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Tanks and Tinsel: The American Celebration of Christmas during World War II

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in History

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Abstract

“Tanks and Tinsel: The American Celebration of Christmas during World War II” is an examination of the American celebration of Christmas during World War II. As the first comprehensive investigation into the most well-known holiday in Western culture and its role in shaping Americans’ experience and understanding of the war, it contributes to historical scholarship in three ways. First, it continues the trend of blending analyses of society into military-focused narratives of the war, and it expands the scope of this by fusing the literature of War and Society with that of Holiday History. Second, it challenges traditional views of the home front by highlighting that Christmas helped to solidify the importance of consumption in the American psyche. Third, it offers an argument as to how American identity and patriotism were tied to these consumerist values and shows how American business leaders and the government used the traditions and rituals associated with Christmas to articulate what servicemen and citizens ought to be fighting for. The celebration of Christmas provided reminders of, and hopes for, times of stability and prosperity in the United States. The holiday’s cultural capital was harnessed to encourage wartime consent, privilege particular values, and structure how individuals and communities, both foreign and domestic, would view America and the war.

Keywords

World War II, America, Home Front, Christmas, Culture, Consumerism, Advertising, Tradition, Identity, Government Policy, Rationing, Women and Children, Community, American Military.

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List of Abbreviations

Archives:

IWM – Imperial War Museum - London
KEW – British National Archives
LOC – Library of Congress
NARA – National Archives and Records Administration
NYHS – New York Historical Society
NYCMA – New York Municipal Archives
NYU – New York University
SNMAH – Smithsonian National Museum of American History

Newspapers and Magazines:

AC – *Atlanta Constitution*
AG – *American Girl*
BG – *Boston Globe*
BL – *Boys' Life*
CD – *Chicago Defender*
CDT – *Chicago Daily Tribune*
CSM – *Christian Science Monitor*
HC – *Hartford Courant*
LAT – *Los Angeles Times*
LHJ – *Ladies' Home Journal*
MFP – *Manzanar Free Press*
NYT – *New York Times*
PI – *Printers' Ink*
RB - *Redbook*
SandS – *Stars and Stripes*
SEP – *Saturday Evening Post*
WHC – *Women's Home Companion*
WSJ – *Wall Street Journal*
WP – *Washington Post*

Other:

EFM – Expeditionary Force Message
ODT – Office of Defense Transportation
OPA – Office of Price Administration
OPM – Office of Production Management
OWI – Office of War Information
UNRRA – United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
WPB – War Production Board

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Introduction

Coming Home to Christmas

After serving for two years in Iceland, Private First Class Jimmy Ludkin returned to his parents' home in Philadelphia to be greeted by none other than a real live Christmas tree in the family living room. While this might not seem particularly startling in December, considering it was April 3, 1945, it brought the private quite a shock. His parents had kept the tree alive for months so Jimmy "could take down the decorations – as he had always done."¹ Christmas was not just a marker of time, an indicator of the years spent far from home, but also an experience that servicemen missed having with their families while they were in the service.² Therefore, upon their return, some decided to use Christmas – its symbols and traditions – as a gesture to welcome their loved ones home. Private Ed Glacken's family in Washington also bought a tree, decorated it, and gave each other Christmas presents so they could have their own Christmas party after Glacken had returned from the battlefields of Europe in June 1945.³ These celebrations were also not confined to only family get-togethers. Whole communities joined in to throw the boys Christmas parties upon their homecoming, regardless of the time of year. Christmas came to Chicago in July 1945, when fifteen servicemen, and their wives and children, were given a seasonal show, complete with Ed Ballentine and his Kris Kringle orchestra playing "White Christmas," "Jingle Bells," and other yuletide music, accompanied by a tree, mistletoe, and a "mountain of gifts."⁴ The Mayor of Norwalk, Connecticut, proclaimed the entire town would observe Christmas on August 8, 1945. The community held a party for one hundred local veterans that day; the press described it as "on the joyous side with jingle bells, Santa Claus, reindeer, sleighs, and

¹ *Stars and Stripes (SandS) London*, Apr. 3, 1945, 4.

² A note on terminology. Throughout this dissertation I use the terms 'troops,' 'personnel,' and 'servicemen' to refer to all branches of the armed forces, rather than stating Army, Navy, or Air Force each time. Additionally, I also intend for these statements to be considered gender-neutral; while the majority of these individuals were male, there were women who served as well. Additionally, there are times when these phrases are meant to also encapsulate the support personnel who also were stationed abroad and served the military in various capacities, though they were not officially part of the armed forces.

³ *SandS Marseilles*, Jul. 11, 1945, 3.

⁴ "Yule in July Party for GIs To Go On Air," *Chicago Daily Tribune (CDT)*, Jul. 25, 1945, 14.

presents for all the honorary guests.”⁵ Norwalk’s August Christmas also included a parade, a choir performance by the local high school, and a pageant to select a Miss Mistletoe to represent the town throughout these celebrations.

These festive displays, spread across the country, reveal that Christmas and the traditions and rituals associated with its celebration were deeply ingrained in American culture. Whether simple or elaborate, Christmas was chosen as a method to welcome Americans home from the horrors of war and provide them with joy and comfort in a particularly American way. Clearly, those on the home front recognized the meaning the holiday held in the minds of those who had been separated from their loved ones, and also realized the power it had to convey a particular sense of what it meant to be an American. Considering the ease with which people separated the celebration from the 25th of December, the supposed date of the birth of Jesus Christ, perhaps it was not the religious connotations of the holiday that they were identifying with most strongly. The secular emblems and actions these parties featured indicate what Americans wanted Christmas to be most of all. As this was used to welcome their veterans back into society, it also highlights what they regarded as the most valuable parts of the American way of life. The gifts indicate the value of capitalist-fueled consumption; the trees and décor indicate an appreciation for wealth and abundance; and the collective parties indicate the value of community – although it was a community founded on the Christian, white, middle-class image that dominated the mainstream media of the time. What constituted the American way of life or American identity was as infinitely malleable then as it is now. While there are certain features that seem to be fixed, such as ideas of freedom, liberty, and individualism, these, in many ways, can and have shifted substantially depending on what the user wants to achieve and what the circumstances call for.

Christmas during World War II reflected America’s belief in an idealistic patriotism that was simultaneously nostalgic for a simpler past and optimistic about a prosperous and generous future for the nation. Both top-down and bottom-up forces shaped the formation of this understanding during the war and in many ways those supposedly controlling the top-down

⁵ “Norwalk Bells Jingle for August Yuletide,” *Christian Science Monitor (CSM)*, Aug. 1, 1945, 1.

process were extremely vulnerable and reactive to the realities of the war and the actions of the American people. The following chapters explore this process and argue that Christmas functioned not only as a comforting tradition but also as an agent of conformity and cohesion. Advertising executives and government officials shaped the contours of the holiday to fit within wartime realities, motivate desired behaviors, and cultivate a profit. American citizens – individually, communally, and abroad – responded to this narrative by shaping their personal experience of the holiday to fit their own needs and give meaning to the conflict. The celebration of Christmas became tied to what the war was being fought to protect. For individuals, the aspects of the holiday that they embraced reveal what they thought it meant to be a patriotic American. Government and business leaders worked to ensure that the meaning people gave to the war through Christmas accorded with their priorities. With traditional home life shattered by the war, American state and corporate leaders attempted to foster the unity of the American people by using the ‘magic’ associated with Christmas to articulate what citizens and servicemen ought to be fighting for – a strong nation backed by a liberal-capitalist economy.

Literature Review

By using Christmas as a lens to look at the war years, some of the central debates in the field of War and Society, namely the nature of wartime experience, the question of change versus continuity, and the manufacturing of consensus, can be examined from a new angle in the American context. In this study, I evaluate Christmas as a public event, one that continued despite the civilian society being mobilized and fully engaged in a global conflict. Therefore, this study brings together the literature on the subject of Christmas, and holidays more generally, with studies of War and Society. Additionally, given the importance of advertising for both the war and the celebration of Christmas on the home front, this literature is also of vital importance. This dissertation examines how the traditions of Christmas co-existed with and often influenced the social and political realities of war. By seeing Christmas as a publicly celebrated holiday that continued throughout the war, it also becomes a public statement related to the war. Therefore, it is critical to ask what that statement was, why it was being made, and who was making it. Was American Christmas in World War II a product of national consensus, and if so, who manufactured and managed it? I argue that

while leaders in the government and business community may have manipulated the meaning to suit their needs, the American people accepted this message because it fit with their conception of what it meant to be an American.

Christmas

Before Christmas during the war can be analyzed, it is first necessary to establish what Christmas in America looked like and what functions it served prior to the conflict. For some time, critical historical study of Christmas was neglected. Those who did write on the subject perpetuated a timeless and sentimental view of the celebration. In the British context, J.A.R. Pimlott's *The Englishman's Christmas* (1978) changed this by offering a nuanced perspective that considered the role of religious revival and humanitarian movements in shaping Christmas from its pagan roots to what emerged in the Victorian period.⁶ Influenced by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), works such as J.M. Golby and A.W. Purdue's *The Making of the Modern Christmas* (1986) and Gavin Weightman and Steve Humphries' *Christmas Past* (1987) sought to show how Christmas was 'reinvented' in the Victorian period to adjust its communal function to the realities of industrial society, namely the anonymity and disjointed nature of the city and the rising wealth of the middle class.⁷ This idea of Christmas as an invented tradition was central to the rise of critical studies of the holiday, and for some time has dominated the major debates of the field.⁸

⁶ J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman's Holiday: A Social History* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1976), 5 of his 13 chapters are devoted to the Victorian period.

⁷ Eric John Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); John M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The Making of the Modern Christmas* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 2000); Gavin Weightman and Stephen Humphries, *Christmas Past* (London: Sigwick & Jackson, 1987).

⁸ While there has been backlash to this understanding, namely with Ronald Hutton's *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1996), generally this has become foundational in the literature. Mark Connelly's *Christmas: A Social History* (I.B. Tauris, London: 1999) also rejected the invention narrative, arguing that from 1780 to 1952 Christmas had been relatively consistent as a celebration of English national identity, but this rejection was more semantic (he preferred to call it "inflation") than in actual substance.

In the American context, James Barnett's 1954 study *The American Christmas: A Study in National Culture* was the standard until the 1980s. While his work is still useful as a discussion of how various customs fused and dissent declined to allow a national holiday to emerge, more recent studies offer critical answers as to why this change took place when it did.⁹ Steven Nissenbaum's *The Battle for Christmas* is seminal in this regard. He argues that the American Christmas was reformed by the middle class in the nineteenth century to be more respectable and domestically-focused, as opposed to the communal, carnivalesque celebration that was becoming a threat to modern society.¹⁰ Nissenbaum was also critical for establishing the idea that Christmas rituals "have long served to transfigure our ordinary behavior in an almost magical function, in ways that reveal something of what we would like to be, what we once were, or what we are becoming despite ourselves."¹¹ This idea is integral to this study as I seek to understand how Americans constructed their identity within the context of the upheaval of World War II. Through the way people participated in Christmas rituals, it is possible to see what Americans wanted to be, and be seen as, by analyzing how individuals, communities, companies, and government agencies fit the season into the realities of war.

Other studies of Christmas in America include those of Penne Restad and William Waits. Restad's is more general, covering the colonial period to the twentieth century, though it focuses considerably on the nineteenth century and presents the holiday as "ever-changing... through the interaction of political, social, economic, and religious realms."¹² Waits sees industrialization and urbanization as critical to the development of the modern Christmas, as opposed to religion especially. Important was his assessment of the rise of consumerism in the modern Christmas, which he dated later than Restad or Nissenbaum (the 1880s as

⁹ James Harwood Barnett, *The American Christmas; A Study in National Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1954).

¹⁰ Here he draws on the work of E.P. Thompson to understand the rowdiness of "urban gang violence and Christmas season riots" in relation to growing class tension. Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), xi.

¹¹ Nissenbaum, xii.

¹² Penne L. Restad, *Christmas in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), ix.

opposed to the 1840s).¹³ Waits finds the period from 1880 to 1920 as one that saw a shift from handmade to manufactured gifts, as well as an increase in the volume of gifts given. He also illuminates how manufacturers and retailers were able to conceal the materialist meanings of these gifts by displaying them in relation to emblems of the holiday that worked to give them a deeper meaning.¹⁴ Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (1995) also dealt with the consumerist aspects of Christmas, as well as other holidays, to reveal a relationship between Christianity and consumer culture. He argued, unlike Waits, that despite its secular nature on the surface, Christmas symbolism, like Santa Claus, is meant to evoke a sense of spiritual awe. Schmidt also emphasized that, in many ways, the Church, and the market were intimately connected in the development of modern holidays.¹⁵

Other historians have considered particular aspects of the holiday. Karal Ann Marling looked critically at the material and visual culture of Christmas to reveal the feelings that particular objects and scenes are meant to inspire in onlookers. For example, she argued that the effect of shop window displays could enhance desire through visual drama, but could also act as a barrier for those who could not afford its wares.¹⁶ Elizabeth Pleck's *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture and Family Ritual* (2000) and John Gillis *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (1996) both argued for the role of holidays more broadly in constructing modern interpretations of the family; they worked to contextualize these celebrations within broader historical subject areas.¹⁷ However, as historian Neil Armstrong argued, "While the history of private life is important, it should not

¹³ William B. Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America: A Cultural History of Gift Giving* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Penne L. Restad, *Christmas in America*; Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*.

¹⁴ Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America*.

¹⁵ Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying & Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Karal Ann Marling, *Merry Christmas!: Celebrating America's Greatest Holiday* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 84.

¹⁷ Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); John R. Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

obscure the importance of Christmas as a public culture, which, particularly in the late nineteenth century, comes to have new meanings in civic, national, and philanthropic contexts.”¹⁸

Festive culture studies have also sought to establish the connection between festivals and national identity. This includes, for the American context, the more general descriptors of festivities celebrated, such as Jack Santino’s *All Around the Year: Holidays and Celebrations in American Life* or Robert Meyer Jr.’s *Festivals U.S.A. and Canada*, as well as the more theoretical approaches such as the edited collections *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation: American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early 20th Century* and *We Are What We Celebrate: Understanding Holidays and Rituals*.¹⁹ In regards to the more theoretical approaches, many of the authors point to the need to understand the power of festivities and why it is important to study them critically, as they are particularly valuable for deepening our understanding of the past. For example, Genevieve Fabre, Jürgen Heideking, and Kai Dreisbach note the importance of seeing “ceremonies, rituals, myths, and symbols as keys for the understanding of deeply held popular attitudes and values as well as for the mechanisms of social integration or exclusion.” They are where “citizens communicate, reflect on, or ‘negotiate’ the meaning of their common experiences.”²⁰ Christmas functioned as a large-scale community and national festival that transmitted meaning to and from those who participated in it. These sentiments are true given almost any large-scale public celebration or event, but they are exceedingly relevant given the calamity of World War II as people had an urgent need to evaluate the meaning of their lives. Important for this study are also the sociological and anthropological discussions surrounding gift-giving and what these mean in

¹⁸ Neil Armstrong, “Christmas in Nineteenth-Century Britain and America: A Historical Overview,” in *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 1 (2004), 125.

¹⁹ Amitai Etzioni and Jared Bloom, eds., *We are what we celebrate: understanding holidays and rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Geneviève Fabre, Jürgen Heideking and Kai Dreisbach, eds., *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation: American festive culture from the Revolution to the early twentieth century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001); Robert Meyer, *Festivals: U.S.A & Canada* (New York, Washburn, 1970); Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Celebrating the Family*; Jack Santino, *All Around the Year: Holidays and Celebrations in American Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

²⁰ Fabre and Heideking, “Introduction,” in *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation*, 1.

various societal contexts. Much of the work that has been done on this subject consider Marcel Mauss's *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (1954) to have laid the groundwork. He broke down the obligations associated with the practice, to both give and receive, as well as norms of reciprocity. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of this practice for maintaining and securing social relations, and consequently infused with power.²¹ Therefore, Christmas in the American context, and its keen fixation on ritual gift exchange was, in many ways, a demonstration of power, social order, and reciprocal obligations. In relation to Christmas, Santa as the "master bearer of Christmas toys and gifts" therefore carries and diffuses power relations amongst those for whom he provides his services. However, he is also a symbolic display of goodness, as Claude Levi-Strauss posited: "Is it not that, deep within us, there is a small desire to believe in boundless generosity, kindness without ulterior motives, a brief interlude during which all fear, envy, and bitterness are suspended?"²² These plural functions of the social obligations of gift-giving functioned to uphold the social relationships muddled by wartime separation and worked to make Christmas shopping an act of good citizenship, even in light of broader calls for sacrifice in the name of victory.

Given the profound power that historians see holidays as having over the lives of individuals, and the ability of these celebrations to shape the way we think and act, more study of them is critical. This is especially so in wartime, given the heightened aura of both emotionality and uniformity – two elements also found in the experience of holidays. In a time of war, there is an intensified desire for communal unity, an enhanced fear of the other, and a deeper concern over things deemed to be a threat to the national community.²³ To understand how Christmas

²¹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, trans. W.D. Halls; foreword Mary Douglas, (Norton: New York, 1990)

²² J. Richardson and C. Simpson, "Children, gender and social structure: An analysis of the contents of letters to Santa Claus," in *Child Development*, Vol. 53, No.2 (1982): 429; C. Levi-Strauss, "Father Christmas executed," in *Unwrapping Christmas*, ed. Daniel Miller, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 50).

²³ Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

functioned within this context, it is also important to understand the work that historians have done in the field of War and Society.

War and Society

The field of War and Society has grown to include a wide range of subjects, including race, religion, consumption, class, gender, culture, and many other topics outside of the more traditional subjects related to war, namely mobilization, politics, diplomacy, economics, and technology.²⁴ The aim of including many of these other subject areas is to heighten understanding of wartime experience, war's lasting changes in contrast to continuity to pre-war times, and the effect of war on the structure and cohesion of society at large.

It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that scholars turned their attention directly to World War II, as for several decades following the conflict, historians were more focused on studying either the New Deal or the Cold War. One of the first to undertake an investigation of the American home front during that period was Richard Polenberg. His 1972 study, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945*, discussed those critical years in terms of the economic and political changes, as opposed to John Morton Blum's seminal work *V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (1976), which considered the effects of the war on society and American culture.²⁵ What made Blum's work path-breaking was how he fused culture, ideology, and meaning into an analysis of subjects like state

²⁴ Here is a brief selection to demonstrate the range of topics: John Morris, *Culture and Propaganda in World War II: Music, Film and the Battle for National Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women during World War II* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981); John E. Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); John Costello, *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-45* (London: Collins, 1986); Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); M. F. Snape, *God and Uncle Sam: Religion and America's Armed Forces in World War II* (Martlesham: The Boydell Press, 2015).

²⁵ Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972); John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1977). Culture, in the context of this dissertation, refers less so to 'high culture' and more so to everyday culture, meaning the customs, values, and way of life of a particular society, or elements of that society. Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* 2nd Edition, (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 34.

policy, business, economics, and foreign relations. He was also one of the first to incorporate sources from popular culture, like advertisements, in addition to more traditionally used official archives. The fiftieth anniversary of the war began in 1989, and with it, more historians turned their attention to the subject and sought to understand how it had impacted America society. Generally, these studies followed two areas of focus. The first was whether the war was a major *dividing* moment in American history, in terms of its impact and lasting change, and the second was whether the war was a major *defining* moment in American history regarding the ‘good war’ myth and the question of national unity and identity. Within these broad interpretations, works on daily life, culture, entertainment, and advertising in the war began to emerge.²⁶ Important to my research was the collection *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II* (1996), edited by Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch.²⁷ The contributors to this collection offer analysis of some of the broad topics of consideration in the field, like the quest for national unity and the formation of an ‘American Way,’ by looking at particular aspects of American culture and using them to show the creation of a new American identity during the war. This dissertation seeks to do something similar, highlighting the role of Christmas in shaping the American identity that formed in World War II. Furthermore, this collection was also useful for reference in regards to the interplay between official and cultural source materials, such as those created by the government or Hollywood, in the formation of a social order.²⁸ In charting the effects of wartime mobilization on American culture, other important studies include *The Impact of War on American Life: The Twentieth Century Experience* (1971) edited by Keith Nelson, John Costello’s *Virtue Under Fire: How World War II Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes* (1985), and Allan M. Winkler’s *Home Front U.S.A.: America*

²⁶ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); Doherty, *Projections of War*; Eugenia Kaledin, *Daily Life in the United States, 1940-1959: Shifting Worlds* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000); John W. Jeffries, *Wartime America: The World War II Home Front* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1996); Lewis A Erenberg and Susan E Hirsch, eds., *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²⁷ Erenberg and Hirsch, *The War in American Culture*.

²⁸ *Ibid*, part 1, especially.

During World War II (1986).²⁹ These works also highlight the interplay of policy and industry in shaping society throughout the war.

Cooperation between business and government worked in many ways to achieve wartime aims. For example, the government convinced Hollywood to use its popularity to mobilize public opinion, as Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black demonstrated in *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies*. The government also was able to considerably shape the content of wartime films; according to Koppes and Black, “the wartime experience can only be understood in that larger context of censorship.”³⁰ The advertising industry was also central to this in its role of constructing and projecting particular government messages to the American people.

Frank W. Fox analyzed businesses’ use of the war to sell products, and the direct link made between consumerism and freedom in *Madison Avenue Goes to War: The Strange Military Career of American Advertising, 1941–45* (1975). He also demonstrated the importance of corporate selling in shaping a dominant view of the war, something that the following chapters demonstrate Christmas was an important part of.³¹ While war elevated the contradictions of advertising and provided critics with one final chance to try to regulate it, the war ultimately solidified the industry as an indispensable institution through its relationship with the government, as Inger Stole has demonstrated in *Advertising at War: Business, Consumers and the Government in the 1940s*.³² In the 1930s, advertising had been defended as a tool for increasing consumer demand during the Depression. When the government contacted leaders in the industry to request help for mobilizing home-front

²⁹ Keith L. Nelson, ed., *The Impact of War on American Life: The Twentieth-Century Experience* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Costello, *Love, Sex and War*; Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.: America during World War II*, (Arlington Heights: H. Davidson, 1986).

³⁰ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: Patriotism, Movies and the Second World War from Ninotchka to Mrs Miniver* (London: Tauris Parke, 2000), viii.

³¹ Frank W. Fox, *Madison Avenue Goes to War: The Strange Military Career of American Advertising, 1941-45* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1975).

³² Inger L. Stole, *Advertising at War: Business, Consumers, and Government in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

campaigns, it was Madison Avenue's moment to show how patriotic and indispensable it could be. As James Sparrow demonstrated in his 2011 work *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government*, "admen and copywriters, radio and film producers, newsmen, and commercial illustrators all devoted their time and skill to public productions that sold the 'Fifth Freedom' of private enterprise as much as they did the other four."³³ Many of these individuals were also 'dollar-a-year men,' industry leaders who remained on their company payroll while on loan to the government. This allowed them to support and encourage their colleagues to ensure that production goals were met, while also safeguarding a good outcome for their business in the long-term.

Advertising and Identity

Many scholars have investigated the consumerist nature of the United States specifically, yet this literature tends to pass over the war as well as the consumerist nature of holidays.³⁴ Some of the most influential works on the role of advertising in the United States for this study are Roland Marchland's *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*, William Leach's *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* and Jackson Lears's *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*.³⁵ They focus on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and provide important perspectives regarding retail displays, parades, the allure and magic of the marketplace, and the power of advertising and its relation to American identity. They all

³³ The other four were the freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of speech and freedom of religion. James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

³⁴ A selection of this scholarship includes Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf Publishers, 2003); Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Joel R. Evans, ed., *Consumerism in the United States: An Inter-Industry Analysis* (New York: Praeger, 1980); Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

³⁵ Roland Marchland, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

demonstrate the strong connection between the market and the American way of life. This link is important to consider in relation to the war. As Jim Jefferies argued in his work on America in wartime, the conflict did not revolutionize American values or norms; rather, given the intense upheaval of the period, it was clear that attempts were made to continue the values of old.³⁶ In other words, people generally envisioned post-war America as simply a more prosperous version of pre-war America. While both Leach and Lears offer insight into how American advertising and merchandising institutions began, they do not analyze what allowed them to continue into the mid-twentieth century, especially through a time of significant conflict that put strain on societal norms.³⁷

In *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, Warren Susman interrogated the history of American culture in an age of massive governmental expansion. This, coupled with what he refers to as a communication revolution (denoting the social change that stemmed from “new sources of energy, [which] made possible the amazingly rapid movement of people, goods, services, and ideas”), created a rapidly changing world, within which American society had to define itself.³⁸ He showed how American identity was formed between the binaries of the values of production versus consumption, work versus leisure, saving versus spending, and frugality versus abundance. Advertising and advertisers played a key role, in his assessment, as “advertising became not only a new economic force essential in the regulation of prices but also a vision of the way the culture worked: the products of the culture became advertisements of the culture itself.”³⁹ According to Susman, advertisements reflected the culture of Americans back to them and defined where American identity would settle along the varying spectra. Under this

³⁶ Leach, *Land of Desire*; Lears, *Fables of Abundance*; Jeffries, *Wartime America*.

³⁷ Other works that continue this theme into the post-war era yet also shed little to no light on the role of holidays include Thomas Hine, *I Want That! How We All Became Shoppers: A Cultural History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002); Cynthia Lee Henthorne, *From Submarines to Suburbs: Selling a Better America, 1939-1959* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³⁸ Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* 1st ed., (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), xx.

³⁹ *Ibid*, xxiv.

interpretation, we can see how the mixed messages of World War II fit or did not fit with pre-existing values and norms, and how advertising played an important role in communicating appropriate interpretations, especially in terms of consumer behavior, as part of the duty of citizenship to the American people.⁴⁰

Leach's *Land of Desire* highlighted merchants rather than advertisers, and a key point to his argument is that the "power to project a vision of the good life and make it prevail has the most decisive power of all."⁴¹ This was true in wartime when people desperately sought a positive vision of the future. Advertisers were given the power to construct this image through their connection with the government, and they did. Leach built on Roland Marchland's 1985 work *Advertising the American Dream*, which examined the needs and desires of consumer society and saw them both refracted and projected within advertising. Some of Leach's critical arguments include the emergence of ideals of modernity and the way in which advertising presented a "logic of living" that emphasized satisfaction. Advertising allowed people to understand progress through their belief in the American Dream and were told that consumption was the way to attain that dream for themselves. According to Leach, society was not being encouraged to buy specific things, but rather being encouraged to value and constantly desire new things in general.⁴²

Lears' *Fables of Abundance* placed advertisers in a slightly different role, that of stabilizers of the marketplace. By containing and rationalizing society's desire for commodities, he argued that advertising collaborated with dominant cultural institutions to produce dominant ideals of personal identity.⁴³ Advertisements had the power not only to encourage buying certain goods but also to "signify a certain vision of the good life; they validate a way of

⁴⁰ Wendy Wall, *Inventing the "American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); Gerstle, *American Crucible*; Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890 - 1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

⁴¹ Leach, *Land of Desire*, xiii.

⁴² *Ibid*, 381.

⁴³ Lears, *Fables of Abundance*.

being in the world.”⁴⁴ This was exactly the power the government sought to tap into during World War II. The American government used this power to promote a certain way of acting (how to be a good, patriotic citizen), an action that was validated as a means to help win the war.

Advertising functioned in this way as a promoter of government initiatives, but as previous scholars have shown, its power in transmitting this message also functioned to shape Americans’ understanding of themselves and their society. The study of the role of advertising in shaping the identity of Americans, both individual and collective, which Susman, Leach, Lears, and Marchland all worked to do, is an important thread to continue into the war years. Even though there were many wartime realities the government and business community had to adapt to, they largely had to work to construct their advertisements within a pre-war values framework in order to compel people to act.

Prior to the war, the advertising industry had gone through several key developments. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rise of mass production, made possible through technological innovations in industrial manufacturing, shipping, and communication, contributed to the growth of national advertising. Many competing products, now being sold across the country, had little real difference in form or function between them and therefore required a brand or trademark to consolidate their sales.⁴⁵ The Committee on Public Information, established during World War I, helped to give a sense of legitimacy to advertisers and their industry.⁴⁶ Prior to this, ads had largely focused on utilitarian information, but with the rise of social psychology and this newfound sense of legitimacy, they now came to present an image or lifestyle to sell their wares. Advertisers saw themselves as “apostles of modernity” and believed they were “creating a national culture”

⁴⁴ Ibid, 1.

⁴⁵ Inger Stole, “Selling Advertising: The U.S. Advertising Industry and its Public Relations Activities, 1932-1945,” PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998, 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 29.

and ensuring the “survival of American heritage within the process.”⁴⁷ However, their newfound rise to prominence also brought out the critics, and throughout the late 1920s and into the 1930s, the Consumer Movement called out advertisers for their misleading practices and sought to regulate their industry and prevent fraudulent advertising claims. The advertising industry in this period was a controversial institution, one that would have to use its own powers of selling to compel the American people to buy into their value as a national institution. According to Inger Stole, between 1933 and 1935 the Advertising Federation of America and the National Better Business Bureau worked with the government, specifically the National Recovery Administration, to protect themselves from legislative attempts to regulate the industry while also convincing the public that they were, in fact, interested in holding themselves to a higher standard.⁴⁸ With the outbreak of war, advertisers were offered another opportunity to shape and enhance public perceptions of themselves and the industry as a whole and to secure their place as a national institution. Advertisers used these years to their advantage. By the end of the war, and most definitely by the 1950s, Americans had come to accept advertising as a critical component of their daily lives and one that was fundamentally a key component of their conception of democracy. This dissertation uses Christmas as a lens to highlight one method of this process, as the celebration of Christmas was a key aspect of wartime experience, and advertisers used these critical holiday moments to shape and reflect American identity, while simultaneously securing their place in the post-war nation.

In collaboration with advertising, department stores also had considerable influence on American national culture in this period. Many of the changes occurring around the turn of the century also contributed to urbanization and a shift in business practices. The countryside, according to Alan Trachtenberg, became a prime target of a “mail-order and chain-store invasion,” while the cities, according to Robert Hendrickson, gave rise to the “grand emporiums” of Marshall Field’s, Gimbel’s, Macy’s, Bloomingdales, and other great

⁴⁷ Stole, “Selling Advertising,” 32; Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 42.

⁴⁸ Stole, “Selling Advertising,” 121.

department stores.⁴⁹ During the Industrial Revolution in America, more capital was available, and when combined with low taxes and cheap labor, the department store emerged. More disposable income encouraged merchants to expand their operations, and by the early 1870s, the department store was firmly implanted in American life, as tough competition drove out smaller shopkeepers and encouraged expanded merchandise lines.⁵⁰ While department store chains can be traced back to the early 1900s in America, the 1920s saw a surge. More than 60% of the 4,221 department stores in the country in 1929 were part of a chain organization. Just as the surge of advertising in the 1920s brought a public outcry against it in the 1930s, opposition to the growth of chain stores also reached considerable heights in the following decade.⁵¹ Much like advertisers, department stores also used the war to secure their place in the post-war future. As will be highlighted in the following chapters, department stores were quick to demonstrate their commitment to the nation and to highlight their patriotic fervor, and Christmas provided a particularly powerful opportunity. Their actions related to its celebration, as they demonstrated support for the war and simultaneously worked to construct a particular sense of what the American nation stood for. That concept was shaped by these retailers and merchandisers, who ultimately used the cultural capital of Christmas to entrench their value to society and their role in creating the greatness that was the ‘American way.’

Problems with Existing Literature

Considering the vast amount of literature that seeks to analyze and interpret wartime experience, few have investigated the way in which holidays impacted that experience. Some studies such as Mike Brown’s *Christmas on the Home Front* or Stanley Weintraub’s *Pearl Harbor Christmas: A World at War, December 1941* have highlighted the Christmas season in wartime, though they have failed to attend to the deeper social and cultural significance of

⁴⁹ Alan Trachtenberg and Eric Foner, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in The Gilded Age*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 114; Robert Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums: The Illustrated History of the Great Department Stores* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 4.

⁵⁰ Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums*, 32–33.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 262.

the holiday in relation to its wartime context.⁵² Given the perceived tension between the holiday of peace and goodwill and the violent nature of warfare, it would seem that in this holiday there is an opportunity to understand how society tried to reconcile the meaning of Christmas with a time of conflict, both on the home front and near the battlefield. It is time for holiday history, and more specifically Christmas history, to contribute to Social and Cultural History, as well as to the study of War and Society. I do this throughout my dissertation by demonstrating how the celebration and symbolism of Christmas became intertwined politically and socially in American society while it was engaged in conflict, and what that meant for American's experiences of World War II and their understanding of how to be a good American during that time.

Investigation into holidays during wartime are limited at best. Historian Stanley Weintraub chose to look at Pearl Harbor specifically for its impact on the Christmas season of 1941.⁵³ In an almost day-by-day account, Weintraub presents both the national and international events of this one-of-a-kind Christmas season. He chose to focus on the elites of the day, noting their interactions and reactions to the attack on Pearl Harbor and the closely related decision to join the war. One of the most interesting elements of the work is the surprise decision of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to travel to America to meet with American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to plan their wartime strategy over the 1941 Christmas season.⁵⁴ Weintraub falls short, however, in his treatment of the significance of the holiday season, using Christmas as time-marker rather than reading deeply into its cultural signifiers and meanings. He ignores how Christmas culture might have influenced decision-makers, as well as how the American population lived it. In this regard, Mike Brown's *Christmas on the Home Front* is more concerned with the popular experience of Christmas, but it focuses largely on the British home front.⁵⁵ Brown moves chronologically through the war years to

⁵² Mike Brown, *Christmas on the Home Front* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2014). Stanley Weintraub, *Pearl Harbor Christmas: A World at War, December 1941* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2011).

⁵³ Weintraub, *Pearl Harbor Christmas*, general.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, chapter 2 and throughout.

⁵⁵ Brown, *Christmas on the Home Front*, generally.

show how Christmas was affected each year by evacuations, the blitz, parties, rationing, and other wartime events. While Brown presents a wealth of information connected to wartime Christmas such as recipes, songs, advertisements, diaries, letters, and many other interesting tidbits, he fails to subject them to any significant analysis. The deeper cultural meaning of Christmas in wartime and how it was adapted and co-opted into the national war effort is left unexplored. While he certainly has compiled a wealth of evidence, he fails to connect the Christmas experience to the deeper study of war and society. Both Weintraub and Brown have indicated that there is something to be gained by connecting holiday history to the study of war and society; unfortunately, they did not engage with this opportunity enough to really demonstrate its possibilities.

In the context of studies of Christmas generally, most do not devote any considerable attention to the years of the war, even if their works span the period. Nissenbaum's *The Battle for Christmas* does not address the twentieth century. Waits's study ends at 1940, and while there is a brief post-1940 summary, he ignores the years of the war in this epilogue. Restad also has a final chapter that spans the twentieth century but skips over the war years. Marling offers the most coverage of the war years, although the mentions are spread sporadically through the work rather than in a contained, intentional, and focused manner. A chapter in Sheila Whiteley's edited collection *Christmas, Ideology, and Popular Culture* (2008) by Christine Agius does concentrate on Christmas and war, but she looks only at the 1914 Christmas truce, the Nazi appropriation of Christmas, the Christmas bombing of Vietnam, and the use of Christmas in the 1990 First Gulf War and in post-9/11 calls to support American troops.⁵⁶ Her chapter is the closest work related to this study. It confirms that there is power in the celebration of Christmas and that leaders in wartime were aware of and have tapped into this power consistently to achieve particular aims, although her work did not highlight, as my work does, how this functioned in World War II in an American context.

⁵⁶ Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*; Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America*; Restad, *Christmas in America*; Marling, *Merry Christmas!*; Shelia Whiteley, ed, *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).
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Scholars such as Sarah Street, H. Mark Glancy, and Max A. Myers have all looked at the relationship between World War II and Christmas in the particular context of films and the film industry.⁵⁷ Generally, from a film studies perspective, they highlight how “in times of national crisis and social upheaval we may find a much stronger desire to objectify a solid sense of the social;” as a result, “in many ways the symbolic values and conventions of Christmas are accentuated during wartime.”⁵⁸ Some of these scholars use in-depth analyses of films themselves, like Doherty, but that method could be strengthened by an approach such as Koppes and Black’s in *Hollywood Goes to War*, where the authors sought to investigate government involvement in their creation, which combined cultural analysis with official mandate. My study also uses this methodology, and assesses the cultural manifestations of Christmas during wartime, in relation to the role of the government, business, individuals, communities, and foreign initiatives. Koppes and Black articulated how “during the war the government, convinced that movies had extraordinary power to mobilize public opinion for war, carried out an intensive, unprecedented effort to mold the content of Hollywood feature films.”⁵⁹ The authors attempted to demonstrate how wartime realities were denied and how domestic issues were deliberately overlooked to perpetuate pre-war stereotypes and maintain a veneer of consensus. This demonstrates not only the ability of cultural products to project an image of consensus but also the capacity of the state to manipulate and manage that image, especially in times of strain on the nation such as war. This is critical for both the debate on wartime consensus and for holiday history, as it leads to questions about the role of government in cultural production generally, both in war and peacetime.

⁵⁷ Sarah Street, “Christmas Under Fire: The Wartime Christmas in Britain” and H. Mark Glancey, “Dreaming of Christmas: Hollywood and the Second World War,” in *Christmas at the Movies: Images of Christmas in American, British, and European Cinema*, ed Mark Connelly, (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000). Max A. Myers, “Christmas on Celluloid: Hollywood Helps Construct the American Christmas,” in *Christmas Unwrapped*.

⁵⁸ Street, 77.

⁵⁹ Koppes and Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, vii.

Sources

Existing studies of Christmas have generally relied on periodicals alone to make their arguments. Examples include both William B. Wait's *The Modern Christmas in America* and Karal Ann Marling's *Merry Christmas!*⁶⁰ Unlike the bulk of holiday history literature, my project uses archival research, as opposed to relying solely on newspapers and magazines. This includes government and military records from both the National Archive and Record Administration in Washington, D.C. and the National Archives at Kew in London, England. It also uses advertising and corporate records from the Smithsonian, Library of Congress, New York Historical Society, and New York University archives. It integrates this evidence with cultural products surrounding Christmas, such as parades and displays, as well as retail and advertising trade journals, domestic and military magazines, and newspapers.⁶¹ Government records are used to probe the intent behind seasonal changes in regulations, such as shopping hours, travel, or rationing, which is left out in press coverage. Additionally, records of businesses and advertising agencies were consulted to go beyond the advertisements themselves, to understand the thinking that went into them. Trade journals were ultimately more accessible and offered similar interpretations and rationale to what I found in the advertising agency records at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History; as a result, they feature more prominently in this study. Use of these sources, combined with the records of government agencies like the Office of War Information, the Office of Price Administration, and the War Production Board made it possible to assess what level of government and corporate direction existed in the construction of Christmas in the public sphere. In connection to this goal, I consulted other kinds of sources, such as

⁶⁰ Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America*, general; Marling, *Merry Christmas!*, general.

⁶¹ The predominant trade journal used was *Printers' Ink (PI)*; the predominant domestic magazines were *LIFE*, *Saturday Evening Post (SEP)*, *Women's Home Companion (WHC)*, *Ladies' Home Journal (LHJ)*, *Redbook (RB)*, *Boys' Life (BL)*, and *American Girl (AG)*; the predominant military magazines were *Stars and Stripes (SandS)* and *YANK*; the predominant newspapers were *Atlanta Constitution (AC)*, *Boston Globe (BG)*, *Chicago Daily Tribune (CDT)*, *Chicago Defender (CD)*, *Christian Science Monitor (CSM)*, *Hartford Courant (HC)*, *Los Angeles Times (LAT)*, *New York Times (NYT)*, *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)* and *the Washington Post (WP)*. Also of use were *DEFENSE* and *VICTORY* bulletins published by the American government. Other useful publications were found using databases including *Newspapers.com*, *America's Historical Newspapers*, *Entertainment Industry Magazine*, *Proquest Historical Newspapers*, and Japanese internment camp newspapers held by the *Densho Online Repository*, especially the *Manzanar Free Press (MFP)*.

ensorship reports, personal accounts, films and newsreels, photographs, cards, and other ephemera to provide a more complete picture of what Christmas looked like for Americans in this period and how they reconciled the ideals of Christmas with the reality of World War II.

My project moves into previously neglected areas of inquiry by bringing scholarly analysis of Christmas into the twentieth century, the era of a dominant American consumer culture. It also builds on the previous literature by illuminating the war as a moment of transformation and social control in a new way. The dramatic changes that home-front mobilization brought meant that American leaders had to move the focus of Christmas out of the wartime realities of the home, and into the fantasy of the marketplace. This was where consumption and entertainment could be used to simultaneously comfort and distract the American people while solidifying an elite vision for the nation's future. The holiday's cultural capital was harnessed by American industry and government leaders to encourage wartime consent, privilege particular values, and ultimately structure how individuals and communities, both foreign and domestic, would view the war and America's participation in it.

Outline

Chapter Structure

Organized into two parts, this project spans the years from 1939 to 1945. The first part, consisting of two chapters, analyzes the top-down structures put into place by business and government elites regarding their ideas of Christmas and their wartime realities. The first chapter in this section evaluates how Christmas was affected by the realities of war, namely the government initiatives that sought to manage the material requirements of wartime within the constraints of a civilian economy. It begins by surveying the American home front and the agencies that sought to control the rapidly changing wartime landscape, and moves into establishing that Christmas was given special consideration within these decisions. The bulk of the chapter evaluates the extent of government control over the Christmas experience following Pearl Harbor and ends with the role that corporations played in establishing support for the measures enacted by the government. Ultimately, the desire to follow the rituals of the Christmas season, many of which required significant consumption, was extremely powerful. While the government and the business community worked to temper

this drive, in many ways the messages they actually conveyed to the American people were mixed. Christmas had a special place and was not wholly controlled by the regulations of war.

The second chapter continues the top-down approach but attempts to flip the traditional home-front narrative of sacrifice on its head by demonstrating that, in the context of Christmas, the message to consume was a more dominant one. The business community, particularly advertisers and marketers, played a large role in managing people's purchasing desires throughout the war, and especially during the holiday season. The government initiated numerous campaigns that were intended to make civilian consumption 'work' within a wartime framework. Consumption was presented as having several key values for the American people in a time of war: buying could bring happiness, help those overseas, and provide a distraction from the present. Buying was also a part of the American identity, and as such could also serve a patriotic function. Eventually, the encouragement of consumption outweighed the controls (discussed in Chapter One) that were placed on the holiday. At the end of the chapter, this is made quantitatively clear by showing that the volume of buying and the volume of mail increased during subsequent wartime Christmases. Consumption was able to thrive at Christmas because it became so powerfully integrated with America's sense of patriotism, and of what the nation had come to believe the war was ultimately being fought for.

The second part of my dissertation, consisting of three chapters, looks at both the individual and the collective response to these structures and the way people themselves sought to manage Christmas during the war. The first chapter focuses on those left at home, namely women and children. It argues that women were the traditional managers of holiday experiences within the context of the home and that Christmas caught them between two seemingly opposing necessities, both part of being good American citizens. These were their desire to maintain the traditions of the holiday (seen as fundamentally American because the freedom to celebrate was tied to why the war was being fought, linked through the longstanding belief in freedom of religion and its solidification as critical in the current conflict via Roosevelt's Four Freedoms), and also wanting to contribute to the war effort and

patriotically follow the actions set forth by the government and business (by salvaging, rationing, and making sacrifices for the good of the nation). Women, as the custodians of Christmas, were instrumental in how this took place. Moreover, since children were the recipients of many of these traditions and were coming of age at this time, these celebrations fundamentally shaped their worldview. The way those on the home front adapted their celebration, the items they bought and the messages they sent, the feelings they had and the personal relationships they managed, are presented as they relate to Christmas. Ultimately, the government and business construction of the holiday helped Americans define their national values and interpret how they should, and would, see the war and act in wartime.

The next chapter remains on the home front but looks more broadly at how communities and collective institutions, such as the churches and national charities, negotiated the mixed messages and desires associated with wartime Christmas. It highlights how they responded to the rhetoric of government and business leaders, as well as the needs and desires of the American people during the holiday season. Christmas, as a jointly celebrated occasion both in actuality and in spirit, helped to connect the public to the armed forces and the larger international community. In this sense, we can see Christmas as a powerful force bringing the nation together in a spirit of shared charity and patriotism. However, this supposedly open vision excluded some groups, and the question of who was included as opposed to who was excluded from the communal Christmas is addressed near the end of the chapter.

The final chapter moves outside the home front to a case study of American troops abroad, specifically stationed in England, and how they were affected by government and business policies surrounding Christmas. Christmas provided a valuable tool for Americans abroad to uphold their morale and shape how other groups perceived them. Being stationed far from home was particularly difficult at Christmas, given the strong connotation of being 'home for the holidays.' Despite this, most had a relatively happy holiday experience. This was in part because of the effort of the military and government in coordinating Christmas activities. It was also due to their own efforts towards entertaining and giving to others. While the British had their own traditions related to the celebration of Christmas, shortages and rationing caused by the war largely limited people's ability to carry them out as they had in pre-war

times. This left British society, and other war-torn societies where Americans were stationed, susceptible to the wealth and influence exported through American Christmas. The script of Christmas played out remarkably similarly across national and religious borders, indicating the degree to which the holiday was ingrained in the American psyche. Much like the malleability of American identity, this script has several elements that are viewed as unchanging (exchange of gifts, use of Christmas trees, family feasting, sending cards), but within these actions and activities associated with the holiday that people felt compelled to follow, Americans could and did use Christmas to define who they were, what they wanted to be and what they believed it meant to be an American. Christmas celebrations abroad functioned in a similar fashion, they did not just bring candy or cake to the children of the world; they also carried with them powerful cultural symbols of American values and were saturated with ideas of freedom, democracy, and consumerism.

Parameters

Some readers might question why a study of American wartime experience begins in 1939 as opposed to following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. This is for several reasons, the first being that America began to ramp up military production for defense purposes with the outbreak of war in Europe.⁶² This American pre-war defense build-up subsequently kick-started the economy and increased individuals' purchasing power, desire, and ability to consume.⁶³ Second, these immediate pre-war years offer a useful before-and-after comparison and allow the changes the war *did* bring to be more apparent. Third, American Christmas was affected in some ways by the war before it came to U.S. shores, namely through shortages of particular foreign products that were either not being produced or could not be imported. Conversely, this study, on the whole, does not extend into the post-war years. There is no doubt that the Cold War would offer a fruitful context for interrogating Americans' identity and culture in relation to Christmas, especially given the importance

⁶² Juliet Gardiner, *Over Here: The GIs in Wartime Britain* (London: Collins & Brown, 1992), 12.

⁶³ Jeffries, *Wartime America*, 10.

leaders placed on their global image in this period.⁶⁴ However, it is not included in this study because the competing cultural influences and the overarching theme of communism versus capitalism, if included in this one, would have pulled focus away from highlighting the effects of World War II in shaping this particular version of American self-conception.

There are always other avenues and directions one could choose to take when trying to give a representative picture of American society. Christmas, and its publicly constructed celebration, is a reflection of the dominant parts of society, and as such, this study does not give considerable attention to how minorities celebrated Christmas. White, middle-class Christians in an urban setting were the dominant cultural trope in this period. Therefore, their Christmas is what mass media highlighted, and elite decision makers attended to and in many ways whiteness was reinforced through mainstream celebrations.⁶⁵ Consequently, this is what gets predominant coverage in the following chapters. African Americans and other non-whites generally were left to either embrace the holiday as the dominant culture presented it to them, or reject it. Mainstream Christmas excludes non-whites through the power relations related to consumption, labor, segregation, racism, and patriotism. African Americans most definitely celebrated the holiday, though what appeared in Black newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* or the *Negro Star* generally reflected the same public image as in mainstream media. It is entirely possible that the private experiences of the holiday may have been very different. However, this dissertation predominantly deals with the public meanings and representations and so the use of oral history, memoir collections, or other source bases which may have indicated a different private celebration of African American Christmas compared to the public, dominant white Christmas is out of the scope of this project. In Chapter Four, I briefly cover those who were excluded from mainstream celebrations of Christmas. In the context of this discussion, I consider African Americans and Japanese Americans and how their place within mainstream society shaped their construction of

⁶⁴ Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* 2nd ed., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁶⁵ Memo from E.C. Walsh to J.F. Brownlee, Apr. 5, 1945. Box 2, Entry 2, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

Christmas as an American experience and how they sought to use the celebration of Christmas for their own means. However, these experiences are not featured prominently throughout the dissertation as a whole.

A similar point can be made for the lack of coverage in this study of non-Christians. In this period, those who were not part of the majority were essentially bystanders to the dominant culture, for example those of Jewish faith. They could choose to embrace the social and cultural aspects of the holiday or be left out of the fold. To some extent, I discuss in Chapter Four how Jewish people navigated Christmas within the public realm. However, to really get at how people of non-Christian sects felt it would require a different and difficult-to-access source base, which would offer little accurate comparison potential. Also, Christmas, as this study argues, came to embody a patriotic spirit related to what the war was being fought for, namely a liberal society backed by a consumer-driven economy, and those of non-Christian beliefs could choose to accept these secular aspects of Christmas without internalizing its Christian heritage, even though to do so meant accepting some degree of forced acculturation. The ideal Christmas as presented in mainstream media was white and middle-class and in many ways reflected what dominant society believed to be the ideal American citizen overall: white and middle-class. While there were certainly many in America who fell outside of this ideal, those in power in society were keen to protect their status at all costs, and cultural symbols and celebrations, like Christmas, were important in this process.

At one point in the process of defining what aspects of the holiday and the war I was going to focus on in my research, I had planned to use a series of case studies to represent different facets of American life: urban versus rural, the south versus the north, or industrial versus agricultural centers. This plan became problematic, as gathering sources to reflect many cities and towns required a prohibitively large body of research, and randomly selecting several small cities and small towns would fail to represent small-town America as a whole. While attention to mainstream media presents the problem of conflating the urban nation with the rural, to truly investigate this subject would have again required sources such as oral interviews and would have offered an ill-fitted comparison to the mainstream. There was also an early intention to look at the large metropolitan centers that cast their distinct shadows

across the nation, mainly New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Washington, DC. While the outline of chapters described above differs from this plan, much of the original research for these cities was still critical, given the importance they had in shaping the image of Christmas in mainstream media and public thought. So, if a focus on these locations appears to readers, this is why. Ultimately, what is presented might not accurately reflect all the personal experiences of every American, but it does, in my opinion, represent the mainstream ideal that most Americans who chose to buy into it would have sought to attain.

During World War II, Americans found themselves in a society that was changing rapidly and becoming more complicated by the realities of wartime. The continued celebration of Christmas during this period of conflict provided reminders of the ‘good old days’ as well as hope for a time of stability and prosperity that would come to the United States, and the world, once the guns fell silent and the sons and daughters of the nation returned home. Today, many lament the commercialization of the Christmas season, but few recognize that this was once the explicit goal of U.S. policymakers. The enormity of World War II heightened the ability of leaders to tap into the power of Christmas to inspire conformity and push their agenda of liberal-capitalism onto the American people and the degree to which the American people accepted and internalized this message. In this atmosphere, my project shows how the war became a key moment in the commercialization of Christmas and strengthened the hold of consumer culture on the country, while also defining the American way of life in these terms. It reveals that our deepest held and most beloved traditions are susceptible to manipulation. In times of great crisis and confusion, the temptation of and the possibility for leaders to use holidays in this way should not be forgotten.

Chapter 1: Controlling Christmas

Introduction

During the years of the war there were several government agencies tasked with mobilizing the American home front and monitoring the American people's acceptance or rejection of their measures. In December of 1942 a memo circulated among them that described a flourishing rumor, one that was supposedly "Axis-inspired and designed to undermine morale." It described how a man "in whiskers" was reported to come down people's chimneys and deliver them gifts. However, the mysterious figure's beard was "an attempt to undermine confidence in the adequacy of the razor blade supply" and his arrival through the chimney was "clearly an effort to encourage American householders to leave their flues open, thus allowing 25% of the heat to escape – and therefore complicate the grave fuel oil problem."⁶⁶ The subject: *Santa Claus*. This memo was an obvious attempt at holiday humor by the Office of War Information, which had issued it, but it speaks to a central theme in the home-front experience during World War II: government concern for rationing and conservation and a desire to control the daily lives of the American people in relation to these issues.

This chapter evaluates how Christmas was affected by the realities of war, namely the government initiatives that sought to manage the material requirements of wartime within the constraints of a civilian economy. It begins by overviewing the American home front and the agencies which sought to control the rapidly changing wartime landscape and moves into establishing that Christmas was given special consideration within these decisions. The bulk of the chapter evaluates the extent of government control over the Christmas experience following Pearl Harbor and ends with the role of corporations in establishing support for the measures enacted by the government. On the eve of World War II, Christmas was, much like it is today, largely based on consumption. Ultimately, the desire to follow the rituals of the Christmas season, many of which require significant

⁶⁶ Memorandum, Correspondence to the Chief, News Bureau, December 24, 1942. Box 1, Entry NC-148-175, RG 208. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD.

consumerism, was extremely powerful. While the government and the business community worked to temper this drive, in many ways the messages they actually conveyed to the American people were mixed. Christmas had a special place and was not wholly controlled by the regulations of war.

The American Home Front

The national government underwent a series of dramatic changes in the years of World War II, and the American people who lived through it found a great deal of their everyday lives politicized by the war. Civilians and servicemen realized the stakes were high, even if their homeland was not under direct attack. Multiple agencies sprang up to mobilize America for war, which quickly outnumbered the programs of the New Deal that had seemed so intrusive to those who sought limited government interventionism just a few years prior.⁶⁷ Many of these agencies formed strong links with big business to manage and undertake the drastic action that total war required.⁶⁸

In the period before Pearl Harbor these included the War Resources Board (1939), the Advisory Commission to the Council of National Defense (1940), the Office of Emergency Management (1940), the Office of Production Management (1941), the Office of Price Management and Civilian Supply (1941) and the Supply Priorities and Allocation Board (1941). There was a great degree of overlap between them and many were short-lived but, according to historian John Jeffries, they established the precedent for later mobilization agencies to come.⁶⁹ President Roosevelt created the War Production Board in 1942 and chose an industry leader, Sears, Roebuck executive Donald Nelson, as chair. However, it was Ferdinand Eberstadt, an investment banker, who pushed the WPB in 1943 to move toward the Controlled Materials Plan and away from

⁶⁷ Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*.

⁶⁸ Sparrow, *Warfare State*.

⁶⁹ Jeffries, *Wartime America*, 19.

the priority system that was initially used to acquire war materials.⁷⁰ This new plan “allowed the Army and Navy to continue to award contracts but gave the WPB control of material allocations and production schedules” and ultimately represented a distinctly American solution to the issue of centralized control.⁷¹ 1943 also saw the creation of the Office of War Mobilization which became the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion in late 1944. This department oversaw economic mobilization and sought to act as a coordinating agency over many of the others. Agencies like the War Food Administration or the National War Labor Board had clear priorities but still intersected with others on numerous occasions and as such coordination between them was often required.⁷²

One of the newly-formed agencies most familiar to the American people was the Office of Price Administration. Part of its role was to set prices to prevent inflation, but the other, more successful but less popular job was to manage rationing. The first programs were instituted in 1942.⁷³ Rationed items included sugar, coffee, gasoline, tires, butter, and shoes, which were controlled via ration books, coupons, priority stickers, and point systems. People did not always respond wholeheartedly to the limitations, and in the context of Christmas especially consumer spending increased during the war.⁷⁴ Rationing boards were run by local citizens who opened the door for favoritism and exceptions. Also, people often blamed government mismanagement for many of the shortages, which increased the dislike for the program.⁷⁵ All of this represented a clear intervention of the government into the interaction between businesses and their customers. Ordinary people were prompted to re-evaluate their role in the nation, as Lizabeth Cohen demonstrated in

⁷⁰ Thomas K. McCraw, *American Business: 1920 - 2000 ; How It Worked* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 2002), 85.

⁷¹ McCraw, 84; Jeffries, *Wartime America*, 22.

⁷² Jeffries, *Wartime America*, 23-35.

⁷³ Jeffries, *Wartime America*, 29.

⁷⁴ This is counter to the commonly accepted narrative that everyone willingly sacrificed and is discussed more quantitatively in Chapter Two.

⁷⁵ Jeffries, *Wartime America*, 30.

Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America. She stated that “new rituals of patriotic citizenship evolved – obeying OPA price, rent, and rationing regulations and reporting violators; participating in recycling, scrap and waste fat drives; planting Victory gardens and ‘putting up’ the harvest.”⁷⁶ Actions and activities that had once been a private choice were now seen as a public obligation, but often conflicted with the consumer culture central to American life.

One of the pillars of the central government response to the conflict raging around the world was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s State of the Union address in January 1941. Speaking directly to Congress but realizing his words would go far further than those men and women alone, the President spoke of building up a national defense to not only protect American democracy but also of four freedoms around the world:

Freedom of speech and expression... freedom of every person to worship God in his own way... freedom from want –which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants... [and] freedom from fear... which –translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor.⁷⁷

These freedoms, the building blocks of a new cooperation between societies of the world, would be embodied in the Atlantic Charter and came to symbolize the Allied aims for a stable and secure peace. Important to note is the freedom from want, which in many ways would become constructed in American society and life as the freedom *to* want.

Many people understood freedom as the ability to have access to and be able to attain the fruits of American industry. As Susan Strasser has shown in *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*, in many ways democracy – the very thing the freedoms were meant to protect – was conflated with access to “an abundance of

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 67.

⁷⁷ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, January 6, 1941. *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16092>

consumer goods.”⁷⁸ The idea of choice and the freedom to buy was part of the rhetoric of the market, which was created by advertisers, merchandisers, and retailers, to ensure their place in society remained a necessary one – necessary because they offered consumers the information needed to make important choices in regards to the abundance of goods available.

Business leaders were quick to realize their value to the government in the capacity of message transmitters to the people. Numerous articles appeared in the advertising trade journal *Printers' Ink* in the immediate pre-war years by key figures from the advertising industry.⁷⁹ Gordon E. Cole wrote, “We are a Democracy, and Democracies are traditionally slow to act.... What can we do to speed things up? The answer herewith suggested is this: By an intelligent use of one of the most potent and misunderstood tools of Management, the joint objectives of Business and Government can be swiftly achieved. That tool is advertising.”⁸⁰ He wanted to speed up the process of mobilization, which he feared would get tied up in bureaucratic red tape. Instead, he advocated using the best practices of private enterprise to manage government production, and applying successful advertising measures to communicate those actions and intentions to the public. This would thereby increase both the speed with which Americans would get the message and their likelihood to comply. If business and government leaders could work

⁷⁸ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 289.

⁷⁹ Paul Hollister, “How U.S. Business Can Be Mainspring of Defense Program,” *PI*, June, 28 1940, 11-14 and 98; Paul G. Hoffman, “Businessman Looks Ahead: How to Save Democracy in U.S.,” *PI*, July 5, 1940, 9-11 and 67; Chester M. Wright, “A Job to be Done! American Business Can Use Commerce to Preserve Freedom,” *PI*, July 12, 1940, 13-15.

⁸⁰ “Nobody knows what is going to happen, but all of us are beginning to realize that we are in for a rather grim and difficult time. We are a Democracy, and Democracies are traditionally slow to act. A great many opinions must be aired before we can arrive at a decision. That is the price of liberty. Meanwhile, we are confronted with many serious and urgent problems. We are not getting ahead with them as fast as we should. The question is: What can we do to speed things up? The answer herewith suggested is this: By an intelligent use of one of the most potent and misunderstood tools of Management, the joint objectives of Business and Government can be more swiftly and effectively achieved. That tool is advertising.” Excerpt of Article, H. A. Batten, “This, or Silence - A suggested method of speeding up the processes of business and government through the intelligent use of a basic tool of management,” reprinted from *PI*, Nov. 14, 1941. Box 2, Series 1, Gordon E. Cole Advertising (ACNMAH 371). Smithsonian National Museum of American History (SNMAH), Washington, DC.

together to articulate their goals, they would be more successful, and ultimately it would benefit each other and the nation.

For these plans to succeed they would require a degree of popular support and the various government agencies were well aware of this reality. Donald M. Nelson, Chair of the Office of Production Management, stated that living as usual in a defense/war economy was no longer possible as demand for materials, not competitive forces, would dictate the flow of materials. As such, the government needed to regulate prices to prevent the extreme need of certain materials from raising the price to exorbitant rates.⁸¹ The place of the consumer in this process would be that, “each must bear his own load... It is essential the consumer exercise a good deal of self-restraint when the emergency is on. Must avoid scare buying,” and that “The temptation to lay in a big stock of this, that, or the other thing on the theory that the prices will be a good deal higher later on is going to be pretty strong, now and then, but it is a temptation you have got to resist. Nothing advances the prices of any commodity as surely as that kind of buying.”⁸² Being a good wartime citizen meant resisting the drive to excessively consume.

Alongside reducing speculative or uncontrolled consumption, conservation was important in a defense/war economy. Just before the outbreak of war, the December 1941 edition of *Ladies' Home Journal* contained an article on how to keep appliances running smoothly and maintain them, noting “Appliances become more precious as materials become scarce... less ranges, refrigerators and washing machines than in 1941 is bound to be the situation on all sides.”⁸³ Additionally, an article by Richard Pratt tied already existing appliances into the conservation discussion in terms of limiting waste in food production.⁸⁴ He stated that the frozen-food locker or freezer was crucial to the home and

⁸¹ Conference Transcript of Mr. Donald Neilson (conference convened at 2:07 p.m. Nov. 2, 1942). Box 2, Entry 42, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁸² Donald M. Nelson, “Living as Usual,” *DEFENSE Bulletin*, May 13, 1941, 11.

⁸³ Grace L. Pennock, “Keep them Going,” *LHJ*, December 1941, 112. In this period, *LHJ* had a circulation of almost four million according to Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Facts on File, 1990).

⁸⁴ Richard Pratt, “Conservation for Defense,” *LHJ*, December 1941, 116/118.

community gardening efforts of both farm and non-farm families for keeping produce edible longer. While neither of these articles was directly related to Christmas, their placement in the December issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal* made that connection, as they were accompanied by advertisements for appliances as Christmas gifts throughout the magazine, as well as talk about the abundance of food traditionally associated with the holiday.

With the outbreak of war, the government and the business community had immediate reactions regarding managing people's interactions with corporate images and critical commodities. At 10:30 pm, on December 7th, 1941, the Supply Priorities Allocation Board broadcasted a message from D.C. that, "The United States has been attacked by the Japanese... You and I know that we are no longer engaged in a DEFENSE PROGRAM... We, the citizens of the United States have a vast stake in the Pacific. This war that has now started thousands of miles from our shores comes directly home to all of us and at once." Speaking directly to the American people, the announcement made it very clear that they had a role to play in this fight, noting "You can help put that equipment in their [the armed forces'] hands -- and make sure there are plenty of replacements -- by doing your bit."⁸⁵ The *Ayer News* of N.W. Ayer advertising agency reported on December 12, 1941, that "Japan's attack on the United States last Sunday created a number of special problems with regard to the advertising of our clients... some of the outstanding rapid-fire jobs [include]: Telephone Hour... Bell System... U.S. Army Recruiting Service... Evening Bulletin... Illinois Bell... Container Corporation." These were advertising campaigns that N.W. Ayer would have to quickly adapt to wartime realities.⁸⁶ The fact that the advertising agency was so quick to make this transition (and actually had contingency plans in place for this very reason prior to the attack) indicates the degree to which advertisers realized their important role in altering American perception of companies with wartime realities in mind.

⁸⁵ Address on the Mutual Network (from Washington, D.C.), Donald M. Nelson, Dec. 7, 1941. Roll 13, Microfilm 1239, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁸⁶ Ayer News file, Dec 12, 1941. Box 6, Series 16, N.W. Ayer Collection (ACNMAH 59). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

As America moved into a war economy, it would be even more important to successfully disseminate a great deal of information to the American people. Ken Dyke, former advertising director of Colgate-Palmolive, was appointed as chief of the Bureau of the Office of War Information's domestic branch and was a key cog in the wheel of government-business cooperation during the war.⁸⁷ In a talk before the Association of National Advertisers in January of 1943, he listed sixty-five separate government campaigns the OWI was working on. He stated that "Obviously the best way of carrying these messages to the people is through advertising... campaigns, handled exactly as a manufacturer would handle an advertising campaign – establish the objective, determine what is required to attain it, prepare the plan in every detail and finally get the necessary money to carry out the plan."⁸⁸ Advertisers wanted to highlight their value to the war effort and clarify their value as a profession.

There were very clear benefits for both the government and the advertising industry in working together in such a way, Dyke argued. One of the more obvious was a quicker path to the successful end of the war, but also, "That if this is done now, it will do more to ensure a continuance of American institutions, free enterprise and the American way of life when the war is over than any other single thing."⁸⁹ One of the most critical institutions to this process was advertising. As such, the government and advertisers were involved in a critical partnership, one that had the power to win the war and ultimately shape how the post-war period would look. By putting the critical war-measure messages in the hands of corporate ad men, it would be the values of advertisers – such as the role of advertising in upholding free-enterprise – that were subsequently leached into the campaigns the American people were exposed to throughout the war.

⁸⁷ Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).

⁸⁸ Letter from Gordon E. Cole to Charles G. Mortimer, Jr. Chairman of the Board, Association of National Advertisers, Jan. 18, 1943. Box 1, Series 1, Gordon E. Cole Advertising (ACNMAH 371). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

By early 1942 the Association of National Advertisers and the American Association of Advertising Agencies had taken the official initiative to create the War Advertising Council which positioned itself as a private adjunct to the government's war information efforts. The Council's task was to advise government agencies on the most appropriate and effective means of keeping the public informed about the war effort, and it had the responsibility to "review, clear, and approve" all proposed radio or motion picture programs sponsored by federal department agencies.⁹⁰ When the Office of War Information was created, it consolidated the spread of information and also helped to facilitate the Council's activities. Soon the government and the War Advertising Council worked in tandem to remind people to conserve fats and metal, to enlist, and to buy war bonds. However, advertisers were also undertaking a campaign of self-interest to ensure advertising came out of the war recognized as "quintessentially *democratic* and *American*."⁹¹ According to them, the partnerships forged between the government and industry were what allowed a democratic nation to undertake a successful war effort.

Selling Action to the American People

One of the most critical ideas that the American people had to be sold on was that they had the power to make a difference. Barton A. Cummings, director of the Office of Price Administration's campaigns division, stated that "We Americans can keep prices down – we can kill the black market."⁹² The "we" in this statement made the government and the average person linked in this endeavor. He went on to say, "An information campaign called the Home Front Pledge has been carefully planned and successfully tested... a movement of community campaigns throughout America."⁹³ These were locally organized and undertaken by both housewives and retailers. What the American people thought was their idea - taking, and encouraging others to take, the Home Front Pledge

⁹⁰ Stole, "Advertising at War."

⁹¹ Ibid, 2.

⁹² Note from Barton A. Cummings, undated. Box 3, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁹³ Ibid.

(which included promises such as not to buy items above the ceiling price or engage in black market purchases) - was really a carefully constructed plan that was sold to them through advertising.

The government was also keenly aware of the power of holidays to transmit ideas and of the importance holidays had in American cultural life. In July 1942 magazines across the nation were mandated to have the same picture of the American flag printed on their covers to present an image of widespread national unity for the Fourth of July.⁹⁴ The government also requested that “all camps, posts and stations observe Mother’s Day,” and that “by being hosts to the mothers who have sons in the service... this observance, it is believed, will receive a favorable reaction from the civilian communities concerned.”⁹⁵ A memorandum for the Chief of Staff from the Adjutant General’s office from early 1942 proclaimed that they should use “national holidays to stimulate national morale and increase production of munitions.” They suggested recruiting the participation of the Army in parades and other displays of troops, combat vehicles, and equipment to display military might and a “feeling that now we’re really getting down to business.”⁹⁶ The government and military realized holidays could powerfully transmit these sentiments that they believed would motivate the American people.⁹⁷ These holiday performances had the dual purpose of stimulating the morale of servicemen as well, through their participation in these patriotic observances.

⁹⁴ *PI*, Apr. 10, 1942, 64-65.

⁹⁵ Letter from WM. Arnold, Chief of Chaplains to the Adjutant General, Apr. 22, 1942. Box 23, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁹⁶ Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, May 15, 1942. Box 23, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD; Memo to Commanding Generals [Army ground forces, Army air forces, service of supply, all defense commands, all armies, all corps areas, all Army corps, all departments], Chief of the Armored Forces, The Provost Marshall General, Commanding Officers, all Exempted Stations, Chiefs of Services and Divisions of the War Department General Staff, June 15, 1942. Box 23, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁹⁷ Memorandum to General Surles from Robert P. Patterson, Under Secretary of War, undated. Box 23, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

While holidays could be useful moments, the problem with certain holidays, Christmas chiefly among them, was that many of the traditions associated with their celebration contradicted critical government campaigns. This included especially calls to restrict purchases, make sacrifices, and salvage as many materials as possible for the war. However, this contradiction could be mitigated by the innate power of Christmas to propel people to conform to its well-established cultural norms, if the government could find a way to tap into this power for its own ends. By harnessing the conformist influence, they could perhaps direct consumption in a way that would not be counter to the war effort.

Theodore Caplow's investigation using the landmark sociological study of social change in Middletown (Muncie, Indiana) is commanding evidence of just how powerful Christmas is for compelling people to participate in certain actions in the name of the holiday. Conducted in the 1970s, Caplow's study documented the unwritten rules of celebrating Christmas and the "effective enforcement of those rules without visible means."⁹⁸ These established and powerful norms included the requirement to put up a tree, wrap gifts and display them under or around the tree, decorate this room of the house and possibly others, distribute the gifts at gatherings where everyone gives or receives a gift, and at these family gatherings where gifts were distributed there would be a "traditional Christmas dinner."⁹⁹ Participants in this study, community members of Middletown, were the agents who enforced and upheld the rules, but they did so seemingly unknowingly and without a conscious acknowledgement of the identified system. The work of A.P. Simonds demonstrated the adaptability of these seemingly fixed norms as he discussed how consumerism had been constructed as an essential part of the Christmas season in "The Holy Days and the Wholly Dazed: Christmas and the 'Spirit of Giving.'"¹⁰⁰ He argued that by the 1990s Christmas could no longer be

⁹⁸ Theodore Caplow, "Rule Enforcement without Visible Means: Christmas Gift Giving in Middletown," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 89, No. 6, (May 1984), 1306.

⁹⁹ Caplow, 1310-1312.

¹⁰⁰ A.P. Simonds, "The Holy Days and the Wholly Dazed: Christmas and the 'Spirit of Giving,'" in *Christmas Unwrapped*, 84-112.

considered a distinctively domestic holiday, which according to Steven Nissenbaum it had become for Americans in the 1820s or 1830s.¹⁰¹ Shifts in demographic trends (increased divorce rates and single-parent households) and centralized national communication meant that Christmas had moved away from being a celebration of “family values and domestic intimacy,” that it had been since the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰² Additionally, if the societal demographic shifts in the late twentieth century had altered Christmas it is likely that the massive demographic and societal shifts brought about by World War II also altered Christmas to some degree. Christmas, according to Simonds, “is neither removed from public life nor from its norms,” and as society changes, so too do the meanings associated with the rituals they perform.¹⁰³ If Christmas is part of public life and public norms and able to influence the way people behave, it inherently functions as an agent of social control. Those who can manipulate the meanings of the holiday, just like those who manage public life, gain significant power over the way people perceive the world. During wartime there was a desperate need to present an image of a unified national community, and as such, holidays like Christmas could be, and were, co-opted into this endeavor.

Special Considerations for Christmas in Wartime

Christmas could potentially serve a special purpose in the war, but it needed to be perceived and constructed as special within the wartime context, and it was. Christmas was given special treatment by American policymakers throughout the war. People were encouraged during the war to conform to patriotic norms of sacrifice for the betterment of the nation, though at Christmas these messages were not as clear. There was something different about the celebration of Christmas. The government and the business community cared about the celebration of the holiday almost in spite of the messages of rationing and conservation that they were dispensing. For example, with the consumption

¹⁰¹ Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 108 and 172-173.

¹⁰² Simonds, 99.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 100.

of traditional Christmas foods the Office of Price Administration adjusted the prices of popular Christmas delicacies, from plum pudding and fruitcake to sweet apple cider and candied fruits, so that stores could stock up. This actually prompted buying sprees that the OPA was created to prevent.¹⁰⁴ The War Food Administration was aware of the demand that both civilian and military sectors would place on these for the Thanksgiving and Christmas season. It tried its best to manage both sides of the coin, while still giving Christmas special treatment. It directed in 1943 that canned cranberries would go largely to war services but that fresh cranberries would be more readily available in the domestic market. They also put into place a decision that the big producers of turkey had to sell to the military first to ensure they had enough to feed the troops. They tried to ensure that the remainder would move as quickly as possible into domestic markets; however, in many cases, they were held up not by shortages in food but shortages in the labor required to process the product and get it into local stores for public consumption.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, it is apparent that government agencies were giving special attention to Christmas and the consumption associated with it during the war.

The mass purchasing that holiday traditions sparked in the civilian economy had the potential to upset the carefully constructed balance the wartime agencies were trying to achieve. The government could have done what Australia did to prevent this, namely the banning of Christmas advertisements in the hopes of cutting down gift purchasing. The Australian Minister of War Organization, J.J. Dedman, issued a ban in November 1942 with the purpose of “prevent[ing] a serious waste of resources of manpower, and materials which would result from unrestricted Christmas purchasing” and included all advertisements with any references to Christmas, New Year’s, and Easter done with the intention of promoting the sale of gifts.¹⁰⁶ America’s ally was clearly aware of the detrimental effects Christmas could have, yet American leadership treated it as an exception to the rule, rather than a time to more strongly enforce wartime policies.

¹⁰⁴ “The Outlook for Christmas,” *VICTORY Bulletin*, Nov. 3, 1942, 4.

¹⁰⁵ “It looks Like We’ll Get the Bird Again,” *Sands Oran*, Nov. 14, 1944, 4.

¹⁰⁶ “Australia Bans Yule Ads to Cut Down Gift Trade,” *CDT*, Nov. 7, 1942, 3.

Before Pearl Harbor, the Army introduced a plan for 1940 to slow down Selective Service inductions for December in light of the Christmas holidays. It was anticipated the same plan would remain in place for December 1941, however, the attack ultimately changed this plan.¹⁰⁷ Instead, an idea was discussed about providing “lifts” for troops who were going home on leave or those returning to their posts over the 1941 Christmas holidays. According to the advisory board of the American Automobile Association, the plan was to coordinate needy servicemen with motorists’ already existing Christmas trips.¹⁰⁸ While it would appear on the surface that this was a plan to reduce traffic and travel, it was also a case of Christmas being given special treatment. The government and the military directed critical resources into attempting to arrange and set up these ride-sharing programs just weeks after the outbreak of war. This process would take far more manpower than simply putting in place travel limitations or other methods of cutting down traffic and travel and instead getting people ‘home for Christmas’ was deemed something worth doing.

Reports of relaxed rules at Christmas continued throughout the years of the war. In 1943, the President himself ordered federal employees to leave two hours early on the Friday before Christmas to give them extra time for Christmas shopping. Not only did this decrease productivity in terms of overall working hours, but it also sent a message encouraging the practice of Christmas consumption, a message coming directly from the leader of the nation.¹⁰⁹ The War Labor Board followed suit when it relaxed its wage rules for Christmas hiring in 1944. It revised the general minimum wage order to “give department store Santa Claus, his helpers and ex-servicemen and women a better break.”¹¹⁰ It did this by permitting that during the Christmas season 25% of all job classifications throughout the company could be hired at above minimum rates. In

¹⁰⁷ *WP*, Oct. 5, 1941, 5; Memo from L. Duenweg, Asst. Ground Adjutant General, Oct. 22, 1942. Box 10, Entry 55, RG 337. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁸ *WP*, Nov. 5, 1941, 8.

¹⁰⁹ *WP*, Dec. 18, 1943, B1.

¹¹⁰ “Relaxes Christmas Rules,” *NYT*, Sept. 23, 1944, 17.

previous years the regulation had limited hiring changes to within specific job classifications. Also, while calls were made to eliminate outdoor holiday lighting nationwide, the War Production Board put no restrictions on the production and marketing of Christmas trees for outdoor and indoor decoration throughout the war regardless of the effects this had on labor, transportation, and inflation.¹¹¹ These are examples of clear adaptations being made to wartime rules by various government agencies throughout the war that accommodated Christmas to the degree that actually hindered wartime policies.

Christmas was regarded as an exception to the rule to the extent that one senator even proposed new legislation to uphold the special place of Christmas. The bill proposed was meant to suspend all holidays in the United States until the war's end, but it made one distinct exception: "the day known and celebrated as Christmas Day."¹¹² After Senator Van Nuys put forth the bill, a committee was put together to investigate what impact this could have on increased labor and production output. The committee determined that removing the federal holiday status could be beneficial: "if all, instead of only part of the 1,800,000 civilians employed in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the Federal Government were to work every holiday except Christmas, as many as seventy or eighty million additional man-hours would be worked each year."¹¹³ Considering that there were only really six other federally recognized holidays outside of Christmas Day, and with possible gains such as this reported, it seems difficult to understand why Christmas was not even considered in their calculations. Christmas, it seems, was untouchable. The bill failed not because of rejection of the protection of Christmas, but mainly because in actuality it was not illegal to work on holidays and as such mandating that people work on all but Christmas was really not necessary. Furthermore, according to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, "such breaks are useful in combatting the effects

¹¹¹ "The President This Week," *VICTORY Bulletin*, Dec. 22, 1943, 15.

¹¹² Proposed Bill S. 2425, 77th Congress 2d Session, Read by Mr. Van Nuys, Mar. 31, 1942. Box 23, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹¹³ Letter from Frances Perkins to Frederick Nan Nuys, Chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary, Apr. 24, 1942. Box 23, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

of cumulative fatigue and in buoying up worker morale, and the need for these breaks is particularly great where regular annual vacations are not or cannot be permitted.”¹¹⁴ Even though the bill failed, the idea of Christmas as an exception regarding labor and production goals remained. It was clear the government realized that the holiday had particular value in its own right and as such was worth protecting.

Donald Nelson, chairman of the War Production Board, made the supremacy of Christmas above wartime needs abundantly clear. As 1942 drew to a close, he issued the following statement:

During this year of war there have been no full holidays in war production... it has been necessary to do this, because of the overwhelming need to turn out munitions and essential equipment in the greatest possible volume without delays or interruption, and the country has recognized this need and meant it. Now we come to the Christmas holiday. I believe that this day should be the one exception to the rule which has been observed thus far. More than ever in our lives, I suppose, *we need this year to pause from our labors on Christmas Day* and think deeply and humbly about the faith by which we live, in order that from the profound promise of this day we may draw the hope and the vision which we must have. On the birthday of the Prince of Peace we can and *should rest from the production of the weapons of war...* After the holiday, we must drive ahead with renewed energy for the increased production job of 1943- a bigger job than we have ever faced before.¹¹⁵

It is not hard to ascertain that, according to Nelson, Christmas was special: a time to rest, reflect, and ultimately not work toward the military victory required to win the war. While newspaper reports attempted to highlight the idea that 1943 should see a greater drive to work, it is impossible to disguise the fact that Christmas was, in some ways,

¹¹⁴ Letter from Henry L. Stimson, secretary of war to Harold D. Smith, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, undated. Box 23, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD. Some workers did lose or voluntarily give up their holidays however this largely is in reference to production schedules, which might make it difficult to accommodate vacation at particular times of the year when it was usually customary to do so.

¹¹⁵ Emphasis added. *VICTORY Bulletin*, Dec. 1, 1942, 6; Statement from Donald M. Nelson, Nov. 27, 1942. Roll 28, Microfilm 1239, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

greater than the war and as such had to be given the appropriate respect by government agencies and wartime mobilization plans.¹¹⁶ Similarly, the President indicated that heads of federal departments and agencies should use their discretion and permit all employees whose service could be spared to be given special time off as well. The rationale was simple, according to an internal memo: “Christmas Day and Christmas Eve have traditionally been important family days in the life of this Nation.”¹¹⁷

However, another deeply significant day for family, Thanksgiving, was not given the same treatment. Nelson’s statement regarding this holiday is striking in comparison:

No holiday has deeper roots in the American tradition than Thanksgiving Day. Year after year, it has been our custom to cease work on that day and thank God for the blessings He has given us. We have been brought through many trials and perils during the past year; more than ever before, we can make this Thanksgiving Day a day of devout and humble thanks to God. But we can best show our gratitude by demonstrating that we deserve the mercies that have been shown us, and the way to do that is to *work with all our might at the job which is before us*. Therefore in every factory which is producing war goods or goods essential to our war economy, and in every mine or plant where war-essential raw materials are being produced, *we must have a full day's production on this Thanksgiving Day*. Our enemies are not going to stop their production on November 26; we dare not do either. Men and women of management and labor alike can easily rearrange their personal schedules so that the traditional Thanksgiving dinner can be enjoyed after work has been finished. And the deepest religious devotion we have will find its truest expression in an unflagging attention to duty by all of us.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ “War Workers Granted Yule Holiday, AC, Nov. 28, 1942, 13; “WPB Announces Shutdown for War Plants,” CDT, Nov. 26, 1942, 9; Memorandum for Sunday Broadcast, “Christmas Will be Observed in Full Holiday,” Dec. 11, 1942. Doc#001535, Roll 11, Office of the Mayor (Fiorello H. LaGuardia) Subject Files 1933-1945. New York City Municipal Archives (NYCMA), New York City, NY.

¹¹⁷ Memo by Direction of the President from Wm. H. McReynolds, Dec. 17, 1943. Box 10, Entry 55, RG 337. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁸ Emphasis added. Memo from Adjutant General, J.A. Ulio to Chiefs of Supply Services, Chiefs of Administrative Services, and Commanding Generals of all Service Commands, Nov. 21, 1942. Box 22, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

In this statement, it is apparent that the need to work and produce war materials overshadows the celebration of Thanksgiving. While other countries may celebrate Thanksgiving, Americans have a date unique to them, meaning that its celebration does not align with other countries, friend and foe. This may be part of the reason why American leadership felt work must continue, as other countries would not be taking a break. Additionally, the association of Christmas with peace and goodwill is contrary to war and destruction. These ideals are not as strongly associated with Thanksgiving, so if there was a time to not participate in war work Christmas was the more likely candidate. In 1944, a new chairman of the War Production Board, J.A. Krug, a New Deal-era power engineer for the Tennessee Vallee Authority, continued this line of thinking. He maintained the tradition of “Christmas Day [as] the one holiday of the year which we should observe.” However, he advised that full production should continue in plants where continuous operation is necessary, for example, blast furnaces and open hearth furnaces used to produce carbon steel.¹¹⁹ Apparently, there were some needs Christmas could be accommodated to meet but for the vast majority of Americans, Christmas Day remained protected throughout the conflict and as such symbolized something greater than the war itself.

The government was capable and willing to press for work on traditional holidays, yet it refrained from doing so for only one day of the year – Christmas. To American society, this projected a particular image of Christmas, one that removed it from the urgency of war. People were left asking: if the highest agencies in the nation upheld traditions of not working on Christmas, and recommended it to (almost) everyone, what other activities central to the Christmas holiday should be maintained during the war years? One of the central considerations in understanding how Christmas functioned during World War II is the fact that while the government advocated certain rationing and sacrificial measures outlined later in this chapter, it also sought to ensure that the celebration of Christmas continued throughout the war. The central norm of Christmas – consumption – conflicted

¹¹⁹ Press Release from J.A. Krug, Chairman of the WPB, Cleared through OWI, Nov. 26, 1944. Roll 34, Microfilm 1239, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

with these war endeavors. This tension in goals led to mixed messages coming from the government to the people about how to appropriately act. Christmas caught people between two seemingly opposing necessities: the need to uphold the American way of life through purchasing, and the need to support the war effort by sacrificing personal consumption. The desire to maintain the traditions of the holiday through making purchases was seen as just as fundamentally American as the freedom to celebrate, and linked to this sentiment were ideas about why the war was being fought. This patriotic-buying mentality conflicted with wanting to conserve for the war effort via the actions set forth by the government and business to salvage, ration, and make sacrifices for the good of the nation.

Christmas and Consumption

In our present-day celebrations of Christmas, it is hard to miss the fact that many of the traditional norms of behavior that surround the holiday are consumption-based. In order to contextualize mid twentieth-century Christmas behavior during World War II, it is useful to trace the traditions back to the emergence of the modern experience of the holiday. Several scholars have demonstrated that Christmas moved into its modern phase and took on the trappings of middle-class Victorian life – family, religion, and consumption – in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹²⁰ Developments in Western capitalism, such as the rise of the department store and mass-communication through advertising, intertwined social and commercial life and facilitated an increasingly common practice of gift-giving.¹²¹ Historian Stephen Nissenbaum argued in his work *The Battle for Christmas: A Social and Cultural History of Our Most Cherished Holiday* that the cause of this transformation was the rise of a “religion of domesticity,” in which a focus on the family gave increased importance to the behaviors that celebrated it. Victorians moved Christmas into the home, and Santa Claus provided a method to de-

¹²⁰ Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 10; Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, 108; Restad, *Christmas in America*, 123.

¹²¹ George McKay, “Consumption, Coca-Colonization, Cultural Resistance – and Santa Claus,” in *Christmas Ideology and Popular Culture*, ed. Sheila Whiteley, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 52.

commercialize and give more meaningful value to the gifts exchanged between family members, changing the meaning of Christmas in the direction of coordinated consumption and domestic bliss. This was because it was Santa, an intermediary, who spoiled the children and brought them their desires, rather than the parent. This middle-man provided a function whereby parents could give in to their children's wants and needs. Furthermore, Santa did not buy gifts and therefore monetary value of items is also obscured through him.¹²² Prior to the Victorian era, Christmas had been more of a communal celebration, which had aspects of wealth redistribution and was meant to upset the hierarchies that existed throughout the year in a safe and controlled manner. Gifts were directed from the wealthy to those less fortunate who were employed by them or under their tutelage in some way, and not between members of the family, and often consisted of food, drink, or some other symbol of appreciation.¹²³

Many have considered the materialistic qualities of Christmas to be at odds with the Christian religion, namely the values of austerity and charity.¹²⁴ This was not viewed as problematic in the early nineteenth century, perhaps due to Calvinism's view that the financial success necessary to purchase gifts was an indicator of religious devotion. Therefore, religious and consumer behaviors were not necessarily at opposing ends of the Christmas celebration spectrum. Christian leaders had little reaction early on to the figure of Santa Claus, when he began to rise in popularity at the end of the nineteenth century.¹²⁵ In this period, there was actually a close relationship between shopping and Christianity, especially at Christmas. For example, Leigh Eric Schmidt described in *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* the Wanamaker

¹²² Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 48.

¹²³ *Ibid*, xii.

¹²⁴ Pimlott, *The Englishman's Holiday*, 9. He asked "what is the key to the paradox of Christmas—the co-existence of the Nativity feast with the Saturnalia of the secular celebrations?"; Russell Belk claimed that "The tension produced by this paradox surfaces each Christmas season when the consumer materialism seemingly stimulated by the holiday challenges the non-materialistic values enshrined by Christian theology" in "Materialism and the Making of the Modern American Christmas," in *Unwrapping Christmas*, ed. David Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 75.

¹²⁵ Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 72.

department store whose creators, also designers of religious institutions, made the store into a “Christmas cathedral” during the holiday season, complete with a pipe organ, carolling and hymn singing. He argued that “people did not just shop at Wanamaker’s; they received devotional reminders and religious encouragement.”¹²⁶ In the years before the war, some began to speak out about the degree to which consumerism seemed to be overshadowing the more austere values of the season, yet the commercial, communal, and Christian elements were deeply integrated from the start and were not easily separated, regardless of the critics.¹²⁷

The process of gift-giving held an important role in society and could not easily be chided away by the calls that had begun to arise from the pulpit. Aside from materialism, or perhaps in addition to it, the exchange of gifts had an important role in managing social relationships and served as a demonstration of communal and familial ties. While a return to handmade gifts may have accommodated the urges to reduce the centrality of consumption, as sociologist James Carrier demonstrated shopping actually served a very important function. According to him, “Christmas shopping is an annual ritual through which we convert commodities into gifts... it is Christmas shopping that proves to them [the celebrators] that they can create a sphere of familial love in the face of a world of money.”¹²⁸ The process by which people attain gifts gives them a greater meaning than their economic value. Part of that value is the struggle to acquire them, an effort which people view symbolically apart from their material worth.

Pre-War Consumer Behavior at Christmas

American society in the era of World War II was most certainly a ‘world of money,’ especially considered against the backdrop of the Great Depression just a few years earlier. As historian Lizabeth Cohen has shown in *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics*

¹²⁶ Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, 159–66.

¹²⁷ Jean M. Bartunek and Boram Do, “The Sacralisation of Christmas Commerce,” *Organization*, Vol. 18, No. 6), 798 and Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 73. Though it wasn’t until 1949 that the “put Christ back into Christmas” slogan emerged according to Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, 188.

¹²⁸ James Carrier, “The Rituals of Christmas Giving,” in *Unwrapping Christmas*, 63.

of *Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, the government expenditure of billions for military mobilization caused “booming demand for consumer products, record-breaking retail sales, and the creation of even more jobs to manufacture and sell long coveted goods.”¹²⁹ Contrary to popular notions of wartime austerity, the volume of buying increased dramatically during the war. Consumer activities remained prevalent and there was a considerable degree of protection of the consumer economy in spite of mass mobilization for war. The importance of Christmas in this context cannot be overstated, given the huge amount of buying, selling, advertising and marketing that surrounded the celebration of this holiday.

Before the attack at Pearl Harbor, the advertising and marketing trade journal, *Printers’ Ink* had commented on Christmas’ “solid block of purchasing power” and told “advertisers to direct particular attention to the holiday season.”¹³⁰ By looking at pre-war Christmas-savings clubs, it is possible to estimate how much of the extra purchasing power of the American public was channeled into Christmas spending. Collectively known as thrift accounts, these Christmas clubs, vacation clubs, or other short-term savings accounts were used for people to put their money in a safe place but still have easy access to taking it out for a particular purchase. In 1938, approximately 4,500 banks distributed \$330 million to their seven million club members. According to the reports of the banks, funds for Christmas purchases represented 32.4% of the money saved.¹³¹ Nearly a third of people’s saved spending money was going to holiday expenses, indicating the degree to which consumption featured within people’s traditional Christmas behaviors on the eve of war.

The *Washington Post* reported that both the Sears, Roebuck Company and the Woolworth Company had the highest Christmas sales on record for 1938 with Sears

¹²⁹ Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic*, 63.

¹³⁰ “The Little Schoolmaster’s Classroom,” *PI*, Nov. 22 1940, 92 and 93.

¹³¹ “\$330,000,000 in Christmas Saving Clubs,” *HC*, Jan 1, 1939, D2.

reporting a 3.7% increase from 1937 and Woolworth an even larger 6.7%.¹³² In anticipation of record sales for Christmas 1939, wholesale buyers at the July California Art and Gift Show set a record for the number of orders put in for the “25,000 potential Christmas presents and knickknacks” that were on display.¹³³ Even before December in 1939, journalists and economists were predicting the largest holiday season in terms of sales since before the crash of 1929.¹³⁴ Regardless of the outbreak of war across the Atlantic, there was more intensity in early buying periods, more community decorations, increased rail travel, and higher demands on the post offices across the country that year than there had been for a decade. The Christmas sales numbers continued to rise, and records continued to be broken for 1940 as well.¹³⁵ Chicago’s main shopping district saw an influx of approximately 1.75 million people into ‘the Loop’ on one day in mid-December, demonstrating how intense shopping surges could be in major metropolitan areas.

Luxury goods caught the eyes of many people who now found themselves with more disposable income than ever before. Companies took note and acted accordingly. With Paris under occupation in 1940, New York made a strong bid to become the “style center of the world.”¹³⁶ Christmas provided a backdrop for the launch of a publicity campaign in relation to this. This all-diamond show was the first to be held in New York and promoted a specifically American style. Advertisers for DeBeers diamonds wanted to capitalize on the growing domestic market, the reduction of competition, and the

¹³² “Sears and Woolworth Set New Peaks,” *WP*, Jan 7, 1939, 16.

¹³³ “Market Opens Gift Preview,” *LAT*, Jul 31, 1939, 4; “Buying Record Set at Gift Show,” *LAT*, Aug. 4, 1939, 18.

¹³⁴ *LAT*, Nov. 26, 1939, 1; “Merry Christmas,” *WSJ*, Nov 30, 1939, 1; “Christmas Business is Booming,” *WP*, Dec. 3, 1939, E3; “Retailers Report Heavy Buying for Christmas,” *LAT*, Dec. 10, 1939, A19; *WP*, Dec. 24, 1939, 29; “Christmas Shopping Gains in the South,” *CSM*, Dec 9, 1939, 7.

¹³⁵ *NYT*, Nov. 7, 1939, 45; “Christmas Club Savings Reported at New High,” *WSJ*, Nov. 12, 1940, 7.

¹³⁶ Campaign Materials, “Diamonds,” Nov. 26, 1940, page 3. Box 5, Series 16, N.W. Ayer Collection (ACNMAH 59), SNMAH, Washington, DC.

heightened patriotic spirit through this American-style diamond promotion and Christmas was the perfect moment to do so.

Economists had no doubt about what was causing this increased level of purchasing, with one report noting the “tremendous sweep and magnitude of the government’s armament program that is making itself felt in almost every phase of American life.”¹³⁷

Psychologists thought people’s “extraordinary outpouring of buying and giving” was part of their emotional response to the fact that war was waging all around the world.¹³⁸ Many goods that had been unattainable for many in the Depression years were now within reach. There was an urgency of the moment that was also magnified by the uncertainty of war and the Christmas tradition of gift-giving as a particular opportunity that led to a heightened desire to consume more than ever before.

Pre-War Changes to Christmas

The Christmas season was affected by the outbreak of international conflict prior to America’s actual involvement. Most noticeable to the American people were the shortages of goods that usually came from warring nations. The *Washington Post* reported as early as August 1939 that there would be a big decline in lightbulb imports from Japan. According to the United States Tariff Commission there had been a decline in imports of twinkling bulbs in both 1937 and 1938 and there was not going to be an increase into 1939.¹³⁹ That year also saw a shortage of Christmas tree ornaments given that Germany was their main prior source and the United States had never produced them in commercial quantities. The wartime needs for manpower, materials, and shipping all prevented German-made ornaments and Japanese-made lights from coming into the

¹³⁷ AC, Dec. 15, 1940, 7C.

¹³⁸ “Yule Trade Best in More Than a Decade,” AC, Dec. 25, 1940, 2.

¹³⁹ “Big Decline Noted in Import of Light Bulbs from Japan,” WP, Aug. 9, 1939, 3.

United States and subsequently would come to encourage domestic production and interstate trade of these products.¹⁴⁰

In the U.S., people were well informed about the war's effect on Christmas in other countries as well. The information came in the form of radio broadcasts, magazine articles, newspapers, and newsreels. One country that featured prominently in these reports was Britain. America and Britain had an extremely close relationship, and American newspapers consistently reported on the effects of war across the Atlantic. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported in December 1939 how the British government's air-raid evacuation precaution plans were being undone by many British parents who were bringing their children home after their evacuation from London and other towns under potential threat. In spite of appeals from the government, some 250,000 children were back in their towns and another 50,000 had returned to London, out of the 1, 220,000 women and children whom the British government had relocated.¹⁴¹ Christmas took precedence in the minds of the British as well. The actions of the British, already engaged in war with Germany, demonstrated from an early moment that being together for Christmas was something many deemed crucial, even if it violated wartime security concerns.

The British government also sought to manage the international image of the country's reaction to wartime realities and Christmas was a time when it could really illustrate how much the war had seeped into everyday life. At Christmas, the harshness of war was magnified by the holiday's supposed values of peace and goodwill and could have the effect of invoking increased sympathy and support from the Americans. A newsreel produced by the British wartime Office of Information entitled *Christmas under Fire* began with the commentary, "It is Christmas Day. I am leaving London to-night and flying to New York. I am taking with me a film dispatch - the story of Christmas in England in the year of the Blitz - 1940." The film contrasted stockpiles of war materials

¹⁴⁰ Alfred Friendly, "U.S. Faces Shortage of Christmas Tree Ornaments from Warring Nations," *WP*, Dec. 6, 1939, 13.

¹⁴¹ David Darrah, "War Takes a Back Seat as England gets Yule Spirit," *CDT*, Dec. 6, 1939, 1.

with traditional holiday scenes like decorated shops or distributors shipping turkeys to holiday markets. The symbols of Christmas were critical in transmitting a message that things were different but that the English resolve to win remained strong in the face of adversity. Statements like, “There's no demand in England for large trees this year. They would not fit into the shelters, or into the basements and cellars with their low ceilings. This year, England celebrates Christmas underground,” drove home the sacrifices forced on individuals but also how the English people were able to adapt to their new reality.¹⁴² The attitude shift from 1939 to 1940 – when Britain found itself under legitimate threat – was clear. Christmas would go on, but safety concerns would get much more attention. This shift in presentation indicated to Americans that Christmas could continue even in difficult times of war and that it was worth making an effort to find the spirit of Christmas wherever possible.

America would have to do this sooner than it imagined as the nation found itself at war during the Christmas season of 1941. The attack on Pearl Harbor came less than three weeks before Christmas Day, and at that time Americans were very much involved in preparations for the holiday. While Pearl Harbor was a grave moment in foreign policy, in many ways it merely accelerated the changes already underway on the home front regarding defense production and policy. Furthermore, the attack had a very limited effect on consumer spending in the final weeks of 1941 – Christmas would continue regardless of the nation’s war status. Journalist Tom Wolf’s report for the *Missouri Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune* clarifies this point. He wrote, “Wandering through many of Manhattan’s expectantly stocked department stores on December 8, the day after the Japanese attack, you’d have thought an air raid was actually in progress here – judging by the conspicuous absence of customers in the usually jammed aisles... but by week’s end, in those same stores where you could have shot moose on Monday, you couldn’t have packed a sardine on Saturday.”¹⁴³ It appears that in the case of Christmas,

¹⁴² Film Script, “Christmas Under Fire,” undated. INF 6/329. British National Archives at Kew (KEW), London, England.

¹⁴³ Tom Wolf, “Santa Claus in a Quick Comeback,” *Chillicothe Constitution-Tribune*, (Chillicothe, MO), Dec. 24, 1941, 1.

the war was not going to prevent people from following through on their beloved traditions, namely the purchase and exchange of gifts. They may have been immediately stunned, but this wore off quickly. The *New York Times* predicted this, writing just two days after the attack that “after a few days of hesitation holiday trade was likely to go ahead, spurred by a resurgence of holiday shopping psychology that this may be the last opportunity to go on a buying splurge.”¹⁴⁴ While the *New York Times* was right that Christmas trade would and did pick up, it was wrong about it being the last opportunity for it as the volume of Christmas shopping continued to rise throughout the war.¹⁴⁵

Wartime Control of Christmas

While consumption continued for the 1941 holiday season, the war did affect the celebration of Christmas. The evolution of rationing through the war affected many materials critical to the celebration of Christmas. While the United States, compared to other warring nations like England, the Soviet Union, or Germany, had far more stability in its consumer goods, the controls placed on materials' prices affected what people could buy and how much they could spend. Fashion was affected as metal for zippers and rubber for girdles was in short supply. Tastes in food were forcibly modified through the rationing of sugar, coffee, meat, and butter. Travel was reduced because of gasoline and tire shortages.¹⁴⁶ The American home front came to feel these restrictions and limitations as government control expanded considerably into the daily lives of individuals across the nation. The remainder of this chapter looks at government controls placed on the items that many people deemed necessary to the holiday season, including items used as gifts and for gift wrapping; Christmas communications, including cards and calls; traditional decor such as trees, ornaments, and other holiday displays; and the seasonally appropriate food and drink. By looking at the war's impact on various commodities and the way the government and business portrayed these shortages, it is possible to

¹⁴⁴ “War Fails to Cut Holiday Shopping,” *NYT*, Dec. 9, 1941, 53.

¹⁴⁵ This is covered in greater detail in Chapter Two.

¹⁴⁶ Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.*, 37–43.

understand how Christmas functioned to shape people's understanding of the war itself and their role in it. The messages conveyed to the American people, often constructed by corporate advertisers, framed their sacrifices within the spirit of Christmas itself and used the holiday to heighten people's sense of patriotism and sacrifice to the nation. People's sense of charity and community, fostered through the meaning of Christmas, was used to imply that everyone needed to work together to ensure both that the war effort was not hindered by the holiday season and that the holiday season was not hindered by the war. Underlying all of this control, however, was the implicit message that Christmas held a special place in American society and even war could not overshadow that. Furthermore, consumption at Christmas would remain an essential concern for policymakers throughout the war, even if at times their controls impacted that process. This left people to navigate this mixed message on their own and to decide for themselves what American Christmas meant to them.

Gifts and Wrapping

Some of the most treasured Christmas commodities hit by wartime material needs was children's toys.¹⁴⁷ The Census of Manufactures indicated that the value (on the manufacturing level) of all toys, games, dolls, and children's vehicles produced in 1939 was approximately \$90 million. Retail toy sales in the same year were estimated at \$275 million, with U.S. manufacturers supplying about 99% of the domestic toy market. Many foreign manufacturers were engaged in war production. The American toy industry had been forced to begin to take the lead in production twenty-two years before when World War I shut down foreign imports as well. Regardless, the most important individual characteristic of the toy industry in America is undoubtedly its seasonality. The great majority of toys sold at retail in any year are sold in the Christmas season, specifically the months of November and December. According to the National Retail Dry Goods Association in 1939, as much as 75% of the toy business in department stores is during

¹⁴⁷ This section will focus on the material shortages that impacted toy production and the regulations put in place to manage them, as well as reactions from toy manufacturers. The social impact of shortages on children and how the war changed children's desires for certain toys and the meaning of the toys themselves is discussed in Chapter 3.

the Christmas selling season. Furthermore, many stores close up their toy departments after Christmas and warehouse the remaining toys until the following season. Only the larger stores maintain a regular toy department and even those are far smaller at off-season times than they are during the Christmas season.

Some of the most desired toys of the era, like bicycles, model trains, games, and dolls, were made of critical war materials, namely metal, plastic, and rubber. The War Production Board moved fairly quickly to curtail the use of strategic materials by the toy industry. Order L-81 limited, during the period of April 1 to June 30, 1942, the use of iron, steel, zinc, and rayon in the production of all toys or games which used more than 7% by weight of the materials listed.¹⁴⁸ After June 1942 the use of these materials was prohibited. The order also immediately restricted a long list of extremely critical raw materials, such as copper, alloy steel, chromium plating, tin, cork, silk, plastics, certain bright colors, oils, and paints from being used in the production of any toys and games.¹⁴⁹ The Office of Price Administration also sought to stabilize the industry by requesting manufacturers of toys to maintain their prices at January 1942 levels. However, in April the toy industry fell under the OPA's General Maximum Price Regulation which established maximum prices for most goods and services at the highest prices charged during March of 1942. Given the seasonality of the industry, retailers found themselves in a threatened position as many March prices were considerable markdowns from the previous Christmas season. Consequently, the OPA decided an equitable position for the toy industry for both retailers and manufacturers would be to set

¹⁴⁸ L81 - General limitation order (1), War Production Board Article 1156. Box 162, Entry 16A, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD. Toys and Games Toy or Game means any device, plaything, article or material commonly referred to as a toy or game, including but not limited to dolls, doll accessories, stuffed animals, adults' and children's games (including but not limited to playing cards, dice, poker chips, mah-jong and Ouija boards), juvenile art sets and materials, juvenile craft sets and materials, masquerade costumes, or accessories, tricks, puzzles, puzzle sets, magic sets, children's play vehicles, Christmas lighting decorations (including but not limited to series circuit strings, parallel circuit strings, candles, wreaths, etc. for decorative purposes), no-illuminated Christmas tree ornaments or stands, sleds, models, model building parts, model airplanes, accessories or kits, toy furniture and juvenile playground and gymnasium equipment (other than that used by clubs, schools, and institutions) but not including sporting goods or athletic equipment.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

maximum prices for manufactures at the highest price charged for each toy during April 1941, plus 50% of the increase in the price of each toy between April 1941 and March 1942.¹⁵⁰ The seasonality of the toy industry presented a unique problem for the implementation of particular war measures. The toy industry got special treatment because of its importance to the celebration of Christmas.

As the war progressed, America's industrial capacity was producing more actual military materials instead of their toy versions. Robert H. McCready, publisher of *Playthings*, the toy manufactures magazine, said in January of 1942, "From now on because so many of the things that go into toy-making are needed for war, the glamour of today is going to be replaced by the simplicity of yesterday in little Johnnie's toys... There will be plenty of toys for Christmas 1942, but there will be far fewer of the items made with steel – such as mechanical toys, tool chests, boats – and rubber products like balls... There will be more games made of wood and cardboard, wooden wagons, and even perhaps wooden velocipedes, such as grandpa used to navigate the country lanes."¹⁵¹ McCready's prediction was right, and there were enough Christmas toys on the market for the winter of 1942, but material priorities meant that they were often made of cardboard or wood.

Toy manufacturing was deemed important enough to continue in some capacity as "morale-builders; to soothe jangled nerves in a jottery [sic] world" as well as to teach "manipulation and co-ordination [sic] to youngsters."¹⁵² In 1943 war material shortages were even more dramatic than 1942, making children's books and other non-metal items on the rise in popularity as gifts for Christmas.¹⁵³ The maker of Lionel electric trains had been enlisted to make precision instruments for the Navy and A.C. Gilbert Co, maker of erector sets, was enlisted to do the same for the Army. Other examples include an Ohio

¹⁵⁰ Statement of Considerations, undated. File 19, Box 1, UD 64, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁵¹ "Grandpa's Toys to be Stylish for 1942, *WP*, Jan. 3, 1942, 20; War Invades Santa's Workshop, *VICTORY Bulletin*, Apr. 7, 1942, 9.

¹⁵² "Merchandise: Christmas Toys Clicking; Good Items Available," *The Billboard*, Vol. 54, No. 49, (Dec. 05, 1942), 52.

¹⁵³ "Christmas Boom in Children's Books," *LIFE*, Dec. 7, 1943, 43.

rubber toy firm had that shifted to producing rubber boats for the Navy and synthetic rubber delousing bags, as well as an Illinois firm that now was making gun grips when it had originally been making doll furniture.¹⁵⁴ While this demonstrated an ingenuity in the toy manufacturing industry to adapt to the needs of the armed forces, there were ultimately fewer toys produced and they were of lesser quality than in the years preceding the war. Also, a top seller in 1943 was the “basic weapon of the soldier, the old-fashioned gun.”¹⁵⁵ Metal guns were out, but wood and paperboard were successful in making ersatz toy versions these items, usually painted black or olive drab. Some even had sighting pieces, realistic triggers, or noisemakers, and could even shoot wooden bullets.¹⁵⁶

By 1944 resistance against these controls was being felt in the form of a newly organized Toy Industry Advisory Committee. The committee argued that an estimated “twenty manufacturers who made wood toys before the war, used about 10,000,000 board feet of lumber a year. As a result of restrictions on the use of metal, considerably more than this amount of wood is being used for toys now. If iron and steel, now permitted to be employed only for joining hardware, could be used more freely,” the industry members said, “a large quantity of wood could be saved, and more serviceable toys could be manufactured.”¹⁵⁷ They argued this was actually the better scenario for the American war machine and the nation overall. Additionally, numerous appeals were made by toy manufacturers to the War Production board for individual exemptions from the restrictions. An appeal from Modern Wood and Plastic Products, ultimately denied by the WPB, based its case on the position “that toys afford children recreation, thereby building morale in parents.”¹⁵⁸ Toys as morale builders is an important concept as Christmas was one of the few instances throughout the year when children across the nation would

¹⁵⁴ *SandS London*, Nov. 1, 1943, 7.

¹⁵⁵ “Christmas Special,” *The Billboard*, Vol. 55, No. 48 (Nov 27, 1943), 82.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ “War Restrictions Cut Variety in Toy Pack of Santa Claus,” *WP*, Nov. 7, 1943, M1; Press Release from the WPB, Mar. 1, 1944. Box 1, Entry 141, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁵⁸ Appeal to L 81 from Modern Wood and Plastics Products (Girard, Ohio), May 22, 1944. Entry 49, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

receive toys; consequently, Christmas was a key moment that could build morale in both children and their parents. In 1944, the War Production Board allowed the use of some metals and rubber in toy making, meaning that while electric trains and bicycles (the two most desired and most unavailable items) were still not in production, there would be more replacement tracks for electric trains, steel wagons, sleds, doll carriages, china dishes, and construction sets available than there had been in 1943.¹⁵⁹ According to the Commerce Department, by Christmas 1944 “Mr. and Mrs. America playing Santa Claus to their children this Christmas will be able to plant a better grade of toy under the tree than a year ago.”¹⁶⁰ One official estimated the U.S. would spend \$250,000,000 for holiday toys that year and while they would not be the same quality as pre-war production, they represented a significant improvement over the ersatz versions created in 1943. However, iron, steel, chromium, copper, cork, silk, certain plastics, antimony, tin, and rubber were still under heavy restriction and would remain that way until the order was lifted at the end of the war. Not until 1945 and even 1946 in some cases did toys begin to return to their former quality and composition.

The extent of the effort the government put into regulating toys for Christmas is shown by the fact that a team of experts from the OPA went to work in late 1944 to set ceiling prices on “every toy for the Christmas market.”¹⁶¹ An article in *LIFE* magazine documented the team that was at work and noted that in spite of the material shortages the OPA was working to keep the prices as low as they were in 1942. So, it was trying to find comparable prices for every manufacturer doing more than \$75 worth of business.¹⁶² There was a massive public demand for toys during the holiday season, and without significant management of the market, this huge demand would have sent prices

¹⁵⁹ “WPB Helps Santa Get Toys,” *SandS London*, Oct. 23 1944, 3; “More Yule Toys Get Sanction of War Board,” *LAT*, Oct. 15, 1944, 3.

¹⁶⁰ “Life In Those United States More and Better Toys Assured Kids For Xmas,” *SandS London*, Nov. 3, 1944, 4.

¹⁶¹ “OPA Enforcing Price Control on Yule Toys,” *WP*, Dec. 17 1944, 3; “OPA Toyland,” *LIFE*, Nov. 13, 1944, 38.

¹⁶² “OPA Toyland,” *LIFE*, Nov. 13, 1944, 38.

skyrocketing. The level of demand speaks not only to the deeply rooted drive people felt to purchase toys at Christmas but also to the care the government had for the holiday season and its realization of the impact that mismanagement could have on both the war effort and the holiday season.

A central norm of Christmas gift-giving is to wrap gifts festively.¹⁶³ In the years before the war, a relatively new material, Cellophane, was growing in its popularity as a gift-wrap. The December 1939 and 1940 issues of *Ladies' Home Journal* included a two-page spread from the manufacturer of Cellophane, DuPont. The 1939 version stated, "Santa goes to school and learns how easy it is to add new-fashioned glamour to a good old-fashioned Christmas. Follow these directions and you'll learn too. It's merry fun – dressing gifts in 'cellophane.'"¹⁶⁴ However, even before the war had come to America, the Office of Production Management issued a limitation order banning the use of Cellophane for gift wrapping. This was because large quantities of scarce chemicals needed for defense, like chlorine, phenol, and glycerin, were needed to produce Cellophane. The OPM also limited the use of this transparent material in packaging and manufacturing of many toiletry items, hardware, sporting goods, decorative items and novelties like molded Christmas bells, wreaths, garlands, and ribbons.¹⁶⁵ The case of Cellophane indicates that not all aspects of the holiday were untouchable by the war. Since this product was a relatively new invention and its association with Christmas had only been made recently, it was more susceptible to the government's wartime controls and not likely to elicit any substantial public outcry.

The most common materials used to wrap gifts, wrapping paper and gift boxes, was not limited outright by the government. Just prior to the war Lessing J. Rosenwald, chief of the Bureau of Industrial Conservation of the Office of Price Management, urged retailers

¹⁶³ Caplow, "Rule Enforcement Without Visual Means;" Marling, *Merry Christmas! Waits, The Modern Christmas in America*.

¹⁶⁴ Suzette Noel, "Make Your Gifts Exciting," *LHJ*, Dec. 1939, 40-41; "7 Simple Tricks to Make your Christmas Gifts Exciting with 'Cellophane,'" *LHJ*, Dec. 1940, 40-41.

¹⁶⁵ "Cellophane Use is Ordered Cut by OPM," *NYT*, Nov. 8, 1941, 21.

and the public to be economical and only sparingly use gift boxes, tissue paper, and wrapping paper in the coming Christmas season. He said “Double wrappings and re-wrappings of packages at home in additional boxes or paper materials... as commonplace examples of wasteful use,” and also noted “that most shoppers request special wrappings for all purchases during the pre-Christmas season, even though many may not be meant for gifts.”¹⁶⁶ By April of 1942, some businesses, like the members of the Chicago Retailers War Policies Committee, had made pledges to restrict the use of fancy boxes for the following Christmas.¹⁶⁷ The government still did not make any hard regulations.¹⁶⁸ Yet many consumers found it difficult to acquire these paper products as the war went on. The December 1944 issue of the magazine *Women’s Home Companion* indicated this and suggested ways to use paper sparingly while still ensuring festively wrapped gifts.¹⁶⁹ The public and businesses took it upon themselves to find solutions to the paper problem, rather than overusing the materials they could acquire. This action indicates an acceptance of the austerity measures the government was putting into place surrounding the Christmas season, within the constraints of still adhering to Christmas norms, as people were willing to expand their actions past the point of official limitations but only to a partial degree.

Communication

Despite paper shortages, the production of Christmas cards continued through the war.¹⁷⁰ Christmas cards were invented by the British in the Victorian era.¹⁷¹ Yet it was German

¹⁶⁶ *DEFENSE Bulletin*, Dec. 9, 1941, 25; Press Release, Dec. 2 1941. Microfilm 195, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁶⁷ “Santa Claus Bans Fancy Yule Boxes as War Help,” *CDT*, Apr. 15, 1942, 3.

¹⁶⁸ “NO Ban on Gift Boxes,” *VICTORY Bulletin*, Jul. 21, 1942, 19.

¹⁶⁹ “Wrap it With Imagination,” *WHC*, Dec. 1944, 53.

¹⁷⁰ Similar to the discussion of children’s toys, this section will focus on the production of cards, and regulations surrounding them, whereas Chapter 3 will delve into what meaning they held for people during the war and how the desirability of certain Christmas card themes changed during the course of the war. “Yule Outlook,” *WP*, Oct. 1, 1944, M8.

¹⁷¹ Tanya Gulevich, *Encyclopedia of Christmas: Nearly 200 Alphabetically Arranged Entries Covering All Aspects of Christmas, Including Folk Customs, Religious Observances, History, Legends,*

immigrant Louis Prang who popularized them in the United States in the 1870s. He created all sorts of greeting cards, including birthday and Valentine cards, as well as Christmas cards.¹⁷² Production expanded dramatically in the early 1900s due to factors such as the penny post, urbanization, and a fascination with photography. Hallmark cards, established in 1910, has become the leader of the greeting card industry and, according to Stephen Papon, has continued the rationalization of that industry.¹⁷³ He stated that greeting cards generally are “object[s] of communication, it functions to both reaffirm and re-establish relationships,” but that “to speak to one another through the greeting card is to speak through the greeting card industry.”¹⁷⁴ This means that the greeting card industry has significant power over communication between people and shapes the messages that people give and receive. In the context of wartime, this position was an extremely valuable one.

Once the war broke out, even with the paper shortage the government was distinctly aware of the power of greeting cards to transmit messages and their ability to contribute to support for the war overall. An April 1942 memo from E.R. Gay, Director of the Industrial Commodities Division, Office of Civilian Supply, to W.G. Chandler, Director of the Printing and Publishing Division, acknowledged the shortages and proposed a possible solution:

The only real function of a greeting card being to transmit a greeting, it is not necessary that the card be either large in size, heavy in weight, or multiple in fold; nor is it necessary that it be enclosed in a heavy weight envelope. It would seem that this industry and the public using such cards might well be asked to

Symbols, and Related Days from Europe, America, and around the World (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 2000), 100.

¹⁷² Gulevich, *Encyclopedia of Christmas*, 103.

¹⁷³ Stephen Papon, “From Symbolic Exchange to Bureaucratic Discourse: the Hallmark Greeting Card,” in *Theory, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 3 No. 2, (1986): 100.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

accept the degree of restriction imposed on similar products and be content with the cards of simple form.¹⁷⁵

The discussion indicates that government officials accepted the important role cards could play in stimulating emotion and transmitting messages but did not think their particular construction played any important role in this process. In 1943, government regulations limited the use of paper for cards to 60% of the previous year. With so many family members separated and unable to return home because of the war, the demand for cards was greater than in previous years.¹⁷⁶ Combined with the increased purchasing power of the public, it was unclear how manufacturers would accommodate the restrictions on paper. They were ultimately able to get around this restriction by making similar numbers of cards but from thinner paper.¹⁷⁷ Additionally, the WPB regulation was reset to limit publishers to 80% of the weight of the paper used in 1942, but the bigger problem was the shortage of paper for envelopes. To increase profit margins, card makers began churning out higher priced novelty cards, with balls of cotton, satin, and other decorations attached to pump up the season's profits in spite of the restrictions and to capitalize on people's desire to send cards regardless of the cost.¹⁷⁸

Another way to connect with loved ones who may have been separated by far distances was via the telephone, and the desire to do this was extremely poignant during the holiday season. Even from the first Christmas of the war, people were urged to refrain, however, from long-distance calling for fear of the circuits becoming overcrowded and necessary war calls being unable to get through.¹⁷⁹ Bell Telephone took out ads stating, "Everything possible is being done to get ready for the rush. Every switchboard position,

¹⁷⁵ Memo from E.R. Gay, Director of the Industrial Commodities Division of Civilian Supply to Mr. W. G. Chandler, Director of the Printing and Publishing Division, Apr. 4, 1942. Box 191, Entry NM-57 16A, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁷⁶ The increased volume in the use of Christmas letters and greeting cards is discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁷⁷ "Yule Card Shortage," *NYT*, Sept. 25, 1943, 12.

¹⁷⁸ "Merchandise: Christmas Cards" *The Billboard*, Vol. 55, No. 41 (Oct 09, 1943): 50.

¹⁷⁹ "Long Distance Phone Calls Out This Christmas," *AC*, Dec. 17, 1941, 4.

every long distance line will be open - and hundreds of extra operators will be on duty. But even so, we know we won't be able to keep the calls moving at normal speed.”¹⁸⁰ The companies realized that as the war took shape and families became separated because of the conflict, calling rushes at the holiday season would continue. Bell's 1942 advertisements to reduce holiday calls featured Santa holding a sign reading “Please Don't Call Long Distance This Christmas! It may be the holiday season – but war needs the wire that you used to use for Christmas calls. Long Distance lines are loaded with urgent messages. Extra lines can't be added because copper and other materials are needed for the war.”¹⁸¹ The company used the imagery of Santa to indicate that it was alright to deviate from Christmas custom as well as indicate the fact that it was unable to do anything to make more calls possible. The campaigns through 1943 and 1944 stuck to a similar message and encouraged the public to make the sacrifice, as by doing so they were directly helping the war. Clearly these were done more to alleviate upset and uphold customer loyalty rather than to manage wartime realities. By 1945 causing a loss of vital war information was obviously no longer the reason not to make Christmas calls. The company still took out advertisements to indicate how busy it anticipated being and that if people called a few days before or after Christmas, they would ideally experience fewer delays and not risk not getting through at all.¹⁸² Overall, these calls to reduce were coming from the company itself and the government did not put any official restrictions in place, indicating their hesitation to fully restrict people's ability to communicate with loved ones at Christmas.

The government also regulated other forms of communication. In 1943 the War Department announced a policy to suspend the Expeditionary Force Message (EFM) system because of a lack of communication facilities overseas and the heavy volume of

¹⁸⁰ 1941 Bell Advertising Campaign Materials, No Author, No Date. Box 22, Series 3, N.W. Ayer Collection (ACNMAH 59). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

¹⁸¹ 1942 Bell Advertising Campaign Materials, No Author, No Date. Box 22, Series 3, N.W. Ayer Collection (ACNMAH 59). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

¹⁸² 1943, 1944, and 1945 Bell Advertising Campaign Materials, No Author, No Date. Box 22, Series 3, N.W. Ayer Collection (ACNMAH 59). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

Christmas greetings coming through. EFMs were a reduced-rate telegram service introduced in June 1942 by Western Union for American servicemen that they could use to communicate with home. The company provided a list of fixed messages with code numbers, and the sender could select the appropriate one; only the code numbers would have to be transmitted via cable.¹⁸³ For the Christmas 1943 season, the messages troops could send home were reduced to six holiday-texts, along the (very impersonal) lines of “Merry Christmas, all is well” or “love and best wishes for a happy New Year.”¹⁸⁴ Telegrams to servicemen were restricted entirely during the holiday season to prevent vital war information from being lost in the chaos of incoming messages in American-concentrated areas.¹⁸⁵ The ban was repeated in 1944 along with warnings that the winter weather would slow air mail. Troops were encouraged to increase their use of V-mail to help cut down on the volume of mail that was overloading the system.¹⁸⁶ V-mail, short for Victory Mail, originated in England and was a process by which original letters could be microfilmed onto sheets at a smaller size and then “blown up” once overseas. These were used to reduce cargo space during the war, and the military even produced special Christmas designs to entice members of the armed forces into using the service instead of sending full-sized letters.¹⁸⁷ Separated from home, people desperately sought to communicate with their loved ones, especially over the holiday season. The mad rush to call, cable, and mail put significant pressure on not only transportation and utilities but also required a significant amount of effort to carry out and yet both the government and corporations worked to keep the lines open and the public happy throughout the Christmas seasons of the war.

¹⁸³ *SandS London*, Dec. 4 1943, 2; Bill Glover, “History of the Atlantic Cable and Undersea Communications,” *Atlantic Cable*, <http://atlantic-cable.com/CableCos/Services/index.htm>

¹⁸⁴ “Usual EFM Cables Suspended; Six Holiday Texts Substituted,” *SandS London*, Dec. 6, 1943, 1.

¹⁸⁵ *SandS London*, Dec. 6, 1943, 6.

¹⁸⁶ *SandS London*, Dec. 4, 1944, 5.

¹⁸⁷ “V-Mail,” *Smithsonian National Postal Museum*, <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/past/the-art-of-cards-and-letters/mail-call/v-mail.html>

Décor

Another key element of the American Christmas was the Christmas tree. The Christmas tree has a long history in American life, both public and private. Legend has it that the tradition of the Christmas tree was brought over from Europe by German immigrants, but historian Stephen Nissenbaum argues that the ritual was actually transmitted via literature and accepted in America as part of a “folk revival” in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁸⁸

Karal Ann Marling argues that it was the public display of trees that inspired individuals to adopt the practice of bringing them into their homes and the “aesthetic of the Christmas tree is closely related to that of the nineteenth-century store window, in which the aim was to show off merchandise in an appealing way.”¹⁸⁹ The tree in the family home was used to demonstrate material prosperity, as well as devotion to the well-being of the children, as the tree was used to display gifts for them.

In pre-war years, trees were shipped in from Canada as well as distributed between states. In 1938 Canada exported approximately five million trees to the U.S. and used about one million domestically.¹⁹⁰ States like Montana provided 1.7 million trees, supplying approximately one-sixth of the domestic market.¹⁹¹ By 1942 imports from Canada were being limited as government regulations prevented the use of specific rail equipment required to transport the trees into the U.S.¹⁹² Regardless, the OPA specifically exempted trees, mistletoe, and other holiday greenery from the provisions of the General Maximum Price Regulation it had instituted that spring.¹⁹³ The WPB reported that similar numbers of trees would be available as in previous years, though there would probably be less

¹⁸⁸ Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, 195.

¹⁸⁹ Marling, *Merry Christmas!*, 170 and 174.

¹⁹⁰ “Canada Counts on Yule Trees for War Revenue,” *CSM*, Dec. 5, 1940, 4.

¹⁹¹ “Montana is Harvesting Big Christmas Tree Crop,” *CSM*, Oct. 24, 1939, 7.

¹⁹² “Fewer Yule Trees From Canada Now,” *WP*, Nov. 22, 1942, L8.

¹⁹³ *PI*, Aug. 28, 1942, 10.

selection because they were harvested locally to avoid haulage.¹⁹⁴ The harvesting and shipping of trees required vast amounts of resources, so the tree industry was another into which women were recruited to work during the war years. The December 1943 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* included a feature article about the young women who had been co-opted into the “frozen swamps of Northern Minnesota... [to begin] cutting Christmas trees for this Christmas.”¹⁹⁵ Even though trees took up vital labor, shipping, and material resources they remained exempt from wartime regulations, covered by a joint ruling of the WPB, OPA, and Office of Defense Transportation because of their centrality to the celebration of Christmas.¹⁹⁶

The trees were slow to make it into public markets in 1943 and this caused a considerable amount of anxiety within the public. The fear of not getting a tree for Christmas caused prices to skyrocket and left many surplus trees selling for almost nothing by Christmas Eve.¹⁹⁷ In 1944 the WPB cautioned buyers not to repeat the pattern, reporting that there would be an ample number of trees available, and the Office of the Association of American Railroads announced that transportation to market would not cause a bottleneck.¹⁹⁸ Evident is the considerable degree of coordination between the government and industry to accomplish a task that had no benefit to the war effort, and if anything actually hindered it. The only explanation is that both groups were aware of the importance of holiday traditions in people’s lives and realized that they had to make accommodations to keep morale up.

According to a government report written for the OPA in November of 1942, this was realized very early in the war. The report detailed import procedures, contribution to

¹⁹⁴ Press Release from WPB, Nov. 13, 1943. Roll 32, Microfilm 1239, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁹⁵ Jesse Rainsford Sprague, “Christmas-Tree Man,” *SEP*, Dec. 18, 1943, 24.

¹⁹⁶ “Christmas Trees are Exempted From Wartime Regulations,” *WP*, Dec. 3, 1942, 10; *VICTORY Bulletin*, Dec. 8, 1942, 2; Press Release from WPB, Dec. 2, 1942. Roll 28, Microfilm 1239, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁹⁷ “Supply of Yule Trees is Ample; OWI Announces,” *CDT*, Nov. 27, 1944, 23.

¹⁹⁸ “Green Xmas Due in U.S.,” *SandS Mediterranean Besancon*, Nov. 11, 1944, 2.

trade, impact on forestry, and how the war would affect the Christmas tree trade. However, it also noted “the custom of using the decorated evergreen during the holiday season as a symbol of hope, life, and merriment.”¹⁹⁹ Regardless of transport or labor costs, the tone of the report makes it clear that trees were critical for the domestic market. Despite the effects of war on the tree trade, effort from both the government and industry would be made to ensure this “symbol of hope” would be available to consumers.²⁰⁰

Conversely, Christmas décor and ornaments were items hit by governmental regulations. Order L219 established limits on merchants’ inventories of certain goods, including Christmas ornaments and metal tree stands.²⁰¹ This was further regulated by Order M126 which restricted the use of iron and steel in the manufacture of these items.²⁰² Metal was also restricted in the use of lights made for Christmas trees, and according to the *New York Times*, “Santa Claus [would] suffer a semi-blackout” thanks to the War Production Board.²⁰³ This applied to lights used mainly for Christmas trees, as well as for Christmas advertising and decorative or display purposes, and was done primarily to reduce the use of nickel, brass, and copper necessary in producing these items. Other non-metal Christmas décor was also affected by the war including items like candles and traditional winter “greens.”²⁰⁴ Newspapers and magazines advocated people use old decorations, or make DIY products out of scraps on hand.²⁰⁵ In 1944 the WPB permitted the production of some Christmas ornaments as part of its conversion from war to civilian production. For example the Paper Novelty Manufacturing Company was allowed to resume production of ornaments made with lead foil, which was used to add sparkle and luster to

¹⁹⁹ Report on The Christmas Tree – A Symbol of Peace and How it Fares in a Wartime Economy, by Beatrice Coleman, Nov. 26, 1942. Box 3, Entry 51, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Order from the WPB – L219, undated. Box 182, Entry 16A, RG 179. College Park, MD.

²⁰² Order from the WPB – M126, undated. Box 182, Entry 16A, RG 179. College Park, MD.

²⁰³ “WPB Restricts Metals for Lights on Yule Trees,” *NYT*, Jan. 29, 1942, 9.

²⁰⁴ *CDT*, Dec. 19, 1943, SW1; *NYT*, Dec. 12, 1943, X14.

²⁰⁵ “Better Figure on Using Old Yule Trinkets,” *CDT*, Dec. 15, 1944, 21; “Decorations are still scarce for Yule tree,” *AC*, Nov. 11, 1945, 6B.

tree ornaments and “icicles” but that were predominantly made of non-restricted materials.²⁰⁶

There are several things that make the Christmas season distinctly special in people’s minds. Among the most public and prominent are the holiday displays that cities and towns put up each year. While the extensive exterior lighting seen on many homes today was not popularized until after the war, lighting the main streets and town squares was customary in many places across the country in the pre-war era. Brian Murray investigated the history of Christmas lights in America and their role in community-building. According to him, it was the invention of the first reliable (and therefore saleable) incandescent light bulb by Thomas Edison in 1879 that allowed this to become such a popular sight. Even then people were aware of the power of Christmas sentiment as an advertising tool. During the 1880 Christmas season Edison chose to construct “an eight-mile underground wiring system in order to power a grand light display on the grounds of his Menlo Park factory” to highlight his new invention.²⁰⁷ Two years later Edison’s business partner displayed the first electrically lit Christmas tree and by 1900 merchants began using lights in their windows in the same promotional way that Edison had.²⁰⁸ However, it was President Cleveland’s 1895 decision to put an electrically-lit tree in the White House that prompted similar community trees to begin being displayed across the nation. Lighted outdoor trees were possible with the development of General Electric’s all-weather wiring and led to displays in San Diego in 1904, Pasadena in 1909, and New York City in 1912.²⁰⁹ The Depression-era Rural Electrification Administration worked to extend the electrical grid into rural communities and by 1939 a quarter of rural Americans had the infrastructure necessary for Christmas lights. Murray argues that “in

²⁰⁶ “WPB opens way to brighter Christmas,” *NYT*, Oct. 6, 1944, 25.

²⁰⁷ Brian Murray, “Christmas Lights and Community Building in America,” *Yale College*, <https://historymatters.appstate.edu/sites/historymatters.appstate.edu/files/christmaslights.pdf>

²⁰⁸ Kerri Dean, “The History of Christmas Lights,” *Claremont Graduate University*, (Dec. 9, 2015), <https://www.cgu.edu/news/2015/12/history-of-christmas-lights/>

²⁰⁹ Melanie Archer, “Christmas – Xmas Excess,” in *The Business of Holidays*, edited by Maud Lavin, (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2004), 237.

an expanding global community beset by urbanization, war, depression, and increasingly impersonal technology the sight of a lighted Christmas tree continued to offer solace to millions of Americans.”²¹⁰

However, the outbreak of war altered the Christmas light displays for several reasons. The first, as already discussed, was that there were less lights on the market, as the materials needed in the construction of light bulbs were needed more urgently for the production of war materials. As such their production was limited and, ultimately, banned. The second and related reason was that the manufacturers of these items often also shifted into war production, further decreasing availability. However, for communities and individuals that were already in possession of the materials necessary, it was security and utility restrictions that caused them to abandon their lighted displays for the duration of the war.

Even before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the OPM began restricting the use of electricity for non-essential purposes due to shortages caused by rearmament. The ban included Christmas lighting displays and affected eight southeastern states served by the Tennessee Valley Authority. Knoxville, Tennessee, canceled its merchant-sponsored ‘Santa Claus Village,’ and Memphis and Birmingham lit their Christmas parades by flares instead of the shop windows as had been planned.²¹¹ Once America was officially at war and coastal bombing became a concern, the Office of Civilian Defense called for the restriction of “potentially dangerous types of Christmas lighting” for fear of enemy attack, along with “the material and electrical power involved and the hazard of a fire at a time when any waste is sabotage.”²¹² Other cities, such as Washington, D.C., issued no mandatory orders, but gave citizens the same warning to encourage compliance without

²¹⁰ Murray, “Christmas Lights and Community Building in America.” The discussion about community reactions to the outbreak of war is more fully discussed in Chapter 4. This section will deal with the shortages and difficulties in production the industry and the government faced in relation to the need to ration materials and utilities.

²¹¹ “OPM Turns off All Christmas Lights in 8 Southeast States,” *CDT*, Nov. 12, 1941, 1; “OPM Turns Out Lights in Face of Santa Claus - Carnival Paraders Forced to Use Flares, *AC*, Nov. 22, 1941, 6.

²¹² “Modest Christmas Lighting Favored by WPB,” *VICTORY Bulletin*, Nov. 3, 1942, 30.

official regulation. Defense Coordinator John Russell Young was quick to point out that “it is not intended by such restrictions that individual stores or homes may not decorate their windows as in previous years, provided such lighting conforms to acceptable dim-out regulations.”²¹³ War Production Board officials, on the other hand, were asking city officials, civic clubs, chambers of commerce, merchants and citizens to dispense with outdoor decorative lighting and many were quick to comply though they sought to keep the spirit with non-lighted decorations from years past.²¹⁴ The White House followed suit and in 1942 agreed that the national Christmas tree on the south lawn would also remain lightless in solidarity. Inside, “decorations saved from years past will be used on a small family tree in the west hall on the White House second floor. There will be a tree in the east room, but it will be smaller than heretofore and will have only white lights. Only other Christmas decorations will be a few wreaths and poinsettias, and a sprig of mistletoe suspended in the main lobby.”²¹⁵ Again, the government was sending the message to conform to wartime requirements and also to keep the celebration of Christmas alive.

By 1943 the Office of War Utilities reported that in light of government and industry efforts to conserve fuels and save materials necessary for electricity, the Director, J.A. Erug, was “asking the American people to refrain from their Christmas lighting custom.”²¹⁶ This was due to a shortage of electric light bulbs, and unnecessary strain on electricity, fuel, manpower, transport, and material, and yet no mandatory order was enacted. Whether this was because, as Erug stated, “the American people [would] realize the necessity” or because in doing so would be to infringe too deeply into people’s tightly held traditions is unclear, but it was evident that regulation of these displays powerfully altered the public appearance of the holiday season. However this was only to the degree

²¹³ “Yule Lighting Cautioned,” *WP*, Nov. 5, 1942, 18.

²¹⁴ “Dear Santa: WPB Frowns on Outdoor Xmas Lights,” *Chicago Defender*, Nov. 14, 1942, 3; “Ban Outdoor Yule Lights,” *NYT*, Nov. 27, 1942, 19; *CDT*, Dec. 6, 1942, W4.

²¹⁵ “It’s ‘Lights Out’ for Yule Trees at White House,” *CDT*, Dec. 24, 1942, 3.

²¹⁶ Press release from the WPB, Nov. 3, 1942. Roll 32, Microfilm 1239, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

that left people free to decide for themselves how to fit their celebration into wartime requests for austerity and conservation and while still upholding the ‘American spirit’ of consumption and abundance so deeply associated with the holiday.

Consumables

On a more personal level, government control also found its way into the home via the traditional foods that people strongly associated with the holiday season and thus were in high demand at particular times of the year. The foods that surround Christmas, while carrying deep personal meaning, are also highly ritualized. The traditional meal has several elements that people work very hard to attain. Cathy Kaufman investigated the history of Christmas foods in her article “The Ideal Christmas Dinner.”²¹⁷ She argued that Christmas and food were connected as far back as Anglo-Saxon times and recounted how feudal lords hosted great feasts for their dependents during this time of year, noting that “through much of its preindustrial history, Christmas was the time when little agrarian work needed to be done” and there were often stores of food from the fall harvests available for consumption.²¹⁸ The family Christmas dinner only became common in the mid-nineteenth century in the Victorian era with the rise of a home- and child-centered holiday. The food – turkey with gravy, stuffing, potatoes, and plum pudding – was not invented by, but became significantly more popular because of, Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Karal Ann Marling called this work “the most significant Christmas of the nineteenth century” in her analysis of American Christmas customs.²¹⁹ Ultimately, through Dickens’ work these foods came to be seen as the quintessential American holiday feast.²²⁰ The cultural power of the Christmas feast is further evidenced by Kaufman as she discussed how, during the Civil War, Americans sought to eat turkey at Christmas regardless of cost. According to her, when the war was

²¹⁷ Cathy Kaufman, “The Ideal Christmas Dinner,” in *The Journal of Food and Culture*, Vol. 4, No. 4, (Fall 2004): 17-24.

²¹⁸ Kaufman, “The Ideal Christmas Dinner,” 17.

²¹⁹ Marling, *Merry Christmas!*, 27.

²²⁰ Kaufman, “The Ideal Christmas Dinner,” 17.

over “Reconstruction brought a renewed urgency to finding common national ground, and the Dickens meal, already well-known, was a perfect vehicle both for reuniting the nation and for assimilating the growing numbers of immigrants arriving.”²²¹ Again we see that Christmas and war, far from being at odds with one another, actually have a deeply entangled past in the United States.

Turkey remained a traditional food for holiday meals in the years preceding World War II. The December 1939 issue of the *Ladies' Home Journal* offered advice on how to select, clean, prepare, and cook a turkey, noting that “turkey never seems to go out of fashion,” and included recipes for fruitcake and plum pudding to accompany it.²²² That same year the *Washington Post* quipped that Americans were “free of the European food card [rationing] fad” and therefore would have “as much or more in prospect for Christmas” compared to previous years, despite the war abroad.²²³ However, by November 1942 America was beginning to feel the effects of war on their diets. Certain fruits and meats were in short supply, and coffee and sugar were controlled by a points rationing system.²²⁴ People began to worry what their holiday meals would consist of. Companies were quick to respond and shape interpretations of the wartime shortages in their own and the war effort’s favor. A 1943 Armor and Company ad proclaimed “meat for the holidays” and insisted people plan their menus around their recipes. It also stated that “all of us are mighty glad that are [sic] servicemen are getting first choice of America’s food supplies for their holiday dinners... Of course, if you can, you will want to have a traditional turkey dinner... but you’ll find the roast pork equally festive.”²²⁵ The same year the *Washington Post* reported a serious shortage of holiday foods including cranberries and turkeys. In New York City, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia urged people to avoid the black market, insisting that turkeys would find their way into

²²¹ Ibid, 20.

²²² Louella G. Shouer, “Talking Turkey,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1939, 28 and 47.

²²³ “Thanksgiving Table in U.S. to be Filled,” *WP*, Oct. 6, 1939, 3.

²²⁴ *SandS London*, Nov. 2, 1942, 4.

²²⁵ “Meat for the Holidays” Armor and Company ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 14.

legitimate stores if people refused to buy at exorbitant prices and outside of official channels.²²⁶

Leaders realized it was critically important to keep people in a positive mindset regarding food shortages, especially when they affected foods with deep cultural significance. The “Food Fights for Freedom” campaign was a coordinated effort between the OPA, OWI, and War Food Administration. The first three months of 1944 saw an emphasis on the OPA’s “Home Front Pledge” which mandated that “the general story of food in war is to be woven into all the food information programs,” and that the overall purpose of highlighting the importance of food within the pledging program was: “1. To build understanding of the wartime role of food and 2. To stimulate action.”²²⁷ Action was compelled by making people not only aware of their sacrifice but also by giving them an active role in connecting their slight discomforts with what was at stake. The Home Front Pledge campaign book stated in the opening paragraph that “Americans on the Home Front are at battle today with one of the most dangerous forces our country has had to face in this war, or in any other war. The ranks of these forces include part-time Americans – those who put personal gain above personal patriotism.”²²⁸ Being an American on the home front meant making sacrifices for the good of the country.

Holiday feasting hardly seemed to fit in with the sacrificial stance the government was promoting to the public throughout the rest of the year. At Christmas the drive to continue the traditions of the holiday remained in spite of wartime calls for conservation. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* advocated it was “best to serve small portions of Yule dinner” and Mayor La Guardia broadcasted that “the sugar situation will continue very tight for some weeks. There may be a little relief now because all of the Christmas candy

²²⁶ “Turkey Shortage Serious as DC Plans its Yule Feast,” WP, Dec. 18, 1943. B1. Press Release from the Office of the Mayor, City of New York. Doc#00029key7, Microfilm 11, Office of the Mayor (Fiorello H. LaGuardia) Subject Files 1933-1945. NYCMA Municipal Archives, New York City, NY.

²²⁷ Memo from Walter O'Meara to James F. Brownlee, Jan. 26, 1944. Box 2, Entry 2, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

²²⁸ The Homefront Pledge Campaign Book, prepared by members of the War Price and Rationing Boards, undated. Box 3, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

has been manufactured and therefore the candy manufacturers will draw less on available supplies.”²²⁹ The demand was still high, and that was not going to change, so the government had to work to make people less upset about what they might not be able to have. Furthermore, it recognized that people would not eliminate these practices entirely so they could only compel them to limit them to some degree.

The War Advertising Council created a special “Call to Action!” booklet that sought to enlist corporations and advertising firms in their goal of influencing the public’s thoughts and actions surrounding food. It spoke to the possible messengers noting, “Today most of 50 million war bond buyers are making good use of their money. And most of 25 million car owners are using their tires wisely. And most of 10 million war workers are putting in long hours – with a new deep respect for the tools they use to make the weapons of war. So it can be with food. The public – most of 130 million Americans – can learn to respect food as a vital war material – can learn to rank it with bonds, machine tools, rubber – with guns, tanks, ships, planes.”²³⁰ A Christmas-themed Jell-O ad proclaimed this loud and clear, stating that food wastage in a year was enough to feed the armed forces at home and overseas. It went on to directly name the “Food Fights for Freedom” campaign and spoke to actionable ways the people could help: by producing, conserving, sharing and not taking more than one’s fair share. Not only did the ad help to advocate for the war effort but it also helped to keep the company name and a positive reputation in the minds of the public. To do this, it concluded its message with the following: “the makers of Jell-O were limited by sugar rationing too. But every effort is being made to distribute stocks fairly.... Always look for the big red letters on the box! Then you know you are getting genuine Jell-O and you can be sure that there’s no wartime letdown in its superior quality and flavor!”²³¹ It was important to make it clear that these shortages were directly

²²⁹ “Best to Serve Small Portions of Yule Dinner,” CDT, Dec. 25, 1944, 20; Sunday Broadcast on Dec. 3, 1944. Doc#001454, Microfilm Roll 11, Office of the Mayor (Fiorello H. LaGuardia) Subject Files 1933-1945. NYCMA, New York City, NY.

²³⁰ Booklet “A Call to Action! How Industry can Cooperate in the ‘Food Fights For Freedom’ Campaign,” prepared by the War Advertising Council in cooperation with the Office of War information and the War Food Administration, undated. Box 3, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

²³¹ Jell-O ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1944, 53.

helping men at the front. The *Washington Post*'s headline on a similar subject read, "Yule Candy at 5-year low, but GI Joe to have plenty."²³² People still wanted their Christmas favorites, but they might be able to accept limitations when the invocation of the Christmas spirit of sharing was used to soften the blow, especially when they could make the case that they were sharing with the men at the front.

While they are not technically foods, liquor and cigarettes were extremely popular during the holiday season, both as gifts and for personal use. In December 1942 there were not any significant shortages, and a Treasury official stated that the government had enough liquor in warehouses to meet the normal requirements of the nation, for not just a year but over three and a half years.²³³ By 1943, however, a congressional investigation body and the OPA instituted higher liquor taxes to "bring liquor out of hiding and into the open market in time for the Christmas and New Year's trade."²³⁴ The shortages of cream, eggs, and sugar also impacted the liquor trade at Christmas as they were likely ingredients in Egg Nog, a popular holiday drink often including liquor. Four Roses distillery traditionally advertised its product to be used in Egg Nog recipes instead sought to present itself as patriotic given the shortages and "so for the first time in 8 years, we are not printing the Famous Four Roses Egg-Nog recipe," but it still hoped consumers would buy its product and join the company in a "highball toast to next Christmas."²³⁵ Cigarettes were often scarce and even rationed in some American cities by 1943. These cigarette insufficiencies were due to labor shortages, early Christmas shipping, and big shipments of tobacco for American troops overseas. Additionally, the Cigar Institute of America reported that its usual Christmas 1943 reserves were already being sold in November to meet consumer demand.²³⁶ By 1944 stocks continued to be low and *LIFE*

²³² "Yule Candy at 5-year low, but GI Joe to have plenty," *WP*, Oct. 29, 1944, M8.

²³³ *SandS London*, Dec. 16, 1942, 3.

²³⁴ "Christmas Special," *The Billboard*, Vol. 55, No. 48, (Nov 27, 1943): 18

²³⁵ Four Roses ad, *RB*, Dec. 1943, 63.

²³⁶ "Tobacco Scarce, Smokes Rationed in Some Cities," *SandS London*, Nov. 15 1943, 2; New York, Nov 14. (AP) - Rationing of cigars and cigarettes was reported in Baltimore, MD; Indianapolis, IN; Rochester, NY; Albany, NY; Charleston, W.Va; Little Rock, AK; Richmond, VA; Des Moines, IA;

magazine reported in late-November that “chain smokers were chain buying, tramping from store to store looking for prevalent brands, finally settling for minor-league substitutes” and that “girls in Atlanta formed share-the-cigarette clubs” to mitigate the shortages.²³⁷ The government, corporations, and individuals themselves were taking active steps to manage the shortages, especially during the busy and emotion-laden holiday season though they still conformed, or were expected to conform, to the underlying behavioral norm.

Corporate Support

The government was keenly aware that the way it structured its messages to the people would have a direct impact on the degree to which people would comply with the controls. Christmas, having significant cultural value to the majority of people in the United States, posed a unique problem. Many of the normative behaviors associated with celebrating the holiday conflicted directly with messages of thrift being promoted in the war economy. However, the internal value of the holiday to people personally, as well as its support of national values like family, free speech, the freedom to want and free enterprise, necessitated its accommodation, regardless of wartime conditions. Advertising was used to both support these controls and promote the association of Christmas with American patriotism and find an acceptable middle ground in the celebration behaviors. In negotiating these two goals, corporations, as well as the state, were able to use the holiday to transmit important messages about proper wartime behavior, about the meaning of the war, and about what it meant to be an American through Christmas’ deep entrenchment in the cultural life of the nation. Some of the broad themes of these messages that invoked the Christmas spirit to transmit them included especially how to make do with less, which made a connection between sacrifice and patriotic citizenship.

Omaha, NE; Charlotte, NC; and in some cities in Utah and Idaho. A general limitation of cigarette sales was reported in Portland, OR; Minneapolis, MN; Los Angeles, CA; Buffalo, NY; and Raleigh, NC. Cigar purchase were limited in Albuquerque, NM; Spokane, WA; and cities in Montana, while a noticeable scarcity of certain brands of cigarettes was reported in Detroit, MI; New Haven, CT; Albany, NY; Rochester, NY; Minneapolis, MI; Milwaukee, WI; Chicago, IL; Memphis, TN; New Orleans, LA; Birmingham, AL; and Spokane, WA.

²³⁷ “US Runs Short of Cigarettes,” *LIFE*, Nov. 27, 1944, 30.

Christmas was used to shape Americans understanding of why America was fighting this war and what patriotism should mean to Americans.

Make do With Less and Patriotism through Sacrifice

Getting people to accept sacrifice through invocations of patriotism was central to a democratic society successfully waging total war. Important to this was the need to make individuals aware that their personal actions could have a powerful impact.²³⁸ People needed to feel a sense of agency if they were to believe their actions mattered and as such would then conform to particular ways of behaving. The government was fully aware that selling rationing as patriotic was critical to its success. In an internal information booklet on general rationing, the OWI identified civilian morale as the first point under its consideration when interpreting rationing to the American people. It realized that “The man who would not hesitate to perform any positive act if called upon by his country, will rail with outrage at being deprived of something to do which he has grown accustomed. Its hard to feel like a hero simply by performing an act as unromantic as climbing aboard a crowded street car.... [To] overcome this natural reaction, it is necessary to minimize the restrictive features of this program. Appeals to patriotism and pride will present rationing in its best light.”²³⁹ Most Americans on the home front had a sense of a shared common purpose during the years of the war. After the uncertain years of the Depression, the steadfastness of purpose that war provided, and the sense of being on the right side of the conflict, allowed most people to genuinely support the war effort and want to contribute to it as much as they could, according to Richard Polenber (*War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945*), Allen M. Winkler (*Home Front U.S.A.:*

²³⁸ Richard R. Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War on? The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York: Putnam, 1970).

²³⁹ Administrative guidance Material, “U.S. Government Share the Meat Campaign,” page 3, undated. Box 143, Entry 40, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

America During World War II), and Geoffrey Perret (*Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph: The American People, 1939-1945*).²⁴⁰

A foundational message constructed by American leadership at Christmastime was to counter the holiday season's drive to consume with the idea of making-do-with-less as the supposedly 'true' spirit of Christmas: being charitable and finding joy in the simple things. *LIFE* published an article in 1942 using children to make this point. First, it acknowledged that things this Christmas were going to be different, noting "this is the year when some people will revere the once-upon-a-time kind of simple Christmas. Stern realities such as priorities, conservation of resources and manpower will put an end to much of the bad taste and commercialism which has made a mockery of the true Christmas spirit." It then went on to explain to readers where to re-discover this 'authentic' version of Christmas: "Because children are masters of sincerity and simplicity, *LIFE* went to various children's groups in New York to find out how children express their Christmas cheer."²⁴¹ In essence, it looked to children to learn how to dispense with the traditional trappings of the season and get back to the simpler things, which according to them included handmade cards and scavenged natural décor, regardless of the fact that domestic Christmas celebrations and consumerism had arisen together.

Advertisers who did not want to cause a decline in the central place of consumerism at Christmas instead promoted proscriptive adaptations to fit wartime realities. An ad from Libby food packers makes this method abundantly clear. The ad proclaimed "wartime calls for ingenuity" and that it had just the solution: "your Ingenuity Cake," which could be made with any of Libby's canned fruits, depending on what was available.²⁴² The important thing to note is that it gave the reader the credit of ingenuity, even though the

²⁴⁰ Polenberg, *War and Society*; Geoffrey Perret, *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph: The American People, 1939-1945* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973); Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.*

²⁴¹ "Christmas – How Children Spread Simple Cheer," *LIFE*, Dec. 14, 1942, 141.

²⁴² Libby, McNeill and Libby Food Packers ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1942, 7.

company had carefully constructed it and still upheld the call to consume even if what to consume was less specified. Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* gave tips on decorating miniature trees and framed it as though the decision to switch to a smaller tree was the readers' and not one being asserted by the paper or by what was available.²⁴³ Consuming was still the thing to do, it just had to be done in a slightly altered way.

Companies were aware that many people would be unable to obtain the items they wanted for Christmas given that they were either producing less because of material shortages or because they had converted to war production. They had to sell to the American people that it was the people's idea to give up the things they wanted, that they should not feel bad about the shortages; and they did not need whatever it was as much as the war effort did. A Graflex camera advertisement illustrated just how compelling using Christmas imagery could be to directly transmit the importance of sacrifice in this time of national need. The ad showed Santa Claus handing Uncle Sam a camera with a tag reading "To U.S.A. from US" and was captioned "Christmas is different this year. We know that you and every other American want us to do just this. Our country's Armed Services are depending on Graflex and Speed Graphic cameras in the great program of defense." It went on to explain that "Photographic records of operations, of equipment and personnel in combat, of maneuvers, and of reconnaissance missions require these cameras.... This Christmas, we hope that Santa Claus will leave a Graflex or speed graphic under your Christmas tree, but if he doesn't, remember that Uncle Sam heads the Christmas list."²⁴⁴ The ad connected the Christmas value of giving to the need of the nation; it personified the ability of the American people to aid the defense effort as Santa Claus himself and clearly linked business and government objectives by keeping the desire for the item (cameras) and the brand (Graflex) firmly at the forefront of peoples' minds while stemming peoples' upset at possible shortages. This worked to acknowledge the desire for the item and the disappointment people might have felt about not being able to attain it. It also helped to redirect those emotions into a more positive direction, one

²⁴³ "Speaking of Trees," *LAT*, Dec. 12, 1943, D9.

²⁴⁴ Graflex Cameras ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 8, 1941, 131.

that was actually happy not to have it because it meant that some soldier, who needed it more, was able to receive it.

An ad published in *Boys' Life* magazine for the Mishawaka Rubber and Woolen Manufacturing Corporation was similarly blatant in its attempt to shift people's interpretation of shortages during the holiday season. It depicted an adolescent boy smiling and read "I gave up my Christmas present for the soldiers on ATTU... ordinarily a fellow really cashes in on his sports equipment... this Christmas, though, some soldier is wearing the shoes I might have had." It followed with a cartoon strip illustrating the men in fighting zones and the important tasks they had to undertake, made possible with the equipment supplied by the company. It closed with "As for me, I'm glad to give up mine so some soldier can have the kind of footwear he needs. The pair I already have, I'm going to take care of and make last as long as possible."²⁴⁵ Adult men were given a similar message in a Ta-Pat-Co Outdoor Sports Equipment ad featured in *Outdoor Life* magazine. It acknowledged that the reader might have looked forward to receiving one of its products but that "the call came for thousands of sleeping bags and life preservers for our fighting forces and overnight Ta-Pat-Co Sports became Ta-Pat-Co FIGHTING equipment."²⁴⁶ Similarly, the Mennen company, which produced shaving gift box kits, invoked the fact that its product was unavailable as proof of its value, noting that "since our fighting men are supplied with the best of everything, this is a tribute to Mennen quality."²⁴⁷ These ads simultaneously transmitted the message of sacrifice for the good of the cause, while also taking away any negative feelings that might have fallen on the company. By clearly identifying the role it was playing in helping win the war and presenting the inability to receive certain gifts as a choice made by the consumer, these ads suggested the American people were giving these various hard-to-attain products as gifts to someone on the front who needed them more than themselves, while still upholding the actual desire to consume.

²⁴⁵ Mishawaka Rubber and Woolen MFG. CO ad, *BL*, Dec. 1943, 33.

²⁴⁶ Ta-Pat-Co Outdoor Sports Equipment ad, *Outdoor Life*, Dec. 1942, 71.

²⁴⁷ Mennen Shave Products ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 14, 1942, 60.

Integrated with the message of re-directed sacrifice was the fact that the United States consumed far more than it really needed in the first place. According to *LIFE*, the best Christmas gift that those on the home front could give troops was “economy;” meaning be frugal, conserve, save, and fix whatever possible. Regarding Christmas, the magazine was aware that “all this seems somewhat incongruous at this season... For Christmas in America is probably the most lavish institution in the history of the world.”²⁴⁸ Tying this back to the war, “the real service we can render boys is one for which they will always thank us. We can keep the meaning of Christmas alive in the simple traditions they learned to love when they were kids. In those traditions, we can keep the family safe and warm. Until they come back.”²⁴⁹ Supposedly those on the home front did not need anything else to celebrate the season besides their family traditions, regardless of the fact that most traditions required some degree of consumption. By focusing on these, individuals could shape the war and post-war era in a more favorable way instead of feeling sorry for what they could not have in the present. This presented any decline of consumerism as a temporary measure, one that would most definitely return once the war was over and all the most-wanted products were once again available to be purchased and consumed by all.

Understanding the War and Why America was Fighting

Christmas had a powerful ability to shape and reconstruct people’s understanding of what Americans were fighting for in World War II. A telegram from the Secretary of War to all the civilian personnel of the War Department symbolized this. It read: “In the midst of wars the coming of Christmas has a deep significance. Christmas becomes the symbol of our hope for peace and good will for our nation and the world.”²⁵⁰ What the abstract ideas of peace and goodwill would actually mean was left unanswered in the telegram and subsequently were answered by advertisers, business leaders, and magazine

²⁴⁸ “The Best Christmas Present You can Give the Boys is “Economy,”” *LIFE*, Dec 21, 1942, 32.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Telegram from the Secretary of War to the War Department, undated. 006 Christmas File, Box 214, Entry X Corps, RG 338. NARA, College Park, MD.

publishers across the nation who took up the themes of Christmas and sought to use them to give meaning and structure to the war for their own ends. Corporations strove to keep their name in the press, comply with government initiatives, and encourage proper wartime behavior. By invoking Christmas norms and discussing how to navigate them despite wartime realities, these companies tried to prevent disapproval of or disillusionment with the war effort and ultimately get people to conform their behavior to wartime requests, while also remaining relevant in the public eye. This ensured consumption was not eliminated as some attempt at ‘re-claiming’ an imagined past Christmas where consumption had been less central to the celebration of the holiday.

National corporations worked diligently to establish positive public perceptions of their companies. The practice of constructing brand and corporate image had begun before the war and is discussed more fully in *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* by Roland Marchland. As part of a trend in the early twentieth century, related to the rise of national brands, a need to manage the corporate image of brands emerged. Business giants of the early twentieth century, like AT&T, General Motors, or General Electric, sought to “legitimize their newly amassed power within the nexus of social institutions” and define what it meant to be a business in America, without coming across as oligarchical in their power.²⁵¹

Advertising was an institution that had only really developed in the early twentieth century, and yet it was exceptionally powerful in this capacity as its key role was to manage a brand and elicit loyalty from its customers. Inger Stole interrogated the political maneuverings of the advertising industry in *Advertising at War: Business, Consumers, and Government in the 1940s*. Stole argued that advertisers were ultimately successful at securing their place in the post-war world as a pillar of democracy and free enterprise, and the companies they represented emerged from the war as patriotic with brand names and image intact.²⁵² One of the ways advertisers achieved this was through the

²⁵¹ Marchland, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 3.

²⁵² Stole, *Advertising at War: Business*, 14 and generally.

connections they forged between their brands and the ambiguous and easily co-opted sentiments associated with the Christmas ‘spirit.’

As demonstrated, advertisers sought to keep their campaigns at the forefront of people’s minds even when they did not necessarily have items for sale. As Graham Broad has shown in the Canadian wartime context, they had to find a way to justify advertising in this new wartime framework, and in general they “readily co-opted the new patriotic watchwords of conservation, thrift, and self-denial, even though their underlying message often flatly contradicted the official line. Beneath the patriotic veneer, the real agenda was what it had always been: to move merchandise.”²⁵³ When there was no merchandise to move in the immediate present, their goal was to “promote brand-name recognition in order to secure future markets.”²⁵⁴ They still wanted people to associate the companies they worked for with the positive sentiments and the Christmas season was a powerful moment to use to this end. Belmont Television and Radio released an ad in December of 1943 which stated “millions of young Americans are standing to their arms... not only in defense of human freedom but to preserve the right to follow the faith for which Christmas stands” and went on to connect this to their own part to play, proclaiming “we are made happier by the knowledge that they are brought closer still by the magic voice of radio. Across the thousands of miles between, they hear the same Christmas music, the same familiar voices.”²⁵⁵ Christmas could bring people together, and Belmont was an important figure in that process according to its advertisements.

General Electric, a household name and maker of household appliances, was unable to produce its most desired products because of material shortages and factory mobilization. Yet it was still able to speak to the American people and convey its version of why the war was being fought and its role in winning the war. A 1943 Christmas ad depicted a candle burning in a holiday-decorated window. The caption, intended to pull at the

²⁵³ Graham Broad, *Small Price to Pay: Consumer Culture on the Canadian Home Front, 1939-45*. (Vancouver: University Of British Columbia Press, 2014), 76.

²⁵⁴ Broad, 77.

²⁵⁵ Belmont Television and Radio ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 27, 1943, 70.

heartstrings of the American people, read “Christmas is a light within.... In the hearts of those who gather scrap, use less sugar and coffee and tea and meat, walk to save gasoline and tires, and keep on buying one more US War Bond. The things we give, and give up today as Americans, are gifts of freedom and liberty and opportunity to all the world tomorrow.”²⁵⁶ GE employed a powerful technique by connecting the people’s personal sacrifices with the spirit of Christmas, and the reader was cast as having the ability to make the world a better place, and keep the Christmas spirit alive by performing these actions. The ad went on to explain, “In past years General Electric has manufactured many gifts for Santa’s pack – gifts that kept on giving in terms of the comforts and conveniences that modern electric servants bring into a home. This year we are manufacturing the tools that America is using to bring liberty and freedom to men of hope and goodwill everywhere.”²⁵⁷ By saying this, it firmly placed its actions as a corporation in line with people’s own actions to contribute to a better future for both America and the world through their shared experience of Christmas.

Corporations strove to ensure that their contributions to the war and why they were contributing was known to the American people to protect their image and place in the post-war world. Doing this could “rescue the reputations of firms still suffering from pent-up ill will” after the Great Depression, as well as “pre-empt accusations of war profiteering that were sure to arise from certain quarters, just as they had during the Great War.”²⁵⁸ North American Aviation described what it was working and fighting for in one ad published in *LIFE*. Framed in the context of a Christmas furlough, the ad depicted servicemen coming home and they described what the war was all about: “Conquest? A new order? No, it’s much bigger, much simpler... it’s families and homes and hobbies.”²⁵⁹ Institutional advertising framed the conflict differently from the government’s rhetoric of spreading the democratic way of life. Here, the American way

²⁵⁶ General Electric ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 21, 1943, 45-46.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Broad, *Small Price to Pay*, 77.

²⁵⁹ North American Aviation ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 20, 1943, 110.

of life was akin to the more personal aspects of home, family and everyday experience. The mention of hobbies is especially interesting because they often require consumption, especially the kind of materials and products that North American Aviation may have made before the war and could potentially return to producing after the conflict. The company's current role in the war was not something that needed to be explained to the American people (as it was a producer of aircraft). Instead, the ad focused on ensuring people did not see the company as having militant antagonistic views, while also presenting that it was working toward a simple, better future. It used the longing to be home with loved ones felt at Christmas to project this image to ensure its success as a corporation in the postwar as well.

Fictional stories could also be used to transmit important messages about the war, especially to the younger generation. "Christmas Express," a story by B.J. Chute in the December 1943 issue of *Boys' Life*, took place on a train. On board were soldiers, government officials, and a couple of children, and the servicemen were keen to put on an impromptu Christmas party for the kids. The story described the lengths they went to collect the necessary items, like a tree and someone to play Santa Claus. Through a lot of creativity and spirit, they were able to pull together the ersatz décor, including a Medal of Honor star as a tree topper, even though there were travel issues, shortages, and some difficult personalities. While all of this presented the idea of making the best of a hard situation and that the Christmas spirit could help to do so, it was the final words of the story that solidified the author's message of freedom as central to the American spirit of the holiday: "'Gosh' he said suddenly, 'that's sure beautiful. You know what? Everybody ought to be able to have Christmas if they want it.' 'Well,' said the colonel gravely, 'Isn't that more or less what we're fighting for?'"²⁶⁰ The mass messages to the people through advertisements, editorials, and articles blended the war with Christmas sentiment to present a quintessentially American Christmas to the public that was at once patriotic and conformist. It represented the ideals of democracy, free enterprise, and the freedom of

²⁶⁰ B.J. Chute, "Christmas Express," *BL*, Dec. 1943, 5-7 and 26-27.

religion, but also the freedom to want. This was what America, its government and industries, were fighting to protect.

Government controls and the rhetoric of sacrifice sought to temper the consumption impulse of the American people. Americans realized their actions had an impact on the undertaking of war. They understood why the government was seeking to control their lives in ways that had been outside of public control in previous times. Within this framework of personal agency and government control fell the celebration of Christmas. The holiday did not stop for the war, yet in some ways, the war did stop for the holiday. The government gave special considerations to Christmas in the context of labor and economic policy that indicated to the American people that in some ways Christmas was exempt from some of the 'rules' of war on the home front. However, one of the central aspects of celebrating Christmas – consumerism – was in direct opposition to wartime messages of thrift and conservation. In this sense, the government found itself caught between wanting to control the holiday and the holiday's special place in the hearts and minds of the American public. While the government did manage the manufacture of various Christmas gifts, décor, consumables, and communication products, these controls were often limited and in many ways constituted special treatment because of the Christmas connection. Corporate support was used to re-frame shortages caused by government restrictions or military necessities within the idea of personal sacrifice. They constructed through the holiday spirit of giving to soften the blow of shortages to the American people. Advertising's intent was to use Christmas to enhance the patriotic spirit of Americans and shape their understanding of why the war was being fought. Companies used this process of institutional advertising to also reaffirm their brand image and secure future sales for when their products were no longer in short-supply following the war. While to some degree the message to make do with less was achieved during the war years, the message to consume and the drive to do so remained the more compelling feature of Christmas celebrations for Americans during World War II.

Chapter 2: Consuming Christmas

Introduction

In December 1942, the *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed “Santa Claus is no war casualty.”²⁶¹ High prices and good shortages brought on by wartime mobilization had not discouraged the American people from buying for Christmas. They would simply buy something else, often at a higher price, if the item they wanted was unavailable. Luxury items were also particularly appealing as many people found themselves suddenly capable of spending money, in contrast to the difficult times many faced throughout the 1930s. The economy had significantly improved due government spending and military production, making unemployment virtually non-existent.²⁶² The spending practices of the American people were not entirely self-serving either, as charitable and community organizations across the country reported record levels of support during the war. More important for the actual waging of war, the American people did not forget Uncle Sam on their Christmas lists. For example, in December of 1942 the National Victory Fund’s \$9 million quota for the Los Angeles area was surpassed by \$1.2 million in the first twenty days of the month.²⁶³ The celebration of Christmas was flourishing throughout the war, in particular its more consumerist aspects, and people were more than willing to support the war effort in the process.

In this chapter, Christmas consumerism and its continuation within the wartime context is established and evaluated. The government was well aware that it would need to allocate resources toward the civilian economy even though it now had to direct a significant portion of total resources to war mobilization and production. With this redirection of materials, while there would still be goods to buy, civilians would need to be directed toward more appropriate consumption. The government initiated numerous campaigns that were intended to make civilian consumption work within a wartime framework.

²⁶¹ “Santa Claus is No War Casualty,” *LAT*, Dec. 23, 1942, A4.

²⁶² Jeffries, *Wartime America*, chapter 2.

²⁶³ “Santa Claus is No War Casualty,” *LAT*, Dec. 23, 1942, A4.

These included shop-earlier promotions, information on how to properly mail gifts overseas, advice on what to send those overseas, and help for servicemen wanting to send gifts home, in addition to advertising war bonds as gift substitutes. The business community, particularly advertisers and marketers, motivated by both patriotic desire help win the war and self-interest to secure their place in the national community, helped the government spread these messages meant to manage people's consumerist desires, especially during the holiday season. Through both the efforts of the business community and these government initiatives, consumption was presented as having several key values for the American people in a time of war. Consumption could make you happy, help those overseas, and distract you from the present. Consuming was part of the American identity, and as such could also serve a patriotic function. There was surprisingly little pushback to the attention given to consumerism during wartime, even at Christmas, when perhaps some might envision people wanting to return to simpler times and cast off the consumerist nature of the holiday for a more spiritual celebration. Some people made such comments, but in many cases, it was superficial rather than providing a plan to achieve this. Ultimately, the encouragement to consume outweighed the controls placed on the holiday that were discussed in Chapter One. At the end of the chapter, this is made quantitatively clear by an examination of the volume of buying and the volume of mail during subsequent wartime Christmas seasons. Christmas consumption was able to thrive because it became so powerfully integrated with Americans' sense of patriotism and what they believed the war was being fought to protect.

Wartime Consumption

The government was keenly aware that the civilian economy was important, and so it would need to consider it within the economic plans for military mobilization. A press release from the War Production Board in 1942 promoted this to the public. It began with the statement that "the entire success of our civilian war effort has hinged on the balancing of production."²⁶⁴ It went on to note that moving production away from

²⁶⁴ Press Release, "Striking a Balance," undated. Box 7, Entry 42, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

civilian requirements had been challenging before Pearl Harbor because of resistance to the conversion of factories to war production. However, after the attack, there was an extreme shift with many manufacturers wanting to contribute to the military output. The War Production Board had to act to prevent the civilian economy from falling out of balance. This balance between the war and civilian economy was critical because without them “many of our power plants and transportation systems might be unable to operate because of a lack of repair parts. Millions of civilian homes all over the country might be totally disorganized because people could not get materials with which to maintain their houses, heating systems and plumbing.”²⁶⁵ Government management was needed to protect consumers. People were going to continue to require items outside of war material production. Not getting those items could hinder the war production process if shortages prevented workers from getting to factories or forced them out of flawed housing. So, it was in the government’s own interest to protect the civilian economy to some degree.

However, government oversight alone would not be enough to manage the civilian economy. Even before Pearl Harbor, Donald Nelson, the director of the Office of Production Management (precursor to the War Production Board), spoke to the public about the place of the consumer in the defense program. He stated that “we are all going to have to make some sacrifices... [and] nothing advances the prices of any commodity as surely as buying.”²⁶⁶ However, the American people did not heed these warnings and throughout the war years continued to set records in retail sales. It became apparent that the agencies set up to manage war production would also need to accommodate and consider consumer needs and desires in relation to their decisions. One plan that the Office of Price Administration came up with was to draw the excess purchasing power away from inflation-causing activities. *Stars and Stripes – London* described it as an “installment-in-reverse” program whereby major household items, such as cars or refrigerators, which were unavailable in wartime, could still be available for early

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ “Living as Usual,” *DEFENSE Bulletin*, May 13, 1941, 11.

purchase to be delivered after the war was over.²⁶⁷ People would pay for these items upfront, thereby drawing the excess dollars into the consumer market, but in a carefully constructed manner. This program acted like war bonds as planned savings for future items. The government agencies did not expect people to comply with requests to cease buying, so they and the business industry constructed alternate buying schemes to direct consumer spending in particular ways.

Business Encourages Consumption

Advertisers and merchandisers were critical in the program of spreading information about various government initiatives and directing consumption in particular ways. Ads were particularly powerful for encouraging, enhancing, and managing consumption generally throughout the war. These could function both in tandem with government campaigns, as well as on their own. In considering these two related yet distinct functions of advertising in American society within the wartime context, it is apparent that they contributed to the mixed messages people received of how to be a patriotic citizen. Advertising worked to articulate the goals and aims of the government, while also speaking to the consumerist desires that had arisen as part of American culture and identity in the early twentieth century. Sometimes government goals fit with consumer ones, but when they did not, it created a confusing situation for the American public.

Advertising also operated in a third critical way, and this was to ensure the importance and prominence of advertising itself within America's future. Advertisers worked to solidify their value (along with that of their products) in the advertisements they created throughout the war while also reinforcing wartime measures. The wartime shortages and restrictions imposed could have threatened the post-war consumer vision of society that leaders in business sought to solidify, if it was not for the reinforcement of these ideas throughout the war. Christmas was a powerful tool in this process because of the holiday's ability to compel people to act in accordance with its rituals and norms, as well as its deep connection to Americans understanding of their own identity. Its perceived

²⁶⁷ *SandS London*, Dec. 24, 1942, 2.

timelessness functioned as a powerful bridge between the pre-war, war, and post-war eras. The holiday's association with the market helped to construct consuming into a weapon, one that civilians could wield against the enemy. The dramatic changes that home-front mobilization required forced American leaders to negotiate wartime realities with the needs and desires of the American public. Advertisers used the cultural power of Christmas to draw people into the fantasy of the marketplace where consumerism could comfort and distract. It also clearly articulated what citizens and servicemen ought to be fighting for through its connection to pre-war values. Ads fostered the idea of consumption as critical to the future of America and used the mythology and magic of Christmas, combined with the urgent setting of wartime, to solidify their vision of and place in the post-war world.

Business Adapts to Wartime

Looking at the various roles advertisements played in wartime reveals the particular values that were privileged by leaders in business. Constructed for and by business and government elites, these advertisements used the 'script' of Christmas to present a particular ideal vision of American society to the American people. The prescriptive actions associated with Christmas allowed the government and its advertising allies to attempt to shape and define American identity within this pre-existing value in the hopes it would compel people to accept and support the actions communicated and the plan for the future.

Advertisers and marketers were themselves a target of government intervention. The government supported their role in promoting a consumer economy. It realized they could be of value to government initiatives given their ability to encourage particular behavior, such as to buy particular goods or services.. In October of 1940 the Deputy Commissioner of the Industrial Materials Division of the National Defense Advisory Commission, William L. Batt, delivered an address to the Association of National Advertisers. In it, Batt made it clear that the government regarded their profession as critical to the defense program. He stated that the government wanted "to avoid the necessity of reducing production of consumer goods to make room for military goods," and that "one of the fundamental supports of a strong national defense is a full, working

national economy.”²⁶⁸ In this, he made it clear that the government agencies tasked with managing production were doing them a service by protecting as much as possible the production of goods upon which their profession depended.

The advertisers had a role to play in return, and this was related to their skill in encouraging particular actions of the public. If the production of consumer goods remained high, ideally this would prevent a gross imbalance of consumer demand that could contribute to price inflation. Advertisers were asked not to use threats of future price increases in their messages as this could spark too much immediate demand for products and industry would be unable to compensate for this sudden shift.²⁶⁹

While there was a role for advertising to play, and the government was interested in protecting its role, it asked advertisers to adapt their techniques to the realities of the current situation. President Roosevelt himself wired a message to the American Federation of Advertising Convention in June 1941 explaining how valuable he thought advertising could be to the preparedness program taking over the nation. He stated that “it can assist in creating and maintaining public morale” through its educational force and it needed to be “applied towards maintenance of our accustomed standards of living. This may require adjustment but it should not mean increased effort.”²⁷⁰ Walter D. Fuller, President of the Curtis Publishing Company and the National Association of Manufacturers, spoke to the American Marketing Profession the following week to sell just how important this was. His address, which was quoted in full in *Printers’ Ink*, spoke of advertising, marketing, research, and selling as the true bringers of democracy and that “you [the marketers of America] can strengthen democracy by finding ways by which more fruits of our free enterprise system can be brought to more people.”²⁷¹ His

²⁶⁸ Address by William L. Batt, Deputy Commissioner of the Industrial Materials Division, National Defense Advisory Commission delivered before the Association of National Advertisers, Inc. at White Sulphur Springs, W. Va. October 25, 1940. PR 197, Microfilm 185, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Quoted in “Guns and Butter,” *PI*, June 27, 1941, 11-17, 88.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 92.

conception of democracy meant the freedom of the market, and he sought to avoid government control of prices and wages, seeing these as oppressive forces on the nation. Even at a time when the conflict had not directly come to American shores, he feared that in the government's desire to fight oppression abroad, it might lose democracy at home. Advertising could work to prevent this by redirecting consumer demand away from defense industries and towards non-defensive goods while still allowing consumer choice and without the imposition of overarching controls.

While many controls were ultimately brought into place over the course of the war, as discussed in Chapter One, advertising was also used to encourage consumer behavior in particular directions and functioned in many of the ways that business and government leaders hoped it would. Donald Nelson, chairman of the War Production Board, declared in 1942 that “advertising has a job to do – must continue as a legitimate tool of business and to play a valuable role in our war efforts... for advertising, I must repeat, is an essential part of our communication systems in wartime.” Nelson was aware that advertising could work to sell the goods that continued to be available in the civilian market and allow companies to “tell his former customers how to use and conserve and service the goods which he has previously sold them.”²⁷² However this would require some adaptations, and *Printers' Ink* reported a survey, conducted in late 1942, on how the war was affecting advertising. It noted that more advertising money was planned to be spent in 1943 to further employee and public relations via advertisements. Furthermore, the use of letters and print ads was replacing direct advertising, personal calls, and industry conferences as the restrictions on gasoline and tires made it more difficult to travel, so this limited form had to be particularly compelling.²⁷³

The use of these methods could aid government initiatives as well as advertiser campaigns. However, it required a great deal of cooperation and coordination for all parties involved. For example, the government reached out to more than 5,000 local and

²⁷² Quoted in Crocker-McElwain's Paper News Poster, no author, January 1943. Box 7, Entry 42, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

²⁷³ Ibid.

national advertisers in 1943 to get help with its mail early campaign and distributed specially created promotional material and fact sheets.²⁷⁴ It also produced a booklet “Advertising in Wartime,” which aimed to promote the cooperation that was taking place between advertisers and the government. It noted that the Magazine Publishers of America, in cooperation with the War Advertising Council, planned to devote an advertising page in every issue of every magazine in America to some war subject that the magazine publishers and the government approved. Newspaper publishers also demonstrated their desire to help and the *New York Times* opened a thousand lines of free advertisement in their papers to twenty advertising agencies and the War Advertising Council.²⁷⁵

Christmas Advertising

In combination with these offers, advertisers who sought to keep their products in the public eye used the pretext of government initiatives to do so. They found their way into the donated pages of many magazines and newspapers throughout the war by aligning their product and company name with patriotic service to the nation. Some of the ways companies could forge a patriotic connection included advertising war-bond purchases along with the product they hoped to sell. Making this connection worked especially well at Christmas as people were particularly primed to want to be both charitable and giving while also wanting to bring joy to their loved ones through actual gifts. Advertisements boasted that buying war bonds in addition to one’s gift provided a chance to do just this. An Old Spice ad from 1943 proclaimed the brand as “Toiletries that reflect the traditional spirit of an American Christmas. The roses-and-spice loveliness of America’s own fragrance, the colorful charm of the decorative package lend enchantment to wartime living,” and added that “Gifts for America – America’s Own War Bonds and Stamps... buy them to give and to keep, to help make next Christmas a happier one for all the

²⁷⁴ “Advertising Backs up Drive on Early Mailing of Soldier Christmas Gifts,” *PI*, Sept. 10, 1943, 82. The Mail Early campaign is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

²⁷⁵ Booklet on Advertising in Wartime, page 22, no author, undated. Box 141, Entry 40, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

world.”²⁷⁶ The ad did not make a real link between these statements, and yet the war was used to enhance the desirability of the product while at the same time projecting along with the company image as patriotic through their advocating to buy war bonds as well as their own wares. It sought to tap into pre-war values by evoking a ‘traditional’ spirit of an American Christmas while also selling a vision of a better future, one in which consumption, of both the product and war bonds, would be used to make the world a better place. People, according to the ads, need not feel guilty about buying for themselves as long as they also bought for Uncle Sam.

Advertisers commended themselves on their ability to form connections with the powerful public meanings of Christmas to sell wartime behaviors while keeping their products present. For example the winner of the 1944 Wartime Advertising Award conducted by trade journal *Advertising and Selling* went to an ad for Fanny Farmer Candy Shops from the J. Walter Thomas Company. The text of the ad read:

Silent Night - Listen... The sounds of battle... hear them? You don't? Then thank God you don't. But millions do. Night after night. Millions who have someone they love 'out there,' And strangely mixed with these haunting sounds are recollections of childish voices... voices which only 'yesterdays' ago were shrilling across the backyard... babbling at the dinner table... pledging a sing-along allegiance to the flag... In homes of men off in their country's service such imaginings aren't often mentioned - not even among the closest members of the family. No... they don't talk about those nights. People fight their fears in silence... suffer in secret... pray in quiet. But, to them, nights will never be silent until their prayers are heard. Prayers which you can help to answer so easily.... prayers to bring their loved ones safely home. Is it too much to ask to buy more... more and more... war bonds? The Sixth War Loan Drive is our chance to answer that... our chance to do a very small thing for those who are making great sacrifices. Let's buy more than we think we can afford because, in decency, we can't afford to do less.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Old Spice ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 97.

²⁷⁷ *Advertising and Selling Wartime Advertising Awards* - Winner 'Silent Night,' no author, 1944. Folder 4, Box 1, Series 1, Gordon E. Cole Advertising Collection (ACNMAH 371). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

While the iconography present along with the text indicated this message was from Fanny Farmer Candy Shops, the text does not reference the company at all. Instead, it presented powerful imagery of men in service to their country and so not able to be at home with their families. The use of “Silent Night” contrasts the familiar Christmas song’s message “all is calm, all is bright,” with the sounds of battle, while also indicating the loss of voices on the home front of those who were serving overseas. More importantly, the sentimentality evoked through Christmas can be solved with the traditional behaviors of the holiday itself – to give, via the Sixth War Loan Drive. Given that this ad was an award-winner there is no doubt advertisers supported these methods to transmit messages to the public and considered them to be particularly effective for both their product and its image.

Christmas, its norms, traditions, and proscribed actions provided important moments throughout the war for the business community to reaffirm and solidify their place in American society. Corporations would sponsor holiday events in order to entertain the public and connect the home front with the war front. The shows would be broadcasted over the radio so that even though people were apart, they could celebrate together. For Christmas 1942, the Coca-Cola Company hired forty separate orchestras to play for three hours each at Army and Navy bases and plants engaged in war work. These were short-waved to troops abroad as well as people around the nation.²⁷⁸ Given the sentimentality associated with being home for Christmas, actions which sought even superficially to bring these separated groups together elicited a degree of praise from the public and worked to maintain the company’s place and public image within the community.

²⁷⁸ “Forty Christmas Orchestras,” *PI*, Dec. 4, 1942, 89; “COCA COLA PLANS CHRISTMAS BANDS,” *Broadcasting, Broadcast Advertising*, Vol 23, No. 21, (Nov 23, 1942): 30; Annual Christmas by General Electric “Hour of Charm” given to the children of the United Nations, children who are making their homes in this country until the war is over. Entertainment mainly for children - one American girl read “The Night Before Christmas” and June Bevis of London, told of English customs at Xmas time; by DuPont “Cavalcade of America” performed “A child is born” written by Steven Vincent Benet starring Alfred Lint and Lynn Fontanne. A Christmas play miracle written for our times. It is the Nativity theme with a new approach, December 20, 1942. NBC Radio Broadcast Index Cards, Recorded Sound Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

Brands also took particular care to ensure that the public was aware they were devoted to war service, even if their products were also available on store shelves. Martinex Towels stated in its Christmas 1943 ad in *Ladies' Home Journal*: “To Patriotic Shoppers: You may select Martinex Towels this Christmas safe in the knowledge that Martinex took care of our armed force requirements first and both mills received the Army-Navy ‘E’ for excellence. The Martinex Towels your favorite store is selling are from production exceeding the requirements of the government.”²⁷⁹ It drew attention to its contribution to the war effort. Forestmann Wool Company similarly noted in a December 1942 ad “How life has changed since last December 7. You – in an endless round of war activities. He – in uniform. We – working day and night to help see that uniform and millions like it are the finest in the world.”²⁸⁰ Forestmann connected its war work to people’s personal wartime adjustments and sacrifices. Both companies tapped into the power of particular moments of heightened patriotic spirit, in Forestmann’s case, the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, whereas Martinex used Christmas in this capacity. Both advertisements realized the power the war had in heightening the sentimentality of the American people and used that as an avenue to direct desire and entice sales, while upholding brand and corporate image and alleviating guilt people may have felt if they believed their purchases were detracting from the war effort.

Christmas Merchandising

Advertisers were not the only promoters of consumerism during the war years. Merchandising was also a powerful tool to encourage shopping, especially at Christmas. The imagery and décor associated with the holiday had been used before the war to draw people into shops and department stores. For example, Wanamaker department store’s elaborate displays discussed in Chapter One. Holiday displays had become a business all of their own in the years before the war. In 1939, Allied Stores Corporation constructed an entire model department store inside a country club in Boston to display their

²⁷⁹ Martinex Towels ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 94.

²⁸⁰ Forestmann Wool Company ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 7, 1942, 1.

merchandising possibilities to various store presidents and buyers.²⁸¹ Even places where Christmas consumption was tangential, such as theatres, got decorated for Christmas “as a way to sell seats.”²⁸² Stores would hire more employees to manage the rise in shoppers as well as provide a more positive shopping experience for their customers. Gimbel’s department store created a program after war broke out whereby people could come into its stores to get help in mailing packages abroad. In a flyer created for the OWI mail-early campaign, it advocated that their employees were “experts in selection, packing, and mailing to overseas outfits even including prison camps! We can be a big help to a large industrial company sending out 5000 gift boxes all over the globe! And we can be a big help to a mother or sweetheart in the selection of one precious box.”²⁸³ While this was clearly advantageous for Gimbel’s in the sense that people would likely purchase items from them in the process of deciding how and what to send, it also played into the importance of gifts for the troops. The top portion of the ad had an excerpt from a storybook in which a young boy failed to receive a Christmas present on Christmas morning. This well-known Christmas story was from the autobiography of Lincoln Steffens, a New York reporter from the early 1900s. In his Christmas story, “A Miserable, Merry Christmas,” Steffens longed for a pony and insisted he wanted nothing but a pony. On Christmas morning he woke to find no presents and was utterly distraught. His father, unbeknownst to him, had arranged for a pony to arrive that morning, however, the deliveryman was late, got lost, and poor Steffens thought he actually did not get anything for Christmas for several hours. Eventually, the pony arrived and he was overjoyed but his despair moments earlier still powerfully altered his experience of Christmas that year. In his own words: “that Christmas, which my father had planned so carefully, was it the best or worst I ever knew? He often asked me that; I never could answer as a boy. I think now it was both. It covered the whole distance from

²⁸¹ “New Setting for Christmas Goods,” *NYT*, Sept. 15, 1939, 38.

²⁸² “Selling Seats: Christmas Display Greets Renaker’s Customers,” *Boxoffice*, Vol. 38, No. 4, (Dec 14, 1940): 41.

²⁸³ OWI Domestic Radio Bureau Gimbels Service Gift Post advertising flyer, no author, undated. Box 2, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

brokenhearted misery to bursting happiness – too fast. A grown-up could hardly have stood it.”²⁸⁴ This story was used in the Gimbel’s advertisement to compel people to act and follow directions to shop early because “On that terrible Christmas morning, Lincoln Steffens was only 9. Our overseas marines and soldiers and sailors and coast guards are considerably more than 9 – but not on Christmas morning! On that day they are – even the toughest of them – just little boys with breakable hearts! Let’s not break them.”²⁸⁵ Here Gimbel’s used the norms of Christmas and the importance of holiday traditions to compel people to act and in doing so reinforced both the business community’s and the government’s support of consumerism during the war. They used fear and guilt to ensure people felt compelled to uphold their rituals in a way that worked within the wartime context. In this sense, consumption was acceptable and even encouraged because of its importance in people’s lives and influence on morale, especially for those far from home.

Communities also worked to make sure their retail zones were attractive to the public. In 1940, the Garfield Park Business Men’s Association of Chicago decorated the streets with wreaths and flags and had Santa Claus fly into the park district in an airplane and march through the streets, in an effort to draw consumers away from downtown Chicago shops nearby and into its retail area instead.²⁸⁶ In the years before the war the Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade had become the most well-known promotion for Christmas shopping and was traditionally the occasion that ushered in the holiday shopping season for both New York City and the nation.²⁸⁷ During the war this parade and many others like it were put on hold, given the immense material and manpower requirements necessary to pull them off. The sponsors of these parades often found other ways to entice their customers. During the war, Macy’s continued its display windows and in fact

²⁸⁴ Lincoln Steffens, *A Miserable Merry Christmas*, The Antonia Chapbooks, No. 25 (Philadelphia: Ayer Press, 1964), 8. Taken from *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*, (New York; Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1931).

²⁸⁵ OWI Domestic Radio Bureau Gimbels Service Gift Post advertising flyer, no author, undated. Box 2, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

²⁸⁶ Communities’ Christmas activities more fully discussed in Chapter Four. “Streets, Stores in Yule Attire,” *CDT*, Dec. 8, 1940, W1.

²⁸⁷ In Chapter Four, this and other regional parades are discussed more fully.

made light of the lack of parade when in 1942 the Bliss Display Company constructed the windows to depict a “funny-page parade” with twenty-six miniature floats, designed emulate cartoon techniques and be a substitute of sorts for the real thing.²⁸⁸ This miniature display found a way to get around that problem while still maintaining the tradition as much as possible and continuing to draw consumers into the store as the parade had been used to do before the war.

As the war continued and supplies and shortages started to affect retail display possibilities, customers began to take note. In 1943, an editorial in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted that the displays “in the store brought a wave of nostalgia, for daily dozens of young and not-so-young stood bemused in front of square pianos, stuffed chairs with antimacassars, festooned drapes, and sections of walls plastered with draped pictures and with whatnots in the corners. The memories of fat years before this lean era returned as slim card-board cut-outs of small Christmas trees were hung on street lamps instead of the gigantic garlands and wreaths and gargantuan red bows of way back when silk chiffon hosiery was the ordinary gift.”²⁸⁹ Commentary like this reveals that these displays had meaning and people did not see them as empty sales tactics. They recognized and appreciated their presence for making it feel more like Christmas. The *New York Times* discussed how people were feeling about the Christmas window displays in the city for the 1944 holiday season. They noted some stores, such as Bloomingdale’s and Altman’s, went with a “no merchandise” plan and instead presented the traditions of Christmas in their windows. At Bloomingdale’s, for example, “furniture from the Museum of the City of New York, antique family silver from Connecticut, and a tablecloth from an antique collection were assembled for its 1944 family dinner, which climaxes American Christmases from the days of the pilgrims.”²⁹⁰ While this may appear like a call to reduce the consumerism of the season, it also worked to entice people to the

²⁸⁸ R.H. Macy & Co., *Sparks Magazine*, edited by Ruth Moore (New York), Dec. 1942. Box 6, William L. Bird Holidays on Display Collection (ACNMAH 1288). SNMAH, Washington DC.

²⁸⁹ Rea Seeger, “Now it’s Only a Memory for Yule Shoppers,” *CDT*, Dec. 25, 1943, 13.

²⁹⁰ “Store Windows Reflecting Yule Spirit Draw Many Letters of Appreciation, *NYT*, Dec. 14, 1944, 26.

store to see the display, and also demonstrated the power possessions had in instilling a sense of American identity and tradition. The “no merchandise” plan was more likely a way to mitigate the shortages of the season and not spark too much demand for any particular item that might prove impossible to obtain. One store window spoke directly to those, albeit with mixed reviews. Shulte’s Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street store had “three laughing Santas... surrounded with posters of a popular-brand cigarette, with the center [Santa] disappearing clutching a carton.”²⁹¹ This was meant to make light of the fact that ‘Santa’ would likely have difficulty getting these cigarettes because of wartime shortages. People who saw the display wrote in to the local newspaper to say they were not sure if the Santas were “laughing at us or with us” in the face of such shortages. While clearly the message was unclear to viewers, the fact of the matter was that people were particularly attuned to Christmas displays and their possible meanings.

Also in 1944, the Fire Commissioner of New York City dropped regulations banning Christmas trees and decorations that he had put into place because of fire risks.²⁹² These bans had been initiated in response to the Cocoanut Grove Fire that occurred in Boston on November 28, 1942. Estimates state that over 1000 people were in the popular restaurant/supper club at the time of the fire, which ultimately took the lives of 490 and injured 166 others. This horrible tragedy was so extreme because of the particular layout of the exits for the establishment and also because the palm-decorated ceiling allowed the blaze to spread so quickly.²⁹³ It brought attention to the fire risks décor could pose and led to bans, like the one in New York City, as policymakers realized Christmas was a time when extravagant décor might pose a particular hazard. Kansas City also banned indoor Christmas trees and decorations in 1943, citing “the Boston fire” as the “background of this ruling.”²⁹⁴ These risks were even more consequential in wartime and

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² “Yule Tree Ban Lifted,” *NYT*, Nov. 29, 1944, 25.

²⁹³ “The Story of the Cocoanut Grove Fire,” *Boston Fire Historical Society Official Website*, <https://bostonfirehistory.org/the-story-of-the-cocoanut-grove-fire/> and <https://bostonfirehistory.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2016/11/reportconcerningcocoanutgrovefire.pdf>

²⁹⁴ “KC Nixes Christmas Décor,” *The Billboard*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Jan 02, 1943): 4.

yet the value of Christmas and its imagery, used mostly to encourage consumption, was more important as some bans were overturned in 1944. The possible joy these decorations could bring and the effect on morale of not having them was enough to overhaul safety precautions. These are just a few diverse examples meant to indicate that regardless of wartime regulations the business community put considerable effort into promoting Christmas consumption over the course of the war, and municipalities and government agencies worked to support these endeavors. The public experience of Christmas was used to make a statement about the support of consumption and the value of consumerism generally in American society.

Government Encourages Consumption

While it is to be expected that advertisers and marketers would continue to work to encourage consumerism in the war, given the sales-driven nature of the business community and the importance brands placed on upholding their image, the government also put considerable effort into fostering Christmas consumerism. One of the largest indicators of the government's recognition of Christmas as a primarily consumption-driven holiday comes in the years just before America's involvement in the war: "Franksgiving."²⁹⁵ This is the name critics gave to President Roosevelt's decision to move Thanksgiving a weekend earlier than usual in November, 1939. Retailers, concerned with the late date (November 30th), had urged the President to move the holiday to the second-last Thursday of the month to extend the holiday shopping season.²⁹⁶ The same request had come up in 1933 and FDR had denied it, so it is not entirely clear why he sided with retailers in 1939. Still, there was no official ruling that holiday merchandise and displays had to wait until after Thanksgiving weekend to make their appearance. Perhaps by 1939 Roosevelt had come to believe this tradition was too rigid and perceived that the best way to extend the shopping season was for him to decree

²⁹⁵ Matt Soniak, "Happy Franksgiving: Why FDR Rescheduled Turkey Day," *Mental Floss*, (Nov. 19, 2011), <http://mentalfloss.com/article/29317/happy-franksgiving-why-fdr-rescheduled-turkey-day>

²⁹⁶ "Late Thanksgiving Day Put Up to the President," *NYT*, Aug. 5, 1939, 28.

the change.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, the increased purchasing power brought on by defense spending meant many people had more money to spend than they had in 1933, so FDR may have been trying to give people more time to spend it to further improve the economy. Instead, many regarded this as the victory of commerce over tradition and the nation was deeply split on the issue. Some Governors, especially Democrats, fell in line and others, particularly Republican, refused to adopt the date change, resulting in a moderately extended, yet heavily politicized shopping season.²⁹⁸ Regarding the American people themselves, a Gallup poll from August 1939 indicated that 71% disapproved of the change.²⁹⁹ The advertising industry was generally in support of this earlier shopping season, arguing that it was unnecessarily costly to hold off on merchandising until after Thanksgiving.³⁰⁰ Undeterred, the President issued the same change in 1940, leading to increased public outcry.³⁰¹ In 1941, the *Wall Street Journal*, armed with two years of data, presented the President with the facts: moving the holiday had done nothing to increase holiday retail sales. In May, FDR did something Presidents rarely do; he admitted that moving the holiday had been a mistake not to be repeated.³⁰² While this may look like a failure, and perhaps it was, the act itself indicated to the American public that not only were Christmas and shopping intimately related but also that the government was inclined to act to protect and promote that relationship. Christmas consumption trumped Thanksgiving tradition.

²⁹⁷ “Thanksgiving Blues,” *PI*, Aug. 25, 1939, 78.

²⁹⁸ James W Baker, *Thanksgiving: The Biography of an American Holiday* (Hanover: University of New Hampshire Press, 2010), 152.

²⁹⁹ Hadley Cantril, ed., *Public Opinion, 1935-1946* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 284.

³⁰⁰ “A Christmas Thought,” *PI*, Nov. 3, 1939, 96; “Highly Satisfactory,” *PI*, Dec. 1, 1939, 80.

³⁰¹ “The People’s Forum,” *HC*, Aug. 18, 1939, 8; “Thanksgiving Shift Ruffles 11 Governors,” *WP*, Aug. 16, 1939, 5; “Calendar Tampering by Roosevelt Stirs Traditionalists,” *PI*, Nov. 29, 1940, 140.

³⁰² Legislation was drafted to move the holiday to the fourth Thursday in November officially so this issue would not come up again, however plans for thanksgiving 1941 were already underway and rather than repeat the double-thanksgiving crisis it was made to not take effect until 1942. “No New Thanksgiving Deal,” *PI*, May 30, 1941, 79.

It was not just the executive administration that sought to manage and encourage Christmas. This kind of planning also took place in the armed forces. The Army was very considerate of the impact the holiday could and should have on the troops. Just prior to the last peacetime Christmas, in December of 1940, a memo went to all commanding generals of all Armies, Army corps, corps areas, and departments, as well as chief of the armed forces and the chief of staff from the Headquarters of Army Ground Forces. It outlined that “particular attention be given to planning religious services and holiday festivities [at Christmas],” because “there is no other time in the year when men away from home miss their home associations more than at this season... it is of extreme importance that the season be utilized to contribute to a spirit of contentment to the entire Army and to knit closer the ties which already exist between the Army and civilian communities.”³⁰³ It went on to discuss the undertaking of various preparations, including decorations, dinners, souvenirs, Christmas trees, custom Christmas cards and hosting special Christmas activities within the community. While the memo indicated to also hold religious services and described the role of chaplains, all of these other proscribed suggestions centered on consumption. Following these orders to acquire the appropriate décor, gifts, and food would require significant resources. Yet, in a time of national defense, this was what the Headquarters of Army Ground Forces was advocating. Central command was well aware of the importance Christmas and its traditions held in terms of both soldier and civilian morale and was willing to act to ensure their protection.

Coordination between various agencies, the business community, and ordinary citizens was necessary to achieve a successful wartime Christmas. Consider the degree of coordination required for a four-page spread to appear like the one in the December 1942 edition of the *Women's Home Companion*. The magazine compiled suggestions of appropriate gifts for men in the armed forces, including soldiers and sailors, as well as

³⁰³ Memo to the commanding generals of all Armies, Army corps, corps areas and departments, commanding officers of exempted stations, chief of the armored force, Fort Knox, Kentucky, and chief of staff, GHQ, no author, Dec. 2, 1940. Box 4, NM5 Entry 57, .RG 337. NARA, College Park, MD.

WAAC, WAVES, and war workers.³⁰⁴ Appropriate gifts included travel game sets, toiletry sets, writing sets, and travel bags, along with all the approximate costs for such gifts.³⁰⁵ These items had to be in line with what the War Department allowed, and the prices had to follow the OPA's maximum price standards. The importance of the government's price-setting measures was reaffirmed just pages after the suggestions in a column on how "We live under The Rules of War," which articulated to the magazine's predominantly female audience what they needed to do to "win the home front."³⁰⁶ This included adhering to price controls and credit controls, and ensuring quality and standards of the items they did buy. Given the vast numbers of American troops and support personnel who were abroad over the course of the war, considerable effort was required to maintain the Christmas traditions away from home. People were required to go through their Christmas rituals sooner than usual, as they needed more time to be shipped all over the world. Various agencies worked to ensure that appropriate and acceptable gifts were selected and that people understood the rules for mailing said items, especially when they were being sent to service personnel overseas. Furthermore, the government made it easier for people to send gifts abroad by removing customs duties on gifts for members of the armed forces. This was up to a maximum of \$50, and packages sent by friends or relatives to troops overseas were duty-free if addressed to the serviceman through his Army post office address, Navy number, or Marine unit number.³⁰⁷ Later in the war parcel "request letters" were necessary for troops to receive packages. However, this stipulation was suspended during the Christmas mailing period.³⁰⁸ This ensured servicemen could receive packages from various sources and further indicated

³⁰⁴ WAAC stands for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and were the first women, other than nurses, to serve within the ranks of the U.S. Army, and WAVES, the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service entered the war as members of the U.S. Navy.

³⁰⁵ "Wartime Gifts For Servicemen," *WHC*, Dec. 1942, 29.

³⁰⁶ "We Live Under the Rules of War," *WHC*, Dec. 1942, 63.

³⁰⁷ Memorandum for Sunday Broadcast, "Duty Free Packages from Service Men," Dec. 11, 1942. Doc#001534, Microfilm Roll 11, Office of the Mayor (Fiorello H. LaGuardia) Subject Files 1933-1945. NYCMA, New York City, NY.

³⁰⁸ "Restriction Lifted On Xmas Packages From U.S. to ETO," *SandS London*, Aug. 13, 1943, 1.

the support the government and the military directed to Christmas consumption, despite the significant effort it required on their and the public's behalf. Gift exchange was not a one-directional process either, as those away from home also wanted to ensure their loved ones in America received something from them too, so programs were put into place to help servicemen select gifts for those at home. As opposed to the traditional historical narrative which has argued consumerism was replaced with sacrifice during the conflict, in many ways the consumerist impulses associated with the Christmas season were reinforced throughout the war by government agencies and corporate initiatives.³⁰⁹ The cultural value of Christmas to Americans was used to protect and secure the celebration of the holiday itself. As America became actively engaged in the war, the importance of consumerism grew rather than diminished, and the coordination required to pull off a happy holiday season grew along with it.

Promote Earlier Shopping

The first calls to shop earlier were not directly related to wartime measures and in fact, were related to the President's push to move Thanksgiving. The President's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, was reported to have been doing her Christmas shopping as early as October in 1939. As discussed earlier, moving Thanksgiving stemmed from the business community, which feared the reduced shopping season. A "shop early – mail early for Christmas" campaign was sponsored by the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, which decided to open toy departments on November 11th and put out Christmas window displays between the 19th and 24th of the month.³¹⁰ Arthur J. Sundlun, president of the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, argued with similar logic that shopping early was the smarter thing to do and flattered "women, who are the keenest buyers [because] they have realized that postponement of their Christmas shopping until the last possible

³⁰⁹ Argument of Lingeman, *Don't You Know There's a War On?* While there are some studies which address consumerism and culture in World War II, it does not get the attention it deserves. Graham Broad covers this in the Canadian context (Broad, *Small Price to Pay*.) and Lizabeth Cohen has a chapter on the period in Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*.

³¹⁰ "President Wife Does Her Christmas Shopping Early," *LAT*, Oct. 24, 1939, 5; "Shop Early' Drive Advanced a Week," *WP*, Nov. 1, 1939, 3.

moment is an unwise and expensive process.”³¹¹ The business community wanted the longer selling season, as the longer people had to shop, theoretically the more they would buy.

The war brought another impetus for moving the Christmas selling season earlier. Not only was it supposedly cost-effective, but it was necessary to ensure mailed gifts would reach their destinations in time for the big day. So, while Thanksgiving remained fixed after 1941, merchants continued the shop-early campaign. In 1942 Macy’s department store instituted a program called “Courtesy Days” that allowed customers to preview available items for three days before their pre-Christmas sale, which began on November 9th and lasted for three weeks. Not only would this program help to reduce the load placed on the postal service but with “Christmas buying spread over two months instead of one... every customer can get what she wants without burdening our delivery facilities beyond the limits set by the government regulation.”³¹² This referred to the regulations the government had put in place to limit gas and tire usage by retail delivery vehicles and represents another example of managing consumption without actually reducing it.

Similarly, government agencies introduced a campaign to get shoppers to carry their packages home. The Office of Defense Transportation pushed this message to reduce deliveries and this worked in tandem with the shop-early campaign.³¹³ A press release from 1942 urged the “housewives of America ‘the real purchasing agents of the time’ to do their part to aid in the conservation of rubber by carrying parcels wherever possible, [as] now more than ever as the Christmas season approaches the cooperation on the part of purchasers is necessary.”³¹⁴ By shopping earlier, people could spread their buying out,

³¹¹ “Yule Season Off to Earliest Start,” *WP*, Nov. 24, 1940, 10.

³¹² “Courtesy Days Precede Annual Pre-Christians Sale,” in *The Macy Gazette*, Vol 2, No. 5, (Nov. 1942). Box 6, William L Bird Holidays on Display Collection, (ACNMAH 1288). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

³¹³ “The War Department Asks every retailer to co-operate in this nation-wide campaign to get Christmas gifts delivered on time to our men overseas,” Report – Advice for Shoppers, no author, undated. Box 2, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

³¹⁴ Press Release from the ODT in an Advertising Federation of America Bulletin, No. 2, Nov. 2, 1942. Box 140, Entry 39, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

meaning they would not end up with too much to carry. This was reportedly the case with last-minute shoppers who could be detrimental to efforts to reduce transportation and shipping requirements. Once again, the government was not suggesting people reduce their consumer behavior, but merely adapt it to the realities of war.

Macy's continued its collaboration with the government to encourage people to shop early throughout the war. The Office of War Information put together information booklets on the storewide campaign being planned by Macy's to distribute to other retailers in hopes they would follow suit.³¹⁵ The National Retail Dry Goods Association also advocated spreading the Christmas season over two months due to labor shortages. Magazines helped to spread the message to the public. For example, a two-page spread in the October 1943 *Women's Home Companion* proclaimed "You'll be doing the earliest shopping of your life this year," and provided a range of possible gift ideas for different climates, tastes, hobbies, and difficult-to-attain items, as well as specific instructions on how and when to send such gifts.³¹⁶ By putting this information in an earlier issue of the magazine, the readers would hopefully be inspired to shop earlier and think it was part of their own wartime initiative inspiring them to do so rather than government mandate.

Retailers and shoppers supported the shop-early campaigns and appreciated the longer buying season. In Los Angeles, the general manager of the Downtown Businessmen's Association said "Downtown Los Angeles stores have always taken pride in their efforts to assist Christmas shoppers in every way" in response to the early Christmas shopping season taking over the city in early October 1943. At the same time, retailers in New York were reporting that Christmas shopping had not yet reached tremendous proportions but that those buying early for servicemen overseas frequently purchased gifts for other civilian friends and relatives.³¹⁷ According to a survey in *Printers' Ink*, in July 1944,

³¹⁵ Information flyer regarding Macy's storewide campaign plans, no author, undated. Box 2, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

³¹⁶ "For a Wide Wide Gift World," *WHC*, Oct. 1943, 54-55.

³¹⁷ "Gift Buying Gets Off to Early Start," *HC*, Oct. 11, 1943, 16.

87% of the nation's retailers favored starting the season early.³¹⁸ The government and business community moderated consumer behavior in a way that would work within the wartime framework. This, combined with the volume of Christmas buying that took place during the war (discussed later in this chapter), illustrates the degree to which the nation accepted the shop-early campaign and the coordination required to ensure Christmas consumption continued over the course of the war.

Provide Mailing Instructions

Gifts were not the only thing being shipped around the world during war-time Christmases. There was also an incredible amount of mail sent during the wartime Christmas seasons. This is discussed in more quantitative detail at the end of this chapter, but in order to manage it the government and the military required the American people, both soldier and civilian, to modify their behaviors to carry out this momentous task. The accurate and complete addressing of Christmas packages was one key requirement. By the end of the war "the Navy Department said that 21,000 Smiths are registered at the Fleet Post Office in San Francisco. In New York, the Navy has more than 14,000 Smiths listed, of whom 1,500 are J.J Smith, 300 are John J. Smith, and 80 are John A. Smith. Army postal records show 72,000 Smiths, 48,500 Johnsons, 39,000 Browns, 33,600 Millers, 31,320 Joneses, 31,000 Davises, 29,000 Wilsons, 24,500 Andersons, 24,300 Martins, 22000 Taylors, 15,170 Halls, and 15,000 Lewises [sic]."³¹⁹ There could be a considerable degree of confusion from errors in addressing mail. People had to be as accurate as possible if they wanted to ensure their particular Smith or Brown or Jones got the Christmas present intended for him. The OWI worked to publicize this information so people would realize how important it was to follow directions if they wanted their mail to make it to the intended destination.

³¹⁸ "Most Stores Favor Early Christmas Promotions," *PI*, July 14, 1944, 44.

³¹⁹ Press Release from the OWI, Aug. 26, 1945, Box 8, Entry 84, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

In order to manage the confusion that stemmed from having millions on the move, overseas and at home, the government launched an information campaign that urged people to “shop early, wrap securely, mail early, and above all address legibly and completely these holiday gifts which mean so much to a soldier’s morale.”³²⁰ Advertisers and retailers were called to cooperate with the program, and they proclaimed this message to the nation through newspapers, advertisements, motion pictures, newsreels, visual displays, and via collaboration with other organizations like schools and clubs.³²¹ The OWI’s Domestic Radio Bureau actively worked to get the message out to civilians on just how important Christmas was as a time to heed its warnings. One of their key initiatives was to ensure they heeded the postal warnings because “if the average citizen realized the bitter disappointment our fighting men face when the mailman passes” they would be more inclined to ensure they followed the rules.³²² While some things might have seemed obvious, it was necessary to make certain conditions for mailing very clear, as indicated by instructions given by *Women’s Home Companion*, which told its readers not to mail the package to “somewhere in Italy” or send “perishables... Incredible as it seems some well-intentioned citizens have tried to send ice cream to India.”³²³ It was a massive undertaking, but one that the government knew was critical to the ability to get the huge number of Christmas gifts to overseas personnel properly and promptly. Soldiers were even recruited to help the effort, with troop magazines like *Stars and Stripes* telling their readers to “ask your family to mail early.”³²⁴ Behavior had to be modified to accommodate Christmas traditions in wartime, but reducing consumption was not the way the government or business leaders chose to do that. They realized the importance of these rituals for morale, of both servicemen and civilians, and as such they

³²⁰ Full campaign for mail early instructions “URGENT! Overseas Christmas Package,” no author, undated. Box 2, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

³²¹ Information booklet for the Christmas Mail Program, no author, undated. Box 2, Entry 52, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

³²² OWI Domestic Radio Bureau Fact Sheet N. 152 “Overseas Christmas Mail,” no author, Aug. 31, 1943. Box 2, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

³²³ Eve Hatch, “Hurray! It’s GI Christmas Time,” *WHC*, Sept. 1944, 116 -117.

³²⁴ “Soldiers: Ask Your Family to Mail Early,” *SandS London*, Sept. 12, 1942, 4.

used the compelling nature of the holiday to encourage people to follow their instructions.

Give Gift Suggestions

Coordination and dissemination of information were also required to direct consumers on what gifts were appropriate for servicemen. Many of the things people might ordinarily give as Christmas gifts were not necessarily suitable in the context of war. Size and space were obvious factors that would eliminate many gifts, but there were numerous other things to consider. Given the degree of significance assigned to gifts in relation to morale, it was of critical importance that those gifts be ones that would actually make someone happy to receive them. The government undertook a great degree of effort to discern what would make good gifts for servicemen and collaborated with corporations to transmit that information back to the American public. The *Women's Home Companion* summed this idea up nicely when it wrote: "it's a gift - or is it? A gift that doesn't get there, or is just what he didn't want, is worse than no gift at all. So when you do your Christmas shopping for your serviceman this month, please see what not to do."³²⁵ There was considerable pressure put on people to figure out the right gift, get it sent correctly, and ensure that Christmas joy was not lost by improper practices or inability to follow the rules.

Numerous surveys were conducted to learn just what servicemen wanted. Three hundred men on furlough in London, England, were asked by the American Red Cross in September 1943 what they wanted for Christmas. The highest ranked item was a cigarette lighter, followed by cameras and film, photographs from home, and fountain pens. The results were broadcasted back to Americans by Col. E.M. Barnum, Army Exchange Service Chief for London.³²⁶ *Women's Home Companion* wanted to make it clear to its readers that "members of the armed services are supplied with food, clothing and the necessities of life. They can buy cigarettes in most war zones more cheaply than you

³²⁵ *WHC*, Sept. 1945, 95.

³²⁶ "Home Folks Told to Mail Gifts for Christmas Before Oct. 15," *SandS London*, Oct. 4 1943, 1.

can... although they are always glad to get more.”³²⁷ For WAACs in the European Theatre the most desired gifts according to the periodical were “practical” gifts, especially gloves, stockings, khaki sewing kits, watches, and manicure sets, as well as cosmetics which were difficult to obtain in the area.³²⁸ The Office of War Information actively worked to spread the data gathered regarding overseas gift desires in addition to other mailing instructions. In a press release from August 1944, findings from the overseas correspondents of *YANK* were discussed. It included some general suggestions, including not to send bulky or perishable items, as well as region-based suggestions, role-based suggestions, rank-based suggestions, and examples of gifts that were ill-suited to the intended recipient, such as the “private first class [who] complained that he had been sent an officer's tropical gabardine cap.”³²⁹ They also made note of gifts that would have a broader effect on morale, as they indicated Navy nurses requested Christmas and birthday decorations so they could create more of a party atmosphere aboard the ships they served. Lastly, they wanted to project the image to the American public back home that the Army and Navy were doing everything they could to ensure packages reached the intended destination while still instilling a sense of personal agency over the process, stating “Distances, heat, cold, sand, dampness, fleet or combat operations, and the fortunes of war are hazards that complicate the delivery of all mail overseas, even without the Christmas rush. The only factor in Christmas gift delivery over which the sender has control is the type and condition of the parcel when it leaves his hands.”³³⁰ If people thought the situation was entirely out of their hands, they might be less compelled to follow the rules, but they also needed to be aware of how difficult the process was, both to encourage them to do what was asked and to be prepared if things did not work out. This was a careful balancing act and indicates the level of importance the government and the military put into ensuring the success of these programs.

³²⁷ Eve Hatch, “Hurray! It's GI Christmas Time,” *WHC*, Sept. 1944, 116 -117.

³²⁸ “Fill That Sled With Rouge, WACs in ETO Ask Santa,” *Sands London*, Oct. 15, 1943, 4.

³²⁹ Press release from the OWI, Aug. 21, 1944. Box 1040, Entry 198, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

Help Servicemen Shop

Christmas was not only about receiving but also about giving, and most servicemen and other personnel far from home still wanted to be able to send gifts to their loved ones. Advertisers focused on troops as a distinct market with money to spend before the war even began. *Printers' Ink* noted in October 1941 that these individuals had strong preferences for national brands and gave advertisers tips on what they wanted to buy and how best to sell to them.³³¹ In many cases, after the war broke out men were stationed away from the national market. Some decided the best gifts would be those available in their local location. For example, Sgt. Bill Richardson stationed in Labrador noted that “the Eskimos are wonderful craftsmen with leather and skins. Beautiful doeskin slippers, softer than any glove leather you ever felt, can be had at settlements a few miles away for three or four dollars.”³³² Considering the growing number of men stationed away from home and their considerable purchasing power, it is not surprising that American businesses worked out a program with the military to ensure they did not lose those valuable dollars to international competitors.

The War Department, in collaboration with the Army Exchange Service and domestic businesses, created a gift program. Catalogs with hundreds of gift choices from national retailers would be distributed to men overseas, and all they had to do was fill out a blank order form with their name, rank, and the name and address of the intended recipient back home. Items that servicemen could purchase included flowers, toiletries and perfumes, toys, and candy.³³³ In doing so, gifts would only have to be wrapped and shipped from the domestic manufacturer or merchant to the individual at home, reducing demands on international shipping while also reducing American dollars spent abroad.

The program featured prominent companies and that helped to reaffirm their brands, while their participation portrayed them as patriotic and supportive in a time of national

³³¹ Frank Coutant, “Soldiers with Money to Spend,” *PI*, Oct. 3, 1941, 78-85.

³³² Sgt. Bill Richardson., “Life in Labrador,” *YANK*, Oct. 28, 1942, 11.

³³³ “PX Santa Claus,” *YANK*, Nov. 18, 1942, 15.

need. *YANK* proclaimed, "If you're in Iceland or South Carolina and want to send your wife a handbag from Neiman-Marcus in Dallas, Texas, Neiman-Marcus is just where Shopping Service will buy the bag. If you don't know just what you want to send the wife, girl, mother, or friend, Shopping Service will make a selection for you within whatever financial limits you set."³³⁴ By 1943 the range of selection was reduced because of wartime shortages, and yet the program was still extraordinarily popular.³³⁵ Apart from the cost of the gift, retailers did not add any extra charges to the price, which indicates how profitable it was to provide this service for the companies involved and the degree of coordination and support from the American business community in encouraging Christmas consumption throughout the war.³³⁶

Carrying out this program also required support from the various government agencies that were created to manage war materials, especially regarding the consumer market on the home front. The Program Bureau of the War Production Board had to coordinate with the Army and Navy Munitions Board, the Army Service Forces, and the Army Exchange Services, as well as the Office of Civilian Requirements, the War Food Administration, and the War Production Board Program Implementation Office. The WPB announced that it would "undertake to see that any request for additional allocation of materials or containers resulting from acceptance of orders under the program, which is so certified by the Army Exchange Service, will be approved."³³⁷ This statement indicates the level of coordination and organization required for such a program, as well as the priority placed on ensuring that the gift program functioned successfully, as providing additional materials meant the program would not limit companies capabilities for the domestic market.

³³⁴ "Strictly GI: You Name It, They Buy It," *YANK*, Oct 14, 1943, 15.

³³⁵ "Gift Service," *YANK*, Sept. 17, 1943, 11.

³³⁶ "Xmas's Gifts for Folks at Home May Be Bought Through PX American," *SandS London*, Sept. 21, 1943, 1.

³³⁷ Press Release on American Buying Programs, no author, May 1, 1944. Roll 34, Microfilm 1239, RG 179. NARA, College Park, MD.

The undertaking of this endeavour would have required a significant amount of material and manpower. In New York, the Service Men's Service utilized trained shoppers as volunteers who would put considerable effort into their role, with *Stars and Stripes* – *London* reporting “No task is too small or large. A corporal in Great Britain recently asked for a string of sleigh bells ‘because I’ve been picked to pass out gifts to my buddies at Christmas and need some atmosphere.’ The time a sailor on sub patrol asked for a good violin for \$30 (his ‘war fiddle’ he called it) a volunteer shopper from the service searched second-hand stores two days to find one.”³³⁸ Even while there were urgent shortages in manpower on the home front, taking the time to select gifts for servicemen was an important task that needed to be carried out in the most diligent manner. The gift program allowed American businesses to reaffirm support for consumerism throughout the war while also providing government agencies a way to manage it, and the materials and manpower it required, throughout the war without upsetting the morale of either servicemen or civilians.

Purchase War Bonds

The government and finance community actively promoted Christmas consumption for reasons other than morale. It also hoped to profit from the compulsion people felt to spend money during the holiday season. In this sense a critical program it advocated was the purchase of war bonds and stamps as Christmas gifts. In November 1942, John Whitney Richmond, the deputy state administrator for the New York War Savings Board, urged the New York State Bankers Association to advise their customers to use their Christmas Savings Club checks to buy war bonds. He suggested at least 20% of the amount used for holiday spending should be directed into bonds.³³⁹ In Washington, D.C., twenty banks abandoned their Christmas Savings Clubs altogether as a “patriotic effort to increase the purchase of war savings and bonds and stamps.”³⁴⁰ *The Wall Street Journal*

³³⁸ “Fifty New York Bargain Hunters Ready to Assist,” *Sands London*, Nov. 18, 1943, 8.

³³⁹ “Yule Checks for Bonds,” *NYT*, Nov. 3, 1942, 34.

³⁴⁰ “20 Banks Drop Yule Clubs for Bond Sales,” *WP*, Nov. 18, 1942, 5.

reported that Christmas gift buying in December was boosting war-bond sales compared to both November levels and the previous December's totals. However, the *Boston Globe* credited this mostly to large institutional buying rather than individuals.³⁴¹

While corporations could realize the impact its buying might have, individual people had to be convinced that their contributions were worthwhile as well. Wartime innovation was the theme Philco Corporation used in its 1942 Christmas message that proclaimed the company was joined in the world struggle to preserve the ideals of peace and goodwill for the future. It suggested people buy war bonds so that “when victory is won, you will have the means to enjoy the brighter Christmas tomorrow that will come from war research and production today.”³⁴² In this way the corporation was able to place itself in people's minds during the war but used the Christmas spirit of buying to encourage them to save for the improved products that would come out of its important war work. To promote war bonds for Christmas the government, and especially the Office of War Information, undertook a massive campaign to broadcast the idea to the American people. It required the help of those who managed the media, as well as retail trade, and the OWI worked tirelessly to ensure participation and support for the program.³⁴³ In 1943, Eleanor Roosevelt herself stated that she was only buying war bonds and stamps for Christmas that year – except for her grandchildren who would still get their toys.³⁴⁴ In addition to sponsorship from various individuals and corporations, radio broadcasts were a popular method to spread information about these programs. In New York City, a December 1944 radio broadcast stated “If you want a bond to be sent to anyone in the service, or a relative, or to a friend as a Christmas present, and you think it would add to it if it comes from this office [of Mayor LaGuardia] with a letter from the Mayor, send the money here, send a check in, send the address and we'll send the

³⁴¹ Charles Speare, “Financial Review and Outlook,” *BG*, Dec. 20, 1942, C7.

³⁴² Philco Corporation ad, “A Brighter Christmas Tomorrow will come from War Research and Production Today,” *LIFE*, Dec. 21, 1942. 10.

³⁴³ ““Bonds for Christmas’ Top Radio War Messages Scheduled Week of Nov. 8,” *Broadcasting, Broadcast Advertising*, Vol. 25, No. 16, (Oct 18, 1943): 28.

³⁴⁴ “Mrs. FDR's Xmas Shopping,” *SandS London*, Dec. 7, 1943, 4.

bond.”³⁴⁵ While it is unclear how many people accepted this offer, it was clearly an unnecessarily generous gesture that was superfluous given wartime realities. On one hand it portrayed the Mayor’s office as generous and patriotic, and on the other it followed government agency directives to advertise and support war-bond purchases. By 1944 retailers were reporting an “amazing” number of persons buying bonds as Christmas gifts, according to the field director of the Treasury’s War Finance Division.³⁴⁶ The publicity on important figures in American life buying war bonds acted similarly to brand sponsorship and tried to get people to identify personally with the cause. Evidently, the program was successful in getting people to see the value of buying bonds as Christmas gifts, even if it took time to get the average citizen on board. The behaviors associated with Christmas that people felt compelled to carry out could be co-opted to support the war while still allowing people to believe they were both fulfilling the traditions of the season and acting like patriotic citizens in a time of war.

Value of Consumption

With the rise of mass consumption in the early twentieth century came a connection between the goods purchased and their meaning outside of the actual function they served. People purchased specific goods because advertisers and culture more generally constructed them as having associations with particular markers of identity and status. People were no longer just buying a dress because they needed clothing; that dress represented something more than merely covering naked flesh. People purchased certain items to manufacture and uphold a particular image of themselves. This relationship between buying and American identity is well discussed in the historical scholarship.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Broadcast, Dec. 17, 1944. Doc #002172, Microfilm Roll 12, Office of the Mayor (Fiorello H. LaGuardia) Subject Files 1933-1945. NYCMA, New York City, NY.

³⁴⁶ “Topping off Quota for E Bonds Seen,” *NYT*, Dec. 19, 1944, 18.

³⁴⁷ This is covered in works such as Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*; Inger Stole, *Advertising at War* and “Selling Advertising;” Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic*; Wall, *Inventing the “American Way;”* Charles McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*; Marchland, *Creating the Corporate Soul*; Lears, *Fables of Abundance*; Leach, *Land of Desire*.

More important in this discussion of the value of consumption in the wartime context is the relationship between American identity, consumerism, and the state.

Works such as Lizabeth Cohen's *Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, Charles F. McGovern's *Sold America: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945*, and Meg Jacobs's *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* cement the argument that in the early twentieth century a link formed between what people bought and their role in society. Cohen looks more closely at consumer behavior, McGovern at advertisers and advocates of consumers, and Jacobs at political maneuvers. Each reveal that consumption was not just a personal choice but a social practice tied to what it meant to be an American citizen. World War II enhanced and highlighted these ideas and sharpened the connection between consumer behavior, businesses, and the government. According to McGovern "During World War II, consumption shaped daily home-front experience and the conscious articulation of wartime ideology. In the imagery and practices of nationalism and patriotism, Americans came to see consumption as an integral part of American culture and to experience it as citizenship."³⁴⁸ The government worked to manage the consumer economy through many of the regulatory agencies discussed, like the Office of Price Administration or the War Production Board. Businesses sought to maintain their image and sustain brand loyalty. Consumers were encouraged to "save today (preferably through war bonds) so that they might become purchasers tomorrow," and turned the purchases they did make into a political statement.³⁴⁹ Consumption was critical both to the winning of the war and to people's understanding of their role in that process.

With consumer behavior playing a pivotal role both in people's understanding of themselves and their role in society it is important to consider what message consumption at Christmas presented to the American people. What value was holiday buying presented as having, how was it tied to conceptions of American identity, and ultimately in what

³⁴⁸ McGovern, *Sold American*, 302.

³⁴⁹ Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 70 and 83.

ways would it shape understanding of the war and the massive changes the war brought into the lives of Americans both at home and abroad?

Consuming Will Make You Happy

The government and the business community constructed Christmas consumption as a way to make yourself and others happy, even during the dark days of the war. The government presented the purchase of war bonds in this way, noting that “This year with over half of the homes of the world shaken by the earthquakes of war, there can be no greater gift than that which serves your country as well as you. A gift that will bring security for yourself, for your family, for your home... A gift that guarantees freedom from fear... freedom from want... freedom of speech.... And freedom to worship as you please.”³⁵⁰ The connection of Christmas to freedom was made through the act of buying. While not necessarily the same as the freedom of choice mentioned earlier, buying a war bond as a Christmas gift made possible the future purchase choice though this could only come to pass after America’s victory in battle.

Buying and receiving gifts at Christmastime was something that could provide a brief moment of cheer for an otherwise unhappy set of circumstances the nation faced. Widely broadcasted newsreels sought to demonstrate the drive to keep things normal while also showing how to come to terms with the realities of war. The Universal Newsreel of December 1943 documented the actions of the men of the *U.S.S. North Carolina* who sent money to Macy’s department store in New York asking store employees to pick out gifts and mail them to their sons and daughters back home. The short film, arranged by the ship’s Chaplain, Everett Wuebbens, in collaboration with Macy’s, opened with a mail truck rolling down the street, passing three young boys sitting on the side of the road. As it drove by them, they began to discuss how hard Christmas was going to be and how sad they were about the limited number of presents they would receive.³⁵¹ While this may

³⁵⁰ War Bonds ad, *RB*, Jan. 1943, 15.

³⁵¹ Universal Newsreels, “Blue Jacket Holiday,” 1943, *AP Archive*, <http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/Universal-Newsreels-1943-Part->

seem superficial, it reveals the power of consumerism and the way in which war impacted the psyche of the nation. Buying and receiving gifts at Christmastime was seen as something that could not be forgotten, even when fathers were out at sea, fighting for the nation at war. If even the men aboard the *U.S.S. North Carolina* could make an effort to maintain Christmas consumption, so too should everyone else.

Getting the right gift and ensuring its safe delivery was something to worry about but once that was accomplished, all other worries should melt away. A tale of a young man trying to mail a package to his mother for his first Christmas away from home in the *Christian Science Monitor* made this concept clear. The story, called “War or No War, It’s Christmas,” described the busy scene of the holiday rush inside a post office. The boy brought his parcel to the counter, and the clerk asked what was inside. While the boy replied “Pyrex” the clerk misheard “tie-racks.” The clerk inquires further to fill out the insurance slip, and when the boy replies they are made of glass and heat-resistant for the oven more confusion ensues. Eventually, some other customers overhear and explain the misunderstanding, to which the clerk replies “All right, my boy. All your troubles are over now until the draft catches you.”³⁵² Military service might become something the boy has to contend with, but at the moment his largest problem, regardless of the wartime context, was ensuring his mother got a good gift from him despite the fact the country was at war.

People understood that receiving a gift at Christmas was meant to instill happiness, as *Ladies’ Home Journal’s* Dawn Crowell noted in 1943, “Christmas is a thing called Fun! – It’s the postman with a pretty package.”³⁵³ In a wartime context even fantasizing about future purchases for Christmases to come could bring joy. The 1944 Kelvinator Christmas ad presented a young military man and his future wife holding a miniature model of a house, depicting their dream of owning their own home. Kelvinator home

17/3496b229db6045e3fa213344327de43a?searchfilter=Compilations%2FUniversal+Annual+Reviews%2FUniversal+Newsreels+1943%3A+Part+17%2F24

³⁵² J. A. A., “To Change the Subject: War or No War, its Christmas, *CSM*, Dec. 10, 1941, 13.

³⁵³ Dawn Crowell, “Christmas is a Thing Called Fun!,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 36.

appliances not only directed future buying but also sought to inspire present happiness through just the thought of this lifestyle that would be attainable as soon as the war was over and normal consumer behavior could resume. Their ideal domestic future hinged on the idea of consumption – buying the requisite items to make this the perfect home, like Kelvinator home appliances – and seeing that future through the lens of Christmas. Christmas provided the outlet and the opportunity to see that vision through the imagery described in the advertisement: “the life we’ll have together when this war is over and you’re home... I can see a blanket of snow on that little roof... and the lovely litter of Christmas on our living room floor.”³⁵⁴ It told people to send for a complimentary catalog to begin their planning as soon as possible. Christmas provided the context for people to imagine the possibilities of their post-war future and advertisements presented planning for this future as a way to be happier. It was the idea of shopping that could be used to make people happy, even if they realized they might have to wait for post-war Christmases to do the actual buying.

Consumption Will Help Those Overseas

Industry and the government also connected Christmas consumption with the holiday sentiment towards being charitable, especially for those overseas and far from their homes. In this sense, you could make people happy apart from yourself and your immediate loved ones. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* suggested their readers adopt a Yank and send him a copy of the *Tribune* for Christmas as “a joyous message from home...” and to “let him know that he wasn’t forgotten.”³⁵⁵ While there was a clear business incentive to advocate for people to do this, it taps into the pre-existing understanding that Christmas gifts made the giver feel charitable and the receiver feel appreciated and happy. If anything then, the war was a time to expand this practice rather than constrict it.

Advertisements presented the giving and receiving of gifts for Christmas, and the happiness it was meant to bring, as something particularly American. Elgin watches

³⁵⁴ Kelvinator “Home at Last” ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 25, 1944, 15.

³⁵⁵ “Tribune Helps You Send Yule Gifts to Tanks,” *CDT*, Dec 10, 1941, 1.

proclaimed that by sending an Elgin watch, you could make it a “real American Christmas” even in the islands of the Pacific.³⁵⁶ It was not just the American make of the product which transmitted this sentiment, but the act of giving in itself. By using consumption as a way to acknowledge the soldier abroad through the sending of a gift, Christmas acted as a transnational force spreading American values around the world, most importantly the American value of consumption itself. Giving and receiving at Christmas reaffirmed social bonds and transmitted the message that these bonds could be upheld through the material goods themselves.

Consumerism Will Distract by Planning For the Future

Christmas and its perceived timelessness made it particularly powerful for discussing the post-war future. The idea that Christmas would endure and people would continue to celebrate following the conflict was used to transmit certain visions of how post-war America should look. Even before the war, advertisers realized they could both work to direct demand to the goods available and “preserve good-will where the market is lost.”³⁵⁷ *Printers’ Ink* was explicit in warning its readers not to underestimate this second function and its importance to when the war would be over. Companies heeded this warning and worked to project their brand into the coming peace, using Christmas as a powerful tool in achieving this timeless quality for their brands. The Hamilton Watch Company was explicit in its description of Christmases across time and how its product fits into this picture, noting:

We shall ride this storm through: There was a pioneer Christmas in America – when a lonely band of Pilgrims knew fear and cold and hunger. There was a Revolutionary Christmas – when a nation struggling to be born almost perished at Valley Forge. There were Christmases in bitter years of civil strife and bloodshed – when brother fought brother, friend took up arms against friend. There was a Christmas when the outcome of the First World War looked heartbreakingly unsure. Those times too, shall pass away! America will live to know a day when

³⁵⁶ Elgin Watches ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 7, 1942, 10.

³⁵⁷ “Wartime Advertising,” *PI*, Oct. 4, 1940, 86-7.

boys and girls can love and marry and not be torn apart... when mothers can tuck their children into bed without an anxious look to the sky... when America will be not only the land we know and love, but the land of richer promise than man today has ever dreamed. You can't make this a normal Christmas. Families are scattered, many gifts hard to get. You may have to hunt a little harder, for instance, to find the Hamilton Watch you want most to give the one you like best. (Hamilton is busy today making wartime precision instruments). But when you do find it, it's doubly precious now. Like the love you give with it, it's one of the things that endures. Like that love too, it looks to the future –America's future – when Hamilton watches may again mark every shining, golden hour of peace!³⁵⁸

The message and imagery in this ad is particularly compelling and emotionally powerful. It presented the many conflicts and struggles that Christmas had to endure and used the endurance of the holiday to project a vision of a more prosperous future. It also empathized with the current struggles civilians faced, so as not to diminish their present wartime experiences. The company's war work is also noted, which helped to forestall any possible problems in finding their product. However, this also gives the product meaning and works to conceal the consumer behavior within an ideal that love will endure, just like how Christmas has endured and would last into the years of peace. These years of peace are described as being even better, which additionally helps to give meaning to the conflict; all the suffering of the war will ultimately be worth it, according to the Hamilton Watch Company.

When products were known to be unavailable, it was even more important for ads to make connections to the future to establish and solidify post-war demand. Companies did not want people to be drawn to alternate options; rather, they wanted to compel people to wait for their product. Toastmaster Toaster showed Santa Claus in one of its ads holding a framed photo of a toaster to indicate that this was the gift "you've set your heart on." The company also noted that "another way to solve the problem this Christmas is to give her a bright new War Bond, and write on the card, for that toastmaster toaster."³⁵⁹ This

³⁵⁸ Hamilton Watches ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 21, 1942, 33.

³⁵⁹ Toastmaster Toaster ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 21, 1942, 3.

suggestion presented a patriotic option that also sought to ensure consumers would return to them when products became available. Some ads were even more explicit in this endeavor. Hotpoint Electric Kitchen's 1942 Christmas ad showed a shiny new kitchen and yet its main text read "Our War Bond Gifts Do Double Duty." It went on to explicitly say that by buying war bonds consumers were "helping win the war [and] making sure there'll be years of real American Christmases to come... and we're also building a nest-egg for the Hotpoint Electric Kitchen we're going to buy as soon as Hotpoint returns from war work to making home appliances again."³⁶⁰ In addition to encouraging consumers to support the war with their money, they could fantasize about their consumption-driven future that would come in the post-war years. By promoting the importance of continuing to buy and give gifts at Christmas, even when they were difficult or impossible to obtain, advertisers entrenched the value of consumerism deeper into the public consciousness. Using war bonds as a placeholder for these fantasized future gifts connected patriotism with the importance of consumerism, creating a desire for a quintessentially American Christmas to come – one where people could easily attain not only the products but the brands they wanted. This also meant upholding the possibility of a choice of what to buy. With an abundance of options and the importance of brands for helping to understand those options, advertising would also have a critical place within America's future as the tool which helped the consumer navigate the free market.

Consumption is Part of American Identity

Americans recognized that in a time of national crisis the items they owned transmitted meaning, especially if they had connotations with the enemy. One family in Bristol, Connecticut set fire to their "made in Japan" Christmas tree ornaments in the days immediately following the attack at Pearl Harbor.³⁶¹ While they had already made this purchase, so this was not a matter of patriotically directing their dollars, they felt they had

³⁶⁰ Hotpoint Electric Kitchen ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 7, 1942, 15.

³⁶¹ "Family Sets Fire to 'Made in Japan' Yule Tree Ornaments," *BG*, Dec. 12, 1941, 5.

to physically destroy the item to convey their allegiance to the country. Germany and Japan had been the predominant suppliers of glass Christmas ornaments in the years before the conflict. Not only were those products more difficult to obtain because of lack of imports, but also the item's association with an enemy nation's identity caused some Americans to reject them in protest.

American corporations jumped at the chance to get into the ornament trade and used their domestic patriotic association to establish their quality. The Pyrex glass company's Christmas ornament ad from 1942 proclaimed "made in America on American machines, they're stronger, rounder... better than any ornaments you've ever seen before!"³⁶² Pyrex tapped into the enhanced desire to buy American-made goods, taking advantage of items that were in short supply because of the war but that people still wanted for the holiday. People could direct their purchases in patriotic ways, and some did not want to buy or even have items from enemy nations.

The act of buying was constructed as an integral part of being American, especially at Christmas. Pacific Fabrics called for making Christmas 1942 especially beautiful by buying its fabrics as "among the inalienable rights for which Americans are fighting today is the simple, beautiful rite of Christmas celebration."³⁶³ Some saw the constant search for the next best thing as a particularly American attribute, as in this Hallentine Ale Ad: "How American is it... to want something better? Maybe we have to wait till the war is over and television comes from around the corner before we can all have this particular 'something better.' But how American is it to want such things. A better camera or a better watch or a better baking potato – it makes no difference what the product is – we are forever looking for 'something better.'"³⁶⁴ For others, it was consumer choice that was at the center of what it meant to be American. *Women's Home Companion* proclaimed "Brands, trademarks, labels, displays, even the merchant's proud

³⁶² Pyrex Christmas Ornaments ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 14, 1942, 99.

³⁶³ Pacific Fabrics ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1942, 73.

³⁶⁴ Hallentine Ale ad, *TIME*, Dec. 21, 1942, 8.

sign over his own door, are therefore vivid if humdrum symbols of your freedom... freedom to speak, read, think, worship, make, sell, and buy – freedom of choice.”³⁶⁵ Government and business, working in tandem, constructed consumption as part of the rights of an American citizen, and part of what the war was being fought for. The value of consumption was strengthened via Christmas as both the holiday and buying itself were seen as quintessential parts of the American experience that needed to be upheld and protected in wartime.

Consumption is Patriotic

People continued to consume throughout the war, especially at Christmas and despite wartime restrictions. Business and government elites chose to tap into the compelling power of Christmas to give structure and meaning to this behavior. The link between consumption, identity, and citizenship that existed before the war was an important foundation in this regard. Ultimately, the act of buying and what people bought was reaffirmed as a patriotic act through the sentimentality of the season.

The most obvious example of this is the meaning ascribed to war bonds. While people wanted to buy at Christmas, buying war bonds could satisfy this desire while also making them feel altruistic and patriotic. The power of holidays in transmitting this meaning is clear in a war-bond ad from U.S. Steel in December 1942. It showed an image of a father standing over a baby in a crib sleeping. He had bought his newborn son a war bond. While the father was aware this would not be the most exciting gift his son received on Christmas morning, he felt that it would be appreciated in the future for in buying this war bond he was “giving [him] Christmas – and the 4th of July... and thanksgiving, and hot dogs, and pink lemonade... [he] bought a slice of today’s – and tomorrow’s – America!”³⁶⁶ This father was able to give his son the things America valued most: holidays and the consumer goods associated with them.

³⁶⁵ *WHC*, Nov. 1940, 2.

³⁶⁶ United States Steel ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1942, 119.

This idea of parents giving war bonds to their children was a powerful one that many advertisements capitalized on. In giving to the younger generation this concept of being able to buy it was like giving America's future as a gift for the holiday. The U.S. Rubber Company's Christmas 1942 had a similar theme to U.S. Steel's. It depicted a mother holding a newborn baby and talked about the father's sacrifice in leaving them to go and fight for the nation. She reveals how she has saved her money so "each day's pennies could add their might to winning the war" in the hopes that both that money and the father they have "loaned to the America you, too, will grow up to love. We have loaned him so that in the years to come, young mothers everywhere on Christmas Day shall be able to say 'Merry Christmas' to their sons."³⁶⁷ This advertisement sought to compel people to accept their personal and material sacrifices in the name of the future and the values of family and togetherness that Christmas embodied. By giving war bonds as gifts to children, parents were essentially buying a happier American future as a Christmas gift, or at least that was how advertisers and the American government wanted people to see it.

Limited Opposition

Not all were in support of the rising consumerist tide and thought that, given the grave wartime realities, perhaps attention should be devoted to less frivolous features of the holiday season. Often these complaints came from the Church, as some religious leaders were anxious to see religious devotion heightened in response to the global conflict instead. In 1939, Rex Miller wrote in the *Christian Science Monitor* that instead of starting Christmas shopping earlier, perhaps people should also start "Christmas thinking" and argued that goodwill and peace should be really what people hoped for on their Christmas lists.³⁶⁸ In New York, Reverend Dr. Wesley Megaw, pastor of the Fort Washington Presbyterian Church, urged his parishioners to see that "To use Christmas as a time to pay for the gifts we received last year by sending a return package to the giver

³⁶⁷ United States Rubber Company ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 21, 1942, 4-5.

³⁶⁸ "Behind the Headlines: Early Christmas," *CSM*, Nov. 17, 1939, 3.

this year defeats the spirit of Christmas.” Instead, “Every gift should be a sacrament reminding us of God’s greatest gift to the world in Jesus Christ.”³⁶⁹ He criticized what he perceived as an empty exchange between parties and disregarded the role gift-giving plays in establishing and reaffirming communal and familial bonds.

It was not just Christmas which bore the brunt of attacks on the use of consumer goods in personal relationships. A column in the *Negro Star*, Lessons from the Church, noted “in the age that will even commercialize a man’s love for his mother it is a small wonder that the great holy days of the Church – Christmas and Easter – have become the special object of profit-seeking purveyors of everything from hats to whiskey... it is high time that intelligent folk make effective protest against such perversion of sacred things.”³⁷⁰ However, Christmas especially was a time when people attempted to make a gesture of love and affection through gift-giving and felt particularly compelled to participate in this behavior regardless of the circumstances. At least the *Dallas District Crusader* was a little more realistic when it published its version of the Ten Commandments for Christmas. Some of the commandments included to not neglect the church or use the short form “Xmas.” It also called for people to “not value thy gifts by cost” and in the gifts people did give, to give themselves in spirit and love.³⁷¹ The column realized that advocating for more meaningful consumption was a better option than trying to get people to halt the practice of Christmas gift exchanges altogether. Even in wartime, Christmas consumption was too deeply entrenched in people’s behaviors and traditions to be given up entirely.

There were calls to reduce the use of patriotic fervor to simply sell things. In 1941, the Senate put forward a bill to prohibit the use of the flag in advertising.³⁷² It sought to ensure companies could not use the standard, colors, or ensign of the nation on their

³⁶⁹ “Yule Giving Criticized,” *NYT*, Dec. 2, 1940, 26.

³⁷⁰ “Lessons from the Church,” *Negro Star* (Wichita, Kansas), Feb. 24, 1939, 2.

³⁷¹ “Commandments for Christmas,” *Dallas District Crusader* (Dallas, Texas), Dec. 22, 1944, 10.

³⁷² “Flag in Advertising,” *PI*, Apr. 18, 1941, 33.

labels, packages, and other advertising material. The bill failed, but it does reveal that the sentiment was prominent enough to make it through the Senate and some lawmakers considered it necessary. An anonymous analyst for *Printers' Ink* wrote in 1941 the “well-known patriotic motifs are already being given a general work-out in legitimate government advertising – where they properly belong,” and urged readers, those in the advertising and selling profession, to “not make them commonplace by dragging them by the heels into advertisements that are connected in no other way with the Victory Program.”³⁷³ Evidently, the analyst thought some of the patriotic meaning would be lost by attaching the design to everything possible, rather than where they were truly relevant. This is not to say that the advertising profession was entirely unscrupulous, with all willing to send Santa off to war. While a wide range of companies were inclined to use this technique, some did speak out about the militarization of Christmas. P.H. Erbes Jr. wrote a thought piece for *Printers' Ink* in December 1942. He critiqued the use of Santa, especially in military garb, to sell products. He described how people had even altered his mode of transportation, yet “happily, nobody put St. Nick, beard and all, into a gas mask.”³⁷⁴ He argued that these changes caused upset and unrest among children and said it was only a matter of time “before the aroused and indignant parents of the nation, seeing that the business won’t clean up its own abuses, will call for government control of Santa Claus.”³⁷⁵ Ultimately this did not happen. Santa Claus was enlisted into the war effort for its duration and found his way into numerous military outfits and modes of transportation and the government adopted rather than restricted this tactic. There were also instances of scammers trying to take advantage of people and using the wartime context and urgency of Christmas to do so. Mayor of New York City, Fiorello LaGuardia, spoke out about how the inspector of the Department of Markets had discovered this type of behavior. An investigation of gift packages intended for servicemen, decorated with patriotic emblems and meant to be sold as Christmas

³⁷³ Anonymous Analyst, “After Hours,” *PI*, Jan. 23, 1942, 64.

³⁷⁴ P. H. Erbes Jr., “St. Nick Goes Military,” *PI*, Dec. 18, 1942, 37.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

presents, revealed that many were underweight or did not contain the items they were described as having. In his Sunday broadcast to the city, he described the contents of one such box in detail and the discrepancies in price and quality. He also revealed cases of people paying for a display box, only to have another of far lesser quality actually be mailed to the intended servicemen overseas. He ensured his listeners that “I know that Commissioner McColley of the Department of Markets will move very energetically on the merchants engaging in such bad business practice,” and urged that “the papers to carefully scrutinize the advertisements of these gift boxes for the boys in our armed forces.”³⁷⁶ No doubt there were many other instances of this type of behavior, as there are always some who move to take advantage of a crisis. For some, the drive for profit at Christmas combined with the urgency of war was enough to force them over the line between simply encouraging sales and into taking advantage of customers’ desires.

Encouragement Outweighs Controls at Christmas

There was not as much pushback to a consumer Christmas as might be expected. While articles in newspapers and magazines may have opened with a statement of returning to the simpler things, on the whole, these comments were superficial rather than sincere. They would often be followed with descriptions of what to give as gifts or what to eat, and these actions would require consumption. Returning to an imaginary simpler time, one that pre-dated the consumer-centric Christmas, was not really a possibility. As has been previously discussed, the domestic-centered Christmas was formed both because of and as an expression of the rise of consumerism. A purely religious festival is one that exists in people’s minds only, as opposed to being an actual moment in the past. While some religious leaders may have advocated for more attention to the religious underpinnings of the season and advertising critics were wary of people taking advantage of the increased sentimentality of war, consumption was not something that could be pushed aside entirely. The American government, media, and business community supported and encouraged Christmas consumerism throughout the war. In looking at the

³⁷⁶ Broadcast, Dec. 6, 1942. Doc#01529, Microfilm Roll 11, Office of the Mayor (Fiorello H. LaGuardia) Subject Files 1933-1945. NYCMA, New York City, NY; AC, Dec. 7, 1942, 9.

volume of Christmas buying that occurred and the volume of Christmas mail Americans sent during the war, it is apparent that the encouragement of consumption strongly outweighed the controls placed on the holiday season.

Volume of Buying

Looking to the Christmas season of 1941, merchants began amassing the largest toy and gift stocks possible, expecting the pre-war buying surges that were outlined in Chapter One to continue and with even more record-breaking sales to be made that year.³⁷⁷

Refrigerator production was up 164% in the first half of 1941, and automobiles and other large consumer durables showed similar numbers.³⁷⁸ A corporate information booklet from Marshall Field Company department store in Chicago reported that on normal occasions there were approximately 63,000 customers and visitors in the store daily and that this number could exceed 200,000 during the holiday season, prompting the store to increase its staff from 7,500 to 14,000 for Christmas 1941.³⁷⁹ While Pearl Harbor brought a brief shock to the business system, buying returned with renewed haste and Christmas 1941 saw one of the largest holiday seasons on record.³⁸⁰

It is possible to imagine that Christmas 1941 could have gone on as planned, given that consumer goods would still have been on the shelves, a full transition to a wartime economy had not yet taken place, and most people still had their loved ones by their sides. However, even after months of being at war, record-breaking sales were expected for the fall of 1942. With so many Americans overseas the need to get presents delivered spurred the Christmas shopping season to start even earlier.³⁸¹ Domestically, travel restrictions through gasoline and tire rationing meant that many gifts would also have to

³⁷⁷ “Record Yule Trade Seen,” *LAT*, Nov. 21, 1941, 21; *CSM*, Dec. 18, 1941, 8.

³⁷⁸ Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic*, 63.

³⁷⁹ Promotional Material for Marshall Field’s and Company, Chicago, no author, 1941. Box 1, William L. Bird Holidays on Display Collection, (ACNMAH 1288). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

³⁸⁰ “War Fails to Cut Holiday Shopping,” *NYT*, Dec. 9, 1941, 53.

³⁸¹ *PI*, Oct 30, 1942, 68b-68e; “Record Yule Trade Anticipated This Year,” *WP*, Nov 7, 1942, 15.

be mailed within the home front in lieu of traditional holiday visiting. October sales in several gift categories reported huge increases; for example, jewelry was up 82% from the previous fall. Reports from thirty-four states showed an overall increase of 12% in sales for all store types. While an 81% decrease in motor vehicles counterbalanced the numbers, it was clear that the war had not stopped people or caused them to reduce their Christmas buying.³⁸² As Christmas 1942 got closer, the buying volume continued. One New York department store reported a crowd of 250,000 people in a single day. The increase in sales of luxury lines of items also continued. Furthermore, this spending was in addition to the war financing drives happening nationwide. Estimates put the December Victory Loan drive at bringing in more than \$700 million in war-bond sales for the month.³⁸³ Despite the war, people continued to open their pocketbooks to buy for their friends and loved ones at record-breaking volume and just added Uncle Sam onto their lists.

The Christmas buying season for 1943 started even earlier due to post office advisories for early mailing for overseas soldiers (by October 15th) and for those soldiers in the United States (by November 30th). These regulations prolonged the buying period as many had to do parts of their Christmas shopping long before they usually would. Retailers welcomed the extension. The National Retail Dry Goods Association reported it had actually planned to start Christmas promotions early to try and spread the buying period because of severe labor shortages.³⁸⁴

Despite shortages of goods due to restrictions outlined in Chapter One, there was a 7% increase over 1942 in department store sales reported across the country for November according to the Federal Reserve Bank. The *Wall Street Journal* reported this was due to increases in luxury goods sales, up 15-60% above the previous year depending on the

³⁸² “Yule Shopping in October Set All Time High,” *WP*, Nov. 18, 1942, 19.

³⁸³ “Yule Trade at New High,” *LAT*, Dec. 14, 1942, 18; “Yule Buying Shatters All U.S. Records,” *WP*, Dec. 20, 1942, SP5; “Store Stocks Depleted by Yule Buying,” *HC*, Dec. 25, 1942, 20.

³⁸⁴ “Earliest Yule Buying Season Started by Servicemen's Needs,” *WP*, Oct. 10, 1943, M16.

product, and noted cosmetics, jewelry, and furs as huge contributors to this trend.³⁸⁵ On the other side of increases in luxury goods was also a huge rise in ersatz-style gifts. These were items that were not quite the quality, style, or make compared to the pre-war years because of the government's restrictions on certain materials and decreased manufacturing facilities. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported "the things they came for either are not there or they look only strangely familiar in the makeup of some substitute material. Does all this put a damper on buying? It does not." Even though some common household items and toys were being made out of wood now instead of metal, people were still extremely eager to buy, with household furnishings being particularly popular.³⁸⁶ People's buying activity in this period was so intense newspapers actually reported a drop in blood donations, which according to the Red Cross, Christmas shopping was responsible for.³⁸⁷ December 1943 ultimately was not as record-breaking as the previous year. The extended season meant the biggest Christmas selling took place in the last two weeks of November, up 16% from November 1942. According to the Federal Reserve Bank, the sales in Washington, D.C., for December overall were down 3% from the previous year, meaning more buying was happening earlier. Regardless, it was clear that while the war may have altered people's schedules and the goods they were in search of may have had to be rethought, there was no large-scale reduction in Christmas consumption overall in the name of wartime austerity.

Similar trends continued into 1944. The Commerce Department estimated that consumers spent a record \$97 billion on goods and services in 1944 overall, up 6% from 1943.³⁸⁸ There were adequate toy stocks across the country (except the Rocky Mountains Area), although they were increasingly made of wood and paperboard instead of the pre-war

³⁸⁵ "Shoppers' Xmas Spending Spree Depletes Stock," *SandS London*, Dec. 1, 1943, 4; *CSM*, Dec. 15, 1943, 1.

³⁸⁶ "Yule Shoppers Swamp Stores in Record Rush," *CSM*, Dec. 15, 1943, 1.

³⁸⁷ "Yule Purchasing Blamed in Drop in Blood Donors," *WP*, Dec. 1, 1943, 1.

³⁸⁸ "Life in Those United States U.S. Spending in '44," *SandS London*, Dec. 22, 1944, 4.

metal models.³⁸⁹ Fur sales decreased after the government tried to capitalize on the luxury buying trend by placing a 20% excise tax on them in April.³⁹⁰ Even with these changes, December 1944 saw record-breaking sales across the nation. Many thought this demonstrated customers had become more willing to accept higher-priced or lower-quality merchandise.³⁹¹ Even still, Americans were determined to try and buy their way to a merry Christmas even if to do so meant accepting the effects of the war on the consumer market.

With such surges in retail volume at Christmas came a rise in the prices of various holiday commodities. The cost of diamonds surged in 1939 with the outbreak of the European conflict. This was because 90-95% of diamonds sold were imported, as well as the fact that smaller diamonds, like those used in jewelry, were normally cut in Germany.³⁹² The wartime holiday season also saw rising of prices for turkeys, due to strong civilian and military demand on the product.³⁹³ Even some of the makeshift toys meant to accommodate wartime shortages saw massive price increases. For example, rag dolls were being sold in New York department stores for as much as \$12 each during Christmas 1943.

The government was particularly cognizant of the increased purchasing power of its citizens moving into the war years and that this would have an impact on prices. It took steps to manage the consumer market throughout the war. Chapter One demonstrated many of the material and price controls put into place by agencies such as the Office of Price Administration or the War Production Board. Still, many consumer goods found their way under the trees of many homes and contributed to the record-breaking retail

³⁸⁹ “Yule Buying Fast Setting a Record in U.S.,” *SandS London*, Dec. 11, 1944, 3.

³⁹⁰ Evelyn Maranek, “Merchandise Trends,” *The Billboard*, Vol. 56, No. 46, (Nov. 11, 1944): 47.

³⁹¹ “Retailers See New Record in Yule Sales,” *WP*, Dec. 3, 1944, M8; “D.C. Yule Sales in Week Show 18% Upsurge,” *WP*, Dec. 23, 1944, 10.

³⁹² Wesley Smith, “Reaction to Los Angeles Importers; Retail Advances Seen Before Christmas,” *LAT*, Sept. 28, 1939, 14.

³⁹³ “Pre-Yule Rise Noted in Turkey Prices,” *WP*, Dec. 20, 1942, SP5.

sales throughout the years of World War II. Regardless of wartime difficulties, people continued to consume at Christmastime.

Volume of Mail

The volume of mail generated by Christmas consumption is one of the key examples of the massive amount of strain the holiday season put on the American war machine. The war abroad increased the demand on American post offices as early as 1939 as many people were more inclined to send letters, cards, parcels, and airmail to friends or family away from home. The *Los Angeles Times* reported exactly 9,032,166 letters and cards, 37,892 sacks of parcels, and 11,050 pounds of airmail processed in a single day in the city's central post office.³⁹⁴ Additionally, that same year the Navy called a considerable number of reservists into active service, and according to Postmaster General Jim Farley, many of them held post office jobs so this reduced the staff available to process the growing amount of mail. The Army, which usually lent trucks at Christmas to post offices, notified the department that it would not be able to give nearly as many for the 1939 holiday season as they were needed for enhanced defense requirements.³⁹⁵ The war and Christmas were overloading American post offices from a multitude of angles.

The need to transport considerable amounts of mail and packages is one obvious outcome of people's desire to buy and therefore send gifts at Christmas. In wartime, this Christmas mail took up the space that munitions, personnel, and other war necessities required. Yet the Office of Defense Transportation, despite the transportation problems, announced it would not be putting any restrictions on Christmas packages in 1942.³⁹⁶ In New York, 500 extra workers were brought in to aid the post office, which was handling between 150,000 and 200,000 parcels for overseas delivery a day.³⁹⁷ The volume of holiday mail put a strain on labor as well as transportation and regardless the government did not call

³⁹⁴ "Post Office, With Extra Help, Has Greatest Day in History," *LAT*, Dec. 21, 1939, A2.

³⁹⁵ "Army Can't Help on Those Christmas Packages," *WP*, Nov. 5, 1939, A7.

³⁹⁶ "No Restrictions Planned on 1942 Christmas Mail," *WSJ*, Aug. 15, 1942, 8.

³⁹⁷ "Yule Mail for Overseas Swamps Post Office Here," *NYT*, Nov. 1, 1942, 6.

for an end to this Christmas behavior. While the government enacted regulations for the size and weight of packages, there was no limit on the number of parcels that individuals could send.³⁹⁸ The OWI did ask advertisers to reduce their impact on the system by avoiding the mailing of calendars and catalogs in December. However, it framed this within the context of “everyone’s attention is so monopolized by Christmas activities that they pay little notice to circulars pertaining to other matters.”³⁹⁹ This was not a measure meant to reduce Christmas consumption, but rather advice on how not to get in the way of it.

The volume of mail increased exponentially over the course of the war with Secretary of War Henry Stimson reporting that the volume of Christmas mail for 1943 was three times greater than in 1942.⁴⁰⁰ This was reported immediately after the Christmas mailing window ended in mid-October, when approximately thirteen million boxes had arrived in New York for Army personnel. The infrastructure necessary to handle this was considerable, meaning both personnel and equipment had to be redistributed to manage the influx caused by the Christmas season.⁴⁰¹ In 1944 the volume of Christmas mail was predicted at 40 million packages, so the Army Postal Service prepared for this by building the New York processing center, the largest one-story post office in the nation, to handle the volume. In actuality 1944 saw a record 17,474,830 parcels arrive for the mid-October deadline at New York’s Port of Embarkation for delivery to soldiers overseas and the volume of cards sent exceeded 1943 as early as the 7th of December.⁴⁰² Final numbers of Christmas parcels in 1944, for Army and Navy personnel combined,

³⁹⁸ *Sands London*, Oct. 29, 1943, 1.

³⁹⁹ Bulletin from the Advertising Federation of America, “Mail Calendars and Catalogs Early,” no author, Nov. 20, 1942. Box 140, Entry 39, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁴⁰⁰ “A White Christmas,” *Sands London*, Oct. 18, 1943, 1.

⁴⁰¹ It was reported that Americans overseas received an average of one letter a day throughout the year. “Army Mail Chief Expects 40 Million Yule Packages,” *WP*, Jul 9, 1944, M4; 200 Army Vehicles to Relieve D.C. Yule Mail Rush, *WP*, Nov. 15, 1943, 7; “Mars Flying Boat Shatters Records,” *Sands Oran*, Dec. 20, 1943, 4.

⁴⁰² “Soldiers’ Yule Parcels Triple 1943 Total,” *WP*, Oct. 18, 1944, 2; “Yule Card Mailings Exceed 1943 Volume,” *BG*, Dec. 7, 1944, 12.

totaled 82 million and the postal service managed to distribute 97% of them on time, according to a press release from the OWI in 1945. While the sending of gifts serves many functions, including raising morale and reaffirming connections to home and community, it requires the drive to consume. Christmas consumption was ultimately supported and backed by the military, business, and government through the considerable resources they all devoted to this process.

Conclusion: Patriotism Promoted through Christmas Consumption

Government and business elites promoted the American values of capitalism and free enterprise through the management and support of Christmas consumption during the war. The volume of buying increased significantly and the government went to considerable lengths to control and encourage Christmas buying especially. War production increased purchasing power, which drove the volume of buying up and meant people would spend a larger portion of their disposable income on the holiday season. With so many separated by war, the volume of mail increased and the government had to respond with information campaigns on proper mailing procedures, encourage people to shop earlier, and advise what they should buy for the troops. On top of suggesting the purchase of war bonds the government, business community, and armed forces administration worked together to create a program to help servicemen buy for their loved ones at home.

American businesses were particularly primed to encourage consumerism, even during the war and especially at Christmas. Advertisements were used not only to sell government initiatives to the people but also to maintain brand loyalty and help people envision a post-war future where the consumer would be king. The value of consumption was made abundantly clear: not only could giving gifts for Christmas make you and your loved ones happy but it could also spread that joy overseas. Buying was part of the American identity and what you bought was constructed as a patriotic act. It is important to consider what particular values were being promoted within these calls for patriotism during the Christmas season, and what message was made prominent by this rhetoric and imagery.

With traditional home life upended by the war, American leaders sought to move the focus at Christmas off of the realities of the home and into the fantasy of the marketplace to solidify their vision of America's future. State and corporate actors attempted to foster the unity of the American people by using the holiday to articulate what citizens and servicemen ought to be fighting for – a strong nation backed by consumer culture and a liberal-capitalist economy. They did so by using advertisements and the media, the constructors of marketplace fantasy, to articulate what the public could and should do to be a patriotic member of society, and used the power of Christmas to strengthen their message. Examples include the buying of war bonds for gifts or highlighting items from companies that were supporting the war effort in some way. They emphasized that by shopping for and buying the perfect gifts, you could escape the wartime realities by imagining the possibilities of your and America's future.

Business leaders recognized early on that they could promote a particular kind of American patriotism, namely one centered on free enterprise as a basis for America's greatness due to its ability to protect this conception of democracy. According to Susan Strasser, "twentieth-century rhetoric has conflated democracy with an abundance of consumer goods."⁴⁰³ *Printers' Ink* featured numerous contributors speaking to this theme, including Paul Hoffman, president of the Studebaker Corporation, Raymond Moley, editor of *Newsweek*, and Chester M. Wright, representative of the American Federation of Labor.⁴⁰⁴ A moment of so-called "Star-Spangled Selling" was upon them due to a rising pride in the American spirit. This meant several things, notably new products or models with a particularly American character, the use of American colors or sentiments for sales appeal, and using advertising space to sell American ideals and institutions.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 289.

⁴⁰⁴ Paul Hoffman, "Businessman Looks Ahead: How to Save Democracy in U.S.," *PI*, July 5, 1940, 13-15; Chester M. Wright, "A Job to be Done! American Business Can Use Commerce to Preserve Freedom," *PI*, July 5, 1940, 22.

⁴⁰⁵ P.H. Erbes, Jr., "Star Spangled Selling," *PI*, Aug. 16, 1940, 15-17.

In 1943 Dr. Henry C. Link from The Psychological Corporation addressed the Association of National Advertisers on the topic of the ANA's third survey of Public Sentiment toward Wartime Advertising. He revealed that the research showed brands as having a major contribution to social progress and world harmony. He argued that:

More people elect Campbell Soup every month than electing the President every four years. People throughout the world have more faith in Coca-Cola than they do in the system of international law which is supposed to govern nations. According to Mr. Willkie, [Wendell Willkie, *One World*] it is one world because airplanes made it small. It is more likely to be one world because Coca-Cola has come to stand for something which all its inhabitants trust. That is why the German and the Jap propagandists hate it and call it a symbol of degenerate democracy. Coca-Cola is a typical product of the free enterprise system which makes democracy possible. Its use represents an act of faith in which all men. Regardless of nationality, are friends... At a time when the certainties of life are being attacked on all sides; when confusing propaganda and conflicting reports about the war effort are creating distrust... in the midst of all these uncertainties, the relative certainties of brands and their quality stand out like a good deed in a naughty world... Brands, according to our study, represent promises that men live by.⁴⁰⁶

He meant that manufacturers of the products and advertisers who created the brand had a critical role to protect and uphold the quality and image of the company outside of simply profit motives, because it stood for so much more. Brands could offer stability, safety, and ultimately security at a time when the world needed them most. By arguing brands have this much power it also solidified the brand manager – advertisers – as critical to constructing a successful post-war future.

The patriotism promoted through Christmas consumption was a particularly American brand. In looking at the messages presented to the people from business and government

⁴⁰⁶ Proceedings Wartime Conference of Members, Association of National Advertisers Survey of Public Sentiment, Highlights of Third ANA Survey of Public Sentiment Toward Wartime Advertising, "Brands, A Major Contribution to Social Progress and World Harmony," Henry C. Link, PhD (The Psychological Corporation), The Waldorf-Astoria, New York City, June 2, 3 and 4, 1943. Folder 3, Box 1, Series 1, Gordon E. Cole Advertising Collection, (ACNMAH 371). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

elites through advertising and information campaigns, we see that the war and Christmas were blended to create a quintessentially American Christmas that was at once patriotic and conformist, and valued democracy, free enterprise, freedom from want, and the freedom to buy. One journalist revealed just how central Christmas was to America's understanding of itself and the war. To the question of whether Christmas should be celebrated in wartime, the response was "The answer, we think, is yes – as never before. It is the symbol of what we are fighting for."⁴⁰⁷ For Americans, it was clear that gift-giving was fundamental to this exaltation of the holiday. By buying, citizens worked to protect democracy through the protection of access to consumer choice and abundance and Christmas was a perfect moment for them to do this.

The wartime shortages and consequent restrictions that occurred during wartime could have threatened this vision of consumer society if it was not for the reinforcement of these ideas throughout the war. The use of Christmas to uphold consumerism led to the production of mixed messages directed at the American people. There were so many competing influences as to how to navigate policy that it was not always clear what the best way to act was. For example, Americans who wanted to send Christmas parcels to interned German prisoners of war in America could only send new books purchased straight from the publisher, driving them to consume new items to fulfill their Christmas customs. However, this regulation directly conflicted with messages about paper shortages and the need to salvage and save paper products, like books. The American people who found themselves in this conundrum, usually those with German relatives, sent hundreds of letters to the government seeking advice on this and trying to understand how to navigate this predicament and be the best citizen they could be.⁴⁰⁸ They realized their behavior was politicized and needed to know how best to buy like a good citizen. While this would have affected only a small percentage of the population, people constantly felt themselves being pulled in multiple directions in terms of how to behave patriotically.

⁴⁰⁷ "Christmas 1942," *Charleston Daily Mail*, (Charleston, West Virginia), Dec. 25, 1942, 1.

⁴⁰⁸ Report, no author, undated. Box 1510, Entry 451, RG 389. NARA, College Park, MD.

A 1942 message from BVD Clothing Company is a clear example of the competing influences that could be contained all within the same ad. The ad called for readers to “be a sentimental Santa – on the practical side Buy Bonds First! This Christmas does call for sentiment... but you’ve got to be practical, too. You score on both counts when you give War Bonds and Stamps! Buy some for everybody on your list. Then, with the money you have left, you can add to your gift with practical Freedom Shirts or pajamas by BVD.”⁴⁰⁹

Buy war bonds, but also buy our product – be practical but also be sentimental.

Ultimately the message was to buy, and consumption was the way to navigate this confusing process, the American public just had to figure out the right way to buy first.

Magazines also functioned to provide an array of mixed messages to the American public about how they should be behaving in wartime and what behavior was considered most patriotic in American terms. *Ladies’ Home Journal’s* December 1943 edition featured numerous images of fantastic Christmas dinner spreads of the traditional American turkey dinner. However, prominent food editor for the magazine, Ann Batchelder, also noted that “orders from Headquarters, Washington DC. Suggested Christmas presents for Uncle Sam. Do without turkey, give the war worker’s family a chance and keep the black market down. Forget the equally rich Christmas pudding and pastries and serve a good bread pudding with lots of the plentiful jam and preserves on top.”⁴¹⁰ While the words proclaimed a sacrificial behavior as the best way to consume patriotically, the imagery gave a different picture. It showed there was value in upholding American traditions even in those turbulent times. *LIFE* instructed their readers on this point more explicitly, stating that “The real service we can render the boys is one for which they will always thank us. We can keep the meaning of Christmas alive in the simple traditions that they learned to love when they were kids. In those traditions we can keep the family strong and safe and warm. Until they come back.”⁴¹¹ Making sure the traditions of Christmas were upheld was portrayed as a patriotic act at a time when good American citizens were

⁴⁰⁹ BVD Clothing ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 7, 1942, 88.

⁴¹⁰ “Christmas Dinner,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 38.

⁴¹¹ “The Best Christmas Present You can Give the Boys is “Economy,”” *LIFE*, Dec 21, 1942, 32.

expected to want nothing more than to support the nation. Many of these traditions required consuming and ultimately acting in contradictory ways to the messages that were also being proclaimed – to conserve, salvage, and save. The American people, communities, organizational groups, and troops abroad were left to interpret these mixed messages themselves. The way they chose to handle wartime realities within the prescriptive traditions of Christmas reveal what Americans themselves considered to be patriotic. Consumerism at Christmas continued during World War II and had a significant impact on the culture of the times. As business and the government worked to encourage and direct consumption in particular ways, it revealed to the American people what the value of consumption was, or at least what the elites of the nation wanted it to be. They used the sentiments of Christmas to frame buying as a way to both define identity and the future, while also making yourself and others happy. The following chapters assess how much the American people-at-large internalized these ideas of a consumerist Christmas, and the extent to which Christmas functioned to maintain a sense of the American way of life in such turbulent times.

Chapter 3: Christmas at Home

Introduction

Who was that woman who used to say
 ‘Give me a giddy gift any day –
 Give me things that sparkle and shine
 With a uselessness almost divine;
 Give me things that I’d like to try
 But never, never would just go buy’?

Who was she? Well, I might remember
 But, Santa, this is a new December –
 The things I want are brand-new tires,
 And sun-porch screens made of copper wires;
 I could use rib roasts for the yawning roaster,
 And how I’d love a pop-up toaster,
 I’d almost settle (oh, change most utter)
 For some country eggs and a pound of butter!

- Santa Claus, Please Listen (1944)
 by Virginia Scott Miner⁴¹²

The war forced women both to feel and to act differently toward the celebration of Christmas. The home, the center of the family-centered domestic Christmas tradition, was not removed from the war effort. Everyday activities were mobilized and even before the war broke out America’s housewives were called to make contributions to national defense. *DEFENSE Bulletin* reported that in one week in July 1941, on average a third of a pound of aluminum per household had been sacrificed by housewives through collection of “pots and pans.”⁴¹³ The contributions made were personal ones, sacrificed from their domestic possessions. It was their job to not only donate their belongings to the cause but to also manage their purchases to protect the nation’s economy.

This chapter focuses on the home-front experience of Christmas through a focus on women and children. The war brought many changes to the lives of these two groups, and both believed they had important responsibilities to the nation in order to win the war.

⁴¹² Virginia Scott Miner, “Santa Claus Please Listen,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1944, 73.

⁴¹³ *DEFENSE Bulletin*, Sept.30, 1941, 22.

Women, culturally conceived as the managers of the holiday, and children, the supposed central celebrators of the holiday, both had to navigate their participation in the rituals of Christmas within their newfound wartime responsibilities. This chapter will first outline the idea of women's work and the power of tradition at Christmas. It will then demonstrate what women were expected to do by showing how the media constructed Christmas for women, including how to be the ideal cook, homemaker, hostess, and gift-giver. The ideal image of Christmas is followed by the personal reactions of women to these ideals. The way they adapted their celebration and worked throughout the holiday season, the items they bought and the messages they sent, the feelings they had and the personal relationships they managed, are presented as they relate to Christmas in wartime, before transitioning to the subject of children's wartime Christmas experiences. Childhood during the war was a unique experience, and the actions of children during the war were different from both earlier and later times. The war also changed their Christmas celebration, especially in terms of the activities and desires they had. Charitable work, as well as the toys they played with and their changing meaning, will be discussed in relation to wartime realities. Christmas helped to give meaning to their experiences of the war and how individuals navigated wartime Christmas gave them a way to reaffirm their idea of American values and shaped how people conceptualized the conflict on a more personal level.

Women in Wartime

The housewife is now a key figure. In this tightly woven pattern of war economy the housewife is a figure of growing importance. She'll be bringing more parcels home herself instead of having them delivered. She'll help keep down the cost of living not merely by careful buying but by checking the process of foods, newly bought under price control – poultry, mutton, butter, cheese, eggs, canned milk, onions, white potatoes, dry beans, cornmeal, fresh and canned citrus fruits and juices – all of which should not be priced above the levels charged between September 28 and October 2. She'll have to watch the quality and quantity as well as the prices of these items. And this winter and next spring she must expect to find at her market fewer cantaloupes, cucumbers, cauliflower, eggplant, watermelon, bleached celery, head lettuce, green peppers, asparagus, and artichokes. The Department of Agriculture has

urged reduced plantings of these foods to make room for more essential farm produce.⁴¹⁴

The outbreak of war brought to the home front, and women especially, an outpouring of new roles and responsibilities. William Chafe argued in 1972 that the war years caused a major shift in women's position in society, which "radically transformed the economic outlook of women" by changing notions of what women could do.⁴¹⁵ Historians of women in America have since challenged Chafe on the idea that the war was a watershed moment for women. Notably, Leila Rupp and Karen Anderson saw more continuity, arguing that the war did not actually bring about lasting change. Rupp noted that "the war transformed the image of the American woman" but that "beneath her begrimed exterior, she remained very much a traditional woman."⁴¹⁶ Anderson realized the immediate changes, but argued they were "a temporary retreat from prevailing notions of women's capabilities and proper roles."⁴¹⁷ Others like Susan Hartmann and Emily Yellin sought to avoid the debate of the war's long-term impact and sought to highlight instead the diverse opportunities and experiences that women had during the war years.⁴¹⁸ Most notably, in relation to this study, Melissa McEuen has argued that the U.S. government, along with the private sector, took considerable care to instruct women on how to behave in wartime and were incredibly concerned with how they responded. The most critical message was that all of these changes and opportunities were "for the duration" only and would cease once victory had been achieved. Regardless of this message and however temporary the experiences between 1941 and 1945 may have been, it "prevented them from stepping

⁴¹⁴ *VICTORY Bulletin*, Oct. 20, 1942, 3.

⁴¹⁵ William H. Chafe, *The American Woman; Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 135.

⁴¹⁶ Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 143 and 151.

⁴¹⁷ Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 4.

⁴¹⁸ Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982); Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front during World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

back into prewar social and economic structures... [and] laid solid foundations for the various civil rights movements that would sweep the United States.”⁴¹⁹

What all of these scholars reveal is that there was ultimately a great diversity in how the war affected women, and in some cases differed dramatically from what had come before and what would come after the war years. The predominant image of change has often been either the working woman, Rosie the Riveter, or the active duty woman, the WAAC or WAVE, but those who remained housewives and homemakers had a considerable degree of new responsibility brought into their lives also. As Mary Martha Thomas revealed in her study of Alabama women, “housework is essential to family life and the economy, but it has often been unnoticed, unrecorded, and unappreciated. The conditions of war made the usual tasks of homemaking – buying, cooking, nursing, consuming, washing, cleaning, and child-rearing – more difficult.”⁴²⁰ Even though they were not sacrificing their lives on the battlefield, women at home were called to make their own contributions to the national war effort by changing the way they managed their time, money, and purchases throughout the war. Furthermore, as Doris Weatherford demonstrated, volunteerism cost women time as well as money, especially regarding transport, childcare, paying dues, and donations.⁴²¹

Influential journalist Dorothy Thompson spoke directly to housewives in the December 1941 issue of *Ladies' Home Journal* to make them aware of the important role they had to play in fighting the war. She described them as “the only people who can save civilization,” clearly emphasizing their importance, as they “dispense the bulk of American income.”⁴²² She described their rising purchasing power stemming from the wartime growth happening in the economy. In this context, she explained how by not

⁴¹⁹ Melissa A. McEuen, “Women, Gender, and World War II,” in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, (June 2016) <http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-55>.

⁴²⁰ Mary Martha Thomas, *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie: Alabama Women and the Second World War* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 99.

⁴²¹ Weatherford, *American Women and World War II*, 236.

⁴²² Dorothy Thompson, “Women and Inflation,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1941, 6.

taking an active role in curbing inflation their actions could lead to the downfall of the nation, namely “national bankruptcy, social unrest and all the miseries and divisions that arise from social unrest.”⁴²³ Only they had the common sense and ability to prevent this from happening. While she was not wrong, the hyperbolic plea is a clear example of trying to transmit a sense of agency to a group that may have felt what they did in wartime was not as important as the actions of the military or government leaders.

Housewives were compelled by the government to pledge their efforts to the nation. The Office of War Information created a campaign to call on people to swear: “I pay no more than top legal prices. I accept no rationed goods without giving up ration stamps.”⁴²⁴ Given that women predominantly held both the ration books and pocketbooks, this pledge was for them. In a booklet to advocate for this campaign, the OWI sought to provoke fear and anger at those who failed to abide by this pledge. It referred to them as “one of the most dangerous forces our country has had to face in this war, or in any other war. The ranks of these forces include part-time Americans - those who put personal gain above personal patriotism.”⁴²⁵ Women were meant to put the nation first and follow these guidelines if they wanted their country to be victorious in the war.

Christmas for Women at War

All of this had a dramatic impact on the way women went about their everyday lives during World War II. To what extent were non-everyday activities, like those associated with Christmas, militarized as well? According to Caroline Sigler’s analysis of World War II-era films, the domesticating traditions of Christmas shown in these films functioned to provide “solutions” to the “unresolvable social contradictions between the accepted female identity defined by domestic ideology and the long-term consequences

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Community Service Members of War Price and Rationing Boards, “The Home Front Campaign Booklet,” undated. Box 3, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

of American women's wartime experiences."⁴²⁶ Women's lives and traditional roles were upended by the war, even if only temporarily. They were breadwinners, heads of household, and perceived to be the emotional care-takers and self-sacrificers of the family. While these films provided solutions to unresolvable problems, in actuality, Christmas traditions celebrated within the paradoxes of war functioned to provide a space for women on the home front to define their own identity and understanding of their roles within the domestic sphere and for the nation-at-large.

Women were called to sacrifice in a multitude of ways that sublimated their personal choice to that of the nation. Even though Christmas got special treatment from government campaigns, there were times when it fell to housewives to manage the restrictions on Christmas. There were overarching rules out of their control, like areas of heavy defense industry being called to eliminate Christmas tree lighting for security and electricity reasons by the War Production Board in 1942.⁴²⁷ However, there were also more individual initiatives, like the War Production Board asking housewives to "save the grease from Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years' Turkey, geese, ducks, and chickens" and contribute it to fat salvage drives.⁴²⁸ The requests added up and in many ways contributed to Christmas during the war becoming a different experience on the personal level than it was before or after.

A woman's role as protector and upholder of family values and traditions in America had been cemented during the nineteenth century through the rhetoric of True Womanhood. According to Barbara Welter, this was the idea that women's magazines and religious literature presented as the core of a woman's virtue: her ability to uphold religious tenets and piety. This role also worked to confine women to the domestic sphere as it was deemed to be her responsibility to instill in her children these same values. Furthermore, "home was supposed to be a cheerful place, so that brothers, husbands and sons would

⁴²⁶ Caroline Sigler, "I'll be Home for Christmas: Misrule and the Paradox of Gender in World War II-Era Films," *The Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 28, No. 4, (Dec. 2005), 345-6.

⁴²⁷ *SandS London*, May 8, 1942, 2.

⁴²⁸ *SandS Oran*, Dec. 1, 1943, 1.

not go elsewhere in search of a good time. Woman was [sic] expected to dispense comfort and cheer.”⁴²⁹ According to historian Meghan Winchell, “if a hostess made a servicemen happy, then she had done her job, and this, not meeting her own interests, theoretically provided her with satisfaction.”⁴³⁰ Similarly, Melissa McEuen argued that women were not supposed to entertain individual needs, but instead join the war for more noble reasons, like patriotism. She did discuss that while this may have been the aim of OWI propaganda, years later women admitted many of them had joined up for independence or adventure.⁴³¹ However, holidays, especially those with religious undertones, could be an important aid in controlling the rhetoric associated with women’s newfound roles and responsibilities, especially in regards to volunteerism and charitable activities.

At the turn of the twentieth century, women were still largely expected to fulfil their duties to their home and family, as opposed to operating in the public sphere. However the cult of True Womanhood began to give rise to the New Woman. These were women who had been educated at colleges and universities, yet by graduation found themselves having to confront the domestic expectations thrust upon them by society.⁴³² Some became active in social reform as a way to bridge this gap, like Jane Addams in the early 1900s.⁴³³ While in the following decades women’s rights in society would grow to include the vote and protective labor laws, the image of women as upholder and protectors of the family and its values remained. When unemployment reached all-time heights in the Depression, few were advocating for women to expand their careers. In a

⁴²⁹ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” in *Locating America Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, edited by Lucy Maddox (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), quote from 55, also 43-45.

⁴³⁰ Meghan K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses during World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 89.

⁴³¹ Melissa McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Feminism on Duty and the American Home Front, 1941-1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 190-191.

⁴³² Rosalind Rosenberg, *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Eric Foner, 1st ed., (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 25–27.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

Gallup Poll conducted in 1936, 82% of people said that wives should not work if their husbands were employed (75% of women in that poll agreed).⁴³⁴ While World War II brought women into the workforce in record numbers, it was constructed as a temporary measure that was meant to ensure women would return to their homes and families once their duty was done. As Rosalind Rosenberg argued, “the war did not dramatically change women’s lives... [it] made traditional family life, with all of its demands on women, seem more desirable than ever before.”⁴³⁵ The war merely amplified the sense of urgency and necessity to uphold tradition while simultaneously increasing the expectations society put on women more generally.

Leslie Bella’s *The Christmas Imperative: Leisure, Family, and Women’s Work* argues that society has tasked women with the emotional well-being of their families, and rituals and traditions are one way in which female care is expressed.⁴³⁶ They are the caretakers of the traditions who do the necessary activities required for them to be carried out. The labor of women produces the leisure activities of families and as such, it is up to them to ensure an enjoyable celebration of Christmas. The celebration of Christmas is the carrying out of a set of accepted rituals that follow a familiar script to “celebrate and affirm all that is positive about our family and the relationships between family members.” But if they fail they can also “confirm that our family is divided... and [then] Christmas becomes a crisis rather than a celebration.”⁴³⁷ Christmas for many women involves significant work as deep-rooted anxieties to live up to the idealized image of the holiday both in terms of consumption and family-togetherness encourage them to try and achieve the perfect Christmas.⁴³⁸ Given the amount of strain possible in relatively good times, it is especially important to investigate the additional pressure women put on themselves, and that was put on them by society to uphold tradition in the context of war.

⁴³⁴ Ibid, 103.

⁴³⁵ Ibid, 137.

⁴³⁶ Leslie Bella, *The Christmas Imperative: Leisure, Family, and Women’s Work* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1992), 13.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, 15.

⁴³⁸ Ibid, generally.

Many family members were unable to be together, and wartime shortages prevented women from acquiring the ‘right’ gifts and decorations. The media and advertising still propagated the idea that Christmas mattered and thus women still felt the continued pressure of finding and buying all the things they needed to have a perfect holiday. As Winston Churchill, speaking to Americans from the White House on Christmas Eve in 1941, stated: “Let the children have their night of fun and laughter, let the gifts of Father Christmas delight in their play.”⁴³⁹ The media made it very clear it was the woman’s role to shop for Christmas. The *Boston Globe* printed an article from “A. Verage Husband” who stated that “my wife knows me and realizes that I am not to be trusted” regarding holiday gift buying.⁴⁴⁰ The article even offered suggestions to its male readership as to how to get out of buying things and what to do if you forgot to buy something for your wife. *The Journal of Home Economics* agreed that women were the predominant shoppers, noting that in the case of food they made 50% of the purchases, with men only making 10%. Children, under 15, made even more than men with 11%, and the 15-18 age range almost tripled the rate of men, at 27%.⁴⁴¹ Men did not make purchases as much as women and even when men did buy they were not expected to follow the same rules. An article published in England described an American “three-star general” doing the grocery shopping in Washington, noting “so far they do not appear to merit full marks for discrimination in their purchases, and they are less apt than their wives to understand the intricacies of the ration point system.”⁴⁴² Men were not expected to put the same effort as women into winning the war when it came to the home front.

Furthermore, women were expected to deal with the hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping in a pleasant manner. One writer for *Christian Science Monitor* noted that he had found his way into “a crowd of women shoppers,” which for a man alone was

⁴³⁹ Winston Churchill quoted in Lisa L Ossian, *Forgotten Generation: American Children and World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 21.

⁴⁴⁰ A. Verage Husband, “Why Friend’s Wife Does Most of the Family’s Christmas Shopping,” *BG*, Nov. 26, 1939, B47.

⁴⁴¹ American Home Economics Association, Consumer Education Service Pamphlet, January 1941. File 1, Box 1, Entry 51, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁴⁴² *Daily Herald* (London, England), Dec. 22, 1944, 2.

“pathetic,” and the women regarded him no “sex courtesy” and merely went about their purchases without acknowledging him.⁴⁴³ Not only were women expected to do this work but they were expected to act in a particular way throughout the process. Antoinette Donnelly wrote in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* that “Shopping Manners are a test of charm for every women” and that “Christmas [should] be utilized as the study period” for how to act, as well as how not to act because of just how busy and stressful it could get.⁴⁴⁴ The paper gave examples of people who dawdled or did not know what they wanted. Little sympathy was given for the fact that society expected women to select Christmas gifts that would be well received and were also meaningful, and that these selections were even more important given the state of the world around them, yet more difficult because of wartime restrictions. Even when women were performing their Christmas roles appropriately, which required considerable effort, they were expected to make it easier for a man. The reality of the increased difficulty of these tasks was not compensated for and yet the war made women and the tasks assigned to them all the more vital to maintaining and upholding relationships.

Christmas was a time when women felt particularly compelled to ensure that others were happy. It was also a time when individuals placed much significance on the way things looked because of the sentiment it could evoke. Therefore, people’s emotional reactions to Christmas decorations were particularly heightened in wartime. The *New York Times* reported in 1944 that “Christmas window displays are drawing fan-mail for the first time this season.”⁴⁴⁵ The newspaper reported that Franklin Simon & Co.’s display of model life-sized children of all races under a decorated Christmas tree was drawing particular attention, both because of the message of a peaceful future for the different nations of the world and because the models had been made of paper shavings, scraps, and other odds and ends. Gimbel’s and Macy’s were also reporting appreciative letters and repeat

⁴⁴³ *CSM*, Dec. 18, 1944, 1.

⁴⁴⁴ Antoinette Donnelly, “Shopping Manners are a Test of Charm for Every Woman,” *CDT*, Nov. 1, 1939, 22.

⁴⁴⁵ “Store Windows Reflecting Yule Spirit Draw Many Letters of Appreciation,” *NYT*, Dec. 14, 1944, 26.

visitors to their windows. Another extremely popular display was at McCreery's store which displayed scenes of old-fashioned New York Christmases.⁴⁴⁶ Department stores put considerable effort into upholding their Christmas display traditions, and the response from the public indicates that this held considerable meaning for people – enough that they would come again and again or write letters to express their gratitude.

Holiday merchandising displays had been popular long before the war. One critical element to their development was the manufacturing of plate glass in America, which began in 1868 and was used extensively after the 1880s.⁴⁴⁷ According to William Leach, the modern display style can be traced back to the influences of *The Dry Goods Economist*, an economic trade journal that shifted its focus to retail and in 1889 urged its readers to “show your goods.”⁴⁴⁸ Glass also worked to separate the affluent shoppers who could enter the store and make purchases and those who were left on the outside to look only, while simultaneously heightening the desire for the products that, for some, were just out of reach.⁴⁴⁹ In the first few decades of the 1900s stores shifted from simply displaying their goods to an associational style of merchandising. Similar to the way in which advertisements worked to create a belief that purchasing certain goods could have particular effects on the buyer, displays sought to create the sense that their goods were associated with particularly desirable qualities. In this context Christmas window displays emerged, to convince potential Christmas shoppers that the products being highlighted were the most desirable through their connection to the symbols and images of the holiday.

During World War II, people were urged to reduce travel and material use, and when parades and other large communal celebrations were cancelled or considerably changed, these window displays took on a larger role in terms of the visual spectacle of Christmas

⁴⁴⁶ “War Brings Old Customs New Meaning,” *WP*, Dec. 24, 1944, B6; “Store Windows Reflecting Yule Spirit Draw Many Letters of Appreciation,” *NYT*, Dec. 14, 1944, 26.

⁴⁴⁷ Hendrickson, *The Grand Emporiums*, 31.

⁴⁴⁸ Quoted in Leach, *Land of Desire*, 55–56.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 62–63

in the public sphere. Perhaps, because of this, people were more receptive and responsive to the displays and commented about them more frequently.⁴⁵⁰ Above and beyond the patriotic sentiment that was used to encourage conservation throughout the rest of the year the way things looked at Christmas held significant value to individuals during the war because they were used as ersatz symbols of the larger celebrations that people remembered and missed.

On top of all the additional work that war brought into women's lives, they also felt it was their personal responsibility to maintain traditions. To continue the rituals of Christmas they often had to make adaptations because of shortages and wartime material restrictions. As discussed in Chapter One, the government put in place numerous controls that affected the celebration of Christmas, yet all the while, as Chapter Two demonstrated, a message of consumption continued to be promoted to the American people. Ultimately people still had to buy things throughout the war and to do so they had to navigate the array of regulations the government agencies put into place. Imposing ceiling prices for scarce items was one way the government worked to prevent inflation. According to an OPA internal memo, 80% of U.S. housewives had a fairly accurate knowledge of what ceiling prices were. It was following the regulations, however, that required motivation as "87% said 'It's too much to bother,' or 'I don't have enough time,' or 'I trust the stores where I trade,' etc. Furthermore, 34% said they would pay a few cents more than the ceiling price if they could get a scarce item by doing so."⁴⁵¹ While the government was telling women they had a duty to perform on the home front, many found it difficult to do so.

Ads tried to encourage compliance by painting in a negative light the woman who skirted the rules. A Jell-O ad from 1944 stated, "There's one in every neighborhood" and showed several depictions of a woman skirting the rules, for example, saying she had pneumonia

⁴⁵⁰ "Store Windows Reflecting Yule Spirit Draw Many Letters of Appreciation," *NYT*, Dec. 14, 1944, 26.

⁴⁵¹ Memo from Clyde Hart to Tom Donnelly, Undated. Box 2, Entry 2, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

to get extra coal, continuing with holiday travel plans, and shopping on the black market. It told the readers “you’ve met her – the woman who isn’t willing to ‘share and play square’ like other folks!” and that “square shooters only take their fair share.”⁴⁵² The ad was trying to highlight what was considered unfair behavior in wartime and encourage people to play by the rules. What it also reveals is that this behavior was common enough to be featured in a national ad campaign. Even though women knew what the government expected of them, as a group they were not perfect in following the rules.⁴⁵³

Societal expectations and their own desires caught women between the urge to uphold holiday traditions in the face of uncertain times and an abundance of regulations that made their lives even more challenging. Trying to adapt to wartime shortages yet maintain a ‘Christmassy’ look was a common theme of women’s reactions to wartime Christmas. Fashioning decorations from materials on hand was one way to navigate this conundrum. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that Mrs. J. Wilson McAllister, vice-president of the Garden Club of Illinois, put on a demonstration of how to make holiday ornaments from scrap material, for example, “tin can tops, cut into strips with can openers and twisted into snowflake shapes.”⁴⁵⁴ While this show of ingenuity was inspiring to those who attended, it also represented another choice women faced: to donate their tin to scrap metal drives or use them in their aims of making the holiday season just a little bit brighter. It seems that regarding Christmas, a little deviation from the rules was not necessarily an action to be frowned upon, but could be held up as an example of resourcefulness given the important role the holiday played for uplifting morale.

Depictions of the Ideal

It is impossible to study the personal experiences of Christmas for all of American society. Christmas is many things, both individual and collective. *LIFE* magazine

⁴⁵² Jell-O ad, *LHJ*, Nov. 1944, 64.

⁴⁵³ For a discussion of this in the Canadian context see Jeff Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers Canada’s Second World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

⁴⁵⁴ “Today With Women,” *CDT*, Dec. 12, 1944, 15.

recognized this when it wrote in December 1942, “It celebrates the Christian spirit... the story of the Nativity, the carols and hymns... And besides these great common traditions there are others, just as important, which each family builds up for itself – mince pie, a fire on the hearth, mistletoe hanging from the ceiling.”⁴⁵⁵ Individuals are compelled to follow tradition based on a sense of their memories of the past. Historian John Gillis draws on the work of anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff who established that rituals carry with them messages of order and continuity with the past. Using this understanding, Gillis argued that family rituals, like those of Christmas, concentrate attention so that “family present [is able] to connect with family past.”⁴⁵⁶ In this sense, celebrating traditions together breaks down the generational divides to create a coherent family identity. The ability of traditions to collapse the differences between people also contributes to a notion of a national family as “peoples divided by race, age, and gender could imagine themselves as having a common national identity” by participating in similar traditions.⁴⁵⁷ Jennifer Mason and Stewart Muir had a less rosy picture of Christmas traditions noting that while imagining family practices as traditions could create “a vivid and potent sense of generational eras, atmospheres and family styles,” it could also be “negative, difficult, fraught, painful, exclusionary and oppressive.”⁴⁵⁸ Traditions are not always positive, but they do have significant power over people’s emotions and experiences.

Every family would have had distinct variations on the way it chose to celebrate the holiday; yet, there are some constant features of Christmas in America, a common script that was embraced by the majority. As Penne Restad argued in *Christmas in America: A History*, following the Civil War “Christmas acquired a more unified set of rituals, symbols, and meanings, a pattern for a nationally celebrated holiday.”⁴⁵⁹ Central to this

⁴⁵⁵ “The Best Christmas Present Ever,” *LIFE*, Dec. 21, 1942, 32.

⁴⁵⁶ Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making*, 93.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 94.

⁴⁵⁸ Jennifer Mason and Stewart Muir, “Conjuring Up Traditions: Atmospheres, Eras and Family Christmases,” *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 61, (2013), 607–62, 617 and 625.

⁴⁵⁹ Restad, *Christmas in America*, 91.

script is the popularity of the myth of Santa Claus and the gift-giving associated with him. The Santa myth gives rise to other important symbols of the holiday like the tree, the stocking, and the fireplace on Christmas Eve. Family gatherings are also a key part of the traditional celebration, often centering on a meal eaten together, with considerable care taken to acquire the ‘right’ foods. Other activities like caroling or church attendance may or may not be a part of these get-togethers. For those that cannot come together physically, Christmas is often a time to reaffirm the relationship, either through sending a card or some other form of communication. As Theodore Caplow demonstrated in his study of Middletown, people follow these “unwritten and largely unrecognized” customs that regulate the holiday season without any clear method of enforcement.⁴⁶⁰ Furthermore, most of these activities were under women’s responsibility to carry out. Christmas is a deeply ingrained part of the American culture and individuals generally abide by the rules for following the script of Christmas without them actively being enforced. While each family will have its own rituals and traditions, they often fit into this shared framework.

Popular conceptions and descriptions of Christmas can be used to get a sense of what the general features of an American Christmas were supposed to be. The image of Christmas presented in media and advertising was distinctly Protestant, white, and middle-class, and represented the dominant majority of the population or what was idealized by the majority of the American public.⁴⁶¹ As Lynn Freeman and Susan Bell established, women’s magazines serve as powerful facilitators of Christmas rituals. They argued that women had the responsibility of upholding the “magic” of Christmas, and yet “magazines’ text convey a contradictory message by offering readers budget and timesaving tips, while their visuals imply that such ‘shortcuts’ stand in the way of the

⁴⁶⁰ Caplow, “Rule Enforcement without Visible Means,” 1306.

⁴⁶¹ According to Gallup poll records, in 1948 approximately 69% of Americans were Protestant, followed by 22% Catholic, 4% Jewish, 3% undesignated, and 2% who listed no religion. Gallup, “Religion,” *Gallup News* <http://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx> Similarly, in the 1940 census 89.8% of the American population was listed as white and the remainder, 9.8%, was listed as Black or African American. CSPAN, “A Look at the 1940 Census,” *United States Census Bureau* https://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/1940census/CSPAN_1940slides.pdf

sought-after magical Christmas, [so] the rituals must be followed in full.”⁴⁶² The contradictions in the messages presented to women were even more evident in World War II, when the desire to uphold traditions to maintain a sense of normalcy contrasted with the media’s urging to salvage and scrimp at every turn in the name of national sacrifice. Jennifer Scanlon’s *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* investigated advertisements within the magazine and argued that the notion of consumer choice was illusory. The desire to buy brought about by these ads functioned as a distraction from women working toward actual change in society as they portrayed consumption as the solver of all problems.⁴⁶³ In displaying a range of possible options for consumers, advertisements obscured the decision to consume or not in the readers’ minds.

During the war, *LIFE* magazine staffer Dorothy Dannenberg surveyed her office to get a sense of the varieties of family Christmas traditions. Most predominantly fit within the general script with slight variation in the way they were carried out. She noted in an internal memo that welcoming Santa Claus was a common custom, but many families had variations ranging from a glass of water to an elaborate cot awaiting the visitor. One family even left a Coca-Cola for Santa, indicating the degree consumer culture had penetrated the familial celebration. There was also a wide range of how children would inform Santa of their desires. Some wrote letters, others called into hand-made horns, and one family burned lists in the fireplace in a magical sacrifice. Common Christmas Eve activities included reading “The Night before Christmas” or the biblical Christmas story. There was limited variety in the hanging of stockings: most did so and if they had a fireplace, it was the spot; otherwise they used bedposts or door knobs. Christmas trees were also a staple in most households although there was a variety of traditions for decorating them; one family saved a branch from the previous year’s tree and tied it to the new tree each year. The memo also detailed the continuation of European traditions in

⁴⁶² Lynne Freeman and Susan Bell, “Women’s Magazines as Facilitators of Christmas Rituals,” *Qualitative Market Research Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (2013), 336-354.

⁴⁶³ Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4, 10, and 331.

America, such as coins in wooden shoes for the Dutch, as well as the religious observances that were common for some denominations, like a Christmas Eve candlelight service. Whole communities had their own unique traditions too. For example, in the South many towns would light firecrackers on Christmas Eve, and in Boston the residents of Beacon Hill would display religious artwork in their windows, lit by candlelight for passersby to admire.⁴⁶⁴ The range of traditions was as numerous as there were American families but some common themes of home and hearth, trees and gifts, and ritual storytelling and singing, were seen to some degree in most families across the nation. Furthermore, consumption played a central role in many of these rituals. In many cases, it was up to women to maintain those traditions to retain the deeper meaning of the holiday season as it was these traditions that made Christmas a special time of year for the family and according to societal norms they were the care-takers of the family. While there were slight variations in the way they were carried out, many of the overarching scripts of appropriate holiday behavior continued into the war. The drive to carry on these rituals indicates the degree to which they were entrenched within the minds of individuals as they strove to continue them, despite the difficulty of doing so.

The elements of Christmas that women would confront in the media would often center on holiday foods, homemaking, hosting, and gift-giving and managing their purchases. These messages from advertising, business, and the government shaped the way individuals on the home front experienced Christmas during World War II. How women and children navigated the diverse range of messages directed at them reveals what Christmas meant to individuals. Consequently, because society had come to see the holiday as tied to American national identity, it also provided a way for individuals to understand their sacrifice to war effort overall.

⁴⁶⁴ Memo from Dorothy Dannenberg to Russel Davenport, *LIFE* Office NYC, Dec. 9, 1942. Box 47, Russell Wheeler Davenport Papers, Manuscript Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

Food

Food played a pivotal role on the home front during World War II. Campaigns for rationing, conserving, and salvage were largely directed at American women in hopes of gaining their support in following the government's food consumption policies. Food is not just about ingesting nutrients. Amy Bentley demonstrated in *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* that in World War II America food was “highly symbolic” and “aid[ed] in developing and maintaining cultural identities.”⁴⁶⁵ Even while Rosie the Riveter was calling American women out of their homes and into the workshops of the nation, popular media still placed women firmly in the kitchen. As Sherrie Inness noted in *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture*, cooking literature “promoted the idea that during the war women should be *both* housewives and workers in war-related industries across the United States.”⁴⁶⁶ The messages that surrounded Christmas foods and eating, in particular, have a heightened sentimentality in this regard. There was a clear connection between eating at Christmas and cultural identity. Society told women it was up to them to maintain these connections. Furthermore, the war heightened the links between the personal and the national and the common behavior, both individual and collective, of Christmas eating rituals strengthened these ties.

As Chapter One noted, Christmas dinner had been used in America's Reconstruction period to bring the nation together via a shared experience after the divisiveness that was the Civil War. In the context of World War II, the Christmas dinner both shaped how women perceived their role as a homemaker on the home front and presented women's ability to uphold tradition as a vital skill within the larger national war effort. What were some of the traditions surrounding Christmas foods that women would work to uphold in the war years?

⁴⁶⁵ Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 1.

⁴⁶⁶ Emphasis in original, Sherrie A Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 125.

In 1939, the *Ladies' Home Journal* stated “Turkey never seems to go out of fashion as the traditional choice,” though it was careful to point out that “carving is a man’s show. Your job is to have the carving knife sharp, the turkey roasted to just the right degree of doneness, with plenty of room at the table to work.”⁴⁶⁷ The same issue also noted that “Things to eat, such as cake and plum pudding and candy and cookies, make pretty lovely presents as well as being a ‘must’ in your own kitchen and pantry” and “For such a pudding is as important a part of the holiday dinner as the lights that shine on the tree when the presents are opened.”⁴⁶⁸ The power of food to shape the experiences of the holiday season was made clear to readers. There was very little flexibility according to the magazine as to what women should have prepared for Christmas foods, and the media told women that their ability to achieve this held significant weight for the celebration of Christmas overall.

The *Ladies' Home Journal* was very aware of the fact that when it printed something, especially in the case of food, its readers were apt to follow their instruction. A call to advertisers to put their advertisements in the *Journal* noted that one Christmas supper for their four million readers equated to “8,000,000 cans tomato juice, 4,000,000 packages crackers, 4,000,000 jars mayonnaise, 16,000,000 lbs Chicken, 6,000,000 lbs cranberries, 4,000,00 packages unflavoured gelatin, 8,000,000 lbs ham, 5,000,000 dozens of oysters, 8,000,000 cans creamed corn, 4,000,000 cans crushed pineapple, 1,306,096 lbs coffee,” if all their readers followed their cooking section suggestions.⁴⁶⁹ These food totals were just for one meal on one day. The purchasing power of its readership was clear. Getting a product suggested, especially for Christmas, would be exceptionally powerful because of *Ladies' Home Journal's* circulation and abiding readership. In January of 1940, the magazine reaffirmed the importance of food during the holidays, highlighting particular foods that are “homey” and important “for memory and a sweet nostalgia” for each

⁴⁶⁷ Louella G. Shouer, “Talking Turkey,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1939, 39.

⁴⁶⁸ “Holiday Doings,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1939, 47-48.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ladies' Home Journal* advertising plan, undated. Box 313, Series 3, NW Ayer Collection (ACNMAH 59). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

region, including New England, the West, the South, and Texas.⁴⁷⁰ The most important thing to note here is not the foods themselves but the meaning they held for people according to the magazine. Consequently, this would have put pressure on women to achieve these tastes of home, especially at Christmas, when the desire for a feeling of home was particularly strong.

The amount of planning and effort was recognized, yet there was little said in women's magazines to genuinely reduce the work of women at Christmas. *Women's Home Companion* noted that "Christmas can be Christmas whether you have much or little money, lots of leisure or none, a family or just a group of good friends" and provided three plans on how to make the Christmas dinner.⁴⁷¹ While the magazine mentioned the possibility of a lack of time or money, the plans provided different options only in terms of the demographics of possible guests. A "grown-up family," the magazine claimed, would expect a traditional dinner but perhaps a stuffed bird could be substituted with a goose instead of the usual turkey. If there were going to be "many guests," the magazine's plan called for the host to use baked ham, as it did not need to be stuffed or basted. The final option was a Christmas dinner "with the children," which proposed for the host to work some kind of fun or surprise into the meal.⁴⁷² None of these options cut down on time or effort to prepare even though the article opened with that thought. Consequently, women, regardless of their situation, would have felt compelled to cook the perfect Christmas meal. The only accommodations the magazine suggested were regional specialties and managing the number and kind of guests in attendance.

If anything, once the war broke out the expectations of women for Christmas meals was even higher. An ad for Swan's Down cake flour stated "It wouldn't be Christmas without cake... especially now, when every bit of extra cheer means so much."⁴⁷³ In light of sugar shortages, it provided a recipe that reduced the amount needed, but the ad pressed

⁴⁷⁰ Ann Batchelder, "Home for the Holidays," *LHJ*, Jan. 1940, 30-31.

⁴⁷¹ Dorothy Kirk, "More Christmas Recipes," *WHC*, Dec. 1941, 64-65.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*

⁴⁷³ Swan's Down Cake Ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1942, 40. *WHC*, Dec. 1942, 58.

the continued importance of making traditional Christmas foods onto their customers. Crisco shortening made the stakes even higher with its Christmas ad, noting “With wartime shortages, you can’t take chances with your Holiday baking,” which was meant to encourage buyers to purchase their product as the safest choice.⁴⁷⁴ Ultimately it also increased the pressure on women to ensure that everything at Christmas turned out just right and reminded them war made it more difficult to ‘fix’ their mistakes. Campbell’s Soup advertisements were a little more conscientious of how the war was making women busier, especially at Christmas, even if they still spoke to her in her role as family chef. A 1943 ad in *Ladies’ Home Journal* read “Three holiday hits to lighten mother’s Christmas season: Round out holiday meals with these good, nourishing soups. Now – with life a whirl of holiday shopping and all the work that goes into a wartime Christmas- you’ll find these good soups more of a help than ever. Quick and easy to serve, they’re made with all the fussy care you would give them in your own kitchen.”⁴⁷⁵ It was important for the company to ensure the message was clear that serving these soups was in addition to traditional holiday meals and that women would be the one to serve it, regardless of how quick and easy the soups were. Campbell’s could make a woman’s task easier, but it could not eliminate the expectation for her to do it entirely.

Fictional stories could also serve to instruct women on their roles and responsibilities at Christmas. One of these from *Redbook* magazine told of a group of women hosting a Christmas bazaar at a church for charity. In the context of organizing the event the narrator, speaking with two other women about whether or not they should have the annual event, stated “We never ought to have it...” Her thoughts were narrated to the reader on why she felt this way, namely: “She did not think December was a proper time of year for any self-respecting woman to leave her kitchen, except to go to bed.”⁴⁷⁶ One of the other women noted that the war provided a good excuse to get out of hosting the event and the third woman replied: “Even in wartime, seems to me everybody needs a

⁴⁷⁴ Crisco Ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1944, 4.

⁴⁷⁵ Campbell’s Soup Ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 13, 1943, 41.

⁴⁷⁶ Gladys Hasty Carroll, “Christmas,” *RB*, Jan. 1943, 12.

change of air once in a while.”⁴⁷⁷ While this may seem inconsequential, the story intended to make it clear to women that not only was their place firmly in the kitchen, especially at Christmas, but also that they should continue to put on the events they had before, even if now they found themselves with less time and additional responsibilities because of the war. They were the caretakers of the season, and despite how busy they may have been they had a responsibility to carry on in the kitchen and the community to uphold the celebration of Christmas throughout the war.

Homemaking

Women were not just in charge of Christmas foods, but the overall holiday experience in the home. *Women’s Home Companion* offered, in December 1941, plans to organize the entire week before Christmas, including making menus, checking linens and dishes, laundry, and calling relatives, on top of food purchasing and prepping. The only mention of the rest of the household was in the plan of Christmas Day when the author indicated they could be tasked with helping with the breakfast dishes that morning.⁴⁷⁸ For Christmas 1942, the magazine offered similar advice on getting “a running start for the holidays.”⁴⁷⁹ Aside from a point about war bonds being the most patriotic gift that year, little else was different, and the bulk of Christmas labor was placed on the woman’s shoulders to ensure “a happy ending to a lovely day.”⁴⁸⁰ The burden that women felt to ensure the home was made up in proper Christmas fashion was so heavy that ads and articles even made a point of discussing it. Frigidaire noted that its refrigerators would allow for preparing in advance so “No need to spend your holiday in the kitchen, while everyone else is having fun!”⁴⁸¹ *Women’s Home Companion’s* week-long Christmas plan for December 1944 stated “you are likely to greet the Noel with that sigh of so many harassed mothers,” so “some of the meals have been designed to be served on trays or in

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ “How to Make Light Work of Christmas,” *WHC*, Dec. 1941, 56-57.

⁴⁷⁹ “A Running Start for the Holidays,” *WHC*, Dec. 1942, 82.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Frigidaire ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 117.

the kitchen itself – to save linen, silver and table setting.”⁴⁸² All aspects of planning Christmas and ensuring it went smoothly fell upon a woman’s ability to manage her tasks. This was regardless of other responsibilities and even when it was clear women were overburdened by these tasks, especially considering their additional wartime responsibilities.

Given that many decorations were in short supply due to the rationing and shortages outlined in Chapter One, making the home look ‘Christmassy’ was even more difficult. Women’s magazines detailed how to make décor instead of purchasing it and tried to present it as more fun and easier than ever before. *Ladies’ Home Journal’s* Ann Batchelder tried to paint it as women’s choice themselves. She said that they “may not want to spend so much this year on brittle things like decorations and tinsel and all that flitter that goes on the tree” and suggested that even though there might be leftovers from previous years the war provided a perfect opportunity to make their own.⁴⁸³ Batchelder presented this process in a carefree nostalgic way, and there was no concern for where to get the materials to undertake such activities or the added time and effort that making them by hand would require. *Women’s Home Companion* also had a similar message for its readers, noting “decorations are a war casualty. But you can easily make some enchanting ones of your own with crepe paper, lace doilies, cardboard and a few accessories.”⁴⁸⁴ Again, an added task, but the process and the outcome were described as easy, fun-filled, and notably the woman’s job to organize and carry out. The magazine advocated that the house be properly decorated for the holiday season regardless of wartime material shortages. The idealized image of homemade Christmas décor was presented to women as their duty, regardless of the fact that homemade items still required women to make purchases and often required significantly more labor on their part. That aspect was consistently overlooked.

⁴⁸² Dorothy Kirk, “Christmas Planning Made Easy,” *WHC*, Dec. 1944, 82-83.

⁴⁸³ Ann Batchelder, “For Christmas,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1942, 32. “Little Things to Make for Christmas,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1942, 130.

⁴⁸⁴ “For that Festive Feeling,” *WHC*, Dec. 1943, 104.

Hosting

The house was not to be all decked up for no particular reason, as women were encouraged to host parties for Christmas both before and throughout the war. The *Ladies' Home Journal* even gave strategies for how to increase the size of them noting, "Playing hostess is as much a part of the glamour of the holidays as a wreath in the window. A dinner party puts a limit on the number of guests, but you may invite as many to tea or a buffet supper as you have plates and cups."⁴⁸⁵ While *Women's Home Companion* told its readers how to host "wartime style" Christmas parties, the advice differed little from what they had advised before the war. According to them, the "hostess plans the menu and furnishes the main dish in generous quantity."⁴⁸⁶ It appears that the magazine was not concerned with calls to conserve if you were the hostess of a holiday party. It was important also not to let the war dampen the spirit of the season. Ann Batchelder, told *Journal* readers to "never let that vacant chair spoil the Christmas for those who gather round to fill the happy hours" and to instead ensure for those who were present a "tree and trimmings and music and fun? Food and drink and maybe memories? I guess so. I guess candles aren't out of style and trees are still growing and are still green, and there's music in the air."⁴⁸⁷ She wanted readers to continue the joyous holiday parties of the years before the war to try and make happy memories for all to remember even in those less-cheerful times. In this sense, hosting Christmas parties were presented to women as having an important part to play in upholding the morale of the nation. This was something which would have only increased women's desire to try and live up to the idealized images presented to them in magazines, ideals that had been made more difficult by the complicated realities of wartime.

Christmas parties for morale-boosting purposes were not for just family members alone. Women were encouraged to open their homes and share their parties with members of the armed forces and war workers who stationed near them too. The *Washington Post's*

⁴⁸⁵ Louella G. Shower, "Recipes for the Holidays," *LHJ*, Jan. 1940, 53.

⁴⁸⁶ "Parties in Wartime," *WHC*, Nov. 1942, 76.

⁴⁸⁷ Ann Batchelder, "There'll Always be a Christmas," *LHJ*, Dec. 1944, 37.

Church editor, Robert Tate Allen, reminded readers of how lonely their first Christmas away from home was and how war-workers would also suffer a lonely Christmas this year because of travel restrictions. It was difficult or impossible for them to return to their own homes and he suggested that “unless you offer them in [a spirit of] warm hospitality – which is the essence of Christmas – they will have a miserable holiday. And that sort of a ‘nobody cares’ attitude is not good for war morale.”⁴⁸⁸ This share-your-home program was in its early stages and Allen believed that it was vital to the war effort. Therefore he called for women to step up and host Christmas parties for the stranded workers of the nation. *Ladies’ Home Journal* and *Women’s Home Companion* both encouraged women to take on this responsibility.⁴⁸⁹ The magazines included suggestions for group entertainment and plays suitable for these kinds of events. *Ladies’ Home Journal* even had mail-order booklets about different holiday party ideas that readers could request. Its style section in 1944 featured a “Home for Christmas” spread where the magazine displayed fashions meant specifically for the season via pictures of women and servicemen at festive holiday occasions.⁴⁹⁰ This imagery reinforced the idea and ultimately demonstrated that it was perfectly acceptable and even encouraged to host Christmas parties for the good of the nation and that women should look good while doing so, thereby encouraging consumption over thrift.⁴⁹¹

Buying

Gifts, both the giving and receiving of them, were central parts of the American woman’s Christmas experience during World War II. Society and the media had constructed perceptions of what gifts were appropriate for women, and the way women should make, shop for, and choose particular gifts. What we buy and what we own are incredibly

⁴⁸⁸ Robert Tate Allen, “War Workers’ Yule Outlook Dim as Share-Home Drive Lags,” *WP*, Dec. 18, 1942, B1.

⁴⁸⁹ “Christmas Plays and Parties,” *WHC*, Nov. 1944, 56. “Journal Reference Library – Holiday Parties,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 84.

⁴⁹⁰ “Style – Home for Christmas,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1944, 34-36.

⁴⁹¹ This program eventually became quite popular and had a powerful impact on creating a wartime sense of community, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

important to individuals' sense of self. According to Russell Belk, "gift-giving is more self-gratifying to the extent that the recipient is part of the giver's extended self."⁴⁹²

Daniel Miller has argued that gift-giving, especially through "incorporating them into the sociality of the home," transforms the materialistic process of consumption.⁴⁹³ His point is particularly important for understanding the role that Christmas gifts play in defining women's identities. This is shaped by how the media presented the gifts that women should have wanted for themselves, as well as what they should have wanted to give to others. Giving gifts was an extension of one's own emotions and beliefs about one's self and the state of the bond between them; it was not an empty practice of consumerism but rather a form of identity formation and relationship-building.

Not surprisingly many gifts directed at women were for the home. Ads encouraged wives to hint to their husbands about these kinds of gifts; for example, a Vacuum ad from just before the war stated "she knew a gentle hint just before Christmas would make life so much easier! When Premier Partners move in, dirt moves out in a hurry! Half-clean homes become a thing of the past."⁴⁹⁴ While many of the home appliances that women were told to desire were unavailable, difficult to attain, or of lesser quality because of the war, there was very little reduction in their advertising presence. As discussed in Chapter Two, the idea of dreaming for the perfect gift to be had in the post-war period was a common theme, and often this perfect gift was a toaster, refrigerator, range, or entire kitchen. With the unavailability of gifts that represented domestic bliss, other items had to fill the void. Take for example an ad for LANE Cedar Hope Chests for Christmas 1943, which proclaimed its product as "the love gift that says: darling you are mine forever. This Christmas give her the 'gift that starts the home!' and showed men on the battlefield while a woman sat next to her hope chest serenely contemplating their future, noting "her every thought a prayer for you and a happy future together. If she could only

⁴⁹² Russell W. Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research* Vol. 15, No. 2 (1988), 158.

⁴⁹³ Daniel Miller, "A Theory of Christmas," *Unwrapping Christmas*, 20.

⁴⁹⁴ Vacuum Ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1940, 88.

start now the peaceful home you both have always yearned for.”⁴⁹⁵ There is no question here regarding the meaning that the gift was supposed to hold both from the receiver and to the giver. More importantly, it intended to place a woman firmly in the home or at least preparing for that home with this product. It aimed to construct what her deepest desires should have been and in that regard served a particular relationship- and identity-building function.

Even though women may have been moving out of the home into non-traditional roles because of the war, ads worked to reaffirm traditional gender roles and used Christmas gifts as a powerful vehicle to do so. An Avon ad for 1943 in *Women's Home Companion* started out “To the Heroines of America,” but was careful to end with “To feminine virtues so typically and traditionally American... to a loveliness which is so inspiring to see... Avon respectfully dedicates its new Christmas gift suggestions for 1943. Exquisite cosmetics to delight every feminine heart on your Christmas list.”⁴⁹⁶ Women also had to maintain their appearance and femininity, regardless of new roles they may have taken on. Pacquin’s hand cream ad spelled this out more clearly, noting “war worker or worker in her own home, every girl and woman wants soft, smooth hands.”⁴⁹⁷ The ideal of keeping up appearances, both personally and domestically, was consistently pressed upon women throughout the years of the war and Christmas gifts designed for them offered a particular vision and vehicle to do so.

Magazines and advertisements also instructed women in what items made good gifts to give to others. Making their own gifts was a common suggestion. Sometimes this was to save money: “Fifth Avenue fashions, made for a few dollars;” or because of wartime realities: “shops will not have for sale those gay toys which sprung from the better side of German ingenuity. There will be far fewer cheap little gifts marked ‘Made in Japan.’ English plum puddings, French perfumes, Dutch cheeses, Norwegian skis, Italian leather goods, Swedish glass, Swiss watches, Belgian dolls - such things from friends or foes the

⁴⁹⁵ Lane Cedar Chest ad, *LIFE*, Nov. 27, 1944. 32-33.

⁴⁹⁶ Avon ad, *WHC*, Nov. 1943, 47.

⁴⁹⁷ Pacquin’s ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 14, 1942, 101.

harsh hand of war has reduced or cut off.”⁴⁹⁸ Once men were at war, the government, the military, and the business community worked together to instruct women as to what would make their men most happy. These suggestions included things like homemade Christmas treats, which would have taken considerably more effort to make and properly pack to ensure that they would make it to their destinations in an edible state.⁴⁹⁹ *Ladies’ Home Journal* noted in 1942 for readers to “Let’s have a homemade Christmas” and that “This is the Christmas of full hearts – and of little gifts that come from the heart. Some of you will make them, with a wish in every stitch. Others of you, too busy in war jobs for even a single stitch, will buy them.”⁵⁰⁰ Homemade was described as the more meaningful option. The media did not mention how making these gifts still required women to go out and buy supplies and then also take time out of their increasingly busy lives to make them. Their effort was often masked as a requirement of the ideal Christmas and presented to women as something they should want to do if their heart was really in it. *Women’s Home Companion* told its readers “Christmas is what you make it... get started right now.”⁵⁰¹ It was up to women to ensure Christmas turned out just right and a lot of that had to do with ensuring they made or bought the right gifts.

While advertisers worked to help sell wartime conformity to government initiatives, like encouraging buying war bonds, they also realized how good the war was for selling other products. Christmas became caught in the rise of this patriotic and militaristic fervor. Many companies took advantage of the war to make their wares appear more appealing as Christmas gifts through militaristic imagery and messages. People seemed to buy into this technique as patriotic and militaristic merchandise became quite popular throughout the war.

⁴⁹⁸ “Make it Yourself with Love for Christmas,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1940, 24-25. “Noel, Noel, Noel,” *WHC*, Dec. 1941, 2. “Christmas Gifts in the Making,” *LHJ*, Nov. 1943, 38-39.

⁴⁹⁹ “Fighters Like Homemade Yule Candy,” *LAT*, Oct. 15, 1943, A7. Wilhela Cushman, “Gifts to Make for Children,” *LHJ*, Nov. 1944, 37.

⁵⁰⁰ Wilhela Cushman, “Let’s Have a Homemade Christmas,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1942, 22-23 and 26.

⁵⁰¹ Florence R. Casey, “Santa Claus is Coming,” *WHC*, Nov. 1945, 25.

The rise of militaristic imagery and themes had lasting effects on Americans' understanding of their country, as Michael S. Sherry demonstrated in his work *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s*. World War II changed the nation as the "politics and economics of wartime mobilization strengthened the forces of militarization... taught Americans to associate defense spending with prosperity... taught them to regard their industrial and technological muscle as the key to prosperity at home and power abroad."⁵⁰² Christmas played a powerful role in this process of an increased appreciation of militarism. The media often portrayed the holiday of peace and goodwill as participating in the conflict itself, outside of the goods this association was being used to promote. Not only did this normalize the conflict but it also helped to obscure the actual consequences of war and make militarism more acceptable in everyday life.

Militarized advertisements could take many forms. There were products that in light of the conflict instantly became more useful, and advertisers highlighted them in this manner. Other corporations found a way to make their products inseparable from the war itself. However, in many cases, ads just ended up promoting militarism itself along with the products they hoped to sell. Ultimately, advertisers proved that almost anything could become war-themed. With so many points of battle emerging and Americans flung all over the earth, one gift that instantly became more useful to own was a globe or an atlas. Rand McNally and Company, which made globes and atlases, realized that this was a perfect opportunity to promote its product. It was practical, according to a Christmas 1942 ad, because "This is a global war. You need a globe as well as an atlas to understand the daily happenings all around the world," and furthermore, "Of all the years in his life, now is the time when he really needs that globe and atlas he's always wanted."⁵⁰³ However practical it may have been, Rand McNally also wanted to give the impression that its product was something people always wanted yet perhaps never quite found the moment to buy. In doing so, it would serve both a practical role, important in the context of war, but also bring joy, another important purpose of Christmas giving in

⁵⁰² Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, 79.

⁵⁰³ *TIME*, Dec. 7, 1942, 79.

wartime. Taylor Instruments also saw the war as an opportunity for its products to make it under the Christmas tree. Its 1941 Christmas ad made a connection between Christmas and nationalism explicit, stating “Santa Claus Looks like Uncle Sam this year” and “national preparedness depends on healthy Americans.”⁵⁰⁴ It advocated thermometers for their health-monitoring properties, “stormoguides” to help forecast bad weather, and meat thermometers to ensure properly cooked food – all, which would “help this country stay strong... so ask Mr. S. Claus to tote someone a Taylor gift from you this Christmas.”⁵⁰⁵ The national emergency provided a particular moment that would transform the products from the sensible to the sensibly desired and given with sentimental thought; perfect for a Christmas gift rather than something to buy at any time of the year.

Larger companies with deep advertising pockets and friends in high places could find a way to make their products particularly relevant, even if they were not doing essential war work. The Coca-Cola Company was able to send its products overseas to refresh troops while reminding them of home, and because of this its ads carried particular poignancy and were able to evoke emotions about the product’s ability to bridge the gap between the home front and the war front. Considering the deep longing felt for togetherness and to be home for Christmas, this gave Coca-Cola a leg up during the holiday season especially. It advertised having a “Coke” as a way to welcome your son home for a Christmas furlough, and that “the spirit of goodwill [that] rules the Christmas season” is the “atmosphere where Coca-Cola belongs.”⁵⁰⁶ The charitable spirit of Santa Claus was something the company also tried to associate itself with, with ads showing the generous American soldier abroad dressing up as Santa for local children, while also drinking a Coke.⁵⁰⁷ Showing the soldier engaged in normal holiday behavior, especially as the charitable and generous Santa Claus, despite the wartime context, and consuming the same beverage that he would have had if he were home helped to make the war front seem less foreign and sell more Cokes in the process. These ads portrayed Coca-Cola and

⁵⁰⁴ Taylor Instruments Ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 8, 1941, 6.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ Coca-Cola ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 73. Coca-Cola ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 18, 1943, 12.

⁵⁰⁷ *AG*, Dec. 1943, 29.

the war through the lens of Christmas' values – not just those of goodwill, but American consumer culture too.

While this established a relationship between consumption and war, ads that promoted militarism did this more directly. Products were sold based on the company's devotion to the war or just in honor of the war itself. Armor and Company, a canned meat manufacturer, boasted how important its products were to the troops, at Christmas and throughout the year, as “only the trimmings makes the Christmas Dinner show here different from everyday meals. Nine out of ten men in uniform are getting better balanced, more nourishing meals... Because Armor and Company and the other packers have such great facilities.”⁵⁰⁸ The company asked civilians to consider this when planning their Christmas meals for themselves, noting their available products but also the government's ‘share-the-meat’ initiative. All of this was meant to make products more enticing through the shared connection with troops abroad as well as the company's patriotic efforts generally.

Even traditionally feminine products could be given a particularly militaristic spin for Christmas. Cannon Towels noted that “All men like big, sturdy, thirst towels that do a he-man's job of drying. Even soldiers and sailors want them this Christmas.”⁵⁰⁹ The ad featured two men in uniform along with a domesticated wife or mother figure. All were presented as happy as Cannon was represented to be a gift that would make anyone pleased to give or receive, military men included. At least Pacquin's hand cream ad spoke of its more traditional recipient, just within the wartime context. Creators of the ad presented it like an advice column, meant to help people choose an appropriate Christmas gift for their friends and loved ones. Pacquin's hand cream was a “Quick cure for one Christmas shopping headache,” especially for someone like “Polly [who] works on plane parts, her hands are stained with grime so she needs a jar of Pacquin's – swell tip for Christmas time! ... and Florie – Florie's getting ready to meet her soldier beau. With

⁵⁰⁸ Armor and Company ad, *LHJ*, Dec. 1942, 2.

⁵⁰⁹ Cannon Towels ad, *LHJ* Dec. 1942, 1.

hands made Pacquin-lovely for ‘neath the mistletoe.’”⁵¹⁰ Again we see the practicality of the gift superimposed onto a wartime context, but not removed entirely from the important sentiments of the season that were necessary to convey the product as appropriate to give as a Christmas present.

Personal Reactions to Wartime Realities

It would be impossible to assess how every woman in America internalized these messages or to what degree she acted upon them. In moving from what society expected of women to what women actually did, it is important to get a sense of how personal reactions and wartime realities interacted within this ideal Christmas framework. If this were an analysis of British women, it would be possible to dive deeply into the social research of Mass Observation which collected data on British citizens from 1937 to the early 1950s. It has diaries of ordinary citizens, responses to a wide range of questions, and surveys from Mass Observation’s observers. These recordings and reports of everyday life in Britain, unfortunately, do not exist for the American public during the years of the war.⁵¹¹ To some degree, it is possible to get a sense of reactions to various wartime measures through the use of Gallup poll records. On the whole, however, little was asked about how the American public felt at the time regarding Christmas specifically. Some things can be inferred from more general questions: who predominantly did the household shopping (74% of women reported they did in January 1943) or if the family had purchased war bonds (88% said yes in November 1943) and why they had purchased them (patriotic reasons and bond drive were the highest at 18% and 16%, respectively). Clearly, women did take on the prescribed role of family shopper and did accept the wartime call to buy war bonds. The only mention of Christmas in the American context for the entire 1951 publication of *Public Opinion, 1935-1946*, edited by Hadley Cantril, was in response to the question “Will you tell me what you think is the reason for the cigarette shortage?” in November 1944; 1% of those asked said “Christmas

⁵¹⁰ Pacquin’s ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 20, 1943, 8.

⁵¹¹ *Mass Observation Online*, Adam Matthew, SAGE, <https://www.amdigital.co.uk/primary-sources/mass-observation-online>

presents to armed forces.”⁵¹² This question obviously reveals very little about personal reactions to wartime effects on Christmas. More generally, the Association of National Advertisers conducted a study in November 1943 on the public sentiment toward wartime advertising. Some of the key conclusions were that “people heartily approve of advertising which supplies information on topics such as War Bonds, food shortages, rationing and nutrition and many other civilian activities so necessary to the winning of the war” and that “people believe in the superiority of advertised over non-advertised products.”⁵¹³ From this, we might not know what people thought about specific ads, but we can conclude that in general the American public approved of and appreciated wartime advertising.

So, to understand how people reacted, both in terms of action and emotion, a more creative approach has been undertaken. Editorials and opinion pieces are a useful source as they provide a more personal style of writing compared to advertisements and more widely directed magazine articles which seek to create an ideal. Letters and diaries of contemporaries are also useful for looking into the more individual accounts of people’s lives that perhaps might not have found their way into the pages of mass media. Additionally, newspaper reports of what people were actually doing or wanted to do at Christmas, rather than the fanciful descriptions in magazines, can give a sense of both the community’s (and the people that made up those communities) responses to the realities that war brought into their lives.⁵¹⁴

Celebrating

Elite members of society would be the most likely to have their behavior reported by the media, and their behavior would have influenced others to some degree. According to

⁵¹² Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 799.

⁵¹³ American National Advertisers psychological corporation, Public Sentiment toward Wartime Advertising study, Nov. 1943. Box 1, Series 1, Gordon E. Cole Advertising Collection (ACNMAH 371). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

⁵¹⁴ The broader communal aspects of Christmas including parades, lighting displays, and other large-scale organized Christmas projects are discussed in more detail in Chapter Four, along with reactions from the Church and Charitable organizations.

Allen Winkler, “Roosevelt fully understood the importance of his role” and was well aware the American people were watching him.⁵¹⁵ The press was keen to note how President Roosevelt and his family were celebrating the season. Pearl Harbor occurred less than three weeks before Christmas, and so it was over the holiday that the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill joined the President in Washington to discuss their plans for war.⁵¹⁶ The President and the Prime Minister addressed the nation on Christmas Eve at the traditional tree-lighting ceremony held on the White House lawn.⁵¹⁷ The following year the Roosevelt family was scattered, and the national tree remained unlit.⁵¹⁸ In 1943, the family returned to its home in Hyde Park, which they had not done since FDR had taken office. Being together, aside from two sons on active duty, was the priority for the occasion and newspapers reported that “a few old friends and neighbors were in and out during the day, but for the most part Christmas at the Roosevelts was a family affair.”⁵¹⁹ Reports also detailed the family’s traditional Christmas dinner menu of turkey, dressing and plum pudding, carved by none other than the President himself. In 1944 the Roosevelts returned to the White House and continued the usual tradition of a Christmas Eve dinner following the President’s broadcast. Days earlier a party for White House and Executive Office staff, including members of their families, had been thrown – complete with a tree, presents, and candy for the children.⁵²⁰ If the President’s family could continue to host Christmas parties in wartime, perhaps ordinary people felt they could as well.

Many Christmas parties in 1941 followed the model set by the President as he was someone most Americans looked to as an example of how to act. A Chicago newspaper reported that “traditional yule parties” were to be held on Christmas Day and profiled the Boals family which always entertained on Christmas Day and had every intention of

⁵¹⁵ Winkler, *Home Front U.S.A.*, 4.

⁵¹⁶ For a more detailed coverage of this subject, see Weintraub, *Pearl Harbor Christmas*.

⁵¹⁷ *NYT*, Dec. 25, 1941, 13.

⁵¹⁸ *WP*, Dec. 13, 1942, 1.

⁵¹⁹ *WP*, Dec. 26, 1943, M1.

⁵²⁰ *NYT*, Dec. 22, 1944, 30.

inviting all the neighbors over for a “bit of holiday cheer in the late afternoon” that year as well.⁵²¹ The *Los Angeles Times* reported that societies and individuals there were also planning to continue their events with the traditional spirit of the holiday season. One notice for a party, held by Roland and Lucille Nicole, did announce that their event had been “knocked out by the blackout” but they were quick to state this was “merely a postponement and not a cancellation.”⁵²² People were going to uphold Christmas celebrations and continue with plans that they had made before Pearl Harbor.

As the war became more entrenched in people’s lives over the course of 1942, it brought with it more changes to the way people celebrated Christmas. For lucky families where a furlough allowed servicemen to return home, Christmas was a time to celebrate indeed. For others, the responses were mixed with some “try[ing] to have as nearly normal Christmas as possible” because, as Mrs. Ben Neely of College Park, Atlanta, stated, “I think the boys would want to think of their homes as being as nearly in keeping with the season as possible... and be thankful for the privilege of being together.”⁵²³ Upholding traditions was most definitely a theme of 1942, turning inward towards the home and family and appreciating those who were able to be present and keeping in one’s mind’s eye those who could not.

In many ways 1943 and 1944 looked similar to 1942. The *Los Angeles Times* stated “It may not be the same Christmas as in peacetime, but there is a lot of old-fashioned holiday spirit just the same. Open houses, cocktail parties, at homes and luncheons dot the calendar.”⁵²⁴ The restrictions of war did have some consequences. For example, as Alice Gardiner wrote to her husband Ben, “we made stuffing for the goose (couldn’t get a turkey)” but that “even with rationing we managed quite a feast.”⁵²⁵ Some families had to move their holiday celebrations to accommodate husbands, brothers, or fathers who were

⁵²¹ Judith Cass, “Traditional Yule Parties Set for Christmas Day,” *CDT*, Dec. 17, 1941, 27.

⁵²² Christy Fox, “Christmas Party Bids Flow into Mailboxes,” *LAT*, Dec. 15, 1941, A1.

⁵²³ “Atlantans Dream of a Quiet Christmas,” *AC*, Dec. 6, 1942, 4D.

⁵²⁴ “Yule Calls Old-Time Gatherings,” *LAT*, Dec. 22, 1943, A5.

⁵²⁵ Letter from Alice Gardner to Ben Gardner, Dec. 27, 1943. Box 1, Series 2, Benjamin Gardiner Papers (ALBA 1). TAM, New York City, NY.

there just before or just after the actual week of Christmas because of military regulations.⁵²⁶ The share-your-home program was flourishing, and Robert Tate Allen reported that “Washingtonians are going out on their own initiative to invite fellow workers and strangers and others into their homes for Christmas Day hospitality.”⁵²⁷ He told of how the Secretary of the Community War Fund had invited a private in a specialized training unit at nearby Randolph-Macon College to her home for Christmas dinner. It seems many people accepted the message from the media that if they could host someone for Christmas, they should.

Charity

The combination of the Christmas spirit of giving and the war call for sacrifice created a particularly heightened moment for women to participate in charity. Women packed gifts for servicemen, hosted parties for them, and invited them into their homes.⁵²⁸ Bess Wilson wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* that “it may be patriotism – it may be just the universal maternal instinct that makes every woman see in every soldier her own son or brother, and determine that his holiday shall not be utterly lonely just because he has to be away from home serving his country.”⁵²⁹ While there is no question that not all women had a universal maternal instinct, or that the women who did participate were doing it for this reason, by printing and highlighting these ideas mainstream media sought to uphold traditional gender norms in a time where the war and the greater opportunities for women could threaten to undermine them. At Fort Sheridan, women were responsible for “Christmas trees, wreaths, and holiday plants placed in the chapels, library, service club, cafeteria, the recruit reception center, the WAACs recreation room, and the hospital wards,” as well as the packing and distribution of gift kits, and the organizing and hosting

⁵²⁶ “Homecomings Bringing Early Yule for Many,” *CDT*, Dec. 11, 1943, 15.

⁵²⁷ “Share-Home-For-Yule Idea Gains Impetus,” *WP*, Dec. 17, 1943, B13.

⁵²⁸ “Pulse of the Public,” *AC*, Oct. 11, 1941, 7. “Be a Goodfellow and Help a Needy Family,” *CD*, Dec. 27, 1941, 8. “Negros Pledge to support ‘Share at Home,’” *WP*, Dec. 16, 1942, 8. “Women’s Activities,” *LAT*, Dec. 19, 1943, D7.

⁵²⁹ “Urgent Call Issued for Army Yule Gifts,” *LAT*, Dec. 16, 1941, A8.

of holiday parties for the men.⁵³⁰ All of the women of the Fort Sheridan Volunteers had families of their own, yet they put considerable effort into ensuring the servicemen in the area would be well taken care of, especially at Christmas. For many people, this was to help with the fact that their families were unable to be home for Christmas. As one woman from Chicago remarked, they enjoyed talking to “some one like dad.”⁵³¹ For those who were planning on being with their own families, there was a sense they had to make sure they had contributed their fair share. Mrs. Frank Hixon, who in 1944 was going to be away, made a point of “devot[ing] many days of wrapping gifts” in preparation for her not being able to help out on the big day.⁵³² The holiday season brought the desire both to do good for others and to be around family; charitable work directed at improving servicemen’s Christmas did just that. For others, it added an additional requirement to the list of what a good woman does during the holiday season.

Another form of charitable behavior that women were inclined to do because of the war was to salvage waste material for the war effort. Knowing that people would undoubtedly use paper in their everyday lives and that during the holiday season this use would increase from compelling Christmas behaviors like wrapping gifts and sending cards despite issues with paper supply, the government launched several campaigns to save waste paper. Paper was critical for the packing and shipping of defense materials. The actual work of collecting the paper fell to housewives, as well as small businesses: to save the waste paper and either sell it to waste dealers or give it to charitable organizations like the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the Salvation Army, or Parent-Teacher Associations that were enlisted to help the cause.⁵³³ The American Women’s Voluntary Service started a waste paper drive in December 1944 with the slogan, “Send your Christmas present to Hitler and Hirohito by saving all waste paper.” The salvage chairman of the organization, Mrs. Copeland stated, “General Eisenhower is pleading for more and more ammunition. Industry will manufacture it, but we must help provide the

⁵³⁰ “Women in War Work,” *CDT*, Dec. 21, 1942, 18.

⁵³¹ “Many Women to Spend Yule Serving Yanks,” *CDT*, Dec. 20, 1944, 19.

⁵³² “Many Women to Spend Yule Serving Yanks,” *CDT*, Dec. 20, 1944, 19.

⁵³³ “Campaign Launched to Save Waste Paper,” *DEFENSE Bulletin*, Sept. 9, 1941, 2.

paper to protect and ship it.”⁵³⁴ It was clear that serious need for paper was not lost on Americans yet the Christmas behaviors remained unquestioned; instead, they were merely co-opted into the aid of the war without fundamentally altering them. Furthermore, women felt the urge to aid in these efforts, and it added a considerable degree of work and responsibility to their lives.

Working

As was discussed at the start of this chapter, women were working more, involved with more charity, and required to give considerably more attention to their purchases because of rationing and shortages. In terms of work, the Christmas season itself increased the need for female labor. With so much of the usual surplus labor force finding work in defense industries, department stores turned to women to fill the roles. By 1943 the War Manpower Commission had labeled Santa Claus as “non-essential” for the draft, meaning those who listed their employment as Santa impersonators could be drafted for military service. Department stores were having extreme difficulty hiring individuals to play the role. In New York City, Saks Fifth Avenue began hiring women as substitute Santas because of the shortage of available men.⁵³⁵ The *Atlanta Constitution* told its readers: “the perfume ‘girl’ a married woman of 50 whom the employment manager is glad to get back though she hasn’t worked for the store since 1930” would be one of the many people unexpectedly filling the needs of department stores.⁵³⁶ As munitions production expanded, housewives, as well as high school and college students, were required to help meet the holiday buying rush that occurred throughout the years of the war. All of this took time away from women’s responsibilities to do their own Christmas labor. A newsletter for Macy’s shop girls recognized this and tried to give advice. It stated “we help all the others attend shopping chores... but all the while, in the back of our minds, we frantically wonder what gifts we can find” and offered shopping tips and suggestions

⁵³⁴ “New Paper Drive Today,” *NYT*, Dec. 11, 1944, 25.

⁵³⁵ “Stores in Chicago Pray That Santa Sends ‘Em a Santa,” *Sands London*, Dec. 7, 1943, 1.

⁵³⁶ “Defense Cuts Yule Help Supply,” *AC*, Nov. 12, 1941, 11.

for them.⁵³⁷ The store was aware that even though these women were working, they were still concerned about their more traditional responsibilities. Women's work multiplied rather than changed in terms of Christmas labor. While the amount of work associated with Christmas might not have changed during the war, the war did make significant changes to the celebration of Christmas in other ways.

Communicating

One of the biggest shifts in how the holiday looked and felt was the militaristic theme that came to be associated with the holiday, as discussed earlier, and it seems that the American people generally accepted this militarized Christmas. Throughout the war, there was an increase in the design and purchase of Christmas cards depicting militaristic scenes and Santa participating in many of them. Unlike ads, people put more active thought into the meaning of cards when choosing them. They could have rejected these themes if they did not like them as pre-war card designs and stock were often still available or being produced. So, if people bought these wartime cards, and there is evidence they did, then they likely were not offended by similar imagery turning up in the advertisements on the pages of the magazines they read and probably accepted and internalized the messages being presented to them.

In the first year of the European conflict, the *Washington Post* reported that peace was the theme of new cards that year for Christmas, with "many cards stressing the deeper religious significance of the Christmastide as a symbol of 'Peace on Earth.'"⁵³⁸ There were also new colors, textures, and atmospheric effects sought to evoke a more modern attitude, while also "hark[ening] back to the days of 'things as they were' with designs of Victorian reminiscence."⁵³⁹ The imagery of peace and better days of old contributed to

⁵³⁷ R.H. Macy & Co., *Sparks Magazine*, edited by Ruth Moore (New York), inside cover, Dec. 1942. Box 6, William L. Bird Holidays on Display Collection (ACNMAH 1288). SNMAH, Washington DC.

⁵³⁸ "Christmas isn't in the Cards," *WP*, Dec. 10, 1939, AM4.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

attitudes of the time, and these new production themes reflected societal acceptance of them given their reported popularity.

By the Christmas season of 1942, it was clear that the war had seeped into the Christmas cards of the nation. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that “instead of angels there are planes; instead of the traditional sentiment will be found a pungent threat about what the enemy may look for during the new year; or there may appear homemade verse on food problems and their effect on life.”⁵⁴⁰ Cards were used to make a statement that people, regardless of hardship, were in support of this war through messages like “... in spite of these lacks, there is joy in the air – For they’ve not rationed Christmas; so do have your share.”⁵⁴¹ As America became engaged in the conflict people sought to make light of the realities they faced in wartime rather than express patriotic fervor alone. Christmas that year would not be perfect, but they were coping and using these kinds of techniques to deal with the emotions associated with the difficulties that a wartime Christmas brought.

Cards also made light of wartime realities. For example, one message read “Merry Christmas to an alert air warden! With a gas mask on your shoulder, a knapsack on your back, and an iron hat and whistle, you're set to attack - you're well-equipped for anything that comes along your way, but hope you get what you deserve - an all-clear Christmas Day.”⁵⁴² This card was geared to a specific role but glossed over the horrors of war and instead painted a portrait of the importance of readiness in surviving any attack. There were cards made specifically for different services, ranks, support roles, and locations; there was no limit to how connected the war and Christmas could be on a card, but they did not highlight the realities of violence associated with these roles. There were cards depicting Santa Claus riding a tank, driving a jeep, flying a plane, visiting Army barracks or jungles or deserts, working with military equipment, wearing military attire, and

⁵⁴⁰ “War Takes Tinsel Tone From Christmas Cards,” *LAT*, Dec. 25, 1942, A6.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴² Patriotic and Military Themed Cards, undated. Box 15, World War II Christmas Card Collection. NYHS, New York City, NY.

carrying military weapons.⁵⁴³ They sought to convey that Christmas could find its way into any location, like “on the rolling tanks - Above a bomber's noise - It's Christmas all around the globe for these are Yankee Boys,” regardless of the war and because of the power of the American Christmas celebration.⁵⁴⁴ Companies worked quickly to accommodate these desires as there were suddenly so many possible products that they could produce outside of the traditional brother, son, father, or husband message. There was also a rapidly growing public demand for specialized cards to send to the boys in the service, as well as friends and family who were forced apart by the war. Their simplicity and unrealistic portrayals of war may have also worked to make those on the home front feel more secure about their loved one's uncertain future.

Cartoon images emerged as a more prominent feature of Christmas cards during the war than either before or after. Caricatures could represent a desire to remove the feelings that sending a card implies from the reality of the context in which it was being created and sent.⁵⁴⁵ According to columnist Genevieve Reynolds, some of the modernistic art that had been popular earlier, as well as ‘cute’ cards, were on the decline that year and an American patriotic motif was on the rise. She noted American scenes like the Golden Gate Bridge and Santa Claus or Uncle Sam were being featured together more often.⁵⁴⁶ Few things are further apart than the traditional Christmas spirit and war, but this connection became particularly powerful during World War II. The war separated loved ones, which stimulated an increase in the volume of Christmas cards and likely enhanced their meaning and this connection.

With paper shortages, there were those who counselled against sending Christmas cards altogether. Others spoke out in favor of keeping the practice despite calls for

⁵⁴³ Letter from Annette Keilhain at Norcross Publishing and Advertising to the Smithsonian Librarian, Feb. 18, 1942. Box 6, Series 1, Sarah Tolman Greeting Card Collection (ACNMAH 579). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

⁵⁴⁴ Patriotic and Military Themed Cards, undated. Box 15, World War II Christmas Card Collection. NYHS, New York City, NY.

⁵⁴⁵ György Buday, *The History of the Christmas Card* (London: Rockcliff, 1954), 189-90.

⁵⁴⁶ Genevieve Reynolds, “Patriotism is Emphasized in Yule Cards,” *WP*, Dec. 23, 1940, 13.

conservation. In a letter to the editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal* Mrs. R. E. Bula argued that "Christmastime is the only time I hear from some of my friends and relatives. It seems to me that this year, more than ever before, we should all send Christmas greetings. Our husbands, sons, and sweethearts who are thousands of miles away from home like to know that someone is thinking of them at Christmas time. Your greeting may change a sad lonely heart into a happy, thankful one on Christmas Day."⁵⁴⁷ Others presented conflicting advice, such as Edgar Dewitt Jones's insistence that Christmas letters were far more meaningful than Christmas cards. He noted that "there are those persons one knows or knows about who have no expectation of receiving a single letter at Christmastide... To such persons a Christmas gift letter would come as a joyous and complete surprise and accomplish a world of good."⁵⁴⁸ According to Dorothy Dix, author of a women's advice column, it was particularly a woman's role to mask her feelings, suggesting many were feeling sad and worried. She urged her readers,

To mothers, who will not need to be urged to write a Christmas letter to their boys, I would say: 'Please, ma'am, for heaven's sake, try to put as much cheer and spice in your Christmas letter as you do in the cake you are sending him. Don't make it sodden with your tears and heavy with your forebodings. Don't tell him how you are crying over the little socks he used to hang up when he was five years old. Don't complain about the rationing and say you won't have much of a Christmas dinner this year, what with the points and it being so hard to get good food. It isn't going to make a merry Christmas for him to think of his family sitting down to a table with a pork chop on it, instead of a turkey, and Mother sobbing into her ersatz coffee cup. It isn't true, anyways. So write him a bright letter, full of cheery gossip about the family and give him something that will shirk him up and make him feel he still has something to fight for. And if you are a girl writing to your 'steady' or a wife writing to your husband - but there is no use in telling you what to say. Your heart will do that. Only no gobs of gloom about how you miss

⁵⁴⁷ "Dear Editors: Send Christmas Cards," *LHJ*, Dec. 1944, 27.

⁵⁴⁸ Edgar Dewitt Jones, "On Writing Letters instead of Christmas Cards," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, Illinois), Dec. 20, 1943, 4.

him. Write that Christmas letter, And write it today. The deadline for mail is upon us.’⁵⁴⁹

It was up to women to make others happier and in doing so conceal their own emotions about the wartime situation. Christmas was a time when servicemen would want to think of their families enjoying themselves and any information to the contrary was to be concealed from those at the front. Women, considered in contemporary culture to be more emotional, had to be especially coached on what a good Christmas letter should or should not contain, regardless of their personal feelings.

Women did put considerable thought into the emotions of those at the front and worked to ensure they were as happy as they could be. In a letter to her husband, Helen Larsen expressed how much she hoped he enjoyed the gift she had sent him. She was “so glad you got your Christmas package on time” and hoped that Leonard “really like[d] everything.”⁵⁵⁰ The emotional tone of her letter and the specific description of the gifts she sent and why she sent them makes it clear that considerable effort went into the selection of these items in hopes that they would bring joy to the recipient. Similarly, Saidee R. Leach of Edgewood, Rhode Island, wrote to her son Douglas “I do hope your Christmas box reaches you by Christmas Day. We shall be thinking of you and wish we could send you much more of course we were limited by what you could have.”⁵⁵¹ In 1943, when the mailing window for Christmas packages overseas opened on September 15, the postmasters in the west suburban area of Chicago designated the day as “mother’s day” because of how many mothers arrived eager to have their packages sent to their sons overseas. A woman named Mrs. Knapp stated, “I don’t suppose there was ever a time when so much mass sentiment has gone into Christmas mailing as during these weeks

⁵⁴⁹ Dorothy Dix, “Write Christmas Letters to Service Man; Make it Merry,” *The Wilkes-Barre Record* (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania), Dec. 4, 1943, 13.

⁵⁵⁰ Letter from Helen Larsen to Leonard Larsen, Dec. 29, 1942. Box 1, Leonard Larsen Papers. NYHS, New York City, NY.

⁵⁵¹ Letter from Saidee R. Leach to son, Douglas, Nov. 1942. Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith, *Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 183.

leading up to October 15 [when the mailing period ended].”⁵⁵² The postmaster in La Grange, Illinois, noted: “we are as anxious as the mothers who put their very hearts into the packages that there will be no disappointment on Christmas Day.”⁵⁵³ A great deal of concern went into Christmas packages for those overseas, and in all of this, it is evident that women felt a strong desire to make others happy during the war and especially at Christmas.

Feeling

For many people, the realities of war could not be overcome by Christmas decorations, music, or displays or by keeping busy with charity or work. How magazines and the media portrayed Christmas did not always align with people’s personal experiences and emotions. Susan Camille Samuelson has identified this paradoxical emotional state as festive malaise, a “conflict between idealized versions of what a festivity ‘should’ be and the fact that real life persists during a celebration.”⁵⁵⁴ Writing to her husband, Helen Larsen illustrates the complicated emotions people felt toward the rituals of Christmas when they were separated from their loved ones. In a letter written on December 19th, 1942, she began “I’m very lonesome for you. I guess its cause it’s getting so near to the holidays” and went on to tell Leonard how she had just finished “decorat[ing] the porch and does it look nice. Then Jackie came home from camp and we set up the tree. Put the lights on and decorated it. It really looks beautiful with all the decorations around it and all.”⁵⁵⁵ However, all of this only served to remind Helen of their separation, as she notes “gee I wish you could have helped me sweets. I sure miss you. This is the first year in forever that we won’t be together... I don’t feel much like Christmas honey. I wish it would come and go in a hurry.”⁵⁵⁶ While she had gone through the ritual of decorating

⁵⁵² *CDT*, Sept. 26, 1943, W1.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁴ Susan Camille Samuelson, “Festive Malaise and Festive Participation: A Study of Christmas Celebrations in America,” PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1983.

⁵⁵⁵ Letter from Helen Larsen to Leonard Larsen, Dec. 19, 1942. Box 1, Leonard Larsen Papers. NYHS, New York City, NY.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

and was happy to some degree to tell her husband about it, the process had intensified her feelings of separation as that was something the couple had usually done together.

Christmas during wartime and the pressure it put on women as both upholders of holiday tradition and the emotional center of family life represents an extreme example of the tension between ideals and reality. When this tension got too great, people came to resent the holiday and wanted to skip it entirely because of their loneliness. Isabel Alden wrote to Maurice Kidder, her husband of almost ten years, on December 10, 1944, “My heart aches for you constantly... because you have to be where you are and cannot be with us. And because things are going so very badly and your Christmas will be such a terrible one... I got through the other two Christmases, but I am too tired this time. I am not going to do it up this year. I think, what’s the use, even the tree isn’t much good. I don’t seem to care.”⁵⁵⁷ While magazines and newspapers encouraged women to remain in good spirits, especially in their letters to servicemen overseas, for some this was too difficult with the holiday-heightened feelings of loneliness, and therefore Christmas was not able to act as a distraction from the realities of everyday life. Frances Clark wrote to the editors of *Printers’ Ink* in December 1944 hoping that advertisers could help her with a particular problem, namely the playing of heart-wrenching Christmas songs on the radio, particularly “I’ll be Home for Christmas” and “I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas.” She wrote “with more than 5,000,000 or more men overseas – many of them for the second Christmas – you can figure each man has at least two or three close relatives at home here who, hearing these songs, are plunged into tears at least, if not a deep slough of despond.... As Christmas Day approaches, I hate to think of the number of times I will be caught unaware by the two songs sung, always, in the most pitiful tones.”⁵⁵⁸ The closer it got to Christmas, the more likely these songs would be played, and these would act as a reminder that her loved ones were not going to celebrate with her as they had always done in the past. Similar sentiments were expressed by Evelyn Alvey to her husband

⁵⁵⁷ Letter from Isabel Alden to Maurice A. Kidder, Dec. 10, 1944. Litoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*, 93.

⁵⁵⁸ Frances Clark, “Letter to the Editor: Wants Radio to Watch Christmas Songs,” *PI*, Dec. 22, 1944, 82.

Robert: “Christmas 1944, won’t be a merry one, honey; but it will be a loving one... It won’t be a happy one, either. I can’t be happy without you... I hope you have a decent place to sleep, and decent food to eat, and don’t be too lonely. Remember that this is positively our first and last Christmas that we aren’t going to be together.”⁵⁵⁹ Again separation and the feelings of loneliness were intensified by the holiday season and caused these women to abstain from the holiday altogether.

Even though Christmas heightened feelings of loneliness, it offered a way to express those emotions more positively. The Christmas acts of consuming and communicating were a powerful distraction. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* noted in 1943 “For many Americans this will be the saddest Christmas of their lives... we can only hope that the boy who opens our meager package of gifts in barracks or in a pup tent or at a flying field may have a moment of communion with us in the Christmas spirit of those older times.”⁵⁶⁰ Evelyn Alvey also stated that “I shan’t be too unhappy if I have some recent mail from you, and you are all right. As for you, dear, I hope all of your packages get there before Christmas.”⁵⁶¹ Isabel Alden also wrote a very similar line in her letter to her husband: “Oh, how I pray that just one of your packages will turn up.”⁵⁶² The attention and effort women put into their Christmas packages and letters offered a distraction from actual feelings of separation and a way for loved ones to feel a connection and reaffirm their relationship through the ritual of gift-giving. Christmas, then, could function in multiple ways – it could also be a reminder that things were not as perfect or ideal as some wanted them to be, but the drive to achieve a degree of perfection could be a distraction from negative emotions. It was not just the relationship with their husbands or loved ones far from home that women had to contend with. Especially at Christmas, but

⁵⁵⁹ Letter from Evelyn R. Alvey to husband, Robert Alvey, Dec. 1944. Litoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*, 107–8.

⁵⁶⁰ “Tarkington Sees Peace Thru War Gloom,” *CDT*, Dec. 5, 1943, B3.

⁵⁶¹ Letter from Evelyn R. Alvey to husband, Robert Alvey, Dec. 1944. Litoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*, 107–8.

⁵⁶² Letter from Isabel Alden to Maurice A. Kidder, Dec. 10, 1944. Litoff and Smith, *Since You Went Away*, 93.

throughout the war, women on the home front had another critical role to play, that of parent.

Parenting

Parenting at any time is a challenge, but war creates its unique issues that parents had to navigate. What were parents supposed to tell their children about the war? *Redbook* magazine answered this question by arguing that children needed to understand that while peace was ideal, the American way of life was something worth fighting for. The author, Angelo Patri, believed that “Our children are not weaklings to whom we must sugar hard facts. They listen to the radio, and see the movies and read the papers. Our part is to try to interpret the news so that our children hold to one set of ideals – freedom, justice, and truth – for living.”⁵⁶³ *VICTORY Bulletin* advised parents not to talk too much about the war in the presence of children, but to give them instead patriotic tasks to make them feel like they were doing something to help.⁵⁶⁴ There was a concern during the war that absentee caregivers (fathers away at war and mothers away at work) were contributing to a rise of juvenile delinquency.⁵⁶⁵ An article in *Ladies’ Home Journal* in December 1944 by Josephine D. Abott, a former educational consultant for the American Social Hygiene Association, argued that the youth in America were being failed by their elders. She highlighted that their unsupervised behavior was leading to a loosening of morals, particularly in terms of crime and premarital sex.⁵⁶⁶ She was far from the only one to make these claims. However, according to William Tuttle, these claims were much exaggerated during the years of the war and often used to discredit working mothers.⁵⁶⁷ This was just another issue that women had added to their plates because of the war.

⁵⁶³ Angelo Patri, “Children and War,” *RB*, Nov. 1940, 124.

⁵⁶⁴ *VICTORY Bulletin*, Dec. 16, 1941, 30.

⁵⁶⁵ Dorothy W. Baruch, *You, Your Children, and the War* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942).

⁵⁶⁶ Josephine D. Abott, “Youth in Wartime,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1944, 39.

⁵⁶⁷ “Our Kids are in Trouble,” *LIFE*, Dec. 20, 1943, 97. William M. Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War: The Second World War in the Lives of America’s Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 69–70.

There were so many things necessary to being a good parent; many people felt that ensuring a happy Christmas was one of them.

The media told parents to take considerable care in managing their children's experience of Christmas. Adults still wanted children to experience the joy of Christmas despite, and perhaps because of, wartime realities and anything else that might stand in the way. However, the war brought to Christmas unique concerns of family separation, gift shortages, and anxieties over the state of the world. The *Atlanta Chronicle* asked its readers, "holidays put a strain on mothers, but has it occurred to mothers that holidays are a strain on children too?"⁵⁶⁸ It went on to note how too much excitement and an over-indulgence of sweets was problematic for young children and therefore parents needed to monitor how their children participated in the holiday carefully. The *Christian Science Monitor* chastised its readers by saying "if parents would give more of themselves and less of things, children would be much better off."⁵⁶⁹ The famous etiquette expert Emily Post joined in on the recommendations. She said that Christmas keeps you young, so children should be able to experience the excitement of Santa, Christmas trees, and Christmas feasts, and parents should enjoy the process.⁵⁷⁰ The shadow of war that hung over the holiday made it more difficult to be joyous but it was because of that, many in the press argued, that more effort should go into trying to make it special.

The war put more pressure on the decisions parents had to make regarding their children and the celebration of Christmas. *Women's Home Companion* said in December 1941, "this year more than ever the greatest gift we can give children is the gift of Christmas itself. Don't cheat them of it."⁵⁷¹ Similarly, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* advised to "put aside the everyday duties as much as you can."⁵⁷² *Redbook* thought that through promoting the joy of Christmas for children, adults could work to "renew your soul in the

⁵⁶⁸ Sally Saver, "Xmas Festivities are a Strain on Children, *AC*, Dec. 28, 1939, 16.

⁵⁶⁹ *CSM*, Dec. 6, 1939, 9.

⁵⁷⁰ Emily Post, "Christmas Keeps us Young," *LAT*, Dec. 19, 1939, 110.

⁵⁷¹ *WHC*, Dec. 1941, 53.

⁵⁷² "Plan Special Yule Treats for Children," *CDT*, Dec. 27, 1943, 14.

spirit of childhood” and that even though some may have been unable to return home, by “keep[ing] Christmas as they knew it... they will feel it and live it again.”⁵⁷³ However, the changing atmosphere also changed the toys children wanted for Christmas toward more militaristic themes. As *Women’s Home Companion* put it, “children naturally carry out through play the activities they see and hear about.” Even still, they thought “there are many constructive war toys” and “in this war play children are probably working off vague and undefined worries.”⁵⁷⁴ Parents should be mindful of the war play and war toys that were becoming more popular but so too should they understand that such things served an important mental purpose for the children who wanted to play with them. While the advice and the response to it differed from person to person, one thing was certain: Christmas was special compared to other times of the year and parents had to decide what that meant for their own children.

Women’s actions and emotions toward Christmas during the war were mixed and complicated. While understanding the diverse reactions of all women of America is impossible, there was a clear expectation that was placed on them by popular media. For the most part their actions, namely hosting parties, working, volunteering, and adapting to shortages, adhered to the messages that magazines and advertisements set for them. Regarding emotions, women felt a strong desire to make others happy, and this meant upholding traditions and trying to recreate the look and feel of pre-war Christmases. However, the nostalgia and desire for togetherness that the holiday evoked could make people lonelier rather than offer a distraction. Some turned to religion to deal with this emotion; others found comfort in consuming. By sending cards or packages to their loved ones separated from them, they could continue the traditional family ritual of gift exchange that had previously been done together and still maintain the familial bonds that the Christmas ritual worked to uphold. Through all of this, though, women had one other primary concern. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported, “Christmas has a deep significance for the women’s organizations.... No group seeks to totally forget the war, but all are

⁵⁷³ Angelo Patri, “Your Christmas; This Year,” *RB*, Dec. 1943, 43.

⁵⁷⁴ Adele McKinnie, “Shall I Let My Child Play with War Toys?,” *WHC*, Nov. 1942, 52.

striving during this Christmas season to find a little peace and calm in a troubled world... above all, no groups are forgetting that Christmas belongs to the children [and] their most beloved Christmas tradition: the belief that there is a Santa Claus.”⁵⁷⁵ Regardless of wartime realities, mothers across America strove to ensure that children would still be able to appreciate the wonder and innocence of the Christmas season. For many Americans this would be the aspect of Christmas they were told to protect the most.

Children in Wartime

Historiography

To understand how individuals on the home front experienced Christmas it is particularly important to give attention to one often overlooked group in studies of war and society: children. World War II was not just a transformative event for the nation, but also for the children who experienced the war during their formative years. It affected them uniquely and critically shaped their understanding of the world and what it meant to be an American. Two historians, in particular, have investigated how the war years impacted the children of America: William Tuttle with *Daddy's Gone to War: The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children*, and Lisa Ossian in her work *The Forgotten Generation: America's Children in World War II*.⁵⁷⁶ Both discuss how the war had a unique effect on those who were children during those particular years and make a note of how age has a powerful influence on the way children experienced those years. As Lisa Ossian demonstrated, children's sense of time is skewed; while they crave repetition and routine, they also “yearn for the height of holidays and crazy celebrations, especially Christmastime.”⁵⁷⁷ Christmas, then, held a particularly important place in the lives of children on the home front. It is important to understand how parents attempted to navigate wartime Christmas for their children, how the toys they desired and the meaning of them changed over the course of the war, and how other children's activities at

⁵⁷⁵ “Tradition Marks Yule Celebration,” *LAT*, Dec. 20, 1942, A5.

⁵⁷⁶ Ossian, *Forgotten Generation*; Tuttle, *Daddy's Gone to War*.

⁵⁷⁷ Ossian, *Forgotten Generation*, x.

Christmas were affected by the war, such as working, volunteering, pageants, and holiday get-togethers.

Sydney Mintz, who studied the history of American childhood from the colonial period until the close of the twentieth century, argued that the war “politicized the lives of the young; it altered the rhymes they repeated, the cartoons and movies they watched, and the songs they heard, and it instilled in them an intense nationalism” and that “growing up in wartime involved disruption and stress but also early opportunities to contribute to the family and assert one’s independence.”⁵⁷⁸ Mintz, Ossian, and Tuttle show how children and teenagers contributed to the war effort through filling the needs caused by labor shortages, by collecting waste and scrap material, and by selling and purchasing victory bonds and stamps.⁵⁷⁹ Children, then, were very much influenced by the war – both positively and negatively – and their experience of the war was unique compared to those who lived through the war years as adults.

The patriotic wartime atmosphere influenced the way children understood what being an American meant, who an was American, and who the enemies of America were. *American Girl* magazine featured an article originally featured in the *New York Times* entitled “I am an American” in July of 1942. It stated that being an American meant being part of a melting pot of “all races and all tongues, all colors and all creeds. But I am an American because I have dreamed the dream of the founders of this democracy.”⁵⁸⁰ According to the article, democracy meant “the right to think for themselves and to vote as they pleased, to choose their own church, to read a free press, to name their own leaders in a free election; the right to discuss, to disagree, to try new roads, to make mistakes and to correct them; the right to be secure against the exercises of arbitrary power, the right to live their lives in their own way.”⁵⁸¹ Similarly, another magazine for

⁵⁷⁸ Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 255 and 258.

⁵⁷⁹ Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War*; Ossian, *Forgotten Generation*.

⁵⁸⁰ *AG*, July 1942, 1.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid*.

young women, *Redbook*, stated in the October 1941 issue that “The life you live today was passed on to you by men and women who pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to win it for you. You are free to go and come at will; you speak your minds openly; you are free to follow your conscience; you are secure in your person and property; you can choose your work; you have a voice in your government and the power to make your voice heard; you are that proudest of God’s creatures, freemen.”⁵⁸² This was, according to the title of the article, the American way. *Boys’ Life* magazine proclaimed that its readers, the Boy Scouts of America, had an active role to play in upholding the ‘American way.’ The editor and chief executive scout, James E. West, told readers that “We need to strengthen and invigorate our democracy. There are many of us who believe that the paramount need of democracy is for processes of education, for development, with the help of the Church, of spiritual qualities and sincere, firm, religious convictions on the part of the American people. Those of us in Scouting, I hope, are going to rally as we have never rallied before, to do all within our power to make our contribution to invigorating and strengthening our democracy.”⁵⁸³ The magazine was telling the youth of America what they believed American values were and why they were important. Clear in this regard were the ties to Christianity, individualism, education, and sacrificial spirit. Furthermore, it told them what they could do to ensure the protection of these values at a time when they were under significant threat.

Children at Christmas

In November 1944, Christmas came early for Forrest Hoffman of Cheyenne, Wyoming. The three-year-old, nicknamed Nubbins, was suffering from a bladder ailment that his parents feared would lead to his death before Santa Claus could make his official visit. Even in the midst of war, national attention was drawn to this poor child who might not live to see Christmas Day. Photographers, newsreel cameramen, and reporters were stationed outside the Hoffmans’ house, which was guarded by three policemen, who had

⁵⁸² Angelo Patri, “The American Way,” *RB*, Oct. 1941, 102.

⁵⁸³ “The Editor Speaks: God Bless America,” *BL*, Dec. 1940, 3.

been “ordered to let no one in except Santa Claus.”⁵⁸⁴ Gifts and greetings of good wishes poured in from around the nation so Nubbins could have a dream Christmas over a month ahead of schedule. His father said, “if he lived 99 years he would have a new toy to play with every day.”⁵⁸⁵ The press recorded over 250 gifts coming from as far as New York and Florida, including a “candy-filled toy plane, locomotive, fire engine, battleship, building logs, and a wooden freight train.”⁵⁸⁶ The Union Pacific Railroad (that employed his father) ensured a proper Christmas dinner would be enjoyed by the family, sending a turkey and other accompaniments. As November moved into December, the three-year-old underwent a surgery that ultimately was successful and saved the boy’s life. National sympathy changed to joy as Nubbins lived and the press continued to follow his heartwarming Christmas miracle over the 1944 Christmas season and throughout 1945.⁵⁸⁷

There are several things about this story that are particularly interesting. First, so much care and consideration was given to ensure that Nubbins would get to have a Christmas, even though his illness should have been top priority and his doctors advised to limit his excitement. Second, ensuring he had a proper Christmas experience centered around a large number of gifts, a visit from ‘Santa,’ and a proper Christmas meal. Third, the gifts he received were heavily influenced by the wartime atmosphere, notably toy planes and battleships, but also the wooden train, a substitute for the metal ones in short supply because of wartime restrictions. Moreover, this was something the nation was particularly drawn to – the childhood experience of Christmas – despite the massive global developments in war and post-war planning happening all around them. Even in wartime, and not just in the case of Nubbins, it was particularly important that children still got to experience the joys of Christmas, and this Christmas was primarily a consumer-driven experience that was shaped considerably by the atmosphere of war.

⁵⁸⁴ *AC*, Nov. 20, 1944, 1.

⁵⁸⁵ “Piles of Gifts Assure Nubbins,” *WP*, Nov. 19, 1944, M1.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷ *AC*, Nov. 19, 1945, 7.

Presents

Historian Gary Cross has argued that the ritual of parents giving gifts to their children was actually “invented by adults to evoke in their offspring the wonder of innocence.”⁵⁸⁸ Focusing gifts on children coincided with the celebration of Christmas evolving from a communal event into a domestic ritual focused on the young and the rise of consumerism. Santa as the bringer of those gifts disguised the materialist indulgences that middle-class parents bestowed upon their children as they began to see them less as dependent servants and more as individuals whom they would raise and shape into proper adults.⁵⁸⁹ The idea of the innocent child was created by adults in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and with it came their attention to giving children new and unexpected experiences. This giving brought joy to the adult giver as they felt “pure delight, an emotion long lost in his or her own encounter with consumer goods.”⁵⁹⁰ Christmas, birthdays, vacations, and many other moments that have become child-centered function in this way in most middle-class families in America.

Other scholars have determined a wide and complex range of motives for the entrenchment of the Christmas gift exchange from parents to children.⁵⁹¹ To some degree, it stems from a desire to establish and reaffirm the bonds of the relationship between them, to bring attention to the family, and to motivate, encourage, or control behavior and desires. Contemporaries were also aware of the many purposes that presents could serve for children. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, gifts like construction sets, chemistry sets, and similar playthings were “sugar-coated education,” and dolls and cooking sets were “a subtle plan to teach good little girls there are many responsibilities

⁵⁸⁸ Gary S Cross, *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 83.

⁵⁸⁹ Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*, chapter 5; Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, chapter 4. William B. Waits argues that the Santa Claus myth is actually predominantly used to “maintain some control over their offspring at Christmas.” Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America*, 121.

⁵⁹⁰ Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 15.

⁵⁹¹ Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*; Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas*; Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*; Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America*. Neil Armstrong, “England and German Christmas Festlichkeit, c. 1800-1914,” *German History*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (2008), 486-503.

connected with children.”⁵⁹² While some gifts became more or less popular, and more or less available over the course of the war, as the *Washington Post* stated, “War or No War, youngsters the world over are in a tingle of expectation over the arrival of Santa Claus.”⁵⁹³

The war changed the nature of gifts. There were two major categories of change that took place in relation to children’s toys during World War II. The first was a change in popularity, particularly the rise of war-themed toys or replicas that allowed children to play war. The second was a material change, and this was dictated by wartime material restrictions, shortages, and limits on the manufacturing of toys because of wartime factory and labor shifts to weapons or other war products which were discussed in Chapter One. This section highlights the way wartime changes impacted consumers of these toys and gifts, as opposed to Chapter One which focused on the production side of the process.

Popular contemporary author Elizabeth MacRae Boykin reflected “Christmas presents were once an apple and an orange, some nuts and a hard candy,” now “manufactured things are the order of the day.”⁵⁹⁴ Manufactured goods had become common as Christmas gifts by the 1930s. Additionally, even before America joined the war, Santa Claus had taken up the martial spirit. In 1939, reviewers of the coming season’s toy selection noted an increase in soldiers, guns, tanks, battleships, and “all other necessary war implements.”⁵⁹⁵ Just how popular these new toys were was up for debate, however, as newspapers were quick to talk about all the other kinds of toys that were available.⁵⁹⁶ Perhaps this was because, as one department store toy buyer told the *Washington Post*, “You can tell now, from the way mothers behave at the counters. When her son fingers a pistol and asks mother to buy it, she grabs it away nearly every time and suggests a

⁵⁹² “Children and Grown Ups Enjoy Toys,” *CSM*, Dec. 2, 1939, 9.

⁵⁹³ Carolyn Bell, “Christmas Customs at Home and Abroad,” *WP*, Dec. 22, 1940, S5. “Christmas Triumphs over War,” *AG*, Dec. 1943, 22. “Children Keyed for Visit to Santa,” *NYT*, Nov. 23, 1944, 36.

⁵⁹⁴ Elizabeth MacRae Boykin, “Traditional Gifts of the Season,” *AC*, Dec. 12, 1939, 19.

⁵⁹⁵ “Santa Claus is Going to War for New Christmas Toys,” *AC*, Oct. 25, 1939, 2.

⁵⁹⁶ *CDT*, Dec. 25, 1939, 1. *CSM*, Oct. 31, 1939, 3. *NYT*, Oct. 31, 1939, 22. *LAT*, Dec. 5, 1939.

football, a game or something else more peace-able.”⁵⁹⁷ By 1941, militaristic styles of toys had only grown in popularity. The *Los Angeles Times* pronounced the military theme had come to dominate toys, and that “even little girls’ dollies wear uniforms of soldiers, sailors, nurses.”⁵⁹⁸ Lines had expanded to include accurate models of various planes and other kinds of equipment including anti-aircraft guns. Even model trains, popular before the war, were rebranded in camouflage to fit in the season.⁵⁹⁹ Mothers may not have wanted their sons playing with the toys of war, but that did not stop the children’s desire for them and consequently manufacturers continued to produce them, even in wartime. T. W. Smith, president of the Toy Manufacturers of America, pointed out that many mothers performing war jobs needed toys to keep their children happy.⁶⁰⁰ The war years brought not only material changes noted in Chapter One, but also a clear rise in the popularity of military-themed items. The 1942-1943 Fall-Winter catalog from Montgomery Ward only had a few militaristic items, including archery sets and air corps officer play costumes. By the winter of 1943-1944, the catalog included four different models of airplane so children could “build authentic scale models of famous fighting planes,” including one that “faithfully reproduces famous 3-seat attack Army bomber now used on many war fronts,” and another, described as a “sensational torpedo plane now being used against the Jap Navy.”⁶⁰¹ Along with these were play military uniforms for boys and girls, other patriotic masquerade costumes such as “American Girl” or “American Boy,” which idealized the flag, and toy weapons such as the drill rifle or submachine gun. There was a clear attempt to tie children’s playthings to the current realities of the war.⁶⁰² Similarly, the Sears Roebuck Fall/Winter 1944-1945 catalog highlighted a range of war-style toys.

⁵⁹⁷ *WP*, Sept. 30, 1939, 5.

⁵⁹⁸ “Toys on this Grim Yuletide Dominated by Military Theme,” *LAT*, Dec. 8, 1941, A1.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.* “War Featured in Toys Ready for Yule Trade,” *CDT*, Oct. 20, 1941, 24.

⁶⁰⁰ “Toys,” *SandS London*, Nov. 1, 1943, 7.

⁶⁰¹ Montgomery Ward Fall/Winter 1942-1943 Catalog, Box 8, Department Store Catalog Collection, Business, Science, and Technology Collection. Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore, MD. Montgomery Ward Fall/Winter 1943-1944 Catalog, 387C, Box 9, Department Store Catalogs Collection, Business, Science, and Technology Department. Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore, MD.

⁶⁰² Montgomery Ward Fall/Winter 1943-1944 Catalog, 387C, Box 9, Department Store Catalogs Collection, Business, Science, and Technology Department. Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore, MD.

These included trainer rifles, telescopes, destroyer tanks where the “turret moves in any direction, just like a real tank,” a “realistic Army jeep for a little boys Army,” and an 8-piece convoy fleet set that “any boy with a daddy or brother in the Navy will love.” Sears also indicated that many of its toys were made with materials, wood in particular, which were in line with limitations and controls caused by war production.⁶⁰³

Another item that parents were urged to buy their children as Christmas presents were war bonds and stamps. Papers across the country published a letter from Santa Claus in which, after consultation with Uncle Sam, he stated,

This Christmas is different. We want you to have just as much fun as ever... We want to be sure you'll have a Christmas next year, too... That's why you're getting a War Bond or Stamps this Christmas, Johnny, instead of some of the toys and things you wrote down in your letter to me... You see, Johnny, your War Stamps make you a soldier, too, just like you'd be if you were big enough to shoot a gun or fly a plane or drive a real tank. They mean you hold a stake in America. They mean some day you can tell your children just like this: 'Yes, Sir! There'll always be a Santa Claus.'⁶⁰⁴

Not only did this encourage war bonds as gifts, but it also glorified the war and portrayed the holders of war bonds as active participants within it. Another example of the idea of war bonds as presents for children came from the most desired and the most commonly unavailable item for the youth of America, the bicycle. ROADMASTER acknowledged bicycles' unavailability and took it one step further, indicating that a Victory bond was a better present, and one that could lead to a bicycle when America had won the war.⁶⁰⁵

Companies, realizing their products were difficult to attain but wanting to secure a future sale, and the government that wanted to encourage investment, could work together to

⁶⁰³ Sears Roebuck Fall/Winter 1944-1945 Catalog, 524-525. Box 26, Department Store Catalog Collection, Business, Science and Technology Collection. Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore, MD.

⁶⁰⁴ *Biloxi Daily Herald Newspaper* (Biloxi, Mississippi), Dec. 23, 1943, 3. *The Tennessean* (Nashville, Kentucky), Dec. 25, 1942, 55.

⁶⁰⁵ ROADMASTER ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 21, 1942, 133.

encourage the buying of war bonds so parents would be more likely to buy certain gifts for their children when they became available again.

Furthermore, the war shaped the meaning that children placed upon the toys, and upon the Christmas gift exchange process as a whole. The reasons children wanted particular gifts shifted. Things like weapons were seen as rites of passage between father and son; for example, the Harrington and Richardson Arms C ‘THE GENERAL’ Rifle that, according to their advertisements, told sons their “Dad is a real present giver because Dad would like to use THE GENERAL too.”⁶⁰⁶ Bicycles, while difficult to obtain, also carried a heightened meaning of independence and for girls especially were seen in a new way, as contributing to better physical health and strength, which the war had made more important for females, given their increased wartime responsibilities.⁶⁰⁷ With memories of people and moments becoming increasingly valuable due to wartime separation, cameras presented an opportunity like never before to capture a moment in time and hold onto it as a keepsake indefinitely, thereby making cameras a more desired gift.⁶⁰⁸ While the war may have made children want all sorts of weapons of war, it also changed the way they saw Santa Claus. New York City’s Postmaster Albert Goldman allowed reporters to examine a thousand children’s letters to Santa in 1942. They concluded that “children seemed to consider their favorite patron saint as an important part of war production, enmeshed in the vagaries of priority ratings and rationing and a man whose time and purse are both limited this year.”⁶⁰⁹ Children’s understanding of Santa linked to the way they understood wartime changes happening in the nation. One boy asked for a gasoline station along with roller skates and toys; a girl told Santa she had left money for her request on the table. They understood that wartime requirements caused shortages, and that the nation needed things more than they did. However, they still felt Santa Claus might have the power to help or change their circumstances. He was not removed from wartime realities but enmeshed within them.

⁶⁰⁶ Harrington and Richardson Arms ad, *BL*, Dec. 1944, 38.

⁶⁰⁷ Bicycle ad, *BL*, Nov. 1939, 39. *AG*, Dec. 1939, 44.

⁶⁰⁸ Kodak Camera Ad, *BL*, Dec. 1939, 31.

⁶⁰⁹ *NYT*, Dec. 9, 1942, 43.

How children understood the Christmas gift exchange process overall was in many ways left unchanged by the war. In letters to the ‘Kiddies Korner’ of the *Lincoln Star* in Lincoln, Nebraska, children detailed their Christmas activities and the gifts they received over the holidays. These letters reveal that they genuinely believed that they had to be good to get nice things and that if they received things they liked, they must have been good. They also portray Santa as generous and seem to see his actions as stemming from his goodness and not a sense of entitlement on their parts. They often list in great detail what they received as well as the gifts their siblings received, seeing this as a family affair. In many ways these letters seem untouched by the war, except for the occasional mention of a family member who was in the service, indicating that this was both something to take pride in and something that affected them enough to include it in their short letters. Some did make mention of receiving war bonds and seem just as excited about them as actual playthings. The children often made a note of their school’s Christmas programs, indicating that Christmas was not just a one-day affair with exchange of gifts, but a season that extended both in time and in place for them as well.⁶¹⁰ It was something they participated in outside of the home and whose activities required effort on their part.

Working

As discussed previously, the increased need for seasonal labor caused by the Christmas industry led to an expansion of who could fill those roles. This additional labor had to come from women, especially those not already engaged in war work, as well as older children like high school and college students. America’s youth undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the labor needs of the nation at war throughout the year and not just during the holiday season. While women are usually the dominant image that comes to mind when thinking about changes in the workforce, the American Home Economics Association determined that by February 1944, of those between the ages of 14 and 17, nearly one in four were working. This was a particularly marked increase from

⁶¹⁰ *The Lincoln Star* (Lincoln, Nebraska), Jan. 7, 1943, 4. *The Lincoln Star* (Lincoln, Nebraska), Jan. 14, 1943, 4.

the pre-war period especially in the 14 and 15-year-old age group.⁶¹¹ More children at work contributed to a decline in national student enrollments by about 24%.⁶¹² While the need for labor ultimately stemmed from an increase in war industry work and enlistments in the armed forces, Christmas presented a unique opportunity for many youths to find jobs and feel like they were contributing to both the season and the war's ultimate success.

Even before the war, young men were encouraged to find work, if they could, over the holidays. *Boys' Life* stated in December of 1940, "Christmas may spell carols and presents and good cheer to most of us, but it also spells ambition to students and jobless youth."⁶¹³ In 1942, sixteen-year-olds were being recruited into the postal service after Army and Navy enlistments depleted the pool of eighteen-year-olds that had usually filled the surplus roles. Postal couriers had expected the War Production Board to "eliminate or curtail card production" and were surprised the WPB had instead "displayed [faith in the] ability of mail carriers to perform."⁶¹⁴ It was not just the volume of mail that increased: Christmas shopping, too, put a considerable tax on the already overburdened labor pool. According to the Census Bureau, by 1942 an additional 400,000 employees across the country would be needed to handle the increased business in retail stores, especially department, dry goods, variety, stationary, clothing, furniture, and toy stores.⁶¹⁵ Young men were also recruited to help control the increased pedestrian and vehicular traffic brought on by the Christmas shopping rush in some areas.⁶¹⁶ Furthermore, these actions make it clear that the war could, in some cases, trump education, but it could not trump Christmas.

⁶¹¹ American Home Economics Association Consumer Education pamphlet, Feb. 1, 1944. Folder 1, Box 1, Entry 51, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁶¹² Ossian, *Forgotten Generation*, 4.

⁶¹³ Robert K. Burns and Lyle M. Spencer, "Jobs for Christmas," *BL*, Dec. 1940, 22 and 59.

⁶¹⁴ "High School Students May Aid Yule Rush," *AC*, Nov. 24, 1942, 6. "Schoolboys and Maybe Girls to Deliver Boston Yule Mail," *CSM*, Oct. 15, 1942, 1.

⁶¹⁵ *WP*, Oct. 10, 1943, M16.

⁶¹⁶ "Boy Scouts to Help Handle Yule Traffic," *AC*, Dec. 13, 1943, 13.

Schools in some cases worked with local businesses to manage student employment in an effort to prevent decreased attendance. Provisio High in Chicago offered its students special studies to prepare them for clerking jobs, including instruction in selling methods and the use of the cash register.⁶¹⁷ In Los Angeles, school officials created a student employment bureau in November 1944. They believed that “retail selling experience during the Christmas season is an educational aid to our students, as well as a benefit to local firms experiencing help shortages. The school feels it is performing a service to both the student and the business firm by making help available during the Christmas rush.”⁶¹⁸ Similar programs were in place in Washington, D.C., where high schools reported releasing 6,000 students early for their Christmas break to help with the holiday sales rush.⁶¹⁹ These more coordinated school-industry programs had begun in 1943 in cities where labor shortages were particularly prominent, like Baltimore, Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, Charleston, Savannah, Pensacola, Oklahoma City, Wichita, Dallas, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Portland, Spokane, and Seattle, as well as Los Angeles and Washington, D.C.⁶²⁰ Ultimately, young men, as well as young women, were working more because of the war and this need for labor was particularly felt at Christmas when the war had absorbed the traditional surplus labor pool usually available at this time.

Charity

Working was not the only way American youth contributed to the war effort. As William Tuttle demonstrated, “During the war school children collected extraordinary amounts of waste paper, bacon grease, and scrap metals, and they sold War Bonds and Victory stamps worth hundreds of millions of dollars.”⁶²¹ Salvage provided an opportunity for younger children to also feel like they could make an effort. Accordingly, “what is

⁶¹⁷ *CDT*, Nov. 29, 1942, W2.

⁶¹⁸ “School Classifies 500 Students for Yule Jobs,” *LAT*, Nov. 26, 1944, 11.

⁶¹⁹ *WP*, Dec. 17, 1944, M5.

⁶²⁰ *WP*, Oct. 10, 1943, M16.

⁶²¹ Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War*, 121.

important is not the aggregate figures, but rather the individual enthusiasm and dedication that produced these totals.”⁶²² American children for the most part wholeheartedly embraced the patriotic fervor of the war years and worked to do their duty in any way they possibly could. Reporting before a congressional committee, Eleanor Roosevelt testified that “you should get your children to feel they are making a contribution, no matter how small,” highlighting the important role parents and educators could have in instilling this belief.⁶²³ Children heard the home-front messages to conserve, save, and salvage materials needed for the war just like the adults around them. They, too, were faced with the confusing mixed messages about how to follow these instructions while also participating in the important rituals of Christmas that the government and the media had tied to what it meant to be an American and what the war was fighting to protect.

American Girl magazine offered its readers, both Girl Scouts and not, strategies to do their duty and still have a happy Christmas. It said to “do nothing that taxes the country’s effort to conserve food, not overcrowd transportation facilities, not use gasoline or food needlessly and not spend money that could and should be put to the use of the country. It was mighty easy, in the days before the war to whip up parties, go to the movies, make great batches of candy and cakes, and to buy all our gifts at the stores.”⁶²⁴ It then provided a few examples of how to make Christmas both a day of service and joy, including singing Christmas carols, making candles, or making decorations with Christmas greens, while ensuring “Conservation of our outdoor resources [because it] is one thing we must all practice,” making Christmas cards, and having a gift-wrapping service – perhaps for soldiers in hospital.⁶²⁵ All of these were ways Scouts could raise money both for themselves and for the good of the nation.

⁶²² Ibid, 122.

⁶²³ Ibid, 125.

⁶²⁴ “Girl Scouts Reporting for Duty,” *AG*, December 1943, 20.

⁶²⁵ *AG*, Nov. 1942, 26-27. Marie Gaudette, “The Inside Story of Your Christmas,” *AG*, Dec. 1944, 24-25. Photos with captions, *AG*, Dec. 1942, 26-27.

Boys' Life magazine presented Christmas as a time to rise above the shadow of war, and told its readers how to make others around them happy. It encouraged Scout groups to collect, repair, and distribute toys to the needy, both to help with the calls of conservation and salvage because of the war and to ensure the continuation of the Christmas spirit at a time when the nation needed it most.⁶²⁶ They were also tasked with being collectors of the waste produced by the rituals of Christmas, notably paper salvage.⁶²⁷ The Boy Scouts were actively engaged in this task and participated in it intensively throughout the war. The magazine reprinted correspondence between Leon Henderson, the Administrator of the OPA, and Dr. James E. West, the Chief Scout executive, to demonstrate the need to support the defense program to the male youth of the nation. Henderson stated that, "The situation calls for an immediate plan of action as well as forceful organization. We must start a national waste paper collection campaign and the Boy Scouts of America as a large uniformed body, trained to quick mobilization and with a record of successful accomplishments seem to be a group well qualified to handle such a vast project."⁶²⁸ While the use of flattery is blatant, it is important to acknowledge that the government was active in persuading organizations to support and take charge of causes that were inherently the government's and not that of the organization. Furthermore, given this printing in the January 1942 issue, it was partly also a response to the abundance of paper that people had presumably used during the recent holiday season. At the same time, the magazine gave the same young men instructions to make their own Christmas cards, which clearly would have used paper, paper they were supposed to be saving and salvaging.⁶²⁹ The Girl Scouts actually sold Christmas cards despite paper shortages. In 1944, they earned \$130,000 for troops across the country.⁶³⁰ Generally, these magazines advised both girls and boys on how they could contribute to the war, especially through

⁶²⁶ "The Editor Speaks: Scouting Christmas," *BL*, Dec. 1941, 3.

⁶²⁷ "American Needs Waste Paper – Scouts are Urged to Act: The following is a word-picture taken from correspondence between Dr. James E West, Chief Scout Executive and Leon Henderson, Administrator, Office of Price Administration, Washington DC," *BL*, Jan 1942, 1.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁹ *BL*, Dec. 1942, 28.

⁶³⁰ "Headlines in Girl Scouting," *AG*, Oct 1945, 32-33.

the organizations of the Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts, but also on their own. Many of their projects took salvage and conservation language and strategies into account in their suggested actions, but they did not let the war and these efforts fully overshadow Christmas.

Young men and women in America were not just involved with the Girl or Boy Scouts. Many were also active members in the Junior Red Cross.⁶³¹ This organization made significant contributions throughout the war as well as some specifically connected to the Christmas season. When the war broke out in Europe, the Junior Red Cross members prepared Christmas packages to be sent to children in affected countries. In 1940, they sent more than 30,000 packages to England and another 30,000 to Greenland, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, Mexico, China, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Philippines, Alaska, and Guam, each including ten to twelve small gifts or toiletries.⁶³² By 1942, 100,000 boxes went to twenty-one countries along with 75,000 boxes of candy. Enrollments in the Red Cross were particularly high during the years of the war: in 1942 alone, seventeen million out of an approximate thirty million elementary and high school age children were members.⁶³³ There was significant praise for this program, even after the war. The Director of the American Junior Red Cross stated in a letter from 1946 that “There can be no doubt that our gift box program is helping to meet a real need for basic education and health supplies in war-devastated countries.”⁶³⁴ Christmas was a moment when the rituals associated with its celebration enhanced the ability of America’s children

⁶³¹ OWI Fact Sheet For Domestic Radio Bureau, No. 158, Nov. 1, 1943. Box 3, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD. For more information on the Red Cross see Reah Foster Dulles, *The American Red Cross: A History* (New York: Harper, 1950); John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); Marian Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Robert Wm Kirk, *Earning Their Stripes: The Mobilization of American Children in the Second World War* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994); Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War*; and Ossian, *Forgotten Generation*.

⁶³² BG, Nov. 18, 1940, 6. “Junior Red Cross Sending 30,000 Yule Packages to Britain,” Chapter 8 of the official history of the American Junior Red Cross, undated. Box 1, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁶³³ OWI Fact Sheet for Domestic Radio Bureau, no. 158, undated. Box 3, Entry 43, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁶³⁴ Letter from the Director of the American Junior Red Cross to the Chairman of the American Junior Red Cross, Dec. 31, 1946. Box 1043, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

to have a real impact on children worldwide. Their participation and contribution indicate that while there were mixed messages associated with the holiday, the spirit of giving remained particularly strong.

Celebrating

Christmas was certainly not all work and no play for the youth of America. While they devoted considerable time to salvage, conservation, fundraising, and other forms of charity, they also participated in a range of events associated with the holiday season, like dances, concerts, pageants, plays, and parties. These kinds of events had become common for children throughout the rise of a child-centered Christmas and into the first half of the twentieth century, especially. Some changes that occurred once war broke out included the reduction of holiday dance parties because of a lack of male hosts; consequently, changes were made to the structure of debutante and coming-out balls that were often scheduled over the holiday season.⁶³⁵ The armed forces, especially in areas where there were large bases, also hosted children's parties for underprivileged children or children whose parents were involved in war work themselves.⁶³⁶ They were so common that American servicemen and support personnel consistently hosted them wherever they ended up serving outside of the United States.⁶³⁷ Around the world, Americans took on the role of Santa for the children near their stations. Domestically and abroad, these Christmas parties often had a military air about them. For example, one party in Chicago featured tanks and 300 guests, who all wore military-themed uniforms to a high school dance; the hosts who were actually enlisted wore their real uniforms, while the children wore either costume replicas or the uniforms of their affiliation in groups like Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts.⁶³⁸ Additionally, these parties often followed the same script, with Santa Claus, gifts, trees, songs, and festive foods. Predominantly

⁶³⁵ *CDT*, Aug. 14, 1944, 13.

⁶³⁶ "Carnivals: HASC Christmas Party Successful," *The Billboard*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Jan 17, 1942), 30. "HASC Christmas Party Successful," *Valdosta Newsletter*, Dec. 11, 1943. Valdosta State Archives, Valdosta, GA.

⁶³⁷ This is discussed in Chapter Five.

⁶³⁸ "Yule Parties to Have Military Air," *CDT*, Dec. 13, 1942, W1.

secular, the parties worked to establish the host as generous, while also relaying the abundance the American way of life had to offer.

Conclusion

The war impacted the American home front to a significant degree, and its effects were reflected in the way American women and children celebrated the Christmas season. Despite the hardships, shortages, and separations, Christmas came and went four times for Americans over the course of the war and people had to figure out for themselves how to negotiate the changes occurring, taking into account the desires of others, as well as their own. Christmas was more than just a marker of time; it represented a moment when particular values and ideals could be reaffirmed and strengthened on the American home front. For some, it would have been a painful reminder of those who were not present. In a fictional story entitled “Christmas Courage” by Kathleen Coyle published in *Redbook* in 1943, this sentiment was described: “She felt dead about Christmas, stone dead. She had no mind at all for it. It only served to set her back in the past, when Steve was a boy, when it was fun with him. All of it was unbearable to her how, for it always brought her thoughts out, hammeringly, on the same note, the last message: ‘Killed in action.’”⁶³⁹ For others, it was a reminder of the uncertain fate of their loved ones and of the length of the war overall, and meant “thoughts and prayers will be focused on distant parts of the world.”⁶⁴⁰ Christmas was a marker of another year passing without peace being brought to the world. While people might continue to go through the ritualistic behaviors, their thoughts were somewhere else. As Sergeant Hilary S. Lyons wrote for *Stars and Stripes – Rome*, “For all its scurrying and rushing, its frantic buying and feverish selling, its preoccupation with the traditional surface manifestations of the season, America’s heart has not forgotten. In the homes with the blue stars, Christmas will be subdued and in those with the gold stars, it will hardly seem Christmas at all.”⁶⁴¹ However, this also

⁶³⁹ Kathleen Coyle, “Christmas Courage,” *RB*, Dec. 1943, 12.

⁶⁴⁰ “Memory of Sons who Sleep in Overseas Graves Tempers America’s 4th War Time Christmas,” *SandS Middle East*, Dec. 23, 1944, 1.

⁶⁴¹ Sgt. Hilary S. Lyons, “The Holiday Season Finds Those at Home Well Aware of Fact There’s A War On,” *SandS Rome*, Dec. 24, 1944, 5.

brought the nation together. Shared sacrifice was a common bond that almost everyone on the home front experienced in some way, and women played a significant role in carrying out the celebration of Christmas that helped people to understand and navigate their experience of the war.

Just as Christmas prompted women and children to think especially of those who could not be present, it also sparked a desire to appreciate each other and value the togetherness that was possible. Not just physical togetherness, but an intangible sense of connection – brotherhood between one another and a belief in something greater than one’s self.⁶⁴² Not just families but Christmas reminded individuals of national togetherness: “united in their faith in the future – resolved to carry on come what may.”⁶⁴³ Christmas presented a unique moment to appreciate the nationalistic fervor brought on by the war in a way that reminded individuals of the American values associated with the holiday itself. For many, this meant that “Under the tinsel and the glitter of glass balls, under the wrappings, under the hurry and fatigue, lies the real, the secret gift. Belief in God, faith in man.”⁶⁴⁴ The commonality in Christianity, the value of having faith in leadership, a sense of justice and righteousness – Christmas reminded some people of these American values through its religious underpinnings and sense of shared cultural heritage.

There was also a patriotic element to Christmas that reminded individuals of what it meant to be an American in a more secular and particularly nationalistic fashion. To “keep Christmas in the belief that they are defending the dignity of human kind” was likened to “the Declaration of Independence on which the Founding Fathers took their stand.” Christmas was a reminder of “endowed... certain inalienable rights” to all the people of the world, and also a reminder of those same values on which the founding of America had been based.⁶⁴⁵ This was what American fathers, sons, and brothers were fighting for on the battlefield, and consequently also protecting the real meaning of

⁶⁴² Gladys Taber, “Diary of Domesticity,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1941, 63.

⁶⁴³ *BL*, Dec. 1942, 36.

⁶⁴⁴ Gladys Taber, “Diary of Domesticity,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1941, 63.

⁶⁴⁵ Uncle Dudley, “War Christmas,” *BG*, Dec. 25, 1941, 20.

Christmas.⁶⁴⁶ These supposed true meanings of Christmas were deeply entrenched with national conceptions of self. This was so much the case that some commentators complained that the holiday seemed “like a weird scramble of Independence Day and Yuletide.”⁶⁴⁷ Americans conceptualized Christmas as what the war was being fought for and consequently reaffirmed the war within this framework. If Christmas was an inalienable right, part of what it means to have a democracy, and the war was protecting this, then the war must be a good and just war. In this sense, this is because these are key values worth protecting; consequently, by celebrating Christmas women and children on the home front were upholding the values America was fighting for.

Christmas helped Americans define their national values and interpret how they should see the war and act in wartime through the prescriptive yet malleable actions associated with the celebration. Women, as the custodians of Christmas, were instrumental in determining how this actually took place. Some initially asked if they should still celebrate the holiday of peace in wartime, but the dominant answer was in the affirmative. An author for *Redbook* magazine, Angelo Patri, argued this was because “Christmas does not depend on men’s whims, nor their laws. It was sent to earth to meet men’s great need for Love, and here it will remain forever, despite evil, in triumph over it. Its spirit will stay on to warm men’s hearts and inspire their souls long after the war has been fought, the last warrior laid in the place of forgetfulness. For Love is eternal, the voice of God Himself.”⁶⁴⁸ Through its timelessness, by continuing to celebrate Christmas, people could connect to the idea that the world would get better again. In a Christmas 1942 broadcast, Mrs. Dwight Eisenhower made this point clear. She said,

This year we will find other ways of expressing the Christmas spirit. Those of us who can will invite soldiers and sailors to our Christmas dinner tables, inside our homes we will laugh and joke this Christmas Day because our hopes are high, because we know that we are going to win, because we know our victory

⁶⁴⁶ *LAT*, Dec. 25, 1943, A1.

⁶⁴⁷ Newspaper clipping from the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (St. Louis, Missouri), Aug. 7, 1942. Box 8, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁶⁴⁸ Angelo Patri, “Christmas,” *RB*, Jan. 1943, 108.

will make the world a better place, for ourselves and our children, because our victory will give freedom to millions of people who are now conquered and in slavery and last but not least we will be gay because that victory will bring our men home to us, a happier Christmas on which we will gather round the tree together and sing peace on earth good will toward men.⁶⁴⁹

Doing this, and doing this together, made people feel more connected. Gladys Taber from *Ladies' Home Journal* put it this way: "All over the country people will keep Christmas as a sacred trust."⁶⁵⁰ While people continued to celebrate, they did so with a spirit of solemnity and sentimentality in being a part of something greater than themselves.⁶⁵¹ Being part of a greater purpose was why, they believed, Christmas should remain present in the lives of individuals, despite shortages, separations, and slaughter.

The war itself meant that the spirit of goodwill associated with Christmas was needed more in the world than ever before. As *The Colorado Business Woman* trade journal stated, "Certainly it is needed... the Christmas spirit - that spirit of generosity and charity and charity in its broadest sense and love in its best sense. Business women have an opportunity - and a duty - a patriotic and Christian duty - to display these characteristics of Christianity."⁶⁵² As Christmas advertising and business still flourished throughout the war, individuals had to work out for themselves how to interpret the mixed messages they received, and decide what they would try and make of their wartime Christmas experience. For many this was both a personal and a patriotic endeavor – they were doing this not just for themselves but for the good of the nation and the world. As the *Saturday Evening Post* wrote, "This Christmas there are people starving and cold all over the

⁶⁴⁹ Christmas message from Mrs. Dwight Eisenhower upon the world's fourth wartime Christmas, and America's second, Dec. 19, 1942. LWO 6087 GR6 R1A6, Recorded Sound Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

⁶⁵⁰ Gladys Taber, "Diary of Domesticity," *LHJ*, Dec. 1942, 52.

⁶⁵¹ "Christmas Spirit Lightens Tragedy of World at War," *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1943, 1. *WP*, Dec. 25, 1944, 4.

⁶⁵² Newspaper clipping of *The Colorado Business Woman* (Denver, Colorado), Dec. 1942. Doc# 001132, Roll 55, Office of the Mayor (Fiorello H. LaGuardia) Subject Files 1933-1945. NYCMA, New York City, NY.

world. We cannot yet do much for millions of them but there are other millions within reach of our charity. From China to Greece are opportunities to implement the Christmas spirit, thereby making it glow more brightly at our own secure firesides.”⁶⁵³ The *Negro Star* put it another way: “Christmas is not merely a time of personal rejoicing and good fellowship... We, the fortunate ones, in this land, protected by our valiant forces from the onslaught of the aggressor have the opportunity to answer the challenge and to share our Christmas cheer.”⁶⁵⁴ In these ideas Christmas was used to help people understand the war, to understand America’s role in that war, and to see themselves as part of the process of bringing a better future into the world.

In the upheaval of World War II, a link was formed by individuals between the spirit of Christmas and what it meant to be an American. For children coming of age at this time, this idea fundamentally shaped their worldview. Celebrating Christmas instilled a deeper appreciation and understanding of the identity of the nation; something to be protected and upheld. There was an understanding that it was this sentiment associated with celebrating Christmas, especially consumption, that made American people and culture so influential: by giving “our Christmas presents this year [we are] giving specimens of our own handicraft... imbued with the spirit of Christmas we will also take food and clothing to the needy in our neighborhood” as a way to pass what it meant to be an American onto another and give it value and meaning.⁶⁵⁵ There was a particular magic associated with Christmas gifts: even while they may have been banal items, the Christmas spirit filled them with a deeper meaning. With what it meant to be an American under siege because of the war, the magic and meaning of Christmas gifts grew exponentially.

Christmas gifts were ultimately about relationships – relationships between individuals that were strained under the pressure of war but could also have a much deeper and broader meaning. According to Susan Eckstein, forms of gift giving both reflect and

⁶⁵³ “Merry Christmas,” *SEP*, Dec. 26, 1942, 84.

⁶⁵⁴ Ruth Taylor, “Christmas, 1943,” *The Negro Star* (Wichita Kansas), Dec. 31, 1943, 1.

⁶⁵⁵ Dan Beard, “Merrie Christmas,” *BL*, Dec. 1939, 19 and 42.

affect the culture, while simultaneously providing trust and are a key element of the social glue that holds society together.⁶⁵⁶ As Dr. Smiley Blanton and Margaret Gray Blanton wrote in *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1943, “No matter what the breaks have been in our relationships, we try at Christmas time to put them back together again. We pick and choose the presents and the wrappings. We spread our good efforts to the very edges of the family and then at the last we rush to the train, laden with gifts – and memories.” While this was true in years gone by, they believed that the war meant “This year we must make a different and less self-centered thing of Christmas... If we have not learned a new way to meet it, then this Christmas of separations will indeed be intolerable to most of us.”⁶⁵⁷ People had to work toward finding deeper meaning in the holiday. That did not necessarily mean sacrificing consumerism for piety, but it did mean they had to believe that those gifts were symbolic of the Christmas spirit – of love and charity – and that gift-giving reflected a particularly American version of this. The consumptive aspects of Christmas contradicted the messages from the government and business to save and salvage, but this was allowed and encouraged because gift-giving served a powerful function in American society during the war.

Women in wartime were forced to take on a multitude of new responsibilities on the home front. On top of these, they continued to feel compelled to carry out the rituals and traditions of Christmas. The expectations of the holiday seemed even greater because of the uncertain future war created, and the depictions of the ideal in magazines and the media continued to hold up unrealistic expectations for the celebration, despite wartime realities. Personal reactions to the war were mixed, but women continued to work, volunteer, celebrate, and communicate throughout the holiday season. They were also the primary caregivers to their children, since so many fathers had left for military service of some kind. Children, too, experienced new responsibilities because of the war and the conflict shaped their understanding of the world around them. Christmas played a role in

⁶⁵⁶ Susan Eckstein, “Community as Gift-Giving: Collectivistic Roots of Volunteerism,” in the *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 66, No. 6, (Dec. 2006), 834.

⁶⁵⁷ Dr. Smiley Blanton and Margaret Gray Blanton, “How to Make Christmas 1943 the Best Day for Your Family and Yourself,” *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 54-55.

that construction, through the toys they received as gifts, the charitable causes they put effort into, and the celebrations they were a part of. Ultimately, how Christmas was experienced and understood by people on an individual level is as varied as there are people and moments in time. However, the celebration of Christmas worked on an individual level to shape the way people understood the war and America's place within it. It also had a powerful communal function that is discussed in Chapter Four and on the international level, as will be covered in Chapter Five. In both cases, many saw and used Christmas as a powerful way to uphold American values and way of life at home and to export those to oppressed peoples all over the world.

Chapter 4: Community Christmas

Introduction

While the Victorian era saw the domestication of Christmas celebrations, the communal function of the holiday was not entirely lost. In fact, as William Waits has shown, Christmas celebrations were one way in which social commentators in the early twentieth century sought to solve the perceived problem of a weak sense of community, brought on by rapid urbanization and immigration, in the growing metropolises of America. This indicates that Christmas has been used in American history by those in power to articulate a particular vision of what they wanted the dominant norm to be. It was New Yorkers in 1912 who “originated the idea of community Christmas celebrations,” and on top of that they “became the most vigorous and effective advocates of establishing the festivals in cities nationwide.”⁶⁵⁸ The organizers of this first community celebration sought anonymity for themselves, but their efforts required help from the Lake Placid Club that donated the tree, the Edison Company that gave the lights, and the city government that installed and disposed of the tree and also provided the location, Madison Square. These acts set a precedent that would form the basis of many later community Christmases.

Organizers wanted to bring a small-town feeling to the big city, to encourage citizens to identify with the city, and by providing special events like this Christmas celebration, they hoped to strengthen the city-citizen relationship. According to Penne Restad, “in creating a Christmas in the city center, they reasserted symbolically citizens’ obligation to harmony, faith, family, and civic unity – the qualities believed necessary to keep the nation healthy and prosperous.”⁶⁵⁹ Creating a communal Christmas celebration was a process taking place on the local level but had much farther reaching implications. Civic leaders continued to foster the relationship between an individual and their community into the mid-twentieth century. Urbanization, improved technology, and a wartime

⁶⁵⁸ Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America*, 152.

⁶⁵⁹ Restad, *Christmas in America*, 156. Restad, 156.

context tinged with a growing sense that the idea of a community, both local and national, was something to be protected and upheld, shaped this process.⁶⁶⁰

Community Christmases are performative and a performance; they are “a ritual event that both says and does things in a way that leaves room within shared meaning for individual elaboration.”⁶⁶¹ This means that while people can watch or even participate in these group activities, they can still find their interpretations of the more general cultural messages presented to them by the festivities. Therefore there is not one meaning but a malleable range of meanings that can be constantly redefined or reinterpreted. These celebrations and festive culture more broadly have received attention from a variety of scholars, yet few delve deeply into the war years.⁶⁶² However, this is an important moment to study, as during the war millions of Americans were separated from their loved ones *and* uprooted from their home communities. One community undertook a year-long project to compile an assortment of local scene throughout the year to be used for the Christmas cards the town was planning to send to those of their community serving abroad.⁶⁶³ These cards were meant to bring holiday greetings with a sense of familiarity to those who were so far away from their local communities and immediate families.

Realizing just how difficult it was for servicemen and their loved ones to be separated due to World War II, communal Christmas celebrations helped to reaffirm bonds between

⁶⁶⁰ Richard R. Lingeman, *Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620- the Present* (New York: Putnam, 1980); Robert B. Fairbanks, Patricia Mooney-Melvin, and Zane L. Miller, eds., *Making Sense of the City: Local Government, Civic Culture, and Community Life in Urban America*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), chapter 5.

⁶⁶¹ Barbara Bodenhorn, “Christmas Present: Christmas Public,” *Unwrapping Christmas*, 196.

⁶⁶² Fabre, Heideking, and Dreisbach, *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation*; John J. Macaloon, *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle*. (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984); Victor W. Turner, ed., *Celebration, Studies in Festivity and Ritual* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982); Paulus Gijbertus Johannes Post, ed., *Christian Feast and Festival: The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture*, (Sterling: Peters, 2001); Robert Meyer, *Festivals U.S.A. & Canada* (New York: Ives Washburn, Inc., 1971); Steve Penfold, *A Mile of Make Believe: A History of the Eaton’s Santa Claus Parade* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Marling, *Merry Christmas!*; Waits, *The Modern Christmas in America*; Miller, *Unwrapping Christmas*; Horsley and Tracy, *Christmas Unwrapped*; Patrick McGreevy, “Place in the American Christmas,” in *Geographical Review*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (Jan 1990), 32-42.

⁶⁶³ “Main St. Goes Afar to Cheer Fighters’ Yule,” *CDT*, Dec. 17, 1944, W1.

citizens and their connection to society at large. Daniel Miller has suggested that when a community with a strong sense of self perceives itself to be under threat, it will attempt to objectify a stronger sense of the social, “to re-establish and retain this highly localized image.”⁶⁶⁴ Regarding Christmas imagery’s power to do this, he wrote about how the “bright lights within the home illuminate and gradually dispel the dark cold and austere outside, making it bow to the sociality within. From this base it reached out with the aim of incorporating some larger humanity in a divine or global sphere.”⁶⁶⁵ This chapter will demonstrate how, during the war, community Christmas celebrations helped to establish a link between the individual and their conception of global humanity, and within this context worked to reaffirm what Americans believed they were at war to protect. While the home was a powerful beacon in wartime, especially at Christmas, so too was the broader sense of community as it helped to bring individuals together and to remind people of their shared commonalities and stake in the overarching nation.

In this chapter, a brief history of pre-war communal Christmas celebrations is described before moving into how the war affected these celebrations. The chapter will establish some general trends, including the adaptations made to community Christmas parades and lighting displays, as well as some of the more unique cases. This chapter will also cover other forms of community engagement besides the civic one, namely involvement in charitable organizations and the Church. It will highlight how these groups responded to the rhetoric of government and business leaders, as well as the needs and desires of the American people during the holiday season and how they too worked to shape Americans’ understanding of the war. Christmas, as a jointly celebrated occasion both in actuality and in spirit, helped to connect the public to the armed forces. In this sense, we can see Christmas as a powerful force bringing the nation together in a spirit of shared charity and patriotism. However, this supposedly open vision excluded some groups, and the question of who was included as opposed to who was excluded from the communal Christmas is addressed near the end of the chapter. The chapter concludes with how

⁶⁶⁴ Miller, *Unwrapping Christmas*, 4.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

community Christmases shaped ideas of American identity and defined what it meant to be a valuable member of society. In many ways, Christmas helped to reinforce the idea of working together, both nationally and internationally, to make the world a better place and broadened Americans' outlook on the world and the understanding of their role within it by connecting the local to the global.

Communities

Before War

While there is little doubt that ruminations about home were and are a critical part of Christmas ritual and tradition, communities also functioned as a larger piece of 'home' within the holiday framework. In the pre-war years, the landscape of communities would transform dramatically to match the season, including light and window displays, outdoor trees and décor, parades, and pageants. The war brought changes to these exterior holiday symbols, and also brought changes to the meaning of community itself. Communities used much of the same imagery of Christmas that is found within the home, albeit on a larger scale, to evoke a sense of a shared holiday spirit.

Elaborate Christmas events were common in major metropolitan areas. Santa Claus flew into Union Air Terminal in Los Angeles in 1939 to the cheers of nearly 4,000 children. Accompanying him was Mrs. Claus and seven dwarfs [sic], who entertained the crowd with a performance of shock and surprise at the lack of snow and igloos. They proceeded to give out toys and read letters from the children. Nearby in Altadena, California, a 'Christmas Drive' featured a mile of lighted trees ready for sightseers. Hollywood Boulevard was even more extravagant, costing the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce \$25,000, with Santa Claus taking a nightly sleigh ride on a sleigh equipped with a straight-eight engine and a smokestack to puff artificial snow on viewers.⁶⁶⁶ These kinds of spectacles, while all could enjoy them, were often directed at consumers and meant to

⁶⁶⁶ "Santa Claus Welcomed," *LAT*, Nov.24, 1939, A1. "Christmas Drive Opens Tomorrow," *LAT*, Dec. 23, 1939, A5. Frederick C. Othman, "Hollywood Blvd. Already Transformed into Santa Claus Lane," *WP*, Nov. 25, 1939, 16.

encourage Christmas consumption. Funded by businesses, department stores, retail districts, or chambers of commerce, these events were meant to entice people into the area and encourage them to get into the holiday spirit, which in theory would subsequently enhance the urge to buy.

Just before the war, some places in America had developed unique celebrations for the season. Resort destinations, such as those in Florida or Palm Springs, California, saw large influxes of travelers from the North each year who sought to celebrate the holiday season in warmer weather. When the war broke out in Europe, some of these state-side destinations saw increased tourist dollars as the war prevented many travelers from heading to their usual places abroad.⁶⁶⁷ Other unique locales include Santa Claus, Indiana, which was a small town with less than 100 inhabitants in 1939, but its post office handled about 25,000 letters a day throughout the month of December. This was because so many people wanted the ‘Santa Claus’ postal mark stamped on their letters, meaning that each had to be postmarked and re-directed to its intended destination.⁶⁶⁸ Bethlehem, Connecticut was also a popular post office hub for a similar reason. However, it was Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, that dubbed itself ‘Christmas City’ and looked to the town’s Moravian history to make itself into a heritage tourism destination. According to Chloe Taft, in 1941 the city’s Chamber of Commerce wanted to put on a community-wide show of unity to celebrate the town’s bicentennial, so it urged “every household to place a lighted candle in every window, a Moravian tradition, by December 18.”⁶⁶⁹ Supposedly, local stores sold over 40,000 candles that year. The attack on Pearl Harbor impacted the display as colored lights in the downtown shopping district had to be dimmed and regulations permitted only lighting that could be extinguished at a moment’s notice as a

⁶⁶⁷ “On Florida’s West Coasts,” *NYT*, Dec. 10, 1939, 185. *CSM*, Dec. 9, 1939, 15. “Novelty of Christmas in Florida,” *CSM*, Dec. 23, 1940, 3. Christy Fox, “Snow and Desert Lure Society for Holidays,” *LAT*, Dec. 25, 1940. *WP*, Dec. 24, 1939, 46. Frederic Babcock, “The Tribune Traveler’s Guide,” *CDT*, Dec. 25, 1940, 29.

⁶⁶⁸ “Yule Mail Rush on at Santa Claus Ind.,” *CSM*, Dec. 8, 1939, 3.

⁶⁶⁹ Chloe Taft, “Wishing Upon a Star: Christmas Tourism and Urban Renewal in Bethlehem, PA,” *Journal of Planning History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (2013), 159.

defense precaution.⁶⁷⁰ These are clear examples of communities that were organized around the holiday season and while they experienced the time of year very differently from other places in the nation, they exemplify the degree to which some in America had embraced the celebration.

1941

Most individuals across America would have remained largely unaffected by the goings-on of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, or Santa Claus, Indiana. However, people across the nation did look to the White House on Christmas Eve for the national tree-lighting ceremony.⁶⁷¹ After the attack on Pearl Harbor, it was not clear if the ritual would take place as planned, but the President was adamant that the 1941 ceremony continue. Both President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, visiting the United States to discuss Allied war strategy, addressed a crowd of approximately 20,000 on the South Lawn and their words were carried across the nation via radio and later reported in newspapers across the country.⁶⁷² In his address, the President proclaimed “Our strongest weapon in this war is that conviction of the dignity and brotherhood of man which Christmas Day signifies – more than any other day or any other symbol.”⁶⁷³ Christmas, and the shared experience of joy and goodwill it was meant to evoke, was presented to Americans as an emblem of the nation’s righteousness in this war and something they ought to maintain despite the conflict.

The 1941 national tree-lighting was a symbolic display of the power of light against the darkness of a world at war and America’s newfound place as a combatant in the struggle. The *Los Angeles Times* wrote, “The season points not only backward to a sacred event, but the event itself always pointing forward to a liberated future. Christmas is a guarantee

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ The origins of this practice is covered later in this chapter.

⁶⁷² Hilary Parkinson, “The 1941 Christmas Tree: A Bright Light in Dark Times,” *The National Archives: Pieces of History Blog*, (Dec. 6, 2012), <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2012/12/06/the-1941-christmas-tree-a-bright-light-in-dark-times/> Weintraub, *Pearl Harbor Christmas*, 77.

⁶⁷³ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Christmas Eve Message to the Nation,” *The American Presidency Project*, (Dec. 24, 1941), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16073>

that everything that darkens it, is definitely defeated, judged, and condemned and marked for ultimate expulsion from the world of men.”⁶⁷⁴ Leaders realized that because of Christmas’ powerful place in American life, it was also at risk as a target of attack. The Secretary of War sent a memo to all state governors, commanding generals of corps areas, and defense commands that “the approaching Holiday Season is a period of increased danger from fifth column and sabotage activities” and pressed the importance of increased vigilance at this time.⁶⁷⁵ The contrast of the customary cheer and frivolity against mobilizing resources for war was frequently commented on by reporters. The *Boston Globe* wrote that “while carolers sing century-old music and thousands of lights gleam from homes and in public displays, air raid watchers will be at their posts and men of the armed forces will be at their stations.”⁶⁷⁶ As much as Christmas was a powerful, symbolic display of hope and faith, much of the communal celebrations in 1941 were unable to ignore that the nation had so recently been attacked and was now engaged in this horrific global conflict.

War

To understand how communities at large interpreted and represented wartime Christmas it is useful to look at two general ways communities displayed their holiday spirit – parades and lighting displays – and how these events changed in response to the circumstances of war. The ultimate result of communal celebrations represents a unique blending of top-down and bottom-up forces through the mandated changes dictated on the holiday from above as well as the traditional rituals people felt compelled to uphold. By looking at the changes to wartime Christmas celebrations, it is possible to reveal another layer of what was presented to people as the way to be a ‘proper’ American during the war, and also what Americans themselves wanted to be.

⁶⁷⁴ James Warnack, “Yule Spirit Sweeps City,” *LAT*, Dec. 26, 1941, A1. Planning to include in this footnote point about how NYC went on alert in 1943.

⁶⁷⁵ Memo from Major General, by order of the Secretary of War, Dec. 23, 1941. Box 4, Entry 57, RG 337. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁶⁷⁶ “Yule Festivity as Usual Here Despite War,” *BG*, Dec. 24, 1941, 1. “War Casts Shadow over Christmas Joy Throughout the Land,” *NYT*, Dec. 25, 1941, 1. “Festive City Puts Holiday Before War,” *HC*, Dec. 25, 1941, 1. “Santa Claus Lane Shines Again,” *LAT*, Dec. 14, 1941, E1.

Parades

Christmas parades are a cultural moment of exchange between the community, the individual, and the sponsoring body. As Steve Penfold demonstrated in his history of the Eaton's Santa Claus Parades, these were a type of cultural intervention into communities that not only acted as a public relations strategy for the corporation but were also "a new expression of Christmas culture," stemming from "the most powerful institutions of twentieth-century consumer capitalism."⁶⁷⁷ In the American context, the same is true for Wanamaker's, Macy's, or Marshall Field's department stores and their parades' influence on the communities they served. Their institutional status as pinnacle representations of consumer society gave them considerable power to shape popular perceptions, traditions, and expectations and, with the power of national media, the major metropolitan parades had an even more wide-reaching effect on the nation-at-large.

In the years before the war, considerable attention and excitement were devoted to these Christmas parades in many communities across the nation. Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade signified the start of the holiday season with the arrival of Santa Claus and the corresponding holiday merchandise subsequently set to appear in their, and many other, department stores. The parade was a spectacle to behold; in 1938 huge helium balloons of Uncle Sam, the amazing Little-Man-Big-Man, Pinocchio, and a Christmas stocking drifted overhead as floats representing the World's Fair and the North Pole, and other momentous ideas and occasions, passed beneath.⁶⁷⁸ Particularly interesting to note is that even before the outbreak of international conflict, these parades showed a curious blending of patriotism (the Uncle Sam balloon), commentary on current events (the World's Fair float), beloved characters (Pinocchio), and Christmas symbolism (Christmas stocking balloon). The following year, Macy's followed a similar formula, with a seventy-five-foot-high balloon of the Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz* film that had been a huge success that year. There was also a float featuring Santa's workshop, a float

⁶⁷⁷ Penfold, *A Mile of Make Believe*, 4.

⁶⁷⁸ R.H. Macy & Co., *Sparks Magazine*, edited by Ruth Moore (New York), inside cover, Dec. 1938. Box 6, William L. Bird Holidays on Display Collection (ACNMAH 1288). SNMAH, Washington DC.

featuring Mickey Mouse, Minnie, Donald Duck, and other popular Disney characters, and a float of the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker from the popular children's rhyme. That year the balloons were able to be bigger than ever as the city had removed an elevated structure on the parade route that had previously limited height and width measurements.⁶⁷⁹ Every effort was made to make the parade as large of a spectacle as it could be.

Another important Christmas spectacle was the figure of Santa Claus himself. He often was brought into the retail districts in major cities in modern and exciting ways, but generally with the same end – to entice customers into the downtown retail centers of the city. In Chicago, “Santa Claus winged down out of the north in a giant silver flagship of American Airlines... the plane circled the city before landing.”⁶⁸⁰ These displays worked both to draw consumers in (as parking lots across the city reached more than double capacity) and as advertising for the airline company – if it could transport Santa, then who would not want to fly with American Airlines. In 1940, the parade in Los Angeles had Santa aboard a “rocket ship” as the climax to their event, which featured “Indians, Western riders, majorettes, bands, and clowns.”⁶⁸¹ While these parades signaled the start of the Christmas selling season, and major department stores, chambers of commerce, or civic retail districts often sponsored them, there was a particular pride taken by organizers in presenting the impression of rising above purely commercial aims. A testimonial presented to Joseph Belcher Mills, one of the key parade organizers for the Detroit-based J.L. Hudson Company, upon his retirement in 1944 stated that “You accomplished consistently for this store at Christmas each year a very notable thing - an atmosphere of the season which evoked a spirit in keeping with the store's character and with the tender traditions of the day itself. Never did your Christmas atmosphere lie like a commercial veneer spread upon routine merchandising. This has been a high accomplishment.”⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁹ “Macy’s Preparing for Huge Parade,” *NYT*, Nov. 5, 1939, 13.

⁶⁸⁰ “Santa’s Arrival Sends City on a Shopping Spree,” *CDT*, Nov. 25, 1939, 10.

⁶⁸¹ *LAT*, Nov. 21, 1940, A1.

⁶⁸² A testimonial presented to Joseph Belcher Mills, J.L. Hudson Company, January 1944. Box 17, William L Bird Holidays on Display (ACNMAH 1288). SNAHM, Washington, DC.

While these department stores were obviously geared toward a profit motive, they did not want this aim to shine through too obviously to the public watching their parades. Instead, the events were supposed to be about something else, a larger sense of the Christmas spirit, wonder, and fantasy.

The parade season for 1941 came before the attack on Pearl Harbor as most parades took place over the Thanksgiving weekend in late November. That year, the Los Angeles parade featured live horses, lions, tigers, elephants, zebras, and monkeys, along with Santa still riding in his rocket ship from the year before.⁶⁸³ Perhaps as an ominous warning of what was to come, the giant helium-filled rubber balloon Santa that was to usher in the Macy's parade collapsed just before the start and had to be carted off in a truck. The rest of the parade went fairly smoothly despite the sweltering temperature, which perhaps was what led to the demise of rubber Santa.⁶⁸⁴ According to the *Pittsburgh Press*, the Christmas parade of November 1941 was a chance to “forget the war abroad and strikes at home.”⁶⁸⁵ The newspaper had a front-page image of Santa Claus high atop his parade float, complete with constructed reindeer. Hundreds of people packed the sidewalks to enjoy the festivities. An adjoining article noted how little concern the parade seemed to have for the war abroad, and considering its motive to act as a distraction some might have seen this as a success. While there were symbols of patriotism in some of the parades, generally this was not the highlight of these kinds of events.

By the 1942 season, community leaders made dramatic changes to these parades for an array of reasons. First and foremost were material and labor shortages. Parades, especially the large metropolitan ones like Macy's, required considerable material to construct the floats and balloons, as well as the personnel needed to organize beforehand and supervise the day of the parade. Macy's canceled its parade and instead sacrificed the materials to the war effort. Jack Straus, the parade organizer, presented the helium balloons to the Mayor of New York City, Fiorello La Guardia, for a rubber scrap drive in

⁶⁸³ “Parade Opens Yule Season,” *LAT*, Nov. 20, 1941, A1.

⁶⁸⁴ “Santa Still No. 1 to Small Fry,” *NYT*, Nov. 21, 1941, 12.

⁶⁸⁵ *The Pittsburgh Press* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), Nov. 22, 1941, 1.

a symbolic display of corporate patriotism in 1942. Macy's stated that generally approximately 3,000 police officers were needed to manage the parade route, but in a time of war, this would have led to the endangerment of vital points in the city, such as docks and warehouses, that these men were needed to protect. Furthermore, canceling the parade would conserve gasoline and rubber, and according to Straus, "today these trucks and their tires are practically irreplaceable. To use them for any other purpose than the delivery of merchandise would be wasteful."⁶⁸⁶ Moreover, in addition to the scrap donations Macy's vowed to halt the great tradition of the parade until America had won victory, further indicating a unity of purpose between the corporation and the state.

In Chicago, Santa's elaborate pre-war entrance aboard an airplane was toned down. In 1942, he made a "patriotic entrance" to the shopping district in a decorated wagon hitched to six champion draft horses. His downgrade from airplane to wagon was framed in patriotic terms: "Santa is keeping the airlines open for Uncle Sam."⁶⁸⁷ An article from December 1943 commented that the "Christmas season finds Hollywood Boulevard looking like a ghost town compared with its brilliantly lighted Santa Claus lane of previous years."⁶⁸⁸ The article went on to explain that this was because the city had donated the brightly lit metal Christmas trees used before the war to a scrap metal drive. However, this did not mean the spirit of Christmas was sacrificed to the war effort entirely, as the author described how the community came together to replace the metal trees with papier-maché Santas to line the boulevard instead. Furthermore, even though the author pointed out that the Santa Claus parade itself had been one "cooked up by merchants" to get people into the streets to shop, now it had taken on new meaning: to keep morale up and remind people of the good old days. This was a common purpose that reappeared consistently during the holiday season as people looked for deeper meaning in their traditions, and tried to understand why they felt compelled to continue them despite

⁶⁸⁶ "No More Parades – 'til Victory!" R.H. Macy & Co., *Sparks Magazine*, edited by Ruth Moore (New York), Dec. 1942. Box 6, William L. Bird Holidays on Display Collection (ACNMAH 1288). SNMAH, Washington DC.

⁶⁸⁷ "Santa Arrives and Wishes All a Patriotic Yule," *CDT*, Dec. 15, 1942, 3.

⁶⁸⁸ Helda Hopper, "Untitled," *The Pittsburgh Press* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), Dec. 20, 1943, 23.

the calls to subsume everything to the war effort. Materials from parades were often donated to the war effort in patriotic shows of support, again indicating the primary purpose of the parade as a public relations tool but also fitting with the search for sentimentality. Similarly, while many were scaled down, there was no intention to eliminate or halt the Christmas retail trade these parades were meant to support and encourage. Even though Macy's canceled its parade, its toy departments were still decked for Santa and its window displays, another powerful tool to draw consumers in, continued throughout the war. Ultimately, the sacrifices these parades did make indicated to the community a need to conform the rituals of Christmas to wartime measures, the importance of a public display of patriotic support, and again that the power of consumer culture was something even the war could not fully overshadow.

Trees and Lights

Much like parades, Christmas trees and lighting displays were often used to entice people into retail districts. However, tree-lighting ceremonies had a powerful community-building function as well. As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the first community tree erected in America was in New York City's Madison Square Park in 1912. Important to note about this community tree was that it was put up purposely in the park so that "everybody, rich or poor" could experience the tree and that also the "musical program planned for the lighting ceremonies on Christmas Eve were absolutely free."⁶⁸⁹ The domestic rituals of lighting the tree and singing carols were successfully transported out of the home and into the public sphere. But what purpose did it serve? By bringing the rich and the poor together, it could offer a symbol of class unity, consequently heightening a communal harmony. Interestingly, Jacob Riis, an immigrant in New York who famously wrote *How the Other Half Lives* in 1892, was also the author of *Is There a Santa Claus?* in 1904. In this Christmas tale he ruminates about all the good things he has witnessed done in the name of Christmas that, according to him, must ultimately prove there is a Santa Claus. Riis stated that community Christmas trees were what the big cities needed to bring together rich and poor and to alleviate some of the

⁶⁸⁹ Marling, *Merry Christmas!*, 181.

loneliness or longing that the holiday could bring on if one did not have the finances or the family to enjoy it to the fullest.⁶⁹⁰ While parades and store Santas could potentially inspire class discontent because of the extravagant displays of wealth and corporate power, trees were more of a show of the fruits of the nation and the great bounty of nature available to be enjoyed by all.

By the mid-twentieth century, community trees functioned both in this way and much like parades, as a draw for consumers. The famous tree in Rockefeller Center has been an annual establishment since 1933. In the 1930s, all-blue light displays were common for community trees across the nation and took on the somber tone of the Great Depression.⁶⁹¹ In the immediate pre-war years, with the American economy starting to revive itself through defense production, more commercial community trees began to emerge in department stores: for example, the first indoor tree at Marshall Field in 1938. Both the Rockefeller and the Marshall Field trees represent an interesting blend of the community-building project that the 1912 Madison Square tree initiated and the interjection of corporations into public life that had emerged alongside the rise of consumer culture more broadly.

Christmas community displays were extensive and heavily organized in the years before the war. In Hartford, Connecticut, the Chamber of Commerce had determined “Of some 100,000 feet in the city where Christmas lighting might be erected, 84,000 feet were covered last year, an area expected to be equalled or better this year” (1939).⁶⁹² The more lighting that could be set up, the better. Community Christmas displays could also incorporate private homes into the festivities. In Atlanta, the Junior Chamber of Commerce not only planned the downtown lighting displays for the major retail streets, but it also set up a home-lighting contest that awarded prizes to the most elaborate displays.⁶⁹³ There was a sense generally that “citizens [gave] hearty approval to

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid, 184.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid, 188.

⁶⁹² *HC*, Nov. 8, 1939, 13.

⁶⁹³ “Christmas Lights to Enliven Streets,” *AC*, Oct. 26, 1939, 5K.

decorative lighting projects” and as such the “public expects and looks forward to [them] each year.”⁶⁹⁴ Regardless of this fact, merchants were aware that they were particularly powerful as business draws. *Boxoffice*, a trade journal for the theatre industry, advocated the importance of gaily decked theatres during the holiday season: “something showmen have found to be excellent business practice... Christmas decorations do much to encourage the ‘come again’ spirit.”⁶⁹⁵ The commercial aspect of these displays was clear. By the eve of war, while the public had come to appreciate and even expect them, and was keen to participate in them, they worked to draw people into public spaces with the purpose of encouraging consumption, along with community-building.

The National Christmas Tree at the White House represents the community-building function on a national scale. The tradition began in 1923 under President Coolidge, who was approached by numerous parties hoping to establish a national tree. A 60-foot fir from the Coolidges’ home state was illuminated with 3,000 lights on Christmas Eve. President Roosevelt, himself a tree-farmer, had two spruces planted outside the White House to take turns serving as living National Christmas Trees every other year. In 1941, FDR rededicated the National Tree and against an imposed blackout on the city continued with the Christmas Eve lighting ceremony where both he and Winston Churchill addressed the nation.⁶⁹⁶ Fighting a war based on ideals required symbols of those ideals and the lighted Christmas tree, a symbol of material prosperity, generosity, and hope for a better future, provided a powerful symbol to the nation and to the world of what was to come if America and her Allies were successful in their quest for victory.

War abroad brought a renewed symbolism to the community Christmas display, especially lighting displays which represented lightness in a darkened world. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, “Christmas Lights Symbolize Peace in America.”⁶⁹⁷ It

⁶⁹⁴ “Christmas Lighting Cultivates Good Will,” *Boxoffice*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Dec 07, 1940), 46.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ Marling, *Merry Christmas!*, 186; Weintraub, *Pearl Harbor Christmas*, 77. Brian Murray, “Christmas Lights and Community Building in America,” *Yale College*, <https://historymatters.appstate.edu/sites/historymatters.appstate.edu/files/christmaslights.pdf>

⁶⁹⁷ *CSM*, Dec. 23, 1940, 9.

reported on displays in New England area, commercial and private. Reportedly, there was a movement gaining headway in the region and spreading throughout the country “for making Christmas Eve bright with light as a symbol of the freedom of America.”⁶⁹⁸ The Governor of Massachusetts contrasted the fear and blackouts abroad with liberty and light at home. He urged people to “let our Christmas lighting be an expression of our conviction that we have something to be deeply grateful for in the privilege of being an American and living the lives of free men in America.”⁶⁹⁹ Christmas lights could serve as a powerful symbol of what it meant to be an American. The sentiments regarding community-building were extended across the nation and in a sense, their meaning was meant to be broadcast to the rest of the world.

In 1941, communities across the country had already planned and erected many of their lighting displays before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Even still, war preparations and precautions such as restrictions on power and materials did have some effect on plans that year. In the Southeast, a blackout had been put into place to reduce electricity strains that had been heightened because of defense production in the area. The Chief of the Office of Production Management’s power branch, J.A. Krug, announced – before the outbreak of war – that these bans would be lifted on December 15 to ensure “a bright and merry Yuletide.”⁷⁰⁰ After Pearl Harbor, some cities maintained their public and private displays. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* detailed the displays across Southern California, stating that “nowhere else in this country do citizens take so much pride in their Christmas decorations.”⁷⁰¹ The acting Mayor of New York City, Newbold Morris, stated there would be “no blackout of Christmas cheer in New York” at the lighting of the Christmas tree in City Hall Park.⁷⁰² In contrast, the *Hartford Courant* reported that its community had fewer lighting displays. It noted how complicated procedures in the event of a blackout were a leading reason for the reduction of several outdoor private displays.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ “OPM Promises Lights for Yule,” *AC*, Nov. 25, 1941, 20.

⁷⁰¹ “Santa Claus Lane Shines Again,” *LAT*, Dec. 14, 1941, E1.

⁷⁰² “Yule Carols Sung in Rockefeller City,” *NYT*, Dec. 20, 1941, 15.

However, community lights that remained lit received a lot of compliments and the paper was quick to note how there appeared to be no shortage of Christmas lights within people's homes. Additionally they reported a heightened display of patriotism as there was an increase in a red, white, and blue color schemes.⁷⁰³ It seemed important to the paper to convey to readers that the lights of Christmas were still on and that keeping them on was tied to people's sense of commitment to the nation and their community. The small town of Quitman, Georgia decided to donate all the money normally spent on Christmas lights and décor for the downtown to the Red Cross. A unanimous vote from the city commission confirmed this and followed the example of the town's Women's Club, which had donated the prize money for the annual lighting contest to the same cause the week before.⁷⁰⁴ Perhaps the smaller towns could more easily sacrifice their community displays to the nation because they already possessed a stronger sense of community than the larger metropolitan areas of Los Angeles and New York City. Additionally, a common thread between the bulk of these varied responses remained some form of commitment to the patriotic ideal in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

By 1942, however, the trend of dimming the lights and donating the funds had become considerably more widespread in communities across the nation. The War Production Board had not banned outdoor lighting outright, except in certain areas with high power needs or increased security concerns, and yet still many communities conformed to their request to make reductions. New York City had an outright ban, so Mayor LaGuardia symbolically lit the City Hall tree for one evening only.⁷⁰⁵ In Chicago, the Chamber of Commerce decided that no outdoor decorative lighting would be used and instead merchants would brighten their own windows however they saw fit. They also chose to discontinue outdoor lighting contests for those in the area.⁷⁰⁶ Similar reports were coming out of New England, Atlanta, and California. Hartford, Connecticut, lit up its shopping district for one day only, the first shopping night of the season, as a symbolic last light for

⁷⁰³ "Yule Lights are Fewer this Season," *HC*, Dec. 25, 1941, 32.

⁷⁰⁴ Edna Cain Daniel, "Yule Fund Goes to Red Cross," *AC*, Dec. 17, 1941, 11.

⁷⁰⁵ *NYT*, Dec. 22, 1942, 2.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

the duration of the war and a symbolic indication of the centrality of consumerism.⁷⁰⁷ There is a sense that due to the important symbolism of light, it could not be dimmed entirely and instead each community sought to reduce its lighting but still allowed for times when the community could come together in the Christmas spirit of both patriotism and consumerism.

Just because the lights were out did not mean community festivities were also on hold. Even though a blackout order had darkened streets and squares and prevented the celebration of midnight mass in Boston, and the community had not made any definite arrangements otherwise, carol singers joined each other on Beacon Hill and at city churches to celebrate “the traditional observance of many of the customs handed down through the years.”⁷⁰⁸ In Alhambra, California, the Chamber of Commerce made more official plans as it organized the streets of the business district to be “decorated with music” by eleven church choirs.⁷⁰⁹ Even in the face of war, if the lights could not be turned on, then people would find another way to express and enjoy the Christmas season and a common way to do that was through a similarly shared tradition – Christmas carols.

As the war progressed, communities across America continued to show commitment to maintaining the traditions of the season in the face of growing regulations and material restrictions. While the public was urged to “confine ornamental Christmas lighting to the Christmas trees inside private homes” by the WPB, this did not mean an end to community Christmas ceremonies.⁷¹⁰ The importance of upholding the symbols of Christmas, tied to America’s history and commitment to liberty and charity, were clear and therefore had to be maintained in other forms. Santa Claus, Indiana, continued its tradition of postmarking mail, and in 1943 received over one million pieces, many of them children’s letters to Santa. With considerable effort, the American Legion provided

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁸ *BG*, Dec. 24 1942, 1.

⁷⁰⁹ “Carols Ring out in Alhambra,” *LAT*, Dec. 20, 1942, A6.

⁷¹⁰ “Public Asked to Limit Christmas Lighting,” *BG*, Nov. 4, 1943, 14. “Victory Forum,” *BG*, Dec. 22, 1943, 7.

responses for these children.⁷¹¹ While the municipal tree of Sparta, Georgia, could not be lighted because of the ban and a shortage of materials, the community instead held a carol service inside the school auditorium as a replacement for the community lighting ceremony that had become a beloved tradition in the previous years.⁷¹² The Washington Square Association in New York opted for white plastic spheres on its tree, as opposed to previous years when it had illuminated the tree. In 1943, it moved the Christmas Eve carol singing to earlier in the evening and coordinated with the commissioner of the city's Water Supply, Gas, and Electricity Department to increase the illumination of the street and park lights so that people who came would still be able to read the words of the carol books.⁷¹³ People conformed to wartime regulations, but they refused to accept the top-down rules as an all-out ban. Ingenuity and creativity sparked unique ways to maintain the traditions of the community. Larger cities were slower to adapt to the changes or sacrifice their celebrations in the name of war entirely. Smaller communities were quicker to redact their Christmas festivities for wartime needs, perhaps because their sense of community was less dependent on these events, and also because they had fewer regulations and organizational issues to deal with when making such changes. Ultimately, these community Christmas celebrations lived on because the people who came together to celebrate believed they were intimately tied to key aspects of the American identity and therefore had to be upheld in some way throughout the war.

Charity

The ambiance created by special events and accompanying décor compelled people to act differently than they might at other times of the year.⁷¹⁴ 'Cousin Eve' told the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, "What I liked best this year were the Christmas trees, a blazing trail along the north shore, and even in the gray avenues of our town. And the gallant carolers in

⁷¹¹ *SandS London*, Dec. 23 1942, 3.

⁷¹² "No Yule Trees," *AC*, Dec. 20, 1943, 15.

⁷¹³ Neighborhood Meeting - Annual Meeting, Secretary Report, 1943 and 1944. Box 3, Series 1, Records of the Washington Square Association (MC94). NYU, New York City, NY.

⁷¹⁴ Restad, *Christmas in America*, 157.

ancient attire, high hats, high stocks, lanterns, and sticks, like London days gone by.”⁷¹⁵ The hustle and bustle of the city, combined with the supposed timeless tradition of goodwill and charity that Christmas was supposed to represent, allowed people to reflect on their past and try and aspire to a better present. One commentator in the *Hartford Courant* on December 25, 1939, wrote “There was no alternative but to feel the spirit of the season. No involuntary action on my part could have fought off the happiness around me. Even the little old woman by my side toddled her way along merrily. She was very poorly clad. Taking her arm, I helped her make her crossing. When we mounted the curb on the other side, she looked up at me, thanked me, and bid me ‘Merry Christmas, Mister.’”⁷¹⁶ People were inclined to reach out and help one another in ways that might seem too intrusive at other times of the year. The adoption of Christmas imagery into many communities shaped the public space and altered the behavior of the people who came into contact with it.

Many Christmas decorations attempt to show bounty and warmth, for example, trees and lights contrast against the cold and dark winter. Perhaps because of this juxtaposition, Christmas provides a particular moment to consider the needy of the community especially. There were numerous municipal organizations involved in charitable projects that focused particularly on festive events and activities for the less fortunate. One of the more prominent were drives to ensure needy children in the city did not feel neglected at Christmas. There were programs for people to donate old toys to be repaired, often by the city’s fire or police departments. In New York City in 1938, 112,873 toys were donated, repaired, and repainted by members of both departments according to John H. Morris, Sixth Deputy Police Commissioner.⁷¹⁷ Other events of the pre-war years included banquets and parties. In Los Angeles, 2,500 homeless men were served a turkey dinner on Christmas Day 1940, and the South Boston area received more than 500 pounds of

⁷¹⁵ Cousin Eve, “untitled,” *CDT*, Jan. 1 1939, C4.

⁷¹⁶ *HC*, Dec. 25, 1939, 14.

⁷¹⁷ “Every Day Christmas for Needy Children,” *CDT*, Jan. 14, 1939, 12. “Thanks Donors of Toys: Police Official Grateful,” *NYT*, Jan. 2, 1939, 23. “Firemen Seek Toys for Needy,” *WP*, Sept, 23, 1939, 28.

turkey to be distributed with toys and gifts to needy families in the area.⁷¹⁸ Christmas may be the holiday of peace and goodwill, but as has been established, consumption and abundance are key factors in the way people felt compelled to celebrate. There was something particularly disheartening to people that less fortunate members of their community might not be able to celebrate Christmas in some way and so those who saw themselves as more fortunate put significant effort into ensuring all could experience the joys of the season. It also provided a safe way to assuage the guilt of those who were more fortunate without them having to do anything to alter the structural forces that allowed this inequality to happen in the first place.

Even with the needs of war, material and labor shortages, many of these programs continued to operate. In 1942, the *Hartford Courant* reported that the city had 7,000 toys ready for distribution to the area's needy children.⁷¹⁹ In Chicago, the Salvation Army's family service bureau hosted five parties for the needy, each with a Santa Claus, a tree, fruit, candy, and toys for all the children. There was also carol-singing and entertainers, like magicians and ventriloquists.⁷²⁰ In some ways, these organizations attempted to establish an adjacent form of community that would support the needs of the individual as opposed to the civic community, which had become heavily focused on consumerism by the mid-twentieth century.

The larger change in wartime charitable trends was a shift of focus away from the needs of the immediate community and towards the rest of the world. This attention to foreign aid could take many forms. General support for troops overseas, for prisoners of war, or for those injured or hospitalized abroad was particularly strong during the holiday season. The desire to be home for the holidays and the distance and dire circumstances these groups particularly faced made them the objects of charitable interventions. It is important to note that it was not just for the holidays and not just when America was at

⁷¹⁸ *CSM*, Dec. 21, 1940, 1. *LAT*, Dec. 22, 1940, A1.

⁷¹⁹ "Just Before Christmas Good Little Toys Get All Fixed Up," *CSM*, Dec. 19, 1939, 3. *NYT*, Nov. 5, 1939, 47. "Santa Claus Shop Makes Bid for Toys," *HC*, Nov. 23, 1942, 4. "City has 7000 WPA Toys for Yule Distribution," *HC*, Dec. 17, 1942, 4.

⁷²⁰ "Salvation Army to Cheer Needy at Yule Parties," *CDT*, Dec. 20, 1942, W3.

war itself that the people of the nation supported international aid. The American National Red Cross donated over \$12 million from its funds and \$21 million in government funds to foreign war relief between Sept. 1, 1939, and June 30, 1941. It also produced and shipped an estimated \$13.6 million worth of supplies, including 25,200,000 surgical dressings and 4,900,000 other chapter-produced articles, principally clothing.⁷²¹ However, once America fully mobilized with so many servicemen overseas, the previous effort to send a Christmas bag to every soldier or sailor had to be abandoned and instead only the sick and those in the most remote military posts received the bags.⁷²² Even though the Red Cross halted this particular program, Americans significantly stepped up their efforts in coordination with the Red Cross in other ways, including sending plasma, bandages, and numerous other necessary supplies.⁷²³

While each serviceman or woman may not have received something individually, on the whole, they were not totally neglected either. Both at home and overseas, Red Cross clubs, rest stops, recreation halls, and hospitals put on thousands of Christmas parties. In 1944, they distributed over 4,500 kits with which to decorate for such parties. These were supplemented by an additional 5,000 kits with less extensive decorations made by the Junior Red Cross. Members of the Junior Red Cross that year had also made an astonishing 550,000 menu covers for Christmas use, indicating the symbolic value Christmas held for all of those involved. 150,000 gift boxes for war-impooverished foreign children were put together, containing games, school material, toiletries, sewing equipment, and candy, which were distributed by American Red Cross service club parities held for such children.⁷²⁴ Wherever possible canteen corps volunteers served turkey, plum pudding, baked ham, and all the trimmings to Americans away from home

⁷²¹ "A Review of Foreign War Relief Operations," Booklet, Sept. 1, 1939 to June 30, 1941. Box 711, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁷²² Letter from Eula B. Stokely, Director of Volunteer Service for the Midwestern Area to Volunteer Service Chairman, Mar. 5, 1940. Box 672, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁷²³ "Plasma as Gift for Christmas via Red Cross," *AC*, Dec. 1, 1943, 10. "Women's Activities," *LAT*, Dec. 17, 1942, A5. Letter from Eula B. Stokely, Director of Volunteer Service for the Midwestern Area to Volunteer Service Chairman, Mar. 5, 1940. Box 672, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁷²⁴ This will be discussed in greater detail, especially in the English context, with the case study of Americans in England in Chapter Five.

on Christmas Day. The Red Cross motor corps transported trees, carolers, and able-bodied servicemen to Christmas parties around the world.⁷²⁵ Every attempt was made on the part of the Red Cross to ensure that even though personnel were away from home, on the move, or bedridden they too would experience the joy of Christmas. There was an overarching drive to transplant the traditional American Christmas – food and festivities – to wherever Americans found themselves throughout the world in the midst of World War II.

While the American Red Cross actively worked to provide joyous Christmas celebrations for Americans and others in war-torn areas, one of the groups the organization focused most on during the holiday season was injured and hospitalized American members of the armed forces. After the suspension of the universal Christmas stocking program, the Red Cross directed its attention to these people who were stuck in hospitals due to war injuries. In 1942, Red Cross workers provided Christmas packages for every overseas hospitalized serviceman containing cigarettes, playing cards, and other locally secured items. They also made extensive local plans for the Christmas holidays, including parties, décor, entertainment, and carol-singing – “no effort will be spared to make it a Merry Christmas.”⁷²⁶ Extensive guidelines were produced to ensure that Red Cross workers on the ground would be able to arrange Christmas celebrations in their local hospitals. These guidelines included who to solicit for advice, which personnel should assist, and special authorizations that they might have to request. Care was taken to ensure that the greeting cards, gifts, and the menu covers made by the Junior Red Cross found their way into these celebrations too.⁷²⁷ A considerable degree of coordination was required with hospital personnel (to ensure patients did not gain access to things that could be detrimental to their care, such as particular foods or possible weapons), with Army or

⁷²⁵ “American Red Cross Christmas Activities,” Press Release, Nov. 1944. Box 980, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁷²⁶ Letter from Wm. Carl Hunt, Manager, to Eastern Area Chapter Chairman, Oct. 27, 1942. Box 672, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁷²⁷ Letter from J.H. Whiting, Director of Military and Welfare Service to Field Directors, Assistant Field Directors, Sub-Offices Assistant Field Directors at Station Hospitals, Oct. 21, 1942. Box 672, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

Navy personnel (who were often commanders of the hospital itself, and supplied certain resources like the Christmas tree), and within the Red Cross itself (to secure the items from the Junior Red Cross and other supplies donated from chapters across the country). This was a considerable undertaking but one that all these groups and the volunteer citizens who participated in them deemed necessary, even in a time of war. Care for the sick and injured, while important generally, took on a deeper meaning during the holiday season as these individuals had sacrificed their bodies, and almost their lives, to secure the ideals embodied within Americans' conception of Christmas, most notably freedom, capitalism, individualism, and democracy.

Corporate America was involved in these efforts as well. The greeting card industry donated over one million Christmas cards for use in military hospitals in 1944 and 1945. Red Cross workers helped those who were unable to write and address such cards to send home to loved ones for the holidays. While the charitable aspect of this donation is evident, it also served as a very useful public relations move on the part of the Red Cross and the greeting card industry. Newsreels and recordings were made to show how the project was carried out because "though this personal interest and cooperation the Greeting Card Industry wins the respect of public spirit officials of such great organizations as the American Red Cross, the Post Office Department and many other government and civic groups."⁷²⁸ Similar to the way parades and lighting displays functioned to establish a connection between the corporation and the individual, this program worked to form a bond between the business community, charitable associations, and the American public. Cards were powerful transmitters of meaning as people who could become volunteers for the Red Cross might do so after they were recipients of these cards from their injured loved ones. Christmas was a valuable symbolic tool for corporations, as well as charities.

⁷²⁸ The Greeting Card Industry News Letter (to all members of the greeting card industry) Vol. 3, No. 35, Nov. 22, 1944. Box 673, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD. Letter from Chauncey L. Brown the Deputy Director to Area Directors and Camp Hospital Council Service, Aug. 14, 1945 and Oct. 18, 1945. Box 673 and 371, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

While the war was over by Christmas 1945, it certainly did not mean an end to the work of the American Red Cross, especially in relation to work with injured servicemen and military hospitals. Organized at the national level, each patient that year received a Christmas gift, and each hospital would continue to be supplied with festive decorations and entertainment.⁷²⁹ Generally, what was supplied were consumer goods – individual gifts including “double photo-folders, salted mixed nuts, hard candy, a humidifier tobacco pouch, a miniature world atlas, an address book, table calendar, handkerchief, six correspondence cards, Christmas wrapping paper, and five yards of red or green Christmas ribbon.”⁷³⁰ The wrapping paper and ribbon provided to hospitalized servicemen allowed them to send festive gifts to their loved ones as well. The decoration kits included “a little of everything -- Christmas tree trimmings such as tinsel, icicles, and gaily colored tree balls; Christmas wrappings, ribbons, gold and silver paint with brushes, and many other items. Christmas carols have not been forgotten. In each kit are phonograph records of all the familiar carols, and a complete album of Dickens' Christmas Carol.”⁷³¹ Largely secular, these kits separated the religious elements of the holiday from the supplies they distributed. The sending of these packages continued into 1946, and the Red Cross expanded the program to cover servicemen overseas, especially those still serving occupation areas. These efforts were for outside recognition as much as they were meant for those they hoped to cheer. Publicity, through magazine articles, pictures, and radio, was used to inform the American public, to solicit donations, and to encourage continued volunteer support for the organization. The Red Cross extended these efforts to individuals who were separated from their domestic American communities over the holiday season and the publicity these actions generated presented an image to the American people at home of what was required to create an ersatz American community Christmas abroad and the important work charities were doing to achieve this.

⁷²⁹ Letter from Administrator of the Services to the Armed Forces to Field Directors of General Hospitals, Nov. 6, 1945. Box 980, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁷³⁰ “Christmas Projects,” Radio Fact Sheet, undated. Box 31, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁷³¹ Ibid.

Civilian-Military Connection

One of the largest differences in wartime in terms of charitable activities within the community was the attention devoted to servicemen. People's hearts went out to those in the armed forces, especially at Christmas, as they could not return and spend the holiday with their loved ones. Accordingly, numerous organizations shifted or added them to their focus. In areas with a high concentration servicemen, this was even more the case. It was in these areas too that the influx of men had disrupted the normal sense of community, so locals needed to give more attention to maintaining the communal feel necessary to holding the nation together in a time of war. In Chicago, "emphasis is on the servicemen, and the city's service clubs will be the center of much activity."⁷³² Parties were scheduled, and it was hoped that with enough entertainment the men, lonesome and far from home, would forget their woes and find some enjoyment in the season's festivities. Community Christmas celebrations in wartime provided a powerful moment to connect the public to the military, to solidify the former's support of the war effort, and to reinforce the morale of both service personnel and civilians.

Christmas, through its shared rituals and the longing for a particular sense of home, created a powerful moment during the war years to connect the public to the military and shape a virtual sense of community among people who had been forced together by wartime realities. This connection helped to bolster morale and public support for the war as a deeper sense of community encouraged people to follow the rules and make the sacrifices necessary for victory. Even before Pearl Harbor, Christmas offered an opportunity to break down the divide between military and civilian. In Los Angeles Harbor, on Christmas Eve 1938, approximately 2,000 children from welfare organizations in the city were guests aboard the naval ships docked there. There was an elaborate dinner and all the children in attendance received a gift.⁷³³ Similarly, many former servicemen and auxiliary groups hosted parties for the holidays, often to raise

⁷³² "Yule Festivities Numerous for Men in Service," *CDT*, Dec. 23, 1943, 13.

⁷³³ "Naval Christmas," *CSM*, Jan. 21, 1939, 17.

funds to aid veterans or their children.⁷³⁴ After 1941, this trend continued when possible, often creating a curious Christmas blending of merriment and militarism.

Some areas saw dramatic population changes as thousands of people moved around the country for various forms of war work. In such areas, the number of servicemen significantly affected the local population, so something had to be done to keep these individuals content and decrease their possible feelings of displacement or disillusionment. Much of the entertainment for servicemen was organized at the local level. Communities and individuals were encouraged to give to servicemen in their midst, host and attend parties held for them, and even invite them into their own homes for the holiday season in an effort to foster a sense of community between them. The War Department refrained from setting up elaborate entertainment and recreation programs on a national scale. While it “assume[d] full responsibility for the maintenance and provision of all entertainment and recreation on military reservations, it [was] most desirable that civilian groups should supply appropriate facilities in neighboring communities.”⁷³⁵ Enlisting civilians in the process, the government hoped, would make them feel connected to the military and was done under the auspices of the importance of entertainment for soldier morale, especially true in the case of Christmas. A memo on the subject of Christmas activities from the Chief of the Morale Branch of the War Department to the Adjutant General stated that “there is no other time in the year when men away from home miss their associations more than at this season. Because this concerns the state of mind and contentment of a soldier, it is a morale problem. Many men will be spending Christmas away from home for the first time, and it is of extreme importance that the season be utilized to contribute a spirit of contentment to the entire Army and to knit closer the ties which already exist between the Army and the civilian communities.”⁷³⁶ The memo went on to recommend decorations, menus as possible

⁷³⁴ “Military and Naval Dances and Sales for Holiday Funds,” *BG*, Dec. 10, 1939, D7.

⁷³⁵ Draft of Proposed Letter to Commanding Officer of All Armies, Army Corps, and Corps Areas, undated. Box 24, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁷³⁶ Memo “Christmas Holiday Activities,” for the Adjutant General from W.H. Draper Jr. Colonel, Acting Chief of the Morale Branch for the Infantry, Nov. 25, 1941. Box 24, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

souvenirs, Christmas trees, home letters, specially made unit Christmas cards, and invitations to civilians to the reservation, noting it “should be made a pleasant one so they will receive a favorable impression of Army life.”⁷³⁷ Evident here is not only the clear realization that Christmas celebrations could serve an important morale function but also that they could establish positive relations between troops and neighboring communities, operating in a similar public relations function to community Christmas parades and events hosted by corporations and business leaders.

Servicemen did notice and enjoy the entertainment that was put on for them. In many cases, they told their families just how much they appreciated the effort, which further established a link between the public and the military through a sense of shared activities. It also created a positive perception of military life in the eyes of more distant civilians. Dewayne Lungden, a soldier stationed in Miami, Florida, wrote to his wife Bertha that while he “hope[ed] next year we will be together again I just got finished eating my Christmas Dinner. I hope you had one as good as I did. We had turkey and all the trimmings to go with it. We all got a Christmas box from the Red Cross... Everything here is made to look like Christmas.”⁷³⁸ There is a sense that Dewayne was able to experience a happy Christmas even though he was separated from his wife. While he wished they could be together, there is a sense that because both were participating in and enjoying the same traditions, Christmas could still provide a powerful boost for morale.

The connection between the public and the military was also strengthened through the actions of the public. To take Chicago as an example, as there were many nearby bases and members of the armed forces frequented the city often, numerous efforts were undertaken by the community to ‘give’ those servicemen a merry Christmas. Donations were one way the public sought to do this. Chicago high school workshops made more than 10,000 games for men at Fort Sheridan and Great Lakes Naval Training Station, including darts, ring toss, checkers, chess, backgammon, and more. Similarly, a women’s

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Letter from Dewayne Lungden to Bertha Lungden, Dec. 25, 1943. Box 3, Dewayne Lungden Papers (MS393). NYHS, New York City, NY.

organization called Bundles for Bluejackets worked to fill gift stockings for all of the 10,500 sailors in the area.⁷³⁹ In 1942, Chicago donated its State Street decorations to three of the city's servicemen's centers and members of the Drapery, Window Shade, and Tapestry Decorator's Union, Local 17, donated their services to help hang the decorations for the men.⁷⁴⁰ With so many men of the community far from their homes, the Riverside area of Chicago's servicemen's committee put together a year-long project in 1944 to remind the men of their hometown at Christmas. Community members took photographs throughout the year of children playing in familiar parts of town and of other local landmarks. These were put together in a Christmas card bearing the words "Your neighbors and friends back home wish that a fervent handclasp accompany this greeting to indicate how earnest are our best wishes for you and hopes for a speedy return."⁷⁴¹ This project indicates the importance that people placed on the community at Christmas throughout the year.

Communities hosting Christmas parties for service personnel also enhanced interactions between civilian and military personnel more generally. In New York City, the local Defense Recreation Committee coordinated with hotels, restaurants, and nightclubs to put on feasts and festivities for more than 6,000 men for Christmas, 1942.⁷⁴² The same year, St. Petersburg, Florida, announced on the radio that it had "turned from a tourist city to a military camp and we like it."⁷⁴³ In the years before the war, its hotels had catered to tourists from the North, and now they were being used as training centers for military personnel. Regardless of the shift, the hotels and the citizens of the community still endeavored to host the same kinds of Christmas parties for the military men as they had for the tourists in years gone by in an effort to reorient the community to fit the

⁷³⁹ "Fort Sheridan Soldiers Will Get Yule," *CDT*, Nov. 21, 1943, N5.

⁷⁴⁰ "Soldiers to Get State Street's Yule Garlands," *CDT*, Dec. 19, 1942, 3.

⁷⁴¹ "Main St. Goes Afar to Cheer Fighters' Yule," *CDT*, Dec. 17, 1944, W1.

⁷⁴² Sunday Broadcast, Dec. 20, 1942. Doc#001555, Roll 11, Office of the Mayor (Fiorello H. LaGuardia) Subject Files 1933-1945. NYCMA, New York City, NY.

⁷⁴³ Burl McCarty, Christmas Greetings from St. Petersburg Florida, Dec. 19, 1942. Side A, R10, LWO 5554 GR9, Sound Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

contemporary reality.⁷⁴⁴ In Chicago, the Mayor and his wife estimated that 21,300 men would be entertained for Christmas in the city's community centers in 1943, and they vowed to make every effort "to provide holiday hospitality through a series of parties."⁷⁴⁵ Special theatre shows, dinners, and other events were also planned throughout the city. By 1944, that number was more than 100,000 in Chicago, and it required more than 2,000 women volunteers to host the parties, working tirelessly to "create a more homelike atmosphere for servicemen and women spending holiday leaves in Chicago."⁷⁴⁶ Communities, and the individuals that constituted them, took it upon themselves to entertain members of the armed forces stationed nearby or visiting their communities.⁷⁴⁷ A huge effort was undertaken to put on dinners and other forms of entertainment, often sacrificing their own homes for the morale of those on duty. They did this because they understood the cultural importance of Christmas and its ability to bring people together and distract both the troops and the public from the realities of their wartime experiences.

Those who did not sacrifice their Christmas celebrations at home to volunteer in community centers were called upon to invite servicemen into their private dwellings for Christmas. As was discussed in Chapter Three, this program eventually drew considerable support from the American public. In 1942, Washington had more hosts than individuals who were available for dinner. The same was true for men from Fort Sheridan and their prospective hosts in Chicago.⁷⁴⁸ Ultimately, these dinners, while they connected families with military personnel on an individual level, also sought to establish a sense of support between those personnel stationed in the area and the communities at

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ "Service Clubs to be Centers of Yule Cheer," *CDT*, Dec. 16, 1943, 40.

⁷⁴⁶ "Homesick Yanks will Find Happy Yule," *CDT*, Dec. 24, 1944, NW2.

⁷⁴⁷ "Many Parties Held in Chicago Area," *CDT*, Dec. 22, 1941, 22. "Big Yule Program for Servicemen," *NYT*, Dec. 23, 1941, 42. "Yule Fetes for Servicemen Planned," *WP*, Dec. 20, 1941. "City Ready to Mark Joy on Christmas," *LAT*, Dec. 25 1943, 1. "Yule Party Arranged for Servicemen," *WP*, Dec. 14, 1942, B4. "War Fund to Spread Cheer on Christmas," *NYT*, Dec. 19, 1943, 20. "Homesick Yanks Will Find Happy Yule," *CDT*, Dec. 24, 1944, NW2. "City an Open House for Wartime Yule," *NYT*, Dec. 25, 1943, 1. "City Goes All Out to Share Yule Joy," *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1941, 17.

⁷⁴⁸ "Hosts Exceed Warworkers in 'Share Homes' Yule Project," *WP*, Dec. 23, 1942, B1. "Yule Hosts, Lonesome Guests to Meet at Church Teas," *WP*, Dec. 5, 1943, M16. "Service Clubs to be Centers of Yule Cheer," *CDT*, Dec. 16, 1943, 40.

large. This connection not only indicated the importance of the holiday season but also the values it represented: charity, goodwill, and generosity. These ideas were presented as the essence of being an American and were used to encourage individuals to invite people they did not know, into their homes during one of the most cherished celebrations of the year to heighten the bonds of national community.

While the ties between military and civilian could be formed within private homes and parties held during the holiday season, this bond could also be established on a national level and short-waved to those abroad. With radio broadcasting, people around the world could listen to the same program and experience the same entertainment. Radio was able to collapse the distance separating communities.⁷⁴⁹ At Christmas, a time when people most wanted to be with their loved ones, the radio could function as a bridge between the home front and the war front. The sense that one might be listening to the same show or song was a powerful one and helped to improve morale and support for the war within the framework of Christmas' ideals.

A sense of community tradition was one of the things broadcasters tried to replicate in their programming. On Christmas Eve, 1941 "the universal language of yuletide music" went out from Boston, where roving microphones picked up carols sung on the streets of Beacon Hill and broadcast them to those in the western hemisphere and European countries, as a message of "greetings from a free America at war."⁷⁵⁰ Similarly, reporters speaking to those away from their homes often took time to describe what was happening in the country so that they too could feel like they were connected to their community's celebrations. They tried to establish common beliefs, such as this broadcast to Northwest Maritime Sailors, which stated: "our Christmas hasn't been the same as it has been in the past, we all realize that, but this Christmas we have the same fundamental reasons for

⁷⁴⁹ William C. Ackerman, "U.S. Radio: Record of a Decade," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol.12, No. 3, (Autumn 1948), 446.

⁷⁵⁰ "Boston Broadcasts Yule For Fighters," *HC*, Dec. 25, 1941, 11.

observing the day.”⁷⁵¹ That fundamental reason was to work together to eliminate the enemy to have a happier Christmas in the future.

Significant coordination was required to broadcast the same show to such a wide audience. The Office of War Information, the War Department, and the Hollywood Victory Committee worked with national networks and entertainers to secure performances.⁷⁵² In 1942, a “Victory Parade’s Christmas Party of Spotlight Bands” covered some 40,000 air miles on December 25th “to form a Yuletide link between thousands of servicemen and their homes.”⁷⁵³ In some cases, networks also worked to link members of the armed forces with their homes and families directly. In 1943, WMCA New York dedicated five hours to broadcasting radio messages from foreign areas in a globe-circling program which let servicemen get in touch with their hometowns. Through arrangements with AT&T and RCA communications, troops who were stationed in far-off places but had family in the New York area could send a personal message, and WMCA would give a recording of this greeting to their families for free.⁷⁵⁴ It is no surprise that these roving microphones could create a particularly sentimental atmosphere, with *Variety* magazine reporting “The things they said had the same poignant effect as their v-mail and provided throat-clogging listening.”⁷⁵⁵ Separated by great distances, radio provided a sense of connection that could not be attained in actuality; technology allowed for the formation of a virtual community. Through communal carol singing, distant broadcasts, and reports of what each other were doing for the season an ersatz community was formed based on the values of Christmas and worked to uphold the communal reasons why America was fighting the war.

⁷⁵¹ Northwest Maritime Christmas Greeting, Dec. 21, 1942. Side A, R 10, LWO 5554 GR9, Recorded Sound Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

⁷⁵² NBC Radio Broadcasting Index Cards, “Command Performance USA,” Dec. 24, 1942. Recorded Sound Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

⁷⁵³ “Bands Set for Gigantic Yule Party,” *WP*, Dec. 13, 1942, L4.

⁷⁵⁴ “WMCA HAS 5-HOUR CHRISTMAS PICKUP,” *Broadcasting, Broadcast Advertising*, Vol. 25, No. 26, (Dec 27, 1943), 38.

⁷⁵⁵ “Radio Review: ‘CHRISTMAS OVERSEAS’,” *Variety*, Vol. 153, No. 3, (Dec 29, 1943), 26.

Churches

Civic organizations, charitable groups, and communication networks played a large role in shaping people's perceptions of their community through the use of Christmas. The Church was also a powerful alternate community that could shape the way people related to each other and how they viewed the world. Several historians have discussed America's history as a religious nation.⁷⁵⁶ Charles Lippy argues that popular religiosity in America has been a constant in American culture since its formation, and into the twentieth century.⁷⁵⁷ Similarly, George Marsden states that American historians have consistently neglected religion as a driving force in modern American history.⁷⁵⁸ However, Christianity, particularly Protestantism, dominated mainstream culture and thought at the time of World War II. Anti-Catholicism and antisemitism were prevalent beliefs throughout the 1930s and into the war years, yet the heightened national unity lessened these to a degree during and following the conflict.⁷⁵⁹ Regarding World War II, the Christian Church's reaction, on the whole, was mixed, as highlighted by Gerald Sittser in his work *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War* (1997).⁷⁶⁰ While the Churches, according to Sittser, did not undermine loyalty to the nation, church leaders saw the "war [as] the church's opportunity to increase its influence in world affairs," noting that "Wartime theodicy did not so much make the church an accomplice to militarism as it made it attentive to truths that transcended the conflict."⁷⁶¹ The Church was not blind to America's faults. In a chapter entitled "Civil Rights and the War at Home," Sittser looked at the treatment of Japanese and African Americans, as

⁷⁵⁶ Gerald Lawson Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches & the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); M. F. Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London: Routledge, 2005); Ron E. Hassner, *Religion on the Battlefield* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016). Snape, *God and Uncle Sam*.

⁷⁵⁷ Charles H. Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994).

⁷⁵⁸ George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990).

⁷⁵⁹ Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style*, 208–220.

⁷⁶⁰ Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism*.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid*, 13-14.

well as Jehovah's Witnesses, Communists, and Fascists, and considered how the Church sought to fight a different war at home. According to him, the Church sought to apply religious beliefs to a society that, even while engaged in a war, it believed should have been expanded to include some groups and causes deemed unpatriotic or un-American at the time.⁷⁶² In the eyes of the organized Church, the war was divisive rather than unifying. He argued that ultimately there were divisions within American society, in this case between Church elite and the Christian masses, noting "the prophetic words of the few were not enough to reverse the inertia of the many."⁷⁶³

Looking at the Church's response particularly during the holiday season it is possible to discern a unique understanding of community in comparison to other groups. While the broadcasters, businesses, and municipal leaders saw community as a way to shore up national unity and a particular kind of American identity and patriotism, the Church at Christmas often had a more inclusive and international outlook. This can be seen through its actions in the pre-war period, in its reaction to Pearl Harbor, in sermons made by church leaders throughout the war, and in the response to the internment of Japanese Americans.

Christianity and Christmas

Pre-war

Before America's entry into the war the Church was active in its support of American Allies engaged in the conflict. In 1939, many churches, both Protestant and Catholic, discussed the "difficult problem to be met in a Christmas season with war going on."⁷⁶⁴ Some, like Bishop William T. Manning, saw this as a call to Christians all over the world to make their own contribution to the life of the Church more faithfully. In a sermon, he described Christmas as a commemoration of the greatest event in human history that

⁷⁶² Ibid, Chapter 10.

⁷⁶³ Ibid, 222.

⁷⁶⁴ *NYT*, Dec. 23, 1939, 10.

meant to “show us the way of peace and love and brotherhood.”⁷⁶⁵ Christmas was a reminder that good would eventually triumph over evil and as such more faith should be put in Jesus than ever before. The Reverend Samuel M. Shoemaker saw war as a necessary “outworking of human sin” and Christmas as a symbol of hope that, after issues were worked out, possibilities were still bright for humankind.⁷⁶⁶ In addition to the sermons, churches also continued traditional retellings of the story of the nativity, hosted and performed carol singing, and provided dinners to the needy.⁷⁶⁷

By 1940, Christian religious leaders in America continued to consider the place of Christmas in wartime and continued to reaffirm its symbolic power. Preaching to a crowd of 3,000, Reverend Dr. Fosdick proclaimed that even decisive wars, while devastating in the moment, were ultimately transient. The birth of an influential individual could enact more lasting change over the course of history than a war. He cited Jesus as an obvious example, but also listed Charles Darwin, Tennyson, Lincoln, and others who had been born in 1809, a year when Napoleon and war dominated Europe and whose lasting impact were greater than the Napoleonic Wars.⁷⁶⁸ He contrasted the long history of celebrating the birth of Christ against the current context of the world, indicating that what was happening now was only a brief moment in time. New York’s Bishop Manning argued that “if not for the heroic struggle of the people of Great Britain, this country would not be celebrating a peaceful Christmas.” According to him, Americans could not forget the terrible events happening around the world and instead had to dig deeper into their personal faith. This was because “personal faith which gives meaning and reality to Christmas ... can fill the Christian Church with the power to give true help to the world in these tragic, fateful days.”⁷⁶⁹ Christmas was used both to look beyond the current issues through its timelessness and universal message of peace and goodwill and was

⁷⁶⁵ *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1939, 12.

⁷⁶⁶ *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1939, 12.

⁷⁶⁷ “Christmas Services Set,” *LAT*, Dec. 23, 1939, A2. “Topics of Sermons,” *NYT*, Dec. 2, 1939, 19. “Church Programs for Christmas,” *CDT*, Dec. 22, 1940, S1.

⁷⁶⁸ “Christmas Story Called Timeless,” *NYT*, Dec. 23, 1940, 22.

⁷⁶⁹ “Bishop Credits Joy in U.S. to Britain,” *NYT*, Dec. 23, 1940, 22.

promoted as a moment to consider the contemporary realities of the world and realize a need for deeper faith in humanity. In each of these contexts, Christmas possessed a particular cultural power that religious leaders hoped to tap into to shape people's understanding of the war abroad and Christianity's place within it.

1941

When the war came to America's shores, the Church had to reframe its position within the context of a domestic struggle. Not only did many offer hospitality and recreation to "boys away from home" in their communities, but they also planned home-coming celebrations for those who were able to return on furlough.⁷⁷⁰ Regarding their stance on the war as a whole, some believed the Church should remain neutral. Others, like Bishop Manning, believed that this would be "blind morally and spiritually" as it was clear that the enemy forces were "seeking to destroy all that Christmas represents in the lives of men."⁷⁷¹ Christmas, as a beacon of world brotherhood, was what the war was being fought to protect and as such the Church could hardly remain neutral. Reverend Leonard Gray of Boston argued that this war was all about the divisions between men: competition, race prejudice, and class arrogance. According to him the "emotional uplift of Christmas" could help to bypass these divides and keep up morale.⁷⁷² If anything, the message of Christmas should give hope for a victorious outcome according to the Reverend John Reilly, the Shrine Director at Catholic University who in his Christmas Day sermon of 1942 preached that the ability of a helpless babe to overcome the armed might of men should inspire confidence and humility as America moved against the enemy.⁷⁷³ Clear is the use of Christmas as an interpretive framework to help give meaning and understanding to something as chaotic and unexplainable as war.

⁷⁷⁰ "Church Groups Offer Hospitality," *DEFENSE Bulletin*, Nov. 21, 1941, 29. *BG*, Dec. 26, 1941, 1.

⁷⁷¹ "No Inconsistency Seen in Yule Fete," *NYT*, Dec. 29, 1941, 12.

⁷⁷² Leonard B. Gray, "Letter to the Editor: More Christmas Than Ever This Year," *BG*, Dec. 21, 1941, C6.

⁷⁷³ "Faithful Worship at Yule Rites," *WP*, Dec. 25, 1942, 17.

War

The war affected how churches celebrated Christmas on the home front, both in terms of their messages and their actions. Some changes were necessitated by the realities of wartime; more female voices in the choir because the men were at war and activities and décor had to be rethought in light of wartime restrictions. In Chicago, some churches made a note of abandoning their Christmas pageant rehearsals because of shortages of fuel oil.⁷⁷⁴ Churches also initiated new programs to respond to wartime needs. For example, a Milwaukee publication, the *Living Church*, started a toy campaign in response to the request of one of its readers to make Christmas “more real to people of other countries.” Readers were asked to include a small toy for children in the packages they were sending to their loved ones overseas for them to give to needy children where they were stationed. The campaign attracted attention domestically when *TIME* magazine mentioned it, as well as internationally when the troop paper *Stars and Stripes* warned its readers not to be concerned if they received any such items.⁷⁷⁵ Religious leaders also had to contend with a changing congregation as those who were stationed away from home in the region often felt particularly inclined to attend a church service at Christmas and so would go to an unfamiliar church. Furthermore, many of the traditional parishioners of these churches may have been unable to attend because of various forms of wartime service, contributing to the experience of a congregation in flux. In Washington, D.C., arrangements were made through the city’s War Hospitality Committee for downtown churches to reserve about 1,000 extra seats for transient personnel, indicating how dramatically numbers could fluctuate from week to week.⁷⁷⁶ These are just a few examples of how the Church modified Christmas activities to fit the needs of the war.

A sense of longing brought on by wartime relocation also contributed to a rise in religious observance during the Christmas season as it was an alternate community to the civic one that had undergone significant changes due to the war. In 1942 the *Chicago*

⁷⁷⁴ “Religious Tone Gets Emphasis on North Side,” *CDT*, Dec. 20, 1942, NW1 and W1.

⁷⁷⁵ “Yule Gifts May Carry Toys for World Kids,” *SandS Oran*, Sept. 22, 1944, 2.

⁷⁷⁶ “Peace Prayers to Dominate Yule Services,” *WP*, Dec. 24, 1944, M2.

Daily Tribune expected an increase in attendance at Christmas church services across the city.⁷⁷⁷ The *Boston Globe* similarly stated that “New England took its second Christmas of World War II in a reverent and patriotic way yesterday, marked by capacity attendances at churches and home gatherings of small family groups in a return to a more old fashioned observance.”⁷⁷⁸ As the war went on, religious-themed Christmas cards and films grew in popularity. *The Billboard* noted “film libraries report there is perhaps greater action in religious subjects this year than in any recent past. Many church groups are planning more active holiday programs... with millions of boys in the armed forces the families are turning more to religious faith than ever before.”⁷⁷⁹ In terms of cards, particularly those of American design, there was a rise in “verses from the bible and designs of the nativity” as opposed to “simple Christmas nature” which reportedly was on the decline.⁷⁸⁰ A spokesperson for a card manufacturer noted “People want more of the Christ Child, the Wise Men, the Star of Bethlehem, Babe in Manger or home scenes, plus enough blank space to write short notes.”⁷⁸¹ The *Women’s Home Companion* took to its readers to determine if there was a “revival of religious faith” in the nation. They argued that there was no revival because faith was already present, but the poll indicated it was in fact increasing. Reportedly, 98% of respondents believed in God, and when asked if they went to church more, less, or the same amount as before the war, 50% said no change, 27% went more often, and 23% less often; however, the magazine cited gas and tire rationing, as well as war work, for the decrease.⁷⁸² Gallup polls indicate similar responses: in November 1941, 31% of people said they had noticed an increase in religion since the outbreak of war in Europe. By May 1942, that had increased to 47%.⁷⁸³ While these polls do not give a clear picture on the degree of increase in religiosity in

⁷⁷⁷ “2nd Wartime Yule to Draw Large Throngs,” *CDT*, Dec. 20, 1942, N1 and NW1.

⁷⁷⁸ “Yule Cheer Plentiful,” *BG*, Dec. 26, 1942, 1.

⁷⁷⁹ “Religion - Christmas Special,” *The Billboard*, Vol. 55, No. 48, (Nov 27, 1943), 30.

⁷⁸⁰ “War Inspires All Time High in Yule Cards,” *CDT*, Dec. 5, 1943. *NYT*, Nov. 16, 1944, 20. Assorted Christmas Cards, Undated. Box 15, World War II Christmas Card Collection. NYHS, New York City, NY.

⁷⁸¹ *SandS London*, Dec. 14, 1944, 4.

⁷⁸² “Companion Poll,” *WHC*, Nov. 1944, 12.

⁷⁸³ Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 700.

America because of the war alone, it appears it was evidently on the minds of some people. Coupled with the rising popularity of particular film and card themes, Christmas was a time when Americans could give particular attention to their rising religious beliefs.

The messages that church leaders gave to their congregations also had to be adapted to the wartime context, and especially at Christmas carried a heightened meaning. Sentimentality and comfort were important themes in sermons across the nation. Reverend Richard Morford, the Executive Secretary of the United Christian Council for Democracy, wrote to the organization for Christmas 1942. He stated that for many people, this Christmas would be a different one because of so many separated loved ones. However, according to him “it can be real if you and I make it real” and to “remember those in other countries, our enemies and our allies, who are praying for peace, too, who worship this Christmas, at the manger of the Christ child just as we do.”⁷⁸⁴ For Morford, Christmas was an experience that could remind people of their shared connection, both between separated friends and wartime foes. In December 1942, the *Christian Science Monitor* proclaimed to its readers that even for homes that had been affected by wartime loss, this was a time to feel the true significance of Christmas as “in its realization lies salvation for a struggling world.” Those who had experienced war’s sorrows were more closely aligned with why and to whom God originally sent his son, to “prove the indestructibility and eternity of life [and] to heal the broken hearted.”⁷⁸⁵ Dr. Edward Pruden made a similar point at the annual Christmas Day 1943 service held in Washington Cathedral by the Federation of Churches. He noted that Jesus was born into similarly harsh conditions, and while there was something to be said for the work of statesmen in the current conflict, this revealed the “secret of a better society is in the transformation of individuals.”⁷⁸⁶ The meaning of this was that change had to come from

⁷⁸⁴ House of Friendship Booklet, page 1, December 1942. Box 3, Richard Morford Papers (TAM 361). TAM, New York City, NY.

⁷⁸⁵ *CSM*, Dec. 22, 1942, 20.

⁷⁸⁶ Robert Tate Allen, “Support of Masses Required to Keep Peace, Dr. Pruden Says,” *WP*, Dec. 26, 1942, M12.

the bottom up and could not just be mandated from above. This was a powerful point to make to a congregation that included the Vice President, the Secretary of the Navy, and their wives, and historically had been attended by the President, though Roosevelt was not there that year because he was instead celebrating Christmas at Hyde Park.

Changing the attitude of individuals toward Christmas was also often framed by church leaders as a need to return to the ‘real meaning’ the holiday season, something that they framed as more important due to the wartime circumstances. The war was evidence that people had lost their way and a return to religious values would potentially put the world back on track. Reverend John T. Dallas, an Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire, urged readers of the *Christian Science Monitor* to give up what he called “habit” gifts, which he deemed the less thoughtful thing to do for a real friend. One should instead “write a personal note as a token of good will.”⁷⁸⁷ He also proposed buying war bonds with the money people would usually spend on Christmas gifts. The Magister William A. Scully, Secretary for the Education of the Archdiocese in New York, stated in a Christmas Eve sermon of 1942 that perhaps because the American people had been so blessed with prosperity in recent years, they would be more able to recognize “the serious tasks at hand and draw closer to our Father in Heaven.”⁷⁸⁸ The Reverend Eugene Bushong of Wethersfield, Connecticut, stated that “it is not enough that we are merely “dreaming of a white Christmas. The songs on our lips should bear some tidings of the birth of the Saviour of the world.”⁷⁸⁹ Bushong, aware of the popularity of secular entertainment related to Christmas, called for people to remember the religious aspects of the season too and not just the new and trendy additions to ‘tradition.’ Ultimately, all of these religious figures were calling for their communities to give a deeper meaning to the season, but they did not reject outright the materialism or secularism that had become a significant part of Christmas in the popular consciousness.

⁷⁸⁷ “Bishop Would Abolish Yule Habit Giving,” *CSM*, Oct. 21, 1942, 2.

⁷⁸⁸ “War Lends Color at Midnight Mass,” *NYT*, Dec. 25, 1942, 8.

⁷⁸⁹ “Significance of Yule Held Prime Issue,” *HC*, Dec. 21, 1942, 14.

Christmas also served a powerful function as a symbol of hope for a better future, not through more prosperous consumerism as advertisers constructed it, but as an expression of the resilience of humankind. As Reverend Morford put it, “over the centuries, through war and pestilence, flood and famine, man has pursued the goal of a better world, a world of peace and justice. He has not succumbed to weariness or despair, to hostile environment or wicked leadership. He falls but to rise again. The light flickers but never dies. Here is the evidence of some mysterious force that gives man strength and will and courage. Christmas expresses our faith in that force.”⁷⁹⁰ Similarly, the Reverend Dr. John Edwards of St. Paul Methodist in Washington called Christmas a celebration of hope and said that the way it was celebrated would indicate what would follow after the end of hostilities. He praised the ability of labor, commerce, the media, the Church, and the state to work together toward a common goal of justice during the war and saw this as a powerful indicator of hope for the future.⁷⁹¹ The Reverend Cyprian Truss of Providence, Rhode Island, took this a step further, arguing that future peace would only be preserved if God was present everywhere, including government, business, commerce, and education, in addition to the church.⁷⁹² This view was rather extreme in comparison to the majority of Christian leadership but indicates a similar longing for a lasting peace, one that Christians could take pride in because it was based on their religious tenets. Bishop Charles Gilbert, the substitute for New York’s Bishop Manning due to illness in 1943, presented it as “the Christmas message pointing a way to a new order and a new understanding of the sacred responsibility for the freedom and peace for which our sons and brothers are fighting.”⁷⁹³ Celebrated during numerous wars, the timelessness of Christmas and the ability of Christianity to re-emerge after the struggle justified Christianity itself as the basis of the post-war world. Christmas gave church leaders a

⁷⁹⁰ Newspaper Clipping, undated. Folder 1, Box 2, Richard Morford (TAM 361). TAM, New York City, NY.

⁷⁹¹ Robert Tate Allen, “Churches Hold Annual Services Symbolizing Yule Sacrificial Spirit, *WP*, Dec. 21, 1942, B1.

⁷⁹² “Peace is Theme of Yule Sermons,” *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1943, 4.

⁷⁹³ “Christmas Called New Hope Symbol,” *NYT*, Dec. 27, 1943, 13.

moment to inspire people to think critically about the future they wanted and about what values should be privileged in that future.

In the context of World War II, the Church often viewed the war as a struggle to gain a better future for America and the world. That future would be predicated on Christian tenets and in line with the Christmas message of brotherhood and goodwill. The idea that the birth of Christ came at a tumultuous period in human history provided justification for the sentiment that good could be formed out of evil. Some religious leaders felt that for this to occur, a shift away from material and secular ideals was required. Most sought to bring awareness to shared humanity or the strength of humanity within the framework of the existing holiday season. Bishop Manning broadcast a Christmas message to American troops in 1943 in which he presented the efforts of the armed forces as “an example to us Americans in the homeland to live together in mutual respect.”⁷⁹⁴ Christmas was an important time to take stock of that because of its universal message of respect for humanity that he believed the troops were spreading as they worked to protect and preserve the nation and its ideals. Christmas and the war were intimately linked, yet they were linked in a way that provided a path to a better future for all, not just the patriotic American citizen. According to the Christian Church, that path could be built on Christian ideals and values: ideas that were both part of the founding of the nation and that could be established transnationally throughout the world.

Wartime Value of Community Christmas

Christmas in wartime functioned as a way for Americans to define their identity. While this operated on a personal level, as discussed in Chapter Three, it also worked on the community level. Key elements include the idea of America as a generous and prosperous nation, as well as the idea of celebrating Christmas as part of what it means to be a real American. Different minority groups who found themselves outside of the mainstream American community could choose to buy into the holiday for their own reasons or use it to demonstrate their degree of acculturation and acceptance of the

⁷⁹⁴ “American Clergy Sends Messages,” *SandS Mediterranean Naples*, Dec. 23, 1943, 4.

majority. In some cases, minority groups were allowed into the fold, but only if they carefully followed the script outlined by the dominant group. Certain rituals and traditions of Christmas strengthened the community and in particular highlighted the values held by mainstream America.

Once the nation joined the war, isolation was no longer the country's path forward on the world stage. Christmas could bring together the conflicting ideas of isolation versus action through the values of charity, goodwill, and brotherhood as they could (and some believed should) be applied to other countries, as well as individuals in need. Through the rhetoric of the holiday season, communities constructed a belief in a better future for the world, articulated an understanding of the importance of collaboration, and promoted the value of internationalism to Americans at large.

Show Generosity

Historian Elizabeth Pleck assessed the contrast between the rise of an indulgent domestic middle-class Christmas and those left out of the celebrations, namely “deprived children” and “alienated adults,” in her work *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals*.⁷⁹⁵ She established how the rise of the child-centered holiday, and the centrality of gift-giving within it, functioned to highlight class differences. While charities and kind individuals sought to “bridge the gap in wealth, assuage their guilty feelings, and discharge some of the responsibility they felt for poor children,” they did little to actually reduce real class divides.⁷⁹⁶ With Christmas as the pre-eminent American holiday and its key feature being consumer indulgence, those unable to participate were ultimately left out of this particular idea of what an American ‘was.’ Many did realize that their particularly consumption-based Christmas would be difficult for those less privileged to manage. For example, the *Atlanta Constitution* printed an editorial that argued “suppose you had lost your job... and you didn't have any money. Suppose, just for a moment, Christmas was coming... How would you feel? ...they are blue. They are

⁷⁹⁵ Pleck, *Celebrating the Family*, 54–61.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 57.

desperate.”⁷⁹⁷ While those who receive charity might appreciate the gesture, through this action of the more fortunate, they are left out of the American narrative about itself and its people as a land of prosperity, a nation able to give. As the recipients rather than the providers, certain Americans were unable to identify with this aspect of the American character constructed through the community celebration of Christmas.

Christmas provided a finite moment for individuals to define themselves as charitable and good within the spirit of the season. The behavior associated with this image was often directed at those less fortunate within their communities. As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, communities worked to ensure that those who were needy could also experience the joys of the holiday season. Provisions ranged from toys for underprivileged children to meals for the homeless.⁷⁹⁸ They did this, according to James Warnack of the *Los Angeles Times*, because “There will always be a Christmas as long as there are Christians” as “this city is preparing to live up to its reputation of providing Christmas cheer for the homeless and the destitute.”⁷⁹⁹ Here the link between Christianity and charity is clear. Others made a connection between charity and American pride, such as Frank Drake of the *Atlanta Constitution* who wrote “Invest in America by helping... do not put it off. Do something for someone else this Christmas.”⁸⁰⁰ Just days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Drake indicated that the best Christmas gift you could give yourself was the gift of doing something for others. It was an American value to give to those who were in need at Christmas, and it was even more crucial in wartime. Christmas allowed those who were more fortunate to soften their guilt at being better off in comparison to those in need in a way that did not actually change the status quo.

⁷⁹⁷ Frank Drake, “Life Begins at Yule for Many With New Chance to Get Ahead,” *AC*, Dec. 14, 1941, 15A.

⁷⁹⁸ “Christmas Fetes Given for the Needy,” *NYT*, Dec. 21, 1942, 12. “Chicago Gives Yule Cheer to All,” *CDT*, Dec. 21, 1943, 10. “Christmas Fetes Getting Under Way,” *NYT*, Dec. 22, 1943, 25.

⁷⁹⁹ James Warnack, “Spirit of Christmas Will Rule Despite War,” *LAT*, Dec. 20, 1942, A1.

⁸⁰⁰ Frank Drake, “Life Begins at Yule for Many With New Chance to Get Ahead,” *AC*, Dec. 14, 1941, 15A.

It was not just Christian America that bought into the narrative of generosity constructed within the holiday's rituals and traditions. Jewish America, to a considerable degree, sought also to align itself with this charitable image. In the 1940s, there were just under five million Jews in the United States, out of a total population of approximately 133 million. Consequently, Jewish Americans made up around 3% of the total American population. Wartime Christmas provided this minority group a unique opportunity to 'give' a happier Christmas to Christian America by offering to cover their work or responsibilities over the holiday season. The heightened wartime demands on labor provided a context wherein they could make this offer, both in the civilian workforce and in the military, domestically and abroad. Thousands of Jewish soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines gave up the possibility of furloughs over Christmas to ensure that their Christian fellows would be more likely to receive one. Surrendering their days off was not a centrally organized initiative, but one that "sprang up spontaneously" and revealed to one commentator that "the Christian spirit has not died, and we are reminded of it by men who may have other tenets but who share with us the good will that the day signifies."⁸⁰¹ Evidently, while Christmas may have Christian aspects, there were some elements of it deemed beyond strict religious observance or association. Even when undertaken by those of other religions, the generosity was constructed as Christian in origin when Jewish Americans did it in the spirit of Christmas. It also represents an example of how those excluded from the mainstream community could be accepted into the fold, but only if they followed the script outlined by the majority.

Jewish participation in Christmas celebrations in America has waxed and waned over the nineteenth and twentieth century. According to Penne Restad, the *Philadelphia Times* reported members of the Jewish community taking part in Christmas celebrations in 1877. By 1903, two polarizing views had developed. Rabbi Schulman rejected the Christianity associated with Christmas and the entertainment devoted to it in public schools especially, leading to a boycott by Jewish parents and children of New York City school's holiday closing exercises. Another Rabbi at the time, Rabbi Judah L. Magnes,

⁸⁰¹ "The Christmas Spirit," *HC*, Dec. 24, 1941, 10.

did not find Christmas overly concerning and thought taking part in the activities was harmless and could even help Jews strengthen their own beliefs. By World War II, Christmas had become even more entrenched in American culture, yet the question of how Jews should navigate it remained unanswered. Rabbi Louis Witt argued in 1939 that Jews should participate in Christmas, because not only did he not want Jewish children to feel left out of the joy but also because Christmas represented the universal humanness of Jesus and by celebrating, Jews could show Christians the common ground between them. Rabbi Edward Israel rejected this and argued that Christians would have more respect for Jews who kept to their own beliefs. As Restad has suggested and the previous chapters have shown, Christmas emerged as a more secular and public celebration, with functions separate from Christian theology and more aligned with consumerism as its focus of devotion.⁸⁰² Joshua Eli Plaut, an ordained Rabbi and Ph.D. in Hebrew and Judaic studies, articulated in his book *A Kosher Christmas: 'Tis the Season to be Jewish* (2012), just how much Jews had participated in Christmas as well as the ways in which the Jewish community created strategies for managing their experience during the holiday season. Jews have made many contributions to Christmas popular culture, such as songs and films, and formed unique traditions for their community, such as going to Chinese food restaurants, movie theatres, or tropical locations during the holidays.⁸⁰³ Ultimately these could be accepted by Christian America because they did not pose a threat to mainstream traditions.

During the war, Jews and Christians in many ways came together to make the holiday as joyous as possible, despite the difficult circumstances. As was mentioned above, Jewish men in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, along with some female nurses, offered to give up their furloughs for Christians to get the holiday off instead. The president of the National Jewish Welfare Board reported that this had taken place in over thirty camps, Navy yards, and hospitals, and appears to have originated at Camp Robinson in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1941, many Christmas furloughs were canceled so even though the

⁸⁰² Restad, *Christmas in America*, 157–59.

⁸⁰³ Joshua Eli Plaut, *A Kosher Christmas: 'tis the Season to Be Jewish* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

offer stood, few were able to take advantage of it.⁸⁰⁴ These offers continued into the war years, both at home and abroad, and symbolized an understanding between the distinct religions in a shared common humanity and charitable spirit.⁸⁰⁵ Dr. Felix A. Levy, a Rabbi in Chicago, wrote in 1943 that “in addition to specific Christian implications there is an appeal in the festival... The oneness of mankind taught by the Christmas story is a legend on the one hand and a beautiful ideal on the other.” He went on to say that “We pray for this unity, but attempt little of a practical sort to realize... Everyday must be Christmas in this sense!” He realized the possibilities of Christmas to bring people together outside of the strict religious meanings, and given the tension of the war years saw this as a more poignant moment than ever before for Jews to participate in this display of shared humanness.⁸⁰⁶ Even in 1943 when the Jewish Sabbath fell on Christmas, many Jewish troops broke it so their Christian comrades could enjoy the day instead.⁸⁰⁷ In Boston, Jewish women volunteered to serve in USO recreation centers so Christian volunteers could spend the day with their families. In return, Christian volunteers offered to serve in the Jewish centers on other Jewish holidays.⁸⁰⁸ There was a clear sense that Christmas could bring people together through the ritualistic actions of generosity and charity it inspired, but this was done by conforming to the script of the majority rather than accepting the differences of minorities.

These actions also represented a particular kind of American patriotism. Many, especially those somewhat removed from the mainstream of America, could buy into the holiday celebration as a way to show how truly American they were. Rabbi Levy wrote in 1942 that “none are more thankful than we for the new spirit that is abroad in the land, for the renewal of ideals, of purer aims for the larger and more earnest fellowship that possesses the heart of civilized humanity.”⁸⁰⁹ By this he meant the turn in American popular

⁸⁰⁴ “Jewish Surrender Christmas Leaves,” *NYT*, Dec. 22, 1941, 30.

⁸⁰⁵ “Jews Volunteer for Yule Duty,” *NYT*, Dec. 23, 1942, B7.

⁸⁰⁶ *CDT*, Dec. 5, 1943, B39.

⁸⁰⁷ “Yule Spirit Abounds at Army Camp,” *AC*, Dec. 19, 1943, 11A.

⁸⁰⁸ “Jews to Serve USO on Holiday,” *CSM*, Dec. 22, 1943, 5.

⁸⁰⁹ *CDT*, Dec. 6, 1942, G21.

thought out of isolationism and a greater concern for the people of the world that had come in the wake of America's involvement in the war. Here he showed pride in this renewed spirit of the nation and saw Christmas as a way to help the reconciliation that the world would need after the conflict was over.

This response was not universal among American Jews. Some did still push against the place of Christmas in the public realm, especially within the school system. However, the reaction from the Jewish public was far different from the earlier boycott of 1903. Rabbi Harold Englander protested in December 1944 to the board of education in Kingston, New York, that nothing of a religious character should be allowed in public schools, including the singing of Christmas carols. After this came out, he was forced to resign from his position in the synagogue due to "public indignation and disavowal of his actions *by his congregation*."⁸¹⁰ In the *Kingston Press*, the publisher of the Rabbi's protest letter, the wife of an Army colonel overseas wrote: "there are millions of our men fighting so we can sing our Christmas carols... He should be glad that in America he can sing any song he chooses, when he chooses, in any church he chooses, where any religious group can have their own organization, where they can teach their own ideas without persecution."⁸¹¹ Based on the response to Rabbi Englander's protest it would seem that the general Jewish population at least accepted, if not supported, the celebration of Christmas in American public life, and certainly more so than in 1903. However, what is also evident is that while Jews could be accepted and allowed to celebrate alongside Christian America, they could only do so on the majority's terms. Any deviation or criticism, as is evident by the case of Rabbi Englander, would lead to calls for removal from the community, even if that call came from within the minority community itself. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported in response to the congregation's disavowal of the Rabbi's protest that "Christmas can no longer be said to be merely the Christian Church's observance of the birth of the founder of its religion. It

⁸¹⁰ Italics mine, "Christmas is Universal," *CSM*, Dec. 16, 1944, 18.

⁸¹¹ *CDT*, Dec. 7, 1944, 12. The special committee of the board of education appointed to review this protest ultimately decided that they did not consider the singing of Christmas carols an infringement of the law forbidding the teaching of religious doctrine in public schools. *CDT*, Dec. 12, 1944, 3.

has grown to be much more than that. It transcends the outburst of gift-giving, merriment, and material celebrations.”⁸¹² Evidently, Christians supported the adoption of their holiday by people whose religious beliefs were different from their own, but only when the majority did not feel challenged by the difference. The allowance of Jews to participate in Christmas by Christians was a token gesture and not one of true acceptance. Christmas provided a path for those outside the dominant culture to ‘overcome’ their ‘inconvenient’ differences in the eyes of mainstream Christian America, allowing the outsider to be more like them.

Show Support for America

African Americans

While Christmas did, on a superficial level, work to bring Jews and Christians together despite differences in religion, it had less of an impact on racial divides in America. There were some gestures of kindness, such as in 1944 when 1,000 white workers celebrated Christmas by working “without pay to build two Liberty Ships named for Negro merchant seamen” in Georgia.⁸¹³ Reported in an African-American newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, this might seem like a clear example of Christmas working to overcome racism. However, it appears that the white workers saw their actions more in terms of a gift to the nation rather than to the African-American community. Generally speaking, while Christmas celebrations were common among African Americans and often included many of the same features that ‘white’ Christmas did (such as church activities, gift-giving, charity, caroling, pageants, and family get-togethers) the holiday did little to break down racial lines.⁸¹⁴ White Christmas was strictly that, white, and there while America’s wartime rhetoric preached the elimination of fascism abroad, whites at home put considerable effort into ensuring their status remained secure at home.

⁸¹² “Christmas is Universal,” *CSM*, Dec. 16, 1944, 18.

⁸¹³ “It Happened in Georgia,” *CD*, Dec. 30, 1944, 1.

⁸¹⁴ Floyd G. Snelson, “Harlem – ‘Negro Capital of the Nation’,” *The Plaindealer* (Kansas City, Kansas), Jan 6. 1939, 6. *CD*, Nov. 18, 1939, 8.

Important to note is that despite the end of slavery following the Civil War, African Americans were far from being seen as equals within American society. Legislation bound them to an inferior status, and even when it was not explicitly mandated social custom dictated a separation of the races. This was far more prevalent in the South but also prominent in many areas of the North, especially urban industrial centers, which had witnessed significant migration of blacks into those areas for work. Wartime manufacturing increased this flow of people and in many cities race relations were particularly tense, occasionally resulting in violence, for example in Harlem and Detroit in 1943.⁸¹⁵

Several scholars have illustrated that the contradiction of America fighting a war against oppression, particularly racial oppression, and the state of race relations at home was not lost on African Americans themselves. While African Americans displayed considerable loyalty toward the nation, there was also protest against the situation, namely the ‘double V’ campaign – fighting for victory abroad and racial equality at home. Historians have come to see the war years as crucial in the struggle for civil rights, and many have noted how, as the war progressed, tension continued to grow between the races.⁸¹⁶ According

⁸¹⁵ Brandt, *Harlem at War*, chapter 183 and Dominic J. Capeci, Jr., and Martha Wilkerson, “The Detroit Rioters of 1943: A Reinterpretation,” *Michigan Historical Review*, Vol. 16 Issue 1, (Jan. 1990), 49-72.

⁸¹⁶ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 210. There are several more general works that touch on African-American experience in World War II, included Polenberg’s *War and Society*, one of the first detailed analyses, followed by Blum *V Was for Victory*, Jeffries, *Wartime America*, Robert J. Norrell, *Dixie’s War: The South and World War II* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), William L. O’Neill, *A Democracy at War: America’s Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1993), and Winkler, *Home Front, U.S.A.* Alan Clive, *State of War: Michigan in World War II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979) deals extensively with a state where African Americans had a significant wartime impact. Others have written specifically on the African-American experience of the war, including Richard M. Dalfiume’s *Fighting on Two Fronts: Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces, 1939-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969) and his ground-breaking article “The Forgotten Years of the Negro Revolution,” in the *Journal of American History*, Vol. 55, No. 1, (June 1968), 90-106 were some of the first, followed by Neil A. Wynn’s *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1976, 1993) and “The Impact of the Second World War on the American Negro,” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (1971), 42-53, which emphasized the idea that the war contributed to the later civil rights movement. A. Russell Buchanan, *Black Americans in World War II* (Santa Barbara: Clio Books, 1977) looked at social matters including African Americans and their experience in the military, with the judicial system, black women’s experiences, labor, and racial violence. Later studies presented some of the less positive aspects of African-American experiences and were more critical of black voices during the war years, including Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War: The Black Experience in WWII* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), Dominic Capeci Jr., *Race Relations in Wartime*

to Neil Wynn, this “seriously undermined wartime national unity.”⁸¹⁷ Historian Gary Gerstle demonstrated the broader connections between race and nation in his 2001 study *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*. He argued that American national identity has been constructed along two important and yet paradoxical values: the civic and the racial. While racial nationalism was formulated on the basis of certain ethnic understandings and white privilege, civic nationalism was centered on the ideas of economic opportunity (the ‘American Dream’) and democratic liberty (the ‘American way’). The war in this context helped to “sharpen American national identity against external enemies who threatened the nation’s existence” which contributed to the lowering of ethnic, class, and regional divisions in white America. Despite the continued racial antagonism and continuation of the Jim Crow South, African Americans supported the war and realized that it provided an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty, a loyalty predominantly directed at ideas of civic nationalism and defined by the white majority, but an opportunity nonetheless. Even though the American military remained officially segregated throughout the war and African Americans were relegated to subordinate roles and divisions, they continued to serve.⁸¹⁸ It is within this paradox of civic and racial nationalism that the African-America celebration of Christmas is located.

Karal Ann Marling explored the history of black Christmas in America in the antebellum and reconstruction periods, noting that in slave times Christmas was a time of “bonding between the races” particularly as a marked period of generosity from slave-owners to slaves.⁸¹⁹ Shauna Bingham and Robert E. May complicated that view to some degree, noting that in many ways Christmas celebrations were a time for whites to display paternalism but that they were also manipulative devices to keep slave people in line and the holiday could and did act as a safety valve for slave discontent. According to them, “virtually all slave-owners expected that gift-giving, whatever its form, would conclude

Detroit: The Sojourner Truth Housing Controversy of 1942 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), and Charles D. Chamberlain, *Victory at Home: Manpower and Race in the American South during World War II* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

⁸¹⁷ Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War*, 43.

⁸¹⁸ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 1–10.

⁸¹⁹ Marling, *Merry Christmas!*, 258.

with requisite expressions of appreciation by recipients.”⁸²⁰ After the Civil War, Christmas functioned more as a tool to urge “reconciliation between North and South,” rather than to bring the races together.⁸²¹ Marling asserts that by the turn of the twentieth century, as it was depicted in white media, “Black Christmas was a means of giving poverty a fresh and compelling face: a meaner, leaner version of everybody else’s Christmas, it proved that the sentiments of the holiday were universal, even if the material means of expressing them were not.”⁸²² African Americans would participate in similar Christmas activities, but there was often a disconnect between the reality of their celebrations and the white middle-class ideal mainstream media promoted. The smothering whiteness of Christmas made it difficult or undesirable for the black community to carry out these traditions in the same way. Just like in the case of those who were disadvantaged financially, the clash between the mainstream ideal and their experience meant that some found the holiday alienating as in many ways its mainstream representation was never meant for them in the same way it was potentially attainable for other groups.

To some extent, this idea of a more modest but similarly joyous celebration of Christmas continued into the pre-war years. How the people of Harlem celebrated Christmas in 1939 was described in *The Plaindealer*, a Kansas City African-American newspaper. There was a wide range of celebration, like the rest of society, as “While the poor and needy were busy enjoying their Christmas cheer more fortunate revelers kept the high tempo - wine, women, and song in more fastidious climes in keeping with the genuine Christmas spirit. Sumptuous parties galore, elaborate dinners, dancing in superb finery and augmented atmosphere.”⁸²³ The paper went on to describe charitable activities, the receiving of gifts, worship, song, and people going home for the holidays indicating that

⁸²⁰ Shauna Bingham and Robert E. May, “The Time O’ All Times? Masters, Slaves, and Christmas in the Old South,” in the *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Summer 1998), 273.

⁸²¹ Marling, 259.

⁸²² Ibid, 267.

⁸²³ Floyd G. Snelson, “Harlem – ‘Negro Capital of the Nation,’” *The Plaindealer* (Kansas City, Kansas), Jan 6. 1939, 6. *CD*, Nov. 18, 1939, 8.

the broad strokes of the holiday looked the same, as it appeared in public representations, regardless of race.

With the world at war, African Americans too viewed Christmas as a symbol of peace and freedom. However, their particular position in American society made them keenly aware of the racism they faced in America. An editorial for Christmas 1940 in *The Plaindealer* pointed out:

With America rests the hope of preserving the ideas of democracy. Americans will enjoy this Christmas season. But we sometimes wonder, although free of war, if America is any more free of intolerance than some of the European countries. Segregation and discrimination stalk America unchallenged in many cases by a people who claim to be followers of this Jesus Christ whose birth we will celebrate on December 25th... We are now in the midst of the great defense, program which calls for the patriotism of all peoples regardless of race, color or creed. And as we approach the Christmas season it would be a fine thing if we could unite as one and eliminate those social, economic and political evils that keep us divided as Americans and that will keep us from building a strong democracy, and that will keep us from preserving what sparks of democracy we already have.⁸²⁴

Christmas could serve here as a powerful tool not only to bring to light the racial injustices in America but also as a hope that the races might one day come together. Some contemporaries imagined Christmas to be the sentimental backdrop to break down racial barriers. There was also a greater need to do that than ever before, as the war provided an urgency that might have compelled people to rethink their views or act against systems of intolerance, at home as well as abroad. Others also realized the possibility of this moment. E.B. Henderson of Falls Church, Virginia wrote to the *Washington Post* that,

Upon listening to the many testimonies to the spirit of Christmas, one is led to wonder when the American people are going to become Christ-like enough to rid the United States of laws that discriminate against law-abiding and well-behaved Negro citizenry. With President Roosevelt, and spokesmen for

⁸²⁴ "Christmas Season," *The Plaindealer* (Kansas City, Kansas), Dec. 20, 1940, 7.

the Catholic, white Protestants, and Jews panning a world-wide peace crusade, why cannot Christian humanity in America, 1,939 years after the Christ, begin to break down the barriers of racial hatred maintained as legal discrimination in public places?⁸²⁵

Similar statements were made by the African-American community after America was at war. In 1942, on Christmas Day, members of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen called for their full inclusion into the national community. It issued a statement that proclaimed “we who deny and defy the boastful claim of racial superiority by the dictators must stop asserting this claim by word or by deed amongst ourselves.”⁸²⁶ The timing of the statement on Christmas indicates that these leaders realized the power the underlying sentimentality of the season could have and sought to use it to evoke change in the national community for themselves. Ultimately this opportunity passed and America remained deeply divided along racial lines. While Christmas had worked in the past to bridge the divide between the North and the South after the Civil War, it was not enough for white America to give up its hold of mainstream society. They were very aware of segregation based on race and worked to keep it that way. Take for example the fact that in many cases German prisoners of war interned in the United States received better treatment than African Americans serving their country. According to Matthais Reiss, “Because the German POWs looked ‘just like Kansas farm boys,’ they [white Americans] tended to treat them as social equals.”⁸²⁷ Whiteness gave German prisoners privileges over African Americans in American society even though they were enemy combatants.

⁸²⁵ “Extending Christmas Spirit, *WP*, Jan. 7, 1940, B9. Similar statements were made after America itself was at war. *The Plaindealer* wrote in December 1942 that “It would be a fine thing for us as Americans to regard this precious privilege of celebrating Christmas in a broader and freer sense than some other nations... since we have the opportunity of celebrating Christmas it should be appreciated more than any other Christmas in American history and this celebration preserved along with the outer ideals which we fight to preserve. *The Plaindealer* (Kansas City, Kansas), Dec. 18, 1942, 1.

⁸²⁶ As quoted in Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War*, 131 (*NYT*, Dec. 26, 1942).

⁸²⁷ Matthais Reiss, “Solidarity Among ‘Fellow Sufferers:’ African Americans and German Prisoners of War in the United States during World War II,” in the *Journal of African American History*, Vol. 98, No. 4, (Fall 2013), 531-561.

Some African Americans saw celebrating Christmas as a moment of possibility to improve unity within the nation through the values it sought to promote. As such, it would improve their standing within the national community, but it also provided a particularly powerful indication of just how far they had to go for white America to view them as equals. Additionally, just like Jewish Americans, if they were seen to pose any threat or critique to the mainstream model they would be pushed even further from inclusion within the white narrative. As the *Arkansas State Press* wrote in 1944, “Christmas, 1944 finds the Negro no nearer to citizenship rights than Christmas, 1941.”⁸²⁸ The paper argued that white America had lost sight of its own battle for superiority at home while it was busy fighting to end Nazi Germany’s similar claim. However, it also argued that it was up to African Americans themselves to do something about their status. While the years of the war had been very prosperous for some, they needed to manage that purchasing power into political power. Here, Christmas functioned not only as a marker in time but also as a moment when the consumer dollar was particularly valuable and might allow African Americans another path to equality. However, capitalism as a cure for racism was a trap and was more of a way to blame the victim for not having the financial means to participate rather than a failure of the overarching system.

The spirit of Christmas was both personal, in the sense that it compelled people to act charitably and with more goodwill they might at other times of the year, and universal, as in the perceived ability of the Christian tradition to be for all, and therefore represent a sense of shared humanity and a desire for peace and goodwill for all. Christmas, with its rhetoric of peace and goodwill, did not inspire white Americans to look inward at their own treatment of African Americans, though it did compel a significant response on the part of Christian America for the interned Japanese Americans.⁸²⁹

⁸²⁸ “Christmas 1944,” *Arkansas State Press* (Little Rock, Arkansas), Dec. 22, 1944, 1.

⁸²⁹ The following section of this chapter contains a brief discussion of internment and the experience of Christmas within that context for Japanese Americans and those who endeavored to help them. A deeper analysis will be appearing in a forthcoming article on the subject, currently under review.

Japanese Americans

In 1942, President Roosevelt established the War Relocation Program which uprooted over 115,000 Japanese-American men, women, and children, a majority of whom were U.S. citizens, from the West Coast in the name of national security. Relocated to camps of varying sizes and conditions throughout the interior, Japanese Americans had to find a way to live their lives within these new and harsh circumstances. Day-to-day and camp-to-camp experiences varied dramatically. Many scholars have studied this process and these environments.⁸³⁰ Greg Robinson has focused on the removal of the Japanese within its broader context, both temporally and transnationally throughout North America.⁸³¹ Roger Daniels established how this process fit within contemporary racial policy and popular thought of the time and attempts to understand how the process played out in the political/legal realm and how those decisions shaped the experiences of those who were affected.⁸³² Most recently, Richard Reeves used the voices of the victims themselves to give a more-human perspective, yet still integrated these stories into the larger wartime narrative whereby the American government was fighting a war for democracy and freedom, yet was devoted considerable resources to a massive human rights violation on its own soil.⁸³³ These environments are areas where unique conditions and cultures emerged. It is possible to consider how individuals negotiated wartime realities within their transplanted space.

⁸³⁰ A selection of the Japanese internment during World War II includes Stephan Fugita, *Altered Lives, Enduring Community: Japanese Americans remember their World War II Incarceration* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Jessie Garrett and Ronald Larson, *Camp and Community: Manzanar and the Owens Valley* (Fullerton: California State University, 1977); James D. Houston and Jeanne Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of Japanese American Experience during and after the World War II Internment* (Boston: Houghton/Mifflin, 1973); Denice Lee Mils, *The Evacuation and Relocation of Japanese during World War II: A Bibliography* (Monticello: Vance Bibliographies, 1989); Richard Reeves, *Infamy: The Shocking Story of Japanese Internment in World War II* (New York: Henry and Holt Company, 2015); Greg Robinson, *By the Order of the President: FDR and the internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Page Smith, *Democracy on Trial: The Japanese Evacuation and Relocation in World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

⁸³¹ Greg Robinson, *A Tragedy of Democracy: Japanese Confinement in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁸³² Roger Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trial: Japanese American Internment in World War II* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II* (New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1972).

⁸³³ Richard Reeves, *Infamy*.

The experience of Japanese Americans during World War II was unlike any other group. The role that Christmas played in their experience was also different from any other racial or ethnic group in the nation. Christmas provided sympathetic observers a moment to show their support for this disadvantaged people, and it also gave the Japanese a particular moment to display their support for America despite their condition. The horrible context in which these actions took place must be remembered. The experience of Christmas was not separate from the war, and for interned Japanese Americans it also could not be separated from their removal and relocation.

To understand the celebration of Christmas in the camps it is first necessary to outline the religious and cultural beliefs of the internees themselves. The religious life of Japanese Americans prior to the war was dominated by two major religious denominations: Buddhism and Protestantism. The majority of first-generation Japanese Americans were Buddhist, though a small number had converted to Christianity prior to their arrival through contact with missionaries in Japan. Upon arrival in America a significant proportion converted to Christianity, especially considering that several Christian denominations “actively reached out to the new immigrants and helped them cope with the exigencies of living in a foreign and frequently hostile environment.”⁸³⁴ Scholars have estimated that by World War II more than one-half of Japanese Americans were Buddhist, and therefore one half presumably were not.⁸³⁵ While not all of these non-Buddhists were Christian, a proportion of them were; enough that considerable effort was devoted within the internment camps to have Buddhist and Christian services both available in English and Japanese.

Prior to their interment, Japanese-American Buddhists responded to the attack on Pearl Harbor in a number of ways. Anne Blankenship has demonstrated their attempts to avoid association with the enemy and in many cases their attempts to prove their loyalty. For

⁸³⁴ Stephen Fugita and Marilyn Fernandez, “Religion and Japanese Americans’ Views of their World War II Incarceration,” in the *Journal of Asian American Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (2002), 115.

⁸³⁵ Fugita and Fernandez, “Religion and Japanese Americans,” 116.

example, Buddhist leaders called for their community to buy war bonds.⁸³⁶ She also highlighted that some Christian denominations, including “Catholic Bishops, the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), mainline Protestant Pastors, the Quaker American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), foreign and domestic missionaries, and Pacific Coast ecumenical councils vouched for the loyalty of Nikkei [Americans of Japanese descent].”⁸³⁷ While the Christian Church was particularly vocal in its outcry against the removal process, it was unable to persuade the government to change its policy against the Japanese Americans.

Instead, in church organizations across America, Christmas was used to show support for interned Japanese and to demonstrate to them that “faith transcends racial differences.”⁸³⁸ Inside the camps three religions were authorized to be celebrated – Protestantism, Catholicism, and Buddhism – and the Christian Church used Christmas to reaffirm the positive values of Christianity that it believed were still valid, despite the realities of internment.⁸³⁹ The Church organized gifts, money, and entertainment to be sent to various relocation camps and especially at the holiday season.⁸⁴⁰ For example, 13-year old Akira Isozaki, an internee at the Manzanar relocation center, received for Christmas 1942 the personal Bible of a similarly-aged boy from Pennsylvania. The sender had enclosed a picture of himself and his dog, along with a stamped self-addressed envelope and stationary, indicating a clear desire to establish a personal connection and to show that this was more than just thoughtless holiday giving. This act was part of a larger Christmas project organized through St. Mark’s Church, which sent boxes of children’s gifts, decorations, and other items in a holiday display of “Christian Fellowship.”⁸⁴¹ Some Japanese Americans relegated to the camps appreciated these efforts because of the

⁸³⁶ Anne Blankenship, “Religion and the Japanese American Incarceration,” in *Religion Compass*, Vol. 8, No. 10 (2014), 318.

⁸³⁷ Ibid.

⁸³⁸ “No Racial Barriers,” *MFP*, Jan 6. 1943, 2.

⁸³⁹ Anne Blankenship, “Religion and the Japanese American Incarceration,” 319.

⁸⁴⁰ “Fellowships to Bring in Gifts Sunday,” *HC*, Dec. 12, 1942, 12. “The Nisei’s Fighting Chance,” *CSM*, Jan. 29, 1945, 16.

⁸⁴¹ “No Racial Barriers,” *MFP*, Jan 6. 1943, 2.

joy they brought to children in the camps. However this was in light of the fact that the adults had been dispossessed of any means to acquire these goods for themselves and so they were left to rely on outside aid to provide their children with the joys of Christmas. The camp newspaper *The Gila News-Courier* of Rivers, Arizona, stated that at Christmas, 1943 “what a heartwarming joy it is to us to know that in spite of war and the severe, drastic change it has brought in our lives...faith in Santa Claus will not be crushed. Through the noble efforts of the national JACL [Japanese American Citizens League], Christian organizations and individuals in many parts of the nation have generously contributed gifts so that not a single child in a relocation center will be without a gift come Christmas morning.”⁸⁴² The *Manzanar Free Press* detailed how much Christmas generosity the camp had seen for Christmas, 1942. Reportedly, every state in the union had sent aid, and the top donating organizations were the Mission Band Evangelical Churches which sent gifts and the Home Missions Council which sent money. Also noted were the Ladies’ Aid Society and the YMCA.⁸⁴³ While appreciation for these gestures was made by the interned Japanese Americans, ultimately these actions did little to actually alter the unfortunate state of affairs.

These actions were meant to instill a belief in the interned Japanese that not all of America viewed them as a threat or had forgotten about them. However, one must not forget that the Japanese had been dispossessed and dislocated from their land and relegated to camps in which the conditions could not be made up for by Christmas charity alone. Most lost their homes and the majority of their possessions in this process. In some ways, the act of helping the Japanese at Christmas let free America consider themselves to be good people without really coming to terms with the realities of interment and their role in allowing that tragedy to occur and continue. These acts were a safe way to manage the personal guilt of those on the outside at Americans being treated this way based on their race. It let free people think of themselves as not being racist without

⁸⁴² Christmas Issue, *The Gila News-Courier* (Rivers, Arizona), Vol. 1, No. 232, Dec. 24, 1942. Box 5, Japanese American Documentary Collection (ACNMAH 305). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

⁸⁴³ “Residents Get Generous Gifts, *MFP*, Jan. 1, 1943, 4. “Gifts Arrive For Center Distribution,” *MFP*, Dec. 22, 1943, 1.

actually having to work to enact large-scale change. It was also meant to establish a particular kind of patriotism, one based on loyalty to the nation. One donor, an eight-year-old girl from Pennsylvania, wrote a note along with her gift, which read “To a girl I have never met but I know the receiver of this gift loves America just as much as I do and I know you are true to the land both you and I love.”⁸⁴⁴ Here the idea of a common love for America is presented through the Christmas gift exchange; a connection between the giver and receiver is established through this ritual and the related ideas of reciprocity and goodwill associated with the season. While the girl sending the gift had evidently been made aware of the situation of the Japanese, and likely that the recipient could not send her anything in return, the expectation is that a love of country will be shared by both parties as reciprocation for this gesture. There is a degree of allegiance that is being asked of the recipient in return for the ‘generosity’ shown by the donor, despite the overarching fact of being interned by a nation to which they are supposed to be loyal.

The amount of aid that interned Japanese received during the holiday season reveals something particularly important in regards to American society at large. Those who chose to help at this time valued celebrating Christmas as something critically important to what it meant to be a real American, and the most important aspects of celebration were charity and gift-exchange activities as opposed to religious service or other behaviors associated with the holiday. For example, the Christmas gift packages sent to Manzanar in 1943 contained many letters. One such letter from a community leader in the Midwest read “my daughter, age 5, first heard about the Japanese American evacuees and said simply, ‘but Americans don’t do things like that.’ I think it was her first disillusionment about her country. We are sending these gifts with prayer that the evacuees soon resume normal community life in our land.”⁸⁴⁵ Gifts were sent both in protest to the situation and as a display of what ‘real’ Americans considered the right thing to do. Similarly, the American Friends (Quakers) Service Committee wrote to

⁸⁴⁴ Communique, Official Bulletin of Jerome Relocation Center (Denson, Arkansas), No. 20, Dec. 22, 1942. Box 5, Japanese American Documentary Collection (ACNMAH 305). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

⁸⁴⁵ “Give Data on Yule Gifts,” MFP, Jan. 5, 1944, 1.

internees at Minidoka Camp, “At this Christmas time and at all times we want to live together with all our brothers.... We look forward to the time when you may return freely to your home communities. We shall welcome you as neighbors.”⁸⁴⁶ Again, Christmas provided a particular moment for the outside world to comment on the situation and send their well wishes and symbolic but ultimately ineffective protest against the treatment of the Japanese when they might not be as compelled at other times of the year.

While the acts of kindness shown by Christian America to the interned Japanese do not make up for the condition they were in, some Japanese still sought to participate in the mainstream Christmas script. Within the internment camps, some put on their own community Christmas celebrations. Minidoka relocation center had one of the most elaborate community activities compared to other camps. Participation in the Christmas activities that the camp organizers put on was high, and is often well regarded in oral histories and memoirs of individuals interned there, as noted by Anne Blankenship.⁸⁴⁷ According to her, participation in the Christmas activities represented both a patriotic act within the context of World War II but also an act of resistance, in line with the protest against their internment that the charitable work of churches and other individuals was meant to represent on the outside. Similar actions and ideas can be seen in other internment camps as well. Jerome Relocation Center had Christmas caroling, along with special meals and Christmas entertainment like children’s pageants, and the children also receiving donated gifts from charitable groups outside the camp.⁸⁴⁸ The newsletter of Rohwer Camp in Arkansas noted in December 1942, how “nothing will be so dull and drab as Christmas without a Christmas tree,” however, a local group of boy scouts was going to bring them some so “please don’t crab, there’ll be one for you to see.”⁸⁴⁹ In a

⁸⁴⁶ “American Friends Service Committee Sends Greetings,” *Minidoka Irrigator* (Idaho), Dec. 25, 1942, 3.

⁸⁴⁷ Anne Blankenship, “Sagebrush Trees, ‘Slant-eyed Santas’ and Uncle Sam: Christmas at Minidoka Relocation Center,” MA thesis, University of North Carolina, 2008.

⁸⁴⁸ Communique, Official Bulletin of Jerome Relocation Center (Denson, Arkansas), No. 20, Dec. 22, 1942. Box 5, Japanese American Documentary Collection (ACNMAH 305). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

⁸⁴⁹ “Untitled,” *Rohwer Camp Newspaper* (Arkansas), Dec, 19, 1942, 4.

letter to the *Manzanar Free Press*, one individual wrote how he endorsed the sale of Christmas seals within the camp, noting “in these days when so much of Christmas has been commercialized, it is good to know that here is one humanitarian note... Christmas seals are your badge of membership of the brotherhood of goodwill of men.”⁸⁵⁰ He was against the fact that proceeds from the sales were given special permission to be funneled back into the camp. Considering the conditions of life within the camp and the treatment shown to them through the act of internment itself, it might be surprising that not only did this individual feel that charity and goodwill were important actions at Christmas but that those actions should be directed to needy within the larger American community, the very people who had interned them.

While the outside world continued with the commercial spirit of Christmas despite the war, as discussed in previous chapters, this was a potential problem for those in the camps. This was because the Japanese, in the years before the war, had strongly adopted the secular and commercial aspects of the holiday, as noted by the *Manzanar Free Press*: “in the days before the war, gift exchanging was a social must.”⁸⁵¹ The increased socialization in centers could create a sense of heightened obligation, and yet people’s means to give were significantly limited by their condition. The newspaper urged that while the children would receive, adults should try to refrain from the practice. While this may have been the message, there were also notices of craft fairs where people could purchase gifts and other examples of adults giving amongst themselves despite the hardship. This indicates that while Christmas could be used to show support for America and as a bond between the interned Japanese and the outside world, aspects of the holiday celebration, consumerism and charity especially, were internalized by the community despite their circumstances and provided a similar community-building function, even within this forced setting.⁸⁵²

⁸⁵⁰ Sam Hohri, “letters from the public,” *MFP*, Dec. 11, 1943, 2.

⁸⁵¹ *MFP*, Dec. 11, 1943, 2.

⁸⁵² This is not to say that gift giving among interned Japanese was an American practice alone. The Japanese have a long history of gift giving within their culture and related to the social framework of their society. One element of gift giving among modernizing Japan, as outlined by Harumi Befu, that is

For both individuals and communities Christmas could be used to build a more patriotic citizenry. While the mainstream gestures of inclusion were superfluous at best, they indicate that there was an understanding that if one accepted the mainstream script of Christmas they were aligning themselves with particular American values. For example, a 1942 broadcast from Houston, Texas, to the community's troops abroad stated that it was a strange and different Christmas that year, yet "there [was] something in these trying days that is very close to the heart of Christmas, making common purpose together is a great contribution to the brotherhood of men... a firm and resolute hope in the soul of America."⁸⁵³ Even though things may have been different, Christmas provided a powerful moment for the home-front community to come together in a common cause, a cause that Christmas represented and embodied for protecting and upholding American values. Similarly, the *Ladies' Home Journal* proclaimed to its readers in December 1943, "Yet to all Christians – Chinese, German, Polish – Christmas means Christ's Birth... Religion is one great common denominator between the new and old arrivals in America. Love of liberty another. One in every eleven persons you pass on any US street is foreign-born. Yet we are all, in a sense, foreigners, with blood roots centuries deep in distant continents. All of us have ancestors who crossed the ocean in search of a great and shining promise."⁸⁵⁴ While the magazine was trying to establish a common understanding between groups that may have borne the brunt of domestic hostility due to the war, that commonality was based not just on religion, but on American patriotism rooted in liberty and the promise believed to be embodied by the nation. It clearly neglected the American Indian who had not immigrated to that land, as well as the forced migration of African Americans, and was a clear call to the civic nationalism identified by Gerstle. It also highlights a particularly prevalent thought that sprang up during the holiday season:

important in this contest is the idea of moral reciprocity (*giri*) that is present within the gift exchange process and its importance as "social insurance." By giving gifts, one would be more likely to receive aid from neighbors and friends in times of hardship, and there is no question that the forced incarceration of the Japanese in this period was certainly a time of hardship. Harumi Befu, "Gift-Giving in a Modernizing Japan," in *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 23, No. 3/4 (1968), 452.

⁸⁵³ Christmas Greetings from Houston, Dec. 1942. Side B, R4, LWO 6087 GR6, Recorded Sound Division, LOC, Washington, DC.

⁸⁵⁴ "Americans All – How America Lives," *LHJ*, Dec. 1943, 103-113/125.

heightened attention on how other communities and cultures celebrated and a broader shift in outlook toward the international. Perhaps this was already primed given the wartime context but it was also heightened during the holiday season because of the shared commonalities in celebrating across borders. While the allure of Christmas was not enough to overcome American prejudice at home, in some ways it did help Americans re-evaluate their beliefs about other cultures and nations beyond their borders.

American Community within the International

America's involvement in the war brought an end to isolationist sentiments that had dominated mainstream American thought in the 1930s.⁸⁵⁵ A realization emerged that in order to make the world a safer and more peaceful place, nations would need to work together. Working with diverse countries and cultures is never easy to accomplish, and often it is necessary to find common ground between groups to establish understanding and appreciation of each other. Christmas in many ways not only embodied the American values the nation hoped to spread to the world but it could also be seen as an international bridge. Due to its widespread yet unique celebration, it was seen as a possible way to connect but also appreciate differences around the world, as long as these differences did not pose a threat to the American way of life. Numerous magazines and newspapers across the country detailed how Christmas was celebrated around the world, both in normal times and now under the strain of war. For example, the *Christian Science Monitor* detailed how one prominent Christmas party held for the children of New York City featured the theme "Christmas Around the World." The traditional celebrations of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, and France were included. The organizer, Ireene Wicker, told the paper how "these simple religious celebrations are now forbidden in the countries of Europe that are under Nazi domination... but here in the United States, age-old traditions are revived by loving relatives of those oppressed peoples."⁸⁵⁶ The appreciation for different customs is clear,

⁸⁵⁵ Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*.

⁸⁵⁶ "Holiday Fun," *CSM*, Dec. 30, 1943, 8. "Christmas Gets Global Celebration," *HC*, Dec. 26, 1944, 8. "Yule Hope for Peace," *CSM*, Dec. 23, 1944, 10. "Christmas, 1944," *SEP*, Dec. 23, 1944, 80.

as is the understanding that this is the American way of freedom in contrast to oppression. Americans saw it as their duty to ensure that the freedom to celebrate Christmas prevailed, internationally as well as at home, as long as those people did not deviate from the script in a way that threatened the mainstream.

There was a particular appreciation for the ability of people under these conditions to continue to celebrate Christmas. The *Saturday Evening Post* noted that “But the truth is, of course, that Christmas belongs to dispossessed, suffering and perilously situated people more truly than it belongs to the rest of us.”⁸⁵⁷ This clearly was meant in the case of suffering whites rather than oppressed racial minorities at home. *American Girl* magazine published in December 1944 a story on how a Norwegian family traditionally celebrated Christmas despite Nazi oppression along with an article on Christmas legends and customs around the world.⁸⁵⁸ *Women’s Home Companion* printed four Christmas poems, each specifically chosen by a woman in the U.S., China, Britain, and the Soviet Union, to highlight the particular wartime importance of the holiday season to their respective countries.⁸⁵⁹ Dorothy Thompson, reporting on 1,000 European refugees who had been given asylum at Fort Ontario, in New York, commented that “it is no permanent home and yet it is a first home - admitted on an act of Christian charity but it is also a message to us - in this darkness we may see a great light and these visitors brighten our Christmas as far as they ease our conscience.”⁸⁶⁰ She reminded listeners that the birth which Christmas celebrates was, in reality, the birth of a refugee, and in celebrating Him, people were choosing to believe in the possibility of a better world despite the darkness that currently prevailed. Even an interned Japanese minister commented on the suffering around the world and its contrast to the Christmas message. He saw this as a sign that for “too long, men have looked to themselves for wisdom and direction. We are like

⁸⁵⁷ “Christmas, 1944,” *SEP*, Dec. 23, 1944, 80.

⁸⁵⁸ “We’ll Always Have a Christmas,” *AG*, Dec. 1944, 5-7, 38-39, and 42. “Christmas Around the World,” *AG*, Dec. 1944, 22-23.

⁸⁵⁹ *WHC*, Dec. 1944, 12-13.

⁸⁶⁰ NBC Broadcast of Dorothy Thompson, Dec. 23, 1944. RWA 7601, 1786820, Recorded Sound Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

frightened children, after all our bravado, clinging in desperation to the edge of thin ice. Our only hope is to seek, think, and live the eternal divine music of Christmas.”⁸⁶¹ According to this minister, who was interned at Minidoka, the turmoil in the world was a sign that people should return to the values associated with Christmas; Christian values but within that, a sense of brotherhood and care for one's neighbors would bring peace to the world.

Christmas provided a basis for nations to work together with a backdrop of American values that Americans believed were necessary for peace on the international stage. Norreys Jephson O’Conor of the *Los Angeles Times* stated on Christmas Day 1943, “Not merely the celebration of Christmas Day but the entire series of Christmas customs associated with the season marks the unity of the Allied nations fighting the Axis. However, a pleasing diversity in national usages typifies that freedom in a larger union which is one of the objects of the war.”⁸⁶² Christmas could be used not only to show unity between allies but also the hope of a broader unity in the future, referring to the hopes that more nations would align themselves with Allied plans for the post-war world once America and the Allies won the war. Commenting on the season of peace on earth and goodwill, the troop magazine the *Stout Felder* stated that “one of the chief reasons why we are fighting is to make sure that one day there will be a real and greater peace on earth; that good will toward men will be a great deal more than an empty phrase... with full confidence in ourselves, our country, and the rightness of our cause.”⁸⁶³ Many people touted the idea of Christmas being something that the war was fighting to protect, but it was also a belief that allowed individuals and communities to look to the international and see their connections between themselves and other communities and nations of the world, as long as those connections were formed in line with American values.

⁸⁶¹ “Bethlehem’s Message From Young People’s Minister,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, Dec. 25, 1942, 3.

⁸⁶² “This Day Shows Unity of Allies,” *LAT*, Dec. 25, 1943, A4.

⁸⁶³ “Peace on Earth,” *Stout Felder Newspaper (Stout Field, Indianapolis, Indiana)*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Dec. 24, 1942, 8. Box 5, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

However, even those left outside the mainstream American celebration could see Christmas as a potential path to a better future for the world. Rabbi Levy of Chicago stated that Christmas was more of a mood than a festival, and in that sense, it could compel both Jew and Gentile toward peace and goodwill. This, he believed, fit with the “determination abroad in the land that the post-war world is going to be different, that men shall have purer beliefs and cleaner ideals, that a larger fellowship must possess the heart of humanity.”⁸⁶⁴ He saw Christmas as a way to regenerate Christians and Jews toward a spirit of harmony and propel them to reconcile “nation with nation, race with race, creed with creed, class with class.”⁸⁶⁵ Similarly, the African-American newspaper the *Chicago Defender* referred to peace as “a Christmas party” in an article that considered whether “negroes [should] sit at the peace table.”⁸⁶⁶ The author believed that African Americans could offer something particularly valuable to the plans for peace, notably because of their underprivileged position, as they were more aware of what kind of values were really necessary to prevent oppression. However, the presentation of this meeting as a ‘Christmas party’ indicates how symbolic this cultural icon was, as it could represent the potential framework for the formation of future peace at a time when that idea was very much being shaped and constructed in actuality.

This idea of the power of holidays to promote tolerance of difference and to create a better future for the world was studied by the Institute for Democratic Education shortly after the war (May 1946). The study conducted interviews to determine what psychological beliefs were associated with holiday feelings and if they could be used to promote tolerance. While the study revealed that many holidays had lost their emotional significance, Christmas was the least affected by this. According to the study “Holidays seem to be days set apart from other days on which you can come closer to what you really want out of life ... of not being alone, of being loved and appreciated.”⁸⁶⁷ Holidays

⁸⁶⁴ *CDT*, Dec. 3, 1944, B18.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁶ Margaret Anderson, “Should Negroes Sit at the Peace Table,” *CD*, Oct. 30, 1943, 13.

⁸⁶⁷ Institute for Democratic Education, “Holidays and tolerance: a psychological study to serve as guide in the conception of a series of radio programs,” May 1946, 22.

made people more tolerant and consequently friendlier regardless of race or background, because, according to the interviews, in these moments they had the sense that their personal needs were more clearly being met. The task of the Institute was to use this finding to determine how to extend the tolerance that the holiday seemed to create to other times of the year, and that perhaps this might be possible through particular kinds of holiday programs. The sentimentality of the season could inspire people to be more tolerant of differences that they otherwise might close themselves off to, if only on a superficial and non-intersectional level.

Ultimately, during the war, ideas about the future of the world were connected to Christmas ideals of peace and goodwill. The wartime value of Christmas was particularly important for upholding local, national, and international communities within a framework based on mainstream American values. It also shaped how individuals in these communities understood how they fit and interacted with their broader world. Through the various functions of community Christmas connections were forged between military and civilian groups, and between classes, religions, and races. These were forged on the basis of shared understanding and appreciation of American values that Christmas upheld in society, namely the idea of the U.S. and its people as generous and that they were engaged in a valiant fight to bring these American values to those who needed them most, and obscured the hypocrisy of a nation built upon racial oppression being the one to do this. What it meant to be an American was particularly brought to light through the inclusion in or exclusion from in the celebration of Christmas and gave dominant whites the delusion they were 'good.' While the rhetoric and sentimentality associated with Christmas presented a possible path to a better future for the world and greater tolerance among individuals, it was in many cases superficial. Rather than actually promoting tolerance, it provided a possible way into the dominant community, but only if the minority subjugated themselves to the values of the majority and proved themselves not to be a threat to the status quo.

Chapter 5: Christmas Abroad

Introduction

On Christmas Day 1943, NBC radio did not just play the carol “Oh Little Town of Bethlehem;” it actually connected to servicemen and support personnel stationed in Bethlehem, Palestine. After the song, a voice came over airwaves and said, “I am an American soldier. I am standing in the grotto under the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. This is a great moment in my life and I want to tell you as much as I can about it. A long time ago this place was a stable in the back of an inn – right here in front of my eyes is the place where Jesus lay in the manger, where Wise Men brought him gifts and where shepherds came guided by the star.”⁸⁶⁸ Then a female voice spoke, saying “I am an American Red Cross worker here where there are hundreds of American soldiers – we’re having a Xmas [sic] this year that none of us will ever forget as long as we live, one that will give greater meaning to all the Christmases we’re going to have at home with you in the future.”⁸⁶⁹ Before the carol, a message from Alaska had been on the broadcast. Corporal Robert Simon of Chicago joked about speaking with Santa and Mrs. Claus at the Alaskan post due to its proximity to the North Pole and told listeners that all of the post’s food was being eaten by Santa’s visiting reindeer. After the Bethlehem segment, U.S. bomber crews based in China came on the air and told of how they delivered their ‘gifts’ to the Japanese just days before.⁸⁷⁰ In the span of several minutes a radio show originating in New York City revealed the diverse range of Americans’ global Christmas experiences brought on by war and affirmed many of the traditional elements of a typical American holiday experience, including the myth of Santa Claus, religion, giving, food, and community. Christmas, whether it was in the cold of Alaska or the heat of Asia, in the context of Jesus or Santa, was still Christmas, despite the war.

⁸⁶⁸ Described as “Special Christmas program presented by NBC's Special Events Department in an attempt to bring together by radio the men and women of the United States armed forces from around the world and to give their relatives on the home front a first-hand account of how Christmas is being spent at those far distant outposts by their loved ones” in NBC’s “Christmas Reunion,” Broadcast, Dec. 25 1943. NBC Radio Broadcasting Index Cards, Recorded Sound Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid.

Furthermore, troops and listeners back home were able to reconcile the violence of war with the Christmas spirit with little concern for their contradictory nature. Even the dropping of bombs on the enemy could be framed within the context of Christmas gift-giving. World War II positioned American troops and personnel around the globe to a degree that had never been seen before. Radio broadcasters realized that a unique consequence of the war was that Americans were celebrating around the world and sought to connect these diverse experiences and relay them back to the American people at home. There was a deep concern for the nation's armed forces, especially at a time when being far from home was particularly poignant. Christmas could make even the darkest moments of war just a little bit brighter, or so the radio station hoped the broadcast would convey.

The story of the American experience of Christmas in World War II is not complete without a discussion of how the holiday was celebrated abroad, how that celebration was communicated and connected to the American people back home, what Christmas meant in these ersatz American communities formed in various foreign locations, and why the government put so much consideration into these events. Considering that 73% of American servicemen were stationed abroad during World War II, that they served an average of sixteen months overseas, and that they served in places as varying as India to Iceland, it would be impossible to cover the huge range of possible American experiences in the context of this study.⁸⁷¹ Therefore, a particular case will be used: the American experience of Christmas while stationed in Britain from 1942-1945, with occasional reference to experiences outside this region that were promoted or broadcasted on a large scale to Americans back home.

Americans engaged in war work arrived in the United Kingdom before their own country's entry into the war. In June 1941 there were 362 civilian technicians in Northern Ireland, working to help build naval and air bases deemed necessary to protect U.S.

⁸⁷¹ "U.S. Military by the Numbers," *National World War II Museum*, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-us-military-numbers>

convoys tasked with supplying Britain through the Lend-Lease program.⁸⁷² After the Christmas 1941 meeting between British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt an agreement was signed on New Year's Day 1942. This ensured that American troops would be headed to Britain to prepare for an Allied invasion as part of the 'Europe First' strategy the two leaders had agreed on. The first 4,000 arrived in Belfast on January 25-29th 1942, and would continue to cross the channel throughout the spring and summer.⁸⁷³ Some of those first troops to arrive would wait over two-and-a-half years to see the action of the cross-channel invasion. For example, the 29th Infantry Division arrived in October 1942 and would remain stationed in the southwest of England for more than a year-and-a-half. The 8th Army Air Force would put down roots in the Suffolk and East Anglia regions, though it was engaged with the enemy in air combat much sooner than ground troops. Accompanying these air and ground forces were support personnel (drivers, cooks, and construction and other service units) critical to ensuring the combat forces could live, train, and fight from their new base locations.⁸⁷⁴ From the spring of 1942 until 1945 some three million Americans would find themselves in the United Kingdom at some point or another. After the invasion of Europe, troops streamed onto the mainland to complete the task and deliver the final blow to the enemy. By VE-Day fewer than 250,000 American troops were left in Britain, and by the end of 1946 the last of them had left (taking with them over 60,000 war brides back to America).⁸⁷⁵ The military planned to have 850,000 Americans on their way home within the first three months of the end of the war, another 1.2 million in six months, and ultimately the 3.1 million not needed for occupation duties would be on their way home within a year of the end of the war in Europe.⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷² Gardiner, *Over Here*, 12.

⁸⁷³ "On This Day: January 26, 1942," *Forces War Records*, <https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/blog/2017/01/26/onthisday-january-26-1942---american-soldiers-arrive-in-great-britain>

⁸⁷⁴ David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942 - 1945* (London: Phoenix, 2000), xxiv.

⁸⁷⁵ Gardiner, *Over Here*, 201.

⁸⁷⁶ Norman Longmate, *The G.I.'s: The Americans in Britain 1942-1945* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1975), 320.

While an argument could be made that selecting one of the more obscure, exotic, or culturally different locations, like India or Iceland, might provide a broader perspective of how Christmas was celebrated, England was chosen for several key reasons. The first is the length of time that Americans were stationed there (1942-1945), which allowed for a significant degree of interaction between locals and American personnel. The second is the large number of Americans who were posted there, with approximately three million men and women passing through the country. With slightly more than twelve million Americans serving in the conflict, this is about a quarter of the total number of those who served. These large numbers had an intense impact on the local population, especially when considering the demographics of England itself. It is a considerably smaller country in terms of land, though more densely populated in comparison to the U.S. The British were more concentrated in the cities, especially London, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester. They were also a considerably more homogenous society with race and ethnicity far less divisive than in the United States, and instead, the divisions in British society often fell along class lines. There was some animosity towards those of Jewish descent, as well as towards the largest minority, the Irish, though they totaled less than 1% of the total population. Conversely, America was a land of immigrants with comparatively deeper racism coupled with a much shorter national history on which to build common ground.⁸⁷⁷ Aside from these statistics, it might seem that choosing a case study whose population and culture is so similar to that of America might not allow for a clear assessment of a ‘transplanted’ American Christmas. However, it was the similarity of culture between Britain and America that gave their celebration of Christmas overlapping features, allowing the interaction and blending of local and foreign elements of the holiday celebration, and generating significant concern and discussion of the similarities and differences between them. Additionally, both the American and the British governments were particularly concerned about the American celebration of Christmas in England, especially in terms of ensuring morale remained high considering

⁸⁷⁷ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, 17–25. The population of the continental United States was 131 million in 1940, compared to England and Wales combined total of 41 million. England has 750 people per square mile in 1940, compared to the United States which had only 44.

the large numbers of idle American troops in the U.K. This created a unique case wherein both the national and a foreign government put considerable effort into ensuring the holiday went off without a hitch.

The British had their own Christmas celebrations long before the Americans arrived in 1942. As was discussed in earlier chapters, many of the origins of American Christmas traditions had British roots, though Americans often liked to disregard that lineage. Just as Americans had come to develop their own quintessential American Christmas, so too did British Christmas reflect the “interests, hopes, and fears” of British Society.⁸⁷⁸ Mark Connelly has traced the development of the celebration of Christmas, how it was articulated through popular culture, exported to overseas empires, and how its most central modern component – shopping – also fit within “a distinctly national feeling.”⁸⁷⁹ American Christmas developed from British roots and can also be seen to follow a similar pattern, of definition through popular culture and consumption, though the process of exporting American Christmas took place later than the British export and in many cases began in the context of World War II.

Americans in Britain

Several works have discussed the experiences of Americans in Britain during World War II, most notably, David Reynolds’ *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (1995).⁸⁸⁰ This study blended military and social history to unpack how those who came to Britain during World War II affected the host society, and vice versa. Reynolds investigated the validity of the contemporary view that the Americans were “oversexed, overpaid, overfed and over here” in comparison to the British who were “undersexed, underpaid, underfed and under Eisenhower.”⁸⁸¹ Reynolds confirms that this

⁸⁷⁸ Connelly, *Christmas*, xv.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

⁸⁸⁰ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, general. Other studies include Longmate, *The G.I.'s*; Gardiner, *Over Here*; C. P Stacey and Barbara M Wilson, *The Half-Million: The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1946* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). Stacey and Wilson looked at the Canadians in Britain during the war.

⁸⁸¹ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, xxiii.

stereotype was largely accurate but complicates this popular view by articulating *why* there were differences between British and American troops and societies more generally. Considering that the Chief of Staff, General George Marshall, believed that the key to successfully keeping a force of citizen-soldiers together was to ensure good morale through lavish material conditions, a deep divide emerged between American and British standards of living. He argued there was a need for the American state to work harder to ensure its troops were happy; their home was not on the front lines of the actual fighting, which meant their citizens and servicemen would not tolerate the same levels of deprivation that other nations might. Reynolds' work demonstrated how, because of American and English differences, the ultimate result of the interaction was that Americans came to realize how they stood apart. His work is also significant for the way it blends civilian experience with the military realities of war, highlighting that to understand the experiences of an army of non-professional troops one needs to look beyond mobilization, deployment, maneuvers, and campaigns. Reynolds argued that the extensive American presence in Britain had an effect on subsequent changes in English culture in the post-war period, as "the GI became a symbol of American wealth, values and power... [and] contributed there to longer-term patterns of Americanization."⁸⁸² While Reynolds is quick to note the dangers of ascribing too much power to this episode in history, it represents an important moment in both the history of the United States and of Britain.

While the historical ties between Britain and America might seem particularly obvious today, at the time most British people were indifferent towards Americans, and most Americans had little knowledge of the British.⁸⁸³ However, at the top levels of both governments there existed a desire to create a mutual feeling of esteem between the two allies and foster a special relationship between them.⁸⁸⁴ This was sometimes difficult to establish on the ground. On bases, the American military provided facilities for its troops,

⁸⁸² Ibid, 445.

⁸⁸³ Ibid, 30-40.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid, 161.

namely entertainment and exchange centers, while the American Red Cross was commissioned to establish service clubs and hospitality centers for those on leave and in transit. Regardless, because of the popularity of the American service clubs, organizers were forced to render them American-only, leading unintentionally to a separation between British and American troops off-base. Furthermore, the U.S. also benefited from a favorable exchange rate. Combined with the high U.S. pay rates, and the attraction of many British women to these wealthy, well-dressed foreign troops, it is not surprising that there was a degree of friction between these Allies.⁸⁸⁵ Christmas, then, held a particularly special place in the hearts of both the British and the Americans, and provided a particularly powerful moment to improve relations, perceptions, and interactions between the two nationalities, both soldier and civilian.

Wartime Christmas Experiences

After the first Christmas the Americans spent in Britain, the press reported thousands of parties across the country hosted by the Americans. Most were thrown for local children and featured holiday food, décor, and gifts, much of which was saved or scavenged by the American troops themselves. While the British would have had Christmas without the presence of Americans, by the time of the Americans arrival in 1942 the British population had been at war for several years and the effects of shortages and restrictions had severely impacted the celebration. This presented an opportunity for Americans to ingratiate themselves with the locals by sharing in and helping along the Christmas celebrations and traditions. Similar to programs established on the home front discussed in previous chapters, servicemen were invited formally and informally into the homes of locals to celebrate. According to Red Cross records, such invitations in 1942 outnumbered the men 50 to 1 that year. *Stars and Stripes – London* reported that Piccadilly Circus was “such a place as Piccadilly or perhaps even Times Square, New York, never has been before. There was a spectacular outburst of jollity as Americans

⁸⁸⁵ Conduct on American Troops, East Suffolk Police File, 1943-1945. A2437, Ipswich Record Office. Suffolk Records, U.K.

mingled with civilians and soldiers of a score of nations to ring in Christmas.”⁸⁸⁶ The paper went on to state that a “typical example was a lanky doughboy parading down London’s great thoroughfare with a white Scotty dog in his arms and a pretty girl on each elbow, a Canadian wearing a shiny pink top-hat and tooting merrily on his Christmas as whistle—a group of Polish refugees singing strange, rhythm carols on a main corner... everywhere [people] were ‘understanding’ and had a lot of fun.”⁸⁸⁷ This story details the broad strokes of American Christmas experiences abroad: the foreign location, the strange sights and sounds, the blending of cultures and military personnel with civilians. Overall, Christmas in Britain was a time when Americans, Brits, and other diverse nationalities were reminded of their shared humanity and desire to create a better future for the world.

There were many aspects of the Christmas celebration that shaped the time spent serving in a foreign land. The following sections will detail the experience of celebrating in a transplanted American community. First, the wartime emotions of those serving in Britain will be discussed, especially noting the role of nostalgia, loneliness, and humor, and how these emotions blended to encourage individuals to recreate the American version of the holiday and adapt it to wartime conditions. This re-creation included festive food, gifts and mail (as both givers and receivers), and entertainment (for themselves and others). Considerable effort was required on the part of the government to carry out these endeavors, so the question *why* it was undertaken will be addressed: why was Christmas carried out to such an extent in foreign lands despite the urgency of war? Key in this regard will be the foreign perception of Americans in their transplanted surroundings. Christmas functioned as a demonstration of generosity; replicating, on an international scale, a similar purpose that the holiday provided for the home front. Additionally, Christmas helped troops away from home cope with realities of war and allowed them to celebrate and project their personal support for the American way on the international stage. While many of the countries Americans were stationed in, Britain

⁸⁸⁶ *SandS London*, Dec. 28, 1942, 2.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

included, had their own Christmas celebrations, Americans believed celebrating and spreading their particular version of Christmas was a patriotic act. Moving into the post-war period, Christmas worked to present the American way as a path for a better future for the world. In a time when nations were particularly keen to change the international framework of relations between states, looking at Christmas is particularly useful as one way to illustrate the relationship between the experience of World War II and the war's legacy within of the global community.

Wartime Christmas Sentiments

In July 1946, a survey asked veterans what they disliked the most about being in the service. While the top response was that there were too many orders, the second most common response was the distance they were from their homes and families.⁸⁸⁸

Christmas was a particularly difficult time to be separated from one's home and family, so many troops stationed abroad became very nostalgic for their homes at this time of year. Lawrence Winston, an African-American sailor, wrote to his wife just before

Christmas that he "couldn't help but think of all the things I would like to be home for. I think Xmas is about the biggest time of the year for everyone to be home that possibly

can. Of course that means sailors to [sic], but I'm almost afraid to think of the places I may be besides home on that favorite day. However I'm hoping against all things that I

will be there to help you and the girls celebrate."⁸⁸⁹ Similarly, Leonard Larsen, an Army officer stationed in England, wrote to his wife just before Christmas 1942, "I'm feeling a

little lonely right now. I can't help but think of you without feeling so. We haven't been getting much mail and there's no place to go. So it's pretty lonesome here. When you

have no diversion, there's nothing else to do, and naturally your thoughts turn to home.

Of course I'm always thinking of you hons, but more so at a time such as this."⁸⁹⁰ Both of these letters indicate that while Christmas could be a time for merriment, it could also

⁸⁸⁸ Gallup poll, July 24, 1946. Cantril, *Public Opinion*, 953.

⁸⁸⁹ Letter, Lawrence Winston to wife "darling," Nov. 5, 1943. Box 1, Lawrence Winston Papers (MS2). NYHS, New York City, NY.

⁸⁹⁰ Letter, Leonard Larsen to Helen Larsen, Dec. 21, 1942. Box 1, Leonard Larsen Papers (MS365). NYHS, New York City, NY.

serve as a powerful reminder of being far from home, clearly something on the minds of people when they lacked distractions.

Some troops put thought and effort into trying to forget the reminder of home that Christmas instilled in them. Jack Sydow wrote to his parents in November 1942 that while he wished he could be home for Christmas, “If I can’t I hope I’m stationed somewhere in the south where there won’t even be any snow or cold weather so that it won’t seem anything like Christmas.”⁸⁹¹ Others took a more active approach to their forgetting. In a letter from the Panama Canal Zone, one soldier wrote “‘Tis the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature is stirring not even a mouse... I suppose most are out to Panama City where they are celebrating Christmas Eve drinking and ‘blue-mooning’ at the various night clubs and cantinas. In one respect they cannot be blamed for it is very lonely here and so very far from home. Drinking makes them forget their troubles even though it be but for a few hours and the ‘blue-moon gals’ offer them a little companionship while their money holds out.”⁸⁹² While this individual was not indulging in the distractions that Panama City had to offer on Christmas Eve, he certainly understood why the rest of his group were partaking in these behaviors and the fact that Christmas loneliness had spurred them on.

Sadness, drinking, and purchased companionship were not the only ways servicemen tried to work through their emotions of the holiday season. Many also tried to make light of their situation by poking fun at their reality, taking to poetry to convey their Christmas experiences abroad. It allowed them to present their resentment of the situation in a safe manner, with humor to dull the difficult emotions brought out by being separated from their loved ones. Many Christmas poems were featured in military magazines such as *YANK* and *Stars and Stripes*, indicating that to some degree they were popular and appreciated by the majority of readers. A poem by Lieutenant S.A. Loverde published in

⁸⁹¹ Letter, Jack Sydow to his parents, Nov. 1942. Box 1, Series 1, Jack Sydow Photographs and Papers Print Collection (P289). NYHS, New York City, NY.

⁸⁹² Letter, Dan Farkas to Betty Leve, Dec. 24, 1943. Box 1, Betty Leve Correspondence Papers. NYHS, New York City, NY.

1943 ended with the lines “Der Fuhrer in the rear, Yeah we’ll be home by Christmas, God only knows WHAT YEAR.”⁸⁹³ Frustration at the war not being finished, even though it seemed to be going well, was felt particularly at Christmas given the deep longing to be home that the holiday inspired. The holiday also inspired satirical takes on holiday classics and traditions. Many troops wrote their own renditions of *The Night Before Christmas*, with lines like “Twas the night before Christmas and all through the barracks not a creature was stirring, not even the CQ,” or “When what to their wondering eyes should appear, But a miniature tank and eight tiny officers. With a little young driver so lively and quick, They knew in a moment it must be Captain Frick.”⁸⁹⁴ These fun poems and rhymes gave the men an opportunity to safely express their frustration and critique the authority and rigidity of the military, acknowledging how they felt about not being able to be home at Christmas without actively rebelling against their situation.

Generally speaking, though, especially in Britain, most men had a happy Christmas, despite the unfortunate reality of being away from home. In an open letter published in *Stars and Stripes – London*, the director of the George Street Red Cross Club in London, George Goodman, wrote how he had personally experienced one of the happiest Christmases of his life witnessing the common good feeling that was shown by both the British and the Americans stationed there.⁸⁹⁵ According to British censor reports for Christmas 1942, many letters expressed “utmost gratitude to the British, both organizations and private people for the way they have tried to recompense U.S. soldiers on being away from home, especially at Christmas time.”⁸⁹⁶ In that report, an excerpt from one letter from an American soldier described how a British family had taken him and a couple other soldiers in at Christmas. The men had found themselves in a small town with nowhere left to stay, and yet this British family with little for themselves to

⁸⁹³ S.A. Loverde, “Propheteering,” *SandS Oran*, Nov. 17, 1943, 2.

⁸⁹⁴ Joe McCarthy, “PFC Shea’s Merriest Christmas,” *YANK*, Dec. 24, 1943, 19; Poem, Audrey Mayer, January 1943. NYHS, New York City, NY.

⁸⁹⁵ George W. Goodman, “An Open Letter,” *SandS London*, Dec. 29, 1942, 2.

⁸⁹⁶ Home Field Censors Report on the US Soldiers' Mail, undated. FO 371/34123. KEW, London, England.

begin with offered them a room to sleep in and a meal. Another letter detailed how one town was so packed with visiting Americans that they could not fit all the guests in the community center so, they had to host three separate Christmas dances to accommodate everyone. The author went on to discuss how lovely the free Red Cross dinner was that American troops had been given prior to these dances.⁸⁹⁷ While the censor was particularly attuned to American perceptions of the British, these letters make evident that some positive experiences were had by the Americans despite being at war and far from home for Christmas.

Others, too, detailed that generally they had a good Christmas in England. A serviceman, George Johnson, wrote to his friend Garrett Winter in December 1942 that “Even though I was not with my old friends at home, I had a swell Christmas.”⁸⁹⁸ He described how a few of his friends went into town to the pubs to celebrate the holidays on their days off, and on Christmas Day itself the military provided a “grand dinner,” one that he did not “believe I could have seen a meal of such quantity even at home.”⁸⁹⁹ There is an obvious desire to confirm that he had been able to enjoy himself, even though he was unable to return home for the holidays. Relaying this information served the purpose of reassuring those at home that they were well even though they were separated.

Stars and Stripes – London took this one step further and, on top of trying to describe the good times the men were having for Christmas abroad, argued that it was their closeness to war that actually made their holiday experience all the more gratifying. The paper stated:

If the folks at home look forward with any degree of pleasure to Christmas, they must try to imagine the joy and happiness of those men whose great good luck has brought them through many hardships and dangers and having been brushed by death, now look forward to Christmas with the certain knowledge that they have brought closer the day when reunion with loved ones

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁸ Letter from George Johnson to Garrett H. Winter, Dec. 28, 1942. Box 1, World War II Collection (MS672). NYHS, New York City, NY.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

at home will be an actuality. To such men the Spirit of Christmas is a living thing. Having tasted, the bitterness of war, they can appreciate to the full the meaning of 'Peace on Earth... Good will to all Men.'⁹⁰⁰

Individually and collectively, those stationed abroad told of their positive Christmas experiences and were eager to relay that message to their loved ones back home. They were also eager to transplant their ideas of 'home' through Christmas into their foreign locations.

Drive to Recreate

Given the intense desire to be at home for the holidays and the inability of American troops stationed around the globe to get there because of war, the holiday was recreated and celebrated abroad. Some of the key features of a transplanted Christmas celebration included finding a way to create the appropriate décor and atmosphere; festive food; get gifts and mail, as well as receiving them; and host or attend holiday parties and entertainment. American personnel were quite ingenious and self-sacrificing in their determination to have Christmas despite the realities of war while on foreign soil. The similarity in form and function of the transplanted celebration indicates how ingrained the holiday was in the American psyche. Regardless of where they were or who they were hosting, the ersatz Christmas celebration followed a remarkably similar script. It could function for people personally as a reminder of home and their 'American-ness.' It could also be used to transmit meaning and motivate particular behaviors. In the international context, the holiday functioned as a way to convey meaning to the locals of these foreign lands about the Americans, what it meant to be an American, and the value of the American way of life. Through their proscriptive Christmas celebrations, Americans could demonstrate, to themselves and others, their country's values, generosity, and particular vision of how foreign people, like foreign nations, could and should interact outside of conflict.

⁹⁰⁰ "ETO Christmas 1943," *SandS London*, Dec. 23, 1943, 2.

Atmosphere

It would not be Christmas without toys to distribute to children, and yet that is exactly the reality that many American troops found. In many cases, it was something that servicemen took it upon themselves to correct. With Americans stationed near local communities, there was often a considerable interaction between themselves and locals. Children especially were drawn to bases, out of both curiosity and the chance of a soldier or sailor offering up some candy or chewing gum. During the holiday season, the men also wanted to give out toys to the neighborhood children, though in many cases local shortages made them extremely difficult to obtain. Convalescing troops made hundreds of toys for Irish children in December 1942, including mechanical gadgets, dolls, bracelets, and airplane models. These were often salvaged together from odds and ends, scraps, and other unnecessary war material. According to *Stars and Stripes – London*, “the patients [troops in hospital who made the toys] were even more enthused than the sponsors [the children receiving the toys], and immediately agreed to the idea of turning their creative efforts to building toys.”⁹⁰¹ Similarly, in 1943 the Special Services and the American Red Cross funded a workshop for troops to build toys for the disadvantaged children of London’s East End. In both cases, the gesture seems to not just serve the children receiving the toys but also the men building them, as it kept them busy and allowed them to “put their spare time to more advantage... and enjoy themselves in the process.”⁹⁰² However, this was not simply a make-work project, and the American soldiers seemed to be quite committed to providing toys to England’s children, as they even wrote home about it. For example, Corporal George W. Brown wrote to his parents to “send me some toys –old or new- as often as the post office regulations allow, and I’ll see that they get to mothers and fathers here who are finding it difficult to buy Christmas toys for their children.”⁹⁰³ This type of behavior continued throughout the war and it did so because it was believed to benefit all involved: the children who received toys, the

⁹⁰¹ *SandS London*, Dec. 18, 1942, 4.

⁹⁰² *SandS London*, Oct. 16, 1943, 2; *SandS London*, Dec. 14, 1943, 2.

⁹⁰³ *SandS London*, Oct. 9, 1943, 4.

men who kept busy and honed their building skills, and the respective governments which saw this as a way to improve relations and understanding between their peoples.⁹⁰⁴

The ingenuity of crafting toys out of various war materials was frequently reported in newspapers and letters, perhaps to indicate the skill of the American soldier, the importance of the notion to ‘make do and mend,’ and just how dedicated individuals were to the continued celebration of Christmas abroad. In 1944, the American Service Center depot made toys for 300 British orphans out of salvaged aircraft material.⁹⁰⁵ Similarly, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that a machine shop company used the shavings of a downed Nazi plane as tinsel on a GI Christmas tree in Algiers.⁹⁰⁶ Lawrence Collins, a surgeon with the 56th Evacuation Hospital stationed in North Africa, noted how “the pre-op ward put up a Christmas tree and started decorating it. Before the X-ray section knew what they were up to, pre-op conned them out of all the extra tinfoil and red paper that films come in - all they had on hand - and cut them up into various tree decorations.”⁹⁰⁷ The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported how servicemen from Illinois stationed in Hawaii had used the local flora: a Norfolk pine, decorated with Hawaiian flowers, became a Christmas tree.⁹⁰⁸ Around the world, American troops worked to recreate Christmas on distant soil and a similar pattern of using leftover war material emerged. When combined with a consistent reporting of these actions to the American people back home and their local hosts, it ultimately presented the servicemen as skillful and resourceful, bolstering their image at home and abroad, and working to shore up morale for the war effort in the process.

⁹⁰⁴ *SandS London*, Dec. 4, 1944, 5.

⁹⁰⁵ *SandS London*, Dec. 7, 1944, 5.

⁹⁰⁶ *AC*, Dec. 25, 1943, 18.

⁹⁰⁷ Lawrence D. Collins, *56th Evac Hospital: Letters of a WWII Army Doctor*, (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1995), 145.

⁹⁰⁸ *CDT*, Dec. 25, 1943, 5.

Food

Christmas and food have had a particularly close relationship throughout the various phases of the holiday's development. As was discussed in Chapter One, the family Christmas dinner, its form popularized by Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), not only served to domesticate the Christmas celebration but also worked to establish common national ground, as it did for Americans following the Civil War.⁹⁰⁹ In the context of World War II, traditional Christmas meals served a similar purpose, namely to remind personnel of happy memories of home and what they were fighting for. Conceptions of home were frequently conflated with war aims, and celebrations of Christmas were seen as critical moments of home away from home. Food had a powerful ability to evoke emotion and feelings of familiarity in a foreign land and with people who were ultimately not one's own family.

In a radio interview, Private Joel Ghetty stated that the thing he missed most was "on Christmas Day that big dinner with all the family there... the dinner and all the food."⁹¹⁰ Similarly, Private Lawrence Jascunes said that he wished he could be with his family and "help you eat that wonderful turkey, also could go for some apple pie with fresh cold milk."⁹¹¹ These two were hardly the only soldiers to mention food in the context of missing home, as this was a frequent theme in the radio interviews that were broadcast back to the home front, illustrating the important emotional connections formed by food tradition.

In terms of what foods were served to American troops, turkey was usually the central feature of the traditional Christmas meal. The armed forces put significant effort into securing the proper foods. As the war progressed, this represented a serious effort considering the rising numbers of service personnel and varied locations they were

⁹⁰⁹ Cathy Kaufman, "The Idea Christmas Dinner," in *The Journal of Food and Culture*, Vol. 4, No., 1, (2004): 1549 and 1559.

⁹¹⁰ Marine Corps Combat Recording, undated. Side B, R13, LWO 7025, Recorded Sound Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

⁹¹¹ Ibid.

serving. In 1943, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that 33 million pounds of turkey had been shipped to battlefronts and the military had secured another 25 million pounds for those stationed on the home front. Officials indicated that most would have the master-planned dinner of creamed celery soup, turkey with giblet gravy, sage or oyster dressing, cranberry-orange sauce, potatoes, baked squash, corn, lettuce with Russian dressing, hot rolls with butter, mince pies, chocolate nut cake, fruits, candies, nuts, and coffee.⁹¹² This was very similar to the 1942 menu which had also included olives, green beans, tomatoes, pumpkin pie, ice cream, and spice cake, in addition to the traditional turkey.⁹¹³ Despite the larger numbers of personnel and locations, the military worked to ensure that some version of a traditional dinner would reach the troops regardless of where they were.

The men definitely did take notice of the food, especially if they did not receive it. For example, Corporal Jerome Fraenkel, stationed in England, wrote a poem called “Food for Thought” in December of 1943:

Xmas Day will soon be here,
 With Xmas wine and Scotch and beer.
 Turkeys, roast and rich baked ham;
 But not for us for we'll get spam.
 The rules say we will get the bird
 The shipment's come or ain't you heard?
 But usually, we're late for chow...
 Turkey's gone... here's spam... and how!
 So Santa won't you try and make
 The cooks give us poor guys a break;
 And not run out of food before
 The late gang files through the door.⁹¹⁴

Apparent in this poem is the critical commentary on food shortages. From the content of this poem it would appear that even though the military went to great lengths to ensure that each soldier received a traditional holiday meal, it did not always work out that way.

⁹¹² “Army to Eat 35 Million Pounds of Yule Turkey, *CDT*, Dec. 18, 1943, 5.

⁹¹³ “Pass the Turkey,” *SandS Algiers*, Dec. 23, 1942, 4. Spam is a pre-cooked canned meat product made by Hormel that was used widely during World War II.

⁹¹⁴ Jerome Frankel, *SandS N. Ireland*, Dec. 13, 1943, 6.

The attention to the reality of the situation, especially the need to ship and feed vast numbers of troops, is noted, but so too is the desire that remains in spite of all that. There is a clear recognition of the fact that even though higher-ups had regulated something, it did not mean it would necessarily come to pass.

Food was also a powerful way to make connections with the local communities. British rationing, while it followed similar lines as in the U.S., was far more severe. Their situation was worsened by having been at war for two years prior to the American entry and being an island nation that primarily relied on imports to begin with. The British were encouraged, and took it upon themselves, to invite servicemen to their homes for holiday dinners. Often the American military would provide those invited with special rations to bring to their hosts. A typical package might include “fruit or tomato juice, evaporated milk, peas, bacon, sugar, coffee, lard or shortening, butter, rice, or available substitutions.”⁹¹⁵ These packages were particularly important as the combination of the British people’s meager rations and their desire to be hospitable hosts meant that American troops visiting could, if they did not recognize the situation, accidentally eat a large portion of a family’s rations. One example of this involved a GI from Virginia who went to one British family’s home for dinner. He reported that they “had a meal which even by American standards was great – complete with ham and much more. Only afterwards did I discover that I had eaten the family’s special rations for a month.”⁹¹⁶ While the soldier eventually returned with supplies from camp to make up for this error, it does reveal that there could be tension and mishaps in these encounters.

As Receivers

While Americans might have found themselves far from home for the holidays, they were certainly not forgotten. For Christmas 1942, the first Christmas to really see a significant number (one million approximately) of troops stationed outside the U.S., friends and relatives sent nearly 2.5 million packages, in addition to the fifty million ordinary mail

⁹¹⁵ *SandS London*, Dec. 10, 1942, 1.

⁹¹⁶ Gardiner, *Over Here*, 132. See pages 130-135 for more examples of occurrences like this one.

letters and greeting cards and the fourteen million sent by airmail that were posted in the October/November Christmas mailing period.⁹¹⁷ As was established in Chapter Two, considerable coordination between the government and the business community was undertaken to inform the public of what to send to servicemen, and how to send it. As the war progressed, more and more space had to be reserved in cargo planes and ships to ensure proper delivery. Every passenger plane heading to the European Theatre in 1943 had 1,000 pounds of mail space reserved (2,000 pounds on every cargo plane) in the hopes that this would be enough extra space to get the troops their holiday mail. By the last Christmas of the war, GIs stationed overseas were averaging about twelve packages per person, with a total of 82 million parcels cleared for shipment to Army and Navy personnel combined, 30 million of which were destined for Europe.⁹¹⁸ Officials estimated that Americans in Britain probably received more letters and packages per man this Christmas than servicemen in any other combat theatre.⁹¹⁹

As the war progressed and troops were eventually moved out of England and into the European continent, the mailing of gifts grew even more complex. As *Stars and Stripes – London* reported, “There’s the problem of a unit that moves from the U.K. to the Continent. New York is immediately advised. But mail sent to the original APO in England must be trans-shipped. And that takes time. When the mail finally gets to its destination on the Continent, the unit has moved again. The Army postman has to start all over again to catch up with the elusive Joe. But he doesn't give up until he has him located.”⁹²⁰ With so many men on the move, it was a significant undertaking to ensure that the mail made it through, and with holiday volumes what they were, it was extraordinarily difficult. In this context, those on the front lines got priority: “They get letters right in their foxholes. The Army knows why... To quote an officer from the 28th

⁹¹⁷ “Overseas Yule Gifts Tripled Over Last War,” *WP*, Dec. 20, 1942, L8.

⁹¹⁸ *SandS London*, Nov. 21, 1944, 1; Igor Cassini, “Soldier’s Mail,” *SandS London*, Dec. 30, 1944, 8.

⁹¹⁹ Arthur W. White, “Air Mail Space is Doubled to Speed up ETO’s Letters,” *SandS N. Ireland*, Jan. 8, 1944, 1.

⁹²⁰ Igor Cassini, “untitled,” *SandS London*, Dec 30, 1944, 1 and 8.

Division, somewhere in Belgium, ‘Mail from home means a hell of a lot to the boys. They dream of letters from their loved ones.’”⁹²¹ Mail priority was not simply a strategic function but served an important morale purpose, especially for those under heavy fire. Policymakers realized this and also understood that it was not just mail that could improve morale; Christmas presents too were important in this regard.

It is important to note that there was not a one-size-fits-all gift. The *Atlanta Constitution* reported that photos of family and loved ones were at the top of many Christmas lists for those stationed overseas, especially when accompanied by news from home.⁹²² However, according to one poll done by the *Army Times*, 19.6% of soldiers stated that “photographs of friends or family in unbreakable frames” are “junk,” likely because they were heavy and bulky to carry around. According to a reporter for *YANK*, “A lot of us may secretly have been thinking that for years, but it took the *Army Times* to bring those courageous outspoken few to the fore. Another heroic stand was taken by the 11.7% who came right out and said that ‘home-made cookies, cakes, jams, etc.’ are worthless,” for they could be spoiled in transit.⁹²³ This reveals not only a clear set of mixed emotions toward home-related or sentimental gifts but also that servicemen may have at times tried to conceal their real preferences for particular gifts for fear of hurting the feelings of their loved ones back home.

In an advisory note on overseas war mail for people on the home front, the Office of War Information stated that military personnel might “rather than hurt the feelings of the sender” write “a ‘white lie’ saying how much he enjoyed the gift package and its contents.”⁹²⁴ Certain gifts may not have been the best fit and despite how much advice was given to those back home, in many cases letters were often enough to fulfill the function of holiday gift exchange and boost the morale of the recipient. Therefore, the

⁹²¹ Ibid.

⁹²² “Boys Overseas Begging Photos,” *AC*, Sept. 9, 1943, 3.

⁹²³ “Merry Cribbage and a Happy Shower Clog,” *YANK*, Dec. 3, 1943, 22.

⁹²⁴ Note on overseas mail, no author, no date. Box 8, Entry 84, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

OWI encouraged those on the home front to send letters to troops. According to their advisory notice,

[Mail] is something that goes straight to his heart. He can carry a letter around with him indefinitely and read it over and over again when loneliness descends on him. Letters reassure him of the love of his sweetheart, wife, or mother; food for his soul; maintain his morale at a high level; give him peace of mind. I have seen such letters virtually work out from repeated readings. He often proudly shares his letters with his buddy as proof of how well he stands in the affection of his loved ones back home.⁹²⁵

Receiving reminders of home during the holiday season was tied directly to troop morale and conceptions of what they were fighting for. As Staff Sergeant Vince Lonergan stated,

Mail keeps a belief in their hearts. We believe in our country and we believe you have faith in us too - it's not because we are heroes. We are fighting for our homes, our families, and our sweethearts for the rights that should be held so highly by Americans everywhere and the rights that have been forgotten by you and by us. We remember it out here and it comes to us quite clearly at Christmas time as clearly as the star that first showed the way to the wise men, as clearly as those lights that once were shining for us in windows back home.⁹²⁶

The emotions associated with mail, the holiday season, home, and what troops were fighting for were all interconnected and featured prominently in the minds of troops stationed abroad. The military establishment was deeply concerned with ensuring mail and gifts got to their intended destinations. While the polls they conducted were ultimately inconclusive in discovering the perfect gift, the fact that military personnel undertook this effort reveals that they understood the important function of gifts in maintaining and uplifting soldiers' and sailors' morale. Perhaps, in this sense, it really was the 'thought that counts,' both the thought of loved ones sending gifts and the

⁹²⁵ Ibid.

⁹²⁶ Recording, no title, Dec. 1944. R8A1 LWO 7025, Recorded Sound Division. LOC, Washington, DC.

thought of their nation doing the best it could to ensure they made it to their correct destination.

Corporations also sought to tap into the heightened emotional meaning of gift reception for troops abroad. While to some degree a company's decision to send a gift to a soldier might have been based on appreciation or wartime patriotic fervor, it was not wholly altruistic. Companies also wanted to use the moment as a way to insert themselves into the dialogue about the meaning of home and happiness that was being shaped by the evolving ideas of what the war was being fought for. As wartime ideals settled on abstract ideas of the American way (apple pie, Christmas, and others), corporations could use these symbolic ideas to inject themselves into more deeply held American values through the sending of gifts. They would be seen as a quintessential part of the holiday season and the goodwill associated with it, which was meant to make the world a better place in the post-war future. This would be appreciated by both the military personnel overseas and also those on the home front who, tied up in patriotic sentiment, would see a positive corporate act, one that could help to secure the company's place in the post-war world.

Companies varied in the specific ways they carried out this project. Some simply shifted from their pre-war promotional practice of sending gifts to their customers to sending one to someone in the service instead. For example, Sterling Grinding Wheel Company sent a letter to its loyal customers whom they traditionally thanked for their business during the holiday season to ask for a name of a servicemen to send a gift to instead.⁹²⁷ Others (such as Domino Cane Sugar Company) decided to send gifts to former employees who were in the service. The effort was appreciated as one recipient, Lieutenant W. R. Robotham, responded to the gesture: "more than the gift, it's wonderful to know that we are so well remembered and that our effort out here is understood and appreciated by the men and women at home."⁹²⁸ Similarly, Macy's worked to send a gift to every former staff

⁹²⁷ "Customers Send Gifts," *PI*, Oct. 30, 1942, 37.

⁹²⁸ Advertising plan, no date, Domino Cane Sugar. Box 8, Series 3, N.W. Ayer Collection (ACNMAH 59). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

member who had taken a leave of absence from the company in order to join the forces. In the company newsletter of December 1942, the editor “urge[d] all who hear from former Macyites in the service to send their addresses to the *Sparks* [company newsletter] office so that we can be in touch with them and put them on *Sparks* mailing list.”⁹²⁹ That year the company sent a personal greeting card from the head of the department store and a gift package including a “jar of peanut butter, a carton of Saybrooke cigarettes, a jar of jam, a box of melba toast, a pound of candy, and a novel.”⁹³⁰ Generally speaking, food and cigarettes were the kinds of things that were well-received by most troops.⁹³¹ Not only would this have created a positive public relations image for Macy’s but also for the other brands included in the package, such as the cigarette company Saybrooke. Other corporations that undertook this program included Metro, Showmen’s League of America, Goodyear, CBS, NBC, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* – despite the fact that the Army “has discouraged the sending of gifts by organizations on the ground that an impersonal gift of this kind does not fill a soldier's need” and the volume of mail was significant and put considerable strain on shipping capabilities.⁹³² Regardless, the ritual drive to send gifts during the holiday season remained strong throughout the war and was adapted to fit patriotic sentiments of the time even though the actual process of doing so required shipping and labor requirements that could have been directed at more urgent war needs. This indicates that contemporaries viewed these activities as equally or more important than other war needs, presumably because of the significance gifts and letters had for the morale of troops and others stationed so far from their homes during the holiday season.

⁹²⁹ R.H. Macy & Co., *Sparks Magazine*, edited by Ruth Moore (New York), 19, Dec. 1942. Box 6, William L. Bird Holidays on Display Collection (ACNMAH 1288). SNMAH, Washington DC.

⁹³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹³¹ Private Papers of A. J. Longley, Doc. 7782, 21. Imperial War Museum (IWM), London, England. *WP*, Dec. 20, 1942, L8. “Christmas Dinner,” *Sands Algiers*, Dec. 21, 1943, 2.

⁹³² “Overseas Yule Gifts Tripled Over Last Year,” *WP*, Dec. 20, 1942, L8. “Metro's Yule Package to Men in Service,” *Variety*, Vol. 152, No. 12, (Dec. 1, 1943): 4. “Carnivals: SLA Strives for Christmas Packages for Servicemen,” *The Billboard*, Vol. 55, No. 44, (Oct. 30, 1943), 31 and 55.

“Radio: Nets, Indies Remember their Ex-Staffers in Service with Christmas Dough and Works,” *The Billboard*, Vol. 55, No. 42, (Oct 16, 1943), 10. “Men to Get Defenders as Yule Gifts,” *CD*, Sept. 25, 1943, 2. “Georgia,” *YANK*, Dec. 9, 1942, 10.

As Givers

With all these gifts heading to men stationed overseas, it is important to remember that this was a reciprocal process as well. The act of giving during the holiday season was equally important to morale as receiving, and considerable effort also went into ensuring the men could send gifts and mail home to their loved ones for Christmas. If troops were unable to send gifts, this would be mentioned in their letters home, and they often would ask certain family members for help if they could not do it themselves. Lawrence Winston, a private stationed in Britain, wrote to his wife in December 1943, asking “Did you send a card to our families? I didn’t send any one a card from out here so you see it is all up to you to do the honors this year. Whatever you do about those cards though darling, I will be satisfied.”⁹³³ Even though Winston was abroad in the midst of a worldwide war, sending a card to his family for the holidays was still a priority to him. To make sending cards easier and cheaper for the troops overseas, the American Red Cross distributed free cards. In 1942, over 500,000 free cards were distributed throughout the United Kingdom. Each had a photograph of American soldiers listening to the London Choir School in front of St. Marks’s and was inscribed with the message “Christmas Greetings from Somewhere in Britain.”⁹³⁴ If they were mailed from a military camp to somewhere in the United States, postage was not necessary.

Troops often created personalized or unit cards to send back to their loved ones, illustrating a curious blend of militarism and merriment.⁹³⁵ These often made note of the exotic locations to which they were posted. For example, the 1944 Christmas Card of the 83rd Squadron of the 12th Bomb Group stationed in India in 1944 showed a plane flying above the clouds and was captioned “Earthquakes over Burma.” The inside caption read “Christmas Greetings ‘Peace on Earth - Goodwill toward Men’ is only a vision this

⁹³³ Letter, Lawrence Winston to wife “darling,” Dec. 22, 1943. Box 1, Lawrence Winston Papers (MS2). NYHS, New York City, NY.

⁹³⁴ “Red Cross Will Give Away 500,000 Christmas Cards,” *Sands London*, Nov. 3, 1942, 4. s

⁹³⁵ Christmas Card, Dec. 25, 1942. Box 17, Frank Andrew Maxwell Papers (ID MSS 11015), Manuscript Division. LOC, Washington, DC. Christmas Card, undated. Box 1, Betty Leve Papers. NYHS, New York City, NY. “FDR to get Yule Cards from Travelling GIs,” *AC*, Dec. 18, 1944, 3.

Christmas of 1944 but it's a Hope that grows brighter with each passing day. So as we fly through these dark horizons our course is lighted by His Star."⁹³⁶ Religion, military might, and goodwill somehow were able to work together during the holiday season to present an image of a better future for the world which would come through the efforts of the squadron.

Finding gifts to give could prove to be difficult in various theatres of war. As was mentioned previously, American troops stationed in Britain sought to give toys to some of the local children near their base. In one case, even after saving up a collective \$1,600 to do this, when some of them went to London to make an actual purchase they discovered there was a toy shortage in England.⁹³⁷ While the ingenious troops decided to use scrap material around the camp to make their own toys in the end, this reveals that even if Americans had the money to purchase gifts, the wartime realities often meant it was not that easy under local conditions.

Similarly, sending gifts back home involved regulations that needed to be followed, just like the ones their loved ones had to follow to send gifts to them. In 1942, a deadline to post Christmas mail destined for the U.S. was set at November 10th. Senders had to be careful to follow weight and size regulations as well, namely "packages mailed from Britain... must not exceed 70 pounds nor be classified as perishable."⁹³⁸ If servicemen or women missed the deadline, they always had the option of sending a war bond back home as a Christmas present.

In Britain, War Bond offices sold special Christmas bonds with a Christmas card and guaranteed their delivery. The government advertised these to servicemen as a way to "make Christmas shopping easy, and it will speed the day of your return," which presented them as a particularly appealing and patriotic option.⁹³⁹ In 1942, *Stars and*

⁹³⁶ Christmas Card from the 83rd Squadron, 12th Bomb Group, United States Army Air Force. Box 13, Domestic Life Greeting Cards (ACNMAH 109). SNMAH, Washington, DC.

⁹³⁷ "Yanks Can't Buy Toys in London," *CDT*, Dec. 25, 1942, 7.

⁹³⁸ "Final Mailing of Xmas is On," *SandS London*, Nov. 2, 1942, 4 and 5.

⁹³⁹ "Christmas Shopping," *SandS London*, Nov. 4, 1943, 2.

Stripes - London reported that “many yanks are buying bonds to send home as Christmas gifts.”⁹⁴⁰ In 1944, the President himself offered a personal plea to troops stationed in the European Theatre to buy war bonds, noting “The government needs the money, now, for effective prosecution of the war, for hastening the victory we want so much. I hope that in this drive the men and women of this theater will, as they do in everything else, lead all others.”⁹⁴¹ This plea, and the program more generally, was evidently quite a success as GIs purchased over a billion dollars’ worth of war bonds by December 1944.⁹⁴²

Buying gifts for family members could be a complicated task outside of war and separation, so trying to carry out the process in this context required a significant degree of coordination. For example, in a 1944 letter to his girlfriend Ginny, Herbert Adickes asked how her Christmas shopping was going and indicated the items that he was planning to procure for their loved ones:

The enclosed list is what I imagine you and I plan to do for my family: it is a longer total than I had expected, and I wonder if it is too much. What do you think? It might be an idea to cut out one of my items listed for Mother. In fact, on second thought I’m crossing out the chocolate item. The socks for Brent I’ll get them as soon as I can, after Jeanie’s gloves. The catalog for mother I bought and will mail shortly. It cost \$1.10, and if you want another bottle in the same order, or Genodines, I believe I can get it. Also I bought the Hattie Corngil cologne, and will mail that at the same time, I am not quite certain what you plan to do with this, but thought you wanted it for some prim for when you are wanting something a little better. The sales girl in the PX suggested what you said about its quality by saying it was the best one in the perfume department. For your guidance, the regular sale prices is \$1.00 plus 20% tax.⁹⁴³

⁹⁴⁰ “War Bonds as Gifts,” *SandS London*, Dec. 10, 1942, 4. “Report on Bond Sales,” *SandS London*, Jan. 16 1943, 4.

⁹⁴¹ “FDR and Ike Ask ETO GIs to Buy Bonds,” *SandS London*, Nov. 20, 1944, 5.

⁹⁴² “GIs Buy Billions in Bonds,” *SandS London*, Dec. 14, 1944, 4.

⁹⁴³ Letter from Herbert Adickes to Ginny Adickes, November 1944. Box 2, Herbert J. Adickes Papers. NYHS, New York City, NY.

Even though he agreed to get some items, the following week he sent another letter. The war had gotten in the way of his plans to acquire these items and he apologized that he would have to leave her “holding the bag,” as she would need to get the rest of the gifts herself.⁹⁴⁴ Their exchange of letters indicates the degree of concern over choosing the right gifts, concern about how much they cost, where to get them, how to send them, and ultimately just how difficult it was to do this at a distance.

Sending gifts from far-off places could also have unintended consequences. Despite the obvious possibility that packages might get lost or damaged along the way, even if they arrived intact they could cause problems. In February 1944, the Department of Agriculture published a Consumer Education announcement from the American Home Economics Association advising people on the home front to burn the packaging of gifts that had been sent to them from overseas. This was because, with the shortages of labor in post offices, customs, and border quarantines, combined with the breadth of American personnel posted around the world, “A grave threat to the successful control of insects has turned up in an unusual place - the wrappings of gifts sent home by servicemen.”⁹⁴⁵ While Americans on the home front had been advised to salvage and save scrap paper products, these particular items represented an exception to the rule, like the many other aspects of Christmas that often did not fit within the general regulations required to mobilize the American population for total war.

To get around the difficulties of shipping and coordinating gift exchange across continents, the government established the Army Exchange program as was outlined in Chapter Two. Overseas personnel would choose items from a catalog, but their orders would be filled and shipped domestically to avoid international exchange rates and shipping requirements. Other organizations were also operating in a similar capacity. In Britain, the American Express Company handled the purchase of flowers and candy destined for people in the United States. In 1942, this meant “A soldier simply has to

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁵ Consumer Education Service published under the American Home Economics Association, Feb. 1944. Box 1, Entry 51, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

walk into the bank or American Express Co. office nearest to his camp and place his order. If it is flowers, they will cost him \$5.50 or \$7.50 for bouquets and \$10.00 for a basket, plus cabling or air mail charges. The price of candy is \$2 for a two-and-one-half pound box and \$4 for five pounds, plus the cost for cable or air mail.”⁹⁴⁶ *Our Army* magazine also sponsored a shopping service based out of New York where magazine staff did the shopping stateside and mailed the packages, along with greeting cards, to the loved ones of servicemen. Red Cross volunteer women in Britain even offered to help choose what kinds of gifts to send. By 1944, when many of the men previously stationed in Britain found themselves in France for Christmas, American Red Cross women and WAACs continued to help them choose appropriate gifts, especially in combat areas where “emergency shopping centers” were set up for rushed mail deliveries for men who could not exactly leave their positions.⁹⁴⁷

These shopping services were extremely popular and allowed troops to continue to participate in the rituals of the holiday season even though the wartime context made this significantly more difficult. Lieutenant L.V. Dolan, in charge of the London Army Exchange Service centers, stated to *Stars and Stripes – London* that business was so heavy during the five days that the Christmas catalogue service was offered in the London offices that one in particular had to shut down a day ahead of schedule, after it received approximately \$5,600 in orders; similar situations were reported in other centers in Britain.⁹⁴⁸ The success of these programs also indicates that participating in these rituals was something servicemen felt particularly inclined to do. Maintaining a connection with home was a two-way process and servicemen did not just want to be on the receiving end of Christmas giving.

⁹⁴⁶ “Final Mailing of Xmas Gifts in on Nov. 10,” *SandS London*, Nov. 2, 1942, 4.

⁹⁴⁷ Charles W. White, “Paris S&S Helps GIs Buy,” *SandS London*, Nov. 14, 1944, 2.

⁹⁴⁸ *Sands London*, Nov. 14, 1942, 4.

Entertainment

American personnel in Britain were both receivers and givers of holiday entertainment as well. While the military worked to coordinate furloughs and passes, the British government was deeply concerned with ensuring the Americans had a happy Christmas on their shores. Most troops received an eight-day furlough every six or seven months, and weekend passes were even more common.⁹⁴⁹ Policymakers had to consider local conditions in the process of deciding when and to whom furloughs would go, especially during the holiday season. For Christmas 1942, this meant that seven-to-nine day furloughs and leaves were only issued on certain dates, namely the period of December 17 to 23 and could not take effect December 24 to 28.⁹⁵⁰ This was to reduce strains on local travel and required coordination between British and American authorities to arrange and enforce.⁹⁵¹ Similar restrictions and regulations were put in place in subsequent years of the war.⁹⁵² However, it was not just travel limitations of the Americans that the British were concerned about.

At the highest levels of both the British and American governments there was a desire to foster good relations and a mutual sense of understanding between their peoples.⁹⁵³ Fraternization was encouraged from the top and organized through what became known as the Anglo-American (Army) Relations Committee, which came into existence in 1943 after the British deemed existing efforts to be ineffective.⁹⁵⁴ Individuals involved in this plan, like Colonel Brian Rowe, a liaison for the War Office, believed that bringing people

⁹⁴⁹ Gardiner, *Over Here*, 96.

⁹⁵⁰ "Xmas Furlough Set for US Forces," *SandS London*, Dec. 14, 1942, 3.

⁹⁵¹ Memo on Services Leave Travel at Christmas, Nov. 16, 1942. AN 2/891. KEW, London, England.

⁹⁵² "Travel Curbed at Christmas," *SandS London*, Nov. 27, 1943, 1. "Ban Rail Holiday Travel American Military Personnel," *SandS London*, Dec. 22, 1944, 1

⁹⁵³ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, 161.

⁹⁵⁴ Previously there had been a sub-committee of the Morale Committee on relations between British and US troops within the British War Office that worked to encourage positive relations and interactions between the British and the Americans in Britain. A survey of Anglo-American Agencies in the Field, Oct. 1, 1943. FO 371/34122. KEW, London, England.

together would increase tolerance and understanding.⁹⁵⁵ The British Foreign Office believed that “The purpose of all these activities has been, firstly, to build up such a degree of friendship between the English and the Americans, resident in the United Kingdom, as would conduce to a better understanding and friendship in the years succeeding the war, and secondly, to accelerate the integration of the US Forces into the structure of the Allies for war purposes.”⁹⁵⁶ Education of the Americans and the British about each other was central to the success of this program. Some of it was formal, such as pamphlets or films that were meant to introduce the similarities and highlight relevant differences, such as slang phrases, currency, or cultural *faux pas*.⁹⁵⁷ Other information schemes were based more on direct interaction or facilitating personal experience.

Discussions prior to the formation of the Committee revealed “that the morale of your troops and our troops in England will have a very basic effect on how well the British and Americans get on together. When morale is low on either side there will be quarrelling between the two nations. When morale is high, friendships will tend to flourish.”⁹⁵⁸ In response to this understanding, entertainment was planned that would, ideally, improve morale on both sides and increase interaction between them. Joint events for American and British personnel to participate in together were arranged, for example, sporting events, motion picture shows, church services, organizational dinners and dances, and even the sponsoring of orphans of deceased British military personnel.⁹⁵⁹ This joint effort also organized home hospitality and troop exchange programs in an effort to mix Americans and English people in social atmospheres.

Christmas, a holiday with a shared history between the two nations, created a common ground to build up mutual understanding and friendship. While events like the ones mentioned above were carried out throughout the year, the same events undertaken with

⁹⁵⁵ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, 185.

⁹⁵⁶ Memo to Regional Information Officer of the Home Division, Dec. 1, 1943. FO 371/34122. KEW, London, England.

⁹⁵⁷ *SandS London*, Dec. 28, 1943, 3.

⁹⁵⁸ Anglo-American Relations, Report, June 11, 1943. FO 371/34117. KEW, London, England.

⁹⁵⁹ Report to Anthony Eden, Sept. 8, 1943. FO 371/34119. KEW, London, England.

the spirit of the holiday season could transmit a deeper meaning and tap into the holiday's goodwill-promoting value to improve relations.⁹⁶⁰ The Anglo-American Relations Committee noted that for Christmas 1942 the offers of hospitality by the British had been four or five times greater than the number of Americans to be entertained and it vowed to start planning earlier in 1943 to ensure the arrangements could be made smoothly.⁹⁶¹ *Stars and Stripes – London* urged its readers to accept these invitations, writing “We urge a wide acceptance of this hospitality, for it will be good for you, good for those who wish to share with you, and good for the future: for if it is to be a better future, it must be built on the Christmas spirit—the spirit of sharing the good things of this earth one with another.”⁹⁶² Evidently, contemporaries at the time realized that Christmas could provide a blueprint for a better future through the positive interactions that its traditions and rituals could encourage.

Americans could “fill the chairs left empty by British fighting men,” but this also provided an atmosphere to see up close the difference between American and British customs.⁹⁶³ British customs like burning Advent candles and counting down the days to Christmas using Advent calendars were new to most Americans. However, the GIs introduced the British to Christmas crackers, which reportedly “they’d never seen before and were greatly taken with.”⁹⁶⁴ It was due to the overarching similarities in celebration that these minute differences were realized and commented on. It was also due to the shared celebration that the invitation into the homes of the British could even take place in the first place and, generally, they were regarded as a success.

⁹⁶⁰ Letter from the Adjutant General Coordinator to the Commander in Chief of Home Forces and 21 Army Group, Nov. 1943. WO 32/10268. KEW, London, England.

⁹⁶¹ “Christmas Hospitality,” Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of the Anglo-American Relations Conference, Dec. 29, 1942. WO 32/10267. KEW, London, England.

⁹⁶² “Christmas at Home,” *Sands London*, Dec. 17, 1942, 2.

⁹⁶³ Gardiner, *Over Here*, 133.

⁹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 134.

According to a 1943 report on relations between U.S. forces and the British public, the “Christmas in a Home” had been “tried and found [to be] valuable.”⁹⁶⁵ While the offers had been extensive and seemed to work in terms of improving relations, in 1943 the Anglo-American Relations Committee said that “the scheme had the approval of his [Brigadier-General Abbot] Headquarters, but he must issue one warning: careful and timely co-ordination would be necessary if travel difficulties were to be overcome.”⁹⁶⁶ This indicates that while there was a degree of spontaneity on the part of individuals offering their homes and American personnel accepting those offers, coordination had to be carried out at higher levels to ensure the scheme could function successfully, given the number of people involved. It also indicates that this type of activity was considered also something worth planning and organizing at the highest level, even though there was war planning to do.

Other forms of entertainment were arranged for American personnel outside of the offers of Christmas hospitality in British homes. The American Red Cross threw hundreds of “special parties, Christmas dinners, dancing, entertainment and assistance to soldier-groups staging their own Yule festivities.”⁹⁶⁷ Sometimes servicemen who had been entertainers before enlisting offered up their services; for example, Private Homer Harris, a ‘cowboy’ singer for American radio stations, and Officer Frank Rosato, a leader of a swing band, performed at the Kingsway Club in Holborn, London.⁹⁶⁸ At other times professional entertainers were brought over from the U.S. with the sole purpose of

⁹⁶⁵ Minutes on Relations between United States Forces and British Public, Nov. 18, 1943, Appendix A. FO 371/34121. KEW, London, England.

⁹⁶⁶ Minutes of Anglo-American (Army Relations) Committee, Nov. 19, 1943. WO 163/222. KEW, London, England.

⁹⁶⁷ “Red Cross Parties,” *SandS London*, Dec. 24, 1942, 4.

⁹⁶⁸ *SandS London*, Dec. 24, 1942, 4. See the literature on the United Service Organizations (USO), a non-profit organization that provided entertainment to troops throughout the war, and these related works for more information on the entertainment of servicemen more generally. See Julia Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1946); Frank Coffey, *50 Years of the USO: Always Home* (New York: Brassey’s, 1991); James J. Cooke, *American Girls, Beer, and Glen Miller: GI Morale in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012) and *Chewing Gum, Candy Bars, and Beer: The Army PX in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009); Richard Fawkes, *Fighting for a Laugh: Entertaining the British and American Armed Forces, 1939-1946* (London: Macdonald and Jane’s, 1978); Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*.

offering entertainment. In December 1942, 2,500 servicemen went to the Palladium Theatre in London to see a show featuring American entertainers Kay Francis, Martha Raye, Carole Landis, Mitzi Mayfair, Ben Lyon, Bebe Daniels, Vic Oliver, and Teddy Brown.⁹⁶⁹ There were also Christmas shows and performances by famous stars and entertainers that were recorded in the U.S. and broadcast to the troops abroad, featuring stars like Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Judy Garland, and Dinah Shore.⁹⁷⁰ Many shows had a curious blend of American and British tradition, for example, American musicals combined with British pantomimes, “part fairy tale, part vaudeville, intermixed with the intimately topical ‘gag.’” According to the *Washington Post*, 250 professional pantomimes were performed in England for Christmas 1943, and in addition to that, some groups of British forces presented their own.⁹⁷¹ This is an interesting example of how British and American Christmas customs differed, but because of the difference, it allowed each nation to realize what their own customs were through the juxtaposition.

Religious services were another aspect of the Christmas programming held for American troops, regardless of where they were stationed. Michael Snape’s *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* argues that religion was central to military morale and national identity in both of the major twentieth-century wars.⁹⁷² While in this work he covered the British soldier as opposed to the American, he brought up several important points, notably how religiosity can be seen through secular institutions, like the BBC, or reactions to particular events, like how contemporaries viewed the ‘miracle’ at Dunkirk or the celebrated image of the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral standing untouched in the midst of the London Blitz.⁹⁷³ Snape subsequently argued in *God and Uncle Sam: Religion and America’s Armed Forces in World War II* that for American troops too, “faith in God was a central part of life as a

⁹⁶⁹ “Stage, Screen, Radio Stars Present Servicemen’s Show,” *SandS London*, Dec. 28, 1942, 3.

⁹⁷⁰ “Hollywood Yule Broadcast For Men Abroad Planned,” *SandS London*, Nov. 8, 1943, 7.

⁹⁷¹ “Joy for Soldiers,” *WP*, Dec. 12, 1943, L4.

⁹⁷² Snape, *God and the British Soldier*.

⁹⁷³ *Ibid*, 120.

soldier.”⁹⁷⁴ According to Snape, regardless of the separation of Church and State, a civil religiosity existed in America and when combined with the Church’s support of the war effort it infused the war with a “sense of righteous purpose and dependency on God, a sense that demanded a corresponding degree of personal rectitude.”⁹⁷⁵ A letter from a Colonel Warren B. Ough to the Chief of Chaplains in March 1943 stated that “To see men in offices and quarters on a Sunday morning, openly reading testaments and catechisms, and to see them flocking to church services impresses one with the fact that a marked renewal of religious convictions is occurring among our soldiers.”⁹⁷⁶ This intensification of religious spirit was marked during the holiday season, when troops far from home, overcome with nostalgia and longing, sought another way to connect and hold on to their sense of the meaning of home itself.⁹⁷⁷

Christmas also provided another time when American troops and British locals could intermingle and reaffirm their shared *Christian* sense of humanity. In response to an invitation from the British clergy, many Americans were invited into the cathedrals and parish churches for Christmas services.⁹⁷⁸ Similarly, there are also reports of American Army chaplains preaching to British congregations. Chaplain Robert Poole of Elizabethtown, North Carolina, stated that he had “benefitted a great deal from the contacts [he] made” in the process.⁹⁷⁹ However, perhaps the greatest interaction between Americans and their British hosts during the holiday season was not the homes they were invited into or their shared religious experiences, but the parties the Americans hosted for the British. Despite this enhanced religiosity noted by Snape and contemporaries, in terms of the way Americans actually celebrated Christmas throughout the war, the secular aspects remained dominant both at home and abroad.

⁹⁷⁴ Snape, *God and Uncle Sam*, 1.

⁹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁷⁶ Letter from Warren B. Ough, Infantry Colonel to the Chief of Chaplains, Mar. 14, 1943. Box 1, Entry 363, RG 407. NARA, College Park, MD.

⁹⁷⁷ Snape, *God and Uncle Sam*, 265–66.

⁹⁷⁸ “Chapels Call Yanks to Prayer,” *SandS London*, Dec. 24, 1943, 1.

⁹⁷⁹ “English Rural U.S. Army Churches Hear Chaplains’ Sermons,” *SandS London*, May 9, 1944, 2.

Entertaining Others

There were Christmas Parties for hundreds of children everywhere in this island, children who for three long years have suffered the extreme deprivations of war. I, personally, saw youngsters at one of these parties whose expressions were those of little old men and women, and yet whose faces at the offer of a mere chocolate bar lit up with a new joy and hope that seemed to miraculously eradicate the lines and wrinkles that have come much too soon. These parties in Great Britain simplified beyond the remotest possibilities the meaning of the Atlantic Charter, the things for which the ordinary man is daily laying down his life. They were not planned by Mr. Roosevelt or Mr. Churchill; but were the result of the spontaneous reaction of the ordinary American soldier to the kindness of the British people and to the need he saw existing. They came out of his heartfelt yearning for those peace-loving practices that men of every nation have always loved. The things that represent a consummation of all the laughter, tears, joys and sorrows; the things that in the innermost recesses of their hearts men do not normally feel inclined to deny one another, irrespective of whether he be white, yellow, brown or black. These are the things that the staff of our Red Cross Club were privileged to experience on Christmas Day, 1942, and what helped to make it the Merriest Christmas anywhere in the world. And it was so at every Children's Party given by our troops.⁹⁸⁰

This letter, written by a director of a Red Cross Club in England to *Stars and Stripes* – *London*, encapsulates many of the important elements included when American troops hosted some form of holiday entertainment. It also reveals the deeper meaning it held for both the givers and the receivers of these parties. While it could warm the hearts of children who were all too familiar with the realities of wartime, it also could solidify the relationship between Allied nations. This was what elite decision-makers had hoped for regarding improving Anglo-American relations. However, in many cases these parties were organized from the ground up by the servicemen themselves, indicating the degree to which Christmas was not simply a tool of policymakers but deeply entrenched within

⁹⁸⁰ George Goodman, "An Open Letter," *SandS London*, Dec. 29, 1942, 2.

the American identity and seen as valuable for forging connections by Americans themselves.

According to Major General Russel P. Hartle, the acting commander of the European Theatre of Operations in December 1942, in the absence of General Dwight D. Eisenhower,

In every camp, every flying field, and post our officers and men are giving parties, distributing candies, toys, and useful gifts to children who might otherwise be without. Every American soldier in the United Kingdom has made a contribution and a personal effort to brighten some youngster's Christmas Day. Many find that in this way they capture, for a few hours, the holiday spirit of their American homes, in which their own children are celebrating the occasion.⁹⁸¹

This indicates not only how widespread this practice was from the very first wartime Christmas in England but also why so many American troops initiated, embraced, and carried out the practice – it reminded them of home. Conversely, the British believed that the Americans had an “innate affection for children” and that was why they undertook such extensive efforts to cheer them during the holiday season.⁹⁸²

Entertaining others took considerable effort on the part of the American servicemen themselves. According to letters excerpted in a British censor report, many had to sacrifice their own rations to ensure a party's success. One wrote, “We are all saving some of our candy and are passing up the desserts of canned fruit so we will have plenty for the party,” and another said, “The boys for weeks have been pooling and saving their sweet rations for all the homeless and bombed out children.”⁹⁸³ They also wrote home requesting supplies and donations for the children stationed near them. One signal company wrote home asking for donations for approximately fifty children; they received enough for more than 700, indicating just how much not only troops stationed abroad but

⁹⁸¹ “Hartle Pledges Fight to Victory,” *SandS London*, Dec. 24, 1942, 1.

⁹⁸² “A Merry Christmas,” *Bury Free Press* (Suffolk, England), Jan. 1, 1944, 1.

⁹⁸³ Field Censor Report (Home) US Soldiers Mail Examined by British Postal Censorship, Dec. 1-31, 1943. FO 371/38504. KEW, London, England.

also Americans back home bought into the holiday script of giving and charity.⁹⁸⁴ An armored unit in England gave up its candy ration for a month and contributed financially for a party for the war orphans living near them in 1943.⁹⁸⁵ Clearly, American personnel were willing to sacrifice to provide for those they saw as being in greater need than themselves, especially children.

The British public responded positively to these actions. Extracts from British intelligence reports indicate that “The wonderful generosity and kindness of the American troops... made a great impression on the British public who were also only too anxious to open their hearts and their homes to the American soldier. Every Yank not actually on duty on Christmas Day was given the opportunity of spending it in a British home.”⁹⁸⁶ This illustrates the connections between the various holiday events taking place and the way in which certain actions could help or hinder organized plans of fraternization and common feeling between military personnel and civilians.

The parties typically consisted of a visit from Santa Claus, food, and an activity of some kind. They varied in scale depending on the local population and the resources of the camp. In 1943 in Norfolk, children were hosted by the American air force at a party where they all joined in carols and games, with a climax of Santa, dressed in flying gear, arriving on a jeep to give each child a gift under a Christmas tree.⁹⁸⁷ In the same area, a locally stationed ‘colored regiment’ drove through the village on Boxing Day 1943, distributing gifts to children.⁹⁸⁸ An interesting thing to note here is the segregated nature of holiday celebrations. As the American military remained segregated for the duration of the war, almost all aspects of their ‘occupation’ of England were segregated, including Christmas celebrations. Despite the inferior treatment of African-American troops, they still worked to give a happy Christmas to their British hosts. In this period, the population

⁹⁸⁴ “Christmas Gifts a la Henry Kaiser,” *SandS London*, Dec. 20, 1943, 2.

⁹⁸⁵ “GI Christmas,” *RB*, Dec. 1943, 10-11.

⁹⁸⁶ Weekly Intelligent Report, Extract from the Regional on Troops in the UK, Dec. 8-15, 1942. FO 371/34123. KEW, London, England.

⁹⁸⁷ *Diss Express* (Norfolk, England), Jan. 1, 1943, 5.

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

of blacks in Britain was less than eight thousand (aside from the visiting Americans) and so, prior to the American presence, few English people had come into contact with someone who was black. As such, the British often did not hold the same racially-based prejudices that the Americans did. This meant that many British people interacted with the African Americans stationed among them and attended their parties, despite the segregation imposed within the American military.⁹⁸⁹

It was not just British children who were the recipients of these lavish parties. A rough estimate throughout the European Theatre placed the number of children hosted for Christmas parties in 1943 at 25,000 and the number of parties at well over 100.⁹⁹⁰ The same year nearly forty parties were held for more than 9,500 French, Belgian, and British evacuated refugee children by American infantry divisions.⁹⁹¹ These parties followed a particularly American script, one which contemporaries deemed necessary to have a successful event: “The party will be typically American, with a Christmas tree, a red-nosed, white bearded Santa Claus, candy, nuts and chewing gum and entertainment.”⁹⁹² In December 1944 in Suffolk, the children from the local village were brought to the base on Army trucks (an entertainment in itself). Upon arrival they were given a lunch, a handmade stocking filled with sweets, and some Christmas cartoon drawings made by a popular American cartoonist, followed by a group carol sing.⁹⁹³ Another common theme was the American militarized nature of Santa Claus, the central figure of Christmas and American generosity. British children had their own conception of Santa Claus or Father Christmas from before the war and as such were able to clearly recognize and appreciate these gestures. By 1911, *The Times* in London was issuing complaints that children were worshipping this figure too deeply. The paper referred to him as an “alien saint,” and stated he had “a thousand chapels [toy stores] in London; there seems to be a toy fair in every street where he or one of his subordinates from Fairyland receives child-clients all

⁹⁸⁹ Reynolds, *Rich Relations*, 24.

⁹⁹⁰ “25,000 Children Being Feted at GI Yule Parties,” *SandS London*, Dec. 23, 1943, 4.

⁹⁹¹ “Christmas Will Forge New Links With British,” *SandS London*, Dec. 12, 1943, 3.

⁹⁹² “Tankmen Plan Christmas Fete,” *SandS London*, Dec. 9, 1942, 4.

⁹⁹³ “A Merry Christmas,” *Bury Free Press* (Suffolk, England), Jan. 1, 1944, 1.

day long.”⁹⁹⁴ While the myths surrounding the figure differed across countries and cultures, the similar train of a figure embodying goodwill and generosity was a constant. Furthermore, photos of these parties show American soldiers dressed as Santa Claus disembarking from jeeps, tanks, and even airplanes, to the awe and delight of British children.⁹⁹⁵ This created a hybrid militarized-yet-benevolent figure that was simultaneously quintessentially American. This symbolic gesture conveyed to the children a message of American generosity, wealth, and protection through the altered cultural icon of Santa Claus that they could still recognize in this new form. *Stars and Stripes – London* reported “Already, youngsters in many parts of the United Kingdom may have wondered if Santa Claus wasn’t a jeep-or-bicycle mounted U.S. soldier, yelling ‘Hey Doc!’ at them and passing out candy and gum in a Yuletide reconnaissance. Or they may have decided, if there’s a USAAF [United States Army Air Force] base near them, that Santa Claus, dispensing presents from a USAAF plane, looked mighty like a USAAF airman under all those whiskers.”⁹⁹⁶ Clear is the militarized nature of Santa Claus, as well as the strong connection these actions formed between the generosity and goodness of Santa and the American military and consequently, the American people more generally.

Food was a powerful symbol at these parties, especially when considering the intensity of British rationing. Sweets and chocolates had been almost non-existent since 1940 to the point that when one soldier asked a five-year-old in Liverpool if he liked chocolate, the boy could not place what it was. Luckily his older sister chimed in that she “loved them” so the soldier gave them a whole box, which “today would be the equivalent of a small win on the pools.”⁹⁹⁷ Even though the British Ministry of Food allowed for an extra half pound of sugar and half pound of sweets for children for Christmas 1944, the American parties boasted of candy and gum, but also fruit, soft drinks, sandwiches, cake, ice cream,

⁹⁹⁴ Connelly, *Christmas*, 202.

⁹⁹⁵ *SandS London*, Dec. 17, 1942, cover. *SandS London*, Dec. 21, 1942, 3. “1,400 Orphans at Yank Party,” *SandS London*, Dec. 12, 1943, 2.

⁹⁹⁶ “Real Give and Take Christmas Already On for Yanks in ETO,” *SandS London*, Dec. 21, 1943, 1.

⁹⁹⁷ As quoted in Gardiner, *Over Here*, 135.

and even full Christmas meals of turkey and the fixings.⁹⁹⁸ One British girl, an eight-year-old named Cecilia Todd, wrote to her local paper about how her “mouth waters when I see what lovely parties the Americans are giving British soldiers’ children... you see we like ice cream too.”⁹⁹⁹ Cecilia had been unable to attend the local Christmas party that year, but the local troops arranged another party where those few children who had not been present were given “the whole works, cake ice cream, presents and a Christmas feast” to make up for it.¹⁰⁰⁰ In December 1944, *Stars and Stripes – London* published a photo of Norah Colgan, a child from London, up to her neck in candy, cookies, and gum – a haul to be shared with more than 800 children in eleven nearby villages and collected by the 361st Fighter Group stationed in the area.¹⁰⁰¹ Clear in all of these gestures was an image of American generosity but also American abundance, something that was presented as possible because of the American way of life. The children attending these parties might not have grasped the extent of the meaning these gestures could hold for the role of America in the post-war world. However, adults took note of these actions and recognized the deeper meaning. Furthermore, these actions would be working to shape the hearts and minds of the future adults of Britain and conditioning them to have a favorable impression of Americans and the American nation.

What is also remarkable about the celebrations that American troops put on for the local host communities is the degree to which the celebrations look the same regardless of the context. They strove for “something especially American,” meaning there were few differences and no cultural adaptations for different audiences.¹⁰⁰² Around the world, Americans followed the same Christmas script. According to a 1944 Red Cross Press Release, the National Children’s Fund of the Junior Red Cross distributed 200,000

⁹⁹⁸ Brown, *Christmas on the Home Front*, 167.

⁹⁹⁹ “QM Outfit Fetes 6 Children ‘Left Out’ at Christmas Party,” *SandS London*, Jan. 24, 1944, 3. *SandS London*, Jan. 1, 1944, 2.

¹⁰⁰⁰ “QM Outfit Fetes 6 Children ‘Left Out’ at Christmas Party,” *SandS London*, Jan. 24, 1944, 3.

¹⁰⁰¹ “GIs throughout the U.K. are playing Santa Claus as Usual,” *SandS London*, Dec. 21, 1944, 8.

¹⁰⁰² 1944 Christmas Booklet, American Red Cross, Nov. 1944. Box 980, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

packages of small chocolate candies as Christmas presents to children of England, France, and Italy. Additionally, small candy bags, as well as 150,000 gift boxes containing games, school materials, and sewing equipment, were distributed to war-impooverished children through American Red Cross service club holiday parties around the world. Furthermore, in Red Cross hobby shops, found in almost every place Americans were stationed, men and women worked to make Christmas toys as gifts for the children they entertained at Red Cross Christmas parties.¹⁰⁰³ While this gives significant centrality and coordination credit to the Red Cross, it also illustrates the similarity of efforts taken in various locales by Americans to bring Christmas to the children of the world.

A Christmas information booklet from the American Red Cross regaled the ingenuity of the armed forces and support personnel in carrying out Christmas customs despite the difficulty of doing so in foreign and exotic places. According to the booklet, somewhere in the South Pacific a GI had created an outdoor snow scene, complete with Santa and reindeer on top of a ping-pong table. In Egypt, GIs made centerpieces for their tables by cutting tree silhouettes out of cans and used candles to make them cast shadows. In New Zealand, a craft shop made life-size figures out of plywood and painted them to resemble Santa and reindeer. In Italy, a donkey led by “a small Arab boy dressed as Santa Claus” was used to deliver presents.¹⁰⁰⁴ Reportedly, mops made excellent beards in a multitude of places and situations. Another press release revealed the difficulty of acquiring items in foreign countries: in “Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, a mess sergeant representing Santa Claus was clothed in a cotton suit purchased by a Red Cross worker in a native ship in Khartoum, which had been fashioned by a Greek tailor and ordered through a Sudanese interpreter.”¹⁰⁰⁵ While all of these indicate resourcefulness of Americans to recreate familiar American Christmas scenes in their foreign locations, perhaps what also made

¹⁰⁰³ Press Release, Red Cross, Nov. 1944. Box 980, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁰⁴ 1944 Christmas Booklet, American Red Cross, Nov. 1944. Box 980, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Press Release, Red Cross, Nov. 1944. Box 980, RG 200. NARA, College Park, MD.

them so transferrable was the clear use of familiar secular emblems of Christmas: trees, Santa, gifts, reindeer, and sleighs.

Religious differences did not matter much in terms of the way the celebrations looked. In England, Jewish soldiers threw a party for 120 Jewish orphans on December 24, 1943. While it included a special Synagogue service, there were also familiar elements of Christmas, including candy, gifts, and traditional Christmas foods provided to the children. Similarly, *Stars and Stripes – Algiers* reported how the 12th Air Force held a party where they “dished out 150,000 francs, plus candy, soap and gum rations to 200 orphans of four faiths—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and Moslem [sic].”¹⁰⁰⁶ There was a Santa Claus and a sixteen-foot Christmas tree, magicians, acrobats, and a choir of twenty soldiers. Americans showed little regard for other faiths and instead used Christmas’ more appealing, secular elements to draw the children of other faiths in. These guerilla tactics are an example of American cultural imperialism that would continue to spread in the post-war period.¹⁰⁰⁷

Language barriers too could not stop the onslaught of Christmas. A North African outfit held its party in an ancient monastery where an eight-year-old French-speaking boy got up and thanked the Americans in English: “We heartily thank you gentlemen for all the gifts you have given us. Our fervent prayers will always be with you. Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Long Live America.”¹⁰⁰⁸ The phrase ‘long live America’ is an interesting one, considering that ‘long live’ was traditionally used in reference to royalty, for example ‘long live the king’ or ‘long live the queen.’ Perhaps to this young child, who had been living in war-deprived conditions, the Americans with their abundance and generosity appeared like royalty. These parties, while seemingly innocuous, were influential trans-religious, trans-language, and ultimately transnational symbols of

¹⁰⁰⁶ “Santa Claus in Khaki Brings Christmas Cheer,” *SandS Algiers*, Dec. 30, 1942, 1.

¹⁰⁰⁷ John Brewer and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges* (Oxford: Berg, 2006); Timothy Dean Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*.

¹⁰⁰⁸ “Santa Claus in Khaki Brings Christmas Cheer,” *SandS Algiers*, Dec. 30, 1942, 1.

American wealth and power. This perceived abundance, combined with the lack of religious symbolism and a clear preference for the secular aspects of the holiday, made the holiday more powerful as a tool of cultural imperialism and enhanced its potential appeal within non-Christian or non-English-speaking countries.

The Meaning of Christmas

Although Donner and Blitzen will probably be hauling rations instead of presents and St. Nick himself has gone into khaki for the duration, this Christmas for American troops in Italy will be as cozy as the Good Old USA. The Special Services stated today that the Italians have offered to help. To the Yanks, no Christmas is the real thing without a tree, no matter how tiny or spindly, just as long as it's green and piney. More than 2,000 local trees have been purchased by the 5th Army quartermaster who is distributing them through every unit down to companies. Even frontline organisations will get trees. The only hitch is that each outfit will have to supply its own decorations but in the majority of cases colored paper wrappings from gifts from home will be pressed into service. As Pvt. Kenneth P. Duke, Meriden, Conn., with a 5th Army outfit put it, 'even if we can't put much on the tree, we can smell it and that's a good part of Christmas.'¹⁰⁰⁹

This excerpt from *Stars and Stripes – Mediterranean Naples* reveals that recreating the sights, sounds, tastes, and even smells of an American Christmas was deeply important to servicemen stationed abroad, their superiors, and their local hosts. When native trees would not work, the military and other organizations ensured that trees would be shipped in. Troops stationed on the Andreanof Islands, a remote, snow-swept Alaskan island base, received twenty Christmas trees in December 1942.¹⁰¹⁰ In 1943, the Boston Chapter of the American Red Cross had trees rushed to troops stationed in Iceland upon the discovery that there was not any suitable local flora on the barren island. They even sent tinsel, stars, icicles, and colored balls along with the trees to decorate them.¹⁰¹¹ Admiral

¹⁰⁰⁹ "Army Does its Best to Make Yule Merry," *SandS Mediterranean Naples*, Dec. 24, 1943, 3.

¹⁰¹⁰ "Troops on Andreanof Plan 'Regular' Yule," *CSM*, Dec. 17, 1942, 6.

¹⁰¹¹ "Yule Trees Rushed to Iceland Troops," *CSM*, Dec. 23, 1943, 2.

Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas in 1944, ensured that each island under his control received two “good-sized trees, with decorations” and that the military would ship these trees to each location “with the highest priority possible.”¹⁰¹²

Christmas 1944 saw the European Theatre devoid of the traditional Christmas spirit given the Nazi counter-offensive and the intense fighting in the Battle of the Bulge. After the invasion of Europe in June 1944, the Allies had made slow progress across France. In December 1944, Germans launched a counter-attack across the Ardennes. While this would be the last real pushback of the war, Americans “had more troops involved, and suffered more casualties, than in any previous battle in its history.”¹⁰¹³ Still, American soldiers fighting on the front lines received “homegrown turkeys,” ensuring “the boys up front [got] all the white meat they want[ed].”¹⁰¹⁴ All of these elaborate and extravagant celebrations took place within, and only happened because of, the wartime context. This many Americans would not have found themselves stationed far from home for extensive periods of time were it not for the war. Yet all of these actions on the surface appear to have little to no direct impact on the actual outcome of that conflict. So why did so many diverse groups of Americans do all these things? Why did individuals and organizing bodies put considerable effort into acquiring the requisite items necessary for hosting these celebrations, for themselves and also often for large numbers of guests? What was it about Christmas that motivated such extensive behavior that was not related to a direct military purpose?

Perhaps it was for the morale of the soldier. According to one Colonel in 1944, “morale is one of the most important problems with which the Army must contend. Anything which can be done to increase morale will increase the efficiency of the Army, augment the will

¹⁰¹² “Christmas Trees Flown to Pacific,” *NYT*, Dec. 25, 1944, 19.

¹⁰¹³ Gardiner, *Over Here*, 202.

¹⁰¹⁴ “Christmas at Front,” *HC*, Dec. 25, 1944, 25.

to win, and hasten final victory.”¹⁰¹⁵ In this context, the coordination and effort put into planning Christmas could be perceived to have a direct effect on the war itself if it was seen as something being used to improve morale. Considering also that GIs would often relay to loved ones at home their happy Christmas experiences, this could have a peripheral effect on improving the morale of those on the home front as well. The *Lebanon Daily News*, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, reported how “one mother’s heart was gladdened” when she “received season’s greetings” from her son serving in England. The letter was also signed by the Captain of his unit, who added a comment to the letter about her son, noting “they [the people in England] are surely doing a lot for our comfort and entertainment” this Christmas.”¹⁰¹⁶ This interesting addition indicates that not only were people on the home front happy to receive this kind of news, but military officers abroad were inclined to verify such information, revealing they too saw the importance this could have for people’s morale and ultimately the war effort overall.

These Christmas celebrations served an important purpose for the locations troops were stationed. Given the large numbers of American personnel in some regions, they often outnumbered and overwhelmed local populations. This could cause tension between groups who were supposed to be allies. In Britain, locals, especially those in the British military, felt strain because of the high rates of pay of U.S. troops, the attention they received from local women, and the monopolization of local resources.¹⁰¹⁷ Noted anthropologist Margaret Mead was sent to the U.K. by American authorities in early 1942 to assess the differences between Americans and the British and give suggestions as to what could be done to mitigate possible issues between the two groups. According to her, “Relationships between soldiers and civilians or American soldiers and British soldiers become of real international importance, public relations operations are essential; the issue is much wider than the questions of temporary morale or VD or drunkenness;” it

¹⁰¹⁵ Memo from Lieutenant Colonel Thering to Colonel Walsh, June 3, 1944. Box 254, Entry 434, RG 389. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Lebanon Daily News* (Lebanon, Pennsylvania), Dec. 18, 1942, 14.

¹⁰¹⁷ Report “USA Troops in Britain,” July 1942. FO 371/30680. KEW, London, England.

was something that could affect the future peace of the world.¹⁰¹⁸ As such, any effort to aid relations was given considerable attention by authorities, and Christmas was a powerful tool to encourage positive interaction and improve perceptions of Americans by local groups.

Christmas certainly was not a perfect solution to the problem. The elaborate displays, the extravagant children's parties, or the abundance of foodstuffs could be perceived negatively: as a show of boastfulness, a trait disliked by the British. In some cases, the British came to resent these displays of American wealth.¹⁰¹⁹ American efforts could also be overlooked altogether, as noted by one British local: "Because the American troops were paid more and could afford taxis, it was taken for granted that they were generous."¹⁰²⁰ Furthermore, the materials required, food and others, had to be acquired often at the expense of local supplies. This led to complaints that "the Americans are buying up large quantities of spirits, poultry, and ice cream, and that as a result prices are even higher and supplies are even shorter."¹⁰²¹ Additionally, hospitality schemes could backfire, leaving the hosts feeling disappointed or snubbed. British intelligence reports for late 1942 reveal that some British individuals reported "disappointment and disgust in certain households over being let down by US men who had accepted hospitality but never turned up."¹⁰²² The report overall indicated that despite these occasional setbacks, on the whole, "the feeling of friendship has been immeasurably strengthened during Christmas by the hospitable spirit shown on both sides."¹⁰²³ While there could be some negative consequences because of the perception of extravagance in American Christmas celebrations, they were generally well received and ultimately did work in the British

¹⁰¹⁸ Report by Margaret Mead, "The Relationship between American Soldiers and the People of Great Britain," undated. FO 371/34122. KEW, London, England.

¹⁰¹⁹ Report "Anti-American Feeling in Britain," Jan. 14, 1943. FO 371/34114. KEW, London, England.

¹⁰²⁰ Private Papers of Mrs. A Chalmers, Doc. 443, 55. IWM, London, England.

¹⁰²¹ Report on Monthly Review of United States Troops in United Kingdom, Dec. 22, 1944. FO 371/38626. KEW, London, England.

¹⁰²² Extract from Weekly Intelligence Reports, Dec. 21-28, 1942. FO 371/34123. KEW, London, England.

¹⁰²³ Ibid.

context as a way to present a positive picture of Americans and the American way of life to those who encountered them.

Generosity was the most common perception that became attached to American troops through their Christmas displays and holiday gestures. British officials concerned with relations noted the “generous spirit in which the US Forces have approached the matter of Christmas,” especially their entertainment of British children which was “obviously likely to have a pleasant reaction on British opinion.”¹⁰²⁴ This same feeling and reaction was seen in British intelligence reports, censor reports, and local press.¹⁰²⁵ The *Bury Free Press* of Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, where a large number of Americans were stationed, reported a tribute “to the unstinted generosity” after another successful party thrown for the local children by American troops.¹⁰²⁶ A parent of one child wrote: “This is the most splendid Christmas present my family has ever received.”¹⁰²⁷ While Americans may have done these activities personally to cheer themselves, to assuage homesickness, or just to keep busy, the local perception of their actions was clear and in many cases it did require a degree of personal sacrifice to achieve.

The American people, and consequently the nation as a whole, came to be seen as willing to come to the aid of those in need. They were known to ‘adopt’ war-orphaned children and to pool their rations and pay to give money and supplies to those who needed them more.¹⁰²⁸ For Christmas 1942, troops stationed in Britain donated over £10,000 to British war orphans. *Stars and Stripes* created the program and sent the money to the American

¹⁰²⁴ Digest and Comments by Secretary of the Anglo-American Relations Committee on the November Meeting Minutes, Dec. 21, 1942. WO 32/10267. KEW, London, England.

¹⁰²⁵ Extract from Regional Weekly Intelligence Reports, “US Troops in the UK,” Dec. 15 to 22, 1942. FO 371/34123. KEW, London, England. Censor Report, “US Troops in Northern Ireland,” Jan. 11, 1943. FO 371/34123. KEW, London, England. “Kiddies Christmas,” *SandS London*, Dec. 19, 1943, 3.

¹⁰²⁶ “American Generosity,” *Bury Free Press* (Suffolk, England), Jan. 12, 1945, 8. A similar message came from the Mayor of Bury St. Edmunds for Christmas parcels given to the troops. Letter of thanks from the troops for the Mayor of Bury St. Edmunds’ Christmas parcels, 1944. D12/14/1, Bury Record Office. Suffolk Records, U.K.

¹⁰²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰²⁸ *SandS London*, Sept. 26, 1942, 3. *SandS London*, Dec. 3, 1942, 4.

Red Cross, which administered the funds to British war orphans in need.¹⁰²⁹ By 1943, this fund reached totals of over £30,000 donated by American troops in the area for British war orphans. It had also expanded outside of Great Britain, and Americans in other locales were donating to war orphans in the regions they had been transplanted to around the world.¹⁰³⁰ The *Stars and Stripes* British orphan fund continued throughout the war, reaching well over £40,000 in 1944.¹⁰³¹ Similar programs were also created by other American organizations stationed abroad, such as “Christmas Toys Inc.,” organized by Lockheed Aircraft technicians in Northern Ireland whose mass production methods were employed to make \$10,000 worth of toys, which were distributed to nearly 4,000 needy children in the region.¹⁰³² A significant number of the contributions made to this fund and others came during the holiday season when men felt particularly compelled to give, and thoughts of disadvantaged children pulled particularly hard on their heartstrings.¹⁰³³ In this way, Christmas created the appropriate atmosphere for Americans to put their wealth and abundance to good use without (in most cases) being perceived as boastful or arrogant by the British.

On a more abstract level, Christmas also functioned as an opportunity to celebrate and project a personal and collective sense of American values. Lieutenant-General Jacob L. Devers, a commanding general of the European Theatre of Operations, greeted the troops under his command at Christmas 1943 and noted that,

In a foreign land, under circumstances which frequently have been extraordinarily difficult, all arms and services in the ground forces, supply forces and air forces have acquitted themselves with remarkable zeal and often with intrepidity surpassing the call of duty. This reveals a high type of self-respect, esprit and loyalty to our nation. Also it reveals an intelligent grasp of the reasons for our presence in the ETO... You will find that favorable impressions and friendships have a

¹⁰²⁹ “War Orphans’ Fund Nears £10,000 Mark,” *SandS London*, Dec. 24, 1942, 4.

¹⁰³⁰ *SandS London*, Dec. 6, 1943, 3.

¹⁰³¹ *SandS London*, Nov. 20, 1944, 5.

¹⁰³² *SandS London*, Dec. 23, 1943, 6.

¹⁰³³ *SandS London*, Dec. 10, 1944, 5.

significance which will reach beyond the battlefield and, after victory, will be instrumental in helping to mold lasting peace and lasting world freedom... In concert with our Allies we have the means—both manpower and materials—to bring this war to a successful conclusion, which will place in the hands, of the Allies the power with God's help, to rebuild the world along lines that you and I and all freedom-loving people desire.¹⁰³⁴

According to him, the relationships being forged could have an important role to play in shaping peace and the future of international relations following the war. Furthermore, that post-war world would be shaped in the image of the Allies, and ultimately with American values in mind. It was important that Christmas provided a powerful opportunity, not just for Devers to address the men at large, but also for those men to project American values through the relationships they were building with their Allies.

As American troops moved into Europe in 1944, other American leaders made similar statements. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson expressed the “admiration of a grateful nation for your courage and fortitude,” and added, “This year, because of you, the meaning of Christmas has been restored to persons of liberated areas whom you have rescued from the oppression and misery gendered by a savage foe.”¹⁰³⁵ While moving into these regions, Americans brought Christmas with them and with it an appreciation for America. According to *Stars and Stripes – Algiers* nearly every military unit from the front lines in the North to the extreme South of Italy was doing something for the hundreds of thousands of Italian children ravaged by the war. These followed a similar script of the parties thrown for British children, including trees, decorations, candy, and presents. The U.S. Navy reportedly brought toys and candy to 30,000 war orphaned children in Sicily and Corsica, as well as Southern France and North Africa.¹⁰³⁶ In doing this, they carried with them a particular image of the American military presence and America more generally, as the armed forces had done in Great Britain.

1034 Jacob Devers, “Christmas Messages to the American Troops,” *SandS London*, Dec. 24, 1943, 2.

1035 “Soldiers, Sailors World Over Will Play St. Nick to Natives,” *SandS Algiers*, Dec. 23, 1944, 5.

1036 *Ibid.*

There was the perception that Americans were generous and cared for those in need, but also that the American way of life created and allowed for abundance and materialism to flourish, given their ability and desire to give so many gifts. *Stars and Stripes – Mediterranean Sicily* wrote in December 1943 why so much was being done for the children of Italy, considering they had recently been considered the children of the enemy. It was because “They’re human beings who need shoes and a sandwich. They’re youngsters who look up to us settlers and sailors who talk a new language, a language of democracy and freedom. They’re the kids of Sicily, *the Italians of tomorrow’s new world* who will think and act for themselves. Already, in the few months we’ve been here, these kids have undergone an amazing transition.”¹⁰³⁷ American troops on the ground believed that they had the power to shape the minds of the future, and worked to ensure that American values and an appreciation for America itself would be at the forefront of these children’s memories when they grew up and became the future of the Italian nation.

The American government put effort into managing its image abroad as well. It was aware of the power of Christmas to transmit certain ideas and behaviors and worried about the effects of this on foreign audiences. For example, the Office of War Information mandated that the film *Christmas in Connecticut* should not be shown in liberated areas. There were economic perceptions and international relations effects that an abstract cultural exchange could have in these regions. The motion picture was a romantic comedy set in wartime America. While there were “no serious problems” with it, the fact that there was “much emphasis placed on food and menus” and that “the heroine spends six months’ salary on the purchase of a mink coat” reportedly would “not give a very favorable picture of American home front during wartime.”¹⁰³⁸ Evidently, while the Americans wanted to be seen as generous in the local regions where they were stationed, the government did not want to present the image that their nation was so

¹⁰³⁷ Emphasis added. “Buon Natale, Bambini,” *SandS Mediterranean Sicily*, Dec. 24, 1943, 2.

¹⁰³⁸ Virginia Richardson, Review of Film “Christmas In Connecticut,” Dec. 1, 1944. Box 3513, Entry 567, RG 208. NARA, College Park, MD.

wasteful that they would consume to the degree shown in the film while Europe was in such distress.¹⁰³⁹

Conclusion

As the war came to a close, Christmas 1945 brought with it an even greater opportunity to project American values abroad. While a significant number of troops were rushed home in a great attempt to get the ‘boys home for Christmas,’ there were still many who found themselves on foreign soil as an occupation force.¹⁰⁴⁰ As the Commanding General of the Army Services Force stated in 1945, “All of us still held to our assignments in the Army can find inward satisfaction in the knowledge that we are carrying through to the end a mission which must be finished to ensure a world at peace on future Christmases.”¹⁰⁴¹ Peace on Earth had finally come, but it was to a world that was still deeply affected by war and, with America as one of the few nations left standing in a capacity to aid, their presence abroad came with considerable responsibility. While some Americans found themselves torn as to how to treat their former enemies, others spoke to the spirit of Christmas as a guiding principle for the future of international relations. John Barry, a leading figure in the advertising industry, spoke to the Boston Advertising Club in 1945. He argued that “The spirit of Christmas, 1945, must extend to our sharing on a global scale, and the realization that we must accept heavy obligation for the peace of the world... This means getting out from our own personal Christmas tree and sharing the national abundance.”¹⁰⁴² He spoke of the Lend-Lease program, contributions to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the United Jewish Appeal, and the general need in Europe. He compared that to the mundane issues of

¹⁰³⁹ This would continue into the post-war and Cold War era and has been highlighted by several scholars, most notably in the works of Mary Dudziak and Penny Von Echen. Mary Dudziak, *Cold War, Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000); Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁴⁰ This return-effort for getting troops back home is described in the conclusion.

¹⁰⁴¹ “Christmas Messages” from Commanding General Army Service Forces, Dec. 1945. Box 2670, Entry UDUP 421, RG 496. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁴² Charles A. Merrill, “Our Christmas Spirit on Trial,” *BG*, Dec. 23, 1945, C4.

shortages of consumer goods in America that Christmas season. Americans should, he argued, tap into the true spirit of Christmas and be happy to give to those who were truly in need that year.

Similarly, the *Washington Post* characterized the American government and its contributions to UNRRA as “the nearest approach to a Santa Claus that the children of several countries will have this Christmas.”¹⁰⁴³ Once again, Christmas provided a powerful motivating force as its script of generosity, peace, and goodwill could be used to give justification to these large-scale international aid efforts and make the American people inclined to accept and support them. The article went on to tell American readers on the home front that they could “make [their] own Christmas happier by helping somehow and giving all you can. What has been done to date is far from enough,” and this was because the government and the media had been unable to provide “a sense of personal participation.”¹⁰⁴⁴ Saving Europe in the aftermath of the war was such an enormous task that it was difficult for the American people on the home front to feel like they could help. Unlike American servicemen who were direct witnesses to the devastation in these regions, effort was required to make the American people at home realize the need for aid and their country’s capacity to help. They needed to see that the United States was in a unique position to have the ability to provide aid, and they had a moral responsibility to do so, even to those nations who had previously been enemy combatants. The shared humanity and sense of goodwill that Christmas brought to the forefront of people’s minds provided a powerful way to forge this connection.

As this chapter has demonstrated, Christmas provided a valuable tool for Americans abroad to uphold their morale and shape the way other groups perceived them. Being stationed far from home was particularly difficult at Christmas, given the importance of ‘home for the holidays.’ Despite this, most sources indicate that troops had a relatively happy holiday experience. This was in part because of the effort the military and

¹⁰⁴³ Christine Sadler, “UNRRA is Their Nearest Approach to Santa Claus, *WP*, Dec. 23, 1945, S3.

¹⁰⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

government put into coordinating Christmas activities and items, such as trees, food, mail, or entertainment. It was also due to their own efforts of entertaining and giving to others. The parties they held for local children required considerable sacrifice on their part, but they undertook the effort because they wanted to. The script of Christmas played out with remarkable consistency across national and religious borders, indicating the degree to which the holiday was ingrained in the American psyche. These Christmas celebrations did not just bring candy or cake to the children of the world; they also carried with them powerful cultural symbols of American values. Santa Claus riding in on American Jeep with his sack full of toys showed the people of the world that the American military, and Americans themselves, were generous and sought to spread good around the world. That 'good' was heavily saturated with the American values of freedom, democracy, and consumerism.

Conclusion

I'll be home for Christmas,
 You can plan on me.
 Please have snow and mistletoe
 And presents on the tree.

Christmas Eve will find me
 Where the love light gleams.
 I'll be home for Christmas
 If only in my dreams.

- Bing Crosby (1943)¹⁰⁴⁵

America and its allies eventually won the war, and in December 1945 the world saw its first peacetime Christmas in seven years. Much like the sentiments expressed in the song, many wanted to make it home for this Christmas especially, and those on the home front were eager to plan for their arrival. For the return of some servicemen, like those described at the outset of this dissertation, family, friends, and whole communities came together to make this dream a reality regardless of the time of year that they actually arrived home. Unfortunately, there were many cases where, even with these accommodations, this dream could not come true. Over 400,000 Americans had given their lives to the conflict, and another 670,000 were wounded, many of whom were still hospitalized.¹⁰⁴⁶ As the aviation promoter and developer Cliff Henderson wrote on December 28, 1945, in a letter to famous World War I flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker,

This was indeed a holiday of great contrasts – great sorrow – great joy. Obviously we can but feel humble thanks and joy for the victorious conclusion... This same period, however, emphasizes the tragic sorrow in the hearts of tens of thousands who have lost loved ones. Further it is a period of anxiety and loneliness for families and their sons or daughters separated by Military Occupation Services. We must all hope and pray that

¹⁰⁴⁵ Kim Gannon, lyricist, and Walter Kent, composer, “I’ll be Home For Christmas,” performed by Bing Crosby and John Scott Trotter and his Orchestra, Decca Records, 1943.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Michael Clodfelder, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts – A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1500–2000*, (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2002), 582.

lasting peace and permanent understanding has returned to all mankind.¹⁰⁴⁷

For some, the holiday was a painful reminder of the costs of war; for others, the first peacetime Christmas was a true cause for celebration and a reminder of all the things the war had been fought to protect.

In the case of advertisers and marketers, this was indeed a time to rejoice, and that was certainly how advertisements presented it: as a renewed time to buy and indulge in all the luxuries that the war had kept at bay. Calvert Distillers told people “Waiting for this hasn’t been easy... for anyone. But now it’s here... Christmas 1945. To Mom and Dad it brings the best gift of all... He’s Home, time to be maybe a little bigger... maybe a little bolder... all the more turkey then... all the more room in their hearts.”¹⁰⁴⁸ This Christmas was a special one, one where everyone was hoping to be back together. This meant people could and should have whatever they needed or wanted, in order to celebrate. While full reconversion from war production to consumer goods had not been completed by Christmas 1945, ads still highlighted that the consumer market was back to normal. The White Motor Company illustrated this in one of its delivery service ads: “Once again in neighborhoods all over America, there will be the familiar sight of White trucks delivering those mysterious packages that have helped make Christmas merrier in countless homes since the first White truck went into department store service in 1900.”¹⁰⁴⁹ Not only were trucks back on the road but also they were back on the road with purchases all set to be delivered for Christmas, and advertisements made it was clear these packages and consumerism more broadly would be the key to future happiness. Advertisers also told people to buy things as a way to reclaim the time they had lost to the war, to give themselves over to the holiday and enjoy it to the fullest extent possible. For example, the Sterling Silver Company, in one of its ads, focused on the fact that for many couples this would be their first Christmas together; earlier holidays had been spent apart

¹⁰⁴⁷ Letter from Clifford W. Henderson to Eddie Rickenbacker, Dec. 28, 1945. Box 10, Eddie Rickenbacker Papers (MSS013037). LOC, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Calvert Distillers ad, *TIME*, Dec. 24, 1945, 34.

¹⁰⁴⁹ White Motor Company ad, *The Atlantic*, Dec. 1945, 9.

because of the war, and “perhaps in those other years we’d never have dared show we were sentimental.” Now, according to the ad, things were different, and people could begin family traditions and feel “pure happiness that a shining dream is at last becoming real.” They could solidify this feeling in memory through the purchase of some of their fine, long-lasting, silver, “wreathed in traditions.”¹⁰⁵⁰ Consumption could blur the lines between the past, present, and future, especially when it was associated with the timelessness of Christmas.

Of course, things were not just as they had been in the years before the war. Mechanical and metal toys were still in short supply, Christmas tree lights were basically non-existent, and prices were far above market value for most items.¹⁰⁵¹ *YANK* magazine, in an article about the feelings of men returning home for Christmas, noted that things were not as delightful as they might have dreamed: “Civilians in uniform are still scattered around the globe...no peace treaty has been framed, much less signed. And in the country at large, factories that four months ago stopped grinding out the tools of death have only begun to turn out the comforts of life, those gaudy comforts which the advertising pages of magazines taught us to expect in technicolor, in abundance and at prices that all could afford.”¹⁰⁵² Heightened demand, sparked especially by the sentimentality of peace-time Christmas, created the conditions necessary for inflation. The government worked to curb this by putting out advisories regarding the dangers of paying too much for scarce items, just as it had in wartime. One pamphlet from the Consumer Relations Advisor of the OPA cautioned shoppers, “You know that what's being offered this season is low in quality and high in price. Be wise. Let’s work together to stop inflation. If we resist buying over-priced goods now, stores will have to find better values for us after Christmas.”¹⁰⁵³ The government realized that its role in managing consumer drives had to continue into the post-war period. However, unlike wartime when the government could

¹⁰⁵⁰ Sterling Silver ad, *LIFE*, Dec. 3, 1945, 28.

¹⁰⁵¹ *SandS Rome*, Dec. 25, 1945, 3. *TIME*, Dec. 17, 1945, 40. *NYT*, Dec. 20, 1945, 1.

¹⁰⁵² “Inventory USA,” *YANK*, Dec. 28, 1945, 4.

¹⁰⁵³ “Consumer Relations this Week,” from the Office of the Consumer Relations Advisor, OPA notice no. 57, Dec. 6, 1945. Box 2, Entry UD 64, RG 188. NARA, College Park, MD.

use winning the war as a backdrop to encourage people to follow their requests, in peacetime the messages coming from advertisers were much more appealing and the rationale for continued controls was less clear.

The government also had another task to manage – that of actually getting the ‘boys home for Christmas.’ Operation Magic Carpet, sometimes referred to as Operation Santa Claus, was the name given to the mission of getting military personnel home, which officially began in September 1945. It was a point-based system whereby the men who had served the longest would be the first to be repatriated. With 2,000,000 soldiers eligible in September and the fact that they could only send approximately 14,000 home each day (reaching close to 20,000/day by Christmas), this was bound to be a drawn-out and difficult process. The *Saratoga*, an aircraft carrier, set the record for the most transported in a single trip: 29,204 soldiers.¹⁰⁵⁴ Of course, even if they made it to the U.S. coast, getting to their actual homes was another story. Christmas 1945 saw the entire country in gridlock as hundreds of thousands of people jammed the rail lines and other modes of transportation. Approximately 94% of those traveling by train on Christmas Eve from the West Coast were recently returned veterans.¹⁰⁵⁵ Those who made it to their intended destination got to live the dream of ‘being home for Christmas.’ For those who did not, there was obviously some bitterness and resentment. For example, *TIME* magazine wrote: “The clamor to bring the boys home grew louder & louder. Millions complained that demobilization was a scandal. Complaints, based on letters from the boys, recited old grievances. High-point men had been left to languish at overseas ports. Conditions in waiting areas were sometimes deplorable. The elaborate demobilization machinery was falling apart.”¹⁰⁵⁶ However, the Army and Navy tried to make it as happy a Christmas as they could by guaranteeing a traditional Christmas dinner for anyone still

¹⁰⁵⁴ Elly Farelly, “Bringing Home the 8 Million Boys After WWII; Operation Magic Carpet,” *War History Online*, (Jun. 29 2016), <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/world-war-ii/brining-home-8-million-boys-wwii-operation-magic-carpet.html>

¹⁰⁵⁵ Matthew Litt, “The Race to Get World War II Veterans Home in Time for Christmas,” *TIME.com*, (Dec. 21, 2015), <http://time.com/4151426/operation-magic-carpet/> “Coast Troop Jam Mounts,” *NYT*, Dec. 21, 1945, 6.

¹⁰⁵⁶ “Demobilization: Home By Christmas?,” *TIME*, Dec. 17, 1945, 11.

in the service. A typical menu included fruit cocktail, olives, roast turkey with dressing, cranberry sauce, giblet gravy, creamed green peas, mashed potatoes, bread and butter, ice cream, apples, preserves, assorted nuts, coffee, and tea. American Red Cross kits were also distributed, consisting of stationary, Christmas cards, playing cards, and assorted toiletries.¹⁰⁵⁷ For those stranded across the nation and in major port cities especially, strangers and community centers opened their doors.¹⁰⁵⁸ The joy of peace combined with the sentimentality of Christmas inspired a deep desire to do everything possible for those who had been a part of the effort to win the war.

Some people, however, cautioned not to let the celebration of Christmas overshadow the work that still needed to be done. As one writer for *Stars and Stripes – Marseilles* commented, “Heart Over Mind – This pressure to get the boys home by Christmas or Easter or some other time is born of the heart and hence is likely to override the logic born of our overseas commitments. Congress and the armed services must devise personnel policies and measures that squarely recognize the imperative nature of this trend.”¹⁰⁵⁹ They had won the war, but America still needed to put effort into winning the peace. As *Stars and Stripes – Rome* put it, “The man overseas must resign himself to ‘writing off’ another Christmas away from home as his ‘little contribution’ to the peace of the world.”¹⁰⁶⁰ This was especially true for those who had been assigned as occupation forces.

Occupation forces had an important task ahead: to not only secure the victory that the Allies had won, but also to reshape the societies that had perpetrated violence against them. Germany had to be de-Nazified and, in the words of the *Saturday Evening Post*,

¹⁰⁵⁷ “Yule to be Like Home for GIs on Santa Ships,” *NYT*, Dec. 19, 1945, 10. “GI Christmas,” *AC*, Dec. 16, 1945, 6A.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *SandS Rome*, Dec. 25, 1945, 1 and 8. *AC*, Dec. 16, 1945, 6A. “82,000 GIs Can’t Get Home,” *CDT*, Dec 19, 1945, 1. “Throngs Marooned in Yule Travel Jam across the Nation,” *NYT*, Dec. 23, 1945, 1. “Navy to be Host at Yule Parties,” *NYT*, Dec. 23, 1945, A5. “Joy Provided Warriors For Far From Home,” *LAT*, Dec. 25, 1945, A5.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Hanson W. Baldwin, “McArthur Grabs Limelight,” *SandS Marseilles*, Sept. 22, 1945, 4.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Editor, “Dear Editor,” *SandS Rome*, Dec. 6, 1945, 4.

American servicemen had to “civilize the Jap.”¹⁰⁶¹ Colonel Kelsie E. Miller, commander of the 128th Infantry that broke through Japanese lines in the 1942 Battle of Buna (New Guinea), explained this idea to his troops. His unit was still engaged in combat action up until the Japanese surrender, and shortly after he said “On the battle field you won respect at the point of the bayonet. It is the responsibility of each of you, by your conduct, behavior and performance of duty to maintain an equal respect as victors, who believe in and practice the principles of which we fought for.”¹⁰⁶² What were these principles? According to General Dwight D. Eisenhower,

You, the United States army, are now engaged in a mission whose essence is the *establishment and maintenance of conditions in which may prosper World-Wide extension of the Christmas spirit*. Wherever you are stationed and whatever your task may be, all of you are guardians of Peace. You strive so that, at this and every Christmas to come, we may be able to celebrate the good tidings of this season, serenely secure from the sacrifice and terror of war.¹⁰⁶³

In the words of one of the highest ranked generals of the war years, a celebrated war hero who would ultimately become President in 1953, it was Christmas – its traditions, rituals, values, and beliefs – that the war had been fought to defend and the occupation was working to secure.

The war was over but it had caused massive devastation in many areas. Basic needs consumed the thoughts of many and tens of millions of people were displaced across borders.¹⁰⁶⁴ It was up to nations left standing to ensure that chaos did not ensue following Allied victory. Germany only had the agricultural and industrial capacity to produce

¹⁰⁶¹ William L. Worden, “The G.I. is Civilizing the Jap,” *SEP*, Dec. 15, 1945, 18.

¹⁰⁶² Colonel Kelsie E. Miller, Message to the Troops, “End of War in Japan,” Sept. 9, 1945. Box 2670, Entry UDUP 421, RG 496. NARA, College Park, MD. Samuel Milner, *United States Army in WWII - the Pacific - Victory in Papua*, Illustrated Edition (Washington: Pickle Partners Publishing, 2014), cclxxvii.

¹⁰⁶³ Emphasis mine. Christmas Message from the Chief of Staff, Dec. 1945. Box 10, Entry 55, RG 337. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁶⁴ A January 1946 opinion poll in France listed that 49% of people were most concerned with attaining basic needs. David W. Ellwood, *Rebuilding Europe: Western Europe, America, and Postwar Reconstruction*, (London: Longman Press, 1992), 32.

1,000 calories/day on average for its citizens. Imports from the Allies raised these totals to some degree but put strain on their own nations as well. For example, the British had to keep rationing in place as late as 1954.¹⁰⁶⁵

America was one of the few nations left with the capacity to aid these countries in need. Ending this kind of deprivation had been a part of President Roosevelt's plan for a peaceful and prosperous world, which he had outlined in his 1941 State of the Union address. He called for the freedom from want, the freedom from fear, the freedom of speech and expression, and the freedom to worship, and these formed the pillars of America's post-war plan both during the war, with the creation of the Atlantic Charter, and after, with the creation of the United Nations.¹⁰⁶⁶

Just as Christmas had been used during the war on the home front (as a method to fuse patriotism and consumerism) and on bases where Americans were stationed (to demonstrate American generosity and the abundance possible through the American way of life), so too was Christmas a powerful tool of leaders in the post-war period. Christmas was a way to prove solidarity and Americanize oneself, especially for those deemed to be outside the bounds of the mainstream culture of the time. Americans continued their efforts to spread these values abroad, especially in countries that had once been considered hostile. Perhaps this was because of a sense that the enemy nations' lack of appreciation for these values had led to war in the first place. In Berlin in 1945, families with four or more children were allowed by occupation forces to take Christmas trees from the pine forest outside the city. Additionally, more than \$300,000 was collected for gifts and food by overseers for those in most desperate need under their control.¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶⁵ In the American zone it went from 1,135 calories per day to 1,550 by January 1946. E. M. Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 468, 472, and 495.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, State of the Union Address, January 6, 1941. *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16092>; "Atlantic Charter," August 14, 1941, *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>; Ellwood, *Rebuilding Europe*, 34.

¹⁰⁶⁷ "Hunger, Disease, Cold Dampen Spirit of Christmas in Wreckage of Berlin," *SandS Rome*, Dec. 25, 1945, 8.

American papers reported similar efforts of Americans around the world. As the *Atlanta Constitution* wrote, “American servicemen, wherever the season found them, did their best to brighten the yuletide celebration... the same story came from all parts of the world where American servicemen are still billeted: From India, China, the South Pacific, the Philippines, Bulgaria, Romania, Austria, Iceland.”¹⁰⁶⁸ In Japan, troops taught Japanese children Christmas songs like “Silent Night” and “Jingle Bells.” The 8th Marine Regiment adopted Japanese orphans for Christmas and threw them a party, complete with a turkey dinner and a tree decorated with paper ornaments.¹⁰⁶⁹ While these actions demonstrate the desire of occupation forces to re-create familiar experiences, they also were a part of a larger attempt to shape the way occupied people saw Americans, and Christmas worked to highlight the delights of the American way of life through the generosity and excitement associated with its celebration.

With the growing threat of communism, in direct opposition to the American liberal-capitalist way of life, and the difficulty of administering such devastated societies, it would become even more critical for America to win the hearts and minds of the people who were under occupation. In Europe especially, these growing Cold War tensions between the West and the Soviet Union created the conditions necessary for American leadership to be particularly concerned with propagating the values of freedom and democracy. According to the records of the Education and Cultural Relations Division of the Office of the Military Government, programs were put in place from 1947 to 1949 to host Christmas parties for German children. American administrators gave the children cocoa and other sweets, and they also received packages containing a “toothbrush, comb, chicklets, orange, box of cookies, a package of ‘Life Savers’ and a tangerine.”¹⁰⁷⁰ This was done not only for the good of the children but also to gain the appreciation and acceptance of the German community. As such, considerable effort was undertaken to

¹⁰⁶⁸ AC, Dec. 26, 1945, 3.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Howard H Peckham, Shirley A Snyder and James H Madison, editors, *Letters from the Greatest Generation: Writing Home in World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 67.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Letter from the Office of the Military Government to the Director of Education and Religion, Education and Cultural Relations Division, Youth Activities, (1947-1949). Box 970, RG 260. NARA, College Park, MD.

ensure that these parties received adequate publicity. American officials in the region mandated that local newspaper reporters and photographers be in attendance at each party.¹⁰⁷¹ It appears that in some cases this effort had the desired effect. The Senate President of Bremen, a German municipal politician under the control of the Military Government, wrote in a letter that it was his “agreeable duty to express my warmed thanks to you Director Dunn [the Director of the Military Government in Bremen] for the gifts of the Military Government and the US troops, with which you presented our Bremen youth on the occasion of Christmas. In this time, so hard for our town, you have helped in a magnanimous way to exonerate the misery of the present day and give our Bremen children at least some Christmas joy.”¹⁰⁷² Similarly, American administrators abroad worked to convince their own people back home of the importance of this endeavor. In an open letter, Major William Marthinsen of the Education and Cultural Relations Division of the American occupying force commented on this idea when he wrote:

Dear Countrymen: We Americans, looking into a mirror, will see reflected there a picture of prosperity, happiness and generosity. It is incumbent upon us as Americans to help spread this feeling to others. With this goal in mind, and the approaching season of the year that holds a special significance for every youngster, we solicit your co-operation in helping to make a very merry Christmas for the German children.¹⁰⁷³

Christmas once again was used, this time in a foreign context, to shape the beliefs of the people in these contested communities as to how to perceive America and the West.

Unfortunately, the growing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union overshadowed international co-operation. The Truman administration realized it needed to promote an American economic model based on mass consumption and global markets

¹⁰⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷² Letter of Appreciation from Senate President of Land Bremen to the Director of the Military Government, Thomas Dunn, undated. Box 321, RG 260. NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁷³ Letter from Major William Marthinsen, Sept. 24, 1947. Box 321, RG 260. NARA, College Park, MD.

to prevent a post-war economic depression.¹⁰⁷⁴ Once again Christmas was enlisted by the American government, military, and people to illustrate that model and the abundance possible if one chose to accept and follow the American way of life. In this context, American leaders were tasked with winning the hearts and minds of the people of the world, as well as those in their own country. The lack of direct hostile confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States made the propaganda aspects of this war all the more important. Much like at the start of World War II, Americans at the conclusion of hostilities found themselves in a society that was rapidly changing. The atomic bomb, the growing threat of the Soviet Union, and America's newfound role as protector of democracy around the world all changed how Americans saw the world, yet the celebration of Christmas would continue. The meanings that had come to be associated with it through war would also continue to grow in response to the perceived communist threat. This was the notion that consumerism was an inherent right, part of what it meant to be an American, and that it was intrinsically linked to the American values of freedom and democracy. American leaders in government and business were well aware of this and used Christmas as one way to solidify consensus, motivate particular behaviors, and structure how this new conflict should be understood as well.

Christmas had been used in World War II to promote American values, and America's victory in World War II seemed to validate and justify the spreading of those values. Throughout the Cold War Christmas functioned as a part of the American projection of power, both over its own citizens and around the world. It was used especially to endorse the elements of American culture related to national prosperity, progress, and abundance in order to limit the spread of communist influence and opposing values. Historians like Victoria de Grazia, Reinhold Wagnleitner, and Rob Kroes have highlighted the cultural dimensions of American power in this regard, and in particular, the importance of the American "market empire" to inspire imitation and loyalty around the world.¹⁰⁷⁵ In the

¹⁰⁷⁴ Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 114.

¹⁰⁷⁵ De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*; Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University

1940s, '50s, and '60s, Christmas became the market empire's greatest festival, a global advertisement for American prosperity and a worldwide invitation to participate in the American way of life. Some of the most desired holiday gift items in the post-war period were home appliances and other items that were constructed as things that would make the home the ideal location of domesticity and familial bliss, something that was deeply desired after the upheaval of World War II.¹⁰⁷⁶ Domestic imagery of meals and kitchens were depicted with scenes meant to evoke happiness to illustrate the pleasure, progress, and prosperity of the American way. American corporations were successful in exporting these ideals. According to Victoria de Grazia, once modern consumerism emerged in Europe, the kitchen became the household's new center of operation. It was managed by the housewife, and 'Mrs. Consumer' was responsible for stocking her kitchen with the products of mass consumer society.¹⁰⁷⁷ These items, and the replicas for young girls, solidified the idea that consumption was what made America a great place to live and shored up the homemaker ideal that was constructed as a bulwark against communism.¹⁰⁷⁸ Having these kinds of items seemingly led to a happy and therefore better life, or so was the message these advertisements presented, and Christmas was a key time of year for reinforcing these ideals.

Just as in World War II, creators of culture like filmmakers and song writers used their media to reflect and comment on the mood of the times. The song quoted at the start of this chapter, "I'll Be Home For Christmas," highlighted the longing of those far from home to be back with their loved ones and was inspired by the millions separated by the realities of war.¹⁰⁷⁹ Similarly, in 1962, Noël Regeny and Gloria Shayne Baker wrote "Do You Hear What I Hear?" as a plea for peace during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Considered

of North Carolina Press, 1994); Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁷⁶ General Electric ad, *LIFE*, May 3, 1948, 7.

¹⁰⁷⁷ de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 429.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

¹⁰⁷⁹ Kim Gannon, lyricist, and Walter Kent, composer, "I'll be Home For Christmas," performed by Bing Crosby and John Scott Trotter and his Orchestra, Decca Records, 1943.

in this context, the line “a star, a star, dancing in the night, with a tale as big as a kite,” not only harkens back to the biblical story and the star of Bethlehem, but also the existential dread that many in this period felt about the threat of nuclear war.¹⁰⁸⁰ Christmas, and its powerful messages of goodwill combined with American prosperity, progress, and power, allowed American business, state, and military actors to further entrench themselves around the globe and secure their way of life at home against an impending threat. For example, after a misprinted phone number in a Sears catalog to the Continental Air Command (later North American Aerospace Defense Command – NORAD) the American military began tracking the annual journey of Santa Claus around the globe. Children had seen the advertisement and expected to reach Santa Claus when they called the number but reached the military establishment instead. This adaptation was an incredibly successful public relations campaign for the American military.¹⁰⁸¹ The connection formed between Santa and NORAD, the giver of gifts and the tracker of threats, presented both with a benevolent yet powerful ability to monitor, protect, traverse, and improve the world.

In the crisis and confusion of World War II, Americans defined their national identity using the cultural capital associated with Christmas. On the one hand, it is hard to argue against the celebration of Christmas and what it theoretically stood for; who would want to go against the ideals of peace and goodwill to all? On the other hand, the way Christmas was actually portrayed, through advertisements, editorials, and articles in American mass media, as well as in advisories and regulations stemming from the government, present a quintessentially American Christmas that was at once patriotic and conformist.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Noël Regeny, lyricist and Gloria Shayne Baker, composer, “Do You Hear What I Hear?” performed by the Harry Simeone Chorale, Mercury Records, 1962; Spencer Kornhaber, “The Apocalyptic Fear in ‘Do You Hear What I Hear?’” *The Atlantic.com*, Dec. 16, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/12/the-apocalyptic-fear-within-do-you-hear-what-i-hear/420459/>

¹⁰⁸¹ Justin Wm. Moyer, “NORAD Santa Tracker: America’s Bizarre Cold War Tradition,” *Washington Post.com*, Dec. 24, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/12/24/norad-santa-tracker-americas-bizarre-cold-war-tradition/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.0c31e6990334

Democracy, free enterprise, and consumerism were key elements of this Christmas script, but so too were whiteness, Christianity, and the middle-class lifestyle. Leaders in the business community and the government supported this vision of what it meant to be an American. Rhetoric connected what the war was being fought to protect the celebration of Christmas and subsequently reinforced these elements as the dominant cultural trope in American life.

Christmas was a powerful agent of conformity. Through the proscriptive actions associated with celebrating the holiday, people could choose to uphold or withhold their support for these values within their families and communities. Accepting this quintessentially American Christmas as it was defined in the context of World War II was a condition of acceptance into the American polity. Rather than promoting true inclusion and tolerance, Christmas acted as a way to acculturate minorities into the fold without them threatening a change to the dominant culture. As the bipolar power struggle of the Cold War increased so too did the stakes for particular countries and societies to choose on which side of the Iron Curtain they would fall. Christmas was used to illustrate American generosity and helpfulness in World War II, but in the capitalist versus communist, freedom versus oppression, good versus evil mentality of the Cold War, the stakes were even higher. Once again, accepting the American Christmas script as it was written was a way for Americans to define themselves and demand allegiance from others. As has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation, Christmas held power to construct and project American values; this was an influential force throughout World War II and ultimately could be tapped into again in the Cold War era and beyond. Individuals should question how much of their behavior is decided by personal choice versus mandated tradition, especially in times of crisis when routine and normalcy are so deeply craved. As long as the celebration of Christmas continues, those who have the ability to tap into its power can use Christmas as both a force for social change and as a tool of social control.

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Related Work Experience

Teaching Assistant, University of Western Ontario, 2014-2018

- History 2301E: The United States – The Colonial Period to the Present – 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018
- History 1401E: Modern Europe, 1750 to Present – 2014-2015

Graduate Assistant, York University, 2013-2014

Publications:

“Freedom to Want: Politics and the Projection of American Abundance, 1945-1960” in the *Graduate Journal of Food Studies*, Vol. III, No. 1, (September 2016): 55-67.