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Lewis A. Erenberg, Susan E. Hirsch, eds. *The War in American Culture, Society and Consciousness During World War II.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. x + 346 pp. $21.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-21512-9; $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-21511-2.

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World War II is once again a popular topic. Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* scored both lavish critical praise and large box office receipts, while Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* has similarly dominated the nonfiction bestseller lists. These reflections on the war and the generation who fought and lived through it are overwhelmingly celebratory. After all, this was the generation, as Brokaw wrote, who "saved the world."

But it has long been out of style for professional historians to write celebratory books, especially about wartime. This was particularly true after the trauma of Vietnam, when historians' examination of World War II dismantled the earlier simplistic patriotic view of the "Good War" to defeat fascism and Japanese imperialism. While certainly not ignoring the malevolence of the Axis powers, more recent histories have examined the ineffectiveness and barbarity of the Allied strategic bombing campaign (as exemplified in the senseless firebombing of Dresden), the indifference to the extermination of European Jewry, the interment of American citizens of Japanese descent, and the inhumanity of the use of atomic weapons, among other topics.

Now, more than a half-century after the war's end, a more evenhanded view of World War II has emerged. The essays in Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsh's collection, *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness During World War II*, scrutinize both the achievements and limitations of American society in living up to its wartime democratizing ideals.

The central theme of this fine collection of essays is the transformation of American identity because of the wartime emergency. "The terrible demands of total war," the editors write in their introduction, "required that former outsiders be included in a new pluralistic national self-definition" (p. 4). The social solidarity required for efficient wartime economic production did much to ease the ethnic fractures of American society in the 1920s and 1930s, these essays show, although its democratizing effects were ultimately strictly limited.

The essay which illustrates this theme best is Gary Gerstle's "Working Class Goes to War." He describes the high commitment of immigrant workers to the war effort. They participated heavily in war bond and scrap-metal collection drives and in patriotic rallies designed to heighten civilian morale. By such actions, workers of Eastern European (and, in New England, French Canadian) descent demonstrated their patriotism, and consequently, their claim to status as full fledged Americans. This marks the most significant success of the democratization of American society during World War II.

However, the reworking of American identity during the war to include African-Americans, American Indians, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and women was comparatively unsuccessful. While Reed Ueda, for example, shows how Congress liberalized exclusionary immigration laws to allow more Chinese refugees to come to the United States, John Dower demonstrates how clearly language was used to dehumanize the Japanese. In the cultural realm, Lewis Erenberg analyzes bandleader Glenn Miller's appropriation of "hot" jazz from black sources, toning it down and smoothing out the free-wheeling solo improvisations to put his white middle-class audience in the mood. Using exclusively literary sources, Carol Miller examines the alienating impact of the war on American Indians.

Several essays treat the equivocal gains of African Americans during the war. The women and minority workers employed by the Pullman Company, Susan Hirsch shows, gained greater opportunities for advancement due to the shortage of white males as well as by using new wartime federal anti-discrimination laws. While both African Americans and women gained financially during the war, Hirsch explains how management (and union leadership) tried to maintain the traditional gender and racial distinctions at the workplace.

Shirley Ann Wilson Moore's fascinating study of

Richmond, California deals not with the workplace, but the culture of the broader community. A large number of African-Americans poured into Richmond to work at the four Kaiser Company shipyards located there, bringing with them the musical traditions of the rural South. These traditions infused the jazz performances which were the feature of Richmond's lively nightclub culture during the war. Nightclubs brought together not only musical styles, but people, too; in racially segregated Richmond, they were one place where black and white patrons commingled.

The conventional interpretation of the American woman's wartime experience focuses on increased occupational choices that were withdrawn when male workers returned after V-J Day. Elaine Tyler May argues a more lasting effect of the war involved women gaining greater sexual autonomy.

Another theme which runs through these essays is the interplay between "official" sources of culture and social order–such as government propaganda, Hollywood movies, and local police–and the citizenry. Echoing the conclusions of contemporary social historians, these essays show people did not passively accept the doctrines and regulations imposed on them, but rather responded creatively to their circumstances. For example, Perry Duis (despite using too simplistic a definition of the private sphere) shows Chicago's families actively adapting themselves to wartime conditions. On the other hand, George Roeder's study of the censorship of news photographs and Lary May's examination of "conversion narratives" in Hollywood films focus on the purveyors of wartime culture. Both essays show government propaganda efforts, though oftentimes heavy-handed, involved more subtle motivations than usually attributed to them.

Overall, this fine collection of essays not only provides astute perspectives on wartime culture, but is suggestive of the roots of postwar America as well. Therefore, Alan Brinkley's concluding essay on the impact of the war on liberal thought is especially disappointing as he makes such little use of the contributors' insights.

Contents:

Perry R. Duis, "No Time for Privacy: World War II and Chicago's Families"

George H. Roeder, Jr., "Censoring Disorder: American Visual Imagery of World War II"

Lary May, "Making the American Consensus: The Narrative of Conversion and Subversion in World War II Films"

Gary Gerstle, "The Working Class Goes to War"

Elaine Tyler May, "Rosie the Riveter Gets Married"

Lewis A. Erenberg, "Swing Goes to War: Glenn Miller and the Popular Music of World War II"

John W. Dower, "Race, Language and War in Two Cultures: World War II in Asia"

Reed Ueda, "The Changing Path the Citizenship: Ethnicity and Naturalization during World War II"

Carol Miller, "Native Sons and the Good War: Retelling the Myth of American Indian Assimilation"

Susan E. Hirsch, "No Victory at the Workplace: Women and Minorities at Pullman during World War II"

Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, "Traditions from Home: African Americans in Wartime Richmond, California"

Edward J. Escobar, "Zoot-Suiters and Cops: Chicano Youth and the Los Angeles Police Department during World War II"

Alan Brinkley, "World War II and American Liberalism"

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