

## **“The Reception Committee” Soldiers, Citizens, and the Veteran’s Return**

I would like to know what causes the cold attitude toward the soldiers on the part of many civilians. I was surprised at the lack of interest the civilians show in the war. They have developed a selfish attitude and seem to care only for themselves. They are all making money and don't seem to know there is a war going on. Also many of them look like they're in good health. They seem to take attitudes that we're "suckers" for being in while they are the "smart guys" for staying out. It's a rotten situation and darned unfair to guys who are doing their part.<sup>1</sup>

This was the response from an American soldier from World War II when asked if he had anything else to add to a government survey of servicemen's opinions. Expressing a theme found in the views of many of his comrades, the soldier showed hostility to a home front populace that he saw as uncaring, materialistic, and at odds with soldiers' understanding of the war effort. This gap only presented further problems with the war's conclusion. Veterans of the war had been returning in substantial numbers beginning in 1944 and increasingly government officials and the public-at-large recognized that the successful integration of large numbers of military personnel into civilian life presented an enormous challenge for postwar America. Although the home front began to grapple with what some termed "The Veteran Problem," a large segment of American servicemen also expressed their own misgivings about the shape of the postwar world and specifically their place within it. Veterans and nonveterans did share many of the same hopes and dreams for the

# The Reception Committee-

(KNOW ANYBODY HERE?)



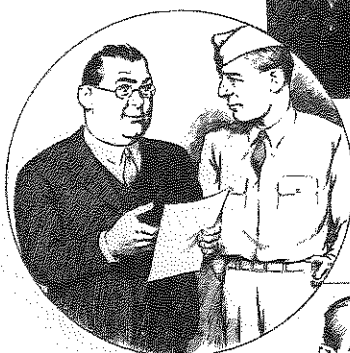
**The Greeter.** A one-man brass band. "Nothing's too good for Our Boys!" he always says. And that's what he gives them. Nothing... except a big hello. Help? "That's the Government's job," he says.



**The Clutch.** One like her in every town. Always leaping to help some disabled veteran over a pebble. Practically blunders while she's doing it. Succeeds in making the veteran feel he's ruined for any normal life. Or career.



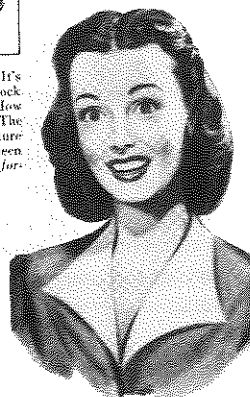
**The Bloodhound.** "It's OK, Sailor, you won't shock me! Ever knife a Jap? How does it feel to be bombed?" The War's just one big adventure story to him. But it hasn't been for the sailor. He wants to forget it—not talk about it.



**The Patriot.** Always talking about all the things he goes without. Mentions the War Bonds he buys as though he were doing the Government a favor. This makes veterans (who've been buying plenty of Bonds themselves) wonder whether we had the right people in foxholes.



**The Rock.** He's nerveless. The Iron Man. War hasn't affected him. Can't understand why discharged veterans are allowed 90 days to relax before going back to their old jobs. Can't understand why they should need time to get over the War. He doesn't. Combat Officers would love to have this type in their care for a while.



**Blue Ribbon Citizen.** Like all good people, she asks no questions, weeps no tears, doesn't stare at disabilities. To her, a returned veteran is an abler, more aggressive and resourceful citizen than the boy who went away. She's proud of him, proud to know him. Anxious to be of real help. She's the kind of person we should all be.

Prepared by the War Advertising Council, Inc. in Cooperation with the Office of War Information and the Retraining and Reemployment Administration.

PUBLISHED IN COOPERATION WITH THE DRUG, COSMETIC AND ALLIED INDUSTRIES BY

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Other points, in addition to those covered in the ads on these two pages: Civilians should not be surprised if some veterans are different. Two or three years in the service may have made profound changes in their personalities. Civilians should expect veterans to be a little at sea on their return. They are faced with an entirely new life, a completely different set of values than those they may have adhered to for two, three, or even four years. It will take time for these veterans to re-orient themselves.

Developed by the War Advertising Council, this ad sought to help civilians understand the problems of returning veterans and to avoid insensitive reactions to soldiers' wartime experiences.

postwar era, but the differences in their respective wartime experiences and perspectives also fostered disagreements between many former soldiers and civilians about the role of the veteran in American society.

Given some of the difficulties that veterans of World War I experienced upon their return from overseas, some experts on the American home front believed that it was prudent for Americans to begin preparing for soldiers' return to prevent the creation of another Lost Generation. In the final years of the war and into the postwar era, social scientists, concerned citizens, and federal and state offices published a wide variety of advice literature aimed at easing the soldier's transition to civilian life. Advertisers and advice columns also suggested methods of anticipating veterans' needs and urged civilians to understand soldiers' perspectives upon their return. Writers suggested that soldiers be given a period of readjustment to civilian life to prevent any threat that these "heroes" might pose to social stability if their reacclimation did not fare well.

Beyond trying to accommodate the new needs of America's fighting men, civilians were also expecting male soldiers to fulfill certain expectations upon their return home. The civilian advice literature and mainstream media were constructing a portrait of soldiers' wartime experiences and a particular role for the veteran in the postwar era. Though veterans agreed with some of these home front prescriptions, veterans had begun to offer criticisms of the military, home front, and American society. A large number of soldiers held views that were at odds with prevailing notions on the home front. Immediately after the war, the home front allowed veterans to air these dissenting critiques of society and the war effort as part of the process of veteran reacclimation. However, as America entered the 1950s, the challenge of these veterans' views were gradually silenced or altered by a growing cold war consensus culture. The need for the nation to confront the challenges of the postwar era limited the ability of veterans to present their views to the American public. The protests of veterans, so powerful in the early postwar years, were ignored by civilians or withdrawn by veterans who began to accept their role within a consensus that many servicemen had a hand in creating.

Understandably, the main image of the war on the home front was one of a noble conflict against the spread of Fascism. Government efforts at propaganda were successful as mainstream American media were filled with images of heroic soldiers battling incredible odds in the struggle for victory. Magazines often contained advertisements from companies that attempted to prove their patriotism by supporting the war effort. A typical example of this type of ad was a 1945 piece from Shell Oil. The ad

showed five Government Issues (GIs) riding atop engines into a flaming pit. Its caption read, "Rode the Six Hundred," a play on Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade." The ad went on to describe how Shell Oil had been the chief lubricant at a factory that produced six hundred different models of wartime engines. Describing the rather odd picture, the ad said, "for on these sturdy engines our fighting men on a dozen fronts ride roughshod 'into the mouth of hell' . . . and out again—victorious."<sup>2</sup> The ad encapsulated many of the themes that surrounded the home front understanding of the war: brave soldiers challenging death in order to fight for American freedom.

But even as heroic images of soldiers dominated home front media, civilians worried about what shape the postwar world would take and what the postwar role of the veteran would be. In early 1945, the research bureau of the Office of War Information conducted a survey of civilian attitudes toward veterans and found both enthusiasm and caution. Although civilians strongly acknowledged a "debt" to the country's soldiers and believed solutions to any adjustment problems were the responsibility of the entire nation, the researchers found "the sense of indebtedness is pitted against anxiety about competition and demands of veterans." Civilians felt that they had to "honor the veterans in special ways" and "recompense their personal and economic sacrifices," but stressed the need to "avoid treating [vets] like a special group" or a "class apart." "Handouts" and "gimmies" to veterans had to be limited, and Americans should "remember that civilians have their rights, too." This tension between wanting to honor soldiers' achievements and fearing the creation of an elevated veteran class was at the heart of the complex problem of the veteran's return.<sup>3</sup>

During the war, a body of advice literature for soldiers and civilians began to be developed to deal with some of the anxiety about the return of soldiers. Works such as *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* and *You're Out of the Service Now* not only offered solutions to problems veterans would face after the conclusion of their military service, but also provided a snapshot of the worries many civilians felt about the soldiers' return. In these works, the authors identified civilian attitudes of both adoration and fear of returning veterans. Conquering heroes were welcomed home but by a home front populace that was unsure of what lay ahead for the nation. Although this advice literature stressed the need for understanding and a period of readjustment for veterans, it also contained underlying themes that stressed a quick return to normalcy as the nation needed its veterans to help construct a secure postwar America. In

this way, literature on the home front reinforced notions of the returning soldier as both a threat and a hero—images that many veterans rejected. The misunderstanding of veterans that these civilian-constructed images created deepened many soldiers' beliefs that they would have difficulty upon their return stateside.

Written with both civilian and veteran audiences in mind, the advice literature of civilian authors stressed the difficulties that soldiers would face upon their return home. Many of the writers were veterans from World War I and drew upon past American wars for examples of what might happen after World War II. Not all began with predictions of postwar decline, but most believed that immediate planning for returning veterans was imperative to prevent divisions between soldiers and civilians. In *The Veteran Comes Back*, World War I vet William Waller began with the biblical story of Uriah the Hittite, a loyal soldier who was betrayed by his commander, King David. After this dramatic example of a soldier's betrayal, Waller showed the history of America's inadequacy in treating its returning servicemen and called veterans "our greatest social problem."<sup>4</sup> Another World War I veteran in *Good-By to GI* counseled veterans not to judge civilians too harshly and warned that the adulation of civilians for soldiers would surely decline.<sup>5</sup> In *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, Dixon Wecter also wrote that after a period of adulation, "the serviceman . . . begins to detect a chill in the social air and the echo of closing doors."<sup>6</sup> For these authors, the possibility of a chasm developing between soldiers and civilians had many precedents in American history and presented a real danger for the future of the United States if left unexamined by the nation.

Chief among concerns about returning servicemen was the employment situation for veterans upon entering civilian life. After experiencing the most severe and prolonged economic depression in the nation's history before the war, the topic of employment was an understandable concern of both veterans and the home front populace, who had watched the economy boom and unemployment rates plummet during soldiers' absence. In *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, the author described the difficulty that veterans might have obtaining employment and the divisions between civilians and servicemen: "In search of a job, the soldier runs into employers fearful of expansion in these uncertain times, the closed shop, the competition of war workers also freshly demobilized, and ill will created by the parasitism of a few veterans convinced that the world owes every soldier a living. The employment seeker begins to increasingly hear a word, three hundred years old, for loafing on the

job—'soldiering'... Failure of civil employment to reabsorb the returned soldier thus opens a rift, like those more dangerous cleavages between economic groups and races that frequently appear under post-war tension."<sup>7</sup> By locating the historical tension between returning vets and civilians, Wecter and other authors warned of the problems that lay ahead if veterans were not able to obtain opportunities for employment.

Economic difficulties and the possibility of a divide between civilian and veteran led authors to predict dire circumstances for America if it did not wake to the problem of the rapid influx of servicemen. Much of the worry focused around veterans centered on their supposed tendency to be antisocial even after their return from the service. The government encouraged soldiers to draw upon feelings of protection for one's family and country in order to be effective in combat. Men were pushed to let out their violent tendencies and channel them into the war effort, but these feelings would not be as useful in the postwar era. In *Soldier to Civilian*, psychologist George Pratt explained that veterans would immediately have to learn to control the aggressive behavior that had served them well in the military. Servicemen would have to realize that "it is far easier to unleash aggression than it is to retame it. Some returned servicemen are going to fail to restrain their aggressiveness once they leave the army and will get into trouble with civilian authorities."<sup>8</sup> The home front was going to have to deal with the fallout from the aggressive nature that their soldier-protectors had used to safeguard America.

With this concern about soldier aggressiveness, most of the authors dealt with the widespread belief on the home front that the nation's veterans were likely to turn to crime if they felt unsatisfied with civilian life. *The Veteran Comes Back* cites vets' battle fatigue and physical disabilities, their loss of mental "discipline," and restlessness as reasons that historically had led returning soldiers to criminal behavior.<sup>9</sup> Waller stated that he did not know exactly how many veterans would turn to crime, but he did provide a harrowing description of a possible future:

The veteran, so justly entitled to move us to pity or to shame, can also put us in fear. Destitute he may be, friendless, without political guile, unskilled in the arts of peace; but weak he is not. That makes him a different kind of problem. That hand that does know how to earn its owner's knows how to take your bread, knows very well how to kill you, if need be, in the process. That eye that has looked at death will not quail at the sight of a policeman. Unless and until he can be renaturalized into his native land, the veteran is a threat to society.<sup>10</sup>

Other authors were not as alarmist as Waller and took great pains to defend soldiers from the notion that they were "beasts" or killers, but the civilian fear of a postwar veteran crime wave was obviously acute and was dividing many soldiers from the home front.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond fears of veteran criminality, the advice literature devoted even more space to alerting the public to the susceptibility of veterans to extremist political groups. Authors used the specter of domestic Fascism to convince readers of the seriousness of the veteran problem and the potential threat that these men posed. Quoting the editors of *The New Republic*, Wecter warned readers in his introduction that "powerful reactionary forces, semi-Fascist and Fascist groups, are at work today, preparing to utilize the bitterness and resentment of the demobilized soldiers."<sup>12</sup> William Waller was also grave when he talked about the rise of the Nazis as a result of disgruntled German veterans from World War I. He stated that if the veteran returned to an unstable economic situation, the same rise of Fascism that started in Germany could appear in the United States:

Let us suppose that some of the veterans must go hungry, must beg on the streets, must sell their Purple Hearts and other medals, must wear their army uniform until it dissolves in rags, must walk the streets in wind and rain and snow to look for work and to be told there is no work by sleek civilians who have obviously done well for themselves during the war and collected a great deal of money. . . . If then there comes a suitable demagogue who tells them they have been suckers and talks against talk with overpowering eloquence and he leads these sullen soldiers in a fascist crusade, may not our democratic structure which even now totters at length collapse? Will the veterans of World War II turn into Storm Troopers who will destroy democracy?<sup>13</sup>

Fascism was not the only threat to postwar peace. Waller, as well as the authors of *Back to Life* and *Good-By to G.I.*, worried about the Ku Klux Klan's efforts to recruit disaffected veterans into their ranks. These authors were concerned about what the postwar era would hold for the returning servicemen and if the United States would heed calls for action to diffuse any threat posed by the veteran populace. Again, this kind of imagery—the linkage of returning veterans with the Fascists that they were fighting—led many soldiers to question what type of reception they could expect on the home front.

Despite these warnings of impending veteran dissent, authors were generally positive about the country's future if the "veteran problem"

could be solved. For most authors, the question was one of instructing soldiers in civilian skills that they needed in order to integrate into American society. One author stated, "The veteran needs retooling. It is retooling for effective civilian living just as he was previously retooled for effective military service."<sup>14</sup> Another author wrote that goals of veteran rehabilitation should include "making him into a civilian once more" and "to help encourage him to overcome attitudes of bitterness and antagonism, and to establish a normal and rewarding relation with family, church, and community."<sup>15</sup> After setting up the possible threat that veterans posed to postwar order, these authors were further dividing soldiers and civilians into different camps by suggesting the need to retrain veterans to conform to societal norms of civilians. Soldiers' experiences that were deemed inappropriate or antisocial needed to be eliminated in order to allow for a more harmonious reacclimation into civilian society. These men were heroes and protectors, but upon their return home they required guides as to their proper role.

Importantly, many of these studies urged civilians and veterans to allow for a period of adjustment before a veteran could pick up where he had left off. *The Road Back* urged veterans not to "conform to what your family expects of you, judging you by what you were before." Instead, soldiers were told, "It's up to you to know yourself and the changes in you, and to set your new standards of value."<sup>16</sup> This period of questioning would allow servicemen the time to integrate back into civilian life at their own pace and prevent any unwanted social problems that could occur with a rushed return. In *Soldier to Civilian*, Pratt wrote, "all returned soldiers pass through a period of disillusionment as an inescapable part of their problem of civilian adjustment." Suggestions to make the switch to civilian life included joining veterans' organizations like the American Legion in order to retain a sense of camaraderie. Although Pratt warned of the danger of some veterans who might not make the switch to civilian life, after one or two months he felt that the majority "become full-fledged civilians again, and their need to perpetuate their former military existence grows less desperate."<sup>17</sup> By giving veterans some time and space to make their own transition, the potential threat of the returning veteran could be diffused, and soldiers could be regarded simply as the heroes they had proven themselves to be on the battlefield.

Some advertisers also pushed the notion of giving the veteran a period of readjustment. One of the more interesting advertisements was entitled "The Reception Committee (know anybody here?)," created by the War

Advertising Council to help with the soldiers' return. The ad portrayed six types of civilian greeters with which servicemen had to contend and, in many ways, did an effective job of dramatizing the problems that veterans felt they faced in their return to civilian life. The first was labeled simply "The Greeter" and pictured a laughing man with an outstretched hand and a "Welcome heroes" button on his lapel. The ad stated that although these types said "Nothing's too Good for Our Boys," in reality "That's what he gives them. . . . Nothing." Obviously, the advertisers were trying to show that they knew the types of troubles veterans were going to have to face and wanted to alert the public.

After disparaging portraits of the self-serving "Patriot" ("Makes [soldiers] wonder whether we had the right people at the front lines") and the ghoulish "Bloodhound" ("The War's just one big adventure to him"), the ad introduced readers to "The Rock." The picture showed an elderly man, looking grim. The caption read: "War hasn't affected *him*. Can't understand why discharged veterans are allowed 90 days to relax before going back to their old jobs. Can't understand why they should need time to get over the War. *He* doesn't. Combat Officers would love to have this type in their care for a while." With "The Rock," this ad tried to show that not all civilians believed that soldiers would expect an easy return from the war. In essence, the ad suggested that soldiers' experiences in the war gave them more authority to recommend what type of behavior should be the norm upon a veteran's return. In the end, the ad hinted that perhaps military personnel should have a crack at this type in order to teach him the true meaning of the war effort and to understand what soldiers went through. "The Reception Committee" seemed to defer to the will and understanding of soldiers.

The last two representations of the ad featured women. "The Clutch" pictured an older woman with a veil, looking distraught. The caption read "Always leaping to help a disabled veteran over a pebble and practically blubbers while doing it. Succeeds in making him feel as if he's ruined for any life. Or career." This image sought to encourage readers not to try to "baby" veterans too much, using the image of the "blubbering" mother who emasculated the wounded soldier through her hysterics. The other negative images of "The Reception Committee" were all insensitive men, but "The Clutch" dramatized the need for soldiers to be respected as capable men and not objects of pity. The need for compassion, although necessary, should not be a smothering, feminine pampering that could be damaging to vets' masculine identities.

The last and only positive image in the ad was the "Blue Ribbon Citizen," pictured in the ad as a young, attractive woman with a bright smile. She, for the advertisers, represented the ideal attitude that the American citizen should have: "Like all good people, she asks no questions, weeps no tears, doesn't stare at disabilities. To her, a returned veteran is an abler, more aggressive and resourceful citizen than the boy who went away. She's proud of him, proud to know him. Anxious to be of real help to him, she's the kind of person we should all be." The image of an attractive, sensitive (but not too sensitive) woman may have appealed to many soldiers as the ideal member of a reception committee. The "Blue Ribbon Citizen" seemed to fulfill many of the soldiers' wishes: a female companion who is eager to work with the veteran in his reacclimation to the home front. In this piece, advertisers appeared willing to aid in soldiers' readjustment and also to defer to their needs in veterans' efforts to cope with civilian life.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of giving soldiers a period of readjustment was a popular one on the home front, but it was also attached to expectations that the veteran needed to return to fulfill certain obligations in postwar America. The image of the heroic fighting man who protected the United States during war fed into ideas about returning veterans who were encouraged to create a postwar economic and social stability. The concept of "settling down" played an important part in most of the advice literature. In *The Veteran and His Future Job*, the returning serviceman was said to be thinking of two things: "locating a good steady job, and marrying that girl he had been waiting to for so long and setting up a home of his own."<sup>19</sup> These two themes, employment and starting a family, were stressed in most of the discussions of the soldier's return to civilian life. The home front's need to secure veterans' places as the economic and social heads of America's families created a cultural climate that encouraged women to leave full-time employment or led to their systematic removal from positions by employers with little opposition from unions or government officials. Veterans' assumptions of their gendered roles as breadwinners and the heads of families was integral to notions of stability found in the popular press, advice literature, advertisements, and government publications of the late 1940s.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond providing economic support, the home front was also asking its veterans to take positions of leadership in the postwar era and help the nation succeed in an uncertain future. Notions of the veteran's masculine duty permeate these calls for servicemen to move from protectors of the free world to protectors of their families, and veterans were challenged to

accomplish the same type of successes in civilian life that they had achieved on the battlefield.<sup>21</sup> As stated in *The Veteran and His Future Job*, "If the nation prospers, [the veteran] will prosper; but he will have to do his part in the fight for peace-time security just as he did in war."<sup>22</sup> This fight for security necessitated soldiers' adoption of a masculine role in American society that would allow for social and economic stability. These sentiments were also found in *Good-By to GI* when the author stated, "It's up to you as a civilian, an American citizen, to pitch in and help make America great. . . . It's up to you to say how far we'll go."<sup>23</sup> In these works, veterans and their conversion from servicemen to civilians were portrayed as essential to the future of America. Veterans were encouraged to shed the antisocial traits essential to their success as masculine protectors in war and instead focus their energy on their new roles as the leaders of their homes and communities. It was this emphasis on stability and communal responsibility that would be an important factor in the development of a cold war consensus culture as America moved into the 1950s. Unfortunately for experts on the home front, many veterans did not share the same understanding of the war, the veterans' role upon their return, or the shape of American society in the postwar era. Just as the home front was attempting to comprehend what America would be like following the war, so too were soldiers looking to the postwar era with a sense of uncertainty.

Like their families and fellow citizens back on the home front, the war created certain expectations in the minds of many veterans, both for themselves and American society. Male veterans' understanding of the role of the returning soldier in postwar America was dramatically shaped by their military service, and although veterans were in agreement with some of the postwar prescriptions being formulated on the home front, many still retained a critical take on American society that was at odds with notions of consensus that were beginning to take shape in the immediate postwar era.

Given the large number of American soldiers involved in World War II, accurately gauging the opinions of such a diverse group of men proves to be a daunting task. However, the need to understand the opinions of the nation's soldiers was not lost on the U.S. government during wartime. It commissioned the creation of a large series of soldier surveys in order to better understand the minds of the nation's fighting men, to improve conditions and operations in the army, and, toward the conclusion of the war, to aid the soldier in his readjustment to civilian life. Headed by Samuel A. Stouffer and a team of other social scientists under the Research



Branch of the Information and Education Division of the War Department, surveys of servicemen were conducted between 1942 and 1945 in different theaters of operation. The result was a four-volume study entitled simply, *The American Soldier*, which contained data on different questions about soldiers' attitudes on army life, combat, the home front, officers, allied and enemy soldiers, and a host of other topics. In the introductory essay to volume I, Stouffer correctly identified one of his study's audiences as historians. In particular, he cited "the newer generation of historians, who are as much interested in institutions and the rank and file comprising [the surveys] as they are in the big personalities and big dramatic events" as scholars who could make good use of the information gathered by the Research Branch.<sup>24</sup>

Although the collected data from the surveys provided a powerful portrait of men in uniform, it is not one of selfless heroes, quietly accepting their fate and saving America from the forces of Fascism. Stouffer commented in his introduction that "from some points of view, the attitudes of soldiers, especially toward many of the traditional practices of Army life, do not make a pretty historical picture."<sup>25</sup> Soldiers were often unhappy with the army, the war, officers, and civilians, and they were not afraid to express their dissatisfaction.

The raw data and tables of the soldiers' surveys compiled in the volumes tell a dramatic story of the individual GI, but the surveys also provide for a more intimate glimpse into soldiers' lives. At the end of each survey, the respondents were given the opportunity to express any thoughts they felt were not encompassed by the survey's questions. These "free comment" sections afforded the soldier the ability to relate his opinions on a variety of subjects without fear of rebuke or the constrictions of the directed questions of the survey.<sup>26</sup> Many took advantage of this opportunity. In a large cross-section study in 1945, nine out of the ten responses were critical of the army, which the surveyors viewed as typical of men thrown together under stressful circumstances and not used to military authority.<sup>27</sup> In the free comment sections of the surveys, complaints typically focused on officers, furloughs, and assignments.

In these responses, soldiers' educational level, race, ethnicity, civilian profession, military rank, and combat status all revealed the diversity of the American soldier at this time. But even with this variety, general patterns in the responses emerged, highlighting which issues were particularly important to servicemen and offering a glimpse into a period of great personal transition for many of the respondents. The free comment responses provide a unique opportunity to hear the voices of American

soldiers speaking about their plans for the postwar era and their apprehension about the return to civilian life.<sup>28</sup>

In different surveys given to men immediately upon their release from active duty, their understandable response was generally one of excitement or relief. When these men were asked "How it feels to get back to the U.S.," the typical responses were "swell," "It's a dream come true," and "There are no words in the dictionary to describe this feeling."<sup>29</sup> Clearly, most men were anxious to return to the United States following their overseas tour of duty and to begin the process of rejoining civilian life. In free comment responses to other surveys, soldiers' stated goals for the postwar era stressed the importance of returning to their lives as they existed before the war or to improve on the old lives they had left behind. In survey after survey, servicemen emphasized the necessity of regaining civilian employment and the centrality of family life to their reacclimation. A selection of typical responses on this theme:

After I leave the Army I want to get settled in a permanent job or business and make plans for life. I want to buy a home and start raising a family and really get established in life.<sup>30</sup>

Once I leave the army I will endeavor to take up a mode of living as nearly resembling the one I left as possible. Since I have been married while in the army I look forward to renting a small house, buying furniture, and raising a family.<sup>31</sup>

Return home to my wife and child and live again.<sup>32</sup>

I want to marry the girl I am engaged to and live a hundred years of happiness and peace.<sup>33</sup>

Settle down, get a good job, get married, and build a home, and live happily ever after.<sup>34</sup>

My only desire is to be able to go home as soon as possible after the war ends. In our duty to our country we haven't failed her—but after it is all ended, our duty to our wives and children must be our first thought. My one plan is to pick up where I left off and establish a home for my family.<sup>35</sup>

Just as civilians on the home front were encouraging veterans to come home and take control of their households, time and again soldiers' primary goal was to assert their role as household breadwinner and to "settle

down" by raising a family. This desire to return to what was referred to as a "normal life" in many of the free comments fit nicely into home front conceptions of the veterans' role in the postwar era.

The desire to settle down, to become the primary breadwinner in the family, and to be the patriarchal head of a family is not surprising given that many soldiers expressed a sense of uncertainty about gender roles in American society with women's participation in the war effort. As women entered into occupations that had previously been limited to men, such as the military or industrial work, servicemen were wary of these alterations and expressed hostility to changes in the gendered work responsibilities that they were in no position to influence. The sense of anger and helplessness comes through when examining the open-ended responses to a survey that asked men to comment on the Women's Army Corps (WAC), which placed women in official military positions for the first time in the history of American warfare. Although some soldiers did acknowledge that the WACs did a service to their country ("They are doing a damn good job I think"), the majority responded negatively to women serving in the military.<sup>36</sup>

Those soldiers who disliked the WAC presence on army bases found many reasons to chastise the army for bringing women into what had previously been an all-male institution. Soldiers commented that limited servicemen could perform all the duties that WACs performed and that if the army effectively utilized its existing manpower, women need never serve in a military capacity. Also, supposed limitations based on gendered stereotypes ("a group of women will not cooperate with each other") led some men to criticize the WAC. Further, many servicemen commented that women should be in a defense plant instead of the military if they wanted to support the war effort. Combining notions of women's domesticity with a concern for the war effort, one soldier wrote that "a womans [*sic*] place is in the home or a defense plant." More typically, however, soldiers were passionately concerned about the erosion of traditional gender norms and also the decline in morality, particularly sexual morality, because of women's military service. Servicemen wrote of how the WAC was turning the world upside down and taking women away from their real patriotic duty during the war, namely raising a family and awaiting the return of male soldiers. Examples of this type of criticism: "To be truly patriotic, I believe that a girl should stay at home, contribute her best talents to the war effort, and prepare to help the returning soldier build a new and greater society." Other comments

along these lines include, "Close social life away from all friends has a tendency to harden and callous a person—I believe a women's place in the world should be in the following order—1—Be Feminine.—2—Be of good disposition.—3—Care for her family.—4—Keep her home life alive.—5—I want my wife to be the same way she was when I left, the day I come back.—6. #1—#5 are enough."

The notion that women would somehow be changed in a negative fashion by their military service was a prevalent theme in the soldiers' responses. Some soldiers wrote explicitly about trouble in the postwar era due to changes in gender responsibilities brought on by the war. The entrance of women into the military signaled to many men that the postwar era might be a period of gender crisis, when the gendered notions and rules that they had believed were inherent in American culture would be called into question or, more ominously, completely changed to the detriment of the returning male soldier. One respondent commented, "It is my opinion that many women enlist in the WACS for other than patriotic reasons and I also believe it will eventually lead to an issue to determine the status between men and women whether or not they should have the same rights and privileges that men enjoy today." Another commentator saw women as postwar economic competition: "I believe a girls [place] is in the home at all times if possible. If they just have to work, it should be in an office. It may seem I am old in my ideas, but a woman should be left in her place, the home. It will be easier to straighten out the working conditions after the war."

The changes women would undergo were not limited to a discussion of their desire for equal rights or improved economic standing in postwar America. When attacking the WACs, much of the criticism was focused on their supposed lack of morality and licentious sexual behavior. WACs were viewed in many of these responses as not fulfilling a patriotic duty like male soldiers, but were seen as "nothing more than women looking for adventure" or being motivated primarily by "sexual adventures." Other commentators wrote more directly stating that the WAC was a "traveling hore [*sic*] house for soldiers" and that the service-women were "nothing but legalized whores." Women stepping out of their prescribed gender roles were demonized as sexual predators who lessened the morality of the nation's fighting men. One soldier speculated on the effect that WACs would have on postwar families: "I know if I had a wife that passed the W.A.A.C.'s I would divorce her because probably she would be going out with some other soldier, and the normal girl



will do those things and it would only end up in a broken home after the war, and when they come back home they would be an intirely [*sic*] different person when you left her much to your disappointment."

The immediate association of WACs with sexual immorality caused many soldiers to question the shape of gender norms on the home front following the war. The fact that pro-WAC soldiers spent much of their comment space defending WACs' reputations ("Their morals are as high as any group of civilians, but they are victims of malicious slander") attested to the general linking of women's military service with being aggressively sexual creatures. Even one of their defenders, who dismissed talk of WAC immorality as "hooey," and who congratulated WACs on becoming "more masculine" due to army life, still referred to women soldiers as "buxom creatures," characterizing them more by their sexuality or their repression of it than by their performance in the service. The challenge that the WACs presented to servicemen's masculine identities spurred resentment among male soldiers who viewed alterations in American notions of gender as a topic of immense confusion and concern.<sup>37</sup>

Fortunately for most male veterans, the home front was already moving in the direction of eliminating the gender crisis that was brewing in postwar America by encouraging or forcing women to abandon their wartime entrance into industrial and military work in favor of preparing for the veterans' return. Soldiers were expecting the government and American business to accommodate their needs upon their return, as revealed in this open-ended response from *The American Soldier* surveys: "The government should do something about women workers after the war. There [*sic*] place is still in the home. When we are finished with our business at present we don't want to come back and find that the women won't give up there [*sic*] jobs to us."<sup>38</sup>

These types of attitudes were in line with many American businessmen, governmental officials, and the American public who worked toward easing veterans' fears by eliminating women from threatening positions. Consequently, the needs of both veterans and the home front worked together to enforce gender prescriptions that normalized men's position as the social and economic head of the family and attempted to limit women's activity to the domestic sphere.<sup>39</sup>

Although soldiers were in agreement with the home front on some conceptions of the veteran's return, many soldiers still expressed hesitancy about their place within postwar society that went beyond concerns about women war workers and changes in the status of American women. The surveys in *The American Soldier* reveal a complex relationship between

soldiers and their view of the home front. Despite its predictions to the contrary, the study found that there was no overwhelming resentment of those on the home front. The soldiers of the front lines as well as the rear echelons gave citizens on the home front praise for working hard during the war years. They did register some complaints about the lack of gratitude shown by civilians, but on the whole soldiers were appreciative of the efforts made to support them while overseas.<sup>40</sup>

However, when given space in the free comment responses, many soldiers spoke about feelings of alienation from civilian life and viewed civilians as uncaring and ignorant of military hardships. It is difficult to gauge a specific number of soldiers who felt this way. Individual soldiers worried about a variety of issues to varying degrees and, although not always a coherent critique of the home front, the criticism of soldiers about civilians was a consistent theme that carried over into the postwar years. Veterans may have appreciated different aspects of the home front's support of its soldiers, giving the efforts of loved ones high marks in the survey. But resentment of specific elements or changes in American society was also very apparent in the surveys. Although this theme of dissent found in the veterans' surveys could be dismissed as part of general complaints about the military, some of the same themes of disenchantment prominently appeared later in the postwar media, showing that these comments reflected feelings shared in part or in whole by many vets.

The most common theme of criticism surrounded the soldiers' belief that the home front was not experiencing the difficulties of warfare and was enjoying the economic boom that accompanied America's entrance into the conflict. For these soldiers, the home front was characterized by an unpatriotic materialism that was alien to the camaraderie between soldiers in the armed service. The difficulty of war should have brought out a spirit of togetherness in all Americans not just those in uniform. A common complaint voiced by many soldiers was "people in the States don't know we are fighting a war!"<sup>41</sup> Soldiers learned from news outlets and from loved ones in America that many civilians were benefiting from the war while they were laying their lives on the line, causing resentment among the troops. Another disgruntled soldier wrote, "We have been overseas too dam[n]ed long it's about time we were going back home. They got plenty men back home doing nothing just sitting in th[eir] ass and having a good time while we are getting a rotten deal."<sup>42</sup> These types of sentiments worried home front authorities when they speculated about "the veteran problem" and the gulf that was growing between those who were fighting the war and those for whom they fought.

Perhaps the most popular target for soldiers' antimaterialistic venom was the industrial war worker who went out on strike. Many survey responses were particularly critical of unions and strikers generally and of union leader John L. Lewis in particular. Responses included:

Why doesn't some one do something about the dam strikes why baby those draft dodgers. . . . Keep a list of their names. When the war is over give a copy to each soldier.

I think there are too many people in this country getting rich doing *war work*—a soldier gets damn poor and often *dead*.

There are entirely to [*sic*] many strikes going on to day [*sic*], this affects the morale of the men in the army because they are being disciplined each day and civilians can defy the govt. and do as they please. I think they do not fully realize that if this war is lost, there [*sic*] right to freedom is lost also. Make them work or fight.<sup>43</sup>

Another thing I don't like is the strikes at home. Why not put some of those men over here for a while on Army wages and let us work their jobs. Let them see what will happen to them if they refuse to work on the front lines.<sup>44</sup>

Why do our leaders have to let John L. Lewis and his henchmen call strikes and thereby slow down production? Is that the kind of politics we will continue to have after the war?<sup>45</sup>

Given the heightened visibility of their agitation, strikers made good targets for the wrath of frustrated soldiers who were increasingly critical of the home front's materialism and its commitment to winning the war.

Politicians on the home front were also the subjects of many soldiers' ire in the soldier surveys. The inability of politicians to conduct the war, the inadequacy of the government's attempts to make the army more efficient, and the failure of elected officials to quell labor and racial unrest at home were all issues for servicemen. One soldier wrote disgustedly of the inadequacy and privilege of elected officials in America:

Put the congressmen in the war for 1 week and see how long it lasts. . . . I suggest they act more and talk less. The G.I. Joes get tired of promises. We want to be home with our wives and sweethearts the same as anyone else, so do something about it. It always involves money and the congressmen

can easy buy their way out. It's usually the man with money who gets ahead. Through a bunch of politicians in the capitol and in the cities. If you don't get rid of them you'll have another war in 5 yrs. I'm glad somebody's getting a benefit of this killing. And the politicians, and Senators, and Congressmen are doing O.K.<sup>46</sup>

Other soldiers blamed the government for not allowing civilians the chance to understand the hardships of soldiers and the price of their sacrifice because of the sugar-coated view of the war that was shaped by government censors. Some soldiers suggested that the distribution of soldier-driven papers such as *Stars and Stripes* back home would help civilians understand the conflict, while others felt that elimination of censorship of men's letters or toning down war propaganda might help to bring the "real war" home. A response from the surveys echoed this theme of a growing divide based on lack of information: "The people in the U.S. should see the war as it actually is. They should see the battlefield covered with our boys who died so that some men can go out on strike because he doesn't believe that he's being well paid. For \$50 a month our boys go through living hell—the minute a picture is published showing mutilated bodies people all over the country rise up to complain. We live for days and even weeks under those conditions yet it can't be shown to the public."<sup>47</sup> For this and other soldiers, the American public needed to be informed about the military experience in greater detail in order to realize the significance of the soldiers' sacrifice and the immorality of the materialistic attitude that servicemen felt was pervasive on the home front.

All of these tensions between soldiers and the home front led to a feeling among many servicemen that they did not receive respect and acknowledgment from the home front that their military service warranted. The alienation of soldiers comes through in several open-ended comments from the surveys:

Civilian population as a whole do not have as much respect for a soldier as they should. Therefore there isn't much else for a soldier to do but get drunk and try to forget it.<sup>48</sup>

The only comment I have to make is one regarding civilians [*sic*]. They think that just because a fellow is in the army, he isn't worth spitting on. I[t] makes me wonder just who the hell we are fighting to protect since most of us would rather be dead than where we are today.<sup>49</sup>

I feel like a foreigner and are [*sic*] looked upon one by my fellow Americans.<sup>50</sup>

Civilian attitudes and reaction to war efforts is doing more to tear down the army than all the training possible can build up. Soldiers often remark when strikes and other acts of sabotage are announced: "So this is what we are fighting for—While those SOB's are getting rich"—"Why should we undergo these hardships in order that the 'white collars' may get rich" the general feeling is that civilians would like for the war to continue so that they could profit financially—in other words, that only a small part of the population is fighting or cooperating in the fight.<sup>51</sup>

In my opinion G.I. Joe hasn't had a fair deal upon returning back to the U.S. and probably never will.<sup>52</sup>

Despite government promises and the passage of the GI Bill, many soldiers were wary of their fellow citizens on the home front and their commitment both to the war and to the future welfare of World War II veterans.

Like civilians, soldiers remembered the situation of veterans of World War I, and memories of what many considered the poor treatment of that war's veterans only heightened soldiers' concern about their return. Ending one survey, a soldier commented that "the Post-war adjustment period has some fears in us as fear of repetition of 1929–1932—unless more definite foresight planning is made than we hear about now."<sup>53</sup> Many used images of impoverished veterans during the Depression to dramatize the possible economic plight soldiers faced in an uncertain postwar period: "Post-war world is still a matter of pure conjecture to us—what it holds in store for us is contingent upon the actual world we have—This survey is an admirable accomplishment—It shows that the War Dept. shall try not [*sic*] leave us in a lurch when we doff our uniforms—It's with a fervent prayer that I say—'No corner apple vendors after the war'—It's going to be different after this war and I'd hate to think that we would suffer the same fate as the Bonus Army."<sup>54</sup>

On the whole, many men wanted to know what they could expect upon their return. Given their worries about civilian attitudes and the postwar economy, soldiers were looking for straightforward answers and support to allay their fears:

For a final thought. I think the Army should enlighten its men and prepare them to look forward to a post war civilian life. Most men, when I ask what their plans are after the war, reply, "I don't know, guess I'll bum around

and see the country." Well, that happened in 1918–1920. Remember the crime wave?<sup>55</sup>

Suggest some definite policy be set up in regards to mustering out of men who are responsible job holders and heads of families. All the latest discussion has been on the style of "don't worry we will take care of you boys". Having been in this army over two years and the only means of support for two dependents, such ballyhoo is not for my liking. Quite a few of us left fairly good jobs to enter this mess and being over 30 years of age I will need to make one choice and no miss. How about it . . . Frankly, I have my doubts that things will be better or as good after the war.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to this sense of apprehension or mistrust of civilians, the discipline and discomfort of military life also affected soldiers' abilities to conform to home front notions of the veteran's role in America. Though veterans reinforced ideas of male dominance in the postwar era, many soldiers were critical of other aspects of the masculine image of the returning veteran that was being constructed on the home front. When describing their war experience, soldiers wanted civilians to know their struggles but were also hesitant to embrace the role of hero. Usually, soldiers described military service as a dirty but necessary job:

It seemed to me when the going got tough you were very tired and hungry. You wanted to go in and get the job done even if you knew you would get shot. Sort of a don't give a damn feeling.<sup>57</sup>

I would like to say I want to go home very much. But we have a job to finish.<sup>58</sup>

On the whole, I am willing to remain in the army till the job is done and then would like to return to a peaceful life in the good ole' USA.<sup>59</sup>

Although not underplaying the sacrifice they made in being part of the military, soldiers nevertheless did not stress the heroism of their work as was happening on the home front. Further, the surveyors found that most soldiers did not attach the same principles to the conduct of the war that seemed to be popular on the home front. For example, a survey done in 1943 found that a third of the men surveyed had never heard of the "Four Freedoms" despite the government's best efforts to popularize the Freedoms as American war aims. Most soldiers agreed that the war was necessary, but the surveyors concluded that "there was little support of attempts to give the war meaning in terms of principles and causes

involved, and little apparent desire for such formulations."<sup>60</sup> Soldiers were not looking to be heroes.

The data from *The American Soldier* surveys also suggest that as soldiers witnessed the horrors of war or as the war's end approached, the likelihood that veterans would question the war increased along with their pessimism about the war's long-term benefits. A survey taken not long after Victory in Europe day (VE day) revealed that more than half the respondents reported feelings that the war was not worth fighting. The survey concluded that soldiers were divided in their reasons for fighting the war and at times seriously doubted the necessity of the conflict.<sup>61</sup> In the open-ended responses, this confusion regarding the war and the soldier's role within it comes through:

They also want to know if we think that the war is worth fighting for. How do we know what we are fighting for, all we know is hear-say. If we thought we had a chance of going home sometime to see what we are fighting for we might feel a little more like fighting.<sup>62</sup>

After a long time on the front a fellow begins to feel tired and bitter. He starts to wonder if he has been forgotten and if his work will be recognized after all he has put into it. Even though he knows better a man can't help thinking that his unit is carrying the whole burden.<sup>63</sup>

The surveyors also concluded that many veterans doubted that the future result of the military life would be peace. After the experience of World War I, and witnessing the brutality of this war, many soldiers gave up hope of a "war to end all wars."<sup>64</sup> What came through in these surveys was the image of a very confused serviceman who was trying to come to terms with the experience of warfare and who was not at all confident about his supposed identity as American hero and protector.

Soldiers' military experiences colored their postwar plans in other ways. A unified theme in almost all of the surveys' open-ended comment sections was the contempt that soldiers felt for officers, noncommissioned officers, and army regimentation in general. Mind-numbing drills, often described as "boy scout stuff," were portrayed as pointless in many free comment responses. When asked what he planned to do after the war, one soldier replied, "To live without K.P., Guard Duty, roll calls, curfew, M.P.s clothing show-downs, crabs, dehydrated eggs, chicken shit."<sup>65</sup> Clearly the lack of freedom was one of the most frustrating aspects of military life for this and other soldiers.

The social scientists found that resentment of army authority was another prevalent problem facing soldiers. Military regimentation was particularly vexing for the new, civilian soldiers who had a difficult time making the transition to army discipline. The surveyors grouped soldiers' criticisms of military authority into three main areas:

1. Many of those exercising authority were unqualified for their jobs.
2. The soldier did not get enough chance to learn the reason why of orders.
3. Authority was exercised as if those in authority assumed a low level of intelligence on the part of trainees.<sup>66</sup>

Soldiers were willing to "do their job" and win the war, but the inequalities of army life were difficult for many servicemen to stomach.

Specifically, many soldiers found army life to be an emasculating ordeal and a process of infantilization that deprived them of their rights as men and independent actors. Soldiers described being "beaten down" by army life and used metaphors of machines, animals, and children to describe the difficulties of dealing with military authority:

Army life tends to dull the mind and very soul of a person—it converts him into a machine.<sup>67</sup>

Yes, I know this is War—War or no war we still are human beings. Treat us as such. It will make us better soldiers, and later on better men.<sup>68</sup>

We are treated more like a rat than a man.<sup>69</sup>

Pass restrictions are like those used in children's camps. We are men—not children.<sup>70</sup>

I would like to know whether soldiers getting readied for combat should be treated like children. That seems to be the general situation.<sup>71</sup>

The military's bureaucracy, inefficiency, officiousness, and attempted domination of soldier's lives created a struggle for men who sought to retain a sense of identity and independence during their service. The fact that this army was one primarily made up of civilian volunteers and draftees meant that the move to the controlled atmosphere of the military would be a difficult transition for many who did not want to sacrifice their individualism and manhood in favor of patriotism.<sup>72</sup>

The most common targets of the soldiers' wrath when it came to anti-authoritarianism were officers. Officers were resented for their lack of training (often referred to as "ninety-day wonders" due to the length of Officer Candidate School), chastised for their stupidity, and attacked for their inefficiency. A typical response: "Most officers I have been under are stupid and mean. I wouldn't like to serve with them in combat. I consider many of them to be 4-Fs in uniform."<sup>73</sup> These complaints could be dismissed as general "bitching" or complaining about the army, but many other soldiers went beyond citing the general incompetence of officers in expressing their hostility to military authority. Soldiers spoke passionately about the injustice of suffering under arbitrary authority while fighting for their country. Many wanted to be regarded as individuals by officers and not to be viewed simply as cogs in the war machine: "Don't treat your men like children (for non-coms [noncommissioned officers] and officers). Treat them with the same respect you would have to have used as a civilian in order to get along with people."<sup>74</sup> This demand for respect was an important theme in almost all surveys in all theaters.

In regard to officers and their mistreatment of their men, soldiers reacted against what they felt was an undemocratic, un-American system of privilege that reserved the best for officers, many of whom had yet to prove themselves as leaders worthy of command or respect. The social scientists utilized the term *caste system*, coined by many of the soldiers, to describe the inequalities that existed between officers and enlisted men. In one survey, the Research Branch cataloged free comment responses and found that "the overwhelming majority of the criticisms dealt with special privileges of officers, their concern for their own prerogatives and welfare, and their indifference to the deprivations of enlisted men."<sup>75</sup> Soldiers took the opportunity in the free comment section to express their displeasure over the division between officers and enlisted men:

More equality between officers and men. Because a man is an officer don't make him a God. We are fighting a war for equality—but our own Army is run on to create a "class basis." An enlisted man is as much of a gentleman as the so-called officers.<sup>76</sup>

I believe the officers elected as administration executives in most cases, know less about administrative procedures than the non-coms and privates who do the actual work. In other words, they think they know it all but are just bunglers. They get a lot of screw-ball ideas that if a non-com got them, he would be busted. But because they wear the bars, their word

is law—and good common sense goes out the window. I have always believed that officers are only human beings and not tin gods. My democratic way of life has taught me that all men are equal and no officer is better than I or should be worshipped as an idol.<sup>77</sup>

Comments such as these were reserved for non-coms as well, who were also seen as petty tyrants or "bucking" for promotion at the expense of other men. For many in the armed forces, the sacrifices of military discipline came at too high a price, and they found irony in fighting for Americans' freedom even as their rights were being curtailed in an unjust military.

In addition, officers seemed to acknowledge some elements of the caste system when surveys compared their responses to those of the enlisted men. One survey found that although predictably 80 percent of enlisted men agreed with the statement "promotions in the Army are based on who you know, and not what you know," 60 percent of officers concurred. For many soldiers, the army represented threats to their individual autonomy and their ability to be justly rewarded for their efforts.

The hatred of undeserving authority figures and their control over the lives of soldiers deeply affected what a substantial number of veterans desired in postwar America and what shape they felt their civilian lives should take. Questioned about what they wanted in the postwar era, many soldiers tied their hopes to obtaining good jobs not just in order to support their families and be solid citizens, but also due to the need for independence after their long periods of submitting to higher authorities:

Economic freedom first and [a] place on the social ladder second, and freedom from regimentation are the things I want most.<sup>78</sup>

What I want most is a good job. Just a chance to make a decent living so I can feel free and independent.<sup>79</sup>

The restrictions of military life during the war encouraged this and many other soldiers to place a premium on independence in the postwar era. Economic independence was tied to individual autonomy and freedom from the prohibitions placed on servicemen during their terms of service. A theme of wanting to be "left alone" was also prevalent in many soldiers' free comments. Historian Michael Gambone has written that many vets sought not to "fit in," finding that "separation from civil society . . . was an important way to gather breathing space in what was a new

and strangely alien culture.”<sup>80</sup> A need for separation also placed these vets at odds with home front prescriptions for the veterans’ need to immerse themselves in community leadership. A sample of responses:

After the war I wish to leave the army and their control all together. I want to be free to live my life my way.<sup>81</sup>

I would appreciate being left alone, with my family, for a period of at least six months. I’m tired of being told what to do at every step.<sup>82</sup>

Leave fellows like me out of your plans and we would appreciate it very, very, very much. I’m dead serious.<sup>83</sup>

We are supposed to be fighting for every man, be he young or old, poor or rich, to have a chance to earn his livelihood and to be unhampered in any way by anyone. The freedoms as expressed in the four freedoms should be carried out to their fullest extent. If one man is denied any of these freedoms, or any group of men, be it by govt. restriction, conscription, or in any other manner we shall have fought in vain. It is my humble prayer that after it is all over we can settle down to a life of opportunity, to not only think, but to do as we please and pursue our way of life unhampered by any one. I look forward to the day when a man can say, “My life is my own, I can live it as I please as long as I don’t interfere with the welfare of others.” May it soon come.<sup>84</sup>

Soldiers expressed the desire to return home and head families in accordance with the home front conception of the role of the veteran, but the particular masculine norms that portrayed them as heroes and mandated communal responsibility were unacceptable to many veterans who expressed their own, more independent visions of American manhood.

This desire for independence transferred into the aspiration of many soldiers to be their own boss following the war’s conclusion. Free comment responses by many servicemen contained their hope that they would not be subject to the authority of others upon their return to the workforce:

If I have a good chance of working for myself would rather do that as I don’t like to work for someone else.<sup>85</sup>

I should like to get permanently established in some business of my own, as soon as possible. However, I want to be reasonably sure of some success at first so that my family would be taken care of.<sup>86</sup>

[I] want a good clean job not a common laborer sort of a job. Just work eight hours a day and then know that I’m through for that day instead of being available twenty-four hours a day. A job that is similar to the one I’m now performing but where I can tell the boss off when things don’t suit me.<sup>87</sup>

I want to have a business of my own so I do not have to take orders from someone else. I will be my own boss.<sup>88</sup>

The need for independence translated itself into the hope for self-employment and to no longer answer to another authority figure. The mind-numbing routine or submission to officers that many soldiers resented led many soldiers to make freedom an important component of their plans for the postwar era.

Not all of the critical sentiments of veterans were transferred into the need to be left alone. Some disgruntled soldiers desired isolation from the demands of others and pressure from their communities, but other veterans who were critical of the war effort and the home front expressed a desire to return to the United States and attempt to tackle the nation’s problems. These servicemen dealt with many of the same themes as those who craved more personal autonomy, and they expressed their needs in a more reformist language. For example, many of these veterans still wanted freedom from the type of authority they experienced in the military, but they also framed this hope in more active or positive terms:

If I could be left completely on my own, eventually I might be able to start a business and provide a few jobs for some of the other boys.<sup>89</sup>

If I get a discharge I will start work at something CONSTRUCTIVE—begin living a normal life again—where a man is boss because of his knowledge of the job—where a person can be a human being the Army has not changed my plans but instead has increased the desire to fulfill them.<sup>90</sup>

The hostility that veterans felt toward unjust authority comes through, but these men were seeking to build something new out of their military experience, and not to retreat into their family lives, in order to assert more control over their lives.

Along these same lines, other critical veterans were inspired to enter into politics upon their return, not to fulfill the home front’s expectations but to enact reforms motivated by their wartime efforts. Typical of these types of responses was the need to work for peace in the postwar era in



order to ensure that later generations would not have to fight in future wars: "I would like very much to vigorously partake in political activity so that whatever our sacrifices may be they will be of no avail."<sup>91</sup> These veterans were looking ahead and did not want their sons and daughters to have to suffer through the same trials that they had. Further, veterans were interested in political activism upon their return to make sure that the government and the nation lived up to its promises to veterans:

I would like very much for the Federal Government to assure me that when I leave this army, I shall go on a payroll which is at least profitable to me. My father had a sad experience in the last war, as did most of the other men who went to the wars the last time. While they were away, they were great men who were giving their all for their country, but when they came back they were the poor suckers who were left holding the sack while the draft dodgers and otherwise had all they wanted and offered no one jobs but their relatives. . . . I want to be assured that I'll be worth that after the war, and not be offered a job for seventy five dollars a month, "take it, or leave it!" That may have been O.K. in the last war, but it isn't going to work after this one, because there are too many of us concerned in this one and we (the fighting younger generation) will fight, if necessary, to assure ourselves that it *WILL NOT* happen again to us, as it did to our fathers!<sup>92</sup>

There is another thing I expect to see to and that is that our boys who are fighting this war and live to return home get a square deal in life. If it requires me entering politics to see that this done I will be right in there pitching.<sup>93</sup>

Still other veterans were looking to take on social problems when they returned home. The dislike of unions, politicians, and a materialistic home front encouraged many veterans to write about changing American society upon their return. One veteran wrote simply, "I will not go back to a community where restrictions and impediments are put in my way by a select few for their benefit."<sup>94</sup> Others had more specific concerns, particularly African American troops who addressed the racism they encountered even as the nation was supposedly struggling for the cause of freedom:

I think there is too much color ban and discrimination according to one's color when all men are dying in this war, regardless of their color. After the war here are some races who will not feel satisfied with being put on the back line again after participating in the war. I look for a civil war if there are not a lot of changes made. There are a lot of people who will not put up with the treatment they received in pre war days.<sup>95</sup>

The colored soldier in the South gets a pretty rotten deal. Traveling trains buses and in the cities. Since the negro soldiers have contributed to the war and have taken a large part in the fighting, I feel that we are due some consideration. If not, what are the negroes fighting for? To be faced with the same problems when he returns home when the war is over.<sup>96</sup>

The war experience led many veterans to question the shape of postwar American society, and although some sought distance from their communities, many veterans were looking to bring the same energy to reform America that they had put forth in the military. Whether they were opting out of positions of leadership or looking to bring their own brand of change to the postwar era, many of the nation's veterans posed a challenge to notions of stability that were formulated on the home front. These soldiers might not have been the proto-Fascists of some experts' most desperate predictions, but as seen in many responses to the soldiers' surveys, the nation would have to contend with veterans' alternate perspectives as America entered the postwar years.

From the beginning, the return of veterans presented a difficult challenge that strained both civilians and soldiers. According to one study of returning vets in a small midwestern community, in the immediate postwar years many ex-soldiers displayed a sense of restlessness, seemed moody, questioned the reasons behind the war, and appeared hesitant to fulfill the expectations of their loved ones after coming home. One vet explained, "I got home here and I found that the town restricts you. There's lots of public opinion you're up against. . . . You can't take off the way you thought you could. Even if you go up to Chicago—no matter where you go—you'll find it's just as dead but on a big scale, so that makes a guy kind of restless."<sup>97</sup> Civilians also expressed their disappointment at the soldiers' behaviors. Many women found them to be rude, impatient, and difficult to be around. Still other civilians worried about vets' fast living and lack of responsibility. One civilian respondent commented, "[Veterans] are more irresponsible. . . . In the army they worked for a while, and then they forgot about it—they were off duty and could do what they pleased. Here in the states, in civilian life, it's a twenty-four hour responsibility."<sup>98</sup> As seen in this study, civilians and veterans struggled in the immediate postwar years to work with each other and ease the transition from military to civilian life.

Despite the clash of understandings with the home front populace, initially veterans who did question the war effort and expressed doubt about the postwar era were given a forum for their views. Major media

outlets heeded the advice of civilian and military professionals and allowed veterans a period of time in which they could air their criticism. Veterans also published books similar to advice manuals by civilians that were intended to aid in soldiers' readjustment. These works also expressed a feeling of tension between civilians and soldiers. One of the most poignant commentators on the postwar situation was Bill Mauldin, the Pulitzer-Prize winning cartoonist who gained fame for his drawings of frontline life in *Stars and Stripes*. In *Back Home*, Mauldin expressed many of the frustrations that veterans felt upon their return. In one cartoon, Mauldin showed a wounded soldier in the hospital asking a friend, "Am I still a war hero or a drain on the taxpayer?" Clearly some vets believed that civilians felt that the vet had had enough time to recover and needed to rejoin civilian life in a more timely fashion. In another drawing, a soldier was having the paper read to him by his wife. The headline read, "Veteran Kicks Aunt," and the caption reads "There's a small item on page 17 about a triple ax murder. No veterans involved." Veterans disliked their image as criminals intensely and Mauldin's commentary highlighted veterans' frustration at being regarded as a possible threat by the populace. Mauldin warned that if the gap between soldier and civilian were not lessened, demagogues could play on these fractures in society.<sup>99</sup>

Other veterans approached the subject of postwar readjustment with the same type of bittersweet humor as Mauldin. In *How to be a Civilian*, veteran Morton Thompson wrote about the experiences of returning servicemen, writing humorous pieces on how to buy civilian clothes or use a civilian toilet. In addition, the author included a chapter on "What are Girls" designed for vets who had not seen women on their long tours of duty. But Thompson also took on the problems that vets faced upon their return and difficulties in their transition. Like many other veterans, Thompson was not convinced that his military experience had ensured future peace. His introduction read, "To the Unknown Baby, who will become the Man Who Will become the Unknown Soldier of World War III." Below this, the author included, "In the sincere belief that the full and honored tomb merits no less consideration than the empty, waiting one." Clearly, this was a veteran who was unsure about the meaning of the war and the future of world peace.<sup>100</sup>

Thompson also commented on the fracture between civilians and veterans, attacking the psychological literature on soldier's sexuality with a chapter entitled "How to Get in Bed with Your Wife." Described as a subject that "too much has been written about," Thompson took

aim at civilian literature that focused increasingly on veterans' sexual dysfunction or inability to head their households. Still, Thompson believed that civilians struggled during the war, and that veterans should understand that many civilians felt guilty that they did not suffer as much as vets. When discussing what vets should do upon their return, Thompson encouraged returning fighting men to join veterans' groups and to seek counseling if feelings of disenchantment continued. In the end, the veteran really just wanted to "feel his freedom" above all else.<sup>101</sup> Like many of the soldiers in *The American Soldier* surveys, Thompson placed freedom from authority as the ultimate goal of the returned GI.

Veterans also expressed their views in shorter pieces, like an article in *Harper's* magazine entitled "It's Not That I'm Lazy." Authored by the anonymous "A Veteran," the article detailed the hardships faced by veterans as they returned to civilian life. He wrote of his difficulty adjusting to his civilian job but admitted "the outside world hasn't thwarted me yet; I haven't given it the chance."<sup>102</sup> The author showed how he could not adjust to working for his old job in an impersonal company. What was worse, he could not bring himself to ask for a job after trying so hard in the army and receiving what he felt was very little in return. In the end, he knew that this "doesn't sound very American. . . . The resilience and clarion call to action are all missing, aren't they? I'm not responding the way I should according to the rehabilitation program, am I? I'm supposed to snap out of it, buck up, straighten out, and buckle down—and get off [government aid]. I know I'm not what I'm supposed to be. That's why I'm worried and that's why I'm trying to figure out why."<sup>103</sup> Like many other veterans, the war experience left this former soldier with unanswered questions and many barriers to reacclimation to American society. Settling down and providing postwar stability was not an easy task for this former soldier.

Another example of this sentiment was found in John Barlow Martin's "Anything Bothering You, Soldier?" The article described in great detail the author's anger at a postwar America that focused more on the economic consequences of the war, or the joy of victory, than the work that it took to achieve victory. Later in his article, Martin expressed his belief that "civilians never learned much about the war. . . . We were all in this together, so none of us should ever forget it. So somebody has got to talk about it. Yet this is futile, for the gap between soldiers and civilians is unbridgeable. What little civilians knew about the war they have forgotten. They should have been taught more."<sup>104</sup> Like other soldiers from World War II, Martin acknowledged that the home front had to work

with veterans, but he was troubled by the lack of understanding that civilians displayed following the war. By seeing the war as a heroic struggle or an opportunity for economic advancement, the civilian could never comprehend the nation's veterans and the critical views that they brought with them from their experiences.

Martin continued by attacking advertisers and politicians for exploiting soldiers for their own purposes but saved some of his harshest condemnation for the system of inequality in America that marginalized a large segment of the American populace. This led him to question the war in general. He wrote:

Why should a man whose skin is black die for something that isn't there? (I have heard them say they are good enough to be buried side by side in Italy but not good enough to sit side by side in Texas.) And why should old folks in Iowa hang out the golden star and give thanks that the other boy got home? Home to what? And why should the Arkansas sharecropper—God save us, he smelled and never wore his shoes—go back to his acre and his mule when his father cannot sit in the Willard because the old man hasn't got a coat? And what of the boy whose friends were burned in Germany, the boy whose bride, like him, cannot gain entrance to the hotel by the sea because it is "restricted"?

Racism, anti-Semitism, and class conflict were all problems that the author saw, but he realized that the war affected these fundamental problems very little. He questioned why men should die for freedom if that concept did not really exist in the America. Many of the values that Americans, and civilians, held up as justification for the war effort were found to be suspect by this and many other veterans. If civilians truly knew what had been at stake during the war, then many of the social problems that worried veterans would be addressed by the civilian populace as well.

In conclusion, Martin reaffirmed his belief that much of the war would be forgotten, and he chided his fellow veterans for not challenging many of the hypocrisies of the country. He ended with the sentence, "But how can they sit there like that?" Martin's article dramatically detailed the frustrations suffered by veterans and gave a voice to those who sought to combat social inequalities in America upon their return from duty. Martin was an example of the type of soldier whose military experience seemed to encourage the need to reform American society. Although veterans like Martin chafed against civilian prescriptions and home front

materialism, they did not want to be left alone like other disgruntled veterans. Instead, these men sought leadership positions in American society, not to solidify home front conceptions of communal stability but to bring reform back home. In Martin's case, the materialism and social inequality found on the home front was unacceptable in a nation that had just fought a brutal war against Fascism.

Veterans like Martin who expressed dissatisfaction with postwar America and sought reform often looked to work with other veterans in formal or informal associations. By grouping together with other servicemen, reform-minded veterans not only hoped to have strength in numbers but also sought to draw upon the close bonds that united soldiers in times of war. As opposed to civilians, whom soldiers saw as more materialistic and self-centered, many veterans felt they knew how to work with one another to get things done. By bringing their tough-minded spirit to the challenges of the postwar era, veterans could move the country in new directions. In a 1947 article for *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled "We're On Our Own," AVC Chairman Charles Bolté reflected this sentiment: "My generation fought for a different war. . . . None of us went as to a crusade. We had been taught that no war is worth fighting, because in war no one wins. . . . This educational process had the tendency to turn cynicism into tough-mindedness, disillusionment into practicality, so that for many of us bitterness against a world we'd never made was translated into the conviction that we make a better one for ourselves."<sup>105</sup> Bolté's article expressed the disappointment that many veterans felt with the return home, but he injected a sense of hope and desire to change the problems of America.<sup>106</sup>

Bolté's article was powerful, but it was nevertheless not typical of the type of image of the veteran that was being reflected in the American mass media. After giving the soldier his period of readjustment, many civilians wanted to put the war behind them and move on to building a strong future. The war was "good," soldiers were brave, and life needed to continue. Even before the war was over, ads also began to focus on returning veterans as a new market and a source of revenue, rather than dwelling on their military exploits. Instead of being portrayed as hard-working heroes, advertisers tried to convince civilians that the soldiers wanted people to purchase certain products. Living up to many veterans' worst fears about the home front, materialistic concerns were equated with the image of the soldier as a source of income or a new, excited consumer of American products. An ad for *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine depicted a serviceman reclining on a chair, with a pipe

in his mouth and a smile on his face. In encouraging other advertisers to purchase space in the magazine, the ad reported on what the returning soldier expected upon his return: "Ask the man back from a Europe on furlough. The whole world can't hold a candle to that shivery bang of the screen door, the sound of his mother's laugh, the feel of his favorite chair, the smell of chicken frying. Home is heaven." After highlighting the importance that soldiers placed on family, the ad continued by combining this nostalgia for home with the reality that returning servicemen were going to be one of the most important sectors of consumers in the postwar economy. It continued, "all his dreams and plans—all his *spending*—will be for the home he and his wife make when he gets back for good."<sup>107</sup> The image of the soldier in this ad focused not on the soldier's safe return from hostilities or his importance to the cause of freedom but instead concentrated on the serviceman as a source of economic stability and an economic market to exploit.

In another ad, this time for Hamilton watches, a mock letter from a navy captain to his wife was pictured. The caption read, "Dearest, I certainly married a smart gal! You're darn right I'd like a Hamilton, darling. Next to yourself, it's the finest anniversary present you could give me."<sup>108</sup> Here, the satisfaction that a servicemen/husband had in his wife was directly tied to her ability to anticipate his material wants. Citizens were encouraged to provide certain material items in order to satisfy soldiers and possibly to reward them for their service. The link between the returning soldier and increased spending was also prominent in a Community Flatware ad that showed a couple in a passionate embrace with the caption "Back Home For Keeps." After a romantic description of the serviceman's return, the ad promises women that "*the day will come*, when you'll have your own beloved man and your own beloved *Community*." The returning veteran became at once not only the object of great longing but also the instrument of increased purchasing power. Happiness was equated not only to the emotional and sexual needs that a returning soldier could provide but also material objects. By being a force of economic and familial normalcy, the returning soldier was being constructed as the backbone of social stability in postwar America.<sup>109</sup>

Not surprisingly, many servicemen disapproved of the images of the veterans propagated by advertisers. As stated earlier, soldiers had a workman-like approach to the war, and some felt that advertisements such as these cheapened the experience of soldiers and led America to be focused on materialistic concerns. John Bartlow Martin expressed his distaste for advertisers, "I am mad because the ad in *Life* (full page, in color; and

plenty expensive) showed pictures of tanks in a river in the jungle and said, "Roughest, toughest test oil ever faced!" Nothing about the men who had to sit inside the tanks. It was very heroic about the oil."<sup>110</sup>

In another article entitled, "The Veteran Says: Aw, Nuts!," author Robert C. Ruark writes of many soldiers' irritation at the commercialization of the soldiers' war experience. He writes, "The G.I. was made a helpless target of oozy sentimentality, wild speculation, and utterly shameless exploitation for commercial gain. . . . The battling G.I. was pictured by the copywriters as storming that beachhead for the right to boo the Dodgers, to raid the icebox of apple, blueberry, or cherry pie, in that order. He was fighting for the right to ride railroads, fly the airplanes, listen to Crosby, and buy Krunchy-Krackly Krispies from the Kozy Korner Store, Inc."<sup>111</sup> Soldiers were contesting the trivializing, degradation, myth making, and commercialization of their military experiences. Veterans wanted to be more than a prospective market for American advertisers and attacked the materialism that they felt characterized civilian life. Though they may have chafed at some aspects of the hero tag applied to soldiers, many veterans also wanted the "real war" to be understood to prevent their war experiences from being misappropriated.

Even as some veterans took on the materialism they found in American life, advertisements from the late 1945 and 1946 period began to reflect a lessening of the influence that the image of the soldier carried with the public. Increasingly, ads dealt less with soldiers' material wants or a company's efforts during wartime and instead sought to portray images of the veteran as he returned to "normal" life. By mid-1946, the image of the soldier gradually disappeared from advertisements. Apparently, portrayals of servicemen had lost their ability to inspire consumers. Only a year after the war's conclusion, soldiers and their experiences, a powerful tool for marketers, lost their appeal among the American public.

In addition, as the war started to become a memory for many Americans, the conflict over the meaning of the war and the difficulties of the soldiers' return captured less space in the periodical literature. Although 1946 still saw some debate over these issues, by 1947 they all but disappeared. More typical were veterans' stories that focused on the triumph of soldiers over adverse conditions. In an article entitled "They Licked Their Veterans Problem," reporter Stanley Frank told the story of Oklahoma City's efforts to provide help to their returning soldiers. Instead of talking about the social inequities that angered many veterans or the depression that many servicemen faced as they tried to make sense of the war, the article focused upon the economic problems faced

by soldiers. The article stated that "no community wants to renege on the promises it made to the boys who went away," but the veterans' return was still viewed as a "problem." The "promises" that were apparently made to the fighting men by the community appeared to be primarily economic in nature. Discussion of issues beyond housing and jobs was avoided. What was left was the feeling that veterans' problems could be solved through hard work and economic cooperation. The problems expressed by other soldier authors, such as feelings of alienation, were replaced with material concerns.

In February 1946, former Red Cross volunteer and journalist Ruth Sulzberger penned an article that questioned the reasoning of veterans. In "Not the G.I.'s Problem, but Ours," the article stated that the American fighting man "approached his job and war in general with little understanding of what it was all about—and even less desire to learn about it." The author continued by questioning the favorable estimations of the German people that veterans made and the disparaging remarks directed at such allies as the French and British. When comments like this were expressed, Sulzberger blamed the soldiers' "lack of understanding" of the principles of the war and of the current international world order. She concluded by placing the blame on the American public for the "soldier problem" because she felt that those on the home front did not educate soldiers well or did not know the reasons behind the conflict.<sup>112</sup>

Sulzberger's article showed how many on the home front completely disregarded soldiers' understanding of the war in favor of their own interpretation. Sulzberger intimated that she, and not those who fought the war, knew the true reason for America's participation in the hostilities. Further, she discounted their views on foreign groups even though she admitted that soldiers had a good deal of contact with these groups in Europe. Articles like these showed a tendency for civilians, even in early 1946, to favor their own interpretation over the experience of soldiers. In many ways, the fears that soldiers had of not being understood came true, as civilians increasingly seemed less interested in some veterans' views.

Another article from 1946, "What's Going on in the G.I.'s Mind," tried to dispel what the author saw as the myth of the depressed soldier. L. H. Robbins wrote of his discussions with veterans whom he picked up hitchhiking and found them to be positive men with much on their mind. In his talks, he found the ex-soldiers to be concerned about their futures but ready to face the challenges ahead. At one point, Robbins dismissed talk of jaded veterans who had a hard time adjusting to life outside the military.

He wrote, "The war has not made despairing cynics of [veterans] to the extent that gloomy intellectuals would have you believe." Basing his article on his own findings, the author questioned the sociological surveys and advice of "experts." He found little for the nation to be worried about and had great faith in the country's future.<sup>113</sup> Again, a civilian, using his experiences as evidence, discounted the very public declarations of other veterans and based his views upon a limited and questionable source of opinions. After several car rides, the civilian believed that he could truly know what was "going on" in veterans' heads and could interpret their experiences for his audience.

As civilians were speaking for veterans and their problems, former soldiers were also beginning to adopt an understanding of the war and veterans' experience that was similar to what noncombatants were forwarding. In "Don't Let the Veteran Down," a 1946 article from the *Saturday Evening Post*, General Leon W. Johnson lamented the civilian treatment of the nation's fighting men. In trying to gain support for increased opportunities for housing and employment for veterans, the general used dramatic imagery to stir the hearts of his readers. He wrote, "Your sons know how to die. I know, because for two and a half years I saw them flaming from the skies over Africa and over Germany."<sup>114</sup> Although many soldiers were unsure about the use of this type of dramatic imagery to gain benefits, by 1946 the success of the GI Bill and veteran political candidates showed ex-soldiers the benefits that their war records and "heroism" could bring.

Another good example of this type of article is Richard L. Neuberger's 1946 piece, "This is a World I Never Fought For." In it, the ex-soldier detailed the difficulties that he and other veterans encountered in seeking adequate housing. In order to dramatize his plight, Neuberger reminded his readers of the price paid by soldiers during World War II: "We have proved ourselves capable of sacrifice and heroism." In addition, the author tried to illustrate his despair over postwar housing difficulties by stating, "The war was grim and dreadful, yet perhaps we shall look back upon it as sort of a golden age when we were concerned about our brothers."<sup>115</sup> The effect of this statement was to remind America of the sacrifices that were made during wartime and to shame civilians into providing increased benefits for veterans. With arguments like these, veterans were buying into the home front understanding of the war and its soldiers and using terms like *heroism* and *courage* to describe what many soldiers had previously characterized as a dirty, tough, and less-than-heroic job. The conflict over what the role of soldiers should be in the

postwar era was settled for some veterans. They were heroes and they deserved a particular type of treatment.

By 1948, the problems of the war that many servicemen had expressed at the war's conclusion had almost completely disappeared from writings by soldiers. From this period into the 1950s, articles discussed the plight of disabled veterans, the problems of postwar housing, and the effect of the GI Bill. Debates continued over the extent of veterans' benefits, but discussions of the war and veterans' roles seem to have merged with the prevailing opinions of the home front populace. Further, veterans were still confused over what their postwar compensation for their service should be. Many appealed to their heroic status, but others dramatically rejected their identity as veterans and instead wanted to be treated as "regular citizens." Unlike earlier articles by veterans who wanted to downplay their veteran status, some later articles in 1947 and 1948 reflected a desire to almost completely disassociate themselves from their war experiences.

In "The Veteran says: 'Aw, Nuts,'" Ruark talked about how the estimations of psychiatrists, law enforcement officials, and politicians were wrong to identify veterans as threats to postwar order. He repeated the soldier's contempt for much of the advertising that used images of the fighting man, but he found veterans well adjusted to civilian life and only identified the problems they had with housing and employment. The article ended with a discussion of the veterans two years after the conflict, stating, "It now would appear that not only is it possible to take the man out of the Army, but it is also possible to take most of the Army out of the man."<sup>116</sup> Ruark and other authors saw the eventual goal of veterans was to assimilate to the point that they no longer were recognized as different from civilians.

This refusal to make the war experience a significant part of a veteran's identity found a voice in ex-serviceman Theodore Draper's "There are No G.I.'s Any More." Published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in January 1948, Draper composed his article after visiting his old division's reunion. There he found that although some GIs did have readjustment problems, the majority had gone on to find employment or to start new businesses. After talking about these successes of his comrades, Draper wrote that, "G.I. Joe disappeared about a year ago and nobody seems to miss him."<sup>117</sup> Draper and his friends apparently closed a chapter of their lives and continued on as civilians. This supported the findings of the midwestern study of returning vets. The authors found by the late 1940s that civilians and veterans showed the same level of personal and social adjustment.<sup>118</sup>

Draper realized that readjustment had not been easy on everyone, but that did not lead him to change his assumptions. He wrote, "Adjustment to civilian life has become an accomplished fact for most men, except those with disabilities." Apparently, disabled soldiers had adjustment problems because of the severity of their injuries or because they had obstacles to economic self-sufficiency, and warranted a different category of readjustment experience. For the rest of GIs, the problems of identity and the clash of military and home front experiences were solved for Draper by the beginning of 1947. Soldiers were becoming active members of their society and not shirking their communal responsibility. In most ways, Draper found veterans living up to the postwar roles that the American home front had prescribed.

He ended his piece, "All in all, the average veteran is too busy with the present to pay much attention to the past."<sup>119</sup> In many ways, this was a fitting epitaph to the critical views of the war and American society that many veterans expressed. After a period of questioning, the overwhelming majority of veterans accepted or at least did not actively resist the civilian interpretations of World War II and the postwar role of the veteran for more than a decade. The large number of veterans expressing divergent views from the American mainstream largely disappeared by the 1950s as vets took up the task of trying to create a stable postwar nation.

So how did veterans who had expressed strong doubts about the postwar era "settle down" so thoroughly by 1950? Certainly as time wore on, civilian worries about "the veteran problem" began to lessen, limiting insulting comments by civilians. Another important reason may have been the answer to a question that soldiers had been debating among themselves from the war's conclusion: what was the role of a veteran in the postwar era? The choice was apparently between heroism and special benefits or an anonymous slip back into civilian life. Although many soldiers wanted the government to aid them in their readjustment, others chose to distance themselves from their identity as veterans or at least downplay it in the postwar era. If these men had to forgo trying to correct any perceived misinterpretation by the nation's civilians of the war and soldiers' experiences, perhaps it was a small price to pay for the benefits accorded their military service, such as the GI Bill, or the anonymity that many veterans craved. Whatever the case, most veterans seemed to accept their roles as heroes by 1950.<sup>120</sup>

Though the success of vets in the postwar era may have encouraged many to limit their critiques, those who still espoused differing views found out that their opinions and experiences were not acceptable in the growing cold war consensus culture, and they would have fewer outlets



for their ideas as the war was quickly relegated to history. The anger and malaise that affected so many soldiers was forgotten or replaced as veterans settled down to work within a postwar America uninterested in opinions that challenged the ideas of conformity that were marginalizing dissent. Just as civilian prescriptions had suggested, the home front had provided soldiers the opportunity to express their critical views as part of their readjustment. As the cold war continued, this type of criticism was less acceptable as conflict with the Soviet Union encouraged veterans to focus more on themes of unity in early cold war America.

This was not simply a matter of consensus norms silencing soldier dissent. Soldiers were certainly not at odds with all elements of the postwar role that civilians had defined for them. As expressed in *The American Soldier* surveys, many soldiers wanted to form households and looked forward to a society that expected them to be the head of their families. Veterans' ability to receive benefits, locate employment, and find adequate housing relatively quickly provided stability and eased some of the tension and bitterness expressed by returning soldiers.<sup>121</sup> The writings of returned veterans highlighted differences with civilians, but many servicemen were in agreement that veterans primarily looked to start families and find steady work. Veteran Benjamin Bowker wrote in *Out Of Uniform*, "What would be the standards that World War II veterans would expect from America? . . . They were promised good jobs among the sixty million envisioned for the prosperous future. They were promised homes made more comfortable through the wonders of scientific development. They were told to lay down their lives, if necessary, in the defense of a good system of government and an abundant way of life."<sup>122</sup> These were promises that civilians had every intention of keeping as long as veterans adhered to societal norms and assumed positions of economic and communal responsibility.

This is true also for the understanding of the war experience of veterans. As time wore on, veterans' benefits were obtained many times through appeals to the merits of one's sacrifices as a soldier, and the home front interpretation of the conflict became increasingly more advantageous to servicemen. Many soldiers did not want to talk about the war specifically, but others were willing to refer to their veteran status in order to obtain different goals. In addition, many soldiers had difficulty expressing the emptiness they felt and consequently they had a hard time trying to relate to civilians or alter the home front enthusiasm for the conflict. Without the proper ideological tools to combat the propaganda of the home front, soldiers for the most part accepted the interpretations set down by others.

In large part, veterans had come to accept or were silenced by the onset of the cold war consensus culture that had its origins in the home front understanding of what the postwar world would look like. Notions of stability, the focus on the family, the need for community over individuality, and the understanding of the United States as a force for freedom were all part of the home front's conception of the war and the role of veterans upon their return. Veterans enthusiastically supported many consensus norms, especially notions of prescribed gender roles and the need to settle into a good job. As cold war tensions began to mount, civilians and many veterans were looking for increased social and political stability in response to the growing international threat from the Soviet Union. Many veterans' questioning of the war, the home front, American materialism, communal responsibility, and other issues was not compatible with the need for consensus in an unsure postwar world. The majority of soldiers fulfilled the roles laid out by the home front and became the economic and social leaders that would help lead cold war America. The prevalent image of the disgruntled veteran largely disappeared as the heroism and unity of soldiers came to dominate popular understandings of the World War II generation.