Children in the United States were not asked to participate in their government’s war in Korea. They did not receive a call for help during the Vietnam War. They were not drafted into service during engagements in Panama, Granada, Kosovo, Iraq one and two, or Afghanistan. In fact, if American children wanted to do their bit for the troops during these conflicts, they had to do it vicariously through their G.I. Joes, plastic F-4 fighters, or model Huey helicopters. No government leader, no educational authority, no parent—at least officially—called out to America’s children to serve their country in a war fought for them, for the next generation.

This would seem reasonable. Real war is frightful. Real war is brutal. Real war does not reflect the values we want to encourage among children.

Or does it? In fact, while the United States has not seen its children lately participating in war, it certainly did during the two world wars. In both World War I and World War II, children were intensive participants on the home front. They were part of almost every activity considered important to the war effort. This included a wide swath of activities ostensibly open to children as volunteers, as well as paid jobs. It included school work, home work, hobbies, management of money, sports, and play. During the world wars, American children found out what “total war” meant—and to them, it meant a whole lot. Adults of the era believed the country was fighting expressly for the children. “Our boys and girls will inherit the world that emerges from this war,” wrote the author of a World War II booklet suggesting war studies in the elementary curriculum.
“And this, as all boys and girls should know, is peculiarly their war—a war waged for the sake of the years to come,” the editor reminded readers of St. Nicholas, a well-known World War I children’s magazine.2

Authorities during the world wars believed the country could not wait for the children to motivate themselves to join the home front. The war had to be brought to them. “Bring the war into the schools,” affirmed one educator.3 They believed the war was a children’s war for an obvious reason: it was the children who would inherit the outcome. And because the world wars were thought nearly universally to be critical tests of democratic ideals and free-world values, American children would be forced to live with the victorious philosophy. The philosophy must not be that of the enemy.

Based on the unifying principle that children had a stake in the outcome of world war—in fact, that they may have had the largest stake—it was obvious that children also had a responsibility to become part of the culture of total war. Total war, as the phrase took shape in World War II, “involves entire populations, military and civilian, adults and youth,” explained a World War II educator. “It involves them not only as victims of dislocation, injury and death, but as contributors to the national effort. Except for invasion or bombing, war has never before so affected the lives of entire populations, nor has the contribution of the average citizen been so significant.”4 Total war demanded “total participation.”5 World War I, the “war to end all wars,” was declared to be a critical crossroads with world tyranny, so that “Every boy and girl over fourteen years of age may, when the war is over, be able to say proudly, ‘I had my part in winning the war.’”6

Despite these exhortations, authorities in both wars realized that American children may not perceive actual enemy danger as would children living in an invaded nation. In fact, the possibility of the United States itself being attacked in World War I was nearly non-existent; in World War II it was slim. To encourage American children’s belief that the war really could reach the doorsteps of Anytown, USA, government leaders established a propaganda campaign mainly for children. They worked closely with any entity associated with children. This most obviously meant working with the schools, the establishments that could reach out most reliably and ubiquitously to children. But it also meant working with organizations for children, with children’s media, with industry, with churches, and directly through government advertising and posters. Nearly all of these were only too happy to help out, in fact establishing their own pro-war campaigns that sometimes veered from Washington’s official line. By the end of World War II, however, the campaign for the children’s war grew into a highly unified and usually efficient machine designed to transform children into com-
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batants of the home front.

How authorities produced a wartime world for America’s children in some ways differed between the two world wars. In some ways it was similar. But in both cases, the outcome was the same: many millions of children enthusiastically marched to the colors of the home front, fervent patriots of their government at war, believers in the cause of Uncle Sam without question, “the army of school children.” Children were mobilized, became metaphorical soldiers, their classroom their citadel, their weapon an education into the values of war. War became their lives, filling much of their school time, most of their waking hours, and perhaps some of their dreams. In World War I France, drawing children into a life permeated by war Audoin-Rouzeau called “framing childhood into the war.” While this research from a United States perspective reflects some constructs as employed by Audoin-Rouzeau, the author hesitates to call what was presented by authorities to American children “framing,” because it suggests media framing theory. Framing theory in communication research examines what publications choose to emphasize, and what they choose to ignore. Publications examined here possibly could have chosen to emphasize war as a disaster, could have opposed the government’s call for children’s service, could have counseled negotiating peace as an alternative to total war. They did not. While a tiny few publications circulating to a very few children did oppose war, they are of interest mostly to researchers considering press censorship and control. As far as America’s children were concerned, no one framed the war in any way contrary to the U.S. Government’s demands in favor of total victory. Interest here is how these groups implemented this frame through public and private life of American children.

Framing theory also hopes causal relationships can be established between what media disseminated, and how audiences subsequently reacted. While finding such relationships is always difficult in contemporary media research, it is even more difficult studying historical events. Surveys were not available during World War I; World War II surveys show some indications, but certainly are not sufficient to posit causal relationships—if they even are sufficient today, an ongoing controversy. Instead of considering American children’s induction into the world wars as framing, a somewhat loaded term among communication scholars, this author looks from a perspective of historical research at the war world that authorities wanted a child to know, and how they constructed that world. At school, at home, at work or at play, a child’s life became infused with military vocabulary and values. In this way, American children of the world wars grew up experiencing what might be called the militarization of childhood. The
author became interested in studying the militarization of American childhood during world war based on his research of the World War I era. Particularly, he was interested in the steps, or perhaps the slide, that the United States has taken from a country of strongly pacifist and isolationist traditions and limited war capacity before 1914, to a country that spends more on its military than the rest of the world put together, and has seldom hesitated to use that war-waging capacity. The country began the twentieth century steeped in historic values opposing military intervention as a way to solve the world’s problems, or to bring American ideals to foreign peoples. “She has abstained from interference in the concerns of others,” said John Quincy Adams in an 1821 speech. He declared the United States wished freedom for everyone, but, “She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.” Yet in 1917 she abandoned that policy to join World War I. “That departure not only spelled the abandonment of nearly a century and a half of American diplomatic practice,” observed historian David Kennedy, “a commonplace observation to which I offer neither dissent nor elaboration. It also compelled the United States, as almost never before, to measure itself against Europe.” The interwar attempt to return to isolationism could not be sustained, Steel wrote, as World War II fascism “destroyed the illusion that America could barricade herself from the immoralities of a corrupt world.” But as he added, “It also provided the means for the dramatic growth of American military power, which made the new policy of global interventionism possible.” Americans became used to expecting that power to produce victories.

War historians sometimes observe that in fighting a war belligerent nations eventually turn to tactics used by their enemies, in direct violation of their own stated values for which they are fighting. This has patently been the case during the world wars, for all belligerents. In World War I, fighting ostensibly to construct President Woodrow Wilson’s world safe for democracy, the government harassed, jailed, and even deported hundreds who tried to exercise free speech, and progressively stripped civil rights from its black, Native American, and other minorities. In World War II, Allies responded to Hitler’s civilian bombing runs with a response so ferocious it approached death statistics of genocide. The practice seems to have continued. United States military power has become the big stick behind foreign policy in many more recent wars, big, small, and often tragic for countries so embroiled. The killing of women and children in My Lai, the torture of prisoners in Guantanamo, are just two of the more famous incidents in which the military power of the United States has been used in ways opposed to the country’s bedrock values.

How did the United States become a frankly, even proudly, militaristic na-
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... tion? Why has the voice of pacifism shrunk from a once strong and respected guide for American society to a marginalized, almost non-existent peep from the fringes? To help respond to this question we can take many roads through United States political, cultural, and diplomatic history. This author has chosen to walk a path with the nation’s children, through two generations who grew up in a militarized childhood to accept a militarized society.

What is a “militarized generation?” Can we even define a “generation?” Strictly speaking, of course, a “generation” doesn’t exist. People are born every year. The Baby Boomers are supposedly those born between 1946 and 1964, the bookends defined by a birth rate increase and a birth rate drop. It does seem that those of that time period have in general a different view of the world. The World War II children did not protest the Korean War. But the Baby Boomer generation not so militarized had plenty to say about Vietnam. Many historians who like to investigate the past through generations will look toward a defining experience of a group of children, an event they shared that was so pivotal to their development that it defined their view for the rest of their lives. Obviously, the total wars of the twentieth century were defining events for the children who lived through those eras. Those still alive to remember the experience of total war consider themselves to be a separate generation. “They cite the cheerful volunteerism of almost all the nation’s children during World War II as an experience that made their age cohort unique.”

These generations of children forged as soldiers of the home front became the leaders who built the United States we know today, a world leader in affairs military.

Militarization of Childhood: Death and Its Denial

The value of military ideals and training as a way to develop character has its basis in the nineteenth century. The idea of manliness, of purification through the cleansing power of war became an attractive theme among young Europeans in the early twentieth century, despite an inkling of just how horrible a modern war could be. As there had been no general war in Europe since 1871, it might be thought that Europeans flocked so gladly to the colors in August 1914 because they had not understood the hideous effectiveness of modern war machines. But by 1917, people in the United States certainly knew the truth. Nevertheless, these same themes found their way into the propaganda serving to militarize American childhood. Children’s publications were filled with tales of heroism and sometimes ultimate sacrifice, the deed made for a cause more noble than the loss of one man. The adventure of the soldier, the excitement...
was emphasized, the manliness of a soldier doing his duty for his country. As a California state board of education vice president reflected:

Our boys were becoming ‘molly-coddles,’ we were told—a soft, selfish, pleasure-loving, joy-riding generation. We were told that there were too many women teachers in our schools and that in consequence the youth of the nation was suffering from ‘feminization’—whatever that is. Today the crisis that is ‘sifting out the hearts of men’ has banished doubt; it has proved that our high-school and college boys are patriots and potential heroes.”

This theme was carried on, perhaps rather less enthusiastically, into World War II. In the mass media certainly, although exhortations from government or other authorities that war could prove manly virtues became much less prominent. Other virtues, however, could still come from war.

The emphasis of manly themes in publication and pronouncement suggests this story of children in war is a story of males. This is mostly true; leaders of American societies focused on those who would become future warriors and after that, future leaders. Women during this period seldom became either. The needs of half of the twenty to thirty million American children were addressed often as an after-thought, or under the presumption that they might apply to boys and girls equally. Even less likely to be addressed were special needs of minorities. African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, or Asian Americans among other minorities were mostly invisible to those in the groups which established principles for the militarization of American childhood. The Crisis, an adult publication for black Americans, did publish a children’s issue once a year during World War I, in October. Content of these issues did not address wartime issues for children, however. As well, no consideration was made for children with disabilities. Because sources addressing these groups of children during war are so meager, this is inevitably if not happily mostly a story of regular white boys.

Ways to help children face death, or to better understand death, also were rarely addressed in either world war. In World War I, the matter of death as applied to older boys who could foresee the possibility of military service was taken relatively nonchalantly. Valor and heroics were what was important. Authors writing about presentation of World War II to children looked back upon the experiences of World War I, often for observations of things gone wrong. Writing in 1943, a Yale education professor noted some educators

Would point to ample evidence from the last war showing that many made
an excellent adjustment to impending death by viewing it nonchalantly. Many others dismissed moment-to-moment anxiety concerning it by adopting a fa-
talistic attitude. Still others relieved their tensions by jesting about it. Few gave the full implications of the situation serious attention.\textsuperscript{17}

This attitude of denial, or really more an attitude of belief that death was an honor for such a noble cause as a world war, can be borne out in the actions of young Americans who volunteered to fight in France in 1914, when the United States was still neutral. Malcolm Cowley, a Harvard University student who volunteered for an ambulance brigade in France, explained, “The war created in young men a thirst for abstract danger, not suffered for a cause but courted for itself; if later they believed in the cause, it was partly in recognition of the danger it conferred on them. Danger was a relief from boredom, a stimulus to the emotions, a color mixed with all others to make them brighter.”\textsuperscript{18}

World War I authorities and media did much to encourage this attitude with their portrayal of heroics and idealistic soldierism. Death was possible, but in a noble sense of adventure, manliness, feeling (ironically) truly alive in mortal danger: “That chance to live life most free from stain/And that rare privilege of dying well.”\textsuperscript{19}

As \textit{American Boy} admonished in February 1918, “Boys, Get Into the Fight!":

Shut your eyes and you can see trenches. Great gashes in the ground, dug with awful labor by blistering hands. In them, helmeted heads of men moving cautiously through mud, among rats. Beyond, tangled masses of barbed wire. Then, No Man’s Land. Then—the enemy. Back of the trenches, enormous guns pouring shells, trying to drive the soldiers out. \textit{Boom—zing—crash—and} many men are hurled to death, or maimed, or blinded. Their comrades crawl over them. They go “over the top.” They feel the sting of the bullet. Their flesh is torn by bayonets. Yet they go on, on. You can see it, can’t you—and hear the deafening noise of battle and the groans of the wounded, dying men?\textsuperscript{20}

This is death described, to be sure, but abstractly, like watching a war movie. Common sense would say a boy would not wish to join in on such an experience, but emotions more important than reason drove the wills of many a teenage boy in World War I. Adventure, manliness, the youthful belief in immortality could serve as a start, but the sustaining reason boys yearned for wartime service was patriotism. Idealism as stated by a 17-year-old writing in \textit{American Boy}:

I, as an American boy, am under an obligation to myself and to my country. I
owe it to myself to make of myself a good man and true. I owe it to my country
to do for her and die for her, as the need may be.\textsuperscript{21}

It was not necessary for authorities concerned with fashioning a view of
World War I to talk about death in any frank manner. The enormous surge of
patriotism, the idealism that unified the country in 1917 United States as it did
in 1914 Europe washed away any cavil to the fact that war means death, and
World War I already meant death to millions. Young people, recently children
or still in their teens, embraced this patriotic fervor even more than their elders.
The speed of technology at the turn of the last century impressed an older world
(and was actually commemorated in 1903 by a series of U.S. commemorative
stamps noting fast things like cars, boats and trains). But it was truly embraced
by the young. “It was a movement of youth. The celebration of modernity led
more to an idea of confrontation, ‘war as a festival.’”\textsuperscript{22}

It is hard to explain the enthusiasm with which older boys of the United
States joined a war they knew was hideous, unless we consider a mythical, ideal-
istic spirit that no longer seems to exist in this century. It drowned in the mud
and blood of the battles—by the time the young idealists saw their first combat,
few would later report any lingering feeling of idealism and patriotism. And at
least some of that would linger into World War II. While certainly the popular
media reclaimed the patriotism, the idealism, the adventure of serving in World
War II, the young men themselves marched more soberly onto the transports.

In his highly unusual, in fact apparently unique, consideration of death for
children during the period, Yale professor Brubacher noted democracies do a
poor job of presenting the certainty of death to children. In school, in church,
death is something to postpone, to ignore, to discard in favor of emphasizing
life. Writing in 1943, he noted that democracies had mistakenly appeased dicta-
torships because democracies did not hold a realistic view of death.\textsuperscript{23} The writer
contended people living in democracies did not understand that death is some-
times the preferable option. “One truly conquers death when he can say life is
cheap in comparison to some great cause, when he can say that there are some
things worse than death.”\textsuperscript{24} The author found some of history’s greatest leaders
succumbed to causes they believed more important than death.”\textsuperscript{25}

This reasoning seems closer to the ideals of some World War I devil-may-
care young men than to the ideals of mostly less-blinkered World War II fight-
ing youth. Parents during the second war were encouraged to introduce children
to death by building on what children already knew. “Death insists on being
noticed,” another World War II author observed. “Even children’s stories have
their killings, while military toys displayed in show windows suggest play killing as an appropriate activity for children.” Faced with such ubiquity, the frank parent needs to explain that “understanding of life and understanding of death should advance together step by step.” Religions have tried to explain death, but mostly by relying on clichés, noted the author, who nevertheless offered no specific approach beyond parents’ need to be calm and mature.26

In neither war did the rare literature addressing death for children try to be explicit or realistic. Perhaps this was partly by patriotism, partly by need to spare feelings of the more delicate. But it also may have served the need to maintain home-front morale, the belief that a war is worth fighting and can be won. To avoid despair, particularly older boys needed to know only the partial truth. Because it was they who would be mostly likely to serve. In World War II, authorities had some hard statistics to back their concerns. A 1942 Forbes magazine poll of high school students showed that while most were in favor of the country’s participation in the war, more than half worried the Axis powers had some chance of victory.27 While certainly not an unreasonable position, less than complete certainty of Allied victory could be considered an attitude in need of propaganda infusion. A 1943 poll of high school students showed even more concern. “One concludes that pupils are rarely overoptimistic, but that there is a strong tendency to exaggerate the dangers and hardships brought by the war. Scores on Part I, describing the present status of the war effort, are especially pessimistic, the mean being well below the estimated reasonable degree of confidence.” The author added, “if military affairs go badly, censorship will conceal the truth from the people.”28 While such polls certainly showed high school students reflected a realistic attitude during a year in which the Allies struggled, authorities apparently did not consider it to be cheerful enough for kids. The author concluded there was morale work to be done among the older children. “After one year of war, the morale of high school pupils is far from perfect. About half the group are more pessimistic than is justified by our accomplishments in overcoming our problems.”29

In both wars American authorities either encouraged, or at least did not move to challenge, boys’ typical nonchalance or disbelief about the possibility of death. This could be counted on in many nations that fought the world wars, because it was what made young men eager to serve. It also was what makes many older men poor soldiers. It was not so much because a forty-year-old was physically incapable of handling battlefield conditions, because many of them were. It was the changing idea of death from youth to middle age that made the old soldier more cautious and questioning. It was therefore never in a belligerent
government’s best interest to encourage adolescents to contemplate mortality, and was not suggested as part of a wartime curriculum, in school or out.

It is perhaps worth considering the value of realistic death education during wartime in schools as a possible way of shortening a war. Perhaps boys so enlightened would not be as happy to fight. Of course, that also may be a formula for losing a war. The truth is that once the adolescent is in the thick of it the blinders come off. Combat soldiers in the world wars became very well aware of possibly impending death. At that point, they tried to make the war as short as possible, because the only thing they really wanted to be was not a hero, a patriot, a defender of a world safe for democracy. They just wanted to go home, and as soon as possible. “What was it about the war that moved the troops to constant verbal subversion and contempt?” wrote Paul Fussell about World War II. “It was not just the danger and fear, the boredom and uncertainty and loneliness and deprivation. It was rather the conviction that optimistic publicity and euphemism had rendered their experience so falsely that it would never be readily communicable.”

The talk of heroics and patriotism and duty and sacrifice—that was the myth made for the home front, people who had no idea of what a battlefield was like (even if they read about one), and yet needed official nurturing to keep producing war materiel, and naive young men with adventure on their minds.

In this sense, the militarization of childhood really became a way to groom children for war. The grooming process played upon the adolescent boy’s attraction to honor and to adventure, and downplayed any idea of suffering or mortality, which is far from most adolescents’ thoughts to begin with. Teamwork, the fun of working with other children in an effort for a cause, pleasing parents, being active, getting out of school, doing something that seemed important—these made war more acceptable. Children could find in a war a really fun way to bond with others in the games of collecting scrap, selling bonds, picking milkweed pods, knitting scarves, or marching around with wooden stick rifles. This makes a war less scary, chops it down to size, makes it actually an attractive pursuit to children of the home front. The ugly verities of actual war were seldom indicated to children, or even much to adults, although certainly in World War II some journalists did try to avoid sugar-coating in the adult media. But by the time young men realized the shocking brutality and crazy stupidity of a world war, it was too late, and they were stuck with doing what they could to survive the experience in one piece, mentally and physically. Heroics were for children’s imaginations and preachers’ eulogies.
Chapter Two: How War Can Make Better Children

War and Manly Values

During the world wars, many people believed war could be a good thing for society in general, and for children in particular. The positive qualities of a soldier have been admired certainly in the twentieth century—and even before. One can look back to the noble sentiments attached to the heroic soldiers who fought for Napoleon, and their gallant depictions by Romantic era painters such as Jacques-Louis David, or the U.S. Civil War soldier idealistically battling for his version of America. The esprit of the hero, the discipline of the men in battle, the precision of obedience, the loyalty of teamwork, the honor of courage, the courage of patriotism—humble service for a cause greater than a man: all these echo through the literature of war as a noble pursuit through centuries and continents. The truth is rather less ennobling. Napoleon dealt with mass desertsions, breakdown of discipline, plunder, stupidity and dishonor. World War I’s pathetic human rats lived in mud and blood and rotting pieces of flesh. But World War II was the worst. When World War II reporter Marguerite Higgins was given permission to visit the European theatre in March 1945, she was shocked at what she saw:

Cities ruined and stinking. Dead bodies everywhere, some mangled or torn apart, the American and German equally awful. ‘More shocking were the wounded, many her own age or younger. Some were blinded, others cruelly disfigured.’ The faces of the Allied soldiers which she had expected to register a degree, at least, of satisfaction over their victories were only ‘weary’ and ‘bitter.’

Young children during World War I were encouraged to act like soldiers and be prepared for future service. (St. Nicholas, June 1918, page 739.)

PREPAREDNESS

[Image of a cartoon depicting children engaged in war-like activities, with the caption: ‘Si & sec arms! Forward march! Hup—hey—Halt! Mick—tanie—forward march! Hey—hey—Halt! Toddle-out—Boom! Soldiers brave are we! Toddle-out—Boom! Neighbors out to see! Daddy send a telegram to the President! Tell him we are ready to go when we are sent!’]
Were the high school boys who were to come into the military told the truth about total war in the twentieth century? Of course not. But who was? Even today, who really knows the truth of the battlefield beyond the men (and now women) who fight there? The reality is that in both world wars the U.S. Government was extremely concerned about home-front morale. Total war demanded the energies of a whole nation, the children not exempt, and if the literal truth about combat zones were told, it was feared morale would plummet and the country would lose. The years leading to both world wars saw in the United States a strident debate between the two p’s, that is, supporters of pacifism versus those of preparedness, who believed war was sometimes necessary, perhaps even desirable, and the United States must militarize to stand ready for a fight.

“Be prepared” would seem to echo common sense, in fact so common it became the motto of the Boy Scout Movement. But common sense does not always apply to war—perhaps it never does—and at the turn of the last century a strong movement argued against preparedness. As applied to military affairs, preparedness compels a nation to spend a considerable amount of its revenue and its human capital preparing for war, even if a war is not imminent. The United States in 1914 had seen no good reason to harvest enormous swaths of its treasury preparing for the kind of vast armies, enormous field guns and dreaded battleships defending the big powers across the pond. England sparked an arms race with Germany over its Dreadnaught class of battleships; Germany threatened France with its divisions of well-trained military backed by the most advanced ordnance on the planet; Russia threatened Germany with its army of conscripts less well-trained, but considerably more numerous and supposedly more brutal. France threatened Germany with its perennial revenge talk for losing in 1871. Everyone in the Old Country seemed, at the least, extraordinarily well spoiled for an extremely bestial fight.

But not the United States. Its entire army of 128,000 men represented barely more than one-fourth of those killed during the first months of World War I alone (400,000). America had little artillery, no airplanes, and no draft. In fact, one reason Germany confidently resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917, knowing full well Washington would likely respond with a war declaration, was that its military advisors presumed the war would be over by the time an unprepared America geared up for battle. They were right, almost. It took a good year for doughboys to hit the trenches, but during that time the Allies managed to hang on.

But before 1917 those U.S. leaders who most aggressively promoted a United States military buildup received only mild support. Pacifists argued that military
preparation in peacetime was worse than costly; it was counterproductive. It not only did not guarantee peace, but practically guaranteed war, because nations backed by arsenals are more likely to fight. Look at Austria-Hungary, backed by Germany—it was Vienna that precipitated the war in the first place. When an apparently isolated incident in Sarajevo cascaded into general war during the summer of 1914, pacifists who maintained that preparedness meant spoiling for a fight seemed to see their baleful predictions come true. But the belligerent nations didn’t see it that way. Every country believed it was fighting a defensive war for its very survival. Patriotic nationalism propagated the position that had only their nation been even more prepared, it would have won the war before a grisly stalemate ground its way through lives of hundreds of thousands of young men.

Many in United States at the war’s beginning did originally see a logic in those who argued that preparedness spoils for war. The country remained steadfastly neutral during 1914. But attacks on United States ships, worry over security of loans made to allies, effective British propaganda, and some actual atrocities and brutality from the Germans, encouraged a slide in public opinion from neutrality to favoring the preparedness advocates. Former president Theodore Roosevelt, in particular, raged against President Woodrow Wilson for not immediately jumping into the war. General Leonard Wood promoted camps to help businessmen prepare personally through military training on weekends. Reflecting business interests, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Committee on National Defense in 1916 issued a report calling for universal military training. President Wilson moved to build a larger armed force, but too slowly for many advocates. The National Security League, supported in particular by East Coast Superpatriots, grew to a powerful foil for anti-preparedness groups such as the American School Peace League. The security league promoted enormous demonstrations in favor of preparedness, particularly in New York and Chicago. Explaining the movement to children, St. Nicholas magazine noted accurately that the spectacles pulled the strings of patriotic emotion, as opposed to the more rational arguments of the anti-militarists.

The main purpose of most of these demonstrations has been to awaken interest in the subject of preparedness. In all parts of the country there are large numbers of people who feel that we ought to have a larger army and a stronger navy.... That the demonstrations have done much for the cause of preparedness cannot be denied. But they have done something else: they have aroused the American spirit and have kindled the fire of genuine patriotism.
While the preparedness debate rippled through government and pressure groups, the central focus argued that human beings as much as piles of ordnance must be prepared. And the human beings most likely to need preparation were children, the pool from which the future is drawn, in war and in peace. The schools became “a battleground in the struggle over militarism in American society.” Proponents saw in those who opposed preparedness a group threatening the masculinity of American boys, particularly as most elementary school teachers were women. “Manliness” was presumed to be lacking in American boys, presumed to mean an education advocating peace. It left them physically weak and bereft of “vigor.” Declared one naval officer, “women tutelage is to do violence to that most precious possession, his masculine nature.... He will never recover. He goes through life a maimed man.”

Several states, most obviously New York, proposed to remedy this danger through defining preparedness as military training beginning as young as twelve. Physical education teachers, who before the war had struggled to establish credibility for the field, made what they thought was a logical connection between physical fitness and military preparation, and so became the greatest educational proponents of preparedness in the schools. One of the more restrained of these wrote in 1918 that physical drills and athletic competition could form a “plan to accomplish this preparedness through a method of training that will not taint coming generations with the desire to test their skill in the vocation of killing.” But even as preparedness advocates were winning their battle and teachers who opposed bringing military affairs into the schools slunk into silence for fear of their jobs or worse, some authorities continued to question the evolving value. “Preparedness’ is one of those mysterious words, hypnotic in its influence. Prepare! Prepare! is the cry of the time,” wrote an Oregon legislator. “Prepare for what? It should mean preparedness for a life of usefulness, and the question is this: Do our schools give our children a workable basis for life?” A state normal school president observed that before the United States entered the war preparedness was so unpopular in the schools that some teachers actually forbade marching and singing martial songs. But when war was declared, the United States, children included, jumped enthusiastically to join their government in wartime patriotism. They apparently had been well prepared: “When the call came to arms, who were the first to join the colors? The young men from the halls of learning—high school, normal school, college, and university.”

Pacifists in World War I included socialists who in the early twentieth century formed a voice strong enough to be heard in Congress and state capitols.
Moreover, Wilson initially was concerned that the “hyphenated Americans,” those immigrants recently come through Ellis Island often to escape European poverty and militarism, would balk at a call to patriotism for their newly adopted country. This turned out not to be the case, but it did not stop the government from launching an enormous propaganda campaign (the word at that time having no negative connotation) aimed at adults as well as children. The few pacifists who did not acquiesce to a spiral of silence found themselves harassed, threatened, or jailed.

After World War I ended, anti-preparedness forces reasserted their viewpoint as the United States fell back into its pre-war isolationism. By 1920, U.S. armed forces that had grown to two million men serving in Europe shrunk to 204,000. American educators reflected the country’s bleak disillusion in seeing that not only did World War I not end all wars, it didn’t solve much of anything. If that war seemed pointless, teaching peace might be a better answer, and interwar educators joined the nation in rejecting the kind of alliances that might only lead the United States back to the battlefields. Americans disillusioned with the outcome of World War I strongly supported moves to avoid “foreign entanglements,” and in 1935 Congress passed laws to formally resurrect neutrality. Only with the threat of a second world war did President Franklin Roosevelt act to re-establish a potent military, and again, not without opposition. Peace education stayed popular—until December 7, 1941.

While martial training again was proposed for the schools, this time the U.S. military came out against it, proposing instead an emphasis on literacy, science, and fitness. But some authorities believed a lack of preparedness in the 1930s actually made World War II possible, as it emboldened Hitler and allowed Germany to remilitarize. And teachers found themselves to be one of the scapegoats. An angry response from an army officer to a letter of sympathy from a teacher for his son missing in action blamed educators: “I wish you to know that maybe if you and a lot of others like you had not preached pacifist doctrines for so many years at the high school, there might not have been a war and we might have had a trained army and an adequate air force.” Interwar educators defended themselves, arguing that teaching peace had little to do with the forces that drove the world to a second general war. A North Dakota teacher wrote, “Let’s all share what blame that we deserve for being unprepared for war. To imply that education should shoulder a major share, however, is evidence of a circumscribed, entirely un-American, spirit.” Calling anti-pacifists “social defeatists,” a Chicago educator observed, “The conditions which gave rise to the present conflict have no relation whatsoever to the nonmilitant peace education
of the past twenty years. And now—while we are in the very midst of war—we must educate for peace more vigorously than ever before." He added, “There can be no such thing as ‘militant democracy.’” But there was. There still is. If preparedness means carrying permanently one of Theodore Roosevelt’s big sticks, then the United States has become a Teddsonian democracy.

Had it not been for the shock of December 7, 1941, that debate over isolationism might have continued, but by the time the date had gone to infamy the country had no doubt it would have to mobilize for a second total war. Three days after the war declaration Byron Price was asked to lead the Office of Censorship. Franklin Roosevelt declared, “All Americans abhor censorship, just as they abhor war. But the experience of this and of all other nations has demonstrated that some degree of censorship is essential in wartime, and we are at war.” The press did not complain. As in World War I, nearly every media outlet in the country squarely stood behind, or in fact became a partner with, the government in promoting its wartime requirements.

Hiding the Hideous

One of them was to censor the most gruesome stories and photos from the fronts as possibly troubling to morale, and in any case, journalists self-censored images they believed their readers did not want to see. After all, they had loved ones in uniform. And no one wants to hear how one of them might have really died: not in a noble charge against a fearsome enemy, but flat as flagstone, run over by one of your own tanks in another debacle of the supposedly precision-inspired planning of the U.S. Army. Reality was ugly, and war was supposed to be, well, worth waging for a higher calling, such as Franklin Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms.”

The truth is that the controllers of reality were right. The home front plainly did not want to hear what war was really like. In a rare exception to the anodyne rule, in World War I the Committee on Public Information sought to comfort families whose sons had become doughboys with a 1918 film entitled “When Your Soldier Is Hit.” But as Mossé discovered, it contained “too much horrifying realism, and alarmed rather than reassured audiences.” In World War II, authorities ever sensitive to mistakes from the first total war did let escape some frank stories. Before Pearl Harbor, Life magazine’s photographers captured fairly shocking images. As a family magazine circulating to millions of American homes, children undoubtedly happened upon these images, but after December 7, 1941, the government moved to censor Life and newsreel footage.
It later relented, believing as Winston Churchill had said that morale could be steeled if the home front were shown the war as it really was, “blood, sweat and tears.” But showing some of this, one World War II child reported, gave her “terrible nightmares.”

Even toys should not be too graphic about war’s realities. In 1938 Gum, Inc., produced a set of chewing gum cards entitled “The Horrors of War.” These were clearly reminiscent of Goya’s horrifying prints, “The Disasters of War,” produced a hundred years before. The 1930s cards for children were frankly explicit in war illustration and description. “The cards could never be marketed today. Scenes showing dogs eating dead bodies, body parts flying through the air, hangings, mutilation, and decapitation.”

Outraged parents could be perhaps mollified that each card included the words, “To Know the Horrors of War Is to Want Peace.” This children’s toy is rare today, and such realistic depictions of war were nearly unique in America during the world war period. But the cards were apparently popular among children, who sometimes it might be admitted particularly relish playthings that produce parent outrage. Noted is that on the cards the Japanese were always depicted as the barbarians.

If the truly hideous nature of the wars was mostly hidden from children, it was not because American authorities hoped to hide the wars themselves from children. Actually, this was not always quite true. Throughout the era the government, schools, organizations and media brought the war to the kids, but before World War I some voices doubted that wisdom. William Fayal Clarke, editor of St. Nicholas Magazine for Boys and Girls, one of the most prominent children’s magazines during the World War I era, included nothing about the war before March 1915. He noted, “for the younger children of its audience, this magazine has felt a natural desire, and was in duty bound, to protect them as far as possible from any intimate knowledge of the horrors which war always carries in its train and of the suffering which, since 1914, has surpassed any similar record in human history.” This reflected the position of the magazine’s founder, Mary Mapes Dodge, who declared that a children’s magazine should be “a pleasure-ground where butterflies flit gayly hither and thither,” and that “snakes of immorality and vulgarity never transgress the pages.”

Actually it was the children themselves who wanted to see snakes; St. Nicholas was most interactive of children’s magazines during this period, offering regular rewards to readers who wrote letters and short articles. These readers began choosing the war as a topic at least as early as March 1915, when St. Nicholas that month featured a letter from a Winnipeg, Manitoba, reader, who said she was in England to be near her father and brother fighting in the war. Later 1915
letters emphasized the wish for peace, theme of a children’s writing contest in June 1915, and emphasis of the first non-reader generated material regarding the war, in July: “When our own American boys and girls think of the numberless boys and girls in Europe whose fathers go out to battle and never return—that is surely an incentive for every one of you to strive to the utmost to cultivate and maintain a peaceful mind toward all. It is something worth trying for.”

In September the editor, bowing to obvious demand from readers for those snakes, inaugurated a new feature, “The Watch Tower,” which digested war news of the month. Other children’s magazines, however, did not try to shield children from war-related topics, and were actually fairly graphic about their presentation before the United States joined the conflict.

War as a Way of Childhood

As the United States became unable to avoid war in 1917, and again in 1941, it was clear to those who wished to reach the nation’s children that the inevitable could actually be of some benefit. In fact, it could do quite a lot for American children, very little of it negative. The idea that war could be an excellent way to build character at home particularly resonated among educators and government leaders in World War I. This was a crisis; those who wanted to see change in society were determined not to let it go to waste. Leaders of the Progressive movement during World War I, in particular, hoped to use the war as a way to advance their educational goals. Strongly pro-war political leaders, such as Theodore Roosevelt, thought the war could bring the American immigrant salad bowl closer into the melting pot, and children could play a critical part in making that happen. Others just thought some old-fashioned military virtue could serve to improve children grown lazy and self-centered. “Without seeming pessimistic, one may truly say that the average modern child had become self-centered,” declared Henry Davidson, chairman of the World War I Red Cross War Council. “The next generation is learning lessons of responsibility and honest service.”

In fact, a war could be excellent education for youth in many ways. Ideals included:

War as a way to habits of sacrifice.
War as a way to physical fitness and toughness.
War as a way to knowledge of geography and world affairs.
War as a way to self-discipline.
War as a way to patriotism.
War as a way to Americanization.
War as a way to serve parents, community, and country.
War as a way to build courage.
War as a way to build loyalty.
War as a way to encourage habits of conservation and thrift.
War as a way to build obedience to authority.
War as a way to teach duty.
War as a way to teach useful skills.

All these were present in children’s programs of both world wars, although priorities and methods of transmitting these values to children differed. But before authorities could build character through a prism of wartime virtues, they had to meet a child where he or she was at. And that meant dealing with a child’s fear.

Number four of the Four Freedoms that guided Americans during World War II, Freedom from Fear, was particularly applicable during that war. The others, Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Religion, and Freedom from Want, could wait until later, but fear—nothing might be more fearful than a world war. While older children could handle war, young children were thought to be especially vulnerable. They had seen their parents’ response to Pearl Harbor, shock and disbelief that a foreign power would attack the United States at home. The war was no longer fought in the abstract, but really could directly reach the home front, or so it seemed. Authorities set up air raid drills in schools across the country, despite the tactical reality that no enemy plane could reach the continental United States. “Even in places like Janesville, Wisconsin, where sirens went off in air raid drills, and blackouts, and so the nights were ‘punctuated with fear.’” In March 1941, *Life* magazine published a photo story designed to show how parents may deal with children’s fears of war, particularly as they responded to the becoming ubiquitous air raid drills. Noting the government had addressed childhood fears by employing psychologists to write a booklet for parents, the [unsigned] *Life* article observed, “The need to educate children against fear—the springhead of all psychic trauma—has already released a flood of advice from child-guidance experts and well-meaning amateurs.” However, the government-produced material emphasized bringing the war to the children in a manner reflecting their habits of play. “Stressing the sound psychological fact that the unfamiliar is the most fearful, the booklet recommends that war’s grim realities be incorporated into family life as rapidly and as casually as possible.”
Photos showed an actual family from New York, “Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Mott, Queens Village, Long Island.” The caption noted, “Seven-year-old Billy and four-year-old Evelyn are learning to face whatever may come as a game, for war is being made a game in their home right now. By joining in the play, the Motts are also fostering the sense of family solidarity which is a child’s greatest strength.”

Other authorities believed the best way to reduce fear might be to keep children busy. That could also lessen the possibility for juvenile delinquency, as in both wars authorities knew from experience in England that a war declaration distracts parents and often draws them away from home, leaving children at loose ends. A well-known educator advised:

If we can be calm and assured, if we can face whatever comes courageously and confidently, they will be courageous and strong in their turn. That is our chief concern for the duration then, because if we win the war and lose this generation of children to illness, weakness and despair, we need not have fought it. Plan to keep these children occupied at home, in school, and in the community, and protect them from the worst effect of the war—fear.

The idea of forcing children to participate in air-raid drills against a farfetched risk of attack became more controversial as the shock of Pearl Harbor receded and the reality of scaring children for no reason became more concerning. Some authorities believed these drills to be good training, but others thought it was a waste of time at the least, at most, detrimental. “Reports from many schools all over the country” showed students coordinating air-raid drills, while new classes for “air raid wardens” invaded school curricula. The National Education Association recommended that parents teach children about blackouts and set up air-raid shelters. Air-raid drills in the elementary schools two or three times a week were in some communities bolstered by issuing each child a metal information tag, dog tag style, in case they were killed or injured. This apparently brought the war too close for comfort of some children, who became terrified of nearly non-existent danger. By 1943, however, authorities began to wonder whether air-raid drills and blackouts were doing more harm than good, pointlessly scaring young children about an attack that will never happen. “I am concerned about the emotional effects of widespread preparations for meeting air-raids,” said one professor of education. “To a child preparation means impending action. I doubt the wisdom of extensive air-raid drills and obvious precautions in communities very unlikely to experience raids.”

In World War I, conversely, no authority expressly addressed the need to
Some parents were concerned that their children loved to dress up and play war. World War II educators were divided over the psychological benefits of war play, but consensus favored the presumption that play relieved fear and gave children something to do. (Parents Magazine, July 1942, page 26.)

calm childhood fears. This may have been because child psychology had not developed into maturity as a research-based discipline. Or it may have been because the United States was not attacked on the home front. The ships at sea sunk by German submarines did not persuade home-front authorities to coordinate extensive air-raid drills, as aerial bombing was in its infancy; it was hard to find a credible war threat to actual lives of American home-front children in 1917-18.

But during this war, as in the second, children were encouraged to confront general anxiety about the war by making it part of their games. This also was addressed expressly in the Life magazine how-to for parents. Photographs emphasized the importance of making the war a game as a way to make it less fearful, and more acceptable:
Evelyn and Billy, wearing miniature Churchill suits, huddle under the dining-room table to play ‘air-raid shelter.’ If they are ever in a real shelter, they will think it’s fun.
Billy and his father stage a naval battle on floor of the living-room. Playing with warlike toys often helps little boys to release their hidden anxieties by acting them out.65

Children in both world wars replayed the battles through an enormous variety of games, some made up, some based on manufactured items. The practice of bringing war into the miniature world of a young child extends to at least the eighteenth century, when boys could be encouraged to learn martial ideals through a collection of metal soldiers. During the world wars millions were produced, along with games and toys to depict nearly every piece of equipment and battle a child could reduce to the language of play. On the plus side, argued a professor of education during World War II, “Probably there is some validity in the concept of catharsis; the child is doing something about his concerns. Certainly it does no good to forbid such activities. Their harm is in the great restriction of activity resulting from constant preoccupation with them.”66 Many parents disagreed, although authorities found little to worry about in war toys, and sometimes encouraged war games in school. Writing for a prominent magazine of the World War I era, an author who attended a toy show observed of the many war toys and games for sale:

Feeling, impulse and idea are so welded together in a war complex in his impressionable mind that for the rest of his life fighting seems to him a necessity, war ‘as inevitable as death.’ I came away from that dingy, antique hotel feeling that I had been present indeed at the sowing of the dragon’s teeth even if for ten or twenty years we wait for the crop to come up.67

World War II authorities generally supported war play not only because parents were powerless to stop the kids anyway, but because it could replace childhood fear and tension with action. One author warned, however, “we must keep in mind that every time a child’s toy gun kills a Jap or his submarine sinks a Nazi boat he has impressed upon his character by way of his muscles and his ears and his eyes and his sharp heart beat and his quick breathing that the surest way out of difficulty is to destroy the thing you fear.”68

Mossé considered war toys as a way of “trivializing the war,” making it less fearful, less menacing, and so more acceptable to children.69 This, of course, was precisely what American authorities wanted to do, but for reasons not so
sinister: they hoped familiarity could assuage fear within the world of a child. In any case, as parents know, if you do not allow your children to have the toys they want, they will make those toys themselves. During the world wars, sticks became rifles, trees became fortifications, and no one wanted to be the “Hun,” the “Jap,” or whatever other enemy children most learned to loathe. Games will be played, and the aggressive nature of children will frighten parents regardless, although the politics of channeling this into a more conscious militarization of childhood deserves further consideration.

**Patriotism to Build the Ideal Child**

Worry of authorities that they would have to address a child’s anxiety and fear over war seldom was addressed in 1917-18, and began to shrink after 1943. It became obvious that the nation’s children were not going to be bombed—although not completely obvious, as that did indeed happen one time, in 1945. Bomb-packed balloons from Japan floated near Bly, Oregon, killing six curious children who chose to investigate. This was the only fatal raid by air in the continental United States during World War II. Despite the earlier frenzy of drills that by this time had waned, this actual incident was censored, not so much to stay panic among children as to avoid giving Japan information on success of their unusual weapon.⁷¹

Of more lasting interest during both wars was not a concern over children’s physical safety, but a focus on children’s moral development. A child no longer fearful could be encouraged to play a wide variety of roles in wartime that could both help the country and help the child. Qualities that war could engender generally fell into four categories: acquisition of skills, improvement of health and fitness, development of civic spirit, and enhancement of moral character.

The hub around which all these virtues fell was patriotism. Wartime patriotism could drive the child, sometimes indolent, often cranky, to motivate herself or himself toward the goals authorities would hope to develop. Patriotism was particularly a helpful beginning, because it sprang from emotional, and not rational sources. Children were presumed to be driven by emotions. “Fortunately the feelings and emotions can be utilized for useful ends as well as evil ends,” observed an author writing for elementary school educators in World War II. “A moderate, reasonable and wise appeal to these emotions can be properly used in the schools. Patriotism is an emotion.”⁷² World War I authorities similarly suggested patriotic appeals, “primarily to the imagination and to the emotions.”⁷³ Patriotism was an emotion also widespread among the country’s adult popula-
tion, and in both world wars probably formed the single most significant force driving the country into war. The strength of World War I-era superpatriots such as Theodore Roosevelt and General Leonard Wood who, under the general heading of “preparedness,” hoped to thoroughly militarize the schools and the country before 1917, was resisted fairly successfully by groups such as the American School Peace League. The league, organized by Fannie Fern Andrews in 1908, found support at the highest levels of government. Federal Bureau of Education commissioner Philander Claxton invited Andrews to advise the office on international peace studies and pacifist literature choices. League efforts spread to Europe as well before the war. In fact, in 1914 French and English governments presumed international pacifism was such a force that it might blunt appeals to the colors. That turned out to be a straw in the wind compared with the appeal of nationalism.

Nationalism, the idea that members of a race or historic class of people care about their identity as a separate state, was presumed in the early twentieth century to be a mostly spent force in world affairs. It is the wellspring of patriotism, both based on emotional feeling of independent rights and gratitude for one’s country. Nationalist force today has proven over and over to be capable of cruelty to the point of genocide. Mossé’s examination of the last century’s incredible violence grew from his “concern with modern nationalism and its consequences.” Comparisons can be made regarding each world war’s ghastly fests of human extermination, but both grew in their own momentum beyond anything initiators expected, black hurricanes destroying millions of lives in ways more hideous than anyone could imagine—or would want to, even today. Patriotism as the engine of morale sustains the home front, and feeds men to the battlefields to make continuation of war possible. World War I, as many Germans believed by 1939, was not lost on the battlefields. The German army had not disintegrated. The German home front had. Hitler was able to exploit this and rebuilt an über-patriotic military state to disastrous end. What American authorities knew in 1941 was that the war was going to be won only if home front support could be maintained. And that demanded a searing level of patriotism from old and from young.

No one could question the extremes of adult patriotism exhibited by those whose charge was to influence children during either war. In fact, to exhibit less than those extremes was to risk censure, harassment, jail, even physical danger. In World War I, teachers who remained neutral concerning patriotism could be fired, as ten were in New York City, of hundreds in many incidents across the nation. In World War II little evidence exists showing many were fired for
flaccid patriotism. But patriotic fervor certainly drove authorities in their attentions to children, as home-front morale was now clearly known to be a critical factor in sustaining total war. In World War I many educators were commanded to sign a guarantee of their patriotism, and to teach it. As the National Education Association itself heard, “It is the sacred obligation of the schools to instill the love of country into the hearts of the growing generation, when the roots of habit, and therefore character, sink deep into the plastic mold of youth.”

But that was preaching to the choir. Nearly everyone was perfectly patriotic during both wars, and pleased to bring the sacred fervor of patriotism to children. Patriotism as the queen value was never in serious debate. Encouraging the feeling of duty and love to one’s country had long been a central goal for a variety of authorities. The founder of St. Nicholas, considered the best children’s magazine of the era, declared in 1873 that “love of country” would be one of her goals.

A wellspring of patriotism among its readers demonstrated that these goals had been achieved, or probably reflected in the patriotism children learned in the home, because the editor noted writing contest entries “show our young artists to be fairly bristling with patriotism, as we all ought to be about this time, and so the editor wishes for the loyal Leaguers a joyous and ‘glorious’ Fourth.” This was before World War I began. When the United States entered the war, editors reminded all children to read Wilson’s speech, “a historic utterance, nobly voicing the true patriotism of the American people in this world crisis, and worthy to rank with the immortal messages of Presidents Washington and Lincoln.”

The Committee on Public Information urged primary school teachers to enhance patriotism and Americanism by teaching the “Flag Salute”:

I give my head
My hands,
And my heart,
To God and my country—
One country,
One language,
And one flag.

Patriotism was described during World War I in religious terms, a “sacred” duty. This was as close as authorities came to presenting war to American youth by way of religious words and metaphors. In both world wars, American children were presented with a program thoroughly secularized, unless perhaps “patriotism” or “love of country” could be considered a religious ersatz in a country bound by religious variety. Despite the occasional reference to a generic “God,”
as in the poem above, the near-universal refusal of authorities to bring religion very far into war for children smartly contrasts with the experience of children living in European belligerents. World War II researchers found children separating war adversaries into religious metaphor: “They never talk about the British fighting against the Germans but of a conflict between God and Hitler.” Mossé observed that in Europe Christian ideals of morality were co-opted for nationalistic goals, and became in symbol and blessing part of the war myth experience. Audoin-Rouzeau found evidence in his research of children in World War I France that Catholic authorities in particular tied religious virtue to war, bringing the Christian ideal of Jesus’ sacrifice to the soldier who does the same for his country.

The few authorities who found themselves uneasy with the overtones of racism and hatred behind United States patriotism saw little tolerance for their viewpoint. E. M. Robinson, director of the Boy Scouts of America, who was Canadian, in 1917 incautiously let drop the remark that Scouts “needed to learn the difference between patriotism and jingoism.” When the group altered its federal charter to deny membership to anyone not an American citizen, Robinson had to resign. The Boy Scout Movement in the United States clung to a stern nationalistic fervor far after that power waned in other areas of American life, and played it out through patriotic suspicion of the slightest disloyalty, even into the 1930s.

But other authorities in World War II in many ways tried to temporize the white-hot rhetoric of World War I, including calls to patriotism. In particular educators worried that too emotional a patriotism would again have its flip side in the kind of jingoism that marked the last war. While certainly many pop-culture authorities reheated the old emotionalism, others urged a revised patriotism with restraint. World War II educators, for example, expressed the underlying presumption that children would be patriotic only in passing, and worried of its excess. “The best teaching of patriotism avoids the teaching of hatred,” cautioned an assistant in the federal education department. “It is well for us to say we will not teach hatred even for our enemies. It might be a quite different problem to keep hatred from creeping into the minds of children.” The natural patriotic emotions of children should be channeled to creative work, music, art, drama and other programs. Fortunately the feelings and emotions could be utilized for useful ends as well as evil ends.

Patriotism as the linchpin emotion could maintain its strength among children (and most adults) during these wars because its appeal reached beyond reason. Confident that they could rely on this quasi-religious, “sacred” virtue,
authorities built an entire system for character development using war as a sourcebook. By militarizing a child’s life in school and out, authorities could mold a character in three areas most coveted in the ideal citizen:

- Physical and mental toughness.
- Moral and civic competence.
- Professional and practical skill.

Healthy, Fit, and Ready to Fight

War would provide the most obvious base in physical and mental toughness. One of the more surprising things authorities learned on establishing the Selective Service (draft) in World War I was that many American boys were weak and sick. This came as a shock to those in government and education, because they had presumed American children were robust as children ought to be. In a 1918 address to the National Education Association, a U.S. Education Bureau representative said the government had no idea Americans were so unfit. In 1917, 34 percent of those considered for military service were rejected as “physically unfit.” Of those accepted, a large portion “were lacking in the strength, endurance and general organic power necessary for intensive military training.... Here then are two facts: a large amount of rejection for physical defects, much of which could have been easily remedied in school years, and a large amount of undeveloped physical capacity, all of which could have been developed during school years.” This development would have to take place before high school, however, as in 1916 only 15 percent of seven million boys reached high school.88

Attempts to improve physical fitness in both sexes beginning in World War I lost ground after a brief post-war burst of enthusiasm. From a high of thirty-six states requiring physical education came the Depression, and phys ed was declared a frill.89 Again in World War II, authorities who worked under the presumption that children were now fit were shocked when draft examiners found fitness to be generally low. Leonard W. Rowntree, medical director of the National Selective Service, speaking at a National War Fitness Conference sponsored by the American Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation in 1943 (theme: “Victory Through Fitness”), reported that before Pearl Harbor, already half of two million candidates were rejected for physical deficiencies. Standards were lowered in 1942. Still, it stood at one-third rejections. Even among the presumably strongest at age eighteen to nineteen, 25.4 percent were rejected. Older men quickly became physically unready for the army: by age
thirty-six, 70 percent failed to meet army standards, and by forty-five, 80 percent failed. “The lesson that war teaches is that we must not take health for granted in times of peace. We must plan for it, work for it, and teach for it.” An aviation medical officer declared,

In trying to organize an army for World War I we were surprised at the great number of potential draftees who could not meet the physical qualifications for military service. Nevertheless, this experience apparently did not make a lasting impression because we failed to put into effect any comprehensive plan for bettering the health of the population in general. The draft eligible population of today probably isn’t better off than it was in 1917 and 1918.

A lack of mental ability was also found to be common among draftees, and considered part of a boy’s physical training. Rowntree declared that physical fitness included mental fitness, but while physical standards could be measured in things like situps and pushups, standards of mental fitness were less clear. Dr. Arthur H. Steinhaus, chief, Division of U.S. Office of Education School Health and Physical Recreation, offered several guidelines. In addition to being “reasonably free from nervous instability,” a candidate “should know when and how to eat, and he must provide satisfactory evidence that he successfully regulates his bowel movements without recourse to medication in any form.” Exact nature of such evidence was not specified. Neither was the mental toughness called upon by numerous writers in World War I, although that such toughness was necessary, and apparently lacking, was presumed among American children. One author did note that physical fitness had as its base proper nutrition, and that the gardening that children were encouraged to undertake for victory could also improve habits of healthy eating. Finally a New York University authority speaking to the NEA laid it plainly on the line:

We have developed into a sedentary people. We, more than any race that has ever survived in history, spend more time in overheated rooms. We have become habituated to living on refined foods, almost predigested foods. Our white flour and our breakfast foods are not the food of champions, nor are white sugar and an excessive amount of fats. Our exercise habits have been a disgrace. Our children have been indulged in limitless ways. We put in bus lines to ferry them to school, when they should walk—within a two-mile radius.
Chapter Two: How War Can Make Better Children

The Virtue of Sacrifice

These words, we must remind ourselves, were written in 1942! If good health and fitness could offer a base for the second and third of authorities’ wartime goals for children, even more useful to parents and society might be the ever-obedient child, always cheerful, ready to serve, “morally straight to help their country to the full in time of war, as well as in time of peace,” as President Franklin Roosevelt wrote in the Boy Scouts of America 1942 report. To build qualities such as courage, thrift, obedience, duty, loyalty, self-discipline and knowledge, is required, to begin with, sacrifice. Authorities asked repeatedly for sacrifice from children who, many suspected, had sacrificed too little during peacetime. In declaring that American children had become self-absorbed, the World War I council chairman of the Red Cross found a solution in war service. “War has laid its hands upon American children as well as those in Europe—they are taking the responsibility seriously, as is shown by the readiness to sacrifice leisure time and candy money to the success of school war work.” The establishment of the Junior Red Cross could encourage children to work their way out of selfishness by volunteering under the general Red Cross umbrella. Woodrow Wilson provided to this new group his usual letter of support, while the junior director added, “President Wilson in a proclamation has summoned them to the colors, the red, white and blue—blue of truth, white of purity, and the red of sacrifice and service.” The red of sacrifice was a metaphor for the blood shed by soldiers fighting for children. As well-known educator Angelo Patri admonished in World War II, “Rationing isn’t sacrifice. When a young man gives up his future, offers his life in pledge of our cause, he is making a sacrifice.”

But if authorities such as Patri did not consider rationing to be sacrifice, children surely did. Sacrifice to American children militarized for wartime needs could be taught as a metaphor: children themselves did not experience actual combat or dislocation. Instead, authorities emphasized sacrifice in three areas: loss of favored foods (specifically sugar), loss of spending money, and loss of free time. Such sacrifices were generally thought to build character as well as help the war effort. On the other hand, authorities only obliquely mentioned a fourth area of loss, if at all: that a father or brother might die. Death was almost never presented in any realistic way to the wartime American child (nor to adults, for that matter). Mourning the death of a loved one became the unspoken ultimate sacrifice for many children, particularly in World War II. Death of a loved one could be explained only through stories of heroism, bravery, and noble courage.
But authorities working in the child’s world of the home front shifted the meaning of sacrifice from the demoralizing possibility of true loss to the presumably uplifting opportunity of trivial loss for patriotic good of the nation.

Food shortages and substitutions became a palpable way American children otherwise far from the battlefields could actually feel a personal loss, even if insignificant in comparison to those in combat. Writing about a twelve-year-old nephew in 1919, an author in the *New Republic* noted, “Self-sacrifice is not a matter of poems and sermons and history, it is the daily news.” Still, when the abstract became a real loss to the child, ideals were harder to maintain. “The weakest spot in Billy’s war program is food conservation. He does not readily respond to the sacrifice of sugar.” Other tangible ways children were expected to build character through sacrifice required denial of money and time for the war effort. In both wars children were recruited as a sales army to aggressively market war bonds among parents and friends, but that expectation sacrificed only some free time. More was asked: children were expected to buy bonds themselves. It did not matter if a child had only a dime or quarter to spend; he or she could accumulate savings stamps toward purchasing a bond. As highly touted campaign after campaign siphoned their money into government IOUs, children found that sacrifice also meant dwindling of small pleasures. “Individual contributions of pennies, nickels, and dimes have been made at a tremendous sacrifice of the luxuries of childhood—the ice cream cone, the stick of gum, and the movie show.” On the plus side, giving up money for war bonds could help children appreciate “the terrific costs of modern war.”

With less money, children might also find less to do. But sacrifice of time could mop up roaming children and put them to work collecting scrap, sending packages to the troops, knitting garments, delivering messages, or helping with household chores to free parents for their own war work. Whether authorities believed such wartime sacrifice could ultimately be a good way to develop childhood character depended on how the sacrifice fell on children. United States religious leaders did not develop the ideal of death as sacrifice for human salvation, common among Catholic authorities in France. But some clergy did believe sacrifice could build character. “Out of sacrifice come many blessings,” affirmed Rev. Hugh F. Blunt, Church of St. John the Baptist, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Schools could build sacrifice as a virtue, “with the ideals of service and self-sacrifice actuating our people.”
War Work and Military Drill: Viable Alternatives to School?

Secular authorities hoped wartime sacrifice of time, money and small pleasures could build in children the self-discipline, thrift, and community spirit so beneficial in peacetime. As an undercurrent to building character, the sacrifice of free time also might serve to blunt the danger of juvenile delinquency. American authorities knew Britain had experienced a rise in delinquency during both world wars. War demands pulled parents out of homes and left the scamps too often with unsupervised time easily diverted into trouble-making. Children could be put to work, in paid agricultural or industrial jobs, and so kept off the streets. American industry experiencing burgeoning demand and a shrinking labor pool thought this a fine way to build character and help the nation’s business at the same time. In fact, during World War I, whenever a labor gap was found, children seemed to be the most obvious sources on which to call. But child welfare advocates who had long fought for limits to child labor did not think suspending the law under an argument of wartime expediency constituted character building. “The welfare of the child had been the last thing considered,” noted one legislator in 1917. But a salary was attractive, and so children in large numbers opted for this kind of sacrifice instead of going to school. In 1918 the federal government weighed in by reminding employers, “Neither the patriotic desire to serve immediately nor the attraction of high wages should be permitted to draw children from school to work.”

But if children working for pay was not considered a character-building sacrifice, children working for nothing was all right. Authorities didn’t consider limits on volunteer work, by age or in hours on task. Children were expected to prefer the reward of patriotic sacrifice over that of remuneration. Children certainly did respond massively to volunteer opportunities. Yet problems in both world wars keeping older children in school when they saw good-paying wartime jobs were there for the taking led authorities to repeatedly plead with the country’s adolescents to stay in the classroom. Between 1940 and 1944, the number of adolescents in school dropped by 1.25 million. Most left to take jobs, raising the number of working teenagers from 1 million to 2.9 million. In 1943 alone, of 4 million high school students present in class in the spring, only 3 million returned in the fall, the rest finding more tangible rewards in war industries.

Sacrifice as a base on which to build other qualities of character could be used as necessary to exhort children to better behavior. From World War I juvenile media a common approach was to invoke the power of guilt. Noted an editor of a boys’ magazine, “If you are willing to work and sacrifice to bring
victory to her in this just cause, then you are an American. If you are not you are a traitor.”

Presuming prompt attention gained from this shameless approach to juvenile motivation, authorities could now work on building other positive qualities difficult to instill during peacetime. Courage, determination, discipline, duty, loyalty, obedience, patriotism, teamwork, thrift—bringing military values to children’s lives could help to perfect a long list of qualities society would admire in the coming generation. Progressivism, the ideological force for change in early twentieth-century America, by World War I had infiltrated political thinking to the highest reaches of government, from Woodrow Wilson to education commissioner Philander Claxton. Optimism that reason and education could change the world mirrored efforts of Progressivist educators who worked to move the nation’s classrooms from relaying on formal methods commanding rote memory of traditional subjects to engaged classrooms learning through community involvement and freedom to explore. What better way to foster this than through the involvement of wartime needs at a community level? A problem with extending this ideal through opportunities opened by wartime expediency was that many Americans who distrusted new educational standards thought the sought-after values could better be taught through a lens of strict military discipline and drill. The battle over the mind of the child during this war was not so much about if childhood should be militarized, but how.

“Dispersed through more than 100,000 school districts, [schools] lent themselves to a kind of ideological guerrilla warfare.”

World War I idealism smashed on the shallows of post-war disillusion. By the eve of World War II Progressivist educators were thrown on the defensive. How to teach values through a wartime prism became less a matter of educational philosophy, and more a matter of practical training. Politicians blamed Progressivism—unfairly—for a spike in juvenile delinquency during the 1930s, and thought virtue could better be taught through military regimentation and military schools. Concluded one historian of the era, “Army generals were blaming Progressive education for desertions, AWOLs, incompetence in the ranks and anything that smacked of ‘softness’ or ill discipline.” This attitude fed into the enthusiasm behind bringing children into the war by militarizing childhood during World War II. While Progressivism had taken a hit, in effect, authorities during both wars still hoped the supposed superiority of military values could offer children of the home front a guide for character.

To teach loyalty to one’s country, community or school, authorities emphasized, teachers or others concerned with child welfare had to prove their own loyalty. In World War I particularly, this presumption developed into a series
of harassments and intimidations threatening careers and safety of anyone even slightly perceived as being neutral. Loyalty oaths and tests ended careers and ruined reputations, and loyalty itself became academic subjects in schools. Teachers deemed fit to impart the virtues carried by a wartime display of perfect loyalty and unquestioned patriotism in many districts walked on the thinnest of eggshells; the slightest crack of disloyalty could lead to immediate dismissal, and lingering shame. Pacifism, a powerful positive force before 1917, became treason. In one of many examples from New York, a state particularly extreme in its wartime exuberance and implacable intolerance, Mary McDowell, a New York City teacher of eighteen years with a pacifist Quaker background, was fired for “conduct unbecoming a teacher.” After the war, a Chicago teacher in 1919 wrote of the irony of teaching democracy in American schools that operated in such a manner. “We want to make American democracy a beacon light for the rest of the world,” he wrote, but “our school system is an autocracy—autocratic in every phase of its organization.”

Discipline and obedience could be learned through drills: “The discipline of military drill can be made to tend to many other kinds of discipline. Obedience to all school regulations, to all civic laws, to all right customs, to all fair codes of youthful ethics, can be instilled along with the ardently adopted war discipline of which they are going to hear so much at home as long as the war lasts.” School athletics could be excellent preparation for war, teaching “the necessity for discipline and teamwork.” Patriotism must become part of the curriculum, as the NEA emphasized in its 1918 platform, and from there could flow other values. “But how are you going to teach them? Certainly not by a little morning lecture on the moral virtues. Most certainly not! Example is better far than precept and thirty children at least watch you every day and see your every word and motion. Are you living and moving as a patriot every day?”

Authorities in World War II found less character-building potential in militarizing childhood, but neither did they generally question qualities of character that war could bring to children. Whether actual drills and school military training could bring these qualities, however, was a matter of debate during World War I, even more so during World War II. “If we look beneath the surface, we find that military patriotism may be no deeper and no more lasting than military obedience,” warned the NEA in 1917. “We must not confuse excitement with patriotism, the showy exhibition with real love of country.” In fact, while World War II government and educational authorities were certainly convinced that war could build character in children, they tempered their enthusiasm in knowing that the experience of World War I proved to be only of
passing success. Warned the NEA in 1943:

Character education, in school and outside of school, is certain to be affected by the impact of the war on the lives of young and old. On the credit side, the war may be expected in most cases to promote such good qualities as valor, industry, thrift, self-sacrifice for a lofty cause, and devotion to the common good. The schools should take full advantage of the impetus provided by the war to cultivate with increased vigor these virtues in the young. However, war also brings hazards to some of our cherished ethical, religious, and spiritual values. Such humane sentiments as mercy, tolerance, and goodwill are apt to be supplanted by malice, revenge, and hate. It is the continuing duty of teachers to encourage and exemplify the highest ethical traits and to cooperate with the home, the church, and other character-building agencies.116

Nevertheless, even the more skeptical educators during World War II agreed that the influence of war on educational attempts to teach values could not be all bad. “If the war brings about a more general recognition of the value of such education, it will not be wholly detrimental to secondary education in this country.”117

While authorities in education and government debated the ways to teach values through militarized curriculum, editors of juvenile media presented a picture less nuanced: character was forged through military experience. “It is no place for ‘mollycoddles,’ but there is no better place for manly boys who have the ‘real stuff’ in them. That’s the kind we want and welcome,” wrote Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels in a letter to boys published in July 1918 St. Nicholas.118 The editor of American Boy opined confidently, “It is evident that war and war-time conditions are having a big influence on boys. A large number of contestants told how they had gained in the past year a realization of the true meaning and importance of patriotism, sacrifice, thrift, education, work and preparation for national service, as a result of the war.”119

Those who promoted establishing a skills-based curriculum of formal military training in the schools, based on drills, firearm skills, marching and athleticism, faced strong opposition before both wars. Pacifists and others argued that such education merely militarized the schools into warrior classrooms that groomed their male charges for fighting. Any useful skill learned through military drills could be learned in less warlike ways. After the United States actually declared war in 1917 and 1941, however, opponents of formal military training sunk into silence, as many schools around the country opted for martial curriculum. Related to this was the possibility of also teaching children the skills
of making bombs. Shortly after the United States entered World War I, the possibility was raised of converting school metal shops into munitions factories. But equipment could not easily be converted to such a use. “A department store, a clothing factory, a library, or an office building would be about as fit for such a purpose as a school building. The same may be said for the use of our schools as hospitals.”

Less controversial, however, were the practical skills children might acquire through infusing less military-specific but still patriotic wartime spirit into their learning in school and out. Such skills gained through wartime needs could be useful in peacetime, advocates argued. Practical and vocational learning had already been part of Progressive attempts to reform American education at the turn of the last century. Reformers hoped to see more hands-on learning in the classroom, and more practical skills put to use in the community. Prominent Progressivist educator John Dewey said learning practical skills on the farm could “conscript the national enthusiasm for athletics to national usefulness, reap the advantage of organized effort with its moral and educational results…” and “develop constructive patriotism.” As well, some authorities hoped a war-based training program for children would help level class differences. Speaking to the NEA in 1942, Kansas Governor Payne Ratner declared, “The war has taught us the tragedy of having too many trained for white-collar jobs, too few trained for vocational tasks.” World War I authorities hoped teaching farming skills might encourage sedentary city adolescents to gain new appreciation for rural youngsters who spent their days in the fields. One of many such formal programs set up during World War I introduced New York City boys to farm work as a way to fill labor shortages during the harvest.

The usefulness of boys learning farm skills became so promoted in World War I that a popular booklet, *Farm Craft Lessons*, was written by University of Illinois Dean of Agriculture Eugene Davenport to help teachers on farm training camps set up to educate on agricultural matters, “the boys subjected to military discipline.” A variety of camps and programs set up around the United States hoped to create a new army of skilled farmers. Success was limited at best.

Less ambitious were efforts of authorities to offer both boys and girls the chance to learn skills related to practical home making. It was presumed such activities could be of actual help to the soldiers, while at the same time offering valuable skills-based training. Practical instruction should begin in early adolescence, stressed a New York professor of vocational education, targeting children aged twelve, and should emphasize skills useful during wartime. “I stated that every teacher of manual training, sewing or cooking should be think-
ing in terms of mobilization service.... I said, furthermore, that any teacher of sewing who was not thinking in terms of Red Cross, and of mending, darning, and repairing, was as far away from the service idea as she possibly could be."\textsuperscript{124} The educator emphasized, “We are going to sew now for the Red Cross because it is war time. Later we shall sew for institutions in our community.”\textsuperscript{125} The first issue of Rally (October 1917), published for Girl Scouts and leaders, included instructions for knitting sweater sets for soldiers. Canning clubs encouraged conservation skills; boys would pick fruit while girls would work over the hot cook stove, a gendered division of children’s skills-based instruction reinforced during both wars. Skills girls could learn through wartime service included the expected work in knitting; skills boys could gain included carpentry, by making packing boxes, hospital night stands, potato mashers, chests, “peg legs,” or puzzles, and checkerboards to entertain troops in France. No evidence can be found indicating what children might have thought while working on artificial limbs, but as one writer noted of her nephew, “Billy’s attitude is that going to war is part of the game.”\textsuperscript{126}

Skills training not only was encouraged within the schools, but also offered through a variety of volunteer and other organizations, particularly the Red Cross, 4-H, and during World War II, FFA. Quasi-military training camps were set up to help teach wartime skills for girls as well as boys. The idea of training camps dated from before World War I; at first businessmen interested in being prepared for war joined the movement on free weekends, but after 1914 camps were extended to accept high-school age adolescents of both sexes. Describing one such camp, the National Service School in Chevy Chase, Maryland, a female participant noted that while military drill was part of the routine, it served only to organize participants more efficiently. “It is needless to say that the discipline of drill is excellent training for anyone,” emphasized the participant, who added that training activities included “first aid, hygiene and home nursing, dietetics, surgical dressing, knitting and sewing, wireless and Morse telegraphy, and signaling; all of which are most useful in any condition of life.”\textsuperscript{127} While skills-based training thought useful in wartime was strongly gender-specific, occasionally children would cross over. In one case, a boy learned to knit: “Carlyle Streit, twelve years old, has knit a regulation sweater for a ‘Sammy’ in France—knit it all by himself. Carlyle is distinguished among them because he is the only boy who ‘got away with it.’”\textsuperscript{128}

While World War I skills training emphasized crafts, World War II children were less likely to provide a mountain of wooden or cloth articles for troops. Girls continued to knit for Red Cross stocks, but skills training more
often emphasized technical and vocational abilities useful to industry and military. Adolescent boys in World War II could learn pre-induction technological skills at school—and thereby counteract the American child’s tendency to be woefully unprepared in science and technical education. In particular aviation was emphasized, as authorities believed the country was alarmingly unready for a war to be determined by fighters in the sky. The movement to train boys as aviators early in the war reached almost hysterically into even the elementary schools, as one educator noted, but “it would be about as silly to study airplanes as a separate subject for elementary school children as to study ‘tanks,’ ‘battleships,’ or ‘long-range guns’ as separate subjects.” Agricultural skills could also be valuable, but the idea of taking a city kid to the farm did not see the kind of enthusiasm authorities gave it during the earlier war. Instead, children already familiar with rural life were encouraged to develop their skills toward wartime needs. The 4-H movement’s “Feed A Fighter” program during World War II produced poultry, dairy, and produce to fill a food shortage as men left the farm for army. But usually in World War II children were not called on to sharpen manual skills beyond their ability to collect scrap, squirrel away stocks of waste paper, peel metal foil from gum wrappers, pluck pods from milkweeds, and milk adults to buy more war bonds.

How Children Can Make Better War

The wide variety of practical things children were asked to do as part of the home-front army appealed to authorities who believed war could make a better child, and certainly a less troubled child: troublesome free time could be mopped out of an idle mind, while fear could be scrubbed away through business projects. Critics muttered darkly about a return to a world in which exploited children shined shoes, hawked newspapers, delivered parcels and generally worked like small dogs doing what adults did not want to do. Laws had made most of that illegal for the under fourteen-year-olds, but volunteer work could skirt those laws. Franklin Roosevelt declared that asking children to collect some scrap or tend a garden shouldn’t harm them much, and moreover, war work could give them a “sense of involvement.” That said, some states ignored the law when convenient; of the three million children working part time in 1943, some were as young as twelve.

Whether this frenzy of knitting socks and mufflers, scrounging for scrap, and hawking war bonds could have much practical value was less certain. Some authorities who advocated putting children to work did not expect their efforts
to be of great consequence, but at least would keep them out of mischief and
give them an opportunity to feel like they were contributing. Children wanted
to do something, to do their bit, at least a little bit, for the war that so preoc-
cupied their parents. A 1942 survey of seven hundred boys did indicate they
wanted to play a role in the war. And so they were given tasks with the affirma-
tion that it would be of great service to the war, even if authorities privately did
not believe children could do much. At the beginning of America’s involvement
in World War I, noted the Red Cross director, no one thought of “mobilizing
the children” for real work. “As the months followed each other, however, there
were more and more little girls knitting wristlets, helmets, and sweaters, and do-
ing it about as well as their wonderful mothers did. There were little girls march-
ing to the chapter rooms and working there like troopers as long as anybody.”
Perhaps children really could make war in their role as troops of the home front.
Keeping children busy for the war perhaps could do more than improve their
character, keep them out of trouble, and allay possible fears. “Boys,” a writer
in St. Nicholas noted, “your part is not a small one! It is vitally important. The
service you can render now in preparing for the service you will surely be called
upon to render in a few years is precious to the nation.” And while girls would
not be called upon for military service, they hardly escaped the call to do their
duty as home-front warriors. “Girl Scouts, you must help to win the war,” ad-
monished Mary Stevick “at the request of Mrs. Hoover” in the Rally. “You are
young but your work can be telling and effective.”

How telling? How effective? Authorities anxious to prove the value of chil-
dren taken into war work made considerable efforts to tally the contributions
of the juvenile home front to the war effort. Juvenile publications featured long
lists of children’s groups around the country doing their bit for the war, from
knitting scarves to passing out sandwiches to passing soldiers. Wartime tallies
from volunteer organizations seemed to indicate the effort was paying off. The
Red Cross after World War I reported its junior members in just four months
delivered 225,000 refugee garments and 4,000 items to furnish convalescent
homes. “Most of this valuable supply work for the Red Cross was done by the
children as a part of their school work.” Boy Scouts reported collecting “a
hundred carloads” of fruit pits for use in World War I gas masks. In 1942,
according to its annual report, Boy Scouts collected 10.5 million pounds of alu-
minum in 11,369 communities, of a total collected by all agencies of 12 million
pounds. They also collected 300 million pounds of waste paper and 30 million
pounds of rubber. A 1944 scout report asserted the boys had collected enough
milkweed floss to stuff 1.5 million life jackets, while a 4-H report asserted its
Chapter Two: How War Can Make Better Children

members in one Illinois county alone had collected five tons of milkweed floss worthy of 1,100 life jackets. The swamps and ditches of America apparently became a favored outing destination for World War II children, many of whom still remember fondly their efforts in milkweed pod collecting. As informal government propagandists, Scouts placed 1,607,500 posters in 1942, growing to a million posters a month by 1944. Boys and girls of 4-H during World War II “produced or preserved enough food to care for a million fighting men for three years.” The FFA reported in 1942:

77,018,762 pounds of scrap metal collected.
30,606,875 pounds of paper collected.
2,767,821 pounds of rubber collected.
605,949 pounds of rags collected.
$44,530 in war bonds purchased by state associations.
$1,541,479.38 in war bonds and stamps purchased by local chapters and individual members.

In World War I no tally was kept on the number of children who bought war stamps and bonds, noted a 1919 NEA report, but of the 20 million pupils in U.S. schools at that time, “practically all” bought some. In 1943 a report to the NEA by U.S. Commissioner of Education John W. Studebaker poured together the superlatives:

The 30,000,000 children in 1943 participated in a wide variety of war effort community work. In the past year (1942-43), the schools were responsible for $300,000,000 worth of war bond and stamp sales; more than 1,500,000 tons of scrap collected, thousands of garments made for Red Cross, millions of “recreational articles” for armed forces; sponsored 1,000,000 school and home victory gardens; through Victory Farm Volunteers recruited several hundred thousand high school youth for farm work; produced 600,000 scale models of airplanes requested by armed forces; collected tons of scrap paper and waste fats; canned and preserved thousands of quarts of home-grown fruits and vegetables.

This certainly seems like quite a contribution, and as the Boy Scouts boasted, “Scouts have continued to carry out war-service projects, long after the novelty was worn out and the tasks became tedious.” But it is difficult to determine the tangible significance of these efforts of home-front children toward winning wars fought on such an enormous scale. Both Roosevelt in World War
II and Wilson in World War I formally issued proclamations of gratitude for children’s work. A more skeptical historian noted, “The truth is that besides serving or war work, there really was little most people could do to help win the war.” Regarding war bond sales, we can compare reported sale figures of children to totals sold. By 1945 half the U.S. population (85 million Americans) had purchased war bonds, for a total of $185.7 billion. If we presume as Studebaker reported that $300 million per year of those sales came from children who purchased bonds and stamps themselves and peddled more to adults, it would total $1.2 billion. This is a tiny fraction of the total, although the Boy Scouts reported its members alone had sold, or “been responsible for” the sale of much more, $1.8 billion. It is difficult to verify accuracy of such reports, but even allowing a liberal interpretation of reported figures, total sales from the children’s home front would seem not very significant.

World War I Liberty Bonds sales totaled $21 billion. While again it is hard to determine what percentage of this total can be credited to children, the Boy Scouts did report their members sold bonds totaling $147,876,962—still a tiny percentage of the total. But authorities during that war pursued children as sales agents more aggressively than they did in World War II. Unlike World War II’s more restrained appeal to children, in 1917-18 widespread contests were promoted as a motivation to youngsters, often by shaming the slackers, to contribute till it hurt, and hurt some more. As the government-produced *National School Service* urged, “The chief means by which teachers can arouse interest and enthusiasm in the sale of Liberty Bonds by their classes is through group competition. There are a great many devices that may be used to this end.”

In contrast, World War II authorities, so often basing their decisions on perceived mistakes of the last war, believed that collecting bond sales through a system of guilt and peer pressure at school would do more harm than good. “One rule: avoid without exception the use of competition in promoting valuable work among the children,” wrote an education professor from Northwestern University. “Buy stamps for the real reasons, not to win banners. Schools that set up cooperative enterprises, rather than competitive ones, gather more scrap, everyone is happy with the results.”

If it is difficult to measure tangible contributions to the wars from the children’s home front, it is even more of a challenge to evaluate the intangibles. Children were exhorted to patriotic displays of public speaking and marching in parades, encouraged to bring government propaganda home, and to generally avoid vexing war-preoccupied parents with their childhood concerns. Certainly World War I authorities had highest expectations that children could be puny
yet powerful propagandists. The media at the dawn of the last century consisted mostly of printed products; while movies were popular, and recordings available, radio was in its infancy and other media still far off. Authorities tried to influence a country splintered on lines of race, class and immigrant status by calling on the one institution that reached pretty much everyone: the schools. In particular immigrant children could bring wartime messages to parents whose language was not English and whose experiences made them fearful of government. But children could be used for more than this informal infiltration into the intimate family setting. They also could publicly advocate wartime needs through word and deed.

By words children could develop public speaking skill through participation in the Junior Four-Minute Man program. The program grew out of the World War I Four-Minute Man campaign established by the Committee on Public Information, in which community leaders were encouraged to give brief patriotic speeches describing wartime needs to audiences at movie theaters or at other events. Adolescents became a second wave of speakers mostly encouraging audiences of adults or other children to buy war bonds and stamps. Based on topics as assigned by teachers who received ideas from government bulletins, noted George Creel, “Both boys and girls were eligible and the winners were given an official certificate from the government, commissioning them as Four Minute speakers upon the specified topic of the contest.” Extent of participation seems to have been broad, although results obtained cannot be specifically determined. An NEA report asserted that in some cases children in public settings could be more persuasive than adults. But public speaking required formal commitment of teachers and schools, who needed to organize and motivate children to write and present. A less formal intangible way children could contribute to war fever and war fervor relied on youthful energy and easy identification with emotional virtues of patriotism in action. The action was marching, the venue a parade. “The American people are very fond of making use of school children for purposes of parade and exhibition whenever occasion calls for spectacular appeal, whether of war, worship, or festival,” noted a California education commissioner in 1917. On the other side of the country, the children marched as enthusiastically to frequent calls for participation in parades for preparedness, war bond sales, Selective Service registration, or patriotic celebrations. “To stimulate patriotism, the NYC school board set up children to participate in parades, such as one on April 19, 1917; with only three days’ notice, 25,000 school children in NYC participated in the “Wake up America” parade.”

Authorities in World War II, however, showed less enthusiasm for using
children as a way to reach adults. The Junior Four Minute Man program was not revived. Parades could feature children, but should not substitute for exercises more useful to developing the child instead of exploiting him to motivate adults. In a 1943 letter to Commissioner of Education Studebaker, U.S. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson seemed to reflect general opinion of authorities showing lukewarm support to children’s participation in parades. “Properly conducted military drills and parades do have their place,” agreed Stimson. “Whenever possible, both should be included in the curriculum; however, if this is not practicable and a choice must be made, physical education is considered the more important.”

Notes

24. Ibid., 139.
25. Ibid., 140.
27. School and Society, November 14, 1942, 461.
29. Ibid., 419.
32. The Nation’s Business, April 1916, 15.
35. Admiral F. E. Chadwick of the U.S. Naval Academy, Quoted in Zeiger, 159.
42. Fussell, Wartime, 268.
43. Mosse, Fallen Soldiers, 148.
45. Tuttle, “Daddy’s Gone to War,” 154.
48. Matthews, Toys Go to War, 4-5.
57. “Children in War. They Can be Trained Not to Fear,” Life, March 30, 1942, 68.
58. Ibid.
59. Angelo Patri, Your Children in Wartime, 5.
60. Chase, Wartime Social Studies, 26.
61. H. M. Lafferty, “Education during War: Matriarch or Hussy?” School and Society, November 7, 1942,

Kirk, *Earning Their Stripes*, 16.


Life, “Children in War,” 68.

Howard Lane, associate professor of education, Northwestern University, “The Good School for the Young Child in Wartime,” *Education* 63, no. 6, (1943), 355.


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Stephan F. Brumberg, “New York City Schools March Off to War. The Nature and Extent of Participation of the City Schools in the Great War, April 1917-June 1918.” *Urban Education* 24, no. 4, (1990), 454.


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Davison, *The American Red Cross in the Great War*, 103.


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102. “Use of Schools in War Time.” School and Society, April 6, 1918, 404.
103. Mrs. Alexander Thompson, member, Oregon Legislative Assembly, “Preparedness—a Veneer or a Fundamental—Which Will Our Schools Give Our Children?”, 1162.
106. “Friendly Talks with the Editor. “America or—” American Boy, June 1918, 3.
107. Kennedy, Over Here, 53.
110. Ibid.
113. W. S. Small, School Life, August 16, 1918, 12.
117. Ibid., 7-8.
119. Editor’s note, American Boy, April 1918, 46.
120. Dean, Our Schools in War Time—and After, 5.
121. Quoted in Dean, Our Schools in War Time—and After, 235.
124. Dean, Our Schools in War Time—and After, 120.
125. Ibid., 12-13.
130. Kirk, Earning Their Stripes, 80-81.
132. Ibid., 81.
133. Davison, The American Red Cross in the Great War, 93–94.


152. McNaught, “The Elementary School During the War,” 166.
