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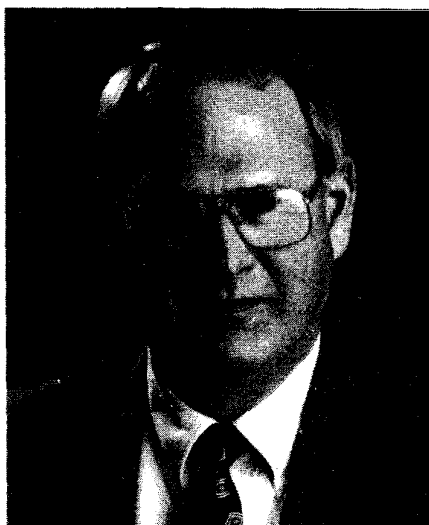
## "World War II: The Great Liberal War" by John Willson, Henry Salvatori Professor of Traditional Values, Hillsdale College

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Preview: *For today's generation, World War II is ancient history, with little to teach us about how modern life should be faced. Yet as Hillsdale professor John Willson points out in this month's Imprimis, the lessons of World War II are more important than ever. Readers should take note that he is not arguing that the U.S. should have remained isolationist at any price, or that our millions of servicemen and women fought in vain. (Dr. Willson's father served in every theater of the war, incidentally.) Rather, his message is that we must recognize the unavoidable costs of war, especially the cost to our own liberty. His remarks were delivered during a November 1991 Center for Constructive Alternatives seminar on the Hillsdale College campus.*

### **The War That Saved the New Deal**

My uncle will turn ninety in January. He retired from the federal bench at eighty-eight, and until a year ago played golf three times a week. Last November he fell at his hunting camp in the Pennsylvania woods. He refused to see a doctor and lived in terrible pain for two months. When they finally found out he had a broken shoulder and compressed twelfth lumbar vertebrae, the pain made sense to his wife and daughter. But he had changed: he sat around and slept in front of the television and lost interest even in the sports he loved so well. Then the United States went to war in the Persian Gulf. He revived. He started calling his friends again. He argued with the newsmen on TV. He took his physical therapy seriously. And one day my aunt said to their daughter, "Debbie, this war has been a godsend to your father!"



World War II was a godsend to American liberals. The New Deal had been dead in the water since 1937, torpedoed by its fundamental failure to effect an end to depression and its increasingly annoying meddling with traditional patterns of American life. Congressman Charles Halleck of Indiana predicted in 1936

Roosevelt's initiatives at least until the foreign policy crisis of 1939-1941, brought about by the wars in Europe and the Far East.

That crisis renewed the President's vigor and allowed FDR gradually to maneuver the United States into a position where it would have been astonishing had we not made those wars into World War II by our entrance. He was aided immeasurably by the recklessness of the Japanese in attacking Pearl Harbor and the arrogance of Hitler in declaring war against the United States four days later. Nothing unites people like a common enemy. And since foreign policy always reflects domestic policy (that goes for military policy, too), it should have surprised nobody that New Dealers geared up for war in New Deal ways. What happened between 1941 and 1945 was an expansion of the national state so vast as to be virtually irreversible.

We should take the time to notice that conservative Americans were pretty sure this would happen. Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, son of President William Howard Taft, a patrician educated for leadership, a traditional American from the heartland, is a case in point. "The

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that the "social experimentation and reckless extravagance of the New Deal are on the way out because the common sense of the American people is reasserting itself." Whatever the merits of Charlie Halleck's analysis, a "conservative coalition" of Republicans and southern Democrats blocked almost all of President

said in 1939, should be strength, independence, and "to preserve peace with other nations, and enter into no treaties which may obligate us to go to war." His reasons were reduced to two: we have little business trying to affect the outcomes of wars that are not ours

(and we have certainly shown that we have no ability to make peace); and war would "almost certainly destroy democracy in the United States."

Senator Taft was especially suspicious of the notion that we should "undertake to defend the ideals of democracy in foreign countries." He added that "no one has ever suggested before that a single nation should range over the world, like a knight-errant, protect democracy and ideals of good faith, and tilt, like Don Quixote, against the windmills of fascism." The national interest of the United States, he believed, was to protect liberty at home, not to extend it abroad. "We have moved far toward totalitarian government already," he said in 1939. "The additional powers [already] sought by the President in case of war, the nationalization of all industry and all capital and all labor...would create a socialist dictatorship which it would be impossible to dissolve once the war is over." To the argument that totalitarian ideas presented a universal menace to peace and freedom, Taft replied: "There is a good deal more danger of the infiltration of totalitarian ideas from the New Deal circle in Washington than there will ever be from any activities of the communists or the Nazi *bund*."

He opposed every Roosevelt war initiative, the draft and Lend-Lease particularly (although he supported a strong defense, especially an air force). He even refused a deal which may have given him the 1940 Republican presidential nomination, if he would turn just a little more internationalist. Once the bombs dropped on Pearl Harbor, how-ever, Taft knew which side he was on; "with a heavy heart" he voted for war. Four months

Former chairman of the division of social sciences, John Willson is currently the new Henry Salvatori Professor of Traditional Values at Hillsdale College. As the Salvatori chair, his plans include an upcoming video and pamphlet series on American history that emphasizes founding documents and the roles played by both famous and unknown figures in the shaping of the American experience. A past presidentially-appointed member of the Board of Foreign Scholarships, a syndicated columnist and a professor at St. Louis University, he has published articles in *Modern Age*, *Imprimis*, and the *University Bookman*, and has contributed to *Reflections on the French Revolution* (Regnery Gateway, 1990). Dr. Willson was elected "Professor of the Year" by the Hillsdale College classes of 1982 and 1991 and was chosen as one of the four best Michigan college/university teachers by the *Detroit Free Press* in 1988. 8

later he was still saying, "We need not have become involved in the present war." Earlier, he had written to his wife Martha: "I am very pessimistic about the future of the country—we are certainly being dragged towards war and bankruptcy and socialism all at once. Let's hope I'm wrong."

One of the many jokes the war played on the American people was that by late 1943 many devoted New Deal *liberals* thought he was wrong. In December of 1943 the President told the press that "Dr. New Deal," who was a specialist in internal medicine, had given way to "Dr. Win-the-War," an orthopedic surgeon. Soon after, speaking to a group of reformers, the New Deal poet laureate Archibald MacLeish lamented: "Liberals meet in Washington these days, if they meet at all, to discuss the tragic outlook for all liberal programs, the collapse of all liberal leadership and the defeat of all liberal aims."

What prompted his lament as well as FDR's change of physicians was a Congress which kept cutting back on New Deal programs. Wartime Congresses were made up of men with

cuts were off the tail of the New Deal; it bled a little, but no major arteries were touched.

MacLeish and his liberal friends were undoubtedly in near despair because they knew the stakes the war allowed them to play for. "We who win this war will win the right and power to impose upon the opening age the free man's image of the earth we live in. We who win this war will win the future." Robert Taft and his fellow conservatives understood this too, at least in part. And Taft also knew that "there is only one way to beat the New Deal, and that is head on. You can't outdeal them." He led all the fights to repeal the New Deal, and seemed to win some of them. Three examples, however, should show how temporary and incomplete his victories were.

First, the conservatives were patriotic Americans, and they wanted to win the war. Congress is only secondarily responsible for waging war. It falls to the President as Commander-in-Chief to take war-winning initiatives, and FDR ran a New Deal war. That is, his initiatives included crisis regulation the scope of which no American could have

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formidably conservative leanings, and while they usually authorized money, agencies, programs, regulations, and taxes to fight the war, they also looked upon some of the sillier, outdated, unworkable, and visionary New Deal programs with budget-chopping eyes. During 1942 and 1943 the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, the National Youth Administration, and the National Resources Planning Board—visible agencies all, from early on in the New Deal—got the axe. "It is well that Congress has denied funds to the NRPB," said the *Wall Street Journal*. "It might be rewriting the Ten Commandments next. Of course, it has already repealed the law of supply and demand." The Farm Security and Rural Electrification Administrations were cut back. Expansion of Social Security was put on hold. Federal aid to education, national health insurance, and regional TVAs got nowhere.

To this day, most historians who write about wartime liberalism call those chapters "The Waning of the New Deal," "The New Deal at Bay," "The Conservative Coalition." But liberals didn't look hard enough, then or now. The

dreamed of even as late as 1939. They included four main elements: price control (Office of Price Administration), rationing, command over production (War Production Board), and control of labor (National War Labor Board). Taken together they represented a bewildering interlocking complex of agencies, and they resulted in a command economy that differed only in tone and details from totalitarianism.

By 1943 government boards and agencies could (and *did*) tell Americans how much they could drive, what they could manufacture and how much, whether they could change jobs, raise rents, eat beef, or stay on the streets at night. Government built housing and tore it down, reorganized the entire automobile industry, created aluminum companies, and withheld new tires from trucks carrying objectionable items like booze, cigarettes and Orange Crush. In Oklahoma, which was still a Prohibition state, the OPA demanded that all speakeasies post ceiling prices for bootleg whiskey, My uncle once illegally traded rationing stamps so he could get champagne and caviar for my aunt on their wedding anniversary. He was fined and threatened with

arrest. My wife, as a little girl, almost cost her farm family their driving privileges for a month by pasting their gasoline stamps on the front windshield. *Gourmet* magazine reprinted a popular ditty:

"Although it isn't  
Our usual habit,  
This year we're eating  
The Easter Rabbit."

This was done in the name of emergency, of course, and there wasn't any *Gestapo* to enforce it. Most Americans who today remember wartime controls remember them with a certain amount of patriotic pride and nostalgia. But the size of the black market by 1944 (especially in cigarettes and silk stockings) shows that it wasn't fun at the time. It also shows that Americans didn't take the controls very seriously—except those Americans who took jobs writing and enforcing and lobbying for controls and exceptions to them. They would want to stay in Washington after the war, illustrating again the oldest law of government: once you've got it, it's hard to get rid of it. An observant Englishman said after the war: "Millions of Americans in 1939 had little or nothing to do with the government of the United States. Millions of Americans in 1944 looked forward to a near and victorious future in which they would have nothing to do with that government. They [would be] disillusioned."

## A Tale of Two Entrepreneurs

Second, the war rid New Deal liberalism of its most obvious enemy. A large chunk of big business was by 1945 married to big government.

Take Henry J. Kaiser. This paunchy, jowly, duckwaddling, table-pounding, oath-swearing package of pure energy took a sand and gravel business and made it into "an organization that combined the merits of a Chinese tong, a Highland clan and a Renaissance commercial syndicate with all the flexibility and legal safeguards of the modern corporation."

In the thirties Kaiser built dams (Boulder, Grand Coulee and others), and during the war he built ships—Liberty ships, small aircraft carriers, tankers, troop ships, destroyer escorts, landing craft—all on a cost-plus basis. In 1943 he garnered 30 percent of the national production total, over \$3 billion in contracts. His secret was not efficiency and quality, but who he knew and who they knew. He enlisted Thomas G. Corcoran ("Tommy the Cork"), a New Deal wonder boy turned lobbyist without peer, who got him into the War Production Board, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation

("the largest aggregate of lending agencies ever put together in the history of the world"), and the White House Map Room. He leased suites at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington and the Waldorf in New York, and settled in with a long-distance phone bill of \$250,000 a year.

Roosevelt wanted fast production, and Kaiser gave him speed; once he built a Liberty ship in fourteen days! His ships didn't last very long, and they didn't work very well, but he could produce so many that the war machine couldn't grind them up as fast as he could spit them out. When the big steel companies fell short of delivering the materials he demanded, he borrowed \$106 million from the RFC and made the Fontana steel plant, at no risk to himself. "Cheap at twice the loan," he would later say. And he knew also through his lobbyist friends that he would get the government facilities that made up so important a part of his empire at ten cents on the dollar after the war was over.

Kaiser saw himself, as he said to *Fortune*, as "at least a joint savior of the free-enterprise system." But he was very nearly the definition of what Professor Burt Folsom calls the "Political entrepreneur." Government supplied his capital, furnished his market, and guaranteed his solvency on the cost-plus formula. He was not required to make quality goods at low prices; just lots of goods, *fast*, at whatever prices he chose. Kaiser's empire was a huge public works agency, funded by taxpayer dollars. And this is the point: unlike earlier trial marriages, this one didn't break up! Divorce rates may have gone up all over the country after World War II, but business and government lived happily ever after.

Third, the war occasioned a tax structure that threatened to abolish profits and that provided the indispensable base for future liberal social experimentation. As much as Roosevelt played the class game during the Depression, as much as he tried to "soak the rich," he never got a revenue bill that matched his appetite through Congress until 1942. Even then Congress for the most part insisted on acting responsibly and taxing the citizens directly, rather than resorting to the administration's funny money schemes of unlimited borrowing and confiscating business revenues. But there was an "excess profits" tax, and payroll deductions became mandatory, and the rate for personal incomes over \$150,000 was 90 percent. This situation makes the wartime career of J.R. Simplot into either a parable or a new chapter of *Alice in Wonderland*.

Jack Simplot was an Idaho potato farmer whose entrepreneurial genius had made him a modest fortune during the hard years of the thirties, with no government contracts.\* "I

ain't no economist," he told a friend, "but I got eyes to see." By 1941 he had worked out an efficient process for drying onions and potatoes, and so was in a position literally to feed the nearly 16 million men and women of the armed forces. Here was the problem: in order to meet the incredible demand, he had to create on average a new business every month—a hog-lot to get rid of the millions of tons of potato skins and eyes and sprouts, phosphate plants to provide soil enrichment for his depleted fields, box factories for shipping his goods, lumber mills for materials to make the boxes. Each step involved enormous efforts of enterprise; each bottleneck threatened the entire enterprise.

Enter the IRS. A governing philosophy of New Deal liberalism was that profits were a form of theft. Because of his rapidly expanding income, and given the excess profits levies, price controls and confiscatory tax rates, Jack Simplot became a target for government commando attacks. Now think of it: this was a man who was literally feeding the U.S. army! He needed profits to invest, to meet the challenges of his dizzyingly expanding enterprises. He couldn't predict what the next challenge would be; real entrepreneurs rarely can. He had neither the time nor the temperament to explain to bureaucrats the necessities of box manufacture, fertilizer production, potato farming, or hog-feeding.

So, faced with confiscation, caught somewhere beyond the looking glass (between "the law and the profits," George Gilder says), he turned to lawyers. They created such a maze of interlocking corporations, using every member of Simplot's family and practically everybody he had ever given a "howdy" as directors and partners. The IRS had to spend so much time *finding* his money, that by the time they did it was gone to another use!

So Jack Simplot, who fed the troops and worked hours that most people didn't know existed and lived in less luxury than almost any Congressman, acquired a reputation as a tax-evader and war profiteer,

One could argue that these things turned out all right. The United States won the war, the ships got built, the soldiers got fed, everybody made a lot of money, and the Depression was over once and for all by 1945. This is true, but Bob Taft was also right, and he didn't want to be right. Despite the fact that the war frightened the liberals into thinking that the New Deal was over, it had really (1) expanded the regulatory state beyond their wildest dreams, (2) rid them of their most potent short-run enemy, the big corporations, and (3) provided them with the tax foundation on which they could build their postwar social agenda. The war had saved the New Deal.

\* His story is excitingly told in George Gilder's *The Spirit of Enterprise* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1984), pp. 32ff.

## The War That Politicized America

World War II was also the war that politicized America. Robert Nisbet has noted that the word is infelicitous (I would call it ugly), but indispensable for understanding the present age. "Now it is the politics of the family, the school, the Supreme Court and the environmental movement. Power, not money, is the great commodity to be brokered and traded."

Once again this was a matter of acceleration rather than point of origin. The war did not create politicization: basic Progressive-liberal ideas did. The New Deal nurtured politicization, and then World War II brought it to maturity. One of the war's most significant doctrines is especially pertinent to this part of the discussion: compulsory military service.

The Selective Service Act of 1940 was the nation's first peacetime draft. It was passed after the fall of

France and after a terrific political struggle in the United States Congress, which was in many ways the last political gasp of the isolationists. According to one biographer, James T. Patterson, Taft summed up his vigorous opposition: the draft is like roulette. It cruelly cuts into a young man's career, deprives him of his freedom of choice, leaves him behind in the competitive struggle with his fellows, and turns society into a garrison state. Of the nearly 16 million who would serve in the armed forces during the war, over 10 million were conscripts. The doctrine made the lives of all America's men through the age of thirty-five the property of the state.

Even at the time, many Americans realized its unlimited implications for the politicization of society. The influential economist Wesley C. Mitchell pointed out in 1943 that when the country agrees to pull its finest young men from their homes and occupations, causing them to accept low pay, physical discomfort, and "risk their lives in the horrible job of killing others," then there is nothing beyond

the scope of the state. "After common consent has been given to that act," he said, "*civilians are morally bound to accept the lesser sacrifices war imposes upon them.*" This is in fact one of the definitions of total war. When lives themselves are means to the end of military victory, then so is everything else. The political decision to draft our young men was the engine that drove all other elements of politicization.

The chief irony of the doctrine is contained in this sentence from the law itself: "In a free society the obligations and privileges of military training and service should be shared generally in accordance with a fair and just system of selective compulsory military training and service." If

after D-Day the issue temporarily disappeared.\* Furthermore, a series of veterans' buyouts collectively known as the "G.I. Bill of Rights" largely removed the issue from postwar politics. The G.I. Bill was to transform American higher education; it also cemented the state's control over its youth in place. The classroom replaced the foxhole. Government could take opportunity away, and government could also restore it; since the sequence went in that direction, compulsory service didn't surface as an issue again until the Vietnam quagmire recalled it.

Meanwhile the universities which would benefit from the G.I. Bill had become militarized in the war. Professor Merle Curti wrote, "The federal capital became the intellectual center of the nation." Government promoted research, enlisted scholars, and proved that both "were as necessary to war as to peace." Militarization of the intellect promoted politicization of the universities, perhaps the single most important social consequence of the entire war.

This is an enormous story, and deserves a far better telling than we can give it here. In fact, it has not been told satisfactorily at all. On one level it is a simple story: total war demanded gigantic and focused scientific research. The government had the money, and the universities had the scientists. Through the National Defense

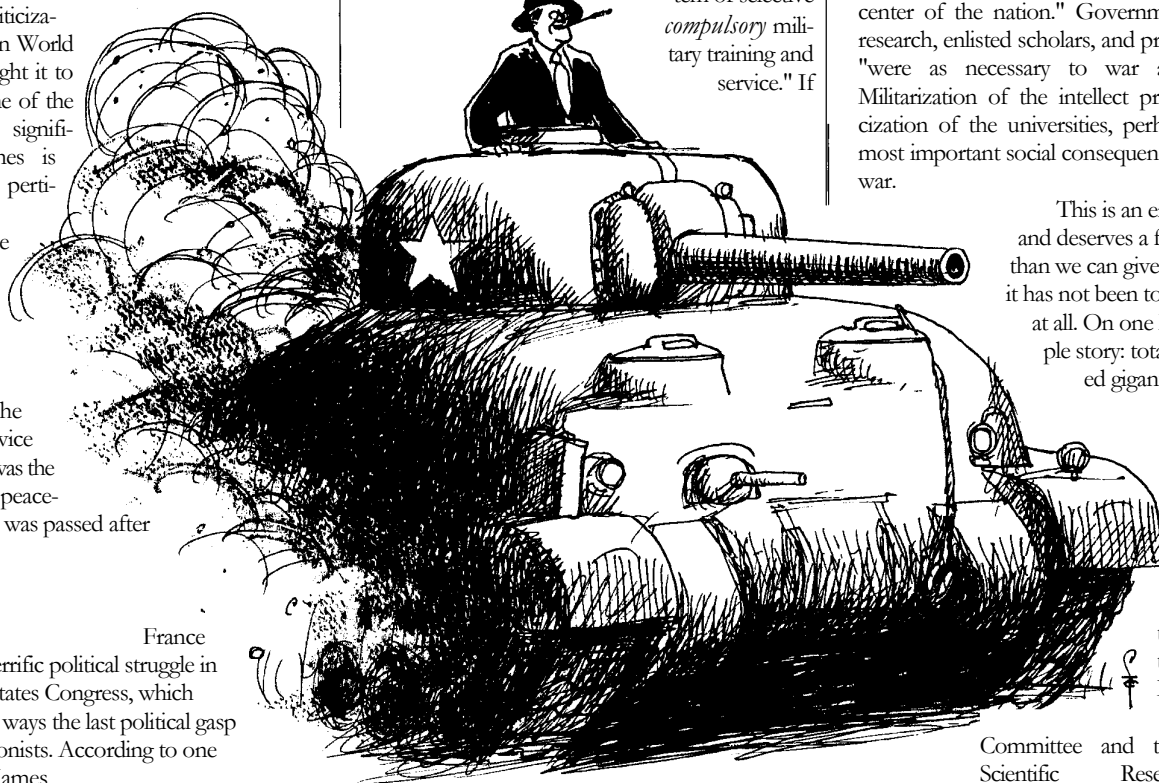
Research Committee and the Office of Scientific Research and

Development the government sponsored thousands of (mostly short-term) projects in hundreds of universities and colleges. The most celebrated was the Manhattan Project which produced the atomic bomb, but it was only the tip of the ice-berg. Vannevar Bush, head of the OSRD, offered the proposal that made the government-science relationship permanent in his 1945 report to the President, *Science—The Endless Frontier*.

Less visible were the thousands of academic intellectuals who flocked to the war effort—to OPA, OSS, OWI, and scores of other agencies. And less visible were the thousands of "social scientists"—economists, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, anthropologists — whose war-related research brought them into the government orbit. By 1945 four-fifths

free is compulsory, then life is property. In 1943 a logical extension of the doctrine led to proposals for "national service." For labor, this amounted to "work or fight." FDR, "consistently ambivalent" toward the "Citizens' Committee for a National War Service Act," decided in 1944 to support it. He insisted that "there can be no discrimination between the men and women who are assigned by the Government to its defense at the battle front and [those who] produce the vital materials essential to successful military operations."

A rare convergence of interests between labor and business, neither of which wanted a government-assigned labor force, allowed the Senate to tear a House-passed bill apart in 1944, and with victory over Germany in sight



\*The military counterpart to national service was "unconditional surrender," a doctrine Roosevelt forced on the British at the Casablanca Conference in 1943. Its logical conclusion was mass terror

bombing of civilians. Unlike national service, which was subject to the American political process, it *was* implemented.

of the nation's psychologists were involved in one way or another with the federal government. Anthropologists studied the "cultural constellations" that helped explain Japanese and German and Jewish behavior. Economists set prices and determined markets and generally congratulated themselves for helping to end the Depression. One economist revealed more than he knew when he said, "You can learn quite a lot about...an economy—by trying to run one." There was no doubt that the war experience seemed to make plausible the bright dream of a "science of society," funded by the national state.

But there is a more significant side to the story. Until World War II it was an unwritten law of the universities that academic freedom in part depended on the ability to steer clear of the national state and its nosy bureaucrats. Robert Nisbet says, "That changed dramatically in World War II when, by early 1942, the militarization of the university was well in progress. Courses were hastily adapted to 'national defense' curricula, young soldiers were marched from class to class, whole colleges were occasionally taken over for war training, and research was almost totally military in character in the sciences and remarkably so even in the humanities." Add these four background factors, and the stage was set by 1945 for the conversion of the university into virtually an arm of the national state and its liberal agenda: (1) The war generation remained in control of postwar universities, and impressed future generations with their newfound importance. (2) The G.I. Bill provided a new source of almost endless funding for postwar academic expansion. (3) The Progressive-liberal agenda had always included the dream of nearly universal education funded by the public. (4) Most academic people shared the liberal-progressive outlook.

One casualty was the emphasis on teaching. Prior to World War II the function of the American college and university had been to pass on our common memory through teaching. This did not mean that faculty members did no research; it meant that they knew that their first responsibility was to their students, and that their research was strictly subordinated to their teaching. The war allowed the liberal emphasis on *process* to emerge at the heart of the university function. Problem-solving research, the university as agent of and guide to change, students as method-learning creatures, rather quickly took the place of the old emphasis on substance, reflection, culture, and memory.

Academic entrepreneurs appeared: grant-getters, doing result-oriented, short-term research projects that could be published. Since their patronage came from outside (government and foundation money), these entre-

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preneurs gained leverage in their universities to define "contact hours," "teaching loads" and other elements of piecework.

Rewards and standards shifted away from the ideal of teaching, service and commitment to the academic *community*, and especially away from loyalty to school. The new academic nation *was* discipline-oriented, professional rather than institutional, institute-making, arrogant enough in its access to money that it created an academic star-system, first in the sciences but ultimately in economics, business schools *and even* humanities.

And it is crucial to understand that these changes put the universities in the service of the liberal-left agenda: social experimentation, economic planning, the growth of the state, destruction of absolutes, hostility to traditional religion—in general, an adversarial relationship with traditional American values and culture. It was all based, to a large extent, on unlimited access to taxpayers' money, but operated without accountability to tax-payers' values.

Total war also politicized the Constitution, or rather it completed the politicization that Roosevelt began when he tried to pack the Supreme Court in 1937. The Congress *and* the American people decisively rejected that attempt, so vigorously that the episode threatened to stop the New Deal in its tracks. But by use of his "emergency powers," FDR later managed to politicize the Constitution and alter it forever in the direction of national and executive power.

Clinton Rossiter once remarked, "Of all the time-honored Anglo-Saxon liberties, the freedom of contract took the worst beating in the war." Perhaps. But we should *turn* to a remarkable little book published in 1947, a series of lectures by the greatest American constitutional historian of this century, Edwin S. Corwin. It is called *Total War and the Constitution*. Professor Corwin argued that the enforced segregation of Japanese-Americans by Presidential executive order in 1942 *was* "the most drastic invasion of the rights of citizens of the United States by their own government that *has* thus far occurred in the history of our nation." It established the principle of "constitutional relativity," which simply *means* that since *there*

are no constitutional absolutes, the fundamental law of the land is what the national government, particularly the executive, says it is.

It would be no accident that the California governor who carried out FDR's executive order concerning the Japanese later became the Chief Justice who presided over two decades of Progressive political meddling by the Supreme Court: Earl Warren. Corwin had already predicted in 1947 that the war had so accelerated prior trends toward "constitutional relativity" that there would be no peacetime Constitution to return to; that the wartime Constitution had resulted in five major developments: (1) Congressional legislative power of "indefinite scope," (2) Presidential authority to stimulate the exercise of this indefinite power for "enlarged social objectives," (3) the right of Congress to delegate its powers to the President for the achievement of those objectives (but not clearly have the right to *reclaim* its authority!), (4) virtually unlimited Presidential "emergency powers," and (5) "a progressively expanding replacement of the judicial process by the administrative process in the enforcement of the law." Potentially, every part of American life was politicized.

### **The War That Restored the Redeemer Nation**

**I**n our foreign policy, World War II was the war that restored the redeemer nation. Senator Taft had known back in 1939 that our wars have a messianic quality, and although the hard-headed Congress of 1943-45 tried to minimize it, unconditional victory turned out to be a heady thing. As the United States geared up for more moral crusades in the Cold War, the wonderfully acid-tongued Clare Booth Luce labeled the new liberal inter-nationalism "globaloney." It is an important part of the story I have been trying here to tell, but it is a part that will have to wait for another time.

Let me close with a few remarks about the wounds given during the war to the traditional American institutions of family, church and local community. These wounds were direct results of total war, politicization and global crusading. The "little platoons" necessarily

suffer when great events set society on the move, kill off its young men, and send money, intellect and power to Washington. In some cases the wounds were flesh wounds—one thinks of the soaring divorce rate in 1945-46, which quickly leveled out for almost twenty years. War strains marriage, and the English bishop may have had something when he proposed a blanket indulgence for all war-separated couples who would simply renew their marriage vows in church.

Other wounds were more serious. Robert Taft favored federally subsidized public housing by 1946, precisely for reasons of family. Patterson reports that he felt that the Depression and war had so dislocated Americans and so disrupted their living patterns that modest, decent public housing was needed to preserve the family by ensuring it a decent environment.

That the conservative Taft had come to trust in a federal solution illustrated the truth of Professor Corwin's conclusion about the wartime effect on federalism, the traditional American doctrine which more than any other protected the integrity of neighborhoods and local communities: "Federalism...has ceased to be capable of obstructing the continued centralization of governmental power in the hands of the national government." This can be read as the epitaph for the traditional American way of life.

"The Best Years of Our Lives" swept nine major Academy Awards in 1946, which is a pretty good indication that it tugged on the American heartstrings pretty hard. It's the story of three servicemen who accidentally return together to the same home town—"Boone City," an Everytown USA. One is a Navy enlisted man

who had lost both hands, returning uneasily to (literally) the girl next door. Another is an older man, a sergeant who had been a rapidly rising banker before the war, coming home to a very charming and competent wife and two by now grown children. The third man is a glamorous officer, a much-decorated pilot who had been a soda jerk in a corner drugstore before the war and who had married a hot number who was in love with his uniform. All of them want to settle down. They want simple, decent things—jobs, security, family. All of them succeed. It is a life-affirming, family affirming movie—pretty awful in some ways, but guaranteed to evoke a tear or two from anyone who hears the rhythms of heartland America.

Yet there is a disquieting undertone. The handless Navy man, although he is very competent with his artificial limbs and learns to play "chopsticks" on the piano in his uncle's bar, is resigned to the fact that he will spend the rest of his life dependent not only on his family, but on his... government! The banker painfully, and somewhat drunkenly, comes to realize that the bank's profits are less important than its social responsibility to the community's poor people and returning veterans. There is no job in the system for the officer, whose wife leaves him when his money runs out, and he is reduced to women's work—selling perfume at the drug store, which has become part of a nasty, plastic and unfeeling chain.

The Heartland has become the Heel-land; profits are slimy, the home town has lost its soul; there isn't even a place for a man who saved its standard of living. The ugliest scene in the movie is at the lunch counter in the spiritless drugstore: a thick-necked, twisted,

shaggy browed, ugly man in a dark hat growls against the war and everybody who fought it. This troglodyte is obviously an old isolationist, unrepentant and not exactly politically correct. He is brought up to date with a right cross to the jaw.

This is not the main message of "The Best Years of Our Lives," but it has been Hollywood's main message more or less ever since. This message combined in interesting ways with very real social unravelling that the war also accelerated. Millions of women were not so much liberated as turned loose. Farmers and southern blacks didn't so much move to the city as they were *expelled* to the city. As money and intellect ran off to Washington, liberalism relied increasingly on the White House and the federal agencies staffed with ideologically sympathetic bureaucrats to corner the compassion market. The wounds of the little platoons of family, church and local community were left largely untreated.

The Progressive-liberal agenda had always been democracy and "Science," equality and relativism. Increasingly, liberals recognized that this agenda required national planning, national citizenship and *national culture*. The American people, largely undaunted even by the New Deal, continued for a long time to resist the agenda, in their hearts and in their votes. To a degree that it is uncomfortable to admit, the Great Liberal War overwhelmed them. Perhaps it had to be fought; I don't know. But these things must be said. Bishop Butler's words of two centuries ago still apply: "Things and actions are what they are and the consequences will be what they will be; why, then, should we desire to be deceived?" 4

## "Revitalizing the Teaching of American History

*John Willson*

As one of the nation's leading philanthropists, Henry J. Salvatori has a well deserved reputation for putting his dollars where his values are. He has been especially generous in supporting people, institutions, and projects that defend the basic ideas and values of our American experiment of liberty under law. Recently, in a discussion with Dr. Roche and me, Mr. Salvatori remarked that it wasn't very long ago that simple patriotism, respect for our ancestors, and vigilance for *our* liberties were "in our bones and in the air" around us. Because that doesn't seem to be true these days, he is particularly anxious to support projects that will get these values—and the legacy of the men and women who held them—back into the air we breathe.

It need not be done with a particular political or moral agenda in mind. The Constitution



George Roche, Henry J. Salvatori and John Willson met a year ago to discuss plans for revitalizing the study of American history in our schools.

of the United States and the basic documents of our common heritage are like the Bible in one important respect: they speak for themselves. One cannot confront them without acquiring awe and wonder at their wisdom and "self-evident" truth. The same is true about the character and values of the men and women who wrote those documents and who built this land.

The problem is, how can we get them back "in our bones"? For many years I have asked my freshman students at Hillsdale if they have read the Constitution all the way through. Not whether they *studied* it, but whether they merely *read* it. Almost three-quarters admit that they have not. If this is true at Hillsdale, which draws students particularly attuned to the importance of the American founding, what is the situation nationwide? Few of us doubt that

we have raised a generation of constitutional illiterates. About our many other basic documents and the stirring lives of their authors, our young people are even more ignorant. Rather than engage *in* more school and teacher-bashing, we would like *to* do something about it. Most of the teachers in our public schools are also victims of teacher education and university curricula that have emphasized process over substance, relativism over enduring values, and have sadly neglected the fundamental truth that the first task of education is to pass on the wisdom of our ancestors. At Hillsdale, we wish to do our part to restore the teaching of the American heritage.

A course called precisely that—"The American Heritage"—is required of all Hillsdale freshmen. It provides the model for this new

effort under the auspices of the Salvatori Chair in Traditional Values to reach a leadership community of teachers. "The American Heritage" at Hillsdale goes back to one of its most honored and respected teachers of history, Windsor Hall Roberts. Robert's mantle was assumed by such fine successors as Louis C. Pitchford and Arlan Gilbert.

In its current form, "The American Heritage" course is biographical and narrative, based on the premise that young people respond best to "living" history; it **Uses whenever possible** the original writings of the people we study. It also emphasizes **the immense power of myth in our lives—not myths that are "the opposite of fact,"** but, rather, in the ancient understanding of the term, myths that speak important truths to all people in all times and in all conditions. It is these that are meant to give the students a common source for "breathing in" the values of our heritage.

Hillsdale's first "Salvatori project" is to pub-

*tion* debates in the spring of 1788. Dickinson is little appreciated these days, but his devotion to what he called America's "experience," by which he meant the English common law, Greek and Roman republics, Christianity, and American colonial history, was without peer *in his* times. Three others will follow (and as many as fifteen are planned): "John Witherspoon's *Plan of Government and Discipline* of the Presbyterian Church, 1788"—Witherspoon, a *Scottish* immigrant, was the President of Princeton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the author



of a major draft of the organizational plan of the Presbyterian Church. He also translated the principles of the Scottish Enlightenment into American religion and education. Witherspoon's plans show the intimate

relation between Christianity and the American constitutional system.

"Arthur St. Clair and the *Northwest Ordinance of 1787*--the law which gave the westward movement most of its orderly features

and ensured the spread of constitutional government to the territories. Arthur St. Clair was the first governor of the upper Great Lakes

region, and although opinionated and some-times the county and township system and **the guarantee of American liberties on the frontier.**

"Timothy Dwight's *Greenfield Hill*, 1794"—a long poem by the President of Yale, **which** is the classic expression of the inherited **values** of the New England village. It is a hymn to the nearly universal

American culture of family, church and local community.

We hope that a national leadership community of teachers will respond to this series, test the essays in their classrooms, and work with us to make them more and more effective in refreshing the historical air we breathe. This little series will not by itself reform the teaching of American history and restore the fundamental values of our past. But it may give a beginning, by providing teachers and community leaders with practical materials and tested methods. Several years ago the great Southern novelist Andrew Nelson Lytle said:

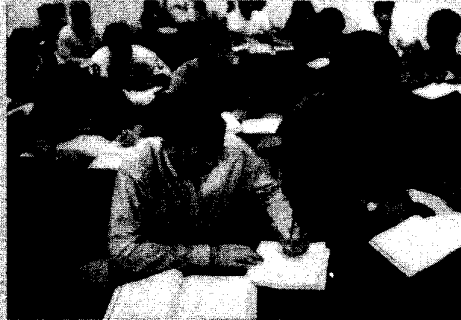
"If we dismiss the past as dead and not as a country of the living which our eyes are unable to see, as we cannot see a foreign country

but know it is there, then we are likely to become servile. Living as we will be in a leaser sense of ourselves, lacking that fuller knowl

edge which only the living past can give, it will be so easy to submit to pressure and *receive what is already ours* as a boon from authority."

Never has Mr. Lytle's warning been more poignant. We at Hillsdale wish to heed it in this modest way, with **Henry Salvatori's** gener

ous help.



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