IMAGINING HEAVEN AND HELL:
RELIGION, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS,
1930-1953

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IMAGINING HEAVEN AND HELL:
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that religiously framed narratives of national identity conditioned the United States approach to the world from 1930 to 1953. When the Great Depression called into question U.S. manifest destiny, Americans reified their divine chosenness first through a “good neighbor” national image and later through a narrative imagining the United States as a righteous nation battling evil enemies. During the Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman administrations, competing religious groups/organizations provided the language and images through which national identity narratives attained their form. The destabilizing impact of the Depression allowed the temporary ascendance of Protestant liberal modernist discourse and an attendant surge in popularity for cooperative internationalism. When the good neighbor narrative failed to reconcile Americans’ experience in the world with their neighborly picture of the world, a gradual shift toward the language/imagery of neo-orthodox realism occurred as Americans began imagining the United States as a righteous defender against the evil Axis powers. World War II empowered fundamentalist Christianity, enabling a postwar transition that gradually marginalized the vestiges of pre-war religious modernism and again depicted the United States as a righteous nation, this time battling the godless Soviet Union on behalf of God-ordained free market economics and political democracy.
DEDICATION

For Anna
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: THE SUBJECT OF RELIGION

Make no mistake about it: This is good versus evil. These are evildoers. They have no justification for their actions . . . The only motivation is evil.
- George W. Bush, September 2001

If the process of naming of objects amounts to the very act of their constitution, then their descriptive features will be fundamentally unstable and open to all kinds of hegemonic rearticulations. The essentially performative character of naming is the precondition for all hegemony and politics.
- Ernesto Laclau, 1989

In the 1950s, few Americans rivaled John Foster Dulles in militant anti-communist zeal. Dulles routinely vilified “Soviet Communism” for its “atheistic Godless premise.” As a critic he argued that NATO’s geographic boundaries were too limited and as Secretary of State he staunchly supported nuclear-threat belligerence. In 1954, Dulles suggested a permanent nuclear policy of Massive Retaliation so that the United States could “retaliate, instantly, by means and places of our own choosing.” Dulles crystallized a dominant American patriotism that viewed the world in the binary terms of righteous democracy and evil communism. Indeed, he exemplified religiously framed national identity so well that biographer Townsend Hoopes titled his book on Dulles The Devil and John Foster Dulles.

The Dulles of the 1950s, however, clashes with the Dulles of the 1930s and the early war years. In 1939, Dulles’s War, Peace and Change argued for new methods of international negotiation to “check the tendency to identify one’s” own nation “with
deity” and “the other nation . . . with evil.” Arguing that the United States should abstain from war in the spirit of the New Testament, Dulles condemned the rising clamor for U.S. intervention in Europe. “‘Practical’ men of the world tell me that all this talk of the Gospels has no place in the world today but it is only by bringing that Christian point of view to bear on world affairs that something really practical and constructive can be done to make peace last,” Dulles claimed. 4 During the war Dulles further suggested that “military establishments everywhere should be brought under some form of international control.” 5

The transformation of Dulles’s foreign policy thinking testifies to a sea change in the religious framing of American identity and the power of that identity to shape the U.S. approach to the world, the central themes of this dissertation. Imagining Heaven and Hell argues that religious narratives of national identity reinvigorate America’s sense of divine chosenness and thereby drive United States foreign relations. When the Great Depression called into question U.S. manifest destiny, Americans sought to reinscribe their chosenness through a “good neighbor” policy that imagined America as a beacon of international arbitration, goodwill, and non-intervention. The rupture of this narrative amid growing tensions in Europe and Asia in the late 1930s resulted in the emergence of an alternative image that depicted the United States as a righteous nation combating wicked Nazis and treacherous Japanese. After vanquishing these evildoers with near genocidal ferocity, Americans temporarily questioned their righteousness, and, in turn, their chosenness. Imagining the United States as a righteous nation contending against evil, atheistic Soviet communism at the end of the decade alleviated the immediate postwar anxiety and allowed Americans to reaffirm their chosenness once more.
Between 1933 and 1953 various religious subjectivities (groups/organizations) provided the discourse (language/images) through which national identity narratives attained their form. A critical mass of Americans responded to the destabilizing impact of the Great Depression by articulating a vision of the United States in the Sermon-on-the-Mount discourse of Protestant liberal modernism. When the good neighbor identity narrative failed to reconcile Americans’ experience in the world with their neighborly picture of the world, a gradual shift toward the language/imagery of neo-orthodox realism occurred and Americans began imagining the United States as a righteous defender against the forces of evil. The experience of war itself empowered fundamentalist Christianity in the postwar period, a transition that gradually marginalized the vestiges of pre-war religious modernism and depicted the United States again as a righteous nation, this time battling godlessness on behalf of Biblically-designed freedom throughout the world.

In focusing on the religious cultural roots of U.S. foreign relations, this dissertation is a product of the recent “cultural turn” in diplomatic history. As a growing number of scholars demonstrate, domestic culture and international relations are not easily separated into strict binary categories.6 “We must look at the ‘domestic,’ historically self-conscious, side of a nation-state’s identity, the way its citizens are organized, the arrangements . . . that give it its sense (or lack) of coherence,” Andrew Johnston observes.7 In terms of “domestic” religious negotiations over national identity, this dissertation adheres to the insight of Amy Kaplan that “to foreground cultures” implicitly questions how “international relations . . . shape a dominant imperial culture at home, and how imperial relations are enacted and contested within the nation.”8
*Imagining Heaven and Hell* builds on the cultural history of U.S. foreign relations by analyzing religious discourse as a critical element of the national identity narratives that drive U.S. foreign policy construction. Analysis of religious culture in diplomatic history remains disconnected from national identity in ways that race, gender, ideology, and other cultural categories do not. I argue that U.S. foreign policy emerges from within religiously framed narratives of national identity and that therefore religious language and imagery (discourse) enables the imagined community known as “America” to establish an ontological existence. As members of an imagined community, policy makers and state actors are part of the culture from which they emerge rather than separate and/or distinct from it. For example, a shift toward obsession with evil enemy others was not simply the province of Dulles, but permeated cultural discourse during World War II and the emerging Cold War.

Although the number of cultural categories employed by scholars of U.S. foreign relations has expanded, diplomatic historians have resisted religion as a category of analysis. In a roundtable on religion in *Diplomatic History* in 2000, Robert Buzzanco castigated cultural analysis in general and the use of religion in particular, arguing that such approaches fail to “explain state action.” In the same roundtable, Patricia Hill suggested that religion “may not always be a variable that matters as we now assume race, class, and gender must always be understood as constituents of any society or state.” Although “we have come to speak of things and people being ‘raced’ and ‘classed’ as well as gendered . . . can we imagine the locution ‘religioned’?” Hill wondered. She concluded that “our inability to do so reflects an intuitive, linguistic awareness of the distinction between religion and these other structural categories.” Tellingly, the 2004
edition of Michael Hogan and Thomas Patterson’s *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* contains chapters on gender, ideology, race, memory, cultural transfer and others, but none on religion. The term “religion” does not even appear in the index.¹² In the words of historian Andrew Preston, “As a systematic rubric under which various moments in the history of American foreign relations . . . can be analyzed and explained, religion has been sorely neglected and is rarely a lens through which historians examine America’s role in the world.”¹³

To be sure, some scholars have addressed religion. For example, Andrew Rotter demonstrates that from 1947 to 1954 Christianity influenced U.S. policy makers to press for closer relations with Pakistan rather than India because Pakistan’s Islam adhered more to American Christianity than did India’s Hinduism.¹⁴ But Rotter examines religion as only one element in a larger cultural milieu that includes gender, economics, race, governance, and class. In another instance, Joseph Henning argues that the United States strengthened relations with Japan in the latter half of the nineteenth century out of a belief that Japan’s technological progress demonstrated its “Christianization,” a perception that ignored persistent indigenous religious traditionalism among the Japanese people. Like Rotter, Henning closely connects religion to other cultural categories, especially race. He reveals, for instance, that U.S.-Japanese relations were heavily invested in discourses of “civilization” and “backwardness.”¹⁵

In perhaps the most in depth study of religion and U.S. foreign relations, Seth Jacobs illustrates that a pervasive religious culture anchored U.S. support for Ngo Dinh Diem as leader of South Vietnam in the 1950s. Like Henning and Rotter, Jacobs links religion and race as Diem’s Catholicism trumped the “primitive” religions of other
potential Vietnamese leaders and political groups. Further, Americans’ recognition of Roman Catholic resistance to “godless” Soviet imperialism in Eastern Europe underscored Diem’s suitability and obscured his weaknesses; the U.S. had found “a miracle man,” but one whose ineptitude ultimately proved a millstone around the neck of U.S. policy, dragging it toward direct intervention.16

Scholars also draw links between religion and nationalism, and sometimes in foreign policy contexts. Nevertheless, even those whose work focuses on religion underestimate the influence of religious language and imagery, often privileging the perceptions and opinions of particular religious groups over the role of religious discourse in foreign policy construction.17 For example, although Leo Ribuffo perceives the organic interpenetration of religion and national identity, and sketches the link between religion and American “exceptionalism” in U.S. foreign relations throughout the entirety of colonial and national history, he concludes that “serious religious ideas have had at most an indirect impact on policy makers - far less, for example, than strategic, economic, or political considerations.”18 Meanwhile, the corpus of study on American “civil religion” remains inchoate, perceiving the importance of religion to “national life” but unable to explain its enduring political and social power.19 Even when scholarship focuses on religious discourses of “destiny” and “mission,” such as that by Anders Stephanson, it remains detached from sustained grounding in religious history.20

This dissertation argues that religiously encoded national identity narratives reifying a divine mission delineate the “strategic, economic, and political considerations” that are ostensibly the “real” concerns of foreign policy. Historian Adrian Hastings argues that “the nation and nationalism are both…characteristically Christian things
which, in so far as they have appeared elsewhere, have done so within a process of westernization and of imitation of the Christian world.” If Hastings has overstated the case, he nevertheless points out that it is difficult to ignore the function of religious discourse in the constitution of the imagined community.

A sense of being God’s chosen nation has functioned throughout colonial/U.S. history as a leading element of American identity. Colonists disembarking into a “new” world between 1600 and 1640 carried old world identities, including notions that they came from the providentially destined nation of England. Groups such as the Puritans hoped to recover that destiny. For example, John Winthrop asserted that “the God of Israel is among us” and “shall make us a prayse and glory” and “as a Citty upon a Hill” through which England might be restored.

Puritans were not the exclusive proprietors of a divine chosenness identity narrative as most Anglo-American colonizers shared a sense of mission. King James I, for instance, granted the Charter of Virginia in part for the “propagating of Christian Religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God.” Seven years later, Church of England clergyman Alexander Whitaker wrote from Virginia that Company leaders should “let your faith which is toward God spread it sefle abroad, and shew forth charitable fruits of it in these barren part of the world” through “compassion” for “these naked slaves of the devil.”

Casting the indigenous peoples as evil others that required conversion simultaneously created the cultural space that sanctified violence against Indians as part of the contest between light and darkness. Lines from a 1662 poem by Michael Wigglesworth capture the essence of the emerging chosenness identity:
The glorious Lord of hostes
Was pleas’d to lead his armies forth
Into those forrein coasts.
At whose approach the darkness sad
Soon vanished away,
And all the shaddows of the night
Were turned to lightsome day.26

Embryonic expressions of a shared colonial identity rooted in divine destiny hardened into a more uniform “American” identity throughout the eighteenth century as the colonies increasingly appeared as God’s chosen land in place of England. For example, when New England pastor John Williams returned from more than two years in French-allied Indian captivity in the early 1700s, his narrative *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion* centered on the threat of French Canadian Catholic priests to Puritan salvation as well as on the de-civilizing, anti-English menace of “savage” Indians. Moreover, that Williams referred to his release from these evil, uncivilized “others” metaphorically as “returning to Zion” indicated the power of religion in shaping a colonial identity.27

The religious revivals that swept the colonies during the 1730s and 1740s forged a new sense of inter-colonial community securing the discourse of chosenness as a particularly American identity structure. In his theological and intellectual work, Jonathan Edwards juxtaposed the “American” colonies with England, reflecting an emerging self-other binary that cast England (and Europe) as more fully other than previously.28 “God has made as it were two worlds here below . . . the latter is as it were now but newly created; it has been, till of late, wholly the possession of Satan,” Edwards proclaimed. Although Edwards indicated the predominance of New England in God’s schemes, he persistently emplotted the mission as an “American” one, insisting that “the
most glorious renovation of the world shall originate from the new continent.” American colonists, he averred, had “abundant reason to hope that what is now seen in America, and especially in New England, may prove the dawn of that glorious day.” Meanwhile, George Whitefield’s successful mass distribution of religious tracts in print form furnished a trans-colonial experience of these religious visions of “America.”

The Revolution of 1776 seemed to affirm destinarian images of the nation. George Washington averred in his inaugural address that “every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of Providential agency.” “All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor,” Benjamin Franklin added. According to Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, “The Reformation was preceded by the discovery of America, as if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years.” Preacher Ezra Stiles declared that ancient Israel’s entrance into the promised land was “allusively prophetik of the future prosperity and splendour” of “God’s American Israel.”

In the aftermath of the American Revolution, Americans had little doubt that U.S. destiny came directly from God and thereby continued to marginalize the presence of the indigenous peoples. Before the New Hampshire General Court Samuel Langdon preached that the “signal interpositions of divine providence” were particularly evident in “giving us peace with a large territory.” As Virginia slaveholder Thomas Jefferson put it in 1801, Americans could “with courage and confidence pursue . . . our attachment to union” because they possessed “a chosen country” with “room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation.” Echoing Jefferson, John
Quincy Adams asked rhetorically, “Shall the fields and valleys, which a beneficent God has formed to teem with the life of innumerable multitudes, be condemned to everlasting barrenness?” Out of this sense of chosenness Americans readily deemed, to use the words of William Henry Harrison, “the murdering of the Indians in the highest degree meritorious.”

Perhaps not coincidentally, the death-filled Indian removals coincided with religious revivalism in the 1830s. Featuring figures such as Charles Grandison Finney, Timothy Dwight, and Nathaniel Emmons, the Second Great Awakening further ensconced the notion of America as a chosen land and Americans as “the last peculiar people which God means to form, the last great empire which he means to erect.” New England preacher Lyman Beecher pronounced, “This nation is, in the providence of God, destined to lead the way in the moral and political emancipation of the world.” Clearly, Beecher asserted, “the West is destined to be the great central power of the nation, and under heaven, must affect powerfully the cause of free institutions and the liberty of the world,” especially since “God, who seeth the end from the beginning, had prepared the West” for just that purpose. U.S. military victories over Indians and Mexicans in the 1840s and 1850s represented “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence,” John O’Sullivan averred. As Duwamish tribe leader Chief Seattle lamented in 1854, because “the white man’s God cannot love our people” the Indians seemed like “orphans who can look nowhere for help.”

Even as civil war ravaged the nation both northerners and southerners remained concerned with American destiny. For example, on the eve of war Harry Ward Beecher declared, “Give me war redder than blood, and fiercer than fire” not just to free the slave
but because “this terrific infliction is necessary that I may maintain. . . my faith in this land as the appointed abode and chosen refuge of liberty for all the earth!”43 From the Confederacy, Benjamin Palmer labeled the North’s understanding of “liberty” as “atheism” and concluded that the war “is the most important and glorious struggle through which the nation has ever passed.” Certain of “the support of God’s immovable Providence,” Palmer confirmed that the South would not “falter upon the path of such a destiny.”44 Soldiers on both sides reflected the religious framing of the conflict. “I have always believed that God was with us,” an artillery lieutenant from Alabama asserted. “The cause for which we battle is one in which we can in righteousness claim the protection of heaven,” declared a northern soldier.45

The Civil War reinvigorated the nation’s mission partly through the sacrilization of the dead. According to Abraham Lincoln, those “who died gloriously on the field of battle” represented “a sacrifice on the altar of freedom.”46 Their deaths not only “consecrated” the physical land, but signaled that the United States “under God, shall have a new birth of freedom” and “that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”47 As Horace Bushnell put it, “we swear by our dead to be Americans,” and as Americans “we are baptized for the dead, to go forth in God’s name, ceasing not, and putting it upon our children never to cease, till the work is done.”48

In the wake of the Civil War Americans busily engaged in “cementing a happy union” destined by God.49 Instead of warring against one another in the latter half of the nineteenth century, conquest of the west in the name of liberty once more characterized the mission of the chosen nation. John Gast’s famous 1872 painting “Manifest Destiny”
accordingly depicted an angelic “America” bringing “light” westward to the “darkened” Indians. And the destruction of the Indians proceeded apace, from the Sand Creek massacre in 1864 to the U.S. defeat at Little Big Horn in 1876 to the slaughter of Indian women and children at Wounded Knee in 1890.

The latter half of the nineteenth century also witnessed prosperity enthroned as a central marker of national chosenness. In a gross elision of U.S. imperialism, Beecher thanked “God for the increasing wealth of America” and making the United States “wise, and rich, and strong” without having to “bombard and destroy other nations.” Gender discourse intersected with religion discourse in the newly arrived “gospel of wealth.” Almost pornographically, William Lawrence averred that “man, when he is strong, will conquer Nature, open up her resources, and harness them to his service. This is his play, his exercise, his divine mission.” “Godliness is in league with riches,” Lawrence added.

The United States reified its manifest destiny in an imperial war with Spain at the end of the nineteenth century. In July 1898, President William McKinley urged Americans to thank God “who has thus far vouchsafed to us the light of His face and led our brave soldiers and seamen to victory” over the Spanish enemy in Cuba. To fulfill “obligations to the Divine Master for His watchful care over us” the United States annexed Puerto Rico, Guam, Hawaii, Wake Island, and Samoa. Finally, McKinley “prayed Almighty God for light and guidance” on how the United States should treat Spain’s former colony of the Philippine islands. The answer from God, McKinley asserted, was that “there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them.” Quite simply, it was “the manifest destiny of the United States to civilize and Christianize” the Philippines, one
commentator wrote in 1899.\textsuperscript{52} Even as Americans waged a war of annihilation against Emilio Eguinaldo’s Filipino freedom fighters, Albert Beveridge exulted that “the star of empire . . . illumines our path of duty across the Pacific into the islands and lands where Providence” has shown that the “holy destiny of the American people” lies.\textsuperscript{53}

Less than two decades later, war again reinvigorated American chosenness. As battles in Europe raged, Woodrow Wilson pronounced that Americans can now see “the high purpose of the nation.”\textsuperscript{54} In 1918, C. F. Thomas preached that it was “incumbent upon every man and woman who glories in the name of American, and who lives under the protection of American freedom and enjoys the benefits of American liberty, to strengthen the arms of those champions” of the United States fighting in Europe because “the Providence of God destines this nation to last.”\textsuperscript{55} A young Reinhold Niebuhr argued that flags and prayers were not enough; Americans had to “really love America until we love it, not only because we happened to be born here, but because we understand and believe in its ideals.”\textsuperscript{56} Amid the postwar peace conferences Wilson proclaimed, “The stage is set, the destiny disclosed. It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God, who led us into this way.”\textsuperscript{57}

Although in the postwar years disillusionment with the war experience set in, it was a disillusionment based on the short-comings of power-hungry European “others.” Americans “cannot be unmindful of the tremendous responsibility” that “the world upheaval has added heavily to our tasks,” president William Harding declared. With this “realization comes . . . reassurance in . . . the God-given destiny of our Republic.”\textsuperscript{58} Amid the economic prosperity of the 1920s Calvin Coolidge added, “If we wish to continue to be distinctively American” then the United States must “embrace the
legitimate desires of a civilized and enlightened people,” insist on “seeking peace and
prosperity” by “promoting enterprise,” and foster conditions for “the advancement of
religion.” Demonstrating the religious framing of this U.S. mission, Coolidge maintained
that “America seeks no earthly empire built on blood and force; the legions which she
sends forth are armed, not with the sword, but with the cross.”

By the late 1920s, to be “American” was to be part of a divinely chosen nation destined to be a beacon of
prosperity and freedom in a dark world.

In the early 1930s the Great Depression problematized notions of manifest destiny
that had seemed obvious to most Americans throughout their history. Anxiously
attempting to reinvigorate their sense of chosenness, Americans turned to alternative
narratives of the nation. How exactly this “turn” occurred and how these alternative
narratives shaped U.S. foreign relations is the central concern of this dissertation.

At a methodological level, Imagining Heaven and Hell draws on the insights of
critical theory to address the conceptual roadblocks evident in extant studies linking
religion, foreign policy, and nationalism. I argue that narratives of national identity serve
as the bedrock of both religious culture and United States foreign relations. As the larger
argument flows directly from the theory in question, some exposition is necessary.

More than simply recounting culture as a tool deployed by state actors, scholars
utilizing cultural analysis are increasingly attentive to the constitutive national identity
effect of “foreign” policy. “The roles danger and difference play in constituting the
identity of the United States involves a deconstruction of conventional political discourse
and its self-presentation, especially that effected in the practice and analysis of both
international relations and foreign policy,” David Campbell explains. Accordingly, I
take seriously the performative function of foreign relations, that is, its ability to inscribe
“America” by “performance;” that, as Judith Butler observes, “the “doer” is variably constructed in and through the deed.”

The notion of identity staging as the process of identity constitution draws on French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s theories suggesting a “lack” at the core of all human subjectivity, as well as Slovenian scholar Slavoj Žižek’s expansion of Lacanian theory into the arena of collective social identity. Briefly, a narrative of the (collective) self is constructed in opposition to some apparent “other” in order to obscure the “lack” at the heart of collective social identity, that is, the essential non-existence of the imagined community. But the formation of identity is also predicated on the necessity of being desired. An individual takes up her/his identity not because it is a desirable “thing” in and of itself, but she/he believes a collective gaze (known in Lacanian theory as the big Other) apparently desires it in her/him. But fully becoming the object of the Other’s desire can never be achieved because the Other would then cease to desire. Therefore, identity always borders on the traumatic realization of its own impossibility, and the importance of the small other becomes irreducible.

National identity narratives comprise stories told through language about the difference between the self and the other. But because identity is constructed, then words deployed to signify the self have no real material reference point. The system of words/images that constitute the self/other is referred to as the imaginary of identity. These words (signifiers) give meaning only in reference to other words (signifiers) in a communal setting where individuals recognize the meaning to which the word (signifier) ostensibly refers. A social group that imagines itself as a linked community (i.e., a nation)
is actually engaged in what Žižek call an “ideological fantasy.” In other words, a narrative of national identity is largely an “ideological fantasy” which turns on the construction of the self (and the other) through signifiers that have no fixed meaning.63

National identity narratives consequently condition the construction of foreign relations because it is in and through foreign policy that differentiation between the self and the other is “officially” enacted. For example, just ask the question, “What is America?” The easiest way to answer is also an impossible way to answer, namely, to pick up “America” and show it to the questioner. Perhaps pointing out America on a map? But a map is just lines on a two-dimensional sheet of paper, and if that which is pointed out really was America, then one could crumple it up, burn it, and declare America gone forever. In essence, the only way to answer the question, “What is America?” is to refer to the signifiers that give it meaning, i.e. the rituals, symbols, ideas, philosophies, people, colors, objects, and other “things” that seem to represent what one imagines America to be. But even these “things” which one might select only have meaning within a larger story. To use a rather erroneous but nevertheless widely held example, “George Washington” has no meaning absent juxtaposition with ideas such as “freedom,” “revolution,” “democracy,” and “Independence.” But these signifiers in turn demand others, such as “unfree,” “undemocratic,” “slave,” and “dependent.” And together these signifying binaries tell a larger narrative of what “America” supposedly is, that is, the imaginary of American identity.

To make the importance of national identity narratives clear, let us take the example of the concrete buildings that fell down a number of years ago when passenger jets exploded on their upper floors. Of course, framing “September 11” in this seemingly
indifferent, non-detailed manner would be immediately off-putting to most Americans. Why? Because “September 11” functions as signifier that calls into being “more than” its actual material occurrence. Once “September 11” is spoken, it brings its own narrative emplotment as evil attacking freedom rather than, say, as the predictable rewards of U.S. imperialism. This second narrative explanation is culturally difficult to maintain (bordering impossible) because it directly contradicts the underlying identity narrative of the United States as a divinely chosen nation destined to spread freedom across the globe. Even if the second narrative is suggested, it remains confined to tales of conspiracy at the highest levels, stories of elites who “tricked” the otherwise well-intentioned “American people.” The first explanation, however, reinforces the divine chosenness and therefore becomes a site for reinvigorating identity. In turn, waving a flag or singing “God Bless America” at a 9/11 memorial allows subjects to stage their “American” identity.

As “September 11” demonstrates, the broader culture must render international events coherent within the terms of a national identity narrative. As the United States is ostensibly filled with “Americans,” narratives that most effectively “explain” the difference between “America” and the “world” (i.e., express “foreign relations” in sensible ways), accrue cultural power; people adopt stories allowing them to verify their own sense of being “American.”

Sets of interconnected language and imagery (discourses) that provide the best “order” to a national identity narrative empower those who ostensibly “know” the languages/images best. For example, the broad cultural acceptance of the World Trade center attacks as the work of “evildoers” allows social and political power to flow to those who presumably “know” evil, say religious figures or even fundamentalist
politicians. In addition, because an evil enemy functions as the opposite of righteous America, those that “know” what evil is intrinsically “know” what is “American” and what is “un-American.” The knowledgeable group then exercises tremendous cultural power (hegemony). Those who resist such hegemonic articulations are marginalized, often because they use the same cultural ground, but of course futilely, to stage their resistance - i.e., U.S. imperialism is merely an aberration of the “true” righteous mission of America, that is, to spread “freedom” of “democracy.”

In the imaginary of identity trauma occurs when a narrative no longer is able to reconcile the identity narrative with the experience of “real” events. Because “America” exists as representation (through flags, anthems, lines drawn on paper in atlases, histories with heroes and villains) and does not have a material reality (i.e., it cannot be grabbed, touched, held, etc.), its representational forms are open for appropriation. In a traumatic moment what constitutes the “self” becomes open to rearticulations and formerly hegemonic discourses lose their cultural power while new discursive regimes arise to take their place. Narratives of national identity consequently arbitrate the dispersal of social, economic, and political power both at home and abroad.

Therefore, if one of the leading components of American identity throughout United States history has been that the nation is specially chosen by God, that it has a manifest destiny in the world, then what exactly that divine mission entails has not always remained stable and remains available for reinterpretation. Religious figures, organizations, and worldviews which provide the most reconcilable vision of American destiny generally find themselves empowered within the culture as their discourse is assumed more broadly. In turn, the broadly accepted vision of the nation requires staging
(it must be continually acted out) for the maintenance of the imagined community. It is because of this interconnected process of identity constitution/affirmation, I argue, that religion shapes decisively the United States approach to the world.

Americans have never uniformly adhered to one particular Christian (or any religious) faith and as a result competing religious worldviews negotiate cultural space within the terms of national identity. Between 1933 and 1952, shifting narratives of American identity emerged as part of the negotiation between competing religious discourses. Within this context, religious modernism, ascendant in the early 1930s, gradually faded to near oblivion by the early 1950s. Neo-orthodox Christian realist discourse, meanwhile, achieved a temporary cultural hegemony in the prewar and war years but succumbed to the rise of Christian fundamentalism during the post war period. None of the central figures or organizations that espoused these discourses ever managed to “hold” the power they received as a result of shifting national identity narratives. More importantly, the turn toward alternative narratives occurred as Americans sought to reaffirm their own personal identities as Americans. Dulles, for instance, could not have maintained his peaceful negotiation advocacy without feeling increasingly “un-American” during the war and post-war years. Therefore he reflexively oriented first toward realist and later fundamentalist discourses to express his vision of the nation.

By placing the history of American religion between 1933 and 1952 within the context of U.S. foreign relations, I argue that by the 1950s the language and imagery of foreign relations enabled fundamentalists, Jews, and Catholics to realize social and political opportunities previously unimaginably largely because of national identity narratives. In other words, this dissertation suggests that the transformation of American
religious culture involved much more than theology or religious institutions; the wane of Protestant liberal modernism and the rise of fundamentalism was intimately connected to the staging of American identity through U.S. foreign relations.66

Given that religious identities are themselves inscribed through performance, and given that Americans are subjects constituted by the performance of religiously framed identity narratives, then Americans themselves may viewed as religious subjects, or, as subjects of religion. One of the contributions Imagining Heaven and Hell seeks to make is a tentative advancement of the “religious subject,” a relatively underdeveloped concept not only in U.S. foreign relations history, but in cultural studies more broadly. Scholars do not typically conceive of religion as a culturally constructed subject position in the same way they understand race, gender, and class. Hill’s comments on religion as a category of analysis illustrate this point. As religion scholars José Cabezón and Sheila Davaney explain, “Where the debates about identity have been more fully developed, religious identity has rarely been systematically examined as an important dimension of identity.”67

To be sure, scholars recognize the cultural impact of religion. Cabezón and Davaney, for instance, attempt to knot identity and religion in their work exploring the role of personal religious identity on religious studies scholarship. Referring specifically to the United States, Eldon Eisenach notes that Americans lurch from one “religious establishment” to the next, inaugurating successive “political theologies.” But Eisenach is at pains to explain just why this is so. Furthermore, he adds that such shifts must continue if Americans are to realize the “promises of American life.”68
Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the most informative scholarship connecting religion and culture has emerged from the field of anthropology. Clifford Geertz’s work on religion as “a cultural system” broadened understanding beyond the much earlier sociological analyses of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Geertz contended that “in religious belief and practice a group’s ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes.” At the same time, “the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs to peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life.”

Building on Geertz’s insights, Talal Asad and Catherine Bell explore the identity implications of religious ritual and practice. Asad’s influential *Genealogies of Religion* argues that “there cannot be a universal definition of religion” because “its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific.” Asad located religious practice and belief within “historically distinctive disciplines and forces” that allowed “their possibility and their authoritative status.” By rooting religion with these broader cultural frames, Asad understood religious ritual as constitutive of identity rather than merely derivative of it. Like Asad, Bell argues that religious practice partly constitutes the social body of the subject and that religion thereby inheres in negotiations of power among social bodies. Using the foundation laid by Asad and Bell, Mary Keller focuses on spirit possession and demonstrates the religioned body of the subject.

One of the most important works on religious subjectivity, and one that requires some explication here, is that done by cultural anthropologist Saba Mahmood. Mahmood’s study of the Islamic ‘Piety’ movement among Egyptian women confronts
“the pious subjects of the mosque movement” that “occupy an uncomfortable place in feminist scholarship because they pursue practices and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status.” Seeking to understand “the conceptions of the self, moral agency, and politics that undergird the practices of this nonliberal movement,” Mahmood attempts to “problematize . . . the universality of the desire - central for liberal and progressive thought, and presupposed by the concept of resistance it authorizes - to be free from relations of subordination and, for women, from structures of male domination.” Religion thus emerges as a discursive regime enabling “specific modes of being, responsibility, and effectivity” so that “what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency - but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment.” By understanding religion as a set of signifiers through which the subject assumes its being, it is possible to see that “agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms.”

Drawing on the insights of cultural anthropology, religious studies, and psychoanalytic theory, I use the notion of religious subjectivity to analyze the operation of religious discourse in U.S. foreign relations. For example, Dulles’s critique of foreign policy emerges in part from his own religious subjectivity, that is, his need to act out a religious identity. The subject of religion emerges within an identity symbolizing structure predicated on “theological” referents, particularly those of tradition, doctrine, organizational affiliation and supernatural deities. In so far as the religious subject performs its identity through ritual and practice, it is in essence locating the religious
‘other.’ Thus, the body of the religious subject is constituted in ways similar to the
gendered and raced body. Of course, religious identity certainly compromises a
multiplicity of localized subjectivities - for example, “Roman Catholic,” “Jew,”
“Methodist,” etc. - but these are often transcended at the level of shared referents, such as
supernatural deities or moral codes like, for instance, “the Ten Commandments.” The
“Moral Majority” in one sense may be understood the constitutive performance of an
overarching religious subjectivity that includes multiple localized subjectivities,
including “Christians,” “Muslims,” and “Jews.”

Specifically, *Imagining Heaven and Hell* illuminates the palpable cultural
negotiation between “religious modernism,” “neo-orthodox Christian realism,” and
“fundamentalism” from 1933-1952. The discursive power of each particular religious
subjectivity shifted with the requirements of an overarching religiously encoded national
identity subjectivity, namely the reinvigoration of “America” as a divinely chosen nation.
As a result, religious groups repeatedly found themselves suddenly resonant within the
broader cultural or just as often suddenly marginalized. That is, narratives of national
identity exercise cultural hegemony, the process wherein social, political, economic, and
other forms of power are dispersed according to cultural norms and behaviors.

Within hegemonic national identity narratives individual Americans such as
Dulles found themselves both reflexively and actively reinterpreting their religious
identity structures for the sake of their American subjectivity. For example, to be a
“good” Christian in 1938, Dulles felt the need to urge cooperative internationalism. By
1950, being a “good” Christian required castigating communist sympathizers and
advocating a foreign policy opposing godless Communism. Staging one’s religious
identity, then, remained intimately linked to staging one’s national identity. Indeed, as Warren Vinz observes, there are multiple religious “faces” of American nationalism.74

The palpable omission of religion from the study of U.S. foreign relations requires an intense analysis of religious culture that might appear somewhat reductive as well as dismissive of other cultural categories such as gender, race, ideology, and class. To some degree, these charges might be true; I do suggest that religious culture drove the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy during the Roosevelt and Harry Truman administrations and I do not fully address the myriad other cultural categories that deserve attention. But such reductionism arises from the need to highlight the influence of religious culture that until now has remained largely unexamined. More importantly, it is my view that religion indeed became the leading discursive frame through which Americans negotiated the destabilizing impact of the Depression, a development that lasted into the 1950s and ultimately produced a “consumption” of religion on a scale not previously or since experienced.

This dissertation traces the reinscription of an “American” identity rooted divine chosenness as it occurred through religiously encoded narratives of the United States in the world. I offer a chronological narrative of U.S. foreign relations mixed with thematic cultural history. The choice of 1930 and 1953 reflects convenient bookends in foreign policy in the form of the rise of the good neighbor policy and the end of the Truman administration. Similar bookends appear in a religious cultural context with the triumph of religious modernism in the 1930s and its disappearance in the face of a hegemonic fundamentalist discourse by the early 1950s. Although the necessity of outlining the
transformation in national identity narratives may make “shifts” seem sharply defined at very specific points, the transitions were undoubtedly gradual.

Cultural anxiety during the Great Depression, the subject of Chapter 2, resulted from the tremendous economic hardship that called into question the organizing structure of American identity centered on being a nation specially chosen by God. Americans expressed their anxiety through religious language and imagery. An examination of the changing nature of George Washington imagery in the 1930s demonstrates that religion became both an avenue to convey fears as well as a means of alleviating them. As a result, calls for religious renewal and spiritual awakening characterized much of Depression discourse.

During the early 1930s, religious modernism achieved the height of its cultural power, an achievement in part coincidental with the Depression and in part a product of it. Chapter 3 argues that religious modernist discourse ordered early efforts at reinvigorating American identity by positing a narrative of the United States as a “good neighbor” in the world. U.S. foreign policy inscribed this narrative through an emphasis on hemispheric and global conferences, disarmament, and peaceful negotiations in international disputes. In overcoming social gospel modernism’s “historical sin” through such exemplary beneficence Americans understood themselves on a mission to build the Kingdom of God in the world.

Chapter 4 explores the breakdown of the good neighbor narrative and the emergence of an alternative narrative framed in neo-orthodox Christian realist discourse. Epitomized by Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian realism provided the language and imagery of “original sin” through which Americans were able to understand that the less than
neighborly international atmosphere. Between 1937 and 1941, U.S. foreign policy
inscribed an international hierarchy of evil that depicted the United States as a righteous
nation struggling against evil in the world. The residual power of religious modernism
relegated explicit, declaratory military intervention impossible, but the new hierarchy of
evil ensured the United States embarked on a course of financial, political, and industrial
intervention on the side of the apparently righteous nations.

Wartime depictions of the enemy other as well as the memorializing of dead
“Americans” ensconced the narrative of the righteous nation, Chapter 5 argues. War
culture, evidenced by efforts such as Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* film series, celebrated
American righteousness with fervor. In addition, the religious hallowing of American war
dead and casualty-laden battles such as D-Day demonstrated the importance of death in
securing the meaning of the war. As “international relations,” the war provided an
unequivocal opportunity to juxtapose the divinely chosen self with evil enemies, a
juxtaposition that elided the destructive violence of war as well as the dubious claims of
righteousness made by the nation.

Chapter 6 examines the consequences of a national identity narrative centered on
religious notions of righteousness for actual wartime policy. It argues that the saturation
bombing of Germany, the fire-bombings of Japan, and finally the dropping of the two
atomic bombs resulted from the unconscious determination to make a literal hell for an
sinful enemy. In obliterating the enemy through a “rain of ruin” the United States verified
its own claims to justness by acting as a judge able to dispense eternal condemnation.

Turning to the interaction of foreign relations and religious culture, Chapter 7
argues that the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki affected a
tremendous cultural anxiety over American righteousness in the immediate postwar period. Such anxiety created the cultural space in which a temporarily renascent religious modernism conjoined with neo-orthodox realism to offer a bifurcated narrative of the United States as a neighborly internationalist entrusted with the guardianship of the world community against potential aggressors. Out of this cultural milieu, the United States paradoxically advocated the international control of atomic weapons while it unilaterally furthered its own nuclear capability.

Even though a bifurcated national identity narrative resting in religious modernist and neo-orthodox realist discourse appeared to dominate postwar culture, fundamentalist discourse had gained tremendous cultural traction during the war. Chapter 8 traces the rise of fundamentalism from relative obscurity in the early 1930s to a position of near cultural hegemony by the late 1940s. Fundamentalist discourse centered on moral law theology and Biblically-ordained individual freedom provided the lexicon through which Americans could understand the Soviet Union as an immoral, tyrannical foe. The changing discursive framing of the Marshall plan from 1947 to 1948 reflects this cultural shift.

Chapter 9 argues that Americans, in the wake of anxiety over the dropping of atomic bombs and the threat of nuclear holocaust, once more reaffirmed their chosen identity by finding evil enemies abroad. Between 1947 and 1952, U.S. foreign policy inscribed American destiny through a narrative that imagined the nation as a righteous force battling godless communists. At home, the righteous nation narrative spurred the social and political violence known as McCarthyism. Abroad, U.S. foreign policy
recognized Israel, embraced the militarization of containment, engaged in the Berlin airlift, drafted NSC 68, and fought the Korean War.

By the end of the Korean War, religion had become firmly ensconced in understandings of American national identity. Dulles, who initially found himself lagging behind the broader culture during the war years ended up ahead of the curve by the early 1950s. The result was his own empowerment as Secretary of State in the Dwight Eisenhower administration. But, as we shall see, Dulles’s appointment represented only the tip of a much larger, and much deeper, cultural iceberg.

Notes


Hogan and Patterson, *Explaining the History*, v-vi, 363.


22 Beginning with William Tyndale’s emphasis on covenantal theology in the 1530s, many English protestants viewed England as a covenant nation especially chosen by God. These views gained even more currency as John Calvin’s ideas on divine “election” and congregational sovereignty made their way into English (religious) culture. By the end of Elizabeth I’s reign, however, the official Church of England remained seemingly rooted in traditional structures, producing anxiety among “radical” Protestants who thought the chosen nation of England needed further church reform. Under James I and especially under Charles I, many of these “Puritans” fled for the new world, carrying their chosen nation identity structure with them. See Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 19-28; Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, 3-12.


36 First Inaugural Address of Thomas Jefferson, March 4, 1801, GNI, 107.

37 John Quincy Adams quoted in Bourne, *Gods of War*, 20-21. In contemporary historiography, the U.S. imperial wars of the 1800s are elided by the phrase “westward
expansion,” a subconscious cultural amnesia perhaps akin to labeling as merely “eastward expansion” the Nazi campaigns against the Poland and Russia in 1939-1943.

38 William Henry Harrison quoted in Bourne, Gods of War, 334.


46 Abraham Lincoln to Mrs. Bixby, January 21, 1864, GAH, 97. See also Fahs, Imagined Civil War, 93-119.

47 Abraham Lincoln quoted in Pierard and Linder, Civil Religion, 103.


49 Ulysses S. Grant, “Inaugural Address,” March 4, 1869, GAH, 98. Of course, the “happy union” that emerged obscured the plight of the former slaves for whom so many had supposedly died, a logical development in light of the underlying predominance of (a religioned) national identity in the debate over slavery. Scholars note the rapid recession of concern for African-descent Americans in the collective American conscience after 1865. See for example David W. Blight, Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American


51 Reverend William Lawrence, “The Relations of Wealth to Morals,” January, 1901, GNI, 250-251. European-descent males became the prime beneficiaries of American’s manifest destiny of prosperity, especially those at the apex of the economic structure. The “captains of industry” such as John Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and others understood that God himself had granted them stewardship over their wealth, and this in turn allowed them to think of themselves as more “true” Americans than others. See Charles Sanford, Manifest Destiny and the Imperialism Question (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), 2-9.

52 McKinley and commentator quoted in Pierard and Linder, Civil Religion, 127, 129, 131, 134.

53 Albert Beveridge, “The Star of Empire,” September 25, 1900, GNI, 146-159.

54 Woodrow Wilson, Second Inaugural Address, March 5, 1917, GAH, 125.


57 Address to the Senate by Woodrow Wilson, July 19, 1919, GNI, 279-288.

58 Warren G. Harding, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1921, GAH, 126.

59 Calvin Coolidge, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1925, GAH, 131.


65 In Lacanian theory the identity imaginary experiences “trauma” when the symbolic register is unable to signify the “real.” See Homer, *Jacques Lacan*, 82-84; Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 29-47.


CHAPTER II
ADRIFT IN A SEA OF CHOSENNESS

*For better or for worse the nation has loosed from old moorings and set upon a voyage fraught with uncertainty, - but, it may also be, with epochal results – as when Columbus lifted anchor for the Western seas.*

- Worth Tippy, Federal Council of Churches, 1933

In the early 1930s, the Great Depression engendered widespread anxiety over U.S. identity. As indicated in the Introduction, divine chosenness had a long history as a central component of the imagined community’s identity imaginary. Hegemonic identity narratives - that is, narratives so widely held that they marginalized competing visions of what the collective social group actually was - usually depicted the United States as the divinely destined land of economic prosperity, political liberty, and religious freedom. As these central elements failed to resonate with the events of the early 1930s, Americans began to search for an alternative narrative of identity and thus the cultural framework of foreign policy construction began to shift. What that new framework might consist of depended on which discursive regime could best reconcile the Depression experience with the imagined community’s sense of manifest destiny.

This chapter argues that acute economic hardship opened up the cultural space in which religious language and imagery expanded its hegemonic purview by ordering the cultural search for a reconcilable identity narrative. That is, Americans turned to religious discourse (*not* religion) as they negotiated the experiences of the 1930s. An analysis of
Depression anxiety reveals that leading signifiers of American chosenness such as freedom and economic individualism lost much of their meaning in the early 1930s. To many Americans, the problems of the Depression seemed the result of a deep moral or spiritual malaise. These fears became particularly noticeable in the changing nature of George Washington imagery during the first half of the decade. As the humanized Washington image of the 1920s morphed into an almost divine image in the 1930s, the imagined community testified to the entrenchment of religious discourse in the revivification of the nation.

For the multitude of Americans accustomed to regular wages and secure access to food, shelter, and modest amounts of leisure, the Great Depression wrought an intense social and economic transformation. The extraordinary numbers of unemployed - close to 13 million Americans in 1933 and less than 8 million only once during the years 1931 to 1940 (or between 14 and 25 percent for the decade) - represents only one statistic, largely offering insight into the ramifications for out-of-work males (women comprised approximately 400,000 of the 13 million unemployed in 1933). Independent farmers suffered as much if not more than urban workers. While industrial mills and factories ground to a halt, national farm income plummeted 67 percent between 1929 and 1932 from an already paltry $6 billion to $2 billion. Even more startling, such figures do not include shorter work weeks or perpetual job insecurity, nor do they consider children or women. For example, in the first three years of the decade, banks foreclosed on 600,000 home mortgages leaving the wives and children as well as the unemployed heads of households without shelter and with a lifetime of investment wiped out. Seemingly overnight, the Depression impoverished millions of Americans.³
Of course, for many Americans the poverty only deepened, especially for members of the most marginalized groups such as African-Americans, the disabled, single women, disadvantaged children, and poor immigrants. On a White House assignment to review the Depression first hand in 1933 a shocked Lorena Hickok found millions of Americans, including nearly all non-whites, living in a state of perpetual poverty engendered by more than a century of laissez-faire industrial growth and capitalism rather than by the Depression itself. For these stricken people the Depression merely aggravated already difficult circumstances.\(^4\)

Statistics alone obscure the Depression’s profound consequences for personal identity. For example, the rapid transformation of economic and social circumstances challenged gender, race, and class identities. As discussed, being “American” included some sense of entitlement to relative prosperity. Consequently, Americans reflexively associated homelessness, breadlines, unemployment, hunger, and drifting with an “un-American” laziness akin to sin. Such failure seemed not only “unmanly” but also the province of only the lowest class of whites and all non-whites.

The Depression thus ruptured the national identity narrative that imagined the United States as a divinely chosen beacon of prosperity and freedom. Widespread anxiety surfaced throughout the culture as the meaning of America seemed elusive. In 1932, for instance, New Jersey governor Harry Moore declared that “the flag of America is sinking like the setting sun.”\(^5\) Revealing the Depression’s impact on the imagined community much more starkly, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr lamented, “We are merely a vast horde of people let loose on a continent with little to unify us by way of common cultural, moral, and religious tradition.”\(^6\) “For the first time in their lives” many Americans
“awakened from a sense of being at home in a familiar world to the shock of living . . . in a universe dangerously too big and blindly out of hand,” sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd observed. As President Woodrow Wilson’s former presidential secretary observed, the “sorely stricken world” seemed to be at a “psychological moment.”

If not the world, then certainly the United States was experiencing a “psychological” moment as many of the traditional tropes anchoring the imagined community seemed less verifiable than ever. To many Americans, “economic individualism,” long part of the religiously encoded identity imaginary, seemed to be unraveling. Niebuhr decried “the end of an era,” declared “the entire brief reign of modern capitalism” at an end, and viewed “western society . . . obviously in the process of disintegration.” Historian Charles Beard agreed arguing, “The cold truth is that the individualist creed of everybody for himself and the devil take the hindmost is principally responsible for the distress in which Western civilization finds itself.” “Before us in the near future” appears “the specter of the hopeless treadmill of the collectivist state,” fundamentalist theologian J. Gresham Machen anguished. “Indeed, America can hardly be called the Land of Promise, in the old sense, any longer,” added Slovenian-born social commentator Louis Adamic.

Anxiety over prosperous individualism reflected deeper fears over American destiny. President Franklin Roosevelt, for instance, declared that Americans “have been compelled by stark necessity to unlearn the too comfortable superstition that the American soil was mystically blessed.” Further, the nation had to abandon its certainty “that the American spirit of individualism” would “repel every form of economic disarrangement or crisis.” Roosevelt scarcely had to urge Americans to recognize the
circumstances. For example, eminent Presbyterian pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick observed that “these days are sobering to all thoughtful people,” but especially to those Americans “brought up on the idea that the world is forging steadily ahead” and that “progress . . . was our manifest destiny. Today we are soberer about that.” Although “we were not sure,” Fosdick continued, “whither we were progressing . . . in our eyes going meant going ahead and change meant advance. How cheap it all seems now! We were progressing straight toward war, unemployment, economic catastrophe.” Now “Americans are soberer” and “many are frightened.”14

The works of several prominent American playwrights reflected Fosdick’s sobriety about American destiny.15 For example, William Saroyan’s *The Time of Your Life* questioned the promise of American destiny by juxtaposing rich, self-made Joe with impoverished dock-workers and unemployed men willing to dance piano jigs for a few coins. When a financially struggling bar-keeper asks Joe how he got to be so rich, Joe replies, “I really don’t know, but I think you’ve got to have the cooperation of the Good Lord.”16 In the middle of widespread Depression and economic turmoil, America, like the dockworkers and jig dancers, did not seem to “have the cooperation of the Good Lord.” As Robert Sherwood’s protagonist Alan Squier averred, “America” appeared on the verge of burial in a “Petrified Forest,” that is, “the graveyard” for “outmoded ideas” such as “patriotism - Christianity - Romance - the economics of Adam Smith.”17

On the big screen, Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night* humorously captured the widespread anxiety over America’s prosperous destiny, in a mixture of gender and religious imagery. As an unemployed reporter down on his luck, the film’s leading character, Peter Warne, readily represents 1930s America. Seemingly without hope,
Warne suddenly finds himself in the company of the beautiful, wealthy Ellen Andrews, a runaway bride-to-be trying to avoid an unwanted marriage. The plot centers on Peter’s hope of achieving both material and physical riches through a potential relationship with Ellen. At the end of every night, the two sleep in the same room but always place some type of barrier between them, flirtatiously referring to it as “the walls of Jericho”. In the biblical story, God’s chosen people of Israel had to get past Jericho to enter into the promised land. Rather than fighting a costly war, however, the Israelites merely watched as God supernaturally crumbled the city’s walls. Reading Ellen as the personification of American destiny, the barrier that separates her and Peter’s union requires supernatural aid, but none is forthcoming and Peter’s best efforts to “win” Ellen continually go awry. Even though Peter and Ellen end up together at the end of the film with the outside help of Ellen’s wealthy father, the strange twists of fate that repeatedly prevent them from knocking down “the walls of Jericho” on their own reveals a deep-seated skepticism regarding the presence and willingness of God to restore America’s destined prosperity.  

In addition to angst over the nation’s economic straits, numerous Americans wondered whether political liberty also had disappeared. The prominent citizens group known as the National Policy Committee, for instance, lamented that democracy seemed to be only “theoretical” and certainly did “not reflect the present realities.” Reverend Francis X. Talbot, a prominent Catholic spokesman, gloomily conceded that “American democracy stands in more danger at the present time than in any period in the 19th century.” Invoking gender discourses, he exhorted that only “a virile, vigilant and clear-eyed American citizenry” could “defend our traditional American democracy.” Fosdick remained fearful that “radicals” and “reactionaries” were “surrendering” liberty through
wild schemes, while too many average Americans appeared indifferent to its death.\textsuperscript{21} Machen had even less hope, pointing out that “democracy almost everywhere is lying prostrate” as “tyranny . . . menaces us here in America.” \textsuperscript{22}

Few Americans offered as bitter an attack on the state of political freedom as Niebuhr. His 1932 \textit{Moral Man and Immoral Society} argued that democracy, far from a religious “triumph of the ethical,” now revealed itself as “much more coercive than at first seems apparent” as “the votes of the majority” represent nothing more than the exercise of “social strength” over a minority. Niebuhr skepticism concerning political freedom emerged from his perceptions of U.S. imperialism and he displayed his anxiety over the nation’s Providential mission through a scathing indictment of the once hallowed destiny of the United States to “uplift” Cubans and Filipinos. “Hardly any war of history,” he wrote, “has been the occasion of more hypocrisy and sentimentality than the Spanish-American War.” He assailed the “pious moral” evoked by writers who claimed that the United States fought the war “for the sole benefit of the conquered” and provided such wonders as “sanitary reformation” making their nation more “healthful” and “safe for life.” The theologian found it “rather significant that the American idea of a universal value should express itself in terms of sanitation.” He similarly condemned the U.S. annexation of Philippines, declaring, “The fiction that the fortunes of the war had made us the unwilling recipients and custodians” of the island nation “was quickly fabricated and exists to this day.” \textsuperscript{23}

To some Americans, even religious freedom no longer seemed a reality. For example, Fosdick asserted that the “dogma of nationalism not only spoils monotheism but enslaves the Christian conscience;” Christians “must obey God rather than men.” \textsuperscript{24}
Meanwhile, Machen grieved that Americans were “witnessing . . . a worldwide attack upon . . . religious freedom.” Although in the United States “it took many centuries of struggle - of much blood and many tears - to establish the fundamental principles of our civil and religious liberty,” Machen claimed, “one mad generation is sufficient to throw them all away.”

Depression-wrought anxiety resulted in widespread fear that the United States suffered from some type of spiritual or moral ailment. Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, for instance, argued that the nation seemed “spiritually sick.” According to Roosevelt, “not only economic, but moral and spiritual foundations throughout the entire world have been shaken.” The president complained that “these are not normal times” and worried about Americans being “jumpy and very ready to run after strange gods.”

In 1932, Fosdick’s *As I See Religion* intended to address “the elusiveness of religion” that “puzzles many people” even though “once they could describe it with definiteness and finality as identical with their creed and church.” It appeared almost fortuitous that “the panic of 1929 put an end to this merry-go-round which fed the body but starved the spirit of the nation,” *The Atlantic Monthly* suggested.

Many Americans concluded that God simply no longer cared about the United States and in some cases blamed the nation’s spiritual shortcomings. Eleanor Roosevelt received a letter from a “young girl” living in “a God forlorn country,” while someone else wrote to the “First Lady” as their “last and only means of salvation.” A third writer informed her that although his Dad intended to go to Bible College, after the Depression struck “Daddy gave up God and all of us and told mother to see what God would do for us now.” Father Coughlin averred sympathy for the suffering but proceeded to
pronounce that widespread economic hardship occurred because “our hearts have grown
calloused to the Divine Providence from whom all blessing came.”

Looking back at late nineteenth century manifest destiny, Niebuhr castigated McKinley’s claim to have
received divine assurance that the United States should Christianize the Philippines as
“hypocrisies . . . a little more than usually naive”.

On the big screen, Americans appeared in equal spiritual trouble. As the
“meaning” of the Depression sank into American consciousness, Gregory LaCava’s
*Gabriel over the White House* suggested the nation could only be revived if God
controlled the White House directly, a possibility that Lacava suggested might happen
through the arch-angel Gabriel’s spirit possession of the president. One frequent theme
focused on an angry God visiting plagues and wrath on an immoral people. Cecil B.
DeMille, for instance, employs implicitly supernatural lightning strikes to destroy partiers
aboard a flying Zeppelin in the film *Madame Satan* (1930).

Other films such as *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Island of Lost Souls* (1933)
illustrated cultural disillusionment with the sense of progress inherent in the American
mission. In both films, promising utopias of progress and prosperity are demolished by
the strange, almost evil creations meant to bring them about. In one of the most striking
images of Depression film, William Wellman’s *Heroes for Sale* (1933) ends with the
image of a drifter in a darkened rainstorm declaring, “It’s the end of America.”

The stage was not remiss in imaging the nation’s religious woes either. For
example, Sherwood’s 1936 Pulitzer Prize winning *Idiot’s Delight* features the main
characters singing “Onward Christian Soldiers” while cowering fearfully inside a small
room. The hymn appears weak and futile as bombs exploding outside promise “to blow
the whole confused and artificial mess into bits.”38 Meanwhile, in Sherwood’s *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, Seth - representing “America” by virtue of his “traveling far to seek a new home in the wilderness, to do Your work, God, to make this earth a good place for Your children to live in” (and, of course, because his name is the same as that of the third child of Adam and Eve in the creation story) - disappears into an uncertain future, leaving his friend Abraham Lincoln confessing that Seth is nothing more than a legend, perhaps even a myth since Lincoln only hears whispers about him “every so often.”39

Several major novels also linked Depression anxieties to a deeper religious failure. For example, not even the church can rescue James Farrell’s protagonist from economic destitution and spiritual unbelief in the trilogy *Studs Lonigan*. Lonigan dies immoral and wrecked before age thirty, the promise of life snuffed out.40 In Jack Conroy’s *The Disinherited*, a friend tells working class Larry “that every American worker thinks that some day he’ll be a capitalist himself” even though he is essentially kidding “himself about his chances.” But Larry is encouraged not to get too down because people “believe in even greater delusions” and even “some believe in God.”41 Both Farrell and Conroy, then, conflate the failing “promise of American life” with religious disbelief, rendering the manifest destiny of America ambiguous.

Although Thornton Wilder was of a completely opposite political persuasion than Farrell and Conroy, his novel *Heaven’s My Destination* reflects anxiety over the same national identity narrative. The main character is George Brush, an outspoken evangelical Christian and confident traveling salesman, essentially the quintessential representation of religion, freedom of speech, and economic individualism. The only problem for Brush is that the combination of these characteristics has not brought him the promise of the
American way of life. To Brush, the founding of “an American home” seems utterly unattainable and he despairs that “something’s the matter with the world.” Finally, “one day he arose to discover, quite simply, that he had lost his faith.”

During the economic hardship of the early 1930s Americans “lost their faith.” The nation essentially encountered (what in Lacanian theory is known as) a traumatic resistance to the continual process of signification. Signifiers (words/images) through which Americans imagined their nation no longer seemed to reconcile Americans’ experience of their nation. It became clear that the representational forms providing some sense of national community had nothing to which to refer. For example, the discourse “economic individualism” became unmasked as an empty, meaningless signifier; the concept failed to reconcile an experience that seemingly indicated, perhaps, that an individual either victimized others in an inter-human chain of material wealth, or themselves became a victim within that chain. Therefore the term “economic individualism” ceased to signify.

To appreciate the implications of the traumatic moment for the imagined community, an analysis of the changing nature of George Washington imagery is helpful. The Great Depression produced a rupture in the national identity narrative of the United States, effectively creating a cultural space in which alternative narratives could emerge through rearticulations of the imagined community’s leading signifiers. In the Introduction, the language and imagery associated with George Washington demonstrated how identity narratives allow a collective group to imagine itself as a nation. During the early 1930s, the sacrilization of Washington reflected both anxiety over American identity as a chosen nation, as well as an increased emphasis on religious
discourse through which Americans might reinvigorate the imagined community. As a cultural “text,” Washington imagery reveals that Americans turned not to religion itself, but to religious language and imagery in reimagining the symbolic structure of national identity.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, popular images of Washington depicted a “familial” president rather than a hero or a sacred icon. To be sure, many Americans still conceived of Washington as a divinely ordained leader or a heroic “Founding Father.” Overall, however, well into the 1920s, Washington imagery presented a humanized president who labored on his farm and spent time with his family, and, indeed, maintained all the trappings of a good patriot and citizen. From the turn of the century until roughly 1925, as the United States industrialized and lost its agrarian roots, images of Washington appeared slightly more distant and restrained, slipping below those of Lincoln in national resonance. Images in the 1920s emphasized his business skills, portrayed him as a common man, and presented to all Americans an individual almost anyone could be like with some luck and a little talent. Such images reflected the largely confident, business-oriented culture of the United States in the 1920s.

Especially in the latter half of the twenties, Washington was far from sacrosanct. For example, on the Sunday before the 1926 Washington Day celebrations some pastors found themselves defending Washington against “recent statements that he used profanity.” But one pastor, Reverend Wakefield Slaten of New York, refused to shield the first President, deciding instead to explore the “various myths” about him, including those concerning “the cherry tree and the praying incident at Valley Forge.” In the same
month, history professor Henry Lawrence asserted that Washington told “white lies.” Lawrence detailed one incident where Washington, afraid “that some of his slaves taken with the family to Philadelphia might claim their freedom under the Pennsylvania laws,” ordered his secretary to return them to Virginia “under any pretext that may deceive both them and the public.”47 Other intellectuals such as Philip Steinmetz criticized “old biographies of Washington as unauthentic” and lauded Rupert Hughes’ biography George Washington: The Human Being and the Hero (1926) which reveled in Washington’s faults as much as in his feats.48 To be sure, such iconoclasm provoked some backlash, especially from groups such as the Sons of the Revolution. Overall, however, the ho-hum “sort-of-refutation” President Calvin Coolidge planned for Washington Day in 1927 reflected the broader cultural indifference.49

Far from depicting Washington as sacred, the imagery and language of the 1920s offered up a strikingly human portrait. The New York Times, for instance, praised Hughes for displaying Washington’s “humanness,” disclosing that “Washington was not the regular churchgoer that he is pictured, but that he seized every possible pretext to stay at home,” and revealing the first President “as a hard taskmaster with his slaves.”50 But the Times also began to tire of the repetitive criticisms, denigrating the numerous attacks Washington’s image made by those who pretended it was “their own discovery that he was not a plaster saint.” It was simply already well known that Washington “had a hot temper, he sometimes swore terribly . . . he gambled, he drank, he did not go to church as often as he should have done - in short, he was an intensely human being,” the paper asserted.51 Coolidge’s 1927 “sort-of-refutation” focused more on Washington’s contribution to American expansion, his foresight in profit-making, and his role in saving
national banks than on anything else. In response to the attacks on Washington, he simply suggested that Washington the “human being subjected to the trials and temptations common to all mortals has been too much obscured and forgotten.” “No great mystery surrounds him,” Coolidge added, “he never relied on miracles.” In the 1920s, Washington was far from divine.

In the early years of the Great Depression, American culture transformed Washington’s image as it struggled to reinvigorate national identity. Discussions of the 1932 bicentennial anticipated celebrations in strikingly religious terms. The Christian Century, for instance, averred that Washington had a “flawless courage . . . even more moral than physical” and by “viewing this Washington, one may be permitted to believe that there is almost a providential quality in the fact that his bicentenary should have fallen in this confused, hesitant, fear-stricken year.” Reflecting a similar religious framing, a 1931 cover of New York Times Magazine displayed a shady, evening time photo of Washington’s Equestrian Statue in Philadelphia that silhouetted the first President high above the city, effectively rendering visual affirmation of the photo’s subtitle, “The Spirit of Washington watches over the city where Liberty was cradled.” In New York City, bicentennial preparations featured a “shrine” in the form of a Mount Vernon replica. When controversy broke out over whether to build the memorial in the city or in a Brooklyn park, a committee decided that the sacredness of the memorial made it “incongruous, illogical and inharmonious” to place it “in a dilapidated public square whose present neglected surface is scarred and disfigured” and was “bounded on one side by a . . . noisy, clanking and utterly barbarous elevated railroad.”

51
The emergence of a divine Washington during the Depression reveals that within American culture, religious discourse gained greater traction amid pervasive anxiety. To be sure, when churches marked Washington’s birthday in the early 1930s with special services and recitals of the Washington “Prayer for our Country,” such ceremonies were hardly new; similar observances occurred in 1926, for instance. But a remarkable shift had occurred within the broader culture. For example, two new Washington biographies in 1932 essentially acclaimed Washington the “soul of the revolution” and one of the greatest leaders of all time. “A few years ago . . . we were told that panegyric should be brushed away and the ‘real’ or ‘human’ Washington revealed,” The New York Times Book Review observed, but now “the pendulum returns in the treatment of Washington.” The first president “was spiritually willed and saw the great purpose” of the United States, pronounced Episcopal rector Walter Bowie. On the Sunday immediately preceding the bicentennial, President Herbert Hoover ventured off to worship in Old Christ Church in Alexandria, Virginia, sitting in the same, unaltered pew Washington had used a century and a half earlier.

The proliferation and content of Washington imagery attest to the discursive space that Washington celebrations allowed for both the expression of anxiety as well as for the centrality of religious language and imagery in the reaffirmation of national identity. For example, when the Washington Bicentennial Commission chose a side photograph of Jean-Antoine Houdon’s bust of Washington as its official symbol for distribution to millions of school classrooms, popular appeal forced them to also dispense posters of Gilbert Stuart’s 1796 portrait. The reason for the popular reaction might be found in the different impressions the two prints conveyed. The photo of Houdon’s...
sculpture appears old fashioned and factual, even, according to Karal Marling, somewhat like a “middle-aged executive staring fearlessly into the corporate future.” To a culture steeped in economic Depression and anxious over its manifest destiny, the Houdon print did little to either express cultural fears or allay them. Stuart’s portrait, on the other hand, being partially unfinished - the print generally appears in an oval frame allowing its unfinished canvas to show - conveyed a certain anxiety about the “truth” of Washington while it simultaneously presented an image of him emerging from a cloud like aura, indicating the divine. Equally significant, the Stuart portrait also depicted Washington looking directly at the viewer, seemingly providing assurance that Washington was alive and all around them.60

While the Bicentennial Commission ordered prints, distributed portraits, handed out trinkets, statues, and other patriotic paraphernalia, Americans heartily embraced their efforts and, indeed, gave them a life of their own.61 The desire to spiritualize Washington resulted in immense popularity for J. L. G. Ferris’ painting Painter and President which portrays Gilbert Stuart working on his 1796 portrait as Washington sits in the background. The juxtaposition of the “real” Washington with the “painted” Washington allowed the audience to become involved in discerning the accuracy of the portrait, leaving them with the feeling that they actually “know” the true Washington. Produced in the late 1910s, the picture received scant attention until the 1932 bicentennial when demand for it exploded and led to its inclusion in calendars and magazine color supplements.62

The differences between the human Washington of the 1920s and the divine Washington of the 1930s certainly reflected the emergence of an acute cultural anxiety
over America’s manifest destiny. A 1928 stamp celebrating the 150 year bicentennial of Valley Forge, for example, pictured Washington kneeling on one knee in the snow looking up to heaven.63 Behind Washington are his horse, a campfire, some of his men, and, in the distance, a house. Washington’s gaze into heaven is confident and sure; there is no doubt concerning whether he will be heard. The presence of his horse, the campfire, and his men attest to a sense of security and community. The layering of the picture, with Washington in the foreground, his men behind, and the house in the distance, conveys a sense of connection between heaven and the nation made through Washington and his men.

In sharp contrast to the 1928 depiction of Valley Forge, the image that appeared on the 1935 Washington Day cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* disclosed anxiety over America’s divine destiny. In the 1935 depiction, Washington is again on bended knee, but he no longer looks to heaven with assurance. Rather, with his head bowed toward the ground and his hands clenched tightly together, he appears to plead with the Almighty, indicating that a favorable response is questionable.64 Unlike the communal, almost prosperous surroundings in the 1928 image, the background is barren except for snow and ice, conveying a sense of angst over the blessings of divine providence not apparent seven years earlier. At the same time, the 1935 image concentrates hope more fully in the combination of Washington and God. Whereas in 1928 Washington had a horse, a fire, and fighting men, in 1935 the outcome rests with Washington and the Almighty. For Americans then, the 1935 image of Valley Forge expressed not only their anxieties but also suggested that those anxieties could be assuaged through divine intercession and the reification of a mythical past.
The language and imagery that surrounded the imaging of Washington in the early 1930s demonstrated in part that Americans continued to anxiously question their nation’s divine chosenness while at the same time turned to alternative signifiers to reaffirm it. That is, the newly imagined Washington offered Americans a readily available “text” through which to organize their experiences of dislocation and apprehension during the Depression by rethinking their own narrative of national identity. In a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt requesting financial help, for instance, a ten-year old girl promised to pray for the First Lady declaring, “We will always remember you like we remember George Washington.” As Americans came to “know” George Washington above their fireplaces and in their classrooms, his bended knee and spiritual appearance subtly reminded them that America was God’s nation and they were God’s people.

The religiously framed shift in the imaging of Washington reveals that the representational forms providing cohesion to national identity narratives are scarcely fixed across several years or even a century, belying the meta-narrative proffered by popular history. For example, in 1832, Senator Littleton Tazewell of Virginia and four of his colleagues protested joining a committee to oversee the centennial celebrations of Washington’s birthday as Tazewell ardently declared, “Man worship, how great soever the man, I will ever oppose.” One hundred years later, on a July Sunday in 1932, a governor Moore delivered what the New York Times called a “patriotic address,” telling a New Jersey Presbyterian congregation that if Americans “get the spirit of Washington . . . we will realize that we have the opportunity for a better day.”

In the early 1930s, the sacrilization of Washington mirrored the burgeoning of religious discourse at the center of cultural efforts to resolve the pervasive anxiety over
America’s national identity as a chosen nation. For example, Catholic priest Father Charles Coughlin avowed that “the days . . . lived through by Lincoln and our forbears will continue to be days of inspiration . . . as we struggle forward towards more perfect things, always holding steadfastly to the purity of our Constitution and to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” In Sherwood’s *The Petrified Forest*, Squier, having sacrificed his life to provide money for Gabby’s future, tells her as he lays dying that “I was blinded . . . but now I can see,” imitating the words of a blind man cured by Jesus - “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” - in the gospel of John. Such allusions illustrated that the “cure” to cultural anxiety could be found in religious faith.

A poignant example of the subtle, religiously encoded reaffirmation of divine chosenness occurs in Conroy’s *The Disinherited*. The title “disinherited” implies a pre-existing rightful inheritance wrongfully taken away, offering a striking similarity to the concept of spiritual inheritance in the New Testament. When Larry refers to himself and his fellow unemployed drifters by saying “most of us were prodigals,” he and they are immediately positioned within Jesus’s parable of the prodigal son, the one who returns home to regain his rightful inheritance. Images such as “prodigal sons” worked alongside unease, doubt, and skepticism over manifest destiny, ultimately countering these anxieties and preventing national identity from eroding altogether.

A similar articulation of a higher religious purpose amid the apprehension of the Depression emerged in letters written to Eleanor Roosevelt. According to an 11 year old girl, “mother votes for Mr. Roosevelt” and “thinks God sent him to lead us out, like he did Moses with the children of Israel.” A young woman asking Roosevelt for five hundred dollars declared that she did not “know exactly how to begin to write you or just
why I should” but “some where off I still hear a little of the words ‘hope’ and ‘faith.’” A young man requesting a school loan for college, informed the first lady that “I sincerely hope that the people of the United States will not . . . forget that our forefathers fought and died that this nation might under God flourish upon the face of the earth and that in its borders ‘men may know the truth and that it shall make them free.’ This last,” he went on, “is taken from the Holy Bible.” One 10 year old sent in two of her own drawings, one of Jesus kneeling and the other of several pairs of fancy high heel shoes, suggesting a concretized connection between the material well-being of the nation and divine salvation.71

Even the gloomy early 1930s writings of Niebuhr testify to the difficulty of abandoning the sense of divine chosenness completely, no matter how fearfully it is questioned. The persistence of American destiny emerges particularly forcefully in Niebuhr’s Reflections on the End of an Era. Although Niebuhr viewed the capitalist system as in disintegration, he intimated that “it is not likely that American developments will follow the general pattern without unique and divergent elements of their own” because “American particularities are of special moment.” Even though capitalism generated an immoral social structure, “the liberal spirit . . . remains a needed resource in building and preserving a community,” he argued.72 Niebuhr thus imagined America as “unique” and “particular,” and the liberal political philosophy as a spiritual resource.

Like Niebuhr, the internal tensions of Fosdick’s texts also illustrate that though anxieties over manifest destiny burst forth, the expression of such anxiety often remained bounded by the narrative of chosenness through central to the national identity. Despite his professed need to be “sober” about manifest destiny, the eminent New York preacher
repeatedly emphasized nation’s ostensible spiritual achievements and heritage. “We, the American people, have staged on this continent one of the most amazing performances in human history,” Fosdick averred. He added that though “we of this generation have talked freely about our opinion of our ancestors,” it remains “much more curious as to what they would think of us,” especially as, in times like the Depression, “one sees them, like a cloud of witnesses, watching us.” Fosdick’s use of the phrase “cloud of witnesses” ties the nation’s “founders” to the “faith heroes” of the Old Testament as they are discussed in the biblical book of Hebrews.

Few captured the simultaneous pall of doubt and religiously conceived solution as concisely as British-born commentator Aldous Huxley. Writing in Harper’s, Huxley argued that “Our time is afflicted with a strange incertitude.” But “our uncertainty is not only, or fundamentally, an uncertainty about economic ways and means. It is a profounder and more universal bewilderment. We cannot decide what we are or what we want to become . . . We are, in a word, without a generally accepted faith.” The solution, Huxley suggested, lay in finding “a faith, because we need to act, and because faith provides us with a motive for action, a stimulus, and an incentive.” It was “intolerable . . . to live blindly, from hand to mouth; philosophy provides us, as it were, with a map of life, traces an itinerary, tells us what should be seen and what avoided.”

The persistence of religious discourse led to calls for religious renewal and repentance. In early 1933, the Federal Council of Churches exhorted that “this is preeminently a time for united prayer.” It hoped that “God’s will may be discerned and the teaching of Christ followed in all our planning for our economic life.” The Council also lauded Roosevelt’s declaration that in the “dedication of a Nation we humbly ask the
blessing of God,” arguing that his “sincere recognition of the need for Divine guidance and strength . . . has persuasively illustrated the spirit which should characterize the life of the entire nation.” Agreeing with the Council, the New Jersey Knights of Columbus resolved in May 1933 that “they approve and appreciate the sentiment and faith of the President of the United States in his humble appeal for Divine guidance and they extend their deep hope that Our Heavenly Father will assist His Excellency in caring for the welfare of the People.” Similarly, in 1932, Chicago’s Great Commission Prayer League issued “A Call to Prayer for Revival.” As Elmer Davis remarked after Roosevelt’s inauguration, “A party which took over after such a debacle must be prepared to rebuild everything from the ground up, to provide not only new administrative policies but a new doctrine and a new faith.”

One of the leading manifestations of the connection between religion and national identity was the National Committee for Religion and Welfare Recovery. Its 1934 pamphlet “Turning to God” outlined the need for the “strengthening and undergirding of the moral and spiritual resources of the nation.” Two years later the Committee published “Mobilization of Spiritual Forces,” a tract encouraging “every citizen” to attend a “church or synagogue” on upcoming “Loyalty Days.” Such days explicitly linked national loyalty to religious revival. The pamphlet argued that the “present breakdown is not merely economic” but “it is fundamentally moral and spiritual and lies within the sphere of human relations to God and religion.” A year later, Roosevelt himself praised and encouraged Loyalty Days, arguing if Americans “repair on those days to their houses of worship” then “shall we rebuild the spiritual fires and strengthen the abiding foundation of our nation.”
Even New Deal initiatives became spiritual endeavors. Outlining his public works programs, Roosevelt argued that “more important . . . than the material gains will be the moral and spiritual value of such work,” especially for “the overwhelming majority of unemployed Americans” for whom the projects would bring “spiritual and moral stability.”

Although the Civilian Conservation Corps would “conserve our natural resources” and “create future national wealth,” it would also “prove of moral and spiritual value not only to those . . . taking part, but to the rest of the country as well.”

Further linking New Deal legislation to spiritual renewal, in 1935 Roosevelt sought the “counsel and advice” of America’s religious leaders, sending a letter to all clergymen requesting information on the “conditions” of their communities and thoughts on his Social Security Legislation. Religious leaders consequently found themselves at the center of the President’s efforts to “solve our many problems . . . for the common end of better spiritual and material conditions for the American people.”

The linkage between national identity and religion frequently implicated a desire for material recovery as well. The sense prosperity long central to divine chosenness therefore remained palpable even during widespread depression. For example, a chain letter craze in the middle of the decade produced a host of get-rich-quick pyramid mail schemes, forcing one Denver post office to hire 100 new workers to handle the extra load. Letters entitled “Prosperity Club” and adorned with the slogan “In God We Trust” informed people that the chain was “started in hopes of bringing you prosperity.” Further instructions encouraged people to “make five copies of this letter, leaving off the top name and adding yours to the bottom, and mail or give it to five friends. In omitting the top name send that person ten cents.” The overall idea was that “as your name leaves the
top, you will receive 15,625 letters with donations amounting to $1,562.50.” The letter ended by exhorting the receiver to “have the faith your friend had” so “this chain won’t be broken.” What is especially significant about these letters, aside from their linguistic linkages of hope, faith, and prosperity, is that Americans had previously used the medium of the chain letter in prayer chains.\(^8^5\) Whereas the message brought national identity to the foreground through its slogan “In God We Trust” and its ideal of “prosperity,” the medium (the use of the prayer chain letter) demonstrated the emerging cultural power of religious discourse in the broader cultural discussion of national identity.

Throughout colonial and national U.S. history, Americans had imagined their nation through a narrative of divine chosenness. The Depression cut Americans adrift temporarily from many of the anchors of that narrative, especially the signifiers of freedom and economic individualism. Nonetheless, cultural discourse remained firmly bounded within a sea of chosenness. As Protestant leader Worth Tippy put it, “For better or for worse the nation has loosed from old moorings and set upon a voyage fraught with uncertainty, - but, it may also be, with epochal results – as when Columbus lifted anchor for the Western seas.”\(^8^6\) In other words, the destabilizing impact of the Depression created tremendous unease but simultaneously betokened the opportunity to remake the nation with potentially “epochal results.” In re-envisioning the nation, the cultural framework of foreign policy (the arena in which identity is staged) would shift as well.

But to what new vision could Americans turn? According to Roosevelt, the “task of reconstruction does not require the creation of new and strange values. It is rather the finding of the way once more to known, but to some degree forgotten, ideals and values.”\(^8^7\) As many of those “ideals and values” remained firmly embedded in religious
discourse the new framing of a new national mission depended largely on which religious subjectivity occupied a hegemonic position in American religious culture.

Notes


4 Kennedy, Freedom From Fear, 160-169; McGovern, And a Time for Hope, 1-19.


Statement of Objectives and Procedure, National Policy Committee, November 15, 1937, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 8, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.


Machen, *The Christian View of Man*, 1, 121.


26 Henry Wallace to Roosevelt, November 1933, OF 723, FDRL.

27 Roosevelt to Walter Head, Chairman, National Committee for Religion and Welfare Recovery, September 14, 1934, President’s Personal File (hereafter cited as: PPF) 1685, FDRL.

28 Roosevelt to Henry Stimson, February 6, 1935, PPF 20, FDRL.


34 *Gabriel over the White House*, dir. Gregory LaCava, 86 minutes, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1933.


43 For a concise explanation of the traumatic moment see Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 82-84. I recognize that there is always resistance to the process of signification and therefore identity narratives and signifiers remained permanently open to rearticulations and, therefore, alternative hegemonic interpretations. The simplification here is intended to make sense of the “traumatic” moment and to assert trauma in the U.S. national identity imaginary in the early 1930s.


Walter Bowie quoted in “Topics of Sermons Preached Yesterday,” *New York Times*, February 22, 1932. Interestingly, as the broader culture increasingly sacrilized Washington, religious figures began to stress Washington’s humanity. Perhaps this resulted from fears that they were losing control of the religious interpretations (the discourse).


The bicentennial celebration in 1932 lasted from Washington Day until Thanksgiving Day. Testifying to the intimate link between the narrative national identity and the signifiers that provided its form, the Bicentennial Commission drew up numerous plans including the mass distribution of trinkets, posters, calendars, statues, and a host of other patriotic “Washingtonian bric-a-brac.” See “Business of a Bicentennial,” *Time*, February 15, 1932.


Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, December 29, 1933, *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt*, 97-98.


Coughlin, *By the Sweat*, 7-18.


See Ephesians 2.14, 5.5, NIV; Hebrews 9.15, NIV; 1 Peter 1.4, NIV; Conroy, *The Disinherited*, 283; Luke 15.11-32, NIV.

Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, November 21, 1940; Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, November 22, 1939; Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, September 15, 1940; Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, 1934; all in *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt*, 83, 126-128, 136, 152-153.


Theo Osbahr, New Jersey State Council of the Knights of Columbus, to Roosevelt, May 22, 1933, OF 28, FDRL.

Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 11.


Pamphlet, “Turning To God,” National Committee for Religion and Welfare Recovery, September 1934, PPF 1685, FDRL.


Press Release by Roosevelt (for September 7), August 21, 1937, PPF 1685, FDRL.


84 Roosevelt to Clergy, form letter, September 24, 1935, PPF 21a, FDRL.


86 Worth Tippy, “The Church in a Nation Reorganizing,” June 7, 1933, OF 213, FDRL.

CHAPTER III
BUILDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another...And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

- Colossians 3.12-14

Perhaps Jesus Christ did have a more significant message on the remedy for depressions than Adam Smith.

- Henry A. Wallace, 1936

In the 1930s, a national identity narrative imagining America as a “good neighbor” drove the construction of United States foreign policy. The good neighbor narrative came to the fore as Protestant liberal modernist discourse reinvigorated the imagined community. Religious modernism’s emphasis on the teachings of a human Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and his imperative to “love thy neighbor as thyself” provided the discursive lexicon through which Americans imagined the nation as a beacon of tolerance and goodwill, reaffirming the sense of divine mission integral to nation.

By stressing religious culture, this chapter breaks with a considerable body of U.S. foreign policy scholarship. Interpretations of 1930s foreign relations rarely include religion, variously stressing either one or a conjunction of other leading factors such as isolationism, idealism, internationalism, national security, cultural incursions, and/or economic imperialism. Although there is much to be gained from these analytical
paradigms, they have obscured the extent to which religious discourse provided the cultural framework of Depression diplomacy. While in recent years the growth of theoretical interpretations has produced an acknowledgement of race, gender, and other cultural discourses in interwar U.S. foreign relations, religion has not received detailed attention from culture-oriented diplomatic historians any more than from more traditional scholars.4

As mentioned in the Introduction, a narrative of national identity is constituted by its staging, that is, through performance of the image that is imagined. Foreign relations functions as the arena where the national “self” can be established by speaking to or about the “other.” Because religious discourse operated as a leading symbolizing structure through which Americans negotiated their Depression experience religion cannot be ignored as a significant cultural category through which U.S. foreign relations in the 1930s might be analyzed.

Religious modernists emerged at the center of American religious culture during the 1920s and dominated the lexicon through which Americans reinvigorated their national identity in the 1930s. The good neighbor image gained ascendancy as part of the religious modernist triumph in cultural negotiations with Christian fundamentalism. As a result, United States foreign policy during the Depression inscribed a good neighbor image through ostensible pursuit of non-intervention, international cooperation, and disarmament. The staging of good neighborism, then, framed the U.S. approach not only toward Latin America but toward the entire world.

The theological and discursive framework best described as “religious modernism” characterized the heart of 1930s Protestant liberalism and emphasized social
gospel Christianity through the socio-political application of an historical Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.\(^5\) Modernism stressed scientific processes, tolerance of other religions, the use of the Bible/Jesus for “principles” not “truth,” and social responsibility for the downtrodden. Resistance to religious modernism existed, especially from Christian fundamentalists, a religious subjectivity that garnered its name by arguing for a return to the “fundamentals” such as the absolute truth of the Bible, the divinity of Jesus, the near sanctity of centuries old traditions and doctrinal standards, and a rigid individualism. Crystallized by the cultural victory of modernism in the wake of the Scopes’ Monkey Trial, the late 1920s witnessed the apparent triumph of the religious modernist worldview over fundamentalism and its adherents. The religious modernist *Christian Century*, for instance, claimed that fundamentalist movement verged on extinction because it was “wholly lacking in qualities of constructive achievement or survival.”\(^6\)

Codified by Walter Rauschenbusch in 1917, religious modernism envisioned a world where the “Kingdom of God” was not confined within the limits of the Church and its activities” but “embraces the whole of human life. It is the Christian transfiguration of the social order.” Disillusioned by the despair of Hell’s Kitchen and the ferocity of the World War, Rauschenbusch argued that earlier social gospel progressives had failed to appreciate the gravity of historically created sin, namely war, poverty, exploitation, and human suffering among others. In his systematic theology, Rauschenbusch outlined that historical and social circumstances produced sin, making it necessary to “inquire for the lines of communication and contagion by which sin runs vertically down through history.” If the historical source of sin could be located, if the “contagion” could be uncovered, then sin could be overcome. After all, sin was like a disease, and “in dealing
with any epidemic disease, the first thing is to isolate the bacillus.” Once isolated, “the free will of love” that “supersedes the use of force and legal coercion as a regulative of the social order” could cure the historical sin.⁷

Coinciding with its theological ascendance, religious modernism’s social gospel emphasis received further empowerment when the Depression produced conspicuous economic hardship, assaulting cultural notions of a prosperous manifest destiny. Among religious leaders, modernism’s social gospel seemed even more relevant. “The Social Gospel . . . is the last refuge of an uncertain priesthood,” Harper’s asserted.⁸ If religious discourse articulated anxiety over American identity in general, religious modernism offered a specific set of linguistic markers to reinvigorate it. In other words, as Americans turned to religious language and imagery to reaffirm their national destiny, a critical mass employed the discourse of religious modernism in particular. For example, in his inaugural address President Franklin Roosevelt proclaimed that “these dark days will be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves and to our fellow men.”⁹

The emergence of religious modernist discourse played significant role in the construction of domestic social and economic policy as it reinvigorated the nation. In October 1933, Roosevelt told the Catholic Charities Conference that “with every passing year I become more confident that humanity is moving forward to the practical application of the teachings of Christianity.” Praising the Catholic Charities work in “visitation and relief of the poor” and in “hospitals and institutions,” the president felt “confirmed” in his “deep belief that God is marching on” and that a new “spirit of neighborliness” prevailed.¹⁰ But more than simply helping the oppressed, neighborliness
provided a signifier that could revitalize national identity. Americans could “climb out of
the valley of gloom . . . because the spirit of America springs from faith - faith in the
beloved institutions of our land, and a true and abiding faith in the divine guidance of
God,” Roosevelt proclaimed. If Americans “used to call the United States ‘God’s
country’” then it was to time to “make it and keep it ‘God’s country.’”

In other words, religious modernism ordered the cultural reinvigoration of “God’s
country” through the image of the “good neighbor” found in Jesus’ teachings in the New
Testament. This image had significant ramifications for the U.S. approach to the world.
For example, Roosevelt argued that the U.S. should build the Kingdom of God on earth
“by example and in practice” through an effort “to bind the wounds of others, strive
against disorder and aggression, encourage the lessening of distrust among peoples and
advance peaceful trade and friendship.” From the good neighbor perspective, Roosevelt
did “not look upon these United States as a finished product” but rather as a nation “still
in the making.”

In 1930-1933, the international implications of religious modernist discourse
became particularly apparent in the rancorous debate between competing religious
subjectivities over Protestant foreign missions. Early in the decade, a slump in
enthusiasm for foreign missions reflected a broader cultural anxiety over the exportability
of American values and ideas, and thus over American identity. Seeking to address the
missions crisis, several major Protestant denominations including the Northern Baptist
Convention and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. commissioned a detailed
investigation under the leadership of religious modernist Harvard professor William
Ernest Hocking. After an eight month tour of east and southeast Asia, Rethinking
Missions: A Laymen’s Inquiry after One Hundred Years exhorted foreign missions to abandon rigid doctrinal standards and traditional religious structures. It argued that missions must develop respect for other religions and learn “to recognize and associate itself with whatever kindred elements there are in them.”

Clearly appalled, fundamentalist Christians moved to create independent missions boards. Their efforts, as will be discussed further in Chapter 8, ultimately resulted in their own loss of institutional power.

As Harper’s noted, in spite of fundamentalist resistance the Layman’s report was “more widely discussed than any religious document in a generation.”

Rethinking Missions disavowed traditional preoccupations with winning individual converts, and focused on building the Kingdom of God on the earth, a decidedly religious modernist objective. No longer sent to save souls, the increasing number of modernist missionaries revealed that many Americans had “caught the vision of international fellowship and cooperation,” the report claimed. Missionaries were “eager to make their lives count for a world-wide kingdom of peace and brotherhood.”

The report asserted that foreign missions should build “international friendships,” hospitals, and social centers, working in general for social justice at a global level. Such objectives emerged from the fundamental organizing principle of religious modernism: religion “cannot stop short of questions of general justice and the moral foundations of world order” since creating “the Kingdom of God may mean . . . the spiritual unity of all men and races.” As the commission saw it, “the goal to which this way leads may be variously described; most perfectly, perhaps, in the single phrase, Thy Kingdom come.”

Practically, as prominent religious modernist author Pearl Buck argued, this meant that missionaries should stop preaching and focus on expanding social services.
In emphasizing the Kingdom of God, *Rethinking Missions* reflected the emerging religious modernist narrative of the United States in the world. For example, Hocking argued elsewhere that if the U.S. encouraged all nations to realize that they existed as part of “a plural community or family of nations” then the historical “evils” of war, international economic competition, and tyranny might be overcome. He contended that each nation had “an obligation to contribute according to its powers to the good order of the world” through “competent world-intercourse,” always being ready to “mix their thoughts and proposals” with other nations “on an equal footing, whatever their inequalities in size, wealth, power.”

Far from mere idealism, modernists such as Hocking hoped for a “a new function, belonging to the new world order,” one that could ensure “peace and not one of war-settlements solely.” Such a function involved “increased responsibilities upon our organs for world-thinking and world-action.” At some point, nations had to get together and “undertake questions which Geneva now prudently avoids as politically untouchable, - questions of race, culture, immigration, the use of the earth’s disposable soil; questions of status, which contain detonating charged talk of future war, and which allow little entrance of pure reason or general rule.” “If it is the world’s business to determine a Kurdish frontier, then let the world do it and relieve Turkey of the sole responsibility,” Hocking contended. “If it is the world’s business to aid in the sanitation of Persia, or the finance of Esthonia (sic) or the education of China, let the world undertake these things as a joint action” consequently “relieving” the individual states and alleviating any “particular axes-to-grind” of private business. Although Hocking concluded that such an
organization of world states could be realized in the League of Nations, he underscored that it would have to have been a much altered version of that “less than august body.”

Both the Layman’s report and Hocking’s thought represented a broader cultural migration toward significations that allowed Americans to reinvigorate their manifest destiny through a good neighbor identity narrative that emphasized peaceful international cooperation. For example, in The Atlantic Monthly eminent foreign policy commentator John Foster Dulles suggested that all nations abide by “a regime of unwritten law.” Although he acknowledged that it might take some time, Dulles hoped that “the hearts and minds of men are so changed that self-restraint and self-sacrifice can be relied upon to assure” peace. Where Dulles merely echoed Hocking’s sentiment, Presidential advisor Alexander Sachs explicitly praised Hocking’s work as “extraordinarily profound and pertinent to our distraught times,” certain that it was critical to “interpret the economic” depression in terms of a “cultural crisis.” According to Stanford professor Johnston Ross, the solution to the “crisis” involved a return to “the ideal social order toward which Christian behavior leans and works,” that is, in “Christ’s own phrase, ‘the Kingdom of God.’”

Religious modernist discourse permeated discussion and thinking about the U.S. approach to the world, revealing foreign policy as an unconscious but lucrative cultural space in which to imagine the U.S. as a good neighbor building the Kingdom of God. Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace urged an international agreement on the protection of cultural artifacts to encourage “a community of feeling among all of the nations.” He deemed such an agreement part of “a ‘New Deal’ in international relationships” and a “prophylactic against war.” “We need this symbol representing the
believers of light to hold us together in our faith of the ultimate triumph of cultural and spiritual forces,” Wallace argued.\textsuperscript{28} Within this cultural context, Roosevelt declared in his inaugural address that “in the field of world policy I would dedicate this Nation to the policy of the good neighbor . . . the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.”\textsuperscript{29}

In the early 1930s, the gradual ascendance of religious modernist discourse in the reinvigoration of the imagined community drove a U.S. foreign policy staging the neighborly character of America. The lengthy record of U.S. military interventions in Latin America during the first three decades of the century countered religious modernist notions of tolerance and goodwill and therefore required radical rethinking. Hardly a conspiratorial disguise to hide economic exploitation, U.S. troop withdrawals, along with promises to abstain from armed intervention, represented the performance of the good neighbor identity narrative. In essence, \textit{military} intervention became culturally unacceptable within the framework of religious modernist discourse. Of course, as we shall see, none of this meant that the United States ceased attempts to influence world events or to dominate its Latin American satellites; in the western hemisphere at least, U.S. hegemony simply persisted through different representational forms.

Initially, the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from countries such as Nicaragua enabled the United States to enact a neighborly image. In 1927 President Calvin Coolidge had sent U.S. marines into Nicaragua to defend “American lives” as well as “American investments and business interests,” more specifically, the vast holdings of Nicaraguan land/wealth by American companies such as Standard Fruit, Bragman’s Bluff Lumber Company, and Cuyamel Fruit. Under personal appointment from Coolidge, Henry
Stimson ventured off to Nicaragua with a sizeable force of U.S. marines to ensure that a right-wing government favorable to U.S. “interests” remained in power. When Augusto Sandino led a guerilla war against the American-backed dictatorship of José Moncada, U.S. forces enabled Moncado’s regime to stay in power.³⁰

U.S. policy toward Nicaragua shifted within the changing framework of American national identity as Americans migrated toward religious modernist discourse in the reinvigoration of the nation. In 1931, for instance, Washington no longer deemed the protection of American interests worthy of military intervention. Now Secretary of State, Stimson, earlier the purveyor of potential military intervention, maintained that “this administration will hesitate long before becoming involved in any general campaign of protecting with our forces American property.”³¹ When Sandino threatened the U.S.-backed Moncado government in April, Stimson declared that ultimately the “problem of defense must be . . . worked out by the [Nicaraguan National Guard] itself.”³² He added publicly that the U.S. “Government cannot undertake general protection of Americans throughout that country with American forces. . . The Department recommends to all Americans who do not feel secure . . . to withdraw from the country.”³³

Throughout the early 1930s, the good neighbor image took shape through proclamations of American military withdrawal from Latin America. The State Department, for instance, ignored pleas from American business interests in Nicaragua and announced the withdrawal of all U.S. marines by 1933. After all, continued U.S. military interventions would put the United States “in the absolute wrong in China, where Japan has done all this monstrous work under the guise of protecting here nationals with a landing force,” Stimson observed in his diary.³⁴ In the wake of the U.S. departure the
Christian Century exulted, “Nothing that has happened in the field of international relations for at least a year past has given us quite so much satisfaction.”

Good neighbor discourse centered on non-intervention also conditioned early U.S. responses to Nazi Germany. In 1933, for instance, amid emerging German rearmament and increasing anti-Semitism, U.S. Ambassador to Germany William Dodd argued that “a people has a right to govern itself” even when “cruelties and injustices are done.” Americans must “be thankful most of all” for the progress “toward a world in which . . . every country will respect its neighbor’s points of view as well as its just rights,” U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Josephus Daniels pronounced. Roosevelt, meanwhile, responded to inquiries concerning German persecution of Jews by ordering the State Department to “take every step that one Government can take in a situation where another Government is dealing with a domestic problem of its own.” While by 1933 many Americans knew much about the persecution of the Jews, it is clear that the United States reflexively avoided public denunciations of German policy.

To be sure, the insistence on military non-intervention did not preclude other forms of “intervention,” such as economic imperialism or cultural infiltration, largely because the “others” were constructed as needy neighbors in need of U.S. beneficence. In 1933, for instance, the United States opened negotiations with Panama that eventually acknowledged Panama’s share of the canal, ended potential U.S. military intervention, and divided canal revenues with the Panamanians, all while further ensconcing U.S. claims to the canal zone by codifying the canal’s joint defense. The Roosevelt administration also withdrew U.S. marines from Haiti in 1934 but considered a change in the crushing financial arrangements with the poor Caribbean island nation out of the
question. Unlike the Europeans who defaulted on their debts, Haitians needed neighborly U.S. financial guidance. Further, when Haitian President Stenio Vincent inaugurated a campaign of terror against political dissent, the U.S. refused to intervene in the affairs of a neighbor nation.40

Withdrawal of U.S. forces from Nicaragua also did not betoken the end of U.S. influence. By the time American marines pulled out, the United States had ensured the rise of Anastasio Somoza to leader of Nicaragua’s National Guard, the future dictator that Americans in the early 1930s considered the best option for what they deemed to an otherwise largely incapable Nicaraguan police force. Meanwhile, guerilla fighter Sandino honored his promise to lay down arms upon U.S. withdrawal and came to terms with Juan Sacasa, the largely democratically elected president. When Somoza ambushed and assassinated Sandino, the United States remained neutral as civil unrest erupted. After Somoza toppled Sacasa in 1936 and began an authoritarian dictatorship, Washington promptly recognized his government and extended economic assistance. Nevertheless, the United States refused to offer domestic political aid to Somoza because it represented interference in Nicaragua’s internal affairs.41

In addition to military non-intervention, then, the United States also established its neighborly behavior by abandoning the policy of non-recognition. Inaugurated by Stimson in response to Japanese aggression in Manchuria, Americans came to view the “Stimson Doctrine” as rather un-neighborly behavior. For example, theologian Richard Niebuhr argued “that nothing constructive can be done” by judgments such as those indicated by non-recognition. Niebuhr urged that “the grace of doing nothing,” even if “China is being crucified,” represented the best of all possible responses. Such inactivity
was “the inaction of those who do not judge their neighbors because they cannot fool themselves into a sense of superior righteousness,” Niebuhr maintained.42

The abandonment of non-recognition emerged most noticeably with the rise of General Maximiliano Martínez to power in El Salvador. After overthrowing the reform-oriented and democratically elected President Arturo Araujo in 1931, Martínez solidified his political position by massacring 30,000 people in early 1932. Despite the bloodshed, an initial U.S. non-recognition policy gave way to informal recognition in June. Two years later, in 1934, Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles anticipated imminent official U.S. recognition of Martínez’s government, declaring that such a policy would “constitute another and important step in the establishment of normal, friendly relations among all the nations” of the western hemisphere.43

Although some scholars point to American anti-communism as the underlying reason for the abandonment of non-recognition in El Salvador, U.S. recognition of the Soviet Union reveals that the continued ascent of the good neighbor identity narrative enabled the policy shift. The migration toward religious modernist discourse already caused a shift in the rationale of non-recognition under Hoover. If non-recognition of the U.S.S.R. had begun amid a “red scare” in the early 1920s, by the 1932 presidential campaign the Hoover administration planned to defend non-recognition because “a vast majority of the American people oppose recognition of any government which, failing to respect the institutions and the form of government of its neighbors interferes with their internal affairs.”44 Meeting with president-elect Roosevelt in January 1933, Stimson asserted that recognition simply depended upon whether the U.S.S.R. agreed to “behave according to the fundamental principle of the family of nations.”45 As Roosevelt
declared, the United States hoped to deal with other nations “as intimate friends attempting to help each other to find solutions for questions which involve the welfare . . . of all mankind.”

Resistance to recognition of the Soviet Union certainly abounded as an impending policy change appeared in the offing after Roosevelt won the 1932 election. Within the State Department, for instance, an entrenched anti-communism dating back to the early 1920s proved difficult to overcome. Such protestations may be partly explained by state actors’ multiplicity of subjectivities. That is, having taken up their positions when anti-communism was an overriding concern, state actors “lagged” behind the broader cultural shift because of the symbolizing structure conditioning their professional identity. Political opposition similarly rooted in the postwar red scare also emerged, particularly in the form of organizations that identified patriotism with anti-communism. Strident examples appeared in newspaper magnate Ralph Easley’s National Civic Federation as well as his Department of Revolutionary Movements. Meanwhile, many Americans, especially Catholic religious leaders and organizations but also figures such as Secretary of State Cordell Hull, protested potential recognition on the grounds that the Soviets denied religious freedom.

As Americans gradually assumed religious modernist discourse in the reinvigoration of the imagined community, recognition of the Soviet Union became an acceptable, even dutiful foreign policy. The signifiers of neighborly tolerance trumped what Roosevelt advisor Raymond Moley denigrated as “the old shibboleths as to whether Russia is a democratic government or not.” The United States “should recognize a de facto government without attempting to force it into the form of our conception of what a
government should be,” Moley added. The Christian Century agreed, arguing that Americans “cannot do better than to decline to pass judgment as to whether every nation in the world has the kind of government that it ought to have.” In May 1933, a group of American intellectuals published The New Russia, an investigative report which concluded the United States had little recourse but to recognize the Soviet Union. Throughout the year, grassroots organizations advocating recognition spontaneously sprouted up across the country. In September, Roosevelt complained that the “over the last three months there have been all sorts of people . . . running around to various people in the Administration” thinking they had “the right to speak for Russia.”

Formerly himself a member of the anti-communist National Civic Foundation, Roosevelt epitomized the broader cultural abandonment of non-recognition discourse. Indeed, the president heartily pursued recognition of the Soviet Union almost immediately after taking office. He convinced leading recognition opponent Catholic Father Edmund Walsh that neighborly goodwill would do more to alleviate religious persecution in the Communist state than would a stubborn policy of non-recognition and Walsh conceded. In November, the United States granted formal recognition of the Soviet Union with only perfunctory pronouncements on religious freedom.

Ignoring the Soviet Union’s systematic destruction of property-owning farmers, continued denial of religious freedom, and Stalin’s “fable about famine” that starved six million people to death, recognition met little sustained opposition. “Virtually all U.S. news-organs approved the President’s act of recognition,” Time observed. According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, “There is a destiny of nations which transcends all such immediacies as those which have estranged the United States from Russia. We bear a
prophetic relation to the rest of the world.” Despite insistent reports of mass political executions, in 1936, Roosevelt replaced anti-communist U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union William Bullitt with Joseph Davies, instructing Davies to pursue a “good neighbor policy . . . based not upon a critical and intolerant attitude that induces irritation, but upon an attitude of tolerant understanding.”

Within the “gospel of the good neighbor,” Latin America in particular functioned as a cultural site in which Americans imagined an international neighborhood through a “family” of nations. For example, in April 1933 on Pan-American Day, a day Hoover instituted in 1930, Roosevelt (mixing gender metonymies) offered a “greeting to our sister American Republics” with the hope that the Pan-American Union would contribute to the building of “a true fraternity.” To ensure the new brotherhood, Roosevelt sought “constructive efforts” to develop “an atmosphere of close understanding” and “fraternal cooperation” involving “mutual obligations and responsibilities.” Despite his confusion about the gendered nature of this community, Roosevelt remained sure that such policies were nothing less than an “expression of the spiritual unity” and “spiritual solidarity” of the Americas, one that could guarantee that “Americanism” would be “a structure built of confidence, cemented by a sympathy which recognizes only equality and fraternity.”

Far from being isolationist, performing the good neighbor image guaranteed U.S. participation in the 1933 Pan-American conference at Montevideo, Uruguay. The imperative to establish some sort of a international neighborhood resulted in a U.S. policy at Montevideo discursively centered on multilateral cooperation, “non-controversial subjects” such as the Pan-American highway, and assuring the continued viability of the good neighbor policy. The State Department instructed the U.S. delegation to ensure that
an “attitude” of “mutual beneficial cooperation” be “manifested” in U.S. “action at the Conference.” For the United States, the overarching importance of the conference rested not in what it could accomplish per se, but rather in its role as “an important factor in the promotion of friendly international relations.”

By the end of 1933, the good neighbor identity narrative staged through non-intervention, tolerance, and international cooperation reinvigorated the sense of national mission central to the U.S. imagined community. For example, at Thanksgiving Roosevelt betrayed the overriding concern of foreign relations with the character of the United States when he rejoiced in the “clearer knowledge by all Nations that we seek no conquests and ask only honorable engagements by all peoples to respect the lands and rights of their neighbors.” A month later, Roosevelt confidently asserted that “this year marks a greater national understanding of the significance of the teachings of Him whose birth we celebrate.” For all Americans, “the words ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’” seemed to take “on a meaning that is showing itself and proving itself in our purposes and our daily lives.”

Ultimately, the good neighbor policy reflected that continued U.S. dominance of Latin American occurred through changing representational forms rather than through a concerted effort at rhetorical trickery disguising American imperialism. The good neighbor identity narrative amounted to what Slavoj Žižek refers to as an “ideological fantasy,” that is, “the fundamental level of ideology . . . not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself.” In other words, the good neighbor narrative did not mask a “real” policy of “intervention,” but functioned as a lexicon of representational forms affording the
possibility of national identity through a system of inter-social (national) relations that simultaneously further ensconced U.S. hegemony in the hemisphere. Therefore, the “illusion” of good neighborism is not found in “actual” U.S. intervention but in the very construction of the possibility of “neighborly” relations which masked the “real” absence (that is, the imagined nature) of the national community.

Consequently, the performative function of foreign policy - its ability to inscribe national identity by “performance,” the notion that “the “doer” is variably constructed in and through the deed” - significantly conditioned the strategic calculus; in other words, it was more important to speak about spreading democracy, multi-lateral cooperation, and peace than to arrive concretely at that end. In the Biblical parable, the Good Samaritan did not merely help an equal, but rather discovered a battered, helpless individual on whom to perform a neighborly act. Similarly, although the United States signed a declaration at Montevideo averring that “no state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another,” the American delegation ensured a caveat that the United States could of course intervene “to protect the lives and property where government has broken down and anarchy exists.” This disclaimer emerged from the image of Latin American nations as needy neighbors incapable of guaranteeing their own stability, an image inherent in the good neighbor narrative of U.S. identity and consistent with long-standing U.S. paternalism.

Non-intervention and tolerance allowed Americans to inscribe a good neighbor narrative of U.S. identity by eliding foreign policy ramifications. In a new 1934 treaty with Cuba the United States abrogated the Platt Amendment. A few months later, Washington averred non-intervention when it declined to land marines in Cuba after
But by casting the Caribbean island as a needy neighbor nation, the United States arrogated the right to determine what was best for the Cubans. As a result, U.S. warships surrounded Cuba, the U.S. maintained a military occupation at Guantánamo Bay, and Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles intrigued to topple progressive Cuban president Ramón Grau San Martín. Nonetheless, the U.S. refusal to send marines into the actual fighting functioned as the signifier of non-intervention, in turn itself a signifier that enabled Americans to imagine the U.S. as a good neighbor helping a needy one.

Well into the mid 1930s, the good neighbor identity narrative provided the cultural framework for U.S. foreign policy as it reinvigorated the imagined community. When Columbia and Peru finally resolved the Leticia land dispute, Roosevelt praised their negotiations as “an inestimable service to humanity.” Despite the “discordant note” sounding from the ongoing border war between Bolivia and Paraguay, Roosevelt remained confident that “we are entering a new era in accepting the plan that no one of our Nations must hereafter exploit a neighbor Nation at the expense of that neighbor.”

To counter and elide the threat of war, U.S. foreign policy repeatedly emphasized the “sanctity of treaties.” When the governments represented at the Pan-American Union signed the Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments in April 1935, Roosevelt rejoiced that this “treaty possesses a spiritual significance far deeper than the text of the instrument itself.” It demonstrated a “renewed allegiance to those high principles of international cooperation and helpfulness.”

Nothing had “been as successful in recent years as the fact that we have convinced Latin America, for the first time in history, that we were not some big bad wolf trying to eat
them up,” Roosevelt rejoiced.70 The good neighbor narrative had achieved a position of cultural hegemony.

Despite its ascendance, alternative narratives of national identity competed with the religious modernist good neighbor vision, resisting its increasingly hegemonic purview. These negotiations over American national identity demonstrate the inherently internationalized character of the contest as well as the importance of competing religious subjectivities in providing the discursive frames through which the debate could occur. For example, many Americans, especially Catholics and orthodox-leaning Protestants, turned to the discourse of “anti-communism,” imagining evil communist others against which a godly American self could be constructed. Midwest fundamentalist preacher, Gerald B. Winrod, for instance, argued throughout the 1930s that the Depression resulted from inroads into the United States made by Russian communists that had forced atheism on the entire population of the Soviet Union.71

Vestiges of 1920s anti-communist discourse became somewhat heated as the United States moved to recognize the Soviet Union in the early 1930s. For example, Episcopal Archdeacon James F. Bullitt, uncle of Ambassador William Bullitt, declared that “the United States has disgraced itself by establishing relations with a country which is beyond the pale a pariah among nations.” “We will never approve the admitted tenets that are opposed in principle and in practice to our belief in the Deity and our belief in American institutions and government,” the American Legion angrily avowed.72 Father Charles Coughlin railed against “the flag of red atheism” and lamented that “every form of religion has been practically banned from Russia.” Coughlin feared Soviet communism threatened the United States through the “approximately five hundred
thousand adult men within our borderlands who actually advocate the overthrow of our own government, the desecration of the Stars and Stripes,” and “the abolition of all religion.”

The U.S. decision to pursue “non-intervention” rather than support “freedom of religion” during Mexico’s “religious crisis” in 1934-1936 offers a striking example of how religious subjectivity intersected with national identity subjectivity in the reinvigoration of the imagined community. That a longstanding signifier such as “freedom of religion” retreated so rapidly from foreign relations discourse highlights the turn to religious modernist discourse in the construction of a cohesive national identity narrative. At the outset, it is important to recognize that Americans chose to talk about events in Mexico, both amongst themselves and to the Mexicans; there was no imperative to do so. Both those who advocated stringent efforts to enforce religious freedom south of the Rio Grande and those who promoted a policy of non-intervention selected Mexico as a site to construct an “other,” in the former case a seedbed of atheism and communism and in the latter a needy neighbor requiring U.S. patience and gentle guidance. More importantly, in both sides of the debate, acting out one’s religious beliefs (i.e. social gospel tolerance or upholding religious freedom) remained subordinated to staging one’s American identity (i.e. neighborly non-interference or defending inalienable rights).

The Mexican “religious crisis” erupted in 1934 when the revolutionary government of president Lázaro Cárdenas attempted to counter the political power of the Catholic priests by banning religious teaching in Mexican schools. Some Americans viewed the ban as part of a larger program to rid Mexico of all religion. U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Josephus Daniels particularly angered American Catholics by comparing
Mexico’s anti-clerical policy to Thomas Jefferson’s vision of an independent education system. Under domestic U.S. pressure, Daniels met informally with powerful Mexican General Plutarcho Calles in early November, informing him that “denying the right to worship was a backward step fraught with loss of prestige to his country.” To many Americans, the unofficial remonstrance from Daniels was too little, too late.

The objections of American Catholics as well as other Americans centered on an appeal to “freedom of religion,” long a significant pillar in the construction of American national identity. Students of Philadelphia’s St. Joseph’s College condemned the ban as part of “the natural reaction of the American mind to such a distinctly un-American procedure as the Mexican policy.” In passing several resolutions, the students claimed that all “true Americans” should “join with us in protest” against “the suppression of freedom of religion” and a host of other “freedoms.” Congressman John P. Higgins of Massachusetts castigated both Daniels and Secretary of State Hull for consorting “with these infidels.” Meanwhile, the House of Representatives introduced a resolution urging U.S. intervention and Senator William Borah pressed the Committee on Foreign Relations to investigate the “religious persecution and anti-religious compulsion and agitation in Mexico.”

Throughout 1934-1935, tension between the good neighbor narrative and the “American” principle of “freedom of religion” bubbled to the surface in the cultural space of U.S. relations with Mexico. For example, more than two hundred members of a rather conflicted voluntary Congressional sub-committee petitioned Roosevelt for an “inquiry” into Mexico’s religious persecution because they felt “obligated to voice their concern that absolutely nothing of an official public character has been put on record to
show American concern for the traditional American principle of religious liberty.” The desire to “show American concern” reveals foreign relations as a cultural arena of tremendous constitutive power; in the sub-committee’s words, a “public statement . . . would clearly indicate in the eyes of our own people and to the expectant gaze of the civilized world that the American government is entirely disassociated from the official persecution of religion in Mexico.” Fraught with the tension of competing national identity narratives, the members deemed that “far from endangering the good-neighbor policy . . . this public championing of the principle of religious liberty would win admiration” across Mexico and Latin America. Although it claimed to be “unalterably opposed to any semblance of interference or intervention in Mexico” the committee urged Roosevelt to refrain from blocking hearings on either House resolutions or Borah’s resolution. It was, they insisted, “a question of the moral vindication of an ethical principle.”79

The Catholic organization Knights of Columbus issued the most vociferous protest against a “lenient” U.S. policy toward Mexico. Supreme Knight Martin Carmody declared that “it is with a deep feeling of outrage that the people of America . . . find at their very border” a nation ruled by “men who are without spiritual or moral restraint.” In “expressing the voice of five hundred thousand patriotic, liberty loving, God fearing men of America” the Knights of Columbus “denounces the atheistic principles” of the Mexican government “as a menace and a peril to the well-being of the people of this nation and the perpetuity of the principles to which this nation is dedicated.”80 Illustrating the intersection of gender and religion discourse, the Knights warned that the lack of U.S. intervention meant that “American citizens whose children attend public schools” would
soon experience “the teaching of Atheism and Red Communism” along with a plethora of “debasing and demoralizing sexual exhibitions and instructions.”

Letters, protests, and petitions objecting to U.S. non-intervention reflected the ongoing effort to reaffirm American identity, albeit through a much different narrative than that of the good neighbor. The students of St. Joseph’s College, for example, seemed more concerned with defining what was “un-American” versus “true American.” The voluntary Congressional committee emphasized the need to “clearly indicate in the eyes of our own people” an “American” position. Similarly, the Knights of Columbus’ anxiety centered more on the proximity of religious persecution - at the “very border” - than on the religious persecution itself; for the Knights, the real problem lay with Mexico’s “avowed and open hostility to our form of government, our free institutions and our principles of civil and religious liberty” which it “works steadily to destroy” and against which it “directs aggressively a continuous propaganda throughout the United States.”

Even the religious modernist preacher Reverend Charles Macfarland, suggested that the United States has “the moral obligation to make known to the world its own fundamental position.” Although he insisted that he would not “offer any opinion as to what should be done diplomatically,” he declared his “earnest hope” for a “clear utterance as to what are the fundamental principles of our government and our people” since “it seems . . . important that this should be done just now when we so deeply need for ourselves a reemphasis of the spiritual life and the moral idealism of which religion and the church are expressions.”

Ultimately, the hegemony of good neighbor discourse marginalized appeals to defend religious freedom. At the State Department, Hull waved aside a series of
Congressional resolutions in addition to letters from anxious representatives, senators, and governors. The Secretary of State repeatedly stated the inadvisability of their desire to “condemn and indict another nation.” He refused to put the United States “in the position of claiming the right to say what the laws of another country should be in controlling its internal affairs.” In the face of appeals to sever diplomatic relations, begin investigations, and incite a hemispheric declaration, Hull steadfastly maintained that “other nations are recognized as being entitled to regulate for themselves their internal religious conditions.” 84 Echoing Hull, Roosevelt reiterated that “it has been the policy of this Administration to refrain from intervening in” the “direct concerns of the Mexican Government,” a “policy of non-intervention” the United States would “continue to pursue.” 85 By mid 1935, the furor had subsided and the United States maintained diplomatic relations with Mexico. 86

In the end, U.S. policy toward Mexico afforded Americans the opportunity to celebrate neighborly non-intervention, eliding stern U.S. preachments to Mexican leaders on the importance of religious freedom and U.S. pressure on Mexico to negotiate with the Roman Catholic Church. The ascendance of religious modernist discourse rendered harmless any remaining attacks from the cultural ground of religious freedom. In mid December, with the blessings of Father John Burke of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, Roosevelt simply ignored a public missive from the Reverend G. A. MacDonald of Solidarity of Our Lady. 87 The president also paid scant attention to continued public attacks by the Knights of Columbus, discounting them as “terribly discourteous.” 88
Mexico’s decision to negotiate with the Vatican in the summer of 1936 vindicated the non-intervention policy and demonstrated that the United States as a good neighbor had guided Mexico into the “correct” policy. Even many American Catholics lauded non-intervention. For example, Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago personally backed Roosevelt’s policy and Father Burke “deprecated in the strongest terms” the interventionist position of the Knights of Columbus. On behalf of the Committee on Religious Rights and Minorities, Catholic William Sands praised Ambassador Daniels, arguing that Roosevelt “could not have a better man in Mexico at this moment.” “As a nation we have no business sticking our nose into the domestic affairs of any other nation,” prominent Knights of Columbus member Francis Durbin pronounced. In April 1936, the Catholic Association for International Peace removed discussion of Mexico from its agenda. Similarly, the Catholic Bishops Commission for Mexican Relief sought “to avoid any semblance of influence with political policies.”

Not just Catholics, but Americans of all religious stripes exulted in neighborly non-intervention. The National Council of the Episcopal Church, for instance, put itself “on the record” as opposed to intervention. Freemason John Cowles argued that when “Germany and Italy destroyed Freemasonry in their respective countries, persecuting, exiling, and even murdering some of its members,” the Freemasons did not request the United States “to interfere in the affairs of sister and friendly nations.” The Federation of Lutheran Laymen of New York assembled specifically to “commend” Roosevelt “for the policy” he “pursued in the internal questions” of Mexico, especially the decision not to “intervene in the religious persecutions.” “To have followed the opposite policy would have involved us in endless and fruitless quarrels with our neighbors,” the
Christian Century intoned. Methodist Episcopal pastor Donald Runyon, a former missionary expelled from Mexico years earlier, also backed U.S. policy. According to Runyon, if “Mexico’s ‘New Deal’ may not be to the liking of all good churchmen,” who could argue with Mexico’s “attempt to banish foreign representatives of foreign religion.”

The Mexican religious crisis of 1934-1936 thus functioned as a site for the reaffirmation of U.S. identity by allowing Americans to stage a divine mission to build the Kingdom of God on earth through neighborly goodwill. Even as Ambassador Daniels witnessed continued anti-clerical policies in some Mexican states, he confidently asserted that “outside attempts to investigate or dictate will . . . delay the coming of the better day.” He hoped that Catholics in the United States would “see that the high ideals of our government cannot be imparted or advanced by outside pressure.” Any “improvement must come from within.” According to Roosevelt, the “practice of the good neighbor” was “founded on the Golden Rule.” It was a policy that “we have preached.” It was nothing less than a “doctrine” by which Americans “propose, of course, no interference with the affairs of other Nations.” The United States only sought “by force of our own example to spread the gospel of peace throughout the world.” The National Committee for Religion and Welfare Recovery concluded that “the World is now one neighborhood” but continued pursuit of “the Golden Rule would make it one brotherhood.”

The hegemony of religious modernist discourse in U.S. culture became stark as the tools of intervention themselves became regarded as an historical evil that required removal. To be sure, a cultural movement rooted in social gospel progressivism had disavowed military armaments throughout the 1920s, especially in the form of a
boisterous peace movement that advocated outlawing war. In 1929, Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* seemingly capped a decade of growing antiwar sentiment. In *Gabriel Over the White House* (1933), Gregory Lacava’s angel-filled President Hammond achieves an international disarmament agreement labeled the “Washington Covenant.” As Americans embraced religious modernist discourse amid Depression anxiety, the United States pressed for universal disarmament at Geneva in 1933. According to Roosevelt, Americans “seek peace by ridding the world of the weapons of aggression and attack.” “World peace that has to be ‘enforced’ by arms is no peace at all, but the unstable equilibrium of potential war,” the *Christian Century* added.

As religious modernism attained cultural hegemony in the mid 1930s, the U.S. arms industry suffered an even greater loss of prestige, inaugurating efforts to pursue and eventually codify neutrality. In 1934, for instance, an article in *Fortune* and H. C. Engelbrecht and F. C. Hanighen’s *Merchants of Death* castigated the profit-making ventures of the munitions industry during the European war. U.S. rejection of the World Court emerged partly out of the religious modernist vision that rejected European power politics as a disease fostering wars and empowering bankers and arms dealers. “I believe in being kind to people who have the smallpox . . . but not in going inside their homes,” Senator Homer Bone of Washington averred. Testifying to the power of the good neighbor narrative to reinvigorate U.S. manifest destiny, a group of Ohio State University social scientists argued that it was “part of the high destiny of America to give lead in the reduction of armaments.”

96
The “isolationist” paradigm frequently employed by scholars to understand the entirety 1930s U.S. foreign relations thus emerges an element within the staging of the good neighbor identity narrative. The isolationist whipping boy is almost always the 1934-1936 Senate Special Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry.\textsuperscript{109} Perhaps better known as the Nye Committee for its chair, Senator Gerald Nye, the Senate inquiry began largely at the instigation of anti-war groups such as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Hardly coincidental, the Nye Committee appointed as lead investigator Stephen Raushenbush, son of eminent social gospel modernist Walter Rauschenbusch. After carefully researching the intimate connections between political actors, military officials, the armaments industry, and war profits, the committee concluded that only a strict policy of neutrality in any and all circumstances could stem the growing power of the political-military-industrial system’s elites. The Nye Committee’s findings and proposals temporarily gained considerable cultural traction and led to the passage of U.S. neutrality legislation between 1935 and 1937. The modernist Federal Council of Churches, for instance, denounced aid to “all belligerents in any conflict that might arise in the future.”\textsuperscript{110}

Although significant grassroots support existed for the Nye Committee and official neutrality, many Americans resisted the committee’s efforts to curtail neighborly internationalism. For example, just after the Senate appointed the committee, Roosevelt acknowledged that “the private and uncontrolled manufacture of arms and munitions and the traffic therein has become a serious source of international discord and strife.” But Roosevelt also warned, “It is not possible, however, effectively to control such an evil by the isolated action of any one country. The enlightened opinion of the world has long
realized that this is a field in which international action is necessary.” Removing the historically rooted evils underlying the world’s troubles required “the concerted actions of the peoples of all nations.”

Far from rendering the United States simply isolationist, staging the good neighbor identity narrative centered on avoiding conflict while pursuing internationalist policies. Peace advocacy according to the Federal Council of Churches involved summoning “all mankind to the larger fellowship of the Kingdom of God.”112 As the Nye Committee met its demise in 1936, the National Committee for Religion and Welfare Recovery envisioned the future as a “Great Rediscovery” of the ideal that “love is better than hate” and “forgiveness nobler than revenge.”113 According to the Christian Century, while Americans rightfully refrained from any participation in international conflict, the United States “can and should face with all the other nations the economic and cultural causes which create war.”

The United States staged the good neighbor narrative through foreign policies discursively centered on non-intervention, international negotiation, and the advocacy of disarmament well into the latter 1930s. Ironically, these policies resulted in continual diplomatic intervention aimed at affirming others as neighbors. For example, Washington pressured Latin American nations in 1935-1936 for a Pan-American conference “to consider the best and most practical methods of perfecting peace machinery.”115 Despite initial resistance by several nations, the United States secured a meeting for late 1936 at Buenos Aires, Argentina.116 “Only since yesterday . . . the Hemisphere has become a vast neighborhood,” Roosevelt exulted. “It is essential that this condition be made
The hemispheric conference seemed so critical that Roosevelt himself ventured off to the Argentinean capital to participate in the opening ceremonies.

Roosevelt’s speech to open the Buenos Aires conference reflected the religious cultural context driving foreign policy creation. Laden with social gospel modernism’s hope for the Kingdom of God on earth, Roosevelt urged multilateral disarmament and the removal of trade barriers. He argued that these policies would lead to peace among all nations. Such “peace comes from the spirit, and must be grounded in faith,” he contended, the “faith of the Western World” in democracy, constitutional government, and freedom of speech. Testifying to his own religious subjectivity Roosevelt added, “This faith of the Western World will not be complete if we fail to affirm our faith in God.” According to Josephus Daniels, the “best part” of Buenos Aires was Roosevelt’s exhortation to “affirm our faith in God.”

Although the conference achieved little more than a tentative non-intervention agreement, in the imaginary of U.S. identity Buenos Aires reaffirmed the United States as a good neighbor, occluding the entrenchment of fully armed military dictatorships throughout the hemisphere. “The prestige of the United States has never been so high among its 20 sister American republics as at present,” Leland Stowe of the New York Herald Tribune pronounced. Upon returning from Buenos Aires in mid December Roosevelt asserted, “The Conference should be an inspiration to all the peoples of the Americas.” “Good neighbors we are; good neighbors we shall remain,” Roosevelt insisted. “Such an example cannot but have a wholesome effect upon the rest of the world.” According to Sumner Welles, Americans “hold out to a darkened world the
beacon of a just and permanent peace” in the hope that “the example which we have consecrated here [will] be of avail throughout the world.”123

Non-intervention persisted as a leading signifier of the American “beacon” in a “darkened world.” After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, for instance, the United States declared complete neutrality. Some scholars argue that U.S. non-intervention aided fascist General Francisco Franco and therefore amounted to intervention.124 But as this chapter has argued, all identity formations are “interventionist” by virtue of the inherent self/other binary whose representational forms condition relations of power. That is, it is in and through representational forms that social groups variously exercise physical, economic, cultural, and other forms of hegemony and resistance. The question is, what kind of self did U.S. non-intervention in Spain intend, and what were the ramifications of the representational forms deployed in the constitution of the self?

Like the Caribbean nations, central American countries, the Soviet Union, Mexico, and others, Spain offered a site in which U.S. foreign policy (re)produced America. Upon the civil war’s eruption the State Department cabled U.S. consulates in Spain advising that “in conformity with its well-established policy of non-interference with internal affairs in other countries” the United States would “scrupulously refrain from any interference.” “We believe that American citizens, both at home and abroad, are patriotically observing this well-recognized American policy,” the Department added.125 In essence, the telegram linked “patriotism,” “citizens,” and “policy” together through its deployment of the cultural marker “American.” In stressing the “established” nature of “non-interference with internal affairs in other countries,” the message provided the
symbolic signification that constituted “America” through the good neighbor narrative in the imaginary of U.S. identity.

Refusing to sell armaments to either side flowed from the overriding, identity-driven concern to remain neutral. When the Glenn L. Martin Company asked the State Department whether it could proceed with the sale of eight bombers to the Spanish government, the Department indicated that such activity would be contrary to the “well-recognized American policy” of non-intervention.126 “It is the duty of the United States to maintain a zone of sanity in a world going mad by keeping out of war of any description in any place,” the Christian Century asserted.127 Echoing the Century, Roosevelt asseverated that “by permitting unchecked the flow of arms to one party in the conflict” the United States “would be deliberately . . . aggravating those disagreements among the European nations which are a constant menace to the peace of the world.”128

In a world of historical sin, sin could not be overcome by participating in the very evils it produced; the good neighbor’s role was exemplary not judicial. Of course, the discursively framed non-intervention policy abetted Franco’s efforts to achieve authoritarian power, but the outcome of a policy should not be confused with its origins. As we shall see in the next chapter, when the narrative of U.S. identity began to shift, so too did American policy toward Spain. As Roosevelt discussed with Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King, “Collective security should not be identified with reliance upon force.” Rather, “social justice” might be reached through the “cooperative effort of the nations of the world to remove the evils . . . of national discontent, world unrest, and international strife.”129 Refusing to exacerbate the sin of war, the United States refused to intervene militarily when Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo massacred as many as
25,000 Haitians in 1937. Helping its needy Caribbean neighbors in this instance involved little more than tentatively guiding a monetary settlement between Haiti and the Dominican Republic that left Trujillo’s power undiminished.\textsuperscript{130} 

Portents of war in Asia and Europe compounded with the eruptions of violence in Spain and the Caribbean scarcely gave pause to the American vision of a world neighborhood. “I am . . . deeply disappointed . . . with the trends of world affairs during the past few years,” Roosevelt admitted in 1937. But, he continued, “I still believe in the eventual effectiveness of preaching and preaching again. That is the method I have used in our Latin American relationships and it seems to have succeeded.”\textsuperscript{131} With civil war raging in Spain, the State Department informed Italy and Japan that the “entire program promulgated at Buenos Aries contains a reasonable, practical and most urgent set of principles and policies” for solving the world’s most serious problems. Hull specifically encouraged the Japanese for a joint implementation of “the basic program proclaimed at Buenos Aires.” The United States, he insisted, advocated “faithful observance of international agreements” and would “avoid entering into alliances” because it desired a “cooperative effort by peaceful and practical means” to solve the world’s ills.\textsuperscript{132} 

By mid 1937, the idea that the “cooperative program” agreed upon in the Western Hemisphere could be “extended to all of the nations of the world” became entrenched. Roosevelt, for instance, believed that “a dramatic statement” introducing a global program based on the Buenos Aires platform would “lead the world on the upward path.”\textsuperscript{133} Such pronouncements elided Buenos Aires’s minimal accomplishments, ensured the conference continued to inscribe the good neighbor image, and ignored that
Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Uruguay vociferously resisted U.S. pressure throughout most of the meeting.

Roosevelt’s infamous “quarantine speech” in early October 1937 reified religious modernist discourses of cooperation and consultation. He exhorted nations “who wish to live in peace and amity with their neighbors” to “work together for the triumph of law and moral principles” so that there could be “a return to a belief in the pledged word.” Tellingly, Roosevelt asserted that it was “a matter of vital interest and concern to the people of the United States that the sanctity of international treaties and the maintenance of international morality be restored.” Echoing Rauschenbusch’s description of historical sin, Roosevelt warned that “the epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading.” Like Rauschenbusch, Roosevelt suggested that “when an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients.” The President added that undoubtedly “there will be a growing response to the ideal that . . . the most practical and most peaceful thing to do in the long run is to ‘quarantine’” the few non-neighborly nations. He believed that such a policy was “more Christian . . . than the previous suggestions that the rest of the world should go to war with them.”

Roosevelt disparaged accusations that a quarantine entailed economic sanctions and committed the United States to participation at the Nine Power Treaty conference in Brussels, Belgium in November, 1937. Likely under American pressure in the wake of the quarantine speech, the United Nations had recommended a meeting of the Nine Power Treaty signatories to address Japanese aggression in northern China. Roosevelt declared that U.S. participation at the upcoming Brussels conference represented “an example of one of the possible paths to follow” in the search for peace. The Federal
Council of Churches concurred, arguing that the United States had a “moral responsibility” as “a member of the society of nations to cooperate with other nations to establish and maintain international morality and peace” without resort to “concerted military action.”

“The summoning of the conference was obviously the proper next step” since “consultation is the antithesis of war,” the *Christian Century* proclaimed. U.S. policy at Brussels, then, emerged out of a religious modernist culture that absconded force and insisted on consultation as the “prophylactic against war.”

Roosevelt’s private instructions to head of the U.S. delegation Norman Davis insisted that all attempts to resolve the Sino-Japanese conflict must rest in mediation. If Japan refused international pressure to attend the conference, the United States hoped “all countries [that] wished to stop this war” could form a neutral bloc to “ostracize Japan.”

Reminiscent of Hocking’s religious modernist vision of international relations, Roosevelt also reminded Davis that it was crucial to “accept the general principle that a small nation has just as much right as a big nation.” The President especially warned him to refrain from aligning too closely with Great Britain since any “action should represent, first, the substantial unanimous opinion of the nations meeting at Brussels, and later the substantial unanimous opinion of the overwhelming majority of all nations.” While Roosevelt recognized that the United States had a “community of interest” with Britain, he wanted an “independent cooperation [with] neither one trying to force the other into something.”

As a good neighbor in a global community, the United States would not be drawn into an exclusivist and entangling alliance. When British foreign secretary Anthony Eden requested preliminary Anglo-American talks in London, Davis turned him down.
immediately. He informed Eden that the conference should bring about peace by consultation. Eden countered that the United States and Britain “should not waste too much time” over the attempt at mediation. Davis replied bitterly that Americans believed Britain “was trying to maneuver [the U.S.] into ‘pulling her chestnuts out of the fire for her.’” At the conference itself, the United States urged a diplomatic solution to the Sino-Japanese crisis and Davis steadfastly pursued “a constructive effort directed toward the creation of conditions which will make unthinkable the use of armed force.”

The problem, of course, was that there were few neighbors to be found. Japan refused to attend the conference while other nations barely “concealed their disappointment” that the United States refused to countenance a policy of intervention. For example, “doubtful” of the conference’s ability to achieve a peaceful resolution, France suggested a Franco-Anglo-American alliance. Meanwhile, Britain pressed for economic intervention and Russian representative Maxim Litvinov wondered why the conference even bothered to invite the Soviet Union. In the face of widespread criticism, Davis ardently maintained that the United States could not align itself with “any of the groups now forming in the world.” Rather, the United States simply “wishes to join” in a “concerted and effective effort to bring about” peace.

U.S. efforts ground to a halt as the neighborhood failed to materialize. There “was less appreciation than we had hoped for of the larger issues involved and a decided tendency to push” the United States out front, Davis lamented. Hull ordered Davis to adjourn the conference by pressuring the other delegations to adopt a resolution professing an unconditional belief in the sanctity of treaties. The cultural logic of the good neighbor narrative allowed Americans to overlook that the United States alone had
any interest in such a resolution and that other nations passed it out of a desire to end the conference more than anything else. Even as the rape of Nanking unfolded in central China, Brussels ended in abysmal failure, and Eden continued to press for bilateral intervention, Davis somehow remained confident that the United States had offered a neighborly example. “There has developed much more of a spirit of coherence and cooperation than I expected,” he wrote.145

World events became more difficult to reconcile with the good neighbor identity narrative after Brussels, but the good neighbor narrative continued to limn foreign policy options. On December 12, 1937 Japanese bombers attacked British and American ships on the Yangtze River in central China, sinking the U.S.S Panay and destroying three American oil tankers. Although reports immediately clarified that the attack had been planned and that an armed Japanese patrol sought to kill any survivors, the United States simply requested that the Japanese pay an indemnity, issue an official apology, and ensure. Even the suggestions of seizing Japan’s U.S. assets and employing the quarantine strategy remained framed as legitimate community endeavors.146 Roosevelt, for instance, stressed that any quarantine policy required the cooperation of countries like the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, France, and the Latin American Republics among others. Furthermore, according to Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Roosevelt intended the “quarantine” to keep the United States “quarantined against a war” rather than as the act of a belligerence.147

The U.S. response to the Japanese attack manifested the persistence of religious modernism as the reflexive framework of U.S. foreign policy creation. On December 24, Japan admitted responsibility, offered indemnities, conveyed regret, and promised to
punish the responsible officers. The door effectively closed on any further response from the United States. To U.S. Ambassador to Japan Joseph Grew, the conclusion of the crisis demonstrated “the wisdom and good sense of two governments who refused to be stampeded into potential war.” Of course, “in an earlier era, the sinking of the Panay would have raised an unshirted outcry for retaliation,” historian David Kennedy explains. But in 1937, the staging of the good neighbor narrative precluded any such outcry. As Harper’s concluded, “We are left then with no alternative but to wait and hope, letting the war take its course, in apparent callousness but actually only with the kind of callousness that decrees isolation for a plague victim, to die if necessary, lest others be fatally inflicted.”

Confronted by an economic Depression that belied the sense of chosenness at the core of the imagined community, Americans reinvigorated their mission-oriented identity through a foreign policy discursively predicated on building an international utopia of peace, something approximating the Kingdom of God. Persistent cultural enthusiasm for non-intervention, international cooperation, and disarmament testified to the hegemony of religious modernism in the articulation of a reconcilable identity narrative. As Hocking and others argued, Americans needed to collectively live out the social gospel encompassed in the moral teachings of a historical Jesus as they led the world on the path to eliminating historically rooted evils such as war.

Of course, the religious modernist good neighbor identity narrative did not emerge uncontested, as became particularly evident in the persistent undercurrent of anti-communism throughout the decade. As with the religious modernist triumph in U.S. Mexican policy, however, the good neighbor narrative kept anti-communist discourse on
the cultural margins. For example, ardent anti-communists such as fundamentalist J. Gresham Machen remained peripheral figures in American religion and culture while “red-baiter” Gerald Winrod failed terrifically in his 1938 bid to become a United States senator. Finally, in perhaps one of the most conspicuous examples of the general repudiation of anti-communism, Americans roundly rejected Father Coughlin’s Union Party in 1936, rendering Coughlin all but a fringe figure for the rest of the decade. While anti-communism offered some relief from the anxiety over American identity during the 1930s, it never gained the cultural traction attained by religious modernist good neighbor discourse.

Perhaps somewhat ironically, the good neighbor identity narrative obscured the entrenchment of U.S. hegemony throughout the western hemisphere. By envisaging “America” through religious modernist language centered on building the Kingdom of God, Americans called into being a world of neighbors intrinsically impoverished and in need of U.S. beneficence. From this implicit position of cultural superiority, the United States “legitimately” pressured the rest of the hemisphere into agreements on U.S. initiatives while rarely consenting to, let alone acknowledging, the proposals of others. At the same time, U.S. economic policies designed to illustrate American neighborliness increasingly relegated Latin American nations to mono-culture while U.S. goods flooded their markets. Finally, cultural “exchange,” such as the student exchange program agreed upon at Buenos Aires, proved to be one-sided as the U.S. consistently exported its values and ideals to “needy” neighbors.

Religious modernist discourse also conditioned a U.S. approach to the world that ignored persecution, dictatorship, and exploitation. The United States pursued foreign
policies that overlooked the entrenchment of dictatorship throughout Latin America, aided Franco’s fascists in coming to power in Spain, remained inert during widespread persecution of Jews in the German Reich, ignored the suppression of democracy in India by Britain and in China by Chiang Kai-shek, and disregarded the Russian tragedy of Stalin’s Five Year Plan. None of this is meant to suggest the alternative of “intervention.” Rather, it discloses that U.S. foreign policy’s role in (re)producing the imagined community produces international truth effects that cannot be ignored.

The rupture of the good neighbor narrative in the late 1930s and the early 1940s produced the cultural space in which neo-orthodox Christian realism and revivalist fundamentalism could challenge the tenets of Protestant liberalism in both religious culture and in the reinvigoration of the imagined community. As we shall see, these seismic shifts in negotiations over U.S. identity by competing religious subjectivities had profound implications for the construction of U.S. foreign relations.

Notes

1 Colossians 3.12-14, New International Version.


5 Scholar of religion William Hutchison argues that “the modernist impulse . . . constituted . . . the single most important . . . [force] . . . informing and shaping Protestant liberalism over a period of about 120 years.” I am using “religious modernism” in the sense that during the 1930s it best describes the religious subjectivity predicated on theological referents that came to dominate the cultural narrative depicting the United States as a good neighbor in the world. For more on modernism in Protestant liberalism see William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).


Hocking, *Rethinking Missions*, 33-34. To be sure, Hocking’s ideas had been anticipated by the figures such as Daniel Johnson Fleming. I am arguing that the sudden, widespread acceptance of religious modernist ideas and the relative ease with which Protestant liberalism dismissed Christian fundamentalist objections during the 1930s reflected the hegemony of religious modernist discourse in the identity narrative of the imagined community. For more on the controversy over the Layman’s Report see William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 146-175.


solidarity of nations” through the “moral simplification which comes when the rays of sympathy rebound from a sharply delimited shell and one decisively says, “This is friend; this is enemy.”” It was clear to him that “when the nation has something to do, visible, immediate, clear, vast, exciting, it shows to the full how, like religion, it can cross the lines of class, creed, wealth, race, party.” More critically, Hocking recognized that nations needed other nations in order to achieve consciousness of their own existence: “the definiteness of the “others” is a necessary factor in the definiteness of the “self.” One needs one’s opponent,” Hocking argued, “in order to be quite clear what sort one’s self is: there is a fundamental craving for reality which cannot be satisfied in merely agreeing with one’s environment: it requires to know that one differs, and that the difference counts.” In large measure, modernity had therefore brought about a world filled with “contrasting national egos.” The “interplay” of these resulted in wars, domestic patriotism, dictatorship, and tyranny; it had literally “poisoned” any potential international cooperation.


25 Economic Extracts: Hocking, W.E., Alexander Sachs Papers, Box 272, FDRL; Alexander Sachs to William Ernest Hocking, May 6, 1935, Alexander Sachs Papers, Box 34, FDRL.


27 Henry Wallace to Professor Nicholas Roerich, June 17, 1933, Official File (hereafter cited as: OF) 723, FDRL.

28 Henry Wallace to Roosevelt, November 1933, OF 723, FDRL (emphasis added).

29 Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933, PPA, 2: 12-14.


31 Stimson quoted in Hodgson, The Colonel, 120.


Stimson quoted in Schmitz, *Thank God They’re On Our Side*, 55.


Thanksgiving Day Address at Union Evangelical Church, Mexico City, by Josephus Daniels, November 30, 1933, President’s Secretary’s File (hereafter cited as : PSF) Diplomatic File: Mexico, Box 43, FDRL.

Roosevelt to Governor I.C. Blackwood, April 12, 1933, *FDRFA*, 1: 51.


Schmitz, *Thank God They’re On Our Side*, 57-72; Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles to Roosevelt, January 8, 1934, *FRUS, 1934*, 5: 219.

Quoted in Norman E. Saul, *Friends or Foes?: The United States and Soviet Russia, 1921-1941* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2006), 260.

Stimson quoted in Mary E. Glantz, *FDR and the Soviet Union: The President’s Battles over Foreign Policy* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 17-18.

Roosevelt to Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, February 20, 1933, *FDRFA*, 1: 16.


Moley quoted in Morgan, *Reds*, 131.


Both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt were members of the National Civic Foundation. They began objecting to the Foundation’s anti-communist campaign in the late 1920s. See Morgan, *Reds*, 121-122.


62 Christmas Greeting to the Nation, December 24, 1933, PPA, 2: 542-543.


64 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1999), 181.

65 Convention on Rights and Duties of States, December 26, 1933, FRUS, 1933, 4: 214-218; Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt, 83; Gellman, Good Neighbor Diplomacy, 25. On U.S. paternalism in Latin America see, for example, Renda, Taking Haiti, 89-130.


67 Schmitz, Thank God They’re On Our Side, 75-83.

68 Speech at Cartagena, Colombia, July 10, 1934, PPA, 3: 346-348.

69 Presidential Statement, April 15, 1935, PPA, 4: 121 (emphasis added).

70 Address to Committee from the National Student Federation, November 11, 1935, PPA, 4: 445-449.


72 James Bullitt and American Legion quoted in “Pretty Fat Turkey,” Time, November 27, 1933.


74 As Matthew Redinger argues, “Catholics in the United States viewed the revolutionary anticlerical agenda as a threat to something at their very soul - their Catholicity. They responded to this challenge by standing up for what they recognized as a truth that lay at the core of their identity as American Catholics, the right to worship freely, as an


76 Josephus Daniels to Cordell Hull, November 5, 1934, PSF Diplomatic File: Mexico, Box 43, FDRL.

77 Reverend Joseph A. Maloney, Dean of St. Joseph’s College, to Roosevelt, November 28, 1934, OF 146a, FDRL.


79 Memo to Roosevelt from Voluntary Congressional Sub-committee, July 16, 1935, OF 146a, FDRL.

80 Martin H. Carmody to Roosevelt, January 13, 1935, OF 28, FDRL.

81 Martin Carmody to Roosevelt, May 3, 1935, OF 28, FDRL.

82 Martin Carmody to Roosevelt, May 3, 1935, OF 28, FDRL.

83 Reverend Charles Macfarland to Roosevelt, July 18, 1935, OF 146a, FDRL.

84 Cordell Hull to the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, February 12, 1935; Cordell Hull to Senator William McAdoo, February 12, 1935; Cordell Hull to Representative Ernest Lundeen, March 16, 1935; Cordell Hull to Senator Lewis Schwellenbach, March 22, 1935; Cordell Hull to Governor Benjamin Moeur, March 26, 1935; Cordell Hull to Representative Joseph Monaghan, June 8, 1935; Cordell Hull to the Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, June 28, 1935; all in *FRUS, 1935*, 4: 789-803.

85 Roosevelt to Martin Carmody, November 13, 1935, OF 28, FDRL.

Reverend G. A. McDonald to Roosevelt, December 13, 1935, OF 146a, FDRL; Reverend G. A. McDonald to Roosevelt, December 14, 1935, OF 146a, FDRL; Sumner Welles to Marvin McIntyre, January 9, 1936, OF 146a, FDRL.

Martin Carmody to Roosevelt, December 16, 1935, OF 28, FDRL; Sumner Welles to Roosevelt, December 21, 1935, OF 28, FDRL; Resolutions Adopted by the San Salvador Council of the Knights of Columbus at New Haven Connecticut, March 2, 1936, OF 146a, FDRL; James Farley, Democratic National Committee, to Marvin McIntyre, March 25, 1936, OF 146a, FDRL. See also Josephus Daniels to Roosevelt, February 26, 1936, PSF Diplomatic File, Mexico, Box 43, FDRL; Cyrille Knue to Roosevelt, February 28, 1936, OF 146a, FDRL.

Sumner Welles to Roosevelt, June 17, 1936, PSF Diplomatic File: Mexico, Box 43, FDRL.

Sumner Welles to Roosevelt, June 25, 1935, PSF Diplomatic File: Mexico, Box 43, FDRL; Dallek, _Franklin D. Roosevelt_, 124.

William Sands to Marvin McIntyre, July 25, 1935, OF 146a, FDRL; Josephus Daniels to Roosevelt, August 2, 1935, PSF Diplomatic File: Mexico, Box 43, FDRL.

Francis Durbin to Roosevelt, November 18, 1935, OF 28, FDRL.

Josephus Daniels to Roosevelt, April 22, 1936, PSF Diplomatic File: Mexico, Box 43, FDRL.


John Cowles to Roosevelt, October 28, 1935, OF 28, FDRL.

Federation of Lutheran Laymen of New York to Roosevelt, October 29, 1935, OF 28, FDRL.


Josephus Daniels to Roosevelt, November 18, 1935, PSF Diplomatic File: Mexico, Box 43, FDRL.

Roosevelt to the Right Reverend George Craig Stewart, Bishop of Chicago, September 12, 1936, _FDRFA_, 3: 422-423; Speech by Roosevelt at the San Diego


103 *Gabriel over the White House*, dir. Gregory LaCava, 86 minutes, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1933.


107 Homer Bone quoted in Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 95.


112 Albert Beaven, President, Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, to Roosevelt, April 14, 1934, PPF 1628, FDRL.

113 Pamphlet, “Mobilization of Spiritual Forces,” 1936, PPF 1685, FDRL.


136 Edgar DeWitt Jones and Others, to Roosevelt, October 9, 1937, PPF 1628, FDRL.


139 Memo of telephone conversation with Anthony Eden, October 13, 1937, Norman Davis Papers, Box 4, LOC.


141 Address delivered by Norman Davis, November 3, 1937, FRUS, Japan 1931-1941, 1: 404-408.

142 Moffat Diary, November 3, 1937, The Moffat Papers, 166. Norman Davis to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, November 7, 1937, Norman Davis Papers, Box 4, LOC; Memo of Conversation with Maxim Litvinov, November 8, 1937, Norman Davis Papers, Box 4, LOC; Harvey Diary, November 3, 1937, The Diplomatic Diaries, 55-56.

143 Memo of Press Conference held by Norman Davis, November 5, 1937, Norman Davis Papers, Box 5, LOC.

144 Norman Davis to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, November 6, 1937, Norman Davis Papers, Box 4, LOC.

145 Cordell Hull to Norman Davis, November, 12, 1937; Cordell Hull to Norman Davis, 7pm, November 15, 1937; Cordell Hull to Norman Davis, 9pm, November 15, 1937; Cordell Hull to Norman Davis, 5pm, November 16, 1937; Cordell Hull to Norman Davis, 9pm, November 16, 1937; Cordell Hull to Norman Davis, 7pm, November 17, 1937; Cordell Hull to Norman Davis, 9pm, November 17, 1937; all in FRUS, 1937, 4: 180-210; Norman Davis to William Phillips, November 17, 1937, Norman Davis Papers, Box 47, LOC.

Whereas anti-communism focused on discredited signifiers such as “economic individualist,” religious modernist language structured a cultural imaging of the United States that allowed Americans to reaffirm their destiny and mission central to their core national identity without requiring significations problematized by the Depression experience.

CHAPTER IV

“SIN HAS NO HISTORY”

The nation has chosen the hard way. It is the way of unimaginable cost and of
doubtful morality...Even now, the reproaches which we heap upon Japan for
opening fire before a declaration of war come back to mock us. History will
record that the United States was itself at that moment engaged in an undeclared
war.

- Charles Clayton Morrison, December 1941

The terms for peace which the American government made to Japan were only fair and
just - stop aggression. That, coupled with the premeditated treachery of the
Japanese attack upon the United States, only helps to clarify the air and show the
righteousness and justice of the cause of our country.

- Carl McIntire, December 1941

By the late 1930s, the gap between the good neighbor narrative on the one hand
and the American experience of the world on the other, combined with the ongoing
Depression, undermined the cultural power of religious modernism. Neo-orthodox
Christian realist discourse emerged amid renewed cultural anxiety over “American”
identity. Through the language and imagery of Christian realism, the United States
reaffirmed its divine chosenness by imagining the world in an international hierarchy of
righteous and unrighteous nations, a mental geography ordering nations in a binary of
good and evil. By associating themselves with “righteous” nations and differentiating
themselves from “evil” ones, Americans reinvigorated the sense of mission central to
manifest destiny.
This chapter traces the gradual rupture of the religious modernist good neighbor narrative and its gradual replacement by a righteous nation identity narrative. It briefly sketches the theological “referents” of neo-orthodox realism, arguing that realist discourse became culturally resonant only in so far as it alleviated cultural anxiety over national identity. The hegemony of the righteous nation narrative by the early 1940s is illustrated in the shifting U.S. approach to Latin America, the victory of “interventionists” over “anti-interventionists,” and U.S. policy toward Europe and Asia in the years prior to Pearl Harbor. The U.S. road to intervention in World War II consequently emerges as part of the reinvigoration of American identity rather than simply the reasonable response to objective international threats.

Throughout 1938 international events resisted incorporation into the imaginary of U.S. identity, triggering the gradual decline of religious modernism even as U.S. foreign policy continued to stage the good neighbor image. Already in 1937, the poor results of the Brussels conference as well as the sinking of the U.S.S. *Panay* anticipated the burgeoning gap between religious modernist discourse and U.S. experiences in the world. Quite simply, global affairs seemed increasingly difficult to interpret through the frames of the good neighbor narrative.

In January 1938, the religious modernist identity narrative drove the U.S. attempt to generate an international conference on principles to govern international relations, limitations on armaments, equal access to raw materials, and principles to govern wartime relations. Dubbed the “Roosevelt Initiative,” the plan envisioned a group of “minor powers” negotiating an agreement that the other nations of the world would later ratify. Already demonstrating unease over the international neighbourhood, the initiative
argued that if Germany and Italy refused to ratify, the United States “would at least have obtained the support of all governments . . . other than those inseparably linked to the Berlin-Rome Axis” for the implementation of “practical recommendations which would insure world peace.” Like the “quarantine” plan announced at Chicago and the strategy pursued at Brussels, U.S. policy imagined the world as a community that functioned like a neighbourhood.³

Before Germany or Italy even considered the Roosevelt Initiative, Britain’s preliminary response contradicted the neighborhood U.S. foreign policy reflexively inscribed. British Ambassador Ronald Lindsay intuitively perceived the potential for catastrophe. He cautioned the British Foreign Office that “destructive criticisms, reservations or attempts to define issues more clearly can only accomplish very little . . . while they will create a disproportionately bad impression.”⁴ Lindsay’s warning indicates that the significance of the initiative did not lie in the issues themselves, but rather centered on the “impression” it created. That is, the initiative attempted to “speak” the symbolic markers (the neighbor “other”) through which Americans understood themselves. But as Lindsay’s caution demonstrates, the good neighbor narrative skirted perilously close to no longer affirming the imagined community and Britain’s response could serve to affirm or deny it in ways that reactions by others such as the Latin American nations or Japan could not.

Ignoring Lindsay’s warning, the British replied that the U.S. proposal directly countered Britain’s own current foreign policy efforts. Viewing the plan as “wooly and dangerous,”⁵ British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain urged Roosevelt to refrain from pursuing it. Chamberlain contended the proposal threatened to damage Britain’s ongoing
negotiations with Germany and Italy that were “specific and concrete in character.”
Perhaps more importantly, Chamberlain hinted that these negotiations centered on
Britain’s decision to officially recognize Italy’s conquest of Ethiopia.5

Britain’s response immediately contradicted the U.S. conjured world of
neighbors. Chamberlain’s reply felt like “a douche of cold water,” Under Secretary of
State Sumner Welles declared. Britain’s plan to recognize Italy’s conquest of Ethiopia
appeared particularly perplexing. Although, as discussed in the last chapter, the United
States abandoned the policy of non-recognition in cases of indigenous upheaval,
recognizing an imperial conquest was altogether a different matter. In a reply to
Chamberlain, Roosevelt harshly criticized British policy. “At a moment when respect for
treaty obligations would seem to be of such vital importance in international relations,”
he pronounced, recognition of Italy’s conquest “would have a serious effect upon public
opinion in this country.” Of course, Roosevelt’s anger had little to do with Ethiopia, or,
for that matter, the plight of the Ethiopians. Rather, according to Roosevelt, “public
opinion in the United States will only support . . . measures of pacific cooperation.”6 In
essence, the strategic and geopolitical results of policy paled in comparison to the validity
of the national image that those policies intended to stage.

In the aftermath of Britain’s decision to recognize Italy’s imperial conquest, the
gradual rupture of the good neighbor narrative became more evident. Without neighbors,
or perhaps more to the point, without a neighborhood, the difficulty of imagining the
nation as a good neighbor increased. As Joseph Kennedy noted in February, Roosevelt
“considered the situation too uncertain for the United States to do anything but mark
time.”7 To be sure, the “situation” was not uncertain from a geopolitical point of view - it
was fairly clear that Britain would recognize Ethiopia’s subjugation and would negotiate bilaterally with Germany; rather, the constitution of U.S. national identity through the discourse of social gospel neighborism seemed increasingly less viable resulting in a feeling of uncertainty.

Far from dissolving instantaneously, religious modernist discourse continued to drive the U.S. approach to the world. Even as Britain rejected the U.S. call for an international conference, Roosevelt declared that “in a world perplexed by doubt and fear and uncertainty, there is need for a return to religion, religion as exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount.” In April 1938, the President again hoped to “eliminate all element of force or coercion” in international relations, pondering what his internationalist friend Arthur Sweetser called a “kind of Quaker non-intercourse.” Americans required a greater “consciousness of the fact that in the highest and the noblest sense we are our brother’s keeper,” Roosevelt asserted.8

U.S. reaction to the persecution of the Jews reveals how the good neighbor identity narrative continued to dominate foreign policy thinking. Since overlooking German violence against the Jews at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Americans had grown uncomfortable with stories of persecution and tragedy. Philosopher John Dewey, for instance, even encouraged Roosevelt to “reestablish” the United States “as an asylum for political and religious refugees.” Between 1936 and 1938, widespread criticism of the State Department’s stingy visa granting process led to a slight reduction in red tape and tripled the number of German and Austrian Jews entering the United States. Nevertheless, even in 1938 the 17,686 German and Austrian Jews granted visas fell
drastically short of the over 27,000 available. Only in 1939 would all of the over 27,000 quota spots be filled.  

In 1938, the persecution of the Jews offered the cultural space in which Americans inscribed their neighborly role in a world community. Although the German annexation of Austria in March produced a new wave of anti-Semitic violence, rather than expanding visa quotas, the United States called an international conference to discuss Jewish emigration from the Nazi Reich. Nicknamed the Evian conference after its location at Evian-des-Baines, France, the gathering seemingly signaled the long-awaited arrival of international cooperation. Consequently, for U.S. policy the actual plight of the Jews mattered less than keeping the conference in session. For example, the United States precluded the possibility of aiding the Jews almost immediately by declaring that refugee discussion could only take place “within the existing immigration laws” of the participating countries. As for the Committee on Jewish emigration, the United States refused “to interject into its considerations such political issues as are involved” with discussion of Palestine. This policy did not flow from concern for Arabs certain to be displaced by Jewish immigrants or out of fear for refugee safety in the face of rising Arab resistance. Rather, the United States did not want to “stir up bitter passions and might even lead to a disruption of the Committee’s labors.” In essence, the cooperative existence of the committee mattered more than the actual outcome of the committee’s work.

Evian, like Brussels, failed to produce the cooperative internationalism Americans imagined their efforts might produce. Nation after nation offered reasons why they could not accept refugees. For example, countries from the preeminent neighborhood of South
America resisted in particular any resolutions “which might seem to be even in the smallest respect critical” of Germany. While a few countries like the Netherlands and Denmark offered some asylum, the conference accomplished little more than the creation of a standing inter-governmental committee on the refugee problem. As for the United States, it simply pledged to fill its unchanged visa quota of 27,370 during 1939.

To be sure, U.S. policy partly stemmed from racial discourses prevalent in the conception of U.S. national identity. For example, the Christian Century argued that although the United States could take in an “additional 100,000” refugees as a “good example to the rest of the world,” it was probably a bad idea because “groupings that are wholly irrelevant to our common national life persist among us with unexpected tenacity.” Similarly, Veterans of Foreign Wars and other “patriotic” organizations spoke out against any potential increase in immigration. According to one White House memo, the United States already had “an unknown, but very large burden of alien non-citizens,” the fact that it was “unknown” betraying the constructed nature of the racial claims.

But the lack of any real U.S. help for Europe Jews at Evian also resulted from the multilateral and cooperative objectives implicit in the good neighbor narrative. The United States refused to engage in anything it perceived as unilateral action or leadership. Days before the conference, Roosevelt reiterated that “the policy of the Good Neighbor . . . can never be merely unilateral.” Rather, “it is a bilateral, a multilateral, policy” and “the fair dealing which it implies must be reciprocated.” In “the principle of the good neighbor certain fundamental reciprocal obligations are involved,” Roosevelt declared. “Unless we can show our own people that the good neighbor policy is responded to wholeheartedly by our neighbors, it can hardly be assumed that” Americans “will favor
indefinitely a continuation . . . of any policy which proves to be one-sided,” Welles asserted. As at Brussels, at Evian the United States could not take leadership or even insist on a particular policy; policy remained tied to the narrative of the good neighbor and all its multilateral and cooperative emphases. In short, by simply calling the conference, Americans deemed themselves to have already done enough for the neighborhood; it was time for other neighbors to step up.

The good neighbor narrative remained palpable in September when word of imminent European war over Czechoslovakia first emerged. For example, the president of Columbia University begged Roosevelt “to issue . . . an earnest appeal” to the nations involved “to seek the solution of their present problems through conference and if necessary, through arbitration and judicial settlement.” The United States should “remind them that they are under treaty obligation to us to renounce war as an instrument of national policy.” Hardly idealism, isolationism, or appeasement, the appeal stemmed from the religious modernist frames though which Americans viewed the world. And in 1938 it was exactly what Roosevelt proceeded to do. In a letter to Hitler on September 27, Roosevelt suggested that “present negotiations still stand open” and “should the need for supplementing them become evident, nothing stands in the way of widening their scope into a conference of all the nations.” Moreover, “such a meeting to be held immediately . . . would offer the opportunity for this and correlated questions to be solved in a spirit of justice, of fair dealing, and, in all human probability, with greater permanence.” The United States “will assume no obligations in the conduct of the present negotiations” but “we recognize our responsibilities as a part of a world of neighbors,” Roosevelt wrote.
When Neville Chamberlain claimed “peace for our time,” some sense of immediate relief greeted Americans as the their neighborly role seemed affirmed. “The President can feel that God was on his side and that he was on God’s side,” Ambassador to Britain Joseph Kennedy claimed. The religious modernist Federal Council of Churches praised “the magnificent leadership which” Roosevelt “exercised in connection with the political crisis in Europe” as well as the “positive moral influence” given to the world by the United States. Roosevelt agreed with the Federal Council, telling them that “as the cornerstone of our foreign relations is the policy of the good neighbor it seems to me that the plain duty of Americans everywhere is to work for peace and to pray for peace.” Roosevelt assured Americans that there was no “problem in the world today - social, political or economic - that would not find happy solution if approached in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount.”

Although Munich initially affirmed America’s good neighbor status, American responses to Munich disclosed the burgeoning gap between the good neighbor narrative and the U.S. experience in the world. For example, commentator Oswald Garrison Villard deemed Munich the most “brilliant chapter in our diplomatic history,” congratulating Roosevelt on “the magnificent timing of your dispatches.” For Villard, the United States “was being a Good Neighbor in the highest degree.” But Villard simultaneously protested the “horrifying . . . dismemberment of Czechoslovakia” and “the violation of treaties by France and England.”

Villard’s disjointed interpretation of Munich signaled a wider rupture in the good neighbor narrative. Although several times over the following year the United States proposed negotiations on international disarmament and consultation, hopes for these
efforts increasingly dissipated. Indeed, Roosevelt viewed an October 1938 proposal merely as a test, arguing that “if Hitler means what he said . . . he will have to go along” with U.S. proposals. Of course, Hitler did not mean what he said, and Kristalnacht, the Polish invasion of Teschen, renewed rumblings of aggression by Hitler, and the moral ambiguity of Munich itself sank into the American conscious. “The first wave of relief at escape from the immediately threatened holocaust was swiftly past,” Harper’s noted.

Munich resulted in a major rethinking of U.S. foreign policy not because strategic, economic, or geopolitical considerations “forced” one, but because the narrative that foreign policy had attempted to inscribe as part of the cultural effort to reinvigorate U.S. national identity encountered what Jacques Lacan might call a traumatic resistance to the continual process of signification. In other words, it had become impossible to be a good neighbor when the lack of a neighborhood insisted.

As 1938 closed, a narrative of the United States as a righteous nation began to replace the narrative of the good neighbor, effectively inscribing a hierarchy of good and evil onto the international order. The discourse of just and unjust nations slowly but interminably replaced those of multilateralism, peaceful negotiation, disarmament and international equality. To be sure, these new binaries had appeared sporadically for more than a year. In the quarantine speech in October 1937 and its immediate aftermath, Roosevelt referred to “unjust aggressors.” In January 1938, Americans declared Britain’s recognition of Italy’s claim to Ethiopia a violation of “international law and morality.” After the German annexation of Austria, Sumner Welles informed the German Ambassador that “that it was impossible for the press or the people of the United States to take a dispassionate point of view” of Germany’s action.
Out of the language and imagery of moral and immoral nations, U.S. criticism of Munich flourished. William Bullitt, for example, claimed that during Munich “the French and British Governments . . . acted like little boys doing dirty things behind the barn.” Assistant Secretary of State George Messersmith intimated that there was no “difference between Hitler taking something which didn’t belong to him . . . and between Chamberlain and Daladier giving away something which wasn’t theirs.” And when Poland annexed Teschen, Roosevelt felt “reminded . . . of a fight between a very big boy and a very little boy. The big boy had the little boy on the ground and a third boy stepped forward and kicked the little boy in the stomach.”

“What in history has been more shameful than England and France conferring with Benêš at midnight in Prague while they played Judas to Czechoslovakia?” Senator William Borah wondered. “Let England go into the wilderness and perish with her sins.” As contemporary Frederick Louis Allen noted, Munich “shook American from end to end,” producing “a new attack of nerves.” The neighbors had all but disappeared.

In 1937-1938, the failure of the good neighbor narrative to reinvigorate American national identity coincided with an economic recession, a stark reminder of the Depression which had sundered the U.S. view of itself as God’s chosen nation. The economic downturn and the apparent repudiation of the good neighbor narrative resulted in a fresh wave of cultural anxiety, one that religious modernist discourses could not abate. Although the Federal Council of Churches insisted that “providentially our country is called to lead the world along the road . . . of sacrificial peace,” it was all too apparent that few were following.
As foreign policy and economic experiences clashed with U.S. identity as God’s chosen nation, anxiety washed over American society at the end of the 1930s. “The more we looked and the more we heard the gloomier we became,” New Deal advocate Sage Brush claimed. U.S. Ambassador to Italy William Philips bemoaned “the loss of our power to extend our moral influence.” Bishop Adna Wright Leonard of the Methodist Episcopal Church saw “on the horizon of our national life . . . the beginnings of fanatical interference with private life, the suppression of freedom of speech and of the press, and occasionally . . . the stifling of the freedom of the pulpit.” He averred that “we are, whether we desire it or not, in a struggle to be free.” In *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*, Frank Capra’s version of the average American, Jefferson Smith, fell onto his knees at the Lincoln Memorial crying out that there was nothing left to “believe in.”

Nothing better alleviated widespread cultural anxiety over national identity than the religiously structured narrative of the United States as a just, moral, and good nation standing up against evil enemies, a narrative made possible by the arrival of neo-orthodox Christian realism and its attendant discourse of “original sin.” Reinhold Niebuhr, once an ardent exponent of religious modernism and chair of the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, characterized the movement of American culture toward a “realist” worldview more so than any other theologian and intellectual. In 1932, Niebuhr reasoned in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* that perhaps all social collectives, all nations in fact, were inherently immoral. The only hope for justice seemed to rest in a collective attempt to mitigate collective immorality. Out of this seeming paradox Niebuhr tried to understand the source immorality. In 1935, his *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* rejected outright the social gospel of love proffered by religious
modernism and argued that national immorality resulted from the exaltation of the individual ego; sinful man seemed to be the reason why a nation might be immoral. In other words, Niebuhr refuted the religious modernist notion that sin resulted from social and historical causes. Instead, he contended that sin persisted as “an inevitable fact of human existence . . . true in every moment of existence;” it existed everywhere and remained unavoidable. Sin, Niebuhr argued, “has no history.”

For most of the 1930s the cultural hegemony of religious modernist discourse relegated Niebuhr’s views to the margins. But by the late 1930s, the persistence of the Depression and the failure of the international social gospel eroded the power of religious modernism to reinvigorate U.S. national identity. “Original sin” served to explain not only domestic turmoil, but the absence of a world neighborhood. In being “modernist,” religious modernism denied the divinity of Jesus, implicitly calling into question the role and existence of sin by removing its symbolic referent. In Christian theology, Jesus operates as a sign of love chiefly because he functions as a divine sacrifice to wash away humanity’s sin. Without the divine, there could be no sacrifice, and without the sacrifice there could be no original sin, only historical sin, sin that could be overcome by more love. As a result, when the Kingdom of God on earth failed to materialize - when the neighborhood that should have been was not - religious modernist discourse lost significant traction to language and imagery that better explained the American experience in light of the ongoing imperative to reinvigorate the nation’s divine mission.

Niebuhr’s own theological and intellectual development, understood within the broader culture, can thus be seen as part of the process to reaffirm American national identity. That is, rather than the “father of us all,” Niebuhr perhaps may better be
considered the “product of us all,” an articulation of the United States path to the reinvigoration of the imagined community. In 1938, his *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* argued that “Christianity’s view of history is tragic insofar as it recognizes evil” and is only “beyond tragedy” in recognizing that evil is “finally under the dominion of a good God.” A “good” God must of course know sin and this is where modernism had failed. According to Niebuhr’s brother H. Richard Niebuhr, religious modernism implied that “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” In a series of lectures in Scotland 1939, Niebuhr lambasted the modernist hope for the attainment of a perfect social order through the law of love. In front of crammed lecture halls at Edinburgh University in Scotland he systematically established the doctrine of original sin, later publishing these lectures as his monumental two volume work *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. In these lectures, Niebuhr argued that original sin resulted from man’s inability to live out the universal law of love, the very discursive regime that had long provided the signifying structure of the good neighbor identity narrative. Thus, Niebuhr both provided and typified the discursive logic that afforded Americans the opportunity to reinvigorate their identity through an alternative religious language.

The importance of “evil” and “original sin” lay in its discursive ability to reconcile the American experience with the ultimate claims of the imagined community’s “chosen nation” symbolizing structure by enabling a cultural transition to an alternative narrative of “America” in the “world.” None of this is to say that Niebuhr, his increasing number of adherents, or American culture more broadly, suddenly believed in the divinity
of Jesus Christ or the divine inspiration of the Bible. Rather, Niebuhr had drawn on Freud’s ego and Nietzsche’s will-to-power to rehabilitate sin without resurrecting Jesus.  

As Niebuhr had tentatively asserted as early as *Immoral Man and Immoral Society*, only the collective enforcement of justice could mitigate sin. Once emplotted as a cultural identity narrative, widespread anxiousness over U.S. national identity as God’s chosen nation could be understood and (temporarily) alleviated by locating and opposing “evil” others who inherently wanted to destroy what was “good,” that is, the United States. And so the rise to prominence of “Christian realism” is critical to understanding the wider cultural project of reinvigorating American national identity through religious language and imagery, a project that chiefly and logically occurred in “foreign” policy.

From out of this shifting cultural terrain, between Munich and Pearl Harbor the United States moved rapidly toward choosing war, undertaking the actions of a “just” nation in self-defense and as righteous nation against the “unjust.” Religion as a symbolic structure, already heavily implicated in American identity, became even more embedded in the cultural framing of foreign policy. In the wake of the Munich crisis, American culture rediscovered itself as God’s chosen nation, vigorously reasserting the divinely ordained nature of democracy, the right to private property, and freedom of religion. All of this involved a foreign policy conditioned by and framed within the religious discourse of Christian realism.

The righteous nation narrative did not simply dissipate good neighbor discourse, but subsumed it. “Storms from abroad directly challenge three institutions indispensable to Americans,” Roosevelt declared in his 1939 annual message. “The first is religion. It is the source of the other two - democracy and international good faith.” If “religion and
democracy have vanished, good faith and reason in international affairs have given way.”
For Roosevelt, “an ordering of society which relegates religion, democracy and good
faith among nations to the background” could “find no place within it for the ideals of the
Prince of Peace. The United States rejects such an ordering, and retains its ancient faith.”
Roosevelt’s speech did not articulate a specific geographic, political or economic threat.
What it did do was reassert the linkage between religion - the image of “the Prince of
Peace” - and “democracy.” Such a linkage reaffirmed that America “retains its ancient
faith,” a faith that could be readily known by looking at nations that did not share it.
These nations consequently became imagined as the “enemies of our faith.”

Roosevelt’s speech linked good neighbor imagery (“international good faith”) to
the hierarchy of evil that threatened religion and democracy. He resolved that “there
comes a time in the affairs of men when they must prepare to defend, not their homes
alone, but the tenets of faith and humanity on which their churches, their governments
and their very civilization are founded.” The defense of “tenets” spoke volumes in the
absence of any “real” threat, but inscribed “faith and humanity” as fundamental
characteristics of the righteous nation. In so doing, Roosevelt’s speech connected the
enemies of religion and democracy to the apparent inadequacy of the good neighbor
policy: “the defense of religion, of democracy and of good faith among nations is all the
same fight. To save one we must now make up our minds to save all.”

Cultural negotiation over American identity between religious modernism and
neo-orthodox realism became especially stark in the repositioning of Latin America in the
imaginary of U.S. identity. For example, during the Mexican “oil crisis” in 1938, U.S.
policy makers oscillated between good neighbor discourse and inscribing the righteous
nation narrative. The crisis erupted when British and American oil companies refused to comply with a Mexican Supreme Court ruling in favor of Mexican labor. The oil companies retaliated by withdrawing funds from Mexican banks, effectively destabilizing the Mexico’s economy. In response, Mexico’s President Lázaro Cárdenas expropriated the entire oil industry.47

The foreign policy options available to U.S. policy makers emerged from the identity frameworks competing in the broader culture. Some Americans, such as Governor of Texas James Allred or Wells Fargo’s Elmer Jones invoked racial discourses. Allred claimed that Americans needed to teach the Mexicans how to run things. Jones lobbied for “the conquest of Mexico and its annexation to the United States” which “in the long run will be the best thing for the Mexicans” since “Cárdenas is an Indian, a fanatical Indian, and hates white people.”48 To U.S. Ambassador Josephus Daniels, however, the “Mexican oil situation will test our Good Neighbor policy,” a proposition with which Roosevelt agreed. In the end, the State Department officially protested the Mexican appropriation and pressured the Treasury Department to halt the purchase of Mexican silver, restricting the flow of U.S. dollars into a country that the oil companies had already destabilized economically.49

Although on the surface the U.S. response to Mexico’s expropriation seems economically motivated, cultural undercurrents of identity conditioned economic the possibility of having economic objectives in Mexico at all. “The money involved is important” but not as “important as compared with something of deeper significance,” a White House Memorandum explained. The memo acknowledged that “profits” from the oil companies resulted in “raising the American standard of living, and enriching our
treasury,” but argued that the deeper problem was that Mexico might turn to “Japan, Italy and Germany who need these raw materials” and who would prevent U.S. access to them “except at prices” they “dictated.”

In light of the totalizing effect of the “History” of the Second World War, these claims to “strategic” reasons seem to make sense. But the memo makes no mention that Britain, in the middle of suppressing Ghandi’s non-violent attempt to achieve democracy in India, also needed the raw materials, and that Britain already controlled 70% of the Mexican oil industry. Furthermore, U.S. consumers already paid “dictated” prices, those “dictated” by the oil companies. But in the cultural logic of U.S. national identity, “Japan, Italy and Germany” functioned as unrighteous enemy others, and thus Americans could envision an economic and strategic “threat.” The potential threats of British control and/or corporate power remained unsignified.

Although the righteous nation narrative thus appeared palpable, that of the good neighbor lingered in the background throughout the crisis. In a statement on the expropriation, Secretary of State Hull angrily averred that “in accordance with every principle of international law . . . the properties of [U.S.] nationals so expropriated are required to be paid for by compensation representing fair, assured and effective value.” To Mexico, as Mexican Foreign Minister General Eduardo Hay indicated to Daniels, the U.S. position completely glossed over that the Mexican people themselves had never received “fair, assured, and effective value” for land taken from them under the Mexico’s reform policies. In the end, Roosevelt insisted that the United States act as good neighbor, pressed for a negotiated compensation settlement, and refused to sanction the oil companies’ request for “future value.” Thus, at least in the early stages of the crisis,
U.S. foreign policy reified good neighbor, effectively rejecting the interventionist position of the State Department and the oil companies.55

But the tension between the good neighbor narrative and the righteous nation image appeared plain in the wake of the immediate crisis. Hull decried Roosevelt’s approach, exclaiming that “I have to carry out international law.”56 In July, Hull told the Mexican Ambassador that Mexico’s efforts at “social betterment of the masses of its people” were “unrelated to and apart from the real issue” of Mexico’s failure to make “prompt payment of just compensation . . . in accordance with the universally recognized rules of law and equity.” Although Hull ostensibly based his reasoning entirely on the good neighbor policy, the cultural logic the righteous nation narrative surfaced decisively. The United States “cannot accept the idea” that Mexico help its own people “at the expense of our citizens, any more than we would feel justified in carrying forward our plans for our own social betterment at the expense of the citizens of Mexico,” Hull averred.57 Despite an earlier government acknowledgement that “the ownership, control and direction of the natural resources” of Mexico “are important to America because they bring not only these raw materials but the profits there from, raising the American standard of living, and enriching our treasury,” the language of U.S. foreign policy revealed that America felt justified.58 Presumably in defense of the good neighborism, the language of “law” emplotted the United States as a righteous nation, producing an international hierarchy of “just” and “unjust,” a hierarchy that ultimately generated “feeling” about national identity.

Latin America increasingly functioned as a cultural space to inscribe an international hierarchy of good and evil rather than as a geographical neighborhood
where U.S. policy could “be of avail throughout the world” through its “example.” After the Munich Crisis, the Pan American conference at Lima, Peru in December 1938 gained new significance, illustrating that the cultural bedrock of national identity delineated the purportedly objective security, economic, and strategic goals of U.S. policy toward Latin America. The “threat from Europe is a good deal closer to the United States and the American continent than it was before” and therefore the United States hoped to ensure “continental solidarity,” Roosevelt declared.

Despite Argentina’s resistance, the United States staged the international hierarchy of good and evil by pressuring the conference for an agreement to meet any “threat of force” from a “non-American government.” In a gross elision of dictator proliferation throughout the hemisphere, the declaration stated that “faithful to the democratic principles inherent in their institutional regime” the Governments of the American Republics would defend themselves “against foreign intervention.” The results achieved” make “it plain to the world at large that all of the twenty-one American nations are animated by the common desire . . . to assure the security of their independence, their democratic institutions, and their legitimate interests, but also to govern their conduct . . . on a basis of law and justice,” Roosevelt rejoiced. The good neighbor that had emerged from religious modernist discourse in the early 1930s slowly passed from view, subsumed and incorporated into an ultimately more lasting narrative of good and evil.

To be sure, for most Latin Americans, the often tragic implications of U.S. identity staging remained, regardless of the shifting religious discursive regimes structuring it. The repositioning of Latin America as a cultural ground for imaging a
hierarchy of good and evil simply resulted in the reinforcement of dictatorships with U.S. military and economic aid, further stultifying any hope for independence or political democracy. But the effect of foreign policy paled in comparison to its performative function; the United States had garnered the agreement of twenty other nations in the hemisphere that democracy was under “foreign threat” and had established itself as a righteous defender against that threat. In essence, Americans had embarked on a mission that reaffirmed their existence as God’s chosen nation.

The struggle between anti-interventionists and interventionists in the years 1939-1941 reflected the cultural migration away from the ordering structures of religious modernism toward those of Christian realism. For example, seemingly torn between two images of the United States, Roosevelt simultaneously desired to righteously send weapons to the Loyalists in Spain and neighborly press for a negotiated compromise. Roosevelt’s oscillation did not simply emerge as part of seer-like efforts at “educating” the isolationists or his own preference for appeasement or political ineptitude. Rather Roosevelt’s indecision illustrated that his own sense of being an “American” remained very much constituted within religious modernist discourse even as he turned to alternative discourses that could affirm that identity. And Roosevelt was not alone. As Henry Stimson noted, “American public opinion is swinging now strongly to the Loyalist side.” Stimson himself suggested that the United States cancel the arms embargo to demonstrate America’s “faith in international law and morals” and perhaps even make “possible a righteous solution of the conflict.”

To be sure, scattered and uncoordinated attempts to reify the United States as the good Samaritan persisted in halting foreign policy efforts at multilateral cooperation,
disarmament, and international tolerance. For example, in April 1939 Roosevelt asked Hitler for official assurances that Germany would not invade thirty-one specifically named countries, offering U.S. participation in multilateral trade and disarmament talks in exchange. Following Roosevelt’s proposal, the *Christian Century* declared that “the President has taken a step of the sort advocated in these columns for months.” Anti-interventionists such as Villard hoped for more, believing that “the President should offer mediation not only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays of each week, but every day if necessary.” Reflecting these hopes in early 1940, Roosevelt sent Sumner Welles to Europe in the hope of finding a negotiated end to the war through a broad agreement on trade and disarmament.

U.S. foreign policy continued to entertain the eventual attainment of religious modernism’s better world. An approach to neutral countries in 1940 sought multilateral agreements on a post-war “reduction of armaments” and claimed that the United States wanted “to keep alive basic ideas, formulas and programs relating to a sound and stable international relationship after the war.” In late 1939 Myron Taylor ventured off to the Vatican to represent the United States in efforts to put “the whole refugee problem on a religious basis.” U.S. policy even attempted bring Greek Orthodox and Islamic leaders in south-eastern Europe and the Middle East on board in a plan to restore the “moral situation in the world.”

Despite these bursts of religious modernist discourse, the gradual ascendance of the righteous nation narrative drove U.S. foreign policy inexorably toward physical intervention. In the summer of 1939, the Roosevelt administration pressed for repeal of the arms embargo clause of the Neutrality Act. Restricting arms sales rendered “helpless
the law-abiding and peace-devoted peoples of the world,” Secretary of State Hull declared. He argued that “if such action is moral, and if, on the contrary, sales of the means of self-defense for the protection of peaceful and law-abiding peoples are immoral, then a new definition of morality and immorality must be written.”75 The irony was that essentially the definitions had been rewritten. Under the hegemony of religious modernist discourse in the mid-1930s, Americans regarded arms sales and arms manufacturers as an historically created evil; U.S. foreign policy inscribed the good neighbor narrative in large measure through its ostensible pursuit of disarmament agreements.76 Within the new hierarchy of good and evil, however, refusing to arm the good nations implicitly meant supporting the evil nations, an increasingly intolerable position for the righteous nation whose mission now centered on mitigating the sin that had no history.

Resisting the rise in U.S. belligerence, anti-interventionists inadvertently undermined their position by unconsciously adopting the righteous nation narrative into the framework of their religious modernist anti-intervention discourse. In a meeting at the White House on July 18, 1939, anti-interventionist Senators refused to repeal of the arms embargo clause in the Neutrality Act. Senator William Borah from Idaho disparaged Hull’s position that a war in Europe would begin by the end of the summer, claiming that he had better information than Hull. Borah’s support for the Washington Conference in 1922, the Kellogg-Briand Pact in the late 1920s, and recognition of Russia in 1933 scarcely marked him as an “isolationist.”77 His reaction to Hull, however, indicated the thin edge of the discursive wedge on which anti-interventionists tried to balance. In simply focusing on the proximity of war, he did not challenge Hull’s contention that
retracting the arms embargo clause involved a moral choice. Ultimately, the Senators’ refusal turned out to be a pyrrhic victory for anti-interventionists.

The cultural in-between position of the anti-interventionists characterized much of their argument. In essence, they had come to agree that sin without history existed naturally, but they disagreed that the United States should resort to coercion to mitigate it. As a result, in an inadvertently self-defeating conjunction of competing religious subjectivities, anti-interventionists promoted religious modernist solutions to counter realism’s ahistorical sin. For example, in the summer of 1939, the Federal Council of Churches called Christian leaders to Switzerland to promote a “Christian strategy” of international cooperation.78 In New York City in May, 1939, Frank Buchman’s “Moral Rearmament” program drew 12,000 people. According to Republican House Minority Leader Joseph William Martin Jr., supporting Moral Rearmament was “just like being against Sin.”79 The anti-interventionist Representative John Shafer of Wisconsin urged the United States to remain uninvolved in Europe, declaring that “Americans will not go to slaughter on foreign battlefields in a tie-up with the ungodly, unchristian, bloody red butchers from Moscow, and the debt defaulting French.”80 The powerful New York modernist preacher George Buttrick simply remained confident “in God and . . . human brotherhood” despite the “present chaos and darkness” and the “lurking fear.”81

Anti-interventionist attacks on the increasingly alliance-like relations with Great Britain secured their undoing possibly more than anything else. After the passage of cash-and-carry provisions by Congress in September, anti-interventionists invoked the discourse of “evil,” labeling the legislation an “unholy business” and tainted with “blood money,” the second phrase conceptually linking cash-and-carry to Judas’ betrayal and
thus the United States to Jesus. After the German invasion of Norway, some anti-interventionists pointed out Britain’s earlier violations of Scandinavian neutrality to no avail. When Churchill assumed power in May 1940, the *Christian Century* proclaimed “Bad News For India!,” pointing out that “Mr. Churchill” was, “of course, no friend of democracy in India.” In May 1940, Harry Elmer Barnes called Britain America’s “most dangerous enemy.” Author Theodore Dreiser issued similar charges in his 1941 book *America is Worth Saving*. Both Barnes and Dreiser registered Britain as part of the world’s evil rather than a force for its eradication.

As anti-interventionists invoked the discourses of sin and unrighteousness, they ceded cultural power precisely because they framed their arguments within already discredited religious modernist social gospel discourse. For example, in a sermon at the University of Chicago’s Rockefeller Memorial Chapel in June 1940, Morrison, the powerful religious modernist editor of the *Christian Century*, declared that Americans must understand that Hitler was merely “the rod of God’s wrath to punish you for you sin.” But “the power of the invader is limited” for “there is a holy hill in every land . . . the citadel, the holy hill, where a nation’s righteous cause, its spiritual treasures, its essential freedom, its democracy . . . are enshrined.” Morrison, like the “interventionists,” reified the divine status of “democracy” and “freedom” but relegated defense against evil threats to God’s principles of love, urging his hearers to wait patiently for the removal of “the rod” of God’s “wrath.”

Ultimately, anti-interventionists proved to be as implicated as interventionists in the cultural project of reinvigorating U.S. national identity as God’s chosen nation. Charles Lindbergh of the anti-interventionist America First Committee, declared that “the
destiny of this country does not call for our involvement in European wars.”87 In positing “the destiny of this country” Lindbergh articulated a view of American identity that primarily rested in “non-intervention” as the means to overcome evil. After the outbreak of war in Europe, the Federal Council of Churches urged Roosevelt to “keep the United States at peace in the hope that our nation may thereby render a greater service to mankind.”88 Theologian and intellectual Kirby Page went further, arguing that within God’s ordained “freedom” nations could and did commit injustice against other peoples, but also that God nevertheless “loves” these evildoers and desired that they be overwhelmed “through human love.”89

The tension wrought by the religious modernists’ subconscious incorporation of the international hierarchy of evil narrative into their own social gospel discourse burst forth palpably in one of the 1930s most prominent theologians, Harry Emerson Fosdick. In 1941, his *Living Under Tension: Sermons On Christianity Today* portrayed both the shift toward cultural narratives of good and evil as well as resistance to it. “We are doomed to the tension of living in two worlds at once,” he wrote. “This present world, war-torn and terrible, denies everything that Christ taught and stood for . . . We are bewildered and confused.” Castigating Niebuhr’s realism, Fosdick argued that realism merely gave in to the “temptation” to “become so obsessed with the urgent, brutal facts of the immediate world, that faith in Christ and his way of living becomes like a lovely, inefficacious dream” and “war . . . fills a man’s whole horizon, until anything so ideal as the Sermon on the Mount seems an ethereal irrelevance.” What was Fosdick’s answer to the “war-torn” and “terrible” world filled with “war” and “brutal facts?” He urged Americans to keep the “higher realm of the Christian faith and spirit intact and luminous
for the world to come back to when these mad days are over” and to see “clearly that . . .
the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount is unshaken, that only goodwill - organized
goodwill - can ever cure ill will.”

While Fosdick, like many other anti-interventionists, envisioned overcoming evil
by simply insisting more vigorously upon the signifying structures of the social gospel,
his arguments ultimately underwrote the righteous nation narrative. In a town hall
meeting in January 1941, for example, Verne Marshall, head of the No Foreign War
Committee, hoped “to keep the United States out of foreign wars and all kindred evils”
claiming that such evils implied that “the dignity of human personality for which Jesus
stood has no value in what we mistakenly call this civilized world.” Marshall maintained
his belief that “God will save our country, all countries, and give this world real and true
democracy, if we consent to listen and to help Him.” Socialist anti-interventionist
Norman Thomas concurred, but “not because I don’t agree on the diabolical character of
Hitler.” Rather, Thomas argued that that if Americans “believe in democracy” the United
States “can yet vindicate democracy on this continent, on this hemisphere.” In fact,
Americans “can make democracy work so well that the flame of that democracy will
kindle light and hope and warmth in Europe, as we cannot do it if we try once more to put
Europe to rights by war.” For anti-interventionists as for interventionists, “democracy”
required “vindication.” That sin and evil existed the anti-interventionists admitted. But
they thought it could be overcome by more rigorous efforts to display “democracy.” In
effect, they countenanced the claim that sin “had no history” but failed to propose a
culturally resonant method to mitigate it.
The final factor in religious modernism’s loss of cultural power rested in its susceptibility to the hierarchy of evil narrative. In subsuming religious modernist discourse neo-orthodox Christian realism continued to envision the making of a “better world.” As Reinhold Niebuhr eloquently argued, “Let man stand at any point in history . . . and if he surveys the human problem profoundly he will see that every perfection he has achieved points beyond itself to a greater perfection, and that this greater perfection throws light upon his sins and imperfections.” In such a way “the tragedy of life is recognized, but faith prevents tragedy from being pure tragedy.”\(^{92}\) Roosevelt’s own speeches betrayed similar themes, although perhaps somewhat less philosophically. “Every realist knows that the democratic way of life is at this moment being directly assailed in every part of the world” by the “poisonous propaganda” of the dictators, Roosevelt proclaimed in January 1941. Despite this obvious tragedy, Roosevelt promised that “in future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.” It was a world, he argued, is “attainable in our own time and generation” and is the “very antithesis of the so-called new order of tyranny which the dictators seek to create with the crash of a bomb.” In that new world, “a good society is able to face schemes of world domination and foreign revolutions alike without fear.”\(^{93}\) A better world in the future would not necessarily eliminate sin, but it would include the tools “to face” it.

Therefore, the hierarchy of evil narrative extended the promise of a better world while explaining “the tragedy” of current experience. In large measure, this characteristic of the righteous nation narrative sheds light on the tremendous cultural power of neo-orthodox Christian discourse. In turn, it also explains why between 1939 and 1942 many
anti-interventionists moved to interventionist positions while interventionists rarely became anti-interventionists. The hegemonic cultural narrative of the period propagates intervention as the “correct response” to “increasing danger,” a move toward the “good war.” But as I have attempted to show here, a culturally rooted religious narrative of national identity in part fostered the turn to intervention.

For Thomas, Marshall, Fosdick, Borah, Morrison, Page, and a host of other anti-interventionists, overcoming evil simply involved an amplified assertion of the good neighbor narrative. The religious modernist roots of cultural “anti-interventionism” produced a political anti-interventionist position that stressed non-involvement, protested the redirection of funds away from social programs and into armaments, remonstrated against claims of an Axis military threat, and feared being coerced into fighting in, as Borah put it, “the hell-holes of Europe.” Part of a larger cultural project to reinvigorate American national identity, anti-interventionists simply represented the remnants of the earlier cultural power of religious modernism, and, as such, offered nothing more than a reassertion of good Samaritan discourse.

Consequently, many anti-interventionists, like many Americans, turned to realist discourses that seemed to account for the failure of the Kingdom of God to materialize. In the end, a declining number of anti-interventionists exalted ephemeral notions of democracy and articulated their arguments by incorporating hierarchy of evil narratives, a reflection not of conscious attempts at compromise with the realists, but rather of their own reflexive subjectivity as “Americans.” By the end of 1941, anti-interventionist advocates had dwindled substantially, casualties of the very cultural process that empowered them in the first place. Only a few, such as Hocking, Charles Beard, Charles
Clayton Morrison, and A. J. Muste articulated an alternative narrative of the chosen nation well beyond the war. But, by then, the hegemony of realist religious discourse effectively excluded them from the dominant culture.95

Between 1939 and December 1941, U.S. foreign policy reinvigorated the imagined community as it inscribed “America” through an international struggle between good and evil. In spite the repeated insistence that the nation would not be involved in war, the righteous nation narrative persistently limned foreign policy options so sharply that the United States constantly acted as a belligerent power in ongoing European and Asian wars in 1940-1941. In the end, the cultural power of the hierarchy of good and evil reflexively recast a Japanese attack on the U.S. occupied Pacific island of Hawaii as an assault by the evil, unrighteous Japanese empire on a righteous United States.

Initially the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 indicated the final ascent of the righteous nation narrative to a hegemonic cultural position. Shortly after the invasion Roosevelt, even as he sought arms embargo repeal, claimed that most Americans “believe in the spirit of the New Testament - a great teaching which opposes itself to the use of force, of armed force, of marching armies and falling bombs.” Though the United States “will remain a neutral nation” Roosevelt could not “ask that every American remain neutral in thought” for “even a neutral has a right to take account of the facts” and “cannot be asked to close his mind or his conscience.”96 Thus, Americans differentiated the belligerents in terms of morality or “conscience.” According to the prominent fundamentalist preacher Carl McIntire, “is it not interesting and beautiful that you cannot begin to face the great question of war . . . without recognizing that the Bible teaches there are two kinds of people on the earth? . . . There are the saved, and there are
the lost.” For Roosevelt, the “saved” understood that only by the “association of the seekers of light . . . can the forces of evil be overcome.”

Foreign policy effectively produced an “imaginary cartography” of morality by locating in geographic space unjust and evil enemy others. When Roosevelt requested Congress to repeal the arms embargo provisions of the Neutrality Act he pronounced that “responsibility for acts of aggression is not concealed” and that “there has been sufficient realism in the United States to see how close to our own shores came” the “enemies of our faith.” Despite opposition from anti-interventionists rooted in religious modernism, in September and October 1939 Congress repealed the arms embargo provisions, something the hierarchy of evil narrative had failed to accomplish only months earlier. In reflecting on the legislation Republican William Allen White betrayed the cultural “positioning” power of the hierarchy of evil narrative when he declared, “I would hate to have my party put itself in a position where it can be charged that we played Mr. Hitler’s game in the matter of the embargo.”

Throughout 1940, the hierarchy of evil narrative became more deeply entrenched as foreign policy imaged threats to religion and religious freedom. In January, Roosevelt warned Americans to “look ahead and see the kind of lives our children would have to lead if a large part of the rest of the world were compelled to worship the god imposed by a military ruler, or were forbidden to worship God at all.” He decried that the United States faced “a set of world-wide forces of disintegration - vicious, ruthless, destructive of all the moral, religious, and political standards.” When Germany defeated the Low Countries and invaded France in May 1940, the United States seemed to be the last “guardian of Western culture, the protector of Christian civilization.”
Positioning itself as the “guardian” and “protector of Christian civilization,” the United States reaffirmed its identity as God’s chosen nation. The Reverend John Calvin Newman of Detroit’s The City Temple exulted that “the entire nation is being awakened, as never before, to the spiritual, moral, and material value of the heritage which is their due.” The United States “alone carries forward full high before God and all men the true emblem of Liberty.” The United States, Roosevelt claimed, “is mobilizing its forces against any and all aggressors” and “against irreligion, conquest and war.” In late 1940, the National Christian Mission argued that “three alternatives confront” the United States: “the collapse of civilization, the acceptance of a new pagan faith like fascism or communism, or the revival of Christianity on a scale and at an intensity quite beyond anything our day is visualizing.” In spite of “the threatening impact of unchristian philosophies and secular totalitarian claims” the Mission prayed for and expected that Americans would “discover the source of true democracy and true freedom in the Christian Bible.”

After the fall of France in June 1940, U.S. foreign policy staged the hierarchy of good and evil through support to Great Britain and its anti-Axis policies. Roosevelt warned that a “victory for the gods of force and hate would endanger institutions of democracy” and that “therefore the whole of our sympathies lies with those nations that are giving their life blood in combat against these forces.” Realist theologian John Bennett argued “that the alternative to successful resistance to Germany is the extension of the darkest political tyranny imaginable.” The fundamentalist Christian Beacon feared that a “Hitler victory” would mean “countless numbers of men upon this earth will go out into eternity without even the opportunity of hearing the good news.” The paper
urged Christians to pray that “victory may come to the allies.” At the Democratic convention, Roosevelt stated that the European war involved “the continuance of civilization as we know it versus the ultimate destruction of all that we have held dear - religion against godlessness.” Increasingly, Great Britain appeared on the side of religion and thus deserved the “whole of our sympathies.”

By late 1940, Britain and Germany epitomized the binary poles of good and evil in the imaginary of U.S. identity. In October, the president stated that “it can no longer be disputed that forces of evil which are bent on conquest of the world will destroy whatever and whenever they can destroy.” Thankfully, “the men and women of Britain have shown how free people defend what they know to be right.” In a Fireside Chat at the end of 1940, Roosevelt told Americans that the British were “putting up a fight which will live forever in the story of human gallantry.” In Nazism, on the other hand, there was “no liberty, no religion, no hope.” The Nazis kept “the servants of God in chains.” The Axis represented nothing but “an unholy alliance of power . . . to dominate and enslave the entire human race.” In contrast, “the British people and their allies today are conducting an active war against this unholy alliance.”

Foreign policy did not react to “real” threats but rather signified international “events” within religious narratives of U.S. identity. For example, Roosevelt understood that the United States was “now engaged in a mighty effort to fortify that heritage” passed down “from . . . the Fathers of our Republic.” To conduct this “mighty effort” Roosevelt announced a Day of Prayer in September, exhorting all Americans to “pray . . . in their churches or at their homes . . . beseeching the Ruler of the Universe to bless our Republic, to make us reverently grateful for our heritage and firm in its defense” and to
give the United States and “to the troubled world a righteous and enduring peace.”

That “heritage,” of course, could not be attacked by Nazi armies, or any armies for that matter. But that heritage was certainly crucial to national identity.

Specific foreign policy decisions inscribed the hierarchy of evil that reaffirmed American national identity as God’s chosen nation. For example, sending food relief to the occupied countries of Europe suddenly meant “building up our own enemy” even though the United States was not at war. In a much more well known example, Roosevelt’s cabinet agreed to send fifty World War One destroyers to Britain, anxious that “the survival of the British Isles under German attack might very possibly depend on their getting these destroyers.” Since the administration’s legal advisor and the Justice Department agreed that the destroyers-for-bases deal violated U.S. law, they suggested amending the law, a suggestion the administration did not follow. But as the legal brief noted, even an amendment of the law could not “relieve us of the charge that the sale of war craft by the Government to a belligerent government would be unneutral.” The use of the word “unneutral,” of course, obscured the true opposite of neutral: “belligerent.”

Nevertheless, on September 2, 1940, Roosevelt by executive order exchanged fifty World War One destroyers for rights to British bases in the western hemisphere.

The destroyers-for-bases deal illuminates foreign policy as a cultural arena of immense constitutive power; the deal immediately positioned the United States categorically on the side of the righteous in a struggle against the “godless,” eliding the marginal strategic impact of the destroyers themselves. By the end of the year, only nine destroyers, all in poor condition, reached Britain. By the following summer the British had managed to outfit and use only slightly more than half of the original fifty. Although
Roosevelt’s unilateral action violated U.S. law, contravened the recent declaration signed by the United States at the Havana Conference, represented an act of war, and committed the United States to the military occupation of non-U.S. territory, the most effective criticism arose from those stung that they had not been able to sign off on it themselves.\textsuperscript{117} The righteous nation narrative had triumphed.

The destroyers-for-bases deal also demonstrated the emergence of Latin America as a cultural space in which to imagine the hierarchy of evil. Despite the brutal military dictatorships prevalent among the hemisphere’s “republics,” in the imaginary of U.S. national identity Latin American functioned as a place where democracy and liberty had to be defended against the threat of the “godless” “enemies of our faith.” In other words, U.S. foreign policy ostensively directed at defending “democracy,” “liberty” and “freedom of religion” in the western hemisphere overlooked their absence even as it claimed their defense. For example, after the German invasion of western Europe in May, Roosevelt declared that “we Americans of the three Americas are shocked and angered” by the assault on the ideal of “individual liberty” and “democracy.” Although “too many citizens of our American Republics believed themselves wholly safe” it was now apparent that the western hemisphere remained “the guardian of Christian culture, the protector of Christian civilization.”\textsuperscript{118} As part of the righteous defense of the “democracy” and “Christian civilization,” Roosevelt labeled the destroyers-for-bases “an epochal and far-reaching act of preparation for continental defense in the face of grave danger.” Tellingly, even as Roosevelt indicated that “the value to the Western Hemisphere of these outposts of security is beyond calculation,” the United States waved
aside any discussion about “specific details” concerning the “exact locations” of the bases.\textsuperscript{119}

Throughout 1941, through the plethora of threats ostensibly confronting the United States, Americans effectively recast the international order in terms of good and evil. Britain and the United States were partners in a righteous struggle to preserve the “democratic faith” from evil Nazis and their Axis partners. “Today” Roosevelt told a radio audience in May 1941, “the world is divided, divided between human slavery and human freedom - between pagan brutality and the Christian ideal. We choose human freedom - which is the Christian ideal.” “We \textit{reassert} our abiding faith in the vitality of our constitutional republic as a perpetual home of freedom, of tolerance, and of devotion to the Word of God.”\textsuperscript{120} In this particular speech, Roosevelt illustrated that foreign policy involves much more than a specific approach to strategic, political, economic, or military interaction with other supposedly discrete nations. His claim that “we reassert our abiding faith in the vitality of our constitutional republic as a perpetual home of freedom, of tolerance, and of devotion to the Word of God” is rendered possible only by the knowledge of an “evil” enemy devoted to “human slavery” and “pagan brutality.” Thus, foreign policy provided the images and linguistic markers in which national identity, and in turn the imagined community, could be reinvigorated and reaffirmed.

The U.S. response to the German invasion of the Soviet Union demonstrated the organizing power of cultural identity narratives. During the Russo-Finish border war in the winter of 1939-1940, significant majorities of Americans approved of U.S. aid to Finland.\textsuperscript{121} Similarly, one month before Hitler’s Operation Barbarossa, Roosevelt declared that the “Nazi world does not recognize any God except Hitler; for the Nazis are
as ruthless as the Communists in the denial of God.” Before the Nazi invasion, Roosevelt, like many Americans, conceptually linked Germany and the Soviet Union through a discourse of godlessness. After the German invasion, however, Roosevelt reminded Americans that “aid to Russia is aid to Russian people of all beliefs who are defending their homeland from aggression.”

Americans needed no reminders though. Public opinion polls indicated that close to three quarters of Americans wanted the U.S.S.R. to defeat Germany. The United States also rediscovered Article 124 of the “Constitution of Russia.” This article, Roosevelt averred, provided for “freedom of conscience” and “freedom of religion.” He also claimed that it supported “freedom equally to use propaganda against religion, which is essentially what is the rule in this country, only we don’t put it quite the same way.”

Within the identity structuring narrative produced by foreign policy ostensible international “facts” ultimately depended on narrative cohesion. As a result, aid to a country depended on its relative place within the hierarchy of good and evil, rather than on any ostensibly real threat.

Emplotting Japan in the cultural narrative of the righteous nation also evolved within the context of the international hierarchy of good and evil. Throughout 1941 Japan functioned as an extension of Germany’s evil. “The fundamental proposition” was that “hostilities in Europe, in Africa, and in Asia are all parts of a single world conflict” in which the United States is “defending” its “way of life,” Roosevelt argued. The whole question of U.S. policy toward Japan rested on whether Japan might damage “the chances of England’s winning in her struggle with Germany.” One memorandum explicitly argued that “Japan’s military leaders are bent on conquest – just as are Germany’s” and
so Japan “proceeds by force to subjugate neighboring areas” while “working in partnership with Germany.””

Implicit in U.S. support for the Britain, France, and the Netherlands despite their brutal colonial rule in Asia was that policies that subjugated people were irrelevant in comparison to policies that indicated “partnership with Germany.” As a result, when the United States negotiated with Japan in 1941, it repeatedly insisted “that it would be very difficult . . . to make the people of this country . . . believe that Japan was pursuing a peaceful course so long as Japan was tied in an alliance with the most flagrant aggressor who has appeared on this planet in the last 2,000 years.” U.S. intervention in the Sino-Japanese war through financial aid to Chinese dictator Chiang Kai-shek, embargoes against Japan, and the Flying Tigers, all served to inscribe the hierarchy of good and evil by connecting Japan to Germany and China to the righteous defense of democracy. And so after Pearl Harbor Roosevelt easily argued that the Japanese attack was simply “the method of Hitler himself.”

The imaging of Germany aside, no foreign policy endeavor by United States in 1941 so baldly originated in culturally rooted narratives of national identity as the Argentia Conference. Whereas Churchill arrived at the conference in August hoping to cement the Anglo-American quasi-alliance and encourage U.S. intervention in the European war, Roosevelt discouraged all talk of war, territorial adjustments, or economic bargaining. To that end, Churchill brought along a plethora of aides and advisors while Roosevelt minimized his entourage, aiming to keep the strategic aspect of the conference as small as possible. At the conclusion of the three day conference, Britain and the United States jointly issued the “Atlantic Charter,” a set of agreements apparently
directed against the “dangers to world civilization,” but in terms of actual military or geopolitical strategies, decidedly vague.\textsuperscript{131} In essence, the Charter elucidated the bond of righteousness between Britain and the United States by stating “common principles” and proclaiming “the world need for freedom of religion.\textsuperscript{132}

In the imaginary of U.S. foreign policy, the worship service held aboard the \textit{Prince of Wales} functioned as a sublime cultural experience of righteousness.\textsuperscript{133} Roosevelt specifically “requested” his staff to attend the service, sending official “written invitations” to them early Sunday morning. At worship, Roosevelt and Churchill sat next to one another, surrounded by intermingled British and American sailors. The chaplain read aloud Joshua 1:1-9 which described the death of Moses, the long suffering leader of God’s people, and the passing of the leadership mantle to Joshua. The text repeats the exhortation “be strong and courageous” three times and is under-girded by the reminder that “the Lord your God will be with you.” The worshippers sung three familiar hymns - “Onward Christian Soldiers”, “For Those in Peril on the Sea”, and “O God, Our Help in Ages Past.” At the very center of the service sat the pulpit draped in flags. Roosevelt later confessed that the worship service was the “keynote of the historic meeting.”\textsuperscript{134}

In his first press conference after Ar gentia, Roosevelt affirmed the bond of righteousness as he gushed about the “very remarkable religious service.”\textsuperscript{135} The first pictures given to the press were of himself, with a Bible on his lap, sitting next to Churchill at the worship service. On August 16, the \textit{New York Times} printed a picture of the worship service from the top down view of the front quarterdeck of the battleship, capturing at the very center the pulpit covered in the U.S. and British flags. The battleship’s four main guns pointed out to sea over the service seemingly in defense the
righteous worshippers.\textsuperscript{136} Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter could only rejoice that Roosevelt and Churchill, “in the setting of that Sunday service” gave “meaning to the conflict between civilization and arrogant brute challenge.”\textsuperscript{137} If Germany represented a universally evil enemy other, Britain represented the righteous defense of religion and democracy, a position in the hierarchy of good and evil that required the full support of the United States as the righteous nation. As Fosdick remarked metaphorically, “sometimes I live more in Britain than at home, so keen my sympathies, so deep my apprehensions, so desperate my hopes.”\textsuperscript{138}

Between 1939 and December 1941, the hierarchy of evil narrative produced an illusion of righteousness that inherently required a foreign policy of increasing war belligerence. Decisions to exchange destroyers for bases, to engage in lend-lease, to undertake “patrols” in the Atlantic, to embargo the Japanese, to proclaim an “Atlantic Charter” and many other “foreign” policy decisions during these years emerged as aspects of a cultural inertia to reinvigorate the imagined community rather than as contingent policies designed to meet objective threats. In the years prior to Pearl Harbor, the United States actively, repeatedly, and forcefully intervened in the European war throughout the Atlantic Ocean on the side of the British Empire. In East Asia, American arms and money empowered a Chinese warlord in his simultaneous struggle to dominate China and defend against a Japanese invasion. Foreign policy options toward both the European war and the spreading Sino-Japanese war remained securely framed in religious narratives of American identity.

To be sure, the efforts of the decreasing number of anti-interventionists became exceedingly difficult as the hegemony of the righteous nation narrative produced a
disciplinary “knowledge” of international threats. Out of this “knowledge” U.S. policy consistently slipped back and forth between articulating “foreign” dangers and “domestic” ones. For example, Roosevelt warned that “today’s threat to our national security is not a matter of military weapons alone. We know of new methods of attack. The Trojan Horse. The Fifth Column that betrays a nation unprepared for treachery.”

Not only had foreign foes infiltrated American society, there existed “a small group of sincere, patriotic men and women who . . . shut their eyes to the ugly realities of international banditry and the need to resist it at all costs.” These Americans should be “embarrassed by the sinister support they are receiving from the enemies of democracy in our midst - the Bundists, the Fascists, and Communists, and every group devoted to bigotry and racial and religious intolerance.” After all, what kind of person would oppose policies designed to defend against the “International Nazi Church” that sought to replace the Bible with “the words of Mein Kampf” and the “cross of Christ” with “the swastika and the naked sword?”

Through the international hierarchy of evil the boundaries of the state could be redefined. At these boundaries anti-interventionists found themselves marginalized. “Danger” abroad, in essence, policed “danger” at home.

The greatest testament to the resonance of the righteous nation narrative as a symbolizing structure for American national identity is the sense of national unity it fostered within the United States. Throughout 1940-1941, opinion polls consistently supported an increasingly interventionist U.S. foreign policy and by September 1941 a large majority of Americans felt it more important to help England win than to keep the United States out the war. Although often expressed grudgingly as the duty of the righteous nation, American culture effectively chose intervention. For example, Cardinal
Francis Spellman, like Catholics more generally, moved from an anti-interventionist position to finally agreeing that although “we Americans want peace and we shall prepare for peace” the United States could not “accept a peace whose definition is slavery or death.” Protestants as well as Catholics generally moved from anti-interventionist positions to interventionist positions. Prominent missionary and author Sidney Gulick urged peace with Japan until the end of 1940 by which time Gulick had come to view the defeat of Japan as a necessity in order to “purge Japan of militarism” and restore it to democracy. These changing positions of foreign policy reflected a broader cultural inertia. Even the popular radio journalist Elmer Davis, who in 1938 believed that morality had no place in international relations, advocated U.S. aid to Britain in 1940 and proceeded to attack Lindbergh and other anti-interventionists in 1941.

When Japan opposed U.S. intervention in the Sino-Japanese war by bombing several American naval vessels anchored at the U.S. colony of Hawaii, Americans united in “incredulity and outrage.” This reaction resulted logically from the image of the righteous nation through which the United States had reinvigorated its identity as God’s chosen people. Unlike in the aftermath of the sinking of the U.S.S Panay four years earlier, no one questioned the presence of American warships on the island chain in the middle of Pacific or the half century U.S. occupation of it. The righteous nation narrative projected injustice only onto the enemy other.

In the wake of Pearl Harbor, most remaining anti-interventionists abandoned their culturally defenseless positions. Herbert Hoover pronounced that “American soil has been treacherously attacked by Japan” and the United States “must fight with everything we have.” “When the nation is attacked every American must rally to its support,” John
Lewis declared. “All other considerations become insignificant.” Even the staunch anti-interventionist Lindbergh announced that now that war had arrived “we must meet it as united Americans.” Just as during the House’s war declaration anti-interventionist Jeannette Rankin struggled in vain to be recognized by the speaker who suddenly became “conveniently deaf,” the religious narrative of the United States as the righteous nation overwhelmed alternative discourses. Americans once again were God’s chosen people with a mission for the world that rendered sensible their experiences with the world. As Time put it, “the U.S. had embarked on the greatest adventure in its history: to make the world really safe for democracy.”

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor cemented the righteous nation narrative within the symbolizing structure of national identity. According to the Christian Beacon the action of Japan “only helps to clarify the air and show the righteousness and justice of the cause of our country.” “Always will our whole Nation remember the character of the onslaught against us,” Roosevelt told the nation. The military ramifications thus dropped away in the face of “the character” of the “onslaught,” implicitly an evil and unjust attack. And so Roosevelt and all Americans “knew” that despite the “unprovoked and dastardly attack” the United States “in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.”

Americans reinvigorated their identity as God’s chosen people through an interventionist foreign policy. The major casualty was religious modernism, a discursive regime ostensibly predicated on building the Kingdom of God through economic, social, and political equality. As early as 1940, Harold Ickes noted that Americans were “abandoning advanced New Deal ground with a vengeance” out of deference to foreign
While Niebuhr and others turned to Christian realism in part to better approximate the seemingly impossible modernist ideal, for the emerging Christian fundamentalists, as we shall see, the impossible ideal seemed as discredited as the religious discourse from which it sprang.

Notes


8 Greeting to the United Methodist Council, January 17, 1938, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Volume 7: The Continuing Struggle for Liberalism, 1938* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1941), 56 (hereafter cited as: *PPA, 7*: 56); Arthur Sweetser to Roosevelt, April 9, 1938, President’s Personal File (hereafter cited as:...


14 Address at New York, June 30, 1938, *PPA, 7*: 411-413.


17 Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, to Roosevelt, September 18, 1938, *FDRFA, 11*: 191.

18 Roosevelt to Adolf Hitler, September 26, 1938, *PPA, 7*: 531-532; Roosevelt to Adolf Hitler, September 27, 1938, *PPA, 7*: 535-537.


20 Samuel McCrea Cavert, General Secretary, Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, to Roosevelt, October 3, 1938, PPF 1628, FDRL.
21 Roosevelt to the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, October 6, 1938, PPF 1628, FDRL.

22 Roosevelt to Archbishop Rummel, October 1, 1938, *PPA*, 7: 540-541.


33 Sage Brush to Thomas Corcoran, April 14, 1938, President’s Secretary’s File (hereafter cited as: PSF) Subject File, Box 128, FDRL.


36 *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, directed by Frank Capra, 105 minutes, Columbia, 1939.


45 Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, 93; Meyer, Protestant Search, 244-245.

46 Annual Message to Congress, January 4, 1939, PPA, 8: 1-12.


51 Gellman, Good Neighbor Diplomacy, 51-55.

52 Statement by Cordell Hull, March 30, 1938, FRUS, 1938, 5: 662.

53 Josephus Daniels to Cordell Hull, April 14, 1938, FRUS, 1938, 5: 662-663.

54 Press Conference, April 1, 1938, FDRFA, 9: 291-293.

55 Gellman, Good Neighbor Diplomacy, 74.

56 Cordell Hull quoted in Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt, 176. Testifying to the continuing undercurrent of anti-communist discourse, Hull also declared, “I have to deal with these communists down there.”


59 David Haglund notes the shifting position of Latin America in the symbolic register of U.S. foreign policy but argues it was a “strategic” transformation. I am suggesting here that “strategy” emerges from culturally rooted structures of identity. Therefore the transformation in thinking about Latin America offers a discursive window into the imaginary of U.S. national identity which drives foreign policy construction. David Haglund, Latin America and the Transformation of U.S. Strategic Thought, 1936-1940 (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).
Roosevelt to Herbert Pell, Minister to Portugal, November 12, 1938, FDRFA, 12: 60; Press Conference, November 15, 1938, FDRFA, 12: 84-88.

Cordell Hull to Sumner Welles, December 6, 1938, FRUS, 1938, 5: 49-50; Cordell Hull to Sumner Welles, December 15, 1938, FRUS, 1938, 5: 80-81; Sumner Welles to Cordell Hull, December 16, 1938, FRUS, 1938, 5: 81-82; Cordell Hull to Sumner Welles, December 20, 1938, FRUS, 1938, 5: 83-84; Gellman, Good Neighbor Diplomacy, 75-77.

Roosevelt to Alfred Landon, December 29, 1938, FDRFA, 12: 362.

Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt, 176.


Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt, 177-180.

Historians and scholars have been at pains to “define” Roosevelt’s foreign policy. Some argue that FDR sought to “educate” Americans away from “isolationism.” See Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt; Waldo Heinrichs, Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Others posit that Roosevelt was unqualified, putting makeshift policies together that simply confused other nations. See Frederick W. Marks III, Wind Over Sand: The Diplomacy of Franklin Roosevelt (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 1988). Still others argue that Roosevelt contributed to appeasement. See Arnold A. Offner, American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938 (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap, 1969).

Henry L. Stimson to Cordell Hull, January 18, 1939, FDRFA, 13: 140-146 (emphasis added).

Roosevelt to Adolf Hitler, April 14, 1939, FRUS, 1939, 1: 130-133.


Samuel McCrae Cavert to Roosevelt, June 5, 1939, PPF 1628, FDRL.


George Buttrick to Roosevelt, December 23, 1939, PPF 1628, FDRL.

Doenecke and Wilz, *From Isolation To War*, 94; Doenecke, *Storm On The Horizon*, 84.

84 Barnes quoted in Doenecke, Storm On The Horizon, 190.

85 Theodore Dreiser, America is Worth Saving (New York: Modern Age Books, 1941), 80-124. Doenecke points out Dreiser’s anti British perspective hinting that perhaps it was part of his “increasingly procommunist” position. See Doenecke’s informative discussion of Britain in the anti-interventionist mind: Doenecke, Storm On The Horizon, 189-211.

86 Charles Clayton Morrison, “Isaiah Speaks to America!’ A Sermon delivered at Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, University of Chicago, June 2, 1940,” Christian Century, July 3, 1940 (emphasis added).


88 Federal Council of the Churches of Christ to Roosevelt, October 9, 1939, OF 213, FDRL.


93 Annual Message to Congress, January 6, 1941, PPA, 9: 663-672.

94 Doenecke and Wilz, From Isolation To War, 100-110; Porter, The Seventy-sixth Congress, 105, Borah quoted on 56.

95 Charles Beard, President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War, 1941: A Study in Appearances and Realities (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948); Editorial, “The World Left By The War,” Christian Century, August 22, 1945; William E. Hocking, “Faith and World Order” and “Culture and Peace,” both in William E. Hocking, et. al., The Church and the New World Mind: The Drake Lectures for 1944 (St. Louis, MO: The


98 Roosevelt to the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, December 23, 1939, *PPF* 1628, FDRL.

99 I borrow the concept of “imaginary cartography” from Slavoj Žižek who uses it in analyzing the role of the Balkans in various European identity imaginaries. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (New York: Verso, 2000), 3-5. Although not the concern of this paper, from my research it seems that the U.S. projection of evil and sin onto geographic space in 1937-1941 seemingly also resulted in part from ongoing internal identity anxieties over lynching, racism, economic inequalities, and other “domestic” experiences that defied incorporation into the God’s chosen nation identity structure.


104 The Reverend John Calvin Newman to Roosevelt, July 11, 1940, PPF 493, FDRL.

105 Roosevelt to Hill Montague, Chairman, Golden Rule Foundation, October 2, 1940, PPF 1685, FDRL.

106 “Statement of Purpose of the National Christian Mission,” 1940, PPF 7302, FDRL.

107 Address to University of Virginia Class of 1940, June 10, 1940, *RFP*, 249-253.

108 John C. Bennett, “If America Enters the War, What Shall I Do?,” *Christian Century*, December 4, 1940.


Address on Total Defense of the Western Hemisphere, October 12, 1940, *RFP*, 296-300.


Proclamation No. 2418, August 7, 1940, *PPA*, 9: 327.

Ickes Diary, August 10, 1940, *The Lowering Clouds*, 296.


Ickes Diary, September 8, 1940, *The Lowering Clouds*, 313; Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 128; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 460-461; Doenecke and Wilz, *From Isolation To War*, 102-107. In July 1940 the Pan-American conference agreed that “it would be contrary to the interests of the American Republics to permit the European possessions in the New World to become a subject of barter in the settlement of European differences . . . Furthermore, in approaching this matter, it appeared desirable that any solution which might be reached should not carry with it the creation of any special interest for the benefit of any particular American republic.” See Cordell Hull to Roosevelt, September 12, 1940, *FRUS, 1940*, 5: 252-255; Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939-1941* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 1969), 68. Although the memo by Hackworth (see note 114) indicated that the deal violated U.S. law, Roosevelt had a brief prepared by the Attorney General’s Office explaining that the chronology of actual construction and intention of sale rendered the law inapplicable in this case. See Office of the Attorney General to Roosevelt, August 27, 1940, *PPA*, 9: 394-405. Wendell Willkie personally approved of the deal but refused to join Roosevelt in announcing it and then later criticized Roosevelt for high handedness as he retrospectively appreciated the import of Walter Lippmann’s exhortation to be “the Churchill rather than the Chamberlain.” Willkie intuitively recognized that he had lost out on the positioning power of foreign policy discourse. Lippmann quoted in Richard T. Ketchum, *The Borrowed Years, 1938-1941: America on the Way to War* (New York: Random House, 1989), 477.


Third Inaugural Address, January 20, 1941, *PPA*, 10: 3-6; “Aid to Russia,” *Time*, August 18, 1941.


Press Conference, September 30, 1941, *PPA*, 10: 401-402. Roosevelt also wrote to Pius XII that if “the leaders of all churches in the United States” did not “recognize” that the Soviet Union is “less dangerous to religion” than Germany it would “directly assist Germany.” Roosevelt to Pius XII, September 3, 1941, *FPL*, 2: 1204-1205.

Historians debate the origins of total embargo in the summer of 1941. Some argue that the State Department warped Roosevelt’s intended temporary freeze. See Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 510-512; Jonathan Utely, *Going to War With Japan, 1937-1941* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1985). Others argue that the embargo was part of active strategy planning by Roosevelt. See for example Waldo Heinrichs, *Diplomacy and Force: America’s Road to War, 1931-1941*, eds. Marc Gallicchio and Jonathan Utely (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1996), 201-211. I am suggesting that religious symbolic structure of identity resulted in a broad cultural inertia toward an embargo.


Department of State Memo of Conversation, November 15, 1941, *DHRP*, 9: 546-552.


Memo of Conversation, August 10, 1941, Sumner Welles Papers, Box 151, FDRL; Memo of Conversation, August 11, 1941, Sumner Welles Papers, Box 151, FDRL. For more on the conference see Theodore A. Wilson, *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill at Placentia Bay 1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969).

Press Release, August 14, 1941, Adolph Berle Papers, Box 54, FDRL.
132 Declaration by Roosevelt and Churchill, PSF Safe File, Box 1, FDRL; Stephen Early to Welles, August 21, 1941, Sumner Welles Papers, Box 151, FDRL.

133 “Sublime” in the sense that it functioned in the identity imaginary as a symbolic approximation of an impossible righteousness. See Žižek, Looking Awry, 83-84.


135 Press Conference, August 16, 1941, PPA, 10: 319-324.


138 Fosdick, Living Under Tension, 7.

139 Fireside Chat, May 26, 1940, PPA, 9: 238.

140 Radio Address, May 27, 1941, PPA, 10: 191.

141 Navy and Total Defense Day Address, October 27, 1941, PPA, 10: 438-444.

142 Geoffrey Smith argues that Roosevelt undermined the non-interventionist position by persistently linking American extremists such as Fritz Kuhn, William Pelley, and Charles Coughlin with the dictators. See Geoffrey S. Smith, To Save a Nation: American Extremism, the New Deal, and the Coming of World War II (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992). I am arguing that the use of this language was part of the broader cultural reflexivity of a religious discourse of national identity, one that afforded power to those who exercised the “knowledge” of what that identity looked like. See also Leo P. Ribuffo, The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right From the Great Depression to the Cold War (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 178-224; Walter L. Hixson, Charles A. Lindbergh: Lone Eagle, Third Edition (New York: Longman, 2007).

143 Porter, The Seventy-sixth Congress, 64; Doenecke, Storm on the Horizon, 269; Poll: AIPO 248, September 17, 1941 quoted in Hero, Religious Groups, 285.


147 Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 402.


151 Rosenberg also noted Roosevelt’s emphasis on the “character” of the attack in a discussion on the emergence of an “infamy” framing of Pearl Harbor. See Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 11-33.


153 Ickes Diary, August 10, 1940, *The Lowering Clouds*, 295.
CHAPTER V
THE CULTURE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS
AND THE DEAD BODIES THAT MATTER

*If ever we have looked for a deeper meaning in the stars and stripes of our flag... we know we have found it today... From her founding fathers, America received a human charter that has a divine sanction and implies a divine destiny... We place our patriotism on the strong base of religion.*
- Archbishop Francis J. Spellman, 1942

*These dauntless dead seem to answer us and say, ‘Grieve not! There are no regrets amongst us. We have a clearer picture now of why we fought and died in this far off place. We fought to preserve inviolate those things which in the privacy of our hearts we call America: our homes, our loved ones, our blessed land, our freedom of thought and of religion, our priceless right to live our individual lives as we see fit. There can be no real tragedy in dying for such things.’*
- Memorial Day Service Program, 1943

World War II, like all wars, juxtaposed the imagined national “self” with a threatening “other” in various representational forms. In essence, Americans staged the righteous nation identity narrative through violent confrontation with an evil enemy. Scholars of U.S. foreign relations rarely analyze the 1941-1945 conflict from a cultural perspective, let alone a discursive one. To be sure, John Dower’s lucid discussion of U.S. racial imaging of the Japanese, as well as Christina Jarvis’s exploration of “American masculinity” and the “male body at war” demonstrate the significance of deconstructing World War II discourse. Unlike the Vietnam War, however, the “good war” largely resists such cultural interrogations.
This chapter argues that religious discourse provided a leading representational framework of the U.S. war experience. Americans imagined the Germans and the Japanese as evil, pagan peoples and their leaders as wicked, virtually demonic figures. The power of war to constitute the self through the image of the other produced a culture of righteousness in which Americans enthusiastically celebrated the nation’s divine mission. The drive to reinvigorate U.S. destiny through war resulted in the inscription of “America” on the dead bodies of young men who died at the point of conflict with the evil enemy. That is, soldiers who died “for their country” essentially enabled the constitution of that country. Through death, the body of the soldier became eternally “American” and “America” secured meaning. Ironically, then, death reveals itself as an essential condition for the life of the imagined community.4

Widespread acceptance of World War II as the “good war” has deep roots in wartime culture. The hegemonic narrative of U.S. history depicts World War II as a righteous triumph over tyrannical enemies who attacked America suddenly and without warning. In response to the unrighteous assault, the “greatest generation” courageously saved freedom from certain defeat at the hands murderous forces bent on enslaving the world.

Any comprehensive interrogation of U.S. wartime society, however, begs the question of how Americans managed to envision themselves as the righteous defenders of freedom. For example, Pearl Harbor proved devastating for Japanese Americans when race discourse conditioned a “security” strategy placing 110,000 Japanese Americans in concentration camps.5 For African Americans, of course, the historical absence of meaningful socio-political freedom did not change markedly during the war. Black
Americans received lower wages than white Americans and in cities they experienced restrictive zoning policies that significantly curtailed their free access to shelter. Discrimination and harassment also plagued other minorities as well as working women. Although wartime corporate profits nearly doubled, many laboring Americans suffered poor working conditions, rampant housing shortages, a lack of urban infrastructure in heavy-industry cities and rural mining towns, government suppression of wages, and return-to-work legislation. Even religious freedom proved illusory as the U.S. Government jailed some four thousand Jehovah’s Witnesses for refusing to register under the Selective Service Act.

Freedom violations - that is, transgressions of the received conditions of freedom - not linked to specific “groups” also characterized U.S. wartime society. For example, government contracting decidedly favored large industrial corporations at the expense of smaller and/or family enterprises, enthroning big business to a position of socio-economic preeminence it has not since rescinded. “We have had perfectly wonderful cooperation from business,” Roosevelt rejoiced in 1943. In another instance, the press voluntarily restricted itself to an even greater extant than the government requested. “No matter how onerous the censorship imposed by the wizards at Washington” the press “will accept it without protest and try to go it one better,” H. L. Mencken observed. “The American people . . . really detest free speech. At the slightest alarm they are ready and eager to put it down.”

To be sure, the seemingly all too frequent unrighteous behavior of U.S. society disturbed many Americans. The violent oppression of African Americans gave the most pause. “Who are we to reproach the Nazis with their concentration camps for Jews if we
ourselves can drag a Negro through the streets and then ignite him with gasoline, for the pleasure of a crowd of 300 acquiescent spectators?” Commonweal wondered. The Federal Council of Churches, meanwhile, lamented “the trends illustrated by anti-Semitism, ill-treatment of Negroes and Japanese-Americans, race riots and other practices which stir up resentment.” Numerous Americans, especially members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the editors of the Christian Century, particularly decried the internment of Japanese Americans. “In other words, to hell with the news!” Mencken bitterly concluded about free speech.

How and why could Americans reinvigorate their divine chosenness through the righteous nation narrative when the ostensible conditions of that righteousness were lacking? Removing repression and socio-political violence at home was not the answer. Rather, the violent juxtaposition of “America” with enemy “others,” particularly evil Germans and pagan Japanese, constituted righteous America. The war thus became a crucial part of the righteous nation identity narrative that alleviated Depression anxiety and that took root well before the Japanese attack on the U.S. Navy at Hawaii.

The rapid dissipation of American anger over Pearl Harbor testifies to the war’s emergence as the final, violent outcome of a pre-existing, identity-driven foreign policy. As we saw in the previous chapter, long before Pearl Harbor, the United States inscribed the righteous nation narrative through increasing belligerence in ongoing European and Asian wars. As Roosevelt poignantly put it, “Although the treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor was the immediate cause of our entry into the war, that event found the American people spiritually prepared for war on a world-wide scale.” An Office of War Information (OWI) survey of public attitudes in early January 1942 noted that Pearl
Harbor “seems to have attracted little particular attention beyond that naturally accorded to the starting point of a serious war.” Less than twenty percent of Americans that discussed the war with the OWI even referred to the Japanese attack.\footnote{17}

In other words, the righteousness of America did not depend on Pearl Harbor, but Pearl Harbor assumed meaning as it entered an already hegemonic righteous nation identity narrative. Germans and Japanese might castigate what they ironically viewed as the “abusive social situation” in the United States, but by imagining Germany and Japan as evil cauldrons of tyranny, Americans understood the physical conflict through the discourse of righteousness.\footnote{18} For example, within weeks of Pearl Harbor, the Federal Council of Churches pledged its “full allegiance to our country in its efforts to go forward in the strengthening of freedom and democracy and to use all its powers for establishing a more just and righteous order of the world.”\footnote{19} “The vitality, strength, and adaptability of a social order built on freedom . . . will again triumph,” Roosevelt declared, for it “is more effective than an ‘order’ of concentration camps.”\footnote{20}

The war’s arrival thus submerged all negotiations between competing religious subjectivities over U.S. national identity, cementing the hegemony of Christian realist discourse in the symbolic structure of American identity. To be sure, some Americans hoped for world peace, as John Foster Dulles put it, through the “basic thoughts which Christ himself expressed - humility, repentance, avoidance of personal hatreds and hypocrisies.”\footnote{21} But religious modernist discourse dissipated rapidly. For example, the Methodist Church, earlier an opponent of violence, now determined that “God himself has a stake in this struggle.”\footnote{22} The often religious modernist leaning Federal Council urged all Americans to “become” God’s “instruments for fashioning a free, just and
neighborly world” in the wake of the “great flood of evil that has overwhelmed nation after nation.” Scarcely a month into the war, Theodor (Dr.) Seuss Geisel denigrated modernism’s non-intervention graphically. His cartoon depicted a Japanese general standing beside a statue holding both a dagger and the statue’s severed head. Referring to the leading anti-interventionist theologian, the statue’s plaque read: “To John Haynes Holmes, who spoke the Beautiful words: ‘The unhappy people of Japan are our brothers!’”

Intolerance toward religious modernist discourse reflected interpretations of the conflict as a religious, supernatural struggle. “Startling parallels . . . may be drawn between the Christian embattled against Satan . . . and our nation embattled against the Axis powers,” the Christian Beacon intoned. Echoing the Beacon, Reinhold Niebuhr imagined a confrontation between the “children of darkness” and the “children of light.” “The conflict that day and night now pervades our lives” was nothing less than a battle “between good and evil,” Roosevelt concluded. The Bible Today compared physical safety from the Axis to God’s spiritual “protection from the forces of Satan,” the “storms of evil, and the attacks of sin.” A famous U.S. government poster depicted boxing champion Joe Louis adorned in full military regalia declaring “We’ll win because we’re on God’s side.” J. Oliver Buswell prayed to God that the United States would “turn back the armies of wicked aggressors.”

In the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor, the hegemony of the righteous nation narrative imbued Americans with a sense of self-justification. For example, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes viewed Cordell Hull as “a Christian martyr” after Hull’s efforts to negotiate with Japan apparently ended in betrayal at Pearl Harbor. After the first year
of war, the OWI discovered that a large majority of Americans believed the United States fought for truly “justifiable ends.” And as Americans “emotionalized their support of the war,” one report concluded, they understood it to be fundamentally “their war.”

Indeed, pastors like William Ashbrook preached the “righteous cause” of the United States. The title of Ralph Perry’s *Our Side is Right* illustrated concisely the linkage between the war and the identity of the imagined self.

The representation of Germany as the epitome of evil cemented the righteous nation narrative as the organizing symbolizing structure of American identity. Hitler became a particular object of demonization. “The world is too small to provide adequate ‘living room’ for both Hitler and God,” Roosevelt pronounced in January 1942. The “revolution” led by “Hitler and his conspirators” was nothing less than “demonic,” *American Mercury* blustered. Although *Commonweal* averred the “urgent need for a diagnosis of the world’s evil” that did not “ascribe all the world’s troubles” to one individual, it found that it, too, could not “deny the wickedness of Hitler.” “Through the leaders of the Nazi revolution Satan now is trying to lead the common man of the whole world back into slavery and darkness,” Vice President Henry Wallace warned. The February 1943 cover of *Collier’s* displayed a raging, dagger clutching Hitler threatening the entire world. Conspicuously behind him stood Satan, the driving force behind Hitler’s madness.

Hitler’s malevolence readily extended to all Germans. An OWI survey disclosed that most Americans believed Hitler simply “personifies the German evil.” As Roosevelt asserted, there was a particularly “evil characteristic that makes a Nazi a Nazi.” Repeating pre-Pearl Harbor accusations, Roosevelt averred that Germany
intended to spread its “pagan religion all over the world - a plan by which the Holy Bible and the Cross of Mercy would be displaced by Mein Kampf and the swastika.” The United States fought “to cleanse the world of ancient evils” and defend its own “divine heritage.” Some Americans viewed the Germans as a pagan people. An OWI interviewee from Texas stated that “the thing I dislike most about the Germans is their pagan heritage. I think that about covers it. If they were not pagan, they could not do the things they do.” Even Germany’s weaponry appeared evil. “The Germans had whole fields of evil devices under the water to catch our boats,” war correspondent Ernie Pyle reported, seemingly ignoring that such “devices” were presumably of the same destructive capacity as those employed by the United States.

On the big screen, Germans emerged as the evil enemy par excellence. As early as 1939, the fictional film *Beasts of Berlin* depicted Germans persecuting followers of all religions, forcing them to praise Hitler alone. Tellingly, the film was re-released in the early war years under the title *Hell’s Devils*. Although the title of Lewis Milestone’s 1943 film asserted the *Edge of Darkness*, the film actually depicted Germany as darkness itself as it juxtaposes evil German occupiers with righteous Christian resistance in Norway. When German soldiers kidnap and rape a Norwegian woman, the local pastor and the Christian townspeople are catapulted into violent resistance while the hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” pervades the background. Highlighting Germany’s paganism, Frank Capra’s *Prelude To War* shows Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels arguing that Jesus Christ is unworthy of comparisons to Hitler. The film then turns to a surreal image of school children singing a hymn to Hitler as their savior.
Wartime novels also produced representations of the evil German. John Steinbeck’s *The Moon is Down* portrayed Norway’s “courage to resist evil against long adds” and became a bestseller in 1942 and 1943. In 1945, Glenway Wescott’s popular *Apartment in Athens* claimed “there would be no peace as long as there were “hard-working, self-denying Germans, possessed of the devil as they are.” English author Nevil Shute found a large American audience for his works depicting the Germans as pagan, evil heathens. In his 1945 book *Most Secret*, a French priest explains that Germans wanted nothing to do with Jesus or Christianity. Rather, “they make sacrifices of living goats to Satan” and “they bow to false gods of war, to Mithras and to Moloch.” The works of Germany were nothing less than “the works of Satan.”

Political cartoons conjured similar images. Only weeks after Pearl Harbor, a *Washington Post* cartoon reminded readers not to be too distracted by the Japanese. It showed Uncle Sam with rifle in hand standing atop the United States and angled toward the Pacific ocean. Looking over his shoulder only slightly, Uncle Sam could only barely glimpse a fire breathing dragon arising out of the Atlantic ocean. Americans would have scarcely missed the parallel between the Satanic dragon of the apocalypse in the biblical book *Revelations* and the Nazi creature rising from the sea. Dr. Suess was in on the action again, too. One of Seuss’s cartoons portrays a Hitler subordinate outfitted in a devil’s costume complete with horns and pitchfork. “Schmidt, I want you should 5th Column a bit around Hell,” Hitler commands the underling. “A lot of us may be going there one of these fine days.” Another of Suess’s cartoons displayed the Nazi leader in a dark, underworld-type cave seated on a throne atop a pile of skulls. Adorned in a
swastika/skull necklace and a hat with horns, the Fuhrer orders a small, lizard shaped
“Laval” to “crawl out and round me up another 400,000 Frenchmen!” 49

As the end of the war neared, an increased focus on German atrocities against
Jews reified the evil other discourse. Commonweal praised “General Eisenhower’s policy
of rubbing people’s noses in the horror,” arguing that “mankind has increasingly . . .
denied the existence of Devil” but “now we see him.” 50 In the wake of Hitler’s death in
1945, the Christian Century eulogized that “the tragedy of our times reached its most
profound and shocking manifestation in Adolf Hitler. His was a spirit tortured by
demons” who “sought rule through a demonic will to power.” The Century further tied
Hitler to the broader problem of “the moral nihilism” that “saw the world as a playground
of evil.” 51

While many Americans felt that “the dreams of empire of the Japanese” paled “in
comparison with the gargantuan aspirations of Hitler and the Nazis,” representations of
Japan as the evil enemy also abounded. 52 For example, an American who had once lived
in Japan asserted that when the a Japanese dons “a uniform” he will surely “turn into a
devil.” 53 The Christian Century accused Japan of leading the United States on “a dark
and tangled path” of which “no man knows” where it leads. 54 Drawing on the biblical
images of Edenic sin, a 1942 Time cover represented Japan as a serpent demonically
eying the American eagle. 55 In December 1942, Collier’s memorialized Pearl Harbor
with an image of a demon-like monkey, outfitted with horned wings, devilish teeth, and
pointed ears, ready to drop a black bomb of death. Far below, an apparently pure, pristine
Pearl Harbor propagated notions of U.S. innocence in the face of Japan’s wicked
treachery. 56
Pagan Shinto especially animated representations of Japan’s evil. The *Christian Beacon* informed its readers that Japanese soldiers indulged “in demoniacal and fiendish acts knowing no parallel,” a reality that could only “be explained” by “the pagan religion of Shintoism,” a “program of the Devil Satan.” “So pagan, so demoniacal, so Satanic an institution as that of shrine worship,” the *Beacon* continued, meant “Japanese soldiers with demoniacal fanaticism marched straight into the muzzles of enemy guns and sure death.” *Harper’s* linked Admiral Yamamoto’s militarism to his pagan upbringing, describing his home “that boasted the largest and most sumptuously gilded Buddhist shrine in any house in the town” and “a very plain kamidana, or god-shelf, bearing a simple miniature of a Shinto temple.” “The Japanese Shintoists have gone beyond any cruelty known to the ancient world,” theologian Oliver Buswell proclaimed. “The Shintoists of our day sometimes torture their victims to the point of death, then allow them to rest and recuperate for a period of months, then repeat the torturing process, alternating periods of recuperation and torture, and drawing out the process as long as possible.”

If Americans reserved the bulk of their German hatred for Hitler, Americans vilified in almost equal measure the Japanese people and their leaders. For example, the OWI reported that Japanese “people and leaders alike are hated and scorned, and no single leader is selected for blame.” Moreover, “derogatory epithets are hurled at the Japanese both more frequently and more vehemently than at the Germans.” To be sure, some Japanese leaders received their fair share of demonization. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, *Time* depicted Yamamoto with a reddish-yellow tinge against a yellow background, evoking both race imaging as well as the impression of a devilish figure.
Letters to the editor lauded the image. “Since early childhood I have had very definite ideas of just what Satan looks like,” one reader confessed. “All my ideas are personified in your cover.” 61 Harper’s labeled the admiral as “America’s Enemy No. 2,” a man with “no heat in his hate, only a cold, implacable fury.” 62

Just as with Germany, the vilification of Japan’s wickedness permeated the American big screen. Capra’s The Battle of China depicted China as a home of “freedom of expression and freedom of religion.” In contrast, the film contended that Japan’s pagan “god Emperor and his fanatic warlords” perverted western technology and “deliberately slaughtered thousands from the air,” conducting “a war of deliberate terrorization, of deliberate mass murder, of deliberate frightfulness.” In the face of such “barbarism,” the film imagined the Chinese resisting “with a new faith” in defense of “their good earth.” The narrator concludes that “China’s war is our war.” “The oldest and the youngest of the world’s great nations . . . fight side by side, in the struggle that is as old China herself, the struggle of freedom against slavery, civilization against barbarism, good against evil,” the film proclaims. 63

Other Hollywood creations echoed Capra’s good and evil representation of the war. Little Tokyo, USA begins by alerting the audience to the Japanese threat within the United States, a threat “more than a decade” in the making by a “vast army of volunteer spies, steeped in the traditions of their homeland - Shintoists, blind worshippers of their Emperor.” 64 John Huston’s Across the Pacific represents Japanese Americans as traitors sneaking about in the dark shadows. The film’s trailer ominously promised an “astonishing tale” of Japanese “cunning, plotting, scheming” for “a diabolical mission of destruction.” 65 Prisoner of Japan simply recreated the wickedness of Island of Lost Souls
in a war-setting, depicting the Japanese island tyrant Matsuru as the human incarnation of evil. As usual, Japan’s evil threatened the Christian “way of life.” In *Gung Ho!* an American GI who is also a preacher, acts from his Christian convictions in accepting the apparent surrender of several Japanese troops. Things turn sour when the Japanese soldiers treacherously use hidden weapons to kill the merciful, Christian American soldier. In a world of good and evil, even cautious goodwill had no place.

Positing a global conflict of supernatural proportions, wartime representations of the evil enemy effectively inscribed the righteous nation identity narrative. “The present war is not a war having its cause in economic injustice or in economic needs, but in the last analysis it is a war of godless despots against the Lord and His anointed Christ,” *Moody Monthly* asserted. Roosevelt hardly needed to encourage Americans to “maintain the offensive against evil in all its forms.” And as Americans remained fixated on the evil enemy other, they effectively occluded the “lack” of righteous freedom within U.S. society. They remained ready, as the United Lutheran Church put it, “to dedicate themselves wholly, with every resource of heart and mind and conscience, to the defeat and destruction of this evil.”

A brief exploration of Capra’s Oscar winning *Prelude To War* illustrates the inseparability of the righteous self and the evil other. The film asserts a struggle between “the free world and the slave world,” a binary imaged on the screen through two globes. The globe labeled “free” appears in bright light while the globe labeled “slave” remains shrouded in an ominous darkness. The film displays Germany as the representative of the slave world, a world that has done “away with free speech and freedom of assembly.” *Prelude To War* then shows the evil Nazis restricting labor unions
and curtailing the right to collective bargaining, curiously ignoring Roosevelt’s forceful put-down of domestic strikes and Congress’s war on American unions through the Smith-Connolly Bill.  

With freedom nearly extinct, the film imagines the impending eradication of all religion. “There is only one obstacle left . . . the Word of God and the word of Fuhrers cannot be reconciled,” the narrator declares. Upon the cry “Then God must go!” a stained-glass window picturing Jesus and a cross suddenly shatters to pieces, revealing an image of Hitler posed like a god. In montage fashion, the film cuts to German ideologue Alfred Rosenberg announcing that churches must “vanish from the life of our people,” gun-wielding Germans madly smashing the tablets of the ten commandments, swastikas replacing crosses atop church steeples, and Landau’s Church of our Lady burning to the ground. Finally, almost as an afterthought, the montage resolves with an image of the Jewish star of David burning up.

Through representations of evil Germany as the dark-slave world, Prelude To War opens the cultural space in which to imagine the “content” of the light-free world. Moses, Mohammed, Confucius, and Christ inspired this world, the film avows. Each of these figures “believed that in the sight of God men were created equal,” the narrator states. “From that, there developed a spirit among men and nations which is best expressed in our Declaration of Freedom: ‘We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal.’” Americans themselves were “lighthouses lighting up a dark and foggy world.” After the aforementioned images of the evil slave world, the film quickly removes the audience to “the democratic world” and peaceful music fills the background. Indicating the intersection of race and religion discourse, the screen suddenly floods with
images of white, suburban, and prosperous individuals, the purported free world of “America.” These Americans, the narrator contends, had the choice of what to read and who to vote for. But most importantly, “on Sunday, if he felt like it, John Q. went to any church he pleased.”

Throughout the war, religious representations of Germany and Japan as evil, diabolical, and satanic enemies constituted a virtuous, moral, and godly United States. Specific geopolitical war aims faded in comparison with the reinvigorating culture of righteousness these images engendered. As the OWI discovered in 1942, throughout the United States there was a “general sense of satisfaction and unity” despite only a “vague” knowledge “about the aims for which we are fighting.” Many Americans preferred simply to “be told, not asked, to sacrifice.” In some cases, of course, Americans complained “that we do not know how many of our aims will prove attainable” because “we are so very uncertain what our aims are.” As Christopher Hollis put it in Commonweal, “we want them quite literally to tell us what we are fighting for.”

In actuality, when it came to what the war was being “fought for,” Americans never really doubted, and the war itself became a cultural celebration of “America.” Surveys showed that “a large majority” believed the United States “fought for justifiable ends.” Consequently, most Americans displayed “a sense of urgency” and were “nationalistic about the war.” Such nationalism expressed itself most often through the reification of the tropes that allowed the nation to be known. Such phrases as “we’re fighting for freedom” or “we don’t want to lose our way of life” found frequent articulation. “We want to be free,” one American woman declared. “That means about everything - speech and worship, you know, and a democratic government like we’re
used to.” Such sentiments were echoed by a nurse who felt that “the Four Freedoms ought to be enough” since it “covers everything: freedom of speech, to vote, freedom of religion, to have your own kind of Government.”

Given that religious discourse structured the representations of the war, religious leaders and institutions emerged at the center of a culture of righteousness. For example, the Federal Council rejoiced in America’s “priceless national heritage of freedom and democratic ideals.” As Americans, the Council continued, “we cherish this heritage more deeply when we see it attacked by a totalitarian threat” and therefore we “rededicate ourselves to the highest purposes of this nation.” The National Committee for Religion and Welfare Recovery echoed the Federal Council and urged “the mobilization of the moral and spiritual forces of the nation.” The Methodist Church demonstrated how seamlessly the physical and the spiritual meshed. The church was “within the Christian position” when it supported “the use of military force to resist an aggression which would overthrow every right which is held sacred by civilization men,” the Methodist General Conference resolved. Prominent Southern Baptists in the Alabama Convention started exhorting a greater display of the national flag in the front of churches.

Individual religious leaders and thinkers exhibited a similar nationalistic celebration. Ashbrook, for instance, delighted from the pulpit that “under freedom’s guiding light, America has become a haven for the oppressed” of “every race and clime and tradition.” The importance of the evil enemy emerged palpably in his claim that this “heritage of freedom” existed only “in those lands where faith in God prevails” and was “not to be found in pagan lands.” To Ashbrook, God himself appeared directly involved in the war; “God has just given a mighty token of His favor in N[orth] Africa” with “the
very completeness of the Axis collapse,” he argued in the spring of 1943.85 In Montrose, Colorado, Pastor Leon Raines delivered a sermon to his congregation proclaiming that the cause of the war was “freedom” and that the army in the field had been especially “picked” by God.86

The war crystallized the difference between the enemy “other” and “America,” overriding former aversion to violence and obscuring social inequality at home. In the words of Archbishop Francis Spellman, “if ever we have looked for a deeper meaning in the stars and stripes of our flag . . . we know we have found it today.” But what “meaning” had Spellman found? Quite simply, the war allowed him to “know” “America.” He asserted that “Americans, true Americans, deplore and deprecate racism, hate, greed, cruelty, and injustice.”87 Similarly, although he had “dreaded the coming of this war as one might dread perdition,” Harry Emerson Fosdick conceded that it was “a great time to be alive.” If the “three major forces of our time are fascism, communism, and democracy,” the popular New York preacher argued, then “our main emphasis is on the difference between them,” a difference in which democracy alone appeared as a “cause demanding all the intelligence, devotion, and character we are capable of,” a cause “to be served by us and by our children against innumerable difficulties.”88

The culture of righteousness also pervaded prominent religious periodicals.89 “There never will be freedom, security, and peace in the world without fighting,” the Northern Baptist Watchmen-Examiner argued. “There never will be any decent standards of morality and justice unless we go out and do battle for them.”90 According to the Christian Beacon, the United States was “fighting for liberty” and “no one disputes it.” Of course, such claims elided race, gender, class, and religion inequalities within the
United States even as it allowed the *Beacon* to conclude that “God, in His gracious providence, has put us in a land where there is freedom.” Only by arguing that “freedom is challenged in parts of the world” could the assertion that “we fight to maintain that freedom” be made. In turn, Americans imagined themselves quite sincerely as the “the stewards of liberty . . . as it is given to us from the Word of God and preserved in the Constitution of our nation.”

The competing religious subjectivities of religious modernism, Christian realism, and Christian fundamentalism shared in the reification of America as the home of freedom. For example, the fundamentalist *Bible Today* argued that “the cause of liberty and democracy will prevail because” of “Christ’s prophecy that the gospel will be preached in all the world.” And such preaching “missions” could only “be advanced under liberty and democracy.”

The religious modernist *Christian Century* disputed any project of dominating the world through political and religious conversion. Nonetheless, it argued that if the United States was “rich in material treasure and powerful in the exercising of its might it is because these riches and this power were meant by God to be used . . . for the good of nations less rich and less powerful.” As such, “the Christian ethic in international conduct would seem to require” the granting to “subject peoples everywhere those rights and privileges and freedom to which all men, as children of God, are entitled.” Somewhat more paradoxically, *Commonweal* asserted that “we cannot fight until wrong has left the world” since “our forces cannot impose freedom on others, and armed power cannot compel anybody freely to decide what is good.” But it too insisted that as Americans, “our ranks are joined now in reasserting for the future the freedom of American history from the assaults of enemies.”
The celebrations of “America” ultimately reinvigorated the sense of divine
choseness and affirmed signifiers of the national community problematized during the
Depression, especially the organizing tropes of political liberty, property rights, and
religious freedom. As Spellman succinctly put it, “America fights for God-given rights,
for her ‘credo’ of religious freedom, industrial freedom” and “freedom of speech and of
the press.” According to Roosevelt, “the present great struggle has taught us
increasingly that freedom of person and security of property anywhere in the world
depend upon the security of the rights and obligations of liberty and justice everywhere in
the world.”

Religious discourse representing the evil enemy recast some of the leading
signifiers of pre-war national righteousness, including the widely celebrated Atlantic
Charter. Americans briefly memorialized the Charter as a symbol of a just, but violent
struggle. In 1943, the OWI made special efforts to commemorate the two year old
document because “its principles . . . express what we are fighting for.” It noted that on
the second anniversary of the summit, “the American people feel more strongly than ever
the determination to fight the war to a finish so that these self-evident principles will have
world-wide application.” Such commemoration was never merely propaganda.
Brigadier General Patrick Hurley, for example, privately pushed a plan for the “United
States to sustain Iran as a free, independent nation” so that “the Iranian people” could
“enjoy the rights of man as set forth in the Constitution of the United States and . . . the
principles of the Atlantic Charter.”

The meaning of pre-war U.S. belligerence also gradually shifted. Only weeks
after the Japanese attack on Hawaii, Roosevelt maintained the ominous tone of pre-Pearl
Harbor peril. “The spiritual liberties of mankind are in jeopardy,” he warned. “The road ahead is dark and perilous” and “man, born to freedom in the image of God, will not forever suffer the oppressors’ sword.”99 As the war reinvigorated American national identity, the pre-war threat to the United States lost significance. For example, in 1944 Roosevelt argued before the Foreign Policy Association that the United States could easily “have come to terms with Hitler” but “rejected that.” The United States also “could have compromised with Japan,” but Americans “rejected that” too. In his “look back,” Roosevelt found himself “more and more certain that the decision not to bargain with the tyrants rose from the hearts and souls and sinews of the American people.” In other words, in place of the dire threat that left no choice for war, Roosevelt now rejoiced that Americans had decided to righteously choose war. “No generation has undergone a greater test, or has met that test with greater heroism,” Roosevelt exulted. “No generation has had a more exalted mission.”100

Americans expressed the renewed sense of mission through a variety of cultural celebrations devoted to “loyalty” and “Americanness.” The designation of “Loyalty Days” continued throughout the war as it had during the Depression, but with a new emphasis on preparing for war rather than for peace. Relating religious faith and war, the Golden Rule Foundation and the Loyal Legion of “laymen and clergy” who organized the Loyalty Days sought to ensure “every citizen in a house of worship every week” for the “full mobilization of the religious and character-building forces of the nation” as is “commensurate with the mobilization of our military and industrial strength.”101

Much more widely celebrated than Loyalty Days, but equally a product of the wartime culture of righteousness, was “I Am An American Day.” Thought up by
Benjamin Edwards Neal, the inaugural I Am An American Day was proclaimed by Roosevelt in 1940. Initially designed to recognize and honor new U.S. citizens, the day took on special meaning during the war. In 1945, thousands of Americans signed “Pledge of Allegiance” posters specifically designed for I Am An American Day. By signing the pledge, Americans promised that, “with love of our country in our hearts and fired by the unyielding spirit of free men and women to preserve and extend our liberties” and “to maintain our national prosperity,” they would “give everything . . . to defeat Germany and Japan, the enemies of mankind and freedom, who would enslave us.” The poster itself was red, white, and blue and featured as its backdrop the famous picture of the flag-raising at Iwo Jima. In a public statement, Neal asserted that I Am An American Day “should be the occasion for every home-front-soldier” to “make covenant with himself” to do everything within his power in helping the United States fight “to the finish” in its “mortal combat with Japanese, stab-in-the-back, fanatic savages.”

Patriotic celebrations also policed the ontological borders of the imagined community, frequently resulting in suppression of freedom domestically. In Arizona, for instance, three strangers accosted a Jehovah’s Witness, hoping to force him to salute the American flag. The Witness refused and managed to escape. Later in the day, however, an angry mod tracked him down, shouting “string him up!” and “chop his head off!” In Jackson, Mississippi, city officials declared that “there is no room . . . for any person who will not salute the American flag and openly says he will not fight for his country.”

The culture of righteousness thus elided repression at home as it reinvigorated the sense of manifest destiny central to American national identity. “The unique . . . fact about the United States is that it was born with a purpose,” American Mercury
proclaimed. “No other nation . . . came into being in this way.” To be sure, the magazine added, “other nations have given birth to purpose. But a purpose gave birth to the United States.” In Harper’s, Frederick Lewis Allen expressed similar sentiments, arguing in late 1944 that “the past few months have been one of the most triumphant periods in all American history.” As such, Americans “may as well enjoy our unfolding triumph to the full. For it is a great one.”

Celebrations of the great triumph appeared in force on the stage. Only weeks after Pearl Harbor the American Educational Theater Association (AETA) appointed a “Committee on War Activities” to facilitate projects devoted to “winning the war.” The Committee quickly marshaled the resources of the AETA, including more than three hundred theatres and producing companies, four hundred theatre workers, and thousands of students studying theatre across the United States. The result was an avalanche of “victory theme” drama scripts for use in a variety of war-centered settings, such as bond drives, patriotic programs, army camps, and functions for war-industry workers. More than this, however, the Committee recognized “the opportunity and responsibility of the theatre to aid in giving purposiveness to the war by maintaining the realization of the meaning of freedom through creative activity.” Through the Committee, AETA intended to fulfill its resolution “to preserve the cultural heritage of the American Way of Life particularly at a time when that way of life is endangered.”

The scripts procured by the AETA initiative mirrored the widespread cultural celebrations of national righteousness. Students at the University of Oklahoma, for example, produced plays directly tying “sacrifices made for the founding of America” to “sacrifices which must urgently be made for the preservation of America.” By 1943
the Committee found “a growing demand for scripts which do not relate directly to the war, but which contribute to our understanding of, and identification with, American traditions and background.” When they finally received those scripts the religioned understanding of America was palpable. Students at the University of Michigan, for example, volunteered their extra-curricular time to developing dramas and musicals that celebrated America’s purported past using a blend of Christian hymns such as “God of our Fathers,” “America,” “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” and “Battle Song of the Revolution.” The authors of a play titled *The Good Land* even added a note on the front of their script declaring that in retelling the “growth of the American ideal” the play showed “first, strength in God, then a democratic form of government.” Other student war scripts included titles such as *Battle Songs of Freedom*, an audience sing-along glorifying in an American heritage of liberty, and *It Happened Before*, a play paralleling the contemporary war with other wars (ostensibly) fought for freedom in American history.

Hollywood provided the largest and most fantastic examples of the war’s power to inscribe the righteous nation narrative. Although the OWI’s Bureau of Motion Pictures initially sought to procure “properly directed hatred” from the film industry, it soon found itself having to restrain Hollywood rather than encourage it. In the end, the result of the “properly directed hatred” was a series of films celebrating “America.” The film *Yankee Doodle Dandy* “waves the flag so fiercely that on occasion the audience is less likely to be captivated than concussed,” scholar Colin Shindler remarks. The film memorializes famous American playwright, singer, and dancer George M. Cohan and is rife with celebrations of a fictitious “America.” For example, during Cohan’s meeting
with the president, the film argues that nowhere but in America “could a simple guy like me come in and talk things over with the top man,” effectively obscuring that in truth most Americans, but especially the marginalized and repressed, could not actually do so.  

The multiple Oscar winning film *Casablanca* (1943) is significant for the cultural logic on which the protagonist Rick’s “moral” choice turns. Representing America, Rick is portrayed as the paragon of equality, freedom, and prosperity. Nevertheless, the audience is uncertain about Rick’s morality because of his seeming indifference to world tensions. In other words, Rick’s (American) identity cannot fully obscure the “lack” at the core of all identity narratives. The possibility of Rick’s righteousness occurs as the film constructs an evil “other” that will force Rick to choose a side. At one point, Rick is confronted with news about “devils taking over Bulgaria” and whether he is willing to do anything about it, but sloughs off responsibility. Further in the film, he is informed that every person “like every nation has a destiny” that they need to follow, but Rick remains dismissive. Finally, the moral choice becomes imperative when a Czech resistance fighter seeks out Rick for aid. Rick (America) makes the correct moral choice by shooting the Nazi officer to enable an escape; in essence, Rick realized his destiny through righteous, violent opposition to an evil other.  

The importance of the film lies not in the protagonist Rick himself, then, but the role of Rick in following the moral choice, a role with which millions of Americans readily identified. “I was Humphrey Bogart in *Casablanca*; that was my movie,” one wounded veteran professed. “A man lived and died for justice on the killing grounds of the world.”
The title screens of Capra’s *Why We Fight* series testifies to the connection between violent opposition and the reinvigoration of the imagined community. Each film contained the same quote from Secretary of War Henry Stimson as an epigram: “We are determined that before the sun sets on this terrible struggle our flag will be recognized throughout the world as a *symbol of freedom*.” In *Prelude To War*, against a background montage of Valley Forge, the White House, the Liberty Bell, and the Statue of Liberty, the narrator vigorously proclaims “Fighting! Living! Dying! For what? For freedom. That for which man have fought since time began: to be free . . . I know not what course others may take, but as for me ‘Give me liberty! or give me death.’” Like the pre-war messages that posited American righteousness by linking the United States to Great Britain, *The Battle of Britain*, *The Battle of Russia*, and *The Battle of China* celebrated the “indomitable will for freedom of our allies” and thereby the same will of the United States who fought along side them.¹¹⁷

*Capra’s War Comes To America* especially illustrated the role of war in fomenting the culture of righteousness. At the beginning of the film, the narrator informs the audience that Americans across the world are “fighting for their country and for more than their country, fighting for an idea . . . bigger than the country” since “without the idea, the country might have remained only a wilderness.” The film then retraces “American” history, from Jamestown and Plymouth Rock to the present, conveniently skipping over such uncomfortable issues as slavery and the political marginalization of women and lauding how the first earliest “Americans” came “in search of freedom, facing unknown dangers rather than bend the knee or bow to tyranny.” The film is an orgy of flags, images of the Statue of Liberty, and proclamations of America as the land
of freedom, liberty, and equality. To make the point, of course, *War Comes To America* introduces Germany and Japan (and Italy to some extent) as the evil enemies “organized to smash personal freedom, equality of man, freedom of speech, freedom of religion.” Against background images of a Nazi soldier smashing the statue of Lincoln sitting in his chair at the Lincoln memorial, the narrator concludes that Germany and Japan sought “to smash the very principles which made us the people we are.”

The wartime culture of righteousness affected pervasive celebrations of “America” that overrode any potential counter-narratives of U.S. identity. An atmosphere of triumph was inherent among all who, no matter their vocation, reflexively celebrated their “Americanness” as war reinvigorated U.S. chosenness. Bell Telephone operator Eleanora Dayton Surry reveals the righteous nation identity as predominant in the interpretation of violent conflict:

> We are the unseen, ever watchful, never sleeping,  
> Binding the atoms together.  
> Not ours the glory nor applause,  
> We wear no uniform and yet are part of our land’s destiny,  
> Guarding her secrets well.  
> We are the unseen, loyal, true to an ideal,  
> One God, one country, one flag:  
> We want no praise, knowing, out there,  
> Men have shed their blood that we might live…  
> With others soon to follow them.  
> Our reward shall be, one day, with the touch of magic  
> at our fingertips  
> To send across the quivering wires  
> One far-flung cry - “Ours is the Victory!”

Since the war enabled the constitution of the nation by staging righteousness through violent opposition, Americans invested tremendous meaning in bodies at the point of contact (the sharp end) with the evil other. The critical role of the American
soldier then, emerged as part of the inscription of national righteousness through violent international juxtaposition. Of course, soldiers were scarcely righteous in and of themselves. As a result, their bodies became a critical sites of cultural imagination. Ultimately, the soldiers’ dead bodies served as a locus of righteousness because death obliterated the possibility of unrighteousness while it signified the violent confrontation with evil. In other words, dead soldiers readily became generic “Americans” rendering possible the verification of “America.” As Surry’s poem put it, “men have shed their blood that we might live.”

Veneration of American soldiers in U.S. society was widespread. Americans required heroes to celebrate in order that they might have some vicarious participation in the sense of righteousness inherent in confronting the evil enemy. As Roosevelt acknowledged, “Not all of us can have the privilege of fighting our enemies in distant parts of the world.”120 “The battlefield provided a plentitude” of soldiers who Americans “clothed, whether justly or not, with characteristics long identified with national virtue,” historian John Blum explains.121 In Leon Raines’ Colorado Church, for instance, the congregants celebrated such “heroes” by hanging a “Service Flag” at the front of the church and pinning stars on it for every member serving in the military. The connection between national identity and the serving soldiers was palpable in the church’s decision to hold a “patriotic” service to “dedicate” the flag on “the Sabbath nearest Lincoln’s Birthday.”122 Representations of soldiers seemingly dwarfed other cultural framings of the war. “We have need of him,” war correspondent John Hersey wrote. “He is our future in the world. Neither the eloquence of Churchill nor the humaneness of Roosevelt, no
Charter, no four freedoms or fourteen points” could “guarantee” anything, “only our” American soldiers could.123

Wartime representations of the American soldier thus inscribed the righteous nation identity narrative. Wartime censors, for instance, reflexively restricted publication of any pictures that might indicate unrighteous behavior on the part of American troops.124 The wartime writings of Pyle, Hersey, and John Steinbeck further imagined soldiers as an innocent group of men simply longing for “America.” In Into The Valley, Hersey describes asking the “men what they were fighting for.” The responses referred to freshly baked pies, music, liquor, a “blonde,” movies, books, and others. To Hersey it seemed that the soldiers “were just American boys” simply “fighting for home.”125 Pyle’s writing reflected a similar exaltation of the soldiers as innocent “brave men.” “Home” remained the “one really profound goal that obsesses every one of the Americans marching on foreign shores.”126 Soldiers “dream about home, corner drugstores and blueberry pie,” Time observed.127

The desire to ensure the righteousness of the soldier spurred efforts to monitor their behavior in the face of alcohol, sex, gambling, and other potential temptations.128 The Federal Council of Churches, for instance, lamented that “vice and drunkenness continue . . . to undermine the health of the service men.” It urged the government “to improve the public attitude on these matters and to increase the general support of law enforcement agents.”129

Ensuring a righteous spirituality also helped. During the war clergy and laymen organized prayer sessions and times, sent Bibles to the troops, and encouraged correspondence and gift packages from fellow church members. In all, close to 10,000
Americans served at one time or another as military chaplains. For the most part, the chaplains organized worship services, funerals, religious festivals and holidays, entertainment, and counseling services, all of which were directed at the spiritual welfare of the soldier. So critical did a soldier’s spiritual state seem that churches struggled to send as many chaplains as possible. Amid zeal over the souls of the “boys overseas,” sometimes doctrinal debates between competing religious groups spilled over into the politics of the chaplaincy service. For the most part, however, chaplains of all religious stripes, Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic functioned side by side without quarrel. 

Although representations of soldierly righteousness abounded, soldiers rarely conformed to the image created for them. Amongst each other, American troops not only engaged in racially motivated violence, but they frequently degraded one another, deployed copious arsenals of vulgar language, and drank heavily. In their treatment of the enemy, Americans also often demonstrated that the purported standard of righteousness remained illusory. “What kind of war do civilians supposed we fought?” former service-man Edgar Jones wondered. Cataloging the immoral behaviors he witnessed in damning fashion, Jones described how Americans “shot prisoners in cold blood, wiped out hospitals, strafed lifeboats, killed or mistreated enemy civilians, finished off the enemy wounded, tossed the dying into a hole with the dead, and in the Pacific boiled the flesh off enemy skulls to make table ornaments for sweethearts, or carved their bones into letter openers.”

Given the inability of any individual soldier to function as the living representative of a collective righteousness, dead soldiers became essential to the process by which war reinvigorated the imagined community. The dead soldier, in essence,
served as open text on which the violence that produced the lifeless body could be rendered meaningful. Accordingly, by late 1943, mounting pressure for more war information, both by the OWI and by the public, led to the publishing of the first photographs of American war dead in Life. Illustrating the regenerative power of dead bodies, the caption beside the photographs simply read “Here lie three Americans,” eliding any individuality and differentiation but inscribing the imagined community. As the war progressed the photographs of dead Americans became increasingly more gruesome and bloody as well as more frequent.

Images of dead Americans paled into significance to the cultural narrative written on their dead bodies, a narrative inscribing America as the righteous defenders of freedom. The fighting units themselves, even though they often fought in what Paul Fussell called an “ideological vacuum,” ensured they never left a war zone without holding “a big Memorial Service in honor” of those “who have died or been killed in battle.” Military chaplains often risked their lives to provide burial rites to the dead under enemy fire. At a memorial service in early May, 1943, Chaplain John Franklin of the 182nd Infantry urged that “we have come to pay our tribute of honor and love to our comrades who here gave their lives for our Common Cause” against “the pagan aggressors” who “have flouted the Truth of God and have cast scorn upon the ideals of human brotherhood, freedom, and personal liberty.” Later the same month, in an official Memorial Day service, Chaplain Lieutenant Colonel Mark Warner beckoned that “the living might pay tribute to the dead” who “on the land, on the sea and in the air have given their lives . . . for the perpetuation of our American ideals.” He urged that “each grave become a sacred shrine where we shall renew our devotion to the principles and
ideals for which others have laid down their lives” so that all could then “turn away with a new sense of obligation.”

Dead bodies reinvigorated the imagined community so powerfully that Americans ascribed them life-giving power. “If we can thus infuse ourselves with the essence of their spirit they will truly never die but will live on within us, strengthening and guiding us in the fight that lies ahead,” Major General Joe Lawton Collins asserted. “Then shall we be loyal to these gallant men and pledge to them our lives that their America shall triumph.” In suggesting that the living “pledge” their “lives” to the dead so that “their [the dead] America shall triumph,” Collins betrayed the predominance of dead bodies in signifying America. In essence, the living became enslaved to the dead. Americans “stand accountable to them,” Roosevelt stated, and “God, the Father of all living, watches over these hallowed graves and blesses the souls of those who rest here.”

On the big screen, the war dead became frequently became a source of new life. After all five Sullivan brothers died in 1943, a celebration of the brothers in film rapidly followed the brief period of national mourning as agents flocked to the Sullivan family home in Iowa to acquire the story rights. When The Sullivans finally appeared in 1944, Mrs. Sullivan sold war bonds at the New York premiere. Whereas The Sullivans celebrated the living patriotism of five very dead Americans, A Guy Named Joe (1943) suggested that the war dead were so alive they returned from heaven in spirit to guide those that took their place.

Dead bodies consequently mattered not in the sense that they were important but because they inscribed in their very deadness the righteousness nation identity narrative; dead bodies literally mattered “America.” “Their unconquerable spirit will live forever,”
Roosevelt argued, because through their deaths Americans “may know that the state of this Nation is good - the heart of this Nation is sound - the spirit of this Nation is strong - the faith of this Nation is eternal.”\textsuperscript{142} Thus, dead bodies effectively lived on as Roosevelt and millions of other Americans commuted “into His infinite grace those who make their supreme sacrifice in the cause of righteousness.”\textsuperscript{143}

The event known as “D-Day” effectively illuminates the inherent linkage between war, national identity, and dead soldiers. Perhaps more than any other wartime experience, D-Day illustrated Roosevelt’s claim “that you can't take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle of it and put the war abroad . . . on one side of the line, and put the home front . . . on another side of the line, because after all it all ties in together.”\textsuperscript{144} Even the anticipation of D-Day excited the culture of righteousness. For example, churches planned their prayers well in advance of the invasion. The Federal Council of Churches asked God “to enter into this struggle with Thy transforming power, that out of its anguish there may come a victory to righteousness.”\textsuperscript{145} More than a week prior, \textit{Christianity and Crisis} intoned that “the invasion of Europe is the climax of a gigantic conflict.”\textsuperscript{146}

Members of an Alabama Southern Baptist church anticipated D-Day with such zeal that they deposed their pastor to ensure their own spiritual readiness. With the invasion fast approaching, the anxious congregation placed an American flag at the front of the church although their pastor had forbidden it on theological grounds. With little support, the pastor resigned. “I want to congratulate you on your resignation,” one member wrote. “That is the best thing you have done for your church in ten or more years . . . The people are tired of a negro loving traitor to our flag . . . The congregation is sorry
for your mother and father, but they have no sympathy for you and your yellow to the core brothers.\textsuperscript{147}

On D-Day itself, the United States virtually shut-down, with many sports leagues, theaters, businesses, and even some factories closing for the day as churches overflowed with praying Americans. In Philadelphia, the Liberty Bell tolled for the first time in nearly one hundred and ten years. Perhaps attempting to share vicariously in the invasion through symbolic blood-letting, Americans flooded Red Cross blood-donors clinics in numerous cities. Eager for any news from the front, they listened attentively to their radios, scarcely able to stand the seemingly interminable delay between the events themselves and any news of them.\textsuperscript{148}

And the news was on its way. The U.S. ensured that fast planes carried the photos and footage of the invasion as fast as possible back to the United States. Despite the cost, effort, and potentially “ineffective” loss of life, the Americans had outfitted the invading force with over fifty 35mm cameras mounted on boats, tanks, and aircraft. In addition, the military designated more than four hundred men to capture images and footage from the landings.\textsuperscript{149} The invasion enthralled the nation. “At last the supreme moment has come,” the \textit{New York Times} exulted. “After the first spine-tingling news, New York City’s millions turned almost as one . . . to prayer.”\textsuperscript{150}

While young Americans disembarked on Normandy’s beaches and torrents of bullets shredded their bodies, Roosevelt calmly led the nation in prayer. “Almighty God,” he intoned, “Our sons, pride of our Nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization . . . Lead them straight and true.” He prayed confidently that “by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of
our cause, our sons will triumph” and that “the darkness will be rent by noise and flame.” Of course, “some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom. And for us at home . . . help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice.” Give us “faith in our sons; Faith in each other; Faith in our united crusade” that nothing might “deter us in our unconquerable purpose. With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy.”

The D-Day prayer of Roosevelt, heard by tens of millions of Americans over the radio, reflected the cultural hegemony achieved by the righteous nation narrative through the violence of war. By invoking divine help for physical battle the prayer repudiated religious modernist social gospel discourse that had dominated the cultural landscape and drove U.S. foreign policy in the early years of the Depression. In casting the war as a struggle between the “righteousness of our cause” and the “unholy forces of our enemy,” Roosevelt reflexively deployed the discourse of Christian realism’s original sin. The “sons” slaughtered on the beaches of France became idyllic dead bodies that mattered America, “heroic servants” of a god whose favor blessed “the united crusade” and the “unconquerable purpose” of the United States. On their corpses, the narrative of the United States as a righteous nation fighting sin in the world was written.

Americans across the land echoed Roosevelt’s religioned framing of the invasion. An editorial cartoon in the Chicago Daily Tribune showed a god-like figure of “history” directing the invading forces into France and writing the phrase “History’s most decisive hour” on what resembles a gravestone. The New York Times editorialized that the United States had “come to the hour for which we born.” “We pray for our country, this
country that is ourselves, as strong as we are strong,” the paper added. “The cause prays for itself, for it is the cause of the God who created men free and equal.” Christianity and Crisis prayed “for the victory of those things which we know are His will - justice, righteousness, honor, freedom.”

Other Americans celebrated national righteousness specifically through the dead bodies that represented the struggle at the sharp end. “In this war, God’s stake is the greatest for liberty and justice,” chaplain Daniel Poling averred. “We will win with love, love of liberty, love of home, love of all brave men who will dare and die.” A local paper in Virginia published the following reader’s prayer: “Dear Father and Great Maker of all things: Beauty that dies the soonest, lives the longest. Who can fail to see the beauty and sacrifice our brave young lads are making? Because they cannot keep themselves for a day, we’ll keep them forever in memory and give them immortality.”

“Our boys were going to die for America,” the Christian Beacon declared. “We are Americans. Our cities, our homes, our shores, our country seemed very precious and worth something! At last our armies were coming into the mightiest death grapple with the enemy.” Archbishop’s Spellman’s poem in The Risen Soldier imagined without abandon that dying for America resulted in eternal salvation:

I am the risen soldier; though I die
I shall live on and, living, still achieve
My country’s mission - Liberty in truth
And truth in Charity. I am aware
God made me for this nobler flight and fight
A higher course than any I had deemed
Could ever be.

As Americans violently opposed the forces of evil in the world, they fomented a culture of righteousness that reinvigorated national identity. In the end, dead Americans
provided the optimal open text on which the narrative of national righteousness could be written. “This generation of Americans has come to realize . . . that there is something larger and more important than the life of any individual,” Roosevelt declared, “something for which a man will sacrifice, and gladly sacrifice, not only his pleasures, not only his goods, not only his associations with those he loves, but his life itself.” 159

Despite the lack of domestic freedom rooted in inequalities of race, gender, class, and religion, Americans experienced World War II as a violent juxtaposition with the evil enemy other. In turn, Americans celebrated their own national righteousness as the imagined community renewed its sense of manifest destiny and divine mission. “If we apprehend this religiously, the sense of destiny ceases to be a vehicle of pride and becomes the occasion for a new sense of responsibility,” Niebuhr wrote. “In that sense, God has chosen us in this fateful period of world history.” 160

On April 12, 1945, Roosevelt’s own dead body became a text through which Americans imagined the nation. “Under his leadership the American people withstood the buffeting of depression,” American Mercury asserted, “and emerged strong and respected, refreshed in their faith in democracy and in the ultimate triumph of justice.” 161 A people in mourning held memorials and churches services across the nation. As the Christian Evangelist observed, “no person who witnessed these manifestations of interest by Americans in the things of the spirit can dismiss them as a mere passing resurgence of sentimentality occasioned by grief and sudden loss.” Indeed, “in mighty concert [Americans] proclaimed the comfort of the old faith, dependence upon the promises of God, hope in a future life, and a belief in the immortality of good.” 162 Roosevelt’s dead
body thus entered the righteous nation narrative as it reinvigorated American chosenness through war. In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, “He died like a good soldier.”

Notes

1 Francis J. Spellman, *The Road To Victory* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1942), 128-129.

2 Memorial Day Service Program, April 20, 1943, Mark Warner Papers, Box 2, Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan (hereafter cited as: BHL).


6 Blum, V Was For Victory, 182-207; Gary Gerstle, American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 210-220; James MacGregor Burns and Susan Dunn, The Three Roosevelts: Patrician Leaders who Transformed America (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 468-469. One African American worker in Los Angeles simply wanted “the same rights for all – not one set for white, one for red, and none for black.” See Preliminary Report, Personal Identification with the War: Selected Interviews, September 22, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL. The OWI noted that in Detroit “the Negro housing problem is the most acute” because of “real estate interests which have successfully followed a policy of having many sections restrictively zoned.” African-descent Americans “in Detroit, as in many other cities, must pay in the bulk of cases much more rent for the same accommodations as white people.” See Special Report, Negro Housing Situation in Detroit, March 5, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL. Attorney General Francis Biddle recommended to Roosevelt that even though “the housing situation…among the colored sections is deplorable,” the solution lay in “limiting, and in some instances putting an end to, Negro migrations into communities which cannot absorb them.” See Francis Biddle to Roosevelt, July 15, 1935, Francis Biddle Papers, Box 2, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter cited as: FDRL). On race violence against African Americans see Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943 (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1991); Dominic J. Capeci, The Harlem Race Riot of 1943 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977).


9 Prison was only one of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ worries. In 1942 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of a municipality that had set-up a complex licensing and fee structure for the distribution of religious literature, a system specifically aimed at curtailing the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Outside the realm of the judiciary, as early as 1940, forty-four states experienced a total of more than 300 cases of mob violence against the Witnesses. Gerald L. Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 186-187; Goossen, *Women Against the Good War*, 18.


11 Mencken Diary, March 8, 1942; Mencken Diary, April 1, 1945; both in *The Diary of H. L. Mencken*, ed. Charles A. Fecher (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 199, 357.


13 Henry St. George Tucker, President, Federal Council of the Churches Christ, to Roosevelt, January 17, 1944, President’s Personal File (hereafter cited as PPF) 1628, FDRL.


17 R. 2: Report on Recent Developments, January 4, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.

19 Roosevelt and Federal Council quoted in Luther Weigle and Samuel McCrae Cavert to Roosevelt, January 2, 1942, Official File (hereafter cited as: OF) 213, FDRL.


23 Message to Our Fellow Christians, Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, January 1942, OF 213, FDRL.


27 State of the Union Address, January 6, 1942, PPA, 11: 32-42.


31 R. 27: Personal Identification with the War, October 13, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.

32 William E. Ashbrook, “The Price We Pay,” April 14, 1943, J. Oliver Buswell Papers, Box 277, Presbyterian Church in America Historical Center, St. Louis, Missouri).


34 State of the Union Address, January 6, 1942, PPA, 11: 32-42.


37 Wallace quoted in Robert Jewett and John S. Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 76.

38 Cover, *Collier’s*, February 27, 1943.

39 R. 27: Personal Identification with the War, October 13, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.


42 Preliminary Report: Personal Identification with the War: Selected Interviews, September 22, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.


44 *Beasts of Berlin*, dir. Sam Newfield, 87 min., Sigmund Neufeld Productions, 1939.


46 *Prelude To War*, dir. Frank Capra, 53 min., U.S. Army Signal Corps, 1943.


49 Minear, *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, 93, 103.


53 Preliminary Report, Personal Identification with the War: Selected Interviews, September 22, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.

54 Editorial “America At War,” The Christian Century, December 17, 1941.

55 Cover, Time, May 11, 1942.

56 Cover, Collier’s, December 12, 1942.


60 R. 27, Personal Identification with the War, October 13, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.


64 Little Tokyo, USA, dir. Otto Brower, 64 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1942; Dick, The Star-Spangled Screen, 237-238.


69 Address to the International Student Assembly, September 3, 1942, PPA, 11: 347-354.

Although initially filmed for the armed forces, both military and political leaders were so enthralled with Capra’s documentary that they demanded it be released to the broader public. See Dick, *The Star-Spangled Screen*, 2-3; Shindler, *Hollywood Goes To War*, 76.

In 1943 John Lewis led more than half a million coal miners off the job to protest poor working conditions, combat-like death rates, and exorbitant commodity prices in mining towns amid soaring corporate profits. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes agreed that the mining companies shouldered most of the blame but the broader American culture eviscerated Lewis and the strikers. In response to the strike itself, Roosevelt declared that “the Stars and Stripes will fly over the coal mines” and followed through by seizing the mines the next day. “Coal will be mined no matter what any individual thinks about it,” he averred, “the operation of our factories, our power plants, our railroads will not be stopped” even “if it becomes necessary to have troops at the mine mouths or in coal towns.” It was simply axiomatic that if “the Government offers the miners a fair contract” then “they have no right in wartime to refuse to work under it.” See Fireside Chat, May 2, 1943, *PPA*, 12: 190-199; Executive Order 9340: Seizure of Coal Mines, May 1, 1943, *PPA*, 12: 185-190; Statement by Roosevelt, November 1, 1943, *PPA*, 12: 464; Executive Order 9412 on the Seizure and Operation of the Railroads, December 27, 1943, *PPA*, 12: 563-569; Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 496-497; Fleming, *The New Dealer’s War*, 237-241; Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, 73. Coal miners especially had a long history of “powerlessness” in U.S. society. See John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

*Prelude To War*, dir. Frank Capra, 53 min., U.S. Army Signal Corps, 1943.

*Prelude To War*, Capra, 1943.

R. 13: American Unity, May 26, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL; R. 14: American Views the Post-War World, May 26, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.

Preliminary Report, Personal Identification with the War: Selected Interviews, September 22, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.


R. 27, Personal Identification with the War, October 13, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.

R. 14, American Views the Post-War World, May 26, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.
80 R. 27, Personal Identification with the War, October 13, 1942, Office of War Information, Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, BHL.

81 “Message to Our Fellow Christians” January 1942, OF 213, FDRL; Luther Weigle and Samuel Cavert to Roosevelt, January 2, 1942, OF 213, FDRL.

82 Mary E. Hughes, Director of Public Relations, Golden Rule Foundation, to McIntyre, July 16, 1943, PPF 1685, FDRL.


85 William E. Ashbrook, “The Price We Pay,” April 14, 1943, J. Oliver Buswell Papers, Box 277, PCAHC.

86 Leon E. Raines to Mark Warner, February 15, 1943, Mark Warner Papers, Box 1, BHL.

87 Spellman, The Road To Victory, 128-129, 2.


89 Gerald L. Sittser makes a similar conclusion although he differentiates such patriotic celebrations from the any idea that the war represented a “holy war.” See Sittser, A Cautious Patriotism, 81-86.

90 John W. Bradbury, Watchmen-Examiner, January 14, 1943.


95 Spellman, The Road To Victory, 2.

97 Thomas Hamilton, Assistant Chief, British Division, Office of War Information, to Harry Hopkins, August 14, 1943, Harry Hopkins Papers, Box 132, FDRL.


100 Address to the Foreign Policy Association, October 21, 1944, PPA, 13: 342-354.

101 Poster, “Mobilization of Spiritual Forces,” 1943, PPF 1685, FDRL.


104 Russell Davenport, “The Promise of America,” American Mercury, September 1944.


106 Committee on War Activities, American Educational Theater Association, 1942, Kenneth Thorpe Rowe Papers, Box 1, BHL.


110 Writing for the war by students at the University of Michigan, 1943, Kenneth Thorpe Rowe Papers, Box 2, BHL; “Thanksgiving is Proclaimed,” Student Script, 1943, Kenneth Thorpe Rowe Papers, Box 2, BHL.

111 “The Good Land,” Student Script, 1943, Kenneth Thorpe Rowe Papers, Box 2, BHL.
112 Writing for the war by students at the University of Michigan, 1943, Kenneth Thorpe Rowe Papers, Box 2, BHL; Michigan Council of Defense, “Battle Songs of Freedom: A Patriotic Song Service,” October 9, 1942, Kenneth Thorpe Rowe Papers, Box 2, BHL.


114 Yankee Doodle Dandee, dir. Michael Curtiz, 126 min., Warner Bros., 1942; Shindler, Hollywood Goes To War, 71.

115 Casablanca, dir. Michael Curtiz, 102 min., Warner Brothers, 1943. Bernard Dick suggests that Casablanca “evolved” into one of America’s “sacred texts,” a condition I argue is explainable in terms of the film’s resonance with the referential structure of the American national identity narrative. See Dick, The Star-Spangled Screen, 167-171.

116 Edward W. Wood, On Being Wounded (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1991), 68. Exhibiting the intersection of gender discourse and religion discourse, Wood adds, “always, always, a beautiful woman waiting with glistening eyes and gentle hands, ready to comfort, cherish and support her man as he fought for a just cause.”

117 Prelude To War, Capra, 1943; The Battle of Britain, dir. Frank Capra, 54 min., Warner Bros., 1943; The Battle of Russia, dir. Frank Capra and Anatole Litvak, 83 min., U.S. War Department, 1943; The Battle of China, Capra, 1944.

118 War Comes To America, dir. Frank Capra and Anatole Litvak, 70 min., U.S. Army Pictorial Services, 1945.

119 Bell Telephone Ad, Collier’s, August 8, 1942.

120 Fireside Chat, April 28th, 1942, PPA, 11: 227-238.

121 Blum, V Was For Victory, 53.

122 Leon E. Raines to Mark Warner, February 15, 1943, Mark Warner Papers, Box 1. BHL.


127 “No Place Like Home,” *Time*, June 12, 1944.


129 Luther Weigle, President, Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, to Roosevelt, March 24, 1942, PPF 1628, FDRL.

130 Brief Prepared and Presented to the Naval Affairs Committee of the United States Senate Against the Favorable Recommendation of Bill S. 300 and H.R. 1023, December 7, 1944, J. Oliver Buswell Papers, Box 277, PCAHC; Carl McIntire to Robert T. Ketcham, May 17, 1945, J. Oliver Buswell Papers, Box 277, PCAHC; Letter, March 17, 1943, Mart Warner Papers, Box 1, BHL; Letter, July 23, 1943, Mark Warner Papers, Box 1, BHL; Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism*, 147-167. *The Bible Today* requested its readers “to pray that more chaplains may by admitted to the services who are not connected with a pacifistic organization, but with one which believes in the war effort, and men who are on fire for the salvation of lost souls” particularly “many of the American boys not yet in the thick of the fight” to “see that they are saved and ready to meet their Maker.” See “American Council Call for Day of Prayer,” *The Bible Today*, January, 1943.


135 Roeder, “Censoring Disorder,” 51.
Fussell, *Wartime*, 129-143; Letter, April 19, 1943, Mark Warner Papers, Box 1, BHL; Frederick Kirker, Division Chaplain, to Mark Warner, August 31, 1943, Mark Warner Papers, Box 1, BHL.

“The Challenge - Be Worthy,” Sermon delivered at American Division Memorial Service by John Shade Franklin, Chaplain, 182nd Infantry, March 9, 1943, Mark Warner Papers, Box 2, BHL; “Lest We Forget,” Address by Chaplain Mark Warner, May 30, 1943, Army, Navy, and Marine Cemetery, Guadalcanal, Mark Warner Papers, Box 2, BHL.

Memorial Day Service Program, April 20, 1943, Mark Warner Papers, Box 2, BHL. I am not arguing that Americans explicitly embraced the deaths of their soldiers. Indeed, Americans sometimes protested specific military circumstances that resulted in death, especially when family members died. But I am suggesting that reflexive narratives of identity flourish most profitably in the violence of war, and, through representations of war dead. For an example of protest, see the discussion of the Battle of Tarawa in Fussell, *Wartime*, 12-13.


*The Sullivans*, dir. Lloyd Bacon, 112 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1944; Doherty, *Projections of War*, 174-177.


Related in Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, 405-407. The pastor believed that the Bible indicated Christians should not countenance the “national exclusiveness” represented by the flag.


Editorial Cartoon, “They Storm the West Wall,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 7, 1944.


“Invasion and Prayer,” *Christianity and Crisis*, June 26, 1944.

Poling quoted in “A Faith For War,” *Time*, July 17, 1944.

Quoted in Ambrose, *D-Day*, 497.


CHAPTER VI

IMAGINING HELL

Justice must be done . . . people must be made to pay for the crimes they have committed. If the nations whom God has been pleased to give victory and to use as an arm of judgment . . . refuse to mete out justice, or fail, then their day of suffering will only be aggravated in the providence of God.

- Christian Beacon, May 1945

Running, screaming. “We’re all going to die! The fire’s coming!” The sound of incendiary bombs falling . . . the deafening reverberations of the planes, and the great roar of fire and wind overwhelmed us . . . We were in Hell.

- Funato Kazuyo, survivor of Tokyo fire bombing

The narrative of the United States as a righteous nation combating evil had significant ramifications for the conduct of the war. Not only did the culture of righteousness occlude repression within U.S. society, it formed the religious cultural framework within which planners and state actors made military decisions. In other words, as “Americans,” the choices open to policy makers were bounded by the narrative of American identity. As a result, the U.S. conduct of air war was conditioned by the Christian realist identity narrative that affirmed the imagined community.

This chapter argues that the need to constitute the righteous nation narrative drove U.S. culture toward incendiary bombing and nuclear warfare. In other words, the United States staged its right to pronounce judgment by meting out fiery justice on evil enemies others. After briefly tracing hostility to bombing civilians in pre-war U.S. culture and air war doctrine, this chapter examines the widespread cultural visions of justice that
transformed U.S. air power into a site for enacting America’s righteous identity. Operating within this cultural framework, U.S. policy makers implemented ruthless bombings campaigns in both Europe and Asia. The shift in U.S. air power doctrine cost hundreds of thousands of women, men, and children their lives and culminated in nuclear holocaust at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As Christian realist discourse articulated an emerging national identity narrative in the late 1930s, one of the earliest signifiers of the unrighteous “other” was bombing civilians. For example, the United States staged the righteous nation narrative through protests against Japan’s bombing of Chinese civilians. In September 1937, the State Department’s Far East Division chief Maxwell Hamilton informed the Japanese embassy that the “whole matter of bombing non-combatants was deplorable.” When the League of Nations passed a resolution condemning Japan’s bombing of Nanking, the U.S. quickly issued a similar statement, declaring that “any general bombing of an extensive area wherein there resides a large populace” was “contrary to principles of law and of humanity.”

“Without a declaration of war and without warning . . . civilians, including vast numbers of women and children, are being ruthlessly murdered with bombs from the air,” Roosevelt railed in his quarantine speech. In 1938, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution echoing the president’s statements, condemning “the inhuman bombing of civilian populations.”

The official U.S. protest against the bombing of civilians remained firmly in place when war in Europe broke out in 1939. In September, the U.S. requested all European belligerents to refrain from bombing population centers, asserting that “the ruthless bombing from the air of civilians . . . which has resulted in the maiming and in the death
of thousands of defenseless men, women and children, has sickened the hearts of every civilized man and woman, and has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.” Roosevelt warned that “resort” to “this form of inhuman barbarism” ultimately would result in “hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings who have no responsibility for, and who are not even remotely participating in, the hostilities which have now broken out” losing “their lives.” The U.S. issued a similar statement in December after the outbreak of the Russo-Finnish war and the Soviet bombing of Helsinki.6 Roosevelt further urged all U.S. companies to refrain from selling airplanes and airplane parts to any belligerents engaged in the bombing of civilians.7 In late 1941, Harper’s pronounced all of “Christendom . . . rightly horrified at the wholesale air bombing of cities” and opposed the establishment of a separate air force service within the U.S. military.8

The remonstrations against bombing non-combatants reflected official U.S. air war doctrine. Throughout the 1930s, U.S. Air Corps strategy concerning bombing civilian centers remained relatively inchoate. Following World War I, even as European students of air war focused on the potential of breaking enemy morale by bombing civilians, American proponents of air power developed doctrine to concentrate air attacks on economic and military targets rather than cities and civilians. To be sure, air advocates such as Italian Giulio Douhet and Royal Air Force (RAF) Marshall Hugh Trenchard propagated ideas of “terror bombing” that percolated across the Atlantic and into the thought of U.S. air power advocates such as Billy Mitchell. Nonetheless, Mitchell’s ideas on “morale bombing” remained marginal within the U.S. Air Corps, and indiscriminate bombing remained outside of the doctrinal and cultural purview of U.S. air power proponents during the Depression years. Commensurate with these views, in 1938, the
Joint Army-Navy Board even temporarily banned increasing bomber size beyond that of the B-17.⁹

A leading example of the U.S. aversion for civilian bombing was the Air Corps Tactical School in Alabama. Although the air service remained embedded within the U.S. Army as the Army Air Force, the school remained free to construct its own theories and served as the central developing grounds for U.S. air doctrine during the 1920s and especially the 1930s. Led by three officers - Harold George, Donald Wilson, and Robert Webster - the School remained firmly focused on developing “precision bombing” techniques and practice. Throughout the 1930s, it persistently disavowed theories of air war that resorted to the attacks on civilians. In 1939, the School’s training manuals baldly claimed that “direct attack of the civil populace . . . is rejected as an air objective due to humanitarian considerations.”¹⁰

During the 1930s, the broader military culture, like the Air Corps Tactical School, remained bounded by the cultural framework of liberal Protestant modernism’s social gospel (good neighbor) discourse. The symbolic signifying discourses associated with religious modernism’s historical sin also emerged in military thinking. For example, mirroring Roosevelt’s various foreign policy initiatives of the 1930s, one infantry officer argued that “no nation will use its air forces to bomb cities” since “such action could only bring on the nation the active resentment of the rest of the civilized world.”¹¹ If the bombing of civilians was considered at all, it frequently emerged out of the hope that it might shorten the war.¹² In other words, since war itself was evil, ending any potential conflict proved the determining factor in the use of air power. The Army War College thus reflected the views of the more narrowly focused Air Corps Tactical School as well
as those of the much broader culture when it taught in 1939 that indiscriminate bombing of civilians was “butchery in the eyes of a trained soldier” and that such activity reflected “a state of moral chaos among nations,” one that could be presumably cured by agreement to some sort of moral principles.13

As wars raged simultaneously in Asia and Europe, precision bombing remained the leading discursive framing of U.S. air power doctrine. To be sure, after the Munich crisis, the U.S. recognized the use of air power as a deterrent force. As the bombing of civilians emerged as the particular mark of the unrighteous, evil enemy others Germany and Japan, U.S. air power doctrine persisted in emphasizing precision bombing.14 “Human beings are not priority targets,” leading Army Air Force Generals H. H. Arnold and Ira Eaker maintained.15 During Anglo-American military talks in early 1941, bombing emerged primarily as a method of attack on enemy military forces in preparation for a future invasion. At the same time, the Air War Plans Division prepared a policy paper, AWPD-1, that directed bombing toward the destruction of enemy economic and industrial capacity, not civilians or cities. Even after Pearl Harbor, whenever the U.S. had the opportunity to bomb enemy civilians and cities in Europe, it chose to attack industrial, military, and economic targets in daylight rather than resort to the nighttime area bombing practices of the RAF.16

Despite the overall U.S. aversion to the bombing of cities and civilians, the shifting cultural terrain of national identity began implicating bombing as part of righteous warfare against an unrighteous enemy other. One of the newly emerging “realists,” foreign and military policy commentator George Fielding Eliot argued as early as 1938 that indiscriminate bombing remained a “form of warfare against which
American public opinion has set its face, and which American airmen would never be willing to carry out unless driven to do so as a measure of reprisal for like enemy conduct." In the late 1930s, the narrative of national righteousness that divided the world into a hierarchy of good and evil ultimately occluded Britain’s bombings of Indians and Persians while signifying Japanese bombing as a grave threat to civilization. Out of this narrative, pressure mounted for aiding Chinese dictator Chiang Kai-shek by bombing Japan. In August 1941, the U.S. designated 165 B-17 bombers to be sent to the Philippines. Such actions represented a policy of deterrence and the refusal to designate cities and civilians as targets remained the modus operandi of U.S. air power doctrine at least into 1944.18

Nevertheless, the United States conducted a campaign of incinerating enemy civilians and cities during the last two years of the war. In the very least this is a puzzling development given the “better” conditions available for precision bombing by 1944, such as the advent of radar, the destruction of enemy air opposition, and increased proximity to targets.19 It is also almost incomprehensible in light of the previous decade in which a pervasive disgust for bombing civilians pervaded U.S. culture. Michael Sherry has argued convincingly that “technological fanaticism” is largely responsible for the cultural and doctrinal transformation. In other words, an obsession with the development and use of technological innovations elided the inhumane effects of the technology, resulting finally in the genocidal bombing campaign carried out by the United States long after the defeat of its enemies was assured. But Sherry’s argument does not explain why certain technologies were used and others were not. For example, even after the development of
a new biological weapon able to wipe out the entire Japanese rice crop, such a weapon was never seriously considered.²⁰

Much more than merely technological fanaticism, the culture of righteousness drove the United States to specifically turn to incendiary bombing and eventually nuclear incineration. These technological forms were intimately linked to the Christian realist discourse of original sin that brought with it notions of just wrath and the Biblical punishment of fiery hell. As early as 1935, emerging neo-orthodox realists such as Gregory Vlastos objected to social gospel modernism because it ignored the justice of God’s wrath.²¹ In 1941, Reinhold Niebuhr contended that religious modernists “failed to realize to what degree the sinfulness of all men, even the best, makes justice . . . a perennial necessity of history.” He warned “American Christianity” to “take the wrath of God . . . seriously” and not to “disavow its responsibilities for the preservation of our civilization against the perils of totalitarian aggression.” “Love must be regarded as the final flower and fruit of justice” not a substitution for it.²²

As Americans imagined the evil enemy other, the staging of self-righteousness through judgment increasingly drove U.S. wartime policies animated by visions of postwar justice. For example, when the Nazis executed French hostages in late 1941 as a reprisal for the murder of occupying German troops, the U.S. warned that such action “only sows the seeds of hatred which will one day bring fearful retribution.”²³ In mid 1942, upon hearing false rumors of a Japanese gas attack, Roosevelt threatened to meet any such attack with not only fearful, but “complete retribution.”²⁴ After the resignation of Benito Mussolini in May 1943, Roosevelt exulted that the Italian dictator “came to the reluctant conclusion that the “jig was up”” and “could see the shadow of the long arm of
justice.” Both “he and his Fascist gang will be brought to book, and punished for their crimes against humanity. No criminal will be allowed to escape by the expedient of “resignation.”25 Japan’s execution of three American airmen from the 1942 Doolittle raid produced similar outrage, leading to a promise that “the American Government will hold personally and officially responsible for these diabolical crimes all of those officers of the Japanese Government who have participated therein and will in due course bring those officers to justice.”26

The official U.S. response to wartime atrocities centered on the promotion of postwar trials. In June 1942, Roosevelt suggested to Churchill the creation of a “United Nations Commission on Atrocities” to “assess” all “obtainable evidence” and “report to the United Nations from time to time on the shooting and maiming of hostages and prisoners, the beating and torturing of women and children, and the other violations of the fundamental rights of human beings.” According to the memo, the primary motivation underlying the creation of the Commission was to “keep the people of the United States informed of the nature of our enemies” and to “deter those committing the atrocities by naming their names and letting them know that they are being watched by the civilized world, which will mete out swift and just punishment on the reckoning day.”27 In part, then, the locating of atrocities became an integral part of the knowledge of the “nature” of the other, itself a critical aspect of knowing the righteous, “civilized” self.

The U.S. desire to change the name of the commission signaled that the nation was not merely a horrified witness, but also a just arbiter of punishment. In October 1942, the United States officially agreed to press ahead with the Commission but insisted on “Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes” instead of “Commission on
Atrocities.” On October 6, the U.S. announced its cooperation with Britain and other Governments in establishing a commission “to see that when victory is won the perpetrators” of the “barbaric crimes being committed . . . against the civilian populations in occupied countries” should “answer for them before courts of law.” The declaration assured that the U.S. would not “resort to mass reprisals” but only intended “that just and sure punishment shall be meted out to the ringleaders responsible.” Conspicuously absent from the declaration, however, was any reference to international law; rather, the Commission would try all perpetrators of “atrocities which have violated every tenet of the Christian faith.”

Although reports from Europe revealed the ferocity of the German extermination policy, U.S. declarations on war crimes failed to translate into action. The U.S. failure to address more fully these reports finally prompted Jewish Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau to take action against what he perceived to be the source of U.S. immobility. In January 1944, he presented Roosevelt with a paper prepared by his department titled “Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of This Government in the Murder of the Jews,” which began by asserting that “one of the greatest crimes in history, the slaughter of the Jewish people, is continuing unabated.” In response, Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board but appointed the cautionary Secretary of War Henry Stimson. Since Stimson’s indifference would likely arrest any serious efforts at aiding Europe’s Jews, Roosevelt’s own indifference and indifference of Americans in general was readily apparent.

In essence, the U.S. response to the ongoing extermination of the Jews reflected the imperative of staging the righteousness of the self and the guilt of the other rather
than achieving the policy purportedly set out. “All who knowingly take part in the
deportation of Jews to their death in Poland or Norwegians and French to their death in
Germany are equally guilty with the executioner,” Roosevelt declared. “All who share the
guilt shall share the punishment.” Roosevelt added that “the United States will persevere
in its efforts to rescue the victims of brutality of the Nazis.” But when asked by a reporter
if that meant the U.S. would be taking in more refugees, Roosevelt responded “no, not
yet.”30

Despite the U.S. failure to assist meaningfully European, and specifically Jewish
refugees, the U.S. did continue to pursue policies to ensure postwar justice. A joint
Soviet, British, and U.S. declaration on German atrocities issued during the October 1943
Moscow foreign ministers conference reiterated the objective of holding the guilty
accountable. In the same month, the War Crimes Commission initiated by the United
States in 1942 finally began its work in London. By 1944, U.S. concern with German
executions of Allied prisoners matched that of German atrocities against Jews and
civilians. As a result, the Office of the Chief of Staff appointed Lieutenant Colonel
Murray Bernays to garner evidence of crimes against U.S. prisoners of war. But in 1945
it became apparent that the British desired the Commission created in 1942 to engage in
summary, on-the-spot “execution” rather than in long-drawn out trials which might prove
disadvantageous. It was an argument the Soviets had been making since 1942. The U.S.,
however, insisted on conducting actual trials with prosecutors, defense teams, and judges.
To that end, president Harry Truman appointed Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson to
be the chief U.S. prosecutor and threatened to conduct the trails with or without the
British, Soviets, and other United Nations.31
U.S. insistence on investigating war crimes as well as the American promotion of criminal trials reflected the manner in which the war afforded Americans the cultural space to constitute the righteous nation identity narrative. “Not to try these beasts would be to miss the educational and therapeutic opportunity of our generation,” Bernays declared. “They must be tried not alone for their specific aims, but for the bestiality from which these crimes sprang.” The “educational” and “therapeutic” “opportunity” testified to the war trials as part of the reflexive staging of U.S. identity. Determining “the bestiality” of the enemy consequently betrayed the cultural origins of a purportedly objective policy of justice.

Heavily implicated in the performance of the international hierarchy of good and evil, the trials thus emerged as part of the inscription of national righteousness that reinvigorated the sense of mission central to American identity. “An inescapable responsibility rests upon this country to conduct an inquiry” into the “atrocities and other crimes” committed during the war, Jackson argued in an April 1945 report. Despite ostensible concern over “crimes,” Jackson found a “real danger that trials of this character will become enmeshed in voluminous particulars of wrongs committed by individual Germans throughout the course of the war.” What mattered was that the trials establish “those things which fundamentally outrage the conscience of the American people and brought them finally to the conviction that their own liberty and civilization could not persist in the same world with Nazi power.” The U.S. needed “to punish those responsible in full accord with . . . our own traditions of fairness.” Consequently, before stating “these offenses in legal terms,” Jackson found it necessary to “recall what it was that affronted the sense of justice of our people,” namely “the oppressions, the cruelest
forms of torture, the large-scale murder, and the wholesale confiscation of property which
initiated the Nazi regime within Germany” as well as the “persecution of the greatest
enormity on religious, political, and racial grounds, the breakdown of trade unions,” and
other crimes. Invoking Old Testament imagery, Jackson asserted that Americans
“propose to punish acts which have been regarded as criminal since the time of Cain.”

The significance of Jackson’s report lay in its signifying structure, that is, in how
it called into being an “America” that had real no material, physical being. This emerged
clearly in Jackson’s dismissal as a “real danger” any focus on the actual crimes and
criminals who committed them. By focusing on the things “which fundamentally outrage
the conscience of the American people,” the Report demonstrated that the reflexive,
unconscious concern with the trials was the inscription of the imagined community of the
United States. As such, the report alluded to illusory “traditions of fairness” and “justice.”
In essence, such language inscribed the United States as a just, righteous nation, eliding a
history replete with genocide (i.e. native Americans), racial oppression (i.e. African
descent Americans), and religious intolerance (i.e. Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses).

The U.S. pursuit of war crimes trials merely represented the broader emergence of
a culture of judgment as Americans envisioned their nation as a righteous arbiter of
justice in the world. Surveys conducted by the OWI in 1942 reveal that the discourse of
“justice” pervaded American ideas on the treatment of the enemy. Although most
Americans did not want to “control” enemy countries after the war, they had no problem
advocating “dividing” them up “into little states.” Others wanted the U.S. to “abolish
Germany and Japan and leave nothing to rebuild.” The sense of U.S. righteousness also
appeared in demands for an international police force” led by the U.S. for the
“disarming” of both Germany and Japan. Still others wanted to see war criminals, especially Hitler, “strung up some place.”34 The San Francisco Council of the Congress of Industrial Organizations resolved that the U.S. “make it clear to the people of the world that the Butchers of Mankind will be treated as the criminals they are, and that swift and certain justice will be meted out to them.”35 One army nurse urged Truman to “indict and convict the German people as accessory to the crimes of their leaders.”36

Having imagined the evil enemy other in religious language and imagery, it was no coincidence that religious discourse was heavily implicated in the culture of judgment that attended the narrative of national righteousness. The *Christian Beacon* imagined the United States to be God’s “arm of judgment,” warning Americans that if they “refuse to mete out justice . . . their day of suffering will only be aggravated in the Providence of God.”37 “Nothing could be more disastrous . . . than to allow the perpetrators of barbaric practices to escape the severest punishment that can be administered,” former General of the Salvation Army, Evangeline Booth believed. “The basis of the [Salvation] Army is . . . the preaching of God’s justice.”38 As president of Princeton Theological Seminary John Mackay declared, “It is not only right for nations to take issue by force with the Nazi program for mankind; it is their responsibility before God to do so.”39

The religious framing of judgment pronounced on the evil enemy other was also evident in wartime films. In *Edge of Darkness* the minister of a local town violently resists the evil German occupiers after repeated atrocities, including the abduction and rape of a woman after she had just left church. Symbolizing the righteous pronouncement of judgment, the minister finally climbs the church tower and uses a machine gun mounted there to fire on the Nazis far below.40 Similarly, in *Pride of the Marines* (1945)
the star of David is emblazoned on the side of a machine-gun as it blasts away at the enemy. In Frank Capra’s Prelude to War the righteousness of violent judgment is so obvious it does not need explicit statement: displaying pictures of Hitler, Emperor Hirohito, and Mussolini, the film urges viewers to “take a good, close look at this trio. Remember these faces. Remember them well. If you ever meet them, don’t hesitate.”

As the culture of righteousness encouraged dispensing just punishment on evil enemies, the taking of enemy life became cause for celebration. U.S. Navy pilot Lieutenant E. S. McCuskey triumphantly reported his first enemy “kill” to Collier’s. “Both of us were in good position to fire on him and we did - plenty,” he recalled, “about ten or fifteen seconds later we saw him blow up . . . That was my first Jap. It was like your first date or your first raise or your first baby.” According to McCuskey, “knocking off that first Jap” was “the greatest thrill in my life.”

McCuskey’s triumphant tone was hardly an isolated incident. When U.S. pilots strafed the lifeboats of Japanese survivors in the Bismarck Sea, readers of Time vociferously defended the killings. “Let us thank God that we have strong men who will kill our enemies anywhere they can find them,” argued one writer. Another likened the strafing to appropriately “killing a helpless rattlesnake after he had spent his ‘strike.’” Some saw it as justified retribution for “the rape of Nanking, the strafing of Hickam, Wheeler, Iba, and Clark fields,” and the Japanese “machine-gunning of American pilots who hit the silk too soon after bailing out.” According to one writer, “another good old American custom I would like to see is nailing a Jap hide on every ‘backhouse’ door in America.” Quite simply, the righteous meting out of justified punishment (death) emerged as part of the broader culture of righteousness. As Newsweek put it, Americans...
were simply telling “the enemy . . . that since he had drawn the sword, he should perish with it.”

Although denounced before the war, as the war progressed aerial bombing emerged as a particularly salient signifier of the righteous nation’s ability to mete out justice. Ever since the Wright brothers invented the airplane in the early 1900s, Americans referred to aviation in terms of the “winged gospel,” reflecting a broader discourse that imagined aerial technology in religious language and imagery. The divine status of aviation facilitated a cultural shift in which aviation came to be seen as an integral part of the U.S. mission in the world. According to Orville Wright, the plane would be “instrumental in establishing for the entire world a guarantee of human liberty and lasting peace.”

With religious discourse heavily embedded in the framing of the war, bombers achieved righteous status in and of themselves. An advertisement in *Fortune* for the International Salt Company, for instance, declared that bombers were “the salt of the sky,” drawing directly on New Testament imagery depicting Christians as “the salt of the earth.” The divine status of the bomber opened up the cultural space in which its mission as the instrument of judgment was not far behind. Accordingly, an advertisement for the Embry Riddle School of Aviation depicted bombs being loaded into the weapons bay of a bomber with the caption “Where the GRAPES OF WRATH are stored!” As Roosevelt put it, the Nazis and the Fascists have asked for it - and they are going to get it.

American culture’s deadly momentum toward the meting out of justice did not proceed without opposition. “A careful analysis of various manifestations of the spirit of
vengeance reveals very clearly how self-righteousness is the presupposition of
vengeance,” Reinhold Niebuhr cautioned. “There are already many ominous signs of this
vindictiveness.”50 His brother Richard agreed, remarking that “the temptation to make the
self the spokesman and lieutenant of the Eternal is never far from any one of us.”51
Refusing to justify the bombing of civilians, the *Christian Century* resignedly resorted to
merely “classifying” war rather than protesting it: “our nation is in the hell of war,” it
announced, “and in hell humanitarian impulses are hardly relevant . . . If we have war, we
shall have bombing. And if we have bombing we shall surely have this hideous slaughter
of women and children . . . If it is necessary to victory, it will be used, because war
knows no law but victory.”52

A small minority vociferously protested indiscriminate bombing. The most vocal
protest came from English pacifist Vera Brittain whose essay “Massacre by Bombing”
made the front page of the *New York Times* in March 1944. Brittain particularly objected
that the bombing accomplished little militarily and subjected “hundreds of thousands of
helpless and innocent people. . . to agonizing forms of death and injury comparable to the
worst tortures in the Middle Ages.”53 “The conceded need for justice is in many quarters
degenerating into a demand for vengeance on whole peoples,” John Foster Dulles bitterly
complained in the *Christian Evangelist*.54 Catholic spokesman John Ford echoed Dulles
and Brittain’s arguments, declaring the bombing of civilians completely immoral.55

Response to Brittain indicated how Christian realist discourse dominated cultural
interpretations of the war. One rabbi retorted that “the Germans must reap the fruits of
their own wicked deeds.”56 Author Mackinlay Kantor illustrated just how repudiated
Brittain’s modernist discourse had become: “Just how on earth they expect to achieve
their highly valued justice, tolerance, humanity, brotherhood and tenderness without socking the rapacious German nation with every pound of explosives available they do not say.” A letter to the *New York Times* illustrated the self-righteousness with which Americans viewed the unrighteous, evil enemy. “As to the unjust suffering of the ‘innocent’ among our enemies, who are they?” the reader wondered. “Let’s not get ‘mushy’ about the poor, poor Germans!”

Bombing civilians and other forms of violent destruction gained broad acceptance as the culture of righteousness and its inherent meting out of justice became entrenched. The Federal Council of Churches believed that, “obliteration bombing, however repugnant to human feelings,” was “justifiable on Christian principles” because it was “essential to the successful conduct of a war that is itself justified.” According to the *Christian Beacon*, “the sword is ordained of God in a world of sin for the protection of man and the punishment of evil doers, whether they be nations or individuals.” “God has never been more concerned with the outcome of any struggle in human history,” pastor Frank Sheldon maintained. “He has a will that aggressors be stopped . . . There are times when combating tyranny and slavery through war has divine sanctions.” Like many other Americans, by 1945 Truman perceived a clear “distinction between retributive justice and vengeance,” agreeing that “the perpetrators of barbaric practices” should not “escape punishment for their evil deeds.”

Journalist Kingsbury Smith’s article on postwar planning in *American Mercury* testified to the illusory nature of the boundary purportedly separating “vengeance” and “punishment.” Contemplating the end of the war in early 1944, he argued that Americans did not want to see the Japanese “hoisting a white flag and begging for mercy” until “they
have been dealt the worst military licking ever suffered by a major power” and “Tokyo, Yokohama and the other big cities of Japan proper have been sufficiently punished by our aerial armadas to make every living Japanese man and woman realize what terror from the sky can mean.” Of course, Smith averred, “this harsh attitude is not prompted simply be a desire for vengeance, justified as that might be.” Rather, the United States hoped “to secure lasting peace in the Pacific” by showing “the Japanese people that justice can be terrible in its wrath.” Ultimately, Smith concluded, the air war would ensure complete surrender, providing the Japanese with “an opportunity to redeem themselves in the eyes of the world, but only after the fiery sword of an avenging justice has purged their souls of warlike impulses and they have atoned for the barbarism of their actions in this war.”

Within the righteous nation narrative of U.S. identity, Americans imagined meting out condemnation to the unrighteous in terms akin to the biblical concept of hell and consequently fire and flame became featured methods for dealing with the enemy. A 1942 article in *Harper’s* urged incendiary attacks on the “inflammable cities of Osaka Bay,” arguing that a typical Japanese house would “light up like a Roman candle at the instant of contact.” Contemplating the “forty-five hundred degrees Fareheit” temperatures and bombs “spitting flaming metal forty or fifty feet,” the article argued that if just one of the “B-17 or B-24 bombers scattered its normal load of two thousand incendiaries across Osaka . . . it would mean twelve hundred immediate fire[s].” In the *Atlantic Monthly*, Dilys Bennett Laing’s poem “Trial By Fury” illustrated the linkage between righteous judgment and flaming punishment:

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Shred the flesh
until the bones are clean:
Shake the tree
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until the boughs are seen.
Fire your house
until the timbers glow.
You had not known its pattern.
Now you know.64

Once again film functioned as a particularly powerful forum to imagine and perform U.S. identity and visions of fiery justice permeated the big screen. In

_Guadalcanal Diary_ (1943), American soldiers encountered resistance from several Japanese troops trapped in a cave. Rather than starve them out or simply shoot them up, the Americans jerry-rig a gasoline bomb and burn the resisting Japanese alive.65 _The Purple Heart_ (1944) tied incineration directly to Japanese unrighteousness. Celebrating the American pilots who conducted the Doolittle bombing raid on Tokyo in 1942, the film warned of impending doom for Japan. U.S. bombers would strike, it prophesied, would “blacken your skies and burn your cities to the ground and make you get down on your knees and beg for mercy. This is your war - you wanted it - you asked for it. And now you’re going to get it - and it won’t be finished until your dirty little empire is wiped off the face of the earth!”66 Howard Hawks’ _Air Force_ (1943) perhaps more than any other film depicted the bomber in particular as the vehicle to deliver righteous judgment on the evil enemy.67

Delivering hellish judgment upon the enemy became an event that ordinary Americans could participate in vicariously. Between January and March 1942, the number of Americans who believed that the U.S. should “fight an all-out war including bombing of Japanese cities” jumped from a little over half to nearly seventy percent of the population, with less than a quarter believing that the U.S. should attack only “military objectives.”68 Reflexively sensing the marketing potential, the Wickwire
Spencer Steel Company encouraged Americans to turn in any scrap metal as a means of meting out punishment on the enemy. One of the company’s summer 1942 advertisements showed Hitler, Tojo, and Mussolini in a dark, underworld-like setting, frantically fleeing a barrage of scrap pitchforks, stoves, irons, knives, tongs, and other household metal objects. The caption simply read “Junk Rains Hell on Axis.”

Flamethrowers became particularly featured in the meting out of judgment. Capable of torching victims at temperatures of 2,000°F, flamethrowers spewed forth streams of burning oil. One U.S. chemical company advertisement hailed it as the best weapon to break through “stubborn Jap defenses” and depicted an American soldier blasting away. According to war correspondent Edgar L. Jones, U.S. troops often lowered heat settings on the flame-throwers “in such a way that enemy soldiers were set afire, to die slowly and painfully, rather than killed outright with a full blast of burning oil.”

Such acts at the sharp end, at the very point of violent juxtaposition with the evil other, could be readily accepted within the terms of a religiously framed identity. Quite simply, Americans easily understood that, as the Christian Beacon put it, “the sword is ordained of God in a world of sin for . . . the punishment of evildoers.”

The culture of righteousness ultimately conditioned the options available to U.S. policy makers in the conduct of the war. U.S. military and political leaders operated within the boundaries delimited by cultural narratives of their national identity and consequently they too imagined the meting out of justice to the unrighteous enemy. For example, as early as 1941 General George Marshall dreamed of setting “the paper cities of Japan on fire.” Upon entering Pearl Harbor and seeing the sunken Utah Admiral William Halsey vowed that “before we’re through with ‘em, the Japanese language will
be spoken only in hell!” Admiral William Leahy echoed Halsey’s sentiments, contending that the U.S. “could lick Japan and that we should go ahead and destroy her utterly.” AAF General Ira Eaker sought the same policy for Germany, desiring to bomb “the devils” day and night without respite. Planning for the postwar years, Morgenthau urged that the “Germans should have simply a subsistence level of food” and nothing more. After Germany’s defeat in 1945, Roosevelt’s son Eliot asserted that the U.S. “objective in Japan should be to keep on bombing until we have destroyed about half the Japanese civilian population.” It should be considered no small coincidence that Arnold later confessed that although he had not fulfilled his family’s desire that he undertake a career in ministry, his air force career “came to require as much sheer faith as any preacher’s” because he evangelized air power as if he was selling “the ‘Wages of Sin.’”

Like other Americans, President Roosevelt reflexively linked bombing to enemy transgressions. “The militarists of Berlin and Tokyo started this war,” Roosevelt argued, but “the massed, angered forces of common humanity will finish it” with the American “eagle . . . flying high and striking hard.” Responding to rumors of enemy gas attacks, Roosevelt went further, vowing to bring down on the “perpetrators of such crimes full and swift retaliation . . . upon their own heads.” Of course, Roosevelt disclaimed, the United States “was not bombing tenements for the sheer sadistic pleasure of killing, as the Nazis did. We are striking devastating blows at carefully selected, clearly identified strategic objectives—factories, shipyards, munitions dumps, transportation facilities.” As a result of these efforts, he declared, “evil power is being destroyed, surely, inexorably, day by day.” At the same time, Roosevelt zealously urged that “all freedom-loving people rally” to the “righteous undertaking” of aiding the victims of Axis wickedness.
To be sure, air power doctrine lagged behind the broader cultural inertia toward dispensing hell on the unrighteous enemy. In August 1942, General Carl Spaatz, commander of the Eight Air Force, praised the successes of U.S. precision bombing at Rouen, declaring unequivocally that “American bombers will not be sent indiscriminately into Germany and daylight attacks on enemy will be progressive.” Backing his European commander, Arnold informed Roosevelt that the Rouen result “vindicates our faith in... precision bombing.”

Arnold and Spaatz’s views mirrored those of other AAF leaders such as Eaker and James Doolittle. But earlier disagreements with the British persisted as the British air leaders continued urging the Americans to forego daylight precision bombing and adopt the nighttime area bombing techniques used by the RAF. As a result, the AAF, fearful the British might succeed in convincing Roosevelt to order a change in air strategy, sent Eaker to the Casablanca conference in 1943. In a meeting with Churchill, Eaker managed to convince the British prime minister to agree to continued AAF daylight precision efforts as a complement to British night bombing.

Nevertheless, the cultural shift that ultimately provided the discursive space in which air power doctrine could be transformed into unbridled righteous vengeance was already well under way. Doolittle’s raid on Tokyo in April 1942 provides a striking example. While ostensibly intending the attack on military targets the raid was initially scheduled for nighttime, rendering hopes for precision bombing chimerical. In the end, Doolittle’s B-25s dropped incendiary and high explosive bombs on Tokyo, including its residential areas. The raid accomplished little militarily but anticipated a pattern wherein air power doctrine repeatedly flowed from cultural demands. Roosevelt and many other Americans rejoiced in the triumph of dropping bombs on Japan. As the *Christian Century*
noted, Americans had long wondered “what might not be accomplished by raining fire and high explosives on the matchwood cities of Japan.” It confessed that “no news since Pearl Harbor has sent such a thrill of excitement through the nation as was caused when Tokyo broadcast word that American planes had bombed that city, Yokohama, Kobe and Nagoya.” The raid on Tokyo was only “the dawn of a day of wrath,” Arnold declared.

Alexander de Seversky’s 1942 book *Victory Through Air Power* exemplified the manner in which righteous judgment weaved its way into air power strategy and eroded earlier notions of precision bombing. Seversky, a Russian-American aviator turned aircraft manufacturer, urged the “emancipation of American air power” from “static, orthodox minds” steeped in “the hackneyed idiom of the past.” He depicted an aerial threat to the United States comprised of “a destructive fury infinitely more terrifying” than anything previously imagined. He argued that the U.S. needed “air power equal to the fearful challenge” in order to “carry the ‘total aerial war’ to the attacker’s home grounds.” Seversky assured his readers that he did not endorse the “haphazard destruction of cities,” a “costly and wasteful” strategy. Rather, he sought a “planned, predetermined destruction” of the enemy’s “electrical power, aviation industries, dock facilities, essential public utilities, and the like.” “Unquestionably,” he confessed, “the indiscriminate bombing of defenseless open cities will be used, but for tactical and not merely morale reasons.” Completely blurring the line between precision bombing and the wholesale slaughter of civilians, Seversky added that the best way to break the enemy’s “will to resist” lay in “destroying effectively the essentials of their lives - the supply of food, shelter, light, water, sanitation, and the rest. This clearly demands *precision*
bombing rather than random bombing.” In other words, the most effective “precision” bombing was the total destruction of everything.

The 1943 bombing of Rome and the resultant creation of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe testified to the persistent belief in precision bombing among U.S. air leaders. AAF leaders bombed the Italian capital in July in order to destroy marshalling yards, airfields, and railroad stations. In preparation for the attack, American pilots carefully studied the locations of historic and religious sites, hoping to demonstrate the effectiveness of precision bombing. Although widely hailed as a success, the bombing of Rome resulted in the destruction of the Basilica of San Lorenzo, seven centuries old. Although civilians also died, protest centered on the destruction of monuments and resulted in the creation of the preservation commission, an endeavor heartily supported by U.S. political and military leaders because they believed in its viability.

Although U.S. leaders clung tenaciously to the discourse of precision bombing throughout 1943, terror bombing of cities soon prevailed. The air campaign waged on the Axis’ Balkan nations in late 1943 resulted thousands of civilian deaths. The decision to bomb Balkan cities had its genesis in the Northwest African Air Forces planning section and called for large-scale bombing and the use of incendiaries on major cities such as Sofia and Bucharest. When Britain suggested a similar plan, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to proceed, even though they doubted the military effectiveness of the idea. The bombing of Sofia began in mid November and reached its crescendo the following January when 143 B-17 bombers combined with 44 of the RAF’s Wellingtons destroyed large sections of the city and started numerous fires. Two and half months later the
Americans returned, this time causing a ghastly firestorm. Days later, U.S. bombers delivered a fourth devastating raid to Sofia, burning a significant area of the city around the marshalling yards. Meanwhile, the bombing of Bucharest resulted in 12,000 civilian deaths, while attacks on Hungary produced 7,000 dead Hungarians. In November 1944, with the Allied Soviet forces mere days from controlling the Bulgarian capital, the United States dropped sixty tons of bombs on the heart of the city.88

The bombing of the Balkans paled in comparison with the air war conducted against Germany. In July 1943, Britain’s RAF led a raid on Hamburg that produced a vicious firestorm leaving approximately 40,000 civilians dead. Although AAF participation remained limited to daylight “complementary raids” ostensibly centered on the precision bombing of docks and factories, Roosevelt saw in the Hamburg conflagration “an impressive demonstration” of the potential uses of U.S. air power. Still, the United States maintained its claim to precision bombing even as it incinerated civilians. In August, the AAF bombed ball-bearing factories at Schweinfurt and aircraft factories in Regensburg but included residential housing on the target lists. Pretense was abandoned in October, however, when an AAF attack on Münster simply aimed for the center of the city. Such tactics were repeated in the “Big Week” bombings of Berlin in March 1944.89

The transformation of U.S. air power doctrine during the war occurred decidedly within the religious cultural framework that infused American identity. According to Canadian Air Marshall William Bishop, in a book published in the United States, air power’s job consisted of delivering “ordinary hell” to unjust aggressor nations.90 Eaker rationalized the mounting civilian deaths with his “certain knowledge that this war
against evil was to save the lives of the just.” Of course he “had a distaste for the whole business, but they were shooting at us.” In the wake of D-Day’s thrilling reinvigoration of American righteousness, a noticeable change in U.S. air power doctrine occurred; one plan called for the bombing of one hundred German cities on a single day.

After D-Day, plans, strategies, and suggestions for widespread, indiscriminate bombing of Germany finally emerged. To be sure, for the better part of 1944, AAF bomber operations remained subordinated to the invasion of western Europe. Operationally, this meant tactical attacks on enemy military positions and supply routes received priority. But after September, with Allied forces firmly planted in western Europe, control reverted back to the air leaders. American and Allied air forces engaged in an orgy of destruction in the last eight months of the war. The bombing of German cities such as Duisburg, Essen, Dortmund, Bonn, Freiburg, and Darmstadt proceeded without concern for the mounting civilian casualties. Under Operation CLARION, launched in early 1945, AAF fighter planes formerly devoted to protecting U.S. bombers turned to strafing railway cars, bridges, and, at least in one case, cows. In another instance, U.S. Eighth Air Force fighters machine-gunned American POWs held near Limburg.

Claims of precision, or even strategic, bombing largely dissipated by early 1945. On February 3, 25,000 Berliners died when 900 AAF bombers attacked the city. General George Marshall even ordered the bombing of Munich because refugees were using the city as a central waypoint on their flight westward from the Red Army. Ironically, at the moment when precision bombing might have become more effective in light of Germany’s loss of the Romanian oil fields, Germany’s synthetic oil industry thrived amid
the violent destruction, producing 49,000 tons of aircraft fuel in November 1944, a 39,000 ton increase from two months earlier. The oil plants simply did not emerge as a significant target for Allied bombing during this period. As Eaker wrote to Spaatz, the Allies had essentially taken the “air effort off the one thing where we really have the Hun by the neck - oil.”94 Viewing a destroyed Berlin in July, Truman noted the “absolute ruin” that had befallen a people with “no morals.” He had never seen “a more sorrowful sight, nor witness[ed] retribution to the nth degree,” he confessed.95

The destruction of Dresden stands as the greatest testament to the power of culture to delineate military “strategy.” On February 13-14, with the war nearly over, RAF and AAF bombers generated a massive firestorm that raged for seven days and nights, burning roughly sixty percent of the city to the ground. The AAF alone pummeled the city with 771 tons of bombs. Furthermore, even as the city burned, U.S. fighter planes strafed the remnants of Dresden’s population on roads, in parks, and on the flatland near the Elbe River. Even a clearly marked Red Cross column bore their wrath. Approximately 60,000 people died in the inferno, the most devastating single attack of the entire European war. Revealing the unqualified abandonment of precision bombing discourse, amid the widespread destruction a nearby airfield crowded with Luftwaffe night fighters and a relatively large army barracks remained unscathed.96

Ultimately, air leaders had a multiplicity of identity structures, including those of “air service personnel” and “American,” that ensured the persistence of precision bombing ideology well into the war. From out of these competing identity structures, U.S. air leaders only reluctantly abandoned their ideological training. For example, in early 1944, former Air Corps officer, organizer of the Flying Tigers, and advisor to
Chiang Kai-shek, Claire Chennault told Roosevelt “that immediately decisive results can be produced by the attack on Japanese shipping and air power” rather than by the long-ranging bombing of Japan itself. Roosevelt agreed that “the plan against shipping” was “part of an effective flank attack on Japan from China” and that the outlook for “successful operations against Japanese shipping are excellent.” But what Roosevelt really desired was “at least one bombing expedition against Tokyo before the second anniversary of Doolittle’s flight . . . as a matter perhaps of sentimentality.”

And so in the Pacific war, too, air doctrine shifted according to the broader cultural desire to mete out justice to the evil other, a desire that preceded the incendiary bombing campaign of 1945. “The whole world must be cleansed of the evil from which half the world has been freed,” Truman pronounced in May. In late 1944, the AAF bombed Tokyo from altitudes over 25,000 feet with high explosive bombs but was unimpressed with the result. In early 1945, the United States turned to almost solely to incendiary bombs. On February 25, a raid on Tokyo saw 450 tons of firebombs dropped, producing a firestorm that wiped out one square mile of the city, a petty conflagration when compared with what was to come. Hoping to increase the destructive capability of firebombing, General Curtis LeMay, architect of the bombing of Münster, decided to organize low-altitude bombing runs against residential areas in urban settings. LeMay’s idea would turn Japanese cities into smoldering ruins.

LeMay must be understood as the foremost expression of a culturally driven national policy, not as that policy’s initiator. Singling out LeMay alone ignores that U.S. planners had eagerly contemplated burning Japan’s cities to the ground for more than two years. These leaders came from a wide swath of American society and included economic
experts, university officials, industry representatives, and officers from other military branches. For example, reflecting the intersection of American culture, shifting air power doctrine, and U.S. military planning, political scientist William McGovern of the Office of Strategic Services informed an operations committee in 1944 that he endorsed “area bombing” and hoped the AAF would “raise hell” with Japan’s major cities.100

On March 9, 1945, the United States commenced Operation MEETINGHOUSE, an air campaign specifically aimed at burning Japan’s cities to the ground. That night more that 334 B-29s dropped close to 2000 tons of incendiaries on Tokyo. The combination of a low-altitude attack and high winds over the city produced a firestorm of such intense heat that metal melted, water in canals boiled, and civilians spontaneously ignited into human torches. For the men, women, and children of Tokyo, the raid was nothing less than complete and utter terror. As one survivor recalled, “the great roar of fire and wind overwhelmed us . . . we were in hell.” Nearly 100,000 civilians died - “scorched and boiled and baked to death,” in the words of LeMay. Returning from the mission, General Thomas Power, commander of the 314th Wing of the AAF, simply remarked that “it was a hell of a good mission.”101

In the wake of the Tokyo firebombing, the AAF conducted incendiary attacks against other major Japanese cities. On the night of March 12, a firebombing raid on Nagoya took the lives of 2,700 civilians. March 13-14 witnessed the torching of Osaka as 274 bombers dropped more than 1,700 tons of firebombs on the ancient city. On March 17, Americans planes pummeled Kobe with 2,312 tons of incendiaries and two days later they returned to Nagoya with 1,842 tons. In mid April, the AAF returned to Tokyo, this time killing close to 9,000 civilians. The targeting of Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe, and Nagoya
was no coincidence: they were Japan’s four largest cities. But other cities suffered as well. Nearly half of Yokohama was burned at the end of May. In June, July, and August the AAF carried the incendiary campaign against medium sized and smaller cities, including Tsu (1,498 dead), Aomori (1,767 dead), Kagoshima (2,300 dead), Okayama (1,737 dead), Hachioji (2,900 dead), Nagaoka (1,490 dead), Mito (1,535 dead), and Toyama (5,936 dead).102

Japan vociferously denounced the attacks as inhumane and evil. “America has revealed her barbaric character” by “raining flaming incendiaries over a vast area of civilian dwellings,” Radio Tokyo proclaimed. The station added that “the action of the Americans is all the more despicable because of the noisy pretensions they constantly make about their humanity and idealism. They are the first to accuse others of atrocities, raising loud protests over claims of” Japanese crimes, “but even the most extravagant of the . . . charges . . . pale into insignificance beside the actual acts of deliberate American terror against civilian populations.”103

But few Americans questioned the campaign. Out of their sense of righteous indignation, they easily accepted civilian deaths with detached calculation. “We knew we were going to kill a lot of women and kids when we burned that town,” LeMay stated. “We just weren’t bothered by the morality of the question.”104 LeMay’s analysis persisted in a culture assured of its mission to mete out flaming justice by the thousands of tons. In May, for example, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal wondered rather matter-of-factly, “How far and how thoroughly do we want to beat Japan?”105

In the end, the U.S. air war against the Axis powers evolved within the religious cultural context of American identity. As a righteous nation, the necessity of bombing
evil enemies occluded the corresponding civilian casualties. Indeed, civilians themselves increasingly seemed legitimate targets within a justified war. As a result, the U.S. gradually transformed its air war from a precision bombing campaign to one centered largely on the wholesale slaughter of enemy civilians, especially of women, children, and elderly who often remained in heavily populated areas as men had long left for the ranks of the army. Stimson may have indeed thought “there was something wrong with a country where no one questioned that” campaign, but his own continuing approval of the air war attested to a broader cultural inertia toward righteous judgment that could not be arrested.\textsuperscript{106} In other words, Forrestal’s question of “how thoroughly do we want to beat Japan” had no quantitative answer, only a symbolic one.

The decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan occurred within a culture imagining hell on its enemies. The cultural of righteous judgment that reinvigorated American identity drove the United States to deploy nuclear incineration with relatively little hesitation. Out of a cultural desire to perform their own righteousness by meting out just punishment on evil enemies, Americans developed and employed the atomic bomb, the world’s first and (to date) only nuclear attacks. That the United States never made a formal, official decision to drop the atomic bomb attests to a cultural inertia underlying an ostensibly military and/or geopolitical decision.\textsuperscript{107}

Military planning did occur, and the work of the Target Committee reflected the culture of judgment in which it operated. In a summary of its findings, the Committee declared the need for “targets possessing the following qualifications: (1) they be important targets in a large urban area of more than three miles diameter, (2) they be capable of being damaged effectively by a blast, and (3) they are likely to be unattacked

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by next August.” Given that the incendiary campaign then in full swing ostensibly aimed
to destroy Japan’s industrial and military apparatus, the criteria laid out by the Target
Committee implicitly meant that population centers devoid of those characteristics would
become the centers of atomic annihilation. The Committee suggested that the cultural
center of Kyoto, along with four other major cities including Hiroshima, met the
necessary objective of having a “small and strictly military objective” within “a much
larger area” of population.108

Perhaps most significantly, the Committee decided “that psychological factors in
the target selection were of great importance.” It hoped to use the bomb for “obtaining
the greatest psychological effect against Japan” while “making the initial use sufficiently
spectacular for the importance of the weapon to be internationally recognized when
publicity on it is released.” In light of the psychological imperatives behind the Doolittle
raid and Roosevelt’s 1944 bombing request to Chennault based on “sentimentality,” the
“psychological” factors underlying the Target Committee’s work reveal as much about
the need to establish American identity as it did about strategic or geopolitical
calculation. For example, as with the broader culture, the committee devoted time and
energy to contemplating potential fires. It discussed “the feasibility of following the
[atomic] raid by an incendiary mission,” arguing that because “the enemies’ fire fighting
ability will probably be paralyzed” after the bomb “a very serious conflagration should be
capable of being started.” If firebombing could not be conducted immediately after the
dropping of the bomb, the committee still hoped that “a coordinated incendiary raid
should be feasible on the following day at which time the fire raid should still be quite
effective.”109
In late April 1945, even as the Target Committee commenced its discussions, the looming success of the Manhattan Project and the death of Roosevelt led Secretary of War Stimson to create the Interim Committee, a formal body commissioned to address the advent of atomic energy with all its domestic and geopolitical ramifications.\textsuperscript{110} The goal of the committee was to issue a report regarding atomic energy with respect to wartime controls, publicity, and “postwar research, development, and control.” The committee’s mandate did not specifically include discussing whether or not the United State should use the bomb. Indeed, it is altogether fair to suggest that the committee’s discussions for the most part assumed that the bomb would be used.\textsuperscript{111}

The Interim Committee meetings also shed light on the cultural context in which U.S. decision makers moved toward dispensing nuclear terror on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Initially, the Committee appeared chiefly concerned with how to effectively publicize news of upcoming atomic bomb tests.\textsuperscript{112} But these discussions quickly waned as it increasingly turned its attention to the implications of the bombs development and use. In a meeting at the end of May, Stimson and Marshall suggested that the “project should not be considered simply in terms of military weapons, but as a new relationship of man to the universe.” Although what exactly that “new relationship” entailed remained unclear, the Committee did determine to target a major population center since “one atomic bomb on an arsenal would not be much different from the effect caused by any Air Corps strike of present dimensions.”

As the targeting suggestion indicated, the performative function of the bombing emerged repeatedly. Oppenheimer reminded everyone that “the visual effect of an atomic bombing would be tremendous. It would be accompanied by a brilliant luminescence
which would rise to a height of 10,000 to 20,000 feet.” In that light, the Committee agreed that the U.S. “could not give the Japanese any warning” and that it “should seek to make a profound psychological impression on as many of the inhabitants as possible,” preferably by bombing “a vital war plant employing a large number of workers closely surrounded by workers’ houses.” In a manner similar to the Target Committee’s contemplation of follow-up incendiary raids, the Interim Committee discussed “the desirability of attempting several strikes at the same time” but determined that “the effect would not be sufficiently distinct from our regular Air Force bombing program.” Somewhat ironically in the face of the American castigation of Japanese “treachery” after Pearl Harbor, by late June the Interim Committee effectively mirrored a broader cultural drive to mete out fiery justice on Japan “at the earliest possible opportunity” and “without warning.”

Within a culture determined to visit righteous wrath on its wicked enemies, the successful detonation of the first nuclear bomb at Alamogordo on July 16, 1945 produced exuberant celebration. Describing the explosion to Stimson, Major General Leslie Groves gushed, “what an explosion!” He recounted the “tremendous blast” and “lighting effect within a radius of 20 miles equal to several suns in midday,” as well as the “huge ball of fire” that “mushroomed and rose to a height of over ten thousand feet.” According to General Thomas Ferrell, “There was in everyone’s mind a strong measure of doubt” just prior to the blast. Quoting from a New Testament conversion story, Ferrell added that “the feeling of many could be expressed by “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.”” Steeped in the religious culture of American identity, Ferrell immediately recognized that “it was a great new force to be used for good or for evil,” and all present “felt their
responsibility to help in guiding into right channels the tremendous forces which had been unlocked for the first time in history.” In terms of “the present war,” using the bomb “for good” by directing policy “into right channels” reflexively included the understanding that the U.S. now “had the means to insure [the war’s] speedy conclusion.”

Within the framework of the righteous nation narrative, the advent of the atomic bomb appeared to be the final, almost supernatural instrument of judgment. Ferrell testified that the bomb’s “awesome roar . . . warned of doomsday and made us feel that we puny things were blasphemous to dare tamper with the forces heretofore reserved to The Almighty.” Hearing of the Manhattan project’s success while at the Potsdam Conference, Truman thoughts echoed those of Ferrell. He could only conclude that “we have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world. It may be the fire destruction prophesied in the Euphrates Valley Era, after Noah and his fabulous Ark . . . This weapon is to be used against Japan.”

With the instrument of just wrath now firmly its hands, the United States balked at Japanese efforts to garner a negotiated peace through the Soviet Union. On July 18, two days after the news from Alamogordo, Churchill urged Truman to afford Japan the opportunity of “saving their military honour and some assurance of their national existence” by rethinking the Allies’ “unconditional surrender” demand. But Truman “replied bluntly that he did not think the Japanese had any military honor after Pearl Harbor.” A little over a week later, the United States, Britain, and China issued an ultimatum largely drafted by the Americans. It warned that the Allies “are poised to strike the final blows upon Japan . . . until she ceases to resist.” The statement averred that the
Allies simply sought to inaugurate “a new order of peace, security, and justice” by ensuring “freedom of speech, of religion, and of thought” in Japan. It also promised that “stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals” and threatened “prompt and utter destruction” of Japan if it did not surrender immediately.118

On August 6, 1945 the United States became the first nation to use nuclear weapons when it dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, killing 80,000 civilians instantly. Tens of thousands more died over the following days and weeks. Ignoring the human ramifications of the bomb, Stimson informed Truman that the “complete success . . . was even more conspicuous than earlier test.”119 With righteous justification Truman informed Americans that “the Japanese began this war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold . . . The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.” If the Japanese refused to surrender, “they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth.”120

On August 9, 1945, the briefing for a second atomic attack “ended with a moving prayer by the Chaplain.” “Does one feel any pity or compassion for the poor devils about to die?” Special Consultant to the Manhattan project William Laurence wondered rhetorically. “Not when one thinks of Pearl Harbor and of the death march on Bataan.” The United States once more staged its righteousness by delivering on its evil enemies “an elemental fury” that symbolized deserved justice.121 Three days after Hiroshima, an atomic attack on Nagasaki incinerated instantaneously approximately 40,000 civilians.122

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki represent the material implications of the culture that imagined visiting hell upon its enemies. In one report, the United States
Strategic Bombing Survey calculated that at Hiroshima a firestorm generating ferocious winds raged for almost three hours, eventually providing “a roughly circular shape to the 4.4 square miles which were almost completely burned out.” At the center of the explosion, the heat “was virtually inconceivable,” most likely “millions of degrees Centigrade. “As might be expected,” the report concluded, “the primary reaction to the bomb was fear - uncontrolled terror, strengthened by the sheer horror of the destruction and suffering witnessed and experienced by the survivors.”

“What happened to the people of Hiroshima never happened to human beings before,” the New York Herald Tribune observed.

For many Americans, the atomic bombs served as just punishment on the unrighteous and there was no need to halt the slaughter. U.S. Senator Richard Russell was less than circumspect. He sent a telegram to Truman urging that the United States “carry the war to them until they beg us to accept the unconditional surrender,” especially since Japan’s “foul attack on Pearl Harbor brought us into war” and Americans “have no obligation to Shintoism.” Russell hoped that “if we do not have available a sufficient number of atomic bombs with which to finish the job immediately” the U.S. could “carry on with TNT and fire bombs.” The American people, he asserted, “have not forgotten that the Japanese struck us the first blow in this war without the slightest warning. They believe that we should continue to strike the Japanese until they are brought groveling to their knees . . . the next plea for peace should come from an utterly destroyed Tokyo.”

Americans echoed Russell’s sentiment. The Chicago Daily Tribune printed an editorial cartoon that depicted the globe with a sign on Pearl Harbor labeled “Jap Sneak Attack Pearl Harbor 1941.” The sign was connected to a lit fuse cord circling the earth
and attached to Japan, apparently igniting a “Catastrophic Atomic Bomb” pictured by a Japanese blown into a hundred pieces high above the world. In case its readers did not get the point, the Tribune added three days later that “the justice we deal [the Japanese] will contain retribution,” but “nevertheless, it will be justice.”126 “By their own crudity and treachery our enemies had invited the worst we could do to them,” the New York Times argued.127

In dispensing the hellish agony of nuclear warfare on its enemies, the United States engaged in the ultimate performance of its own identity narrative, reinvigorating the sense of divine chosenness central to the imagined community. Even as the first bomb was about to fall on Hiroshima, Truman worshipped aboard the cruiser Augusta on his way home from Potsdam, singing with the sailors: “Faith of our fathers, we will strive, To win all nations unto to Thee.”128 After Nagasaki was destroyed, the president solemnly recognized the “awful responsibility which has come to us,” adding that Americans could “thank God that it has come to us, instead of to our enemies; and we pray that He may guide us to use it in His ways and for His purposes.”129 In Christianity and Crisis, Niebuhr declared that there was little doubt that the United States was “indeed the executors of God’s judgment.”130 Similarly, the Christian Beacon decided that “the atomic bomb brings to mind . . . the Scripture” concerning “God’s judgment upon the earth.”131 The Bible Today simply rejoiced that “God Almighty put an end to this terrible war.”132

Some of the most striking affirmations of atomic bomb’s ability to reinvigorate the righteous nation’s divine mission appeared in verse. A poem by Edgar Guest in the Detroit Free Press put the matter starkly:
The power to blow all things to dust
Was kept for people God could trust,
And granted unto them alone,
That evil might be overthrown.133

Equally celebratory was Fred Kirby’s country music hit “Atomic Power,” apparently written the morning after Hiroshima. The song subsequently was also released by the Buchanan Brothers and covered by multiple artists. Declaring that “atomic power” was “given by the mighty hand of God,” the song celebrated the “brimstone fire” that “scorched from the face of the earth” the “power of Japan.” In the end, the song concluded, the Japanese people had “paid a big price for their sins.”134

The ease with which U.S. decision makers moved toward the bombing of civilians during World War II reflected the broad cultural context within which they operated. Beginning in Europe in late 1943, large civilian populations gradually became the necessary precondition for bombing particular military targets. Ultimately, the dropping of the atomic bombs reflected a reflexive understanding of the United States as a righteous arbiter of just punishment. To be sure, geopolitical strategy centered on “warning” the Soviets of U.S. power and military considerations designed to save Americans lives contributed to the final decision. But that the use of nuclear weapons even existed as option for U.S. leaders pondering the international and military implications of the bomb can be explained in part by uncovering the culture of righteousness inherent in the inscription of the United States as God’s chosen nation.

The bombs signified the triumph of the righteous nation over the forces of evil. Before the war in the Pacific ended, Truman concluded that the “victory in Europe was more than a victory of arms. It was a victory of one way of life over another. It was a
victory of an ideal founded on the rights of the common man.” Americans as “a free people showed that it was able to defeat professional soldiers whose only moral arms were obedience and the worship of force.” After the surrender of Japan, the president proclaimed that “the cruel war of aggression which Japan started eight years ago to spread the forces of evil over the Pacific has resulted in her total defeat.” The U.S. victory had “come with the help of God, Who was with us in the early days of adversity and disaster, and Who has now brought us to this glorious day of triumph.” Declaring a day of prayer, the president urged “the people of the United States, of all faiths, to unite in offering their thanks to God for the victory we have won, and in praying that He will support and guide us into the paths of peace.”

But if, as Truman indicated, the dead bodies of Americans remained central to the inscription of U.S. national identity, something to pray for and thank God for, the dead bodies that littered the bombed out cities of central Europe and the charred remains of urban Japan signified the just judgment of a righteous nation. Estimates of the number of German civilians killed by Allied bombing range from 410,000 to 800,000. To be sure, the RAF might perhaps be directly responsible for a large percentage of those deaths. Nevertheless, even as American leaders insisted on daylight precision bombing before 1944, they never protested British tactics. Moreover, by insisting that their own practices were complementary to RAF area bombing, the Americans implicitly endorsed Britain’s indiscriminate approach. In Asia, however, the AAF was almost entirely responsible for the air war against Japan in which likely more than 350,000 civilians perished, mostly in raging infernos. Another 476,000 Japanese were injured and approximately 6 million
were left homeless.\textsuperscript{138} At Pearl Harbor, 2,330 Americans had died. As Truman said, the Japanese had “been repaid many fold.”\textsuperscript{139}

Notes


\textsuperscript{6} President Appeals to Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany, and Poland to Refrain from Air Bombing of Civilians, September 1, 1939, \textit{PPA, 8: 454}; Roosevelt Appeals to Russia and Finland to Desist Bombing of Civilians, December 1, 1939, \textit{PPA, 8: 588}.

\textsuperscript{7} Roosevelt Statement, December 2, 1939, \textit{PPA, 8: 589}.


12 Schaffer, *Wings of Judgment*, 20-34.


Ambassador in the United Kingdom to the Secretary of State, December 7, 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, 1: 66; Aide-Mémoire, August 10, 1943, *FRUS, 1943*, 1: 410-411; Michael Beschloss, *The Conquerors: Roosevelt, Truman, and the Destruction of Hitler’s Germany, 1941-1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 52-67; The “Aide-Mémoire” listed above came from the Polish Government in exile and reported Germans “exterminating the majority of the Jewish population” in Poland as well as the deportation of “hundreds of thousands of Poles.” During the war years, even as the extermination camps came to light, a pervasive anti-Semitism still very much characterized American nativism. Within the State Department the anti Jewish feelings of individuals such as Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long kept refugee visa granting mired in red tape. The War Refugee Board suffered indifference from Roosevelt as well as a lack of funding and Allied cooperation. The Board did save approximately 200,000 European Jews. See Carol Silverman, “The American Jewish Community, the Roosevelt Administration, and the Holocaust,” in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Formation of the Modern World*, eds. Thomas C. Howard and William D. Pederson (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 188-207.


R. 14, American Views the Post-War World, Office of War Information, May 26, 1942; Preliminary Report, Personal Identification with the War: Selected Interviews, Office of War Information, September 22, 1942; R. 27, Personal Identification with the War, Office of War Information, October 13, 1942; all in Rensis Likert Papers, Box 9, Bentley Historical Library (hereafter cited as: BHL).
35 Paul Schnur, Secretary-Treasurer, San Francisco Congress of Industrial Organizations, to General Eisenhower, May 24, 1945, OF 325, HSTL.

36 Dorothy E. Curtis, ANC, Hospital Train, to Truman, July 14, 1945, OF 325, HSTL.


38 General Evangeline Booth to Truman, May 21, 1945, OF 325, HSTL.


40 Edge of Darkness, dir. Lewis Milestone, 119 min., Warner Brothers, 1943.


42 Prelude To War, dir. Frank Capra, 53 min., U.S. Army Signal Corps, 1943.


44 “Letters,” Time, April 19, 1943.


48 Embry Riddle School of Aviation Advertisement, Time, August 17, 1942.

49 State of the Union Address, January 7, 1943, PPA, 12: 21-34.


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60 Letter to the Editor by Frank Sheldon, *Christian Century*, July 29, 1942.

61 Truman to General Evangeline Booth, May 25, 1945, OF 325, HSTL.


75 Ira Eaker quoted in Schaffer, Wings of Judgment, 38.


77 Wallace Diary, 16 May 1945, Price of Vision, 448.


82 H.H. Arnold to Roosevelt, August 19, 1942, President’s Secretary’s File (hereafter cited as PSF), Box 1, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter cited as: FDRL).


96 Although the RAF began the firestorm, the AAF was originally scheduled to lead the attack but was held back for weather related reasons. Casualty figures from Martin Gilbert, *Second World War* (Toronto, ON: Stoddart, 1989), 640-642. See also David Irving, *The Destruction of Dresden* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1963), especially 122-158; Knell, *To Destroy A City*, 253-254. Also useful was Alexander McKee, *Dresden 1945: The Devil’s Tinderbox* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984). In the “Introduction” to Irving’s book, Ira Eaker writes, “I find it difficult to understand Englishmen or Americans who weep about enemy civilians who were killed but who have not shed a tear for our gallant crews lost in combat with a cruel enemy.” Irving, *The Destruction of Dresden*, 7.

97 Major General C. L. Chennault to Roosevelt, January 26, 1944, PSF Safe File, Box 1, FDRL.
Roosevelt to Major General C. L. Chennault, Headquarters, 14th U.S. Air Force, March 15, 1944, PSF Safe File, Box 1, FDRL.


Forrestal Diary, 1 May 1945, *The Forrestal Diaries*, 52.


The absence of an “official” decision has resulted in voluminous historical debate as to “why” the U.S. decided to drop the bombs. J. Samuel Walker, “Recent Literature on Truman’s Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground,” *Diplomatic History* 29 (April 2005): 311-334. Recent scholarship taking culture into account has shed tremendous light on broader context which allowed the U.S. to apparently routinely obliterate tens of thousands of defenseless civilians without any serious debate. The argument here seeks to build on these sophisticated interpretations by adding the lens of religion to a complex cultural milieu.


Memorandum, Summary of Target Committee Meetings, May 12, 1945, *DHTP*, 1: 5-14.
Shortly after Truman assumed the presidency, Henry Stimson wrote him that he needed to see him about a “highly secret matter,” one that “has such a bearing on our present foreign relations and has such an important effect upon all my thinking in this field that I think you ought to know about it without much further delay.” Henry Stimson to Truman, April 24, 1945, DHTP, 1: 1. The Interim Committee comprised, in addition to Stimson, Chairman of the National Defense Research Committee Dr. James B. Conant, Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) Dr. Vannevar Bush, OSDR Chief of the Office Field Service Dr. Karl Compton, Assistant Secretary of State William Clayton, Under Secretary of the Navy Ralph Bard, and soon to be Secretary of State James Byrnes.


Notes of the Interim Committee Meeting, May 31, 1945, DHTP: 1, 22-38; Notes of the Interim Committee Meeting, June 1, 1945, DHTP: 1, 39-48; Notes of the Interim Committee Meeting, June 21, 1945, DHTP: 1, 94-101.

Memorandum for Secretary of War, July 18, 1945, DHTP: 1, 122-135.

War Department Press Release, undated, PSF Subject File: NSC Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL.

Truman Diary, July 25, 1945, Off the Record, 55.


Proclamation Calling for the Surrender of Japan, July 26, 1945, FRUS, Potsdam, 2: 1474-1476.

Henry Stimson to Truman, August 6, 1945, PSF Subject File: NSC Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL.

Revised Statement, Henry Stimson to Truman, July 31, 1945, PSF Subject File: NSC Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL.

122 Casualty figures for both Hiroshima and Nagasaki taken from Gilbert, *Second World War*, 712-715.


125 Richard B. Russell to Truman, August 7, 1945, *DHTP*: 1, 211-212.


129 Radio Address, August 9, 1945, *APP*.


135 Radio Address, August 9, 1945, *APP*.

136 Proclamation 2660: Day of Prayer, August 16, 1945, *APP*.
Casualty figures taken from Knell, *To Destroy A City*, 334.

Figures based on Hoyt, *Inferno*, 137.

CHAPTER VII

“A BLACK RAIN UPON OUR SOULS”

Why if our consciences are so clear and our powers so vast are we ourselves suspicious and afraid in the very hour of our greatest victory?

- A. J. Muste, 1947

Now a new era begins - science preaching like an evangelist, with hell and heaven on earth to choose between.

- Harry Emerson Fosdick, 1946

Despite the celebratory mood with which Americans often greeted the obliteration of the enemy other, anxiety over the use of atomic weapons emerged in early postwar United States culture. To be sure, Americans were also apprehensive about a potential return to economic depression, the possibility of future wars, portents of widespread unemployment, and many other domestic and international issues. But one of the leading causes of cultural anxiety in the period 1945-1947, and one that historians have not fully uncovered, was the rupture in the righteous nation identity narrative in the wake of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This chapter argues that Americans attempted to alleviate anxiety over the atomic bombings by imagining the nation as a neighborly internationalist responsible for guarding the world community. After exploring the manner in which Hiroshima and Nagasaki destabilized the righteous nation narrative, the chapter suggests that a renascent religious modernist discourse mixed with Christian realist discourse to provide a lexicon through which Americans could understand the postwar world. By the end of the war,
then, liberal Protestants had largely accepted the neo-orthodox Christian discourse of original sin and as a result a bifurcated image of the United States as friendly neighbor and righteous guardian emerged. Although this bifurcated national identity narrative did not dominate the culture, it nevertheless represented a leading framework in which policy makers operated during 1945-1946, shaping an incongruent U.S. foreign policy that simultaneously pursued multilateral control for atomic energy and unilateral development of nuclear weapons.

On 10 August 1945, before Japan effectively surrendered, President Harry Truman ordered a halt to the atomic bombings. According to the diary of Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace, Truman felt “wiping out another 100,000 people was too horrible. He didn’t like the idea of killing, as he said, ‘all those kids.’”3 Truman was not alone in experiencing anxious unease. Secretary of War Henry Stimson advocated the suspension of American bombing as both the “humane thing” and as expeditious in light of “the growing feeling of apprehension and misgiving . . . in our own country.”4 Even before the United States dropped the bombs, General Dwight Eisenhower experienced “a feeling of depression” and “grave misgivings,” especially since “Japan was already defeated” and “dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary.”5 Many Americans felt, Admiral William D. Leahy later surmised, that the United States “had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages.”6

The sudden anxiety felt by American statesmen and military leaders over the dropping of the atomic bombs mirrored that in the broader culture. Although in terms of end results the atomic bombs remained materially almost inseparable from other forms of obliteration, for many Americans the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki resisted
immediate incorporation into the righteous nation narrative of national identity. Reinhold Niebuhr noted “a strange disquiet,” a “lack of satisfaction,” and “an uneasiness of conscience” despite that “the use of this bomb was only the climax of the use of methods of warfare” already employed by the United States, “including obliteration and incendiary bombing.” Newsweek found “a special horror in the split second that returned so many thousand humans to the primeval dust from which they sprang.” Any relief that the United States had discovered the bomb first was now tempered by “fear and deep misgiving,” the New York Times observed. Writing to Truman, H. O. B. Shiller viewed “with amazement and alarm the disastrous effect the so-called atomic bomb has had on our morale.” Echoing Shiller, Catholic theologian Ronald A. Knox observed “a very general . . . moral bewilderment.” “We may ourselves . . . be appalled by what was done to Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” the usually bellicose Chicago Daily Tribune conceded.

If the righteous nation narrative had confirmed America’s chosen status, the future seemed incredibly uncertain in the wake of the atomic bombs. For example, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes worried that “in atomic energy we have developed a means for destroying [the] world, and ourselves with it.” The Detroit Free Press reflected a similar apprehension, declaring, “The atomic bomb did more than jar Japan. It jarred all mankind into a realization of what will happen to the earth if World War Three ever comes.” “The Atom: New Source of Energy,” a 1945 McGraw-Hill pamphlet, pronounced the bomb an “instrument that raises by an unimaginable dimension our ability to dole out death,” one ultimately “capable of unraveling the very fabric of our civilization.” The Christian Century agonized that almost “nothing can save the race
from new horrors” while *The Bible Today* pondered disquietingly that “little instrument which was able at one blow to kill over one hundred thousand people.”16

*Atomic Energy for Military Purposes*, the sympathetic official report of the bomb’s development written by Princeton physicist Henry D. Smyth, reflected the broader fear that the future might disappear in an instant. It posited that “a weapon has been developed that is potentially destructive beyond the wildest nightmares of the imagination.” The future of any nation, but presumably especially that of the United States, appeared permanently jeopardized in the face of “a weapon so ideally suited to sudden unannounced attack that a country’s major cities might be destroyed overnight.” It seemed that Americans had discovered “the means to commit suicide at will.”17

The outlook for the nation seemed grim. Americans appeared to be nothing more than “survivors in a dead world about to die,” *Harper’s* remarked.18 The atom bomb’s “detonation forms a kind of signature-tune after all that orgy of destruction which has been going on in the past five years,” Knox professed. “It is a symbol which has struck the public imagination and deepened its sense of doom.”19 “We take pains to educate our children at an early age in the rituals and mysteries of the nation,” social commentator E. B. White noted, but “lately the most conspicuous activity of nations has been the blowing of each other up.” Consequently, “an observant child might reasonably ask whether he is pledging allegiance to a flag or to a shroud.”20

A widespread guilt consciousness also emerged, quickly trumping fear over the future as Americans increasingly suggested that Hiroshima and Nagasaki seemed to constitute a U.S. atrocity. For example, pacifist theologian A. J. Muste argued “Americans would do well to be less concerned about atomic bombs which may be
dropped on them than about . . . the bombs they dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”

And many Americans were. In the Atlantic Monthly, Edgar Jones lamented that the United States “topped off our saturation bombing and burning of enemy civilians by dropping atomic bombs on two nearly defenseless cities, thereby setting an all-time record for instantaneous mass slaughter.” According to Harper’s, “cosmic dramaturgy added to the somnambulism of that second week of August the shame, guilt, and terror of the atomic bomb.”

In August 1946, the New Yorker announced that it was devoting “its entire editorial space to an article on the almost complete obliteration of a city by one atomic bomb” so that Americans “might well take time to consider the terrible implications of its use.” The result was a lengthy essay by John Hersey later published as the book Hiroshima. Hersey traced the lives of six Hiroshima residents before, during, and after the bombing: two women, two religious figures, and two doctors. Hiroshima detailed the horror of the bombs rather matter-of-factly, describing almost mechanically how “wounded people supported maimed people,” “disfigured families leaned together,” “many people were vomiting,” and “the eyebrows of some were burned off and skin hung from their faces and hands.” But that such horrors should be visited upon Hersey’s cast of characters is extremely significant; Hiroshima implicitly indicted the bombings as a crime against innocent civilians (women), against religion (the pastor and the missionary), and against civilized progress (the physicians).

Far from ignoring Hersey’s narrative, Americans embraced it, turning it into a best-seller as well as a radio phenomenon. As the Christian Century put it, “once in a lifetime you read a magazine article that makes you want to bounce up out of your
easychair and go running around to your neighbors, thrusting the magazine under their noses and saying: ‘Read this! Read it now!’”\textsuperscript{26}

Even before Hersey’s work appeared, many Americans felt disgusted by the human toll of the atomic bombs. Several readers of the \textit{Washington Post} vented their anger in letters to the editor. One writer lamented that although the United States was “fighting a war for international law, decency and morality” it could not do so “by mass obliteration of noncombatants.” “In a few seconds we destroy an entire city, including hospitals and schools, killing by concussions and burning 200,000 defenseless . . . men, women and children,” another complained bitterly. According to a third writer the United States had become “the proud initiators of total and unheralded destruction, of an unexampled mass killing of human beings.”\textsuperscript{27}

Other newspapers and periodicals received similar letters. A writer to the \textit{Detroit Free Press} wondered how anyone could “hope to justify the atomic bomb whose object is to destroy a whole city and therefore its whole population.” The writer concluded that “this method of ripping up God’s very earth calls for some protest.”\textsuperscript{28} In the \textit{New York Times}, a reader objected that there was not even a “pretense of precision bombing for military purposes” and that any using a bomb that “will result in the killing of 100,000 women and children . . . is all wrong.”\textsuperscript{29} A scathing letter in \textit{The Christian Science Monitor} pointed out that that the hypocritical “distinctions we draw nowadays between the scourges of gas and germ and such approved weapons as flame throwers, phosphorous shells, blockbusters, and now the atomic bomb” were akin to a defendant who “states with obvious satisfaction” that “I have frequently murdered my wives, but never on a Sunday.”\textsuperscript{30} Putting the issue starkly, a letter to \textit{Time} averred simply that “the
United States of America has this day become the new master of brutality, infamy, atrocity.”

The rupture in the righteous nation narrative appeared forcefully as the United States suddenly seemed no better than the evil enemies against which American righteousness was constituted. Although the “names of places - Rotterdam, Coventry - were associated . . . with a judgment of German guilt and German shame,” and Pearl Harbor was “a name for Japanese guilt and shame,” Commonweal declared, now “the name Hiroshima” and “the name Nagasaki are names for American guilt and shame.” A New York Times reader was simply “horrified at the indiscriminate, inhuman and un-Christia n bombing,” labeling the attacks “mass murder” and “sheer terrorism on the greatest scale the world has yet seen.” One writer to the Washington Post called the bombings “by far the greatest atrocity of the war, outdoing all Japanese and German atrocities combined.” A writer to the White House averred that although “the Japanese have committed many atrocities,” the atomic bombs were “the worst atrocity in the history of mankind.” “If the right to use the atomic bomb is sanctioned, then the right to . . . deal a so-called merciful death . . . as quick and instantaneous as the lethal chambers of Buchenwald is also sanctioned,” United States News declared. “Man need no longer split hairs about the most effective means of inflicting death on his fellowman.”

Perhaps no Americans were as guilt-ridden as some of the scientists who had developed the bomb. As Christianity and Crisis observed in mid 1946, for instance, “the scientists who ushered in the atomic age are uncommonly vocal regarding the social and political perils we face.” The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists lamented that “the two nations which we like to think are the most enlightened and humane in the world - Great
Britain and the United States - used atomic weapons against an enemy which was essentially defeated.38 After a meeting in Chicago, atomic scientist Samuel Allison claimed that “all of us . . . had a momentary elation when our experiment met with success, but that feeling rapidly changed to a feeling of horror and a fervent hope that no more bombs would be dropped. When the second bomb was released, we felt it was a great tragedy.”39 In the summer of 1946, a New York Times headline declared, “Einstein Deplores Use of Atom Bomb.”40

Scientist Robert Oppenheimer seemed particularly anxious. In October, Wallace noted in his diary that he had never seen “a man in such an extremely nervous state as Oppenheimer.” The physicist had come to Wallace worrying that “the destruction of the entire race was imminent.” Oppenheimer even told Truman that some of the scientists worried that they had blood on their hands. Wallace could only marvel that “the guilt consciousness of the atomic scientists is one of the most astounding things I have ever seen.”41

Such anxiety traumatically ruptured the “righteousness” signifier in the imaginary of U.S. identity. Decrying “America’s atomic atrocity” the Christian Century argued that Hiroshima and Nagasaki had resulted in “horror and revulsion,” a “sense of guilt and shame” and a “profound foreboding” throughout the country. It concluded that “the use made of the atomic bomb has placed our nation in an indefensible moral position.”42 A New York Times reader labeled the bombings “a stain upon our national life.”43 Writing to Washington Post, Eunice Knapp claimed that “for the first time in my life I am ashamed of being an American.” Another writer simply penned a solitary line: “The atomic bomb is a crime against civilization.” A third writer sarcastically condemned “the
unbridled ferocity of warfare as waged by a “civilized” and “Christian” Nation.”44 “Our conscience as a nation must trouble us,” United States News declared. “We must confess our sin.”45

Letters to the White House also questioned the moral standing of the nation. Two days after Hiroshima, one writer complained angrily to Truman that “this action . . . has abased the honor of America” and “I and many others are ashamed of our country.” Illustrating the connection between such anxiety over the bombing and national identity, the writer concluded that “this country has forfeited its entire record of decency and moral leadership in one act, so low and despicable as to be unthinkable. May God have mercy on this people for so prostituting the God given power of the universe.” Another writer was especially incensed over the second atomic bombing, asserting that “no amount of praying or beseeching can possibly sanctify the act of using the atom bomb on Nagasaki. Let us not try to throw a halo about this deed.”46

For many Americans, then, Hiroshima and Nagasaki undercut a narrative of national identity rooted in the religious discourse of justice, morality, and righteousness. As a result, the attacks became impossible to ignore. As Time averred, “there was no pretending Hiroshima had never happened . . . Man had been tossed into the vestibule of another millennium . . . a strange place, full of weird symbols and the smell of death.” A week later Time added, “The demonstration of power against living creatures instead of dead matter created a bottomless wound in the living conscience of the race.”47

That coming to terms with Hiroshima and Nagasaki invoked comparisons to being collectively “wounded” or “sick” indicated the extent to which the discourse of righteousness had become foundational to national identity. For example, Anne Ford,
Publicity Director for the publishing house Little, Brown & Company, claimed that she was “sick at heart . . . over what our country has just done to Japan and her people - thousands of them innocent.” Why? Not just because the bombs had resulted in nearly two hundred thousand charred human beings, but because it was “a disgrace that America should be involved in such a diabolical thing” since the United States was supposed to be an “example to the rest of the world” led by Truman “as a Christian leader.”

Given the religioned nature of American identity, it is not surprising that some of the harshest criticism and deepest anxiety emerged among religious institutions and leaders. Particularly apprehensive over the righteous status of the nation was the Federal Council of Churches. In a statement on “The Use of the Atomic Bomb,” the Council argued that the United States had “committed an atrocity of a new magnitude” which “violates every instinct of humanity.” It warned that the bomb’s “reckless and irresponsible employment against an already virtually beaten foe will have to receive judgment before God and the conscience of humankind.” After the Nagasaki bombing, the Council immediately cabled President Harry Truman that “many Christians” were “deeply disturbed over use of atomic bombs against Japanese cities.”

In late August, the Council’s president, Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, and John Foster Dulles of the Commission on a Just and Durable peace issued a joint statement bemoaning that the United States as “a professedly Christian nation” could “feel morally free to use atomic energy in that way.” In March 1946, a Council commission argued that the United States, “as the power that first used the atomic bomb,” had “sinned grievously against the laws of God and against the people of Japan.”
Preachers, theologians, and other religious figures echoed the Federal Council. Not surprisingly, Dr. Cecil Hinshaw, president of Iowa’s Quaker school William Penn College, declared that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki represented a “barbaric, inhuman type of warfare” that was entirely “unjustified.”53 Many religious leaders particularly castigated the immorality of killing women and children. From Chicago Theological Seminary Fred Eastman compared the bombings to King Herod’s attempt to kill the baby Jesus. He concluded that while “King Herod’s slaughter of the innocents - an atrocity committed in the name of defense - destroyed no more than a few hundred children . . . today, a single atomic bomb slaughters tens of thousands of children and their mothers and fathers.”54 According to Harry Emerson Fosdick, “every one of us is . . . horrified at the implications of what we did. Saying Japan was guilty and deserved it, gets us nowhere. The mothers and babies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not deserve it.”55 The Baptist Watchmen-Examiner denounced the “ghastly slaughter of women and children who have not the remotest connection with a military objective.”56

Reflective of a broader cultural anxiety, a perceived decline in collective national righteousness weighed heavily. The Reverend Dr. Bernard Iddings Bell proclaimed at Trinity Church in New York that the atomic bomb had created a “world-wide moral revulsion” against the United States and its “methods of war” which “are cosmically and cold-bloodedly barbarous beyond previous experience or possibility.”57 The feeling of sickness and emptiness also emerged. Pastor of Community Church in New York John Haynes Holmes, for instance, recollected that upon learning of the bombings “everything else seemed suddenly to become insignificant. I seemed to grow cold, as though I had been transported to the waste spaces of the moon. The summer beauty seemed to vanish,
and the waves of the sea to be pounding upon the shores of an empty world.”58 Quite simply, as the fundamentalist *Christian Beacon* noted, “The atomic bomb” has “stunned the United States.”59

Attempts to justify Hiroshima and Nagasaki emerged almost reflexively from the assault the bombings rendered on the righteous nation narrative of U.S. identity. As a *Washington Post* reader perceptibly anticipated shortly after V-J day, “responsibility for using the atomic bomb without warning in the complete destruction of whole enemy cities is one which this Nation will one day regret and seek in vain to erase from the pages of history.”60 And an attempt to “erase” American responsibility was exactly what occurred. Truman, for example, even though anxious himself over killing “all those kids,” responded quickly to criticism from the Federal Council of Churches. Professing that “nobody is more disturbed over the use of Atomic bombs than I,” Truman placed all responsibility on Japan by adding that he was just as “greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor and their murder of our prisoners of war.” He reminded the Council that “the only language” the Japanese “seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them.” Absolving the United States of all accountability, he concluded that “when you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast,” a fact “most regrettable but nevertheless true.”61

Of course, the effort to “officially” justify Hiroshima and Nagasaki went beyond Truman. Even as the two cities continued to smolder, the United States proclaimed the immorality of Germany’s V-2 rockets while defending the atom bombs. At a conference in Rio de Janeiro American representatives made the incredible argument that “the flying bomb is an unlawful weapon, but the atomic bomb is lawful” because the “flying bombs’
blast could not be directed to any given point, but the atomic bomb could be guided so as not to hit undefended areas.”62 Smyth’s official report betrayed the uneasiness that underlay such fabricated differentiations. Attempting to assuage an overwhelming sense of unrighteousness, the report defensively asserted that the bomb had “been created not by the devilish inspiration of some warped genius but by the arduous labor of thousands of normal men and women working for the safety of their country.”63

The official justification of the atomic bombs largely centered on assurances that the United States had acted for a greater righteousness by what initially might appear to many as an unrighteous and evil action. In this light, the most widespread defense for Hiroshima and Nagasaki quickly became that the bombs had saved American lives. For example, Truman declared just days after Hiroshima that although he regretted “wiping out whole populations” his “object” was “to save as many American lives as possible,” even if this countered his “humane feeling for the women and children in Japan.”64 Echoing Truman in a March 1946 radio broadcast, Secretary of War Robert Patterson encouraged Americans to remember “that the atomic bomb hastened victory and saved thousands of lives.”65 Perhaps the closest thing to an official defense of the bombings appeared in the form of Stimson’s February 1947 Harper’s Magazine article, “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb.” According to Stimson the decision rested primarily on the need to save American lives by ensuring the prompt surrender of the Japanese.66

While historian Gar Alperovitz criticizes the Stimson article for lacking “truthfulness,” viewing it as a discursive text flowing from religious narratives of national identity sheds light on its cultural logic.67 Stimson’s argument turns quite profoundly around moral choice rather than on simple military or diplomatic
considerations. In other words, the decision emerged, in part, as the moral fulfillment of
the duties and responsibilities of American statesmen. For example, Stimson asserted that
he could not “see how any person vested with such responsibilities as mine could have
taken any other course,” and emphasized that “no man . . . holding in his hands a weapon
of such possibilities for accomplishing this purpose and saving those lives, could have
failed to use it and afterwards looked his countrymen in the face.” Stimson’s defense of
the bombings also assumed that the United States as a nation had made the best moral
choice. He argued, for instance, that the “deliberate, premeditated destruction was our
least abhorrent choice” and that the bombings ultimately “stopped the fire raids, and the
strangling blockade” and “ended the ghastly specter of a clash of great land armies.”

Such “official” justifications mirrored the broader culture’s attempt to rationalize
the bombings. Just as in the official defense of the bombings, the most prevalent
justification was that they had saved Americans lives and that brutality could not be
avoided in a justified war. For example, popular radio commentator Raymond Gram
Swing argued in September 1945 that “President Truman knew that he would be judged
for what he decided, by his contemporaries, by history, and by the Judge beyond all
judges” and that “he will be justified by the consideration that he was responsible for the
lives of Americans.” According to Swing, war meant killing or being killed, and that “is
the code of war and we were at war.”

Numerous Americans agreed with Swing. The *Christian Beacon* contended that
the United States “owes much to the atomic bomb” since it had saved many American
lives. The *Washington Post* added that in “war without quarter” all actions are justified.
Although the *Post* hoped that a “feeling of horror will persist,” it believed “that sober
second thoughts will bring a new perspective” on how many American lives were saved.71 “The use of the atomic bomb saved hundreds of thousands - perhaps several millions - of lives, both American and Japanese,” Karl Compton averred in the *Atlantic Monthly*.72

On the big screen, Norman Taurog’s *The Beginning or the End* (1947) echoed popular and official justifications depicting the bombings as the just strategy of a righteous nation. As a docudrama, the film attempted to tell the story of the Manhattan Project, including the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Like other anxious efforts to defend the atomic attacks, the film suggested that the decision was morally correct. It argued that the Japanese themselves verged on perfecting their own atomic bomb which they would have used to kill Americans. Additionally, the film falsely suggested that the United States had given more than sufficient warning to the Japanese that the atomic bombs were about to be dropped, in fact, “ten days’ more warning than they gave us before Pearl Harbor.”73

Widespread defensiveness about the atomic bombings indicated that although Hiroshima and Nagasaki resulted in significant cultural anxiety over American national identity, the righteous nation narrative continued to operate as a dominant discursive framework of the imagined community. As discussed in the previous chapter, many Americans viewed the atomic bombs not only as justified, but as a testimony to God’s special mission for the United States. In the immediate aftermath of the bombs, a vast majority of Americans, nearly 85%, approved of the bombings. The number did not change much by the end of the year. A public opinion poll that appeared in *Fortune* in December, for example, showed that just over half of Americans believed that the United
States “should have used the two bombs on cities, just as we did.” But more than one fifth of Americans thought that even more bombs should have been used.\textsuperscript{74}

The seemingly incongruent reception of the atomic bombings was not just a matter of minority dissent versus majority approval. Rather, the bifurcated cultural interpretation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki reflected the difficulty of incorporating the material reality of the bombings into an identity narrative that had been firmly cemented in revelations of Nazi extermination camps and Japanese treatment of American POWs. For example, Truman, even as he experienced anxiety about killing “all those kids” and a “humane feeling for the women and children, rejoiced that Americans could “thank God that [the bomb] has come to us” and declared that “when you have to deal with a beast you have to treat him as a beast.”

Knox’s 1945 book \textit{God and the Atom} reflected the manner in which Americans concurrently experienced anxiety and certainty over the righteous status of the nation. The Catholic theologian strenuously argued that “a given course of action may be right, yet a different course of action may be better.” In other words, although “it would have been a more perfect thing not to bomb Hiroshima” and to have given a “demonstration” of the bomb’s power, the United States definitely “had a right to destroy Hiroshima” and therefore had not acted unrighteously.\textsuperscript{75}

In the early postwar years, Hollywood plots reflected the moral ambiguity of using seemingly unrighteous behavior to achieve purportedly righteous ends. The 1946 United Artists’ film \textit{Angel on My Shoulder} told the story of Eddie Kagle, a gangster criminal who wakes up in hell after being shot. To exact revenge, Eddie makes a deal with the Devil to possess the body of the upright, righteous judge Frederick Parker, for
whom Eddie is physically a dead-ringer. Although the Devil hopes to ruin the upstanding judge through Eddie, Eddie fails to deliver when he undergoes an epiphany that life is much better when lived justly. In order to escape his bargain, Eddie finally blackmails the Devil and returns to hell, allowing the righteous judge to assume his position. By confusing the unjust criminal with a righteous judge and resolving the film’s tension through a criminal act (blackmail), *Angel on My Shoulder* blurs the line between righteousness and unrighteousness, conceding dramatically that immoral behavior might achieve moral ends.\(^76\)

Moral ambiguity also characterized other Hollywood productions. For example, in *Gentleman’s Agreement*, a reporter played by Gregory Peck intentionally deceives people by pretending to be a Jew, all for the sake of uncovering the terrible consequences of racism. The film won three Oscars, including Best Picture.\(^77\) Similarly, in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Notorious* (1946), nominated for two Academy Awards, American agents foil a plan by ex-Nazis to develop an atomic bomb for use on the United States. To do so, however, Alicia, played by Ingrid Bergman, must marry the CEO of I.G. Farben who is the ringleader of the ex-Nazi cause. Even though Alicia and her fellow agent Devlin, played by Carey Grant, are in love, Devlin encourages what appears to be almost an adulterous arrangement. In the end, however, the agents succeed in uncovering the plot and the ring-leader is killed. Once more a seemingly unrighteous act, promoted by a character whose name is strikingly close to “Devil,” achieves an apparently righteous end.\(^78\)

*Film noir* suggested that righteous outcomes might not exist at all, reflecting a deeper anxiety over the possibility of righteousness. Fatalistic and morally ambiguous, a
wave of such movies inundated theaters in 1946-47. One of the most prominent was The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946), a cynical film that told the story of a wife, Cara, generally depicted in virginal white costume throughout the film. Hardly innocent, Cara encourages her lover Frank to “fix everything for us” by murdering her husband, Nick. Although Frank initially protests that Nick “never did any harm to me,” the two conspire to murder Nick anyways. Afterwards, however, the lovers’ relationship falls apart and Cara eventually dies in a car accident. The police blame Frank who ends up “wrongfully” going to jail. The attempt to find happiness by releasing Cara from her marriage imprisonment can only be done through the immoral act of murder, but even that merely results in further violence and imprisonment. A similar love triangle results in the violent deaths of all three protagonists in Jacques Tourneur’s Out of the Past (1947). In Brute Force (1947), a prison guard captain, ostensibly representing justice, is depicted as a mini Hitler, beating his prisoners while listening to Wagner and espousing his disdain for untermensch inmates. Meanwhile, the prisoners plan to escape the clutches of the prison Fuhrer and to freedom. In the end, the escape plan fails and a shootout ensues in which everyone dies.79

Cultural uncertainty erupting in the wake of Hiroshima and Nagasaki became especially noticeable in the “monster” imaging that often pervaded “atomic” discussion. For example, in an editorial cartoon shortly after the bombings titled “A New Era in Man’s Understanding of Nature’s Forces,” the Detroit Free Press depicted a large, swarthy, muscular hand shrouded in darkness high above the earth as it gripped a massive lightning bolt striking down to Japan.80 A similar monster image occurred several days later in the Chicago Daily Tribune. An editorial cartoon depicted a foreboding giant
several times the size of earth ready to pound another atomic bomb down on Japan if it did not surrender. To many Americans, journalist Marquis Childs observed, atomic energy seemed like a “primeval force” that “knows neither friend nor foe.” Even “the scientist,” noted the Christian Century, felt “dwarfed by the magnitude of the thing he has done.” A poem titled “Echo From Hiroshima” warned Americans to “Turn from your play and listen, tilt your head: Giants are striding as the atom cracks!” In the words of The Bible Today, such indescribable force indicated that “man has become like a little child holding a big sword with a razor-like edge in his hand and wondering how he can best amuse himself with the dangerous toy in his possession.”

Particularly forceful in producing the monster image was William Laurence’s “Eye Witness Account” released by the War Department in September 1945. Laurence, who had flown on the Nagasaki bombing mission, described how he watched the bomb’s mushroom cloud “shoot upward like a meteor coming from the earth instead of from outer space, becoming ever more alive as it climbed skyward.” The plume seemed as though “it was no longer smoke, or dust, or even a cloud of fire. It was a living thing, a new species of being, born right before our incredulous eyes.” At one point “the entity assumed the form of a . . . living totem pole, carved with many grotesque masks grimacing at the earth.” The cloud “kept struggling in an elemental fury, like a creature in the act of breaking the bonds that held it down.” In “a few seconds it had freed itself from its gigantic stem and floated upward with tremendous speed” but almost immediately a secondary mushroom cloud made it appear “as though the decapitated monster was growing a new head.”
Doubt over national righteousness appeared frequently in “Promethean” framings of atomic energy. Prometheus, of course, occupied a morally ambiguous place in Greek mythology. A criminal sentenced to eternal punishment for deceiving the gods and stealing fire, he might appear seemingly good for introducing fire to humankind for its benefit. Even before the second bombing at Nagasaki, *New York Times* foreign affairs commentator Anne O’Hare McCormick mulled over the seeming “Promethean role of the United States.”\(^8\) *Time* compared the bombs to “‘the winged hound of Zeus’ tearing from Prometheus’ liver the price of fire.” The magazine further asserted, “The rational mind had won the most Promethean of its conquests over nature, and had put into the hands of common man the fire and force of the sun itself.” In the end, *Time* concluded, “the promise of good and of evil bordered alike on the infinite.”\(^8\) In his poem “God’s Fire,” William Rose Benét declared “Prometheus is unbound.”\(^8\)

Like Prometheus, Frankenstein represented the blending of hopeful progress with terrifying consequences. The bombs reminded theologian A. J. Muste, for instance, of “Frankenstein’s monster veritably coming to life and terrorizing his creator.”\(^9\) Similarly, almost immediately after Hiroshima NBC radio commentator H. V. Kaltenborn broadcast that “we have created a Frankenstein” that might eventually “be turned against us.”\(^9\) A subscriber to *Time* worried less about future consequences than about the immediate atrocity that resulted from the scientific discovery: “Bataan, Buchenwald, Dachau, Coventry, Lidice were tea parties compared with the horror which we, the people of the United States of America, have dumped on the world in the form of atomic energy bombs. No peacetime applications of this Frankenstein monster can ever erase the crime we have committed.”\(^9\) Fosdick envisioned Americans themselves as the monsters,
declaring in a postwar sermon that “we are Franksteins, who have created a technological civilization that in the hands of sin can literally exterminate us.”\textsuperscript{93} Even the Director of Industrial Relations at the Hanford plutonium plant understood the need to ensure some “chain of restraint about the atomic Frankenstein.”\textsuperscript{94}

The guilty anxiety, the justifications, and the fears of unchained monsters all functioned as central elements of Hermann Hagedorn’s aptly titled epic poem *The Bomb that fell on America*. According to Hagedorn, “the bomb that fell on Hiroshima fell on America too . . . It burst. It shook the land.” And like other Americans grappling with the Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hagedorn also evidenced a divided conscience. On the one hand, the poem argued that Americans “have not forgotten Pearl Harbor” nor “Bataan and Corregidor, the March of Death, the concentration camps, the calculated humiliations, the starving American prisoners, the massacres and the torture.” At the same time, however, Americans also knew “that more than half of those whom the bomb obliterated at Hiroshima were women and children, as innocent of the wrongs committed by Hirohito’s arrogant adventures as our wives, our own children.”\textsuperscript{95}

The realization of the bomb’s impact left Hagedorn with a sick, empty feeling wrought by tremendous anxiety over the state of the nation. “A sickness eats at our hearts,” he wrote, and “our bodies have grown fat and our souls thin. The blinding light that lighted Hiroshima, lighted, too, the empty caverns of our souls!” Even the popular monster imaging made an appearance as “the jinn is out of the bottle, the troubles are out of the box, Frankenstein’s baby is on the loose.” From deep within “the conscience of America,” the poem averred, a mournful lament poured forth: “We are like the survivors
of Hiroshima” for “the dead lie across our hearts and fall in a black rain upon our souls.”

The “black rain” that drenched the American conscience in the immediate postwar years problematized the hierarchy of good and evil through which Americans had imagined their nation for more than half a decade. As a result, significant cultural space opened in which competing discursive regimes might find traction. The rupture in the righteous nation narrative allowed for competing interpretations of the nation’s destiny and mission room for articulation. In particular, a renascent religious modernism was able to once more proffer its vision of the United States as a beneficent neighbor in the world community.

In the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombings, a “return” to the “golden rule” seemed to many Americans the only means for survival. For example, Truman declared in a national radio broadcast at the end of 1945 that “in love, which is the very essence of the message of the Prince of Peace, the world would find a solution for all its ills.” The president told Americans that all of the world’s problems could readily “be settled if approached through the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.” Under that guiding light Americans “must strive without ceasing to make real the prophecy” that “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” Then “the Kingdoms of this world shall become indeed the Kingdom of God.”

In 1946, Truman reiterated that the “only one solution” for the world was “the substitution of decency and reason and brotherhood for the rule of force.” “When the sages and the scientists, the philosophers and the statesman, have all exhausted their studies of atomic energy, one solution and only one solution will remain,” Truman
argued. “If men and nations would but live by the precepts of the ancient prophets and the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, problems which now seem so difficult would soon disappear.” Living by the golden rule represented the only real “defense against that bomb.” Even as late as 1948, the president believed that all problems would “yield to solution” through “the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount.” Revealing how such hopes remained linked to anxiety over the atomic bombs, Truman added that once Americans “have learned these things, we shall be able to prove that Hiroshima was not the end of civilization, but the beginning of a new and better world.”

Truman’s emphasis on the Sermon on the Mount reflected a broader resurgence of neighborly internationalism in the immediate postwar years. For example, nearly a year before his “Decision” article Stimson argued in Harper’s that “a direct and open dealing with other nations on” the issue of “the bomb” could “bring us enduring cooperation and an effective community of purpose among the nations of the earth.” Only by the “unreserved cooperation among nations” would “the way toward a real fraternity of nations . . . be open.” According to Ickes, the “whole international situation” was a “cause of grave anxiety” that could only be resolved if Americans did “not thoughtlessly go back to their own comfortable homes, carelessly leaving comrades stricken and in need of succor. That would not be Christian.” Rather, the United States needed to work with other nations “that all of us together might establish a new world in which there would peace.”

The echoes of prewar good neighborism could be heard throughout postwar culture. The Detroit Free Press hoped that in the “a broken, smashed world” Americans could lead the way in establishing “free channels of information with open covenants.
openly arrived at” between all nations. The Christian Science Monitor editorialized that Americans must “accept Jesus’ teachings as practical, commonsense guideposts on the path to peace,” especially “those teachings . . . to love God supremely and one’s neighbor as oneself.” According to the Monitor, “there is no better plan for peace anywhere” than practicing “brotherly love, justice, fair dealing, true equality.” Writing to the Washington Post, a reader from Maryland averred that the United States needed to be “motivated by a faith in a loving God and a sincere love for mankind” so that “we would break the vicious circle of returning evil for evil.” In looking “at the Sermon on the Mount” he could only conclude that “Jesus was a realist. I am sorry that it takes the atomic bomb to verify that fact.” A “Mother” from Washington agreed, writing that “it is now time to realize that the entire world must have real peace; and to achieve this all nations must live by the Golden Rule, and all people must have true brotherly love for their neighbors.”

Some of the most vocal proponents of good neighbor internationalism were modernist and Protestant liberal theologians. Appropriating the language of neo-orthodox realism Fosdick argued that the United States “should be able to do this much: stop talking about international peace, world brotherhood and all that, as beautiful ideals” because “they are no longer ideals, but hardheaded, desperately necessary endeavors to catch up with the realistic facts.” Outspoken pacifist theologian Muste added that all “men, being children of God, are all brethren, members of one spiritual family” and therefore “the neighbor is “the other self” so that if one see his neighbor truly . . . one will love this neighbor as oneself.”

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Religious modernist organizations discovered cultural space to reassert many of their prewar neighborly internationalist ideas as well. Only “the methods and forces of cooperation, service, sacrifice and love” could bring about “lasting peace and progress,” the American Friends Service Committee contended.\(^\text{106}\) The Federal Council, “eager to be of service in these crucial hours,” asserted that although “a world of fear, hated, cruelty, misery, and violent death is closing in on the prospect of a world of fellowship and love,” the atomic bombs provided “a new opportunity, under the Providence of God, to bring in an order of brotherhood, freedom, and justice.”\(^\text{107}\) Explicitly citing the theology of social gospel modernism, the Council asserted that “the evil forces at work are man-made and they can be man-changed,” especially through efforts at demonstrating God’s righteous love for all men.\(^\text{108}\) Even the “realist” *Christianity and Crisis* conceded that man “must find quickly a basis for brotherhood that will bind all men . . . together in cooperative effort toward common humanitarian goals.”\(^\text{109}\)

Righteousness as a signifier of the imagined community’s chosen status did not disappear but became constituted by staging beneficence in the world community. That is, anxiety over Hiroshima and Nagasaki produced a cultural space in which ostensible neighborly internationalism became the leading sign of national righteousness. Staging that beneficence occurred through support for “international” organizations and efforts. As a result, Americans embraced cooperative globalism in the immediate postwar years. The United Nations, for example, received whole-hearted support from most Americans despite a small remnant of “isolationists” who hoped to dissociate the United States from any form of global infringement on “American liberties.”\(^\text{110}\) But such globalism remained linked to attaining righteousness by cleansing the nation from the “black rain” of the
atomic bombings. As the Federal Council of Churches put it, “our nation, having first used the atomic bomb, has a primary duty to seek to reverse the trend which it began” by accepting “moral leadership” in the world.111

Therefore, despite the resurgence of social gospel internationalist discourse, the language of righteousness and unrighteousness remained firmly entrenched, implying that the world neighborhood required a valiant defender. Americans readily embraced such a role because it reinvigorated their sense of divine mission. Truman, for instance, praised the position of the Federal Council on the U.S. “place in the world community” as well as its encouragement among Americans of “a stronger sense of fellowship with other peoples.” Reflecting the necessity of staging narratives of national identity, the president remained convinced that such “spiritual values” were “indestructible only as long as men are ready and willing to take action to preserve them.”112 He asserted that “as a Christian Nation our earnest desire is to work with men of good will everywhere to banish war” and to ensure “that men of every clime should live together in peace, good will and mutual trust.” In essence, the United States desired “to march forward in amity with all men who unite their efforts to bring the Kingdom of God home to this fair Earth” but promised “to struggle if need be” against any opposition from the “forces of evil.”113

In casting the United States as responsible for promoting world community and defending that community against unjust, unneighborly forces, Truman reflected the emergence an identity narrative that incorporated both the hierarchy of good and evil and neighborly internationalism. As Stimson averred in Foreign Affairs, although “the world is full of friends and enemies” and “full of warring ideas,” all “men, good or bad, are now our neighbors.”114 John McKee, a brigadier general and assistant commander of the 87th
infantry division during World War II, agreed with Stimson. In a postwar speech on international affairs, McKee advocated the “removal of social injustices that lead to war” and declared “that the world belongs to all men.” At the same time, however, he acknowledged that “forces of evil do exist” and therefore recommended the “United Nations as a means of international justice” and “use of a police force” to protect the world community. As Secretary of States James Byrnes declared, amid “neighboring nations in one world,” the “policy of non-intervention in internal affairs” of other nations “did not mean the approval of local tyranny.”

Reconciling the dropping of the atomic bombs remained firmly linked to the neighborly global guardian image. Physicist and Chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis Arthur Compton, for example, wrote an article on “the moral meaning of the atomic bomb” that almost exclusively focused on the international role of the United States. Although “the world is a single community” and “everyone in it can be our neighbor,” he wrote, the United States must undertake its “proper share in protecting the world, even to the extent of acting as police.” Like Compton, Fosdick’s On Being Fit To Live With exhorted an international role for the nation in the wake of the atomic bombings. “Brotherhood is the basic law of life,” Fosdick argued. Although “the eternal purpose proposes here on earth a kingdom of righteousness,” the “world is a world of moral law where injustice and tyranny and selfish greed and racial prejudice are everlastingly wrong.” “True religion never suggests that there is a cheap and painless way” to rid the world of “long-enduring and deep-seated evil,” the pacifist Muste conceded.
Christianity and Crisis’s December 1946 “Statement by the Board of Sponsors” provided perhaps the most insightful cultural text revealing the intersection of a religious framed identity narrative and the United States approach to the world. Founded in 1941 to address the world “crisis,” the sponsors eagerly reinforced the bi-weekly’s *raison d’être*; a crisis remained, and if in 1941 “it seemed . . . particularly important to arouse the Christian people of America to the responsibilities which faced our nation in meeting the threat of tyranny in the community of nations,” by 1946 the journal felt it imperative that Americans now “recognize our responsibility . . . to defend what is valuable in the standards of freedom in Western civilization against totalitarian encroachments.”120

Once more however, anxiety over the atomic bombings spurred the analysis of international affairs. “We started badly, as a nation, in dealing with the problem of atomic energy,” the sponsors averred, since “we not only unleashed this terrible instrument of destruction without warning, but also pretended at first that the world ought not to fear the bomb, since it was in the possession of so righteous a nation.” But because the United States appeared “ready to bring atomic energy under international control” in a neighborly internationalist manner, the statement concluded that “our moral and political advance in dealing with this issue has been very considerable.” Of course, if any nation presented “a new totalitarian threat against established forms of justice” then the United States had “a responsibility” to meet such a threat with “firmness.”121

Words like “responsibility” demonstrated that the narrative of the United States as a force to ensure community and brotherhood in the world materialized as part of a reflexive effort to reinvigorate America’s manifest destiny. This was particularly clear in Muste’s 1947 book, *Not By Might* in which Muste argued that the United States needed to
love other nations to the point of laying down its arms, even should the price be conquest.

Why did Muste make such an argument? Quite simply, to Muste, a fanatical good
eighbor internationalism represented the ultimate divine mission for the United States.

“Never in all history has a people been faced with such a responsibility and such an
opportunity as the present generation in the United States,” he argued. Americans could
be “pioneers, leading mankind into the day of peace and brotherhood.” In so doing the
United States would realize its role as a “spiritual Israel” and fulfill its “special
responsibility.” Muste compared the United States to God’s chosen servants “to whom
much is given” and therefore of whom “much shall be required.” Therefore, he
concluded, “if there be a nation on which a special responsibility rests, it is surely the
United States.”

The interpretation of U.S. mission as one of brotherly international conduct
garnered considerable traction in the early post waryears. Neighborly tolerance and the
gospel of love so moved Sally Van Buren, a self-described “deep American,” that she
penned the story of her summer camp epiphany and sent it to Truman. Reflecting on the
U.S. role in the world, she exulted, “We are the chosen nation to give and to encompass
the world in love and understanding, graciously and warmly – not aloofly.” Other
Americans such as Senator Lyndon Johnson echoed Van Buren’s celebration of
neighborly internationalism. Declaring that U.S. security was rooted in “our belief and
practice of Christian teachings,” Johnson asserted that “a nation with the Bible in its heart
is far more secure and far more powerful than a nation with a bomb in its hand.” He
praised Truman’s “philosophy . . . based on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount”
and, highlighting the nation’s sense of chosenness, averred that “in all the world today no other head of a major nation could or would say that.”

By 1947, even perennial foreign policy critic and former Socialist party leader Norman Thomas celebrated the narrative of the United States as a benevolent defender of world community. In Harper’s, Thomas rejoiced that the United States had “little desire for aggressive, imperial power,” had aided financially troubled nations, fed the world’s hungry, “carried through our promise of independence to the Philippines,” and attempted to “turn over to a properly constituted international authority its temporary monopoly of atomic energy.” In light of such policies, Thomas gloried the nation’s manifest destiny as “a land of asylum,” a bastion of religious freedom, a stronghold for “tolerance,” and the home of a “good-humored and good-neighborly responsibility.” In essence, he was “genuinely proud of the great America tradition of liberty, which in the stormy crisis of our time still has strength and validity.”

Hagedorn’s poem The Bomb that fell on America once more serves as the best representative text to illustrate the connection between anxiety over the bombs, religious discourse, and national identity. As mentioned earlier, the first part of the poem expressed tremendous anxiety over the nation’s use of the atomic bombs. But the second part leaves that discussion behind and focuses instead on a lengthy discussion between God and the author reminiscent of the debate between God and his servant Job told in the Old Testament. While the author, who is often simply referred to as “America,” insists on his own relative righteousness, God attempts to bring him to the point of repentance; he/America must come face to face with his/the nation’s sin, implicitly the “black rain” of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Through a vision, God places the author/America before the
cross bearing a crucified Jesus. Faced with true righteousness, the author/America “sank amid thorns, broken and torn and choked” and cried out “I am unclean, I am unclean!”

Having resolved national guilt through religion (at the foot of the cross), the poem then moves to a third part, where God himself provides the answer for how “America” can overcome its anxieties by “growing up” and responsibly controlling “the power of the atom.” _The Bomb that fell on America_ suggests that through a neighborly and loving role in the world, the United States can once more find its mission as God’s chosen people. As God himself tells the author:

I see America, in you, taking Me into her life, and growing up, growing up at last,
America growing up into what the oppressed and forsaken of the world have told themselves that she was;
Growing up into what her noblest sons and daughters have hoped that once she might be;
With one hundred and thirty-five million becoming the soil and seed of greatness;
Seeing beyond personal profit to the national gain, beyond national gain to the healing of the world’s cankered and failing heart.
America, born to be the dawn-lit forerunner of mankind, and growing up, growing up at last to her destiny!

The narrative of the United States as a neighborly internationalist defending the world community from aggressive threats required staging, and thus provided the cultural framework that shaped the United States approach to the world in the immediate postwar period. Within this context, the Soviet Union did not immediately emerge as the dominant threat to international peace, but gradually emerged as the United States increasingly imagined a threat to global brotherhood.

An impetus for working with and remaining allies with the Soviet Union held considerable attraction in the aftermath of the war. Particularly vocal was the National
Council of American-Soviet friendship which pursued its wartime argument that part of the “destiny of America” was to demonstrate friendliness and understanding toward the Soviet Union. Prominent National Council member Dean Acheson, for instance, informed a large gathering in Madison Square Garden in November 1945 that a closer relationship between the two nations remained essential. He argued that “never, in the past, has there been any place on the globe where the vital interests of the American and Russian people have clashed or even been antagonistic” and that there was “no objective reason to suppose that there should, now or in the future, ever be such a place.” The neo-orthodox bi-weekly *Christianity and Crisis* declared that it was up to the United States to “make a fresh effort to come to terms with Russia.” The fundamentalist and soon to be rabidly anti-communist American Council of Christian Churches demonstrated the significant cultural space available for neighborly internationalist discourse when it conceded that although it did “not think Communism has changed,” it could “value Russian courage and thank God for it.”

Many Americans also believed atomic weapons could best be controlled not by brinkmanship toward the Soviet Union but by creating a “world government.” “The political implementation of the Golden Rule in some effective form of world government . . . most concerns us,” Fosdick asserted. Numerous Americans agreed. Social commentator Norman Cousins, foreign affairs critic Raymond Swing, the Federal Council, numerous atomic scientists, and many other individuals and organizations promoted the idea of creating a world-wide government in the immediate postwar years. In the face of “fears and hopes engendered by the atom bomb . . . either we live as one world or we shall be destroyed,” Baynet Nover argued in the *Washington Post.*
Equally important, however, was reinvigorating the imagined community by staging a mission to construct a peaceful world community. As the *Antioch Review* stated, the responsibility of “this generation and of the next . . . is world government.” Even *Reader’s Digest* argued that the creation of an internationalist world government was “no longer merely a vision held by a few idealists” but “a hard-boiled, practical and urgent necessity.”¹³³

Americans staged their national beneficence partly through efforts to feed hungry Europeans. In early 1946, Supreme Court Justice Owen Roberts castigated the United States for delivering less than four percent of the meat and only fifty percent of the wheat that it had promised to the United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief Agency.¹³⁴ “[If we do not regard our superfluities in a world of want with great uneasiness, we will become the greatest obstacle to world accord],” *Christianity and Crisis* warned.¹³⁵ In March, the Federal Council of Churches determined that “feeding a hungry world is too great a task for private agencies” and called “for action by the nation as a whole.”¹³⁶ President Truman agreed with the Council, declaring that “throughout the world there are now millions and millions” of people who “look to . . . the United States for help. They look to us for help - not to fight an enemy, nor help for luxuries and extravagances - but just help to keep themselves alive, help in the form of food and clothing, the barest necessities of life.”¹³⁷

By donating food and supplies Americans staged their own identity as they vicariously participated in neighborly internationalism. The United States seemed like the “grocer to a famished world,” *Time* observed. Americans even began extracting more of the wheat kernel from grain in order to increase wheat supplies for the hungry masses of
Europe. In 1947 Americans inscribed their neighborly internationalism through the “Friendship Train.” Beginning in Hollywood, the train made its way across the United States stopping in numerous towns and cities to allow Americans to contribute food and supplies that eventually would be sent to Europe. At each stop, Americans greeted the train with flags, anthems, and other patriotic regalia. “We have gathered to extend the hand of friendship to the hungry people across the sea,” Governor Robert Blue said as the train entered Iowa. “The most important thing for the people of the world today is to learn how to live together.”

The movement for “one world” faltered as Americans imagined threatening others that constituted the United States a world community guardian. Sumner Welles, for instance, argued that Americans could not “place all of their confidence in an as yet untried world organization.” Welles agreed that “the American people possess an opportunity for world leadership which has never previously been theirs,” namely, “a unique chance to lead the peoples of the world on towards peace, towards human freedom and towards a stable orderly world.” The “less fortunate peoples of the earth” seemed “turned toward “the United States “for true fellowship.” But “fears and suspicions” blocked the fulfillment of those internationalist objectives. Welles could not for example “imagine that the Soviet Union would participate in a world government” unless it was “a World Union of Soviet Socialist Republics” that the Soviet Union would “dominate” from Moscow. Hardly the evil enemy othering of the war period, in 1946 the Soviet Union emerged simply as the most verifiable threat to international community.
In performing the image of a neighborly internationalist and the role of a world community guardian Americans had adopted a bifurcated identity narrative that would not survive its internal contractions. In the meantime, however, this bifurcated narrative required staging and consequently shaped decisively the United States foreign relations in the immediate postwar years. For example, in advocating universal military training in October 1945, Truman asserted that with U.S. “strength comes grave responsibility” and “a continuing sense of leadership in the world for justice and peace.” Until the United States could rest assured that new international “peace machinery is functioning adequately, we must relentlessly preserve our superiority on land and sea and in the air.” Of course, “the United States will always strive for those better answers - for the kind of tried and tested world cooperation which will make for peace and harmony among all nations” but “it is our solemn duty in this hour of victory to make sure that in the years to come no possible aggressor or group of aggressors can endanger” those hopes.142

The bifurcated image of the United States also framed high level foreign policy discussions about whether to share scientific atomic energy knowledge with the international community. Reflecting a dichotomous cultural identity narrative, the cabinet was polarized. At a meeting in the White House on September 18, 1945, Truman suggested that the United States share knowledge on atomic energy with the United Nations without disclosing any information about making atomic bombs.143 The issue of disclosure again dominated a cabinet meeting three days later. As Lend-Lease administrator Leo Crowley observed, it was “impossible to separate our decision on the atomic bomb from our other relationships with Russia.”144

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Half of Truman’s cabinet protested disclosure on the grounds that the Soviet Union seemed to threaten global stability. The Russians actually “saw nothing wrong in the entire program of the Nazi government” and were “taking over Mongolia and Manchuria and various other spots,” Secretary of Agriculture Clinton Anderson contended. Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, Fred Vinson, and Tom Clark also agreed that divulging information about the atomic bomb was unwise because the Soviet Union seemed to represent the dangers of atomic weapons in potentially hostile hands.\textsuperscript{145}

The other half of the cabinet, however, suggested the United States should work toward a system of international control for atomic energy. Led by Stimson, these members determined that “there should be free interchange of scientific information between different members of the United Nations” and avouched that “throughout our history Russia had been our friend.”\textsuperscript{146} Vannevar Bush, a guest at the meeting, agreed with Stimson. Bush demonstrated the linkage between policy and narratives of identity when he argued that “the great advantage” of sharing knowledge was that it “would announce to the world that we wish to proceed down the path of international good will and understanding.”\textsuperscript{147} Acheson voiced a similar position, asserting that since the “moral and political nature of our people is such that the use of the atomic bomb for an unwarned attack on another nation is not a practical possibility” then a competition in bomb building would only place “the advantage of unannounced attack . . . with others.”\textsuperscript{148} Henry Wallace “advocated strongly the interchange of scientific information” and remonstrated that “the quicker we share our scientific knowledge the greater will be the chance that we can achieve genuine and durable world cooperation.”\textsuperscript{149}
In the end, the United States pursued both unilateral development of atomic weapons and a system of multilateral control, reflecting the bifurcated religious identity narrative in which policy makers operated. Truman informed Congress in October 1945 that since atomic science constituted “a power so full of potential danger and at the same time so full of promise for the future of man and for the peace of the world” the United States could use it “not for the devastation of war, but for the future welfare of humanity.” Nevertheless, “the question of the international control and development of this newly discovered energy” remained. The United States, of course, hoped for “international arrangements looking...to the renunciation of the use and development of the atomic bomb, and directing and encouraging the use of atomic energy and all future scientific information toward peaceful and humanitarian ends.” But “the difficulties in working out such arrangements are great” and “a desperate armament race” potentially loomed on the horizon; a race with whom and by whom Truman did not disclose, but he imagined a threat emerging all the same. Therefore, U.S. foreign policy became one of discussing “the conditions under which cooperation might replace rivalry in the field of atomic power.” In other words, the United States as a neighborly internationalist desired full disclosure, but, unsure about the trustworthiness of other nations, would only search for a basis on which to share knowledge rather than actually sharing it.

Throughout 1946 the United States pursued a dichotomous policy on atomic weapons. Early in the year, a committee headed by Acheson produced a policy platform that became known as the “Acheson-Lilienthal Plan.” The report argued that any future development of atomic energy required world cooperation and should only be conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission (UNAEC). The
goal remained to remove control of atomic energy from unilateral, “national hands” by creating an international organization to regulate and supervise all atomic energy undertakings. In June and July, Bernard Baruch proposed the Acheson-Lilienthal plan to the UNAEC. Essentially, the United States suggested that the United Nations maintain a register of all atomic materials, programs, and developments throughout the world through an inspection system. Despite this seemingly beneficent proposal, however, the United States reserved the right to deny UNAEC access to American programs and materials if the United States determined the world situation warranted continued secrecy. At the UNAEC, the Soviet Union demurred, and offered a counter-proposal that essentially agreed to the Acheson-Lilienthal plan but added the stipulation that all nations destroy their current atomic weapons stockpiles within three months, a clause that only affected the United States.151

As responsibility for defending the world community against aggressive threats fell to the United States, Americans coupled their policy at the UNAEC with a concerted effort to enhance their own nuclear arsenal. As Ickes declared, “the future of the world literally lies” in the hands of the United States.152 Equally telling, in February 1946, Secretary of War Patterson told the Senate Special Committee on Atomic Energy that “other nations . . . look increasingly to us for guidance in working out a secure system of international control” of atomic energy. Less than a month later the same Patterson proclaimed that “the atomic bomb is an invaluable weapon in the American Arsenal of Democracy” and the United States would only “surrender it and all other weapons of war when the American peoples can be assured that the peace organization of the world is
secure.” Why? Quite simply, “by giving up the bomb before that time” Americans “would be shirking our responsibility to ourselves and to all free men.”

As the defender of the international community, the United States could hardly agree to the Soviet amendment at the UNAEC and readily interpreted it as evidence of a potential Soviet threat. In turn, the importance of the mission to preserve the world community against any threat of aggression allowed Americans to imagine their pursuit of nuclear bombs in the immediate postwar years as efforts at building a last resort, deterrent weapon. Christianity and Crisis editorialized in April 1946 that although sharing the bomb with the Russians had “become a political impossibility,” the “only remaining alternative is to make a solemn covenant never to use the bomb first.” In the words of Dwight Eisenhower and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the “existence of the atomic bomb in our hands is a deterrent, in fact, to aggression in the world.”

To demonstrate the power of the deterrent, in mid-1946, even as Baruch proposed international control of atomic energy to the UNAEC, the United States unilaterally removed the indigenous people of the Bikini Atoll in the south-west Pacific Ocean and tested atomic bombs throughout the small island chain. Far from keeping the tests secret, the United States invited members of numerous other nations to watch the experiments, including Professor Simeon Alexandrov from the Soviet Union. “By virtue of its atomic bombs the United States can now control the peace of the world,” Arthur Compton argued, an “obligation that goes with the power God has seen fit to give us.”

The leading postwar narrative of U.S. identity was predicated on a mission to inaugurate a period of international brotherhood that could never be realized because threats from aggressors would always exist. As a result the United States demonstrated
the power of atomic weapons at Bikini while it warned people not to “jump to hasty and possibly erroneous conclusions as to the effects of atomic attacks” since “intelligent progress toward world peace as an enduring condition on our planet may be jeopardized.” But how could Americans and the world not “jump to hasty and possibly erroneous conclusions”? As Niebuhr intoned, at the same time that “we offer the Russians a pretty fair solution for the control of the atomic bomb . . . we demonstrate at Bikini the destructive power of the bomb, which we say we are never going to use anymore. There is something very unlogical about this.”

The narrative of U.S. identity that emerged within the broader culture in 1945-1946 was inherently self-contradictory. Fear remained. “The shadows which fall on all of us these days are so huge and dark, and so unmistakable in portent, that they clearly dwarf all that happens among us individually, here below,” George Kennan observed. But even as the mixture of Protestant liberal modernist and neo-orthodox Christian realist discourse failed to give shape to “the shadows” an alternative religious discourse continued to rumble in the background of the anxious culture. In the next chapter we shall see that Christian fundamentalism contained the discursive frames that Americans would assume as they gave shape to the “shadows,” cleansing the nation from the “black rain” of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Notes


5 Dwight Eisenhower quoted in Alperovitz, The Decision, 3.

6 William Leahy quoted in Alperovitz, The Decision, 3.

7 Reinhold Niebuhr, “Our Relations to Japan,” Christianity and Crisis, September 17, 1945.


12 Editorial, “For This We Fought,” Chicago Daily Tribune, August 11, 1945.

13 Address by Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, December 13, 1945, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 27, HSTL.


35 Edward M. Knapp to Truman, August 8, 1945, OF 692a, HSTL.


39 Allison quoted in Boyer, By the Bomb’s, 49.


41 Wallace Diary, October 19, 1945, Price of Vision, 496-497; Boyer, By The Bomb’s, 193.


45 The weekly magazine added, “The truth is we are guilty. . . We have used a horrible weapon to asphyxiate and cremate more than 100,000 men, women, and children in a sort of super-lethal gas chamber.” Editorial, “Where is the Faith?,” United States News, November 23, 1945.

46 Edward M. Knapp to Truman, August 8, 1945; and Marie Pottsmith to Truman, August 11, 1945; both in OF 692a, HSTL.


48 Anne Ford, Publicity Director, Little, Brown & Company, to Truman, August 9, 1945, OF 692a, HSTL.


50 Samuel Cavert to Truman, August 9, 1945, OF 692a, HSTL.


53 “Doubts and Fears,” Time, August 20, 1945.
54 Fred Eastman to the editor, Christian Century August 29, 1945.

55 Fosdick, On Being Fit, 20.

56 Watchmen-Examiner, August 16, 1945, quoted in Boyer, 201.


58 Holmes quoted in Boyer, By The Bomb’s, 3.


61 Truman to Samuel McCrea Cavert, General Secretary, Federal Council of Churches, August 11, 1945, OF 692a, HSTL.


63 General Account of the Development of Methods of Using Atomic Energy For Military Purposes, H.D. Smyth, August 1945, Harry Hopkins Papers, Box 132, FDRL.

64 Truman to Senator Richard Russell, August 9, 1945, OF 197 Misc., HSTL.

65 Address by Robert P. Patterson, Secretary of War, March 9, 1946, President’s Secretary’s File (hereafter cited as: PSF) Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL.


69 Raymond Swing to Charlie Ross, Secretary to the President, September 29, 1945, OF 692a, HSTL; Raymond Swing Broadcast, American Broadcasting Company, September 28, 1945, OF 692a, HSTL.


77 *Gentleman’s Agreement*, dir. Elia Kazan, 118 min., Twentieth Century Fox, 1947; Shindler, *Hollywood Goes To War*, 100.


84 “Echo From Hiroshima” quoted in Pamphlet, “Last Chance,” OF 692a, HSTL.


William Rose Benét quoted in Boyer, *By the Bomb’s*, 245.


Kaltenborn quoted in Boyer, *By the Bomb’s*, 5.


Fosdick, *On Being Fit*, 121.

John Sembower quoted in Boyer, *By the Bomb’s*, 138.


Address in Columbus at a Conference of the Federal Council of Churches, March 6, 1946, *APP*; Address at Fordham University, New York City, Upon Receiving an Honorary Degree, May 11th, 1946, *APP*; Truman to Dr. E. M. Dodd, Chairman, Centennial Committee of Louisiana Baptist Convention, November 12, 1948, President’s Personal File (hereafter cited as: *PPF*) 21, HSTL.


Harold Ickes to Dean Acheson, December 22, 1945, Acheson Papers, Box 27, HSTL; Address by Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, at Chicago, December 13, 1945, Acheson Papers, Box 27, HSTL.


104 Fosdick, On Being Fit, 4.

105 Muste, Not By Might, 63.


108 “A Positive Program For Peace,” Statement Approved by the Executive Committee of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, April 26, 1948, OF 213, HSTL.


112 Truman to John F. Dulles, Chairman, Commission on a Just and Durable Peace, November 6, 1945, PPF 33, HSTL (emphasis added).

113 Truman to Pope Pius XII, August 6, 1947, Myron C. Taylor Papers, Box 3, HSTL; Truman to Pope Pius XII, March 26, 1948, Taylor Papers, Box 3, HSTL.


115 “The Influence of the Church on World Affairs,” undated, John McKee Papers, Box 1, HSTL.


120 “Toward a Christian Approach to International Issues: A Statement by the Board of Sponsors,” *Christianity and Crisis*, December 9, 1946.

121 “Toward a Christian Approach to International Issues: A Statement by the Board of Sponsors,” *Christianity and Crisis*, December 9, 1946.


123 Sally Van Buren to Truman, October 9, 1947, OF 320, HSTL; Manuscript, “It Took the Refugee to Explain Me,” undated, OF 320, HSTL. Two weeks later, and for reasons that will be explained in the following chapter, Van Buren wrote again, this time informing Truman that she added an important line to the manuscript concerning the refugees she had encountered and who had inspired her story: “there was not a communistic proclivity among them.” See Sally Van Buren to William D. Hassett, Secretary to the President, October 27, 1947, OF 320, HSTL.

124 Lyndon B. Johnson to L. F. Rawson, October 17, 1949, Vertical File: Truman Subject File: Religion, HSTL.


128 Extract From National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, 1945, PPF 1505, HSTL; Address by Dean Acheson, November 14, 1945, Acheson Papers, Box 134, HSTL.


130 Pamphlet, “Tests For Church Fellowship,” undated (ca. 1946), American Council of Christian Churches, RG 1, Box 466, Presbyterian Church in America Historical Center, St. Louis, Missouri.


Memorandum for William Hassett from Francis Russell, Acting Director, Office of Public Affairs, Department of State, March 1, 1946, PPF 33, HSTL.

Truman Address, March 6, 1946, *APP*.


Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on Universal Military Training, October 23, 1945, *APP*.

Wallace Diary, September 18, 1945, *Price of Vision*, 481.

Cabinet Meeting, September 21, 1945, PSF: NSC Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL.


147 Vannevar Bush to Truman, September 25, 1945, PSF: NSC Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL.

148 Memorandum by Dean Acheson for Truman, September 25, 1945, PSF: NSC Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL.


150 Message to Congress, October 3, 1945, *APP*.


152 Ickes to Truman, October 22, 1945, PSF: NSC Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL.

153 Statement by the Honorable Robert P. Patterson, Secretary of War, Before the Senate Special Committee on Atomic Energy, February 14, 1946, PSF: NSC Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL; Address by the Honorable Robert P. Patterson, Secretary of War, on Atomic Energy over the Columbia Broadcasting System, March 9, 1946, PSF: NSC Atomic File, Box 173, HSTL.

154 “Editorial Notes,” *Christianity and Crisis*, April 1, 1946.

155 Eisenhower and Joint Chiefs quoted in Patterson, *On Every Front*, 115.

156 Impressions of Damage Sustained by Ships on Able Day at Operation Crossroads as Expressed by Non-Participating Observers on U.S.S. *Pamatint*, 3 July 1946, Albert Joseph Engel Paper, Box 3, BHL.


158 Joint Army-Navy Task Force Number One, Operation Crossroads, Release No. 46, May 13, 1946, Albert Joseph Engel Papers, Box 3, BHL.


160 George Kennan to Dean Acheson, January 3, 1949, Acheson Papers, Box 65, HSTL.
CHAPTER VIII
THE RISE OF FUNDAMENTALIST PATRIOTISM

What shall the shrunk soul do to fill out and be itself again? How shall we rise to the challenge of this hour?
- The Bomb that Fell on America, 1946

Lightning flashes reveal bewildered leaders of the people whose voices are lost in the thunders of confusion. But wise men hear once again from the mountain tops, ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me.’ In such an hour the Church must lead.
- Episcopal Address, Methodist Church, 1948

The end of war in Europe and Asia did not produce an immediate “cold war” between the United States and the Soviet Union. To be sure, disagreements between the United States and the Soviet Union arose, sometimes more confrontational in character than frequent discord between the United States and other nations such as Great Britain and France. And in many ways, by the end of 1946, the Soviet Union had emerged as the leading threat to the world community in the dominant imaginary of U.S. national identity. But this image hardly compared to the vision of the wicked, evil enemy represented by the Axis during the war, or, for that matter, that Soviet Communism would become by the end of the decade.

This chapter argues that in the late 1940s Americans assumed Christian fundamentalist discourse to imagine the United States as the defender of freedom and morality against a tyrannical, immoral other, namely the Soviet Union. Examining the fortunes of fundamentalism in prewar and wartime culture unearthed how fundamentalism
survived the dominance of Protestant modernism in the 1930s and eventually benefited from its own discursive participation in American national identity. Indeed, fundamentalist discourse emerged at the center of American culture during the last years of the war. In the immediate postwar years, fundamentalism posited an alternative narrative of the imagined community that competed with the bifurcated identity narrative offered by the conjunction of modernism and neo-orthodox realism.

By 1948, a fundamentalist narrative that imagined the United States in a sinful world as the defender of God-ordained individual freedom and moral law achieved a hegemonic position within the culture. As the narrative of the imagined community shifted, so too did its foreign policy. The discursive framing of the Truman Doctrine and shifting representation of the Marshall plan in 1947-1948 reflected this transition. Within this context, the resurgence of “anti-communism” in the post war years may be understood as a signifier within a fundamentalist encoded identity narrative rather than as part of a continuous, pre-existing element of American capitalist ideology. That is, as Americans celebrated the nation through a particularly fundamentalist patriotism, the discourse of “anti-communism” gradually became a leading signifier within the imaginary of U.S. identity.

Christian fundamentalism did not suddenly materialize in the late 1940s. Rather “fundamentalism” emerged as a broad religious subjectivity in the early twentieth century in opposition to the growing trend of “modernist” thought in American Protestantism. By accusing Protestants who emphasized Sermon on the Mount social justice of abandoning belief in Biblical infallibility, the divinity of Jesus, and doctrinal purity, fundamentalists
garnered their name, vociferously seeking to defend what they perceived to be the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith.⁴

By the 1930s, fundamentalists and religious modernists were engaged in all out ecclesiastical war. In 1934-1936, the large, mainline Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) attempted to curtail the work of the insurgent, fundamentalist-oriented Independent Board of Foreign Missions. In one case, the PCUSA placed fundamentalist president of Wheaton College Dr. James Oliver Buswell, a leading supporter of the Independent Board, on ecclesiastical trial for “conspiring with others to injure and hinder the work of one of the agencies of the Presbyterian Church.” Rather than simply removing himself from the denomination, Buswell planned an extensive defense, ardently promising to uphold the Biblical truths modernism had supposedly abandoned. In turn, the denomination declared Buswell guilty of actions “inconsistent with the . . . aims of the church and destructive in tendency,” and ordered him to “desist from his course.” Defrocked, Buswell left the PCUSA and helped found the fundamentalist Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936.⁵ The plight of Buswell mirrored that of other fundamentalists in the early 1930s as fundamentalism reached its nadir.⁶

Although fundamentalism eventually benefited from the rise of neo-orthodox Christian realism, its discourse remained significantly different, and, as we shall see, these differences would have a profound impact on American culture in the post war period. To be sure, if Christian realism’s rediscovery of original sin had involved a return to a divine Jesus and belief in the infallibility of the Bible, Reinhold Niebuhr would most likely be an unknown name today. Americans simply would have bypassed Niebuhr and directly embraced fundamentalism. For example, as early as 1926, George Washburn
started the Bible Crusaders of America to move the nation “back to Christ, the Bible, and the Constitution.” Like Washburn, fundamentalists such as the Southern Baptist J. Frank Norris, Northern Baptist Robert T. Ketcham, and the aforementioned Buswell battled modernism in the name of Biblical “truth” for more than a decade. The Association for the Re-emphasis of New Testament Missions (ARNTM) labeled religious modernism’s intellectual triumph, William Hocking’s *Rethinking Missions*, “neither Biblical nor evangelical” and reaffirmed their belief in the divinity of Jesus, the reality of his resurrection, and the inerrancy of the Bible.

Unlike Niebuhr’s sociologically based conception of sin, fundamentalism’s “original sin” resulted from a rigorous defense of the divinity of Jesus, the infallibility of the Bible, and the certainty of heaven and hell. The figure that looms largest in fundamentalism’s 1930s struggle against modernism is J. Gresham Machen, founder of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1929 and of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936. Emphasizing a strict adherence to Biblical infallibility - including the argument that original sin was a condition passed down from Adam and Eve and not an inevitable social malaise - Machen echoed ARNTM’s claims that *Rethinking Missions* was anti-Biblical and excoriated the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church for including religious modernist author Pearl S. Buck. To Machen, both Hocking’s book and Buck’s position represented nothing more than the “destructive Modernism which is the deadliest enemy of the Christian religion.” But forced out of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1929 for his incessant attacks upon modernism’s “higher criticism,” Machen remained relatively marginalized in the broader American culture until his death in 1937.
Unwilling to remain entirely indifferent to the attacks of the fundamentalists, social gospel modernists fought back on the grounds of both theology and patriotism, inherently drawing on national identity narratives. As Protestant modernism dominated New Deal discourse and anchored an identity narrative that imagined the United States as a good neighbor in the world, fundamentalism’s stress on the certainty of demonic evil, punishment in literal hell, and God’s just wrath failed to resonate in the broader culture. “Critics of [fundamentalism] had charged that it was fundamentally disloyal to the Christian ethic and unpatriotic because it spurned the nation’s reforming spirit” that had originated in the Progressive Era, religion scholar Joel Carpenter explains.12

The arbitrating power of national identity rendered fundamentalism largely peripheral throughout the decade. In other words, as competing religious subjectivities negotiated cultural space they frequently deployed alternative visions of the imagined community. For example, Niebuhr’s conception of original sin, widely deployed as the nation reinvigorated its manifest destiny through intervention in 1939-1941, argued that sin was the continuous tragedy that befell mankind because of their ultimate failure to love one another perfectly. The identity narrative that emerged from Niebuhrian discourse imagined the United States as a righteous force to mitigate sin in the world. In this sense, neo-orthodox realist discourse both incorporated and altered that of religious modernism; realism suggested reasons for the failure of the good neighbor identity narrative without abandoning it completely and thus offered an alternative image of the United States in the world, one that Americans could easily embrace.13

Fundamentalism’s original sin was decidedly different than that of Niebuhr’s in that it presupposed a codified, objective, and universal law. “Sin, according to the Bible,
is not just conduct that is contrary to the accumulated experience of the race,” Machen claimed. “It is not just anti-social conduct, but it is an offence primarily against God.” According to fundamentalism it was axiomatic that “you cannot believe in the existence of sin unless you believe in the existence of the law of God.” That law was the “one law over all,” a law “valid for Christians” and “valid for non-Christians alike,” the one, universal law “promulgated amid the thunderings of Sinai.”14 As Buswell asseverated, Moses’ law was “the greatest ethical system of all time.”15 Amid the cultural hegemony of social gospel modernism that exalted tolerance and love, fundamentalism’s emphasis on a particular, seemingly narrow moral code to rule “over all” failed attain significant traction.

But despite an ostensible emphasis on doctrinal purity, fundamentalists, much like religious modernists and neo-orthodox realists, exhibited a subjectivity as “Americans,” thereby frequently conceding doctrinal points for the sake of national identity. In particular, they often excoriated the social and political expressions of religious modernism as much as its theological doctrines, thereby blurring the distinction between socio-political views and theological beliefs. In other words, where modernism believed that the teachings of a human Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount underlay a collective responsibility for the well-being of society and determined this to be “America’s” social conscience, fundamentalists emphasized all the more vigorously the God-given rights of “American individualism,” basing such claims on a divine Jesus’ sacrifice for discrete, elect souls and apparent Old Testament property laws. In the process, however, fundamentalists abandoned the social gospel emphasis on social justice from out which their movement had originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.16
The blurring of the socio-political with the theological indicated just how powerfully national identity shaped religious belief. For example, conflating the Bible and the Declaration of Independence, the fundamentalist *Christian Beacon* declared in 1938 that “the whole conception of the individual is founded squarely upon the Word of God. The Bible gives to men the right to life, to liberty, and to property.” Similarly, Machen claimed that since he loved his country he could not “quite get the principles upon which it was founded out of my mind,” namely the “notion that there are certain basic rights of the individual man . . . which must never be trampled under foot . . . never for any supposed advantage of the whole.” The United States, he argued was founded on “certain basic rights like the right of personal freedom” and “the right of property.” But because of religious modernism, “today this American liberty of ours is very rapidly being destroyed.”

With harangues virtually devoid of theological content, fundamentalists repeatedly vilified Protestant modernism on the grounds of national identity. For instance, as part of his defense strategy in 1935, the embattled Buswell and his counselor Peter Stam sought to discredit a member of the PCUSA’s ecclesiastical Judiciary Commission named Henry Chandler by accusing him of “dangerous affiliations and sympathies” such as communist and Soviet leanings. They argued that “Mr. Chandler has on a number of occasions shown marked sympathy with and has collaborated with persons and organizations that are definitely Communist or Socialistic in their positions, tendencies, and actions” and that he appeared with “pro-Soviet lecturer” Jerome Davis as a character witness in favor of “a leader of communist and socialist organizations” who “was arrested in a communist strike.” Furthermore, they informed the
Commission that Chandler and “a group of well-known radicals” sponsored a “dinner
given . . . to honor communist-atheist A. A. Troyanovsky.”

Arguments against modernism disclosed the particular view of the national “self” proffered by fundamentalist discourse. That is, fundamentalists increasingly argued their position by pointing out the “un-American” character of their opponents, traits that implicitly relied on “knowledge” of who or what was not American. Initially, the leading international “other” that most readily signified the “un-American” character of the religious modernist socio-political position was the “communist” Soviet Union. Because he suspected her of being a communist, Machen accused social justice advocate Florence Kelly of secretly writing the Child Labor Amendment passed by Congress. As for the law itself, he excoriated it as contrary to “the right of privacy of the home” and as a “Russian idea . . . diametrically opposed to the Christian idea, which is also truly the American idea.” The notion of the communist “other” also appeared in Buswell’s ecclesiastical trial when Stam and Buswell attempted to tar Chandler by arguing that “Chandler’s frequent co-operation with persons and movements” known as “definitely Communistic or Socialistic” are “an indication of a direction in his thinking and sympathies which is decidedly un-Presbyterian as well as un-American.”

The efforts of Buswell, Stam, Machen and other Americans to carve out cultural space through the discourse of anti-communism proved fruitless during the 1930s. For instance, Chandler nonchalantly acknowledged the essential truth of the defense team’s “charges” and even confessed that he had not appeared as a character witness in the case of the Soviet leader, but as the attorney in charge of the defense. In addition to Chandler’s unconcerned attitude, the Judicial Commission dismissed what it deemed to be frivolous
and insignificant arguments and simply proceeded with the trial, eventually finding Buswell guilty.\textsuperscript{22} As discussed in Chapter 3, the signifier “anti-communism” never dominated narratives of national identity in the 1930s and finally floundered in 1941 amid the righteous nation narrative and its attendant wartime alliance with Russian dictator “Uncle Joe” Stalin.

Nonetheless, even as the cultural logic of religious modernism produced a foreign policy staging a good neighbor image, fundamentalists insisted on seeing international “threats” everywhere. Machen decried Italy’s “soul-crushing tyranny” and Germany’s “fiendish wickedness.” He also bemoaned “religious persecution . . . going on apace in Russia and in Germany and in Mexico.” As a result of their own seemingly ineffective position in American society, the fundamentalists finally reduced themselves to arguing that “in America, the same tendencies are at work” and “everywhere there rises before our eyes the specter of a society where security . . . will be attained at the expense of human freedom.”\textsuperscript{23} Some fundamentalists such as William Pelley and Gerald Winrod insisted on seeing a Jewish conspiracy to take over the nation.\textsuperscript{24} “Dispensational” fundamentalism invoked prophesy to predict that an anti-Christ from the north (Soviet Union) or a resurrected Roman Empire (Mussolini’s Italy) would initiate the final struggle for world and betoken the imminent return of Christ.\textsuperscript{25} Despite these alternative narratives of the nation, when Machen died in 1937 fundamentalists seemed to have little hope of capturing the mainstream of American identity discourse.

But for all of fundamentalism’s failures, its fortunes changed dramatically as the symbolic structure of American identity began to shift with the rise of neo-orthodox realism. The resonance of the neo-orthodox position on original sin created the cultural
space in which the discourse of fundamentalism could increasingly attract attention. To be sure, stark differences remained between realists and fundamentalists, especially on social issues. Unlike Niebuhr and his fellow travelers who still hoped for an approximation of social justice, fundamentalists exalted individual freedom and decried anything that remotely approximated “collectivist” enterprise. This tension between fundamentalists and the broader culture, perhaps understandable for a group literally pushed out of the organizations and associations they had known all their lives, would not be resolved until after the war. Despite these differences, however, by the end of the Depression decade, as “Americans” both the fundamentalists and the realists agreed on the most important facet of U.S. national identity: the American mission to combat the forces of evil. The United States was “compelled by historic destiny to act as an instrument of God’s justice,” Niebuhr maintained. In the words of Machen, the national state “exists for the repression of evildoers.”

The U.S. experience of World War II empowered fundamentalist discourse within American culture. In short, the war cemented the narrative of national righteousness that reinvigorated American identity and thereby, through the signifier “righteousness,” implicitly called into being an objective code against which nations could be judged as righteous or unrighteous, good or evil. The discourse of “morality” and “law” central to Christian fundamentalism offered a symbolizing lexicon that meshed neatly with the righteous nation identity narrative. And as we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, the discourse of “moral law” gradually replaced the social gospel emphasis on neighborly love and the Sermon on the Mount as the leading signifying structure of U.S. identity in the immediate prewar and wartime years. “Loving our neighbor as we love ourselves is not enough,”
President Franklin Roosevelt proclaimed in 1942. “We as a Nation and as individuals will please God best by showing regard for the laws of God . . . If we love Him we will keep His Commandments.”

But in addition to the discursive framing of the war, the majority of Americans actually experienced the war largely through religious language, imagery, and ceremony. Prayer, for instance, cloaked the entire war effort, as was especially apparent on D-Day, in the memorializing of American war dead, and worship services and prayer sessions throughout the war. To be sure, millions served in support of the armed forces and tens of millions more participated in wartime industries, bureaucracies, and financial efforts. But these mundane arenas could not affect the emotive experience of conducting a deadly national struggle with a demonic foe in one’s spirit in the way that prayer and religious ceremony could. Consider the following prayer sent to the White House, written in early August 1945 before the war was over:

Dear Lord, we pray thee on this day right will prevail in Thine own way. We pray when this conflict is through all men will start their lives anew. And we beseech Thy loving care for all our dear ones over there, for all our allies everywhere. For all the people so oppressed, we humbly ask that they be blessed by Thine own sacred watchfulness. We pray our enemies will see the error of their ways through Thee. When universal peace is won all men will say “Thy will be done.”

Americans especially flocked to places of worship in the thrall of national victory. On V-E day in May 1945, Americans thronged to churches and synagogues, thanking God for victory over Germany and praying for speedy success in the Pacific. “The churches were crowded early,” Time observed. “Across the country the scene varied, but the theme was the same: ‘Thank God.’” In preparation for the end of the war, numerous
organizations such as the Federal Council of Churches, the Washington Federation of Churches, the American Federation of Teachers, and the Ministerial Union of Washington sought to recapture “the high spiritual level” of V-E day, urging Truman to declare V-J day a day of “thanksgiving and prayer.” The White House even received one letter suggesting “people light up their homes from cellar to garret in celebration of V-J day to symbolize that light has returned to dispel the darkness which has shrouded the world.”

Amid the religious experience of the war and the prevalence of fundamentalist moral law discourse in which the war was frequently framed, fundamentalist theologians, preachers, and organizations flourished. In 1941, led by the Bible Protestant Church and the Bible Presbyterian Church, fundamentalists founded the American Council of Christian Churches. They believed that for “too long the so-called “Federal Council of Churches” has assumed to speak for all Christian people” while “it has in fact been a chief instrument of soul-destroying modernism.” The root of modernism’s evil remained linked decisively to its effect on the nation; since the Federal Council was “the very citadel of modernist unbelief in America,” and because “America was founded by those who believe the Bible to be the Word of God,” the American Council argued that America required a Bible-based national church organization to ensure “that America gets the Bible as the Word of God.”

More popular than the American Council was the National Association of Evangelicals, founded in the first two years of the war. Much like the American Council, the Association was concerned with the “break-up of the moral fiber of the American people.” But the National Association represented a much broader union of
“conservative” Protestantism than the American Council, attracting both separatist
fundamentalists as well as doctrinal fundamentalists that still remained in modernist
leaning mainline denominations such as the Northern Baptist Convention and the
PCUSA. Ultimately, the National Association of Evangelicals trumped the American
Council because it offered a more resonant vision of U.S. national identity. Whereas the
American Council doggedly attacked modernism, the main message of the National
Association focused on remaking “America.” For example, in the National Association’s
presidential address “Christ for America,” Harold Ockenga asserted that “the United
States of America has been assigned a destiny comparable to that of ancient Israel,”
especially with its mission to save the world through a “revival of evangelical
Christianity.” Such a goal required nothing less than “national revival.”

Despite its apparent strength, the National Association never managed to control
the burgeoning fundamentalist evangelical movement. Quite simply, the righteous nation
identity narrative implicated religious discourse so directly that grassroots religious
revivals and organizations sprouted up throughout the nation as the war reinvigorated the
imagined community by alleviating longstanding anxiety over American destiny and
mission. In St. Louis, for example, the evangelical organization Children For Christ
nearly doubled its classes and membership in the first ten months of its existence.
Meanwhile, the more popular Youth For Christ revival movement swept the nation in
1944-45 with hundreds of rallies in cities and towns across the land that attracted total
audiences of perhaps 300,000 to 400,000 each week. Of course, like the larger turn to
religion during the war, the movement remained as much linked to celebrations of
“America” as to celebrations of Christ. On Memorial Day in 1945, for example, a
massive seventy thousand person rally at Chicago’s Soldier Field exalted the United States through music and flag ceremonies almost as much as it attempted to win converts to Christianity.\(^{38}\)

In addition to securing a narrative of national identity that empowered fundamentalist evangelical Protestantism, then, the war brought religion to the foreground more broadly within American culture. Americans reflexively understood the global struggle as a titanic battle between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. In turn, tens of millions of Americans experienced their own sense of being “American” religiously, through prayer and ceremony. As Roosevelt observed in the middle of the war, “The perilous days through which we are passing emphasize anew our dependence on the strength which religion alone can infuse.”\(^{39}\)

The hegemony of religious framing in interpretations of the war entrenched the experience of religion in the symbolic register of U.S. national identity, engendering widespread calls for religious revival amid postwar anxiety. Christian fundamentalist discourse did not dominate the imaginary of U.S. identity in the immediate postwar years, but calls for a “return to religion” gradually moved American culture toward a fundamentalist patriotism. As discussed in the last chapter, Hiroshima and Nagasaki had traumatically ruptured the righteous nation narrative and afforded a cultural identity interval in which an ad-hoc mixture of neo-orthodox realism and Protestant modernist internationalism temporarily came to the fore. But as this self-contradictory identity narrative failed to alleviate cultural anxiety, Americans continued to search for a reconcilable narrative of the imagined community. “There is no clear way out of the present impasse,” *Christianity and Crisis* gloomily conceded at the end of 1945.\(^{40}\)
To millions of Americans, however, the way did seem clear and amid the anxiety of the immediate postwar years calls for religious revival reverberated across the cultural landscape. According to the United Church Canvass, “the threats and fears of the Atomic Age” made it necessary “to review and strengthen our spiritual heritage.”41 Similarly, the Layman’s National Committee undertook special radio broadcasts to “keep before the American people the importance of religion.”42 A faculty committee at Yale determined that the university required a greater emphasis on religion, asserting that “a study of prayer, faith and deeds will be no less profitable than the same sort of study in economics and agriculture.”43 In Florida, a group of ministers, fearing that “America has lost her God-consciousness,” began a national “Go to Church Campaign,” since “nothing can set us right, or straighten out the tangle of these trying times like bringing back interest in the church.”44 Even the Good Housekeeping Club put out a special newsletter dedicated to the “importance of returning to religion.”45 Americans “are dislocated” and “pray for a revival,” The Bible Today observed.46

Americans from all walks of life seemed to agree that the nation needed to embrace religion more emphatically. Detroit industrialist Greg Van Syoc hoped for a return to prayer, arguing that “we did not pray before we got into this war nor are we praying today as we did during the war.” Van Syoc worried that “if we wait until we are faced again with destruction and then ask God for help, it would be a slam on the Almighty’s intelligence.”47 A “mother of five” wrote “First Lady” Elizabeth Truman that “what’s wrong today” is that “people are forgetting about God.” Americans “need more religion,” she avowed, “we don’t need all this jitter bugging. We need to get back to God.”48 A woman from Indiana argued that “the president’s influence could never better
be used” than by “an appeal to the nation to return to the genuine principals of Christian living.” Such “a simple, direct call to the American public” would “prove to the world that we are a really Christian nation.” Presbyteriant pastor Malcolm Alexander agreed, wondering why Truman did not do more “to exhort the people to return to a real faith in God by Church attendance and worship.” As Rev. Fitzgerald Smith from the Mt. Zion Tabernacle Christian Mission contended, “the solution for the change of conditions today is to get back to God, and acknowledge God as the true God and his word.” According to Texas Congressman Wingate Lewis, the United States needed “the thing that is the only hope of this world, a genuine spiritual awakening.”

To many Americans, the future of the nation seemed at stake. Youth For Christ leader Torrey Johnson, for instance, worried that “America cannot survive another twenty-five years like the last” since to “have another lost generation” means “America is sunk.” In New York, businessman Don Luis and several others “called a large mass meeting of true Christian churches” from “nearby counties” in “the hope that such a move will, with God’s guidance aid all of us to experience revival and build in our land that future which we look for.” The Go to Church Campaign was similarly concerned with the “soul” of the nation as it busied itself trying to foster “a great nationwide movement to “Get Right With God”” since “the very existence of our national life depends on it.” In 1949, a Sunday afternoon Go to Church Campaign program titled “Our America” took place in the Hollywood Bowl specifically absconding that it would “not be a religious meeting.”

Turning to religion emerged as the remedy for the national self-doubt and anxiety that characterized the immediate post-war years. “The situation now confronting the
nation is so serious,” the Federal Council of Churches argued, “that the churches should meet at the earliest possible moment to consider the question of mobilizing the religious life in support of those moral and spiritual disciplines essential in an hour of crisis.”

One American reminded Truman that although Americans claimed that “In God We Trust,” if Americans were to “truly to put our trust in God . . . our nation would be a more sound nation with less turmoil and distress.” Madeline Spillane, a religious youth activist, hoped that “young people come to know Him too, not only for their own salvation but for the salvation of America.”

Floyd Johnson of the Los Angeles Evangelistic Center starkly invoked the needs of the national community when he simply stated, “Christians make better citizens.”

Like other Americans, President Truman also believed the nation’s hope lay in religious revival. “Religion and democracy in this country have risen side by side,” he averred. “‘In God We Trust’ is more than a motto upon our coins. It is a great people’s declaration of both civic and religious faith.” Despite that faith, however, “the changes and vicissitudes of the last ten decades only emphasize the fundamental truth that we need Divine guidance today more than ever before.” In a letter to Washington D.C. “presidential pastor” Edward Pruden, Truman asserted that “the conviction has come to me with increasing force that a revival of the spirit of old-fashioned religion is what the world most needs.”

In that light, Truman ardently supported the Federal Council’s efforts at increasing church attendance. “May there be another awakening,” Truman fervently wished in the privacy of his diary, “we need an Isaiah, John the Baptist, Martin Luther – may he come soon.”
Truman did not have to wait long as in the late 1940s an American “Isaiah” appeared in the form of Billy Graham. Graham, a popular speaker at Youth For Christ rallies during the war and postwar years, began a crusade for national revival in earnest in Los Angeles in 1949 at the behest of the group “Christ for Greater Los Angeles.” “We are standing on the verge of a great national revival,” Graham declared. Such language in a culture desperate for more religion turned Graham into a country-wide sensation. The connection between “national” and “revival” was revealed particularly well in the conversion story of Louis Zamperini, a U.S. Olympic star who had torn down a Nazi swastika during the 1936 Berlin Olympics and a war hero who had survived two years in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. Despite such glowing feats, Zamperini, like the nation that had opposed the evil Nazis and villainous Japanese, entered Graham’s revival tent in the late 1940s “unhappy, disillusioned, and broken in spirit.” But by the time the evening was over, all that had changed, and the American hero announced that “from now on, I am going to be an honest-to-God Christian.”

The significance of the burgeoning fundamentalist movement is that it focused on much more than conversion to Christianity; it offered the language and imagery through which Americans could imagine themselves as a chosen nation with a manifest destiny in the world. Graham, like Niebuhr a decade earlier, simply became the most articulate voice of a discourse assumed by the broader cultural in its efforts to reinvigorate the imagined community. In other words, Graham and the fundamentalists did not direct, compel, or cause the turn to revivalist fundamentalism in American culture, they merely offered a discourse through which the imagined national community could most readily reinvigorate itself. In Los Angeles, for example, Graham asserted that Americans were
“living at a time in world history when God is giving us a desperate choice, a choice of either revival or judgment.” Through revival, “God can still use America to evangelize the world.”

In essence, religious discourse, already firmly rooted in narratives of national identity, became even more ensconced as the nation grappled with postwar anxiety. This is particularly evident in the “consumption” of religion. For example, between 1945 and 1946, the amount of dollars spent on the construction of church buildings nearly tripled, going from twenty-six million to seventy-six million. In the next two years that figure quadrupled, hitting a quarter of a billion in 1948. Similarly between, 1949 and 1953, distribution of the Bible grew one hundred and forty percent, reaching nearly ten million new Bibles a year. To be sure, part of the spending increase can be attributed to pent-up wartime savings. Nonetheless, that Americans chose to spend their money on church buildings and Bibles is hardly insignificant.

Similarly, as Graham indicated, Americans also adopted a global vision for their own religious revival. As Youth For Christ head Johnson put it, fundamentalists had a “two-fold purpose. First, the spiritual revitalization of America, which will bring America back to God,” and “second, the complete evangelization of the world.” Catholic Bishop John Noll asserted that “the best way to give heart to the people of all nations and to win Heaven’s blessings on the world would be to give the greatest encouragement to religion.” One letter to the White House averred that “as a Christian nation . . . we are the only nation in a position to really see that . . . lost nations are restored to new life.”

And many Americans tirelessly worked to Christianize other “nations.” The American Bible Society, for instance, undertook annual crusades to encourage “world-
wide reading of the Bible.” In 1950 the Society sent five million Bibles to Japan praising “the confidence of many Americans that Japan can become a Christian nation.”71 In 1948, Americans played a leading role in the founding of the World Council of Churches, supplying not only the name but nearly all of the funding as well.72 Fearing the influence of modernism in the World Council, the American Council responded by creating a fundamentalist International Council of Christian Churches “to raise the standard of the Word of God” for all the nations of the world.73

Tellingly, if under social gospel modernism in the 1930s foreign missions had morphed into little more than a method for international wealth equalization, by the postwar years Americans widely embraced the need to convert foreigners to Christ and democracy, and often not in any particular order. The 1940s witnessed the birth of numerous missionary organizations, such as the New Tribes Mission, Evangelical Foreign Missions Association, Overseas Missionary Fellowship, Overseas Crusades, World Vision, Student Foreign Missions Fellowship, and Wycliffe Bible Translators. Similarly, orthodox and fundamentalist missionary personnel grew rapidly in number and many organizations doubled or tripled in size between the early 1940s and the early 1950s. Meanwhile, during the same period the large mainline denominations at the heart of 1930s modernism saw their own missionary numbers declining.74

The building of churches, buying of Bibles, and zeal to convert the world reflected the broad turn to religious discourse more than a turn to Christianity. But what type of religion, exactly? Although certainly concerned with saving individual souls, fundamentalist revivalist discourse often stressed the need for collective adherence to the universal moral law represented by “the Ten Commandments.” Whereas neo-orthodox
Christianity argued that original sin was the result of social interaction but remained unclear on the nature of God and the Bible, fundamentalists emphasized the certain existence of a “Judeo-Christian” God and the divine inspiration of the Bible. Therefore, as the righteous nation narrative called into being some sort of standard against which righteousness could be known, fundamentalism’s stress on Old Testament morality gained significant cultural traction.

At the heart of the postwar revival, then, was an effort to realize national salvation by attaining collective moral righteousness. “There was a time a few year ago, which most of us with gray hair can remember, when this country claimed the Ten Commandments as the basis for our moral code,” Graham lamented. “That is no longer true.” Again, however, Graham appeared only as the efflorescence of a pre-existing fundamentalist discourse heavily implicated in the reinvigoration of national identity. Reminiscent of Machen’s discourse in the 1930s, in 1946 the *Christian Beacon* explained that the Ten Commandments were the cornerstone of the nation. “Our founding fathers” believed “that God had ordained the State and the State was responsible to God,” the *Beacon* stated. “In this relationship there stood out above everything else the divine law, the Ten Commandments. This law is the greatest charter of liberty that the world has ever had. It is the first bill of rights ever promulgated.” *The Bible Today* reminded readers of the importance to national life of “the Old Testament concept of God.” Similarly, the American Council argued that “the Ten Commandments” formed the basis “upon which our free social order rests.”

Fundamentalism’s morality discourse framed an emerging identity narrative that imagined the nation as the defender of freedom and moral law. No longer only focused
on the Sermon on the Mount or Jesus’ command to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” an emphasis on upholding and defending “morality” gradually entered the nation’s “self” understanding. For example, Truman told the National Layman’s Committee that “there is not in this distraught world today a single issue that would not find solution if men and nations would accept the plain teaching of the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount.”

He similarly advised the American Bible Society that “in the Old and New Testaments are stated those unchanging moral principles which point the way to an enduring peace.” Implicitly tying Americans to ancient Israel Truman added that “God is our strength today even as He was in the days of Samuel and Isaiah and of all who have followed them.”

The president believed “the essential mission of the church is to teach the moral law,” and out of those teachings “religion should establish moral standards for the conduct of our whole Nation, at home and abroad. We should judge our achievements, as a nation, in the scales of right and wrong.”

In the privacy of his own diary, the president averred that “all I wanted to do was to organize Exodus XX, Matthew V, VI & VII to save morals in the world.”

By offering a lexicon through the nation could be imagined, moral law discourse resonated within American society and culture. The patriotic organization Freedoms Foundation, for example, utilized a logo/advertisement titled “The American Way Of Life” which depicted the U.S. flag flying atop two stones similar in shape to popular images of the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. On each stone was emblazoned the “rights” of Americans in a repetitive grammatical format similar to the commandments. The stones themselves sat upon a bigger stone labeled “Constitutional Government designed to Serve the People.” This in turn sat on still a wider, more foundational stone
marked “Fundamental Belief in God.” Similarly, an early 1950s patriotic postcard designed for distribution abroad showed a picture of Jesus with a baby in his arms, but this image was placed conspicuously below a list of the Ten Commandments.

The widespread acceptance of moral law discourse appeared throughout postwar culture, especially in efforts to regulate personal and collective social behavior. Graham harangued that the nation verged on hedonism and self-destruction, citing divorce rates, crime, fornication, gambling, drinking, and teen-age delinquency. All of these abominations had resulted in “the American way of life . . . being destroyed at the very heart and core of our society.” Harry Emerson Fosdick railed against “the black market” and declared “drunkenness a public menace.” Truth For Youth urged youth leaders and teachers to make “the case against dance” and “against the movies” because such “bad” behaviors could lead to further “immoral practices” that would corrupt the next generation and jeopardize the future of the nation. Even the Layman’s National Commission bemoaned the “open defiance of law and order, Juvenile Delinquency,” and “corruption in public office,” none of which could “be flippantly minimized.” “Moral decay has taken root in America and it is time to face the facts,” the Commission fretted.

The moral peril of the nation appeared particularly stark with respect to “the home” and the “family.” In one revival sermon, Graham proclaimed that since “the very basis of our entire way of life is built upon the home,” he was less “afraid . . . of what poison bombs will do” than “of what Satan is doing to destroy the morals of American and to break down our homes.” His chief point of attack was “divorce” and “unfaithfulness” which would make a “laughing stock of marriage until Americans have
lost the sanctity of marriage.”89 “It would seem inconceivable that, as we put our hands
and our hearts to the giant task of building anew at this turning point in history, we
should fail to center a great share of our attention and effort upon the family unit,”
Truman stated in 1946. The family remained the center piece of “the steady and
responsible home that begets that important driving incentive of a people.”90

Though still a few short years until Cecil B. Demille would begin work on the
blockbuster film *The Ten Commandments*, Hollywood readily adopted fundamentalism’s
moral law discourse. For example, in her 1950 anti-communist pamphlet *Screen Guide
For Americans*, Ayn Rand warned that “the purpose of Communists in Hollywood is not
the production of political movies openly advocating Communism” but “to corrupt our
moral premises by corrupting non-political movies.”91 Social justice leaning works such
as *The Grapes of Wrath* became objects of suspicion while films like *The Red Menace,
My Son John*, and *The Red Danube* forecast nothing but tragedy and death in the absence
of God, the Bible, and moral behavior.92

Although as usual Hollywood functioned as a barometer for the changing cultural
landscape, perhaps the emergent pervasiveness of fundamentalist discourse was best
captured in a Tocquevillian report on American religion by British theologian Alec
Vidler in 1947. After touring American churches at some length, Vidler observed that
“moralistic homilies are still the order of the day.” He marveled at preachers that
“excogitate some religious or moral lessons that have little, if any, direct relation to the
Scripture they have quoted.” Vidler also discovered that American Christians were “still
advocating justification by good works of one kind or another” and were “not
proclaiming the Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.” And so, Vidler concluded,
“this predicament being unrealized, there is blindness to the starting point of the Gospel of the New Covenant.” Quite simply, Americans were “still preaching the Law.”  

In noting “the appalling religiousness of America,” Vidler captured the essence of how fundamentalist discourse permeated American culture in the postwar years. Although many fundamentalists remained concerned with individual souls and believed (theologically, at least) that righteousness came through faith in Jesus Christ and not by moral behavior, an emphasis on being religious and appearing moral became the principal concern not only of many fundamentalists, but of Americans in general. Religion sociologist Will Herberg captured this essence of postwar American culture in his 1955 study on American religious life, Protestant-Catholic-Jew. Although church attendance rates skyrocketed, church building construction flourished, Bible sales soared, and missionary enterprises thrived, more than half of Americans could not name a single one of the four gospels. According to Herberg, America consisted of “Christians flocking to church, yet forgetting all about Christ,” of “men and women valuing the Bible . . . yet apparently seldom reading it themselves.” But he concluded that such religiousness was much “more than shallow emotionalism” or “mere pretense;” quite simply, Americans “gladly identify themselves in religious terms.”

Amid the postwar cry for religion and national spiritual awakening, Americans reflexively turned to those who appeared to “know” religion the best, namely religious leaders, especially Christian fundamentalists. In a 1942 survey, Americans deemed religious leaders third behind government officials and business leaders in terms of “doing the most good for the country.” In 1947, in response to the same question, Americans placed religious leaders first. As religious figures, fundamentalists had
articulated an alternative vision of the nation throughout the 1930s and frequently deployed that vision to maintain their own unique identity as “fundamentalists.” Part of that identity centered on preserving experiential religion, especially the concepts of being “born again” and living “a holy life.” Fundamentalists maintained that “people got saved,” Joel Carpenter explains, “it was a miracle, an answer to prayer, a life-shaking, life-changing experience.”

Joel Carpenter argues convincingly that fundamentalists in the 1930s built strong grassroots organizations and institutions that later allowed them to flourish in the 1940s. Without doubt, the efforts of hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of fundamentalists certainly paid dividends. But the existence of fundamentalist institutions and organizations does not alone explain why fundamentalist language and imagery came to dominate the cultural narrative of American identity embraced by a majority of Americans by the end of the decade. Protestant liberals and modernists, for instance, maintained their monopoly in denominational size and organizational strength.

In their postwar anxiety, then, Americans found in fundamentalist discourse language and imagery that readily approximated their experiences as “Americans” during the war. As discussed above, for tens of millions of Americans the war was often a spiritual, life-shaking, answer-to-prayer type experience, one represented in the binary terms of the moral, good “self” against the immoral, evil “enemy.” To be sure, Protestant liberal modernists prayed and worshipped, but the heart of their religious experience remained focused on social service. Neo-orthodox realists blended advocacy for social service with political and intellectual efforts at building a Christian socio-political culture. More so than both these groups, fundamentalism offered a spiritually-oriented
lexicon Americans readily deemed more “religious,” both in terms of its practiced forms and in the language of its theology.

Equally significantly, as the Soviet Union increasingly represented the “aggressor” that threatened an otherwise neighborly international community, the fundamentalist identity narrative resonated all the more because of its long track-record declaring immoral “communism” the greatest threat to liberty and morality. It is critical to recognize the difference between the fundamentalist and the realist imaging of the Soviet Union. As we shall see, whereas the bifurcated narrative of American identity increasingly depicted the Soviet Union as a geo-political threat to world community for mostly “realist” economic, military, and political reasons, fundamentalists imagined the Soviet Union as a religious threat to the God-ordained political and social forms of national organization, and therefore as a threat to the nation itself rather than to the international order. Before the war had ended, for instance, the Christian Beacon intoned that Americans had to choose either “Christ or Communism,” declaring that “our only possible hope of help and deliverance from the atheism of Russian communism is the strength and power of the Almighty God.”

Communism brought forth a host of evils, especially its attack on “individual freedom,” which, according to contemporary fundamentalist discourse, represented a socio-political state divinely ordained by God. Fundamentalist minister Carl McIntire, for instance, declared that God was “the author of liberty” and that the United States maintained a “concept of freedom” which was “grounded in the inalienable rights of the individual as his Creator endowed him.” In turn, the “battle for freedom” was essentially “the battle for America,” a “life-or-death struggle” against the “collectivist
idea” promoted by the Russian state. “The Word of God supports freedom,” McIntire concluded, and “America must come back to God or she shall go on to a near-communism,” or, even worse, to “tyranny, darkness, and death.”

Non-fundamentalists gradually came to accept these pseudo-theological claims as well. For example, Truman invoked moral law discourse when he exhorted Americans to “always remember . . . that the freedom we are talking about is freedom based upon moral principles” and that “without a firm moral foundation, freedom degenerates.” Similarly, the Methodist Church proclaimed, “We must make it abundantly clear to our people that within the freedom of Democracy, men, ruled by Christian principles, can bring to mankind a society in which liberty is preserved” and “justice established.”

When the Federal Council of Churches urged closer cooperation in Germany between the American occupation forces and the German churches, it argued that the United States needed to enable “the building of spiritual bases upon which a free society can be reared.”

The complete destruction of the wartime enemy other opened up a cultural space in which moral law discourse came to constitute a new image of the “self.” Within weeks of V-J day Commonweal observed that Americans who were “convinced that all the evils in the world are due to fascism are now hard put to find a major enemy. Much of the starch has gone out of their diatribes on international affairs.” But the bifurcated image of the nation as a member of a global family in which it had to take the lead against unjust aggressors also lacked “starch.” If the world really was one big neighborhood or family, why did nations continuously fail to agree on important international issues, especially ones that threatened the lives of millions such as atomic weapons? If the
United States truly had a mission to lead the world to a peaceful internationalism, why did atomic Armageddon darken the future?

Amid ongoing postwar anxiety over the righteousness of the nation, neither liberal Protestant discourse nor Christian neo-orthodox realist discourse provided a resonant narrative of the imagined community as powerful as that available in Christian fundamentalist discourse. The lexicon of fundamentalism, especially with its aspirations to revive the spirit of the nation and convert the world, provided the language and images that anchored an emerging national identity narrative centered on a mission to defend Biblically derived individual freedom and universal moral law.

Within this cultural context, Communism, and by extension the Soviet Union, would eventually become an enemy other against which a “free America” could be known, and in opposition to whom Americans could confidently assume their place as national subjects.106 As Harper’s succinctly observed in 1947, “the end of war did not allay our fears. But it did change their character. The fear of clear and present dangers that we more or less knew how to handle has given way to forebodings of evil which, though horribly real, are yet intangible and elusive.”107 In the late 1940s, as Christian fundamentalist discourse entered the mainstream culture, those “forebodings of evil” would become increasingly tangible and less elusive.

United States foreign policy in 1947-1948 reflected the changing cultural landscape as a narrative of the nation as destined to defend “freedom” and “international law” slowly but irrevocably replaced the bifurcated narrative predicated on neighborly internationalism and world community guardianship. The staging of national identity occurs at the point of juxtaposition of the self and the other, that is in foreign relations.
Within this transitional period, the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan contained elements of both cultural identity narratives. As became clear in discursive framing of both policies, fundamentalist discourse emerged as the dominant lexicon through which Americans approached the world by early 1948.

Perhaps more so than any other story of the postwar years, the political demise of Henry Wallace exemplifies the borrowed time on which neighborly internationalism persisted. At the White House in September 1945, Truman’s cabinet debated whether the United States should disclose scientific knowledge concerning atomic energy and weapons to other nations. Wallace vigorously promoted an open approach, especially with respect to the Soviet Union. Almost immediately he had to defend himself against accusations that he “favored giving the atomic bomb to Russia,” a position he did not espouse at the meeting but nevertheless a rumor that somehow “leaked out.” Less than two months after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, such a leak had relatively little impact on his political position.

As Wallace insisted upon a cooperative internationalist posture over the course of the following year, his residual New Deal popularity shriveled. In September 1946, Wallace declared that “far too often, hatred and fear, intolerance and deceit have had the upper hand over love and confidence, trust and joy” in international relations. Although he disavowed “namby-pamby pacifism,” he declared that Americans “should close our ears to those among us who would have us believe that Russian communism and our free enterprise system cannot live, one with another, in a profitable and productive peace.” Wallace maintained that he was “neither anti-Russian nor pro-Russian,” a position, he added, that “represented the policy” of the administration.
Wallace’s speech countered the emerging narrative of U.S. identity as the defender of freedom and moral law against totalitarian communism. It appeared so direct a challenge, in fact, that it immediately produced a rupture between Wallace and the administration, ominously presaging Wallace’s eventual rejection by the broader culture. To be sure, the claim to speak for administration policy seemingly provided a rational motivation for the ire of the president, Secretary of State James Byrnes, and the State Department. Senator Arthur Vandenberg, member of the United States delegation at a critical foreign ministers conference then taking place in Paris, angrily complained, “I can cooperate with only one Secretary of State at a time.”

But on the surface, the policy Wallace espoused differed little from that pursued by the White House. For example, Truman confessed to his diary that he essentially agreed with Wallace that the United States “held no special friendship with Russia, Britain or any other country” and that the United States “wanted to see all the world at peace on an equal basis.” Nonetheless, Wallace’s discursive framing of that policy - namely, that to achieve the agreed upon policy objective he invoked cooperative, neighborly discourse rather than the language of toughness and opposition - appeared to undercut the State Department, Byrnes, the U.S. delegation at Paris, and the foreign policy “discussed and agreed to” by cabinet. As a result, Truman forced Wallace’s resignation.

Despite the fallout, a beleaguered Wallace continued to promote visions of cooperative internationalism, even in the face of rising antipathy on the part of Americans. As Commonweal observed, Americans found “the criticism of such men as Henry A. Wallace . . . pointless” because the nation’s foreign policy “choice” lies
between two “alternatives, both of which Mr. Wallace would like to repudiate,” namely, standing up to communism or becoming enslaved to it. “As he sees it,” the journal went on several months later, “the Soviet Union is merely . . . one more member of the world family. It is this genial myopia of Mr. Wallace’s which brings all his talk about peace, abundance, and the Roosevelt tradition to utter nothing” since “the leaders of the Soviet Union just do not happen to be Iowa farmers, and peace is not to be maintained by “sitting down and talking things over.””\(^{112}\) When Wallace announced his presidential candidacy for 1948, *Harper’s* could only wonder “what makes Wallace run?” The magazine astutely, if inadvertently, concluded that he had “fallen into the shadow of forces which he either did not comprehend or could not control.”\(^{113}\)

Those “forces” comprised nothing less than the growing resonance of fundamentalist discourse and the attendant demise of neighborly internationalism. For example, the “One World” movement faded into oblivion, signaled perhaps most obviously when outspoken world government advocate Raymond Swing was replaced at the American Broadcasting Corporation by long-time interventionist Elmer Davis. Similarly, the Acheson-Lilienthal plan for the international control of atomic energy died an ignoble death with the expiry of the United Nations Atomic Energy Committee in 1948.\(^{114}\) Finally, Wallace’s “Gideon’s Army” presidential campaign floundered, failing to capture a single state and garnering more than 30,000 votes and four states less than third place finisher and southern states-rights advocate Strom Thurmond.\(^{115}\)

To be sure, bursts of modernist discourse continued to emerge. In 1948, for example, the Federal Council of Churches declared in its “Positive Program For Peace” that Americans “should not rely primarily on military strategy to meet Communist
aggression.” Rather, they should “press for positive programs” such as a “greater emphasis on increasing social welfare,” “greater observance of human rights,” and “greater use of . . . international conversation and negotiation.” The Council argued that such programs “flow directly from our Christian faith and its requirements for relations of mutual helpfulness and goodwill among men.” By 1948 such Sermon on the Mount neighborly discourse had lost most of its symbolizing power. Reviewing a copy of the Council’s program at the White House, Truman, who had himself frequently deployed Sermon on the Mount tropes in the early postwar years, scrawled on the cover page, “A perfectly asinine document – as full of sophistry as a communist manifesto.”

The framing of the Truman Doctrine reflected the persistent need to stage a dichotomous image of the nation. Concerned with humanitarian, neighborly assistance for Greece, Truman’s March 1947 speech bemoaned the suffering of Greece, a country where “eighty-five percent of the children were tubercular,” “livestock, poultry, and draft animals had almost disappeared,” and “inflation had wiped out practically all savings.” At the same time, however, the United States sought to protect both Greece and Turkey “against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes.”

But more than just part of neighborly humanitarianism or the straightforward defense of world community against aggression, the Truman Doctrine also reflected the transition to an alternative narrative of the United States in the world. Support for the two southeastern European nations became part of “the present moment in world history” when “nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life,” Truman declared. “One way of life is based upon . . . free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and
freedom from political oppression.” The other “is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms.” While the exact nature of the new United States mission in the world remained vague, it was clear that “great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events.”

While Truman’s message to Congress outlining the Truman Doctrine did not specifically name the Soviet Union or communism as the implacable, immoral foe, it signaled the rise of an embryonic national identity narrative predicated on fundamentalist discourse. “Mr. Truman named no names, but left no doubt about the identity of the aggressor,” *Time* noted. “It was Soviet Russia.” Imagining support for southeastern European nations as a righteous defense of divinely-ordained political and economic freedom ignored that the Soviet Union was hardly behind the leftist Greek uprising and elided the degree to which U.S. aid actually supported a repressive right-wing dictatorship in Greece.

The image of the nation cast by the Truman Doctrine immediately reinvigorated the sense of manifest destiny central to American identity. Even before Truman began his speech, Vandenberg argued that the looming confrontation in Greece was “symbolic of the world-wide ideological clash between Eastern Communism and Western Democracy.” On the Senate floor, Vandenberg interrupted regular proceedings before the Truman Doctrine speech in order that the United States might not miss its “date with destiny.” *Christianity and Crisis* observed that “even the opening prayers in House and
Senate held an anticipatory note.” As Truman reverently put it in a private note, the United States “must meet the responsibility that Almighty God has given us to meet.”

The framing of the Truman Doctrine reflected a trajectory in U.S. foreign relations that gained momentum throughout 1947: the bifurcated identity narrative of the immediate postwar years gradually succumbed to a narrative of the United States as the defender of morality and freedom throughout the world. For example, George Kennan’s famous “X” article in *Foreign Affairs* intended to outline a foreign policy strategy that would come to be known as “containment.” But the cultural logic underlying Kennan’s argument was that the Soviet “other” had an “internal nature” that prevented negotiation and compromise. Against such sweeping characterizations (from a so-called “realist” nonetheless!), a narrative of the national self as a moral leader opposing an inflexible, immoral foe took shape. According to Kennan’s “X” article, Americans should “experience a certain gratitude to a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their . . . accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership.”

Undertaking such “moral and political leadership,” the United States launched the European Recovery Program. On the surface, the program appeared to be part of a U.S. attempt to control resources such as oil and to enhance U.S. economic penetration abroad. But these concerns emerged from, and were made possible by, a national identity narrative that imagined the United States leading the world in defense of individual freedom. In early 1947, for example, a joint State, War, and Navy committee argued that the United States needed to defend all “areas which contain or protect sources of metals, oil, and other national resources, which contain strategic objectives, or areas strategically
located, which contain substantial industrial potential” and other economic and military benefits. Why? According to the committee, the United States should protect these vital areas to “enable the U.S. to exert a greater influence for world stability, security and peace” and to ensure that “other nations” did not “lose faith in the leadership of the U.S.”\(^{125}\) Of course, that such “faith” in American “leadership” already existed was a significant cultural presupposition, but one inherent in the understanding of the United States as a moral leader of the world against immoral forces.

Even more than the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan for European recovery represented a critical shift toward a fundamentalist narrative of national identity. To be sure, as Under Secretary of State William Clayton explained, the overriding impetus of the Marshall was “to save Europe from starvation and chaos” and “not from the Russians.” At the same time, however, Clayton viewed the plan as critical “to preserve for ourselves and our children the glorious heritage of a free America.”\(^{126}\) Announcing the proposal at Harvard in June 1947, Secretary of State George Marshall remonstrated that the recovery policy was “directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos.” Nonetheless, he added that such relief remained crucial to creating “political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist.” The neighborly help for the suffering and starving consequently emerged as part of the need to defend “freedom” against “economic, social and political deterioration of a very grave character,” implicitly un-free, communist totalitarianism. And this narrative of the U.S. role in the world reinvigorated the American sense of mission, allowing Marshall to exult triumphantly in “the vast responsibility which history has clearly placed upon our country.”\(^{127}\)
The Marshall plan and, and Truman Doctrine aid for Greece and Turkey, thus reflected the broader cultural shift toward an alternative religious discourse that rendered Americans’ experiences of the world more sensible. Of course, both the Truman Doctrine and the European recovery program reflected the bifurcated identity narrative that had achieved a modicum of cultural traction in the immediate postwar years. But for many Americans, aid for Greece, Turkey, and Europe also meshed neatly with a narrative of the nation that imagined the United States as the defender of morality and freedom against immoral, aggressive communism. For example, Vandenberg asserted in the Senate that aid for Greece and Turkey represented nothing more than “a plan to forestall aggression” and a “global danger of vast design.” If the United States failed to provide such aid, it would “be the forfeiture [of] our peaceful pursuit of international righteousness” and “would stunt our moral authority.”

Americans staged their role as the moral, righteous defenders of freedom largely by imagining an opposing, aggressive threat in foreign policy discourse. In the words of a National Security Council memo, the United States had to help all “free peoples . . . maintain their free institutions . . . against aggressive movements.” But as one State Department official put it, “if [the Soviet threat] had never existed . . . we would have had to invent it.” Of course there was no need for that; fundamentalist discourse had long anticipated a clash with Russian communism, the enemy other of the supposedly Judeo-Christian moral “values” of individualism and freedom.

In the latter half of 1947, the framing of the Marshall Plan shifted dramatically as the neighborly discourse evident in the earliest descriptions of the policy gave way almost entirely to much more fundamentalist-oriented language and images. For example,
in November, the Marshall Plan remained in the preparatory stages and so Truman urged stop-gap aid arguing that “the future of the free nations of Europe hangs in the balance” and only the “moral strength” of the United States remained “the inspiration of free men everywhere.” Casting assistance for Europe in the religious imagery of light and darkness, Truman asserted that “our influence in the world gives us an opportunity - unmatched in history - to conduct ourselves in such a manner that men and women of all the world can move out of the shadows of fear and war and into the light of freedom and peace.” The invocation of these binaries allowed Truman to conclude, “The American people are becoming more and more deeply aware of their world position” and “learning that great responsibility goes with great power.”

When the Soviet Union castigated the numerous conditions attached to Marshall aid and rejected the U.S. plan, Americans reflexively understood the Soviet action as a challenge to American responsibility and moral leadership, and therefore as a challenge to freedom itself. Some Americans, such as former Secretary of State Henry Stimson, tried to maintain a balance between the repudiated neighborly image of the United States and the emergent fundamentalist identity narrative. For instance, Stimson condemned “the mistaken thinking done by my friend Henry Wallace” at the same time as he derided “those who argue that Americans” needed to “rid the world of the Communist menace.” Others, however, understood matters more starkly. The State Department’s Director of the Office of Public Affairs Francis Russell, for example, warned a St. Louis audience that Americans should “not delude ourselves regarding the ideological conflict that is going on in the world today. There is no question that there are forces seeking to impose their way of life on other peoples through a campaign of fear, force and fraud.”
As a result, although many Americans appreciated and perhaps admired the Russians in 1945, “only two years later,” according to Marshall, they were “charged with a definite hostility toward the Soviet Union.” “What produced this tremendous change in our national feeling and attitude?” Marshall asked. Answering his own question, he argued that quite simply “from the termination of hostilities down to the present time the Soviet government has consistently followed a course which was bound to arouse the resentment of our people.” But rather than describing that “course,” Marshall just concluded that “the people of this country are God-fearing people” that “have been virtually driven into a state of active resentment.”

According to Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson, “at the end of the war we thought that everyone believed that enduring peace” seemed within reach, especially in light of the “agreement between the great powers” to “bring to the settlement of international questions the conscience of mankind and the justice of laws.” But, Acheson intoned, “it is now plain that the Soviet Union does not intend to join in the task of . . . economic recovery” in a manner that “any nation wishing to maintain its own integrity can accept.” The cultural logic of Acheson’s speech should not be missed: what mattered was the response to Soviet policy, not Soviet policy itself. By virtue of the U.S. answer to Soviet actions - that is, by opposing the Soviet Union’s attempts to remove many of the aid conditions to the Marshall Plan that other nations also detested - the United States staged “wishing to maintain its own integrity.”

As Americans readied themselves to implement the Marshall Plan, the shift toward an identity narrative of the United States as the righteous defender of freedom and morality became plain in the work of the Committee for the Marshall Plan (CMP), a
group that included Acheson and former Secretaries of State Stimson and Robert
Patterson. In late 1947, Americans warmly embraced the “citizens’ committee,” sending
“generous contributions . . . from nearly every state in the Union” as “people wanted to
be counted as favoring aid to Europe.” Commissioned to promote public support for
the Plan, CMP members maintained that the committee “was started long before . . . in
the minds and hearts of men and women throughout the United States.”

The cultural logic of the CMP’s efforts rested in what the plan “said” about the
United States. For example, Stimson claimed that “the reconstruction of Europe is a task
from which Americans can decide to stand apart only if they wish to desert every
principle by which they claim to live.” In other words, aid to Europe resulted partly
from the need to stand by “every principle by which” Americans “claim to live,”
essentially inscribing those “principles” by declaring their defense. But what, exactly,
were the “principles”? In the first half of 1947 the plan ostensibly centered on alleviating
the suffering of a starving and battered people. Less than a year later the message focused
largely on the defense of freedom against the slavery of communism. “Stop Stalin Now,”
a CMP pamphlet blared, “only a disastrous blunder of American policy” such as not
pursuing the Marshall Plan “would permit the Russian totalitarian state to overrun the
free nations of western Europe” and “the expanding slave state must blot freedom from
the earth if it is to rest secure.”

By early 1948, the Marshall Plan had come to signify the righteous defense of
“freedom.” The official report by the Committee on Foreign Aid professed that
Americans “faced in the world today . . . two conflicting ideologies. One is a system in
which individual rights and liberties are maintained. The opposing system is one where
iron discipline by the state ruthlessly stamps out individual liberties.” To be sure, the United States remained vitally concerned with “humanitarian and economic” considerations. But an “interest of a third kind . . . overshadows the others,” namely, to ensure “the continued survival of a world . . . in which governments based on fundamental democratic principles can prosper; in which right, not might, prevails, and in which religious freedom, economic opportunity, and individual liberties are maintained.”

Truman agreed. In a national broadcast in March, the president pronounced that although “most of the countries of the world have joined together . . . in an attempt to build a world order based on law,” the “Soviet Union and its agents have destroyed the independence and democratic character of a whole series of nations.” Of course, Truman remonstrated, “the Soviet Union and its satellites were invited to cooperate in the European recovery” but “they have declared their violent hostility to the program and are aggressively attempting to wreck it.” Americans, he urged, could not “close our eyes to the harsh fact that through obstruction and even defiance on the part of one nation,” the “great dream” of “rule of law” and a “code of ethics” in international affairs “has not yet become a full reality.” The United States had to “strengthen the powerful forces for freedom” and “justice” and “face the threat to their liberty squarely and courageously.”

As Truman’s framing of the Marshall Plan revealed, by early 1948 fundamentalist discourse had moved to a position of cultural hegemony within the imagined community.

The evolution of United States foreign policy “rationale” throughout 1947 did not arise from exaggerated rhetoric or government efforts to deceive the “public.” Rather, as “Americans,” policy makers acted and shifted within the narratives of national identity
that reinvigorated the imagined community. The turn to religion in the broader culture empowered those who had claimed to know religion the most, namely, the fundamentalists who had battled for decades to establish the truth of the Bible and the real existence of the Judeo-Christian God. Fundamentalist discourse centered on a universal moral code and the significance of individual freedom permeated American society and shaped an emerging identity narrative that cleansed the nation from the “black rain” that had tarred the nation in the early postwar period.

By 1948, fundamentalist discourse articulated a narrative of the nation that reinvigorated the national sense of chosenness and manifest destiny. The United States “must firmly and unequivocally resist Soviet aggression . . . so that it is clear to all that we are defender of the rule of law,” Byrnes argued. The very “survival of this republic depends . . . not upon its material strength alone, but upon its moral strength and its moral unity.” “The United States has a tremendous responsibility to act according to the measure of our power for good in the world,” Truman added. “With God's help we shall succeed.”

Notes


significance and influential capacity of such “forces,” and in some cases even call such forces into being.

4 For more on modernism versus fundamentalism see Chapter 3.

5 Transcript of Proceedings of the Judicial Commission selected to try Rev. J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., February 27, 1936, Peters Stam Papers, Box 410, Presbyterian Church in American Historical Center, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter cited as: PCAHC); Meeting of the Special Judicial Commission of the Presbytery of Chicago, June 14, 1935, Stam Papers, Box 410, PCAHC. Buswell left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in his first year and joined the Bible Presbyterian Church, a fundamentalist denomination begun largely by Carl McIntire.

6 Carl McIntire, for example, was suspended in 1935 and deposed “formally from the ministry” in 1936. See Carl McIntire to Rev. Richard E. Coulter, ca. 1938-1940, Carl McIntire Collection, Box T-001, PCAHC.


12 Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 100 (emphasis added).
This argument is fully developed in Chapter 4. See also David Zietsma, “‘Sin Has No History’: Religion, National Identity, and U.S. Intervention, 1937-1941,” *Diplomatic History* 31 (June 2007): 544-564.


15 James O. Buswell, “Moses’ Ethical View: The Greatest Ethical System of All Time,” 1938, Buswell Papers, Box 289, PCAHC.

16 Figures like fundamentalist forerunner Dwight L. Moody, who emphasized “Ruin by sin, Redemption by Christ, and Regeneration by the Holy Ghost,” as well as movements like the “Holiness Movement,” became integral to fundamentalism in the late nineteenth century, playing a significant role in fostering the social gospel and progressive reform aspect of American Protestantism during this period. This trend underwent what George Marsden called a “Great Reversal” in the period 1900-1930. See Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 35, 72-93.


19 To the Special Judicial Commission of the Presbytery of Chicago, Meeting, October 7, 1935, Stam Papers, Box 410, PCAHC.


21 To the Special Judicial Commission of the Presbytery of Chicago, Meeting, October 7, 1935, Stam Papers, Box 410, PCAHC (emphasis added).

22 Transcript of Proceedings of the Judicial Commission, October 7, 1935, Buswell Papers, Box 280, PCAHC; Transcript of Proceedings of the Judicial Commission, February 27, 1936, Stam Papers, Box 410, PCAHC.


For an excellent, lucid discussion of these prophetic fundamentalist views of the world in the 1930s, see Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 89-105. For more on prophetic thought and the rise of dispensationalism in United States history up to World War II, see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 80-112.


Mrs. M. C. Hutton, Los Angeles, to Truman, August 12, 1945, OF 190n, HSTL.


For V-J day requests see Samuel McCrea Cavert, Executive Secretary, Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, to Truman, August 10, 1945; Carroll C. Roberts, President, and Frederick E. Reissig, Executive Secretary, Washington Federation of Churches, to Truman, August 10, 1945; George E. Schnabel, President, Ministerial Union of Washington, to Truman, August 10 1945; Irvin R. Kuenzli, National Secretary, American Federation of Teachers, to Truman, August 16, 1945; T. R. Tarn to Truman, August 12, 1945; all in OF 190n, HSTL.

General Letter from the American Council of Christian Churches, September 6, 1941, American Council of Christian Churches, RG 1, Box 466, PCAHC.


Ockenga quoted in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 149.

37 Excerpts from Minutes of the Meetings Which Led to the Organization of Children For Christ, undated, Children For Christ, RG 23, Box 294, PCAHC.

38 Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 166.


40 Editorial, “Which Question Comes First for the Church?” *Christianity and Crisis*, November 12, 1945.

41 United Church Canvass to Truman, October 14, 1948, OF 76, HSTL.

42 Howard Kiroack, Executive Vice Chairman, Laymen’s National Committee, to Truman, November 26, 1946, OF 76, HSTL; Howard Kiroack, Executive Vice Chairman, Laymen’s National Committee, to Truman, March 6, 1947, OF 76, HSTL.

43 Faculty committee quoted in “Revival at Yale?” *Time*, August 13, 1945.

44 Rev. E.H. Holloway, Chairman, Go To Church Campaign, to Truman, March 19, 1947, OF 76, HSTL; “Go To Church” Campaign, Form Letter, 1947, OF 76, HSTL.

45 Good Housekeeping Club Service Letter and Study Program, September 1946, PPF 260, HSTL.


47 Greg Van Syoc to Mrs. Truman, November 30, 1945, OF 76, HSTL.

48 Mildred Claridge to Mrs. Truman, November 16, 1947, OF 76, HSTL.

49 Mrs. Walter R. Meek to Mrs. Truman, August 5, 1945, OF 76, HSTL.

50 Rev. Malcolm S. Alexander, Pacific Portal Community Church, United Presbyterian, San Diego, CA, to Truman, November 18, 1948, OF 76, HSTL.

51 Rev. Fitzgerald Smith, Mt. Zion Tabernacle Christian Mission, to Truman, July 14, 1948, OF 76, HSTL.

52 Wingate Lewis, Congressman (Texas) to Truman, October 4, 1949, OF 76, HSTL.
53 Torrey Johnson quoted in Carpenter, Revive Us Again, 171.

54 Don R. Luis to Truman, August 27, 1945, OF 76, HSTL.

55 “Go To Church” Campaign, Form Letter, 1947, OF 76, HSTL; Raymond Stuart to Truman, November 18, 1948, OF 76, HSTL; Raymond Stuart to Truman, September 16, 1949, OF 76, HSTL.

56 Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, President, Federal Council of Churches of Christ, to Truman, January 17, 1946, PPF 33, HSTL.

57 Kenneth C. Koch to Truman, May 8, 1947, OF 76, HSTL.

58 Miss Madeline Spillane to Margaret Truman, June 10, 1948, OF 76, HSTL.

59 Floyd Johnson, Youth Leader, Los Angeles Evangelistic Center, to Truman, September 21, 1945, OF 76, HSTL.

60 Truman to Reverend William B. Lampe, Moderator of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in the USA, April 29, 1946, PPF 260, HSTL.

61 Truman to Dr. E. M. Dodd, Chairman, Centennial Committee of Louisiana Baptist Convention, November 12, 1948, PPF 21, HSTL.

62 Truman to Dr. Edward Pruden, September 9, 1949, PPF 21, HSTL. For more on Pruden and his years as frequent presidential pastor from the 1930s into the 1950s see Edward Hughes Pruden, A Window On Washington, (New York, Vantage Press, 1976).

63 Truman to Jesse Bader, Executive Secretary, FCCC, September 29, 1947, PPF 33, HSTL.


Bishop John Noll, Bishop of Fort Wayne, to Truman, May 19, 1945, OF 76, HSTL.

Edward B. Andross to Truman, October 19, 1947, OF 76, HSTL.

Truman to American Bible Society, October 20, 1947, PPF 2915, HSTL; Francis Stifler, Recording Secretary, American Bible Society, to William Hassett, October 20, 1950, PPF 2915, HSTL.


Carl McIntire to Pastors, Elders, and Congregations of the Bible Presbyterian Church, September 21, 1948, National Presbyterian Missions, RG 53, Box 496, PCAHC; Pamphlet, “The Testimony of the International Council of Christian Churches,” International Council of Christian Churches, RG 1, Box 466, PCAHC.

Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 177-186.

Graham, “We Need Revival,” 53-54.


Truman to Rear Admiral Reginald Belknap, Chairman, Laymen’s National Committee, September 24, 1945, OF 76, HSTL.

Truman to American Bible Society, October 20, 1947, PPF 2915, HSTL.

Truman Speech, New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington D.C., April 3, 1951, PPF 21, HSTL.

Truman Diary, February 26, 1952, PSF: Longhand Notes File, Box 282, HSTL.
83 Pamphlet, “The Objective of Freedoms Foundation Inc.,” 1949-50, OF 320, HSTL.

84 William H. Dyer, Chicago, IL, to Truman, October 11, 1950, OF 76, HSTL.

85 Graham, “We Need Revival,” 53-54.


90 Truman to Rev. Dr. Edgar Schmiedeler, Director, Family Life Bureau, National Catholic Welfare Conference, November 1, 1946, PPF 1936, HSTL.


94 Herberg, Protestant-Catholic-Jew, 2-3 (emphasis added).

95 French theorist Michel Foucault demonstrates that sets of interconnected language and imagery (discourses) offer human subjects the ability to take up their “identity” by assuming certain terms, or linguistic images” as representative of their body. In turn, those who ostensibly “know” those particular sets of language and images (discourses) “best” are granted social and political power. For example, if I come to think of myself as a “patient,” a word that exists within a language/image (discourse) chain we might call medical terminology, then I grant considerable social and political (and physical) power over my body to a “doctor,” someone signified as “knowing” more about “patients” than others in the social group. See Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language (New York, 1972), 21-49; Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures” in Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory, eds. Nicholas Dirks, Geoffrey Eley, and Sherry Ortner, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994),

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96 American public opinion cited in Whitfield, *Culture of the Cold War*, 83.

97 Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 76-85 (emphasis in original).

98 Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*.

99 Editorial, “Christ or Communism,” *Christian Beacon*, April 12, 1945; Editorial, “Offending God,” *Christian Beacon*, May 10, 1945. Fundamentalists never fully abdicated their fear of the Soviet Union, although it would become relatively peripheral to their discourse in the war years. In the 1930s they had frequently attempted to discredit modernism by linking it to communism and the Soviet Union. To be sure, during the late 1930s, under the suspicious eye of Martin Dies, anti-communism temporarily gained some cultural traction. But within the hierarchy of evil narrative of U.S. identity, Americans eventually imagined the Soviet Union as an Ally on the side of righteousness.

100 Carl McIntire, *Author of Liberty* (Collingswood, NJ: Christian Beacon Press, 1946), 188.


102 Truman Speech, New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington D.C., April 3, 1951, PPF 21, HSTL.

103 Episcopal Address, General Conference of the Methodist Church, April 28, 1948, OF 213, HSTL.

104 Bishop Oxnam to Truman, January 18, 1946, PPF 33, HSTL (emphasis added).


106 John Fousek wonderfully recounts how an “American nationalist ideology provided the principle underpinning for the broad public consensus that supported Cold War foreign policy” through a “nationalist globalism” that attempted to universalize its own “freedom, equality, and justice under the law” (often illusory concepts within American
society and its foreign policy, the author does not fail to point out). I seek to build on Fousek’s work by uncovering the religious discourses out of and on which, this “nationalist ideology” emerged, a cultural foundation that Fousek leaves relatively unexplored. See John Fousek, To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), quotes on 2, 7.


114 Paul Boyer, By the Bomb’s Early Light, 44, 54-55.


118 Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey, March 12, 1947, APP.


123 Truman Longhand Note, April 1948, PSF: Longhand Notes File, Box 281, HSTL.


130 State Department official quoted in Paterson, *On Every Front*, 142.

131 Truman to Congress, November 17, 1947, Acheson Papers, Box 4, HSTL.

132 Henry L. Stimson, “The Challenge to Americans,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 1947. See also, for example, Address by Herbert H. Lehman, Former Governor of NY and First Director-General of UNRRA, October 11, 1947, Acheson Papers, Box 4, HSTL; James P. Warburg, “The United States and the World Crisis,” Address to Foreign Policy Association, October 20, 1947, Acheson Papers, Box 4, HSTL.
To be sure, state actors and policy makers exhibit multiple identity subjectivities. I would suggest, as argued in Chapter 5 regarding US air war doctrine, that there is sometimes a “cultural lag” between state actors and policy planners at the bureaucratic and administrative level. In the specific case of the Marshall Plan, some state actors, having taken up their task within a narrative of the United States as a neighborly internationalist ready to lead the world in the resistance of aggression, shuddered at the cultural embrace of a “fundamentalist” interpretation of U.S. policy. In May 1947, for instance, the Policy Planning Staff anxiously desired to “clarify” what the nation had “come to identify as the “Truman Doctrine,” and to remove in particular two damaging impressions which are current in large sections of American public opinion.” One of those “damaging impressions” was “that the United States approach to world problems is a defensive reaction to communist pressure” and “not something we would be interested in doing if there were no communist menace.” See Policy Planning Staff 1, May 23, 1947, *FRUS, 1947*, 3: 223-230.

Text of Byrnes’ Speech on German Treat and Soviet Relations, November 1947, Acheson Papers, Box 28, HSTL.
Address to Congress by Truman, March 17, 1948, Acheson Papers, Box 6, HSTL.
CHAPTER IX

“THIS NATION UNDER GOD”

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

- William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming*

*Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity.*

- Joseph McCarthy, 1950

Shifting narratives of national identity exerted a profound impact on the struggle between competing American religious subjectivities. By the late 1940s, Protestant liberal modernism, so dominant during the 1930s, had faded to the nether world of American culture. As fundamentalist discourse centered on the importance of moral religion increasingly monopolized the emergent identity narrative of the imagined community, social and political power flowed to Roman Catholics and Jews, both formerly relatively marginalized groups.

This chapter argues that by the end of the 1940s a renascent righteous nation narrative achieved cultural hegemony as it reinvigorated the imagined community. Through Christian fundamentalist discourse, Americans imagined the nation guarding not only morality and freedom but defending *religion itself* against an evil, godless Soviet Communist enemy. In turn, this religious identity narrative provided the cultural framework that shaped support for the fledging state of Israel, the decision to airlift
supplies into west Berlin, the response to the Soviet Union’s development of nuclear weapons, the pursuit of nuclear deterrence, and the creation of NSC 68. Furthermore, as the imagined community rapidly coalesced around an atheistic, communist “other,” the “self” became suddenly sharply defined, engendering a socio-political violence at home at the ontological boundaries of the state.

In the early 1950s, the righteous nation narrative drove the United States to choose war once more. Americans reflexively interpreted an indigenous Korean civil war as nothing less than the first salvo in a global struggle with Satan-inspired Soviet communism. For the second time in less than a decade, the United States staged its righteousness through physical violence, reinvigorating its manifest destiny and alleviating the postwar anxiety that had hung over the nation since the atomic bombings.

The shifting cultural terrain of American identity in the latter half of the 1940s initially appeared to some Americans as nothing more than a continuation of the prewar struggles between modernists and more traditional Christians such as the fundamentalists. And to be sure, hope for broad church unity persisted despite these struggles. “Two Christianities compete in the churches today,” Bernard Iddings Bell observed in The Atlantic Monthly. “It is impossible to say that they are one religion, or even two aspects of the same religion.” According to Bell, resolution could only arrive after Americans answered the question, “Shall we labor in love with expectation of human gratitude and effective cooperation or, knowing that these may not be had on earth, shall we look elsewhere?” For some Americans, the best solution was to “scrap all the existing denominations . . . and reassemble the traditionalists from many folds into one new body and the modernists into another.”¹
Those seeking resolution to the seemingly endless religious strife did not have to wait long; in the late 1940s a resonant national identity narrative predicated on fundamentalist discourse marginalized the vestiges of Protestant liberal modernism. In many cases, this occurred largely through a discourse of “secularism.” Modernism appeared to be something totally different than Christianity and hardly connected to religion at all. Fundamentalists, of course, had long castigated modernism as an apostate faith devoid of religious content. The American Council of Churches even labeled modernism as nothing less than “soul-destroying.” But the attack on modernism as anti-religious secularism also emerged as part of the triumph of neo-orthodox realism. In 1941, for example, Reinhold Niebuhr denigrated modernism’s “simple methods” that emphasized “the “gentleness” of Jesus” as nothing more than a “utopianism” that “derived from a secular culture.”

In the postwar period, the temporary resurgence of modernist discourse amid widespread cultural anxiety produced another round of vilification by realists and fundamentalists. In 1946, Richard Niebuhr labeled Protestant modernism merely “utilitarian Christianity . . . in which religion is used as a means for gaining social order and prosperity.” When Truman addressed the Federal Council of Churches the same year, student pastor Edward Noé protested vociferously against the president’s apparent support for an organization “not in the traditional line of historic Biblical Christianity.” Another letter writer wondered whether Truman even knew that the Federal Council did not believe in “the deity of Christ.” The ostensible “religious” failure of modernism also seemed to indicate nefarious communist ties. In the early 1950s, for instance, Bernard Stanton, pastor of the Gulf Coast Bible Church, excoriated the Federal Council’s
successor organization, the National Council, for including “men and movements that have been officially branded as pro-Communist, socialist, pacifists, and dangerous to the welfare of our country.”

Within the dominant early postwar national identity narratives that stressed the need to defend the world community against aggression, modernism’s “kingdom of God” objective appeared increasingly unreasonable. The neo-orthodox Christianity and Crisis declared that because “no historical achievement can be identified with the Kingdom of God” it was “not possible to work sanely upon historical tasks with a religion which confines the meaning of human existence to the limits of historic achievements and frustrations.” This was especially true in international relations, the journal argued. For example, it disparagingly pronounced that Americans “who equate British imperialism in India with Russian imperialism in the Balkans, or American rule in southern Korea with Russian rule in northern Korea,” had simply “lost the capacity for significant moral discrimination.”

As fundamentalist discourse centered on law and morality gained traction in the broader culture, modernist discourse made less frequent appearances among traditional bastions of Protestant liberalism. In early 1946, for instance, Niebuhr finally found “reason to hope that the Christian churches of America are beginning to realize that there is a difference between secular utopianism and the imperatives of the Christian gospel” when relatively few Christian leaders signed a petition urging the creation of a world government. Similarly, in 1951, Truman, who himself had deployed Sermon on the Mount discourse in the immediate postwar period, informed the National Council that although he certainly desired “to leave this world a little better than we found it,” it was
obvious that Americans “may not hope to create a new heaven and a new earth in our own day and generation.”

Although neo-orthodox realist discourse experienced relative empowerment from the shifting narratives of American identity, by the late 1940s, realists, like modernists, helplessly watched as that power began ebbing away. In 1949, *Christianity and Crisis* protested the growing emphasis on moral law as the perceived foundation of freedom and democracy. To be sure, neo-orthodox realism argued that society required some element of force to make conditions possible for the approximation of neighborly love. “But to say that the enforcement of law in necessary for a stable social order is quite different from saying that it is the foundation of that order,” the bi-weekly objected. By 1949, the culture had long forsaken the realist alternative in favor of a fundamentalist narrative, leaving the journal lamenting the dangerous “mindset into which the American people are being slowly led, a mindset which contradicts the implications of love at the start.”

If neo-orthodox realists protested the culture’s trajectory, Roman Catholics and Jews found themselves the beneficiaries of an increasing celebration of religion and moral law. The more ensconced religion became in the cultural matrix of national identity, the more social and political power to flowed to groups and individuals that ostensibly “knew” the most about it, fundamentalists for sure but also Catholics and Jews. Of course, anti-Semitism persisted in varying forms and the shifting fortunes of American Jews also related to changing discourses of “whiteness” and altered ethnic perceptions. Also, Catholics continued to experience heated battles with Protestant groups, particularly over Truman’s attempt to send a permanent diplomatic representative
to the Vatican. Nevertheless, by the end of the decade Americans viewed all three groups as sharing a common “American” identity.\textsuperscript{13}

For Jews, fundamentalist discourse centered on Old Testament moral law allowed them to claim “Americanness” much more readily than in any previous period. This shift began in the prewar and war years as the righteous nation narrative gained traction. Religious figures such as Gerald L. K. Smith, Father Charles Coughlin, Gerald Winrod, and William Pelley found themselves marginalized partly because they insisted on an anti-Semitic posture that no longer resonated within the shifting framework of American national identity.\textsuperscript{14} By the post war years many fundamentalists had come to admire and respect Jews as God’s original chosen people. The \textit{Christian Beacon} for example, declared that “Christians should be kind to Jews” not merely because Christianity required kindness but because Jews and Christians had a relationship approximating kinship.\textsuperscript{15}

As the cultural narrative of the United States as the defender of moral law and freedom in the world reinvigorated American identity, Jews, symbolically if not actually linked to Old Testament religion, found themselves ever more welcomed participants in the national community. For example, Truman praised the Rabbinical Society of America for contributing to the “development as a Nation and to the furtherance our international objectives.”\textsuperscript{16} In turn, Jews themselves became more thoroughly “American” than ever before. Much like Billy Graham or Cardinal Francis Spellman, Rabbi Jacob Polish lamented the “the deterioration of the moral fiber of our country”.\textsuperscript{17} In the late 1940s, Jews suddenly became free to claim their Jewishness not just “by virtue of” their
adaptation to the “American Way of Life,” as Will Herberg argued, but also because Jewishness suddenly seemed much more American.\textsuperscript{18}

Roman Catholics also found themselves newly empowered in the post war period largely thanks to the shifting cultural discourse of national identity. Mirroring leading fundamentalists and Jewish leaders, figures such as Spellman and Bishop Fulton Sheen anxiously worried about a decline in collective righteousness and preached extensively on moral issues. As Catholic Dr. William R. O’Connor stated, because the “influence of religion wanes . . . the nation is facing an army of six-million criminals.”\textsuperscript{19} To combat such moral ills, in 1946 Catholics started a Commission on American Citizenship that met annually for “the teaching of better citizenship in the Catholic schools.”\textsuperscript{20} The emphasis on “American” citizenship was also plain in a 1952 National Catholic Youth Week poster that appeared in red, white, and blue and depicted a white outline of the United States completely overshadowed by a large cross. Capturing the race and gender discourse of American identity, a white, seemingly heterosexual couple looked confidently into the future. Truman wished the conference “success in bringing six million young persons . . . a stronger determination to render ever faithful service to God and country.”\textsuperscript{21}

John Water’s documentary \textit{Faith and Freedom} (1946) captured the essence of the ability of Roman Catholics and Jews to move to the mainstream of U.S. culture. The film celebrated the official dedication of St. Robert Bellarmine-Jefferson School, a high school in southern California whose name betokened the tone of the film. In school, the film declared, “the children learn that it is the American way to believe in God.” The 1945 cornerstone of the school contained an image of the cross wrapped in the star of
David. The architecture of the chapel building, the film noted, represents “the protection which America gives the Christian and Judean conscience” as “the American eagle and the shield are shown guarding the cross and the tablets of the law.” Each school day opened with ritual drum beating as students carried the American flag to the flag pole. Emblazoned on the pole’s base was a large cross, the star of David, and several Bible texts, and all this imagery was in turn encompassed by Thomas Jefferson’s infamous “inalienable rights” quote. “The star of David and the cross, combined with the flag of America, represents the solidarity and dignity of man” and “in this ritual for better understanding the soul of America, these Catholic children salute their fellow Americans” the film claimed.22

Amid the postwar clamor for a return to religion, fundamentalists, like neo-orthodox realists, discovered they could not control the flow of power as Americans migrated to significations that could reinvigorate the national community. To be sure, evangelical revivalism surged. But religion itself soon came to be the primary signifier of what it meant to be an American. As political commentator Peter Viereck put it in the pages of Harper’s, “Protestant, Catholic, or Jew,” all three were “within the same ethical and historical framework” and “a total crisis - moral, cultural, and political, requires not only action but universal principles for action.”23 “Anti-religion is virtually meaningless to most Americans . . . who simply cannot understand how one can be ‘against religion,’” Herberg noted in 1955.24

Despite the relatively empowered position of Catholics and Jews, the type of acceptable religion remained constrained largely by fundamentalist discourse, rendering religious groups and organizations not deploying moral law discourse sometimes
peripheral and often discriminated against. For example, in 1948, the Reverend Henrietta Young of the National Spiritualists Association complained to the White House that one of her fellow pastors from the Association’s Church of Psychic Light was arrested in Los Angeles for fortune-telling. Young demanded to know if “under the Bill of Rights, and the right to practice religious freedom, whether we actually do or do not have the privilege of worshipping God as our Constitution prescribes?”25 In another case, Philip Eidman, a war veteran “totally disabled and confined for life to a wheelchair,” wondered whether his sacrifice had been “made in vain” since “it was to maintain freedom that we fought this terrible war.” “Today,” he protested, “religious freedom is being denied to loyal American citizens in the state of Utah” where “some fifteen stalwart Americans have suffered incarceration rather than abandon fundamental principles of their faith.”26

In essence, the increasing hegemony of the righteous nation narrative allowed Catholics, Jews, fundamentalists, and orthodox-leaning Protestants significant cultural space as it invoked the discourses of morality and freedom. In 1941, the National Conference of Christians and Jews labeled Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism the “religions of democracy,” a grouping that together “repudiates all forms of tyranny.”27 During the war, these groups coalesced around a “declaration on world peace.” Signed by 47 Catholic clergy and laity, 47 rabbis and laity, and 50 leading Protestants, the declaration’s first principle stated that “the moral law must govern the world order,” specifically the “moral law which comes from God.”28

During the immediate postwar years, the turn to religion in all its forms - whether in renascent religious modernist good neighbourism, neo-orthodox realist “unjust aggressor” discourse, or in the fundamentalist language of morality - aided the religious
triumvirate of Jews, Catholics, and Protestants. Industrialist Greg Van Syoc, for instance, hoped Truman would “call in the heads of the Jewish, Catholic and Protestant churches and ask them to carry back to the people . . . the people’s responsibility for daily prayer.” Similarly, the Good Housekeeping Club’s program for “returning to religion” in 1946 contained only four messages, one from president Truman and the other three from a Catholic, a Jew, and a Protestant. In an unabashed elision of the pervasive anti-Semitism that characterized much of American history, the United Church Canvass hoped to “strengthen our spiritual heritage” by giving “our Churches and Synagogues the backing they need.”

The renascent righteous nation narrative shaped decisively the American approach to the world, an “approach” that amounted to nothing more than the constitution of the narrative. Just as the fruition of the Marshall Plan reflected the solidification of moral law discourse in the national identity symbolizing structure, U.S. policy on Palestine also dramatically shifted within religious narratives of national identity. As discussed in Chapter 4, at the 1938 Evian conference the United States refused to discuss Palestine as a potential site for Jewish immigration. By 1946, however, Kermit Roosevelt fretted about the danger to Palestinian Arabs if the changing course of U.S. policy continued. Writing in Harper’s, Roosevelt framed the problem within decidedly internationalist discourse, arguing that “to support the Zionist program in its present form (as we seem inclined to do) will inevitably lead to a tragedy on the same scale as that the Jews have suffered in Europe during the last decade.” He claimed that “only by taking account of Arab as well as Jewish rights can we reach a solution that will work and that will be in line with our American traditions of justice and democracy.”
But in the wake of the war, Truman and many other Americans viewed Jewish claims to the “holy land” sympathetically and launched efforts to help Jewish refugees by promoting the partition of Palestine. According to *Christianity and Crisis*, “Almost everybody in America is anxious to help the Jews, who have suffered so much during the past decade.” When warned by Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal in 1946 that such a policy might jeopardize U.S.-Arab relations and that “if another war came along we would need the oil in Saudi Arabia,” Truman remained determined “to handle this problem not from the standpoint of bringing in oil but from the standpoint of what is right.”

The question of partition festered in the United Nations throughout 1947 before coming to a head in May 1948 when word emerged that a coalition of Jews verged on declaring a new state of “Israel” on the mostly Arab territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. At the highest levels of U.S. policy making, religious discourse shaped the discussion about whether to grant recognition to the potential “state.” Within these conversations, residual neighborly internationalist discourse persisted, particularly through the impassioned voices of Under Secretary of State Robert Lovett and Secretary of State George Marshall. When Clark Clifford indicated in a high level meeting at the White House on May 12 that recognition would shore up Truman’s support among Jewish voters, Lovett and Marshall protested vociferously that the matter still lay before the United Nations and that “the United States in fact was a member of the Security Council’s Truce Commission on Palestine.” Marshall forcefully argued that “the problem which confronted us was international” and not one of “domestic political considerations.” Lovett castigated recognition as a “unilateral act” that “would be highly
injurious to the United Nations” and “most unbecoming” for the United States, especially “in light of our activities to secure a truce.” In other words, the internationalist image of the United States seemed very much at stake.

Marshall and Lovett soon found themselves countermanded, however, as by 1948 a fundamentalist narrative of the United States increasingly empowered alternative religious discourses. To be sure, domestic politics played some role, especially in the machinations of political advisors such as Clifford. And while it is difficult to pin down exactly how much fundamentalist discourse made recognition seem implicitly like the “right” policy, it may only be discounted by ignoring a broader cultural context that increasingly celebrated Old Testament moral law in particular, and Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religion in general.

Given the cultural framework, what reflexive response could Truman possibly have had to Chaim Weizmann’s request for recognition of the new “Israel” which was maintaining “law and order,” “defending . . . against external aggression,” and “discharging the obligations” of a state “to other nations of the world in accordance with international law”? After an affirmative U.S. reply to Weizmann on May 14, an embarrassed American UN ambassador discovered his nation had granted diplomatic recognition to Israel even as he led the United States in partition negotiations at the U.N. in New York. Despite blatant disregard for the so-called international community, a few days later, Truman averred confidently, “I am more convinced than ever that we followed the right course.” The words of Time best described the unconscious identity imaginary at work: “The new state of Israel was born on ancient Judah’s soil.”
By July, it seemed axiomatic that the United States had a vested interest in aiding the fledgling state. Sumner Welles, for instance, angrily complained that although “we have now recognized the State of Israel . . . the establishment of that independent state was until the last moment impeded by American policy.” Particularly incensed over perceived U.S. inactivity in the face of rising Arab resistance to Jewish land claims, Welles castigated the United States for waiting so long before “attempting, within the United Nations, to find a way by which the aggression of the Arab states against Israel may now, at last, be halted.” Of course, he added, “for many months we never even admitted that such notorious aggression in fact existed, and by our Arms Embargo we have made it infinitely more difficult for the Jewish people of Palestine to defend themselves.” Welles bitterly concluded that “as Americans we cannot fail to recognize that our Government’s policy toward Palestine has been devoid of vision and principle.”

Welles revealed the inherent preoccupation of policy with the constitution of the “self” (nation) rather than with any pre-given set of strategic or economic interests: “I know of no chapter in the history of American foreign policy for which we Americans have more just reason to be ashamed,” he lamented.39

The U.S. destruction of United Nations’ partition efforts also reflected the broader migration of the imagined community toward a fundamentalist identity narrative that increasingly framed the Soviet Union as the solitary enemy regardless of geographic or geopolitical circumstances. In January, for example, George Kennan’s Policy Planning Staff argued that “if Soviet forces should be introduced into Palestine for the purpose of implementing partition, Communist agents would have an excellent base from which to extend their subversive activities, to disseminate propaganda, and to attempt to replace
the present Arab governments.” Of course, “the Soviet Union might prefer to have U.S. forces bear the brunt of enforcement and incur the odium of the local population and Moslems everywhere as a result.” Then again, the Soviet Union might attempt to sow “dissention and discord” by “supplying arms not only to Jews but to the Arabs.”

Reflecting the contingent, constructed nature of the Soviet threat, the brief finally conceded, “There is no way of telling in exactly what manner the USSR will attempt to turn partition to its advantage” but “it must be assumed . . . that Moscow will actively endeavor to find some means of exploiting the opportunity.”

Although the Soviet enemy other conditioned discussions about Palestine, events in Europe soon took center stage in the imaginary of U.S. identity once more. In February-March 1948, communists took over the Czechoslovakian government by force. Initially the State Department wished to “avoid a showdown on this issue with the Soviet Union” and to “continue to act merely as a loyal member of the S[ecURITY] C[OUNCIL], stating our views frankly . . . without attempting to persuade others to see the case with our eyes.”

But mirroring the shifting cultural terrain of American identity, Truman asserted that “the tragic death of the Republic of Czechoslovakia has sent a shock throughout the civilized world” and these “recent developments in Europe present this Nation with fundamental issues of vital importance.” Truman added that the Czech coup demonstrated “that we have reached a point at which the position of the United States should be made unmistakably clear.”

But what “position,” exactly, did the Czech crisis clarify? According to Truman, Americans continued to “hope for the eventual establishment of the rule of law in international affairs” and desired to uphold the United Nations “Charter” which
represented “the basic expression of the code of international ethics to which this country is dedicated.” And such dedication could be known by refusing to “close our eyes to the harsh fact that through obstruction and even defiance on the part of one nation, this great dream has not yet become a full reality.”

Framing the Czechoslovak crisis in the language of international law and morality, Americans assured themselves of their own moral position and cemented the Soviet Union as the immoral enemy other. In this light, it became increasingly intolerable to lend any support to the violator of international ethics and the United States effectively cut off the Soviet Union from west German goods in May when it implemented currency reform. In response to American economic intervention against Soviet interests in central Europe, the Soviet Union blockaded western Berlin in June.

The stand off over Berlin crystallized the struggle between moral freedom and immoral tyranny. For example, the usually circumspect Catholic periodical Commonweal declared, “Berlin is the most important point in the contest between Russia and the rest of the world” which was determined “to stick by moral and political principles.” It urged Americans to “pray that Russia has not frozen on war” and would not “attack the armies and air forces and navies and peoples of countries resolved that they shall not submit to the slavery of her evil regime.” And for more than a year the United States and its satellites flew food, fuel, and supplies into Berlin, a policy the National Security Council (NSC) determined to pursue “wholeheartedly” as “a symbol of American determination” rather than out of any overriding strategic calculus.

By the end of 1948, a fundamentalist narrative of the United States as not only the defender of morality and law, but as the protector of religion itself pervaded American
culture; the world once more appeared divided between the forces of good and evil. *Time*
triumphanty recounted how “under savage and provocative Russian pressure in Berlin,
the U.S. refused to abandon Europe's helpless peoples,” concluding that “the last trace of
doubt about the nature of the enemy had disappeared.”48 By “knowing” the “nature” of
the enemy, Americans celebrated the national self. Truman, for instance, avowed that
while the United States “holds out the hand of fellowship to all,” Americans could never
“accept the teaching that religion is unnecessary; that Christianity is untrue.” “As a
Christian nation,” he continued, the United States “prays that all moral forces of the
world will unite their strength.”49

Between 1948 and 1952, a renascent righteous nation narrative once more
achieved cultural hegemony as it reinvigorated the imagined community. Predicated on
fundamentalist discourse that incorporated Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, the righteous
nation at the end of the decade celebrated “religion” as the basis of the nation and
endeavored to save the world from a godless enemy. “Atheistic Communism,” the
Catholics Bishops of the United States declared, “stands out plainly today as the force
which, through violence and chicanery, is obstructing the establishment of a right
juridical order in the international community.”50 “We are fated as a generation to live in
the insecurity which this universal evil of communism creates for our world,” Niebuhr
wrote.51

In 1948 Truman heartily approved the Layman’s Movement for a Christian
World, arguing that Americans “for more than a decade” had witnessed “the forces of
evil engaged in a struggle to banish religion and freedom from the face of the earth.” In
this supernatural battle “the Christian religion is an everlasting reality” that “constitutes a
spiritual force before which the legions of atheistic communism must eventually go down to defeat,” Truman proclaimed. “The spirit of man will not be enslaved. Religion alone will set men free.”

Americans particularly castigated the Soviet Union’s attack on religious freedom. In 1949, Acheson railed against “the series of steps taken by the present regime in Czechoslovakia during the past year to undermine religious faith” and declared that such “measures violate the rights of conscience” and “ignore the religious freedom which should be an inalienable right of the Czechoslovak people.” The religious restrictions in Czechoslovakia appeared “in accordance with the system prevailing in the satellite states of Eastern Europe to suppress freedom of religion.” In essence, the actions of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union affronted the United Nations’ Charter, Acheson argued. He asserted, “The tyrannous domination of religious organizations by the police State are clearly . . . deplored by the Government and people of the United States.”

To Frank Greene of Kentucky, “the forces of evil are certainly growing and enlarging” and the United States, the only, “last bastion of religious freedom, needs God’s protecting hand badly.”

Tellingly, American reaction to the Soviet Union’s detonation of an atomic bomb in late 1949 was relatively nonchalant; Americans had, after all, already cast the Soviet Union as a godless, evil enemy pursuing every available weapon in its war on religion, freedom, and morality. “This is no surprise to anybody,” Acheson averred in a press conference shortly after the explosion. In Commonweal, the Soviet achievement took a back seat to the A&P anti-trust case and the importance of the farm vote in electoral politics. “Public reaction to the news was . . . unemotional,” the journal maintained.
Christianity and Crisis observed that “It is to the credit of both government and people that this announcement was received without signs of panic.” Of course, the bi-weekly added, “the Communist movement has more effective weapons than the atomic bomb,” especially its method of insidiously conquering “whole nations by promises and propaganda.”

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, many Americans believed their nation to be in a death grapple with godless, Satanic evil. In Los Angeles, Billy Graham proclaimed that “the world is divided into two sides:” while “Western culture and its fruit had its foundation in the Bible . . . Communism has decided against God, against Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion.” Graham pontificated further: “Communism is a religion that is inspired, directed and motivated by the Devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God.” Niebuhr agreed with Graham’s sentiments, urging Americans to be wary of “the noxious demonry of this world wide secular religion.” Acheson, meanwhile, paid “tribute” to AFL President William Green’s observation that Americans “are familiar with [Communism’s] boundless criminality” and its “godless purposes.” Jack Fellows of Central Baptist Theological Seminary noted that “there are two ideologies fighting for survival in our world.” One was “Communism and rule by force, the other Christianity and rule by freedom.”

By viewing religion as the source of freedom, and freedom as signifier of the righteous practice of religion, Americans increasingly emphasized both freedom and religion as the righteous nation’s best weapon against its godless enemies. For example, Assistant Attorney General Alexander Campbell argued that the Soviet Union “may either be crushed by the armies of the Christian world, or be convinced by argument and
inspiration that the true way of life is the way of free men whose individual liberties are preserved by the laws of God.” He condemned the “Godless drive” of communism and the “forces of brutality and unmortality (sic)” as the fruits of those who “follow blindly a pagan leadership.” He warned that unless Americans “stress togetherness . . . between Catholics, Jews and Protestants,” the United States “shall lose one of the most critical, spiritual and moral battles in our nation’s history.” Of course, “the principles of Christianity will spear-head our activity.” Finally, reminding Americans of World War II, Alexander declared that “A voice from the tomb of the Unknown Soldier cries out - The Crusade for a Christian World Marches On.”

Alexander’s speech reflected the broader cultural discourse linking religion, freedom, and national identity. “We believe that “This Nation Under God” can be a Christian Democracy,” United Church Women declared. “Therefore we will live democracy in our hometown everyday.”64 “Teach Religion - Make Men Free!” The Presbyterian Outlook blared in 1951.65 The National Council of Churches avidly pursued its program for “Religion in America Life,” hoping “to bring to the attention of all Americans the importance of religious institutions – Protestant, Catholic and Jewish.”66 Reverend Walter Molek of Pittsburgh begged Truman to “rebuke those who capitalized on religious prejudice” because “religious dissension is what the Communists want.” The White House response assured him that Truman “has fought religious prejudice vigorously” and understood the “need for the churches to get together in a united campaign against godless communism.”67

Long having triumphed over modernism, and as heavily invested in their national identity as other Americans, fundamentalists also focused on religion and freedom as the
essence of the nation. “With its perverted logic, its diabolical cunning, its enslavement of
the human mind and spirit and with . . . the destruction of the body as well as the soul,
communism is our No. 1 enemy,” Ernest R. Bryan told the Christian Endeavor
Convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan. At the same gathering, Graham told a youth
audience that the United States was “faced with a fanatical religion that is dedicated to
destroy Christianity. To win the battle against Communism we have got to become as
fanatical as the Communists over our belief in Christ. There is no hope to defeat
Communism save through God.” Daniel Poling worried that the United States seemed to
be failing “to get over to the peoples of the earth the significance of the four words on the
coin, “In God we trust.” In those words is the opportunity to unite the peoples of the earth
who would escape the bondage of Communism,” he maintained.68 As the American
Council of Churches intoned, Americans “should not tolerate any complacency toward
communism” or “its atheism” because “freedom cannot be compromised in any way” and
it is “the Ten Commandments upon which our free social order rests.”69

The cultural hegemony of the righteous nation narrative sharply limned the
boundaries of national identity, engendering a political and social violence on those
deemed “un-American.” Because being “American” implicitly meant being religious and
because communism philosophically excluded religion, the slightest scent of communist
leanings - whether one preached Marxism on street corners or merely desired to help the
materially less fortunate - signaled an “un-American.” In a 1949 national radio broadcast,
the president of the American Council of Churches, Dr. W. O. H. Garman, asserted that
“our precious freedoms have . . . been the object of subtle, vicious, and relentless attack”
and the “enemies are right within our gates, boring from within to make America the easy
prey of those evil forces which have already succeeded in depriving nearly half the
people of the world of their liberty and their property.” Garman worried that Americans
“have been drifting far from their ancient moorings,” especially their “Christian heritage
and . . . Bible-inspired freedoms.”

Fascism, formerly the evil enemy of righteous democracy, suddenly seemed less
problematic. Americans “must now make fascism an ally to stop communism,” the
American Council explained. In a spoof article on “how not to get investigated” for
communist leanings, Harper’s denigrated the shifting cultural landscape. With bitter but
revealing sarcasm the monthly magazine proposed “Ten Commandments for government
employees.” Commandment number nine stated, “Do not yourself be unduly critical of
Fascists or Nazis, and carefully avoid the company of those who have been outspoken on
these subjects.”

As postwar culture increasingly cast an “American” as a religiously-oriented anti-
communist, fascist leaning figures formerly marginalized gradually returned to public
life. Released from prison in 1950, William Dudley Pelley actively pursued his anti-
communism, this time without the vociferous anti-Semitism that had accompanied his
earlier politics. Similarly, Gerald Winrod, tried for sedition during the wartime “Brown
Scare,” returned to Kansas rejoicing that the House Un-American Activities Committee
(HUAC) had finally joined the battle against the communist menace he had warned of
since the late 1930s. Reflecting the broader emphasis on religion, Winrod’s anti-
Semitism remained muted and his periodical, the Defender, even added a Catholic
columnist because the struggle against communism required a “united religious front.”
Fundamentalists that persisted in public anti-Semitic leanings such as Gerald L. K. Smith, however, found themselves unable to gain much cultural traction.\textsuperscript{73}

The fortunes of peripheral fundamentalists such as Pelley, Winrod, and Smith reflected the shifting flow of power that resulted from cultural discourse emphasizing the evils of communism. In 1947, the Catechetical Guild Educational Society put out a lengthy cartoon-based pamphlet titled “Is This Tomorrow?” The title page depicted a massive fire engulfing the U.S. flag and a seemingly innocent American being choked by a swarthy, disheveled man, implicitly a communist. Equally disturbing, the picture also imaged a uniformed military figure forcefully arresting a robed man that might readily be taken for religious leader. Underneath the flames and violent assaults was the caption, “American Under Communism.” The message of the pamphlet is clear throughout: if communism managed to take over the United States, religion, especially Christianity, would be its first victim. When the leader of the victorious American communist movement is killed at the end of the cartoon, another takes over declaring, “Communism does not depend on any one man - it is an idea of government which plans to rule the world.” To prevent such a catastrophe “Is This Tomorrow” urged its readers to “fight communism with” the “Ten Commandments of citizenship,” including “Practice your own religion” and “Be American first.”\textsuperscript{74}

Communism’s apparent threat to religion invoked dire warnings throughout American culture. In its pamphlet \textit{100 Things You Should Know About Communism and Religion}, HUAC asserted that “Communists mark down religion as Enemy No. 1.” The tract warned Americans that Communism sought to demolish the “moral code rooted in religion” and would destroy the Bible as well (at least “every copy they could find”).
Under Communism “only atheistic views could be distributed,” 100 Things argued, and in the Soviet Union, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and “Jews have been suppressed . . . harshly” and virtually “crushed.” Finally, the pamphlet turned to the domestic threat, vilifying publications such as The Protestant “which fanatically spreads Communist propaganda under the guise of being a religious journal.” In the words of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover, “So long as Communists are able to secure ministers of the gospel to promote their evil work and espouse a cause that is alien to the religion of Christ and Judaism,” the United States lay in danger.75

Anti-communism also remained predicated on the tropes of “individualism” and the “right to private property,” ostensibly the primary components of “liberty” and “freedom.” Whereas modernist discourse emphasized equitable wealth distribution and both private and state organized alleviation of economic oppression, fundamentalist discourse (as discussed in the last chapter) exalted personal “ownership” as a Biblically ordained “right.” Consequently, when Henry Wallace attempted to stave off marginalization by declaring that “the life of Christ is strangely parallel to the doctrines of Communism” he revealed a personal failure to grasp that while fundamentalism still claimed the divinity of Christ at a doctrinal level, its discourse largely deployed Old Testament language and imagery.76 The Christian Beacon, for instance, railed against the notion that “private property can be socialized and communized” since “the right of property, private property . . . is one of the human rights which the Ten Commandments guarantee under the eighth commandment, “Thou shall not steal.”” The Beacon printed an editorial cartoon the same week titled “Neither Christian nor American” depicting a
swarthy, overalled (farmer?) man with a sickle, labeled “Controlled Economy,” stabbing “Individual Liberty,” portrayed as a white man in a suit and tie.\textsuperscript{77}

The discourse of “private property” animated anti-communism more broadly as well. For example, Sam Silver of the National Theater’s “Song of Norway” Company wrote to the White House that “the biggest jackass in all history is Judas Iscariot who sold Christ for a few pieces of silver.” But “now, in 1947, develops a bigger jackass, the American Communist who would sell the Spirit of 1776 for the Spirit of Russian Communism.” Silver even penned a short poem to illustrate his point:

\begin{quote}
An American Communist is a lazy spirit, 
fired with propaganda zeal, 
in order to reach his goal, 
TO GET SOMETHING FOR NOTHING.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

Ben Hyde, a small-time landlord from Arizona echoed Silver’s concerns about communism’s threat to private wealth. Although he applauded the “steps president Truman has recently taken to rid our country of Communism,” Hyde suggested the government could more effectively complete the task by getting rid of the Office of Price Administration. He enclosed a picture of himself standing next to the office door of his apartment building with a shotgun conspicuously coddled in his arms. On the door hung a sign that read, “Vacancy. But not for rent under the current Communistic OPA.”\textsuperscript{79}

The rifle Hyde carried in his hands intimated the violent reaction many Americans exhibited toward anything remotely linked to Communism. When Russian-born Shura Lewis gave a talk at a Washington, D.C. high school in 1947 describing the Soviet Union’s public health care program, lack of racial discrimination, and open education system, several students stalked out, some audience members made demonstrations of
their allegiance to “Americanism,” numerous mothers phoned in their protests, the
District Superintendent of Schools professed that the “very unfortunate occurrence [had]
shocked the whole school system,” and Congress became involved trying to stem the tide
of Communism that had obviously infiltrated the D.C. educational system.80 In the same
year, Truman launched his loyalty program for federal employees, effectively creating
backed loyalty boards to vet communist “traitors” to the nation.81 Many Americans such
as Presbyterian minister Wayne Wiman praised Truman’s “stand against communistic
doctrine being taught in the United States.”82 Even Harper’s, much more serious by this
point, featured a lengthy article on how best “to rid the government of communists.”83

In the late 1940s, the U.S. government conducted a courtroom war that effectively
destroyed the Communist Party in the United States. In early 1948, the FBI
recommended that Attorney General Tom Clark use the Smith Act of 1940 to combat the
political arm of Communism’s infiltration of America. The Smith Act, a peace-time law
suppressing freedom of speech, emerged during the interventionist debate prior to Pearl
Harbor. In 1948, the U.S. government charged eleven leading Communist Party members
under the Act and in late 1949 a jury took only a solitary day to find them all guilty.
Interestingly, like Henry Wallace, the defense team invoked Sermon on the Mount
imagery when it declared, “If these prosecutors were contemporaries of Jesus they would
have Jesus in the dock.” But the defendants misunderstood the fundamentalist nature of
religious discourse. Indeed, after sentencing ten of the eleven defendants to five years in
jail each, Americans acclaimed judge Harold Medina a national hero, showering him with
5,000 letters of praise. Lead prosecutor John McGohey found himself promoted to federal
judge. Two years later the Supreme Court upheld the decision by a six to two vote. By
1952, the Communist Party was financially bankrupt and no longer could be considered a functional political organization.84

The war waged by the U.S. government on domestic communism mirrored the one-sided struggle in the broader culture. In essence, the righteous nation narrative rendered being “anti-communist” a leading marker of being “American.” This was particularly true because those narratives established their own cohesive validity through the very acts of political and social violence against the “enemy” on which they were predicated. For example, Harper’s observed that the “communists are valuable” because they forced Americans to be vigilant in defense of their freedoms. Although “what we are confronting in communism is an idea against which the sword is useless,” the periodical explained, it nevertheless “must be opposed . . . resolutely.”85 In one instance, an eighth grade student wrote to the White House wondering, “What qualities should we eighth grade pupils try to develop so that we can contribute something to our democracy? What can we do that will help us to be citizens who will fight communism?”86

Since communism remained conceptually linked to atheism, religion became ever more deeply entrenched in the imaginary of U.S. identity. In 1951 Southern Baptists hoped “to contribute to a spiritual awakening in our nation” through a “crusade . . . based . . . largely on the grounds of loyalty to our nation.” Through their efforts “to meet error with truth,” Southern Baptists desired to demonstrate “that Christianity is the answer to the philosophies of communism.”87 Truman praised their efforts and urged other groups to confront “the challenge of world communism” and to help in whatever way they could to “stem the tide of Godless materialism which the imperialists of the Kremlin have launched.”88
Americans eagerly rallied to the battle cry. The International Society of Christian Endeavor responded with a Crusade for Christian Citizenship designed specifically “to make a notable contribution in the fight against communism.”89 In 1952, Truman warmly welcomed to the White House prize winners from the Anti-Communist Citizens Drive.90 John Crowe of Los Angeles discovered a local roofing company distributing brochures celebrating the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Emotionally overwhelmed, he fervently wrote, “May God bless and prosper all such Americans, who are concerned enough to spread pro American propaganda to counteract and antidote the deluge of red subversion so cunningly being spread by red atheists and fifth columnists.”91 Although some Americans, such as White House aide Stephen Spingarn, bemoaned the rapidly growing “crusade or holy war entirely devoted to attacking Communism,” there was little he or anyone else could do to arrest it.92

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Americans conducted a domestic campaign of intolerance and even death against their internal enemies. In 1947, HUAC commenced hearings into Communist influence in Hollywood, and in 1948 it began probing the U.S. government to uncover signs of Communist infiltration. Reflecting the trajectory of the nation more broadly, Whittaker Chambers, a communist sympathizer in the 1930s turned virtually evangelical Christian by the late 1940s, charged highly placed government official Alger Hiss with treachery on behalf of the Soviet Union. He ignited a long and eagerly anticipated firestorm of anti-communist vitriol.93

The righteous nation identity narrative provided the cultural space that empowered as “truth” any insinuation of “communist” sympathies; a society that had virtually obliterated “actual” communists from its presence consequently reached the
height of its phobia. Briefly, virulent anti-communism served to obscure the “lack” at the heart of collective social identity (the essential non-existence of the imagined community). Anti-communism also elided the self-contradiction that inheres in the ability of an identity structure to exist: in this case, that a divinely chosen nation commissioned to save the world by an omnipotent God could somehow be obstructed by a pithy, atheistic dogma. Rabid anti-communism occluded another contradiction that would certainly vex any “American”: if being an “American” implied an ever greater (and therefore always impossible) righteousness, religiousness, and loyalty, no one appeared more loyal, doctrinally sound, and zealous than the “Communist” enemy other, an “Other” whose desirous gaze upon “American” freedom, religion, and morality allowed millions of human beings to assume the subject position “American.” And so the less verifiable the presence of the desiring “Other” became, the more ardently Americans searched for it.94

Consequently, in 1950 Americans enthusiastically welcomed the baseless insinuations and innuendos repeatedly made by Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy, accusations that in another era (in other words, under an alternative hegemonic narrative) they might have indifferently ignored, or perhaps even shunned in favor of some other enemy, such as Nazi fifth-columnists or Arab terrorists. The phenomenon known as “McCarthyism” wreaked havoc on the lives of numerous Americans. Even Acheson came under suspicion, so much so that in 1951 Lyle Wilson from the United Press asked him if he planned to resign in the face of a “lack of confidence in the Department” throughout the nation.95
McCarthyism represented the cultural hegemony of the fundamentalist narrative of American identity. Specifically accusing wealthy elites from the State Department of being traitors, McCarthy proclaimed that the United States was “engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity” and that “the modern champions of communism have selected this as the time.” Casualties of the “all-out battle” included Americans such as Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, condemned to death in 1952 on suspicions of spying for the Soviet Union. In the words of Judge Kaufman, they deserved their punishment equally for “devoting themselves to the Russian ideology of denial of God.”

Ironically, Americans that had represented the leading edge of the postwar righteous nation narrative by the early 1950s found themselves relatively powerless in the face of a hegemonic cultural narrative. Truman, for instance, professed shock at hearing “a Senator trying to discredit his own Government before the world,” castigated the “pathological liar now in the U.S. Senate from Wisconsin” for “going along with the Kremlin,” and found himself objecting that, no, he was not a socialist. Kennan, meanwhile, protested the “tendency among us to go whole hog, to assume that all our troubles stem from this single source, and to conclude that we have only to eliminate it from our society and everything will be all right.” Although Niebuhr remained a rabid attacker of communists well into 1952, by the end of the following year he had come to regret his much of his earlier anti-communist behavior. He even labeled the execution of the Rosenbergs a “moral” mistake. But long before high voltage electricity boiled the treacherous brains of the Rosenbergs at Sing Sing, the nation had turned its attention
outside its borders, reinvigorating its identity and mission once more through violent confrontation with an evil, godless enemy.

The staging of the righteous nation narrative drove the United States to embrace violence for the defense of religion, freedom, and morality. As with the dispensing of religious modernism, neo-orthodox realist discourse played a significant role in the transformation of American culture from inscribing a good neighbor image through non-intervention to enacting righteousness through violence. In 1948, “realist” commentator John Crosby Brown called for a more articulate “Christian philosophy of force” and praised “American rearmament” as “clear Christian thinking.” The editors of Christianity and Crisis agreed, declaring that “this journal . . . has never questioned but that physical force is constantly necessary in the struggle with the evil forces of the world.”

World War II cemented the use of physical violence as necessary for the defense of righteousness and “freedom.” As discussed in Chapter 6, in many cases the violence of the war resulted from the widely held belief that the United States dispensed justice on immoral, wicked enemies. But the religious cultural context had shifted as well. For example, prior to the war, the National Bible Institute’s logo that appeared on The Bible Today depicted a benign, almost educational type building judiciously set in the middle of the world. During the war, the Institute changed the logo to a picture of Jesus holding an open Bible and guiding an armor clad warrior, with sword raised, out into the world away from the Western hemisphere. Underneath the image, the phrase “Training Christian Warriors” now appeared.

More significantly, however, the use of violence emerged as part of the particular logic of fundamentalist discourse that emphasized moral righteousness and Old
Testament based theology. For example, in 1939 Carl McIntire complained bitterly, “Modernists tell us, perverting the Sermon on the Mount, that the Lord Jesus Christ taught that under no circumstances were men to fight.” But, McIntire countered, “when the conflict is between right and tyranny, between liberty and death to the human race,” then “the Scripture recognizes the right of . . . what we may call a just war.” The evidence for this was in “the Ten Commandments, the law of God” which “not only applies to individuals and their conduct, but also to the conduct of nations.” Extrapolating from his interpretation of Old Testament law, McIntire further decided that “sometimes even the defense takes on the appearance of an aggressiveness” because “nations may appear even to be aggressors when they know that the enemy has designs and purposes.” Of course, McIntire disclaimed, it was “a sad thing . . . that Christians must go at times to defend their very existence, to defend the liberties and the privileges which God in His providence has given to them under their flag and in their land.”

The entrenchment of a national identity narrative rooted in fundamentalist discourse allowed physical violence to become broadly accepted as a solution to international problems. By the early 1950s, for example, the “prevailing opinion in the leadership of the National Council” agreed on “the necessity of military strength to serve as a deterrent to aggression.” As Truman told the National Convention of Methodist Youth, the United States was “laboring to build in our world the temple of peace” and “around that temple we shall throw the protecting walls of international law and justice supported by international power.” Invoking Old Testament language and imagery, he warned that “as we labor to raise these ramparts in our disturbed world,” it was necessary
that Americans “like Nehemiah’s builders of old . . . keep our swords ready by our sides lest, as the Scripture warns, “the enemy come upon us and cause the work to cease.””

As a fundamentalist narrative of identity gained hegemony, pacifism, a leading signifier within modernist discourse, became intolerable. Harry Vaughan, an army general and aid to president Truman, believed it to be “reasonably correct” that Quakers who were “all conscientious objectors” were “hypocritical as hell” and maintained an “Americanism” similar “to Alger Hiss.” Similarly, Truman claimed to respect conscientious objectors who still wanted to “serve” in the armed forces, but insisted that “plain cowards and shirkers” would not “escape retributive justice.” More tellingly, after a 1948 appointment with several representatives of the Presbyterian Church, Truman declared the he was finally “glad to meet some ministers who were not pacifist.” As the president explained in the wake of the Czechoslovakian coup, “we cannot meet our international responsibilities unless we maintain our armed forces.”

During the Berlin blockade several months later, Commonweal conceded somewhat regretfully that “Government, and the means and arms of government, must envision violence; they must accept war . . . in this fallen world.” In 1950 professor of religion Vernon Holloway noted the sharp decline in pacifism and predicted that “modern pacifism, which endeavored to substitute morals for politics, or to equate Gandhi’s political shrewdness with the Cross of Christ, may expect to meet greater difficulties.”

Holloway was right, and the militarization of containment occurred as Americans came to accept violence as a necessary means for combating the enemies of religion and freedom. In 1947, Congress passed the National Security Act, a massive organizational and economic endeavor that created the Department of Defense, the NSC, and the Central
Intelligence Agency. Significantly, these three monoliths, ostensibly constructed to enable the United States to “know” as much about the enemy as possible, simultaneously inscribed the existence of the threatening “other” by their sheer magnitude and task.

Finally, the Act also cemented “air power” as a vital component of national “defense;” it specifically favored the development of B-36 atomic bombing planes, perhaps a reflection of what McIntire described as defense taking “on the appearance of an aggressiveness.”

The inscription of the enemy as an oppositional, threatening power that needed to be met with “force” occurred especially through increasing U.S. emphasis on demonstrating military power. According to one State Department memorandum in 1948, the Soviet Union “underestimated the temper of Congress and the American people.” It consequently recommended “concrete evidence of American determination to resist further Communist encroachment” by the Soviet Union, a “colossus” deviously “counting on the slowness and uncertainty of American reaction” as it engaged in the deceptive tactics of “internal fifth-column aggression.” In the face of such a dire threat, “a general stiffening of morale in free Europe is needed, and it can only from action by this country.”

Staging itself as the champion of the “free” against an insidious enemy occurred especially through declarations that the nation required a large military capability. For example, in July 1948 the NSC argued that through “military assistance” to all “nations of the non-Soviet world” the United States could arrest “the forces of Soviet directed world communism” by helping to “strengthen the moral and material resistance of the free nations.” The NSC report reveals “foreign policy” as an arena of immense
constitutive power. In claiming to “strengthen the moral and material resistance,” the
NSC effectively inscribed the “immoral” physical threat and cast the United States as a
righteous nation. As Senator Arthur Vandenberg from Michigan put it, “There is but one
rule. What is right? Where is justice? There let America take her stand.”

In 1948-1949 the U.S. led creation of the massive military alliance that came to be
known as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) emerged as part of the staging
of the righteous nation combating an evil enemy. U.S. conversations concerning a mutual
military security treaty with Canada and the western European nations gained momentum
as “an implacable enemy of western civilization” rendered the “the present situation in
Europe . . . extremely insecure.” While Kennan and the Policy Planning Staff objected
that the Soviet Union relied on “political conquest” and that therefore a far-reaching
military treaty remained outside the purview of U.S. policy, there was little they could do
to halt the cultural trajectory toward reinvigorating the imagined community through
confrontation with the enemy other; they were powerless to arrest what Kennan saw as
the apparent determination “to renounce hope of a peaceful solution of Europe’s
difficulties, and to plan our foreign policy deliberately on the assumption of a coming
military conflict.”

The military alliance signaled the complete triumph of fundamentalist discourse
over the vestiges of religious modernism; the righteous nation narrative subsumed and
incorporated “neighborliness” as the primary characteristic of a moral, free world only in
the absence of an immoral, evil, godless threat. For example, upon signing the military
treaty Truman asserted that “what we are about to do here is a neighborly act” designed
“to establish freedom from aggression and from the use of force in the North Atlantic
community.” The nations of the treaty, he declared, “are joined by a common heritage of democracy, individual liberty, and rule of law.” Of course, the president anxiously disclaimed, “in taking steps to prevent aggression against our own peoples, we have no purpose of aggression against other peoples. To suggest the contrary is to slander our institutions and defame our ideals and our aspirations.”

Americans readily celebrated NATO as evidence of United States righteous behavior in the world. Christianity and Crisis pronounced the alliance “the logical capstone of a policy which has been developing ever since we emerged from the Second World War as the world’s most powerful nation” and an accurate reflection “our new sense of responsibility in the world community.” The journal decried any “opposition to the pact in religious circles” as “merely the old pacifist opposition to any strategy which takes military considerations into account.” Commonweal praised the pact as the “answer to a challenge” and decidedly “anti-communist.” The Catholic periodical averred that “this struggle, this cold war, is, before all else, an ideological opposition, and it is over the issue of . . . spiritual values that we fight a cold, rather than a hot, war.” Further, its editors concluded, “the basic and binding common interest of the North Atlantic powers is their mutual interest in political democracy, in religious tolerance, in the philosophy and practices of freedom.” Commentator James Warburg vainly pointed out the constructed nature of these claims, arguing that “the inclusion of Portugal and the mere consideration of Spain make a mockery of the pretense that all the nations embraced by the Atlantic Pact have a common heritage and common set of ethical and political standards.” Nonetheless, significant majorities of Americans agreed that the United States should join western Europe in “a permanent military alliance.”
The righteous defenders of God-ordained freedom had to be ready to combat godless enemies with whatever means necessary, including the deployment of atomic weapons. In September 1948, the potential use of atomic bombs remained, at least in the eyes of the NSC, “a moral question.” The Council worried that Americans might question or even oppose “the use of the atomic bomb on moral grounds.” The incineration without warning of tens of thousands of Japanese only three years earlier continued to weigh on policy makers minds. One State Department memorandum argued explicitly that “not only military planning is involved in this decision.” The memo worried that “in the event of war, the Russians would certainly again take up the radio sets of their citizens” potentially ruining the United States ability “to inform the Russian and satellite peoples of our policy with respect to atomic warfare.”

In the late 1940s, the fundamentalist narrative of national identity marginalized earlier policy makers’ fears concerning the reaction of the broader “public.” To save American lives, Americans “might force the use of atomic weapons, even if the chief executive were inclined against it,” Assistant Secretary of State George Allen observed. More significantly, however, Americans willingly accepted an arsenal of atomic bombs as part of the righteous defense of God-ordained freedom against godless communism. By the end of the decade Americans “seemed not only ready to accept the bomb, but to support any measures necessary to maintain atomic supremacy,” historian Paul Boyer explains.

Like a voice crying in the wilderness, Kennan argued against reliance on atomic weapons as the cornerstone of U.S. military strategy. In a lengthy and often melancholy personal memorandum, the formerly influential diplomat questioned the United States
simultaneous pursuit of both international atomic control and an ever larger nuclear arsenal. To be sure, Kennan argued, as part of efforts toward an acceptable system of international control, a minimum of nuclear weaponry should be kept for “deterrent-retaliatory purposes,” especially in the event that before an agreement could be reached “they might be used by our opponents.” But if the United States had already “resolved to use weapons of mass destruction deliberately and prior to their use against us or our allies . . . in the face of all moral and political considerations,” then it should build the largest arsenal it could afford. Kennan recommended the former policy, namely continued pursuit of international control with a small, non-foundational role for nuclear weapons in American military planning.123

The significance of Kennan’s paper lay in its recognition that any decision on atomic weaponry emerged as “only part of a deeper problem, involving certain far-reaching judgments and decisions of national policy, both foreign and domestic.” The “real problem at issue,” he asserted, “is the problem of our attitude toward weapons of mass-destruction.” Although intuitively understanding that a decision on weapons was fundamentally connected to “our attitude,” Kennan did not and probably could not appreciate that the conditioning factor was the American “attitude” toward the ostensible enemy rather than toward the particular weapon. And Americans, in their own religious, righteous identity narrative, had constructed a godless, evil foe, an “implacable enemy” thirsting for world domination. For example, Kennan denounced U.S. efforts for international atomic control at the U.N. as “disingenuous” because the United States “might be acutely embarrassed” should the Soviet Union accept U.S. proposals and then the United States be forced to backtrack in light of its strategic reliance on nuclear
capability. But, Kennan added, “the danger of their accepting it is not serious.” In other words, although he did not think the Soviets desired nuclear war, Kennan reflexively believed that the United States faced an enemy that would never accept international control.124 Unlike Kennan, most Americans, as we have seen, did consider the Soviet Union bent on world conquest, including the destruction of all morality, freedom, and religion. How could they do anything other than suppose that the Soviet Union would use atomic weapons to that end?

The acceptance of violence in the righteous defense of religion and freedom drove the United States not only to produce more atomic bombs, but to create super-bombs with little protest. In January 1950, president Truman announced the decision to develop the Hydrogen bomb declaring, “It is part of my responsibility as Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces to see to it that our country is able to defend itself against any possible aggressor.”125 The Christian Century castigated “this wanton decision,” taken “with no readiness to accept moral responsibility,” and claimed that Americans “become devil-gods.”126 Pacifist theologian A. J. Muste argued that increasing such weapons merely lessened the chances for peace rather than increase them.127

Since most Americans embraced nuclear armaments as both necessary and morally justified, Muste and the Century emerge as isolated objectors. As Senator Edward Martin from Pennsylvania put it, “America must move forward with the atomic bomb in one hand and the cross in the other.”128 In The Hell Bomb, journalist William Laurence denigrated the argument made by several scientists that developing a superbomb was immoral for the United States “no matter its righteous cause.” Laurence agreed that using nuclear weapons on civilians for anything other than “retaliation”
violated “morality and Christian civilization.” But the United States could never renounce, destroy, or stop producing its nuclear arsenal because the Soviet Union would merely “produce them in secret” and use them to claim “hegemony over all of Europe and Asia.” Employing the words of George Marshall, Laurence concluded that the United States had to build nuclear weapons to make the Soviet Union understand that “tyranny inevitably must fall back before the tremendous moral strength of the gospel of freedom.”

Although some dissension appeared in a statement by the Federal Council of Churches, the Council’s final declaration asserted that Americans and “other free societies should not be left without the means of defense through the threat of retaliation.”

If a superbomb proved feasible, American policy makers were certain that the Soviets would endeavor to build one in pursuit of their evil designs. Consequently, Truman requested “a reexamination of our objectives in peace and war . . . in the light of the probable fission bomb capability and possible thermonuclear bomb capability of the Soviet Union.” The resulting report issued by the Secretaries of Defense and State and authored largely by Paul Nitze in early April became known as the infamous memorandum, NSC 68. Hardly a coincidence, during the same months that McCarthy launched his crusade against “un-Americans” at home, American policy makers inscribed through official “strategy” the very “self” communist hunters like the junior senator crusaded to save.

NSC 68 illustrates decisively how hegemonic narratives of national identity drive the U.S. approach to the world at the policy making level. As its basic premise, the lengthy paper juxtaposed the “fundamental purpose of the United States” with the

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“fundamental design of the Kremlin.” The word “purpose” implied a pre-ordained destiny and the word “design” suggested a devious plan to thwart the destined purpose. The mission of the United States was “to maintain the essential elements of individual freedom” and “create conditions under which our free and democratic system can live and prosper,” all, the memo added in the words of the Declaration of Independence, “with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence.” Strikingly, even after the evil othering in World War II and ongoing revelations concerning the Holocaust, NSC 68 declared that opposing the United States was an enemy that, “unlike previous aspirants to hegemony, is animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world.”

In addition to these contrasts, NSC 68 also inscribed the righteous defense of freedom through its characterization of an unfree, unrighteous other. “A basic conflict between the idea of freedom under a government of laws, and the idea of slavery,” exists in the world the memo read. In this “struggle for men’s minds,” the United States was “confronted by a threat to its basic values” and therefore had to “take such action, including the use of military force, as may be required to protect those values” against the “evil men” of the Kremlin who absconded all “moral considerations.” Critically, the United States had to understand the “extraordinary flexibility of Soviet tactics” that resulted “from the utterly amoral . . . conduct of Soviet policy.” Reflecting the turn away from modernist discourse that believed the free will of love and tolerance which eventually overcome all international difficulties, the memorandum declared a critical domestic weakness lay in “the excesses of a permanently open mind wishfully waiting for evidence that evil design may become noble purpose.”
With the Kremlin waiting for opportunities “to do its evil work,” NSC 68 recommended a vast expansion of the military and economic capabilities of the United States. Although “this nation under God” repeatedly claimed “In God We Trust,” the memorandum revealed that a more fitting slogan might have been, “In God And A Massive Military And Nuclear Capability We Trust.” “It is only by developing the moral and material strength of the free world,” the authors explained, “that the Soviet regime will be convinced of the falsity of its assumptions.” Therefore, it was incumbent upon the United States to ensure a “clearly superior counterforce - spiritual as well as material” - as it endeavored to maintain “a moral ascendancy in our struggle with the Soviet system,” especially since “everything that gives us or others respect for our institutions is a suitable object for attack.”

NSC 68 staged the righteous nation narrative through specific military measures against the immoral enemy. “It is only by practical affirmation, abroad as well as at home, of our essential values, that we can preserve our own integrity,” the document tellingly explained. In other words, the “self” of the nation could only attain its ontological existence through performance of that self (“practical affirmation”). And, therefore, in its final conclusion NSC 68 had to claim - and exhorted “this Government, the American people, and all free peoples” to understand - “that the cold war is in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake.” But, of course, it was not a “real war.” As Kennan observed, “In so far as we feel ourselves in any heightened trouble at the present moment, that feeling is largely of our own making.”

As in 1941, the righteous nation narrative of U.S. drove the nation to choose war in the summer of 1950. A peninsular civil war between Korean peasants and a wealthy
despot (and his U.S. backers) became a geographic space in which Americans staged the righteous nation narrative, reinvigorating the imagined community’s sense of manifest destiny. The “Korean War” produced an overwhelming sense of unity in the United States even though relatively few Americans knew where Korea was, or even understood why the conflict had begun. “No sooner had the President announced his support of Korea than a Dallas citizen was on the telephone, calling his local newspaper,” *Time* reported. “Where was Korea, anyway? Were the people Indians or Japanese? And what time was it there? It was a rare U.S. citizen who could pass a detailed quiz on the little piece of Asiatic peninsula he had just guaranteed with troops, planes and ships.”

In the early postwar years, the United States repeatedly obstructed long-time Korean guerilla fighter Kim Il-Sung and his ruthless drive to wrest Korea from foreign domination for the first time in decades and redistribute the lands of wealthy landlords among the Korean peasantry. As a fundamentalist narrative of American identity increasingly reinvigorated the nation amid the anxiety of the post-Hiroshima years, the United States viewed Kim’s growing power in the north as a threat to “freedom” and opposed him by empowering Korean-born Syngman Rhee, a Princeton educated elite with thirty years of experience as a Washington lobbyist.

When Koreans in the South protested Rhee’s despotic and dictatorial rule, the United States and their Japanese puppet authorities (the U.S. had placed the wartime conquering Japanese authorities back into their positions in the government and police forces) violently suppressed any and all dissent. The Americans forced Korean rice farms to adopt “free-market” practices by producing rice for profit rather than for barter and subsistence as they had done for decades. In 1948-1949, the United States cut a swath of
death and destruction across the Korean island of Cheju, killing between ten and twenty thousand “rebels” and placing a third of the island’s population in concentration camps in order to stamp out socialist collectivization schemes initiated by the peasants themselves. As historian Fred Inglis explains, the devastation of Cheju mirrored U.S. policy across east and southeast Asia as the self-proclaimed “guardians of the liberal conscience . . . supervised mass murders, cruel extirpation, and evictions from home in the name of freedom and resistance to the Communist threat.” 139

Although in the imaginary of U.S. identity June 25, 1950 marked the opening of the war, the conflict between “north” and “south” had been joined much earlier. Indeed, some 100,000 Koreans had already perished as military forces under the control of Rhee and the United States had battled Koreans throughout the southern part of the peninsula for well over a year before June 25. Amid the gradually hardening fundamentalist narrative of American identity, a White House memorandum in 1949 alluded to Korean civil strife and urged Truman to press Congress for aid to the grossly misnamed “Republic of Korea.” Tellingly, the memo declared Korea significant because “success or failure of the Republic will be to a large degree regarded as the success or failure of the United States.” In other words, the realization of actual freedom in Korea, to say nothing of the plight of the Korean people, mattered less than the American self image that supporting the “Republic” of Korea allowed the United States to stage. 140

Americans reflexively viewed the concentrated attack by northern military units in the summer of 1950 as, in the words of Commonweal, a transformation of the “cold war into a hot war” between the defenders of religion and freedom and their godless, evil, tyrannical foes. 141 Even though the Soviet Union’s 25th Army withdrew from Korea in
1948 and Soviet premier Joseph Stalin had not instigated Kim’s military plans, American policy makers interpreted the June events within the cultural frames that afforded them their subjectivity as “Americans.”142 For example, the U.S. embassy in Moscow immediately cabled the State Department declaring that “this aggressive NK military move against ROK represents clear-cut Soviet challenge” and a “direct threat” to United States “leadership of [the] free world against Soviet Communist imperialism.” The “Korean adventure thus offers us [an] opportunity to show that we mean what we say.”143 Out of the civil war chaos, General Frank Lowe, Truman’s eyes and ears on the ground in Korea, somehow managed to clearly discern that “the north Korean attack represents a Soviet effort to inflict a heavy blow at US prestige . . . with a view to determining the timetable for further Soviet or Communist expansion.”144 Eliding the absence of freedom under Rhee’s rule, Truman exhorted South Korea’s ambassador to remain strong, arguing that “other men and other countries had defended their liberties under much more discouraging situations.”145

In a series of high level White House meetings in response to Kim’s attack, American policy makers revealed that Korea ultimately afforded the United States a place to “act” (or stage) the binary opposition of communist tyranny and righteous freedom. On June 25, General Omar Bradley of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in accord with Acheson, argued that the United States “must draw the line somewhere” and the “Korean situation offered as good an occasion for action in drawing the line as anywhere else.” Admiral Sherman concurred. “The present situation in Korea offers a valuable opportunity for us to act,” he stated.146 As Acheson argued in a Cabinet meeting in July, “some action must
be announced. *Whether that action is the best possible action is less important than that some effective action be taken and announced.*”

Truman agreed with his advisors on the importance of U.S. “action” and on June 27 told Americans that “the attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that communism has passed beyond the use of subversion . . . and will now use armed invasion and war.” As a result, the United States, without acknowledging the irony, offered “military assistance” in the name of defending freedom to political power-holders throughout east and southeast Asia, including French imperialists in Indochina and dictator General Chiang Kai-Shek in exile on Taiwan. These military guarantees along with preparations to send U.S. troops, the navy, and the air force to Asia represented U.S. efforts to counter “a return to force in international affairs.” In addition, the United States had secured U.N. sanction for its military intervention against Koreans seeking liberation from Rhee. As Acheson stated the following day, the north Korean “attack was the most cynical, brutal, naked attack by armed forces, unprovoked in any way, upon an undefended country that could occur.” The United States had to give “an immediate response” to survive the “test of whether the United Nations is going to survive.”

As Harper’s later noted, “the United States rushed to swing the U.N. into action.”

Policy makers merely reflected the broader cultural trajectory, however, and Americans eagerly celebrated the civil strife in Korea as a contest between Soviet communism and U.S. freedom. Newsweek observed that the president’s “stand electrifies the nation.” It added, “Tired of murky defeats, inconclusive victories, and faulty diplomatic footwork, Americans were revived by Harry S. Truman’s immediate counterpunch against the Communists in East Asia. The Korean crisis presented a clear-
cut issue which they could understand.” According to the New York Times, “the open invasion of South Korea by the Soviet puppet regime of the north sheds a new light on the whole international scene.” The decision to come to the aid of south Korea, the paper added, was “a momentous and courageous act which for the first time since the end of the war engages American military formations in the defense of freedom.” Putting it more simply, Time announced: “Challenge accepted.” As the Christian Science Monitor explained, “to establish a law-abiding world . . . aggressors must be convinced that their crime does not pay” and U.S. intervention “speaks the language . . . most reassuring to the peoples who rely on American aid to guard their freedom, and the language out of which must grow a reign of international law against aggression, terrorism, and rapine.”

The righteous nation narrative of U.S. identity cast the indigenous Korean conflict as a battle between Christian freedom and evil communism. Upon hearing of the north Korean “invasion,” Billy Graham fired off a telegram to the White House. “Strongly urge showdown with Communism now,” he frantically wrote, “more Christians in southern Korean per capita than in any part of world. We cannot let them down.” Rowland M. Cross of the Foreign Missions Conference avowed that “the Korean Christians are the stuff that martyrs are made of,” and until help arrived, “we expect them to hold fast.” On a slightly more hopeful note, the Christian Science Monitor believed U.S. intervention meant the “disheartened, disunited peoples have been galvanized into cooperation to resist aggressive evil.” The Washington Post praised “the exhilarating lead provided by President Truman,” propounding that “three times the United States has met challenges that the masters of the Kremlin have flung in the face of the free world”
and “three times, by God’s good grace, the line has been held;” the United States had to resist those “who would plunge the world into darkness.”

Casting the Korean War a battle between light and darkness, democracy and dictatorship, produced a tremendous sense of unity within the United States. On June 28, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod pledged “to stand shoulder to shoulder with our fellow Americans that the voice of the nation and if necessary its arms may be raised for what is right in the sight of God.” According to Christianity and Crisis, “from disgraceful internal wrangling, the United States has moved toward unity – and almost to unanimity in approval of the steps taken.” “Never before had the United States risked so much in the defense of freedom,” Newsweek rejoiced, and “never had the American people seemed so firmly united in their approval of an audacious national policy.” The Christian Science Monitor observed that “the response of American opinion has been remarkably quick and unified.” As the national community coalesced around war, it marginalized the few remaining pacifists such as Muste, who suggested a non-violent U.S. withdrawal from Korea. As the Christian Century intoned, “If there is any better formula than that for wrecking the United Nations, strengthening isolationism,” and “turning the world over to a galloping communist advance . . . it has not come to our attention.”

The sense of unity produced by asserting the eruption of hot war against godless communism was particularly plain at the political level. Congress quickly passed an appropriations bill for $653 million, fifty of which was earmarked for Korea, and also extended the draft. As Senator William Knowland from California put, “the president should have the overwhelming support of all Americans regardless of their party
affiliation.” Democrat Senator Harry Byrd concurred, remarking that “this is a time for unity” since “we must win.” According to Charles Eaton of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, “we’ve got a rattlesnake by the tail and the sooner we pound its damn head in, the better.” Although Congress had refused to pass a bill for aid to Korea earlier in the year, it approved the formerly controversial draft extension by a vote of 315 to 4 in the House and without a dissenting vote in the Senate. The “Mutual Defense Assistance Program” providing $1.2 billion for western Europe was thrown in for good measure. Acheson, unable to “recall any period of four weeks in the history of the United States when so much has been accomplished,” simply marveled at the “extraordinary degree of unity . . . within the country” As he told the Ambassador of Norway, “it was a turning-point in world history.”

The ostensible magnitude of the war that fostered such unity also further ensconced the widespread desire for religious revival in American culture. In July and August of 1950, more than 10,000 letters to the White House requesting or encouraging a national day of prayer went un-filed, and these, according to one memo, represented only “a part of an avalanche on this subject.”

“As long as we rely solely on material might,” averred The Cotton Trade Journal, “we are placing ourselves on the same level with the Godless forces of the Kremlin.” The business periodical urged a day of prayer to let “Americans of all faiths and creeds, as a people united in God, gather in their houses of worship . . . to seek earnestly that guidance which alone can bring unfailing strength.”

F. Edward Herbert compared the U.S. experience in Korea to the “Passion” of Christ in the final hours before the crucifixion; Herbert exhorted the president to “call upon the
churches of America, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish . . . to appeal to Almighty God for guidance and wisdom in what I believe to the Gethsemane of our existence.”

Similar to the culture of righteousness during World War II, the turn to prayer partly reflected the manner in which physical confrontation with the enemy other reinvigorated American national identity by verifying the righteous mission of the nation. “At the present time our Nation is engaged in a great effort to maintain justice and peace in the world,” Truman proclaimed in 1951. “I have the feeling that God has created us and brought us to our present position of power and strength . . . to defend the spiritual values - the moral code - against the vast forces of evil that seek to destroy them.”

Faced with “a black reaction . . . menacing and dreadful in its repression of human freedom” it was “vitally important that [Americans] be spiritually strong.”

Truman’s interpretation of the war as part of the nation’s righteous struggle was widely shared. The aforementioned Herbert, for example, believed that Americans were “engaged in a crusade as important as any in which our forbears ever participated . . . against a Godless ideology.” William Laurence contended the “Korea cleared the air,” revealing “the face of the enemy in all its hideousness.” Although the “outlook is not bright,” American “strength, physical and spiritual, should give us faith that the forces of good will prevail in the end over the forces of evil.” As Retired air force General Carl Spaatz maintained, Americans “must start making the sacrifices our national mission requires of us.”

Spaatz’s appeal for sacrifice revealed that once more bodies became crucial sites for inscribing the nation’s righteousness. As during World War II, Americans stressed the importance of moral behavior among those at the very point of physical interaction with
the evil enemy. Poling recounted at the Christian Endeavor Convention how he had preached to a couple thousand soldiers in Korea who “stood in a drizzle one Sunday morning at seven o’clock, sang their marching song, “Onward, Christian Soldiers,”” and were “united in their prayers.” The Roman Catholic magazine The Sign, for instance, reminded Americans that “chaplains are needed . . . to inspire fighting men with the highest ideals.” According to Truman, as the United States fought “to secure the free world from aggression, we must be equally diligent to strengthen the moral and spiritual life of our Armed Forces” because “the struggle in which we and our allies are engaged is, as the Apostle Paul so aptly put it: “against the rulers of the darkness of this world.”

Dead bodies offered the best “sites” for reaffirming the nation’s manifest destiny as the defender of religion and freedom throughout the world. The New York Times could barely contain its anticipation. In a June 28, 1950 editorial titled “Fighters For Freedom” the paper stated, “The first entries will doubtless soon be made in a new chapter of that golden book of many pages that contains the names of those who fell at Lexington and at New Orleans, at Gettysburg and Chateau-Thierry, at Omaha Beach and Okinawa.” It rejoiced that “the vigorous refusal of the United States passively to accept an act of naked aggression in Korea is a source of pride to every American and an inspiration to all who believe in freedom.” “But there will be some sacrifice: and it will be made by the Johnny Joneses and the Willie Smiths who are at the electric point of contact in this vast struggle for the minds and souls and bodies of men.” And so before the United States even announced intervention and well before the first American combat deaths, the Times avowed that “the nation already owes them a debt of gratitude.”
And Americans did die. “Every day our newspapers tell us about the fighting in Korea,” Truman observed in 1951. “Our men there are making heroic sacrifices. They are fighting and suffering in an effort to prevent the tide of aggression from sweeping across the world.” Americans who did not appreciate such sacrifice failed “to understand the moral principles upon which our Nation is founded.” Quite simply, “the United States is pledging blood . . . to defend our own liberty” and “to help make the world secure against evil aggression.” Casting the United States as a modern day Israel, the president compared U.S. soldiers to the ancient Jews who returned from “captivity in Babylon.” Like ancient Israel, Truman avowed, Americans “too will be able to give God the glory for the victory of freedom and justice and peace for which we are striving today.”\(^{177}\)

Once more the experience of death in war gave life to the imagined community through religious discourse. Nowhere was this more clear than in the 1952 film *This Is The Life* put out by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. The film begins with Jeff, the protagonist, learning that his son John has died in a plane crash on his way home after completing his war service. Jeff, normally the organist of his church, cannot even enter a church building in the wake of his loss. As a group of friends pass by his home, they remark, “Jeff has lost more than his son. He’s lost his faith. And in a way that’s even worse.” Despite his spouse, friends, pastor, and even his eye doctor’s concerted efforts encouraging Jeff to turn to God and remember that his son is in heaven, Jeff remains despondent, melancholy, and virtually lifeless, even declaring that he will not attend John’s funeral service. In the end, Jeff does go to the funeral service and experiences a spiritual revival as he plays a descant tune written by his son John prior to his death for the hymn “O God Our Help In Ages Past.” Thus, in the very scene meant to memorialize
the death of an American “serviceman,” those left behind experience spiritual rebirth through the work completed by the dead soldier.\textsuperscript{178}

Perhaps as many as four million people perished in the Korean War. “I suggested . . . that we go up north immediately with incendiaries and delete four or five of the largest cities,” General Curtis LeMay recalled.\textsuperscript{179} Some two and half million north Koreans, three quarters of a million Chinese, and one and half million south Koreans died. At a greater level even than in World War II, the United States zealously bombed cities, napalmed villages and forests, and supplied south Koreans with weapons and military assistance. “I have never seen such devastation . . . it just curdled my stomach the last time I was there,” General Douglas MacArthur testified before Congress. “After I looked at that wreckage and those thousands of women and children and everything, I vomited . . . If you go on indefinitely, you are perpetuating a slaughter such as I have never heard of in the history of mankind.” By the time the slaughter ended, 34,000 Americans also lay dead.\textsuperscript{180}

In January 1951, John Moullette, a Marine Corps Corporal stationed at Camp Pendleton, complained bitterly to his father Clarence that “the needless waste of life in Korea, on both sides, is shameful to the human race.” “Don’t you think our “foreign policy” is fouled up a bit?” he wondered. “Fighting won’t settle anything.”\textsuperscript{181} After receiving the letter, Clarence Moullette declared that it left him “cold.” He wanted his son to understand “that the broad policies of our foreign policy” lay “in the conviction of our people and their attitudes toward other peoples.” Clarence wished “to open his [son’s] eyes to an understanding of the forces about him which are inimicable (sic) to the general good of our people - to the powers which can be wielded to destroy a man, no matter how
sincere and true he has been. I will cite the case of Forestal, of Hiss, of others who were earnest Americans of good understanding.”

In the end, both father and son proved correct. On the one hand, as John Moullette accurately predicted, the fighting did not settle anything and the Korean War ended in 1953 with the peninsula divided at the 38th parallel, nearly the same as it had begun minus about four million human beings. But on the other hand, as Clarence Moullette unwittingly attested, in the aftermath of the war, the United States continued to imagine itself in a world wide struggle with the evil, godless forces of Soviet communism and therefore maintained a large military presence in the south Korea to defend against future threats. Furthermore, the Korean military buildup represented only a fraction of what had occurred worldwide. Between 1950 and 1953, U.S. military spending rose from $150 billion a year to nearly half a trillion dollars as it stockpiled nuclear weapons, constructed a ring of bases around the Soviet Union in Britain, Germany, Italy, Japan, and South Korea, and spent copious amounts enriching the military-industrial complex that churned out weapons and supplies at home.

Korea essentially served as a “flashpoint” that verified the righteous nation narrative without resolving its internal contradictions. Since little evidence emerged that the United States actually engaged the ultimate enemy other, that is, the godless Russian communist, the Korean War could not long function as a site of identity affirmation and the American fixation with it so fierce in the summer of 1950 quickly waned. Unsure how to respond to his doubting son, the elder Moullette wrote to Acheson requesting the diplomat’s aid in formulating his answer. Acheson responded saying, “I hope he will
come to see that Korea proves - has already proved - a great deal.”¹⁸⁴ But a “great deal” was not everything. Intervention in Korea could only prove so much.

Despite the interpretive limits of the Korean War, the conflict provided Acheson and other Americans with crucial cultural space. Summing up the trajectory of imagined community in the postwar years, the Secretary of State added in his letter to Moullette that “for our country, and for most of us as individuals, the period which has passed since V-E and V-J Days has been one of cruel disappointment, slowly forming resolution, and, finally, great determination and effort.” Although for Americans it had been “hard to believe that so monstrous an evil can exist” in the world, “the fact is that it does exist” and “in some ways, this is an ancient problem. Our forbears on this continent had it cruelly impressed upon them that the liberty we enjoy is not won and preserved without unremitting effort, without sacrifice, without “eternal vigilance.””¹⁸⁵

In essence, the “forgotten war” emerges as perhaps the most significant war in modern U.S. history.¹⁸⁶ The Korean War verified, in the words of Acheson, the existence of “monstrous evil” and thereby cemented the religiously encoded righteous nation narrative of American identity. Of course, the United States could not enter a hot war with the Soviet Union because it could only end in mutual destruction, and then the very raison d’être of the war would disappear. Therefore, Korea simultaneously demonstrated the difficulty of overcoming evil even as it seemed to verify evil’s persistence. Consequently, the war imbued the United States with a sense that its divine mission as the defender of religion and freedom required an “eternal vigilance.” In the years following Korea, the staging of “eternal vigilance” would occur through numerous covert operations overthrowing ostensibly “enemy-oriented” governments, several more
flashpoint hot wars, the forced free-marketization of numerous industrializing nations, and American economic imperialism by the U.S. controlled World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Notes


2 American Council of Christian Churches to James Buswell, September 6, 1941, Buswell Papers, Box 277, Presbyterian Church in America Historical Center, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter cited as: PCAHC).


6 Mrs. L.J. Stone to Truman, March 7, 1946, OF 213, HSTL.

7 Rev. Bernard Stanton, Gulf Coast Bible Church, to Truman, October 10, 1951, OF 2953, HSTL.


10 Truman to Lem T. Jones, Chairman, United Churchmen, National Council of Churches of Christ, October 5, 1951, PPF 5573, HSTL.

11 Editorial: “A More Excellent Way,” *Christianity and Crisis*, March 21, 1949. Before the World Council of Christian Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, Niebuhr excoriated the “insufferable sentimentality” that “insisted that the law of love is a simply possibility” that might solve political and social problems. At the same time, however, Niebuhr cautioned against parts of the Church that worked to “elaborate detailed schemes of justice and of law for the regulation of the political and social life of mankind.” See


16 Truman to Rabbi Max Davidson, December 1, 1950, PPF 5582, HSTL.


19 Dr. Williams O’Connor quoted in Good Housekeeping Club Service Letter and Study Program, September 1946, PPF 260, HSTL.

20 Catholic Commission on American Citizenship to Matthew Connelly, May 5, 1948, OF 320, HSTL.

21 Poster, National Catholic Youth Week, October 1952, PPF 1936, HSTL; Truman to Monsignor Schieder, National Director, National Catholic Youth Week, October 15, 1952, PPF 1936, HSTL.


24 Seemingly frustrated, Herberg added that “when we come to assess the factors that have made...for this notable shift in the social attitudes and cultural climate...we begin to
sense the inadequacy of all sociological “explanation” of the phenomena.” I am suggesting that a religiously framed national identity narrative played a significant role in arbitrating the distribution of social and political power among various religious subjectivities. See Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 47, 56.

25 Rev. Henrietta Young to Truman, March 13, 1948, OF 76, HSTL.

26 Philip Karl Eidman to Truman, December 13, 1945, OF 76, HSTL.


28 “Joint Catholic, Jewish and Protestant Declaration on World Peace,” *Christianity and Crisis*, October 18, 1943.

29 Greg Van Syoc to Mrs. Truman, November 30, 1945, OF 76, HSTL.

30 Good Housekeeping Club Service Letter and Study Program, September 1946, PPF 260, HSTL.

31 United Church Canvass to Truman, October 14, 1948, OF 76, HSTL.


36 Chaim Weizmann to Truman, May 13, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, 5: 982-983. In the imaginary of US identity, racial constructions also played a role. Secretary of State Marshall, for instance, conceded a Jewish victories because of the “weaknesses” of the Arab nations, the “jealousies” that readily arose between them, and the military problems.
of Arab armies “without Brit officer” to ensure “organization.” See George Marshall to

37 Truman to Eleanor Roosevelt, May 22, 1948, unsent, Off the Record, 137-138.


(emphasis added).

40 Memorandum by George Kennan for Secretary of State George Marshall, January 20,
1948, FRUS, 1948, 5: 545-546; Policy Planning Staff 19, FRUS, 1948, 5: 546-554.

41 Fred Inglis, The Cruel Peace: Everyday Life in the Cold War (New York(?), Basic

42 Acting Secretary of State (Thorpe) to the United States Mission at the United Nations,

43 Special Message to Congress, March 17, 1948, in John Woolley and Gerhard Peters,
(accessed February 2007), (hereafter cited as: APP).

44 Special Message to Congress, March 17, 1948, APP.

45 Inglis, Cruel Peace, 54.

46 Editorial, “Berlin Blockade,” Commonweal, July 9, 1948; Editorial, “In Berlin,

1953, Box 169, HSTL.


49 Truman to Pope Pius XII, March 26, 1948, Myron Taylor Papers, Box 3, HSTL.

50 Statement by the Catholic Bishops of the United States, Annual Meeting, November
13, 1947, PPF 1936, HSTL.

51 Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Realism and Political Problems (New York: Charles
Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 33.
Truman to Wallace C. Speers, Chairman, The Layman’s Movement for a Christian World, September 15, 1948, PPF 260a, HSTL.

Statement by Acheson, June 23, 1949, Acheson Papers, Box 72, HSTL.

Statement by Acheson, July 20, 1949, Acheson Papers, Box 72, HSTL.

Frank C. Greene to Truman, October 19, 1949, OF 76, HSTL.


Niebuhr, Christian Realism, 34.

Statement by Dean Acheson, September 6, 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 72, HSTL.

Jack Fellows, Religious Education Administration, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, to Truman, November 7, 1950, OF 76, HSTL.

“The Choice Before Civilization,” Address by Alexander M. Campbell, Member of National Commission on World Order, Disciples of Christ, and Assistant Attorney General of the United States, Criminal Division, May 13, 1950, OF 76, HSTL.


66 Samuel McCrea Cavert, General Secretary, Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, to William Hassett, October 24, 1950, PPF 5573, HSTL; Karl Quimby, Religion in American Life, to Truman, September 25, 1951, OF 76, HSTL.

67 Reverend Walter J. Molek to Truman, January 16, 1952, OF 76, HSTL; Joseph Short, Secretary to the President, to Reverend Walter J. Molek, January 28, 1952, OF 76, HSTL.


73 Ribuffo, The Old Christian Right, 228-235.


Ben Hyde to John R. Steelman, Assistant to the President, March 14, 1947. OF 263, HSTL.


Rev. Wayne Wiman, General Assembly, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, to Truman, July 21, 1947, OF 263, HSTL.


Morgan, *Reds*, 312-320. Medina sentenced the eleventh defendant to only three years in jail since he had killed Japanese in New Guinea during the war, receiving a Distinguished Service Cross for his efforts.


Janie Fuller, Stratton School, to Truman, February 24, 1950, OF 320, HSTL.

C.E. Matthews, Department of Evangelism, Southern Baptist Convention, to William Hassett, September 22, 1950, PPF 21, HSTL.

Truman to C.E. Matthews, Secretary, Department of Evangelism, Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, September 26, 1950, PPF 21, HSTL; Official Report, 41st International Christian Endeavor Convention, Grand Rapids, MI, July 9-15, 1951, PPF 2603, HSTL.

Rev. Ernest R. Bryan, President, International Society of Christian Endeavor, to Truman, July 28, 1951, PPF 2603, HSTL.

Unsigned note, June 13, 1952, PPF 2603, HSTL.

John Crowe, of Los Angeles, to Truman, undated, (December 1950 or January 1951), OF 320, HSTL.


Memorandum of Conversation, January 23, 1951, Acheson Papers, Box 72, HSTL.


See, for example, the Institute’s logos on The Bible Today, January 1941, and The Bible Today, January 1942.

Carl McIntire, “War and the Christian’s Relation to It,” Sermon Delivered in the Bible Presbyterian Church of Collingswood and Broadcast Over Radio Station WPEN, Christian Beacon, September 14, 1939.

Henry Sherrill, President, National Council of Churches of Christ, to Truman, December 7, 1950, PPF 5573, HSTL.

Truman to the National Convocation of Methodist Youth, July 13, 1951, PPF 5786, HSTL (emphasis added).


Draft Speech, Undelivered, October 1946, Off the Record, 100-102; Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Unsent, May 22, 1948, Off the Record, 137-138.

Paul Harris, Jr., to Truman, May 26, 1948, OF 76, HSTL; Charlie Ross to Paul Harris, June 1, 1948, OF 76, HSTL; Note, June 1, 1948, OF 76, HSTL.
Special Message to Congress, March 17, 1948, *APP*.


Memorandum by the Director of the Office of European Affairs Paul D. Hickerson to the Secretary of State, March 8, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, 3: 40-42.

Report to the President by the National Security Council, NSC 14/1, July 1, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, 1 (2): 545-548.


Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff, George Kennan, November 24, 1948, *FRUS 1948*, 3: 283-289. This memorandum largely consisted of Policy Planning Staff 43. Kennan’s struggle against the “militarization of containment” is lucidly recounted in Hixson, *George F. Kennan*, 73-98. In opposition to Kennan’s arguments, pro military force figures such as Vandenberg maintained that “‘physical security’ is a prerequisite to the kind of long-range economic planning which Western Europe requires” to stave off political conquest. See Letter to Constituent, January 27,

115 Address by Truman, April 4, 1949, *APP*.


118 Nearly seventy percent of Americans in November 1948 believed the United States should join a “permanent military alliance.” See Poll: AIPO 432, November 24, 1948 in *Hero, Religious Groups*, 305. Writing in *Harper’s*, Warburg essentially voiced the same argument that Kennan had made against the need for a military alliance. See James P. Warburg, “The Defense of Western Europe: Deception or Blunder?” *Harper’s Magazine*, June 1949. As with Latin America during the road to intervention in World War II, in the late 1940s and early 1950s Europe and other areas of the globe were interpreted through an “imaginary cartography” that cast the United States as the righteous defender of freedom and religious tolerance in geographic locations devoid of the material referents to which those signifiers ostensibly laid claim. See David Zietsma, “‘Sin Has No History’: Religion, National Identity, and U.S. Intervention, 1937-1941,” *Diplomatic History* 31 (June 2007), 556-557.


121 Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs George Allen, September 14, 1948, *FRUS, 1948*, 1 (2): 630.

122 Boyer, *By the Bomb’s*, 334-351.


125 Statement by Truman, January 31, 1950, *APP*.


Editorial, “Taking A Stand,” *Commonweal*, July 7, 1950. The staging of national identity sharply limned the lens through which Americans interpreted world events. For
example, the cold war good/evil binary conditioned the views of U.S. policy makers toward the Iranian-British oil dispute. By the early 1950s “U.S. policy makers revealed their inclination to place that conflict in a cold war context” and “this was especially the case after the outbreak of the Korean War,” Mary Ann Heiss explains. See Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 226.

142 Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai, *Uncertain Partners*, 133. According to the memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, “the war wasn’t Stalin’s idea, but Kim Il-sung’s. Kim was the initiater. Stalin, of course, didn’t try to dissuade him...no real Communist would have tried to dissuade Kim Il-sung from his compelling desire to liberate South Korea from Syngman Rhee and from reactionary American influence.” Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. and ed. Strobe Talbott (Boston, Little, Brown, and Company, 1970), 368.

143 Walworth Barbour to Secretary of State Acheson, June 25, 1950, PSF: Korean War File, 1950-1953, Box 206, HSTL.


145 Memorandum of Conversation at the White House, June 26, 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.

146 Memorandum of Conversation, June 25, 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.

147 Memorandum by Acheson, July 14, 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL (emphasis added).

148 Statement by Truman, June 27, 1950, *APP*.

149 Statement by Acheson, June 28, 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 72, HSTL.


155 Graham telegram quoted in Graham, *Just As I Am*, xviii.


159 Reverend V.C. Rickman, Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, to Truman, June 28, 1950, PPF 21, HSTL.


164 All figures and quotes other than Acheson in “Overwhelming Support,” *Time*, July 3, 1950; and “Time for Unity,” *Time*, July 10, 1950. For Acheson see Statement by Acheson, July 21, 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 72, HSTL; Memorandum of Conversation, June 30, 1950, Acheson Papers, Box 67, HSTL.

165 Copy of Memo Retained by Mr. Fauver, October 20, 1950, OF 412, HSTL.

166 W. H. Snyder, Snyder Jewelers, Memphis, TN, to Truman, February 13, 1951, OF 412, HSTL; “For A National Day of Prayer,” OF 412, HSTL.

167 F. Edward Herbert to Truman, December 5, 1950, MHDC, Box 13, HSTL.

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The Korean War, rather than World War II, finally put an end to the national identity trauma rooted in the Great Depression. To be sure, World War II continues to provide the language and images, the memorials, and the stories that verify American self-righteousness. But this reflects the need for narrative cohesion rather than for narrative
verification in national identity narratives. In other words, the righteous war against the evil Communist other (or the evil terrorist other) must fit with how Americans see themselves as always having been, and World War II’s gas chambers, death marches, and filmed and recorded battles (i.e., D-Day) provide the cultural material to secure that narrative project. Because of the Korean War, it is of little matter that in the immediate aftermath of World War II millions of Americans believed that U.S. atrocities exceeded those of the Axis, or even that millions more at least questioned the morality of U.S. military actions. On the rapid wane of American interest in the war see Halberstam *The Fifties*, 62-74.
Gazing with horror at the jihadic impulses directed toward it, America needs to re-examine the kind of zeal that has marked its own history. What kind of violence toward others . . . has come out of our zeal? Has it become a permanent part of the nation’s psychic identity? Can the American psyche survive without it?”

- Robert Jewett and John S. Lawrence, 2003

In 1941, John Foster Dulles penned a scathing critique of the Anglo-American Atlantic Charter signed at Argentia Bay. He castigated the Charter’s tendency “to attribute self-righteousness” to Britain and the United States. “This tendency, which violates Christ's precepts, creates much ill-will and is itself a major contributing cause of war.” “Laying aside timidity, adding practicality to sentimentality, we must fearlessly plan a new world order” based on “an international federation for peace,” Dulles argued. Already a few years removed from the cultural hegemony of the religious modernist good neighbor identity narrative Time hailed “a famed peacemaker” almost nostalgically while conspicuously refraining from any sense of agreement with his foreign policy criticism.

Almost a decade later, after the outbreak of the Korean War, President Harry Truman appointed Dulles as an adviser to the State Department. Commenting on the burgeoning Cold War and raging hot war, Dulles proclaimed, “We have borne a Christian witness. We have acted as God gave us to see the right.” He added that Americans need not fear living “sacrificially and even dangerously in a righteous cause.” Against an “evil, repugnant faith,” the United States had to “react with a faith of our own, a faith that
will endure and project us into the world as a great force for righteousness,” Dulles contended. 4

The transformation in Dulles’s approach to the world reflected the sweeping transformation of American culture between the onset of the Great Depression and the outbreak of the Korean War. From the early 1930s into the 1950s, religious discourse operated as the leading symbolic structure in the imaginary of U.S. identity. Through religious identity narratives Americans reinvigorated the imagined community’s sense of divine chosenness that had been sundered by the vagaries of economic Depression. As Americans turned to religious language and imagery, competing religious subjectivities gained or lost power within U.S. culture. By the Korean War, the righteous nation identity narrative achieved a hegemonic cultural position, empowering Christian fundamentalism in particular, but orthodox religion much more broadly.

So powerfully did religion infuse national identity, that the United States experienced what historian Seth Jacobs referred to as “America’s Third Great Awakening.” Indeed, “for the soldier, the preacher, and the politician - as well as for millions of other Americans at mid-century - the conflict with international communism was in essence a holy war,” Jacobs explains. Regardless of personal piety, Americans everywhere appeared religious. Concerned predominantly with 1950s religiosity, however, Jacobs remarks that “the reasons for this upsweep in at least the outward manifestations of religious enthusiasm are far from clear.” 5

This dissertation contends that religious culture in the 1950s originated in the entrenchment of fundamentalist religious discourse in the symbolic structure of American national identity over the course of the 1930s and 1940s. Being “religious” and being
“American” became deeply intertwined in this process. That is, staging one’s religious identity often intersected with the staging of one’s national identity. Dulles’s statement that going to war in Korea constituted “a Christian witness” represented the staging of religious subjectivity inherent in national identity.

Eisenhower’s own religious transformation mirrored that of Dulles and reflects that an “American” national identity subjectivity demanded religious identification. An infrequent church-visitor before the war, his faith grew on the battlefields of Europe. As a “national subject,” upon assuming the presidency Eisenhower felt compelled to fully enact a particular religious identity. After consulting Billy Graham, the president joined a Presbyterian church. While president, Ike was baptized, kept a Bible on his White House nightstand for eight years, inaugurated presidential prayer breakfasts, and oversaw America’s official adoption as a nation “under God.”

Far from being simply politically motivated, Eisenhower’s religious activities reflected that Americans were religiously constituted national subjects. Scarcely interested in the particulars of different denominations, Eisenhower displayed an overwhelming concern for religion itself. Indeed, he could not appear fully American without some officially “recognized” religious participation. “Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith - I don’t care what it is,” Eisenhower declared. And so in assuming his own religious identity Eisenhower could fully make the shift from non-church-attending general leading the forces of righteousness in battle to undertaking the spiritual leadership of God’s chosen nation. “I believe one reason I was elected President was to lead America in a religious revival,” he confessed to Billy Graham.
In essence, Eisenhower revealed the ongoing hegemony of the righteous nation identity narrative in American culture and its power to drive foreign relations. As Seth Jacobs, Ira Chernus, and Andrew Rotter decisively show, religious language and imagery conditioned U.S. foreign policy options during the 1950s. Ultimately, American religious discourse limited policy options so drastically that the United States once more went to war against evil communist others in Asia, this time in what eventually became the morass of the Vietnam War.9

Before that tragic legacy could come to fruition, however, the end of the Truman administration in 1953 found the United States confident of its own righteous mission as the defender of freedom and religion throughout the globe. Religious modernism had all but disappeared save perhaps in a slowly emerging humanist secularism and the discourse of world community that continued to provide a foil for U.S. foreign policies. Orthodox and fundamentalist Protestantism joined with Judaism and Roman Catholicism to supply the lexicon of morality and individualism that would maintain a cultural hegemony into the twenty-first century.

In January 1953, Pastor Thomas Daniels declared in his sermon on the presidential transition that Truman had “restrained and checked the onslaught of the anti-Christ communism,” but that his time had now passed. The nation turned to “the soldier Eisenhower . . . to mobilize our land in the great struggle between Light and Darkness,” Daniels proclaimed. “The Great Omniscient Being has destined the United States as another ark of Noah, to comprise all freedom loving nations and to rescue them from the cataclysm of atheism and destruction which men of hatred and godlessness have rent
against the children of God."10 Indeed, the United States was God’s chosen nation once more.

Notes

1 Jewett and Lawrence, *Captain America*, 168.


4 Dulles quoted in Jacob’s *America’s Miracle Man*, 74.


7 Whitfield, *Culture of the Cold War*, 88; Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency*, 194-205.

8 Eisenhower quoted in Whitfield, *Culture of the Cold War*, 88, 90.


10 Sermon Delivered by the Reverend Thomas Daniels, Pastor, at the Divine Liturgy, January 18, 1953, at Saints Augustine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church, Washington, D.C., PPF 21, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.
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