Crane Naval Base, how the war affected farming, industrial cities such as Gary, and a myriad of other aspects of the daily lives of Hoosiers during the war. [IND 940.53 Ca]

Is It Night or Day? by Fern Schumer Chapman (2010, Farrar, Straus & Giroux): Edith is sent from Germany to Chicago to escape Nazi persecution, and faces prejudice and fear for being Jewish and an "enemy German," and the uncertainty of her family's fate back in Germany. [Y Chapman]

Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War II by Emily Yellin (2004, Free Press): The war and entertainment industries, volunteer organizations, even undercover operations—women helped the war effort in America in thousands of ways not regularly remembered. This thorough, anecdotal account brings their forgotten history to life. [940.5308 Ye]
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